



# The Home Building Skills Partnership

## Independent Evaluation Summary

April 2016 – December 2019

# Summary

## The Home Building Skills Partnership original project description (2016)<sup>1</sup>

Over its first four years it is hoped the Skills Partnership programmes will engage with thousands of companies, workers, colleges and training providers.

### The Skills Partnership's focus is to:

- Influence the development of a more professional, fully trained workforce.
- Increase productivity and the value added per employee.
- Improve the quality and relevance of industry training.
- Co-ordinate the tackling of common workforce challenges.
- Influence and leverage investment in skills to the benefit of the homebuilding industry.
- Develop an improved public identity for home building.

## To achieve this, the Skills Partnership is examining three main areas:

**Attract** – how to attract new entrants into the industry.

**Skills and development** – how the industry trains its staff.

**Supporting supply chain development** – the training interface with subcontractors.

For each of these areas, the Skills Partnership has set up an Activity Group that will focus on shaping individual workstreams and pushing work forwards to ensure the Skills Partnership is functioning to its full capacity. To do this we need to make the Skills Partnership sustainable so that we ensure the longevity of the project past the four-year timescale of the CITB grant. Ultimately, the objective is to instigate a shift in culture and behaviour at all levels of the home building industry – from the major house builders, right through to SMEs.

In its original contract with CITB the Skills Partnership aimed to design common industry standards for critical roles in home building, engage 100 businesses in training needs analysis and upskill 1,000 individuals through training. These outputs were varied as a result of continuous learning since 2016, with greater emphasis on the direct delivery of training to many thousands more individuals.

## 1.0 Context

Home building is a fragmented industry with 85% indirect employment on site. Its workforce comprises a greater % of EU workers than construction as a whole; and is not diverse. The industry self-rated its image as poor five years ago and tragedies since that time have impacted on parents' and young people's perceptions of working in construction. Home builders felt that industry career opportunities were not recognised, compounded by varying investment behaviours i.e. retaining and investing in the skills of staff is a challenge due to cyclical industry affects. And since 2016, whilst housing output has increased year on year, workforce growth has correspondingly grown and the Government demands to build more and better quality homes has provided a demanding landscape within which the Skills Partnership has been formed.

**Assessment:** The Skills Partnership has been alive to its wider social and economic context and sought where possible to have strategic conversations where these might lead to beneficial investment in the home building sector. It has sought to navigate reforms for skills and training funding and influence investment behaviours through the provision of persuasive information about what workforce is required to build additional homes.

## 2.0 Infrastructure

The Skills Partnership successfully created a structure of governance to focus on three areas of agreed workforce challenge facing the home building sector. A senior industry figure chaired the Leadership Board throughout providing important continuity. A relatively stable Board comprising home builders and wider strategic partners has also been retained for the duration. Three Activity Groups have been chaired by industry representatives, each with specific qualities relevant to their workstreams. At times, the structure grew to accommodate shorter term task and finish groups. These convened a wider range of subject matter experts (e.g. communications, digital, human resources, talent, learning and development, commercial, construction, supply chain and production) widening the HBSP's appeal and calibre.

**Assessment:** This structure has successfully sustained the interest, appeal and contributions from a range of large and medium sized home builders and other partners since 2016 attracting 39% more in-kind investment than originally forecast. Attempts to deviate from the core Activity Group structure were less successful mid-term. The structure for 2020 onwards retains the important ingredients of an oversight Board, Partnership Steering Group and 3 workstreams with the support of 10 dynamic task and finish groups. The loss of one Board member was seen to potentially weaken the Partnership's ability to represent smaller builders and developers, a gap that has proven difficult to replace.

### 3.0 Mission

The original mission of the Skills Partnership, and its primacy in the context of its Fund Agreement with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) was to reduce skills gaps in the existing workforce<sup>1</sup>. Over time, that mission has transitioned into something much wider, particularly influenced by the Skills Partnership's early appetite for collaborating around sector attractiveness. In order to recruit the workforce required, home builders emphasised the need to find ways of engaging in joint activity to reposition the image of the home building industry as a career choice, promoting it as a positive place to work. This shift led to outputs, achieved by the Skills Partnership, never anticipated in 2016.

**Assessment:** What started as a funded project with a dominant training delivery mission, has grown into a partnership with wider ambitions for creating longer term change: *“to ensure that the home building industry can recruit and train the people necessary to deliver the supply of good quality new homes the country desperately needs.”*<sup>2</sup>



### 4.0 Reach and engagement

Home builders have engaged with the Skills Partnership in over 20 different ways since 2016 ranging from technical work, to participating in training activity, sector attractiveness campaigns and supply chain project engagement to supporting research and co-ordinated proposals. There have been different depths of engagement by home builders: - a core of 30 have invested heavily in Activity Groups; 70 signed the HBSP Pledge in 2017/18 and engaged to suit their business needs and interests in a mix of activities; whilst a wider group of at least 218 have invested the time of their staff to receive HBSP enabled training opportunities. Furthermore as at January 2020:

- Just under 7,000 individuals (6,948) had been trained as a result of the Skills Partnership.<sup>3</sup>
- A further 830 individuals received training/experience via two pilot projects managed by the HBSP since 2017.
- A further 1,715 individuals have received mental health first aid training separately organised by the HBSP.
- 875 individuals are expected to be recruited to home building by 2022 via a new HBSP project.

- Between 400 and 500 supply chain companies have received HBSP managed training (in site management and bricklaying) and 177 participated in the separately CITB-funded HBSP Supply Chain Collaboration Pilot.
- 34 colleges have engaged in the brickwork CPD opportunity for their tutors.
- Training has been delivered in hundreds of locations on sites, in formal training settings and in company premises from Inverness to Truro, Liverpool to Ipswich and South Shields to Carmarthen.
- 156 trained home building careers ambassadors have reached at least 2,300 young people at events.
- 12 million people have seen the 3 'Attract' campaigns since 2018.
- 67,000 users have clicked onto 142,000 [www.housebuildingcareers.org.uk](http://www.housebuildingcareers.org.uk) pages.
- There have been 6,183 page views of the skills frameworks section of the HBSP website.<sup>4</sup>

**Assessment:** The Skills Partnership has successfully engaged and maintained a core of 30 larger home builders to support its infrastructure since 2016. They have had the capacity and motivation to support the HBSP's ambitions through the deployment of their staff as subject matter experts across Activity Groups. Of the larger set of 70 Pledge Signatories, 66 (94%) have taken at least one direct training action as a consequence. Once the HBSP had products in place it had greater confidence to reach out to a wider set of home builders (including non-Pledge signatories) and supply chain companies; in turn reaching nearly 7,000 individuals with practical short duration training<sup>2</sup>. Sector attractiveness and communications activity has reached millions of individuals, however the conversion of that activity into higher sector favourability remains untested. 78% of (22) non-engaged home builders within the HBF membership reported in 2019 they had not heard of were unsure if they had heard of the Skills Partnership. Of those that had heard, they all felt the HBSP was relevant to their business, however, they lacked in-house resource to give time to it.

The CITB grant for the Skills Partnership was framed in a Fund Agreement that expected agreed activities and outputs to be achieved, and these were performance managed accordingly. There have been two agreed variations leading to the redeployment of the grant towards more training than originally planned. The HBSP Team and Board reports it would have liked to have engaged more mid-sized-, smaller developers and supply chain companies.

<sup>1</sup>The strategic priorities that the Project intends to align with are in order of priority: (1) reducing skills gaps (2) increasing access to the right training (3) increasing the value-add per employee (4) reducing skills shortages (5) increasing the appeal of working in construction.

## 5.0 Resources and Leverage

The Skills Partnership always had an ideal to sustain itself beyond December 2019. It set itself the objective of creating a long-term model for the Skills Partnership so that it can continue to support and develop the future workforce of the industry as skills needs evolve. Importantly, the Skills Partnership was enabled by 4 years of catalytic ‘Structured Fund’ resources and strategic and operational officer support from the CITB.

These resources combined with assets of larger home builders and other organisations, such as NHBC and Homes England, to provide momentum for technical work and collective measures to happen. The initial grant (£2.7m), still one of the five largest Structured Fund investments by CITB, was enough to create the infrastructure and to catalyse specified training outputs. The Skills Partnership would only realise its wider ambitions for ‘Attract’ and ‘Supply Chain Collaboration’, however, if it successfully leveraged further resources.

**Assessment:** CITB’s growing commissioning role has enabled the Skills Partnership to leverage further support aligned to its wider ambitions. Including industry co-investment the Skills Partnership has leveraged £10.3 million to the benefit of the sector (to 2022) that might not otherwise have been galvanised in this period. It has contributed to wider thinking around the need for an improved curriculum to meet the sector’s needs and has been sufficiently influential to be seen by the current Minister<sup>5</sup> as one of Government’s seven priorities (for CITB in England) for the next 12 months; and the expectation that there will be a ‘strengthening of the Skills Partnership with the Home Builders Federation; working closely with Homes England, the Federation of Master Builders, housing associations and small and medium-sized developers’.

## 6.0 Short term and medium term outcomes for home builders

Sample 18-20 home builders, November 2019

Engaged home builders were surveyed at the end of the evaluation period to ascertain the extent to which 16 possible outcomes had happened, and the contribution that the Skills Partnership had made to these outcomes.

The main changes that home builders said the Skills Partnership had made a significant or positive contribution to i.e. more than 40% contribution ascribed to the HBSP in ascending order were:

Outcome as a result of HBSP engagement	Significant contribution	A positive contribution	A minor contribution	No contribution
<b>Collaboration:</b> The way in which your business is more likely to collaborate with other home builders on tackling common workforce challenges	32%	53%	0%	16%
<b>Sector attractiveness:</b> the way in which you are able to make your business more appealing for people to choose (for their career)	11%	56%	33%	0%
<b>Influence:</b> the way in which you think your business’ needs have been represented to influence Government and other organisations to support its workforce needs (e.g. through access to funding, grant or other incentives)	11%	53%	37%	0%
<b>Development:</b> the way in which you have learned from others and been inspired / used it in your business’ approach	11%	37%	47%	5%
<b>Training:</b> the way in which you have been able to locate, access or actually put staff on contextualised training relevant to your business	11%	37%	42%	11%
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b> (of skills, training and recruitment challenges and solutions)	15%	30%	50%	5%

Other benefits where a positive contribution had been reported as a result of the HBSP included: their ability to invest in and demonstrate a more professional, fully trained workforce (39%); attracting and recruiting from diverse pools of talent (37%); making decisions about which people and what training to invest in (i.e. the critical roles) (34%); business reputation and public identity (32%); reduced costs e.g. of recruitment or training (27%); reducing skills gaps by accessing relevant training that fills the ‘holes’ in their knowledge and competence (26%); improving the quality of home building through training and development (17%); reducing skills shortages (16%); sharing risk with and investing in the supply chain (11%); improving productivity (5%).

Another way of measuring outcomes has been to investigate whether home builders that signed the HBSP Pledge in October 2017 have changed their behaviours since that time. Two years on, the evaluation finds that more activity is being reported against the 5 areas covered by the Pledge by between three-fifths and four-fifths of engaged home builders; and that between a quarter and a third of home builders say that the way in which they do some of this Pledge activity has also changed suggesting the HBSP has been influencing behaviours in some home builder organisations.



Have you increased the amount or changed the way in which you have delivered Pledge activities listed below in the last 12 months compared to previously in your business? (sample: 19 to 23 home builders)

Yes, changed approach    Yes, increased activity

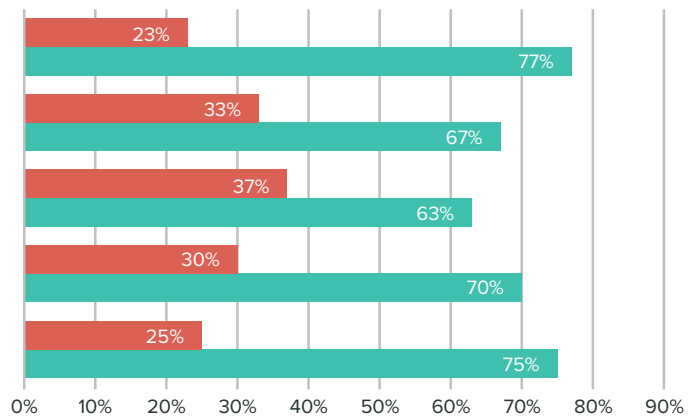
**Pledge 5.** Promoting careers in home building

**Pledge 4.** Championing diversity and inclusion (e.g. recruiting a more diverse workforce)

**Pledge 3.** Training all recruits to the industry standards being developed and actively supporting your subcontractors to do the...

**Pledge 2.** Training and qualifying your workforce to a recognised standard

**Pledge 1.** Collaborating and sharing best practice about skills, recruitment and sector attraction to improve quality and productivity



**Assessment:** Highly competitive home builders are now routinely collaborating on a range of skills, training and sector attractiveness initiatives. On average they have engaged in 7 different ways with the Skills Partnership depending on their business needs. HBSP has enabled 1 in 4 to feel that its activities has made a positive contribution to helping them reduce existing workforce gaps through training; and 1 in 7 feel it has contributed towards them addressing skills shortages. Contributions are recorded for most of the 16 intended outcomes tested. The outcomes where the Skills Partnership has had less direct contribution include productivity gains, supply chain shared risk/investment cultures and influencing the way in which home builders make decisions about how to use their own assets to invest in workforce training more generally. That said, 4 in 5 home builders say they are investing more in training and development of their workforce in 2019 compared to 2018; and navigating the changing landscape of skills and training (including CITB reform) meantime has become easier in 2019 compared to 2018.

## 7.0 Impact

In order to assess impact it is necessary to understand what might have happened in the absence of the Skills Partnership; and also to explore what kind of outcomes and effects directly attributable to its activities might endure in future. Research with an equal number of home builders that have engaged with the HBSP and those who have not engaged since 2016 finds that there are some notable differences between the severity of challenges they face with their workforce; and the way they have sought to overcome them. Home builders that have been engaged report that 'training' and 'attraction' challenges have decreased whilst the non-engaged home builders report that they have increased in the period. Approaches to tackling challenges by engaged home builders are more developmental and less transactional than their non-engaged peers.

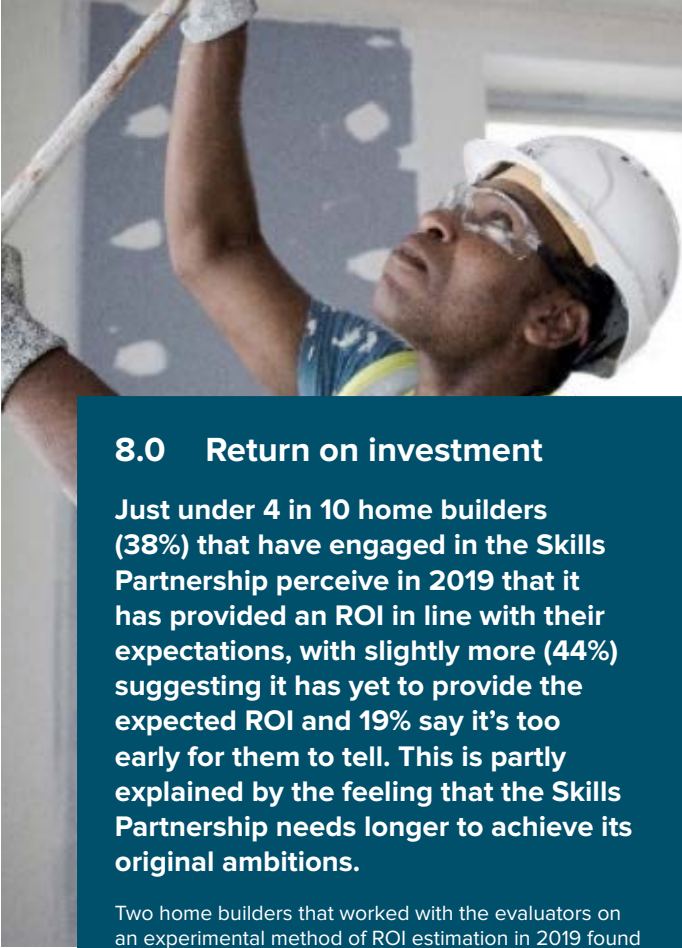
Engaged home builders and Leadership Board members – including strategic organisations – meantime assessed qualitatively what would have happened in the absence of the HBSP and there is consensus that the sector would not have organised itself to focus on common workforce challenges as well as it has been able to; nor would they have invested collaboratively, as they have proven to do so via the workstreams. Instead, most feel that the sector would not have progressed its ability to work together nor turn expansive ideas into focused action. Moreover, in light of CITB's significant reforms and maturing commissioning role, the sector would

not have been ready to be able to come forward with collective proposals. An alternative picture was painted if the HBSP had not existed, which suggested large home builders would have worked in greater isolation from one another, and that poaching and wage inflation could have been higher still.

There is correlation between the activities the HBSP has provided and the effects reported by those home builders that have used them in terms of training and developing staff or feeling more confident to make their business more appealing for people to choose as a career. The strongest evidence of positive gains from training comes via follow up research with Assistant/Site Managers who received pilot training modules; and from sampled research with individuals attending a bricklaying masterclass. There have been gains in confidence, commitment, technical competence, soft skills and more positive attitudes and behaviours on sites as a consequence.

Impacts on other stakeholders are limited. The Leadership Board feel that there has not been any radical change within the college market yet, despite efforts to raise the HBSP's profile at key conferences and meetings. More work will be required to encourage greater awareness and usage of the skills frameworks that have been devised by the HBSP for 12 critical roles in the sector. To create impact HBSP will need more proactive, relational marketing with a clear proposition for organisations who could reach a greater number of supply chain companies via their memberships and training providers (colleges, independent private providers and universities) in localities.

**Assessment:** Of the benefits described by 15 engaged home builders in 2019, two thirds (67%) have been additional i.e. they would not have happened at all (7%), as effectively (7%) or as quickly (53%) in the absence of the HBSP; whilst 33% of the benefits were defined as 'deadweight' i.e. they would likely have happened anyway and / or HBSP was only a small contributor compared to larger factors that brought about change. These results suggest that the main effect of being engaged in the HBSP has been to accelerate or bring forward multiple, varied benefits for home builders. Sampled evidence from Assistant/Site Managers and Bricklayers trained through the Skills Partnership suggest positive benefits too in order to improve their competence / reduce their skills and knowledge gaps; increase their confidence, commitment and attitudes and behaviours on site. One home builder also reports that A/SMs trained via the HBSP stay longer than A/SMs that have traditionally not been trained to the same extent deriving financial benefits from avoided re-recruitment costs of £7,500 per hire.

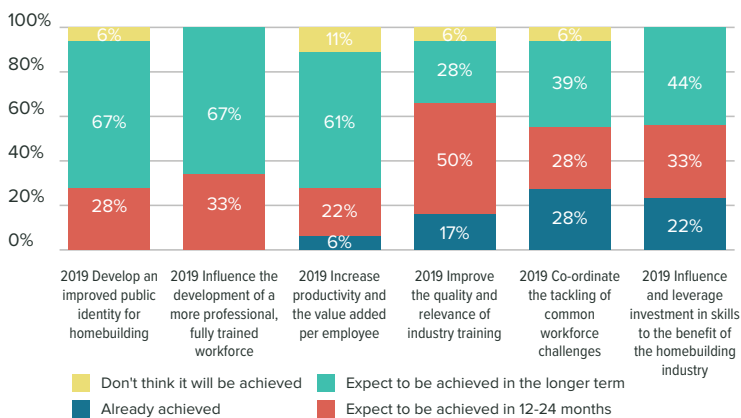


## 8.0 Return on investment

**Just under 4 in 10 home builders (38%) that have engaged in the Skills Partnership perceive in 2019 that it has provided an ROI in line with their expectations, with slightly more (44%) suggesting it has yet to provide the expected ROI and 19% say it's too early for them to tell. This is partly explained by the feeling that the Skills Partnership needs longer to achieve its original ambitions.**

Two home builders that worked with the evaluators on an experimental method of ROI estimation in 2019 found that for every £1 of time they had invested in HBSP since 2016, they received a positive return of between £1.72 and £2.36 suggesting that they received value from sustained engagement.

HBSP achievements against original ambitions



**Assessment:** By 2022, the HBSP is expected to satisfy the expectations of at least 50% of engaged members in respect of three of the original ambitions - co-ordinating the tackling of common workforce challenges (56%), improving the quality and relevance of industry training (67%) and influencing and leveraging investment in skills to the benefit of the home building sector (55%). The remaining three ambitions will not likely be achieved by 2022 and may require reframing so as to be more achievable for the Skills Partnership as it transitions into its next phase.

## 9.0 Learning lessons

The full evaluation report provides detailed learning lessons for each aspect of the Skills Partnership's workstreams, as well as a summary of achievements, frustrations and innovations. They relate to:

- The appropriate deployment of resources (too much, just enough, too little) in different circumstances
- The skill in sustaining expert contributions by people who must justify their time on HBSP to others
- The difficulty in achieving company-wide awareness and buy-in for HBSP amongst large home builders
- The need to build trust through different forms of engagement and participatory activity over time
- The different levels of commitment that home builders can give towards short-term tangible training activities compared to longer-term cultural or behavioural change activities
- The need to avoid duplication of effort with other wider sector campaigns, integrating wherever possible
- The need for a skilful, dedicated HBSP Team able to manage existing and new stakeholder relationships
- The need to have a strategic mind-set, but action-oriented persona to sustain HBSP engagement
- The potential of the HBSP to be a powerful pressure or advocacy group through its collaborative culture
- The challenge of engaging medium and smaller developers and supply chain companies
- The challenge of activating the HBSP at regional / devolved / local levels
- There have also been lessons at three distinct phases of the HBSP's chronology that others in the wider construction sector could usefully learn from when considering sector partnership working:

### Development phase (years 1-2)

- The importance of taking time to build understanding and trust rather than deliver activity prematurely.
- The need to create strong governance foundations with clear leadership and ownership.
- The challenge of creating multiple ways for different stakeholders to engage to build critical mass.

### Delivery (years 2-3)

- The importance of having clear, simple accessible solutions that resonate with the intended audience.
- The need to have reliable delivery partners who buy-in to the wider strategic ambitions of the Skills Partnership.
- The challenge of ensuring there are adequate routes and channels to reach the intended markets.

### Evolution (continuous)

- The importance of having a flexible main funder willing to redirect resources responsive to new insight
- The need to show courage when negotiating changes to service delivery when necessary.
- The challenge of planning for the future whilst delivering activity effectively to agreed milestones.

## 10.0 Sustainability of the Skills Partnership

The Skills Partnership has agreed to continue its work beyond the CITB Structured Fund period. This is a significant achievement as it means that the Skills Partnership has become 'more than a funded project'. The Skills Partnership has become a department of HBF. The HBSP Team will continue to be employed and provide important continuity in 2020 and 2021. This responds to the evaluation survey results in 2019 where 100% of engaged home builders feel it is very (52%) / important (48%) that HBSP continues in future. Its suggested focus on career attraction, skills and supply chain engagement and diversity and inclusion and wellbeing marries quite well with sector expectations. Survey work in late 2019 by the evaluators also found a strong appetite to ensure the HBSP helps the sector with multi skills (76% reporting this to be very / important); and digital skills (88% very / important). Given the wider trend that it is also more of a serious challenge to train people in new things and approaches this theme needs to be embedded across all planned workstreams to respond to these findings. Longer term, the HBSP needs to be certain that the aggregation of its effort can clearly contribute to the performance of the sector in respect of quality and productivity.

**Assessment:** The Skills Partnership has secured sufficient support to continue beyond 2019, but it will need to become even more skilful and adept in the next 18 months to develop a clear income model that comprises a mix of revenue generation and grant in order to cement its long term presence for the sector's benefit. Leveraging its know-how, the skills frameworks, virtual card developments and ability to test the demand for, then create the conditions for training across the critical roles will be success factors. Subcontractor engagement and quality is still the single biggest workforce challenge in 2016 and 2019 for the sector, and it will need significant, additional effort by multiple partners including Government to more thoroughly address this challenge. The evaluators have co-designed a suggested 'HBSP Roadmap' that could help the Skills Partnership take practical next steps via its new governance arrangements whilst also making sufficient time to galvanise the assets of existing and new stakeholders in future.

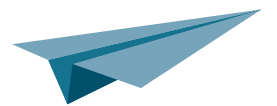
The impact of the Covid-19 crisis will also need to be factored in to future work. In addition to the challenge of developing new ways of working safely, the crisis potentially creates an opportunity to work more closely with the subcontractor supply chain on improved practice and competence. It may also help drive moves to new technologies and digitalisation. The HBSP should engage with the industry to understand new needs and how it can contribute to meeting these.

## 11.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Progress has been made towards the 7 strategic outcomes (see full report) especially in respect of helping to reduce skills gaps for two of the critical roles in the sector. The key outcomes of the HBSP have been twofold: catalysing training activity; and encouraging a maturity in collaborative working – neither of which would have happened to the same extent in the absence of the Skills Partnership. Much longer will be needed to achieve wide-spread cultural and behavioural change. The evaluators make three key recommendations to the Home Building Skills Partnership.

1. Develop and agree a transition plan until July 2022 including output, outcome and impact measures and revenue plan for delivering activities that are not yet considered to be 'business as usual'.
2. Consolidate delivery of projects already underway (brickwork masterclass and Pathways to Construction), whilst embedding and valorising key products including the skills frameworks.
3. Create the conditions and co-ordinate a Home Building Sector Workforce Development Strategy 2022-2027 to contribute to the Government's wish to see the industry develop the skills it needs to meet its ambition to build 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s. This will see the HBSP activated locally as well as nationally contributing to longer-term quality and productivity outcomes in the sector.

These recommendations will need to be considered of course in light of the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the industry and wider economy. HBSP should also look at the opportunities that the new ways of working and engaging subcontractors in the post-COVID-19 world may provide for promoting better as well as safe outcomes.



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