

## Scottish Stone Liaison Group

# NEWSLETTER

## Stone Industry Project Team

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### National Heritage Training Group

The SSLG Chief Executive, Alan McKinney, has been invited to join the Management Board of the new National Heritage Training Group.

The Board, comprising English National Heritage, CITB, employers, trainers, employers association and trade unions met in London on 4th June and received a CITB Report entitled "*National Heritage Training Report*" which based upon an earlier Robert Bilbrough Report.

This new Group is examining all aspects of heritage training within Britain and Northern Ireland but, as can perhaps be imagined, the SSLG Chief Executive, having read the papers for the meeting, sought clarification of the word "national" when references were made to a "national plan" and "national strategy".

With "culture" being a devolved matter it is necessary to ensure that the Culture Minister in Westminster liaises with her Scottish counterpart, Mr Frank McAveety MSP, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, to ensure this "national" aspect is secured.

Whilst accepting that the completed Report was primarily a desk exercise, the Group has recognised that meaningful research requires to be undertaken in order to establish the "national" scale of the problem. The meeting was advised that Scottish Executive had been approached for Scottish statistics and a financial contribution to enable this "national" research be completed as quickly as possible.

However the formation of this Group is a positive development and has been funded by the CITB and English Heritage. In order that it is driven forward, the Board will shortly appoint a Heritage Construction Manager and will also appoint a Training Officer who has the necessary craft background and heritage knowledge.

The development of both a Business and Training Plans are all on the agenda and it is planned that the Management Committee will meet three times a year with the next meeting scheduled for October 2003.

A major heritage event is being planned to coincide with the "Construction Week" (8th/15th October) and other publicity opportunities, stands at trade shows etc, are also in the pipeline.

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### College based training

Skills shortages rather on

## Skills shortages - rather an opportunity deficit?

Much is made of the perceived skills shortages in the construction industry when in fact the real shortage is - lack of training opportunity.

Much is made of the image of the industry with some claiming that it is simply not attractive to young people. Well this is simply a myth, masquerading as an excuse, and obscuring the real reason.

### Facts

The truth, taken from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) statistics compiled here in Scotland, is that 7,500 young people expressed an interest in a career in the construction industry. Some 3,500 passed the aptitude test yet only 1,700 were offered training opportunities by employers.

In other words the majority of employers, perhaps those who that complain of a "skill shortage", simply do not train. In fact although more Scottish companies train that do south of the Border we should not be complacent as the figures indicate that only 38% of Scottish employers actual offer training opportunities.

Some 1,800 young people expressed in interest in the industry, passed the aptitude test and were not given the opportunity advance that interest - this is truly an **"Opportunity deficit"**.

Whilst the issue of stone masonry training has been addressed with the opening of the Historic Scotland facility at the Elgin Cathedral, the SSLG remains concerned about the college based training opportunities for a number of other building skills - e.g. slating & tiling, no college training north of Arbroath - plaster & drylining, nothing north of Dundee.

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## Inverness meeting

Faced with these facts the Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education convened a meeting in Inverness on the 25th April.

The attendees at this meeting included two College principals, two heads of departments at another two colleges, two delegates from HIE, two CITB representatives, Alan McKinney, SSLG Chief Executive and two from the host organisation.

The purpose of the meeting was to examine the training structures to determine if the success of the masonry training at Elgin could be replicated in any other discipline.

## Success

The masonry training facility at Elgin is a prime example of what can be achieved providing the opportunities are made available locally.

Prior to this facility being available young persons in the Inverness/ Elgin and surrounding area required to travel to Aberdeen (which subsequently decided to close its masonry training) to secure the college based training.

The SSLG Chief Executive, when meeting with employers in the area, is aware that trainees from this area, facing a round trip of some 150 miles to and from Aberdeen, simply asked their employers to make them labourers as they were fed up with the travelling.

In preparation for the meeting the CITB had researched its figures and some very interesting facts emerged. The CITB demonstrated that whilst the drop out rate in Scotland was generally around 20% when the college attended was within reasonable travelling distance, this rose to between 40% & 60% if the trainee had to travel and live in the central belt to receive the training.

In other words, despite incurring considerable costs, about half of the trainees returned home after their first year deciding NOT to go back to the College in the central belt.

Unfortunately it is not possible to determine if the trainees who dropped out continued to work in their trade and simply learn "on the job" but whatever measurement is used, this is a waste of both opportunity and money. In addition, with the drive to have all tradespersons accredited, these young people are being seriously disadvantaged by the lack of training facilities nearer to their homes.

The representatives from Highland & Island Enterprise, the organisation that meets the board, lodging and transport costs, were concerned to say the least.

The outcome of the meeting has been that the Northern College has indicated that it is interested in exploring the possibility of offering a slating & tiling course and has identified a building just north of Inverness.

This enlightened approach is to be applauded - it is a pity that not every College was prepared to be so proactive. On reflection - it might be an idea to ask College principals what they perceive to be the function of their college. The answer should be "*To meet the needs of the employers in their catchment area*". If that is not the answer, then perhaps some colleges are part of the problem.

Obviously the statistics supplied by the CITB, re the travelling to the central belt, substantiate the attrition rate.

Now with the Elgin facility about to take on its third intake of trainees the response has been most dramatic.

With only SIX places available some ELEVEN expressions of interest have already been received and that is before there has been any real drive to promote the opportunities. So there is real interest being shown by young people in the area - and thankfully this interest is supported by the employers.

### Further success

In closing it should also be noted that five out of six Elgin trainees passed their Skills Test - it is a target for other Colleges.

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