



The SNIPEF vision for the future

Our Manifesto for the Plumbing and
Heating Sector

Introduction

SNIPEF is the trade body for the plumbing and heating industry in Scotland and Northern Ireland representing more than 700 businesses and over 5,000 plumbing and heating operatives. This manifesto is aimed at the incoming Scottish Government and highlights four key areas that we believe to be critical to building a resilient and sustainable construction landscape in which plumbing and heating firms can develop, compete and thrive.

Net Zero

The Scottish Government has ambitious net zero targets to hit over the next 30 years and our sector will be instrumental in achieving them. While decarbonisation of heat is only one part of the net zero ambition, it is a crucial part, and the plumbing industry will have a major part to play in the decarbonisation of heat in building stock across Scotland.

Qualified plumbers hold the fundamental, theoretical and practical skill sets to provide services to the demand of decarbonisation of heat and are best placed to undertake this work. There will however be a need to upskill the current workforce as well as a need to ensure that only those suitably qualified will be permitted to undertake this work.

There is also a need to incentivise consumers, businesses and stakeholders to invest in low carbon technologies thus ensuring a prosperous pipeline of work and providing the sector with confidence to make the investment.

We call on the Government to:

- Support employers to upskill the existing workforce for net zero;
- Ensure decarbonisation of heat is delivered through the use of industry recognised plumbers and heating engineers;
- Stimulate marketplace demand through incentives to allow consumers, businesses and stakeholders to invest in low carbon and renewable technologies;
- Apply pressure to the UK Government to commit to long term consumer incentives for net zero;
- Maintain and invest in a long-term programme of retrofit of energy efficiency measures to Scotland's building stock;
- Guarantee a future pipeline of work to allow the supply chain to be confident of the future of the net zero industry;
- Introduce a VAT rebate scheme for home repair and maintenance and energy efficiency improvement measures.

Employment

Plumbing and heating businesses have faced financial difficulties during the pandemic. Their business activities have been limited and they have incurred additional costs in order to keep their workforce safe. There is uncertainty about future workloads and this lack of confidence has resulted in a reluctance to recruit apprentices and expand their workforce. The industry is already facing a skills shortage and with the government targets for a green economy and increase in the UK housing stock, there is an immediate need to invest further in skills.

The construction industry is historically male dominated. There is a need to ensure that while we build the workforce to meet the demands of the future, that it is seen to be a good place to work and is diverse and inclusive.

Furthermore, in an industry where mental health is already a major issue, there are concerns that the pandemic will have exacerbated this issue. We want there to be a culture of prevention and early intervention to reduce poor mental health and suicide rates.

We call on the Government to:

- Prioritise funding for apprenticeships in our sector, for all entrants and not just those in the 16-19 category;
- Continue to provide financial support and incentives to employers to recruit apprentices;
- Support upskilling for those already working in the industry;
- Introduce apprentice loans to those coming into the sector from other industries in decline, who may not otherwise choose to undertake an apprenticeship due to financial commitments as they are not able to take a reduction in wages;
- Fund the introduction of a mental health mentor for the construction industry.

Fair Work

The construction industry provides £7.8 billion Gross Value Added to the Scottish economy but poor payment practices continue to be a major issue. It encourages poor standards in the sector, and it affects the mental health of business owners who are worried about getting paid.

Post COVID-19, there are concerns that the industry will be subject to issues relating to the progress of projects, leading to many disputes between employers and contractors across the supply chain.

Procurement practises are outdated and there is too much focus on the lowest cost rather than ensuring procurement is sustainable. Sustainable procurement would allow organisations to achieve value for money on a whole life basis for not just the organisation but also society, the economy and the environment.

We call on the Government to:

- Legislate for the use of project bank accounts in the public sector;
- Mandate 30-day payment terms on all public sector contracts and sub-contracts;
- Endorse responsible contractual behaviour and consider adoption of the Conflict Avoidance Pledge;
- Legislate to protect cash retentions in a secure account for firms in construction supply chains;
- Procure on a whole life basis and not at the lowest cost.

Protection of Title

Qualified Plumbers should hold a Level 3 plumbing qualification and have undertaken a four-year employed apprenticeship. However, because the title “Plumber” is not protected, anyone can hold themselves out as a Plumber and this puts the health and safety of consumers and the general public at risk.

While there is regulation for those undertaking gas work there is no similar regulation for those undertaking other plumbing work.

Protection of title would not only improve the safety of consumers in Scotland but also encourage an even playing field for businesses.

We call on the Government to:

- Carry out consultations on the Protection of title for ‘Plumbers’;
- Set up a Plumbers Working Group to look at ensuring the safety of plumbing work.