



**Scottish Building
Federation**

Crichton House
4 Crichton's Close
Edinburgh
EH8 8DT
Tel. 0131 556 8866

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

07 June 2017

Dear Mr Dornan,

Evidence request: School buildings across Scotland

I am writing in response to your recent request for evidence as part of a short inquiry being undertaken by the Education and Skills Committee on school buildings across Scotland.

As you will be aware, the Scottish Building Federation made an active contribution to the inquiry that led to the publication of Professor John Cole's "Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Construction of Edinburgh Schools".

Alongside its sister organisation the Scottish Building Apprenticeship and Training Council, the Scottish Building Federation remains actively involved in considering the full implications of the Edinburgh schools inquiry and Professor Cole's concluding report for the future of the Scottish construction industry. In particular, we will be hosting two sessions in June with the direct involvement of Professor Cole. These are designed to raise awareness of the report and its conclusions and the associated implications for the industry. One of the sessions will be targeted at college lecturers while the other will be aimed at contractors.

Looking ahead, we are particularly keen to consider these implications as they relate to the future of apprenticeships and other training and development programmes in Scottish construction. This is an area where we feel SBF and SBATC can provide the greatest added value to the Education and Skills Committee's current inquiry. On this basis, Paul Mitchell, SBATC Registrar and Head of Employment Affairs at the Scottish Building Federation is available to provide oral evidence to the committee on the 14th June.

I should make it clear that Paul's main area of expertise will be skills and training as opposed to the implications of the inquiry for the school estate.

As a written contribution to the Committee's inquiry, the following is a summary of the evidence previously submitted to the original Edinburgh schools inquiry, updated with some more recent observations.

In submitting evidence to the original inquiry, we were particularly concerned that its key focus should be to identify specific failures in process that led to the serious defects in construction of a

number of schools built in Edinburgh between 2002 and 2005 under the Public Private Partnership programme (“PPP1”). We expressed concerns that the inquiry should not allow itself to be distracted by any wider debates around the merits or otherwise of public private partnership as a mechanism for financing large scale public infrastructure projects.

Indeed, since public private partnership is likely to continue to be one of the principal mechanisms for delivering such projects in the future, we argued that it would be helpful to explore examples of PPP projects implemented in other jurisdictions that have successfully delivered infrastructure projects without those structural defects that affected the Edinburgh schools that were the main focus of the inquiry. In so doing, we argued that the aim should be to determine how the processes followed in those cases differed from those that were followed in Edinburgh with the aim of pinpointing and eliminating bad practice and promoting best practice in the delivery of future projects, irrespective of how these are funded.

In procuring large scale projects of this nature through public private partnership, there has always been an inherent risk that the supervision of construction is something that is outsourced to the project delivery team on trust – and largely on the basis of self-certification. With projects of this size, this is a substantial risk for the procuring authority (which is ultimately responsible if anything goes wrong) to take. Our own analysis of the background information surrounding these particular cases suggests that a lack of independent supervision and assessment at each and every stage of the construction process may have been a principal contributing factor to the poor construction practices leading to those structural defects that subsequently emerged.

In the current climate of ongoing budgetary constraints, building standards departments within local government have suffered cuts, leading to a different model of service provision to that which existed previously. In this context, we argued that the inquiry should also explore to what extent a loss of in-house resource to support regular on-site assessment and supervision by the procuring authority may have contributed to the problem. Arguably, to avoid a repeat of such cases in future, we have suggested that the procuring authority must assume a much more proactive approach in independently supervising and assessing construction. This will require the commitment of additional resources to building standards and, potentially, the appointment of a dedicated Clerk of Works or similar to carry out regular on-site assessment throughout the period of construction. The additional cost of carrying out this work may be something that needs to be incorporated into future PPP tenders.

In light of the evidence submitted by SBF to the inquiry, we were particularly encouraged by the final report’s recommendations pertaining to procurement, which emphasised the importance of public authorities ensuring they have adequate expertise and resourcing to behave as an ‘intelligent customer’ – as well as highlighting the importance of independent scrutiny.

Beyond this, SBF believes that a more collaborative and less confrontational approach to procurement would further help to avoid a repeat of such poor practice in the future. In particular, contractors and procuring authorities should be encouraged to have a more frank and open discussion at the very start of the process about the true lifecycle cost of major building projects in order that expectations on both sides can be more effectively managed and met. Supported by CITB, the Scottish Building Federation is currently engaged in a project to develop a Collaborative Leadership Framework for the construction industry (CCLF) with the precise aim of addressing some of these issues.

Training and recruitment

SBF and SBATC has been particularly active in seeking to address those conclusions of the Cole report that relate to the future of training and recruitment within the construction industry. As we consider the report's recommendations, we do so in the context of recent proposals for the future of training and apprenticeships in Scottish construction that could seriously hamper the fulfilment of those recommendations and that pose a major threat of deskilling within the industry.

We have noted in particular the Cole report's recommendation that "the effectiveness of current apprenticeship arrangements in meeting the objective of developing a highly skilled bricklaying workforce" and the "current apprenticeship course and skills tests" should be reviewed.

A key purpose of the sessions being organised in June will be to explore precisely what changes may be needed in this area.

The Scottish Building Apprenticeship and Training Council was set up in 1934 and exists to regulate and monitor the working conditions, wages, recruitment and training of apprenticeships within the building industry throughout Scotland. To achieve this, it is composed of representatives from industry, trade federations, and trade unions. SBATC is therefore uniquely placed to comment on those recommendations of the Cole report relating to skills and apprenticeships.

An initial review of current training arrangements carried out by SBATC suggests that there may be a need in particular to place a greater emphasis in the content of bricklaying courses on the use of wall ties and the new types of ties now available.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has recently published a consolidated assessment strategy associated with SVQ Level 3 craft apprenticeship qualifications (which include traditional crafts such as bricklaying). Regrettably, the industry was repeatedly denied the opportunity to contribute to the drafting of this strategy and has strong concerns that this document sets out inadequate arrangements for the delivery of 'skills testing' and collating portfolios of evidence from the workplace. SQA has also indicated its intention to pursue diluted SVQ Level 2 craft qualifications in future, which we believe would be a retrograde step.

We have a number of critical concerns about the new assessment strategy which have important implications for those conclusions and recommendations contained in the Cole report that relate to training and recruitment, specifically that the strategy as currently drafted could result in the following:

- An erosion in the viability of the accepted time-served periods associated with craft apprenticeship qualifications.
- A weakening of the industry registration body's ability to enact collectively bargained terms and conditions governing the employment of apprentices.
- A declining level of independent industry oversight of apprenticeship qualifications including an end to the practice of the industry appointing independent 'skills test' assessors.
- A diminution in the value of craft apprenticeship qualifications by allowing candidates to achieve the SVQ3 without undertaking a structured apprenticeship or completing college training.

- The introduction of diluted SVQ level 2 qualifications in the traditional craft occupations, narrowing the skills set of many trades, limiting career prospects and labour market flexibility and undermining the traditionally high quality of SVQ Level 3 qualifications.
- Concerns over the safety of construction workers and the public resulting from deskilling and the potential absence of appropriate health and safety training.
- Restrictions around the ability to simulate workplace conditions when submitting portfolio evidence, raising significant doubts over the ability of many apprentices to achieve their qualification.

We have raised these concerns directly with CITB, SQA and the Modern Apprenticeship Group. We think it is equally important that the Education and Skills Committee be made aware of these concerns given the potential implications for achieving key recommendations of the Cole report that relate to future training and recruitment within the construction industry.

In conclusion, the construction industry in Scotland has an unparalleled track record of delivering robust and meaningful craft qualifications through an apprenticeship model which leads to rewarding careers and a sustainable workforce comprising highly skilled tradespeople. For over 80 years, the construction industry has collectively and successfully shaped craft qualifications to reflect the industry's needs and expectations.

Our concern is that the proposals put forward by SQA and CITB will inevitably jeopardise these overriding objectives and make it much more difficult to fulfil the recommendations of the Cole report.

SBATC and the Scottish Building Federation are currently seeking to arrange a meeting with the Minister for Employability and Training with a view to working collaboratively and constructively with the Scottish Government to address these issues of concern and to ensure we have a training and apprenticeship framework for the construction sector that is fit for the future.

I hope this letter provides useful input to the Committee's inquiry. My colleague Paul Mitchell will look forward to expanding on some of the points raised when he appears before the Committee on the 14th June.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vaughan Hart".

Vaughan Hart
Managing Director
vaughan@scottish-building.co.uk