

**CASE STUDY: Sally Cave, Project Manager, Gas Membrane Installer, Doncaster Membrane Installations Ltd.**

My name is Sally Cave and I am a Project Manager and Gas Membrane Installer for Doncaster Membrane Installations Ltd. It is a family-run business based in Doncaster operating from Birmingham to Scotland providing gas membrane installation at the groundworks stage of construction. I started working at the company office in 2013 and in 2017 qualified as the first female gas membrane installer in the UK.



**1. What first attracted you to working in the construction industry? How did you find out about the job and what qualifications did you require?**

Construction was the family business, as my dad is the owner of Doncaster Membrane Installations Ltd. I started doing administration at the office in 2013, working one day a week between other jobs and eventually went full time. My role involved arranging site work but I felt that in order to give instructions to our people on site I needed more understanding of the practical side of the business.

In 2014 I took the plunge and decided to try out site work. I enrolled to study through the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) approved British Geomembrane Association course – NVQ Level II in Gas Membrane Installation. The course covered health and safety, PPE, ventilation, installation and relevant regulations. The course meant being out on-site a lot for training and assessment, which really helped me develop my skills and understanding. In 2017 I became the first qualified female gas membrane installer in the UK.

**2. Have you encountered any obstacles in your career because of your gender?**

I wouldn't say I have encountered obstacles as such, but there is definitely still a taboo and stigma around women working on site. It can be challenging at times being the only woman on site as you can be made to feel like an alien. The guys I work with every day are great and very supportive, but there is still the occasional negative comment from others working on the site.

A real problem on site can be the toilet situation – often the facilities are shared or the female facilities are unusable because they're used as storage. Some sites have great facilities, and I do always feel relief when I pull up to site and it's registered with the Considerate Constructors Scheme!

**3. Tell us about your current role(s). What does a typical day look like? What do you like and dislike about the job?**

My current roles are split between the office and on-site work. When I'm in the office I deal with enquiries, book site visits and do the accounts. Some weeks I'll be doing administration work the whole time and other weeks I'll be travelling to sites to oversee the fitting of membranes.

I like how varied the work is, it's never the same every day. It's great to work on a site and it can be very rewarding to see the project progress. When I'm on site I get practical experience and the chance to keep learning and develop my skills. This helps me with the office work as I'm always learning more about the industry.

**4. What qualities are required to do your job?**

Motivation is really important to get where you want to be, but women in the industry do need to have a thick-skin as I feel there is still stigma around women working on site. I think enthusiasm about the sector in which you work in is key.

**5. What are your future career aspirations?**

I am currently working through CITB's training assessor course. I hope to qualify which will enable me to help train others in gas membrane installation. The industry needs more training opportunities to fill the skills shortage and raise standards in the industry. Our company already runs upskilling courses for construction workers so they can learn how to install membranes.

This is particularly important in my field, as there is too much unregulated self-installation by unqualified people – it's more than just putting down a plastic sheet! Using poor quality materials and techniques can be really dangerous as there is a risk of gas ingress from contaminated land into the building. More training in installation will improve standards across the construction industry.

**6. Is construction a welcoming environment for women? In particular, is it a welcoming atmosphere on site?**

As a rule, yes it is welcoming for women. However you do get the odd person who is not as friendly. The problem is that women working in trades is still a little bit alien for some guys in the industry. There are more women in managerial positions within the industry which is great, but still not enough women out on site as bricklayers, plasterers etc. to make it accepted as normal.

**7. Why do you think women remain underrepresented in the industry?**

I think a big part of it is that the idea of being the only woman on site can be quite scary. It can be intimidating to join a male-dominated industry and you have to be strong-willed. Working on a building site with all-male colleagues might not appeal to a lot of people. We need more women working on site to encourage more to follow in their steps.

**8. Would you recommend that young women seek out careers in construction?  
What advice would you give them?**

Yes I would – the main advice I have is to persevere. I know from my own experience that you can get spoken down to on site, but you have to know that you are qualified in what you do and motivate yourself to continue working hard. There are so many opportunities in the construction industry for young women, not only from a managerial position but as a tradesperson too.

**9. How does a diverse workforce benefit the industry as a whole?**

Everyone brings their own different qualities to a project when you're working together, regardless of gender. Having more women on site in particular I think would help make other women feel more comfortable. It would be great to go out on site and see women working in trades, and I hope that would encourage more women to join the industry.

**10. What should the industry and wider society be doing to encourage more women to work in construction?**

I remember when I was at school and we were given careers advice, no-one ever mentioned construction to girls. It was stereotypical, girls do hairdressing and boys do bricklaying and this needs to stop. We need to break down barriers earlier and make the industry more appealing so that young women realise they could have a career in construction. The industry needs more workers to fill the skills shortage so they should help this effort by getting involved and going into schools to give presentations etc. to educate children about construction.