

SCREWFIX

THE VOICE OF THE TRADE 2025

Trade skills survey report



As a business built for the trade, we're proud to launch the second version of our Voice of the Trade report.

The UK is facing a shortfall of 250,000 tradespeople by 2030. With 25% of those surveyed thinking of retirement in the next 5 years, time is running out.

With the UK Government committed to reforming the skills provision in England, we're calling on them to make sure that young people can easily take up a career in the trade, whether that's as a builder, joiner, plumber, electrician, or one of the many other trade specialists needed to build and maintain the homes we live in.

This year's findings reflect the real experiences, concerns and aspirations of tradespeople across the UK. We've listened to more than 700 tradespeople and over 100 young people considering a career in the trade. What they've told us is not only inspiring, it's urgent. The industry needs more direct grants to support hiring apprentices, and flexible upskilling opportunities. Across society, more needs to be done to support the idea that a career in the trade is just as valuable as a university degree.

From sole traders to small business owners, the message is clear: the trade is resilient, ambitious, and vital to the UK economy. As a leading trade retailer, we are passionate about being a voice for what tradespeople are calling for and what's needed to keep our industry thriving.

We remain committed to championing the trade today, tomorrow and for years to come.



John Mewett, CEO

SCREWFIX

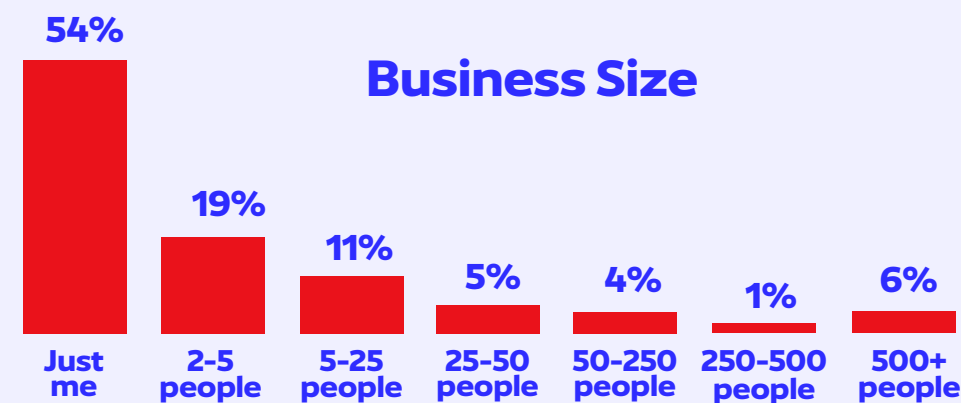


For more information,
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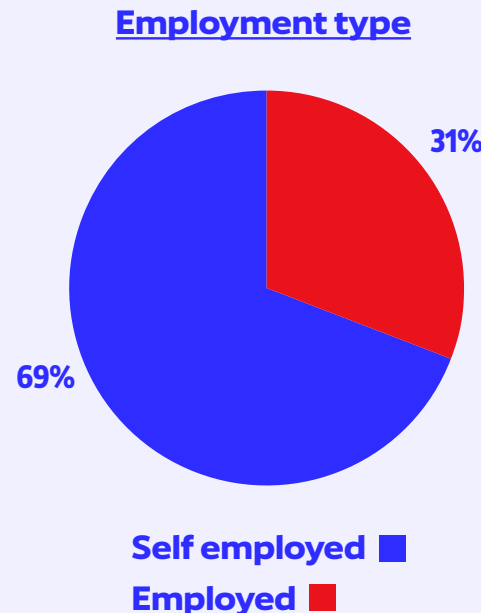
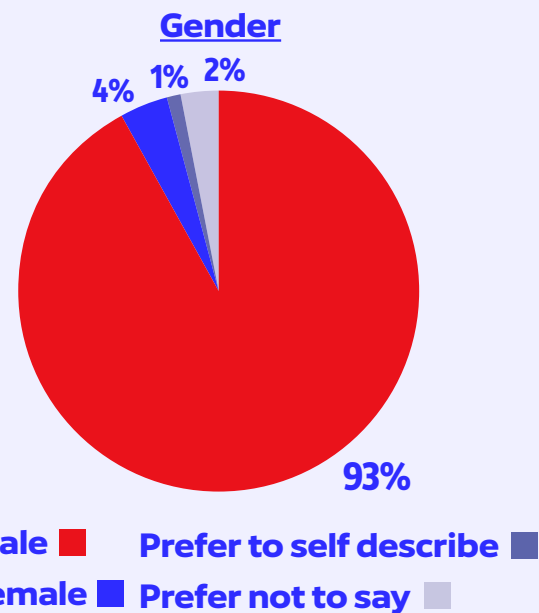
LIFE AS A TRADESPERSON

Most tradespeople surveyed are sole traders or work in a small business. The respondents remain older, with only a quarter under the age of 44 and 25% planning to retire in the next five years. This picture highlights the stretched nature of the trade sector, with a need to replace those leaving the sector to reduce the pressure on those already working.



Demographics
34% of tradespeople surveyed are aged 55-64, the largest demographic group and those closest to retirement. 24% of respondents are under the age of 44, reflecting the lack of talent coming through to replace those who will be retiring soon. 26% have worked in the trades their whole life, demonstrating how rewarding a career it can be.

Administration
49% of tradespeople do administration in the evening, covering accounts, health and safety, and VAT. As seen last year, less than 25% of sole traders hire an accountant. While small businesses (2-25 head count) are most likely to hire an accountant, 1 in 10 rely on unpaid family members. What's more, 23% say they can't afford to take time off due to time pressures.



“Less administration. For small businesses it takes a lot of their time to do the admin. Apart from working the ‘paid’ hours you also have to do lots of ‘unpaid’/hidden work”

Gardener



APPRENTICES AND SKILLS

Getting new people into the trades will be vital to overcome demographic and growth challenges facing the industry.

Many small businesses are reluctant to take on apprentices due to the lack of financial incentives and the challenge of recruitment.

However, research found that respondents who got through this initial barrier indicated they have a positive experience.

Encouragingly, 64% of those who had an apprentice last year would take on an apprentice again.

Sole traders were more likely to recruit apprentices over five years ago than in the last five years (12% vs 8%), with just 2% taking one on in the last year.

48% of tradespeople who had taken on an apprentice did not access any funding to do so. Over a quarter (26%) of tradespeople found their apprentice through family and friends, while 23% said their apprentice approached them directly.

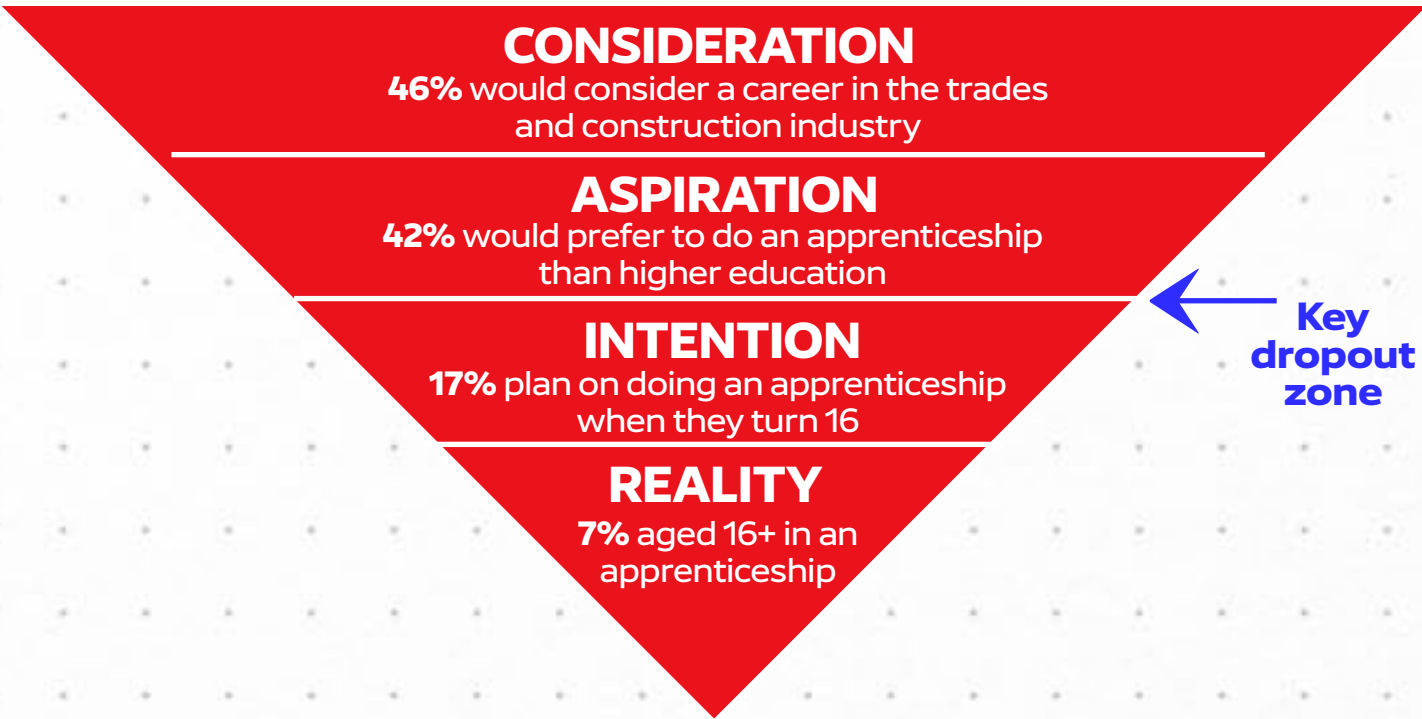


Challenges faced while recruiting an apprentice

Lack of incentive	29%
Difficult to attract suitable candidates	29%
Training schemes don't properly prepare them for the job.	25%
Cost of purchasing additional tools	17%
Difficulty finding time to train them	16%
Candidate wrong age to get government funding	14%
Difficulty with paperwork	13%
There is not enough guaranteed work	12%
Difficulty securing funding	9%
I don't know how to go about finding one	4%
Other	1%
None of the above	14%

YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO BE APPRENTICES

Our career opportunity survey shows that there is a great opportunity to convert more of those pupils who express an interest in construction into future tradespeople.



“Some schools and colleges are interested in encouraging students to forge ahead with careers in new industries but with little help from government it is having little effect”

“Not enough advice or advertising of apprenticeships”

THE DEMAND FOR SKILLS

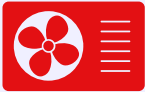
For those already in the industry, adding new skills is often a route to increasing revenue and improving business prospects.

Developing business skills

To better administer their business, 26% of the respondents stated they had taken some form of general business skills training in the past. 29% plan to upskill in the next two years across accountancy, invoicing and more, however 44% state that they would never upskill.

Energy transition

The energy transition to solar panels and heat pumps is a major area of interest to both government and to consumers.

		Plumber or heating engineer	Electrician
 Heat pump installations	Upskilled in the last year	6%	5%
	Upskilled over a year ago	21%	10%
	Intend to upskill in the next 2 years	23%	37%
	Will never upskill	51%	48%
 EV charge point installations	Upskilled in the last year	3%	11%
	Upskilled over a year ago	5%	26%
	Intend to upskill in the next 2 years	4%	40%
	Will never upskill	88%	23%
 Solar panel installations	Upskilled in the last year	4%	7%
	Upskilled over a year ago	12%	19%
	Intend to upskill in the next 2 years	13%	39%
	Will never upskill	70%	35%

While it is encouraging to see some respondents choose to upskill, more can be done to promote this.

SHIFTING ECONOMIC & POLICY LANDSCAPE

Our data shows that tradespeople are facing the challenges of consumer price sensitivity driven by the increased cost of living and a loss in confidence that government policy change will impact them.

Changes to English and Maths GCSE requirements to take up an apprenticeship

Businesses employing adult apprentices can now decide whether they need English and Maths qualifications as part of the course.

- 43% agreed that this is likely to encourage more people into the trades.
- 1 in 4 believed that this would have a negative impact, stemming mainly from electricians and maintenance technicians.

Perceived impact of government change

A significant change from last year's report is the shift in tradespeople's sentiment over the potential impact of government policy change. While over 40% still believe direct grants and support for administration of apprenticeships would support them, this year around 10% more feel policy change will have no impact. This highlights the urgent need for government action to have a direct impact on tradespeople.

Introduction of Onsite trades foundation apprenticeship

This apprenticeship introduces young people to the construction sector with employers getting incentive payments to take on apprentices, as well as funding for training and assessment costs.

- Less than 20% of those surveyed had or might take on an apprentice because of this reform.
- Over 60% thought it did not apply to them, were unaware, or felt that it would not lead to them taking on an apprentice. The majority of this group were sole traders or SMEs.

Cost of Living

Over a third of tradespeople reported that customers are negotiating more on price, and over a quarter said that customers are getting more quotes than they used to. This indicates to a degree that the cost of living is impacting on tradespeople.



HOW THE GOVERNMENT CAN SUPPORT TRADESPEOPLE

A year on from the first Voice of the Trade, many of the aspirations of the government remain reliant on the trade sector. Building 1.5 million homes, energy retrofitting at scale for the 15 million plus homes currently below EPC Band C, and supporting the overall growth of the UK economy are all directly dependent on the UK's tradespeople.

1. Government policy must support small businesses

The dip in confidence highlights the need for bold and clear policy to support small businesses. Simplifying VAT and accounting demands should be considered as well as streamlining professional accreditation.

2. Incentivise SMEs to take on more apprentices

SMEs and sole traders need easy access to what's available including direct grants¹ to take apprentices to fully qualified status² creating a pipeline of talent to become the tradespeople of tomorrow.

3. Make hiring apprentices suit the trades

Promote the value of flexi-apprenticeship agencies. Encourage more providers and colleges to link with flexi-job apprenticeship agencies that support both the needs of the apprentice and tradesperson, throughout the entirety of their course.

4. Promote flexibility in upskilling and focused on when trades have time to train

To fulfil the demand for skills to grow their business, government must push providers to put on courses at times that suit trades.

5. Inspire young people to consider a career in the trade

From hands-on learning through secondary school, to comprehensive career guidance, grants and loans for apprentices matching those offered to their university peers, the education system should promote careers in the trade as a rewarding option.



The Voice of Trade survey received 681 responses from Screwfix trade customers, followed by 20 in-store interviews with store customers. The Career Aspirations survey received 116 responses from the children of our Screwfix panellists. The results of this have been included in this report where relevant, and full results are available separately.

¹ During the pandemic, a rise in the starting grant drove up apprenticeship starts by 20%. FSB, <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resources-page/small-firms-lead-calls-for-3-000-apprenticeship-incentive-for-under-25s-and-smes.html>
² Typically a fully qualified tradesperson would be at level 3 or 4

THE VOICE OF THE TRADE *2025*



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