

The increasing demand on the uk's construction industry

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Britain's construction activities have risen considerably over the last decade and according to industry forecasts, the next five years will see more large projects commencing and highlighting once again the need for skilled labour in the UK.

The government already has many construction plans underway which all lead to an 11% predicted increase (Olympic shortfall 18/11/07) in construction output between now and 2011. Some of the major projects that contribute to the rising demands include a surge in schools construction, increased spending on transport and projects for the London Olympics.

The government has invested in a reported $\pounds 4.7$ bn (Financial Times Limited 2007 17/11/07) to rebuild or renew every secondary school in the country. This is a massive project and dwarfs the construction of the London olympics in comparison.

ConstructionSkills is one of a series of employer-led sector skills bodies established by government to help produce enough skilled workers to meet the high demand.

ConstructionSkills says that employment in the industry will need to rise by almost a sixth to 2.8m by 2011, compared with 2.4m in 2005 and 87,600 new recruits will be needed by the industry " each year between 2007 and 2011 in order to meet demand".(ConstructionSkills 2007)

Infrastructure activity is also increasing with construction underway for the redevelopment of King's Cross and Crossrail and the expansion and refurbishment of the Birmingham New Street and Nottingham railway

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stations. Other infrastructure developments include work on the Manchester Metro Link, the M6 toll road, the M25. Also the Scottish Executive's (Financial Times Limited 2007 17/11/07) planned $\pounds 3$ bn capital investment programme in strategic road and rail projects and expansion of ports at Harwich, Felixstowe and Great Yarmouth.

Aside from all these major developments, there is still as high demand as ever for more residential housing. It is reported (UK home supply way below demand 17/11/07) that Britain is now so short of new houses that an extra 39, 000 need to be built each year just to keep up with the UK's population growth.

The huge shortage of skilled labour in the UK is undoubtedly a major factor and could undermine the success of the 2012 Olympics in London. Reports made through the Research by the sector skills councils has revealed the Olympics needs around 13, 000 construction workers and 1, 500 electricians and plumbers a year between now and 2012 (Olympic shortfall 18/11/07).

The new Heathrow terminal 5 is another project that highlights the severe skills shortage in the construction sector. The new T5 is estimated to cost $\pounds 4$ bn and is one of Europe's biggest projects at the moment. Terminal 5 will have roads and rail links built for it and will have over a hundred aircraft stands as well as the tallest control tower in the country.

All these projects are desperately in need of skilled labour and huge investments are being made by the government and big companies to provide training schemes for people to help overcome these demands.

The construction of the Heathrow terminal 5 has influenced BAA, the company that manages Heathrow to collaborate with the learning and Skills Council (LSC) to set up the Heathrow Construction Centre to train young people in carpentry, joinery and bricklaying. Many young people are now applying to the training centre with the influence of high salary opportunities being advertised for a wide range of jobs. David Boyer, a representative of LSC says " the key is finding something that they want to do and that employers will pay for... and construction fits the bill perfectly." (David Bower 2007)

CSV, the UK's largest volunteering and training charity is another organisation that has many Construction Training Centres around the country. Its main aim is to take on young people from the age of 16 and train them up in a construction field that interests them. The Training Centre on Hornsey Road is CSV Springboard Islington Trust's training facility and is helping to meet the demand from employer training needs arising as a result of the Kings Cross re-generation programme or the Olympics. The Islington training centre has three sectors in the area and alone provides learning for over 600 students (Sky-high salaries for airport construction workers 18/11/07).

The main issue with the construction industry in the UK at the moment is that activity continues to rise at a rapid pace and with all the training schemes at the minute, not enough skilled craftsman and professional workman are coming out of it to keep up with the demand. There is a reported large number of craftsmen in the UK that don't have the

qualifications that are required to work on the Olympic sites etc.

Organisations such as Summit Skills are committed to helping provide the necessary qualifications to people with the skills but who have not finished an NVQ level 3 for instance. Students doing a construction course at schools or colleges will commonly do a full NVQ which includes gaining technical certificates and national vocational qualifications. Some of the courses involve training on-site to acquire the appropriate qualifications.

The government has also addressed the issue for the need of more skilled labour by introducing new courses at schools and colleges. In 2008, a new diploma in construction and the built environment will be introduced. However many specialist diplomas and GCSE's will not be available until 2013.

The other opportunities that are given to young people to work in construction are through the apprenticeship or scholarship schemes. Such schemes are usually offered directly from companies. It's often the best route for young people who do not have the appropriate background. The apprenticeship programme was introduced to the UK in 1994 (as modern apprenticeships). Apprenticeships give the student the opportunity to study at college to receive the required qualifications and do work based on the site on a part time basis. Apprentices earn while being in education and for most young people it is a very attractive prospect. It also gives a higher rate of employment for those that do it as the companies, for the majority of the time offer the person a full time job after they have completed their apprenticeship. But in the last couple of years, the numbers of apprenticeships have reduced as the interest for them has increased. With

over 50, 000 applications for 10, 000 places (Olympic shortfall 18/11/07), the traditional apprenticeship route cannot meet growing demand. However, to help overcome this problem, there are many colleges today that are involved with big construction companies making it easier for students to find the apprenticeship that interest them.

In apprenticeships, the students are usually required to stay in education until they achieve a full NVQ before they are offered a full time job but a scholarship on the other hand requires the student to attend university either part time or full time in order to gain higher qualifications such as a degree to make them eligible for high skilled work afterwards. Scholarships are also offered usually directly from a company and offers to support the student financially by paying the tuition fees to the university and the company will often offer a the student work placement between their time at university to give them the required experience in the job.

Although there is many efforts being done to overcome the shortage of skilled labour in the UK, it is still evident that yet more needs to be done to reduce the gap between the demand for skilled labour and the amount of trained personnel coming up every year. In the next five years, there is going to be an increase in activity for the UK construction industry and it is estimated that 87, 600 new recruits (Financial Times Limited 2007 17/11/07) will be needed by the industry every year to cope with the work needed.

I believethat in order to tackle this problem for the shortage of skilled labour in the UK, more efforts must be made concentrating on the source of the

problem, the training of personal to meet the levels required by the industry. It is a fact that yet not enough programmes are being opened to help encourage young people to look for a career in construction and to educate and train them to the required levels. At the moment, the government is concentrating on opening new training centres in London because of the increasing work being made by the construction of the East London Olympic sites. However, training centres should be opened in more cities around the UK in the next few years to help train up as many people in as short time as possible to help overcome the shortage of required labour.

I think that more training programmes should be done on development sites such as the Heathrow construction centres helping to train young people. I believe that such programmes help to train and educate a person on the job and give them the required skills in a short period of time. Other steps that can be taken is to introduce more specialized construction courses at schools and colleges to help encourage young people to choose a career in the construction field. At the moment, a successful example is the Construction and Built Environment Diploma which around 4000 people take every year (Construction Digital 17/11/07)

Another step that can be taken is to encourage more construction companies to introduce more apprenticeships and scholarships to young people. This will attract more people to join the construction industry and will produce more high skilled labour to meet demands of the modern day.

If the UK construction industry remains to be in the situation it is now with a huge shortage of skilled labour then the only solution left will be to bring in even more migrant workers from east European countries, such as Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, to fill gaps on building sites. This will in effect reduce the building standards and safety on the site just so companies can give out low wages and save costs. In reality, this is very likely to happen but the government will only apply it in a worst case scenario to overcome the problem.

Although it might not be possible to finish all these huge projects in the UK without acquiring the help from migrant workers, we could however train as many people as we can so that less workers from abroad are needed, making the UK construction industry stronger and more successful.