



CONSTRUCTING A NEW FUTURE

Skills shortages have never been more pressing, particularly in the hospitality and construction industries. Solomons Europe has been helping people change their careers for years...

Always up for a challenge, Solomons Europe has been thinking outside the box when it comes to tackling the skills shortage and numerous other pressures facing the construction industry.

Skills shortages have been at the top of the agenda in Cumbria for decades. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic and Government plans to 'build back better'

have made the challenge more acute, and not just in Cumbria. The construction sector has been hit particularly hard. Significant increases in the cost of materials due to several factors, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine, means that professional services, such as quantity surveying, are also in high demand as construction clients look to deliver projects while balancing the books.

"The pace of change experienced over the last

couple of years has been exhausting," says Solomons Europe's co-founder and strategic director Kerry Doig.

"The construction industry is continually evolving in response to the challenges it faces, and those working within it need to keep up. The mantra 'build back better' is easy to say, but in reality, it requires grit, determination and imagination to put into practice."

Solomons Europe is an

SME firm of commercial professionals specialising in supporting clients and contractors delivering major power, infrastructure, engineering, and utilities developments across the UK.

Its regional team of 14 based at offices near Cockermouth and Kendal is currently focused on supporting two multi-billion-pound nuclear frameworks, as well as improving infrastructure and grid



to have a positive impact on the communities in which we work. Those who join us need not only to ‘get it’ but have the passion to bring their own ideas and influence to bear,” says Kerry.

One on-going success has been its approach to taking on and developing people who have come from other industries such as law, financial services, utilities, data analysis, even professional cricket. The company is building quite a pedigree for helping people take the leap into quantity surveying, commercial management, and procurement related roles.

“As the company grows, we’ve been keen to bring in people with different skills sets and fresh perspectives,” says Kerry.

“These have included people with non-cognate degrees and people from industries where there is some sort of link in terms of skills sets. For them the first step is

typically getting their head around what a quantity surveyor actually does and how both their hard and soft skills can be applied to the role.

“For us, it’s about delivering the training and development they need to become the best they can be and harnessing their drive and determination to succeed. It’s a real win-win situation when it all comes together.”

Looking forward, Kerry believes career conversion candidates will play a big part in supporting the growth ambitions of a company she founded with her partner Dominic Doig back in 1998.

She adds: “We’ve grown from the two of us to around 60 people based both in Cumbria and the wider North. We have plans to grow further, so career conversion candidates and a growing intake of apprentices will be important routes alongside our traditional recruitment activities.”



Kerry Doig

management, and supporting the delivery of key projects in the defence sector.

“It’s not just about skills, although that remains important, but attitude and the ability to see and embrace the bigger picture. Yes, we need to be commercially successful, but at the same time we want

**LUCY FARRER,
PROJECT QUANTITY
SURVEYOR**

Determined Lucy Farrer, 29, had ambitions to build a career in law before her eye was taken by quantity surveying.

It is fair to say Lucy’s career ambitions were always firmly set.

“Law was simply ingrained in me from an early age,” she says.

Born, raised, and schooled in Whitehaven, Lucy did not hang around. Armed with A-levels in French, German, History, Philosophy and Ethics, she left St Benedict’s High School, packed her bags, and headed to the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) to secure both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in law.

Returning to West Cumbria, Lucy worked

part-time for a local law firm while she completed her master’s degree in legal practice.

Specialising in conveyancing and private clients, she worked for another local law firm until she reached a crossroads.

“I really just fell into what I was doing,” says Lucy.

“It’s a competitive industry and you have to take what you can to get a foot in the door. I really wanted to practice human rights.

“I was sat in the office one day and suddenly thought ‘I’ve worked and studied for a long time, is what I’m doing proportionate to the amount of effort I’ve put into my work and education’.”

Lucy was introduced to quantity surveying by a colleague of her father.

Admittedly she knew nothing about the role, yet her interest piqued.

“It wasn’t just about finding out what a quantity surveyor does, but how they make an impact,” she says.

“I was concerned it would be entirely different to the legal profession. Again, I’d put in too much effort not to use the qualifications I’d obtained. But the role is so much more than a ‘bean counter’. Nowadays you are required to have knowledge of the law, accounting, planning and project management and more in order to provide a good well-rounded service to your client.”

Inspired, she applied to join Solomons Europe and was quickly offered an assistant quantity surveyor role at the end of 2018.

And Lucy has not looked back since.

“I first started off working in pre-construction, which was interesting because it was similar to where I’d come from in that it was drafting contracts and other associated documents,” she says.

“It gave me a really good foundation to build on, getting to know the different elements of a project, the teams involved and their individual requirements. It was a springboard for my next secondment on a nuclear framework, where I’m currently working. I’m also managing my own project whilst working on another. No working day is the same.



Lucy Farrer

“Problem solving and communication skills are extremely important to the role. I’m a people person and like building personal and professional

relationships. If you can build a good relationship with your colleagues, problem solving comes naturally as information is more forthcoming, and

you can have honest and effective conversations with people.”

She adds: “Looking back, I wouldn’t have got as far as I have if it wasn’t for my legal background and knowledge.”

With her sights on securing chartership with the RICS and a more senior position in the next few years, Lucy has reassuring words for anyone else considering following in her shoes.

“Don’t ever think what you’ve done previously or where you’ve come from has been a waste of time. You can always find something in your skills set that will be to your advantage. Don’t let people tell you otherwise!” she adds.

JANE YOUNGER, PROJECT QUANTITY SURVEYOR

Jane Younger, 41, had carved out a career in the police force before taking what may at first appear a surprising move into quantity surveying.

Jane is the first to admit that she enjoys complex challenges.

With a degree in Forensic Science and Criminology, a career in the police was a natural step. She spent ten years working in a wide variety of roles – first in witness support, then laboratory work, before taking up the role of complaints investigator in the Police’s Professional Services Department. After a stint as a police press officer, she joined the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in West Cumbria as a business support manager and ended up as a project manager.

Then she became restless and was on the hunt for other project manager roles when she came across an advert to join Solomons Europe.

“They were really



Jane Younger

interested in my CV given my background and experience and asked me if I understood what a quantity surveyor does,” she says.

“When I said I thought it was about how much material you need for a project or building and how much that costs – a very traditional view – they advised me to go away and do some research!

“When I did, I thought this is the perfect role for me. I saw it as being like a project manager but with much more responsibility for specific aspects.

“You’re there, on the front line, making sure things are being delivered rather than the

general organisation of activities.”

True to form, on joining Solomons Europe, Jane did not hang around. Working for a client in the nuclear sector, she personally looks after 12 projects ranging from a bridge to a water survey and is responsible for seeing them through from preliminary design to delivery.

“I’ve been quite lucky in a sense that I go through all the phases of the projects I work on, with full understanding and oversight,” says Jane.

“All the skills I’ve picked up in project management, and beyond, come into play. I love the challenges, complexities, and changes – although you can hate them at the same time!

“I also love the people. It’s a very people-orientated role and one where you really have to get stuck in.”

Jane’s current career goals are now quite simple.

“I’m constantly looking to improve my skills to benefit my client,” she says.

“For me chartership isn’t

on the cards. Solomons really sees the value of learning and developing on the job, so that’s ideal for me.

“The company has a very family-orientated culture, which is wonderful. If I have any issues, I know they’re there right behind me. It’s like a having a safety and comfort blanket rolled into one!

“If you’re sat there behind a desk thinking ‘this isn’t for me anymore’ then make the change. You must be brave,” she says.

“When it comes to quantity surveying, I think there’s a place for everyone. Even if you don’t have a degree, if you’ve got transferable and interpersonal skills, know how to apply them to the role and, just as important, have that real spark of interest and can-do attitude, then you’re 75% of the way there.

“I could have easily gone in another direction and become a project manager for another company. But I took a leap of faith and was lucky to be given a chance – and I love it!”