

Skills passport survey

**TUC response to the skills passport
survey**
17 April 2026

Introduction

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) brings together the 5.3 million working people who make up our 47 member unions. We support unions to grow and thrive, and we stand up for everyone who works for a living.

The TUC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Skills Passport Survey conducted by Skills England. This response has been informed by engagement with several of our affiliated trade unions, reflecting perspectives from across the workforce. The TUC has responded to all six questions in the survey.

1. How could a skills passport be useful for employers?

Skills passports can be useful for employers by making workers' skills and competencies clearer and more transferable across sectors. However, their usefulness is currently limited by fragmented language; even closely related industries, such as onshore and offshore wind, often fail to recognise overlapping skill sets due to inconsistent terminology.

For a skills passport system to be truly effective for employers, it cannot be a purely technical or top-down solution. Employers benefit most when these systems are developed through genuine social partnership. Tripartite frameworks, such as the Fair Work Convention in Scotland,¹ demonstrate that trade union involvement is essential. By working together, unions and employers can ensure Skills Passports are relevant and useful, reflecting high-quality training and robust occupational standards as well as safeguarding workers' rights, and ensuring skills passports act as pathways to good work.

To move beyond industry-silos, a skills passport system requires sustained public investment in standardisation and translating skills frameworks, so that qualifications and experience are recognisable so that workers can transition across industries and sectors. This aligns with the TUC's longstanding position, reflected in its joint work with Make UK, that skills systems should support labour market mobility and occupational transition while maintaining high-quality training and robust occupational standards.²

For example, in Wales some evidence from the introduction of a social care workforce register shows that creating a professional system without clear, consistent standards can create complexity rather than clarity. Similar issues have highlighting been raised regarding proposals to introduce a register in the Early Years sector,

¹ [The Fair Work Convention](#)

² [The Skills Needed to Support an Industrial Strategy | Make UK](#)

that a passport system must avoid replicating the risks of fragmentation of different roles, inconsistent qualifications, and weak data structures.

International evidence shows that effective skills passport systems rely on trusted verification and strong governance to ensure employer confidence in the accuracy of worker's credentials. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) ³ stresses that adoption depends on employer and worker buy-in, social partner involvement, and interoperability across systems, not simply technical platforms. ⁴ By embedding social partnership, with unions and employers at the heart of the governance structure for skills passports, the system gains credibility and relevance needed to become a primary tool for recruitment and workforce planning. ⁵

2. How could a skills passport support individuals and improve opportunities for those entering or already in work?

For workers, skills passports have the potential to enhance mobility, open access to new opportunities, and provide clearer pathways into emerging sectors. However, this potential will only be realised where passports are directly linked to real job opportunities. Workers consistently tell us that credentials alone do not guarantee access to new industries.

To improve mobility, ensure career progression and transition, skills passports must go beyond technical data and address the practical barriers workers face.

Evidence from Prospect union shows that workers in oil and gas are successfully transitioning into transmission, nuclear, and clean energy roles, including those linked to programmes such as Rolls-Royce's Small Modular Reactor (SMR) developments. These transitions are often occurring outside formal passport initiatives, indicating that worker capability is not the barrier. Instead, shortcomings lie in system design, employer engagement, and lack of clear recruitment pathways. Trade unions play a critical role here by negotiating these pathways and ensuring that an individual's existing skills are formally recognised and rewarded by new employers.

International evidence also highlights that skills passports must recognise informal and formal learning, and must be embedded within strong public institutions, otherwise workers' real competencies are undervalued or overlooked. ⁶

³ [ILO Homepage | International Labour Organization](#)

⁴ [Skills passport workshop report_16Feb_final.pdf](#)

⁵ [Skills passport workshop report_16Feb_final.pdf](#)

⁶ [Skills passport workshop report_16Feb_final.pdf](#)

A skills passport must not become a tool for offloading costs onto the individual. Lessons from the EY sector highlight the risk of systems that create obligations such as mandatory CPD without guaranteeing protected time or funding. To support individuals, skills passports should be designed in social partnership with unions and employers working to ensure that barriers workers face when trying to access training are overcome:

To genuinely improve outcomes for workers, skills passports must be backed by:

- employer recognition of prior learning
- funded training opportunities
- clear, accessible entry routes into good jobs
- secure employment linked to competencies

3. How could a skills passport reflect both local and national skills needs?

A skills passport must reflect both regional labour market realities and national strategic priorities. The transition from declining sectors to emerging industries, particularly in the context of the clean energy transition, is a clear national priority.

Supporting workers to move from sectors such as oil and gas into renewables, transmission, and nuclear is essential to meeting climate commitments and addressing future workforce demand.

From a Just Transition perspective, skills passports should identify and validate transferable skills and competencies so that workers can move smoothly between sectors without any loss of pay, status, or job quality.

To achieve this, the system must be shaped through strong social partnership, with active involvement from local employers, trade unions, training providers, and regional bodies. This will ensure that skills systems are rooted in local need, reflect real occupational standards, and remain aligned with the wider national industrial strategy.

The EY workforce experience demonstrates that registration or passport systems cannot be designed in isolation from local context. The EY sector is highly mixed market, with significant regional variation in provision. This highlights the need for passports to be inclusive of different employment models and to reflect real labour market diversity. International findings also emphasise that skills passports must be designed through meaningful engagement with workers and employers to ensure they reflect actual labour market needs, including local context and occupational diversity.⁷

⁷ [Skills passport workshop report 16Feb final.pdf](#)

4. How important is consistency across different employers, sectors, and regions for skills passports?

Consistency is critical. Without a common framework, employers will struggle to recognise workers' skills and competencies, and workers will face barriers when moving across employers, sectors, or regions. Current inconsistencies, between closely related sectors, demonstrate that without standardised terminology, skills translation, and mutual recognition, a skills passport will not deliver its intended benefits.

From a trade union perspective, inconsistency will also undermine fairness and worker confidence. When the same skills are valued differently by different employers, workers may be required to repeatedly evidence skills and competence, weakening the credibility of the passport and increasing insecurity for workers.

TUC affiliated unions emphasise that achieving consistency requires clear national leadership, but this must be delivered through genuine social partnership with trade unions, employers, and training bodies. A top-down- system imposed without worker voice risks reflecting employer convenience rather than occupational reality and may entrench inequality.

Consistency should support portability, progression, and fair pay, not simply labour market flexibility. When properly co designed, a consistent framework can improve mobility while protecting standards and supporting good jobs.

International evidence strongly reinforces this point, emphasising the need for a common language for skills, qualifications, and occupational descriptors as a foundation for portability across sectors and regions.⁸

5. What important lessons should be learned from skills passports (or similar systems) currently in use?

TUC affiliates emphasise that the central lesson from existing skills passport systems is clear: they only succeed when they lead to genuine employment outcomes and are created through social partnership. Workers will not engage with platforms that merely catalogue their qualifications unless these open access to good jobs, progression routes, and secure work. Evidence across multiple sectors shows that the main barriers are not worker capability, but weak system design, inconsistent employer uptake, and insufficient investment.⁹

⁸ [Skills passport workshop report 16Feb final.pdf](#)

⁹ [Skills passport workshop report 16Feb final.pdf](#)

International evidence confirms these findings, highlighting that skills passport systems fail when they lack strong governance, have unreliable verification mechanisms, or are not supported by adequate institutional capacity and investment.¹⁰

Experience in England illustrates these issues clearly. In construction, long standing problems with the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card system demonstrate how fragmented and poorly regulated approaches can create obstacles rather than mobility. Unite the union have highlighted how third-party agencies have overcharged workers for CSCS cards and raised concerns about widespread card fraud, exacerbated by employers failing to electronically verify credentials.¹¹

These failings undermine confidence, threaten safety, and show how easily systems can become costly, inconsistent, and open to abuse without strong governance and enforcement.

Similar challenges appear in England's energy transition sectors. At Teesside, GMB has highlighted how employers in the offshore wind supply chain, despite receiving significant public funding, initially refused to recognise the union or engage with workers, creating unnecessary barriers for already highly skilled staff.

The subsequent GMB recognition win at SeAH Wind demonstrates that new green industries must embed fair employment standards and worker voice from the outset if skills are to be properly recognised and utilised.¹²

While these examples highlight weaknesses in England, lessons from Scotland and Wales show that stronger social partnership models where unions have formal roles in governance and, in Wales, statutory roles can create more coherent, trusted, and equitable systems with clearer pathways for workers.¹³

Across sectors, employer engagement cannot rely on voluntary goodwill. Effective skills recognition requires sector wide frameworks, collective bargaining structures, and where appropriate public procurement levers to ensure employers recognise transferable skills, maintain high training standards, and support fair workforce planning. Skills passports cannot, on their own, fix deeper labour market issues such as casualisation or weak enforcement; they must sit within a properly regulated labour market.

¹⁰ [Skills passport workshop report 16Feb final.pdf](#)

¹¹ [A historic win for good clean energy jobs in Teesside | TUC](#)

¹² www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/wales/social-partnership-new-way-forward-wales

¹³ [Skills passport workshop report 16Feb final.pdf](#)

Skills passports must therefore be trusted, portable, and designed to benefit workers, employers, and the wider economy.

They should:

- Recognise agreed occupational standards
- Capture both formal qualifications and experiential learning
- Be codesigned with workers and their unions to reflect real job requirements
- Include strong data rights, giving workers control over how their information is used and protected

ILO evidence also stresses that skills passports must remain free to workers and embedded in public systems to avoid shifting costs or creating financial barriers an important principle for fairness and equal access.

It is important that skills passports do not replace employer investment in training or shift costs onto workers who already face financial barriers or inconsistent recognition of their skills.

6. What features should a skills passport have to provide a positive user experience and support interoperability?

To work effectively across sectors and regions, a skills passport should include:

- Strong social partnership, with trade unions centrally involved in design, governance, and implementation
- Alignment with nationally recognised occupational standards to ensure consistency, fairness, and portability across sectors
- Clear, standardised language that translates skills across industries and avoids sector specific- jargon
- Interoperability and consistent recognition across employers, sectors, and training bodies
- Government conditionality on public contracts to drive employer participation and high-quality- training standards
- An accessible, user-friendly- digital platform that allows workers to record both formal qualifications and informal or experiential learning, ensuring their full range of competencies is recognised and portable across sectors

A well-designed skills passport must therefore strengthen not replace the wider skills ecosystem and must be rooted in high-quality training, worker voice, and fair employment outcomes.

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