

What is nCRISP and what does it mean for the future?

Dr Graham Owens, Director of the Steel Construction Institute and Past Chairman of the Research Panel explains how a new organisation will influence the future of structural engineering research

The infrastructure that guides the strategic direction of the UK construction industry has gone through substantial change in the past 12 months. The Strategic Forum has been reconstituted under the Chairmanship of Peter Rogers and a new CRISP has emerged. What is it and will it make a difference to our research activities?

'nCRISP' is a new organisation with its origins in the Construction Research and Innovation Strategy Panel that was formed in the mid 1990s. Its Chairman, Michael Dickson, is supported by a small Executive Group that is drawn from both clients and construction, as users of research and innovation, and from suppliers of research and innovation. Most importantly, it is supported by an Industry Activists Group of over 100, covering clients, general contractors, house builders, specialist contractors, consultant material producers, government, industrial researchers, academic researchers, research organisations and research funders.

Its Secretariat is provided by Davis Langdon Consultancy, sponsored by the DTI. Jim Meikle or Guy Hazelhurst of DLC are always pleased to hear from any structural engineers who wish to join the Industry Activists Group.

Its mission is:

'to promote research and innovation that will sustain a first class construction industry and enhance the value of its contribution to the quality of the built environment and the wealth and well being of society.'

This is a challenging agenda and readers are entitled to ask if nCRISP will have more impact than previous initiatives on construction research and innovation. It is, of course, too early to say but the signs are encouraging.

It sensibly has no aspirations to be an executive body that directly commissions research. However, it is committed to concentrating on targeted roles where it will be influential. It will ensure that construction is supported by the research and innovation that is neces-

sary if it is to meet the needs of society. Its activities are to:

- argue the case for ongoing research and innovation investment for our sector. This means it has to argue for the importance of construction and the built environment to future prosperity and for the quality of life for UK plc.
- support the work of the Strategic Forum and act as a 'think tank', as envisaged by the late Sir John Fairclough in his report *Rethinking construction innovation and research*;
- be the voice of industry for funders of research, especially the government agencies and research councils;
- act as a broker, improving communications and relationships between all the wide range of stakeholders involved in construction research and innovation;
- encourage the prioritising of R & I activity by the construction industry as a whole.

Priority issues

The Industry Activists' Group has already identified 10 priority issues:

- *The impact of the procurement process on results.* In recent years radically new forms of procurement have been introduced in the construction industry. There is a need to understand how different procurement processes deliver best value in terms of cost, quality, reliability and delivery times for different types of construction.
- *Using knowledge and learning from others.* The dissemination and implementation of research and innovation in the construction industry has been identified as a major bottleneck.
- *The business case for whole life performance.* An increasing number of clients are procuring construction projects on the basis of best value rather than lowest price. This longer-term approach needs to consider the overall cost of ownership rather than only the capital cost of a project.
- *New construction technologies and techniques.* Resources need to be allocated to the development of new construction technologies and tech-

niques in response to changes in society's needs and increases in society's expectations.

- *Off-site production and customisation.* It is estimated that off-site production output for non-temporary buildings will need to grow by 10 times in the next 4 years to address the predicted shortfall in output from traditional construction. Research would address the take-up of off-site production principles.
- *Managing information and value flows.* Knowledge needs to be better managed, both for the sector and individual construction projects. For the sector the key issues are access, quality and searchability. For construction projects, the key issues are the structure of the information, common standards for data exchange, quality and change control.
- *Recognising the importance of education, training and skills for a new industry.* The growing skills gap is now widely recognised. nCRISP's role with others will be to ensure the underpinning research is carried out so that we may better understand the underlying causes. This research will also assist in providing evidence to support the necessary remedial actions.
- *Environmental issues and climate change.* The creation and occupation of the built environment has been, and remains, one of the largest contributors to the greenhouse gases that are attributed to climate change. The nCRISP community will be ready to participate actively in those ongoing programmes sponsored by Government as well as to consider issues that are of particular interest and impact.

The success of nCRISP will largely be measured by the quality of its tangible outputs. One of its first commissions has gone to Professor David Pearce of University College, London. This will address the socio-economic value of construction. It will be targeted at opinion formers outside construction and will demonstrate our substantial contribution to the sustainable development of all aspects of our society. se

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**nCrisp
has a
challenging
agenda as
think tank,
and the
voice of
industry**