

RICS Women in Construction Adjudication Scholarship

With only 15% of the 1.4 million full-time construction workforce being women, the urgency of addressing the gender disparity in our industry cannot be overstated. As women make up half of the general population, it's crucial to ask why so few women are in construction and why they leave sooner than men. In my nearly twenty years in the industry, I've had just one female manager. In 2025, the scarcity of women in leadership roles is a pressing concern. Could the pay gap be a contributing factor?

Mind the Gap

Since 2017, companies with 250 or more employees have been required by the UK government to provide their mean and median gender pay gap for hourly and bonus pay, the percentage of men and women in each hourly pay quarter and the percentage of men and women receiving bonus pay. Of the 14,917 companies reporting in 2024, 517 were in the construction sector. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) reported the gender pay gap to be

an average of 13.1% in 2024, with the construction gap reported as 23% by the CIOB.

Reporting allows women to see the gap between current and potential employers and compare industries. It also raises employers' awareness of their pay gaps and provides an opportunity for them to review and comment.

Top 20 Construction Companies 2024.								
Latest Rank By Turnover	Latest Rank By Profit	Company	2017		2024		Change	
			Diff Mean Hourly Pay	Diff Median Hourly Pay	Diff Mean Hourly Pay	Diff Median Hourly Pay	Mean	Median
1	1	MORGAN SINDALL GROUP PLC	32.90%	31.00%	26.80%	29.00%	-18.54%	-6.45%
2	3	BALFOUR BEATTY GROUP LTD	21.00%	23.00%	17.00%	23.00%	-19.05%	0.00%
3	8	KIER GROUP PLC	26.00%	27.00%	24.30%	20.60%	-6.54%	-23.70%
4	41	ISG LTD	34.70%	40.50%	24.60%	25.20%	-29.11%	-37.78%
5	11	WATES GROUP LTD	29.50%	33.00%	30.60%	35.50%	3.73%	7.58%
6	100	LAING O'ROURKE PLC	6.60%	8.80%	6.20%	7.70%	-6.06%	-12.50%
7	2	TARMAC TRADING LTD	15.80%	14.30%	13.70%	17.10%	-13.29%	19.58%
8	10	MACE LTD	34.50%	39.90%	20.30%	21.30%	-41.16%	-46.62%
9	80	M GROUP SERVICES LD	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
10	4	AMEY UK LTD	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
11	21	GALLIFORD TRY HOLDINGS PLC	30.70%	33.20%	22.50%	25.80%	-26.71%	-22.29%
12	12	J. MURPHY & SONS LTD	26.10%	23.80%	20.00%	23.90%	-23.37%	0.42%
13	7	SKANSKA UK PLC	27.20%	26.70%	21.10%	23.00%	-22.43%	-13.86%
14	14	VOLKERWESSELS UK LTD	26.00%	26.70%	24.10%	25.80%	-7.31%	-3.37%
15	19	COSTAIN GROUP PLC	NA	NA	15.80%	24.40%	NA	NA
16	98	VINCI CONSTRUCTION UK LTD	46.50%	48.20%	35.80%	41.10%	-23.01%	-14.73%
17	9	BOWMER AND KIRKLAND LTD	37.30%	44.60%	36.00%	48.00%	-3.49%	7.62%
18	45	WINVIC GROUP LTD	NA	NA	41.10%	46.00%	NA	NA
19	90	WILLMOTT DIXON HOLDINGS LTD	NA	NA	20.00%	18.40%	NA	NA
20	32	JOHN GRAHAM HOLDINGS LTD	42.50%	41.40%	32.10%	34.10%	-24.47%	-17.63%
Average			29.15%	30.81%	24.00%	27.22%	-17.39%	-10.92%

Sources:
<https://www.theconstructionindex.co.uk/market-data/top-100-construction-companies/2024>
<https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/viewing/download>

Since reporting began, the gender pay gap, especially in part-time roles, has shifted. However, significant disparities still exist, particularly in senior positions. More women are taking up roles in part-time employment, with approximately 61% of female employees in full-time jobs in 2024. The same report shows that the pay gap is decreasing at entry level. However, that gap increases as we age.

The ONS reported the gender pay gap to be more significant for employees aged 40 years and over than for those aged under 40 years. The ONS findings also align with the more substantial gap among high earners than among lower-paid employees. Why does the gap increase?

Retaining women

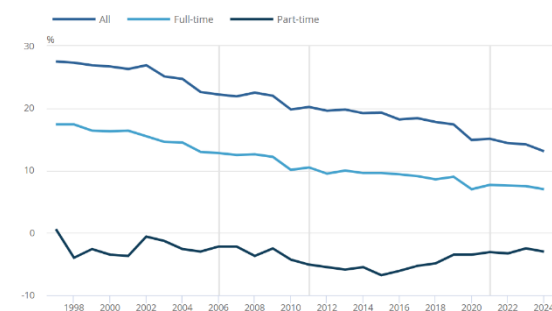
The RICS report Women in Surveying found that despite women being in the profession long enough to move up the career ladder while also

being in full-time roles, not enough women are taking up leading roles or receiving equal pay. In addition, those with caring responsibilities reported not being given greater flexibility in working hours. Unconscious bias may be a contributing factor to the lack of flexibility. Gender stereotypes of women being mothers and housewives may contribute to the reasons flexible working patterns are rejected when they can support a healthy work-life balance and improve productivity. Remote working is not realistic for trades, but flexible working hours are. For many construction firms, COVID-19 was revolutionary in their working practices, with an increase in hybrid working and flexible hours for all.

More needs to be done to retain women in the industry. According to RICS Women in Surveying report, over half of the women surveyed had considered leaving the profession at least occasionally. In the same report, the average age for women leaving RICS membership is 47. Surveys in STEM found similar challenges in retaining women. Despite efforts to increase women's representation in STEM, the average age at which women leave the profession is 43, in contrast to 60 for men.

In the Federation of Master Builders 2023 report, 29% of women said returning to a senior position would be impossible after maternity leave, citing full-time work culture amongst other directors and childcare costs. To work to pay someone to care for your child feels counterintuitive. Employers need to take a fresh approach to working practices to retain women in construction. This could include offering more flexible working hours, creating “whole me” diversity groups, or implementing mentorship programs for women returning from maternity leave. I look at potential employers' maternity policies because they provide insight into how they treat women and who is taking maternity leave. Maternity policies tell me if a company has many women working for them and what roles they hold. A company that only

Gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings, excluding overtime, UK, April 1997 to 2024



Source: ONS (2024). Gender pay gap in the UK

offers statutory maternity pay cannot have many women in leadership roles as it would be difficult to afford the pay difference, and a better policy would be in place.

In 2020, I was furloughed for six months. The isolation I felt from my colleagues was overwhelming. Returning to work was tough, and reintegrating into the team proved challenging. I felt overlooked for opportunities because I had been away and would not be good enough to do the job. It was mentally difficult. It gave me insight into what it might be like to return from maternity leave—a challenge that, if unaddressed, could lead to more women leaving the industry. With all that self-doubt, how are we meant to become leaders?

Am I good enough to lead?

To hold a leadership role, you need experience. If women are leaving construction at 43, the number of women who can be promoted or apply to senior positions is reduced. The lack of women in leadership roles can impact career aspirations. The RICS Women in Surveying report found that lack of recognition of skills, culture-driving imposter syndrome, and unconscious bias to be the barriers faced by women in developing their careers as surveyors.

“We’re more likely to experience imposter syndrome if we don’t see many examples of people who look like us or share our background who are clearly succeeding in our field,” (Nance-Nash, 2020)

Imposter syndrome is a significant barrier that cannot be simply solved by promoting women to senior roles. Changing the culture that allows imposter syndrome to thrive is crucial, without addressing underlying issues employers may inadvertently create imposter syndrome in the very women being promoted.

My imposter syndrome hit when I passed my APC. I was told that although I had accomplished something many of my peers and seniors had not, I was not worthy of a promotion. I was good enough to do the work of my supervisor, but I was not worthy of his pay. When I resigned, I was told it was a bad move; I would fail and be looking for a new role in six months. I believed them. I thought I was not good enough, but I had become chartered by being brave and betting on me. I can confirm I am far from failing. Reflecting on this, I can see how this lack of support and championing of my abilities increased my imposter syndrome. I know its warning signs, and I am ready to go to battle to defeat its presence in the women I work with. I will never tell anyone they are not good enough. We are all capable of greatness.

Becoming Adjudicators.

Considering all the above factors, it is no wonder that fewer women in construction are taking leadership roles, which in turn impacts the number of women who can become adjudicators.

The latest report by Kings College London found that Adjudicator Nominating Bodies (ANB) have 791 adjudicators. However, a person may also be a member of multiple ANBs, so this number may be lower. The report also found that only 8.9% of adjudicators were women. The requirements for joining an ANB vary, with most requiring a minimum number of years in industry post qualification and experience either as an adjudicator or party representative. RICS is the only ANB that requires persons to be invited to apply. To ensure relevant experience and training to guarantee a successful application, the age at which a person could apply to join an ANB is over 30. In the United Kingdom, the average age of women giving birth for the first time is 31. Course fees to support applications vary. You also need time to study, which becomes more precious as we age and progress in our careers. Also, there is a fee for applying (which does not necessarily entitle admission). These are some of the barriers to becoming adjudicators.

When all these factors are considered, 8.9% is arguably a fair reflection of the number of women who would have the opportunity to become adjudicators. The RICS women in construction scholarship is a small step towards improving the gap, and more can be done by ANBs to promote inclusion. Considering how much we must do to prove our worth and place in construction, it is hard not to argue that women are best placed to mediate and assess disputes.

By acknowledging disparity and creating a level playing field, women will have more opportunities. The more allies we have in the industry, the less imposter syndrome will thrive. I find strength in knocking down hurdles and clearing the path for other women to join me. It can be exhausting, but it is worth it. If we are to reach gender parity sooner than 2158, more immediate actions are required. Statistically, I would have gotten here quicker if I were a man. I aspire to become an adjudicator because I like being the minority in the room. And I will be good at it.

Word Count: 1,493

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