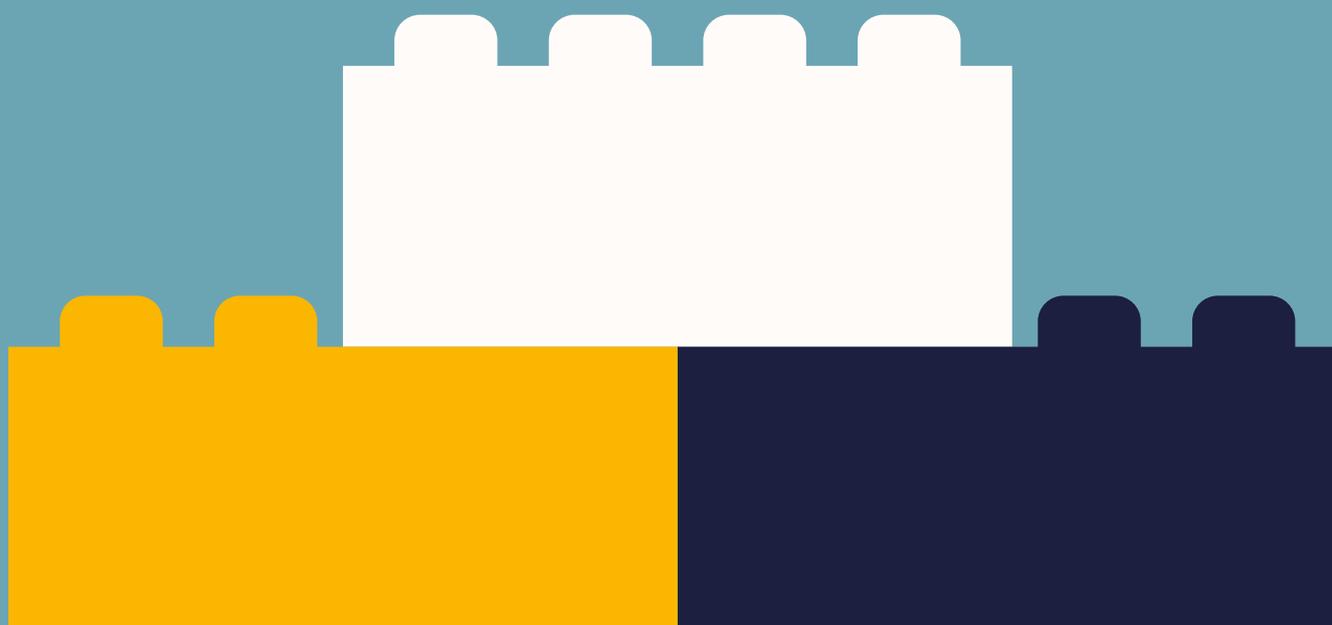


# women in construction.



Building pace post-Brexit.

# foreword.

**The past year has been difficult.** Parliamentary and political paralysis led to widespread spending decision delays across the construction industry. Project procrastination halted productivity and demand for workers stalled. Candidates suddenly valued job security over job variety, with appetite to change roles borderline non-existent.

There are positive signs that demand for skilled professionals in the construction, property and engineering industry is now on the rise. Off the back of a tricky period of uncertainty caused by Brexit, things are slowly gathering pace. Now that the UK is in the process of leaving the EU big top-tier projects are picking up pace. HS2 (which has been given the formal go ahead from the PM), Hinkley Point C and Thames Tideway are all positive indications that the construction industry is hungry to move forward again.

#### **A distraction from the diversity agenda?**

When it comes to diversity, the construction industry has taken some huge leaps forward since the millennium. It's a topic that's gathered momentum both in the boardroom and the building site - it was no surprise that Randstad's previous Women in Construction insight proved so valuable. Has the industry managed to maintain positive momentum during the challenging political climate? That is the question on everyone's lips.

Our 2020 report reveals that there are undoubtedly wins, losses and draws when it comes to moving the needle. If we are to tackle the issue of discrimination in our sector, there is no room for further distractions.



#### **Fastrack or fallback.**

The next 18 months are critical for women in construction. Not only do we need to drive project momentum, but we need to ensure that we don't take our fingers off the diversity pulse.

I'm confident that's something we can achieve together. Whilst there is still a stigma surrounding women in construction, female leaders and career progression, it's been well documented that gender diversity brings a whole range of benefits to business and boosted productivity. This however only exists in the context where gender diversity is viewed as normality, and this is the goal we are trying to reach.

Ultimately, increased diversity will benefit the construction industry and wider society. Diversity leads to innovation, improved performance and economic benefits – everything the construction industry is looking for.

#### **About the research.**

In December 2019, Randstad surveyed more than 4,200 construction, property, engineering and rail professionals to find out the key barriers, limitations and challenges that women are facing on the path to senior leadership.

**Owen Goodhead, managing director,  
Randstad construction, property and engineering.**

# discrimination still exists in a post-brexit britain.

Brexit, naturally has been a huge talking point and potential pain point for business leaders and HR teams.

The construction industry is one that is still playing catch up in working towards a diverse workforce, and women are still experiencing discrimination, despite best efforts to remove. Mixed opinions on the Brexit referendum and the UK's exit has the ability to cause xenophobia in the wider society, which naturally spills into the workplace. As we work towards increasing workplace diversity in general, our survey results provide a good starting point into looking at how women in construction are discriminated against, and what can be done to combat this.



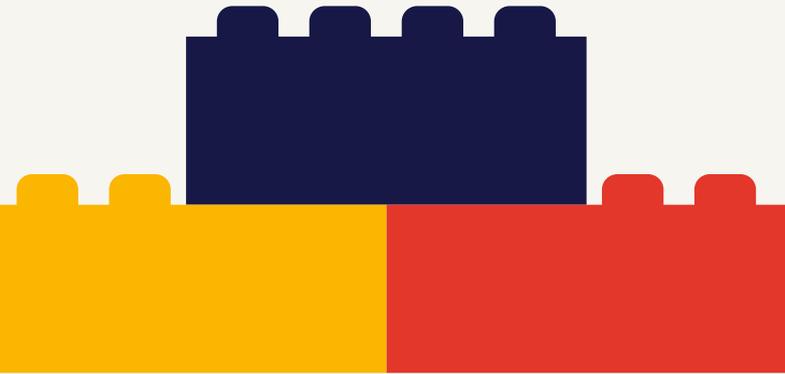
The survey revealed that 41% of female construction workers received inappropriate comments from male colleagues.

Unfortunately gender discrimination still hasn't been stamped out. 2019 survey responses from female workers only showed an 8% reduction in reports of workplace gender discrimination, illustrating little change on the last survey's results, despite moves to improve women's equality such as gender pay gap reporting.

In 2019, 72% of women in construction experienced gender discrimination in the workplace in some shape or form, compared to 80% in 2018.



# tearing down the barriers



## brick by brick.

### A quarter of women are left out of conversations or social events.

Of the 72% of women who experienced being on the receiving end of gender decriminalisation in the workplace, 26% felt left out or excluded from male conversations or social events.

With regards to social events, the analysis found that some women brought up not being invited to social events (including lunch) or being “accidentally” excluded from information sharing opportunities. Being “left out,” even in strong, team-based environments, led to resentment and mistrust of their coworkers.

With women being left out of informal social events, it is possible that this will extend to more important and strategic meetings, with long-lasting career implications. This could also be a result of unconscious bias.

“The industry will not change and will not get significantly better until we increase equality and diversity. We need to utilise women’s unique skill sets, the same way we utilise men’s - that is when the industry will become more efficient.”

[Angela Carney, consultant and director, Carney consultancy](#)

As more women join the industry and diversity of construction roles progresses, employers need to monitor social events or group activities which are traditionally known as ‘male activities’.

With previous Randstad research revealing that over a third of EU nationals were considering leaving the UK due to Brexit, an increase in workers to help fill the gap is vital to prevent key projects slowing. Social exclusion doesn’t need to be the brick wall preventing women from applying for roles.

# what women want.

## A flexible approach to construction work.

The current male-dominated industry is often guilty of overlooking flexible working options and sticking with a traditional hours based model of working. This of course doesn't take into account maternity leave and returning to work programmes for women who would benefit from a phased return.

One in ten revealed that better child care options would be the number one change which could persuade more women to join or stay in the industry. 11% rank flexible working hours as the top factor preventing them from leaving. 7% rank maternity rights and pay the highest, highlighting that the construction industry still has some catch-up to play when compared to other industries.

With Brexit prompting some workers to consider leaving, organisations need to look at how they implement flexible ways of working, and parental leave.

Gender differences in full and part-time experience account for a large amount of the gender differences in wage progression. The percentage of men and women working in part-time jobs (less than 25 hours) changes in the period around the birth of the first child.

The UK does not rank highly in terms of paid leave available to mothers compared to other European countries. With some workers still considering leaving the UK, it's important for employers to look at their policies and see if extra flexibility and ways of working can be implemented in order to retain the current female workforce.



One in ten revealed that better child care options would be the number one change which could persuade more women to join or stay in the industry.

# work-life balance



is key.

“Where employers truly embrace flexible working practices, that can be a major positive contributor to work-life balance; both from a practical but also an emotional perspective.

Agile working is much more attainable in today’s world, and offers benefits both to the employer and to the employee.”

Ingrid Osborne, divisional chair,  
London and South East - Taylor Wimpey Group.



New data shows that the factor holding women back in their career was not necessarily just gender discrimination, but the need to maintain a work-life balance 50% said that it had “a lot” or “some” impact on their career.

A positive work-life balance is notoriously difficult to achieve in senior construction roles, despite gender. Bill Hill adds:

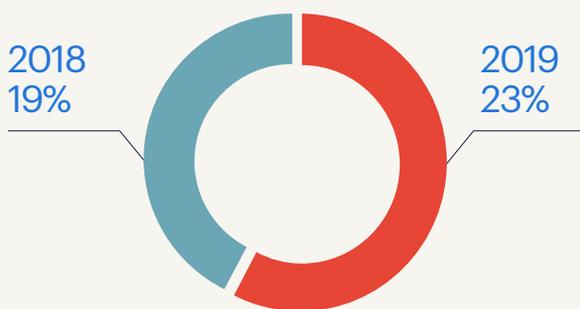
“many of the projects are away from home. You’ve got the stresses and strains of being away from the family and living in difficult accommodation.”

# normalising the female construction leader.

Brexit uncertainty stalled the industry. The lack of confidence in investing in large projects meant that organisations and workers suffered. As the industry slowly picks up pace following the UK's departure from the EU announcement, it's time for employers to fill the roles by accessing wider talent pools.

The good news is that the industry is seeing an uplift in women staying in their roles for longer periods.

According to our 2019 survey data, 23% of women have been in their current job for longer than two years, up from 19% in 2018, showing some progress is being made.



A 2% rise in women staying in construction roles for 6-10 years has also been recorded, although the number of new workers has fallen by 8% since 2018, with 41% of respondents falling into the '0-2 years' category.

Looking into detail about the pull factors, half (50%) said more flexible working hours are one of the key reasons that women would be inclined to stay in their construction role and 42% suggested better childcare options to increase chances of retainment.

"Small adjustments can make a big difference. Being open to starting a meeting at 09:30 instead of 08:30, or finishing a meeting at 4pm instead of 5pm can have a big impact on how women perceive the organisation and their value within it.

Being willing to have the conversation – both the employee and the employer – in terms of apprehensions, concerns and impact of family life is important, so that adjustments can be made where possible."

Ingrid Osborne, Divisional Chair,  
London and South East - Taylor Wimpey Group.

Taking into consideration why women are leaving the industry, 47% of females stated that a male dominated culture remains the number one reason that they think that others might leave.

Looking at a wider pool of respondents, males agree with workplace culture being the key driver behind women leaving. A further 35% highlighted the lack of flexible hours as an issue, and another third (33%) said stress was a key driver pushing women away from construction roles.

# building bridges



## for female construction leaders.

In 2018, more than half of females said that they never had a female manager (52%). In 2019, that number lowered to 36%, showing that progress is being made.

49% of all respondents never had a female manager in 2018. Going into 2019/2020, 40% highlighted a lack of female leadership in their organisation - a change of 9%, indicating slight progress in the number of women in management roles within the industry year on year.

15% of organisations surveyed had never promoted a woman to a senior position.



When asked how having a female manager would impact construction workers' jobs, an overwhelming 95% say that it would either improve or be the same.

With only 5% stating that having a female manager would have a negative impact on their role (down from 7% in 2018) suggests that the female leader in construction is slowly becoming more common.

Of the organisations which provided reasons that they believe are preventing women seeking their first roles in construction, a lack of female role models in the field was the most impactful factor to three in ten (29%).

Disappointingly, many still have a non-gender-diverse leadership board. 43% of organisations surveyed responded 'No' to 'do any women make up your board of directors'.

# picking up the pace post brexit.

## While projects recover following Brexit uncertainty, it's imperative to tap into all available talent pools.

This signals a prized opportunity for both the industry and employers to harness and retain a sizeable proportion of their existing workforce.

Our survey asked candidates what could be done to persuade more women to join the construction industry, or stay in their role they are already working in.

Unsurprisingly, equal pay came out on top, from both a male and female perspective. The gender pay gap continues to be an issue across the country's workforce in general, with the overall pay gap standing at 17.3% (ONS, 2019).

18% of respondents ranked equal pay as the factor which would have the biggest impact on retaining and attracting a female workforce.

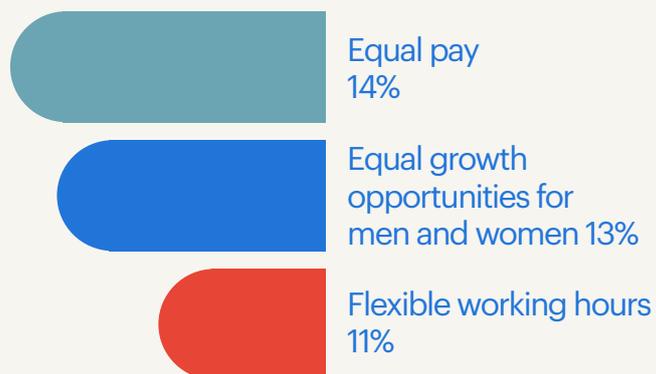


A key factor preventing young female workers from joining the industry stems from a lack of education and knowledge.

It highlighted the importance of STEM students refreshing their capabilities, as many innovative organisations rely on regular intake of good quality graduates.

## Building plans for the year ahead.

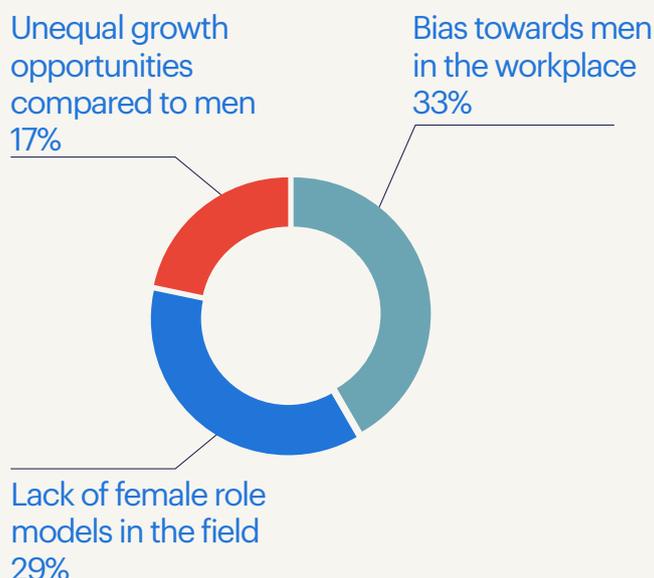
The top three reasons identified by those working in construction roles as the most important factors to help women stay in the industry:



While work is being done in the form of raising awareness for employers to encourage a more diverse workforce through a range of resources and reports, there are still factors preventing women from joining the industry in the first place.

Our survey asked organisations if they thought that anything holds women back when seeking their first job in the industry - disappointingly over half (51%) answered yes.

Top three reasons as identified by organisations as the number one factor holding women back when seeking their first job in the industry.



# the road to equality.

Further Randstad research reinforced the need for employers to work harder to support transgender inclusion, with just 14% of poll respondents admitting that they were not aware of a transgender policy at work, and 60% being unsure.

“my hope is that in the future, diversity is something that is just there in the workplace. It will become a subject we don’t have to talk about anymore.”

Samantha West,  
commercial director, Vinci Facilities



# climbing the construction career ladder.

## career ladder.

Out of the 2,300 women that experienced gender discrimination in the workplace, nearly two thirds (63%) highlighted either being passed over for a promotion, overseen for particular project or being offered a less important role.

In order to overcome barriers to progression in the workplace for women, transparency and formalisation can help reduce gender bias when combined with senior oversight of these processes.

Responses from organisations regarding which initiatives they have in place to support and encourage women to transition into senior positions, show that some are working to implement procedures to promote career progression.



While this is good to see, groups/communities for women are only offered by one in ten organisations and inspirational case studies offered by just 5%.

Advice from the 'Improving Women's Progression in the Workplace Government Equalities Office report, employers are encouraged to ensure that;

-  Training line managers in implementing processes.
-  Senior figures should have oversight of pay and promotion decisions and have the power to challenge them.



Changing perception and removing the unconscious bias is a huge step that the construction industry needs. A third of organisations surveyed who believe that there are specific reasons that hold women back when seeking their first construction role, highlighted the bias towards men in the workplace as the main reason.

To combat this, employers can take steps to prevent discrimination such as removing names from CVs, amending language in job descriptions and reviewing benefit packages to appeal to a more diverse audience.

# get in touch.



Birmingham  
birmingham@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0121 212 7790

Brighton  
brighton@randstadcpe.com  
T: 01273 391010

Bristol  
bristol@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0145 461 0000

Edinburgh  
edinburgh@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0131 240 0884

Engineering  
eng@randstad.co.uk  
T: 01489 560 120

Executive Search  
info@randstadexecutive.com  
T: 0191 244 2553

Glasgow  
glasgow@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0141 248 7212

Leeds  
leeds@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0113 245 6161

Leicester  
leicester@randstadcpe.com  
0116 208 1140

London  
london@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0203 680 0600

Maidstone  
maidstone@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0162 235 7230

Manchester  
manchester@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0161 238 8800

Newcastle  
newcastle@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0191 221 1567

Reading  
reading@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0118 902 7690

Southampton  
southampton@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0148 956 0200

Welwyn Garden City  
welwyn@randstadcpe.com  
T: 0170 737 8378

## resources.

1. [https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what\\_we\\_do/media\\_centre/press\\_releases/987\\_two\\_in\\_five\\_female\\_bosses\\_say\\_their\\_workplace\\_is\\_sexist](https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what_we_do/media_centre/press_releases/987_two_in_five_female_bosses_say_their_workplace_is_sexist)
2. <https://hbr.org/2019/08/even-at-inclusive-companies-women-of-color-dont-feel-supported>
3. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/840404/KCL\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840404/KCL_Main_Report.pdf)
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7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/09/16/minister-orders-inquiry-4000-per-cent-rise-children-wanting/>
8. <https://nationalcentrefordiversity.com/three-reasons-need-better-diversity-construction-industry>
9. <https://www.randstad.co.uk/future-of-the-construction-workforce/>
10. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/840849/KCL\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840849/KCL_Summary_Report.pdf)

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