Built to Last
SKILLS PEOPLE GROUP



Final Project Report – CSP

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Built to Last

Attracting new talent into construction is only part of the challenge; helping people remain and progress in the industry is equally important. To address this, the CITB England Construction Opportunities (ECO) programme was established to provide mentoring and ongoing support that helps new entrants build lasting careers in construction.

CSP is a national construction training provider with a network of Skills Academies across England, delivering practical training and creating pathways into construction employment. Through ECO, CSP launched its mentoring programme, Built to Last, to support new entrants during the critical first 12 months of employment. The programme combined personalised mentoring, regular check-ins and tailored support to help individuals settle into work, overcome challenges and progress in their careers.

Built to Last also enabled CSP to extend support to first-year apprentices through partnerships with organisations including NHBC and RNN College Group. Alongside technical development, participants received guidance on workplace behaviours, communication skills and professional development, helping them build the confidence and resilience needed for long-term success in the construction industry.

Through a combination of mentoring, employer engagement and ongoing development, Built to Last helped new entrants establish strong foundations for sustainable careers in construction.

Introduction

The ECO 25 programme aligned closely with CSP's existing approach to supporting individuals into construction careers. As a national construction training provider, CSP works with both employed and unemployed individuals through a network of Skills Academies located across Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster, Worksop, Nottingham, Derby and Manchester. These centres deliver practical, industry-focused training designed to equip people with the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to enter the construction industry.

In recent years, the focus of publicly funded training programmes has evolved. Success is no longer measured solely by attendance and qualifications achieved, but by the long-term outcomes for learners. Training providers are increasingly expected to help individuals progress into employment and build sustainable careers, rather than simply complete a programme.

At CSP, this has always been a key priority. Working closely with employers, colleges, apprenticeship providers and industry partners, the organisation creates pathways into employment by connecting learners with real job opportunities, arranging interviews and providing ongoing support as individuals take their first steps into the sector.

While significant investment exists to recruit and train new entrants, there has traditionally been far less support available once individuals enter employment. Yet it is often during the first year of work that new entrants face the greatest challenges, with many leaving the industry before they have the opportunity to establish their careers.

The ECO 25 programme provided an opportunity to address this challenge. It enabled CSP to extend its support beyond recruitment and training, offering structured mentoring and guidance to individuals during the critical early stages of their employment journey. Through the Built to Last programme, CSP was able to provide the personalised support needed to help new entrants build confidence, overcome barriers and remain within the construction industry.

Building on strong relationships with employers, apprenticeship providers and organisations such as NHBC and RNN College Group, Built to Last created an additional layer of support for new workers and first-year apprentices. The programme focused not only on technical development, but also on the professional behaviours, communication skills and workplace resilience needed to achieve long-term success in construction.

Built to Last

By combining employer engagement, mentoring and ongoing personal development, Built to Last demonstrated how targeted support can help individuals move beyond simply securing a job and towards building a lasting career in the construction industry

Aims and Objectives

The Built to Last programme was designed to provide new entrants with the mentoring, support and guidance needed during their first 12 months in the construction industry. Combining digital learning resources with dedicated one-to-one mentoring, the programme gave participants access to practical advice, career guidance and ongoing support as they adjusted to employment.

Recognising that every individual's journey is different, the programme was designed to be flexible and responsive to personal circumstances, providing a trusted source of support for challenges that may not always be discussed in the workplace. Through regular contact, tailored guidance and accessible learning resources, Built to Last aimed to improve retention, build confidence and help individuals establish long-term careers in construction.

Budget and Resourcing

The project was initially awarded approximately £185,000 to support 300 new entrants into the construction industry. From the outset, CSP recognised that Built to Last needed to be a dedicated programme rather than an extension of existing training provision, and resources were allocated accordingly.

An experienced member of the training team was appointed as the programme's first full-time mentor, bringing both industry knowledge and mentoring expertise. As demand for the programme grew and additional funding became available, the project expanded significantly. CSP was awarded further allocations throughout delivery, increasing the contract value to £545,000 and enabling support for more than 700 learners.

To meet this growth, an additional full-time mentor was recruited, bringing valuable recruitment experience to the team. This enhanced the programme's ability to support individuals who experienced setbacks in employment and required help re-entering the construction industry.

The investment in dedicated mentoring, personalised support and employment guidance contributed to retention rates exceeding initial expectations, demonstrating the value of ongoing support for new entrants during the early stages of their construction careers.

New Entrants Supported	Totals
Enrolled	718
3 month reviews	672
6 month reviews	610

Implementation

Built to Last initially focused on individuals recently supported into employment through CSP's Skills Academies, allowing mentors to engage quickly with those most likely to benefit from additional support.

The programme was built around personalised one-to-one mentoring, recognising that new entrants are often more comfortable discussing challenges privately rather than in group settings. Alongside

formal three and six-month reviews, participants received regular six-weekly check-ins to help identify and address issues early.

Each learner completed an Individual Employment Support Plan and was given access to a digital e-portfolio containing learning resources covering topics such as communication, personal development and workplace expectations. As the programme grew, delivery was extended to selected partners, including NHBC and RNN College Group, broadening support to apprentices and new entrants across the sector.

Through mentoring, digital learning and regular engagement, Built to Last provided a structured framework to help individuals settle into employment, overcome challenges and build successful careers in construction.

Results

The Built to Last mentoring programme, delivered through the ECO 25 programme, successfully demonstrated the value of structured, ongoing support for new entrants to the construction industry.

Through regular mentoring, workplace reviews and personalised guidance, participants received support during the critical first months of employment, helping them build confidence, overcome challenges and develop the behaviours needed for long-term success. Regular contact with mentors ensured that issues could be identified early and addressed before they became barriers to sustained employment.

The programme helped participants strengthen key employability skills, including communication, reliability, resilience and an understanding of workplace expectations. Many learners entered employment with limited industry experience and benefited from having access to an independent source of advice and support as they adjusted to their new roles.

A key feature of Built to Last was its proactive approach. Mentors worked closely with learners to address challenges such as attendance concerns, workplace misunderstandings, financial pressures and confidence issues, helping individuals remain focused on their long-term goals and continue progressing within the industry.

The programme also supported participants to look beyond their initial role and consider future career opportunities. Through discussions around progression pathways, further training and career development, learners were encouraged to view construction as a long-term career rather than simply a job.

Employers reported positive benefits from the programme, highlighting improvements in reliability, communication and workplace professionalism among participants. The mentoring model also provided employers with a trusted point of contact to help resolve issues quickly and support successful onboarding and retention.

Overall, Built to Last demonstrated that targeted mentoring and personalised support can play a significant role in improving retention within the construction industry. Participants gained confidence, stability and direction, while employers benefited from a more engaged and supported workforce. The programme provides a strong example of how ongoing mentoring can help new entrants not only enter construction but build successful and lasting careers within the sector.

Built to Last

Skills People Group
QUALIFICATIONS & TRAINING

CASE STUDY

Donnell McLaren

From Supermarket to Site: A Journey into Self-Employment in Construction



Greater Manchester Skills Academy

> "Before I started with Skills People I was next to clueless, but with the help of the amazing staff members such as Aarron, I have a clearer understanding of the construction game and it wouldn't have been possible without this amazing team."
>
> - Donnell McLaren

Before stepping into the world of construction, Donnell McLaren worked at Tesco and in the hospitality industry. With no prior experience in construction, he knew he wanted something more physical and rewarding—something that gave him the freedom to work for himself and develop practical skills that could lead to long-term career progression.

Donnell's interest in construction was driven by the desire for a hands-on role and the flexibility that self-employment in the sector could offer. He decided it was time to pursue something different and began looking for opportunities to break into the industry.

TRAINING THE RIGHT WAY, THE FIRST TIME

Donnell completed his Civil Engineering and Groundworks Skills Bootcamp training, funded by the Department for Education, along with Forward Tipping Dumper and Banksman certification, at Greater Manchester Skills Academy through Construction Skills People. This combination of training gave him both the theoretical understanding and practical experience needed to step onto a live construction site with confidence.

He was supported throughout the process by the academy team, who helped him build the foundations of a brand-new career.

SUPPORT INTO EMPLOYMENT

Getting into the industry wasn't something Donnell had to do alone. With the support of Employer Engagement Officer Barry McTeague at the Manchester hub, Donnell received help preparing for employment—including CV building, interview coaching, and arranging his first interview. Thanks to this support, Donnell successfully secured a job as a labourer.

While he's currently working in a general labouring role, Donnell's long-term ambition is to progress into more secure work operating dumpers—and ultimately, to move onto other plant-based qualifications as he builds his skills and confidence.

STEP-BY-STEP SUPPORT INTO SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Transitioning into self-employment can be daunting, especially with no prior experience. That's where the ECO Programme, the CITB's came in. When Aarron Sayles, Learning Engagement Coordinator, reached out to Donnell, it quickly became clear that he needed help setting up all the essentials: