

Research into careers in construction

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Key findings

The research summarises key insights from those inside and outside of the construction industry to understand how careers in construction are perceived and experienced. It presents findings and draws out recommendations to better understand, track and support:

- Attitudes to, attraction to, and awareness of the construction industry.
- Perceptions about entry and access to the sector.
- Engagement with construction careers information, advice and guidance.
- The influence of CITB activities.

Those working in the construction industry had positive experiences of the sector. Both new and established workers valued the job security, pay, progression and development opportunities, and variety of roles offered by the industry. By contrast other sectors were seen by these workers as more hierarchical and stressful than construction and offering work that was less interesting with less generous pay.

Construction workers were attracted to the industry by the interesting and practical nature of the work and opportunities to be creative and see tangible results of their work.

Construction workers also noted that good availability of jobs locally and ease of entry into the industry contributed to their decision to join the sector. New entrants to construction generally had positive experiences of entering the sector due to the informal recruitment and induction processes, supportive colleagues, and visible career pathways.

For those outside of the sector: construction was ranked as the joint third industry that young people would most like to work in, alongside education and teaching, engineering, and science and pharmaceuticals. Just under a quarter of young people (23%) said that they would consider a career in construction although, one fifth (21%) said that they would never consider working in construction. It was ranked sixth by parents, and highly by career guidance professionals but was the least popular sector among potential entrants working in other sectors.

Despite positive experiences among construction workers and ranking highly for most groups, the sector still fails to attract and retain sufficient numbers of people. Attractiveness remained stable for potential entrants working in other sectors but fell slightly in 2022 from 2021 for young people, parents of young people and career guidance professionals. Negative views persist with those outside the sector sometimes holding firmly rooted and largely negative perceptions and stereotypical views of careers in construction as being physically demanding, outdoorsy, and masculine. Further work is needed to address this industry image problem.

In line with previous research, men continue to rate attraction and knowledge of careers in construction more highly than women and have a higher propensity to have considered a career in construction. This means that gendered perceptions of construction as a 'male' occupation persist and will need to be tackled to improve recruitment of women into the industry.

Knowledge of and attraction to construction remain strongly linked. The research found that respondents who knew more about construction also tended to find it more attractive, and vice versa.

Careers guidance relating to construction was seen to be of good quality. Most career guidance professionals felt confident in supporting clients interested in a career in construction with 24% describing themselves as confident and 59% as fairly confident but wanting to know more. New entrants indicated that each element of careers advice was fairly easy to access (at least 59% found each element easy to access).

Personal connections to construction provide valuable and persuasive information about the benefits of working in the construction sector with higher attraction and knowledge of the industry being linked to having personal connections.

- 66% of new entrants to construction had a friend or family member with construction experience.
- 42% of young people knew a friend or family member(s) who had worked in the sector.
- 44% of those working in competition sectors and 38% of those working in pool sectors had these constructions connections.
- 53% of parents and 58% of career guidance professional surveyed had a friend or family member with construction experience.

The research suggests that more could be done to support potential entrants of all ages to make links with people in construction, with career guidance professionals reporting that real contacts, connections, and experiences with the construction sector were the weakest part of their offering.

Over a third of young people (36%) and parents (37%) had seen at least one of the CITB advertisements¹.

¹ See appendix for images of the CITB advertisements.

Introduction

This research was commissioned by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and BMG Research Limited with support from Professor Tristram Hooley and Dr Wendy Hirsh.

The paper summarises key insights from those inside and outside of the construction industry to understand how careers in construction are perceived and experienced. It builds on the CITB's existing portfolio of careers and recruitment research activity, drawing and extending on key performance indicators (KPIs) to support monitoring and evaluation of CITB's careers activities with a broad range of stakeholders. It presents findings and draws out recommendations to better understand, track and support:

- Attitudes to, attraction to, and awareness of the construction industry.
- Perceptions about entry and access to the sector.
- Engagement with construction careers information, advice and guidance.
- The influence of CITB activities.

Background

The construction industry has experienced recruitment and retention difficulties and skill shortages for many years, compounded by a lack of diversity in the sector. The existing workforce and potential labour supply has also been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery, the UK leaving the European Union ('Brexit'), and by a cost-of-living crisis. Construction is not alone in facing such challenges and many sectors have also been badly affected by labour or skills shortages, while workers too have faced challenges to find or maintain suitable employment.

This has strengthened the need to make the construction industry more attractive to a broader pool of individuals to both increase the size and also the diversity of the workforce. This is reflected in CITB's key priorities in their Strategic and Business Plan. This means working to attract education leavers (at all levels), those early on in their professional life, career changers and individuals re-entering the workforce.

The construction industry needs to identify factors that make the industry attractive and understand how these differ across groups of potential and existing construction sector entrants. It also needs to understand how to promote these factors to encourage those with desired skills and characteristics to consider a career in the industry. However, it must also make sure that factors that the industry promotes align with the experience of those moving into construction to ensure retention and a continued labour supply. This will involve understanding the current deterrents to working in the construction industry (entering and staying in construction), what makes competitor industries more attractive, and then addressing these challenges and concerns, especially in the recruitment practices used.

Research approach

The research was undertaken in two stages.

- Stage 1 took place between November 2021 and June 2022 (with fieldwork from December 2021 to February 2022). It collected insights from adults (aged 18 and older) in or close to the labour market. This included individuals who work in construction (new entrants and established workers) known as *insiders*. It also collected views of potential entrants, those who may work or look for work in sectors that traditionally compete with the construction industry when recruiting, known as *outsiders*, for example engineering, manufacturing and IT and communications. The outsider group also includes individuals from a broader range of sectors where construction is less likely to be considered as a potential career option such as health and social care.
- Stage 2 took place between July 2022 and May 2023 (with fieldwork from September to November 2022). It collected feedback from *young people* (aged 14 to 18), and from *parents of young people* and *career guidance professionals* who can act as influencers of young people. This focused on future career plans and aspirations, views and knowledge of the construction industry (compared with other sectors and careers), and engagement with construction focused careers materials.

Across the two stages of the research 3,518 people were consulted through online surveys and 40 construction workers were interviewed.

Attraction to the construction industry

Tracking progress on attraction of construction

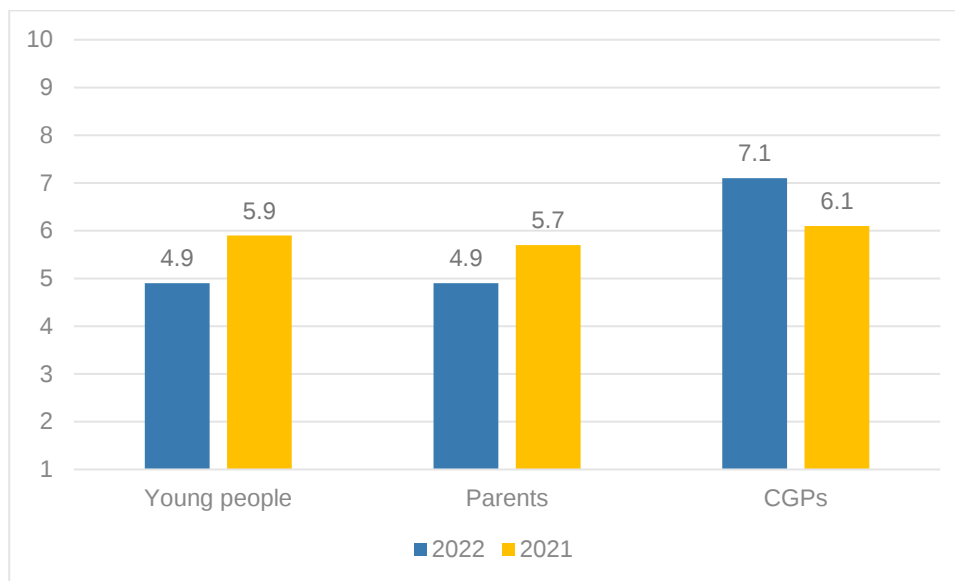
CITB key performance indicators track how perceptions and experiences of the industry change over time². Young people and parents of young people reported middling levels of attraction to careers in construction. Career guidance professionals viewed it as more attractive, but only a minority of potential entrants reported that they found it attractive. This suggests that young people and their influencers are open to the possibility of a construction career but when closer to the labour market views are more set and individuals may be harder to convince to consider work in construction.

² Performance in 2022 has been tracked (where possible) against findings from the Rethinking Recruitment research with new entrants to construction, experienced construction workers and potential entrants working in other sectors. See. [New perspectives on recruitment to the construction industry | Institute for Employment Studies \(IES\) \(employment-studies.co.uk\)](https://employment-studies.co.uk), Performance is also compared with CIAG research conducted for CITB in 2021 with young people, parents and career guidance professionals, Turquoise (2021) *CITB 2021 CIAG research*. Unpublished report.

The attractiveness of a career in construction remained fairly stable for potential entrants working in other sectors between 2021 (17% rating it as attractive) and 2022 (15% rating it as attractive).

Attractiveness fell for young people, parents of young people and career guidance professionals. These groups were asked to rate the attractiveness of construction on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being extremely unattractive and 10 being extremely attractive. Among each group the average rating fell by around 1 point (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Attractiveness of a career in construction (average score)



IES/BMG 2022, Turquoise 2021

Despite this fall in average attraction, construction was rated fairly highly as a potential sector to work in compared to other industries by young people and their influencers. These groups were asked to choose the top five sectors that they, their child or their clients would most like to work in from a list of 16 sectors. Construction was ranked as the joint third most popular sector by young people, sixth by parents³, and was ranked very highly by career guidance professionals⁴. However, among potential entrants working in other sectors construction was the least popular sector, with 13% of survey respondents placing it in their top five preferred sector⁵.

³ Comparison to 2021 was not possible due to different methods of collecting this data.

⁴ This will be explored in further research with career guidance professionals.

⁵ Note that this data was analysed differently than sector rankings of young people, parents and career guidance professionals so cannot be directly compared.

Just under a quarter of young people (23%) said that they would consider a career in construction, while one fifth (21%) said that they would never consider working in construction ⁶.

Construction worker views (insiders)

The research found that those working in construction by and large had positive experiences of the industry and identified many attractive aspects of construction work. New entrants and established construction workers were initially attracted by the interesting and practical nature of the work, opportunities to be creative and see tangible results from their work, and friendly employers and good availability of local jobs. Construction workers were also attracted to the ease of entry into the industry and often felt that other industries were hard to get into (as well as hierarchical, underpaid, stressful and boring). This group generally valued job stability and security, generous pay, progression and learning opportunities and variety in a potential job or career.

The majority of surveyed construction workers regarded the sector as a positive place to work, largely as they felt it aligned with their career values. Construction workers, particularly in manual or trade roles, described construction as well paid compared to other opportunities available to them and offered clear routes for pay progression. Additionally, construction workers ('insiders') widely said that they enjoyed their work, particularly the ability to be creative and work in a social environment and felt that jobs in construction offered diversity of roles and tasks, and flexibility in terms of both working hours and location.

Most construction workers felt that their initial work expectations have been met and they planned to stay in the construction industry as they felt able to use their skills and qualifications and to continue to progress in the industry. Indeed, a key perceived strength of the industry was therefore the ability to offer people a place to build a good career, regardless of previous experience and qualifications. This and the other benefits experienced could be highlighted to potential entrants.

Insiders felt that to further improve attraction to jobs in construction adjustments could be made to current employment practices including better support for new entrants, more promotion of the flexibility offered in construction and the development of policies to support more flexible working. They also felt that actions could be taken to address the pervasive macho culture in the sector (see below).

⁶ Comparison to 2021 was not possible due to different methods of collecting this data.

Views from outside the industry (outsiders)

Despite the positive experiences of existing construction workers, those survey respondents currently outside of the construction industry - potential entrants working in other industries, young people, and their influencers - tended to view the sector as mildly (not strongly) attractive and to hold more negative views of construction work. Those outside the sector may hold firmly rooted and largely negative perceptions and stereotypical views of careers in construction as involving on-site labouring, with physically demanding roles, outdoors work and masculine. This may reflect a lack of real understanding of the variety of roles and career paths available in the sector. Indeed, those working in construction held a variety of roles including manual roles, trades and technical or professional occupations and valued the variety offered by the sector.

Deterrents

The main reason cited for not pursuing work in construction was the 'pull factor' of preferring to work in another sector rather than being strongly deterred from entering construction. Most potential entrants who are already in work, no matter what stage they are at in their career, intend to stay in their current industry. This suggests that their needs, values, and expectations are being met, or at least a belief that construction would not offer them a better option. The key values noted by those working in other sectors were stable work, being able to take pride in your work, helping others, and flexibility. Yet, many new entrants to the construction sector were career changers, with 40% of new entrants surveyed reporting that they decided they wanted to work in construction as an adult while working in another industry. This indicates that to attract individuals away from their current sector (and overcome the pull factor) is difficult but can be done. It is likely to depend on the circumstances of individuals as to whether or not they are receptive to recruitment messages and initiatives at the time these are encountered.

Young people (mostly still in education or training) also cited the 'pull' of having secured a job in another sector as the main factor that deterred them from working in construction. Furthermore, young people feeling that they didn't have relevant qualifications also acted as a deterrent to considering pursuing a career in the construction sector. This suggests that young people have made important decisions about their future careers by their teen years and are already on a path towards industries other than construction by nature of their qualifications. However, it may also indicate a lack of awareness of entry routes, career pathways and diversity of roles offered by careers in construction, which 'insiders' felt offered ample opportunities to apply transferable skills from a range of qualifications and job roles.

Young people and their influencers reported other 'push-factors' that put them off pursuing a career in construction. These included the perceived physically challenging nature of construction work and concerns about safety, and a lack of opportunities to develop digital skills. Career guidance professionals reported that while the construction

industry offered many benefits, it was not perceived as offering opportunities for flexible working opportunities and a good work-life balance.

Finally, the perceived culture of the construction industry was also a strong factor in reducing attraction to the industry, especially for women. Some survey respondents felt that the construction industry was a place where people like themselves would not belong, citing concerns around sexism, racism and homophobia, and about a culture which is hostile to underrepresented groups. Outsiders would be more attracted to work in the industry if significant changes were made to the perceived 'macho' culture (see below). Making a commitment to address discrimination and support an inclusive culture within the industry could help to attract outsiders concerned about the current culture.

How to improve attraction

Construction was ranked as just mildly attractive by outsiders – those in work and those in the education pipeline. However, 23% of young people surveyed would consider a career in construction, most parents of young people said that they would encourage their child to pursue a career in construction if they expressed an interest in this, and career guidance professionals held the most positive views on the industry of all groups outside the construction industry. Career guidance professionals felt that their students and clients were attracted to the industry as a place for their future career, thus most are proactive in sharing information about careers in the construction industry. This positivity about construction was strongest in further education institutions and weakest in higher education.

Outsiders identified factors that could be highlighted to improve the attraction of a career in construction. Those working in other industries cited the work environment, employer's reputations, and a good salary as potential attraction factors to improve and promote. They noted how better pay and progression opportunities could attract them (and therefore potentially others) towards the construction industry as well as tackling the 'macho' culture.

Young people and parents with young children felt the purpose and content of construction work, and the opportunity to make a difference, were the most attractive qualities offered, alongside a good availability of jobs. These suggest areas that could be promoted to young people. However young people also valued pay, workplace safety and work-life balance which they felt construction was less likely to offer. Career guidance professionals however felt it was a sector that did offer good prospects of well-paid work, and was one where students would be able to take pride in their work, do interesting work and could potentially provide opportunities to travel. They also noted (as indicated above) concerns around the ability of the construction sector to offer an inclusive workplace culture with supportive colleagues, a good work-life balance, and flexible working. Many these points align closely with the suggestions of insiders. There are areas where there is potential for improvements of construction is going to be more successful in attracting young people.

Familiarity with the construction industry

Knowledge of and attraction to construction are strongly linked. The research found that respondents who knew more about construction also tended to find it more attractive, and vice versa (reflecting findings of previous research).

Unsurprisingly, knowledge of construction was stronger among current construction workers (insiders) than those outside of the industry. Potential entrants working in other sectors when surveyed felt they had some knowledge of careers in construction (40% reported having a good understanding), but they reported a much better understanding of their chosen sector before they started working in it, particularly in terms of entry requirements and availability of jobs. Knowledge of careers in construction varied among young people and their parents but had dropped for both groups since 2021. Young people who lacked knowledge of the construction industry felt that their knowledge gaps focused on how to find a job in the industry, and what development, progression and work experience opportunities were available to them. For all groups, understanding how to enter the industry could be improved.

Tracking progress on knowledge of construction

Potential entrants working in other sectors, young people and parents reported medium levels of knowledge about career opportunities available in construction.

- Overall, the level of understanding of jobs and careers in the construction industry remained fairly stable among potential entrants working in other sectors since 2021. Levels of understanding were tracked separately for those working in competition sectors (sectors that traditionally compete with construction for workers due to close alignment) and pool sectors (sectors not closely aligned with construction). Understanding among those working in competition sectors was higher than those working in pool sectors in 2021 and fell slightly between 2021 (53% indicating good understanding) and 2022 (45% indicating good understanding). Levels of knowledge were steady among those working in pool sectors (43% in 2021, and 42% in 2022 indicating good understanding). The gap in understanding between pool and competition sectors has therefore reduced but due to decreased understanding among those in competition sectors.
- Knowledge of career opportunities in construction fell among young people and parents of young people, but generally young people consider themselves more knowledgeable than parents do. These groups were asked to rate their knowledge of career opportunities in construction on a scale of 1-10 with 1 'knowing nothing' to 10 'knowing everything'. The average understanding score among young people was 4.8 in 2022, compared to 5.8 in 2021. For parents the average level of understanding score fell to 4 from 5.5.
- Parents of young people were also asked to what extent they understood different areas of careers in construction (Table 1). Just over half felt they knew nothing or very

little, but between one fifth and one quarter felt they knew quite a bit or very much. Parents felt most knowledgeable about what it would be like to work in construction and particularly the types of jobs and careers offered. Parents were least knowledgeable whether there were construction jobs available near them, opportunities for development and progression, how to find work experience, and about the skills and qualifications needed to enter the industry. This indicates lower understanding about the accessibility and availability of construction employment.

Table 1: Parents' understanding of different areas of careers in construction (per cent)

Area of knowledge	Nothing at all	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
What it would be like to work in it	19%	31%	30%	15%	7%
The type of jobs and careers it offered	12%	29%	33%	19%	6%
How to find jobs or work experience in it	20%	31%	29%	17%	6%
Whether there were jobs in it near your child	20%	33%	26%	14%	6%
The opportunities for development and progression in it	22%	30%	26%	16%	6%
Skills, qualifications etc needed to enter it	22%	29%	26%	17%	6%

IES/BMG, 2022; Turquoise 2021

- Most career guidance professionals felt confident in supporting clients interested in a career in construction with 24% describing themselves as confident and 59% as fairly confident but wanting to know more⁷.

Career guidance professionals in both 2021 and 2022 felt most knowledgeable about career opportunities available in general in the construction industry (Table 2), followed by professional, technical and trade roles available. They felt least knowledgeable about Pathways to a professional institution⁸ and recognition such as Chartered status. Perceived knowledge of all career options fell since the 2021 survey (but this could reflect the different sample profiles⁹).

⁷ Comparison to 2021 not possible due to different methods of collecting this data.

⁸ Professional institutions in construction include Royal Institution of British Architects, Chartered Institute of Building, Institution of Civil Engineers, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers, and Association of Project Managers.

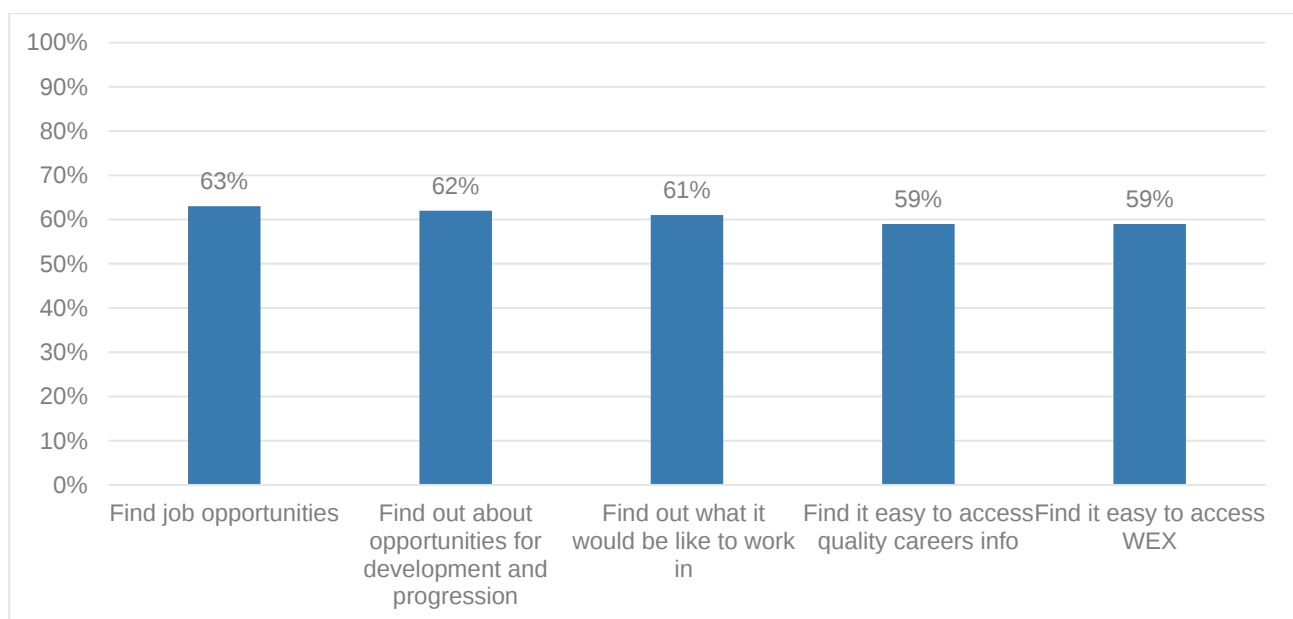
⁹ The responding sample of career guidance professionals in 2022 appeared to be somewhat different from the sample in previous years of the research, where a substantial proportion of respondents (perhaps around one-quarter) were general educators rather than careers specialists.

Table 2: Career guidance professionals' knowledge of career options in construction (average score)

How knowledgeable do you feel about the following career options within construction?	Mean knowledge (out of 10)	
	2022	2021
Career Opportunities that are available in the construction industry	6.5	6.7
Pathways to a professional institution	5.3	6.4
Recognition (e.g. Chartered status)	5.4	6.2
Professional roles where a degree and in some cases a post-graduate qualification may be required	6.1	6.6
Technical and semi-professional roles that require college training or experience	6.1	6.6
Specialist crafts and trades requiring practical 'hands-on' skills and Apprenticeship training	6.1	6.7

IES/BMG, 2022; Turquoise, 2021

- New entrants to the construction industry were asked how easy they had found it to access career information, advice and guidance (Figure 2). New entrants indicated that each element of careers advice was fairly easy to access, and that there was little variation among the accessibility of different types of information¹⁰.

Figure 2: New entrants to construction and their perceptions on the ease of accessing construction careers information advice and guidance (per cent)

¹⁰ Comparison to 2021 not possible as this data was not previously collected.

Tracking progress on connections with construction

Knowledge of construction and career opportunities in the sector were commonly gained through experience of, or connections to, the industry. Construction workers broadly felt that insights into the construction industry are gained once within the industry, rather than before joining. Similarly, good knowledge of the construction industry among parents of young people was also linked to previous personal construction experience.

Personal connections to construction can therefore provide valuable and persuasive information about the benefits of working in the construction sector.

- 66% of new entrants to construction had a friend or family member with construction experience¹¹.
- 42% of young people knew a friend or family member(s) who had worked in the sector, a similar proportion to 2021 (46%).
- 44% of those working in competition sectors and 38% of those working in pool sectors had these constructions connections¹².
- 53% of parents and 58% of career guidance professional surveyed had a friend or family member with construction experience.

Importance of experience and connections

Personal connections with construction workers were associated with greater attraction to and understanding of careers in construction. These contacts played a key role for outsiders when looking for careers information in any sector but were a particularly common source of knowledge around careers in construction. Furthermore, young people and parents who knew somebody with experience in construction were more likely to report good knowledge of careers in construction. Young people and parents of young people with contacts in construction not only felt more knowledgeable but were also more likely to find the industry attractive.

The lack of personal contacts to provide information, insight and understanding of the construction sector could therefore be a barrier to entry. The research suggests that more could be done to support potential entrants of all ages to make links with people in construction, with career guidance professionals reporting that real contacts, connections, and experiences with the construction sector were the weakest part of their offering.

¹¹ Comparison to NPOR not possible as this data was not collected.

¹² Comparison to NPOR not possible as this data was not collected.

Other methods to inform and influence

While personal contacts are an important source of knowledge, outsiders identified a variety of sources of careers information which could also be used by CITB to increase understanding of careers in construction. Those working in other sectors tend to find out about industries that they are interested in by gathering information through educators and conducting research on the internet including using social media. For parents and young people career guidance in educational settings was the preferred way of gaining careers information.

Career guidance within educational settings is therefore an important way for CITB to reach young people, and the research suggests this opportunity is already being successfully leveraged. The career guidance professionals surveyed felt they understood construction: they were generally knowledgeable about the construction industry, confident in supporting clients with an interest in construction, and felt that they had good quality information to share with their students and clients. Career guidance professionals in FE perceived themselves to be more knowledgeable than those in other settings, as were those who have worked with the CITB.

Young people and parents of young people felt that careers information and advice around construction was of good quality. However, they felt less knowledgeable about getting a job or work experience in construction than other areas of career's knowledge such as where to find information on what it would be like to work in the industry and the types of roles available. This suggests that CITB has made good progress in reaching career guidance professionals working with young people, but this has yet to be translated into increased entry into or connections with the industry for young people. This is an important next step given the strong role of experience and connections in the attractiveness of construction.

Wider influences on perceptions, knowledge and understanding

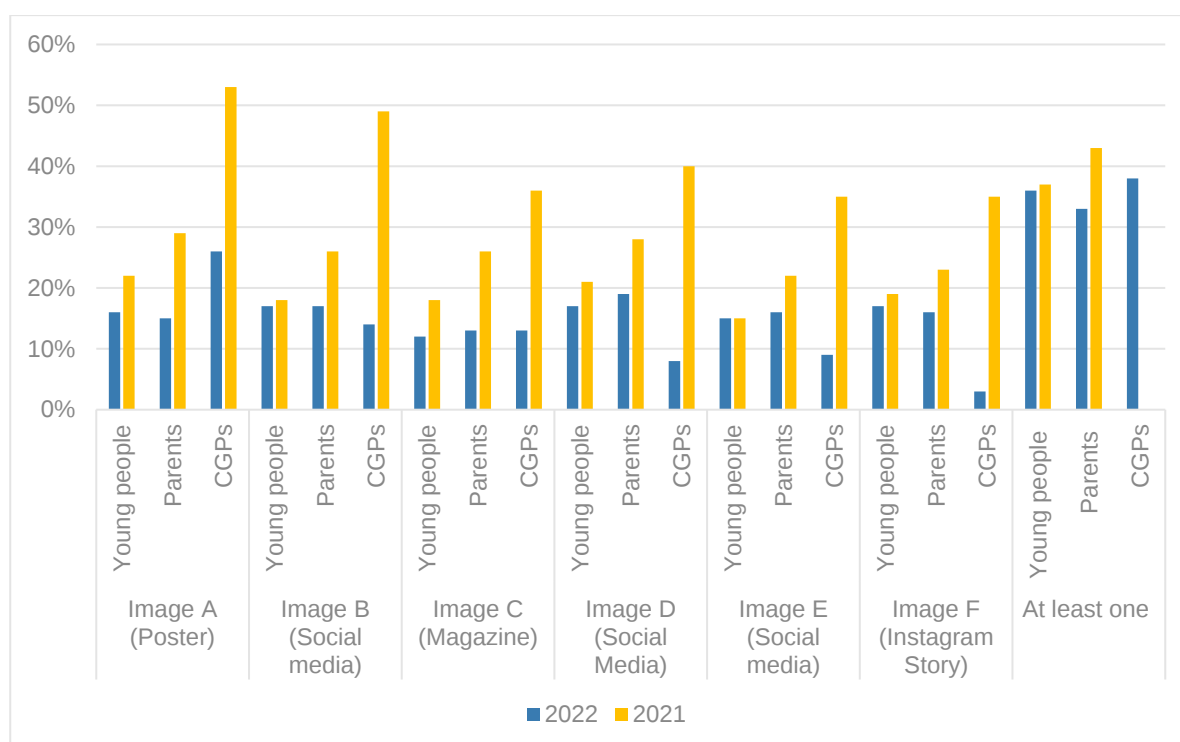
Qualitative interviews with new entrants to construction explored how representations of construction in the media affected people's perceptions of and familiarity with the sector. Interviewees felt that depictions of construction workers on television were largely negative and gave workers a bad reputation, and that these portrayals maintained stereotypes by showing white men working in manual or trades roles. Some women and people from ethnic minorities said that they found it hard to imagine themselves in construction because they don't see themselves in these roles in the media. However, interviewees reported how social media content created by construction workers themselves tends to offer a more positive portrayal of tradespeople showing their work and demonstrating their creativity and skill and the desirable outputs they produce.

Awareness of CITB advertising

Proactive CITB marketing had not reached the majority of young people, parents and career guidance professionals. However, over a third of young people (36%) and parents

(37%) had seen at least one of the CITB advertisements¹³. Awareness of the advertisements remained steady among young people compared to 2021 and had dropped slightly among parents and more so among career guidance professionals (which could be due to the different samples i.e., fewer general educators). All adverts had a similar reach, although social media appeared to be slightly more effective at reaching young people and parents. Conversely, career guidance professionals had the highest awareness of the ‘find your place in construction’ poster compared to other adverts.

Figure 3: Awareness of CITB adverts (per cent)



IES/BMG 2022, Turquoise, 2021

Ease of entry to the construction industry

Current construction workers felt that the construction industry offered easy entry points to jobs, which acted as a major attraction factor for some in the industry. These insiders valued that construction offers multiple entry points, limited requirements for experience or qualifications, the ability to apply transferrable skills, and a lack of formality, especially for entry and recruitment. New entrants to construction had positive

¹³ See appendix for images of the CITB advertisements.

experiences of entering the sector due to the informal recruitment and induction processes, supportive colleagues, and visible career pathways.

Drifting in was still common, yet the prevalence of 'drifting' into the industry was less pronounced than in previous research, with new entrants often securing a job by replying to a job advertisement or through a careers office or agency such as Jobcentre Plus. Entry via word of mouth or through a family or friend was more typical among established workers, and interviews with new entrants suggested it was more common in trades or manual roles. Technical and professional roles in construction tended to use more formal recruitment methods similar to other industries. Moving away from informal recruitment methods based on personal connections while maintaining an ease of entry is likely to make it easier for outsiders to access work in the industry and demonstrates progress in this area.

Yet many outsiders still felt that they lacked knowledge about how to enter the construction industry, particularly the skills and qualifications required for entry, what jobs are available and where jobs might be, and how to access work experience. This suggests that outsiders may not be benefiting from the ease of entry to jobs in construction described by those already working in the sector.

Key differences across and within respondent groups

The research identified several key differences among respondent groups.

Insiders and outsiders

A major theme is the different perceptions of the construction industry between insiders and outsiders to the sector. Insiders are both more knowledgeable about careers in construction and have more positive perceptions of the industry than those outside of the industry. Having personal connections to construction workers was also associated with increased knowledge and attraction for outsiders, an established finding from previous research into careers in construction. These outsiders generally reported that their contacts broadly had positive experiences of working in construction, however, under half of young people and potential entrants working in other sectors respectively knew someone who had worked in construction. This suggests that, where possible, improving links between construction workers and employers and outsiders may help to improve perceptions of the industry.

Pool and competition sectors

Research with 'outsiders' working in other sectors identified differences among those who worked in competition sectors (sectors that traditionally compete with construction for workers due to close alignment) and pool sectors (sectors not closely aligned with construction). Findings suggested that workers in competition sectors are more likely to consider a career in construction than those working in pool sectors. Those in competition

sectors found construction more attractive than those in unrelated sectors and insiders felt that a role in construction would be an 'easier sell' particularly to those working in engineering and manufacturing sectors. This means that attraction strategies may need to target these sectors, rather than pushing to recruit from other industries, or relying on those who are already interested in construction.

Gender

Major differences were identified between men and women. In line with previous research, men continue to rate attraction and knowledge of careers in construction more highly than women and have a higher propensity to have considered a career in construction. This extended to parents, with fathers and parents of young men more likely to perceive construction as attractive for their child and report good knowledge of construction than parents of young women. However, young women with an interest in competitor sectors and reported some knowledge of construction were more likely to consider construction as attractive, so could be a group to target.

Furthermore, young people and their influencers identified sexism as the main discriminatory attitude that they are concerned about in the construction industry, and young women were more likely to be concerned about discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in the sector. This suggests that gendered perceptions of construction as a 'male' occupation persist and will need to be tackled to improve recruitment of women into the industry.

Age

There were some persistent differences across age groups. Potential entrants working in other industries aged 25-54 (early to mid-career) were more likely to find construction attractive than older or younger workers. Age also influenced sources of information, with younger workers (in other sectors) more likely to have gained awareness of construction from teachers, formal careers support or work experience, reflecting their proximity to the education system.

Among young people, those aged 14–15 were more likely to find construction attractive than those aged 16-18. However, 16–18-year-olds reported greater knowledge of the sector. This implies that careers advice and guidance may be more effective prior to entering further education, when young people narrow down their subject choices. Construction workers interviewed also emphasised the need to engage people in construction-related careers information at an early age. This is supported by the fact that the perception that they lacked suitable qualifications was cited as a barrier for entry to construction for young people.

Social class

Findings suggested that construction is more attractive to those from a professional socio-economic background and that this group is more likely to have considered a career in

construction. This could suggest that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be relatively more likely to 'drift' into a construction career rather than make a purposive career move. Construction workers from a professional socio-economic background were also more likely to report they would definitely stay in the industry. This group also reported greater knowledge of construction, which as we have seen is closely linked to attraction. Those from more advantaged backgrounds were also better able to get and gain insights from formal work experience prior to joining their current industry and were better connected to careers and employment support services to find out about their sector. This suggests that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may need support to access careers information and work experience. Interestingly, while those from a professional background report greater knowledge and attraction around careers in construction they are also less likely to feel that construction is a place for people like them.

Health conditions and disability

Individuals with a disability, most commonly a mental health condition, who were working in sectors other than construction were more likely to rate construction highly than those not reporting a disability. This group were also much more likely to have seriously considered working in construction or previously worked in the sector. However, no significant differences were identified around disability or health condition in the surveys with young people and their influencers.

Ethnicity

The research did not identify any consistent differences between groups from different ethnic minority backgrounds.

Diversity and the culture of construction

Understanding the perceptions that outsiders hold of the culture of the construction industry is important as these can deter entry, particularly among groups that are currently underrepresented in construction and groups the industry is trying to reach. An inclusive workplace culture was an important factor for outsiders when looking for a job or career. Most outsiders felt that construction offered this. However, a significant minority of people were deterred from working in the construction due to concerns about a lack of inclusivity, reporting that they felt that people like them did not work in construction or that attitudes and behaviours in the industry are not inclusive. Career guidance professionals also expressed concerns about the lack of inclusivity and support available within the construction industry.

Concerns around experiencing sexism (either directly or witnessing it) were particularly common. This reflects findings from previous research which highlighted perceptions of a 'macho' or sexist culture in construction. Female respondents were particularly likely to

express concerns around the culture in construction, as were parents of female children. This suggests that the underrepresentation of women in construction may in part be due to perceptions of the construction industry as hostile to women.

To a lesser extent, outsiders were concerned about experiencing racism, anti-LGBTQ behaviour/homophobia and fewer still about experiencing ageism, ableism or classism. These concerns largely reflected the profile of respondents. Women were more likely to be concerned about experiencing sexism; those from ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely to be concerned about experiencing racism; older individuals more concerned about experiencing ageism; and those reporting a long-term health condition or disability concerned about experiencing ableism.

There is also some evidence that construction was perceived as a 'working class' occupation which people from different backgrounds do not belong in. Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds were less concerned about experiencing classism in construction work than those from other socio-economic groups. Older potential workers from professional backgrounds and those with higher level qualifications were less likely to feel that construction is a safe and positive place for them. This is supported by some examples of new entrant interviewees feeling the need to 'mask' their middle- or upper-class backgrounds, such as by changing the way they speak.

Experiences of construction workers suggest that while uncommon, discriminatory attitudes and behaviours are present in the construction industry. The majority of construction workers who took part in the research had not experienced any prejudiced or discriminatory attitudes or behaviours and felt that the culture in construction was better than they had expected. However, some construction workers reported experiencing racism or sexism at work. Disabled people working in construction also reported difficult experiences of entry and settling into construction and experiences of ageism. These negative attitudes and behaviours were more common on-site, especially when many contractors were working together. The root of these attitudes and behaviours was often attributed to older workers or those who have been in the industry a long time and a poor culture developing among people who had been working together for a long time.

Tackling perceptions of the construction industry is needed in order to improve attraction. This requires a dual approach: tackling both perceptions of the industry (as being hostile to women and other underrepresented groups) but also crucially addressing the real experiences of underrepresented groups within it which requires changes to the culture, particularly on site and these changes need to be communicated to outsiders.

Inclusive working practices

Improving diversity in the construction industry and attracting underrepresented groups also requires more inclusive working practices to provide equality of access to careers in construction. Providing access to flexibility (in terms of workplace or hours) and a good work-life balance were identified as attractive factors to young people and to underrepresented groups in the sector, such as women and those living with a disability or health condition. Flexible working and good work-life balance increases the

accessibility of work to those with caring responsibilities and health needs, and therefore may attract more diverse groups of workers to construction.

Improving attraction among women and disabled people will expand the potential construction workforce and allow construction to tap into the large group of older and disabled workers who are currently outside of the labour force. The research suggests that the latter may be a particularly successful group to target. Older potential entrants living with disability or health condition were more likely to have considered construction and rate it as attractive (although this could indicate a general willingness to consider a wider range of options than other groups of individuals), and potential entrants with a disability were more likely to have qualifications in a skilled craft or trade. However, this group may face barriers entering construction as they are less likely to think construction offered availability of work to them and were prevented by their health. Ensuring flexible and inclusive working practices can help to tackle these barriers.

Feedback from construction workers suggests that the industry is already offering a good work-life balance and flexibility to many. Those working in construction believed it provided flexibility, with new entrant interviewees describing construction as offering the benefits of self-employment, with the stability of a traditional job. Female interviewees particularly appreciated flexibility and good maternity provision offered in the sector. This allowed them to fit their work around other commitments due to flexibility in working hours and location, including opportunities for remote or hybrid working. This was more common in professional roles. However, other construction workers did not feel they were offered as much flexibility as they would like. Furthermore, outsiders did not associate construction with flexible working. Increasing and publicising opportunities for flexibility, and what flexibilities there are, in the construction industry may therefore be an important lever for improving the supply of construction workers.

Recommendations

The Careers in Construction research draws on primary research evidence from a large number and wide range of stakeholders. These include individuals currently working in the construction industry, both new entrants and established workers, most of whom have a very positive view of their industry which is not true in every sector. They also include individuals outside of the construction industry, those working in other sectors (sectors with some similarities to construction and also sectors that are very different), young people aged 14 to 18 who are mostly still in education, parents of young people and career guidance professionals. Many of these outsiders feel they have some knowledge of the sector but generally lack understanding, experience and contact with the construction workplace and employers. Such outsiders often articulate negative stereotypes. Yet this outsider group also includes individuals who do consider a career in construction as attractive or could be open to this as a potential pathway.

This feedback has identified areas for action to further develop and improve engagement with construction CIAG and also areas for action to support a more inclusive sector and to recruit from a wider talent pool. The recommendations will help CITB to address the following questions:

- What are the opportunities for improving engagement with industry CIAG and promotional activities?
- Where should resources be directed?
- Are different recruitment strategies needed for diverse workers and what should these involve?
- How can attraction be improved among those who don't yet know about or engage with the sector?
- What strategies and actions could be adopted to help achieve measurable improvements in behaviours and culture?

A: Recommendations for increasing understanding of, connections with and experience in construction

Those outside of the industry could consider a career in construction but continue to have a narrow view of what the industry offers. They also have a lower understanding of how to enter the sector and what it would be like to work in it, despite reporting that careers guidance around construction is of high quality. Overall, understanding appears to have reduced over the past year. Improved understanding is linked with more positive perceptions and a greater likelihood of considering construction careers. Such improved understanding is closely associated with having industry connections or direct experience of the industry. Marketing and informing can only go so far, while personal stories and insights are compelling it is better still to give individuals opportunities to try it for themselves. It will be important therefore to support greater links between industry, education providers and career guidance.

Employers should:

- Offer opportunities for people to gain construction experience and connections through work experience, site visits and talks. Such activities should be designed to provide a real insight into work in construction and allow people to make contacts. It is particularly important to improve opportunities to gain work experience for young people and those outside of education looking to gain work or change careers. This will require employers to truly engage with the agenda and set aside appropriate resources.
- Engage with local career services including job centres, charities and careers providers both within and outside of education (recognising the wide range of potential influencers and organisations that can and do provide CIAG) to make knowledge about careers in construction more accessible. Again, this will require employers to truly engage with the agenda and set aside appropriate resources.
- Provide accessible routes into the industry for those without industry connections and make themselves more approachable. For example, employers looking to hire could place advertisements around the outside of sites with information on how to apply for jobs, or attend careers fairs and events.

CITB and the sector should:

- Highlight and demonstrate the variety of roles and career paths available using examples and personal stories (ensuring the 'story tellers' are diverse) to promote specific roles alongside generic industry information. This could attract new groups of workers to the industry and dispel stereotypical understandings that construction only offers careers involving manual labour.
- Use a range of media channels to share information about the industry to raise understanding and to reach a diverse audience, including use of social media which tends to promote more positive messages and TV advertising.
- Lobby the media to modernise and improve its presentation of the industry.
- Support teachers and career guidance professionals to develop real contacts, connections, and experiences with the construction sector as they reported this was the weakest part of their offering. This may require some form of brokerage support between education, the industry and employers, and promotion of the strong business case for employers to provide experiential openings as a potentially lower cost investment than a failed recruitment exercise.
- Continue to build links and develop its brand with career guidance professionals as greater knowledge of the CITB is associated with more positive and proactive engagement with the sector. It should also review existing marketing channels to see whether the organisation is marketing itself in the best way.
- Make construction promotion and careers events accessible to those further from education by holding local community-based events as adults can find it harder to access construction careers information, advice and guidance. This could also include supporting employers to engage with job centres, charities and careers providers outside of education.
- Improve accessibility of careers advice and guidance by targeting areas of high deprivation and use of accessible and inclusive terminology, language and images on promotional and educational materials.
- Add construction careers information to the CITB website including career pathways, contacts, and events, and make this easy to find. Have clearer linkages or signposting to Go Construct from the CITB website.
- Consider the adult user experience of Go Construct, which is pitched more towards educational pathways for young people. Use Go Construct to target those interested in a career in construction but lacking relevant qualifications by highlighting transferable skills and qualifications.
- Lobby the government for a better funded career guidance system and employer engagement system as there is a strong case for the government to play a role across the whole economy.

B: Recommendations to improve and broaden the attraction of construction careers

Construction careers do not hold strong attraction for those outside the industry and attraction appears to have fallen slightly, particularly for young people and their influencers who may prefer other sectors. There are a number of real and perceived factors that act as deterrents including the way work is organised which can be at odds with individuals' needs for a good work-life balance and flexibility in where, when and how much someone works. Yet those who work in the industry have positive experiences and believe it can offer some aspects of flexibility.

Employers should:

- Provide good quality employment opportunities in terms of pay and conditions. In particular, construction employers can make their firms more attractive by working to spread and improve opportunities for flexible working in terms of hours and location across all roles and workplaces (on and off-site) to make construction more accessible to parents and disabled people, and more attractive to younger people. Flexible working can be about much more than remote or home working which can be challenging for site-based roles. It can be about changing work patterns with job sharing, part-time or compressed hours, flexitime or staggered hours, changes to start and finish times, and having predictable working patterns. Employers should engage with their employees to understand the needs and experiences of their employees around flexible working, gather their ideas of what would work and involve them in designing solutions so that flexibilities offered are not just employer-led¹⁴.
- Continue to ensure ease of entry through multiple pathways and recruitment methods to respond to changing individual preferences and wider labour market change. Employers should look beyond the traditional 'model construction recruit' to consider older/career changers and those on vocational pathways to professional qualifications.

CITB and the sector should:

- Highlight and promote the variety of roles, good pay, interesting work and opportunities to make a difference that the construction industry offers. Demonstrate how careers in construction can align with people's values and make a difference to local communities and the environment. Target young people and also career guidance professionals with these messages.

¹⁴ Allen, A. (2023). Beyond the hybrid; exploring the potential for a broader approach to flexible working, HRN Paper 161, Institute for Employment Studies.; Allen, A. (2023) Beyond the hybrid: flexible working for site-based roles, Blog post, Institute for Employment Studies.

- Target younger people (14 and under) to influence career decisions before young people have narrowed down their options at GCSE and tap into their greater attraction and openness to the industry compared to their older peers. Also target young women who are interested in competition sectors as they could be helped to consider a career in construction with more information and more targeted information.
- Highlight and communicate what flexible working practices there are in construction and understand where they work well, focusing particularly on opportunities for hybrid and remote working and flexible hours to fit around wider responsibilities and allow for better work-life balance.
- Encourage and support construction workers from underrepresented groups to act as role models and ambassadors, with care to avoid tokenism. This will help to improve attraction among underrepresented groups, so they can see themselves in the industry and that it is possible to build a career in construction.
- Address concerns about physical safety at work in the sector by highlighting and communicating actions to provide high standards of health and safety in construction work.
- Actively target career guidance practitioners in higher education providers as they were consistently less positive about and engaged with the sector, less so than other types of practitioners. This may be due to a lack of understanding of the graduate opportunities the sector offers. Consider further research focused on the perceptions of construction amongst a range of higher education stakeholders (students, academics, and careers professionals) and an exploration of the employer links and practices that currently exist between higher education and the construction sector.

C: Recommendations for improving the workplace culture

Those outside the industry have concerns that it has a macho culture, lacks inclusion, and permits bad behaviour. This can deter potential entry, particularly for underrepresented groups (women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and older individuals). This was reflected in the experiences of some current construction workers. It is important that these concerns are addressed, that bad behaviours are recognised as such and stopped and that good examples are shared to promote a more positive view of the sector; and that the industry continues to work towards a culture that ensures all workplaces are safe and equal where everyone can thrive.

Employers should:

- Recognise that poor attitudes and behaviours may be present which impact particularly on the experiences of underrepresented groups and provide processes for anonymous reporting of poor behaviour and attitudes, and follow up with investigation and action.
- Communicate the behaviours they expect of workers for example with posters on site and policies that clearly set out standards of behaviour. These could include statements on professional standards and values. They could also utilise on-site training and tool-box talks to remind people about expected behaviour.

- Encourage and support inclusive social events to encourage integration and networking within the organisation.
- Highlight where improvements have and are being made to improve confidence within the workplace.

CITB and the sector should:

- Work to embed desired culture and behaviours in training and specifically engage with trainers and educators to embed values of inclusivity, as poor attitudes and behaviours can start or be reinforced in the classroom.
 - Share actions taken and improvements made across the sector to raise understanding that the sector is working to ensure it is a place for all and so that those who may be sceptical (including young people and their influencers) can have their concerns addressed.
 - Use social media to target younger age groups with information about campaigns underway and the work taking place to tackle poor behaviour and set positive expected behaviours.
 - Target career guidance professionals, as they play a key role in sharing these messages about positive change, through existing mechanisms and their professional networks. Support careers guidance professionals to have confidence to encourage those from diverse backgrounds to consider careers in construction.
 - Support women who work in the construction industry to share positive experiences that they have had.
 - Encourage and support inclusive social events across employers to encourage integration and networking.
 - Identify and publicise examples of good practice and highlight key champions within the sector for tackling negative behaviours and promoting inclusivity, consider how these good practices could be transferred to other organisations and scaled up across the industry.
 - Encourage conversations around culture change within the sector and disseminate learning, best practice and guidance around equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace from other sectors. This could include guidance around specific issues for example recent guidance from CIPD on transgender and non-binary inclusion¹⁵.
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¹⁵ Fletcher, L, & Marvell, R. (2023). Transgender and non-binary inclusion at work guide, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Additional information

CITB advertising images

Image A



Image B



Image C



Image D



Image E



Image F:



Image A: Poster

Image B: Social media

Image C: Magazine

Image D: Social media

Image E: Social media

Image F: Instagram story