

EXECUTIVE
APPOINTMENTS

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Young and
jobless: the
voice of one
in a million**Jazz Jagger** reflects on
what choosing a career
means to the youngsters
struggling to find work**Y**outh unemployment is at an
all-time high and the young of
today – including me – are
starting to reassess the mean-
ing of this term “career”.It has become a strange animal for
anyone aged 24 and under, as it sits
staring at us, smugly. When adults
ask us, as children: “What do you
want to be when you grow up?” theemphasis is on the “be” – what path
will shape your identity as your limbs
develop and you start to wear stiff
clothes.But self-identity is a touchy subject
for today's graduates, who are likely
to be on the dole, scrounging off their
parents and feeling worthless for
doing so: broken pride, diminishing
self-worth and financial despair bot-
tled up in their old bedroom back at
home. We are tempted to knock back
beakers of Talisker at the thought of
the cheques to be made payable to the
ever-present student loan company.Meanwhile, our qualifications are
being laughed at over polished table-

Nice work if you can get it: Ben Southall won a competition to work as a caretaker on an island off Australia

PA

Is youth unemployment a
top priority? How difficult
is it for anyone to find a
job? Email your thoughts
to: recruitment@ft.comtops by grown-ups in stiff suits and
beads or cufflinks.As the 200th impassioned covering
letter and CV is tossed into the bin,
we think: “To hell with this – as a
lowly arts graduate with a pointless
degree, perhaps I could afford to be a
bit more creative about career possi-
bilities than my more sensible voca-
tional buddies.”So how about working as a baker?
As many iced buns as you can eat? Or
there are people who get paid to test
water slides in holiday resorts. Or
farming – farmers are supposed to be
the happiest of all workers. And in
2009 someone won a job as a caretaker
on a paradise island for six months.
You can't say no to that.Back in the real world, my friends
have worked as refuse collectors and
behind the counter at McDonald's
since leaving university.That's still far preferable to being a
miserable tethered intern. A friend,
after two years of interning that cost
her hundreds of pounds and an
unhealthy accumulation of cynicism,
even heard one of her bosses chortle
that “they” (interns) were “like meercats
– so eager!”. Everyone in the
office thought this was funny.She didn't. She was just sent off to
make more coffee.Perhaps there's no such thing as a
“dream job” any more. I told my
father I was into books and liked the
way they were worked on and laid
out. “Book publishing is a dying
industry,” he boomed.People in advertising always seem
fairly happy – or is that because they
become so good at selling that they
sell themselves to themselves? And
those bankers pop a lot of champagne
corks. Or what about shiny, sparklingGoogle? It looks fun, crazy, the
future?Then I spoke to an occupational
psychologist, Simon Draycott at Men-
das career coaching, who said money
and fame were definitely not the
answers. “Of course, you're right,
you're completely right,” I retracted,
not entirely convinced. We only say
these things to psychologists so that
we don't look like money-grabbing
wasters – or so I thought.But it turns out to be true –
research shows that money just
doesn't add up to happiness. Salary,
bonuses, worldwide adoration – these
things are “hygiene factors” in psy-
chological terms – they please us up
to a point, but without more sub-
stance we soon feel empty again.“It's about challenge,” says Simon
Lutterbie, an astute DPhil in social
psychology from the iOpener Institute
of People and Performance. “It's one
of the great psychological findings
that we are at our happiest when we
are on the brink of achieving some-
thing.”AA Milne summed up this trait, too:
“Well,” said Pooh. ‘What I like best...’
and then he had to stop and think.
Because although Eating Honey was a
very good thing to do, there was a
moment just before you began to eat
it which was better than when you
were, but he didn't know what it was
called.”Are a million young unemployed
people on the brink of achieving
something? If so, what might it be?
When I left university I felt on that
brink. Since then, I've decided that
firing off CVs and Post-It-note stack-
ing do not count as legitimate work-
ing challenges. Surely there now has
to be some kind of honey involved.

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Chief Financial Officer/Finance Director

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