

Why are so few girls choosing careers in construction?

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Senior Research Fellow, Dr Phillippa Carnemolla. Credit: Andy Roberts

A new report looks at how construction is portrayed and perceived by high-school girls as a potential career option. Dr Phillippa Carnemolla, Senior Research Fellow at UTS School of Built Environment also examined the pathways that young women are taking when they do

choose to pursue a construction career.

Despite modest improvements, construction remains Australia's most male-dominated [industry](#) with the lowest representation of women of all industry sectors. At every [career](#) stage - recruitment, retention and progression - men vastly outnumber women.

The report "Why Would I Want to do That for a Career?", was commissioned in 2018 by the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) as part of a \$20,000 scholarship to Dr Phillippa Carnemolla, sponsored by CULT design.

Over the one-year study, Dr Carnemolla investigated perceptions of the [construction industry](#) by examining existing research, interviewing female high [school](#) students, and analysing UTS enrolment data for the Bachelor of Construction Project Management.

"In interviewing the students, it was clear that they had little knowledge of the construction industry and its potential career options," said Dr Carnemolla.

"The fact that it is a growth industry and one of Australia's three largest industries was also unknown."

None of the interviewed students could recall speaking to a successful woman with a career in construction and felt they could not visualise themselves in a construction role.

The research also revealed a lack of understanding about the diverse scope of jobs and careers that comprise the construction industry.

"One of the most revealing aspects of the research was that many girls didn't believe they would be respected or heard in the construction

industry. Nor could they visualise what achievement might look like for them, or how they could make a difference." said Dr Carnemolla.

"In fact, construction was not seen as a viable or aspirational career path like law, business, medicine or engineering – despite engineering being a part of the construction industry."

While, the interviews demonstrated that few girls had a comprehensive understanding of what it means to work in construction, the research showed that females from all-girls schools were significantly more likely to choose to study construction at university.

55% of girls offered placements in the UTS Construction Project Management degree as school-leavers came from all-girls high schools – while only 9% of schools NSW are all-girls.

Professor Heather MacDonald, Head of the UTS School of Built Environment says that Dr Carnemolla's research gives valuable insight into the challenges universities face in attracting a more diverse range of students to Construction Project Management programs.

"Many [young women](#) don't understand the range of skills and knowledge entailed in the field, nor the significant opportunities to be part of major projects that transform the built environment," said Professor MacDonald.

"One of the key messages we hear from our industry partners is the importance of expanding the recruitment base for Construction Project Managers – not only to ensure that the industry reflects the diversity of Australian society, but also to ensure project managers bring a wide range of skills and experiences to construction in the 21st century."

As a result of her research findings, Dr Carnemolla has made

recommendations that will enable NAWIC, employer groups, leading companies and broader construction networks to better engage with high school girls and to communicate the potential for a [construction](#) career.

More information: Girls' Perceptions of the Construction Industry: Building a Picture of who isn't Interested in a Career in Construction and Why www.nawic.com.au/Web/IWD_Scholarship_Archive.aspx

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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