

# Addressing the skills shortage in construction



**Mike Bialyi, Director, CITB-ConstructionSkills, is responsible for promoting training and engaging stakeholders for CITB-ConstructionSkills. Here he answers questions on the role small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can play in addressing the skills shortage, the response to SkillsDirect and the demands of 2012**

**What role can SMEs play in ensuring that the blueprint for UK Construction Skills is met by 2010 ie the need to recruit 348,000 new workers?**

Every company has a role to play in contributing to the success of the industry. Critical to the ongoing development of skills is a commitment to training the workforce across the board.

The scale of this commitment will depend on the requirements of each business, but to ensure that we have a safe, professional workforce, and the right skills, in the right place, at the right time, the involvement of SMEs will be vital.

Whether ensuring that their workforce is qualified to minimum NVQ Level 2 or they carry the right proof of qualification card for their occupation, there are a number of simple steps that every business can take.

We recognise that the development of skills is not a one way street. Our role is to work with SMEs to create services and support systems that enable them to introduce training in a time and cost-effective way.

Central to our efforts is the promotion of the CITB Grant to registered companies to provide SMEs with financial support towards the cost of training, and an annual publicity campaign aimed at raising awareness of the benefits of training amongst smaller businesses.

We also offer tailored training and skills advice across the country through our Company Development Advisors.

**How has the launch of SkillsDirect been received by the construction industry?**

SkillsDirect has been very enthusiastically received by the industry as it delivers what they have asked for – a simpler, faster and easier service. Early signs are that companies are embracing the service with call figures in the first month alone reaching 13,000.

The primary motivation for contacting SkillsDirect to date has been to get qualified and carded prior to the Major Contractors Group's (MCG) deadline for full compliance, but there is also a growing recognition among smaller businesses that the service could provide a valuable offering to them.

As the number of bodies lending their support to full compliance increases exponentially, the need to get qualified and carded has similarly intensified.

Whether a small business works with the MCG, Major Home Builders Group, Civil Engineering Contractors Association or not, they may have partners, suppliers and competitors that do.

As such, smaller companies need to meet the same standards to ensure their business opportunities are not hampered. What's more, as the SkillsDirect system now brings the Health and Safety Test to the front of the process, all businesses will benefit from the improvements in on-site safety they can offer.

**With construction output expected to rise significantly in the run up to 2012, is the**

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**construction industry doing enough to prepare for the demands upon its workforce?**

The Olympics represent a huge construction project. However, it only makes up 7.5% of total major projects currently in the pipeline for the wider south east London area. Putting the Olympic building programme's recruitment needs in the national context, it is expected to account for less than 0.25% of the UK's total construction workforce.

To attract the large number of new recruits needed across the UK, the industry must look beyond its traditional demographic and involve more atypical recruits by employing more women, more people from ethnic minorities, more graduates and investing in training local labour.

CITB-ConstructionSkills is already undertaking a huge range of programmes, including its Positive Image campaign, to encourage young people into the industry; the Inspire Scholarships scheme, which awards grants of up to £9,000 to students applying for construction-related degree courses as well as on-the-job training; and the launch of the first National Skills Academy for Construction – an employer-led initiative which will provide project-based training on sites across the UK.