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## Confronting Goliath: Solomons Europe's Bold Response to the Skills Shortage

The challenge is clear: tackle the skills shortage and prevent what is described in Building Magazine this week as the 'existential threat to some British construction firms'.

The call to arms is often to the government, universities, professional bodies and the major employers in the industry, with additional funding the most likely weapon of choice. There's no doubt that government funded top down schemes should be welcomed and are absolutely necessary, but we believe that the long term solution starts with values driven SMEs like Solomons who can use their passion for people and adaptability to properly tackle the giant problem facing the industry.

At Solomons, we've developed our Accelerated QS Pathway scheme, designed not only to tackle the challenge of today, but the challenge the industry has been facing for the past two decades. Even before the recession, the rocketing of university fees and the uncertainty brought about by Brexit, there has been a shortage of properly trained, skilled quantity surveyors; which includes those graduating from full time degree programmes.

Our Accelerated QS Pathway (AQSP) is a 5 and a half year programme for school leavers, non-cognates and people simply looking for a career change, that aims to take people from entry level to membership of two professional bodies: the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Association of Cost Engineers (MRICS & MACostE).

Our AQSP is not about plugging gaps and it's certainly not a lowly paid apprentice scheme; it offers a career with a generous salary, car allowance and benefits package in order to bring the best and most committed people into the industry, who will get the right skills needed for both them and us, rather than simply undertaking a fixed term training programme.

Significantly, there is no expensive and largely irrelevant degree; instead there is substantial work based experience, NEC3 and contract law training and personal mentoring and support, with a focus on the skills that we need most as Quantity Surveyors in the process and engineering sectors.

At a time when the industry is in a state of uncertainty, the catalyst for change can be SMEs like Solomons who are positive about the future despite economic uncertainty, who are not solely driven by profit reported to shareholders and who, most importantly, can be bold in accepting the challenge.

The four people that we are looking to recruit for our AQSP starting in October of this year will represent a growth of 8% on our current total team of 50. In context, that's equivalent to the construction industry's biggest company, Balfour Beatty, employing 2,880 full time professional apprentices. As an SME with a strong management structure, we can be confident the programme will be a success and our boldness will be rewarded.



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Whilst government funding and big business apprenticeships are certainly necessary, it's hard to believe the benefits will be felt any time soon, so my call to arms is to all of the David's in the industry; the SMEs that are bold and passionate enough to stand forward, draw their slingshots and make a difference today. What are you waiting for?

**By John Rossiter** - Executive Director

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