

Construction workers still in demand despite blip but skills shortages rife, says recruiter

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Demand for construction specialists will remain strong despite a downturn in output, according to One Way.

An analysis by the rail and construction recruitment specialist outlined how the drop in output is a temporary blip caused in part by uncertainty over the EU referendum along with public spending cuts. One Way found that, despite this drop, demand for construction professionals should continue to remain stable over the coming months.

According to the firm, output will rise again as businesses become more confident about what the future could hold for the country following the referendum. While housebuilding picked up to a record high in February, the rest of the sector struggled and shrank by 0.3% according to data from the Office for National Statistics.

Paul Payne, managing director of One Way, comments.

“There’s been some alarm in the media over the unexpected dip in output in February, however we’re not overly concerned. It’s hardly surprising that some firms have withheld their investment while there’s so much uncertainty over our position in the EU, however regardless of either outcome, we fully expect the market to pick back up over the coming months, particularly after the referendum has been decided.”

“However, while the overall market has dropped slightly, it’s highly likely that demand for construction workers will remain strong across the board throughout this period and beyond. Not only is the continued demand for housebuilding driving many of the positions, but there’s also such a shortage of professionals in the market that many are able to choose between roles. In fact, once the market does pick up again we’re likely to find ourselves on the verge of a significant skills shortage which could affect productivity. While the media may pick up on a drop in output, it’s highly likely that construction experts won’t be affected.”

Speaking to the Radio 4 Today programme, Jeremy Blackburn, Head of Policy at the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) also commented on the shortage of available talent.

“There’s definitely more that the government can do, even though they’ve made certain commitments in areas like infrastructure. [...] However construction firms are being constrained by the lack of labour, particularly in the trades. We lost a record number of skilled people during the recession and combined with the ageing workforce and many people who worked through this period now retiring there has been almost a double cliff in terms of labour shortage.”