



WOMEN'S PPE IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION
YORKSHIRE REGION

02

INTRODUCTION

In August 2023, we asked our network of women in construction to fill out a survey about 'Women's PPE in the Construction Industry'.

In total, we received 157 responses which has provided some really valuable feedback about the current situation with women's PPE in terms of it's procurement, availability and barriers that women face when trying to find well-fitting PPE.

Women's PPE is a hot topic within the construction industry at the moment, with CIOB launching their #PPEthatfits campaign in July 2023. There are also a number of other ongoing campaigns within the industry, such as: #HairandSafety and #Designherin.

We felt that as NAWIC Yorkshire has such a diverse network of women across the UK construction industry, it was the perfect opportunity for us to undertake research on the topic.

THE KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the research were:

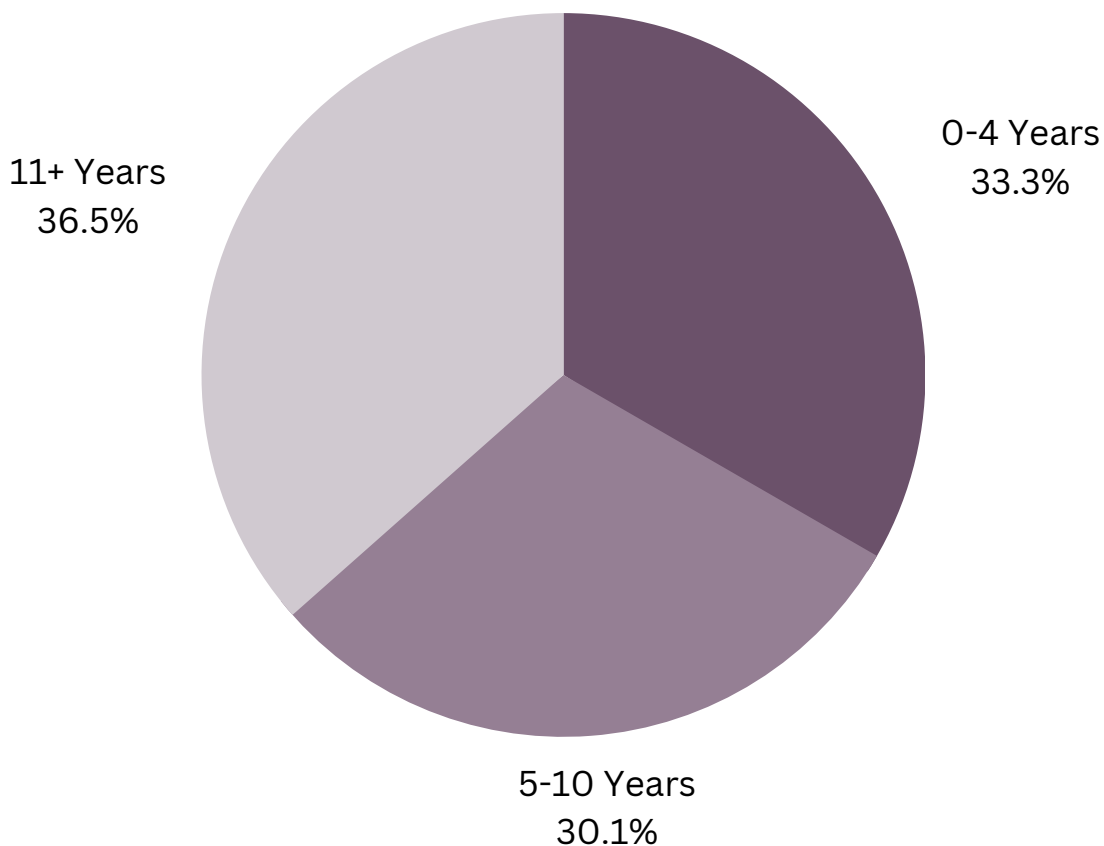
1. Most employers don't provide specific women's PPE.
2. The main barrier to employers for providing women's PPE is the cost.
3. There is a lack of awareness of ill-fitting PPE and the 'One Size Fits All' stigma.
4. There is a lack of awareness of the suppliers of women's PPE.
5. Over 40% of respondents noted that ill-fitting PPE had impacted their career negatively.
6. Most respondents noted that ill-fitting PPE had caused them health and safety concerns, with the main PPE items mentioned being: High Visibility Coats/Jackets/Vests, Safety Boots, Trousers, and Gloves.

04

THE STATISTICS

How long have you worked in the construction industry?

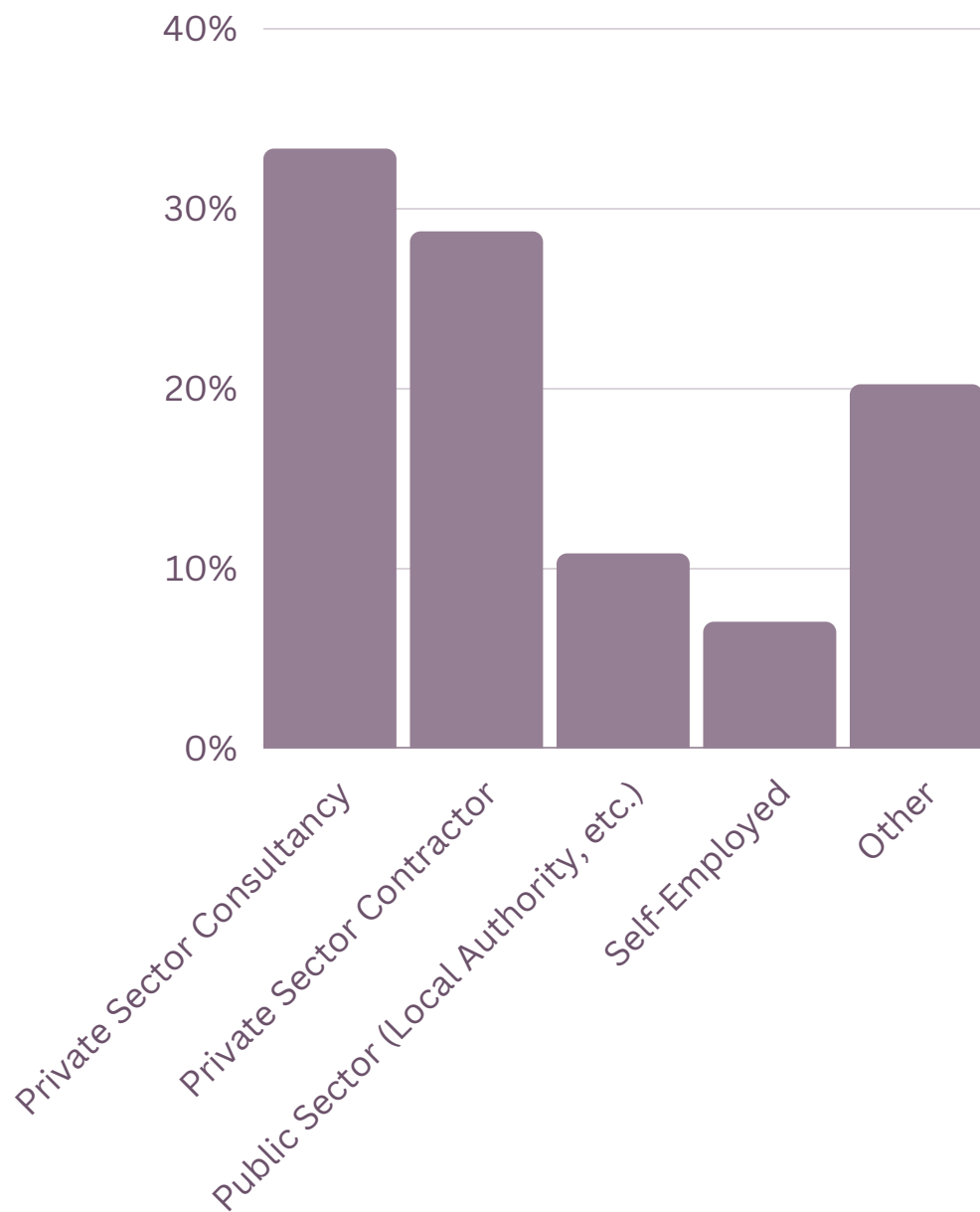
We asked the respondents how long they had worked in the construction industry. The results show that the respondents had a mix of years worth of experience in the construction industry.



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What type of company do you work for?

The results show that nearly 50% of respondents work for a private sector consultancy.

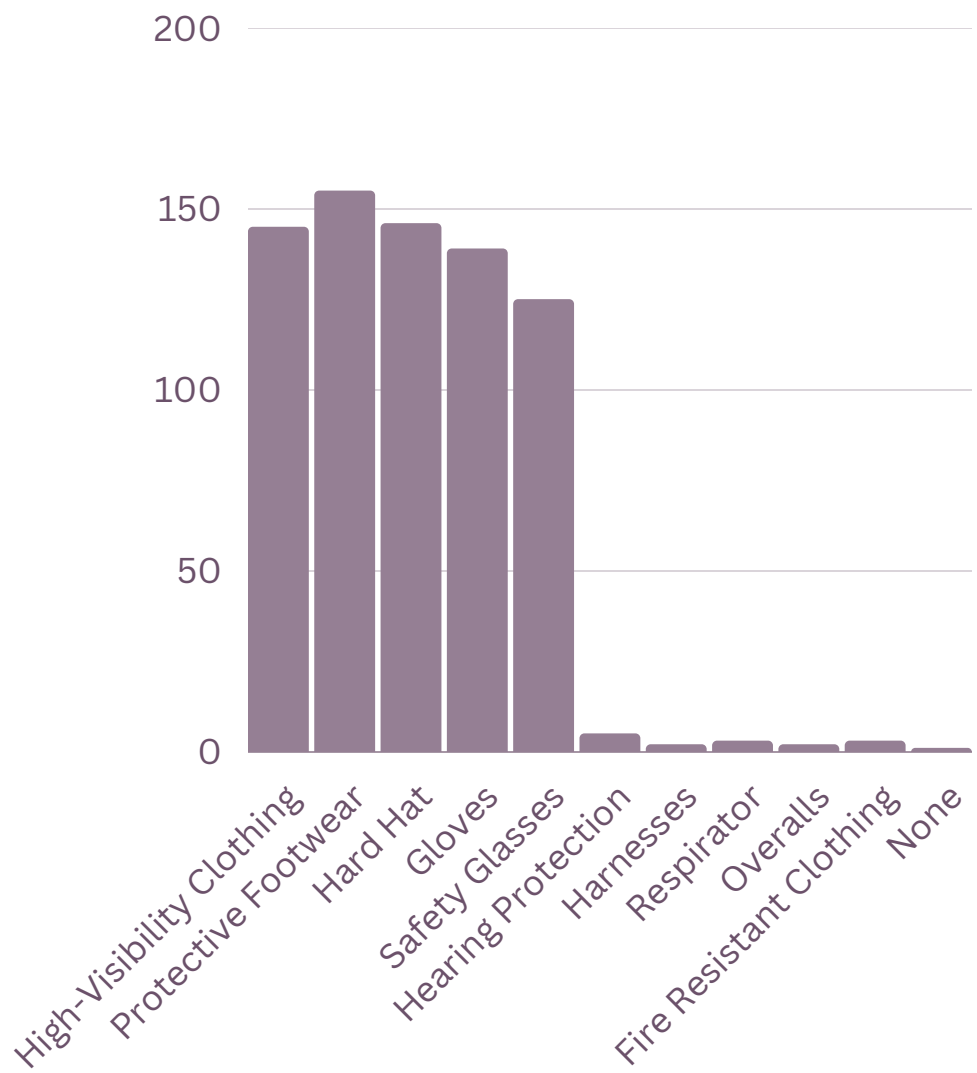


The respondents who selected the 'Other' option, worked in the following organisations: Suppliers, Community Organisations, MMC Manufacturers, Developers, Engineering, Energy, and Legal.

06

What PPE do you wear?

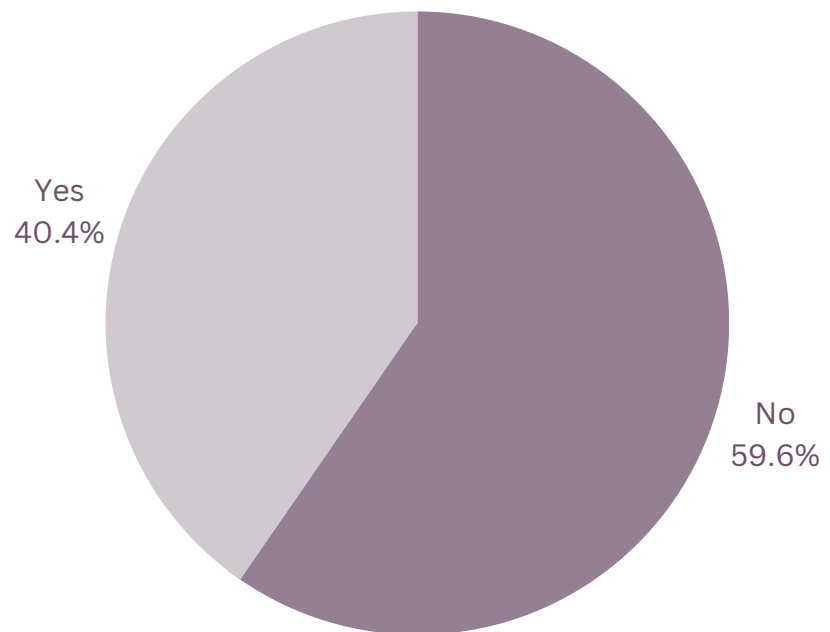
The results show that most respondents wear high-visibility clothing, protective footwear, hard hats, gloves and safety glasses.



07

Do your employers provide specific women's PPE?

The results show that the majority of the respondents employers do not provide specific women's PPE.



Do you face any barriers regarding receiving well-fitting women's PPE in the workplace?

The results show that respondents highlighted the following barriers to receiving well-fitting women's PPE

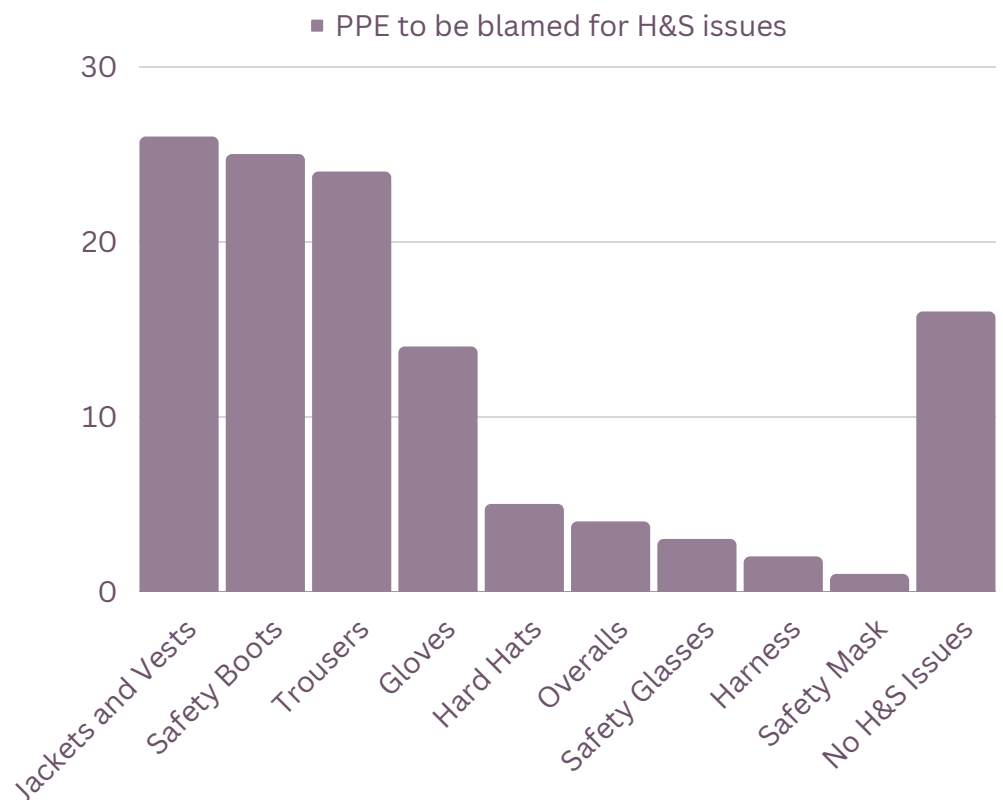
- Women's PPE is more expensive
- Difficulty in finding good suppliers
- Employers only providing men's PPE
- Wait times due to women's items not being kept as stock
- Managers being reluctant to seek out women's PPE
- Stigma with "why do you need that; the regular ones would do"
- Limited size availability

08

Have you had any experiences regarding health and safety issues relating to ill-fitting PPE

The results show that respondents highlighted H&S issues as follows:

- Oversized boots causing a trip hazard, discomfort and health problems (ie. Tendinitis, Mortons Neuroma).
- Oversized gloves causing issues with gripping handrails and tools
- Baggy legs on trousers causing a trip hazard
- High visibility vests not buttoning up and causing discomfort
- Difficulty in adjusting harnesses to fit
- Ill-fitting overalls restricting movement
- Constantly fixing ill-fitting PPE distracting from what's happening on site
- Ill-fitting goggles causing them to steam up and hamper vision
- No experiences in relation to H&S issues

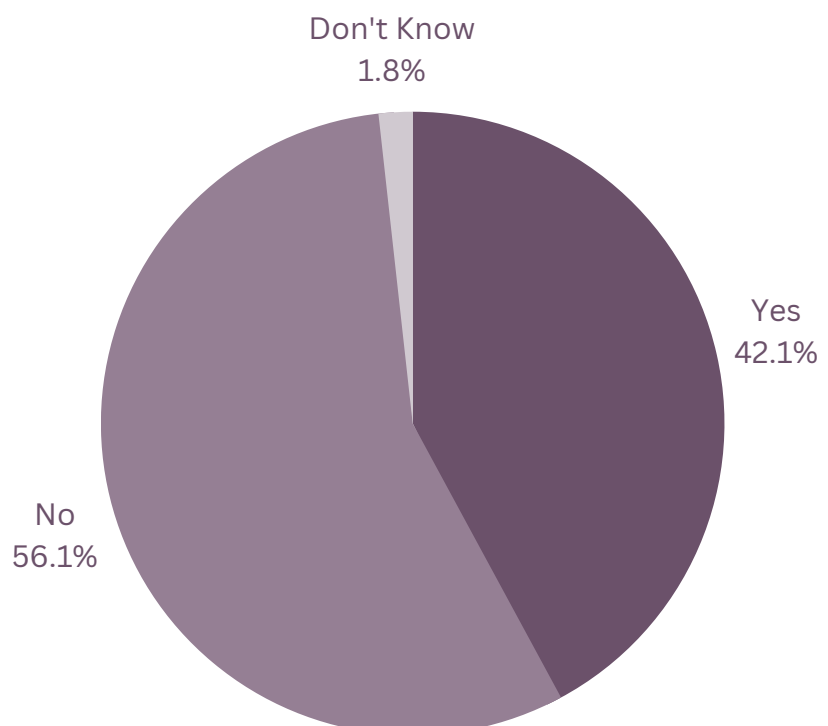


09

Have you had any experiences relating to ill-fitting PPE that has impacted your career

Over 50% of respondents didn't believe ill-fitting PPE had impacted their career, but it's worth noting that the following comments were made in response to the question:

- "I feel I look unprofessional as I am wearing oversized men's clothing"
- "Ill-fitting PPE often makes me feel like I'm perceived as a child in an adult's world, and that impacts how people perceive my knowledge, experience and professionalism."
- "Getting well-fitting PPE unlocked a new level of confidence on site. I would have been streets ahead by now if I could have commanded the same respect 5 years ago as I do now"
- "Made site work more difficult and uncomfortable than it had to be"
- "No - but it would nice to be comfortable!"
- "Makes me not want to be working in the construction industry"

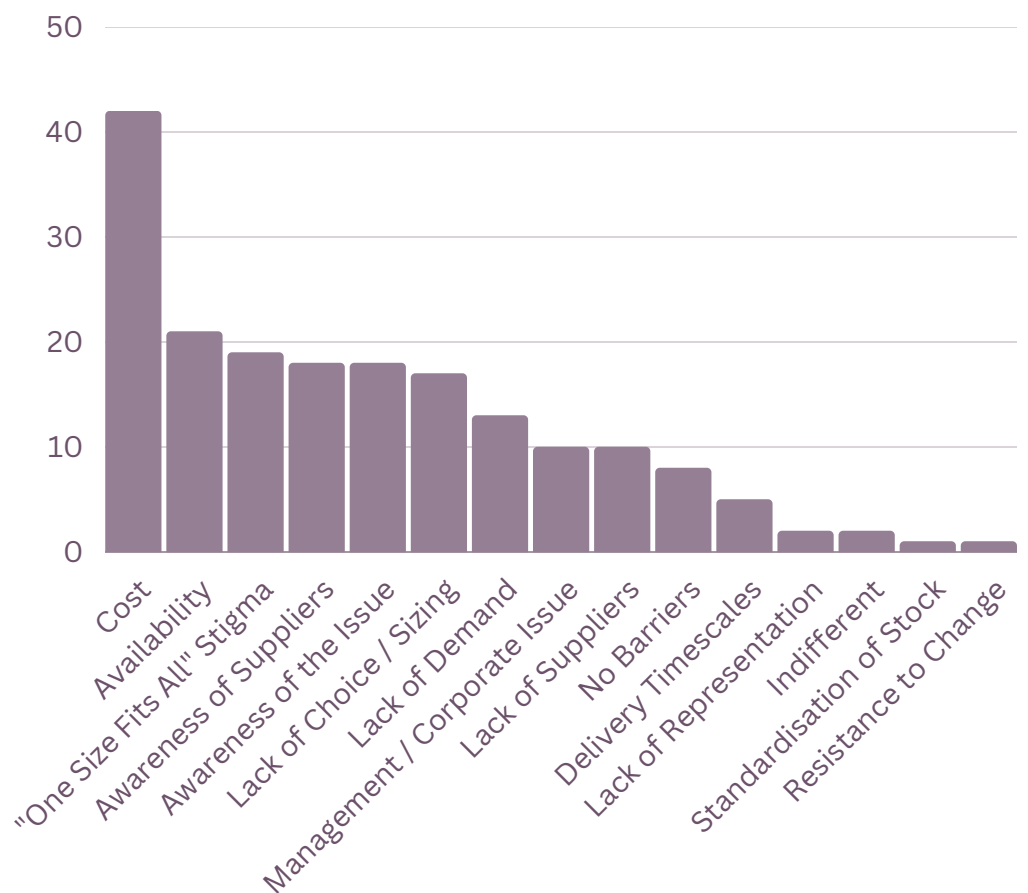


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What do you believe are the biggest barriers for employers to provide women's PPE in your workplace?

The results show that the respondents believe that cost is the biggest barrier for employers to provide women's PPE. The following comments were made in response to the question:

- "No one takes responsibility for this at a corporate level"
- "Lack of availability due to a smaller female percentage within the workforce, there is less inclination from companies to make female specific equipment"
- "Women realising that asking for something other than standard male PPE is even an option"
- "Lack of attention or knowledge on the topic"
- "Limited choice and assumption that we all fit in the same size/shape clothing"



Any other thoughts?

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Ill fitting PPE is dangerous and employers should be made aware, by government, that the law requires PPE to be suitable, not just provided whether it fits or not.

”

“

PPE design has a long way to go for women but even for men.

”

“

Once hosted a site visit where a young girl could not fit in any of the men's PPE. Presented a very poor picture of opportunities for women in the construction industry.

”

“

Not supplying easy to understand size guides S, M, L does not offer an easy comparison to women's clothing sizes.

”

“

My company would buy women's PPE but I feel that there is a lack of suppliers providing it meaning it would take a lot longer to receive the PPE than just sizing down in men's- it's just easier.

”

CONCLUSION

We would like to thank all of the respondents who took the time to complete the survey and provide us with a useful insight into the current situation with women's PPE in the construction industry.

"After our first meeting about the PPE campaign and research, I had a browse of our corporate PPE catalogue and found that only men's PPE was available, (and funnily enough, even children's PPE!). I had a discussion with our supplies procurement team, and within a matter of weeks, they had added women's high-visibility clothing into the PPE catalogue!"

There's still a lot of work that needs to be done, across individual organisations and the wider industry, but it's important to celebrate the small wins and the employers and suppliers that are committed to making a change."

Katy Robinson, Senior Project Manager, ERYC

"Following our meeting, initially I spoke to our office manager to gauge if each offices procured PPE individually, or if we had a group procedure. It was confirmed that normally they have a list of what to order and where from. All PPE ordered was unisex!"

After a discussion and raising this on the Diversity & Equality team for Ridge, we have contacted the head office team to change this and allow women's PPE to be mandatory, given it is a huge H&S issue. We are currently working on rolling this out through all Ridge offices.

Sophie Doyle, Project Management, Ridge & Partners

RESOURCES

A number of respondents in the survey noted that there wasn't enough awareness of women's PPE manufacturers, with a number even noting that there is a lack of manufacturers. In response to this, we have included of brands which are leading the way for inclusivity in women's PPE, kindly compiled by Katherine Evans from Bold as Brass:

Leo Workwear: <https://www.leoworkwear.com/>

PULSAR: <https://www.pulsaruk.com/>

BLAKLADER: <https://portal.blaklader.uk/en>

Rockfall: <https://www.rockfall.com/>

V12 Footwear: <https://v12footwear.com/>

Amblers Safety: <https://www.amblerssafety.com/>

Cromwell Tools: <https://www.cromwell.co.uk/>

STALSEN: <https://stalsen.com/>

3 Donkey's Clothing: <https://www.3donkeys.co.uk/>