

CIVIL ENGINEERING TRANSITION AND CAREERS ADVICE: **COMMENTS BY CAREERS ADVISERS**

Do students know what they want to do?

- Career-wise, at 17/18, generally not (which is not necessarily a bad thing). **JB**
- In my experience younger students rarely know exactly what they want. As they move towards the end of 6th form or college, more and more have specific ideas. **TP**
- Many students don't know what they want to do and this has been worsened by the fact that many do not now have the opportunity to undertake work experience, which was a great aid to guidance in that it made them more aware of their own strengths and increased their self-awareness. **LD**
- Some have their career path mapped out from an early age, but I still think there are many who, at 16, have no idea whatsoever, probably at least 30-40%. **AL**

How often do we see students who want to be civil engineers?

- I have only ever had two students who were looking at civil engineering. I have suggested it to a few students though. **TP**
- There is quite an interest in engineering from students who like Maths and Physics but very few know much about it. I get roughly one civil engineer a year out of a 200 year group and even then the level of occupational knowledge is low. **LE**
- We don't have many saying they want to go into Civil Engineering but we do have a university who come in each year to speak to students about it. **DM**
- Can't say I see many, but it often comes into the conversation when they say engineering, construction or architecture. **TT**
- Civil Engineering is popular here. Girls taking sciences and art often end up doing Civil Engineering who had initially thought of Architecture but were put off by the length of the course, cost of materials to study, or job prospects compared to engineering. **AF**
- Mechanical slightly more popular than Civil. **MW**
- I don't see many who specify civil engineering, but I might suggest it as an alternative to those who are interested in architecture. Those who do ask about it have either undertaken some work experience in it or know someone who is already working in the industry – like a member of their family. I would also suggest it to more able students who are seeking apprenticeships in the building trades and who aren't aware of the sponsorships or Inspire scholarships available. **LD**
- I have rarely seen students who want to be civil engineers - those I have seen usually have some sort of link to the profession (family etc). It's more usual to see students who "want to do engineering or design" and who express an interest while discussing all the different types of engineering with me. **BW**
- We don't see many who want to be civil engineers because they just don't know about it as a career. However, there are some really good information and advice tools created by the civil engineering sector and the engineering sector as a whole which we do use and promote. **MLK**
- I see Civil Engineers because one of my schools is a state comprehensive and extremely strong in Maths and Physics. **AG**
- I can't honestly remember one incident in the 10 years I spent working in a London FE college that I was approached by a student wanting to get into civil engineering. That is a real shame, as I'm sure many of the students would have been suited to it. It does however, appear to be the 'unsexy face of engineering' (which is saying something) and I think its image detracts from the industry's ability to attract suitable students. **HMH**
- Engineering is of interest to quite a lot of our students, but civil engineering has a lower profile in our college than, say, aeronautical or marine. **AL**
- Not many, but fairly regularly. **JB**
- I haven't met any yet, but I think it's an area that isn't as well-promoted as electrical or aeronautical. **AM**

Do they know enough to enable them to make a decision?

- Most students have little real idea of Civil Engineering or how the individual engineering disciplines differ, UNLESS they have tested it out with real work experience or gone on **Smallpiece** or **Headstart**-style programmes or university tasters. I wish more would try **Year in Industry, Headstart** or similar options. **MW**
- In general students work with a limited amount of information and awareness and with the severe cutbacks in careers guidance we as advisers have very limited opportunities to increase their awareness of different careers or to go into any detail about particular ones. Unfortunately civil engineering has not got such a high profile as let's say architecture, so very few students are aware of it or consider it unless it is suggested. **TP**
- The biggest issue is students don't really understand engineering and they certainly don't really differentiate between types of engineering; and it's often talked about in school as something for the kids who can't cope with academic qualifications to do. **MLK**
- In my experience these early WISE or Go4set engineering schemes are not actually changing people's ideas. Kids may say they like doing them, but it doesn't seem to be converting people. However, if they choose A levels in Maths and Physics, and they do **Headstart**, they feel this has been a fantastic experience, confirming their choices in most cases. **AG**
- Most individuals still don't have much idea of what engineering is generally and what civil engineering is specifically, so they often don't have enough information to make a decision. Plus, of course, they make very stereotypical decisions, based on gender, ethnicity and so on. So, for example, the majority of young Asian people who are good at sciences think first of medicine rather than STEM careers. **JC**
- Usually, yes. **JB**

Do we know enough ourselves as careers advisers? (frank, honest answers)

- After all these years, I like to think so! **JB**
- As a classicist myself, not really. **W**
- I think awareness of advisers is possibly limited, but I am speaking for myself here. This is partly due to the fact that we see so few students who are considering it, so it's not something we deal with all the time, compare to let's say medicine. I think it would be useful to have access to some good posters that can be put up around schools and colleges and I think young people are more likely to look at information for something new if they can see a link to things they already think are interesting (architecture as an example). **TP**
- To be honest I don't know too much, but I know where to get all the info I need. **DM**
- I suspect there is a lack of understanding about Civil Engineering for most careers advisers - I'm only clued up because I live with one! **MLK**
- Yes, and also my own son is applying for Civil Engineering this year (at Glasgow, Heriot Watt, Leeds, Newcastle and Sheffield). But we also know that, across the country, a lot of careers advice will lack detailed knowledge of it. **AG**
- No, I could do with finding out more. **AL**
- The ICE website is always a good place to start, so I tend to make reference to that. It shows progression routes, appropriate A levels and different ways into the profession. **TT**

What's the current state of careers guidance?

- Grim **W**
- Patchy. **JB**
- Careers guidance is obviously now lacking at school level and only those targeted will get the support. Most schools do have agencies going in, but most have had a significant decline in the number of days' provision. One of our local schools has signed up with a guidance provider for just **1 day per term**. We are looking to recruit a new admissions officer at the college and are keen to get someone with IAG experience based on the fact that most students who now apply to us haven't received any 1-1 guidance. **DM**

- The current state of career guidance is that it is "hit and miss". Lots of students do not undertake any research and do not seek guidance. And schools, who are now paying for careers services, will identify the students for interview, resulting in lots of students missing out. **LD**
- I would sum it up with "the fragmentation of careers services across the country". **LE**
- Careers guidance is going through change. I had mixed views of Connexions: whilst there was some good practice, the 'one-stop universal Personal Adviser' couldn't possibly know everything about everything and careers guidance was neglected. Having to 'buy in' a service, which up to now has been free at the point of delivery, will now go some way to raising quality and standards. **AL**
- I would say patchy at best! **JC**

Other miscellaneous revealing comments

- I do think Civil Engineering has a lot to offer but I think they need a proper 'campaign of awareness' - to careers advisers as well as students - if they want to increase knowledge and accessibility and, indeed, change perceptions. Interestingly, when I started my blog series, The Monday Interview, the very first interview I chose to use was one with a Civil Engineer. I can't remember why I consciously chose to use this interview, but I suspect it was because I viewed it as an industry with lots to offer but with a fairly negative public image. I've been doing lots of guidance work at UCL over the last few weeks and have seen lots of civil engineering students. Most of them seem to want to become investment bankers (which, knowing someone who does this, I wouldn't totally recommend). **HMH**
- I'm always looking for FREE opportunities to pick up Labour Market Information, so if they want to do a nice lunch with workshops some day, I'm in! **LE**

My fellow-advisers who are quoted above work in a wide range of settings as freelancers and/or for a diverse range of employers. They are:

AF – Director of Careers at a selective girl's 11-18 languages/engineering specialist school in Kent
AG – Freelance adviser and national leader in the field working in state 6th forms in London
AL – Manages Careers at a small 6th form college in a relatively deprived coastal area
AM – Newly-qualified adviser, freelancing with a new-start guidance provider in Berkshire
BW – Experienced adviser working in 11-16 schools for Hampshire County Council
DM – Manages Careers at a prestigious 6th form college in an affluent, leafy city
HMH – Experienced adviser, based in St Albans, now runs her own guidance company
JB – Experienced freelancer working in a consortium of London schools
JC – Experienced careers adviser now working with a STEM project in Sheffield
LD – Experienced adviser working for 2 different guidance providers in 11-16 Hampshire schools
LE – Freelance adviser working in a big North London mixed comprehensive
MLK – Very dynamic and enthusiastic adviser based at a Hampshire 6th form college
MW – Experienced adviser who manages Careers in an independent school in Warwickshire
TP – Recently-qualified Southampton-based adviser, now freelancing after job cuts
TT – Careers adviser and welfare officer in a 6th form college

They are all brilliant people and part of my own professional network – which is all the more valuable now that guidance provision is so fragmented.

Alan Bullock
 Freelance Careers Adviser
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