

FULL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION - WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

Although the outlook is positive about the future of women in construction, there is still more work that needs to be done. Two FIS members and the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) share with us how they are encouraging women to join the sector and how they support and inspire them to flourish, and stay in the industry.



L-R Lisa and Julie Cartwright, Directors at Access Panel Shop

ISA and Julie Cartwright, Directors at Access Panel Shop explained they have over twenty years of experience working in the construction industry, specialising in the design, manufacture, and supply of access panels. In 2020 they set up their new business, stocking and supplying access panels to construction projects of all sizes. They also continue to work on designing new access panels that are sustainable, fire rated and aim to be net zero in production.

Change in the gender demographics

Julie said: "In the last couple of decades, we have noticed a significant change in the gender demographics of the construction industry. We see more and more women on construction sites - with hard hats and all the gear - whereas notably before women were typically found in office spaces and support roles.

"This is a positive change. Women are no longer confined to office jobs in construction. It is amazing to see the transition from office to onsite work, which we have also achieved.

"More awareness is being generated regarding women in construction. For example, we attended the London Build Expo 2022 on 17 November 2022, which hosted a meeting of Women in Construction featuring speakers and ambassadors from across the sector. It was amazing to see the number of women attending, which goes to show just how diverse the industry has become.

"This is a necessary shift, particularly for the finishes and interiors sector. It's thought that currently, 15% of people working in the construction industry are women¹. While this is an improvement, according to FIS, there is currently a shortage of skilled and qualified labour for the sector. This is a gap that can be filled by female labour". Julie concluded by saying: "Lisa and I frequently ask ourselves, why waste skilled labour and opportunities because of gender?"

Still more work that needs to be done

Lisa explained that work to build the industry starts with encouraging opportunities for women and young girls. She said: "Education about the industry for girls is vital - often it is a sector that is overlooked in favour of service sector jobs that have always been held by women in the past. Now more than ever, it is vital to show girls that a career in construction is possible for them. After all, it worked for us!

"Investment for women in construction is also still low. There needs to be a change in the way funds are distributed, as neglecting an able workforce based on gender is missing a huge opportunity. Furthermore, looking at the way women in construction are perceived by others is an important step toward easing the transition. We encountered other business owners and leaders (female and male) who assumed we work in the beauty industry! Curbing these assumptions about women in construction is another important step we must take to provide more diverse career opportunities for women".

www.accesspanel.shop

Amy Hough, Marketing Director at Workplace Interiors Company, tells us about constructing a diverse workforce.

Amy explained that Workplace Interiors Company is a dynamic group of brands within the construction industry, specialising in commercial interiors. Their focus is to help create engaging workplaces with end-to-end solutions such as design

and build, supply and fit, and nationwide e-commerce services.

It is a family-run business and the staff are an extension of that. Thanks to its fantastic team, Workplace Interiors Company received a Great Place to Work™ certification. This award is based on employee satisfaction and celebrates the company's culture, including its values in gender equality.

As it stands, its workforce is currently 55% female and 45% male, spread across multiple departments.

Amy tasked Ali Townsend, Content Writer at Workplace Interiors Company to ask her female colleagues about their experiences within this industry.

Women at Workplace Interiors Company

Amy said: "With a predominantly female workforce, we recognise the prejudices that women face in the industry. To support our team, we offer equal opportunities to every employee, regardless of gender". Amy explained she asked the female members in the business questions about their role in construction.



L-R Jayne Mason, Health, Safety and Compliance Manager and Amy Hough, Marketing Director at Workplace Interiors Company

What attracted you to the construction industry?

"I fell into the construction industry by accident. The role of Health, Safety and Compliance Manager was really interesting and the idea of working within what I had always perceived to be a 'man's world' was too tempting to pass by." said Jayne, Health, Safety and Compliance Manager.

What challenges do you face working in a predominantly male industry?

"Trust. I almost feel I have to prove my worth through knowledge and competence - though generally it only takes a minute! Ceiling tiles are such a niche area of construction and there's a lot of technical knowledge required. Customers then forget gender and realise they're dealing with someone passionate about their job and wanting the best for them." said Emma, Sales Team Manager.

What challenges do you face working with a predominantly male target audience?

"I wouldn't say they're challenges as such. I actually see that being a woman working within this industry provides opportunities to bring a different perspective and try new ideas to reach our target audience.

Typically, people perceive marketing in construction as more traditional than other industries, and far less creative - but this isn't the case. Marketing within the B2B construction sector relies heavily on detailed strategic marketing planning and measurements that are continually reviewed and evolved." said Amy, Marketing Director.

What would you say to inspire other women in the construction industry?

Emma, Jayne and Amy said: "It feels great to buck the trend that construction is a male-dominated industry. Every call I take, I feel like I'm changing the mindset that they should be speaking to a man to obtain a price or information on our products.

"Be confident in who you are and if the construction industry is something you want to consider, go for it - you may be very surprised!

"There's so much opportunity within this industry to improve how we market to our customers. No day is ever the same because the industry is constantly changing and evolving.

Source

1. www.chas.co.uk/blog/women-in-construction
2. <https://austinnawic.org/history-of-nawic>

"As a pioneering construction group, we know it's important to lead by example. We're always keen to break biases within the industry, especially when it comes to the younger generation. Just the other day

we were overjoyed by the conversations we had when visiting a local school to discuss the skills needed to thrive in a construction role, from a female's perspective".

<https://workplaceco.co.uk>

The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC)

The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) original chapter was founded in the USA in 1953³. The UK & Ireland branch was founded in 2003³. It is run by committees of volunteers who work within organisations or run their own businesses in the construction industry.

Across the UK, NAWIC has six active regions. Each region is run independently by a local committee that works to promote the industry in the best possible way for their region. "NAWIC exists to promote opportunities for women in the construction industry" says **Annie Clift**, Chair of the London and South East Region of NAWIC.

Annie said: "Across the UK, the organisation works to improve industry standards. In recent years, we have worked with the JCT to support the change to gender neutral language across their suite of contracts.

"NAWIC is not only for women, though we are women-focussed. Our platform exists to celebrate some of the fantastic role models, and to promote the construction industry as an attractive career choice for the next generation.

"One way of doing this is through our collaboration with architectural photographer Morley Von Sternberg⁴ 'The Image of Women in Construction'⁵. This project aims to highlight the diversity of roles held by women in the industry. We hope it will inspire the next generation to see themselves as potential construction professionals in the future".

Annie explained its plan of events for 2023 will focus on sustainability, one of the most important topics in the construction industry at present. They will be highlighting projects that are using innovative new techniques, hosting panels, site visits, and workshops, and looking at how we can all be a little more sustainable in our personal lives.

They will also be looking at new ways of supporting small businesses. The construction industry makes up over 20% of the UK's SMEs, and many women in the NAWIC network are small business owners. They hope to develop a small business owners group for its members to work together to solve some of the problems that crop up time and time again.

Annie concluded by saying: "Ultimately, our vision is to increase the number of women joining the construction industry. Once here we need to continuously support women so their careers may flourish, and they stay in the industry. Our committees will continue to work towards these aims and give back to the industry that they are passionate about".

www.nawic.co.uk



National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) committee members

3. www.nawic.co.uk

4. www.instagram.com/morleyvon/?hl=en

5. www.instagram.com/imageofwic