

**Graeme Millar, Chairman Scottish Construction Forum
Conference Speech, 2007**

It's hard to believe that a year has passed since I was standing here welcoming you to what we claimed was going to be the industry's premier conference platform.

Well I'm delighted to say that judging by the numbers we have attracted here today that you were all impressed enough to come back.....and invite your colleagues.

It is testimony to the positive experiences of last year that the delegate numbers have grown by around 50%.

So welcome to those attending for the first time and to those returnees who found it worthwhile enough to come back.

With the quality of speakers we have here today and the range of issues we'll be discussing we're sure to have a productive day.

Before outlining the programme can I just say a special thank you to our sponsor today Sharkey - the interior fit out specialists.

They are responsible for the seats you are sitting on and the design of this fantastic venue we're in today. It recently won an award from the British Construction Industry with the arena signalled out for praise which I'm sure Sharkey will take great pride.

They are great example of a new breed of professional company that is doing a lot to build a more positive image of our industry.

Last year I focused on the rationale for the Forum itself, what its role was and what we wanted to achieve, along with a bit of scene setting on the just how important the construction industry was for the country's economy.

Well one thing that hasn't changed in the last twelve months is the importance of construction to the wider economy and the opportunities that exist to grow this sector even further.

So, if last year was very much scene setting, this morning I would like to talk about delivery. The Forum is not just an industry talking shop it is here to serve the industry.

You will see in your delegate packs a copy of the annual report which covers off in detail the Forum's key achievements but let me illustrate a few for you.

The highlight of the past year for me was getting approval for the new centre of excellence. It has been a long and complex, some might say overcomplex, process but we now have approval to take it forward and the Minister will fill us in with more details later.

It will make a huge difference to the way that the industry operates and play a key role in aiding modernisation while acting as a platform for sharing information and best practice.

It will provide a focus for the industry to work more closely together and address key issues of quality and productivity.

Securing the centre was a key pledge when the Forum launched and is a tangible example of how we are working to develop the industry.

Over the past year our Key Performance indicator project has received excellent industry feedback.

So far we've had 61 companies of all sizes going through the programme and this is increasing all the time.

As more companies see the customer benefits of being involved in this programme these numbers will increase.

Benchmarking is an effective way of improving performance and has a crucial role to play in improving the reputation of the industry

In the longer term we want to see the industry starting to embrace these new standards with the same enthusiasm that European quality marks have been accepted by other industries.

Another Forum led initiative that is gaining a growing reputation is our demonstration projects.

Set up last year as a way of showcasing the type of innovation going on in the industry, we are now seeing attendances of more than 50 companies at each event.

Companies who are now seeing the benefits of building their own knowledge of the latest cutting edge processes, methodologies and products that are improving productivity in the industry.

Productivity improvement through innovation is one of the key planks of what we are here to achieve and I'm pleased to see interest in this area growing throughout the industry.

Five demonstrations were successfully completed last year and we currently have eight on the go at the moment. Chair of the expert panel, Gordon Masterton will be presenting some certificates of recognition to those projects chosen as best practise later on today. And for anyone who would like to find out more about either submitting a project for demonstration or attending an event there is an exhibition in the foyer.

As they become more widely known within the industry their popularity will know doubt continue to grow as they are an excellent platform for sharing best practise within the industry.

Skills continue to be huge issue facing the industry at the moment and will continue to be so as long as the industry remains buoyant.

The fact is that we do have vacancies in the industry and we have the people willing to do the job but the skills and jobs don't always match.

Workforce development is something that the Forum has been helping to give a more overarching industry wide view on and while without trying to take too much credit, I believe that the work we have been engaged in with employers groups and government has contributed to the massive increase in training opportunities which we will hear about later today through progress on the Construction Skills Action Plan.

Going forward we will continue to develop our liaison role between industry, government and further education to drive up standards and increase skills.

All this delivery is helping us cement our role as the voice of the industry in Scotland with key decision makers.

Of which one of the most important is our next speaker, minister with the responsibility for construction, Allan Wilson who I will introduce shortly

Before that though I would like to mention a little event I know the he in particular will be very interested in - next May's election.

In the run up to May we have an opportunity as an industry to present to parties of all persuasions what we, as an industry would like to see adopted as policy. Policies that will create an environment for the industry to grow and develop.

Early in the New Year we want to publish a manifesto outlining what we see as key issues going forward.

I would like you all to think about that today and feed back how you think this could be developed and presented to our next set of potential decision makers.

I'll leave you with that thought for now, it's a packed programme today and we need to press on. Following the Minister will be Scott Sharkey CEO of our main sponsor today.

Then moving on towards lunch we have seminar sessions giving delegates the chance to discuss:

- Future construction opportunities for Scotland
- More on construction skills
- The Innovation and excellence centre
- And general discussion on innovation and excellence in the industry.

Building on theme of key opportunities for the future after lunch we will hear from Sir Craig Reddie from the British Olympic Authority

who will be talking potential construction opportunities from London's successful 2012 bid. And also from Derek Casey about Glasgow's Commonwealth bid for 2014.

Finally after a summing up session from myself, I hope everyone will join me for a glass of wine. From the quality of the delegate list today, it presents a superb networking opportunity and I hope you take the time to take advantage of it.

And now to get things underway, it's my great pleasure to introduce Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for Enterprise & Lifelong Learning.

Thank you