



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Department of Engineering

CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Are we bridging the gender gap? Retention, career progression and gender in the UK construction industry

The underrepresentation of women within the UK construction industry has been under scrutiny for decades. With the support of government and charitable organisations, the industry has been striving to close the gender gap by attracting more girls into engineering subjects. Once the work has been done to attract women into the industry, it is then down to individual organisations to retain, develop and progress them to achieve better gender representation at all levels.

This research assesses the extent to which the construction industry has achieved increased gender representation and aims to extract lessons learnt from gender diversity efforts. Initiatives to attract women to the industry are widespread, however there is a lack of knowledge in the areas of retention and career progression. To explore these areas, I used semi-structured interviews to investigate how organisations have approached gender diversity and what strategies were found to be successful. I also carried out a survey of industry staff to gather employee views on diversity initiatives, organisational culture and commitment. Findings suggest that efforts have indeed been focused on attraction and early careers recruitment whilst working practices and culture have remained largely unaddressed. Many of the barriers to women's retention and career progression therefore remain in place. There has been a renewed drive in recent years, as diversity initiatives move away from a gender-specific focus towards broader diversity characteristics. As a result, organisations appear to be initiating changes to working practices which could begin to bridge the gender gap.

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