



Whitepaper

How to make construction sites more family-friendly

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People 3 Construction LTD

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<https://www.careersafterbabies.org/>

<https://www.p3cl.co.uk/>



Careers After Babies is building world-class employers of working parents through our transformative accreditations



WHY JOIN

Joining the Careers After Babies Accreditation means being part of a pioneering movement dedicated to transforming employee experience. We're experts in creating family-friendly environments where parents thrive. With 83% of women expected to become parents, businesses that join show commitment to supporting employees through all life stages, attract top talent and, most importantly, keep it.



WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU

The Careers After Babies Accreditation helps retain talent by enhancing your employee experience. Implementing world-class policies, processes and practices improves productivity, loyalty and engagement. Strengthen your brand reputation, appeal to more diverse talent, and equip your people with tools to balance work and family life effectively.



WHAT'S INCLUDED

The Careers After Babies Accreditation provides a rigorous data-led assessment of how you're serving your working parents, extensive expert feedback followed by a bespoke roadmap to help you achieve your accreditation. You will have access to ongoing support, thought-leading best practices and networking within our community of like-minded organisations.



People 3 Construction LTD and P3CL Women's Leadership Group are working towards breaking down the barriers for women to thrive in business and into management and leadership roles.

We also recognise the importance of retaining female talent and encouraging mums and carers back into the workplace after career breaks. We also recognise the need to support men and women equally to have opportunities to support their families and loved ones and achieve work life balance and parity when it comes to the role of parenting, work, and career.

Your support

Careers After Babies exists to build world-class employers of working parents with our uniquely transformative accreditations. We are a social enterprise committed to making the world a better place for working parents and the 74% of families in the UK who require both parents to work.



We change how employers behave, making them a better choice for working parents



We raise the bar for employers by sharing the successes and practices of our members to educate others



We collaborate with organisations with a shared mission and charities committed to supporting parents



We make job opportunities with our family-friendly employers more accessible to working parents

You can support our movement in many ways. Become [Careers After Babies accredited](#), leading the way for your employees and clients. Or you can [join as a member](#) learning from best practices and participating in our community.

Please support us on social media by sharing this report and interacting with our content. We'd love to hear what you think!



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A huge thank you to our contributors and survey respondents.

Without you, none of this would be possible.

In late 2024, P3CL and Careers After Babies hosted a roundtable event supported by Jacobs and attended by some of the most high-profile organisations in the construction sector.

The challenge was to discuss how to make construction sites more family-friendly.

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McALPINE**



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Partners Foreword



I have spent the last 6 years of my career in the construction sector in people centric leadership roles and consultancy continuously championing positive action. I have always advocated for inclusion for all minority groups, and in more recent times with a focus on supporting more Women into leadership roles through **P3CL Women Leadership Group** that I launched in 2023.

The Construction sector needs to hire a staggering 251,500 more workers by 2028 (CITB) and unless we hire with a diverse mindset, unless we support working parents, single parents, carers, grandparents and nurture inclusive cultures, and adopt a progressive hiring methodology we will simply not succeed.

It is well researched that businesses enriched by a hard working diverse work force are more financially stable, successful, innovative, they have enhanced attrition rates, and company cultures and have an improved attraction for Gen Z's who prioritise organisations who evidence diversity.

The construction site phase is the most challenging environment to conquer and introduce high levels of flexible working for all sorts of reason which this report highlights, but there are steps we can take. We recognise some great initiatives that some organisations in sector have trialled in recent years which are starting to shift the dial and we support continuous collaboration and lesson learnt to enable more progress for the betterment of the sector as a whole.

Together we can effect change, and pave the way for future generations to see construction as a progressive and diverse sector of choice.

Vicky Brook, Chartered Fellow FCIPD, FREC
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www.p3cl.co.uk



Author Foreword

The construction industry is under constant scrutiny in the media as a pivotal part of the future of the UK. Whilst it's not traditionally thought of as an industry that focuses on more people-led initiatives, it employs a huge number of men in the UK.

The role of men is changing. Fathers play a different role at home to those of previous generations, which is no different in construction. This need to change pressures an already precarious workforce, one that has not yet recovered from Brexit.

It's easy to dismiss initiatives associated with out-of-work life for those who have spent their lives on building sites but the reality is that times are changing. Attitudes are changing. People are changing. Work-life balance is no longer a nice-to-have.

Flexible working is the number one demand for working parents and one of the hardest things to achieve in construction so the problem is not easily solved. It requires creative thinking, investment and open minds.

There is also more to it than just flexible work patterns. In order for changes to be successfully implemented, like every company that Careers After Babies works with, the focus needs to be on culture. That is the people and their attitudes. Flexible working policies alone will never be enough. Support from every level of the organisation combined with cultural change will be key to changing the industry.

It has been a pleasure to work with the forward thinking organisations that came to the table for this report. There is a clear appetite to undertake the challenge of making building sites more family-friendly. We're excited to work with the industry on this next period of change.

With the right thinking and attitudes, there is no doubt that the industry can turn a corner if we continue to see experimentation and creativity. Together we have the power and knowledge to change the landscape forever.

I hope that many more people will feel inspired to tackle the issues raised using the practical advice we have included in this report. And I hope that when you need help, you will ask for it.

Jess Heagren
Author
Founder of Careers After Babies
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<https://www.careersafterbabies.org/>





“It’s all about culture. If you’ve got a candidate with two opportunities, they will pick the one that is more flexible and family-friendly. We’re starting to think about, over a long period of time, using data and measurements to be able to demonstrate what we know - that having a diverse team actually outputs successful performance.”

HR leader, Sir Robert McAlpine



Key findings

Key findings

The UK construction industry is a cornerstone of the nation's economy, employing over 2.3 million people and contributing approximately £117 billion annually to GDP. Despite its economic significance, the sector faces immense pressures, including sustainability challenges, narrow profit margins, and a critical skills shortage exacerbated by workforce attrition and shifting employee expectations.

The barriers

The industry is rooted in rigid scheduling, financial pressures, and traditional gender norms, particularly concerning men's roles as fathers. Women remain underrepresented, face significant gender pay gaps, and encounter barriers to entry despite efforts to achieve gender parity.



The Industry

The construction industry is under intense pressure

Labour shortages: The workforce is aging, apprenticeship uptake is low, and the industry remains male-dominated, deterring diverse talent.

Rising costs and supply chain disruption: Factors such as Brexit, COVID-19, and global supply chain issues have led to delays and cosy increases.

Sustainability and regulation: As the source of 40% of carbon emissions, the sector is under scrutiny to innovate and reduce environmental impact.

Health and safety concerns: Physical risks are compounded by a mental health crisis, with suicide rates in the sector three times higher than the national average.

Technology and digital transformation: Slow adoption of modern technologies has left the sector trailing, further widening the skills gap.

Workforce expectations: Long hours and rigid schedules deter new talent, while high childcare costs and inadequate parental leave policies alienate working parents.



Organisations

The way companies are organised make the experience more difficult for women

Lack of flexible working: While flexible working has become the norm in many industries, construction largely missed this shift due to its operational nature and lack of pandemic-driven adaptations.

Stigma and gender norms: Rigid gender roles and traditional perceptions discourage men from requesting flexibility and limit women's participation, particularly after becoming a parent.

Psychological safety and trust: Many employees fear raising concerns about flexibility or family obligations, leading to burnout and dissatisfaction.

Lack of connectivity between parents: The absence of parental networks, especially in on-site environments, makes it harder to transform.

Accessible policies and guides: On-site workers often struggle to access organisational messaging, making cultural shifts harder to implement.

Inconsistent support and management practices: Flexible work and parental leave policies are inconsistently applied, with site managers prioritising productivity and health and safety over welfare messaging.

The reality for returning parents: Returning to work after parental leave is emotionally and logically complex, often leading to confidence issues and a mismatch between workload and pay for those on flexible schedules.

There is a very clear **business case for supporting working parents**, but many organisations lack the data to articulate it clearly. Careers After Babies is building the case, ready to support HR and diversity leads in giving working parents what they need. Add your data now!



The drive for change & how to respond

To secure its future, the construction industry must evolve into a family-friendly sector that attracts and retains diverse talent. This requires a holistic approach addressing cultural, operational, and structural barriers led from the top both from a financial and structural perspective.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Economic pressure

The continued squeeze on costs combined with increased cost of resources puts pressure on margins. Companies need to think creatively.

The urgent need for talent

Continued labour shortages means the industry needs to attract new talent. This requires a different employment proposition.

Fatherhood has changed

Fathers now want to play a more active role in parenthood being available to their family requiring more flexibility.

The next generation

Environmental impact and purpose in their work is a priority for the next generation, both of which require transformation.

The need to diversify

New talent sources mean appealing to people not traditionally attracted to construction - retaining them will require a more inclusive environment.

Despite the many barriers faced by the construction industry, there is an overwhelming and urgent need for the construction industry to change.

Now is that time.

Share this page on Social Media

Don't forget to tag us
@CareersAfterBabies
@P3Construction



Tier 1 to lead the charge

Large contractors must model best practices by fostering openness with clients, planning for flexible work patterns, and providing on-site amenities for parents. They must be demanding of their sub-contractors to require positive work practices.



Organisational changes

Introducing gender-neutral leave policies, equitable family-friendly practices, shared parental leave, and support for childcare costs is a necessity. Sites must include access to family-friendly facilities including breast-feeding rooms and childcare facilities.



Culture shift

Introducing flexible working to sites will not be enough. This transformation will require extensive cultural change including role modelling, fostering psychological safety, and creating connectivity among parents to build trust and inclusivity.



People-led leadership

Consistency is key. Managers and HR must ensure fair application of policies, provide accessible guidance, and maintain open communication with employees returning from parental leave.



Data-driven evaluation

Establishing metrics to assess the effectiveness of family-friendly policies will drive continuous improvement. This includes measurement through individual performance reviews, particularly for line managers.

Organisational change

Policy

Family-friendly and equitable policies:

Leading and equal policies for parents that cover all circumstances.

Increased use of gender-neutral parental leave:

Encouraging use by fathers and co-parents supported by educated line managers.

Application of policies:

Support with Family Champions who can ensure everyone knows what is available that it is used.

Flexible working:

An absolute must for working families, particularly those who work from home and share jobs.

Process

Technology: Making better use of modern technology to free up budget to invest in people, skills and work patterns.

Client management & supplier demands:

For clients labouring on D&I requirements, companies should be opening the conversation around a more flexible delivery.

Planning for work patterns:

Planning for differing work patterns during the prelims phase is an imperative. Collaboration between tier-1 employers and their contractors on projects is necessary.



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<https://www.careersafterbabies.org/>

Practice

The transition chapter:

It is critical to support all working parents through the transitions and offer them protected hours and pay while they do this.

Hiring practice:

Diversity of shortlists will only be achieved by working with specialist recruiters, who do exist!

The cultural safety blanket:

Empathetic and inclusive line management combined with a culture respectful of parenting protects against unengaged line managers.

Inclusivity:

The conversation needs to involve everyone – not just those with lived experience – if everyone is to feel respected and included.

Valuing parenting:

Stop hiding that we're parents and bring the conversation to the fore.

Language:

Words have power and need to be chosen carefully, avoiding derogatory terms such as "baby break" and "baby brain".

Mental wellbeing:

Mental health is not just a hot topic – it's a real issue for the construction industry and must be prioritised.

Networks:

Providing connectivity opportunities contributes to consistency as parents help other parents and it becomes a critical source of support.

Senior leaders parenting loudly:

An incredibly powerful and easy-to-achieve objective that empowers people to parent loudly themselves.

Contents

Forewords.....	7
Key findings.....	10
Introduction.....	15
Part 1: The Context.....	16
The construction industry.....	17
Working parents in construction.....	21
The changing role of men.....	22
Women.....	24
Part 2: The Barriers.....	25
Part 3: The Future: How to respond.....	32
Organisational change.....	36
Best practices.....	46
Part 4: The business case.....	53
The impact of change.....	58



Introduction

The UK construction industry, a key driver of the nation's economy, employs over 2.3 million people and contributes approximately £117 billion to the UK's annual GDP.

The industry encompasses various sub-sectors, including residential, commercial, industrial, and civil engineering, each playing a vital role in infrastructure development and societal advancement. From housing projects and renewable energy facilities to large-scale infrastructure like HS2, the industry is indispensable to the UK's economic growth and quality of life.

But the industry is under significant pressure. New regulation, the drive for sustainability while maintaining vital health and safety puts already low margins at risk and major players, including ISG, have fallen victim.

There remains is a huge skills shortage driven by historical reliance on overseas labour and a largely ageing workforce. The demanding work environment, location-based work and lack of flexibility means existing skills are at risk of being lost, and the industry is less appealing to the younger generation who are demanding greater purpose and freedom in their work, evidenced in all-time low apprenticeship levels. Combined with the high turnover rates and competitive nature of this industry, the pressing need to retain skilled talent, particularly experienced parents has never been more real.

Many of the major players have looked to alternative sources of labour and new initiatives to retain existing employees such as appealing to under-represented groups and trialling new work patterns. While there have been some successes, notably Sir Robert McAlpine's flexible working trials, little progress has been made in comparison with other sectors.

The manual nature of much of the work continues to attract more men than women into the industry. However societal changes to views on masculinity and fatherhood means the industry is coming under increasing pressure to consider employees' home settings as other more gender-balanced sectors have been for years.

There is a significant employee shortfall which urgently requires addressing. Strict and costly deadlines demand urgent solutions. As an industry it is time for leaders to be more creative with their solutions and think more broadly about how to address labour shortages. If they are to become more appealing to men, women and trainees, that will include more family-friendly sites. That requires cultural and mindset changes as well as the more obvious lever of work patterns.

The construction industry struggles to recruit and faces worker shortages across the UK, which threaten to halt economic growth if not urgently addressed. Industry figures suggest an extra 224,900 people need to be recruited in construction jobs by 2027, or an average of 44,980 a year, if the sector is to meet expected demand.

**Chartered Institute of Building
(CIOB)**





Part 1

The context

The construction industry

The UK construction industry is currently grappling with significant challenges. Very low margins and high competition for projects has resulted in some major business failures, including ISG who went into administration Q3 2024. With margins highly leveraged, the smallest slippage on labour and material costs can be costly.

As weather creates a further level of uncertainty, costly time delays erode margins further. As a result, organisations are more inclined to take a conservative but financially more stable position.

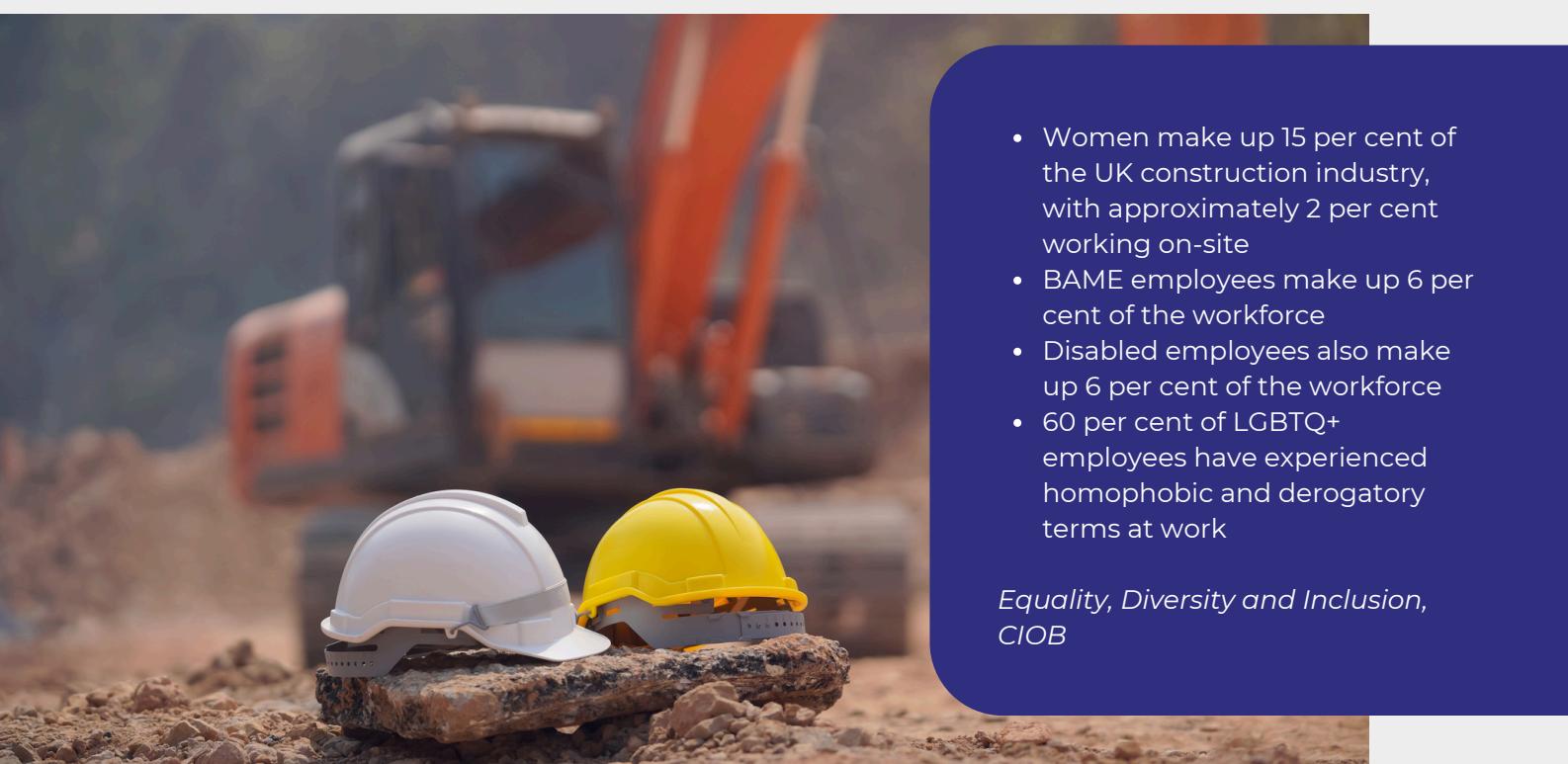
This backdrop makes it difficult for business and HR leaders to be creative with their human capital strategies for solving well-documented and significant workforce shortages.

Factors contributing to this shortfall include an ageing workforce, declining apprenticeship numbers, and the impact of post-Brexit immigration policies, which have reduced the influx of foreign workers. The intake is further reduced at junior levels as they recognise the poor work life balance that comes with a job in construction and the rate of apprenticeship uptake falls short of the required levels to sustain the workforce. The slow pace of policy implementation further exacerbates the situation.

Organisations are attempting to address the shortage by attracting a more diverse workforce embracing people that might not have entered or remained in the industry previously, including working parents and under-represented groups.

But the low-cost, low-risk approach is not working quickly enough and as the demand for work life balance and parent-friendly policies increases, many construction companies are falling behind.

Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring the UK's construction sector can meet its future demands and contribute effectively to the nation's economic growth.



- Women make up 15 per cent of the UK construction industry, with approximately 2 per cent working on-site
- BAME employees make up 6 per cent of the workforce
- Disabled employees also make up 6 per cent of the workforce
- 60 per cent of LGBTQ+ employees have experienced homophobic and derogatory terms at work

*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion,
CIOB*

Labour shortages

Labour shortages have become increasingly critical, with the construction industry grappling to attract and retain skilled workers. The industry has traditionally relied heavily on EU workers, and Brexit has limited this labour pool, exacerbating the shortage.

Additionally, an ageing workforce and the underrepresentation of young talent, women, and other underrepresented groups in the sector have widened skills gaps, particularly in specialised roles like plumbing, electrical engineering, and site management.

“Nearly three-in-ten people say they would be unlikely to recommend a career in construction to their children or other young people”

Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)

“Salaries in construction have seen gradual positive increases, particularly in roles such as skilled trades, project management, technical design, engineering, quantity surveying and commercial. We experience limited salary wars of intense competition on counter offers as compared with other sectors, it happens but the Tier1 organisations are typically very similar on base salaries it's their benefits including bonus structures and culture that make the point of difference.

Inflation in the UK has been relatively high in recent years, driven by factors such as cost of living crisis, energy prices and supply chain distribution on the back of Covid and legacy thereafter. Salary growth in lower skilled roles in particular haven't increased in line with inflation. What we are seeing evidence of is the larger organisations offering comprehensive and favourable employee benefits, with heavier weighting of these benefits being seen in the higher paid/graded roles”

Vicky Brook, founder of People 3 Construction Ltd

Rising material costs and supply chain disruptions

Global supply chain disruptions, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit, have led to increased material costs and longer delivery times. Essential materials such as timber, steel, and cement have seen significant price hikes, impacting project budgets and timelines. Supply chain issues have forced companies to source alternative suppliers, which can compromise quality and increase costs further. Managing these disruptions remains a pressing concern, as they directly impact profitability and project completion rates.

Sustainability and environmental regulations

With growing pressure to address climate change, the UK construction industry faces stringent sustainability goals and regulatory compliance challenges. The government's target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 places construction under scrutiny for its environmental impact, as the industry is responsible for around 40% of the UK's carbon emissions. Implementing eco-friendly building practices, utilising sustainable materials, and incorporating renewable energy technologies into construction projects are essential. However, these adaptations require significant investment, industry-wide innovation, and a shift in traditional building practices, making compliance costly and complex.



Health and safety concerns

Health and safety are critical priorities in construction, where workers face higher risks of physical injury than in many other sectors. Striking a balance between meeting productivity targets and maintaining strict safety protocols is a constant challenge.

The industry must also address the mental health of its workforce, as construction workers experience high rates of stress and mental health issues due to demanding hours, physical strain, and job insecurity. Increasing support for workers' mental well-being is becoming a top priority, yet remains an area needing greater investment and structural support.

"For those working nights, we need to be mindful of the fact that we don't know what a day shift looks like , if they are running a parenting shift in the day then working in a high risk environment at night "

Tier 1 Manager

"The risk of suicide among low-skilled male labourers, particularly those working in construction roles, was 3 times higher than the male national average. For males working in skilled trades, the highest risk was among building finishing trades; particularly, plasterers and painters and decorators had more than double the risk of suicide than the male national average."

ONS



Technological advancements and digital transformation

While digital transformation offers opportunities for improved efficiency and productivity, the construction industry's adoption of technologies like Building Information Modeling (BIM), drones, and AI-powered project management has been gradual. Budget constraints, a lack of digital skills, and resistance to change hinder the widespread adoption of these innovations. As the industry navigates the shift toward smart construction, greater investment in technology, along with targeted upskilling, will be essential for achieving digital progress and staying competitive.

Adapting to changing workforce expectations

For the next generation of talent, priorities are different. Being much more mental health conscious, work-life balance ranks more highly when considering a career choice. Flexibility is critical to attracting them into the industry presenting a challenge for the construction industry, where roles are often physically demanding and site-based. Attracting diverse talent, including working parents and younger generations, will require companies to rethink traditional work practices. Adapting to these expectations could also improve productivity, morale, and loyalty, but doing so requires a shift in the industry's culture and mindset.

Without action, this talent squeeze from loss of existing employees and fewer new entrants will lead to a smaller talent pool and one less diverse than it was before.

Return to work

75% of Gen Zers would prefer a job that offered full flexibility over one with a high salary

Forbes

Work patterns

40% of Gen Zers consider flexible working and workdays a deal breaker when accepting a job

Forbes

Retention

Less than half of Gen Zers say their boss helps them maintain a healthy workload, and 28% say they struggle with their mental health because of their boss.

Deloitte Digital

Gen
Z

Working parents in construction

Working parents face the same issues in construction as other industries - lack of flexible working, high cost of childcare and inability to progress.

However, the construction industry brings a unique set of barriers too including necessity to be onsite for frontline workers, intense project deadlines and little appetite to trial new arrangements.

Cost of childcare

Childcare costs for a 2-year old in full-time childcare are in the region of £15k per annum.

Whilst the new scheme expands to 2-year olds, nursery places are limited and there are financial restrictions.

[The Independent](#)

[Add your data here](#)



Flexible working

There are still 49% of businesses that don't offer as much flexibility, and these tend to be in frontline like construction. While it's good to see that recently, [17% of construction](#) roles being advertised online offered flexible working options, there's still a lot of work to be done in this space

[Timewise](#)

Women returning from maternity

85% of women leave the full-time workforce within three years of having their first child, and 19% leave work completely, because businesses aren't offering the flexibility needed.

[Careers After Babies](#)

Shared parental leave

Less than 2% of fathers in the UK have taken Shared Parental Leave in the last ten years, and 60% are higher earners

[The Dad Shift](#)

U-turns on working from home

Initial Careers After Babies research suggests that 55% of companies have changed their approach to home working in the last two years.



The changing role of men

Men account for 85% of employees in the construction industry. 60% of men over the age of 15 are fathers and the average age to become a father is 33.

Many senior leadership roles are occupied by a generation of men who have a more traditional view of fatherhood and family roles. But the view of what it means to be a man has changed significantly in the last ten years.

The next generation of fathers expects to have different bonds with their children. Extensive scientific research shows that the father's involvement positively impacts his mental health and that of his children ([National Library of Medicine](#)). The introduction of shared parental leave has opened the door to the opportunity for men to share parental responsibilities more equally however very few organisations are offering equalised and gender-neutral parental leave, believed by many to be the remedy for parents returning to work.

Construction companies offering equalised shared parental leave

**Sir Robert
McALPINE**

KIER

LAING O'ROURKE

**MORGAN
SINDALL
CONSTRUCTION**

Wates

COSTAIN



"The majority of Millennial fathers have a different role at home to that which may have been the cultural norm for generations gone by. 87% are either mostly or fully involved in day-to-day parenting duties."

Han-Son Lee, [The Millennial Dad at Work report](#)

"There's a lot of talk about flexible working and work life balance, but in reality it's frowned upon. There is still a generation of project leads that think everyone should be on site at 7am and not leave until 5pm"

Sarah Cooke, REBHA

"One of the colleges on the project who work for Costain thanked me for the recent changes his company made in the paternity leave policy (3 months equal maternity paternity leave) due to raising awareness as part of the Parents in Construction initiative. While I would not be able to take a credit for that, I believe the equal paternity and maternity leave is essential for healthy families and will secure more female back to the industry as well as help to close the gender pay gap."

Senior manager, Jacobs



Why Britain needs a father-inclusive parenting leave system

**FATHERHOOD
INSTITUTE**

The Fatherhood Institute

At the Fatherhood Institute, we think the UK needs a parenting leave system that reflects the needs and aspirations of modern British parents – who want to be fully involved hands-on dads and mums, while also providing financially for their families and each other.

Improved parental leave allowances for fathers have a multitude of benefits, including:

- More mothers able to re-enter employment sooner, and experiencing a reduced 'motherhood penalty' in their career earnings – bringing a boost to overall employment and economic growth
- A reduced gender pay gap. A Swedish study found that women whose husbands took a month's parental leave saw their earnings rise by 7%, for example
- More fathers becoming expert caregivers, enabling them to better share the unpaid childcare work which currently falls mostly to mothers
- Improved maternal and paternal mental health and wellbeing, which may be negatively affected by stress and relationship conflict arising from gendered parental roles and expectations
- Reduced parental conflict and separation, with resulting savings to the economy (estimated to be £48bn).
- More babies benefiting from strong attachments with two parents, setting them up for a wide range of improved lifetime outcomes (e.g. doing better at school, having higher self-esteem, forming better relationships within and beyond the family, and being less likely to indulge in risky behaviours)
- Less sex-based discrimination in the workplace, since employers would know that a high proportion of men as well as women are likely to take a substantial period of time away from work in their babies' first year.

"More than 14,400 people across the UK signed our '6 weeks for dads' [Parliamentary petition](#), [...].

The petition called on the Government to introduce two weeks' paternity leave and a 'daddy month' of non-transferable parental leave (in the baby's first year) as a Day 1 right for all employed fathers/second parents – and for all this leave to be reimbursed to employers at 90% of salary (with a cap for high earners). It also calls for a Paternity Allowance for other fathers/second parents, like the Maternity Allowance currently available for mothers ineligible to maternity leave."

What's next?, The Fatherhood Institute



Women

The construction industry employs 7% of the UK's workforce (32 million people). But women account for just 15% of the workforce presenting a huge opportunity for increasing staffing levels.

The sector also has one of the largest gender pay gaps of any sector in the UK with very few women in senior roles.

According to NAWIC:

- 44% of construction women are in professional or management roles.
- 28% of construction women are in sales or office roles.
- 21% of construction women are in service-related roles.
- 6% of construction women are in production, transportation, or material moving roles.
- 1% of construction women are in natural resource, maintenance, and construction trade roles.

As construction is a vast industry that ebbs and flows based on supply and demand, the tracking of these numbers isn't a perfect science.

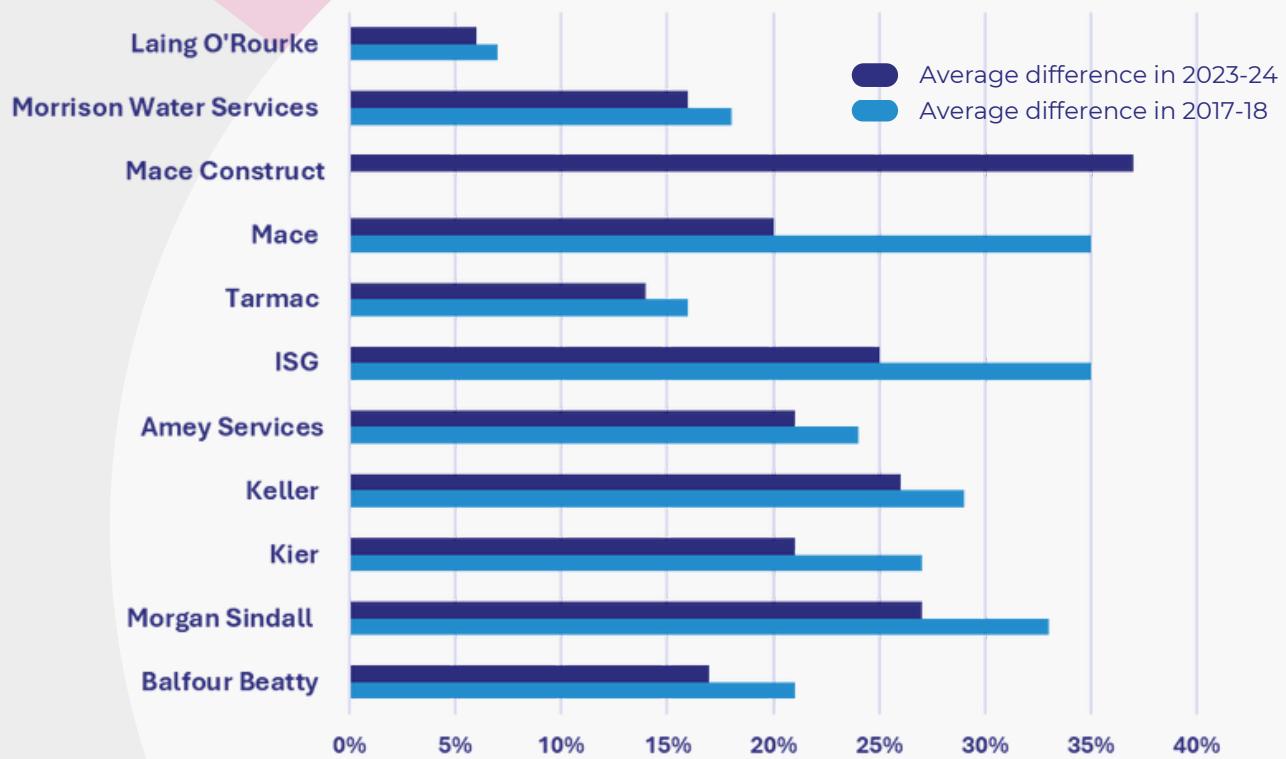
National Association of Women in Construction

Extensive effort has been made to close this gap, reducing it from 27% in 2018 to 23% in 2024 (compared with 14% in UK industry as a whole), and some of the larger companies have made great progress. However the average difference in hourly pay between men and women remains excessively high.

There is a marked difference gender difference in role with 44% of professional or management-type roles compared with just 1% in trade roles.

Increasingly organisations are attempting to recruit a 50: 50 gender split at graduate level but at grass roots level, construction continues to be a male-dominated profession.

Gender pay gap in 2024 in the top ten construction companies:





Part 2

The barriers

The Barriers

The UK construction industry faces entrenched barriers to modernisation and workforce inclusivity. Limited flexible working, cultural stigma around parental responsibilities, and inconsistent application of family-friendly policies leave employees, especially working parents, feeling unsupported. Deep-seated gender norms discourage men from seeking flexibility and limit women's progression, while a lack of psychological safety and parental networks exacerbates these issues. Rigid scheduling, financial constraints, and resistance to change further hinder the sector's ability to adapt.

Returning parents face unique challenges, including confidence issues, workload imbalances, and costly childcare, which impact retention. On-site managers prioritise health and safety over welfare, while poor communication of policies leaves workers unaware of available support. Rising costs and supply chain disruptions add pressure, limiting innovation.

Without addressing these barriers, the industry risks worsening its talent shortages. A comprehensive, inclusive reform is vital to attract and retain diverse talent while meeting evolving workforce expectations.

"Men may not feel comfortable requesting flexible working, as a perception that flexible working and part time is for female employees. Younger generations coming into the workplace prioritise wellbeing and work/life balance and expect flexible working – companies need to get on board with this or risk not been attractive. Decisions may be made by regional or scheme level managers who may personally not agree with flexible working."

Vicky Brook, People 3 Construction LTD



Industry barriers

Rigid scheduling and limited flexibility

Construction projects operate under strict timelines and budgets, often necessitating long hours and demanding schedules. Many roles require consistent on-site presence, reducing opportunities for remote work or flexible hours. This rigidity can make it difficult for parents to manage childcare arrangements or tend to family obligations. While some of the tier 1 companies have begun implementing flexible hours, these are often pilot projects limited to specific sites or roles, with variable success.

"Prelims are always tight to help win the job. And so, they are never set up for job shares or shift patterns to facilitate better support to working parents with late starts and early finishes because that would ramp the cost up. To then deliver on budget, projects have to deliver against the staff prelims. Programmes are always tight and our projects have long site opening hours. And so, releasing working parents to fulfil their working parents responsibilities can be challenging."

HR Leader, Sir Robert McAlpine



Financial pressures

The construction industry operates on exceptionally low margins leaving little scope for trialling new initiatives, in particular ways of working. The smallest slippage in materials or resources can be exceptionally costly.

Intense competition, stringent budgeting and high penalties for missing deadlines reduces the appetite for experimentation.

The collapse of ISG

Fibertec

The recent collapse of construction giant ISG left 2,400 employees redundant and threw £1bn of projects into uncertainty affecting public and private sector alike. That's despite a £2.2bn annual turnover.

With ISG's collapse, subcontractors and suppliers — many of whom were dependent on payments from ongoing ISG projects — are left in a precarious financial position. Hundreds of smaller companies now face the risk of insolvency themselves.

The UK construction industry has faced increasing costs due to supply chain disruptions, exacerbated by Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. These factors have driven up the cost of raw materials, making it difficult for contractors to maintain profitability. In addition to material costs, the construction sector has been battling a skilled labour shortage. This has resulted in project delays and increased labour costs, putting further pressure on profit margins.

It served as a stark reality as to the fragility of the construction industry in today's economic climate.

Health and safety concerns

Health and safety regulations in construction are strict and often serve as barriers to flexible working arrangements. The necessity of maintaining safe, controlled environments can make it challenging to implement part-time roles, shift work, or job sharing. For example, if two people job-share a role, additional training and handover time are required, leading to increased costs. Managers and contractors also worry that flexible schedules might lead to oversight in critical safety protocols, which adds complexity to promoting flexibility in construction roles.

Cultural resistance to change

Construction has traditionally been a male-dominated industry, which can create an environment less understanding of the needs of working parents, particularly mothers.

Cultural biases and stigmas prevent both men and women from requesting flexibility or parental leave. Many parents fear that taking advantage of these policies may negatively impact their career progression or that they may be viewed as less committed to their roles. Traditionally masculine environments also make men less inclined to take advantage of such benefits.

Managers without direct experience in balancing family responsibilities may also struggle to empathise or provide adequate support, especially in encouraging a more family-friendly culture.

Retention and recruitment pressures

High turnover rates are a notable issue in construction, partly due to the challenging work environment for parents. The loss of skilled, experienced workers directly affects the bottom line for companies, as recruiting and training replacements incur additional costs.

Additionally, a lack of family-friendly policies can make construction less attractive to prospective employees, limiting the industry's access to a diverse talent pool.

Organisational barriers

The culture within the construction industry presents unique challenges to implementing family-friendly practices. Beyond policies, achieving a true shift toward inclusivity and support for working parents requires a cultural transformation at all levels of an organisation.

Lack of flexible working

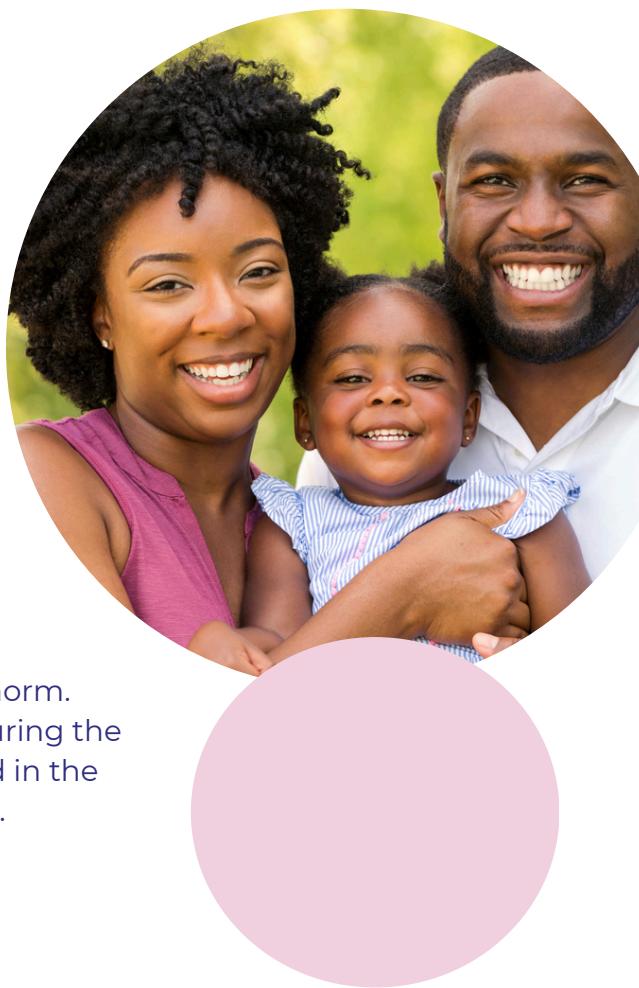
In other industries, flexible working has become the norm. This was driven in part by changing work practices during the COVID pandemic. But construction was not impacted in the same way and was not 'forced' to try new approaches.

Stigmas and gender norms

The construction industry has historically held rigid gender roles, often viewing flexibility and parental responsibilities as barriers to productivity. Men, in particular, may face stigma for requesting family-related flexibility or parental leave, as traditional gender norms can discourage men from participating fully in family life. Conversely, women may face stereotypes that assume they cannot handle demanding roles, particularly after having children. These cultural barriers reduce the likelihood of parents requesting the support they need.

"Being late to work or leaving early was always one of my biggest personal hurdles. I always followed the best employee guide policy standard - never be late or leave early. But becoming a mum, I didn't have that option. I had to work during my lunch hour to ensure all my daily tasks were done before I had to leave to pick up my son first from Nursery and then from the afterschool club. Working in the Construction Industry and being a mum while trying to progress in your career was always hard. But with LQ, from the start of my employment they have supported me with the arrangement I need and leaving early was never an issue. I was always grateful for the support I received right through my employment."

Senior Design & Technical Manager, LQ



Psychological safety and trust

Another barrier to family-friendly work environments is a lack of psychological safety—the feeling that one can raise issues without fear of judgment or career impact. Working parents often feel they must prove their dedication by foregoing flexibility or minimising family obligations. This can lead to burnout and reduced job satisfaction.

Inconsistent support and management practices

Policies supporting flexible work or parental leave may be inconsistently applied, depending on the attitudes and awareness of individual managers. In some cases, managers may unintentionally discourage flexibility by prioritising productivity over individual needs or by failing to fully understand family-friendly policies.

Additionally onsite managers are more focused on health and safety and productivity meaning messages around policy and welfare can be lost or under-communicated.

Lack of connectivity between parents

Parental networks have proven to be a huge success at connecting parents with the purpose of instigating change but such initiatives are more challenging in a construction environment where many individuals will not have access to technology that enables such connectivity.

“Poor line management is the most commonly cited reason for women leaving their organisations and their likelihood of staying and it is, overwhelmingly, the single point of failure. This line manager lottery should not be an acceptable response to any organisation claiming to breed a culture of inclusivity and those that rely on this only have themselves to blame when they lose working mothers from the workplace.”

Jess Heagren, CEO Careers After Babies



“One of the challenges is knowing where to find this information. Having a brilliant policy is great, but how easy is it to access the policy? Also, policies can be a bit vague. What does it actually mean in practice? Sometimes you need to speak to somebody and understand, for example, how to apply for shared parental leave. Or how to apply for the benefit of subsidized childcare? There's a big barrier around parents, particularly first time ones, learning all these things. It's new for them. Easy if you've got employees sat at a computer screen for eight hours a day, but on site, what does that look like?”

Senior Manager, Jacobs

Accessible policies and guides

Typically it is more difficult to access organisational messaging around policies and guides whilst onsite. Construction companies have to be innovative with access to information and communications, often relying on site managers to cascade important messages. This makes cultural change more challenging to bring about.



The reality for returning parents

Returning from an extended period of parental leave is a unique period of time that is complex and emotional.

Combining often expensive new childcare arrangements, often accompanied by repeated infant sickness, with re-integrating back into a role brings challenges and many women in particular will experience difficulties with confidence.

Once back in the business, returning parents discover the reality of conflicting priorities. Many find themselves working a flexible work pattern of four days a week, but they will often work the same number of hours as a full-time employee to keep up with the workload but at 80% of the pay.

Assumptions are often made by colleagues and line managers with regards to availability and commitment that exacerbate feelings of low confidence and can build resentment.

“Childcare cost is a significant factor for the families in deciding the working patterns. Many females give up returning to work if the salary is meant to cover the childcare expense only. Employers can help reduce that cost by providing a benefit to allow salary sacrifice. While the scheme is free for employers, it is not common practice. Other examples of benefits that would be beneficial include childcare sessions for the emergency situation, option to sacrifice sick leave for the members of family sickness, equal paternity leave.”

Senior manager, Jacobs



“Transitioning from worker to motherhood and then to a working mother is a deeply personal journey filled with challenges that often go unrecognised and therefore unsupported. Many women grapple with a loss of confidence as they navigate the unfamiliar terrain of parenthood, questioning their abilities and worth in both their personal and professional spheres.

Added in, a shift in priorities can feel like an emotional overhaul, requiring them to reassess what truly matters in their lives.

Returning to work after a significant period of absence can be particularly daunting, as women strive to reintegrate into their teams while responding to the increased demands of family life. The process of rebuilding professional relationships, catching up on industry developments, and adjusting to new routines can be overwhelming.

Yet, with the support of a workplace culture that values empathy and flexibility, an understanding manager, and a strong support network, women can navigate these challenges with greater confidence and resilience, ultimately thriving in both their roles as mothers and professionals.”

Lizzie Martin, founder of WorkLife Mother



Part 3

The future: how to respond

To build a truly family-friendly construction industry, an all-round approach is essential —one that goes beyond flexible work policies and instead addresses cultural, operational, and structural barriers.

It will require commitment and willingness to change from every level of management and for the larger organisations to be demanding of their suppliers and collaborators.

The industry

Tier 1 contractors must lead the way

Many of the tier 1 contractors have introduced flexible working, notably Sir Robert McAlpine who have talked very publicly about their commitment and efforts to adapt to new working practices. If real change is to be introduced to the industry, all tier 1 contractors need to lead the way and require sub-contractors to do the same. Without this demand, the industry will not change.

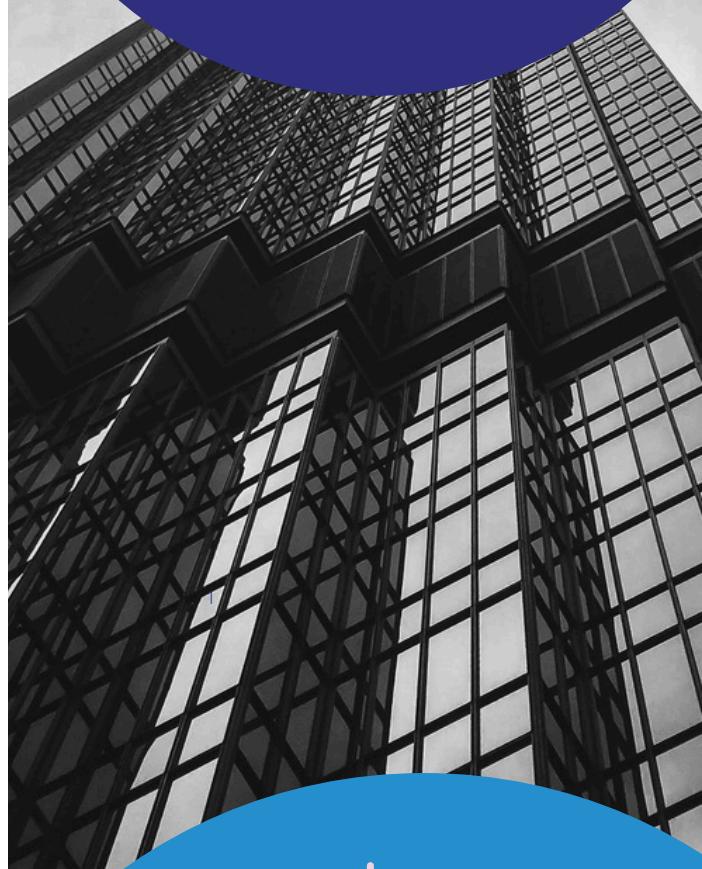
Openness with clients

Increasingly clients are demanding visibility of working practice and commitment to the fair treatment of employees. However there is a disconnect between the initial conversations and the actual delivery. Clients must be more demanding that organisations stick to their original commitments.

Action: Drive more openness with clients and continue the conversation with events and awareness around embedded initiatives and change. Demand that they hold you to account.

“I believe that the tier 1 companies should be driving the agenda, setting the example for supply chain when it comes to diversity and inclusion in particular. If they’re seen to be taking it seriously then everyone else will have to too”

Senior Manager, Construction



Is it time for a cross-construction industry commitment to vary work patterns?

With prelims so tight across projects preventing any initiative or experimentation, is it time for cross industry agreement to be reached on pitches or projects where additional allowances are made for varying costs?

Even better, can clients demand that work patterns play not just a part of a tender, but a mandatory requirement that is evidenced and followed up on?

Facilities and amenities on construction sites

Construction sites often lack basic amenities needed to support parents, such as private spaces for breastfeeding or accessible restrooms for expectant mothers. These gaps can significantly deter parents from continuing in construction roles.

Action: Include family-friendly facilities in the site planning process for larger projects. These should include clean, private spaces for breastfeeding and pumping, child-friendly restrooms, and potentially flexible shift accommodations for expectant mothers and parent. Similarly for childcare provisions. These could be made available onsite, or at the very least nearby either with a temporary solution or a partnership with nearby providers.

Providing these facilities can make construction sites more welcoming to parents, fostering an environment where they can comfortably balance work and family obligations. Planned properly, they could even be re-used across sites making this a longer term investment.

"We should challenge the perception of flexible working impacting the cost of the job; if it's the right thing to do and we can do the work safely then we should challenge ourselves on how we make it work within the constraints we have"

Senior Manager, Construction

"Childcare costs play a huge role in women returning to work and making decisions on how many days they can work. Construction sites by virtue of the scheme being for a "period in time" creates a mindset blocker for childcare provision, however there is a solution - a strategic partnership with a recognised childcare provider or creating temporary buildings near to site with the facility/service being managed by a national childcare provider. There are also schemes that allow salary sacrifice to pay for childcare provision, enabling employees to exchange a portion of their gross salary in return for their childcare and these types of initiatives should be promoted."

Vicky Brook, founder of People 3 Construction Ltd

"I wouldn't even want to use some of the toilets I have visited onsite never mind pump milk for a baby! Facilities need to be built into costs, not ignored because they don't fit costs. They have the facilities - they're moved from one site to the next. But they're not necessarily upgraded. It's not a huge cost, it's just something that gets missed. It's a bottom of the pile"

Female Construction Manager

Planning for work patterns

Whilst financial pressures exist, the continued repetition of the same mistake of not budgeting for different work patterns is non-sensical.

Action: Develop a template for prelims that allows for some flexibility in work patterns to enable this. If all Tier-1 contractors were to commit to such endeavours, the fear of loss of contracts may be reduced.

"It's not always a cost. It's an investment, isn't it? Because it's for short term versus the long term.

Go for the person that works the most amount of hours - short term get the bums on seats.

But longer term, you're constantly having to recruit because you've have a high turnover. Amongst other things that's massively disruptive to the team. Particularly in an environment where those skills aren't readily available.

The way to get support for family-friendly and carers policies is engaging managers from a retention perspective. That and a high performing, productive team that functions properly and hits the deadlines"

Lizzie Martin, WorkLifeMother



Organisational change

The imperative for flexible working

The Careers After Babies research showed that 87% of mothers are unable to make full-time hours work alongside being a parent. Similarly, the Millennial Dad report, published by Daddilife and Deloitte, showed that Dads are looking for flexibility too. A third of dads have changed jobs since becoming a father many pinpointing lack of flexibility as the reason. The most resounding need for working parents is, unsurprisingly, flexible working.

48% of fathers in construction have requested a change in their working hours and 73% were successful
The Millennial Dad report

A third of Dads have changed jobs since becoming a father, 37% citing lack of flexibility to fulfil parental responsibilities as the reason
The Millennial Dad report

The presence of remote working reduces absence rates by 1.3%
Flexonomics, Sir Robert McAlpine and Motherpukka

Efforts to introduce flexible working arrangements in construction have included pilot programs and initiatives focused on reducing hours, compressed work schedules, and job-sharing. But these are challenging to implement and have failed to attract the kind of buy-in that's necessary to instigate industry-wide change.

As seen in pilot programs, compressed workweeks and flexible start times can improve work-life balance without negatively affecting productivity. However, flexibility must be adaptable to different project stages and site requirements.

Action: Develop a flexible hours framework tailored to specific project phases. For example, compressed work schedules could be encouraged during regular project phases, with more rigid hours applied as projects near completion. Part-time options should also be considered, especially for employees transitioning back to work after parental leave. Implementing a part-time framework can reduce turnover by allowing parents to adjust their workload without leaving the company.



What does flexible working mean?

It is defined by Careers After Babies as a non-standard 9-5 site-based work pattern. Very deliberately, it is not hours that change week to week. In fact, most parents desire a consistent work pattern that can, on occasion, be flexed to meet the needs of their children, for sickness or events, for example. The environment determines success. Supportive line management and role modelling are both critical.



Compressed work weeks

In some pilot programs, companies have trialled compressed work schedules, where employees work longer hours across four days instead of the traditional five-day week. This approach aims to provide workers with an additional day off, thereby offering some balance without significantly impacting overall productivity.

A notable case study involved a construction project where teams adopted a Monday-to-Thursday schedule with an early Friday finish, resulting in higher engagement and job satisfaction among participants. However, near project deadlines, these flexible hours were suspended to ensure timely completion, highlighting the balance needed between flexibility and project requirements.

Shift Work and Job Sharing

Another approach piloted in the industry is shift work or job sharing, where two employees share the responsibilities of a single role. In this model, individuals alternate shifts, allowing each partner greater flexibility for family responsibilities. While feedback has been generally positive, project managers noted that this approach requires careful planning to ensure consistent handovers and communication. Additionally, job sharing is likely to increase labour costs, as companies need to budget for overlap hours.

Flexible Start and End Times

Flexible start and end times have been trialled to allow employees to manage childcare drop-offs and pick-ups. For example, some companies offer start times ranging from 7am to 10am. This flexibility can help parents accommodate their schedules, but it requires careful coordination, especially when roles are interdependent on-site.

Remote and Hybrid Work Opportunities

Although remote work is less feasible for on-site roles, some construction companies have implemented hybrid models for roles like project management, design, and engineering, where part of the work can be completed off-site. These arrangements allow parents to work from home a few days a week, reducing commute times and giving them greater flexibility to manage family responsibilities. However, the effectiveness of hybrid work in construction is often constrained by site requirements and technological limitations.

"Realistically it would probably cost you the equivalent of six days pay to cover 5 days when facilitating a job share. For this reason, there is a cost burden and looking at it purely from a construction director perspective, it wouldn't be attractive. And of course, the working winning team won't want added cost in fear they will be too expensive and ultimately lose the bid. Strategic initiatives driven by HR to change the construction site phase need to be costed and supported by leadership clearly highlighting the direct and indirect benefits such as holiday and sickness cover, improved employee engagement, retention, ability to attract top talent, and better work life balance leading to long-term cost"

Vicky Brook, founder of People 3 Construction Ltd

Gender neutral parental leave policies

Equal access to parental leave can significantly impact family dynamics and support both parents in balancing work and childcare responsibilities. Currently, maternity and paternity leave policies in construction can vary widely, and many men feel reluctant to take leave due to perceived cultural stigmas.

Action: Implement a gender-neutral parental leave policy that provides every type of parent with equal time off, along with the flexibility to take leave in segments to match family needs. This approach not only supports families but also normalises the idea of shared parenting responsibilities. Companies should communicate these policies proactively and provide reassurance that taking parental leave will not impact career progression.

JustParent is a revolutionary new parental leave benefit solution that helps organisations plan their finances for the pivotal moments in their employees lives.

JustParent offers a unique insurance product covering 100% of the basic salary (above annual excess) for employees on parental leave, providing them and you with financial security during this crucial time.



The **Careers After Babies membership** includes access to all the policy templates and guides you need to set yourself up as a family friendly employer



Equitable & family friendly policies

Insofar as possible organisations should offer equalised paid leave for as long as affordable and without clawback provisions.

Approximately 60% of organisations offer enhanced paternity leave, paying for the co-parent to take time off in the first year with as much flexibility as possible as to when that time is taken.

Action: Use toolkits rather than policies avoiding confusing legal terminology and instead focusing on empathy and line managers guidance.

They should be easy to understand, readily accessible both to existing employees and prospective ones and be accompanied by guides that set expectations for both the line manager and the employee.

Fair application of policies

Written word is open to interpretation, particularly in the case of line managers' understanding policies. Bias from their own lived experiences will influence how policies are applied and interpreted for individual circumstances.

Action: Provide access to Family Support Champions (specialists in supporting working parents) sitting either within HR or elsewhere in the business. They can make the experience altogether more straightforward enabling managers to focus on supporting their employees through a vulnerable period and focus on bringing them successfully back into the business.

Communication of available policies and benefits needs must be prioritised for larger organisations. They should refuse to accept "I didn't know about it" as an answer from employees or line managers. Family networks are another line of defence against this.

"I think there's an education piece around people that are actually managing people, Knowledge sharing is amazing. Managers should be able to offer advice and answer 'what do I need to be doing?' They need to take ownership of people going off on parental leave"

Andrea Lowe Drua Ltd,



"One of the main challenges for parents is obviously the drop off and pick up times. School holidays are another challenge. I try to maximize

my time with my children during school holidays by buying the maximum amount of the days off. I'm also not afraid to use unpaid leave to cover that time. But sometimes I get comments from others.

The culture and policies allowance to use the time for the holidays work against each other! Another difficult aspect is children sickness and emergency. My company provides a substantial amount of sick leave. Before had children, I never used that. But since the children started to go to nursery and pick up bugs, they are often at home. One of the things we are changing in our company policies is the ability to transfer sick leave to your dependents. And that's something that can be done, not only for parents, but also for non parents. So it's inclusive."

Senior manager, Jacobs

Increased use of shared parental and gender-neutral leave

The shared parental leave process is currently complicated and uptake is low. Except in those organisations where shared parental leave has been equalised with other family leave. There, is the uptake is higher.

But where it is used the benefits are extensive. Better bonding with the child, improved familial relationships and an ongoing better work life balance are just some of the reported benefits.

The role of fathers is changing as they become more involved at home in childcare and in domestic work, but there is currently no drive legislatively or any other way from a regulatory perspective to force organisations' response to that. It is also an enabler for same-sex couples who tend to have much more equal roles in relation to parenthood.

Action: Introduce gender-neutral parental leave available to all parents regardless of their gender or circumstances. This must be supported by trained line managers who understand the benefits and actively encourage transitions in and out of work.



Sharing of best practice

Careers After Babies and the Women's Leadership Group bring forward-thinking companies together to share best practice and move the industry forward.

If you would like to take part in the Women's Leadership Group, [contact us here](#).

If you would like to hear more thought leadership from Careers After Babies, check out [our events page](#).

"One of the things Costain did so well was equalise paternity and maternity leave. On my project, I know two people who actually changed their career to work with Costain to take advantage of that. In other companies it's so complicated because the female has to gift maternity leave. But it's so complicated."

Senior leader, Construction



Careers After Babies is on a mission to build a world-class cohort of employers of working parents.

Join us now!

Role modelling

Building a family-friendly culture requires strong, visible commitment from leadership. By normalising flexible arrangements and ensuring that both men and women feel comfortable discussing family responsibilities, organisations can reduce stigmas. Initiatives like equal parental leave and visible role models can help redefine norms around gender and family responsibilities.

Action: Leaders of industry should speak publicly about their home set ups giving others permission to do the same. Such actions generate conversation onsite around individual needs and restrictions. encouraging open communications and a more family-friendly culture.

Psychological safety

Creating an environment of psychological safety is critical to ensuring working parents feel comfortable requesting flexibility without fear of career consequences. The evidence that employees who feel safe to express family needs bring more engaged, productive, and loyal to the organization is overwhelming.

Action: Develop clear communication channels where employees can discuss family-friendly policy concerns without fear of reprisal. This could include anonymous feedback forms, employee resource groups for working parents, or regular check-ins between managers and team members to discuss any family-related needs. Consider incorporating a psychological safety assessment in regular employee surveys to gauge whether employees feel comfortable discussing family responsibilities openly.

Support for childcare costs

Childcare costs are a significant financial burden for many working parents, often affecting their decision to return to work full-time.

Action: Offering financial support for childcare alleviates this pressure and improves retention. Implement a childcare support program, offering subsidies or vouchers for use with licensed childcare providers. Additionally, consider creating partnerships with local childcare facilities near worksites to offer discounted services. For larger projects, companies might explore on-site childcare facilities where feasible, creating a safer, more convenient option for working parents.

Language

Organisations need to move away from the divisive language in relation to working parents' work patterns.

The term "part-time" is derogatory in its nature, suggesting a lesser contribution and importance. Eradicating such divisive language immediately levels the playing field, bringing the conversation to circumstances outside work rather than people who work a traditional work pattern versus those who do not.

The same applies to other terms related to working parents such as "primary" and "secondary" carers. Defining roles as primary and secondary suggests one is more significant or important than another and actively works against driving equality. There is also a wider societal issue regarding assumptions.

Action: Encourage open conversations about individual circumstances and stop assumptions about the role their colleagues will play in their family lives. Introduce thought leadership from external experts to prompt conversations. Call out those using inappropriate language and role model language you want to be used in all communications and documentation.



The Careers After Babies thesaurus

Family network: The ideal term for an employee resource group or network that focuses on parenting. Using family instead of parents is more inclusive of those with other caring responsibilities, such as grandparents, but still makes it clear who the network is for.

Family leave: Assuming equalised leave is the end objective, family leave is the term to be applied to what is currently known as maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental.

Kinship: Refers to those with other caring responsibilities outside of parenting, for example fostering, temporary childcare and other arrangements.

Co-parents: The term to be used for moving away from the concept of primary and secondary carers.

Work time and family time: By moving away from full-time, part-time, and any other references to working hours, colleagues can distinguish between when they are available for work and when they are not.

Connectivity between parents

In other industries, the power of connectivity between parents has resulted in innovative and dynamic changes to working practice that have made a significant difference to working parents.

Action: Implement a family network and appoint family experts on each site who can act as an advice point for parents and advocate for them in difficult conversations.

Data-driven evaluation of family-friendly practices

To build and maintain effective family-friendly policies, processes and practice, organisations should measure the impact of these initiatives on employee retention, engagement, and overall satisfaction.

Action: Establish metrics to evaluate the success of family-friendly policies, including tracking post-maternity and shared parental retention, turnover rates, job satisfaction scores, and productivity among parents compared to non-parents. Regularly review and adjust policies based on these findings to ensure they meet the evolving needs of working parents. By openly sharing results and progress, companies can foster trust and demonstrate their commitment to supporting working parents.

"My company has a dedicated team and programme 'Bridge the Gap', created to help transition between parental leave and returning to work by holding regular sessions every six months with people who go on maternity or shared parental leave. There are also dedicated sessions to the maternity leavers' line managers and returners with plenty of material and role modelling examples shared. It was fantastic because we knew that any person going on family leave has seen the policies and had it communicated."

Senior manager, Jacobs

"We started Parents in Construction network to talk openly about the issues the parents are struggling with. And we deliberately made sure that non parents were involved, because not everyone understands the challenge of parents with young children. In the first session contractors project director was there - a father of five - and he said, 'I was today at work at 10am today.

It's not my drop of day, but my wife had a very important meeting, and her career is important to me. I'm also going to leave earlier because I'm also picking up the children today.' This is how we achieved the very top overstatement. It's very important that it comes from the organisation's leaders, especially males, because these are not women-only issues."

Founders of Parents in Construction



Metrics to track

Careers After Babies recommends tracking the following metrics to measure retention of working parents

General: Employee turnover, gender pay gap and demographics

Family: Number of parents (new and repeat), parent to non-parent pay gap and retention of working parents

Maternity: Number going on leave, length of leave, role returned to and ongoing career progress

Family: Paternity uptake, shared parental leave uptake and length and ongoing career progress

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OUR SEVEN SUCCESS THEMES CONTAIN 75 PROOF POINTS FOR POLICY, PROCESS & PRACTICE AS WELL AS THE TOOLS YOU NEED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN AND KEEP YOUR WORKING PARENTS WHERE THEY BELONG - IN YOUR BUSINESS.



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Display your Careers After Babies assets so that you are credible and your small business to be taken seriously.



EMPATHETIC & INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Everyone, especially line managers, is empathetic and inclusive and understanding of the changes and challenges that parenthood brings

[Learn more](#)

FLEXIBLE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Parents are able to work in a way that works for them and that is recognised and embedded at every level of the organisation

[Learn more](#)

EQUITABLE & FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES

Parents have access to fair policies that are applied consistently and they are paid fairly for their contribution

[Learn more](#)

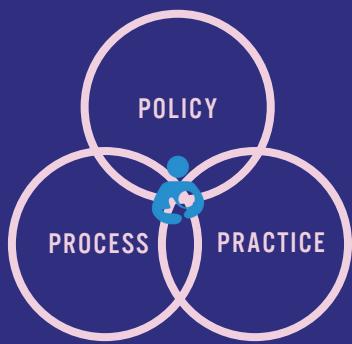
CONSISTENT NURTURE & SUPPORT

Parents need to be consistently supported at this life-changing time and know that their career is secure and that they can return

[Learn more](#)

The Careers After Babies framework

Careers After Babies identified seven key themes based on parental needs. These themes underpin the framework for building world-class employers of working parents.



Equitable & family - friendly policies

Parents have access to equitable and family-friendly policies that are applied consistently and they are paid fairly for their contribution

Flexible work environment

Parents are able to work in a way that works for them and that is recognised and embedded at every level of the organisation

Consistent nurture and support

Parents need to be consistently supported at this life-changing time and know that their career is secure and that they can return

Parents are progressing

Parents return to their careers continuing on the same development and reward as if they never left

Parenting is valued

Parenting is valued, respected and celebrated across the organisation

Visible role models parenting loudly

Leaders are parenting loudly at work and not hiding their own ways of balancing work and family

Empathetic and inclusive leadership

Everyone, especially line managers, is empathetic and inclusive, understanding of the changes and challenges that parenthood brings

Flexible work environment

Parents are able to work in a way that works for them and that is recognised and embedded at every level of the organisation

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Best Practices for Line Managers and HR

The issue that plagues most organisation is an inconsistency in approach as individuals fall to their personal belief systems around what work should look like. Support from line managers and HR is essential to the success of family-friendly initiatives. By training managers on family-supportive practices and empowering HR with resources, companies can create a more inclusive environment.

Building consistency across sites and teams

Inconsistent support from line managers remains a major barrier to the effective implementation of family-friendly policies. Often, managers lack training on how to support team members with family obligations, which can lead to misunderstandings or reluctance to offer flexibility.

Action: Provide mandatory training on family-friendly policies, along with guidance on how to support parents effectively. Training should also cover the business benefits of supporting working parents, such as higher engagement and retention rates. Including family-friendliness in performance reviews for managers can also reinforce accountability.

By measuring and rewarding managers who excel in supporting their teams' family needs, organisations can create a ripple effect that strengthens family-friendly culture across projects.

More focus on the softer skills in leadership such as empathy and active listening skills will also assist with retention.



"It's really important, especially for new people coming into the business to know what the business objectives are on hiring and culture. Divisional leads and managers all need to be cascading this message right from onboarding and ensuring its consistent and delivered against. Setting the right tone of voice, and holding hiring teams accountable against those inclusive vision and values. As the site phase tends to be more transient, this will ensure that when teams are mobilised, for example to another scheme of division, a consistent approach and culture is achieved. That way everybody knows what's expected and what good looks like. Constancy is key, not only to ensuring success for change but also to prevent any unintentional discrimination."

Vicky Brook, founder of People 3 Construction Ltd

Active listening and empathy training

Line managers are the first point of contact for many working parents, and their ability to listen actively and empathise with team members' family responsibilities can shape an employee's experience significantly.

Action: Offer training on active listening and empathy as part of manager development programs. Managers should be encouraged to hold regular one-on-one meetings with their teams, creating space to discuss both work and personal needs. This practice builds trust and helps managers identify areas where they can support working parents.

"The way I see flexibility is not Monday or Friday or this hour or this hour. The way that I apply flexibility to my team, is flexibility of the flexibility, which means that it's not about 'you work this amount of hours', it's output driven. We understand your struggle, because of the logistics of being a parent (childcare, baby being sick, and you are quarantined for 48 hours, etc) are complicated. It's about the expectation and being ready for these things. Once all the team understand this, the care and the trust is built with the team. The team then organised themselves. But what is impressive is sometimes, when things are urgent, you will find a way to work around it"

Senior leader, Bachi Soletanche

Regular policy refreshers and signposting resources

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HR departments should ensure that family-friendly policies are easily accessible and clearly communicated. This includes regular policy updates and resource guides that help parents understand available benefits.

Action: Implement an internal portal or HR management system where employees can access family-related policies, guidance on parental leave, and contact points for further support. Providing FAQs, case studies, and testimonials can make these policies more relatable and easier to navigate.

"Something as simple as a pack containing all the information as soon as any announcements were made would really help – simple but effective!"

Andrea Lowe, Drua Ltd



Accountability through performance reviews

Embedding family-friendly practices into manager performance reviews can reinforce the importance of supporting working parents. This accountability ensures managers are evaluated on productivity and their ability to create a supportive, inclusive work environment.

Action: Include criteria related to family-friendly practices in manager evaluations. Performance reviews could measure how well managers accommodate flexibility requests as seen in other industries.

Mentoring and coaching

People coming back from extended periods of leave benefit enormously from additional support whether that's within the organisation or outside. This is particularly true of those operating at a senior level where performance expectations can often be higher.

Peer mentors can share practical advice on managing work-family balance, navigating parental leave, and accessing company resources. By fostering a community for parents, companies can help employees feel less isolated and more connected.

Action: Implement an internal peer to peer mentoring service and consider using an external coaching who specialises in supporting those going on family leave.



Empathetic & Inclusive line management

Everyone, especially line managers, is empathetic and inclusive, understanding of the changes and challenges that parenthood brings.

"We have started to use our performance reviews to drive culture because, whilst we educate and train, attendance is not always consistent as people have conflicting priorities. If we think something is important we build it into their performance objectives and their reviews.

For example, this year we're asking about engagement, retention and technical competence through bespoke questions for line managers. And it's working – people are prioritising those three things as a result."

HR Leader, Sir Robert McAlpine

"Tracking retention and progression and placing as much focus and funding as we put into attraction! Investing in good support and development opportunities for parents. Providing coaching, accessible leadership development. Career conversations and committing to understanding what is and isn't working."

Suzanne Holt, Inside Coaching

The feedback loop

The ability to provide feedback after family leave is a critical but often overlooked tool, offering unique insight into the family leave experience.

Action: Implement a feedback loop that enables all parents to feed back on their leave and return experience, run at regular intervals in the first year after leave. They often feature quick wins that can be easily implemented but make a huge difference to working parents experiences.

This could be in the form of back to work interviews at regular interviews after work, surveys specific to family culture or exit interviews from employees who have left.



"As part of the Parents in Construction network regular sessions were held gathering over 100 employees to spark discussion about the need for family-friendly culture. The Working Flexibility Survey was launched to gauge the current perception of work life balance among Tideway colleagues and the industry. Over 130 people participated in the survey and a general positive work-life balance on Tideway transpired from the results."

Founders of Parents in Construction

"It's important for parents navigating parental leave to have the opportunity to feedback - and invaluable to the organisation. I worked with an organisation recently to create handbooks where, we took the policy and made it into something that was more of a practical document. So whilst it had facts such as 'you're entitled to 10 keep in touch days', it had more information about who to speak to about them, when to use them, the types of things that you might want to use your keeping in touch days for. It took that policy and made it easier to implement and to understand."

We also put a QR code in at the end for anonymous feedback providing psychological safety for returning parents. If you want to raise an issue as a working parent, you may fear being judged and may feel guilty. You might think 'I'm just making a mountain out of the molehill so I'm not going to bother raising it as I don't want to be seen as an inconvenience'.

It was a really progressive way to tell their people they wanted to listen their working parents about what's working and that's what isn't working."

Lizzie Martin, founder of WorkLifeMother

Hiring

A family-friendly reputation can enhance recruitment efforts by attracting diverse talent pools, including experienced professionals with family responsibilities. Often, the filtering process removes anyone with gaps on their CVs, any time away from their market or anyone who doesn't look immediately ready to walk into their role and hit the ground running at the maximum available hours possible.

Whilst many organisations claim to want to attract people from under-represented communities, they continue to use the same recruiters resulting in the same candidates. Most recruiters are trained to find the most employable and easy-to-hire people - the ones that will deliver their commission the fastest! This is not only limiting from a talent attraction perspective but is likely to efficiently filter out anyone that looks like an active parent, particularly if they have had any form of career break.

Action: Use dedicated recruiters focused on attracting working parents. Track the number of applicants who identify as working parents or who inquire about family-friendly policies during the recruitment process. Include a question in candidate surveys to assess whether family-friendly practices influenced their decision to apply. An increase in applications from working parents can indicate that these policies improve the company's appeal as an employer.

"As an ex HRD in construction and a recruiter, a working parent and a campaigner for diversity my message to businesses, leaders, HRDS, hiring managers, is simple. The genz's have expectations, not only for themselves but for their partners, they are growing up in a world that is changing, largely for the better. All our insights and learnings they are grabbing with both hands and fast. If you don't start thinking differently about your talent pool and the opportunity to hire differently, and if you don't promote diversity in your recruitment strategies you will lose competitive edge and will cease recruit or retain the best-in-class talent. There of course has to be a win, win, commercial model, so engage HR in the business case and financial modelling early to ensure that any changes you wish to adopt have been fully costed and are commercially viable. Change recruitment strategies slowly but surely taking the hiring managers on your journey. They need to buy-in to the benefits and they need to be held to accountable for their hiring decisions."

Vicky Brook, founder of People 3 Construction Ltd

The Women's Leadership Group from People 3 Construction LTD

The Women's Leadership Group consists of male allies and female leadership from all sectors of UK businesses, charities and public sector, who all share the desire and commitment to change the bias on women achieving main board positions in male-dominated sectors.

We challenge the executives and boardrooms across the sectors and encourage them to take an active role in our mission of change by inviting them to identify the barriers to entry through a working group approach. We host events, working group, participate in white papers, publish a quarterly newsletter and create podcast content.

If you're interested to learn more please reach out or take a look!

<https://www.p3cl.co.uk/womens-leadership-group/>

Case study: Sir Robert McAlpine flexible working trials

Sir Robert McAlpine teamed up with consultancy Timewise to understand how on-site construction could benefit from flexible working. There were a number of pilots that used either compressed hours or job sharing.

The job-sharing model allowed two employees to alternate shifts, enabling each to manage family obligations more effectively. This approach was especially beneficial for parents returning from leave, as they could ease back into their roles without committing to full-time hours.

In the second study, they worked as a pair enabling them to operate a shift pattern or alternative means that worked for them.

Initial consultation with employees revealed that they were keen to continue working full-time on site, but with adjusted hours. Flexible working for site workers has long been thought impossible but McAlpine says it has found a solution thanks to its trials.

Feedback from the pilot indicated that job sharing contributed to reduced burnout and higher retention rates. However, the arrangement also led to slightly increased costs, as overlapping hours were required for thorough handovers. The pilot team recommended continuing the job-share model, particularly for parents returning from maternity or paternity leave, while accounting for handover time in project budgets.

“We did a survey on all of our projects to understand what agile and flexible work meant for the participants. We then piloted the trials on a number of projects having consulted with managers. We found a way of making agile working, work on their projects. There were different approaches between and amongst projects and so it was incredibly agile in its nature - whatever worked for the project, at that time, was the approach and it could change from week to week. It worked! And whilst it had its challenges, it was great!”

HR Lead, Sir Robert McAlpine





Part 4

The business case

A statement recently overheard from a CFO: "This is all great and might seem like the right thing to do, but aren't all people replaceable?"

In the construction industry, this isn't true. Resources are scarce and the industry needs to work with the people available.

Eighty-three percent of women will become mothers by the age of 45 (ONS) and more than 60% of men of working age are fathers. Therefore investing in working family friendly resources and initiatives will impact a huge proportion of the workforce.

The business case is normally the place to start.

"Not thinking about family and flexibility at its very widest is an issue. Everyone will need flexibility at some stage in their career whether it's for raising children or caring for an older relative or for wellbeing and health reasons or a return to studying.

More so than ever grandparents are stepping in to provide childcare (Sweden are including grandparents in shared parental leave). If we continue to assume that it's just mums who need this most it adds to bias, feelings of guilt and suggestions of unfairness. If we consider how to create a culture that's agile and supportive at all life stages it expands the possibilities and opportunities."

Suzanne Holt, Inside Coaching

"In order to normalise family-friendly culture, it is important for management at all levels of the organisation to build the culture by introducing policies, raise awareness and ensure parents are not stigmatised due to work life balance choices when creating resilient and high-performing teams. It is important to bring to the discussion non-parents and people working with parents to have open discussions and to find solutions together."

Senior manager, Jacobs

74% of families need two working parents
ONS data



"Many consultancies and client organisations in construction industry developed flexible working patterns which support parents and work life balance. The contractors however have less flexibility to compensate working hours by working from home due to site presence requirements. This is a major challenge in developing the system to support site based employees in achieving work life balance."

Senior manager, Jacobs



How to build your business case

Given the tight margins and threat of financial penalties for missing deadlines, watertight business cases are required to secure resources for non-business critical initiatives.

Producing a strong business case requires data, something most organisations lack.

That's why Careers After Babies has built the business case for you!



Retention

Uplift in retention from improved support and proposition



Silent loss

Cost of replacing people leaving before, during or after family leave



Cost reduction

Cost of hiring and training replacements for those that leave



Increased productivity

Uplift in productivity from happier, supported employees



Talent attraction

Cost saving from shorter recruitment timeframes and more productive talent



Culture & diversity

Improvement from the D&I business case

Looking to build a business case for parental support in your organisation but lacking the data you need?

Careers After Babies has built the first business case for increasing parental support. Inputting a small amount of company data, your business case is collated for you including norms and stats from our extensive database.

Download your business case today



The business case for diversity



Improved financial returns

Inclusion, and in turn, a more diverse workforce leads to improved returns:

- Enhances creativity and innovation by 20% ([Deloitte](#))
- Helps make better decisions 87% of the time and makes them twice as fast ([Deloitte](#))
- Companies with the representation of women exceeding 30 per cent (and thus in the top quartile) are significantly more likely to financially outperform those with 30 per cent or fewer ([McKinsey](#))



Improved talent attraction and retention

A company's approach to diversity and inclusion is a critical factor in choosing whether to accept a position:

- 75% of people looking for roles want to work for a diverse organisation ([Deloitte](#))
- More than 50% of women will research whether an organisation has policies ([PWC](#))
- More than 60% of women will look at the diversity of their leadership before accepting a position ([PWC](#))



Improved customer perception ([Deloitte Australia](#))

In an age of social media, customer perception has never been more important. Additionally:

- One in two customers who identify as gay or lesbian or practice a noticeable faith say that an organisation's reputation influences their buying choices in terms of their approach to diversity
- As many as one in two non-heterosexual people and people who have a faith feel their needs as a customer have not been met



The impact of change

The impact of change

The construction industry's unique demands present challenges to building a family-friendly environment, yet these challenges are not insurmountable. With thoughtful, data-driven approaches, construction companies can create workplaces that support working parents, build loyalty, enhance job satisfaction, and ultimately improve organisational success. Such action will make the industry more attractive to new talent as well as retain the raft of skill and talent that exists already.

Careers After Babies outlines a comprehensive framework for all organisations. Making construction sites more accommodating to parents, focusing on key areas such as flexible work arrangements, supportive site facilities, gender-neutral policies, and cultural shifts within teams is as applicable in construction as in any other industry. We have witnessed the success of initiatives such as compressed workweeks, job sharing, and open communication channels to create more inclusive and supportive work environments and know the difference they can make.

Looking ahead, the continued integration of family-friendly policies within construction requires both commitment and innovation, especially from leadership. As such a connected industry, the opportunity for partnerships and collaborations is stark and could make a real difference, particularly if the tier-1 companies lead the charge.

Change will require commitment from business leaders and site leaders.

By adopting these recommendations, construction organisations can not only support their employees but also set a standard for the industry, demonstrating that family-friendliness and productivity can thrive together.

Giving working parents access to what they need will lead to higher retention within the industry and attraction of more talent into the industry helping address the significant challenges around resourcing in construction.





CAREERS AFTER BABIES IS LEADING THE MOVEMENT TO CREATE WORLD-CLASS EMPLOYERS OF WORKING PARENTS THROUGH OUR UNIQUELY TRANSFORMATIVE ACCREDITATIONS.

WE ARE A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE COMMITTED TO MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR WORKING PARENTS. 74% OF PARENTS IN THE UK REQUIRE BOTH PARENTS TO WORK (ONS) AND THE MOMENT, 85% OF MOTHERS ARE STRUGGLING TO DO THAT.

You can join our movement by supporting us on social media. If you would like to explore accreditation for your own business and join our world-class cohort of employers of working parents, visit Careers After Babies.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR EMAIL US TO FIND OUT MORE

