

Constructing the Future

Providing an Industry of Opportunity for Generation Z



**CONSTRUCTING
EXCELLENCE**
South West



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Constructing Excellence South West (CESW) supports and stands up for construction in the south west region of the UK.

CESW is a not-for-profit, self-funding think tank and best practice organisation charged with improving the performance of the UK construction industry for the benefit of its clients and all stakeholders. A platform for industry improvement to deliver better value for clients and industry users through collaborative working – Excellence through Collaboration.

CESW is the single organisation charged with driving the change agenda in construction within the south west region, and we form part of the Constructing Excellence Regional Partnership (CERP). We exist to improve industry performance in order to produce a better built environment. We are a cross-sector, cross-supply chain, member-led organisation operating for the good of industry and its stakeholders.

As champions and challengers, Constructing Excellence speaks to government with one voice on behalf of the whole sector, increasing the impact of our messages and achieving the required results for our members and the industry at large.

The Generation for Change South West (G4CSW) is a sub-group of CESW. It is the professional voice of young people in the UK built environment industry. The G4CSW's agenda is to drive change in the industry through the development and connection of future leaders. It is particularly focused on encouraging school leavers to consider a career in the construction and engineering industry and will be the driving force for implementing the recommendations contained in this report.



The construction sector has a huge influence on people's lives. We build their homes and the roads and railways they use to travel. We build the power stations that provide their electricity, the ports and airports they use for holidays.

Our industry shapes people's lives every second of every day – but perversely, is not considered by many as a career.

Which got us thinking – why don't people want to get involved in an industry with such far-reaching and exciting outputs?

Construction has an ageing workforce with almost half of personnel aged between 45 and 65. We have full order books – yet limited new recruits. We need to evolve as an industry with new skills, ideas and ways of working. We need to make construction relevant, exciting and appealing.

As we emerge from the Covid crisis, we have the opportunity of a lifetime to revolutionise the way our industry is portrayed, performs, and is resourced. But we need to do this quickly as the window of opportunity is limited.

We hope this report provides the information and inspiration needed to get the revolution underway.

Andrew Goodenough
Chair of Constructing Excellence
South West and Infrastructure Director,
Bristol Airport

The construction sector is vital to the nation's economy, employing over 2.6 million people and contributing £124 billion gross value added to UK plc. Without an effective and thriving construction industry, all other business sectors will diminish; from independent coffee shops to large infrastructure projects, retailers and manufacturers, as well as essential services such as utilities, waste and recycling.

However, as we all know, the industry is facing a serious recruitment problem. As the older generations retire, labour shortages becoming acute, made worse by the disruption and uncertainty caused by Covid and Brexit.

It's essential to welcome new blood into the industry. That means attracting the young people of Generation Z – but so far it has proved a struggle to interest enough of them to fill the vacancies and bring the ambition, drive and fresh attitudes the industry needs to thrive.

So how can we inspire youngsters to be part of the delivery of our sustainable future? Many schemes and initiatives are underway to educate children and young people in the realities of the industry and encourage them to consider a construction career. However, impressive and beneficial as many of these are, it is not enough. Both here in the south west and in the country as a whole, we need to do more.

This report examines the issues surrounding the recruitment of the next generation of construction employees. It looks at the attitudes and perceptions that influence career decisions, the barriers that discourage young applicants and those from minority groups, and the difficulties in disseminating accurate information and positive messages. It looks at the schemes currently in operation and discusses ideas for more effective, targeted and creative approaches that will resonate with young people as they plan their futures.

Finally, it provides a set of recommendations for further action to promote the recruitment of young people into the construction industry.

2.6 million
employed

£124 billion
gross value

Vital
industry

The construction industry is the lifeblood of the nation's economy and has a huge impact on people's lives. It is also at the forefront of the battle to mitigate climate change.

Yet the industry is being held back by a labour shortage that has been worsening for years – and following the twin disruptors of Covid and Brexit, has become critical.

The industry needs to attract more recruits from among the school leavers and graduates of Generation Z.

These young people, born between 1997 and 2012, represent the pool of talent needed to propel the industry into a post-COP26 world. However, few are registering interest in construction as a career. Many are more attracted to jobs in areas such as sales, health and social care, business, public service, media, and technical occupations.

Part of the problem is negative perceptions of the industry.

Unpleasant working conditions, a traditionally macho culture and assumed poor pay are discouraging many young people, particularly women and those from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Prejudice against trade-oriented careers lingers. Young people do not know enough about the modern industry to make an informed judgment about its value as a career.

At the same time, the industry is not helping itself by allowing poor working conditions, prejudice and bigotry, and negative behaviour to blight its sites and workplaces.

While many schemes and initiatives exist, both nationally and in the south west, that reach out to young people, these tend to be piecemeal, creating isolated pockets of excellence.

The industry needs to think more strategically in its efforts to market its strengths to young people, teachers, careers advisors and parents, correcting misconceptions and highlighting the many opportunities available in the built environment sector.

The industry also needs to get its own house in order, correcting the negative conditions and behaviours that rightly repel young people, women, people of colour and other minority groups.

Labour shortage

Covid disruption

Brexit disruption

Negative perceptions

Positives hidden

Improve conditions

To a tech-savvy generation interested in the environment and activism, concerned with the future, and doing good, the construction industry offers a wide range of rewarding, well-paid careers, many of which utilise state-of-the-art technology. The popularity of social media platforms such as YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok offers an excellent opportunity to channel this message directly to potential Gen Z recruits.

Positive action should include engaging with educational institutions, mounting creative marketing and recruitment campaigns, and working as one industry to develop career pathways that ease young people from education and training into construction careers.

In the south west, several 'next steps' have been identified by Constructing Excellence South West (CESW) to advance this agenda. Action on these recommendations will be led by the Generation for Change South West (G4CSW), a sub-group of CESW, with the backing of the CESW board.

Recommendations include:

Determine an exact brief that G4CSW can take and use as a mission guide to deliver the changes recommended in the report.

Identify and make better use of existing resources, i.e. analyse existing schemes and establish best practice (what works); double check what CESW members are doing, what can be learnt from it and what can be shared; support G4CSW so that it can liaise with industry representative bodies and groups already pursuing initiatives.

Facilitate a roundtable meeting for members to discuss ideas and make plans for what can be done – agree/identify key stakeholders and delivery partners and liaise with them to find out how we can support work they are already doing or plan to do.

Establish an industry memorandum of understanding to make construction more inclusive in terms of gender, disability and race. There must be a commitment by the industry and an acknowledgement that it needs to clean up its act.

Work with schools and building companies to encourage engagement in order to educate children on the positives of the industry, such as potential earnings, career paths, teamwork and so on. Create material that establishes construction as a curricular item to provide learning support materials.

Devise and implement a marketing campaign – leaning heavily towards advertising through all relevant channels – that reaches out to the target audience and creates simple, clear messages or straplines that engage people both inside and outside the industry.



Labour and skills shortages have afflicted the construction industry for years, not just in the south west but across the whole country. However, the situation has become acute following both the Covid pandemic and Brexit. A survey by specialist recruitment agency Randstad found that the number of construction vacancies rose by 39 per cent in the first half of 2021 in comparison to 2020, while the number of applications dropped by 23 per cent.



This is supported by data from the Office for National Statistics, which reported that job vacancies in the UK construction industry between April and June this year reached the second highest level in two decades, surpassed only by the number of vacancies between March and May.

The jury is out on what, exactly, has caused this. Statistics for this period are likely to be skewed by a number of factors, such as the number of workers on furlough, the surge in demand for workers following the lockdown, the departure of EU workers as a result of Brexit and larger numbers of young people staying on in education.

But these issues have only highlighted the ongoing problem that construction is chasing a limited pool of talent in competition with many other sectors. Gen Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) represent the biggest generation yet, with around 1.3 billion of them expected to join the global workforce over the next 10 years. But how many will choose construction?

A recent monthly wages and salaries survey by the Office for National Statistics (below) shows that salaries in construction are in the higher bracket among a range of other sectors.

These figures from November 2021 are not seasonally adjusted and show average earnings from January until September 2021.

Sector	Average weekly earnings
Finance and Business Services	£770
Construction	£664
Manufacturing	£636
Public Sector	£582
Whole Economy	£578
Public Sector excluding Financial Services	£578
Private Sector	£577
Services	£566
Wholesaling, Retailing, Hotels and Restaurants	£380

EARN02 Average Weekly Earnings, Jan 2021 – Sept 2021 by Sector ONS, 16 November 2021.

“We need to change perceptions of our industry. For too many people, the construction sector is still a macho world with long working hours, which brings to mind muddy boots and unpleasant working conditions. If we are to build a sustainable pipeline of young, diverse talent clamouring to join our industry, we are going to have to change that perception.”

This quote by Mark Castle, Chair of Build UK, summarises much of what is wrong with the public image of the construction industry.

Traditional attitudes persist, with little acknowledgment that construction is one of the most vibrant, forward-looking industries, at the forefront of the battle to mitigate climate change, with a huge range of careers on offer.

Gen Z

Every sector of the economy is keen to recruit from the rich pool of Gen Z graduates and school leavers over the next decade. Given so much competition, employers need to understand the motivations, interests and priorities of this group of young people.

Gen Z is not only numerically dominant in comparison to millennials, it is more highly educated, more diverse, and more interested in making a difference in the world than making money. It cares about the environment, activism and racial justice.

Gen Z has been badly impacted by the pandemic. Their education has been disrupted, prolonging their time in full-time education and postponing the entry of many to the workforce. The lockdown may have limited their exposure to careers counselling and opportunities to attend careers fairs and similar events, restricting their knowledge of the range of careers available – including construction.

Lacking input from those actually involved in and knowledgeable about the built environment, many will be guided by the advice and perceptions of their parents and inaccurate cultural assumptions, such as that trade-oriented jobs lack a future and do not pay well. Attracted by industries that appear more progressive, dynamic and exciting, they may not appreciate that innovation and cutting-edge technology play a vital role in the modern construction industry.

Gen Z, and many generations before them, are not motivated by the current imagery offered by the industry. So, similarly to the armed forces, we need to be moving towards the sense of belonging as part of a team – delivering a lasting and tangible legacy that the industry provides – to be more successful.

This suggests that reaching out to young people in order to correct misconceptions and present a positive, inspiring view of the industry is a top priority.

Women

Research shows that many potential female recruits are put off by factors such as worksite sanitation, poor work-life balance, sexism and gender bias. In early 2021 surveys show that women make up around 14% of construction industry professionals; a survey by Randstad in 2020 showed that, of 4,200 women working in construction surveyed, nearly three-quarters (72%) had experienced some form of gender discrimination in the workplace; and the GMB commented in 2019 that it might take 200-years to see equality in the industry. There is no doubt that construction is a male-dominated industry, although the proportion of women is growing thanks to the efforts of organisations such as Women in Property.

Black and Asian minority ethnic (BAME) groups

According to government data, only six per cent of the 2.3 million people employed in UK construction are from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. Reasons for BAME workers to be put off include prejudice and a culture that in spite of efforts to improve diversity and inclusivity is still white-male dominated.

‘Banter’, for example, remains an issue. A survey published by the CITB found that racist language is still heard frequently on construction sites in the UK. More than half (53 per cent) of workers had heard some form of racist language within the previous year, with 14 per cent hearing it within the past seven days.

Perceptions

There are numerous schemes and initiatives, both national and local, aimed at encouraging young people to take up careers in construction (see Appendix 1). These range from outreach projects with schools to roadshows, site visits and inspirational videos. Many are beneficial, have produced good results, and provide useful lessons for future projects. However, such efforts tend to be piecemeal and overall, their messages are not reaching a wide enough audience to have a real effect.

What are the key messages we need to send to Gen Z?

Attention

Changing perceptions

First and foremost, we need to change negative perceptions of the construction industry, which have tended to be reinforced by popular drama. The typical view of a building site as a muddy quagmire inhabited by macho men interested only in bunking off, swearing and wolf whistling at women should be challenged, replaced with images of industrious, skilled people working in a range of responsible and rewarding jobs.

We need to create a sense of excitement. The modern construction industry is vibrant and going places. We need to make more noise about the opportunities and challenges ahead, many of which should resonate with Gen Z.

For example, we need to showcase the industry's use of sophisticated technology, from imaging drones to mobile data platforms and digital twins. To a generation that lives and breathes technology, it should be an exciting prospect to work with new and forthcoming techniques such as 3D printing, augmented reality, exoskeletons and hydrogen-driven JCBs.

Gen Z is concerned about climate change and the environment and wants to see real action. Construction and the built environment are responsible for a shocking 40% of global carbon emissions and that means when it comes to achieving a net zero future, building matters.

Construction is a chance to make a real difference. Are they aware of the vital role of construction in mitigating climate change through technology, design and sustainable practices? If not, they should be.

Finally, we need to emphasise that careers in construction are diverse and well paid, with plenty of opportunity for career development. How many young people know, for example, that the average construction industry salary is around 15 per cent higher than the average full-time UK salary? This is a fact that would certainly interest parents – if they knew.

Workplaces fit for the future

At the same time, the industry needs to get its own house in order, ensuring that its workplaces and working conditions are in line with Gen Z expectations. Building sites by definition are messy places, but they should be safe, well organised and inclusive, with negative behaviour and attitudes treated as unacceptable.

Positive action to tackle barriers is essential to attract more women and minority groups. For example, recruiters and interviewers should routinely undergo fair recruitment training to eliminate bias. Blind CVs, which omit personal details that identify gender and ethnicity, can be a useful way to circumvent prejudice.

Employment packages need to align with the aspirations and expectations of young applicants. Gen Z is more likely than previous generations to value benefits above salary – particularly those that assist with their finances.

According to a 2018 survey by Perkbox, over a third (36%) of Gen Z respondents said employee benefits influence their decision to accept a job. The most valued benefits are: paid holiday on birthday; free coffee and hot drinks; flexible hours; free lunches; and private healthcare.

Z

Engaging with local schools

Many successful initiatives are built around mutually beneficial partnerships between the construction industry and local educational institutions. However, such schemes tend to be opportunistic and limited in scope, not part of a strategic plan.

Given that schools, colleges and universities are the source of our future workforce, the industry needs to make a more concerted effort to establish such links. Collaboration can be fruitful; employers gain a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of construction and their own companies among potential future recruits, while students are alerted to career possibilities they may not otherwise have considered.

We could also encourage schools to be more ambitious in arranging trips, taking pupils to view impressive buildings and feats of engineering that might inspire them to become part of the process that creates such outcomes.

Creative campaigns

The construction industry needs to change perceptions among young people on a wide scale. That means finding compelling ways to connect with young audiences, in a way that grabs attention and spreads the word.

Gen Z spends much of its life online and responds naturally to visual and digital content. This suggests campaigns based on popular social media platforms, such as YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok, are most likely to reach the target audience.

This is not a new idea. Social media, particularly videos on YouTube, is already being exploited by recruitment initiatives. But there is the potential to be more creative and (as far as Gen Z is concerned) relevant.



The CITB's new Future Made campaign, for example, aims to change perceptions through influencers posting content on their platforms to show young audiences their adventures in bricklaying, roofing, painting and decorating and more. Day-in-the-life videos of inspirational young bricklayers, carpenters, painters and decorators will also be promoted to young people on their favourite social media.

Another CITB initiative, Go Construct, can be followed on several platforms including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Participants are encouraged to use these channels to directly share photos, videos, stories and experiences. IGTV, a popular app for smartphones, allows longer videos to be shared and has great potential for similar campaigns. With so much fake news and 'clickbait' around competing for attention, schemes based on sharing via social media need to ensure that content is fresh and authentic. Involving an influencer – a personality with the power to grab attention and influence people's thinking – would be hugely beneficial.

Campaign planners could also learn from the British Army's 2019 Snowflake campaign, which boosted the number of recruits by turning negative stereotypes about millennials ('selfie-addicts', 'binge gamers') into positives – strengths desirable to the army. Young people felt that the army saw them and could provide a place for them.

Developing career pathways

A commonly heard complaint is that there are not enough links between school, further education, training and jobs. The disconnect may partly explain the high dropout rate.

Apprenticeships have become a viable option for those interested in a more vocational route, particularly since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 which has made it easier for businesses to hire apprentices.

But there is a lack of clearly defined pathways guiding young people seamlessly from education into a construction career. As an industry we need to develop options that suit everyone, from school leavers to graduates – there is plenty of room for all of them. This would appear to be an area ripe for collaboration between construction and educational stakeholders.

An excellent example of this is the Inspire Education Programme, run by EDF Energy in Somerset in collaboration with STEMworks (see Appendix 1). The programme aimed to prepare young people for the job opportunities expected to arrive with the construction and operation of the new Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. In particular the goal was to inspire young people to study STEM and associated subjects, raising awareness and aspirations, and create a pipeline from education to skills and future long-term employment.



Highlighting success stories

Our G4C board in Appendix 2 is made up of people who never intended to get into construction. However, they fell into it as a career and now love it!

It was not the career of choice for them, but they are excellent examples of why we need to remove chance and make construction an attractive choice.



Based on the findings in this report, the following recommendations are made for further action to promote the recruitment of young people into the construction industry. Generation for Change South West (G4CSW) will take the lead in implementing these recommendations with the backing of the CESW board.



Construction is seen by many people as a stopgap. It is rarely seen as a career choice. Even in families or schools and colleges where individuals are recommended to 'choose a trade', it is often regarded as a last-ditch choice when other options have been ruled out.

Career choice

The truth is that construction is a rewarding profession.

Construction is society's great enabling force. Superior design, engineering, building and facilities management bring communities together, create dynamic working environments, improve the quality of life and underpin our environment.

Of course, we know that. But Gen Z, the source of our future workforce, does not.

We as an industry have to do a much better job at selling that vision.

We have to work collaboratively to promote construction as a career, all the way from building sites to the boardroom. We need to ensure it is a choice championed by parents, teachers, careers advisors and lecturers.

The actions listed in 'next steps' are all doable.

Some are not new but simply need fresh impetus and support from a united industry. Working together, we have the resources and commitment to mount a campaign comparable to HM Forces' recruitment adverts.

But on the flip side of the coin, we have to look at why our industry is not attractive.

It's not just about misconceptions and poor marketing. We have our failings, and it's time to own up to and correct them.

We must clean up the industry.

Its culture and behaviours discourage inclusivity. Success stories tend to be small pockets of excellence. We must recruit differently, think differently and behave differently. We need to create a construction industry that is representative of the society it serves. There are not enough women, people of colour or different gender identities to make our industry dynamic, appealing or creative.

We are not just building for Gen Z.

What we build has to be designed, engineered and delivered by Gen Z. So, we must clean up our act. And we must do it together, as one industry. Government will not do it for us. We have to act now.

A selection of national and local initiatives and resources for promoting careers in construction

The BIM



The world's largest and most subscribed-to video channel for construction with millions of YouTube subscribers and viewers. Founded by Fred Mills, the channel aims to improve the perception of construction to the worldwide population and promote the need for constant improvement.

Build UK



Representative organisation for the UK construction industry. Organises events such as site visits and Open Doors, designed to show young people and those looking for a change of career the range of opportunities available in construction.

Build UK and CITB have joined forces with STEM ambassadors to show more young people the wide range of opportunities available in construction. STEM construction and built environment ambassadors help to inspire young people to think about a career in construction through a range of activities, including school presentations, careers talks and mentoring. Businesses can register as a STEM employer and encourage their teams to sign up as STEM ambassadors.

Building Greater Exeter



An organisation that supports the construction sector across Exeter, East Devon and Teignbridge. One of its priorities is delivering an effective engagement programme with schools and young people.

Online resources include:

- Construction Education Hub

- Construction Training Directory – a section that aims to help employers find apprentices and trainees, and school leavers to connect with training providers

Videos (created with different partners to promote careers in construction, available on the website and the organisation's YouTube channel), including:

- Celebrating women in construction and STEM careers

- Apprenticeships in construction and the built environment

- Carl Rimmer – from rugby player to building surveyor

- St Sidwell's Point: a 10-minute video about the design and build of a new state-of-the-art leisure centre aimed at schools, including a look at the various roles involved

- Plus further videos on individual success stories.

CITB



Online resources:

- Information about the Shared Apprenticeship Scheme in the south west

- Talentview Construction, a launchpad for young people interested in a career in the building industry, run by the Construction Talent Retention Scheme

Reports:

- Career and training progression routes 2016 (PDF available to download)

- Post 16 routes into construction (2018)

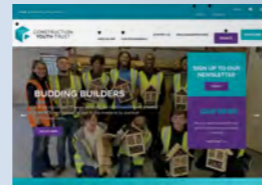
- Learning to earning: Increasing FE learners into construction (December 2020)

Social media campaigns:

- Future Made, aimed at changing the hearts and minds of under-25s to address the skills shortage via inspirational videos on social media platforms

- Go Construct, a platform providing resources for anyone looking for a career in the construction and built environment sector.

Construction Youth Trust



A charity whose aim is to inspire and enable young people to overcome barriers and discover a career in the construction and built environment sector.

Its Inspiring Futures programme, launched in March 2021 and funded by BBC Children in Need and the Youth Futures Foundation, focuses on working with young people who are underrepresented in the construction industry.

Heart of the South West (HotSW) Careers Hub



One of 33 careers hubs in the UK, established in collaboration with The Careers and Enterprise Company to help transform careers education for young people. The HotSW Careers Hub is delivered by the HotSW LEP, and operates in the area of Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay.

It currently comprises 60 local secondary schools, colleges and FE institutes working together with employers, universities and career professionals to deliver the Gatsby Benchmarks and ensure that careers outcomes are improved for all young people.

More information at: careershub@devon.gov.uk

Inspire Education Programme independent evaluation report (2014-19)



The Inspire Programme was run by EDF Energy in Somerset, linked to the construction of Hinkley Point C (HPC). The programme, in collaboration with STEMworks, began in 2011 and aimed to prepare young people for the job opportunities expected to arrive with the construction and operation of the new nuclear power station.

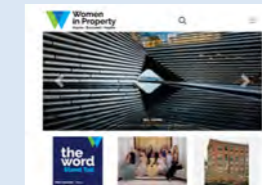
In particular the goal was to inspire young people to study STEM and associated subjects, raising awareness and aspirations, and create a pipeline from education to skills and into future long-term employment.

Somerset Education Business Partnership



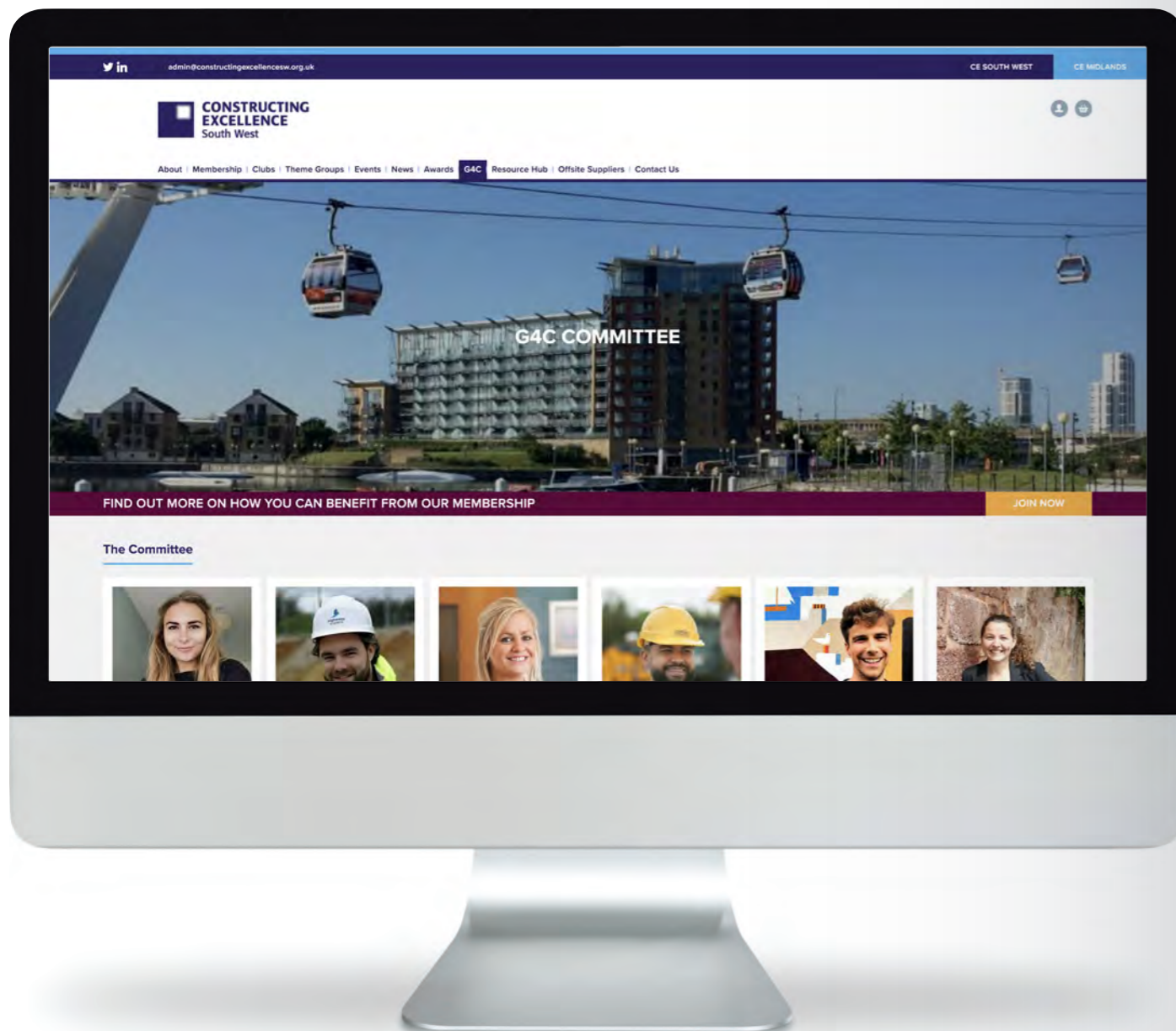
Practical advice for employers and schools on creating productive and effective engagement opportunities.

Women in Property (WIP)



An organisation that supports women who already work in the built environment industry as well as encouraging girls to enter the industry in the future. It specialises in schools outreach projects, such as its Schools Roadshow, working in conjunction with Girls' Network – a charity that gives opportunity to girls from less advantaged areas by connecting them with a mentor and a network of professional women.

When seeking examples of young success stories, the G4CSW committee members, who represent various professions within the industry, is a good place to start. None of the leaders of G4C in the south west saw construction as a career! They all got involved 'by chance' and now love it. We need to remove chance and make construction a career of choice!



Elizabeth Painter

Solicitor
Royds Withy King LLP

Elizabeth (Lizzy) studied philosophy and ancient history at university, eventually converting her degree into law. As part of her legal training, she did some work in her law firm's construction and engineering department and thoroughly enjoyed it. Lizzy has been with the team ever since, advising a range of clients on everything from procurement and risk management to delivery and life use of a development.

"Although as a lawyer I play a small role in the overall delivery of a construction project, I get to learn something new about the technical aspects of the industry every day. It is guaranteed my career will be interesting, challenging, and inspiring. I want more people to know about this specialist area of law, so they too have the opportunity to be involved in such an innovative and changing industry."



Josh Hodder

Senior Project Manager
National Highways

At 22, Josh was working as an operations co-ordinator at Bristol Airport when he was sponsored to undertake an HNC in construction. Having worked on a range of airport development projects, including the prestigious West Terminal Extension, he is now a senior project manager for National Highways' Major Projects Directorate in the South West. He is currently responsible for the delivery of a £300 million road project in Cornwall.

"I discovered a real passion for construction when I realised how tangible the results of my work could be. The fact that some projects I've been involved in will outlive me, and even my kids, is inspiring. There aren't many professions that can afford you an opportunity to have such an impact on the world."



Olivia Moorey

Project Manager
Coreus Group

Olivia studied Spanish and Italian at university, then worked in the travel industry for a year before deciding to try something completely different and joining Coreus Group as an assistant project manager. Now a project manager, Coreus are supporting her to complete a MSc in construction management as well as the RICS chartered in project management.

"When I considered career options at school and university, I never would have pictured myself working in the construction industry because I wasn't aware of the wide range of job opportunities that are available. I would encourage young people to consider a career in construction because it is such an exciting, dynamic and rewarding sector."

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