

Employer Involvement and Curriculum Co-Design

Sustainability in Groundworks Apprenticeships

- ▶ Provider: Derwentside College
- ▶ Employer Partner: Wyn Construction Ltd
- ▶ Sector: Construction / Groundworks



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Derwentside College identified sustainability in groundworks as an emerging skills priority through direct feedback from employer partners across the regional construction sector, with these views also echoed during a Construction Industry Forum.

Employers advised that, while the national Groundworks apprenticeship standard includes a basic awareness of environmental hazards, it does not fully reflect the sustainable working practices now expected on modern construction sites. Employers highlighted the growing importance of apprentices understanding sustainable materials, responsible procurement, waste reduction, and the use of low-emission plant. Although sustainability is not currently a discrete unit within the national standard, the College identified opportunities to strengthen this aspect of delivery to better align apprenticeship provision with current industry practice.

To address the identified skills need, the College worked closely with Wyn Construction Ltd, building on a long-standing and well-established partnership. Wyn Construction has a strong history of working with the College to recruit groundworks apprentices and regularly supports careers fairs, employer talks, and other learner-focused events. As one of the College's largest employer partners for groundworks apprenticeships, Wyn Construction was involved at the earliest stage of curriculum planning and invited to take an active role in co-designing new curriculum content. This collaborative approach ensured that industry expertise informed curriculum intent from the outset, enabling the curriculum to reflect real workplace practice and anticipated future skills demands.

Senior leaders from Wyn Construction contributed directly to shaping key curriculum themes, drawing on their operational experience to inform content relating to sustainable design and whole-life thinking, responsible sourcing of materials, waste minimisation on site, and the use of eco plant, alternative fuels, and low-emission processes. In addition, Wyn Construction further strengthened the curriculum through its established industry networks by involving five members of its supply chain in the curriculum development process. These partners, including material suppliers and specialist subcontractors, contributed technical expertise, practical examples, and live industry case studies. Their involvement helped to ensure the curriculum reflects current and emerging practice across the construction sector, rather than a single employer perspective, and provides learners with a broader understanding of the range of roles, standards, and expectations found within modern construction environments.

As a result of this collaboration, the College developed two new employer endorsed curriculum modules, each of three hours. The modules focus on the use of sustainable products and processes in groundworks, and on sustainable design and procurement. Employer and supply chain input informed learning activities, resources, and assessment tasks, which are designed to mirror real workplace decision making and increase relevance for apprentices. Industry examples and employer interview contributions have been embedded to support engagement and contextual understanding.

The sustainability modules developed through this work provide a clear framework for embedding industry expectations into apprenticeship delivery. As they are implemented, they will support apprentices to develop the professional behaviours, judgement and awareness required on modern construction sites, including responsibility for materials, environmental impact and safe, sustainable working practices. This curriculum enhancement is intended to strengthen learners' understanding of workplace expectations and support their transition into employment where these behaviours are essential. Ongoing evaluation will focus on how effectively the content supports learner engagement, readiness for work and progression into sustained employment.

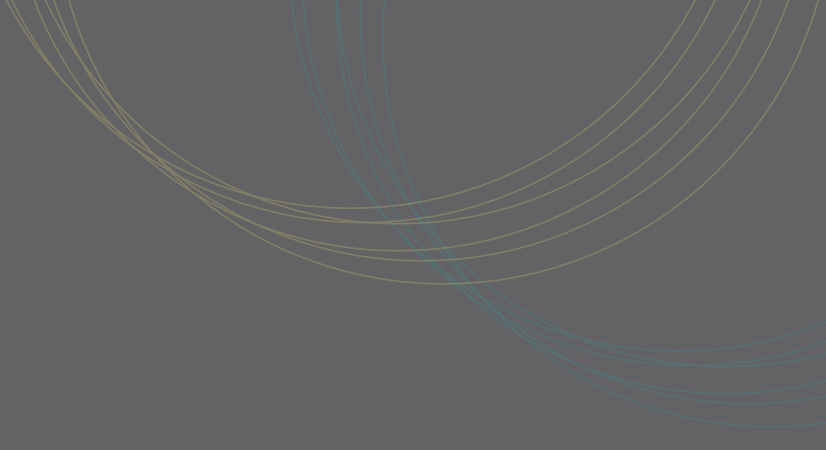


“ Our relationship with Derwentside College has always been built around developing people properly for the industry. Being involved in shaping the curriculum means apprentices are learning what actually matters on site today. Sustainable construction is now a core part of how we operate, and this approach helps ensure new entrants understand those expectations from the outset. ”

John Osborne, Operations Director at Wyn Construction

“ This partnership shows what can be achieved when employers are involved from the start, not just asked to validate delivery. By working closely with Wyn Construction and their supply chain, we have been able to enhance our apprenticeship provision in response to real industry need, giving learners the skills, knowledge and confidence required to succeed in a modern construction environment. ”

Nicola Raine, Assistant Principal – Business Development and Technical Education at Derwentside College



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