

CASE STUDY: Margaret Conway, Project Manager, McAleer & Rushe

My name is Margaret Conway and I am a Project Manager for McAleer & Rushe. I have been working in the industry since I graduated in 2006 and I am currently working on a 200,000 square foot office block in Edinburgh for HMRC.



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 saw a degree in Construction Engineering and Management advertised at my local university in Jordanstown and I quite liked the sound of it. At the time I was working as a BT Engineer and I wanted to go back to university and do a degree but I still wanted a job that involved working outdoors. I was lucky enough to have 3 A-levels and so I met the entry requirements.

2. Tell us about the 9 Adelaide, Belfast project which earned you the title of Construction Manager of the Year. What challenges did you face on that project?

Some of the major challenges of the 9 Adelaide project included the demolition phase which took nearly 6 months and due to neighbouring roads and residents was only able to take place at weekends. There was also a lot of design changes through the course of the project and an immovable end date due to the client's existing lease expiring. The project was also the first BIM level 2 project and the first NEC contract for McAleer and Rushe

3. What does a typical day look like as a construction manager? What do you like and dislike about the job?

There is no typical day for a construction manager and that is what I like about the job! However it does mean you have to be very organised as you are trying to juggle so many different roles.

4. What are your future career aspirations?

I want to continue to work for McAleer and Rushe and also to work with local schools and universities to help promote careers in construction, especially among young girls.

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

No, I can genuinely say that I have always been treated as an equal.

6. Is construction a welcoming environment for women?

I find that all the men I have encountered throughout my career are fantastic and treat everyone the same. Most contractors know the benefits that employing women can bring to their company. Hopefully more young women will see how welcoming it can be and consider it as a career option.

7. In the time you have worked in construction, do you think the industry has improved its attitude towards women?

To be honest I have never encountered anyone with a negative attitude towards women, the only difference now is there are more women joining the industry. I just think the problem has been there are not enough women considering it as a career option.

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

I believe it is not being presented to them as a career option when they are at school. Construction is not given the recognition it deserves in academia and people outside the industry do not appreciate how professional and technical a career it is.

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

I can only recommend that they go for it, as it is a really rewarding career. I would advise young women to look at all the different roles that there are in the industry as there is definitely something for everyone, from consultancy to QS, site engineers, design managers, BIM coordinators etc.

10. Do you consider your position as the first woman to win Construction Manager of the Year a platform to promote women in construction?

I do appreciate the significance of being the first woman to win the award as it can show young women that there are opportunities for them in the industry and if they work hard they will be treated just like their male counterparts.

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

Organisations can't thrive and grow if everyone in them thinks and behaves the same way; workplace diversity can hold the key to fostering new ways of thinking, leading to innovation and improved performance. Diversity is great for morale and creates a greater talent pool for the industry to recruit from.

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

I think the effort needs to be concentrated on visiting schools and giving talks and lectures to young women to make them realise what is available to them. I also think women should be shown excelling in construction roles on the TV. At the minute all the construction-related TV shows such as DIY SOS etc. all have men working on them.