SKILLS GAP REPORT
2026

NASC®

SETTING THE SCAFFOLDING
STANDARD SINCE 1945

nask.org.uk

March 2026

FOREWORD

The scaffolding and access sector underpins the safe delivery of construction, maintenance and infrastructure projects across the UK. It is also instrumental in large-scale outdoor events and the film industry and essential to sectors such as aerospace and energy. Our members operate at the highest standards of safety, competence and professionalism across all these areas of the economy. Sustaining those standards depends on a skilled and resilient workforce.

This Skills Gap Report provides the first evidence-based picture of workforce capacity across NASC full member organisations. It highlights current vacancies, anticipated recruitment needs, retirement pressures and the barriers affecting workforce growth.

The headline figure for me is that NASC member firms expect o have almost 6,000 vacancies this year. When we extrapolate that to the sector as a whole it is deeply concerning. If you allow for retirements and some natural attrition and turnover among staff, you quickly get to around 40,000 vacancies that will need to be filled.

And these findings confirm that while there is sustained demand for scaffolders and supervisory grades, there are gaps in the supply of staff. Our report finds structural challenges, including recruitment difficulties, uneven regional pressures and a growing number of experienced operatives approaching retirement.

This report reinforces the importance of coordinated action across industry, training providers and government. If we are to maintain standards and meet future demand, workforce planning must remain a strategic priority.

Skills and competence sit at the heart of NASC. This report provides the data we need to understand where the sector stands in terms of the much talked about, but under-researched, skills shortage. It will help NASC members and other key stakeholders decide where to focus our efforts.

The evidence from this report shows some clear themes. It tells us that recruitment pressure remains concentrated in core operational roles, particularly scaffolders and advanced scaffolders. It also shows that most organisations within NASC membership are expecting growth over the next five years, both in turnover and staffing.

It also highlights that confidence declines further when industry leaders are projecting beyond the immediate planning horizon. This increased uncertainty in the long term suggests a high likelihood that future skills gaps may in fact be underestimated.

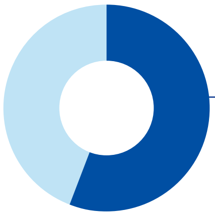
These findings will inform our work on training access, standards, funding discussions and early pipeline engagement. They also strengthen our case when engaging with all parts of government and other large public sector bodies.

On behalf of NASC, I would like to thank every member organisation that took the time to complete our survey. The level of engagement we had strengthens the credibility of this report and ensures the conclusions reflect real operational experience across the sector.

I would also like to recognise the efforts of the HR leads, directors and managers who provided so much workforce data. Sharing this information enables NASC to build a clearer picture of the current and likely future situation and allows us to advocate more effectively on behalf of our members.

Clive Dickin
Group CEO, NASC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

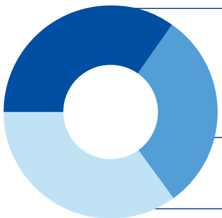


56% of respondents reported at least one vacancy.

There were an average of **4.4 vacancies** per NASC member firm.

Estimated total vacancies across the full membership is **1,760 roles**.

Shortages are concentrated in operational roles:

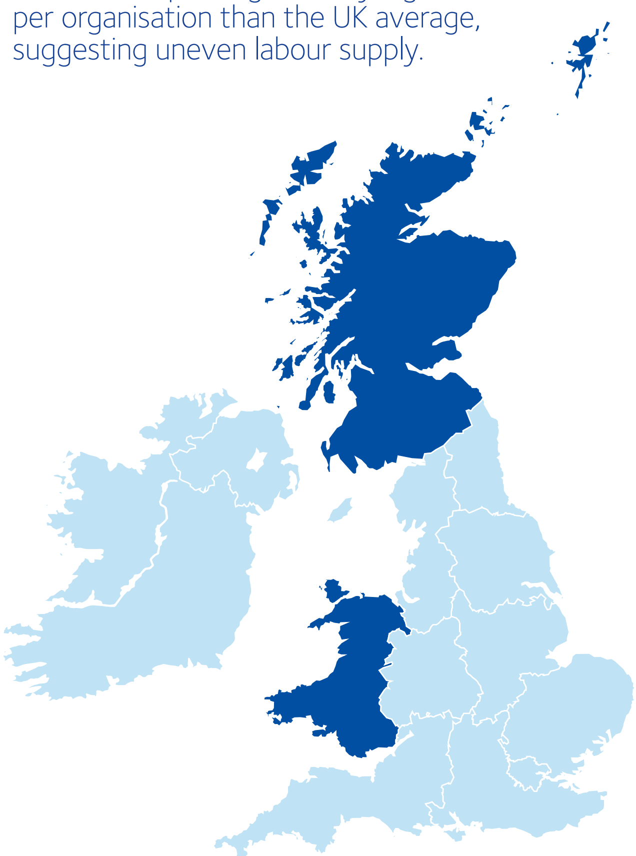


36% of all vacancies are for scaffolders

21% of all vacancies are for advanced scaffolders and supervisors

36% of vacancies are for labourers and trainees

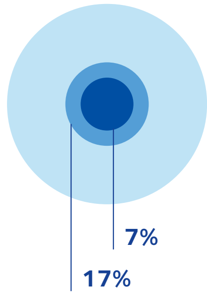
Vacancy pressure varies regionally. **Wales** and **Scotland** report significantly higher vacancies per organisation than the UK average, suggesting uneven labour supply.



Retirement risk

Around 7% of direct employees are within four years of retirement, equating to an estimated 1,459 workers across full members by 2029.

For **another 17%** of employees, retirement timing is unknown, meaning actual near-term losses may be higher. This indicates a structural risk from experienced staff leaving alongside ongoing recruitment pressure.



Anticipated recruitment needs

NASC members report their 2026 outlook as follow:

83% expect to need to recruit this year

Scaffolder roles account for **37%** of this projected demand.

Longer-term projections suggest ongoing labour demand, but uncertainty increases significantly beyond one year.

Workforce expansion is tied to labour availability, meaning growth ambitions depend on solving recruitment challenges.

Barriers to recruitment

The main constraints reported:

Difficulty finding qualified staff (**60%**)

Economic uncertainty (**48%**)

Pay expectations (**48%**)

Lack of applicants (**47%**)

Organisations planning workforce growth report barriers more acutely.

Impact of unfilled vacancies

Most respondents (**81%**) reported negative impacts from unfilled roles, including:

Reduced ability to take on new contracts (**47%**)

Increased workload for existing staff (**46%**)

Higher overtime costs (**34%**)

Lost revenue or profitability (**34%**)

Lower productivity (**33%**)

Larger firms report more strategic and financial impacts, while smaller firms are more likely to report limited impact.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Workforce size and composition

On average, a full NASC member organisation directly employs 54 staff and engages nine contractors or subcontractors. This equates to an average combined workforce of **63 individuals per organisation**.

The typical workforce profile is strongly operational:

- **42%** scaffolders
- **24%** advanced scaffolders and supervisors
- **14%** labourers
- **10%** trainees
- **10%** managers

Contractors account for approximately **14%** of the total workforce.

Retirement risk

The current workforce is ageing and scaffolding is a physically demanding activity, which does not lend itself to working long into old age. Among respondents, 7% of directly employed staff are expected to retire within four years. Based on current membership levels, this equates to an estimated **1,459 experienced employees** leaving by 2029. This will lead to further pressure on an already squeezed sector.

And the picture may be even worse than this **7%** figure suggests. For almost a fifth of employees (**17%**), retirement plans and timelines are currently unknown or uncertain. This points to the short-term retirement outflow, and its effect on the industry and the skills gap, being much higher than current estimates suggest.

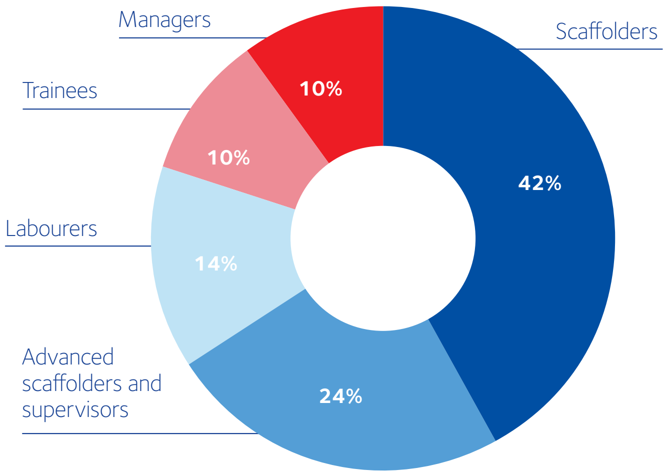
Alongside the loss of people, this represents a massive loss of experience to the industry. It is impossible to equip a new entrant with decades of experience. The industry needs to look hard at the most appropriate schemes to allow older workers who wish to do so to find ways to pass on their wisdom and experience to younger workers.

Regions of busiest operation

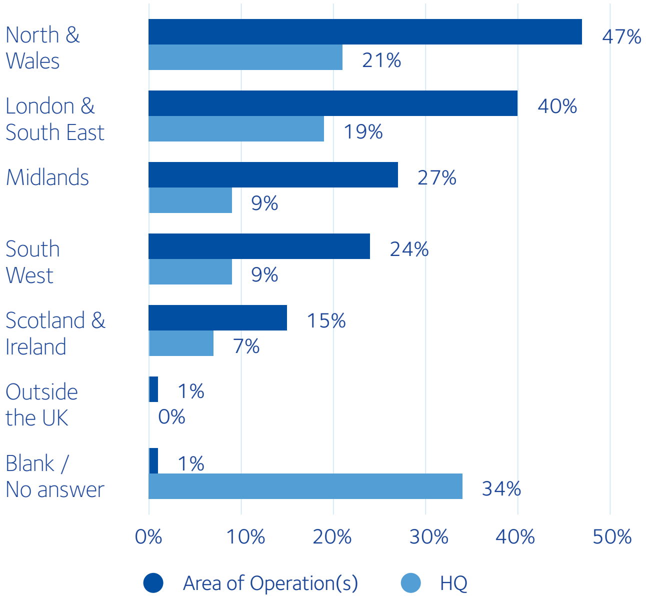
Base: All respondents answering; n=151

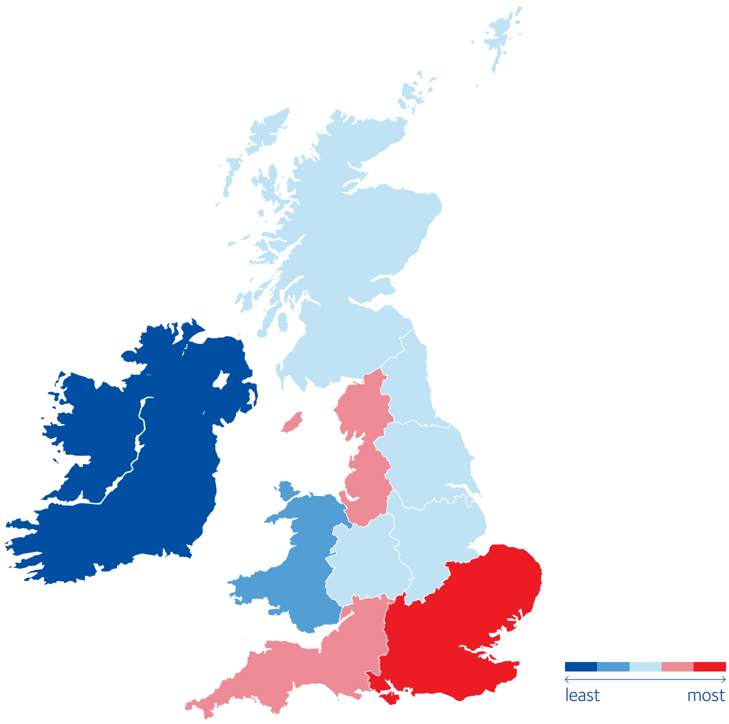
Region	Base size	% who are operationally busiest here
SE (inc London & East Anglia)		40%
SW		24%
NW		23%
NE		17%
E.Mids		15%
W.Mids		12%
Scotland		12%
Wales		8%
Ireland		3%
Outside the UK		1%
Channel Islands		0%
Don't know		0%
Prefer not to say		1%

The typical workforce profile



Region of HQ or region of busiest operation





Current vacancies

Over half (56%) of all respondents reported at least one unfilled vacancy. But the average number is **4.4 vacancies** per organisation. This equates to approximately **1,760 vacancies across all full members**.

This represents a major skills challenge, with this figure being the number of vacancies at one point in time.

Scaffolders account for the largest share of vacancies, followed by advanced scaffolders and supervisors. These are the most important roles across all member firms. Labourers and trainees together also represent over a third of current vacancies.

The number and range of vacancies – the so-called "vacancy intensity" – varies considerably by region. Members primarily based in Wales and Scotland report significantly higher average vacancies per organisation than in most English regions. This is an issue for an industry where firms and employees rarely look outside their immediate region to hire or seek work.

Recruitment outlook

Looking ahead to 2026 (the survey was conducted in late December 2025), there is good news in that 83% of organisations are expecting to grow and therefore recruit in 2026. Extrapolated across the full membership, anticipated recruitment in 2026 totals approximately 5,954 roles.

Here again, scaffolders account for the largest share of these new roles, with 37% of the total projected recruitment being at this level.

Projected recruitment reduces in 2027 and again for 2028 to 2030, though this appears to be linked as much to forecasting uncertainty as it does to any sense of declining demand for work. Almost half of respondents (45%) were unable to estimate recruitment needs for the period three to five years ahead.

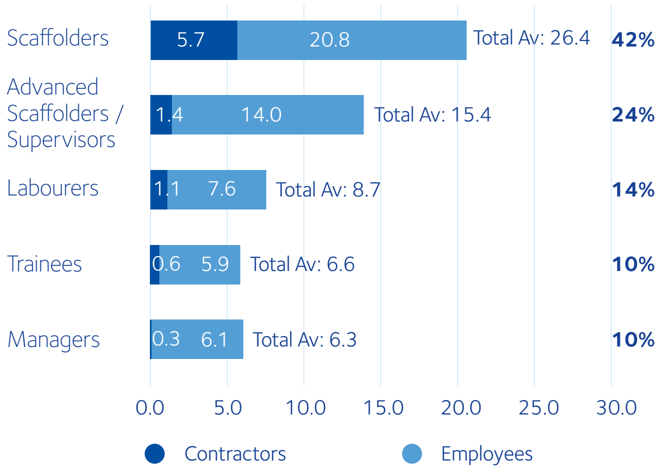
Barriers to workforce growth

Across all respondents, regardless of size or region, there were several common barriers to recruiting more staff. The most frequently cited barriers to future workforce growth are seen as:

- Difficulty finding qualified staff
- Economic uncertainty
- Pay expectations
- Lack of applicants

Perhaps as expected, those organisations that are planning workforce growth report these barriers as being more acute than those that are expecting static or declining staff numbers in the years ahead.

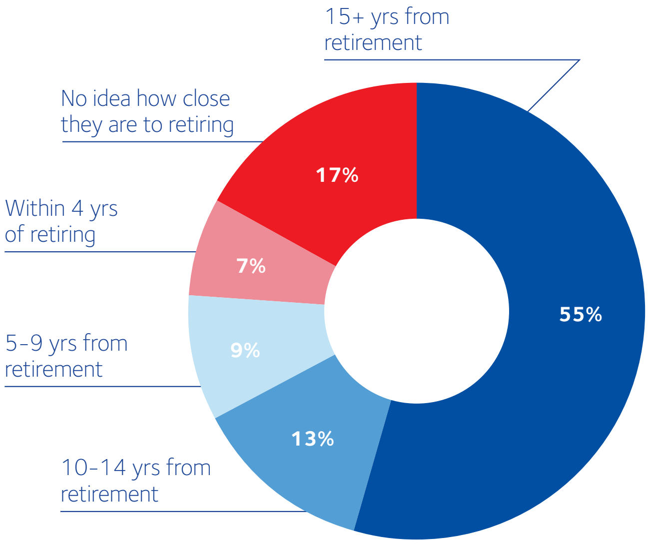
Average number of direct employees and contractors
Base: All respondents answering; n=148



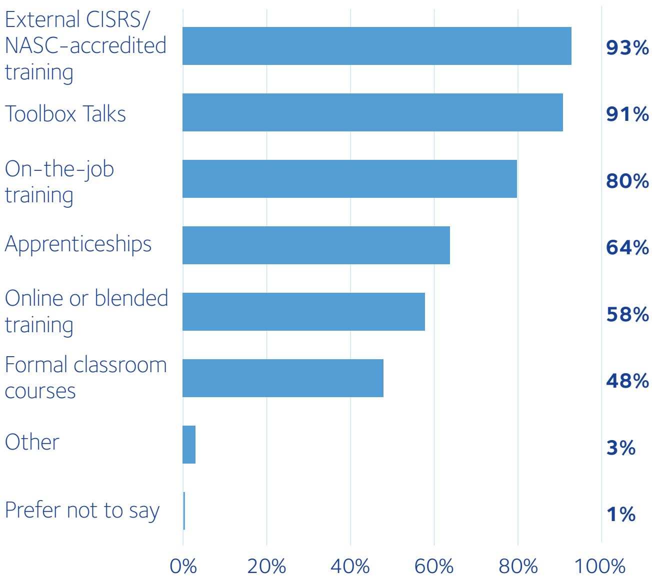
Average number of direct employees and contractors
Base: All respondents answering; n=148

	Average direct employees	Average contractors/ sub-contractors	Total
Scaffolders	20.8	5.7	26.4
Advanced Scaffolders / Supervisors	14.0	1.4	15.4
Labourers	7.6	1.1	8.7
Trainees	5.9	0.6	6.6
Managers	6.1	0.3	6.3
Total	54.4	9.0	63.4

Retirement plans for employees
Base: All respondents answering; n=148



What training does your organisation currently provide?
Base: All; n=151



Impact of unfilled vacancies

Most respondents (81%) reported operational or financial impacts from having unfilled roles in their companies. The most common consequences were cited as being a reduced ability to take on new contracts and increased workload for existing staff. Larger organisations were more likely to report strategic impacts including revenue loss and client relationship damage than smaller ones.

Organisational outlook

Two thirds of organisations expect turnover and staffing levels to increase over the next five years. Most are planning for moderate growth rather than rapid expansion. Medium-sized organisations expressed the strongest confidence. Smaller organisations were more uncertain and more likely to report that they don't know how staffing levels will change over time.

Turnover growth and staffing growth are closely aligned and highly correlated across all respondents. Organisations expecting increased revenue are also highly likely to expect workforce expansion.

Regional activity

Operational activity is highest in NASC's South East Region, which includes London and East Anglia, followed by the South West and then the North West.

But there was little correlation between activity and vacancy intensity across the regions. Those regions with the highest activity were not always those with the highest vacancy intensity. For example, Wales and Scotland reported higher average vacancies per organisation than other regions, suggesting a significant regional imbalance in labour supply.

Perceptions of regional shortages do not always align with vacancy data. Many organisations report being unable to assess regional differences.

Recruitment patterns

As mentioned earlier, recruitment in the scaffolding and access sector remains predominantly local. Almost half (43%) of responding member organisations never recruit outside their local area. Only 7% recruit non-local talent with any degree of regularity.

This suggests that there may be some opportunities for recruitment if firms can be encouraged to adopt more nation-wide approaches to hiring.

International recruitment also plays a minimal role at the moment, with 81% of respondents never recruiting scaffolders from outside the UK. Here again is an area where there may be some short-term wins.

Recruitment timelines vary by role. Labourer roles are typically filled fairly quickly, while managerial roles frequently take two months or longer.

Medium and long-term projections

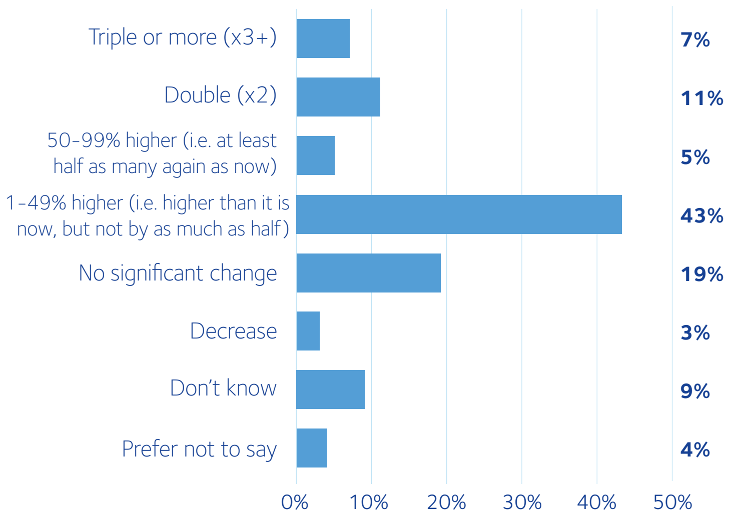
Projected recruitment for 2027 totals approximately 4,782 roles across full membership. For 2028 to 2030, projected recruitment totals 5,544 roles over three years, equivalent to roughly 1,848 per year.

But this trend for lower longer-term projections, especially for later years in the projection period, often reflect reduced forecasting confidence rather than reduced anticipated demand. Put as simply as possible, as planning horizons extend, uncertainty increases.

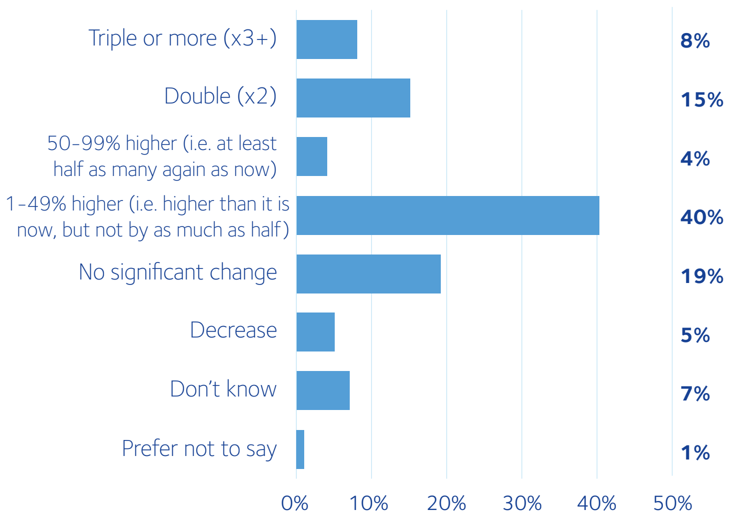
Training and NASC's role

Training provision among NASC contracting members is as widespread as expected. Given the requirement to have at least 90% CISRS cardholders in their workforce, with the demands placed on firms to provide continuous training, it is no surprise to find that 93% provide CISRS-accredited training and 91% deliver Toolbox Talks.

How do you expect your organisation's turnover to change over the next five years?
Base: All; n=151



How do you expect your staff numbers to change over the next five years?
Base: All; n=151



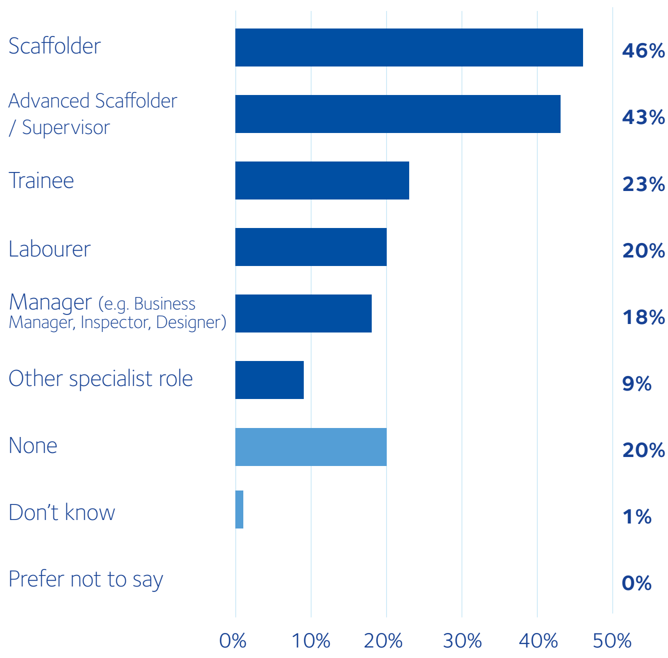
Members identified several priority areas where NASC can support the sector in this aspect of workforce and skills management:

- Improving access, affordability and geographic reach of training
- Strengthening early engagement with schools and colleges
- Reforming aspects of training structure and sequencing
- Promoting scaffolding as a professional career
- Engaging government and industry bodies on funding and policy

These themes reflect a shared recognition that workforce sustainability requires both immediate recruitment solutions and long-term pipeline development.

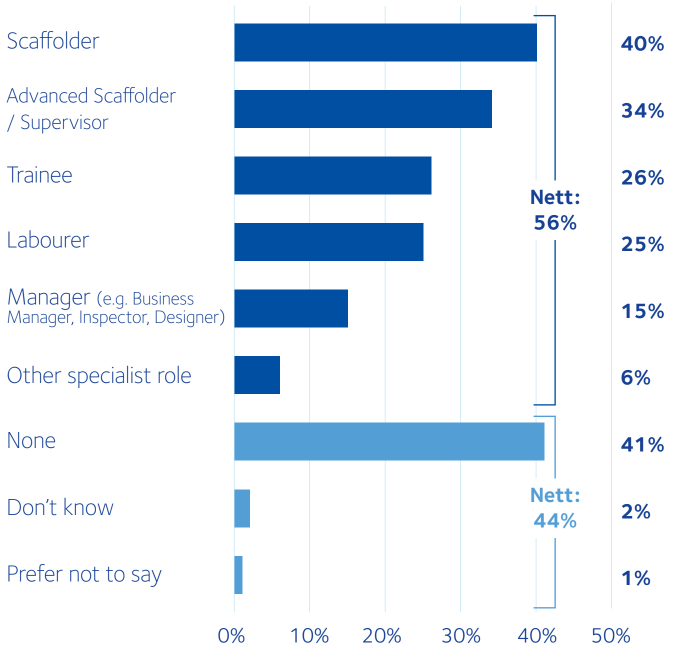
NASC is engaged in a range of activities, both under its own banner and working with CISRS and the training centres that deliver CISRS courses, to cover most if not all of the above areas. Visit scaffoldingcareers.com and nasc.org.uk for more details of this wide range of on-going engagement in skills, training and career development.

Which roles are you finding hardest to recruit?
Base: All; n=151



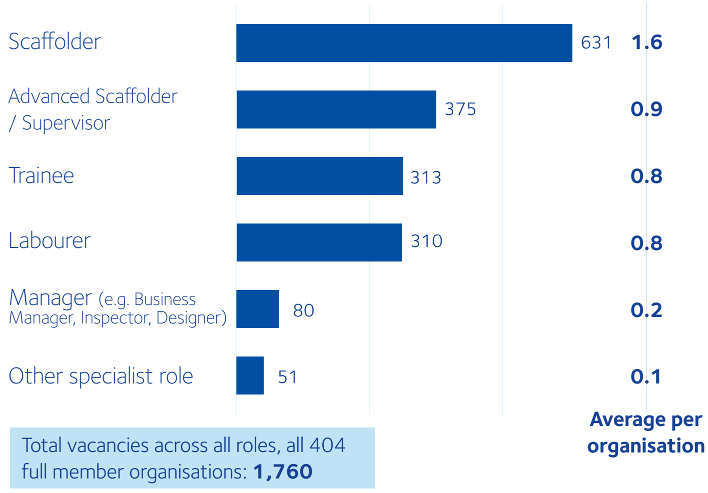
Current vacancies by role

Base: All; n=151



Total vacancies in 2025 across all member organisations

Base: Universe; n= 404 (extrapolated from Base: All respondents; n=151)

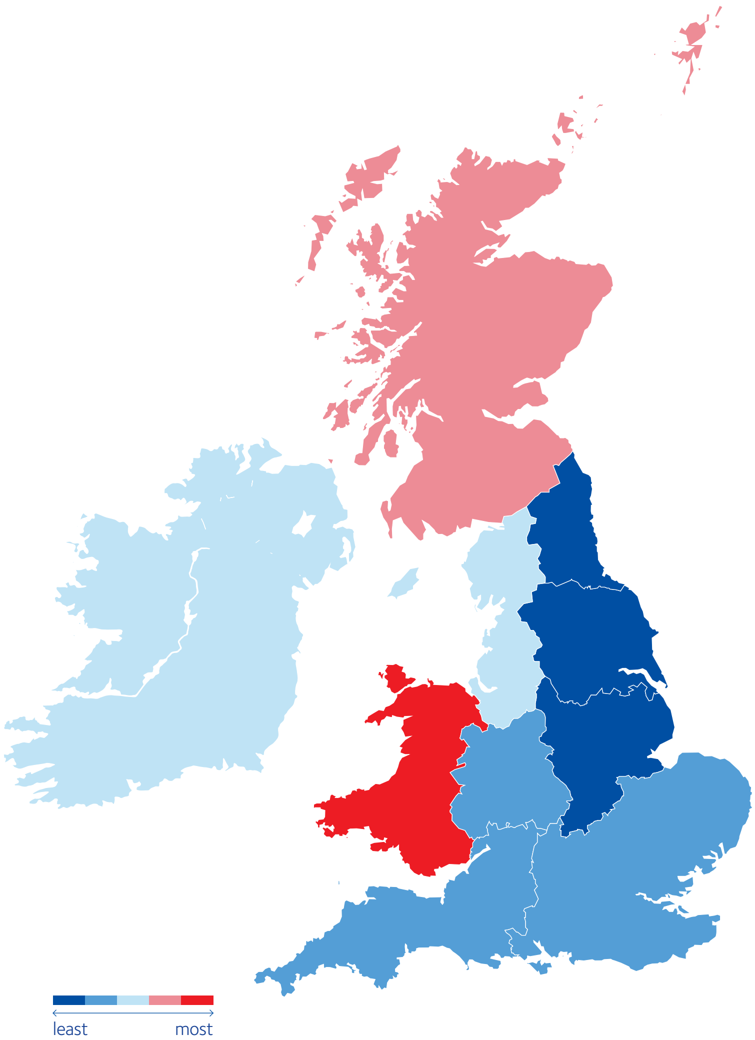


Average vacancies in 2025 per organisation by region

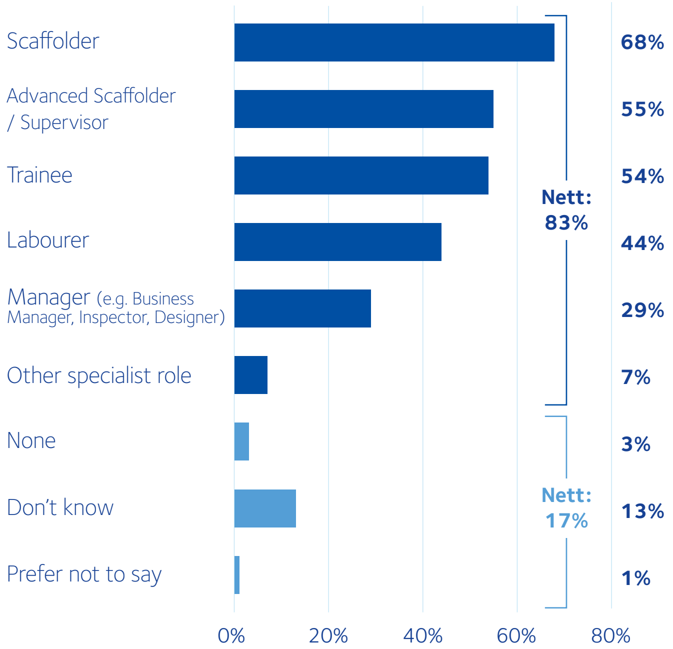
Base: Universe; Extrapolated from Base: All respondents; n=151

Average vacancies per organisation, shown by regions of busiest operation:

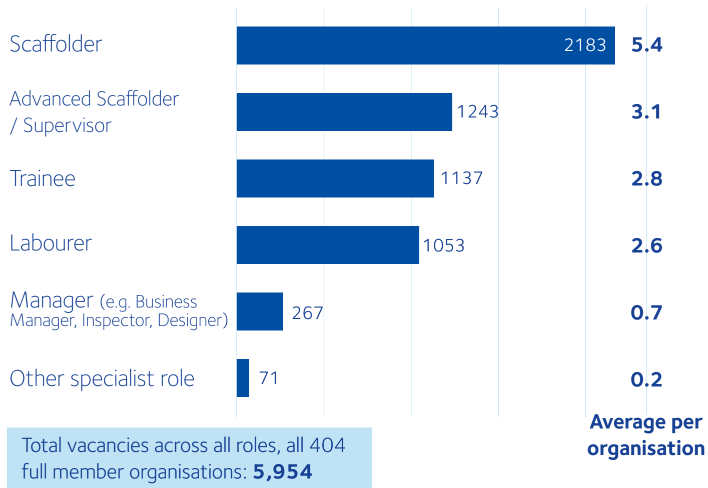
Region	Base size	Av. vacancies per org.
UK	**151**	**4.4**
Nett: England	**137**	**4.1**
Wales	12	9.3
Scotland	18	6.5
NW	34	5.6
Ireland	5	5.4
W.Mids	18	4.2
SE (inc London & East Anglia)	61	4.1
SW	36	4.1
NE	25	2.9
E.Mids	23	2.9
Channel Islands	0	–



Anticipated vacancies in 2026 by role
Base: All; n=151



Number of anticipated vacancies in 2026
Base: Universe; Extrapolated from Base: All respondents; n=151

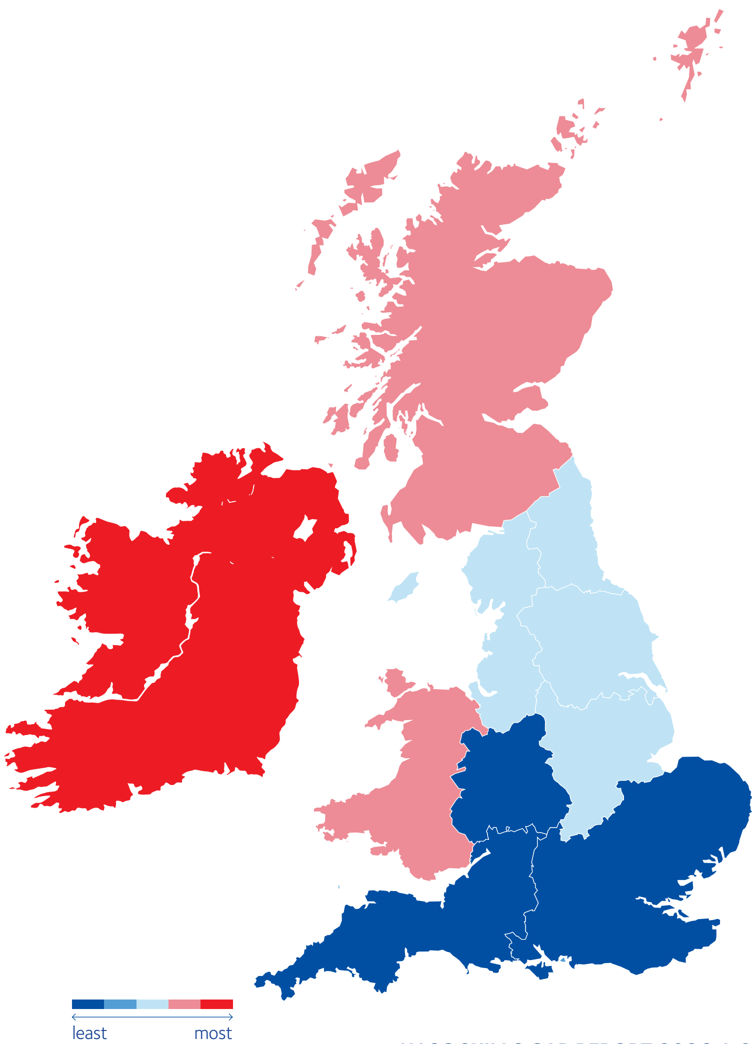


* For respondents providing at least one numerical estimate for 2026, any roles left blank are treated as zero. Respondents answering "Don't know" or "Prefer not to say" to Q13 are excluded from the calculation.

Average anticipated vacancies per organisation in 2026, by region of busiest operation
Base: All answering; base varies by region – please see chart

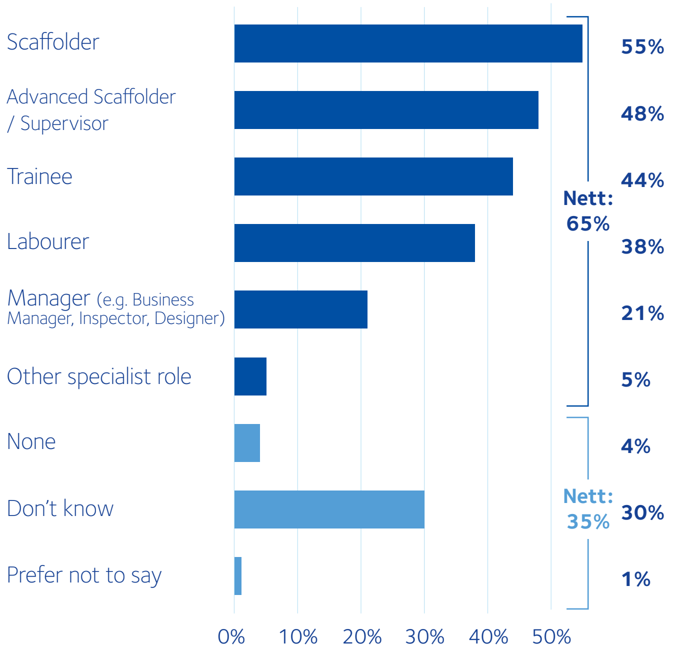
Average expected 2026 vacancies per organisation, shown by regions of busiest operation:

Region	Base size	Av. vacancies per org.
UK	**130**	**14.7**
Nett: England	**117**	**14.8**
Ireland	5	50.0
Wales	11	35.6
Scotland	17	30.7
E.Mids	20	27.9
NE	24	26.0
NW	32	23.6
W.Mids	15	20.7
SW	34	20.3
SE (inc London & East Anglia)	50	18.2
Channel Islands	0	–



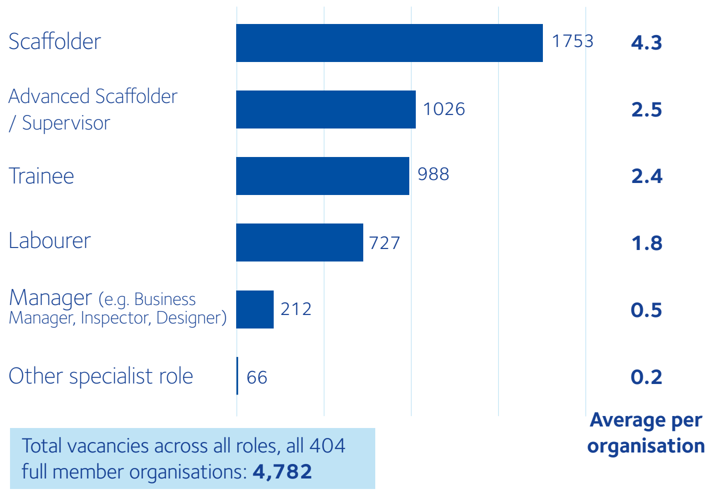
Anticipated vacancies in 2027 by role

Base: All; n=151



Estimated number of vacancies in 2027

Base: Universe; Extrapolated from All answering; n=104



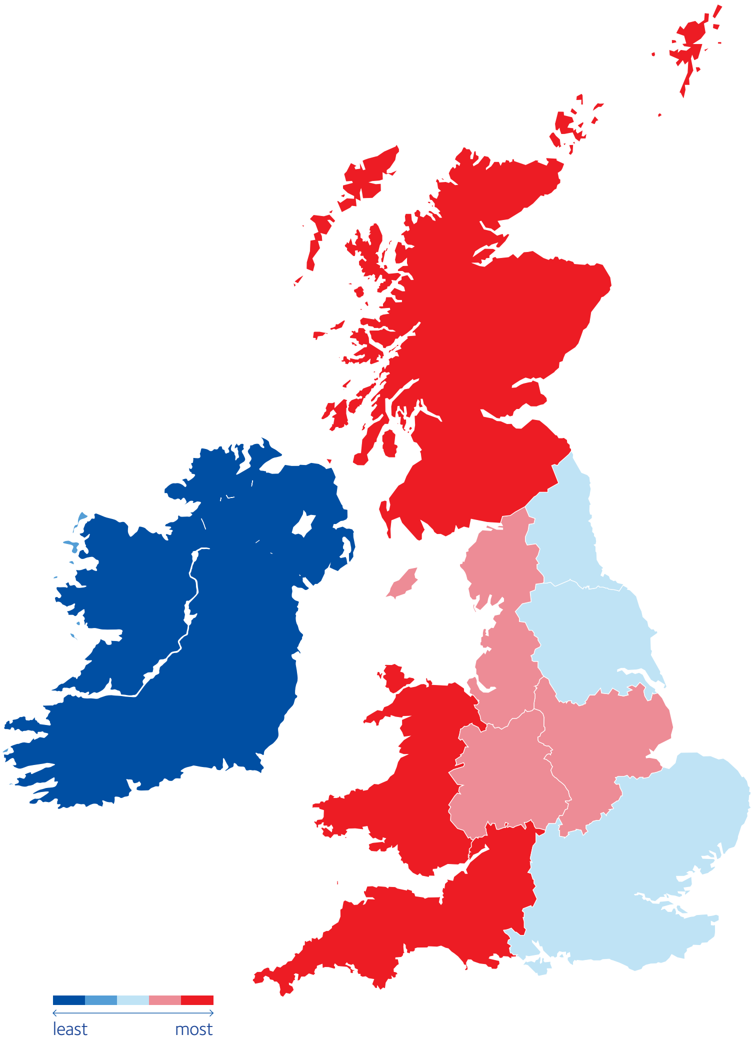
* For respondents providing at least one numerical estimate for 2027, any roles left blank are treated as zero. Respondents answering "Don't know" or "Prefer not to say" to Q15 are excluded from the calculation.

Average anticipated vacancies in 2027 by region

Base: All answering; base varies by region – please see chart

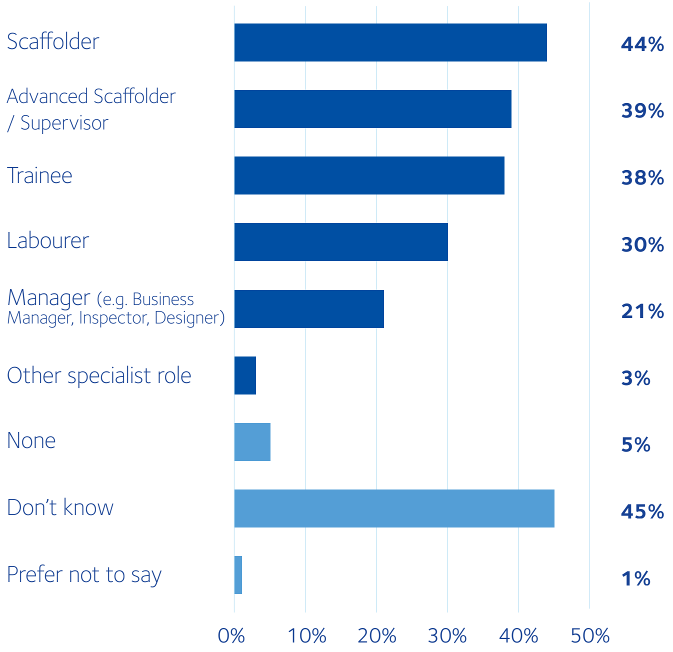
Average expected 2027 vacancies per organisation, shown by regions of busiest operation:

Region	Base size	Av. vacancies per org.
UK	**104**	**11.8**
Nett: England	**93**	**11.5**
Scotland	15	17.6
Wales	10	16.7
SW	22	15.2
W.Mids	13	13.8
NW	30	13.5
E.Mids	17	13.3
SE (inc London & East Anglia)	40	12.5
NE	21	12.4
Ireland	4	6.5
Channel Islands	0	–



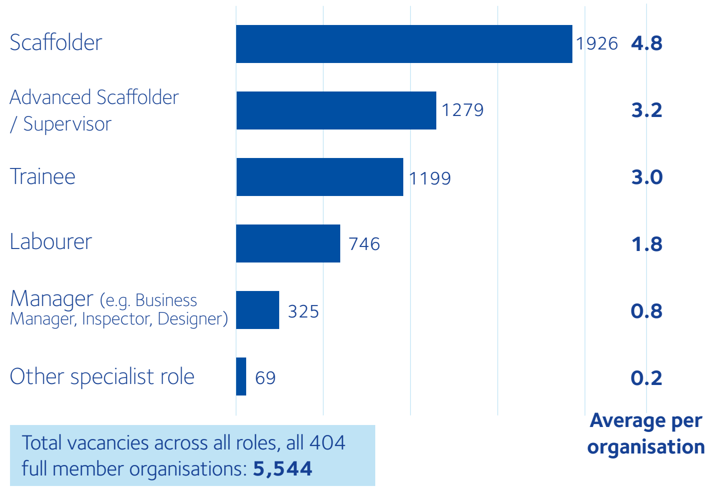
Anticipated vacancies 2028-2030 by role

Base: All; n=151



Anticipated number of vacancies 2028-2030

Base: Universe; Extrapolated from Base: All respondents; n=151



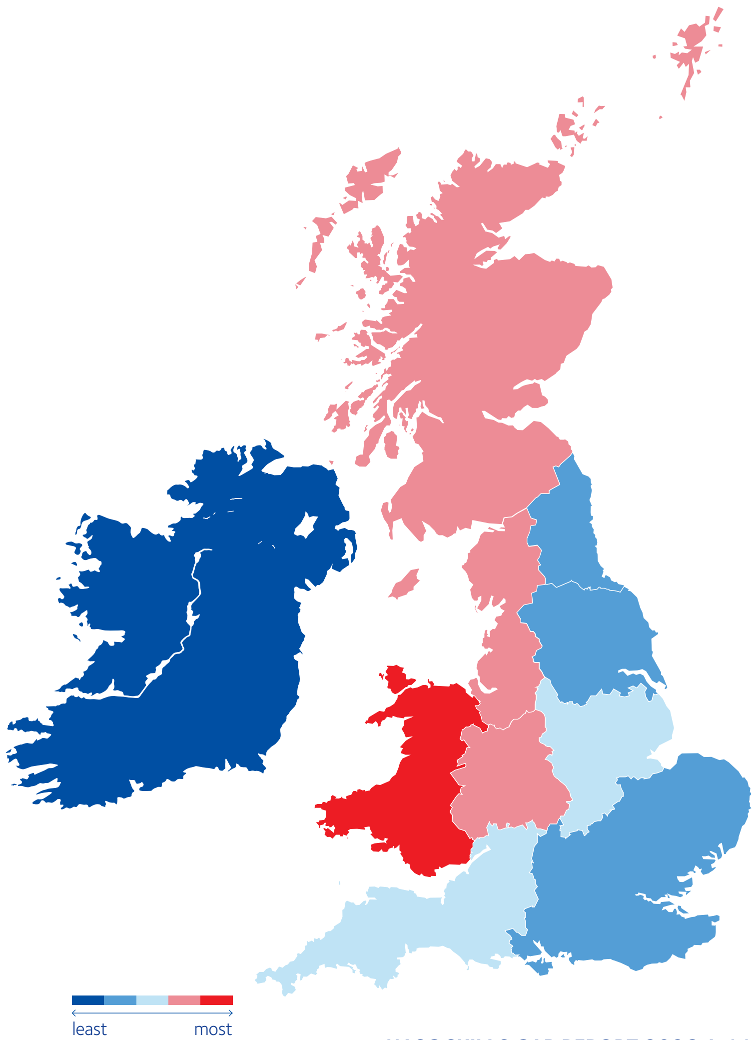
* For respondents providing at least one numerical estimate for 2028-30, any roles left blank are treated as zero. Respondents answering "Don't know" or "Prefer not to say" to Q17 are excluded from the calculation.

Average anticipated vacancies 2028-2030 by region

Base: All answering; base varies by region – please see chart

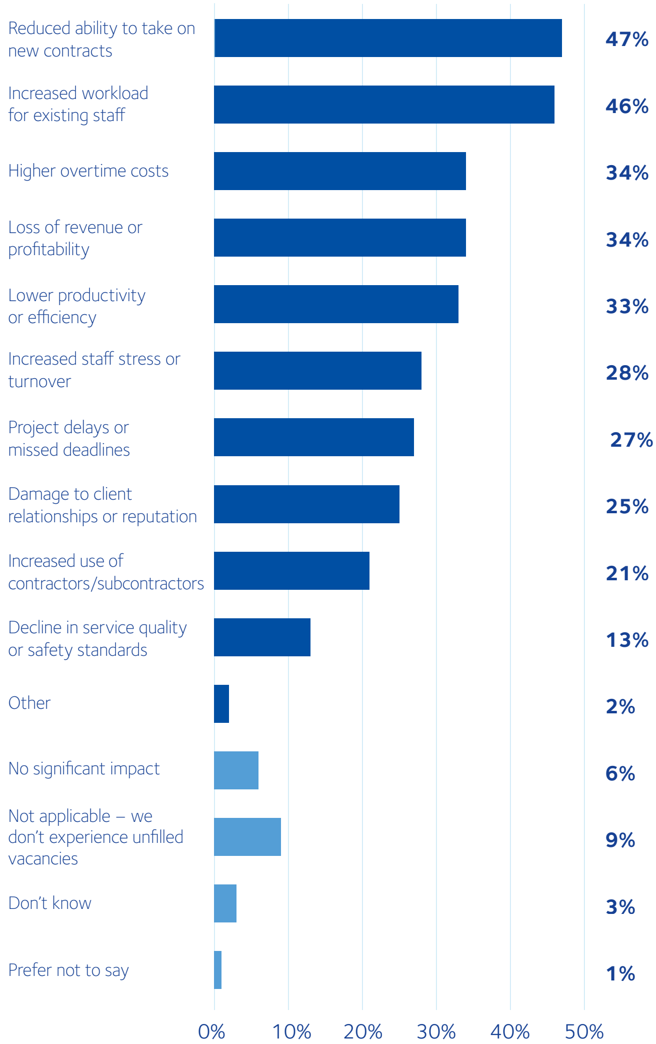
Average expected 2028-2030 vacancies per organisation, shown by regions of busiest operation:

Region	Base size	Av. vacancies per org.
UK	**82**	**13.7**
Nett: England	**74**	**13.6**
Wales	9	23.4
W.Mids	12	20.7
NW	21	19.6
Scotland	13	19.0
SW	20	17.1
E.Mids	15	16.0
NE	14	14.0
SE (inc London & East Anglia)	36	13.5
Ireland	2	12.0
Channel Islands	0	–

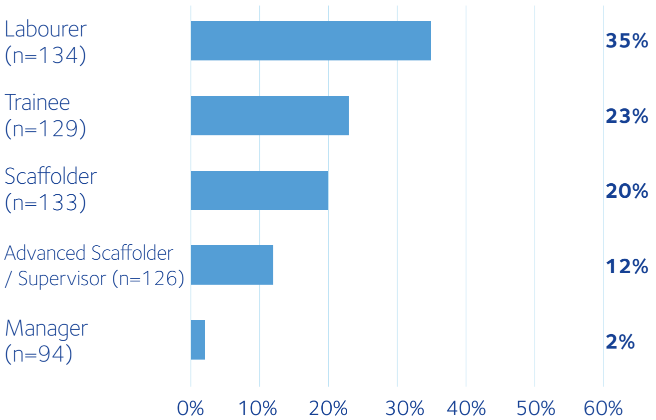


Barriers limiting your ability to expand your workforce
Base: All; n=151

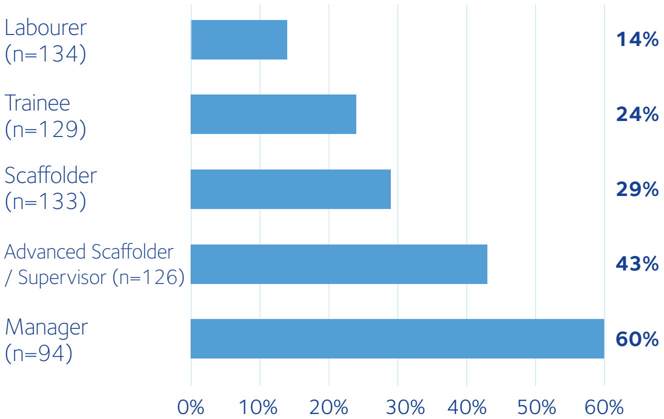
Biggest impacts of unfilled vacancies
Base: All; n=151



Proportion of members able to fill vacancies in under two weeks by role
Base: All answering; base size stated in chart (differs by role)

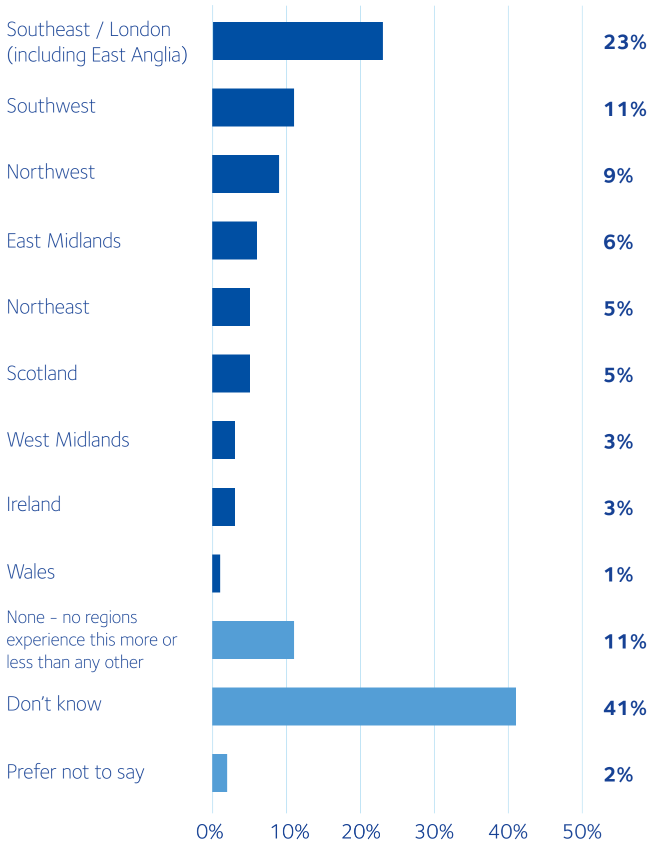


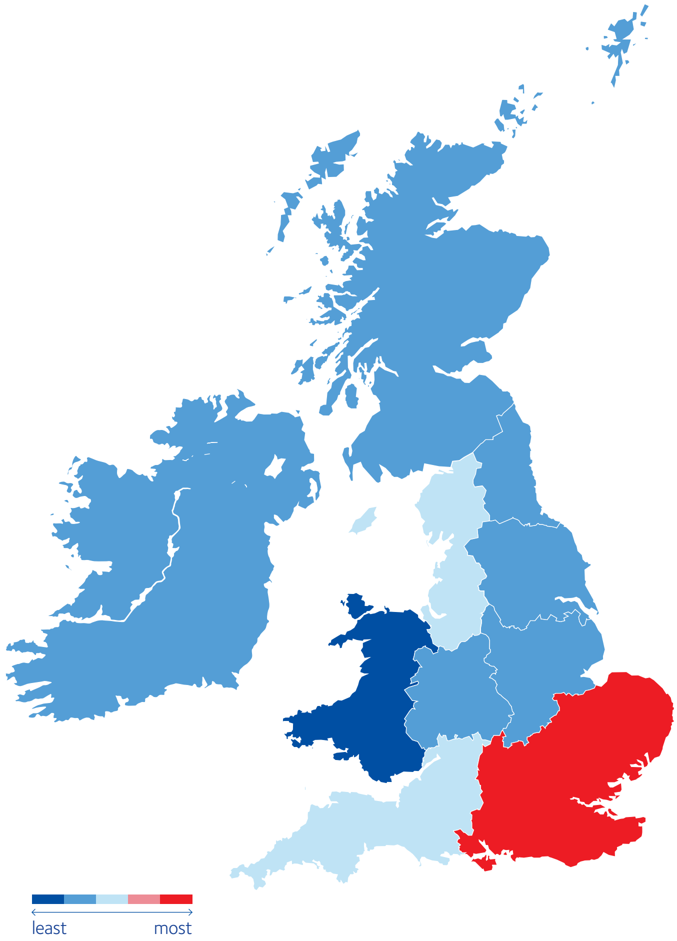
Proportion of members taking over two months to fill vacancies by role
Base: All answering; base size stated in chart (differs by role)



Severity of workforce shortages by region

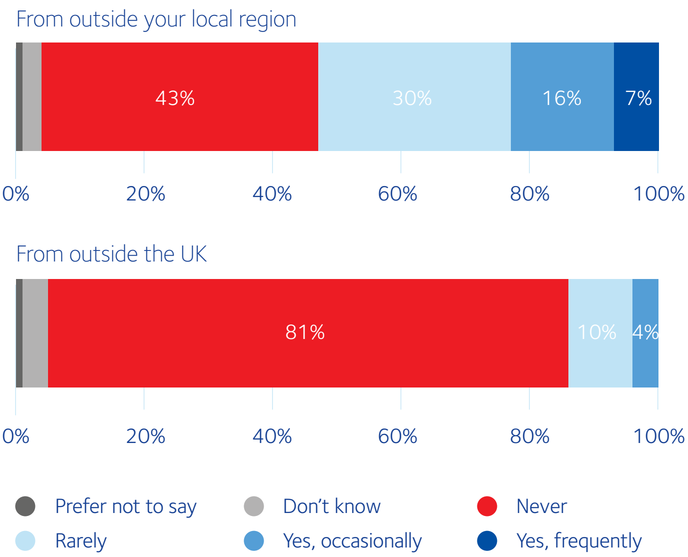
Base: All; n=151





Proportion recruiting from outside their local region

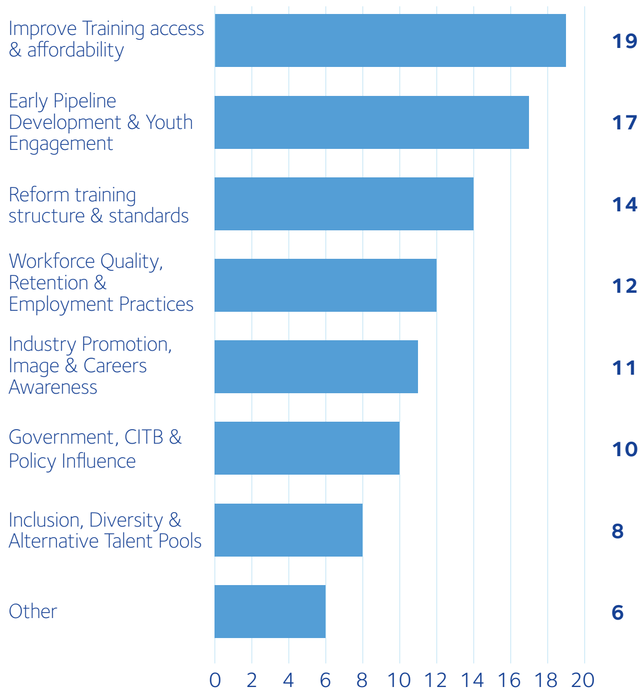
Base: All; n= 151



Suggestions for how NASC can best address skills gaps and training needs

Number of mentions shown, not %

Base: All answering; n= 71



CONCLUSION

The evidence in this report points to sustained recruitment pressure across the scaffolding and access sector. Extrapolating from member data to the wider sector suggests some 40,000 vacancies in the UK even before any major new construction projects get underway. Closing this gap will require action from a wide range of stakeholders.

But without action this pressure is set to get worse and to potentially slow down member firms and hamper their ability to play their full part in assisting the UK economy to achieve its growth potential.

The UK government has set out a wide and ambitious set of targets across a range of construction projects, including the plan to deliver a million new homes by the end of this parliament and the delivery of several major national infrastructure and energy projects. Before these projects can feasibly get off the ground they will require scaffolding and access solutions; solutions provided by teams of scaffolders.

The logic seems self-evident. If the scaffolders are not in post, not trained and ready to work, the projects will not get off the ground.

And yet these seems to be little awareness at the higher levels of government and policy of these issues. There is little awareness of the fundamental importance of scaffolding and access to these projects and little or no recognition of the current situation in terms of the skills gap. The intention of this report is to change this situation.

Action is required on several fronts. First, we must invest more energy, resource and effort into training local talent. But this is an area where there can be no shortcuts. We can't risk slaying on-site safety on the altar of expediency. We therefore need immediate action to adjust the criteria to allow in more skilled, trained scaffolders from overseas. It is not politically popular, but it is the only sensible short-term solution.

Current vacancies in the scaffolding and access sector remain significant. And these are most acute at the most vital levels – namely experienced frontline scaffolders and their immediate supervisors and advanced scaffodlers. Anticipated recruitment in 2026 is substantial and retirement outflow will add further strain to an already pressed sector.

NASC members are doing their bit and will continue investing in training, but barriers to workforce expansion persist. Access to qualified staff remains the primary constraint on growth. The sector's ability to meet future demand will depend on proactive workforce planning, continued investment in training and coordinated engagement with government and industry partners.

NASC will use this evidence to lead that work on behalf of its members and the wider industry.

Methodology

The Skills Gap Survey 2025 was conducted in December 2025 among all NASC full member organisations.

All members were invited to complete an online survey. Reminder communications were issued during the fieldwork period. The survey achieved 151 completed responses.

Data is self-reported. Where totals have been extrapolated to represent all members, this is clearly stated and assumes respondents are broadly representative of the wider membership.

Percentages may not total 100 % due to rounding. Multiple response questions may total more than 100 %.

The survey relates only to NASC full member organisations and does not capture non-member scaffolding businesses.

Research credentials

The research was conducted by PFA Research Ltd, an independent UK market research agency. All work was carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. The Code requires research organisations to protect the interests of both clients and respondents, and to ensure that public statements are supported by the data. Quantitative findings are based on self-completed questionnaires and are subject to normal limitations associated with survey research.

NASC

NASC
4TH FLOOR
12 BRIDEWELL PLACE
LONDON, EC4V 6AP

TEL: 020 7822 7400
EMAIL: ENQUIRIES@NASC.ORG.UK

NASC

NASC - National Access and Scaffolding Confederation

nascscaffolding

NASCscaffolding

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WWW.NASC.ORG.UK