



Construction Work Tasters Project (2022-2025)

Final Report

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SUMMARY

The Construction Work Tasters project (2022–2025), funded by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), aimed to address Scotland's critical construction skills shortages by introducing young people aged 16 to 25 years old to consider careers in the sector through Work Tasters sessions. The Work Tasters provided structured, practical experience of careers in construction for students by bridging the gap between education and employment through employer led hands-on activities. The project, managed by Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Scotland, successfully delivered over 2,800 students Work Taster sessions. This was in collaboration with approximately one hundred construction businesses ranging from SMEs to major contractors, many of which reported that the sessions were valuable for their own talent pipelines and community engagement.

The project had a positive impact on the young people participants, with post Work Taster feedback surveys indicating a notable improvement in their understanding of construction jobs, career pathways, and the skills required. Reported interest in pursuing a career in construction also increased after Work Taster participation and around 95% of participant respondents rated the Work Tasters experience as 'good' or 'excellent'. One of the key aims of the project was inclusivity, with efforts made to engage diverse groups that may have had little or no prior exposure to the opportunities the construction industry can offer.

Although the project was a success, a number of challenges and barriers were identified. Achieving the targeted participant diversity proved to be challenging, with the majority of the young people involved being male high school students, with females and older young people – such as non-high school participants – underrepresented. Other logistical barriers included compliance with on-site safety standards which limited the sessions that could be held by employers. Capturing the participant feedback, to measure the outcome and success of the sessions, also proved difficult, although changes to the structure of the Work Tasters to ensure this was captured from participants before the end did increase the number of responses in the sessions.

Engaging employers and schools also proved difficult, as initial interest often did not translate into active participation due to constraints like transport costs, time, staffing, and school exam timetabling priorities. This was mitigated to some extent by DYW coordinators offering administrative support to employers and schools.

Each obstacle encountered informed recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Work Taster programme based on feedback from schools, employers, Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) staff and young people participants. These were split into recommendations for employers, educators, and policymakers and funders summarised below.

For employers:

- Employers are encouraged to use resources provided by DYW staff to minimise the burden of organising tasters, and they should ensure that PPE requirements are in place before the sessions start.
- Employers should embrace flexible formats, such as shorter or partial-day engagements, if they cannot commit to a full day session to make their wider participation more feasible. Employers, such as SMEs, are also encouraged to collaborate and pool resources with other companies to lower the burden of hosting Work Tasters.
- Employers should ensure the individuals delivering the Work Tasters have the correct skill. This could involve designating a 'Youth Engagement Champion' within a company who has the training to effectively engage young people.
- Employers that have run successful Work Tasters should be encouraged to share their approaches with other companies.
- Work Tasters should be linked to employer recruitment pipelines by offering follow-up opportunities for participants as this would further enhance their impact.
- Employers should also try to use Work Tasters to showcase, as far as possible, the diversity of the construction industry.

For educators:

- Educators play a vital role in the success of such initiatives. Incorporating tasters into school curriculum planning and securing senior management support are key to ensuring Work Tasters go ahead as planned.
- Educators should recognise the value of Work Tasters to students, and not treat them as 'nice-to-haves'.

- Educators should ensure that a thoughtful selection of students are chosen for Work Tasters, focusing on diversity and those with genuine interest. Work Taster hosts should also be made aware of any accommodations attending students may require.
- To maximise the learning impact of Work Tasters, schools should provide pre-session briefings to students, detailing what they should expect and how to behave, as well as encouraging post-session reflections from participants.
- Educators should treat the completion of participant feedback forms as an essential part of the Work Taster sessions.
- Schools that have successfully taken part in Work Tasters, and understand their benefits, should be connected with schools that have shown a reluctance to get involved in order to share positive experiences and to build enthusiasm.

Policy-makers:

- Work Tasters should be embedded into community benefit clauses and national skills frameworks is recommended to ensure long-term sustainability and nationwide roll-out of work tasters.
- Funding should be increased to address issues like transport barriers with a travel grant, and cultural change should be promoted by highlighting to schools and companies the importance of employer-led activities like Work Tasters.
- Finally, monitoring the long-term outcomes of Work Taster participants is essential to measuring their long term success of increasing the number and diversity of young people entering the construction industry or entering further construction related training.

The Construction Work Tasters project demonstrated its potential to address skills shortages and inspire young people to consider construction careers. While challenges remain, the pilot project has shown the benefits that Work Tasters can bring to young people and the construction industry of the future. Continued collaboration among employers, educators, and policy-makers will be critical to ensuring that Work Tasters become an integral part of Scotland's youth employment and skills strategies, fostering long-term transformation in the construction sector and beyond.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Construction Work Tasters project is a three-year initiative (from 2022 to 2025) in Scotland funded by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to address skill shortages by inspiring new entrants into construction careers. The project's core objective was to deliver at least 2,800 high-quality Work Taster experiences to young people aged 16 to 25 across all 32 Scottish local authorities by 2025. Work Tasters are defined by CITB as short, focused insights into a construction working environment – whether on a site, at a training facility, or virtually – that allow individuals to gather information and experience without the commitment of full work experience. These tasters are intended to bridge the gap between education and industry, providing an engaging, aspirational introduction to construction that can help young people make informed career choices. Work Tasters are distinct from traditional work experience, which typically involves longer-term participation (of varying duration, but typically a minimum of one full day or more) in work and skill-building activities.

1.1. IMPORTANCE OF WORK TASTERS

In the context of Scotland's policy landscape, Work Tasters support the nation's youth employment and skills strategies. Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) emphasises linking education with employers to better prepare young people for the world of work.

Employers are in a unique position to help give young people the inspiration, knowledge, skills, and motivation they need to transition successfully from education to the workplace. Education Working for All¹ ()

Likewise, the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) seeks to connect every 16 to 24 year-olds to an opportunity in education, training, or employment. By offering meaningful, short-term exposure to real working environments, construction Work Tasters serve as a practical tool to fulfil these policy aims, helping young people (especially those with no family connection to construction) to explore the industry and consider it as an attractive career path. The project was also conceived against a backdrop of critical skills shortages in construction – CITB's labour market analysis indicates that Scotland has been under-recruiting by about 5,220 construction workers each year², leading to a projected shortfall of around 26,000 new entrants over five years if not addressed³

Work Tasters help tackle this gap by informing and motivating a broader and more diverse range of young people about the construction industry. As a follow-up to the work tasters the number of participating young people that enter construction will be recorded, thereby contributing to future workforce development. Notably, an Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape in Scotland, led by James Withers and reported in June 2023, echoed the need for more work-based learning opportunities across sectors. This high-level policy review recommended significant changes to how skills and training are coordinated nationally; importantly, the review explicitly called for expanding work experience and taster opportunities to strengthen the talent pipeline⁴.

CITB have identified a projected shortfall of 26,000 new entrant workers into the construction industry by 2028

1.2. PROJECT OVERVIEW AND APPROACH

The CITB Construction Work Tasters project has been led by Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Scotland in collaboration with industry and education partners. A Project Manager was appointed in June 2022 to drive the initiative. In the first year, the focus was on planning and stakeholder engagement: a steering group of key influencers across construction, education, and social value sectors was established, and meetings were held with over 100 stakeholders (employers, educators, third-sector partners, and government) to introduce and co-design the programme. A one-page summary of the programme was distributed to over 1,600 stakeholders nationwide to raise awareness. Five local authority areas were identified for pilot activities, with several construction employers volunteering to host the first tasters.

The project emphasised a co-creative approach – for example, focus groups with young people were conducted early in the project to gather young people's input on designing effective tasters. Resources to facilitate Work

¹ [Education working for all: developing Scotland's young workforce](#)

² [Focusing on the skills construction needs](#)

³ [CSN Industry Outlook - 2024-2028 - CITB](#)

⁴ [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation](#)

Tasters were developed, including participant registration and feedback forms, brand guidelines and marketing materials, and a Work Taster Session Toolkit for employers (with guides and example itineraries). Notably, an online hub⁵ was launched to publicise opportunities and streamline matchmaking – employers can post upcoming tasters and young people or educators can sign up directly via the website. This infrastructure aimed to ensure accessibility to opportunities, in line with the project’s mandate to cover all regions and reach isolated communities as per Scottish Government inclusion guidelines. CITB’s ‘Go Construct’ website is being explored as a platform to sustainably continue this feature moving forward.

1.3. REPORT OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

This report presents the findings, lessons, and recommendations from the Construction Work Tasters project, grounded in evidence from quarterly monitoring reports, stakeholder meeting minutes, and interim evaluations. We draw on insights gathered from employers who have hosted tasters, DYW regional coordinators facilitating school engagement, and feedback from young participants where available. Throughout the report, references are made to relevant Scottish skills and education policies to ensure the findings and recommendations are framed in the current policy context.

The structure of the report is as follows:

- an understanding of the Work Tasters model and best practice in Section 1;
- the challenges encountered in delivering Work Tasters in Section 3;
- the influence of the broader skills landscape on employer engagement in Section 4;
- an evaluation of the target age group’s suitability in Section 5;
- the key findings of the project and future considerations in Section 7; and
- detailed recommendations for employers, educators, and policymakers in Section 8.

2. UNDERSTANDING WORK TASTERS: PURPOSE AND BEST PRACTICE

2.1. DEFINING WORK TASTERS

Within this project, a Construction Work Taster is a short-duration, structured experience of a construction working environment, designed to give a young person a meaningful insight into the industry. It can take various forms such as:

- a site visit;
- a hands-on workshop;
- a “day in the life” observation;
- a virtual session using simulation;

Work Tasters differ from traditional work experience placements by being shorter and more focused. For example, a Work Taster might be a half-day visit to an active construction site where participants tour the site, meet workers, try a basic trade skill under supervision, and learn about career paths. This contrasts with traditional work experience, which CITB defines as a longer engagement (typically a week or more) where a young person actively participates in work tasks and gains hands-on skills over time.

Work Tasters fill an important niche as they are more substantial than a brief career talk, but less committing (for both employer and young person) than a full internship or apprenticeship trial. The purpose of Work Tasters is to spark interest and inform career choices – they aim to positively promote construction as an aspirational career path in an engaging way, helping individuals make informed decisions about whether to pursue further training or roles in the sector. By lowering the barrier to entry (in terms of time, prerequisites, and formality), Work Tasters appeal to a broader range of young people, including those who may not have considered construction before or lack personal connections to the industry.

⁵ [Home - Construction Work Tasters](#)

2.2. PROGRESS TO DATE

At the end of its initially planned three-year phase, the project has made significant strides in delivering Work Tasters yet has underspent sufficiently to extend the project to the end of 2025. Although timelines shifted slightly from initial plans, the official launch was moved to March 2023, and activity ramped up thereafter. By Year 2, the project moved from pilot phase to full delivery. The initiative delivered 2,931 Work Taster experiences, surpassing the CITB target of 2,800 tasters by June 2025, with a substantial acceleration in Years 2 and 3 after the groundwork laid in Year 1.

The project has delivered 2,841 work taster experiences as of the 31 March 2025

On average there were 16 participant young people per Work Taster across the whole pilot project. Figure 1 shows the number of Work Tasters delivered each month and Figure 2 shows the target and actual number of participant young people in Work Tasters from November 2022 to the end of March 2025.

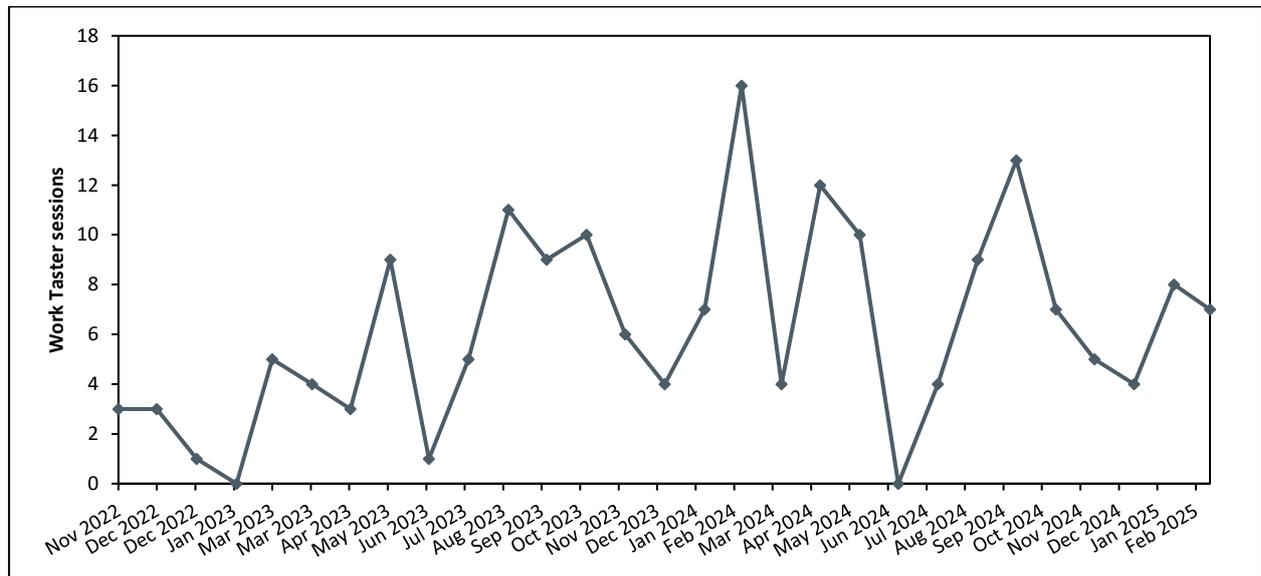


Figure 1 - Number of Work Taster sessions.

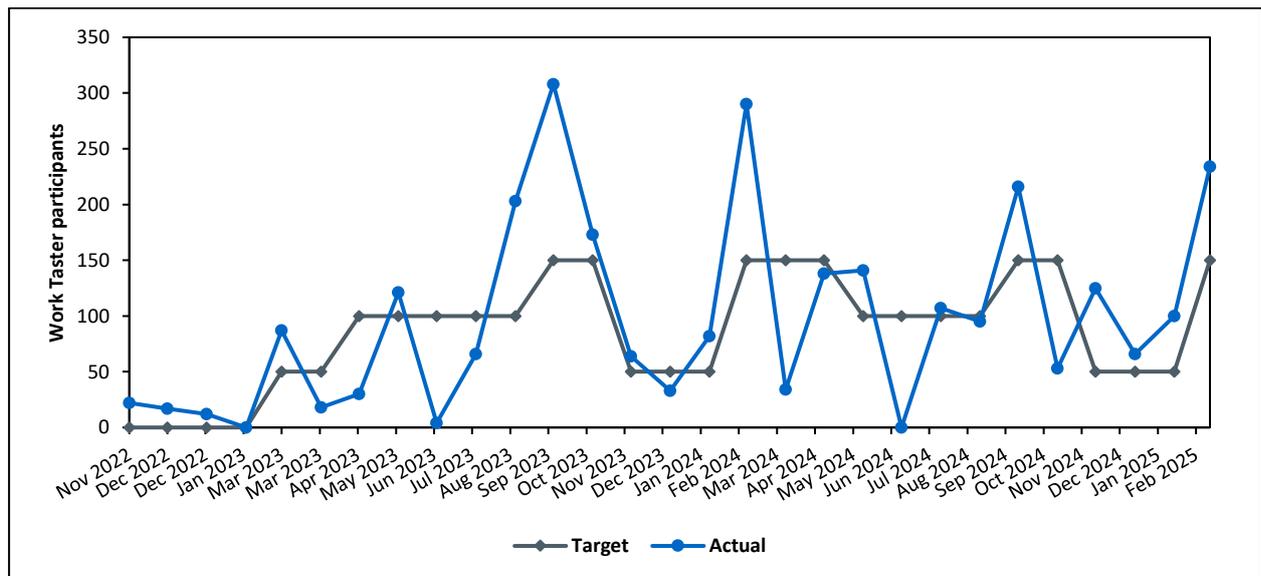


Figure 2 - Number of Work Taster participants.

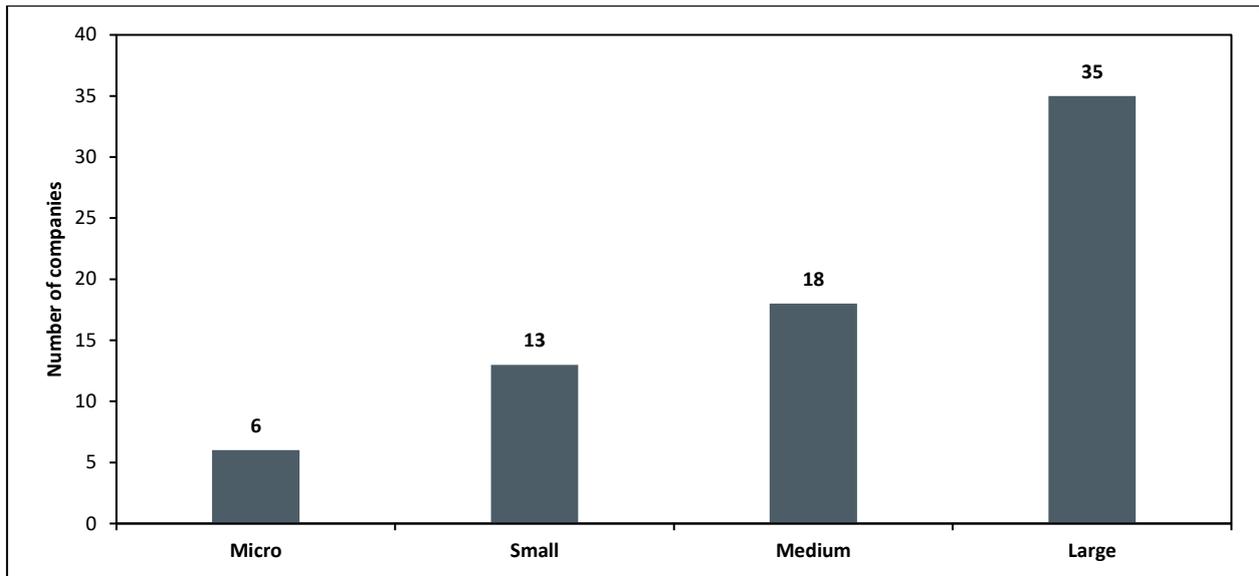


Figure 3 - Size of companies that delivered at least one Work Taster⁶

Participation and reach expanded significantly: all Scottish regions have hosted tasters, and dozens of industry partners have been involved. Importantly, this growth was achieved while maintaining quality control through the toolkit⁷ and stakeholder training. The momentum built in the second half of the project demonstrates the viability of scaling Work Tasters as a model.

2.3. KEY COMPONENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY WORK TASTERS

Through consultations with employers, educators, and young people, the project identified what makes a Work Taster effective. The core components of best practice that emerged are covered in the following sections.

Clear learning objectives

Effective tasters are not ad-hoc site visits but planned experiences with clear goals, introducing participants to a variety of roles (professional and trade) aiming to dispel myths about construction work (e.g. the notion that it is “dirty” or strictly male-only). As part of this project, an Employer Work Taster Toolkit⁷ was developed, providing sample itineraries and activity checklists to help employers design purposeful sessions.

For example, a taster session plan might include:

- an induction and safety briefing;
- a tour of the workplace (site or workshop);
- interactive tasks or demonstrations; and
- a Q&A or reflection activity at the end.

Employers found that having an itinerary or session plan helped ensure the taster was informative and impactful.

⁶ The number of companies that delivered at least one Work Taster during the pilot project is shown in Figure 3 by company size where:

- Micro is 2 to 9 employees
- Small is 10 to 49 employees
- Medium 50 to 249 employees
- Large 250 or more employees

⁷ [Construction Work Tasters - Employers guide](#)

Preparation and safety compliance

In the construction environment, safety and preparation are paramount. Best practice tasters include a proper induction for participants (covering health & safety protocols and expected behaviour) and provision of any necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) in advance. By meeting all site compliance requirements (risk assessments, parental consents where required, etc.), the taster not only runs smoothly but also demonstrates to young people the professionalism and safety consciousness of modern construction.

Best practice work tasters include a proper induction for participants and provision of any necessary PPE in advance.

Engaging, hands-on activities

The project's consultation with young people found they want tasters to be *“practical and not classroom based”* and to include fun, hands-on activities (Youth Focus Group, 2023). This was echoed by post-session feedback from young participants, which consistently shows that interactive elements make a taster memorable.

High-quality tasters go beyond just a site tour or presentation – they involve the young people in some form of active participation. This could include trying a basic trade skill, such as bricklaying a small wall under supervision, operating a piece of equipment via a virtual reality simulator, or participating in a team challenge such as building a small structure from provided materials.

Young people want work tasters to be *“practical and not classroom based”* and to include fun, hands-on activities.

For instance, at a large-scale taster event hosted by SCAPE Scotland, participants rotated through practical workshops covering six different construction skill areas, giving them a taste of each. Such variety kept students engaged and allowed them to discover aspects of construction they might not have known about. Employers noted that even simple tasks – like a mock design activity or a problem-solving game – can energise a session and leave a stronger impression than passive observation alone.

Involvement of knowledgeable, relatable personnel

A distinguishing feature of effective tasters is the presence of enthusiastic staff who can connect with young people. Having the right people deliver the experience is key – for example, current apprentices or recent graduates who can relate to the participants, or engaging mentors who genuinely enjoy interacting with young people. Not all technical staff have the skills to engage with young people (we discuss this challenge in Section 3), so best practice is for companies to brief all staff involved on how to interact with the audience – ensuring they use plain language (avoiding jargon), encourage questions, and share personal career stories. It is also desirable for staff members to receive appropriate training, guidance and feedback if they're working with young people. Guides and toolkits should also be used to support staff to deliver consistent, high-quality experiences for young people.

During the project, some employers reported success by involving their young apprentices in hosting; the apprentices could explain trade careers in relatable terms, creating a near-peer influence that resonated with participants. Focus group input reinforced this approach: young people said a session should be led by *“someone who makes you feel comfortable, someone approachable... firm but fair”* and ideally by someone close to their age for relatability. In short, the people delivering the taster need both subject knowledge and the ability to inspire. When enthusiastic role models are present, the experience is far more impactful.

Having the right people deliver the experience is key.

Reflection and feedback

A critical component often overlooked is giving participants a chance to reflect on and provide feedback about the taster. High-quality tasters dedicate time at the end for a debrief – asking young people what they learned, what

surprised them, and addressing any questions. This helps reinforce their learning and gives hosts immediate insight into what aspects worked well.

The project provided a standard feedback form for participants to complete, ideally on-site before leaving. While getting these forms returned proved challenging at times (see Section 3.1), the principle remains that a structured reflection (even a short group discussion or a fun quiz) is part of best practice. Moreover, the project introduced a post-event follow-up: starting in mid-2023, every participant who completed the feedback form received a personalised follow-up email with additional career resources and signposting to next steps (such as relevant college courses or apprenticeship information). This follow-up aimed to extend the impact of the taster beyond the day itself, reinforcing the message that construction welcomes them and providing concrete guidance on how to take their interest further.

Structured participant reflection is part of best practice.

2.4. SUMMARY

By incorporating these elements – clear objectives, thorough preparation, engaging activities, relatable presenters, and reflection – Work Tasters can maximise their effectiveness. The practices above were continually refined through pilot feedback. Notably, the focus group consultations with young people early in the project validated many of these best practices and generated creative ideas (such as using VR and providing certificates or tangible takeaways) that were used to enhance the taster model.

The next section discusses the practical and engagement challenges encountered when putting these best practices into action at scale.

3. CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING WORK TASTERS

Implementing Work Tasters at the scale and ambition of this project has revealed a range of challenges. These can be broadly grouped into:

- Structural and Logistical Barriers – the practical issues of setting up and running tasters; and
- Engagement Challenges – the difficulties in securing and sustaining the commitment of participants and partners.

Understanding these challenges is essential to contextualise the project’s results and to formulate solutions for the future.

3.1. STRUCTURAL AND LOGISTICAL BARRIERS

Delivering construction Work Tasters involves many practical considerations. The structural or logistical challenges identified from the outset and experienced during the pilot phase are detailed in the following sections.

Site safety and compliance

Construction sites have strict safety regulations, which can make hosting young visitors difficult. Many sites require visitors (especially school groups) to meet certain criteria – for example, being at least 16 years old, wearing full PPE, and being supervised at a low student-to-staff ratio. Ensuring compliance added complexity to organising tasters.

In some cases, risk assessments determined that certain high-risk sites (e.g. those with heavy civil engineering works or demolition in progress) were not suitable for visits at all. The project navigated this by selecting sites and activities carefully. Nonetheless, this could limit opportunities, with site safety and compliance requirements noted as a key barrier that could constrain which employers or sites could participate. Despite thorough safety planning, the inherent risk-averse nature of construction meant some companies were hesitant to open active sites to young people. This is highlighted by a response from a contractor in the process of arranging a Work Taster:

Construction sites and work taster activities must be selected carefully.

“I have caught up with the project team again and we are not able to put on the work taster that we want in September. It is mainly due to lack of trades on site at the moment. We mainly have ground works and a few other that are high risk so they couldn’t take part in any activities.”

Tier one contractor

Availability of staff to supervise and mentor

A recurring logistical hurdle was securing sufficient staff time from both the employer and the school/college to facilitate the Work Taster. For any given session, employers needed to allocate personnel to plan and run activities (often taking them off their regular duties), and schools needed to send teaching or support staff to accompany students. Several pilot Work Tasters had to be cancelled or rescheduled due to last-minute staffing issues.

In late 2022, two planned pilot sessions were cancelled at short notice due to a lack of school staff available to accompany the groups. In one case, the teacher who was to take the students fell ill and the school could not find a replacement supervisor in time; as a result, the employer – who had already prepared the site for the visit – had to stand down. This not only caused inconvenience but risked discouraging the employer from future participation.

On the employer side, many mentioned that freeing up skilled staff to run tasters was hard during busy periods. If a site manager or tradesperson is already stretched thin, taking a half-day for a taster feels costly. These issues are highlighted by the following feedback from contractors:

Securing staff availability, both in schools and companies, was a limiting factor.

“I have bad news. The change of date for this one [Work Taster] has caused some issues. I have struggled to get enough people to support for the taster day. The few that I did have all had to pull out for business reasons. I have currently only got a QS.”

Tier one contractor

“I am going to have to cancel [the Work Taster]. I am really sorry. I have been trying to sort this for weeks and it’s not worked out.”

Tier one contractor

“I am hesitant to put another date in for this [Work Taster] due to the school timetable. June may be an option.”

Tier one contractor

“... I have copied you in as the high school have agreed to a couple of [Work] Taster days. I am trying to lock down the dates but they may be after the Summer.”

Tier one Contractor

This is exacerbated in smaller companies where one person might wear multiple hats – if that person is out hosting students, a job might get delayed. In some instances, employers have been reluctant to engage in activities like Work Tasters or to recruit new entrants. Many commented that the time and financial investment in new staff can feel wasted when those staff are poached by companies that will offer higher wages.

Scheduling and the school curriculum

Timing of Work Tasters proved to be a delicate issue. Schools have dense timetables and key periods (exams, prelims, coursework deadlines) when releasing students is difficult. Scheduling conflicts with the Scottish curriculum are a structural barrier to work-based learning activities. During the winter exam prelim season (roughly November to January), the project saw a dip in school engagement – this time of year is a known challenge for engaging with young people in education due to an overall focus on prelims. Many schools were reluctant to let senior students (S5/S6, typically 16 to 18 year-olds) out of class for a half-day visit, especially from January onwards as exams loom.

The project had to work around the academic calendar, clustering tasters in early autumn and spring and avoiding critical exam periods. The lesson learned is that Work Tasters need flexible scheduling and perhaps a policy nudge to allow excused absences for such career learning activities. Without high-level support, educators often face pressure to prioritise classroom time over external visits, no matter how beneficial the latter might be. In essence,

a cultural shift is needed so that Developing the Young Workforce activities like these are not seen as low-priority extras but as integral to a young person's education. When looking specifically at the construction sector, winter can often be a quieter time of year for companies. However, this is the time of year when prelims take place for senior phase pupils, which compounds the issues around aligning school timetables with employer-led activities like Work Tasters. These are highlighted by feedback from a tier one contractor and DYW coordinator:

"With the project nearing completion, I still have a few requests from the high school and other local schools to fulfil. At the moment I won't be able to support these requests. If we get closer to December or January it may be something we can do. Please touch base in a few months."

Tier one contractor

"The challenge with [the high school] is also that they don't allow any senior phase pupils to be out of timetabled classes from January through May each year. This is school policy and is strictly administered."

DYW coordinator

We recommend that schools and colleges formally embed Work Tasters (and similar employer engagement) into their curriculum and annual planning. This proactive approach ensures tasters are not ad-hoc but expected. For example:

- High schools could decide that every student in S5 will attend at least one Work Taster or workplace visit in the year, and schedule accordingly.
- Colleges offering construction courses might incorporate tasters with industry employers as part of career development modules.
- Local authorities could include Work Taster participation as a metric in their school progress reports or even tie it to school evaluation frameworks. If a school knows that it is expected to facilitate, say, 30 pupil tasters a year, they will plan resources for it (just as they plan for work experience week or careers fairs).

Coordinators should map out potential taster slots at the start of the academic year, taking into account exam periods to avoid, etc., and then work with DYW colleagues and employers to fill those slots. By normalising tasters as part of the education calendar, issues like teacher cover and transport can be anticipated and budgeted for. Some regions have begun doing this – for instance, one council added Work Tasters into its DYW Plan – and we encourage all education partners to follow suit. When tasters are seen as integral, the likelihood of last-minute cancellations or low priority treatment diminishes.

Education authorities should explicitly recognise the value of work tasters in the curriculum so that schools feel confident prioritising them.

Transport and geographic barriers

Getting young people to the taster location safely and on time was a non-trivial challenge, particularly in rural areas or for inter-region events. Many schools do not have a budget for transport beyond local trips; hiring a bus or paying train fares can be a significant barrier. Several stakeholders highlighted transportation as an impediment, highlighted by the quotes from school staff below, even if an employer is willing to host, they might be some distance away from a school with interested students. This project did not have a dedicated transport budget for participants, so it relied on schools or local DYW groups to cover or arrange travel. This issue is highlighted by the following quotes from high school staff:

"... due to the cost of transportation I don't think we will be able to attend the event [Work Taster] in Stirling now I am so sorry! ..."

High school teacher

"... We are most disappointed to inform you, that unfortunately due to transport and staffing issues our young people will be no longer able to attend this worthwhile opportunity."

High school teacher

In one case, a group of interested students from a remote area could not attend a multi-employer event because the cost and logistics of travelling to the city were prohibitive. Transport issues also tie back to timing, including difficulties like getting young people to a Work Taster for a 9am start time and the general challenge of travel distance – even relatively short distances can become problematic if a school doesn't have a minibus or a driver available at the needed time. Notably, even though Scotland introduced free bus travel for young people and discounted rail fares for school groups, in practice some schools still found it difficult to utilise these options (for instance, they may not allow students to travel independently on public transport for a school-organised activity).

A dedicated travel grant or fund to support work-based learning participation, to ensure geography and transport cost do not exclude interested young people should be established.

To mitigate this, some tasters were scheduled for late morning starts or early afternoon to better fit within the school day, and clustering multiple schools at one event helped justify pooling transport resources. Nonetheless, transport remains a barrier that often requires additional funding or coordination.

External factors (strikes, weather emergencies)

Unplanned events also disrupted delivery. During the 2022–23 winter, teacher strikes in Scotland forced the cancellation of some tasters. When schools were closed or operating with limited staff, previously arranged visits had to be put off. Similarly, extreme weather (snow days) impacted a few sessions in rural Highland areas in early 2023. While these events were beyond the project's control, they highlighted the importance of flexibility and backup planning. The project responded by rescheduling where possible and prioritising continuity of employer engagement (so that a cancelled session didn't result in losing that employer's interest entirely). Still, these factors contributed to a stop-start nature of progress in some quarters.

Data collection and reporting processes

A less visible but significant structural challenge was capturing the data from each taster – registrations, attendance, and feedback – and feeding it into the project's monitoring & evaluation system. The project required that each young person complete a registration form (collecting demographic data and intended outcomes) and a feedback survey after the taster to evaluate the experience.

Compliance with this was inconsistent, especially when multiple parties were involved in delivery. Some schools forgot to have students fill the forms in advance; some employers, after a busy session, did not prioritise the feedback survey. By the end of Year 1, it became clear that relying on digital forms alone wasn't yielding enough responses, so the team reintroduced physical paper forms handed out at sessions to boost response rates. Even so, at a major event like the SCAPE multi-school taster, even with staff dedicated to data collection and prize incentives for form completion, only 118 out of 213 participants' data sets were fully captured – roughly a 55% response rate despite best efforts.

This low response rate indicates an issue in both education and industry around evaluation – an issue that CITB and DYW have observed before in similar programmes. The incomplete data makes it harder to evaluate impact and report accurate figures to funders. The project tried to remedy this by incentivising feedback (e.g. promising participants a personalised follow-up email or entry into a prize draw only if they completed the survey) and by personally chasing up educators for missing forms after the fact. These measures improved the situation somewhat, but data capture remains an area needing ongoing attention and likely a more streamlined solution.

This challenge, though administrative, has real implications: without robust evidence of outcomes, it is difficult to make the case for continuation or expansion.

For Work Tasters delivered to students, educators play a crucial role in the feedback loop that makes the Work Tasters accountable and improves them over time. We strongly recommend that schools and colleges treat the completion of registration and feedback forms as mandatory components of the activity. This means, practically, that a teacher or lecturer should allocate time (either on the bus back from the site, or first period the next day) for students to fill in the evaluation survey while their impressions are fresh.

Schools and colleges should treat the completion of registration and feedback forms as mandatory components of the activity.

The project learned that relying on goodwill to get forms back was not sufficient – but when a teacher says: *“this is part of the trip; we do it now,”* the response rates shot up. To incentivise, schools could integrate the feedback into a class activity or give recognition (maybe a certificate of completion that requires they finish the feedback). The data gathered not only helps the organisers but can provide insights for the school’s own career education efforts.

We also urge DYW regional teams to collate and share feedback results with the schools involved, creating a virtuous cycle of improvement. By viewing themselves as partners in the evaluation (rather than just chaperones), educators can help ensure the longevity and funding of such programmes (since strong data will be needed to justify continuation to funders like CITB or government). In essence: make reflection and feedback part of the learning – for the benefit of both the participants and the programme.

DYW regional teams should collate and share feedback with schools and colleges involved.

3.2. ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Beyond the practicalities of organising tasters, the project faced challenges in engaging stakeholders – particularly employers and schools – and maintaining that engagement through to successful delivery. While interest in the concept of Work Tasters was widespread and positive, translating interest into action proved to be delicate. The key engagement challenges are detailed in the following sections.

Converting employer support into action

Many construction employers, both large and small, voiced strong initial support for the idea of Work Tasters. However, getting those employers to actually schedule and run sessions took sustained encouragement and follow-up. For instance, one major contractor enthusiastically pledged to deliver 10 Work Tasters by the end of 2022 – yet none of those had materialised on schedule.

This pattern – high-level buy-in but slow follow-through – was attributed to several factors:

- companies are busy;
- internal communication gaps (often the person who agreed to host tasters did not have immediate capacity or a clear process to organise them); or
- simple inertia in the absence of deadlines;
- a lack of belief in the benefits and positive outcomes of delivering work tasters and other activities.

The project manager found that without regular check-ins and close support, even committed employers would let plans slide. To address this, a Pilot Pack was created to give employers step-by-step guidance and example plans, making it easier for them to initiate a taster. Additionally, one-to-one support was offered; in practice this meant the project manager often took on coordination tasks for the employer (such as liaising with schools and setting dates) to reduce the burden on the company. Over time, this did yield results – by Year 2, 51 employers had hosted at least one taster and will be taken forward as a recommendation. But the lesson is clear: interest does not equal execution. Many employers operate without a dedicated community or education outreach person, so these tasks are extra to their core business. Without external coordination, even well-intentioned offers can fall through the cracks.

Employers should take advantage of the support mechanisms that projects like this provide and lean on DYW staff for administrative help which will lower the perceived burden. The Work Tasters project has shown that with toolkits, example itineraries, and coordination assistance, even small companies can host effective tasters.

For industry, leaders (including government ministers and industry executives) should champion engagement publicly. For instance, a government minister for skills or education visiting a Work Taster event and speaking about its impact would send a strong signal. Likewise, including the topic in speeches or policy documents about addressing the skills gap can help shift mindsets. The same goes for industry attitudes: some employers historically see school visits as distractions. Industry bodies and CITB can do more to showcase success stories where outreach led to tangible recruitment or community relations benefits, thereby convincing more companies that these efforts are worthwhile.

Employers should use the available support by partnering with intermediaries to lower perceived burden of hosting work Tasters.

SME participation constraints

Engaging small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Work Tasters emerged as a particular challenge. The construction industry in Scotland has a large proportion of SMEs (small contractors, specialty trades, etc.), and their involvement is crucial for offering diverse Work Tasters and reaching the target numbers across all regions. However, SMEs often cited time and resource constraints as reasons they couldn't take part. Many SME owners or managers felt that they did not have the staff to spare, or that the administrative burden (insurance paperwork, safety preparation, etc.) was too high for something seen as outside their immediate business needs. In later project discussions, a range of reasons from SMEs were documented, such as:

- having no available apprenticeship or trainee slots (so they weren't in a position to mentor new young people at that moment);
- dissatisfaction with training providers or funding programmes, which made them disengage from training young people altogether; or
- uncertainty about their own future work pipeline making them reluctant to invest time in tasters.

Some even expressed cynicism that after they train young people, those individuals might leave for bigger companies, so they questioned the value of initial engagement.

These insights show that SME engagement is entwined with broader issues in the training system and employment market. For the project, this meant that additional effort was needed to bring SMEs on board. Approaches included partnering them with other companies. For example, an SME can join a taster event hosted by a bigger company, (a subcontractor could participate in a taster hosted at a main contractor's site, rather than having to set up their own event), pooling the resources of multiple SMEs into a single Work Taster event, and emphasising the minimal time commitment (e.g. inviting an SME to give a one-hour talk or demonstration as part of a larger event, rather than hosting a full half-day alone).

Despite these efforts, SME involvement remained limited, and SMEs represent untapped potential if the barrier to participation could be lowered. The project recognised this and increased focus on SME outreach in Year 3, but it remains challenging to engage this group at scale.

We recommend SMEs partner with others (DYW coordinators, trade bodies, or larger contractors) to share the load, make use of available grants or funds (where provided for outreach), and lean on DYW staff for administrative help. The Work Tasters project has shown that with toolkits, example itineraries, and coordination assistance, even small companies can host effective tasters. In short, don't go it alone – collaborate and seek support to offer tasters rather than opting out due to capacity constraints.

SMEs should partner together or with larger companies to lower the burden of hosting Work Tasters.

We also encourage employers to offer what they can, even if it's a shorter or smaller-scale Work Taster than the ideal. The project found that while half- or full-day immersive tasters are great, even a 2 to 3 hour site visit or a single workshop at a local college can be valuable. By being flexible – for instance, offering an evening site tour for college students or a hands-on demo at a community centre – employers can reach different segments of young people who may not be available during a school day.

Any exposure is better than none, and a variety of formats (site visits, virtual tasters, in-school practical sessions, etc.) will collectively engage a broader audience. Employers should not feel that only a large, day-long event “counts” as a taster; the key is providing an informative, positive experience, even briefly.

Employers should offer whatever Work Tasters they can even if these are shorter than a full day.

Lack of experienced engagement practitioners

Another engagement challenge was that not all companies have staff skilled in interacting with young people. As identified in the project design, there is a lack of trained professionals who can effectively engage young people in meaningful experiences. Construction professionals are experts in building, but not necessarily in teaching or youth work. Some employers did an excellent job – often those with dedicated community benefit or social value officers, or those who had previous experience with apprenticeship programmes – but others struggled.

For example, one report from a pilot noted an instance where an employer’s session for students began with a 40-minute PowerPoint presentation and no interactive element, and they collected no feedback from the participants. This was far from the engaging taster model the project advocates, and it underscores that delivery quality can vary widely. A poorly run taster can actually deter a young person from the industry (the opposite of our goal). It is recommended that staff with less experience of delivering Work Tasters should follow the industry toolkit and guide produced by DYW, available in the appendix, as it has a blueprint for delivering a successful Work Taster based on the project’s learnings.

The project’s mitigation was two-fold: provide guidance and brief training to employers (e.g. coaching them on how to run a session, sharing what activities work well, emphasising the need for interaction and feedback); and, where possible, involve third-party facilitators (like DYW staff or college instructors) to support planning and delivery if the host employer lacked experience. Over time, as more case studies and examples were gathered, the project shared these with less experienced hosts to improve their practice. Still, this challenge highlights a need for building capacity within the industry to deliver outreach – an area where collaboration with education professionals is beneficial.

There are currently industry-wide efforts to address this need; for instance, an Industry Engagement Guide is being developed with partners such as SDS, CIOB, and RICS to compile best practices, so that even companies new to outreach can upskill quickly in how to engage young people.

Employers should ensure that those delivering tasters are equipped with the skills to engage and inspire. This might involve a short training or briefing for staff on how to work with young people (DYW or CITB can help facilitate this). As a recommendation, companies could designate a “Youth Engagement Champion” among their staff – someone given basic training in presenting to and mentoring young people. Additionally, using the best practices highlighted in this report (clear agenda, interactive activities, relatable role models, etc.) will enhance the experience.

Employers should designate a “Youth Engagement Champion” and ensure those delivering Work Tasters are equipped with the skills to engage and inspire.

Employers that have community benefit or CSR officers should leverage their expertise to design the tasters, and those that don’t have such roles could seek advice from organisations that do. Peer learning is also valuable: for instance, companies that have run successful tasters can share their approach with other employers (perhaps through industry association forums). By investing a little in staff preparation and sticking to proven engagement techniques, employers can ensure their tasters leave a genuinely positive impression – which in turn makes it more likely that participating young people will consider careers with that company or in that field.

Employers that have run successful Work Taster sessions should be encouraged to share their approach with others.

Schools’ engagement and last-minute cancellations

While schools in principle are very supportive of connecting students with industry, in practice the project faced significant issues with school engagement reliability, commitment and follow through outside of the scheduling

and staffing issues discussed in Section 3.1. Several DYW regional leads noted that some schools enthusiastically sign up for opportunities but then withdraw at short notice due to internal issues (exams, staffing changes, competing events). This was evidenced by multiple instances of no-shows or cancellations.

For example, the SCAPE multi-school event in October 2023 had bookings for 339 students, but on the day only 213 attended because many groups simply didn't turn up. Even with waiting lists, those empty spots couldn't always be filled last-minute, leading to lost opportunities. The project kept a record of schools that cancel to identify patterns and address the issue through DYW regional teams. It is important to understand why schools cancel: often it's due to factors outside the control of the individual teacher who organised it (e.g. school leadership might pull a trip if something urgent comes up, or there is a lack of substitute teachers to cover classes). Regardless of reason, it's an engagement problem because it frustrates employers and wastes preparation effort.

The project learned to over-invite or have backups – for example, if a taster capacity is 20, perhaps book 25 students knowing some may drop out. However, for large events this was harder to manage. Going forward, improving communication and perhaps setting clearer expectations with schools (essentially, a “contract of commitment” when they sign up) might be necessary.

It was observed that having school senior leadership buy-in is key; DYW staff can help by vetting the interest level and ensuring that the headteacher or senior management in the school is on board, not just an enthusiastic teacher. This challenge essentially comes down to the low prioritisation of DYW activities in some schools under pressure – when something has to give, unfortunately a Work Taster trip is seen as more expendable than a regular class. Changing this mindset will likely require both top-down policy support and continued relationship management at the school level. It may be possible to connect schools that have participated in Work Tasters, with those that have not, to share experiences and build enthusiasm.

DYW regional coordinators are the bridge between schools and employers; their role is critical in making tasters happen smoothly. We recommend that schools work closely with their DYW coordinators to manage expectations and commitments. When a school signs up for a taster, it should be treated as a firm appointment – not a casual interest. Schools could implement an internal sign-off from a deputy head or head teacher for each trip, to guarantee support from leadership.

Moreover, DYW leads can help by establishing a sort of “contract” of participation: for example, agreeing that if a school cancels without good cause, it affects their priority for future opportunities. This may sound strict, but it underscores the importance of follow-through. The aim is not to punish schools but to elevate the status of these activities. Education authorities might consider issuing guidance that participating in CITB tasters is part of schools' DYW deliverables, which must be reported on – thereby incentivising completion. In short, treat a commitment to a taster with the same seriousness as any curriculum event or exam date. This will reduce no-shows and build trust with employers who need reliability.

DYW coordinators and schools should establish a “contract” of participation with sign-off from head/deputy head teachers to guarantee support from leadership.

Beyond specific programmes, there is a broader need for cultural change – which policymakers are uniquely positioned to influence through communications and leadership. We recommend national campaigns or communications that reinforce the value of short-term work experiences. For schools, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government should explicitly message that activities like Work Tasters are a vital part of learning, not an “extracurricular” add-on. If regional education directors and headteacher networks hear this consistently, it will filter down into school priorities. Many in education still hold outdated views of construction as purely manual or low-skilled work – targeted information (perhaps via CPD for teachers or updated careers resources) should address this, highlighting modern construction career pathways (digital, professional, sustainable building, etc.) so that educators feel more confident encouraging students into the field. Essentially, policies alone aren't enough; a concerted effort to change hearts and minds must accompany the structural recommendations.

National campaigns or communications that reinforce the value of short-term work experiences as a vital part of learning should be established.

Matching the right young people to opportunities

Another challenge was ensuring that the young people attending a taster are those who can truly benefit from it. The project found that Work Tasters are not always being attended by the most appropriate or intended young people. In some cases, schools would send students who were not particularly interested in construction, while keen candidates missed out – possibly because the opportunity was not advertised widely within the school, or selection wasn't done thoughtfully.

There's also the issue of diversity: by default, if a construction Work Taster is offered, schools might disproportionately put forward male pupils (given traditional gender splits in interest). Indeed, even towards the end of the project it was noted that the diversity of attendees was still a challenge, with predominantly white male students participating in many of the Work Tasters. Data from participant feedback confirms this imbalance: for instance, only about 22% of taster feedback respondents identified as female, and roughly 7% identified as being from a minority ethnic background, showing there is significant room to improve on inclusion. This indicates engagement efforts need to be more inclusive and targeted to ensure girls and minority ethnic students (and other underrepresented groups, such as those with disabilities or from different socio-economic backgrounds) are encouraged to participate. The limited engagement of minority ethnic and females is highlighted by the following quote from a tier one contractor:

"I think work tasters support the talent pipeline but at a very early stage. It may help some people consider construction who wouldn't have before. Generally, work tasters seem to attract a lot of males who are interested in trade style jobs. They are not always the best fit for the degree apprenticeships we offer. This is why we often rely on our supply chain to support the sessions."

Tier one contractor

DYW regional teams also engaged inclusion-focused organisations (Prince's Trust, Barnardo's, LGBT Youth Scotland, Enable Scotland, etc.) to reach young people who are often left out of such activities. While these partnerships opened dialogues and raised awareness, concrete co-delivered Work Tasters with those groups were limited in number by the project's end. This remains an area for growth: better mechanisms to identify and invite the right mix of young people (and to ensure a diverse mix) would increase the impact of each Work Taster.

A comment from one young female focus group participant starkly illustrates why this is important – she noted that:

"being a woman that isn't straight, the assumption of not being welcome in [construction] is already enough to not think of it as a real option... I would never feel safe in that sort of workplace until it is properly acknowledged and dealt-with [by those in the industry with power]"

Work Taster participant

Such perceptions are deeply ingrained; to overcome them, it's critical that Work Tasters actively include and support underrepresented young people, demonstrating through experience that the industry is changing and welcoming.

Schools should be judicious and inclusive in selecting students for tasters. The goal is not to use Work Tasters as a reward for the top students or a treat for a select few; rather, identify those who will benefit most or who would otherwise not get exposure to construction. We recommend using career interest data or guidance teacher input to pick students who have expressed interest in practical careers, who are undecided and could use inspiration, or who come from backgrounds underrepresented in construction (e.g. girls in technical subjects, or pupils with no family experience of higher education or trades).

One school-based best practice was to run an internal application process for tasters – asking students to write a short paragraph on why they want to attend. This ensured they had buy-in and allowed the teacher to gauge genuine interest. While that level of admin might not always be feasible, the principle stands: be intentional about who goes.

Educators should use career interest data or guidance teacher input to pick students who have expressed interest in practical careers.

At the same time, strive for diversity in the group: aim for a mix of genders, and include students who might not normally put themselves forward. If only the “usual suspects” (e.g. those already set on construction or those whose parents push them to go) participate, the project’s broader goal of widening the talent pool is missed. DYW School Coordinators can assist by maintaining a list of pupils interested in construction and nudging those who need an extra push to sign up. Inclusion also means considering additional support – for instance, if a pupil has special educational needs or disabilities, ensure the host is aware and able to accommodate (as was done in some pilots, where adjustments like a smaller group size or a pre-visit were arranged).

Educators should also strive for diversity in the participant students, including a mix of genders, minority groups, and those that may not have much experience of the construction industry.

Employers also play a critical role in dispelling the outdated views of construction as an unwelcoming environment for certain groups. We recommend that when hosting tasters, companies make a point of showcasing diversity – for example, having female engineers or tradespeople, staff from minority backgrounds, and young apprentices as part of the team interacting with participants. Even if a company’s workforce is not very diverse yet, bringing in ambassadors (perhaps via networks like Women in Construction or Pride in Construction) for the taster can help. Additionally, to create an inclusive atmosphere companies should ensure PPE of all sizes is available, use language that is free of stereotypes, and explicitly encourage questions about equality or workplace culture.

Work Taster hosts should be aware of, and ensure accommodation is made for, students requiring additional support.

Doing so, employers will help break down the perceptions that deter underrepresented groups. One practical step is to prepare a brief segment in the taster addressing the industry’s efforts to become more inclusive (for instance, mention initiatives to support women in trades, or how the company accommodates diverse needs). Young people notice these things – as seen in the focus group feedback, they are sensitive to whether construction will welcome them. Showing commitment to inclusion during a taster can make a big difference in who feels encouraged to join the sector.

Employers hosting work tasters should make a point of showcasing workplace diversity and ensuring that PPE is available in all sizes.

Doing so, employers will help break down the perceptions that deter underrepresented groups. One practical step is to prepare a brief segment in the taster addressing the industry’s efforts to become more inclusive (for instance, mention initiatives to support women in trades, or how the company accommodates diverse needs). Young people notice these things – as seen in the focus group feedback, they are sensitive to whether construction will welcome them. Showing commitment to inclusion during a taster can make a big difference in who feels encouraged to join the sector.

Lack of participant preparation and follow-up

Education providers have the responsibility to ensure that students arrive at a Work Taster ready to learn and behave professionally. The project found that students who had a classroom session beforehand – even a 20-minute talk – got more out of the taster because they had context and questions in mind. This was highlighted by feedback from a DYW colleague, who stated that:

"Yes, the sessions beforehand are crucial for us as it lets not only the team outline the pathways and alternative routes for pupils but also allows us to reinforce the standards and processes of attending a live site. It always helps when someone from outwith the school delivers this I find."

"We can also manage expectations, particularly for the younger age group who may not be able to participate in direct practical activity."

DYW colleague

Schools could integrate this prep into guidance or PSE (personal/social education) classes. We recommend that before any taster, teachers/lecturers spend time briefing students on what to expect, going over basic etiquette (such as safety rules, appropriate dress if not in uniform, punctuality), and priming their curiosity by discussing what they might see or what roles they

Educators should prime students with a pre-Work Taster briefing and conduct post-Work Taster debriefs.

might encounter. Likewise, after the taster, schedule a debrief or an assignment (like a short reflective essay or presentation to classmates about what they learned). Treating the taster as a learning activity with pre- and post-components maximises its value and reinforces to the student that it was an important part of their education, not just a day out. Furthermore, by capturing the students' reflections, schools can gather qualitative evidence of impact to report to parents and administrators, which helps sustain support for such activities.

To maximise impact, employers should create a follow-through plan for interested taster participants. Rather than treating a taster as a one-off event, treat it as the start of a relationship. For instance, collect contact information (with permission) of keen participants and send them updates about apprenticeships or entry-level job openings. If feasible, invite taster attendees to future events or offer them an exclusive opportunity, such as a chance to apply early for an apprenticeship assessment or to attend a "next level" experience. One idea is to issue a certificate or letter to each participant that includes a note like "we'd be happy to see you again – here's how to stay in touch". Some project employers did this informally, and we formalise it as a recommendation: close the loop by guiding taster participants toward next steps (be it a site visit, work experience placement, application workshop, or even direct recruitment for older attendees). This not only helps the young person but also provides the employer with a pipeline of warm candidates who have already shown interest. Essentially, integrate tasters into your recruitment and talent development plans.

Employers should develop follow-up plans for willing work Taster participants.

Data sharing and visibility of activities

The project discovered that many work-related outreach activities were happening in silos. There were a lot of activities similar in style to a Work Taster session taking place already across the sector, but a challenge existed in connecting those efforts so that they could complement each other rather than duplicate. In other words, various organisations – DYW regional groups, individual companies, trade associations, etc. – might be running site visits or career days independent of this project, and without coordination these did not count toward the project's targets nor share learnings with the wider network.

Some employers were introduced to the concept of Work Tasters through the project manager before conducting their own outreach with schools without informing the project (perhaps because they didn't see the need or benefit of reporting it). This led to under-counting of what was actually happening in terms of construction engagement.

There was confusion between the use of the terms "site visits" organised by DYW and "work tasters". Many activities in Year 1 weren't reported because they had been recorded as 'site visits'. However, further investigation found that many of these activities were site visits with practical activities, Q&A sessions with employees, and career presentations. These activities were aligned more closely to Work Tasters than simply site visits and consequently, the project adjusted course to begin capturing data about site visits and work tasters in Years 2 and 3.

The engagement challenge here is about communication – encouraging industry partners and regional DYW groups to share information about their engagement activities. Industry delivering activities which the project team wasn't aware of was identified as a missed opportunity. The remedy was to improve communication channels and emphasise the importance of letting the project know about these events. This speaks to the wider ecosystem: there is no single point of truth or central database for all construction outreach events in Scotland.

Companies might not want extra paperwork by reporting to DYW on something they voluntarily did. The project tried to demonstrate the value of data by showing employers that when they share their taster outcomes, it helps build evidence of impact that can benefit the industry's talent pipeline as a whole. Indeed, some employers came to appreciate the evaluation data when it was captured and fed back to them – hosts were provided with summarised feedback from participants at their tasters, which they found useful and encouraging. This kind of positive reinforcement hopefully will lead to more reporting of activities in future. Still, it remains challenging to corral all independent efforts under one umbrella without a formal requirement or incentive to do so.

Broader industry pressures

Finally, a significant engagement challenge is the context of widespread skills shortages and high workloads in construction – paradoxically one of the very issues the project is trying to address. When companies are under pressure to deliver projects with tight margins and too few staff, asking them to take time for outreach can be a

hard sell. External factors like an aging workforce, record infrastructure demand, and the post-pandemic construction boom mean many companies are extremely busy. In our experience, when the construction market was very active (many contracts on the go), employer participation in tasters slowed, whereas if work tended to slow down (fewer contracts at a given time), companies were more willing to engage.

It's a bit of a catch-22: the worse the skills shortage and workload burden, the more important activities like tasters are for the future, but the harder it is for employers to spare capacity in the present. This broader context has critically shaped employer engagement. The project, in turn, has informed and influenced some of these factors by providing a live case study of work-based learning in action.

One positive development during the project was increased support from policy and client-side organisations: for example, the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) and several local councils began to see Work Tasters as a tangible community benefit activity that could be requested in public contracts. That kind of structural support can help alleviate the pressure on individual employers by making outreach part of normal business expectations.

Policymakers should continue to embed Work Tasters into policy instruments like community benefit clauses, grant criteria, and youth employment initiatives.

We recommend policymakers at national and local levels should continue to embed Work Tasters (and similar short-term work experiences) into policy instruments like community benefit clauses, grant criteria, and youth employment initiatives. As seen with Scottish Futures Trust and North Lanarkshire, when clients specify Work Tasters as an expected outcome on projects, industry responds accordingly. We recommend that CITB and Scottish Government work together to add Work Tasters to the menu of recognised activities in frameworks such as the National Skills Academy for Construction (NSAFC) and any public procurement guidelines. Whilst work tasters can be accepted as part of broader activity headings, an explicit reference to work taster activities would raise the profile of tasters as equally valuable as longer work placements or apprenticeships in delivering social value. By aligning these high-level levers, policymakers will create a structural demand for Work Tasters, overcoming the current situation where they are sometimes seen as optional or low impact. The inclusion of tasters in policy sends a clear message: brief work exposures are an important stepping stone in the skills pipeline and deserve institutional support.

CITB and Scottish government should work together to add Work Tasters to the recognised activities in frameworks such NSAfC and public procurement guidelines.

Another clear recommendation is that CITB (and/or government funding streams) continue to support this model beyond the initial project. The target of 2,800 tasters by 2025 has been met, but maintaining momentum will require sustained funding for coordination, particularly if DYW structures evolve in the wake of the Skills Review.

We advise CITB and partners to plan for a Phase 2 or mainstreaming of the Work Tasters programme. If CITB's current commission ends towards the end of 2025, alternative support should be identified so that the infrastructure (website, toolkit, coordinator roles) and goodwill built up do not dissipate. The relatively modest investment (the project was £280k over three years) has yielded significant engagement; scaling it up or extending it would likely generate even greater returns as processes are now established. Policymakers should consider integrating Work Tasters into larger youth employment or economic development funding pots. For example, if there is a fund for employer engagement or for addressing sectoral shortages, allocate a portion specifically to facilitate tasters in construction (and potentially as a template for other industries too). In light of the Skills Review's call for a more coherent skills landscape, there may be changes to DYW or SDS roles – it's crucial that in any new structure, resources are earmarked for early engagement activities like tasters.

We should advise CITB and partners to plan for a phase 2 or mainstreaming of the Work Tasters programme.

Policymakers should consider integrating Work Tasters into larger youth employment or economic development funding pots.

3.3. SUMMARY

The engagement challenges in Section 3.0 underscore that sustaining a programme like Work Tasters requires not just goodwill, but also structural alignment with the incentives and capacities of both industry and education. The next section (Section 4) will situate these engagement findings in the broader skills landscape, examining how external factors (like national skills policies, economic conditions, and industry frameworks) influence employers' willingness and ability to engage with initiatives like Work Tasters.

4. THE ROLE OF THE SKILLS LANDSCAPE IN EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

The success of the Construction Work Tasters project does not depend only on its internal management; it is also heavily influenced by the broader skills landscape and policy context in Scotland. Employer engagement with Work Tasters is shaped by factors such as:

- skills shortages,
- training infrastructure,
- economic conditions, and
- government policies/initiatives related to workforce development.

The following sections explore how these external factors have impacted employer participation in the project, and how the project's experiences feed into and reflect wider policy discussions.

4.1. WIDER SKILLS SHORTAGES AND WORKFORCE PRESSURES

The construction industry in Scotland is currently experiencing significant skills shortages and recruitment challenges which form a double-edged backdrop for Work Tasters. On one hand, the acute need for new talent provides a strong incentive for employers to engage in initiatives that attract young people. On the other hand, those same shortages mean companies are stretched thin, which can make them less able to spare time for outreach (as noted in Section 3.2).

CITB's labour market analysis shows Scotland needs thousands of additional construction workers annually to meet demand and has been under-recruiting by about 5,220 workers each year. This under-recruitment accumulates to a projected shortfall of over 26,000 new entrants in five years if not corrected⁸. The causes are multifaceted – including a lack of employer capacity to support new trainees, and limits in training provision and funding. Employers who are aware of these trends understand that engaging young people early (through tasters, apprenticeships, etc.) is part of the solution to the skills crisis. Indeed, many companies voiced support for the project because they see it as helping to “grow our own” future workforce. As one outcome of the project, some employers – such as large contractors Robertson and Morgan Sindall – began looking at integrating Work Tasters into their recruitment and talent pipelines (for example, planning taster events as a precursor to apprenticeship intakes). This indicates alignment with workforce needs: forward-thinking employers are attempting to convert taster participants into trainees or new hires down the line.

However, those same workforce pressures often limited engagement in practice. Companies busy scrambling to meet current project deadlines (amidst labour shortages) felt they had no time for extra activities. It's a paradox: the worse the skills shortage, the more important these talent pipeline activities are, but the harder it is for employers to allocate resources to them in the short term. As discussed in Section 3.1, when the construction market was very active, employer participation in Work Tasters slowed, which manifested as a decrease in the Work Tasters delivered during summer; conversely, when work volume dipped, companies were more willing to engage. This dynamic suggests that to ensure consistent employer engagement, structural support might be needed (like temporary staff cover or financial incentives) so that outreach doesn't fall victim to immediate business pressures. It also suggests timing outreach requests strategically when companies have a bit of slack. In any case, the overarching skills shortage narrative helped the project make the case to industry stakeholders that they *must* invest in outreach or face longer-term workforce decline.

⁸ [CSN Industry Outlook - 2024-2028 - CITB](#)

4.2. POLICY DRIVERS – SCOTLAND’S SKILLS AGENDA

The policy environment during the project period increasingly highlighted work-based learning. Scotland’s Skills Action Plan and related strategies stress the importance of exposing young people to industries with opportunities. The 2023 Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape⁹ (the Withers Review) provided a significant backdrop, as mentioned earlier. This high-level review recommended a streamlining of skills agencies and a more coherent national approach to vocational pathways. Importantly, it explicitly called for more work-based learning opportunities, including work experience and shorter taster engagements, to help young people transition from education into employment.

The Work Tasters project can be seen as a practical example of the kind of initiative the Skills Review advocates. There is a clear opportunity now for policymakers to incorporate the lessons of this project into Scotland’s skills system reforms – making structured Work Tasters a mainstream element of how we prepare young people for the world of work.

4.3. COMMUNITY BENEFIT AND SOCIAL VALUE REQUIREMENTS

Another external factor influencing engagement is the role of community benefit clauses in procurement and the wider social value agenda. Many construction contracts, especially public sector projects, include community benefit requirements (e.g. a certain number of jobs, apprenticeships, or school engagements), as shown by the quote below:

“In terms of our community engagement. We would be doing these things anyway but it does help. We like being part of a programme and working collaboratively with partners such as DYW. You get better buy in from pupils, parents and teachers when we come together for work tasters.”

Tier one contractor

Initially, Work Tasters were not widely recognised as a standard community benefit activity, meaning contractors didn’t always get “credit” for hosting tasters in the same way they would for, say, hiring an apprentice or doing a school presentation. This made Work Tasters a relatively low-tariff activity in the eyes of some companies – nice to do, but not a priority for meeting contractual obligations.

The project worked to change this perception by engaging with procurement bodies and clients to position tasters as a valuable social value outcome. By Year 2, we saw progress: North Lanarkshire Council committed to embedding Work Tasters into their future community benefit contracts¹⁰, and the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) included Work Tasters in its updated Social Value Toolkit for construction projects¹¹. This effectively forces or at least encourages contractors on certain public projects to deliver tasters as part of their obligations.

Embedding tasters as a unique and clearly defined activity into frameworks like these (as well as CITB’s own National Skills Academy for Construction (NSAFC)/Client Based Approach benchmarks) is a slow process but crucial. If Work Tasters are written into policy, contracts, or funding criteria, then even when staff change or individual enthusiasm wanes, the requirement remains, and someone will pick it up. The project’s work to influence community benefit frameworks and local authority policies has been an important strategy to increase sustainability – it helps institutionalise the practice of offering tasters, rather than leaving it to ad-hoc goodwill.

4.4. EDUCATION AND CAREERS STRATEGY CONTEXT

On the education side, the project aligned with ongoing efforts to strengthen career education and work exposure in schools. The DYW initiative, since its inception, has aimed to get employers involved in schools, and Work Tasters provided a concrete method to do so.

The Career Education Standard¹² and Work Placement Standard¹³ in Scotland set expectations for what learners should experience by way of career guidance and work placements. While those standards typically envision a

⁹ [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation](#)

¹⁰ [North Lanarkshire Council Report: City Deal Programme - Community Benefits Delivery Update](#)

¹¹ [Scottish Futures Trust. Guidance - Measuring Social Value using the Social Value Toolkit Themes, Outcomes and Measures](#)

¹² [Developing the Young Workforce: Career Education Standard \(3-18\) - September 2015](#)

¹³ [Developing the Young Workforce: Work Placements Standard - September 2015](#)

week-long work placement by age 18, tasters complement by providing earlier, lower-commitment encounters. Careers advisers (including Skills Development Scotland staff) were supportive; indeed, a recorded presentation about Work Tasters was shared with all SDS Careers Advisers, and many signposted students to the opportunities. There remains, however, an institutional challenge: guidance teachers and school leaders have many initiatives competing for time. Some teachers noted that it's difficult to justify a short taster versus, for example, a week of work experience which is a more established practice. The project's advocacy within the education system – e.g. presenting to headteacher networks and regional DYW groups – tried to position tasters as complementary rather than competing with longer placements. In policy terms, if future guidance could formally recognise short tasters (perhaps as contributing to a learner's "profile" or awards), that would elevate their status in schools.

4.5. ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER INDUSTRY INITIATIVES

The project did not operate in isolation; it intersected with other construction industry initiatives aimed at addressing skills gaps and improving the sector's image. One challenge noted in Section 3 was the fragmentation of efforts. From a landscape perspective, a clearer national framework for all these taster and pre-apprenticeship activities would be beneficial.

4.6. SUMMARY

The broader skills landscape in Scotland both drove and was influenced by the Construction Work Tasters project. Critical shortages created urgency but also practical constraints; policy reviews and strategies increasingly backed the kind of intervention this project represents; and mechanisms like community benefits began to adapt to include tasters as a recognised good practice. The interplay between project and context is a two-way street: external factors shaped what was possible, and the project's outcomes are feeding back into that external context (for instance, informing policy and employer practices). Recognising this interplay reinforces that sustaining and scaling initiatives like Work Tasters will require not just project-level effort, but continued alignment with policy and industry trends.

5. EVALUATING THE SUITABILITY OF THE TARGET AGE RANGE (16 TO 25)

The Construction Work Tasters project targeted young people aged 16 to 25 year-olds as participants. The following sections evaluate the rationale for choosing this age range, how the project engaged across this spectrum, and whether different approaches may be needed for the younger (school-age) versus older (post-school) participants.

5.1. RATIONALE FOR THE 16 TO 25 AGE RANGE

The 16 to 25 year-olds range was chosen to encompass both senior-phase school pupils and young adults who have left school (whether in further education, training, or unemployed). The logic was to not limit the opportunity strictly to school students, since many young people make career decisions or need career inspiration in the years immediately after school as well. CITB and DYW recognised that while schools provide a convenient channel to reach teenagers, there is also a cohort of 18 and over who could benefit from short exploratory experiences to redirect or kick-start their careers. This could include college students in construction-related courses (who might use tasters to learn about specific roles or employers) or young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) who might be encouraged into construction through a low-commitment taste of the work environment. By setting 16 to 25 year-olds as the target group, the project aligned with the age span of the Young Person's Guarantee and many apprenticeship and training programmes, thereby creating potential pathways from tasters into those opportunities.

5.2. PARTICIPATION BY AGE GROUP

In practice, the vast majority of Work Taster participants were at the younger end of the spectrum (15¹⁴ to 17-year-olds), largely due to the strong engagement with high schools. Based on project records, most attendees were senior phase high school students (S4–S6) or recent school leavers in college. Engagement of those over 20

¹⁴ Although the project targeted 16 to 25 years, some 15 year-olds also participated in Work Tasters.

was comparatively limited. This skew is not surprising, given that activities were primarily organised via schools and DYW school coordinators.

While the project was open to older young people (and some focus group and survey outreach specifically targeted 18 year olds and over through employability groups and social media), the numbers indicate that under 18 year olds made up the bulk of participants as shown in Figure 4.

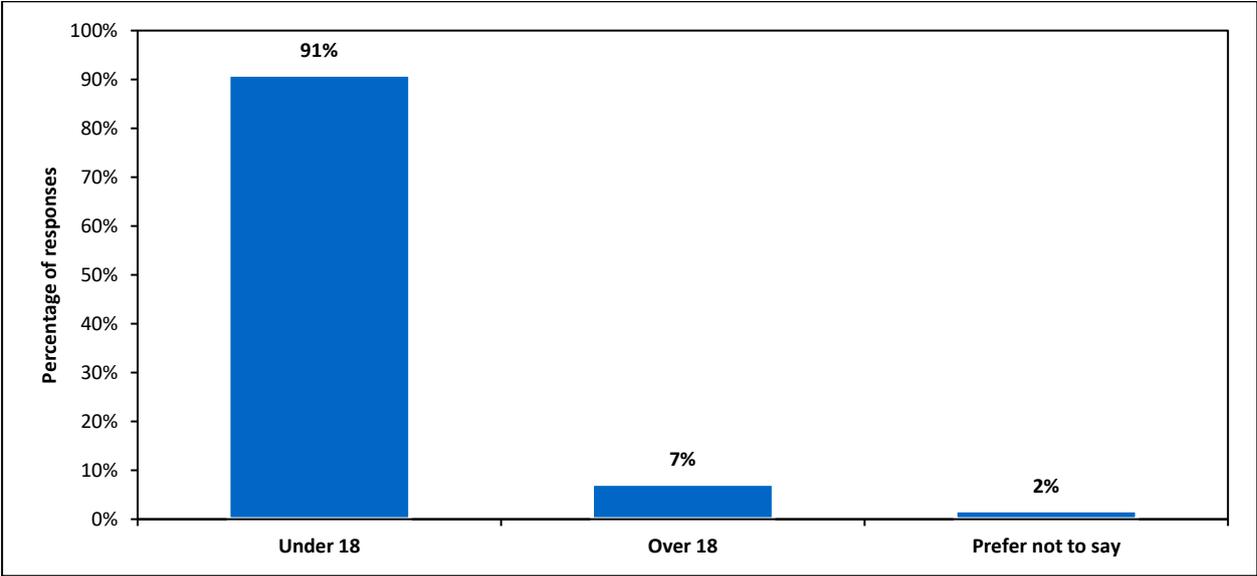


Figure 4 - Percentage of Work Taster respondents under and over 18.

For example, among feedback survey respondents, about 79% indicated they were in high school at the time of their taster, around 17% were in college, and only a small fraction of participants (under 5%) were not in formal education (some were apprentices or unemployed young adults who attended tasters through other programmes). This distribution suggests that the project’s primary mode of operation – working through schools – was effective for reaching young people, but that additional effort or different channels are needed to reach those past school age.

5.3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER (18–25) ENGAGEMENT

The relatively lower participation from the 18 year olds and over segment raises the question of whether the 16 to 25 year-old range is too broad for a single model. It may be that different approaches are required to serve different subsets of this age range. For instance, someone who is 22 and unemployed might benefit more from a taster embedded in an employability programme (with wrap-around support and direct links to job opportunities) rather than the school-oriented format used for under 18 year-olds.

The project did pilot some activities with this in mind: a few tasters were arranged in partnership with youth employment charities targeting school leavers, and these indicated that older young people have slightly different needs. They have higher expectations of what the taster might lead to. From discussions with young people at Work Tasters, it became apparent that those older participants who particularly enjoyed the taster were very interested in immediate next steps especially how they could quickly get into a job or apprenticeship. They approached Work Tasters not just as career exploration, but as an opportunity for networking and recruitment. By contrast, a 16 year-old might still be a year or two away from work and is using the Work Taster more for inspiration and information. Both uses are valid, but it means facilitators should tailor how they deliver and follow up.

In future, segmenting tasters or follow-up by age could improve relevance. For example, a Work Taster for college students or recent graduates (maybe aged 18–25) could include an element of CV review or direct referral to open apprenticeships, which might not be necessary for a high school group.

5.4. FEEDBACK ON CONTENT VS. AGE

The content of Work Tasters tended to be similar regardless of the age of participants, but facilitators noted differences in engagement. Younger pupils sometimes needed a more basic introduction to what construction is

and what jobs exist (some under 18 year-olds came with very little prior knowledge), whereas older participants often asked more specific questions (e.g. about wages, career progression, or how to start their own business). From the respondent feedback, more participants 18 year-olds and over had previous experience in the construction industry, as shown in Figure 5. The difference between the under 18 year-olds and the 18 year-olds and over responses was found to be statistically significant to a confidence level of 99%.

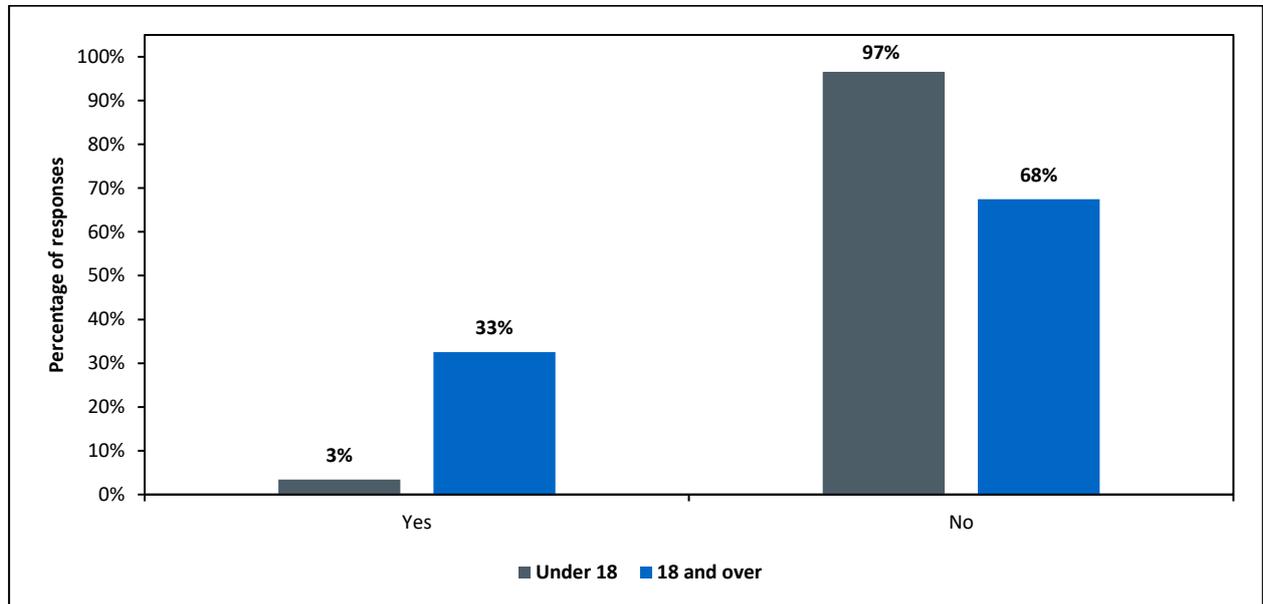


Figure 5 - Prior construction experience by age group.

However, the differences in self-reported prior knowledge levels were minor, as shown in Figure 6. The difference between under 18 and over 18 self-report prior knowledge levels of construction was not statistically significant.

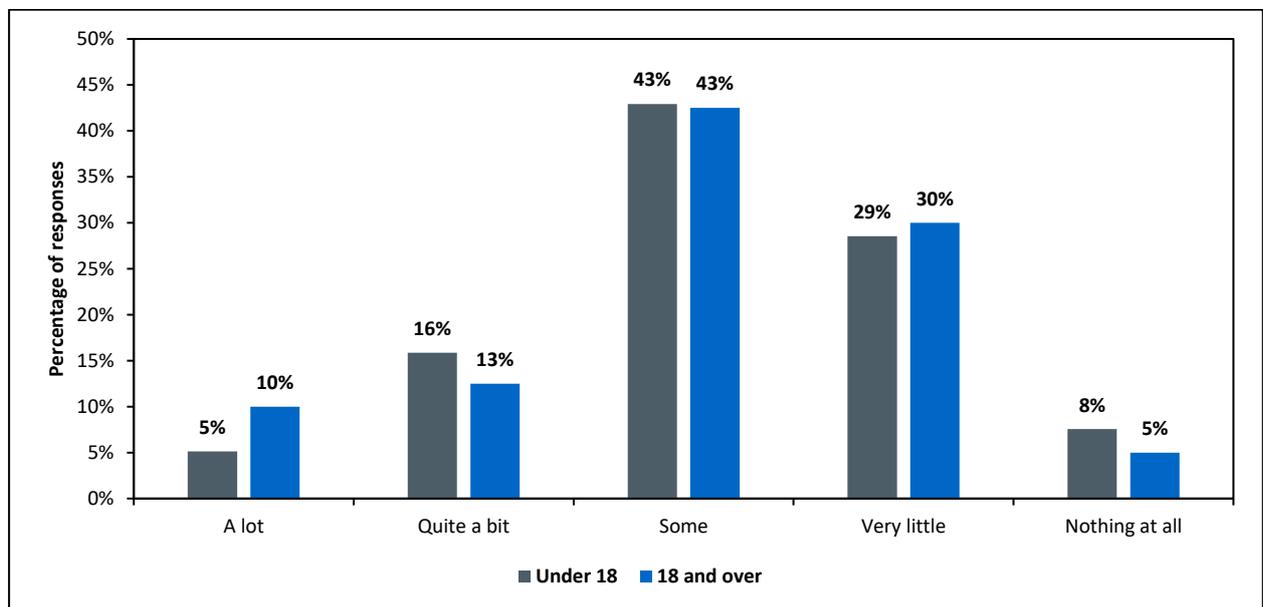


Figure 6 - Prior construction knowledge by age group.

The focus groups conducted as part of the project also shed light on age-related preferences. For example, some high school students indicated they would like tasters to potentially count toward something (like a skills award or a line on their record of achievement). Meanwhile, young adults emphasised the need for tasters to be scheduled at convenient times if they were to attend—since many in the 18 years-old and over group might have part-time jobs or other commitments, they suggested offering sessions in the evening or weekends to accommodate them. Indeed, one recurring suggestion from focus group participants was to hold tasters on Friday afternoons or Saturdays so that those who are in college courses or working could still participate without taking time off. The

project did experiment with a few twilight (late afternoon) sessions and found attendance by college students was better when not during class hours.

5.5. MATURITY CONSIDERATIONS

Another aspect of the age range is maturity. Some stakeholders questioned whether a 16 year-old and a 25 year-old should be in the same session, as the dynamic could be odd. In practice, mixed-age sessions were rare because of the recruitment channels (schools would bring groups of 16 to 18 year-olds, and any older attendees were usually in separate Work Tasters via other routes). However, when mixed groups did occur, facilitators observed that older young people sometimes took on a mentoring role within the participant group, which wasn't necessarily negative.

Peer interactions can enhance the experience – for instance, an 18 year-old who had just started a construction college course might inspire a 16 year-old still deciding. That said, our focus group with high school leavers indicated some concern that:

“a 16/17 year old isn't always as mature as a 24/25 year old”

High school leaver

This implies that tailoring by age could make participants more comfortable.

5.6. RETAINING UPPER AGE LIMIT BENEFITS

Despite the challenges in engaging the 18 year-olds and over cohort, keeping the upper age limit at 25 has benefits. It signals inclusivity – that tasters are not only a “school trip” but an option for any young person curious about construction. It also future proofs the model: as DYW and other partners strengthen channels to reach post-school young people those efforts could drive more older participants into tasters.

The project has laid some groundwork here by establishing that the format can work for different ages. Additionally, some of the project's most impactful individual stories came from participants outside the school system – for instance, a 21 year-old who was unemployed attended a Work Taster at a house-building site through a charity partner and subsequently gained the confidence to enrol in a construction skills course, something he cited the taster as directly influencing. These anecdotes illustrate that the 16–25 range is appropriate and that even if numbers were smaller at the older end, the value for those individuals can be high.

5.7. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK TASTERS BY AGE GROUP

The 16 to 25 year-olds target age range remains valid, but future programmes might consider differentiated approaches within that band. Schools will likely continue to be the main avenue for under 18 year-olds – and here, integrating tasters as part of the senior phase curriculum or guidance programme will be key.

For the 18 year-olds and over group, collaboration with colleges, Job Centre Plus, and community organisations could yield better participation. It may also be worth exploring *slightly* longer tasters or series of tasters for this group: for example, a “Work Taster Programme” that meets once a week for three weeks, which older young people might commit to if they see a tangible outcome (like earning a certificate or direct recruitment opportunities). The project focus groups indicated openness to a “series of events” approach to build popularity and depth of information over time. As the Work Tasters model is adopted more widely, providers can experiment with such variations. The critical factor is to maintain the essence of what makes a taster appealing – hands-on, no long-term commitment, and informative – while adjusting the surrounding support to fit the participant's stage of life.

5.8. DIVERSITY AND GENDER

Table 1 provides a snapshot of participant demographics based on feedback data, illustrating the diversity – or lack thereof – among those who took part. This further informs how we might target certain groups in the future. In terms of gender, because females were underrepresented overall, we did not see a clear age trend (i.e. it's not that older females were more likely to attend than younger ones, they were few across the board). But one strategy to improve female engagement at the upper age range could be to link tasters with women-in-construction networking groups or events specifically marketed to young women exploring career changes.

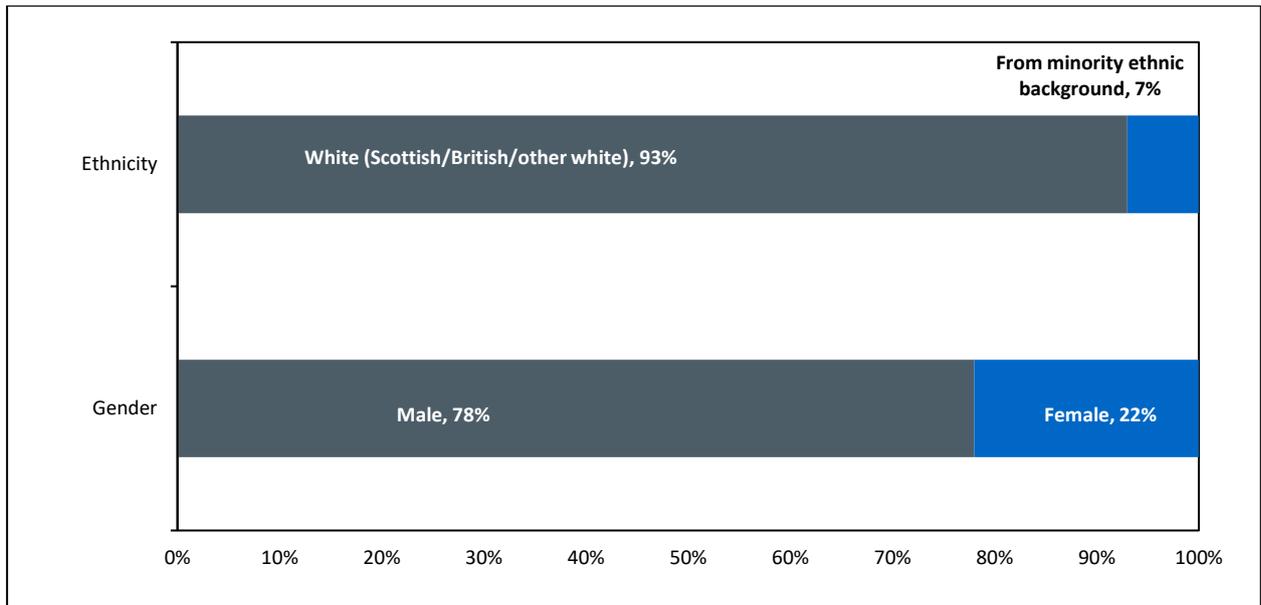


Figure 7 - Participant demographics based on feedback data.

Figure 8 shows the breakdown of Work Taster respondents based on home address Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (from Q1 the lowest 10% to Q10 the highest 10%).

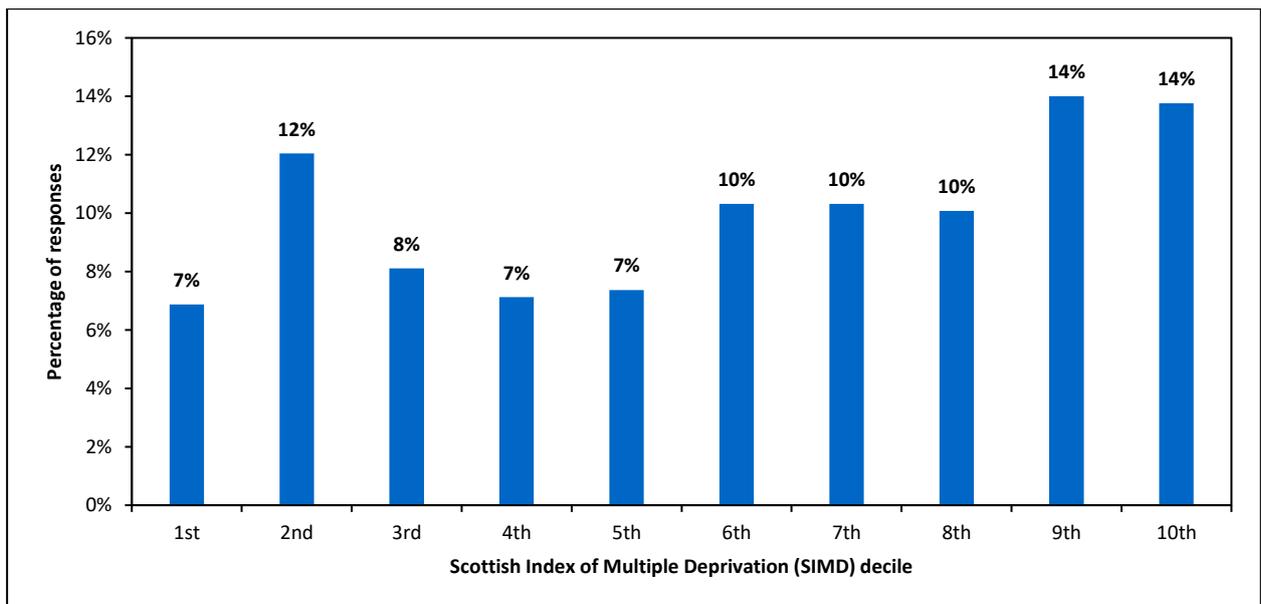


Figure 8 - Percentage of Work Taster respondents in each of the ten Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) areas.

The respondent data highlights that the project reached a mix of backgrounds, though there was a tilt toward participants from less deprived areas and a need to improve gender balance and ethnic diversity.

5.9. SUMMARY

Targeting 16 to 25 year-olds allowed the project to reach young people at multiple transition points: before leaving school, during further/higher education, and in early adulthood. The take-up was strongest in the school-linked segment, which demonstrates where the easiest access lies. However, the need to support the wider population of young people remains, and Work Tasters have shown potential in that regard. The evaluation suggests the model is flexible enough to serve the whole range, provided engagement strategies are tailored appropriately.

Going forward, partners should not shy away from including the 18 year-olds and over demographic – instead, they should develop dedicated recruitment and delivery methods to unlock that part of the cohort. By doing so,

Work Tasters can truly function as a bridge into construction for all young people who are at a career crossroads, whether that's choosing a path at 17 or reconsidering one at 24.

6. EVALUATING SUCCESS

Based on respondent data, this section evaluates the way in which Work Tasters changed the attitudes of young people towards the construction industry. It explores the changes in the participants' knowledge of the construction industry, how likely they would be to apply for a job or apprenticeship in construction, why these changes occurred, and what participants suggest could improve the Work Taster experience.

As part of the Work Tasters, participants were asked to fill out feedback forms. Although collection of these was a challenge, with many uncompleted or partially completed, there were still sufficient responses to assess the impact of the Work Tasters, as reported by the young people who attended them.

6.1. PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE

The following sections cover each of the six-participant knowledge topics asked of the Work Taster attendees before and after the Work Tasters:

- What it would be like to work in construction.
- The type of jobs and careers construction offers.
- How to find jobs or work experience in construction.
- Whether there are jobs in construction near you.
- The opportunities for development and progression in construction.
- The skills, qualifications, etc needed to enter construction.

Participants were asked to quantify their knowledge of the construction industry in each question area on a Likert scale from the following:

- A lot
- Quite a bit
- Some
- Very little
- Nothing at all

The following sections show the percentage of each response before and after the Work Taster for the 356 full responses received. Percentages may not always add up to 100 due to rounding errors.

The change in the mean response for each topic was calculated by assigning numerical values to the responses where 'a lot' is assigned a five and 'nothing at all' is given a one). This was tested statistically using the two-sample t-test with unequal variances (Welch's t-test) to identify whether the changes were significant.

What would it be like to work in construction

Figure 7 shows the proportion of responses for each of the five knowledge levels, before and after the Work Taster sessions, in the knowledge topic 'what it would be like to work in construction'. Before the Work Taster the mean of the responses was 2.9, which increased by 27% to 3.6 after the Work Taster. This increase was found to be statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%.

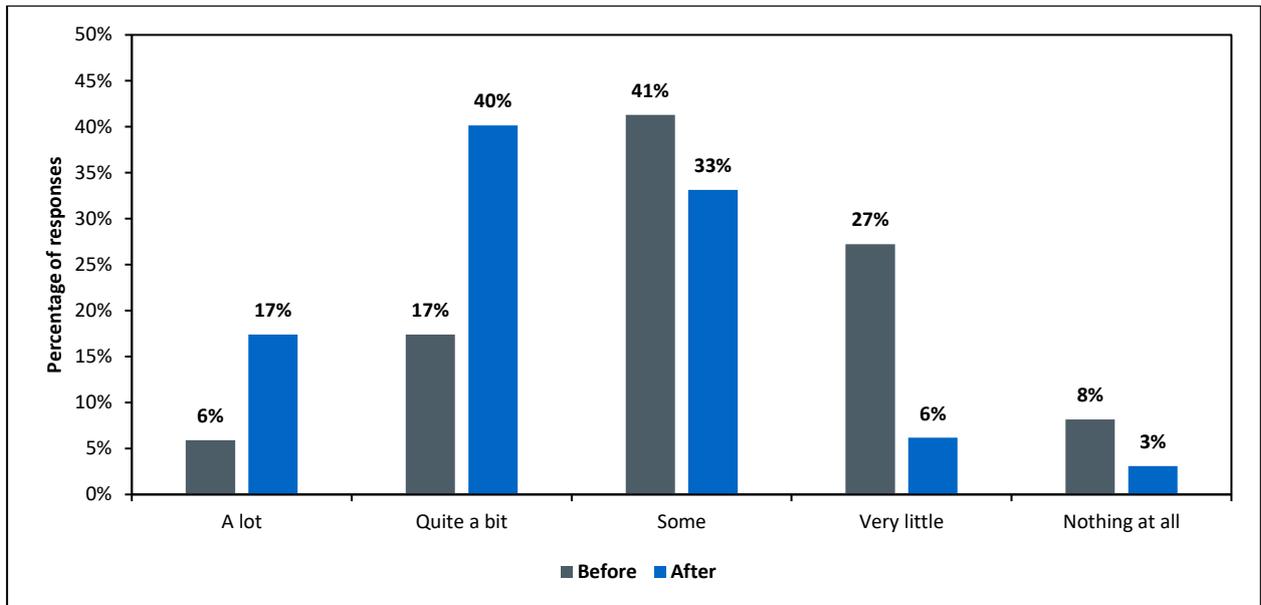


Figure 9 – Knowledge of what it would be like to work in construction before and after Work Taster

The types of jobs and careers construction offers

Figure 10 shows the proportion of responses for each of the five knowledge levels, before and after the Work Taster sessions, in the topic 'the types of jobs and careers construction offers'. Before the Work Taster the numeric mean of the responses was 3.1, which increased by 19% to 3.7 after the Work Taster. This increase was found to be statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%.

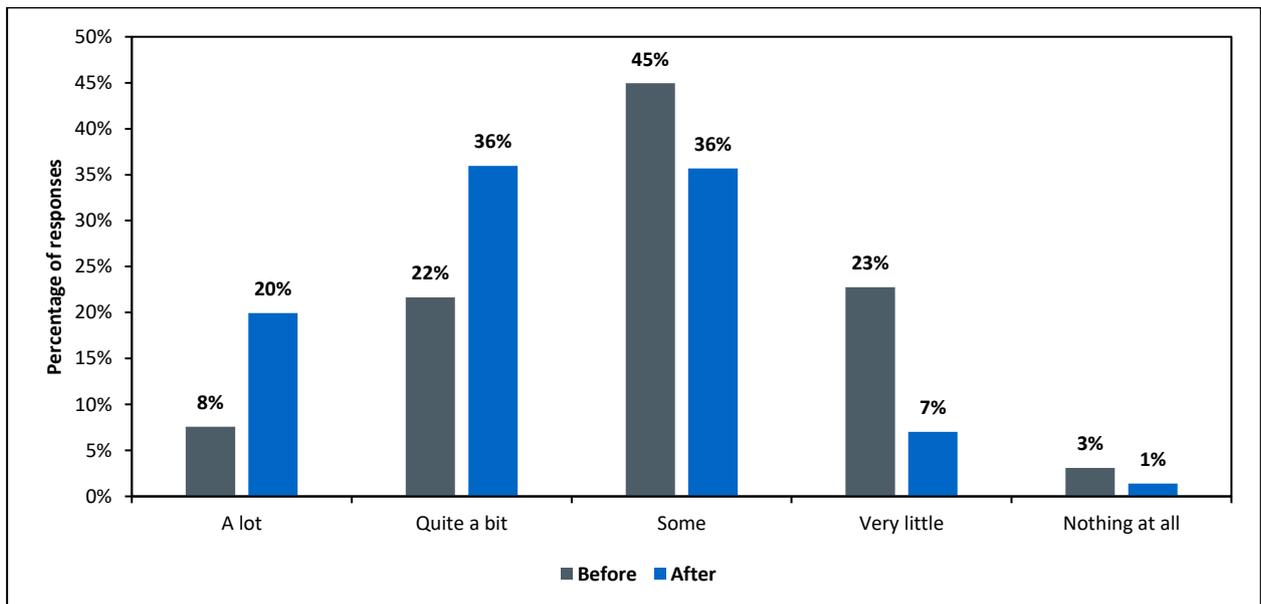


Figure 10 - Knowledge of the jobs and careers construction offers before and after Work Taster

How to find jobs or work experience in construction

Figure 11 shows the proportion of responses for each of the five knowledge levels, before and after the Work Taster sessions, in the knowledge topic 'how to find jobs or work experience in construction'. Before the Work Taster the numeric mean of the responses was 2.6, which increased by 33% to 3.5 after the Work Taster. This increase was found to be statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%.

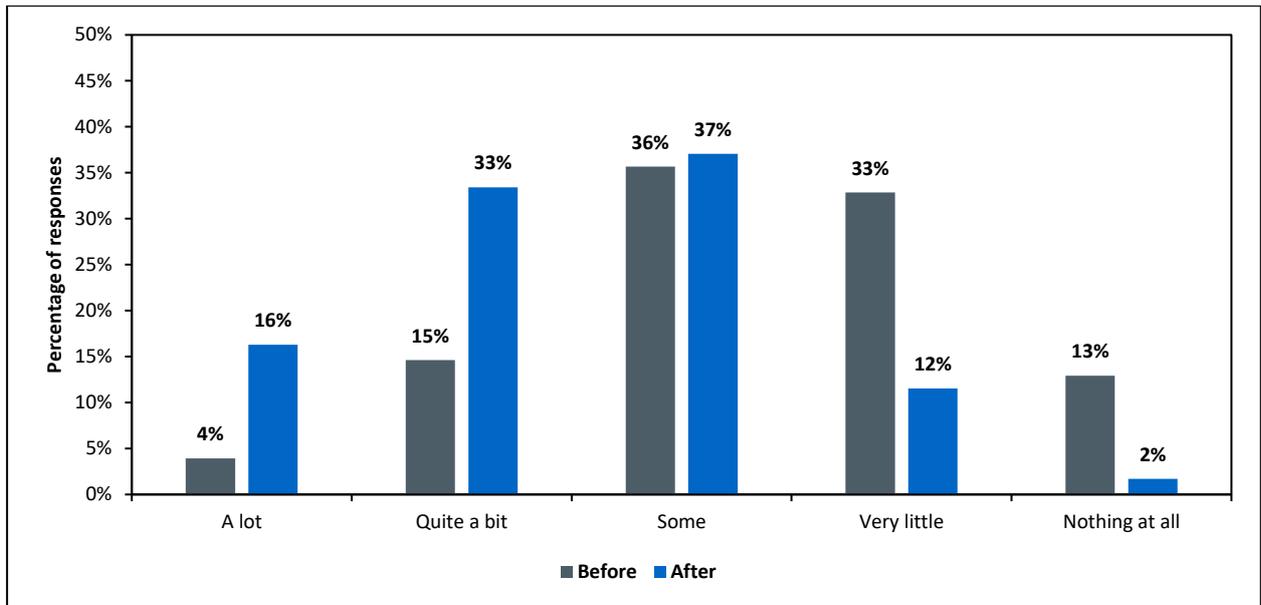


Figure 11 - Knowledge of how to find jobs or work experience in construction before and after Work Taster

Whether there are jobs in construction near you

Figure 12 shows the proportion of responses for each of the five knowledge levels, before and after the Work Taster sessions, in the knowledge topic for 'whether there are jobs in construction near you'. Before the Work Taster the numeric mean of the responses was 2.6, which increased by 28% to 3.3 after the Work Taster. This increase was found to be statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%.

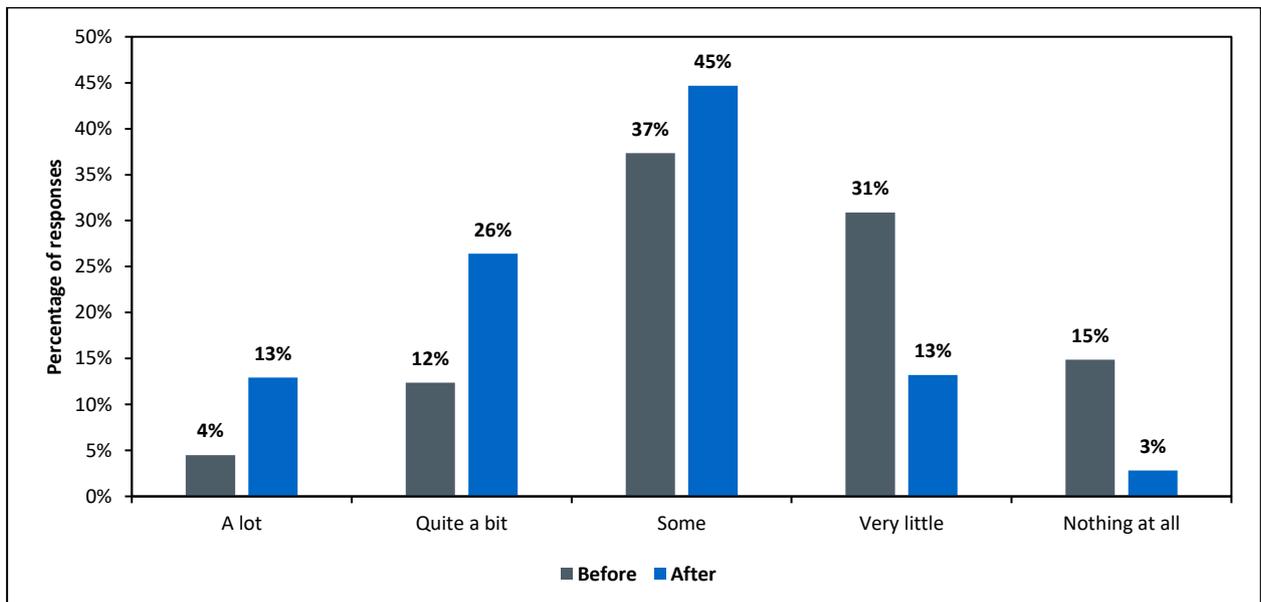


Figure 12 - Knowledge of whether there are jobs in construction near you before and after Work Taster

The opportunities for development and progression in construction

Figure 13 shows the proportion of responses for each of the five knowledge levels, before and after the Work Taster sessions, in the knowledge topic 'the opportunities for development and progression in construction'. Before the Work Taster the numeric mean of the responses was 2.6, which increased by 32% to 3.5 after the Work Taster. This increase was found to be statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%.

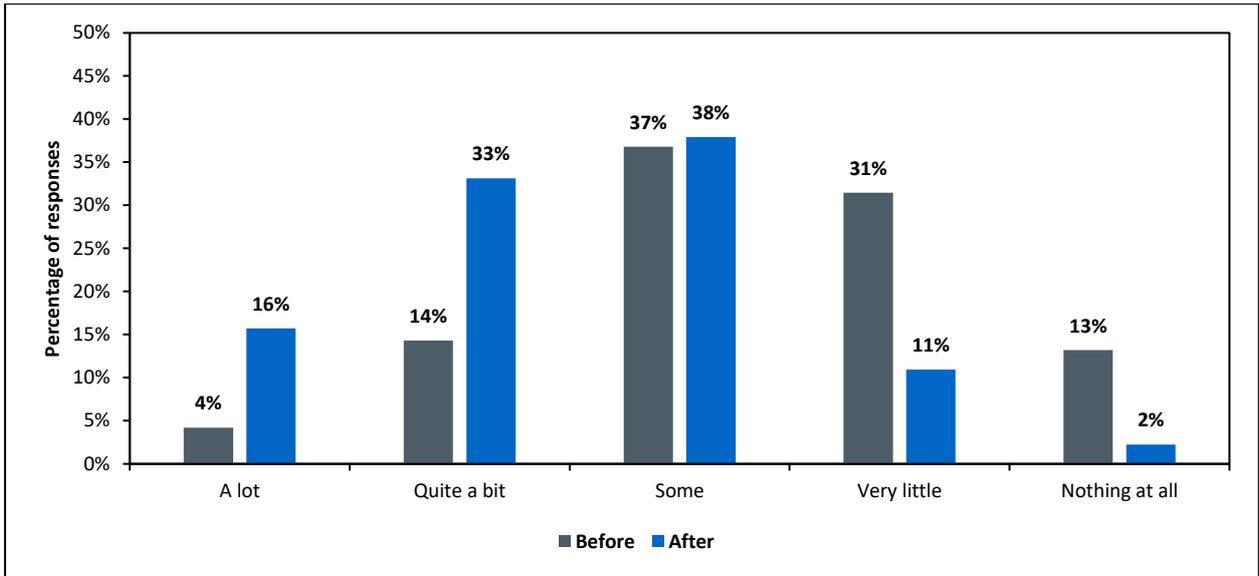


Figure 13 - Knowledge of the opportunities for development and progression in construction before and after Work Taster

The skills, qualifications, etc needed to enter construction

Figure 14 shows the proportion of responses for each of the five knowledge levels, before and after the Work Taster sessions, in the knowledge topic 'the skills, qualifications, etc needed to enter construction'. Before the Work Taster the numeric mean of the responses was 2.8, which increased by 25% to 3.6 after the Work Taster. This increase was found to be statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%.

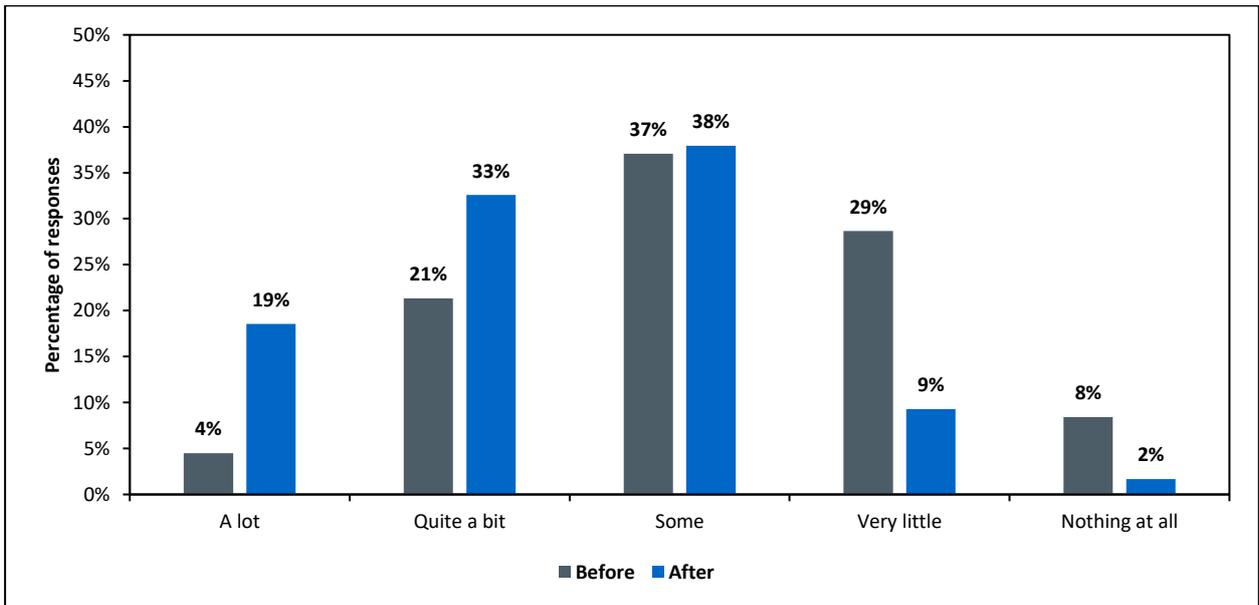


Figure 14 - Knowledge of the skills and qualifications needed to enter construction before and after Work Taster

Summary of participant knowledge

The percentage mean numeric score for the six knowledge topics before and after the Work Taster events are given in Figure 15.

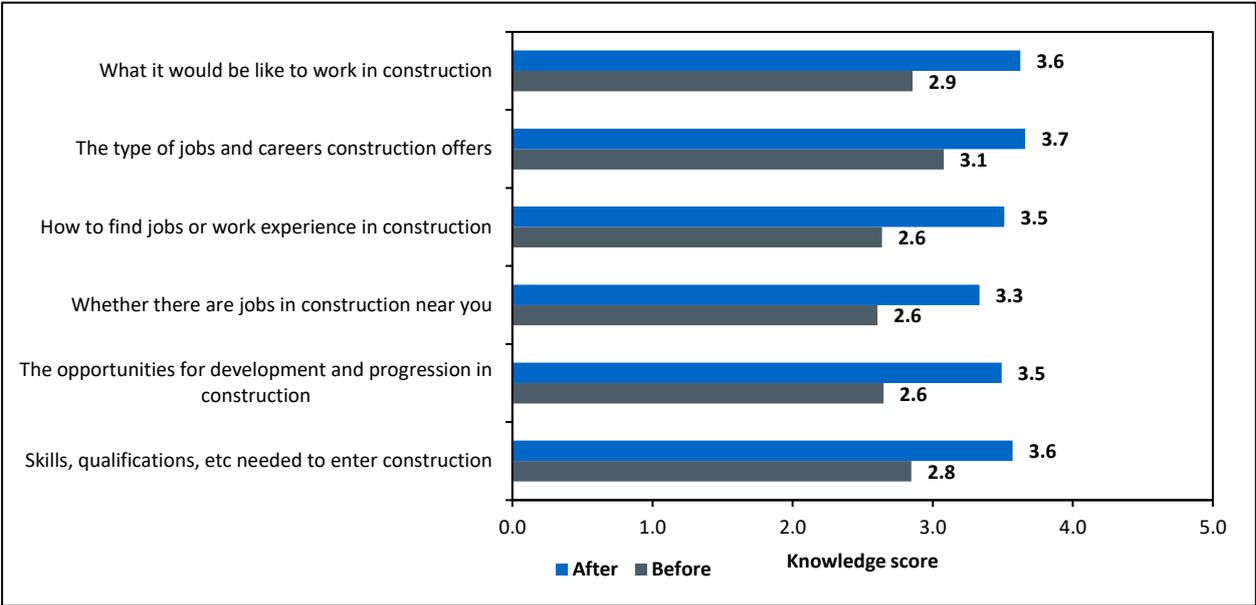


Figure 15 - Participant knowledge scores before and after Work Taster

6.2. PARTICIPANT INTEREST IN A CONSTRUCTION CAREER

Participants were asked to quantify their interest in a career in construction on a Likert scale from the following:

- Very likely
- Likely
- Unsure
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

Figure 16 shows the percentage of each participant response before and after the Work Taster of the 352 full responses received, four participants that were already in a construction apprenticeship or job have been excluded from the results. Percentages may not always add up to 100 due to rounding errors.

The change in mean response was calculated by assigning numeric values to the responses ('very likely' is five down to 'very unlikely' as one) and then tested using the two-sample t-test with unequal variances (Welch's t-test) to identify whether the changes were significant. The two-sample t-test was most appropriate to evaluate whether the means of the two populations (before and after Work Taster) were statistically different due to the Work Taster sessions.

Before the Work Taster the numeric mean of the participant interest in a construction career response was 3.7, which increased by 10% to 4.0 after the Work Taster. This increase was small but found to be statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%.

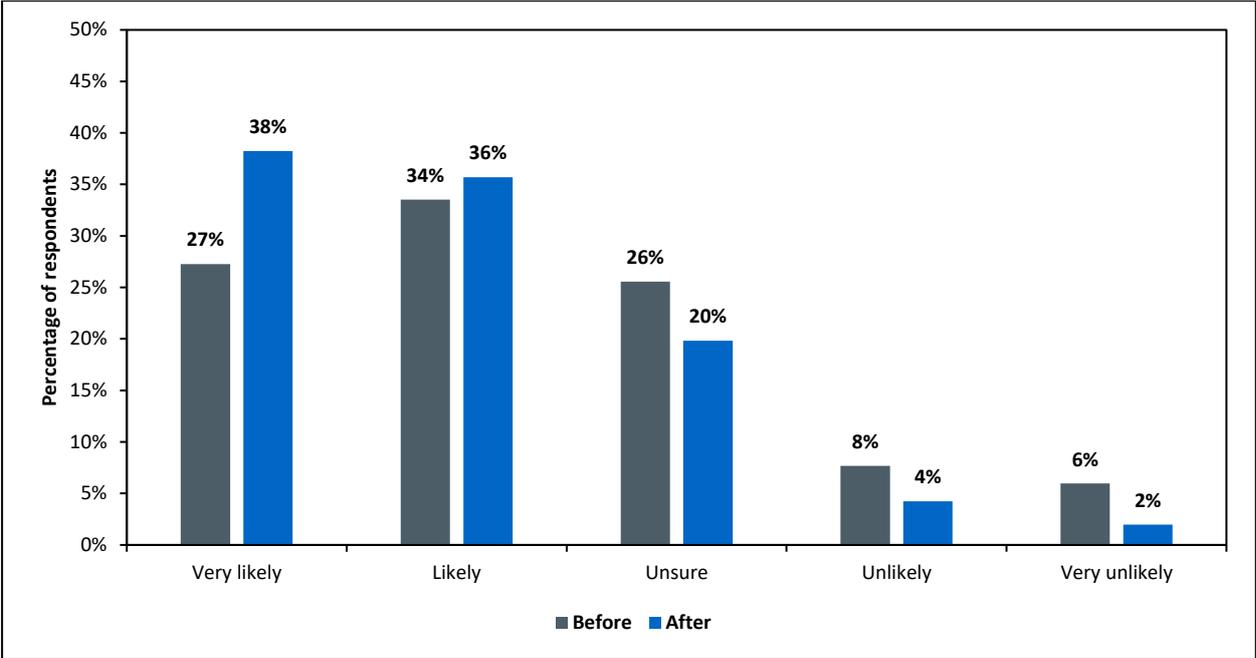


Figure 16 – Interest in applying for a job or an apprenticeship in construction before and after Work Taster

6.3. REASONS FOR AN INTEREST IN CONSTRUCTION

As part of the participant feedback, the young people were asked to provide the reasons why they were likely or unlikely to pursue a career in construction. Figure 17 shows the participant free text responses aggregated into their main theme(s) as a word cloud.

The primary driving forces for young people’s engagement with construction was that they were interested in and/or enjoyed the work. Many respondents were also attracted by the practical and hands-on nature of construction. The count of the responses for the word cloud are summarised in Table 1.



Figure 17 - Responses to why participants are likely to pursue a career in construction.

Table 1 – Reasons respondents are 'likely' or 'very likely' to consider a career in construction participant responses.

Aggregated response word	Count ¹⁵
Enjoyed	67
Interested	66
Learned	34
Hands-on	26
Options	18
Opportunities	13
Family in construction	11
Fun	11
Practical	11
Good pay	7
Joiner	7
I don't know	7
Variety	5
Apprenticeship	4
Trade	4
Architect	3
Know a trade	3
Local jobs	3

6.4. BENEFITS OF WORK TASTERS

Participants were also asked what they gained from the Work Taster experience, the results of which are given in Figure 18. The feedback shows that the Work Tasters were most effective in raising awareness of the types of jobs available in construction, what the construction sector is, and the skills and qualifications required. Participants also indicated that they gained improved teamworking and communications skills from the Work Tasters.

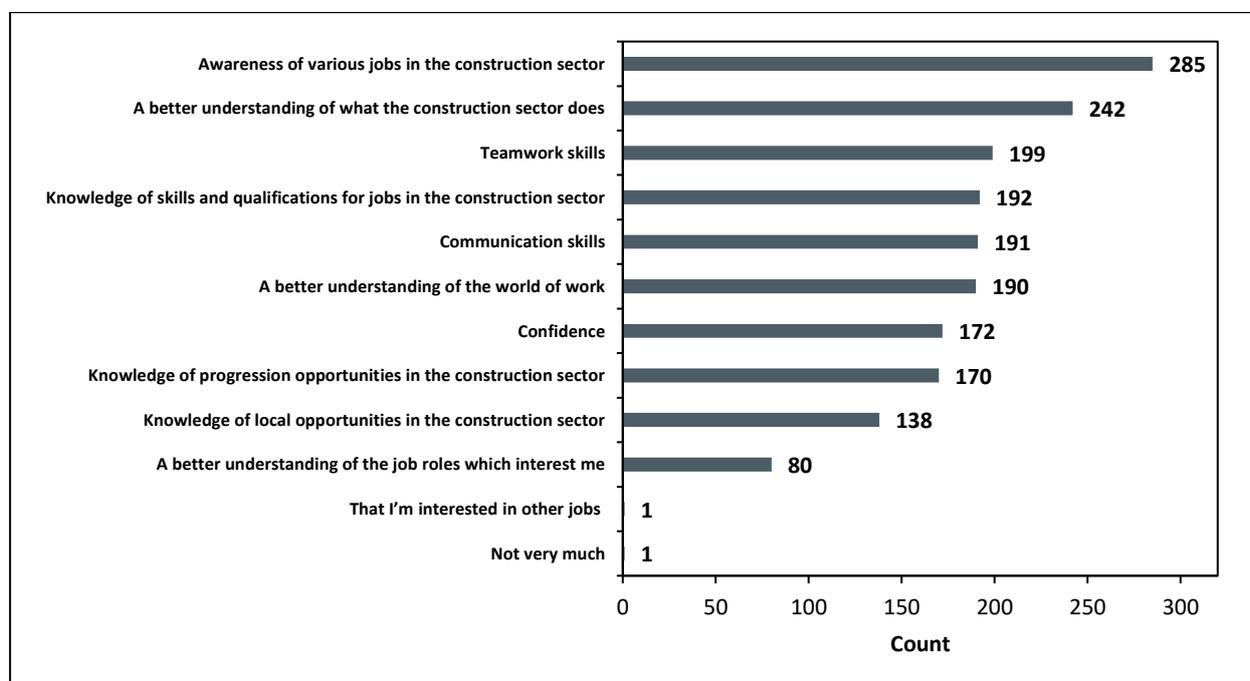


Figure 18 – What participants gained from the Work Taster

The participant feedback further demonstrates the success that Work Tasters have achieved in informing young people about and engaging them with the construction industry.

¹⁵Responses with a count of two or less were excluded.

6.5. SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS TO WORK TASTERS

Finally, as part of the participant feedback, the young people were asked what could be done to improve the Work Tasters. A word cloud of this feedback, aggregated by theme, is given in Figure 19 and the counts in Table 2.



Figure 19 - Work Taster suggested improvement responses.

The feedback shows that the majority of participants could not suggest improvements to the Work Tasters and overall were happy with how they were run. The most common suggestions for improvement were:

- more time at each activity station;
- more time for the Work Taster overall;
- more hands-on activities; and
- more variety in the trades and jobs demonstrated.

This feedback is in agreement with the observations made by the project manager in Section 3, which highlighted the difficulty in securing a full day of time from employers, and the difficulty in ensuring that students can be transported to the event in time to experience the full day.

Table 2 - Suggested improvements to Work Taster themes.

Participant feedback theme	Count ¹⁶
Nothing	130
More time at each station	30
More hands-on	27
More time/longer session	25
Don't know	22
More variety in trade/job roles	15
Better catering	11
More engaging	8
Better organisation	6
More information on jobs/apprenticeships	4
More information on skills and qualification	3
Site visit	3

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The Construction Work Tasters project has introduced 2,800 young people to the construction industry through brief, focused experiences. Over the course of three years, the project engaged a wide range of stakeholders and piloted a new model of career exploration that complements existing educational and training pathways. The results demonstrate both the promise of Work Tasters and the challenges inherent in implementing them at scale.

On the positive side, the project delivered over 2,800 taster experiences (as of 31 March 2025) across every region of Scotland, achieving its target of 2,800 by the end of the delivery period. Dozens of employers – around 100 in total – participated, from major contractors to smaller companies and micro-businesses, and many reported that the tasters were valuable for their own talent pipeline and community relations. Hundreds of educators were involved, and awareness of construction careers was raised among school staff and career advisers. Most importantly, thousands of young people who might otherwise never have set foot on a construction site or spoken to a tradesperson got a chance to do so. The qualitative feedback from participants is encouraging: a large majority (roughly 95%) rated their taster experience as good or excellent, and many indicated they learned new things about the sector and felt more motivated to consider construction as a career option. Measures of self-reported knowledge and interest rose appreciably – for example, the share of participants who said they had “quite a bit” or “a lot” of knowledge about construction jobs doubled after the taster (from ~28% before to ~56% after, based on survey data), and the proportion who said they were likely to pursue a construction career increased from about 61% pre-taster to 74% post-taster. These are meaningful shifts in perception that, if followed up, can translate into new entrants to the industry.

The project also brought to light critical challenges that temper these achievements. Engagement was uneven, with some employers and schools needing extensive support to follow through on their commitments. External factors like school timetables and staff shortages frequently disrupted plans, requiring adaptability. The intended breadth of participant reach (16 to 25 year-olds, diverse backgrounds) was not fully realised – participation skewed toward males who were in the senior phase of high school, highlighting ongoing issues in attracting females, older groups of young people, and those from certain demographics. The data collection difficulties mean that the true impact may be under-recorded, and they illustrate a need for better systems if such initiatives are to be scaled. These challenges are not reasons to abandon the model, but rather to refine it. Each obstacle encountered has informed the detailed recommendations in Section 8, which provide a roadmap for sustaining and improving Work Tasters.

¹⁶ Themes with a count of two or less are excluded.

7.1. KEY FINDINGS

The Work Tasters pilot project identified several key findings summarised in the following sections.

Short targeted interventions work to raise awareness and enthusiasm

Even a one-day or half-day experience can significantly change a young person's view of construction – especially if it is hands-on and delivered with enthusiasm. This supports the notion that multiple, smaller career exposures during school (as opposed to a single two-week placement) can cumulatively have big impacts.

Support and coordination are essential

The project's successes were often in areas with strong DYW coordination or where there were particularly committed members of staff in a construction company making things happen. Where that was absent, activity lagged. This underscores that having dedicated roles or organisations to broker and manage tasters is a prerequisite to success; it won't happen on goodwill alone in a busy school or business.

There is no one-size-fits-all participant

The variation in age, background knowledge, and interest among young people means tasters need flexibility in design. The model can accommodate a wide range, but care should be taken to tailor approaches (as discussed in Section 5). Future programmes should plan for differentiated pathways (e.g. a strand for school pupils, a strand for college students, etc.) under a common umbrella.

Industry buy-in grows with evidence

At first, many employers were hesitant or simply passive. As the project delivered successful examples and as word spread (and as some policy levers like community benefits kicked in), the willingness to participate increased. By project's end, we even had companies approaching us unsolicited to host tasters. This indicates a tipping point is achievable: once a critical mass of employers see tasters as "the done thing," it could become self-perpetuating. Continued demonstration of value (through case studies, data, and recognition) will push the industry past that tipping point.

Schools need empowerment from the system.

Where headteachers treated tasters as a priority, their schools consistently showed up and benefited. Where there was ambivalence or lack of support, opportunities were lost. It's clear that if education authorities and inspectors explicitly value these activities, schools will respond accordingly. Embedding tasters into formal expectations (and providing resources for them) will integrate them into school culture rather than relying on individual teachers' enthusiasm.

7.2. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Looking ahead, to fully capitalise on what has been started, some future considerations that should be highlighted are detailed in the following sections.

Mainstreaming within the DYW/skills system

The processes and relationships established by this project should be integrated into the ongoing operations of DYW regional groups and any successor bodies. Rather than viewing it as a time-bound project, Work Tasters can become a standard offering of DYW to schools and employers. As the Skills Delivery Landscape in Scotland potentially evolves (with the prospect of a single agency or closer alignment of SDS, SFC, etc.), it will be important that Work Tasters, and the lessons from this project, inform those structural changes. For example, if SDS and local partners develop new programmes for school-employer engagement, the Work Tasters model should be included as a proven method. CITB and industry partners should continue to champion it in these conversations.

Expanding to other sectors or scaling in construction

The concept of short, focused Work Tasters is not unique to construction. While this project was sector-specific, the approach could be applied in other industries suffering skill shortages (manufacturing, care, tech, etc.). In fact, one unintended outcome of the project's publicity is that other sectors' DYW groups showed interest in doing similar schemes. There may be an opportunity for Scottish Government to promote "taster experiences" as a national initiative across industries, using this project as a template. Conversely, within construction itself, the demand for new workers (driven by infrastructure plans, net zero targets, and retiring workforce) suggests that even 2,800 tasters is just scratching the surface. Scaling up might involve setting higher targets (e.g. make 5,000+ tasters a regular annual goal across Scotland) or deepening the experiences (converting more of those tasters into actual apprenticeship or college enrolments). To achieve scale, a combination of the policy alignment and increased funding noted in the recommendations is vital.

Monitoring long-term outcomes

The true success of Work Tasters will ultimately be measured by how many young people enter construction careers who otherwise might not have. While that is beyond the immediate scope of this project's measurable outcomes (given the time lag – a S5 pupil might not enter the workforce until a couple of years later), it is a crucial question. We recommend that CITB and partners track participants longitudinally where possible. Even anecdotal follow-ups – for instance, checking if those who showed strong interest during tasters went on to apply for apprenticeships – can provide powerful evidence. One idea is to maintain a contact list of willing participants to send a follow-up survey a year or two later, asking what path they took. Over time, building this data will show conversion rates. If it turns out that, say, 10% of taster participants join the industry within two years, that's a metric that can be used in ROI calculations for expansion. Additionally, those who don't enter construction might still cite the experience as beneficial in other ways (such as improving their confidence or helping them make informed choices), which speaks to broader outcomes in education and personal development.

Sustaining the network of champions

Finally, the project has created a network of engaged individuals – educators who have seen the lightbulb go on for their students during a taster, employers who have discovered a new recruitment avenue, young people who have become ambassadors to their peers for construction careers. It is important not to lose this human capital. As the formal project ends, CITB and DYW should find ways to keep these champions connected. This could be through an annual event or forum on work-based learning, a newsletter highlighting ongoing taster opportunities, or involving them in mentoring the next wave of participants/hosts. For example, teachers who were successful could mentor other teachers at different schools on how to organise and get buy-in for tasters; experienced host employers could buddy up with new hosts to guide them. Leveraging this peer-to-peer support will reduce the need for central intervention over time.

The Construction Work Tasters project has been a pioneering effort within Scotland's construction sector. It tackled entrenched stereotypes and structural barriers with a fresh approach and has laid down a model that can be built upon. The findings underscore that early, engaging exposure to the world of work is a critical ingredient in addressing skills shortages – but it must be done thoughtfully, with support and inclusivity at its heart. As we conclude this initial phase, the hope is that Work Tasters will not end as a pilot project but rather evolve into a sustained programme that continues to inspire future builders of Scotland.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Drawing on the project's experiences and the analysis above, this section presents recommendations tailored to key stakeholder groups – Employers, Education and Training Providers, and Policymakers/Funders – with the goal of improving future Work Tasters and, more broadly, strengthening youth engagement in construction. By addressing the challenges identified and building on successes, these recommendations aim to embed Work Tasters as a sustainable element of Scotland's approach to developing the young workforce.

8.1. FOR EMPLOYERS

The following recommendations are aimed at Work Taster participating employers – construction companies and industry partners.

Make use of available support and resources

- Employers should collaborate and make use of the support available from DYW to reduce the perceived administrative burden of holding Work Tasters on capacity.

Embrace flexible Work Taster formats

- Employers should be encouraged to provide shorter/smaller-scale Work Tasters if they cannot commit to a full day Work Taster.

Train staff and use established best practices

- Employers should ensure that those delivering tasters are equipped with the skills to engage and inspire young people.
- Companies could designate a “Youth Engagement Champion” among their staff who has been given basic training in presenting to and mentoring young people.
- Companies that have run successful taster sessions should be encouraged to share their approach with others.

Link Work Tasters to recruitment and further opportunities

- Employers should offer avenues for follow-up with the young people for future more in-depth experiences, apprenticeship opportunities or job openings.

Recognise and champion diversity and inclusion in Work Tasters

- When hosting tasters, companies should make a point of showcasing workplace diversity and adopting inclusive approaches to delivering Work Tasters.

8.2. FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

The following recommendations are aimed at education and training providers – schools, colleges, DYW teams.

Build greater commitment from schools

- Schools should work closely with their DYW coordinators to manage expectations and commitments. Work Tasters should be agreed to and signed off by appropriate school management and treated as firm commitments.
- Schools should vet Work Taster attendees based on genuine interest, not convenience.
- Education authorities may wish to issue guidance for participation in Work Tasters and deliverables which must be reported.
- Connect schools that have successfully participated in Work Taster sessions with those that have shown reluctance in order to share positive experiences and build enthusiasm.

Focus on the right students and promote inclusion

- Schools should identify students who would benefit from or otherwise not be exposed to construction as a possible career to attend Work Tasters.
- Schools should use career interest data or guidance teacher input to pick students who have expressed interest in practical careers, who are undecided and could use inspiration, or who come from backgrounds underrepresented in construction.
- Work Taster hosts should be aware of, and ensure accommodations are made for, students requiring additional support.

Prepare and pre-infrom students for Work Tasters

- Before any Work Taster, teachers/lecturers should spend time briefing students on what to expect, going over basic etiquette and priming their curiosity by discussing what they might see or what roles they might encounter.
- After the Work Taster there should be a debrief or an assignment for students to reflect on what they have learned.

Embed Work Tasters into cirriculum planning

- Schools and colleges should formally embed Work Tasters (and similar employer engagement) into their curriculum and annual planning.
- Local authorities could include Work Taster participation as a metric in their school progress reports or even tie it to school evaluation frameworks.

Support data collection and evaluation efforts

- Schools and colleges should treat the completion of registration and feedback forms as mandatory components of the activity.
- DYW regional teams should collate and share feedback results with the schools involved, creating a virtuous cycle of improvement.
- DYW should follow-up with participants of Work Tasters to measure how many participants later went on to future training, an apprenticeship, or a career in construction. This will help quantify the impact the Work Tasters are having on the workforce and skills shortages in construction.

8.3. FOR POLICYMAKERS AND FUNDERS (CITB, SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, INDUSTRY BODIES)

Align community benefits and funding policies with Work Tasters

- Policymakers at national and local levels should continue to embed Work Tasters into policy instruments like community benefit clauses, grant criteria, and youth employment initiatives.
- CITB and Scottish Government should work together to add Work Tasters as a unique and specific activity to the menu of recognised activities in frameworks such as the National Skills Academy for Construction (NSAFC) and any public procurement guidelines.

Continue and scale funding for Work Tasters and similar programmes

- CITB (and/or government funding streams) should continue to support this model beyond the initial project. This could involve a plan for a phase 2 or mainstreaming of the Work Taster programme.
- Policymakers should consider integrating Work Tasters into larger youth employment or economic development funding pots.
- Establishing a Travel and Access Fund for young people's work-based learning that schools or DYW could use would help remove the travel barrier for students.

Promote cultural change in schools and industry

- National campaigns or communications that reinforce the value of short-term work experiences and demonstrate benefits should be established.

8.4. SUMMARY

By implementing the above recommendations, policymakers and funders will create an enabling environment that amplifies the efforts of employers and educators. The Construction Work Tasters project has shown what is possible on a pilot scale; it is recommended that CITB and other stakeholders should scale up the impact, remove

systemic barriers, and ensure that such engagements become a permanent feature of Scotland's skills development landscape. The upcoming reform and investment decisions (such as those following the Withers Review) are an opportunity to institutionalise Work Tasters. If implemented, these steps will help ensure that the spark ignited in many young people by their first taste of construction work is fanned into a lasting interest, and ultimately, a new generation of talent for the industry. The challenges are real, but so is the momentum now created. The task ahead is to embed and expand what has been proven to work, so that short, powerful Work Tasters become a staple of how we grow our future workforce, in construction and beyond.

Construction Work Tasters

A Guide for Employers



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Guide to planning & running Construction work tasters for employers

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CITB Foreword

Inspiring young people to explore a career in construction is key to tackling the skills shortage that currently exists within the industry. With over 180 different construction roles in this diverse industry, understanding the range of opportunities that exist for young people of all backgrounds and abilities is key for both the individuals themselves and the career influencers guiding them into the world of work.

Short, targeted interventions work to raise awareness, knowledge and enthusiasm for the industry within young people. Even a one-day or half-day experience can significantly change a young person's view of construction – especially if it is hands-on and delivered with enthusiasm.

The CITB funded Construction Work Tasters project was commissioned to increase the number and quality of construction work tasters delivered in Scotland. During 2022 - 2025 employers delivered over 2800 quality taster experiences to young people in Scotland. For the industry to channel the diverse, skilled and capable workforce of the future we need to build on this momentum.

This guide provides information on how to plan and deliver a good quality work taster with the support of your local DYW Regional Team



Part 1 - Introduction

I. Who is this guide for?

This guide is aimed at employers operating within the construction industry.

The aim of the construction work tasters project is to encourage more talented young people, from a diverse range of backgrounds, to pursue one of the many careers that construction offers.

Participating in a construction work taster can support young people with their decision-making when it comes to careers. Delivering work tasters can also help employers match the right young person to the right role - aiding apprenticeship recruitment and retention.

Much like the industry itself, construction work tasters lend themselves well to collaboration - whether it be principal contractors co-ordinating their supply chain to deliver a large-scale event or multiple SMEs working together to showcase different trades and disciplines. Joint planning and pooling of time and resources can help to engage a more diverse group. It can also make delivering work tasters more sustainable over the long-term.

Organisations/ forums that can host work tasters, examples -

- Construction companies
- Design and engineering consultancies
- Training providers
- Trade associations and membership bodies
- Third-sector organisations
- Suppliers and manufacturers
- Employer forums/ networks

People that can run work tasters, examples -

- **Community Engagement / Benefits Officers**
- **Construction and Site Managers**
- **Supervisors**
- **Training Managers and Officers**
- **Experienced tradespeople / Senior Designers**



Part 1 - Introduction

II. What is a construction work taster?

Construction work tasters help to provide a positive and realistic experience of the industry and to raise awareness of the range of roles on offer. With the industry facing unprecedented skills shortages - work tasters can highlight career paths to young people, aged 16 – 25, that they may not have previously considered.

From planners and designers to skilled trades and plant operators, as well as all of the ancillary and managerial roles in between, work tasters can help match young people with a profession or vocation that is right for them.

Work tasters, at a ½ day to 2 days duration, are shorter than traditional work experience placements, are employer-led and have a practical/ site element involved. Work tasters typically take place within a work environment (although employers have also linked up with construction academies and set-up small temporary worksites to provide the best possible experience).

Ideally, your work taster should contain five key elements - an induction with health and safety briefing, practical activity (or shadowing where the activity is high-risk, a Q&A, site tour and finally an evaluation (these are highlighted in yellow in the example schedule below).

Construction Work Taster Schedule		
Date: 20/08/25		Location: Head Office, 424 Steel Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1XX
Time	Session	On the day
08:45 - 09:00	Arrival - report to reception	PPE will be provided (collect from reception). Please take a packed lunch hot & cold drinks will be provided.
09:00 - 9:30	Welcome Plan for the day, why choose construction?	
09:30 - 9:45	Health and safety induction Site safety, code of conduct, emergency procedures, PPE	Contact Name: Rachael Slater, Community Engagement Officer Contact number: 07891 XXXXXX
09:45 - 10:45	Practical activity Bricklaying and insulation workshop	
10:45 - 11:00	Break	Where to find us 
11:00 - 12:00	Meet the..... Site manager, apprentice scaffolder, architectural technician & ecologist	
12:00 - 12:45	Lunch	
12:45 - 14:00	Site Tour Be inspired & gain some onsite insight with a tour of one of our local building projects	
14:00 - 15:00	CV clinic Tips for successful applications, take part in a mock interview	
15:00 - 15:30	Debrief & evaluation Feedback from your supervisors and your chance to give feedback on the day's activities	

5

Part 2 - Getting Started

I. Aligning with goals & objectives

By considering the following when planning your construction work taster -

- Workforce forecast / skills plan (a work taster can be designed to focus on skills that are with a current/ projected high demand (or have been difficult to recruit for in the past or have a high turnover);
- Key performance indicators;
- Alignment with community benefit delivery/ community engagement required under public contracts awarded/ recently tendered for;

you can design the work taster in a manner that works for your organisation/ group of companies

II. Selecting & preparing participants

- Identify the schools / colleges / areas you would like to target
- When scheduling the date(s) of your work taster, your local DYW Regional Team will be able to advise suitable dates (that avoid with school holidays, exam periods and other school events). Links to regional teams can be found in Part 4 - 'Where to get help.'
- Discuss the scope of the work taster with your team / companies you intend to work with - do you wish to showcase specific trades / disciplines or will the work taster have broader appeal? Giving the participants a 'taster' of as many roles as possible increases the likelihood of finding a good fit with their future career
- Complete the 'Work Taster Offer Form' (appended to this guide), provide as much detail as possible (timetable
- Consider co-designing the construction work taster with the participants themselves. Whether via a school visit beforehand or a questionnaire - find out what they'd like to gain from the experience. Such input may lead to better outcomes

Part 2 - Getting Started

III. Risk Assessments and PPE

Most young people attending work tasters will have little or no experience of working in a construction environment. This lack of experience, and, in some cases a lack of physical and psychological maturity, is a key factor to consider when deciding what work areas young people can access/ what activities they can undertake.

If your company already employs a young person or have recently hosted a work taster/ placement at the same site, your existing risk assessment should be sufficient. Providing those attending are of a similar level of maturity, and have no additional needs requiring adaptations, there is no need to repeat your risk assessment. You can use the following checklists to help ensure that you are ready to host your work taster and/ or site tour -

Work Taster Risk Assessment Checklist (Part 1)	YES	NO
Is there any task that is likely to be beyond the participants physical or psychological capacity? e.g. manual handling tasks that involve sustained force whilst adopting an awkward posture?		
Are there any significant risks on site that young persons cannot reasonably be expected to recognise and/ or avoid through their lack of experience or training?		
Do any of the tasks/ elements of site visit involve exposure to noise, vibration, radiation, extreme heat/ cold or airborne dust that could put the young persons' health at risk?		
Has exposure to hazardous and toxic substances been eliminated to within permitted exposure limits/ as far as is reasonably practicable? Have you considered participants with medical conditions that may put them at increased risk?		
Could the work that is taking place on site potentially expose participants to any substances that are carcinogenic (can cause cancer e.g. asbestos) or teratogenic (can damage or harm an unborn child e.g. lead)?		

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the above, ensure that control measures to suitably manage/ eliminate these risks have been included within your risk assessment (an example Young Persons Risk Assessment can be found on Page 18).

Part 2 - Getting Started

III. Risk Assessments and PPE (continued)

Work Taster Risk Assessment Checklist (Part 2)	YES	NO
Do you have the appropriate Employer's Liability and Public Liability Insurance/ Contractors' All Risk Insurance in place? (separate insurance policies are not required for young people however employers are advised to inform their insurer that the work taster is taking place/ submit risk assessment if required).		
Can adequate levels of supervision can be maintained during the work taster?		
Will the young person receive a health and safety induction/ briefing including an explanation of site hazards, safety measures in place and emergency procedures?		
Have you received details of any medical conditions that may require additional support? (ensure emergency contact details are held for all of those attending)		
Have you ensured that any equipment and machinery used during the work taster is in good condition and safe to use?*		
Will the young person be provided with all of the appropriate PPE?		
Do you have trained first-aiders/ first-aid equipment available at the site?		

*The Provision and use of work equipment Regulations 1998 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 put the onus training and capability rather than minimum age limits. However this would still exclude the use of high-risk work equipment such as power-driven, hand-fed cutting and splitting machinery e.g. band saws from being used during work tasters.

Some DYW Regions hold limited stocks of PPE so it's worth getting in contact if obtaining sufficient quantities presents a barrier to delivery.



Part 2 - Getting Started

IV. Safeguarding and Welfare

DYW offer the following guidance in relation to DYW activity, such as Construction Work Tasters -

'Providing occasional Work Taster experiences is not deemed to be part of your usual day-to-day activity nor your main role as an employer, and thus interpreted as 'incidental contact,' under guidance relating to Disclosure Scotland's PVG Scheme.

Such work taster activity may see you providing career insight and inspiration., Whilst the role of a Careers Advisor, who delivers mandated careers guidance to young people in schools via the national careers service, is a 'regulated' role, offering a work taster would not be classed as as 'regulated work.'

Should you have any questions relating to the above, please contact your local DYW team.

Should a young person or group fail to show for a pre-planned work taster, please get in contact with your main school liaison

V. Insurance

Please check with your insurer in advance if your existing employers' liability insurance and public liability insurance/ Contractors All Risk insurance covers young people attending work tasters (some Employers' Liability policies will have a definition of "employee" that covers students on work experience placements). They may require a copy of your risk assessment for the activities being delivered.

In the event you are currently exempt from requiring employers' liability insurance e.g. a family run business which is not a limited company, please contact your insurer - you will likely require temporary employers' liability insurance for the duration of the work taster(s).

In England, Association of British Insurers (ABI), BIBA and Lloyds of London have agreed that, as a matter of convention, students on work experience placements should be treated as employees for the purposes of insurance against bodily injury (that is, they will be covered by the Employers' Liability policy). We are currently seeking clarification as to why this does not apply in Scotland.

Part 3 -

Delivering your work taster

I. Welcome & Safety Briefing

This sets the scene for the session / day, so it's important that personnel running work tasters have the ability to inspire and engage with young people.

- Introduce yourself and the companies taking part
- Provide an overview of the day's schedule and reiterate what is expected in terms of conduct (an example code of conduct has been appended to this guide). This information can be communicated in advance of the work taster to save time
- Emphasise the importance of the health and safety of the workforce within the industry, as well as your company's commitment to it
- Explain that construction sites are constantly evolving, highlight the hazards, significant risks and the control measures that are in place to manage these
- Ensure that attendees are aware of any areas of the workplace / site that are off-limits
- Check that attendees understand the risks, as well as any instructions that have been provided. Make them aware of how to report / raise any concerns that may arise
- Explain that PPE is mandatory on construction sites and ensure that attendees are provided with the appropriate PPE for any practical activities being undertaken
- Highlight what to do in the event of an emergency
- Pace the flow at which this information is communicated - check that attendees have understood and ask them to raise anything that they are unsure about
- If time permits, establish rapport with an icebreaker and make the work taster as interactive as possible

Part 3 -

Delivering your work taster

II. Practical Activity/ Shadowing

The practical element can take place on a construction site, workshop, construction academy, an office environment or across a mix of all of these

- When devising activities, you may wish to base these around skills needed in growing professions and / or hard to fill vacancies
- Providing the risks are sufficiently managed, it may be possible for the participants to contribute to a live project e.g. assisting finishing trades, preparing work areas etc. One employer managing a larger site was able to section-off a small work area to allow participants to work there
- Circumstances / numbers may restrict this element to observing an experienced team member. Consider ways of making this more relatable e.g. asking participants to take measurements, interpret drawings or by having an apprentice or younger member of staff present



Case study:

AC Whyte delivered a construction work taster to students in Lanarkshire that focused on the installation of energy-efficiency measures and solar PV panels.

Pupils gained hands-on experience of boarding, roofing and solar PV installation (undertaken at ground level) as part of the work taster.

Examples of work taster activities

- Laying courses of brickwork
- Using CAD
- Priming and painting
- Making a 3D Passivhaus model
- Using a laser level
- Reading and interpreting models
- Quantity surveying costing exercise
- Correct use of PPE
- Retrofit workshops
- Handcarving stonework
- Project management simulation
- Preparing and clearing work areas

Part 3 -

Delivering your work taster

III. Site Tour

Visiting active construction sites is one of the best ways for students to learn more about how construction projects work, site tours can -

- help young people to understand safety on and around sites
- provide an opportunity to interact with a range of professionals and tradespeople showing the diversity of careers within the industry

If it is not possible to incorporate a site visit within the work taster you may wish to consider alternatives e.g. VR to explore 3D models of projects or time-lapse videos of construction projects.

IV. Voice of Experience / Q & A Session

This element of the work taster can be run as part of the practical activities or be set-up separately in a meeting room or portacabin. You may wish to run a 'Speed Networking' session as part of your work taster (guidance/ prompts can be found in Appendix 5 of this guide). Young people relish the opportunity to ask questions of those with years of experience behind them - How did you start out in construction? What is the average salary in your profession? What can I do to increase my chances of being recruited by your company? What qualifications do I need?

Depending on the size and nature of your company, this could be run by a manager or supervisor (community engagement officer for larger companies), or where several companies are involved, you could include representatives from all of them. Apprentices and younger members can be highly beneficial from a peer perspective.

This can be opened up to discuss potential career paths and opportunities within the construction industry e.g. trades/ disciplines that are in high demand, current apprenticeship opportunities or one that you may have a recruitment requirement for in the near future.

The CITB's 'GoConstruct' website is a good careers resource to signpost to if time is limited.

Part 3 - Delivering your work taster

V. Wrap-up and evaluation

As the work taster is brought to a close this is the time to debrief the group, answer any final questions, provide participants with any feedback and thank them for attending but also for you to evidence your impact.

Asking young people to evaluate the work taster can help ensure it is achieving its objectives and maximise the benefits for future participants.

Photographs taken during the work taster session can also be useful in evidencing impact and for you to use in publicity (if you intend to take photographs/ videos during the work tasters please advise DYW in advance so that the necessary consents can be obtained).

Part 4 - Where to get help

Useful websites -

DYW construction resources www.dyw.scot/construction

DYW regional group contacts www.dyw.scot/regional-groups

CITB Go Construct www.goconstruct.org

Contact Us
Website
Phone
Website

What construction work tasters can look like

Appendix 1

1) Work taster for S4 - S6s led by Tier 1 contractor at training facility (working with subcontractors and suppliers)

Time	Session (Group 1)	Session (Group 2)	Info	Location
08:30 - 09:15	PPE issue, site induction & safety briefing*		Site visit to new build school	Site Office
09:15 - 10:45	Site Tour of new build school (constructed to Passivhaus/ equivalent standards) with Q+A		Scheduled time with Site agent, Construction manager, Plant operator, Sustainability Officer information on roles and career paths	Sitewide
Break				
11:00 - 11:45	Practical Activity A - Bricklaying	Practical Activity B - Roofing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical activities delivered by subcontractors and suppliers Outline of how passivhaus principles are being accommodated in both trades Sharing information on career journey/ advice on apprenticeships 	Training area
11:45 - 12:30	Practical Activity B - Roofing	Practical Activity A - Bricklaying		Training area
12:30 - 13:45	Travel to training facility followed by lunch			Cafe
13:45 - 14:30	Factory tour	Workshop: Airtightness in Buildings	Delivered by in-house team	Factory
14:30 - 15:15	Workshop: Airtightness in Buildings	Factory tour	Delivered by in-house team	Factory
15:15 - 15:30	Wrap-up & evaluation		Feedback from employers/ complete evaluation forms	Seminar Room

Case Studies

'Scaping out a World of Work Tasters' (SCAPE Scotland Event) - Morgan Sindall, Historic Environment Scotland and construction partners

Constructing Futures - Kier Construction, City Access Scaffolding and Castle Building Services

What construction work tasters can look like

Appendix 1

2) Civil engineering and groundworks work taster, discipline specific construction work taster for S4s – S6s

Time	Session	Location
09:30 -10:30	Civil Engineering: Not just roadways - visit to Stockingfield Bridge, Glasgow with intro and safety briefing Insight into the variety of careers available in the civil engineering field, the role of civil engineering in transforming transport and the importance of diversity in recruitment	Stockingfield Bridge, Glasgow
11:00 –11:40	Activity 1 – Integrating different modes of transport: from railways and roads to urban transport (session demonstrating the diversity of roles in civil engineering) 'My job' – Transport Engineer	Training academy – meeting room
11:40 - 12:40	Activity 2 – Safety briefing, PPE issue and groundworks activity – laying a screed, discussion on sustainability and innovation – recycled, upcycled and less carbon intensive materials in civil engineering 'My job' – Civils grounds worker	Training area
12:40 –13:20	Lunch	
13:20 –14:00	Activity 3 – Laser applications in civil engineering or project management exercise 'My job' – Project Manager & Design Engineer	Training area
14:00 - 15:00	Q&A/ Speed networking with apprentices and facilitators, evaluation and feedback	Meeting room

Case study - Story Contracting (DYW LED)

What construction work tasters can look like

Appendix 1

3) Office-based construction work taster for S4s – S6s, delivered by an architectural and surveying practice

Ideally a construction work taster should involve a site visit, since most people working in the industry will be required to attend site at some point. A site presence can help put roles into context, focus on the safety-critical elements of construction (both from an occupational and design perspective) and it can be exciting for to see work in progress. However site visits may not always be possible, therefore in this case the BIM demonstration helps bring the project to life

Time	Session	Location
09:00 – 09:30	Welcome & information on pathways into architecture, digital design and building surveying	Reception
09:20 – 10:30	Activity 1 - Architecture: More than just buildings: Creating a sustainable city	Training room
10:30 – 11:15	Activity 2 – Building Information Modelling: Intro and demonstration	BIM room
11:15 – 12:00	Activity 3 – Building Surveying (laser level exercise & quiz)	Training room & car park
12:00 – 12:30	Q&A session, evaluation and feedback	Reception

Construction work tasters can be designed to promote roles in the built environment where there is strong demand (in this case architects, building surveyors and BIM technicians with project management skills all have high annual recruitment requirements).

What construction work tasters can look like

Appendix 1

4) One-day construction work taster for 16 – 25 year olds – coordinated by CITB Training Group* with local SMEs (held at local college)

Time	Session	Location
09:00 – 10:00	PPE issue, Safety briefing and site visit (local housebuilding project)	Site
10:30 – 11:00	Introduction to construction & insight into in-demand roles from Training Group member companies	College
11:00 – 11:40	Activity 1 – Scaffolding activity	College
11:40 – 12:20	Activity 2 – Heat pump demo & electrical activity - cable terminations & fault-finding	College
12:20 – 13:00	Lunch	
13:00 – 13:40	Activity 3 – Quantity surveying activity	College
13:40 – 14:20	Speed networking with tradespeople, training manager, college lecturer and construction professionals*	College
14:20 – 14:40	Evaluation & feedback	College

Adding Value - Professional Bodies, Trade Associations and other Membership Organisations

Membership organisations operating within the construction and built environment sector regularly run campaigns to encourage young people to consider specific careers. Partnering with such organisations can not only help market the work tasters to a wider audience but may also supplement resources and number of facilitators available.

Case study - Coming soon

Work Taster Offer Form

Appendix 2

To be completed by employer/ lead employer delivering work taster

1. Name of Work Taster	
2. Name of Employer(s) delivering Work Taster(s)	
3. Main Contact (Lead Employer)	
Name	Job Title
Email	Phone no.
4. Address/ location of Work Taster	
5. Proposed Date(s), Start & Finish Time(s)	
6. How many young people is this for?	7. Age range*
8. Do participants need to be accompanied by an educator/ responsible adult?	
9. What sessions/ activities will be included?	
10. Is your work taster promoting specific roles/ professions within the industry e.g. Roofing, Civil Engineering, Surveying, Plant Mechanics? OR Targeting young people studying particular subjects/ with specific career interests e.g. Trades, STEM, Digital, Green Careers & Sustainability? (If yes please provide details)	

Work Taster Offer Form

Appendix 2

11. Can reasonable adjustments be made to make this work taster inclusive/ accessible?	
12. Will PPE be provided? Any dress/ clothing requirements?	
13. Will refreshments/ lunch be provided?	
14. Is there any other information you would like the young people should be aware of?	
15. Do you plan to take photographs/ video footage of the event?	
16. Do you have employers liability insurance and public liability insurance?	
<i>Please see note on Page 9, you may be asked to provide a copy of your insurance certificates.</i>	
17. Contact details (on the day of work taster)	
Name	Job Title
Email	Phone no.

Please contact your local DYW group if you have any questions/ wish to discuss any aspects of this form. Once your local DYW Regional Group are in receipt of this form - school coordinators will liaise with the relevant school(s) and collect the details of the students interested in participating. Registration lists will then be forwarded to you by return.

Risk Assessment – Example

Appendix 3

Site/ Location	Group Details (School)		
Health Conditions & Additional Learning Needs Have you been advised of any of the young people attending have any physical/ learning needs/ allergies that have to be taken account of (please list here)			
Hazard	Existing control measures	Supplementary control measures for young person(s) attending work taster	Person(s) responsible supplementary control measures
Unfamiliar work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tour of site included in site induction; Personnel made aware of any site specific hazards; All site personnel and visitors made aware of fire/ emergency evacuation procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical activities undertaken in fenced-off area; Information on construction hazards in safety briefing; Young Persons accompanied/ supervised at all times & encouraged to ask for help when needed; Suitable breaks provided to maintain focus concentration 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator
Manual handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manual handling eliminated where possible; Personnel trained in safe lifting and handling practices; Lifting equipment provided and maintained in good condition; Two-person lifting and carrying where possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical capabilities of group taken into account in design of work taster activities; Demonstration, instruction and support on safe lifting and handling technique; PPE (gloves) supplied Adequate breaks provided 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator/ Brickwork Supervisor

Risk Assessment – Example

Appendix 3

Hazard	Existing control measures	Supplementary control measures for young person(s)	Person(s) responsible for supplementary control measures
Falls from height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scaffold inspected at regular intervals and scafftag system in operation; Scaffold stairs installed wherever practicable; Scaffold not to be used during high winds; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young persons will be accompanied at all times Young Persons are not permitted to work from ladders whilst on site (ladder use limited to access to upper scaffold platforms during site tour) 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator
Falling objects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stored items to be stacked securely/ adequately secured; Regular scaffold inspections Scaffold/ surrounding work area not be used during high winds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young persons will be accompanied at all times; Young persons advised to report any concerns 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator/ Brickwork Supervisor
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All electrical equipment on site/ brought on to site maintained in good condition and subject to inspection/ testing at suitable intervals; 110V equipment/ portable tools used wherever practicable; Personnel trained in isolation procedures; Personnel instructed to report all faults/defects (and not use until made safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young persons will be accompanied at all times; Young Persons instructed to report any defects or hazards; Young Persons not permitted to use high risk equipment 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator
Use of high-risk machinery/ work equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only to be used by trained and competent personnel (training certificates held on site) Equipment checked/ inspected at appropriate intervals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young persons to be accompanied at all times; Young persons not using high-risk work equipment as part of work taster activities; 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator

Risk Assessment – Example

Appendix 3

Hazard	Existing control measures	Supplementary control measures for young person(s)	Person(s) responsible for supplementary control measures
Exposure to hazardous substances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDS held and COSHH assessments undertaken for all chemicals stored on site • Employees trained in the correct storage, handling and use of chemicals; • Internal work areas to be kept clean to keep dust to a minimum • Dust suppression/ LEV in place where required • Personal protective equipment provided and used e.g. goggles, gloves and respirators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young persons to be accompanied at all times; • Young persons provided with, and instructed on the correct use of PPE i.e. goggles, nitrile gloves and disposable respirators; • Lime/ sand mortar to be mixed by brickwork supervisor 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator/ Brickwork Supervisor
Traffic and plant movements on site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation • Trained banksmen used where segregation not possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young persons to be accompanied at all times • No deliveries/ waste collection scheduled during work taster • Site Manager to speak with plant operators before guiding participants through site 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator
Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot-work permits system in operation • Personnel made aware of fire warning system, evacuation routes and procedures; • Waste and flammable materials kept to a minimum and securely stored; • Flammable dusts minimised through good housekeeping and dust suppression/ LEV • Refer to fire risk assessment for further info 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Persons sign in when arriving on site/ sign-out when leaving site; • Young Persons to be accompanied/ supervised at all times; • Information on fire hazards and emergency procedures included in safety briefing; 	Site Manager/ Work Taster Facilitator
Risk Assessment undertaken by		Signature	Date

Example Code of Conduct

Appendix 4

A code of conduct such as this can be used to prepare young people for their work taster experience. Setting expectations on both participants and employers, it's objective is to nurture a positive, safe experience for all.

Construction Work Tasters Code of Conduct

We look forward to you attending our work taster, which takes place in a real-life, construction work environment/ site.

We prioritise the health and safety of our employees, as well as anyone else affected by our work activities. To maintain a safe working environment, we also need our employees, and you as a work-based learner, to play your role in ensuring your own safety, and that of others.

The following Code of Conduct details what is expected of you during your work taster -

Behaviour

- Approach the work taster with a mature and sensible attitude and be courteous and respectful of others;
- Listen carefully and take notice of any instructions given (if there is anything you do not understand or are unsure about - ask the facilitator to repeat/ clarify);
- Switch your phone off during the work taster sessions, avoid making calls or sending texts (unless during specified breaks), respect the privacy and consent of others regarding photos and videos;
- Approach the work taster as an opportunity to learn - think about any questions you'd like to ask our team (and partners) in advance -any queries after the event should be directed through your school's DYW coordinator or a teacher.

Health, Safety and Welfare

A risk assessment has been undertaken and the relevant control measures put in place to ensure your safety whilst on site –

- Listen carefully to, and follow the safety guidance given – if you have any concerns report these to your supervisor or the work taster facilitator;
- Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and use other safety equipment as instructed, tie long hair back and we would ask that you remove any jewellery (which may catch, become trapped) whilst participating in practical activities, prior to your arrival on site

Food and drinks may be provided during the work taster – we recognise those with allergies and dietary requirements are best placed to know what they can eat. We'd ask that you check the ingredients before deciding what is safe for you to consume and ensure that the work taster facilitator has been made aware of any severe allergies.

Example Code of Conduct

Appendix 4

In turn, we commit to the following -

- Creating a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment where young people can ask questions, and gain insights about working in the construction industry;
- Ensuring that a risk assessment has been completed to cover the activities being undertaken and to sharing this in advance;
- Ensuring that you are appropriately supervised and supported, provided with the appropriate safety training and have suitable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- Addressing any safety concerns promptly;
- Offering constructive feedback to participants on their performance during the work taster, encouraging self-improvement and growth;

I have read, understood and agree to the above.

Signed		
Work Taster participant	Print Name	Date
Signed		
On behalf of employer	Print Name	Date

Enjoy the work taster and remember - the more effort and enthusiasm you put in, the more you will get out of it!

Example questions/ prompts

- 1 What was your first job in construction?
- 2 How long have you been in this job?
- 3 What does your job involve?
- 4 What is your salary (or entry level/ average salary in your role?)
- 5 Did you complete an apprenticeship at the start of your career?
- 6 What qualifications did you need for your job?
- 7 What subjects would you recommend I study?
- 8 What is the best, and most difficult part of your job?
- 9 Have you had the opportunity to travel as part of your job?
- 10 Why would you encourage young people to take up a career in construction/ take up your line of work?
- 11 What's the one piece of advice you would give to a young person wishing to follow you into a similar role?
- 12 How can I improve my chances of securing an apprenticeship?
- 13 What projects are you working on at the moment?
- 14 What is your favourite project that you have worked on to date?

A speed networking session can be a good way of educating young people on the diversity of roles available, as well as diversity of professionals who work within the industry.

The number of participants per group will depend on the number of employers/ facilitators taking part (as a guide 6 – 8 minutes allows time for a more in-depth dialogue if the situation arises, for the employer to provide more detail on their pathway into the industry, or to ask about the young person's interests and career aspirations if the questions should run out).

You may prefer to have time for questions at the end of each session or activity – the important thing is sharing experience. This can be important in challenging unhelpful stereotypes and allowing young people to learn about the various career pathways available within the industry. In this case the questions above can give employers an idea of what to expect, or what information to provide.

APPENDIX B. CONSTRUCTION WORK TASTER PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP

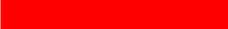
369 young people who attended work tasters during the course of the project, gave consent to be contacted. Of those 369, 303 provided a valid email address and/ or mobile phone number.

This cohort were asked if they were either employed or studying towards a career in construction and if so, asked to advise what job or course of study they had taken up.

We received 36 responses, summarised below -

Date attended	Name	Response
14/06/23	Ethan Creighton	Apprentice Gas and Heating Engineer - recently started at Fife College, Dunfermline / Glenrothes
05/10/23	Aaron Boyle	Studying music - chose not to go into construction
05/10/23	Simba Samushonga	Currently p/t lollipop man but stated Work Taster experience as being good for his CV
05/10/23	Joseph Anderson	Mechanical Engineering - Work Taster heightened interest in Sector
06/10/23	Cameron Sheridan	Studying for BEng Civil Engineering - cites Taster as what led him to pursue this course of study
06/10/23	Cole Bryson	Not currently employed - ambition to become electrician - work taster
06/10/23	Ally Paul	Pre-apprenticeship Course - Electrical Installation
14/03/24	Karla Porteous	Employed as Roofing Apprentice
15/04/24	Scott McDonald Kirk	Currently in final year of school - still plans to go into construction
12/03/24	Joseph Anderson	Access & Progression Course - Painting and Bricklaying
12/05/24	Jack Kennedy	Groundworker with Luddon Construction
25/02/25	Kaden Murphy	Now employed as an electrical apprentice
04/03/25	Leon Jason Mcilroy	Not working in construction but responded ' the work taster did help me out it was brilliant'
04/03/25	Logan Robertson	Plumbing pre-apprenticeship, looking for employer
04/03/25	Kaya Shand	Foundation Apprenticeship - Joinery & Carpentry
04/03/25	Matthew Mason	Studying Mechanical Engineering - Glasgow Kelvin College
04/03/25	Daniel Groden	Not employed/ studying - looking for employment at present
04/03/25	Brodie McQueen	Studying Electrical/ Electronics Engineering - City of Glasgow College
04/03/25	Owen Dickie	Studying electrical engineering at City of Glasgow College
05/03/25	Jenson Johnstone	Still at school - applying for college next year
05/03/25	Abbie Coutts	Opted for alternative study but may consider construction in the future
05/03/25	Emily Louise McMinn	Working on skills needed to pursue apprenticeship/ career in construction

Date attended	Name	Response
05/03/25	Phoebe Valerie	Studying Automotive Engineering - career interests lie in light vehicles not plant/construction
05/03/25	Ryan McLaughlan	Still at school, attending college taster course (Painting, Bricklaying, Joinery, Plastering etc)
06/03/25	Layton Kerr	Employed with Prime Electrical Group
06/03/25	Aiden Rodgers	Employed - working as part of an e-planning team
06/03/25	Freddie Chaundy	Construction Labourer after leaving school (now employed as an apprentice mechanic)
06/03/25	Leo Suchinskyj	Employed as labourer with landscaping business - looking for electrical apprenticeship next year
06/03/25	Jason Wilsdon	Working for skip hire company
06/03/25	Ruairi Baxter	Electrical Pre-Apprenticeship and employed with FES part-time
06/03/25	Aaron Pollock	Employed in construction - no further information given
06/03/25	Bailey Caven	Apprentice Mechanical Fitter (studying for an NC in Mechanical engineering)
06/03/25	Kevin Byrnes	Still at school - planning to study Architectural Technology at college
06/03/25	Josh Christie	Apprentice Civil Engineer
06/03/25	Kayden Mitchell	Welding and Fabrication Apprentice with FES
06/03/25	Alex Grigorica	Studying at college - intending to join the police

	Construction Pathway
	Still at school
	Not currently employed
	Alternative Career Pathway

83% (30 of the 36) young people who responded had attended large-scale work taster events (100+ attendees, 7+ trades/ disciplines covered).

APPENDIX C.

EMBEDDING CONSTRUCTION WORK TASTERS IN THE SKILLS DELIVERY LANDSCAPE – SUSTAINING THE PROGRAMME BEYOND 2025

Preamble

The 2023 Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape (the Withers Review) explicitly called for more work-based learning opportunities, including work experience and shorter taster engagements, to help young people transition from education into employment.

This project has demonstrated that Construction Work Tasters offer such an opportunity – immersing over 2800 young people into the world of construction.

Tier 1 contractors and other key players within the industry have found good homes for work tasters within their community engagement and social value programmes -

- Morgan Sindall, having scheduled their fourth large-scale work taster, are making excellent progress, engaging their supply chain through their ‘World of Work Tasters’ events and making best efforts to link up work taster attendance with relevant apprenticeship opportunities, taking others (including another Tier 1) with them in the process
- Kier Construction Scotland, have used them as a means of selecting candidates for longer-term, vocational learning opportunities i.e. their ‘Constructing Futures’ programme (incorporating a NPA Construction Craft & Technician’ at SCQF Level 4) at Currie High School in Edinburgh
- Warmworks have called upon the expertise and facilities of one of their major suppliers, Vaillant UK, and worked with their subcontractors to develop a large-scale work taster model. Integrating well into their community benefits/ job creation programme. With plans to repeat, there is the potential to hold at different locations as well as encompass different trades.

However, it is also evident that if Work Tasters are to serve their purpose, and delivery sustained then -

1. There needs to be structural re-alignment between the construction industry and education that considers capacities and incentives, manages expectations and provides the necessary support
2. Other blockers, preventing or deterring SMEs from taking on apprentices (namely funding and provision, highlighted in the CITB report ‘Construction Apprenticeships: Opportunities. Challenges. Support’ – February 2025) need to be addressed simultaneously

To explore how construction work tasters can be embedded in Scotland’s skills landscape, the CITB provided authorisation to continue with the following workstreams –

- Identifying ways of engaging more SMEs with the delivery of Construction Work Tasters – CITB Training Groups **‘1. Engagement with CITB Training Groups and other Employer Forums’**
- Exploring if the delivery of Construction Work Tasters can be incentivised through Social Value Contracts – **‘2. Social Value in Public Procurement – The key to skills growth the construction sector needs?’**

Engagement with CITB Training Groups and other Employer Forums

During the final year of the project we engaged with the following CITB Training Groups, choosing to tap into existing networks with the potential to use these as a forum for which SMEs could engage with the project –

Angus Construction Training Group
Ayrshire Construction Training Group
Building Contractors Training Group
Dumfries & Galloway Construction Training Group*
Dunedin Construction Training Group
Grampian Construction Training Group
Highland Construction Training Group*
North Highland Construction Training Group*

*No response to introductory email/ telephone call

We joined the following Groups’ meetings/ AGMs to provide information on the project and gauge interest on the collective delivery of work tasters -

- Angus Construction Training Group
- Building Contractors Training Group
- Dunedin Construction Training Group

Both the Dunedin and Angus Groups expressed interest in organising collective work tasters, however in the end only Angus Construction Training Group progressed plans, committing to delivering a work taster in October 2025 (led by one of the larger SMEs). We invited the Chair along to Morgan Sindall’s ‘World of Work Tasters’ event to get ideas on content, involved the DYW Tay Cities Team with scheduling a date and drawing up the timetable and provided information to aid with the delivery of practical activities.

Unfortunately, at the end of August 2025, the contractor who was to host the event chose to withdraw – citing a break-in at a local business, and insufficient apprenticeship numbers as the reasons. We also suspect that rumours that CITB Training Groups were to be defunded and a distinct lack of interest from Dundee and Angus college to get involved also played a part in this decision. The CITB confirmed last month that funding to Training Groups would be withdrawn in 2026.

In addition, we engaged with the Scottish National Demolition Training Group, who had expressed interest in delivering a demolition work taster. Our aim was to partner with Routes to Work South on this to engage an older demographic (17+) on a work taster, however after two planning meetings, RTWS ceased engagement – not responding, despite several attempts to contact them by telephone and email.

Incentivising Construction Work Tasters Through Social Value Contracts

The presence of work tasters on existing construction frameworks had already made the delivery of such activity more efficient in some regions e.g. DYW Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire cite mutual benefit to their team and the construction employers they work with, in the delivery of activity to North Lanarkshire schools.

The Benefits of driving delivery of Construction Work Tasters through Social Value Contracts

- Construction work tasters can serve as an early intervention: helping to lay the foundations of a talent pipeline with sufficient regional capacity to align with the pipeline of construction projects across Scotland
- Suitably timed, can function as a 'springboard' for young people to access work experience placements, vocational training and apprentices provided under community benefits (helping employers to select those who are a good match and ultimately aiding employers with apprenticeship retention and selection)
- It is a vehicle for Tier 1 contractors/ Principal contractors to involve more of their supply chain (as well as Design Teams and other professional advisors and consultants to highlight the variety of careers) and connect them to young people
- Scope for even greater industry collaboration with others working on public contracts (thus appealing to a wider array of career interests and attracting a greater number of young people)
- Standard format (DYW Construction Work Taster toolkit) allows employers to replicate tasters elsewhere in Scotland/ adapt activity to reflect Skills Plans and local needs
- DYW-supported delivery can make it easier for employers to connect with the relevant schools (Construction Work Tasters are a DYW National Programme)
- Represent a minimum youth offer from the sector – allowing young people without a connection to the industry (and who may have been unable to access a foundation apprenticeship or work experience placement) at least some basic insight

DYW Developing the Young Workforce

CONSTRUCTION WORK TASTERS

CONSTRUCTION WORK TASTERS: AN EARLY INTERVENTION TO ACCELERATE SKILLS GROWTH

The skills gap in the construction industry presents numerous challenges, putting planned economic, social and environmental transformation at risk

17,950
The number of extra workers the construction industry needs to attract by 2029 (over and above current replacement levels)

NET ZERO

Wage inflation 7.1% (Projected Q2 2025)

4.65% rise in input costs (year to 2025)

Unfilled construction vacancies 40% Higher than in 2019

Rising Construction Costs

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Delayed work output and delivery

CONNECT employers with young people aged 16 - 18, providing insight into a variety of jobs and pathways (from the people that do them) whilst helping dispel negative perceptions

CONSTRUCTION WORK TASTERS

PROMOTE specific trades/ professions with high demand forecasts or which have historically been difficult to recruit to in specific regions

IMPROVE DIVERSITY - widening the talent pool, encouraging more young people, particularly young women & ethnic minorities to explore careers that are a good fit for them

Are you interested in driving initiatives that connect employers and education to:

- help more school leavers secure high-value careers AND
- build workforce capacity to ensure successful project outcomes in the future?

Visit <https://www.dyw.scot/construction-work-tasters.html>

Currently major Scottish projects are being hit by cost increases and delays with labour inflation and the capacity of supply chains being cited as significant drivers of these. We therefore decided to engage, initially, on this basis, issuing the briefing - 'Construction Work Tasters - A Social Value intervention to help build the capacity major Scottish projects need' to the relevant Procurement specialists.

Dialogue at Local Authority Level/ Regional Level

A series of meetings with representatives from Highland Council (Community Support and Engagement and 'My Highland Future') and Leads from three DYW Regions*, and, separately with Hub North, proved positive -

- Highland Council provided an overview of current initiatives that link into skills growth in the construction sector, including 'My Highland Future.' Working closely with the Education Service and the Council's Community Benefits Team 'My Highland Future' aims to align it's objectives with social value

commitments, ensuring any funding received from industry through contractual social value obligations is strategically directed to support educational priorities across the region.

- Hub North and Highland Council are working together to standardise their approach to Community Benefits, including featuring Construction Work Tasters on Community Benefit menus.

However the Quality Improvement Manager at ‘My Highland Future’ requested assurance that DYW teams across the region would be able to provide consistent support to employers with Construction Work Taster delivery. At this point DYW Inverness and Central Highland indicated their preference to select elements from the work taster to be delivered by employers, rather than deliver the toolkit model.

- Hub North hold a regular Social Impact Forum for Tier 1 Contractors and are strongly encouraging Construction Work Tasters to be delivered at the pre-construction stage (further comment is made on this under ‘Considerations’)

*Later meetings were limited to DYW Inverness and Central Highland, as Lead roles at both DYW North Highland and DYW West Highland were vacant.

Roundtable Discussions - Social Value in Public Procurement – The key to skills growth the construction sector needs?

With time running out on the project we made the decision to hold a Roundtable discussion, inviting social value managers and construction framework managers from across Scotland, Education Scotland, DYW Regional representatives, construction companies and other construction industry representatives.

Our aim was to explore Public Procurement’s role as a catalyst to ease skills shortages and encourage much-needed apprenticeship opportunities. Thereafter we sought to discuss whether contracting authorities were in the best position (through Social Value contracts) to drive the delivery of work tasters in education and help to establish a more sustainable pipeline of talent and skills.

Engagement, included (but was not limited) to the following stakeholders) –

Scottish Procurement Alliance	Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
Hub North Scotland	Education Scotland
Hub East Central Scotland	Scottish Futures Trust
Hub South West Scotland	SCAPE Scotland
Hub South East Scotland	Warmworks
North Lanarkshire Council (Social Value/ NL Academy)	Morgan Sindall
Scottish Building Federation	AC Whyte
Scotland Excel	DYW Inverness and Central Highland
Highland Council	DYW Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire
DYW West Highland	DYW North Highland

The following organisations were also invited to participate but were unable to attend/ did not respond -

Hub West Scotland	NHS National Services Scotland*
Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC)*	Edinburgh College
Wheatley Group	

The discussion took place over two sessions (despite a preference to hold the meeting in-person, the first meeting took place in hybrid format and the second, having already been rescheduled, on Microsoft Teams)

The following agenda served as a guide to help steer the discussion over the two sessions -

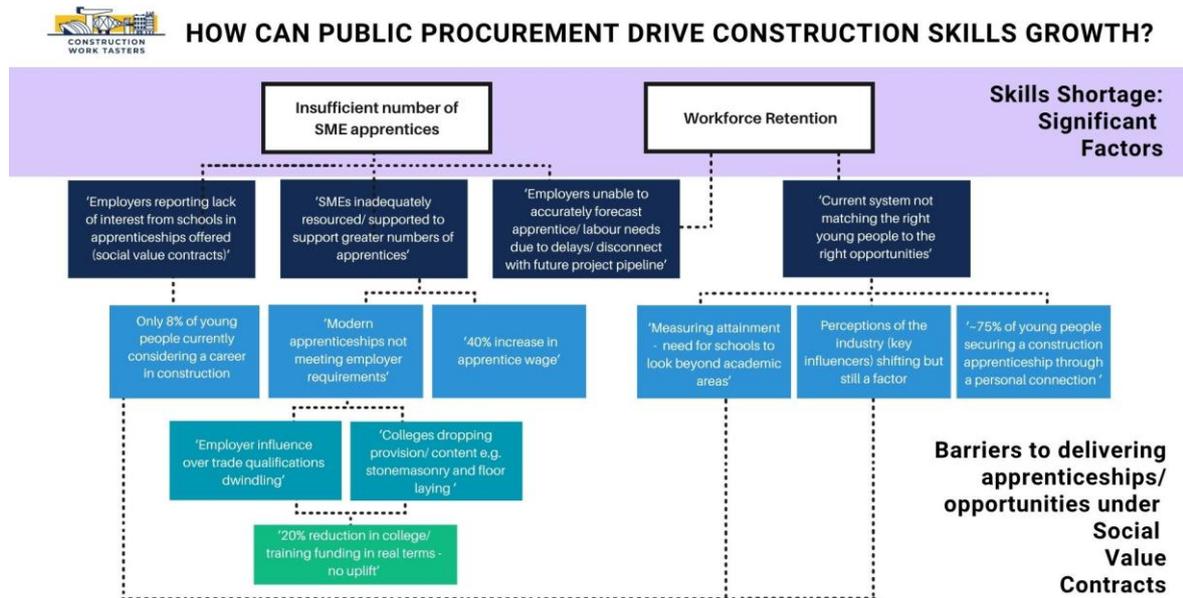
- i. Are existing social value contracts/ community benefits able to deliver on career opportunities and apprenticeships for young people?

- II. **WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO CREATING APPRENTICESHIPS AS PART OF SOCIAL VALUE CONTRACTS, HOW CAN THESE BE ADDRESSED?**
- iii. How can we, and others working in procurement and skills development and growth, collaborate more effectively to help build a more sustainable talent pipeline?
 - iv. Is there a greater role for construction work tasters, in terms of apprentice selection and retention?
 - v. SMEs offer the majority of construction apprenticeship opportunities. How can we encourage more SMEs to engage with activities that bridge education and industry, such as construction work tasters?
 - vi. Do construction work tasters merit greater value, in terms of community benefits? Can they be linked with other community benefits to improve apprentice retention rates and strengthen the talent pipeline?

Key insights – Challenges in embedding Construction Work Tasters in the Skills Landscape/ Delivering apprenticeship and other opportunities under Social Value Contracts

Lack of apprenticeship opportunities

'The current focus is on attracting young people into the industry. Whilst this has been a significant issue in the past, the lack of apprenticeships offered by SMEs now poses a greater problem'- Paul Mitchell, Scottish Building Federation.



In the final year of the project, as we attempted to involve more SMEs with the delivery of Work Tasters, we were advised by several companies that they didn't intend to recruit apprentices in the coming year/ near future and saw little point in participating. We also encountered several companies who did wish to take on apprentices but were unable to do so.

The themes under which these reasons fall were well articulated during the first Roundtable Session –

- Lack of college / training provision in the Region (with a 20% real-terms funding reduction placing significant pressure on the sector)
- Modern Apprenticeships not meeting the needs of employers
- SMEs having limited capacity to support apprentices
- Significant rise in apprentice wage – 40% rise in wages (increase in minimum wage)
- Risk of apprentices being 'poached' by other companies deemed too high, taking into account the level of investment required - £75,000 - £90,000 was the estimated figure for bringing through an apprentice (£18,000 - £22,000 of which will be incurred whilst they are at college)

- Short project timelines that don't suit apprenticeship durations
- Uncertainty regarding future work: project pauses and delays create an inability to plan recruitment
- Nepotism – still perceived as a problem for the industry (and possibly impacting retention levels) – research undertaken at one college revealed that almost 75% of those surveyed had secured an apprenticeship via/ with the support of a personal connection

Schools/ Careers Engagement

Reach Matters

'These work tasters can help motivate our young people to achieve what they need from school in order to access the trades and careers that have caught their attention today.' – Tom Holt, Braes High School

'It is often disengaged young people who are connected with opportunities in the industry.' - Lindsey McNaughtan, Hub East Central Scotland

DYW have been keen to promote the GoConstruct ethos that “there is virtually a career for everyone in construction.”

Whilst we have been encouraging employers to design work tasters that showcase a variety of trades and disciplines, with potential to appeal to a diverse audience, there have been problems achieving this (both in terms of protected characteristics, and in terms of educational attainment). These problems have been outlined in the main body of the Construction Work Tasters project.

At the first Roundtable sessions (as well as at Work Taster debriefing sessions that have taken place since the submission of the Final Report) employers raised concerns of not being able to reach their target audience. This related to not just work tasters but also work experience placements and apprenticeships, with Morgan Sindall advising that one young person placed with them on work experience had unresolved issues with substance misuse.

Two of the procurement hubs, Hub South West and Hub North have made us aware of instances where employers have offered apprenticeship opportunities to schools but received no interest. In the first instance the employer had been advised by DYW that ‘a majority of our school leavers are going on to university’ whilst in the second instance the employer, having received zero applications, was not confident that any young people had got to hear of the opportunity at all.

Additionally, one employer who is actively involved in delivering work tasters, failed to get any applications for junior design engineer role they were offering and advised that the majority of people attending the last work taster did not have the required level of Maths to be able to undertake the role.

Considering these examples, alongside work taster attendance, suggests that unhelpful perceptions i.e. that the construction industry is the domain for the lesser educated are still out there. This is particularly problematic for the industry when such perceptions are held by those within the education and careers space.

It's a particular disservice to young people (particularly those who lack the financial support to attend university/ concerned about student debt) when you consider the graduate apprenticeships and other degree-progression routes that the industry has to offer. It also fails to consider the number of graduates with conventional degrees who are choosing to take up adult apprenticeships due to problems in the graduate labour market e.g. CCG recently advised they currently have a bricklaying apprentice, who changed path after experiencing a period of unemployment following completion of his degree.

It is important to point out that many schools have put significant effort into engaging a diverse range of students across multiple subjects when it comes to attending work tasters – one example being Wallace High School in Stirling, whilst others have been worked smart and helped bring greater gender balance to work tasters. Without students from St. Margarets High School in Airdrie and Bellshill Academy, attendance at a recent Warmstart Work Taster would have been exclusively male.

Mainstreaming work tasters (which will ultimately increase the quantity of work tasters delivered) will help ‘educate the educators’ raising awareness of the variety of opportunities available – trade, professional and ancillary. However, there is undoubtedly more that needs to be done to put positive messaging and imagery about the construction industry out in the public domain/ targeting career influencers to help set things straight about who belongs in the construction community.

Late cancellations and no shows at Work Tasters

Late cancellations and no shows continue to be a problem with a recent work taster event (intended to cater for 72 young people and their educators) the subject of 23 last-minute cancellations (as well one group of 10 showing up on the wrong day). The fact that there had been six schools on the waiting list for this event only adds to this disappointment. Whilst we were ultimately successful in filling the majority of these places, making dozens of phonecalls and badgering supportive educators to find more young people is not something which an employer would be expected to do on the day of an event.

This cancellation rate (just over 30%) was similar to that at Morgan Sindall's 'World of Work Taster' event earlier in the year, where just over 29% of attendees cancelled last-minute or failed to show.

In an industry of scarce (and dwindling) resource and where a lot of time as well as money has been spent planning such work taster events, dialogue with Education is needed to see what can be put in place to limit non-attendance.

Aligning the Talent Pipeline with the Future Project Pipeline

Whilst capital investment for the pipeline of infrastructure is there - there is often disconnect between linked opportunities for Tier 1s and the supply chain - projects can take years from procurement to construction - how can companies plan labour / apprenticeship opportunities when there are delays on projects and there is disconnect with the future project pipeline? **Lindsey McNaughtan, Hub East Central Scotland**

Interim Conclusion and Future Considerations

'Construction work tasters give young people a realistic view of the sector, helping them make informed choices. This leads to better matching, higher motivation, and improved retention. They also allow employers to assess potential candidates in a low-risk setting, strengthening the recruitment pipeline.' – Scott Black NL Academy

There are approximately 32,000 fewer construction workers in Scotland in 2025 than there were in 2018.³

Persistent skills shortage are not only putting the construction sector at risk – stalling projects and inflating costs are creating uncertainty that impacts the future programme of work, negatively impacting the wider economy and society as a whole.

It is therefore not surprising that throughout the project, in particular, it's final months, it has been difficult to steer conversations and discussions away from the fact that there are not enough apprenticeships available to fill skills gaps.

The project has demonstrated that construction work tasters, as short-targeted interventions can be effective on many different levels. From changing young people's views about construction, to helping them choose what trade or discipline is right for them, to connecting employers with young people in a way that can aid apprenticeship selection and retention - the benefits are multiple.

The discussions and dialogue that have taken place - with procurement specialists and the wider construction community, have shown promise with strong potential for construction work tasters to be mainstreamed through Social Value. In an industry where many employers are time poor/ SMEs have scarce resources Work Tasters can help ensure that work experience placements and other opportunities offered under Social Value are allocated to those to whom they would serve most benefit.

However, for construction work tasters to be truly effective mainstreaming needs to be to a backdrop to other reforms and incentives to SMEs within the sector to ensure sufficient job opportunities are created. High-expectations are placed on the industry, and in particular SMEs, in terms of the work-integrated learning they are expected to deliver. Additionally effective collaboration is needed between a range of stakeholders to ensure these efforts are supported.

Recommendations

- i. **Integrate Construction Work Taster programme as a standard offering to schools and employers across all DYW Regions.** This provides assurance (particularly with those monitoring Social Value contracts), that employers will be supported by local DYW teams to deliver e.g. support with admin., linking with other employers in the region, help on the day, support with evaluation/ measuring impact, recognition and visibility for the companies who participate.

Where time and resources are scarce, adoption of Construction Work Tasters as a DYW Programme, and within Social Value contracts benefits all. Getting across the message that construction employers' time is not unlimited, should also stop the proliferation of wish lists and unrealistic demands on specific employers' time.

ii. Add Construction Work Tasters as a unique and clearly defined activity to the National Skills Academy for Construction (NSAfc) framework

iii. Continue work with the 'Social Value in Public Procurement/ Skills Growth' Working Group to mainstream Work Tasters, share good practice in terms of collaboration and look at how skills outcomes can be improved as a whole -

Exploring if Construction Work Tasters can be embedded into community benefit frameworks with such flexibility that early engagement is encouraged, activity is future focused, cross-collaboration between employers / different levels of projects can be facilitated and Design Teams, Suppliers and Professional advisors/consultants can get involved with the delivery of Work Tasters

Example

Due to the short timeline of a project a Tier 1 may decide that the most appropriate time for them to offer a Work Taster may be pre-construction (or even pre-tender) with the view that it sparks interest in construction, and allows them, and their preferred subcontractors (and perhaps smaller SMEs working on other projects) to identify potential apprentices in the local area at a point that better aligns with typical apprenticeship duration. This reduces the risk of apprentices being let go before they have completed their end point assessment. The work taster may take place at another of their sites or even a college or a training facility that can be set up to simulate a work environment, but the aim would be to embed apprenticeships early in procurement. The longer-term aim would be that work tasters, as a formal community benefit, would take place throughout Scotland offering good geographical coverage and be accessible to young people all over Scotland

A potential Chair has already been identified for this group and North Lanarkshire Council have drafted a list of suggestions on transforming skills outcomes which would serve as a partial agenda for the next meeting

iv. Advocate for Regional Skills Hubs to implement skills mapping and facilitate partnership working that aims to resolve workforce challenges

With input from local authorities and the Scottish Government Procurement Hubs, these could be used as a connector between Tier 1 contractors, SMEs, colleges, schools and other relevant stakeholders, allowing them to work through issues to respond to skills gaps ahead of time e.g.

- facilitating shared apprenticeships;
- filling places or identifying funding that would enable a particular college or training course to run;
- serving as an incubator for construction work tasters;
- fostering better communications to better align the talent pipeline with the future project pipeline.

(At time of writing, we had contacted the Energy Skills Partnership regarding their Construction Leads Forums and Training Networks, which are described on their website have action plans that focus on industry demand and capability, capacity and curriculum, with a strong focus on future skills needs).

v. Further engage with Education Scotland on embedding Work Tasters into Curriculum Planning, producing guidance on Work Taster Participation and their suggested Design Sprint

vi. Organise Roundtable Discussion with relevant stakeholders in relation to school transport (under 22s have NEC cards providing them with free bus travel and our main train operating company is under public ownership but transport still presents as a barrier to accessing opportunities)

vii. Consider the use of the GoConstruct Careers Portal to help measure the long-term impact of Construction Work Tasters and enable young people's journeys into the industry to be tracked from 'school to site'

- viii. **National Advertising Campaign promoting careers in construction (target audience: key careers influencers such as parents, in addition to young people themselves)**