

# Planning and Managing the Recruitment and Retention of Construction Surveyors

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## SUMMARY

Professional Institutions in the UK have recently reported on the problems the construction industry is facing in the recruitment of professional staff. This problem is particularly acute for Quantity Surveyors.

Like all Project Management requirements, recruitment and retention of staff requires procedures which use best practice in the industry.

The process of "recruitment and retention" of staff is often a function of the Human Resources (HR) departments. Filling the staff demand histogram for a project will be critical to the follow on skills of finance, design, measurement, construction etc.

This paper looks at:-

The current demand for Quantity Surveyors in the UK, and published forecasts.

What planning is required to meet this demand and how can recruitment be encouraged?

What can the institutions do? What can companies do?

What procedures are recommended in the process of recruitment?

Once a Quantity Surveyor is recruited what can be done to develop and retain the skill within the company?

Part of the management of Risk for any Project is the management of staff. Best practice is required to recruit and retain staff in the current overheated environment.

## Comments

It is intended that this paper will provide a guide to UK best practice for one of the management skills included in the remit of Working Group 10.3 reviewing "Planning & Project Management..."

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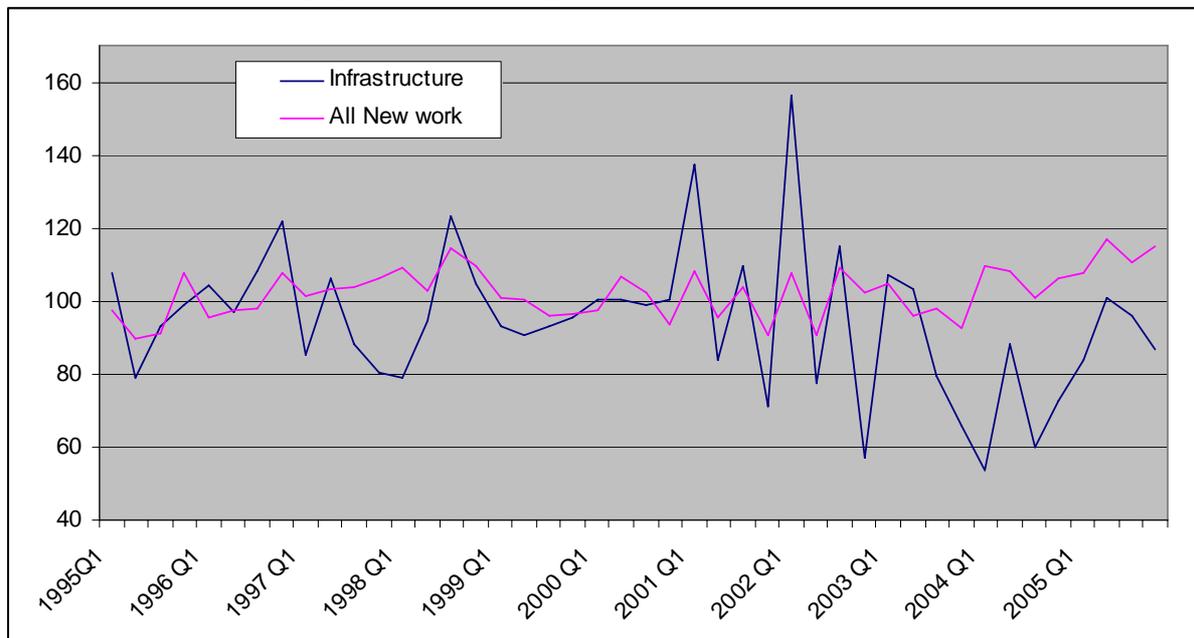
## 1. INTRODUCTION

Forecasts for the UK construction industry anticipate rising demand for infrastructure over the next few years. Output is expected to grow at 7.0 per cent per annum peaking at 10% in 2012 when the Olympics and its associated infrastructure and transportation are completed. Growth is occurring in roads, rail, airports, energy, water, sewerage and ports with demands for replacement facilities in health & schooling. Alternative sources of funding such as PFI are being used to help satisfy these developments.

This growth is increasing the requirements for resources particularly for skilled professionals. The overall aim of this report is to review the planning required to manage the recruitment and retention of commercial construction surveyors in this overheated environment thereby mitigating the risk of reduced profitability and over-run due to lack of adequate staffing. This report looks particularly at Quantity Surveyors in the UK but the principles considered apply to all recruitment and retention of staff.

## 2. FORECAST CONSTRUCTION DEMAND

One of the key problems is the erratic nature of national construction demands. This is typical of the Civil and building cycles in all European countries.



Source: Construction Market Intelligence, Department of Trade and Industry, Table 1.3

Fig 1 shows the peaks in commissioning of new work in the UK civil infrastructure sector. It also shows the smoother line associated with new work for all construction activities.

It is apparent that forward planning staff requirements is more difficult if workload is limited to specific sectors of the industry. A broader spread of workload will assist in providing continuity of employment provided staff can be moved between sectors.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION IN THE UK

#### 3.1 Demographics of Supply

During the 1980's the construction industry in the UK became overheated. This was followed by a recession in the early 1990's. This recession led to professionals and craftsmen leaving the industry a reduction in skills training, a drop in applications for construction courses and when demand slowly increased in the late 1990's a significant increase in self-employment. The unmanaged effect of this recession has led to an industry wide skills gap for professional staff who should have been recruited and trained during this period. The UK employs a particular skill described as Quantity Surveyors. This may be called Cost Engineering or Commercial Management in other parts of the world.

#### 3.2 Demand Forecast

Table 2 indicates the growth in professional staff required in the Civil Engineering sector alone.

**Table 2:** CSN Projections of Employment Demand for Civil Engineering Skills: UK Total Demand for Workers

Occupation	2007	2011	Growth*	AAR**
	(000)	(000)	(%)	(000)
Construction Professionals & Technical Staff	277.6	302.0	10.8	12.3
Plant Operatives	42.9	47.1	9.6	1.6
Plant Mechanics & Fitters	23.4	24.9	6.5	1.0
Steel Erectors/Structural	26.8	28.8	7.4	1.0
Civil Engineering Operatives nes	62.8	69.2	10.1	2.1
Construction Managers	193.3	211.1	9.3	6.3
Bricklayers	100.2	114.4	14.1	5.1
All Wood Trades	288.0	320.9	11.4	12.7

**Source:** CSN (2007) Blueprint for UK Construction Skills 2007 -2011

**Notes:** \* Growth is absolute percentage change between 2007 and 2011

\*\*AAR is Average Annual Requirement to meet new and replacement demands

This indicates a projected increase of 24,000 professional jobs in the civil engineering sector over the five year period. Taking into account the need to replace existing professionals implies an increase of some 12,000 new entrants for each year through to 2011.

Of these professionals the “Survey of UK Professionals” indicates that we can expect some 17% to be commercial staff representing an average annual increase in demand in the UK Civils sector of about 2000 new civil engineering commercial surveying entrants per year.

The recent credit crisis in the UK and the downturn in new starts for housing and offices will have an impact, but the latest survey figures available (Q1 2008) still show 30% of companies in the UK reporting difficulties in recruiting quantity surveyors.

#### **4. SUPPLY OF SURVEYORS IN UK**

The response of companies to the demand for new entrants has been:-

To increase UK graduate recruitment

Recruit from outside the UK

Make the industry more attractive to under-represented socio-demographic groups.

Raise the required work of qualified professional staff to cover the more challenging commercial aspects of construction.

##### **4.1 From Colleges**

The number of people studying towards degrees has been increasing. Changes are also taking place in the structure of supply with the creation of skill academies and apprenticeship schemes

Increased supply of graduates does not necessarily mean increased supply to industry. Significant numbers of students studying in UK are of overseas origin and will not continue to work in the UK. Graduates also choose to pursue careers’ in other industries.

Organisations must maintain and increase their share of those graduates entering the industry by improving the profile of the profession, improving the profile of the company and seeking to become involved with trainees at an early stage. Companies in UK have improved their graduate recruitment packages and widened their focus to other disciplines in non-cognate areas such as accountancy.

##### **4.2 From outside the UK**

Recruitment has taken place from Eastern Europe,, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada and most recently from the Indian sub-continent and South America. There is however a worldwide demand for the skills of quantity surveyors commercial and contract

engineers. This has limited the potential sources of migrants to the UK with many European countries reporting difficulties in recruiting commercial surveyors.

### **4.3 From other sources**

Organizations must also look to improve the supply by attracting under-represented groups such as women and ethnic minorities. UK statistics indicate that the construction sector only employs about 13% women.

Organizations must continue to build on training and development within the profession and make the best use of skilled staff with the use of less skilled staff for routine tasks and improving productivity through “working smarter”

Un-employment in the UK is at historically low levels. There is no obvious pool of un-employed who can provide professional skills although re-training from other professions remains possible.

Re-employing older workers provides opportunities for short term assistance and consultancy roles. Recruiting older workers requires a flexible approach to employment arrangements to accommodate lifestyle requirements. Increasing numbers of older staff are retiring in the UK as the post second world war bulge in the population passes 60.

## **5. RECRUITMENT**

A summary of the process and procedures involved is shown in Appendix 1. Recruitment steps described apply to recruitment of new starts from the UK but provide a framework for all recruitment.

### **5.1 Lead In Time**

The vast majority of recruits will have a degree in a related discipline, preferably from a university affiliated with one of the major industry bodies. To assist candidates gain their degree companies often sponsor students through their studies, these students also acquire work experience with the sponsor in holiday periods from University. Companies also take on candidates at trainee level just after they have completed A-Levels who then complete a degree-course whilst working.

All this means that the minimum basic lead-in time to a Commercial or Cost Management career is the three-year degree course. Subsequently staff are expected to obtain accreditation from one of the industry bodies, ICE, RICS, ICES etc. The length of time this take depends on the accreditation but generally requires a 2 to 4 year, post degree course, commitment. Staff must be fully supported through the process of obtaining their accreditation with a full suite of training materials and courses. The best companies have strong training programmes for Graduates which encourages up to 80% of students applying for Professional Competence passing first-time.

## **5.2 Structured Career**

Employees are more comfortable, and more likely to be retained if they can see a structured career path with an employer. Much effort is expended in developing staff during the training period leading to chartered professional status. Retention during the first few years following accreditation is the most problematic when training goals have been achieved. Middle management positions are currently the most difficult to recruit due to the shortage described in 3.1 above.

## **5.3 Range of benefits**

All companies have to ensure their benefit package is competitive and comprehensive. With the shortage of candidates driving the recruitment market, every company is keen to attract and retain staff by providing a strong benefit package. Candidates do get used to the level of benefits they can expect from the major companies, so most of the packages are now very similar with very little to choose between them. Benefit packages include;

26/28 days holiday

Pension – contribution by the company depending on the level of role

Healthcare cover – single cover, with family cover available at extra cost

Life Assurance

## **5.4 Spread of Recruitment**

Recruitment before or during training requires long term commitment to a development programme.

Recruitment overseas involves protracted and costly recruitment programmes and a commitment to employ for a period.

Recruitment of women and senior individuals requires, in particular, attention to the work-life balance by allowing flexible working conditions.

Recruitment by transfer between companies, a minimum of 5-7% churn rate (annual movement of staff between companies) is experienced in the industry, but this pushes up benefit packages without increasing new entrants.

## **5.5 Raising the Construction Industry profile for Children**

Companies and Professional Organisations need Graduate recruitment teams who are targeted to attract candidates at all levels from school leavers through to Graduates.

Many UK offices, particularly those with a regional bias, have a strong policy of taking on trainees. These candidates are 18 years of age and just completed A-levels (or equivalent

qualifications). They are then offered full-time employment whilst supporting a day-release course at college. This has been very successful for offices where the pool of candidates is very small locally. Companies must take responsibility for increasing awareness of the opportunities in the industry for school leavers.

## **5.6 Quality of recruits**

There are a number of selection methods that can be used to ensure recruitment of the right person for each position. With recruitment a key driver, companies have to adopt a recruitment process to support the business. The process ensures that every candidate who applies, whether through an Agency, advert response or recommendation, is captured and acted upon appropriately. This also ensures that every candidate, regardless of whether they are right at that point in time, receives the same experience of the recruitment function.

Initially a trained recruitment team, who understand the requirements for staff across the business, evaluate the applications, often obtaining greater clarity on certain aspects of their background. For suitable candidates they send details onto the relevant team for review, this ensures every candidate is put forward to the most appropriate role / office for their skills, experience and aspirations.

Candidates are also provided with a clear job description with detailed competencies. This assists them to prepare appropriately for the interview and provides clarity on the expectations / responsibilities involved in the role. It is using these competencies that allow determination of a candidate's suitability for the role at interview.

Every interviewer should be trained to ask candidates competency-based questions at interview and it is normal for a representative from HR to be present to provide an alternative perspective in the interview. Companies need to use their line managers to buy into the recruitment process and they should be trained to get the best out of candidates at interview and to truly test candidate competency. This ensures selection of the right candidates for each role and effective interpretation of the information gained at the interview.

For certain roles this selection process needs to be enhanced. Candidates are expected to undertake a group exercise (industry and role-related) and to complete a presentation on a pre-identified topic in front of a selection panel (in front of between 2-6 Managers in total). This is a more in-depth selection process which assesses group dynamics and candidate technical competence on specific job-related topics. Such selection techniques demand a greater time commitment from candidates and line managers but ensure more information is gained on which to base important appointment decisions.

A policy of talent pooling candidates so they can be identified for future roles, while they may not be suitable for any roles on offer at the immediate time their skills could be an asset in the future. This assists planning for projects and ensures candidates are put forward for the most suitable role for their skills, experience and aspirations.

Once a decision to recruit has been made and a candidate identified, companies need to plan to recruit individuals quickly. Whilst recruitment of staff remains a sellers market a quick response and quick resolution to making an offer are pre-requisite to being seen as a progressive and dynamic company. A period of 4/7 days should be the target for making an offer.

## **6. MANAGING THE NEW RECRUIT**

It is necessary to focus a great deal of time ensuring candidates understand the role they are undertaking and the company's expectations. This also provides a measure against which to identify training needs.

Once candidates are appointed they should undertake a personal development review which identifies training needs and role objectives. This is a continual process normally completed every six months and is an invitation for both employer and employee to share their thoughts on their current role and their aspirations. It is an opportunity to identify new roles or promotion prospects, thereby ensuring staff are continually offered the opportunity to undertake roles that are suited to their knowledge and experience.

### **6.1 Job Description**

Clear job descriptions are important to new recruits. Job descriptions should form part of the enquiry and be part of the information supplied to a new recruit. Providing easy access to clear information on a company is an important start to development of long-term loyalty. A list of headings of information to be available to new recruits is attached as appendix 2.

### **6.2 Induction**

To assist new recruits 'transitioning' into a company everyone should have a corporate induction for at least one day. This reaffirms the company's values and mission, and ensures that everyone understands what the company is looking to achieve.

## **7. RETENTION**

### **7.1 Retaining employees**

Many of those working in the industry have a weak attachment to their employer. Organisations have to put in place practices which will encourage retention and reduce wastage and churn.

#### **7.1.1 Workload**

The construction industry is notorious for its cyclic workload. In civil engineering, capital expenditure is too easy to alter as the Governments budget alters. In housing and construction peaks and troughs depend on the supply and demand for built up area.

Professional organisations and the industry need to encourage the highest degree of co-operation with clients to even out the workload. Partnering and framework agreements assist in longer-term resource levelling but Government must take account of the downside to cyclic funding.

### 7.1.2 Promotion

Providing a strong meritocracy environment, ensures that employees are promoted based on merit. Companies should not wait for a vacant role in the organisational structure before promoting staff; this supports a culture of recognition and encourages all staff to consistently perform at their best. With the industry's shortage of candidates, looking after staff is incredibly important, new recruits of the quality required are a scarce skill-set which must be supported.

### 7.1.3 Career Opportunities

In the current overheated environment companies have to consistently examine how they can continually attract new staff without inflating industry salaries unnecessarily. One main focus is to provide candidates with a career opportunity with specific focus on their training and education needs which are whole-heartedly supported regardless of their level in the organisation. Career development must be maintained even within flat management structures

## **7.2 Motivation**

### 7.2.1 Improved work-life balance

Arranging to provide work closer to home often improves retention.

Provide and encourage participation in sports and extra cericular activities.

Provide a community of professionals to keep abreast of latest developments and encourage participation in professional .

Professional organizations can continue to increase the number of women employed by improving the work-life balance in roles that do not require sustained on-site work.

Continuing to address the aspiration of staff by change through regular appraisals and action to address the changing needs of the individual and family. Examine the drivers which influence employees during their professional life (Career, professional status, social life, progression, security, location, financial, opportunities,) and

### 7.2.2 Training

#### Formally assess Skill Gaps

Companies need to formally assess individual's skill gaps. Only some 44 percent of employees in construction have formal needs assessment annually.

#### Formally review Performance Reviews

Companies need to formally assess performance at least annually. Only some 46 percent of employees in construction have formal performance reviews.

#### Structured Training Schemes

Training is normally divided into three areas. Technical Training, Management Training, Corporate Training,

Training schemes concentrate on the initial core technical capabilities but need to be extended to cover individual's total career period to retirement. Long term commitment to the individual will improve long term commitment to the company. Supervision and mentoring to continue

### 7.2.3 Continuing Professional Development

Companies to provide career and organizational structures which allow people to develop their careers within increasingly flat management structures.

The industry needs to be seen as more attractive to a wider range of people.

Young people need to be persuaded of the benefits of a career in construction. Institutions need to be active in promoting the profession

## **8. INDUSTRY PRIORITIES**

National KPI's for the Construction Sector indicate that Employee Satisfaction is about 50% scoring 8/10 or better. Employer organisations and Professional organisations need to continue to raise the profile of working in construction and working as a professional surveyor.

All organizations need to try and improve the uncertainties attached to workloads over the long-term by lobbying clients for level workloads. Levelling internal demand may be achieved by working in a number of sectors and encouraging flexible movement between sectors.

Professional organisations need to work harder with schools and colleges to raise awareness of career opportunities in the profession

Succession planning will be crucial as the skill gap increases as retirement takes a greater effect. Companies need to take more involvement at an earlier stage of study periods. Greater use needs to be made of technician and non- cognate graduates.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

In an over-heated environment, management of all resources requires particular care. At present this is particularly true of the recruitment and retention of Quantity Surveyors in the United Kingdom

Recruitment and retention will be improved if best practice is understood and used. Lessons learnt during times of high demand should be used at all times. Lessons learnt when examining recruitment and retention of UK Quantity Surveying can be applied to all Surveyors in all countries

Employers and Professional organisations need to continue to raise the profile of the profession and encourage a steady workload for the industry

Development of career path and training must be continued throughout the career and not end when professional competence has been achieved. The needs and drivers for employees have to be taken into account throughout their career.

Employers need to look at the tasks required of their professionally qualified quantity surveyors and those tasks which may be undertaken by staff with complimentary skills.

## Appendix 1

### Recruitment

Step	Description	Comments
	Profile	Raise profile of Industry, profession & company.
1	Programme	Programme forward works as far as possible. Continually review demand.
2	Organisation Chart	Determine organisation to suit forecast workload and populate organisation chart.
3	Identify staff demand	Determine staff requirements to suit workload and organisational structure.
4	Job Description	Prepare job descriptions of positions to be filled.
5	Requisition	Order recruitment through requisition.
6	Advertise	Advertise position internally, externally, & through 3 <sup>rd</sup> parties.
7	Review expressions of interest	Receive CV's applications & responses.
8	Interview	Preliminary interview, technical interview.
9	References	Take up references
10	Offer	Letter of offer
11	Acceptance	Written acceptance
12	Start	New employee starts
13	Process Payroll, tax, etc	Complete all admissions paperwork
14	Induction	Introduce employee to company

### Retention

Step	Description	Comments
1	Training	Provide training programme at each stage of development and match to appraisals & reviews
2	Remuneration	Regular reviews of the market place, Regular assessment & reviews of the individual
3	Life Style	Provide opportunities for improved life style
4	Mobility	Recognise the mobility requirements of the individual and the changes that occur with changes in family circumstances.
5	Promotion	Provide career opportunities and promotion

## Appendix 2

### Information to be available to new recruits (Contract of Employment details)

	Description	Comments
1*	Position	Describing Role
2	Job Title	If not included in enquiry package
3*	Reporting To	Senior Line Manager
4*	Initial Location	Initial place of work
5*	Starting date	Date employment commences/continuous.
6	Induction Agenda	Agenda for induction to the company
7	Corporate style guide	Format, colour etc [letters, business cards]
8	IT Rules	Use of IT within the company
9	Data Protection Policy	Compliance with data protection act
10	Emergency Evacuation	Relating to place of work
11*	Standard Working Week	Core Working hours, start and finish times.
12	Overtime	Payment (if any) for overtime and travel.
13	Holidays	Holiday entitlement, calculation, year.
14	Public Holidays	Payment for Public Holidays
15	Salary package	Salary details and how paid
16	Bonus	Details of scheme/share investment etc
17	Pension & Life Assurance	Details of scheme
18	Healthcare	Provision of Private Medical Cover
19	Sickness	Policy if unable to attend work
20	Authorised Absences	Guidance Notes
21	Maternity Leave	Policy
22	Paternity Leave	Policy
23	Development Programme	Details of development expected
24	Training Programme	Details of training available/planned
25	Car/Car allowances	Car grade, tax, car scheme or allowance.
26	Allowable expenses	Guidance on expenses policy
27	Probationary Periods	Normally 3 months on first appointment.
28	Loans	Policy
29	Disciplinary	Policy
30	Grievance	Procedures
31*	Any special conditions	Additional terms & conditions
32*	Details of employer	Company name and registered address
33*	Terms of employment	Temporary, permanent etc
34	Security Policy	Right to search, screening for drugs etc
35	Notice of termination	Minimum periods of notice
36	Confidentiality	Data Protection Act
37	Health & Safety	
38	Company Capability Profile	
39	Childcare vouchers	In support of childcare arrangements

Notes: - \* normally part of letter of offer

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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