Skills Vision Report 2025

Employer-led solutions; building a better future

CONSTRUCTURE

Building Construction Futures

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The construction industry supports the UK's economy by designing, building, operating and maintaining the physical assets which drive economic growth and sustain the lives of the UK's diverse communities.

This physical environment covers housing, commercial buildings and infrastructure i.e. structures, roads, railways, air and sea transportation, water supply, sanitation, power generation and distribution as well as the move to renewables as part of achieving Net Zero.

Unfortunately, there has been a historic under-investment in physical assets over several decades, which the government is now trying to address particularly in housing and infrastructure to support economic growth as well as achieving of a low carbon economy.

With an aging workforce there has been a growing skills gap in all parts of the sector's major verticals – building, civil engineering and infrastructure as well as building services engineering. The government's ambition to build 1.5 million new homes, the drive to Net Zero and the investment needed for economic growth means addressing the skills gap has become critical.

In response to this the government with industry set up the joint government and industry Construction Skills Mission Board (CSMB) earlier this year.

Our Response

Constructure has responded by bringing together key industry contributors to put forward thoughts and proposals to help the CSMB in this crucial and complex challenge.

Two events were held, one at the Institute of Civil Engineering on 16 June 2025, which was chaired by Mark Farmer and then the second as an integral part of Constructure's Annual Conference on 2 July 2025, chaired by Martyn Price.

At both of these events there was tremendous support for what the CSMB is aiming to achieve. A very wide range of examples of existing programmes and interventions by industry and its training bodies to address the challenges were discussed.

These have been written up as case studies in this report and provide excellent examples which can be built upon by the government and industry with the support of the CSMB.

This report sets out these case studies and brings together the over-arching views that came out of the two events.

Since the events in the Summer, we note that the policy responsibility for adult skills and apprenticeships is moving from the Department for Education to the Department of Work, Pension and Skills.

New Steps

We can see from the industry feedback and proposals that there are a wide range of ideas and interventions coming from employers which have the potential to provide a practical commitment to addressing the skills challenges across the UK. Employer commitment is critical to success.

It is important that these ideas and proposals are actively progressed in the new steps. Therefore, we recommend to the Construction Skills Mission Board (CSMB) and the construction industry:

Confidence to Employ and Invest

Work with central, local government in England and the Devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to:

- In addition to investment for 1.5 million homes, develop a secure programme of funded infrastructure projects designed to support improved transportation, better water utilities, reduced pollution, more secure water supply for the future and achievement of the objectives under Net Zero;
- Support government in speeding up the reform of the planning regime for homes and provide strategic management of the housing market so that we build enough homes and that these are affordable, either to buy or to rent; and
- Support government in removing the 'gateway' restriction currently holding back development.

Clear New Entrants Pathways

Work with the Department of Work, Pensions and Skills as well as the administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to improve the effectiveness of the way we bring people into the industry. In this regard, the Department for Education, for England, announced their proposals for the breakdown of the £623 million investment in England to address construction skills gaps. Industry, through the CSMB should propose some changes to the current allocations:

- **Foundation Apprenticeships £38 million:** These only cover some of the trades needed for house building in England and none for civil engineering and infrastructure nor green skills. There is little support for even this limited offer of foundation apprenticeships in construction as currently configured. Many employers want a pre-apprenticeship model in England similar to that available in Scotland. There could be limited take up of the currently proposed foundation apprenticeships by non-levy payers, but this is already funded in the 'base' budget. Accordingly, we propose that the additional £38 million be redirected to support the pre-apprenticeship programmes required by employers and the type of interventions highlighted in the Case Studies in this report;
- **Funding for Level 3 High Value Courses Premium (HVCP) and Free Courses for Jobs (FCFJ) £165 million:** The majority of skills gaps are for Level 2 trades and Level 4 to 6 professional and technical roles. In this regard we welcome the recent announcement to also fund the L1 Award in Health and Safety in Construction Environment as well as some L2 courses. In addition to this we propose being more flexible and less prescriptive by re-allocating some of this investment to qualifications which results in an individual gaining a Blue CSCS trade card, the various alternative proposals coming forward from employers and the work underway with CITB on alternative routes. We would also propose funding for mentoring, brokerage services, employer incentives, micro/short courses and increasing funding rates across the board.

The last of these will help the issue of tutor pay rates. Mentoring and brokerage services would help to increase the proportion of learners eventually gaining employment in construction;

- **Bootcamps £100 million:** Embed the proposals coming from employers and include funding for alternative routes into industry.

Access to Provision and Training

Work with the government on the detailed allocation of funding. In this regard, we welcome the planned investment of £100 million for industry placements, part of which could be incentives, and the £20 million for supporting employer personnel into teaching.

In addition, we propose industry, through the CSMB, push for tutors' pay to be increased to ensure a sustainable training workforce. We also propose that employers, through the CSMB develop a programme of interventions on equalities, procurement and supply chain management.

Funding that Works

Work with government on creating a more integrated and efficient funding regime. We must recognise that there are both national and local priorities and therefore we propose that employers through the CSMB push for both nationwide funding of programmes such as bootcamps as well as delegation of funding to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and the new Strategic Authorities when they are eventually operational.

Industry, through the CSMB, should work to redesign the Apprenticeship Levy into a much more flexible Growth & Skills Levy, which can be better managed alongside the CITB and ECITB Levies. This will provide industry with an integrated system.

To achieve this, we recommend that CSMB, set up a specific project to look at the funding, including the Levies.

Reliable and Rewarding Careers

Work with government to standardise occupational standards and career pathways. We propose that the CSMB decide that the Super Sectors programme be confirmed as the single process for agreeing what occupations there are, what competency is and how to continually develop the occupations. In this regard we would want to build upon the excellent work done to date, including the career maps developed by IfATE and to bring in the work of Skills England and the Devolved Administrations into a coordinated approach.

Conclusion

The consensus view of key industry stakeholders and contributors contained in this document offer a meaningful way in which sectoral skills development can be secured.

Developing and implementing pragmatic employer led methods creates the best possible chance to achieve the desired growth within UK Plc.

Graham Hasting Evans, CE, NOCN Group

Martyn Price, MBE, Chair, Constructure

FOREWORD

Mark Farmer

We stand at a critical juncture in the construction industry. On the one hand, we have a government that appears to recognise the importance of the construction industry in driving growth and fulfilling so many of its political ambitions. On the other hand, we have an industry that has reverted to the survivalist culture we have seen in every economic cycle.

Despite the recent publication of the National Infrastructure Strategy and associated pipeline, and a bold ambition to deliver 1.5 million new homes during the life of this Parliament, there is a gulf between the ambition and reality of workload and orders, whether it be in housing, commercial construction or civil engineering. That creates risk in the construction skills sector, as we know from past history that unless we have the right economic and demand led fundamentals, the propensity to employ, train and upskill is negatively impacted. It is easy to point to future prospects and targets but employers need workload now and even if they had it, we know there is an inevitable lag between training and new entrants being fully productive and additive in the workforce. This is further exacerbated by regulatory reforms starting to change the way we build and demand higher competence and standards. This means we have to work harder to just stand still.

This therefore means that the nature of the next recovery cycle for our industry, whether it be a return to robust homebuilding levels or the advancement of the many planned major projects and programmes set out by the government, risks being undermined by low levels of trainee / apprentice recruitment and a skills system that is not fit for purpose.

All of the recent policy and funding announcements made by DfE regarding construction skills will not translate into outcomes unless we are able to turn the corner and restore positive sentiment and output growth.

I am glad to have been able to support Constructure in their leadership of a healthy debate on what their members see as the main issues ahead. From the outputs of a round table event that I chaired and then subsequent more general feedback at the Annual Constructure conference, this report highlights what should be a focus for both government and the industry if we are to ensure we have the human resource base to deliver in the years ahead.

It is no surprise then that the overarching theme is ensuring the confidence to employ and invest. This mirrors recent discussions that I have had across industry recently, including with the skills minister, Jacqui Smith. All of the recent policy and funding announcements made by DfE regarding construction skills will not translate into outcomes unless we are able to turn the corner and restore positive sentiment and output growth.

As I write this, a further steep decline in the Construction Purchasing Managers Index (PI) and reports that cement and brick manufacture are at their lowest levels for some time, show the urgency and scale of this challenge. If we can sort this through a combination of economic policies and tangible committed demand stimuli, I am confident the industry will respond in the right way.

It is clear that beyond pipeline certainty and demand, the second most important issue raised is that of pathway modernisation. This aligns well with some of the key recommendations of my recent Industry Training Board Review. We need to overhaul the traditional routes into industry, not so much to improve attraction but more to urgently address the huge absorption problem we have where we are not able to convert post 16 learners into employed long term positions. This points to a real focus on work readiness, productivity and learning priorities. I am involved myself in innovative approaches to taking existing apprenticeship standards and reformatting the college/site mix and improving the learning/experience process.

We need to go further and look at much more incremental, modular approaches that are fully informed by employer needs and also extend into upskilling the existing workforce through micro-credentials.

To this end, the recent foundation apprenticeship announcements from government, although welcome in terms of intent to accelerate entry pathways, risk being a backward step in terms of lack of industry engagement in shaping these standards. The overwhelming feedback I have heard from employers is that they want more freedom to design and implement training that works for them and they need the funding and institutional frameworks that set the rules of the game to be far more flexible to make this happen. This has implications on Skills England and CITB.

I continue to be an advocate of an industry wide digital skills passport and although not explicitly focused on in this report, my personal belief is that we need to move to a much more structured approach to defining and proving competence at all stages in the career timeline. This will become even more important as the Building Safety Act embeds itself. However, there is no point in introducing passporting unless the base pathways and training provision infrastructure are not aligned.

We know there is a challenge in FE at the moment and the funding of lecturers and course provision are both blockers to sustainable reform of a modern, fit for purpose training system that is aligned to current and future practice and which can be policed in action through competency frameworks that are meaningful and industry are bought into.

As we look at how the recent £600 million plus of government funding lands in the industry, there is an imperative that the recently formed Construction Skills Mission Board is accountable for measurable outcomes. It has set a target of 100,000 additional workers per annum.

What is this measured against as a baseline? Does it realistically reflect the current point in the economic cycle and most importantly, what workers do we need, where and when? These are the basic strategic workforce planning questions I have been asking regularly and which are now becoming mission critical to being able to target and measure the right outcomes for the industry.

Despite the challenges we face, I am hopeful we can take control of our own destiny here if government provides the right demand and institutional fundamentals and then gets out of the way where necessary to allow industry to drive activity. I have met enough passionate people to know the answers are already out there, we just need to have a long term outlook which avoids short term 'boom and bust' and we need Skills England and CITB to ensure the system enables us to get biggest 'bang for our buck' in terms of inputs leading to outputs. I certainly know Constructure and their members are willing to help shape and implement what that looks like.

Mark Farmer, Founder, Cast Consultancy

SITE READY SOLUTIONS

A simple solution to close the skills gap

The UK construction industry is facing a defining challenge and a defining opportunity. The well documented skills gap remains high with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) forecasting the need for over 250,000 construction workers by 2028, in effect to meet existing demand.

This combined with the governments ambition to build 1.5 million homes during the current parliament (300,00 per year or 842 per day) creates a significant challenge. Many of the key trades such as bricklaying, carpentry, and groundworks are already stretched thin. The question, therefore, what can be done to overcome these challenges.

In reality this isn't a new problem; it's been quietly compounding for decades. An ageing workforce, a steady decline in new entrants, and underwhelming training routes have left the sector struggling to keep pace with sector demands. In addition the impact of Brexit and the lingering impact of COVID-19 along with rising costs, all compound the problems.

With just 1 in 4 (24%) of college students who study construction enter the industry. Apprenticeship drop-out rates hover around 47%. Meanwhile, highly experienced tradespeople are retiring—taking decades of irreplaceable knowledge with them.

How then do we overcome this. At its core, construction has always been about passing knowledge down seeing a skilled tradesperson training a new entrant to the sector. Across the spectrum learning path, not just techniques, but also standards, pride, and problem-solving. It's the 'time-served' model of Master and Apprentice that has worked for centuries.

This is a pragmatic, practical and sustainable approach that needs to be re-introduced.

This simple approach, where one skilled person invests in one unskilled person, the unskilled become skilled, then they teach the next person. If embedded across the sector, this model could play a significant part in helping closing the skills gap.

Disconnects in Training and Ownership

Over time, the way we teach construction skills has shifted—from site to classroom, from employer-led training to institution-led education. In too many cases, skills are taught in FE colleges by individuals who are not directly connected to industry or current site conditions.

This results in students learning in a vacuum, with the accountability, urgency, or context that comes from being part of a real-world construction team all missing elements. The figures reported by CITB quoted earlier suggest many struggle with traditional academic methods and become further disengaged by FE courses.

At the same time, housebuilders often 'sponsor' apprentices, but then pass responsibility for training down the supply chain. Subcontractors—already stretched for time and resources—are left to manage trainees without adequate support or understanding of the potential upside. The result is a lack of consistency, no clear accountability, and a breakdown in mentorship delivery.

It can, at times, clearly appear as if everyone assumes someone else is responsible and no one owns the development journey.

For too long, the link between training and output has been broken. Skills have become qualifications, but qualifications don't always equal capability. And when there's no real connection between trainer and employer, it becomes almost impossible to ensure that new workers meet the standards the industry needs. We end up with new entrants who are nowhere near work-ready—or "Site Ready."

To build homes at scale, rebuild the missing bridge between learning and doing.

With just 1 in 4 (24%) of college students who study construction enter the industry. Apprenticeship drop-out rates hover around 47%.

Housebuilders must focus on what they do best—building homes—but they must also enforce real accountability in their supply chains by expecting credible, practical training strategies from their subcontractors. Strategies that include on-site mentorship. Strategies that make "Each One, Teach One" more than a slogan.

The Hidden Strength of the Ageing Workforce

What if, instead of seeing retiring tradespeople as a loss, we saw them as a resource?

There is an untapped opportunity in transitioning experienced bricklayers into mentors, coaches, and even trainers. They hold knowledge that can't be Googled. And they often have the patience, insight, and leadership to guide new entrants.

This isn't just good for young workers, it's good for our seasoned experts who want to keep contributing in a meaningful way.

Inspiration Is Everywhere—Let's Channel It

The idea that young people aren't interested in construction is a myth. On social media, millions are following tradespeople who document their daily work. Bricklayers, carpenters, and roofers are becoming influencers, showcasing not just their skills but their passion and pride.

The challenge is no longer awareness. It's action. It's helping young people take the first step with confidence that they are ready to succeed. This will give employers far more trust—and create real pathways to success for both employee and employer.

Strategies that make 'Each One, Teach One' more than a slogan.

OPERATOR SKILLS HUB:

A Balfour Beatty & Flannery Plant Hire joint venture

The opportunity for employer-led skills programmes in the built environment & infrastructure sectors.

The UK construction sector is at a pivotal moment. With a need for over 250,000 additional workers by 2028, the focus must move beyond simply plugging gaps. At the Operator Skills Hub, we are proud to embrace employer-led skills programmes through initiatives like the Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations - creating meaningful, long-term skills opportunities that support both individuals and the future of our industry.

Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations - Creating skills opportunities

Funded through the Department for Education (DfE), Skills Bootcamps are helping to build a future-ready workforce, equipped to meet the demands of digital innovation, green construction, and major infrastructure delivery.

PLANT OPERATORS: CRITICAL TO INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY

One of the most in-demand roles in the sector today is that of the plant operator. This critical occupation is central to delivering the government's ambitious infrastructure pipeline, supporting growth in housing, transportation, energy and more.

Key drivers behind the increasing demand include:

- Government commitments to infrastructure development.
- Emerging trends in digital technologies and green initiatives.
- An ageing workforce, leaving the industry faster than younger workers are entering.

In response, Skills Bootcamps have emerged as a scalable, impactful solution, directly aligning with employer needs and economic demands.

Transformative outcomes with limitless opportunities

In 2020, the Operator Skills Hub (OSH) was born from a shared vision between Balfour Beatty and Flannery Plant Hire to create skills opportunities and support workforce development across the built environment and infrastructure sector. In 2022, Flannery Plant Hire secured funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver the Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations. Delivery commenced through the Operator Skills Hub, which acts as a key delivery partner.

The Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations plays a crucial role in addressing local and national skills shortages, boosting employment opportunities and contributing to the lasting skills legacy required to meet the built environment and infrastructure sector outputs.

With a need for over 250,000 additional workers by 2028, the focus must move beyond simply plugging gaps.

Delivered through a network of purpose-built OSH's, the 10-day programme empowers learners to gain industry-specific 'work ready' skills to support their transition into full time employment.

This employer-led model ensures that the training reflects real-world requirements, from the latest in digital plant operations to safe, sustainable construction practices. Most importantly, it delivers positive outcomes for our learners.

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LEARNERS	CATEGORIES DELIVERED	ACHIEVEMENT RATE	SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME
Individuals that have been trained through the Skills Bootcamp and are now qualified to work on UK construction projects.	Number of machine categories delivered through the Skills Bootcamp.	Percentage of learners that have achieved the required assessment standard on the Skills Bootcamp.	Percentage of learners that have gained employment or promotion after completing the Skills Bootcamp.
1,683	**2,270**	**93%**	**81%**

Figure 1. Skills Bootcamp in Numbers

Fostering an inclusive culture to create skills and employment opportunities

One of the key benefits of an employer-led delivery model is its inclusive approach through targeting underrepresented and marginalised groups. The Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations is helping to diversify the workforce and build a more resilient, reflective construction industry. It gives the sector a platform to attract learners from diverse backgrounds and help them transition into sustainable careers.

MINORITY ETHNICITY	WOMEN	NEET	DISABILITY
Learners from ethnic populations.	Learners that identify as female (an increase on the industry average of 1% of females working in trade roles).	Learners that were not in education, employment, or training prior to graduating the Skills Bootcamp.	Learners with a learning disability/ difficulty or health problem.
45%	**10%**	**27%**	**14%**

Figure 2. % of learners from underrepresented groups.

A purpose-built network of skills hubs

The Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations is delivered through a nationwide network of dedicated Operator Skills Hubs, in collaboration with:

- Employers and contractors
- Local authorities
- FE colleges and training providers
- Industry bodies and trade associations

The hubs are equipped with modern facilities, experienced trainers, and real-world simulation environments to ensure learners gain hands-on experience.

Through considerable investment from Balfour Beatty and Flannery Plant Hire, the model has scaled rapidly, proving its value to both industry and communities across the UK.

At present the hubs are located in East Anglia, Southern UK, Iver, Brackley, Birmingham, Kirklees, Penrith.

Learner success stories: real people, real opportunities

Behind every statistic is a person whose life has transformed. From women breaking into a traditionally male-dominated industry, to military veterans, ex-offenders, career changers, and those previously not in education, employment or training (NEET), the Skills Bootcamp is creating real and lasting career pathways. With the right support, guidance, and opportunity, individuals from all walks of life are building brighter futures in the built environment and infrastructure sector.

"Women should not be put off of coming into this industry. There is a real sense of community. It is an evolving industry and everyone is welcome here."

Molly Gill, nursery assistant to plant operator: a successful outcome

Equipping the workforce with the right skills to get Britain building again

The sector cannot wait for change, we need to be at the forefront, driving it! Through employer-led training models such as the Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations, we are proactively building a workforce that is skilled, inclusive, and ready to meet the demands of the future.

The flexible approach to Skills Bootcamps is crucial to supporting the built environment and infrastructure sector, as it continues to evolve. As the sector faces changing demands, employer-led training models will ensure that a 'future ready workforce' is prepared to quickly adapt to these shifts.

The Skills Bootcamp in Plant Operations is not just addressing skills shortages. It's unlocking potential, transforming communities, and laying the foundations for a stronger, more diverse sector.

'If I can make this big transition, anyone can. I was fully committed to military life and still am, but this career move has given me a completely new level of work-life balance and financial stability."

James Grant, military veteran to plant operator

Building Skills, Securing Futures: Safeguarding Employer-Led Provision

Skills shortages continue to impact housing, energy infrastructure, transport, social infrastructure and other major projects. These are all sectors where our Skills Hubs are actively making a difference, working in partnership with employers, sector clients, further education providers and third sector organisations.

Having led the way in plant operations, we are now expanding into electric vehicle (EV) installation. Plans are also underway to deliver training in groundworks, formwork, steel fixing and lifting operations as we continue to grow our Skills Hub network across the UK.

As highlighted throughout this article, the Skills Bootcamp model has already supported a significant number of learners, many of whom have gone on to achieve positive employment outcomes. These achievements are only possible through genuine collaboration between clients, contractors and partners. This collective approach ensures a strong and consistent pipeline of employment opportunities, whether for new entrants, career changers or individuals looking to upskill.

Salaries in plant operator roles offer strong earning potential, with newly qualified plant operators typically starting on salaries around £45k per annum, while experienced operators and those specialising in more skilled disciplines can earn upwards of £80k per annum. These career paths have the power to transform lives and make a significant contribution to the wider economy.

With government policies evolving and funding priorities shifting, we are calling for the opportunity to continue demonstrating the real-world impact of employer-led skills programmes. These programmes show what can be achieved when skills delivery is shaped by employers, for employees.

The Operator Skills Hub, together with our partners including employers, clients, education providers and local authorities, strongly supports continued investment in employer-led initiatives like Skills Bootcamps. These programmes are essential for building the workforce needed to unlock the full potential of the UK's built environment and infrastructure sector. This is a national priority that Britain must continue to benefit from.

"Qualifications are not 'one-size fits all', and we recognise we must take a pragmatic approach. Our ambitious programme must meet the needs of employers and our public services if we are to see our economy flourish."

The Rt Hon. Jacqui Smith, the Baroness Smith of Malvern, Minister for Skills

M&J EVANS CONSTRUCTION

Facing the challenges

At M&J Evans, all our projects are delivered by highly skilled and trained operatives in all areas of essential groundwork infrastructure, from a variety of foundation types, drainage solutions, retaining structures, block, and beam floors, slab construction and associated finishing works.

With experienced groundworkers on site, all of whom must be CSCS qualified and further trained in-house, we are well placed to oversee the entire groundwork contract from start to finish. We specialise in delivering the full groundworks package in line with client expectations from infrastructure works to finishes and not just helping to build a site, but to helping to build homes and futures for some of the leading major housebuilders.

Groundworks play a crucial role in the construction industry, providing the essential foundation for a variety of structures. In the UK, successful groundworks projects are pivotal in ensuring the stability and longevity of buildings, roads, and infrastructure.

The intricacies involved in groundworks require meticulous planning and execution. From site preparation to the laying of foundations, each step is critical.

Currently, the UK needs to hire over 250,000 extra construction workers by 2028, the equivalent of 83,000 a year, to meet the current construction output.

We found that students struggle in school because they don't fit well in the standard classroom environment; everyone learns differently. Some students learn better with more hands-on learning than reading textbooks or listening to lectures.

When they realise that they can make a career out of working with their hands, and realising the potential for doing so, it motivated student to stay in school and explore a new way to learn. M&J took a more collaborative approach to programs, which offer both education and real-world experience.

81% of high school dropouts say that real-world learning opportunities would have kept them in school. By discovering hands-on learning and opportunities for real-world experience, a student can get far more out of their education and has a massive benefit to their future.

We have had some remarkable success through collaborations with secondary schools and colleges to offer career advice, workshops, and work experiences. It was certainly eye opening to see just how many young people didn't really understand what groundworks was about and the opportunities within construction.

Getting out to recruitment events and open days is critical; not just for those individuals who are in their final year at school, but also those who are 2 years from leaving.

81% of high school dropouts say that real-world learning opportunities would have kept them in school.

What challenges are we facing?

The construction industry is a vital part of the UK economy, but the range of factors currently disrupting the industry's contribution to the UK economy include higher energy costs, price inflation, shortage of materials, and, of course, the lack of workers. All of these aspects will certainly impact the future of the industry, especially the skill shortages which could diminish quality and speed, resulting in an even bigger gap to fill.

The industry needs to have competent workers to fulfil the rise in projects and meet government targets such as housing and net zero. This will continue to be a challenge whilst we do not have enough people in the industry.

Currently, the UK needs to hire more than 250,000 extra construction workers by 2028, the equivalent of 83,000 a year, to meet the current construction output. According to research data, there are around around 6,600 average monthly searches for construction jobs. What is M&J doing to support this challenge?

Apprenticeships

The industry is limited in terms of what flexibility it can offer in order to appeal to a younger workforce who are keen on having a better work-life balance. It can be a challenging place both physically and mentally, and this may be a reason people don't want to join the industry. So, what are we doing to contribute to this challenge?

In November 2024 M&J launched the first bespoke groundworks apprenticeship programme in partnership with the NHBC. This programme was designed by M&J to give individuals of all ages the opportunity to see and feel what it is like to work in the industry.

The programme went live in February of this year, giving individuals the opportunity to work on one of our sites for 4 weeks.

The apprentices are between the ages of 17 and 30 with the average age being 21.

This was really important to experience life on site before committing to an apprenticeship. The apprentices are between the ages of 17 and 30 with the average age being 21.

Whilst there were challenges attracting individuals initially, once the programme was up and running, the interest this has sparked both across the industry and through word of mouth has been incredible. The best way to educate young people is quite simply, word of mouth.

There are people who want a career in the construction industry, but employers need to take responsibility for highlighting why it's a great place to work.

Working in construction offers opportunities for career advancement. Workers can progress quickly by gaining experience and additional qualifications. Apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and professional development programs are widely available, allowing employees to continually improve their skills and move up the career ladder. This provides a clear path for career growth and development.

Partnerships & Collaborations

Collaborating with educational institutions has been an instrumental part of our strategy to attract young talent and build a diverse workforce. These partnerships have enabled M&J to showcase the wide array of careers we have available, from engineering to project management, and introduce young people to the benefits of pursuing a construction career.

School & College Partnerships

Introducing construction into the classroom created an interest in students to want to keep learning.

LEEDS COLLEGE OF BUILDING

A view from inside a college

How we bridge the gap between young people who want to work in construction, and employers facing a critical skills crisis, is the biggest issue facing our industry. Fortunately, there has been a recent realisation that without resolving this skills gap, other priorities for growth will not happen. Without a fix for this crisis there are no new hospitals, no clean energy plants, no data centres, no essential infrastructure upgrades and no million plus new homes.

The construction skills issue is multifaceted, which is why there is no quick fix. It has been an issue for decades. That's not to say people haven't tried - there have been false starts, promises and best intentions. But now, thanks to clear leadership from within the sector, we have an opportunity to create real change.

The risks of not fixing this problem are real for everyone. The government have pinned all their flags to the mast of economic growth, using infrastructure and the industrial strategy as drivers. Without a highly skilled workforce, these plans will remain just that. For employers, there is a very real risk of simply not having the workforce to deliver these ambitions. For skill providers - if we don't get this right, our long-standing credibility in regard to meeting employer needs may be significantly affected.

This is why today feels different – for the first time, we are all on the same side. We are together, trying to make change for the betterment of a sector which provides so many opportunities. The 'Construction Skills' package announced by the government is not the silver bullet, but it is the start of a programme in which results will matter. The ability to demonstrate impact will, in turn, drive more investment. Skills providers are a results business, and the result now must be supporting more people into the sustained, well-paid careers which the construction sector offers.

At Leeds College of Building, we have waiting lists of young people for whom we do not have capacity. This is due to the well documented tutor shortages and a lack of delivery space. Construction is space hungry but also requires specialist tutors with industry experience. We are not the only college that has this issue. Construction courses are oversubscribed countrywide; this problem isn't due to a lack of interest, but an issue of connection.

What may prove to be a defining feature of the skills package is the creation of the Construction Skills Mission Board (CSMB), led by Mark Reynolds from Mace. A group of people from every side of the industry, all invested in the same outcome, reporting directly to the Deputy Prime Minister. Challenges are expected and needed as industry navigates difficult decisions. The CSMB has been given five main tasks.

These are:

1. Confidence to employ and invest
2. Clear new entrant pathways
3. Access to provision and support to train
4. Funding that works
5. Reliable and rewarding careers

As the only further education college in the country which specialises in construction and the built environment, I am delighted to be part of the CSMB alongside Janet Smith from Nottingham College.

Colleges currently train enough students in construction to meet the new recruitment demands, but not enough are joining the industry. There are numerous reasons; a disconnect to apprenticeship opportunities, not employment ready, and a lack of tutors to deliver high quality skills.

For new to college 16-year-olds, this may well be the first time they have experienced anything close to technical education. The academic curriculum in schools has removed opportunities for students to test out different skills, prior to selecting a course or employment route. A broader range of knowledge and skills is required to enable young people to make a more considered choice.

Colleges currently train enough students in construction to meet the new recruitment demands, but there is a disconnect to the opportunities the sector has.

A related issue is that impartial careers advice is too much of a lottery. Schools can only do so much during the week with a limited budget. It is unrealistic to expect schools to have an expert understanding of the entire job market. There over 170 roles (and counting), in construction alone.

A funded, centralised and impartial careers service is necessary. This could potentially be part of 'The Job Centre', provided by the government Department for Work and Pensions. This would take the burden away from the education sector and mean that links to re-training don't stop at 18. With many people these days having multiple careers, this support continuing throughout adulthood would be paramount to maintaining a skilled and supported workforce. If these services could be hosted within colleges, it would turn good advice for the individual into access to training and employment opportunities.

We also need to simplify what skills providers teach. Employers are looking at full time qualifications and expecting students to be fully prepared for the workplace.

There are over 170 roles (and counting), in construction alone.

The reality is that providers, within funding and Ofsted frameworks, have little time to deliver the practical or technical skills employers expect. Once GCSE English and Maths courses, and 'British Values' tutorials, have been included, there is very little time left to deliver the workshop skills which students want, and employers expect. No one is disputing the importance of improving the literacy and numeracy of students, but I do question the validity of GCSEs as the gold standard.

There is evidence that supports retaining the GCSE, with its positive impact on future earnings and other wider metrics. However, each year we watch some of our students arrive to collect their results, only to be told they have failed again.

The impact this has on a young person should not be underestimated and can be devastating at a time in their lives when their confidence and self-esteem are already fragile. Surely, providers can be trusted to do the right thing for the individual student. If a student wants to progress onto a level three course or go onto higher education, then GCSE qualifications are required to get there. If they want to become an electrician, for example, why not teach them the specific maths skills an electrician needs – a maths GCSE would not prepare them properly for this highly technical route.

Providers and employers need to work together to create more opportunities and access points into construction. Unless you know Joe from down the road is looking for an apprentice plumber, it can be very difficult to get an apprenticeship. Some larger companies are flooded for apprenticeship roles in the thousands – the kind of applicant ratios on a par with securing a place at Oxbridge. Small and medium sized businesses don't tend to advertise publicly, and this informal recruitment practice perpetuates the issues the industry has when it comes to workplace diversity.

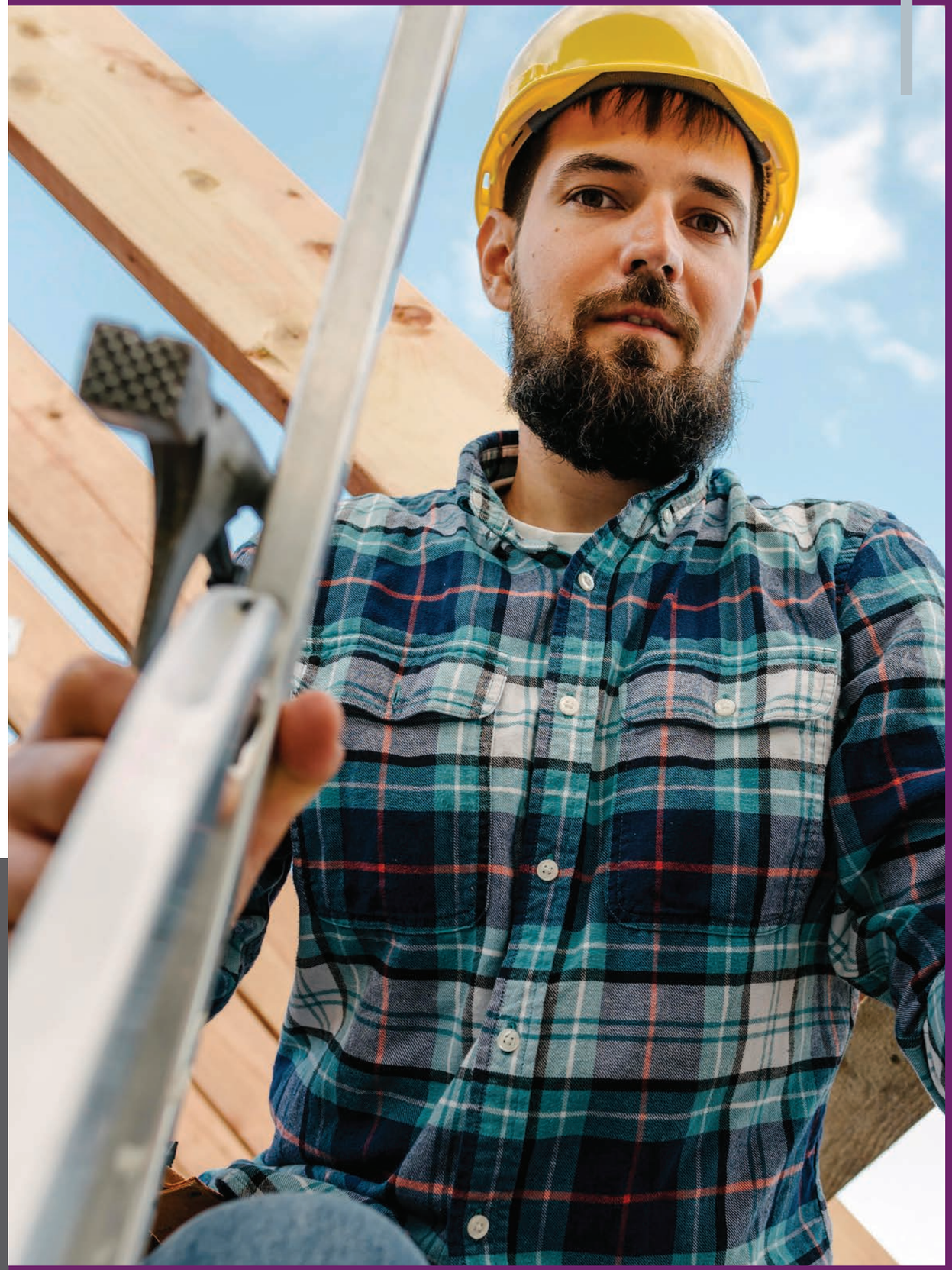
Small employers make up the bulk of the sector and do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to taking on apprentices and training up the future workforce. The biggest issue they face is not being connected to the almost unlimited supply of young people looking for an apprenticeship. These companies will only have the confidence to invest in apprentices if they see this work pipeline built and then maintained.

The issues raised above are the most pressing. That is before referencing a whole host of other factors. For example; the complexity of apprenticeships at the onboarding stage, delays at the End Point Assessment stage, funding which disappears due to compliance, changing the perception of construction to attract a more diverse workforce, recruitment of tutors to deliver high quality training and flexibility for colleges to expand provision without unnecessary restraints.

If the CSMB can achieve progress despite these challenges, we have a chance of making a real difference - the prize is worth the effort. At Leeds College of Building, we have many examples of alumni who are now employers in the industry. We have taught students who progressed from full time programmes, to an apprenticeship, and are now running their own business.

We also have students who completed their Higher or Degree Apprenticeship with us before entering employment. All of whom are providing for themselves, their family, their employees and are sustaining a productive career. They have become the lifeblood of the industry, and this what we need to achieve consistently on a larger scale to ensure the construction and built environment sector can prosper, as we all need it to.

If the CSMB can achieve progress despite these challenges, we have a chance of making a real difference - the prize is worth the effort.



VGC GROUP - CASE STUDY

Skills Development through Pre-Employment Programmes/SWAPs

Project Overview

VGC have recently collaborated with our supply chain and the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to develop a robust pre-employment programme for operatives working on the A428 project.

This initiative is targeting a wide demographic to provide training, work-ready experience, and sustainable employment opportunities to individuals seeking either to enter the sector or returners to the workforce.

The A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvement Scheme is a National Highways project which will enhance connectivity and reduce congestion between Milton Keynes, Bedford, and Cambridge by upgrading the existing road network. This is a major project for National Highways and the success of this programme could significantly influence and embed wider collaboration on employment related activities on future National Highways projects.

The pre-employment programme targeted a diverse group, including long-term unemployed individuals, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), ex-offenders and those who have previously worked in the construction/civil engineering sector, although for a variety of reasons are no longer actively working in the sector.

Target Cohorts

The programme focused on individuals currently underrepresented or marginalised in the workforce, including:

- Long-term unemployed
- NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)
- Ex-offenders
- Industry returners (individuals previously employed in construction but not currently active)

Strategic Aims

- Encourage new entrants and local people to engage in employment opportunities on a strategic infrastructure project.
- Address the skills shortages within the construction sector.
- Engage individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those furthest from the labour market.
- Create sustainable pathways to employment and career progression.
- Establish a replicable model for future infrastructure projects.

Programme Design and Delivery

The pre-employment programme was structured to provide a comprehensive introduction to the construction industry and included the following components:

Core Components:

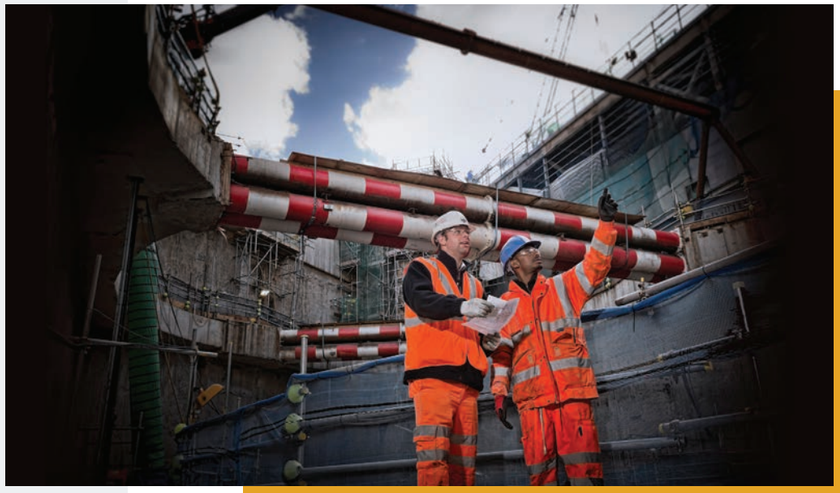
- Industry Awareness: Introductory sessions to inform participants about careers in construction and civil engineering.
- Technical Training: Entry-level training in key new entrant skills.
- Health & Safety: Basic certification to ensure site readiness.
- Work Experience: Site visits and shadowing opportunities to understand the work environment and the real-world application of skills and opportunities.
- Interview & Employment Opportunities: Guaranteed interviews for all participants with VGC and supply chain partners.

Key Engagement Activities:

- Jobcentre Plus (JCP) Outreach: Programme awareness and recruitment sessions hosted jointly by VGC, Skanska, Bedford College, the DWP and the wider supply chain.
- College Collaboration: Ongoing engagement with Bedford College to support candidates and promote vocational pathways.
- On-Site Exposure: Supervised site tours providing hands-on insight into live construction environments.

Pathways to Employment

- Work trials and entry-level positions
- Continued training through the VGC Academy
- Access to long-term development routes including NVQs, apprenticeships, and leadership programmes



Outcomes and Impact

- Enhanced access and employability for disadvantaged individuals
- Increased workforce diversity through targeted recruitment
- Improved retention through structured career development and ongoing skills development.
- Upskilled labour force aligned with project and sector needs
- Replicable model for future infrastructure initiatives

Collaboration as a Success Factor

On this specific project VGC readily collaborates with our supply chain colleagues to ensure alternate sector, training and career opportunities are communicated including the Circle of Life programme and Careers in Plant training.

This collaborative approach enhances employment outcomes for both VGC and the supply chain and creates sustainable career pathways, increasing both employment outcomes and retention and develops a culture of continuous learning and development. The model is adaptable to future major infrastructure projects.

More broadly VGC seeks to partner and collaborate with clients, principal contractors, stakeholders, sector bodies and supply chain colleagues to deliver industry leading solutions across a full spectrum of activities targeting; work experience, pre-employability programmes, upskilling, apprenticeships for a plethora of socially disadvantaged cohort groups including ex-offenders, long term unemployed, NEETS, (not in Employment, Education or Training) and the like.

The Academy works closely with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to leverage funding and ensure alignment with industry standards.

The initiative exemplifies effective cross-sector collaboration involving:

- VGC and its supply chain
- National Highways
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Further education providers (e.g., Bedford College)

Credentials

This is a proven model that supports candidates access entry level opportunities within our sector and is underpinned by genuine long term and sustainable career opportunities though the VGC culture of continuous learning and development for all.

Our success within this field has been recognised by our industry through recent awards including the New Civil Engineer Recruitment Solutions Provider of the year and the Supply Chain Sustainability School – Inspiring Change in the Community Award.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates how targeted pre-employment programmes can successfully bridge skills gaps, support inclusive recruitment, and foster long-term career pathways in construction. This initiative on the A428 scheme offers a practical, scalable model for delivering social value through infrastructure investment.

CONSTRUCTURE – CONFERENCE 2 JULY 2025

Industry Feedback & Proposals

This Summer saw Constructure create two opportunities for sector stakeholders to offer their insights and views in respect of the current skills landscape when looked at through the lens of current government ambition and following the creation of the Construction Skills Mission Board.

The first meeting, chaired by Mark Farmer, produced several key perspectives and suggestions. This then was followed some weeks later by the Constructure Annual Conference which added more collateral and insight from a wider cross section of industry representatives. The following is an amalgam of these ideas and suggestions reflecting the view from within the sector.

Confidence to employ and invest

- Government Departments, MCAs/Local Government and Devolved Administration must publish national and local (sub regional) pipelines as this will benefit employers and training providers to clearly invest, with confidence, to address skills gaps and plan skills development programmes for both new entrants and existing workforce. Greater confidence in the economy will underpin employers spending on skilling for the future.
- Local government and planning authorities to set out clearer Section 106 requirements for skills development and enforce compliance. In major metropolitan areas where there are various local authority boundaries, permit more flexibility for developers to place people in jobs in neighbouring area whilst still complying with the Section 106 requirements in the development area.
- Confidence in skills investment will be demand led. Accordingly, we need construction (including civils & infrastructure) and housing market recovery as a precursor to firms being able to engage with all the various initiatives and funding for training. This includes intelligent use of the new £39 billion affordable programme and the introduction of a mortgage guarantee scheme to stimulate private housebuilding.
- An urgent intervention is needed on the BSA to create impetus for Gateway 2 applications for complex buildings. The 'fast tracking' announcement on evolving the BSA is interesting but there are more severe market and economic challenges to be addressed to fully get business confidence to employ and upskill.

Clear new entrant pathways

- In response to BSA the industry, through the Super Sectors programme, needs to fast track the work on competency frameworks as these underpin all routes for both new entrants and upskilling.
- Routes/pathways need to recognise that 'one-size fits all' approach simply does not work. Even within the sector the various verticals, with their multiplicity of occupations, including house building, commercial developments, highways, structures, rail, power, water utilities, flooding and coastal protection, all need different pathways and approaches to competency and skills development. A planned structuring of role specific pathways will provide improved options and outcomes.
- The retention of occupational standards, assessments and maps developed by industry and IfATE should remain. These are delivering better quality in terms of the people completing them and there is a concern that changes planned for EPA put these hard-won gains at risk. It is essential that employers continue to control the development and decide occupational competency standards and the underpinning apprenticeships assessments, qualifications and micro/short courses. These also need to be integral to the CSCS carding scheme and the CLC's carding policy.
- Existing routes into industry need to be retained, updated as required (e.g. green skills and technology) and used to maximum effect through improved collaboration between employers and training providers.

- Routes to be retained for trades are NVQs (these are the most commonly utilised qualifications), bootcamps which work for some occupations e.g. plant operatives and brick for mass house building, apprenticeships (including flexible apprenticeships front loaded).
- Bootcamps should be retained, specifically those developed and overseen by industry. A review of Bootcamps provided by training providers and local authorities to be reviewed to assess appropriate delivery of what industry needs.
- More flexibility in the design of bootcamps or alternative entry routes (with further subsequent in job skills development). For some occupations a 4-6 month programme would help bring people into the industry quickly e.g. civils occupations and brick for mass house building.
- Following the stopping of traineeships in England and with T Levels inappropriate for trades, employers have developed flexible replacement variants which suit specific needs. These approaches should be supported and funded as well as promoted with case studies being widely shared.
- The proposed three foundation apprenticeships in construction do not match the needs of the sector and should be replaced as a matter of urgency by a 'preapprenticeship model', as in Scotland. This could be mainly delivered in FE Colleges, for 16-18/19 year olds. The apprenticeship model should recognise the wide range of backgrounds, additional support and entry levels of learners entering a construction course. The model should be multi-skilled to give the learners tasters and prepare them to become site-ready for a full trade apprenticeship at Level 2 or 3 as appropriate to the relevant occupation.
- Further apprenticeships and micro/short courses for new green skills and new AI/ technologies need to be developed.
- Math and English should be truly functional and focus on the specific needs of the industry.
- There should be better collaboration between employers and training providers to increase the percentage of people starting courses/apprenticeships eventually entering the industry. The introduction of a brokering service would help apprentices to transfer to other employers in order to complete their apprenticeships and improve retention of skills in the sector.
- A properly funded mentoring service is needed to support people through their apprenticeships and training programmes in order to increase the percentage of people starting courses/apprenticeships eventually entering the sector.
- Create and publish the best practice strategies and approaches of employers and sector more widely, providing shared knowledge via an easy access central portal.
- Design the detailed aspects of routes into industry which reflect the needs of young people. These include better mentoring, more practical work, job applications skills, health & safety, mental health, site visits and exposure to what it will be like to work in construction. It should explain the different types of jobs that are available and an understanding of the industry and the progression opportunities.

(Young people were involved in the Constructure workshop on views.)

- The development and delivery of more promotional interventions and taster sessions for schools.
- Design and publish a core construction wide induction pack for both promotion of the industry and introduction to new entrants.

Access to provision & support to train

- Develop a national skills strategy which includes clear programmes, funding and interventions which support the SMEs and self-employed as well as the larger firms.
- An Increase in remuneration for tutors and assessors is essential in attracting industry skilled individuals that can, in turn, offer the appropriate level of sector experience and knowledge.
- Development and creation of specific policies and strategy to introduce and improve access to a more diverse potential workforce e.g. women, people from different ethnic heritages and those with disabilities.
- Main/Principal Contractor's need to be encouraged to recognise the importance of the contribution SMEs and supply chain can make to performance and sector outcomes and further motivated to support them to access the right provision.

Funding that works

- Employers that operate nationally or cover multiple local government areas should be allowed to retain nationally funded contracts e.g. bootcamps for certain occupations; whilst also having access to relevant local funding. This would allow the two funding streams to be coordinated to the benefit of all.
- Reduce complexity within the existing Apprenticeship Levy, making it much more flexible so it can properly support different routes into industry, SMEs and also the self-employed part of the workforce. This should include the ability to fund short duration courses 4-6 months and micro/short courses.
- A simplification of devolution in England is needed. Current methods are making investing in skills more complex and bureaucratic.

  A fragmented patchwork of different devolution arrangements in England, with the approach to rolling out devolution taking far too long. The so called 'post code lottery' for funding in England must stop and as quickly as possible.
- A managed reduction of costs relating to reporting of compliance in existing funding arrangements, which can then be re-allocated to improved remuneration for tutors and assessors.
- Introduce a collaborative framework for the construction industry to work with the government, to shape and manage the existing Apprenticeship Levy and, moving forward, the new Growth & Skills Levy, and co-ordinate these levies with the longstanding CITB and ECITB levies. This would empower employers; allowing them the flexibility to act to ensure they are developing a sustainable workforce as circumstances change.

Reliable and rewarding careers

- Industry needs to be in control of setting and updating UK wide occupational competency standards and their underpinning apprenticeships, qualifications and micro/short-courses – ensuring compliance with BSA and a framework for a sustainable workforce where there is clear pathways to progression.
- There should be better collaboration between the various trade federations and industry bodies to develop sustainable careers and succession planning.
- The skills required in the economy are going to keep changing. Therefore, it is recommended that NVQs or parts of NVQs, 'bootcamps' and micro/short courses (stackable credentials) are used for upskilling and increasing productivity. These are to be funded from the various levies.
- More flexibility around working patterns and working environments which are suitable for and more readily accommodate a more diverse workforce e.g. women, people from different ethnic heritages and those with disabilities need to be encouraged.
- Develop and provide courses and pathways for 'green skills' and AI/Technology for upskilling.
- The creation and implementation of improvements to career mapping in the industry is required. This measure will support improved sectoral attraction and aid on-boarding of new entrants and subsequent retention strategies.
- The Introduction of measures and approaches that can materially and measurably 'move the dial' on the percentage of people that are on PAYE will improve the sector and impact positively on the skills gap.
- Improvements in the position on payment to help the supply chain feel confident to invest in skills.
- Support for the self-employed on skills development, this might include grants from the Government or the various levies. This should include support on how to manage a small business.

"There should be better collaboration between the various trade federations and industry bodies to develop sustainable careers and succession planning."

CONSTRUCTURE

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