



GETTING TRAINING ON TRACK

*Progress is being made, but improving training and education continues to be an imperative for the future of the timber sector, writes **Geoff Rhodes** of forest products and international trade consultancy GRA, recipient of TTJ's 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award*

Improving educational provision across the timber industry continues to interest me and I remain involved in initiatives to help drive this agenda forward. Whilst president of the TTF in 2003-4, I initiated the 'education training and careers committee' and, since that embryonic start, we are now seeing actions finally coming to fruition. But there's still much to do!

The Construction Industry Training Board stated that 4,000-plus carpentry and joinery craftspeople needed to be trained between 2017 and 2022 to address the sector's skills shortage. That's over 25,000 people to connect with over the next four to five years.

Craft skills are vital for all woodworking trades. The young – and not so young – trainees we attract now will be key future users of our products, so we must connect correctly and develop appropriate interactions.

As president of the Institute of Carpenters (www.instituteofcarpenters.com) this is a real motivating factor for me. We are now linking students, colleges, lecturers, working and retired IoC members (mentors) and a network of collaborating organisations through a pilot 'City Hub' programme based in further education colleges in London, Lancashire and Tyneside. And we hope to roll this out nationally in the next year.

It's been invaluable to bring into reciprocal membership with the IoC, the BWF, TDCA, NAS, TTF, TRADA and the STA, all of which have an interest in linking this complex industry and sharing knowledge with the next generation of learners.

A network of over 40 FE Colleges is evolving and, by connecting with the IoC, helping train students through diploma, NVQ and apprenticeship programmes. This has

also given the IoC, established in 1890, fresh purpose and direction, offering the support of a professional organisation to those in training and then beyond when qualified, at a time of major industry change.

Timber research and application in innovative construction has been a focus at the Institute for Sustainable Construction (ISC) at Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) for 15 years. In parallel, the School of Engineering and the Built Environment (www.napier.ac.uk/sebe) has led timber-related courses aligned to professional careers, introducing ISC research into its teaching programme. Given the growth of timber-based construction in the UK and abroad, the school recently launched an MSc Timber Architectural Design and Technology course, which, as an ENU Business Engagement Forum board member, I was delighted to see. This covers offsite timber construction, timber design, building performance, new technologies and materials.

The school also operates the Built Environment Exchange (BeX) MSc programme, where companies sponsor students to undertake projects and course work aligned to the sponsors' needs. This was awarded the 2018 Herald Higher Education Award.

More recently the ISC team secured major funding through the Edinburgh City Region Deal to support more inclusive approaches for training and CPD in the construction sector. South-east Scotland is among the UK's fastest growing regions, with over £30bn of new construction investment over the next 10-15 years. This provides a 'green gold' opportunity for timber-based construction to become a keystone for future low carbon development. ■