

BUILDING OUR FUTURE

- ▶ The UK construction sector is facing a prolonged skills shortage
- ▶ Predictions are that this is set to get worse in the next decade
- ▶ More should be done to recruit young people into this vibrant and growing industry

What's it about?

Construction is a major sector of the UK economy, responsible for the employment of nearly 3 million people. However, despite a relatively cheerful outlook - with large complex projects in the pipeline alongside continuing demand for 'bread and butter' development - it remains in the grips of a prolonged skills shortage set to get worse before it gets better.

This is attributable to a number of factors, including an aging workforce (1 in 10 workers being expected to leave the sector in the next decade), insufficient recruitment (losing out to competing sectors where work is more stable and pay more competitive) and a poor image of construction as a career aspiration.

Why does it matter?

The Federation of Master Builders has reported that many construction companies struggle to recruit skilled tradespeople (40% of construction trades are experiencing their greatest shortage of skills since 2013) with demand far outstripping supply. Consequently wages are rising sharply for skilled trades and, combined with an increase in the cost of building materials, this has dealt a sharp blow to construction companies. Skills shortages are driving up the high cost of building in the capital, and contributing [to the poor quality of workmanship](#) in the construction sector.

All this is to ignore that perennial elephant in the room; Brexit, and the unknown consequences that leaving the European Union may have on the UK labour market.

Now what?

The good news is there is plenty more that can be done across the sector to address this issue, such as improving the routes into the industry and really investing in recruitment.

We need to address negative perceptions and to encourage young people to consider the wide range of jobs available by engaging with schools and colleges to educate students – as well as parents and teachers – about what a career in construction might actually look like. We need to find better ways of promoting the industry to students from STEM subjects who might not typically consider a career in construction by highlighting the exciting opportunities that exist in [engineering](#), [project management](#), design, [quantity surveying and town planning](#). The challenge of designing and building adaptable [places](#) that will grow and flex with a changing [community](#) and climate, in already crowded [spaces](#), needs bright ideas and clever thinking and will surely appeal to a new generation of young people if properly showcased.

Perhaps the most obvious solution is to work harder to overcome the gender bias evident across the industry and the prejudice against women working in traditionally male-dominated construction roles, which immediately doubles the pool of talent that is available.

In short, we all – from lawyers to brick layers - need to take a part in changing the way that construction is perceived. We need to talk to our young people, and those that would not ordinarily consider the industry as a career, highlighting the variety of interesting opportunities that there are across a huge range of specialisms. We need to amplify the voices of those in the industry that are doing things differently and demonstrate the passion and enthusiasm that we all feel about the projects we are involved with. We need to be part of the solution to ensure that the construction industry (and our economy) continues to thrive and grow with the next generation.

Who to Contact

PANDORA LOUGHEED

Managing Associate

+44(0) 161 934 6831

+44(0) 7747 765982



NANCY MCGUIRE

Partner

+44(0) 0161 934 6562

+44(0) 07730 804424



10-31247716-1

addleshawgoddard.com

Aberdeen, Doha, Dubai, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hamburg, Hong Kong,
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