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Policy paper

Methodology for establishing the pathways to priority occupations measure

Published 25 June 2026

This was published under the 2024 to 2026 Starmer Labour government

Applies to England

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Methodology for establishing the

pathways to priority occupations measure

Establishing the methodology for our measure starts with mapping the pathways most likely to lead people into the 'priority occupations' identified by Skills England^{[footnote 1](#)} in conjunction with sector-owning government departments.

Skills England's modelling suggests that employment demand in priority occupations across the Industrial Strategy priority sectors, construction, and health and social care is expected to increase by 1.8 million by 2035, from 7.6 million in 2025 to 9.4 million in 2030, an increase of 24%. Non-priority occupations in these sectors are expected to grow by 14%.

For building our measure, we identified 2 types of pathways to priority occupations:

(1) pathways aligned to occupational standards

(2) pathways not mapped to occupational standards

For (1) we include all T Level occupational specialisms which map to one or more of the priority occupations, based on their occupational standards. For apprenticeships, we use the same approach but have applied judgement where the mapping did not reflect the intent (given multiple apprenticeships can map to a priority occupation); and/or where, due to wider Growth and Skills levy reforms, funding has been removed or restricted. We expect to include V Levels in our methodology as they are launched fully from 2030.

For (2) we take a different approach - for level 4 and above HE or FE and level 2 and level 3 classroom-based FE, we include subjects that have a high relative progression rate to priority occupations based on historical labour market data. More information is given in [the technical details section](#).

For skills bootcamps, the data we have available is not mature enough for a similar approach. We have therefore made a qualitative assessment on skills bootcamps alignment to priority sectors based on the area of focus.

Where pathways tend to lead to further study - rather than being a direct route through to the labour market - we have chosen not to include these pathways at this stage. This applies to:

- GCSEs

- level 1 pathways
- A levels

We will consider options for including A levels in the future.

Limitations to our methodology

The methodology focuses on the most likely pathways into occupations in high growth sectors, health and construction, where we know we need to grow the future workforce.

This measure does not judge the value or importance of different qualifications, instead it measures how strongly particular pathways convert into a defined set of priority occupations in priority sectors.

The measure focuses on pathways with the clearest links to priority occupations. It does not capture all valid routes into work. This includes limitations in the [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings \(ASHE\)](#) and [Longitudinal Education Outcomes \(LEO\)](#) data used for the assessment of priority subjects.

In particular, while the earnings data in LEO includes self-employed, it does not capture their industry or occupation. As a result, pathways from education into self-employment are not represented in this metric, which may be relevant for sectors with higher levels of self-employment. It should, therefore, be used as one source of evidence.

We recognise that while a backward-looking measure on progression into priority occupations is a strong indicator of future career outcomes, it is not a definitive predictor. We will continue to refine our analysis in partnership with Skills England, using responsive data and insights to reflect evolving evidence and trends.

Establishing a baseline for the pathways to priority occupations measure

Applying this methodology, we are able to establish a baseline for our new measure. Based on applying the methodology for our 'pathways to priority occupations' measure to the 2023 to 2024 cohort, we established a baseline of 616,000 starts on a pathway to a priority occupation – or 33% of all starts. This includes:

- academic year starts for:

- level 4 and above HE or FE
 - full FE level 2 or 3
 - apprenticeships
 - T Levels
-
- financial year starts for skills bootcamps

Proportion of starts in priority pathways by provision type, 2023 to 2024

Pathway	Percentage
Level 4 and above	32%
Full level 2 or 3	19%
Apprenticeships	45%
T-levels	60%
Skills bootcamp	70%
Total	33%

Source: DfE estimates based on Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and higher level learners data for England

The in-scope pathways for this measure will be updated on an annual basis. We will:

- react to updated Skills England priority occupations analysis
- monitor closely how updates affect our baseline
- explain any changes in future publications

Technical details for building the pathways to priority occupations measure

Pathways aligned to occupational standards

Skills England collaborates closely with employers to develop and approve high-quality occupational standards, apprenticeships, and technical qualifications. These elements form a coherent skills system that ensures training aligns with real workforce needs. The occupational maps illustrate how each component connects, creating clear pathways for learners and employers alike.

We have used these occupational maps to identify which apprenticeships standards and T level occupational specialisms link to the priority occupations. We recognise there are limitations in this mapping approach, including for more specialised standards and those that have a weaker link to a single occupation. A further qualitative assessment has been undertaken to refine the final list of apprenticeships and T level occupational specialisms to take into account these nuances.

We will review the priority courses as new qualifications launch, such as:

- apprenticeships standards
- foundation apprenticeships
- T Levels
- V Levels

We will review the list as future policy and priority decisions are made that impact on existing provision of qualifications.

For example, foundation apprenticeships began being introduced in the academic year 2025 to 2026. The initial 7 foundation apprenticeships were based on industrial strategy growth area needs. Therefore the initial 7 foundation apprenticeships are to be included as priority courses in the measure when starts data is available.

[Lists of priority pathway apprenticeships and T levels occupational specialisms](#) are available and will be reviewed regularly.

Pathways not mapped to occupational standards

Skills England have developed a model called the education leavers model of

occupations (ELMO) to understand the movement into occupations for learners after completing their post-16 education or training. This model was built using LEO data linked with the ASHE, which when combined, includes information on the occupation or employment after training for a 1% sample of the education leavers population.

The model is built on historical data covering employment in years 2015 to 2024 (excluding 2022) and ages 21 to 30. The model identifies education pathways based on the highest level qualification attained by learners prior to entering occupations. This approach is used to identify the main qualification across a learner's education history.

Using ELMO, we can see the types of occupations that people with similar qualifications have typically entered in the past. The model produces a set of progression rates showing how likely it is that someone from each education pathway will go into each type of occupation, based on this historical data. We have used this to identify the subjects that have the highest progression rates into the priority occupations.

Approach for level 4 and above HE and FE progression rate threshold

The list of level 4 and above subjects designated a priority is driven by the historic proportion of a subject's recent leavers who work in a priority occupation. When modelling the percentage of recent leavers in priority occupations, 'recent leavers' means they're in a priority occupation 1 year after completing their qualification.



The subjects designated a priority are those with at least 60% of leavers going on to work in a priority occupation.

Drawing the threshold here means there is a relatively significant gap between the priority and non-priority subjects in this measure (4 percentage points between the priority subject with the lowest rate of progression and the non-priority subject with the highest rate of progression). It also means that around a third of HE provision is designated a priority subject, which allows for meaningful prioritisation of those subjects, while still including the most important pathways to priority occupations.

Limitations

- The methodology is based only on level 6 HE data (undergraduate first degrees).

Data on levels 4, 5 and 7 and above are not used since sample size constraints would result in less robust analysis. However, analysis of these data (notwithstanding the sample size limitations) confirm that they align closely with the level 6 results.

- The methodology is implemented at a CAH 2 level (which splits HE into 35 subject areas) to ensure sufficiently high volumes in each subject for robust analysis. This does mean that the approach’s granularity is limited and does not distinguish between CAH 3 level subjects within the same CAH 2 level group that may have varying outcomes.

Priority level 4 and above HE subjects for the Industrial Strategy

These are the level 4 and above priority HE subjects for the Industrial Strategy, construction, and health and social care^{[footnote 2\]](#)}.

HE Subject (CAH2)	Percentage of recent leavers in priority occupations (%)
Medicine and Dentistry	96
Nursing and Midwifery	95
Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy	80
Architecture, Building and Planning	78
Computing	76
Allied Health	74
Engineering	74
Medical Sciences	72
Physics and Astronomy	72
Economics	68
Chemistry	65
Mathematical Sciences	60

Priority level 4 and 5 FE subjects for the Industrial Strategy

Levels 4 and 5 qualifications are also delivered by FE providers and so equivalent FE subjects have been mapped from the priority level 4 and above HE subjects for the Industrial Strategy^{[\[footnote 3\]](#)}.

HE subject (CAH2 code description)	FE subject (sector subject area tier 2 description)
Medicine and Dentistry	Medicine and Dentistry
Allied Health	Nursing and Subjects and Vocations Allied to Medicine
Mathematical Sciences	Mathematics and Statistics
Engineering	Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
Engineering	Engineering
Engineering	Manufacturing Technologies
Engineering	Transportation Operations and Maintenance
Architecture, Building and Planning	Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
Architecture, Building and Planning	Architecture
Architecture, Building and Planning	Building and Construction
Architecture, Building and Planning	Urban, Rural and Regional Planning
Computing	Information and Communication Technology
Computing	ICT Practitioners
Computing	ICT for Users



Source: Office for Students (OfS)

Approach for level 2 and 3 FE progression rate threshold

Similar to the level 4 and above HE and FE lists, the list of level 2 and 3 FE subjects designated a priority is driven by the historic proportion of a subject’s recent leavers progressing into priority occupations.

FE subjects are classified as priority where there is at least 40% of recent leavers going into priority occupations, and where there is a clear alignment to a priority sector, including:

- accounting and finance
- engineering
- transportation operations and maintenance

We are including building and construction as this subject area is just under the 40% threshold and there is strong policy alignment to the government’s commitment to build 1.5 million homes^{[\[footnote 4\]](#)}.

List of priority level 2 and level 3 FE subjects for Industrial Strategy, construction, and health and social care

Sector subject area	Percentage of recent learners in priority occupations (%)
Accounting and Finance	58
Engineering	44
Transportation Operations and Maintenance	43
Building and Construction	38

Source: Analysis of Education Leavers Model of Occupations (ELMO)

Limitations

- The methodology is implemented at sector subject area (SSA) tier 2 which splits FE into 50 subject areas to ensure sufficiently high volumes in each subject for robust analysis. Small cohorts have been excluded from this analysis.
- The ELMO cohort of education leavers includes leavers from [further education outcomes](#) who were in sustained employment only (not sustained learning) in the 2022 to 2023 tax year and achieved their qualifications in the 2021 to 2022 academic year. These are limited to those aged 16 and above with a full level 2, 3, 4 or higher level qualification.
- Pathways from education into self-employment are not represented in this metric due to limitations in the ASHE-LEO data used for the assessment of priority subjects, which may impact sectors with higher levels of self-employment.

Approach to skills bootcamps

We are making a qualitative assessment of skills bootcamps alignment to Industrial Strategy priority sectors, construction, and health and social care.

This means that we are including in the measure starts in bootcamps in the following sectors (and their priority sector alignment),

Priority sectors for skills bootcamps

Sector (Skills Bootcamp)	Priority sector
Arts, Media and Publishing	Creative Industries
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	Housebuilding
Digital Technology	Digital and Technology, Financial Services
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	Manufacturing, Defence, Clean Energy

1. Priority occupations for each priority sector were identified by Skills England using analysis and projections most relevant to that sector. [Assessment of priority skills to 2030 - GOV.UK](#) provides the full methodology. ↵
2. HE subject classification follows [CAH2](#) ↵
3. We have used the subject code mappings used in the Construction of student outcome and experience data indicators for use in OfS regulation. Available here: [subject-code-mappings-for-student-outcome-and-experience-indicators-2025.xlsx](#) ↵
4. [Government unleashes next generation of construction workers to build 1.5m homes](#) ↵

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