

# Topps Tiles Partners with Colleges to Tackle National Skills Shortage

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A new education partnership designed to boost the number of qualified tilers in the UK has been launched by [Topps Tiles](#).

The UK's number one tile specialist is teaming up with Leeds College of Building and South & City College Birmingham to inspire the next generation of skilled tradespeople. The partnership comes in response to a troubling decline in skilled tilers. The UK needs around 37,650 wall and floor tilers by 2028, according to CITB [Labour Market Intelligence Report 2024-2028](#) forecasts. In 2004, over 47,300 tilers were recorded in the UK, but this plummeted by nearly 34% to 31,300 roles in 2020.\*

To counter this, Topps Tiles is transferring 50% of its Apprenticeship Levy funds (government tax employers pay to fund apprenticeship training) to support small tiling companies wanting to take on a tiling apprentice. This is the maximum Apprenticeship Levy amount an organisation can gift.

As part of the initiative, Topps Tiles will promote the tiling apprenticeship training delivered at Leeds College of Building and South & City College Birmingham via in-store and online promotions. The company has already donated tens of thousands of pounds of tiling equipment and materials to both colleges to support teaching.

Alan Heard, Leeds College of Building Wall & Floor Tiling Lecturer, said: "Carl Goulden from South & City College Birmingham made me aware of the fantastic Topps Tiles opportunity through our roles on The Tile Association (TTA) Training Committee. He asked if Leeds College of Building would be interested in joining as a Northern education partner. As one of the country's largest specialist training providers for tiling, we were the perfect fit! It is incredibly beneficial for the College to be affiliated with such a prestigious

national brand."

Although few colleges in England still offer wall and floor tiling training, it is an established part of the construction curriculum at South & City College Birmingham and Leeds College of Building. In 2022, the government removed funding for Level 2 Wall & Floor Tiling Diplomas, which halted progression routes for full-time students. However, both colleges still offer a Level 2 Wall & Floor Tiling Apprenticeship Standard, usually completed over two years. Apprentices travel to the colleges from as far away as Northumberland to Lincolnshire.

Rebecca Waterfield, Executive Director: Business Development at South & City College Birmingham, said: "Tilers are in high demand for both commercial and home projects, but a skills gap is growing due to reduced training funding and an ageing workforce. From homes to industry, apprentices must master safe working practices and quality finishes. Training young tilers is vital to keep the trade alive and to be working with a renowned national brand brings significant advantages to our students."

John Shaw, Learning & Development Manager at Topps Tiles, added: "Tilers today may handle larger or more complex geometric patterned tiles, sustainable materials, high-insulation tiles and underfloor heating, heightened safety regulations, or even new technology such as precision tooling and digital planning using 3D design software. Fresh talent is urgently needed to keep up with industry demands, so our new education partnership is vital for the industry and the wider economy."

Alan continued, "Topps Tiles deserves credit for helping to tackle national skills shortages and boosting the number of tiling apprentices. Their investment and support in Leeds and Birmingham have been second to none. We already received a delivery of 12 palettes of tiles along with other tools, materials, and even matting for electric underfloor heating. Having equipment like this for hands-on training is vital to ensure young professionals are fully prepared for sector demands when they qualify."

Leeds College of Building is already producing the next generation of skilled tilers. Apprentice Holly Taylor Whitehead took 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Wall & Floor Tiling category at SkillBuild 2024 – the largest multi-trade skills competition in the UK for construction trainees and apprentices. Fellow student Ben Gordon achieved 3<sup>rd</sup> position.

South & City College Birmingham also had a student competing at SkillBuild 2024. Despite Nadir being a multi-skills student previously, and had only completed very basic tiling tasks, he earned enough points with his wall tiling to make it to the national competition. Lecturer Carl Goulden knew that Nadir was exceptionally versatile, producing outstanding work in most trade areas and entering the competition showed great courage and determination. Nadir's next goal is to get a Wall & Floor Tiling Apprenticeship with the college so that he can build his real world skills.

\* Research from Skills Training Group's [trade trends report 2021](#).