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INDUSTRY ANALYSIS AND FORECASTING

# Rethinking Recruitment

Constructing a More Attractive Industry



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# Foreword

**Construction has long faced challenges in recruiting the people it needs. Competition with other sectors for skills is getting more intense. Skills shortages are getting worse and too few are joining the industry. Employers are facing pressures for existing skills and the need to develop new skills.**

**Approaches to recruitment need to change and industry needs to develop to make itself relevant to a wider base.**

By 2030, the number of young adults entering the workforce is expected to increase by 25%. And millions of workers are potentially looking to switch their career as a result of the pandemic. This provides an opportunity for industry to attract more people from a wider range of backgrounds to meet existing needs and with more diverse experience to meet future challenges.

New approaches that will succeed in increasing the volume of new recruits are likely to be driven by the need to modernise – not just in the way industry does things, but in attitudes and behaviours, working practices and the flexibility offered. These, in turn, will improve retention and diversity.

“The UK is used to the idea of skills gaps, but they are becoming more pronounced across the whole economy. Research is a powerful tool and CITB’s work here is of great strategic importance for construction.

We all need to take stock of how our collective industry ‘brand’ is perceived, and understand how we can open people’s eyes to the exciting and rewarding opportunities.

The objective is a clear pathway to follow, one that ensures construction is not overlooked or misunderstood. This is a journey, and there will always be improvements we can make, but we’re keen to drive together with the rest of the industry, so the UK talent pool is alive to the exciting and well-paid possibilities in construction.”



**Pat Boyle**  
Managing Director,  
Morgan Sindall Construction

## Preparing for the future

As construction is competing against other sectors for key skills it needs to match what they do. That may mean offering similar levels of flexibility and working conditions. It needs to build on existing skills with technological and behavioural innovations to improve productivity.

Without the workers and skills required to do it, industry will be unable to build the homes the country needs, construct the infrastructure to ensure the economy thrives and retrofit most of our built environment to meet net zero targets. There is no other option.

Approaching a third (30%) of the research respondents said construction is for someone like them. There is plenty of room to improve this proportion, which means there is a great opportunity to meet the recruitment need.

But to attract people to work in an industry, it needs to offer what they want – something that looks like them and meets their career aspirations. Construction needs to look ahead and give itself this new perspective. Our research suggests that it needs to make more of its many strengths.

## Increasing the number and diversity of new recruits

Increasingly employers are seeking more diverse and new skills in carrying out traditional jobs. A lack of diversity means whole sections of the potential workforce are missing.

We do not have enough skilled people to meet existing, yet alone future, needs. And yet, women make up 14%<sup>1</sup> of the workforce and workers from ethnic minorities just 6%<sup>2</sup> – despite respectively accounting for 50% and 14% of the total working age population. Improving the diversity of the workforce will help fill the skills gap, while bringing new perspectives and ideas.

## Recruitment barriers

Construction workers are more likely to have found a job through their personal network and word of mouth rather than through competitive application. If workers without the right personal contacts don't get a chance to apply, industry misses their talent.

## Industry working together

Recruiting enough of the right people is ultimately down to employers – presenting to a new generation an industry they want to join. There is already industry-wide support behind this.

The Construction Leadership Council (CLC), with support from employers, federations and others including CITB, is coordinating strategic change and action plans, as well as highlighting best practice and promoting attraction initiatives.

Go Construct provides vital careers information to a new cohort and has introduced new tools to help employers promote construction careers. The Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR) Programme is encouraging positive cultural shifts. Go Construct STEM Ambassadors are taking construction into the classroom. We must build on the great work already taking place and innovate to achieve meaningful change.



### Lucie Wright

Careers Strategy Manager,  
CITB

1. [www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lor/2092957698/report.aspx#tabrespop](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lor/2092957698/report.aspx#tabrespop)
2. [www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/working-age-population/latest](http://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/working-age-population/latest)



# Key findings

## Insiders and outsiders

Industry insiders view construction as diverse, flexible and aligned with their values. Outsiders often disagree. Outsiders have limited knowledge of what construction can offer, while negative perceptions surrounding culture and behaviours persist.

Improved delivery of information, advice and guidance via targeted recruitment messaging will encourage more outsiders to consider a construction career.

## Positive values

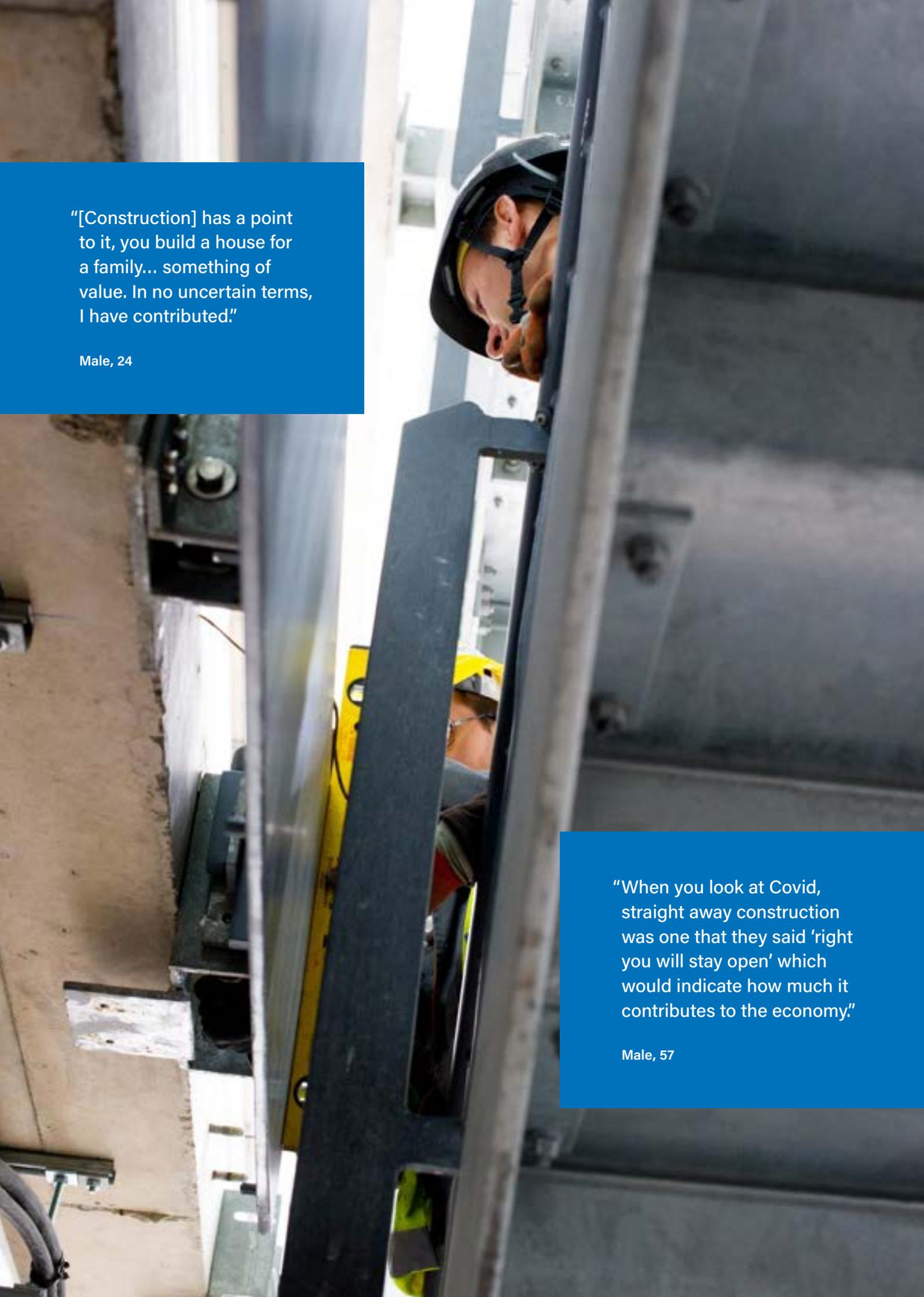
The industry needs to understand what makes other sectors more appealing in order to learn from them. But it should also understand that there is much that makes construction attractive and play to these strengths. Recruitment needs to align with individuals' values and principles and make clear the positive things that can be achieved in a construction career.

Positive values where construction performs strongly include:

- Stability and security
- Experiencing a variety of work
- Having a positive impact on others
- The ability to specialise and become an expert.

## The effects of the pandemic

During the peak of economic uncertainty, construction's perceived stability was viewed positively by new recruits. This may present an opportunity to target candidates with recent work experience from industries which have suffered upheaval, job losses or now seem insecure. The response to Covid also increased flexible working and the use of new technologies and processes. Both are seen as being key to creating an environment that is more appealing to a diverse workforce.



"[Construction] has a point to it, you build a house for a family... something of value. In no uncertain terms, I have contributed."

Male, 24

"When you look at Covid, straight away construction was one that they said 'right you will stay open' which would indicate how much it contributes to the economy."

Male, 57



"[We need] A clear presentation of the types of careers it entails, how career progression in it works, what skills it requires and what's the salary range to expect."

Male, under 25

# What the research highlights industry can do

**The research establishes some clear opportunities for industry to respond to.**

## Increase the visibility and awareness of what construction has to offer

Awareness and understanding of what the industry can offer is poor. Construction is a huge, fast-growing sector with a diverse range of opportunities – and yet many do not consider it as a viable career option.

Careers information, advice and guidance needs to focus on the gaps identified by the research, including:

- The skills and qualifications required to enter particular roles
- How to find jobs or work experience
- Availability of jobs locally
- Opportunities for development and progression
- Availability of technical roles
- The large diversity of roles – with something for everyone.

## Emphasise industry's strengths

The research identified the following key strengths of the industry which should be promoted in recruitment messaging:

- Stability and security
- The potential for progression
- Variety of roles
- Competitive pay
- Pride in having expertise and doing a good job.

Those already in construction say they want clear information on career progression, including examples of pathways and how skills and training can enable progress.

## Target messages at the right groups

Recruitment messaging should be segmented and targeted towards those most likely to consider a career in construction or changing careers.

Those working in IT, engineering, communications and manufacturing possess relevant transferrable skills and are open to consider working in construction. They are accessible through sector-based networks, publications and specialist agencies.

Segmentation also helps widen the diversity of the workforce and tackle occupation-specific shortages, which can be identified through CITB's Construction Skills Network.

Traineeships, the ambassador programme and Construction Tasters are also useful channels through which to target messaging.

## Try different methods to attract potential recruits

Individuals' expectations of the workplace are changing, and it's essential the industry aligns itself with these. Employers should highlight, in recruitment advertising, the values important to them to help candidates identify common ground. Values which are important to workers include:

- Stability
- Having pride in their work
- Helping others and making a difference
- Flexibility in work hours
- Career progression through training.

Highlighting positive personal and societal outcomes can be effective at attracting individuals with different preferences, which increasingly includes tackling environmental issues.

## Change perceptions

Those outside the industry tend to have a more narrow, negative view of construction, whereas those inside have a much more positive perception. Utilising the voices of insiders could be key to changing outsiders' perceptions.

**"It's probably surpassed my expectations. I think I thought I would be onsite all the time and I would probably be around people who would not respect me because I'm a young kid out of uni and I don't know the trade. But people have been respectful, and I think it's been a better experience to what I thought it would have been."**

**Male, 29**

The ambassador programme already does this. But countless employers and employees also informally act as ambassadors through outreach, friends and family. The industry must support those acting as ambassadors, signposting to supporting guidance and information and to avoid inadvertently reinforcing myths or a limited perspective.

Industry needs to continue encouraging ambassadors to inspire those from under-represented groups to join construction. Insiders from ethnic minority backgrounds are seen to have particularly strong positive voices and influence.

## Develop employment practices

Younger entrants report fewer positive experiences and require more support. Structured induction programmes and training can help guide progression and improve retention rates – as well as making an employer more attractive to future candidates.

Flexible working is highly valued but formal arrangements in construction are rare. Industry needs to get better at finding ways to enable flexible employment options.

## Cultural transformation

It remains clear from the research that some antiquated attitudes and behaviours can deter many potential recruits.

In the long term, construction must demonstrate more consistently that it is for everyone – positive, fair, welcoming and makes provisions for people's differences. And that needs to be communicated so it is recognised by industry outsiders.

They are rare, but occasional bad practices and discrimination in any form must be challenged – it can be a toxic issue. And a few poor examples can tarnish perceptions of a whole industry.

In the few cases where they persist, employers must eliminate biases from recruitment and employment practices and initiate change to support an inclusive culture. This isn't a choice – it is a legal requirement.

Build on the good work already being done – industry should promote the FIR Programme's resources further, especially towards SMEs.



# What CITB is doing to support industry

**CITB is making it easier to find out about construction – how to get into it, to gain experience and access apprenticeships and jobs.**

## Measuring progress

CITB is helping to tackle the barriers to getting into construction, targeting a KPI to assess *'how easy or difficult was it to find relevant careers material, work experience and job opportunities in construction?'*

CITB is addressing gaps in the provision of information, advice and guidance and feeding this into careers information products. By measuring against benchmarks, successful examples can be identified and shared throughout industry.

As part of our strategy to *attract, inform, inspire, help join, and retain*, CITB is already supporting or has developed initiatives to help industry, including:

- Construction Tasters
- Go Construct
- Talentview Construction
- The Fairness, Inclusion and Respect Programme
- Timewise Flexible Working Pilot
- Traineeships.

## CITB initiatives

### How the Levy helps attract people to join the construction industry

#### Go Construct

The research highlighted the need for accessible, digestible careers information and clear career progression routes.

Go Construct does this by emphasising what a career in construction offers, as well as how to join, train and progress through the industry. Go Construct and the associated social media channels will continue to be developed by CITB.

#### Go Construct STEM Ambassador Programme

Representing the diverse backgrounds of their communities, Go Construct STEM Ambassadors are visible, vocal role models who promote construction face-to-face with young people.

The ambassador programme taps into a deep pool of industry champions. Now aligned with STEM Learning, the programme can access every school in Great Britain.

The number of ambassadors is constantly growing, and is particularly targeting under-represented groups, which are so vital to future growth.



## Talentview Construction

Talentview Construction, developed by CITB and the CLC, allows employers to showcase their business to potential recruits across England and Wales.

The home for talented people to find first jobs, apprenticeships and work experience, it is aimed at those starting out in the industry to access local entry-level vacancies and training opportunities.

Crucially for employers, it lets them promote their roles at no cost and directly contact potential candidates through the platform.

## Inspire – Construction Tasters

Candidates need an understanding of their local opportunities to find work or work experience and how to progress.

Construction Tasters, including site tours and work experience, offer insight into the construction work environment, virtually or physically, onsite or in an office. Tasters are an effective way to increase visibility and understanding to allow people to make informed decisions about working in construction.

CITB supports employers with the delivery of Tasters, sharing positive results and advice on running them to help and encourage more employers to offer them.

## Occupational traineeships

Just four in ten Further Education construction learners progress to a job or apprenticeship in the industry<sup>3</sup>. Traineeships bridge the gap between education and employment, offering a taste of working life within construction. They deliver flexible work-based learning which provides vital work experience in a specific occupation.

The first traineeship in bricklaying is underway at Hartlepool College, with further pilots for priority occupations starting soon.

## CITB and industry partners promotion, funding and collaboration

### Timewise Construction Pioneers Flexible Working Pilot

Flexible working is valued by those outside construction but the majority considering a career do not feel the industry offers or accommodates it. To help establish the value to industry, CITB has supported the Timewise Flexible Working Pilot led by Build UK.

The pilot demonstrated that flexible working can be implemented on construction sites, with no adverse impact on budgets or timelines. It increased workers' sense of wellbeing and work-life balance, as well as greater acceptance and understanding of the benefits of flexible working.

### Fairness, Inclusion & Respect (FIR) Programme

Employers need to tackle unacceptable behaviours and discrimination, but they also need to know how to do it. The Levy-funded FIR Programme provides free training and resources to help employers instil an inclusive work environment.

The programme is delivered by the Supply Chain Sustainability School, who are working in partnership with the CLC to increase the number of SMEs participating.

3. [www.citb.co.uk/about-citb/construction-industry-research-reports/search-our-construction-industry-research-reports/learning-to-earning-increasing-fe-learners-into-construction/](http://www.citb.co.uk/about-citb/construction-industry-research-reports/search-our-construction-industry-research-reports/learning-to-earning-increasing-fe-learners-into-construction/)



“[We need] more information on the construction industry at school, how to get into the sector, work shadowing opportunities and taster days.”

Female, under 25



# The research

## Background to the research and why this is important

The research examined perspectives on what makes construction an attractive career choice as well as the perceptions, misconceptions and image of the industry. It is intended to provide evidence to help industry:

- Increase the number and diversity of new recruits
- Identify what makes construction an attractive or unattractive career choice for new recruits and career changers
- Explore alternative recruitment methods.

The research spoke to those inside and outside the industry, including new recruits and those looking for work. In order to learn from other sectors, it examined manufacturing, engineering, IT and communications – viewed as competitor sectors to construction. It also sought insight from those in education, health and social care, retail and hospitality.

## Key findings

- 30% feel construction is for someone like me
- 17% feel construction is attractive to me
- 15% previously applied for a construction job
- 6% seriously considered construction before entering their current industry
- 2% consider construction to be their current preferred industry, and most industries are considered more attractive than construction.

Based on respondents outside the construction industry.

## Objectives

The objectives of the research were to establish:

- The extent to which a career in construction is perceived as attractive as other sectors
- Where information, advice and guidance have been successful in other sectors, and how this could help inform construction
- Potential alternative recruitment methods
- How to attract those with limited knowledge and experience of construction
- Whether targeted recruitment strategies would yield positive results.

## Recruitment motivators

The motivations behind career decisions are changing. Individuals report wanting a sense of purpose from their work and alignment with their prospective employer's mission.

Seven in ten workers feel it's important to work in an industry that shares their values. Values-based recruitment approaches, which emphasise the values important to and offered by companies, can help attract candidates.

Variety of work, stability, security and opportunities to progress are particularly valued – and those inside construction say that's what the industry gives them. Those outside need quality, tailored information to help them appreciate these attributes construction can offer.

## How attractive is construction for potential entrants?

The answer is a mixed one. Individuals' views vary, often reflecting their positive experiences and good employment practices as well as, unfortunately, the opposite.

Those who previously worked in construction typically consider the industry attractive. As do those who have applied for a construction role.

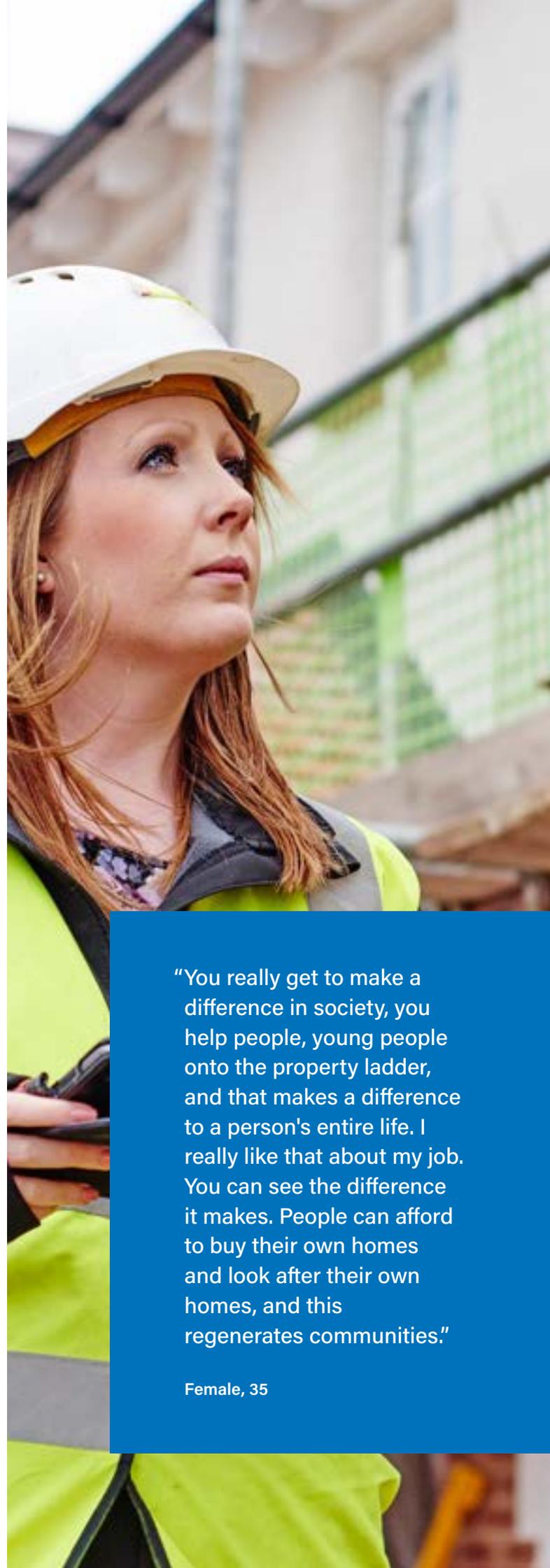
The outcomes of a construction career, including what it can offer in terms of pay, defined career paths and progression routes, and opportunities to gain expertise are strong attraction factors.

*Where industry needs to improve:*

In comparison with other sectors, construction has an image problem. Pervading negative perceptions of the industry include the prevalence of manual work, physicality required for the job, working outdoors in poor conditions and being male-dominated.

There is often a mismatch between perception and reality. Many roles are office-based within a diverse work environment – but this is not the stereotype which persists. Industry needs to ensure its many sides are well represented.

There are also widely varying experiences and perceptions within the industry. Some report long inflexible working hours, others say it gives them great flexibility.



**"You really get to make a difference in society, you help people, young people onto the property ladder, and that makes a difference to a person's entire life. I really like that about my job. You can see the difference it makes. People can afford to buy their own homes and look after their own homes, and this regenerates communities."**

**Female, 35**

## Attitudinal, behavioural and cultural change

Perceived attitudes, behaviours and culture of the work environment have a tangible impact on the diversity of the workforce. Just 2% of site technical roles are held by women<sup>4</sup>, and that composition has remained for decades.

Despite statistics that show the industry lacks diversity, many of those within it consider the workforce to be diverse. The majority of women working in construction felt their work environment was diverse, though to a lesser degree than their male colleagues.

This may indicate pockets of good diversity in which employers are getting things right and benefiting as a result. The majority of women in construction work in environments seen to be more diverse, such as office-based roles, and a greater proportion hold management positions than men. However, in some cases it could also be due to low expectations of diversity or a poor understanding of diversity in all its forms.

Some extreme negatively expressed views are reported. Some of those who work onsite described experiencing sexism, racism and homophobia. Some respondents reported this behaviour as banter, but others consider it a serious issue which puts them off working onsite. Nonetheless, it is illegal and every employer has a duty to eradicate it. Importantly, perceptions are improving – industry has recognised it as a serious issue which must be addressed.

“[Construction] is more manual. Very masculine orientated. Perception of men making rude jokes to females. Not set up to cater for women's needs.”

Female, 25-34

## Methodology

The research was carried out by the research Institute for Employment Studies and included:

- A comprehensive literature review
  - An online survey with 1,100 individuals of working age in competitor and pool sectors, including 200 individuals working in construction
  - 40 in-depth online qualitative interviews with new entrants working in construction.
4. [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentbyindustryemp13](http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentbyindustryemp13)



# Useful links

[CITB](#)

[Go Construct](#)

[Go Construct STEM Ambassadors](#)

[Supply Chain Sustainability School's Fairness Inclusion & Respect Programme](#)

[Talentview Construction](#)

[Timewise](#)

[Morgan Sindall research "Are we Gen Z ready? A roadmap to securing the construction and property industry industry's future workforce"](#)

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