

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Careers in Construction

A close-up photograph of a young child wearing a white hard hat, focused on building with grey and orange LEGO bricks. The child's face is partially visible through the brim of the hard hat, showing concentration. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

**MAY
2025**

Foreword

We know construction can provide a great career for people of all backgrounds, but we still face a big recruitment challenge.

The issue is often perception. Those perceptions can be formed at a very young age. In fact, by the time children are ready to move to secondary school, a significant proportion will have already made up their minds about what they want to do – and what they don't.

This suggests that all within construction need to engage young people when they are in primary school. For example, if employers can bring positive stories of construction careers to younger children, this could make a big difference when they decide on their career.

This research provides a deep dive into four audience groups and the challenges and opportunities for reaching them with construction-focused careers information and guidance. Those are: children in early years, and primary school settings, those in vocational pathways, and people currently outside of the labour market.

My big take home from this work is that careers guidance is always needed – from the very start of our educational journeys, through further and higher education, and throughout our working lives. There is never a time when careers guidance doesn't have significant value.



Lucie Wright, Head of Careers Strategy

However, our research shows that careers advice can often be fragmented and unclear. And with more hard-to-reach groups, it sometimes doesn't happen at all. That can't be right.

We have seen from the Government in England, in its Youth Guarantee, a drive to ensure young people are either earning or learning. In addition, they propose a new jobs and careers service to support more people into work and get on in work. Both of these changes present an opportunity for CITB to work with industry to reach out to talented people to attract them into construction careers.

Our recently published Strategic Plan laid out how we would inspire and enable diverse and skilled people into construction. It set out what CITB will do to get more trained people, post 16, into industry over the next four years. This research provides further practical insights about how we can attract new talent.

We know there is a mismatch between supply and demand for skilled people across Great Britain. In this highly competitive landscape, the sectors which come out on top will be those which think creatively about who they reach out to, and make a compelling case to them.

If we can work together as an industry, and help everyone see the brilliant opportunities construction can provide, I'm betting construction can win the battle for talent.

Background

This Careers in Construction research is the third part of a series looking in depth at construction as a career choice. It follows parts one and two which looked at perceptions towards the construction industry, the influence of careers information, advice and guidance, factors impacting career decision-making, and the influence of CITB activities. Part four will follow in 2026, exploring how social class influences young people's career decision making, what employers can do to support people from a range of class backgrounds to enter the industry, and the role of social media in making career choices.

Research focus

This research looks at four audience groups identified in previous research as potential sources of labour for the construction sector. By broadening the sector's approach to careers, we can improve and broaden the supply of labour.

The four audience groups are:

Early years

Young children, aged 3-5 years. We know occupational stereotypes can start to form from this early age.

Primary years

Young children, aged 5-11 years. During primary school attitudes are still forming and some will have decided their career by age 11.

Vocational pathways

Potential entrants to construction of all ages who are in FE and vocational education and training.

Outside the labour market

Potential entrants to construction, including those not in education or training, long-term unemployed, early retirees and people with health issues.



The construction skills shortage: five challenges...

Our research identified five key challenges fuelling the construction skills shortage. These are:

1

Negative perceptions:

Potential construction entrants and their influencers hold persistent negative perceptions about work in construction. When many people think of construction, they see it as low status work, involving labouring work suitable only for men, rather than recognising the very broad range of roles available.

2

Changing nature of work and skills required:

There is a need for technical and analytical skills in the sector with the growing use of digital technologies. The existing workforce may lack these skills, and the aging construction workforce presents challenges to retraining. However, the increased use of technology could modernise the image of the sector. It could also attract new entrants and create jobs that are more inclusive of home workers, older workers and those with disabilities.

3

Challenges in changing career:

Construction needs to attract individuals with the right skills from other industries. However, moving to a new sector often means a person will need to retrain and may initially not be paid as much as in another sector where they have more experience.

4

Poor retention:

Construction faces issues retaining workers due to a lack of job stability and career progression.

5

Barriers to joining:

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 resources and a long-term pipeline of work, to enable them to offer apprenticeships or other vocational training.

...and the opportunities

These challenges mean the sector must engage with potential employees at an earlier stage. This would ensure they know what the industry is really like, the jobs available, and the skills needed to join.

Our 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. There are around 188,900 people with construction experience who are currently out of work, and 40% – around 76,000 – of these feel they would definitely or probably work again in the future.

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 the labour force by targeting people currently in primary and early secondary education and adults outside of the labour market.



Early years and primary school

Children's understanding of the world of work is heavily influenced by their family, friends and the media. Their perspectives can be formed at an early age and, once aspirations are narrowed, are likely to remain so. Interventions in schools with good careers advice can help to broaden horizons and counteract negative stereotypes.

Challenges in reaching early years and primary aged children

While there is a 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 sector to support efforts on primary schools initially as early years, as important as it appears, is currently largely uncharted territory.

Careers support in primary schools is largely voluntary and depends on schools working with local employers and careers professionals. Primary schools also lack time, funding and resources to deliver career-related learning. 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. Half of primary school teachers we polled said they did not deliver any construction-related learning activities, yet this was not for lack of appetite.



Working with young people

Working with younger children should focus on play and interactivity. Employers can offer vital support by offering talks, workplace visits, mentoring and tutoring programmes and access to role models.

Career-related learning in primary settings works best when it is:

- Personalised, age appropriate and involves the whole school
- Backed with quality resources and training
- Embedded in the curriculum
- Done with employers and parents.



How employers can work successfully with schools

Construction employers consulted in the research, generally larger and more active employers, engaged with schools to help develop their recruitment pipelines and improve the understanding of construction among teachers. However, employers had limited experience working with primary schools.

17% of primary school teachers we polled reported contacting construction workers and employers to visit their school. They said construction links well with subjects such as maths, art and design, geography and computing. This suggests opportunities for greater involvement of construction employers in careers work in primary schools.

Further Education (FE) and vocational learners

Vocational education and training has always been a key route into the industry. However, take-up and retention on vocational pathways tends to be low and young people are often unaware of all the opportunities available to them.

Career guidance for vocational learners is provided by training providers and employers, through standalone lessons or as part of subject lessons. Employers also deliver careers learning on placements. Careers education is therefore built into vocational learning more than on academic courses.

Vocational and FE learners often prefer practical and interactive approaches to education and careers guidance, rather than talks and presentations. Family and personal connections continue to be a key influence and source of careers information for this group.



Challenges in reaching FE and vocational learners

Unlike other nations such as Germany, higher education continues to be held in higher esteem than vocational learning in Great Britain. In addition, vocational routes can be harder to access, with more university places up for grabs than apprenticeships.

There is a lack of careers guidance, with provision often inconsistent and fragmented. Construction is typically presented as a fall back for young men who do not perform well at GCSEs. This sometimes means people are steered towards construction despite it not being a good fit for them, while other people may not get a chance to explore the sector. These factors both reinforce stereotypes and contribute towards high levels of people dropping out from construction courses and apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships are popular. Indeed, they are oversubscribed but may be filled through informal recruitment of friends and family, or by existing construction workers looking to upskill, rather than new entrants.

Construction employers often face barriers to offering vocational opportunities. Smaller employers lack the time to navigate the apprenticeship system and find it difficult to guarantee work for the length of an apprenticeship.

Promoting vocational pathways into construction

Secondary schools are obliged to provide at least six encounters with apprenticeship and technical education providers for all their students. This obligation, in place since 2023, should boost awareness of vocational routes into the construction industry.

Employers play a vital role in promoting the vocational pathways they offer through events, school visits, careers fairs, mentoring, work experience and industry placements. They can also act as STEM ambassadors and share marketing materials and social media content.

Construction employers we spoke to gave examples of engaging with schools which helped to challenge stereotypes and helped to develop their own recruitment pipelines.

Careers guidance for vocational learners

Where careers guidance in FE and vocational education does take place, it tends to focus on career selection, CV writing, job application support and mock interviews, and signposting to resources.

Vocational learners can learn a great deal about work and careers on placements. These experiences are important in helping people identify and decide on future career paths, develop sector-specific and workplace skills, and build confidence.

Employers can deliver effective guidance for vocational learners, providing information about learning opportunities, mentoring and additional training. They can also shine a light on what the industry is really like by offering site visits, work shadowing, meeting clients and suppliers, attending trade events, and supporting membership of trade bodies. Employers can also keep college staff up to date with how the industry is changing.

The employers consulted supported a range of vocational pathways including apprenticeships, and in England only, T levels and Skills Bootcamps. Smaller employers often lacked the resources to support vocational learners, preferring instead to hire experienced, site-ready workers.

Adults outside the labour market

Adults outside of the labour market are a large and growing group and could provide potential entrants for the construction industry. They are a diverse group, encompassing students, young people 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. As such, they have complex and diverse needs and barriers to accessing work.

Challenges reaching adults outside the labour market

Adults outside the labour market present several challenges in accessing and supporting them into work. They are often distant from the labour market and may not be linked to education providers or the benefits system.

This group has complex needs which require tailored support. Career guidance is often inconsistent and fragmented, involving multiple stakeholders and lacking a common thread of activity or coordination, meaning its purpose and benefit can be unclear to users. It is also often lacking in highly qualified staff and focused on short-term outcomes, resulting in limited access to personalised and tailored support. This means, despite career guidance being key in supporting this group back into work, few engage successfully with it. The UK Government's proposed new jobs and careers service may address some of these barriers to help this group get into work.

While there are economically inactive adults who either have construction experience or would be interested in working in construction, they are often more challenging for industry to reach than other groups. Even if only a modest proportion of this population were enticed and supported into employment in the construction industry, its sheer size means it could significantly help meet the sector's substantial workforce and skills needs.

Support for 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.

Good adult guidance involves:

- Person-centred support to help individuals overcome complex barriers and access good work
- Tailored career guidance
- Strong partnerships between services
- Independent and impartial support
- Services communicated and promoted to the wider adult population.

There is a desire across England, Scotland and Wales for each national careers service to be for all ages, joined up with other services, locally delivered and tailored to local needs. This end-to-end approach to careers information, advice and guidance is to be welcomed.



Employer engagement with adults outside the labour market

Adult career guidance should help employers be more inclusive and improve access to work for disadvantaged groups. Adult guidance services can be hampered by a lack of understanding of employer needs and limited awareness among employers of available support. These difficulties mean most employers focus their outreach efforts in schools.

However, some employers we spoke with discussed targeting groups of adults outside the labour market including young people who are NEET and those

with health conditions and disabilities. This included supporting targeted construction skills training courses and site visits.

These activities were discussed in relation to social value requirements, supported by dedicated teams in larger employers, often delivered in partnership with third party organisations. These activities need to become more widespread if construction is to successfully tap into this group of working age adults.

The way forward

We need a larger and more skilled workforce in the construction industry to keep pace with demand. We set out in our recently published 2025-2029 Strategy the ways in which we will inspire and enable diverse and skilled people into construction. Initiatives include Go Construct and Go Construct Careers, SkillBuild, Go Construct STEM Ambassadors, Apprenticeships, New Entrant Support Team (NEST) and Employer led Experience Hubs.

This research provides vital insights into how we can reach different audience groups, change perceptions, and encourage more people to choose construction as a career, now and in the future.



Early years and primary school

There are opportunities for CITB to work with industry, government and education providers to get more construction-focused learning in primary school and early years settings. This could tackle stereotypes about construction careers and provide better information about the construction sector from an early age.

CITB is currently working with third parties such as the Careers Enterprise Company and through Go Construct STEM Ambassadors to:

- Work with education providers and industry to support contact with the construction industry across the course of a person's education and working life.
- Encourage more employers to engage with schools to discuss and demonstrate jobs within construction.
- Provide resources for schools linking with construction careers and activities.
- Help employers partner with education providers and organisations such as Careers Hubs to deliver career activities through our NEST team.
- Advocate for formal career-related learning to be extended into primary settings through sharing our research and insights.



FE and vocational learners

We can support employers and education and training providers to offer more construction focused careers guidance. We can influence government and industry to improve the provision and uptake of vocational pathways and improve awareness of construction careers.

To do this CITB will:

- Support employers engaging with careers activities, such as helping employers to provide taster or work experience opportunities and mentoring programmes. Help create networks for employers to visit other sites and working environments.
- Share best practice outreach activities, such as supporting Build UK, Open Doors and CITB Wales' See Your Site.
- Facilitate engagement in networks such as the Go Construct STEM Ambassadors and the Top 100 Most Influential Women in Construction.
- Encourage the FE sector to maintain sector knowledge and linking employers directly with FE providers and students to facilitate work experience placements to support the individuals to gain their qualification and to join construction.
- Provide resources for anyone looking for a career in the construction and built environment sector through Go Construct Website
- Continue to promote and support the uptake and retention of apprenticeships and all other new entrant routes into construction.



Adults outside of the labour market

There is a need to make construction jobs more accessible to adults outside of the labour market.

To do this CITB will:

- Work with the National Careers Service to ensure it has up-to-date information about construction career pathways.
- Provide a one-stop recruitment solution for construction employers, through our employment hubs linking together employers, training providers, local authorities, LEAs, community agencies and other partners, to enable the development of employment and site-ready people from local communities.
- Simplify the way employers get the support and funding to access the training they want through Employer Networks
- Engage with local networks to identify into work programmes and link employers with individuals who want to join the industry.
- Promote making workplaces more accessible and inclusive as a positive for employers.
- Make employers aware of support and funding to help become more inclusive in recruitment and retention.



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 Tristram Hooley, Professor of Career Education at the University of Derby.

Research approach

The research was conducted in six stages to gain a comprehensive picture of careers issues for the four audience groups.

These were:

- A rapid review of published research.
- Analysis of large-scale Office for National Statistics (ONS) data.
- Interviews with 17 stakeholders within education, training and the construction industry.
- Interviews with 10 parents of children aged between three and 11 years old.
- A careers education poll of more than 5,500 primary school teachers.
- Two construction employer roundtables with 7 employers in each group.

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