



Trade partners

UK and Irish construction firms have reaped many rewards from the Gulf market.

By Ben Roberts

The UK and Ireland have enjoyed a close business relationship with GCC countries, with many prominent companies forging long-standing relationships.

History has closely intertwined the UK and the GCC region, primarily through politics and trade. Khaled Al Duwaisan, Kuwait ambassador in London, last October said trade between the GCC and Britain exceeded £15bn (\$23bn) in 2009, far higher than the UK's trade with China and Russia taken together, for example.

Though the global financial crisis has affected the two nation groupings in different ways and to different extents, there have been in the last year a stream of events, discussions and announcements focused around enhancing commercial and economic ties.

Almost a year ago London hosted the GCC-Britain Expo 2010, an exhibition and conference that showcased more than 50 companies from the Gulf, with a seminar promoting the region as a business venue.

A month later the British minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, met with ambassadors from the GCC states at the Foreign Office to provide an update on how the British government's desire to elevate its relations with the Gulf was being put into action. Since then, visits by British prime minister David Cameron and minister in charge of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Lord David Howell, have emphasised the importance of the region – and the UAE in particular – to British business.

Closer to the construction industry, British building standards are still prominent on projects and for product suppliers from around the world wishing to gain the attention of consultants.



The BREEAM standard for sustainable building design is also an industry benchmark for the region, even as equivalent local systems such as Estidama and QSAS gain prominence.

The UK's Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) opened its first full-time office in Dubai due to the growing number of its members now working in the region. The institute said it remained upbeat on construction prospects in the Middle East, despite the impact of the global financial crisis.

"The new Dubai branch is in direct response to that demand, and it also gives us greater capacity for growth in line with future construction activity," said Amy Gough, international head at the CIOB. "People on the ground will see a more active CIOB that will be promoting the value of professionalism at industry, government and education levels."

A steady stream of companies from the UK have entered the region and worked seamlessly with local players, including Wates Construction, a British construction company, which entered Abu Dhabi in 2007 on the invitation of Al Fara'a Integrated Construction. The pair is jointly working on two school projects in the city.



British PM David Cameron and HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi during their meeting at 10 Downing Street on 25 October 2010.

\$23bn

British exports to Gulf (Alan Duncan MP)

25%

Rise in Irish companies into the Gulf (Enterprise Ireland)

The entrance of Wates adds to the many big contractors that have made the region a home from home, including Dutco Balfour Beatty, Mace and Carillion. Consultants such as Mott MacDonald, EC Harris, Arup, Atkins and Halcrow also represent the long-standing relationship between the region's construction industry and UK companies.

There has also been a smattering of recent entrants, such as Hilson Moran, the consultant, which is now looking to expand its regional presence from its Abu Dhabi base into Qatar. Ireland's flow of business with the region is more modest, but steady.

It is now almost nine years since the country's government established Enterprise Ireland, a trade body serving the region and based in Dubai. The office services Irish interests in Egypt, Kuwait, Libya, Oman and Qatar, and it has since been complemented with an office in Saudi Arabia, which covers both the Kingdom and Bahrain.

Despite the retreat of Laing O'Rourke, the contractor, from the Middle East region last year, a number of companies across the construction spectrum have thrived. These include Byrne Rental, the machinery rental company, and Irish Gulf Construction and John Sisk & Son, the contractor that is currently working closely with El Seif Engineering Contracting in Saudi Arabia.

Construction has been increasingly important as an offering by Irish companies to the Gulf, along with healthcare and technology, according to Jim Mongey, regional manager for MENA at Enterprise Ireland.

He added that internal surveys at the organisation show that the flow of Irish companies across all sectors into the GCC rose by 25% last year.



SAS International

SAS International is a leading designer and manufacturer of interior fit-out solutions. Its products include performance-led metal ceiling systems and partitioning.

Having operated in the Middle East for over 30 years, SAS International is driven by its core values of quality, innovation and value. Its philosophy is based on supporting individual projects, and establishing and maintaining supply chain partnerships with clients, architects and contractors.

The company has supplied many projects in the region, including the new Aldar HQ and The Souk at Abu Dhabi's Central Market. It has also undertaken work on projects in Kuwait, KSA, Qatar, Oman and Yemen.

"The Middle East is an important market, and we have established good relationships with many key developers and contractors in the region," says SAS International director Andrew Jackson.

"As part of our ongoing commitment,

we opened a dedicated training suite at our Dubai Investment Park site. The centre will offer contractors flexible training and seminar programmes, taking advantage of the technical knowledge of local SAS International staff when installing or specifying our own high-quality metal ceiling systems or partitioning," says Jackson.

"We recently launched a range of commodity products, available from stock, at our Dubai site, including SAS International's popular International White T-grid, as well as SAS International's System 150 and 130 clip-in and lay-in metal ceiling systems.

"We have also launched our fully-glazed, frameless partitioning systems to the Middle East market.

"This development is to service our customer base even further, meeting the needs of contractors co-ordinating interior fit-out projects for the Middle East market," explains Jackson.

"We are a price-competitive and

solution-led manufacturer, delivering value for money for clients while meeting sustainability demands and answering aesthetic requirements."

In terms of current projects, SAS International is working on the extension of the main terminal building and inbound baggage handling facilities at the New Doha International Airport (NDIA) project in Qatar.

"Despite the depressed current economic climate due to the global financial crisis, we have seen steady growth this past year. The Middle East, however, has remained a strong market for fit-out providers.

"We will continue to invest and develop our operational facilities in the region and expand our range of commodity products. This commitment ensures high-quality product solutions are delivered on schedule, providing outstanding value to project teams and clients pursuing excellence for a range of interior schemes," concludes Jackson.

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Atkins

Atkins Middle East MD Richard Barrett has been in the job for just a year. "The first quarter has so far been very, very encouraging," he says. "We have managed to secure a couple of big projects on the infrastructure side, and we are currently in the process of mobilising teams to work on them."

One of these is the King Abdul Aziz International Airport expansion project in Jeddah, worth about \$80m, and won with the help of Atkins' latest acquisition in the US, PBSJ. The other contract secured is for work on the Etihad rail project, where Atkins has been contracted to carry out the concept and preliminary design for 1,200km of freight rail connecting the seven emirates, valued at around \$20m. Notably, these projects are different to those which originally made Atkins so famous in the Middle East, the biggest, of course, being the Burj Al Arab.

Globally, the business is also faring well. Despite the economic difficulties



The Crescent by Atkins.

in the UK, Clarke is confident that the firm is manoeuvring its way through the recession successfully. The US acquisition has been particularly good for the firm, giving Atkins another major geographical footprint outside the UK and the critical size and mass needed to pursue projects there.

"We are trading in line with our expectations. Our US acquisition is growing well, our Far Eastern business is improving, our European businesses in

Denmark are growing, and as a group we are extremely well-positioned for the economic recovery."

He adds how investment in the energy side, particularly the recent partnership with French nuclear builder Assystem, means Atkins is also well-placed to capitalise on the global move towards more sustainable energy resources. As to how the Assystem partnership and the move towards nuclear projects will help the business, Clarke says it is a long-term investment opportunity.

"We are bidding right now for [nuclear build] projects in Kuwait, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and we are in a strong enough position to take a long-term view," he says.

On the subject of Saudi Arabia, Barrett is keen to point out the recent partnership with local architect Mohamed Al Harasani, to form a newly-registered Atkins branch in the Kingdom, Atkins Arabia. The partnership will expand project opportunities.

Halcrow

The Middle East is Halcrow's largest market outside of the UK, and is one of its core regional businesses. With a track record in the Middle East stretching back continuously over 55 years, Halcrow has been instrumental in building the infrastructure that underpins the quality of people's lives in the region today.

Addressing Halcrow clients, business partners and senior staff, when inaugurating Halcrow's flagship office in Abu Dhabi in 2008, HE Edward Oakden CMG British Ambassador to the UAE said: "There is no doubt about Halcrow's commitment, and its experience sets it apart to strengthen its position as a valued partner in delivering innovative and sustainable development solutions for the region now and into the future."

Halcrow's earliest work in Abu Dhabi included master-planning for the young city in the 1960s, marine and port works, and the start of its long association with the Abu Dhabi airport. Other achievements include structural design review, design development and site supervision of the award-winning, iconic



Halcrow carried out infrastructure work at Yas Island, Abu Dhabi.

Abu Dhabi Grand Mosque, and the design and construction supervision of infrastructure works for Yas Island and the Shahama-Saadiyat freeway. The interchange on the Abu Dhabi-Dubai freeway is one of the largest in the UAE, comprising 12 bridges and four underpasses in total.

Halcrow's earliest work in Qatar involved two major developments. The first started in 1993 and involved the creation of Doha West Bay Lagoon,

an inland tidal lagoon 8km north of Doha. The lagoon provided a waterside environment for prestigious commercial and residential developments.

The second development began in 2001 as Halcrow was appointed to project manage and supervise the construction of the Four Seasons and Qtel Tower complex in the West Bay area of Doha. This development included a hotel, offices, apartments, houses and a marina.



CCL

CCL was established in 1935, and is now recognised as one of the world's leading engineering companies specialising in prestressed concrete technology. It has a manufacturing facility based in Leeds in the UK, and has companies in the US, Lebanon, Morocco, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Peru, together with a network of partners across the globe.

The company has been involved in post-tensioning and its development throughout the MENA region since the late 1950s and in the Gulf since the 1980s, and was influential in the introduction of post-tensioning in buildings within these markets.

CCL offers high levels of service and a focus on sustainability, together with high-quality systems that comply with all major industry standards, including ETAG and AASHTO, and which meet local requirements – and, crucially, a keen understanding of the local market. The company uses its experience and expertise to provide value engineering

services to the industry in order to maximise the benefits of its post-tensioning systems.

"CCL provides design, manufacture and installation of post-tensioning systems for buildings and civil structures. It is involved in the early schematic and design phases of some major development projects. Some of the latest advances in post-tensioning concern design analysis software," says CCL Qatar GM John Habib.

The 3D finite element analysis (FEA) software used by CCL allows the design of more economical post-tensioned slabs, which contribute to more sustainable construction techniques. The latest standards (ETAG, AASHTO, etc.) have also continued to enhance the quality of manufacture and testing throughout the industry. As a leading post-tensioning specialist, CCL complies with all major industry standards.

CCL has an ongoing R&D programme, whereby it is constantly

seeking to enhance its products and services. The company continuously looks for ways to reduce the environmental impact of structures and to enhance the performance of buildings over their lifetime, focusing on both the construction and operational phases of projects.

The latest CCL design techniques reduce the amount of material (concrete, reinforcement, formwork) consumed during construction, thus reducing the amount of embodied energy by up to 40% and the amount of carbon dioxide emissions by up to 35%. Design teams also investigate options to speed up the construction schedule to alleviate the social impact of the construction phase on the local community and nearby businesses.

"Maintaining quality standards is an ongoing issue in a competitive market. While striving for competitiveness, CCL will not compromise its products or services," notes Habib.



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Al Futtaim Carillion

Carillion plc is one of the UK's leading support services and construction companies, employing around 50,000 people. Its annual revenue is about £5bn, and it has operations across Britain and in Europe, Canada, the Middle East, North Africa and the Caribbean.

It has a portfolio of award-winning work in areas vital to society, such as health, education and regeneration, road, rail, defence and commercial property. From first concept to ongoing FM and support services, it provides high-quality, cost-effective and sustainable solutions tailored to the needs of its customers.

Through its JVs in Dubai, Oman and Abu Dhabi, Carillion is a regional leader in design, construction, FM and maintenance services, from land reclamation, industrial and infrastructure projects to the creation of whole new waterfront cities, leisure facilities, retail parks and marinas.

In last year's Construction Week



Stuart Mee and Arthika Saseendranath.

Awards, Al Futtaim Carillion won the Corporate Social Responsibility Award. Accepting the award on behalf of the company, Stuart Mee said: "It is a great achievement, which I largely dedicate to our sustainability team. CSR is an aspect of the construction industry that I think is continually growing. A lot has

been done in this arena, and obviously there is a lot more that can be done.

"We have got quite a robust strategy going forward. This is an important part of Al Futtaim Carillion in terms of not only the work we do in the Middle East, but our international presence as well, which includes the UK and Canada," commented Mee.

Al Futtaim Carillion provides a broad range of business in building, construction, civil engineering, sewerage works and concrete repairs, transport and construction services, to a range of clients in the commercial and public sector throughout the UAE.

The judges said: "Nominations for this award had to demonstrate that an organisation went beyond lip service, and truly had either its employees' welfare or the community at heart."

Al Futtaim Carillion was declared the "clear winner" and commended for addressing "every aspect of life and work for employees."

JCB

JCB has been active in the Middle East for over 40 years. Its network has grown substantially, with many of its dealers, like JCB itself, still family-owned. "JCB now boasts the best network in our industry bar none," says Middle East regional manager Paul Murray.

"Our network currently supports over 20,000 JCB machines across the Middle East. The market is one of the fastest-growing in the world. The size and scale of projects in the Middle East dwarf projects in other parts," says Murray.

Last year saw a welcome return to growth for JCB, with an increase in our worldwide sales of almost 50%, which is a tremendous achievement in a very competitive market, adds Murray.

"One thing that sets us apart as a privately-owned, family company is that we take a long-term view and can make decisions quickly. Investments are being made in products and coverage," he explains.

JCB continues to invest millions in new innovative products that save its customers money, while JCB also has the



JCB has been active in the key Middle East market for over 40 years.

best coverage in all Middle East. "This will be strengthened with over \$20m being invested in new facilities," reveals Murray.

JCB has a range of over 300 machines, which are deployed in industry segments including agriculture, construction, government and defence, industrial, power generation, rail, rental, roads and bridges, waste and recycling.

"We are focused to continue to develop machines which deliver

customer needs in their application. Customer service is the key element of our relationship with our customers. Our machines work in some of the most demanding environments on this planet. Our customers depend on JCB machines to work for tens of thousands of hours." Evidence of this commitment is the JCB Dubai parts Centre, which stocks over 15,000 lines of parts. For further information, visit www.jcb.com.



Dutco Balfour Beatty LLC

Dutco Balfour Beatty LLC is a major participant in the Middle East construction industry. It is one of the largest civil engineering, building and marine contractors in the UAE, and also offers clients the focus and expertise of specialist scaffolding, formwork, interiors and plant.

DBB LLC was originally established in 1976 when Dubai Transport Company (Dutco) and UK-based Balfour Beatty joined forces to undertake the \$4bn mega-project that was the construction of Mina Jebel Ali for the Dubai government.

Upon completion of the project, DBB LLC then engaged in major civil works projects, which included the Arrivals Terminal at Dubai International Airport, 'G' station power and water desalination facility and, more recently, the construction of the Dubai Mall, the largest shopping mall in the world.



A view of Jebel Ali Port in Dubai.

In addition, DBB has been involved in many major infrastructure projects, including Sheikh Zayed Road Interchanges 3, 4 and 5, as well as the Business Bay development, the Dubai Airwing Facilities at Dubai International Airport, the Marina Bridge package and the development of Qaffay Island, as well as major building projects such as Marina Heights, the Sheikh Hamdan

Awards Building, the Emirates Airlines Training Centre and the IBIS and Holiday Inn Express hotels on Sheikh Zayed Road.

DBB maintains a high degree of health and safety awareness with a 'zero tolerance' target.

In 2010 it won two major awards at Construction Week's annual awards ceremony, including the prestigious Contractor of the Year prize.

RMD Kwikform

RMD Kwikform established its office in the UAE in 1978, and has been servicing the Middle East region for over 30 years. Since these beginnings, it has expanded its operational base to service Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia. It also operates export activities throughout the GCC, India, North Africa and Levant regions.

"With our global head office located in the UK, we have operations in 17 countries, with export activities in significantly more. RMD Kwikform Middle

East is an 'investor in people' employer, and was one of the first companies in the U.A.E to achieve this accreditation," says RMD Kwikform Middle East MD Paul Williams.

The Middle East market, reaching into Africa and Asia, is a key market in global construction, says Williams. "There is a focus on providing both fundamental infrastructures, as well improving living standards. There is a focus on improving quality and ensuring safety standards

are met. The Middle East is taking a lead role in new construction techniques, and there are exciting challenges happening in structure and building design. We are seeing an emphasis on bigger, taller buildings and more intricate aesthetics. All of these challenges make it an exciting industry to be involved in over the next few years."

In terms of opportunity, Saudi Arabia is significantly important to as it represents enormous potential, says Williams. "We have now established an operational network to cover Saudi, and are excited about both the medium- and long-term opportunities this region holds. Regarding Qatar, the long-term outlook is positive mainly on the back of the 2022 World Cup requirements.

"We have enjoyed great success in North Africa over the past few years, and are currently looking to establish an operational presence in these markets to capitalise on the forward opportunity. In the near future, we are also looking to establish ourselves more firmly in India," says Williams.



The Yas Hotel under construction in Abu Dhabi.