Construction builds a future for traditional skills

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The scheme which focuses on skills shortages in the repair and maintenance of traditional buildings was officially launched today at the Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh. This included demonstration of traditional building skills by a number of local craftspeople, showing how these skills have survived and are relevant today.

The scheme has been developed by CITB-ConstructionSkills NI - with £240,300 funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Skills for the Future programme.

The programme is providing a unique opportunity for craftspeople in Northern Ireland to work and train alongside experienced practitioners from a range of leading built heritage sector contractors and organisations on live projects. It includes:

- up-skilling for a small number of craftspeople to develop their knowledge, skills and experience of traditional building skills through work-based placements.
- increasing the capacity to deliver future training by funding lecturers from further education colleges to participate in a dedicated Training the Trainers programme.
- using experienced craftsmen and craftswomen as heritage ambassadors and mentors to pass on their skills and knowledge to the trainees on this scheme and promote the built heritage sector more widely.

These three elements will help address and improve the current under-provision of training in this field and contribute to caring for and better maintenance of the 125,000 pre-1919 buildings in Northern Ireland.

The official launch was conducted by Nuala Kerr representing the department for employment and learning and in endorsing the project she said, “It is essential that we safeguard our architectural heritage for future generations. Training is vital to ensure we kick start the revival of traditional building skills and produce the suitably qualified and skilled workforce over the next few years needed to work on these historic buildings."

The project represents a real opportunity to sustain the traditional building skills required to maintain the rich built heritage in Northern Ireland from castles and stately houses to more humble dwellings in our towns, villages and cities. From a small beginning this will influence future provision of quality work-based training and this is expected to be extended beyond the life of this funded project.

Rita Harkin, representing HLF, spoke at the launch added: “Skills for the Future is helping to revive traditional building skills and, in turn, historic buildings in our towns and villages which are in real danger of being damaged or lost. This exciting programme supports the creation of work-based training opportunities at the conservation end of the construction industry.

"The repair and re-use of existing buildings is increasingly recognised as the most sustainable approach to development, but the industry’s focus has largely been on new build to date. This funding aims to address the resultant skills shortages and help invigorate and broaden the appeal of conservation work to those who may not have previously considered working in this important area.”

Barry Neilson Chief Executive of CITB-ConstructionSkills NI outlined the organisations commitment to providing a range of training and skills development programmes for the construction sector. In recognising the importance of this specific project to the built heritage sector in Northern Ireland he said: "As a sector skills council and industrial training board, skills and training are the central core of our business, we understand the importance of training and the positive affects it can have both internally and externally.

"We are committed to providing a range of training and skills development interventions to meet the needs of contractors and craftspeople in Northern Ireland including within the built heritage sector. These flexible on-site training schemes and the heritage qualifications will encourage people to pursue a career in this specialist sector. By training further education college trainers and developing ambassadors and mentors we are also improving the availability of traditional building skills training essential for pre-1919 buildings in Northern Ireland."

CITB-ConstructionSkills NI has appointed South West College to manage the delivery of the project and Ciaran McManus from the college outlined the progress to date and opportunities available through the project.

For more information regarding the training opportunities within this project please contact:
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Notes to editors

CITB-ConstructionSkills NI website provides details of our services
South West College website provides further information.