



UK NATIONAL PLATFORM: an industry vehicle for change

The future of the UK built environment industry is undoubtedly dependent upon harnessing a greater balance between research and the requirements of industry. Industry engagement must be strengthened to build a competitive, innovative and technology-led construction sector. I strongly believe that the National Platform for the Built Environment has the means to achieve this.

The UK National Platform, serving as an interface to the European Construction Technology Platform (ECTP), will direct a new approach to the challenges of society, sustainability and technology faced by the sector over the next 25 years. The UK built environment industry now has the opportunity to drive the National and EU research agenda forwards to ensure it supports its strategic needs. This industry-owned vehicle will communicate the key imperatives for research and innovation to achieve improved performance and added value for its customers.

The high level group of the National Platform, headed by Atkins Chief Executive Keith Clarke, recently announced its first set of priorities: Increased Efficiency; A new Client-driven, Knowledge-based Construction Process; and ICT and Automation. In order to build an agenda that is owned and endorsed by industry, a sector-wide consultation is currently being undertaken, the results of which will form the UK Strategic Research Agenda (SRA). The SRA, to be launched in June, will provide the means for procuring substantial EU and national funding for research and innovation in the built environment industry. The National Platform will provide the mechanism and momentum required to establish research as a critical business process for successful UK industry organisations.

Constructing Excellence is currently providing managerial support for The National Platform. For further information please contact us by sending an email to nationalplatform@constructingexcellence.org.uk



Bob White
Chief Executive, Constructing Excellence

In Brief...

The Innovative Construction Research Centre (ICRC), recently completed research on a number of EPSRC funded projects:

- Measuring Construction Competitiveness in Selected Countries - compares the competitiveness in construction across three countries, UK, Sweden and Finland.
- Premises of Facilities Management Innovation - examines the motivations and factors that bring about the innovation.
- Design for Business Needs Reliability - optimising Whole Life Performance through design for reliability of building systems. For further details of these projects go to www.icrc.reading.ac.uk Alternatively, contact Jim McIlwee

21ST CENTURY CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The Salford Centre for Research & Innovation (SCRI) and the Cambridge-MIT Institute (CMI) has brought together leading construction clients with senior academics from the University of Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Salford.

This process began with a launch event held at the Institute of Directors in London on 1st February. Debate focused upon the issues and challenges facing the demand side of the industry with the objective of developing a joint agenda for changes in response. After a welcome by academics from the three partner universities the context for the day was set by Martin Sykes (Executive Director – OGC) who asked 'Why is it so important to get it right?' and reflected upon how a customer focused approach used by enlightened clients could be adopted by the public sector.

During the group sessions, delegates were asked to jointly agree three key issues facing the construction industry from a client perspective. It soon became evident that there was great value in bringing together forward-thinking clients in an environment where they were able to jointly reflect on their problems and solutions.

Key points arising from the groups were discussed in the plenary session:

- How can we exploit standardisation for increased flexibility?
- How can we learn better? (Not only from ourselves but also from industry and international expertise)
- How can we produce objective performance measurements so that we can compare ourselves against the 'possible' instead of against the 'normal'?
- How can we overcome the constraints to innovation in rigid contractual arrangements?
- How can the UK exploit its expertise and grasp the opportunity that is provided by globalisation?

The group agreed to take these questions forward to the next meeting on 26th April. For more details contact Carl Abbott.



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In Brief...

Loughborough University & Heriot Watt University have jointly launched a new work-based learning Construction Project degree.

Specifically designed with the busy professional in mind, the 3-year course is available in Diploma and Certificate levels to suit individual student needs and circumstances.

The course will provide an opportunity for practitioners to acquire an MSc through work-based distance learning (mainly delivered through web-learning) and will suit those who are unable to take time off work to attend full time education. Substantial bursaries are also being made available for suitable candidates. More details can be found at: www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/wbl alternatively please contact Mike Ward.

The Future of the UK's Construction Industry – Today!

In February the Innovative Construction Research Centre (ICRC), based at the University of Reading, showcased their research to industry. The event attracted a good cross section of industry delegates and covered a wide range of topics including competitiveness, innovative procurement and knowledge management (in the context of the through-life integration of design), and construction and facilities management.

During the event speakers addressed a number of key issues: Dr Will Hughes discussed performance-based contracting; Carol Jewell presented research comparing the competitiveness of UK, Sweden and Finland; Stephen Hughes (Head of Business Development) talked about knowledge transfer through R & D, education, and the commercialisation of IP; Vic Fairey (Dytecna Ltd) presented his company's experience of working with the University and the benefits derived from the relationship.

Professor Stuart Green, Director of the ICRC, introduced 'The Big Ideas': a joint collaboration with Loughborough and Salford Universities. The research project seeks to understand how companies can remain competitive in an ever changing environment. In workshop discussion on this project delegates raised views regarding the meaning of competitiveness, how it is maintained and the barriers to remaining competitive. In the final presentation Dr. Roine Leiringer talked about the 'Grand Challenge' project. Involving a number of collaborative UK universities, this work aims to focus upon understanding the shift from facility construction to service provision.

The central aim of this event was to engage with industry. The approach to research taken by the ICRC relies heavily upon industry integration, without which it could not carry out such valuable work. Similarly, for the research to contribute to industry at regional and national levels it needs to be grounded in reality.

Further details can be found at: www.icrc.reading.ac.uk. alternatively contact Jim Mcllwee.



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Dates for the Diary...

South East - for details contact Jim Mcllwee j.g.mcllwee@reading.ac.uk

- 12th April: Research at Sussex University - Sussex Constructing Excellence Club event hosted at The Freeman Centre, University of Sussex
- 16th May: Built Environment research event - hosted by the Oxford Constructing Excellence Club
- 13th July: Intelligent Buildings @ Reading, Research and Education - A joint showcase event with CIBSE and IBG.

East Midlands - for more details contact Mike Ward

- 24th April, 12 June: East Midlands Construction CoVE Breakfast Workshop 'Construction joined up', New College, Nottingham



THE BIG IDEAS

Sustained Competitiveness in UK Construction

The Big Ideas project is about helping the industry to be prepared for future change. The built environment sector is continually affected by ongoing technological, environmental and social change. The challenges thrown up by these have varying impacts for different players within the construction sector.

Working with construction organisations and professionals, the Big Ideas project aims to assess the likelihood of different future scenarios (e.g. rising sea levels). Thinking about the future in a systematic way will allow the industry to be prepared for a range of potential futures. In this way steps can be taken to prepare for and exploit future opportunities, and mitigate or avoid problems.

The Big Ideas is a collaborative project between the Universities of Reading, Loughborough and Salford. For more details and to register an interest please go to www.thebigideas.org.uk alternatively contact Mike Ward.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS

A Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) involves at least one high-quality graduate (a "Knowledge Transfer Associate") working in a company for 1 to 3 years on a project central to the needs of the company. KTP's enable companies to develop closer working relationships with universities, giving access to university expertise, knowledge, technology and skills throughout the life of the project.

KTP's are part funded by the DTI (up to 60%) with company contribution being as little as £16,000 p.a. for SMEs and £24,000 p.a. for larger organisations. The Knowledge Transfer Associate is employed by the university for the duration of the project and companies are invoiced monthly. For more details (including a typical annual cost breakdown) contact Mike Ward.



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- 25th April: BEST network Environmental Efficiency Workshop, Nottingham Racecourse.

North West – for more details contact Carl Abbott

- 5th April: Successful Implementation of Innovation Strategies in Construction – Delft University, Holland
- 26th April: 21st Century Construction Industry - SCRI, Cambridge-MIT Institute (CMI)/University of Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Salford (see page 1).
- 6th June: Project Management and its Effective Delivery - in collaboration with Association of Project Managers (APM) - University of Salford
- 20th June: SCRI UK Industry Day - Intelligent Buildings and Communities