**How the UK has ‘a mountain to climb’ to attract enough talent to the sector**

A multi-million-pound deal in which Amazon Prime Video joins streaming giant Netflix to lease space at Shepperton Studios in Surrey is the latest boost for the UK construction sector, which has experienced record growth over the past 22 months.

The multi-million-pound contract for nine sound stages, workshops and office accommodation, and new production space is part of a wider development of the studios which will total around 1.2 million sq ft once completed.

However, such news is tempered by warnings from industry leaders including Mark Reynolds chief executive of global construction firm Mace, who has publicly shared his view the UK has a mountain to climb to attract enough talent to provide the necessary workforce for projects like this.

Mr Reynolds, who consistently champions change within the industry, told Building Magazine that despite all the positives there is still both a gaping capacity and a skills challenge, and that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the opportunities in the sector.

The CEO, and Construction Leadership Council (CLC) lead, also questions whether the Government’s apprenticeship levy, a UK tax on employers which is used to fund apprenticeship training, has the flexibility to help ramp up the number of apprentices trained annually.

A recent survey of HR professions by business campaigning group London First revealed funds are still going unspent despite urgent upskilling needs with almost half of firms subject to the levy returning unspent apprenticeship funding to the Treasury.

Mr Reynolds says the CLC, which works with government and industry to promote industry initiatives that deliver, has identified accelerated routes into apprenticeships from Further Education, the provision of pre-apprenticeship experiences, and supporting SMEs to offer job placements.

But he says this can only work if the government, construction employers and the Department for Education, all work together to make routes into construction more accessible and to do more to inspire young people.

Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show a record leap in job vacancies across all industries particularly in the construction sector, due to workers reaching retirement age, and too few people entering the industry to replace them.

In my own business, as a design and construction specialist working on premium residential projects for more than 15 years, I have first-hand experience of the shortage of skilled construction workers, such as joiners, quantity surveyors, electricians, and other skilled trades.

Construction needs more than 200,000 new workers by 2025 to meet demand, so change needs to happen fast.

To do this we need to break down preconceptions and get away from the image of hard hats, and muddy boots. We must do more to sell construction as a career option and to show the extent to which STEM skills contribute towards the final creation of a construction project.

New technologies and trends are constantly emerging, with a variety of innovations in designing, materials, manufacturing, testing, and extending modern construction techniques that will provide multi-disciplinary and diverse careers for future employees.

Like Mark Reynolds I believe the key is training, on-boarding, and recruiting people young people with talent and an energetic outlook. Without doubt the industry has a formidable task ahead of it that will require nimble moves and deft navigation, yet the size of the prize is enormous.

The news of the Pinewood Group’s long-term contract with Netflix is hugely positive but whether the UK can provide the requisite workforce for this project and others like it as the country springs back into action post-Covid remains to be seen.

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**ENDS**

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