



Small businesses in the UK's sustainable construction sector are lacking vital support to enable the transition to greener building practices, according to a new survey of green entrepreneurs by the University of Hull.

The survey of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the green construction sector found they were being hampered by inconsistent policies and lack of access to funding. Poor planning rules and a shortage of skilled labour in sustainable building practices were also cited as hindrances.

All new buildings will have to be zero carbon by the end of the decade and to help meet the UK's target to reduce carbon emissions by 80 per cent on 1990 levels by 2050, a mass retrofit of the UK's existing housing stock is urgently required. Estimated to be worth £500 billion, this represents one of the biggest opportunities for jobs and growth in the UK.

Lack of strategic direction

But respondents to today's survey said they were concerned by the lack of support from Government and are calling for a clear strategic direction from Government to enable the transition to greener building practices.

"The two headline findings from our survey are that access to funding is quite a concern and policy inconsistency is the second major concern," Dr Kirstie O'Neill of the University of Hull's department of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, said.

Qualitative survey

The research by the University of Hull took the form of in-depth interviews with 50 businesses and policy makers engaged in a wide range of practices aimed at reducing the environmental impact of building – from the use of straw, hemp or rammed earth as building materials, to

installing cutting edge technologies to reduce energy consumption after construction.

It found that green construction businesses are facing major obstacles, including:

- a tendency for Government policy to favour large businesses in the construction sector over SMEs
- wide variation in the application of planning rules across different local authority areas that stifle innovation in sustainable building
- risk averseness by banks unwilling to invest in green businesses
- a shortage of skilled labour capable of using sustainable building materials coupled with a lack of knowledge to incorporate new green technologies into buildings.

"Our research indicates that the UK could miss out on a big opportunity if comprehensive measures are not put in place to support this innovative sector," Prof David Gibbs said.

The qualitative survey is part of a three-year project being undertaken by the University of Hull looking at UK green entrepreneurship.