

Green Entrepreneurs survey finds vital support lacking in sustainable construction sector

New research on green entrepreneurs by the University of Hull has found that the UK's sustainable construction sector could be missing out on a great opportunity.

Respondents to the largest qualitative survey of the sector yet undertaken called for a clear strategic view from government to enable the transition to greener building practices. They cited inconsistent central and local government policies, low investment and lack of support as issues that are holding back business development.

Researchers from the University of Hull's Department of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences found that green construction businesses are facing major obstacles, including:

- a tendency for government policy to favour large businesses in the construction sector over small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- wide variation in the application of planning rules across different local authority areas that stifle innovation in sustainable building;
- risk averseness by banks unwilling to invest in green businesses and;
- a shortage of skilled labour capable of using sustainable building materials coupled with a lack of knowledge to incorporate new green technologies into buildings

Research took the form of in-depth interviews with 50 businesses and policy makers engaged in a wide range of practices aimed at reducing the environmental impact of building – from the use of straw, hemp or rammed earth as building materials, to installing cutting edge technologies to reduce energy consumption after construction.

While output in Britain's mainstream construction sector continues to fall, green builders are bucking the trend as homeowners take action to reduce the costs of heating their homes, creating a huge opportunity for entrepreneurs and faster growth in the sector.

With its roots in the 1970s 'alternative technology' movement, green construction is rapidly gaining acceptance in the mainstream. The survey found that today's green entrepreneurs, inspired by German green building pioneers, are attempting to combine environmental and business objectives and to educate customers, suppliers and the wider building sector about green building practices.

Researchers, Prof David Gibbs and Dr Kirstie O'Neill, said that they hoped their work would encourage policymakers to consider the real problems faced by green entrepreneurs in the sustainable construction sector.

Dr O'Neill said: "We've had a remarkable response from small businesses prepared to give up their time to voice their concerns. Much is made by the current government of its green credentials, but our research suggest that there is something of a gap between the rhetoric and the situation on the ground."

Prof Gibbs added: "Our research indicates that the UK could miss out on a big opportunity if comprehensive measures are not put in place to support this innovative sector."

The interim findings, published by Emerald and to be launched at the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship's annual conference in Dublin today (November 8), form part of a wider University of Hull research project into green entrepreneurship

The next stage of the 'green entrepreneurship' project will consider ecotourism. Businesses operating in this sector who are interested in being interviewed should email Kirstie O'Neill: K.ONeill@hull.ac.uk

Prof David Gibbs, Dr Kirstie O'Neill and farmer Nick Voase are available for interview. Please contact Catherine Ackroyd at Mapa on 01482 589900, 07739 139056. catherine@mapa.org.uk

Picture caption

From left to right: Prof David Gibbs, Nick Voase, Dr Kirstie O'Neill and Margot Voase.

They are pictured at Inn Carr Farm, near Brandesburton, East Yorkshire in front of the Voase's farmhouse built from of hemp. The Voase family, which took part in the Green entrepreneurs survey, are hemp growers and processors. Nick Voase has called for more awareness of the potential of hemp as an environmentally friendly and sustainable building product, saying that planning policy is not keeping pace with innovative building techniques necessary for achieving low carbon homes.

Picture by Sean Spencer, Hull New & Pictures. (Alternative pictures available)

Editors' notes

About CASS

CASS is the University's business facing renewable energy and low carbon hub.

Bringing together expertise from all the University's faculties, CASS is committed to working in close partnership with business to develop successful and sustainable economic growth.

For further information about how CASS contact

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About the University of Hull

The University of Hull is an institution with a long heritage of academic excellence and is rich in tradition. Established in 1927 as England's fourteenth university, it received a Royal Charter in 1954. The University has campuses in Hull and Scarborough.

The University of Hull features some of the most inspirational figures of modern times, and has an illustrious history which includes pioneering developments in science and engineering, health, business, humanities and social sciences as well as performing arts. The University today is a vibrant and future-oriented institution, recognised for excellence in learning and teaching as well as a commitment to research, enterprise and engagement. The University is known for its friendliness and high student satisfaction as well as the employability of its graduates.

The University's regularly features in the top bracket of national teaching quality league tables and has consistently performed impressively in the National Student Survey, reflecting the high premium the University places on the quality of student experience. Staff and students frequently win prestigious national and international awards and accolades. Hull is currently placed among the top 500 in the QS World University Rankings.

Research and enterprise are core academic activities of the University. Amongst its most well known achievements are the discovery of liquid crystal displays and the bone density scanner which revolutionised the detection of osteoporosis, both of which were featured in *Eureka UK's* list of '100 discoveries and developments in UK universities that have changed the world'. The most recent Research Assessment Exercise revealed that 80% of the University's submitted research is of international standard in terms of originality, significance and rigour.

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