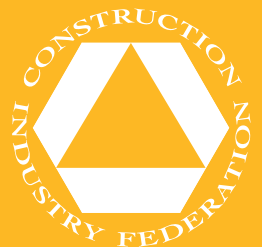


Prepared for the **Construction Industry Federation**  
by Accuracy Market Research



# **WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

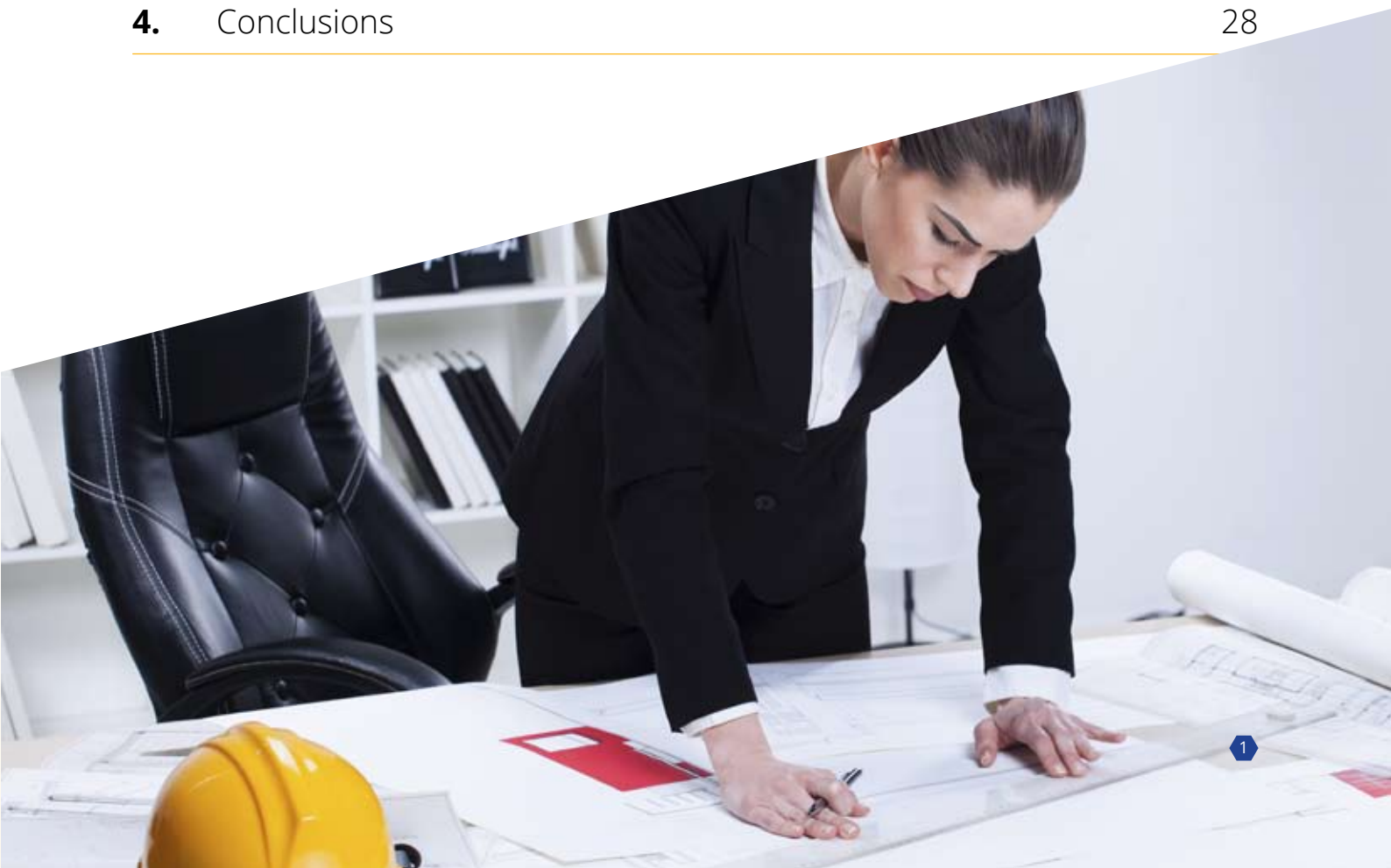
Accurate information is central to all decision making





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# Foreword

## Colleagues

Irish construction needs to employ more women if it is to have a sustainable future. Currently, the CSO estimates that only 5.5% of the workforce across all construction related sectors are women. Our member survey estimates that approximately only 1 in 10 employees in their organisations are women. The number of women in senior management positions is also chronically low.

Addressing this imbalance is more than a moral issue. It is a practical challenge for our industry in the face of the ongoing productivity issue and an imminent skills shortage. For example, in 2016, the CIF and SOLAS identified the need for an additional 112,000 workers to meet Ireland's housing and infrastructure requirements. We cannot do this only drawing from the male talent pool.

Our failure to attract, retain and develop female talent has implications for Irish society and its economy. Without female talent, the industry's efforts to deliver critical Government strategies in housing and infrastructure such as Rebuilding Ireland, the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework may fall short.

Our industry is in a war for talent with other professions that many consider to be more female-friendly. Our survey shows that construction companies recognise the pressing need to recruit more women. However, it is not enough to simply recognise the problem. We all need to do more to proactively facilitate women in the industry and to influence young women to choose construction as a career.

Today's survey is a first step in our journey towards achieving better gender balance in the industry. The results will be used as a call to action to all construction leaders, male and female, to make gender balance a priority in their organisation. The CIF is bringing industry leaders, policy-makers and stakeholders in the education and training system together to address the gender imbalance in construction. Working together and with Government, the industry should aim to increase the proportion of women in the workforce to 25% by 2030.

Careers in construction have changed dramatically over the past 10 years. Better health and safety and increased use of technology are two trends making construction more attractive to young people, male and female. Off-site, in the offices and boardrooms of construction companies, we should be able to address gender imbalance at senior management level more rapidly, than on sites, with concerted efforts over the next three years.

With the assistance of our recently established Building Equality Working Group, the CIF has launched a year-long awareness campaign to promote gender balance amongst its members and the wider industry. We're looking for male and female leaders to be role models, to mentor and inspire women in construction wherever they can.

Increasing female participation to 25% of the total workforce by 2030 will be very challenging. However, we have met similar challenges in the past. Together, we can achieve this essential goal to the benefit of our companies, our industry and Irish society generally.

**Jean Winters**

*Supported by*



## Recommendations

Recommendations arising from this survey can be divided into industry-wide and company specific. They are intended as initial actions that both policy-makers and industry leaders can address in the short-term. The CIF will be developing a wider set of policy recommendations in the coming months to be launched in 2018.

Industry-related recommendations require collaboration amongst leaders, the CIF and in partnership with other agencies (i.e. Engineers Ireland, Department of Education, SOLAS etc.). Company specific recommendations refer to what individual companies can do to make their organisation more gender inclusive in the short-term.

### Industry-recommendations

- Execute a national multi-annual awareness campaign to highlight gender balance as a key priority and promotes the industry as a career destination for women whilst challenging the outdated perception of construction sector as a male only profession
- Engage in structured outreach to primary and post primary schools to educate career guidance teachers and students about the breadth of career opportunities available to both men and women:
  - Careful attention should be given to the use of ICT to present the sector as dynamic, modern and gender inclusive
  - A critical element is to demonstrate the real life everyday working environment of people in the industry (ie open days, site visits to industry etc)
  - Emphasis should also be placed on the alternative pathways open to students outside the academic route (ie apprenticeships)
  - Specific focus should be given to promoting female participation in apprenticeships
- Continue to run and develop networking events that employ successful women from the sector to share their experiences with both men and women
- The CIF should provide advice, support and training to Irish construction companies in diversity and inclusion
- Develop a mentoring network involving senior male and female industry leaders that supports young women in construction

### Companies

- Company-owners/CEOs should outline the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion and 'walk the walk'
- Introduce a gender inclusive recruitment policy (ie one that affords equal opportunity to men and women candidates)
- Introduce female role models from the industry to speak to potential female candidates
- Introduce mentoring programme to assist women in the company to progress to senior positions
- Encourage young women and men to network and attend formal events where learning can be shared and issues discussed (events should be open to all)
- Populate interview panels with a mix of men and women
- Introduce training on gender bias for staff
- Engage with local schools to promote the industry to young male and female students

## Background & Objectives

### 1.1 Background

The construction industry continues to play a critical role in Ireland's economic growth with the sector due to expand by 14% in 2018. As the economic recovery continues and we move to the prospect of full employment, we will need a flexible and skilled workforce to meet the ongoing demand for labour.

The volume of construction output by 2020 is forecast to reach over €20 billion, just over 10% of GNP. The CIF has forecast that the construction sector will require 112,000 additional workers up to 2020 to deliver on the targets set out in the Government's €43billion Capital Programme and in meeting the increasing demand from Foreign Direct Investment companies for specialist buildings.

To successfully meet the industry's future demand for labour will require an increase in the number of young people working in the sector, upskilling those on the live register and actively encouraging those who have left the industry to return and take up new job opportunities.

Central to expanding the construction sector's workforce will be the ability to attract young and mature women alike who can bring a dynamism and creativity to the job and forge a lifelong career in the industry. Historically the construction sector has remained male dominated with only 6% of all workers being women. However opportunity now exists to change this work practice with a breadth of exciting careers open to women including engineers, project managers, architects, technicians etc.

The Construction Industry Federation is aware of the low level of female participation in the construction sector and is committed to achieving a more diverse and inclusive workforce that drives innovation as well as attracting and retaining key talent.

In recognition of the need for the sector to be more inclusive, the CIF engaged Accuracy Research to conduct interviews with its members to measure attitudes towards the issue of improving the gender balance and to explore the benefits of including more women in the workforce.

*Central to expanding the construction sector's workforce will be the ability to attract young and mature women*

## 1.2 Research Objectives

More specifically the research focused on a number of core areas, namely to measure:

- The percentage breakdown of men and women in the industry
- The percentage breakdown of men v. women in different roles (i.e. on-site v. off-site) in the workplace
- The roles & positions in which women are employed within the industry
- Attitudes towards the issue of gender balance in the construction industry
- Attitudes towards the shortage of women in the sector and why it persists
- Perceived benefits v. drawbacks of including more women in the sector
- Importance placed on increasing the number of women in the workplace
- Current initiatives in place to recruit women
- Identify any gender inclusive work practices companies are employing in 2018



## Methodology & Sample

### 2.1 Methodology

A two-step methodology was employed for the project.

#### Step 1

Firstly a telephone survey was conducted with 350 construction companies. The sample was drawn from the 2018 Construction Industry Federation's database. The results were subsequently weighted to reflect the entire population of 1,222 companies.

This delivers a margin of error of approximately + or – 4.6% at the 95% confidence level.

#### Step 2

In addition, 12 qualitative one-to-one interviews were conducted with senior personnel within Irish construction companies to enable a deeper exploration of the issues of inclusion and diversity.

In particular, we spoke with 6 employers to ascertain their experiences of recruiting and retaining women in the workforce. We also spoke to 6 senior women working in the sector to get their perspective on what it is like to work in a male dominated environment and the opportunities and barriers experienced in forging a career in the industry.

Each interview built on the insight garnered from the one before to help construct a clear picture of the sector from the employers' and senior female employees' perspective respectively.

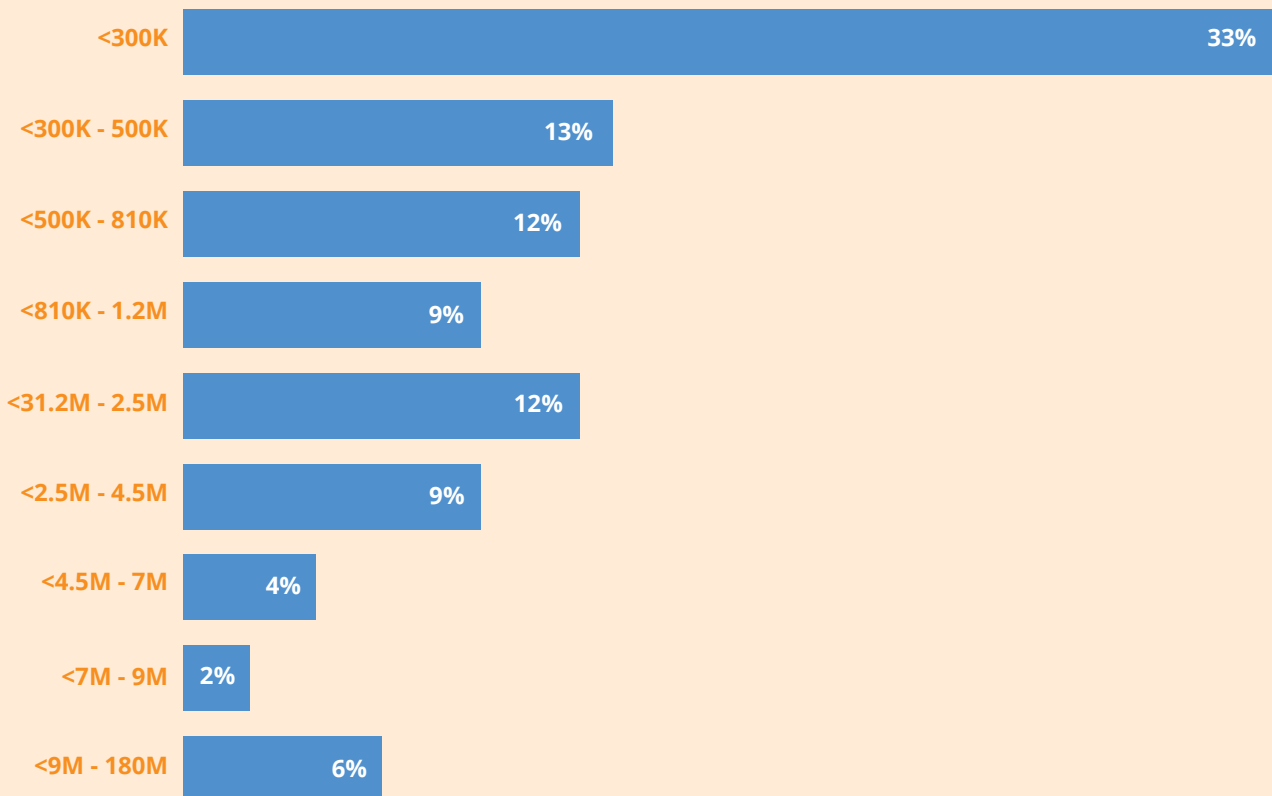
All interviews were conducted between 18th January - 20th February 2018.



## 2.2 Sample

The sample of 350 CIF member interviews is reweighted so that the results can be generalised to the entire population (1,222).

### Sample Breakdown by Company Category



(Base: All Companies: 1,222)

*We also spoke to 6 senior women working in the sector to get their perspective on what it is like to work in a male dominated environment*

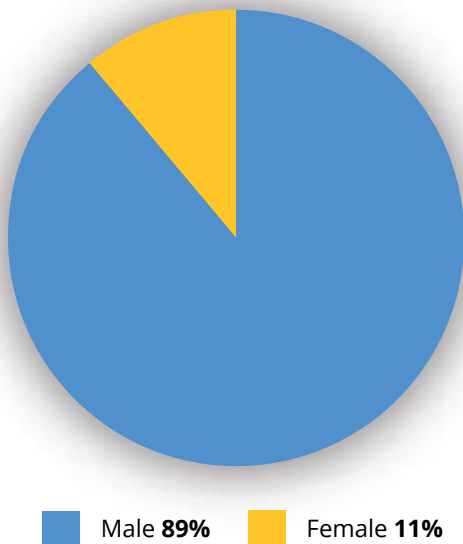
## Key Findings

### 3.1 A male dominated sector

The construction sector continues to be a male dominated sector with the average percentage of men working in the sector estimated at 89% compared to only 11% for women.

#### Breakdown of Male v. Female Staff

*What is the approximate % breakdown between male and female staff employed by you/your company?*



#### 455: Companies with no Female Staff

Total:	37%
<300K	64%
301 - 500K	46%
501 - 810K	42%
810K - 1.2M	20%
1.2M - 2.5M	14%
2.5M - 4.5M	6%
4.5M - 7M	13%
7M - 9M	0%
9M - 180M	3%

*(Base: All Companies: 1,222)*

Furthermore over 1/3 of all construction companies report having no female employees. Smaller construction companies (i.e. turnover below €810K) are notably less likely to have female staff than companies earning in excess of €810K.

The low proportion of women reported to be working in Irish construction companies is consistent with the data from other secondary sources (i.e. CSO etc.).

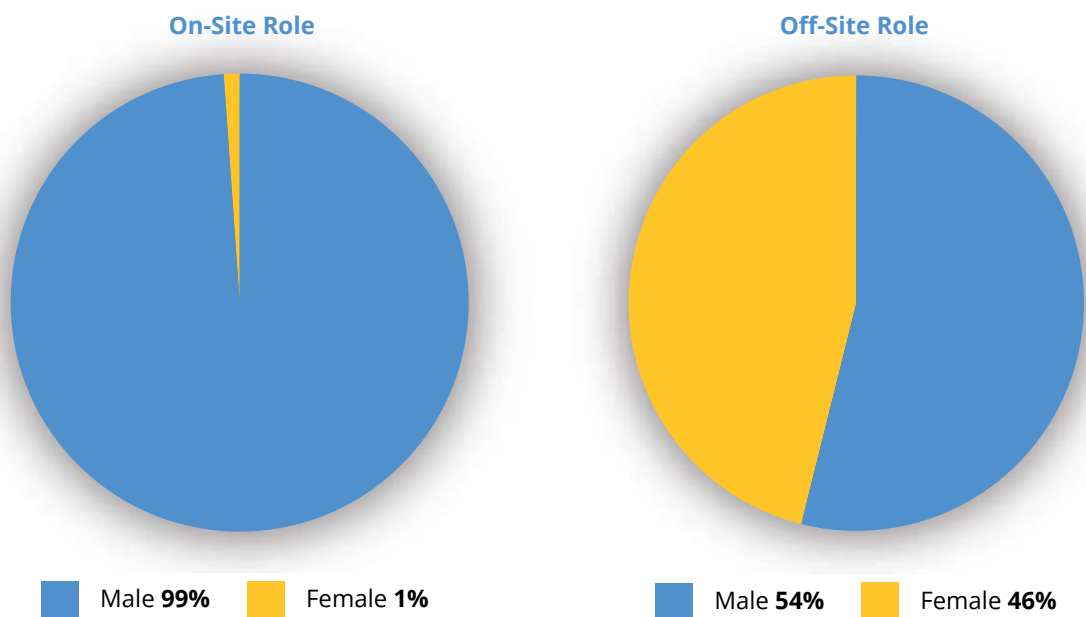
### 3.2 An imbalance in roles & responsibilities

Interestingly when we examine the types of roles and responsibilities both men and women occupy within the sector, a consistent pattern emerges. On-site work (i.e. working on or as part of a construction site team) is very much male dominated with men accounting for 99% of the jobs.

Conversely off-site positions (i.e. working in an office-based role) are more likely to comprise a balance of men (54%) and women (46%).

#### Breakdown of Staff by On-Site v. Off Site

*Now thinking about all of your employees that are working in an on-site / off-site capacity, what is the % breakdown between men and women?*



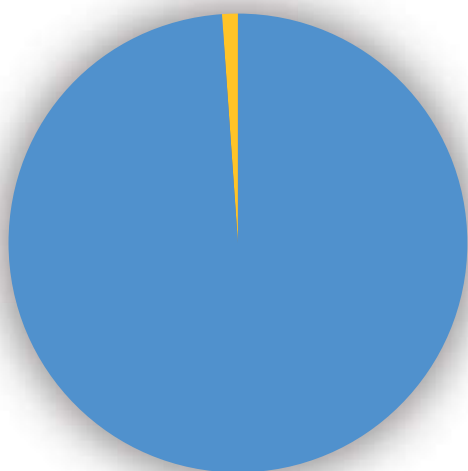
*(Base: All Companies: 1,222)*

When we examine all the companies who are currently employing women as a group (767) again we see that 99% of all female staff are reported to be working in an off-site role. In particular the majority of women (54%) appear to be working in administrative roles, followed by finance (33%), with a small number working in HR (5%) and marketing (5%).



## Where and How are Women Working within the Industry?

Thinking about all of the women you have working in the company as a total = 100%, what is the % breakdown between those working on-site v. off-site?



■ Off-Site **99%**    ■ On-Site **1%**

### Off-Site Roles (764)

HR	5%
Marketing	5%
<b>Finance</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Admin</b>	<b>54%</b>
Other	4%

### On-Site Roles (37)

Health & Safety	13
Engineers	7
General Operatives	10
Site Clerk	3
Cleaner	3
Other	1

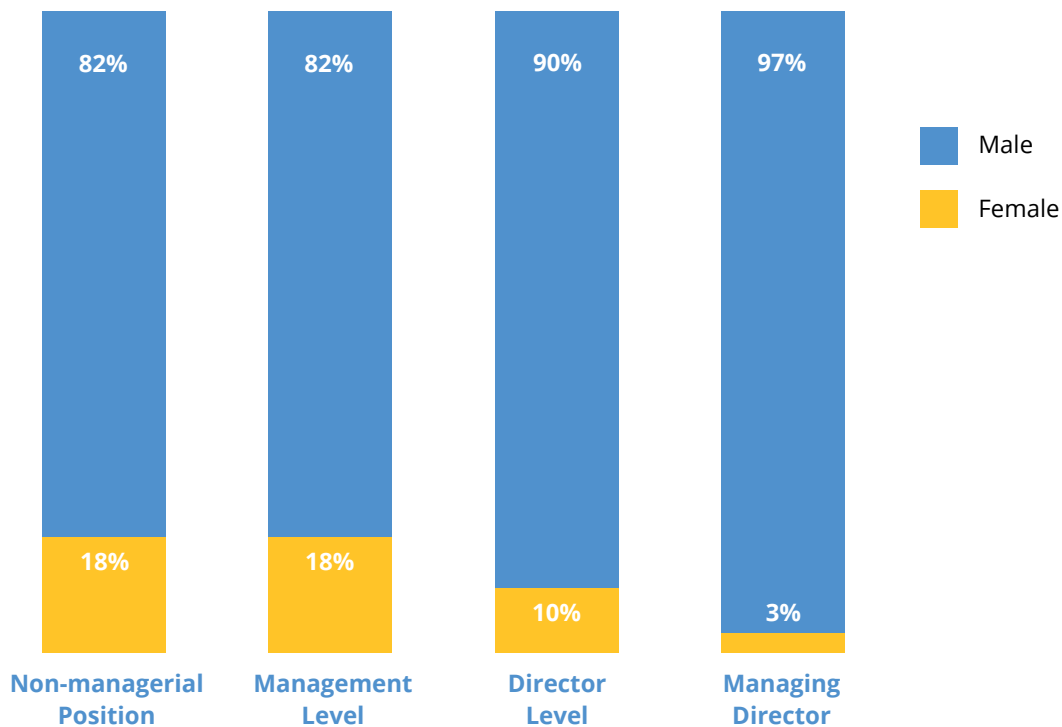
(Base: All Companies: 1,222)

When we explore the small population of women who are working in an on-site role and the individual professions they are engaged in, the majority work in the areas of Health and Safety and as General Operatives. There is a notable shortage of women working as engineers, project managers or technicians.

There is also a notable difference in the level of seniority of women working in the sector with companies estimating that only 10% of senior management (i.e. Directors) and 3% of CEO's are women. This contrasts with the 18% of women reported to be working in non- managerial positions.

### Seniority of Role within the Industry x Gender

What is the % breakdown between men and women working in the following roles within your company?



(Base: All Companies: 1,222)

*There is a notable difference in the level of seniority of women working in the sector with companies estimating that only 10% of senior management and 3% of CEO's are women*

### 3.3 The lack of gender balance - a recognised issue

The shortage of women working in the sector and the need for construction companies to attract a higher number of female staff are well recognised issues.

72% acknowledge that there is a shortage of women in the construction sector. 71% also agree that the sector needs more women and that it would benefit from a higher level of female participation in the industry.

In addition, 65% also report that the construction industry is missing out by failing to attract skilled female graduates. While 60% accept that it is “critical” for the sector that it increases the number of women working in the industry.

#### Attitudes Towards Women in the Sector (1)

*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

There is a shortage women in the Irish construction industry:



The construction sector would benefit from attracting more women to work in the industry:



We need more women working in the construction sector:



Our company provides a “women-friendly” work environment:



There is a lack of female role models in the construction sector:



The construction sector is missing out by failing to attract skilled female graduates:



Our company is good at attracting the and retaining the number if women we need:



It is critical for the Irish construction sector that we increase the number of women working in the sector:



There are less career opportunities for women in the construction sector:



Our industry has been slow to provide a flexible working environment to attract and retain women:



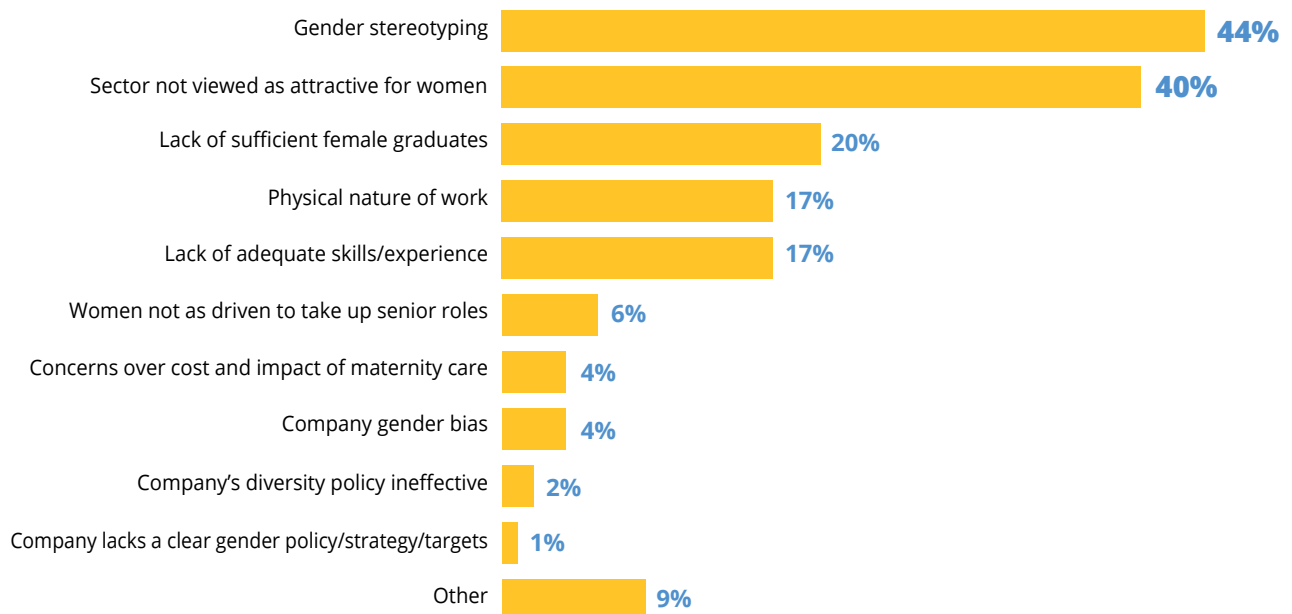
(Base: All Companies: 1,222)

### 3.4 Gender stereotyping & an outdated image

The two primary reasons cited by respondents for the low number of women working in the construction industry were gender stereotyping (44%) and the fact that the sector was viewed to be unattractive (40%) to female candidates.

#### Reasons for Shortage of Women in the Sector

*What are the reasons why there are notably less women than men working in the construction sector?*



#### Other (34)

Poor working conditions	6
Education system	3
Don't know	3
Long hours	2
Family commitments	2
Misc	18

(Base: All Companies: 1,222)

The issue of gender stereotyping can be best explained as a fixed perception that ***“the construction industry is a man’s world and that it is not really a place for women.”*** The interesting point about this stereotype is that it is notably at odds with what the majority of people (including men, women and employers) who work in the industry actually believe.

Coupled with the view that construction is a man’s world is a perception that the industry is not one that appeals to women.

***“I think many women, when they think of the construction industry, think of hard hats, cold weather, dirty building sites and a lot of physical labour. Add to that a perception that it is male oriented and you can see why it may not be viewed as an attractive career for a woman.”***

**(Senior Female Professional)**

A deeper examination of such issues with both employers and women working in the sector uncovered a belief that the public as a whole (including parents, grandparents educators and young and mature women) remain largely unaware of the diverse range of careers and opportunities available within the construction sector.

***“I don’t think the parents and most kids at school, and even the career guidance teachers, have any real understanding of what it is like to work in the industry. How could they? The industry has changed so much in the last 20 years and they have no experience of this.”***

**(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)**

Modern construction methods have shifted away from traditional block work to embrace new technologies and the increased use of metal, glass and panelling etc. Much of the work that was previously conducted on-site has now moved off-site where prefabricated design and building has greatly enhanced project efficiencies.

The modern world of construction is one that includes a breadth of on-site and off-site roles requiring engineers, project managers, quantity surveyors, architects, technicians and designers working together to deliver a project from beginning to end. However employers and senior women in the sector agree that the public at large are not cognisant of this “new” working environment and that the industry needs to actively address this issue.

*Gender stereotyping can be best explained as a fixed perception that “the construction industry is a man’s world and that it is not really a place for women”*

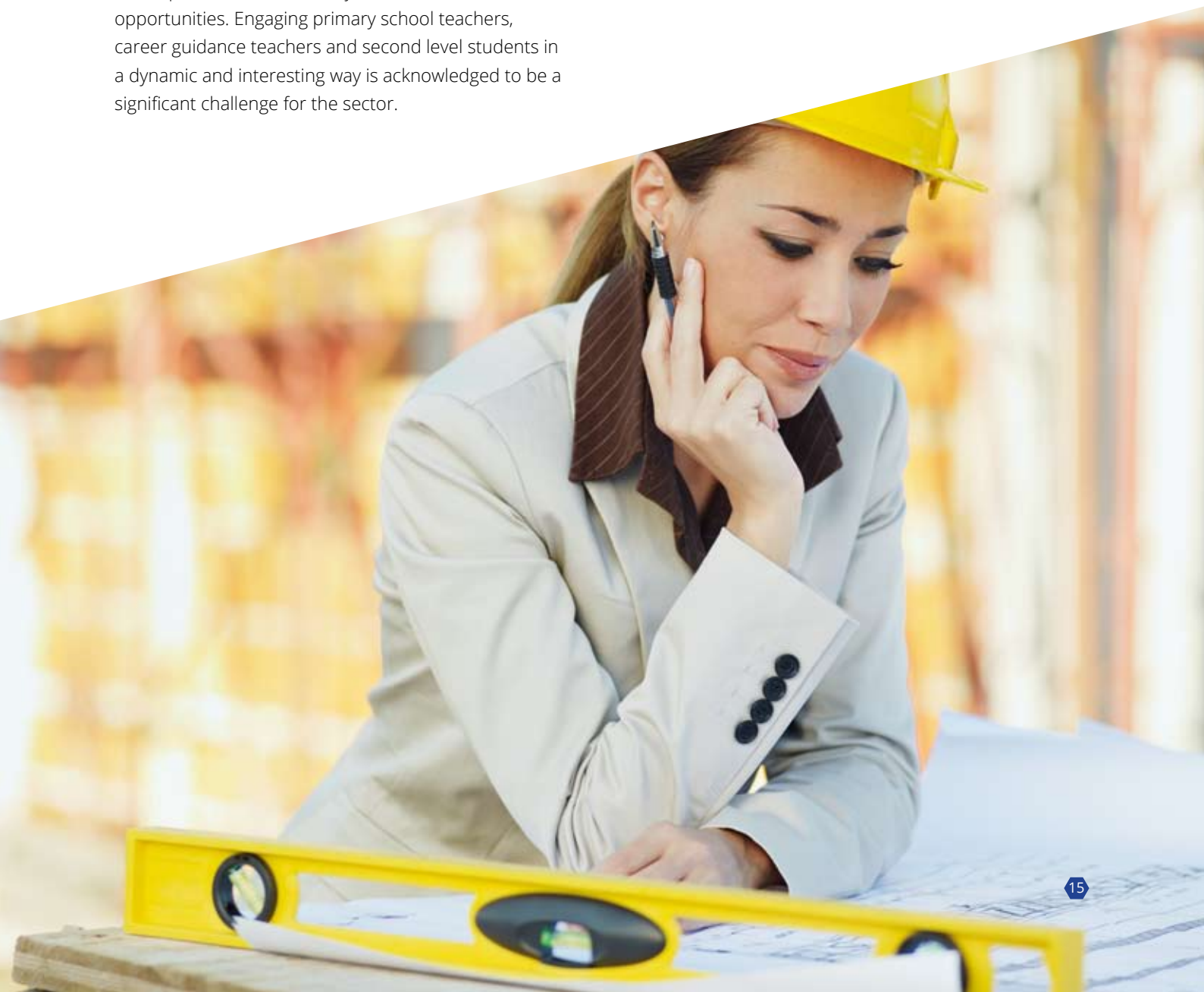
*"I think we as an industry need to be much better at communicating and marketing ourselves as to the broad range of skilled careers available. A lot of the work that goes on now in terms of planning, project management and design is office based. It is a different world now and many of the skills needed can just as easily be done by a woman as a man."*

**(Employer, Large Company)**

The formal education (primary, secondary and third level) environment is recognised to offer critical access points where students can be exposed to new developments in the industry and the breadth of career opportunities. Engaging primary school teachers, career guidance teachers and second level students in a dynamic and interesting way is acknowledged to be a significant challenge for the sector.

*"We really need to be in the schools from primary to second level, really showing young people the types of careers they can have and the range of skills and professions for them to consider. Girls need to be informed that there are plenty of interesting opportunities and avenues open to them in this area."*

**(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)**



The need for the construction industry to engage female students at primary and post-primary level is borne out by the number of young women participating in both STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) and construction related subjects. Although 2017 saw an increase in the number of women taking STEM subjects for the Senior Certificate (43%), the proportion is somewhat skewed by the high number of young women taking higher-level biology (62%) and chemistry (59%). In 2017, only 28% of students sitting higher-level physics were females.

Furthermore, only 10% of those sitting higher-level construction studies were young women, with 6% of students taking higher-level engineering being women. Although the 5 year trend in the percentage of young women sitting higher-level construction studies (+4%) and engineering (+1%) is positive, there is notable room for improvement.

### 3.5 Academia not the only route

Another important theme to emerge from the research was the need for the industry to inform educators, young women and men of the career pathways that exists into the sector outside the academic route. In particular, many trade apprenticeships exist (i.e. electricians, carpenters, plumbers, technicians) for students, for whom third level education proves unsuitable.

Such apprenticeships enable students to learn a skilled trade and provide a route to direct employment or alternatively, serve as an opportunity for further career advancement via additional study (i.e. a qualified electrician going on to study electrical engineering etc.).

According to data provided by SOLAS, the number of young people accessing craft apprenticeships declined dramatically from 2007-2010 owing to the economic downturn. From 2012, the total population of apprenticeship grew from 6,223 to 11,273, a growth of 81%. In particular, many of the construction-related apprenticeships (ie carpentry & joinery, plumbing, wood manufacturing and finishing, mechanics and electrical) have demonstrated strong growth.

Although this increase in apprenticeships is positive, the total number of new registrations in 2017 (4,147) is some 39% below the 2007 (6,763) figure.

Evidence to date also suggests that less than 1% of state apprenticeships are taken up by women. This again points to the significant challenge in encouraging women to view apprenticeships as a viable option in entering and developing a career in the industry.

***“We need to let women know that one size does not fit all and that if the academic route does not work out for whatever reason, there are other ways to forge a career in the sector. This might be doing an apprenticeship in any number of trades which they may then choose to work in or they might decide at a later date to go on to college. Whatever they decide to do, the main thing is that they have options.”***

**(Senior Female Professional)**

*Evidence to date also suggests that less than 1% of state apprenticeships are taken up by women*



### 3.6 The benefits of gender balance

80% of all companies reported that there is a need for the sector to recruit more women.

#### Need for More Women in the Construction Sector

*Do you think that the construction industry sector needs to recruit more women?*



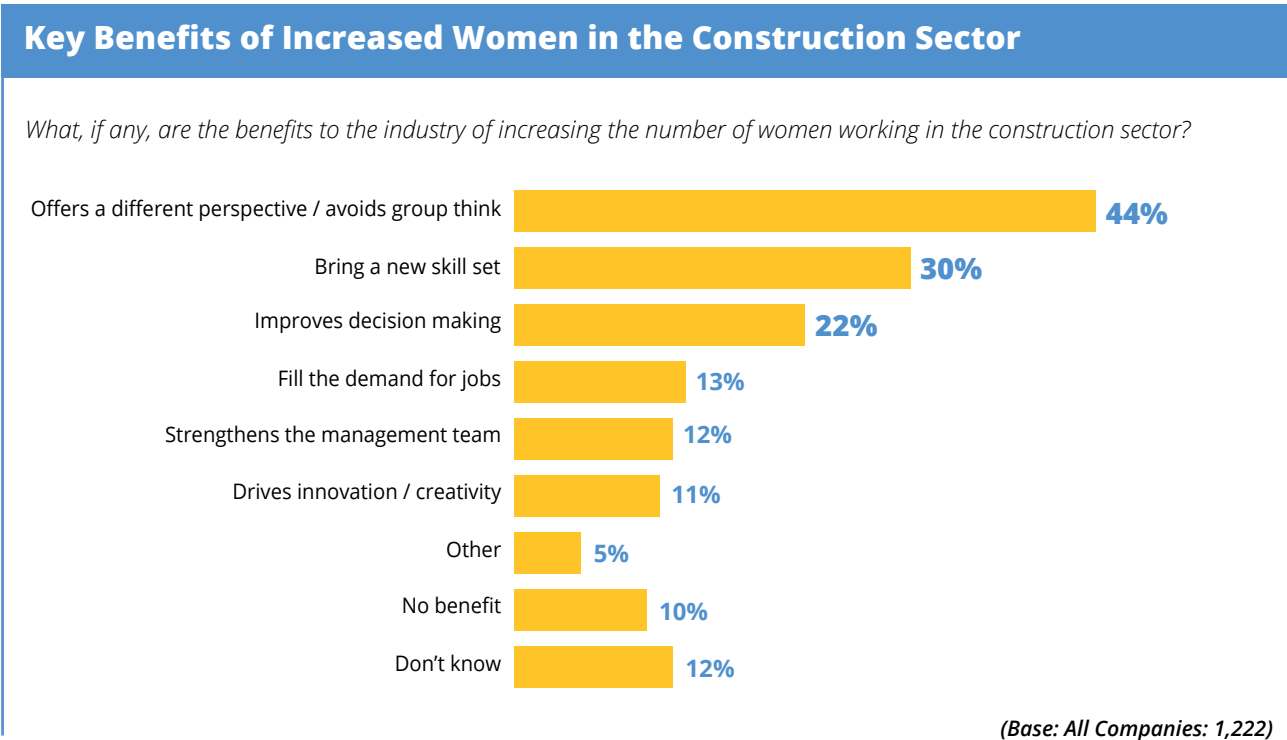
■ Yes **80%** ■ No **20%**

#### Yes 80%: Company Size

<300K	86%
301 - 500K	83%
501 - 810K	58%
810K - 1.2M	77%
1.2M - 2.5M	76%
2.5M - 4.5M	82%
4.5M - 7M	76%
7M - 9M	100%
9M - 180M	89%

*(Base: All Companies: 1,222)*

The key benefits of increasing the number of women in the industry were viewed to be the different perspective they can offer and the ability to avoid group think (44%) followed by a new skillset they bring (30%) and the ability to improve overall decision making (22%).



Exploring the issue of gender balance with employers, all were of the view that the recruitment of new personnel must be based on meritocracy and the ability of the candidate to conduct the job in question. In this way employers do not set out to recruit more of a specific gender but will pick the best candidate on merit.

However, all reported that achieving a better gender balance (i.e. an increase in the number of females currently employed) is positive not only for the industry at large (i.e. provides a larger candidate pool etc.) but also for individual organisations. In addition to their technical skills, women were praised for their emotional intelligence, their flexibility in decision making and problem solving. In many cases women were viewed to be adept managers, employing the appropriate measure of authority and empathy.



The general viewpoint was that improving the gender balance within a company exposes staff to different perspectives, offers a broader outlook which ultimately improves decision making and leads to a more vibrant workplace.

***“I do not believe in choosing a candidate just because she is a woman, but I do believe that having more women in the company benefits everyone. In my experience women make great designers, planners and project managers, they are very methodical and less inclined to shoot from the hip. They can often come at things from a different angle and one that is non-confrontational, it often helps you see things slightly differently and that ultimately leads to more rounded decision making.”***

**(Employer, Large Company)**

These findings are consistent with international research that shows that diversity in the workplace prevents companies from becoming too insular, avoids “groupthink”, challenges the status quo and leads to increased innovation. Furthermore diversity in the workplace is recognised to be important to attract the best talent and retain key staff.

*In addition to their technical skills, women were praised for their emotional intelligence, their flexibility in decision making and problem solving*

### 3.7 How do we get there?

#### 3.7.1 Are gender quotas the answer?

Although the majority of companies in the industry are positive about achieving an improved gender balance, the process of achieving this objective is more complex.

85% of all respondents were not in favour of their company setting specific targets in relation to the balance of men and women employed. Furthermore only 23% believe that it is an important work practice to set gender recruitment targets for the company in 2018.

#### Setting of Company Targets

*Do you think that your company should set specific targets in relation to the balance of men and women employed?*



**No 85%**      **Yes 15%**

##### Yes 15%: Company Size

<300K	23%
301 - 500K	11%
501 - 810K	4%
810K - 1.2M	17%
1.2M - 2.5M	7%
2.5M - 4.5M	16%
4.5M - 7M	12%
7M - 9M	8%
9M - 180M	14%

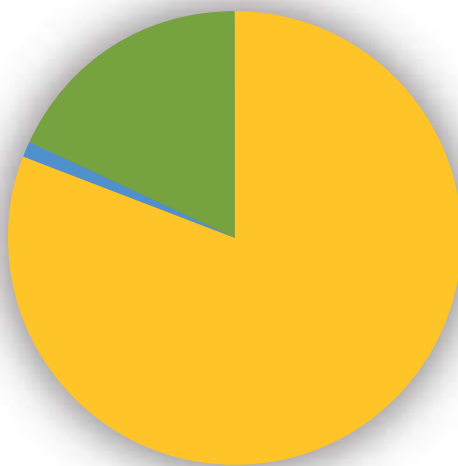
*(Base: All Companies: 1,222)*

The low level of support for company gender recruitment targets is evident in the fact that only 1% of all companies reported setting gender targets for 2018. Interestingly almost all employers and senior women working in the industry were negatively predisposed towards such an initiative.

## Has your Company set Specific Targets for the Number of Women Recruits for 2018

Has your company set specific targets with regard to the % breakdown of women v. men it is seeking to recruit in 2018?

Specific Recruitment Targets  
of Men v. Women



Yes **1%**    No **81%**  
Not recruiting **18%**

Will you be measuring the company's  
performance against the recruitment target?

Yes	100%
No	0%

(Base: All Companies: 1,222)

Employers were of the view that the introduction of quotas would encourage companies to employ women on the grounds of gender alone over their technical ability etc. They also reported that such an initiative had the potential to create staff disharmony and give rise to a potential questioning of the ability and competencies of female staff.

*"I would be dead set against introducing gender quotas. You cannot simply employ someone because of their gender and turn away a potentially excellent candidate because they do not fit your quotas. It could very easily have a destabilising effect on the work environment and on how women are viewed in the workplace."*

(Employer, Mid-Sized Company)

*"I 100% believe this would be the wrong way to go and it is taking things too far. If we are looking to attract more women into the sector they need to be there on merit. What we need is equal opportunity for men and women but the individual must be right for the role."*

(Senior Female Professional)



### 3.7.2 It's more an industry problem

An interesting point to emerge from the research was the distinction many companies made between their behaviour and that of the broader industry regarding the issue of gender inclusiveness.

65% of companies report that the construction sector is missing out by failing to attract skilled female graduates. Similarly 59% perceive the industry to be poor at recruiting senior experienced women from outside the sector. Yet 62% believe that their company is good at attracting and retaining the number of women they need.

No doubt part of being a modern inclusive employer is to provide a flexible working environment that matches the needs of women and men alike.

Yet again, 60% of companies acknowledged that the industry has been slow to provide a flexible working environment to attract and retain women. While 52% report that their industry is poor at assisting women who have taken a career break to return to work. However, 71% believe their company provides a “women friendly” work environment.

Perhaps the best example of this pattern of behaviour is evident in the fact that although 71% of companies acknowledge that the industry needs, and would benefit from, more women working in the sector only 23% are actively seeking to recruit more women.

Furthermore, only 30% believe their company needs to achieve an improved gender balance.

*Part of being a modern inclusive employer is to provide a flexible working environment that matches the needs of women and men alike*

## Attitudes Towards Women in the Sector (2)

*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements*

Our industry is poor at recruiting senior experienced women from outside the sector:



There is a lack of mentoring programmes to assist women to progress to senior positions in the industry:



Our industry is poor at assisting women who have taken a career break to return to work:



It is more difficult for a woman to reach a senior position in the construction sector:



Women leave the construction sector due to a lack of gender balance:



Our industry has been slow to provide a flexible working environment to attract and retain men:



Our company needs to achieve an improved gender balance:



Our company has made achieving a better gender balance a priority issue in 2018:



Our company is actively seeking to recruit more women:



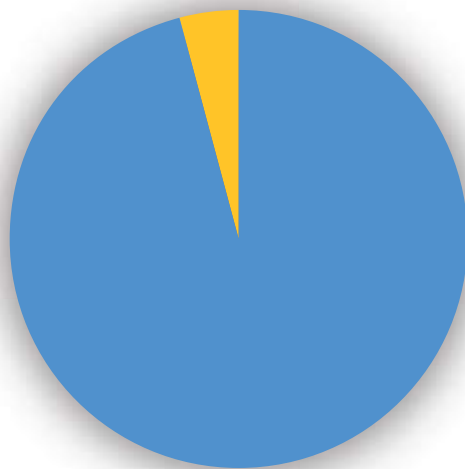
*(Base: All Companies: 1,222)*

The majority of companies have not prioritised the issue of gender diversity, with only 26% setting an improved gender balance as a key objective for 2018.

Further evidence that gender inclusiveness is not a primary concern for construction companies can be found in the fact that only 4% report having a strategy to increase female participation in their company in the next 3-5 years, while only 5% have a formal policy on gender balance.

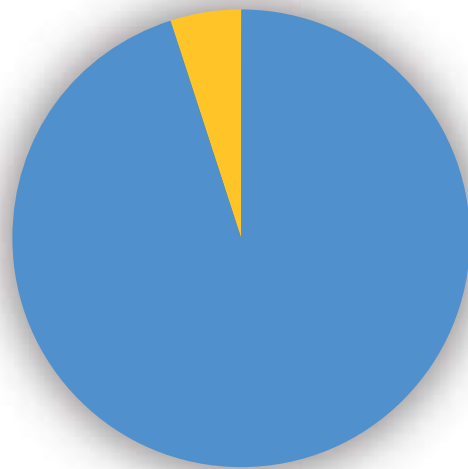
## Company Strategy & Policy to Increase the Number of Women

*Does your company have a strategy to try and increase the number of women working in your company in the next 3-5 years?*



■ No **96%**    ■ Yes **4%**

*Does your company have a formal policy on gender balance?*

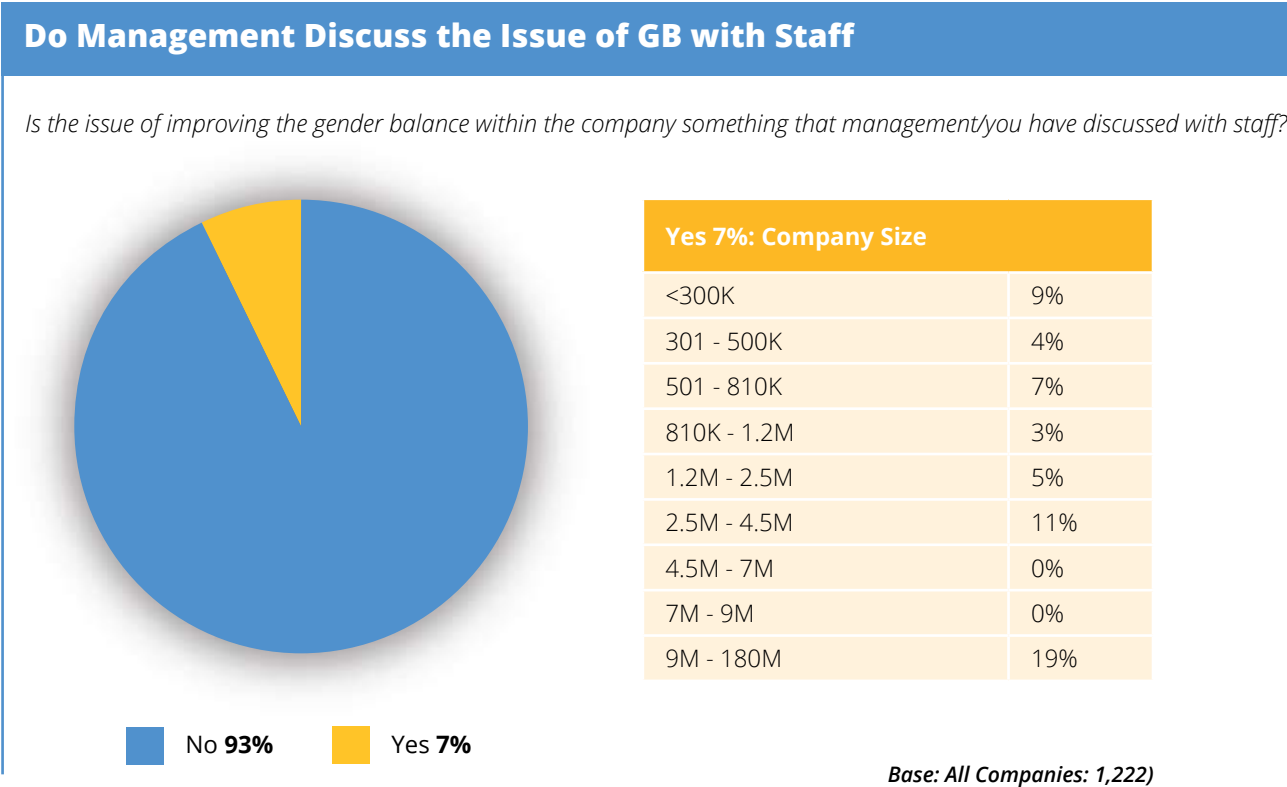


■ No **95%**    ■ Yes **5%**

*Base: All Companies: 1,222)*



In addition, it appears that the subject of gender inclusion is not something that is openly discussed in many companies, with only 7% reporting having raised the issue with staff. Interestingly, the subject of gender balance is one that is more likely to be considered in larger organisations (9M-180M), where approximately 1 in 5 has discussed the issue with employees.



3.7.3 Where do we start?

Although companies recognise there is a shortage of women in the industry, there is a danger that it can be perceived as a sectoral issue only with individual companies failing to implement company specific initiatives to tackle the problem.

It is well recognised that significant sectoral issues exist that have limited the number of women entering the industry, namely:

- Gender stereotyping
- The outdated image of the industry
- The low number of women choosing construction and STEM subjects at 2nd level
- The low number of women entering craft apprenticeships

Notwithstanding that each of the above issues needs to be addressed, the challenge also is for companies to recognise the small but significant steps they can implement to improve gender inclusiveness and increase the diversity of talent available to their organisation.

It appears that for many, adopting gender quotas is a step too far and it may also be that the majority view the introduction of a formal policy on gender balance as too rigid an approach to address the issue.

Hence, a good starting point is to examine the company work practices that respondents in the survey acknowledged to be most important to promote a gender balance in the industry. In addition, companies also reported those work practices they are currently undertaking in 2018 thus highlighting those areas where opportunities exist for quick wins etc.

Adopting a gender inclusive recruitment policy was viewed to be the most important (91%) work practice, followed by the use of gender neutral job advertisements (90%). Implementing both initiatives would seem a good starting point for all construction companies.

85% reported the importance of introducing female role models to act as advisors for young women considering entering the sector, yet to date only 4% have done so. This points to a notable opportunity to engage with experienced women in the industry to act as ambassadors.

## Important Work Practices for the Sector

*Which of the following work practices do you view to be important and are currently undertaking to promote a gender balance in the construction industry?*

Work Practices	Important	Currently Undertaking
Adopt a gender inclusive recruitment policy	91%	61%
Gender neutral job advertisements	90%	63%
Female role models from the industry to speak to potential female candidates	85%	4%
Interview panels with a mix of men and women	80%	27%
Training on gender bias for all staff involved in recruitment	80%	13%
Mentoring Programme to assist women to progress senior positions	78%	4%
Commitment to diversity on company website	71%	16%
Mandatory gender quotas for interview shortlists	61%	4%
Specific recruitment targets for number of women seeking to recruit in 2018	<b>23%</b>	3%
Recruitment target for number of senior experienced women in 2018	<b>23%</b>	2%

*Base: All Companies: 1,222)*

Other practical work practices that are recognised to be important but which very few companies have undertaken to date include:

- Ensuring that all interview panels include a mix of men and women
- Training on unconscious gender bias for all staff involved in recruitment
- Mentoring programme to assist women to progress to senior positions
- Articulating the company's commitment to diversity on the website

All of the above initiatives could be considered with companies choosing to implement any number within a relatively short time period.

## Conclusions

- The construction sector continues to be male dominated with the average percentage breakdown of men to women estimated at 89% and 11% respectively
- Men (i.e. 97%: Managing Director/CEO) continue to occupy the more senior roles within the industry and also account for 99% of on-site positions
- The lack of gender balance is a recognised issue in the industry with 72% acknowledging a shortage of women in the sector and 65% agreeing that the industry is missing out by failing to attract female graduates
- The low number of women within the industry is viewed to be a product of gender stereotyping (i.e. construction is male oriented and unsuitable for women), a view that pervades all levels of society including primary and second level education
- The gender stereotype coupled with an outdated image of the industry appears to contribute to the low number of women taking construction subjects at second level and entering into apprenticeships
- There is broad agreement that there is a need for an improved gender balance within the sector. In addition to their technical skills, women were praised for their flexibility in decision making and problem solving skills

Furthermore it is widely recognised that improving the gender balance within a company, encourages a more vibrant workplace, exposes staff to different voices which improves decision making.

- The issue therefore appears less to be about whether gender diversity is a positive development and more about what is the best way to achieve this aim
- In the main, companies are negatively predisposed towards gender quotas. 85% were not in favour of their company setting gender targets with only 1% of all companies reporting having set gender targets for 2018

The primary argument against setting quotas reported by men and women alike is that it threatens the ethos and values of meritocracy.

- It would appear that, consistent with their dislike of gender quotas, many companies disapprove of the idea of having a formal policy on gender balance with only 5% reporting same
- Given the shortage of female construction graduates and the very low number of women entering into apprenticeships, there is a danger that the issue of gender diversity can be viewed as a sectoral issue only and outside companies' locus of control
- Yet this research clearly identifies a range of important practical steps that companies can employ to be more inclusive, helping them to attract and retain key talent



*The gender stereotype coupled with an outdated image of the industry appears to contribute to the low number of women taking construction subjects at second level and entering into apprenticeships*



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