

Print Scotland
News Release
For immediate release

Print Scotland Warns Of “Skills Cliff Edge” As English Apprentices Receive Three Times More Funding

Industry leaders say Scotland is underinvesting in the skills on which our economy depends

Print Scotland, the sector’s trade body, has issued a stark warning during Scottish Apprenticeship Week that Scotland risks a “skills cliff edge” unless apprenticeship funding disparities with England are urgently addressed.

Under the current system, a Print Industry Occupations apprenticeship in Scotland attracts just £3,200 in training contribution (age 16–19) and only £1200 for 19–24-year-olds. In England, comparable Print Technician apprenticeships attract funding closer to £10,000, representing a gap of almost £7,000 per apprentice.

Leaders from across Scotland’s print, packaging and label industries say the disparity places Scottish businesses and training providers at a serious disadvantage.

Richard McCombe, Managing Director of **Graphic Warehouse**, representing the **large format print and signage sector**, and **Vice President of Print Scotland**, said: “How can a Scottish apprentice be worth less than half of their English counterpart? The qualification level is comparable. The industrial skill level is comparable. But the funding support is nowhere near comparable.”

McCombe said the industry remains committed to developing the next generation of skilled workers but warned that employers are increasingly being asked to carry an unsustainable share of the cost.

The issue is shared across the wider print supply chain. **Micheil Molenaar**, President of Print Scotland and Managing Director of **Kennedy Smith**, representing the **packaging sector**, said: “Packaging supports some of Scotland’s most successful export industries, including food and drink and pharmaceuticals. These industries depend on highly skilled technical operators.

“If apprenticeship pipelines weaken because funding does not match the real cost of training, that will ultimately impact the wider economy.”

Susan Carr, Managing Director of **CV Labels** and **Print Scotland Board Member**, representing the **label printing sector**, said the disparity is becoming increasingly visible to employers.

“Label and packaging production relies on precision manufacturing skills that take years to develop. Apprenticeships are the most effective way to build that capability.

“When Scottish employers see similar apprenticeships in England receiving significantly higher funding, it raises serious questions about how Scotland values technical skills.”

Garry Richmond, Managing Director of **Print Scotland**, said the organisation sees the pressures facing both employers and training providers.

“Businesses across Scotland want to recruit apprentices and invest in the next generation. But the current funding structure makes that increasingly difficult to sustain.

“Without adequate support, both employers and training providers face real challenges in maintaining apprenticeship placements.”

Jim McKenzie, Apprenticeship Assessor with Print Scotland and a member of the organisation’s board, works directly with apprentices and employers across Scotland. He warned that the issue could have long-term consequences.

“Across print and manufacturing we are seeing large numbers of experienced professionals approaching retirement. Apprenticeships are the only sustainable way to replace those skills. If funding does not properly support those placements, the pipeline of new talent will inevitably shrink.”

Print Scotland says the funding gap comes at a critical moment for Scotland’s manufacturing and infrastructure sectors. **Richard McCombe** added: “We are heading towards a skills cliff edge. If we do not replace retiring skills now, Scotland will struggle to deliver the infrastructure, manufacturing and export projects it depends on.”

Print Scotland is calling for:

- A review of apprenticeship funding bands
- Alignment of print funding with comparable technical frameworks
- Greater parity with English apprenticeship funding
- Stronger incentives for SMEs to recruit apprentices

“Scottish businesses are ready to invest in young people,” McCombe said. “But without proper funding support we are asking employers and training providers to carry a disproportionate burden.” He added: “Celebration during Apprenticeship Week is important - but celebration alone will not prevent a crisis.”

ENDS

For more information, please contact Garry Richmond, Director of Print Scotland at C/O Dentons, 1 George Square, Glasgow, G2 1AL.

M: 07776 493740,

W: www.print-scotland.com

E: garry@print-scotland.com

Issued by Michael Crawford at Blueprint Media on 0330 223 4288.

Date: March 2026