

# Roundtable on engineering construction, planning reform and skills

with David Nash, Director of Policy & Strategy at the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board

Online via zoom



David Nash

## Introduction

The PLG's latest roundtable was convened to address the urgent challenges and opportunities within the engineering and construction sectors, with a particular emphasis on skills training. As the ECITB invests approximately £28 million annually to enhance workforce capabilities, the meeting underscored the critical issues of chronic skills shortages, an ageing workforce, and the necessity for innovative training approaches. Participants discussed the projected increase in demand for engineering construction jobs, driven by major infrastructure projects across the UK, and highlighted the pressing need for collaborative strategies that bring together industry stakeholders, government, and educational institutions.

Key topics included the importance of flexible training models, such as modular and pre-apprenticeship programs, to meet the evolving needs of the workforce. The roundtable also explored the role of public procurement as a lever for skills development, emphasising the potential for government initiatives to foster a more robust and skilled labour market. This document encapsulates the key takeaways from the meeting, offering insights into the current landscape of skills development and the necessary steps to ensure the industry is equipped to meet future demands effectively.

## Key Takeaways

- The meeting highlighted the urgent need to close the skills gap in the engineering and construction sectors, with government projections indicating a potential shortfall of 40,000 workers by 2028. Stakeholders agreed that a concerted effort is essential to enhance training initiatives, promote careers in these fields, and attract new talent from diverse backgrounds to ensure a sustainable workforce.
- The discussions highlighted that many employers in the engineering and construction sectors are competing for the same pool of talent. This competition is exacerbated by the overlapping skill requirements across different areas, such as electrical engineering, construction management, and technical roles in renewables and traditional engineering.
- Government involvement is crucial in addressing this competition for talent. By providing support for training initiatives and encouraging collaboration among industries, the government can help mitigate the effects of workforce competition and ensure a balanced approach to skills development across sectors.
- To effectively meet the evolving needs of the workforce, there is a pressing need for the development of flexible training programs. This includes modular training, which allows for targeted skill acquisition, and pre-apprenticeship schemes designed to prepare individuals for entry into the industry. By diversifying training pathways, the sector can attract a broader range of candidates and address specific skill shortages more efficiently.
- The roundtable underscored the potential of public procurement processes to drive skills development in the construction sector. By requiring contractors to adhere to specific skills demands in their supply chains, the government can foster accountability and ensure that projects contribute to building a competent and skilled workforce. This approach can also encourage investment in local training programs.
- As the industry adapts to new technologies and environmental imperatives, there is a growing need to incorporate training for digital skills and green technologies. This includes preparing the workforce for roles in renewable energy and carbon capture, which are projected to be significant growth areas. By prioritising these skills, the sector can align itself with national sustainability goals and future market demands.
- A unified approach is vital to effectively tackle the skills crisis facing the construction and engineering sectors. The meeting emphasised the importance of collaboration among government bodies, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions to align training programs with industry needs. By fostering partnerships and open communication, all parties can work together to create a more agile and responsive workforce capable of adapting to changing market conditions.

## Issues raised

- A significant concern is the persistent skills gap within the engineering and construction sectors, with projections indicating a shortage of 40,000 construction workers by 2028. This shortage poses risks to the delivery of critical infrastructure projects and hinders the industry's ability to meet future demands.
- The industry faces an ageing workforce, with many skilled workers nearing retirement and insufficient younger entrants to replace them. This demographic shift exacerbates the competition for talent, making it crucial to attract new workers through innovative training programs and appealing career pathways. There is also a lack of credible data on the number of skilled workers migrating to other markets.
- Current training models and industry practices often fall short of meeting the evolving needs of the sector. Issues such as outdated training facilities, lack of qualified instructors, and limited flexibility in training programs contribute to a mismatch between available skills and industry requirements, hampering workforce readiness.

**We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support.**

Braidwater  
HOMES



CommCommUK  
Community Communications

MILLS & REEVE  
Achieve more. Together.

pprestates



**To get involved, please contact**  
[secretariat@plgregeneration.org](mailto:secretariat@plgregeneration.org)