

UK Shipbuilding Skills Taskforce (UKSST)

Thursday 14 September 2023, 10:00 -16:00

Thales, Manor Royal, Crawley

Item 1: Welcome and Chair's Business

- Chair welcomed the Taskforce to its 15th meeting and thanked Matthew Guy for hosting at Thales' Crawley site.
- Chair stated that the purpose of the meeting was to reflect on how the report had been received at launch, review the approach taken by the Taskforce to meet this milestone and to workshop the transition to delivery of the recommendations, including optimising the Engagement phase.
- Chair shared positive feedback he had received for the Taskforce's report (including from the Shipbuilding Enterprise for Growth (SEG)) and personally thanked members again for the significant efforts and sacrifices made to achieve its publication by the due date.
- Chair asked the Taskforce to approve the minutes from August's Taskforce meeting and the updated minutes from July's Taskforce meeting. Both were approved and will be published on gov.uk.
- Chair welcomed Elena Newton, who would be supporting the Taskforce as part of a summer internship at the National Shipbuilding Office (NSO).
- Chair reminded the Taskforce that the Secretariat was smaller now that Bryony Danks and Helen Barker's placements at the Department for Education (DfE) had ended.
- Chair noted that a revised set of suggested lines to take had been shared with Taskforce members, as a guide in case members were asked questions and felt unsure of how to answer.
- Chair explained that the Taskforce would spend the next three months focused on the following activities:
 - Conducting regional engagement with stakeholders around the UK;
 - Further promoting the report;
 - Participating in a working group to develop a 'new narrative' for shipbuilding;
 - Supporting Skills Foresighting for shipbuilding; and
 - Participating in development of a proposal for a Skills Delivery Group, to sit under the SEG.
- Chair noted that government would be working on its formal response to the Taskforce's report.
- Chair invited comments from the Taskforce. These included:
 - A question from Sarah Dhanda about when the government response would be published. Charlotte Govan from DfE said it was expected in early 2024. Sarah reflected that the Taskforce should commence work with industry and educators before that, and not wait for the government response.
 - Kerrie Forster said the Taskforce was keen to speak to the Opposition about its recommendations and acknowledged that Civil Servants would not be involved in that. Bob King said he engages regularly with the Labour Party and has had positive conversations about the Taskforce. He had highlighted the report with the Scottish Parliament's Shipbuilding Cross-party group.
 - Matthew Guy said it would be important to explore what a 'good' response to the recommendations, from industry and educators, would look like.

Item 2: Reflections on report launch

- Chair invited thoughts from the Taskforce on how the report had been received. Chair noted that the report and toolkit had been commended at a ministerial roundtable at 10

Downing Street, and by HRH the Princess Royal at a reception, both for London International Shipping Week.

- Taskforce members reported a positive reception among stakeholders in the Solent, new entrants to shipbuilding, trade unions, universities, businesses, and the renewable energy sector.
- Taskforce members noted that some stakeholders were sceptical about delivery. Other stakeholders had stated their eagerness to see the recommendations implemented, and asked about how they could support next steps. Taskforce members felt momentum should be sustained and delivery commence as soon as possible. Chair noted that the recommendations would be delivered by the Skills Delivery Group.
- Matthew Guy explained that some business colleagues had reiterated the importance of the demand signal.
- Taskforce members shared views on what had worked well in the Taskforce and should be replicated in the Delivery Group. These were:
 - That members had to apply to be part of the Taskforce and were therefore committed to the project.
 - Broad representation among Taskforce members, including educators.
 - Generous meeting time, which allowed rich discussion.
 - Solutions-focused approach.
 - Time for discovery at the beginning of the project.
 - Meeting apprentices and trainees from the sector.
 - Support from the Secretariat, which made it easier to balance Taskforce work with day jobs.
 - The Chair's approach, which ensured all Taskforce members' voices were heard and built trust among the group.
 - Having face-to-face meetings around the UK, which built strong relationships between Taskforce members, ensured a genuine four-nations approach, and allowed members to learn about different parts of the sector to their area of work.
 - Regular workstream and Solution Group meetings, which strengthened Taskforce relationships.
- Chair asked the Taskforce how best to optimise its remaining months. Bob King said it would be important to ensure engagement with workers' representatives. Matthew Guy suggested that trade bodies like ADS Group and the Defence Suppliers Forum could help influence industry.
- Chair asked for any impactful quotes about the launch to be shared with the Secretariat to use in newsletters and social media.

Item 3: Taskforce communications strategy

- Chair invited Kerrie Forster to update on work that a group of Taskforce members had conducted, to begin developing a strategy for communicating its recommendations to key audiences. Kerrie explained that there were specific audiences that the Taskforce would need to reach and the group had thought about who they were, what they needed to know, when, and how to reach them. Kerrie asked for feedback from the Taskforce.
- The Taskforce suggested targeting specific organisations and groups, such as:
 - International trade unions. Bob King offered to connect the Taskforce to the global trade union IndustriALL.
 - Senior leadership teams in schools and colleges.
 - Non-governmental bodies like Skills Development Scotland and Industry Wales.
 - STEM and outreach intermediary organisations.

- Trade associations, whose job it is to communicate with these audiences, and could support in disseminating Taskforce messages. Kerrie said further input from Taskforce members would be needed, to identify these organisations.
- Taskforce members fed back that this Communications strategy to promote the report felt daunting, and suggested distilling it into key actions that the Taskforce could take over its final months, and suggestions to pass onto the Delivery Group after the Taskforce disbands. Kerrie agreed that the group would develop this and share with the rest of the Taskforce for comment via email.
- Kerrie suggested that there should be more visibility of what life in a shipyard was like, and a celebrity should become the face of UK shipbuilding. Matthew Guy suggested using social media influencers to promote the sector. Aimee Spriggs suggested running the communications strategy past the SMI Future's Group and SEG Shadow Board to gain diverse feedback on the strategy. Charlotte Govan noted that lots of industry leaders were once apprentices, which is a positive message to promote.
- Chair thanked Kerrie for his proactivity and leadership with this piece of work.

Item 4: Skills Foresighting

- Chair introduced Paul Feely, to give an update on Skills Foresighting.
- Paul recapped that the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland were leading a funded Skills Foresighting project for shipbuilding. He outlined the 'skills value chain' and explained that Foresighting was the beginning of the process, which would ultimately be a long-term exploration of future skills and capabilities.
- Paul said the Foresighting process will be split into cycles of between nine and ten weeks, with several workshops as part of each cycle. Taskforce members will be involved to give industry expertise, and other academics and technologists will also be part of the process. Each cycle will require about a day of each person's time. Paul stated that NMIS was aiming to start the first cycle in November and report in early 2024.
- Paul noted that the Taskforce had suggested 'advanced manufacturing for productivity' as a topic, and NMIS had suggested either robotics and automation, or data and artificial intelligence, as the specific focus of this.
- Paul said he would share this information with the Taskforce via email and invite feedback on the topics.
- Comments in response to Paul's update were as follows:
 - Aimee Spriggs (NSO) offered to connect Paul with an NSO project with InnovateUK.
 - Bob King stated that defence procurement requires production to be as cheap as possible, which he sees as a barrier to employers investing in productivity. He also argued that there is not a reliable way to measure productivity.
 - Nick Mansell asked for an update from the SEG Shipyard of the Future Task and Finish Group. Aimee agreed to arrange this.

Item 5: Shipbuilding Skills delivery workshop

- Chair updated the Taskforce on the most recent meeting of the SEG, which had taken place that week. He said the report and toolkit had received positive feedback from SEG members, and he had told the SEG that the Taskforce proposed it forms a Skills Delivery Group. Chair noted that he had been completely open with the SEG about Taskforce members' misgivings about aligning with it. Chair explained that the SEG had accepted the Taskforce's idea in principle and the next step would be to share a proposal paper with SEG members. The Chair stressed that Taskforce members would be sighted on this before it went to the SEG.

- Chair stated that the Taskforce would use the remainder of the meeting to discuss members' ideas and expectations for the Skills Delivery Group, and to reach agreement on whether or not to develop a Shipbuilding Skills Charter.
- Key points from the discussion on the Delivery Group were as follows:
 - The Taskforce does not have the resource and expertise to implement all of its recommendations. The Delivery Group will need room to interpret them and the right expertise to do so.
 - The Delivery Group will be different from the Taskforce, in that it won't be intensively researching problems and developing a report, instead it will be mobilising relevant parties to take action.
 - The Taskforce will write a letter to the new group, which should serve as a strategic delivery plan and can be used as a handover, tied to the recommendations.
 - Individual Taskforce members can do things at a task level while the Taskforce is still in operation, and after it concludes.
 - It will be important to sustain momentum, to ensure an enduring legacy for the Taskforce.
 - The Taskforce would like the opportunity to comment on draft Terms of Reference for the Delivery Group, although NSO will be the decision-maker.
 - Taskforce members would like to give steers on the make-up of the group, to ensure it represents all four nations of the UK, educators, and all parts of the shipbuilding sector, particularly small and medium-sized businesses.
- Bob King said he thought he had agreed that, in the absence of a mechanism for setting up a new body, the SEG itself should take on skills delivery work. Bob said he thought this had been agreed in the absence of a mechanism for forming a new body. He added that he did not feel trade bodies would achieve the Taskforce's intended outcomes if they were members, as he felt that they had not met the sector's needs thus far, which he saw as the result of lack of influence. He felt that the seniority of the SEG as a group would have the necessary influence and any new sub-group would not have sufficient authority.
 - Aimee Spriggs, Rue McIlmoyle and Charlotte Govan clarified that the SEG would provide a governance structure for a new Delivery Group, which would report into the SEG via a Chair who would be a SEG member. They said the Group would need to be comprised of individuals with the capacity to take tangible action. They explained that SEG members are CEO-level and therefore not always able to 'do the doing' themselves. They reiterated that NSO would be the ultimate decision-maker on membership of the Delivery Group, as the Taskforce had decided to recommend that government convenes this group under the SEG.
 - Other Taskforce members disagreed with Bob's interpretation, and confirmed their view was that the Delivery Group should be a newly appointed sub-group of the SEG, made up of individuals who could be 'doers' and prevent it being a talking shop. The Taskforce agreed that their role would be to have a written handover to the Group and give steers on what should happen next, cognisant that the Taskforce wouldn't be able to decide which individuals would ultimately be part of the Delivery Group.
- Chair confirmed that the NSO would prepare a proposal for the Skills Delivery Group ahead of the next Taskforce meeting.
- Matthew Guy asked if it would be possible for Taskforce members to have a meeting or workshop with Delivery Group members, as part of a richer handover. The Secretariat noted this suggestion.

- Chair asked the Taskforce if a Shipbuilding Skills Charter was the Taskforce's preferred mechanism for getting industry commitment to the recommendations. Members' comments were as follows:
 - It is unclear how a charter would interact with the pledges in the toolkit.
 - There are not yet specific actions that the Taskforce can ask industry to take. There will be as the Delivery Group moves forward.
 - There are lots of charters and similar initiatives that already exist and do not achieve much.
 - It will be more important to get industry to commit to the Delivery Group than a charter.
 - Taskforce members present felt it would be best not to pursue a charter. They noted that several members, including some who had supported the idea, were unable to attend the meeting. The Secretariat agreed to follow up with them to see if they were content with the other members' decision.

Item 6: Next Steps and AONB

- Chair reiterated his heartfelt thanks to Taskforce members for their hard work, dedication and sheer determination to achieve the successful publication of their report and toolkit at such a high-profile event during LISW.
- Sarah Dhanda informed the group that National Manufacturing Day would take place on 28 September and would be an opportunity to raise the profile of the shipbuilding sector. The Secretariat would circulate more information.
- Chair reminded Taskforce members to arrange regional engagement opportunities in all parts of the country.
- Chair noted that the next Taskforce meeting would be on 9 October in Cardiff, hosted by the Welsh Government.