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Association for Project Management urges Government and industry to use major national projects to create new opportunities for NEETs and early-career talent

Association for Project Management (APM), the chartered membership organisation for the project profession, is calling on Government and industry to take urgent action to help young people enter project careers, warning that the UK risks missing out on a generation of talent at a time when AI, infrastructure renewal, clean energy, defence, housing and digital transformation are increasing demand for project skills.

In its report, *The Importance of Reskilling and Upskilling to Meet Project Workforce Demand*, APM says the UK needs a more coherent national approach to project skills, including stronger early-career pathways, wider access to professional qualifications, and targeted support for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS)[1]. This is to ensure sustainable delivery of the projects the UK needs to succeed.

APM is calling on Government, employers, training providers and professional bodies to work together to:

- Reform the Growth and Skills Levy so employers can fund recognised professional qualifications and certifications supported by industry
- Mandate a percentage of entry-level project roles, apprenticeships and trainee project management positions for NEETs, subject to minimum requirements[2]
- Review and update Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes and associated occupational mapping
- Introduce a 10-year local project pipeline strategy to ensure local skills stay in the regions
- Make project management a clearer and more visible career pathway for young people
- Use professional standards to give employers confidence that early-career talent is developing recognised project competence.

In targeting support of getting NEETS into employment and project careers, APM recommends that when Government launches major projects - including infrastructure programmes, digital transformation initiatives, NHS modernisation projects, housing developments and net-zero schemes - project delivery organisations should be required to reserve a percentage of entry-level roles, apprenticeships or trainee project management positions for NEETs. The report states that “This will help reduce economic inactivity, improve social value outcomes and speed up the talent pipeline into the project profession.”

In addition, expanding the use of Levy funding (for not only apprenticeships) to enable employers to pay for recognised professional certifications will develop long term capabilities required to deliver complex projects, while providing individuals with recognised pathways into project leadership roles.

Harvey McCabe, Policy and Public Affairs Manager at APM (pictured), says: “If the UK is serious about delivering the major projects needed for economic growth, it must be equally serious about building the next generation of project professionals. Too many young people, including NEETs, are currently outside the labour market at the same time as employers are struggling to find the skills needed to deliver projects.

"APM believes Government-led projects should do more to create visible, supported entry routes into project professional careers. Reserving a proportion of entry-level project roles, apprenticeships and trainee positions for NEETs would help reduce economic inactivity, improve social value and give young people the practical experience needed to progress.

Reforming the Growth and Skills Levy so employers can fund industry-backed professional qualifications would help turn untapped potential into the capability the UK needs. Membership bodies such as APM have an important role to play in setting those standards, supporting employers and making project careers more accessible, inclusive and future-ready."

APM's report highlights that the project profession is facing growing workforce pressure, with recent research[3] citing that 54% of project professionals are concerned about having the right skills to deliver projects successfully, while 57% say their organisation is concerned about a lack of skills to deliver current projects. It also points to a future pipeline challenge, with 61% of business leaders saying they do not believe there are enough project professionals in the talent pipeline to sustain emerging sectors.

APM says the challenge is becoming more urgent as AI changes the skills project professionals need. The report notes that 88% of project managers identify AI capability as the most important skill for the next five years, reinforcing the need for young people to enter the labour market with digital confidence, ethical awareness, communication skills, stakeholder management, risk awareness and the ability to work in complex delivery environments.

ENDS

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Notes to editors

[1] The latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests 981,000 people aged 16 to 24 were Neet between April and June 2026. That is approximately one in eight people in that age group. The final instalment of a major report on youth employment and economic inactivity by former minister Alan Milburn is expected to be published in Autumn 2026, setting out recommendations on tackling the problem.

[2] Minimum requirements suggested are those required by the Level 4 apprenticeship standard (Maths and English GCSE by the end of the apprenticeship). Training to include support to achieve minimum requirements to be accepted onto the Level 4 apprenticeship standard.

[3] APM Skills Survey 2026.

About APM

Association for Project Management (APM) is the chartered membership organisation for the project profession. APM supports project professionals and organisations through standards, qualifications, chartered status, research, policy engagement and professional development.

APM is the only chartered organisation representing the project profession in the world with over 40,000 individual members and more than 470 corporate partners based across 140 countries.