

fiesta

Furniture & Interiors
Education, Skills & Training Alliance

2026 Strategic Overview – 2 June 2026 issue

Fiesta is funded by:

*British Furniture Association, Commercial Interiors UK, National Bed Federation
& The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers*

FIESTA has four key goals

FIESTA is an employer led organisation for the furniture and interiors industry to co-ordinate and facilitate skills development. It has four key goals:

1. To support employers in developing and managing apprenticeships
2. To reduce skills gaps and shortages
3. To boost the skills and productivity of the industries workforce
4. To improve learning supply including apprenticeships, further education and higher education.

FIESTA aims to achieve these goals by

1. Connecting employers, training providers and students – *through the Furniture Apprenticeship Service*
2. Understanding the future skills needs in the industry – *through research, conferences and consultation*
3. Facilitating the design and approval of skills solutions – *with partner Achieve+Partners*
4. Facilitating the debate on industry qualifications to ensure relevance – *through working groups and forums*
5. Providing insight, intelligence and ideas flow between the industry and government – *through Skills England representation on their expert network & briefing to the British Furniture Confederation*

Furniture Apprenticeship Service

- Small Business Support
- Apprenticeship Recruitment
- Full Apprenticeship Solution
- Trade Association Advisory Service
- Consultancy Service for Businesses
- Apprenticeship Power Hour
- Working with Training Providers

To attract talent into the industry

Qualifications and training must be relevant to employers

Qualifications and training must be career inspiring

Qualifications and training must be widely available to employers and learners

The industry must facilitate connections between learners, employers and training providers

- **Apprenticeships** – To help the employers retain and access Apprenticeships Standards that meet the needs of a diverse furniture industry.
- **Short courses** – map and promote short courses
- **Making connections** – provide a single point of contact for learners, training providers and employers accompanying them on their journey to connect with each other

Skills England, formed in 2025

Skills England is an executive agency of the UK government is responsible for tackling national skills shortages and connecting people to skilled jobs, published its first annual skills report on 1st June 2026

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a19740bb95db968c8f3bc3d/skills_england_annual_skills_report_2026.pdf

As the furniture & interiors industry skills training body, FIESTA will support Skills England in addressing its five challenges through industry representation on their Expert Network.

The five challenges

Challenge 1: addressing skills shortages

Challenge 2: how to maximise employer investment in skills

Challenge 3: how to respond to the accelerated adoption of AI

Challenge 4: how to support young people's employability skills

Challenge 5: how to build a more responsive and locally integrated skills system

The five challenges align with FIESTA goals

Skills England, background

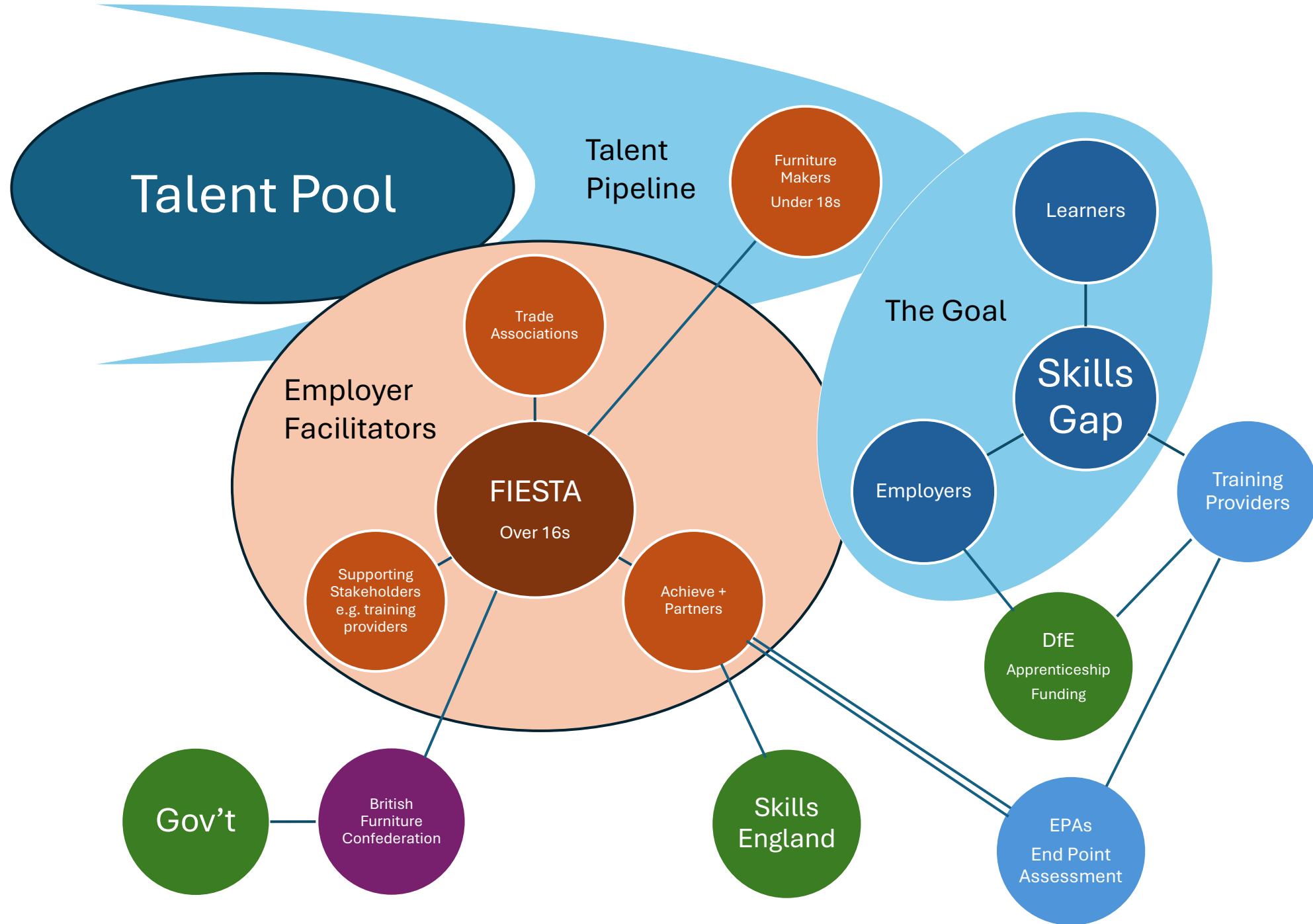
Key aspects of Skills England include:

- **Key Functions:**
Skills England absorbed the functions of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). It works to identify critical skills gaps, oversee occupational standards, and advise on how to shape the Growth and Skills Levy.
- **Collaboration:**
Skills England brings together central and local government, businesses, unions, and training providers to ensure training aligns with both national and regional labour market needs.
- **Parent Departments:**
Skills England operates under the umbrella of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Education (DfE) to bridge the gap between skills policy and employment.

Given the funding

FIESTA would support more services and projects that:

- Promotes and fulfils the demand for training
 - Connecting employers, training providers and students
 - Update Mind the Gap research to refreshes understanding of the future skills needs in the industry
- Promotes and fulfils the supply of training
 - Realise the Potential of Suppliers - Higher Education, Further Education, Work-Based Apprenticeships Providers, Commercial Short Course suppliers
 - Growth Strategies – in response to employer / industry demand
 - Reach – Hard to reach learner cohorts e.g. geographically remote, disabled, NEET's (Not In Education Employment or Training)



Furniture & Interiors Education Skills Training Alliance

Background Information

Foundations laid through knowledge

In 2014 the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers commissioned FIRA to research training and skills in the furniture industry. The outcome was the Mind the Gap Report published in October 2015.

It was a seminal piece of research, which spawned two conferences and the formation of the Furniture & Interiors Education Skills Training Alliance.

Since then, a great deal has been achieved.

The report would benefit from a re-fresh, but many of the key findings and recommendations are valid today.

Download: Mind the Gap Report - Link expires 30th June 2025

<https://didac.glasscubes.com/share/s/bvbfkobo3rumgmo4fbia9lrg4m>



Achievements

- FIESTA stepped in to fill the void left by the 2016 closure of Proskills (Sector Skills Council)
- Regained control of the furniture and interiors industry skills agenda
- Created and liaised with forums for dialogue between employers, trade associations, training providers, Apprenticeship Standards Working Groups, Government, IfATE (now Skills England) and the Furniture Makers Education Committee.
- Helped the industry navigate the 2017 Apprenticeship reforms
- Facilitated the debate and development of furniture Apprenticeship Standards
- Seeded a connections service between employers, learners and training providers through the skills brokerage service (forerunner to the Furniture Apprenticeship Service)
- Facilitated information dissemination to employers

Funding

Unlike some industries, FIESTA does not receive any *Government funding. To fund its core activities FIESTA is reliant on the three lead trade associations and The Furniture Makers Company.

The funding trade associations are:

- British Furniture Association
- National Bed Federation
- Commercial Interiors UK

Whilst FIESTA will always struggle to fund its ambitions, its current level of activity means that the industry is 'mostly' in control of its skills agenda destiny.

* The furniture industry was part of Proskills Sector Skills Council until it closed in 2016 following the withdrawal of Government funding. Whilst it was disappointing, it provided the opportunity for the furniture and interiors industry to regain direct control of its skills agenda. It coincided with the initiatives that followed the publication of Mind the Gap Report and the 2017 Apprenticeship Reforms which reshaped how apprenticeships were funded and delivered in the UK. Whilst FIESTA will always struggle to fund its ambitions, it does mean that the industry is 'mostly' in control of its skills agenda destiny.

Realising training provider potential

The furniture industry is no longer a priority sector for the Government, so past grants for projects channelled through the Education & Skills Funding Agency, which closed on 31 March 2025 are no longer available. Government funding has transferred the Department for Education

Past grants that have directly benefited the furniture & Interiors Industry are:

Capital – for plant & equipment that is necessary for teaching but cannot be justified on normal investment analysis.

Growth – in support of training provider strategy, ambition and initiatives formulated in response to employer / industry demand

Reach – Hard to reach learner cohorts, geographically remote, disabled, NEET's (Not In Education Employment or Training).

Digital Dividends – support for IT related projects delivering enriching the learning experience, achievement rates

Since 1965, the furniture industry has been addressing skills shortages by upskilling the current workforce and developing new talent through a range of government recognised industry training bodies

- **1965:** the **Furniture and Timber Industry Training Board (FTITB)** was formed becoming the industry's first employer-led statutory body, established under the Industrial Training Act 1964 to address skills shortages by ensuring furniture and timber industry-specific training standards and funding.
- **1982:** Following Government culling of Industry Training Boards from 23 to 7 the **Furniture and Timber Industry Training Board (FTITB)** continued as a non-statutory body providing a voluntary, industry funded employer-led voice to manage the skills agenda in the furniture and woodworking industry through to 1999.
- **1999:** Following a Government policy change in 1997 National Training Organisations (NTO's) were gradually set up with the remit and funding to become the government recognised industry training bodies. The **Furniture & Interiors Industry National Training Organisation (FFINTO)** was formed in 1999.
- **2008:** Following Government culling of NTO's, FFINTO was absorbed into **Proskills**, a newly formed **Sector Skills Council (SSC's)** covering the process and manufacturing of extractives, coatings, refractories, building products, paper and print. In 2016, Government funding for all but two SSCs was withdrawn, which resulted in the closure of Proskills.
- In 2018 the furniture industry regained control of its skills agenda with the formation of **Furniture & Interiors Education Skills Training Alliance (FIESTA)**