

## Segment One

**Sector:** Construction

**Executive summary (compiled by CITB)**

### Introduction

A thriving construction industry relies on a strong pool of labour across the country; but employers report significant shortfalls in supply of skills in many construction trades and construction-related professions across the country. CITB have therefore commissioned a three-stage programme to investigate this problem in England, and possible solutions. The first stage identified shortages in nine of the largest LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) areas in England; this stage seeks to investigate possible solutions to the problems in each of these areas. The final stage will be to devise and implement a construction skills strategy that will address shortages.

This particular report focuses on the Leeds City Region, which is the area served by the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership. It includes Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Halifax and Wakefield within West Yorkshire, as well as York, Barnsley, Harrogate and surrounding areas. The research comprised a series of depth interviews with stakeholders, employers, training providers and learners in the Leeds City Region, as well as secondary data analysis and a quantitative survey of 200 employers.

This report uses as a framework, a list of eight possible 'pools' of recruits which CITB identified as potential sources of recruits for the industry; these are listed in Chapter 3. It also focuses on eight priority occupations identified by CITB and the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership: Bricklaying, Carpentry and Joinery, Civil Engineering, Labouring, Painting and Decorating, Plant Operations, Quantity Surveying and Site Management. Plant Operations includes Compacting Plant, Excavating Plant and Transporting Loads – in practice, however, it is not usually possible to distinguish these in the data.

### Identifying barriers

From the qualitative interviews, a logic model was built up of a pathway for potential learners from a position of deciding on a career in construction to sustained employment in the sector, and of barriers that might cause learners to leave this pathway. Barriers particularly key in the Leeds City Region are highlighted with red and orange stars, to denote the extent of the barrier.



**IFF Research**

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**Local Skills Supply and Demand – findings for Leeds City Region**

Five steps to sustained employment in construction: identifying barriers

Based on IFF Research depth interviews with stakeholders, providers, employers and learners

### **Quantifying the pools of potential recruits**

The research included an exercise to identify the broad size of each pool of potential recruits, to the extent possible within the limitations of the data (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 4 for details). The largest pools were young people leaving FE courses (2,600), people retraining to move sector (a tentative estimate of 800), and people leaving long term unemployment (500). People released from prison (200), young people direct from school (100), and people leaving the military (60) are fewer in number.

### **Deciding on construction and seeking training**

The key barrier identified at this stage was a lack of interest in construction among young people. This was connected by stakeholders, and especially employers, to the image of the sector, and particularly to schools. Stakeholders felt the perception that the sector was for those who were less academic was a particular problem. Some stakeholders also felt that the lack of a formal training pathway beyond initial training in some sectors acted as a deterrent to potential recruits. The impact of this was not an overall shortage of recruits to training programmes (providers reported that demand exceeded supply in most cases, except for Plant Operatives), but it did result in a reduction in the proportion of higher achieving recruits who might be interested in management roles in the future.

Stakeholders said that career changers were particularly poorly catered for, and training providers were in the main unable to identify provision specific to career changers. Learners who had changed career found the process difficult and complained of a lack of information and having to use courses designed for those who did not have other employment or self-employment. In other regions, a lack of subsidy for provision aimed at career changers was cited as a reason for this; although this was not mentioned specifically in Leeds City Region, this is likely to apply equally across England.



Initiatives to tackle this particular issue would be likely to create a strong return for the sector as a whole. Quicker returns might be expected from catering to career changers (in terms of information and course provision) than to efforts to change the sector's image as a whole.

### Training pathways and initiatives

The research also included an analysis of training pathways in the priority occupations; most were found to be quite well catered for in terms of variety of qualifications. However, the market was relatively concentrated with few providers serving the region for some occupations, in particular for site management. This has advantages in terms of economies of scale and ability to attract and retain proficient training staff, but does reduce choice for learners and employers.

In the stakeholder interviews, a gap was mentioned in training provision for those changing careers, as mentioned above. These types of courses, if funded, could assist people joining construction from a variety of pools.

### Effective training

Although few employers criticised the training available to them to purchase, many mentioned a shortage of skilled recruits with site experience. Employers felt that courses needed to include site experience to provide useful recruits; but training providers said they were constrained by the difficulty finding employers willing to participate in apprenticeship programmes or provide on-site experience to learners. Supporting this, learners and stakeholders also reported that while it was easy to find college-based training courses, it was very competitive if seeking an apprenticeship.

While some felt that employers needed to be pushed harder to support training, others pointed out that smaller employers faced real constraints in terms of variable workload and cost. CITB may find that initiatives designed to incentivise employer engagement in offering

work experience or apprenticeships would therefore offer a good return on investment, especially if these initiatives could address employer concerns regarding variable workloads at smaller firms, and affordability for employers.

Training providers reported that the main constraints on provision were employer engagement, discussed above, but also shortages of funding, and shortages of training staff. Shortages of funding particularly limited potential for provision of courses requiring relatively large amounts of space or expensive equipment, such as plant operations and (although this was not a priority occupation in Leeds City Region) scaffolding. Colleges also mentioned a difficulty finding space for sufficient bricklaying training; although there is less space required per learner for this, there are a much larger number of learners involved. Learners also complained of outdated and poorly maintained equipment, which sometimes limited the applicability of college-based learning for their work.

Shortages of skilled trainers were primarily caused by competition with the industry itself: they would often leave to higher paying work in the industry itself when demand was high; the impact of this was particularly severe since the problem by its nature affected sectors where demand was the most acute. Findings from Leeds City Region in terms of solutions were limited, and most training providers felt that they simply required more funding to compete on a par with wages offered in the sector. However, a stakeholder in London suggested that an initiative to offer a formal training pathway into construction training to older construction workers might be beneficial, providing an alternative career path to moving into management for construction workers who might want to move away from physically demanding site work.

### **Barriers to employment**

Employers were generally positive about the idea of employing people from non-traditional groups, except in specific circumstances (e.g. where employees had to work alone in clients' homes) but often reported that they might struggle to fund any additional training required.

Poor retention of employees in the sector was reported to be a barrier for employers funding training; some stakeholders and employers felt that the lack of longer training and career pathways in the sector was a key constraint here. Stakeholders mentioned that the sector was 'like an hourglass' in that there were career options in place for management and senior roles, and for initial recruitment and training into trade and craft roles, but a relative lack of routes in-between. People would often spend a short time in the sector and then move elsewhere for career progression. It may be that providing a greater range and number of training and career routes at or above Level 3 in many priority occupations (or above Level 2, in Plant Operations) would help in this area.

Find out more about the Construction Collaborative Skills Partnership and get in touch through - <https://www.westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk/contracted-projects/lets-talk-real-skills/construction>