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Policy paper

UK shipbuilding skills taskforce report: government response

Published 9 May 2024

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Introduction

The UK government in partnership with the Scottish government, Welsh government and Northern Ireland Executive, welcomes the UK shipbuilding skills taskforce's independent report, [A Step Change in UK Shipbuilding Skills](#). The report is the culmination of months of intensive work and

represents pioneering collaboration between all parts of the UK shipbuilding industry.

The UK government also commends the taskforce on the development of its toolkit, [How to Leverage UK Skills Systems](#). This practical guide is a resource to help businesses navigate the skills system.

Education and skills are devolved in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. With a small number of exceptions, Department for Education responsibilities relate to England only. The Scottish government, Welsh government and Northern Ireland Executive are responsible for deciding how they develop their education systems and deploy resources. Engagement between governments allows us to share our collective knowledge and experience, and work collaboratively on shared interests and challenges to deliver better outcomes for people across the UK.

The [National Shipbuilding Strategy \(NSbS\) Refresh](#) set out the government and industry's vision for a globally successful, innovative, and sustainable UK shipbuilding enterprise. As a critical enabler of a thriving industry, ensuring the sector has access to a skilled and motivated workforce will play a pivotal role in achieving this vision. The National Shipbuilding Office (NSO), which is charged with leading the implementation of the NSbS Refresh and with a mission to drive transformative change, wants to see sustainable growth within the UK shipbuilding sector, of which access to skilled labour continues to be a critical component. The taskforce has been the first step in achieving this longer-term aim, and the UK government, together with the devolved governments, therefore remains committed to ongoing collaboration with industry to implement its vision.

We welcome the opportunity to continue supporting the shipbuilding sector but note that the report also includes several recommendations for industry and educators. The taskforce's vision for shipbuilding skills cannot be achieved by government alone and all stakeholders in the UK shipbuilding enterprise have a role to play to ensure success. We therefore look forward to working with industry as they engage with and respond to the recommendations of the report.

This document sets out the response to each of the taskforce's recommendations for the UK government and the devolved governments.

Response to recommendations

Collaboration

Recommendation 1: We need government to support and facilitate the industry-led group to represent shipbuilding's skills needs.

The taskforce recommended that the UK government convene an industry-led group to represent shipbuilding's skills needs and oversee implementation of its recommendations.

We support this recommendation. To sustain momentum on shipbuilding skills, the NSO has already begun recruitment to the Skills Delivery Group (SDG), with a view towards the group becoming operational in spring 2024.

The taskforce has worked hard to identify the challenges for skills in the sector and develop a strategy to address them. We agree that, without a convening structure to unify work on shipbuilding skills and oversee delivery, there is a risk the taskforce's vision may be aspiration alone. We recognise the need for a unified voice for shipbuilding skills among government, industry and educators, given the pivotal role this sector plays to our economy, national security, and maritime capability. This will be delivered by the SDG. This will function as a sub-group of the Shipbuilding Enterprise for Growth (SEG), which is the established interface for collaboration between government and industry to deliver the NSbS Refresh.

This group will work to oversee implementation and drive delivery of the taskforce's recommendations, monitor the supply of and demand for skills across the whole sector, and cohere collaboration and investment in shipbuilding skills from across industry and government. The UK government will look to this group to hold the sector accountable for progress against the policy goals of the NSbS Refresh and will be empowered to do so through access to senior leaders in both industry and government to leverage change. Through the SEG, the SDG will have access to wider shipbuilding governance which will ensure that it is empowered to act and provide a route for escalation. This includes the cross-government Director's board (the NSbS Board) and the Shipbuilding Inter-ministerial Group which is chaired by the Secretary of State for Defence in their role as Shipbuilding Tsar.

Through its work, the taskforce identified differences in the needs and provision of skills regionally and across the UK, and by the different sub-sectors within shipbuilding. Alongside a remit for skills nationally, the SDG will be asked to consider the specific skills needs of different parts of the sector, with a particular focus on the interests of smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

To be successful, the SDG will also rely on the support and participation of industry, including collective contributions of skills and resources. We also hope that the SDG will provide a strong voice for the education sector, and on behalf of the workforce.

Promoting shipbuilding

'New narrative' for shipbuilding

Recommendation 2: We need government to promote a new narrative for shipbuilding, with a campaign to showcase the exciting careers opportunities available.

The taskforce identified that, to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce, the shipbuilding sector

will need to create a new narrative that presents shipbuilding in a positive light and highlights the exciting range of opportunities available in the sector.

We share the ambition to increase awareness of the sector and update and improve the public perception of shipbuilding. The NSO will use its convening power to partner with industry, academia, and trade bodies to deliver a targeted campaign that will aim to achieve greater recognition of shipbuilding and showcase the opportunities that a career in the sector can offer. This will in turn support individual organisations' recruitment campaigns and increase the talent pool available to the sector.

Here too, government looks to industry, trade associations and academia to participate in the design and delivery of this activity to ensure it reflects an ambitious, yet authentic portrayal of the sector.

Career pathways framework

Recommendation 3: We need government to support the creation of a career pathways framework to inform existing and future shipbuilding workers.

The taskforce recommended creating a career pathways framework, to be a sector-specific resource that informs people about what careers shipbuilding can offer.

Whilst the UK government recognises the value of such a tool to the sector, it has become apparent since the taskforce published its report that there is at least one other career pathway in development which would achieve this goal. For example, Maritime UK is currently developing a skills and careers platform for the maritime sector, including shipbuilding. In addition to this sector-specific resource, further resources and policies are available in each UK nation which the shipbuilding sector can use to promote its career opportunities and training pathways.

England

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) has created [occupational maps](#), which contain employer-led descriptions of occupations, called occupational standards. All apprenticeships, Higher Technical Qualifications and T Levels are based on these standards and the maps bring these occupations together to show where technical education can lead.

The maps group occupations with related knowledge, skills and behaviours and are designed to be accessible to both employers and learners. They include potential progression options into occupations with similar knowledge and skills needs, identify 'green' occupations and give average salary information. Industry experts on IfATE's route panels keep the maps updated, ensuring they reflect industry practice.

Shipbuilding occupations, including marine electricians, marine surface finishers, marine engineers and boatbuilders are represented in occupational maps under the construction and built environment or engineering and manufacturing routes.

The welding, metal fabricating and electro-mechanical engineering occupations all highlight marine, shipbuilding or maritime sector relevance, and 3 maritime occupations have recently been added to the occupational maps (maritime mechanical fitter, maritime electrical fitter, and maritime pipeworker).

The [National Careers Service](#) could also be a useful conduit for promoting shipbuilding careers. Its website gives customers access to a range of useful digital tools and resources to support them including [Explore Careers](#) which includes a broad range of industry areas and more than 800 job profiles. The job profiles provide information on what a role entails, qualifications and entry routes. Shipbuilding roles are represented within the [engineering and maintenance](#) and [construction and trades](#) categories. The content team regularly researches and updates content and welcomes updates from industry to ensure content is accurate and up to date.

The National Careers Service can help industry sectors to disseminate information to careers advisers via bulletins and newsletters. They can also facilitate webinars and Q&A sessions. This is a partnership arrangement and requires regular input from industry to ensure that content is accurate and up to date.

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) supports the delivery of high-quality careers programmes in schools and colleges. There are a number of ways employers can engage through CEC to expose young people to different career pathways and develop their workforce pipeline, through partnerships, local Careers Hubs (which bring together schools, colleges, employers, and apprenticeship providers in local areas), or by becoming [Cornerstone Employers](#), who work with Careers Hubs to support careers education in their local region.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, Careers Education Information and Guidance (CEIAG) is a statutory part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum in schools and is covered in the Learning for Life and Work area of learning. Careers teachers work in partnership with the Department for the Economy's Careers Service. The Department for the Economy careers advisors provides professional advice and guidance at key transition points.

Employers in Northern Ireland engage with the Department for the Economy's Careers Service's Careers Occupational Information Unit (COIU) which provides emerging, localised, up to date careers messaging across a range of key sectors. This work involves engagement with key strategic partners and draws upon statistical information provided by economists. Importantly, this work provides a vehicle for the shipbuilding sector itself to set out key messages on industry needs. All digital bulletins are available to schools, students, parents, careers advisers and citizens.

In August 2023 the COIU team published a [short feature](#) providing an overview of this important industry in Northern Ireland, including future opportunities and skills needs.

The 6 further education (FE) colleges provide training and education in a number of sectors which would align with the taskforce's report. The FE Curriculum Hubs in particular ensure a common curriculum across the FE colleges in 7 key areas. The Curriculum Hubs of construction, digital IT, and engineering provide training and courses which would align particularly closely to the shipbuilding sector. The Curriculum Hub managers work positively with employers across each of the relevant sectors to ensure the curriculum offered remains relevant to the needs of learners, employers, and the wider sector.

Wales

In 2022 Wales's first curriculum set in law became mandatory for all learners aged from 3 to 16 in Welsh maintained or funded non-maintained nursery education. As part of this reform, GCSEs are being reimagined to reflect what and how learners are being taught. The new Made-for-Wales GCSEs will prepare learners for the challenges of modern society and will incorporate digital technologies to future-proof qualifications.

Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) are a critical component of the Curriculum for Wales. Through effective careers education learners will have an improved understanding of the world of work. Schools are encouraged to work with businesses and third-party stakeholders to enhance the understanding of the world of work.

Careers Wales delivers the national professional careers information, advice, and guidance service for all ages. It offers a free, bilingual, and impartial service, underpinned by access to impartial careers guidance and coaching from professionally qualified careers advisers. Careers Wales helps young people and adults to plan their career, prepare to get a job, and find and apply for the right apprenticeships, courses, training, and employment.

Careers Wales delivers services to young people and adults in a variety of methods including face-to-face careers guidance to help explore career ideas and options, group work, employer engagement events and activities and through a range of digital channels such as webchat, telephone and via the website. It employs Business Engagement Advisers who liaise with schools and industry to help schools showcase authentic real-world experiences. Specific information on careers in the maritime industry can be accessed on the job information tool. The information contained within the job sheets are based on recent labour market trends analysis and will give those individuals interested in working in the sector information about pay, training and opportunities within the sector.

Scotland

Career awareness for the shipbuilding sector is delivered on a regional cluster basis, in partnership with employers, schools and training providers, through the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) [Careers Information Advice and Guidance Service](#) and [Scotland's Regional Developing Young Workforce Groups](#). An account management system will be developed to ensure that support reaches all employers across the sector, including SMEs and microbusinesses within the supply chain.

For the 2024 to 2025 academic year, specialist colleges in Scotland are planning an expansion of the [Foundation Apprenticeship model](#). This will build greater awareness of career opportunities and across the sector, offering strong transition programmes from school to [Modern Apprenticeships](#), employment and further education and training.

SDS will also enhance sectoral career awareness through its digital platform, [My World of Work](#). This will build on developments across the 4 nations, incorporating case studies and sector-based science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activity.

The UK government and the devolved governments believe the SDG will play a key role as a group through which the sector can communicate updates to existing careers guidance in the skills system, or indeed, any other career tools in the skills space. However, we do not feel that

there is a need for a new, additional tool specific to shipbuilding.

Network of excellence

Recommendation 4: We need government to convene a network of excellence for shipbuilding training providers to help shipbuilding employers access the skills they need.

The taskforce's report highlighted the challenges that SMEs often face navigating the apprenticeships system and accessing high-quality training for staff. The taskforce recommended establishing a network of excellence for shipbuilding training providers to help address this. We recognise these challenges and are taking a whole-system approach to address them, across the 4 nations.

England

The Department for Education (DfE) is focused on supporting small employers across all sectors, including shipbuilding, to develop their apprenticeships programmes. The DfE has a programme underway to develop options to reduce barriers and continues to respond to employer feedback on how we can reduce burdens on businesses and better meet the needs of small employers.

Recent simplification measures include cutting by a third the number of steps needed to register to take on an apprentice. The DfE and IfATE are also making sure that the right apprenticeship standards are available to meet the needs of smaller employers across a range of sectors. In 2023, IfATE reviewed the content of 100 priority standards, so they reflect technological developments and up-to-date technical skills. The DfE has also introduced a more proactive and timely approach to provide accountability, based on a wider range of quality indicators including employer and apprentice feedback, to drive up quality of provision.

[Institutes of Technology \(IoTs\)](#) are a collaborative model involving partnerships of existing further and higher education institutions collaborating with employers. They deliver higher-level technical education such as Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, Higher Technical Qualifications, CPD and modular courses, in STEM subjects with a clear route to high skilled employment in priority sectors across England.

The structure of the IoT Network is a benefit for employers, particularly SMEs, with a single point of contact at network level to represent 21 IoTs which in turn represent 77 of the nation's colleges (over half), 35 universities and over 100 employer partners. This is a key example of how IoTs can already support SMEs to navigate the skills system and access high quality training.

Northern Ireland

Information for employers on how apprenticeships are supported in Northern Ireland, including how the funding model works and how to advertise opportunities, can be found under 'Apprenticeships' on [NIdirect](#) and [NIBusinessInfo.co.uk](#). Twice yearly advertising campaigns and an annual NI Apprenticeship Week in February are also used to promote apprenticeships to

employers.

The [Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Sectoral Partnership](#) offers an avenue for SMEs in the sector to engage with the apprenticeship ecosystem in Northern Ireland.

DfE in Northern Ireland also liaises with the local authority-led Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) on apprenticeship-related issues. LMPs include training providers and local employers of all sizes.

Wales

Welsh SMEs can access information and advice on recruitment and training support via the [Business Wales Skills Gateway](#). The site gives information on skills and training events, support schemes, workforce planning and skills development.

Strategically significant companies in Wales will receive support via Welsh government Relationship Managers who undertake a business support diagnostic and signpost to relevant organisations and individuals. In addition, small and micro businesses are able to receive general business advice and guidance from contracted advisors which include training needs.

All companies in Wales can access the [Flexible Skills Programme](#) which provides funding of up to 50% of eligible training costs to employers that wish to upskill or reskill their staff. It is intended that any approved training should help address existing skills gaps. Training is usually of a technical nature but can also address leadership and management issues within a business. Companies of any size, from any sector and any part of Wales may apply.

The Welsh government offers skills funding support to individuals in employment, with a strong focus on priority sectors and business areas, including engineering and manufacturing, digital and net zero and green skills. Access to [Personal Learning Accounts](#) is via a pre-approved list of training courses which are fully funded and delivered by further education colleges in Wales. They allow individuals to study on a part-time basis, around existing responsibilities. They are available to anyone aged over 19, in employment (earning under £30,596 a year) and living in Wales. There is no earning cap on approved courses in digital or green skills.

Scotland

Scotland has a strong tradition of skills development in the shipbuilding sector, from craft level apprenticeships through to doctorate programmes at universities. The work of the taskforce has further stimulated awareness and activity, both within the sector and with supporting partners in the public and private sectors. Increased future order books have brought greater confidence to workforce planning projections, stimulating investment in skills development, but also increasing competition for labour and skills, which can have a disproportionate impact on SMEs as wages and staff turnover increase.

Scotland's industrial base is primarily made up of SMEs and micro businesses, so the skills system is geared to support engagement and participation in apprenticeships and upskilling. SDS will work with the 2 significant manufacturing clusters on the Rivers Clyde and Forth, and with industry bodies like [Scottish Engineering](#) and the three Scottish Enterprise Agencies ([South of Scotland Enterprise](#), [Highlands and Islands Enterprise](#), [Scottish Enterprise](#)) to ensure comprehensive reach and coverage to connect to regional yards and align to growth in the offshore renewables sector. Account management teams will offer support with workforce planning and engagement with national and regional skills programmes.

WorldSkills UK is also working on a UK-wide basis to improve quality in technical education provision. Drawing on international benchmarking and best practice, the [WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence](#) is a professional development programme which raises standards for educators in the technical education and apprenticeships sector. The free-to-access programme supports educators in UK institutions to teach to excellence rather than competence. It equips educators with knowledge and skills to embed international learning in their practice, reaching learners as a result. It provides an opportunity to drive systematic change in key vocational areas, with a clear focus on high quality provision. The programme can support learners with improved learning experiences and lead to a better skilled and motivated workforce that is more able to meet employer needs.

In addition to these initiatives, in February 2023 UCAS announced the intention to create a common application process for apprenticeships as part of a journey toward parity between the different pathways to, and through, higher education. The vision for the UCAS apprenticeship application service is to create a simple 'one-click-to-apply' experience. This will provide an easy to navigate common application process for all levels of apprenticeship vacancies, connecting individuals with employers, and streamlining the experience. The UCAS apprenticeships application service has the potential to make a significant contribution to the apprenticeship ecosystem by increasing the quantity and improving quality of applications, increasing accessibility, improving efficiency, and helping to create a more skilled and diverse workforce.

Given this suite of support across all 4 nations, there is a risk that introducing additional measures aimed at shipbuilding alone could add to challenges the taskforce identified in terms of complexity in the skills system and lack of awareness of government initiatives, especially among SMEs. We will support the sector to understand and benefit from these existing measures, through the partnership of the SDG.

British Marine Academy

Recommendation 5: We need government to provide bespoke bootcamp-style investment to support boatbuilding on the south coast of England.

The taskforce's report included a proposal for a boatbuilding training programme, called British Marine Academy, to be piloted on the south coast of England. We believe that the DfE's [England Skills Bootcamps programme](#) offers an accessible route to deliver this course. Skills Bootcamps are primarily aimed at delivering flexible training at levels 3-5 and are co-designed with employers to respond to skills shortages, both at local and national levels. These give learners the opportunity to build up sector-specific skills with an offer of a job interview with an employer on completion. Skills Bootcamps are popular with learners and employers. Learners value the opportunity to train and develop new skills and knowledge, and employers also find that Skills Bootcamps [help to increase the diversity of their organisation](#). It is important to note that Skills Bootcamps must respond to a clearly evidenced skills shortage, and only work where there are existing vacancies.

The Solent region, where the taskforce proposes piloting this programme, has local Skills

Bootcamp grant funding, through the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), that can support regional economic priorities like boatbuilding. We have offered support and advice to the taskforce's proposed delivery partners on how to adapt the proposal for the British Marine Academy to fit with the Skills Bootcamp model and will continue to do so as needed.

Future proofing

Recommendation 6: We need government to make systems that allow for more flexible and modular learning, to more rapidly respond to the needs of employers.

The taskforce stressed the impact that technological change will have on future skills requirements, and the risk that skills systems will not be agile enough to respond quickly. Across all 4 nations, enabling training to keep pace with technology must be a collaborative effort. The UK government and training providers rely on industry to take a proactive approach to updating provision and offering skilled and knowledgeable staff to train others.

The taskforce called on governments to make systems that allow for increasingly flexible, modular learning, so training can be more responsive to employer need and technology change. The UK government and the devolved governments recognise this challenge and are working to meet it.

England

We are delivering reforms to increase the profile, prestige, and uptake of higher technical education. Central to our reforms is the introduction of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). HTQs are current (and new) level 4 and 5 qualifications approved and quality marked by IfATE as providing the skills employers need. HTQs align to the same occupational standards that underpin apprenticeships and allow learners to enter their chosen profession or progress on to higher education. HTQs are well positioned to support flexible learning. Qualifications at this level are often broken down into credit-bearing modules and with the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), HTQs will be the first qualifications eligible for modular funding.

The LLE will be delivered from academic year 2025 to 2026, providing individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of 4 years of post-18 education to use over their working lives (£37,000 in today's terms). It will be available for full years of study at higher technical and degree levels, as well as, for the first time, modules of high-value courses, regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or universities. Under this flexible skills system, people will be able to space out their studies and learn at a pace that is right for them, including choosing to build up their qualifications over time, within both further education and higher education providers. They will have a real choice in how and when they study to acquire new life-changing skills, and the model can be used to enable the upskilling and reskilling at any age or career stage that technology change will necessitate.

Northern Ireland

The [Sectoral Partnerships](#) approach in Northern Ireland ensures that employers are deeply

involved in the design of vocational pathways, from Level 2 Traineeships through to Higher Level Apprenticeships. This includes horizon scanning to ensure that apprenticeship frameworks are kept under review to ensure they are ready to meet the future needs of industry.

The Essential Skills review was initiated in 2021 to ensure that qualifications remained relevant and retained currency. As part of the review the curriculum for Essential Skills Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was refreshed. The new [Essential Skills Digital ICT curriculum](#) was published in December 2023. This new qualification will be available for first delivery in September 2024.

Wales

In 2021, the Welsh government established [a strategic vision for the post-compulsory education sector](#). Essential to the realisation of the vision was the establishment of a new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) which will have extensive funding, planning and regulatory powers, enabling it to improve quality, efficiency, and efficacy across the post-16 sector. It will have the interests of learners at its heart and work collaboratively across to improve individual and national outcomes. CTER will drive economic growth and prosperity and will give its citizens the skills and education to exploit and benefit from an increasingly knowledge-based economy.

The Welsh government acknowledges there is a need to look into how we synergise education, skills and economic policies and strategies across the nation and has made a commitment to promote parity of esteem between vocational and academic education routes. It is recognised that more needs to be done to address the skills gap.

Officials are working with industry and stakeholders to create clearer education and career pathways into higher and degree apprenticeships in key priority sectors, such as the advanced engineering and digital sectors. By working in partnership with the industries of the future, the aim is to create clear pathways that will allow apprentices to progress from level 2 to level 6.

The Welsh government is committed to a regional approach with an ambition to stimulate demand for employment and skills by providing the flexibility to develop responses based upon local and regional need. In this context, Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) advise the Welsh government on the strategic direction of travel for skills and make recommendations on areas of growth or decline, based on robust evidence and strong engagement with employers and regional stakeholders.

Scotland

Enterprise and skills agencies in Scotland are committed to supporting employers to adopt advanced manufacturing processes through the integration of new technologies and the development of their workforce.

The [Making Scotland's Future programme](#) supports the adoption of advanced manufacturing. It will assist employers of all sizes to explore and identify the development opportunities that are right for them and the future direction of their markets and customer requirements.

National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS) is leading a Skills Foresighting exercise for shipbuilding that was initiated by the taskforce. NMIS will be a key delivery partner, supporting advanced skills provision for the sector through its Manufacturing Skills Academy. It will link to

existing engineering skills providers across private training organisations, further education colleges, and universities.

Next steps

The UK and devolved governments commend the taskforce for its report and welcome its recommendations. The UK government, in partnership with the Scottish government, Welsh government and Northern Ireland Executive, will continue working with the shipbuilding sector on skills.

Work to establish the SDG has already begun. As active participants in that group, representatives of all 4 UK nations will work collaboratively with the shipbuilding sector, supporting its employers to understand and benefit from skills infrastructure and collaborate with educators to continue nurturing the skills pipeline.

Through the SDG, government will work collaboratively with the sector towards the vision for the future that the taskforce set out in its report: for a collaborative shipbuilding sector, that is better understood by the public, which offers a range of opportunities to train and progress through the skills system, and ensures that we have a pipeline of talent for the industry which is at the forefront of technological and environmental innovation.

The UKSST report could not have come at a better time as we look to meet the challenges and ambitions for the sector. The department welcomes the recommendations made in the report and looks forward to working with the sector, through the SDG to meet this bold ambition.

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