

Lack of construction careers advice in Scotland threatens housing targets: Research Briefing

Who are CIOB?

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) is the world's largest and most influential professional body for construction management and leadership. Our members, over 2,600 of which are in Scotland, work worldwide in the development, conservation and improvement of the built environment. Our status as a chartered professional body means we act in the public interest and develop policy positions, recommendations, and research that is based on evidence and best practice. We accredit university degrees, educational courses, and training.

Key messages

- New data released by the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) for Scottish Apprenticeship Week 2025 shows changing attitudes to construction careers amongst young people and parents
- A recent survey by the CIOB found almost three quarters (74%) of young people aged between 16 and 24 in Scotland hold a positive view of construction careers and more than a third (36%) would consider working in the construction sector
- A survey of parents of 16-24-year-olds showed more than three quarters (77%) in Scotland would be supportive of their child working in construction with only eight per cent saying they'd be unsupportive.
- Almost half of those surveyed (43%) said information about the sector was not included in the careers advice they received whilst in education.

Introduction

Ensuring the construction industry has a steady supply of labour with the necessary skills continues to be one of the biggest issues for the industry. It has long suffered from challenges posed by skills shortages and skills gaps, and the cyclical boom and bust nature of construction means workloads and staffing requirements are heavily dictated by the general condition of the economy. Recent reporting from Skills Development Scotland noted supply challenges have worsened across Scotland, with vacancies in the construction sector becoming harder to fill.¹ Recent figures from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) estimate 5,220 new entrants will be needed in Scotland annually between 2024 and 2028 to meet workloads.²

New data from the CIOB, released to mark Scottish Apprenticeship Week, indicates Scottish Government plans to address the housing emergency and achieve necessarily ambitious climate change targets could be rendered unattainable if urgent action is not taken to entice young people into the construction sector. If Government is to realise its ambition to provide safe and warm homes for all and move towards net zero, more needs to change to bolster the current construction workforce and develop a pipeline of competent people entering the industry.

¹ Data from Skills Development Scotland, Sectoral Skills Assessment - Construction, October 2023.

² Data from Construction Industry Training Board, Focusing on the Skills Construction Needs, Scotland 2024-2028, May 2024.

Changing perceptions of the construction industry

The CIOB's survey found almost three quarters (74%) of young people aged between 16 and 24 in Scotland hold a positive view of construction careers and more than a third (36%) would consider working in the construction sector, however, almost half of those surveyed (43%) said information about it was not included in the careers advice they received whilst in education.³

A similar survey⁴ of parents of 16-24-year-olds showed more than three quarters (77%) in Scotland would be supportive of their child working in construction with only eight per cent saying they'd be unsupportive. Over a third (39%) of parents surveyed in Scotland said they'd prefer their child to "earn while they learn" instead of going to university, reflecting concerns over the rising cost of living for students and a lack of graduate opportunities.

When asked to choose words to describe construction roles, "highly skilled" and "professional" were among the top four selected by the 2,000 young people surveyed across the UK with "working on building sites" and "careers for men" being the other two most preferred options.

The CIOB's survey data also shows an encouraging trend in young people's perceptions of the industry including more than one in 10 associating the sector with modern, tech-focused roles and describing the sector as "diverse."

The research makes clear sound careers advice and guidance are crucial. The construction sector offers a wide range of careers suitable for people with different skills and interests, with different routes to entry, that can differ greatly from wider societal perceptions of the sector. The findings indicate there is an opportunity to appeal to young people beyond those who are interested in skilled trades, by emphasising roles in areas of construction such as management, technology, and health and safety.

Closing the skills gap

Despite these promising shifts in perceptions of the construction sector, barriers to recruiting and retaining the necessary pipeline of skilled workers to undertake construction projects remain a challenge for the sector. Further research from the CIOB, outlined in our '[Building Up Scotland: professional insights from the construction industry](#)' discussion paper, noted that Construction Project Management was frequently seen as a shortage occupation (62% of respondents). Further, 74% of survey respondents experienced some difficulty and 26% experienced severe difficulties over the past 12 months when recruiting for a construction project manager.

Urgent action is needed to address the worsening skills gap and to bolster recruitment efforts for the industry across the length and breadth of Scotland. To that end, we have outlined the CIOB's policy recommendations for skills below.

³The research was conducted by Opinion Matters, among a sample of 2001 young people in the UK aged 16-24. 136 of them live in Scotland. The data was collected between 04.02.2025 - 07.02.2025.

⁴The research was conducted by Opinion Matters, among a sample of 2000 UK Parents, aged 31+, with children aged 16-24 years old. 145 of them live in Scotland. The data was collected between 04.02.2025-10.02.2025. Opinion Matters abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Opinion Matters is also a member of the British Polling Council.

Policy asks

- **Develop a Construction Skills Action Plan** – Scottish Government has already recognised that critical sectors require government-led skills planning. The commitment to an Offshore Wind Skills Action Plan in the recent Programme for Government is a clear example. Construction, which underpins delivery across housing, net zero, and infrastructure, requires the same level of strategic focus. Scottish Government should commit to developing a government-led Construction Skills Action Plan, equivalent in ambition and status to that for offshore wind. This plan should:
 - take a long-term, demand-led view of skills needs across the built environment
 - align education policy, funding and curriculum provision with delivery requirements
 - address barriers to apprenticeships for both employers and learners
 - support upskilling of the existing workforce, including green and retrofit skills
- **Increased resources for apprenticeships** – Current funding schemes continue to be a barrier for many firms when it comes to recruiting an apprentice and up-skilling staff. With so many funding pots available, access to finance is made more complex for many SMEs. We believe it is vital for the future of construction to have an apprenticeship system that works for the industry in order to address skills gaps and shortages. More must be done to stimulate recruitment for the construction industry, and mechanisms could be created to incentivise recruitment by small and medium enterprises that hire apprentices.
- **Improving careers advice** – There is an opportunity to reach a wider talent pool of young people through more consistent coverage of construction in careers advice in schools, given almost half of young people reporting these were absent. The Government should therefore look at opportunities to strengthen the consistency and quality of careers advice to ensure that key sectors of the economy, such as construction, are covered appropriately.

3. Further Information

CIOB would be keen to collaborate to help develop policy priorities to ensure that they work for the benefit of all users and creators of the built environment.

We would be delighted to brief you further on any of the points raised within this briefing, to support the development of parliamentary questions or to speak with you further about our research. With that in mind please let us know if you would be interested in meeting with our policy and public affairs team either virtually or in person.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

For further information, please contact:

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