

EASTERN

Foreword



Andy Laflin
Regional Chair

As some semblance of normality threatens to return, the industry remains in the most challenging of times. Covid is less of an issue than it was but is still significantly affecting many of us in different ways.

Particularly hard hit are

those whose work is primarily in the commercial sector, who are suffering the knock-on effects of businesses struggling and retailers whose customers were first forced to stay away and then have been hard to persuade back to the high street.

Government incentives and support, particularly around housebuilding and buying, have been welcome, as has the furlough scheme. But these support structures can only exist for a finite amount of time and soon we will have to find a way to survive and thrive without them – and while firmly in a major recession.

Then we add into the mix the likely consequences of the end of the Brexit transition period. Again, depending on your

company, its size, sector and so on, the effects could be minimal or they could be very significant.

The team at NFB has been working incredibly hard on supporting all members as much as possible through Covid and will do the same through Brexit. Their advice, guidance and supporting documentation has been helpful and their leading position on the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) has ensured they have the ear of Government, and can relay the experience of NFB members to ministers and civil servants.

The NFB team has been pulling together information on the website and in emails, and holding online events to ensure members are up to date – but they do want

to keep hearing from you to ensure they are giving you the information you need. Please either call head office or get in touch through me if you have any feedback or specific requests for how the organisation can support you.

Finally, keep an eye on the website for more information about the next Regional Construction Forums. These free regional events have been very popular with members for accessing information on business-critical issues, best practice and new business opportunities. The next events are in November and will take place as normal unless local lockdowns occur, in which case they will be taken online. It would be great to see you there.

Welcome



Yvette Holden
Membership Advisor

Welcome to the second edition of Britbuild, the NFB's new magazine for all members. What a strange few months it has been, with the sector battling against the effects of Covid and the lockdown. We are proud to have been alongside you every step of the way,

providing regular guidance to help you navigate your way through the crisis. There are still lots of resources, including key documents, in the Members' Area of the website.

Covid hasn't been our only focus, however. Members will be aware that NFB has been vocal in its scrutiny of recent decisions made by the CITB, the industry training board for the construction industry. While the CITB has made some positive decisions around collecting the Levy, we are very disappointed in its decision to delay the Consensus process for up to two years, as well its decision to cut many training courses. It is vital that the industry has its say on the CITB and that we are able to represent our members' views and interests properly.

On a more positive note, NFB

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has completely revamped its own training offer, now providing a huge range of courses across all possible relevant elements of the industry – and at all levels. Each training course is provided by the leading training provider in that particular specialist area and each course is available with an exclusive member discount.

Alongside the more technical training, there is also a raft

of training courses covering areas such as Communication, Leadership, Management, Sales, Wellbeing, Personal Effectiveness and much more. These online courses are delivered by renowned online trainer, Video Arts who, ever since it was founded by John Cleese and Sir Antony Jay back in 1972, has sought to use entertainment to capture the imagination of participants.

Now NFB members can gain access to over 300 Video Arts training courses. NFB is the only organisation outside of Video Arts which has been granted permission to offer these, so we're delighted to bring them to you. A free trial is available too – so do take advantage.

Finally, please remember we are here to help you and I'd love to hear from you.



No hiding from Brexit

Covid-19 might have taken Brexit out of the headlines for the last few months but Brexit is about to come roaring back into view. While many business owners have been focusing on keeping their businesses solvent and keeping their employees safe, the clock has continued to tick on the Brexit process. The transition period of the UK leaving the EU will end at midnight on 31 December 2020 and whether a deal is struck with the EU or not, everything changes on 1 January 2021.

NFB is clear that a deal between the UK and the EU is still by far the most favourable scenario but the reality is that no-deal is a real possibility. Members should be preparing for both eventualities, each of which will bring challenges.

If no deal is reached between the UK and the EU over a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), then from 1 January 2021, full border

controls will be in place with the same checks for goods coming from the EU as the rest of the world. The Government has, however, announced that it will introduce the new border controls in three stages between 1 January and 1 July 2021.

HMRC will implement the changes to customs controls and new processes to support flow of goods, whether or not an FTA has been signed.

If no deal is agreed between the UK and the EU, the UK will trade with EU countries under WTO (World Trade Organisation) rules from 1 January 2021. While most members may be unlikely to be directly affected, it seems highly unlikely that their supply chain or the builders' merchants they use will remain unaffected, so the impact is likely to be felt one way or another, both in terms of cost and availability of products.

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products and materials from EU countries. The free movement of goods afforded by EU membership means many UK sites can operate on a 'just in time' basis; as the situation stands at the moment, this is likely to be compromised.

The knock-on effects could be considerable, bringing uncertainty to every stage of a project. Business planning

becomes difficult, as do site operations and consequently project completions. Once schedules begin to be compromised, then it is likely that contractual issues may arise and cashflow could become an issue.

This is a complex, detailed and rapidly-changing situation. NFB will be publishing detailed guidance tailored to our sector in the Members' Area of the NFB website: please keep checking these web pages and looking out for relevant emails.

Labour

NFB represents a broad range of members, a considerable number of whom employ foreign workers. In recent weeks, the Government published its new rules around immigration and these rules will apply from 1 January 2021 whether the UK and the EU make a deal or not.

James Butcher, Head of Policy at NFB, says:

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“Anyone wanting to access European labour after 1 January will pay for it. While lobbying the Government through the CLC (Construction Leadership Council) has led to a number of construction trades being included in the Tier Two Skilled Work category, a number of other roles are not categorised in this way and the only option available to those individuals is to apply for a temporary worker permit. Currently those permits are limited to one year. The cost to the employer and the short-term nature of the employment will make this unviable to both employer and employee. Unless the Government changes its mind, it may be time to think about switching to home-grown talent.”

James continues, “If you have staff from European countries working for you now and you want them to stay (and they want to stay), ask them to apply for Settled Status as soon as possible. It is a much easier and cheaper process.”

Any citizen from the EU can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue living in the UK and it is free to apply. Applicants are given either ‘settled status’ or ‘pre-settled status’, depending on how long they have been living in the UK when they apply. Both statuses mean successful applicants can continue working in the UK, use the NHS for free, have access to education and public funds.



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Contrast this to those applying through the points-based immigration system, which could cost well over £1,000 per person, with ongoing costs.

Products and materials

One other element to look out for in the slightly longer term is developments around the regulation and importation of products and materials. Currently these regulations are

in line with those applying to the whole of the EU and it is unclear as to what will happen next. The NFB, through the CLC, will continue to ensure Government understands how critical any changes in this area are, and that any change should come with a robust, detailed and long consultation period.

Fortunately NFB’s Head of Policy, James Butcher, and Richard Beresford, Chief Executive, have been asked to co-ordinate the CLC’s Brexit Working Group. This is an important development for NFB members as it means NFB will be at the heart of the

discussions with ministers and senior civil servants around Brexit and its effect on construction and building.

James Butcher concludes, “It looks like negotiations between the UK and the EU will continue right to the wire but it’s really important that members act now to make sure they are prepared for 1 January 2021. It has been easy to forget about Brexit while everyone has been battling for sheer survival through the pandemic but having survived that, Brexit could be the sucker punch if companies don’t make plans now.”

Herman Kok, Lindum Group, comments:

Before the lockdown we were noticing labour rates inflating a little but this was probably due to an increased confidence in the market after Brexit finally happened, following a lack of confidence and certainty during 2019.

As a business we’re not particularly reliant on directly-employed EU staff but I’m sure our supply chain and the industry at large will suffer from a shortage of labour once

the transition period ends. This will be mitigated in the short term by the effects of the Covid crisis, which has dampened productivity this year and left people out of work and actively looking for it.

As main contractors, products and materials have often already been specified by the time we come to the job - although we can sometimes adjust them depending on the contract. There may be some issues with supply but we will work around them. We already

have to deal with this anyway, when certain products or materials become unavailable – maybe a factory has shut down, for example – so it’s a familiar challenge. It’s also more likely that these issues will have to be dealt with further down the supply chain rather than directly by us.

More of a concern is the likely inflation in the cost of these products and materials. It’s a difficult market at the moment and we’re fighting hard to secure work, so

margins are not generous. We’ve concluded that there is no point endlessly qualifying our tender costs because clients are desperate for price certainty. There is more flexibility on time pressures though, so through discussions with clients we can come to agreements that suit both parties.

The final issue to consider is what happens to standards if there is no deal with the EU. The Government has given us no certainty over that.

A quick word with...

Ben Virdee

Site Manager - RG
Carter Construction



What do you like best about working in construction?

I thoroughly enjoy all aspects of construction but my favourite aspect is seeing a project's journey from a drawing on day one through to its completion. It's brilliant to work in a project team and to see the operatives on site also work as a team to pull a project together. I've worked on projects varying from £250k to £47 million but one thing that is always key is team-working. It's also excellent to see apprentices start on site who are really keen to learn, which takes me back to when I was a carpentry/joinery apprentice myself. I'm lucky to work for a company that is very supportive to young people and always gives everybody an equal chance if you're dedicated and hard working. Finally, there's no better feeling than coming up with a solution to a problem which helps towards a project's successful completion.

If you could change one thing in construction, what would it be?

I wouldn't change anything. I think the construction industry is a fantastic industry for everybody.

If you weren't working in construction, what would be your dream job?

Something within the sports industry, to do with football. Possibly a football manager or sports journalist!

What do you like to do to unwind?

I like to spend time with my wife and daughter, and really enjoy watching anything to do with football.

What's your favourite holiday location and why?

Dubai. Mainly because there's so much to do and see. The construction industry there fascinates me too: it's so impressive to see the way they construct things, including the Burj Khalifa which is totally mind blowing (and project-managed by an English PM!).



I would like to visit 1966 on the day that England lifted the World Cup!"

What's the last movie you saw? Which character best sums up your life?

The Longest Yard, although none of the characters really match my personality. The only thing I and the main character have in common is that we never give up.

What's your favourite TV viewing?

The Fresh Prince of Bel Air and The Simpsons.

What sports do you follow and what teams do you support?

I'm a football addict and a lifelong Manchester United fan.

If you could have lunch with a celebrity or historical figure of your choice, who would it be and why?

Sir Alex Ferguson (below) – the true definition of a leader; and businessman Peter Jones – it would be inspiring to hear his business knowledge.



Photo by Austin Osulide (CC BY 2.0)

Who do you feel has been the most inspiring person in your life?

There are four people: Malcolm and Alison Rogerson owned the company where I carried out my apprenticeship; if it wasn't for their constant backing, along with Scott Grimwood who was my foreman, I wouldn't be in the position I'm in today. They constantly backed my enthusiasm and supported me throughout my apprenticeship.

I worked extremely hard to achieve four apprentice of the year awards: none of that would have been possible without their constant belief and drive towards career progression. Malcolm and Alison drummed into me from age 17 that I must never curb my enthusiasm towards learning new things; 11 years on, I still carry that same attitude. Scott was an excellent foreman and taught me the importance of man-management, methods I've used over the last six years since I've been in management.

The final person is my Dad, who moved to this country alone from Kenya at 17. His old-school parenting taught me the importance of always working hard.

If time travel was possible, what era would you most like to visit and why?

I would like to visit 1966 on the day that England lifted the World Cup! I would also like to visit the future to see how much construction evolves over the years.