

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) – Written Evidence (YPB0009)

Young People and the Built Environment Inquiry

Introduction

1. 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.
2. Our members work worldwide in the development, conservation and improvement of the built environment. We accredit university degrees, educational courses and training. 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.

Background

3. CIOB has an established programme of work focused on education pathways, skills development and workforce challenges across the built environment. This includes industry research, such as our annual [Attitudes to Construction Careers survey](#), alongside engagement with employers, educators and early career professionals through initiatives such as [CIOB Aspire](#).
4. This work highlights a clear and pressing challenge. Youth unemployment and economic inactivity remain significant, with 729,000 young people aged 16–24 unemployed and a further 957,000 not in education, employment or training (NEETs)¹. At the same time, the construction sector faces acute skills shortages, with projections indicating that approximately 239,300 additional workers will be required by 2029².
5. Demographic trends further intensify this challenge, with 35% of the workforce aged over 50 and only around 20% under 30³. Improving engagement with the built environment among young people is therefore essential both to support individual opportunity and to meet national economic and infrastructure priorities.

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

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

³ Places for People, [Construction and Building Trades: The Skills Horizon](#), March 2025

6. This submission also builds on evidence previously gathered as part of CIOB's response to the Department for Work and Pensions call for evidence on young people and work. That response drew on insights from CIOB members, including employers, trainers and early career professionals, and provides additional context on the barriers young people face in entering and progressing within the construction sector.

Full response

Question One: How would you describe the current attitudes and interest of children and young people towards both the built environment sector, and issues surrounding the topic?

7. CIOB research from March 2026 suggests that attitudes towards the built environment are broadly positive, but this does not consistently translate into active interest or career intent. In our survey, over two thirds (66%) of young people aged 16–24 reported a positive view of construction careers, while only 5% expressed a negative view. However, only around a third (30%) said they would consider pursuing a career in the sector, a figure that has remained broadly unchanged from the previous year⁴.
8. This gap between perception and intent is significant. It suggests that while the sector is not viewed negatively, it is not being actively chosen. This reflects a combination of limited awareness and persistent misconceptions about the nature of work in the built environment. Young people continue to associate construction primarily with "working on a building site", often overlooking the breadth of professional, technical and digital roles available.
9. Perceptions are also shaped by specific concerns. The most common reasons cited for not pursuing a career in construction include the physical nature of the work, working outdoors, perceptions of the sector as male-dominated, and concerns about pay and career progression. While safety concerns remain present, they have become less prominent compared to previous years, suggesting some improvement in how the sector is perceived.
10. Gender differences are particularly pronounced. While 44% of young men say they would consider a career in construction, this falls to just 25% of young women. Over half of young people (53%), and a higher proportion of young women, perceive the sector as not welcoming to women. These perceptions continue to shape career intentions and reflect wider structural challenges within the workforce.
11. Parental influence plays a critical role in shaping these attitudes. While 62% of parents report a positive view of construction careers and 75% say they would support their child entering the sector, only 42% would actively recommend it. This gap reflects a lack of confidence and understanding, with 44% of parents stating they feel under-informed about modern career pathways.

⁴ CIOB, [Attitudes towards Construction Careers](#), March 2026

12. Taken together, these findings suggest that the challenge is not one of negative perception, but of limited visibility, understanding and confidence. **CIOB recommends the introduction of a high-profile, long-term national construction recruitment campaign to address this.** Such a campaign should raise awareness of the diversity of roles available, challenge outdated perceptions, and clearly communicate routes into the sector for both young people and their parents.

Question Two: Does the national curriculum include sufficient references to topics related to the built environment? If not, how could the built environment be better incorporated?

13. The built environment is only partially reflected in the national curriculum, primarily through subjects such as Design and Technology, Maths and Physics. However, this coverage is fragmented and lacks a coherent narrative linking learning to real-world applications and careers in the sector.
14. As a result, many young people do not develop a clear understanding of how the built environment shapes their daily lives or the opportunities it offers. This is reflected in CIOB research, which shows that 45% of young people report that construction careers were not covered in the careers advice they received during their education.
15. This lack of exposure contributes directly to low awareness of career pathways and reinforces reliance on informal sources of information, such as family and social media. Given that family influence is the single most important factor in shaping career decisions, gaps in formal education risk perpetuating outdated perceptions.
16. There is also a structural gap in early-stage qualifications. The absence of a widely available GCSE focused on construction or the built environment in England limits early engagement and prevents the development of a clear pipeline into post-16 pathways. Professional bodies, such as CIOB, have also supported the idea and intention for a Built Environment GCSE in England, something which has been implemented in Wales through the WJEC and Northern Ireland through the CCEA to open up pathways.
17. Improvement should focus on integrating built environment topics more consistently across subjects, alongside greater use of applied, project-based learning. Embedding careers education within subject teaching, rather than treating it as a standalone activity, would help students understand how their learning connects to future opportunities. Models exist to fill this gap, such as Class of Your Own's (COYO) [Design Engineer Construct!](#), which is a learning programme developed to create and inspire the next generation of built environment professions.

Question Three: How can children and young people learn about the broad range of careers in the built environment sector and be encouraged to pursue them?

18. Awareness of pathways into the built environment remains uneven. While nearly 23,000 learners started construction-related apprenticeships in

2024/25⁵, this alone does not indicate system effectiveness. Completion rates and progression into sustained employment remain key challenges, particularly for younger entrants.

19.CIOB's Attitudes report highlights that awareness of government initiatives is limited. Over a third (36%) of young people report that they have not heard of any major construction training programmes. However, among those who are aware of specific pathways, such as T Levels or Skills Bootcamps, levels of interest and consideration are relatively strong. This suggests that the primary barrier is visibility rather than perceived value.

20.Awareness does not always translate into engagement. Even where programmes are recognised, uncertainty around progression routes, employer recognition and long-term stability can deter uptake. This reflects a broader issue within the post-16 skills landscape, where frequent reforms and changing qualification structures have created confusion among learners, parents and educators.

21.**CIOB therefore recommends that Government ensures stability and clarity across post-16 pathways.** Qualifications such as T Levels, alongside forthcoming routes such as V Levels, must be given sufficient time and policy certainty to build credibility.

22.This should be supported by **a dedicated national awareness campaign focused on technical pathways**, clearly communicating their purpose, progression routes and long-term value. Parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes must be consistently reinforced.

Question Four: How can the perspectives of children and young people be better included in the planning process, and what is the value of doing so? Should there be a statutory duty for children to be involved in local planning?

23.While CIOB does not directly represent young people in planning processes, our research highlights the importance of early engagement in shaping understanding and interest in the built environment.

24.Greater inclusion of young people's perspectives can improve the relevance, accessibility and long-term success of developments, particularly in areas such as public space, housing design and community infrastructure. It also plays an important role in building awareness and fostering a sense of ownership over the built environment.

25.Structured engagement mechanisms, such as school-based projects, local consultations and digital participation tools, could provide more consistent opportunities for young people to contribute. One such initiative is [Open Doors](#), delivered by Build UK and endorsed by CIOB, which takes visitors behind the scenes to showcase the fantastic range of careers available in the UK construction industry. The construction projects participating ranged from houses to skyscrapers, with manufacturing facilities, offices

⁵ Gov.uk, [Academic year 2024/25 – Apprenticeships](#), 17 July 2025

and training centres also opening their doors to demonstrate the off-site roles across the sector.

Question Five: Does current government policy about the built environment effectively capture the needs of children and young people? If not, what specific policy areas could be improved? Is there a need for specific guidance from the Government?

26. Current policy demonstrates a growing recognition of the importance of skills and technical education, particularly in relation to construction. However, CIOB's evidence suggests that this is not yet translating into widespread awareness or engagement among young people and their families.
27. A key gap lies in communication and coherence. While multiple initiatives exist, awareness remains low and the overall system can appear fragmented. Greater clarity, consistency and long-term stability are required to ensure that policy intent translates into real-world outcomes.
28. There is a case for clearer, more accessible national guidance that brings together information on pathways, opportunities and progression routes in a way that is understandable to young people, parents and educators.

Question Six: What are the barriers the enabling children and young people to take an interest in the built environment outside of the classroom?

29. Barriers to engagement include uneven access to employer-led activities, limited school capacity, and structural challenges within the skills system. Access to opportunities often depends on local networks, leading to inconsistent experiences across regions.
30. Structural challenges within apprenticeships also persist, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. Administrative burdens, inflexible training models and concerns about retention can limit participation, reducing the availability of opportunities for young people.
31. CIOB's engagement with members has also identified practical barriers that affect entry and retention. These include transport and accommodation challenges, with construction roles often requiring long commutes or early relocation. For young people on entry-level wages, these costs can be prohibitive.
32. Employers also report gaps in workplace readiness, particularly in areas such as communication, time management and adapting to professional environments. These challenges can vary across different roles and require more tailored support.
33. To address systemic barriers, **CIOB recommends the creation of a single, integrated platform for post-16 applications and information.** Expanding the remit of UCAS to include both academic and vocational routes would provide a unified system, helping young people navigate options more easily and make informed decisions.

Question Seven: How can digital tools, including video games and social media, be used to develop children and young people's interest in the built environment?

- 34. Digital tools present a significant opportunity to engage young people with the built environment. Platforms such as design software, simulation tools and educational games can support creativity, problem-solving and spatial awareness.
- 35. Digital platforms like SketchUp for Schools, Minecraft Education Edition, and ArcGIS StoryMaps enable interactive learning, however these are not deployed uniformly across the school system in England and can be constrained by access to resources such as PCs, laptops, tablets, or licenses.
- 36. These tools are particularly effective in making the built environment more tangible and interactive, allowing young people to explore concepts such as design, planning and sustainability in an accessible way.
- 37. Social media also plays an increasingly important role. CIOB research shows that 32% of young people use social media to inform career decisions, highlighting its potential as a channel for outreach. However, this requires coordinated and targeted messaging to be effective.

Question Eight: What benefits could a greater interest in the built environment have for children and young people, as well as wider society?

- 38. Increasing engagement with the built environment offers significant benefits for both individuals and society.
- 39. For young people, it supports more informed career decision-making, broadens awareness of opportunities and helps develop transferable skills such as problem-solving, collaboration and critical thinking.
- 40. For society, it strengthens the future workforce in a sector facing acute skills shortages, supporting the delivery of housing, infrastructure and economic growth. With an estimated need for around 240,000 additional workers by 2029, improving engagement is essential to meeting these demands.
- 41. More broadly, fostering interest in the built environment can contribute to better-designed, more inclusive and sustainable places, as future generations become more informed and engaged participants in shaping the world around them.

1 May 2026