

MANIFESTO

2023



Delivering a safe, innovative, resilient and globally competitive built environment sector in Northern Ireland.

Foreword CEO

Following the launch of ACE's three-year Blueprint and publication our UK Manifesto, I am pleased to introduce ACE's Manifesto for Northern Ireland, outlining the Built Environment sector's policy aspirations for 2023 and beyond.

Northern Ireland is home to a vibrant and diverse engineering sector, with ACE members playing a central role in delivering innovative and transformative projects across the region – can we amend to: Northern Ireland is home to a vibrant and diverse engineering sector, with ACE members playing a central role in delivering innovative and transformative projects.

We are committed to working in concert with our members and stakeholders in Northern Ireland to tackle these challenges and unlock the opportunities that lie ahead. This manifesto is the result of extensive discussions and consultations with our members and stakeholders, and sets out the essential ingredients for a thriving and sustainable engineering sector in Northern Ireland.

We believe that by working collaboratively with government, industry, and the wider community, we can make a positive difference and drive real change in the region. can we amend to: We believe that by working collaboratively with government, industry, and the wider community, we can make a positive difference and drive real change across Northern Ireland.

As the business association for the Built Environment sector, we will continue to champion the impact of our members' work and ensure all political voices understand that our sector is pivotal to unlocking economic growth, creating jobs, and nurturing opportunity for all no matter where they live.

ACE Northern Ireland looks forward to working with you to make this happen.



Stephen Marcos Jones
CEO



Foreword ACE Chair



Northern Ireland is home to many ACE members, who are proud to work on transformative projects that change people's lives.

But like many other parts of the UK, the industry in Northern Ireland faces increasing pressures, particularly when it comes to recruitment and retention, and ensuring procurement drives value rather than cost. Members who live and work in Northern Ireland have also faced the very real consequences of political uncertainty, so this manifesto will also rely on a return to a collaborative government and a functioning executive.

The ACE in Northern Ireland has existing relationships with parts of the supply chain to achieve positive change, and we look forward to working with all our stakeholders to make the ambitions in this manifesto a reality. This document is a culmination of many discussions with our members and stakeholders and highlights the many challenges and opportunities in front of us during the short, medium, and long term.

Our members are well-positioned to drive forward development through their expertise and experience, and we are committed to working with our stakeholders to deliver the best possible outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland.

As an industry, we have a responsibility to ensure that our work is aligned with the wider societal goals, such as promoting sustainability, improving quality of life and creating opportunities for local communities.

We believe that our manifesto provides a roadmap for achieving these goals and demonstrates the industry's commitment to being part of the solution. We are excited to embark on this journey, and we are confident that by working together, we can build a better future for Northern Ireland.

Andrew Campbell
Chair, ACE Northern Ireland

Introduction

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) champions infrastructure and the built environment to government, industry and other stakeholders.

Our members employ over 60,000 in UK and 250,000 worldwide, contributing more than £15 billion to the UK economy. However, the buildings and structures they deliver actively contribute over £570 billion a year of GVA. Our members operate right across the economy in Northern Ireland and contribute significantly to the Scottish economy.

Our 2023 **Northern Ireland Manifesto** provides a foundation for working with the Northern Ireland Executive, Assembly, Northern Ireland Office, and others for ACE to deliver a safe, innovative, resilient and globally competitive built environment sector on behalf of its members – against a backdrop of economic uncertainty.

Whether building a diverse and inclusive workforce, delivering social value, improving procurement practices, rethinking risk, or encouraging new technology and innovation, this Manifesto provides realistic recommendations, and an overarching ambition for greater collaboration to achieve these goals.

These are increasingly turbulent political and economic times, yet all recent administrations have committed to supporting infrastructure delivery. This Manifesto provides a basis for the current and future administration to support the sector in unlocking the potential in transport, energy, flood resilience, water, waste, and digital networks in Northern Ireland.

Innovation, people and social value

If we are to grow and transition our economy, innovation will play a critical part in making that happen. However, the current reality is of a fragmented and inconsistent approach to innovation, increasing challenges over IP, cost, awareness and adoption. We must also recognise that the international market poses both an opportunity and a risk to the sector right across Northern Ireland.

Our manifesto recommendations aim to drive best practice in innovation, and ensure that the Northern Ireland Assembly plays an active role in creating the conditions to support the sector to be a strong player in an internationally competitive marketplace.



The built environment is not alone with challenges around **people and skills**. We know of the recruitment and retention challenges, the lack of sector-specific data, and inconsistent workplace cultures. Recommendations from our NI committee are aimed at ensuring government can support the delivery of a reliable and diverse talent pool to serve both the immediate and future needs of our industry.

At the heart of all our members' projects is the positive impact it has on local communities in all parts of Northern Ireland. We also know that **social value** can be an ambiguous concept – difficult to measure, and there continues to be low community engagement in too many areas.

At this current moment in time, many public and private procurement opportunities are focused on price rather than value. Our members in Northern Ireland have supported the development of practical solutions as part of this Manifesto, agreeing to develop a set of metrics, language and approaches which will deliver social value.

Finally, to deliver any project, **excellence** and **risk** need to be carefully considered as part of the procurement process. In practice, quality tends to be measured by cost rather than value.

It is also difficult for new companies to attain recognition on the project frameworks of major clients, and the perception of risk has not evolved with the current industry reality – leading to a disproportionate burden on companies. Some of the practical solutions outlined in this Manifesto will ensure continuous quality improvements across the supply chain, support procurement activities, and promote a competitive market.

Recommendations in this Manifesto have been formulated following **discussions at the ACE Northern Ireland Committee**. The Committee feeds into the delivery of ACE's three-year Blueprint and ACE will be working with the Northern Ireland Assembly and other policymakers to make the ambitions in this Manifesto a reality. In a noisy policymaking and political space, it will ensure we have a distinct voice in debates around Net Zero, regional development and levelling up, and skills.



People

A reliable and diverse talent pool to serve the future needs of our industry.



Social value

A common language and approach to delivering social value across the sector which understands and meets the needs of communities.



Excellence

Continuous quality improvement across the supply chain supporting procurement activities and promoting a competitive market.



Risk

A transparent, fair and proportionate appraisal of risk that supports and drives the use and uptake of standard tools.



Innovation

The right conditions to support the UK sector to be a stronger player in an internationally competitive market for new technology.



Association

A relevant, resilient and sustainable business association dedicated to serving its members regionally, nationally and internationally.

Blueprint (2022-2025)

[Click here to view the ACE's Blueprint.](#)





Innovation

Current reality

- A fragmented and inconsistent approach to innovation.
- Challenges over IP, cost, awareness and adoption.
- International market a risk.

2025 Ambition

The right conditions to support the sector to be a stronger player in an internationally competitive market for new technology.

Challenge

By creating the right conditions for innovation, Northern Ireland can be supported to become a stronger player in an internationally competitive market. Innovation is vital in supporting businesses to develop, explore new opportunities and flourish. Through collaboration, sufficient funding opportunities and chances to showcase successful innovative approaches or methods our members in Northern Ireland can be supported to innovate at all stages.

There are a variety of challenges from a lack of clarity and confidence in relation to policy and accessibility to funding, to problems with having the physical space to test innovation. It is often not rewarded sufficiently and is more challenging for SMEs, in particular. Contractual issues can stifle innovation and there are ongoing issues around intellectual property.

This lack of confidence feeds into a lack of investment and while grants are accessible, these must be clearly signposted to the industry. It is also the case that the current regulatory environment may sometimes lead to innovative approaches being seen as a last resort, so it is important to retain flexibility.

Recommendation 1: Government to prioritise working with industry to establish a platform to showcase innovation.

Recommendation 2: Drive forward collaboration research and development partnerships, allowing for demonstrator projects or even pre-project simulations to allow businesses a safe space to experiment and test their innovations.

Recommendation 2: Government to simplify access to funding for innovation and grants and increase knowledge and awareness of funding opportunities.



Excellence

Current reality

- Quality measurement tends to be eclipsed by cost rather than value.
- Difficult for new companies to attain recognition on project frameworks of major clients.

2025 Ambition

Continuous quality improvement across the supply chain supporting procurement activities and promoting a competitive market.

Challenge

Our members continually strive for excellence and improvements across their work. Currently, there are issues within the procurement space particularly in relation to slow sign-off time by public sector clients, a lack of meaningful project programmes and issues with outdated or over-complicated procurement techniques. Through the use and regular review of the Construction Toolkit, there is room for more efficient procurement processes.

Excellence in this space has the potential to realise economic growth opportunities while achieving climate-friendly and sustainable solutions the move to net zero is on all of our members' agendas, yet the lack of clear planning and actions set out following the publication of the draft green growth strategy is concerning. Clear dialogue with Government, members can be supported in pre-planning and retaining that climate-resilient measures are at the forefront.

Recommendation 1: Promote the use and wider adoption of the Construction Toolkit and continually review and monitor its success.

Recommendation 2: Continue to review the Construction and Procure Delivery (CPD) role in helping clients to deliver successful projects specifically with a focus to tackle slow procurement processes.

Recommendation 3: Ensure the publication of sector-specific action plans regarding green growth and the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.



Social Value

Current reality

- Social value is an ambiguous concept, and difficult to measure.
- Low community engagement continues.
- Focus still on price vs. value.

2025 Ambition

An agreed set of metrics, language, and approaches to delivering social value across the sector.

Challenge

The understanding amongst the client base varies concerning social value. Producing a consistency of language and a commonly agreed set of metrics for the measurement of social value outcomes will be key to solving this issue.

Social Value in Northern Ireland is not coordinated to an appropriate level, it is an ambiguous often misunderstood concept resulting in difficulties in measuring and evidencing it. Social value is commercialised and seen as a box-ticking exercise. At its core, social value encapsulates choosing value over cost and avoiding a 'race to the bottom' in NI whether this is through procurement or the design process of internal working matters.

Despite the Value Toolkit being a UK-wide document, it was clear that knowledge of this tool was limited in Northern Ireland. With the government to increase social value to 20% of public procurement of government contracts in June 2023, it is important that our members remain engaged in the effectiveness of evidencing social value during bids.

Recommendation 1: Promote the use and wider adoption of the Value Toolkit.

Recommendation 2: Review PPN 0121 Scoring Social Value, giving companies and industry a greater say in its effectiveness.





People

Current reality

- Severe challenges in recruitment and retention.
- A lack of sector-specific data.
- Inconsistent workplace cultures.

2025 Ambition

A reliable and diverse talent pool to serve the future needs of our industry.

Challenge

Within the Built Environment sector contributing to roughly 7% of GDP to the Northern Irish economy maintaining a driven and valued workforce of all levels of seniority is imperative to our members' success and their input. Currently, our members in Northern Ireland as with all of those working in the UK and globally are facing the issues of a skills shortage with struggles to recruit and retain staff throughout their workforces. Staff and people are the biggest asset to companies hence further support is needed to assist the sector in recruiting and retaining sufficient talent to meet demand.

The industry has raised particular challenges with young entrées into the sector, specifically due to different funding for degree-level apprenticeships and the need to revisit courses and specifics within these.

Some of the largest challenges our members have noted they are facing are the levels of uncertainty around public sector projects with 100% of our members surveyed suggesting that the existing project pipeline is not clear enough. Similarly, issues have been flagged with a lack of students entering into specific courses pertinent to the Built Environment resulting in a lack of available potential staff and candidates with an insufficient amount of experience.

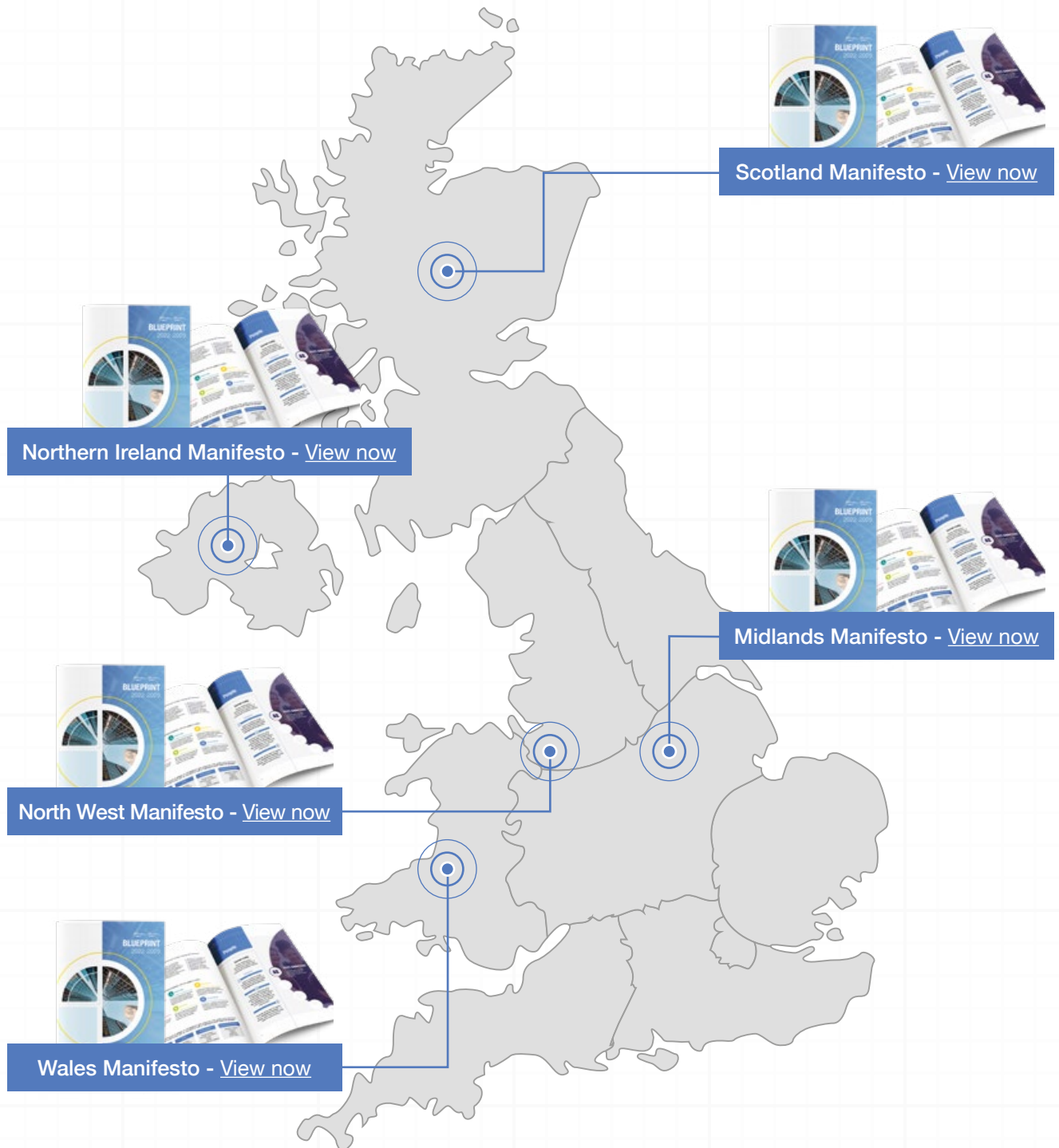
Recommendation 1: Strengthen support for apprenticeships and Building Services engineers apprenticeships to encourage new entrées into the sector and support businesses in doing so.

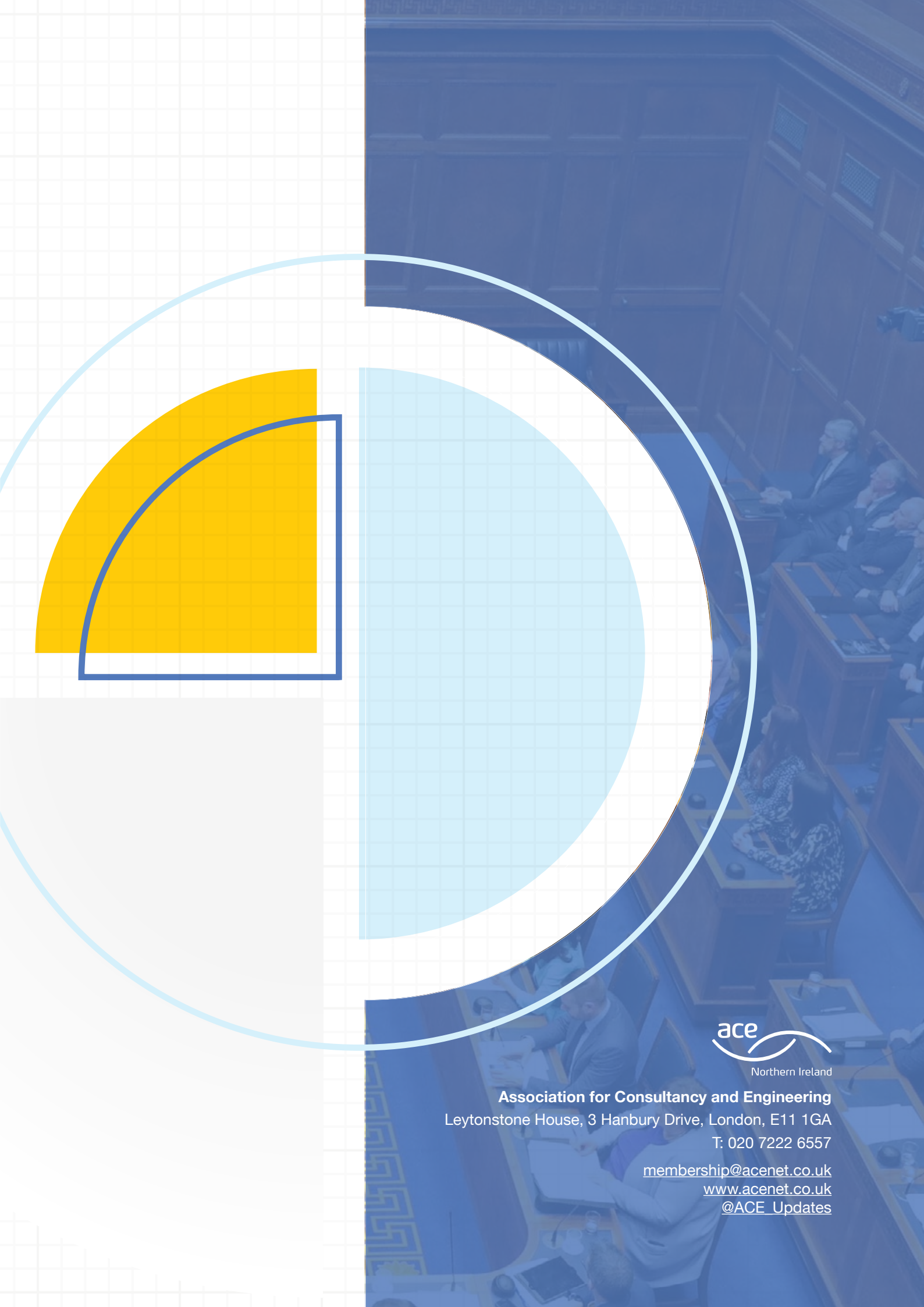
Recommendation 2: Ensure that a visible pipeline of specific projects is published coming to market to enable the wider infrastructure sector to invest in skills and capabilities.

ACE Policy

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) is a UK professional organisation that advocates for the interests of consulting and engineering companies. As part of its advocacy efforts, the ACE has published a series of manifestos across the UK that promote the importance of investing in infrastructure to improve the economy.

These manifestos typically include recommendations for policymakers and analysis of trends and challenges in the infrastructure sector. To coincide with this manifesto, ACE has published a [UK-wide manifesto](#).





Northern Ireland

Association for Consultancy and Engineering

Leytonstone House, 3 Hanbury Drive, London, E11 1GA

T: 020 7222 6557

membership@acenet.co.uk

www.acenet.co.uk

[@ACE_Updates](#)