

Boden Group - what can we do to improve diversity in construction and engineering?

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The following article is from Amarah Ranger, one of [Boden Group](#)'s divisional managers leading the engineering team. In addition to her excellent management skills, she's also one of our mental health first aiders, demonstrating her dedication to creating a supportive and caring work environment.

The construction and engineering industries haven't always been inclusive. But times have changed, and companies have changed their mindset. Companies have a responsibility to create workplaces where everyone feels safe and respected. And this is the same for diversity in construction and engineering, we all need to do better.

This article will give you some ideas for diversifying your workforce, by discussing:

- Diversity in the construction industry today
- Why diversity is so important in construction
- Diversity in engineering today
- Why diversity is so important in engineering
- How to improve diversity in traditional industries

How can diversity and inclusion help traditional industries?

Diversity is essential in traditional industries, where outdated biases clash with new skill gaps. With fewer candidates in the market and companies searching for the best talent, diversity should be a priority.

Making that extra effort to build a diverse and inclusive workforce will lead to greater productivity and happier teams. Companies with more diverse management teams even enjoy [19% higher revenue](#), on average. Equality, diversity and inclusion should be top of mind.

Diversity in the construction industry today

Only [5.4% of construction workers are from a Black, Asian or ethnic minority background](#). And 13.8% of the UK population is from a minority ethnic background. But just 11% of the construction workforce are women, even though under half of the total UK workforce is female.

Improvements have happened, but they're not enough. Between 2021 and 2022, the presence of [ethnic minorities increased from 13.3% to 13.7%](#) in tier-one contractor workforces such as [Morgan Sindall](#). Yet ethnic minorities account for 18.5 per cent of the UK population.

Pay gap data is as worrying. Especially when surveys show there's a [20.7% difference between male and female workers, and an 8.3 per cent ethnicity pay gap](#).

This lack of diversity in construction can't continue if the sector is to survive and thrive. It's time for change.

Why is diversity so important in construction?

The construction industry is struggling to attract and keep a diverse range of employees. This is when 100,000 fewer people work in the sector compared to last year.

How can you benefit from addressing this problem?

To be efficient, you should identify and tackle issues before they hit crisis levels. The construction industry is facing a number of challenges, including an aging workforce and a mental health crisis. The sector is about to [lose a quarter of its workforce, over 500,000 workers, as the most common age group in the workforce is 50-64 years old](#). This is a common issue across traditional industries, and as a result, many companies are competing for the same pool of talent.

That's not the only problem. In addition to the skills and labour shortage, the construction industry also has a mental health crisis. [Construction workers are three times more likely to take their own lives than those in other sectors](#). Unskilled workers are especially affected by the crisis, as they are often marginalized and overlooked.

But even without skills and labour shortages, it would still make sense to recruit for a more diverse workforce.

A construction industry that is dominated by certain demographics is not representative of the population, and it leaves many needs unmet.

The construction industry is at a crossroads. It can either continue to operate in the same way, or it can embrace change and become more inclusive and diverse. The future of the industry depends on the choices that are made today.

More diverse perspectives can positively impact every stage of the property lifecycle. Whether that's in building design, construction, and maintenance and management.

Having a stronger gender split in your team could bring different experiences to the table. For example, a women's experiences of the built environment could differ from the male counterpart. Everyone has different needs and priorities.

After all, did you know the Waterloo bridge is the only bridge in London that was built by majority women?

AND it was completed on time and on budget.

This is a remarkable achievement, as it was built during World War II when there were labour shortages and materials were scarce. The women who built the Waterloo Bridge were known as the "Ladies of Waterloo," and they were a diverse group of women from all walks of life.

They included engineers, carpenters, riveters, and painters. The women worked long hours in difficult conditions, but they were determined to complete the bridge on time and on budget.

They were a symbol of strength and resilience, and their achievement is a testament to the power of women. This is a testament of the important role of having a strong gender split in the construction industry.

Diversity in the engineering sector today

As an engineering recruitment specialist, I've seen the numbers of candidates reduce over the past six months. I've spoken with clients who are struggling to find talent to fill their vacancies.

My experience is very much in line with statistics.

Engineering is traditionally a sector dominated by men. Although the number of women entering the field has almost doubled over the past decade, they're still under-represented. (it's crazy that the engineering talent team here at Boden Group is actually made up of 77% female).

But the percentage of female workers in engineering remains lower than in the economy as a whole. In 2021, women represented [16.5% of engineering workers in 2021 \(up from only 10.5% in 2010\)](#). This is great news of course. Except that a whopping [24.5% of engineers working outside the sector are women](#). Employers in areas like health and entertainment are attracting female engineers away from the sector.

How are people from minority ethnic groups faring in engineering occupations?

Sadly, it's a similar story. The sector is seeing a growing number of people from these groups in its employment. In 2021, [11.4% of all engineering workers had minority ethnic backgrounds, up from 7.6% in 2012](#). But during the same period, other industries increased their minority ethnic workers by greater amounts.

It's not all doom and gloom in engineering.

LGBTQI+ engineers have explained that there's been [big advancements in inclusivity since 2017](#). And we've seen the benefits in FM organisations by fostering inclusive cultures. For example, ISS is an incredible company to look at in the Facilities Management industry for driving change.

ISS recently created a cookbook to share recipes, celebrating different dishes from different cultures with their people. Making the workplace feel inclusive.

This goes to show how change can happen.

The age profile is improving in engineering too. Between 2010 and 2021, engineering roles saw an [increase in workers aged 25 to 34 years](#).

Having said that, there's still a lack of diversity among engineering and technology students. The gender imbalance is particularly worrying, with [only 18.5% of undergraduates being female](#), compared to 56.5% across all subjects.

Finding engineering candidates has definitely become. There are simply not enough people entering the sector to meet the demand.

Why diversity is so important in engineering?

Diversity and inclusion are important in any industry. There's plenty of ways you can support a more inclusive environment. You could do talks at engineering apprenticeships or go into colleges. That's just a few ways to expand your talent pool. ([You can read our full blog post here on encouraging youth to start a career in FM](#))

This way, you'll be encouraging new people, and new influences to join your team. Enhancing what has always been an innovative profession.

It's not about recruitment. It's about retention too. [Younger people and those from minority groups](#) are more likely to consider leaving the engineering sector. Even if they've managed to secure an entry-level position, they're likely to encounter barriers to promotion, for example.

How to improve diversity in traditional industries

Here are our top tips for businesses in traditional industries that want to diversify their workforce:

1. get commitment from the top

Without senior-level commitment to diversity and inclusion, your efforts to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace will be limited.

Once you have the backing of your senior leadership team, you can cascade that commitment to hiring managers and embed inclusive behaviours throughout your organisation.

2. review your job adverts

Remove any conscious bias from your job adverts.

- State in your job adverts that you encourage applications from minority backgrounds. This will set the right tone in your relationship to all candidates.
- Make your advert artwork more diverse – bin those classic corporate photos!
- Revamp your entire careers website to make it more accessible – that’s what HS2 did.

3. adopt blind application processing

This is something we’ve tried at Boden and it works well. It works by neutralising the identity of the candidate, stripping out job application content until late in the selection process. And it’s quite flexible – you can carry out blind application processing to varying degrees.

4. introduce age-neutral recruitment

There’s a lot of ageism in traditional industries.

Ask yourself – does someone really need 15 years’ industry experience to do the job?

Remove all age-dependent content – like dates and durations – from CVs during the selection process. That way, you’ll free yourself of any age-related assumptions.

5. open up non-graduate routes to success

Do you really need a graduate for that entry-level post? The spiralling cost of a university education can put young people off, especially if they’re from a low income household or one with no higher education experience.

Consider these alternatives;

- Increase the number of women entering engineering apprenticeships (currently only 7.4% of the total).
- Partner with secondary schools to improve girls’ perceptions of STEM.
- Offer funding for young people to undertake engineering training – across different forms of study.

6. combat bullying

Macho culture is far from dead in many traditional industries. Is workplace banter tilting into something more damaging and discriminatory? Engineers from under-represented groups continue to report [higher rates of bullying and harassment](#). Anti-bullying policies are a constructive way to retain talented staff from every background.

7. introduce a buddy system

Some organisations have set up buddy systems to support women entering the industry. They can partner

up with more senior colleagues or get help from internal committees and support groups.

Finally, be patient!

Diversifying your talent pool won't happen overnight. But doing the right thing will eventually bring positive results.