

Better jobs, bad bosses and biscuit tins

The hopes and bugbears of construction professionals



After years of stagnation, construction appears to be in the grip of job-hunting fever. As the recovery gathers pace, better job prospects are motivating industry professionals to scour the classifieds, with 42% looking to move before August. This is one of the key findings of the first Building/Hays Montrose careers survey, which questioned readers about their attitudes to life at work. Its findings are presented here. Those firms frantically trying to poach staff, take note: a company pension and company car are still the most coveted perks. And those looking to hang on to their staff should hone their management skills – bad bosses are employees' biggest irritation at work. Forget biscuit tins and birthday cakes for lifting the spirits – except in architectural offices – what would make Building readers most happy is sloping off early on Friday.

Do you intend to start looking for a new job?

%	All respondents	Architect	Consulting engineer	QS	Main contractor	Subcontractor	Other
In the next three months	42	38	47	41	40	14	48
In the next six months	11	13	13	13	9	21	9
In 6-12 months	16	17	20	15	11	14	19
No plans to seek a new job	30	33	20	30	40	43	23
Don't know/no answer	1	0	0	2	0	7	1

The survey shows an industry on the move, with 42% of people planning to hunt for a new job in the next three months, and a further 11% in the next six months. Consulting engineers are the most restless and so, too, are readers in the £20 000-24 000 salary bracket.

If you are considering a new job, what are your salary expectations?

%	All respondents	Architect	Consulting engineer	QS	Main contractor	Subcontractor	Other
Match current salary only – more interested in a good career move	29	46	7	25	33	50	25
Increase of 3-5%	6	4	0	5	5	0	8
Increase of 5-10%	17	17	13	13	23	7	18
Increase of 10-15%	15	13	27	16	21	7	11
Increase of 15-20%	14	8	13	21	9	14	14
Increase of more than 20%	10	4	33	10	4	14	11
Don't know/no answer	10	8	7	10	5	7	13

Better career prospects rather than more money is the biggest motivation for seeking a new job. Nearly one-third of readers said they would move for their current salary. Half of subcontractors, almost half of architects and one-third of main contractors would move for the same salary.

Which ways of finding a new job do you expect to use?

%	All respondents	Architect	Consulting engineer	QS	Main contractor	Subcontractor	Other
Friends/contacts/word of mouth	42	42	33	49	53	64	31
Newspaper advertisements	64	63	67	62	60	43	68
Recruitment consultancies	45	50	60	38	54	50	42
Speculative approaches to companies	22	17	47	25	26	29	15
Don't know/no answer	10	8	7	10	5	7	14

Scouring classified adverts is how most readers expect to find a new position. Subcontractors are most likely to use word of mouth to find a new job.

The respondents

A total of 281 readers responded to the questionnaire published in Building's Careers supplement (March 1997) and in Building (27 March, page 29). Of these, 24 were architects; 15, consulting engineers; 61, quantity surveyors; 57, main contractors; 14, subcontractors; and 110 readers were from other sectors, including clients and building surveyors. About 45% had been in their current jobs for four years or more; 13% had been in their jobs for less than 12 months.

By salary, respondents broke down as follows: 10% earned £12 000-15 000; 18%, £16 000-19 000; 24%, £20 000-24 000; 22%, £25 000-29 000; 17%, £30 000-39 000; and 6%, £40 000 plus.

If offered two similar positions, what factors would influence your decision?

Forget niceties such as staff canteens and gyms. Pension plans and company cars are still the perks to woo staff (chart, right). More than 90% of main contractors and 100% of subcontractors said they would plump for the job with a pension. Private healthcare was also given a higher priority by subcontractors.

Company pension 88%

Company car 81%

Private healthcare 64%

Gym 24%

Staff canteen 12%

Have you been approached about moving job?

As expected in the industry's current frenetic job market, poaching is rife, and 40% of respondents have been approached by rivals or headhunters in the past six months. Almost two-thirds of those who had been approached said they had followed it up.

What would improve your job satisfaction?

Treats like staff biscuit tins, not surprisingly, perhaps, are unlikely to improve job satisfaction (chart, right), although one-quarter of all architects said a birthday cake would cheer them up at work.

Although a casual-dress day would be appreciated by 27% of all respondents, being allowed to turn up in jeans and T-shirt went down particularly well with consulting engineers. Leaving early on Fridays is a universal winner, and shower facilities are popular with half of respondents – although a higher proportion of consulting engineers and subcontractors would like them. As a sign of the times, providing a smoking room would improve job satisfaction for only 10% of respondents.

Early departure on Fridays 76%

Shower facilities 56%

Fan in summer 50%

Drinks dispenser 49%

Christmas shopping day 45%

Casual dress day 27%

Birthday cake 12%

Staff biscuit tin 12%

Smoking room 10%

How many hours do you work in an average week?

%	All respondents	Architect	Consulting engineer	QS	Main contractor	Subcontractor	Other
30 hours or less	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
31-35 hours	2	4	0	3	0	0	3
36-40 hours	32	50	20	41	19	14	33
41-45 hours	24	33	27	30	11	7	27
46-50 hours	22	4	27	15	32	43	21
51-55 hours	19	8	27	11	37	36	15
More than 55 hours	1	0	0	0	2	0	1
Don't know/no answer							

The working week in construction, although not as arduous as, say, a doctor's, can still be a long haul. More than half of respondents work between 36 and 45 hours, with 41% working 46 hours or above. A similar figure, 42% of respondents, think their hours are too long. Architects are less concerned about working late, with two-thirds of saying they are happy with the length of the working week. However, 65% of respondents think their career would suffer if they left on time every day – particularly among subcontractors, where the figure was 86%.

What annoys you most about your working life?

Poor management and lack of recognition are the things most likely to irritate staff, according to the survey (chart, right). In a male-dominated industry, more than half of female respondents are annoyed by sexism. Colleagues smoking is another significant aggravation, particularly when they smoke in the office. On the other hand, lack of smoking facilities is a source of irritation for one-third of subcontractors.

Ineffective management 89%

Lack of recognition 85%

Heavy-handed management 63%

Office environment 49%

Boss 48%

Colleagues 45%

Pressure to perform 44%

Colleagues smoking 40%

Sexism 20%

Lack of smoking facilities 9%

Have you received training in the past 12 months?

On average, nearly two-thirds of readers have received some form of training in the past 12 months. The percentage was highest among architects (75%) and subcontractors (93%).

Winners

Magnums of champagne for the first five responses opened the way to readers in Warrington, Cheshire; Manchester; Darlington, County Durham; Crawley, Sussex; and London. Names have been withheld to retain anonymity.