

A Workforce Strategy

for the Building Standards
Verification Service

Closure Report



December 2023

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Ministerial Foreword

It has been a great pleasure to offer my support towards achieving the ambitions set out in the building standards workforce strategy. I am pleased that this has been seen through to completion following the launch by my predecessor, the Minister for Local Government and Housing, in 2020. Delivery of the workforce strategy for the building standards verification service has achieved significant improvements that directly benefit verifiers.

I'm pleased to see that strategy actions have delivered all of the aims and objectives over the last three years. These were to raise the profile of building standards as a valued and respected profession, balance the age demographic of the workforce, support succession planning for improved sustainability and operational resilience of service delivery, introduce a national methodology for assessing the competence of building standards professionals and recognise the need to build skills in response to changes in construction.

Partnership working has been key to achieving the aims of the strategy. Scottish Government and Local Authority Building Standards Scotland ensured all decisions were based on feedback from verifiers about current practice. This remains important as the building standards profession provides an essential public service that we rely upon to ensure our buildings are safe, energy efficient and fit for the future. An effective verification service supports wider economic development across Scotland that benefits all of our communities.

At the start of the strategy, delivery of actions across five discrete projects was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, resilience shown by the workforce during the pandemic showed how all verifiers were able to adapt quickly to ensure services to customers were maintained during this time. Embracing new ways of working, such as using technology for remote verification inspections, and the introducing the Professional Competency Framework and the Competency Assessment System were important successes during this time.

This positive culture was also evident with the introduction of both graduate apprentices and modern apprentices into the workforce. Apprentices were supported by their workplace mentors and managers to learn the skills needed for their role and quickly became valued members of the team. The willingness of individuals to volunteer as building standards ambassadors and talk about career opportunities through their own lived experience in the job was also a hugely welcome initiative.

Ministerial Foreword

As the strategy work closes, new initiatives have been identified that will build on the progress achieved. The partnership approach so evident through the national and local commitments in the strategy will continue to embed the positive changes delivered so far. Looking ahead, a bespoke online learning platform is currently under development. When this goes live next year, it will aid verifiers to accelerate training and development on a wide range of technical and legislative topics. It is expected that this will benefit all individuals, regardless of whether they are new to the profession or an experienced member of staff.

As a result of the hard work over the last three years, the building standards profession is on a more sustainable footing, better able to meet new challenges affecting the built environment and more able to provide a resilient service for all customers.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Harvie".

Patrick Harvie

Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings,
Active Travel and Tenants' Rights

Statement from Chair of Building Standards Futures Board

It gives me great pleasure to recognise the achievements delivered through the workforce strategy for the building standards verification service. As Chair of the Building Standards Futures Board, I have seen how partnership working and commitment to positive change has made a significant difference in how building standards teams are supported in the long term.

The Building Standards Futures Board is delivering seven workstreams to transform how the building standards system operates. Focus is on raising levels of compliance with building regulations and a new delivery model that maximises the use of digital technologies where these can improve productivity. A high-performing and skilled workforce is the foundation for the changes being introduced through the other workstreams. The individuals involved in delivering the building standards service are our greatest asset, and this strategy has brought a new focus on raising competence and investing in the future of the profession.

I supported the strategy's objectives and outcomes sought by raising matters directly with Local Authority Chief Executives at the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) meetings. Their interest in the strategy and willingness to support key actions such as the appointment of modern apprentices was paramount to achieving success. It was, and remains, clear to me that the building standards profession is respected for the contribution it makes not just to the operation of the building standards system, but more widely throughout local authorities, for example on licensing, and safety at sports grounds.

I would like to thank Scottish Government for overseeing successful delivery of the strategy in partnership with Local Authority Building Standards Scotland, and most importantly recognise the changes verifiers across Scotland have made to their working practices to ensure success, as the formal strategy period ends. I look forward to working together to advance the outcomes of the workforce strategy.



Craig Hatton

Chair, Building Standards Futures Board/
Chief Executive, North Ayrshire Council

Executive Summary

The Workforce Strategy for the Building Standards Verification Service was published on 1 October 2020 and contained 43 actions across five core projects for delivery over a three year period.

The aim of the strategy was to create a first-class and sustainable verification service for the future. The strategy was Scottish Government's response to the issues originally identified by the Compliance and Enforcement Review Panel in 2018, chaired by Professor John Cole. The panel identified the need to strengthen skills, training and competence of verifiers and the subsequent public consultation on Compliance and Fire Safety in 2018 confirmed these issues should be addressed.

A partnership approach to delivery of the strategy was established between Scottish Government's Building Standards Division (BSD) and Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS). This report provides information on what has been achieved and how the combined efforts of all partners have delivered benefits for everyone working in the building standards profession.

This was the first workforce strategy for verifiers and the purpose was to develop the competency of the workforce, define the building standards profession and raise awareness of job roles with an aim to reach a wider audience to improve recruitment into the profession.

A key driver for change was the aging demographic which indicated the profession would be reduced by around 20% over a five to ten year period. Strategy actions were designed to mitigate this loss of expertise by supporting individuals to address their skill gaps and by balancing the age profile through the introduction of apprentices into the workforce.

The workforce strategy aimed to improve the competence of the workforce and ensure individuals are capable of meeting evolving challenges and high customer expectations for a reliable public service. Actions have provided a mechanism to manage competency on a profession-wide basis and new learning opportunities have been developed. The building standards profession is more open and visible than before and succession planning for the future is supported by the introduction of apprentices into the workforce.

The development of a training platform for access to up-skilling modules and the expansion of accredited courses with building standards content has ensured that learning needs will be met more easily in the future. Linkages with colleges and universities has enabled experienced surveyors to deliver building standards learning to students working towards their degree and this direct relationship has improved the recruitment of graduates into the profession.

Executive Summary

The national and local commitments to change ensured that all partners had a role in delivery of the strategy. Completion of the actions set out across five projects has provided a firm foundation for future work to ensure the profession is resilient and individuals can gain the skills and knowledge to progress their career in a building standards role.

Although this report marks the closure of the strategy, work is continuing to embed the changes delivered and support the profession to meet future challenges and flourish in the long term.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the report

This report summarises the delivery of the workforce strategy for the building standards verification service over the three-year period from October 2020. Detail on the projects and actions are provided to show the benefits of the strategy and the actions that have now been implemented.

Future work will continue to pursue the positive outcomes of the strategy.

1.2 Background

The aim of the strategy was to create a competent and sustainable service for the future. The focus was to raise the profile and grow the profession by attracting more individuals to work in a building standards role and to create a high-performing and skilled workforce by raising the competence of individuals.

The strategy was published on 1 October 2020 and the approach comprised national and local commitments to deliver change for the building standards profession over a three-year period. The Workforce Strategy was one of the seven workstreams overseen by the Building Standards Futures Board which has the remit to develop and implement transformative change to strengthen how the building standards system is delivered.

The sole purpose of the workforce strategy was to benefit local authority verifiers. Delivering a first class and resilient building standards system was at the heart of the strategy commitments.

The main drivers for change related to the forecasted loss of expertise from the workforce due to retirement of long-serving staff and the loss of expertise through

turnover and career moves out of a building standards role. An older demographic profile resulted in continuing losses of experienced staff and the difficulties in recruiting represented an ongoing and significant loss of capability and capacity across a workforce of around 570 staff in 2020.

A workforce data collection exercise was carried out in 2019 to provide an evidence base for the development of the strategy. The exercise was repeated on an annual basis to monitor the impact of actions over the period from 2020 to 2023. An analysis report covering 2020 to 2022 is available online¹ which provides a three year trend analysis. The most recent data collection provided a snapshot of the workforce as at 31 July 2023 and shows the impact of the strategy in full. The data indicates that the workforce has grown from 559 in 2022 to 597 in 2023. The age profile of the workforce is changing with a steady increase in the 16-39 age range over the three years of the strategy; in 2020 the people in this age range represented 29% of the overall workforce with this now rising to 34%.

Actions were designed to be delivered in partnership between Scottish Government and Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS). The intention was to involve verifiers, and individuals drawn from across the profession, to inform decision-making and support delivery.

A Workforce Strategy Working Group with membership from Building Standards Division, LABSS, and latterly the Building Standards Hub, was established in 2020. The Working Group met on a monthly basis for the duration of the three-year delivery period and bi-annual Delivery Status Reports were issued to all verifiers to provide updates on progress.

¹ [6.0 Workforce Supply - Building Standards Workforce Data Collection Analysis Report 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/6-0-workforce-supply/building-standards-workforce-data-collection-analysis-report-2022/pages/6-0-workforce-supply-build-standards-workforce-data-collection-analysis-report-2022.pdf)

2.0 Strategy Delivery

2.1 Themes and Commitments

The strategy was based around four themes each with supporting national and local commitments for delivering change.

The national and local commitments related to four key themes:

- A profession for everyone
- A professional framework
- A sustainable workforce
- A skilled workforce

The national commitments were opportunities for Building Standards Division to bring the influence of Scottish Government to the delivery of outcomes. The local commitments were hands-on activities for local authorities to lead change across the workforce, to embed improvements arising from the strategy for the long term.

2.2 Five Core Projects

Delivery of actions contributed to the achievement of local and national commitments. The outcomes delivered crossed over different themes and commitments. Due to the synergies across the themes, it was sensible to group all actions in a practical way into five core projects. This was done to support effective programme management and frequent reporting of progress to verifiers.

- Implementing the Competency Assessment System
- Promoting the Profession
- Implementing a Professional Framework
- Developing Vocational Pathways
- Developing a Learning and Development Hub

3.0 Outcomes

This section provides an overview of the five projects with information on what has been delivered and realisation of benefits.

3.1 Project 1 – Implementing the Competency Assessment System

The Competency Assessment System (CAS) was launched in June 2021. The CAS supported the overarching Professional Competency Framework for Verifiers (PCF) which was launched at the same time. The building standards profession now, for the first time, has a consistent and national approach to assessing competence of the workforce. This change was necessary to identify training needs to meet the competency requirements for the individual's current role and to build experience and knowledge necessary for career progression.

Individuals were mapped to standardised job roles with specific competency requirements based on the risk profile of building projects. The CAS toolkit provided a comprehensive method for each person to identify their skill gaps against the competency requirements for their role. The evidence from the skills assessment was used to support the development of upskilling training modules and in discussions with colleges and universities about including bespoke content for building standards in accredited courses.

The CAS, together with the PCF, defined the building standards profession down to individual job roles. As a result, perception of the building standards function in local government as a profession in its own right is changing and becoming more open and visible than before.

Outcomes

- A single consistent process for managing competence and identifying skill gaps.
- Definition of the building standards profession.
- Greater openness and visibility of the profession and job roles.
- Evidence base on training requirements to support the development of courses for building standards.

Benefits

- Managers have an improved understanding of specific development needs for each person.
- There is a comprehensive and inclusive set of competences for everyone in the profession.
- Learning material in courses can be developed to address specific skill gaps to strengthen competence.
- Succession planning is supported by effective skills acquisition.

3.2 Project 2 – Promoting the Profession

A priority was to raise the profile and esteem of the building standards profession in its own right. The aim was to show that a rewarding and lasting career is available in an essential regulatory role in local government. Early actions reframed the public’s perception of “building control” by referring to the verification service as the building standards profession and by providing accurate descriptions of job roles and a set of career information leaflets specifically for construction professionals considering a career change. The My World of Work website, managed by Skills Development Scotland, was revised to reflect the reality of a career in building standards. The information was presented in an accessible way for senior secondary school pupils who are at the point of considering their direction after leaving school.

The creation of the Building Standards Ambassadors’ Network was a significant development to support this aspect of the strategy. The role of the Ambassador was defined clearly to give an accurate idea of the activities to be carried out and the commitment required. Access to online training was provided to cover best practice approaches to running outreach activities. Volunteers from across the profession stepped forward in 2021 to become Building Standards Ambassadors. A network of 18 ambassadors was established, supported by Network Facilitators, to promote building standards careers in schools, colleges, universities and with construction professionals considering a career change. A fully funded Delivery Plan was developed by LABSS to direct the work of the ambassadors over the next three years to continue raising the profile and esteem of building standards and attracting individuals to work in the profession.

Outcomes

- Accurate and consistent information is available online to promote building standards as a rewarding career choice.
- The term “building control” has been replaced with positive references to “Building Standards Profession”.
- Information on building standards job roles is available from reputable sources and is maintained for accuracy.
- The profession has its own Ambassadors’ Network to promote careers in schools, colleges and universities.
- Individuals who are Ambassadors use their own lived experience to give an authentic view of the profession.
- A high level career route map has been developed to define entry points and progression routes to raise awareness.

Benefits

- The nature of the profession is better understood by skills agencies and further and higher education institutions.
- The profession has a positive and evolving profile in the built environment sector across industry.
- The role of building standards in key aspects such as building safety and energy efficiency is appreciated more widely.
- Awareness of careers and the opportunities for development and progression are much more visible.
- Ambassadors are connected with Developing the Young Workforce and directly with colleges and universities.

3.3 Project 3 – Implementing a Professional Framework

The Professional Competency Framework for Verifiers (PCF) was developed, using the “Bsi Flex 8670 Built environment. Core criteria for building safety in competence frameworks. Code of practice”, to define the competence requirements of the profession. The PCF also introduced a nationally consistent set of job roles aligned with qualifications and experience.

The PCF was implemented from June 2021 supported by the Competency Assessment System (CAS). The introduction of standardised job roles enabled individuals working in a building standards role, to align themselves with the role that best matched their daily duties. Since the introduction of the PCF verifiers have confirmed it is fit for purpose.

The PCF was also used to define the profession for those who were unfamiliar with building standards. Having a single definition of the roles and competency requirements created a more transparent profession. Greater visibility is helping attract individuals into the profession by removing any confusion about the nature of the work and requirements of different job roles. The development of standard job descriptions for use in future recruitment campaigns will go even further to embed consistent naming of job roles and essential competency requirements irrespective of where the vacancy exists across the 32 verifiers.

Outcomes

- The PCF provides a single and concise definition of the profession.
- Everyone is aligned to a specific job role with its own competency requirements.
- The PCF aligns with the broader requirements of professional institutions offering chartered membership.
- The use of standardised job roles has introduced much needed transparency into the profession.

Benefits

- The PCF raises the profile of building standards as a profession in the built environment sector.
- Defining competency requirements improves understanding of different roles.
- A single and nationally consistent framework supports recruitment.
- Career pathways are supported through new training content to address competency requirements.

3.4 Project 4 – Developing Vocational Pathways

The loss of expertise from the profession as individuals pursue new career opportunities or leave through retirement was a key driver for change addressed by the strategy. Loss of skilled staff through turnover combined with an aging demographic required a new approach to developing a talent pipeline.

The dispersed nature of the profession based on geographical boundaries, and the demand for skilled professionals across the industry, raised challenges affecting recruitment of experienced surveyors. In particular, verifiers based in remote locations and those spanning large areas were more adversely affected. The strategy advocated a “grow your own” approach to talent development which required upskilling of current staff and efforts to employ individuals who live in the local authority area.

Learning on building regulations and the procedures underpinning the building standards system was incorporated into the Building Surveying degree course at Glasgow Caledonian University. Experienced building standards surveyors developed the content with their academic partners and provided guest lecturing to deliver the learning to students. This model proved to be highly successful with positive feedback from students.

Improved awareness and knowledge about the role of building standards resulted in a number of graduates from the course, and other courses such as Construction Project Management, Quantity Surveying and Fire Engineering, securing employment in the profession with various local authorities. This approach, which was a joint venture with Glasgow Caledonian University and LABSS, was cited in discussions with other institutions. Work is continuing to achieve national availability of in-person learning on building standards matters.

Recruitment of Graduate Apprentices provided a route for individuals with built environment related knowledge or a degree in a related subject to join the profession. This approach was successful as on-the-job training and mentoring reduced the time taken for a graduate to become competent in their role.

A new approach was developed to provide longer-term resilience for the profession. A vocational pathway for modern apprentices was developed to help address the age profile of the workforce and provide a clear entry point into the building standards profession. The course utilises the HNC Architectural Technology with the addition of new content for building standards learning requirements. The pathway enabled individuals to complete the apprenticeship in two years with the option of progressing to university to achieve a degree qualification within five years. Cohort 1 in 2022 attracted 14 apprentices into the profession while funding pressures in local authorities impacted on the ability to confirm posts for cohort 2 leading to four apprentices joining the course in 2023. Verifiers remain committed to the modern apprenticeship route and future work will seek to make the course sustainable for the long term.

Outcomes

- The recruitment of Graduate Apprentices and Modern Apprentices has grown over the strategy period.
- The inclusion of building standards content in the Building Surveying degree at Glasgow Caledonian University has been well received and recognised by other institutions.
- Graduates from Glasgow Caledonian University have successfully secured employment in the profession.
- The new pathway for Modern Apprentices provides a route for individuals to find employment in the profession while studying for a relevant qualification.

Benefits

- Building standards learning content is now embedded into vocational and academic qualifications.
- The introduction of apprentices helps to balance the demographic of the profession and provide long term resilience.
- A 'grow your own' approach supports succession planning by ensuring there are competent individuals working at all levels in the profession.
- Apprentices are increasing staffing levels in teams where recruitment has been difficult or unsuccessful.

3.5 Project 5 – Developing a Learning and Development Hub

A profession-wide approach to upskilling of all staff on the requirements of the building standards system was identified as a necessary outcome from the strategy. The aim was to develop a mechanism for efficient delivery of training directly to individuals at every level at different points in their career to address their training needs. The Competency Assessment System (CAS) provided an evidence base to enable the prioritisation of training modules covering specific aspects of the Building Standards Technical Handbooks, the role of the verifier and the local authority enforcement function.

LABSS led work to develop an online training platform comprising both a virtual learning environment and a learning management system. The platform has recently completed user acceptance testing and is expected to go live by Spring 2024, with an initial set of short, self-led, training modules developed to provide essential learning for new staff joining the profession. The provision of up-skilling opportunities will enable individuals to access learning anywhere and at a time that suits them best. Successful completion of modules is recorded and will contribute to closing the skill gaps identified across the profession.

All learning and development activities for the profession will be managed by the Building Standards Hub to provide a long-term and strategic approach to training based on evidence from the CAS.

Outcomes

- A single point of focus for access to tailored training modules to address skill gaps recorded by the profession.
- Online courses can be developed quickly to meet evolving training needs.
- Individuals can complete training at a time that suits them best and in a location that is convenient.
- Third party organisations are working with LABSS to develop training modules covering wider aspects of the regulations.
- The platform is supported by a reputable digital partner with expertise in the delivery of online learning.

Benefits

- Training modules and learning resources are delivered online to remove geographical constraints.
- The Building Standards Hub has responsibility for a long-term strategic approach to learning and development.
- The CAS process provides an evolving picture of training needs for the profession to keep courses relevant.
- The online platform ensures consistency of the content and quality of training offered across the profession.

4.0 Embedding the Changes

4.1 Moving forward

The end of the strategy delivery phase does not mean work to support the profession comes to an end. Activities to embed the changes introduced by the strategy will continue. BSD, LABSS and the Building Standards Hub are taking responsibility for leading tasks that ensure the benefits achieved through the strategy are realised in the future.

It is essential that collective efforts by everyone involved in the strategy remain focused on developing the competence of the workforce, ensuring the profession remains an attractive and rewarding place to work, and verifiers continue to provide a resilient, first-class service. The strategy was the starting point for this work over the last three years and has provided a strong foundation to continue to build upon.

4.2 Continuing activities

At a national level

BSD has an ongoing responsibility to work with LABSS and the Building Standards Hub to ensure the changes delivered through the strategy improve continuously. The annual workforce data collection will continue to monitor the levels of demand for, and supply of, individuals in specific job roles, and be used to track the qualifications held and being studied, the number of apprentices recruited and how many leave the profession. The focus on building competency of the workforce remains a priority, and will continue under the remit of a new competency steering group in 2024.

The online learning platform will be hosted by LABSS with strategic management delivered in partnership with the Building Standards Hub. A Learning and Development Manager will be appointed into the Building Standards Hub to develop a strategic approach to training and provide oversight of the Ambassadors' Network.

At a local level

It is essential that verifiers continue to use the CAS to assess where individuals have skill gaps and use this information to find appropriate training opportunities. The “grow your own” approach to talent development has been boosted by the introduction of Graduate Apprentices and Modern Apprentices over recent years. Managers should support the professional development of individuals to help them reach their full potential and continue to make the case for recruiting apprentices as an investment in the future of the profession. Building a talent pipeline to support succession planning remains essential for the future of the verification service.

4.3 Next steps

A new Competency Steering Group will be established to develop an approach to independent validation and revalidation of competence for individuals in the building standards profession. This will align with the competency requirements for all professions introduced by the Building Safety Act 2022 in England and Wales. Work will begin in early 2024 with the aim of introducing an assessment scheme by 2026.

Work will also be taken forward to embed the outcomes delivered to fully realise the benefits from the Workforce Strategy. Future work will be led in partnership between BSD, LABSS and the Building Standards Hub.

The main activities that will follow are set out in the table below.

Action	Lead
<p>Annual workforce data collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor levels of demand for, and supply of, people in specific job roles. Track qualifications held and being studied, the number of apprentices recruited and how many people leave the profession. 	BSD
<p>Professional Competency Framework for Verifiers (PCF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the PCF to ensure it remains fit for purpose and representative of the profession. 	BSD
<p>Competency Assessment System (CAS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued use of the CAS to assess where individuals have skill gaps and use this information to find appropriate training opportunities. Development of a strategic long-term approach to learning and development based on the skill gaps identified through the CAS process. Development and implementation of a digital CAS to introduce a more flexible and intuitive system which will replace the current process. 	<p>Verifiers</p> <p>Building Standards Hub</p> <p>LABSS</p>
<p>Online learning platform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation and management of the virtual learning environment and learning management system. 	LABSS and Building Standards Hub

<p>Building Standards Ambassadors' Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery and oversight of the Building Standards Ambassadors' Network. 	<p>LABSS and Building Standards Hub</p>
<p>Apprenticeships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifiers to build a talent pipeline through continued use of modern and graduate apprenticeships that supports succession planning including recruitment into cohort 3 of the modern apprenticeship. 	<p>Verifiers with coordination by Building Standards Hub</p>
<p>Accredited training and continued professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of a wider range of accredited training courses appropriate to the building standards profession. • Work with construction industry professional institutions to expand the range of continuing professional development opportunities. 	<p>Building Standards Hub</p>

Closing Statement from Local Authority Building Standards Scotland

Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) role is to work continually on improving the building standards profession to ensure we all have safe, efficient and accessible places to live, work and socialise in.

LABSS recognised that the inception of the Workforce Strategy in October 2020 marked a particularly significant milestone in a review of the profession, containing as it did forty-three actions across five core projects with the aim of creating a first-class and sustainable verification service for the future.

We are delighted that the strategy actions have been achieved despite the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic which affected all building standards verifiers and the construction industry. Key to this achievement was the collaborative approach to delivery in partnership with BSD and the many industry partners and individuals we worked with over the last three years. LABSS led the development of the Competency Assessment System to support competency development across the profession, worked with academic partners to deliver building standards learning as part of degree courses and we are currently developing an online training environment to benefit all staff working in the profession. We will continue working with our partners as we move forward to fully implement all of the positive changes delivered through the workforce strategy.

Our approach to delivery was dynamic in terms of maintaining a focus on the future of the building standards profession. There were many emerging issues that were subsumed into the delivery phase and successfully embedded into the outcomes. Through our collective approach, there is now a better understanding and a positive direction of travel towards addressing future challenges to further strengthen the building standards system in Scotland, which is held in high regard by our European and International peers.

Moving onto the next phase, LABSS, alongside local authorities, the Building Standards Hub and BSD, will seek to maximise the outcomes of the strategy and ensure we continue to have a truly world-class building standards service in Scotland.

Local Authority Building Standards Scotland

December 2023



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