



Federation of Master Builders (FMB)

response to:

Proposals for new Post-16 Occupational Certificates Construction

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Further information:
Jeremy Gray
Head of External Affairs
externalaffairs@fmb.org.uk

About the FMB

The Federation of Master Builders (FMB) is the largest trade association in the UK construction industry. With more than 6,500 member firms, representing around 45,000 employees, the FMB is the recognised voice of micro, small and medium-sized (MSME) construction businesses.

Local builders sit at the heart of supporting the economy, creating new jobs and training the next generation of builders with skills fit for the modern economy. They are also key drivers in helping to deliver government priorities on growing the economy, quality housing delivery, and improving the UK's existing housing stock to be healthier.

Response

Overview

The FMB welcomes this review, however it must deliver what employers need and inspire young people to study for the Certificate. It should also tackle entry level skills to ensure competence is embedded from the beginning.

We have significant concerns about the short timeframe for this review. The overall consultation closes on January 12th, but this has been shoehorned in before that deadline, which suggests a lack of preparedness. We understand that the Government wish to proceed at pace, and this is appreciated, but giving the industry such little time to respond could end up with an outcome that needs tweaking later down the line, or at worse fails to deliver.

We hope that industry voices are heard and that a decision on Post-16 Occupational Certificates has not already been decided, with this consultation merely being an exercise in democratic necessity. Consultation with industry is a cornerstone of developing good quality training outcomes, especially considering the failure of other such initiatives, like T-levels in construction, which also suffered from poor industry engagement.

Q1. Referring to the occupational standards published on the occupational maps, are there any standards that are missing from the above list that you think should be included for 16-19 classroom-based provision? Please explain why you think they are suitable

In consultation with members the following have been identified:

- Roofing - this does not require working from height. Roof trusses can be created on the ground and then roof tiles installed all within reach of student without the need for elevation.
- Heritage – it has been noted that there is a lack of those working in heritage trades. We are aware of ongoing work in CITB to address this, but that shouldn't lead to exclusion here.
- Airtightness – which will be vital for the Future Homes Standard.

Q2. Are any of these occupational standards unsuitable for 16–19 classroom-based provision?

Group 1: on site construction

- Architectural Joiner
 - Architectural joinery requires advanced precision and experience, making it more appropriate for Level 3 or an apprenticeship route. Including it risks setting unrealistic expectations for learners and employers.
- Carpentry and Joinery - Architectural Joiner
 - needs to be removed as this is about designing and making custom fitting timber products and is a specialised craft.
- Carpentry and Joinery - Site Carpenter
 - Carpentry is the entry level for working with timber where items such as architraves and skirting are installed on a site. Joinery is at a more advanced level where items are crafted in a workshop. At this level of training, you cannot expect a student to be studying joinery which is a Level 3 qualification. Remove Joinery from the title
- Plasterer - Fibrous plasterer
 - Fibrous plaster is not appropriate for entry level students. There may not be tutors to deliver such a niche area and not one that should be kept, unless there is clear industry need.
- Bricklaying
 - **Appropriate**, but needs to include block work to make it suitable.
- Plasterer - Solid plasterer
 - **Appropriate**, but it should include the skill to mix and apply different renders on to bricks, blocks and concrete walls

Group 2: Construction Finishing Trades

- Roles involving gas, heating and electrical engineers
 - These roles require advanced levels of training.
- Roles with power tools
 - Requires one to one supervision and therefore difficult in a classroom environment.
- Painter and Decorator
 - Industry discussions would suggest that this should be removed or just focus on painting. However, we would recommend consulting with the appropriate trade body - Painting and Decorating Association.
- Floorlayer
 - It is unclear what this role would involve. Would this cover carpet, vinyl, laminate, wood and tiles? We would suggest the focus is on laminate and wood. Potential to remove carpet and vinyl if applicable.

- Groundworkers – insufficient room to train effectively.
- Wall and floor tiler
 - **Appropriate**, but will only be able to cut tiles with hand tools
- Domestic Plumber
 - **Partly appropriate** - can only include basic plumbing for kitchens, bathrooms, showers, fitting washing machines and small-scale issues including leaky taps, burst pipes and blocked toilet drains. Plumbing is otherwise an advanced skill set.

Q3. Are the proposed subject groupings appropriate to develop shared core content?

The best content from the core introductory content should be drawn from common Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviours (KSBs) in occupational standards. But this should be reviewed before finalising this process. The FMB strongly recommends embedding soft skills and employability behaviours within the core content. Employers consistently value punctuality, reliability, communication, and teamwork alongside technical ability.

There should also be additional knowledge, such as realistic expectations of site work (e.g., bricklaying outdoors), health and safety awareness, basic multi-skills exposure, understanding organisational structures (from sole traders to SMEs), and professional behaviours such as time management and customer interaction.

Q4. If you think that a different grouping of standards would lend itself better to developing shared core content, how would you change the groups?

The following could be added to help better prepare students:

- Health and safety & site awareness
- The concept of Retrofit - insulation, ventilation and air tightness
- Sustainability
- Waste management & the importance of recycling
- An understanding of building regulations and their importance
- An awareness of different build types and their requirements

Other areas, potentially nuanced, have also been suggested. We recommend discussions with the FMB and other organisations to ensure all groupings that industry are looking can be captured.

Q5. What additional knowledge and understanding, over and above that included in standards, would you like students to have when they enter employment in your sector?

As noted throughout, employers want students to enter the workplace with a clear understanding of site realities and professional behaviours. English and Maths is important, but these should remain relevant to vocational skills, such as financial literacy for business management, this is vital given the number of builders that set up as sole traders or run businesses.

Further additional understanding should include:

- Health and safety
- First aid
- Mental Health training – we see this as vital given the high suicide rate within the industry
- Awareness of sustainability.
- Building regulations.
- Basic financial literacy.
- Communication skills.
- Timekeeping.
- Attitudes (e.g screen time awareness).
- Understanding documents & reading drawings.
 - Recording work through photographic evidence.
- Building a portfolio to show to skills achieved on the course.
- An understanding of other trades to avoid siloed work.
- Different working environments: e.g. domestic, commercial
- Different building types: e.g. new build, refurbishment
- Emerging technologies

Q6. How important is it to employers that the grading of Occupational Certificates allows them to compare candidates' attainment?

Consistency in grading is essential for employer confidence. The FMB recommends a simple, unified grading scale across all Occupational Certificates, supplemented by competency descriptors to clarify practical ability.

Q6(a). Would a grading scale have more value to employers if it was consistent with the equivalent apprenticeship End Point Assessment?

While alignment with apprenticeship EPA grading could provide continuity, many SMEs are unfamiliar with EPA frameworks. Therefore, consistency with EPA grading is less critical than clarity and simplicity.

It is also unclear if it is proposed that an EPA would come at the end of the course or as the student progresses. One EPA at the end will be a cheaper option than assessing as they complete a section of the course. We would welcome clarity on this point.

Q6(b). Or would a single, consistent grading scale across all Occupational Certificates be more helpful?

The FMB recommends a simple pass or fail requirement to ensure robust competency. However, if a grading scale is the overall industry preference, a single, consistent grading scale would allow for greater flexibility and allow transferable skills to enable students to take up job opportunities that may not be in the area they have previously studied in.

We would welcome some thought provided to areas like attendance, punctuality, commitment and attitude to be counted towards grading to support students with the skills employers are looking for.

Additional Observations

Use of ‘experts’

The consultation notes the use of experts, but it has been noted by members that ‘experts’ would not have put the combinations of skills sets together, as some are too advanced and niche. The FMB would like greater transparency over which ‘experts’ were consulted and will be involved in the roll out of these measures. We have serious concerns that the use of so-called experts, marks a move away from using employers, who should sit at the heart of this rollout.

Type of study

We have questions over whether it is proposed that the training be undertaken at a school or at a college, this is not clear and needs expanding. There are also concerns over the nature of the expectation on students, for example we’re uncertain how students can have their own individual study programme as it raises questions over the nature of the work they would be doing in the classroom, would it be individualised? This would be impractical in practice.

Career prospects

Wider issues, over the nature of young people knowing career prospects are also relevant to discuss as part of this consultation. As we see it, the proposed measures assume a 16-year-old has a good idea of their future career path, but in reality, that’s rarely the case. The focus appears to be on preparing students for an intended occupation, but we have concerns that tutors would struggle to manage the differing requirements of students within a single class, we’d welcome greater discussion on this matter.

Length of courses

The FMB agrees with the 2-year study programme, but we are clear that academic study such as Maths and English should be relevant to their future career. However, we do see a route for a 1-year programme. The feedback the FMB has received suggests a one-year programme is easier to deliver and results in better achievement rates, alongside improved retention – the FMB would happily arrange a discussion with those involved with this feedback.

We would appreciate further clarification on work experience, especially in the context of course length. We’re unclear if it is planned for students to have work experience. T levels have shown that this was a complex element to deliver. We’d welcome further discussions on this aspect.

Good practice

The FMB has noted that the Australian school-based apprenticeship model¹ as a strong example of integrating classroom learning with real work experience, which could improve engagement and retention. However, examples also exist closer to home.

The CITB funded project Build Academy², in collaboration with the FMB and Shooters Hill College is an industry led training initiative. It takes students through continuous training for up to a year. At any point during their training, a student can be employed, with the sign off from the Academy and employer to ensure they are ready. The students are given basic training in

¹ MEGT - <https://www.megt.com.au/apprenticeship-and-traineeship-information-schools>

² Build Academy – FMB Website - <https://www.fmb.org.uk/resource/help-to-train-london-s-next-generation-of-builders-through-build-academy.html>

multiple trades and soft skills, so that they can understand their likes and dislikes before specialising. This solves a perennial issue in construction of high dropout rates because of dissatisfaction with a particular trade or route into construction.

The project is in a pilot stage, and outcomes have not yet been collated, but preliminary evidence suggests a positive model that encourages employment and embeds basic skills sets and behaviours. We would welcome discussions with the department on this project as part of this consultation.