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2026 ETS Human Progress Report: A Credentialing Perspective

Credentialing

Credentialing plays a central role in workforce readiness, skills validation, and professional mobility. Findings from the 2026 ETS Human Progress Report, based on a global survey of more than 32,000 people across 18 countries, highlight a growing tension.

Demand for credentials is rising. But access, clarity, and alignment are not keeping pace.

This creates a new imperative for certification and licensure bodies. The role of credentialing must adapt and evolve from validating competence to enabling workforce participation and progression in a rapidly changing environment.



The Access Gap

Interest in credentials is strong, but access remains limited.

- **73%** of respondents are interested in credentialing programs
- Only **45%** report having access
- **54%** say getting support is difficult

Demand is not the constraint. Access is.

Barriers such as cost, complexity, and inconsistent support are slowing progression and delaying entry into professions. In licensed fields, this impacts the availability of qualified professionals. In certification, it limits adoption and engagement.



What this means for you

Reducing friction through clearer pathways, flexible delivery, and improved candidate experience will be critical to unlocking participation.

This includes exploring ways to improve accessibility, such as enabling secure, flexible delivery models like remote testing, supported by multi-layered, AI-enabled test security that expands access while maintaining rigor and comparability.



The Proof Gap

As skills needs evolve, people across the globe are developing new capabilities but are often uncertain how to demonstrate them.

- **70%** of respondents worry they lack sufficient proof of skills
- **74%** want to benchmark their skills against peers
- **85%** agree credentials are essential as skills evolve

Credentials are no longer just milestones. They are signals of readiness and credibility. Their value will increasingly depend on how effectively they provide trusted, relevant proof of capability. This requires assessment content to keep pace with rapidly evolving skills and technologies.



What this means for you

For credentialing organizations, this reinforces the need to:

- Clearly **define** competencies and outcomes
- Align credentials to **current** roles and industry expectations
- Support **ongoing** validation of skills, not just point-in-time assessment
- Keep assessment content **aligned** to evolving practice through more responsive development approaches, including AI-driven test development



The Responsibility Shift

Expectations for workforce readiness are expanding.

- **86%** of respondents want government support
- **88%** expect employer support
- **71%** say their employer provides support

Credentialing now operates within a broader ecosystem of employers, governments, and education providers. Trust in credentialing organizations remains strong, positioning them as key anchors in this system.



What this means for you

This creates both an opportunity and a responsibility. Credentialing programs can:

- Bridge education and employment
- Define and validate workforce-relevant skills
- Support mobility and progression

To do so, systems must balance:

- Rigor and defensibility
- Accessibility and responsiveness

Innovation in assessment, continuing competence, and industry engagement will be key to maintaining relevance, particularly where it enables greater access, responsiveness, and alignment with workforce needs.



Credentialing in a changing workforce

The findings point to a clear direction. Individuals are motivated to develop skills and pursue credentials. But gaps in access, clarity, and support are limiting their ability to do so.

For credentialing programs, the priority is not generating demand. It is enabling it.



What this means for you

- Reduce barriers to entry
- Strengthen alignment with workforce needs
- Maintain trust through rigorous, evidence-based practices
- Build systems that can adapt as roles and skills evolve

Credentialing will continue to play a central role in workforce readiness. How it evolves will determine its long-term impact.

Meeting this imperative will require innovative approaches to assessment design, delivery, and security.

Download the full 2026 ETS Human Progress Report

Explore global insights on workforce disruption, skills development, credentialing, and AI.



[Download the report](#)



Methodology: The 2026 ETS Human Progress Report is based on a global survey of 32,558 individuals across 18 countries. Survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of ETS August 25-September 10, 2025.