

# Building the Case for a Sector That Builds Everything Else

Progress and Impact Report 2026



[acenet.co.uk](http://acenet.co.uk)



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# Introduction

by Milda Manomaityte, Chief Executive

We have a government with genuine ambition for infrastructure and growth and an industry that is ready to step up. There is cross-party acknowledgment that nature's role is vital to how we plan and build. However, ambition must be matched by the right decisions, made at the right time by people who understand project delivery. That is where our members' expertise is essential and why ACE's role is so important.

The engineering consultancy and design sector touches almost every part of national life. Clean energy, transport connections, flood resilience, green spaces and the places where people live and work – our members are involved in all of them. Yet the sector is too often brought in late or overlooked when major strategic decisions are being made. Changing that is at the heart of what we do.

This year, our campaigning is focused on how Government and clients think and act. Our Nature as Infrastructure

campaign makes the case that nature is not a barrier to development; it is an asset that can deliver better, more resilient outcomes when incorporated into design from the start.

Our Design Early, Deliver Better campaign makes an equally straightforward argument: involve the right experts earlier and projects are more likely to be delivered on time, on budget, and to the standard communities deserve.

Both campaigns have taken us into conversations with ministers, parliamentarians, combined authorities, and clients across the UK. The response has been encouraging.

Through our policy, public affairs and communications work, we have engaged with every major party across all four nations, as well as many of the people who shape infrastructure planning and procurement. Our members operate across the length and breadth of the UK, and our influence must reflect that.

**We are not only acting for our members but sharing our story, shaping the industry narrative and influencing public perception. In the first four months of 2026 alone, ACE generated 57 pieces of media coverage reaching a potential audience of 495 million people. We featured in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, and were quoted in Government press releases from NISTA and HM Treasury.**

**We are making certain that ACE's voice is heard in the places that matter, on behalf of the members and the sector that we represent.**

**We are proud to champion infrastructure, ensuring our members' expertise is valued, sought out and embedded at every stage of the decision-making that shapes the United Kingdom. This report demonstrates the tangible impact of our advocacy.**



# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE UK ENGINEERING DESIGN CONSULTANCY SECTOR

THE SECTOR DELIVERS  
A MAJOR BOOST  
TO THE UK ECONOMY



CONTRIBUTING  
**£39.5BN**  
TO UK GDP

WITH  
**HIGHER  
WAGES**  
THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE



GENERATING  
**£8.4BN**  
IN TAXES

OUR MEMBERS DON'T JUST ADVISE,  
THEY DELIVER AN IMPACT THAT IS

**MEASURABLE,  
SCALABLE  
& BORDERLESS**



# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE UK ENGINEERING DESIGN CONSULTANCY SECTOR

## OUR MEMBERS ARE HIGHLY SKILLED DESIGNERS, ENGINEERS & STRATEGISTS



Exports are spread widely around the globe

■ EU-27 ■ Other Europe ■ North America ■ South & C. America  
■ Middle East ■ Asia Pacific ■ Africa



## GLOBAL EXPORTS EXCEEDED £11BN IN 2023

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

# Shaping policy, delivering results

This year has provided significant opportunity for policy development. As Government has advanced its agenda, we have worked to ensure that the expertise and experience of our members have helped shape the policies and programmes that will define the future of our sector.

Through targeted advocacy, evidence-based engagement and strong collaboration with policymakers, we secured a number of important wins on the issues that matter most. The achievements highlighted below demonstrate the value of a strong collective voice and our continued commitment to our members.

## **Influencing radical change**

ACE played an active role in the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA's) review of the road and rail civil engineering sector, providing evidence and championing reforms that support a more productive and efficient infrastructure market.

Many of the CMA's recommendations reflected ACE priorities, including long-

term pipelines, better procurement, stronger client capability and greater collaboration across the supply chain.

The CMA estimates that these reforms could generate up to £5 billion in annual savings. For members, they promise greater certainty, improved investment conditions and stronger opportunities for sustainable growth.

## **Securing a clearer infrastructure pipeline**

ACE has a strong relationship with National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA): we've secured direct engagement between members and Chief Executive Becky Wood and her senior team, while helping shape discussions on infrastructure delivery and long-term investment.

As the Government's 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy gathers pace, a clearer pipeline and greater visibility of project readiness will give members more confidence to invest in people, skills and innovation while planning for future opportunities.



*Mike Reader MP at the ACE Parliamentary Reception 2025*

### **Influencing the Government's growth agenda**

ACE worked closely with HM Treasury, the Department for Business and Trade, the Cabinet Office and other Government departments to ensure consultancy and engineering expertise informed discussions on economic growth, industrial strategy and infrastructure investment.

We advocated for and welcomed measures supporting planning reform and investment while continuing to make the case that growth relies first on high quality consultancy and engineering expertise.

These policy changes ensure that members are better placed to support major programmes and to benefit from new opportunities across the built environment.

### **Driving fairer commercial practices**

We have continued to promote procurement practices and commercial approaches that encourage innovation and whole-life value.

Our recommendations on fair payment are set to be reflected in legislation, while our engagement with clients has helped ensure that consultancy expertise informs future procurement models.

We are working with the Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) to make the case for a more-collaborative approach to managing risk across the

supply chain, recognising that better outcomes are achieved when clients and suppliers work together. These efforts support a stronger, more-resilient market with better opportunities for investment and growth.

### **Creating opportunities through nature and resilience**

Our advocacy elevated the case for recognising nature as infrastructure. Record attendance at the Environmental Industries Commission (EIC) Parliamentary Reception, strong stakeholder endorsement and broad amplification of our messaging across social media demonstrate growing support for this agenda.

We also welcomed the Government's confirmation that Biodiversity Net Gain exemptions would be limited to developments of up to 0.2 hectares, providing greater certainty for environmental markets while supporting sustainable growth.

Our work has also connected the FIDIC Carbon Management Framework with UK Government initiatives and major infrastructure programmes, facilitating greater knowledge transfer and best practice sharing.

These actions create opportunities for members working across environmental consultancy, sustainable infrastructure and resilience.



**We delivered 100 group meetings with more than 1500 members attending in 2025/26.**

*Marie-Claude Hemming with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon. Rachel Reeves MP*

### Preparing the workforce for future demand

Delivering the Government's ambitions for growth will require the right skills and capacity. We continue to play an active role within the Construction Leadership Council and are championing five critical policy interventions for our sector through our engagement with the Construction Skills Mission Board. We are also helping members prepare for increased activity in the defence sector.

Our work ensures that future workforce planning reflects the needs of the consultancy and engineering sector while opening up new markets for members.

### Strengthening the sector's voice

We have strengthened engagement between the Government, industry and major clients, ensuring members' expertise is represented in key decision-making.

The Big Construction Debate at the Labour Party Conference brings together politicians and industry leaders to discuss the future of the sector, while our programme of member events has connected members with senior figures including Becky Wood, Chris Stark, John Fingleton and James Stewart.

For members, these relationships ensure that practical experience informs policy making and that the sector has a strong voice as Government develops future reforms.



Our events attracted more than 500 industry guests.



We provided input to 25 Government consultations and calls for evidence - official requests for evidence and opinions – using research and reflecting the real experiences of our members.

*"ACE provides a forum that facilitates dialogue between Government, clients, and the consultancy and engineering community, bringing together stakeholders to discuss issues and opportunities across the sector. NISTA has a valuable relationship with ACE, recognising the important role it plays in supporting the development of policy and delivery and fostering collaboration with industry."*

*Becky Wood, CEO, NISTA*



You can help shape ACE's lobbying activity by joining our advocacy groups email [membership@acenet.co.uk](mailto:membership@acenet.co.uk)

# Our campaigns

Delivering Infrastructure 2050 is ACE Group's overarching campaign and the framework within which all our policy, public affairs and communications work sits. It sets out a long-term vision for how the UK plans, finances and delivers infrastructure – not just during the next Parliament, but over the next quarter century.



The Delivering Infrastructure 2050 campaign is built around five pillars: resilience and nature, investment and finance, productivity and innovation, planning, and people and skills.

These five pillars reflect the full breadth of what needs to change if the UK is to deliver the infrastructure its economy, communities and environment require. Through research, roundtables, manifestos launched ahead of the Welsh and Scottish elections, a major national conference and sustained engagement with ministers, parliamentarians and combined authorities, we are making the case that ambition must be matched by the right conditions for delivery, and that,

crucially, our members are central to making that happen.

Our campaigns, as part of Delivering Infrastructure 2050 are:

## Nature as infrastructure

For too long, nature has been treated as an added extra. ACE's Nature as Infrastructure campaign challenges that assumption directly. The natural environment, from rivers and wetlands to green corridors, urban trees and natural flood management systems, is as much a part of our national infrastructure as roads, rail and energy networks are. When nature is integrated into project design from the start, it delivers better outcomes: greater resilience, lower whole life costs and places where people and nature can genuinely thrive together.

Through this campaign we have been working with Government, clients and our members to embed that thinking into policy and practice. We launched our three-point plan calling for nature to be recognised as infrastructure, for cross-department Government coordination and for robust methods to evidence nature's economic value. The momentum behind this campaign reflects a growing consensus: you cannot deliver long-term economic growth without treating nature as part of the solution.




## Delivering Nature as Infrastructure: A three-point plan

- 1. Treat nature as infrastructure**  
Recognise nature enhancements, such as climate resilience to communities, alongside engineered infrastructure, elevating the role of nature in policy, planning and decision-making.
- 2. Coordinate cross-government action for nature infrastructure delivery**  
Ensure cross-departmental coordination via NISTA and Defra.
- 3. Evidence nature's economic value**  
Develop robust methods of impact assessment to measure and report the performance and economic impact of natural assets in delivering solutions.

### Design early, deliver better

The decisions made at the front end of any project directly affect everything that follows. Involving the right design and engineering experts at an early stage gives projects the best chance of being delivered on time, on budget and to the highest standards for our communities. When experts are brought in too late, it becomes far more difficult, or even impossible, to achieve those outcomes.

This is the thinking at the heart of our Design Early, Delivery Better campaign, which we believe Government and clients need to hear. As we launch this campaign in the coming months, we will be working with members to capture their experience and engaging with Government, combined authorities and major clients to build our case. The stories are already there: projects reshaped midway through construction, costs that could have been avoided, infrastructure that fell short of expectations. ACE's role now is to bring that evidence together and to use it to make the argument for earlier supplier engagement, procurement that values our industry's expertise, and recognition that consultants are most valuable when they are influencing project trajectories from the start, rather than becoming involved at later stages when key decisions have all been made.

 495M potential impressions



GOV.UK – NISTA

Infrastructure Pipeline update signals future workforce needs



GOV.UK – HM TREASURY

Stakeholder reaction: Chancellor's growth plan sets key principles for UK-EU alignment



THE GUARDIAN

HS2 firm says new steel tariffs will 'exacerbate' cost pressures for UK construction industry



THE TELEGRAPH

The saga of the Stonehenge Tunnel shows we've forgotten how to build



# Thank you

To our group chairs and vice chairs

Chairs	ACE Advisory Group Role	Group	Company
<b>Professor Denise Bower OBE</b>	Chair	ACE	Mott MacDonald
<b>Dr Sarah Prichard</b>	Outgoing Chair	ACE	Buro Happold
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<b>Dr Julia Baker</b>	Chair	Nature & Biodiversity	Mott MacDonald
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<b>Michael Symons</b>	Chair	Water	Jacobs
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# Thank you

We thank all our members, sponsors, supporters and industry collaborators for their invaluable support in championing infrastructure.

## Partners, sponsors and supporters



If you would like to get involved by sponsoring an ACE report, publication or event or would like to provide member benefits to ACE members please contact [membership@acenet.co.uk](mailto:membership@acenet.co.uk)



The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) is the business association for the UK's professional consultancies and engineering companies operating in the social and economic infrastructure sectors. As the leading voice for the sector, we foster collaboration to propel the industry to fulfil its ambitions.

We champion infrastructure and the built environment – helping our sector to build a safe, prosperous and sustainable future.

The Environmental Industries Commission (EIC) champions new environmental markets to Government and other stakeholders and is the leading association representing the environmental technologies and services sector.

Together, ACE Group members provide insight and guidance on infrastructure and environmental projects at all scales and stages of development. Leveraging insight from global best practice, they bring innovation, solutions and cost effectiveness.

The sector is highly skilled, productive and forward-looking, employing more than 470,000 people and contributing more than £39 billion to the UK economy. It competes on a global stage, exporting more than £11.1 billion, providing solutions to the world's pressing issues, and holds the key to a brighter future.

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