



GATSBY CURRICULUM DESIGN GROUP REPORT

Group: Construction

Date of report: October 2026

Colleges involved: Newham College, Brooklands College, Derby College, Leeds College of Building, South Staffordshire College, Bedford College Group, Barnet and Southgate College, Milton Keynes College, Middlesbrough College and West Suffolk College

Context or problem being addressed

Colleges are seeing increasing numbers of young people studying construction full-time; and yet fewer are progressing into sustained employment. While learners are achieving the required qualifications, employers consistently report that many lack the wider skills and behaviours needed to succeed in the workplace.

Purpose (summary)

The group's aim was to increase the proportion of level 2 construction students progressing into sustained employment in the sector. The group brought together colleges and employers to redesign the wider level 2 study programme so that, alongside technical qualifications, learners also develop the personal, professional and practical skills needed to secure employment and thrive in the sector.

The group focused on three key objectives:

- To define the knowledge, skills and behaviours that support successful progression into employment, apprenticeships and further study.
- To work with employers to identify the wider skills that young people need to succeed in the construction industry.
- To develop and share practical curriculum approaches that will successfully embed these skills in level 2 study programmes.

What is different or innovative about this work?

Instead of focusing on the qualification in isolation, the group started by asking a different question: what knowledge, skills and behaviours do employers want to see in young people entering the construction industry?

Working backwards from these outcomes, colleges redesigned the wider study programme so that it develops not only technical competence but also the personal and professional skills needed for sustained employment. Project-based learning sits at the heart of this approach, providing authentic opportunities for learners to develop and demonstrate these skills in meaningful contexts.

By bringing together colleges and employers to co-design, test and refine approaches, the group has created a shared model for curriculum innovation that can be adapted and adopted across the sector.

Activity to date

- The group came together, combining strategic leadership with practical curriculum design.
- Senior curriculum leaders met to agree the overall aims and priorities for the work, while curriculum practitioners collaborated in dedicated working groups to develop and refine solutions.
- Together the group:
 - engaged with employers to identify the wider skills needed for sustained employment in the construction sector (see [Appendix 1](#))
 - developed a shared master skills list to underpin curriculum design (see [Appendix 2](#))
 - designed approaches that would include the development of these skills in level 2 study programmes
 - allocated different skill areas to individual colleges, enabling resources to be developed collectively and shared across the group (see [Appendix 3](#))
 - identified opportunities for pilot activity during the next academic year

Outputs that can be shared at this stage

- A report produced by KWP Ltd that brings together the evidence base from construction research, workforce studies, employability research, the Skills Builder Universal Framework and the World Economic Forum (see [Appendix 1](#)).
- The group considered this report alongside direct feedback from the Federation of Master Builders and a number of college employer boards to develop the shared list of wider skills needed in level 2 construction programmes. This recommended master skills list shows the skills required for successful and sustained employment in the sector; employer expectations of these skills and early thinking on how these skills can be included in the study programme (see [Appendix 2](#)). It is reassuring to see how well this skills list aligns with the August 2026 Skills England report [Sector Skills Needs Assessment \(Construction\)](#) (see 4.2, Core Skills).

- Sample draft proposals for skills development that share existing good practice and approaches for further development and piloting (see [Appendix 3](#)). Each of the colleges in the group took the lead in developing proposals for a specific skill from the master list. These proposals consider not just how these skills can be developed (often through project-based learning approaches), but also how students can evidence these skills to potential future employers. Further work is needed to finalise the proposals for all skill areas before piloting in 2026/27.

Impact or early insights

From the outset, the group has been clear that the challenge facing construction provision is not about qualification delivery or success rates, but about construction students progressing into long-term sector employment. Group members have invested considerable time, supported by employers, to develop a robust list of the skills needed for employment – skills that construction businesses often report are lacking in young people.

Colleges collaborated to develop a shared employability framework and explore how these skills could be embedded in the study programme using project-based learning and employer-informed activities. Early findings suggest that, when designed well and supported by employers, project-based learning is an effective way of developing the wider skills needed for employment, while making full use of the flexibilities available in study programmes.

Collaboration has been central to the group's success. By developing a common employability framework and co-designing curriculum approaches, colleges have been able to test ideas, share expertise and reduce duplication of effort. Rather than each provider developing resources independently, participating colleges have taken responsibility for different elements of the work, creating a shared bank of approaches that can be refined, piloted and adopted across the sector.

The group has also identified opportunities for greater collaboration in delivery. Shared project briefs, employer-led activities and inter-college projects have the potential to increase learner engagement while also enabling colleges to continue developing and evaluating approaches together.

Implications and transferability for other providers

Colleges seeking to adopt a similar approach can use the master skills list developed by this group (see [Appendix 2](#)), which has been informed both by employers and research into the barriers facing young people seeking employment in the construction sector.

The group's shared skills framework provides a common language for curriculum design and enables colleges to collaborate on developing project briefs, learning activities and assessment approaches. This creates opportunities to share resources, reduce development workload and explore inter-college projects and competitions that increase learner engagement and motivation. Colleges interested in developing similar approaches should consider forming partnerships with other providers to support design and delivery.

The sample approaches for skills delivery drafted so far have been shared to help other providers consider how they could be used in their own institutions (see [Appendix 3](#)). Many of the approaches require input from employers, so could be

redeveloped or adapted by other providers using their own partnerships with employers. Careful consideration needs to be given to the integration of these activities into the study programme to ensure they do not feel like an add-on. They may need to be tailored to individual institution needs.

Consideration has been given early in the work to how these newly developed skills can be demonstrated to potential future employers. In some cases we hope that this will be evident in the way the young person presents and conducts themselves (communication skills, professional conduct, etc.), however the group would like to develop a skills passport or a badging system that will demonstrate the skills developed on the programme but also the types of projects delivered by the student, thereby helping them to demonstrate skills such as problem-solving, safe working and teamwork to employers. This is expected to be part of the group's next steps, but colleges looking to implement a similar approach should consider any existing systems in their region that would support such an approach.

The strategic group also felt that, even though the focus of the work has been construction and the delivery approaches for developing the skills will differ from sector to sector because the projects will need to be contextualised to a specific employment area, colleges may still benefit from using the master skills list as a framework for enhancing any level 2 study programme to better support young people in their next steps.

Next steps

The group has made good progress in the six months since it formed and is keen to continue. The agreed next steps are to:

- continue collaborating but also to open it up to other colleges – a curriculum group formed as part of the national Construction Technical Excellence Colleges collaboration will take this forward and the focus will be:
 - sharing resources, approaches and piloting delivery
 - supporting each other with site visits among participants
- develop common project briefs and competitions to promote inter-college activity that helps support student skill development, building on examples of activity delivered by some of the colleges in the group
- further develop the skills passport or badging system to demonstrate skills to employers, giving careful consideration to how this might work with other systems and with regional and national developments

Want to find out more?

Colleagues interested in further information or collaboration are encouraged to email Gatsby at TEN@gatsby.org.uk

APPENDIX 1: WIDER SKILLS FOR CONSTRUCTION LEVEL 2 REPORT (THE KWP LTD)

Introduction

Many young people study construction courses in college, but fewer than expected progress into long-term employment in the industry. Of those who enter the sector, employers often report that although they may have technical knowledge, they are not always fully prepared to meet workplace expectations.

Research consistently shows that success in construction depends not just on technical ability but on wider skills, such as communicating clearly, working safely with others and behaving professionally at work (Dainty, Cheng and Moore, 2005; CITB, 2022a).

This review brings together evidence from construction research, workforce studies, employability research, the Skills Builder Universal Framework and the World Economic Forum to support the development of the shared list of wider skills needed in level 2 construction programmes. It also looks at embedding these skills in delivery rather than teaching them separately.

Skills challenges in construction

The UK construction industry continues to report labour shortages. However, workforce reports show that recruitment problems stem not only from technical skill gaps but also from difficulties in finding work-ready entrants (CITB, 2022a; Farmer, 2016).

Research on construction project delivery shows that many problems are caused not by technical mistakes but by weak communication, poor coordination and planning issues (Chan, Scott and Chan, 2004; Love, Edwards and Smith, 2006). Workforce research also suggests that some new entrants leave construction employment early because they are not fully prepared for the expectations and pressures of the workplace (Maqbool et al., 2024).

This means education programmes should teach workplace behaviours as well as technical competence.

Wider employability and future skills needs

Research across industries shows workers increasingly need transferable skills such as communication, teamwork and adaptability. Employability research also emphasises the importance of continuous learning and adaptability at work (de Grip, 2015).

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 predicts that around 39% of workplace skills will have changed by 2030, driven by technological and economic change. The report highlights that important skills for the future will include analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, leadership, creativity and social influence (World Economic Forum, 2025).

The Skills Builder Universal Framework identifies eight essential skills that support employability and lifelong learning: listening, speaking, problem-solving, creativity, adapting, planning, leadership and teamwork. The framework also breaks each skill down into progressive steps that, if followed, support its development over

time. Research shows strong links between these essential skills and successful employment outcomes (Skills Builder Partnership, 2022 and 2025). These findings also closely match employer feedback in construction studies.

Embedding wider skills – evidence from Skills Builder pilots

A Skills Builder report on piloted approaches to developing workplace attitudes and behaviours in education (Skills Builder Partnership, 2022) provides clear evidence that wider skills can be developed during taught programmes, instead of being left to chance.

Findings from pilot programmes show:

- skills improve when they are taught explicitly and practised regularly
- embedding skills into practical projects improves engagement and understanding
- students develop confidence and teamwork when skills are linked to real tasks

This evidence supports embedding essential skills directly in vocational delivery.

Skills needed beyond technical ability

Research on construction shows that project success depends heavily on communication, teamwork and management capability as well as technical competence. Loosemore, Dainty and Lingard (2003) also show that people management has a big impact on project outcomes.

Modern construction increasingly relies on coordination between trades and digital systems, making communication, planning and adaptability even more important (Eadie et al., 2013).

Research and employer feedback consistently feature the following wider skills:

- communication
- teamwork
- professional behaviour and reliability
- problem-solving
- planning and organisation
- adaptability
- personal responsibility

Many construction programmes assume that wider skills develop naturally through workshop activity or placements. However, vocational education research shows learners often require explicit guidance about workplace expectations (Fuller and Unwin, 2017).

When employability skills are delivered separately from technical learning, learners can struggle to see their relevance. Evidence suggests these skills develop more effectively when they are embedded in occupational contexts and assessed through practical activity.

Implications for level 2 construction courses

Research indicates that level 2 programmes should build workplace readiness alongside technical competence.

This includes:

- making wider skills explicit to learners
- embedding skills in practical activities
- assessing behaviours alongside technical competence
- working with employers to ensure activities and tasks are realistic
- using feedback and reflection to encourage improvement

Conclusion

Evidence from construction research, workforce reports and global employability frameworks shows construction workers need wider skills in addition to technical competence. The persistent difference between the number of students studying construction and the number in sustained employment in the construction sector suggests that programmes do not always prepare learners effectively (CITB, 2022a; Farmer, 2016).

The World Economic Forum evidence reinforces this conclusion by showing that future workforce success will increasingly depend on transferable human skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork and adaptability (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Embedding the structured development of these skills into level 2 construction programmes offers a practical opportunity to improve employment outcomes and meet employer needs.

Suggested master list of wider skills

Based on this evidence review we developed a suggested master list of wider skills for construction. The curriculum design group then reviewed, refined and expanded the list, agreeing a recommended master list (see [Appendix 2](#)).

Wider skill	Skills Builder link	World Economic Forum core skill alignment	Construction 'I can ...' statement
Communication	Speaking	Empathy and active listening Leadership and social influence	I can listen to instructions and explain what I am doing on site.
Teamwork and collaboration	Leadership Teamwork	Leadership and social influence	I can work safely with others and help complete shared tasks.
Problem-solving	Problem-solving	Analytical thinking	I can identify problems and help find safe solutions.
Adaptability	Adapting	Resilience, flexibility and agility	I can adjust when tasks or site conditions change.
Planning and organisation	Planning	Analytical thinking	I can plan my tools, tasks and time so work finishes on time.
Professional behaviour	Planning	Motivation and self-awareness	I can arrive on time, follow site rules and complete work to standard.
Personal responsibility	Planning	Motivation and self-awareness	I can take ownership of my work and improve it.
Learning mindset	Adapting	Curiosity and lifelong learning	I can accept feedback and improve my skills.
Digital awareness	Problem-solving	Technological literacy	I can use digital drawings or systems to help complete tasks.
Customer and stakeholder awareness	Speaking	Empathy and active listening Leadership and social influence	I can behave professionally when around clients or the public.
Health and safety awareness	Problem-solving	Analytical thinking	I can identify risks and follow safe working practices.
Initiative	Adapting	Motivation and self-awareness	I can stay productive and help without being asked.
Leadership foundations	Leadership Teamwork	Leadership and social influence	I can support others and help organise small tasks.
Creativity	Creativity	Creative thinking	I can suggest better ways to complete tasks safely.
Emotional intelligence	Leadership Teamwork	Empathy and active listening	I can work well with others and respond positively to feedback.

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APPENDIX 2: RECOMMENDED MASTER SKILLS LIST FOR LEVEL 2 PROGRAMMES

This table is the group's recommended list of master skills based on The KWP Ltd evidence review and their suggested master list of wider skills (see [Appendix 1](#)). This recommended master skills list refines the wider skills required for successful and sustained employment in the construction sector; their mapping against the [Skills Builder Universal Framework](#) and the [World Economic Forum core skills](#) and the learner-facing 'I can' statements that support self-assessment and provide evidence to present to employers. The group also included employer expectations for each skill and early thinking on how the skills can be included in the study programme.

Skill area	Skills Builder link	World Economic Forum core skill alignment	Construction 'I can ...' statement	Employer expectations	Embedding behaviours (purpose and strategies)
Communication	Speaking	Empathy and active listening Leadership and social influence	I can listen to instructions and explain what I am doing on site.	Communicate with team/clients, use correct technical language, ask questions, understand drawings, mobiles used for work only.	Purpose: improve clarity, confidence, listening, written accuracy. Strategies: daily learner briefings, explain-your-plan tasks, short written tasks.
Teamwork and collaboration	Leadership Teamwork	Leadership and social influence	I can work safely with others and help complete shared tasks.	Support team, show interest, communicate clearly.	Purpose: reflect real teamwork demands. Strategies: pair/group rotations, allocated roles, group build tasks.
Reliability and professional conduct	Planning	Motivation and self-awareness	I can arrive on time, follow rules and complete work to standard.	Behave professionally, be prepared, follow expectations.	Purpose: develop punctuality and readiness. Strategies: track punctuality, rotate responsibilities, self-evaluations.
Safety awareness (behavioural)	Problem-solving	Analytical thinking	I can identify risks and follow safe work practices.	Use tools safely, use personal protective equipment (PPE), follow site safety rules, ask if unsure.	Purpose: use equipment and site correctly, improve hazard recognition. Strategies: spot checks, planted hazards, role play unsafe practice.

Problem-solving and decision making	Problem-solving	Analytical thinking	I can identify problems and help find safe solutions.	Ask questions, apply techniques correctly.	Purpose: prepare for unpredictable work. Strategies: scenario cards, tutor-added mistakes.
Adaptability and willingness to learn	Adapting	Resilience, flexibility and agility	I can adjust when tasks or site conditions change.	Adapt to new tasks, be flexible.	Purpose: support positive response to change. Strategies: mid-task changes, new tools, reflection.
Self-management and work ethic	Planning	Dependability and attention to detail	I can plan tasks, manage time and organise tools.	Arrive early, tidy workspace, complete tasks on time.	Purpose: independent task management. Strategies: timed tasks, sequencing plans, progress logs.
Respect and professional relationships	Leadership Teamwork	Empathy and active listening	I can work well with others and respond positively to feedback.	Stay polite, communicate professionally.	Purpose: develop professionalism and inclusivity. Strategies: clean-down, dilemma discussions, negotiation tasks.
Customer awareness	Speaking	Empathy and active listening Leadership and social influence	I can behave professionally around clients.	Communicate politely, respect client spaces.	Purpose: develop understanding of client-facing expectations. Strategies: tutor as customer, explain methods, quote writing.
Resilience and managing pressure	Adapting	Motivation and self-awareness	I can stay productive and keep working under pressure.	Stay calm, complete tasks under deadlines.	Purpose: build persistence. Strategies: timed tasks, unexpected changes, coping reflections.

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE APPROACHES FOR SKILLS DELIVERY

Six of the participating colleges shared their existing approaches to the development of specific skills and drafted proposals for new approaches that could be piloted through this collaboration. The draft format of these documents are included here:

Skill area	College
Communication	Leeds College of Building
Teamwork and collaboration	Milton Keynes College
Safety awareness (behavioural)	Middlesbrough College
Respect and professional relationships	Brooklands College
Customer awareness	Barnet and Southgate College
Resilience and managing pressure	West Suffolk College

Because many of the delivery approaches support the development of multiple skills, the next stage is to bring these proposals together and create shared project-led resources that the colleges will then pilot with level 2 students next academic year. With this in mind, the documents that follow are early draft documents that are included solely for information sharing purposes.

Skill area: Communication

College name: Leeds College of Building

College contact: Sarah Sunderland, Wayne Chappelow and Phil Bray

Introduction	Why communication skills matter in education Communication is a core academic and employability skill. It enables students to: • express ideas clearly and confidently • engage in discussions and collaborative work • demonstrate understanding of subject content • prepare for workplace expectations (meetings, briefings, presentations) Effective communication in education includes: • speaking (verbal) • listening • non-verbal communication (body language) • structuring and presenting ideas Teaching communication is most effective when students actively practise it, rather than just observe it.
What good practice do you already deliver in developing this skill area?	Developing communication skills through student presentations We currently develop students' communication skills by integrating presentations and opportunities to present work to peers across our provision. This ensures communication is not treated as an isolated skill, but embedded in teaching, learning and assessment. Presenting at the front of the class forms a key part of our delivery model and supports both academic development and employability skills. Students are regularly expected to: • present work and explain ideas to peers • structure and articulate their understanding clearly • use subject-specific language appropriately This supports students to: • build confidence in speaking • communicate ideas clearly and logically • develop professional behaviours (eye contact, tone, body language) • engage in discussion, questioning and active listening Presenting also reinforces learning, as students must explain and justify their understanding, not just complete written work. Overall, this approach ensures students develop clear, confident and professional communication skills aligned to academic and industry expectations. Mock interviews We develop students' communication skills through mock interviews, delivered both by employers and peer groups. Students participate in: • employer-led mock interviews, providing real industry expectations and feedback • peer-led interviews (particularly by higher levels), allowing students to take on both interviewer and interviewee roles

This approach enables students to:

- practise professional communication in a realistic setting
- develop confidence in articulating skills, experience and knowledge
- improve verbal communication, body language and listening skills
- receive feedback from both industry professionals and peers

Higher-level students particularly benefit from acting as interviewers, strengthening their ability to question, assess responses and communicate professionally; creating a mutual learning experience for all learners.

Communication skills – guest speakers

We support students' communication development through the use of guest speakers and industry professionals embedded within the curriculum.

During these sessions, students are actively encouraged to:

- engage with speakers through discussion
- ask relevant and thoughtful questions
- participate in follow-up conversations

This approach enables students to:

- practise professional communication in a real-world context
- develop confidence when speaking to unfamiliar audiences
- improve questioning, listening and interaction skills
- gain experience communicating with industry professionals

Encouraging students to ask questions ensures sessions are interactive rather than passive, helping to build both confidence and effective communication behaviours aligned to workplace expectations.

Active teaching techniques

We develop students' communication skills through the use of interactive teaching strategies, including think-pair-share and jigsaw activities.

Students are regularly encouraged to:

- discuss ideas in pairs or small groups
- share their thinking with peers
- present outcomes back to the wider group

This approach enables students to:

- practise verbal communication in low-risk settings before speaking to the whole class
- build confidence in sharing ideas and contributing to discussions
- develop listening and questioning skills through peer interaction
- learn how to communicate and explain information clearly to others

By embedding these techniques into lessons, we ensure communication is active, collaborative and consistent, supporting students to engage more confidently and effectively in both academic and professional contexts.

Peer support and pairing

We support communication skills by pairing students with different levels of knowledge e.g. in maths and practical tasks.

Students are encouraged to:

- work together to complete tasks
- explain processes and solutions to each other
- support peers in developing understanding

This helps students to:

- develop clear communication and explanation skills
- build confidence in speaking and asking for support
- strengthen listening and collaboration skills

This approach ensures communication is practical, supportive and embedded within learning across both theory and practical delivery.

	Non-verbal communication We develop written communication through report writing, technical documentation, and the production of drawings and designs. Students are required to: • produce structured reports to present findings • record work clearly in both theory and practical activities • develop and present drawings, designs and visual ideas This supports students to: • communicate ideas clearly in both written and visual formats • use technical and professional language appropriately • present information logically and professionally This ensures students can effectively communicate through writing, visual representation and design, reflecting industry expectations.
New proposal(s) for how this skill area could be delivered and assessed	Video presentations/recorded reflections • students record themselves explaining work or reflecting on learning • can be used for assessment or feedback Develops confidence and allows self-review of communication. Employer-style project pitches • students present ideas/designs, as if to a client • include drawings, reports and verbal explanation Builds professional communication and industry relevance. Structured debate/problem-solving discussions • students argue solutions to a scenario or project challenge • use roles (e.g. contractor, client, designer) Develops confidence, questioning and articulation of ideas. Real-world communication tasks • emails, reports, client updates or site logs • linked to live or simulated projects Develops written communication aligned to industry practice.
New proposal(s) for how this skill could be demonstrated to employers	Placement and apprentice ready Communication is embedded as a core employability behaviour that students must demonstrate consistently in real and simulated workplace contexts. Students will evidence readiness for industry by: • clearly explaining tasks before starting work • asking relevant questions to clarify instructions • using appropriate technical language • demonstrating professional interactions with staff and peers Students will demonstrate they are ready for apprenticeship opportunities by: • communicating confidently in: – interviews – employer-led project presentations • responding to feedback professionally • explaining their work and decision-making clearly • demonstrating understanding of workplace expectations

How could this be further developed/ piloted next academic year?	Structured debate/problem-solving discussions Structured debate and problem-solving discussions to be used to strengthen communication skills: • use real industry scenarios where students must explain, justify and respond to challenges • link tasks to site-based situations e.g. safety issues, project changes, client queries Builds confidence, improves use of technical language, strengthens listening and response skills, and prepares students for real workplace communication – supporting placement and apprenticeship readiness.
Any other comments?	N/A

Skill area: Teamwork and collaboration

College name: Milton Keynes College

College contact: Alfonso Del Basso

What good practice do you already deliver in developing this skill area?	Students regularly work in pairs and small groups during practical construction activities to develop communication, teamwork and leadership skills. Learners are allocated clear roles within tasks, such as team leader, materials coordinator and quality checker, to reflect real site responsibilities. Group build activities are used to encourage collaboration, problem-solving and safe working practices. Learners are expected to communicate effectively, support peers and complete shared tasks within agreed timescales. Tutors also rotate groupings to ensure students can work with different personalities and trades, helping to build resilience and adaptability. Peer feedback and reflective discussions are embedded into practical sessions, encouraging students to recognise the importance of teamwork, leadership and social influence within the construction industry.
New proposal(s) for how this skill area could be delivered and assessed	Introduce structured team-based projects where learners complete a construction task from planning through to completion in allocated groups. Each learner would rotate through leadership and support roles to ensure all students experience responsibility, communication and collaboration. Assessment could include: • observation of teamwork and communication during practical tasks • peer and self-assessment reflections • tutor assessment linked to professional behaviours • group project presentations explaining decision-making and team contributions Scenario-based activities linked to real industry expectations would strengthen learners' understanding of workplace collaboration, safe working and shared accountability.
New proposal(s) for how this skill could be demonstrated to employers	Learners could develop a teamwork and leadership portfolio containing tutor observations, peer feedback and evidence from collaborative projects and employer-led practical challenges. Employers could be invited to observe group build activities and provide feedback on communication, attitude, leadership and professional behaviours. This would help students demonstrate their ability to work safely with others, contribute positively to teams and take responsibility within shared tasks.
How could this be further developed/piloted next academic year?	Pilot cross-trade collaborative projects involving multiple curriculum areas working together on a shared construction brief. This would better reflect industry expectations and develop communication between different trades and departments. Other colleges within the group could support by sharing project ideas, assessment approaches and employer engagement strategies. Joint moderation and sharing of best practice would help ensure consistency and allow successful approaches to be refined across the wider group.

Any other comments?	Teamwork, communication and leadership are essential employability skills within the construction sector. Embedding these consistently across practical delivery will help learners better prepare for industry expectations, workplace culture and collaborative site working.
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Skill area: Safety awareness (behavioural)

College name: Middlesbrough College

College contact: Ben Robinson/Mike Emery

What good practice do you already deliver in developing this skill area?	As a college we have identified: • Training needs for all delivery staff, technicians, support staff (vocational coaches) with them now upskilled to hold an Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Working Safely qualification, so that staff are proficient in all aspects of safety within the workshop activities carried out by students. • All students are provided free PPE at the start of their course. • Students are also taken through a comprehensive induction routine in all trade areas at the start of their course to ascertain their starting points. • All students complete an industry-designed risk card (audited) on every task, so they can personally identify risk and demonstrate their understanding of the dangers associated with tools, equipment and surrounding environment and hazards. • Middlesbrough College has a dedicated team of work experience coordinators that engage with employers year on year, to provide work experience to the majority of the construction students. • A range of employer talks (five employer encounters per student per year) are targeted to increase awareness of safety requirements and develop their understanding of the importance of safety in the construction industry. • Regular audits of all workshops (13) are carried out internally and externally to ensure workshops are fit for purpose and meet legislation. • Industry-designed toolbox talks provided by a local health and safety consultant are used with students each day to focus on relevant health and safety themes pertinent to practical tasks. • Level 2 students complete a level 2 City & Guilds employability qualification. • Manufacturers of power tools brought in to showcase new industry tools and safe use to students and staff.
New proposal(s) for how this skill area could be delivered and assessed	• All planned activities with students, facilities, equipment and staff are audited internally within the directorate by trained staff and externally by the health and safety team (involving all trade areas) on adherence to the college health and safety policy. • An operational safety group meeting with construction staff and the college health and safety team are carried out termly to evaluate ongoing risk, near misses, accidents, injuries and provide opportunity to develop new ways of working and incorporate this learning into taught sessions with students. This is circulated to all construction staff. • A health and safety committee meeting for all college managers to attend is held termly to evaluate the near miss and accident statistics from each term. The health and safety team report and make managers accountable for any actions to address.

	• Workshop-based construction staff audit the students use of industry-designed personal risk assessment cards that record the details of the tasks being undertaken and review the surroundings being worked in. This risk assessment card is also linked to the risk assessment per task. This demonstrates their compliance to the systems and processes. • Termly employer engagement events take place with local employers invited into college and encouraged to advise on workshop design and delivery techniques to match current practice in industry.
New proposal(s) for how this skill could be demonstrated to employers	• The work experience team at Middlesbrough College source local employers within the construction industry, who are invited in as guest speakers to discuss industry practices and set tasks for students to test their knowledge and demonstrate skills. • Employers are also invited in to view students working within the workshop to evaluate their skills and application to tasks set. • Employers are encouraged to source future apprentices from the pool of students at level 2 and level 3. Profiles of students based on attendance, application, exams, discipline and skills to date are provided as a pack. This then progresses to the next stage, where interviews and trade tests are carried out to provide a suitable candidate. • Students are provided work experience/placement to use the health and safety knowledge developed on programme and in many cases have real industry community projects and employer supervised experience in the workplace.
How could this be further developed/ piloted next academic year?	• In 2026/27 students will complete a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)/Client Contractor National Safety Group (CCNSG) card and a Highfield Level 1 Health and Safety in Construction qualification to increase their competence and awareness in readiness for entering industry. • Increase links with employers to ensure the college provides a comprehensive process to convert students into apprentices for various industries on request. We would provide attendance/ performance data, observations of students on task, theory work produced, work readiness examples, CSCS/CCNSG. • Further increase employer interactions for students to have even more employer encounters to further increase industry awareness. • All students create a CV and carry out interview techniques and employment do's and don'ts in Thrive. (tutorial sessions) to increase awareness of employer requirements for employment. • Students on entry 3 and level 1 programmes (not directly ready for work placement/experience) to undertake work related experience in workshops as health and safety officers or site supervisors (role play auditing, checking, advising other students, to a proforma*) to increase health and safety awareness and supervisory experience. Checked and signed off by workshop staff.
Any other comments?	*Proforma available.

Skill area: Respect and professional relationships

College name: Brooklands College

College contact: Errol Ince

What good practice do you already deliver in developing this skill area?	Students: • clean work areas when told • return personal tools • follow basic housekeeping rules • share resources when requested • wait turn patiently • use basic polite language and acknowledge feedback • correct mistakes when prompted • avoids arguing with others
New proposal(s) for how this skill area could be delivered and assessed?	To further develop skills, students should be given opportunities to and be encouraged to: • proactively clean bay • assist peers voluntarily • organise shared tool storage correctly • ensure zero hazards remain • seek out constructive criticism • reflect on performance • help peers improve tasks safely Sign up to student workplace commitments: • I am a professional: I will wear my college uniform and assigned hi-vis jacket correctly at all times. • I respect my team: I will listen actively to my lecturers and peers without interrupting. • I care for the environment: I will treat the workshops, tools and shared spaces with respect, completing my housekeeping duties daily. • I grow from feedback: I understand that constructive criticism from my tutors is designed to make me employment ready. I will accept feedback positively. Student pledge: I agree to treat every student, staff member and visitor with respect. I will speak politely, use professional language and take accountability for my workspace.

New proposal(s) for how this skill could be demonstrated to employers?	The Employer Digital Badge Framework This framework allows local contractors to validate student soft skills during work placements, site visits or college competitions. Badge title: Site-ready professional communicator Issued by: [College Name] Construction Department (endorsed by [Employer Partner Name]) Level: Intermediate/Work-ready [DIGITAL BADGE GRAPHIC] +-----+ SITE-READY Professional Communicator [Icon: Handshake/Muted] +-----+ Earning criteria To earn this badge, the student must successfully demonstrate the following workplace behaviours over a four-week assessment window: • Active listening: Consistently follows complex multi-step safety briefings without needing repetitive reminders. • Respectful dialogue: Uses professional language on the workshop floor; eliminating offensive slang, casual swearing or aggressive tones. • Conflict resolution: Resolves at least two simulated or real workplace dilemmas (e.g. material delays or workspace overlapping) through calm negotiation. • Feedback application: Achieves a minimum of a merit (level 3) in the active listening and feedback practical rubric across consecutive weeks. Evidence portfolio Signed-off observation log from the workshop tutor or site foreperson.
How could this be further developed/piloted next academic year?	Continue to stay up to date with current industry practice to ensure the department continues to mirror commercial construction sites ensuring teamwork, respect and communication remain of the upmost importance.

Skill area: Customer awareness

College contact: Robert Jones

College name: Barnet and Southgate College

Programmes: Electrical installation (16-19 study programmes)

Purpose

This summary outlines a strategic approach to embedding customer awareness within the electrical installation curriculum for 16-19-year-old learners. It can be applied to any trade-based course with direct customer interaction.

Customer awareness is a core employability competency for electricians and is increasingly prioritised by employers seeking work-ready apprentices capable of communicating effectively, understanding client needs and representing their organisation professionally.

Rationale

Feedback from industry partners highlights a consistent skills gap in customer-facing behaviours among new entrants. Embedding customer awareness directly supports:

- improved apprenticeship readiness
- stronger employer confidence in college-trained learners
- alignment with Ofsted expectations for personal development and professional behaviours
- delivery of a curriculum that reflects real-world industry practice

This approach strengthens colleges' strategic priorities around employer engagement, high-quality technical education and positive learner destinations.

Approach

Customer awareness is integrated through four complementary delivery mechanisms:

1. Project-based learning – this can be integrated into already existing projects to reduce load. Learners undertake realistic installation and fault-finding projects requiring direct interaction with simulated customers. Activities include client interviews, customer-friendly proposals, costed plans and clear explanations of technical decisions.
2. Live employer briefs – these could be part of an employer day. Employers set authentic tasks such as designing lighting layouts, producing quotations or completing site surveys. Learners receive structured feedback, ensuring alignment with industry expectations.
3. Competitions and challenges – college-wide and as part of wider activities (e.g. London skills and other regional competitions) and employer-judged competitions (e.g. best quotation, clearest customer explanation, strongest handover pack) motivate learners and benchmark professional standards.
4. Employer-led sessions – industry partners deliver talks, demonstrations and role play scenarios focused on customer interaction, communication and professional conduct on site.

Assessment and evidence

Learners build a customer awareness evidence pack demonstrating their readiness for employment. This includes:

- customer proposals and quotations
- annotated installation plans
- customer-friendly risk assessments
- handover documentation
- employer feedback from live briefs
- observational evidence of communication and professionalism

This portfolio provides employers with clear, credible evidence of customer-facing competence during apprenticeship interviews.

Impact

The proposed model is expected to:

- enhance learner confidence and professionalism
- increase apprenticeship progression rates
- strengthen employer partnerships
- improve the quality of technical and personal development outcomes
- provide robust evidence for inspection and quality assurance

Recommendation

This integrated model formalises employer involvement and ensures all learners produce a customer awareness evidence pack as part of their assessed portfolio they can use to support career progression. It is light touch and should exist alongside existing training to give context and reinforce its importance to tradespeople.

Skill area: Resilience and managing pressure

College name: West Suffolk College (Eastern Education Group)

College contact: Brenda Peaston

What good practice do you already deliver in developing this skill area?	West Suffolk College already develops resilience through authentic technical and vocational learning in which learners are expected to persist, respond to feedback and complete work safely to an agreed standard. In addition, the overall culture with trade vocations is that robust training before exposure to pressure should be manifest. This is based on enhancing student confidence through skills-based learning. Current practice includes: • Practical workshop tasks with fixed deadlines, quality tolerances and clear completion standards. Learners are supported to recover from mistakes, re-plan and improve rather than abandon the task. • T-level employer-set project exam preparation, CAD activities and role reversal tasks that require learners to explain decisions, manage competing demands and respond constructively when a solution does not work first time. • The futures teams at West Suffolk College engage a wide range of local and regional construction employers to enhance curriculum delivery. Employers are invited into college as guest speakers to share industry knowledge, current practices and expectations, and to set practical tasks that test and extend students' technical understanding. Through these live and employer-informed projects (including construction briefs, community activity, site visits and employer engagement), students are exposed to changing requirements, professional expectations and realistic accountability. • Students undertake meaningful work experience and placement opportunities, enabling them to apply health and safety knowledge and technical skills in real industry contexts. In many cases, students also engage in employer-led community projects and supervised workplace experiences, further strengthening their readiness for employment. Within these placements learners must adapt to unfamiliar teams, routines, travel arrangements, site rules and customer or supervisor expectations. • Structured progress reviews, tutorials and pastoral support that help learners identify barriers, set manageable actions and reflect on attendance, punctuality, workload and personal responsibility. Excellent relationships, discussions and support are provided to learners through the tripartite relationships between learner, vocational tutor and personal progress tutor. • Practical observation and verbal feedback from tutors, technicians and employers, with learners expected to act on feedback and demonstrate improvement during subsequent tasks.
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	• All construction activities, facilities, equipment and workshop environments are subject to regular internal audits conducted by trained staff, alongside external audits undertaken by the college health and safety team. These reviews ensure compliance with college health and safety policies, industry standards and legislative requirements across all trade areas. This then feeds into further reviews at both senior leadership team and committee level to share best practice with actions communicated to all staff. • Students are actively involved in developing safe working practices through the use of industry-recognised personal risk assessment processes. Prior to undertaking practical activities, students assess the task, equipment and working environment, recording their findings and control measures. These assessments are linked to task-specific risk assessments and help reinforce personal responsibility, risk awareness and compliance with industry expectations. Risk assessment, method planning and sequencing activities encourage learners to pause, think and make safe decisions when under time pressure. • Competitions, timed challenges and group build activities in which learners experience deadlines, shared responsibility and the need to remain calm and productive. These approaches are effective, but resilience is often developed implicitly. The proposed model makes the skill visible, teachable, assessable and easier for learners to evidence to employers.
New proposal(s) for how this skill area could be delivered and assessed	Proposal: 'Pressure with purpose' – construction challenge cycle A repeatable six-stage model will be embedded within existing practical and project work rather than taught as a separate unit. Each challenge will include realistic, controlled pressure and a planned opportunity to recover, improve and complete the work. 1. Brief and baseline: Learners receive a realistic trade or project brief, identify likely pressure points and record their starting confidence. 2. Plan: Learners sequence the task, allocate time, identify support routes and agree what they will do if something changes. 3. Controlled pressure: Tutors introduce one proportionate challenge, such as a reduced timescale, unavailable material, drawing revision, quality defect, team absence, client change or competing priority. 4. Reset and respond: Learners use a simple pause, prioritise, plan, proceed routine. They must communicate, adjust the plan and continue safely. 5. Review and improve: Learners receive feedback, correct errors and complete a second attempt or improvement activity. 6. Evidence and transfer: Learners explain what happened, how they responded, and how the same approach would apply on site or at work.

Delivery principles

- Pressure must be authentic but safe, inclusive and proportionate; it must never compromise safeguarding, wellbeing or workshop safety.
- The model will be differentiated. Entry and level 1 learners may receive visual prompts, shorter tasks and coached re-sets; level 2 and level 3 learners will work with greater ambiguity and independence.
- Tutors will explicitly teach practical coping behaviours: asking for clarification, breaking work into stages, communicating delays, checking quality, using feedback and seeking help before a problem escalates.
- Activities will be integrated into existing schemes of work, employer briefs and practical assessments to minimise additional workload. Support also provided through personal progress tutor planned tutorials and ad hoc responsive discussions.

Assessment

Learners will be assessed against a concise four-part rubric: maintaining safe and professional behaviour, prioritising and adapting, communicating appropriately, and reflecting and improving. Evidence may include tutor observation, photographs of work, revised plans, employer comments, learner reflection and the finished product. Judgements will use three stages: developing, secure and employer ready.

To note: From 2026/27, West Suffolk College will introduce fully integrated construction industry boards to strengthen employer voice and ensure alignment with local skills improvement plans (LSIPs). These boards will include local and national small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and will meet three times a year, supported by sub-sector groups focused on individual trade areas. This structure will ensure curriculum planning, training needs and skills development remain responsive to current and emerging industry requirements.

New proposal(s) for how this skill could be demonstrated to employers	Resilience evidence record/digital badge Each learner will create a small evidence record containing two or three verified examples of managing pressure. The record will be suitable for use at interview and could sit within an existing portfolio, e-portfolio or employability passport: • a brief description of the challenge and why it created pressure • the action taken using the pause, prioritise, plan, proceed routine • evidence of safe completion, improvement or recovery • a short reflection using the STAR structure: situation, task, action, result • tutor, employer or placement supervisor verification • a personal statement beginning: 'When work becomes difficult or priorities change, I ...' Employer demonstration • Employer-judged challenge day: Employers observe a live practical or planning activity in which a controlled change is introduced, and score learners using the shared rubric. • Interview-ready evidence: Learners present one verified resilience example during mock interviews, apprenticeship interviews or progression events. • Placement feedback: A short employer prompt asks whether the learner remained calm, communicated problems, accepted feedback and continued productively. • Employer-set 'change notice': An employer supplies a realistic variation, delay or quality issue for learners to resolve and then gives feedback on their response. • Portable evidence: A one-page summary or digital badge allows employers to see not only that a learner claims resilience, but what they did and who verified it. Employers will also be offered the same language and rubric so that resilience can continue to be developed consistently during placements and apprenticeships.
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How could this be further developed/piloted next academic year?	Proposed 2026/27 pilot West Suffolk College proposes a two-term pilot across a small sample of construction crafts and built environment programmes, for example, one level 1 trade group, one level 2 trade group and the T-level design, surveying and planning cohort. • Autumn term: Establish a learner baseline; introduce the pause, prioritise, plan, proceed routine; complete one low-stakes challenge; moderate the assessment rubric across staff. • Spring term: Complete an employer-informed challenge or live brief; gather employer verification; learners produce an interview-ready resilience example. • Evaluation: Compare learner confidence, completion, behaviour and quality before and after the pilot; gather learner, staff and employer feedback; review whether the approach supports attendance, retention and progression. Review to include feedback from employers, vocational tutors, personal progress tutors and learners. • Success indicators: At least 80% of participating learners produce two verified examples; employers judge the rubric clear and useful; staff report that the model can be embedded without creating disproportionate workload; learners can explain a credible example at interview. Support requested from the college group • Share challenge scenarios from different trades so that a common resource bank can be developed. • Test the same assessment rubric in at least two other colleges and compare judgements through light-touch moderation. • Invite employers from different regions to review the language and confirm that the evidence would be meaningful during recruitment. • Agree a common learner-facing statement and portable evidence format that could be recognised across the Gatsby construction group.
Any other comments?	The proposal is intentionally light touch and designed to strengthen existing practical delivery rather than create a separate qualification or additional assessment burden. The emphasis is not on placing learners under unnecessary stress; it is on teaching them how to respond safely and professionally to the normal pressures of construction work. Any challenge must be planned, risk-assessed, inclusive and followed by constructive feedback and an opportunity to improve.

Draft pilot challenge brief

Challenge title: The Mid-Task Change – complete a construction task while responding safely and professionally to a realistic change.

Suitable programmes: Adaptable for brickwork, carpentry and joinery, decorating, groundworks, construction management and T-level design, surveying and planning.

Scenario: Learners begin a planned practical or design task. At an agreed point, the tutor issues a change notice. Examples include a revised dimension, a missing material, a client request, a quality defect, a shortened handover time, an absent team member or a new safety constraint.

Learner outcome: Learners must pause, confirm the change, review priorities, revise their plan, communicate any impact and continue safely. They then submit a short reflection and evidence of the completed or improved outcome.

Rules: Safety and quality remain non-negotiable. Learners may ask for clarification and use approved support. Marks are awarded for the quality of the response, not simply speed.

Evidence: Original and revised plan, tutor observation, photographs or drawings, completed work, learner reflection, employer or tutor verification.

Duration: One practical session or project milestone, followed by a 10-15 minute reflection activity.

Draft assessment rubric

Criterion	Developing	Secure	Employer ready
Safe and professional response	Needs repeated prompting, pressure affects safe or professional conduct.	Maintains safe conduct and responds appropriately with some support.	Remains calm, safe and professional; positively influences others.
Prioritising and adapting	Struggles to identify priorities or revise the plan.	Identifies key priorities and makes a workable adjustment.	Rapidly evaluates options, anticipates impact and produces a strong revised plan.
Communication	Does not explain the issue or ask for help at the right time.	Communicates the problem, impact and next action clearly.	Communicates early, clearly and appropriately to different audiences.
Reflection and improvement	Gives a limited account and does not act fully on feedback.	Explains what worked, what changed and how performance improved.	Provides a specific, honest evaluation and transfers learning to future work.

Learner reflection prompts

1. What changed or became difficult?
2. What was the most important priority and why?
3. What did you do first?
4. Who did you communicate with and what did you say?
5. How did you maintain safety and quality?
6. What feedback did you receive and what did you improve?
7. How would this example help you answer an employer interview question about working under pressure?