

CASE STUDY: Caroline Barker, CCS Monitor, Director, TE Services

My name is Caroline Barker; I am a civil engineer by profession and now run my own construction consultancy company. I am also a senior Monitor and committee member for the Considerate Constructors Scheme.



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?

While at school I loved maths, science, technical drawing and problem solving. I researched routes into construction and the qualifications needed through my uncle who worked as a designer on highways and I did work experience in the design department in the school holidays.

From there I took my O-levels and got a job as a trainee technician; the company I worked for sponsored me through college to get my qualifications. This led me to a career as a civil engineer, working on highways and in drainage within the water industry.

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

Getting the correct size PPE was difficult and made working on site uncomfortable at times. I also felt that I had to prove myself in the industry, though this was driven by myself and no one else.

3. Tell us about your current roles.

I transitioned from a site role around the time I had children and moved into the management, planning and purchasing side of construction. Around 15 years ago I set up my own construction consultancy company which advises SMEs on business practices.

In addition to this role I am a Monitor with the Considerate Constructors Scheme, and sit on the Scheme's Service and Performance Committee. I am also a co-ordinator of the South Yorkshire Construction Training Group and a Director of SOAR Build. The South Yorkshire Construction Training Group exists to support construction and related companies in South Yorkshire. The training group members work collaboratively to:

- Provide focused construction based training
- Organise and co-ordinate training locally
- Create opportunities to develop relevant training
- Encourage apprenticeships
- Ensure industry-education links including work experience, diploma support and year out placements
- Raise the image of the Construction Industry in South Yorkshire

SOAR Build is a social enterprise which enhances social value by enabling people from disadvantaged groups to achieve their goals by finding employment in the construction industry.

My roles enable me to talk to people, encourage and motivate people who are within construction or looking for a career in construction. I meet individuals of all ages and backgrounds and help them get into the industry.

4. What qualities are required to do your roles?

You would have to be a people person with effective communication, organisational and problem solving skills.

5. Is construction a welcoming environment for women?

In general, yes, there are far more women on site than there used to be, especially in the professions such as site management, quantity surveying and health and safety.

However, some areas of the industry have a way to go. Some trades in particular can be hostile to women, though this too is improving and I am seeing more and more female plumbers, painters, decorators etc.

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

On site in operative roles, I feel it is still under represented. I feel it's down to the lack of awareness of the opportunities available, perceptions of the industry and ingrained gender 'norms' that haven't been challenged and addressed adequately. We have come a long way from outright discrimination in the industry; we just need to change people's perceptions.

7. During your time as a Scheme Monitor, have you noticed any changes in the attitude towards women on site?

There are more women working in professional and support functions on site, which leads to increased acceptance of women on site and improvements in female welfare provisions. Site managers are increasingly keen to have women on their sites, so this is certainly an improvement.

8. How do you think the image of the industry has changed in recent years?

The image of the industry is improving, with more women considering it as a career option. We just need to make women aware of the roles that are out there to attract the young generation to the industry. There are lots of fantastic female role models out there who can help change the image of the industry and spread the word about the opportunities in construction. As the image of construction keeps improving, the more it will attract a diverse workforce.

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

Yes – young women interested in construction should ask questions, get work experience and speak to women in the sector. This will help change their perceptions of the industry.

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

Diversity supports the skill shortage, attracts talent, enables women to start to influence the areas that need addressing and encourages more females to consider construction as a career opportunity.

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

We need to increase awareness and understanding across young people, parents and educators. This will raise understanding of the vast and variety of careers offered. Utilising the current and future avenues to raise awareness (social media etc.) will help appeal to young people making career choices.