

CIHT response to the Skills for Work consultation

Section 1: Getting people into skilled jobs and careers

Question 17. How well do occupational standards describe the skills, knowledge and behaviours people need for skilled jobs? What changes would you make?

CIHT considers occupational standards to provide an essential foundation for describing the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for skilled employment.

The employer-led approach is particularly important in a technical sector such as highways and transportation, where occupational competence requires a combination of technical knowledge, practical application, professional judgement and behaviours.

However, occupational standards need to reflect the breadth of skills required across modern highways and transportation roles. In addition to occupation-specific technical skills, standards should recognise transferable skills including communication, collaboration, problem solving, stakeholder engagement, project and risk management, public sector governance, digital literacy, data analysis, sustainability and professional ethics.

This is particularly important as roles increasingly cross traditional professional boundaries. For example, highways and transport professionals may need to work across engineering, planning, environmental management, data, technology and policy.

CIHT recommends that occupational standards:

- continue to be developed and reviewed with meaningful input from employers, professional bodies and practitioners;
- distinguish clearly between essential occupational competence and skills that can be developed subsequently through continuing professional development and work/project experiences;
- recognise transferable skills alongside technical knowledge;
- incorporate digital, data, sustainability and climate-related competencies where these are relevant to the occupation;
- reflect the importance of professional ethics, risk mitigation, public safety and responsibility; and
- provide clearer links to professional development and career progression routes.

Standards should also be sufficiently accessible to prospective entrants. They should help a young person, careers adviser or employer understand not only what someone must know to become competent, but also what a career in that occupation involves, how to enter the profession e.g. graduate programme, apprenticeship, and the opportunities for progression.

Skills England's current definition of occupational standards already recognises knowledge, skills and behaviours and their role beyond apprenticeships, including in T Levels and other technical qualifications. CIHT supports this wider use but considers it important that standards remain understandable and useful to learners and employers as well as to the skills system.

Question 18. How effective are current skills products at helping young people move into skilled employment?

Current skills products provide important routes into skilled employment, particularly apprenticeships and technical education. However, their effectiveness is affected by how easily young people, their employers, parents and careers advisers can access and understand the publicly available information, the range of routes available and how clearly those routes connect to paid employment and actual careers and long-term employment stability .

This is particularly relevant to highways and transportation. The sector offers a wide range of skilled careers, but these are not always visible to young people when they are making decisions about education, training and employment.

Skills England's 2026 analysis shows that apprenticeships can provide strong routes into priority occupations, with almost half of employed recent education leavers from apprenticeships entering priority occupations.¹

CIHT therefore supports a skills system which makes pathways into skilled employment more visible, coherent and navigable, rather than focusing only on individual qualifications.

Question 19. Please explain your answer. What works well and what could be improved?

Effective apprenticeships combine structured learning with meaningful workplace experience. This model is highly relevant to the highways and transportation sector because many occupations require practical experience and the ability to apply technical knowledge in real-world situations.

There are nevertheless opportunities to improve the system.

First, careers information should describe occupations and career pathways, rather than presenting qualifications in isolation. A young person considering a career should be able to understand how an apprenticeship, technical qualification or degree connects to particular roles and how they can progress afterwards.

There should be more investment in skills training, careers education and exposure to skilled occupations at all levels, to encourage skills development from before school leaving age and ensure that young people of all genders, demographics and nationalities understand the range of routes and careers available to them.

Second, there should be greater visibility of less traditional routes into professional careers. Apprenticeships and work-based learning can provide routes into highly skilled occupations, including occupations that have historically been associated primarily with university education.

Third, employers need support to provide high-quality paid and unpaid placements and meaningful work experience and short-term school holiday work experience placements. The

¹ Department for Work and Pensions and Skills England (2026) [Skills England annual skills report 2026](#)

existence of a qualification alone does not guarantee that a learner develops the applied capability employers need.

Finally, there should be clearer opportunities for progression between different parts of the skills system. Individuals should not be disadvantaged if they change route during their career or enter the sector through a different pathway.

Section 2: Meeting employer and workforce needs

Question 20. How well do current occupational standards reflect what employers and the economy needs for growth? Please explain your answer.

Occupational standards provide an important mechanism for aligning skills provision with employer needs, but they need to remain responsive to rapidly changing workforce requirements.

This is particularly important for highways and transportation. CIHT's 2025 Sector Employment Trends survey of 975 professionals highlights recruitment pressures and changing skills requirements in highways and transportation, including those associated with AI and new technologies, net zero and environmental challenges, and continuing professional development.²

The skills required by transport professionals are therefore changing alongside the technologies, environmental requirements and societal expectations affecting the sector.

CIHT supports a continued employer-led approach but recommends that employer input should include professional institutions and representative bodies, particularly where occupations involve regulated or professionally recognised competence.

Standards should also consider future workforce requirements rather than simply describing current job roles. This will require stronger links between occupational standards, labour-market intelligence, workforce planning and horizon-scanning.

Skills England's annual Skills Needs Assessments provide a useful basis for this approach by combining quantitative labour-market evidence with sector knowledge and mapping training pathways to occupations.³

Question 21. How well does the current mix of apprenticeships, technical qualifications and apprenticeship units meet the needs of employers and the economy?

The mix provides valuable routes into employment, but greater coherence between the different products would help employers and learners navigate the system.

Different routes have distinct strengths. Apprenticeships provide substantial workplace learning and are particularly valuable where practical competence is important. Technical qualifications can provide a structured foundation of knowledge and skills, while shorter units can support targeted upskilling and continuing professional development.

² CIHT (2025) [Employment Trends Survey](#)

³ Department for Work and Pensions and Skills England (2026) [Skills Needs Assessments - Introduction](#)

The key issue is ensuring that these products operate as part of a coherent system rather than as separate offers.

For the highways and transportation sector, there is value in having:

- clear entry-level routes;
- progression into higher technical and professional roles;
- opportunities to build specialist and transferable skills throughout a career;
- recognition of prior learning and existing competence; and
- flexible opportunities for experienced workers to update their skills.
- clearer links between qualifications, occupational standards and professional recognition.

This is particularly important given the sector's need to retain existing expertise while developing new capabilities.

Question 22. Please explain your answer, what works and what doesn't work.

The strongest feature of the current system is the opportunity to combine technical learning with workplace experience. Apprenticeships can be particularly effective in this respect.

However, the system can be difficult to navigate. Employers may struggle to determine which product best meets a particular workforce need, while learners may find it difficult to understand how individual qualifications relate to occupations and longer-term career progression.

There is also a risk that an emphasis on individual qualifications can obscure the importance of professional development after initial entry to an occupation.

CIHT recommends greater interoperability between qualifications and occupational standards, clearer information about progression routes, and stronger recognition of prior learning and competence and stronger continuing professional development.

Question 23. How could occupational standards be made simpler without reducing quality or confidence in the system?

Simplification should focus on removing duplication and improving usability rather than reducing the level of competence required.

CIHT would support:

- a consistent structure and terminology across standards;
- removal of duplicated or overlapping knowledge, skills and behaviours;
- clearer separation between core occupational competence and optional/specialist content;
- greater use of plain English;
- clear identification of mandatory versus contextual requirements;

- digital tools that allow users to navigate standards according to their role; and
- periodic reviews to identify duplication between neighbouring occupations.

Simplification should not result in the loss of important technical, safety, environmental or professional requirements.

Professional bodies should play a role in assuring that simplification does not inadvertently remove competencies necessary for professional recognition or public safety / confidence.

Section 3: Supporting local and regional skills needs

Question 24. What role should Strategic Authorities and local partners play in reviewing and shaping occupational standards?

Strategic Authorities and local partners should have a meaningful role in identifying local and regional skills needs and providing evidence to inform occupational standards. Their insight should complement national employer and professional input, helping ensure standards remain responsive to changing workforce needs.

However, occupational competence should remain nationally consistent. Local and regional priorities should primarily inform delivery and contextualisation, rather than creating different standards for the same occupation.

Question 25. How can occupational standards reflect local and regional skills needs while staying consistent nationally?

CIHT supports a model of nationally consistent core standards with locally responsive delivery.

The core knowledge, skills and behaviours required to be competent in an occupation should be consistent nationally. Local and regional needs can then be reflected through:

- optional or specialist modules;
- contextual examples;
- employer projects;
- work placements;
- locally relevant infrastructure and technologies;
- regional skills priorities; and
- additional CPD or short-course provision.

This would allow an individual to achieve a nationally recognised level of occupational competence while also gaining skills relevant to the labour market in which they are working.

Strategic Authorities should therefore contribute labour-market intelligence and employer evidence to standards reviews, while Skills England retains responsibility for ensuring national coherence.

However, it is important to recognise the risks associated with this approach. Excessive regional variation could create confusion for employers, learners and providers and could, over time, undermine consistency in occupational competence.

Section 4: Preparing for future workforce and skills needs

Question 26. How might labour market changes, such as AI, new technologies, automation and net zero, affect occupational standards over the next 5 to 10 years? How could they be updated more quickly to remain relevant?

AI, automation, data-driven technologies and the transition to net zero are likely to change both the tasks undertaken within occupations and the skills required to perform them effectively.

For highways and transportation, this includes areas such as:

- artificial intelligence and automation;
- data analysis and management;
- digital twins and modelling;
- connected and automated mobility;
- new transport technologies;
- carbon literacy and carbon reduction;
- climate adaptation;
- sustainable materials and construction;
- environmental assessment; and
- new approaches to managing transport networks.

Occupational standards should therefore be designed around underlying capabilities, rather than overly specific technologies which may soon become obsolete.

CIHT recommends:

- Regularly reviewing and updating standards to reflect changing skills and technologies.
- Working closely with employers and professional bodies and using labour-market evidence to identify emerging skills needs.
- Making it easier to update specific skills and competencies without requiring a full review of the standard, while strengthening links with continuing professional development.

The UK Standard Skills Classification could support this approach, provided it is regularly updated to reflect changes in occupations, skills and technology.

Question 27. How useful is the Standard Skills Classification (SSC) for the skills system? How could it be improved?

CIHT considers the SSC potentially valuable as a common language for describing skills across occupations, education and training, employers and policymakers.

Its greatest potential is in helping connect information that is currently held in different parts of the skills system. This could help employers articulate their requirements and help individuals understand and communicate their capabilities.

This is particularly relevant to highways and transportation, where skills increasingly cross occupational boundaries.

However, the SSC will only be useful if it is:

- understandable to employers and learners;
- regularly maintained;
- sufficiently granular to distinguish meaningful technical skills;
- capable of representing emerging skills;
- mapped effectively to occupations and qualifications; and
- supported by clear guidance on how organisations should use it.

Skills England's 2026 development report recognises the need for ongoing monitoring of the UK Standard Skills Classification and identifies sources including job vacancy data, workforce forecasting and employer forums as ways of identifying and validating emerging skills.⁴

CIHT would support the establishment of a strong user group for the SSC, including professional bodies and sector representatives, to ensure that its development reflects practical employer and professional needs.

Question 28. Which 3 areas should be the highest priorities?

CIHT's three priorities would be:

1. Occupational standards content and design remain current, accessible and aligned with employer and professional requirements;
2. Opportunities for young people - including careers information and improved pathways into skilled employment.
3. Developing Standard Skills Classification (SSC) as a practical, common framework for describing and connecting skills across occupations, qualifications and professional development.

Section 5: Additional evidence

Question 29. Is there anything else Skills England should consider?

Skills England should consider the importance of professional bodies as a bridge between employers, individuals, education providers and the wider skills system.

⁴ Skills England (2026) [Updating the UK Standard Skills Classification](#)

Professional institutions can provide sector-specific expertise, support professional competence and ethics, contribute to standards development, and provide lifelong learning and professional development. For example, CIHT's Learn platform provides self-paced, on-demand online learning for individuals and organisations across the highways and transportation sector.⁵

CIHT's 2025 Employment Trends Survey identified four pillars for building a skilled highways and transportation workforce: workforce planning within infrastructure strategies; investment in technical education, apprenticeships and lifelong learning; professional competence and ethics; and equality, diversity and inclusion in recruitment, progression and training.⁶

The skills system should also recognise that workforce planning and skills development are closely connected to infrastructure investment. Where government and industry have long-term visibility of infrastructure programmes, employers and education providers are better placed to plan recruitment, training and workforce development.

Finally, Skills England should consider how the system can support people to remain and progress in skilled employment, not only how it supports initial entry. In sectors experiencing workforce shortages, retaining existing expertise and enabling workers to update their skills are as important as recruiting new entrants.

Question 30. Have you included any information in your responses that you would like treated as confidential?

No

Question 31. Please identify the information you would like treated as confidential.

N/A.

⁵ CIHT (2026) [CIHT Learn](#)

⁶ CIHT (2025) [Employment Trends Survey](#)