

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01, TUESDAY 29 APRIL

HERITAGE BUILDINGS AT RISK DUE TO SKILLS GAPS WITH SPECIALIST WORKERS AND BUILDING PROFESSIONALS

Two reports by the National Heritage Training Group (NHTG) launched today at The Prince of Wales's Foundation for the Built Environment, highlight serious skills and knowledge gaps affecting specialist workers in England and building professionals working across the UK built heritage sector.

Encouragingly, the shortage of skilled craftspeople to work on England's historic buildings has been greatly reduced since the first NHTG report in 2005. However, the future of the five million pre-1919 buildings in England could be at risk as most of the workforce undertaking repair and maintenance work does not possess all the skills required to do the job properly.

Similar knowledge gaps affect the majority of the building professionals who specify, commission and oversee this work across the UK and this is exacerbated by recruitment difficulties in the professional ranks of the sector.

The ***Traditional Building Craft Skills in England*** study, backed by ConstructionSkills and English Heritage, shows that the shortage of craftspeople in this sector has reduced by 3,000 since 2005, when the NHTG announced a skills shortage of 6,590. The number of craftspeople in the sector is around 109,000 compared to fewer than 90,000 in 2005, but with only 36% percent of contractors working on pre-1919 buildings it is estimated that only 33,000 craftspeople undertake work with traditional materials.

While around 16,000 mostly new entrants were identified as requiring some form of traditional building skills training in 2007, the evidence suggests that over two-thirds of the work, of which 67% is for private home-owners, is being carried out by those without the right skills and materials. This is detrimental to the buildings and stores up future problems and unnecessary extra cost to rectify.

Home-owners have experienced difficulties in the past 12 months sourcing particular trades, with 16% reporting general trades/craftspeople hard to find rising to 21% for joiners and roofers, and 26% for carpenters. Levels of satisfaction with quality have declined considerably since 2005 (very satisfied down from 60% to 42% for public and commercial stockholders and 60% to 39% for private owners). Those very satisfied with completion times is up from 35% to 43% for public and commercial stockholders and down from 45% to 16% for private owners. This reflects the difficulty in finding contractors to undertake small jobs for domestic clients and that builders fit these around larger projects.

The National Heritage Training Group is now focussing on ensuring that individuals working on traditional buildings receive the required training and guidance. This expands the work over the past three years, including improved recruitment and careers advice, developing heritage-specific qualifications and a programme for mainstream construction course college trainers to improve their understanding of traditional building methods and materials.

The second UK-wide report, ***Built Heritage Sector Professionals***, assessed skills and training of architects, engineers, surveyors, conservation officers and other professionals – the gatekeepers for this sector.

However, of the half million professionals working in the UK, only 507 are building conservation-accredited. This equates to one accredited surveyor for every 85,000 traditional buildings, and only one engineer with relevant conservation experience for every 276,000 pre-1919 structures. The report also shows that new recruits may be ill-equipped to replace experienced professionals approaching retirement, creating a vacuum in this part of the industry.

Working on heritage buildings, which are mostly privately owned, formed one third of all professionals' workload over the past year, but almost two thirds of workers do not believe their education prepared them adequately for this work and their knowledge is self-taught.

And, although nearly two thirds of professionals stipulate that this type of work should be carried out by experienced contractors, half of these report difficulties in finding qualified or experienced craftspeople, echoing the findings of the ***Traditional Building Craft Skills in England*** report.

The NHTG will now be working with its partners in the home countries to increase demand for suitably skilled and building-conservation accredited professionals and maximise the number of high-quality entrants into the sector by strengthening building conservation components within mainstream built environment courses. There is also a need to develop flexible training and improve advice and guidance on traditional building skills and materials and link these to the sustainability agenda.

Peter Lobban, Chief Executive of ConstructionSkills, said: "We've taken some giant steps to ensure that more people are taking up these traditional building crafts that are so important to preserving the country's heritage buildings.

"But there is more work to do. Many of the people undertaking repair and maintenance work on pre-1919 buildings need upskilling to guarantee that tasks are completed to the highest possible standard and England's iconic and more humble buildings are not spoilt. To address this issue, we have developed a variety of flexible on-site training schemes and new heritage qualifications."

The ***Traditional Building Craft Skills in England*** report also found that:

- Demand for maintenance work on historic buildings has rocketed in the past three years, with the market now estimated to be worth a massive £4.7 billion, up from £3.5 billion in 2005
- The vast majority of contractors in the built heritage sector are general builders and, on average in the past 12 months, 36% of their work has been on pre-1919 buildings
- Only 37% of tutors running construction-related qualifications in further education colleges are able to teach traditional building skills

The ***Built Heritage Sector Professionals*** report also found that:

- Most professional firms (85%) expect their workload to either stay the same or increase in the next 12 months
- Over a third of professional practices reported difficulties recruiting professionals, which is most prevalent among architects and engineers
- Nearly three-quarters of firms report not having a formal training and development strategy in place

- Demand for formal education specialising in the built heritage sector is currently low, and there are funding concerns that could affect this further

Bill Martin, Director of Conservation at English Heritage, said: “The serious shortage of craftspeople that was highlighted in our first report three years ago captured the imagination of many people and has resulted in a huge renewal of interest in careers in the heritage build sector. The 3000-strong force of new blood is crucial to addressing the succession problem within the sector. We may be reversing a trend but clearly there is still lots to do to make sure the quality of work is maintained. These skills issues affect not just listed buildings, but the whole swathe of undesignated and locally important heritage and conservation areas that form an integral part of the historic environment.”

The National Heritage Training Group and its partners will now be investing £1 million to help reduce the skills gap, to be spent on initiatives including:

- Raising awareness of the built heritage sector and career opportunities through information and advice leaflets and brochures, plus a website and dedicated phone line, taster days and careers workshops
- Encouraging up-take of qualifications such as the Heritage Skills NVQ Level 3 and a Heritage Apprenticeship Programme
- Supporting Regional Heritage Skills Action Groups – providing training and skills development to meet regional demand and need
- A mentoring programme, with experienced craftspeople passing on skills and knowledge to less experienced practitioners
- Expanding the number of National Heritage Training Academies

Mike Moody, Chairman of the National Heritage Training Group said, “As an employer in this sector, I know too well the value and importance of retaining a skilled workforce. This is essential if we are to maintain the highest possible standards of workmanship, as well as remaining commercially successful. The work of the NHTG has helped reduce the skills shortage, but we will now redouble our efforts to address the skills gaps for both craftspeople and building professionals to ensure we properly care for and maintain our built heritage.”

Dr Steven Parissien, Director of Education and Skills for The Prince’s Foundation, added: “This report clearly underlines The Prince’s Foundation’s belief that better opportunities are needed for able craftspeople to progress from basic skills to master craftsmanship. This means a wider knowledge of architectural language and context as well as mentoring by today’s most accomplished practitioners. We’ve begun to model that through The Prince of Wales’s Building Craft Apprentice programme and, in a parallel conference being held by The Prince’s Foundation, will work with committed national and international bodies to create an action plan to dramatically improve the quality of skills training available.”

For further information about the National Heritage Training Group, please visit:
www.nhtg.org.uk

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CASE STUDIES AND PHOTOGRAPHY ARE AVAILABLE

For further information, contact Sam Holl at Geronimo Communications on 020 7299 8442 / sam.holl@geronimocommunications.com.

Definitions of traditional building craft trades mentioned in the press release are as follows:

Bricklayers: In the built heritage sector, bricklayers often repair and replace bricks on an historic building or wall. In order to do this, they need patience and an eye for detail, as well as needing to learn about the different methods of laying (bonding) the bricks over the centuries and the changes in pointing that have occurred.

Carpenters/ joiners: In the built heritage sector, these roles require many of the same skills as modern day carpentry and joinery. However, it also involves lots of problem solving and an understanding of how different wood is affected by different conditions and amounts of time. A carpenter or joiner could be asked simply to make repairs to a building, or even to copy original features.

Slate and tile roofers: Roofers need to be able to identify problems and know how to fix them before they strip a roof for re-slating or re-tiling. As with all traditional materials, a roof slater and tiler needs to be able to make best use of the original roof covering and be able to use traditional methods for fixing both the original and replacement tiles or slates in place.

Lead Workers: Lead Workers are recognised for their specialist skills in shaping lead sheet and other metals into different details, either by bossing or lead welding to make the different component items for the job in hand. These range from lead flushing for a chimney or dormer window to elaborate coverings for specific roof features, such as a turret or dome.

Stonemasons: Stonemasonry covers a range of different roles. A banker mason works stone to replace decayed stonework on a historic building and needs to be skilful with tools used for working stone into different shaped components, using templates and moulds as a guide. In contract, a fixer mason uses the stone components created by the banker masons to carry out the repair and conservation work on the buildings.

Painters & decorators: Historic buildings contain some of the most detailed and elaborate decoration and painters and decorators specialising in this area need to be inspired by decoration of early periods and be able to rise to the challenge of replicating them. It is also possible to specialise in the more ornate decorative work of gilding, graining and marbling.

Thatchers: A thatcher installs and repairs thatched roofs, using a range of cutting and fixing tools. Like many craftspeople, thatchers work outdoors at height, in all weather conditions. The thatcher needs to know what is the most appropriate thatching material to use on the roof according to where the building is and the historical use of longstraw, combed wheat reed, water reed and sedge grass. This is a highly skilled job that involves having the skills to check and repair the wooden roof structure and chimneys and preparing the thatching materials before fixing them to the roof, adding the new thatch, and installing or repairing the ridge line whose design is often personalised by the thatcher.

Dry Stone Wallers: Dry Stone Wallers build walls without cement or mortar. The walls are mostly boundaries to fields or properties and can be found in most parts of the UK except East Anglia. A waller will repair and rebuild dry stone walls using the most appropriately available local stone. The skill is in the technique used to construct the wall.

Cob and earth walling and Clay dabbins: Cob and other earth-walled buildings now remain in specific parts of England, particularly the South West, the East Midlands and the Solway Plain in Cumbria. A cob / earth waller needs to understand how to build in courses and how to integrate other elements and materials such as plinths, roofing, limewash and lime plaster, to the structure. Repairing cob / earth walls is a highly specialised skill as you need the knowledge and skills to stitch new blocks to old and make blocks to match the existing structure.

Flint-knapping and walling: Flint wallers have a range of skills that enable them to work with the material in a variety of ways to provide solid masonry walls, facing to an outer skin of a cavity wall, as a decorative, non-structural surface to a wall, as cobbles for flooring. Flints can either be used whole or fractured, i.e. 'knapped', and the latter is a highly specialised skill.

Wattle and daub: The majority of timber-framed buildings in England are in-filled using a framework of thin wood (wattle) and a covering of earth, straw or hair and lime (daub). Repairing and consolidating wattle and daub requires skill and expertise and an understanding of how to re-create this much localised material and apply it at the appropriate time of year to ensure it is not compromised by bad weather.

Glazier: To repair historic glass, glaziers need specifically to understand how to use the appropriate material relevant to the window and building on which they are working.

Notes to Editors

1. The *Traditional Building Craft Skills in England 2008 Review* skills mapping research was commissioned by the NHTG in May 2007 and undertaken by independent research consultants Pye Tait Limited to cover the nine English regions: South West, South East, London, East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber, North West and North East. This involved primary (qualitative and quantitative) and secondary (desk) research and included 646 structured quantitative interviews with: 533 contractors, 58 stockholders, 30 training providers, 25 suppliers and manufacturers and 68 in-depth qualitative interviews with stakeholder groups, including 26 interviews with trade associations and trade federations, representing both the construction industry in general and various traditional building craft specialisms. The interviews were conducted between August 2007 and January 2008. Apart from providing up-to-date statistical data for traditional building craft skills in England, the report enables the National Heritage Training (NHTG) to evaluate the impact of the work of the (NHTG) in addressing the skills shortage identified in the first-ever NHTG Skills Needs Analysis research of the built heritage sector, published in 2005. It also allows the NHTG to measure and improve the effectiveness of its strategic planning and tactical delivery.
2. The UK-wide *Built Heritage Sector Professionals* research was again commissioned by the NHTG in May 2007 and undertaken by independent research consultants Pye Tait Limited between August 2007 and January 2008 to cover the four home countries. It complements the UK-wide programme of Skills Needs Analysis for the built heritage sector, published as *Traditional Building Craft Skills: Assessing the Need, Meeting the Challenge* (England, 2005 and 2008; Scotland, 2007; Wales, 2007; Ireland, forthcoming 2008). This report sought to provide a separate assessment of the needs of UK building professionals – architects, building control officers, conservation officers and specialists, engineers, planners, surveyors and property managers – to establish their training, knowledge and skills in relation to specifying for and advising on traditional buildings and structures. The research included: a quantitative survey of 398 professional services firms and building professionals, 52 in-depth qualitative interviews with building professionals and professional bodies, a further 20 interviews with education and training providers offering courses of relevance to built heritage sector professionals, a set of 30 further in-depth qualitative interviews with property owners and managers and the building professionals they commission.
3. For the purposes of this research, an historic or traditional building is defined as a building constructed prior to 1919
4. ConstructionSkills, the Sector Skills Council for the construction industry is a partnership between CITB-ConstructionSkills, CIC and CITB Northern Ireland with a UK-wide remit for the whole industry from professional consultancies to major contractors and SMEs. It is working to deliver a safe, professional and fully qualified construction workforce and delivers industry-led skills and training solutions through the Sector Skills Agreement for construction.

5. English Heritage is the lead body for the conservation of England's historic environment. It maintains and opens to the public over 400 historic properties including the World Heritage Sites at Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall. It advises national and local government and the public on matters affecting the historic environment and gives grant aid for its conservation and repair.
6. The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment is an educational charity which seeks to improve the quality of people's lives by teaching and practicing timeless and ecological ways of planning, designing and building. The Foundation believes that successful towns – old and new – share certain design characteristics which, when deliberately applied to today's town-making, result in enduring, thriving neighbourhoods that don't damage the environment
For more information visit www.princes-foundation.org
7. The National Heritage Training Group (NHTG) is an independent specialist sector skills development group with a UK-wide remit to provide assistance with all aspects of recruiting, training, and qualifying the built heritage sector workforce of the construction industry. This is achieved by working in partnership with clients, heritage bodies, contractors, trade federations, trade unions and FE and private training providers. Its first Business Plan was launched in October 2003 and financial and administrative support for the group is provided by ConstructionSkills and English Heritage.