Opening Keynote speech

Jeff Cuthbert
Deputy Skills Minister

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and my thanks to Marilyn for the warm introduction.

May I firstly take the opportunity to formally welcome you to Caerphilly. As the Assembly Member for Caerphilly I am very pleased that Cadw has selected our historic Castle to hold their Skills Summit.

I would particularly like to extend a warm welcome to those from across our home nations. Sometimes we forget that our history and culture extend beyond our borders, and there is a lot we can learn from sharing our experiences with our partner nations. So I thank you all in advance for your valued contribution.

As a proud Welshman I am passionate about maintaining our cultural identity and the history captured in some of our most iconic monuments. But preserving such sites is no easy task. The seemingly straightforward task of renovation can take many years to complete, involving a complex mix of trades and professionals. And this is where the role of the Construction sector comes to the fore.

I have always had a strong affiliation with the Construction sector here in Wales. Prior to taking on my role as Deputy Minister for Skills I was the Chair of the cross party group on the Built Environment where I worked with industry representatives to understand the barriers for business growth. I am also a strong advocate for organisations like Cadw, Construction Skills, the Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment and many others, who work tirelessly to promote and develop traditional construction skills.

During my tenure as Deputy Minister for Skills I have so far met with many of these organisations and the key message I have taken from these discussions seems to be one of optimism. Despite the underlying challenges of a recovering economy, there are signs of strong growth on the horizon. In Wales we have a number of reasons to celebrate: our Pathways to Apprenticeship programme is strengthening our ability to train the high quality Apprentices of the future; the Construction Shared Apprenticeship scheme has provided an innovative way for smaller businesses to take on new Apprentices; and, our Young Recruits programme is providing the financial incentive for businesses to continue to train despite a difficult trading environment.

What these programmes highlight is the importance of testing new ways of working in responding to the specific needs of industry. Nowhere is this more significant than across the construction sector. The changing face of the
industry means new building products, techniques and practices are constantly evolving. At the one end of the sector we see the cutting edge designs of new buildings. And at other, the traditional craft skills used to repair and maintain some our existing buildings and historic sites.

The reality is that these different parts of the industry are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Underneath all of the occupations involved is a core set of high quality traditional skills. It is the application of these skills which sometimes sets apart the traditional from the new. Contextualising these traditional skills, as well as providing specific learning pathways for more advanced technical skills, are therefore important practices for the sector to develop.

A practical example of these different skills coming together is the low carbon agenda. Our focus on energy efficiency and generating new forms of renewable energy has provided real opportunities for new growth across the construction sector. This has also provided a well needed boost to some of our existing housing stock.

Across many of these sites we can see the traditional being mixed with new technologies. Often we think of ‘green skills’ as those involving installers of renewable technologies. Yet the reality is the basic skills of making a building air-tight and reducing damp are just as critical as the electricity produced from a solar panel.

Our Delivering Low Carbon Skills Project has recognised some of these challenges. In Wales, we have supported not just the new skills associated with renewable technologies but the traditional skills required to work on Pre-1919 properties. This upskilling training has been well received by industry and I am keen to here your views how we can further reduce barriers in taking forward the low carbon challenge facing us all.

Clearly the need to develop new skills is not solely associated with new green industries. Continuous training is an essential part within any restoration or maintenance project. Much like the history and culture of the sites being worked on, for many individuals learning their trade involves handing skills from generation to generation. These are skills that take many years to develop and craft; challenges which we must seek to prepare for.

Responding to growth opportunities, as well as anticipating underlying skills shortages, are critical if we are to prepare the workforce of the future. I have already mentioned some of the programmes established by the Welsh Government to support new entrants entering the sector. It is important we continue to adapt these; widening their scope to include some of the specialist occupations on offer via the heritage sector. Both the Minister and I are strong advocates for the role a national construction facility could play in providing leadership on creating more dedicated training for what is a very diverse sector. I would see an important element to any facility being associated with maintaining the flow of traditional craft skills into the sector and I am sure the Minister would also welcome this view.
From some of the examples I have mentioned today it is clear that we are already heading in the right direction. I am fully supportive of the Minister’s approach to addressing some of the common myths about the modern heritage sector and the role education and training can play within this. With new challenges on the horizon there will continue to be the pressure for reducing barriers to training across the heritage sector and today’s summit clearly marks the start of that process.

Thank you all again for your time and input; it is very much valued. I hope you enjoy the remainder of your day here in Caerphilly Castle.

**Closing Keynote speech**

**Huw Lewis**  
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage

I am delighted to speak at this event today and first of all I would like to thank you all for being here all day. I’d also like to thank the Deputy Skills Minister for opening this event, setting the scene and putting traditional building craft skills into context within the overall skills agenda in Wales.

I am also grateful to my Historic Environment Group for highlighting the importance of traditional building craft skills and for putting this event together. I know they have worked tirelessly to bring this to fruition.

I am conscious that you may have already heard a lot of what I’ve got to say, but I would like to emphasise some points because this subject is very important to me and the Government of Wales.

Today has been about what traditional buildings need - and they need traditional building craft skills. We are not just talking about buildings which are protected such as listed buildings, but all traditional buildings.

I am sure that after today, everyone will understand that traditional buildings are categorised as those built before 1919, which make up 34% of our total building stock here in Wales, compared to 22% in England, 20% in Scotland and 16% in Northern Ireland.

This makes Wales distinctive but also provides us with a big challenge to conserve and maintain such a large amount of built heritage.

Our heritage is important for many reasons. It is rich and varied, its part of our history and our culture and its not just magnificent iconic structures like Caerphilly Castle which are important. The streetscapes in our cities, towns and villages provide unique identity, and sense of community, as well as offering attractive and interesting places for people to live, work and play.
We must understand traditional buildings and treat them properly, if we are not to put them at risk. But we must also ensure that they work well, as this affects the way they can be used and the health and well being of those who occupy them.

I know you will have heard something today on the energy efficiency of traditional buildings. Treat them properly and they will perform well and much better than is commonly understood.

But treating them properly requires the right type of understanding by those who determine the treatment and the building crafts skills to be used.

The Deputy Skills Minister has outlined the training provision in Wales and why it's important.

Talking to him, it is clear that many good things have happened, but many challenges lie ahead for skills in Wales.

Looking ahead into the future, our failure to deal properly with this valuable resource could have huge implications for both our heritage and our economy.

Construction industry stakeholders will demand certain skills and skills training, but this must be what our building stock needs. We know what a place like Caerphilly Castle needs.

Cadw’s conservation experts and its own craft workforce maintain this site and the other 126 sites in its care, in the most appropriate way, according to published Conservation Principles.

These properties are understood – we know what they need and make sure it’s supplied, and that includes the most appropriate traditional building craft skills.

Buildings which are scheduled or listed, more often than not receive input from heritage or conservation experts. The needs of their fabric are understood and the most appropriate craft skills are demanded and deployed.

But over 90% of traditional buildings are not Listed or Scheduled, and may not receive the same level of expert attention.

If we want to sustain our traditional buildings we need to make sure that their requirements are really understood.

So when the industry says give us the skills we need, should we not make sure, that the industry understands the skills needed for our traditional buildings? I am sure that you have debated this today.

I think we would all agree that a lot of good training has taken place, but comparing the size of the building industry and the number of traditional
buildings in the UK, the numbers trained for work on traditional buildings seem to be very small.

But in a country where traditional buildings make up over one third of the total building stock, we should seriously consider whether relying on the up skilling of relatively few crafts people in the skills required for traditional buildings, is enough. The knowledge and skills required for work on a traditional terraced house in Caerphilly, has a lot more in common with Caerphilly Castle, than the skills required to construct modern buildings today.

And we also need to ensure that those surveying and analysing traditional buildings have the expertise to understand them and specify work which will call for appropriate traditional building craft skills.

I know you have heard today about some of the good work that’s been done in delivering traditional building craft skills here in Wales, but we can learn from what others are doing elsewhere and interesting lessons from our colleagues in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England have been presented today. Thank you for that.

Without a sufficient supply of traditional building craft expertise, the future of our built heritage in Wales will not be in safe hands. I look forward to receiving a report on today’s proceedings and your ideas on how we can tackle these issues.

Finally you will be aware that we have stated our intention as Government to introduce a Heritage Bill for Wales in 2014–15. This gives us a real opportunity to develop a suite of modern-day measures for our historic environment. We have started to take a fundamental look at current systems and practices in protecting and managing all parts of the historic environment. We are looking to come up with solutions that are specifically geared to the needs and circumstances of Wales. I have no doubt that in the workshop discussions currently underway that skills will feature prominently.

I have my personal aspirations for Welsh heritage, but I am anxious too that others with their own passion and concerns have the opportunity to contribute to setting the direction. I want to hear what you think the Welsh Government should be doing to make our past fit for the future and what you and your respective organisations will bring to our partnership. Taking today’s focus, traditional building craft skills surely has to be an important part of our shared agenda.