

Federation of Piling Specialists

1.0 Learning and Development Questionnaire Summary Initial Report.

The following is an initial summary of the findings of the recent FPS Learning and Development Survey.

The intention of the survey was to identify which roles are currently employed by member companies and how those roles are viewed in terms of their,

- Impact on Quality and Safety
- Training provided
- Difficulty in recruitment
- Likely change due to future digital or other technologies

The intention is to identify training shortages and skills-gaps which the FPS can potentially assist with via the apprenticeship scheme and other influence.

2.0 Results

Overall there were 16 respondents with one entering answers which were difficult to reconcile with the questions. The sample size is therefore 15 which can be considered representative.

There is a definite divide between those who find recruitment for all roles easy and those who find recruitment for all roles difficult.

Some roles stood out as not of concern. These roles are characterised by

- Easy to recruit
- Formal, role specific training, or well defined experience route
- Role specific qualifications
- Professional accreditation for skills available.

These roles are,

- Commercial Manager / QS
- Safety Advisor / Safety Manager
- Estimator
- Buyer
- Planner
- Crane Operator
- Lift Coordinator
- Site Engineer

Attributes were selected to determine which roles are 'At risk'.

- Difficult to recruit (in the opinion of >50% of respondents to that question)
- No formal, role-specific training course, academic route or way in for ab initio applicants.
- Very important for quality and or safety (in the opinion of >50% of respondents to that question).

The roles resulting from that sorting process are,

- Support Fluid Operative
- Rig Operator
- Mechanical / Hydraulic / Electronic Fitter
- Foreman
- Design Manager
- Project Manager
- Contracts Manager

2.1 Support Fluid Operative

These are rare indeed. 7 members employ them. 0 members have any specific training and 6 of the 7 report a great effect on quality and or safety, whilst finding them difficult to recruit.

2.2 Rig Operator

Training of rig operatives is varied. Their selection is from a variety of backgrounds e.g. a very good banksman can make a good rig operator. The training is not to a programme and is ad hoc, supervised by an experienced operator. There is no specific or mandatory course in contract to crane operators. In view of the sophistication of modern rigs this could be an industry oversight. 8/15 respondents thought the rig operator would be significantly affected by digital engineering or technology in the future.

2.3 Mechanical / Hydraulic / Electronics Fitter

15/15 employ them, but 7/15 have no formal training or apprenticeship. The others rely on previous training and OTJ experience. 5/15 believed the fitter's role would be affected by future technology or digital engineering.

2.4 Foreman

Most reported easy recruitment of General Operatives, Slinger Signallers, Banksmen and Pumpmen. As these are the primary source of Foremen by advancement and experience, there is presumably a very high attrition rate in these four roles, or a disproportionate lack of those suitable for site leadership roles in this pool, for there to be such difficulty recruiting foremen. Training was reported as a variety of NVQ or bespoke leadership training or in some cases none at all, simply by experience.

2.5 Design Manager

7/15 employ them. 1/7 provide specific training. 5/7 rate them important for quality and or safety and 6/7 find recruitment difficult.

2.6 Project Manager

7/15 employ them. 0/7 provide specific training. 5/7 consider them important for quality and safety and 5/7 find them difficult to recruit. Training is reported as through recruitment of existing graduates or progression of site engineers.

2.7 Contracts Manager

9/15 employ them. 0/9 provide specific training. 6/9 consider them important for quality and or safety. They are difficult to recruit. Training provision or requirements refer to existing graduates and experience etc.

3.0 Future impact

Very few roles were considered likely to be affected in the future by technology or digital engineering. Those roles are,

- Project Manager
- Design Manager
- Safety Manager
- Rig Operator
- Foreman

No role however had a stand out significance to any large majority as being likely to be affected. This is perhaps worthy of further consideration in the light of ongoing advances in technology.

Across the 15 valid respondents, a consistent 3 or 4 considered most roles likely to change in the future.

4.0 Training v retention

Whilst perhaps an obvious result, wherever significant training was identified for a particular role, it had a positive effect on retention. No difficulty was recorded in finding trainers for specific roles requiring and receiving training.

5.0 Observation

For an industry using 2 principle materials, one being concrete, 4/15 employ specific cubemen, 2 employ concrete technicians. 15 employ pumpmen but they are considered easy to recruit and 5/15 provide role specific training for them.

This is possibly a reflection of the use of sub-contract sampling and testing houses, or multi-tasking by general operatives.

4 employ grout batchers. 0/4 have any specific training, but these too are considered easy to recruit.

6.0 Initial conclusion

Anecdotally, when piling representatives meet the subject of recruitment arises and the difficulty of finding good people is an almost universal stated problem. The findings of this 'Startpoint Survey' would appear to contradict this.

This could potentially be a result of the delay or 'soft' start to significant HS2 projects, leaving a surplus of skilled operatives in the job marketplace.

In view of the small numbers of any role employed as an industry, this surplus will quickly be re-absorbed, leaving a shortage in the 'At Risk' roles identified above. The time taken to progress from easily recruited General Operative to experienced Supervisor will possibly preclude the traditional advancement route and an alternative accredited development plan could be a necessity for the future of the industry in the UK.

Likewise the varied routes by which a piling rig operator can be trained (or not as the case may be) is also worthy of consideration.