



This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document, © BERA 2025 and is licensed under Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 license:

**Allison, Jordan ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8513-4646> (2025) 'Skills England' and the future of UK apprenticeships: A more agile skills system? British Educational Research Association blog.**

Official URL: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/skills-england-and-the-future-of-uk-apprenticeships-a-more-agile-skills-system>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/14919>

#### **Disclaimer**

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

## **‘Skills England’ and the Future of UK Apprenticeships: A More Agile Skills System?**

*Jordan Allison, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science, School of Business, Computing and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire*

In October 2024, the Skills Minister introduced a new bill to the House of Lords to reform the skills system for apprenticeships. Since 2017, apprenticeships were developed and regulated by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) which is an employer led organisation funded on behalf of the UK government. IfATE works with employers to identify skills gaps and then develop occupational standards. However, the [bill](#) intends to abolish IfATE and transfer its functions to the Secretary of State (2024) in an attempt to unite stakeholders in a single approach to help support nationwide growth. This blog post will consider the potential implications of this policy reform and whether it will result in a more agile skills system.

### A new Policy Vehicle for the England Skills System

In July 2024, the Prime Minister and Education Secretary [announced the new policy vehicle for the England Skills System, ‘Skills England’](#), to address what has been described as a ‘fragmented’ and ‘broken’ skills system (GOV.UK, 2024a). Skills England will be situated in shadow form within the Department for Education and have a wider remit than IfATE in developing a single picture of skills needs by working with industry, unions, committees, and local and regional government (IfATE, 2024).

### Towards Greater Government Control

While seemingly logical and considered, the change brings potentially larger implications on the skills system. Currently, IfATE is an executive non-departmental public body which operates on behalf of the government, instead of being part of the government and accountable to Parliament. Hence, Skills England means there will be greater government control on apprenticeship standards and provision, which has been more employer led previously. For example, the Bill states: “The Secretary of State may prepare an apprenticeship assessment plan if satisfied that it would be more appropriate for the plan to be prepared by the Secretary of State than by a group of persons”. While this could be deemed as a more agile skills system, allowing greater speed in establishing apprenticeship standards to be created for national skills gaps, these instances would bypass employer led panels.

### Apprenticeship Levy Reform

This comes amidst an apprenticeship levy reform which will fund shorter apprenticeships but require more funding for businesses to fund level 7 apprenticeships equivalent to a master’s degree (GOV.UK, 2024b). The change largely indicates a shift to focus more on investing on younger workers as opposed to upskilling the existing or more mature workforce. However, the level 7 apprenticeships naturally invite those who already have prior academic qualifications or professional experience (Cook, Sims, Brindley and Poole, 2024), and this is potentially a good thing.

The first Skills England report indicates UK digital and computing occupations are facing significant skills shortages (Department for Education, 2024), where over two thirds of UK businesses are not confident they will be able access the digital skills required over the next 3 to 5 years. Hence, upskilling existing employees who already have a degree to change career may be an attractive value proposition for businesses, but the levy change may diminish this.

#### A required change, or perception of progress?

A shorter-term problem with the move to Skills England is that apprenticeships or qualifications currently under approval may face disruption, with employers and training providers confused about the current policy regime for skills training. In any case, there are reports degree apprenticeships have been successful in meeting the government's intention for the programmes, such as improving social mobility and productivity (Nawaz, Edifor, Holland, Cao, and Liu, 2023). Unfortunately, UK policy has been subject to perpetual change with Norris and Adam (2017) contending there is the "tendency to abolish and recreate organisations as a proxy for demonstrating progress". Hence, whether Skills England will present itself as a more agile skills system will take time to prove itself.

#### **References:**

Cook, F., Sims, S., Brindley, J., & Poole, R. (2024). Level 7 degree apprenticeships – a story of challenge, resilience and success. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 29(2), 191–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2024.2330778>

Department for Education (2024) Skills England report: driving growth and widening opportunities. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-england-report-driving-growth-and-widening-opportunities>

GOV.UK (2024a) Skills England to transform opportunities and drive growth. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/skills-england-to-transform-opportunities-and-drive-growth>

GOV.UK (2024b) Prime Minister overhauls apprenticeships to support opportunity. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-overhauls-apprenticeships-to-support-opportunity>

IfATE (2024). Skills England Launches. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/about/skills-england/>

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill (2024). HL Bill 38. London. UK Parliament.

Nawaz, R., Edifor, E.E., Holland, S.R., Cao, Q. and Liu, L.S. (2023). The impact of degree apprenticeships: analysis, insights and policy recommendations.

Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 372-386.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/TG-07-2022-0105>

Norris, E. and Adam, R., (2017). All change: why Britain is so prone to policy reinvention and what can be done about it. London: Institute for Government

**Biography:**

Dr Jordan Allison is a Senior Lecturer in Computer Science within the School of Business, Computing and Social Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire, where he teaches on a range of cyber security modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Jordan is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA), a Professional Member of the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM), and a Professional Member of the British Computer Society (MBCS), the Chartered Institute for IT. His research primarily focuses on computing education pedagogy, curriculum design, and teacher development, with an emphasis on qualitative research.



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jordanrallison/>