

Controlling the future

14 August 2015

Mark Scott describes an innovative apprenticeship scheme that could provide the answer to building control skill shortages

With the need for more housebuilding high on the agenda in the UK and the construction sector lobbying for further investment, recent press reports of a potential 'skills time bomb' in the sector make gloomy reading.

The [Confederation of British Industry's](#) 2014 [Housing Britain: building new homes for growth](#) report indicated skills as a priority area for action. At the same time, the [Home building skills - an action plan to 2020](#) from the [National House Building Council](#), the [Construction Industry Training Board \(CITB\)](#), [House Builders Federation](#) and [Zero Carbon Hub](#), also highlights industry concern that skills shortages now and in the future would be a constraint on growth.

For an industry centred on delivering solutions, why can't an answer be found to the issue of skills shortages?

Of course, account has to be taken of the sporadic nature, location and duration of projects. So how can companies both large and small plan for the right skills they require?

A practitioner's view

The industry's skills shortage has become exacerbated by the upturn in the construction market. I have always tried to help colleagues progress and gain experience but bright hardworking people are surprised to find that their university education does not prepare them or match employment requirements. But what surprises me is their lack of basic construction knowledge.

Surveying requires this knowledge, yet many companies appear to dismiss the need for training where considerable practical knowledge is gained on the job. Surveyors do not come with a quick fix. Experience comes with exposure to many different scenarios and mixing with experienced people. But you do not expect to have to explain what a damp proof course is and where it is applied to partly trained people.

I was recently asked: "Why do we pay someone without a degree the same as someone with one?" The answer I gave was: "We have to train you ? in time your degree and experience will combine and hopefully you will progress." The practical and basic understanding of construction seems to be forgotten: everybody expects to be a manager and not need to understand how a building is constructed.

Training is the responsibility of employers as well as universities and requires both to work together, not only for the benefit of the individual but for the organisation. I would also like to see RICS encourage people who work and study part time because I believe that their commitment is to be a

admired.

Cathal Wright is a senior building control surveyor

To add to an already complex problem, certain career paths are affected more than others. Take the current shortage of building control officers. Why does the sector struggle when it comes to attracting new talent or existing skilled individuals?

The answer lies in 2 parts.

- First, mixed levels of investment in workforce planning has led to many more leaving the sector than joining, through retirement or career progression.
- Secondly, careers advice for young people highlighting opportunities in the sector is extremely poor. This is generally down to a lack of understanding of the entry and development routes and the lacklustre way that the industry is portrayed.

As a result, talented young people aged 16 to 18 do not even consider the sector, despite the good, well-paid career opportunities available.

Sustainable solution

To reverse the trend, the Association of Consultant Approved Inspectors (ACAI) has devised a 2-part programme based on the innovative [YORfuture](#) shared apprenticeship scheme run by [Futureworks \(Yorkshire\)](#) in conjunction with the CITB.

- **Part 1** consists of a 16-18 apprenticeship programme, aimed at attracting school leavers and building on existing technical apprenticeships, funding and potential bursaries. This programme includes targeted recruitment and mentoring options along with ensuring progression routes are available, thus retaining the workforce and maximising investment. Working with Futureworks (Yorkshire) on this programme brings about the added value of the shared apprenticeship scheme.

Using this scheme alongside traditional recruitment of apprentices means that additional individuals can be recruited into the sector and shared between companies, thus helping smaller companies, allowing for fluctuating workloads and futureproofing skills needs. Roll out is taking place over the coming months with apprentices starting at college in September.

- **Part 2** consists of a graduate/career development programme, aimed at individuals aged over 18 and providing career progression of existing staff. Building on part-time degrees and linking experience to professional body requirements, it offers a pragmatic approach to retaining the current workforce while bolstering new skilled staff.

Details are still being finalised, but the programme is demonstrating a way forward to growing a sustainable workforce.

Mark Scott is Director of [Futureworks \(Yorkshire\)](#)

Further information

This article is taken from the RICS *Building Control* journal (June/July 2015)

