



# 'WE WERE PROMISED JOBS'

But these three, like so many other construction graduates, have not found them in the industry. Building's first annual survey of university leavers reveals just how grim things are. By **Roxane McMeeken**. Portraits by **Tim Foster**

**R**osie Olley is "spending all day, every day, trying to get a job". It's not going particularly well. "I check employers' and recruitment websites, I've been emailing potential employers direct and using all the family and industry contacts I can think of," she says, "and it's all leading nowhere." The only interview she's had was through a recruitment agent, "but the firm changed its mind and said it might have a vacancy in January. It's soul destroying".

Olley, 21 (and centre in picture opposite), has just obtained a first-class degree in building surveying from Reading, after which she joined the ranks of the nation's unemployed graduates. The government's Higher Education Careers Services Unit estimates that between 35,000 and 40,000 of the 350,000 people who left university this year will fail to find a job within six months of graduating. Like many others, Olley has

had to move back in with her parents – "which feels like a step backwards" – and she is worrying about how to pay off the £10,000 debt that studying has left her with.

This is not what she planned: "When I started the degree, the course leader pretty much promised us a job. He said we'd be sorted – particularly because we would have a qualification from Reading, which is known for surveying. Since then he has apologised to us."

When she started studying three years ago, construction firms were desperate to hire any graduates, let alone those with first-class degrees, and people like Olley had their pick of jobs. Since then swaths of people have been laid off – there have been 170,000 redundancies in the industry in the year to August, according to the Office for National Statistics – which has made it difficult for firms to make a case for hiring

graduates. As we'll see below, some of the industry's biggest employers have cut their graduate programmes and others, like Gleeds, have suspended them. It is easy to understand why the young people that the industry made such an effort to attract to built environment degrees feel betrayed.

Building surveyed 604 graduates from construction-related degrees to find out how many are giving up on the industry and which professions are the worst hit. Here we assess the extent of the damage and whether anything can be done to stop a generation of skilled young people slipping through our fingers.

### Surveying the damage

Building asked the Higher Education Statistics Agency to track the number of people studying for architecture, building, planning and civil engineering degrees. ©

### Anil Joshi

Age 21

Debt £10,000

Degree 2:1 in building surveying from Westminster university

**Ideal first job** A place on a graduate scheme with a large consultant or contractor

**Job-seeking strategy** "I started looking for a job while I was still at university and have only had one interview in six months – it was with Southwark council and I was unsuccessful. I've been applying for jobs in the UK, UAE and US and cold-calling employers and recruitment agencies. I haven't had many responses, though. I also applied to work unpaid on the Olympics three months ago and haven't had a response."

**Message to the industry** "At least give us unpaid work experience – giving a desk to a graduate doesn't cost much. You attracted us to your industry, we worked hard at university and now we deserve a chance."

**Plan B** "My uncle works for Hewlett-Packard and he's offered me a job. I said no, as my heart's in construction. The job's there if I get desperate, though."

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ANIL JOSHI

