

BUSINESS WALES

## SATURDAY BUSINESS



Wales director  
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Engineering  
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Association  
(CECA) Ed

Evans on the importance of infrastructure investment underpinning a more prosperous Welsh economy

**W**E'RE all guilty of taking our infrastructure for granted. Our transport systems, our water systems, flood defences, power and energy, communications and social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals - they all support us in our daily lives.

But given how it underpins how well we live our lives, perhaps we should all take a bit more interest in it because when it fails, we feel it.

The appointment of a new First Minister, new cabinet ministers and, crucially, the creation of new portfolios within the Welsh Government, provide a much-needed restart and refresh when it comes to the Welsh Government's focus on our vital sector.

Over the coming year, as an association representing those who build and maintain our infrastructure, we will be focusing our energies on the following set of priorities - creating work opportunities, creating a skilled workforce, creating a talent pipeline, and creating a better environment for all. All of which feed into creating a strong Welsh economy.

So as the new-look Welsh Government commences its work, we relay our key asks of them to ensure high-quality infrastructure and opportunities for Welsh civil engineering businesses.

The first ask is not new but remains as important today as always, which is our call for a visible pipeline of public sector work opportunities for the future.

This is critical to providing confidence for increased investment and, in turn, ensures opportunities for not only our existing workforce but the talent that we need to nurture to deliver Wales' future infrastructure needs.

Key information on future workstreams needs to be regularly shared and updated with the sector so that businesses can plan for the future.

Sadly, this does not currently happen.

Tied to this is the need for more funding certainty for longer-term infrastructure programmes and, while we of course recognise the fiscal challenges faced across the public sector, it's equally important to recognise the risks that come with lack of investment in our infrastructure, especially our existing infrastructure.

Which is why it's already heartening to hear the comments of the new Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport, Ken Skates MS, on

# Wales must invest in civil engineering to lay the foundations for future prosperity



> Wales needs investment in infrastructure

road-building in Wales and prospects for a potential third Menai crossing.

Further potential changes in the UK Government over the coming year, with a General Election on the horizon, may bring other opportunities for some changes.

Regardless of the colour of a future Westminster government, we will continue to call for a fair Barnett consequential for Wales for the HS2 project, which would provide funding desperately needed to both maintain and improve Wales' transport infrastructure.

Additionally, we need to see rail infrastructure devolved and also devolution of the Crown Estate, so that important decisions on delivering infrastructure can be taken in Wales.

However, to deliver the infrastructure that we need now and into the future, we need to ensure that a skilled workforce is maintained and increased in Wales.

As an organisation representing civil engineering contractors, we continually work to maintain and develop the skills of our members, whether that be in commercial matters or in areas like carbon management and social value.

More widely, we're still working with partners such as the Welsh Government and CITB to ensure they create relevant skills and training frameworks.

However, we continue to face barriers

to ensuring the right provision is in place for our sector to deliver the future skilled workforce that we need.

To address this, we feel a Welsh Government review into the current provision of apprenticeships for civil engineering trades, the ground workers and machine drivers of the future, is desperately needed. There are great opportunities ahead for people from some of our most deprived communities and we mustn't fail them.

We need to see improvements in skills provision based on business needs and future prospects such as floating offshore wind infrastructure.

Allied to this is the need for clear career pathways into the sector.

This is a priority for us. We already do this by increasing engagement with young people, with schools and colleges, and by promoting career pathways for ex-offenders and ex-armed forces personnel.

We continue to work with colleagues in the education sector including Qualifications Wales, the WJEC and City and Guilds to promote the new Built Environment qualifications in Wales.

The introduction of new vocational VCSEs in Wales also aligns well with our work at CECA Wales, helping to deliver that all-important parity of esteem between those who pursue academic and vocational routes to employment.

In support of this we are also work-

ing with centres across Wales to develop a model and resources to support businesses to help deliver the Built Environment GCSE, VCSE and A-level qualifications.

This approach aligns well with the Welsh Government commitment to careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) and the new Welsh curriculum.

However, we are concerned that learners, teachers and parents are not fully aware of the range of opportunities available to them across the civil engineering sector and the breadth of qualifications available to them to pursue these high quality opportunities.

Therefore, we are calling on the Welsh Government to reinforce and promote the key role that businesses can play in the delivery of new vocational qualifications in Wales and promote the scope of these new qualifications and the opportunities available to young people in Wales across the built environment.

Climate change is having a huge impact on this industry and our 2021 report, Decarbonising Our Infrastructure, outlines four themes that we continue to pursue to work towards decarbonisation.

We're also still working with and supporting our members to take action on the issue of reducing their carbon footprint and improving the "green value" of their projects.

However, there remains a lack of

clarity on the expectations of construction clients in terms of decarbonisation.

We are, therefore, calling on the Welsh and UK governments to set out a consistent methodology for carbon measurement on infrastructure projects and the targeted reductions that they expect to be applied.

In addition, where our civil engineering contractor members are working with the Welsh Government and public bodies in Wales, they adhere to social value requirements on contracts which deliver long-lasting community benefits for projects delivered here in Wales.

However, these requirements are often lost on non-devolved infrastructure developments such as offshore wind projects in areas leased out by the Crown Estate.

In future, we would like to see these standards being included in public sector contracts applied to any and all projects in Wales and we are calling on the Welsh and UK governments to ensure that this happens. If we're serious about social value opportunities across the whole of Wales, then we all have a stake in this.

So, while this year of change moves forward, so too, we hope, will the prospects for the vital infrastructure sector in Wales. Positive change for the infrastructure sector will mean positive change for Wales and a better future for our people.