Brickwork Masterclasses - End of Contract Report

Contract ref: TD57-HBC-HBF-2301

Contract Value: £321,600 incl. 1 variation

Contract period: 01 October 2023 to 30 September 2026

Contract lead: Home Builders Federation (HBF)

Partners: National House Building Council (NHBC), Brickwork Contractors (ABC)

Main contact: Tracey Hill, Home Builders federation Project and Contract Manager

Date report submitted: 13/10/2026

Project summary

Brickwork Masterclasses an HBF initiative funded by CITB, were created in partnership with the NHBC and the Association of Brickwork Contractors to upskill the workforce on home building sites across England, Scotland and Wales. Targeting employed bricklayers, Brickwork Masterclasses address common issues found by NHBC inspection teams. Delivered by NHBC Building Inspector trainers, the 90 minute sessions offer practical skills and knowledge, and are delivered on home builders' own sites to reduce disruption to the working day, supported by a takeaway reference guide. Since Brickwork Masterclasses began in 2019 over 1,700 sessions have been delivered, reaching over 15,000 bricklayers. During this contract 595 sessions were delivered to 4244 bricklayers and almost a 1000 more supporting roles such as Site Managers, Contract Supervisors, Project Managers all keen to know how to support and check the quality.

Introduction

The Brickwork Masterclass Project is an industry-led quality and skills initiative managed by the Home Builders Federation and delivered with NHBC. It is referenced within the current Home Building Sector Plan and supports the home building industry by improving the competence of existing bricklayers through practical, site-based training focused on the defects most frequently identified in NHBC Construction Quality Reviews.

The Masterclasses were developed because brickwork defects—including problems with damp-proof courses and trays, cavities, weep holes, insulation, fire stopping and soundproofing continued to affect build quality, productivity and warranty costs. Although the programme had already operated at scale, continuing demand and reported defects showed that a wider proportion of the workforce still needed to be reached.

The Masterclasses address a recognised trade-wide skills and quality challenge. By combining targeted training with measurable quality data, it is expected to reduce defects and claims, improve productivity and workmanship, raise standards across the supply chain and contribute to the delivery of higher-quality new homes.

Key evidence at the outset estimated 72,000 bricklayers working in construction, with around 63% employed in home building. Since January 2019, more than 1,700 Masterclasses had been delivered to over 15,000 bricklayers across England, Wales and Scotland. Demand remained strong after marketing stopped, resulting in a waiting list, while NHBC data continued to identify substructure and superstructure among the poorest-performing build stages. Hence the need to continue to support more delivery.

Aims and objectives

- Upskill bricklayers on home building sites
- Improve brickwork quality on home building sites
- Improved productivity
- Reduce the number of defects reported by Building Inspectors

Budget and funding sources

CITB funded

- delivery of Masterclasses by trained Building Inspectors (NHBC)
- booking management (NHBC)
- monitoring and analysis of training registers (NHBC)
- follow up survey (NHBC)
- printing of takeaway booklet (NHBC)
- Marketing campaign (NHBC)
- Programme management – incl. strategy, claims and reporting (HBF)

90% of contracted value was claimed. The reduced number of bookings seen in the latter year of the contract (late 2025/2026) can be linked to the fact that the home building industry is facing difficult market conditions and a shortage of skilled workers particularly in key trades such as bricklaying. Together, these pressures are making some developments financially unviable, delaying new sites and reducing the number of homes being built. The slowdown has also led builders to reduce workforce numbers, limit investment in training and postpone site-based activities, which affected attendance and demand for programmes such as the Brickwork Masterclasses.

HBF, NHBC, employers and delegates gave a significant amount of in kind time over and above that which was funded, in order to make the programme a success.

Approach

Masterclass sessions were offered on working sites to minimise time off the tools and off site, delivered by experienced BIs with detailed knowledge and who have earned respect from the trade teams. As an alternative for individuals or small groups Masterclass sessions were also scheduled at NHBC Hubs across the country in Hull, Tamworth/Lichfield, Cambridge, and Newcastle. Minimum of 8-10 bricklayer per session

The Masterclasses were promoted collaboratively across the industry. NHBC raised awareness during site visits and through its social media channels and *Bricks & Mortar* newsletter. HBF communicated through its social platforms and *Weekly Industry News Summary*, while the Association of Brickwork Contractors regularly encouraged members to book a session. CITB also shared promotional posts and provided its engagement teams with programme information and booking links. Supporting videos were created and shared across these channels to extend the campaign's reach.

Sessions were booked through NHBC online shop.

The Masterclasses were typically delivered in site cabins using slide presentations featuring real-life examples of good and poor practice. Sessions also included discussion, delegate participation and quizzes to reinforce learning.

Each attendee received a takeaway booklet containing the presentation slides, accompanying best-practice guidance and extracts from the relevant NHBC standards.

Results

Delivery analysis:

Brickwork Masterclass Output	Target	No. Brickwork Masterclasses delivered	Variance
No. of Masterclass session	666	595	-71 (-10%)
No. of Bricklayers	5753	4244	- 1509 (-26%)

A total of 5417 delegates trained during the 3 year contract period Oct 23 to Sept 26

Included in the overall total

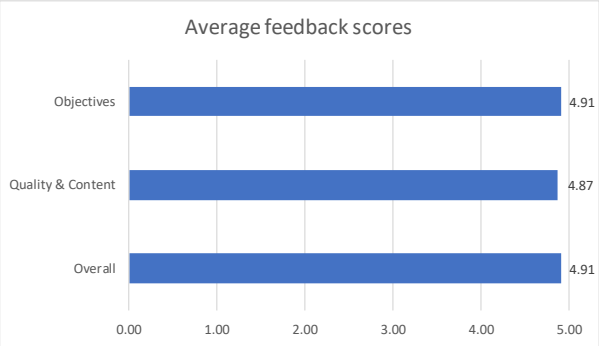
- 7 hub sessions were delivered – 3 Cambridge, 2 Hull, 2 Newcastle to 52 Bricklayers 68 delegates altogether.
- Colleges showed an interest and booked sessions for their employed brickwork apprentice classes, reaching multiple employers in one go.
- 6 colleges held Masterclasses, Wiltshire College, City College Norwich, East Durham College, Hull College, East Sussex College and Tameside College with 67 bricklaying apprentices in attendance.

HBF Home Builders Federation

Delivery Feedback:

Feedback evidence from October 2023 to September 2026 • Prepared to support continued programme funding

OVERALL SCORE	QUALITY & CONTENT	OBJECTIVES MET	RATED 4 OR 5
4.91	**4.87**	**4.91**	**99.5%**
out of 5	out of 5	out of 5	of overall responses

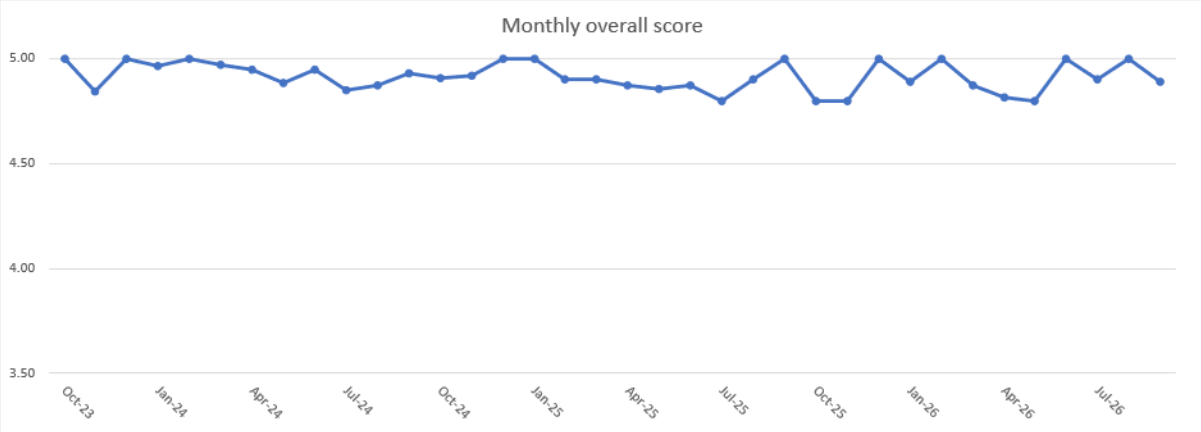


THE FUNDING CASE

The brickwork masterclass delivers consistently excellent outcomes at scale: 560 scored responses across 304 organisations, with 99.5% of overall ratings at 4 or 5.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS VALUE

- Knowledgeable, engaging trainers and open discussion
- Practical explanations relevant to site quality
- Questions answered clearly and in useful detail
- Strong refresher value for bricklayers and site teams



Evidence base: 560 scored responses • 304 organisations • 206 substantive comments • Trainer effectiveness 4.94/5

PARTICIPANT VOICE



TARGETED OPPORTUNITIES

Feedback supports continued investment, with focused enhancements likely to strengthen impact further:

- Add more timber-frame content where relevant
- Increase practical/site-walk elements where feasible
- Keep slides, statistics and standards current
- Improve selected pictures and multilingual materials

Overall feedback revealed that the masterclasses were well received by the site teams, delivered brilliantly and appreciated the expertise and were a superb refresher for everyone.

Impact analysis

- Evidence of impact is reported through NHBC Reportable Items (RI) data from inspections carried out on live sites by Building Inspectors against technical requirements and data from warranty claims received.
- Analysis of External Masonry walls during the period 2023 -2026 showed year on year improvements with far fewer reportable items down on average by a third.

A review

A review of delivery during the contract period identified several practical lessons relating to booking patterns, attendance, learning materials and eligibility requirements:

- Most sessions were booked by home builders for trades working on site. On occasions, subcontractors brought their teams together for a dedicated company session, helping to ensure that skills development took place across the workforce.
- The takeaway booklet was well received. Many site teams kept copies in site offices and work cabins for regular reference, noting that they were less likely to revisit the material if it were available only online.
- As building materials and construction techniques evolved, it was considered appropriate for bricklayers to return after two years to refresh their skills, an approach agreed with CITB.
- Sessions scheduled at NHBC hubs were less popular than anticipated and attracted lower attendance.
- On some occasions, Building Inspectors arrived on site to find that only four or five bricklayers were available. This was generally due to adverse weather restricting construction activity or unavoidable last-minute changes to build programmes, both of which affected overall attendance.
- Almost every session attracted attendees beyond bricklayers, including hod carriers, labourers, site managers, contract supervisors, contract managers, quality inspectors and carpenters. All were keen to understand what good and poor practice looked like and how their roles contributed to improved quality and better outcomes. Partway through the contract, however, eligibility rules meant that only bricklayers and other operatives who remained on the tools and occasionally worked on site could be counted.
- Sessions attended by fewer than six eligible delegates could not be claimed under the contract; consequently, NHBC had to charge for these sessions.

Products

Training session slides and the Brickwork Masterclass Further learning booklet

NHBC own the IP in terms of content of the sessions and booklet as this was developed outside of the funding parameters, but CITB have access to it. A copy of the booklets can be obtained from NHBC.

Recommendations

Future bookings allow for associated roles to be part of the training delegates as they ultimately have more influence over the final quality of a product.

Continue to watch take up through employer networks to avoid a decline in numbers being trained and quality having a downturn.

Monitor future take up by large home builders who used to book training for their sub-contractors on site as it is unlikely now that they have an £18k annual training fund, that it will be diverted to other priorities.

The evaluation carried out at the end of the previous contract in 2022 is reviewed, CITB have a copy.

Conclusion and Next steps

The Brickwork Masterclasses have made a substantial contribution to workforce competence and construction quality since 2019. During the 2023–2026 contract, 595 sessions reached 4,244 bricklayers and almost 1,000 people in supporting roles. Although delivery was below the original volume targets, the programme maintained broad industry reach, achieved very strong participant feedback and coincided with a year-on-year reduction in reportable items for external masonry walls. The site-based model, experienced NHBC trainers and practical reference materials were central to its effectiveness.

The end of fully funded delivery creates a risk that participation will fall under the Employer Network model, particularly while employers face difficult market conditions and competing training priorities. Continued access will therefore depend on clear communications, a straightforward funding and booking process, and active monitoring of demand. Maintaining the involvement of site managers, supervisors and other associated roles will also be important because these roles influence workmanship, assurance and the quality of completed homes.

Next steps

- **Support the transition to the Employer Network model:** maintain clear guidance explaining that clients must apply to CITB first, allow up to seven days for eligibility confirmation, and then book the Masterclass through NHBC for delivery at their chosen site.
- **Maintain accessible booking information:** keep the NHBC Masterclasses webpage up to date and continue coordinated promotion through HBF, NHBC, ABC, CITB and employer networks.
- **Monitor participation and reach:** review bookings, cancellations, attendance, employer type, geography and delegate roles at regular intervals, with particular attention to large home builders and subcontractors that previously arranged training for site teams.
- **Review eligibility and value:** explore whether associated roles such as site managers, supervisors and quality inspectors can be included in future funded delivery, and revisit the 2022 evaluation alongside current reportable-item and warranty-claims data.

- **Set an early review point:** assess the effect of the new funding model after sufficient booking data is available, including whether the 50% employer contribution is creating a barrier to take-up.
- **Prepare a contingency delivery option:** if participation declines materially, develop and test a lower-cost eLearning or blended-learning offer while retaining practical site-based delivery where demand and funding allow.