

Briefing Recruitment

“The time for navel gazing has passed. It’s tin helmets on, head down and push on – Tally ho!”

David Bland of Blackmore on the market volatility following the EU Referendum, page 10

Is the printing industry leading the UK's recruitment drive?

A recent survey has found that print is the industrial sector most likely to recruit in the near future, so what are the facts behind the statistics? Words **Max Goldbart**

To hire or not to hire? That is the question. Close Brothers Asset Finance recently announced the results of its Q2 *Business Barometer* survey, looking at recruitment across a variety of different industries.

For those in print, the results are intriguing, with the industry officially being confirmed as most likely to recruit in the near future.

More than half (52%) of the 100 print companies surveyed said they are planning on recruiting soon and of those 87% said they are looking to appoint permanent staff.

Furthermore, 77% believe they will have no problem taking on adequately skilled staff, compared with the UK average of 50%. Not all doom and gloom then.

Of the 1,000 companies spoken to, 100 were in print, with 90 questions and sub-questions making up the qualitative telephone survey. Other industries surveyed included construction, transport and other manufacturing fields.

However, as Mercury Search & Selection managing director Dani Novick points out, the study is snapshot, and, for example, doesn't cover the supply side of the equation.

“Recruiting is not only limited by the availability of talent but also by the confidence of that talent to move to a new job. When there is uncertainty even companies who are doing well can find it difficult to secure new talent. Thankfully every indication currently is that confidence has returned to both sides,” she says.

“I definitely admire the confidence regarding recruitment amongst

SMEs, but they will need to work hard to attract the best and really differentiate opportunity.”

Novick also pointed out that the research took place prior to the Brexit vote, something George Thompson, managing director of print and packaging recruiter Harrison Scott also noted, highlighting that the responses were garnered when the idea of a “recruitment freeze” was but a distant blot on the horizon.

“It doesn't come as much of a surprise but I would like to put these results under more of a microscope. If you look across the board in print, it's divided into so many different sub-sectors; some vacancies are easier to recruit for than others, like

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George Thompson Harrison Scott

operations director, whereas getting someone in sales is difficult because they are in such high demand.”

However, Thompson considers that maybe Brexit will change this landscape, meaning the opening up of sales vacancies and a slowing down on the operations and production side.

Sales search

Internal research carried out by Harrison Scott found an 18% increase in new sales vacancies registered with them compared to the same period last year. Contrast this with a 7% decrease in operations vacancies and an 11% decrease in

production vacancies.

“I think the referendum result had quite a shock effect on people. Managing directors are thinking that they need to increase their sales activity,” says Thompson.

“A lot of the vacancies I've taken on since the vote are newly created roles. It's good from one point of view, that managing directors are bold and optimistic enough to think: ‘Well, we should be acting and not be negative.’”

One issue that keeps cropping up when looking at recruitment is the ageing nature of print's employees. Print companies looking to hire may not be such a positive thing when a retiring workforce drives a necessity for positions to be filled.

This all seems then to boil down to training, something that, since the recession, print has been disinclined to do, especially on the sales side, which could lead to skills issues if Thompson's predicted post-Brexit sales drive comes true.

“For the last 20 years they have been saying print is an ageing workforce,” says Thompson.

“Many years ago we did not replenish and bring in enough new blood and even though in the last three to five years we are doing a little bit better, even if the industry shrinks by just a couple of percentage points a year, I think there will soon be a real skills gap. Unless of course people are



encouraged to stay on well above retirement age.”

And, according to Novick, taking a fresh approach to training is key to plugging the skills gap.

“Training remains important and can be seen as expensive, but there are a number of ways to minimise costs, such as key team members attending external formal training and them delivering the training

internally to their colleagues,” she says.

“Of course all of this is focused on the talent within the market currently and we face the ever-present need to attract the next generation. Whilst it would be nice to see specific well publicised initiatives driving waves of young talent into the industry it is perhaps not that realistic. However, I don't think we should

despair just yet as, without fanfare, we are seeing new and younger people in the industry.”

De La Rue, the world's largest security printer, knows all about getting young people into the industry. It took on three apprentices nearly three years ago, one of whom has been earmarked for a management role and another of which recently won a Printing Charity Print Futures Award.

“You need a mix of experienced people and young people,” says De La Rue HR manager Lorraine Canavan.

“What we have done with the apprentices is make sure they had mentors and were being mentored on the machines. They also spend time in other departments, in order to understand the process.”

De La Rue is set to take on a further five apprentices at the end of this year, and is doing its bit to keep recruitment steady and secure.

It is always difficult to predict how recruitment levels will change for any industry, but, in the long term, print recruitment figureheads are understandably concerned.

For now, in the wake of the Brexit vote, it seems the print powers that be need to focus on making the industry as attractive as they can for those starting out, as well as those already established.

Reader reaction

Are you planning to recruit more staff in the near future?



Georgia Brown
Operations manager,
Your Print
Specialists

“I've only been here for two years, but from what I've known we've always looked at different ways to see if we can get people into the industry. There is really high demand but there are not a lot of young people coming in, and a lot of the time I think that is down to a lack of knowledge and awareness of all the different roles. We take on work placements quite often just to get people interested in the industry and show them all the different routes they can go down.”



Andy McGuinness
Managing director,
South East Drawing
Office

“Over the last 12 months, we have hired three people, including an apprentice on a BPIF scheme. It's always hard, I think, to know when to recruit; you don't want to get so busy that you end up taking your foot off the pedal on something, but you need everyone working at full capacity. We think there might be a bit of a skills gap in a few years, when a lot of the older generation start to retire. I've never really seen a young engineer; it always seems to be people from late 30s up to late 50s.”



Jacky Sidebottom-Every
Sales director,
Glossop Cartons

“I don't know my recruitment plans at the moment as things are quite new with our recent acquisition and they haven't really settled down yet. In general, recruiting is very hard for us and that problem is industry-wide, really. We have a skills shortage – there is no young blood in the industry. We've had apprentices in the past but they've not really been the right calibre. There are certain requirements to be met, like, for example, coming into work. This is a problem we need to address as an industry.”

30-second briefing

- Close Brothers Asset Finance has published a survey stating that, of a number of industries surveyed, print is the most likely to recruit in the near future
- More than half (52%) of the 100 print firms surveyed said they are planning on recruiting in the near future and 87% said they are looking to appoint permanent staff
- But industry figures are torn on whether this is necessarily good news for print, many highlight the lack of young people getting involved and candidates lacking the correct skillsets
- Since the Brexit vote, there has been a huge rise in the number of sales vacancies but a drop in production and operations vacancies
- Apprenticeships like those run by De La Rue are helping to stave off the issue of ageing in print, but they are too few and far between