APPRENTICES & EMPLOYABILITY

Construction Liveries Group Symposium — 6 October 2026

Summary, reflections, and proposed next steps **by David Adams**

1. Purpose and context

The Construction Liveries Group (CLG) convened the symposium to explore how the different parts of the apprenticeship ecosystem can work together more effectively to bring young people into construction, develop their skills and retain them in the industry.

In his opening remarks, David Adams highlighted the apparent paradox that construction needs almost one million additional people by 2035, approximately half to meet new demand and half to replace retiring workers, while the UK has around one million young people who are NEET and three million other unemployed people. There should be considerable potential to connect people seeking work with an industry facing sustained demand for skills.

The challenge is to create clear, joined-up pathways into work. Construction remains misunderstood and sometimes undervalued as a career by schools, colleges and families. Vocational routes do not always receive the recognition given to academic pathways. Too many young people risk losing interest, failing to complete their training or leaving the industry early.

Consistent with themes in the Milburn report and Skills England's 2026 Annual Report, the symposium explored how to improve the transition from school to employment. Young people should encounter construction careers early, ideally from around age 14, and understand the potential for interesting, rewarding and lasting careers in a sector where demand for skilled people is expected to remain strong.

2. What the symposium covered

The programme brought together representatives from across the apprenticeship ecosystem.

- **Government and funding — DWP and Skills England:** Abbe Waterman (DWP) & Liam Day (DWP: Skills England) spoke about approaches to skills shortages, vocational training, apprenticeships and employment support including available funding. They expressed willingness to engage further with employers, including helping them understand and access support such as the Youth Guarantee.
- **Curriculum and qualifications — CIPHE and City & Guilds:** Kevin Wellman and Jerry Whiteley (CIPHE) discussed the challenges of developing a new plumbing and heating curricula, including new sustainable technologies. Andy Moss (C&G Ltd) addressed the awarding body's role in ensuring qualifications and assessment meet current workplace needs and the needs of young people today.
- **Further education — MidKent College:** Principal & CEO Simon Cook explored the challenges of delivering effective vocational education, including college–employer collaboration, attitudes to construction, college resources, and the recruitment and retention of teaching staff.
- **Young people's experience — Daisy Turner and Ollie Salmon:** Two high-achieving, fully qualified young plumbers described their journeys from school

through college and training into employment. This was particularly well received by delegates.

- **Employers' experience -** 3 employers were on the panel: a plumbing SME owner/ director (Louchavan Lemard), a fire alarm and security SME owner/director (James Simpson), and Chief People Office from the large employer, Wates (James Saunders). They explored recruitment, training, workplace development and retention.
- **Open discussion:** Participants considered the implications and opportunities for further action in a plenary Q&A.

3. Principal lessons

The value of bringing the ecosystem together

Formal written delegate evaluations are not yet available, so conclusions about impact remain provisional. However, anecdotal feedback was strongly positive. Many delegates particularly valued hearing the different parts of the apprenticeship ecosystem brought together in one event.

This may be the symposium's principal achievement. It helped demonstrate that successful outcomes depend on the contributions of many interconnecting parties: schools and families introducing construction as a career option; colleges providing relevant education; professional & awarding bodies designing & maintaining appropriate curricula & qualifications; employers recruiting & developing apprentices; and government enabling effective provision and support.

Weakness at any stage of this pathway can undermine the investment made at the others.

The young people's experience: achievement and concern

Daisy and Ollie demonstrated what can be achieved through drive, commitment, family support and a willingness to learn. Their stories also exposed potential weaknesses in the system.

They reported that only eight out of 40 starters on one of their college programmes, and four out of 40 on the other, achieved the full qualification. These are individual experiences rather than national statistics, but they raise important questions about completion rates, and the support learners receive.

Both described concerns about FE college resources, staff turnover, teaching materials and tutors' ability to keep pace with technical developments. They also stressed that good technical skills alone do not make a good mentor. Young employees need constructive feedback, coaching and an understanding of their needs as individuals, once in work.

Their experience poses a difficult question: **are young people succeeding because the system supports them effectively, or are some succeeding despite its shortcomings?**

Employability extends beyond technical competence

The employer discussion reinforced the importance of reliability, attitude, communication, teamwork, listening, problem solving, initiative and trustworthiness. Employers need young people who can apply their technical skills effectively, work with others and continue developing.

Workplace coaching and management therefore deserve as much attention as technical training. Employers themselves, particularly smaller businesses, may benefit from better support and closer relationships with colleges and government.

4. Priorities for further investigation

The symposium covered a wide field. Four areas merit consideration for more focused work:

A. Better pathways from school into construction. How can schools, families, colleges and employers introduce construction careers earlier, improve careers advice and give vocational routes greater credibility? How will the new V-Level qualification help this?

B. Apprenticeship completion and retention. What are the principal reasons for non-completion and early departure? What can be learned from employers and programmes that achieve better outcomes?

C. FE college and employer collaboration. How can colleges and employers improve curriculum relevance, workplace experience, teaching capacity and support for learners? A symposium or workshop attended by the recently designated FE Colleges for Construction Excellence could provide a useful starting point.

D. Access to government support. How can employers, especially SMEs, better understand and use available funding, incentives and employment schemes? DWP and Skills England speakers expressed willingness to engage further on this subject at future events.

5. Proposed next steps for CLG

CLG's strength lies in connecting organisations, identifying shared problems and brokering constructive discussion, rather than duplicating the work of government, colleges or employers.

A small organising group should consider:

1. **Capture delegate feedback** to establish what was most useful, what was missing and which topics deserve priority.
2. **Explore a meeting of FE Colleges for Construction Excellence**, bringing together college leaders, employers and relevant industry representatives. Simon Cook indicated that MidKent College would welcome a CLG-convened meeting; DWF's premises could be explored as a venue – it would be popular.
3. **Arrange an employer briefing (or briefings) on government support**, with DWP and Skills England explaining relevant schemes, eligibility and practical access, while hearing directly from employers about barriers.
4. **Establish the available evidence on completion and retention**, distinguishing reliable wider data from individual experiences and identifying effective practice.
5. **Decide whether further symposia are warranted**, preferably focused on two or three ‘drill-down’ priorities with clear objectives and practical outputs.

These activities need not all proceed at once. The organising group should select a manageable number, identify partners and agree responsibility for delivery.

6. Concluding reflection

The symposium established a useful platform for collaboration and highlighted the interdependence of the organisations involved in developing construction talent.

Daisy and Ollie's achievements showed the potential of motivated young people. Their experiences also demonstrated why individual determination cannot substitute for effective education, training and workplace support.

CLG now has an opportunity to turn the relationships and shared understanding created on 6 October into practical collaboration. **The test of success will be whether this work helps create clearer pathways into construction, improves qualification completion and enables more young people to build rewarding careers in the industry.**