



career. Failing to find a job left me disillusioned with the industry but now I'm excited about it and feeling increasingly confident about my ability to work as a QS."

Stafford's experience will resonate with those concerned that swaths of the talented graduates we tried so hard to attract a few years ago are feeling jilted. The fear is that those that don't find jobs quickly will drift off into other industries permanently. This could result in a repeat of the skills shortage we were grappling with before the recession and a gap at middle management level 10 years from now. Stafford's story suggests that by giving unemployed graduates internships, we may be able to keep them committed to construction, and avoid a skills deficit in the future. Internships are easier to put into place than you might think. They needn't cost the employer much and can bring immediate benefits to the business. The government has even set up a website where you can advertise internships for free.

Why, then, are so few firms taking them on? And what are they missing out on? Here we explain why Building is backing a campaign to get interns into the industry.

Why internships?

The problem of unemployed construction graduates is widely acknowledged. About 36,000 people graduated in construction-related subjects in 2009. But when Building surveyed a sample of 600 in September, we found that 60% were unemployed, and a third were already considering working outside the industry. Evidently we don't need more employees

right now, but the industry is predicted to grow by 3% a year between 2011 and 2013. To keep pace with that, we need to recruit 37,000 new entrants a year between 2009 and 2013, according to ConstructionSkills. This includes 3,770 "professional and technical" roles a year.

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CANDICE HOMEWOOD, LEFT

So how much of a difference could internships make in the battle to keep talented graduates? Stephen Gee, managing partner in John Rowan, has made an interesting calculation. He reckons that if every firm in the industry made up just 2% of their workforce from interns in 2010, this would be enough to give each currently unemployed graduate at least one placement. He says: "Given that the 'professional and technical' element of the industry accounts for about 300,000 jobs - excluding senior executives and construction managers - then that 2% will

WHAT COMMITTING TO THE PLEDGE MEANS

- Providing the equivalent of 2% a year of technical/professional headcount in graduate internships
- Keeping internships open for a minimum of four months, with the option to extend
- Covering expenses and supporting access to state benefits or paying a minimum wage
- Posting internships on the Graduate Talent Pool website



THE PLEDGE
Securing future talent in Construction

maintain skills slightly above the forecasted level, allowing for some losses along the way."

What's in it for us?

Leaving aside the need to do your bit for the industry as a whole, interns can bring benefits closer to home, too. Jonathan Brookes, corporate social responsibility manager at Lakehouse, an Essex-based contractor with 274 staff, has had several interns since the recession started. He says: "We've just taken on three sustainability interns and so far we are extremely impressed. We're just paying their expenses at the moment but we'll review that and hopefully offer at least one of them a full-time paid job."

Naturally, Brookes is not motivated

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MATT STAFFORD, RIGHT

least, work experience that could help them get a permanent job and, at best, a full-time job with their placement provider. Candice Homewood, who has just completed a masters degree in environmental engineering at University College London, is one of Brookes' current interns. She sees internship as "win-win for employer and graduate. They get to test us out, at no cost, and we use the internship as a springboard for our career."

She adds that although her qualifications would allow her to work in the energy industry, her internship means she's set her sights on building. "I'm learning so much about construction now that I'd like

to stick with the sector."

How do internships work?

Internships are paid or unpaid stints of work experience that typically last between two weeks and nine months. They tend to be for people who have skills already, but the placement also involves an element of training. There is no obligation to consider an intern for a full-time role after the placement finishes.

Both John Rowan and Lakehouse advertised for interns using a government website launched in August 2009 (graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk). It is free, and under the scheme employers can choose whether to pay interns a salary or only expenses. Interns are also able to continue to claim jobseekers' allowance for up to 13 weeks while on an



unpaid placement secured through the website.

Graduates from 2008 and 2009 are eligible to use the site, where they can search for vacancies without registering.

At the time of writing the website was advertising 5,829 vacancies, including 3,477 paid positions.

Surprisingly, perhaps, only five construction industry companies are using the service. There seems to be several reasons for this. One could be that larger firms already have links to universities and offer internships to undergraduates midway through their courses. Another is that the graduate talent pool doesn't appear to have been marketed strongly to the industry. A straw poll of HR managers at 10 medium-sized firms revealed that only one had heard of the site.

A more troubling issue is that many HR heads are uncertain what an internship actually is. Gee says: "There's no intern culture in our industry. I sat on a panel at Building's Good Employers' conference a

Internally grateful

Our jilted generation of graduates can be trained, retained and ultimately employed - if firms woke up to the advantages of internship. **Roxane McMeeken** met two interns and explained why Building is backing The Pledge to recruit more. Photography by **Eoghan Hanrahan**

entirely by altruism: he has found that interns are a perfect way to cope with a spike in workload. What's more, "if you do decide you need to make the post full time, then you have effectively been able to interview someone for several months." Employers also avoid spending on recruitment agents' fees - which can be up to 15% of a new starter's annual salary. Meanwhile, the graduate gains, at the very