



Spotlight on...
women in construction

**CONSIDERATE
CONSTRUCTORS
SCHEME**

Case Study: Higgins Construction

Victoria Betts - Site Manager

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 father was a Site Manager when I was growing up and I thoroughly enjoyed going to work with him in the school holidays. As I got older I decided that I wanted to go into property development therefore I studied for a National Diploma in 3D design at Writtle College. Whilst looking for university degrees I came across one for a BSc in Construction Management and the content really appealed to me. I applied at universities that taught practical skills as well as classroom based learning and was offered a place at Kingston University.

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

My current role involves the management of a team of Site Managers and Subcontractors to ensure the successful handover of Gabriel Square. A typical day will include being on site monitoring health & safety performance, quality control and the programme. I hold weekly meetings with the internal and external trades to ensure that we follow the programme and to discuss any issues that may cause potential delays. Part of my role is to ensure all of the health & safety documents are in place to ensure compliance with legislation. This includes the reviewing of safe systems of work known as 'Method Statements and Risk Assessments'.



I am responsible for the management of logistics on site including the arrangement of deliveries of materials required to complete the job.

I enjoy my job role because no two days are ever the same. There is always the opportunity for career progression and my knowledge is always developing. The negatives to the role are that it can sometimes be very stressful and involve long hours.

3. WHAT QUALITIES ARE REQUIRED TO DO YOUR JOB?

The job requires good time management skills and good organisational skills. You also need to be good at managing people therefore I am required to have good listening and communication skills. The job requires technical knowledge, the basics of which I learnt during my studies and the rest I have developed during my time as a site manager.

4. WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE CAREER ASPIRATIONS?

As part of my future career aspirations I would like to get to the Director level of a construction company. Short term I am working towards the role of Project Manager which would involve the management of the onsite team along with the supporting services that are involved in the project.

5. IS CONSTRUCTION A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN?

I have been in construction for a number of years now and have found it to be a very welcoming industry. Many people may think that being the only female on site is a daunting experience, but it isn't and we have great team spirit amongst the staff.

6. AS A FEMALE SITE MANAGER, HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ANY HURDLES YOU DO NOT THINK A MALE SITE MANAGER WOULD ENCOUNTER?

I do not believe that I have encountered anything as a female site manager that I wouldn't have done as a male site manager. As a young site manager every new job encounters a new set of people that you have to prove yourself to.

The hurdles during my career were more related to getting into the industry in the first place. I had to take part in a larger number of interviews than my male colleagues at University even though I had industry experience and better grades. A few commented that 'I did not look like I had experience'. This very nearly put me off the industry but then I was offered a couple of jobs and this returned my confidence.

7. IN THE TIME YOU HAVE WORKED IN CONSTRUCTION, DO YOU THINK THE INDUSTRY HAS IMPROVED ITS ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN?

In the time I have been working in the industry there has definitely been an increase in the amount of females working in it. The Considerate Constructors Scheme has been a big driving force in this as it insists on facilities for females that previously would not have been in place.

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

I do not believe that as an industry we are doing enough to encourage children and young adults that construction is a good industry to work within. Children are brought up with this notion that builders are all men. If we changed this mind set from an early age then the industry may be considered more by young females when selecting career choices.

At Higgins we work very closely with organisations such as Enabling Enterprise who encourage children to consider construction as a career path and demonstrate all the learning areas and opportunities available in construction.

There are also many training opportunities available, particularly with apprenticeship schemes, which we fully support and engage in. We hold career fairs and have links with a number of universities to encourage students into the industry.

In the industry we have a horrible habit of publishing all the bad statistics without advertising many of the good things. Salaries are kept very quiet amongst staff and therefore there is nothing to appeal to young individuals. Females are not aware of the large number of job roles that are available to them.

9. WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT YOUNG WOMEN SEEK OUT CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION? WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THEM?

I would strongly recommend a career in construction for females. It is a very rewarding job with a potential for high salaries and a chance to get yourself noticed. I would strongly advise women to go against what they are being told regarding the industry being male dominated as females have a place here too! Another piece of advice I would give to all genders is not to chase the money. Sometimes it is better to go for the job offering better career prospects and then the money comes after!

10. HOW DOES A DIVERSE WORKFORCE BENEFIT THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE?

Having a diverse workforce benefits the industry as a whole as it allows us to bring together different skills sets which can result in a more rounded team on site.

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

The industry and wider society should be carrying out more visits to primary school children with attendance from female construction operatives as roles models. We should be targeting young adults that are making career choices to demonstrate what an amazing industry this is to work in. Teachers and lecturers should be educated about the careers available so that they can assist in encouraging their students to consider a role within construction.