

# News

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## Tackling the UK's construction skills shortage

By Bob Enschede, Morgan Sindall area director, Cambridge

The burgeoning skills gap is hitting the construction industry hard, with a recent Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) report showing that the percentage of skilled workers is now at its lowest level since 2013.

It's a worrying time for the industry, with significant skills shortages now spreading beyond carpenters and bricklayers to other key trades including roofers, electricians and plasterers.

In this landscape, it's crucial that we collaborate and join forces to adopt new, more innovative processes and Morgan Sindall and other main contractors are exploring new channels and approaches to give the sector the skills boost it needs.

The current shortage of roofers and other skilled trades in the UK threatens to destabilise the government's ambitious housing targets; with demand for skilled labour outweighing supply and creating a talent vacuum that employers are struggling to fill.

Roofing is a vocational trade that requires in-depth knowledge and practical skills, with a sound understanding of mathematics and accuracy in calculations. For generations, the sector has been adapting to keep up with the advances and new trends in the industry, but traditional skills are still essential.

Ensuring that we are creating an attractive and sustainable working environment for our existing skilled workforce is a key first step that will ensure the industry has a valuable talent base to build upon. However, this does not go far enough to address the shortage.

In Cambridgeshire, Morgan Sindall has recently pioneered a new apprenticeship programme to bridge the skills gap in the region's roofing industry supply chain. With many of the current generation of roofers fast approaching retirement age, roofing contractors throughout Cambridgeshire are struggling to satisfy industry demands.

A fresh flow of talent is key and our Built-Up Felt Roofing (BUFR) apprenticeship programme will help to address this need. So far, we have enrolled eight apprentices on training sites across Cambridgeshire.

Apprenticeships are an essential aid to growth in industries across the board, and we recognise the importance of investing in training and skills.

We've launched the initiative in partnership with the Construction and Industry Training Board (CITB), the National Federation of Roofing Contractors (NFRC), training provider TrAC, Cambridge Regional College, local roofing firms and fellow construction company Kier. Our hope is that this will help to allow us to create the infrastructure needed to engage with young people and provide the training and mentoring needed to reboot the UK's roofing workforce.

We understand that the skills gap is not an issue that is going to go away without decisive action. Training facilities such as the one in Cambridge will be part of the answer to bridging the skills gap in the roofing sector and the wider construction industry. Creating local facilities will provide firms

with an opportunity to train and upskill young people and develop a qualified workforce for the future, which will benefit the industry as a whole.

For more information on the BUFR roofing apprenticeship programme being run by Cambridge Regional College, please email: [SAdam@camre.ac.uk](mailto:SAdam@camre.ac.uk)

For more information about the above please contact Ruth Cobban or Stephanie Bocking at Influential on 0151 239 5000 or email [cobban@thisisinfluential.com](mailto:cobban@thisisinfluential.com) or [bocking@thisisinfluential.com](mailto:bocking@thisisinfluential.com)