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Building Magazine Sustainability Awards 2009
Sustainable Contractor of the Year Winner

The CIPD People Management Awards 2008
Learning and Development Award Winner

Skanska Environment, Health,
Safety and Caring Awards 2008
Supply Chain Award Winner

Building Awards 2008
Best of the Best Award Winner
and Specialist Contractor Award Winner



BYRNE GROUP

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PRECISE • COMPLIANT • DISCIPLINED • EDUCATED • CARING

BUILDING THE BYRNE FUTURE

The Real Apprentices





Building the Byrne Future

> Michelle Tilley
> Byrne Group Health, Safety and Environment Director

“Yes, we teach skills. But we also give people, especially young people, the knowledge to use those skills to get to the top,” says Michelle Tilley, Byrne Group’s Health, Safety and Environment Director. “Once young people see what’s possible through training and work experience they have the confidence and self-belief to aim further up the ladder. And if they can show us how their training will benefit the business then we’ll back them all the way.”

Creating opportunities for everyone to develop

We take pride in investing in our staff and supply chain, routinely earmarking 12.5% of profits for education and training. We want our staff to have the skills to do their jobs safely and effectively – and the ability to realise their own potential within the industry.

This level of commitment gives us the ability to recruit the best in the business – and the means to retain them. Our turnover rate currently stands at 11%, in an industry where the norm is 30%. So, its no surprise that our clients now think of us as a market leader in terms of employee excellence.

“Our business is better placed to win work because we have a highly skilled, well-qualified workforce,” says Michelle.

“Each and every one of them has the right training for the job at hand. This puts us ahead of the game when approaching new clients because we can confidently highlight our training programmes.”

With more than a million young people in the UK not in education, employment or training, its more important than ever to give young people the skills they need for life. Behind every statistic are very personal stories, and on the following pages you’ll find a handful from young people working for Byrne Group. All the stories are different but linked by a common thread – the importance of training and work experience. By providing the opportunities for both Byrne Group is actively investing in a better future for them and for our business.



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Looking ahead

What advice would I give to young people coming in to the industry?

“Experience is the best training you can get - it’s always worked for me. For anything you learn from a book, you’ll learn twice as much in just a day on site.”

- > Grant Smit
- > Chorus Project Manager

‘My mum used to say, “Bricks and sticks is a good thing to get into.” She was right. From 15, I didn’t want to do anything else. I took a National Higher Diploma in Construction Management in my native South Africa, then worked with my brother in a family roofing business for six years before coming to London.

When I first got here I temped as a project manager, then just over three years ago I was head hunted by John Laybourne and started as a project manager with Chorus, working on jobs like the £11m refit of the atrium in Fortnum & Mason. I haven’t looked back.

It’s a great industry. Yes, you start at the bottom. There’s always a broom that needs pushing. But on site you’ll be learning from the best – people who’ve been in the business for years. Or you could take a course that’s part theory, part practical and start slightly higher up the ladder.

Even after 16 years in construction I still get a sense of achievement from watching jobs grow. New designs come in from the architects, mechanical engineers or consultants, and I spend most of my days co-ordinating the different aspects of the build, and getting the new information out to the management team on site. I suppose you could say I’m like the conductor in an orchestra!

Luckily I work with great professionals, and I still learn from them. The emphasis on safety in the Byrne Group is something I’d never seen before. The 30-day check sheets and Safety Net schemes really work.

And the management teams here are inspirational. There’s this outdated view outside the industry that we’re grunts. It doesn’t take long on site to realise that construction has some of the best business brains. Getting a job across the finishing line on time tests every facet of the guys on site – and nothing would get finished without great teamwork!



'Now I want to push on and get as much training as I can'

> Robert Miller, 33
> Carpenter with Ellmer

'When I left school at 16, I trained as a chef, working in a country club near where I grew up in Cork. The pressure of getting orders out kept things interesting. But the hours were anti-social. Not a great lifestyle in the long run.

Ever since I was a kid I've been fascinated by how things are made. As a teenager I worked for a carpenter on Saturdays, making kitchen cabinets. Sometimes he'd throw a bit of cash my way, but I didn't do it for the money. I just wanted to learn.

Remembering that, I switched to working on a building site. The craic's as good as any kitchen!

Then I met my wife Ita at a Wedding in Ireland. She lived in London, which is how I found myself at an interview for Ellmer in 2002.

I could never be someone who just turns up for a wage, and my managers soon saw that. After a year on site I started the City & Guilds carpentry course at Nescot College, in Surrey.

That was a tough year. I went Mondays and Thursdays after work, starting at 6.30am on site, and not finishing until 9.30pm at night.

What a relief to do my second and third years on a day release basis. I did my first NVQ in carpentry in 2008, which took a year. Now I want to push on, get as much training as I can and aim for management.

It doesn't matter how keen you are, you need bosses who support you. People like Mark Sellars, who's helping me get my NVQ Level 3 at the moment. College is great, but it can't match learning from guys like him.

Do I miss being in the kitchen? I don't get a chance – I do most of the cooking at home! And you'd be surprised how similar being on site is. In the kitchen you get minutes to do something whereas on site you get months – but there are definitive deadlines. Miss those and the project's not going to get finished on time.'

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'One accident is too many. We're lucky to work for a company where Health & Safety comes first – but could we be doing more to make sure everyone gets home safely?'

'Why don't they tell you at school that you can earn while you learn?'

> Sophie Gale, 20
> Assistant Quantity Surveyor with Ellmer

'The idea of leaving University with £30K of debt really put me off. What an awful start to working life, knowing it will be years before you get sorted.

I joined Ellmer's surveying team in October 2008, and before that I'd never realised I could get a job, where I'd earn and be able to learn at the same time. Why don't they tell you this at school?

I get one day a week to go to Greenwich University, where I've got three years to go on my surveying degree. And the best bit – Ellmer's cover my costs. So in the end I will get a University degree. That's such a relief. Mind you, I probably learn more in an hour at work than I do on that day at college.

Most days I sit with my boss Andy Wells. We handle the valuations and payments. Andy's so easy to approach and I've picked up loads from watching how he does things and deals with problems. I recently went through some emails I'd sent when I first started at Ellmer. It was like a different person had written them, I've got way more confidence in my abilities since then – and confidence in general. I remember being terrified the first

time my phone rang, now I'll happily call someone I don't know, or speak up in a meeting full of managers.

I've also learnt loads about construction. I'm ashamed to admit it, but when I started I had no idea there was more than one type of brick. Now, if there's something I don't understand I ask. Not that long ago I went to a site to watch concrete being poured so I'd be able to see what happens during the process. How many students on my University course get to have that kind of experience?'

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd get my boss Andy Wells to make me cups of tea all day – and get my lunch!'

'I couldn't have imagined feeling this settled in a job when I was in school'

> Tom Hibbert, 23
> Carpenter with Ellmer



'I work with Lee Wills. We've been studying and working together since we were 17, and it's strange to see all the new apprentices starting. We're not the youngest on site anymore.

It makes me realise how far I've come since joining Ellmer. I couldn't have imagined feeling this settled in a job when I was at school. I picked my GCSE subjects at random, often because they were the ones friends were doing. And the only thing I really enjoyed was design and technology, especially working with metal and wood. When I left school I started a City & Guilds carpentry course at Nescot College, and it wasn't until I got there that I learnt about apprenticeships – and how to get one. Just after starting my second year I got my job with Ellmer. I finished that year while working, took a year off college to work full-time then did my carpentry and joinery NVQ.

It's not until you actually get out on site that you really get confidence in what you've learnt at college. You hear stories that if you're new and not up to scratch the other guys won't give you the time of day. But Ellmer isn't that kind of company. Yes, you want to be the best because you see the other guys working so hard out there. But if you don't get how to do something you know you can ask without being laughed at.

Chances are your manager has done the job before you, so you know they know what they're talking about when they explain how to do something. That makes you respect them even more – and it gives you something solid to aim for.

Just look at Gary Hull, Ellmer's Managing Director, he started as a labourer. He's savvy and worked his way up. If I'm honest though, I wouldn't mind Patsy Byrne's job. I recently fitted a lock on his door. That's one solid piece of wood, really beautiful. You must know you've made it when you get an office door like that!

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd set up a buddy system for carpenters. We work in pairs, why not pair us up for our time with the company? It's quicker and safer to work with someone you already know.'

'I never knew my job existed – now I can't imagine doing anything else'

> Lisa Hearse, 22
> Assistant Quantity Surveyor with Ellmer



'A few years ago, I wouldn't have believed anyone who told me that by the age of 22, I could have a career where no two days are the same, where I'd always be right in the thick of it, and where I'd get to go to a completely different job every couple of years so I'd never get bored. Yet, that's my job now.

I was working for a property development company when a family friend, who was working as a surveyor, told me Ellmer had vacancies. At the interview I admitted I didn't really know what a surveyor does. I must have said something right though, because they gave me a three month trial. And that was three years ago.

I'm now in the third year of a five-year part-time course at Southbank University. I go one day a week. Otherwise I'm based at the Olympic site. I deal with clients and sub-contractors, using our internet based document storage system QED, and also working with clients' systems like BIW.

I'd hate to be office based all the time, so it's always great to get out on site. Even though when I first got the brochure to choose my PPE gear I could only find one page with stuff

for women – and even the smallest boots were a size 5. I'm a 3½. Someone somewhere managed to get me a pair of size 4s and I wear huge chunky socks. My high-vis jacket is also on the big side. With increasing numbers of young women coming into construction you'd think someone would make kit to fit us.

My boss is Russell Scrase, and he's got the right balance of inspiring and helpful. I always feel I can ask him when I'm not sure how to do something.

I've been involved with the refit of RBS branches and the Canary Wharf shopping centre. It's satisfying seeing what you work on take shape, but the best bit is knowing that before long you'll be on a different site, for a different project with different clients. It's like getting a brand new job every few years. I never knew my job existed before, now I can't imagine doing anything else.'

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'Let's have week-long job swaps. Say a surveyor becomes a construction manager and vice versa. Maybe they'd do their jobs better if they saw each other's day-to-day role?'

'Life lessons'

- > Beth Cutting, 18
- > Gap year safety role at The London 2012 Car Park and Media Centre

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd organise events for young people to get them interested in construction. I went to a career's fair when I was doing my 'A' Levels and I never saw anything about construction.'

'I knew I wanted to go to University, but had no idea what to study. I knew I wanted to take a gap year but had no idea what to do. Travelling with friends sounded great, but something inside me told me to stay and work. I'm so glad I did. I liked the idea of events or big projects, seeing everything come together.

Construction has been perfect for that. I started at the Central Saint Giles site last spring then switched to the Olympics site. I have to get two trains, a tube, the DLR, and a bus to get there but every morning I see it has changed. It's exciting to be part of that.

I've been surprised how many different jobs there are in the industry, I always thought it was all about builders on site plus office support staff. There's so much more design than I'd imagined, which is something I'm really interested in.

I designed a poster for fall prevention and it helped me realise that I want to do something more creative than safety. So I'm going to Bournemouth University in September to do an advertising, marketing and communications degree. I could well end up back in construction afterwards, maybe on the marketing side.

Whatever happens the life lessons from this year will help me. I've learnt how to communicate with different people, there are some real characters on site! Some of them have been in the industry since before I was born so it's not as if you can just stroll up and tell them what to do – or what not to do. I've also had a great insight into the world of work so it won't be such a shock when I graduate and have to get a real job again.'

'Anyone can be an apprentice at any age – it's not just for school leavers'

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'Now that can't be an easy job! But I'd make sure people know that you can be an apprentice at any age – it's not just for school leavers.'

- > Troy Hutchinson, 40
- > Carpenter with Ellmer

'I started labouring with Ellmer seven years ago, and after two years I was put forward for an apprenticeship. I did my NVQ Level 2 at Lambeth College on a day release basis. Hopefully I'll do my NVQ Level 3 in carpentry and joinery soon.

My managers had faith in me, and I feel lucky because of that – so I give my best back.

It's not the first time I've gained professional qualifications. When I lived in Jamaica I worked as a mechanical engineer. I wanted to do the same when I arrived in the UK in 1997, but I'd have had to retrain which was expensive, and I couldn't see the point learning the same thing all over again. The measurements are pretty much the same in carpentry so it seemed a good alternative.

I get to do different stuff every day on site, and I love it. I've worked at Croydon Exchange, Victoria Plaza, Carnaby Street, Ropemaker Place and One New Change. On every job I pick up something new about carpentry – and also about plumbing and electrics from seeing the other guys work on site. I ask questions whenever I can – hopefully without being too annoying!

I've never met anyone who hasn't had the time to explain things and the people I work with inspire me. I watch Martin Grady and think I'd like to be as good a carpenter as him. My boss Martin King is also so down to earth even though he's so successful. He was the person who put me forward for my apprenticeship.

Next up I want to do my master carpenter course. In fact I want to do every course I can – there's just so much to learn.

I even work with wood at home. I built bunk beds for my sons Tinashae, 7, and Kyle, 2. I also built a wooden plane – but that's a toy for me.

If you're thinking of construction, ask yourself if you like making things. You've got to like what you do – otherwise you just watch the clock until it's time for your next break!

'The real world and the classroom don't have that much in common'

> Michael Kendall, 30
> Accountant with Ellmer

'I used to work in insurance, but I couldn't see enough scope in the job to keep me interested. This is my first accountancy role, and I've been here for seven and half years.

I was 23 when I started here as an accounts junior, right at the bottom, on the understanding that I'd start Kingston College to study accountancy. For four and half years I went two nights a week. Working without having to study for the past couple of years has been great. But I do want to go for my chartered accountancy qualifications at some point in the not too distant future. I'd be the first accountant here working towards chartered status.

The real world and the classroom don't have that much in common. At college you get set scenarios where there is always a right and a wrong answer. In reality it can be a completely different matter. You can prepare a set of figures perfectly, then you'll be asked a question on a completely different subject – and you need to be ready. You can't walk into a meeting and not know all the numbers.

Few people realise how many different levels of management and supervision are needed to build anything. Part of my role is credit control, and I also do cash forecasting for Ellmer. We map cashflow based on outgoings for eight weeks in advance. Then every quarter we do a projection across the group, which is presented to the bank. We use a system called 'Coins', Construction Industry Solutions, which is specifically for accounting at a building firm. And we work closely with the surveying team, who act as cost managers for their projects.

It certainly is challenging. There are set monthly and quarterly deadlines, but lots of other things crop up in between.

I'm pleased that I was already earning and working my way up the ladder when friends of mine were purely studying. One told me that for three months in his first job people kept expecting him to know things – and he just didn't. Thankfully I never had to go through that!

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'Let's bring back pub quiz nights out. Seeing your colleagues outside work when you're all relaxed makes for a much easier working environment!'

'Career change...? More like an about-turn!'

> Cydni Buxton, 22
> Health & Safety Co-ordinator at The Shard

'My Dad used to be a steel fixer for Byrne Bros so I grew up hearing his stories about working on site – and the dangers. I never imagined that one day my job would be to keep guys like him safe. Luckily there's now a real emphasis making sure everyone is safe, especially at Byrne Group. I got the job last year. To say it was a career change is a massive understatement. I was a visual merchandiser for Topshop. I spent my days – and sometimes nights! – dressing the shop window dummies. Swapping that for the construction industry was the best decision I've ever made. Not that you'd believe it from the response I get when I say where I work. 'No seriously, what do you really do for a living?' is something I hear a lot! Forget fashion, construction is a perfect fit for me. I must love it – I have to get up at 4.30am every day to commute to the site for 7.30am. Luckily when I'm on that 6.02 train to London I never know exactly what the day's going to bring – I'd get bored if I did.

Generally I look after inductions on site and sort method statements. My job is paper based but I'll be on and off site all day.

Byrne Group are particularly good at making sure everyone is well trained. It would be so easy

to assume that because someone has the job they know what they're doing. I've just finished my NEBOSH and I've done First Aid and Fire Safety courses. Eventually I'd like to be a project manager.

I also take as many evening classes as I can fit in and I'm currently doing an accountancy course. When that's finished I want to do a part-time construction management degree, hopefully alongside my work. So many people have all the qualifications with no experience – or the other way round. I can do both!

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd get the Byrne Group divisions together, don't ask me how exactly. But it would be great to meet people from the other divisions and find out more about what they do.'

'You have to be ready to get your boots dirty'

> Dolly Manwani, 21
> 3rd year out from a Construction degree at UCL and working at The London 2012 Olympic Stadium

'Growing up in Dubai you can't help but be fascinated by construction. The skyline is constantly changing, so much so that when I visit I can easily get lost in my own city. Universities aren't as developed in Dubai, so I wanted to study in the UK. I was keen to get a year placement after my second year but most companies won't consider international students. They'd rather take a local student for obvious reasons, like not having to worry about work visa hassles. I'm really glad Byrne Group took a chance on me. I didn't even get to interview stage with anyone else.

My aim is to do project management in a consultancy, but I'd never set foot on site before. And you've got to get your feet dirty to really learn how this business works. It should be compulsory to take a year out on any course that's construction based – it's just not a textbook subject.

I went back to University the other day and our lecturer tried to tell us how special we were to be on such a sought after course. We're not special. The people I've met on site are; some of them left education really young and I'll never be able to do what they do.

I told the lecturer so too – in front of a packed lecture theatre. It didn't go down too well.

But I speak my mind now, I'm much more confident after spending time on site. I used to wait until the very last hour of the day before asking a question, I was so worried about looking dumb. Now I ask away. I've realised what great back up I've been given. The team are right there whenever I need something. I'll be taking what I've learnt this year and using it to graduate. I'd urge any other student considering a year out to stop thinking and get applying. You won't regret it!

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd strengthen the link between University construction courses and the industry itself. Surely both sides would benefit from that.'

'No one knows everything – but there's always someone to ask'

> Paul Lynch, 26
> Project surveyor with Ellmer

'My old job was office based and I like getting out on site, so my role with Ellmer is perfect. It's so much easier if you have hands on knowledge of the day-to-day issues on site. Luckily, I like dealing with the unexpected – because there's a fair amount of that in this job!

Once the estimators have got the contract, we take over and manage the budget and finances for the project. Even after the contract is won, it might still be months before work begins on site. It's our job to keep costs tight to maximise profit.

At Ellmer our projects range from £1m to £45m. I've worked on Ropemaker Place, which came in around £3m and a project on Oxford Street, which was £5m. I try not to think too much about the big numbers, I just get on with making sure I get my job right every day so I can help make the job happen. I suppose you could say I'm the accountant for the building site itself.

I've done an HNC in construction, and I'm in the last year of a degree in commercial management at Southbank University. It's getting harder to juggle work and the amount of study needed for my final year – I can't wait to graduate in May 2010.

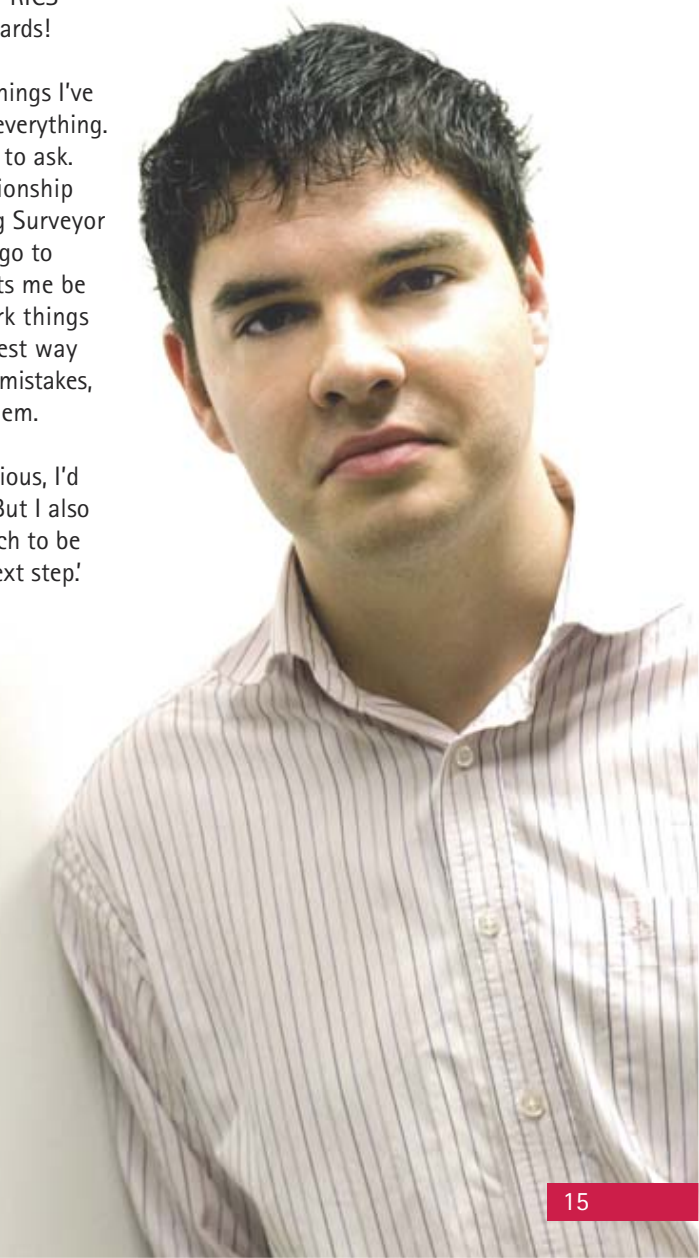
But I'll probably go for either RICS or CIOB accreditation afterwards!

One of the most important things I've learnt is that no one knows everything. But there's always someone to ask. I have a great working relationship with my manager, Managing Surveyor Russell Scrase. He knows I'll go to him if I need help, but he lets me be my own person. I like to work things out myself. I find that the best way to learn. Occasionally I make mistakes, we all do, but I learn from them.

As for the future, I am ambitious, I'd like to be a senior surveyor. But I also enjoy what I do now too much to be constantly striving for the next step.'

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd get a handful of people from each sector of each company in the Byrne Group together, including the people on the ground, to talk about what works, what doesn't work, and what could work better.'



'Now I know who I want to be'

> Chris Tupper, 20
> Health & Safety Co-ordinator

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd probably get on site to listen to a couple of toolbox talks – maybe one of mine!'

'Before joining Byrne Group in May last year, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I'd drifted through various bar jobs and wound up selling mobile phones – which I hated. I was actually out of work when I heard there were health and safety vacancies at Byrne Group. I'd never even considered construction. No one had suggested it as a career at school. My idea of building sites was simple – lots of people laying bricks. As for health and safety, I thought that was all about stopping people doing what they wanted to do.'

Thankfully as well as an interview I got to visit a Byrne Group site. There was such a buzz. I was hooked. When I joined I was shy, I couldn't have spoken to a packed room. Now one of my favourite things is giving toolbox talks on site, often to up to 30 people. I just can't imagine being able to do that a year ago.

My senior manager Paul Quaid and Marese Lynch are the first people I've ever worked for that I look up to. They do their jobs so well that it makes me want to do mine better.

I now look after three sites, including Riverbank House. I spend a lot of my time charging around London making sure new people are inducted onto site, and walking round the sites doing Health and Safety inspections. No two days are the same, which is great. This year has helped give me a clear idea of what I want to do. I start a civil engineering course at Brighton University this September, and I also know that I now have the work discipline to graduate. I wouldn't have lasted six months if I'd gone straight after school.

I've already been offered work at Byrne Group next summer and the ideal would be to come straight back to them when I graduate. But whatever happens I'm hopefully going to be at the head of the queue when I apply for jobs because of the experience I've gained this year.'

'Occasionally I dream of an easy job – but I'd miss being on site'

> Daniel Barrett, 26
> Construction Manager with Ellmer

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'Maybe we should open a branch somewhere sunny like Abu Dhabi. I'd be happy to base myself there.'

'I started as a trainee quantity surveyor with Ellmer, but knew very quickly I wanted something more hands on. My next role was cube making – cutting sections of concrete to test and prove it's right for the task at hand. Definitely starting at the bottom, but I knew instantly I preferred being on site. Even on the cold rainy days. Although I'm pretty glad I now have a toasty office with two radiators!'

Occasionally I dream of an easy job, just answering the phone – usually in the morning when I'm dragging myself out of bed. I have to be the first on site and I'm the last to leave. But if I did anything else I'd be itching to get back on site within days.

You can have a laugh and be approachable on-site, but you also have to keep your mind on the job. I look after the inspections and quality checks. I also make sure the drawings we work from are up to date. Clients change their mind all the time and every change has to be documented and shown on the drawings.

I feel like I'm learning from the best. Guys like Andy Wells, who I've heard described as the hardest working man in the company. And my unofficial

mentor Joe Halpin, project manager on my first job. The way Joe worked made me want to do that job, and project manager is now my next goal in the company.

Last year, I finished my NVQ Level 4 in construction management. It was an on-site evidence based qualification. Now I'm doing a BSc in construction project management at the University of Westminster. I'll be going one day a week for the next five years.

Everyone on my course is working at the same time, and we all agree it works better for us. Even so, it doesn't feel as relevant to my job as the NVQs were. So, I'll be taking my NVQ Level 5 when I can.

Ultimately, I want to be a contract manager, and I'm going to get there as soon as possible.'

'I might not have a degree but I have a career'

- > Lee Wills, 23
- > Carpenter with Ellmer

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?
'Create more apprenticeships. There still aren't enough.'

'I did consider working for myself, like my Dad does. He has a loft conversion business. But you can't really concentrate on your job when you have to keep the work coming in too.

I started with one and a half years at Nescot College, then joined Ellmer at 17. That's where I met Tom Hibbert, we've been like a carpentry double act ever since. We finished our NVQ Level 3 last year and now work in a pair on site. Because we know how the other one thinks we can work faster – and safer.

We have a laugh on site, but no one jokes about safety. Nine times out of 10 whatever the Health and Safety rules are, they make sense. Walking round with goggles on all day is hard, but we all value working for a company that takes safety seriously. When we were on the Ropemaker Place project I won the H&S monthly award, £50 of vouchers!

I do mainly second fix carpentry, the details people will see. So it has to look perfect – but you often find the measurements are a bit out. A couple of millimetres makes all the difference to how easy it is to hang a door right. That's why being on site is so different to college – and way more interesting. That's not to say every day is fun. In summer you can find yourself working on the 14th floor with all the windows fitted, no way to open them and no air. Then in winter, when the wind's howling there'll be no windows. I wouldn't want to do anything else though.

Loads of my friends who went to University are quitting their course because they feel like studying is dragging out. Now they're working check-outs or paper pushing in an office. I might not have a degree, but I have a career.

I want to train as a construction supervisor. And I can imagine doing that with Ellmer. The great thing here is that so many of the bosses have worked their way up. Mark Sellars was a carpenter first and Robert Pincher started as a surveyor. It makes you think, it really could be me.'

'We need to get kids interested in construction'

- > Christine Saeverud, 22
- > 3rd year out from a Building Engineering degree at the University of Westminster. Working at The London 2012 Olympic Stadium

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?
'In Norway, where I'm from, most engineers are about to retire. So there's a national campaign to get kids as young as six interested in the subject, in the hope they'll choose it as a career. Why not do the same here with construction? Get to them young – before they make the subject choices for GCSE.'

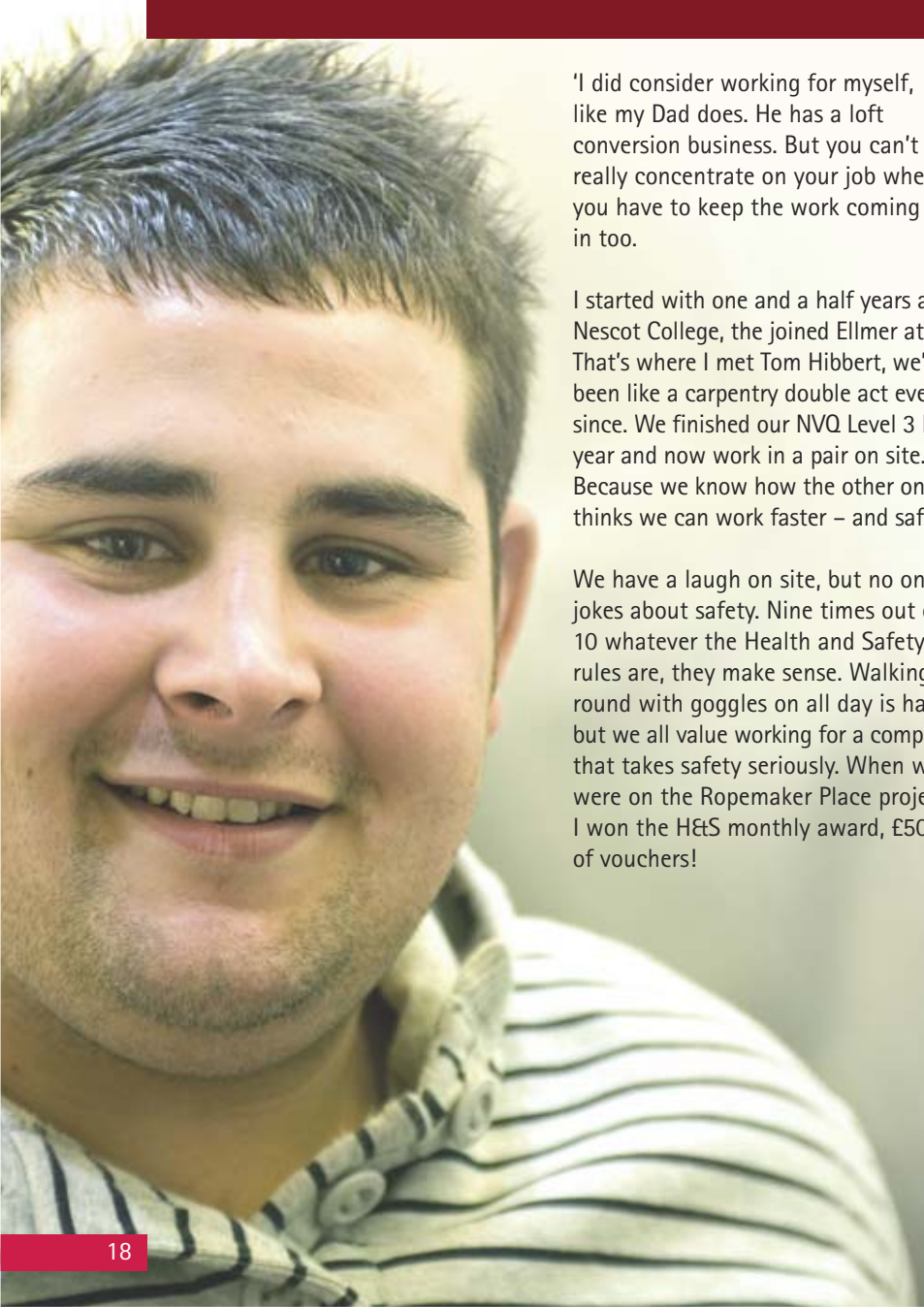
'I hadn't planned to take a year out from my building engineering course at the University of Westminster. That all changed when I met Michelle Tilley at the Women in Property Awards. I'd been entered by one of my lecturers and won the South East regional final last year. Michelle asked me if I'd be interested in interviewing for a job at Byrne Group. What an amazing opportunity.

Some people on my course do work experience on a day release basis, but I wanted to give it my all to get the most from the year.

I'd never even been on a building site before, so the first couple of weeks were pretty daunting. Right from the start I said to my managers, 'If I have a question can I ask you?' They are all so open and helpful, I've learnt a lot. Like not to pipe up with, 'But that's not what it says in the book!' You should see the looks you get! That's when you realise fast that there are two very different realities – what you learn at University and what

happens on site. My time with Byrne Group has helped me decide between civil and structural engineering. I've decided to focus on structural engineering so that I can work in a consultancy environment.

It has also meant that when I am in a position to be designing I've seen first hand what can be done and how best to do it. Now I'll hopefully have the knowledge to design in such a way as to make it easier for the people who are actually going to have to build it.'



'Getting the tender right is a fine art'

> Steven Chenery, 23
> Trainee estimator with Ellmer

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I'd get people from different divisions together more often so we can find out what's happening across the company.'

'I was sure I didn't want to go to University when I left college at 18. It seemed madness to start a course I wasn't sure about – when I didn't even know what I wanted to do afterwards. I knew I wanted more from a job than a pay packet. But as for what to do, I was lost.'

My Dad's a self-employed quantity surveyor, so I'd heard him talk about his job and it sounded interesting. It's like having to get the best price for everything on a giant shopping list. Succeed and your company gets to build the project, fail and someone else gets the job.

I started as a trainee quantity surveyor in April 2007. I'm now two years into a five year part-time BSc in quantity surveying at Westminster University. Yes, I'm at University – but it makes sense now. I go up to London one day a week, and Ellmer pay all my travel costs – they even buy my course books. I'm not sure how I'd afford it otherwise.

Getting the tender price right is a fine art. There could be six or seven firms going for the same job – and only one gets it. But it's not as simple as just pricing low – because you've got to make money at the end of the day.

The relationships you build up with your sub-contractors and suppliers give you the edge – you need their best possible price, everytime.

I help the more senior estimators over a wide range of jobs, like The Shard, Wimbledon AELTC and Ropemaker Place. It's great to see different projects, but can be frustrating if I start something, then don't see it finished. I'm looking forward to following tenders from start to finish.

When I've got my degree, I'll go for accreditation from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). It takes about two years, and you work in diary form. Then you have an Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) interview. After that, hopefully I can just enjoy doing the job I love!'



'There are so many different career possibilities in this one industry'

> Jessica Soper, 18
> Gap year working in document control at St Botolphs

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE THE BOSS FOR THE DAY?

'I would open the business to local schools and colleges for the day so they can see the diverse range of jobs construction offers.'

'I sort of had a plan before starting my gap year – but it's changed quite drastically now. Working at the Byrne Group made me realise that I actually want to work in construction. So instead of studying business management with French, which was the original idea, I'm starting a city planning course at Oxford Brookes University in September. If I hadn't taken a year out I'd have wound up doing something I didn't want to do.'

I've also learnt loads during my year here, not just about the job I'm doing although that has been great, but improving my IT skills and I can now use the BIW system to upload documents like drawings.

I've also had an education in how to interact with people. I take my lead from Chris Davron, he's amazing in the way he can talk to everyone on site – from me to the managers, to a sub-contractor he's never met before. He's learnt what he knows on the job and it's amazing how he's on top of every little detail.

It's the little details that still surprise me. You'll be talking to someone and realise they know everything there is to know about concrete. Or you'll see drawings for a job and it hits you that every aspect has been planned years in advance. They've designed the roof garden before laying the foundations. I find that amazing.

I'd never realised how many jobs are involved in getting just one building off the ground. I think people would be surprised by that – and if they did it might make more people want to work in construction.'





FROM FORMWORK TO FIT-OUT

