

## Scottish Stone Liaison Group

# NEWSLETTER

## Stone Industry Project Team

Issue No. 8 Summer 2004

### Training

In 2003 the CITB-ConstructionSkills undertook an extensive exercise entitled "Scottish Skills Survey" and on the 27th May '04 the results of this research were launched by Lewis MacDonald MSP, Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Janice Roach, Head of Construction, Scottish Enterprise – Glasgow and Sir Michael Latham, Chairman of the CITB-ConstructionSkills. Mr Graeme Ogilvy, Scottish Manager CITB-ConstructionSkills chaired the event.

The statistics make for interesting reading - full details from [www.futureskillsscotland.org.uk](http://www.futureskillsscotland.org.uk), or [www.researchonline.org.uk](http://www.researchonline.org.uk) or by contact with the CITB-ConstructionSkills on 0141 810 3004. However there is a summary below.

The commonly used phrase of "skills shortages" is addressed but the research highlights another interesting statistic. The 15% of employers contacted indicated that they were aware of at least one "skills gap" (namely an operative not considered to be fully proficient) within their current workforce and that equates to 6% of the total workforce. (See "Skills Gap" below)

Some 2,000 employers were contacted between August & September 2003 and the following are excerpts from that research:

#### General statistics

### Training

Keeping the above in mind:

- Only 25% of employers have formal training plans - another 11% expressing an interest in developing such a plan.
- Fewer than 25% were interested in receiving assistance on recruiting a new entrant to the construction sector.
- 51% of employers provided training in the last 12 months (NOTE – this is below average taken across all sectors – this is 61%)
- 37% of the smallest employers train whilst 93% of the largest employers train with the lowest levels of training activity in glazing and flooring (35% and 37% respectively).
- A total of 52,000 construction workers received some form of training in the last 12 months – 47% of the workforce. 72% of the training was trade specific with 69% being health and safety training.
- THE MAIN reason for NOT TRAINING? – Employers felt that their staff were already proficient!

As indicated at the outset, this is a substantial piece of research and the above is only a fraction of the data gathered.

- There are 10,000 employers and 109,500 employees.
- 55% of businesses employ fewer than five operatives.
- Companies employing 50 or more account for 42% of employment.
- Most employers work on projects that were repair; maintenance and improvement work with a relatively low number citing new building or infrastructure projects.
- 17% of employers had at least one vacancy at the time of the survey and this equates to 3,300 vacancies or a 3% vacancy rate.
- 2,300 of these vacancies are deemed “hard to fill” – equivalent of 2.1% of employment and 68% of all vacancies.
- 84% of employers cited craft or trade specific skills as lacking among applicants.

### **Skills gap (as opposed to skills shortages)**

- 10% of employees within smaller companies were classified, by their employer, as having skills deficiencies.
- 40% of employees in the largest companies (employing 50+) were deemed to have skill deficiencies.
- 59% of employers cited craft or trade specific skills as being deficient whilst 40% cited health and safety/welfare as less than proficient.
- 1,400 employers, constituting 15%, reported at least one skill gap – this affected 6,200 employees or 15% of the total workforce.
- 70% of employers felt that the above statistics had an impact on their business. As a result, almost a fifth (17%) believe that they had lost business. 28% stated that they had difficulty in meeting their own customer service objectives with 26% indicating that this was impacting on their own quality standards.

The CITB-ConstructionSkills will now be using the outcomes of this exercise to plan its way forward – perhaps it could be suggested that employers might also consider how training could advance their businesses!!

A note of caution to other organisations that might seek to address the skills issue – save your money - do not re-invent the wheel – the work has been done!

The clever part now is to build on that information – that takes effort, imagination and enlightened thinking.

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## **Slating & tiling courses**

The case having previously been made, namely that there were no such college based courses

This demonstrates, as does the stonemason facility at Elgin, where training is local that there is an increase in the number of employers sending their trainees to these colleges. The avid reader

that there were no such college based courses north of Arbroath, the SSLG Chief Executive is delighted to be able to report that the Northern College will be offering slating & tiling courses this autumn in Alness. Already considerable interest has been expressed and, with this new facility pending, there has already been an increase in the number of trainees for this trade.

of the Newsletter will recall that, whilst the normal drop out rate for trainees is somewhere in the area of 20%, where travelling to the “central belt” for training this drop out rate rises to between 40% - 60%. What a waste of money, effort and time – this can only lead to disillusionment and contribute to the partially / semi-skilled operatives that can result in the proverbial “cowboy builders”. This leads very nicely into the next subject.

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## Mobile training rigs

The case is simply put – if trainees in rural areas are unable (or perhaps unwilling) to attend college (which may necessitate living away from home) then colleges, particularly in the Highlands, should consider some innovative ideas which might result in taking the training to the trainees!

Such training facilities are apparently available in America and Colleges, outwith the central belt of Scotland, should consider the possibility of emulating their American colleagues. OK the actual size of the rigs would have to address the road conditions in such areas but the challenge is there. The question is – are any of the colleges able to consider, let alone address, this challenge?

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## Glasgow project

Details of this project were outlined in the previous Newsletter but, for new readers, a brief recap.

In order to determine the number of stonemasons required to ensure the appropriate maintenance of Glasgow’s built heritage for future years the SSLG considers that it is first necessary to determine the skill level of the current workforce, assess the “health” of that built heritage to determine the skills that will be required in the future and then, and only then, is it possible to determine if there are sufficient stonemasons with the necessary skills to meet that need.

A funding bid was submitted to Scottish Enterprise and, whilst not wishing to be over optimistic, a structure is being established, to enable us “hit the ground running” if and when approval is received.

The project will be overseen by a management team which will include Professor B Bluck, Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, Mr John Gilbert, nominated by the RIAS - Glasgow Chapter, Mr A Stark, formerly a Director of Watson Stonecraft, Mr Graeme Ogilvy, Scottish Manager CITB, Alan McKinney Chief Executive SSLG, and nominees from the City of Glasgow Council and the Scottish Civic Trust. In addition there will be a Project Director – Mr Dennis Urquhart, formerly RGU.

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## Centre of excellence

Price Waterhouse Cooper has been commissioned to undertake research into the feasibility of the creation of a Centre of Excellence based at Fyvie Castle and its report is imminent. The National Trust of Scotland is the co-ordinating body and Alan McKinney, Chief Executive SSLG, is on the Steering Group progressing this possibility.

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## National planning policy guidelines

Following the coverage given to this matter in Newsletter No.7, seeking to determine how Scottish local authorities were addressing their obligations listed under NPPG 18 para 20, three Councils were named for not having responded – these were Dumfries & Galloway, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire. It is a matter of regret that, even after four letters and a public naming, no response has been received.

However the issues raised during this research are now being pursued at a different level.

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## County mineral maps

[\(see Newsletter No.7 for details\)](#)

Pursuing the NPPG issues above the SSLG identified that the planning authorities in England had available "County Mineral Maps" (BGS) and these enabled them ensure no developments limited access to vital building materials.

In Scotland no such modern digital maps are available – instead Scottish planning authorities have to depend upon non-digital maps, compiled in the 1980's, that go further out of date with every passing day.

Highlighting this problem the SSLG pursued this matter with the Scottish Executive - Planning Department which appears, by all accounts, to be perfectly content with this aging data which, as far as can be established, does NOT include dimensional stone reserves. Fire clay, hard stone, sand/gravel etc are all covered BUT NOT DIMENSIONAL STONE!

How can local authority planning officers safeguard mineral reserves that are vital for the repair and maintenance of Scotland's built heritage when there is no modern reference point to assist them?

## Challenge

However, in an effort to advance this issue the SSLG has issued the following challenge to the Planning Department. Finance the undertaking of a Scottish County Mineral Map for only ONE Scottish county and then let us all compare the results with the old and rapidly aging data.

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## Centre of excellence

### Scottish Lime Centre Trust

On the 19th May the SLCT ran one of its Master Class programmes addressing the issue of slate – with Dr Ewan Hyslop ([BGS](#)), Dr Joan Walsh ([University of Paisley](#)) and Mr Neil Grieve ([University of Dundee](#)) amongst the speakers.

The event was fully subscribed and, with the benefit of good weather, it was possible for those keen to try their hand at "dressing slate" to have the opportunity. It was, by all accounts (including the feedback forms), considered to be a successful day.

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