

EEF says banking industry is unfit for purpose

Delegates at the recent Finance for Future conference, organised by the manufacturers organisation EEF, agreed that the current banking situation provides an ideal opportunity for change, in particular with strong support for a re-established Industrial Bank tasked with investing in the future.

The EEF has called for a 'Bank for Industry' that would bring together the various government mechanisms for supporting innovation into a single financial vehicle, with the specific intention of supporting innovation. This move would unite – the new regional venture capital funding, the Enterprise Capital Funds, the Innovation Investment Fund, the Grant for Research and Development and the regionally delivered proof of concept funding – into a single entity.

Speaking at the conference, EEF director of policy Steve Radley, said: "There is a growing consensus that the current banking system is unfit for purpose as far as innovative, high value manufacturing businesses are concerned. The current situation provides the ideal opportunity to take stock and reform the financial architecture of the banking system.

"This must include a national Bank for Industry to meet the needs of small and medium size companies that the current system is failing to address. Without this the growth of innovative small and medium size companies, as well as the economy overall, will be impaired."

What do you think of having a 'Bank for Industry'? Email the editor at: knowheditor@eriks.co.uk to have your say

Purchasing Managers' Index Shows Optimism

The UK-based Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) – a measure of the buying habits of those responsible for securing materials for manufacturing firms – ventured into positive territory for the first time since November 2007 with a value of 53.7. Any index reading greater than 50.0 indicates a net increase in buying activity. The PMI report is an extremely important indicator for the financial markets as it is considered the best indicator of factory production.

The PMI is compiled by the Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply and is issued one day after the end of the month it refers to. For more information visit: www.cips.org

HSE accused of complacency on lead exposure

UK limits on exposure to lead are too lax and could be putting tens of thousands of workers at risk of serious health problems a new report has warned. The, as yet unpublished, report reveals that around 5000 workers, known to have blood lead levels below the UK's recommended action level could be suffering serious ill-health effects from exposure to lead.

The report points to an abundance of supporting research which warns that blood levels of lead less than 20µg/100ml can cause hypertension, a risk factor for heart disease, stroke, chronic kidney damage, and impaired kidney and brain function.

HSE figures, which give a breakdown of blood lead levels for all those under medical surveillance, apparently indicate that more than 5000 workers in 2007/08 had blood lead levels above 10µg/100ml, of whom roughly 3200 had levels in excess

of 20µg/100ml. Just shy of 700 had exposures in excess of 40µg/100ml. All had levels of lead, which, according to the new information, puts them at risk of permanent health damage.

The HSE's 'Lead and you' guide claims: "Serious health problems rarely occur unless people have at least 100 microgrammes of lead per decilitre of blood." However, the guidance has recently been removed from its website and an HSE spokesperson has said: "The leaflet 'Lead and you' was due a periodic review that has now begun, and this will take into account the latest scientific developments and the language used to be clear about risks. The leaflet will then be republished and will also be available free on the HSE website."

Have you got ideas about health and safety. Email the editor at: knowheditor@eriks.co.uk to have your say

Confusion over EN 954-1 now resolved

The European Commission has finally issued a definitive statement concerning the future of EN 954-1, due to be replaced by the new safety standard EN ISO 13849-1. Originally setting the changeover date as December 29th 2009, the Commission then announced in September that this date would be put back by three years. Confusion then reigned when the Commission revoked its decision to delay, pending a meeting of the EC Machinery Working Group in December.

Now, though, this confusion has been resolved, as this meeting has taken place. It has been agreed that the transition date will be extended after all – though the extension is for an (as yet) undetermined time.

A feature article discussing the new Machinery Directive can be found on page 8

SummitSkills responds to government higher education policy

SUMMITSKILLS, THE SECTOR SKILLS COUNCIL FOR BUILDING SERVICES ENGINEERING (BSE), HAS WELCOMED THE PUBLICATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S HIGHER AMBITIONS FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (HE).

The framework sets out a number of key priorities including businesses engaging in the design of HE programmes, special support for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, a continued commitment to foundation degrees, taking account of students' aptitude and potential, and encouraging collaboration between universities on research.

The UK participation rate in higher education is still below that of many other developed economies, and widening participation including for adult learners may bring about significant opportunities for higher level learning in the BSE sector.

Higher Ambitions emphasises the importance of both teaching and research, and the need for both to provide the

knowledge and skills that industry needs. The framework highlights that Government will increasingly look to employers to contribute towards the cost of HE, and programmes with a strong work-based element such as Foundation degrees, which can only work with employer commitment.

Catherine Elliott, development manager at SummitSkills, comments: "The commitment to Foundation degrees and other qualifications which can support the upskilling of the existing workforce, and the recognition of the need for HE to respond to industry is most welcome. Both the importance and challenges of developing HE provision that is responsive to the needs of industry should not be underestimated, particularly for sectors such as ours where the pace of change is fast and many employers are micro businesses."

Despite the pressure on public spending, it is a particular concern to SummitSkills that employers in the BSE sector, who have themselves been adversely affected by the current economic climate, may be asked to contribute more to the cost of HE than they can sensibly afford. Additionally, access to

suitably qualified recruits or HE programmes to upskill the existing workforce could be in jeopardy if funding is not available to support new or existing BSE programmes.

Keith Marshall OBE, chief executive, SummitSkills concludes: "As a Sector Skills Council, we support the potential for higher level skills in our sector. As the sector driving the green agenda and skills in environmental technologies, it is particularly relevant that the framework recognises universities' need to establish themselves as intellectual leaders on environmental sustainability, and I hope that future funding will specifically take into account the role our sector plays in helping to meet targets to reduce carbon emissions. Building services engineering needs to be treated as a strategically important and vulnerable subject in the future in recognition of its role in combating climate change, and consequently receive more of the prioritisation it requires."

Training, apprenticeships and qualifications are thorny subjects? If you have an innovative approach at your company then Email: knowheditor@eriks.co.uk to let us know

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MX Awards 2010 NOW OPEN

The MX Manufacturing Excellence Awards 2010 are now open for entries. The high profile contest, that claims to bring business improvement to every company that enters, now has entry details available via its website. In 2009 ERIKS UK sponsored the MX Award for Financial Management, won by ContiTech Beattie, a company that supplies fluid handling systems to the oil and gas sectors.

For entry details visit: www.mxawards.org

Government to address industry fears over rate relief cuts

Following criticism from the food industry, the Government has promised to review its proposal to cut incentives for businesses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Announced in the December 2009 pre-budget report, the proposal would cut rate relief under the Climate Change Agreements (CCAs) from 80% to 65% for all fuels from 2011.

The Food and Drink Federation (FDF), was quick to express its view that the development would be unwelcome. "We are surprised at the changes announced," said the FDF's director of sustainability and competitiveness, Andrew Kuyk, "as the Chancellor acknowledges that they are an effective way of reducing carbon emissions

in industries that are high users of energy." The FDF's concerns were echoed by the dairy sector, which claimed it would cost dairy companies about £1M a year from 1st April 2011.

At an FDF event held soon after the pre-budget report, Food Minister Jim Fitzpatrick acknowledged the industry's fears. "I hear what you say," he said, in response to Kuyk's remarks, "and I am very happy to listen to the concerns of the organisation."

How concerned are you about government energy conservation initiatives for your company?
Email: knowheditor@eriks.co.uk to share them with us

Ammeraal Beltech acquires uni-chains

At a cost of 62.9 million Euros Ammeraal Beltech has acquired uni-chains, the family-owned company that produces modular belts and chains for applications in the food, automotive, paper and print industries, among others.

Ammeraal Beltech's strategy is directed at being an overall supplier for its customers by offering a complete range of belts and services. The specific product expertise and innovative power of uni-chains combined with Ammeraal Beltech's global network and customer base will facilitate growth.

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Paper industry safety campaign

Improving health and safety in the paper industry is the focus of a joint campaign launched by workers' union Unite and the Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI). The 'Say No and Say Yes' campaign was launched recently in response to the high number of serious machine accidents, which have taken place in paper mills, corrugation plants, and recycling sites during the last two years.

The initiative is calling on employers and employees to 'say no' to unsafe tasks, and stop putting production before safety. It also urges the industry to 'say yes' to implementing risk assessments, safe systems of work, health and safety training, and carrying out accident investigations.

Unite assistant general secretary, Tony Burke, said: "This campaign will seek to educate our members on this very serious issue. Health and safety of workers should not be taken lightly and we will fight to ensure all our members are safe at work and are up-to-date with health and safety legislation. The current health and safety guidelines for these workers are not working especially in an era that encourages greater participation on health and safety issues."

Have you any initiatives in place at your site that are proving a health and safety boon?
Email: knowheditor@eriks.co.uk to share them with us

10 Nuclear power stations not enough says IMechE study

The government has announced 10 sites where nuclear power stations can be built. However, according to Climate Change: Have we lost the battle?, a study produced by engineers, civil servants, economists and environmental scientists from the IMechE the UK needs to build 30 nuclear power stations in the next five years to meet the targets outlined in 2008's Climate Change Act.

The report questions the ability of industry to deliver the technology required to meet emissions targets saying that the UK would need to build 27,000 wind turbines by 2030 and 40,000 by 2050 to do this. Currently, there are just 2,600 turbines in operation. A section of the report reads: "To decarbonise the UK economy to meet emissions targets would require an unprecedented engineering effort."

Read the Tig's views on page 26.

Have you had your say on the UK's energy policy? Email: knowheditor@eriks.co.uk to put forward your point of view.

Hillhead 2010

The postponed quarrying, recycling and heavy construction exhibition, Hillhead 2010 will now take place between 22nd and 24th June 2010. The event, located in Buxton in Derbyshire was postponed in 2009 due to the economic climate but has returned strongly. A new feature at Hillhead 2010 will be an 'Industry Information Village' located in the centre of the main pavilion. The village will comprise of stands presented by key institutions such as the Institute of Quarrying, Mineral Products Association, Health and Safety Executive, British Aggregates Association, Mineral Products Qualifications Council, University of Derby, Institute of Asphalt Technology and Proskills, the Sector Skills Council for the manufacturing and process industries.

More information can be found at www.hillhead.com

Energy saving schemes

If, like almost every company, you're looking for ways to cut your energy usage, there's a good chance you're planning to invest in new equipment, either now or in the near future. Before you do, though, it's worth making sure you're aware of the various schemes that could affect your thinking.

Take the Carbon Trust's Big Business Refit scheme, for example. This will be of real interest to you if you're one of the 52% of British businesses that wants to upgrade old, inefficient equipment, but don't have the cash. Under the scheme, interest-free and unsecured loans of between £3,000 and £400,000 are available, repayable over a period of up to four years. The loans are designed to pay for themselves through energy savings, so once the loan is paid off, savings go straight onto the bottom line. And they can be considerable – the Trust claims that a typical business saves around £16,000/year by replacing inefficient equipment.

Or take the next phase of the Government's carbon-reduction strategy – the Carbon Reduction Commitment scheme, or CRC. Targeting around 5,000 mid-to-large sized consumers of electricity, it affects organisations that consumed more than 6GWh of electricity in 2008 and are on half-hourly metering tariffs. Coming into force next April, the CRC takes the form of a cap-and-trade scheme in which participating organisations buy allowances equivalent to their annual carbon emissions. Top performers will be repaid their investment plus 10%, while poor performers will get back only 90%. Failure to comply could result in jail sentences of up to three years, and fines up to £50,000.

You'll find more about these topics and others in the latest issue of ERIKS Innovation. You can request a copy at your local service centre or order one online at www.eriks.co.uk/update

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