



Inspiring Change

Attracting women into construction

October 2017

Balfour Beatty



Foreword



The construction and infrastructure industry is part of the fabric of our daily lives. It impacts almost every element of our work, travel and leisure and makes a significant contribution to the economy. This makes it all the more indefensible that although half the country's working population is female, women make up just 13% of the construction sector's workforce. Shocking in itself, the figure is brought into sharp focus by the skills shortage the industry is facing.

At Balfour Beatty, we are determined to create a new 'business as usual' and ensure the industry appeals to the best and brightest regardless of gender. But the sector is starting from a low base. There is a huge amount to be done to ensure that we are attracting, recruiting and retaining talented women into the full range of roles and at all levels.

The issues also go far wider than the industry itself. Tackling them will require a joined-up approach from the industry, Government and commissioning authorities, beginning with children at primary school and continuing throughout education and training and in the workplace. We must inject some momentum to ensure both that the industry is accessible to all and that we have the skilled workforce we need to deliver the exciting infrastructure projects planned for the next decades.

Balfour Beatty has started its journey towards a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we operate in, with this paper representing another small step forward. We know we and the wider industry still have a way to go, but I am optimistic about the future. There is rightly an expectation of change now, on this agenda. It is not just the right thing to do – it is the common sense thing to do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leo Quinn'.

Leo Quinn
Group Chief Executive

About Balfour Beatty

Balfour Beatty is a leading international infrastructure group. With 15,000 employees across the UK, Balfour Beatty finances, develops, delivers and maintains the increasingly complex infrastructure that underpins the UK's daily life: from Crossrail and Heathrow T2b to the M25, M60, M3 and M4/M5; Sellafield and soon Hinkley C nuclear facilities; to the Olympics Aquatic Centre and Olympic Stadium Transformation.

Improving the diversity of the people we employ is important to Balfour Beatty. We recognise that it is not only right to ensure that people of all genders and backgrounds are able to access fulfilling careers in the construction industry; but that a business which fully reflects the society it serves will make us better placed to continue to deliver the most innovative infrastructure for our customers.

As part of Balfour Beatty's commitment to diversity and inclusion, we are working hard to increase further the representation of women employees. Our diversity and inclusion three-year plan sets out strategic aims, objectives and, more importantly, metrics in support of our endeavours. Overseen by Balfour Beatty Group Chief Executive Leo Quinn, its progress against these metrics is regularly tracked.

We have also undertaken a range of initiatives aimed at tackling the gender gap, including Unconscious Bias training for members of the executive committee and leadership teams across the business; signing up to the Young Women's Trust to help more women undertake a construction apprenticeship; and becoming a signatory to WISE, the industry campaign to improve women's retention and progression.



Executive summary

Construction is evolving. The increasing use of digitisation, robotics and artificial intelligence are changing the face of the industry and how it does business, injecting dynamism and making the sector a leader in the use of cutting-edge technology.

At the same time, infrastructure is rising up the political and economic agenda. New, inspiring and increasingly complex projects are being commissioned to stimulate the economy and cater for the growing and changing population. From Hinkley Point C, to HS2, each creating upwards of 25,000 jobs, Heathrow's third runway and other unique, once-in-a-lifetime projects, the sector is growing as billions of pounds of investment are poured into it. Designing, building and maintaining this infrastructure will need an army of skilled, talented, creative individuals in a wide range of exciting and challenging roles, from engineering, architecture and planning, to finance and risk. It provides the opportunity to work in an area which is simultaneously vital to the economy and improving everyday lives. And it offers job security for decades to come. Yet in spite of this, the number of women in the industry remains low.

While there are more women in work than ever before, accounting for just under half the workforce, progress has been slow in increasing the number of women in the construction and infrastructure industry. A largely male-dominated sector, it remains one of the worst in the UK in terms of gender balance. The statistics are stark and frequently quoted: women make up only 13% of the total UK construction sector workforce¹, of whom only 1%² work on-site. Indeed, many of the women who do work in the sector are desk-based, working in design, management or administrative roles. More women are in senior roles than ever before, with the number having risen by over 100% from 6% in 2005, however, only 16% of senior roles are held by women³. Even looking at those coming into the industry, the picture is not much brighter: there is only one female apprentice in the construction sector in England to 56 men⁴.

Pointing to the fact that this has long been the case is not good enough. The industry is facing challenges including an ageing workforce, an existing skills shortages, uncertainty surrounding Brexit and, although it is a nice problem to have, a significant increase in the amount of infrastructure to be built in the coming decades, including HS2, Hinkley Point C and, hopefully, a third runway at Heathrow. Now, more than ever, it is important that we are accessing all the talent available to us.



To keep up with demand, the industry needs another million workers by 2020⁵. With the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the workers from the EU that the industry has become reliant on, this is likely to be challenging. And yet, women are expected to make up only a quarter of the industry's workforce by 2020⁶.

Although the skills shortage offers an opportunity to focus on increasing the diversity of the sector, it would be wrong to suggest that doing so should only be considered during a time of skills shortage. The construction industry is a key part of the economy, employing around 3 million people in the UK – around 10% of the workforce⁷. Women make up half our population and so it is right that they are able to fulfill their potential and thrive in careers across our economy, including construction. The construction industry has a responsibility to really begin to address this issue.

Of course, if the solution was simple, it would already have been implemented. Unfortunately, it is a complex problem, requiring action on a number of different fronts. We must make sure that the education system signposts careers in engineering and construction so that young people of all genders study relevant subjects and sign up for apprenticeships. The sector must be proactive in accurately projecting the rapidly changing nature of construction, driven by innovation and technology; updating its policies to support best practice in this area, looking at other industries to learn lessons; and thinking about leadership differently to break the cycle of leaders recruiting successors in their own image. We have to take positive steps to ensuring that we are appropriately targeting our recruitment materials; tackling any unconscious bias in our recruitment processes; highlighting

¹ Annotation

¹ ONS Oct – Dec 2016, Labour Force Survey

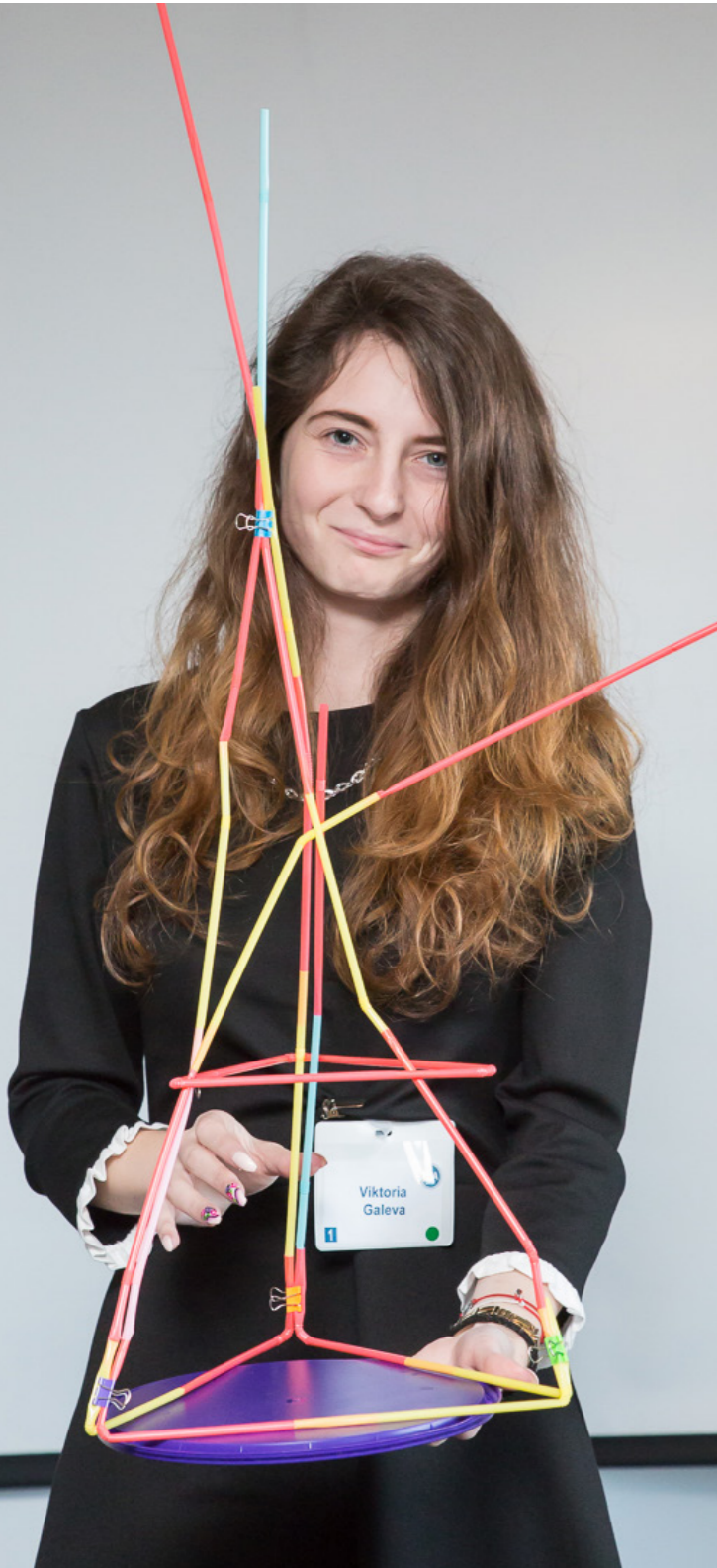
² Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, 2017

³ Women and the Education Pay Gap, Randstand, 2016

⁴ Making Apprenticeships Work for Young Women, Young Women's Trust, March 2016

⁵ Randstad Construction, Property & Engineering, November 2015

⁶ Women in Construction Report, Randstand, 2015 ⁷ CITB



role models and celebrating the achievements of women in the industry; encouraging a mentoring culture; and of course, we must maintain our zero tolerance approach to sexism, bullying and discrimination against anyone, going further than the good work already going on. Balfour Beatty believes that there is no reason why the construction and infrastructure industry should be any different from other sectors in terms of equality and diversity.

Beyond attracting and recruiting women to the industry, we must also stop the flow of talented women leaving it; by supporting returners and those who have dependents; tackling the pay gap; and ensuring that we are supporting talented women across the industry to advance their careers and take up senior roles. Attracting more women into the sector is only a partial victory if they are confined to lower levels of the corporate hierarchy in administrative roles for example, or if they are only to be found in specific disciplines, such as law, human resources or communications. It does not reflect well on many of the companies in our industry that we have so few women in senior positions. Increasing the pipeline of women coming into and remaining within the industry is the only way to make sure they are represented at director level.

Industry has a leading role to play in bringing about these changes and we must step up our efforts. Companies must be proactive in meeting this challenge. We must have diversity strategies that encourage more women to develop their careers in the industry. But we cannot do it alone. We welcome Government and other schemes to bring the industry to the attention of young people of all genders, and to highlight the wide range of exciting opportunities that it holds. Government also of course has a key role in ensuring that relevant subjects and careers advice are available and effectively delivered in schools and, in an industry where around 40% of projects are publicly funded, the role procurement can play in driving the requirement for industry to change its ways should not be underestimated.

If we are going to address the skills shortage, build the infrastructure the UK needs and see the next generation fulfil their potential, we must become much, much better at appealing to, recruiting and retaining the best and brightest talent, regardless of gender and background.

Recommendations



1. Promoting the wide range of exciting roles involved in large schemes in addition to work on-site will allow women to take advantage of the opportunities that exist. This message must be spread more clearly, both by industry and the Government and all parties must work together more quickly to change outdated perceptions of the industry.
2. There have been a number of campaigns recently aimed at getting more women into engineering in general and into construction in particular. These are welcome and should be sustained.
3. Raising the profile of existing female employees to help encourage others into the profession is key.
4. With women still making up such a small percentage of the UK construction workforce, senior men must take responsibility for driving change.
5. With children forming views early, not necessarily of what career they want to pursue, but of the options that are available to them, encouraging an interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects must begin at primary school. Focusing mainly on secondary school children is likely to be too little, too late.
6. Change needs to happen throughout the education system to ensure that young people are not being consciously or subconsciously discouraged from studying subjects based solely on their gender.
7. Other steps would encourage greater visibility of the opportunities on offer in the sector to all young people. For example, establishing a single, universal admissions service for people applying for T-levels, A-levels, Further Education colleges, Higher Education institutes and apprenticeships; and designing and implementing better strategy and longer term view on University Technical Colleges (UTC) and training academies.
8. Those commissioning for schemes can play a key role in increasing workplace diversity: they should lead by example and set high expectations of their supply chain. This, in turn, will drive construction companies to be more imaginative in how they attract and retain talent.
9. The industry must ensure that it has a culture that does not accept sexism, discrimination or bullying and we must challenge every instance of it.
10. Staff should be rewarded and promoted on results rather than just on the basis of those who are confident enough to demand a promotion or pay rise.

Attracting women into the industry

Although there is still much that needs to be done, attitudes to women working in the construction and infrastructure industry have changed significantly over recent decades. While construction remains a male-dominated industry, the workforce is at last becoming more gender diverse and there are now women working across many of our sites and schemes. Stereotypes surrounding what are considered to be “male” and “female” roles have also, to a large extent, been broken down. However, this is not yet being reflected in the number of women working in the industry.

Part of the reason for this relates to the outdated perception of the industry that many still have – an off-putting image of a male-dominated, macho environment focused largely on digging holes and pouring concrete. This can understandably dissuade young women and also young men, from considering studying construction-relevant subjects, or taking up apprenticeships.

More worrying is evidence⁸ that even where women are showing an interest in the industry, for example, UCAS has seen an increase in the number of women taking construction related degrees, these figures do not translate into those women moving into careers in the industry. While this, in part, is because those with engineering degrees for example are sought after elsewhere, such as in the City, part of it is also because many women feel that the construction industry holds no place for them.

Technology and innovation have changed the face of the industry. Construction is no longer about manual labour and the idea that women are not physically strong enough to work in it is no longer relevant. For one thing, women can handle the same power tools and operate the same machinery as men. But there is also a huge diversity of rewarding, challenging professional roles in the industry, covering a wide range of disciplines, from architects,

building surveyors, civil engineers, design managers, ecologists and economists, to project managers, risk engineers, structural engineers and town planners. Remaining perceptions of the industry being more attractive to men must surely fade away more quickly as the sector becomes increasingly reliant on digital technology, but we should not be waiting for that to happen to drive change in the image of the sector.

There are also many exciting, long-term projects to work on, such as HS2, Hinkley Point C and Heathrow’s third runway. This message must be spread more clearly, both by industry and the Government. There have been a number of campaigns recently aimed at getting more women into engineering in general and into construction in particular. These are welcome and should be sustained. Promoting the wide range of roles involved in large schemes in addition to work on-site will allow women to take advantage of the opportunities that exist, as will raising the profile of existing female employees to help encourage others into the profession. However, with women still making up such a small percentage of the UK construction workforce, senior men must take responsibility for driving change. Even without this being the case, gender issues in the workplace should not solely belong in women’s hands and should move beyond preserve of the Human Resources team.

Inspiring real change is firstly about changing the lingering outdated perceptions that exist of what it means to work in construction, not just amongst women, but amongst young people in general as well as those that influence them and their career choices, for example, their parents and teachers.

In particular, with children forming views early, not necessarily of what career they want to pursue, but of the options that are available to them, encouraging an interest in STEM subjects must begin at primary school. Focusing mainly on secondary school children is likely to be too little, too late.

Even with recent, welcome steps which have been implemented or announced, targeted at secondary school pupils, gender bias remains – and it is not just girls who make gendered choices. For example, the Institute for Physics had two stark findings in its *Closing Doors* report⁹. Firstly, that single-sex schools are significantly better than co-educational schools at countering the gender imbalances that exist in pupils choosing to study subjects



traditionally seen as being “boys” or “girls” subjects. Secondly, that not only are girls less likely to study subjects such as maths or physics: boys are less likely to opt for “girls” subjects such as English. Change needs to happen throughout the education system to ensure that young people are not being consciously or subconsciously discouraged from studying subjects based solely on their gender.

Other steps which could be implemented would encourage greater visibility of the opportunities on offer in the sector to all young people. These include, for example, making it simpler to apply for technical and vocational routes by establishing a single, universal admissions service for people applying for T-levels, A-levels, Further Education colleges, Higher Education institutes and apprenticeships; and designing and implementing better strategy and longer term view on University Technical Colleges (UTC) and training academies, including measures to make UTCs more attractive to a high-achieving students of both genders; changing the law to require all local authorities to write to parents of 13-year-old children about UTCs after providing information to children as they go to secondary school, to signpost the UTC option.



⁸ Chartered Institute of Building, 2016

⁹ Closing Doors: Exploring Gender and Subject Choice in Schools, Institute for Physics, December 2013



Those commissioning for schemes can play a key role in increasing workplace diversity: they should lead by example and set high expectations of their supply chain. For example, Andy Mitchell, upon taking up his role as chief executive at Thames Tideway Tunnel, announced that he wanted to achieve gender parity by the time construction of London's "super sewer" is completed in 2023. Major projects such as London's Crossrail network are making an effort to hire equally – almost a third of its jobs are filled by women. Commissioning authorities setting the tone in this way will drive construction companies to be more imaginative in how they attract and retain talent.

As the Government is the construction industry's biggest client, public procurement should be used to ensure that companies are taking all possible steps to reduce the gender pay gap. The Department for Transport (DfT), for example, is writing targets into contracts with infrastructure suppliers to ensure new apprenticeships are created and to bring more women into engineering and technical roles. Implementing steps such as these, outlining expectations of all those undertaking publicly-funded work, creates a level playing field and makes it the norm.

More needs to be done to address issues relating to work-life-balance. Working long hours in a variety of locations, resulting in frequent travel, have traditionally been requirements of roles in the industry, especially for those aiming to progress to more senior roles. However, with talented workers from all genders placing greater importance on spending time with their families and with the opportunities provided by technology, this should and can begin to change.

Balfour Beatty believes that we need to take a positive, proactive approach to attracting more women into the industry – and to attracting more young people from any gender. As part of this, there are key things individual companies should be doing as part of a dedicated, long-term strategy. Some of the measures Balfour Beatty is implementing include:

- Undertaking outreach visits and programmes in conjunction with schools and other educational establishments, to showcase the variety of careers in the sector.
- Tackling unconscious bias (stereotyping characteristics, roles and abilities of women and men, or unconsciously mirror-imaging in the recruitment or progression pipeline whereby candidates who display similar behaviours and skill sets to the interviewer or superiors are more likely to be chosen for a vacancy), with bespoke training for leadership teams, line managers and recruiting managers across the business.
- Carrying out targeted recruitment campaigns and working with expert diversity and inclusion focused bodies such as the Youth Women's Trust and WISE, to get guidance on how we can better improve our recruitment and workplace culture so that we can recruit and retain a talented and diverse workforce.
- Reverse mentoring, also called reciprocal mentoring, involves the pairing of a senior person with a junior person of a different gender. This is a way of creating visibility of talent internally to top executives, as well as breaking down unconscious bias. The mentor/mentee meet regularly, each learning from the other.
- "Returnships" enable us to access a talent pool of high-calibre women who want to return to their profession following an extended break. We provide training and support, which helps them to get up to speed, supported by coaching and mentoring, with the possibility of a permanent role at the end of the period.
- Balfour Beatty has also launched a 'Women in Business' network¹⁰ to drive positive change across the company, attract talented women into the industry and help them progress up the career ladder. The Women in Business Network is one of our national "Affinity Networks"¹¹, set up to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), Women and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) staff and to ensure we are creating an inclusive environment where our employees feel valued and respected.
- We are actively recruiting men at all levels to become Allies to our Women in Business network.
- Targeted training, including a 3-day Career Development Programme to help our female employees achieve their potential.
- Holding conferences and other events to celebrate and inspire women in the business and in the industry more widely, such as the February 2017 *Inspiring Women* conference, using the events to take on board feedback and views from women in our sector to drive change.
- Actively promoting and encouraging our women to enter awards such as the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) Young Woman Engineer of the Year Awards to overcome the perceived barriers to career progression.
- Embedding equality into our culture, via our Code of Conduct and Values – and providing a mechanism of reporting any cases where these are not adhered to in our "Speak Up" helpline.
- Providing high potential women with a senior management mentor to support their development.
- Ensuring respect for the needs of our female colleagues, for example, ensuring that there are female Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) options in our catalogue – work clothing which fits properly and enables women to do their jobs comfortably, well and safely. Although this might seem basic, there are too many companies in the industry which do not yet do this.

This list is not exhaustive, but it hopefully offers an insight to how importantly Balfour Beatty takes the issue of gender balance. Others in the industry are also implementing measures which we aim to learn from. The key point however, is that these points are moving beyond being 'initiatives' and are becoming second nature. This is how Balfour Beatty now does business.

¹⁰ <https://www.balfourbeatty.com/news/balfour-beatty-continues-to-encourage-more-women-to-join-remain-and-rise-up-within-the-construction-industry/>

¹¹ <https://www.balfourbeatty.com/investors/governance/diversity/>

Retaining women in the industry



While attracting women into the industry is of course vital, keeping them in the sector is just as, if not more important. However, it is well documented by the Construction Industry Council, Construction Skills and other industry bodies that high numbers of women who start their careers in the industry, leave it within five years of joining. Tackling this outflow of talented, skilled women has to involve the following key areas:

1. Rooting out discrimination and sexism

While legislation, public expectation and organisations such as the Government supported Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS), have resulted in considerable improvements, many women in the construction and infrastructure industry still report that they face sexism in the workplace¹². The industry must ensure that it has a culture that does not accept sexism, discrimination or bullying and we must challenge every instance of it. Women working in construction should be treated equally to their male colleagues, who should not have to face discrimination, sexism or bullying either.

Equality for all genders extends to working conditions too. From ensuring access to appropriate toilet facilities to providing personal protective equipment that fits properly, employers have a responsibility to make sure their employees' basic needs are catered for.

2. Ensuring compatibility with caring responsibilities

Parenthood is, of course, a significant factor for women in any male-dominated profession, but especially in a sector which has traditionally been characterised by long working hours away from home. However, the question is not about finding ways to enable mothers to continue to commit to the industry, but to ensure that all parents and those with broader caring responsibilities are able to do so. If we succeed in achieving that balance, we are more likely to have a choice of the most talented individuals of any gender. We must ensure that we are supporting all those with caring responsibilities to work in the industry rather than losing skilled workers to other industries.

3. Supporting career advancement

Companies must ensure that they are tackling any embedded gender bias which may exist in terms of deciding which individuals to promote. Gender bias training can be useful in tackling this, as can reverse mentoring, in terms of educating senior staff about possible differences in approach between genders. Where possible there should be a mixed group involved in decisions about who should be promoted into senior roles.

Staff should be rewarded and promoted on results rather than just on the basis of those who are confident enough to demand a promotion or pay rise.

Other steps can also help with supporting career advancement and therefore retaining talented women: for example, ensuring a mentoring culture is cultivated across the company and that senior staff are encouraging and investing time in women within the company so they can be brought through to the top ranks. There should be a consciousness about the sector's traditional reliance on recruiting executives from the existing pool – people who have done similar jobs at other companies – rather than

making the effort to look at the next generation and recruit from within, which can mean that women have to significantly out-perform their male peers to break through. Role models should be visible. Coaching and “buddy” systems could be considered.

Ultimately, those companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to a diverse workforce will attract the most talented and forward-looking employees.

4. Tackling pay imbalances

Office of National Statistics figures show that on average women in construction are paid 12% less than their male counterparts carrying out the same role. The gender pay gap in construction is higher than the national average. New legislation to compel companies with more than 250 employees to publish bonuses and the difference between the average pay of male and female workers should eventually help to redress the balance, where companies develop and implement robust strategies for taking action to narrow any gap.

5. Encouraging career extensions for mature women

With so few older women in the industry, finding ways to retain them in the sector to act as mentors and role models and to pass on their experience can be important. Career paths are increasingly fluid, allowing employees to continue to upskill and reinvent themselves if given the opportunity and support to do so. Steps to encourage career extensions can range from flexible working, or moving to a shorter working week, help with succession planning or retirement planning for example.

¹² <https://www.ucatt.org.uk/women-construction>

Conclusion

In order to benefit from the talents of a balanced workforce, the construction and infrastructure industry must create a work environment that encourages and supports those it seeks to attract and retain. Although there have been some improvements in this area, there is still much to do. Industry and Government must work in partnership and increase and accelerate their efforts to attract and retain the skilled, diverse workforce the sector needs. More than that, the supply chain must be engaged too on this agenda, to ensure we are driving real change.

Technology will play a part both in terms of changing the outdated image of the industry and in facilitating a better work-life balance. Large Government-commissioned schemes, such as HS2, will also help by setting targets their suppliers must meet. But we must go further than this. Real change calls for a truly joined up approach which encompasses all those involved in the industry and the whole career-span from education to retirement. Only by doing so, and by keeping this high on our agenda, will we truly break down the gender imbalance in the construction industry.





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