

Scotland's Built Environment: a unified call for action.

If we continue as we are, we will not be where we need to be.

Introduction

Scotland's built environment is one of our greatest national assets. Our homes, town centres, infrastructure and historic places shape daily life, support local economies, anchor communities and play a critical role in delivering net zero, wellbeing and place-based regeneration. When cared for properly, existing buildings provide warm, safe homes, skilled local employment and resilient places that people are proud to live and work in.

Yet the scale of challenge is now undeniable. Around **1.1 million homes in Scotland are at risk due to disrepair to critical elements**, including approximately **340,000 pre-1919 traditional buildings**.¹

At the same time, the skills needed to maintain, repair and adapt the places we live, and work are becoming increasingly scarce. Training provision is fragmented, pathways are unclear, and employers, learners and providers are struggling to navigate a system that is no longer fit for purpose.

This is not simply a buildings issue, nor a narrow skills problem. It is a systemic challenge with consequences for public safety, housing quality, climate targets, economic resilience, and community wellbeing.

This collective statement brings together organisations from across Scotland's built environment to set out a shared diagnosis, a common ambition and a clear call for action. Our sector is resilient, innovative and ready to work differently – together - to unlock the full value of Scotland's existing buildings and ensure the skills system that we all have a stake in, can support the places, people and priorities Scotland depends on now and in the future.

Our Shared Diagnosis:

If we continue: as we are, we will not be where we need to be

In October, representatives from across Scotland's built environment came together at the BE-ST FEST fringe event [Building Connections: Shaping the Future of Construction](#)

¹ Scottish Household Survey (2023)

to explore how better collaboration could strengthen the sector's resilience. The discussion revealed:

- A **complex and fragmented skills system**, with duplicated routes and unclear progression pathways.
- **Unstable and inconsistent funding**, with essential courses such as tiling, stonemasonry and building surveying disappearing from local provision.
- **Limited access to quality entry level opportunities** for those seeking to join the sector.
- **Procurement practices** that prioritise the lowest cost over quality, undermining investment in skills and workforce development.
- **SMEs carrying disproportionate responsibility** for training despite facing the highest financial and administrative burdens.
- **Cultural challenges**, including outdated workplace behaviours, a lack of well-being support, and a negative public image that puts off potential new entrants.
- **Retrofit** a major national priority, does not fit neatly within existing trade structures, leaving a mismatch between need and training routes.
- **Inconsistent training provision** between regions, worsened by barriers such as summer college closures or restrictions on simulated assessment.

Our Shared Ambition

We commit to a system-wide collaborative approach to skills that the sector and industry can invest in, that values quality, nurtures talent, and accelerates the collective skills and knowledge we need to ensure Scotland's existing buildings are fit for purpose now, and sustainable for the future. We aim to ensure that every learner and employer can navigate clear training and education pathways, and that public investments into these pathways are good value for money, supporting competence, productivity, and social value.

We as signatories are committed to...

- The development, growth and promotion of expertise required to maintain existing buildings in Scotland in line with our shared ambition
- Working together to explore opportunities to align the trades and professions learning offers and deliver joint learning
- Providing opportunities for the next generation and support careers education through coordinated outreach and site-based learning.
- A collegiate and transparent approach to sharing data and advocacy messages where appropriate to meet collective aims.
- Continuing to engage with stakeholders across the industry to implement key tasks and hold each other to account

We can't do this alone. We need support from across the Built environment and policy makers

Our asks

Skills

- Take a holistic, systems approach to training and education, rather than the current individual, trades/professions approach. Learners need to be aware of other trades and professions and the impact their discipline has on them.
- Map the skills pipeline against need and Scottish Government targets
- Modernise apprenticeships and competency frameworks, considering modular credentials
- Develop courses and curricular that ensure learners have foundational, sector-wide knowledge that facilitates a collaborative approach in addition to their trade-specific, specialised training
- Connect classrooms, colleges, and sites

Investment

- Provide long-term stability in funding and policy to give employers, colleges, and training providers the confidence to invest.
- Invest in preventative spend to increase capacity across built environment specialisms – from construction, craft and retrofit to planning, conservation and intangible cultural heritage – to reverse the decline of these essential skills and ensure national targets for Net Zero, place-making and heritage can be met.

Policy

- A commitment across government departments with a long-term policy that matches the scale of the challenge
- Establish clear national leadership - through a ministerial oversight group on retrofit - to coordinate cross-government- action and develop a National Retrofit Delivery and Resource Plan
- Address reserved policy- constraints in partnership with the UK Government, ensuring employers in Scotland are not disadvantaged in areas such as National Insurance and apprenticeship investment.

Procurement

- Ensure that mechanisms are in place within procurement processes to maximise skills outcomes

- Mandate compulsory skills requirements within contracts to create a direct lever for quality and support the sustainability of the sector

This statement has been created to show that across Scotland's Built Environment sector there is consensus on the scale and nature of these challenges and the interventions needed to address them. We, as signatories, are sharing this statement because we believe that action is needed, now.

We will continue the conversation with policy makers, industry and wider stakeholders, and encourage you to get involved to build more connections together.

Signatories:

[Full list of signatories to be confirmed]

Please complete the short form at the following link if your organisation would like to be added to the list of signatories to this collective statement:

<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/bQFpdPriH>

BEFS asks for signatories to complete this form by no later than Friday 15 May. The final collective statement will be published by the end of May.