

New Civil Engineer

nce

www.nce.co.uk

PPA BUSINESS MAGAZINE EDITOR OF THE YEAR



MIDDLE EAST REPORT

Survey reveals best places to work
NEWS p08

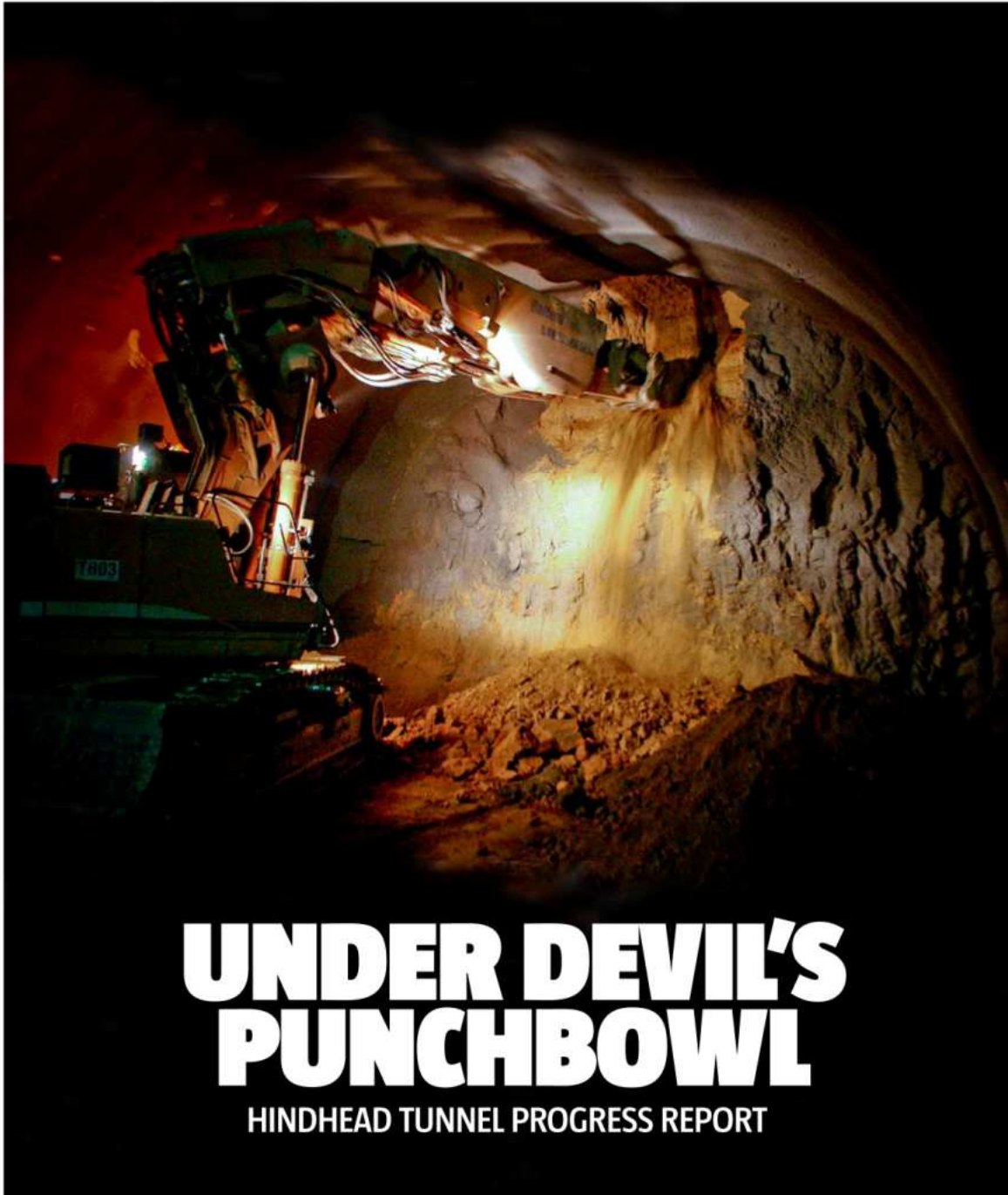
CROSSRAIL HOTS UP

Bidders line up for £16bn megaproject
NEWS p10

NCE.CO.UK

Keep track of Hurricane Gustav

04.09.08



UNDER DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL

HINDHEAD TUNNEL PROGRESS REPORT

Publication: New Civil Engineer
Subject: Quality of life Survey
Circulation: 55,523
Date: September 4th, 2008
Source: Coverage arranged by Wide PR

NEWS

GEOTECHNICAL

Belfast gets massive wharf extension

By Alexandra Wynne

Contractors were this week installing combi-piles at Belfast's Stormont Wharf, set to be the longest deep water facility on the Irish mainland.

Piling contractor Dawson WAM is installing the combi-pile system for the 250m quay wall extension making it more than 1km long. It is doing the work as part of an £8.7M contract.

The contractor is installing a combination of 1.42m tubular as well as sheet steel piles to form the wall. The quay wall will be anchored to a retaining wall using 24m long, steel tie rods.

The contractor is also installing 9,000m² of asphalt hard standing.

The extension will help the port handle vessels up to 300m long.



Quay job: Piling is now underway

"Stormont Wharf is a critical piece of transport infrastructure for the port – it's our equivalent of a new section of motorway junction providing Northern Ireland with links to global markets," said Port of Belfast chief executive Roy Adair.

Work is due to finish in December.

» www.nce.co.uk/geotechnical

BUSINESS

French steps aside at Scott Wilson

By Jackie Whitelaw

Scott Wilson's executive chairman Geoff French, 61, is to become a non executive from 1 November, the consultant announced on Tuesday.

Chief executive Hugh Blackwood, 60, will take over running the company.

French has been with Scott Wilson for 40 years, and took the business public in 2007. It now employs over 6,000 staff. Fee income reported in *NCE's Consultants File 2008* was £300M.

"The decision [for French] to step back is part of the group's commitment to planning for senior executive succession and board structure over the long term," the company said.

Scott Wilson acquired highly respected consultant Benaim in July along with Terence

Lee Partnership and Strategic Leisure.

Since the year end the group has extended its committed banking facilities to £70M to provide additional resources to support its acquisition strategy.

In a trading statement the company said its order book remains at a high level.

It has picked up significant new project wins including the detailed highway design of the A421 from Bedford to the M1, major highways projects in Poland, Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka and India, nuclear sector commissions in the UK, the Grand Mosque in Bahrain, new buildings in China and power projects in Pakistan, Greece and Indonesia.

"As a result the board remains confident of achieving group performance in line with expectations," the statement said.

Scott Wilson will announce its interim results in December.

MIDDLE EAST

Arab states

Bahrain better place to live and work than UK, according to Gulf engineers' poll.

By Bernadette Redfern

Bahrain and Oman are the best places in the Middle East for engineers to live and work, a survey published this week claimed.

Bahrain also topped a poll of the best work locations worldwide.

Analysis of feedback from more than 500 engineers who have lived and worked in the region since 2003 shows that the Gulf's smallest states have the best quality of life.

The survey was conducted by recruitment consultant EPC Global. Results show that 88% of engineers who have worked in Bahrain would recommend it to other professionals.

This compares to 76% for Abu Dhabi and 73% for Dubai.

Compared to findings from engineers working in other parts of the world these states still score highly. Eighty three per cent of engineers who have worked in Australia recommended it as a place to live. The UK scored just 61%.

Bahrain ranked highly thanks to its low living expenses, plentiful accommodation and relaxed lifestyle.

Oman's culture counted strongly in its favour. "Oman is a great place to live," said EPC Global operations manager Joe Rothwell.

"The culture is different [from other Gulf states]. The locals are more active in the day to day workings of business and are much more hands on. It makes for a better working and social environment," he said.

Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) also won praise for its healthcare facilities and suitability for expatriate families.

ENGINEERS RATE THE STATES

GULF LIVING STANDARDS RATED BEST AND WORST BY ENGINEERS

SOCIAL LIFE
Oman 67% | Qatar 18%

ACCOMMODATION
Oman 67% | Iraq 33%

AFFORDABILITY
Kuwait 71% | Iraq 33%

SECURITY OUTSIDE WORK
Dubai 83% | Iran 33%

SUITABILITY FOR FAMILIES
Abu Dhabi 73% | Iraq 8%

LEISURE AMENITIES
Dubai 65% | Saudi 18%

POWER & WATER SUPPLY
Abu Dhabi 98% | Iraq 33%

HEALTHCARE
Abu Dhabi 71% | Iraq 33%

ACCEPTANCE WITH LOCALS
Oman 47% | Iraq 23%

LOCAL COLLEAGUES' SKILL
Iran 56% | Saudi 17%

SECURITY WHILE WORKING
Oman 93% | Saudi 49%

IT INFRASTRUCTURE
Oman 67% | Iran 33%

The poll findings are good news for UK consultants and contractors seeking to boost staff numbers in the region.

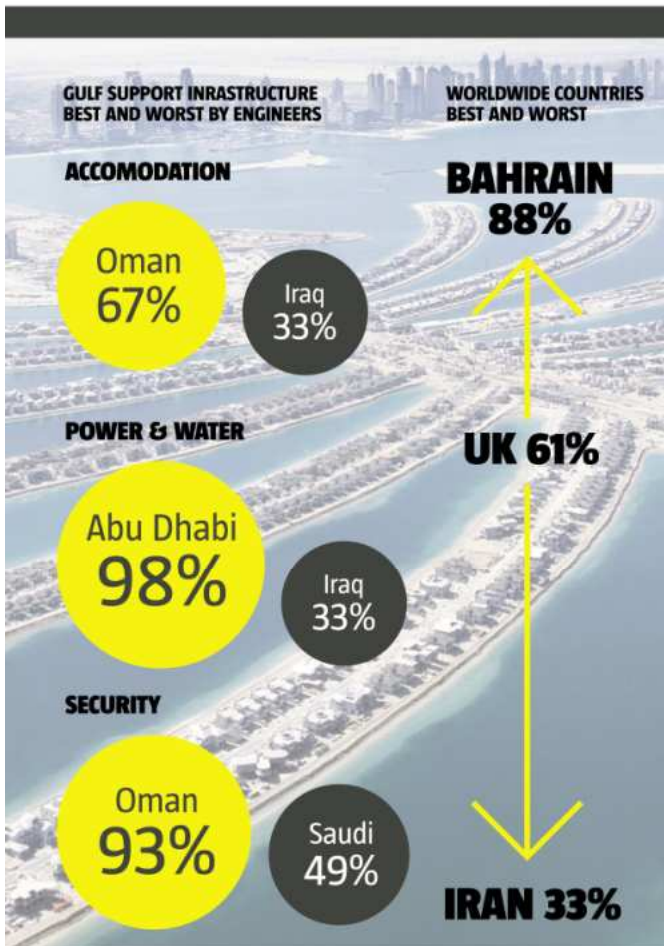
Firms such as Scott Wilson and Parsons Brinckerhoff are looking to triple staff numbers within the next five years.

"The region is a very, very dynamic market at the moment with some very big projects taking off. Staff demand is high," said Rothwell.

Some Middle East states did not score so well, however. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran and Iraq all came in for criticism.

Saudi Arabia was singled out for its poor leisure amenities with only 18% of those who had worked in the region being satisfied with

get rated



“The region is a very dynamic market with some very big projects taking off. Staff demand is high”

Joe Rothwell



them. Only 17% of engineers were satisfied with the abilities of their local colleagues.

Unsurprisingly Iran and Iraq scored low on criteria such as security, acceptance among locals, and the provision of basic infrastructure.

But Iran was rated highest in terms of the proficiency of local staff with 56% of engineers being satisfied with the competence of their colleagues.

Qatar was considered the worst performing state among engineers for its health and safety procedures with only 31% happy with the standards in place.

■ See NCE Middle East special report p30

TRANSPORT

Network Rail demands cash to speed up possessions

By Ed Owen

Network Rail this week said it would need “significant funds” if it is to reduce disruptive track possessions after the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) ordered it to cut delays to passengers by a third.

The regulator praised the track operator for reaching punctuality targets of 90.1% for the first time in a decade.

But last week it told Network Rail to cut disruption to passengers by 17% within three years and by 37% within five years.

“The regular closure of parts of the network for engineering work causes substantial disruption and inconvenience to many passengers and freight customers, as well as deterring others from using the network altogether,” said ORR chief executive Bill Emery.

“We expect the railway to be kept open for business for as much time as is possible.”

Network Rail responded by asking the regulator for more money to help it meet the new demands.

“Reducing disruption caused by improvement work is a central pillar of our plans in the years ahead,” said a Network Rail spokesman.

“Delivering a railway at week-ends to the standard we see during the week must be our goal and we’ve asked the ORR for significant funds to make this ‘seven day railway’ a reality.”

Network Rail already has a plan to reduce track possessions to a maximum eight hours (NCE 8 November 2007).

Weekend possessions are typically 52 hours, and Network Rail hopes to reduce this to 27 hours by 2010.

The track operator is in dispute with the ORR over how much it can spend between 2009 and 2014. The ORR expects Network Rail to make 20% savings worth around £4bn a year.

» www.nce.co.uk/transport

briefs

COSTAIN ORDERS SURGE AHEAD

NCE Contractor of the Year Costain last week revealed its forward order book was at its highest-ever level at £2bn, up 25% on the £1.6bn reported at the end of 2007. First half pre-tax profits rose to £10.1M, up 26% on the same period last year. Revenue was £467.5M, up from £430M in the first half of 2007.

TAYLOR WIMPEY PLUNGES INTO LOSS

Falling land and property prices have forced house-builder and contractor Taylor Wimpey to post a massive £1.5bn loss for the first six months of 2008. The loss comes from write-downs worth £690M. Underlying profits plunged from £119.8M last year to just £4.3M in the first half of this year.

AMEC REPORTS HALF YEAR RISE

Contractor Amec's first half pretax profits rose to £92.3M in 2008, up from £66.9M reported in the same period a year ago. The rise was fuelled by oil and gas sector work. Turnover was up from £1.15bn to £1.26bn. The firm remains involved in UK civils work in the energy sector. It is part of the winning consortium for the £17bn Sellafield Site Licensing Company contract.

CARILLION PRETAX PROFITS SOAR

Contractor Carillion has reported pre-tax profits for the first half of 2008 of £27M, up 42% from the same period last year.

MIDDLE EAST REPORT

Consultants are looking to double or even treble staff numbers in the Middle East over the next five years. But which are the best places in the region to work?

Dubai may be the centre of the Gulf construction boom and in turn receive the most attention, but engineers with experience of working throughout the region recommend Bahrain, Oman and Abu Dhabi as the best places to live.

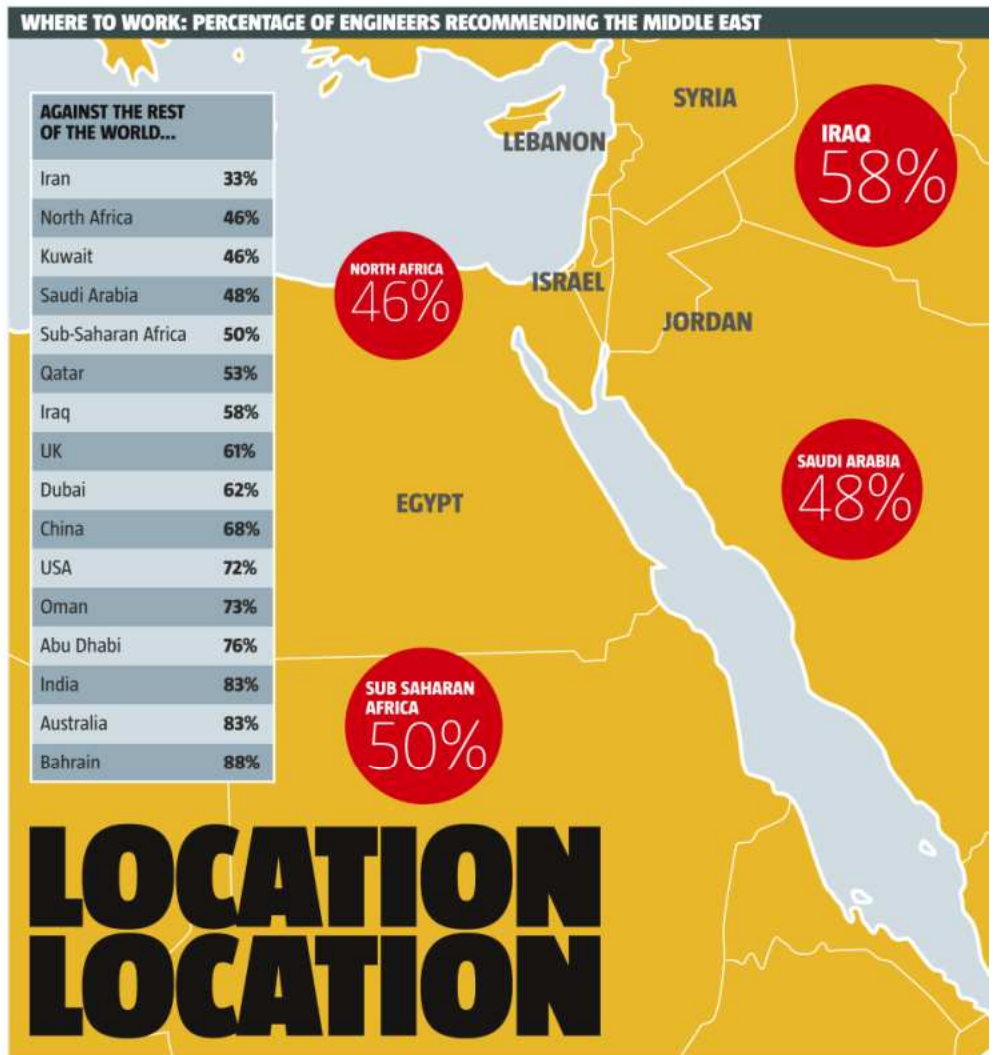
In a survey by international recruitment specialists EPC Global, over 500 engineers that have worked in the region since 2003 have made recommendations on the best places to live and work.

Internationally, 88% of engineers recommended Bahrain as a good place to live. It was also ranked as having high or very high living standards by 50% of all engineers that have spent time there. "It is a very liberal society and very comfortable," says Hyder's project director Brett Doughty who moved to Bahrain two years ago (see page 32). "The cost of living is a lot cheaper than some other states – a three course meal can be less than £6."

That the Gulf states are ranking high in these international recommendations is good news for consultants in the region. Firms are increasingly turning to global markets for their staff. "We have staff of 41 nationalities," says Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) managing director Stuart Wallace. "We source our staff globally, drawing them from the US, the UK, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa."

Like many consultants PB is prioritising growing staff numbers. "We are committed to growing our Middle East business from the current number of 600 to 1000 in 2010. Our 2012 target is less defined but we are thinking of around 1500," says Wallace.

Scott Wilson is also look-



"The cost of living is a lot cheaper than some other states – a three course meal can be less than £6"

Brett Doughty,
project manager, Hyder

ing to almost triple staff numbers. It currently has 240 staff in the region. "But we are looking to have 700 by 2009," says regional director Eddie Foster. In 2005 there was just 40 staff, so the firm has demonstrated its ability to grow quickly.

Multiply these opportunities for civil engineers by the 20 plus UK firms operating in the

region, before even considering other international companies, and the result is that opportunities for civil engineers are vast.

All Gulf states are investing heavily in infrastructure and recruitment consultants such as EPC Global and BBT place more than 100 engineers a month each. This means that engineers really can pick and choose where to live.

When considering Middle Eastern countries by a range of specific criteria such as transport infrastructure and accommodation, Oman rates most highly. "Oman is a great place to live," says EPC Global operations manager Joe Rothwell. "The culture is different [from other Gulf states]. The locals are more active in the day-to-day workings of business and are much more hands on. It makes for a

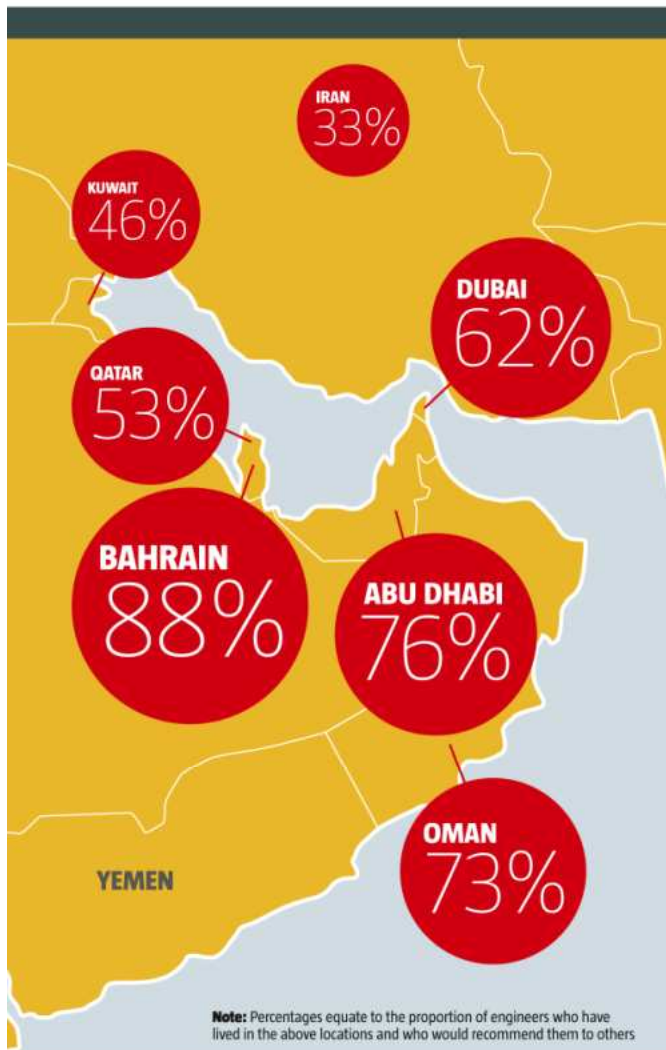
better working and social environment."

It seems engineers agree, 67% of respondents, say Oman have a high or very high quality of life, compared with 51% in Abu Dhabi and only 20% in Saudi Arabia. Abu Dhabi scored highly on healthcare and suitability for expatriate families.

Only 18% of those who had worked in Saudi Arabia were satisfied with the leisure amenities on offer, which compares to a high of 65% for Dubai.

In terms of the professional environment there was also frustration in Saudi Arabia that the proficiency of local staff was low with only 17% being satisfied with local colleagues' performance. By this criteria Iran scored the highest with 56%.

In terms of health and safety Qatar was considered to be the



“We are committed to growing our Middle East business from the current number of 600 to 1000 in 2010”

Stuart Wallace,
Parsons Brinckerhoff

worst performing state among engineers with only 31% happy with existing standards. Rothwell puts this down to the pace of development in the state. “Qatar has essentially gone from being almost a small town to a global city as it becomes the world’s biggest exporter of natural gas. The low health and safety score is probably because

it has had to develop so quickly,” he says.

In such fast moving markets as Qatar and with demand being so high it is common for staff to move between firms. For an employee to do this, a document must be issued by the existing employer called a no objections certificate (NOC). “We always give NOCs. Now and then we find that some firms don’t want to give them to incoming staff. In these cases we try and negotiate with the current employers,” says Wallace. “In many cases we expect to get the staff back eventually. The grass is not always greener.”

Demand for staff in the region shows no sign of slowing and although inflation is high salaries are rising too. For civil engineers looking for international experience, the positions are waiting.

Viewpoint

Tony Douglas

Lands of opportunity

Join thousands of engineers seizing the moment in the Middle East

Put the words “optimism” and “construction” together in a sentence to define trends in 2008 and you are guaranteed a dual reaction: slack-jawed incredulity instantly followed by disdain.

I have learned one or two lessons over the years – none more important than remembering it is often those who go against the grain who end up leading the pack. This is why I am relaxed about perhaps being a solitary voice saying we are now witnessing an unrivalled moment of opportunity for construction, particularly in the Middle East.

The key is ambition, reach and relationships – Laing O’Rourke is fortunate in being able to trace back its roots in the Middle East over 30 years. Through the relationships built up over decades it has established a track record of delivery, which has sustained the business during volatile economic cycles.

If relationships form the foundation, then ambition is the key to success in the region right now. That means personal ambition – and it means ambition to succeed on behalf of one’s own business and, critically, for demanding clients.

Right now the biggest challenge is people: matching this ambition on the part of clients with ambition among those prepared to take their careers into a new, exciting and challenging direction.

The reality is this is often just too challenging for some. Fixed views, comfort zones and lack of ambition hold some back in a self-selecting way.

This helps me and colleagues here look at the people problem differently. In other words if we as an

“If relationships form the foundation, then ambition is the key to success in the region right now”

organisation are to seize opportunities, we must be prepared to reach out into other markets to identify those who wish to join us on the journey.

With one of our three hubs in Australasia we have already built a pipeline of skilled people moving from Australia to the Middle East, while in the UK some of our most able engineers and project managers have recently responded by moving to the region.

The Al Raha Beach project Laing O’Rourke is delivering in Abu Dhabi, with joint venture partner Aldar, is a classic example of the attraction of scale for those who share our ambition.

To really understand it think of London’s Canary Wharf, then multiply this by 25.

As a member of the London 2012 delivery partner CLM board, I was fortunate to be able to attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics last month.

Again, I took away one important lesson – above all – from that eye-opening experience: never discount those who say it cannot be done, but never let their negativity over-rule the certainty that personal, and collective, ambition can create stunning results. Just ask Team GB.

■ Tony Douglas is Laing O’Rourke chief operating officer