



SME Housebuilder APPG – Call for Evidence - House Builders Skills and Apprentices

1. What emerging new technologies or techniques are you observing for which there is a need to adjust the skills to support your projects/businesses?

- MMC/Offsite: require a different skill set including multi-trade operatives for the manufacturing process and on-site installation operatives
- Net Zero: New skill sets needed in Design, Installation and Servicing
- Net Zero: Skills required to deliver e.g., Air Source Heat Pumps, EV charging infrastructure and Hydrogen
- Emerging new technologies or techniques are not just a challenge for SME's this is right across the supply chain
- In addition, reported issues in skills to deliver in a timely way additional focus on compliance and accreditation
- SELEP commissioned a report into the skills needs of major projects locally (e.g., Lower Thames Crossing, London Resort, Ebbsfleet Garden City which will require significant numbers of skilled people including in the new technologies identified above. The Mace report cited a demand of nearly 118,000 at the peak of activity (2025-28) and including robotics and visual simulation, off-site fabrication and modular construction. The Lower Thames Crossing (for example) has a commitment to net zero which is likely to increase the need for new techniques and technologies and will include aspects such as using electric vehicles to get to site.

2. What is your view regarding the various merits of on-the-job training -v- more formal college education, in terms of delivering the skills SME House Builders need?

- Hybrid approach can achieve best outcomes for students and businesses
- Funding to support trainees working for SME's can be an issue
- Concerns also about the number and capacity of FE and HE places for students who wish to study construction related courses
- Difficulty to recruit and retain teachers, tutors and lecturers in FE and HE, salaries in education sector not attractive to those working in building and construction, this is even harder in the SE because of the salary factor.
- Local colleges have reported challenges in construction, with one college citing 20 vacancies for construction tutors alone.
- SELEP has developed a programme and website to help respond (www.becomealecturer.org) and this includes a construction sector video showcasing local teaching opportunities, but it remains one of the biggest barriers to training. One option could be a combination of support from industry in the form of guest speakers to deliver modules alongside a qualified tutor to deliver the theory. A requirement to this effect could be built into contracts over a certain value for the main contractor and supply chain.
- The traditional academic year is a challenge for industry in terms of more formal college education and a move to fit with the industry would be positive. This would also mean training would prepare individuals for working hours

3. What has been your own life experience in working/engaging with colleges and how can they more effectively deliver the skills agenda?

- Lack of teachers available which needs to be addressed (training time, lack of pay for trades coming off the tools, incentives for employers to allocate staff one day a week etc
- Courses need to reflect the zero-carbon agenda
- Courses and skills need updating in line with what is required
- There is a lack of courses in areas such as roofing, groundworks etc which exacerbates the shortages for SMEs recruiting
- SELEP has invested significantly in ensuring the right facilities and equipment are in place, with a new Construction Centre at Chelmsford College as one example and which helps to raise the profile of the sector locally.
- Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP) locally (Kent and Sussex Chambers are trailblazers) are also enabling the trialling of new approaches and facilities in areas such as green construction.

4. What role should manufacturers play in identifying/building the skills required? Areas like decarbonisation of housing as well as Modern Methods of Construction would be two examples.

- Example: Berkley Homes

“The Berkeley Group have established a modular factory in Ebbsfleet, Kent under a new company, Berkeley Modular. The purpose-built facility covers 150,000 square feet and produces 1,000 modular homes per year; all homes include electrics, plumbing, flooring and internal fittings. The workforce is directly employed and there are apprenticeships available in areas including digital design, offsite assembly and site management and integration.”

<https://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are/our-brands/berkeley-modular>

Copied From: 'House of Lords - Built Environment Committee - Meeting housing demand 1st Report of Session 2021-22 - published 10 January 2022 - HL Paper 132'

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5802/ldselect/ldbuiltenv/132/13202.htm>

5. How is demand for skills in the house building sector currently being met?

- We currently have a widely reported skills shortage and a problematic level of labour cost inflation. This is increasingly becoming an inhibitor to productivity and will constrain the capacity across the industry to deliver new housing starts and completions to meet local and cumulatively national housing targets

6. How can Government promote an on the job, skills-based training approach as opposed to formal university routes as to where young people should focus?

- The Government needs to work with business to promote on the job, skills-based training as opposed to formal university routes through a focus and investment in:
 - Marketing, Funding, Design and delivery of courses
 - Starting early in school curriculums from primary school up to make the case for a career in construction

7. Is there a role for Government to publicise a more work-based learning for young people, motivating them to consider technical colleges and the like to build up their skills set?

- Yes, with the education sector and the development industry – see answer to Q6
- Wider than construction, needs wider promotion of the value of on the job working as opposed to traditional FE/HE model
- Risk identified for SME's that to get on board with training new entrants and lose them when trained to larger companies, could government create a mechanism to encourage SME's and if required compensate them if staff move on to (or are poached by) other or larger businesses when fully trained

8. Are the current skills development opportunities (college courses, apprenticeships,) meeting existing needs or is there a gap between current focus and future needs?

- A gap exists and is growing
- Also, need for greater liaison between providers to understand the demand, need and match with supply, this will require a joined-up approach from FE/HE and government to secure required funding
- Course design and provision would benefit from regular engagement between business and FE/HE

9. In the likes of colleges, is the current teaching matching the skills requirement of the house building sector?

- No – for a range of reasons covered in answers to other questions

10. Why is it that anecdotally that training opportunities in the house builder sector not proving attractive enough to young people and what needs to be done to improve this?

- Not enough effective marketing and advertising to prospective trainees
- General labour market shortages are exacerbating the problem in that young people will choose other options such as digital which they perceive to be more attractive and without realising the range of opportunities in the construction sector.
- There is a well-established Enterprise Adviser Network across the SELEP geography and working with bodies such as CITB and the Go-Construct programme much has been done already to improve the attractiveness of the sector. Additionally, many construction employers are engaging with education and offering a range of opportunities such as virtual work experience.

11. What are the barriers for greater uptake of apprenticeships?

- Correct courses and availability of teaching staff
- Pitching to children at a younger age to encourage uptake
- Education of parents to encourage children into the sector
- Awareness of schools of the sector and increasing understanding of the range of opportunities available locally at different educational levels
- A perception of the sector which is out-dated
- Many courses are focused on domestic building rather than commercial or public sector buildings and therefore courses are always delivering what's needed. E.g., mechanical engineering linked to plumbing in commercial buildings
- A lack of or affordability of materials for courses such as plastering

12. Are there opportunities for wider industry collaboration on traineeships and apprenticeships?

- Yes – we support mandating businesses to employ trainees with proper funding
- Shared apprenticeship model – to allow SME's to fully engage and trainees to be given a fully rounded trainee experience

13. What part does retaining skills play a role alongside development of new skills?

- Significant role as industry adjusts to challenges and opportunities of fully imbedding net zero and MMC in the supply chain

14. What are the opportunities between building new skills and greater diversity in the sector?

- Helen Clements of Morgan Sindall is the Chair of the SELEP Skills Advisory Panel and has fed into this response. Morgan Sindall have developed [a White Paper](#) on delivering virtual work experience and which illustrates how educational outreach is changing and can reach wider and more diverse cohorts. This also sets out Morgan Sindall's ambitions to help create a more diverse workforce and addressing issues such as the gender imbalance. The virtual work experience offer has been successful and Morgan Sindall has recently launched an initiative with their supply chain to encourage them to supply the same model. It will also be embedded on larger value projects. Helen has noted that the sector needs to engage with all ages to bring about change, so reaching adults as well as young people is a priority and SMEs also need support to cover their costs and time in delivering such engagement.
- Need not to turn back on traditional skills but bring the new skills forward as additionality, to effectively respond to housing need and demand we need both approaches to be delivering at full capacity

15. Government is very focused and supportive of the skills, training, and apprenticeship agenda, what specifically could Government do to assist housebuilders now in this area?

- See above

16. How much of the current skills shortage is down to training issues or the inability to get workers from outside the UK?

- Both an issue, this has been exacerbated by the interdependencies of Brexit, Covid, Furlough and transnational factors all at the same time, what some commentators have described as a 'perfect storm'

17. Are there initiatives that SME Housebuilders as a whole could implement to improve skills and training?

- Greater facilitated joint working to allow trainees to get a more rounded on-site project experience while training

18. What other policy initiatives could be used to improve the issues around skills and apprenticeships?

- Increased and concerted political will to do it
- Funding
- Marketing and promotion

Useful Links:

<https://www.dhaplanning.co.uk/news/article/436-dha-s-graduate-programme-update>

www.becomealecturer.org

<https://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are/our-brands/berkeley-modular>

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5802/ldselect/ldbuiltenv/132/13202.htm>

[a White Paper](#)