



# Women



# n The Tools

A research document into women in  
construction: 2022





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# 78%

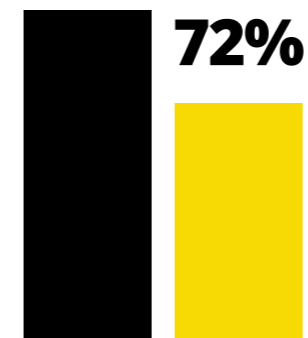
of UK tradeswomen said they had seen or experienced discrimination

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

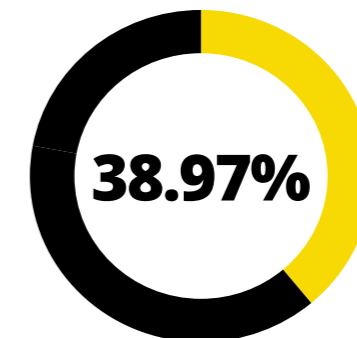
The Women On The Tools report was designed to uncover what it is like to be a woman in construction in 2022. Our aim was to not only identify and challenge the inequalities encountered by women on-site but to celebrate what can be a fantastic career option for many.

This groundbreaking white paper represents the views of tradeswomen, tradesmen, consumers, industry bodies and construction brands, gathered over a series of focus groups, in-depth interviews and targeted surveys. In order to contextualise this insight, our independent research is supported by third party studies and independent sector analysis.

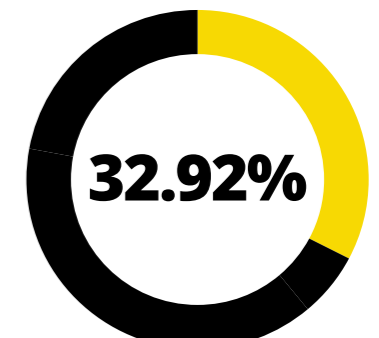
According to our findings, the anecdotal perception of the construction industry as male-dominated, and even sexist, is unfortunately not unfounded. When asked if they had seen or experienced any discrimination against women, 78% of UK tradeswomen said that they had.



This report explores why and where this discrimination happens, and how working conditions and limited progression opportunities can compound those experiences. We know, according to the [Rated People Home Improvement Trends Report 2022](#), that **women get paid just 72% of what men do on average for trade roles**, and that when we asked tradeswomen about their pay in comparison to their men counterparts, that they knew this, **with only 29.75% stating they felt they were paid the same.**

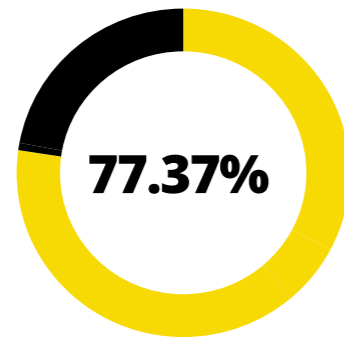


When we started to identify how women could access pregnancy or maternity benefits, **38.97% of self-employed tradeswomen stated they were unsure of the benefits** they could access if they were starting a family and **21.13% believed they would not be able to access any benefits** when starting a family as a self-employed tradeswoman.

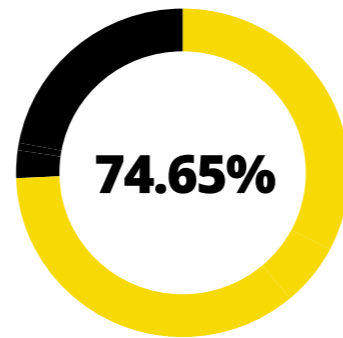


With construction contributing between 6-9% of GDP annually, the lack of basic amenities for women is markedly out of step with other major industries. For example, **32.92% of the women we surveyed** stated that they either never (14.35%) or less than half of the time (22.57%) had access to a women's toilet when working on-site. Of these, **only 22.15% stated they always had access to one.**

However, despite the above concerns, there is room for positivity. According to our research, an impressive



of self employed tradeswomen are satisfied with their career,



of women employed by construction companies are satisfied with their career.

In 'The Role That Businesses Play' section within this report, we take a look at some brands that want to make a positive impact and who are consciously working to support women.

Tradespeople, industry supporters and sponsors of this project all used the term 'role models' when asked what was needed to improve opportunities for women on-site. In light of this, we have included a section on successful women within the industry, providing much-needed insight into the opportunities, rather than challenges, offered by a career in construction.

The report draws the conclusion that women's and men's experiences in the world of work, and in the construction industry specifically, need to be recognised as different. We should be striving towards **equity rather than equality** to make the change that is needed, and giving women, or any person, the support they need as an individual to succeed.

What's more, this research emphasises the recognised seriousness of the construction skills gap, and the role that discrimination may play in it. Of those included in our sample consumer groups,



78% of female consumers,



66% of male consumers,

said they would **NOT** consider a career in construction.

These responses indicate that very few women are entering the industry, or have the desire to enter the industry. Furthermore, once women are working in construction, they seem to have very few role models or business opportunities. We look at the ways we can solve these problems, including examining how we can introduce more women to the construction industry and how we can change perceptions of the construction industry as a career choice.

*I have worked for and with construction businesses for over a decade now, and the conversation surrounding diversity in the industry certainly seems to be growing in momentum, with a desire to improve things.*

*However there is still a long way to go. Research such as this is invaluable in order to identify issues that exist within the industry, so that they can begin to be addressed.*

*Though this paper is in my name, it represents the hard work of the wider On the Tools team, as well as the incredible tradeswomen who contributed to it.*

*I'd like to also take an opportunity to thank the industry supporters and sponsors of this research - your contribution has been invaluable.*

*If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at [Clare@electrichouse.co.uk](mailto:Clare@electrichouse.co.uk)*



**Clare Harding**  
Brand Director  
On the Tools



# ABOUT THE REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is not only male-dominated but often perceived as a discriminatory and hostile working environment. With fewer men and women entering the workforce than is needed to meet demand, alongside an ageing workforce, the skills gap is a pressing concern.

We recognise that typically women-focused issues, including (but not limited to) the pay gap and sex bias, are faced by more than just those assigned female at birth, those who are biologically female, or those who strictly identify as women. For the purposes of this report, the word “woman” or similar will be used to encapsulate all those who identify with or share typically women-focused issues.



## RESEARCH

The existing research into women in construction is fairly limited, as this group constitutes a hard to reach demographic within an already niche market- a ‘niche’ within a ‘niche’.

The Women On The Tools research covers:

- // What are the challenges faced by existing women in this industry?
  - // Is discrimination as prevalent as it seems anecdotally?
  - // Where does discrimination happen?
  - // What is the perception from women as to why it happens?
- // Why aren't women entering the industry?
  - // Why do we have a skills gap?
  - // How many people are currently entering the industry?
- // Who gets it right?
  - // Placing a spotlight on role models who thrive in construction
  - // What role do businesses play?

## METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the research aims and objectives a mixed-method approach was selected as the most appropriate methodology. This included:

- // 3x Qualitative focus groups of 20 tradespeople combined (12 women, eight men)
- // Qualitative interviews with 3 industry bodies:



- // Quantitative study of 474 tradeswomen
- // Consumer research via YouGov (sample size 2059)

Please see [appendix](#) for a comprehensive overview of the report's methodology.





# PART 1

**ENTERING THE  
INDUSTRY**

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## HOW MANY WOMEN ARE IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY?

The skills shortage in the construction industry has been a growing concern for many years. However, since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, the issue has become both more pressing and more widely reported. This shortage has been caused by an array of factors, including an ageing workforce, lack of new entrants, and a loss of foreign workers post-Brexit.<sup>1</sup>

However, a further, perhaps underreported, contributor is the startling lack of women entering the construction industry. The Considerate Constructors Scheme estimates that only one in every ten workers in construction is a woman, and 90% of women working in construction are actually off the tools.<sup>2</sup>

In the academic year 2018-2019, 10,930 apprentices completed their construction apprenticeship programmes, and only 300 - 2.74% - of those were women.<sup>3</sup> But by the latest academic year, 2021-22, a much higher figure of 2,400 women started their traineeship programmes in construction compared to 3,200 men, an increase of 73%.<sup>4</sup> Statistics like these indicate that we are heading in the right direction, but perceptions around women entering the industry are still not to where they should be. According to our consumer research, 78% of women working across alternative industries would not consider a career in construction. (FIG 16)

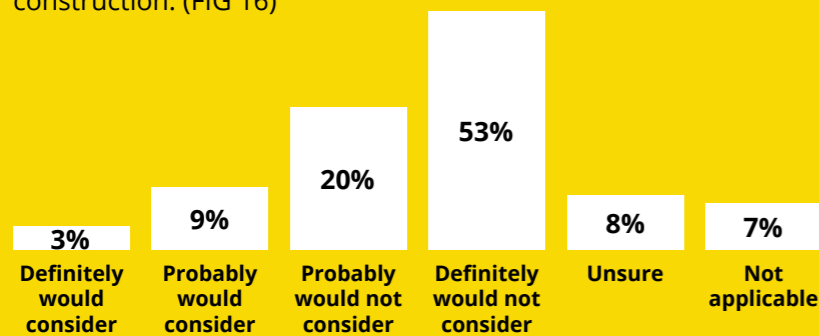


FIG 16. Likelihood of men, women, and other consumers to consider a career in construction (TOTAL 2,059)

Beyond recruitment, construction also has an issue with retention. More than four in 10 women and non-binary tradespeople who work, or have worked, in construction either left or 'seriously' considered leaving the industry at some point. What's more, nearly half of these said that this was because of harassment and lack of respect at work.<sup>5</sup> (See section 3. [discrimination for more information about the harassment faced by women who work in the construction industry.](#))

Through a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research, we explored the reasons why the women of the UK choose to either have a job in construction or not have a job in construction. We also explored the differences between men's and women's experiences of entering the industry. By doing this, we can begin to understand the steps that need to be taken in order to make a career in construction possible for more women and to create more accessible routes into the sector for all.



## WHY DON'T WOMEN GENERALLY CHOOSE A CAREER IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY?

Industry body Build Your Future cited negative stereotypes as a key reason why women do not consider careers in construction. These negative stereotypes include, perceptions that those in construction are uneducated or unintelligent, have few or no alternative job prospects, that they work in dirty and hot conditions, and that construction is a 'man's profession'.<sup>6</sup> Women who work in construction are expected to not only surmount these stereotypes but other preconceived notions about a woman's role in the world of work too. For example, that they should be working behind a desk, or at home as a mother.

*Construction has historically been seen as a man's job. There is a very old fashioned view that manual labour, engineering, architectural design and even DIY is something that's done by men. There have been many industries (construction being one of them) that have held sexist views that women have no place in these types of environments, as they were deemed, 'too hard' 'too dirty' or just not interesting for women.*

*There is also, generally speaking, a negative perception of individuals working in the industry and how they are portrayed in the media and online. This kind of 'broad stroke' stereotyping does very little to help women take up a career path that can be rewarding, educational and very flexible for any individual that chooses it."*

- fischer

In addition, when reviewing the information in Section 3: [Discrimination](#), it's clear to see that women who work in construction are statistically far more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace due to their sex. This stark disproportion is recognised by women who work outside of the construction industry and often dissuades them from considering a career in construction, as shown in our YouGov results [FIG 16].

Interestingly, whilst 78% of women in our consumer research told us that they wouldn't consider a career in construction, 49% of the same pool of respondents suggested that they would be likely to encourage young women to consider construction as a career path.

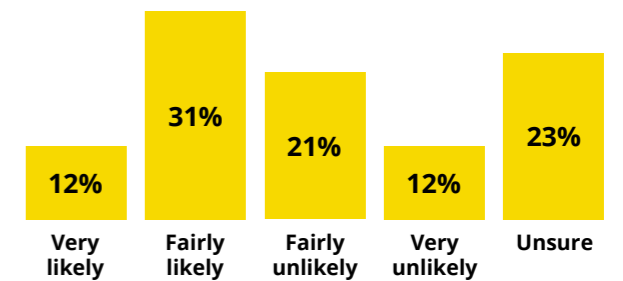


FIG 17. Likelihood of men, women, and other consumers to encourage young women to consider a career in construction (TOTAL 2,059)

*When I was at school, women could only be hairdressers, nurses, or secretaries."*

- Emma Chamberlain, building surveyor

This could suggest that perceptions towards women's roles in the world of work and, more specifically, the perceptions of the overall experiences of tradeswomen in the construction industry are changing for the better, at least among women. The disparity between the number of women choosing not to work in construction, but willing to encourage other young women to do so, could indicate that these women were not given adequate opportunities or role models in school, and therefore were unable to see a route or role for themselves in the industry.

*When I was younger I wanted to be an engineer, or study metalwork or woodwork. Since I was a girl, and those were 'boy's subjects', I had to study cookery instead. I ended up doing primary school teaching, and taught children until I was 27."*

- Hattie Hasan, MBE, Founder of Register of tradeswomen and Stopcocks

Whilst 49% of consumers reporting that they would encourage others to join the industry seems like a promising statistic, it is not the whole story. Within the same pool, 29% reported that they would be unlikely to encourage a career in construction, and 22% were unsure about the question [Fig 17]. This shows a clear uncertainty among those who work in alternative industries as to whether the construction industry is a valuable and preferable career choice.



## HOW TO GET MORE WOMEN ON THE TOOLS

We asked UK tradeswomen if they had seen or experienced any discrimination against women in the construction industry, and **78% said that they had**. The first step to encouraging more women to work in construction should be to minimise, if not eradicate, the varied and illegal discrimination faced by women working in the industry.<sup>7</sup>

We asked tradeswomen to tell us how they thought we could prevent discrimination in order to encourage more women to work in construction.

	Tradeswomen (%)
Updating or reestablishing the UK Government equality act	8.24
Introducing more women-focused government programmes	10.41
Encouraging more discrimination prevention training in construction companies	9.99
Showcasing tradeswomen in primary schools	14.13
Showcasing tradeswomen in secondary schools and higher education	16.16
Emphasising vocational courses in education	11.00
Showcasing tradeswomen at open days and careers events	15.01
Publicising more women-focused social media groups and other organisations	13.40
Enforcing harsher penalties for discriminatory offences	0.14
Addressing discriminators directly about their behaviour	0.37
Normalise accommodations made at work for women-focused issues, e.g. flexible working hours	0.37
Denormalise the ingrained sex bias and deconstruct learned behaviours	0.18
It's up to tradeswomen to prove they're as good as tradesmen	0.18
Nothing should be done	0.18
Unsure	0.09
Other	0.14

FIG 8. Methods suggested by tradeswomen to stop or reduce discrimination against women working in construction. (TOTAL 2127)

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADESMEN/WOMEN ENTERING THE INDUSTRY

Women, those who identify as women and everyone who identifies with women-typical experiences, will undoubtedly have a different experience to tradesmen both when entering and working in the construction industry.

*"This isn't necessarily because of men in the industry, but because there are some things women experience that men haven't a clue about,"*

*- Hattie Hasan MBE, founder of Stopcocks and Register of Tradeswomen.*

It follows that a rise in the number of women, and those who identify with their experiences, will improve conditions for those already working in a male-dominated industry. Shared experience can certainly help to inform change, but, as founder of Practical Women, Caroline Henn, argues, women-typical issues should not be faced by women alone.

*Menopause has become a hot topic (no pun intended) in many industries across the board. It can have a devastating impact on individuals. I frequently raise it as an issue while standing in the queue of Builders Merchants - the women on the tills are often of an age where it hugely impacts them. The men in the queue are often of an age where their partners are experiencing it or will be one day soon. Raising awareness feels very important to me."*

*-Caroline Henn, founder of Practical Women*



*I was alone at the beginning of my career not by choice, but because it seemed like nobody was there to help me. If something happened at work, there were no other women to talk to about it. But now, we have Facebook groups and other social media communities; I've noticed a big difference, and you have to make the most of it."*

*It starts with us - the tradeswomen. We should be going into schools along with the careers advisors. The kids ought to be seeing us, it has to be more than simply telling girls they can be plumbers if they want."  
- Emma Chamberlain, Building surveyor*



Among the methods suggested to reduce discrimination that are explored in *section 3: discrimination*, representing tradeswomen in primary schools, secondary schools, and at careers events and open days, in addition to emphasising more vocational routes of further education, were the most popular. The popularity of these approaches likely stems from the fact that they all relate directly to giving children and young people, especially young women, more information, more role models, and more opportunities to enter the construction industry.

The consensus as to whether increased visibility is the responsibility of educational institutions, construction companies, or tradeswomen themselves is unclear.

*I've noticed younger women, like my sisters, are lacking in trade skills, so they've asked me if I can teach them the basic skills to maintain their houses. They can't learn these things at work placements and open days, because they haven't found many of them. Having an element of the trade in work placements and open days would be really useful.*

*When I was a school leaver, I would have loved to see female tradespeople at fayres and open days. I also feel that females are not given enough information about the trade to make the right choices at the right time."*

*- Simone Weighell, gas engineer*

A further potential platform for visibility is social media. Social media not only provides the opportunity to highlight tradeswomen at work, but can also support women in construction to connect with others in the industry.

*Social media is a massive platform for me when it comes to advertisements and winning work. I'd had a lot of positivity (both men and women) messaging me to tell me it's refreshing to see a woman in the job - I've been really busy purely from Facebook. In fact, I'm probably getting more jobs because I am a woman."*

*- Simone Weighell, gas engineer*

Regardless of where representation comes from, it is clearly viewed as a vital part of not only attracting more women to the trade, but offering a more inclusive experience to those already working on the tools.



# PART 2

**PROGRESSION  
& CAREER  
OPPORTUNITIES**

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## STARTING A LONG-TERM CAREER IN CONSTRUCTION

Currently, only 4% of young people go on to do an apprenticeship following their GCSEs,<sup>8</sup> and with apprenticeships as one of the main routes into the construction industry, it is no surprise that the skills gap is a growing issue for the sector.<sup>9</sup>

Career guidance at school appears to be still stuck in the past, with fewer pupils being given technical choices in comparison to academic routes.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the longer-term career opportunities in the construction industry have proven to be broad and profitable, with opportunities early on to grow your own business.

### We asked our industry partner, Youthbuild UK, what attracts women to work in construction?

1. Construction leaves a legacy - it builds communities
2. Construction is never dull - there is always room to learn and develop
3. The industry is challenging and offers many opportunities to problem solve
4. It offers a wide variety of career opportunities
5. Construction is about collaboration and teamwork
6. It's a fairly stable industry
7. High earning potential

*Construction is an incredibly rewarding industry to work in; it offers stability and fantastic long term career prospects. It's not going to be easy but just by bringing your whole self to work, you have an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and pave the way for more women to enter the industry.*

*- Sheenaz Chenai, Youthbuild CEO*

## GROWING A CAREER IN CONSTRUCTION

Once the hurdles of entering construction have been overcome, how can women flourish in the industry? We asked both self-employed and employed tradeswomen about the career progression and training opportunities available to them.

*The apprenticeship system seems to depend very much on the goodwill of employers. The financial incentives themselves are not always sufficient to overcome the negative attitude of too many employers. Highly engaged and often exceptional women students are being passed over and let down by the system, which sees them train, but not qualify."*

*- Before The Level Playing Field report, Hattie Hasan MBE.*

For tradespeople, regardless of gender, there are options early on to explore employed and self-employed routes. In 2019, two-thirds (3.3 million) of self-employed people in the UK were men, and of those 3.3 million over a quarter worked in the construction sector.<sup>11</sup>

We asked self-employed and employed women in construction what career and progression opportunities were available to them:

	Self-employed tradeswomen (%)	Employed tradeswomen (%)
Nothing	21.48	2.29
Job-related training	13.13	22.04
Mandatory training, e.g. health and safety	10.74	21.00
Mentoring	5.73	10.50
Shadowing	12.17	14.76
Professional qualifications	9.79	16.42
Coaching	21.72	4.78
Personal development plans	5.25	8.21

FIG 9. Types of career opportunities available to tradespeople (TOTAL 1381)

21.48% of self-employed women felt they had no progression or career opportunities available to them. This stands in sharp contrast to the employed category, where only 2.29% indicated that they had nothing available.

What we don't know as part of this research, is whether this is a specific problem for women, or whether all those self-employed within the industry feel this way about career progression, development and training.

Continued training and development is vital for self-employed workers to keep up to date with relevant changes in legislation, products they use, or wider business management and economic issues. However, this group is required to self-fund this activity, which can mean time away from work and consequent income loss. It is therefore arguably not surprising that self-employed women perceive fewer opportunities for progression and career development.

*Getting into the trade is expensive. Training is expensive, so we need to look into that as well. How do you train and pay bills? If you want women in the trade, you have to support them to get into the trade. I've got tough skin but there have been times where things have happened at work and I've just wanted to cry because it's too much - there's a mental health aspect, as well. That's the support we need to get into the industry."*

- Maria Kinsella, Multi-tradeswomen, London, UK

## EMPLOYERS MAKE AN IMPACT ON WHETHER SOMEONE CAN PROGRESS

Employers have a vital role to play in whether someone feels as though they are developing, or can develop their career. <sup>12</sup>

*The industry is based around problem-solving and we have one of the largest problems right in front of us. How to change the perception and ideology that there is little or no opportunity for women in the industry."*

- fischer

**fischer** 



*We have a long history of promoting diversity and inclusion within Bosch and across the industry. In 1950, the daily newspapers reported that Bosch would also start taking on women school leavers as apprentice industrial clerks. Back then, that was considered very progressive for the times. Fast forward to 2022 and we run various global initiatives for women "*

- Bosch

## CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Continued professional development is defined by the CIPD as 'a combination of approaches, ideas and techniques' to help manage your own learning and growth, which may be to help increase your earning potential or to achieve other potential career ambitions.<sup>13</sup>

Once within the construction industry, once training routes at colleges, universities, and apprenticeship programmes are no longer suitable, our qualitative study highlighted a lack of awareness surrounding the range of career development opportunities available.

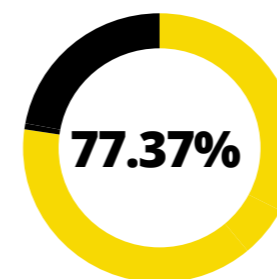
Self-employed vs employed was the main option most tradeswomen discussed as a career route open to them. The gender distribution of the UK's self-employed workforce is almost two-thirds men (64%) and a third (36%) women.<sup>14</sup> The women in our research discussed concerns around becoming self-employed and identified a lack of confidence as the main reason as to why women are less likely to choose self-employment than men. Tasks such as asking for payment directly were highlighted as particularly daunting prospects.

*"The same issues that I had, women are still having. We hear about it all the time. Lack of confidence is everywhere. Just go out and do small things; the best way to build your confidence is just to do it. The sky is the limit these days. Within self-employment I was working as much as I wanted. I'm a big advocate for self-employed women in construction; I was earning a bomb. I believe that you can progress most if you're self-employed."*

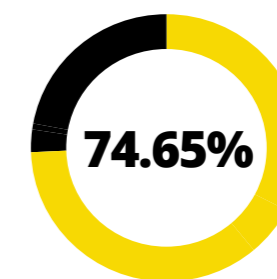
- Hattie Hasan, MBE, Founder of Stopcocks and Register of Tradeswomen

## CAREER SATISFACTION

We asked tradeswomen to describe how satisfied they were with their ability to progress their careers.



of self-employed tradeswomen stated they were satisfied, more than satisfied or extremely satisfied with their career (with 25.26% in the extremely satisfied category)



of employed women stated they were satisfied, more than satisfied or extremely satisfied (with 22.54% in the extremely satisfied category).

Despite a slightly better result from self-employed than employed tradeswomen, both groups of women reveal strong levels of satisfaction within their careers and ability to progress, suggesting those who do work in the industry, really can thrive (see [section women who thrive in industry](#) for examples).



# PART 3

**DISCRIMINATION**

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# DO WOMEN EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY?

Sex discrimination in the workplace is illegal as of the last UK Government Equality act in 2010, which describes direct discrimination as when “a person (A) treats another (B) less favourably than A treats or would treat others because of a protected characteristic like sex,” and indirect discrimination as when “a person (A) applies to another (B) a provision, criterion or practise which is discriminatory in relation to a relevant protected characteristic of B’s.”<sup>15</sup>

However, in male-dominated industries such as the construction industry, where only 1 in 8 workers are women (including office roles),<sup>16</sup> the estimated level of discrimination remains high despite legislative efforts. In addition to facing discrimination, and perhaps as a consequence of it, women working in heavily male-dominated workplaces may suffer levels of stress that could harm their health, according to research by The Independent.<sup>17</sup>

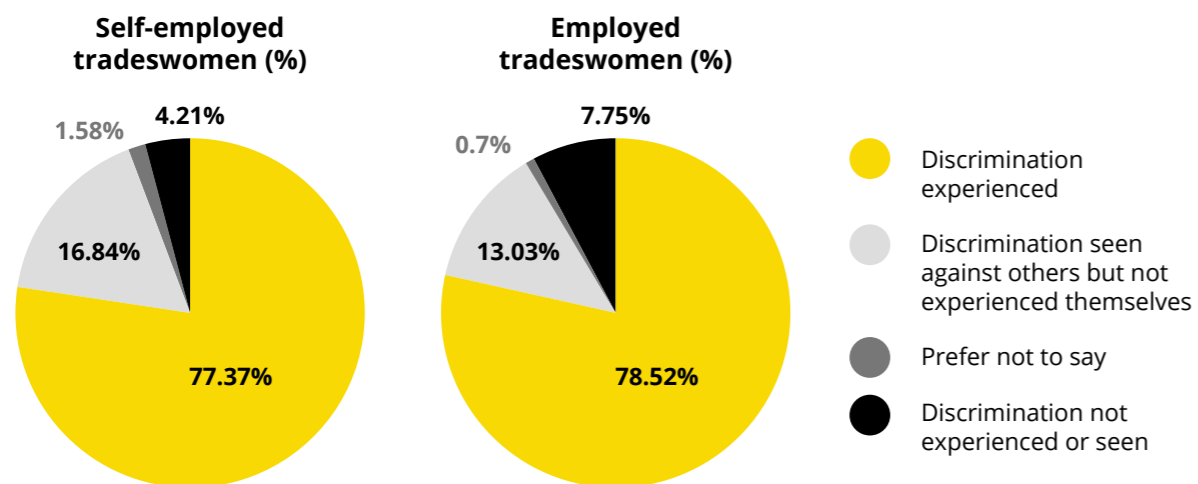


FIG 4. Percentage of tradeswomen (TOTAL 474) who have experienced discrimination due to their sex when working in construction.

We asked UK tradeswomen if they had seen or experienced any discrimination against women in the construction industry, and **78.06% said that they had**. This is compared to a 2021 survey where 23% of UK women working in any industry indicated that they had seen or experienced discrimination in the workplace due to their sex.<sup>18</sup> On the basis of these two drastically different figures, it can be reasonably assumed that gender-based discrimination is far more prevalent in construction than in alternative industries.

Furthermore, it’s important to consider unreported incidents of discrimination. In the course of our research, we conducted interviews where the respondent stated that they had not experienced discrimination, before describing a number of situations that would be classed as discrimination under the UK Government Equality Act. This indicates a gap in the understanding of what constitutes discrimination and potentially points to higher incidences of discrimination in construction than are initially evident in the research. It is also possible that this knowledge gap is particularly relevant to the construction industry, where discrimination masquerading as ‘harmless banter’ is perhaps a more accepted part of the working culture.

# AN INSIGHT INTO THE TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION FACED BY WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY.

The Citizens Advice Bureau says that sex discrimination can be direct or indirect, deliberate or accidental, and takes many forms, including victimisation and harassment.<sup>19</sup> We asked UK tradeswomen to tell us what types of discrimination they had seen or experienced against women who work in construction.

	Self-employed tradeswomen (%)	Employed tradeswomen (%)
Direct negative comments	30.44	27.23
Indirect/overheard negative comments	26.70	26.71
Harassment	11.94	13.22
Victimisation	6.79	7.18
Unfair/unlawful working conditions/pay	7.26	8.33
Unfair disciplinary action	3.75	4.31
Sexual assault/harassment	4.68	6.61
Physical assault	0.47	0.14
Being ignored, overlooked, or not taken seriously	2.44	1.96
Systemic, including difficulty accessing training, underrepresentation in promotional material	0.94	0.00
Discrimination not seen/experienced	5.85	3.30

FIG 6. Types of discrimination seen against or experienced by tradeswomen (TOTAL 1218)

Negative comments make up more than half of the discrimination reported by tradeswomen, with 28.76% of tradeswomen experiencing direct negative comments, and 26.71% experiencing indirect or overheard negative comments.

Additionally, 12.73% of tradeswomen told us that they experienced harassment in the workplace, whilst 7.03% of tradeswomen indicated that they experienced victimisation, meaning mistreatment as a result of complaints lodged regarding discrimination.

Concerningly, 5.88% of women told us that they had experienced sexual assault when working in the construction industry. It is possible that the disproportionate likelihood of tradeswomen to experience sexual assault correlates to their likely working conditions. For example, women working in construction are generally more likely to work in outdoor environments, and, according to a 2020 UK Government study, sexual harassment outdoors in a public place is considered a greater concern for women than indoor public spaces.<sup>20</sup>

More generally it is worth noting that Gov UK data tells us that certain demographic groups (women, people aged 15-34, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and those with disabilities) are more likely to experience sexual harassment than others.<sup>21</sup>

On the subject of remuneration and working environments, 7.93% of tradeswomen reported experiencing unfair/unlawful working conditions or pay and 5.88% of tradeswomen had experienced unfair disciplinary action.<sup>22</sup>

Other types of discrimination experienced by tradeswomen, as suggested by our survey results, included bullying, being isolated or ignored, and intimidation.

## WHO DISCRIMINATES AGAINST TRADESWOMEN?

We asked UK tradeswomen to tell us where they had seen or experienced discrimination, and by whom.

	Self-employed tradeswomen (%)	Employed tradeswomen (%)
In a builders' merchant from customers	9.46	6.31
In a builders' merchant from staff	14.89	7.00
From tradesperson colleagues	13.68	17.42
From tradespeople who aren't colleagues	0.80	0.41
From construction management	9.66	13.17
From clients/customers	19.52	21.40
In the wider world from men	20.72	21.95
In the wider world from women	6.24	8.23
Online	0.40	0.14
Education/training settings	0.20	0.41
No discrimination seen	4.43	3.57

FIG 5. Situations where discrimination against tradeswomen has been seen or experienced (TOTAL 1226)

The results of this question emphasised the importance of considering the discrimination of tradeswomen within the wider context of society, as well as specifically within construction. As one focus group participant explained:

*It's usually the funny looks that I get that make me uncomfortable. When I'm wearing my work gear and I go to the supermarket after work, some women will look me up and down disapprovingly."*

- Simone Weighell, Gas Engineer

According to our respondents, the most likely environment for tradeswomen to experience discrimination is in the wider world, from men who aren't tradespeople. **In fact, 21.45% of tradeswomen reported experiencing discrimination in this situation.** In addition, 7.42% of tradeswomen report experiencing or seeing discrimination against women who work in construction from other women outside of the industry.

In terms of discrimination within the industry, **15.91% of tradeswomen reported seeing or experiencing discrimination from their colleagues on-site,** and 0.57% of tradeswomen who took our survey had seen or experienced discrimination from other tradespeople who weren't their colleagues.

*I think some men might put women off from joining the industry by making comments. Like, a tradesman once said to me, 'shouldn't you be at home?' No, I shouldn't be at home. This is my job. It's guys like them that I want to prove wrong."*

- Alison Potter, Landscaper

Beyond on-site environments, 20.64% of tradeswomen who took our survey indicated that they had seen or experienced discrimination from clients and customers: almost as much as was experienced from men in the wider world.

*A customer once told me that I could give my job up any time because I had a man at home to look after me.”*  
 -- Maria Kinsella, Decorator

However, when we asked 2,059 consumers on YouGov whether they would prefer a tradeswoman or tradesman to work alone in their home, most consumers (79%) told us that they had no preference either way. This shows that when it comes to hiring tradeswomen, irrespective of how they are treated once they take the job, most consumers believe they are prepared to treat tradeswomen in an equal capacity to tradesmen.

*What makes me uncomfortable when I'm working as a tradeswoman is when men clients are overly friendly with me. I believe that if I was a man they wouldn't be standing that close to me or looking down my top.”*  
 - Sally Warner, Co-owner of Sally & Heather Painting & Decorating.

That said, in the same survey, 5% of respondents answered that they would choose tradesmen over tradeswomen to work in their home. Whilst justification for why this might be was not provided within the survey, context could indicate that it represents an archaic belief that a tradesman is more likely to provide a good service than a tradeswoman on the basis of sex alone.

## REASONS SUGGESTED FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TRADESWOMEN.

Whilst discrimination is never justifiable, it is, unfortunately, an undeniable reality for tradeswomen. In order to consider how all forms of discrimination can be reduced or eliminated, we asked respondents for their opinion as to why discrimination occurs within the construction industry.

	Self-employed tradeswomen (%)	Employed tradeswomen (%)
Learned behaviours, or traditional bias against women	15.98	14.81
Discriminators feel that women shouldn't be in the construction industry	13.94	15.14
Encouraged by negative stereotypes associated with the construction industry	12.40	13.25
The construction industry is male-dominated	17.52	18.27
Discriminators feel insecure and threatened	12.92	12.51
Discriminators feel that tradeswomen are less important or valuable than tradesmen	10.87	10.86
Discriminators mistake discrimination for banter or otherwise acceptable behaviour	16.11	14.73
Unsure	0.08	0.33
Discrimination against tradeswomen doesn't exist.	0.26	0.08

FIG 7. Suggested reasons for discrimination against tradeswomen (TOTAL 1997)

*There is an attitude towards women that they should be primary carers for the family and not tradespeople; this comes from learned behaviours.”*  
 - Emma Chamberlain, Building Surveyor

Most tradeswomen (17.98%) believe that they are discriminated against simply because the construction industry is male-dominated. If we accept that this is the case, construction should serve as a warning to industries that are or could become male-dominated. According to the BBC, male-dominated offices may well become the future of the corporate workplace,<sup>23</sup> which, if we follow the example of the construction industry, could pose a serious discrimination risk to women.

The second most popular response, with 15.27%, suggested that tradeswomen are discriminated against due to learned behaviours or the inherent sex bias against women in general.

*Some of the older generation are so stuck in their ways, that they think women who work in the construction industry are only there to make things more balanced statistically. I've been in the trade for a while, but still today I have to prove myself on every job. It takes a lot of energy; it's exhausting, and I can see why other women would quit the industry or not get into it altogether.”*  
 - Kate Hicken, carpenter, survey participant

*I think half of the comments that get made towards women on-site are because they think it's funny, not because they're trying to be malicious.”*  
 - Nicola Dobbie

Returning to the question of industry culture, 15.27% of tradeswomen believe that they are discriminated against because the perpetrators mistake discriminatory comments for 'harmless banter' or otherwise acceptable behaviour.



## MEASURES WE CAN TAKE TO STOP OR REDUCE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TRADESWOMEN.

We asked UK tradeswomen to suggest practical measures that could be implemented to stop or reduce discrimination against women in the construction industry.

	Tradeswomen (%)
Updating or reestablishing the UK Government equality act	8.24
Introducing more women-focused government programmes	10.41
Encouraging more discrimination prevention training in construction companies	9.99
Showcasing tradeswomen in primary schools	14.13
Showcasing tradeswomen in secondary schools and higher education	16.16
Emphasising vocational courses in education	11.00
Showcasing tradeswomen at open days and careers events	15.01
Publicising more women-focused social media groups and other organisations	13.40
Enforcing harsher penalties for discriminatory offences	0.14
Addressing discriminators directly about their behaviour	0.37
Normalise accommodations made at work for women-focused issues, e.g. flexible working hours	0.37
Denormalise the ingrained sex bias and deconstruct learned behaviours	0.18
It's up to tradeswomen to prove they're as good as tradesmen	0.18
Nothing should be done	0.18
Unsure	0.09
Other	0.14

FIG 8. Methods suggested by tradeswomen to stop or reduce discrimination against women working in construction. (TOTAL 2127)

Most tradeswomen (16.16%) believe that representation of women in construction within secondary schools and higher education would reduce future discrimination. Similarly, 14.13% believe the same effect could be achieved by introduction at primary school level, with 15.01% anticipating reduced discrimination as a result of representation at open days and careers events.

Continuing the focus on education, 11% of tradeswomen indicated that greater emphasis on vocational courses could reduce discrimination against women in the industry. Given that 12.92% of tradeswomen believe that they experience discrimination as a result of negative stereotypes associated with the job, it is reasonable to suggest that putting the same value on vocational career choices, such as construction apprenticeships, as schools do on more conventionally academic career choices, like a university degree, would help to dispel negative stereotypes and consequently reduce this particular form of discrimination.

The last UK Government Equality Act was released over ten years ago; 8.24% of tradeswomen believe that updating or reestablishing the act would reduce discrimination against women who work in construction.

However, some respondents felt a need to go beyond this, with 10.41% indicating that the introduction of more female-focused government programmes, in general, could help to reduce discrimination. This sentiment reflects a statement regarding the act made by Unison in 2020, "Let's celebrate 10 years of the Equality Act. But real equality is still a long way off."<sup>24</sup>

Taking another approach to representation, 13.40% of tradeswomen think that publicising more women-focused trade organisations and social media groups could reduce discrimination against women in the construction industry.<sup>25</sup>

It's impossible to study the discrimination faced by women who work in construction without considering their working conditions. Due to the nature of the job, construction workers have higher incidences of lone working, and therefore higher safety risks, greater likelihood of working outdoors and frequent requirements to carry out physically demanding tasks. Discrimination of any kind is often represented by access to basic amenities, and this is reflected by our findings.

**Most tradeswomen believe that representation of women in construction within secondary schools and higher education would reduce future discrimination.**

# PART 4

**WORKING  
CONDITIONS**

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Physical working environments for construction workers can differ greatly depending on the stage of a project, their particular specialism, and whether the job is commercial or residential. This variety does not differ between male and female professionals, but unfortunately, the availability of required facilities often does.

As part of our qualitative study, we established working conditions for women in construction as a key theme, with the subject encompassing physical environment, work benefits, flexibility and safety risks.

## FACILITIES ON-SITE

The HSE gives guidance on the minimum welfare facilities that must be provided or made available to workers on construction-sites.<sup>26</sup> This states 'men and women may use the same toilet if it is in a lockable room and partitioned from any urinals. Otherwise provide separate toilets.'

However, this does not take into account the additional requirements women may have for a bathroom.

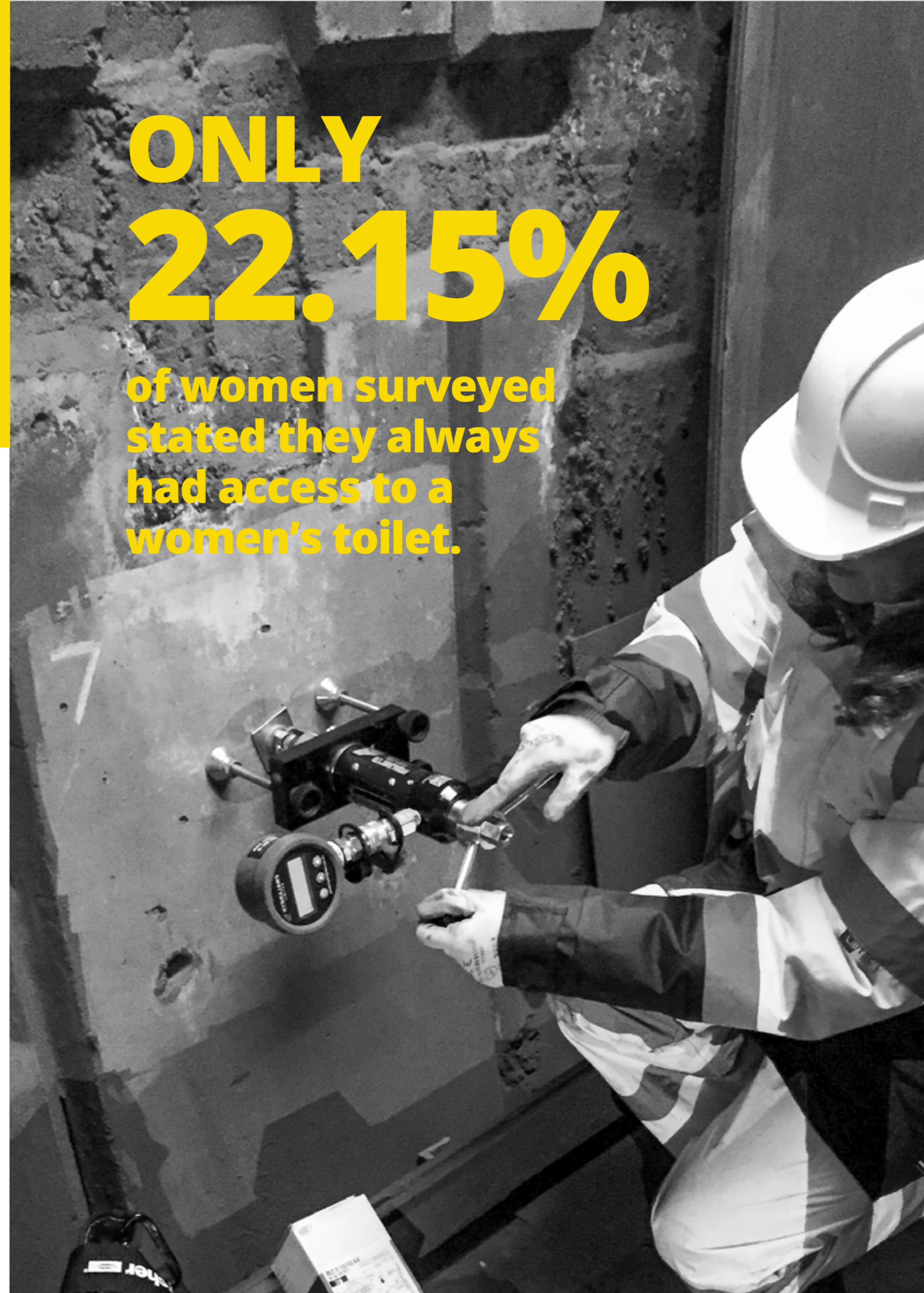
*“Site conditions are not inclusive ( i.e no women's toilets or sanitary bins) - these practices have been the norm for decades, and it may just be that no one even notices them now!”*

*- Youthbuild CEO,  
Sheenaz Chenai*

In line with Sheenaz's comments, 32.92% of women surveyed stated that they either never (14.35%) or less than half of the time (22.57%) had access to a women's toilet when working on-site. While only 22.15% stated they always had access to a women's toilet.

# ONLY 22.15%

## of women surveyed stated they always had access to a women's toilet.



## PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY

Working during pregnancy and associated maternity benefits were identified as a key area of concern in the focus groups. Opinions on this did differ depending on whether the subject was employed or self-employed, with the general consensus being that employed people receive greater benefits than those who are self-employed.

We asked women employed by construction companies what, if any, benefits they would be able to access if they were pregnant or away from work on maternity leave (FIG 16). Of our respondents, 15.23% stated they were unsure, 14.64% identified they would receive statutory maternity benefits, and **only 12.88% thought they would be able to have time off for antenatal appointments if pregnant (which is a legal requirement).**<sup>27</sup>

When we then asked self-employed tradeswomen about the benefits they could access when starting a family, the numbers rose again (FIG 15).

What is clear from both our qualitative and quantitative results is a huge lack of awareness of the government self-employed maternity pay (called maternity allowance).<sup>28</sup>

*"I have to work away a lot. I'm self-employed so as soon as we decide that we want to start a family, I don't know how I'd do it. My other half would have so much pressure to get things together in my absence. Being self-employed, we don't get enough from anyone. It's shown over the pandemic."*

- Amy Jagger, Steel Erector, Yorkshire

As well as maternity benefits, we asked self-employed tradeswomen what their biggest concerns would be as a woman in construction when starting or raising a family (FIG 17). The majority of perceived obstacles were focused on financial stability, with 25.26% reporting concerns around income loss, 24.01% stating concerns surrounding time off from work (maternity leave), and 18.58% worried as to how long they would physically be able to work whilst pregnant.

*"I was self-employed when I had my children, and that was incredible. If I have an awful day, I remember all the benefits of being self-employed regarding childcare arrangements, and that accounts for so much. I would highly recommend going self-employed for parents just because of the freedom it gives you. It's worth a lot."*

- Sally Warner, Co-owner of Sally & Heather Painting & Decorating.

**38.97%**  
of self-employed tradeswomen were unsure of the benefits they could access if they were starting a family.

**21.13%**  
believed they would not be able to access any benefits as a self-employed tradeswoman.

*"Caring for elderly relatives is as much an issue at the moment as childcare. Often it hits women, just as they have finished bringing up their children. Again, unfortunately, the responsibility falls to women, far more than men. I find myself on edge waiting for the phone call, and having to drop everything to go and sort things out."*

- Caroline Henn, founder of Practical Women

## CARE RESPONSIBILITIES

As well as childcare responsibilities, women in the qualitative study also identified caring responsibilities for older or disabled relatives and loved ones as a challenge for women in construction. This is a particular concern for women rather than men, as they are statistically more likely to take on unpaid caring roles; according to the census, of the 6.5 million unpaid carers in the UK, 58% - 3.34 million - are women.<sup>29</sup>

Achieving work-life balance in this context is difficult, and women are still more likely than men to be working part-time as a result. For context, UK government data, gathered in 2020, suggests that 38% of women in employment work part-time.<sup>30</sup>

When we asked women employed by construction companies whether their employer offered support for any care responsibilities, 70.85% stated they had access to either flexible working, paid time off, or unpaid time off. This certainly provides a certain amount of optimism, but further insight into how much of this is represented by unpaid leave would be beneficial.

## IS THERE A GENDER PAY GAP FOR WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION?

Pay discrepancies between men and women allegedly occur across many sectors. Whilst legislation was introduced in 2017 which requires companies of over 250 to disclose the rates of pay for male and female employees,<sup>31</sup> there is still a strong perception that men are typically paid more.

The qualitative study revealed that this perception was shared by our respondents.

*I think women tradespeople generally get paid less than their men counterparts. When I was working for the local authority, one of the reasons why I left was because they were hiring men who weren't as qualified as me, but they were making more money. One of the men was making £15,000 more than me per year. When I challenged this, they told me it was because they were men and they had a family to provide for. But, I was trying to provide for my own family as well. This was within the past three years."*

- Anonymous tradeswoman

The Rated People Home Improvement Trends Report 2022 found that women get paid just **72% of what men do** on average for trade roles, or to put it another way, they get paid 28% less.

When we asked tradeswomen about their pay in comparison to their male counterparts, **only 29.75% felt they were paid the same as men** (FIG 2).

**ONLY 29.75% OF TRADESWOMEN FELT THEY WERE PAID THE SAME AS MEN**

*Women are sometimes bullied on price by customers - this is an industry-wide issue. We hear householders say 'I want to support women' and then they almost always argue about the price. We now know that this is common. Some householders know that women are paid less for the same work and want to take advantage of this; they might say that they want to support women when what they mean is that they want to pay less. This is so common that we warn self-employed tradeswomen about this paradigm."*

- Mica May, Director of Corporate Sales, Stopcocks Tradeswomen CIC.



*Our Rated People report finds that when looking at would-be ratings for work done by tradeswomen in 2021, 75% of tradeswomen were rated 4 or 5 out of 5 by the people who hired them, compared to 57% for men\*. That's important as promotions are linked with performance and the reality of homeowners' current experience is that women are just as skilled as men."<sup>32</sup>*

- Rated People



## SAFETY

The Health and Safety Executive defines lone workers as those **"who work by themselves without close or direct supervision."**<sup>33</sup>

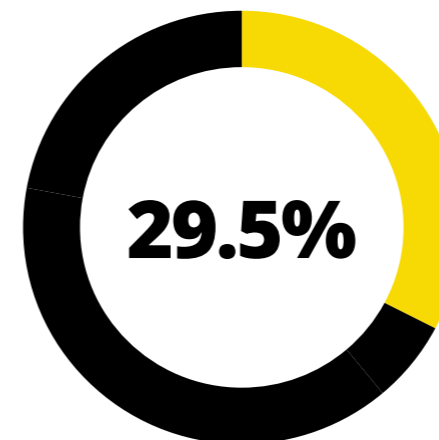
We asked tradeswomen who work alone the measures they take to keep safe when working alone (FIG 3).

29.5% of self-employed tradeswomen stated they do not take any measures when working alone, in comparison to 9.59% of women employed by construction companies. However, this could be due to employers having policies in place which ensure employees take measures to protect themselves, as opposed to women making this choice on their own behalf.

For self-employed women who did take measures to protect themselves when working alone, keeping an up to date address of where they were working in a diary or online calendar was the most used measure, with 18.5% of respondents selecting this.

For employed women, letting a manager or coworker know where they were was the most used measure at **28.49%**.

Despite what can be classed as nothing less than a challenging working environment, women do thrive, succeed, and go on to have long and happy careers as highlighted by the role models we focus on in [section 5 Spotlight: Women who thrive in construction](#).



**of self-employed tradeswomen stated they do not take any extra safety measures when working alone.**



# PART 5

**WOMEN WHO  
THRIVE IN  
CONSTRUCTION**

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## SAMANTHA JEPSON

Groundworker at P Hughes Construction Ltd

I started out in the construction industry as a landscaper. I did this role for four years before laying down my last roll of turf and becoming a groundworker. Before that, I used to work boring office jobs where I would spend my days just watching the clock tick by.

My brother actually encouraged me to join the trade as he was a landscaper himself and it was the best decision I ever made. The days go by so quickly working on-site. I have fun with my colleagues and I'm never watching the clock anymore. It's so much more satisfying than sitting in an office!

I often get asked about what made me - a woman - decide to want to work in construction. My answer is probably the same a man might give, but they never seem to get asked that question. Why do I need a special reason?

But most of the time, I get treated well at work. I've suffered more discrimination and harassment working in retail than I have working in construction. When people have

been discriminatory towards me on-site, I just show them what I can do, and it changes their opinion. We're hearing more talk about equality every day, so we're definitely heading in the right direction.

What needs to change in the industry is, in my opinion, the views of the older generation. Many still have the attitude that women can't do this job and that we should be working at desks instead. But, women can work in construction and can be tradespeople, and do the job just as well as the men can.

We could also be doing more to promote this type of work to schoolchildren to get them involved and interested. They should know that there are so many amazing jobs out there that are fun, hands-on and challenging. Plus, they tend to offer excellent pay - not like many stereotypical 'women's' jobs that usually pay minimum wage. Not that there's anything wrong with those - just explore the options! Women really can do anything!



## DARCIE RICHARDS

Bricklayer at Richards Builders

Overall, I've been bricklaying for a year and a half. I also did six months of labouring, as well. So, in total, I've been on-site for two years. Starting out was difficult, just to be able to get the hang of a trowel. It's just a metal thing on the end of your arm that you've got to use as your hand for an entire day, so getting the hang of using the trowel was the hardest thing!

I went on-site the other day, and I'm wearing a pink hi-vis and a pink hard hat, and it's my first day on-site, and everyone's looking at me like, "what the hell is she doing here?" Sort of thing.

But you've just got to go there and own it, you know? You have as much right to be there as anyone else. But, once they see you can do your job, they're like, "oh, yeah, she's actually quite a good bricklayer." People start giving you a bit of respect.

Through TikTok and Instagram, I have found tons of women in the trade. There's loads and loads of girls that are actually doing it and posting about it. So, it's not as scarce as what you think it is.

What needs to change in the industry to help fit women in, I think, is just having two portaloos: one for men, and one for women, would just change everything. That would, honestly, be such a step in the right direction just for inviting women onto site.



**VICKIE MATHER**  
 Dulux Academy & Dulux Select Decorators Lead at AkzoNobel

My career has been human resources based for the last 25+years. Initially in retail and then moving into trade merchanting. With voluntary redundancy I had the opportunity to review the sector I could work in and waiting for an interview at AkzoNobel I remember being strangely comforted by the tins of paint on display in the reception and until that moment I'd never appreciated how much I felt at home working in the construction industry.

Since 2014 I've been the development lead of the Dulux Academy, where I've formed a team of decorating experts, designed a full curriculum, engaged third-party providers and partnerships and fitted out a flagship training facility at the organisation's Slough-based head office and more recently a number of other locations within our Dulux Decorator Centre network.

The Dulux Academy is dedicated to developing skills, knowledge and confidence at every stage of a decorator's career with over 10,000 trade professionals trained since its launch. Our plans for

the next five years centre on doubling this number and developing a suite of activities that aim to attract, grow and support a diverse workforce of the future.

Our Dulux Select Decorator scheme is currently underrepresented by women, so I've been involved in taking some positive steps to understand this further and promote the scheme to women decorators. I'm especially excited about our new Dulux Academy Women in Decorating online forum which is gaining traction and opens up direct access to conversations with women decorators enabling us to further understand their needs and celebrate their Successes.

My passion for the construction industry isn't just about the products, although I am a big fan of all things paint and colour, it's always been about the people. I'm very fortunate to have an amazing team, supportive colleagues and customers who really care.

## RACHEL BATES

Dulux Select Decorator, Bates & Misons

When I started, I went on numerous training courses to learn as much as I could about painting and decorating. I'm now a Repair Care contractor and a Dulux Select Decorator. I've been on numerous Dulux Academy training days, which have been hugely helpful, and we receive great support and advice through the Dulux Academy Facebook page too. As a single mum with three kids, it was hard finding a job that I could plan around the school hours of my children. When I spoke to friends who worked in decorating, I liked the idea of being able to earn while choosing your own work hours. It's a brilliant job to be in and you're able to turn out beautiful work that you can take real pride in. I've also had lots of praise from people when they see me in town with my decorating whites on. If I were to retire tomorrow, those are the positive aspects I'll always remember.



**SALLY WARNER**  
 Co-owner of Sally and Heather Painting & Decorating

I worked in interior design shortly after leaving school, but soon realised that I would rather be using practical skills rather than being a shop-based designer.

My mum, Heather, had always worked in secretarial jobs but loved painting and hanging wallpaper. She was often asked to decorate the homes of friends and family but was not confident enough to start a business on her own. We thought the ideal solution was for me to work alongside her if she taught me her skills.

Now I run Sally and Heather Painting and Decorating with my mum and this is our 20th year of trading. I spent some time as a trader not having enough confidence in my own abilities, possibly because the sector is very much male-dominated and I felt a bit like a square peg in a round hole. However, Heather and I knew we did a professional job and our customers were very comfortable to have women decorators in their home. Over the years we have built up a very healthy client base and become more business minded. If I could go back in time I would tell my younger self to get good business advice early on and believe in myself more.

We need to show children what it means to be a female tradesperson. My mum Heather is 74 this year and is still working. When people see her using the dustless sander or up the ladder doing ceilings, they are quite surprised because it's very unusual to see an older woman working on the tools. You often see young men with their tattoos looking cool, there are loads of them, but where are we in the mix? We need our faces to be seen. There is so much more that women can do in the construction industry than is currently being shown to school children. It's a great time to be a female tradesperson but we've got a long way to go before it's the norm.



# MIRKA VALOVICOVA

Technical Lead at fischer



I have been working as a Technical Manager for fifteen years now. I can't believe it's been so long - time flies when you're having fun! I always preferred subjects at school that required more logical thinking, and I did a university degree in civil engineering.

I love my job. It's never boring and gives me an opportunity to utilise my technical, slightly nerdy side, but it also gives me a chance to use my outgoing personality. Some days, I'm in front of my laptop crunching numbers, solving various technical challenges. Then on another day I may be out in the field, meeting various customers who work on different projects, on different applications.

I didn't find it difficult to enter the construction industry, nor did I lack the confidence to enter a male-dominated industry; this was probably supported by my upbringing, where boys and girls were treated equally.

In my opinion women are much more supported and accepted in the construction industry now. It's lovely to see many more women on building sites these days. Of course, there are still existing

perceptions of a traditional men-women divide, and our roles in the community.

I always try to set the best example and inspire young women to join the construction industry. For example during my training sessions, I try to show my true passion for the job. I hope that will encourage any women in the audience to stick with their decision and remain in the industry. How many people can walk around our towns or drive through the UK and say "Look, I worked on this project". It's nice to know you played a part and contributed to creating something new even if the involvement was small.

I have been working in the construction industry for over 25 years and I hope many more women will follow in my footsteps. It's not always easy but definitely an interesting and rewarding journey! So to women who may be reading this, if you have any doubts but feel like you would like to be in a technical and ever changing environment, go for it. Be brave and follow your dreams. If you are dedicated and determined I'm sure you will succeed and you will never look back. Wishing you all the best!

# HATTIE HASAN, MBE

Founder of Stopcocks and Register of Tradeswomen



I have always been handy, and when I was at school I wanted to be an engineer, or study metalwork or woodwork. Since I was a girl, and those were 'boy's subjects', I had to study cookery instead. I ended up doing primary school teaching, and taught children until I was 27. Once I realised teaching wasn't working for me anymore, I decided to become a plumber. I started by going to evening classes, and I loved it from the first moment I was there.

I've always been interested in water. For me, there's such a deep connection. I believe that water is life; without water, nothing would live. I want to control water, contain water, get it to do things you want to do, and be a hero by fixing people's problems. It wasn't because of the money that I became a plumber, it was because of everything else, and the money just happened to come with it. It's the best decision I've ever made. I don't regret it. I'll be lifting spanners up until I physically can't any more.

At first, I couldn't get any jobs as a tradeswoman so I employed myself straight away; I've never been employed by a company as a plumber ever. It was a little scary, obviously, but I love it now. I did have to work on my confidence to start asking people for money. Women are still constantly told that we shouldn't be in the industry, and the issues that I was having in the beginning of my

career, women are still experiencing today.

The honest truth is that women have been putting up with this forever, all over the world in every industry. We can deal with it. But why should we have to? In industries full of women, we don't force men to be like women. Yet, we are all expected to become like men in order to work in construction, and it's not right. I've long advocated that you can be a woman and a plumber.

Community between tradeswomen is so important; before everyone had a computer, I used to go through the yellow pages and contact any plumbers that sounded like they were women, and we would have a picnic in the park together. Then, I created websites and started getting people's emails and sent them out a newsletter all at my own expense because I needed that community which I didn't have.

A woman's experience in the trade is always going to be different to a man's. Not necessarily because of men in the industry, but because there are some things women experience that men haven't a clue about. We don't want 'special treatment', we just want the differences in our lives to be accommodated for. We need equity, rather than equality.



# PART 6

**THE ROLE THAT  
BUSINESSES PLAY**

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fischer is the UK's leading supplier of fixings for the construction industry, manufacturing and supplying a wide range of anchors, fixings and tools.

### **What does your business do to encourage more women into construction roles?**

Currently, around 30% of our staff are women. Their roles range from engineers, technical support and members of the senior management team.

We are very keen to support changing perceptions throughout the industry and it is something we really want to be a part of. In 2022 we have taken the decision to be more involved in the employment landscape of our industry. We know we cannot make instant change alone, but we hope that by continually prompting perception change in our community work, and working alongside other businesses, we can start to make small but lasting change in the industry.

Businesses need to work together to build a collective roadmap to build interest, trust and indeed future opportunities for women within the industry. The whole concept is bigger than one individual business doing a "good job" and improving their own employee makeup and future opportunities.

### **What does your business do to ensure women are given adequate working conditions?**

We have very strong policies in place in terms of sexual harassment, equality and discrimination. We also ensure that staff have access to information concerning the current maternity, paternity and parental rights. All employees are made aware of this from the start. We have a transparent recruitment process and ensure that all employees are encouraged to progress within the business and to take on additional learning.

We take the viewpoint that every employee in our industry is equal. This means all employees, no matter; sex, age, race or religion are offered the opportunities that they deserve. We always aim to promote from within and we have an amazing educational programme that is based out of Germany for all ability levels and career aspirations. We strongly push equal pay across all of the fischer group.

We do not operate a formal dress policy so all employees may choose how they dress for work which ensures the women in our business have

the right to choose what they feel is appropriate for them. Globally we do offer women targeted incentives, such as flexible maternity /paternity leave and also on-site childcare facilities. We like to stress that the business is a great place to work for anyone, with no barriers to success relating to gender, age or race as this is really how every business should act in 2022.

### **What role do businesses play in promoting progression and career opportunities for women in construction?**

At fischer, we offer an environment where anyone can flourish. We offer equal pay, employment packages and opportunities within the business. We have a great female presence across our whole group of companies and within the UK, with women taking a large percentage of senior management roles throughout the group. Most recently, Dr Annette Becker joined fischer at the position of Regional Managing Director for the Americas - she will be directly in charge of multiple regional businesses and directly involved in strategy development across the group.

Every company in our industry could potentially offer an exciting career path for all women, be it from GCSE level, to on-site apprenticeships and even adult education. The construction industry is a great environment for any potential employee. We truly believe this is one of the last industries where you get out what you put in. If you have the drive, passion and ability to succeed, there is very little to hold you back. We are a multicultural collective of individuals that don't shy away from a hard day's work, are always willing to lend a hand and, of course, have fun! No matter which area of construction you work in - from the architect, engineer or groundworker to the installer, we feel this ethos runs throughout.

The women in our business have had great opportunities to be promoted and in some instances have become speakers and 'points of knowledge' within the industry. We promote this throughout every employment application, no matter the gender of the individual.

# SPOTLIGHT ON



# rated people

## **What role do businesses play in promoting progression and career opportunities for women in construction?**

It's vital that businesses promote progression and career opportunities for women in trade and construction. The Rated People Home Improvement Trends Report 2022 found that women get paid just 72% of what men do on average for trade roles, and if businesses are aware of that, they can actively work to tackle it and ensure that women can access the same opportunities as men and achieve equal pay for their work.

There seems to be this underlying question of whether women are as skilled as men when it comes to trade and construction work, but our report found that when looking at would-be ratings for work done by tradeswomen in 2021, 75% of tradeswomen were rated 4 or 5 out of 5 by the people who hired them, compared to 57% for men.<sup>34</sup>

At Rated People, we also believe it's important to communicate the many opportunities that a trade and construction role can bring to women, such as providing them with autonomy and flexibility. We take our role of offering equal opportunities seriously and we're offering the Rated People Empowering Tradeswomen Programme on the basis of diversity, equity and inclusion. It is harder for women to get into and succeed in our industry and therefore we believe it is on us to work harder to support them in doing so.

## **The Rated People Empowering Tradeswomen programme**

At Rated People, we're making a pledge to empower more women to enter the trade and construction industry by launching the Rated

People Empowering Tradeswomen Programme – designed to give women a launchpad into successful trade careers. One pain point we heard from our tradeswomen is that it takes them longer to assert their credibility in the industry. That's why we have decided to support women by offering them free exposure for an extended period of time and giving them access to dedicated resources. We're now offering tradeswomen free exposure on Rated People for 3 months with extra credits to put towards finding work and discounted access to leads. We're also working with selected partners to provide these tradeswomen with exclusive discounts on skills courses and business training that's designed to help them build profitable and scalable companies.

## **What does your business do to encourage more women into construction roles?**

Working together, we can all make a huge difference. Some of the key areas of opportunity are presenting trade and construction roles in careers advice at schools, increasing the representation of women currently working in the industry, and finding ways to tackle their on-the-job concerns.

In our hiring practices, we work hard to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion. Visible representation is important, so we actively highlight diverse women working across all departments and levels of the business in relevant materials such as our recruitment videos where we give a glimpse into life at Rated People.

We promote our employees on merit, and as a result, there are women at all levels of seniority in the business. Our senior leadership team has a 60/40 ratio of women to men, led by our female CEO, Adrienne Minster.

# SPOTLIGHT ON



Dulux Academy was formally launched by AkzoNobel in March 2016 in response to the widely reported UK construction skills shortage and has since welcomed over 10,000 course attendees. Dulux Academy also manages the Dulux Select Decorator scheme, an accredited scheme established in 1996 for experienced decorators with a suite of benefits.

## What do you think are the biggest barriers for women entering the construction industry?

The biggest barrier for women entering the industry is perception and bias, whether this be at a conscious or unconscious level. The second biggest barrier is that women don't see themselves represented as much in trade roles, so don't necessarily feel that the sector is open to them. There needs to be more positive representation of women undertaking roles in all elements of construction – especially when it comes to hands-on work – and not a token image as an office-based role.

We need to address equality within the wider industry, which is an issue many women face where they may be judged on physical capabilities. More must be done to portray women in the same way as men and showing they are equal to their male peers. We see a lack of female representation in advertising and promotional material, while more practical considerations – such as a lack of women's workwear – also present further challenges.

*Dulux Academy encourages inclusion across the business, with women such as myself occupying senior roles. I'm the lead at Dulux Academy, and it's been great to have the opportunity to support the thousands of trade professionals who have developed their skills through Dulux Academy courses, including many women decorators.*

*- Vickie Mather, Dulux Academy Lead*

## What does your business do to ensure females are given adequate working conditions?

Dulux Academy provides courses for decorators at every stage of their career. Previous female attendees have commented on the benefit of learning in bite-sized days over a period of time rather than attending block-style training programmes. This provides them with greater flexibility as a career changer or if they are balancing other life priorities.

Dulux Academy offers all our attendees a supportive post-course forum. Women currently represent 24% of this forum and often comment on the difference of the supportive and friendly nature of the members over the types of content and engagement in the wider, more male-dominated online forums. We have also recently created a Facebook forum for women to be able to openly voice their opinions.

We are a family-orientated business, and this profession caters for the needs of women who may need flexibility in terms of working hours around their family. We do not employ decorators ourselves at Dulux Academy, but these same merits are reflected in our company ethos of helping decorators to meet their personal and professional ambitions.

## What changes must be made to ensure we have more females entering the industry?

At Dulux Academy we believe there needs to be a change of mindset in terms of the perception of women in the industry, and we need women to be treated as equal to men. Education is also needed for people to understand what challenges and barriers female trade professionals are facing.

**We would champion a commitment to positively showcase the women in our industry. This will help to inspire others and normalise construction as a career option, removing the stigma of it being a novelty.**

We would also promote the benefits that careers in construction can provide. For example, simple things like being your own boss provides the benefits of flexible working and managing work around other life priorities.

## What else should we know in relation to your brand and women in construction?

As part of Akzonobel's 2025 ambitions, we want to be top quartile in our organizational health score (OHI), increase the number of female managers as well as the number of women in our sales teams.

We're developing an increasingly engaged, diverse and capable workforce, with an ambition to ensure that our teams reflect the diverse society that we live in. We have made significant progress in the last few years on our key diversity and inclusion (D&I) commitments. We completed the roll-out of our online D&I training curriculum – designed to increase awareness around unconscious bias in the workplace. We also introduced D&I webinars covering gender diversity, race and ethnicity and LGBTI+ inclusion. Our UK Women Inspired Network has grown significantly since its launch in early 2020, and our True Colors network – focused on leading inclusion for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex colleagues – continues to grow.

We have taken a number of steps to increase the percentage of women in our sales teams including running workshops to understand what barriers (real + perceived) result in women being reluctant to move across to sales, and that there is a plan to follow this up with a myth busting section at the forthcoming business briefing session. We have also reviewed our job adverts and where we place them to ensure we create a strong pipeline of female candidates. We have also pledged to increase the profile of women in the industry through partnerships like this.

What do you think are the biggest barriers for women entering the construction industry?

Women are not taken seriously.

Women are assumed to be weaker and less able.

Women continuously have to prove themselves in a male-dominated industry.

Women are sexualised.

## SPOTLIGHT ON



**BOSCH**

### What role do businesses play in promoting progression and career opportunities for women in construction?

Many studies show that mixed teams at all levels develop better products and services. At Bosch, everyone has the same opportunities regardless of gender — and that applies to leadership roles, too.

We have a long history of promoting diversity and inclusion within Bosch and across the industry. In 1950, the daily newspapers reported that Bosch would start taking on women school-leavers as apprentice industrial clerks. Back then, that was considered very progressive for the times. Fast forward to 2022: We now run various global initiatives including mentoring programmes, networks for support and discussion across our business, and even seminar series such as our Business Women's Programme for women in specialist, project and leading functions.

We also offer flexible and mobile working models, in order to find individual solutions for professional development, life stages and private goals — as well as to ensure a better compatibility of work and private life. All these measures are effectively bringing in more women to Bosch Power Tools than ever before. Today, 40% of all our employees worldwide are women.

### What changes must be made to ensure we have more women entering the industry?

We believe representation and the use of role models for women to relate to and resonate with will be vital in moving things forward to attract more women into the industry.

We actively look to work with women in the industry and focus on skill sets rather than gender. We design and market our products with women in mind, and involve them in product testing and marketing campaigns to promote equality to all.

Construction can be synonymous with banter and derogatory phrases and terms associated with women, and this is something that we think needs to stop. The world is changing — especially in times of transformation, and we need diversity more than ever. The uniqueness of our employees and our customers, their personalities, experiences and perspectives drive change. Diversity helps to make the industry innovative and agile, and we need to promote this to encourage more women into the industry.

### What sort of changes are already happening within your business to help shift perception of women in construction roles?

As the industry is male-dominated, power tool businesses have traditionally projected a certain idea of masculinity in their marketing and still do. But the industry has changed a lot. There are a lot more women on site now than there used to be. Even jobsite clothing are now better tailored to fit women, with higher waist trousers and better-fitted tops.

Tradeswomen are increasingly visible, popular and outspoken on social media. In some cases, they attract even more visibility than male influencers. At Bosch, we actively work with female influencers and we're moving towards a visual language that prominently and authentically includes tradeswomen as part of the team.

Women should not just be shown to carry lightweight tools and measuring tools, they also work with demolition hammers and saws, and should project strength and expertise. In terms of language, we actively use "tradespeople" and not "tradesmen". We avoid exclusionary language such as "bro humour" in our marketing. It's a mindset shift for everyone and will take time to become mainstream for the industry, but at Bosch the change is already happening.

# PART 7

**CONCLUSIONS**

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# CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this white paper, though far from exhaustive, point us to a number of conclusions from which we may draw relevant recommendations.

## 1. REPRESENTATION

Across all areas of research, both quantitative and qualitative, the under-representation of women working in construction was cited as a significant factor in both the discrimination faced by tradeswomen and the reluctance by other women to explore careers in construction.

The discrepancy between women choosing a career in construction, and those willing to encourage younger women to consider it as a career choice suggests that exposure to representation needs to begin at an early stage. By introducing construction and non-academic career routes as viable and desirable career choices at even a primary school level, we begin to destigmatize both the industry and women's role in it.

However, consistency is key to a perception shift at this scale. Any formal plan to increase representation in schools would need to not only begin early, but continue until the age when students are asked to choose their next steps.

As to where responsibility falls for this representation, responses were mixed. Given the vital nature of construction in the context of the UK economy, it is reasonable to expect Government support in appealing to the potential workforce of the future. Whilst many tradeswomen feel passionately about raising awareness of construction careers amongst young girls and women, they require formalised backing and funding.

The same applies to construction companies, and even publicly funded bodies such as the BBC - in order to truly normalise women on the tools, the government must supply incentives which ensure positive representations of tradeswomen become at least as prevalent as their male counterparts. However, cultural change is a gradual process, so it is important that these tactics are understood to be long-term, rather than quick wins.

**The Government must investigate funding for tradeswomen and industry bodies to provide positive exposure to diverse construction professionals in public, professional and educational spaces.**

**Industry bodies should consider free or subsidised social media training for women on the tools as a low-cost route to attracting potential candidates/ shifting youth perception of construction.**

**Industry bodies, charities and businesses should consider creating safe and inclusive online spaces for women working in construction.**

## 2. SOCIAL MEDIA

Whilst not a central focus of this study, social media was a topic that recurred in many areas of our research. Amongst respondents, social media was described as both a fast track to representation and a lifeline in connecting women currently working in construction.

In terms of representation, social media is a quick and low-cost option for tradeswomen aiming to raise awareness amongst the younger generation. According to Omnicore, around 50% of TikTok's global audience is under the age of 34 with 32.5% aged between 10 and 19. With this in mind, social media should be an area of focus, without the time away from work or formal relationships required to reach young people via schools.

Equally, social media was referenced as a place for tradeswomen to connect and support one another. Whilst this does not necessarily represent a solution to negative experiences or perceptions of the industry, it could well support the retention of existing female professionals. Funding and moderation of further inclusive spaces for tradeswomen online may promote greater wellbeing and happiness for those working in the industry today, which in turn, may lead to greater advocacy of the sector from those already in it.



### 3. EDUCATION

One of the more insidious elements of discrimination is the difficulty it can present to identify it. Many women that we spoke to were unaware that the negative experiences they had encountered actually qualified as discrimination, falling under the legal definition of what constitutes discriminatory behaviour.

Furthermore, there was an element of gaslighting attached to and driving this lack of clarity. Reports included incidents where respondents were made to feel overly sensitive or lacking a sense of humour when they objected to comments which would most certainly be interpreted as discrimination by an employment rights professional.

As with any offence, the onus should be on the perpetrator to change their behaviour, not the victim. However, this is not to say that we shouldn't consider how women in construction can be given greater insight into what is and is not discrimination.

We also found that many respondents were unaware of their legal rights, both as employees and self-employed construction professionals. Further insight as to whether this is a construction-specific, or women-specific, experience is required to inform recommendations. However, construction bodies and employers should certainly be providing clear information around entitlements such as maternity pay.

**Resources around discriminatory behaviour, what it is and the consequences of it, should be provided by industry bodies and employers.**

**Campaigns that encourage colleagues to call out instances of discrimination masquerading as 'banter' should be launched and supported by industry bodies and employers.**

**Further insight into general awareness of employment rights should be undertaken by the government to understand where exactly the knowledge gap is, and how it can be addressed.**

**Employers and industry bodies should work to promote understanding and awareness of employment rights, especially as they relate to women and other underrepresented groups working in construction.**

### 4. AMENITIES

At present, HSE guidance states that the only provision needed to classify a toilet as suitable for both men and women is a lockable room, partitioned from urinals. This is clearly not an acceptable state of affairs. Whilst a separate women's toilet may not always be possible, the bare minimum should be a toilet that is gender-neutral, and suitable for all users.

By suitable for women, provision for disposal of sanitary products should be provided, provision of space for expressing breast milk should be provided, and both safety and privacy should be ensured as a matter of course.

**HSE guidance needs immediate review, with the needs of women and other underrepresented groups within construction considered and reflected in amended guidelines.**

**Employers should be going above and beyond HSE guidelines until such time as they are amended, creating safe and suitable spaces for women working on-site.**



### 3. CAREER PROGRESSION

Once within the construction industry, after established training routes at colleges, universities, and apprenticeship programmes, our qualitative study highlighted a lack of awareness surrounding the range of career development opportunities available.

While solutions to this will vary between employed and self-employed professionals, there is certainly more that industry bodies could be doing to facilitate a greater understanding of progression opportunities within the sector. For example, providing a mentoring platform for women in construction, or a career advice service.

**Industry bodies and employers should be doing more to connect successful women within the trade, for example networking events, mentoring schemes, webinars and free career advice.**

## FINAL WORD

As an industry we are facing a skills crisis. Of those surveyed outside the industry via our YouGov consumer research, 78% of women said they would not consider a career in construction, versus 66% of male respondents.

If we are to close the skills gap, we need to change perceptions of the industry and make it a more inclusive space for women and other underrepresented groups.

*Nearly a third of construction workers are over the age of 50 - in the next 10 to 15 years half a million workers will leave the industry. Women will be vital to plug that gap and the only way this will be done is with a huge shift in culture,"*

*- Charlotte Childs, GMB National Officer for Construction and Engineering.*

However, in order to do this, we need to recognise the importance of equity. While it is important that everybody is treated fairly, it is crucial that we understand the differing needs of male and female construction professionals and reflect that in working practice.

To create a more hopeful future for the industry, change needs to come from both within and outside construction - we need to break negative stereotypes, but we need to change negative behaviours first in order to achieve that.

Ultimately it is the interest of employers, government and industry bodies to make careers in construction appealing to a broader demographic than white cisgender males. As the existing workforce retires, time is running out to solve the skills crisis, and without the backing of these key stakeholders - financial or otherwise - we may find ourselves falling behind both on governmental build targets and on the world stage more generally.

# OUR SUPPORTERS



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