

Developing a strong skills agenda in the UK: key Government asks

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With skills shortages remaining rife as the Budget nears – with recent data from a range of leading business groups revealing that 65% of firms are struggling to fill roles – the Chancellor needs to demonstrate a clear path to a stronger, flexible, labour market. That's according to the Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo), the trade association for the professional recruitment sector.

In order to support the creation of a globally competitive skills environment, APSCo has argued that three key actions are needed:

- A national skills strategy which recognises regional hubs: A UK-wide strategy that plays on regional strengths through investing in hubs such as Newcastle and Sheffield where tech and niche scientific jobs are in demand should be a priority.
- Apprenticeship Levy reforms: The Levy needs to be used for shorter, more flexible modular training for not only 18–24-year-olds, but also 'lane changers' and older workers. A tailored approach that targets regions suffering from labour shortages and enables independent professionals and those from the self-employed workforce to fund their skills training by transfer of levy funds is also needed.
- Flexible visas: The UK needs to be able to attract highly skilled international talent to bolster the economy. In order to achieve this, the Government needs to put in place the right regulatory environment, visa routes and recruitment environment to allow employers to draw talent from across the world and expand globally.

Tania Bowers, Global Public Policy Director at APSCo comments:

"Skills shortages remain a real challenge for the country's employers, particularly in highly regulated and highly skilled remits such as healthcare, technology and digital. There have been initiatives to drive new partnerships with business and industry such as T Levels, but more support for employers on a longer-term basis is needed. Incentivising employers that participate in long-term skills development will support a future-focused strategy, but this does also need to recognise the value of regional hubs and ensure funding and training is distributed appropriately across the UK.

"The Apprenticeship Levy is a resource which APSCo and its members have found is largely underutilised. Reforming this to be more appropriate in the modern working landscape will help strengthen skills development. While developing skills is a necessity, access to the highly skilled, flexible workforce across the globe is also critical if the country is to make Brexit a success. APSCo highlighted the need for a clear skills agenda in its Budget submission and we hope that this is heeded by officials and translates into positive action for the UK's labour market."

Ends

Tania and other APSCo representatives are available for interview ahead of, during and after the Budget.

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About APSCo

The Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) is the trade association for the professional recruitment market. APSCo Global comprises APSCo Asia, APSCo Australia, APSCo Deutschland and APSCo United Kingdom as well as APSCo OutSource, the trade body for the RPO and MSP sectors.

Find out more: www.apsco.org