



# **MENTORING CHAMPIONS**

## Institute of Carpenters

# **Crafting Futures: Final Report**

## **IOC Mentoring Champions Project**

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# Crafting Futures: Final Report on the IOC Mentoring Champions Project

## Summary

The **IOC Mentoring Champions project**, funded by CITB from April 2023 to April 2025, set out to test whether structured mentoring could make a measurable difference for learners in carpentry and joinery. Over two years, almost 30 IOC mentors worked with around 50 students and apprentices across ten IOC member colleges nationwide, supported by college leads, industry partners, and hub events.

The results are clear. Mentoring built confidence, communication, and career awareness for young people, strengthened links between colleges and employers, and gave experienced professionals a rewarding way to pass on their skills. Not every match succeeded, but where learners were motivated and mentors well-aligned, the benefits were striking.

The project has created lasting value: a national network of Timber Industry College Hubs, a new IOC Colleges Working Group, and a tested model for structured mentoring. Most importantly, its lessons now flow directly into Wood/Work, the next phase under CITB's ECO25 commission, taking the best of Mentoring Champions into the workplace to help new starters settle, succeed, and stay.

## Introduction

The IOC Mentoring Champions project has been an ambitious and rewarding journey, delivered between April 2023 and April 2025 with the valued support of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). The project was designed to connect experienced members of the Institute of Carpenters (IOC) with students and apprentices across the UK, creating structured mentoring relationships that would strengthen early careers in carpentry and joinery.

The work has been practical, people-centred, and ambitious in scope. It has involved ten colleges across England, Scotland, and Wales, nearly 30 volunteer mentors, and around 50 mentees, alongside college leads and employers who created the space for mentoring to take root.

This report marks the conclusion of that pilot. It acknowledges the support of CITB as funders, and the leadership of IOC President Geoff Rhodes, whose determination was crucial to securing investment and building the national network of ten IOC Timber Industry College Hub events. Geoff has also provided invaluable guidance throughout delivery, making sure the mentoring project remained tightly connected to the broader skills agenda.

This report is structured to reflect both the outcomes achieved and the lessons learned. It aims to give CITB a clear picture of what was delivered, what impact it made, and how those insights are being carried forward into the next stage of development, being the Wood/Work programme of in-work support under CITB's ECO25 commission.

## Project Scope and Growth

When the Mentoring Champions project was launched in 2023, the brief was simple but ambitious: trial a national model for mentoring that could help learners in carpentry and joinery bridge the difficult gap between college and the workplace.

The design was intentionally straightforward. Each participating college was asked to nominate three full-time students and three apprentices to take part. Mentors were volunteers drawn from IOC's highly experienced membership base, bringing decades of practical know-how, craft insight, and industry knowledge. The focus was not on creating another formal training curriculum but on building human relationships; connections that could give learners confidence, advice, and perspective at the point they most needed it.

The project reached ten colleges, creating a genuinely national spread:

- **Lincoln College**
- **Building Crafts College (London)**
- **West Suffolk College**
- **Neath Port Talbot College (Wales)**
- **UHI Inverness (Scotland)**
- **New College Durham**
- **Leeds College of Building**
- **Newcastle & Stafford College Group**
- **Northampton College**
- **Exeter College**

Each of these hubs also hosted a **Timber Industry College Hub event**, bringing together learners, employers, industry experts, and IOC members. These events proved vital in raising awareness, creating momentum, and giving learners direct exposure to the world of work.

Over time, the administrative demands of the project grew. Safeguarding checks, mentor induction, coordination with college leads (CLOs), and regular feedback loops all required careful management. This was not a case of simply matching people and leaving them to it. Each relationship needed support, encouragement, and at times more than a few nudges to keep things moving.

## Partnerships and Collaboration

From the outset, collaboration was central. The project was led by IOC but delivered in partnership with:

- **National Association of Shopfitters (NAS):** who helped broaden the reach into interiors and fit-out, adding relevance for learners with interests beyond pure site carpentry.
- **Timber Development UK (TDUK):** who supported the hub events and brought industry perspective.
- **IOC College Liaison Officers (CLOs):** whose role proved vital in nominating students, liaising with mentors, and sustaining momentum locally. Their effectiveness depended on strong endorsement from college principals and heads of construction; senior buy-in was essential. When leadership teams understood the purpose of mentoring and made it part of their delivery plan, the CLOs had the authority and clarity to follow through.

This “contract” between IOC and each college was the backbone of the project’s success.

- **Employers and Industry Partners:** who contributed time, insight, and in some cases potential job opportunities for mentees.
- **IOC Royal Patron HRH The Duchess of Gloucester:** whose presence at the final hub event at Exeter College gave the project national visibility and underlined the importance of mentoring in sustaining craft skills.

These partnerships provided credibility, resources, and reach. While the mentoring relationships were always the heart of the programme, the added value of collaboration helped extend its profile and embed it within the wider timber skills agenda.

## Operational and Logistical Insights

Delivering a project across ten colleges was never going to be simple. A number of operational lessons stand out:

- **Regular Meetings Matter:** Whether in person at hub events or via hybrid catch-ups, maintaining a cadence of interaction was vital. Momentum could easily dip if relationships were left to drift.
- **CLOs as Gatekeepers:** College leads played a central role in nudging disengaged mentees, troubleshooting when communications slowed, and ensuring mentoring remained visible to students. They were also the link between mentors and college management, ensuring communication and accountability. Where the principal and head of construction were directly engaged, delivery was smoother, and mentoring became embedded in the culture of the department rather than sitting alongside it.
- **Leadership Buy-In:** The most effective colleges were those where senior leaders saw mentoring as part of their responsibility to support learners. Their involvement set the tone for the CLOs and reinforced that this was not an optional extra but a shared commitment.
- **Mentoring is Two-Way:** Many mentors commented that they were learning as much as they were giving. The process encouraged reflection on their own careers and skills.
- **Organisation Management:** Considerable orchestration went into delivering effective events and processes. From safeguarding paperwork to diary management, organisation and administration was often the hardest work.

## Staffing, Roles, and Retention

Although the project relied heavily on volunteer mentors, professional staffing was also essential:

- **Project Management:** Ensuring DBS checks, commissioning the creation of appropriate induction materials, and tracking spreadsheets were completed and maintained.
- **College Liaison Officers:** Acting as on-the-ground facilitators, motivating students and ensuring participation.

- **Volunteer Mentors:** Experienced IOC members who gave their time generously. Many were motivated by the chance to “give something back” without needing to commit to formal teaching roles.
- **IOC Leadership:** Geoff Rhodes as President, and the supporting staff and team including Lucy Kamall, Karen Hopkinson, Kristien Wendt and Denise Tabone, ensured continuity, accountability, and sustained momentum.

One of the strongest lessons here is the need to retain experienced coordinators. Relationship-based projects rely on trust and continuity. If staff turnover is high, the quality of delivery suffers. Creative ways to enrich roles, recognise contributions, and give staff varied responsibilities will be important for future phases.

## Measurable Outputs and Impact

The project achieved a range of tangible outputs:

- **10 College Hubs established** across the UK.
- **28 Mentors recruited**, trained, and supported.
- **49 Mentees onboarded**, combining apprentices and full-time students.
- **10 Major Hub Events delivered**, each featuring leading industry speakers, workshops, and networking opportunities.
- **Dozens of one-to-one mentoring relationships** established, with varying degrees of intensity.

Impact can best be illustrated through stories:

- At **Exeter College**, student *Brad* was mentored by experienced carpenter *Steve*. Brad described it as “not like school; Steve just listens and helps me think through what’s happening on site.” For Steve, the relationship was a reminder of how much he had learned over a career: “You forget how much you know until someone asks.”
- At the **Building Crafts College**, mentor *Jack* described mentoring as “a chance to give something back without having to become a full-time tutor. I can just be myself and help someone avoid the mistakes I made.”
- At **West Suffolk College**, a student *Alice* requested a mentor with a specific specialism in furniture and cabinet making. She was matched with *Jan*, an Argentinian cabinet maker. This targeted connection showed how mentees can actively shape their own opportunities when engaged.

In all these cases, mentoring built confidence, communication skills, and a sense of belonging to the wider craft community.

The ten **IOC Timber Industry College Hub events** were a defining feature of the project. Organising and delivering them across the UK was a significant undertaking, personally led by IOC President Geoff Rhodes. Drawing on his long-established industry relationships, Geoff secured the participation of respected and high-profile speakers from across the timber and construction sectors. This vital task required persistence, goodwill, and the ability to connect industry leaders with education in meaningful ways. The quality of the speakers and the regional reach of these events added considerable value to the programme and helped ensure that each hub reflected both local context and national relevance.

## Challenges and Solutions

No pilot is without challenges. The Mentoring Champions project surfaced several that deserve reflection:

- **Engagement is Uneven:** Not all mentees embraced the opportunity. Some were proactive and eager; others struggled with confidence, communication, or motivation, regardless of this being the very essential of the mentoring programme. As one mentor put it, “you can take a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.”
- **Colleges Vary:** While some colleges were proactive and organised, others required more persistence. Logistics and established college processes could be a challenge. This highlighted the importance of principal-level buy-in and clear accountability.
- **Equity vs. Effectiveness:** The project deliberately included a “good, bad, and ugly” mix of students. While this ensured fairness, it also made disengagement more likely and negatively affect the programme. Future designs may need additional support mechanisms for less confident learners.
- **Admin Burden:** Safeguarding, scheduling, and feedback collection were heavier than anticipated.
- **Scaling Complexity:** Running across ten colleges required significant coordination. Scaling to 50+ would need dedicated infrastructure.

Solutions included:

- Using CLOs to nudge mentees and resolve issues quickly.
- Creating chat groups to keep communication flowing.
- Providing monthly supervision for mentors to ensure they felt supported.
- Learning to accept that not every relationship would succeed, and focusing energy where the potential was greatest.

## Recommendations and Next Steps

Several clear recommendations emerge from this pilot:

1. **Retain IOC College Hubs:** The hub model works. It creates focal points for activity, builds pride, and connects learners to industry. The IOC will continue an evolved version of these in-person engagements in 2026.
2. **Prioritise Mentor-Mentee Matching:** Interest alignment (e.g. furniture maker with aspiring furniture maker) increases engagement. The scale of the pilot limited these opportunities, but where it was possible there were positive results.
3. **Strengthen CLO Role:** College leads are critical and formal recognition and support from senior leaderships teams is essential.
4. **Build Tiered Engagement:** Design future projects to support both highly engaged students and those who need more structure.
5. **Evaluate via Insights, not just metrics:** Use slide decks, case studies, and qualitative insights to capture real value.
6. **Link Directly to Career Pathways:** Mentoring should not stand alone but feed into apprenticeships, employment, and in-work support.

Most importantly, the project has created a platform for Wood/Work by IOC/NAS, as an informed next phase under CITB’s ECO25 commission.

## Human Element and Teamwork

At heart, IOC Mentoring Champions was about people. The project succeeded because mentors, mentees, CLOs, IOC staff, and industry partners worked together in good faith.

- **Mentors** rediscovered pride in their craft by sharing it.
- **Mentees** gained confidence and direction at a critical stage.
- **Colleges** felt a stronger link to the industry.
- **IOC** strengthened its identity as a membership body committed to supporting the next generation.

The creation of the IOC Colleges Working Group is a particularly positive legacy, ensuring that information sharing and peer learning between colleges will continue.

## Conclusion: From Mentoring Champions to Wood/Work

The IOC Mentoring Champions project has achieved what it set out to do: test whether mentoring could make a difference for early careers in carpentry and joinery. The evidence is clear: it can. When mentees are engaged, when CLOs are active, and when mentors are supported, the benefits are significant: confidence, retention, industry connection, and a sense of pride in the craft.

At the same time, the project surfaced the challenges that need to be addressed: uneven engagement, administrative burdens, and the difficulty of reaching less confident learners. We are happy to share these valuable insights for others to learn from, and our challenges are already informing the next stage.

That next stage is Wood/Work, delivered jointly by IOC and NAS under CITB's ECO25 commission. Wood/Work will take the best of Mentoring Champions - the college relationships, the focus on transition from education to work, the mentoring interventions, and the supportive culture - and apply them to the in-work phase. New starters in the wood trades will have access to check-ins, online bite-sized learning modules, peer stories, signposting, and mentoring designed to help them not only start, but stay.

Mentoring Champions has laid the foundation. Wood/Work will build on it. Together, they represent a powerful model for how the timber industry can support its future workforce: welcoming, resilient, and committed to craft.

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## Appendix 1: IOC Mentoring Champions Toolkit Overview

(full Toolkit available separately: email [info@instituteofcarpenters.com](mailto:info@instituteofcarpenters.com))

The **IOC Mentoring Champions Toolkit** captures the design, materials, and delivery activity behind the Institute of Carpenters' mentoring pilot, funded by CITB. It documents how a national mentoring network for carpentry and joinery learners was built from the ground up, including systems, communications, safeguarding, college partnerships, and mentor training.

The Toolkit brings together every element that made the pilot work: templates, guidance, emails, agreements, and resources that supported relationships between mentors, colleges, and learners. It demonstrates the depth of practical coordination required to engage apprentices, train mentors, and maintain consistent communication across ten colleges and dozens of volunteers.

This annex provides a summary in support of the final project report. The full toolkit is available from CITB or directly from the Institute of Carpenters ([info@instituteofcarpenters.com](mailto:info@instituteofcarpenters.com)).

### 1. Programme Foundations

- Overview of the IOC Mentoring Champions initiative: purpose, scope, and link to CITB's wider objective of improving retention in craft apprenticeships.
- Role of IOC college members as the delivery route for mentees, ensuring geographical spread and inclusion of both apprentices and full-time learners.
- Framework for mentor–mentee pairing through secure online systems, ensuring safe communication and structured engagement over two academic terms.
- Establishment of clear operating principles through **expectation agreements, confidentiality clauses, and safeguarding protocols.**

### 2. Mentor Recruitment and Training

- National outreach to IOC members, inviting experienced carpenters, joiners, and woodcraft professionals to volunteer as mentors.
- Targeted recruitment ensured a mix of self-employed, employed, and retired professionals, with several college tutors participating.
- All mentors completed enhanced DBS checks, coordinated centrally by the IOC with support from a specialist partner.
- Development of an *Introduction to Mentoring* video course tailored for carpentry contexts, produced in partnership with The Mentoring School.
- Additional short learning resources, including *Being a Good Mentee* and a two-page safeguarding guide adapted from NSPCC Learning.
- Use of DocuSign to streamline mentor–mentee and college agreement processes, improving compliance and record-keeping.
- Recognition of mentors' contribution through an annual honorarium payment, reinforcing value and accountability.

#### **Significance:**

This section of work established professional standards for volunteer mentors. The structured training and safeguarding measures ensured mentors could work confidently with young learners while maintaining duty of care.

### 3. College Engagement and Leadership

- Initial outreach to IOC college members to confirm participation, prioritising regional coverage and readiness to nominate learners.
- Each participating college appointed a College Liaison Officer (CLO) to act as the main contact between the IOC, mentors, and students.
- Formal *IOC–College Expectations Agreements* were signed between the IOC President and college leadership teams, securing institutional commitment and accountability.
- Detailed onboarding materials provided to colleges, including student selection criteria, template communications, and promotional flyers.
- Guidance on selecting a balanced group of six learners per college (three full-time, three apprentices) with mixed abilities and learning stages.
- Support for college leadership to champion mentoring as part of their broader retention and progression strategy.

#### **Significance:**

Leadership involvement from Principals and Heads of Construction proved essential to college engagement. The agreements established mentoring as a shared responsibility, not an optional add-on, helping ensure students attended sessions and tutors maintained contact with mentors.

### 4. Safeguarding and Digital Systems

- Creation of a dedicated mentoring website ([www.iocmentors.com](http://www.iocmentors.com)), integrated with the IOC's main site and managed by a specialist web partner.
- Secure logins for each mentor and mentee, with monitored one-to-one chat rooms and integrated Zoom scheduling for remote sessions.
- Embedded help videos for mentors and mentees, showing how to set up calls, share resources, and upload work safely.
- Clear safeguarding escalation route within the system, with direct access to the IOC's safeguarding team and onward links to college CLOs.
- Introduction of ClickSend SMS reminders to prompt mentees to log in or attend Zoom sessions - an important adaptation based on college feedback that students respond better to text than email.

#### **Significance:**

The online mentoring system balanced accessibility with robust safeguarding. It created a scalable, national framework that allowed safe contact and consistency, regardless of location or technology access.

### 5. Mentor–Mentee Relationship Building

- Template *Mentor-Mentee Expectations Agreement* setting out mutual responsibilities, meeting schedules, and confidentiality principles.
- Structured guidance for first sessions, including ice-breaker topics, goal-setting prompts, and reflection exercises.
- Suggested discussion topics for ongoing meetings covering course challenges, project work, employability skills, and career planning.
- Guidance on sharing practical resources (photos, videos, social media links) to enrich learning.

**Significance:**

The Toolkit promoted meaningful, reflective conversations rather than transactional check-ins. It supported mentors to listen, guide, and encourage self-confidence and resilience in their mentees.

**6. Monitoring, Feedback and Continuous Improvement**

- Microsoft Forms feedback tools for mentors and mentees to evaluate the website, session structure, and learning outcomes.
- Feedback captured on progress toward goals, communication effectiveness, and perceived career impact.
- Practical improvements implemented in real time, for example, text-message reminders and simplified onboarding forms.
- Evidence base created for reporting to CITB and informing future development under ECO25 and Wood/Work.

**Significance:**

The feedback process provided genuine insight into learner engagement and mentor experience. It confirmed the value of structured mentoring and established a foundation for future scaling and evaluation.

**7. Partnership and Delivery Management**

- Collaboration with specialist partners for web development, safeguarding resources, DBS administration, and mentor training.
- Central coordination by the IOC to ensure communication flow between colleges, mentors, and learners.
- Proactive problem-solving and consistent relationship management, essential to maintaining participation across multiple regions.
- Documentation of all communications, agreements, and procedures in the Toolkit to support replication by future projects.

**Significance:**

Delivering the Mentoring Champions programme required ongoing relationship-based management, not just administration. The coordination between mentors, colleges, and IOC staff demonstrated the value of human connection in sustaining engagement across the sector.

**Summary**

The IOC Mentoring Champions Toolkit reflects a comprehensive body of work that extended far beyond a pilot. It captured the systems, safeguards, communication methods, and partnership approaches needed to make mentoring in the craft trades both safe and effective.

The materials created - from digital templates and agreements to video learning and college engagement tools - provide a practical, proven model for national mentoring that can be drawn from and learned from, across the wood occupations and wider construction training sectors.

## Annex 1: IOC/NAS Insights Paper

### Building the Next Generation:

### A Framework for Carpentry Mentoring in the UK



16<sup>th</sup> October 2025

*An insights paper from the Institute of Carpenters/National Association of Shopfitters (IOC/NAS), supported by CITB*

#### 1. Introduction - From Project to Principle

Mentoring isn't new. It's how our trade has always passed on skill, confidence and pride, one person teaching another. What *is* new is treating mentoring as a strategic solution to some of the biggest problems facing construction today.

Over the last two years, with CITB's support, and working with Timber Development UK (TDUK) and the National Association of Shopfitters (NAS), the Institute of Carpenters (IOC) has been testing a modern model for mentoring. One that connects colleges, employers and craft professionals across the UK.

This paper doesn't re-tell that project story. That's what our final project report *IOC Mentoring Champions: Crafting Futures* does. And if you're looking for how we did it, that's in the *IOC Mentoring Champions Toolkit*. This is about insight. What the pilot taught us about people, systems, and what needs to change if we want more young people to enter the craft, stay, and thrive.

**The findings go beyond carpentry. They point to a model that works because it's human, structured and scalable. CITB now has the opportunity to turn that insight into national infrastructure — to embed mentoring as part of how the construction industry grows and retains its people.**

**By building on what has been proven through IOC and NAS, the UK could lead the way in building a mentoring nation: one where connection and care are built into training, not added on later.**

**While carpentry has shown what's possible, other trades can and should adapt the model, creating a consistent framework that supports every new entrant to feel seen, valued and part of something bigger from day one.**

## **2. The Case for Mentoring as System Change**

Carpentry sits at the heart of the construction industry, but too often the people who train for it don't stay. Colleges see high enrolment but too many drop out before completing their course or moving into work.

We've come to believe that mentoring is not an optional extra. It's a system fix.

The problem isn't just skills. It's belonging.

Students often don't see themselves as part of a profession. They don't meet many people actually doing the work. They don't have a clear picture of what a good career in carpentry looks like. And employers, stretched and under pressure, rarely have the time to show them.

Mentoring bridges that gap. It offers a "third voice". Someone who isn't their tutor or boss, but who understands the trade and can translate between the classroom and the real world.

It gives students a picture of their future self.

It gives mentors a renewed sense of purpose.

And it gives the sector a stronger, more confident pipeline of skilled, motivated people.

## **3. What the Mentoring Model Reveals**

The mentoring model, tested through our Mentoring Champions and Wood/Work programmes, is small but powerful. We've seen what works and what doesn't.

Here's what we've learned:

### **Belonging drives retention**

When a student feels connected to a real professional world, they stay. That connection doesn't come from a poster or a careers talk. It comes from a conversation with someone who listens, believes in them, and models what a carpenter looks like in practice.

### **Motivation grows from connection**

Mentoring works best when it meets people where they are. New starters aren't signing up for a programme, they're stepping into a profession. By welcoming them into IOC membership, we're giving them immediate access to guidance, community and tools that make sense in their first year of work. It's not about earning a place, it's about feeling supported from day one and seeing that there's a clear path ahead.

### **Middlemen matter**

The College Liaison Officers (CLOs) are the unsung heroes. They know the students, they manage expectations. They're the bridge within the bridge. They need support, not just inclusion.

## **Structure enables care**

The human side of mentoring only works when the structure behind it is solid. Clear onboarding, safeguarding, and quarterly check-ins meant everyone could relax into the relationship, confident that the system had their back.

## **Mentors gain as much as mentees**

This is the unexpected dividend. Many senior IOC members told us mentoring re-ignited their own sense of purpose. It reminded them why they started and gave them a way to “put something back”. That emotional return is part of the value proposition and should be recognised as such.

## **4. The System Behind the Skills Shortage**

The mentoring pilot didn’t just help individuals. It exposed the cracks in the wider system.

- Fragmented pathways. Schools, colleges and employers still operate in silos. Young people fall through the gaps between them.
- Uneven employer engagement. Some employers are brilliant, others absent. Too often the incentive to train simply isn’t there.
- Mixed messaging. Carpentry can still be presented as a “fallback”, rather than as a creative, professional career.
- Hidden excellence. Colleges and small firms are doing extraordinary work, but few mechanisms exist to share that practice nationally.

Mentoring doesn’t solve all of this. But it reveals the pressure points and offers a working example of how things could be done differently.

It shows that people stay in this industry when they feel part of something bigger than themselves.

## **5. Lessons for the Wider Sector**

Beyond carpentry, the lessons are surprisingly universal.

1. Human connection outperforms compliance. Tick-box engagement doesn’t change behaviour. Relationships do.
2. Identity shapes outcomes. When learners see themselves as professionals in training, not “students who couldn’t get into university”, their motivation changes overnight.
3. Local champions are the lever. Every successful college partnership had a passionate internal champion. Usually a lecturer or CLO who believed in the work. Future models must invest in them.

4. Digital tools must serve people, not replace them. Technology can schedule calls, share resources, and record progress. But the magic still happens in conversation.
5. Mentoring revitalises the mentors. For a membership body like the IOC or NAS, mentoring reconnects longstanding members to their purpose and brings fresh energy into the organisation. It's community-building in action.

## **6. From Pilot to Policy - A Future Framework**

What the pilots have proven is that mentoring works, but only if it's structured, supported and scaled with care.

The next step is not more pilots. It's embedding what we've learned into a national framework.

We call it **The Carpentry Mentoring Framework**. Five simple principles drawn directly from experience:

1. Embedded, not optional. Every carpentry learner should have access to mentoring, starting in college and continuing into early employment.
2. Scaled through simplicity. One national platform for matching, scheduling and feedback, accessible to mentors, mentees and colleges alike.
3. Recognition built in. Completion should count, whether through digital badges, certificates or credits towards IOC membership or CSCS cards.
4. Shared accountability. Employers, mentors and colleges each own part of the process. Success depends on their coordination.
5. Evidence-led evolution. Data and feedback loops should continually refine how mentoring is delivered.

This framework would sit naturally within CITB's wider skills and retention objectives. It would deliver a tested, human-centred model that can extend to other trades.

## **7. The Cultural Dividend**

Something deeper has been happening through this work, something that can't be captured in spreadsheets.

Mentoring has re-awakened pride in the craft. It has shown students that carpentry isn't just a trade. It's a professional identity built on mastery, reliability and respect.

For mentors, it has been a reminder that their experience still matters. For colleges, it's created new bridges to industry. For employers, it offers a future talent pipeline shaped by shared values, not just skills. It's rebuilding the culture of craft, one conversation at a time.

## **8. What We'd Do Differently Next Time**

Learning is part of the point. If the IOC were to start again, here's what we'd change:

- Simplify the admin. Build on existing systems of college registration and tracking, and membership platforms. Automation and clear toolkits can help.
- Broaden the definition of mentoring. Not everything needs to be one-to-one. Group sessions, Q&As, and peer mentoring can multiply reach effectively.
- Secure employer buy-in early. Involve them at design stage.
- Add light-touch incentives. Certificates, micro-credentials or even recognition within IOC/NAS membership levels can reinforce engagement.
- Tell more stories. Impact stories inspire others to get involved and they're powerful evidence for policy makers.

## **9. What Mentoring Tells Us About the Future of Craft**

If you strip away the logistics, the deeper lesson is this: mentoring shows us what the future of craft could look like.

A future where professionalism is defined not by regulation alone but by shared pride and care. Where education and employment talk to each other. Where the idea of craftsmanship carries weight again; not nostalgia, but value.

This is the modern version of the apprenticeship tradition. It's less about hierarchy and more about connection. Less about passing exams and more about passing wisdom.

And that's the kind of system young people want to belong to.

## **10. Call to Action - Building a Mentoring Nation**

The next generation of carpenters is already here. What they need is connection, real human guidance, structure, and a sense that they belong to something worth mastering.

The IOC has proven that mentoring delivers this.

CITB now has the opportunity to turn that insight into national infrastructure.

- Embed mentoring within future ECO25 and retention frameworks.
- Support the development of the digital platform and national toolkit.
- Encourage other trades to adapt and adopt the model.
- Recognise mentoring formally as a skill in its own right. A hallmark of professional maturity.

Every skilled carpenter can name someone who showed them the way. The challenge now is to make sure every new one can too.

## **Closing Reflection**

Mentoring doesn't just make better carpenters. It makes better people. It creates a culture of care, pride and professionalism that the whole construction industry can learn from.

The Institute of Carpenters is ready to share what we've learned and to help build a mentoring nation, one apprentice, one mentor, one conversation at a time.

## Annex 2: Voices from the Project - Quotes

Mentors, college staff and apprentices all share what they've seen, felt and learned while helping others take their first steps into the trade.

“The first conversation is everything. Once you've broken the ice, they realise you're not there to judge, you're there to listen.”

— *Mark, mentor and site carpenter*

“Colleges, mentors and employers all want the same thing; we just need to keep talking to each other. When that happens, you see learners grow in front of you.”

— *Brian, College Liaison Officer*

“A lot of young people think construction's a fallback. It isn't. It's a craft, a skill, and it can take you anywhere in the world if you stick with it.”

— *Jason, mentor and former apprentice*

“Sometimes students just need someone outside college to talk to. Once they know you care, they start to care about themselves and their future too.”

— *Karen, college mentor*

“When a new starter has someone who listens, they stay. It's as simple as that.”

— *Anonymous mentor reflection from project feedback*

“You can see the moment it clicks; that realisation that they can make a life out of this. It's not just work, it's pride.”

— *Euan, mentor and workshop supervisor*

“Mentoring reminded me why I love this trade. Seeing that spark again in someone just starting out, it's the best feeling.”

— *Lee, mentor and former apprentice trainer*

“Those first few weeks on site are tough. You are trying to learn fast and prove yourself at the same time. A bit of encouragement from someone who has been there makes all the difference.”

— *Sam, apprentice carpenter*

“There’s real magic in making things that last. Carpentry isn’t old-fashioned, it’s alive. Young people need to see that being good with your hands and your head is something to be proud of.”

— *Adam, construction lecturer*

“We use CAD to draw the plans, and precision cutting machines in the workshop, but robots won’t be climbing into lofts or fitting kitchens any time soon. Carpentry will always need people who can think, solve and build.”

— *Chloe, apprentice joiner*

“You can’t automate craftsmanship. AI can’t hang a door in a wonky old frame or rebuild a sash window in a listed house. That is the human part, and it is what makes this trade future proof.”

— *Martin, master carpenter*

“You can’t teach confidence from a book. It comes from talking to someone who has been there, who remembers their first day too.”

— *Juan, mentor and cabinet maker*