

Modern Apprenticeships for Building Standards Workshop Tuesday 28 November 2023

1. Welcome and Introduction from LABSS and BSD

1.1 LABSS reflected on the importance of the modern apprenticeship course which was an integral part of the workforce strategy and the continuing need to grow the workforce. The introduction of new staff through the modern apprenticeship pathway is necessary to ensure there are more Building Standards Surveyors in the profession to ensure teams can continue to deliver the service to customers. The work by Energy Skills Partnership and both Fife and Inverness UHI Colleges is appreciated to ensure the course is available to all without distance from a college being a problem for attendance. The course was created as a distance-learning option to remove geographical barriers and enable the apprentices to access the course regardless of their work location. LABSS noted that the success of the MA course ultimately relies on commitment from local authorities.

1.2 BSD provided a strategic context explaining why the course was introduced through the workforce strategy. The course provided an entry point for employment in the building standards profession and helped to raise the profile of building standards careers. Increasing modern apprentices in the workforce would also help to balance the age profile of the workforce as it has been shown that the profession was experiencing a loss of expertise through retirement and general turnover of staff. Importantly, apprentices would support succession planning in teams and help close the gap between supply of staff into roles and the actual demand for staff needed to deliver a reliable service as reported in the annual workforce data collection. The aim was to achieve a better balance between junior roles and more senior roles in teams.

1.3 The 18 modern apprentices recruited over cohorts 1 and 2 was lower than hoped but this is still a significant addition to the workforce and a success for verifiers. LABSS and BSD are keen to see continued employment of modern apprentices in cohort 3, and also graduate apprentices, to provide greater resilience in service delivery and to build the profession in the future.

2. Q&A for LABSS and BSD

Q1. Is BSD considering processes to allow building standards teams to access additional funding for roles in the future.

A1. Funding the employment of staff in local authorities is not the role of BSD. The review of building warrant fees is ongoing, and it is for verifiers to recognise higher fee income as a way to strengthen their business case for recruitment and posts. There is on-going work under the Futures Board to recognise that more investment is required into building standards services. The recent public consultation on increasing building warrant fees is expected to result in a change to the Building (Fees) (Scotland) Regulations 2004 from 1 April 2024.

Q2. What is the required duration of the employment contract of a modern apprentice in relation to completion of the course?

A2. It takes a minimum of two years to complete the modern apprenticeship course. Appointment of apprentices for two to three years or four years provides scope for the candidate to complete both the SVQ and HNC parts of the course and consider progression to a relevant degree course. The HNC element of the course takes two years while the SVQ element is two years but can be as long as three years.

Q3. What are the plans for years three and four of the course?

A3. There are different approaches by local authorities in relation to the duration of employment contract offered to apprentices, so it is difficult to make a commitment to years three and four. Some authorities cannot guarantee a position for the MA beyond the two years. Longer contracts allow the candidate to achieve the HNC and consider a degree course. This approach enables the verifier to create an Assistant Building Standards Surveyor role to which the apprentice can apply at the end of year three and be retained in the profession.

Q4. Is the resource burden for mentoring modern apprentices recognised in relation to impact on performance of the verifier as 1:1 mentoring removes an officer from their duties?

A4. Local staffing issues including the impact of mentoring a modern apprentice or a graduate apprentice is taken into consideration by BSD when discussing key performance outcomes with verifiers. The greater impact on small to medium sized verifiers when mentoring and supporting apprentices is taken into consideration.

Q5. The career destination for modern apprentices and graduate apprentices is uncertain. What can be done to retain staff in the profession?

A5. Increasing the number of Building Standards Surveyors is the aim of introducing apprentices into the profession. It is important that consideration is given to creating a post for the individual to move into for the long term when the apprenticeship ends.

Q6. Will it be possible to recruit a modern apprenticeship at different times during the year and still be able to join the course?

A6. Yes, recruitment to bring the apprentice into the workforce throughout the year is possible and colleges will confirm their inclusion in the next cohort.

3. Presentation from ESP, Fife College and Inverness UHI College

3.1 The presentation covered the reasons for developing the course as a distance-learning option and the structure of the pilot used for cohorts 1 and 2. Fife and Inverness UHI Colleges were able to deliver both the SVQ and HNC elements of the course in this way and funding from Skills Development Scotland was confirmed to cover the training costs for candidates on the basis of delivering an online course.

3.2 The MA consists of an HNC in Architectural Technology, delivered by Fife College, and a SVQ3 in Built Environment Design delivered by Inverness UHI College. The HNC element of the course has added learning content on building standards procedures and requirements of

building regulations. The presentation covered different routes over various timescales leading to a degree qualification.

3.3 Fife College confirmed that the course is online and there is no requirement for MAs to attend campus.

4. Q&A for ESP and Colleges

Q8. Are local authorities able to send apprentices to their local college rather than using the course delivered by Fife College and Inverness UHI College?

A8. Local authorities are able to send candidates to complete HNC qualifications at their local colleges as has always been the case but in doing so the local authority incurs the cost of the college fees. The benefits of using the MA for building standards is that the local authority will not incur costs for training and the candidate will benefit from bespoke learning on building standards matters that are not currently included in other courses.

Q9. When seeking to enrol a candidate, does a local authority ask for the candidate to be added to Inverness UHI College's existing contract with Skills Development Scotland?

A9. Yes, this will ensure costs are covered under the arrangements for the course as agreed with Skills Development Scotland. Any further enquiries on the contract arrangement should be forwarded to Carrie Higgins at Inverness UHI College.

Q10. Can the colleges confirm that the course will proceed for cohort 3 based on the expected number of candidates which may fall below the minimum cohort requirements?

A10. Yes, Fife College and Inverness UHI College can confirm the course will proceed for Cohort 3 in September 2024. Additional candidates are preferred, and local authorities should seek to confirm recruitment with LABSS as soon as is practicable.