

Industry Training Board reform

Energy & Utility Skills Group draft response to the government's proposal to bring together the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) and the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to create a single, unified Industry Training Board (ITB)

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May 2026

1. Do you agree with the proposal to create a single, unified ITB by bringing together the CITB and ECITB?

Yes.

2. Please explain the key reasons for your answer to question 1.

Energy & Utility Skills supports the objective of reform because the current skills challenge is increasingly cross-sector, place-based and strategic in nature. The government's consultation is explicit that reform is intended to improve impact, efficiency and strategic clarity, while retaining sector-specific expertise. We agree with that direction of travel. A single ITB could create a clearer system interface for employers, improve the coherence of workforce planning and strengthen the collective ability of industry to respond to national infrastructure priorities.

This is particularly important given the Government's dual priorities of accelerating housebuilding and delivering a significant pipeline of major infrastructure. These programmes are interdependent in labour demand, geography and skills requirements, and require a more coordinated approach to workforce planning and investment.

In addition, we recognise that the status quo is an unlikely outcome of the current proposals and, as such, doing nothing is not a viable option. We also believe the sectors in scope are too strategically important and complex to operate without strong coordination and representation.

Reform will only succeed if a unified body combines system-wide leadership with real sector depth, protects employer confidence in levy-funded activity, and improves outcomes rather than simply altering organisational form. Engineering construction

must not become peripheral within a larger construction-led institution. The test of reform should be whether it delivers better workforce intelligence, better investment decisions, stronger entry and progression routes, and greater responsiveness to employers operating across major infrastructure programmes.

A well-designed single ITB has the potential to strengthen strategic alignment, simplify the employer interface and improve workforce planning. However, these benefits will only be realised if the model combines strong central leadership with clearly defined, empowered sector-facing structures.

Accordingly, we support the creation of a single, unified Industry Training Board in principle, provided that the design preserves sector expertise and delivers a material improvement in system, sector and workforce outcomes.

3. What do you see as the most significant potential benefits of a single, unified ITB and how might these be maximised?

The most significant potential benefit is improved strategic coherence. A single ITB could bring together labour market intelligence, employer engagement, investment planning and skills delivery across sectors that are increasingly interdependent in practice. That matters because the workforce challenge is no longer confined to narrow occupational silos. A new ITB must be forward looking and constantly working backwards from an agreed future horizon to the needs of the day. This forward look is essential to ensure that the UK is not only a safe place to work but is also at the cutting edge of technology and innovation which are essential if productivity is to be enhanced and growth opportunities harnessed.

In practice, major infrastructure projects are not delivered through discrete civil engineering and engineering construction silos. Construction, engineering construction, and process engineering draw on related capabilities and often compete in the same locations for the same people. A more joined-up body could therefore help government and industry plan with greater realism and act with greater speed. For example civils and mechanical and electrical delivery are integrated throughout project lifecycles, which makes the current separation between ITBs difficult for clients and developers to navigate. This fragmentation risks misalignment in workforce planning and training provision across the same project environment.

Key benefits:

- A single, clearer employer interface, reducing duplication and fragmentation and increasing the impact of representation.
- Citizen and worker visibility, clarity and simplicity to unlock and support ambition for those looking to join as sector entrants, upskill and retain, or retrain and transfer.
- A stronger and consistent focus on worker safety and supporting industry in this critical area.
- Improved workforce planning and enabling the UK to deliver multiple major projects concurrently.
- Greater ability to align training investment to long-term infrastructure demand, not just immediate sector pressures.
- More consistent national leadership on attraction, inclusion, quality and competence.
- A single body leading on the workforce, safety, skills and future needs across the full construction and engineering lifecycle (from breaking ground to decommissioning and reused of resources).
- Greater efficiency and consistency in central services.

These benefits will only be maximised if the unified body is designed as a group model rather than a highly centralised structure. In our view, the strongest model would combine a single chief executive and shared corporate functions with distinct sector directorates that have delegated authority, visible leadership and formal routes for employer challenge. That would allow the organisation to achieve efficiency and strategic clarity without eroding specialist credibility.

- A central group core responsible for strategy, finance, people, digital, communications, insight and government engagement.
- Separate sector directorates for:
 - Homes and heritage,
 - Infrastructure and civil engineering, and

- Process and engineering construction.
- Delegated sector directorate leadership supported by employer and expert advisory panels with a clear role in challenge, prioritisation and review.
- A transparent performance framework, including reporting on worker safety, levy income, investment decisions, training outputs, employer reach and outcomes.

A specialist 'Homes and Heritage' directorate would support workforce planning, competence development and training investment across residential construction, repair, retrofit, maintenance, recycling and heritage activity. It should help address the long-term workforce requirements linked to national housebuilding ambitions, building safety, retrofit programmes and the preservation of specialist heritage skills. The directorate should also support smaller employers and regional supply chains that often experience the greatest barriers in accessing training capacity, funding support and workforce intelligence.

A specialist 'Infrastructure and Civil Engineering' directorate would support the delivery of nationally significant infrastructure programmes across transport, utilities, energy, water, environmental services and wider civil engineering activity. It should focus on improving workforce coordination across integrated project environments where civils, utilities, mechanical, electrical and regulated infrastructure delivery increasingly overlap. This directorate would also play a key role in decommissioning and recycling that would influence and deliver strong environmental benefit. This directorate could create substantial value for utilities contractors and infrastructure supply chains by better aligning levy-funded activity to infrastructure delivery pipelines, regulated and safety-critical occupations, workforce mobility and the development of scalable training capacity linked to major programmes and regional investment.

A specialist 'Process and Engineering Construction' directorate would support sectors delivering complex industrial, process, energy and engineering construction activity, including industrial decarbonisation, electricity generation, transmission infrastructure, hydrogen, CCUS and wider transition-critical programmes. The directorate should retain strong focus on high-hazard and safety-critical environments, specialist technical competence and long-term workforce sustainability. Decommissioning and recycling would also be a key focus for this

directorate and ensure that where possible materials were reused. It should also support coordinated investment in occupations and training associated with engineering construction and regulated infrastructure activity, including areas such as substations, overhead lines, cable jointing, network construction operations and wider technical competence requirements across energy and utilities infrastructure.

This more strategic model is justified by the scale of future demand. The infrastructure pipeline now provides a stronger forward view of where projects and workforce requirements will arise, and that should be matched by an institution capable of planning across boundaries rather than within them.

A key feature of our thinking is that each directorate should operate with delegated authority, led by a recognised sector expert, and supported by a sector challenge and expert panel drawn from employers, providers and independent specialists. These panels should also include relevant sector bodies (for example the Royal Academy of Engineers) provide structured challenge on strategy, investment and delivery, ensuring each directorate remains focused, specialist and forward-looking, while preventing drift towards over-centralisation.

4. What do you see as the most significant potential costs and risks of a single, unified ITB and how might these be mitigated?

The principal risk is that reform becomes administratively neat but operationally weaker. A single ITB could dilute sector-specific expertise, weaken employer confidence, and reduce responsiveness if engineering construction and other specialist activities are absorbed into an overly general model. There is also a material transition risk.

Mergers of this kind can consume leadership attention, disrupt delivery and create uncertainty for levy payers, training providers and learners if implementation is rushed or insufficiently governed.

The key risks below can be mitigated, but only through design and discipline:

- Loss of specialist focus and sector trust.
- Over-centralisation, with slower or less informed decisions.

- Disruption to levy-funded services during transition.
- Insufficient attention to regional and project-based workforce pressures.
- Structural reform proceeding without corresponding changes in data, funding and delivery practice.

Government should require a phased transition plan with clear accountability, continuity protections for current services, and explicit criteria for success.

The new organisation must have distinct and specialist sector directorates with genuine delegated authority, not merely advisory branding. It should also publish a transparent performance dashboard so governments, employers, training providers and citizens can see how levy income is used and what outcomes are being achieved.

The original justification for Industry Training Boards was, in part, to address market failure in training provision. While there remains a risk of underinvestment in some areas, it is unlikely that critical training would not take place given the strength of regulatory frameworks, including health and safety requirements and building regulations.

The more significant ongoing and current market need is in coordination: aligning workforce planning, investment and training provision across complex, multi-employer project environments and integrated supply chains. Reform should therefore focus on improving system coordination and strategic alignment, rather than assuming a risk of complete absence of training.

Finally, reform should be linked to broader skills system improvements, including how sector skills bodies work at the interface of employers and governments. Reforms should also include labour market intelligence, entry routes, retraining and regional workforce planning, otherwise the benefits of structural change will be limited.

5. If you answered 'No' or 'Don't Know' to question 1, please identify any other approaches to ITB reform that should be considered and the reasons why they would be more effective in meeting the employers' construction and engineering construction skills needs.

Not applicable, as we support reform in principle. However, we would emphasise that the success of a single ITB will depend less on the legal act of merger and more on the operating model adopted, the preservation of sector depth, the quality of transition planning and the robustness of accountability for delivery.

6. Please provide any evidence you believe is relevant to the assessment of whether the proposal for a single ITB would have positive or negative impacts on individuals with protected characteristics.

A single ITB could have positive impacts on individuals with protected characteristics if it makes the system simpler to navigate, improves consistency of employer practice, and scales interventions that widen access to training and skilled employment.

In sectors where entry routes can be fragmented and awareness of opportunities is uneven, a clearer and more coherent system may particularly benefit groups that are currently under-represented or less well connected to informal industry networks.

However, there is also a clear risk of negative impact if reform leads to the loss of targeted sector-specific programmes, weakens local relationships, or treats inclusion as a generic corporate function rather than a delivery discipline. This is particularly relevant where under-representation varies materially by occupation, geography and subsector. A larger organisation may improve consistency, but it may also unintentionally flatten important differences unless equality impact assessment and monitoring are built into the design from the outset.

- Retain targeted interventions aimed at improving participation, completion and progression for under-represented groups.
- Monitor outcomes by protected characteristic, occupation and region, not only at whole-organisation level.
- Ensure sector directorates remain accountable for inclusion outcomes, rather than locating responsibility solely in the corporate centre.
- Use reform to simplify pathways and communications for employers and learners with additional support needs.

7. Please provide any evidence you believe is relevant to the assessment of whether the proposal for a single ITB would have positive or negative environmental impacts.

The most likely environmental impact is indirect but potentially significant. A more coherent ITB could improve the alignment of workforce development with the delivery of low-carbon infrastructure and industrial decarbonisation. Alongside retrofit and specialist maintenance in the homes and heritage directorate we also see the new ITB as playing a lead role in the continuous improvement of the decommissioning and reuse of materials.

However, positive impact is not guaranteed. It depends on the reformed body retaining sufficient focus on engineering construction, industrial clusters and transition-critical occupations. If specialist capability were weakened, the effect could be negative, because delays in skills development would in turn constrain the pace of delivery. For that reason, environmental impact should be considered as part of institutional design, not only as a downstream benefit.

8. Please provide any views on changes that should be made to the employer activities currently in scope of the CITB and ECITB to better reflect the needs of the construction and engineering construction sectors.

In our view, scope should evolve to reflect how delivery actually happens across modern infrastructure systems. Current activity definitions provide a statutory basis for levy collection, but they do not always map neatly to integrated supply chains, hybrid occupations or employers operating across construction, engineering construction, utilities and major programme delivery.

A reformed ITB should therefore have sufficient flexibility to respond to real patterns of employer activity and workforce demand.

- Place greater weight on occupational and capability demand, not only historic activity categories.
- Achieve a balance of task and occupational competence that reflects the modular and task based nature of modern construction and how a worker can

be safe and productive at speed when fully task competent, and how task competence can be aggregated to achieve occupational competence.

- Better reflect employers working across multiple sectors, projects and regional labour markets.
- Support multi-skilled pathways, retraining and transferability between adjacent sectors.
- Enable planning for concurrent major programmes rather than isolated pipelines.

This matters because the emerging infrastructure pipeline is both larger and more explicit about future workforce demand. If delivery is to keep pace with national priorities, the skills system must be able to recognise overlapping demand across sectors and places, not simply administer legacy boundaries.

A further issue for government and the future ITB to consider is the different operating models currently used by CITB and ECITB. CITB owns and operates the National Construction College, whereas ECITB operates primarily through employer support, grant funding, qualifications and approved provider capacity. A single ITB should therefore undertake a transparent review of whether direct delivery, commissioned provision, or a mixed model will best serve employers and learners across the combined sectors.

Where inherited assets are retained, repurposed or released, decisions should be tested against employer need, training capacity, value for money and long-term sector benefit. Any proceeds or savings arising from changes to direct delivery should be transparently ring-fenced and potentially invested for skills, training capacity, workforce intelligence and interventions that improve entry, progression, safety, competence and productivity across the work of the new single ITB.

9. Please provide any views on whether the maximum levy period for an ITB should be extended beyond three years and, if so, what the new maximum should be.

Yes.

We believe the maximum levy period should be extended from three years to five years, with a formal mid-term review at year three.

A three-year cycle is short relative to the time needed to plan, commission and realise the benefits of workforce interventions, particularly where training capacity, provider relationships and major infrastructure programmes operate over much longer horizons.

The CITB and ECITB levy arrangements themselves have traditionally been structured around three-year periods, but the strategic case for longer-term planning is strengthening, especially given the scale of projected infrastructure demand and the long lead times involved in developing skilled labour.

- It would give employers greater certainty over the framework within which they invest.
- It would provide the ITB with a greater opportunity for efficiency as consensus period durations would be increased.
- It would better align levy-funded activity to long-term programmes and capacity building.
- It would reduce the administrative burden for employers of frequent renewal.
- It would support more strategic and evidence-led commissioning.

A five-year maximum should not reduce accountability. A mandatory review point at year three should test performance, employer confidence, labour market relevance and any need for adjustment. That balance would provide longer-term stability without removing necessary scrutiny.

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