

Research into careers in construction 2023 to 2024

Summary

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Institute for Employment Studies

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Summary

Aims

This research aims to support CITB to explore alternative sources of labour for the construction industry, both now and in the future. Building on previous research it suggests that CITB could widen the pool of potential construction entrants by targeting pre-secondary education pupils who have not yet decided on careers, those in vocational education and training (VET) and adults outside the labour market. It explores the opportunities and challenges for working with four new audience groups:

- **Early years** – young children aged 3–5 years.
- **Primary years** – young children aged 5–11 years (covering Key Stage 1 and 2).
- **Vocational pathways** – potential entrants to construction who are in FE and vocational education and training (all ages, covering established vocational pathways such as City and Guilds and apprenticeships, and newer pathways such as T-levels).
- **Outside the labour market** – potential entrants to construction who are currently not in the labour market (covers those not in education or training, long-term unemployed, early retirees and those with health issues).

Context

Data analysis suggests that there that there is an opportunity for construction to recruit from a pool of adults outside of the labour market with construction experience, and from a growing cohort of school leavers over the coming years. The research explored the context and challenges around working with these four groups to make use of these opportunities.

Views and stereotypes about jobs are formed at an early age, both through formal careers-related learning and informal exposure from children's families and communities. Early career-related interventions can help to broaden horizons and provide equal access to knowledge about a range of careers. While little is known about current and potential careers provision in early years settings, there is a growing acknowledgement of the importance of careers-related learning in primary schools. Construction was highlighted as a sector that young children are interested in and which would benefit from early intervention to address misconceptions and stereotypes held about the sector.

FE and vocational pathways are historically a key route into construction. However, take-up and retention on vocational pathways tends to be low. In part this is due to a longstanding disparity of esteem between vocational and academic pathways. Careers education, information and guidance (CEIAG) supports informed decision making and

career entry for those in FE and VET. When engaging with this group CITB and employers should account for the broad range of backgrounds and aspirations among these learners, as well as the fact that many have already specialised in non-construction careers and may be harder to reach.

Adults outside the labour market were the hardest group to research and are likely to be the most difficult for CITB to target. This group are generally referred to as 'economically inactive' as they are not in work and either not seeking work or unable to work. This encompasses a range of people with differing needs and circumstances and diverse, complex and individualised barriers to work. Many economically inactive adults are not working with careers services, or other institutions such as the benefits system, so can be hard to identify and access.

Good practice

Careers education should be a lifelong intervention from primary school through post-16 education and into adult services. Sustained, age appropriate, careers interventions involving schools, careers services, parents and employers ensures equal access to job information and entry. Additionally, it provides employers with a talent pipeline, creating a long-term approach to filling labour and skills gaps.

In primary schools short, interactive career-related activities linked to the curriculum can introduce young people to a range of jobs and tackle stereotypes and inequalities in careers knowledge. While this is currently happening in some primary schools there is no statutory requirement to provide this, so delivery is inconsistent. Moreover, construction related learning appears to be less common than other sectors. Primary schools and employers can struggle to make links, although working with charities and career services can help them to overcome barriers such as time and resources.

Secondary schools should provide equal access to academic and vocational pathways, when young people are making decisions about their future education and careers. This has been supported by legislation introduced by the previous government to improve awareness and take up of VET which provides an opportunity for CITB and employers to increase take up of construction courses.

For vocational learners and FE students CEAIG focuses on supporting learners to move from education into the workforce. Employers therefore play a key role at this stage both through placements and formal CEAIG interventions. Employers have a role in mentoring those interested in a career in their industry, and working with teaching staff and careers guidance professionals to provide up to date information on their skills needs and the local labour market.

As noted, adults outside of the labour market are a more difficult group to reach and support. However, the evidence shows that holistic, tailored careers advice and support can help some economically inactive individuals to (re)enter the labour market, and that these services would benefit from employer engagement to provide opportunities for individuals and educate staff on skills needs. Construction employers are already

providing this support through initiatives designed to engage underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, often through social value teams.

Recommendations

CITB is well placed to influence and collaborate with government, industry, and education providers to improve awareness and access to construction careers at various stages of education and employment. This mission aligns with CITB's current and planned activities, which could be more widely communicated to both young people, schools and employers, particularly smaller employers.

Alongside current activities the research identified new activities which could support the four audience groups. At early years and primary CITB could advocate for and support employer engagement with schools and nurseries, provide resources for primary schools linking construction to the curriculum, and promote career-related learning for young children. For further education and vocational learners, CITB can help employers enhance careers guidance, produce resources for employers and college staff, and provide up to date sector knowledge for staff. CITB can assist employers in supporting adults outside of the labour market by providing resources on career pathways to adult education services, promoting inclusive recruitment practices, and supporting employers to make partnerships with local service providers to address regional skills needs.

Introduction

This research was commissioned by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and BMG Research Limited with support from Professor Tristram Hooley. This paper summarises key insights from exploratory research with four new audience groups who were identified in previous research as alternative sources of labour for the sector to engage with to improve and broaden the (future) labour supply. The aim of the research was to support CITB to build on its portfolio of research activity into careers in construction and to expand this to be as all-encompassing as possible, considering the whole journey into a career in construction.

The four new audience groups explored are:

1. **Early years** – young children (aged 3–5 years, covering early years and reception).
There has been little work (research or initiatives) focused on careers related learning with this group, although it is known that occupational stereotypes can start to form from this early age.
2. **Primary years** – young children (aged 5–11 years, covering Key Stage 1 and 2). This is the age where attitudes are still forming and there has been some limited research and activity around careers related learning with this group.

Together, the groups above represent an area of focus for CITB's longer term strategy, in recognition that individuals' life preferences and career choices are made at an early age (before the age of 16).

3. **Vocational pathways** – potential entrants to construction who are in FE and vocational education and training (all ages, covering established vocational pathways such as City and Guilds and apprenticeships, and newer pathways such as T-levels).
4. **Outside the labour market** – potential entrants to construction who are currently not in the labour market (covers those not in education or training, long-term unemployed, early retirees and those with health issues).

These two groups represent a more immediate focus for CITB and a potential means to broaden their labour supply.

This report focuses on the following priority research themes:

1. **Improving understanding:** to understand the circumstances, motivations and constraints of new audience groups.
What are the challenges facing these groups and the challenges in providing careers support for them?
2. **Innovation and good practice:** to understand and map policy and practice in the area of careers education, information, advice and guidance with the new audience groups.
What is going on with regards to careers and employer interventions and with tackling stereotypes and broadening horizons?
3. **Supporting improvements/progress:** exploring what can practically be done to achieve positive change in the construction industry in the short and longer-term.
What could change in the future to improve and diversify the talent pool for the construction industry?

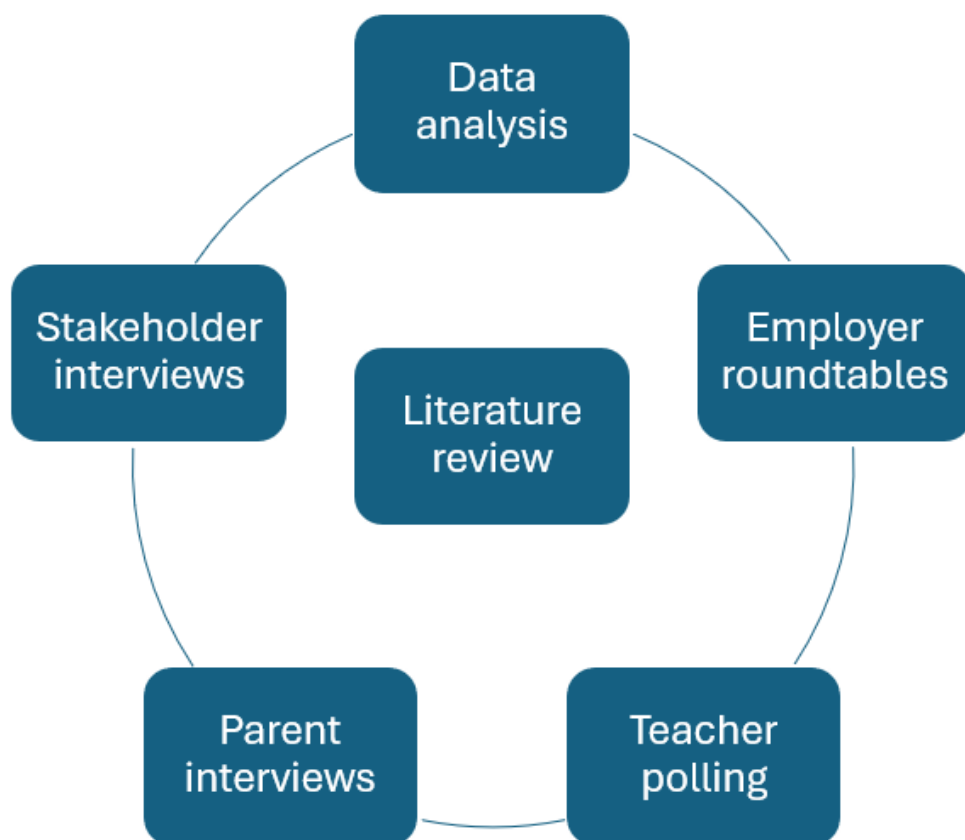
Research approach

The research questions were explored in six stages. A rapid evidence review explored current policy and practice in careers education, information, advice and guidance for the four audience groups, with additional information gathered from analysis of education and labour market data. Then research questions were investigated from multiple perspectives by engaging experts and stakeholders, parents of young children, construction employers, and teaching staff working in primary schools.

- **Literature review:** a brief, exploratory review of academic and grey literature explored policies and practices aimed at the four groups, and implications for the construction industry.
- **Data analysis:** analysis of large-scale secondary data sets explored current and future sources of construction entrants. Analysis of Labour Force Survey data from 2016 to 2023 explored flows into and out of construction and the population of unemployed workers with construction experience. Analysis of ONS National Population Projections was used to investigate projections for the number of people leaving education from 2020 to 2024.
- **Stakeholder interviews:** interviews with 17 stakeholders representing organisations within education, training and the construction industry. These explored current provision of general and construction specific careers education for the four groups, gathered examples of good practice, and suggested actions for future progress.
- **Parent interviews:** interviews with 10 parents of young children (aged 3–11 years old) were used to gain insights into ‘if and how’ young children are learning about careers in general, and the construction industry specifically. Interviews also explored the career aspirations of children, and what parents of young children hope for in their future working lives, and parents’ views on the construction industry and its suitability as a place for their children to work.

- **Teacher polling:** polling of 3,559 primary school teachers explored the provision of general and construction specific careers-related activities, levels of general and construction specific employer engagement, which industries pupils were introduced to and how teachers believe construction links to curriculum subjects.
- **Employer roundtables:** two roundtable discussions with construction industry employers were conducted to gather employer insights and experiences into careers in construction and how routes and pathways to entry can be promoted to the possible new audience groups. These discussions allowed for further understanding of the challenges employers face with recruitment and outreach, to potential entrants to the construction industry.

Figure 1: Overview of research methods



Source: IES/BMG, 2025

Improving understanding: context and challenges

The research aimed to understand the circumstances, motivations and constraints of the four new audience groups, to support CITB to understand the challenges and opportunities in reaching out to them. Evidence suggests there is an opportunity for construction to attract new entrants from outside the labour market, and from a growing cohort of education leavers over the coming years. Both opportunities and challenges for CITB reaching these groups were identified. This chapter presents the context of the construction industry and the four new audience groups.

Construction

The construction industry in the UK is facing an ongoing skills shortage. Data analysis of labour flows into construction found that between 2016 and 2023 new entrants to construction make up one in ten of the construction workforce, and that just under 4% of education leavers (aged 16–20) who enter employment worked in construction, with the rate of entry into construction decreasing as qualification levels increase. As the construction sector has an aging workforce there is a need to attract more new entrants to the industry including education leavers and workers from other sectors.

Our research identified five key challenges fuelling this skills shortage: negative perceptions and narrow horizons among potential entrants, the changing nature of work in construction and the skills required, difficulties attracting individuals to change sectors, poor retention in the sector, and barriers to providing routes into the sector. These challenges reinforce the need for the sector to engage with potential employees at an earlier stage, to ensure they have the relevant and accurate knowledge about the industry and the jobs available, as well as the relevant skills and qualifications required now and in the future.

- **Negative perceptions and narrow horizons:** potential construction entrants and their influencers hold persistent negative perceptions about work in construction. Construction work tends to be conflated with labouring and trade roles and is viewed as low status, involving hard manual work and more suited to men than women.
- **Changing nature of work and skills required:** there is an increased need for technical skills and knowledge in the sector with the growing use of digital technologies in construction. The existing workforce may lack these skills and the aging construction workforce and prevalence of SMEs and micro-enterprises presents challenges to retraining. However, the increased use of technology presents an opportunity to change the image of the sector, attract new entrants to the industry and create jobs that are more inclusive of home workers, older workers and those with

disabilities. Additionally, while beyond the purview of this research, the application of new technology has potential implications for learning and training that might benefit alternative approaches to the recruitment and training of (what might be considered) non-traditional entrants.

- **Challenges in changing career:** meeting changing skills needs requires upskilling existing workers or attracting individuals with those skills from other industries. Changing jobs is relatively common in the UK, particularly among young people and is linked to higher earnings growth. However, moving between sectors or jobs can have negative financial consequences for individuals, linked to the cost of retraining and initial pay cuts in a new sector. ONS analysis suggests that construction does not offer a financial pull to career changers with competitor sectors including professional, scientific and technical activities, IT, and manufacturing offering a higher average wage growth for career changers than construction. IES data analysis found that these are the largest feeder sectors for construction, but also the most common sectors that construction workers leave the industry for.
- **Poor retention:** construction faces issues retaining workers due to a lack of job stability and career progression. Poor retention affects many sectors and the turnover in construction (35%) is slightly higher than across all industries (34%).
- **Difficulties in offering ways in:** construction employers face barriers to offering sufficient opportunities for apprenticeships and placements to support new workers into the industry. Employers in many sectors struggle to navigate the apprenticeship systems. This is particularly challenging for SMEs and micro-enterprises which are common in the construction sector and may lack the time and resources to offer apprenticeships and other forms of vocational training and entry. Smaller organisations also have less resources to influence government policy through contributing to government consultations on training and careers matters, meaning that policy and systems are often designed around the needs of larger employers when in fact they are highly atypical of the sector. The short-term nature of some construction contracts also acts as a barrier to guaranteeing placements, and construction employers deal with health and safety concerns that are not present in some industries. Furthermore, a culture of informal recruitment in construction limits pathways into the sector for those without connections to the industry.

While the construction industry faces workforce challenges, data analysis suggests that there is an opportunity for construction to attract new entrants from outside the labour market, and from a growing cohort of education leavers over the coming years.

The analysis identified a large group of unemployed and economically inactive people with construction experience who could act as a pool of potential labour supply to the construction industry. There are 188,900 people with construction experience who are currently out of work and 40% of these feel they would definitely or probably work again in the future.

On the other hand, the number of school leavers is projected to change over the next two decades. The number of 16–17 year olds will rise in 2028 to 20% higher than in 2020 before falling again.

This suggests that an opportunity for construction to increase their labour force by targeting people currently in primary and early secondary education and adults outside of the labour market. The remainder of this paper will present research findings relating to the four audience groups to support this, covering context and challenges, current practice, innovation and good practice and recommendations for actions to support progress.

Early years and primary school settings

Research highlighted the importance of early careers-related learning (the preferred term when working with younger children). This phase of the life course has a strong impact on individuals' understanding and decision-making about the world of work. Stereotypes about work and suitable careers are formed at an early age. Early careers interventions can be used to broaden horizons, counteract stereotypes and support social mobility.

Younger children learn and form ideas about jobs from a range of formal and informal sources, which can influence their future decision making. Alongside formal careers-related learning in education settings, children's understanding of the world of work is heavily influenced by informal exposure to careers from parents and the media. Aspirations are informed by the jobs that they are exposed to informally through their family, the media, and in their local communities. This can lead to unequal access to careers knowledge, narrower horizons and limited social mobility for children from poorer backgrounds. By the time children start primary school they may already have a narrow concept of career options and possibilities and once career aspirations are narrowed, they are likely to remain so. Formal careers-related learning can counteract this unequal exposure to the world of work.

The construction industry is well placed to make use of opportunities provided by early careers-related learning. Construction was highlighted by parents and stakeholders as a profession that is highly visible and attractive to young children. Early careers learning offers an opportunity for the construction industry to capitalise on interest in the sector among young children, and to tackle stereotypes around construction work and who it is suitable for.

Challenges in reaching early years and primary aged children

While there is clearly an opportunity for the construction sector to engage early years and primary aged children with a view to building a future talent pipeline, the research also found challenges in reaching these groups and providing careers-related learning opportunities.

In particular, there is very little evidence around how careers related-learning is or could be delivered in early years settings, indicating that it may be better for CITB and the construction setting to focus efforts on primary schools initially; as early years is currently largely uncharted territory.

At present, there is no legal requirement for early years and primary education settings to provide careers support, and no specific resourcing or infrastructure to facilitate these

endeavours. This is in contrast to what happens in secondary schools.¹ Working with younger children is therefore voluntary, and expert stakeholders suggest the quantity and quality of provision is inconsistent and depends on school buy-in, staff skills and local careers infrastructure and labour markets.

A major barrier for primary schools in delivering careers-related learning is a lack of time, funding and resources to deliver career-related learning. Schools are juggling competing responsibilities, and government focus on curriculum learning and attainment makes it more difficult to deliver other priorities such as career-related learning, especially with the lack of dedicated funding. Furthermore, it can be challenging for primary schools and employers to co-ordinate and deliver career-related learning interventions. This includes a lack of employer volunteers and challenges in communicating and scheduling teacher and employer interactions. Often, connections between employers and schools are informal and links can be lost when individuals move role

In relation to construction, a lack of knowledge of the construction industry among teachers and parents of primary aged children can limit their ability to provide good quality education around construction careers. This is compounded by negative perceptions and misunderstandings of the sector. Interviews with parents suggested that most want their children to pursue a career that will be fulfilling, regardless of sector and would not object to them entering construction. However, many expressed a preference for their children to pursue professional careers within the industry to have a higher salary, indicating that parents continue to hold misconceptions of the industry and of the quality of careers available in non-professional roles.

FE and vocational learners

Vocational education and training (VET) has traditionally been associated with construction and remains a key route into the industry. However, take-up and retention on vocational pathways tends to be low. The research explored both the context and challenges around supporting individuals into VET, and the nature and support needs of those in vocational education.

In providing guidance *about* vocational pathways, the research literature suggests it is important that people, particularly young people, are aware of all the opportunities open to them, without bias and with equal value of vocational and academic pathways. Effective careers guidance for both those considering and those pursuing VET can provide young people with equal access to vocational pathways. It also offers an opportunity for the construction industry to educate young people about careers in the sector, and support interested young people to enter a career in construction.

¹ An infrastructure has been developed and funded to support secondary school aged pupils across the UK nations, and in particular in England due to the legal requirement for schools and colleges in England to provide independent careers guidance for students aged 11 to 18 years old. Key to this are the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, Careers Hubs, careers leaders in schools and Enterprise Advisors and Cornerstone Employers. This infrastructure places importance on and facilitates employer involvement.

Career guidance *for* vocational learners is provided in a number of ways by both education/training providers and employers. Education and training providers deliver careers education through standalone lessons or as part of subject lessons. Employers also deliver both formal and informal careers learning on placements. Careers education is therefore incorporated into vocational learning to a greater extent than on more academic courses.

Vocational and FE learners tend to have a broader range of needs, circumstances and motivations compared to those studying academic qualifications. These learners have a wide age range and diverse interests and aspirations, both within and between courses and qualifications. Due to the nature of vocational education, learners will already be working towards sector or career specific qualifications, which may make learners outside of construction courses harder to reach for the sector.

Vocational and FE learners also often prefer practical and interactive approaches to education and careers guidance, rather than traditional approaches to careers learning which tend to focus on talks and presentations. Finally, family and personal connections continue to be a key influence and source of careers information for FE and vocational learners.

Challenges in reaching FE and vocational learners

The research consistently highlighted a disparity of esteem and accessibility between vocational and academic pathways in the UK. Higher education has historically been and continues to be held in higher esteem than vocational learning, and is often prioritised by individuals and their influencers, including teachers and career guidance practitioners. This is compounded by the wide variety of vocational pathways and frequent policy changes in this area which makes vocational education harder to understand and navigate for individuals and their influencers compared to Higher Education. Moreover, vocational routes tend to be harder to access than Higher Education, with the number of university places outnumbering apprenticeship opportunities, for example. This disparity has implications for the construction sector, as a lack of understanding around vocational pathways can act as a barrier towards young people finding successful routes into the industry.

The quality and quantity of careers education for FE and vocational learners appears to be inconsistent. There is no legal requirement for FE colleges to provide careers advice to those aged over 18 or for independent training providers to provide careers guidance at all. This means that apprentices and older learners on vocational pathways may not be receiving careers guidance. While FE colleges do have a legal requirement to provide careers education to under 18s, the delegation of responsibility for careers education to individual providers can mean that provision is inconsistent, fragmented and not prioritised.

FE and vocational learning providers face challenges around funding, resources and expertise needed to deliver high quality careers education, and from cuts to external careers services for young people. Effective guidance for vocational learners depends on the industry expertise of staff and their links to sectors (which can quickly become out of

date). Inconsistent careers education can risk inequalities of knowledge of and access to different careers.

For construction, these challenges are compounded by limited understanding of the construction sector and stereotypes about work in the industry among career guidance professionals and other influencers which can limit support and encouragement towards working in the sector. Construction is often presented as a fall back for traditional groups associated with construction who do not perform well at GCSE. This may mean that people are steered towards construction despite it not being a good fit for them, while underrepresented groups do not get a chance to explore the sector. A lack of understanding of construction can also lead to high levels of drop out from construction courses and apprenticeships.

Furthermore, there are not enough meaningful vocational opportunities to meet the demand from those who do want to explore a career in construction, particularly apprenticeships. Those that are offered are heavily oversubscribed and may be filled through informal recruitment of friends and family, or by existing construction workers looking to upskill rather than new entrants. Construction employers face a number of barriers to offering vocational opportunities. The large number of construction SMEs and prevalence of subcontracting makes it difficult for employers to offer apprenticeships as smaller employers often lack the time and resources to navigate the apprenticeship system. The short-term nature of construction projects can make it difficult for construction employers to guarantee work for the length of an apprenticeship, while health and safety concerns on construction sites makes it more complicated for employers to provide vocational experiences to under 18s.

Adults outside the labour market

Adults outside of the labour market are a large and growing group which, as noted, could be a promising pool of potential entrants for the construction industry. This group are generally referred to as 'economically inactive' as they are not in work and either not seeking work or unable to work. Adults outside of the labour market are a diverse group, encompassing students, young people who are not in education or training (NEET), those who have never worked, early retirees, those with caring responsibilities and those with disabilities and physical and mental health conditions preventing them from working. As such they have diverse, complex and individualised needs and barriers to accessing work.

Challenges in reaching adults outside the labour market

The nature and diversity of adults outside the labour market introduces several challenges in accessing and supporting them into work. It is hard for services and employers to identify and access this group, particularly given their distance from the labour market and the fact that they may not be linked to institutions such as education providers or the benefits system which can be used to identify and access individuals who could be supported. The role of employers in supporting this group has been particularly hard to ascertain compared to employers' roles in supporting those in education.

Moreover, adults outside the labour market have a wide range of needs that are often complex and require tailored support. This is reflected in the diverse range of services supporting this group. Career guidance for adults tends to take place within employment support and thus is employment focused but has been found to be inconsistent, fragmented, lacking cohesion and unclear to users; involve multiple stakeholders with no common thread of activity/coordination; focused on targets and short-term outcomes resulting in limited access to personalised and tailored support; and lacking in highly qualified staff. This means, despite career guidance being key in supporting adults outside the labour market back into work, few people are able to engage with it.

Therefore, while there is a potential pool of economically inactive adults who either have construction experience or would be interested in working in construction, they are likely to be more challenging for the construction industry to reach than other groups.

Innovation and good practice

The research mapped policy and practice in careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) with key groups of interest for CITB, as potential new sources of talent for the sector. The work has identified that CEIAG does take place with these groups, although there are challenges in doing so, and that there are instances of good and innovative practice (case study examples can be found in supplementary research reports). The CITB and the construction sector could take note of these and consider whether and how these could be adopted or adapted for their sector.

Careers provision

A review of careers literature indicates that careers interventions can be effective in promoting outcomes associated with choice-making and job finding. In particular they can help with goal setting to direct attention and sustain efforts and help in building and enlisting support and building self-efficacy which helps translate interests into choices and finding jobs. The key to effective interventions appears to be a combination of:

- personal guidance that is tailored and ongoing and delivered by trained professionals;
- interventions linking employers with young people and with teaching staff, and offering meaningful work experiences; and
- a good start through embedding careers in the curriculum as a subject in its own right, incorporated into other subjects or as co-curricular activities using high quality curriculum resources and (where possible) involving parents.

Effective careers provision therefore should go beyond a one-off intervention and instead be incorporated into learning journeys from early years to post-16 education and adult careers services.

Early years and primary: working with young people

The research indicates that working with younger children (those in early years aged three to five, and those of primary school age, aged five to eleven) is about broadening career options, aspirations and possibilities, giving wider exposure to the world of work particularly for children from poorer backgrounds, and helping them to understand what skills and knowledge they may need to succeed (rather than guiding towards particular pathways, roles or qualifications). It is, and should be, different to what is delivered in secondary school settings, for example with a greater focus on play and interactivity. Parents feel that exposure to the world of work is an ongoing process and that they share the responsibility for their children's exposure to the world of work with schools and

teachers: parents helping to nurture interests and schools offering a wider perspective on jobs available.

Little is known about what happens (if anything) in the early years sector, in part due to provision being dominated by independent providers. There is evidence that career-related learning activity does take place in primary schools and the previous government was funding pilot work² in this area. Indeed, the majority of primary school teachers polled for the research indicated that career-related learning was taking place. However, one-third (31%) did not conduct any specific career-related learning activities.³ Career-related learning was more common among teachers of younger primary school children (aged five to seven, i.e. key stage 1) than older primary school children (aged seven to eleven, i.e. key stage 2); and activities were focused towards roleplay and using books and videos to introduce the world of work

Career-related learning with primary age children tends to be characterised by activity that is:

- organised and led by the school;
- is delivered via multiple channels (through lessons, topic work and projects, or enterprise activities);
- is supported by employers; and
- draws on external resources (resources, guides, programmes and projects providing examples of good practice, and to train teachers to deliver curriculum linked activities).

Activity includes role play, jobs corners, discussing parents' jobs, curriculum linked activities, whole school career days, aspiration days, enterprise days, and activities or displays to challenge stereotypical thinking about jobs. Employers play a key role in supporting activities by offering career insight talks, workplace visits, mentoring and tutoring programmes and access to role models. Supporting teachers is also important, and expert stakeholders agree that career-related teaching is a skilled role, and teachers may struggle to understand and navigate a complex labour market and explain it to young children in an appropriate manner.

The research indicates that career-related learning in primary settings works best when it:

- is personalised and relevant to the age group (e.g. age appropriate);
- involves a whole-school collaborative approach;

² The Careers and Enterprise Company Start Small Dream Big pilot [Primary school pilot to help children dream big about their future careers | The Careers and Enterprise Company](#)

³ In the 2023 to 2024 academic year, and this follows patterns found in 2022. The activities measured were: visits to workplaces (physically or digitally), sharing examples of pupils' parents work or family business, working with an external organisation to support teaching relating to the world of work, careers days or weeks, roleplay relating to the world of work, talks from employers or parents about their work, learning activity linked to the world of work, activities or displays that challenge stereotypical thinking about jobs. For construction specific activities this also included introducing pupils to construction jobs in less direct ways (e.g. via books or videos).

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- is supported with good quality resources;
 - has sufficient capacity to deliver (e.g. time, resources and training);
 - is embedded in the curriculum (e.g. in daily learning and conversations with children, and linking curriculum subjects to the world of work);
 - draws on partnerships and networks (e.g. Careers Hubs); and
 - involves employers for breadth and authenticity, and (where possible) involves parents as family is the main influence on younger children.

Polling of primary school teachers suggested that construction career-related learning is taking place but less commonly than other forms of general or sector specific career-related learning. One-half (50%) of teachers reported not delivering any construction related activities. Primary teachers most commonly reported that science and research, and emergency and health services were the jobs or careers they had introduced their pupils to, either directly or indirectly, whereas construction and retail and hospitality jobs and careers were least common. Where teachers did carry out construction career-related activities, this tended to be roleplay related to construction jobs, challenging stereotypical thinking about jobs in construction and introducing pupils to construction in less direct ways such as through books or videos.

Employer engagement in primary schools

Many career-related learning activities rely on volunteers from the world of work including individuals to act as role models. The research literature indicates that employers are a trusted source of information about the world of work and about occupations and sectors, especially for young people. Employer engagement in careers work with young people helps students see how subjects link to careers, tackles any pre-conceived notions and helps to build connections and networks.

Expert stakeholders and employers reported that the construction industry is aware of the need to reach people at an early age, before subject and career choices are made, to tackle stereotypes and generate interest in construction among underrepresented groups. Construction employers consulted in the research (generally larger and more active employers) were indeed engaging with schools, teachers and young people to help with these goals, and to help develop their recruitment pipelines, support employer social value activities and improve the understanding of construction among teachers. They gave examples of attending open evenings, hosting work experience and site visits and facilitating employability skills training and class talks.

However, the activities cited by employers were mainly with older children in secondary schools and FE colleges, these outreach activities were patchy and inconsistent, and employers had limited experience in providing outreach in primary schools. Employers recognise outreach can be resource-intensive and challenging and they have concerns that knowledge of construction among educators tends to be limited. They note that employer engagement works best when supported by dedicated teams within their organisations, and with schools which have the time and expertise to make links and build relationships. However, dedicating these resources can be difficult for both schools and

employers, and means it can be particularly challenging for smaller construction firms to get involved. Stakeholders highlighted that intermediary organisations that link or create partnerships between education and industry, such as careers hubs or charities like Speakers for Schools, are a key mechanism for overcoming this issue.

Primary school teachers polled for the research reported that visits to workplaces (in person or virtually) were rare and talks from construction employers and actual visits to construction workplaces were rarer still. Most primary school teachers (69%) did not engage with employers but many reported they would like to do so, and head teachers and senior leaders were the most likely to report making links with employers. Only a small group (17%) reported contacting construction workers and employers to visit their school. This suggests opportunities for greater involvement of construction employers in the careers work taking place in primary schools and that senior leaders are the best contacts to approach.

Curriculum development

Expert stakeholders believe it is best practice to link career-related learning to the curriculum and incorporate discussions about jobs and careers into lessons. It can introduce the world of work, contextualise what children are learning and bring the curriculum alive. Interactions should be short (30–45 minutes) with limited amount of listening required, and with lots of breaks and time to move and reflect.

Embedding careers-related learning in the curriculum is key to effective practice in primary settings. Primary teachers felt the curriculum subjects that afforded the closest links to construction were design and technology and mathematics, as well as art and design and computing. This suggests there are opportunities for the sector to help primary teachers create content for curriculum in these subjects but also to think about how content could be produced for other subjects such as geography and language and literacy. It also suggests opportunities for greater representation of construction-related careers for primary aged young people more generally, to draw attention to the wide variety of roles available in the industry.

FE and vocational learners: working with those on vocational pathways

There are two ways to view careers guidance interventions for vocational pathways:

- providing careers guidance to support individuals to take a vocational pathway; and
- giving careers guidance to those already on vocational pathways.

The research literature suggests a focus on the former, in part due to recent legislative changes which are explored below.

Guidance and support about vocational pathways

As discussed in the previous chapter, learners, teachers and guidance professionals tend to be less aware of vocational routes compared to traditional academic routes. The previous government aimed to address this disparity through updated Provider Access Legislation (PAL) which took effect in January 2023. This specifies that schools must provide at least six encounters with approved providers of apprenticeships and technical education for all their students.⁴ This requirement means students will get greater and more meaningful exposure to VET providers which in turn should boost awareness of the alternatives to the more traditional higher education route; help with parity of esteem for VET with academic pathways; allow young people to make more informed career choices and decisions; and improve take-up of and reduce drop-out from vocational courses.

Schools and colleges can access support to fulfil their PAL duty and specialist organisations can also provide guidance and support to raise awareness of and improve access to VET through: CPD for staff; resources for students including posters, videos, case studies, subject guides and preparing for work experience guides; and activities for students such as awareness assemblies, apprenticeship application workshops, mock interviews and assessment centres, and careers fairs. Schools and colleges can also access support for arranging employer encounters and similarly employers can access support in accessing schools and colleges.

Employer engagement in providing guidance about vocational pathways

Alongside the work of learning providers, the outreach work of employers has been key in supporting the provision of guidance about vocational pathways, as well as encouraging take up and diversity in participation. Employers promote the vocational pathways they offer through:

- virtual events;
- school visits, class talks and open evenings;
- attending careers fairs and employability days (e.g. facilitating employability skills training);
- providing mentoring;
- offering site visits or longer work experience and industry placement;
- acting as STEM ambassadors (the Go Construct STEM Ambassador programme is linked to the broader STEM ambassador scheme); and
- distributing general marketing materials and developing social media content to reflect and promote the diversity of sectors.

⁴ Guidance accompanying the legislation sets out parameters for the exposure to providers and employers, around the duration and content of this exposure including information about the provider, learning or training, qualifications and careers they might lead to.

Construction employers participating in the research had worked with schools in this way, and gave examples of engaging with schools to help change stereotypes and preconceptions while also helping to develop their own recruitment pipelines.

In developing and engaging in these activities employers need to be mindful of students' fatigue with virtual interactions, need to work around school/college timings and be aware of school/college contexts to tailor their material. These activities are often developed and delivered in collaboration with specialist organisations such as careers services, youth organisations, local community groups and charities (e.g. Speakers for Schools), alongside the Careers & Enterprise Company. These organisations can also support employers with widening their recruitment to vocational entrants.

Careers guidance for vocational learners

In providing guidance to those on vocational pathways it is important to help people understand the opportunities available in the careers they are interested in and the options open to them outside of their current pathway or employer. Guidance for vocational learners can also support them into a career, offering opportunities for construction to identify and recruit new entrants.

Research explored the provision of careers-related learning in FE and vocational settings. The research literature indicates that despite the lack of legal requirement to do so, training providers do undertake career guidance activities and tend to use the Gatsby Benchmarks to structure their careers provision. Where careers guidance in FE and vocational education does take place, it tends to focus on career selection, employability training (e.g. CV writing and mock interviews) and one-to-one guidance. This encompasses many activities including:

- careers fairs;
- industry weeks;
- employer encounters;
- job application support;
- CV building tools;
- sharing labour market information;
- providing career pathway maps;
- basic employability skills training (e.g. information about professional behaviours required for specific careers); and
- online careers portals with access to information and resources.

Providers also support learners before and during enrolment to check they are applying for the right course for them, with activities such as taster days, experience days, interviews and course inductions.

Career guidance can be provided as a standalone subject or activity, as part of the subject curriculum/vocational programme or via extra-curricular activities. It can also be

provided to individuals by their learning/training provider, their employer or through their placement. Indeed, vocational learners can learn a great deal about work and careers while on placement. These experiences are important in helping people identify and decide on future career paths, develop sector specific skills and essential workplace skills, and develop confidence. However, this can mean that the distinction between careers guidance and vocational curriculum can be blurred and be limited to the current role and current employer. Both learning providers (colleges and independent training providers) and employers therefore play a key role in careers guidance for vocational learners.

For colleges and training providers, advice and support is available from the Careers & Enterprise Company who produced a guide setting out how the Gatsby Benchmarks can be used to support apprentices with careers guidance. Colleges and training providers can also work with employers and local networks (e.g. Careers Hubs) to gather information about local labour markets and skills needs. DfE are also working in this space to provide information about progression opportunities from vocational education and qualifications. IfATE published a set of profiles that identify some of the progression opportunities including profiles for three T-levels in construction.

As well as understanding current practice, the research also identified good practice in delivering guidance to vocational learners. This involves expert staff keeping up to date with their industry; providers offering a range of events across the year covering academic and vocational pathways; tailoring careers events to sectors that learners are interested in; enabling learners to engage meaningfully with employers and ask questions; and following up events with further work and discussions. Work placements/experience were recognised as important but need to be done well. They need to be designed with clear objectives so that learners are prepared before-hand; be aligned to learners' courses (and sequence of course content) or to their career aspirations; have sufficient duration; and involve a breadth of activities.

Employer engagement in FE and vocational settings

Employer engagement was highlighted as being particularly important to delivering effective guidance for vocational learners. As well as providing placements and opportunities for vocational learning, the research literature indicates employers can support personal and career development beyond the apprenticeship or learner role. This can involve providing information about career prospects and engaging in next step conversations, offering mentoring/buddying and additional training.

Employers can also help vocational learners to gain exposure to wider experiences beyond the role through the provision of information about and experiences of different roles, different site visits, shadowing different roles, meeting clients and suppliers, attending trade events, and supporting membership of trade bodies. This may involve employers collaborating to offer a wider range of experiences and insights than they can individually offer. Employers can also help by keeping college and provider staff up to date with the industry. Employer engagement is most effective when it is sustained over a period of time for a cohort of learners, rather than delivered as a one-off intervention, and can help create a talent pipeline for sectors including construction.

The employers consulted supported a range of work experiences and vocational pathways into their organisations including apprenticeships, T-levels and Skills Bootcamps, but recognised larger employers were most likely to offer these. Smaller employers and subcontractors often lacked the resources to support vocational learners, preferring instead to hire experienced, site-ready workers. Employers, particularly larger employers, can therefore get involved in supporting careers guidance for those on vocational pathways, and can have more influence on government policy in this area, potentially influencing it to suit their needs.

The research highlighted that engaging employers with FE and vocational education can be challenging due to a lack of connections, time and resources for both training providers and firms. Intermediary organisations such as the national careers services (across the UK) can provide support to meet the needs of both sides, particularly in finding time and resources to make connections. Construction employers also face a particular issue with health and safety concerns when bringing under 18s on to site. Expert stakeholders suggested that virtual work experience utilising technology and remote working can help to overcome practical and geographical barriers to deliver work experience placements.

Adults outside the labour market

Adults outside the labour market are supported by a wide range of services including employment support services, education and skills providers, and employer led services. The key mechanisms for careers guidance for adults (in England) include the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus. Support for adults outside the labour market is broad and varied, encompassing employment support, education and skills support, employer/workplace support and broad-based support.

Good adult guidance involves: personalised, person-centred and holistic wrap-around support to help individuals overcome complex barriers and access good work; tailored career guidance (which requires time to understand people's needs and challenges); strong partnerships between services to provide joined-up support and accessibility; independent and impartial support with honest brokers (to source the support that is needed not just the support they can provide); local understanding and delivery; and services communicated and promoted to the wider adult population.

Looking to the future, there seems to be a desire across England, Scotland and Wales for each of the careers services within each nation to be:

- unified and for all ages;
- joined up with other services and thus holistic;
- locally delivered and aligned with local priorities and needs;
- to have a stronger focus on high quality skills, training and work experience;
- to focus on good work as an outcome; and
- to improve access to all.

Therefore while adults outside the labour market are a diverse and dispersed group, making them difficult to reach, there is an opportunity for CITB to embed construction

within reformed careers services. Additionally, there is an opportunity to be involved in the work and debate about how these services may best be reformed, and to support employers to engage with adults as well as those in education.

Employer engagement with adults outside the labour market

Adult career guidance work should also aim to help employers be more inclusive and improve access to work for disadvantaged groups. However, adult guidance services working effectively with employers can be hampered by a lack of understanding of employer needs and how they work, and limited awareness among employers of the support they can access. This can result in employers having to navigate the different systems and services available. Employers involved in the research tended to focus their outreach efforts in schools; reflecting the difficulties in reaching those who are economically inactive.

However, some employers discussed targeting groups of adults outside the labour market (including young people who are NEET and those with health conditions and disabilities), through initiatives aimed at supporting underrepresented groups into the industry. This included supporting targeted construction skills training courses and site visits. These activities were discussed in relation to social value requirements, were supported by dedicated teams in larger employers, and were often delivered in partnership with third party organisations who support these groups.

Supporting improvements and progress

The research sought to explore what actions can be taken to achieve positive change in the construction industry by supporting and influencing the new audience groups explored in this research. This chapter presents evidence-based recommendations, drawing on all stages of the research process, to suggest ways that CITB can build on their current practice to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the new audience groups covered in this paper.

CITB acknowledges the need for a larger and more skilled workforce in the construction industry to address both forecasted growth and the replacement of workers leaving the sector. This could involve looking to broaden the recruitment pipeline to new groups. CITB is investing in a range of activities to support this by raising awareness of construction careers and providing flexible entry routes through initiatives including Go Construct⁵, SkillBuild⁶ and STEM Ambassadors⁷ work experience and work tasters; apprenticeships; New Entrant Support Team⁸; and Onsite Experience Hubs.⁹

The research identifies areas of focus for CITB moving forwards, many of which align with current and planned activities especially those of the Go Construct STEM Ambassadors

⁵ Go Construct is a website providing information and resources around careers in construction and the built environment sector. It showcases the range of opportunities available. Go Construct is also a service which provides input to careers events and wider media. Go Construct is aimed at young people looking to start a career or more experienced people looking to change careers, those starting out in the industry or those considering where they want to work. See <https://www.goconstruct.org/about-go-construct/>

⁶ SkillBuild is a multi-trade skills competition for construction trainees and apprentices. Each year it attracts over 1,000 registrations, holds regional heats and a final competition, and covers a range of construction trades. See <https://www.goconstruct.org/skillbuild/>

⁷ Construction STEM Ambassadors are construction professionals who act as the face of the industry for young people and provide an introduction to the industry, bringing the industry to life, and they bridge the link between studying STEM subjects and a career in construction for young people. They engage with young people in schools, workplaces, careers fairs and events; they can deliver talks, run stands at careers fairs, lead workshops, provide mentoring, and support teachers with developing curriculum resources. Schools and colleges can book a Go Construct STEM Ambassador to visit them. Construction STEM Ambassadors are part of the wider STEM Ambassador network, supported by STEM learning. See <https://www.goconstruct.org/get-started-in-construction/go-construct-stem-ambassadors/>

⁸ New Entrant Support Team (NEST) supports employers with finding, recruiting and retaining new entrants, particularly apprentices. Support is provided with recruitment, paperwork, accessing grants and funding, and ongoing mentoring.

⁹ Onsite Experience Hubs are designed to provide one-stop recruitment for construction employers – linking employers with training providers, local authorities, Local Employment Partnerships, and community agencies – to develop candidates and link them to employer's vacancies. See <https://www.citb.co.uk/levy-grants-and-funding/funded-projects/live-funded-projects/onsite-experience-hubs-england/>; and <https://www.citb.co.uk/levy-grants-and-funding/funded-projects/live-funded-projects/onsite-experience-hubs-wales/>

programme. These could be more widely communicated to both young people, schools and employers, particularly smaller employers; and could be reviewed to explore how they might extend their influence on wider groups of potential entrants and thus provide a solid foundation to build upon. However, the research also indicates possible new activities and areas where ambitions could be raised even higher.

Primary and early years

There are opportunities for CITB to work with and influence government, industry, and education providers to support greater learning about construction in early years and primary settings. This could help to tackle ingrained stereotypes about construction careers and provide greater equality of access to information about the construction sector from an early age. To do this CITB could:

- make the case for employers engaging with schools and nurseries to encourage employer involvement;
- work with education providers, industry and intermediary organisations in the delivery of sustained and strategic industry encounters across the life course, starting at early years;
- produce a resource guide for employers to raise awareness of the tools, initiatives and organisations available to support employers working with schools, careers leaders, teachers and pupils. This could include ideas and examples of how to get involved, personal testimonies from construction employers about their experiences, and signposts to useful organisations;
- provide resources for schools linking construction careers and activities with the national curriculum;
- help employers form partnerships with education providers and intermediary organisations such as Careers Hubs to collaborate and deliver construction sector career activities; and
- advocate for change to extend formal career-related learning into primary settings, and advocate and support further research on career-related learning within early years settings.

FE and vocational learners

CITB can support employers and FE and vocation training providers to offer more, and higher quality, construction focused careers guidance, and influence government and industry to improve the provision and uptake of vocational pathways. This would improve awareness of and attraction to construction careers and support greater access to vocational pathways into construction. To do this CITB could:

- provide support for employers in engaging with standalone careers activities such as careers fairs and mentoring programmes; in providing meaningful encounters for

college-based learners in practice; and in offering wider insights (beyond the current role, department or employer) in the workplace to show breadth of prospects and pathways – including facilitating and creating networks for employers to visit other sites and working environments;

- produce guidance and share best practice on outreach activities, particularly on how to overcome challenges with arranging in-person workplace visits, working with school timetables and tailoring input to school and learner needs;
- produce a guide for employers of organisations offering support, facilitate partnerships for employers to provide sector specific information, create case studies and resources for colleges and providers, and facilitate engagement in networks such as the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network;
- increase the knowledge of FE and training staff by supporting the sector to work with provider staff to keep their sector knowledge and links current; through offering visits, industry days and in supporting curriculum materials focused on construction;
- work with industry to develop a centralised approach to outreach and marketing and produce a coherent industry brand. This could capitalise on wide interest in innovative technologies and combatting climate change; and
- advocate for changes to simplify the Apprenticeship Levy and make it more accessible to smaller employers.

Adults outside of the labour market

CITB can support adults into the labour market to pursue careers in construction by working with employers and adult career guidance providers to share knowledge of the sector and make construction jobs more accessible. To do this CITB could:

- help employers and the sector work more broadly with the National Careers Service to ensure it has up to date information about career pathways into and within the construction industry (reflecting changing skills needs and technologies);
- help employers to work with local service providers to improve their understanding of local skills needs and (where possible) input into Local Skills Improvement Plans;¹⁰
- develop a guide for employers, to raise awareness of national employment support programmes and projects that provide opportunities for employers to engage with adults;
- promote the business case for making workplaces more accessible and inclusive and how this can be achieved, and collate and maintain a directory of support and funding for employers to help them be more inclusive in their approaches to recruitment, retention and progression; and

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-meeting-local-skills-needs-to-support-growth/local-skills-improvement-plans-lsips-and-strategic-development-funding-sdf>

- encourage employers to research and share information about local providers, programmes and projects which could help them engage with a wider group of adults and deliver diversity of their intake.

Next steps

This project is the part of ongoing Careers in Construction research commissioned by CITB, exploring how to promote careers in construction and support entrants into the industry. The findings presented in this report have generated new lines of enquiry which CITB will be exploring in the next round of research (2024 to 2025).

KPI tracking

CITB will continue to track KPIs around attraction to and knowledge of the construction industry, and awareness of CITB advertisements among young people and their influencers. This will involve online surveys with a target of:

- 650 young people aged 14–18;
- 450 parents of young people aged 14–18; and
- 150 careers guidance professionals.

Social class and career decision making

This research found that, alongside formal careers education, people's career decision making is greatly influenced by who they know, where they live and their local labour market. As noted in this report this can lead to inequalities along socioeconomic lines when formal careers education does not offer equal access to knowledge and entry to a range of careers. The next round of research will further explore how social class influences young people's career decision making and aspirations, how class affects current and potential construction workers' experiences, and what employers can do to support people from a range of class background to enter the industry. These questions will be investigated through:

- a literature review exploring the impact of class on aspirations and career decision making; and
- interviews with stakeholders including experts, employers, and current or potential construction workers to investigate how class affects the construction workforce and individuals views on the construction industry.

Young people's career decision making processes and social media

Careers in construction research has so far had a strong focus on how young people (14–18) make decisions about their careers, and how CITB can most effectively reach them to provide information and support around careers in construction. The next round of research will continue to build an evidence base around this, with a particular emphasis on the use of social media.

KPI surveys with young people and parents show that social media is an important source of careers knowledge, and CITB is actively using social media to reach young people and improve attraction and knowledge around careers in construction. The next round of research will support CITB in this by gathering information on how young people use social media, what they think about construction focused social media content, and what is important to them in their future jobs or careers. The research will explore how these differ between groups with different orientations to the construction industry, to help CITB understand what information and content different groups need and to respond to this. This will involve:

- interviews with young people using cognitive interview techniques to explore their reactions to three sources of construction careers focused social media content, and semi structured discussion of their use of social media; and
- interviews with young people using 'rep grid' methodology to identify underlying constructs behind careers preferences of people with different orientations to construction, as well as semi structured discussion of sources of careers knowledge.