



Media Source Press Page 54

Circulation 5,300

Topic CITB

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INVESTMENT IN HERITAGE SKILLS UNLOCKS POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY...

Future growth potential from bygone skills

The **Construction Industry Training Board** NI (CITBNI), working in partnership with the Department for Communities Historic Environment Division, has appointed its first Heritage Project Manager.

Isabel McKernan takes up this new role which will not only preserve, develop and deliver heritage skills supply and training in

Northern Ireland but will seek to unlock the potential of developing jobs and employment in the construction sector. It will also help raise awareness of the region's built heritage, the heritage skills required and promote the preservation and development of traditional crafts and skills.

Isabel is an architecture graduate from Queen's University Belfast and has an MSc in Building Surveying from Northumbria University focusing on Irish vernacular construction methods. She previously worked with Ulster Architectural Heritage. The Heritage Project Manager role is funded by the Department for Communities' Covid Recovery Programme, administered by the Heritage Fund in Northern Ireland. The Project



Isabel McKernan has been appointed Heritage Project Manager with Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) NI.

will deliver heritage training and upskilling opportunities, engage with schools to raise the profile of a career in Heritage and establish a central supply organisation for Heritage skills in NI.

Two reports have revealed that Northern Ireland has an increasing number of pre-1919 buildings requiring restoration, conservation, repair or

maintenance which has increased the demand for traditional building materials and increasing skills. The reports highlight a range of key issues of concern including the shortage of heritage skills training available in Northern Ireland; a lack of knowledge and shortage of the skills has resulted in a skills gaps and training requirements within the sector and many tradespeople who have heritage skills are likely to be leaving in the next 10 years, with no one to replace them.

By the end of the project in summer 2025, the aim is to increase the pool of skilled craftspeople, which will allow for the enhancement of heritage places and spaces and begin to re-establish heritage trades/skills currently in danger of being lost. Barry Neilson, Chief

Executive **CITB** NI, commented, "**CITB** NI is delighted to announce a fantastic opportunity to join us and develop this very important role with our partners in the heritage sector. Given low levels of skills availability, we must take action now to ensure the sustainability of heritage and conservation skills and develop a pool of locally employable, effectively skilled and experienced professionals for the work required to maintain heritage assets and address the real deficit in essential remedial works required. Failure to act now will result in the continuing loss of traditional skills and an experienced workforce. That places all NI built heritage at risk."

On the new role, Dr Paul Mullan, Director Northern Ireland at the Heritage Fund, said, "It's a positive step to address skills shortages and create new opportunities for skilled tradespeople to get involved in protecting and conserving our historic buildings."



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