

Long-term thinking: engineering sector builds talent pipeline ready to deliver future local construction needs



As Jersey's government launches a bold new vision for its future construction needs, the Jersey Federation of Consulting Engineers responds by reminding that its members possess the knowledge, skills and experience needed to turn plans into reality.

Short-term thinking goes largely against the grain for engineers.

Sure, there may be perfectly justifiable reasons for designing something that's here for today and gone tomorrow. But mostly, engineers logically focus on building things to last – it's the nature of the job.

And it's always been that way – despite the sometimes short-term focus of others.

Take Gustave Eiffel, for example, the legendary 19th century French engineer. His Eiffel Tower was conceived and commissioned as centrepiece for the 1889 Paris World's Fair and due to stand for no more than 20 years.

Eiffel, however, clearly designed his remarkable structure to last – thankfully. What would the City of Lights be today without its most famous landmark.

Talent-centred approach

Fortunately, the local engineering sector hasn't limited its focus to short-term specific events, designs or projects. It's infused with the same long-term thinking possessed by Monsieur Eiffel and others like him.

There are understandable reasons for this.

Jersey needs a pool of engineering talent capable of delivering both its present and future built-environment needs. Nurturing, developing and improving this vital asset must be a long-term commitment.

The industry makes every effort to build ambitions among local youngsters to choose a career in engineering. Schemes such as Primary Engineer and Secondary Engineer see members of the profession regularly engaging with schools and colleges in programmes designed to educate and open employment pathways into the industry.

There is strong support for students in further education studying to gain engineering qualifications. Local companies offer work placements for these aspiring engineers, provide real life experience and build relationships for future employment opportunities.

Once in fulltime employment, trainee engineers need nurturing through shadowing opportunities and taking on small scale design projects. Thoughtfully structured and delivered in-house learning and development programmes exist with this aim.

Engineers in training require support and continued professional development to gain qualifications and accreditations. This is delivered through links to widely recognised industry bodies – the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) and Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE).

These are significant commitments – but what's the short-term alternative? Bringing in UK or other engineers leads inevitably to enduring problems – no local economic contribution and diminishing local skills base are among them.

Local body for local needs

Broad responsibility for overseeing this engineering pipeline and its progress falls to the local industry representative body.

The Jersey Federation of Consulting Engineers, which has been in existence for more than 20 years, is a trade alliance formed from and driven by the Island's leading engineering firms. Its

members employ more than 100 people, among which are nearly 60 qualified civil and structural engineers and technicians along with others in training.

It boasts an impressive pool of professional qualifications and accreditations. Among these numerous degrees, diplomas, institute members, chartered engineers and Licensed Certifiers of Building Structures (SER).

The Federation also possesses an imposing portfolio of experience between its members – gained locally, nationally and around the world, drawn from a vast array of projects and challenges – small, medium and awe-inspiring – carried out using traditional methods or delivered through cutting edge innovation.

Ready to support the new Government programme

All this collective capability stands ready to support the Island's future construction requirements – whether that's new hospitals, homes or next door's loft conversion.

The Government of Jersey recently set out its stall in this area through launching an Island Construction and Engineering (ICE) Programme.

This bold document describes the planned 10-year pipeline of new public building and infrastructure development. Government-owned organisations Andium Homes and Jersey Development Company also contributed their anticipated construction needs.

One intention behind this welcome initiative is ensuring the local construction industry is ready to rise to the challenge.

One thing Jersey's engineering sector can assure in response is that long-term talent investment is ready to pay local dividends.