

Queensland Major Contractors Association

Future Industry Working Group

Focus Area: Talent attraction & Retention in the Civil Construction Industry



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PREFACE

One of the single biggest risks to the sustainability of the Civil Construction industry is the lack of a skilled workforce, be it technical, professional, trade or support roles. Two of the biggest challenges that we face are firstly how do we attract new entrants, and equally as important how do we retain the best and brightest. The answers to these questions are simple - We need to employ the right person for the right job, support individual growth and incentivise them to stay; whilst this is an easy statement to make the truth is the action required is deeply complex and Contractors need to work together with each other, our clients, government bodies and education institutes to develop a sustainable solution.

The following discussion paper seeks to explore our current challenges, contributing factors and what steps we can take to ensure that our industry is sustainable. As these challenges cannot be solved alone, it endeavours to promote conversation with the view of a collective solution.

TALENT ATTRACTION

As an industry we would benefit from the development of a focused campaign to highlight the economic, social and personal benefits that a career in construction provides.

The Australian Defence Force was one of the most exclusive clubs in our nation. Almost three decades ago they were faced with a critical personnel shortage and launched their “Do something for yourself” campaign which targeted volunteer recruits from every corner of Australian society to tap into all available resources. ADFA now recruit people from all genders, ethnicities, race, religions and sexual orientations, and are continually looking at ways to increase participation.

This diverse recruitment strategy has not only increased their available resource pool, but has aided in increasing necessary social skills in today's modern world; including increased linguistic capabilities and cultural sensitivity awareness.

Inclusion and Diversity do not have to be taboo words, they do not define a person nor should it disadvantage a person via an un-necessary bias. They are merely two words that our industry should be seeking to understand and embrace to ensure the future sustainability of our industry. Within all tiers of our industry recruitment of new engineering and construction staff is becoming increasingly difficult. In order to promote and maintain our industry's growth it is necessary to recruit, develop and retain the best and brightest. In this day and age we tell our sons and daughters equally that they can be anything they want to be. If we truly believe this as individuals, then why would we as an industry not be spreading this message far and wide?

In our industry, the potential benefits of a more diverse workforce stretch beyond the tangible benefit of capacity and reach into the less measurable, but equally valuable benefits of:

- Different and better ways of thinking, often borne from gender differences
- Different and better ways of working together, often borne from cultural upbringing
- New construction or design skills, borne from overseas environments
- Willingness to travel, because we're not all moulded from the same family model

There are a number of societal groups that are under-represented in our industry, and we need to challenge our current way of thinking to attract from this market, to harness the available potential.

Qld proves marginally better than the national average with 13.4% overall female participation
Source: Qld Government Statisticians Office, Regional Profiles Report 14 August 2019 (Table 31)

Women

With some one million workers, construction is Australia's most male-dominated industry with only 12% of the total National construction workforce being women; professional positions fare a little better at 14%, but in the trades less than 2% brave Australian work sites. Mining fares only slightly better at a participation rate of 14% overall. Source: ABS, Gender Indicators, September 2018 (cat.no.4125.0)

Education and the message we should be sending. Overall, women participate more in education nationally. The Department of Education's reported figures for 2018 for Australian Public Universities shows that of the 255,998 commencing students, 57.6 percent were female. However in Qld the trend is less with 48.9 percent female participation overall

More women than men attain a bachelor degree, with most women likely to qualify in Health and Education. Men are most likely to qualify in Engineering and Related technologies or Architecture and Building. The below table summarises the percent split across the professional sectors.

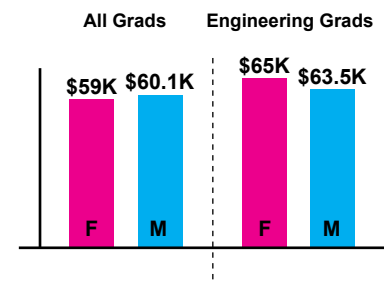
Queensland		
Qualification/Field of Study	Females	Males
Bachelor Degree of Higher	57.2	42.8
Engineering and Related Technologies	6.3	93.7
Architecture and Building	6.7	93.2
Education	77	23
Health	76.6	23.4

In our industry's favour is the recorded pay benefit that female graduates enjoy over their male counterparts and this should be highlighted in our campaign to attract these young women

- Female graduates earn less than male graduates overall, with median starting salaries of \$59k and \$60.1k respectively, and they earn less in 15 out of 19 key industries.
- Bucking the trend, female engineering and related technologies graduates had a higher starting salary than their male counterparts for the first time in 2017: \$65k compared with \$63.5k.

Female engineering grads now earn more than men

Graduate median starting salaries



Breaking the Boys Club stigma

There are few women in this industry who would not have their own story or experience with the “Boys Club” or “Glass Ceiling”, albeit with varying degrees of impact. It could be as simple as not being invited to a sporting event with the rest of the “guys” or as serious as not receiving a promotion or position based on gender alone. We need to ask ourselves what drives this stigma; do I contribute to this stigma, and if so what behaviours can I change? Unconscious bias often plays a big role and many companies have developed training for all levels of the organisation to bring self-awareness to our decision-making processes.

Social responsibility is everyone's responsibility.

Individuals - Are there behaviours that I can change as an individual to ensure that I am not singling out specific people or promoting types?

Company - Do we have the necessary and appropriate policies and procedures in place to go beyond ensuring fairness, and drive a culture of inclusivity. Are there adequate penalties in place for individuals or groups who do not display the correct behaviour? It is one thing to have a policy or procedure, it is another to hold people accountable; at all levels of the organisation.

Client - Similarly to the Company approach, do we have appropriate and adequate contractual conditions, policies and procedures in place to drive change, workplace conditions and the overall culture of the industry? Are we conducting business with partners who ensure fairness and equality? As Contractors we are increasingly seeing Client awareness coming through our Client's Social Procurement schedules requesting evidence of work practices around equity etc, however, price still seems to trump social responsibility in most instances. Lowest price should not be the only consideration when engaging an engineering delivery partner.

Government - Again, do we have appropriate and adequate standard contractual conditions, policies, procedures and legislation in place to ensure equality and appropriate workplace conditions area achieved. Are there adequate penalties in place for breaches? Are we, as a government, practicing what we preach? Are there training programs, initiatives or marketing campaigns that we can contribute towards to ensure not only the survival of the construction industry, but the continued growth of our economy as a whole?

There is much discussion currently around quotas and targets, and at times the discussion has been viewed as quite controversial, but how do we ‘make’ employers and managers actively promote more diversity in the workplace. Government have used targets for Indigenous and social enterprises, but are they effective in achieving the end goal? Do they ‘force’ people to change the way they think? Or are they just perceived as another “tick box”? One would hope that the next generation will laugh at the thought of having quotas and targets in place to increase diversification in the workplace, but some would say that they serve the purpose and without them you can't achieve change.

Mentoring - We need both structured and informal mentoring approaches tailored to the person, position or situation. One size does not fit all. Mentoring needs to come in many forms and from many perspectives. Whilst women mentoring other women is a powerful tool, we cannot underestimate the importance of having positive male and female mentors across both genders to ensure a rounded development of individuals.

Physical limitations. On-the-ground roles can be seen as being too physically demanding and not within a woman's physical capabilities. We need to invest in technical advancement and education eg. ergonomic tools, training, fitness for work programs.

"My first week on my first job site I doubted my own physical ability to undertake all of the tasks that the experienced men around me were doing. I went home every night tired, aching and physically drained. As the following few weeks went by I noticed that my physical capabilities were improving as my body became 'job fit'. After speaking to the men on the site, they confirmed that they also experienced a similar job readiness at the start of their careers. What this confirmed to me was that me being a woman was not a physical barrier to completing my work. I have now been doing this for over 15 years and complete the same tasks that all of the men on my site undertake"
Anonymous Female Electrician - Qld

Flexible working arrangements. We must first recognise that flexible working arrangements means different things to different people. Is it flexible working hours, job sharing, part-time work, flexibility of work location, including working from home. If child care is an issue are there childcare options/facilities that can be explored? The banking sector does this well, with many such as NAB, offering childcare facilities or subsidised care for their workforce.

Career vs Family. Breaking the stigma around career vs family - it's not a choice, it's your right to do both, for everyone.

We are not just Engineers. Recognition that we need to attract women into both blue collar and white collar roles is important. It is essential that we showcase the variety of positions available - not all roles are engineering or on the tools. The many support roles include legal, accounting/finance, HR, contract administration, pre-contracts, risk management, marketing & communications, environmental, safety, stakeholder and community engagement, mental & physical health, career coaching, business development and general administration.

The perception of harassment. The construction industry has at times had a bad reputation for harassment; it is shown in news stories (ie particularly in relation to Unions and IR), adverts, TV shows and movies. Most of us have seen the stereotypical image of a construction worker holding a stop sign and making comments to a woman passing. This is typically not reality. Construction workers are professionals, generally well educated and highly skilled individuals. The media reflects the poor behaviour of the minority, and this is what people see. Our reality is one where many of our traffic control personnel are women, when will the media catch up?

Support and networking. There are a growing number of industry and affiliate associations (such as our comrades in the building and property industries) aimed specifically at supporting women in construction; who work extensively to bring awareness to issues of inequality, provide women with career support and provide avenues for networking opportunities and forums. How do we bring these connections together to bring about wider long-lasting change? How do we capitalise on the good work that each individual association is undertaking?

There has been a lot of rise given recently to mental health issues within our industry, particularly the disconcertingly high suicide rate amongst men. The coverage given to the topic of mental health is critical and should be applauded. How do we learn from this campaign to give the same level of exposure to equality in Construction?

Young entrants



How do you know which way to go?

One of the biggest dilemmas facing kids these days is the seemingly endless bombardment of options - so much so that it is hard for them to understand what all of the available options are and to narrow down to one that appeals to them.

Just type into any search engine "How do I choose a Career" and you will be spoilt for choice with online quizzes and tools claiming to assist school leavers with choosing potential career path options; but **how do we make Construction and Engineering stand out in the crowd?** How can we influence the influencers (to coin the latest buzz term) to encourage and support the idea of a career in our industry?

What is important to the younger generation? What drives them?

Career progression - Millennials have grown up believing in their own individual skills and talents. They have been encouraged to consider how any opportunity can enable them to grow. They have been taught to investigate what support is available to them to aid their personal development. Structured mentoring and apprenticeship schemes are ideal for providing experience and coaching to potential employees, therefore demonstrating that they will receive dedicated input to develop and learn faster. The flip side to this eagerness to progress quickly is that we need to find a balance between career progression and promoting prematurely before the necessary personal and professional skills are developed.

Wealth Creation - With a strong focus on wealth creation, young people should be educated in the variety of both white collar and blue collar roles available; How skilled tradespeople can earn a prosperous living. A lot of focus has been put on the importance of STEM subjects for High School students to successfully enter Engineering and Technical placements at Universities, however not everyone is cut out for University. Apprenticeships for skilled trades requires a similar emphasis in our schools and marketing campaigns.

Social responsibility - A common misconception is that Millennials are self-serving and only interested in immediate self-gratification, but quite the contrary, they have in fact a deep-rooted need to feel they make a difference in the communities in which they interact. There are many things that most organisations already do in this space, however, we don't always think to use this as a selling point to attract new entrants.

Flexibility - Much like most generations, we want a better lifestyle than what we perceived our parents had. In a digital age when we are expected to be available all of the time and our minds rarely have time to rest, a work environment with low stress and the ability for a work-life balance is increasingly attractive. Workplaces or career paths that offer flexibility is an attractive prospect.

What does flexibility mean to the younger generation and how do we change the way in which we think and work to accommodate a degree of flexibility in the workplace? This is particularly difficult when working in a site-based role when you are required to be at the coal face. Can we challenge the norm to allow flexibility in all cases. Are there other industries that we can learn from?

Are there key contractual conditions or requirements that need to be amended to enable and support change for industry?

Industry introduction to school children - There has been some headway into marketing Engineering and the importance of STEM subjects to high school students with the aim of encouraging tertiary education through a number of initiatives such as Power of Engineering and Engineering is Elementary. Whilst these programs are bringing greater exposure to older high school students, predominately years 10-12, it is important to attract the attention of students before they begin the process of choosing which subjects to pursue in the final years of high school; to this end it is equally important to get children excited and interested in construction in years 7-9, at a level aimed at getting them excited about the possibilities the industry brings. It is by this stage they have already started to formulate (even loosely) in their mind what's on offer, often from looking at what the adults in their life potentially do. The decision of career choice is made so early when schools and families are the main influencers; It is important that we provide them with a well rounded understanding of what is available to them.

Negative Industry Perception and Challenges

- Young people are heavily influenced by their surrounding environment whether it be social media, television or print media, teachers, friends or family. With all of this information around them one of the top influencers continues to be their parents. As an industry of construction professionals we should be mindful of how our words can influence the impressionable minds of those in our own lives. The language we use is important





RETENTION:

Is it the end of the Gold Watch era?

It has been highly recognised in recent times that the growing trend is for the younger generation to undertake several career changes over their working lifetime. A generation that is not necessarily interested in obtaining the 20 year gold watch status that their parents aspired to. If this trend continues to prove true our challenge is how do we use their skills whilst we have them, and how do we ensure the longevity of our industry with this transient model in mind? What does this disruption look like to an industry where skills are typically developed over many years?

It is time as an industry to recognise that talent is 'owned' by the industry not the company; that increasingly people are happy and want the freedom to choose employers and/or projects. **How does the construction industry adapt to the gig economy?** How do we adapt our traditional way of thinking to understand that by making our employees the best that they can be, that we are all benefiting in the long run.

How do we support people for the long haul?

So, how do we gain loyalty in a time of potentially short-lived career choices? There has already been much headway within many of the major contracting companies to identify and develop initiatives aimed at the retention and support of their workforce. It should be recognised however that these initiatives must be regularly reviewed and challenged to ensure their effectiveness in an evolving industry. Today's employees are looking for a supportive workplace that provides opportunity for work life balance, a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging.

There are a number of common structured initiatives such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's), structured promotion and progression pathways (which ensure an equal pathway for all employees) and physical and mental health programs.

Whilst these structured programs can result in tangible outcomes, and not to mention are a good sales pitch to potential employees, it is often the way we 'feel' about coming to work that drives a sense of loyalty and commitment to a company (or industry). Creating positive workplace culture is critical. We should think of our business as not only constructing infrastructure; but connecting people and communities. What makes you happy to come to work every day? Usually the people that you work with. What is usually the hardest decision when you leave a job? It's not leaving the job - it's usually leaving the people.

Great culture is not easy to come by in an industry where we are all under immense pressure to perform and generate profit. Great culture is something that we need to be conscious of, and something that we need to consistently work at. It comes from mindful leadership; from leaders that practice what they preach, and genuinely believe the message they are projecting.

We need to take the time to understand how our individuals and teams tick, what drives them. We must ensure they are regularly challenged, and that they understand how their individual contribution benefits the greater collective. People have an underlying need to feel they have made a difference, which is evident when you see a Mum or a Dad pointing to a bridge and hear them say "Hey kids, I was on the team that built that". It fills them with a sense of pride and accomplishment. It makes them feel good to be a part of that team/company.

We need to think differently about what constitutes a modern career. We should be thinking about how we showcase the many different career choices that can be made whilst still maintaining a career in the construction industry, and then making a pathway available to transition between roles. For example if a person is tired of moving around from one job site to the next and shows a commercial aptitude, perhaps they move to Estimating or a Pre-contracts role. A community and stakeholder officer, may make a move into the Marketing or HR team, and so forth.

WHAT ASSISTANCE DO WE NEED?

Government led campaigns (advertising campaigns, pathways to school aged children, connections to minority groups, funding for training). While youth campaigns are important, it is equally important to reach the influencers – parents and teachers. Review of standard contract conditions that recognise change in work practices and review of policies such as Training policy to ensure keeping up to date to include a focus on technical skills as well as the traditional skills

University marketing campaigns, assistance with surveys to better understand perceptions, attitudes and challenges

Clients - responsible engagement, realistic expectations / achievable targets

Contractors & Designers - development and implementation of internal and industry recognised programs that support the attraction, mobility, retention and diversity of our people across our workplace.

Industry bodies (QMCA, IAQ, CCF etc) - interaction with the above groups, development of training &/or mentoring programs, awards and recognition; advocating for improved industry collaboration and appropriate changes in contractual conditions, policy targets to improve productivity and workplace arrangements whilst still delivery the infrastructure outcomes





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