

**CASE STUDY: Megan Robinson, Technical Coordinator,
Barratt Developments plc, co-founder Built by Both**



1. In your experience, is the male to female ratio balanced?

It can vary according to discipline and location. I am currently working in London where women have a bigger presence which is reassuring that perceptions are changing, but it is still not enough. There can be an imbalance between departments too. Sales advisors, architects, marketing staff, and often solicitors make up the largest percentage of females I work with on a daily basis, with few being engineers or tradeswomen which demonstrates the imbalance of women embarking on these disciplines.

2. Why do you think that is?

The construction industry can be seen as an undesirable vocation for young women as it has the perception of being typically male dominated. There are fewer female role models for young women to aspire to when applying for degrees and job opportunities. This can make the industry less attractive with fewer examples of female career progression. The whole industry needs to take big steps to encourage a positive perception of the career opportunities available, make diverse workforces customary and show support for our existing female workforce.

3. What has been your experience as a female in the industry?

I have been very lucky in my career at Barratt to have had exposure to all aspects of the business and training opportunities to better my personal skills. Occasionally I can be treated differently when new people I deal with are not accustomed to seeing a young woman managing aspects of a multi-million pound project on a construction site. This can often be by apologising when they swear, not using gender neutral phrases such as 'darling' or 'love' or not being confrontational. Although this is technically sexism, this behaviour can help diffuse tension in all-male teams, showing how diverse workforces are vital to the success of modern projects.

4. Do you think you've had as much support from the companies you work for as your male counterparts?

At Barratt I have felt supported throughout and beyond my graduate programme but I understand it can be difficult for some inexperienced professionals to approach their colleagues in such a masculine environment. There is no difference of treatment between sexes in my company, which has helped me to confidently push to be heavily involved in more challenging projects.

5. Do you believe there is a glass ceiling?

Glass ceiling issues need to be acknowledged openly in the workplace with diversity and inclusion workshops being compulsory which is something my employer, Barratt Developments is doing to fight negative stigma surrounding gender in housebuilding.

This is a great way to raise awareness and emphasise the impact of the gender pay gap, promotion and simply day-to-day attitudes.

Along with a poor representation of women industry wide, in senior positions, another cause can be because women often do not feel confident enough to apply for that promotion or big interview as they believe they will not meet all criteria for the job. I read an article once which stuck with me and helped to boost my confidence, explaining how men apply for a job when they only meet 60% of the qualifications, whereas a woman only applies if they meet 100%.

6. Do you think the industry does enough to encourage women to join the industry?

Not enough is done to attract women to what the built environment offers. Construction was never mentioned to me as a student, as a credible career path for a girl. The industry has a very lax approach to changing this school attitude. Big construction bodies should be working to attract young, ambitious women – not the other way around. I do believe that there is still a very long way to go and that the drive should be supported and incentivised by the Government, to ensure the future of the built environment is not jeopardised.

7. Do you think the industry does enough to support women once they are in the industry? (Flexible working, maternity pay, promotions, % of women in senior positions in the company)

Although more women are joining the industry shockingly only 14% of the industry's professionals are female. Many reasons may affect female progression; children, applying for new jobs or an employee's perception of ability. There are still perceptions that employees base their assessment of female ability on past performance, rather than an assessment of a male's potential. A focus is now needed on providing young women with strong and experienced role models – meaning eradication of the gender pay gap and more female promotions!

8. Do you think it makes a difference which area of the industry women join in order to get more support?

My position is highly dependent on my presence on site actively managing the design and construction progress which can sometimes be difficult. However, whilst working in all disciplines of housebuilding during my graduate programme, I never witnessed any advantages or disadvantages to a particular department.

9. Do you think that enough is done to change the perception of the industry?

Maintaining a positive image of the industry is important to encourage young people into built environment roles. Historically, the industry has experienced poor press due to reputation, construction methods, health and safety risks, environmental impact and gender imbalance,

making it an undesirable choice. Though, applying for a position at a leading housebuilder was my best decision, not realising how diverse the career opportunities were in this sector. I have now had the chance to be involved with reducing our carbon footprint, exploring innovative methods and engaging the public.

10. Do you think there is enough done at school level to encourage girls to choose the right subject to go into a construction related role?

I feel passionate about this because young girls are not encouraged to consider construction careers. I went to an all-girls secondary school which played a huge role in encouraging me to be a feminist and strive for a powerful job. However, there was never an emphasis on construction, with this being mainly on medicine or law, so when I expressed my interest in engineering my school struggled to support me.

It would be wonderful to see successful, passionate women in construction visiting schools regularly to educate young girls on their options. Personally, I think this should be part of a Government agenda to not only help young girls understand but also ensure boys see females doing traditionally male dominated jobs.

11. What do you want to see change going forward?

The most important thing is improving the perception of the industry to encourage more women to join the built environment. More females need to be promoted to senior positions to create strong role models and prove the industry is modernising.

12. Why did you decide to start Built by Both?

The built environment has always been a passion for me and at University I was one of very few females studying a construction related degree. We were always outnumbered by males in classes and projects, so to ensure our voice was heard I ran as female representative on our Civil and Building panel. My determination to promote gender parity grew from there with my plan always being to be heavily involved with a women's organisation once I graduated.

Starting work I met fellow graduates who shared my determination to see more women in construction. Individually we all saw a need for change due to the poor representation of women. From there we collaborated to take action and instil gender parity in our industry; Built by Both finally became a reality. The notion behind our name is to show respect for both men and women in our industry by making the events open to both.

13. What do you hope it will achieve?

As a diverse team of founders ourselves, with two males and two females, we were very passionate for our main objective to be making gender parity the norm within our industry. Diverse teams are important and effective in construction; it is great to have both perceptions.

Built by Both has the objective to inspire young women to embark on careers within the built environment and to celebrate the women already working in our industry. In doing this, more women will see the progression opportunities available and become ambassadors for the built environment. We have been promoting this initiative by partnering student experience days with sociable networking events. The networking events are there to provide young women with the opportunity to hear inspirational speakers and meet experienced professionals, with the potential for them to become future mentors. Ultimately, the Built by Both team are incredibly passionate about breaking down the barriers of stereotypes so that together we can launch the construction industry into a new era for women!

14. Do you think the industry can get to a point where there are as many women as there are men?

To be honest, this isn't the most important thing that needs to happen for women to be respected and integrated into the industry. More importantly, we need to focus as a whole industry on changing perceptions of jobs available to females and to show appreciation and recognition to the incredible women already working in our industry. I am very passionate about doing whatever I can to develop the built environment to be more sustainable and diverse, so I hope the Built by Both team and I can make a difference to help make an equally represented industry achievable.