Demand for Skills in Construction to 2020: Addressing the Challenges

The Irish Construction Industry continues in recovery mode and there is currently a strong demand for skills across the trades and professions. The Construction Industry Federation (CIF) recently commissioned DKM to produce a report, titled "Demand for Skills in Construction to 2020" the report warns of the skills shortages and the challenges the industry will face.

Press Release 

The report "Demand for Skills in Construction to 2020" was commissioned by the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) in order to assess the current and future skills needs of the construction industry in Ireland. The report was carried out by research firm DKM and was launched at the CIF Conference in November 2016.

The report highlights the following key findings:

- There is a significant and growing demand for construction skills in Ireland.
- The skills shortage is expected to increase in the coming years.
- The shortage of skilled workers is expected to impact on the ability of the construction industry to deliver projects on time and to budget.
- The skills shortage is expected to have a negative impact on the competitiveness of the Irish construction industry.

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- Investing in training and education.
- Encouraging more people to enter the construction industry.
- Improving the attractiveness of the construction industry as a career choice.

The CIF is calling on the Government to invest in training and education to address the skills shortage. This includes:

- Increasing funding for training and education.
- Improving the quality of training and education.
- Encouraging more people to enter the construction industry.

The CIF is calling on the Government to increase funding for training and education to address the skills shortage. This includes:

- Investing in training and education for the current workforce.
- Investing in training and education for the next generation.
- Supporting the development of new training and education programmes.

The CIF is calling on the Government to improve the quality of training and education to address the skills shortage. This includes:

- Improving the relevance of training and education to the needs of the construction industry.
- Improving the delivery of training and education.
- Improving the support for training and education providers.

The CIF is calling on the Government to encourage more people to enter the construction industry to address the skills shortage. This includes:

- Investing in marketing and promotion.
- Improving the image of the construction industry.
- Improving the attractiveness of the construction industry as a career choice.

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Apprenticeships and their structure were covered extensively this year in the media, we asked what changes should be made to the way apprenticeships are delivered. “Apprenticeships have served us well. We do have problems in the wet trades and getting people into the wet trades. We may have to be more innovative with regards to how the apprenticeships operate. We have a programme whereby contractors share apprentices and the apprentices get a broader experience. The duration of apprenticeships is an issue in some cases, maybe not all of them have to be four years. The image of apprenticeships is a big thing. We need to improve the image of apprenticeships and make them attractive career choices for students. We have launched www.apprentices.ie to promote apprenticeships and are working with teachers to promote the opportunities available to those who choose this career path.”

Finally, we asked Dormot how industry and Governments’ employees future training needs. “It enables the CIF to provide high-quality training in a significantly subsidised price to its members. Robert talked to us about how the CIF Training and the Construction SME Skillnet can be focused on delivering modern training at a significantly subsidised price to CIF member companies to assist in developing its members. Robert talked to us about how training at a significantly subsidised price to CIF member companies to assist in developing its members.

Part of Robert’s role at the CIF is operating the Construction SME Skillnet. The Skillnet is enterprise led. It is based on the idea that when industry is doing the Live Register, we are working with SOLAS and the Department of the Social protection ie to promote apprenticeships and are working with teachers to promote the opportunities available to those who choose this career path.”

Winifred Ryan, Training Manager at John Sisk & Son (Holdings) Ltd Irish building spoke to Winifred Ryan, and asked what the major skills shortages are for main contractors. She said, “There is a shortage of engineers and senior quantity surveyors with up to 5 years’ experience. For the supply chain, there is a shortage of those working in the wet trades and semi-skilled operatives e.g. steel fixing and formwork.” Winifred said with the rise in construction, it will be a challenge to fill the vacancies with people with the relevant experience.

We asked what she would recommend for the industry to develop their skills base. She responded giving us an example of what Sisk are doing. “There are a number of things that can be done, and Sisk are involved in a few different areas at the moment. Sisk have started looking at this and are involved in a number of initiatives, currently we have 3 trainee quantity surveyors who are attending college 1 day a week in DIT Bolton Street, and working with Sisk the other 4 days. This is a great opportunity for a young person to work and study, it is over 5 years and is working out very well. We are also engaging with the Schools. Sisk are working with the Technoteachers association (teachers of construction subjects) to encourage young people to consider a career in construction. We have been doing school visits and tours of our journey / training centre. Sisk are supporting the ETB training programmes to upskill those from a construction background on the Live Register in those areas which have a skills gap at the moment. These training programmes have been very successful in Mount Lucas and Ballyfermot.”

Fergus Barry, Group Head of Human Resources and Associate Director at Kirby Group Irish building asked Fergus what are the major skills shortages for Kirby, and he gave us his concerns with regards recruitment. “The main challenge I am seeing is in the commercial end, specifically with senior project quantity surveyors and junior quantity surveyors with mechanical and electrical experience. With regards to craft professionals, it can be challenging to recruit craft professionals given the limited recruitment pool. However, we identified this potential shortfall some time ago and took a number of measures to ensure a sustained pipeline of talent.”

We asked what his main concerns were for recruiting personnel over the coming years. He said, “We have invested heavily in apprenticeships. We have upped our recruitment to fifty apprentices per annum. We are investing in our training and skills pipeline as we are aware of potential shortages going forward. We take on electrical, instrumentation and mechanical apprentices across the company and like most construction industry bodies, we are experiencing skill shortages across the Irish Construction Industry. We need to look inside the box. In particular, quantity surveyors at all levels are quite sought after. Most clients I speak to are on the lookout for junior quantity surveyors to project quantity surveyors. Some other shortages are in Health & Safety estimating and procurement and trades. We have recently targeted the UK in a campaign to attract Irish expats back home and the response was overwhelming. A lot of people are interested in returning home to family, however, it does build down to the job opportunity and what the company is offering.”

Amy explained where she sees problems in the industry in the next few years, up to 2020. “Problems I see for the Irish Construction Industry up to 2020 include a continued skills shortage as construction output continues to increase. As construction activity grows each year we must meet the needs of this sector and continue to encourage our young people to pursue a career in the construction, engineering and trades sectors, attract our experienced professionals back home and also upskill our current workforce. There has never been a better time to return home as the opportunities are certainly there.”

In our Irish abroad series, Irish building have been asking Irish construction professionals working abroad what knowledge, skills, and experiences the Irish construction workers are getting and what can be done to get them to return and meet the skills demand. This series will continue in 2017.

Robert Butler, CIF Head of Learning & Development Part of Robert’s role at the CIF is operating the Construction SME Skillnet as the Network Manager. The Skillnet provides funding for CIF member companies to assist in developing members’ employees future training needs. Robert talked to us about how the CIF Training and the Construction SME Skillnet can be focused on delivering modern building techniques, green construction and professionalism across the industry. He said “The Skillnet is a simple concept. It is focused on delivering modern training at a significantly subsidised price to CIF member companies to assist in developing its members. It enables the CIF to provide high-quality training in a significantly subsidised price to its members. Robert talked to us about how the CIF Training and the Construction SME Skillnet can be focused on delivering modern building techniques, green construction and professionalism across the industry. He said “The Skillnet is enterprise led. It is based on the idea that when industry is doing the Live Register, we are working with SOLAS and the Department of the Social protection ie to promote apprenticeships and are working with teachers to promote the opportunities available to those who choose this career path.”

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