Creating Rainbows: The Road to Innovation and Success

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The construction sector is one of the least diverse sectors in the UK. Among employees only 4% are BAME (compared to a national population of 12%), and the proportion of women in the construction sector remains low at around 13% (ONS, 2018).

Yet there is growing research identifying that diverse workforces are key to innovation with gender diverse companies 14% more likely to perform better than non-diverse companies and ethnically diverse companies 35% more likely to perform better.

There is also a growing skills gap in the sector particularly with the growing use of technology.

From interviews with those in the construction sector, it emerged that family was a major influencer for those entering the industry. However the industry cannot continue to rely
on this method if it is to address the current skills shortage and attract a wider diversity of entrants.

**Image:** How can the industry change the way it works to make it more attractive to people?

**Culture:** How can stakeholders be made to understand the value that changing the culture could bring, the advantage of diversity and inclusion to business performance and innovation?

**Career Knowledge:** How should career messages be presented in primary and secondary school?

**Technology:** How can industry leverage technology to help it to address issues that can enhance work image and culture?

The BRIDGE (Building Routes Into Degrees with Greater Equality) project, a collaboration led by Gateshead College with Northumbria University and Derby College is seeking answers to these questions by our future interventions, activities and resources are designed around seven themes aiming to:

- ✔ positively change young people’s perception of the sector;
- ✔ provide a diversity toolkit to support recruitment and promotion activities;
- ✔ challenge the stereotypes and unconscious bias within the sector through training and awareness raising.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Rebecca Strachan is an Associate Pro Vice Chancellor and Professor of Digital Technology and Education at Northumbria University. A leading expert in the exploitation of digital technologies to improve daily life, she believes we should be using technology in transformational ways to support student learning. With a keen interest in gender, diversity and STEM, she supports equality of opportunities for all and is a strong advocate of partnership working. An elected member of the IEEE Education Society Board of Governors, she was part of the team that developed their MOOC on Open Education. She recently led the EU funded IMPRESS project aimed at improving student services across higher education in the Ukraine (www.impress-eu.com) working with European partners, the Ukrainian government and four leading universities in Ukraine. She coordinates the Digital Learning Lab at Northumbria University and is working with a team in Nigeria to introduce digital games in the classroom. She is also the Faculty executive lead for NUSTEM, a major widening participation programme to engage more young people, particularly females in STEM (www.nustem.uk); and the university lead for the BRIDGE project, aimed at encouraging greater diversity in the construction sector (http://www.gateshead.ac.uk/bridge/).
For further information, see
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