

Women in Construction

Following last month's celebrations of the International Women's Day on the 8th of March and Mother's Day on the 26th March, we would like to present to our readers that the construction industry is open for women. Despite numerous campaigns, according to the latest NHBC Foundation research, women still accounts for 12% of construction professionals and only 4% of skilled workers. The building industry has become significantly more professional, more sustainable and technologically advanced. It offers competitive pay, prospects and career advancement, but the awareness of these benefits available for women is still unconvincing.

The construction sector is very rewarding but demanding. It also has an unattractive public im-

age. The perception of daily work on dirty, cold and male-dominated building sites do not encourage young women to direct their career this path. On the other hand, the question can be asked whether construction employers are ready to employ women?

Many companies are actively taking on women employees, while others still see females workers as weaker labourers than man. The barriers to entry the sector are less visible in other construction roles, for example, building inspectors, surveyors, estimators, managers or other construction related professional jobs. The stereotype of the men as the construction sector workers have to be constantly challenged-are homeowners ready to employ the residential building companies directed by women on their renovation projects or to work with female architects? To keep up with demand, the industry needs to recruit another million workers by 2020, so the potential for women to secure a well-paid position in the industry is huge.

What career opportunities construction industry offers for women?

- Architects
- Developers
- Contractors
- Surveyors
- Engineers
- Project managers
- Planning Officers

- Estimators
- Building Control & Site Inspectors
- Construction Lawyers and Legal Advisors
- Tradeswomen Off-site
- Tradeswomen On-site
- Designers
- Policymakers
- Secretarial roles
- Procurement managers
- Health, Safety & Environmental Advisor
- Sustainability Specialists
- Accountants
- Heritage Consultants
- HR
- Materials Engineers
- Plant Operators
- Depot Managers
- BIM Managers

Visit www.goconstruct.org to browse through varied construction roles.

New research by the NHBC Foundation warns that the UK's house-building industry must do more to attract women and young people to avoid workforce crisis. NHBC Foundation report: The gender and age profile of the house-building sector warns of a significant shortfall in workers caused by an over-reliance on an ageing, male-dominated workforce and potential restrictions to migrant labour following Brexit.



According to the report 700,000 new workers will need to be recruited to cover those retiring, plus an extra 120,000 if the government's aim to build one million new homes by 2020 is to be achieved (source: Farmer report). The NHBC Foundation report calls on government and house builders to recognise the seriousness of the problem and to act now to address the shortfall.

The report, based on data from the Office of National Statistics' Labour Force Survey and detailed interviews with house-building companies and senior industry commentators, provides valuable insights into age and gender diversity within the house-building sector. Just 12% of the UK's house building workforce is female, the majority

in secretarial or administration jobs, with less than 4% having a skilled trade role. The report also finds that young people, especially girls, are put off working in the industry because of the negative, stereotypical image of a male-dominated house-building industry.

Some of the major challenges for the industry in attracting women and young people include:

- Working conditions – the belief that all work in the industry takes place outdoors in all weathers
- Fears of a sexist environment – concerns about the language and behaviour of male workers on site
- Poor hiring and recruitment practices
- over reliance on gender biased recruitment literature and advertising and over-use of personal contacts and networks to recruit workers
- Skills shortages – cycles of recession and growth mean that many skilled workers leave the industry during downturns, which has a knock-on effect of reducing the talent pool
- Outsourcing of site staff – a large proportion of on-site trade roles are managed by sub-contractors, and therefore house-building companies themselves have little say on who is actually working on site.



One of the main findings of the report is that women are still seriously under-represented in skilled, technical and managerial roles in house building. It identifies a number of challenges that need to be tackled by the sector, and the broader construction industry, that are deep-rooted and endemic, such as ongoing stereotyping and antiquated recruitment practices.

Uninformed and outdated careers advice in schools is also failing to make all young people aware of the variety of jobs and roles on offer, with advisers unable to promote effectively the many attractive career opportunities in the sector.

Commenting on the report, NHBC Head of Research and Innovation Neil Smith said: "Young people and young women in particular need to be made aware of the wide range of roles in the house-building industry. From design to engineering and site management, many careers in house building are rewarding and well paid, offering work in a variety of roles and environments."

Commenting on her experiences as a woman working in the house-building industry, Redrow Homes' site manager and 2016 NHBC Pride in the Job Seal of Excellence winner Zara Fairman said: "It's a real privilege to be able to show that it's not just a man's world and that women can do well in the house-building industry. It's also important to know that you don't necessarily have to be from

a trade, or engineering background – there are lots of transferable skills needed for this job."

The report has a number of recommendations to help government and companies tackle the problem including;

Top level/government

Recognition and awareness – government must acknowledge that the current lack of diversity is a serious issue that results in the industry missing out on talent

Sustained investment – government and housing developers should commit to continued investment to sustain the talent pool even in times of economic downturn

Investment in career guidance – careers education in schools must be prioritised to ensure that young people (and adults throughout their careers) are given impartial, accurate advice to guide them in decision making for their

Companies and Human Resources teams

Greater collaboration – companies must work together to provide a consistent approach to tackling diversity

Reflection and learning – vital lessons can be learned from other industries and organisations that

have successfully begun to tackle diversity issues, e.g. the British military

Funding opportunities – initiatives such as apprenticeship academies need further investment to increase their breadth of reach

Development of social media – making more effective use of social media to market careers in house building effectively

Promotion of women – To highlight female success and inspire the next generation of female leaders in house building, companies should be encouraged to promote more women into senior positions and non-executive board roles

Encouragement and support for retraining – to capitalise on talent and loyalty within their business and to promote career progression, companies should consider offering to support current staff, in particular women, to retrain in trade or technical roles

Mentoring young people already within the sector – companies should use experienced workers as mentors to give young people role models that they can easily relate to and who demonstrate progression and success.

The gender and age profile of the house-building sector (NF75) was published 06.02.17 and is available to download on www.nhbcfoundation.org

(Source: NHBC Foundation)