

SKILLS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



BUILDING COMPETENCE, CULTURE AND CAREERS ACROSS THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Who we are

This report is delivered by Constructing Excellence and BRE Academy.



Constructing Excellence

Constructing Excellence is a UK-wide industry movement bringing together clients, consultants, contractors, manufacturers and innovators committed to improving the performance of the built environment. It focuses on the commercial and cultural aspects of industry change. The diversity of stakeholders engaged across the movement provides a unique forum to unlock progress. It is the place for leading organisations and individuals with a role in shaping and delivering a better built environment to come together, share knowledge, insight and approaches. The insight gained enables them to implement solutions that will improve the performance of their businesses, their projects and the built environment.



BRE Academy

BRE Academy is a leading training provider for professionals and businesses in the built environment, offering science-led courses on sustainability, BREEAM, fire safety, BIM and Information Management. We support organisations across construction, manufacturing, real estate, infrastructure and public sectors. Our training enables organisations to bridge skills gaps, seize growth opportunities and navigate the evolving construction and infrastructure landscape. Supporting global initiatives, we provide lifelong learning and promote best practices in sustainability and building performance - equipping professionals with the knowledge and skills to meet real world challenges through research driven insights to develop practical and industry relevant capabilities.

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Overview and Summary

On 28 July 2026, Constructing Excellence and BRE Academy convened a roundtable of 29 stakeholders – representatives from industry, professional bodies and educators, as well as skills experts, to discuss the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *Call for Evidence: A Strategy for the Built Environment Professions, Trades and Occupations*. The Call for Evidence seeks views on how government and industry can strengthen competence, skills, behaviours, accountability and professional standards across the built environment workforce to deliver safer, higher-quality and better-performing buildings throughout their lifecycle.

This report presents the conclusions of that roundtable. To support the findings, we also include quotes from the responses to a survey of Constructing Excellence members, carried out in July 2026, focused on three questions:

- What challenges do you face in maintaining and developing skills and competency in your workforce?
- What is your experience of demonstrating competence, and how can it be better recognised and rewarded?
- How do you approach culture and behaviours within your organisation and on projects?

Fourteen responses were received to this survey.

This report thus brings together insight from skills-focused organisations and professional bodies, as well as direct insight from the industry.

Some of the key themes identified were:

- **Looking beyond qualifications:** Competence should combine technical knowledge, practical experience and professional behaviours, underpinned by continuous learning and a culture of quality, collaboration and accountability.
- **Keeping competence up to date:** As responsibilities and specialisms expand, the sector needs more consistent and standardised competency frameworks.
- **Supporting development through mentoring:** Mentoring is vital for attracting and developing people, but time and commercial pressures, especially for SMEs, can make delivery challenging.
- **Retaining future talent:** Young people see construction as a strong career option, but more support is needed to prevent the "leaky pipeline" from interest to long-term careers.
- **Putting purpose at the centre:** Competence should focus on delivering safe, sustainable, user-centred buildings while promoting the sector as a purpose-driven career.
- **A greater emphasis on whole-life value, collaboration and long-term outcomes.** Commercial pressures and lowest-cost procurement models can undermine investment in skills, quality and professional development. Constructing Excellence has long advocated for value-based procurement and delivery.
- **Leading through values:** Values-led organisations that invest in mentoring and development are better placed to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce.

1. Skills, Knowledge and Experience

Moving Beyond Qualifications

A recurring theme at the roundtable was that qualifications and certificates alone are insufficient evidence of competence. Participants argued that competence comprises a combination of technical knowledge, practical skills, experience and professional behaviours. The government's Call for Evidence separates this traditional 'SKEB' framework into skills, knowledge and experience; with behaviour, conduct and culture and personal accountability seen as a critical, separate components. Discussion at the round table broadly supported this emphasis on the importance of behaviour and accountability, shaped by professional culture.

There was support for approaches that assess individuals holistically rather than relying solely on formal credentials. Several attendees highlighted the importance of ongoing professional review. While qualifications may demonstrate initial capability, participants emphasised that competence must be maintained throughout a career through supervision, mentoring and continuous professional development. This was seen as particularly important given the pace of technological change and evolving regulatory requirements.

Respondee to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"Qualifications are essential but can sometimes not be enough to deal with real-life project challenges, which comes with experience." (Project manager)

"There is an opportunity to improve this by linking competence more clearly to defined role-based standards and performance metrics, as well as tracking not just training attendance but the application of skills in live projects." (Tier 1 contractor)

"The pace of change in legislation, building regulations, sustainability requirements, digital technologies, and procurement processes means that maintaining competency is no longer limited to technical design skills." (Architectural practice)

"Competence should be recognised through evidence of behaviours and outcomes, not just credentials. For example, the ability to develop a clear client brief, challenge unrealistic assumptions, advise on appropriate procurement routes, manage risk transparently, and support better decision-making should be valued more explicitly." (Surveying practice)

"The core challenge is not appetite or provision, it is the breadth and depth of what colleagues are expected to know... Time is a persistent constraint, and the pace of regulatory and technological change means the volume of what constitutes necessary professional knowledge continues to grow." (Multi-disciplinary practice)

Defining and Demonstrating Competence

The discussion highlighted growing support for clearer and more consistent competence frameworks, including BS 8670 and professional registers. Participants welcomed efforts to provide clearer routes for clients and employers to assess competence but noted that awareness and understanding remain limited across significant parts of the supply chain. Several attendees observed that many organisations still struggle to understand the

competency requirements associated with key roles and how competence should be evidenced in practice.

There was broad agreement that stronger assurance mechanisms are required, but participants stressed that any future framework must remain practical and proportionate, particularly for SMEs and sole practitioners.

Respondees to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"There is a lack of consistent, standardised competency frameworks across roles, which makes it difficult to benchmark capability and ensure alignment, particularly in emerging areas such as low-carbon materials and digital tools." (Tier 1 contractor)

"No single cross-professional competency framework exists." "Any future national framework [should] give proper weight to behavioural and cultural competence alongside technical standards, and to consider how cross-professional recognition might better reflect the collaborative, multidisciplinary nature of how built environment projects are actually delivered." (Multi-disciplinary practice)

"If you are an active, engageable person on site - this is often seen to show competence within construction." (Tier 1 contractor)

Linking Competence to Outcomes

Participants repeatedly emphasised that competence should not be treated as a compliance exercise. Competency should be measured against a clear picture of the capabilities required for quality construction work.

Examples such as airtightness and energy performance were used to illustrate this point. Participants argued that these issues should not only be framed in technical terms but also linked to occupant health, comfort, wellbeing and long-term building performance. A stronger focus on purpose was viewed as critical to improving both competence and professional motivation.

Many attendees suggested that putting occupant outcomes at the centre of decision-making could help establish a shared purpose across a fragmented industry. Competence, procurement and regulation should ultimately contribute to delivering safer, healthier and better-performing buildings. The attendees welcomed that the government - in its work on the Single Construction Regulator - has identified delivering safe buildings that meets occupant needs as the central objective for the sector.

Respondees to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"Competence should be recognised not only as a compliance requirement but as a contributor to safer, higher-quality, and more sustainable buildings." (Architectural practice)

"Recognition of this competence is not always consistent and is often disconnected from measurable outcomes or added value." (Tier 1 contractor)

Knowledge Sharing and Professional Development

The roundtable highlighted concerns about declining opportunities for mentoring and knowledge transfer. Participants recalled environments where experienced professionals were more visible

and accessible, supporting younger colleagues through regular guidance, coaching and supervision. Today, mentoring can struggle to compete with project delivery pressures.

Respondee to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"A key challenge is maintaining in-house competency while relying heavily on consultants and delivery partners to undertake many project management and technical roles." (Tier 1 contractor)

"Competence is often developed through experience, mentoring and exposure to difficult project situations. However, commercial pressure, resource constraints and remote working can reduce the time available for structured coaching and knowledge transfer." (Surveying Practice)

Some roundtable attendees advocated for the development of "T-shaped professionals" who are trained to combine specialist expertise with a broader understanding of how their discipline needs to interface with other specialties to achieve a quality outcome. Respondents observed that many project challenges arise not because an individual discipline fails, but because the interfaces between disciplines, responsibilities and project objectives are poorly understood. Better communication and collaboration across professional boundaries were therefore seen as essential to improving competence and reducing fragmentation.

Respondee to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"Technical competence is increasingly being tested against a more complex project environment. It is no longer enough for professionals to understand their own discipline in isolation... Many project issues arise not because one discipline has failed, but because the connections between disciplines, decisions and responsibilities are weak." (Surveying practice)

2. Entry, Progression and Skills Development

Attracting People into the Sector

The roundtable heard that the evidence shows that young people do see construction as a viable and strong career. The challenge is in stopping the "leaky pipe" from initial interest to an established career in the sector.

There was support for earlier engagement with schools, with some attendees arguing that outreach activity should begin well before students reach key career decision points. Dedicated engagement programmes such as Open Doors can be effective ways of helping young people understand career opportunities and relate to industry role models.

Participants also stressed the importance of communicating the sector's wider social value. Young people increasingly seek careers with purpose, and attendees argued that the industry has not sufficiently communicated its role in improving health, wellbeing, sustainability and quality of life.

Apprenticeships and Early Career Support

Apprenticeships were identified as a critical pathway into the industry, but participants highlighted significant challenges relating to completion rates, funding pressures and inconsistent employer support. There was broad consensus that apprentices require stronger pastoral, professional and technical support throughout their development.

The discussion highlighted challenges for SMEs, which often bear both the direct costs of training and the indirect costs associated with reduced productivity. Participants suggested that different support models may be required if apprenticeship opportunities are to expand successfully across the sector.

Participants also emphasised that successful apprenticeship programmes require clear progression opportunities. Without visible long-term career prospects, trainees may leave programmes prematurely or exit the sector altogether.

Responsees to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"Graduates often require significant additional support to bridge the gap between academic learning and the realities of multidisciplinary construction projects."
(Architectural practice)

"Many require significant experience and mentoring before they can consistently deliver the level of service expected on complex construction projects."
(Government client)

"The cost of training can be prohibitive, particularly for SMEs." (Project manager)

"The pace of change in legislation, building regulations, sustainability requirements, digital technologies, and procurement processes means that maintaining competency is no longer limited to technical design skills.. ..For smaller [architectural] practices in particular, the cost of training and time to organise, accreditation, and staff development can be difficult to absorb while maintaining commercial viability." (Architectural practice)

Flexible Career Pathways and Lifelong Learning

Participants advocated for more flexible and responsive career pathways. There was support for routes that allow individuals to move between disciplines, specialise over time and receive recognition for existing skills and experience.

Support for career changers emerged as a significant theme. Attendees argued that later entrants can help address skills shortages while also improving workforce diversity. Greater recognition of non-traditional entry routes was viewed as essential for broadening participation in the sector.

There was also consensus that learning should be viewed as a continuous process rather than a one-off event. Industry must foster a culture of lifelong development, with ongoing investment in training at every career stage, including leadership development and higher-level apprenticeships.

Responsees to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"Construction-related degrees can be beneficial but are not always essential where individuals have significant practical experience and strong communication skills." (Government client)

Further Education and Training Capacity

Participants raised concerns about the capacity of the further education system to meet future industry demand. Challenges included difficulties recruiting and retaining teaching staff, an ageing workforce within Further Education (FE), and competition with higher private-sector salaries. Student retention in the FE sector can also be an issue, with attendees reporting that a high proportion of students on some courses were failing to complete training.

Attendees argued that closer collaboration between employers, training providers and educational institutions is needed to ensure training reflects real-world conditions and emerging technologies. Greater use of digital tools, simulation and modern methods of construction were all identified as opportunities to improve learner engagement and preparedness.

Respondees to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"Training providers are struggling to deliver quality programmes because they cannot recruit qualified trainers." (Tier 1 contractor)

"The transition from IfATE to Skills England has, from my perspective, caused a loss of continuity and clarity. Employers are left grappling with a complex, ever-shifting levy funding landscape. While Skills England focuses heavily on NEET groups, I worry that other critical workforce cohorts are falling through the cracks due to a lack of system stability." (Tier 1 contractor)

3. Behaviour, Conduct and Culture

Clients and Procurement

Perhaps the strongest area of consensus centred on the impact of commercial pressures on behaviour and culture. Participants referred to a "race to the bottom" in procurement, where lowest-cost decisions can undermine quality, competence and long-term outcomes.

Many attendees argued that organisations investing in skills, quality assurance and professional development are often placed at a competitive disadvantage compared with firms operating to lower standards. Leaders can fail to support staff development and people in their early careers because of market conditions that reward short-term cost reductions rather than long-term value creation.

Among public sector clients, attendees reported challenges of expertise and leadership. In this sector, clients can become over-reliant on call-offs and procurement frameworks. All clients need to be more aware of their legal responsibilities.

There was a strong call for procurement models that place greater emphasis on whole-life value (set out in the Constructing Excellence *Value Toolkit*). Over-competition has a high cost for the sector and attendees discussed the need for partnership working rather than sub-contracting, with some moves happening towards this on larger and infrastructure projects.

Participants suggested that meaningful culture change will remain difficult while commercial incentives continue to reward short term thinking and resulting poor behaviours.

Respondees to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"For clients, particularly public sector and estate-owning organisations, another challenge is retaining sufficient in-house capability to be an intelligent client." (Surveying practice)

"We aim to create a collaborative, "one team" culture across the client, consultant and contractor teams." (Government client)

Standards and enforcement

There were calls for more active enforcement of regulations. Attendees questioned whether current regulations are clear and specific enough. The point was raised that self-certification (of certain controlled works) is not the European norm. An argument was made for a built

environment council, modelled on the Legal Services Board with the ability to bar people from the profession.

Equally, participants argued that recognition and reward are important alongside sanctions. Allowing feedback into standards developments were considered crucial elements of a positive professional culture. The question of access to standards – both in terms of cost and staying up to date with new standards – was also raised.

Creating an Inclusive and Supportive Sector

Leadership emerged as a critical driver of culture. Participants argued that organisations require leaders who actively support their people and promote quality, professionalism and long-term thinking throughout the supply chain.

Participants stressed that retention is closely linked to how valued people feel within organisations. Poor behaviour, weak supervision and a lack of support continue to act as barriers to progression and inclusion across the sector.

There was widespread support for greater investment in mentoring, coaching and leadership development. Attendees noted that technically capable individuals are not automatically equipped to manage people or support career development, and that stronger leadership skills are needed across all levels of the workforce.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of listening to younger workers and adapting to changing workforce expectations. Participants argued that creating inclusive, supportive workplaces will be essential to attracting and retaining future generations of built environment professionals. Training on “soft skills” for career entrants – including graduates – is key to their professional success and retention in the sector.

Respondees to the Constructing Excellence survey said:

"When people understand the company's values and see those values being demonstrated by leadership, they are much more likely to adopt them in their day-to-day work." (Tier 1 contractor)

"We have codified the behaviours we expect, and aspire to, through a behaviour matrix embedded across the practice from induction through to senior leadership development." "The harder question is how those values translate beyond our own studios and into project environments and supply chains where we do not control the culture." (Multi-disciplinary practice)

Conclusion

The roundtable, supported by the survey responses, concluded that the built environment's skills challenge extends far beyond workforce numbers alone. Participants consistently emphasised that competence, skills development and culture form part of a single interconnected system. Improving one area without addressing the others is unlikely to deliver lasting change.