# Mark Farmer calls for transformation of construction workforce training boards



A new report by Mark Farmer, titled “Transforming the Construction Workforce 2023 Industry Training Boards (ITB) Review,” has been released by the Department for Education, calling for a significant reevaluation of the current structures of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB). The report was made available today and signals a critical analysis of the impact and relevance of these organisations in shaping the future workforce of the construction industry.

Farmer, who is well-known for his previous review "Modernise or Die" published in 2016, has scrutinised the effectiveness of the ITBs and concluded that their existing impact does not justify their current operational status. He states there is an “urgent need for a fundamental reset with activities, key capabilities, and leadership all ‘root and branch’ reviewed with a ruthless focus turned purely to addressing the future workforce resiliency and quantum challenge.”

Among the key recommendations is the proposal for a “wholesale transformation” of the boards, suggesting that a merger between the CITB and the ECITB could lead to greater efficiency. Farmer envisions a new operative body as a workforce development agency, taking on the responsibility of improving training for both new entrants and existing workers. This new entity would consist of specialist teams focused on specific sub-sectors within construction.

In detailing his vision, Farmer emphasised the need for these boards to adhere to government spending rules, being classified as Arms Length Bodies (ALBs). He suggested that funding mechanisms should be made more accountable, linking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to the objectives set out by the boards. Farmer expressed the need for a change in how poor performance is managed, advocating for early intervention by both the government and industry, rather than waiting for another full review cycle.

Farmer's critique extends to the boards’ ability to retain workers within the construction sector, asserting that the current focus on attracting new entrants has not adequately addressed issues of diversity or counteracted current attrition risks. He proposes the cessation of ringfencing the Apprenticeship Levy, suggesting that more flexible funding could be used for training and upskilling initiatives aimed at retaining apprentices in the industry.

Moreover, Farmer advocates a holistic approach to training, proposing a modular system to expedite the upskilling of construction workers while improving retention rates. He underscores the importance of training trainers and assessors as a priority. Furthermore, he recommends emphasising competency by introducing a digital passport system to monitor the competencies of workers, a move he acknowledges as stepping towards licensing in practice.

Industry responses to Farmer's recommendations indicate a supportive stance. James Talman, CEO of the National Federation of Roofing Contractors (NFRC), expressed optimism that these recommendations will enhance the relationship between the NFRC and the CITB. He highlighted ongoing efforts to develop industry-relevant standards and training that align with the review’s insights, particularly in enhancing data collection and analysis to inform strategic planning.

Brian Berry, Chief Executive of the Federation of Master Builders (FMB), remarked that the construction industry has long faced a skills crisis that impedes economic growth. He noted that the urgent requirement to advance infrastructure projects and housing development necessitates a radical reassessment of the training landscape. Berry voiced strong support for the assessment presented in the report, advocating for quick implementation to modernise the workforce in alignment with contemporary economic demands, especially in relation to new markets within construction, such as retrofitting.

This report serves as a pivotal document that seeks to address pressing challenges within the construction training sector, presenting a roadmap aimed at revitalising workforce training and development for future growth and sustainability in the industry.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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