

# New perspectives on recruitment to the construction industry

A low-angle photograph of a modern building's facade, featuring a complex geometric structure of dark, angular beams and large glass panels. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds. The building's surface is composed of light-colored, square panels.

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# **New perspectives on recruitment to the construction industry**

**A report to the Construction Industry Training  
Board (CITB)**

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## Institute for Employment Studies

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# Glossary

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## 2 New perspectives on recruitment to the construction industry

Career anchors	The concept of career anchors was developed by Edgar Schein and describe the priorities individuals have and aspects they value in working life that guide career and employment choices.
Competitor sectors/industries	These are engineering; utilities; transport, storage and logistics; IT and communications; and manufacturing. These are sectors containing the target audience for construction, sectors which closely align with the construction industry and seen as key competitors for recruits.
High-level roles/occupations	These are Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) groups of Managers, Directors and Senior Officials; Professional Occupations; and Associate Professional and Technical Occupations.
IAG	Information, advice and guidance.
Insider	Those currently working in the construction industry.
Intermediate-level roles/occupations	These are Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) groups of Administrative and Secretarial Occupations, Skilled Trades Occupations; and Sales and Customer Service Occupations.
Level 4+ qualifications	Examples include Diploma of HE, foundation degree, higher national diploma, degree apprenticeship, degree with honours, graduate certificate/diploma, masters degree, postgraduate certificate/diploma, doctorate.
Level 4 qualifications	Examples include certificate of HE, higher apprenticeship, higher national certificate (HNC).
Level 3 qualifications	Examples include A-level, Access to HE diploma, AS-level, International Baccalaureate.
Level 2 qualifications	Examples include National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Level 2, GCSE grades 4,5,6,7,8,9 or grades A*,A,B,C, intermediate apprenticeships.
Level 1 qualifications	Examples include National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Level 1, GCSE grades 3,2,1 or grades D,E,F,G.
Lower/unskilled roles/occupations	These are Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) groups of Process, Plant and Machine Operatives; and Elementary Occupations
Millennials or Gen Z	Millennials and Gen Z are those who reach adulthood in the early 21st Century, Millennials tend to be those born between 1980 and 1995, and Gen Z are those born between 1996 and 2010.
Outsiders	Those not currently working in the construction industry.
Pool sectors/industries	These are hospitality, retail, health and social care, business and management, sports and leisure, arts, and culture. These are sectors containing potential applicants for construction that includes sectors not traditionally aligned with the construction industry and rarely appear as an option considered alongside construction when choosing a career.
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics



## Executive summary

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The construction industry experiences recruitment difficulties and skills shortages and has a relative lack of workforce diversity. It is therefore considering ways to both increase the volume and the diversity of its talent pipeline. A key aspect of this work focuses on attraction. The industry is looking to increase its attractiveness to potential recruits; those entering the labour market from school, college, or university; older individuals re-entering the labour market; and to those already in the labour market working in other sectors who might consider changing industry and/or career. To some, the construction industry needs to understand what makes the industry attractive and how this can be shared to encourage others to consider construction careers, to understand the image construction has and what misconceptions need to be tackled, and to understand what makes other sectors (more) attractive to see what construction can better highlight or needs to change. This understanding can then be used in new recruitment approaches emphasising values and outcomes; that set out to create realistic and compelling messages of key elements of jobs in ways that speak to targeted groups of candidates.

This research gathered the insights from insiders, those working in construction including new entrants; and insights from outsiders, those working or looking for work in other sectors. The outsider group includes those working in sectors traditionally seen as competitors to the construction industry for recruits, such as engineering, manufacturing, and IT and communications. It also includes those working in a much broader pool of sectors, where construction is highly unlikely to have been considered as a potential career option, such as education, health, and social care, hospitality, and retail; some of which have been badly affected by the pandemic, creating challenges for many individuals to find or maintain employment.

The research involved a literature review; an online quantitative survey of 1,366 individuals spread across construction, competitor, and pool sectors and across the UK; and in-depth virtual interviews with 40 new entrants to the construction industry (starting within the past two to three years). Fieldwork took place between December 2020 and February 2021, when England returned to a full national lockdown although the construction industry continued to operate with social distancing measures and other precautions in place.

### A view from the outside

Those outside the construction sector provided feedback on their career decisions and motivators and the knowledge and understanding they had about their sector prior to entry; and critically gathered new insights into perceptions about the construction industry and how these were formed, and the potential attraction of working in construction.

- Generally, outsiders have some understanding of their chosen sector before they start work, particularly about entry requirements and the availability of jobs, although they have a lower confidence about what the work will actually be like. This intelligence is largely gathered through their own internet-based research, such as visiting employer websites, through personal networks and social media, and through teachers. It is rarer for insights to be gained through employers, workplace contacts or formal careers guidance. This suggests the channels most likely to reach and inform potential entrants about the construction industry. The importance of personal networks creates a challenge and can create barriers for those with no friends or family in construction.
- Individuals feel it is important to their decisions about careers and employment that employers share their values.. Key values are stability of work, pride in one's work, helping others and flexibility. Key work attraction factors are the work environment, the employer's reputation, and a good salary. These are aspects that could be promoted to attract individuals to construction. Values and attraction factors vary considerably by an individual's background and sector. However, there are some shared values between construction workers and those currently working in engineering, IT and communications, manufacturing and transport, storage, and logistics (competitor sectors). Construction will be an easier 'sell' to those working in competitor sectors, whereas others outside of those sectors may need different and tailored recruitment messages.
- Most individuals, whether early, mid- or late-career, intend to stay in their current industry suggesting that their needs (values) and expectations are being met. It will be difficult to persuade people to change to work in construction. This is hindered by a lack of real understanding and accurate knowledge (particularly for those working in pool sectors) of construction; of the entry requirements, availability of jobs, progression opportunities offered, and how to access work experience. And it is further hampered by firmly rooted and largely negative perceptions of the construction industry. The industry is seen as physically demanding, involving working outside, manual work, and masculine.
- The attraction of construction among outsiders was measured in various ways:
  - 30 per cent feel construction is for someone like me;
  - 17 per cent feel construction is attractive to me;
  - 15 per cent previously applied for a construction job;
  - Six per cent seriously considered construction before entering their chosen industry;
  - Eight per cent would recommend construction to friends or family; and
  - But just two per cent consider construction to be their current preferred industry, and most industries are considered more attractive than construction.
- Among outsiders, construction is more attractive to those who previously worked in construction (potential returners), those who applied for a construction job, those currently working in engineering in professional roles, and those working in manufacturing and retail (potential new recruits). It is also more attractive to males,

those aged 25-to-54 (mid-career), those from ethnic minority backgrounds, those who are highly qualified, but also conversely those currently in lower level or unskilled roles.

- Factors that could encourage outsiders to consider construction are the pay and progression offered, if they were given better information about the industry (its jobs and careers, working conditions and entry requirements), and if the culture changed. The perceived macho culture puts many off.

## A view from the inside

Those inside the construction industry provided feedback on finding out about and getting into construction, early experiences of the industry, and their future plans.

- Insiders see a lot of good in the construction sector, which is not known about by outsiders, although insights are largely gained once in the industry, rather than prior to entry. Insiders value it for its stability and security, generous pay, progression and learning opportunities and the variety and change it offers in terms of roles and work environments. Insiders are much more positive about the construction industry compared to outsiders; and feel it offers many desired aspects including interesting and practical work, opportunities to be creative and to produce tangible outcomes, friendly employers, and local jobs.
- They also feel the construction industry offers diversity and flexibility, which is somewhat at odds with statistical evidence on workforce characteristics and working patterns. The construction industry may offer a particular type of flexible working that relates to having control over ones working hours rather than offering a more formal and structured form of flexible hours found in other sectors, such as part-time work; and experiences of diversity may reflect pockets of good practice or a historical reliance on (eastern) European labour, low expectations or a different or poor understanding of diversity (different to definitions of diversity used in statistics).
- Some insiders make purposeful moves into the industry, but others drift in and then stay. Many insiders are therefore also attracted to construction by its ease of entry including multiple entry points, limited requirement for experience, roles that require little qualification or existing skills for entry or roles where skills can be transferred from other industries, and lack of formality. The latter is experienced as a reliance on personal networks for information, advice, and guidance, for preparation for entry, and to find work. Informal entry and recruitment methods are valued but this can mean ways in can be hidden to those not well networked and can narrow the recruitment pool.
- Insiders view other industries as being difficult to get into, and as hierarchical, underpaid, stressful and boring.
- New entrants' experiences are largely positive involving informal induction, supportive colleagues, and visible career pathways. In addition, expectations for the construction industry tend to be met; people intend to stay, to use their skills and qualifications and continue in jobs they enjoy and want to progress within the industry; and insiders would recommend and have recommend construction work and careers to friends and family.

## Recommendations

The sector needs to bring the knowledge and understanding of insiders to outsiders and bring the outsiders inside: to celebrate what is good about the construction industry, make a case for construction rather than other sectors, and fire up potential recruits.

However, there are some challenges experienced around self-employment, long and unsocial working hours, time away from family and keeping up with the physical demands of work as they get older. And more worryingly, despite perceptions that diversity is increasing, there are experiences of discrimination. So, there is work for the industry to do to flush out these bad aspects and address the negatives.

The research identifies six areas of activity for the industry, some of which require a greater commitment and a longer-term strategy than others:

- 1. Increasing the visibility and awareness of construction:** focusing recruitment messaging on information gaps identified by the research; providing better but more accessible information for potential recruits; harnessing technology to build knowledge and attraction; using a range of channels including teachers, careers advisers and employers to promote the opportunities and benefits available in the industry; and offering more work experience opportunities.
- 2. Emphasising the strengths of the industry:** focusing messaging on key strengths identified by the research; raising the visibility of career pathways illustrated with real-examples and personal stories; and helping individuals see the relevance of their skills and qualifications for construction and how they can fit in.
- 3. Targeting recruitment:** segmenting potential recruits to distinguish key targets including those who previously worked in construction and those most open to career change, as identified by the research, for increased volume of recruits; to also target those from underrepresented groups and those with skills the industry lacks to diversify the talent pipeline.
- 4. Trying different attraction approaches:** trialling values-based recruitment drawing on the motivators, identified by the research, of different groups and tailoring recruitment messages to align with their values and desired outcomes; indicating how the industry can deliver on these values and providing concrete examples ensuring that it doesn't over promise as authenticity is critical in attraction and retention; emphasising what new recruits could achieve within the first couple of years in the industry and demonstrating pathways for different entry points; widening access to informal networks and providing additional mechanisms for information about work experiences and job opportunities.
- 5. Working to change perceptions:** working to broaden the view of potential recruits of what the industry offers and what working in the industry is really like; equipping insiders to act as ambassadors and promote the industry by supporting them to have wider perspectives (beyond their own role) and how to signpost to sources of additional information; and helping insiders from diverse backgrounds to share their personal stories and act as visible and vocal role models.

6. **Adjusting employment practices and the changing pervasive macho culture:** offering support to younger unskilled entrants; articulating the type of flexibility the industry currently offers and offering more formal flexibility in working hours as inflexible working patterns creates barriers for some outsiders; and setting out a commitment to change the culture and tackle discrimination and initiate a change programme to support an inclusive culture.

# 1 Introduction

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This chapter first details the industry and strategic context which led to the commissioning of this research, before outlining the research aims and objectives. It then gives an overview of the methodology, before introducing the structure of the remainder of this report.

## 1.1 Research background

The construction industry has grappled with recruitment difficulties and workforce diversity for several decades and therefore increasing the attractiveness of the construction industry is one of CITB's key priorities set out in its 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, and Business Plan 2021–2022. Existing programmes such as Fairness, Inclusion and Respect focus on changing culture and improving inclusion and the Construction Skills Fund had an engagement target for under-represented groups.

The current context of the pandemic and resulting national and regional lockdowns are creating challenges, but also opportunities for the construction industry, with these external pressures affecting ways of working, and the labour market and skills pipeline. These changes may affect how the construction industry is perceived by potential applicants. For example, with more people out of work, facing redundancy, or looking for a career change, especially where entry level routes to industries such as retail and hospitality are limited, more people may be looking for information, advice, and guidance to help them navigate the changing labour market and make career decisions. This provides the construction industry with opportunities to attract individuals who may not have considered working in the industry before, and more specifically to recruit candidates with recent work experience and from diverse backgrounds.

Work in the construction sector has continued throughout the national lockdowns, enabled by revised health and safety protocols, and working practices. Whilst vacancy data shows that recruitment activity in construction fell to 7,000 vacancies between April–June 2020, it has since increased and most recently, vacancy levels had recovered to those at levels prior to the pandemic (c.25,000 per month) (ONS, 2021).

The recruitment methods used by organisations to attract their workforce have been changing, with increasing use of outcomes-based (and similar) recruitment approaches in some sectors, which draw on the concepts of values and career anchors. These newer approaches fit with individuals increasingly reporting wanting to have a sense of purpose from their work and becoming more interested in a prospective employer's mission. Essentially these approaches set out to create realistic and compelling messages of key elements of jobs in ways that 'speak to' the targeted groups of candidates; and moving beyond a competency-based approach to thinking about whether someone will love the

job. These overlapping, yet similar, recruitment approaches are argued to be more inclusive because they reduce structural bias and have been defined as follows:

- Outcomes-based recruitment: describing a job as a set of expected outcomes for a specific timeframe to help potential candidates see themselves in the role and showing them how the role will help them progress.
- Values-based recruitment: Incorporating the values and attributes (guiding principles influencing decisions and behaviours) required by the sector into the recruitment and selection process, making them explicit and assessing against these. In this way candidates and organisations can assess whether they have shared values. This is most common in sectors such as health and social care and research shows a strong appetite for a values-based approach amongst the current and future workforce (CIPD, 2020c).
- Strength-based recruitment: Homing in on a person's interests and motivations during the recruitment process on the premise that interest and motivations will influence development of ability and behaviour in the role and determine the impact they will have and the outcomes they can deliver.

Research literature indicates that while money is always going to be a factor in careers and employment decisions for many; employers increasingly recognise that candidates are looking for more from their work (Sherwin, 2019). There are several other key factors or values that motivate people, and younger people especially towards work and careers. These include feeling a sense of meaning and purpose, wellbeing of others, recognition of success, opportunities for learning and clear paths of progression (CIOB, 2016c; CIPD, 2020c; Burrage, 2020). A key author in the work around values is Edgar Schein who introduced the concept of career anchors in the 1970s (Schein, 1990). These describe the priorities individuals with different sets of talents, capabilities, and personalities have, which can develop over time into a sense of self-concept shaping one's identity. They are formed from talents, skills, and abilities (the things we think we are good at), motives and needs (our goals), and attitudes and values, including the kinds of organisations we feel comfortable with and match our own values and beliefs. These career anchors can be useful in career planning and career change and provide another lens to understand individuals' career decisions (see technical report for more details).

Branding has become a central concept in organisational and social life (CIPD, 2020a) and has become an important strategy for employers to attract individuals. The appetite for purpose, demonstrating culture and an increasing demand for responsible business, transparency, and accountability, suggest areas where employer brand management needs attention. Demonstrating these are not enough on their own; industries and employers must back this up with evidence. Authenticity is required to attract candidates and to retain them once they have joined (Access Generation, 2020). Branding may also need to be personalised to the needs of a diverse workforce (IFF, 2017).

Ultimately for recruitment to be successful, it is important that the individual's expected experience and the reported values match the reality of the role. Realistic job previews (RJP) are presentations of both the positive and negative aspects of a position, organisation, and industry, and have been shown to have a positive effect on intention to



proceed with an application, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, staff retention, and performance, which emphasises the need for truthful branding (eg Earnest, 2011; Ward, 2016).

Attraction activity in the construction industry has traditionally focused on promotion of the breadth of roles on offer, to increase awareness of the range of opportunities available. However, this breadth approach may be failing to translate into the desired outcomes by not clearly explaining the skills that are transferable from other sectors, and the potential career routes and pathways within the sector, with the aim of increasing attraction to the sector and reduce skills shortages and increase workforce diversity.

## 1.2 Aims and objectives

This research was commissioned to inform the development of the CITB careers strategy and associated key performance indicators to measure change and impact. The research aims to provide insight into recruitment approaches, and attraction mechanisms to the construction industry, and to consider whether alternative approaches, such as outcomes-based recruitment, could be usefully adopted. It aims to look at how the sector is viewed among people of working age (in several sectors) and to provide a set of benchmarks against which to measure change over time. Based on this evidence, it aims to suggest ways CITB might work with the industry to successfully promote the benefits of the sector to attract more and, crucially, a more diverse range of people to work in it.

To achieve this, the research has two sets of objectives. The first set is focused on people in the workforce or studying specific routes and seeks to gain a quantitative and comparative understanding:

**1A. Relative attractiveness:** How attractive is a career in the Construction sector versus other sectors? What are the reasons for this? Was the Construction sector ever considered for a career, and if so, why was this not acted upon? Previous experience of the Construction sector and reasons for leaving.

- **1B. Role of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG):** Where has IAG been successful in terms of recruitment across other sectors? How might these practices be adopted in the Construction industry?
- **1C. Potential for outcomes-based recruitment:** Can alternative recruitment methods, such as 'outcome-based' recruitment be adopted in the construction industry? How and where is outcome-based recruitment used alongside other approaches?
- **1D. Attraction drivers:** How can people with limited knowledge of the sector and/or unrelated experiences or skills be attracted to construction? Can articulating outcomes or values be used to attract individuals? Which outcomes and values appeal to target and potential candidates?
- **1E. Need for targeted approaches:** Are tailored recruitment strategies needed for diverse workers? Do different groups respond better to different recruitment approaches and to different outcomes and values?



- The second set is focused on the experience of new entrants to the sector (entering within the past two to three years) and uses qualitative research methods to provide depth of experience.
- **2A. Decisions and experiences:** What other industries were considered alongside construction? What are the attraction factors to working in the construction industry? Do the expectations of working in the construction industry match the reality?
- **2B. Transitions:** How easy or difficult is the transition into employment in the construction industry? How well prepared are new entrants? What support for transition/entry is given, and by whom?
- **2C. Destinations;** Where might those considering leaving the construction industry go on to? Why might individuals leave the sector?

## 1.3 Overview of research approach

The research consisted of literature review, 40 in-depth qualitative interviews with new entrants to the construction sector, and an online survey of respondents working or studying in ten sectors, alongside a sample of respondents working in construction.

### 1.3.1 Literature review

A short exploratory literature review was undertaken to inform the development of the research tools and provide context for the findings. It involved a search of academic and grey literature focused on two key areas. First, outcomes-based recruitment: how it works, and the types of outcomes emphasised, the benefits and the challenges involved, the sectors and contexts where it has been trialled and the aims it has sought to address, evidence of success and the success factors required. Second, approaches to information, advice, and guidance provision for potential entrants across different sectors to raise awareness and support realistic ambitions for careers. A summary of the findings from the review is provided in the accompanying technical report.

### 1.3.2 Online survey

A quantitative survey of individuals was undertaken. It used a web-based approach, via a commercial online panel. The survey covered respondents' current or most recent job, their knowledge and awareness of the sector prior to entry and other sectors they had considered. It asked questions about their career values and what is important to them about work, as well as their experience of their current sector and future work aspirations. Lastly, respondents were asked about if they would consider working in construction. Respondents that had worked in the construction sector were asked about their experiences. Full details of the survey content and a copy of the questionnaire is provided in the Technical Report.

It was intended that 1,100 completed surveys would be undertaken with people aged 16+, to a sample specification stratified by age and nation. Quotas set for age were: 16–24 years, 425 responses; 25–54 years, 450 responses; 55+ years, 225 responses; and nation-based quotas to include 700 responses in England, 250 in Scotland, and 150 in

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Wales. A minimum of 100 completed surveys was specified and achieved among people from an ethnic minority background (across all sectors).

The in-scope population included people who were currently working, those currently looking for work, and students on vocational pathways but could also include those on academic pathways following Science, Technology, Engineering or Maths (STEM) courses (who may or may not be currently working or have previously worked). The sample specification included a minimum of 50 completed surveys in ten selected sectors which fall into two groups:

- **Construction competitor sectors:** containing the target audience for construction, which includes sectors closely aligned with the construction industry and seen as key competitors for recruits. These included, engineering, utilities, transport, and logistics, IT and communications, manufacturing.
- **Construction pool sectors:** containing potential applicants for construction which includes sectors not traditionally aligned and which would rarely appear as an option considered alongside construction when choosing a career. These included hospitality, retail, health and social care, business and management, sports and leisure, arts, and culture.

Additionally, there was a target of 200 completed surveys within the construction sector. The fieldwork period ran from 26 January 2021 to the 8 February 2021 and a total of 1,366 usable responses were received. It was necessary to weight the data because the sample specification required over-sampling young people and workers/those looking for work in certain industry sectors. Details of the weighting approach are in the Technical Report.

The survey data were analysed using statistical tests for association and difference by several key variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, reported disability, qualification level, sector, status (employed, unemployed, studying), and job role/activity (professional, technical, craft). Statistically significant differences at the five per cent level of significance are reported in the text, and they are noted in the tables in the remainder of the report with an asterisk.

### 1.3.3 Qualitative interviews with construction workers

Forty interviews were undertaken in December 2020 and January 2021, with individuals recently (in the last two to three years) starting work in the construction industry, to gather data about their decisions and motivations around entering the industry, attraction factors, any other sectors considered, their expectations and early experiences in the sector, and their current plans. A copy of the topic guide is provided in the appendices.

The qualitative interviews provide depth of insight into individual decision-making, and detailed examples of situations and experiences working in the construction industry. While the findings are not representative, the research sought to include people with a range of characteristics. The qualitative data were analysed using the framework method. Full methodological details are provided in the Technical Report.

### 1.3.4 Limitations of the method

The fieldwork for both the qualitative and quantitative elements took place within the context of the global Covid-19 pandemic. During early 2021, the United Kingdom returned to a full national lockdown, with people required to stay at home and to work from home where they could. Several sectors of the economy, such as retail and hospitality were closed, with many employees on furlough via the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). However, the construction sector could continue to operate with social distancing measures and other precautions in place. The research therefore took place during a time when many individuals were worried about their employment, health, and families. This is likely to influence the insights collected in the research, and for example the relative attractiveness or perceptions of stability or opportunity in specific sectors. Indeed, some themes evidenced may not have emerged in a different context or to have featured so strongly. It will therefore be important to consider repeating some of the study at a later date to understand if the findings are enduring.

## 1.4 Report structure

The remainder of the report is largely structured around the two sets of objectives.

Firstly, to understand the values, experiences and understanding of a wide group of individuals in the workforce across a range of industries and sectors; and their perceptions of the construction industry to gauge their potential for recruitment. **These views are set against those of individuals already in the construction industry (noted in blue text for ease of identification).** These chapters largely draw on survey data and primarily provide an 'outsider' perspective:

- Chapter 2 explores career and employment decisions and motivators, and the extent to which these decisions are well informed.
- Chapter 3 explores knowledge and awareness of construction among potential entrants.
- Chapter 4 explores the potential attraction of the construction industry among possible entrants.

Secondly, to understand the experiences and expectations of new entrants to the construction industry, entering within the past two years, set against those of who have been in the industry for varied lengths of time. These chapters largely draw on interview data supplemented with survey data and present an 'insider' perspective.

- Chapter 5 explores pathways into the construction industry and how and why individuals decided to work in construction.
- Chapter 6 explores the experiences in the construction industry, positive and negative aspects and whether experiences have lived up to expectation.

The final chapter:

- Chapter 7 considers the implications of the research findings for CITB and the sector in terms of the attraction of the industry and how this can be best capitalised for increasing the volume and diversity of new recruits.

Full details of the literature review, research methodology and research tools plus additional tables are contained in the accompanying technical report.

## 2 Career decisions and motivators

This chapter explores the factors influencing the life, career, and employment decisions of those working in a range of sectors and compares them to those working in the construction industry. It looks at the motivators, drivers, and values in career decisions; and the factors that attract individuals to employers, jobs and industries. It also examines the extent to which individuals felt informed about the sectors they work in prior to entry and how they gain any information needed to understand whether they are making informed work and decisions. Lastly this chapter looks at individuals' future work goals and attachment to their current industry.

The chapter provides insights into career values and the similarities and differences between those among construction workers and people working in other sectors; and particularly the messages and channels which could be used to encourage more individuals to consider building a career in the construction industry (research aims 1B and 1C). Alongside this, for construction workers, decisions relating to transitions to enter the sector and decisions to leave (research aims 2B and 2C).

### Key points

- Construction workers share similar values-based attractions to people working in competitor sectors (engineering, IT and communications, manufacturing industries) and with workers in the transport, storage, and logistics industries. This suggests that individuals in these industries might most easily move into the construction industry and represent a priority target for recruitment activity focused on attracting individuals already in work.
- It is important to individuals that their industry and employer shares their values, regardless of sector. Key values influencing career decisions are stability in where and who you work for, having pride in your work, helping others, and making a difference, and flexibility in work hours. However key values differ according to respondent background and current industry. This suggests that values-based recruitment needs to target different messages at different groups.
- For construction workers key values are ranked as: pride in their work, stability and security, and variety and change. This group are relatively more likely than others to be driven by the desire to become expert, being independent/running their own business, and being challenged. The abstract or altruistic impact of values such as building homes for people seem less important than the more tangible such as pride in work and positive feedback from customers.
- Other attraction factors (when choosing jobs) are: a good working environment, the good reputation of the employer and a good salary; followed by good career prospects, ethical practices, and diversity of the workforce. For those in construction, salary is particularly important and having personal connections or recommendations is more important than found in other industries.

- Individuals tend to enter their industry feeling that they have some understanding about it, particularly the skills and qualifications required for entry and whether there are jobs available locally. However, they are less confident in what it would be like to work in it. Knowledge of their industry is primarily gained from undertaking their own research (largely online), from friends and family, and from employer websites. Few gain insights through direct contact with employers and workplaces (eg employer visits/talks, work tasters) or through formal sources such as careers advisers, careers services, careers events or employment support.
- Prior to entry, construction workers were more confident in their knowledge of their industry than respondents from other industries and tend to report finding it easier to gain the insights they needed, including access to work experience. Key sources of information are friends or family working in the sector and these informal networks are also key to finding work in construction. This can create barriers for potential entrants who do not have personal contacts in the construction industry.
- The majority of construction workers intend to stay in the industry, but as many as half expect some form of promotion or progression. Reasons for staying are to benefit from the stability and security and good salaries offered by the industry. However, most people working in other sectors also intend to stay. This indicates that without a strong 'push' factor, such as redundancy, or a strong 'pull' such as increased stability in another sector, individuals are unlikely to change career.

## 2.1 Values in career decisions and recruitment

Career values were explored in the survey. This confirmed the importance of shared values between the employer and employee in employment and career decisions. The majority (69%) of survey respondents felt it was important to work in an industry that shares their values (39% very important, and 30% quite a bit). [The pattern for those working in construction was similar \(39% considered this to be very important, and 25% quite a bit important\)](#). This was however most important to those working in pool industries and sectors.

Across all the respondents, shared employer and employee values were significantly more important to: females, those in high-level occupations (eg in managerial, professional, or associate professional and technical roles), and those with higher education qualifications (Level 4 and above). There were no statistically significant differences by age (which is contrary to what might be expected from the research literature), ethnicity, reported disability, or current employment status.

**Table 2.1: Importance of shared values in employment and career decisions (%) by sector grouping**

Importance	All	Construction	Competitor	Pool
Not at all	3	2	3	3
Very little	4	7	5	5
Some	20	25	24	18*
Quite a bit	30	25	32	29
Very	39	39	34	42*
Not sure/don't know	3	3	2	4
Unweighted base	1366	234	285	700

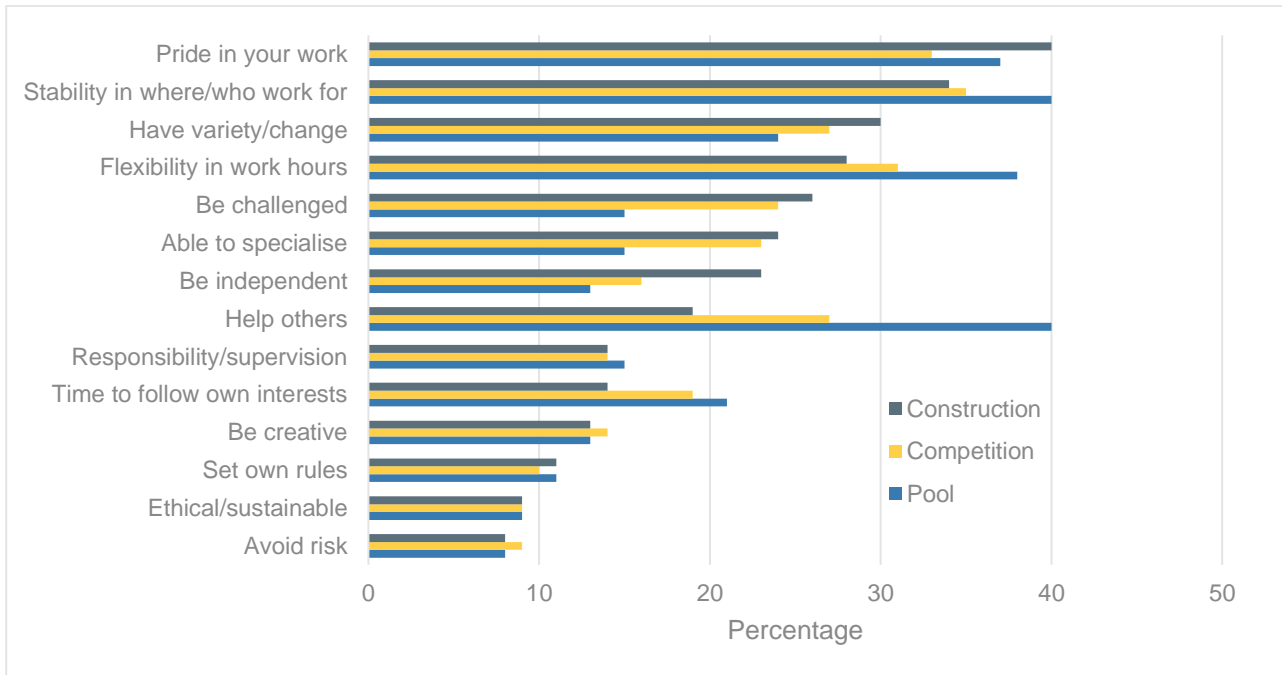
*Base: all respondents (N=1366), \* indicates significant difference.*

Respondents were asked to rank from a list of 14 aspects up to three that they felt were important to them in the decisions they have made and will make in the future about work and life. They were then asked to identify which was the most important, second most important and third most important to them (ie top-3). The most cited factors ranked in their top three factors were: stability (which probably reflects context in which the research was undertaken), having pride in their work, helping others/making a difference, and flexibility in work hours. These are clear motivators for many respondents, and thus could form the basis of values-based recruitment initiatives in many sectors. Whereas digging deeper into the responses of different groups provides insights into the values-based messages that would resonate most strongly for them.

The most cited factors in their top three of those currently (or most recently in the case of those not in work) in the construction industry were: having pride in their work, stability, and variety and change. These factors and their order of frequency of mention were repeated when focusing on the most important (ie ranked as first) factor in their decisions about work and life. When asked about their top three factors it appears that those in construction were relatively more likely than all respondents to be motivated by: being independent/running their own business and being challenged. They are however relatively less likely than found in other sectors to be primarily motivated by or value helping others/making a difference and having time to follow their own interests.



**Chart 2.1 Top 3 values in career and life decisions (%) by sector grouping**



Base: All respondents, Construction N=234, Competition N=285, Pool N=700.

## 2.2 Employment attraction factors

Moving from factors influencing wider life and career decisions, to consider decisions about their current job, survey respondents were asked whether a set of factors had made their current job appealing to them. This was explored using two groups of factors – the first were drawn from the research literature around values and career anchors, and the second from the literature around wider aspects of roles and working conditions. These were asked as multi-response questions and so individuals could select as many as they felt were appropriate.

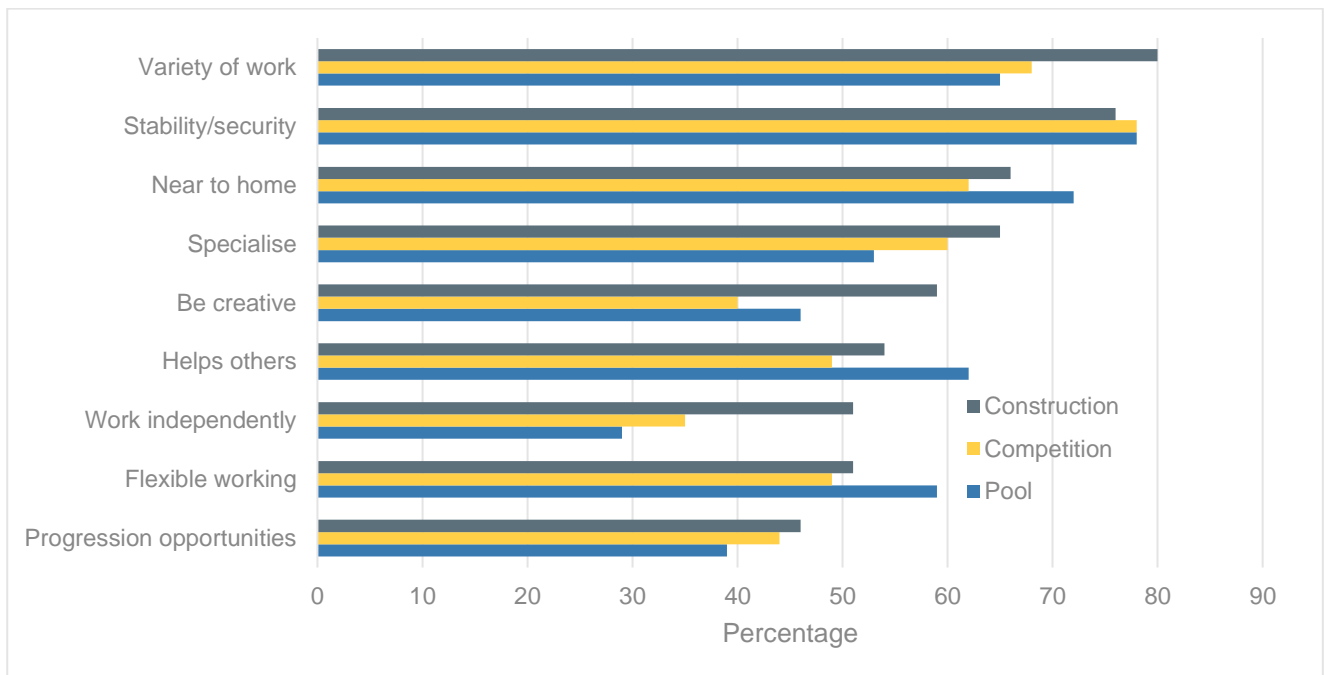
Across all respondents, the strongest values-based attraction factor to their current or most recent job (for those not currently in work) was stability and security (77%). This is likely to reflect the context in which the research was undertaken. It is important to note however that stability and security can manifest itself in different ways – security of employer and security of employment/work are slightly different concepts. Other commonly cited attraction factors were the job being near home (68%), offering variety of work (67%), having a positive impact on others (56%), providing them with the opportunity to specialise/become an expert (55%), and offering flexible working arrangements (55%). Creativity (45%), opportunities for progression to management (40%), and work independence (32%) were less commonly cited.

There were considerable differences in these values-based attraction factors by industry worked in. However, in many respects, respondents working in competitor industries held similar values to those in construction, and both were very different to the values of those working in pool industries.



The strongest values-based factors for those in construction were variety (80%), stability and security (76%), being near to home (66%), and the opportunity to become a specialist (65%). Indeed, for those construction: becoming a specialist, progressing to management, working independently/managing their own business, being creative, and variety in work were all significantly more likely to be important than for those working in other industries. This suggests a strong(er) need for these aspects of work for those attracted to the construction industry.

**Chart 2.2 Values-based attraction factors for current job (%) by sector grouping**



*Base: All those who have worked, Construction N=234, Competition N=285, Pool N=700.*

The four most common values-based employment attraction factors stated by those working in construction, were the same as held by respondents working in the competitor sectors of engineering, IT and communications, and manufacturing. This suggests that these factors could be used to attract recruits to construction from these competitor sectors.

**Table 2.2: Values-based attraction factors for current job (%) by (selected) competitor industries**

Factor	Construction	Engineering	IT & Communications	Manufacturing	Transport, storage & logistics
Offered variety of work	80	53	68	52	61
Stability and security	76	79	75	88	81
Near to home	66	61	69	71	75
Specialise/become expert	65	52	77	68	39
Opportunity to be creative	59	41	52	42	21
Benefits society, helps others, positive social impact	54	43	48	38	34
Offered flexible working arrangements	51	35	69	48	48
Work independently, run own business	51	29	45	32	29
Opportunity to progress to management	46	52	53	45	23
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>234</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>55</i>

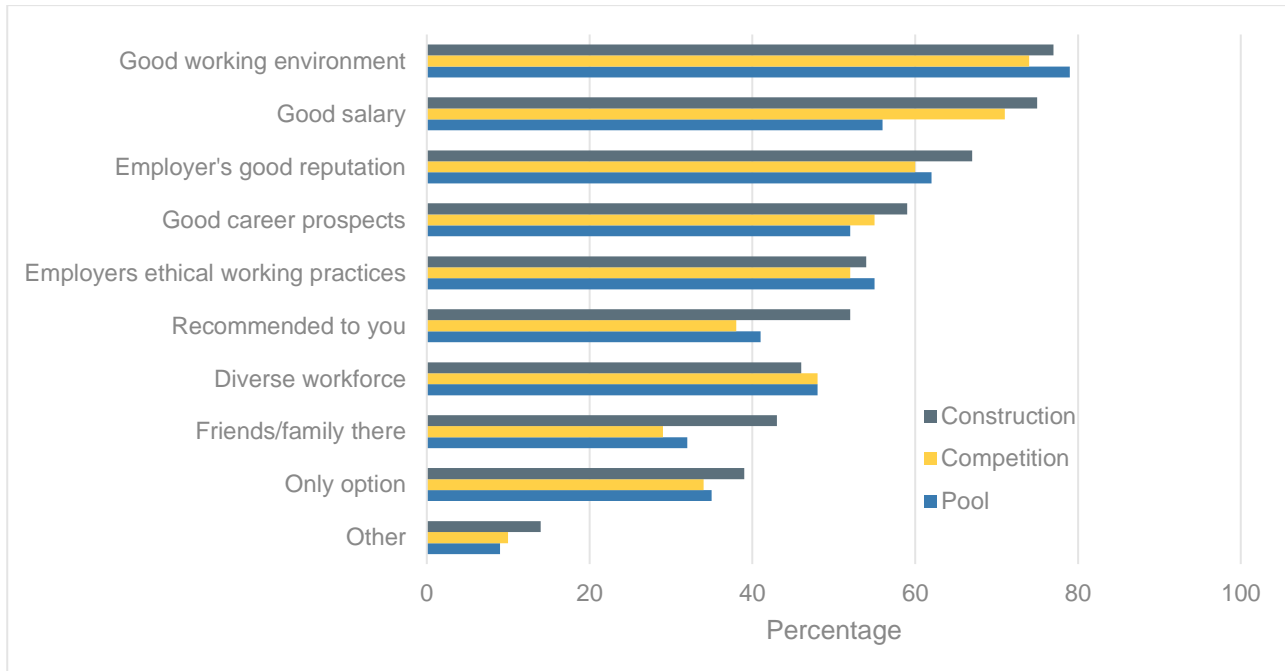
*Base: all those who have worked in construction, engineering, IT & communications, transport, storage, and logistics (N=448). Not tested for statistical significance.*

Looking at wider factors, across all respondents, the most cited aspect that attracted them to their jobs was having a good working environment, followed by employers' good reputation and good salary. This corresponds with the literature that salary is not often the primary motivating factor. Good career prospects, ethical practices and diversity of workforce were also noted by a substantial proportion of respondents (approximately one-half). Less frequently cited motivating factors were the job being recommended for them, having friends and family working there or the job being their only option; all aspects suggesting a lower sense of agency in their decision making.

The most cited factors for those in the construction industry were also good working environment, good salary, and employer's good reputation, but salary was more likely to be cited by those in construction (and could reflect the male skew in the industry, and perhaps links to a breadwinner model of family life). Linked to the ways of finding work (see below), being recommended, or having family and friends working there were

significantly more likely to be an attraction factor for construction workers than found for other industries.

**Chart 2.3 Wider attraction factors for current job (%) by sector groupings**



Base: All those who have worked, Construction N=234, Competition N=285, Pool N=700.

## 2.3 Making informed decisions

### 2.3.1 Understanding of current industry

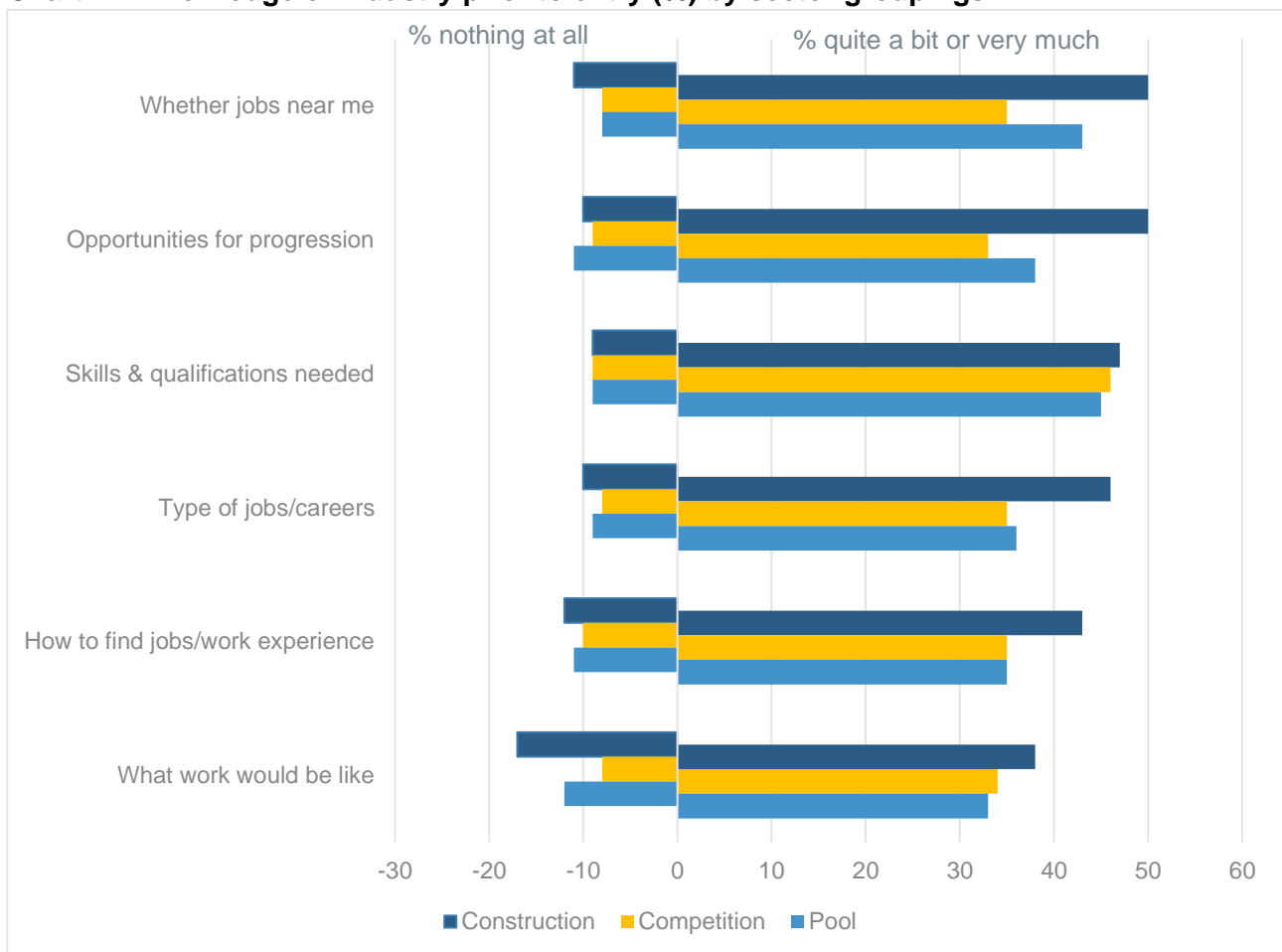
Survey respondents were asked about their understanding of various aspects of their current sector prior to joining. For each aspect, around a half to a third of respondents reported that they had good knowledge prior to entry (eg reporting they knew quite a bit or very much), with around a third to a quarter feeling they knew something, and similarly around a third to a quarter feeling they knew nothing or very little. Aspects where it was most common for survey respondents to report they had good understanding about their current industry/sector prior to entry were in relation to the skills and qualifications needed for entry and whether there were job opportunities locally.

There was some differentiation between construction, competitor and pool sector groups for most knowledge areas, the exception being skills and qualifications needed which was almost universally answered across the sector groups. Those working in competitor sectors were the least confident, when compared to those in construction or pool sectors, in their knowledge of whether there were jobs near to them (corresponding with jobs in these sectors being more geographically clustered), and opportunities for development and progression.

Those currently (or most recently) in the construction industry were most confident about their knowledge of opportunities for development and progression in their sector and

offering jobs locally prior to entry, more so than those working in other industries. Generally, a higher proportion of workers in construction felt they knew quite a bit or very much about all the aspects compared to all respondents. However, there was a substantial minority (17%) who felt they didn't know what it would be like to work in the construction industry before they started work, and this was higher than found for those working competitor and pool sectors. This could be due to the predominance of informal recruitment methods (for example it might be difficult to define clearly when you have started work).

**Chart 2.4 Knowledge of industry prior to entry (%) by sector groupings**



Base: All those who have worked, Construction N=234, Competition N=285, Pool N=700.

### 2.3.2 Sources of information

The most common sources of information used to find out about their industry or sector before joining were their own research (and feedback from the interviewees discussed in later chapters indicates that this is largely undertaken via the internet), through friends working in the sector, employer websites and family members. Few gained their information directly from employers, either via talks, work tasters or work experience.

There were considerable and significant differences in the information sources used by sector groupings. **Those in the construction industry were most likely to get their**

information from friends or family in the sector (these were also key sources of jobs), and this was significantly more common than found across all sectors. These informal channels present less opportunity for the sector and CITB to have an influence on the information and messages shared. It was significantly less common for those in construction to have gained their insights from employer websites, teachers, and adverts; these are channels where the sector could have some input or influence into the careers and employment information provided but are not 'go to' places for those seeking information. These may require a longer-term strategy to encourage individuals considering construction to use these resources to the extent used in other sectors. It is interesting to note that work tasters, shadowing, open days, and employer talks and visits do appear to have a greater role in informing about construction than found in other sectors, so this could present the sector with an easier opportunity.

Essentially there are three different clusters of information sources used by those in the construction industry:

- Informal sources which have high use but offer little potential for the industry to influence.
- Wider influences which have low use but offer a great potential for the industry to influence.
- Employer-related sources which have medium use and perhaps offer the greatest potential for the industry to influence the information and messages shared.

**Table 2.3: Sources of information about sector prior to entry (%) by sector groupings**

Information source	All	Construction	Competition	Pool
Own research	39	30*	46*	37
Friend working in the sector	23	34*	21	23
Employer websites	18	12*	22	18
Family working in the sector	17	29*	16	17
Teacher/tutor/lecturer	11	3*	14*	11
Other websites (sector, profession)	11	10	17*	8*
Social media	11	7	14*	10
Advert, poster, TV	10	3*	16*	8*
Careers adviser (in education)	9	10	13*	8*
Work taster/shadow/open day	8	12*	11*	6*
Longer work experience	8	5	9	8
JobCentre/employment support	8	9	12*	7*
Careers event	7	3*	13*	5*
Employer talk/visit	7	11*	11*	5*
National Careers Service (or retraining schemes)	4	2	5	4
Other	4	3	4	4
None of these	10	6*	7*	10
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1,312	234	285	700

Base: all working/previously worked (N=1312). \* indicates significant difference.

### 2.3.3 Access to information

Overall, more respondents (about twice as many) found it easy to find the information they needed about their industry prior to entry than found it difficult. This reflects their confidence in their knowledge and understanding of their sector. Respondents found it easiest to find out about job opportunities, followed by what it would be like to work in it. The greatest difficulty appeared to be in accessing work experience.

There were some differences by sector groupings. Those in construction tended to report finding it easier (and less difficult) to gain the insights they needed than found across all respondents. Access to work experience appeared to be less of an issue for those in construction as a relatively greater proportion reported finding this easy and a lower proportion reported finding this hard than found for those in competitor or pool sectors.

**Chart 2.5 Ease of finding information about sector prior to entry (%) by sector groupings**



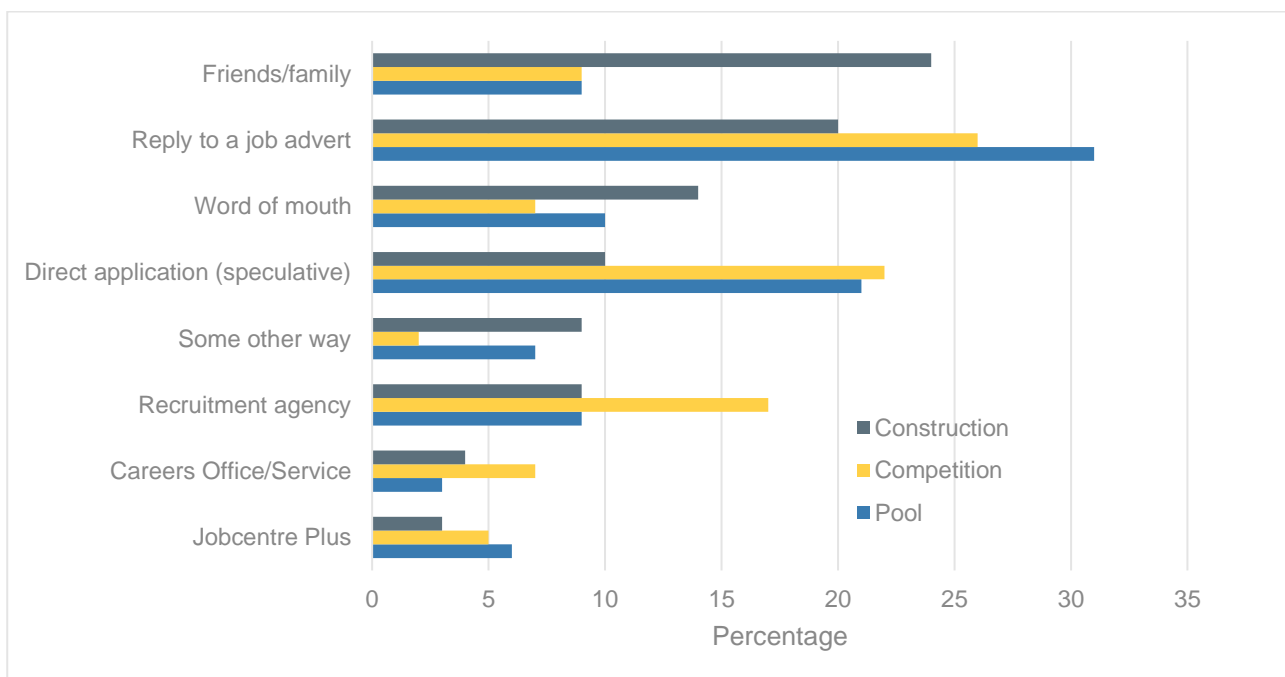
Base: All those who have worked, Construction N=234, Competition N=285, Pool N=700.

### 2.3.4 Finding work

Across all respondents, the most common method of finding their current (most recent) job – and thus a successful method – was to reply to a job advertisement placed on the internet, in social media or newspaper etc, this was followed by making a direct application to the employer. Use of recruitment agencies was relatively common as were more informal channels, such as hearing about the job from someone already working with the employer (word of mouth), or through friends and family. Finding the job through a careers office or Jobcentre Plus was relatively rare.

Those working in the construction sector were significantly more likely to have found their current/most recent job through their personal networks (24% via friends and family) and word of mouth; and were significantly less likely than other respondents to have found their jobs by making a formal application (either in response to an advertised vacancy or by making a speculative application). Ways of finding work for those in construction appear to be quite different when compared to those in competitor sectors (where formal application and use of agencies were common) and pool sectors (where again formal applications were key).

**Chart 2.6 Methods for finding work (%) by sector groupings**



Base: all working/previously worked, Construction N=234, Competition N=285, Pool N=700.

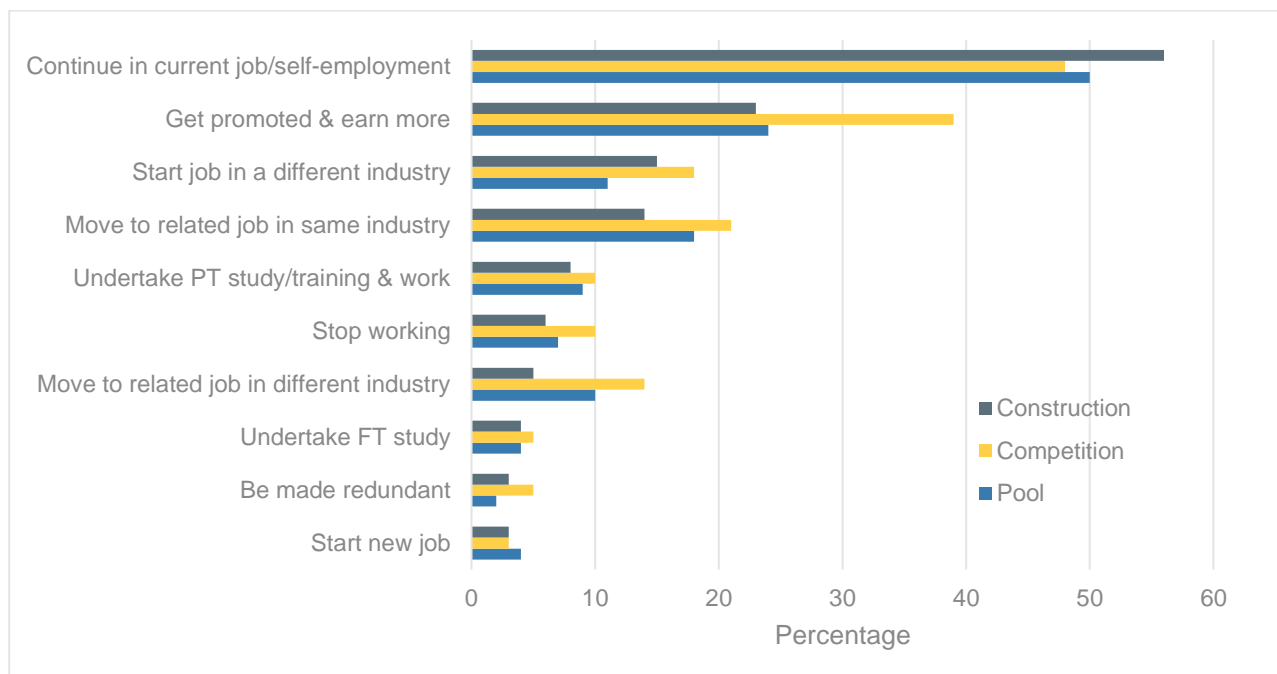
## 2.4 Future goals and expectations

Survey respondents were asked about their future work plans: what they expect will happen to them at work in the next two to three years; and then specifically how likely is it that they will stay in their current industry in the next two to three years.

Among those in work or looking for work, half (50%) expected to continue in their current job (role and industry) in the next few years. Other common expectations included promotion (27%), moving to a related job in the same industry (18%), starting a job in a different industry (14%), or moving to a related job in different industry (10%). Few of those in work at the time of the survey expected to be made redundant, and few of those in work or looking for work anticipated undertaking study or training. Overall staying within their sector appeared to be a more common expectation than moving sectors, which again is likely to reflect the challenging labour market context at the time of the survey. Additionally:

- for the small group who were not looking for work or were retired at the time of the survey, the majority (half of those not looking for work and all those retired) expected to remain out of work or stay in retirement (ie maintain their status quo). But one quarter of those not looking for work expected to start work in the next two to three years, and a slightly smaller group expected to undertake study or training. Due to the small, unweighted base these findings should be treated as indicative only; and
- for those who were studying at the time of the survey, the majority (76%) expected to get a job related to their study/training in the next two to three, and 32 per cent expected to progress to further study or training. Whereas 16 per cent expected to be self-employed and 11 per cent expected to get a job not related to their studies.

**Chart 2.7 Top ten expectations for next 2 to 3 years (%) by sector groupings**



*Base: all working or looking for work. Construction N=225, Competition N=260, Pool N=631.*

There were differences noticed in the expectations of respondents with different characteristics. Looking at the most common expectations for work, those most likely to anticipate continuing in their same job in the same industry were older and white. Those most likely to anticipate a promotion were younger or mid-age, from ethnic minority



backgrounds, those already in a higher-level role and with higher level qualifications (above Level 4); and this was also a more common expectation among those working in competitor sectors. Those most likely to anticipate moving to a related job in the same industry were mid-age, reported a disability, working in higher-level roles and with higher level qualifications (above Level 4). Whereas those anticipating moving industry were males, mid-age and working in competitor sectors.

**Table 2.4: Expectations in the next two to three years (%) by background**

Expectation	All (%)	More likely to be expected by*
Continue in current job (incl. self-employment)	50	55+, white
Get promoted and earn more/be on higher grade	27	16–24, 25–54, ethnic minority, high role, competition, L4+,
Move to related job in same industry	18	25–54, disabled, high roles, L4+
Start job in a different industry	14	Males, 25–54, competition
Move to related job in different industry	10	Males, 25–54, high roles, competition, L4+
Undertake PT further study/training alongside work	10	Females, ethnic minority, high roles, L4
Stop working	8	Males, 55+, lower/unskilled roles
Start new job	4	16–24, not working, looking for work, lower/unskilled role
Be made redundant	4	55+, stop working, high roles
Undertake FT study	4	16–24, not working, looking for work
Become self-employed/start own business (if not already)	1	16–24, ethnic minority, not working, looking for work, intermediate role, L4
Start job within previous industry	1	55+, not working, looking for work, competition, L3
Something else	1	-

*Base: working or looking for work (N=1206), \* significant difference*

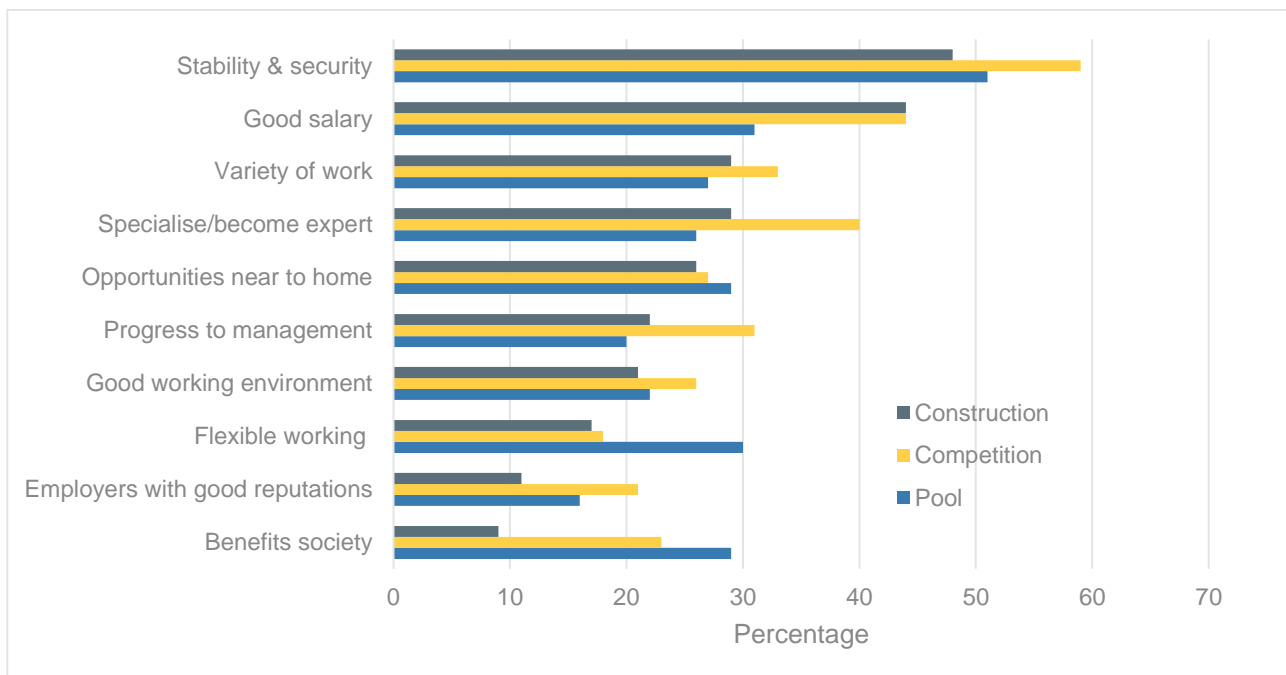
Most respondents felt they would definitely or probably stay in their current industry or sector (34% and 38% respectively). This compares with just 12 per cent who reported they will probably, and six per cent definitely will leave. There was no significant difference in reported likelihood of staying or leaving an industry for those in construction, competitor, or pool sectors.

- The main reasons given for staying in their current sector were stability and security, and good salary. Among those currently in work or looking for work, those most likely to stick with their sector were: currently in work, in a higher-level role and did not report a disability. These are general points in one's career when an individual is less likely to want to retrain unless exposed to a push factor or strong pull.
- In contrast the main reasons given for expecting to leave their industry were most commonly: to improve work/life balance, a desire to change occupation, lack of promotion/progression opportunities, a desire to change sector, or unsatisfactory pay.

It wasn't really about employer or sector values not aligning with their own, nor about wanting to change hours (either wanting to increase or more commonly to work shorter hours). Those most likely to anticipate moving industry or sector were males, younger (aged 16-to-24), looking for work, and in lower or unskilled roles.

For those in the construction industry (currently or most recently), expecting to stay in the sector was common and indeed to stay in their current job (56%, marginally more so than across all respondents) and approximately one-quarter (23%) expected some form of promotion with higher pay or a higher grade. Key reasons for staying were also stability and security and good salary; followed by opportunities to specialise/become expert, variety, local opportunities, opportunities to progress and good working environment. The opportunity to work independently or run their own business was also a reason for staying in the sector and was significantly more common among those in construction than found for other sector groupings. The latter reflects the ambitions of some interviewees (discussed later).

**Chart 2.8 Top ten reasons<sup>1</sup> given for expecting to stay in the industry (%) by sector groupings**



1. Top ten reasons given by all respondents for expecting to stay in their industry

Base: those working and will stay in their industry. Construction N=156, Competition N=170, Pool N=415.

### 3 Knowledge and awareness of construction among potential entrants

This chapter explores knowledge and awareness of the construction industry among people currently outside of the industry who could therefore be potential entrants. It looks at the perceptions of the construction industry held by these individuals, the extent to which they feel informed about the construction industry and from where they gain this knowledge and understanding. This will give CITB insights into areas where negative perceptions need to be tackled and positive perceptions strengthened, and where efforts to improve awareness of the industry should be directed (linking to research objectives 1A, 1B and 1D).

#### Key points

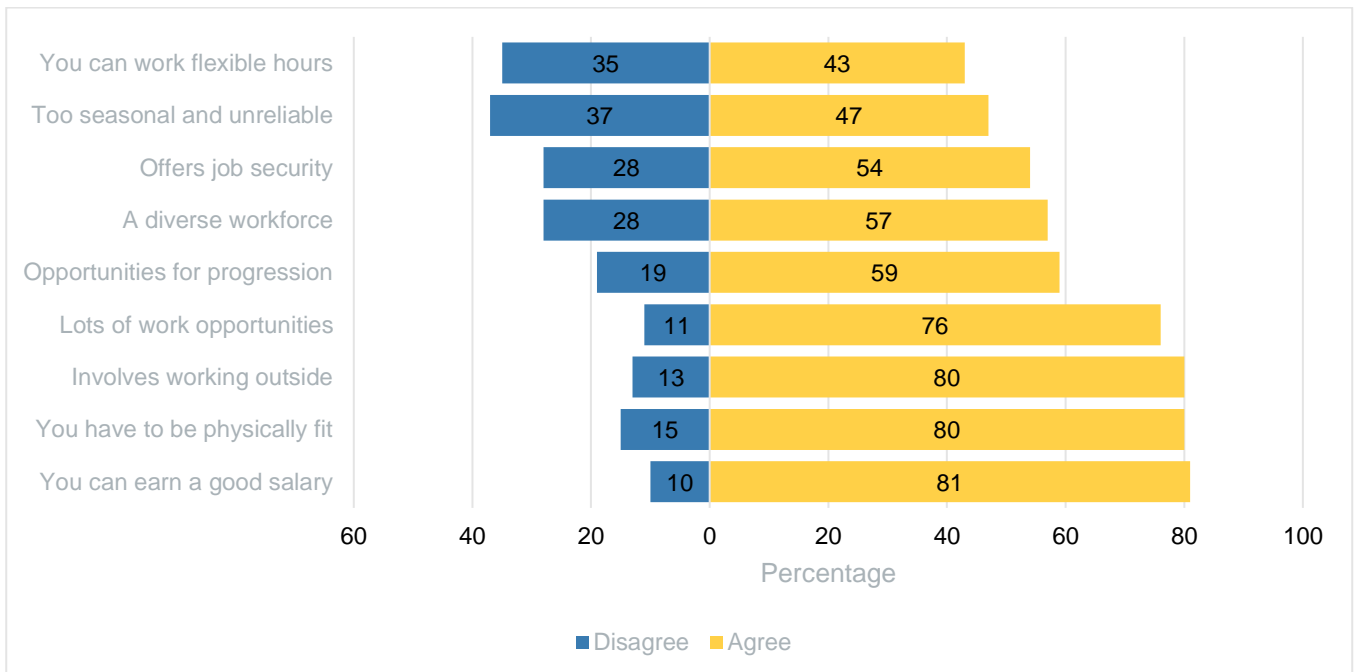
- The construction industry has an image problem and may not be a popular career choice for many potential entrants. However, people in the industry hold more positive views than those on the outside, and those in the sector are good ambassadors for the industry.
- The construction industry is seen (across all respondents) as physically demanding, involving working outside, offering a good salary, opportunities for progression and with availability of work across the UK. Among outsiders it is commonly described as manual, demanding and masculine; but a substantial minority also regard it as being professional, varied, and innovative.
- Many in the industry feel construction has a diverse workforce and offers flexibility, although respondents from underrepresented groups are less likely to feel this is true. However, this is at odds with the perceptions of those from outside of the industry and does not reflect the industry profile (eg evidenced by the Labour Force Survey). Diversity and flexibility are potential barriers for some prospective entrants, particularly those from the backgrounds the industry wants to attract.
- Almost half of potential entrants feel they have a good understanding of the construction sector, particularly the types of jobs and careers it offers. However, probing further indicates less knowledge about specifics. For example, many (up to one-quarter) feel they know nothing at all entry requirements, existence of local opportunities, opportunities for progression and how to find work or work experience in the sector. These are areas where the construction industry could focus its messaging.
- Those in competitor sectors feel they have a better understanding of the construction sector than those in pool sectors. This could be harnessed by the construction industry in their targeting, and in determining the type of information to provide (to target audiences).
- Personal networks are key sources of information about the construction industry for those within, but also those outside, the industry.

### 3.1 Perceptions of the construction industry

A review of the literature indicates that despite being one of the largest and fastest growing sectors in the UK economy, construction has an image problem when it comes to being considered as an attractive career prospect, particularly among young people (CIOB, 2016b; CIPD, 2020d). Research suggests that key challenges to recruiting more young people into construction are negative perceptions of the industry, and negative experiences within the industry. Awareness and perceptions of young people and their parents need to be improved as well as changing industry practice and culture (CITB, 2019a).

Our survey of construction workers and people working in other sectors (but who could potentially be entrants for the industry) finds that generally, respondents perceived the construction industry requires you to be physically fit and to work outside. It also found that the industry was perceived to be a place where you could earn a good salary and where there were lots of job opportunities around the country (over three-quarters of respondents agreed with these statements). Additionally, just over half felt the industry offered opportunities for progression, had a diverse workforce, and offered job security (a factor that appeared to be particularly critical in choice of employer and preferred industry). However, fewer than half felt the construction industry allowed for flexible working. Just under half also felt that work in the industry was too seasonal and unreliable.

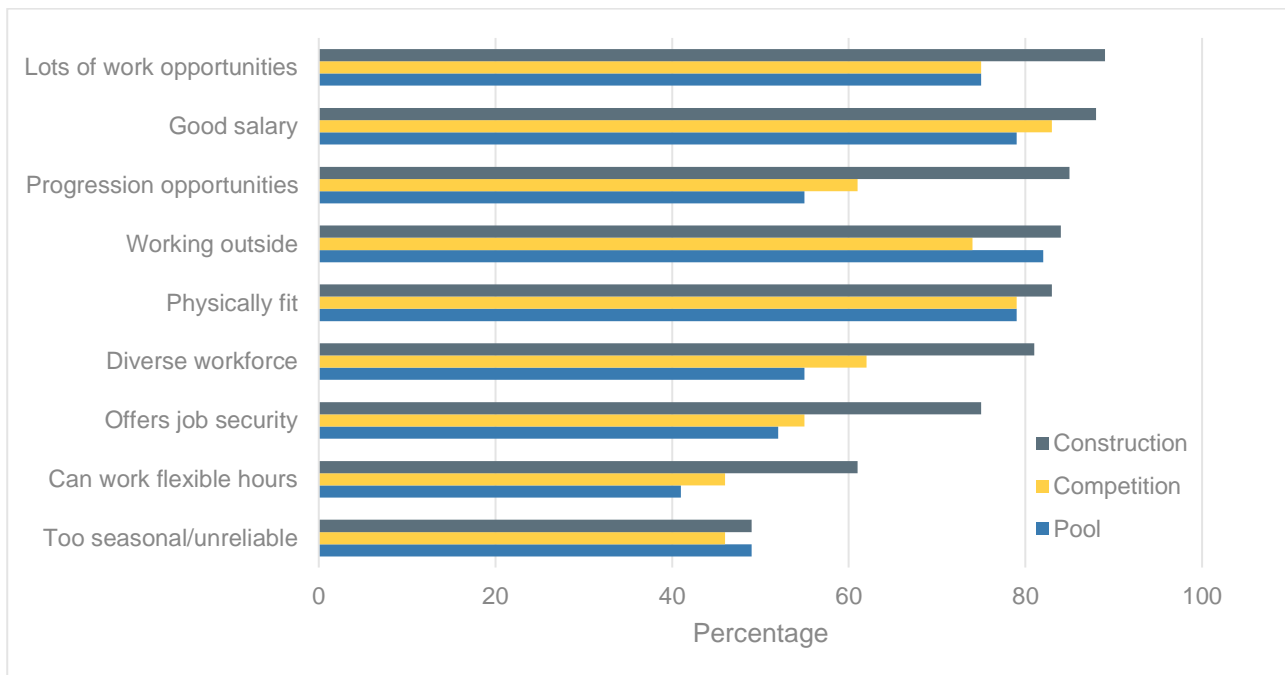
**Chart 3.1 Statements about the construction industry (%)**



Base: all respondents (N=1,366)

Those working in the construction industry were most likely to agree with each of the statements and were significantly more likely than those in competitor or pool sectors (those outside of the construction industry) to agree to positive statements that the industry offered lots of work opportunities, a good salary, opportunities for progression and promotion, and job security. These are aspects of the construction industry recognised by those within it but not by those on the outside, which indicates these aspects could be better promoted.

**Chart 3.2 Statements about the construction industry (%) by sector groupings**



*Base: all respondents, Construction N=234, Competition N=285, Pool N=700.*

Looking at perceptions around two aspects of concern for the construction industry, diversity and flexibility, the survey finds generally positive perceptions of these issues among the current workforce, suggesting that they view it as a diverse and flexible place to work.

- Those in the construction workforce were much more likely to agree that the sector has a diverse workforce (in terms of different ages, ethnicities, men and women, transgender/non-binary), which contradicts industry data that shows it not to be diverse. This gap could be the subject of further research. It could suggest that expectations prior to entry were particularly low and were exceeded from a low base, or that there are pockets of diversity experienced by respondents, or that there is a poor understanding of diversity (in all its facets).
- Most women working in construction felt the workforce was diverse, but they were relatively less likely to have this perception when compared to their male colleagues (71%, compared with 83%). Similarly, younger construction workers and disabled individuals were also relatively less likely to perceive the workforce as diverse, but this difference was not statistically significant (72% and 75% respectively).

- Looking at perceptions around flexible working, construction workers were more positive about being able to work flexible hours than those outside of the industry. Women in the sector were marginally less likely than men to agree you can work flexible hours in the sector (55%, compared with 63%) but the difference was not statistically significant. Those with a disability working in the sector were significantly less likely to perceive the sector allowed for flexible working compared to those who reported no disability (44%, compared with 66%), and a higher proportion of disabled construction workers disagreed than agreed with this statement (54% and 44%). Again, this is something that needs further exploration. The construction industry may offer a particular type of flexibility and flexible working that relates to having control over hours (fluid-flexibility) rather than offering a more formal and structured form of flexible hours such as part-time work (structured flexibility).

The construction industry across all respondents is mainly perceived as being manual, demanding and masculine; but a substantial minority also regard it as being professional, varied, and innovative. Fewer respondents regard construction as being dynamic, diverse, supportive, or ethical. However even fewer regard it as being old-fashioned, dull, uncaring, and unprincipled. **Generally, those in the industry are more likely to use positive adjectives to describe construction than those outside of it.**

**Table 3.1: Descriptors of the construction industry (%) by sector groupings**

Descriptor	All	Construction	Comp	Pool
Manual (-)	58	58	49*	61*
Demanding (+)	53	54	46*	55
Masculine (-)	49	33*	41	54*
Professional (+)	28	46*	31	27
Varied (+)	28	41*	27	26
Innovative (+)	21	26	25	20
Dynamic (+)	17	19	22*	16
Diverse (+)	15	26*	16	14
Old-fashioned (-)	13	14	12	12
Supportive (+)	9	16*	12*	7
Dull (-)	8	5	8	7
Ethical (+)	7	9	8	6
Uncaring (-)	7	9	9	6
Unprincipled (-)	6	7	9*	6
None of these	3	2	2	3
Don't know	4	2	3	5

*Base: all respondents (N=1366). \* indicates significant difference.*

Looking at the perceptions of different groups, gives an indicator of the myths or negative perceptions that may need to be addressed and the perceived strengths that can be emphasised with targeted messages:

- Women in the survey were more likely than men to describe the construction industry as manual, demanding, masculine, but also professional. Whereas men were relatively more likely than women to describe the industry as supportive and ethical, but also unprincipled.
- Older respondents (those aged 55 and over) were more likely than others to describe the industry as manual, demanding, varied and diverse. Conversely younger respondents (aged 16-to-24) were relatively more likely to describe it as old-fashioned and dull, but also supportive. Whereas those mid-age (25-to-54) were more likely than older or younger respondents to describe the industry as dynamic.
- Those from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to regard the industry as professional, innovative, dynamic, supportive, and ethical, but also to see it as dull.
- Individuals reporting a disability were more likely to describe construction as dynamic, diverse, supportive, and ethical.

**Table 3.2: Descriptors of the construction industry (%)**

Descriptor	All (%)	Most likely
Manual (-)	58	Females, older, white, L1-3 qualifications, pool sectors
Demanding (+)	53	Females, older, white, L4 qualifications
Masculine (-)	49	Females, L4 qualifications, pool sectors
Professional (+)	28	Females, ethnic minority, L4+ qualifications, <a href="#">construction</a>
Varied (+)	28	Older, white, <a href="#">construction</a>
Innovative (+)	21	ethnic minority,
Dynamic (+)	17	Mid age, ethnic minority, disabled, L4+ qualifications, competitor sectors
Diverse (+)	15	Older, disabled, low-level roles, <a href="#">construction</a>
Old-fashioned (-)	13	Younger, low-level roles, L4 qualifications
Supportive (+)	9	Males, younger, ethnic minority, disabled, L4+ qualifications, <a href="#">construction</a> , competitor sectors
Dull (-)	8	Younger, ethnic minority, low-level roles
Ethical (+)	7	Males, ethnic minority, disabled
Uncaring (-)	7	L4 qualifications
Unprincipled (-)	6	Males, High roles, competitor sectors

*Base: all respondents (N=1366).*

## 3.2 Knowledge and understanding of construction

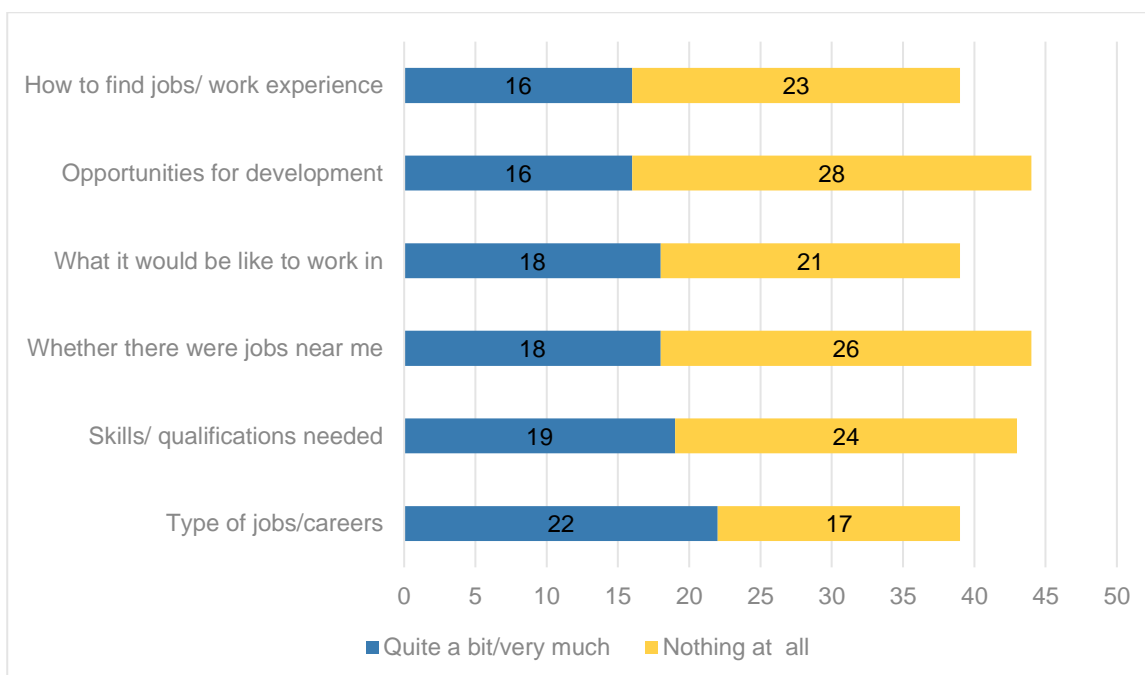
Among those not currently (or most recently) working in the construction industry, almost one half (45%) felt they had a good understanding of the jobs and careers available in the construction industry: 36 per cent mostly agreeing with the statement, and nine per cent definitely agreeing. Interestingly this compares with 37 per cent who felt they had a good understanding of the jobs and careers on offer in their own industry and sector prior to entry (26% quite a bit, and 11% very much).



Unsurprisingly those who had previously worked in the construction industry were much more likely to feel they had a good understanding (77%) as were those who had applied in the past for a job in construction (76%). Those currently working in competitor sectors were relatively more likely than those working in pool sectors to agree they had a good understanding of jobs and careers available in the construction industry (53% and 43% respectively).

Probing further, those not currently in the industry were asked about particular aspects of their industry knowledge and how much they felt they knew. Only 22 per cent felt they knew quite a bit or very much about the types of jobs and careers the construction industry offers. Similarly, approximately one-in-five felt they knew quite a bit or very much about the skills, qualifications and experience needed for entry, whether there were jobs near them, or what it would be like to work in it. Slightly fewer felt they knew whether the industry offered opportunities for development and progression, or how to find jobs or work experience in the industry (reflecting the general lower confidence in this aspect of the work environment across all work sector groupings).

**Chart 3.3: Knowledge of construction (%)**



*Base: current or most recent work not in construction (N=1,279)*

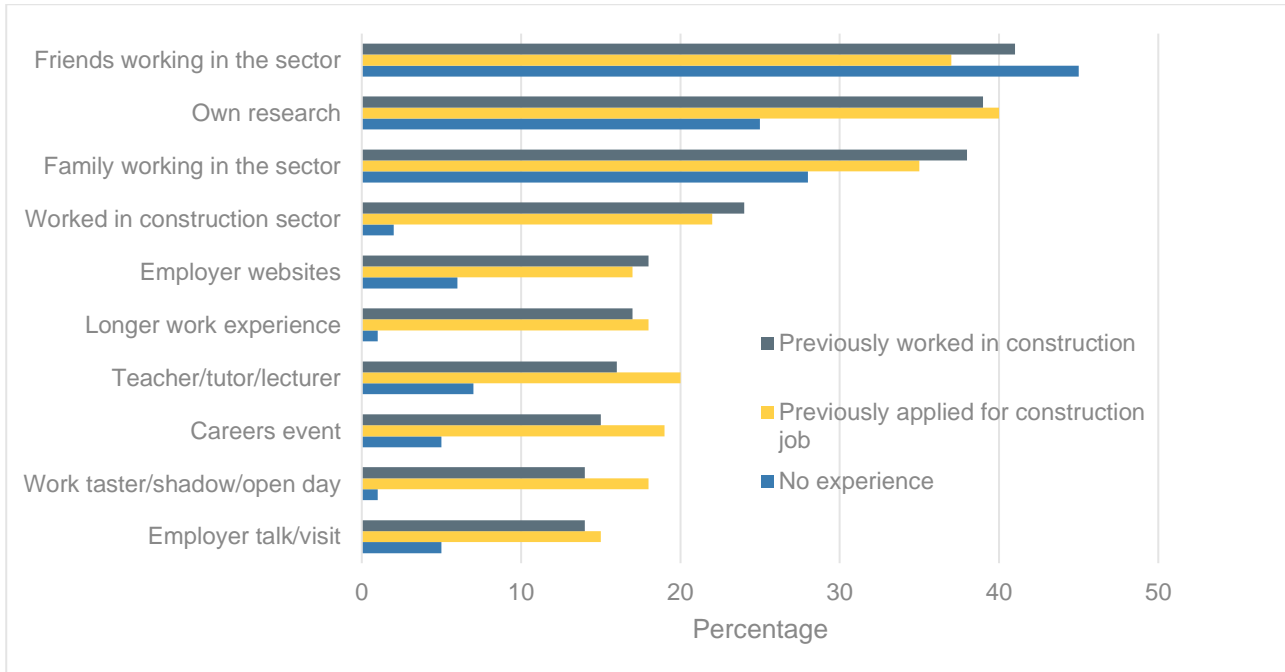
### 3.2.1 Sources of information about the construction industry

Those not currently (or most recently) working in the construction industry were also asked where they gained their knowledge of the construction industry and the most common sources were friends, family members and their own research. A small group, 15 per cent (rising to 18% of those who hadn't previously worked in or hadn't applied to the construction industry) felt they couldn't answer this question as they felt they knew



nothing about the industry. It is interesting that informal sources are still important sources to find out about construction, even for those who haven't found their way to construction.

**Chart 3.4 Top ten sources of information about construction (%) by experience of construction**



*Base: current or most recent work not in construction, previously worked in construction N=183, previously applied for construction N=165, no experience N=775.*

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## 4 Attraction of construction among potential entrants

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This chapter explores the relative attractiveness of the construction sector among people in different industries and from different backgrounds, to understand which groups might be easier to target for recruitment. It looks at various aspects of attraction and the extent to which individuals have or could consider a career in construction, and what might put them off from considering construction. This will give CITB insights into the groups that may be more receptive to recruitment activity (linking to research objectives 1A, 1D and 1E).

### Key points

- Attraction to construction was measured in several ways. Among potential entrants (those not currently in construction): 30 per cent feel construction is for someone like them, 17 per cent feel a career in construction is attractive to them, and 15 per cent, had previously applied for a job in construction. A smaller group, six per cent, had seriously considered construction before joining their current sector. A similarly sized group, eight per cent, are deemed to be promoters of the industry and would actively recommend working in construction to their friends or family. However, most industries are considered more attractive than construction by potential entrants.
- Those relatively more likely to consider a construction career attractive (and to recommend it to others) are male, mid age (25-to-64), from ethnic minority backgrounds, more highly qualified; and also, those currently out of work, working in lower level or unskilled roles, or working in competitor sectors, particularly engineering and manufacturing. The industry is also more attractive to those who have previously worked in construction and those who have previously applied for a job in the industry. This suggests groups the industry could target for recruitment.
- Among potential entrants, the majority of respondents working in engineering consider working in construction to be attractive or of some attraction, and many rank construction in their top-5 industries. There was also 'some interest' from a large proportion of those currently working in the manufacturing industry. This suggests that those working engineering and manufacturing could respond well to recruitment efforts. Additionally, almost one third of those currently in the retail sector placed construction in their top-5 industries and so could be persuaded to consider moving into the sector. This could reflect the impact of the pandemic on retail.
- Factors that could attract potential entrants to the construction industry are primarily pay, better information about the industry and what it can offer, the potential for progression, and a change in culture. Deterrents are the perceived working conditions (hard manual work and working outdoors) and masculine culture. Culture seems to put off potential applicants, but the culture is better inside than one might have expected.

## 4.1 Relative attractiveness of construction

### 4.1.1 Consideration of a career in construction

Among those not currently (or most recently) working in the construction industry, 15 per cent reported that they had applied for a job in construction. Those most likely to have done so were male, from an ethnic minority group, reported a disability, in lower level or unskilled roles, and working in competitor sectors. In terms of disabled individuals and those from ethnic minority backgrounds this is encouraging, suggesting an interest in the industry which links to their more positive perceptions about construction. This would make an interesting topic for future research to see where and why applications and interest in construction were not converted to a job.

In addition, six per cent of those not currently (or most recently) working in the construction industry had seriously considered working in construction before joining their current sector, and it was the fourteenth most commonly considered sector (out of 20). Only two per cent of those outside of the industry reported construction as the industry they would most like to work in now. This suggests that the construction industry is not necessary on the radar of those outside of the industry.

Again, focusing on those not currently (or most recently) working in the construction sector, 30 per cent felt that the construction sector was for someone like them, with 20 per cent mostly agreeing, and 10 per cent definitely agreeing. **Unsurprisingly this is much higher among those currently in construction, at 89 per cent.** Across all respondents those (significantly) more likely to feel the construction sector is for someone like themselves are male, mid-age group (25-to-54), currently working in construction or in a competitor sector, those who previously worked in construction or applied for a job in construction, and in lower level or unskilled occupations, and those qualified at Level 3.

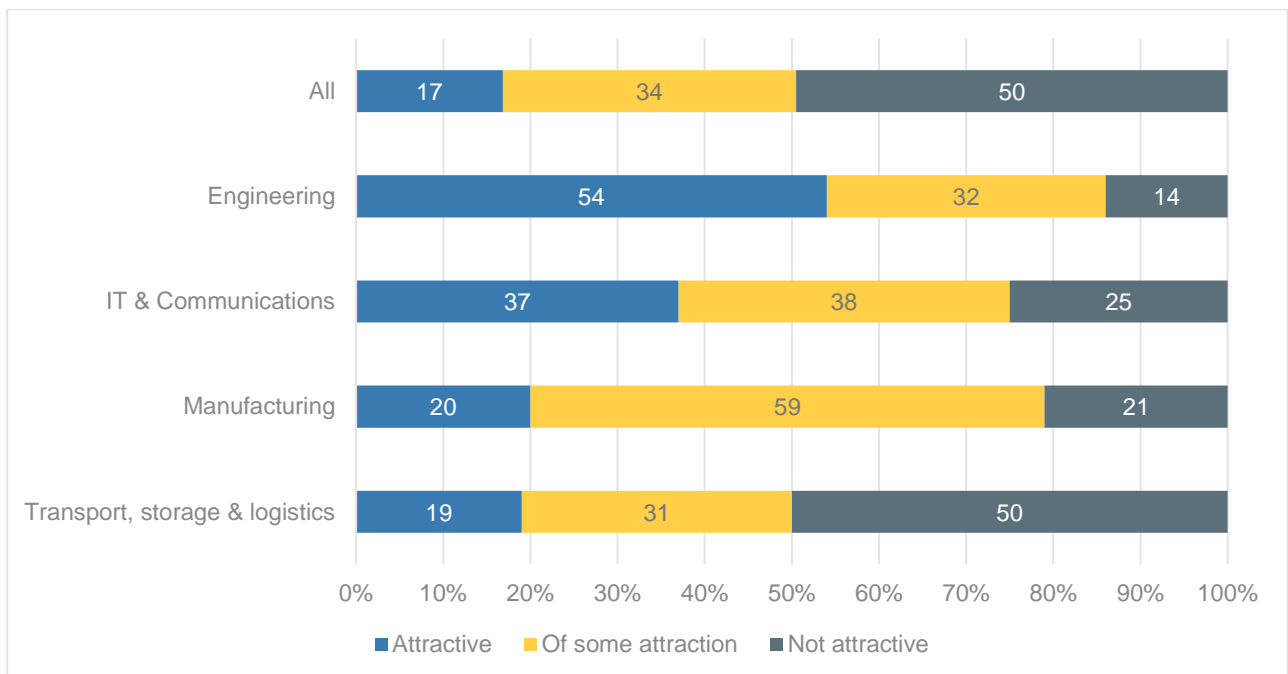
### 4.1.2 Potential attraction

Among those not currently working in the industry: 17 per cent felt construction was an attractive career to them (scoring eight, nine or 10 out of 10 on attractiveness) and a further 34 per cent felt it had some attraction (scoring it five, six or seven). However, half (50%) of those not currently (or most recently) working in construction did not consider it to be an attractive career. This increases to 58 per cent among those with no experience of the industry (ie no previous work in the industry or not having applied for a job in the industry). This suggests that there are many individuals who completely discount the construction industry. However, those relatively more likely to find a construction career attractive (ie scoring eight, nine or 10) were: male, mid-age (25–54), from ethnic minority backgrounds, qualified to above Level 4, those looking for work (ie currently unemployed), those in lower/unskilled roles, and currently working in a competitor sector. Unsurprisingly it was more likely to be regarded as attractive by those who had previously worked in construction or had applied in the past for a job in construction. This suggests some groups of individuals that could be targeted for potential recruitment.

Looking more closely at potential entrants currently in competitor sectors could suggest some industries CITB could target for recruitment activity.

- The survey finds that those currently in the engineering industry were most likely to consider a career in construction attractive: 54 per cent scored it as attractive and a further 32 per cent as having some attraction. It may however be higher level roles that are attractive rather than lower-level roles because most respondents from the engineering industry were qualified to Level 4 or above (75%) and many (39%) were working in high level occupations. Finding a suitable role that did not require re-training or starting from the bottom again was more likely to attract those in engineering to construction compared with those in other competitor industries and sectors (see below).
- Additionally, a large group (59%) of those working in the manufacturing industry consider a career in construction to be of some attraction. Both manufacturing and construction respondents have a similar age profile and there appears to be less long-term attachment to manufacturing by those working in it (only 30% had worked in manufacturing for 10 years or more). However, manufacturing, as with other industries is more diverse in relation to gender and ethnicity compared with construction so recruitment activity targeted at this industry would need to take this into consideration.

**Chart 4.1 Attraction of construction among potential entrants (%) – by (selected) current industry/sector**



*Base: Those whose current or most recent work was not in construction, All N=1,132, Engineering N=53, IT & Communications N=51, Manufacturing N=55, Transport, storage & logistics N=55.*

When asked to compare the attractiveness of working in the construction industry compared with 11 other amalgamated sectors and industries<sup>1</sup>, the others were considered 'more attractive' by more respondents in nearly all cases. The exceptions were the groups of energies and utilities industries, and the armed forces and emergency services. In these cases, roughly the same proportion of people considered them 'more attractive' as those considered them 'less attractive' compared to construction. This question was used to calculate how many sectors were deemed more attractive and how many less attractive, and whether construction was in top-5.

Among potential entrants (those not currently or most recently in construction) 11 per cent ranked construction in the top-5 industries/sectors. However, a large group of respondents (52%) had no ranking calculated due to the large number answering: 'don't know.' This indicates a general lack of awareness about industries and sectors (other than the ones individuals work in or are aiming for). This suggests that ranking questions where individuals must consider a wide range of industries may not work given their relatively narrow understanding of industries.

Across all respondents, where we can calculate the ranking, the construction industry was ranked in the top-5 industries/sectors by 25 per cent of respondents. This was highest among those already working in construction (53%) and people aged 55-to-64 years old (37%). Respondents working in engineering were more likely than those working in other industries to place construction in their top-5 sectors (50%), which links with findings around their relatively greater attraction to the construction industry. Interestingly 29 per cent of those currently working in retail (and where the ranking could be calculated) placed construction in their top-5 sectors, and perhaps reflects the impact that the pandemic and lockdowns have had on this industry. This could suggest another industry for the construction industry to target for recruitment activity.

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<sup>1</sup> These were: agriculture/environment, manufacturing/engineering, energy/utilities, retail/hospitality/leisure/sports/creative, transportation/storage/logistics, IT/communications, finance/insurance/real estate/administration, legal/scientific/professional services, education/public admin, health/social care, armed forces/emergency services

**Table 4.1: Proportion of people placing construction in their top-5 industries or sectors to work in (%) by industry/sector currently worked in**

Industry/sector currently worked in	Proportion ranking construction in top-5	Unweighted base (N)
Construction	53	104
<b>Competition sectors (all)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>152</b>
Engineering	37	33
IT and communications	12	30
<b>Pool sectors (all)</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>318</b>
Retail	29	54
Hospitality	11	36
Education and teaching	22	38
Health and social care	25	64

*Base: all respondents where ranking could be calculated (N=642). Note: only sectors with a base of 30 or higher were included in this table, however percentages should be treated with caution due to the low base size.*

A further dimension to the perceived attraction of the construction industry to potential entrants was captured by asking this group to score how likely it would be that they recommend working in the construction industry to friends or family. The scoring used a scale of 0-to-10, where zero was not at all likely to recommend, and 10 most likely to recommend. Only eight per cent of potential entrants were promoters of the industry (scoring nine or 10 when asked if they would recommend working in the industry), 25 per cent were passives, and 67 per cent were detractors. This means those not currently in the construction give it a net promoter score of -59. Those most likely to be industry promoters were male, mid-age (25–54), from ethnic minority backgrounds, with a disability, qualified above Level 4, and currently working in a competitor sector.

## 4.2 Possible attraction factors and deterrents

The survey provided insights that could help with messaging to attract new entrants into the construction industry, particularly in terms of how attraction and deterrent factors differed between groups of respondents. Some aspects of working in the construction industry were seen by those outside of the industry as positive factors (pull factors), and similarly some were regarded as negative aspects or deterrents. However, responses to some aspects had both positive and negative perceptions.

### 4.2.1 Attraction factors

Those not currently (or most recently) working in construction, were invited to describe what could encourage them to consider working in the construction industry. The text responses were coded into a list of factors. The factors most cited factors that could encourage them to work in construction were good or better salary, jobs and industry

being better advertised and more information about it, career paths and progression/development, and if it was less male dominated or had a less masculine culture. The latter appears to be particularly an issue (perception) for women, those with Level 4 qualifications, or from pool sectors. However, almost one-quarter (22%) of potential entrants reported that nothing could encourage them to consider working in the construction industry.

There were few significant differences between those in competitor and in pool sectors. However, salary appeared to be stronger attraction factor towards construction for those currently working in competitor sectors, whereas having a less male dominated culture was relatively more important to those in pool sectors than in competitor sectors. Further analysis suggests:

- Salary was likely to be a stronger attraction factor for: males, those mid age (25-to-54), those from ethnic minority backgrounds, no disability and with the highest-level qualifications (above Level 4) and in higher level roles, and those in lower level and unskilled roles. It was also relatively more important to those currently in the IT and communications industry. It was not however as important to those currently in the hospitality sector.
- Better advertising of the industry could work for women, younger individuals (aged 16-to-24), those currently not working, and with Level 4 qualifications.
- Offering progression and development opportunities and career paths would be more attractive to those currently in work.
- Working to improve gender diversity would be relatively more attractive to women, those mid age (25-to-54), in intermediate roles and with Level 4 qualifications.
- Work satisfaction was more attractive to those from ethnic minority backgrounds and to those currently working in engineering and manufacturing industries.

Potential encouraging factors	% all potential	% comp	% pool
Good or better salary	17	24*	13*
Job/industry being advertised in general/more information	10	9	10
Career paths/progression/development	6	7	6
If it was less male dominated/less macho culture	6	3*	7
Enjoying the work/job satisfaction	4	6	4
Job security	4	3	4
If I was younger (too old)	4	4	5
Good working hours (including flexible working)	3	4	4
No manual labour/prefer office work	3	2	3
A suitable vacancy (incl. not having to retrain/start at bottom)	3	3	3
Other	5	4	5
No interest in construction/changing sector	7	6	8
Nothing	22	19	22
Don't know	6	4	7
Not answered	5	9	5

**Table 4.2: Factors to encourage consideration of construction (%) by sector groupings**

*Base: Those currently or most recently not in construction (N1,132). \* indicates significant difference. Note this was coded from an open text question, and not all respondents provided an answer*

Potential encouraging factors	%	More likely
Good or better salary	17	Males, 25–54, ethnic minority, no disability, L4+ qualifications
Job/industry being advertised in general/more information	10	Females, 16–24, not in work, L4 qualifications
Career paths/progression/development	6	No disability, in work
If it was less male dominated/less macho culture	6	Females, 25–54, intermediate roles, L4 qualifications
Enjoying the work/job satisfaction	4	ethnic minority, engineering, and manufacturing industries
Job security	4	25–54,
If I was younger (too old)	4	55+, white, disability
Good working hours (including flexible working)	3	
No manual labour/prefer office work	3	Females, disability, L4 qualifications
A suitable vacancy (incl. not having to retrain/start at bottom)	3	
No, none, nothing	22	55+, white, lower/unskilled roles

**Table 4.3: Top encouraging factors**

*Base: Those currently or most recently not in construction (N=1,132), most likely as indicated by statistical significance*



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**Examples of comments expressing an interest in and curiosity about construction:**

*'I am fascinated with engineering, architecture, agriculture and would have liked to pursue a career in these industries only if I had the right qualifications. I realised my interest in this industry a little too late.'*

Female, 25-to-54, pool sector, high level role

*'Construction industry can give me the new experience and ability to work outside, workers' wages have increased as well. The managers and the engineers are earning higher, besides this they are supporting government by their knowledge and ideas.'*

Female, under-25, student

**Examples of comments relating to a need for more information, insights into career pathways and understanding/reassurances about whether their skills would be a good fit:**

*'More information on the construction industry at school, how to get into the sector, work shadowing opportunities/ taster days.'*

Female, under-25, pool sector, intermediate occupation

*'If I was more aware of what the job entailed and how I could make a career out of it. Also if more women were encouraged to be part of it.'*

Female, under-25, student

*'A clear presentation of the types of careers it entails, how career progression in it works, what skills it requires and what's the salary range to expect.'*

Male, under-25, student

*'If I knew there were jobs available that would utilise my skills and experience.'*

Male, aged 25-to-54, competitor sector, high level role

**Examples of comments expressing the desire for better representation of women and diversity in the industry:**

*'More female roles, I have a family member who is female in the construction industry and although she's in charge of the men who work for her, the lack of respect and promiscuousness of the men working make it uncomfortable for any female to work alongside.'*

Female, under-25, student

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*'More information about the roles available other than 'builder'. What it's like for women, LGBTQ+ people, those with disabilities.'*

Female, under-25, student

### Comments reflecting wider motivations:

*'If construction was involved with more ethical and green projects.'*

Male, aged 25-to-54, pool sector, intermediate occupation

*'New tech and methods being implemented.'*

Male, under-25, student

*'If it was more flexible and friendly for people with disabilities and with hidden disorders like CFS and Fibromyalgia.'*

Male, aged 25-to-54, pool sector, intermediate occupation

*'Having a sense of how it would be of benefit to society.'*

Female, aged 55+, retired from pool sector, higher level occupation

## 4.2.2 Deterrents

Survey respondents were asked to describe what might put them off working in the construction industry and these text responses were coded into a set of factors. Among those not currently (or most recently) working in construction the key aspects which could put them off working in the sector were: the manual work involved and their preference for office work, or concerns over their health and fitness and whether they would be able to cope with the physical aspects of the industry; the potential to work outdoors in poor weather conditions; and being male dominated. These potential deterrents correspond with pervading views of the sector (from the outside).

**Table 4.4: Most commonly cited factors that could deter consideration of construction (%)**

Potential deterrents	%
Hard work (manual labour/heavy lifting/prefer office)	18
Working outdoors	16
Too male dominated/macho culture	11
Poor salary	6
Lack of job security	6
Boring work/no interest in construction	6
Long hours/inconvenient hours/shifts	6

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Lack necessary skills/experience/qualifications	5
Age/too old	5

*Base: Those currently or most recently not in construction (N1,132)*

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Those from ethnic minority backgrounds and younger respondents were relatively more likely to report poor salary as a deterrent; women were more likely to report a male dominated/macho culture as a deterrent along with perceived hard work, manual labour, and heavy lifting. Older workers (those aged 55-plus) were also more likely to be put off by working outdoors and poor weather (reflecting the types of health conditions this group reported such as mobility issues, stamina/breathing and fatigue, and hearing disabilities).

Other factors reported (and coded) included: perception of the work as dangerous, worries about working at heights, and poor working environment; concerns about discrimination and lack of diversity; having disabilities or health conditions preventing them; worries about lack of progression and/or no career paths; and generally lacking information about the industry and its jobs.

In terms of the **masculine culture**, comments referred to: the all-male workforce or masculine environment, the industry being masculine-oriented, the manly atmosphere or blokey culture, there being too many men, and male dominance. Some comments also referred to how this would deter women and would make them feel uncomfortable; that the attitudes in the industry towards women were old-fashioned and misogynistic; and that the culture could be hostile:

#### Examples of comments about the masculine environment:

*'Too much of a manual, masculine, blokey environment, which would be intimidating.'*

Male, aged 25–54, competitor sector, high-level role

*'I feel like it attracts a lot of hyper masculine men.'*

Male, under-25, pool sector/student

*'Being outside all the time working in an exclusively male dominated job. The job is so physical and difficult. Men would not give a woman a chance in this job at all. A woman would be made to feel very uncomfortable.'*

Female, aged 55+, pool sector, intermediate level role

#### Examples of comments about the old-fashioned attitudes:

*'Attitudes of workforce still stuck in the 70s.'*

Male, aged 55+, competitor sector, lower-level role

*'Old fashioned thinking regarding gender roles.'*

Female, aged 25–54, pool sector, intermediate level role

*'That it is more manual. very masculine orientated. Perception of men making rude jokes to females. Not set up to cater for women's needs.'*

Female, aged 25-54, pool sector, high level role

### Example of comments about toxic environment:

*'Toxic work environments. Particularly ones where the ratio of men to women poses a safety threat.'*

Female, aged 25–54, pool sector, high level role

Some comments indicated respondents felt there was **discrimination** or potential for discrimination in the industry, with individuals mentioning sexism, racism and homophobia; and also that they were aware of poor attitudes and behaviours:

*'How some of the workers I've experienced talk and act.'*

Female, aged 25–54, pool sector, high level role

*'Literally everything about it. I have construction outside my house and all I hear is the workers yelling racist and sexist comments! Disgusting.'*

Female, under-25, competitor sector, intermediate occupation

*'If the people ain't nice ya get me. I ain't working with no racist.'*

Male, under-25, pool sector, lower-level role

*'Being gay and having things said.'*

Male, aged 25–54, pool sector, intermediate occupation

*'It's mostly a male environment and women often face harassment.'*

Female, aged 25–54, pool sector, high level role

## 5 Getting into construction

This chapter draws from the interviews with new entrants to the construction industry (insiders), alongside key findings from the survey with a broader range of individuals with experience of the construction industry. Using these data, it explores reasons for choosing construction, the perceived attraction factors of the industry, and whether any other work options were considered. It looks at pathways to and preparation for working in the construction sector including whether and how entrants gain an understanding of the industry before entry. It also gathers feedback from new entrants on their recruitment and entry experiences. This will give CITB an understanding of in-depth reasons why interviewees were attracted to construction work (research objective 2A) and why they chose construction over other industries (research objective 1B).

### Key findings

- There were two pathways to construction: largely unplanned, versus a more purposeful move. Purposeful moves tend to be motivated by a desire to make use of training and qualifications, to build professional careers by transferring skills to a new context, or to try something new. Unplanned moves can stem from individuals being undecided about careers and using the construction industry as place to work whilst they make decisions, or from a perceived lack of work options.
- Both purposeful and less deliberate entry to the construction industry can be facilitated by easy access to entry-level jobs without needing qualifications or experience and to higher level non-construction related roles without needing industry-based experience. Ease of entry is a key facet of the industry particularly for those who feel they have limited work options.
- New entrants to construction had invariably considered and/or experienced other industries before choosing construction.
- Among competitor sectors, engineering was commonly considered particularly as it offered individuals opportunities to work with their hands, followed by the armed services, emergency services, and transport, storage and logistics. However, interviewees were put off by the perceived high level of competition for jobs, fewer job opportunities, and the recruitment processes involved (eg reliance on agencies). Construction was seen as easy(ier) to access, offering opportunities to make something and some degree of physicality of work.
- Interviewees tended to feel they had little knowledge about the sector prior to entry, despite many reporting that they undertook self-directed research using the internet (particularly to research specific employers). Some blamed the education system, including higher education, for failing to provide information about the industry, or felt there was a paucity of information, particularly about specific technical construction roles, available online.
- How respondents heard about job opportunities and the recruitment methods they experienced were largely determined by the type of role they looked for. Word of mouth was

a common method of finding work, particularly for manual and trade roles, followed by informal recruitment approaches such as meeting a prospective employer and perhaps undertaking a short trial period. Those in professional and technical roles typically found their jobs through websites, social media, and agencies, and underwent a formal recruitment process involving submitting a CV or application form, interviews and sometimes tests or an assessment centre. There was a suggestion that even with more formal recruitment approaches, construction roles were more accessible than found in other industries.

## 5.1 Choosing construction

### 5.1.1 Purposeful versus unplanned entry

The interviews indicated there were two different approaches to entering the construction industry differentiated by the level of purposefulness – whether it was a deliberate choice and course of action involving consideration of potential attraction factors, or something largely unplanned, pragmatic and that they ‘fall into’ with little consideration.

Some interviewees described how they had decided on a job or career in construction early on, such as when choosing A-levels. For instance, one interviewee who now works in a technical role, described thinking about what they were good at, what they enjoyed, and the possible industries they could go into, when they were made A-level choices. Those who decided early on that they wanted to work in construction often reported how some formal or informal work experience, generally with a family member, had influenced their decision. For example, having experience from helping a parent with home DIY projects or helping on-site for a family business:

*‘I helped out when I was 16-to-18, here and there, ad-hoc, being an extra pair of hands on-site.’*

Male, 24, white, Manual

Others gained work experience at their parent’s place of work. One interviewee whose parent was a surveyor, gained work experience at their practice when they were 16 years old, which encouraged them to follow that career path.

*‘When I did work experience, I found it really interesting because I wasn’t just sitting at the desk...to me that was a very attractive side of it.’*

Female, 22, white, Professional

Some of those who entered the industry with more purpose, tended to choose construction because it related to their previous training, and qualifications. For example, one interviewee working in a technical role conducting compliance monitoring chose to work in construction because it related to their degree. Others chose construction and then chose appropriate qualifications to prepare. Indeed, there was evidence that many interviewees had undertaken relevant training or gained a qualification prior to joining the construction industry. These could involve relatively short-term and low-cost commitments or longer-term periods of study. Most commonly, interviewees reported gaining the CSCS

card so they could work on-site. Individuals also reported gaining other tickets and cards, such as asbestos awareness, and manual handling. Whereas those who worked in trade roles had often undertaken a specific trade qualification or an apprenticeship. It was felt by one interviewee that ‘getting a qualification provides you with the necessary paperwork’ and can help build your reputation as a tradesman (Male, 23, white, Trade). Examples of qualifications described included a City and Guilds in painting and decorating, a BTEC in construction, an NVQ in carpentry and joinery, and a multi-trade course. However, there were some conflicting views as to whether a qualification is needed before entering the industry, or if it is something you should get after gaining some experience. One interviewee in a technical role, also described undertaking an internship in construction.

Some interviewees reported that they chose to move into the construction industry after working in other sectors because they recognised that they could transfer their specific skills (although unrelated to construction) from a role within another industry. For example, one individual reported that moving into a sales role in construction was ‘a natural extension of my previous marketing role’ (Female, 25, white, Professional). Others described how they had not intended to work or build a career in the construction industry but recognised how their qualification – generally a degree – in a related field such as geology, heritage, business, or marketing could be useful in the construction industry. These individuals tended to move into a technical or professional role in construction. Both these groups of individuals, those with generic and with construction-related skills and qualifications, tended to be more aligned to their profession, specialism, or role rather than a particular industry. The construction industry was therefore perceived to offer an opportunity to carry out their role but within a new industry. Female interviewees were particularly likely to cite the ability to transfer skills as the reason they chose to work in construction over other reasons.

*‘I thought I would dip my toe in the water.’*

Female, 25, Mixed/Multiple Ethnic group, Technical role

Many interviewees described seeing their role in construction as an opportunity to try something new. Some interviewees described being ready for a change from their previous role, whereas others had sometimes been forced into making a change. For example, after being made redundant or moving back to the UK which provided a break in employment and spurred them on to ‘give it a go’. Choosing construction following a forced employment gap was more common amongst those who had a passion for construction, and often those now working in a trade role.

*‘I was sick of working in a warehouse basically, and there was more money in construction.’*

Male, 25, white, Trade

*‘I was in that frame of mind where I wanted out of where I was currently working, and it seemed like a really good company with lots of benefits on offer and flexibility in the role.’*

Female, 37, white, Professional

These key points suggest ‘moments’ alongside traditional transition points that the construction industry and CITB can tap into and target for recruitment messaging.

Other interviewees purposefully chose construction because of the ease of entry to the industry without qualifications or experience. This was particularly common for those working in manual and trade roles or when the role was found through a friend or family member.

Ease of entry was a common reason for choosing construction amongst interviewees who entered the industry with less purpose or deliberate intent. While this view was more common among those in manual roles, some interviewees in technical and professional roles also described the ease of entry as a reason for choosing construction. Individuals commonly reported choosing construction because it was a means of avoiding unemployment.

*‘I was out of uni and I didn’t want to spend ages and ages not working...I just thought the quicker I start working the better.’*

Male, 24, white, Technical

Similarly, some interviewees felt limited by their educational attainment and viewed construction as a valid career option. Here individuals reported either they did not want to continue in education and could enter construction without needing to, or they felt their (lower) educational achievements meant they had limited other options. Particularly interviewees in manual roles, felt that finding work in construction was easy and offered a way of making money.

*‘It wasn’t really a choice. I was made redundant, and I did float around for a bit. I’ve never really had a career path as such, so it’s literally because it’s easy, it’s a way to make money, and I’m working with people I know.’*

Male, 48, white, Manual

Others described choosing to work in construction while they decided what they wanted to do, looked for work in another industry or saved money to do something else (eg an entrepreneurial venture).

*‘The construction stuff has really been a means to an end. I do enjoy it, it’s not what I want to do in the future.’*

Male, 23, white, Manual

### 5.1.2 Reasons for choosing construction or their construction employer

The interview discussions highlighted how there were also certain factors about the construction industry which compelled interviewees to choose to work within it. These largely correspond with the findings from the survey in terms key factors of attraction for current (or most recent) job in construction. These were variety of work, stability and



security, good working environment, good salary, and the employers' good reputation. However, the interviews provide additional insights about the draws of the industry.

Critically the construction industry was seen as a stable option by many interviewees, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic when it was difficult to find work elsewhere. For some, it was felt that construction could offer a more stable income compared to their previous roles, and the amount of work would be more consistent. This may reflect the specific context of the pandemic, and the emphasis the current government has placed on the sector, including housing and infrastructure development, because historically the sector has not always been stable, and for example following the 2008 recession suffered a significant downturn. Nevertheless, in the current context, interviewees believed there would always be work for people in construction, particularly those in manual or trade roles as 'there is always work out there, someone is always building something' (Male, 24, white, Manual). This was emphasised to interviewees by the continuation of work in the industry throughout the Covid-19 restrictions.

*'There will always be opportunities in construction, and that is quite a reassuring thing to have – I've got a friend in events whose job has completely dried up.'*

Female, 22, white, Professional

Indeed, some individuals identified that the construction industry is important to the country's economy and so has fared better than other industries during the Covid-19 crisis. One highlighted that the Government 'like to build their way out of trouble', reflecting on the Covid-19 'Build Back Better' response (Male, 28, white, Technical).

*'I am so grateful being in construction and not in retail. The construction industry is usually well looked after. It is important to the country. People are always going to want housing, to own their own home. Whereas retail has really struggled, there are always ups and downs and lots of pressure from week to week.'*

Female, 35, white, Professional

The opportunities for learning and progression within the industry were also highlighted as a key factor that attracted people to the industry, with progression leading to increased earnings, responsibility, autonomy, and proficiency. Some interviewees also perceived there were good opportunities for growth and progression within the construction industry, often because they knew people who worked in construction and had seen them progress and succeed. Those working in manual roles often had friends or family in the industry who were role models for what working in the industry would be like and the opportunities it afforded. The opportunity for progression within a particular company was also a reason that interviewees gave for taking a role in construction. Indeed, those in professional and technical roles described how they aligned themselves with a larger employer because they felt there would be greater progression opportunities.

The nature of the work was also a reason some interviewees chose to work within the construction industry. They were attracted by the physicality of the work and being able to work outside. Moreover, many interviewees indicated they were attracted to construction because they did not want to work in an office environment. Interviewees, particularly

those in manual and trade roles, enjoyed working outside or on different locations, and many participants in technical and professional roles also enjoyed having a mix of working in an office environment as well as some on-site work. These are aspects that can be considered by those outside of the industry as negative aspects to the work and potential deterrents (as indicated by responses to the survey of potential entrants, discussed in Chapter 4), but clearly can act as an attraction:

*'I always wanted to be hands-on with a job, I wanted to be outside working.'*

Male, 18, white, Trade

Some interviewees reported that they chose to work in the construction industry because of the offer of a specific employer, rather than a more general attraction to the industry. Individuals described the likability of their employer upon meeting them and the feeling that their values 'were part of me already.'

*'At the interview I felt like I belonged there, and they were on the same wavelength. I had not experienced that before.'*

Female, 30, white, Professional

The location of a specific employer was another reason interviewees' chose a particular job in the construction industry, especially when they felt there were limited options in their local area. Individuals also reported that their employer offered a benefits package (including pay, hours, annual leave allowance) which was generous and drew them to take that role in the construction industry.

Another common factor that attracted interviewees to the construction industry was how easy it was perceived to be to enter. Here individuals explained that not necessarily needing qualifications or experience made the industry more accessible.

### 5.1.3 Choice of construction over other industries

The survey explored whether respondents had seriously considered working in any other industries or sectors before taking up work in their current or most industry. Among those working (or most recently working) in the construction industry other sectors most considered included: engineering, the armed forces/emergency services, IT and communications, and finance. There was also a larger group in the survey who had previously worked in the construction industry but were now working in other sectors. They most commonly worked in engineering and in IT and communications, but many were spread fairly equally across competitor and pool sectors.

Similarly, the interviews provide evidence of individuals choosing construction over both 'pool' and competitor industries.

#### Pool industries considered

The most common pool industry and sector areas discussed were related to professional business services including finance and accountancy, sales, marketing, and

administration. Interviewees noted how professional roles within these industries and sectors can be transferred easily to work within the construction industry. For these individuals (as noted above) choosing construction was less about deliberately targeting the industry and more about continuing within their profession and having the opportunity to carry out that work in a new industry.

The reasons why interviewees didn't take up work in these pool industries (and essentially chose construction instead) included push factors from the alternative industries, such as the need for work experience, which was typically unpaid, or the perception that the other industry was stressful or hierarchical. There were also pull factors from the construction sector, where respondents felt there was more variety (in work environment), learning and development and progression opportunities.

*'I didn't like being in the same place, I like being outdoors.'*

Male, 24, white, Manual

*'At the time I thought 'why didn't they want me? I've got experience, I'm confident' but looking back on it now I'm so grateful not to have got that and still be in a call centre, whereas now I can hone my skills and think about maybe starting a company of my own.'*

Female, 20, Asian/Asian British, Trade

Other common 'pool' industries or sectors which interviewees considered were related to customer services, including retail, hospitality, leisure, sports, creative arts and other services. It is interesting to note how several interviewees had thought about or trained in a sports-related role such as personal trainer, nutritionist, or physiotherapist. These individuals commonly moved into manual roles within construction because they were attracted to the physicality of the work. Additionally, some interviewees had previously worked in retail and hospitality industries, and it was common that they had undertaken this work alongside their education (at school or college) to earn some money.

The reasons why interviewees didn't take up work in these pool industries (and essentially chose construction instead) included not considering them suitable to build a long-term career, perceptions that they were boring, not physical enough, or too focused on customer service. Construction was preferred as it offered an easy way for these individuals to make money, and because they felt it was more interesting and easier to get into.

Other 'pool' industries that interviewees expressed an interest in were agriculture and environment, education and public administration, and health and social care. Within agriculture and environment, interviewees reported interests in environmental science and/or environmental management. These individuals typically worked in professional or technical roles within construction which aligned with their previous experience or education. For example, one interviewee considered bid management within environment, archaeology, or heritage, and is now in a bid writing role within construction.

Similarly, interviewees who considered teaching typically had experience in a teaching role. However, it was felt that the education sector could not match the progression opportunities offered in construction, and the result of your work in construction was felt to

be more tangible than in teaching. One individual reported that they considered becoming a nurse, in part because their parent was a nurse. They chose construction instead because they perceived nursing as stressful, underpaid, and an underappreciated profession.

### Competitor industries considered

Interviewees also considered several industries closely aligned to construction – those termed as ‘competitor or competition’ industries by CITB. The most common ‘competition’ industry interviewees considered was engineering. One interviewee who is now in a technical role, described the draw (and industry presence) of large car companies when finishing their engineering degree. Interviewees with an engineering background were commonly attracted to the engineering industry because it allowed them to work with their hands/make something, which also explains why they were drawn to the construction industry. Some interviewees reported having difficulty finding work in the engineering industry because it was competitive, and so entered construction because it was easy to get into.

Other ‘competition’ industries that interviewees had previously considered included the Armed Forces and Emergency Services, and transportation, storage, and logistics. Interviewees identified recruitment processes as one of the reasons they chose not to pursue working in these industries. For example, one individual now in a professional role, considered working for the police but ‘when the recruitment was halted it put me off going to the police and I just never got back to it’ (Male, 22, white, Professional). Another found going through recruitment agencies to find work in warehousing difficult.

*‘The warehousing work was all through an agency, but in construction it’s all been through friends.’*

Male, 25, white, Trade

Many interviewees reported considering or working in multiple industries prior to entering the construction industry. One individual in a professional role, described themselves as a ‘Jack of all trades’, reflecting the variety of skills and experiences they have gained and ability to put their hand to different roles including in construction (Male, 31, Black, Professional). It was common that these individuals did not enter the construction industry purposefully and did not have a particular career planned out. One of the most common reasons for choosing construction over work in another industry for this group of interviewees was the ease of entry, particularly where the role was found through a friend or family member.

## 5.2 Making informed decisions

### 5.2.1 Knowledge and understanding of construction

As noted above (Chapter 3) those working in the construction industry appeared to be more confident than those in pool or competitor industries and sectors in their knowledge

of their current sector prior to entry. This group included both new entrants and individuals who have been in the industry for a considerable period, and overall, they were more likely to feel they knew quite a bit or very much about all aspects measured including how to access work experience. Similarly, those working in the construction industry tended to report finding it easy/very easy to gain the insights they needed, and again access to work experience was reported to be easy or very easy by just under one-half of those in the survey. However, a relatively small group, approximately one-in-five, reported they didn't know anything about what it would be like to work in the industry prior to working in it and this was larger than found in across all respondents and those working in competitor and pool industries. This is likely to reflect the unplanned move into construction described by some interviewees.

Exploring further, the survey responses indicate that those working in the construction industry for less than two years (ie more recent entrants, similar to those who participated in the in-depth interviews) were more likely than those who had worked in it for longer to report knowing quite a bit or very much about it prior to entry, and to find it easy to find out what it would be like to work in construction and to access work experience. This could suggest improvements over time in information provision about the sector, but it could be an indicator of better recall of more recent entrants, or generally greater confidence amongst more recent entrants. Generally male respondents, and younger individuals (aged 16–24) were also more positive about these aspects, which could suggest some additional work might be required to support women and older individuals to enter the construction industry.

The interviews with new entrants provided a different perspective. In general, interviewees reported having very little knowledge of the construction industry before they entered it and commonly described learning about the industry whilst on the job, which likely reflects the opportunistic or tentative entry routes to the industry. A few interviewees described a lack of exposure to the construction industry as the reason they did not understand much about it.

*'I had never been in that [construction] work before so didn't really know anything. You drive past sites when you are a kid and see people working on houses but that is all... I was just happy to get stuck in, to start doing something.'*

Male, 17, white, Trade

Some interviewees highlighted a disconnect between the education system and the construction industry, and how other industries and sectors were made more visible during their education. For example, those who had previously considered working in the professional business services industries and sectors reported gaining understanding and knowledge of these sectors through their degrees. Whereas those who trained as engineers reported a lack of understanding of how their skills could be utilised in the construction industry. This suggests a need for the construction industry to continue to work with young people and across the entirety of the education system to increase the visibility of the industry and its entry routes.

*'I did find there was a disconnect between the degree and the practical side of what I could be doing. I didn't really have a clue.'*

Male, 24, white, Technical

Additionally, one interviewee who is now in a design engineer role noted:

*'I had no clue it [construction] existed as an option, I thought "what can a design engineer do with roof tiles and bricks?".'*

Male, 28, white, Technical

Poor understanding of the industry was particularly common amongst those in manual roles who tended to have found their role through word of mouth and learned whilst on the job. Apprenticeships could help understanding, but only when on the programme. One interviewee who had previously considered entering the engineering industry, reported gaining knowledge of construction through an apprenticeship. Likewise, those who entered the construction industry through an apprenticeship, commonly learnt about the industry once in the role.

*'I guess the fact that it was an apprenticeship, I hoped I'd learn everything I needed to on the job.'*

Male, 25, Multiple Ethnic group, Professional

One individual recognised that his lack of knowledge about the sector was driven by a lack of proactive research.

*'I don't think I did, at that time I was probably 18/19 and I probably wasn't thinking about it as much as I should have done, I suppose I just jumped straight into it without researching.'*

Male, 22, white, Professional

## 5.2.2 Sources of Information

As noted in Chapter 3, the responses to the survey highlight the importance of undertaking research and informal sources of information such as friends and family to gain understanding prior to entry to the labour market. These sources were particularly important for those working in construction. Further analysis shows that the ways in which those in construction found out about the industry may have changed over time but does reflect patterns across all respondents. Across all respondents (including those in construction, competitor industries and pool industries) those who had worked in their industry for more than 10 years were much more likely to have relied on friends for information than those entering more recently. Although informal sources are still highly used by recent entrants to the construction sector to gain information, social media has become a more commonly used source of information, as have employer websites.

These patterns are largely reflected in the interviews with recent entrants to construction, but the dominance of online information was clear. The internet was one of the most



common sources interviewees identified to gather information about the industry or about specific roles and some interviewees felt it was easier to find information about the construction industry online compared to other industries. However, as many interviewees felt they knew very little about the construction industry this suggests that self-directed online research may not be very effective.

It was common for interviewees to research a specific employer online prior to beginning working for them. This was particularly true for those working in professional roles. Interviewees reported that the employer's website as well as recruiter websites were useful for this, and some had been sent information by their prospective employer.

*'Most of it was on their website and I read a few things on Wikipedia, so it was quite out there, quite easy to find online.'*

Male, 33, Mixed/Multiple Ethnic group, Professional

*'I was surprised how much information was available online about the sector, I thought most people got into construction by word of mouth and through friends or family links.'*

Female, 22, white, Professional

Interviewees also reported using general search engines, the CITB website and GoConstruct, Government websites, Wikipedia and YouTube including watching videos to get an insight of what a 'day-in-the-life' was like. The internet was also used to find out about training and qualifications. Those interviewees who work in manual and trade roles often engaged with information about apprenticeships through training providers website, the Government's apprenticeship website, or the CITB website. CITB's website was also used by interviewees to help them understand what qualifications they needed. It was also reported that there were lots of resources to help them take the tests to get cards they needed.

There were however some criticisms about the information available online. It was reported that there was a lack of information about specific roles within construction online, particularly technical roles. While some had found the information about apprenticeships online useful, this was not always the case.

*'If you are looking for an apprenticeship but don't know which type the information online is less helpful.'*

Male, 23, white, Trade

Interviewees also relied on word of mouth most commonly from family but also friends, colleagues, and tutors. One individual, now in a professional role, also reported reaching out to some people in the industry on LinkedIn. Other sources of information related to interviewee's previous experience with the industry, either through a previous role which was closely aligned to the industry, or through personal experience such as home DIY projects.

## 5.3 Recruitment and entry experiences

### 5.3.1 Finding work and experiences of the recruitment process

The survey indicated that those working in the construction industry (all ages and lengths of service) were significantly more likely than those working in other industries and sectors to find their current job (or most recent job if not currently in work) through their personal networks. They were conversely significantly less likely to have found their jobs through a formal application process. However, the survey also indicates that the emphasis on informal methods particularly via family and friends may be lessening over time and among more recent entrants to the construction industry the most common method for finding their jobs was by replying to a job advertisement.

Feedback from the interviews on the recruitment process involved in finding and getting their jobs corresponds with their narratives around the (relative) ease of access to the construction industry and its jobs. Indeed, interviewees most commonly reported finding out about their job through word of mouth (corresponding with the survey findings). While this was primarily the case for those in manual or trade roles, there was also evidence of word of mouth recruitment for those in technical and professional roles. Others, more commonly those in professional roles, found out about the role through a recruitment agency, website such as Indeed, or professional social media (ie LinkedIn). One interviewee reported using a website called Grafter to find labouring work.

The survey found that methods of finding work among those in the construction industry differed depending on the level of role applied for and highest level of qualification (which are linked). Those working in intermediate, and lower/unskilled roles within construction were more likely have got their job through friends and family than those working in high level occupations. These findings are reflected in the interviews.

Some interviewees had undergone a formal recruitment process to enter their current role. This was more common for those in technical and professional roles, although some interviewees reported going through a formal process to get a trade apprenticeship. These formal recruitment processes typically involved sending a CV or application form to a prospective employer, followed by one or more interviews. There was some evidence that recruiters had been involved at the initial stages, such as sharing individuals CVs with employers. Interestingly, one interviewee reflected that even with a formal process to recruitment, this was more straightforward in construction than in other industries:

*'I do tend to prefer the ones where it is straightforward – it is easier for everyone if you send a CV and covering letter and let the employer see...Some recruitment processes are too long-winded and it feels like a job in itself.'*

Female, 37, white, Professional

Some interviewees reported completing a test as part of the recruitment process to demonstrate their skills. These included a grammar and writing test or providing a sample of their work. There was also some evidence of those in professional roles being required



to give presentations. One interviewee reported attending an assessment centre where they gave a presentation and wrote a short report.

Women in the interview sample primarily worked in professional and technical roles so had been through a more formal and traditional recruitment process. However, one female interviewee who currently worked in a trade apprenticeship reported that she applied using an application form and then had an interview.

An informal recruitment process was more common for those who worked in manual and trade roles, reflecting how individuals in these roles often found employment through friends or family. Typically, participants either had heard about the work through word of mouth and approached the employer informally, or the employer, often a friend or family member, knew they were looking for work and invited them to come and work for them.

*'I had a good set up, my Dad knew him [his boss] so it went smoothly.'*

Male, 17, white, Trade

There was some evidence of trial periods being used within the more informal recruitment approach, as a way for employers to determine if the individual was competent.

*'I thought, 'Ok, its two weeks free labour but it's worth it at the end of the day.'*

Male, 51, white, Labourer

One interviewee preferred the informal process as he could demonstrate his skills.

*'I prefer it to an interview because you just do the job and if you're good enough you're good enough, and if you're not you're not.'*

Male, 18, white, Trade.

## 6 Experiences of construction

This chapter explores experiences of the construction industry particularly for new entrants. It looks at the work individuals do in the industry and the wider work experiences they have, experiences of entering the industry (often referred to in human resources literature as on-boarding) and gaining feedback on whether their experiences so far have measured up to their expectations. It also gathers insights into the perceived positive aspects of working in the construction industry gained from lived experiences, and any negative aspects encountered; and collects recommendations and advice from new entrants for potential entrants. Lastly it explores the goals and anticipations of those in the construction industry and whether and why they intend to stay or leave.

Where possible, feedback from the interviews with new entrants is compared with the survey feedback captured from those with varying lengths of service. This will give CITB an understanding of recent experiences of moving into the sector, including the perceived ease, and support (research objective 2B), whether their expectations have matched reality (research objective 2A), and future destinations (research objective 2C).

### Key findings

- Interviewees experiences of entering the construction industry were generally positive: the induction process was informal, colleagues were supportive, but there was a lot to learn, and some felt they had been ‘thrown into it’ or left alone to do the job too early without necessary training. Younger and least skilled joiners may have fewer positive experiences and thus require additional support.
- Most felt their expectations of the industry had been met, possibly because they did not have many prior expectations rather than having accurate pre-conceived ideas about what it would be like to work in construction. However, many of the positive factors experienced map against attraction factors, with pride in work and client satisfaction tangible ways people feel they are making a difference.
- New starters are generally positive about the industry and would recommend it; the industry has many people acting as ambassadors. However, some found being self-employed difficult and others (particularly in manual and trade roles) reflected on the long working hours, needing to get up early or to travel to jobs, or to stay away from their family.
- Interviewees reported that although the industry is dominated by white men, they saw increasing diversity in offices and women in management positions and felt that in many organisations the culture around diversity and inclusion is changing. Nevertheless, some had encountered incidents of sexism, racism, and homophobia which would or has put them off working on-sites.
- Most new entrants planned to stay in the industry for the next 2–3 years, often: to benefit from their specific qualification, because they genuinely enjoyed what they did, for the pay and/or opportunities to progress. Goals for the future typically involved getting more

experience and progressing within their profession or deciding on and building up a specialised trade and eventually setting up their own business or moving to the management of others. 'Going independent' or managing others was perceived to give more choice over the work they would undertake.

- The main reasons individuals said they might leave the industry were if an opportunity came up that they were more passionate about, a change in company culture or work-life balance, retraining in another area, a decrease in pay or better salary offered in another industry, if they were no longer able to cope with physical work, or retirement.

## 6.1 Employment characteristics

Among the survey respondents who were currently (or most recently) working in construction most were in work at the time of the survey and were less likely to have been furloughed or out of work than found across all respondents.

- The largest group were in intermediate level roles, and there were fewer in higher-level roles than found across all respondents. About one-half had managerial, supervisory, or training responsibilities.
- They tended to be long serving, with almost half having worked in the industry for over 10 years, with far fewer (around 15%) being in the industry for less than two years. The survey respondents therefore differed considerably (and deliberately) to the group of construction workers selected for interview.
- A substantial minority, almost one-quarter, were self-employed, and this was a much higher proportion than found in other industries and sectors. Correspondingly permanent contracts and temporary contracts were less common than found across all respondents.
- The vast majority were on full-time contracts, and full-time working was significantly more common among those working in construction. Whereas part-time working and working flexible hours was relatively rare. This could reflect the heavy male-skew in construction or could be causing the heavy male-skew.
- The most common type of company worked for was a company undertaking construction or development of buildings, roads, rail, or water projects (51%); followed by installation and maintenance of fittings or insulation (24%), floor or wall coverings (25%), or demolition and site preparation (23%), plumbers or electricians (21%).

The employment characteristics of those in the construction industry (as evidenced by the survey), particularly when compared to all respondents or those in certain other industries and sectors, indicates that construction workers experience a particular type of stability and security. Many have been in the sector for a long time and so have managed to maintain their work. Also, they experience a particular type of flexibility though self-employment rather than working part-time or on under formal flexible working hours arrangements.

Individuals who participated in the research as interviewees were all currently working in the construction industry and had joined the industry within the past two years. Interviewees were employed in a range of roles.

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- Those in **manual roles** (which corresponds with lower and unskilled roles in the survey) typically worked as labourers and were self-employed but affiliated to a particular construction company. A minority of labourers were employed on contracts. Most labourers worked full-time hours, however a small group worked fewer hours as a labourer because it was a second job. These individuals tended to have a second labouring job alongside work in a specific trade, sometimes because there was not enough work in that trade.
  - Most interviewees working in a **trade** were also typically self-employed but worked full-time hours. Those in trade roles included: stonemason, carpenter, electrician, painter/decorator, tiler, plasterer.
  - Interviewees who worked in **technical and professional roles** also worked full-time but were more likely to be employed on permanent contracts by their employer. In general, interviewees who did work part-time, did so either because of the limited amount of work available in each role, in which case most people had a second job, or because working part-time was their preference sometimes because of caring responsibilities.

Those who worked in professional and technical roles spent more if not all their time in an office, those in technical roles were more likely to work in both an office and on-site. Technical roles taken up by interviewees included engineers (structural, design, geo-technical), and health and safety officers, and professional roles which included project management, bid or contract management, accounting, buyer, sales, and brand management.

## 6.2 Experiences of new entrants

The survey asked those currently or most recently working in the construction industry, as well as those having ever worked in the construction industry, to reflect on when they first entered and consider how easy or difficult it was to settle into work in the industry. Almost half (44%) felt it had been easy to settle into work in the industry: 10 per cent found it very easy and 33 per cent found it easy. However, one-in-five (20%) found it difficult. Those who found it easier to settle in were older (aged over 55 at the time of the survey but could have entered the industry some time ago), still in construction at the time of the survey, and with lower level qualifications (Level 1 or 2). Those who found it difficult tended to be younger (aged 16-to-24), in lower or unskilled roles, with Level 4 qualifications and who had worked in the industry but were now working elsewhere (particularly in competitor sectors). There were no differences by gender, ethnicity, or disability status.

Echoing the survey findings, interviewees experiences of entering the construction industry were generally positive. It was commonly reported that the induction process was informal, but that their colleagues were supportive. This was particularly true for those working in smaller organisations.

A key theme that emerged was that interviewees often felt there was a lot to learn once they entered the industry (as noted above), and that necessary training was not always

provided when they started, leaving them feeling like they had been ‘thrown into it’ or left alone to do the job too early. This could reflect the one-in-five in the survey who found it difficult to settle in. Individuals who had joined the industry from university study, reported that their education (studying for degrees in subjects close to construction such as geology or engineering) had not taught them about the construction industry but largely employers did not expect them to know very much.

*‘I think when you start a new job and are quite fresh from University they don’t expect you to know much, because university doesn’t teach you about construction.’*

Female, 27, white, Technical

Interviewees recognised that their employer had been supportive of the learning process they had to go through, and their colleagues had been helpful. One individual who worked in a manual role identified how the job ‘can be hard if you don’t ask’ (Male, 24, Mixed Ethnic group, Manual).

### 6.2.1 Measuring up to expectations

Over three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents who currently, recently or had ever worked in construction agreed that working in the construction sector had met their expectations. Those most likely to feel their expectations had been met were in intermediate level roles, with Level 1 to 2 qualifications, or still working in the sector (at the time of the survey). Those most likely to feel their expectations had not been met were younger (aged 16-to-24), in lower or unskilled roles, with Level 4 qualifications or previously worked in the sector but were now working elsewhere. There were no differences by gender, ethnicity, or disability.

Similarly, most interviewees felt their expectations of the industry had been met. This is possibly because interviewees did not have many expectations (coupled with their reporting of a lack of knowledge about the industry), or that their expectations were low; rather than them having very accurate pre-conceived ideas about what it would be like to work in construction. For example, interviewees in manual or trade roles expected the work to be hard and physical, and the hours to be long, but that they would be paid well. One interviewee reported that the opportunities for them within their role were ‘what I imagined it would have been’ (Female, 22, white, Professional).

For some the reality was better than expected, such as the ease of finding work, or the attitude of staff on-site being more relaxed than they thought. One interviewee felt the location of their work was more varied than expected, and that the culture was more respectful than anticipated.

*‘It’s probably surpassed my expectations. I think I thought I would be on-site all the time and I would probably be around people who would not respect me because I’m a young kid out of uni and I don’t know the trade. But people have been respectful, and I think it’s been a good experience to what I thought it would have been.’*

Male, 29, Asian/Asian British, Technical and Trade

One female interviewee in a professional role did not expect there to be as many women in the industry as there were.

*'I think people think 'construction' and they think hairy-arsed builders...it's a man thing...and it's not a man's thing at all. If anything, I've learned that there are lots of women workers in there...it's not just a male dominated field...it might be on-site, but not in the area I work.'*

Female, 34, white, Professional

Whereas others had some negative experiences when compared to their expectations. Some interviewees expected there to be more opportunity to learn while on-site. Moreover, the analysis of interview feedback suggests that some of those in professional roles felt the pay had not met their expectations and they were not being paid in line with their skills and experience, and that the working hours were longer than expected.

*'No one will sell you the bad vibes - the issues, no one will be honest about the long hours, it is not 9-5.'*

Male, 31, Black, Professional

### 6.3 Positive aspects of working in the construction industry

The interviews were able to probe on aspects individuals found positive (and indeed found negative, see below) about working in the construction industry. This is subtly different to the survey question around what makes a construction job appealing as the former is grounded in experience. However, many of the positive factors experienced do map against key attraction factors, which perhaps helps to explain why those in the industry feel their expectations are met and are generally positive about the industry (eg would recommend the sector, see below). The interviews do help to flesh out what some of these positive/attraction factors mean.

Interviewees reported a variety of positive aspects of working in the construction industry. Many of those in both professional and manual roles took pride in their work and enjoyed seeing a tangible end-result. This gave interviewees a sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction, particularly when they also saw that the customer, be that the commercial client or a homeowner, was pleased with the work also.

*'I like seeing the wall go up and then finish, and then people looking at it and congratulating you on how nice it looks.'*

Male, 18, white, Trade

Those working in manual roles also reported enjoying that their role was physical and kept them active, that they were working with their hands.



*'I guess it's very honest work, it's simple, you've got to follow a procedure and do it well and if you don't do it well it won't work. It's hard graft, it's nice to go to work and feel sort of knackered after the day knowing you've done a good day's work.'*

Male, 23, white, Manual

In professional roles, interviewees described formal progression routes either within their current employer or by transferring their skills into a different role or organisations within the industry. There was evidence from some interviewees that for those in professional roles there was more opportunities for progression within larger companies, whereas working for a smaller organisation may be preferable for those in trade or manual roles because there is more opportunity to learn.

Those in manual roles could also see a clear path from general labouring, into a specific trade and the possibility to one day have their own business and be able to 'down tools' and move to management.

*'I like the idea that it could lead to something more, I could start my own business, work for myself.'*

Male, 17, white, Trade

Interviewees often identified the people they work with as a key attraction factor, describing their colleagues as knowledgeable, hardworking, and supportive of their learning, as well as approachable and sociable. One individual reported the opportunity to work with other people outside their office as a contributor to their enjoyment of their role.

*'It's definitely quite a fun and interesting job to do I reckon, compared to other accounting jobs where you don't necessarily speak to anyone outside your office.'*

Male, 33, Mixed/Multiple Ethnic group, Professional

For some, the macho (or as described by others in the interviews) 'laddy' culture of working in the construction industry, particularly on-site, was a positive, as interviewees liked the straight-talking, down-to-earth camaraderie, although for others this was a negative factor as discussed below. Interviewees reported enjoying working in an environment where they could 'have a laugh' and where people 'don't take things too seriously.' While a fun working environment may be harmless, the language used by participants could be covering up more serious bad behaviour. However, the specific behaviours being described were not explored in depth as part of the aims of this research.

Positivity about the working culture was reported by both white men, who stereotypically work in construction, as well as women and those of non-white ethnicity who may be on the receiving end of such bad behaviour. There is likely variability in the degree to which behaviour is truly harmless and creates an enjoyable working environment, and more severe experiences of discrimination, which needs to be explored further. Positive views were more common amongst younger male interviewees, than older men, suggesting age

may contribute to individuals' perceptions of the seriousness of the 'banter' being discussed.

*'There's a bit of banter about it, you are not sitting in silence in an office.'*

Male, 17, white, Trade

Some interviewees reported that although the industry is dominated by white men there is increasingly more diversity in offices and women in management positions, and in many organisations the culture around diversity and inclusion is changing. One interviewee felt that their employer was trying to challenge industry stereotypes and that 'this is something that needs to be broadcasted', but she reflected that the industry 'still has a long way to go' (Female, 25, white, Professional). A few interviewees from under-represented groups liked that they were part of the movement within construction to increase diversity.

*'I've also enjoyed hopefully being a part of the movement of getting more females into the industry.'*

Female, 20, Asian/Asian British, Trade

The few positive views of diversity within construction were reported by those considered minority groups in the industry, as well as more typical white, male workers. However, the responses indicated that the improvements in diversity may be specific to the interviewee's employer, and do not necessarily reflect a wider movement in construction.

### 6.3.1 Wider benefits and influence of the construction industry

The survey indicated that helping others and making a difference was important to those working in the construction industry and is an important factor in their career and life decisions. However, this aspect had a greater influence for those working in other industries and sectors. Among those in construction stronger drivers or values were having pride in their work, having stability in where they work and who they work for, having independence or running their own business, and having variety and change. All of which are reflected in the narratives above.

Some interviewees discussed how the construction industry benefits society, and the degree to which this is important to them in their work. Interviewees commented on the industry's role in supporting communities through regeneration and house building.

*'You really get to make a difference in society, you help people, young people onto the property ladder, help them get out of rent traps, and that makes a difference to a person's entire life. I really like that about my job. It is about wealth creation through property... You can see the difference it makes. People can afford to buy their own homes and look after their own homes, and this regenerates communities.'*

Female, 35, white, Professional

*'[construction] has a point to it, you build a house for a family... something of value. In no uncertain terms, I have contributed.'*



Male, 24, white, Manual

It was also recognised by several interviewees that construction plays a part in contributing to the economy by creating jobs.

*'When you look at Covid, straight away construction was one that they said "right you will stay open" which would indicate how much it contributes to the economy.'*

Male, 57, white, Trade

Some also described how construction supports the environment by using green energy and green processes. However, other interviewees felt the construction industry was not environmentally friendly and created a lot of waste.

## 6.4 Negative aspects of working in the construction industry

The interviews also explored what individuals felt were the negative factors about the construction industry or their role. Many of the factors identified reflect those also seen as positives, suggesting that aspects of the industry can be perceived as both positive and negative depending primarily on whether individuals worked on-site or in an office-based role.

One of the most common factors interviewees did not like about their role or the construction industry more widely was the culture and lack of diversity. The analysis suggests the degree to which this is an issue depends on if someone works on-site or in an office-based role. Those who work on-site described experiencing sexism, racism, and homophobia. Some interviewees reported this behaviour as 'banter', but others saw it as a serious issue within the industry that would, or has, put them off working on-sites.

*'I dislike the toxicity sometimes of the environment and the guys working there....It's like false bravado, this whole macho vibe.'*

Male, 26, white, Manual

Female interviewees and those from ethnic minority backgrounds emphasised that the industry is dominated by white males, and characterised by 'stereotypical', 'old fashioned', 'macho', and 'offensive' behaviour. There was also evidence of white male interviewees perceiving the culture within the industry as negative, and citing experiences or concerns about serious sexism, homophobia, and racism within the industry. These views typically emerged from older interviewees, who worked in trade or manual roles so perhaps had more first-hand experience of this behaviour. However, the responses indicated interviewees felt the issues were always elsewhere, for example pointing to older tradesman, other teams, or different contractors on a worksite.

Another common negative factor identified was the weather as this can be unpleasant to work in for those who worked outside, but also affected the ability to carry out work which can impact individuals' earnings. Being self-employed was also a difficulty for some

interviewees in terms of understanding and staying on top of their finances, knowing how to run their business, or being able to take holiday (which is largely unpaid).

Many interviewees identified that the hours were long and getting up early or having to travel to jobs and be away from their family were aspects of their job they did not like; particularly for those in manual or trade roles. Some therefore wanted more flexible working hours.

Those in manual roles also commonly identified the 'back breaking work' often coupled with the long hours as a negative factor as the strain on the body of the physical work means it may not be a role they can continue in the long run.

*'The strain on your body, getting up at six in the morning and feeling tired when you get home, all you want to do is sleep.'*

Male, 17, white, Trade

Interviewees experiences of the construction industry also varied depending on if they worked for a large or small organisation. In larger companies, some manual workers reported feeling 'messed around' or that they were 'just a number'. Here interviewees sometimes felt less valued by their employer, felt like they had less clarity in their job role, and fewer opportunities to learn and progress.

## 6.5 Staying or leaving construction

The survey found that across all respondents the majority (71%) do not anticipate moving sector/industry within the next two to three years. The figures for those currently in the construction sector were 72 per cent anticipating staying including 38 per cent who reported that they definitely intend to stay in construction. For those in construction the key reasons for staying were stability and security, good salary, opportunities to specialise/become expert, variety, local opportunities, opportunities to progress and good working environment.

However, 18 per cent (approximately one-in-five) anticipated leaving construction within the next two to three years and 10 per cent didn't know whether they would leave or stay. Those who reported a disability were the most likely to anticipate moving (ie leaving construction); and women and those in lower or unskilled roles in the industry were much more likely to be uncertain about their future with regards to staying or leaving construction.

Those in construction were also asked in the survey how often, if at all, they consider leaving the construction industry, so this relates to their experiences at the time of the survey rather than looking to the future. Again, the majority appeared to be happy to remain: one-in-five (21%) have never considered leaving, and a further 31 per cent seldom think about leaving. Few (19%) think about leaving often or always and there was no group that were more likely than others to think about leaving. The factors that were most likely to make those currently working in the construction sector consider leaving (ie push factors) would be because they wanted to improve their work/life balance, because

they would want to change occupation, because they felt the pay had become unsatisfactory, or there was a lack of promotion or career opportunities.

### 6.5.1 Staying: ambitions for careers in construction

The interviews with new entrants to the industry also found that the majority reported that they planned to stay in the industry for the next two to three years. The interviews probed further on goals for the future. These typically involved getting more experience and progressing within their profession, possibly with a different employer, or deciding on and building up a trade and eventually setting up their own business.

*'There was never a great need or overarching desire to go work on a building site, but now that I'm here, I'm settled in, and I've got my feet under the table I do quite enjoy it.'*

Male, 57, white, Trade

The survey also indicated how 23 per cent of those in the construction industry anticipated some form of promotion within the next two to three years.

Interviewees intended to stay in the industry because it was something they had training or a qualification in so wanted to continue to use that, or because they genuinely enjoyed what they did. Other reasons for staying included, pay, and opportunities to progress (reflecting the survey findings). Those in professional roles described wanting to progress in their current positions; this was often motivated by the possibility of their employer providing training allowing them to progress.

To move towards meeting their goals some interviewees reported needing to find a specific opportunity. For example, a specialist in a specific trade who they could labour for and learn from, or a customer who would trust them to build their kitchen to start generating a portfolio of work. Some interviewees felt they needed to gain more or different qualifications to progress.

Many younger interviewees planned on remaining in the industry, however, most did not intend to remain in their current role. A number cited wanting to progress to the next level, this included moving from groundwork to a specialised trade, or moving from a trade to management of others, often to avoid the more physical aspects of the work.

The desire for some to progress in their current role was further supported by their employer offering funded training, or the possibility of improving their own skills through attending education facilities such as night school. Those who did not intend to remain with their employer but wanted to remain in the industry often said they might start their own business. The desire to 'go independent' echoed the attitude of those wanting to progress in their current role in terms of the increased opportunity to manage others, alongside the option of choosing what work they undertake.

*'Get on with my own work, look after my own jobs, and get a gang together.'*

Male, 24, white, Manual

All female interviewees reported that they would stay in construction for at least the next two to three years. Many claimed the opportunity for upward progression in their role was a motivation to remain. One described wanting to stay in sales/marketing and wanted to advance to a sales manager role as ‘this is the natural progression’ (Female, 25, white, Professional).

Women’s experiences once they were in the construction industry were important in determining if they wanted to stay. For example, one interviewee when asked if they were planning on remaining in the industry claimed that ‘If you had asked me that question a year ago, I wouldn’t have wanted to stay in construction.’ This was due to negative experiences in the first few months resulting from a masculine culture, however she described how things had changed quite radically and so her more recent experiences with her current employer had changed her mind (Female, 35, white, Professional).

Indeed, many female interviewees reported that they had not intend to work within the construction industry, but once inside it, they were happier than they initially thought they would be. Even those who entered a role and had some negative experiences made note of how their employer was changing and improving; and those with already good, supportive employers were happy, perceiving that their employer looks after its employees. These individuals often claimed they would only leave the industry if a change in company culture occurred.

### 6.5.2 Leaving construction and likely destinations

The survey identified a group of respondents (17%) who had previously worked in the construction sector but were now working elsewhere. Over half (56%) of these had had a relatively short stint in the industry, leaving within two years, so essentially were passing through. The main reasons for leaving were beyond their control – the end of a temporary job (24%), redundancy (13%), or giving up work for health reasons (11%). However, 17 per cent of this group had left the sector because they wanted to work in another sector, and so reflected a deliberate move. As noted above, the group of former construction workers tended to have moved on to engineering or the IT and communications industries, but they also moved on to a wide range of other competitor and pool sectors.

Although most interviewees wanted to and intended to stay working in construction (reflecting the survey findings), some noted aspects that could encourage them to leave, but few had any clear ideas about likely destinations if they did leave. The primary reason individuals would leave the industry would be because an opportunity came up that they were more passionate about. Other reasons that interviewees felt might lead them to leaving construction included:

- a change in company culture or work-life balance;
- retraining in another area;
- decrease in pay or better salary offered in another industry;
- no longer able to cope with physical work; and
- retirement.

Many interviewees cited the physical working aspect of construction as a possible reason for leaving. However, they tended to use this as justification for remaining in the industry but instead retraining in a less physical role, particularly as they get older:

*'If I stay down this route, I might try a trade maybe to make it more of a skilled thing rather than a physically challenging job.'*

Male, 24, white, Manual and Trade

Those in the older age group were more inclined to comment on the physical aspect of the work, one interviewee claimed they were getting too old for physical work and wanted to prepare for retirement, although this was not exclusive to this group. Younger interviewees also seemed to be aware of the impact that physical work could have on their health and cited that as a reason for possibly leaving the field in the future. Those who wanted to remain in the industry regardless of the potential health impacts often considered moving away from more physical roles into professional roles to lessen these impacts.

Although some claimed they would leave to pursue other passions, this did not necessarily mean an end to their construction involvement forever. One interviewee hoped to pursue interests related to the arts within the next year, however, was accepting that if this didn't happen, they would remain in the construction industry:

*'This year has been a bit of a write-off in terms of finding work, and I've juggled all sorts of things. I'm really hoping that by the end of the year I'll have something that's a lot more within the field of what I'm interested in. But it's not something I'm going to say 'no' to in the future, it's the kind of thing where I would be happy to do a 5-week construction job here or there if the project sounded right.'*

Male, 23, white, Manual

Keeping in contact with the construction industry to work in the sector again was a recurring theme, another interviewee described always keeping in contact with some individuals in the industry in order to 'keep [his] hand in.'

Intention to stay in construction may also reflect the perceived stability of the industry, which was identified by most interviewees, particularly in the current context of economic uncertainty following the pandemic. Getting through the pandemic whilst earning money was a common trend, another interviewee claimed that in the short term he 'Just wants to survive Covid and keep on earning money' (Male, 24, Black, Manual). A number of interviewees were more focussed on short-term goals related to keeping afloat during the pandemic or exercised caution when committing to the industry:

*'I will see what is on the horizon with the economy, take as many opportunities to build money.'*

Male, 24, white, Manual

## 6.6 Recommendations and advice for potential entrants

Those currently and most recently working in the construction industry along with those who have ever worked in the industry were asked whether they had ever recommended the construction industry as a place to work to anyone, and whether they had ever discouraged anyone from working in the construction sector. Well over half of this group (57%) had recommended the sector and far fewer (half as many, 26%), had discouraged someone from working in the sector. This suggests that the industry has a large volume of individuals who are already acting as ambassadors. Those most likely to recommend the industry were men, mid-ages (25–54), those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those with qualifications above Level 4. Those relatively less likely to recommend the industry were women, older (aged 55 and over), and qualified to Level 1 or 2.

Interestingly the survey data suggests that those relatively more likely to have discouraged someone were also men, from ethnic minority backgrounds or with qualifications above Level 4. This could suggest that individuals tailor their advice to the recipient rather than providing blanket approval or recommendation). Others more likely to discourage potential entrants were those with a disability, currently in work, or had previously worked in the industry but are now working in a pool sector.

The interviews with new entrants also found that most interviewees were positive about recommending the construction industry to other people. Many in professional roles emphasised that the industry is not necessarily one people consider as they go through training and education, but that it is better than expected due to the range of opportunities and things to learn within it, and how rewarding it can be.

Advice interviewees would give to others was heavily focused on doing research about the industry and getting experience in it, even though most interviewees had not undertaken research themselves and felt they entered the industry with limited knowledge and understanding. Interviewees felt it was important to try and understand the different roles or trades to make sure ‘you choose the one that is right for you.’ Many also thought it was important to get a qualification however some thought this could happen later, once you had some experience (and so could choose the most appropriate qualification and course). Those in manual work also advised that potential entrants needed to be prepared for the physical nature of the work and working in bad weather. Interviewees also advised that potential entrants need to have the right mind-set; to enter the industry with a positive open-minded attitude, be willing to learn, and ready to work hard as ‘people will notice if you are wasting time’ and you will not progress.

In terms of advice for women or LGBTQ+ groups, interviewees generally emphasised that their advice would depend heavily on the individual, their skills, and their personality. Many interviewees said they would give the same advice regardless of the recipient but stressed that potential entrants from diverse backgrounds should ensure working in construction is something that they really wanted to do. This group thought the masculine culture was less of an issue in office roles. Indeed, positive responses regarding



recommending construction to entrants from diverse backgrounds typically came from those who perceived greater improvements in terms of diversity in the industry. Notably, white women in professional roles were positive about recommending the industry to those from diverse backgrounds, however they may be positioned further away from the on-site bad behaviour experienced by others.

The discussions commonly emphasised that the industry is male-dominated and experiences could be negative. For those working on-site, interviewees described needing to be a certain kind of person who could take the 'banter' on the chin, not take offense, and 'give as good as you get' to deal with the culture on construction sites.

*'The only thing I've found is you have to know where you stand with banter and when also to talk up about something in the construction industry. People have a laugh and that's fine but there's certain individuals who take it too far.'*

Male, 25, Multiple Ethnic group, Professional.

Those from diverse backgrounds highlighted that gender and sexuality can be a target for remarks by people on site, so individuals needed to be prepared to encounter this behaviour. It was also reported that older men may display discriminatory behaviour towards younger female employees and immigrants.

Some interviewees felt that negative experiences were also dependent on the employer and company culture, and so could vary considerably. Some also advised potential entrants to do research on their prospective employer's values around diversity and inclusion to try to understand what the culture would be like. One female interviewee reflected that her negative experiences varied between different projects.

*'There are new and cool projects you can work on where it doesn't matter who you are, and there are projects where you might struggle...there can be some negatives when you are going on site if people treat you differently.'*

Female, 27, white, Technical

## 7 Implications for CITB and the construction industry

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The construction industry experiences recruitment difficulties and skills shortages and has a relative lack of workforce diversity. It is therefore looking to increase its attractiveness to potential recruits (relative to other sectors) - to young people entering the labour market from school, college, or university; to older individuals re-entering the labour market; and to those already in the labour market who might consider changing industry and/or career. The industry needs to increase both the volume and diversity of its talent pipeline.

The research drew on the experiences and perspectives of 'outsiders' – those not currently in construction – and could be regarded as potential recruits for the industry to target. It also drew on the experiences and perspectives of those of 'insiders' who are the construction workforce and have real insights that could be shared.

The research measured the relative attractiveness of the construction industry to outsiders, the potential recruits (those currently outside of the industry), in several ways. A substantial group, three-in-ten (30%), felt the industry was for someone like them but only about half as many felt that a career in construction was attractive to them (17%), or had applied for a job in the industry previously (15%).

Attraction was also measured among potential recruits by examining whether individuals had seriously considered the construction industry before joining their current sector, and just six per cent had done so; only two per cent reported that the construction industry was the industry they would most like to work in now. A further measure to rank construction against other sectors was attempted but it proved difficult for respondents and indicated a lack of awareness and understanding of careers and work in sectors and industries outside of their own. Only just under half of all respondents completed the question fully so that the ranking could be calculated, and of these 23 per cent of potential recruits ranked construction in the top-5 industries or sectors.

It is unsurprising that the construction industry had most attraction to insiders, those who currently work in the industry: 89 per cent felt the industry was for someone like them, 58 per cent reported it is still the industry they would most like to work in, and 53 per cent (where it could be calculated) ranked construction in their top-5 industries or sectors to work in. Other sectors considered by those now in construction included engineering, the armed forces and emergency services, IT and communications, and finance.

Insiders are very positive and see a lot of good in the industry which is largely unknown to outsiders. So, there is much the construction industry could do to increase its attractiveness among potential recruits; to bring the understanding and experiences of insiders to outsiders, for them to act as ambassadors, to share personal stories and



highlight the advantages of construction careers. This is largely about bringing the outsiders inside.

Informed by the research findings, below are six suggested approaches the industry could take to increase its attractiveness; some will require a greater commitment and a more long-term strategy than others.

**Figure 1: Overview of approaches**



## 1. Increase the visibility and awareness of the industry among potential recruits

The construction industry is large, fast growing and offers a wide range of opportunities at different skill levels and for specialists (with construction specific skills) and generalists (non-construction specific skills), but for many individuals it is not one of the work or career options they would consider. This is largely because they lack awareness and understanding of what it is and what the industry has to offer. Wider research (Atticus, 2018; as noted in the literature review in the technical report) indicates that few young people are fully decided about what they want to do for a job or career and the scope of jobs and careers considered is often narrow and heavily influenced by gender and geography.

People need information and examples of individuals in specific roles. Almost one-half of potential recruits felt they had a good understanding of the jobs and careers available in the construction industry, but probing further, this falls to about a quarter who feel they

have a good understanding of the types of jobs and careers offered. Unsurprisingly, this is lower than found for their own sector. On the surface potential recruits feel they understand the sector, but many have no knowledge at all, particularly about the skills and qualifications required to enter, how to find jobs or work experience, availability of jobs locally, and opportunities for development and progression. These are areas where the construction industry could focus its messaging, as well as emphasising potential attraction factors (see below).

The knowledge potential entrants do have about the construction industry mainly comes from their personal networks, so the vast majority have had little formal input through the education or welfare system, careers professionals or employers. Survey respondents noted how if the industry had been better advertised or there was more information about it this might have encouraged them to consider working in the industry. And some interviewees working in construction described how they felt the education system, including higher education, had failed to provide information about the industry; and, that there was a paucity of information online, particularly about specific technical construction roles available.

### **So what should the construction industry do?**

- Focus messaging on the identified information gaps.
- Provide better but also more accessible information for those who are or might think of working in construction. Providing accessible, navigable, and easily digestible information about the construction industry online may be most fruitful, and consideration should be given to where to place or link to this information so that it can be easily found by people making career choices.
- Technology also offers the opportunity to increase virtual networks and to offer virtual tasters for example, to build knowledge of the industry among potential recruits. Indeed, the research literature highlights how organisations are increasingly using technology to attract candidates (to specific vacancies), and the most effective attraction methods are corporate websites and professional networking sites; and technology can also be used to facilitate the targeting of passive jobseekers.
- A further opportunity would be to utilise teachers, careers advisers and employers to promote the opportunities and benefits available in the industry, particularly using: a) industry/education connections to provide access to employers and experiential opportunities for younger individuals (and building on the momentum of work in schools supported by the Careers and Enterprise Company); and b) the National Skills Fund, renewal of focus on adult learning, and other changes in the delivery of adult careers guidance to support individuals in reviewing their future work and learning options.
- Support the development of more work experience opportunities and make work experience available in different ways.

However, it is worth noting that between one-third and one-quarter of respondents felt they knew nothing or very little about their own sector prior to entry, approximately one-quarter found it difficult to find information about their sector prior to entry and particularly

to access work experience, and formal sources of information were used less than online sources, social media, and personal networks. This suggests that the construction industry is perhaps no worse than other sectors in these respects, and most sectors could do more to provide information about what it has to offer so that individuals can make informed decisions.

## 2. Emphasise the strengths of the industry

Potential entrants lack awareness of what the construction industry has to offer, and how it can offer the aspects they find attractive in their own industries and that align with their personal values. Even some of those working in the sector, who largely wander in to earn money whilst deciding what they really want to do, can be unaware of its attractions initially. So, the industry could do more to promote the strengths of construction, particularly those reported/experienced by its workers.

Those in the construction industry considered its key attraction to be that it offered stable employment and income particularly in the current context of Covid-19 restrictions and resultant economic impacts as construction work has continued through lockdowns and vacancy levels although falling have now quickly recovered. This is something universally valued across respondents, regardless of industry or sector worked in, and clearly reflects the timing of the study. Security of work (although not necessarily security of employer) through recession has not necessarily been something the construction industry has been able to offer previously but the sector is seen to offer this now.

A recurring theme was its ease of entry – with multiple entry points, roles that require little qualification or existing skills for entry, and roles where skills can be transferred from other industries and require little relevant experience. Indeed, the interviewees described how employers didn't tend to expect any experience (of the job role or industry or sometimes both); and how they were put off other industries and sectors by the need for experience, the high levels of competition for jobs, or the recruitment processes involved (eg use of agencies). Also related to ease of entry was the reliance on informal recruitment methods, including word of mouth and introductions from friends and family without the need for an application, interview, or series of tests.

Other strong attraction factors among those in the construction industry are that it offered: variety of work/a wide range of opportunities including the potential to work outside of an office environment involving more practical/hands-on work; jobs in the local area/opportunities near to home (thus minimising commutes and/or time away from home); good and friendly employers and good working environment; and a good salary and generous benefits packages. Indeed, pay was reported in the survey by possible entrants as something that would encourage them to consider working in the construction industry. Additionally, the industry offers tangible benefits – pride in one's work and positive feedback from customers.

Another attraction factor for those in construction was opportunity for growth, development, and progression. The interviews indicated this meant to be able to build a career in a specialist construction area or to build a professional identity/occupation within the construction industry (thus to specialise and/or become expert); to progress to gain

more responsibility including to management roles; and to build their own businesses. Potential to progress was another aspect reported by possible entrants as an attraction factor for the construction industry and aligns with values espoused by many respondents; and across all respondents almost one quarter anticipate some form of career progression in the next two to three years.

For some in construction, these acted as key motivations to join the industry or in selecting their job or employer; but for others their entry to construction was less purposeful and these strengths only became apparent after entry. These aspects are also key reasons for expecting to stay in construction.

### **So what should the construction industry do?**

- Focus messaging on the key strengths of stability and security; ease of entry and potential for progression and personal and professional development; variety in roles, work environments and locations, and employers; competitive pay and benefits; and tangible benefits in doing a good job (rather than altruistic or abstract benefits). This suggests an approach more along the lines of the Armed Forces advertising (Made in the Royal Navy) rather than that used in teaching (Those who can), and one that taps into a feeling of pride rather than altruism.
- Raise the visibility of career pathways, provide illustrative examples.
- Help individuals see the relevance of their skills and qualifications for construction and how they can fit in.

### **3. Consider targeting messages to specific groups**

Although many individuals lacked awareness of the construction industry, some groups could be targeted in recruitment messaging as they may be more open to considering a career change and/or a career in construction. Targeting both the types of potential recruits as well as the tailoring the messages (see below) may prove to be more effective than a blanket campaign as the survey indicates that the vast majority (72%) of individuals already in the labour market have no intentions of changing industry (at least in the next two to three years) and many expect to continue in their current job. Similarly, most students (76%) expect to get a job related to their study or training rather than change direction.

Those most likely to anticipate moving industry were male, younger (aged 16–24), either looking for work or working in lower or unskilled roles, so arguably not yet settled in their career. Key reasons for anticipating leaving their industry were: to improve work/life balance, unsatisfactory pay, or a desire to change sector or occupation (change/do something different). Additionally, those most likely to anticipate moving industry to a related job were male, mid age (25–54, and thus arguably mid-career), in competitor sectors and in higher level roles and/or with higher level qualifications (above Level 4). These may be looking for a way to progress in their career as one of the main reasons given by respondents for expecting to leave their industry was a lack of promotion/progression opportunities. This suggests career transition points to target, such

as leaving education, moving between education phases, labour market re-entry or life transition; and suggest levers that the construction industry could use to attract new recruits.

The measures used to assess attractiveness of the construction industry among potential recruits found that the industry appeared to be relatively more attractive to males, those mid age (25-to-54 years old), from ethnic minority backgrounds, in lower level or unskilled roles. The sector is also more attractive to those working in competitor sectors, particularly the engineering industry, IT and communications industry, and the manufacturing sector and the data suggests some degree of flows between these sectors and construction (both in and out). Indeed, other sectors considered by those now in construction included engineering, IT and communications, transport, storage and logistics (as well as the armed forces and emergency services, and finance); and those who previously worked in construction now work in engineering and IT and communications as well as other competitor and pool sectors. In addition, those currently (or most recently) working in the retail sector also seem to be open to considering the construction industry, which perhaps reflects the impact the pandemic and lockdowns have had on this industry. The industry is also more attractive to those who have previously worked in construction (and thus aware of the benefits it offers), and perhaps could be encouraged to return. This suggests that these groups may be more receptive to messages about the construction industry.

Targeting those most open to working in construction may help to address issues of volume of new entrants but will not necessarily help to address skills shortages in key areas or particularly in widening the diversity of the construction industry's workforce. This will require a different targeting approach – to identify the skills and groups to target. Indeed, the survey indicates that women and younger individuals may require more work for them to consider a career in the construction industry, and to overcome the perceptions they hold about the industry (see below).

### **So what should the construction industry do?**

- Divide potential recruits into segments according to their openness to career change and to the construction industry. To increase the volume of new recruits, target males, those mid-age/mid-career, and those working in engineering, IT and communications and manufacturing with information, and help them to consider changing careers and translating their skills into the construction context. These can be reached through sector-based networks, publications, and specialist agencies. Also reach out to those who previously worked in construction to consider returning, and to those who worked in sectors hit by the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Divide potential recruits into segments according to skills gaps and diversity requirements. Prioritise groups that meet these requirements and target these. Those from ethnic minority backgrounds may need less persuasion/convincing than other underrepresented groups.

#### 4. Try different methods to attract potential recruits

Employers and industries are using new methods to attract recruits to try to align with individuals' changing expectations, particularly around gaining a sense of purpose from their work and employers sharing their own values. Values-based recruitment has emerged – particularly in health, social care, and emergency services - and this is designed to ensure that the current and future workforce is attracted and selected against the values of the organisation, with key values espoused by organisations clustered into: ethical or moral concepts, attitudes towards ways of working with others, quality of work, emotional attachment, longer-term or societal impact, and future or improvement orientation. It is claimed that values-based recruitment improves job-match, job satisfaction, productivity, and retention; although there is little empirical evidence to date of its impact.

In our research, survey respondents confirmed the importance of shared values between the employer and employee in employment and career decisions: 69 per cent felt it was important to work in an industry that shares their values. This was consistent across the age groups in the survey which suggests it is not just important to younger individuals (not just the preserve of Millennials or Gen Z). Key values across all respondents were stability (probably heightened by the context in which the research was undertaken), having pride in their work, helping others and/or making a difference, and flexibility in work hours.

Additionally, the research suggests that outcomes-based recruitment messages could work particularly around careers outcomes and opportunities to train, specialise and gain expertise. These are all positive attributes of the industry described by those in construction, and the literature recognises how as an employer (as well as through what it builds) the industry has a profound impact on economic mobility and life chances. Individuals are attracted to construction, as they feel it offers progression, and many individuals anticipate some form of progression (promotion, higher salary etc).

In terms of recruitment and selection methods, the ease of access and entry to the construction industry is clearly valued by those in the industry and it is seen as a key strength. It enables those who want to, to make a purposeful entry and enables others to drift in (and then stay). The recruitment methods experienced are largely determined by the type of role potential recruits are looking for; and particularly for those in manual and trade roles informal entry mechanisms including personal networks and recommendation are key. However, for those outside of the industry these informal entry mechanisms may mean that the ways in are somewhat hidden. So, there is a need to retain the ease of access but to help those not well networked to access these networks or be able to find other ways in. The reliance on informal sources – for information about the industry and access to jobs – can also narrow the recruitment pool as networks tend to be self-reinforcing (with members sharing similar characteristics and values). This could act as a barrier to the industry in attempting to diversify its workforce.



### So what should the construction industry do?

- Values-based recruitment messages or branding could be trialled by the construction industry. The survey identified clear motivators for many respondents, and these could form the basis of values-based recruitment initiatives, indicating how the industry can deliver on these values and providing concrete examples.
- Values-based messages could also be used in targeting to emphasise different aspects of construction to different groups of potential recruits depending on their values. The dataset could be mined more thoroughly (using multivariate techniques) to help to determine the strongest values for the groups the industry would most like to target. For example, women are relatively more likely than others to value stability in where they work or who they work for; younger individuals are relatively more likely to value the opportunity to specialise/become expert, invent things and be creative and avoid risk; those from ethnic minority backgrounds are relatively more likely to value setting their own standards and rules, and being independent and/or running their own business.
- It will be important to ensure that any promotion around values is matched, and that the industry does not over promise. The wider research literature indicates that demonstrating culture, values and purpose is not enough and industries and organisations must back this up with evidence; and that authenticity is key to attraction and retention.
- Additionally, recruitment messages could emphasise what new recruits could achieve within the first couple of years in the industry and demonstrate the pathways for different entry points and skill or qualification levels, this would help to make career paths more visible and raise the attraction of the industry.
- Work to wider access to informal networks and provide other supplementary mechanisms to impart information about work experience and job opportunities.

## 5. Change perceptions

Many of those outside of the construction industry think they have a good understanding of the jobs and careers it offers and have strong views about it. Many perceive the construction industry requires you to be physically fit and to work outside, and it is commonly described as being manual and demanding (even by those within the industry), and masculine. These views are particularly held by women, older individuals, and those from white backgrounds. Those qualified up to Level 3 were most likely to describe the industry as manual whereas those with qualifications above Level 4 were relatively more likely to view the construction industry as professional (reflecting the types of roles they may see as more fitting). These perceived attributes of the construction industry – hard work involving manual labour, heavy lifting etc, working outdoors and the male dominated culture – put individuals off from working in construction.

It is worth noting that for some individuals the physicality of some roles in the industry is an attraction, providing them with the opportunity to be creative, to work with their hands and see tangible results from their endeavours. The industry is also perceived to be a

place where you can earn a good salary and where there are lots of job opportunities around the country, and some describe it as being professional, varied, and innovative, again strengths upon which to build.

Generally, those in the construction industry are much more positive than those outside when describing construction and are much more likely to feel it offers lots of opportunities, opportunities for progression/promotion, and job security; and that it has a diverse workforce and that you can work flexible hours. They are also much more likely to use positive adjectives to describe the industry. They generally feel their expectations have been met, settled in well, would recommend the industry to others, and have indeed recommended it as a place to work.

### **So what should the construction industry do?**

- Individuals outside of the industry have a very narrow view of what the industry offers, and the industry needs to present different insights into what work in the industry is like. This is likely to require a longer-term focus.
- Insiders can and already do act as ambassadors for the industry, but they may only be able to provide a narrow perspective of the industry and so could inadvertently reinforce some myths and stereotypes. Supporting ambassadors to have wider perspectives and equipping them with ways to signpost to sources of additional information will help.
- The industry needs to continue to use ambassadors from a range of backgrounds to promote the industry, share their personal stories, and to act as visible and vocal role models for individuals from under-represented groups. Insiders from ethnic minority backgrounds have strong positive views which could be capitalised.

## **6. Adjust employment practices and culture**

A final area for action for the industry is to consider providing individuals, particularly those from groups currently under-represented in the industry, with aspects of work that they value and/or attracts them to other industries and sectors and provide those who are or could struggle with additional support. A perceived or real absence of these in the construction industry can create barriers. Three key areas for action are: offering support to younger unskilled entrants; offering formal flexibility in working hours essentially adjusting employment practices; and developing a more inclusive culture and diverse workforce essentially a programme of changing the culture. The latter would require a substantial change for the sector and thus represent a long-term commitment.

### **Additional support for key groups:**

Younger entrants entering into labouring and general roles had fewer positive experiences and so the industry could do more to support this group. This could include induction programmes with training opportunities (to soften the transition) and offering apprenticeships to those performing well and other such mechanisms to support them in achieving a qualification and being able to specialise. Others entering the industry into



self-employed positions or progressing to setting up and running their own businesses also reported struggling so could be supported with training on the practicalities particularly around finances.

## Flexibility

Having flexibility in work hours was the third most highly ranked value in career and life decisions across all survey respondents (alongside helping others/making a difference); and for 14 per cent of survey respondents it was the most important factor in their decisions. Offering flexible working arrangements was also a factor that attracted over half of all respondents to their current job; and additionally, for a quarter of those anticipating staying in their industry in the next two to three years, flexible working arrangements were cited as a reason for staying.

Flexibility in working arrangements/hours was particularly important to those in pool sectors, and those aged 25–54 (mid-career). It appears to be relatively less important to those in the construction industry and ranks alongside opportunities to work independently and run their own business which provides another form of flexibility (or control over working arrangements).

The vast majority of those in the industry were on full-time contracts and part-time working and formal flexible hours arrangements were rare. Yet three-in-five believed you could work flexible hours in the industry, and this may suggest they hold a different perception of 'flexible hours.' The construction industry may offer a particular type of flexibility and flexible working that relates to having control over hours (fluid-flexibility) rather than offering a more formal and structured form of flexible hours such as part-time work (structured flexibility), and it may be more commonly offered in some roles than in others. Some respondents working in the industry found they worked long or unsocial hours and had to spend protracted periods away from their families so wanted more flexible hours.

The industry does not seem to offer the type of flexibility that many potential recruits would value, and this is certainly the perception that those outside of the construction industry hold. The survey responses indicate that over half of those outside of the construction industry do not think that you can work flexible hours in construction, and this is higher among those working in pool sectors which arguably offer the most flexible working patterns. Additionally, the perception of long hours, inconvenient hours and shift working was regarded as a potential deterrent to considering construction (the fourth most cited, alongside poor salary, lack of job security, lack of interest in construction). Although very few felt that good working hours including flexible working would encourage them to consider the construction industry.

### So what should the construction industry do?

- Consideration could be given to articulating the type of flexibility that the sector currently offers and starting a conversation about the types of flexibility which are less common (and found in other sectors), the reasons for this and whether it is due to long standing ways of working, and whether any changes could be made to offer potential recruits and existing employees different forms of flexibility.

### **Inclusive culture**

Overall, almost half of all survey respondents reported that a diverse workforce was something that attracted them to their current job. Other aspects were more commonly cited (such as good working environment, employers' good reputation, good salary, good career prospects and employers' ethical working practices) which suggests this may be a secondary consideration. However, for some groups, diversity of workforce may be particularly critical.

In terms of how the construction industry is perceived, more respondents agreed than disagreed with the statement that the construction industry has a diverse workforce (defined in the survey as 'having workers of different ages, ethnicities, men and women, transgender/non-binary') (57%, compared with 28%). However, as noted above the majority of respondents outside of the industry did not feel they had a good understanding of what it would be like to work in it. Indeed, statistical analysis of the industry shows it is not very diverse. When selecting adjectives for the industry, the responses are quite different: 49 per cent would describe construction as masculine, and only 15 per cent describe it as diverse. Suggesting a perceived lack of diversity at least in terms of gender.

Culture can put potential recruits off the construction industry, but the insight of insiders suggests it is better than one might have expected. Those inside the industry are much more likely to consider it diverse, agreeing with the statement about diversity and describing it as diverse. The majority of those in the construction industry from under-represented groups – female respondents, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those reporting a disability – also agreed that the industry was diverse. This could suggest that expectations for the sector were particularly low and have been exceeded from this low base, that there are pockets of diversity experienced by some respondents, that some are experiencing a positive culture change, or that there is a poor understanding of diversity.

Tackling the perceived macho culture and male dominance in the workforce was an issue that could encourage individuals to consider working in construction (third most cited factor that would encourage them) and similarly a common deterrent among those outside the industry is that it perceived to be too male and/or has a macho culture (third most cited deterrent). This was particularly an issue for women, those mid age (25–54), in intermediate roles, and with Level 4 qualifications.

The literature suggests that challenging discrimination is a key theme in attracting and recruiting talent across a range of industries but that many employers have work to do in this area, particularly work to eliminate bias from their processes. Also embedding a climate of inclusion brings positive outcomes for individuals and their organisations.

### **So what should the construction industry do?**

- Undertake additional research into what is driving positive experiences of diversity, and where there are examples of positive change (moves towards diversity and inclusive culture) that can be shared and translated to other parts of the industry.
- Undertake additional research to understand how the masculine, white and heterosexual culture is experienced.
- Challenge discrimination – the sexism, homophobia and racism that exists – as this is a toxic issue that needs addressing.
- Initiate a change programme to support an inclusive culture across the industry.