

Spotlight on...

women in
construction

Date published: March 28th 2017

Last updated: June 29th 2018



The Considerate Constructors Scheme's 'Spotlight on...' campaigns focus on different areas associated with improving the image of construction, raising awareness among registered sites, companies and suppliers about the issues and how to help.

Spotlight on... women in construction

Spotlight on... women in construction aims to demonstrate why the construction industry should be addressing the issue of attracting more women into the industry.

In 2016, the number of women directly employed in construction hit a 20-year high. But despite comprising over 50% of the UK population, women still make up only 11% of the construction workforce; this number drops to just 1% of operatives on site. At less than 10% of engineering professionals, the UK has the lowest proportion of female engineers in Europe. With the industry facing a skills shortage, it has never been more important to draw from a wider pool of talent.

This campaign seeks to increase understanding of the issue of women in construction, highlight the great work done so far to promote diversity, showcase female role models and offer guidance on how to further encourage women into the industry.

Why are there so few women in construction?

Lingering sexist attitudes in the workplace are off-putting for many women. A July 2017 **survey by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)** found that nearly one third of women in construction said a fear of sexism held them back from pursuing senior roles. A January 2017 survey reported in **Building.co.uk** found that a shocking 73% of female engineers have experienced sexual discrimination, harassment or victimisation at work.

In 2018, it was revealed **in a survey** that construction has the third highest rate of unwanted sexual attention in the workplace, just below the hospitality and retail industries. Casual sexism, such as patronising and belittling attitudes, is also damaging and can result in women feeling unwelcome.

Other reasons for female under-representation in the industry relate to working conditions. While there have been vast improvements in recent years, particularly in on-site facilities, some sites still do not provide separate and equal welfare facilities. A **2018 survey by Unite** discovered that women share toilets with men on one in five construction sites.

Inflexible working hours can also deter women who have family commitments, contributing to the 'leaky pipeline' which sees women not return to the industry after having children.

The gender pay gap is an issue that must be addressed in every industry but it is particularly acute in construction. **The Office of National Statistics** reports that the national pay gap is 18.1%, but also found that male construction and building trades supervisors are paid 45% more than their female counterparts – this is the largest pay gap in the UK.

While there is certainly still room for improvement in the industry's approach to diversity, it can sometimes be more of an issue of image and perception which puts women off construction careers. People often perceive the industry as an all-male environment where the only jobs available involve manual labour.

A survey by housebuilder Redrow asked young people about the careers advice they received at school – just 29% of women had been given advice on construction careers compared to 40% of men. This leads to a lack of knowledge among young people about the variety of roles in the industry, encouraging the assumption that construction is a world of male builders and discouraging them from joining the industry.





Why does it matter?

Recruiting more women into the construction industry should not be just a tick-box exercise – it is essential to the long-term viability of the UK construction industry, especially given that the industry accounts for 6.5% of total economic output (House of Commons – Construction industry briefing paper, 2015).

The industry needs 35,000 new workers a year to tackle the skills shortage and this will not be filled by ignoring the talents of half of the population. Diversity is also an economic generator, driving innovation through collaboration and creative thinking.

According to McKinsey & Company, companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 21% more likely to experience above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile.

What is the Scheme doing to encourage women into construction?

The Considerate Constructors Scheme has been leading the effort to improve the image of construction and make the industry accessible to all. In the Checklist used by Scheme Monitors to score registered sites during their visits, Question 5.1 asks 'Does the site demonstrate a commitment to respect, fair treatment, encouragement and support?' while question 5.8 asks 'How is the site providing for the needs of a diverse workforce?' These questions address issues such as inclusion, harassment, open door policies and separate welfare facilities.

The Scheme is making a big impact in promoting construction careers to young men and women through our industry mascot Honor Goodsite. Honor is

a structural engineer and can be used by contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers to showcase the great career opportunities open to women in construction.

Honor appeals to primary school children, tackling perceptions about construction at an early age.

Scheme survey results

In order to understand how these issues affect the industry, the Scheme issued an anonymous survey to all registered sites, companies and suppliers. Over 1000 men and women responded, and the following results were gathered:

- **94%** said the industry would benefit from employing more women.
- **79%** said the industry has improved its approach to encouraging women into construction.
- **76%** said there are no construction jobs which only men can do.
- **74%** said there should not be quotas for hiring women into construction
- **52%** have witnessed or experienced sexism within the construction industry
- When asked the most important reason women do not choose to work in construction, **22%** said working conditions, **22%** said lack of female role models and **20%** said negative image of the industry.

The Scheme followed the survey with this 'Spotlight on...' campaign to provide information on the issue of women in construction.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Considerate Constructors Scheme Chief Executive Edward Hardy said:

"On behalf of the Scheme, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the 'Spotlight on...women in construction' campaign. The Campaign provides a must-read set of resources for organisations and individuals who would like to improve their standards of considerate construction – with the aim of driving greater equality, diversity and inclusion throughout our industry."

"Not only is it imperative that standards must be raised in this area in order to help encourage more people into the industry, a more equal and diverse workforce also brings greater collaboration, creative thinking and more inclusive workplaces – which can only be a positive step in helping to improve the image of the UK and Irish construction industry."

"The Scheme continues to push construction sites to ensure that the reality of being on site is one which is welcoming and suitably-equipped with the necessary facilities for all. It is only through these practical steps that the construction industry can achieve true equality, diversity and inclusivity."

While women are still under-represented in construction, the industry is making considerable progress in addressing diversity. The following sections highlight the steps taken by construction organisations and the Government, and showcase case studies of successful women across the industry. However, there is more to be done to improve gender diversity in construction and the conclusion offers advice on how to address these issues.



Law and legislation

The following law and legislation is relevant to helping address the obstacles faced by women in the workplace.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act superseded earlier legislation including the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The Act requires equal treatment in access to employment, as well as private and public services regardless of age, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender.

For Government guidance on the Act, click [here](#).

Gender pay gap reporting

From April 2017, UK employers with over 250 staff are required to publish statistics on the gender pay gap in their organisation. This provision of the Equality Act will apply to a number of UK construction organisations.

For Government guidance on mandatory gender pay gap reporting, click [here](#).

To read Acas's guidance on pay gap reporting, click [here](#).

External resources

Gender diversity is a huge issue in the construction industry today. There are numerous organisations and initiatives committed to encouraging women into the construction industry.

Organisations

- **Built by Both** is a campaign to inspire young women to embark on careers in the built environment through educational experience days and networking events involving female role models. The initiative was organised by graduates from Barratt Homes.
- **Chicks with Bricks** is a network for established and emerging women in the construction industry. They organise events throughout the year with guest speakers from the industry.
- **Constructing Equality** offer training workshops and consultancy services to guide employers on creating and sustaining a diverse workforce.
- **National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC)** is an international organisation of women working in the construction industry. They organise site visits and host seminars and workshops to promote women in construction.
- **Tomorrow's Engineers** seeks to create a national network of employers working to connect with young people interested in a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) career.
- **Volunteer It Yourself (VIY)** offers opportunities for young people (aged 14-24) to learn construction skills while volunteering on local community projects. Some 38% of the VIY volunteers are women.
- **Women's Engineering Society (WES)** is a charity and professional network of women in engineering disciplines, offering inspiration and support.
- **Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)** works to achieve gender balance in STEM industries by showcasing role models and providing consultancy and training. Their Ten Steps initiative encourages companies to sustain the pipeline of female talent in STEM. A number of contractors have signed up to this framework. Read more about the initiative [here](#).

SPOTLIGHT ON...

- WISE also offer an online Culture Analysis Tool which allows STEM companies to understand and benchmark the diversity and inclusion culture in their organisation. Read more [here](#).
- WISE's **People Like Me** resource uses the natural tendency of girls to articulate their self-identity using adjectives to show them that people like them are happy and successful working in STEM. View the 'People like Me in construction' pack [here](#).
- **Women into Construction** is a not-for-profit organisation that provides support for women looking to work in construction and assists contractors to recruit female workers.
- **Women on the Tools** (formerly Women and Manual Trades) aim to increase the percentage of women in manual trades through connecting tradeswomen and working with schools and employers.
- **Your Life** aims to increase the number of young people post-16 studying Maths and Physics by 50% by the end of 2017, encouraging more students to consider a career in STEM.

What is the industry doing?

- **Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)** released a video called 'Building Tomorrow' profiling women in construction. Watch the video [here](#). They have also launched a video blog series featuring a young female construction student using the hashtag #elliethbuilder. Watch the series [here](#).
- **Construction Industry Council (CIC)**'s Diversity Panel is a collaborative forum for members of all construction disciplines and professional bodies to identify and promote diversity policies in the construction industry. Find out more [here](#).
- **Construction Industry Federation** Ireland is encouraging women in the industry to share their stories as part of its **Building Equality** campaign.
- **Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)**'s BeFair accreditation framework aims to raise awareness about fairness, inclusion, respect and equal pay among construction companies. Find out more [here](#).
- **CITB Northern Ireland** run the Women in Construction Network Northern Ireland which provides site visits and seminars and provides an opportunity for women in the industry to network and experience different elements of the construction industry. The network also showcases case studies of women in the industry and runs events promoting construction among schoolchildren. For more information click [here](#).
- **Construction Youth Trust** has a #notjustforboys campaign which showcases role models and hosts careers courses for young people, such as the Budding Brunels programme. Find out more [here](#). To read the Smith Institute's 2016 #notjustforboys report covering the whole spectrum of the issue, click [here](#).
- **Federation of Master Builders** challenge stereotypes that women cannot be involved with manual building work by citing women's involvement in domestic DIY. View more [here](#).
- **Go Construct** highlights career opportunities for women by compiling information, case studies, links and personality quizzes. Find out more [here](#).
- **Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)** developed an apprenticeship toolkit in partnership with WISE to help businesses close the skills gap in construction by recruiting more female apprentices. For more information, click [here](#).
 - ICE is working with engineering companies to offer paid 'returnship' placements for older workers, with a particular focus on women. Read more [here](#).
- **Royal Academy of Engineering** offers a Diversity and Inclusion toolkit to give companies practical advice, tools and inspiration to improve diversity and inclusion in their workforce. Access the toolkit [here](#).
- **Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)** provides guides on how employers can implement diversity and inclusion. Their Inclusive Employer Quality Mark encourages companies to sign up and commit to improving inclusivity along six principles. Read more [here](#). To read RICS's 2016 report detailing the initiative, click [here](#).
- **Supply Chain Sustainability School** offers a free Fairness, Inclusion and Respect toolkit for the construction industry, including induction videos, e-learning courses and other key resources to promote inclusive behaviours. Access the toolkit [here](#).

What are contractors doing?

- **Ardmore** worked with Women into Construction to support female graduates into employment on the Olympic Park site. This work has continued and Ardmore routinely place female construction workers on their sites. Read more [here](#).
- **BAM Nuttall** has launched a range of work clothing specifically designed for women. The company is also using its highway vans as mobile advertising hoardings to encourage women to consider a career in construction. Read more [here](#).
- **Ballymore** is encouraging women to join the industry by providing fair career opportunities and supporting women in the workplace. They recently interviewed women working on their London City Island project about their experiences in the industry. Read more [here](#).
- **Bechtel, Bouygues** and **BRE Group** host women's networking forums for men and women to share advice and identify role models.
- **Crossrail** is seeking to boost the representation of women working in construction. Almost one third of jobs with Crossrail are filled by women and they are conducting school visits and working with Women into Construction to place more women with the company. Read some of their stories [here](#).



- **Durkan** worked for a decade with Lambeth Council Building Work for Women and Women and Manual Trades to build a sustainable pipeline of female apprentices. Read more [here](#).
- **Laing O'Rourke** has a PeopleFIRST (Fairness, Inclusion, Respect and Sustaining Talent) programme to create a workforce that reflects society by making the company appealing to people from diverse backgrounds. Find out more [here](#).
- **Lendlease** promotes women in construction as part of its commitment to diversity, with campaigns to increase the visibility of women in the industry. Read more [here](#).
- **Mace's** Women of the Future programme is a key part of their gender diversity policy. Run in partnership with WISE, the programme seeks to help participants reach their potential by building their skills, networks and confidence. Read more [here](#).
- **RG Group** is committed to equal opportunities and has written a whitepaper on women in construction, which can be read [here](#).
- **Willmott Dixon** is the only construction firm represented on the Women's Business Council, which advises the Government on how women's contribution to economic growth can be optimised. Watch their video on women in construction [here](#).
- **Women Returners** is a consultancy service for women returning from a career break. **Amey**, **Balfour Beatty**, **Skanska** and **Tideway** are among those offering returnships.



Examples of best practice

The Scheme aims to improve the image of construction through sharing best practice with the industry. Below are a number of best practice examples that have been witnessed by the Scheme's Monitors on their visits or submitted directly by registered sites, companies and suppliers:



- The company worked with Women into Construction to offer short term work placements and to place female professionals onto their projects.
- Appointed a 'female advisor' on site for female staff to contact, if an issue occurs.
- The contractor created an educational programme of hourly after-school sessions with two girls' schools. The programme involved working in groups to complete each stage of a new build.
- Created a range of company-branded PPE specifically designed for women.
- Hosted site visits from local girls' schools so they could see construction work in progress.
- The contractor promoted International Women in Engineering Day by interviewing female employees and sharing their stories through internal communications and social media channels.
- The site visited local schools to host engineering taster days involving practical challenges such as constructing a bridge using paper and recycled household waste.
- Encouraged employees to invite young women from their families to a taster day visiting construction sites to learn about engineering.

To view all Best Practice Hub entries relating to the 'Spotlight on... women in construction' campaign click [here](#).

Case studies

Women interested in a career in construction need to hear from successful women in the industry, as female role models are essential in helping to attract more women into the industry. The Scheme has reached out to women throughout the industry to hear their experiences of working in construction



Roma Agrawal is a Structural Engineer at AECOM and a Director of the Considerate Constructors Scheme. Throughout her career she has worked on major projects, including The Shard, and appeared on television and radio promoting engineering careers to young people. Read her case study [here](#).



Nayera Aslam is Aviation Engineering Manager for AECOM. Nayera was attracted to an engineering career by technical feats like the Channel Tunnel and the Hoover Dam and has since worked on projects including the London 2012 Olympics. Read her case study [here](#).



Caroline Barker is a civil engineer by profession and a Monitor for the Considerate Constructors Scheme. She is actively involved in the effort to improve the image of the industry and encourage people from diverse backgrounds to consider a career in construction. Read her case study [here](#).



Stephanie Bennett is a trainee Quantity Surveyor with Morgan Sindall. She worked in administration before becoming a surveyor and is currently being supported through university by Morgan Sindall. Read her case study [here](#).



Victoria Betts is a senior Site Manager at Higgins Construction working on the Gabriel Square project in St. Albans. She started in the industry working with her father for a general building company carrying out plastering, tiling and kitchen installation. Read her case study [here](#).



Sally Cave is the first qualified female Gas Membrane Installer in the UK. She began working at her father's installation company in administration but trained to become qualified for on-site work. Read her case study [here](#).

SPOTLIGHT ON...



Margaret Conway is a Project Manager for McAleer & Rushe. In 2017 she became the first woman to win the Construction Manager of the Year Award for her work on the 9 Adelaide project in Belfast. Read her case study [here](#).



Michèle Dix is Managing Director of Crossrail 2, a new railway which will improve access to and from London and reduce congestion on existing rail services. Before moving to Crossrail, Michèle worked as Director of Congestion Charging at Transport for London. Read her case study [here](#).



Katie Kelleher is a crawler crane operator working for Select/Laing O'Rourke. Katie worked in recruitment before starting an apprenticeship in October 2014. She has been working on the Tottenham Court Road Crossrail site since May 2015. Read her case study [here](#).



Eilish Kwai is the Employment and Skills Manager at Ardmore. She is actively involved with the Women into Construction organisation, providing women with advice, training and job opportunities in the industry. Read her case study [here](#).



Ruby Lee is a Trainee Site Manager with Berkeley Homes. She had never considered a construction career until attending a careers event where Berkeley were present. She has been working on the Kidbrooke Village site since September 2017. Read her case study [here](#).



Kath Moore is a qualified carpenter by trade and the Managing Director of Women into Construction, a not-for-profit organisation supporting women wishing to work in the construction industry. Read her case study [here](#).



Megan Robinson is a Technical Coordinator at Barratt Developments plc and co-founder of Built by Both, a campaign to inspire young women to embark on careers in the built environment. Read her case study [here](#).



Noelene Russell is an Architectural Assistant at Claridge Architects. She was attracted to architecture by its artistic nature and is currently working on a large development project in Plymouth. Read her case study [here](#).



Morganstone employees **Natalie Bishop** (Civil Engineering and Groundworks Buyer), **Trudi Bowen** (Business Systems Manager) and **Lisa Snape** (Gate person) discuss their routes into construction and their experiences as women in the industry.

What can you do?

As we have seen, the construction industry is making important strides in addressing the gender imbalance. Diversity is increasingly embedded in company policy and the number of women working in construction is increasing.

Recruitment agency Randstad report that in 2005, 79% of female construction workers said their company was doing little to attract female workers; by 2015, this was down to 29%. Indeed, 79% of respondents to the Scheme survey agreed that in recent years the industry has improved its approach to encouraging women into construction.

"My experience is very positive and I have found most on site to be supportive and helpful ... A career in construction is hugely rewarding, I am proud to be here."

"In the 15 years I have worked in the industry there has been a positive increase in the number of female trainees, construction managers and engineers."

"I experience no difference in pay or opportunity and no mistreatment at work because of my gender and believe the industry has come a long way from more traditional views."

– Anonymous responses to the Scheme survey

However, the effort to achieve gender equality in construction is far from over. The industry is making progress on the issue but women still comprise only 11% of the construction workforce. The imbalance needs to be corrected due to the skills shortage, so what more can the industry do to contribute to this effort?

Embedding equality and diversity in recruitment

"I work for a small construction company, who have an older and more traditional outlook. We have no women employed to work on site and although it is never mentioned, I don't think that a woman would be considered for such a role."

– Anonymous response to the Scheme survey

Embedding equality and diversity in recruitment will

help increase the number of women working in construction and make the industry more inclusive. Organisations should consider the following points to address gender inequality in their workforce:

- Companies should have an Equality and Diversity policy which ensures the requirements of the Equality Act are implemented. This will involve providing equal and transparent recruitment, training and promotion prospects for men and women.
- Employers should be aware of how hiring policies can create barriers for women through unconscious bias, for example informal word of mouth recruitment/promotion and using traditionally masculine words like 'strong' in job descriptions.
- Encouraging returnships for older workers will address the 'leaky pipeline' which sees construction lose talented women who do not return to the industry after a career break.
- The issue should not sit in Human Resources but be closely monitored and incorporated into the business plan through Key Performance Indicators making diversity a top priority.

Improving the image of the industry

"The first thought people have about the construction industry is instantly of cold, wet working conditions and an unpleasant working environment, which is not the case."

– Anonymous response to the Scheme survey

To attract both women and men to construction careers requires changing perceptions to show that construction is a professional industry with a wide range of interesting and lucrative jobs available. When conducting recruitment drives and youth outreach the following points should be emphasised:

- Most people associate construction work with hard manual labour. It should be advertised that, especially with the rise of technology such as Building Information Modelling, construction is about project management, leadership, creativity, organisation, communication and teamwork. Resources such as WISE's '**People like Me**' pack can assist contractors in highlighting this to young people.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

- The industry must showcase that construction can be a highly paid, highly skilled industry to work in. **Careers in Construction** records the average Site Manager salary as £60,000 in London, £50,000 in the South East and £37,000 nationally.

Encouraging a change in culture

"I've become really demoralised over the past year because I still face sexism in the workplace all the time. It's draining me."

– Anonymous response to the Scheme survey

While the situation has improved for many women in construction, there are some construction sites in the UK which continue to be hostile to female workers and members of the public. As long as this remains the case, many women will be discouraged from joining the industry. There are steps that sites can take to tackle sexism and encourage a more inclusive workplace culture:

- All sites must have a zero tolerance policy on sexism and harassment and have an open door policy to encourage all workers to report inappropriate behaviour. Some sites have introduced telephone hotlines for workers to report bullying and harassment.
- Site induction and toolbox talks should cover equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure all workers are treated with fairness, inclusion and respect. **The Supply Chain Sustainability School** provides free training videos on these subjects; see the 'External resources' section for details.
- Companies could work with women's organisations to organise training for their workforce in recognising and eliminating casual sexism and unconscious bias.
- Establishing company support networks for women to share their experiences will help to break the isolation that many women in construction face.

Improving working conditions

"I was given no flexibility when I was pregnant and was told "you chose to do a man's job so you have to get on with it""

– Anonymous response to the Scheme survey

The working conditions in construction have improved dramatically in recent years, but there are further ways to promote equality through fairer working conditions and modern facilities. Measures that sites could consider include:

- Ensuring that all sites have separate and equal welfare facilities for men and women.
- Providing appropriate PPE for women, securing their safety and comfort on site.
- Ensuring men and women receive equal pay for equal work while also monitoring and working to close the gender pay gap by encouraging more women in senior positions.
- Introducing flexible working hours to accommodate those with family commitments. Flexibility benefits working fathers, older workers and those with disabilities, helping to increase diversity across the board.



Promoting female role models

"As women, in our lives we do not see women in high places as much as you do men. This is very disheartening."

– Anonymous response to the Scheme survey

Women currently working in construction should openly discuss their careers with children and adults to change perceptions of the industry and break down stereotypes. The following points will help organisations effectively promote female role models:

- Successful women in the industry should be identified in promotional literature and encouraged to speak in schools and colleges to show the future generation that the industry is diverse and inclusive.
- Rewarding female role models, for example through the annual **Women in Construction awards**, helps raise the profile of leading women in the industry and shows that women do excel by having a career within construction.
- More women in senior leadership positions within construction companies and other organisations will help to inspire women already in the industry to aim high and seek promotion.

Working with schools and colleges

"I do a number of school visits at primary age and am often told that I cannot be a builder as I am a girl. At college, young adults do not even consider a career in construction because they are unaware of all the roles that are available."

– Anonymous response to the Scheme survey

Many preconceptions about construction are formed at a very early age. Contractors are already doing great work through school outreach programmes, but this could be translated into more formal links between the industry and schools and colleges. The following factors should be considered when working with schools and colleges:

- Careers advisers, teachers and parents need to be given a better insight into the industry to enable them to pass on accurate and useful advice to young people considering a career in construction. This will ensure construction is portrayed positively

and not as a 'last resort' for non-academic students or a profession only suited to men.

- Work experience, taster days and site visits will help challenge preconceptions about construction by showing young people that the industry is an exciting and interesting place to work.
- Apprenticeships are vital ways of providing young people interested in construction with opportunities to develop their skills. The industry should work with schools and colleges to identify students who could benefit from such training.
- When appealing to a younger audience, contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers could use the Scheme's **Honor Goodsite** character as an example of a female engineer to show that women can have rewarding careers in construction.



The industry is making great progress in encouraging more women to pursue construction careers, but more can be done to increase gender diversity. By continuing to work together to tackle perceptions and change industry practices, construction will become a truly inclusive industry.

As well as the information above, it is also advised to use the resources provided in the 'External resources' section of this campaign which identifies information from other organisations and companies.

The Scheme will continue to update this page as new case studies and examples of how the industry is tackling this issue are identified.

If you would like to share how your organisation helps to encourage more women to consider a career in construction, please contact the Scheme by emailing enquiries@ccsbestpractice.org.uk.