

Real Estate:UK Response to MHCLG's Call for Evidence on a Strategy for the Built Environment Professions, Trades and Occupations

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Real Estate:UK

Real Estate:UK (RE:UK) brings together global and domestic capital, world-leading expertise and forward-thinking policy to drive growth.

With over 500 member organisations spanning investors, developers, advisers and operators, we represent the full breadth and diversity of the commercial real estate market, worth £950bn to the UK economy.

We connect UK and international investors with the insight, networks and opportunities that make the UK one of the world's most dynamic and investable markets.

Working closely with national governments and their agencies, as well as regional and local leaders, we promote the UK real estate sector as a premier destination for capital. Through direct engagement with ministers, policymakers and advisers, we help shape a regulatory environment that unlocks growth and builds investor confidence.

We support thriving communities across the UK through the homes, workplaces, critical infrastructure such as logistics and data centres, and retail and leisure centres our members build, maintain and operate.

Real Estate:UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence.

General Comments

RE:UK welcomes the Government's decision to undertake a comprehensive review of the future skills, competence and capacity needs of the built environment sector.

The call for evidence addresses a broad range of professions, trades and occupations across the built environment lifecycle. While this reflects the interconnected nature of the sector, feedback from members suggested that the breadth of the exercise risks obscuring the Government's intended priorities and desired outcomes. As the strategy develops, greater clarity regarding the key challenges it seeks to address and the changes it aims to deliver would be beneficial.

A recurring theme throughout the evidence gathered by RE:UK was that a significant body of work already exists across the sector on competence, professional standards and skills development. The success of the strategy will therefore depend not on creating additional

frameworks, but on ensuring that existing standards, qualifications and competence regimes operate in a coherent and complementary manner.

The evidence also highlighted the importance of adopting a whole-lifecycle perspective. Too often, policy discussions focus on individual stages of a building's development. In practice, decisions taken during planning, design and construction directly influence operational performance, maintenance requirements, safety outcomes and the ability to adapt buildings over time. Greater emphasis should therefore be placed on understanding how buildings perform in use and ensuring that lessons learned are fed back into future projects.

Finally, while technical competence remains fundamental, the skills required across the built environment are evolving rapidly. Digitalisation, artificial intelligence, sustainability requirements, data analysis and building performance are all likely to become increasingly important. This reinforces the need for a strategy that supports continual learning and professional development throughout an individual's career rather than focusing solely on initial education and entry routes.

Section 1: Pre-Design

Skills, Knowledge and Experience

Feedback received from our members suggested that it is becoming increasingly difficult to define a fixed set of future skills requirements because the sector is changing rapidly.

Members highlighted the growing importance of data and digital skills, the effective use of artificial intelligence, communication and advisory capabilities, strategic thinking and problem-solving, sustainability expertise and the ability to interpret evidence and apply professional judgement.

There was a view that traditional technical expertise remains essential, but that professionals are increasingly expected to act as advisers, coordinators and strategic thinkers alongside their technical responsibilities. Future competence frameworks should therefore recognise the growing importance of these broader skills.

The evidence also pointed to the need for organisations and individuals to adapt to changing technologies and ways of working. Future professionals will need to combine technical knowledge with an ability to understand data, challenge assumptions and exercise judgement in increasingly complex environments.

Behaviours, Culture and Decision-Making

The role of clients in shaping project outcomes emerged as an important theme.

There was a strong view that client behaviours, organisational culture, procurement decisions and strategic objectives often influence outcomes as much as technical competence. Positive outcomes are more likely where clients encourage collaboration, innovation and long-term thinking.

Conversely, concerns were raised about commercial pressures that can create a "race to the bottom", where increasing demands are placed on project teams while programmes and budgets continue to be compressed. These pressures can have a direct impact on behaviours, decision-making and ultimately project outcomes.

Competence Frameworks

A recurring theme was the absence of a consistently applied framework for assessing and recording competence across different organisations and professional disciplines.

Many organisations have developed their own approaches in response to evolving requirements, resulting in significant variation across the sector. While this reflects the diversity of professions operating within the built environment, greater consistency and clarity would be beneficial, particularly where competence requirements relate to higher-risk buildings and safety-critical activities.

Section 2: Design and Specification

Skills, Knowledge and Experience

The increasing importance of data and evidence-based decision-making featured prominently in the evidence received.

There was a view that the industry is gradually moving beyond reliance solely on design standards and historic practice towards greater use of performance data gathered from occupied buildings. This trend has significant implications for the future skills required across the sector.

The ability to analyse evidence, understand building performance and draw lessons from operational data was identified as an increasingly valuable capability. Some organisations

reported growing demand for data specialists alongside more traditional technical disciplines.

Evidence also pointed to shortages in a number of specialist professions, including electrical engineering. Concerns were raised that these shortages could constrain the sector's ability to deliver future objectives, particularly as demands relating to sustainability and electrification continue to grow.

Behaviours and Professional Judgement

The importance of professional judgement was highlighted repeatedly throughout the evidence received.

While standards, guidance and digital tools all have an important role to play, contributors emphasised the continued need for professionals who can apply first-principles thinking, analyse problems critically and develop innovative solutions.

At the same time, concerns were raised that excessive commercial pressure can discourage innovation and reduce opportunities for reflective decision-making. Creating an environment in which professional judgement is valued and encouraged will therefore remain important.

Professional Bodies

There was a strong view that professional bodies already play a central role in maintaining standards, supporting competence and facilitating professional development.

As a result, Government should work closely with professional institutions and seek to build on existing standards, qualifications and competence frameworks wherever possible. A coordinated approach is likely to be more effective than creating new and potentially overlapping structures.

Section 3: Construction

Skills, Knowledge and Experience

Evidence received through this exercise pointed to ongoing shortages in both professional and trade skills across the construction sector.

Particular concern was expressed regarding shortages in specialist engineering disciplines and the challenges associated with attracting and retaining suitably qualified individuals. Contributors also highlighted wider labour market constraints and barriers to recruiting skilled workers.

Alongside traditional construction skills, increasing demands are being placed on professionals and supply chains to generate, manage and interpret significant volumes of information and performance data. Future skills strategies will therefore need to recognise the growing importance of digital competence alongside technical expertise.

Building Lifecycle Thinking

A clear theme throughout the evidence was that construction should not be viewed as a standalone phase ending at practical completion.

Instead, contributors highlighted the importance of understanding how buildings perform once occupied and ensuring that operational experience informs future design and construction decisions. There was a recognition that complex buildings often require ongoing optimisation and refinement following completion.

This points towards a more continuous understanding of project delivery, with greater emphasis placed on post-occupancy performance and long-term outcomes.

Commercial Pressures

Commercial pressures emerged as one of the most consistent themes throughout the evidence received.

There was a view that persistent pressure on fees, programme and margins can undermine quality, discourage innovation and create conditions in which long-term performance is deprioritised. While competence remains essential, contributors emphasised that even highly capable organisations can struggle to deliver the most optimal outcomes when operating within unsustainable commercial environments.

The evidence also highlighted the importance of promoting a more positive narrative around the construction industry and recognising the significant social and economic value created through successful projects.

Artificial Intelligence and Data

The growing role of AI within construction and asset management was recognised as both an opportunity and a challenge, with emerging professional standards, including the RICS Responsible Use of AI Standard, reflecting its increasing importance.

While technological advances have the potential to improve efficiency and decision-making, questions were raised regarding transparency, accountability, liability, evidence sources and the verification of AI-generated outputs.

As these technologies become more widely adopted, future competence frameworks will need to ensure that professionals remain capable of exercising judgement, understanding the evidence on which decisions are based and challenging outputs where appropriate.

Section 4: Occupation and Maintenance

Skills, Knowledge and Experience

Occupation and maintenance were consistently identified as areas of increasing importance. Changing market conditions in some asset classes have reinforced this focus, with asset owners placing greater emphasis on occupier satisfaction, building performance and effective management as a means of supporting occupancy and protecting long-term asset value.

Future skills strategies should place greater emphasis on building performance in use, facilities management, asset management, surveying, retrofit, building adaptation, climate resilience, the operation of low-carbon technologies and the interpretation of performance data. Surveyors should also be adequately equipped to understand the importance of effective and efficient building management and its impact on long-term building performance.

The growing responsibilities arising from the Building Safety Act 2022 should also be reflected in future skills provision. Property and facilities management teams can play an important role in meeting requirements relating to building safety, including resident engagement and mandatory occurrence reporting. This reinforces the need for appropriate competence, knowledge and understanding of regulatory responsibilities among those involved in the ongoing management of buildings.

The structure of property and facilities management delivery may also create challenges for longer-term skills investment. In particular, outsourced property management contracts can operate over relatively short contract cycles, potentially reducing incentives for employers to invest in longer-term training and development, including apprenticeships and chartered pathways, where staff may transfer between providers or contracts may not be renewed. Future skills strategies should therefore consider how investment in professional development can be supported across different operating and employment models.

A related concern was the apparent decline in some traditional repair and maintenance skills. There was a view that the industry has become increasingly focused on replacement and new construction, while skills associated with repair, maintenance and prolonging the life of buildings have received comparatively less attention.

Competence and Existing Standards

Contributors noted that a number of competence standards and frameworks have already been developed in relation to occupied buildings.

As the strategy develops, consideration should be given to how these existing standards are being embedded and implemented before introducing additional requirements. This would help avoid duplication and ensure that existing initiatives are given the opportunity to deliver their intended benefits.

More broadly, there was strong support for ensuring that the final strategy aligns with and incorporates existing work already underway across the sector.

Sustainability and Retrofit

Sustainability considerations were viewed as cutting across the entire building lifecycle.

The evidence highlighted growing demand for skills associated with retrofitting existing buildings, servicing low-carbon technologies, understanding whole-life carbon, improving climate resilience and optimising building performance.

This also reinforces the growing importance of data and performance-analysis skills highlighted elsewhere in this response. Occupation and maintenance provide an important source of information on how buildings perform in practice, requiring professionals to be able to collect, interpret and apply building performance data to support effective management and inform future design, retrofit and investment decisions.

Given the pace of technological and regulatory change, these requirements are likely to continue evolving. This further reinforces the need for flexible learning pathways and ongoing professional development.

Outcomes Rather Than Process

A recurring concern was that some aspects of regulation risk becoming overly focused on process and compliance.

Contributors stressed that competence, sustainability and building safety requirements should ultimately be judged by the outcomes they deliver rather than the volume of

paperwork they generate. There was a view that excessive focus on process can risk obscuring the underlying objectives that regulation is intended to achieve.

Section 5: Cross-Cutting Issues, Themes and Challenges

Leadership and Professional Standards

Leadership was identified as a critical factor in shaping organisational culture, behaviours and outcomes.

There was a view that senior leaders, employers, professional institutions and industry bodies all have an important role to play in promoting professionalism, maintaining standards and challenging poor practice.

Some contributors also highlighted the importance of mechanisms that allow concerns to be raised safely and constructively, including whistleblowing processes where appropriate.

Lifelong Learning

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the evidence was the need to move beyond traditional models of front-loaded education.

Changing technologies, sustainability requirements and new ways of working mean that professionals increasingly require opportunities for retraining and skills development throughout their careers. A greater emphasis on continuous learning, modular training and flexible professional development pathways would better reflect the pace of change affecting the sector.

Capacity Building

The importance of ensuring that education and training infrastructure can support future workforce needs was also highlighted.

Consideration should be given to whether existing educational pathways, colleges and training routes are sufficiently aligned with the skills that will be required in the coming decades. Particular attention was drawn to retrofit, sustainability, digital technologies, data analysis and building performance.

Repair, Reuse and Building Longevity

The importance of maintaining, repairing and extending the life of existing buildings was repeatedly emphasised.

Concerns were raised that some traditional skills are being lost as experienced practitioners retire and fewer new entrants acquire these capabilities. This is particularly significant given wider ambitions relating to retrofit, circular economy principles and reducing whole-life carbon emissions.

Greater emphasis on repair, reuse, adaptation and lifecycle management would help support a more sustainable and resilient built environment.

Key Priorities for Government

Based on the evidence gathered through this exercise, RE:UK believes the following themes should be prioritised as the strategy develops:

- Build upon and align existing competence frameworks and standards.
- Improve consistency in how competence is assessed and recorded.
- Support lifelong learning and continuous professional development.
- Address emerging skills needs associated with AI, data and digital technologies.
- Strengthen skills relating to sustainability, retrofit and building performance.
- Improve understanding of how buildings perform in use.
- Support the repair, maintenance and adaptation of existing buildings.
- Ensure that regulation remains focused on outcomes rather than process.
- Promote positive industry cultures that support collaboration, professional judgement and long-term value.
- Work closely with professional bodies, industry organisations and employers in developing future reforms.

Conclusion

RE:UK welcomes the Government's commitment to developing a long-term strategy for built environment professions, trades and occupations.

Our evidence gathered through this consultation strongly supports a lifecycle-based approach that considers how buildings are planned, designed, constructed, occupied, maintained and adapted over time.

While competence remains fundamental, our members consistently emphasised that professional behaviours and outcomes are also shaped by wider commercial, cultural and organisational factors. Future reforms should therefore address not just technical skills and qualifications, but also the broader environment within which professionals operate.

Above all, the strategy should build upon existing work, respond to emerging skills requirements and remain focused on delivering positive outcomes across the built environment.

RE:UK would welcome continued engagement with Government as the strategy develops and would be pleased to contribute further evidence from across the real estate sector.