

Apprenticeships at Risk as National Wage Increases Outpace Employer Training Support

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[The Plumbing and Heating Federation \(SNIPEF\)](#) is warning that the sustainability of plumbing and heating apprenticeships is at growing risk as Apprentice National Minimum Wage increases announced in the budget continue to rise faster than the support available to employers who deliver training.

While the Federation supports fair and progressive pay for young people, it cautions that above-inflation statutory increases, without corresponding support for employers, are creating financial pressures that are already reducing apprenticeship opportunities and risk weakening Scotland's future skills pipeline.

SNIPEF's newly published apprenticeship research shows that 93% of employers identify increased funding as the single biggest change needed to maintain or grow apprenticeship recruitment, underscoring that training costs, supervisory requirements and periods of college attendance are already stretching micro and small businesses.

Wage costs are now reported as a major barrier by 65% of employers, with micro and small firms facing the greatest strain. Furthermore, 42% of employers say they do not plan to take on an apprentice in the next three years, signalling an emerging slowdown in recruitment at the very point the Scotland needs to expand its skilled workforce.

Although employers overwhelmingly value apprenticeships and continue to regard the four-year model as the gold standard, the latest apprentice minimum wage uplift for young workers risks intensifying these pressures.

Since April 2024, the Apprentice National Minimum Wage has risen by about 40%, with a further 6% increase now scheduled, a pace of change that many employers simply cannot absorb.

Many firms operate on very tight margins, and when wage obligations rise faster than contract values, the result is often a slowdown or pause in recruitment. This means young people could ultimately face fewer opportunities to enter a respected, skilled profession.

Stephanie Lowe, Deputy Chief Executive of SNIPEF, said: “Fair pay for young people is essential and something we fully support. However, the pace of recent statutory wage increases does not reflect the realities faced by the micro and small employers who train the overwhelming majority of apprentices in our sector.

“When wage costs rise without matching support for training, it becomes harder for employers to take on new apprentices, and that risks diminishing the opportunities available to young people.

“We are calling for a more balanced, evidence-based approach that protects both fair pay and the apprenticeship model. With the right policy decisions, Scotland can deliver strong, well-supported pathways into a vital, safety-critical profession.”

SNIPEF will continue to work with the UK and Scottish Governments, the Low Pay Commission and partner organisations to ensure that future wage decisions and training support mechanisms better reflect the real cost of delivering high-quality apprenticeships, protecting opportunities for young people and sustaining the workforce needed for Scotland’s housing, infrastructure and net zero ambitions.