

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)

submission to

The Department for Work & Pensions

on the call for evidence on

Young People and Work Report

30 January 2026

Young People and Work Report: Call for Evidence Written Submission

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) is the world's largest and most influential professional body for construction management and leadership.

We have a Royal Charter to promote the science and practice of building and construction for the benefit of society, and we have been doing that since 1834. Our members work worldwide in the development, conservation and improvement of the built environment.

Background

Between September to November 2025 there were 729,000 young people aged 16 to 24 who were unemployed, 103,000 more than the previous year. The unemployment rate for young people was 15.9%, up from 14.4% from the year before. While rates fell sharply after peaking at 22.5% in 2011, and reached record lows in 2022, they have since been rising again, leaving around 95,000 more unemployed young people today than immediately before the pandemic.

The issue is compounded by high economic inactivity among this age group: during the same period, there were 2.88 million young people aged 16 to 24 who were economically inactive, 138,000 fewer than the previous year. The inactivity rate for young people was 38.6%, down from 41.0% the year before.

While some of these are in full-time education, unpaid training, or caring responsibilities, a significant proportion are not engaged in any form of employment, education, or training. In July to September 2025, there were 946,000 people aged 16 to 24 who were not in employment, education or training (NEET), 12.7% of all 16-to-24-year-olds. This includes unemployed and economically inactive young people who are not in education or training.¹

The persistence of high NEET levels is not a new or unknown challenge for the UK, nor for Parliament or successive governments. More than a decade ago, in 2014, CIOB supported a cross-party group of parliamentarians in an inquiry examining the role the UK's substantial construction programme could play in securing jobs and training opportunities for young people who were NEET. That inquiry resulted in the publication of the [No More Lost Generations](#) report, which highlighted many of the same challenges seen today: difficulties in translating sector growth into accessible training pathways, high drop-out rates from apprenticeships, weak alignment between training provision and available jobs, and structural features of the industry that discourage long-term investment in young people. Despite multiple policy reforms, funding initiatives and skills strategies since then, the number of young people who are NEET has remained broadly consistent, and the construction sector continues to struggle to attract and retain young entrants at the scale required.

The construction sector, with its acute skills shortages and demand for new entrants, is well placed to play a significant role in addressing youth unemployment. The UK construction industry represents a significant opportunity to tackle youth unemployment while addressing the sector's critical skills shortage. Estimates from the Construction Industry Training Board's (CITB) [Construction Skills Network report](#) published in June 2025 suggest around 240,000 extra workers will be required by 2029 simply to keep pace with sector growth and the Government's construction and infrastructure ambitions.² At the same time, the industry faces an ageing workforce, with 35% of workers aged over 50 and only 20% under 30 as shown by

¹ House of Commons Library, [Youth Unemployment Statistics](#), 20 January 2026

² CITB, [The Construction Workforce Outlook 2025-2029](#), June 2025

Places for People's report, [Construction and Building Trades: The Skills Horizon](#). The need to attract new, young entrants into construction is therefore both urgent and essential.

Yet attracting young people has long been a challenge for the sector. Construction is heavily reliant on apprenticeships, but these pathways continue to suffer from social stigma.

Apprenticeships (as well as broader vocational options) are often wrongly viewed as inferior to university degrees, and associated with low pay, long hours, and limited career prospects. These misconceptions have roots in the abolishment of the Connexions service in 2012, which resulted in the loss of local, face-to-face careers advice. Responsibility for careers guidance shifted to schools, often without sufficient resources or expertise, leading to partial advice and an over-emphasis on higher education. Parents and family members, who remain a primary influence on young people's career choices, can reinforce these outdated perceptions.

CIOB's submission will give evidence based on our previous research on attitudes towards construction careers as well as mental health in the construction industry. We will also provide evidence regarding the current apprenticeship system and how this works for both young people and employers across the built environment.

Attitudes of Young People

CIOB's [Attitudes Towards Construction Careers report](#) published in 2025 explores perceptions towards construction careers, surveying 2,001 young people (aged 16-24) and 2,000 parents (with children aged 16-24) across the UK.

The report identifies key attitudes and perceptions that currently shape young people's interest in entering a career in the construction sector. It provides a current evidence base for future initiatives aimed at attracting more young people to the industry and improving awareness of the wide range of career paths in the construction industry.

This insight is vital for shaping effective strategies to attract talent and mitigate the construction skills shortage that threatens the Government's ambitions for the built environment. A second edition of this report will be published in March 2026 to track changes in attitudes towards construction careers of both young people and parents as efforts to increase the number of new entrants into the industry have ramped up over the past year.

Key Survey Results

Young People's Views of Construction Careers

- Over two thirds (68%) of young people surveyed hold a positive view of construction careers. However, only a third (31%) stated they would consider working in the construction sector. A similar percentage (31%) viewed the sector as not offering good career opportunities.
- There were barriers to joining the construction industry that the survey results point to. Over half of young people (53%) perceive the construction sector as unwelcoming to women. The perceived level of accessibility is also a barrier, with 28% of young respondents feeling that construction careers are not easily accessible to them, rising to 34% for males.
- Reasons for not pursuing a construction career included it being 'male dominated', involves 'physical work', is 'unsafe', involves 'working outdoors', and has 'poor pay'.

- The main reasons why young people would not pursue a construction varied greatly by gender. For males, the most common reason given was that the sector has physical work, but for females, it was that the sector is male dominated. Whilst some of these perceptions are valid, such as the low gender diversity in the construction workforce, **many of the perceptions do not capture the wide range of roles in the construction industry.** For example, there are many non-manual occupations that do not require physical work, and construction offers above-average salaries compared to other sectors.³

Influencing Young People's Views of Construction Careers

- The survey identified a large gap in careers advice for construction, revealing **47% of young people reported that construction careers were not discussed in the careers advice they received during their time in education**, meaning many young people are being left without a formal and positive introduction to opportunities in construction at a critical point in their career-decision making.
- **Young peoples' views of construction careers are more likely to be influenced by people they know** rather than through formal careers advice, schools or companies.
- The survey indicates **parents are the greatest source of influence on young people's careers choices overall**, with family members including parents most often shaping their views of the construction sector. Social media was also identified as have greater influence than careers advisors and online careers advice.

Parent's Views of Construction Careers

Understanding parents' attitudes to construction careers offers important insight, with parents identified as a critical influence on both young people's career choices overall and their views of the construction sector.

- The survey shows an encouraging perception of construction careers among parents, with **65% holding a positive view of construction careers** and 79% being supportive if their child chose to pursue a career in the sector. However, only 42% would actively recommend a construction career to their children.
- Parents indicate they are particularly open to their child taking a vocational route into a career, with **43% of parents saying they would rather their child 'earn while they learn' instead of going to university**, compared to only 21% that disagree with this preference. This suggests an opportunity to influence parental recommendations to join the construction industry through boosting awareness of different careers in the sector and the range of routes to join the construction industry.

Overall, these figures suggest that attitudes are broadly positive and suggest a changing view of the construction sector, which has often been perceived to be unsafe, unskilled and for those that perform poorly at school. These results should be considered by Government as it seeks to scale up its construction and infrastructure targets, as well as seek to develop meaningful careers for NEETs.

³ Based on the data for 2022, the average (median) full-time construction employee, including both males and females, earned more than £36,000. (£36,259 in the ASHE data) This compares with £33,000 for all full-time employees across the economy. *It should be noted that figures on average earnings in construction are impacted by the gender pay gap. Men tend to earn more than women and are far more heavily represented in construction than across the overall workforce.*

Apprenticeships and Other Pathways into Construction

Nearly 23,000 people started Construction, Planning and the Built Environment apprenticeships in the 2024/25 academic year in England.⁴ While this demonstrates continued interest in construction careers, apprenticeship starts should not be treated as a proxy for success. Of greater importance is whether apprentices are supported to complete their training and transition into sustained, meaningful employment.

The construction sector (particularly 'on-site' work) continues to experience high drop-out rates, particularly among younger apprentices, driven by a combination of low pay at entry level, the physically and mentally demanding nature of site-based work, and practical challenges such as early starts, travel time and frequent changes in work location. These pressures can be particularly acute for young people with limited financial resilience or additional support needs. To better understand where the system is failing, the Government should publish clearer, more accessible data linking apprenticeship starts with completion and progression outcomes, and work closely with industry to strengthen pathways from training into long-term employment.

The Government's recent investment of over £600 million, announced in the previous Spring Budget, to train up to 60,000 additional skilled construction workers by 2029 reflects a recognition that skills shortages pose a major risk to housing delivery, infrastructure programmes and wider economic growth.

Measures such as the creation of new Technical Excellence Colleges, expansion of construction provision in further education, scaling up Skills Bootcamps, and funding for industry placements at Levels 2 and 3 are all welcome.⁵ These interventions have the potential to improve work-readiness and reduce the gap between training and employment. However, their success will depend on effective delivery, sufficient numbers of qualified teachers and assessors, and clear reporting on outcomes. There is also a need to ensure that construction careers are promoted in a holistic way, encompassing not only trade roles but also the wide range of professional, technical and managerial pathways the sector offers.

Despite this investment, structural issues within apprenticeship funding continue to limit uptake, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises. SMEs make up a substantial proportion of the construction sector but often perceive apprenticeships as administratively burdensome, inflexible and misaligned with their business models. Unlike large Tier 1 contractors, SMEs may lack dedicated HR capacity, have limited ability to absorb the costs of supervision and training, and operate on shorter project cycles that do not align neatly with rigid apprenticeship frameworks. SMEs also have concerns about talent drain when employing apprentices. Examples from across the industry have shown SMEs paying to train young people who later end up moving to larger companies or projects after being promised a better salary. This is particularly prevalent in regions located near major infrastructure projects.

Without greater flexibility in funding rules, training delivery and assessment models, apprenticeships risk remaining concentrated among larger employers, undermining their potential as a sector-wide solution to youth employment and skills shortages.

Flexibility is also required in the design of training programmes themselves. Construction is a highly diverse sector, yet some apprenticeship and vocational pathways are narrowly focused, limiting their relevance across different sub-sectors. For example, as we have heard in

⁴ Gov.uk, [Academic year 2024/25 – Apprenticeships](#), 17 July 2025

⁵ Gov.uk, [Government unleashes next generation of construction workers to build 1.5m homes](#), 23 March 2025

conversation with one of our members, quantity surveying programmes may be heavily geared towards housebuilding, offering insufficient exposure to infrastructure, retrofit or commercial construction. This can result in employers needing to provide substantial additional training, increasing costs and acting as a disincentive to recruitment. Greater industry-led input into curriculum design, and more modular or adaptable training structures, would better reflect the realities of construction careers and support both employer engagement and learner progression.

Alongside these challenges, a lack of consistency and clarity in the wider skills landscape has made it increasingly difficult for young people to plan their progression. Frequent changes to qualifications and pathways have created confusion for learners, parents, educators and employers alike.

The removal of the T Level in On-site Construction in 2024, followed by the introduction of new construction T Levels in subsequent years, alongside proposals for V Levels and Occupational Pathways⁶, has contributed to an environment of uncertainty. For young people making decisions at key transition points, such as choosing post-16 or post-18 options, this instability can deter engagement altogether. A more stable, clearly signposted system is needed, with transparent progression routes and sufficient lead-in time for new qualifications to become understood and trusted by employers.

Beyond formal education and training routes, the construction industry has demonstrated a strong commitment to engaging young people through sector-led initiatives. [CIOB Aspire](#) provides accessible information for those interested in the construction sector on the wide variety of careers paths it provides, from apprenticeships, courses, and job opportunities. Build UK's [Open Doors](#) also offers the opportunity for visitors to look behind the scenes of UK construction projects and will next take place from 23-28 March 2026.

These initiatives play an important role in improving awareness and challenging outdated perceptions of the sector. However, without parallel reform to funding mechanisms, training quality, and the coherence of pathways, such initiatives alone cannot overcome the systemic barriers that continue to restrict entry and progression for young people.

Taken together, these issues highlight the need for a more flexible, employer-informed and stable approach to apprenticeships and vocational pathways in construction. Improving completion rates, supporting SMEs, aligning training with sector diversity, and providing clear, consistent routes for young people are all essential if construction is to play its full role in reducing youth economic inactivity and offering sustainable, high-quality employment opportunities.

Mental Health in Construction Industry and Other Retention Issues

Once young people enter the construction industry, understanding the workplace challenges they face is critical to improving retention and preventing early exit from the sector. Many of these challenges relate to stress, physical and mental health, and the often-abrupt transition from education into demanding working environments. If left unaddressed, these issues risk pushing young people not only out of construction, but out of the workforce altogether.

CIOB's [Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment](#) report, published in 2025, which is a follow up of its [2020 predecessor](#), sheds light on the levels of stress, anxiety and depression faced by industry workers, as well as the factors contributing to poor mental health.

⁶ Department for Education, [Post-16 Level 3 and Below Pathways](#), Government Consultation, 20 October 2025

The report also seeks to understand how the experiences of neurodivergent employees might differ when it comes to workplace factors impacting their wellbeing. Four in five suicides are by men, remaining the biggest cause of death for men under the age of 35.⁷

The construction industry is male dominated and poor mental health within the sector remains a silent crisis. In England and Wales, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported 355 people working in skilled construction and building trades died by suicide in 2024, although these are provisional numbers. One of the largest figures compared to other occupations.⁸ Unfortunately, workers are less inclined to reach out for help and instead will often suffer in silence until the problem is too much to handle. By then, it can be too late.

Key Survey Results

Overview of the mental health crisis in construction

- Male construction workers are three times more likely to die by suicide than the national average.
- An alarming amount of people working in construction are struggling with their mental health despite support being put in place by organisations.
- Results from a survey of construction workers included in the report found that:
 - 27% of workers had suicidal thoughts over the past year, with 2% reporting they are having suicidal thoughts on a daily basis.
 - 83% experienced anxiety and 59% experienced depression over the past year
 - 20% experienced fatigue and 24% experienced stress on a daily basis
 - Main factors for high stress were around high workload, poor planning and communication, financial pressures as well as unrealistic deadlines with inadequate staffing to support.
 - 24% of people do not feel confident in reaching out to someone showing signs they are struggling. With 38% only confident to reach out if they knew that person well.

Young People in the Construction Industry

Looking specifically at young people, a persistent issue identified in the CIOB report on mental health by respondents is the lack of privacy in the workplace, with 38% reporting that this caused them to feel extremely or moderately stressed. This was particularly pronounced among those working predominantly on-site. Young people aged 18–25 and those in skilled manual roles were most affected, having reported the lack of privacy as either ‘extremely stressful’ or ‘moderately stressful’. The findings suggest that younger workers are disproportionately impacted by limited access to private or quiet spaces on site, affecting their ability to decompress, manage stress, or address personal needs during the working day.

This challenge is compounded by the transition many young people make from education into full-time work. Many will have come from educational settings with structured support systems, access to facilities and regular contact with peers and tutors. Some cohorts, particularly those whose education was disrupted by the pandemic, may have spent extended periods studying remotely. The shift from these environments into construction workplaces, especially site-based roles, can therefore be abrupt and difficult to navigate. This underlines the importance of effective inductions, clear communication of expectations, and the

⁷ Mates in Mind, [Mental Health in UK Construction: The Statistics](#), November 2023

⁸ Office for National Statistics, [Suicide by occupation in England and Wales: 2023 and 2024, provisional](#), 31 March 2025

availability of mentors or supervisors who can support young people as they adapt to the realities of working life.

The report also highlights other environmental stressors. Noise levels were identified as a particular issue for neurodivergent respondents, with over a third (36%) reporting that noise was extremely stressful. Catering facilities were another source of stress, especially for younger workers. Among those aged 18–25, 15% reported that the lack of quality of catering facilities was extremely stressful, with a further 46% describing it as moderately stressful. Neurodivergent respondents reported similar challenges, with 10% finding this extremely stressful and 39% moderately so. These findings point to the cumulative impact of everyday workplace conditions on wellbeing, particularly for those who may already face additional barriers at work.

Concerns about retention are especially pronounced among younger people. Those early in their careers are more likely to consider leaving the industry than older cohorts, potentially reflecting a mismatch between expectations and lived experience, as well as the cumulative effect of the issues outlined above. Among respondents who identified as neurodivergent, over half (52%) reported that working in the construction industry had negatively affected their mental health, while just over a quarter (27%) felt it had improved. This variation suggests that organisational support, workplace culture and management practices play a decisive role in shaping outcomes.

Alongside the findings from our report, CIOB's conversations with members have surfaced additional challenges that are not always captured in survey data but are highly relevant to young people's experiences. Employers, trainers and mentors highlighted persistent difficulties around accommodation and transport. Construction sites are often located in areas that are poorly served by public transport, making access costly and time-consuming for young workers. In many cases, suitable roles are not available close to home, requiring young people to relocate and take on rental costs at an early stage of their careers. For those on entry-level wages or apprenticeships, this can create significant financial pressure and act as a deterrent to remaining in the industry.

Members also pointed to gaps in soft skills and workplace readiness among new entrants, particularly during the transition from education into employment. While technical competence may be developing through qualifications or training, young people can struggle with the expectations of professional environments, communication styles and time management.

These challenges can markedly differ between site-based and office-based roles, requiring tailored support that recognises the diversity of working environments within the sector.

Finally, discussions with members highlighted that levels of support vary significantly depending on company size. Larger organisations may be better equipped to offer structured mentorship programmes, wellbeing initiatives and access to occupational health support, while smaller firms often face resource constraints despite good intentions. This disparity can affect workload management, access to mental health support and the overall experience of young people entering the industry, with implications for retention across the supply chain.

Taken together, these findings highlight the need for a more holistic approach to supporting young people once they enter the construction workforce. Improving site conditions, addressing practical barriers such as transport and accommodation, strengthening induction and mentoring, and ensuring consistent mental health support across organisations will be key to improving retention and creating a more inclusive and sustainable workforce.

Recommendations

Many of the recommendations set out below are not new. They echo findings made by the cross-parliamentary group in 2014, as well as consistent messages raised by employers, professional bodies, and training providers across the construction industry in the years since.

The persistence of these recommendations reflects not a lack of analysis or understanding, but longstanding challenges in delivery, coordination, and implementation. If the Government is to avoid repeating cycles of reform without lasting impact, future policy must focus on making existing pathways work better for both learners and employers.

Improve available career advice

There is a clear and urgent need to improve the quality, consistency and accessibility of careers advice. With almost half of young people reporting that construction careers were not covered in the careers advice they received whilst in education, there is opportunity to reach a wider talent pool of young people through more consistent coverage of careers advice. Young people, parents and educators must have a better understanding of the breadth of roles available in construction, spanning trade, technical, professional and managerial careers.

Careers advice should be impartial, well-resourced and delivered earlier, with stronger engagement from industry to ensure information reflects the realities of modern construction, including emerging green and digital skills. 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.

Reforming apprenticeship content and structure

Apprenticeship training content and delivery must be reformed to better reflect the diversity of the construction sector and the needs of learners and employers. Apprenticeships should offer greater flexibility, including modular structures, clearer progression points and course content that is adaptable across different construction disciplines. This would help reduce drop-out rates, allow learners to move between roles more easily, and ensure training aligns with the types of jobs actually available. A more industry-led approach to curriculum design would support consistency in quality while allowing responsiveness to changing skills needs.

Supporting SMEs

Targeted support is required to enable SMEs to play a greater role in training and workforce development. SMEs make up the majority of the construction sector but often lack the capacity to navigate complex funding systems, manage administrative burdens or absorb the short-term costs associated with training. Financial incentives, shared apprenticeship models, and better-funded placement schemes would help SMEs offer more opportunities to young people, whether through apprenticeships, industry placements or other entry routes, without placing disproportionate strain on their businesses.

Funding reform

The Government has made welcome reforms to the apprenticeship funding system by enabling the Growth and Skills Levy, which has replaced the Apprenticeship Levy, to be utilised for shorter courses.

Apprenticeship delivery should be employer-led and is vital for construction which often requires greater flexibility to enable skills gaps to be addressed. However, the funding regime underpinning apprenticeships must be simplified and made more accessible. The current system remains difficult to navigate, particularly for smaller employers, and is widely perceived

as bureaucratic and inflexible. Reform should focus on ensuring funding mechanisms actively incentivise training rather than creating barriers, with clearer routes to accessing support and greater alignment between different levy and training systems affecting the construction sector. A further review of the current CITB levy model could also be undertaken to find a system that also allows for self-employed professionals to take part in the upskilling and training of new entrants.

Clear pathways into the industry

There must be greater clarity and stability in the pathways available to enter construction. Frequent changes to qualifications, training routes and technical education frameworks make it difficult for young people, educators and employers to plan ahead. A clearer, more coherent skills landscape, with transparent progression routes and consistent messaging from government, would give young people the confidence to commit to construction careers and enable employers to invest more confidently in training.

Apprenticeship Data

When it comes to the numbers of entrants starting on built environment apprenticeships and courses, we warn that this should not be seen as an 'indicator of success' in its own right.

Statistics showcase the low levels of competition and attainment on these apprenticeships, highlighting a plethora of potential issues. These might be because of low levels of pay, training or might centre around the more challenging aspects of construction that young people are not ready for such as early morning starts and the locational variations that are often inherent in construction.

This is why we believe that data on the numbers of starts and achievements in built environment courses must be closely monitored. This is particularly pertinent when there are dropouts, and research should go into understanding the reasoning here.

Taken together, these recommendations point to the need for a more joined-up, learner-centred and employer-informed approach. Without addressing these structural issues, continued investment risks delivering incremental change rather than the step-change required to reduce youth unemployment, tackle skills shortages and build a sustainable construction workforce for the future.