



# Apprenticeships Under Pressure Why Scotland Must Act

**Employers Insights Research**  
**December 2025**





Apprenticeships matter because they provide opportunity, social mobility and long-term, secure careers. They matter because they safeguard public health and safety. And they matter because Scotland's economic and environmental future depends on a strong, well-trained workforce.





# Why apprenticeships matter

## **Apprenticeships sit at the heart of Scotland's plumbing and heating profession.**

They create skilled, confident and competent tradespeople who protect public health, ensure safe water and heating systems, and deliver the essential work that keeps homes, businesses and communities running. As Scotland moves towards a low-carbon future, these skills are not just valuable – they are indispensable.

Our latest employer research shows the strength of support for the four-year apprenticeship model. Employers consistently tell us that this pathway remains the best way to develop the depth of knowledge, practical competence and safety-critical understanding that the profession demands.

Yet the same employers are also clear that sustaining apprenticeships has become increasingly difficult. Rising costs, widening skills gaps and more complex technical requirements are squeezing businesses at a time when stable, well-funded training routes are needed more than ever.

The findings highlight two truths. First, employers want to train. They are committed to high standards and to giving young people, career changers and new entrants a high-quality start in a respected profession. Second, many are finding it harder to do so. Apprenticeship contribution rates have been frozen for over eight years, reducing the real value of support at a time when wages, materials and supervision demands have all increased. The result is a downward trend in recruitment just as Scotland needs more skilled workers to meet its housing, energy and net-zero ambitions.

Apprenticeships matter because they provide opportunity, social mobility and long-term, secure careers. They matter because they safeguard public health and safety. And they matter because Scotland's economic and environmental future depends on a strong, well-trained workforce.

This insight report provides clear evidence of the pressures employers face – and a compelling case for action. By working together, we can ensure that today's apprentices become tomorrow's skilled professionals and that Scotland has the workforce it needs for the challenges ahead.

**Fiona Hodgson**

Chief Executive  
SNIPEF



# Employer insights About SNIPEF and our apprenticeship research

## About SNIPEF

The Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation (SNIPEF) is the leading representative body for the plumbing and heating profession across Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Its 700 member businesses employ more than 3,000 professional operatives and over 10,000 employees in total, supported by a network of more than 60 supply-chain affiliates.

As the recognised employer voice, SNIPEF advocates for high standards, safe practice and a skilled workforce, while influencing policy and supporting the long-term resilience of the profession.

SNIPEF Training Services is the profession's managing agent for the Scottish plumbing and heating apprenticeship, supporting more than 1,000 apprentices at any one time. Working closely with employers, colleges and awarding bodies, STS ensures high-quality training rooted in competence, safety and industry need. It helps employers recruit, train and retain apprentices, while driving improvements in pathways, delivery and qualification standards.

## Purpose of research

This research was undertaken as the first stage of SNIPEF's apprenticeship campaign, designed to capture the real experiences and views of employers across Scotland's plumbing and heating profession.

At a time when the profession is facing growing skills shortages, rising costs, and the urgent need to deliver low-carbon heating solutions, it is vital that apprenticeships remain accessible, sustainable and aligned with national priorities.

The purpose of this research was to understand the barriers employers face in recruiting and supporting apprentices, as well as to gather insight into the effectiveness of current pathways and training models.

By grounding the campaign in robust employer evidence, we can ensure that our proposals reflect industry reality and strengthen our case to government. The findings will inform advocacy for enhanced funding, flexible and accredited pathways, and wider recognition of apprenticeships as a safety-critical profession underpinning Scotland's future.

# Employer insights

## Survey methodology

### Survey methodology

The research was carried out in September 2025 with SNIPEF members (Research Project One) and employers engaged through SNIPEF Training Services (Research Project Two). It was distributed to a mailing list of about 1,200 contacts and received 188 completed responses, comprising 136 from SNIPEF members and 52 from STS-only employers. Based on the sample size and response rate, the results carry a margin of error of approximately +/-7% at a 95% confidence level, providing a statistically reliable indication of employer perspectives across the plumbing and heating profession in Scotland.

Respondents were asked 23 core questions, combining both quantitative and qualitative formats. Some questions included branching pathways to capture more detailed feedback depending on responses.

The survey explored a wide range of themes, including:

- Current apprenticeship engagement and future intentions
- Costs, funding and financial responsibility
- Experiences with training provision and delivery
- Apprenticeship models and alternative pathways
- Barriers to recruitment and retention
- Perceptions of Scottish Government support
- Views on levy and funding mechanisms

The research also explored whether employers, both members and non-members, would be willing to contribute further by joining a working group and whether they would be prepared to engage with local politicians to help raise awareness of the profession's needs.

In total, over half of respondents (56%) said they would be willing to join a working group or were open to receiving more information, providing a strong base for deeper employer engagement beyond the research itself.



# Employer Insights

## Executive Summary

### Research Project One: SNIPEF Members

The survey of 136 SNIPEF members shows strong engagement: around two-thirds currently employ apprentices (67%), and most have maintained this over five years. This reflects a deep-rooted view that apprenticeships are essential to business health and to the plumbing/heating profession.

Motivations are primarily business-focused ie. training to firm standards, building a skilled pipeline, and supporting growth, while broader sector benefits are acknowledged but secondary.

Support for the four-year model is overwhelming (81% confirm it as the gold standard), reflecting the need for rigour in a safety-critical trade.

Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government support is pronounced (77% rate it poor/very poor).

Costs remain the key barrier, especially for micro firms.

### Research Project Two: STS Employers (Non-Members)

Among 52 STS employers who are not SNIPEF members, engagement is slightly lower, with about two-thirds (65%) currently employing apprentices.

This group is more sceptical about return on investment, about a third indicate it is not worthwhile, and a higher share say they do not plan to recruit in the next three years (42%).

Motivations mirror members' (train to firm standards, build a pipeline, support growth), but cost barriers bite harder, particularly wages, supervision time, and access to funding.

Support for the four-year model remains very strong (81%), alongside greater openness to complementary pathways (college-first and pre-apprenticeships) that shift early costs and improve job-readiness.

Dissatisfaction with Scottish Government support is similarly high (71% rate it poor/very poor), reinforcing the case for simpler, SME-first funding.

# Employer Insights Executive Summary

## Comparative trends

Taken together, the 188 responses (136 members, 52 non-members) present a clear, consistent picture. Both groups regard apprenticeships as essential to the profession, but view the system as financially stretched without stronger, more accessible government support (72% rate current support poor/inadequate).

Across the sample, increased funding is the standout lever to unlock more recruitment (92% selected “Increased funding support”). Both groups overwhelmingly back the four-year apprenticeship model while remaining open to complementary pathways that improve job-readiness (about 80% say four years is appropriate).

There is also tangible appetite to get involved: 56% would join or consider joining a working group (Yes/Maybe), and 87% would engage with politicians.

## Employer sentiment and readiness for change

Across both research groups, there is clear recognition of the value of apprenticeships and broad commitment to maintaining the four-year model. Yet employers also express growing concern about the financial sustainability of training and the consistency of college provision.

While many maintain deep pipelines, others, particularly smaller firms, are signalling fatigue with rising costs, weak government support and the risk of poor retention. Despite these pressures, employers show strong willingness to engage in solutions, with more than half open to joining a working group and nearly nine in ten prepared to support political engagement.

This indicates a profession that is frustrated but energised, and ready to contribute to reforms that secure a more stable and better-supported apprenticeship system.





# **Research Project One:**

## **SNIPEF Members**



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

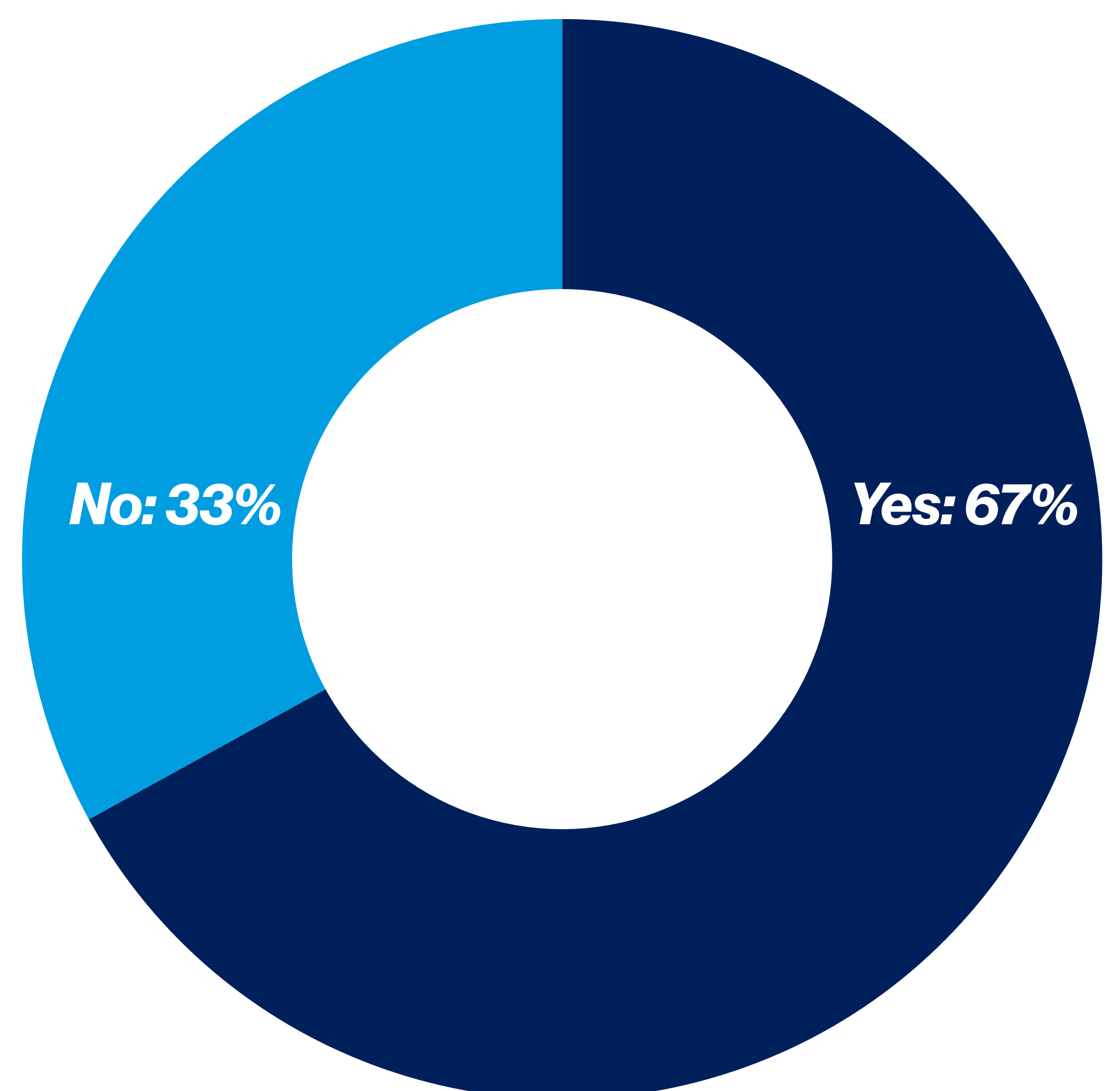
## Question 1: Do you currently employ any plumbing & heating apprentices?

**Among the 136 SNIPEF members who responded, 91 (67%) confirmed that they currently employ apprentices with 45 (33%) saying that they do not.**

It should be noted that members who currently employ apprentices will naturally be more inclined to engage with research of this kind.

However, the one third who answered No provides sufficient robustness to counter any potential bias. This balance gives confidence that the findings are representative of the wider membership and not disproportionately shaped by current apprentice employers.

Notably, the views of members who do and do not currently employ apprentices are broadly aligned when looking ahead, as are those of the STS employer-only group. Across all groups, respondents highlight similar barriers, concerns about government support, and common priorities for sustaining the plumbing and heating profession. This consistency strengthens the survey's credibility and provides a robust evidence base for the campaign.





# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

## Question 2: How many employees does your business employ?

Business size	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
Sole trader	11 (8%)	3 (3%)	8 (18%)
1-5 employees	48 (36%)	21 (24%)	27 (60%)
6-10 employees	21 (16%)	17 (19%)	4 (9%)
11-20 employees	25 (19%)	23 (26%)	2 (4%)
21-50 employees	26 (20%)	23 (26%)	2 (7%)
Over 50 employees	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

The research indicates a clear relationship between business size and apprenticeship employment (Questions one and two). Percentages are calculated by dividing the number of firms employing apprentices by the total number of firms in each size category.

Firms with 6–10 employees (81%), 11–20 employees (92%) and more than 20 employees (88%) are significantly more likely to take on apprentices, while smaller firms and sole traders are far less likely to do so (1–5 employees: 44%; sole traders: 27%). This pattern also reflects the wider structure of the profession, where the majority of plumbing and heating businesses are sole traders or micro-firms. Many of these smallest employers simply do not have the financial capacity, supervisory time or operational resilience to take on an apprentice, even though they recognise the value apprentices bring.

Apprenticeships in the plumbing and heating profession are therefore sustained primarily by medium and larger businesses. Micro-firms and sole traders face proportionally greater barriers, which has implications for how government and the profession design support to widen apprenticeship participation.



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 3: In the LAST 5 years, how many plumbing and heating apprentices have you employed?**

	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
I have not employed an apprentice in the past five years	18%	8%	38%
1-2 apprentices	36%	29%	49%
3-5 apprentices	33%	43%	13%
6-10 apprentices	10%	14%	0%
10+ apprentices	4%	6%	0%

When combined with company size (Question 2), larger firms, particularly those with more than 10 employees, dominate the categories that employed 3–5 or more apprentices, with just over 50% of this group reporting sustained recruitment.

Smaller firms with 1–5 employees and sole traders are most common among those with no or minimal recruitment, making up around 70% of respondents with either none or only 1–2 apprentices in the last five years. The middle group of 6–10 employees shows mixed patterns, with some engaged in regular training but others absent, splitting roughly half and half between active and inactive recruitment.

Overall, it seems that scale plays a decisive role: larger firms have the capacity to sustain apprenticeships, while smaller firms face higher barriers. Unlocking support for micro and small businesses is therefore critical if apprenticeship numbers are to grow more widely across the profession.

Exploring collective approaches, such as larger firms sharing resources with smaller ones or groups of sole traders collaborating to support apprentices, could help distribute costs more fairly and enable wider participation.



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 4: Have you experienced any of the following (multiple options allowed)**

Experience	% of responses
Apprentice left within 1 year of qualifying	42%
Disciplinary issues requiring formal action	34%
None of the options provided	31%
Apprentice left before completing training	29%
Persistent attendance or punctuality problems	29%
Apprentice was poached by another company	24%
Other	2%

The results reveal the practical pressures that accompany this sustained engagement. Larger firms are more likely able to absorb issues such as dropouts or poaching, but for smaller businesses, the impact of losing even one apprentice can be disproportionately damaging, albeit the reasons are fairly evenly spread.

The risks of poor retention or weak performance reinforce the perception that apprenticeships carry high costs and uncertain returns. These experiences explain why a significant minority of employers, particularly smaller ones, indicate in Question 5 (future intentions) that they have no plans to recruit apprentices in the next three years.



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 5: Over the NEXT 3 years, how many plumbing and heating apprentices do you expect to employ?**

	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
1-2 apprentices	27%	29%	24%
3-5 apprentices	10%	14%	2%
More than 5 apprentices	4%	5%	0%
Too early to say	26%	26%	47%
I don't plan to employ an apprentice	33%	25%	27%

Although this question looks to the future, the results suggest that those who currently employ apprentices are more inclined to consider recruiting more in the next three years (48% compared with 26% of non-employers), albeit a quarter of both groups indicate that it is too early to say. However, a worrying trend is that another quarter of both groups indicate they have no intention to recruit any apprentices at all.

When examining this “no intention” group against company size (Question 2), the picture becomes clearer. Over half of this group (53%) are small firms with 1–5 employees, with a further 11% being sole traders. Mid-sized firms of 6–10 and 11–20 employees each account for 13% and 11% respectively, while only 7% of larger firms with more than 20 employees fall into this category.

This indicates that reluctance to recruit apprentices in the future is concentrated among micro-businesses, who face the greatest relative barriers, but is not confined to them alone. Even some larger employers signal no intention to take on apprentices, suggesting that confidence in the system is under pressure across the profession.



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

## Question 6: What age group do you prefer to employ apprentices from?

Age	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
16-19 years	82%	81%	88%
20-24 years	14%	18%	4%
25+ years	3%	2%	8%

The survey results show a clear preference for apprentices aged 16–19, with 82% of respondents selecting this group. This is consistent across both current apprentice employers (81%) and non-employers (88%).

There may be several reasons why this age group dominates. Younger entrants are at the start of their careers and may be easier to train in workplace practices, giving employers the opportunity to build skills and behaviours from the ground up. The cost structure also favours younger apprentices, with lower wage expectations and stronger funding support making them more affordable, especially for smaller firms.

Tradition may be another factor, as apprenticeships have historically been a school-leaver route, producing fully qualified tradespeople by their early twenties.

By contrast, older groups are less popular, which may reflect higher wage expectations, reduced funding support and concerns about lower long-term returns on investment. A minority do see value in older entrants, often in the context of career changers or adults seeking a structured path into the trade.



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 7: What are the main reasons that you choose to recruit apprentices? (Multiple choice allowed)**

Reason	Percentage
To train people in the workplace the way I want	18%
Pipeline for skilled employees for my business	17%
To grow my business	16%
To address current industry skills shortages	11%
Can't find suitable people so this is the best route	8%
I want to give back to the industry which supported me	7%
My last apprentice has completed training, therefore we have a vacancy for a new apprentice	6%
Positive past experience	5%
Receive employment support from SNIPEF Training Services	4%
Supported funding for college training	3%
Low cost (compared to any alternative type of employee)	2%
Other	2%
Good return on investment	1%

For members who employ apprentices, motivations are clear and primarily business-driven. The top reasons are the ability to train people to their own standards (18%), building a skilled pipeline (17%) and supporting business growth (16%), together accounting for more than half of all responses.

Other factors such as addressing industry skills shortages (11%) or giving back to the profession (7%) are recognised but less influential, reflecting the understandable priority employers place on their own workforce needs.

Overall, the results show that motivations are strategic and business-focused, with apprenticeships seen as essential for maintaining standards, securing future skills and supporting long-term business and sector sustainability.



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 8: For those who do not currently employ apprentices, what are the main reasons? (Multiple choices allowed) (45 member sample)**

	Reason	Percentage
	Limited funding support	67%
	Cost in wages too high	65%
	Cost of providing training and supervision in the workplace	47%
	Frustrated that apprentices left soon after qualifying	38%
	Poor past experience with an apprentice	29%
	Not enough work/uncertain workload	16%
	No suitable applicants	13%
	Poor past experience with a college/training centre	11%
	Poor past experience with SNIPEF Training Services	11%
	I find managing apprentices too challenging	9%
	Other	7%

For SNIPEF members who are not currently employing apprentices, the barriers are predominantly financial. Two-thirds cite limited funding support (67%) and nearly as many point to high wage costs (65%), with the cost of workplace training and supervision close behind (47%).

Alongside financial factors, “people” issues are common: 38% say apprentices left soon after qualifying and 29% report poor past experiences with an apprentice. Capacity and pipeline issues also feature, 16% report not enough work/uncertain workload and 13% a lack of suitable applicants, while 9% find managing apprentices too challenging.

Quality concerns are noted too, with about 1 in 9 reporting negative experiences with colleges/training centres (11%) and 1 in 9 with SNIPEF Training Services (11%).

Overall, the decision not to take on apprentices reflects financial risk and resource pressures, rather than any lack of recognition of their value.





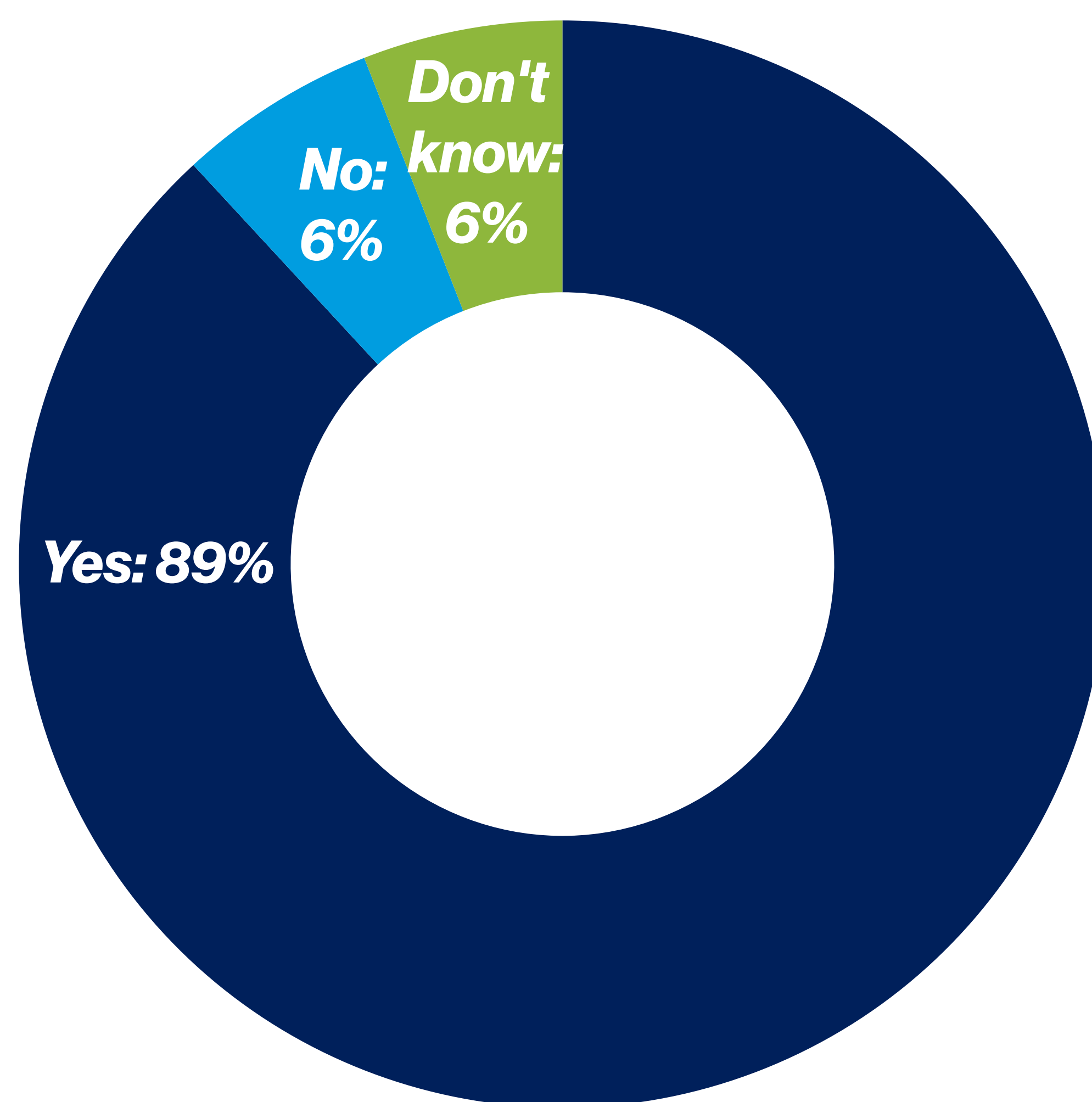
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Our apprentices are training to a standard where their skills and professionalism directly protect public health, water safety and the performance of low-carbon heating systems.



# Experiences with training provision & delivery

**Question 9: Do you currently use SNIPEF Training Services to manage your apprentice/s?** *(of the 91 people who currently employ an apprentice in question one)*



**Question 10: How would you rate your experience of using SNIPEF Training Services?** *(of the 91 people who currently employ an apprentice in question one)*





# Experiences with training provision & delivery

**Question 11: What type of college training programme provision do you believe is most suitable for apprentices?**

Programme provision	Percentage
College programme should remain as it is (block release model)	60%
Apprentices should attend more of the college programme	18%
Apprentices should attend less of the college programme	10%
Other varied responses (eg. pre-apprenticeships, 1 week/month, stricter entry at 16, H&S, etc.)	8%
No response	2%

**Question 12: How would you rate the quality of education and training provided by colleges or training centres?**

Rating out of 5	Percentage of members
<div> <div>★ ★ ★ ★ ★</div> <div>(Excellent)</div> </div>	21%
<div> <div>★ ★ ★ ★</div> <div>(Good)</div> </div>	26%
<div> <div>★ ★ ★</div> <div>(Average)</div> </div>	36%
<div> <div>★ ★</div> <div>(Poor)</div> </div>	11%
<div> <div>★</div> <div>(Very poor)</div> </div>	4%
No response	1%



# Experiences with training provision & delivery

## Commentary

The results for this part of the research show that the majority of respondents who currently have apprentices use SNIPEF Training Services (89%), albeit this could be a bias from SNIPEF releasing the survey.

Satisfaction levels are broadly positive, with 62% rating their experience as good or excellent. However, more than a quarter (26%) describe their experience as average, and 10% rated it poor. This suggests a solid foundation of trust in STS but also highlights opportunities to improve consistency and lift perceptions from “average” to “good. Further work is needed to understand why the service is often rated as only average.

On college provision, 60% support the current block release model. While the four-year model is strongly supported elsewhere in the research, employers are signalling that structural tweaks to delivery could help improve the balance between college and workplace learning.

When asked to rate the quality of education and training provided by colleges and training centres, the mixed feedback mirrors earlier employer concerns about candidate quality and retention. It suggests that while many employers value college provision, others may see inconsistency that undermines confidence.

Overall, these findings show a system that is functioning well but with uneven quality. Employers trust STS and broadly support the college model, but they also see room for improvement.



# Value

## Question 13: In your opinion, do you believe the return on investment from hiring apprentices is worthwhile?

Response	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
Sometimes (depends on the apprentice)	61 (45%)	45 (50%)	16 (36%)
Yes, in the later stages of their apprenticeship	20 (15%)	14 (15%)	6 (14%)
Yes	17 (13%)	14 (15%)	3 (7%)
No	29 (22%)	13 (14%)	16 (36%)
Unsure	8 (6%)	5 (6%)	3 (7%)

The results show that views on return on investment are mixed and often conditional. The largest group of members (45%) said it depends on the apprentice, highlighting that experiences can vary widely depending on individual commitment and quality. About 28% said they do see a clear return, either in the later stages of training (15%) or overall (13%).

However, there is also significant scepticism. 22% said apprenticeships are not worthwhile, a view especially common among non-employers (36%) compared with just 14% of current apprentice employers. This split suggests that direct experience makes employers more confident in the value of apprenticeships, while those without apprentices are more likely to view them as a cost rather than an investment.

The findings link closely with other parts of the research. Employers who identified funding and wage costs as barriers (Q8) or who reported apprentices leaving soon after qualifying (Q4) are also those most likely to say ROI is weak. Conversely, those with a track record of sustained recruitment (Q3) are more likely to see a positive return.

Overall, these insights underline the importance of tackling costs and retention. Employers need confidence that apprenticeships will deliver value consistently, not just in isolated cases, if they are to increase participation.



# Value

## **Question 14: For those who said NO to question 13: Why do you NOT believe the return on investment for hiring an apprentice is worthwhile?**

This was an open text question. The following responses are based on 26 submissions from the 29 members that said NO to question 13.

- 1. Financial burden on employers:** Many employers feel the costs of wages, training, and supervision are too high compared to the value apprentices bring in the early years. Several noted that rising minimum wage rates make older apprentices especially expensive, and the lack of meaningful funding or grants leaves small businesses carrying the full burden.
- 2. Lack of loyalty and retention:** A common frustration is that apprentices leave soon after qualifying, or are “poached” by other firms. Employers feel this means they never see the return on the years of investment in training.
- 3. Time away from work:** Members highlighted that apprentices spend a significant proportion of time in college, leaving employers to cover wages without any productivity. For small firms especially, this was seen as a direct financial loss.
- 4. Quality and motivation concerns:** Several comments pointed to a perception that younger apprentices lack work ethic or commitment. Some employers criticised education quality, citing “dumbed down” qualifications and apprentices disengaging due to too much college time.
- 5. Model and system issues:** A few members questioned whether the current four-year model is fit for purpose, suggesting it has not kept pace with modern technologies such as renewables and new installation methods. Others reported negative experiences with training providers or SNIPEF Training Services when problems arose.



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

## Question 15: Do you believe the current 4-year apprenticeship model is the right time length?

Response	Percentage of members
Yes, 4 years is appropriate	81%
No, it should be shorter	8%
No, it should be longer	5%
Not sure / Don't know	5%
No response	1%

Support for the four-year apprenticeship model is overwhelmingly strong across the membership, with 81% of respondents confirming it as the appropriate length.

Cross-analysis (questions one and two) indicate that this support is consistent among both those who currently employ apprentices and those who do not, though current employers are slightly more likely to endorse the model.

When compared with apprenticeship activity over the past five years, a clear pattern emerges. Employers with sustained experience of taking apprentices are the strongest advocates: those who recruited 3–5 apprentices or more overwhelmingly back the four-year model, with support reaching nearly universal levels among firms that have trained more than ten. By contrast, firms with little or no recent engagement are more mixed, though even in this group, the majority still support the current system.

These findings underline that confidence in the four-year model grows with experience. Employers who have seen apprentices through the full cycle value the time needed to achieve competence and independence in a safety-critical trade.

While a small minority prefer shorter or longer options, the dominant view across the profession is that four years strikes the right balance between rigour, skills development and return on investment.



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

## Question 16: What length of time do you believe would be more appropriate for an apprenticeship?

Response	Count	Percentage of members
No change – keep at 4 years	118	87%
Three years	7	5%
More than four years	6	4%
Two years	2	2%
18 months	2	2%

The results of this question confirm the findings of Q15. The overwhelming majority of members (87%) gave no alternative length, instead affirming that the apprenticeship should remain at four years.

Of the minority who suggested a different duration, 5% favoured three years, often linked to faster-track options for older entrants or those with prior experience. Very few supported a significantly shorter model, with only 2% each suggesting two years or 18 months, and narrative responses made clear that most employers view such options as insufficient for producing competent professionals.

Taken together, these findings show that while there is some openness to flexibility, particularly for adults or career changers, the profession remains firmly anchored to the four-year model as the gold standard.



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

**Question 17: Should other pathways into the plumbing and heating profession be considered beyond the apprenticeship and Experienced Worker Assessment Route?**

Response	Count	Percentage of members
Yes	49	36%
Maybe	48	35%
No	36	27%
No response	3	2%

The results show a profession that is open to flexibility, but with caution. Just over a third of members (36%) believe new pathways should be considered beyond the current four-year apprenticeship and the Experienced Worker Assessment Route, while a similar proportion (35%) answered “maybe.” Only 27% rejected the idea outright.

This near-even split reflects the discussion elsewhere in the survey about the balance between maintaining the four-year gold standard (Q15 and Q16) and exploring complementary options that could reduce costs, improve readiness, and diversify entry routes.

In short, while the four-year apprenticeship remains central, members are signalling that complementary, accredited routes could play a role in broadening access and strengthening the pipeline.



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

**Question 18: Would you support any of the following pathways into the plumbing and heating profession? (choose up to three options)**

Pathway option	Count	Percentage of members
A one year–18 month plumbing and heating college course before a 3-year apprenticeship	61	45%
It should remain as it is (apprenticeship + Experienced Worker Assessment Route)	49	36%
Pre-apprenticeship course content should be formally included in the apprenticeship model	47	35%
Shortened apprenticeship for person with working/industry experience	35	26%
On-site training only (non-college route)	20	15%
Fast track and managed learning programmes	18	13%
Other	4	1%

The results reinforce the findings of Q17 by showing where members' preferences lie when it comes to new or complementary pathways into the profession. The most popular option, chosen by 45%, was a college-first hybrid model, where a one year to 18 month course would precede a shorter three-year apprenticeship. This reflects employer interest in seeing apprentices arrive more "job ready" and with some foundational training already completed.

Close behind, 36% said the system should remain unchanged, showing that a sizeable proportion of members remain firmly committed to the current model. At the same time, 35% supported the inclusion of pre-apprenticeship course content within the apprenticeship framework, another option that strengthens preparation without reducing overall rigour.

The combined picture suggests that members are not calling for the four-year model to be replaced, but are open to complementary, structured pathways that can ease the burden on employers in the early stages. The emphasis on college-first and pre-apprenticeship options aligns with the financial concerns raised elsewhere in the survey (Q8 and Q19), as these routes shift more of the initial cost and training onto colleges or learners, allowing employers to take on apprentices who are better prepared from day one.





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Every apprentice we train is a future professional whose skills, judgement and professionalism will underpin Scotland's housing, infrastructure and net zero ambitions.



# Support, funding & responsibility

**Question 19: What (if any) changes would encourage you to recruit a plumbing and heating apprentice (or more apprentices)? (Multiple Choices allowed)**

Change	Count	Percentage of members
Increased funding support	126	93%
Better access to suitable candidates	39	29%
Improved support from colleges	35	26%
More flexible training delivery	33	24%
Reduced administrative burden	23	17%
Nothing would encourage me to hire an apprentice	2	2%
Other individual comments (each <1%)	6	<1%

The findings from this question are unambiguous. Almost every respondent (93%) selected increased funding support as the single biggest change that would encourage them to recruit apprentices. This mirrors the wider survey evidence which shows that cost, wages, and financial risk are the most significant barriers, and confirms that funding reform is the key to expanding apprenticeship numbers.

Other changes were supported at lower levels but still point to important improvements. 29% of members highlighted the need for better access to suitable candidates (which is something that SNIPEF could do).

Overall, this question provides one of the clearest signals in the survey: if government and partners wish to expand apprenticeship numbers, they must prioritise direct, accessible funding support, while also addressing secondary issues around recruitment, training quality, flexibility, and bureaucracy.



# Support, funding & responsibility

**Question 20: How would you describe the current Scottish Government support for apprenticeship training?**

Response	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
Very poor	70 (52%)	48 (53%)	22 (49%)
Inadequate	34 (25%)	24 (27%)	10 (22%)
Adequate	13 (10%)	7 (8%)	6 (13%)
Very good	3 (2%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)
Don't know	15 (11%)	8 (9%)	7 (16%)

**Question 21: In your opinion, who should bear the main cost of apprentice training?**

Response	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
Shared equally between employer and government	84 (62%)	53 (59%)	31 (69%)
Government	32 (27%)	29 (32%)	8 (18%)
Employers	6 (4%)	3 (3%)	3 (7%)
Apprentice	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Other suggestions (blended models, system changes, one-off comments)	7 (5%)	3 (3%)	3 (7%)



# Support, funding & responsibility

## **Commentary: Q20 & Q21**

The research reveals widespread dissatisfaction with Scottish Government support for apprenticeships. More than three quarters of members rated current support as either very poor (52%) or inadequate (25%), with dissatisfaction consistent across both employers with apprentices and those without, highlighting a profession-wide concern that current policy and funding structures do not match the needs of businesses.

When asked who should bear the main cost of apprentice training, members made clear that they see apprenticeships as a shared responsibility. Nearly two thirds (62%) believe costs should be split equally between government and employers.

Taken together, these findings provide a consistent message. Employers value apprenticeships and are prepared to contribute, but they expect government to play a far greater role in supporting training. This aligns closely with the earlier findings on barriers (Q8) and desired changes (Q19), where funding and financial support were identified as the decisive factor.



# Support, funding & responsibility

**Question 22: Would you support the introduction of a levy (similar to the CITB model) to support apprenticeship training across the plumbing and heating profession?**

Change	Count	Percentage of members
Yes, if it guarantees more consistent funding	41	30%
Yes, if it means everyone contributes, not only those who employ apprentices	24	18%
Not sure/Don't know	32	24%
No, I don't support a levy model	31	23%
Other individual comments (each <1%)	6	4%
No response	1	1%

The survey shows mixed views with 48% expressing conditional support. At the same time, 23% opposed the idea outright, and a further 24% were unsure, indicating uncertainty about how such a scheme would operate in practice.

The CITB levy model, used in the construction sector, requires all employers above a certain size to pay a levy based on their payroll. These pooled funds are then redistributed to support training and apprenticeship provision across the sector. In theory, such a model could provide consistent and predictable funding for plumbing and heating apprenticeships while ensuring that the cost is shared more widely across the sector.

However, members' responses suggest caution. Employers are clearly open to collective solutions, but support is highly conditional. They want assurances that any levy would spread costs fairly, that smaller firms would not be disproportionately burdened, and that the system would deliver tangible improvements in funding and training outcomes. Without those guarantees, scepticism will remain strong.



# Support, funding & responsibility

## **Question 23: Do you have any comments, experiences or suggestions you'd like to share?** *There were 55 comments submitted:*

A recurring theme is the financial burden. Many employers feel wages, supervision costs, and contributions (NI, pensions, minimum wage) make apprentices financially unviable, particularly for small businesses. Several noted that wage structures and annual increases are unsustainable, with some stating they would no longer consider employing apprentices under the current framework.

- 1. Funding arrangements also drew strong criticism.** Employers highlighted the lack of upfront support, inconsistent grants, and the difficulty of funding college time when apprentices are not productive. Many called for full or greater government funding, likening it to student loans or higher education models. Some suggested apprentices themselves should contribute through loans repayable once qualified.
- 2. Retention and loyalty emerged as another major issue.** Employers expressed frustration at apprentices leaving soon after qualifying, or being “poached” by competitors. Suggestions included contracts binding apprentices to remain with their training employer for a fixed period, or reimbursement for companies if apprentices leave.
- 3. Quality and suitability of candidates were another concern.** Employers reported poor attitudes, lack of motivation, and inconsistent college quality. Some believe the system has become outdated and needs reform, including shorter, tailored apprenticeships for adults and the integration of modern technologies such as renewables.

Alongside these frustrations, some positive stories were shared, with employers describing apprentices who had become valuable long-term employees. However, many long-standing supporters of apprenticeships said bureaucracy, costs, and weak candidate quality were undermining their willingness to continue.



# Support, funding & responsibility

## Question 24: Which SNIPEF Local Association do you belong to?

Local Association	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
Glasgow & West of Scotland	44	33	11
Edinburgh & District	29	19	10
Aberdeen & District	11	6	5
Dundee & District	11	7	4
Fife & Kinross	10	5	5
Inverness & Northern District	9	6	3
Banff & Moray	7	5	2
Not sure / Don't know	12	8	4





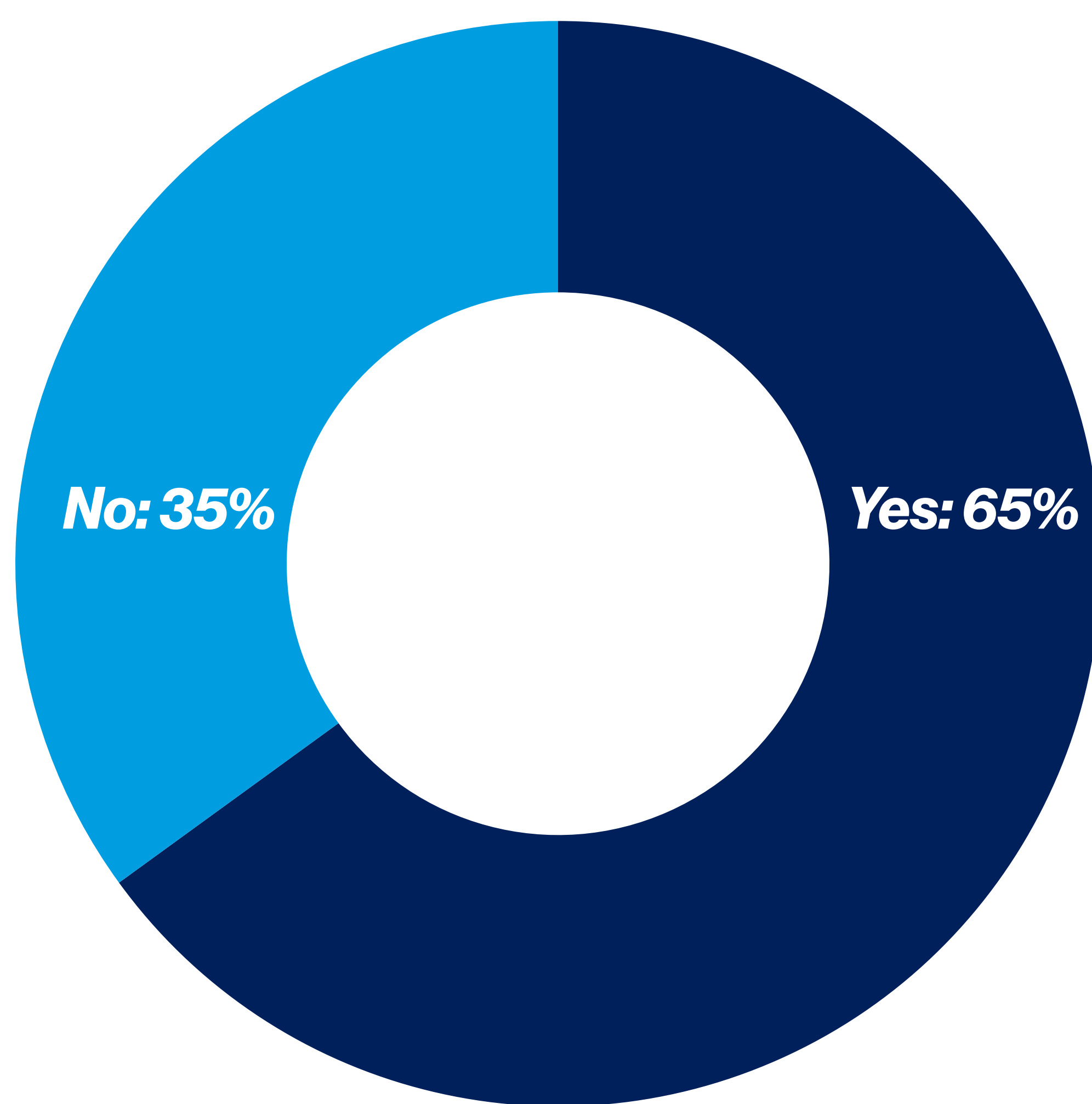
# **Research Project Two:**

## **SNIPEF Training Services Employers (*Non-members*)**



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 1: Do you currently employ any plumbing & heating apprentices?**



**Question 2: How many employees does your business employ?**

Business size	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
Sole trader	8 (15%)	3 (9%)	5 (28%)
1-5 employees	19 (37%)	10 (29%)	9 (50%)
6-10 employees	12 (23%)	10 (29%)	2 (11%)
11-20 employees	6 (12%)	5 (15%)	1 (6%)
Over 50 employees	7 (13%)	6 (18%)	1 (6%)



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 3: In the LAST 5 years, how many plumbing and heating apprentices have you employed?**

	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
I have not employed an apprentice in the past five years	12%	3%	28%
1-2 apprentices	60%	56%	67%
3-5 apprentices	21%	29%	6%
6-10 apprentices	8%	12%	0%
10+ apprentices	0%	0%	0%

**Question 4: Have you experienced any of the following (multiple options allowed)**

Experience	% of responses
None of the above	48%
Apprentice left before completing training	27%
Persistent attendance or punctuality problems	25%
Apprentice left within 1 year of qualifying	21%
Disciplinary issues requiring formal action	17%
Apprentice was poached by another company	15%
Other (individual comments)	2%



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 5: Over the NEXT 3 years, how many plumbing and heating apprentices do you expect to employ?**

	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
1-2 apprentices	21%	24%	17%
3-5 apprentices	13%	21%	0%
More than 5 apprentices	4%	6%	0%
Too early to say	19%	24%	11%
I don't plan to employ and apprentice	42%	26%	72%

**Question 6: What age group do you prefer to employ apprentices from?**

Age	Overall	With apprentices	No apprentices
16-19 years	90%	88%	100%
20-24 years	7%	8%	0%
25+ years	3%	4%	0%



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 7: What are the main reasons that you choose to recruit apprentices?**  
(Multiple choice allowed)

Reason	Percentage
To train people in the workplace the way I want	20%
To grow my business	18%
Pipeline for skilled employees	10%
To address current industry skills shortages	10%
Can't find suitable people so this is the best route	9%
I want to give back to the industry which supported me	9%
My last apprentice has completed training, therefore we have a vacancy for a new apprentice	8%
Supported funding for college training	5%
Receive employment support from SNIPEF Training Services	3%
Positive past experience	2%
Good return on investment	1%
Other	1%



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Question 8: For those who do not currently employ apprentices, what are the main reasons? (Multiple choices allowed)**

	Reason	Percentage
	Cost in wages too high	78%
	Cost of providing training and supervision in the workplace	56%
	Limited funding support	50%
	Poor past experience with a college/training centre	28%
	Frustrated that apprentices left soon after qualifying	28%
	Poor past experience with an apprentice	17%
	Poor past experience with SNIPEF Training Services	11%
	No suitable applicants	11%
	Not enough work / uncertain workload	6%
	Other individual comments (eg. semi-retired, £2000 grant issue, became an employee)	17%



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

## Comparisons between Member and Non-Member results

The two datasets tell a coherent story. Apprenticeships are primarily sustained by medium and larger employers within the member base, while non-members, being smaller on average, face steeper financial and supervisory hurdles.

**Sample:** Despite different sample sizes, the split between those who currently employ apprentices and those who do not is almost identical across both groups. This provides a reliable basis for comparison.

**Recruitment:** Members show deeper historical engagement. Over half (51%) reported employing three or more apprentices in the past five years, while non-members cluster at the 1–2 apprentice level (60%). This highlights the greater capacity of member firms to sustain pipelines.

**Motivations:** The top three drivers align closely across both groups: training apprentices in the workplace to employer standards, building a skilled pipeline, and supporting business growth. For members, these account for 51% of all reasons cited. Non-members show the same hierarchy but with a slightly stronger emphasis on “giving back” and addressing skills shortages.

**Challenges:** Members report a wider range of issues, most commonly apprentices leaving soon after qualifying (22%), disciplinary matters (17%), and attendance or punctuality problems (15%). By contrast, nearly half of non-members (48%) reported “none of the above,” suggesting lighter exposure, though this likely reflects smaller-scale involvement rather than fewer challenges in practice.

**Age preference:** Both groups show strong consensus that apprenticeships are primarily a school-leaver route. Among members, 82% prefer 16–19 year olds; among non-members this rises to 90%, with all non-employers selecting this group. Members display slightly more openness to older entrants, which may reflect the greater scale and systems of larger firms.



# Current apprenticeship engagement & future intentions

**Barriers:** Funding is the decisive issue across both groups. Members most frequently cited limited funding support (21%), wage costs (21%), and supervision costs (15%). Non-members face even sharper financial pressures: wage costs (78%), supervision (56%), and limited funding (50%). Other barriers such as retention or training quality appear in both groups but remain secondary.

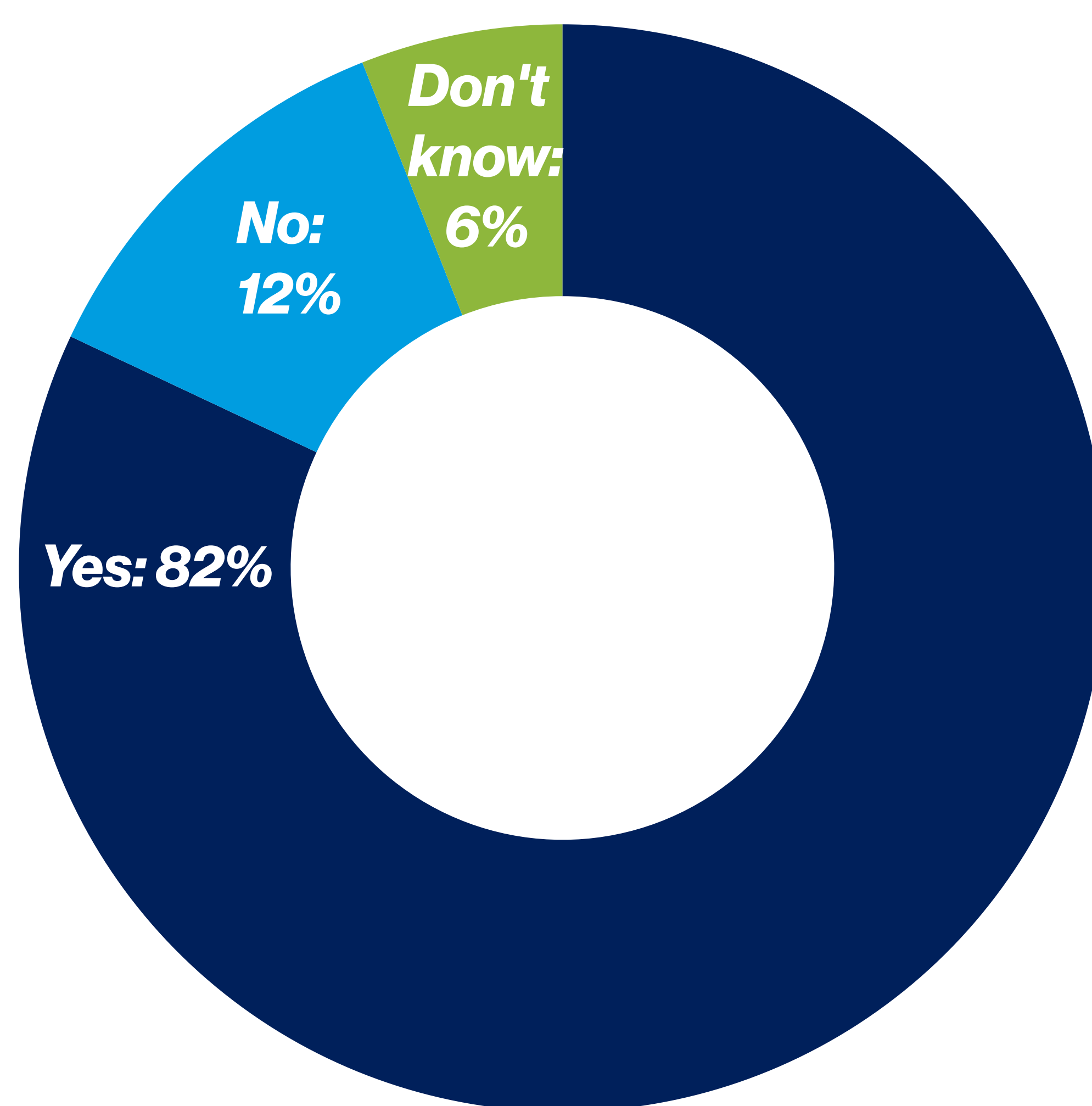
**Overall:** The two samples reveal striking similarities. Both share the same employment split, prioritise 16–19 year olds, highlight the same business-focused motivations, and identify costs as the main barrier.

The differences lie in scale: members, generally larger, have deeper pipelines and more experience of challenges, while non-members, typically smaller, feel the financial burden more acutely and show less future intent.



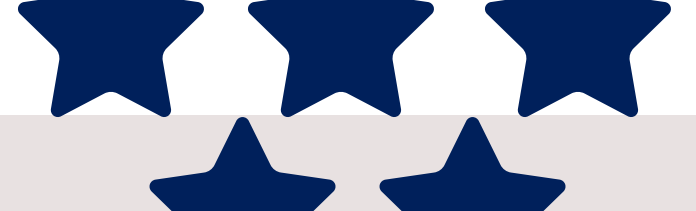




# Experiences with training provision & delivery

**Question 9: Do you currently use SNIPEF Training Services to manage your apprentice/s?** *(of the 91 people who currently employ an apprentice in question one)*



**Question 10: How would you rate your experience of using SNIPEF Training Services?** *(of the 91 people who currently employ an apprentice in question one)*

Rating out of 5		Percentage of non-members
	(Excellent)	29%
	(Good)	39%
	(Average)	25%
	(Poor)	7%
	(Very poor)	0%



# Experiences with training provision & delivery

**Question 11: What type of college training programme provision do you believe is most suitable for apprentices?**

Programme provision	Percentage
College programme should remain as it is (block release model)	64%
Apprentices should attend more of the college programme	15%
Apprentices should attend less of the college programme	15%
Other varied responses (eg. pre-apprenticeships, 1 week/month, stricter entry at 16, H&S, etc.)	6%

**Question 12: How would you rate the quality of education and training provided by colleges or training centres?**

Rating out of 5	Percentage of non-members
<div> <div>★ ★ ★ ★ ★</div> <div>(Excellent)</div> </div>	39%
<div> <div>★ ★ ★ ★</div> <div>(Good)</div> </div>	25%
<div> <div>★ ★ ★</div> <div>(Average)</div> </div>	17%
<div> <div>★ ★</div> <div>(Poor)</div> </div>	14%
<div> <div>★</div> <div>(Very poor)</div> </div>	6%



# Experiences with training provision & delivery

## Comparisons between Member and Non-Member results

The results across questions 9–12 show strong alignment between members and non-members on the core elements of apprenticeship delivery, with differences emerging mainly in the intensity of satisfaction rather than the direction of sentiment. This alignment provides a strong demonstration that the sentiment of members is comparable to that of non-members, giving confidence that the findings present a true and fair representation of the profession as a whole.

## Use of SNIPEF Training Services (STS)

Both groups show high engagement with STS, the primary managing agent for the profession, but members report slightly higher usage (89%) compared with non-members (82%). This reflects the natural connection between membership and STS services, yet the similarity indicates that STS functions as a sector-wide managing agent rather than a member-only service.

## Satisfaction with STS

Satisfaction levels are broadly positive in both datasets. Members report 62% rating their experience as good or excellent, while non-members score slightly higher at 68%. Both groups include a notable minority rating the service as average (26% members, 25% non-members) and a small but meaningful “poor” rating (10% members, 7% non-members). The pattern suggests that while employers trust STS, both segments perceive variability in service consistency.

## College model preference

Preferences are almost identical. A strong majority in both groups favour retaining the current block-release structure (60% members, 64% non-members). A similar proportion in each group favour adjustments such as more or less college time, with non-members displaying slightly more appetite for reduced attendance (15% vs 10%). The shared preference reinforces the block model as the standard employers understand and value.



# Experiences with training provision & delivery

## College training quality

Views diverge more sharply here. Members give a mixed rating, with only 47% scoring the quality as good or excellent and a significant proportion rating it average or poor (49%). Non-members, however, are more polarised, with a higher share rating quality as excellent (39%) but also a higher share rating it poor or very poor (20%). This suggests that non-members experience more variability across colleges, possibly due to using different or more geographically dispersed centres than larger member firms.

## Overall

Across these questions, the patterns are strongly aligned. Both groups rely on STS, support the college block-release model and see similar strengths and weaknesses in delivery. The main differences lie in the spread of views: members provide more moderated feedback, while non-members show more extreme positive and negative ratings. This reflects the broader theme of the research, members, typically with deeper engagement, have more stable experiences, while non-members encounter more variability and feel challenges more acutely.



# Value

## Question 13: In your opinion, do you believe the return on investment from hiring apprentices is worthwhile?

Response	Overall	Percentage
Sometimes (depends on the apprentice)	16	36%
No	16	36%
Yes, in the later stages of their apprenticeship	6	14%
Yes	3	7%
Unsure	3	7%

## Question 14: For those who said NO to question 13: Why do you NOT believe the return on investment for hiring an apprentice is worthwhile?

This was an open text question. The following responses are based on 9 submissions from the 16 non-members that said NO to question 13

- 1. High costs relative to return:** Training apprentices requires several years of investment before they are useful to the business. Wages, insurance, pension, PAYE, and lost productivity make apprentices financially unviable for small firms. Rising apprentice wages compared with limited charge-out rates and some employers compared apprentices unfavourably to labourers, who were seen as more useful for the same or lower pay.
- 2. Lack of loyalty and retention:** Several reported apprentices leaving immediately after qualifying, describing it as wasted investment (eg. “might as well have put £16k in the bin”). There was a perceived lack of loyalty undermines employers’ confidence in recovering costs.
- 3. Problems with college provision,** with some courses described as “outdated” and poorly connected to employer needs. There were also concerns about apprentices being taken away from site during busy periods (eg. Christmas) and spending too much time learning irrelevant skills (eg. lead work).
- 4. Sole trader pressures** with single-person businesses reported struggling to meet wage requirements without funding support.



# Value

## Comparisons between Member and Non-Member results

### Overall sentiment on return on investment (ROI)

Both members and non-members give mixed but broadly aligned views on the value apprentices deliver. The largest group in both datasets selected “Sometimes – depends on the apprentice” (Members 45%, Non-members 36%), showing that experiences are highly dependent on individual performance, commitment and work ethic. Clear positive sentiment is present but modest, with around a quarter of members (28%) and a similar proportion of non-members (21%) believing apprenticeships do deliver a worthwhile return, particularly in the later stages.

Where the two groups diverge is in the level of scepticism. Non-members are more likely to see apprenticeships as not worthwhile (36% vs 22%), reflecting the greater financial vulnerability of smaller firms and lower historical engagement. Among members, negative sentiment is concentrated among businesses with poor retention or inconsistent workloads, while among non-members it is closely tied to cost pressures, wage expectations and lower productivity during early training years.

## Reasons for saying ROI is not worthwhile

The explanations from both groups show striking similarities. Financial pressures dominate across the profession, including wage costs, pensions, insurance, supervision time and lost productivity while apprentices attend college. Both groups also highlight poor retention, with new tradespeople leaving or being poached soon after qualifying. However, non-members express this more sharply, often describing the financial loss as unrecoverable for a small business.

Both datasets also raise concerns about college provision, including outdated content, poor communication and a mismatch between what is taught and what employers need. Members frame this as a frustration within an otherwise workable system, while non-members more often see it as a barrier that magnifies the financial risk.

### Overall

The combined results show that members and non-members share the same core concerns: ROI is inconsistent, early-stage costs are high and retention challenges undermine confidence. Differences relate mainly to scale and financial resilience rather than fundamentally different views. This alignment provides strong assurance that the sentiment captured in both groups is comparable, offering a true and fair representation of the profession's overall perception of value.



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

**Question 15: Do you believe the current 4-year apprenticeship model is the right time length?**

Response	Percentage of members
Yes, 4 years is appropriate	81%
No, it should be shorter	12%
No, it should be longer	4%
Not sure / Don't know	4%

**Question 16: What length of time do you believe would be more appropriate for an apprenticeship?**

Response	Count	Percentage of members
No change – keep at 4 years	42	81%
Three years	5	10%
More than four years	2	4%
Two years	1	2%
18 months	2	4%



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

**Question 17: Should other pathways into the plumbing and heating profession be considered beyond the apprenticeship and Experienced Worker Assessment Route?**

Response	Count	Percentage of members
Yes	18	35%
Maybe	19	37%
No	13	25%
No response	2	4%

**Question 18: Would you support any of the following pathways into the plumbing and heating profession? (choose up to three options)**

Pathway option	Count	Percentage of members
A one year–18 month plumbing and heating college course before a 3-year apprenticeship	20	39%
Pre-apprenticeship course content should be formally included in the apprenticeship model	17	33%
It should remain as it is (apprenticeship + Experienced Worker Assessment Route)	15	29%
Shortened apprenticeship for person with working/industry experience	11	21%
On-site training only (non-college route)	7	13%
Fast track and managed learning programmes	6	12%
Other	2	4%



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

## Comparisons between Member and Non-Member results

### Support for the 4-year apprenticeship model (Q15)

Across both groups, support for the existing four-year model is exceptionally strong and identical at 81%. Both datasets show only small minorities preferring shorter or longer durations.

This unanimity demonstrates a shared belief that a full four-year cycle remains essential for competence, maturity and safety in a highly technical profession.

### Preferred alternative duration (Q16)

When asked what length would be more appropriate, both groups again converge: 87% of members and 81% of non-members want no change. The remaining responses are similarly distributed, with small proportions suggesting three years (5% members, 10% non-members) or slightly longer options. These minor variations do not alter the core message: confidence in the four-year model is sector-wide. Differences relate only to employers' experience levels, with those less familiar with apprenticeships more open to change.

## Openness to new pathways beyond the apprenticeship and EWAR (Q17)

Members and non-members show a near-identical balance between openness and caution. Among members, 36% said "Yes" to exploring additional pathways and 35% said "Maybe." Non-members recorded 35% and 37% respectively. Only around one quarter of each group said "No." This shows a profession ready to explore complementary routes without undermining the four-year gold standard. There is no evidence of divergence: attitudes toward innovation in pathways are stable across both groups.



# Apprenticeship model & alternative pathways

## Support for specific pathway options (Q18)

Preferences also follow the same pattern. The most popular alternative pathway in both groups is a college-first hybrid model (Members 45%, Non-members 39%), indicating strong appetite for more job-ready entrants. Both groups place similar value on formally integrating pre-apprenticeship content (Members 35%, Non-members 33%). Roughly one third in each group prefer the system to remain unchanged.

Support for shortened apprenticeships for those with experience is likewise comparable (26% members, 21% non-members), showing consistent recognition of mature entrants as a potential talent source. Less supported options, such as on-site-only training or fast-track programmes, were selected by small minorities in both datasets.

## Overall

Across Questions 15–18, the alignment between members and non-members is remarkably strong. Both groups firmly endorse the four-year model, express similar levels of openness to complementary pathways, and choose near-identical options when assessing alternative models. This coherence provides a robust demonstration that the sentiment of members closely mirrors that of non-members, offering a true and fair representation of the profession's collective view on apprenticeship structure and future pathway design.



# Support, funding & responsibility

**Question 19: What (if any) changes would encourage you to recruit a plumbing and heating apprentice (or more apprentices)?** *(Multiple Choices allowed)*

Change	Count	Percentage
Increased funding support	47	90%
Better access to suitable candidates	16	31%
Improved support from colleges	14	27%
More flexible training delivery	12	23%
Reduced administrative burden	8	15%
Nothing would encourage me to hire an apprentice	2	4%
Other individual comments (each <1%)	3	6%

**Question 20: How would you describe the current Scottish Government support for apprenticeship training?**

Response	Overall	Percentage
Very poor	22	49%
Inadequate	10	22%
Adequate	6	13%
Very good	0	0%
Don't know	7	16%



# Support, funding & responsibility

## Question 21: In your opinion, who should bear the main cost of apprentice training?

Response	Overall	Percentage
Shared equally between employer and government	31	60%
Government	8	15%
Employers	3	6%
Apprentice	0	0%
Other suggestions	7	6%

### The seven other suggestions were:

1. "They (the employer) should get the benefit of the apprentice."
2. "Employers NI payment crippling businesses."
3. "The government have the responsibility of looking after and strengthening the construction industry with the taxes they collect from everyone."
4. "Will train youngsters and keep them off dole etc."
5. "I believe it is unfair that CITB apprentices for other trades get funding to cover apprentice wages while at college and we get no help at all."
6. "Apprentice funding should be funded in the same way as a student attending a university course – both are training for a career choice and offer life skills – there should be no difference in the funding offered."
7. "To help with costs of employing an apprentice there should also be more incentive for an employer to take on an apprentice."



# Support, funding & responsibility

**Question 22: Would you support the introduction of a levy (similar to the CITB model) to support apprenticeship training across the plumbing and heating profession?**

Change	Count	Percentage
Yes, if it guarantees more consistent funding	12	23%
Yes, if it means everyone contributes, not only those who employ apprentices	9	17%
No, I don't support a levy model	15	29%
Don't know / Not sure	13	25%

The survey shows mixed views with 40% expressing conditional support. At the same time, 29% opposed the idea outright, and a further 25% were unsure, indicating uncertainty about how such a scheme would operate in practice.

The CITB levy model, used in the construction sector, requires all employers above a certain size to pay a levy based on their payroll. These pooled funds are then redistributed to support training and apprenticeship provision across the profession. In theory, such a model could provide consistent and predictable funding for plumbing and heating apprenticeships while ensuring that the cost is shared more widely across the sector.

However, the responses suggest caution. Employers are clearly open to collective solutions, but support is highly conditional. They want assurances that any levy would spread costs fairly, that smaller firms would not be disproportionately burdened, and that the system would deliver tangible improvements in funding and training outcomes. Without those guarantees, scepticism will remain strong.



# Support, funding & responsibility

## **Question 23: Do you have any comments, experiences or suggestions you'd like to share?** *There were 19 comments submitted:*

A recurring concern was the lack of support from colleges and training providers. Employers felt disengaged from training establishments, with some saying they had received no contact or assistance during the course of an apprenticeship.

Several argued that college curricula were outdated, overly focused on areas such as lead work, and failing to adapt to modern technologies like heat pumps, oil, gas and biomass. Others stressed that employers should not be left to rely on colleges alone and called for more structured, worthwhile training partnerships.

- 1. Financial pressures and government responsibility:** Employers highlighted the rising costs of taking on apprentices, describing them as a “luxury” that many businesses can no longer afford. Some reported that the financial burden had more than doubled in recent years, leading them to rule out taking on apprentices in the future. A common view was that government, rather than employers, should shoulder the financial responsibility for apprenticeships.
- 2. Workforce shortages and future risk:** Despite the financial pressures, several employers pointed to the urgent need to address skills shortages in the trades. They warned that the lack of qualified tradespeople was holding back business growth, particularly in renewable heating. While some employers continued to take on apprentices out of necessity, others said the costs made expansion unsustainable.
- 3. Frustration with industry conditions and fairness:** Respondents also expressed frustration with wider industry practices. Some blamed government policy for encouraging tradespeople to work for themselves, avoiding apprenticeships and regulations while cutting corners. Others highlighted the scarcity of opportunities for young people, noting that only a small proportion of school leavers were able to secure apprenticeships.





Almost nine in ten employers say increased funding is the single biggest change needed to keep taking on apprentices. Without it, Scotland's plumbing and heating pipeline is at risk.







# **Research Perspectives:**

## **Comparison of research & conclusions**



# Research Perspectives: Comparison of research & conclusions

Here we set the findings from members alongside those from non-members to draw out where views converge and where they diverge in ways that matter for policy and practice.

Across recruitment, motivations and pain points, the picture is broadly aligned, but scale differences shape behaviour, with members sustaining deeper pipelines and non-members feeling cost pressures sooner.

We also tested sentiment on the apprenticeship model, preferred age profile, funding responsibilities and a potential levy, highlighting where there is strong consensus, and where support is more conditional.

The aim is to surface the clearest signals for SNIPEF's advocacy and for profession actions that could unlock more, and better-supported, apprenticeship places.

- **Both groups see apprenticeships as essential**, but members (typically larger) sustain deeper pipelines over time, while non-members (smaller on average) participate more episodically and feel the financial strain earliest.
- **Motivations are business-first on both sides**: Training to firm standards, building a skills pipeline, and enabling growth.

- **The biggest frictions are also shared**: Funding, wages and supervision time. Members report a wider spread of people-management issues.
- **There is strong consensus on the current 4-year model**: The four-year apprenticeship remains the gold standard (members 82%, non-members 81%), with cautious openness to complementary routes.
- **Preference for 16–19-year-olds** is near-universal (82%/90%)
- **The loudest signal for policymakers**: Current Scottish Government support is viewed as poor/inadequate (77% / 71%). Most think costs should be shared (62% / 60%), with a sizeable minority preferring government to bear the majority of costs.
- **Interest in a CITB-style levy is conditional** rather than universal (conditional YES 48% / 40%; outright NO 23%/29%)







# Support our Apprenticeship Campaign

## Contact Us

Help support SNIPEF's campaign. For more information,:

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