**Class of 2014: Three months on**

In September Building introduced its Class of 2014 – fourteen bright young recruits in their first jobs in the industry – to try to get a handle on the attractions and difficulties facing those considering a career in construction.

Our group – seven women, seven men – includes four architects, four surveyors, two engineers, two contractors and two housebuilders, representing the breadth of intake of professional talent entering construction at a time when the availability of new recruits is the central issue facing construction leaders.

In our initial feature in September the recruits spoke of their hopes of working in a dynamic, hi-tech industry where they could feel the pride of leaving a positive mark on the communities in which they were to work. However, a number also spoke of their fears over entering a sector subject to severe cyclical highs and lows, which has not had a reputation for employing those outside of the white, male stereotype.

Now, we catch up with the self same recruits three months on, to see how the experience of actually working in the sector has – so far – matched up to their expectations. On the whole they’ve been pleasantly surprised, with few registering disappointments. However, a number have been somewhat bewildered at the sheer complexity of the modern construction industry.

**Name:** Abigail Watts-Cherry

Part 2 architectural assistant,Hawkins Brown

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

It hasn’t massively changed yet!

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

The sheer quantity of people who are involved in the construction of a building and how small the architect’s role and power is amongst all the other players involved.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

Working in a large and diverse practice there are definitely perks- I’m really enjoying the variety of scales, project sectors and design stages that I’ve been able to work in.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

Understanding project specific systems and new software quickly, whilst turning around drawings to tight deadlines.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

There’s far more to it than drawing and designing buildings. Equally you need good management, technical and people skills.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

No

**Name:** Jack Carroll

Graduate structural engineer**,** Atkins

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

Having done a year in industry as part of my degree I already had a reasonable insight into the industry so my perception hasn’t changed much since I started as a graduate.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

What has surprised me is how varied the work can be. Even in a design team that deals with similar types of projects I have got involved in a huge range of design tasks with very little work being repetitive.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

The most enjoyable part has been getting the chance to get out on site and see first-hand how the design work I have been doing fits into the wider scheme. It is very easy to get bogged down in the detail and forget the overall reason why it is being done which can influence the route the design takes.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

Due to the varied nature of the tasks I have undertaken I have spent a large amount of time grappling with design codes, which never seem to be particularly user friendly and are only briefly touched on at University level. Also, as a recent graduate there are often occasions where I’ve had to work independently when senior engineers are unavailable, this can be challenging but also rewarding when you overcome any issues.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

I’d like to believe I had a reasonable grasp of what to expect so there isn’t really anything I wish I had been told apart from the pass rate for the IStructE chartered member exam but I have a lot to learn before that anyway!

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

The main thing that has disappointed me is the continual misuse of the title “Engineer”, even within large engineering consultancies. The industry as a whole needs to tackle this and more effectively communicate to the wider public exactly what engineers actually do. A greater respect for the profession can only help bring more people into the industry and could even allow firms to increase fees if clients understand the complexity of the challenges that engineers overcome and the value that they add to a project.

**Name:** Emma-Kate Ryan

Graduate quantity surveyor in the QS Infrastructure Team, Faithful+Gould

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

I’m currently working with a client, and so my perception of the industry has been informed by this. It’s interesting to see how a client organisation operates, and how their considerations impact the requests they make of consultants.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

Having made the move from contracting to consultancy, my expectations of my current role were very different to what I thought I would be doing, based on my previous experience.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

All the people I have met, both at work, and in client organisations. Working with highly talented estimators and quantity surveyors at Faithful+Gould has been very enjoyable also.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

Working with such talented individuals can be challenging, as I am continually learning and taking on new tasks.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

I feel like I’ve been very lucky to be put in the team I have been, and to work in infrastructure at a time of such huge investment in the sector. If I knew this before I started, I would have made sure I asked to be in the infrastructure team at Faithful+Gould, not simply leave it to chance!

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

No, there really hasn’t.

**Name:** Fergus Ellis

Development assistant**,** Barratt London

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

There is a huge focus on innovation, which I didn’t expect when I joined. Many aspects of the industry are far more complex than I’d anticipated, and I now better appreciate the challenges we face as an industry and a company.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

The diversity of work and how I am learning something new nearly every day.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

Working on a scheme from the very beginning – Learning how to design a concept and seeing it develop and mould into a tangible product that’s part of the London landscape.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

As I didn’t have any formal training or background in house building, it was tough building my industry knowledge, while simultaneously learning about business practices on such a large scale. However, the graduate programme helped me jump in with both feet and quickly pick up an understanding of what different departments do, and also find the right fit for me within the business – Land & Development.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

There’s a lot more to learn that you’d think – I felt coming into the business I’d hit the ground running, but now I realise there’s a huge amount to learn before I’ll be taking on more responsibility.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

From a digital standpoint the industry’s lagging. Today, consumers are used to having so much information at their fingertips, I don’t think we are making the most out of digital innovation – for example, when I was looking to buy a car I could select the colour and fabric of the interior at the click of a button.

**Name:** Emily McLoughlin

Mechanical engineer, Aecom

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

I think my perception is similar. Having worked in the industry for a few months I have seen the detail and innovation that goes into large-scale projects.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

Having the opportunity to work on such a big projects so early on in my career with AECOM.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

I have really enjoyed working under pressure to meet deadlines; it shows great teamwork within the company.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

Coming straight from university I think the most challenging part was picking up the influx of knowledge and skills I was exposed to in the industry within the first few months.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

Before starting I didn’t know the scale and variety of projects that I would be able to work on as a graduate and the flexibility of the company so it was welcomed news after starting with AECOM.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

No, I don’t think so.

**Name:** Bilaal Ali

Building surveying graduate scheme**,** John Rowan & Partners

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

It has changed as I have become more aware of how broad the construction industry is, in terms of the different sectors, range of roles and also the changing scale of small to large projects.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

I have been surprised by the eagerness within the work place to complete tasks. The job is very motivating which is down to the combination of a good atmosphere in the office and an excitement to be working on deadlines for live projects.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

I would have to say that, the diverse range of tasks and involvement with different projects, from being on-site taking measurements or carrying out inspections, to undertaking different work tasks within the office. It keeps you on your toes and becomes very fulfilling.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

The most challenging is exercising your time management skills in order to complete tasks efficiently, so that the involvement within a project meets the projected deadlines.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

To stick to de-caffeinated coffee in order to not displace you sleeping pattern, and to not take on too much. To take a realistic approach to the work being undertaken within a given time as the risk may outweigh the benefit.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

Not at all, I understand that it can be very demanding but it is also very rewarding.  It is a great feeling to be able to contribute within a team to complete work. There is such a steep learning curve which may seem daunting at first but use of skills from academic learning helps to assist greatly, especially with APC commitments so far.

**Name:** Jamie McGovern

Graduate quantity surveyor**,** Gleeds

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

I thought that the industry as a whole would be a lot more “mud and boots” but its turned out, that on the consultancy side at least, to be more managerial than muck!

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

Gleeds really give their staff a lot of scope to develop the job in their own way. Always within certain boundaries and supervised by more experienced colleagues but you feel empowered and this is something that I assumed would take longer to achieve..

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

The scope of the role and the teamwork.  Working with like-minded people in a developing and changing work place keeps you on your toes and makes coming to work interesting and demanding.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

Dealing with new aspects and having to pick up things quickly.  We are very busy and there is not much room for lack of concentration. This is a challenge if you have been out the night before and a big change from my life as a student.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

I come from a construction background and did work experience for a couple of summers so I kind of assumed that I would know the role of all those working on projects. However one aspect I had no idea of was the complexity of the industry.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

Not really. I went into the job with my eyes open and there have been no shocks so far.

**Name:** Emma Taylor

Working towards Part 2 architecture,Assael

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

Since joining the industry I have realised how varied the world of architecture is. Each architect brings different passions to the table, creating the diverse modern architecture we see around us.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

I have been surprised by how much I have been able to become involved with projects at Assael  and have an input, which I have enjoyed greatly.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

I find it exciting, learning about the buildings we live and work in and being part of creating them. It is great to see projects I have worked on become realised, and one day become people’s homes.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

It has been challenging to adapt what I have learnt at University to the industry. There are many different disciplines that Architects have to combine into one project, which is a step-up from projects at University.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

Projects in industry are very different to projects at University. There are more constraints to consider, so of course less creative freedom. But I have personally found the practical application of the course refreshing.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

I have been fortunate to avoid this myself, but I am disappointed at the amount of unpaid internships there are, and some of my fellow students have to do, here at Assael there are no unpaid internships  The main resource in Architecture is its staff, and they need to be valued.

**Name:** Euan Beaddie

Management trainee,Willmott Dixon

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

It hasn’t changed, as I feel the industry is still exciting and fast paced as ever.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

How busy I am!

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

I enjoy snagging the most, as I get to see plots progress from bare shells to finished flats. Handing over completed flats is a very rewarding feeling.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

The most challenging part of my job is trying to earn the respect of sub-contractors given my age, however I believe that as I progress on my trainee programme this will not be an issue.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

Not to get too disheartened when problems occur that are outside of my control

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

Nothing has disappointed me

**Name:** Sam McGuire

Assistant cost manager**,** Turner & Townsend

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

The most striking thing I've learned since going from construction student to construction professional is the huge range of roles involved in delivering a major project. It's bewildering at first, but also exciting - and my time in the industry has already given me a sense of the many opportunities that construction can offer.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

Most of my time has been spent working on a range of education projects - and I have been surprised by just how collaborative the work is. I've often found myself working alongside a senior manager with many years' experience. For a recent graduate like me, this integrated team approach is both exhilarating and helping me learn a lot.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

Turner & Townsend has been a great place to meet new people and to get involved in other activities outside work such as the YPF (Your Professional Future) group, I am currently involved in putting forward a business case for a feature on the website as part of this group. I also really enjoy the company's ‘work hard, play hard’ ethos.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

Learning to manage my time and workload effectively, and ensuring I always meet deadlines.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

That you should always have the confidence to speak up when there is anything you are unsure on. Of course you will learn more and be more efficient if you understand exactly what's required, but I've noticed that senior staff tend to respect you more if you ask questions to clarify whenever you are unsure about something.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

Not really. It is a tough and demanding job, but this was what I expected. The flipside for all the hard work is that it is also very rewarding.

**Name:** Lucrecia Mercedes Bibiloni

Architectural assistant, HLM

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

My perception of the industry hasn’t changed much since I started working at HLM. My vision is particularly optimistic; we are involved with many interesting projects, with many more to come in the following months. I wholeheartedly believe the construction industry will continue to grow during 2015.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

What surprised me the most was the organisation of the company and the dedication and passion of the members who work in it. I also love the fact that I work in a leading design practice that not only cares about the design quality, sustainability, innovation and its clients, but also focuses on developing the future of its team, supported by The HLM Academy.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

What I like about my job is that every day is different, and this makes my experience even more rewarding.

The day to day job schedule is varied and challenging, but we also work in a series of extra-curricular collaborative community programs in order to help those most in need.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

The most challenging part of my job is being able to perform the tasks according to the plan and manage time properly to meet deadlines.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

Working at HLM has met all my expectations by far. As time passes I feel more comfortable and more confident in my role as an Architectural Assistant.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

I worry that not all companies place the same level of priority on the design, care of the environment and the user when creating buildings, and this impacts on the reputation of the industry as a whole.

**Name:** Joe Eke

Trainee Quantity Surveyor, Balfour Beatty

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

My perception of the industry has changed slightly as before I began working I had a rough idea of what to expect but since I began working, I have realised there is so much more to my job role than meets the eye

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

The most surprising thing about my job was the variety of tasks I was undertaking that I wouldn’t have originally thought would be part of my role, this has been beneficial to my transition into the working environment as I have been constantly busy and productive.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

Getting to meet different people in a variety of careers and getting advice of them, whether they are in the same job role as me or a completely different one, all advice given has been very valuable.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

The most challenging part of my role has been adjusting to pressures of working in a site office and adjusting to the long hours required to complete the job in hand.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

The long hours required on site around the time of handing over the building to try and get the building finished and handed over to the client on time!

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

Currently nothing within the industry has disappointed me!

**Name:** Sophie Miller

Graduate, Redrow

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

The industry is far more complicated than I originally thought, especially within land and planning, it is a drawn out and very difficult process

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

How fast paced and intense various aspects of the job are, and being involved with large scale projects and being trusted with these projects as a trainee.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

Working on current projects with the team and getting involved in each department, I am looking forward to rotating into the next four departments in the industry having already worked in land and technical, to move onto construction, sales, commercial and customer care.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

The challenging aspect of the industry I feel would be the fast pace at which everything has to work and be completed e.g. pressure and deadlines

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

I wish I knew the legal complications of the industry and the planning side of land before starting.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

On a whole I am enjoying everything that the housing industry has to offer but I would like there to be more involvement in the design side of development.

**Name:** Marija Ambrasaite

Part 1 architectural assistant, RHWL

**How has your perception of the industry changed since you joined?**

Already, since I joined RHWL Architects in September, I have realised how complex and challenging an architect’s day-to day-role is in real life and how different it is from the academic teaching of the subject. Architects have to manage far more than just the design aspect of a project. But working in a well organised and supportive environment has had a positive impact on enabling me to juggle the many facets of the role and in understanding how varied that role is.

**What has most surprised you about your job?**

The most fascinating aspect of my role has been working so closely with the various construction industry professionals, and the collaboration in order to realise an architectural design and deliver it to the highest standard. The level of communication and drive to share ideas has inspired me to believe that everything you can imagine is potentially possible.

**What has been the most enjoyable part of your job?**

The most exciting part of my role while working at RHWL has been my involvement in Crown Plaza Hotel project at Albert Embankment in central London. By the time I joined, the project design team had already been taken it to the construction stage, so learning how the building is put together has complemented my skills developed at the university.

**What’s been the most challenging part of your job?**

The most challenging part of an architect’s role is to find the balance between social, ecological, political and economic spheres. The more you integrate them, the more sustainable your project becomes and so more acceptable to today’s standards, which encourage a holistic approach.

**If there’s one thing you know now you wish you’d be told before starting, what would that be?**

I would like to see a more direct link between university and practise as this would help graduates integrate faster into the real projects/work environment. The alignment and relationship between academia and the ‘real world’ is what the courses lack.

**Has there been anything about the industry that has disappointed you?**

No. What has been enlightening is the understanding that everything you do is not only artistic expression but much more a reasonability that has an incredible influence on the way people live/. This has expanded my thinking rather than disappointed.