

# Administration Committee

## Oral evidence: Support for Women in Construction in Parliament - 04 03 24, HC 571

Monday 4 March 2024

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Members present: Sir Charles Walker (Chair); John Cryer; Michael Fabricant; Marion Fellows; Navendu Mishra; Giles Watling.

Questions 1-44

### Witnesses

I: Kath Moore, Managing Director, Women Into Construction, and Jacqui Wordsworth, Business Development Director, WIC.

II: Chris Elliott, Managing Director of Strategic Estates, Gemma Collins, Director of Property and Asset Strategy, Strategic Estates, Matthew White, Programme Director, R&R Delivery Authority, and Janet Campbell, HR Director, R&R Delivery Authority.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Kath Moore and Jacqui Wordsworth.

**Q1 Chair:** Welcome to our brief public inquiry on women in construction. We have Kath Moore and Jacqui Wordsworth with us. Kath, I think Women into Construction was your brainchild. Before we go into the main round of questioning, can you very briefly tell us what led you to create the organisation? I also believe we are in Women in Construction Week at the moment, so please tell the Committee why you thought this was important.

**Kath Moore:** I am a carpenter. I trained as a carpenter when I was 19. I fell into it by accident really, but I found that I absolutely loved it. I loved the whole thing of structure. When I started I thought maybe it was furniture and that kind of thing, but then I discovered it was structure. I was building walls, floors, roofs, and staircases and I absolutely loved it. I worked for a small company that focused on renovations for a few years. Again, I absolutely loved the work. I was only ever the only woman on site, so that was a little bit lonely, but I very much enjoyed the work. Every day is different, and you are learning constantly. I really felt, "Here I am. I'm the only woman on site, but surely there is going to be a flood of women coming in afterwards. There's bound to be. It's such a great area of work."

That firm went bust after a few years, and I set up my own business. I worked for myself for a while, and then I went into teaching carpentry. I found that I would be teaching a class mainly of young lads and one or two women, and the women would do really well—they would often concentrate a lot more and mess around a lot less—but at the end of the course the guys got the jobs. The women never got the jobs. Year after year that was repeated. I felt that there was something going on here where we have all these great women coming through and they are not getting into work.

An opportunity came to set up a project on the Olympic build—this was in 2008—to support women into the build. I thought, "Yes. This is something that I would like to be involved in; this is the next stage for me." I set up the Women into Construction project on the Olympic park, and we were very successful. We more than doubled the numbers of women working in construction on the park, but more to the point, we changed the culture. It was acceptable and normal to see women at all levels. We had women driving trucks, we had bricklayers, we had painters, we had construction managers, and we had engineers. That was that.

From there, when the Olympic build finished, which for us was in 2011, we went back to our funders and said, "Look, we have got something that really works here. Can you continue to fund us, and we will try and see if we can deliver it across London?" So we did, and that also worked really well, and since then we have continued to develop as an organisation.



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Now we are working pretty well nationally. That is a very short synopsis of it.

**Chair:** Fantastic—amazing. Jacqui joined you in 2017, and, as they say, the rest is history. You are adding new chapters to your book. I am going to bring in Giles, who has got a couple of questions.

- Q2 **Giles Watling:** It is an amazing story, particularly going into that construction site in 2008 when it was massive—it was the biggest thing going. It sounds like a silly question, but what does Women into Construction actually do? By which I mean, how do you do it, who do you talk to and how do you liaise with people? How does it work?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** First off, we try to encourage as many women as possible to think about construction and engineering as a sector, because we know that there are some amazing jobs here, as we have heard from some of our other colleagues. We go out and speak to women. We attract them to our information sessions and give them careers advice and guidance to tell them about the plethora of jobs available.

- Q3 **Giles Watling:** Do you hold job fairs and that sort of thing?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** We do online events and events in locations. We give women that guidance, and we help to put them through some training so they can get on site. We put them through some work experience so they can try it before they make a decision. The aim is to increase the supply of women who are considering construction, but there is no point doing that unless we have contractors on the other side of the table that are willing and keen to take them on. The demand side of the equation is for us to talk to contractors—from clients all the way down through the supply chain. We talk to them about their recruitment needs and to understand the barriers there and to encourage women into their businesses. We try to break down those barriers through our employment programmes.

- Q4 **Giles Watling:** Exactly on that point: do you meet resistance along the way, and do you find it relatively easy to overcome?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** We have had a lot of resistance over the years. I think that picture has changed in the last few years as diversity and inclusion is higher on the agenda for a lot of the main contractors and client organisations, particularly through public sector procurement. I think we are pushing at an open door now in terms of having those conversations with companies, but it is still challenging because it is great to talk the talk, but actually when we say, "Will you take a woman on a work placement? Will you give her a job?" that is sometimes when the barriers come up again.

- Q5 **Giles Watling:** Right, but you have moved a long way. How many women have you worked with?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** In 15 years, we have supported over 4,500 women through our programmes. We have trained 2,700 and put 1,000 through



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work placements. Just last year—our 15th year of operation—we got over 1,000 women into work. We are really proud of that statistic.

- Q6 **Giles Watling:** There are so many different jobs in construction. Are there some that women tend to go towards or that men would fill, or is it even across the board? How does it work?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** There are no jobs that are gender specific in construction—women can do any of them. For us, it is about opening up those opportunities so that they can see what they are, have a go at them and see if they are for them. In our programmes, we find that some roles are easier to start with to get to know the construction sector. At entry level, something like a document controller is a really good position to find out about construction and then decide where you want to go next. For the women who come to us through further or higher education, they have already made a decision around their career pathway, and then it is about, again, speaking to companies that have vacancies in those areas. We get a lot of women interested in site management and process management—those kind of roles at a white-collar level—but it is across the board. We have had women interested in absolutely everything from quantity surveying to plant—the works.

- Q7 **Giles Watling:** We have heard evidence from elsewhere, but do you find that women are surprised at the opportunities?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** Yes. There is nothing better than doing a site visit with a bunch of women who have never set foot on a building site before, and they hear from some of the companies about the roles they take on, walk round and get to see what is possible in terms of building something tremendous. Without fail, the women come out from our programmes excited about the opportunities and say, “I never knew that was possible.” It is such a fantastic career opportunity, so it is about raising that awareness and then giving them the tools and confidence to come and have a go.

**Giles Watling:** That is so encouraging.

- Q8 **Marion Fellows:** Why do you think it is important to encourage women into construction?

**Kath Moore:** Equality. There are so many fantastic opportunities, and it gives women a much wider choice of career. I think it is a hugely satisfying career. It is a type of career that you can progress in, so there are real opportunities. It is well paid. When we are working with schools, I have encountered jobs events where the schools come in and the girls go off to hair and beauty and the boys are directed to construction. Guess which is better paid, has far more interesting opportunities at the end of it and possibilities for progression? As we heard elsewhere, there are real opportunities to move within and to expand in various areas of work.

- Q9 **Marion Fellows:** I can attest to that from personal experience. Because my granddaughter wears false eyelashes and make-up, she was told to go into beauty therapy at a careers fair; I think that is the last thing she



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would ever want to do. I am definitely going to talk to her about this. We are here on the estate. We have heard from women who are working here. What do you think Parliament can do to encourage more women to take up roles here? Is it doing okay at the moment?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** I have had a few meetings here in terms of understanding what goes on here. I think it is clear from the parliamentary teams that there is a really good representation of women at senior levels and down through the workforce. That is great to see, and we have been encouraged by that. We have heard that there are some really fascinating career choices to be had here as well, so there is great opportunity.

For us, it is about the “what next?”. It is understanding where your baseline is, and being clear about what the data is telling you about how many women you have, where they are across the organisation and where you need to place emphasis. As we move into the bigger programmes—whether those are capital programmes, maintenance across the estate, or the restoration and renewal programme—there is huge opportunity for creating new jobs and to ensure that those jobs are open to women as well.

**Kath Moore:** This is a real opportunity for Parliament. This is a really high-profile site. Everyone has heard of it. Everyone knows what a fantastic opportunity it is. This is an opportunity for education: to educate women and girls about the different types of opportunities that are available. If Parliament is offering it, then you are leading the way. There is a real chance that you can make a change here.

**Chair:** There will be some great stories to tell, let us hope.

Q10 **Navendu Mishra:** Thank you both for joining us. There does seem to be a significant issue around gender parity in the construction sector. What do you think are the key barriers preventing women from entering the construction trade?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** We have worked with a lot of women over the years, and some key barriers come up time and again from the women we talk to. Certainly, discrimination and discriminatory behaviour on site is still prevalent. The dial has moved slightly, but we still hear comments on site and some of our women when they are out on work placements—

Q11 **Navendu Mishra:** Is that the biggest issue, do you think?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** It is one of the issues. It is not the single biggest issue. Lack of suitable PPE and welfare facilities is absolutely common, in terms of finding the right kit; it is a health and safety issue if you have not got the right size boots on but also, if you have to walk 20 minutes across site to go to a locked toilet, that is going to affect your productivity and your confidence at work. They are really easy things that we can fix.

Exclusion is a big issue in terms of the language that is used in offices on site. It is great if everybody is having a chat about the golf day, but if you are not particularly into golf, then that is something that can exclude you from those conversations. In a lot of the instances that we understand,



there are a lack of networks and a lack of support. If you are the only woman in your team or the only woman on site, it can be a bit lonely and you do have to project confidence and be assertive in your demeanour at work. That can be quite challenging to sustain over a period of time.

That is a number of barriers, but the single biggest barrier that we find in getting women into work and then keeping them there is around job flexibility. The women we work with are adults, and they come to us either unemployed or as career changers. If they have caring responsibilities outside work, we have to try to find roles that will facilitate those. It is about persuading employers that construction can be done flexibly, that you do not have to start at 7 o'clock every morning and that there could be different shift patterns. A young woman may not need that flexibility to start with, but at some point in their life, they might do and then it is difficult to stay in construction. We have an issue with retention and drop-out that needs to be addressed. Coming back to your question, Marion, on what we can do, it is about trying to instil some best practice through the parliamentary estate to look at some of these barriers and see what you can do to address them.

- Q12 Navendu Mishra:** I had a follow-up question regarding what impact bodies such as the House of Commons can have. I think that Kath addressed that in the previous question. On the flipside, what are the challenges for organisations when encouraging women into the construction industry? Are there any?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** There are. Of the companies we work with, some of the larger ones—the main contractors; the tier 1s—have a strategy. They have a plan; they are addressing this issue. We find that the challenges are further down the supply chain—companies that may have been told to do this as part of the procurement strategy but do not necessarily have the buy-in or, frankly, the resources to do it. Cascading knowledge and understanding through the supply chain is a challenge for a lot of our contractors.

- Q13 Navendu Mishra:** Do you think some organisations do this as a tick-box exercise just to secure a contract? Is there a lot of that in the industry?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** There is an element of that in tenders, but the better organisations we work with follow through, deliver on those promises and really embrace the challenge. It is something we can work on down through the supply chain.

**Kath Moore:** We find that a lot of the social value managers we work with, in particular, really believe in this and want to make it work. That enables us to facilitate it—to help make it happen.

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** Yes, one of the challenges we find is that social value managers are fully up for it and want to employ a more diverse workforce and create new jobs, but when the contract has been priced, there is no headroom for additional individuals on the site, no additional training positions and no flexible positions, so the subcontract is constrained in terms of how it is being procured and offering those



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opportunities. How you procure and what you can build into procurement packages is something to be looked at.

**Chair:** Michael will act as the sweeper now and make sure that if we have missed any questions, they are asked.

- Q14 **Michael Fabricant:** Kath, you talked about your experience being a woodwork teacher. I am afraid that reminded me, rather similarly, of my experience in a woodwork class, although not as a teacher—I would have been one of your worst students, flinging things around and all the rest of it. That brought me onto something else you talked about in schools generally. This sounds an incredible thing to say in 2024, but do you think that school career masters and mistresses, or whatever we call them now—teachers—are sufficiently advanced or open-minded to suggest to their girl pupils that they should go into construction?

**Kath Moore:** We could support our teachers more with education about construction and the different opportunities that are available. Everyone knows what a doctor, lawyer or politician does, but construction is a bit of a grey area. People do not realise the breadth of opportunity. We have all been to the doctor and to hospital, but you can't just walk onto a construction site. You can't really see how these things work. That can be a bit of an issue. But yes, we should support teachers more.

- Q15 **Michael Fabricant:** I am not that familiar with construction. I used to set up radio and television stations, but other people did the actual building part of it. There are organisations such as the Construction Industry Council. Do you think they could be doing more? Have you approached them and said, "Look, you could have a real role here in making contact with schools and promoting the industry."

**Kath Moore:** Yes. The Construction Industry Training Board does a massive amount to promote the industry.

- Q16 **Michael Fabricant:** Does it promote the industry as a job for women?

**Kath Moore:** Yes. It has female role models. It has a fantastic website, Go Construct, which is all about the different roles available, and it showcases women in those roles.

- Q17 **Michael Fabricant:** That begs the question: if there is all that, why isn't it working? Why is it that the girls go off and do one thing and the boys go off and do something else? Nothing seems to have changed since I was at school.

**Kath Moore:** Go Construct is a website—we need more than that. We need more support for teachers and more education for them about the fantastic opportunities. It was mentioned that there is a preconception that you use either your brains or your hands in a job—construction, of course, uses both. There can be a feeling among teachers of, "We'll send the ones who are not going to make it to university off to construction." We need to challenge all these preconceptions about construction, not just for girls but for boys.



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- Q18 **Chair:** Thank you. Just before you go, I thank my colleague, Natalie Elphicke, who has been working closely with Women into Construction. She helped to facilitate this session, namely by introducing us to each other, so in Natalie's absence, I thank her.

One final question on further education colleges. Are you working with them? I am sure you are. Are they receptive?

**Jacqui Wordsworth:** Yes, we are. That is one of the many routes that we use to find our women. We have good relations with FE colleges, HE colleges and DWP in terms of job centres. For us, it is about finding women everywhere. The women on those programmes have already made a positive choice for construction, which is great, and we want to just scoop them along and make sure that they get the jobs at the end of it. It is also about challenging those women who have never considered it, so career changers or women who have good transferable skills from other sectors who could really add value to the construction sector. We want to find as many women out there as possible, from all avenues.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, Kath and Jacqui, and thank you for being so concise because we are back on time for our final panel. I hope you can stay and listen to the last set of witnesses.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chris Elliott, Gemma Collins, Matthew White and Janet Campbell

- Q19 **Chair:** Thank you for joining us today. We all know who you are, but for anybody watching, we are about to receive evidence from the House authorities and people involved with restoration and renewal. For the benefit of those sitting behind you and anybody watching the session today, could I ask you all to introduce yourselves?

**Chris Elliott:** Good afternoon. I am Chris Elliott, managing director of Strategic Estates in Parliament.

**Gemma Collins:** I am Gemma Collins, director of property and asset strategy in Strategic Estates at the House of Commons.

**Matthew White:** I am Matthew White, programme director for the Delivery Authority for restoration and renewal.

**Janet Campbell:** Good afternoon. I am Janet Campbell, HR director for the Delivery Authority.

- Q20 **Chair:** We have just had Women into Construction giving evidence, and earlier today we had some of the women who work on the estate giving evidence about their experiences in a private session. What do you make of what you have heard so far today? The House has a good story to tell, but what more could we be doing and what more would you like to do? We will start with Chris and work our way down.

**Chris Elliott:** A lot of what we heard from Women into Construction resonates. I think we are doing some good things. We have some good

data as a client organisation in terms of where we are, for example, as Strategic Estates.

To give you some statistics, 55% of my entire organisation are women. Five of my six senior managers who report to me are women. Women are operating in a whole breadth of roles across the organisation. We have 40 women in frontline project management roles, and we have women in administration roles and in highly technical roles. Our head of architecture is a woman and our principal electrical engineer is a woman.

However, there is more that we can do, and a number of the topics that have been talked about are things that we are actively looking at and want to pursue. It is great to have the opportunity to talk about it today, because with your support we can do more.

**Chair:** After this first round of questions, we will come on to how we can perhaps work better with our contractors, because obviously you have suppliers. Gemma?

**Gemma Collins:** I agree with that. My professional background is in architecture, so it was interesting hearing the commentary today. I can relate to much of what they said. I have been in the industry for 30 years and I have seen improvements, but there is obviously still a long way to go.

The key areas that they talked about include welfare facilities and the importance of having support—a mentor or role model to speak to. Another thing that they slightly touched on was understanding technical capability. As a woman, that is something that I have come across: whether you are taken seriously when you are in a technical role, and how you can support people and grow people's confidence in that field.

**Chair:** Matthew?

**Matthew White:** We are absolutely committed to making R&R an attractive and rewarding programme for women to work on. The important thing is to say why, and sometimes we lose that message. Having been lucky enough to have worked on seven major construction programmes, I have learned that the most successful teams in those programmes are the ones with the most diverse communities of people, both gender and background diversity.

In terms of advertising roles and looking to the future, I think that the construction industry has a bit of an image problem. To support engineering and construction, I need problem solvers, people with ingenuity and creativity, forensic planners, change managers and risk managers in the team. That is the broad aspect of construction and engineering. As we have heard today, it is much broader than what you see out on the street, which tends to be the scaffolding and the holes being dug in the roads. Those are important parts, but they are only a fraction—the tip of the iceberg—of a very exciting and rewarding industry.

Q21 **Chair:** Janet, you are the HR guru, so you have a huge role to play in



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attracting these diverse teams into the industry and into restoration and renewal. What challenges are you facing? What successes are you having?

**Janet Campbell:** It is really important to pick up on what Matt is saying. We are keen to make sure that the Delivery Authority is an attractive, inclusive place for women to come into. We have a range of things that we are already doing. It was great to hear, from the earlier evidence, that some of the things that we are doing are what is required in the industry to attract women.

I will give a couple of examples while I have the floor, if I may. In relation to attracting, it is worth talking about a couple of things. The first is that we use a gender decoder on our job descriptions and job adverts. A gender decoder is a tool that enables you to analyse the words in a job description, or in other written material, and pick out any bias. That may be gender bias, other bias or exclusive. We use the gender decoder to make sure that, when we are advertising jobs, we are using language that is inclusive and encouraging from the very outset.

Quite often job descriptions can run to six pages, and there is a massive list of all these essential requirements. Research shows us that women are very likely to rule themselves out at the application stage if they cannot tick off all the essential requirements, so we are trying as a matter of course to reduce the list of essential requirements in any job description.

The final thing I will say at this point is around pay. We heard about pay earlier on. It is really important to have pay transparency, and the salaries for all our jobs in the Delivery Authority are advertised with the job. We do not ask applicants to disclose their salary history through the recruitment process. That is really important, because it means that as an organisation we reduce the opportunities to bring historical pay gaps into the Delivery Authority.

**Chair:** That is really smart.

Q22 **Navendu Mishra:** Thank you all for joining us. I have two questions to follow up on some of what we heard from the frontline colleagues who work on the estate. My first question is what happens if someone working on the estate who is not employed directly by the House of Commons or House of Lords faces discrimination: is that something that they would take up with their employer, or would they take it up with the House authorities?

My second question is this. We have some data for the gender split with the various contractors and overall. When it comes to recruitment of women, is the House open to recruiting from all the different communities, as in ethnic diversity? London is quite a diverse place. How is that going? Are there any comments on that?

**Chris Elliott:** On the first question, in the first instance they would raise that with their employer, but if it is not being resolved at a local level, we as the client organisation have to take an attitude where we can support

the individual if they are not getting resolution. On the second matter, yes, we are open to applications from any background or any walk of life.

- Q23 **Navendu Mishra:** On the first question, is there a widely advertised process as, for example, people working for IPSA or in the House of Commons have with the ICGS?

**Chris Elliott:** Yes.

- Q24 **Navendu Mishra:** For people working for contractors with an issue, is there an advertised route that they can pursue?

**Chris Elliott:** Each company will have its own scheme.

- Q25 **Navendu Mishra:** I appreciate that, but if they are not getting any progress or any movement on that, is there an advertised process or would they just speak to—

**Chris Elliott:** They would just speak to us. I would need to go away to check their specific access to ICGS.

**Navendu Mishra:** Okay. I was not sure whether ICGS was open to contractors. Is it possible, Chair, to have some data on the ethnic diversity of the workforce in future, or is that not possible? Maybe it is something to discuss later.

- Q26 **Giles Watling:** One thing that has cropped up in the evidence that we have taken today on equality is the provision of basic things like PPE and toilets. Matthew and Chris, as programme director and MD, what are you going to do about that? It is a fundamental. It is just wrong.

**Chris Elliott:** It is fundamentally wrong. It was disappointing to hear, but this is very relevant and it resonates with those two things. We are actively looking at how to mandate contractually appropriate fit PPE; that is one thing that we will actively look at in our plans going forward. Secondly, one thing that has been important for me is that we are raising the standards of construction, welfare and accommodation across the estate in general, in a broader sense. We are in the process of developing some new accommodation at the House of Lords end of Parliament, and our responsibility is to make sure we get the right facilities in there to address this issue.

- Q27 **Giles Watling:** Absolutely, but with all due respect this is something that should have happened years ago. If you have both men and women working on the same site, they should have access to the same facilities.

**Chris Elliott:** I agree.

**Giles Watling:** Okay. You are getting on to it. Matthew, have you anything to add?

**Matthew White:** Certainly. For restoration and renewal, we are definitely in the foothills of the programme, but it is very important at this stage that we start as we mean to go on. We have recently procured specially designed PPE, which we are rolling out with the survey works that are



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progressing. We have also acquired equal welfare facilities, which are only small at this stage, as the survey works are relatively small compared with the works of Strategic Estates, but it is important to grow from there and to show that we mean what we say in all aspects.

- Q28 **Giles Watling:** I am just taken aback that it is only coming in now, after R&R has been going on for some time. We have seen the entire Elizabeth Tower covered up and opened up again. Surely there were women working on that site as well.

**Matthew White:** That was not part of the restoration and renewal programme. I am pleased to say that we have started with that equal diversity for gender and facilities on site.

**Giles Watling:** Janet, do you have anything to add to that from the HR point of view?

**Janet Campbell:** I would add only one other thing to what Matt has said about our initiatives. In the Delivery Authority going forward, we are looking at having specially designed PPE for women, which will include maternity ranges and PPE for women who observe the hijab or the burqa, for example. Those are things that we are looking at now. As Matt said, we have started as we mean to go on.

- Q29 **Giles Watling:** Can you apply pressure from an HR point of view on toilets as well?

**Janet Campbell:** Indeed, it is about having equal welfare facilities for everybody, from the very beginning, from the outset.

- Q30 **Giles Watling:** I have a final question for you, Gemma. What has been your experience generally, as a woman working in the construction industry?

**Gemma Collins:** It has been a very positive experience. I also went into architecture because I loved structures, building things and mathematics. I also think that being on site is really important, because that is where you learn your technical skillset. One thing is that when I started in my architectural career, I did not have any female role models; there were no female technical tutors who had practical experience. I think that is one of the things that Parliament has supported me in. I now do outreach with university students, so there is a connection into the day to day. That is something that has been raised by people: it is really important to have someone you can go and talk to and see that career path.

The other thing is that it is important to ensure that people are comfortable on site. Again, doing tours, opening up and allowing those conversations is really important as well, and it is about having that time for feedback. This has been a really positive forum because it has allowed people to have that voice. It is really important to ensure that Strategic Estates and Parliament as a whole continue to allow those forums to happen, so we can get that full feedback. Like you say, some of the things raised today were apparent when I started, and although I have seen positive changes, there are still undercurrents of some of those things still



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happening. I really applaud this event today to allow those things to be voiced, and it is something we will take away from that today.

Q31 **Giles Watling:** So we have come a certain way but there is further to go?

**Gemma Collins:** Yes, absolutely.

**Giles Watling:** As the mother of Parliaments, we should be leading the way.

**Chair:** There you go.

Q32 **Michael Fabricant:** I am going to ask you a couple of questions, Gemma, as you have been in the business a while. We heard earlier that one person challenged a woman saying she would not be able to pick up a 100 kg pack of anything. Having tried to pick a 80 kg Royal Marines bergen, I can say that 100 kg is a challenge to anyone. Gemma, in reality, is there anything in construction that you think a woman cannot do which a man could?

**Gemma Collins:** No, and a point was raised earlier that was very relevant about how people consider what skills are required in construction. Especially today, if you look at construction, there is such a wide range of skillsets and innovation needed. I completely agree with what Matthew said earlier about the fact that you need that diverse and inclusive workforce. For me, a meeting that has a range of diversity within it gives much better perspectives, different outlooks and better solutions. So to answer your question, absolutely not.

Also, on site you are only ever allowed to lift 20kg on your own, without having someone to help you, so I think it is not important. Everybody should have that opportunity, but it is about ensuring that you understand what is required to allow those people to deliver, and that is where we should be in today's society. By having that range and diversity of people involved, you definitely get better outcomes.

Q33 **Michael Fabricant:** Thank you. I was intrigued by Janet's point, which I thought was excellent, that you do not import the unfairness in salaries from previous organisations. That is in R&R, so I am going to swing over to Chris. Do we have a similar policy on the estate generally?

**Chris Elliott:** I do not have the statistics to hand, but from the perspective of the gender pay gap, Parliament as a whole has done a lot of work to close that gap.

Q34 **Michael Fabricant:** Do you have that policy that Janet talked about? When you bring in people from outside, you do not look at what their payment patterns have been historically.

**Chris Elliott:** Again, I don't have the details of the policy to hand, but we operate it as a policy Parliament-wide, because we are part of Strategic Estates. As opposed to where the R&R Delivery Authority is an organisation in its own right, we operate under Parliament's wider auspices, rather than having a Strategic Estates-specific policy.



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Q35 **Michael Fabricant:** In the broadest possible way, you believe you are an equal opportunities employer?

**Gemma Collins:** Absolutely, and I can say, as someone who line-manages and hires on quite a regular basis, that we do not discuss salary in the interview process. It is completely separated.

Q36 **Chair:** There's the price of the job, basically?

**Gemma Collins:** Yes. So you are purely talking to someone on a qualitative basis.

**Navendu Mishra:** Chair, is it possible to get that data for the next meeting?

**Chair:** As Chris says, that is a matter for the House, so there will be a House policy and the director of HR can provide us with what the House policy is on that. I don't want to lay this at Chris's door, because he does what the House does.

Q37 **Marion Fellows:** We have already heard the whole business about how difficult it is going to be, because construction will take place during business as usual and sometimes it is going to be a bit more difficult to place women, who might have difficulty working later because of caring responsibilities or other responsibilities. It should be factored in, but has that been factored in to what you are doing? Do the equality policies cover that kind of scenario as well?

**Matthew White:** From a restoration and renewal point of view, for the future and our planning it is a big feature of how we are looking at the work.

We are trying to take learnings from other industries where there is an operating business to maintain. The railway industry tends to work outside business as usual, as do airports. The airports especially have been very successful in promoting a flexible working and gender equal basis around broadening the skill-set, because some of these skills don't need to be implemented and the jobs don't actually need to be done during the time that the site work is done. It is actually the planning of the work that is adding more value to the construction industry, as is getting the job done well than sometimes doing the work. It is about reinforcing and promoting those other jobs and those other skills and capabilities that is really attracting women into the industry.

Q38 **Chair:** Clearly you are direct employers but you also have a lot of contractors. What leverage do you have over your suppliers with regard to the framing of contracts for the recruitment of their own staff who then come and work here?

**Chris Elliott:** One of the things we already do in any procurement that happens at Parliament—any of our procurements or any broader procurements—is have a clear, unambiguous weighting around social sustainability, which covers this area, and includes things like gender diversity. For example, when we survey our big suppliers, most of them,



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about 80%, say they actively pursue schemes to encourage diversity. Pretty much all of the say that they have positive schemes to help women into roles. I think we heard that from Women Into Construction earlier. Most of the big suppliers in construction—what you typically call the tier 1 suppliers—have a plan, a strategy and the resources to do that. We can hold them to account through our leverage—through the social sustainability weighting in our procurement. Where it becomes more challenging is making sure that flows down and through to some of the smaller suppliers.

The positive leverage we have as a client organisation, the role we have to play with our weighting, is saying, “Unless you take this seriously, it’s going to affect your procurement score.” That is the leverage that we can bring. And we must recognise that we need to put some investment into this as well.

**Janet Campbell:** Our process is very similar to the one that Chris has just described for Strategic Estates. Our EDI policy is included with all of our key contracts to ensure that there is an environment of equal opportunity for everybody. We measure those in our annual EDI report. In that report, as well as the diversity of the Delivery Authority as an independent entity, we report on the diversity make-up of the entire restoration and renewal programme, including our key supplier data.

Q39 **Chair:** This will be the final question from me; Nav has a concluding question. How can you monitor this? It’s one thing to say, “Here’s the tender document that people have to fill in and they have to score highly on areas that are under discussion now,” but how do you make sure that the words they put in those documents are actions? How do you monitor their performance against the tender requirements?

**Gemma Collins:** Currently, on Norman Shaw North and also on 1 Derby Gate, we have key performance indicators. Internally, we have 72 KPIs that we check against, and we work collaboratively with the contractor to see how they are meeting them. For them to meet them when it comes to social value, it also means sometimes that we need to change how we are working. We have worked with an external consultant to look at the social value of that, using the Treasury Green Book. That allows us to put a social value cost against it. For instance, at the moment we have worked out that Norman Shaw North has had about £3 million of social value applied to it within the social value bank. As the ladies from Women into Construction said, seeing that allows you to understand your baseline and then the actions that you need to take to improve.

Q40 **Chair:** This really will be the final question from me before I bring in Nav to wind up. We had Women into Construction before us today and we have had meetings with them outside the meeting. I don’t think that was the first interaction you had had with Women into Construction, but—this is a loaded question, isn’t it, because you’re only going to say yes—is it possible that we can take forward this relationship and they can have a positive impact on our future hiring practices, bringing in their expertise and experience to support what we want to do and are already doing?

**Matthew White:** Absolutely. From a major programmes point of view, it is essential for us to paint that broader picture that working with various networks can absolutely help us do. I know that major programmes in the past could sit back and wait for things to happen and people to come to them. We need to get out on the front foot, on the doorsteps, working with networks, to make sure that those messages are getting out.

**Chair:** Fantastic.

**Chris Elliott:** The answer from the House authorities now is yes. We have continued to have that engagement, and listening to the feedback and views today, we heard a couple of the things that we were already thinking about, particularly in terms of the importance of education outreach, ambassadors in schools and mentoring for women in construction. Those are some ideas we want to take forward, and we want to learn from expertise as to how to do that best.

**Chair:** Brilliant. Nav, you have one last question and then we will let you all go.

- Q41 **Navendu Mishra:** This is for Gemma and Chris. Do you think that Parliament does enough to advertise networks like ParliGender to women who work for contractors and other women who work on the estate?

**Chris Elliott:** If I may, I will give some more thought to that. I have recently, for example, taken up this post: I am the Commons Executive champion for the ParliAble network. It's very recent and I have come only relatively recently into my role here, so I would like to have a look at that in more detail.

**Gemma Collins:** I think this is similar to the point that you raised earlier. We very much understand the links for people who work directly for us, but in terms of working with our contractors, we need to understand that relationship.

- Q42 **Navendu Mishra:** Fair enough. If we are not doing enough to advertise the ParliGender group, is that something that could be taken forward, depending on how the group is set up and all of that?

**Chris Elliott:** I can certainly take it away for discussion with my colleague on the Executive Board who is the champion for the ParliGender network. I am happy to do that.

**Navendu Mishra:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you very much for coming here today, telling us what you're up to and answering our questions. I really appreciate that. We are ending one minute before time. That is amazing in this place, as all those of us who work here know.