

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Building is the world's largest and most influential professional body for construction management and leadership across the built environment. We have a Royal Charter to promote the science and practice of building and construction for the benefit of society, and we've been doing that since 1834. Our members work worldwide, and across the island of Ireland in the development, conservation and improvement of the built environment. We accredit university degrees, educational courses and training in universities and colleges in Ireland. Our professional and vocational qualifications are a mark of the highest levels of competence and professionalism, providing assurance to clients and other professionals procuring built assets. The CIOB also has a dedicated policy and research function, whose expertise we have drawn on in the preparation of this response. To ensure that we captured the breadth of views from thousands of CIOB members across Ireland, our members have also been consulted in the preparation of this response

Question 1: What criteria should guide decisions to create new apprenticeship or traineeship programmes?

Decisions to establish new programmes must be fundamentally aligned with Ireland's strategic national objectives, specifically the National Development Plan and Housing for All. CIOB maintains that priority should be given to apprenticeships that address the acute skills deficit in Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and Deep Retrofitting, which are essential for meeting the state's 2050 net-zero targets. Furthermore, new programmes should be benchmarked against internationally recognized professional standards, such as the CIOB Undergraduate Education Framework. This ensures that apprenticeships are not merely vocational "dead-ends" but rather rigorous educational pathways that offer a clear trajectory toward professional chartership (MCIOB). By using a competency-based framework as a criterion, the state can ensure that new programmes produce professionals capable of managing the complex digital and ethical demands of a modern built environment.

Question 2: How can apprenticeships and work-integrated-learning options be promoted as first-choice education and training pathways?

To establish apprenticeships as a first-choice pathway, the state must aggressively pursue a policy of parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes. This involves promoting Level 7-9 degree apprenticeships as academically equivalent to traditional university degrees, supported by the CIOB Postgraduate Education Framework to highlight the high-level management and leadership skills involved. Promotion should begin early in the second-level cycle; CIOB advocates for the introduction of a Built Environment module in the Leaving Certificate and the expansion of Transition Year "taster" courses. By shifting the public narrative from "manual trades" to "professional stewardship and sustainability," we can attract a new generation of tech-savvy learners who see construction as a high-skill career dedicated to solving the climate crisis and delivering vital national infrastructure.

Question 3: What supports or incentives would encourage learners to engage and stay engaged?

Learner retention is heavily influenced by financial security and a clear sense of career progression. CIOB research suggests that apprentice wages must remain competitive and be shielded from the rising cost of living to prevent "leakage" to other sectors. Beyond financial support, learners require a clear career map; we propose the implementation of a digital "skills passport" that allows apprentices to see exactly how their practical experience and educational credits align with professional body memberships. Furthermore, given the high-pressure nature of the construction sector, integrated mental health and wellbeing supports must be a core component of the apprenticeship experience. Providing a structured mentorship environment where learners feel supported both technically and personally is vital for reducing the high attrition rates often seen in the middle phases of craft apprenticeships.

Question 4: What supports or incentives would encourage employers to engage and stay engaged?

Employers, particularly the SMEs that form the backbone of the Irish construction industry, require targeted financial and administrative relief to maintain their commitment to training. CIOB recommends the introduction of Apprentice Retention Grants or "Completion Bonuses," which provide financial offsets when an apprentice is away for off-the-job training. Administratively, the government should simplify the "Authorised Officer" process and create a streamlined digital portal for grant applications. To address regional challenges, the state should invest in flexible training delivery models, such as mobile training units or regional hubs, which minimize the time apprentices spend away from active sites. Reducing the logistical and financial burden on the employer ensures that training an apprentice is seen as a long-term investment rather than a short-term productivity drain.

Question 5: What targeted measures would improve participation among under-represented groups?

Improving diversity within the built environment requires a shift from passive recruitment to active inclusion. While the existing gender-based grants are a positive step, CIOB advocates for pairing these incentives with a requirement for employers to sign an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Charter. We must also modernize the curriculum to ensure it is inclusive and flexible enough to accommodate those with caring responsibilities or from non-traditional backgrounds. Furthermore, CIOB supports the formalization of prison-to-work pipelines, providing rehabilitated individuals with structured pathways into construction. By creating a culture that actively removes "macho" stereotypes and replaces them with a professional, inclusive environment, the sector can tap into a much wider pool of talent to solve the ongoing labor shortage.

Question 6: What mechanisms would make apprenticeships more adaptable to emerging skills and occupations?

The rapid pace of technological change requires a move toward a modular apprenticeship system. Instead of rigid, multi-year blocks, the system should allow for "micro-credentials" in emerging areas such as BIM (Building Information Modelling), Circular Economy principles, and MMC assembly. CIOB suggests that all construction-related apprenticeships include mandatory modules on offsite manufacturing to ensure the workforce is "MMC-ready." Additionally, we propose a mandatory 3-year "sunset review" for all apprenticeship curricula. This mechanism would ensure that training content is continually updated to reflect new building regulations, digital tools, and sustainability legislation, preventing the skills gap from widening as the industry evolves.

Question 7: What specific actions will best strengthen quality assurance?

To ensure the highest standards of safety and quality, the "Golden Thread" of information and accountability must start during training. CIOB recommends that all on-site mentors undergo a certified Mentoring Practice programme to ensure the quality of on-the-job training is consistent nationwide. We also advocate for the use of digital evidence logs, where apprentices use mobile technology to document their work in real-time, allowing for continuous assessment rather than relying solely on end-of-phase examinations. This approach not only strengthens quality assurance but also prepares apprentices for the digital record-keeping requirements now standard on high-risk projects. Independent audits of training sites should also be increased to ensure that the learning outcomes defined in the CIOB Frameworks are being met in practice.

Question 8: How can the apprenticeship system maintain its national character while expanding to meet diverse regional needs?

The apprenticeship system must balance national standardization with regional flexibility. CIOB supports a model where Regional Skills Fora have the authority to add "top-up" modules to the national curriculum that reflect local industrial needs—for example, heritage conservation skills in historic urban centers or specialized infrastructure training for offshore wind projects on the coast. To maintain a "national character," large-scale contractors should be incentivized to share their high-tech training facilities with local SMEs through a hub-and-spoke model. This integrated approach ensures that while the core competencies remain consistent across the state, the specific delivery of skills can be tailored to the unique economic and geographic demands of Ireland's various regions.

Question 9: Where should additional investment be focused to deliver the greatest impact?

Strategic investment should be prioritized in areas that clear existing bottlenecks and support future-proofing. Specifically, funding must be directed toward Retrofit Centres of

Excellence to meet the government's ambitious residential upgrade targets. To address the persistent Phase 2 backlogs, investment is needed to attract experienced industry professionals into teaching roles through competitive "Industry-to-Education" salary packages. Furthermore, CIOB advocates for direct SME support packages, specifically targeting micro-enterprises that face the highest risks when taking on new apprentices. By focusing investment on educator recruitment and SME subsidies, the state can increase capacity and ensure that the apprenticeship pipeline remains robust even during economic fluctuations.

Question 10: Are there innovative ideas or international best practices Ireland should adopt?

Ireland should look toward international best practices such as the Shared Apprenticeship Scheme, where an apprentice is employed by a central "host" organization and rotated through several different SMEs. This ensures the apprentice receives a breadth of experience and has continuous employment even if an individual SME's pipeline of work slows down. Additionally, the state should better align tax policy with skills development; for example, mirroring CIOB's proposal for VAT recalibration on retrofit to provide higher training grants to firms specializing in the circular economy. Finally, integrating the concept of the "Golden Thread" into all management-level apprenticeships will ensure that building safety and accountability are hardwired into the next generation of construction leaders, mirroring successful regulatory reforms seen internationally.