

Rosie Olley

Age 21

Debt £10,000

Degree First in building surveying from Reading university

Ideal first job "I want to do my APC for building surveyors at a project management or building surveying firm and then specialise in refurbishment and development of old buildings, which I find a really creative area of the industry."

Job-seeking strategy Relentless internet research, cold-calling local surveying firms, tapping up all contacts and doing unpaid work.

Message to the industry "I hope someone who has a graduate opportunity will read this and get in contact!"

Plan B "I'll go travelling if nothing comes up. If it's like this when I come back, I'll have to look outside construction."

© The irony is that the figures show the success the industry has had in attracting young people – from 22,620 graduates in these degrees in 2007, the number has risen to an estimated 36,000 this year. A couple of years ago, those graduates would have walked into jobs, many of them collecting golden hellos on the way. Now, however, of the 604 built environment graduates that Building questioned, 61% of them did not have permanent, salaried employment and 24% expected to be claiming unemployment benefit in September.

Michael Brown, the deputy chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Building, is well aware of the problem. He says a survey by his organisation found that "only 1% of respondents said their companies were recruiting the same levels as before the recession. Five per cent of respondents said they were already making graduates redundant and more than 60% had slowed or ceased recruitment".

61%

Surveyed graduates without permanent, salaried employment

WHEN I STARTED THE DEGREE, THE COURSE LEADER PRETTY MUCH PROMISED US A JOB. HE SAID WE'D BE SORTED

ROSIE OLLEY

The types of graduates least likely to have a job were those who studied architecture, building surveying or construction management. Graham Watts, chief executive of the Construction Industry Council, says this reflects wider industry trends. "Architects are involved at the start of the construction process, so they have been feeling the effects of the recession for longer. They also tend to do a lot of work in the sectors worst hit by

the downturn – commercial, retail and industrial. Building surveyors also work at the start of the process. Although that's not the case for construction managers, I expect graduate places for them to be down in line with the overall fall in vacancies."

So what are the unemployed graduates going to do? It seems certain the construction industry will lose many of them. About 27% are considering working outside construction. The most popular alternatives were banking and teaching.

Thirty-eight per cent of construction managers and 37% of architects said they would consider looking for work outside the construction industry, making their professions the most likely to lose talent. The professionals least likely to look outside the built environment were OSs – only 13% said they would. One quantity surveying and construction management graduate, Michael Kleios, 21, has launched his own non-construction business (see box, overleaf). He says: "I'm not the type of person who could just sit around unemployed waiting for the industry to pick up again."

The good news is that only 1.5% of the graduates surveyed said they planned to quit construction permanently. Of the two-thirds that thought they would not get a job in construction during the recession, just under half planned to study further, 32% said they would work temporarily in another industry and 26% said they would go travelling. Those most likely to seek shelter in another industry were construction management graduates (43%). In the other professions, the most popular option was to do further study: 67% of architects, 44% of OSs and 40% of

SOME OF OUR GRADUATES ARE MISSING ...

Graduate recruitment at some of the industry's biggest firms:

COMPANY	INTAKE 07	INTAKE 08	EXPECTED INTAKE 09
Aecom	226	171	50
Arup	not available	198	72
Atkins	300	330	150
Balfour Beatty	185	185	150
Bovis Lend Lease	not available	34	21
Building Design Partnership	59	49	35
Carillion	76	105	105+
Drivers Jonas	34	28	6
EC Harris	81	84	39
Faithful + Gould	27	17	0
Foster + Partners	534	306	not available
Galliford Try	16	12	12
Gleeds	40	40	0
Greentrij	35	33	3
Hyder Consulting	107	96	68
James Lang LaSalle	34	28	10
Keller	1	3	1
Kier	85	109	47
King Sturge	50	36	10
Morgan Ashurst	14	13	24
Mouchel	60	120	70
PRF	5	3	2 to 5
Rider Levett Bucknall	9	9	14
Scott Wilson	80-100	80-100	30
Skanska	27	28	29
Sir Robert McAlpine	9	17	11
WSP Group	120	200	200
Approximate total	2,214	2,234	1,159

27%

Unemployed graduates considering working outside construction

building surveyors said they would do this.

Olley is among those thinking of a round-the-world trip. She says: "I'd really prefer to get a job in the industry – I'm dying to get stuck in – but if it doesn't happen soon I'll go travelling."

When it came to debt, half of those surveyed owe more than £10,000 and 16.5% owe more than £20,000. Unsurprisingly, architectural graduates, who tend to study for longer, were the most in debt: 28% were in the £20,000-plus bracket.

Despite all this, only 7% of our graduates said they regretted choosing a construction-related degree. Anil Joshi, for example, a 21-year-old building surveying graduate (see box, page 35), says: "Times are tough in the construction industry right now, but I have

wanted to work in construction since I was a kid and that won't change."

Those that did regret their choice tended to be in the professions worst affected by the recession so far: 12% of architects wished they had studied something else, as did 9% of surveyors.

What can be done?

The recession of the late eighties and early nineties cut the industry's numbers by about half a million people, including graduates. Sir Michael Latham, chairman of ConstructionSkills, says the industry lived with the consequences of that for about 15 years. Indeed, there is still a dearth of people in their 30s and 40s. Latham says we could face the same gap at middle management level 10 years from now.

In the shorter term, Latham says: "If graduates are not taken on now, when the upturn comes in a year or two, firms will be short of trained staff and therefore less competitive." This gap can be filled, as it was in the past, by drafting in recruits from countries such as Australia and Malaysia. But Latham points out that people with homegrown skills "have been trained specifically in British laws and conditions".

Watts adds that the other problem is that a skills shortage causes inflation. "Salaries will go up as competition to recruit people intensifies. Therefore the cost of the job goes up and you end up with a constant, cyclical problem."

Some employers are still taking on graduates, although few are signing up the same volume as in previous years. Mace, for example, took on nine recruits this year, rather than the 38 it brought in last year, and has dropped its £1,000 joining bonus. Trina Sollis, the company's head of learning and development, says not hiring now would mean "having to go out to the marketplace" later, and Mace wants to put people through its three-year graduate training programme so they are well versed in how the firm does things.

Sollis is not convinced by the argument that firms can't take on graduates at the same time as they are laying off staff (last year Mace made over 75 redundancies internationally). "We have to bring new talent into the industry," she says. "And we must protect our industry from other sectors that are trying to recruit – some sectors are hiring more than usual because they know graduates have fewer options. Also, graduates are not paid as much as many of those being made redundant."

Latham says firms should also consider whether they could take on graduates to send overseas. "Young people tend to ©