



22 June 2017

Mr Dornan MSP
Convener
Education and Skills Committee
T3.40
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

CITB
Head Office
Bircham Newton
Kings Lynn
Norfolk
PE31 6RH

Telephone: 0300 456 7932
Email: sarah.beale@citb.co.uk
www.citb.co.uk

Dear Mr Dornan MSP,

School infrastructure inquiry

Thank you for your 16 June letter regarding the School infrastructure inquiry and the concerns raised by Scottish Building Federation (SBF). We also note specific comments made by Paul Mitchell of Scottish Building Apprenticeship & Training Council (SBATC) which refer to CITB.

As requested by your committee, we have been asked to comment on the opinions stated by SBF and how CITB will take account of the findings of the Cole report, and are happy to do so.

On September 2016, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) determined that the Skills Test – an assessment of a learner’s competence in their construction craft, such as bricklaying or plastering – was likely to be withdrawn. This was primarily because the Skills Test was being carried out in an unregulated environment and the SQA, as the national regulator of training competence in Scotland, were not satisfied with this arrangement continuing. This raised concerns as to whether the 2017/18 construction apprenticeship programme in Scotland could continue.

To address this, working in partnership with the SQA, CITB consulted with 173 employers in Scotland in February 2017 to understand whether or not employers still required the Skills Test. We also asked how they would best like the test to be administered. Some 95% of the employers consulted wanted to keep the Skills Test. However, many employers said they wished to make the test an integral part of the L3 SVQ, as a component of the apprenticeship programme rather than a separate process. This would in essence place the Skills Test within a regulated environment. We presented this feedback to the Scottish Government and the SQA, who accepted the results of our consultation.

Having listened to what employers wanted, we have since delivered:



- a qualification that matches employers' requests and will be ready for the August intake;
- the Skills Test formally incorporated within the L3 SVQ for all nine craft occupations, with retention of employer witnesses, and protected in its delivery by regulation;
- the competency assessment requirements for each trade preserved in the same way as the current skills test criteria – but now protected by regulation;
- preserved the time-served element within the apprenticeship framework to be four years, and the skills test not to be administered any earlier than three years and six months.

A critical change within the new qualification is that the previously unregulated Skills Test process will now be under the quality control and assurance of the Regulator and Awarding Organisations. The changes will make apprenticeship delivery easier for employers in Scotland, reducing paperwork and creating a far more streamlined process that better meets their skills needs.

I believe that the changes to the Skills Test will positively reinforce the valuable work of Professor Cole's inquiry, in which CITB has actively participated. Professor Cole's recommendations on skills and training reflect our own aim of ensuring that the construction industry has a fully qualified workforce. It is our view that the changes to the Skills Test will help to meet this objective.

Whilst we have protected the time-served element of the apprenticeship framework, employers can still train their workforce using standalone vocational training qualifications, such as SVQs. These qualifications are typically used to help experienced or adult workers gain formal recognition for their skills. The delivery and quality assurance of these qualifications is the responsibility of the Scottish Regulator, working through approved and recognised Awarding Organisations.

More broadly, we recently took part in an industry-wide workshop looking at the findings of the Cole report. We have agreed to feed our views into Construction Scotland, who are drafting an agreed set of actions which are expected to be published later this year.

My team and I would be pleased to further discuss any element of the above with you and the Committee and our broader role in supporting careers, standards setting and training and development across construction in Scotland.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Beale', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Beale
Chief Executive