

**CASE STUDY: Stephanie Bennett, Trainee
Quantity Surveyor, Morgan Sindall**

My name is Stephanie Bennett. I am 25 years old and I started training as a quantity surveyor two years ago for Morgan Sindall working out of the Norwich office. Since starting my new role, I have worked on a variety of projects. My first project was a wonderful Grade II listed house which had burnt down and we were employed to refurbish it to its original state. Since then, I have worked on two schools and an RAF base where a new water tank was installed. My current projects include three schools in Haverhill, Great Yarmouth and Attleborough.



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?

I wasn't particularly attracted to working in the construction industry until I started working for Morgan Sindall. I had no knowledge or interest what so ever. Now that I am working here, I have gained a huge interest very quickly. Specifically Grade II listed buildings.

I first started working in the industry as an administrator. I had finished a business administration apprenticeship with another company and then applied for the administration assistant role at Morgan Sindall and started in September 2014. While doing this role I was able to pick up little bits of what the construction industry was about.

By January 2015, I had been having a chat with an estimator who worked nearby and he asked me what I had got in my GCSEs. He then asked why I had chosen a career in admin and had I ever thought about a different career choice. I hadn't ever really thought about it and I quite enjoyed administration work. As far as I am aware, he then discussed this with my current line manager who then approached me and asked if I would like to apply for the trainee quantity surveyor position that was being advertised. I initially said no as the thought terrified me. This then played on my mind for weeks as it was such a good opportunity. After having a long think about it and doing some research on what the job entailed, I decided to apply. I had an interview, got the job and started in September 2015.

Morgan Sindall has put me through university and I attend once a week on day release. Ideally I needed GCSEs and A levels to be able to do the degree, however my A levels weren't brilliant and I didn't have enough UCAS points to be able to go straight on to the full degree so I started the foundation course which I have just completed after 2 years. I have 3 years left at university and have now moved onto the full Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Quantity Surveying.

2. Did you encounter any obstacles early on in your career because of your gender?

I don't think that I have encountered obstacles due to my gender so far on my career journey but I do think that it is something women in construction will probably have to face now and then during their careers. To be honest, I haven't had to deal with anything major.

When I first started, colleagues were overly helpful and everyone wanted to get involved with teaching me which was great but sometimes it was too much. Some guys out on site were quite protective over me which I have put down to the fact that I am female, especially since some site managers have asked the boys on site to leave me alone which I found slightly amusing.

In my first year I found that subcontractors were very reluctant to talk to me but that seems to have changed now and most people will have a bit of banter with me on site. I think it has helped that I have become more confident when out on site and just join in with everyone.

Sometimes I feel that as a female there is little respect from external companies. I have often encountered remarks from subcontractors such as 'and then she can make the teas' but this kind of situation has always been dealt with swiftly and appropriately by my management. I do think some men aren't used to seeing or working with women out on site. You have to be strong; however I receive a lot of support from my managers which is great.

3. What was the biggest surprise you found when you started working in construction?

One of my biggest surprises when I started the job role was how fast a building could be built but how many processes are involved. Some can take less than a year! I guess with how naïve I was before hand, I assumed it would take years. The costs of building them surprised me too. I never dreamed that I would be dealing with hundreds of thousands of pounds, let alone millions!

The variety of job roles also surprised me since I thought it was simply your bricklayers and carpenters. This is something that I like to teach young people in schools.

4. Tell us about your current role. What does a typical day look like? What do you like and dislike about the job?

My current role is a Trainee Quantity Surveyor working in the Special Works department. We work on projects up to £3,000,000. This means that we cover all packages on a job from the ground works to the final finishing touches.

My average day consists of compiling subcontract orders, putting comparisons together and negotiating costs with subcontractors. I place orders with subcontractors and book them in for pre contract meetings to discuss the job. I will measure works that have been done either by scaling off a drawing or walking around site and make payments.

I enjoy negotiating with subcontractors and find it rewarding when we are able to come to a good agreement and secure best value for a project. Making payments is another favourite of mine as it is a very important task so I feel I have responsibility.

The only thing I dislike about my job role at the moment is the challenge of taking specific measurements from drawings. This can be confusing and a bit frustrating, but it is part of the learning process. That's the only thing I dislike and I am looking forward to conquering this and deepening my understanding in this area!

5. What qualities are required to do your job?

Qualities required for this role are the ability to negotiate effectively, good written and oral communication skills, the ability to be logical and methodical, good commercial awareness and strong team-working. Specifically for women I would say confidence, ambition, resilience and determination.

6. What are your future career aspirations?

My future career aspirations include being promoted to an assistant, then completing my degree and eventually being promoted to a Quantity Surveyor. I would then like to work my way up to a Senior Surveyor and one day get into management and run my own team. Working abroad is also a big dream of mine which would be a wonderful experience and thankfully this job role could take me there.

7. Is construction a welcoming environment for women?

Construction can be a welcoming environment for women, but it can also be the complete opposite. Sometimes it can be very daunting walking on to a site full of men. I guess it wouldn't bother some women but others it might. For a young girl first starting out it may be a bit intimidating but after a while they would get used to it. They would need to. There are plenty of people willing to support female colleagues and there are organisations in the industry that specifically support women in construction.

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

I think women remain underrepresented in the construction industry because although women work in the industry, they are more office based than out on site. There aren't as many women as there are men that are interested in working out on site or in the industry.

Having gone to schools to speak to school leavers or younger, I think I have only ever come across 4-5 girls that are interested in architecture or engineering. I personally don't think the industry is advertised enough to young people, especially girls.

I also think that a lot of people are still very old fashioned when it comes to women and working. Despite the changes that have been made over the years, it is still perceived as a male industry. This is something I would love to see change even more than it already has.

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

Of course I would recommend that young women seek out careers in the construction industry. It would be nice to have more! Within my business unit we currently have two female surveyors.

I think the thought of working in the industry can be quite scary for a woman but actually it is a wonderful environment to work in. It is satisfying and rewarding, it can be a good laugh, and it is a fantastic career to have since it can be taken anywhere around the world, it pays well and no day is ever the same. I have only been doing the job for 2 years and I have seen some awesome buildings.

There is always support from colleagues so you're never left by yourself. And when women do join the industry, work hard, don't give up and keep on learning. Definitely take advice from people and set your sights high.

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

A diverse workforce benefits the industry because not only does it bring a variety of ideas and ways of doing things to companies but it helps to encourage new people to enter the industry. Diversity helps to remove the fear of being the only one, and could quite possibly make people more willing to work in the industry too. It can provide a wider variety of talent to the industry from underrepresented groups, and provides a more diverse supply chain and improved relationships when working on site because people will respect everyone's differences.

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

The industry has plenty of opportunities to encourage more women to the industry. The company I work for goes around schools informing young people of the opportunities that are out there. Sometimes we specifically target females, encouraging them to think about their future. The industry and society can do more to announce opportunities explaining that there are plenty of creative and flexible jobs roles available.

Promoting current female role models is a good way of attracting more women to the industry that other women can look up to and aspire to be like. Many careers advisors still associate construction with manual labour so it isn't really going to appeal to women. If career advice is right, more girls may be inclined to look further into it.

There are already campaigns to encourage women into the construction industry, but I think maybe more needs to be done to advertise this. I do think that the most effective way to promote it though is to attend career events in schools and target the correct people.