

Our Vision: Enabling professionalism in plumbing and heating



**SNiPEF**

Plumbing and heating association

# Supporting Apprenticeships

## Fixing Scotland's skills shortage

*A manifesto for skills, safety and standards*

**"By investing together, government, employers and apprentices can ensure Scotland has the skills to keep homes warm, safe and energy efficient, benefiting households and the environment."**



**55%\*** of businesses say they're very unlikely to recruit an apprentice in the next 12 months due to lack of support.



Only **4%** report sufficient local availability of skilled plumbing and heating professionals; **67%** say availability is low.



**93%** of employers say increased funding would get them hiring, boosting business growth and building Scotland's skills pipeline.



**81%** of the plumbing and heating profession back the four-year apprenticeship model to ensure quality, safety and standards.

\*All statistics provided are drawn from SNIPEF's Apprenticeship Insights and State of Trade research reports. Download the reports at [snipef.org/Publications](https://snipef.org/Publications).

# Who we are & why our manifesto is focussed on apprenticeships

## Who we are

SNIPEF is the voice of the plumbing and heating profession in Scotland and Northern Ireland. We represent more than 700 businesses, from sole traders to national contractors, employing over 10,000 people, including more than 3,000 plumbing and heating professionals.

We ensure the needs and concerns of the profession are heard by government, the media and across the construction sector. We support and empower our members through guidance and training to uphold high standards, safe practice and professionalism.

Our members form a micro- and SME-led profession responsible for training Scotland's safety-critical workforce through high-quality apprenticeships in water, gas and heat.

## Why apprenticeships, and why now

**Trading confidence & margins:** Only **21%** of firms are confident about UK economic prospects, while **49%** report lower profit margins, both adding pressure on recruitment.

**Skills shortage:** The pipeline is weak, with **67%** reporting low availability of skilled people.

**Recruitment intent is fragile:** Only **28%** of employers say they are likely to recruit an apprentice in the next 12 months.

**The funding gap:** **93%** of employers say better funding support would unlock new apprenticeship places.

**Standards:** Concerns that poor quality training options risk compromising public safety.

**Productivity & efficiency:** Persistent skills shortages and incomplete training reduce output, increase remedial work and delay projects, undermining quality and reliability in a safety-critical profession.

## Our single-theme ask

Support a fairer and more balanced funding model for Scotland's skilled apprenticeships, ensuring government and employers work together to expand opportunities, improve completion rates, promote social mobility and strengthen the nation's long-term skills base.

# Ask One: Make regional employer grants accessible for four-year professional apprenticeships.

## What we're asking for

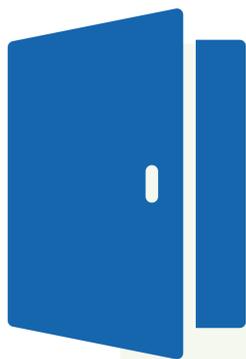
Amend existing local authority-funded Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) to support four-year apprenticeships through staged, completion-weighted payments (for example: 20% at 12 months, 20% at 24 months, 60% at completion). Grants should be portable where an apprentice transfers, with the final tranche paid to the finishing employer.

## Why it matters

- Stops “first-year churn”, rewards completion and shares the additional wage and supervision costs between businesses and government.
- Mirrors the outcome-based approach already used in payments to colleges and training providers, but applies it to employers who bear the upfront costs of training.

## Evidence base

Costs, particularly wages and supervision, remain the main barrier to apprenticeship recruitment and completion. Employers overwhelmingly support increased funding support while maintaining the four-year gold standard.



### Question to your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

**Question:** *What will you do to support businesses that want to offer four-year apprenticeships?*

**Why this matters:** Most government support, delivered through local authority-funded Employer Recruitment Incentives, is limited to the first 12 months of an apprenticeship, does not reflect agreed industry pay rates, and fails to recognise the full costs faced by employers in training apprentices over a four-year programme.

# Ask Two: Offset the real costs of training for micro, small and medium companies.

## What we're asking for

- **College-time wage offset:** A simple day-rate reimbursement for timetabled off-the-job learning.
- **Supervisor or mentor support:** Introduce a targeted tax credit or allowance to reflect the verified hours employers invest in mentoring and supervising apprentices.

## Why it matters

- Directly tackles the early-years cash flow pinch, when employers face net training costs while apprentices are off-site at college, as well as the time required for supervision.
- Keeps standards high while protecting the four-year apprenticeship model that employers trust.

## Evidence base

Employers consistently cite wages and supervision time as decisive barriers, with most saying funding reform would unlock new apprenticeship places.



### Remind your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

A four-year plumbing and heating apprenticeship provides skills for life, supports social mobility and protects public safety in a safety-critical profession.

## Ask Three:

# Reward completion & retention, and give micro businesses and SMEs flexible ways to train.

### What we're asking for

- **Completion & retention bonus (split 50/50):** Payable at completion + 6 months in post, shared between employer and apprentice.
- **Flexible pathways:** Work with SNIPeF to develop more flexible routes into the plumbing and heating profession, including pathways for career changers and upskilling, while maintaining high-quality training that meets industry standards and protects public safety.
- **Fair cost recovery:** Examine fair and balanced options for recovering costs when apprentices leave early, such as a payback or loan system to cover college training time, helping reduce financial losses for employers while keeping opportunities open for those committed to completing their apprenticeship.

### Why it matters

- Tackles the main frustrations for employers, including drop-off, poaching and the cost of early leavers, while rewarding commitment and completion.
- Opens flexible routes for new entrants and career changers, helping to attract and retain talent in a safety-critical profession.
- Strengthens Scotland's skilled workforce by maintaining high standards and ensuring long-term capacity for essential water, gas and heating services.

### Evidence base

There is strong support for measures that improve completion, provide fair cost recovery and create flexible routes for new entrants. Employers remain firmly committed to high-quality, four-year apprenticeships but want a fairer system that helps them sustain and grow participation over the long-term.

# Call to action: Government, PPCs, employers and the public

## For Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) & Government

- Recognise the role of not-for-profit, employer- and profession-led managing agents in sustaining high-quality apprenticeships and skills development.
- Improve access to regional funding, ensuring it supports longer, higher-value apprenticeships rather than short-term routes.
- Prioritise safety-critical apprenticeships that protect the public, focus on quality over quantity, and recognise plumbing and heating operatives as essential skilled professionals.

## For employers

- Join the SNIPEF Apprenticeship Working Group; host an MSP/MP visit; share a case study.
- Pledge a 2026 apprentice place and speak to SNIPEF Training Services for guidance.

## For the public

- Support and value paid, four-year, safety-critical apprenticeships that provide clear career progression, uphold high standards and ensure quality and public safety.

## Why this partnership pays back

- Businesses get a pipeline of competent, certified talent.
- People earn, learn and progress into modern, low-carbon careers.
- The state secures higher apprenticeship completion rates, greater workforce capacity and improved consumer safety by tying public funding to outcomes.
- A stronger skilled workforce drives productivity, tax revenue and sustainable economic growth.

## Final Word

Apprentices are ready to learn and employers are ready to train, but the system is holding them back. More than half will not recruit, and two-thirds cannot find skilled people. A shared commitment to change is now required.

# Support our Apprenticeship Campaign

## Spoken with a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate?

Tell us what they said by emailing [richard.campbell@snipef.org](mailto:richard.campbell@snipef.org), or contact us by phone, text or WhatsApp on 07710 542 381.

**Why?** Because it helps inform our collective engagement and strengthens the case we make on behalf of the profession.

## Contact Us

**Policy & Public Affairs:** Richard Campbell ([richard.campbell@snipef.org](mailto:richard.campbell@snipef.org))

**Training and apprenticeships:** Dale Thomson ([dale.thomson@snipef.org](mailto:dale.thomson@snipef.org))

**Media:** Gregor Millar ([gregor.millar@snipef.org](mailto:gregor.millar@snipef.org))

## Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation

Bellevue House  
22 Hopetoun Street  
Edinburgh  
EH7 4GH

W: [SNIPEF.org](http://SNIPEF.org)  
T: 0131 556 0600  
[@snipefnews](https://www.instagram.com/snipefnews)

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