

# Get stuck in for the Big Society

Engineers of all stripes might have been forgiven for raising an eyebrow at the close of last year, as the coalition government launched its natively named Growth Review Framework for Advanced Manufacturing. Why? Because the review's launch document posed as many questions as it paraded statements of intent – and the latter were long on rhetoric and short on detail.

That said, it would appear that DBIS' (Department for Business Innovation and Skills) stance is indicative of a government taking manufacturing rather more seriously than just about any other since the post Second World War years.

Just look at its action plan. The policy document speaks of providing stability for industrial businesses by bearing down on the deficit and encouraging longer-term thinking. It also talks of removing barriers to growth, with a £1.5 billion fund specifically for SMEs, as well as support for the Enterprise Finance Guarantee.

Then it points to decisions already taken in the Spending Review in favour of industry, with protection for apprenticeships at one end of the spectrum and further funding for science-based research at the other. It also offers a pledge to share such manufacturing-led growth as it can muster around the regions, citing the coalition's Local Growth White Paper as proof of its determination to decentralise and reminding readers of £50 million of new money for employers needing to up-skill.

Finally, it reveals an investment of £50 million over the next three years in the highly regarded Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS), and £600,000 towards a two-year automation and robotics programme, both, we're told, in support of advanced manufacturing – although it offers no definition of what exactly constitutes 'advanced' and what 'basic' manufacturing (page 3).

And yet we've heard it all before. So it would be easy to ridicule the fact that, thereafter, this document becomes not a little woolly – even irritatingly shallow and predictable. We might also pour scorn on the very general nature of the questions it asks: 'Have we identified the right barriers?'; 'What are the top priorities?'; 'How can business and their representatives best contribute to achieving the goals?'

But, you know, Business Minister Mark Prisk claims that he wants this review to examine how the UK can "remove the barriers that are preventing the UK from becoming Europe's leading exporter of high value goods".

Maybe it's time to give the coalition a chance. In the spirit of its Big Society, let's stop carping and get stuck in at [amgr@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:amgr@bis.gsi.gov.uk). Put Prisk to the test.

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