

CASE STUDY: Ruby Lee, Trainee Site Manager, Berkeley Homes

I am Ruby Lee, a Trainee Site Manager working for Berkeley Homes. I started in September 2017 and I have been working on the Kidbrooke Village Development site since starting work for Berkeley Homes. This development comprises 1238 units - a commercial space for retail and entertainment. The development also includes an energy centre, sub stations and section 278 works to Kidbrooke Park Road.



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?

If I'm being honest I was never attracted to working in construction as I was not very knowledgeable about the industry. During my time at school and later in the Sixth Form there was not an option or an opportunity to learn about construction, or the role models for women in construction. I always had the understanding that construction was a profession solely for men. It was a profession that stereotypically was for men and not for women.

This all changed when I attended a careers event at my local council offices. I had a brief understanding of what companies were present and was not aware of the career opportunities that were available in construction such as managerial roles not just craft work. The Berkeley Homes work place assistant I spoke to guided me into the idea that construction roles are just as suitable for women as they are men. She offered me some work experience on site shadowing site managers and project managers. I can honestly say after I completed the work experience on the Berkeley Homes sites shadowing different managers in different roles, I knew construction was the industry for me. The industry is rewarding and exciting and I cannot recommend it highly enough to any women or young women deciding on a new career or a career change. Women need to believe that construction is just as available to women as it is men.

The qualifications that are required differ for each role. I am currently studying for my HNC in construction and built environment. This will allow me to progress further into my managerial career. However, I would strongly advise any women to research into the role you are interested in and apply yourself, as you can achieve anything!

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

I start around at 7:30am where I complete the site morning checks. I walk around the site and record any findings that affect health and safety and the smooth day to day running of the site.

After I have completed my morning checks I revert to going through my work areas. I ensure all contractors are on site working suitably and are completing their work to Berkeley Homes' high quality assurance standards and in line with our construction programme.

I have learnt that everyday in construction is different I never know what I am going to encounter. This is what is so exciting about construction, you are learning every day and there will always be new tasks to work on and my role is so varied.

During my working day I get a 1 hour break - it allows me to get a clear mind and refresh my brain before going back out on site. Construction can be hard work but the results are worthwhile once a task has been completed. Unlike any other industry you will see a physical completion; this is rewarding for both you and your team members.

3. What qualities are required to do your job?

I believe you need to be hard working and have good concentration skills. You need to be able to work alone and actively as a team member as you will be reliant on these team members when handing over units for occupation. In my opinion the leading role of a site manager is having effective communication skills as you need to work with a variety of people in different roles and need to tailor your communication skills to different people and different personalities. Construction requires you to be constantly alert and to be vigilant as a small mistake can lead to bigger issues.

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

The biggest surprise for me when starting work in construction was the amount of knowledge needed for the industry, the vast knowledge that each craft and trade have is immense. The majority of the trade operatives and supervisors that I have worked with have the broadest knowledge and understanding of their craft.

I honestly can say another surprise for me when working in construction is how rewarding it is when a task or activity gets finished and the overall product is going to be used for a person's future benefit, for example, if the site you are working on is a children's school, refurbished hospital and or an elderly person's home. Construction can have such a positive effect on the society we are in, we need to have the attitude that it's not just another building - this could benefit the surrounds we live in.

5. What are your future career aspirations?

I think my goal at the moment is to finish my studies and gain my experience in the industry. In my opinion until you have a good knowledge and understanding of construction you shouldn't progress because construction is complex. However, once I have completed my studies and gained experience I would hope one day to progress up to a project manager role where I can manage and run my own project with the help of my team. In this industry you can progress as far as you want but hard work and being a team player will help this. Everyone's career goals will differ but, I think that having a role model in the position you

would like to be in is good as you then have some understanding of the career and may even be able to gain advice or guidance.

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

As I have only been working in the industry for a short amount of time, I have not had to encounter any obstacles yet. I work on a site that is very open to the fact that I am a woman and I am treated just as any other site manager on site. I have heard accounts from other women in construction about how they were treated unfairly or excluded from tasks because of their gender. I believe that a change is occurring and there is a slight improvement in educating all people who work in construction that it is a profession for both men and women. Although I am the only female site manager on the development I have never felt excluded or intimidated because of this and recommend a career in construction to any woman.

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

In my opinion women are not well represented enough in the industry. The stereotype that men are builders and that it is a man's job and not for women needs to be tackled. This needs to be addressed from a young age in schools etc., once this image is reversed we will then see a rise in school leavers coming into construction.

There are many excellent female role models in construction that should be encouraged to express their views about women working in construction and encourage more women to think about construction as a career. They need to be proactive and enthusiastic about women working in construction and that it is not such a male dominated profession as it was, and women can take on various roles within construction. More women need to attend construction events such as Open Doors. Women need to take the time to visit a site or research women in construction and gain some advice from construction workers. The only people that can change the under representation of women in construction is women.

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

In my opinion it is important that anyone, including women, understand that they can seek out careers in any industry including construction. I would never tell anyone to become a site manager I would suggest that they should research the various roles within construction as there are great opportunities out there as construction is a great industry to work in.

I would suggest that we target school leavers and have more open discussion about careers in construction as from experience I never knew the vast amounts of opportunities within construction as I was not taught or educated on this at school. As mentioned before I think that until we tackle the stereotype of men being builders we will never have a diverse workforce.

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

I think having a diverse industry will be a benefit as women can be more analytical and will think about decisions rather than making rash decisions that can have a good short term impact but in the long term will have a negative effect. So I think that having a diverse workforce will have a good effect on the industry.

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

I think that there should be more social media forums for women in construction as we have great role models out there who have great experience and accounts to inspire young women. I also believe that having more advertisements such as TV adverts, posters and billboards will inspire women and allow them to believe that they can achieve a career in construction.

In my opinion we need more women in construction to verbally speak out to schools or other women to inspire them as I genuinely believe this will capture the interest of women across all ages if they see someone's passion and interest in the job.

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

I believe that if we carry on promoting and inspiring women that construction is just as available to women as it is to men we will have a growing number of women working in construction. However, as I stated before the only people that can change the under representation of women in construction is women.

12. Do you have any other comments on the topic of women in construction?

The only comment to add is that women can do anything they want regardless of their gender or capabilities. Women need to believe that you can achieve anything with hard work and with this success will follow.