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SUMMARY REPORT

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# TRADITIONAL BUILDING CRAFT SKILLS

*Assessing the Need, Meeting the Challenge*



SKILLS NEEDS  
ANALYSIS OF  
THE BUILT  
HERITAGE SECTOR  
IN IRELAND 2009

# foreword

Maintaining and wisely using our older buildings not only preserves the past for the future, but makes a major contribution to the increasingly important sustainability, regeneration and climate change agendas. To respond to this we need a workforce equipped with the right knowledge and understanding of traditional building methods and materials, and the right practical skills to carry out appropriate repair and maintenance. Sadly, these once widespread skills declined in the latter part of the 20th century, which resulted in significant skills and knowledge gaps in this sector.

This report provides hard evidence on the current state of demand, supply and training provision within the built heritage sector across the whole of Ireland, and also provides an overarching strategy and Skills Action Plans (see Section 10 of the full report) for both countries, to exploit and enlarge the pockets of excellent existing provision. In Northern Ireland, ConstructionSkills (Sector Skills Council for Construction), the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), the National Heritage Training Group (NHTG) and others will work together to respond to the needs in the province. In the Republic of Ireland, the Office of Public Works (Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí, the government's agency responsible for heritage sites), FÁS (Foras Áiseanna Saothair, the Republic's national training and employment authority) and their partners will similarly use the findings and their Skills Action Plan to respond to current and future demand.

To maximise resources it would be ideal if these bodies could share best practice with each other and the rest of the United Kingdom and vice versa. We need to involve a wide range of partners, including the Assembly and government departments in the two respective countries, employers and employers' groups, trade unions, heritage organisations, education and training providers, and funding bodies, to achieve this common objective.

On the basis of previous UK home country NHTG reports, we believe this unique piece of labour market intelligence is a key element in stimulating the revival of traditional building skills in both countries and promoting the cultural and economic value of our built heritage. This report comes at a time of economic downturn and major challenge, especially within the construction industry, but we need to ensure that we train and upskill the workforce in readiness for the eventual financial recovery. Care and conservation of our built heritage sits firmly within the repair, maintenance and improvement sector of the construction industry, but has different skills and knowledge sets. As custodians of our built heritage, we have a responsibility to insist that this work is carried out to the highest possible standard.

**Help us to meet the challenge and make a difference to the built heritage sector.**



Mike Moody  
Chairman  
National Heritage Training Group



# context to the research

## 1.1 Context to the Research

This first major primary research of traditional building craft skills in the built heritage sector for the whole of Ireland follows the first ever report of this series on the sector in England, *Traditional Building Craft Skills: Assessing the Need, Meeting the Challenge*, published by the NHTG in 2005. Similar research reports in Scotland and Wales were published in January and July 2007 respectively, and the England 2008 review and a UK-wide report on built heritage sector professionals were published in April 2008. This latest report provides up-to-date statistical data on traditional building craft skills in Ireland, thus completing the UK-wide picture on this sector and extending the research to cover the Republic of Ireland. This data underpins the strategic planning and tactical delivery necessary to ensure a suitably skilled and qualified workforce for this sector of the construction industry is available now and in the future.

The research objectives were to:

- understand the place of traditional buildings in the cultures of each of the two countries
- understand the influence of legislation, conservation groups and building professionals
- analyse and quantify supply and demand in the sector and identify specific skills shortages
- assess the material supply chain and related skill issues for manufacturers and suppliers of traditional building materials
- assess current training provision
- inform the Skills Action Plans (see Section 10 of the full report) and identify appropriate performance measures within an appropriate timetable agreed with major stakeholders.



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The research included structured quantitative interviews with:

- 87 stockholders
- 260 contractors
- 93 manufacturers and suppliers
- 80 architects and surveyors
- 57 training providers
- 11 conservation officers.

These were supplemented by 66 in-depth qualitative interviews with the stakeholder groups listed above and with conservation organisations and grant-awarding bodies.

## 1.2 Main Findings of the Report: Northern Ireland

	Demand	Supply	Manufacturers and Suppliers	Training Provision
<b>Findings</b>	<p>Around 125,000 pre-1919 buildings</p> <p>Estimated spend in 2007 of almost £25m on conservation, repair and maintenance, expected to rise to £26.1m in 2010</p> <p>Actual 2007 market for traditional building craft skills worth around £11m (using traditional materials), expected to rise to £11.8m in 2010</p> <p>Small market reflects the boom in new build over the past few years</p> <p>Grants are important in conservation of historic buildings</p> <p>Current lack of demand due to cost, lack of knowledge and understanding of traditional building materials, and harm to pre-1919 buildings in using modern alternatives has led to inappropriate repair and maintenance</p> <p>Enough output in 2007 to sustain 570 full-time equivalents (FTE) working on pre-1919 buildings, and 260 with skills in the use of traditional materials; expected to rise to 600 and 270 respectively by 2010</p> <p>Potential for traditional building craft skills is twice the current demand</p> <p>Lack of knowledge of traditional building materials and skills, cost and perceived lack of availability of traditional materials have led to inappropriate repair and maintenance</p> <p>Recent focus on new build at the expense of conservation</p> <p>Much less conservation culture exists compared to the rest of the United Kingdom</p>	<p>Currently over 1,800 people work in the pre-1919 built heritage sector (excluding self-employed)</p> <p>Only 5% of contractors undertook any work on pre-1919 buildings in last 12 months, on average only 25% of their work</p> <p>Vast majority are general builders; only 14% see themselves as conservation or heritage specialists</p> <p>Most consider themselves capable of working on listed buildings and have high regard for employees' skills</p> <p>Recruitment is moderately difficult; only a few long-term vacancies</p> <p>Contractors recruit skilled or partially skilled staff, but around 50% have staff on formal training programmes</p> <p>Of the members of the traditional building workforce, 100 were estimated to have required some form of training in 2007, including 20 needing top-up training in the use of traditional materials; numbers expected to remain constant over the next few years</p> <p>On-the-job training/work experience considered more important than college courses</p> <p>One-third interested in Heritage Skills NVQ Level 3 and in the HLF Bursary Scheme</p> <p>Subcontractors used by 66% in the previous 12 months; subcontractors easy to find</p> <p>Modern methods/materials easier than traditional materials; lack of specialist training and information means low awareness of the dangers of using modern alternatives</p> <p>Increased use of modern methods of construction to meet building and energy regulations at the expense of traditional materials</p>	<p>Main materials supplied: wood/timber, stone, glass, roofing tiles and slate</p> <p>Materials partly sourced from within Ireland and Great Britain, but timber products from further afield</p> <p>Around three-quarters of products supplied by those interviewed are traditional materials</p> <p>Only 11% regard themselves as specialist conservation or heritage suppliers</p> <p>Increased sales of traditional materials in the past 5 years because of higher awareness and greater affluence</p> <p>More difficulty experienced in recruiting skilled craftspeople compared to contractors, and most are in need of some training</p> <p>Skills of employees (including craftspeople) well regarded</p> <p>Mixed views expressed on competence/knowledge of traditional materials by stockholders, professionals and contractors</p> <p>Gap exists between proportion of traditional materials specified by professionals and actually used by contractors</p> <p>Training on some materials available only from manufacturers and product suppliers</p>	<p>Construction NVQ courses mainly provided through FE colleges</p> <p>Wood trades and bricklaying are most popular courses</p> <p>Three-quarters of trainees go into new build; almost all of the remainder go into repair and maintenance, and only 2% into specialist heritage work</p> <p>Almost no specialist conservation or heritage skills courses available</p> <p>Almost 60% of trainers thought to have traditional building craft skills</p> <p>Pressure from employers to design the syllabus to reflect need for modern building materials and techniques</p> <p>Most consider that current courses do not equip trainees to work on pre-1919 buildings, but optional traditional building skills modules welcomed on mainstream courses</p> <p>Lack of awareness among trainers of recent traditional building skills initiatives; under 50% aware of the Heritage Skills NVQ Level 3</p> <p>Low awareness of NHTG Training the Trainers programme, but considerable interest in this</p> <p>Strong agreement that schools should include teaching on building and building materials</p> <p>Lack of opportunity for specialist/traditionally skilled craftspeople</p>

## 1.3 Main Findings of the Report: Republic of Ireland

	Demand	Supply	Manufacturers and Suppliers	Training Provision
<b>Findings</b>	<p>Around 175,000 pre-1919 buildings</p> <p>Estimated spend in 2007 of €186m on conservation, repair and maintenance, expected to rise to €207m in 2010</p> <p>Actual 2007 market for traditional building craft skills worth around €108m (using traditional materials) and expected to rise to €116m in 2010</p> <p>Grants are important in funding historic building conservation</p> <p>Enough output in 2007 to sustain 3,290 FTE working on pre-1919 buildings, and 1,910 with skills in the use of traditional materials; expected to rise to 4,770 and 2,570 respectively by 2010</p> <p>Potential for traditional building craft skills is just under half current demand</p> <p>Lack of knowledge of traditional building materials and skills, cost and perceived lack of availability of traditional materials have led to inappropriate repair and maintenance</p> <p>Protected structures legislation introduced in 2000, and the Irish Heritage Trust only introduced in 2006</p> <p>Recent focus on new build at the expense of conservation</p>	<p>Currently 4,600 people work in the pre-1919 built heritage sector (excluding self-employed)</p> <p>Only 7% of contractors undertook any work on pre 1919-buildings in last 12 months; on average this forms one-third of their work</p> <p>Almost one-third (30%) of interviewees regard themselves as conservation or heritage specialists</p> <p>Almost all interviewees regard themselves as capable of working on protected structures and generally have a high regard for their employees' skills</p> <p>Recruitment is moderately difficult, with only a few long-term vacancies</p> <p>Contractors prefer to recruit skilled or partially skilled staff, and under 20% have staff on formal training programmes</p> <p>Of the traditional building workforce, 540 required some form of training in 2007, including 150 needing top-up training in the use of traditional materials; expected to rise to 790 and 210 respectively by 2010</p> <p>On-the-job training and work experience seen as more important than college courses</p> <p>Almost 90% expressed interest in the Heritage Skills NVQ Level 3 (not currently available in Republic of Ireland)</p> <p>Almost 80% used subcontractors in the previous 12 months and had no difficulty in finding these</p> <p>Builders unaware of dangers of using modern materials on traditional buildings because of lack of specialist training and information</p> <p>Contractors find modern materials easier to use than traditional techniques</p>	<p>Main materials supplied are wood/timber, stone, glass, roofing tiles and slate</p> <p>Materials partly sourced from within Ireland and Great Britain, and timber products come from further afield</p> <p>Around two-thirds of products sold by those interviewed are traditional materials</p> <p>More than one-fifth (22%) regard themselves as specialist conservation or heritage suppliers</p> <p>Increased sales of traditional materials in the last 5 years due to higher awareness and greater affluence</p> <p>Mixed views regarding competence/knowledge of traditional materials by stockholders, professionals and contractors</p> <p>Skills of employees (including craftspeople) highly regarded</p> <p>Slightly more difficulty experienced in recruiting skilled craftspeople than contractors, and most are in need of some training</p> <p>A small difference exists between proportion of traditional materials specified by professionals and actually used by contractors</p> <p>Training on some materials available only from manufacturers and product suppliers</p>	<p>Level 2 training provided by FÁS centres; levels 4 and 6 by Institutes of Technology</p> <p>Wood trades, plumbing and electrical courses are most popular</p> <p>Almost 80% of apprentices go into new build and almost all the remainder into repair and maintenance; only 3% go into specialist heritage work</p> <p>Almost no specialist conservation or heritage courses are available</p> <p>The majority (70%) of trainers are thought to have traditional building craft skills</p> <p>Pressure from employers to design the syllabus to reflect need for modern building materials and techniques</p> <p>Most consider that current courses do not equip trainees to work on pre-1919 buildings and would welcome optional traditional building skills modules</p> <p>One-third aware of Heritage Skills NVQ Level 3, even though this is not available in the Republic of Ireland</p> <p>Considerable interest in NHTG Training the Trainers programme as model for use in Republic of Ireland</p> <p>Lack of opportunity for specialist traditionally skilled craftspeople</p> <p>The few trainers that have links with schools agree that schools should include teaching on building and building materials</p>

# key recommendations

## 1.4 Key Recommendations

■ Without **active demand** for heritage building skills there will be little change in the current market, and this requires action directed towards all sectors of the construction industry and historic environment field, including improved education, publicity and information sources.

■ Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland share a **common heritage in the built environment** and much of what has already been achieved has been characterised by cross-border co-operation, so continuing in this manner will have major advantages, not least in the potential for both economies.

■ A real need exists in both countries to **increase public awareness of the value and importance of the built heritage**,

with education essential to inform private property owners and government agencies of the dangers of using inappropriate materials on traditional buildings and the real whole-life and sustainability benefits of using compatible techniques and approaches.

■ The **sustainability of conserving old buildings**, as opposed to demolishing and rebuilding, must be stressed in terms of retaining this sizeable part of the total building stock, integrating it with the rest of the built environment and saving non-renewable natural and physical resources.

■ Proper **accreditation of building contractors, craftspeople and professional practitioners** is crucial for property owners, especially in the private sector where the majority of this work is undertaken, to help them make a more

informed choice when engaging those who are suitably skilled and knowledgeable in this type of work and can undertake this to the required standard.

■ Measures are needed to **improve statistical information on the built heritage stock**, which is currently difficult to access, consolidate and analyse.

■ Increasing pressure to use modern methods of construction (MMC), especially in house building, in order to meet **new energy efficiency requirements** and the introduction of more modern systems may exacerbate the current training situation. This can be offset by including heritage modules within mainstream construction training, and highlighting the importance of using the existing building stock in minimising future carbon emissions.



# key actions

## 1.5 Key Actions

The lead partners in this field need to continue to develop partnership working to ensure that the following key actions are implemented to address training and skills development for the built heritage sector in both countries.

### 1.5.1 Partnership Working

■ Partnership between contractors, trade federations and associations, trade unions, craftspeople, training providers, major stockholders, heritage organisations, building preservation trusts and government is needed to **drive the recommendations within this report**. Ideally, this would work under a single inclusive organisation focused on the built heritage, which forms only part of the overall built environment in each country. The Building Limes Forum Ireland is an example of stakeholders working together across the country boundaries, and the NHTG in the UK is a model of partnership working that might be suitably adapted to support the work in Ireland.

■ A formal **Partnership Agreement** between ConstructionSkills in Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is planned to help coordinate delivery of the Skills Action Plan for Northern Ireland (see Section 10 of the full report), but this also requires the active involvement of the other heritage partners working within a Traditional Building Skills Working Group, and support for skills development from relevant Assembly departments.

■ The OPW and FÁS already work closely together on built heritage sector training, and this cooperation needs to be increased, with the other heritage partners in the Republic of Ireland similarly coming together

under a **Traditional Building Skills Working Group** to provide an overarching strategy and structure for delivery of the Skills Action Plan (see Section 10 of the full report).

■ Partnership working within each country will include **accepting the strategic vision and helping to deliver the Skills Action Plans** to address the issues within the report and improve the supply of skills within the sector to meet current and future demand.

■ This will include **improved information, advice and guidance** on the built heritage and traditional building skills and materials for a range of stakeholders, including schools, colleges and property owners, to accurately inform the public of the need to use the right methods and materials, and suitably qualified and experienced practitioners.

### 1.5.2 Training Providers

■ Very little specialist conservation or heritage skills training exists in either country, and coordinated action is needed to increase awareness among trainers of the various **heritage building skills training initiatives and to develop a network of appropriate training providers** to match demand in both countries.

■ While different education systems exist in both countries, **awareness of and interest in the Heritage Skills NVQ Level 3 and the Heritage Lottery Fund Bursary Scheme for Masonry Conservation was high in the Republic of Ireland**, and FÁS may wish to consider developing similar training and modules from this qualification at Level 8.

■ Similarly, the successful NHTG **Training the Trainers programme** needs much more publicity, and, as trainers from both countries expressed a keen interest in this, a programme can be devised and delivered in Ireland by those experts

in the field there. This will improve the FE trainers' understanding and knowledge of conservation, repair, maintenance and restoration as part of their own continuing professional development (CPD).

### 1.5.3 Accreditation of Contractors

■ A number of directories and information sources relating to built heritage contractors, material suppliers and professional practitioners exist, but **stockholders would benefit greatly from a single source which can be easily accessed and which carries some form of accreditation**. This could be accommodated on one website with signposting to other websites or publications.

■ The NHTG unified, accredited **Heritage Building Contractors Register** currently under development for the rest of the UK should be extended to include Northern Ireland. The Irish Georgian Society's **Traditional Building and Conservation Skills Register of Practitioners** and the **Construction Industry Federation Register of Heritage Contractors** should be further developed and promoted within the Republic of Ireland. These registers should contain publicly available information on the companies, but also the conservation or heritage qualifications, competencies and experience of their employees to help users when selecting a contractor or craftsperson.

■ **Conservation officers** provide information, advice and guidance to property owners and have a great deal of local knowledge. As this source is not particularly well known, especially in Northern Ireland, their role needs to be much more highly publicised, and unified information must be provided to them to assist in this process.

The NHTG would like to acknowledge its gratitude to CITB-Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Office of Public Works, FÁS and ConstructionSkills for funding the research and production of the main report and summary document. PDF versions of both reports can be downloaded from the following websites:

[www.nhtg.org.uk](http://www.nhtg.org.uk)

[www.constructionskills.net/research](http://www.constructionskills.net/research)

[www.constructionskillsni.org.uk](http://www.constructionskillsni.org.uk)

[www.ni-environment.gov.uk](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk)

[www.opw.ie](http://www.opw.ie)

[www.uahs.org.uk](http://www.uahs.org.uk)

[www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)



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