

Plumbing courses in demand

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Everyone knows about plumbers and the fabulous amounts they charge to change a single washer, especially at weekends.

So staff at the City of Bristol College were expecting a healthy response when applications opened for a course in plumbing.

But they were astonished by a flood of more than 2,000 people chasing just 36 places yesterday.

Some applicants, buoyed by reports of £70,000-a-year salaries, even camped out overnight in plunging temperatures on the steps of the college.

But by the time the application process officially opened, at 9am, there was a queue of 50 outside.

Hundreds of postal applications had already arrived and the phones rang continually all day.

Overall demand was so high that college chiefs decided to give just 15 places to those who had queued.

The lucky 15th, Rob Thompson, 29, was turning his back on the high-pressure world of finance in favour of pipes and taps. Mr Thompson, who runs a company in Bath, said: "I just don't see myself working in the finance industry in ten years time and decided to get out now."

"I've always fancied being a plumber, because you get out and about and the long-term prospects are really good."

"I came down at 6am and only just made it."

Among those who spent the night in sleeping bags were friends Ben Watkins, 30, and Paul Tripp, 37, who hope to set up a plumbing firm together.

Mr Watkins, of Hanham, Bristol, has been a butcher for 14 years but has seen the trade slip into decline.

He said: "I came up on Monday to ask about the course and when I was told that 2,000 people were applying I decided to camp out overnight and be first in the queue. My heart was set on it and if you want something, you've got to be prepared for sacrifices."

Mr Tripp, a labourer from St George, Bristol, said: "I'm a single parent and I've had to spend all my time looking after my two kids. But now they've reached their teens I can look to get a better career."



Pic: Mike Floyd

2,000 joined the gush for 36 plumbing courses

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