

21st November 2022



CECA Wales Monday Briefing

No apprentice groundworker provision in Wales!

Last week I picked up on the challenges facing civil engineering contractors in terms of the lack of skilled workers in the industry and its effects on business development and growth - for many it really is the key factor in holding businesses back in Wales. This week I wanted to focus specifically on one particular trade and that's one which is crucial for our sector : Civil Engineering Operatives, often referred to as Groundworkers.

This is an area that has been challenging our industry for many years. Historically the role has been looked down upon as something that young people would do as a last resort. As a result it was never "sold" particularly well in schools and, arguably, wasn't taught that well in colleges either and this made it a real challenge for our sector to attract good groundworkers. However, in reality it's a crucial role for our sector whether it be in earthworks operations, installing drainage systems, concrete structures, small plant operation, etc. And rates of pay are increasingly more attractive. But with less people coming in to the sector to undertake these roles there's a real threat, especially for smaller companies with ageing workforces, that the future sustainability of their businesses could be impacted.

Addressing this challenge has been a key priority for CECA Wales and has been a constant part of our strategic plans for the last 4-5 years. For the last three years we have been supporting Qualifications Wales and City and Guilds in developing new qualifications for the CE Operative role following the Welsh Government review of Construction and the Built Environment (C&BE) sector. This has resulted in a new CE Operative apprenticeship and new GCSEs and A-levels specifically in C&BE. Hopefully this will be another step forward in drawing more people to the sector. However, in terms of the apprenticeship what we are seeing is, ironically, a complete lack of provision at FE colleges across Wales this year. This is an absolutely shocking state of affairs given that all of Wales' Regional Skills Partnerships (the organisations set up to advise Welsh Government on skills investment priorities and who we have been inputting industry requirements to) have identified construction as a priority sector and groundworkers as one of the "in demand" trades. And yet funding from Welsh Government to FE colleges (it used to go to CITB) clearly isn't being used to meet this demand!

Since becoming aware of this situation I have met with CITB to develop alternative proposals to try to fill this gap. These discussions are continuing and we hope to take proposals to our next board meeting in an effort to address this matter. We are also engaging with members across Wales to see what we can do address this "market failure" so that provision is made across the whole of Wales.

I have also written to the Minister for Economy, who has responsibility for apprenticeships, seeking an urgent meeting to discuss how this situation has arisen and what will be done to address it. I will provide a further update for members as soon as we have something to report.

CECA Wales Political Update

Infrastructure matters at the Senedd :

Procurement: Equality and Social Justice Committee has published it's [stage 1](#) report on the general principles of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill.

Skills:

- The Minister for Education and the Welsh Language [delivered a statement](#) to the Senedd outlining Welsh Government support for adult education and learning. The Minister announced that the Welsh Government is working with partners to deliver five new citizens' curriculum pilots, which will help tackle the barriers that prevent wider adult learner participation.
- The Welsh Government has [published](#) a statistical release on apprenticeship learning programmes started for February to April 2022.
- The Economy Minister has [announced](#) that more than 1,100 unemployed people facing hidden barriers to entering the labour market have been helped to start their own business thanks to the Barriers to Start Up Grant scheme.
- The Economy Minister has [responded](#) to Written Questions on graduate apprenticeships, the Young Person's Guarantee and job interview support for young people.

Energy:

- Sam Kurtz MS **highlighted** the proposed of the Celtic Freeport bid, he emphasised the potential economic benefits of floating offshore wind, hydrogen production and carbon capture.
- Ken Skates **called on** the UK Government to accelerate the delivery HyNet.
- Mabon ap Gwynfor **raised concern** regarding Rolls-Royce SMR's announcement regarding new nuclear power plant sites relating to Cwmni Egin. The Minister for Economy welcomed the commitment by Rolls-Royce to small modular reactors.

In terms of events at Westminster :

- The Chancellor delivered the Autumn Statement to the House of Commons. CECA's briefing on the Autumn Statement is available [here](#), and CECA's press statement on his announcements is available [here](#).
- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has announced that businesses will be given an additional 2 years to apply new product safety marking.
- Western Gateway has announced that Oldbury (South Gloucestershire) and Berkeley (Gloucestershire) have been prioritised by Rolls Royce as potential sites for the development of new small modular nuclear reactors (SMR).
- The Department for Transport has announced that self-charging trains could make their way onto Britain's railways after receiving £400,000 in government funding.
- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has announced the Alternative Energy Markets Innovation Programme, of up to £18 million in funding, aims to support the development and demonstration of innovative domestic demand side flexibility propositions in a future energy system.

CECA Wales Director Activities

My activities over the last week included :

- Hosting the CECA Wales Leadership Challenge 2022 (south)
- Attending the CIHT Annual Dinner at Abergele with members
- Meeting partners to agree a format for "mock trial" training for members
- Meeting CITB to develop a plan to address the lack of provision in Wales for Groundworker/Civil Engineering Operative apprenticeships
- Attending a meet the buyer event with Bute Energy
- Finalising the CECA Wales post Conference report
- Meeting members to discuss concerns and opportunities

Client engagement and business opportunities

Last week I attended a Meet the Buyer event with Bute Energy to discuss opportunities for members and future events in the renewable energy sector.

At our CECA Wales Leadership Challenge we were joined by construction clients from Transport for Wales, Caerphilly Council and Powys Council.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss or propose any specific engagements with clients and/or let me know if you would like to raise any specific matters with specific clients in the future and I will plan further activities for the Autumn period.

Training Events

Please note that our events programme for 2022 is coming to a close but we are currently assessing the need for membership training in **Carbon Management** and will announce proposals in the new year. Please check out our website for further updates <https://www.ceca.co.uk/wales/events/> .

We are also preparing a series of webinars on social value opportunities and sources of support for CECA Wales members as well as "Mock Trial" training. We hope to host these in 2023.

Our programme of **NEC4 workshops** for members is underway and members have been contacted separately to secure places on this programme of courses. Please be assured that, as always, we will ensure that all CECA Wales members will be able to access these courses but please keep an eye out for further announcements via these briefings and our website.