

## The Impact of Apprenticeship Reforms and the Case for Specialist Vocational Training



The UK's infrastructure ambitions spanning renewable energy, utilities, and transport rely on a skilled workforce of property professionals. Yet recent changes to apprenticeship funding, including the removal of public support for Level 7 qualifications, risk cutting off critical training pathways for career changers and experienced professionals.

This article explores how the reforms will impact the training and development of specialists in wayleaves, easements, land acquisition, and compulsory purchase, the essential roles that keep infrastructure projects moving, and makes the case for a shift towards specialist, sector-focused vocational training that better aligns with the needs of the property sector.

### INTRODUCTION - CONTEXT AND POLICY CHANGE

The UK's apprenticeship system is undergoing significant reform. From January 2026, the government will withdraw public funding for Level 7 apprenticeships for all new learners aged 22 and over; a decision that will have a profound impact on sectors such as property, infrastructure, and professional services.

Level 7 apprenticeships, which are equivalent to postgraduate degrees, have been a key route for professionals seeking to become chartered surveyors and enter other high-skill roles within the property sector. Many of these individuals are career changers or mid-career professionals; people who bring valuable experience from other fields but need formal qualifications to progress into specialist roles such as land referencing, compulsory purchase, or renewable energy land acquisition.

The government's stated aim is to prioritise younger learners (aged 16 to 21) and focus funding on foundational skills. While this is a laudable goal, it raises serious questions about the future of upskilling and reskilling pathways for those looking to move into the property sector later in their careers.

Without funded access to Level 7 qualifications, many aspiring professionals may find it financially unviable to pursue the training required for chartered status at a time when the industry is facing acute skills shortages and an urgent need to support the UK's Net Zero infrastructure ambitions.



### THE SKILLS SHORTAGE IN THE PROPERTY SECTOR

The property sector plays a critical role in delivering the UK's Net Zero ambitions, but it is facing a growing skills shortage; one that cannot be solved by a narrow focus on entry-level training for school leavers.

Specialist roles such as those in wayleaves and easements, land acquisition (for renewable energy and infrastructure projects), compulsory purchase and compensation, and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) require deep, technical expertise. These professionals are not just administrators, they are the ones who navigate the complex legal, environmental, and commercial frameworks that underpin major infrastructure projects. Their work directly enables the development of green energy networks, transport systems, and essential utilities that form the backbone of the UK's Net Zero strategy.

These roles demand a level of specialist knowledge that is not typically taught in broad, generic degrees or standard apprenticeships. They require an understanding of land law, planning frameworks, regulation, and stakeholder engagement; skills that are acquired through targeted training and practical, industry-specific experience.

Crucially, many of the people entering these roles are career changers; individuals who bring valuable experience from other sectors but who need structured, formal training to transition into the property profession. The traditional apprenticeship model, particularly when focused on the 16–21 age group, does not cater to this demographic. By restricting funding for advanced apprenticeships and focusing on younger learners, there is a real risk that the property sector will lose access to a vital pool of talent; those who are ready to apply their skills in new ways to meet the challenges of Net Zero and infrastructure delivery.

The result? An increasingly constrained talent pipeline at a time when the demand for skilled professionals is only growing. Without clear, accessible pathways for specialist training, the sector risks delays in project delivery, rising costs, and a failure to meet national targets for infrastructure and sustainability.

This is why the case for alternative, focused vocational training, the kind of targeted programmes that Coppergate Training is developing, is so important. It is not just about creating opportunities for individuals; it is about ensuring the UK has the skills base required to deliver the projects that matter most.

## THE LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT APPRENTICESHIP MODEL

For many professionals in the property sector, the Level 7 apprenticeship, typically aligned to a master's degree, has been one of the few viable routes to achieving chartered status. This has been particularly important for career changers: individuals who bring valuable experience from other industries but need formal qualifications to transition into roles such as chartered surveyors.

However, the decision to withdraw funding for Level 7 apprenticeships for learners aged 22 and over makes this pathway significantly less accessible for precisely the kind of people the sector needs most; those with prior experience who are seeking to retrain and specialise in areas like wayleaves and easements, land acquisition for renewable energy, compulsory purchase, and NSIP delivery. Without financial support, these learners may be priced out of professional training altogether, leaving employers without the specialist talent they rely on to deliver complex infrastructure projects.

The problem runs deeper than just the funding change. Many of the current apprenticeship standards, particularly at Levels 3 to 6, are too broad or too academic in nature to effectively prepare learners for the specialist, technical roles the property sector demands. A general management degree or a broad surveying programme may touch on some relevant concepts, but they rarely provide the practical, targeted skills required for roles that sit at the intersection of land, law, infrastructure, and regulation.

In short, the apprenticeship system, as it stands, is not aligned with the real-world skills needs of the property sector. The loss of funding for Level 7 only sharpens this issue: it highlights the system's lack of flexibility and its failure to support career changers or those seeking to upskill into specialist roles that are critical for the UK's Net Zero and infrastructure goals.



## THE CASE FOR SPECIALIST, VOCATIONAL TRAINING

The reality is that the property sector's skills needs are too specialised to be fully met by broad, generic training programmes or traditional academic pathways. Roles such as wayleave officers, land agents, compulsory purchase specialists, and renewable energy land consultants require precise, practical knowledge not just theoretical understanding. These professionals must navigate complex legal frameworks, negotiations with multiple stakeholders, and the unique regulatory challenges that underpin major (and less major) infrastructure and Net Zero projects.

The current system is not designed to meet this need. Generic degrees and standard apprenticeships may provide a broad foundation, but they rarely cover the specific technical skills required to deliver complex property and infrastructure work. Moreover, the removal of funding for Level 7 apprenticeships for those over 21 will only make it harder for career changers and diverse learners, many of whom have valuable experience from other sectors, to gain the qualifications needed to enter and progress in these specialist roles.

This is why the property sector needs to rethink its approach to training. Employers must consider alternative, specialist providers who can deliver practical, sector-specific vocational training that aligns directly with their needs.

Coppergate Training is developing exactly this kind of provision: targeted qualifications that equip learners with the knowledge and skills required for real-world job roles whether that's acquiring land for a new wind farm, negotiating wayleaves for a utilities project, or managing the legal and procedural complexities of a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

By focusing on practical application, regulatory knowledge, and real-world problem solving, specialist vocational training offers a faster, more relevant, and more cost-effective pathway to building the workforce the property sector urgently needs. It's not just about academic achievement; it's about creating professionals who are ready to deliver from day one—and ensuring the UK has the talent required to meet its Net Zero targets and deliver the infrastructure of the future.

## INTRODUCING COPPERGATE TRAINING'S VISION

At Coppergate Training, we believe that the property sector needs a new generation of training; one that is specialist, practical, and directly aligned to the skills employers actually need. The challenges of Net Zero, infrastructure delivery, and land acquisition for renewable energy projects demand a workforce that is job-ready, not just academically qualified.

That's why we're developing a suite of sector-specific qualifications designed to support professionals working in areas such as:

- Wayleaves and easements
- Compulsory purchase and compensation
- Renewable energy land acquisition
- Land referencing for utilities and infrastructure
- Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)
- and many more...

These qualifications will be built around practical skills, regulatory knowledge, and real-world scenarios, equipping learners with the tools to contribute immediately and effectively to the sector's most critical projects.

We recognise that the property sector is not solely driven by school leavers or early-career entrants. Many of the professionals we aim to train are career changers, mid-career professionals, or individuals seeking to specialise in new areas. Our courses will be designed with flexibility in mind providing accessible, affordable pathways for learners of all backgrounds, not just those who fit the narrow criteria of traditional apprenticeship schemes.

With the withdrawal of funding for Level 7 apprenticeships on the horizon, and the growing urgency of the UK's Net Zero and infrastructure goals, the need for this kind of training has never been more pressing.

We are working hard to ensure our first qualifications are ready for delivery by early 2026, if not sooner. Our goal is to give employers a real alternative: a partner who understands the property sector's unique challenges and can provide bespoke, high-impact training that delivers results.

Coppergate Training is here to help bridge the skills gap and build the workforce that will shape the UK's future!

## CONCLUSION - A CALL TO ACTION

The UK's ambitious targets for Net Zero, infrastructure delivery, and the modernisation of its energy systems will only be met if the property sector has the specialist skills and talent required to get the job done. Yet the current training system, narrowly focused on younger learners and generic qualifications, does not reflect the complete reality of the workforce.

Employers must now take a fresh look at how they develop and retain the people who are critical to their success. With the withdrawal of funding for Level 7 apprenticeships for career changers and older learners, the time has come to explore new, targeted training solutions that better align with the specific challenges facing the property sector today.

At Coppergate Training, we are building practical, sector-focused qualifications that are designed to fill the skills gaps in areas such as wayleaves, easements, land acquisition, renewable energy, and NSIP delivery. Our courses will provide the hands-on knowledge and technical understanding that employers need without the high costs and academic barriers of traditional routes.

We invite employers, industry bodies, and professionals to join us in rethinking training for the property sector. Let's move beyond outdated models and embrace a more relevant, cost-effective, and inclusive approach to developing the talent that will drive the UK's future.

Coppergate Training is ready to partner with forward-thinking organisations who share this vision. Together, we can build a workforce that's ready to deliver the projects that matter most and help secure the UK's place at the forefront of the Net Zero transition and infrastructure transformation.

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