

## Scottish Stone Liaison Group

# NEWSLETTER

## Stone Industry Project Team

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### Training - So far so good

The issue of training is always to the fore and the Project Team is alert to the "Final Report on Lifelong Learning" - Report No. 9 of the Scottish Parliament Enterprise & Life Long Learning Committee.

A significant number of organisations had contributed written material to those compiling the Report. It was gratifying to hear MSPs, during the debate, stressing the importance of trades and that such qualifications should be considered on a par with higher education. Indeed the Construction Industry Training Board (C.I.T.B.) has already produced a chart that clearly demonstrates that a SVQ is the equivalent of a Higher.

So the ground work is in place and it is now a matter of changing attitudes of parents, guidance teachers and young people on this matter.

The CITB already does considerable work in this respect and has dedicated staff who visit schools, provide material and encourage young people to consider "taking up a trade" .

What must also be changed is the approach of politicians who appear to continually emphasise the number of young people "going into higher education". The current target is 50% of all school leavers to go into higher education.

Looking at percentages it is perhaps worth noting

Indeed the SSLG Chief Executive is aware of an employer in the Elgin area who reported that his young trainees, previously having secured masonry training in Aberdeen - the round journey of some 130 miles resulted in trainees asking to be made "labourers" as opposed to pursuing their skills training!

#### **College based training - granite**

With College based training concentrating primarily on the use of sandstone the Project Team Convener, Mr A Stark, has met with a number of employers in Aberdeen to review the training for those in the granite industry. Concern is expressed that the importation of granite from abroad could result in the demise of monumental production in Scotland in the short to medium future.

It is a matter of serious concern, both from the production and the moral point of view, that stone secured in less than favourable circumstances could be used as gravestones in Scotland.

#### **College based training - Slating**

The Project Team is also aware that there is NO college based slating training north of Arbroath and understands that this issue, having been raised with the Enterprise & Life Long Learning Committee, is currently being pursued in a review of the construction industry initiated by the Scottish Executive.

Looking at percentages it is perhaps worth noting that a significant percentage of pupils currently in secondary education have difficulties in reading and writing. Such figures could lead a cynic, heaven forbid, to speculate that providing a student could read and write then there is a very good chance that they could go to university!

### **College based training - Masonry**

Prior to the Elgin training facility being opened, previously a Historic Scotland training workshop, there was no masonry college based training north of Edinburgh/Glasgow axis.

The opening of the Elgin facility enabled employers in the region to secure the appropriate training for their young trainees without their being required to travel to either Glasgow or Edinburgh.

### **Training in Lime Technology**

The Project Team is supportive of the activities of the Scottish Lime Centre Trust and the advances that have been made in the use of lime.

With a greater understanding in the role of lime in the industry there are now opportunities for companies and operatives to secure the appropriate training here in Scotland - contact the Lime Centre on 01383 872722.

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## **Current review of the construction industry**

This has taken the form of a number of Cluster Groups which have been charged with the responsibility of identifying the needs of the construction industry.

The Scottish Construction Group (SCIG), Pulling Together and others with the active support of Scottish Enterprise are currently progressing issues such as "Workforce Development", "Industry Image and Awareness", "Deeper understanding of the Markets", "Procurement Policy", "Collection & dissemination of Best Practice case studies" .

These Clusters will report to the main Strategy Group on the 28 January with a final report being presented at a conference in Victoria Quay on the 28 March 2003.

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## **Registration of operatives**

The Project Team supports the efforts of Historic Scotland that will require architects to secure a "Conservation" qualification if they wish to tender for grant aided work. (NOTE it is the architect and not the practice that secures this qualification.)

However the SSLG is of the view that architects only form one part of the supply chain and considers that all others in that chain should have the appropriate conservation training for their particular sphere of activity in order to maintain

Unless these conservation modules become a requirement of the market place then it is highly unlikely that employers will make such an investment - in other words no such training will be undertaken.

As it currently stands anyone can call himself/herself a stone mason and it is only when they actually undertake specific tasks is it possible to determine if they are indeed skilled operatives.

the integrity of the concept.

To that end the Project Team was instrumental in securing conservation SVQs for the masonry industry and the introduction of similar SVQs for other trades.

However, although these are currently available no employer or employee, to date, has asked about them.

With the apparent labour shortages, "Upskilling" of the current workforce becomes a more important aspect of business - but so too is money.

The SSLG is of the view that this is NOT the most efficient or appropriate manner in determining the skills of the operative.

Currently there are a number of "trade cards" which, in addition to displaying the photograph of the holder, detail his/her actual skill levels.

This forms a term of reference for employers and also encourages the operatives to "upskill" at any opportunity so enhancing their "employability" and job opportunities.

The addition of the appropriate "Lime Modules" would be an asset to both the operative and the employer.

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## "From Geology to Building"

The Project Team has supported the current seminar programme which has sought to widen the vision of those involved in the industry.

The title is no accident as the programme does go from how the stone was formed, its winning in the way of dimensional stone and ultimately its fixing. Life cycle costing is also included in the programme with Historic Scotland dealing with a local conservation project.

In the afternoon SCOTS (Society of Chief Officers of Transport in Scotland - a local authority organisation) addressed the issue of the use of stone as hard landscaping in pedestrian areas.

Following the first two seminars the agenda was amended to enable attendance at the whole day or part - morning or afternoon - according to the areas of interest.

The next Seminar will be held in Glasgow on the 6th February and information and booking forms have been sent directly to all architects, local authorities and those on the SSLG mailing list from the west of Scotland.

It should be noted that although every effort has been made to take these seminars around the country, to minimise the "time out of the office" for those attending, it is necessary to ensure that sufficient interest is generated locally. On that basis, unless there is a significant increase in interest in the seminar planned for the 13th March, that event will be cancelled.

Those who have made an initial booking for Ayr have been advised of this possibility and are being directed to the Glasgow event.

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