

DATE OF NEXT MEETING
Date: 15 January 2008 Time: 2 pm Venue: Room O Portcullis House

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY BUILDING SERVICES ENGINEERING GROUP HELD AT 2PM ON 30 OCTOBER 2007 IN ROOM O, PORTCULLIS HOUSE, LONDON SW1

PRESENT

Claire Curtis-Thomas CEng MP (Chair)

Tim Boswell MP

IN ATTENDANCE

David Lammy MP	-	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Skills)
Tim Down	-	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Angela Ringguth	-	Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers
Cedric Sloan	-	Federation of Environmental Trade Associations
Prof Tony Thomas	-	London South Bank University
John Hardaker	-	MODUS
Harry Pooley	-	Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors
Clive Dickin	-	Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors
John Nelson	-	Specialist Engineering Contractors' Group
Chris Sneath	-	Plumbing and Heating Industry Alliance
John Byrne	-	CORGI
Blane Judd	-	Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering
Keith Marshall	-	SummitSkills
Rachel Fisher	-	Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Gareth Keller	-	Heating and Ventilating Contractors' Association

APOLOGIES

Rt Hon John Spellar MP (Deputy Chair)

Ian Taylor MP

Jack Wishart - BPEC

Dr Peter Rumley - Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

Roger Webb - Heating and Hot Water Council

21/07 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Claire Curtis-Thomas welcomed those present and introduced Gareth Keller from the Heating and Ventilating Contractors' Association who would be taking the minutes of the meeting.

22/07 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING ACTION BY

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 June 2007 had been previously circulated. They were agreed without comment.

MATTERS ARISING

23/07

1. Fair Payment Practices (minute 17/07)

John Nelson reminded those present that two years previously Claire had led a deputation to John Healey, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, to press for fair payment. A Working Group had subsequently been set up under the Office of Government Commerce. John said that the Group was about to launch a new "Guide to Best Fair Payment Practice" and a model "Fair Payment Charter". He showed a copy of the document to members. Tim Boswell welcomed the new Guide and suggested that the Group should inform Parliamentarians. It was also necessary to keep the pressure on Government. Claire Curtis-Thomas said that she would ask some questions in the House. In the meantime details would be posted on the APG website.

**CC-T
GK**

2. Trade and Industry Select Committee (minute 18/07)

Claire Curtis-Thomas said that the Committee was being re-organised and reduced in numbers from 13 to 11. As a result she would no longer be a member. John Nelson advised that SEC Group would be giving evidence on 10 December to the Committee inquiry into the UK Construction Industry.

3. Annual Luncheon (minute 19/07)

It was agreed that a luncheon should be held in 2008 on a date to be decided by the Secretary. A discussion took place on the format of the event. It was suggested that an Annual Report should be published on the day. This should highlight past successes and future themes. It was agreed to discuss the question of speakers at the next meeting.

GK

24/07 THE SKILLS AGENDA

Claire Curtis-Thomas welcomed David Lammy, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Skills) and Mr Tim Down, an official from the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, to the meeting. After introducing David to the members, Claire invited the Minister to say a few words about the Government's skills agenda.

David Lammy said that it was an exciting time for skills in Government. Skills was no longer second or third on the agenda for a Secretary of State concerned with schools. The new Department was focused on skills issues. He added that money was not an issue in the sector. His responsibilities included apprentices. Although some 250,000 had been completed, at least 500,000 were required by 2010 and more beyond that. It was also important to include adults and some £16m of funding was available. He said that one of the problems was that

apprentices were not coming forward from schools. More needed to be done to encourage schools to promote apprenticeships. There was a role here for SummitSkills but the building programme for schools and the Olympics both provided an opportunity to increase members.

There was also a need to encourage women to enter the industry and a pilot scheme "Pathways into work for women" was underway. David said that the Department was looking at the work of the Sector Skills Council. He felt that there were too many qualifications in the system and these needed to be slimmed down. He invited industry to tell government what qualifications they wanted accredited. David concluded by saying that with so much going on it was a good time for the All Party Group to be talking to Government.

In responding to David Lammy, Keith Marshall said that he was pleased to see the Minister in attendance as the All Party Group had always had skills high on its agenda. He commented that one of the risks with apprentices was treating them all in the same way whereas different sectors tended to do things differently. An influx in the number of adult workers was essential as the industry was saturated with young people. It was also important not to water down the brand by downgrading qualifications in order to make qualifying easier. Keith felt that the Leitch Report struck the right balance between academic study and workplace learning. He said that "train to gain" was proving popular, but the level issue was a problem. The basic level was NVQ Level 3, but funding tended to follow Level 2. David Lammy pointed out that 100% funding was available for Level 2 but only 2/3rds for Level 3. If employers wanted 100% funding for Level 3, people would have to pay more tax!

Tony Thomas said that employers needed encouragement and the issue was not only about money. Many employers were put off from applying for funding because it involved too much effort. SMEs needed guidance and the DIUS had an important role to play. David Lammy acknowledged the need for a simplified agenda.

Keith Marshall said that a key issue was engagement with 1, 2 and 3 person companies. He added that accreditation of in-house training schemes needed to be monitored by industry rather than regulatory bodies such as QCA. Finally he wanted to highlight the problem of rogue trainers. These were unscrupulous operators who took money from trainees for short courses, based on the NVQ Level 2 Technical Certificate, on the promise that they would become qualified plumbers, (no account being taken of the practical element of the NVQ which can take up to 3 years to complete). SummitSkills was working on the problem, but he wanted to raise the issue with the Minister and come back to him at a later date if necessary.

Blane Judd felt that the Government could help by increasing the standard to Level 3. A Level 2 NVQ was not enough. People also needed to have a greater understanding of the standard, so that they could not be hoodwinked into parting with money they could ill afford.

David Lammy said that he would support the case for a Level 3 qualification, but wanted advice on how the rogue trainer problem could be resolved? Chris Sneath commented that he received two or three letters a week on the subject. When he had raised it previously with David's predecessor, Phil Hope, the Government had said that they could not intervene. He wondered if the situation had changed in any way. Tim Boswell remarked that it sounded like passing off, in which case it was an issue for Trading Standards to take up. He also questioned whether the people who took such courses were competent enough to be allowed into people's homes. Keith Marshall said that unfortunately householders were often more concerned with price than qualifications. Claire Curtis-Thomas said that consumers tended to see CORGI as a mark of competence. John Byrne remarked that CORGI had problems with illegal installers.

Tony Thomas pointed out that the problem of rogue trainers did not seem to exist in Scotland. The problem in England was that for the last few years colleges had been mis-selling the Technical Certificate courses. It was a misuse of funds. Chris Sneath offered to provide the Minister with some of the latest correspondence he had received.

David Lammy said that he would want to look at the issue as it affected his constituents as well. He asked whether a CSCS type card scheme might provide an answer?

Summing up the discussion, Claire Curtis-Thomas commented that it was a fractured sector. SMEs could not afford to send people on training courses. She felt that Level 3 training was the key to raising standards, but how could we ensure that training gave taxpayers value for money? Level 2 just seemed to encourage rogue trainers. Blane Judd said that IPHE received around 40 complaints a year concerning its 12,000 members, but people who were expelled could still practice. David Lammy suggested that some of the issues discussed could be a useful subject for an adjournment debate in the House. Claire agreed to follow this up.

CC-T

Claire Curtis-Thomas thanked David Lammy for attending the meeting.

25/07 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

26/07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This has been arranged for 15 January 2008 at 2 pm in Room O, Portcullis House.

There was no other business and the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3 pm.

