



# ROUNDTABLE

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## TECHNICAL & PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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**MARCH 2026**



Construction  
Leadership  
Council



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The **Built Environment Futures Assembly (BEFA)** is a powerful leadership forum for the built environment sector to build future-facing capacity, capability and competency through shared knowledge, learning and innovation. Supported by the University of the Built Environment, BEFA serves as a centre of excellence – a partnership focused on facilitating knowledge exchange, thought leadership, commissioning innovative projects and initiatives. It recognises and aggregates best practices for the built environment.

[www.befa.org.uk](http://www.befa.org.uk)



The **Construction Industry Council** is the representative forum for professional bodies, research organisations and specialist business associations in the construction industry. CIC uses expertise to shape a built environment that delivers a better society and a better world bringing built environment professionals together – sharing a collective interest in enhancing the industry for a greater positive impact and contribution to society.

[www.cic.org.uk](http://www.cic.org.uk)



The **Construction Leadership Council** works in partnership with government and organisations of all sizes across the industry to ensure the construction sector has the voice, support and resilience needed to grow, improve productivity, attract and retain talent and successfully transition to Net Zero. Our vision is to lead a new era of delivery in the built environment.

[www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk](http://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk)



The **Technical Apprenticeship Consortium** is a consortium of employers and key stakeholder partners committed to developing and managing high-quality technical and professional apprenticeships for the built environment. Since 2010, TAC has supported the development and management of apprenticeship standards in England and Wales which have enabled over 15,000 apprenticeship starts in the built environment sector.

[www.linkedin.com/company/  
technical-apprenticeship-consortium-tac/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/technical-apprenticeship-consortium-tac/)



## SUMMARY

A high-level roundtable discussion was held on 7 January 2026 focused on the demand for technical and professional skills for the built environment. Chaired by Mark Farmer, Founder and Board Executive, Cast, and co-hosted by Dr Caroline Sudworth (Technical Apprenticeship Consortium) and Aled Williams (University of the Built Environment). The event brought together a diverse range of stakeholders to explore the direction of education and skills policy, the emerging role of Skills England, the role of industry and the professions, and to identify shared priorities for the built environment sector.

In the collaborative spirit that defines **Built Environment Futures Assembly's (BEFA)** mission, the roundtable convened senior figures from across industry, professional institutions and academia. It was supported by **Construction Industry Council (CIC)** and **Construction Leadership Council (CLC)**. The discussion provided a confidential forum to share experiences, voice concerns and exchange ideas and solutions on building the future talent pipeline.



A central focus was the direction of technical and professional skills and their alignment with forthcoming skills policy, including approaches laid out in the Government's Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper and budget announcements. It also addressed the most recent reforms in relation to apprenticeship assessment reform and the impact that this may have on apprentices achieving professional qualification and the mechanisms through which employers are supported to demonstrate the ongoing competence of their workforce when

faced with increasing regulation through the Building Safety Act. Participants examined how these priorities and challenges can work in tandem with industry initiatives to encourage new entrants and reskill those in the existing workforce, to make effective interventions that will reduce a growing skills gap. They noted that there needs to be:

- a greater focus on the development of an **evidence-based and data-informed workforce plan** which places technical and professional skills at its heart,
- new means to **measure accountability and define success**, through which we can track educational outcomes and skills training which reflect industry's requirements to attract, train and retain talent and demonstrate ongoing competence of the workforce in the long term,
- a better understanding of **apprenticeship assessment reform**, its impacts for apprentices and employers seeking to demonstrate competence against the Building Safety Act, and support the broader links to professional registration for completing apprentices, and

- greater **collaboration and coordination** with the sector through the Construction Skills Mission Board, Skills England, Construction Leadership Council and Construction Industry Council to achieve these priorities.

They explored ways the built environment sector can coordinate and engage with these bodies to advance priorities and present solutions that drive effective action, improve engagement and support improved outcomes across the built environment sector. The group also identified shared priorities, such as strengthening more diverse pathways into the industry, as well as supporting upskilling and reskilling pathways for the existing workforce in areas including emerging technologies; digital, data and AI; green and sustainability skills.

The roundtable reinforced a broad consensus on the way forward. A collaborative ethos, bringing together voices from industry, government, professional bodies and academia, proved critical in finding common ground. The Built Environment Futures Assembly will continue to serve as a central convening platform to align practical solutions with high-level policy, helping to shape a future-facing built environment workforce.

**Mark Farmer, Chair of BEFA**, commented. *“Now more than ever, we need joined up thinking across the built environment. This requires sector-wide engagement and collective leadership to break down traditional industry silos and modernise skills development. We were pleased to co-host this roundtable, an example of the integrated, cross-sector thinking that BEFA was created to foster.”*

**Dr Caroline Sudworth, Director, Technical Apprenticeship Consortium**, added, *“Technical and professional skills development must be employer-led but system-supported. Employers are at the forefront of identifying these skills but rely on strong support from education and training providers, the professional institutions, and government to deliver these skills at scale. With that backing, training can meet the needs of new entrants and those upskilling in our sector, align with industry demand, and remain accessible, financially viable, high quality and sustainable in the long term.”*

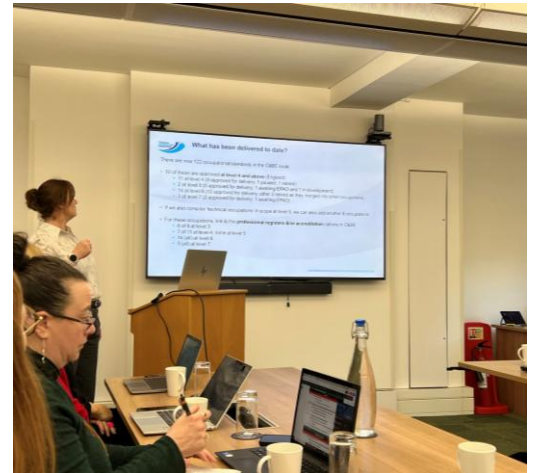
**Aled Williams, Pro Vice Chancellor, University of the Built Environment**, stated, *“The roundtable highlighted the value of collaborative approaches to education and training. By bringing together industry, education and professional bodies to shape policy and practice, the sector has a real opportunity to align strategy with delivery. Supporting the Construction Skills Mission Board, we can build a future-facing skills system that supports new entrants, enables progression, and lifts industry competency.”*

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECHNICAL & PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

*Dr Caroline Sudworth – Technical Apprenticeship Consortium*

The presentation explored the evolution, achievements, and ongoing challenges of technical and professional apprenticeships in the built environment sector, drawing on insights from employers in the Technical Apprenticeship Consortium (TAC). It highlighted that, prior to 2010, there were limited apprenticeships due to a lack of frameworks in the sector and emphasised how initiatives like the Richard Review in 2012 positively transformed the apprenticeship landscape.

A key factor in raising the availability, quality and credibility of apprenticeships has been the employer-driven definition of occupational standards, being closely aligned with professional registration requirements. The development of level 4, 6, and level 7 apprenticeships has expanded opportunities across disciplines including civil engineering, transport planning through to emerging roles in environmental and sustainability. Apprenticeship starts in the sector have risen to approximately 6,000 per year with positive strides in learner outcomes with steadily increasing achievement and success rates. However, overall qualification and achievement rates (QAR) remain comparatively lower, largely due to the length and rigour of these programs, as well as wider life challenges and work pressures experienced by apprentices.



The discussion highlighted ongoing funding disparities, with advanced manufacturing and engineering apprenticeships often allocated higher funding bands. This enables greater investment in teaching and training support than in the built environment sector, despite these apprenticeships delivering similar technical complexity, professional qualification outcomes and workforce benefits. Both operate within a high risk, highly regulated working environment.

Concerns were raised about structural reforms, such as changes in apprenticeship assessment and moves toward more unitised approaches. These were seen to potentially add administrative burdens and erode the high standards established over the past decade. Shorter, lower-level programs and rapid achievement metrics have begun to overshadow the needs of highly technical or professional pathways.

A clear call was made for collective sector action to clearly articulate shared needs and solutions to government, particularly as the industry responds to emerging digital, sustainability, data and information management roles. Emphasis was placed on collaboration and forward-thinking to sustain fairness, quality, and progression within apprenticeships and into the professional registers across the built environment.

## PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTION PERSPECTIVE

### Steve Feeley - The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)

The presentation outlined the approach of a major professional engineering institution in addressing workforce development, skills pipelines, and the evolving demands of civil engineering. A significant strategic pivot was described: moving away from traditional volunteer-led schools' outreach towards digitally focused engagement designed to present civil engineering as a creative, professional and technologically advanced discipline. Particular emphasis was placed on attracting students at key decision points (ages 16–18), through initiatives such as digital competitions and targeted curriculum partnerships.

The institution's role in apprenticeship (end-point) assessment and its partnership with organisations across the UK, were highlighted as central to '*placing the learner at the heart of the apprenticeship*'. This approach enables the conversion of these learners into qualified and registered professionals at various levels, whilst streamlining process, minimising duplication and broadening entry routes to promote greater inclusivity within the profession. This has been further supported by offering new qualifications such as Chartered Infrastructure Engineer, recognising those working across infrastructure. Collaboration with other institutions was underscored as vital to meeting the needs of a much wider infrastructure workforce (beyond only civil engineers).

Key challenges discussed included the impact of proposed apprenticeship reforms, the risk of potential duplication in assessment processes required to retain professional qualification, pressures on the academic sector to sustain high quality provision, and a post-pandemic decline in volunteer mentorship. The importance of adapting to emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), and embedding ongoing competence and sustainability criteria into standards was emphasised. The presentation concluded that long-term thinking, policy consistency, and sector-wide partnerships are critical to recognising and sustaining future workforce success.



## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: BUILT ENVIRONMENT WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

A comprehensive discussion examined the systemic workforce challenges facing the built environment sector. The discussion culminated in a set of targeted priorities to inform actions aimed at advancing strategic workforce planning, skills development, industry advocacy and to support long-term sustainability of the sector.

### CHALLENGE 1: STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Participants emphasised the need for a robust, timely, data-informed strategic workforce plan. The sector too often reacts to immediate market demand through short-term recruitment drives and rapid upskilling initiatives. Whilst these approaches address urgent, immediate gaps, they risk industry quality, undermining long-term capacity and future resilience.

There was clear agreement that the sector must move beyond reactive cycles and cyclical recruitment and instead adopt a more stable, future-facing approach. This should involve designing interventions that reconcile immediate business demand with sustained capacity building across technical, professional and trade roles, as well as less visible but essential 'hidden professions' within the built environment, such as project management.

### CHALLENGE 2: APPRENTICESHIP & COMPETENCE FRAMEWORKS

Concerns were raised about the growing focus on speed of completions and funding viability within apprenticeships. Participants felt that this emphasis risks reducing the depth and quality of education and training. Hence, substantive skills acquisition may be diluted, potentially weakening occupational competence and undermining the overall quality of apprenticeship training.

Significant concern was also raised in relation to apprenticeship assessment reforms. There are serious risks that these will lead to the decoupling of apprenticeship outcomes from professional qualification, reduce the rigour and efficiency of competence assessment, and thereby become misaligned with the requirements of the Building Safety Act. Participants also noted that continual churn in policy and processes within the apprenticeship eco-system creates confusion for all parties, while also risking instability in the apprenticeship brand.



### **CHALLENGE 3: FUNDING AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES**

The inadequacy of current funding band allocation methodology was highlighted as it does not fully recognise the cost of education and training for highly technical and professional occupations within the built environment sector. This limits the availability of high-quality training and reduces employers' use of the apprenticeship levy to train apprentices. It also risks becoming misaligned with evolving competency requirements.

The regulatory environment that training providers face is challenging and overly bureaucratic, adding significant costs to apprenticeship delivery. Participants argued that these resources could be far better focused and directed towards actual training. The group called for the revised growth and skills levy to enable greater employer engagement in the forms of training required at technical and professional levels. This would create a far more adaptive and responsive system, supporting learner entry and progression with defined outcomes at each level. Such changes would improve learner success whilst providing increased flexibility for both learners and employers.

### **CHALLENGE 4: PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS & LIFELONG LEARNING**

Potential deficits in the current skills plans for technical and professional occupations were highlighted. There is a need for a cultural shift towards increasing the quality and consistency of ongoing professional development. The roundtable strongly supported the need for flexible training to support and encourage employer investment in lifelong learning, including re-skilling and upskilling the existing workforce.

There was also a focus on the development of future-facing programmes to address the emerging skills gaps across the sector. The current limitations of professional accreditation of educational programmes over recognising full (and part) occupational competence outcomes remain. This is further compounded by the limited routes to professional qualification and/or titles particularly at technical levels.

### **CHALLENGE 5: SME ENGAGEMENT & SECTOR REPRESENTATION**

Addressing the underrepresentation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in policy and skills is important as they represent a large part of the sector. Attendees called for a concerted, unified industry voice to enhance engagement in policy consultation and allocation of resources, ensuring SMEs receive the guidance and support needed to navigate the rapid changes in the apprenticeship and skills system. Interdisciplinary collaboration and consistent evidence-based messaging was emphasised as essential to position the sector credibly with government and the wider community.

## CHALLENGE 6: ADAPTING TO TECHNOLOGICAL & MARKET CHANGE

Technological disruption, especially AI, requires more adaptive and flexible skills frameworks and professional standards. The discussion endorsed innovative solutions, such as digital skills passports, advocating for a decisive shift towards competence-led, evidence-based approaches to workforce planning and optimisation.

## CHALLENGE 7: SECTOR IDENTITY

A strong and clear consensus emerged to consider the industry as the “built environment,” a term that better reflects its full breadth and societal value (while recognising that construction remains an integral part). Consistency in sector language and public-facing narratives was identified as essential for enhancing reputation, influencing policy, attracting future talent and driving investment in the skills for growth.



## KEY ACTIONS & NEXT STEPS

- Undertake systematic evidence collection in partnership with employers and professional institutions to build a data-driven skills case for technical and professional occupations. Ensure that these findings are fully reflected in the Construction Workforce Plan, encompassing the wider built environment.
- Advance development of an industry-wide, digital and data-led workforce planning platform, focused on technical and professional skills. This supports the work of the Construction Skills Mission Board together with Construction Leadership Council (CLC) People and Skills Network.
- Produce a summary of the 'pros' and 'cons' of Skills England apprenticeship assessment reform in relation to technical and professional occupations. This should include the potential impact on competence and professional outcomes for learners and employers; providing feedback to the Skills England 'Construction Assessment Reform Taskforce'.
- Explore reasons for non-completion of apprenticeship assessment among technical and professional apprentices and track their destinations. Propose measures to recognise all positive outcomes, including partial programme / qualification completion and retention. Recommend revisions to Qualification and Achievement Rate (QAR) or apprenticeship accountability framework success metrics to reflect alternative outcomes.
- Implement structured follow-up activities and communications to foster continued stakeholder engagement and alignment. Prepare full report to inform and influence key stakeholders across the built environment and government.



**Mark Farmer (Chair)**

BEFA Chair

Construction Leadership Council Industry Sponsor for People & Skills



**Dr Caroline Sudworth (Co- Convenor)**

Director, Technical Apprenticeship Consortium



**Aled Williams (Co- Convenor)**

Executive Director, BEFA

Chair, CIC Education & Future Skills Committee

31 March 2026

## APPENDIX 1: ATTENDEES

NAME	ROLE	ORGANISATION
Mark Farmer	Founder and Board Executive Chair, CLC People & Skills Workstream Chair, Built Environment Futures Assembly (BEFA)	Cast Consultancy
Aled Williams	Pro VC / Executive Director, BEFA Chair, CIC Education & Future Skills Committee Lead, CLC Routes into Industry	University of the Built Environment (UBE)
Caroline Sudworth	Director	Technical Apprenticeship Consortium (TAC)
Ashley Wheaton	Vice Chancellor Construction Skills Mission Board (HE Lead)	University of the Built Environment (UBE)
Izzy Williams	Senior Learning and Development Lead	Ryder Architecture
Karen Hoad	Executive Director	Tony Gee and Partners
Scott Bell	Training and Competence Lead	Laing O'Rourke
Jill Nicholls	Director of Competence & Compliance	BESA
Eddie Tuttle	Director of Policy, External Affairs & Research	CIOB
Gill Hancock	Head of Technical Content	Association for Project Management (APM)
Richard Harral	Chief Executive	CABE
Sharon Spice	Membership Director	CABE
Robyn McKenna	Chief Product Development Officer	RICS
Jenny Russell	Director of Education & Learning	RIBA
Matt Mahony	Policy & Public Affairs Manager	Construction Industry Council (CIC)
Helen Taylor	Director of Practice	Scott Brownrigg
Steve Feeley	Director of Membership Recruitment	ICE
Tony Ellender	Professional Development Manager	Balfour Beatty
Linda Hausmanis	CEO	IWFM
Clare Johnson	Deputy Head of Profession	VOA
Cat Goumal	Head of Education	CIHT
Rosie Fairfax	Policy Manager (Professional Standards)	ARB (Architects Registration Board)

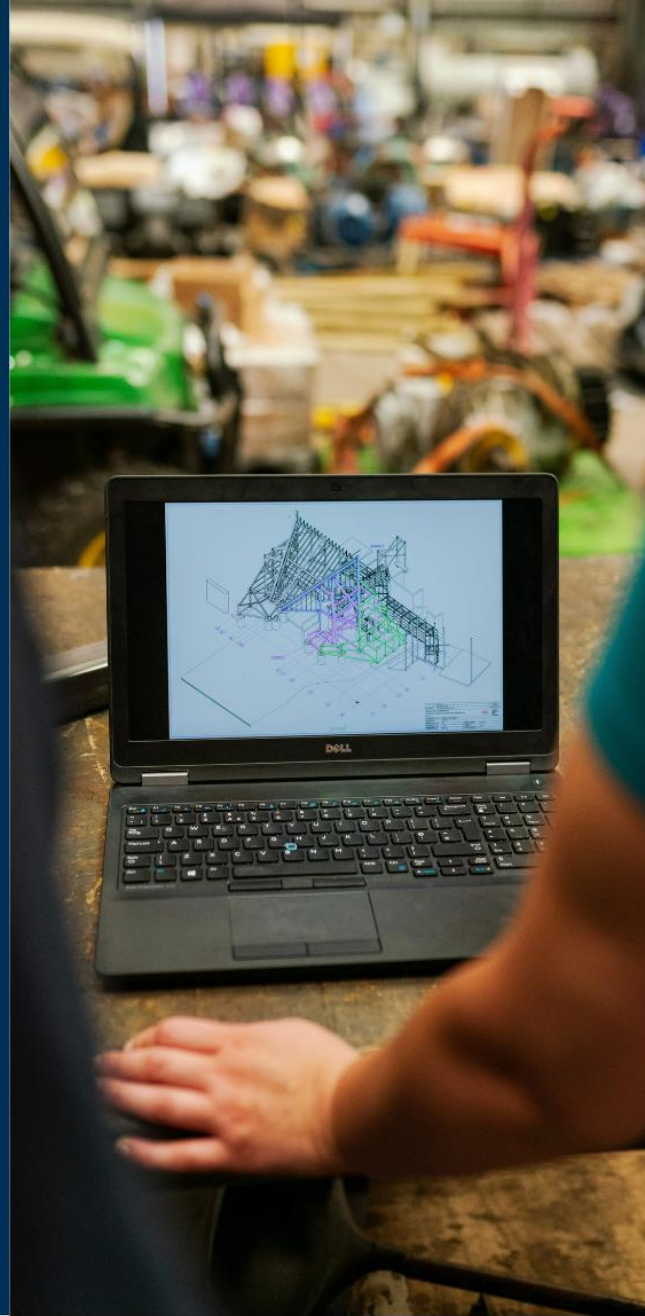
**ROUNDTABLE**

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**Thank you for reading!**

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