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CHIEF EXECUTIVE BARRY NEILSON OBE, CITB NI DISCUSSES HIS CAREER, APPRENTICESHIPS AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN NI BUILDER MAGAZINE...

From apprentice draughtsman to industry leader: Barry Neilson OBE

I started work as an apprentice draughtsman with a consulting engineers' practice in Glasgow where I also obtained my ONC & HNC qualifications. I was encouraged to go on to do a degree in Civil Engineering. After working with the Scottish Special Housing Association as a Graduate, I returned to a consulting engineers where I became a Chartered Civil Engineer. I went on to join the National House Building Council (NHBC) in Scotland, which gave me a more strategic view of the sector and was very much involved in setting and monitoring building standards as well as moving further towards a managerial role. My move to the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) reinforced this direction. It showed me a UK-wide view of the industry in terms of both skills and the strategic nature the construction sector plays within the economy, and I moved to work in London for a number of years as their Divisional Director for Policy and External Relations. After CIOB, I moved away from the construction sector to become Director for Scotland and NI for Cogent, a Sector Skills Council for the Petrochemical and Polymer industry. The opportunity to return to construction as Chief Executive of CITB NI arose in 2010. CITB NI has allowed me to combine all my different roles and experiences and use them to work alongside government and employers in developing the people and skills we need for the future of the construction sector. The construction industry is vital to everyone's life, health and wellbeing. There is not a job or activity that doesn't rely on the construction sector or wider built

environment for its success. The impact of infrastructure and the built environment on the health and wellbeing of individuals cannot be underestimated. To deliver the future, we must build it first - and to build it we need people with the right skills and competencies in the right place at the right time. That is what we are trying to do at CITB NI in partnership with our industry. At CITB NI, we find ways to help to improve the skills of people and companies in the sector for the needs of today and far into the future and we were delighted to recently celebrate reaching a milestone of supporting 1,000 apprentices through our apprenticeship grant scheme. Looking ahead, one of the key challenges is to foresee what the skills of the future are going to look like and convincing the systems around skills development to invest in this. There is no doubt that AI, like some many other industries, will play a part in this.

My advice to anyone coming into the construction industry is to never stop looking ahead. There are a thousand routes to any role. The routes are more varied and complex as you develop. Don't stop wondering if you can do the "next job" - keep thinking about what you need to learn to be able to do it well. Barry Neilson has been Chief Executive of Construction Industry Training Board NI (CITB NI) for 13 yrs. In 2023, he received an OBE for services for Economic Development.



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