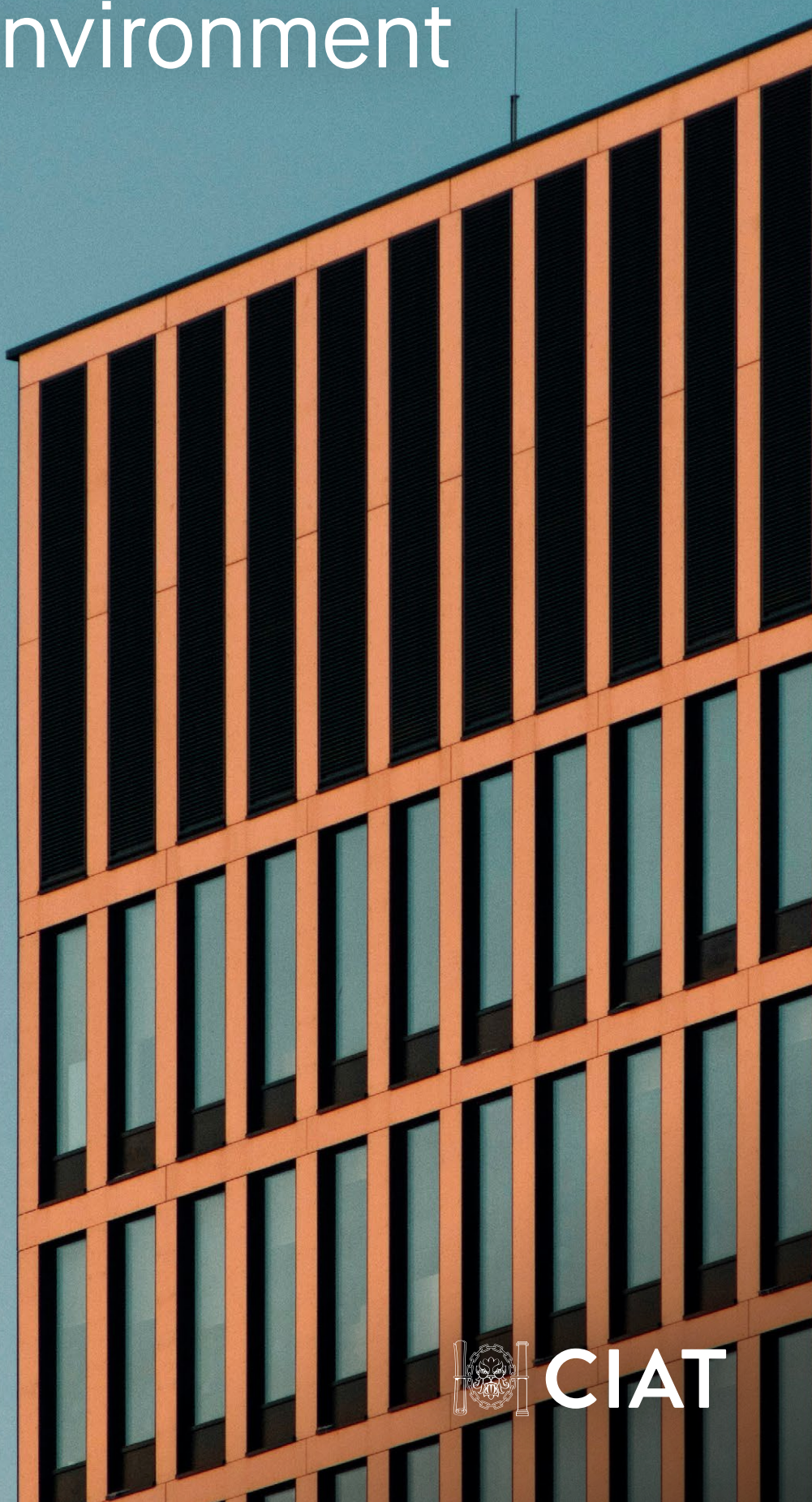
Be the change to lead the future of our built environment



CIAT's recommendations for the next Government

CIAT

Foreword

In advance of the general election, the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT) is calling on political parties to work more closely with the built environment sector to tackle significant issues facing the country.

CIAT is a dynamic, forward-thinking and inclusive global membership qualifying body for Architectural Technology. It exists as a not-for-profit organisation to lead, represent and promote Architectural Technology and to set and maintain the standards for education, practice and professionalism.

As professionals deeply engaged in shaping the built environment, CIAT recognises the crucial role our sector plays in addressing pressing societal challenges. We have identified critical areas on which the Government should collaborate with CIAT and the wider sector to ensure we create a built environment that is agile, responsive to challenges, prosperous and led by world-class expertise.

The UK's actions on key issues such as net zero and building safety must be dramatically expedited so we can produce healthy, safe and sustainable communities. In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the inquiry into the poor construction of Scottish schools, and RAAC in public buildings, competent built environment professionals are more important than ever, and for the UK to compete on a global scale, we need to address the skills shortages in our sector.

The time for action and delivery is now, and we call upon the UK Government to consult with CIAT and the wider built environment sector, which is perfectly placed to offer support and advice on the associated challenges our country faces.

We present this three-point plan to the next UK Government, outlining key areas of focus to build a sustainable future for our nation. This will require a coordinated effort from Government, the sector, and communities to overcome barriers and accelerate progress towards a more sustainable and resilient built environment.

Eddie Weir PCIAT
President

Low carbon and retrofit

The creation and use of our built environment is responsible for approximately 40% of the UK's carbon emissions. This is through the energy-intensive processes, production and use of construction products and materials, energy consumption during occupation and use, and other associated activities, such as transportation.

The UK Government has set ambitious targets to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050, and reducing emissions from the built environment is a key part of this goal. Initiatives such as the Future Homes and Building Standards and proposed regulation on embodied carbon aim to encourage the adoption of sustainable building practices, improve energy efficiency and encourage the use of low-carbon technologies.

More needs to be done to promote energy efficiency measures, incentivise the use of renewable energy sources, and invest in sustainable infrastructure projects. Tighter regulation must be implemented to achieve our Net Zero goals whilst also being mindful of the financial impact. Cost should not prohibit the implementation of robust measures or create a situation where the affordability of solutions restricts sector growth, but it is imperative that the broader impact of climate change is addressed.

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While the design and delivery of sustainable new social and economic infrastructure are integral to best practice, retrofitting is one of the most effective ways to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions in the built environment. With 80% of today's built environment expected to still be in use in 2050, there is an urgent need for existing structures to be retrofitted to comply with modern standards to meet the needs of society. Retrofit measures are pivotal in reducing carbon emissions and meeting the UK's climate targets, and have the added benefits of lowering energy bills, thereby mitigating fuel poverty and enhancing living standards for occupants.

The Government must prioritise retrofit of housing, public buildings and infrastructure as well as produce a clear long-term plan with funding to demonstrate how this will be achieved.

Retrofitting involves complex technical challenges and carries inherent risks. This is why built environment professionals, particularly Chartered Architectural Technologists, who are competent in identifying suitable holistic retrofit measures, mitigating risk and implementing solutions that comply with Building Regulations and standards, are best placed to lead and deliver retrofit projects. It is important that a 'one size fits all' approach is discarded to preserve the fabric of traditional buildings whilst using innovative methods to achieve these results.

The Government should invest in supporting the built environment to educate its clients, contractors and the wider general public on how they can retrofit their homes or invest in technologies to make their properties more sustainable or reach net zero. There should be a greater push by Government to gain 'buy-in' from all built environment users and stakeholders by explaining complicated concepts in a straightforward, honest and non-patronising way.

Overall, reducing carbon emissions resulting from the built environment is a critical component of global efforts to meet our net zero commitment as well as achieve a sustainable, low-carbon future. Collaboration between the Government, the sector, and communities is essential to drive progress in this area and transition to a more sustainable and resilient built environment.

Building safety

Building safety is a critical aspect of responsible development and management of buildings in UK communities and it is fundamental to restoring and maintaining public confidence in the built environment following recent tragedies, notably Grenfell. The public rightly expects buildings to be safe, secure, and fit for purpose, yet trust in the regulatory system and the sector has been severely eroded. By prioritising building safety, we can protect lives, restore public confidence and ensure that people feel secure in their surroundings.

There is an impetus on the built environment to comply with new legislation and regulations in relation to building safety, and we must work collaboratively with the Government to ensure ongoing competence of those that work within this critical area. Upholding high standards of building safety is essential for promoting resilience and sustainability in the built environment.

CIAT's Principal Designer Register will enable its Chartered Architectural Technoligists to demonstrate competence in compliance with legislation, but more centralised support must be provided to aid professionals in terms of upskilling and maintaining currency of their knowledge and skills through continuing professional development.

CIAT calls on Government to establish more engagement with the sector to produce workable solutions that are clear and transparent. Any legislation which is to be amended should be vigorously scrutinised to understand the impact and address these challenges before enforcement. It is critical to the workability of these proposals that clear guidance is issued with support to achieve them as this will ensure a smooth transition into new ways of working.

Skills shortages and recognition

The UK built environment's skills shortages and ageing workforce have been well-documented and they have manifested in critical failures and poor performance within the built environment.

From an educational perspective, the number of students applying for many built environment programmes in the UK has decreased over the last five years. This indicates that there are fewer graduates entering the sector, further compounding the critical skills shortages identified. Although apprenticeships are widening access into the sector, they may not be enough to plug the significant workforce gap.

In addition to the decreasing pipeline, built environment professionals are unable to keep up with technological advancements. Often misunderstood as a technical challenge, built environment organisations invest in technology without considering the socio-change programme needed to support new ways of working. As such the sector, consists of professionals who do not have the skills needed to fully realise the tools at their disposal.

The UK needs a wider breadth of built environment professionals with different specialisms to ensure we can deliver on key government priorities as well as its infrastructure pipeline. To that end, the Government is challenged with giving greater support to learners and new entrants into the sector, and providing greater recognition to built environment professionals - not least in relation to procurement processes - who are competent and qualified to undertake the same important functions. This will allow for greater transparency, fair competition, increased quality, greater choice for consumers, risk mitigation through the use of specialist experts and the elimination of barriers to practise.

If the UK wants to lead on key issues such as net zero and promote a built environment other nations can learn from, then the Government must nurture talent and promote accessible routes into Architectural Technology and the wide range of built environment disciplines and specialisms that are essential to the success and prosperity of our built environment and our country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we call upon the next UK Government to prioritise these critical issues within the built environment. Through the implementation of proactive policies and collaboration, we can build a safer, more sustainable, prosperous future for generations to come.

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