



# Women in Construction:

## A Roadmap for Industry

National Federation of Builders



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Michaela Wain  
NFB National Ambassador



# Women in Construction: A Roadmap for Industry

The construction industry is one of the most notoriously male-dominated professions which has always struggled to attract and retain women. Although there is a very small percentage of women working in the industry, there are a variety of gender-related challenges that they encounter which has contributed to the lack of women in the profession. In order to tackle those issues, we have created a roadmap to encourage companies to implement small, positive changes that can gradually make a change for the better, and in turn, boost the percentage of women entering and staying in the sector.

To achieve this, we must start by supporting those women at grass roots and at board level. Addressing a career in construction needs to start at school age where we can quash the assumption that construction is only for men. Inspiring a new generation of young women to consider a career in this industry also begins with women leaders as valuable role models. Therefore, supporting and retaining women that are already in the industry is equally important to having new ones join. Building a strong women's alliance which can educate, support and push for better benefits will help to provide a community for guidance and mentorship.

With a skills gap shortage always plaguing construction, combined with productivity and labour levels declining, it is essential that we target this untapped workforce. More women in construction can play a crucial role in helping to eliminate these industry-wide challenges.

An environment that supports diversity through the culture on site, the policies that reinforce best practice and the equipment and facilities provided all help create a diverse workplace with different perspectives and solutions. Ultimately, companies can expect to see improved profitability due to more creativity and productivity, but also reputationally, as consumers become more aware of brands and their inclusive values.

The most important thing to remember is, women are an asset to construction. Those already in the industry are thriving and contribute massively to the workforce. Others need the opportunity and encouragement to do so. This roadmap is the first step in creating those opportunities.

**Michaela Wain**  
**NFB National Ambassador**

Find out more about Michaela at:

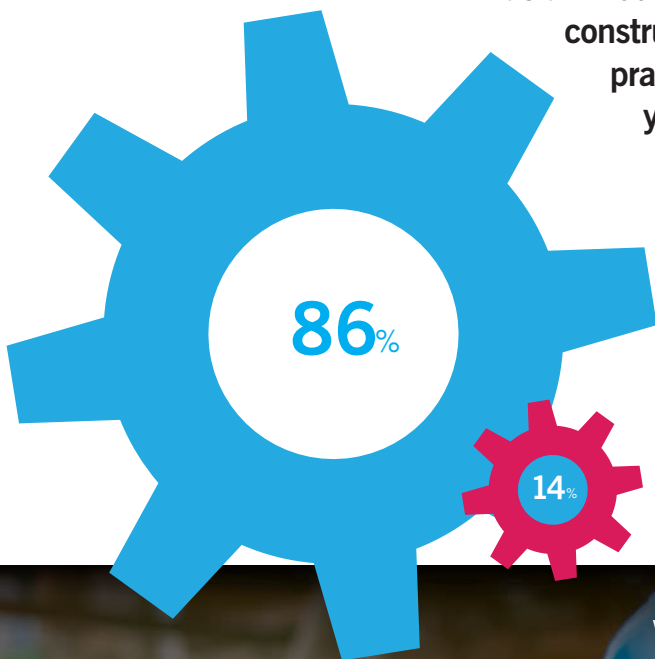
<https://www.builders.org.uk/the-nfb/nfb-people/nfb-ambassadors/>

## Why do we need a roadmap?

The construction industry is one of the most important parts of the UK economy, contributing 10% of GDP, employing millions of people and quite literally 'building our future'. But the construction industry has a problem. Specifically, it has a women problem. Currently, only 14% of all construction workers are women, compared to over 50% of the general population. Research has shown that workforces that better represent society are happier, more productive, safer and have better retention rates of staff.

This roadmap provides simple and straightforward ideas for how we, as an industry, can improve the number of women in construction. It is designed to be accessible and applicable, practical in nature and ambitious in statement. Doing your bit to promote Women in Construction is not contingent on the size of your business, everyone in every part of the industry can make positive changes that will result in better outcomes.

If your company is committed to increasing the number of the women in construction and would like to join in our campaign you will find a Pledge Form in Appendix A, where you can pledge your aims of what you will do differently.



14% of all construction workers are women



## ACTION you can take now

All construction businesses have it within their ability to make immediate commitments and changes to their business that will help to promote women in the workforce. Here are some suggested actions you may consider pledging as your aims:



### 1. Think Woman!

Consult with women inside your workforce or outside your workforce for advice and live examples of their experience and challenges they face. Change can be to combat the bad but also monopolise on the good experiences too.

### 2. Ensure a positive culture at both an organisational and site level

Some site cultures can be perceived as being, 'laddish' and macho and that can be an issue for women. Speak with your team and talk through your plans to attract more women into the industry and enable them to suggest ways to make this happen. Making your existing workforce part of the solution goes a long way to enabling acceptance for people that start, particularly at site level.

It not only helps to demonstrate your commitment to your workforce and encouraging diverse and inclusive workplaces it will also help you to promote a professional, respectful culture where everyone is welcome, works hard and has a good time whilst ensuring your able to ensure that the behaviours represent your organisation in the best way.

Look to ensure that you include this goal in your site inductions, toolbox talks and management structure. If your organisational culture does not support women in construction then this should be the starting point to addressing unsupportive behaviours.

### 3. Working welfare

When planning works or site activities, consider how you can best cater for all staff and visitors working on that site. Look at your organisation and site facilities and consider whether they are supportive of all workers. Then look at what else you can do.

### 4. Make a statement

Whether your company has an equality policy, a diversity and inclusion policy or a specific women in construction policy (we can provide guidance on these too), make a statement.

Set out your intentions and commitments for your business, the importance of having women in the workplace, your pledge to the charter and the goals you are working to.

Discuss it to with your staff, publish it on your website, showcase it to your clients and suppliers. Make your pledge and work on delivering it.

### 5. Work with your supply chain

When engaging with suppliers and subcontractors, ask what they are doing to promote women in construction and whether they have or will commit to the charter. Maybe consider including this question in your tendering process and weight the answers however you see fit.

Highlight your goals and ask them to consider what else they can do in their own business for women in construction.

### 6. Flexible / agile working

Flexible working is proven to help attract and retain women, allowing a better work life balance, especially for those who have childcare responsibilities. Consider the changes your business has made to adjust to the pandemic, can you keep or build on some of them to enshrine flexible working? Could you consider a job share or part time work?



## 7. Recruitment

There is only one way we are going to improve the number of women in construction, and that is to recruit them! Make sure your jobs are attractive to women, do your bit to promote construction to young women and widen the net when it comes to your talent pool. Review your job descriptions, people specs and ads. What are you asking for in terms of people's qualities and attributes? Does your job ad read like it wants the archetypal man in construction? Make subtle changes and consult with women inside your workforce or outside your workforce for advice on ensuring your ads appeal to women too.



Think outside the box. A real challenge for your business might be recruiting the women you need from the traditional pools of talent, so think outside the box. Construction companies need a wide range of skills and job types, so where you can, consider and be open to transferable skills from other industries. It won't work for all jobs you offer but be open to it for those where it will.

## 8. Retention

Ensuring women work in construction is not just about attracting them to the industry but about keeping them too. Ensuring adequate support for women within your business will have a real and tangible impact on keeping them, reducing knowledge loss, reducing your staff turnover cost and in turn your training costs of new employees. Look at your turnover for this demographic and try to understand why they left, have they left to join another company in the industry or have they left the industry altogether?

## 9. Future Generations

Many construction businesses give back to the community by doing careers talks, outreach, jobs fairs and other community engagement. Ensure that girls are considered and included from the start, make sure that children know that construction is for men and women. Hold your women leaders and workers up for young women to see and aspire to. Challenge their perceptions from a young age and embed the possibility of a construction career from the word go.

## 10 Women mentors and women's networks

Remember that women are already severely underrepresented in the industry. Do what you can to help connect them with peers and inspirational leaders. If possible offer mentoring for women employees by other women. If you can't do that internally then look externally – to another construction company, another industry or via a trade association. Consider having women mentor men, to engrain the open culture of your workplace. Set up or join a women's network, either within your company, in the local area or via your trade association – it not only has the benefit of giving women inspiration and team building but it helps company feedback for continuous improvement.



## 11. Health and Welfare

It's a reality that many women will choose to have children and take maternity leave during their careers and this is a critical time for ensuring retention. Challenge your company, does it offer an attractive maternity package. Has the company got an effective plan to ensure fast and effective reintegration into the team on return to work? Make good use of keeping in touch days, offer comprehensive training on return so that they can catch-up with any lost training or business changes. Remember, any member of staff you don't retain will mean you'll need to retrain a new person and that is a cost to your business, can you afford it?

## The PLEDGE – Your Company Pledge

Pledge what you will do within Appendix 1 and return to:  
Email: [membershipservices@builders.org.uk](mailto:membershipservices@builders.org.uk)

# Women in Construction

**This is to certify that**

.....  
will adopt and commit to the principles of the  
**Women in Construction Roadmap**

## **Principles**

**Our company is signing this pledge to:**

- Develop working practices that encourage women into construction
- Educate future generations on the role of women in construction and the benefits of working in the industry
- Provide awareness and understanding of the benefits of creating an inclusive and diverse workforce and promoting a positive working culture through facilitated learning, with the aims of:
  - Reducing stigma and discrimination
  - Encouraging positive conversations in the workplace
- Educate and enable champions from across the workforce to support our people
- Provide access to industry mentors to support workers in their roles and the organisation

As a company, we are committing to encouraging more women into construction and ensuring the values of our business enable this aim.

**Our goals this year, include:**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

Name .....

Organisation .....

Date: .....

The National Federation of Builders (NFB) is one of the longest standing trade bodies representing the construction industry across England and Wales. NFB strives to create optimal conditions for the construction industry and implement real positive changes for the benefit of the sector. In doing so, NFB seeks to create and enhance an environment of diversity, equality and inclusion in the workforce and wider society. NFB is committed to creating a welcoming industry where all can thrive and succeed, regardless of background or identity.

The NFB boasts over 600 members representing 1300 construction companies with a combined annual turnover of £6.6bn and 21,000 employees. The NFB provides expert advice, training, representation and business services for members so that they can comply with industry standards, excel in delivery, and grow successful businesses. Members must observe the NFB's Code of Conduct which commits them to business integrity, good practice and high standards of service.



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