



Spotlight on...
women in construction

**CONSIDERATE
CONSTRUCTORS
SCHEME**

Case Study: Watson & Cox

Mollie Phipps - Intermediate Quantity Surveyor

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?

My family have always renovated the houses we have lived in and I always loved getting involved however I could. I also remember when I was about 6 years old I first learnt the word architect when it was on a building block game and I asked my dad what it meant.

From that point I always thought it was so cool to be able to be involved in something that was so hard for me to comprehend at 6 years old. I couldn't make sense of how it worked and from that point I wanted to understand. I've always been someone who if I don't understand something I have to go and find out how it works.

I don't think I ever fully got made aware of the actual role of an architect until I was 15. I was having a conversation on holiday with a family friend (who actually used to be a QS for an insurance company) and he asked why I wanted to be an architect and what I thought it was. I explained that I wanted to design the most amazing buildings and be involved in the creation of buildings from start to finish. However, I then learnt that an architect's involvement remained mainly at the start of the project and that the role actually wasn't exactly what I thought it was.

From this point I felt a bit lost as I didn't now know what I wanted for a career.



I went through a few years not sure of what I wanted to do and not getting enough guidance from schools about career paths etc. My eagerness to start earning money and getting out into the working world drove me to research for myself and apply for a position as a Trainee Quantity Surveyor. It was through my own research I learned that I didn't actually need any qualifications to start on this career path. I was offered the job and the company enrolled me on a Construction & the Built Environment HNC at a college. This was one day a week, of which my work paid me a wage and my course fees. I needed my Level 3 to get onto this course (which I had albeit unrelated to construction) plus a letter from my employer. I did this course for 2 years and received my HNC. I was then able to apply for a degree apprenticeship at Nottingham Trent University. As I had achieved my Level 4 I was able to skip first year and go straight into the second.

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As the course is part time (one day per week) the apprenticeship lasts about 6 years, with the degree being 5 of those 6 instead of 3 which is typical for the full time degree. Of course, as I skipped first year it reduced the 6 to 5 and 5 to 4. I now have 2 years left of my degree and 3 years to complete my apprenticeship.

The degree is Quantity Surveying and Commercial Management Bsc. I, again, don't personally pay for anything in relation to course fees as this is 90% funded by the Government as it's an Apprenticeship, with my employer making up the remaining 10%. In 2025 I will have completed my degree, my RICS chartership and also have 7 years' experience as a Quantity Surveyor. Although I went down this route, I didn't have to. This was an option from my employer. They would have still trained me as a Quantity Surveyor with or without my degree.

I would still recommend going and getting qualifications as it furthers your knowledge so you can perform your job to the best of your ability and makes you more desirable as it shows your commitment to your job role.

2. TELL US ABOUT YOUR CURRENT ROLE. WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE? WHAT DO YOU LIKE AND DISLIKE ABOUT THE JOB?

It's worth pointing out that there isn't really a typical day in construction, which is what makes it so exciting to me. Of course, I have routine tasks I carry out on every job such as carrying out valuations, approving payments and cost reporting, but the content of these differ as even though the fundamentals of building remains the same, every job is different. Different problems arise on each job so various solutions need to be carried out to resolve these. I like helping to resolve problems, so this is a positive for me.

Any problems can have cost implications which is then my job to ensure that this is managed. One day I might be measuring and pricing changes to an architect's design and another I may be placing orders with subcontractors and holding meetings with clients.

Spreadsheets are involved A LOT; however, I absolutely love spreadsheets so I'm happy about this. The only negative for me is it can get quite stressful when things go wrong and money starts spiralling on a project, but it's always made less stressful by having such a supportive team. I would say the most important thing for me is having that collaborative team environment that you can always depend on and feel heard within. I've found this at Watson & Cox. To me that's more important than any job role I'm carrying out.

3. WHAT QUALITIES ARE REQUIRED TO DO YOUR JOB?

People skills, attention to detail, methodical, technical ability, negotiation skills. It's a misconception that you have to be good at maths. Yes, there are numbers involved but spreadsheets do most of the work in this sense for you.

4. WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST SURPRISE YOU FOUND WHEN YOU STARTED WORKING IN CONSTRUCTION?

I thought I wouldn't get treated the same being a Trainee/Apprentice when starting out, however I was so wrong. Every single person I have met the past 4 years working in the industry has given me the same respect as anyone else. Also I thought it was going to be extremely hard. Don't get me wrong it's not easy, but it's nowhere near as difficult as schools lead you to believe.

5. WHAT WERE/ARE YOUR FUTURE CAREER ASPIRATIONS?

To learn as much as possible throughout my career in order to help me achieve the personal aspirations I have. One of my personal aspirations is that I'd like to get involved in property (buying, renovating and renting out properties) as I have a personal interest in this.

6. HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ANY OBSTACLES IN YOUR CAREER BECAUSE OF YOUR GENDER?

No I've not. I was surprised by this when I started in the industry as I did expect to because it is widely thought that male dominant industries treat women with less respect. This hasn't been true in my experience.

7. WHY DO YOU THINK WOMEN REMAIN UNDERREPRESENTED IN THE INDUSTRY?

I don't think all the different roles within construction and the routes to get into construction are advised enough to young women and people in general. If you ask most young people what roles are available to them in construction, I'd imagine the most common answers to be Architect, Plumber, Electrician, Bricklayer, Structural Engineer. Roles I think would be less likely to appeal to Women (except Architect or Engineer perhaps). However, these roles don't even scratch the surface of the number of different roles involved in construction. There are fantastic progression routes within this industry and such a wide variety of job roles, both hands on and management based that would appeal more so to a lot of people, including young women yet these aren't advised as career options to young people when they are growing up or in school.

8. WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT YOUNG WOMEN SEEK OUT CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION?

Yes, I would recommend that anyone of any gender and background pursue a career in construction. There are so many career options within the industry and it can be as challenging, simple and rewarding as you'd like it to be.

9. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ANY WOMEN WISHING TO PURSUE A CAREER IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY?

Share your ideas as much as possible, ask questions as much as possible and listen to people as much as possible.

10. HOW DO YOU THINK A DIVERSE WORKFORCE BENEFITS THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE?

I think a diverse workforce encourages different individuals with different talents and perspectives to want to come into the industry. What I mean by this is that ultimately it doesn't matter what culture, race or gender a person is within an industry, it's about encouraging as many people as possible regardless of these things. A person's talents aren't defined by their culture, race or gender and is individualistic to the person, but to encourage more individuals to come into the industry a diverse workforce will help to do so, which in turn helps the industry gain more talented individuals with different perspectives and ideas.

Without this the industry would struggle to progress.

11. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE INDUSTRY AND WIDER SOCIETY SHOULD BE DOING TO ENCOURAGE MORE WOMEN TO WORK IN CONSTRUCTION?

It needs to start with young children. As children are developing, people tend to naturally put them in a gender box (i.e. you're a girl so I'll buy you make-up and dresses etc, and you're a boy so I'll buy you lego and footballs). If the child wants to deviate from that 'gender box' they are then labelled as a 'Tomboy or Tomgirl' instead of letting the child decide what it is they actually like and just remain as being known as their biological gender.

That's not to say girls won't want to play with dolls and make-up or not wear dresses and boys won't want to play with lego and football. They may well choose to do those things on their own and neither one makes them less of the gender they're born as but there is definitely a tendency to assume likes and dislikes based on gender.

The same can be said with influencing careers to children at a young age. A little girl brought up and told she's going to be a princess I'm sure would be less likely to fall into a construction career. The difficulty here is there are so many external factors that can influence children with the exposure to the online world, movies, tv shows celebrities and schools etc. What I'm trying to say is, as a society, we need to not encourage a particular career onto children based on their gender and instead encourage careers based on their own skills, likes/dislikes. I do think society has got better at this in recent years, but it's really just ensuring the right influences are presented to children as they develop and the same up until they leave school.

For me I can reconcile with this. When I was a child, I wanted to play football and lego and dress up as spiderman. I wanted to help my dad in the garage. I wasn't interested in princesses, yet I was always made to feel like less of the gender I was born as because of this. Not at the fault of anyone in particular but it was the consensus of how society just was. I always thought why I couldn't just be a girl that likes these things, yet it made me feel like I was doing something wrong. Because of my personality, I fought against this feeling but I can imagine other children just fall into only liking something because other people in their gender do or because of what they've been influenced to like.

So, to answer the question genders need to stop being generalised to job roles in society. Parents, schools, media and society in general can all influence this.

I think schools play a massive role and conduct themselves very poorly not just in regard to this but even in offering the correct advice. Of course, I have no scientific research to concur any of this and it's based on my own experiences alone.

12. DO YOU THINK THE INDUSTRY CAN GET TO A POINT WHERE THERE IS A BETTER BALANCE OF GENDERS?

I don't see why not. I think the main problem at the moment actually lies with getting anybody new into the industry. This alarms me more.