

Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity School of Business and Management

The Women into Construction Project:
an assessment of a model for increasing
women's participation in construction

Tessa Wright





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Queen Mary University of London

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The report has sought to represent the views of participants accurately, but the interpretation and conclusions drawn are the responsibility of the author alone.

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Executive summary

This report provides an independent assessment of the Women into Construction (WiC) project. The project was established in 2008 to provide opportunities for women to work on the construction of the Olympic Park in London, and redress women's longstanding underrepresentation in the construction industry. Following the project's success in gaining work experience for women on the Olympic Park site, funding was extended and the project has continued since 2011, providing work placements and brokering employment for women in manual trades and professional construction roles in London. The project receives financial support from the industry skills body CITB and is hosted by Be Onsite, the charitable arm of construction company Lend Lease.

A recent call for the construction industry to renew its efforts to address women's underrepresentation (Munn, 2014) highlights current initiatives that have the potential to produce lasting change in the culture of the industry, mentioning the Women into Construction Project. Furthermore, an inquiry into women in the workplace by the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee of the House of Commons last year recommended that the Government should use its procurement policies to promote better gender representation in certain sectors, and should build on the example of 'best practice' shown by the Women into Construction project (Business Innovation and Skills Committee, 2013: 67).

This therefore represents a good moment to assess the project's achievements so far. The findings presented here are based on a small-scale research study that explored the perspectives of a variety of participants and stakeholders in the WiC project – women participants, employers, funders and those managing the project. The objectives of the research were to explore:

- The experiences of WiC project participants of taking part in the project and of work placements and/or employment;
- The motivations of employers for engaging with the WiC project and their experiences of providing a placement or employment to women participants;
- The effectiveness of the WiC project model in achieving its aims, and to consider barriers and opportunities for expansion.

The main findings of the research are summarised here.

Background

1. Women represent a small minority of the UK construction workforce, accounting for only one per cent of craft and trades occupations and eleven per cent of those in the construction professions. The construction of the Olympic Park for the London 2012 Games was viewed as an opportunity to address the underrepresentation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled workers in the construction workforce, with employment

targets introduced for each group. The WiC project was established in 2008, with funding from the CITB and the London Development Agency (LDA), to support contractors in meeting the gender employment targets.

2. The percentage of women working on the Olympic Park site more than doubled compared to the industry average, with the WiC project training 455 women, placing 87 into work placements and 255 in employment between 2008 and June 2011. Following these successes, funding for the project was continued in 2011, through the CITB and Be Onsite, to enable the project to provide work placements and broker employment for women across London.
3. Since 2011 the project has consistently achieved results beyond its targets, training 450 women, and placing 135 into work placements and 195 into employment, approximately half of whom are in the manual trades and half in professional construction occupations. The key activities of the project are: outreach to women to raise awareness of construction opportunities and recruit project participants; preparation and training of women, including safety certification; provision of supported work placements (unpaid) with participant expenses met by the project; brokerage of women into employment; and ongoing support to women participants, both during and after the programme.

Research methodology

4. The research employed qualitative methods, with fieldwork carried out by the report author between October 2013 and January 2014. A total of 36 individuals participated in interviews and a focus group, with data collection comprising: 11 individual interviews with women who had done placements or obtained employment through the WiC project; one focus group with 10 women working or on placement at the East Village site on the Olympic Park; seven interviews with individuals representing six employers of different sizes that have worked with the WiC; eight interviews with other project stakeholders, including the project steering group and project managers (see Appendix).

Employer experiences

5. Employers were initially motivated to engage with the project for two main reasons: a commitment to workforce training and development, in particular to providing apprenticeships; and a need to find alternative ways to address labour and skills shortages.
6. The benefits of participation identified by employers are: access to high quality, well-prepared and trained workers; 'no risk' opportunities to try out women workers during the placement period; support in meeting local labour targets and demonstration of

commitment to workforce diversity, which was beneficial in competing for public sector contracts; and improvements in the working environment and image of the industry owing to female presence on site.

7. All employers interviewed had offered paid employment to selected women after completion of work placements, with women's eagerness to work in the industry identified as a valuable attribute. Most said that they would not have found these workers without the WiC project.

Women's experiences

8. Women greatly value the opportunity to "get a foot in the door" of the construction industry, often after many years of unsuccessful job searches. WiC's role as advocate for women to potential employers opened up opportunities which they were not gaining through other avenues or direct approaches to employers. For others, supported work placements gave them a chance to demonstrate their commitment and abilities, beyond their CVs.
9. The WiC programme is felt to offer very valuable preparation for employment, including: relevant training and certification, in particular the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card; financial help with buying tools; and work experience through placements supported by travel, food and childcare expenses. Provision of childcare costs enabled mothers returning to work to establish childcare arrangements before accepting paid employment.
10. The high level of individual and sustained support provided by project workers is significant in enabling women to overcome some of the factors that result in poor retention of women in the industry. Support includes advice or direct intervention in cases of bullying or harassment, exclusion or employer mistreatment; negotiation of more flexible working hours, of particular help to those with childcare responsibilities; plus regular reviews of progress and experience gained while on placement. The commitment, expertise and personal qualities of the project workers are highly valued by project participants.
11. Employment structures in the industry, characterised by high levels of self-employment in the manual trades in particular, means that some project participants struggle to gain sustained employment. This appears more difficult for older women entrants, who are above the usual age for apprenticeships. Nevertheless, the project continues to provide advice and information about employment opportunities to women who have been through the project, which broadens access to job vacancies.

12. Construction work offers huge variety and job satisfaction to women, contributing to a sense of achievement and increased confidence from acquiring skills that are predominantly associated with men. This challenges both their own preconceptions of their abilities, as well as societal stereotypes about the nature of women's and men's work.

Assessment of the WiC project model

13. The WiC project model is distinctive in addressing both 'supply' and 'demand' sides in its interventions to increase the women numbers in construction. On the supply side, it ensures that women are skilled and ready for employment or work placements, while on the demand side, it seeks to persuade employers of the business benefits of participation in the scheme.
14. Work placements give women an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities to employers, who can regard them as "an extended interview". The findings suggest that employers' positive experiences of women carrying out placements has contributed to changing attitudes about women's suitability for construction work.
15. While there are wider concerns about the practice of unpaid work placements and the abuse by employers of free labour, women interviewees were generally positive about the experience gained on placement and the opportunities they opened up in a sector where women face discriminatory obstacles to entry. Regular reviews are undertaken by project workers, reducing the risk of placements that are not worthwhile or exploitative.
16. Procurement demands from clients specifying local labour targets and workforce diversity are significant in driving the engagement of main contractors with WiC. However subcontractors also see benefits in the tendering process from their involvement with WiC. New legal requirements for enhancing 'social value' from spending by public authorities appear likely to become increasingly important in placing employment and training requirements on contractors.
17. Some employers favour specific targets for women's labour as a means of requiring actions by contractors which they believe would lead to changes in the male-dominated industry culture. Some feel that more widespread adoption of targets for women would recognise their existing good practice in this area, and provide a level-playing field in tendering for contracts.
18. The project's specific focus on women enables it to take a 'holistic' approach to addressing the variety of obstacles to women's increased participation in construction. It offers appropriate support to help reduce barriers to entry (i.e. lack of confidence,

childcare, working hours and employer resistance) as well as advice and support in case of workplace problems. This high level of support is believed to be a factor in the high rates of retention in employment achieved by the project, in comparison to other employment access schemes.

19. The project has impressive success rates for supporting unemployed women into employment: more than three-quarters (78%) of women who gained work through the project were previously unemployed, half of whom were claiming state benefits. Of those who were previously employed, almost half (49%) moved from part-time employment into full-time positions. The majority of project participants are from ethnic minority backgrounds, with the greatest number (36%) describing themselves as black or black British. The project therefore contributes to improvements in the employment opportunities of women, and particularly those facing additional disadvantage in the labour market. Furthermore, by entering better-paid traditionally male occupations (compared to more typically female occupations with lower rates of pay) women may be improving their economic position.
20. The sustained funding to the project, provided by the construction industry, is crucial to the results it has achieved. In contrast to initiatives to increase women's presence in construction which are limited by short-term funding, the duration of the WiC project, now completing its sixth year, has enabled relationships of trust to grow and develop with contractors. Furthermore, the experience gained by project workers of what is effective can be built upon to obtain increasing results.
21. The project currently operates on limited resources, although it is thought to offer good value for money by stakeholders. However it is small and is constrained by its limited resources – the research suggests that, with increased resources, the model operated by the project has the potential to achieve greater results for women in construction in London and beyond.
22. The WiC project operates on a variety of levels to raise awareness of construction opportunities for women, for example through links with JobCentre Plus, colleges and other initiatives that share their objectives. With more resources, there is the potential for the WiC project to take greater advantage of such links to maximise the benefits of collaboration to increase women's numbers in construction.

Opportunities for the future

The research has identified some areas of opportunity for the future development of the project. Suggestions for taking advantage of these are summarised here.

1. **Construction growth and skills shortages:** several high-profile construction projects in London will continue to demand skilled labour, while industry predictions are for growth of an average 2.2 per cent between now and 2018, the equivalent of 182,000 jobs (Lowe and Woodcroft, 2014: 73). This provides a significant opportunity for employers to look to women and other underrepresented groups to address these labour shortages.
2. **Procurement and social value:** the findings show the importance of public procurement processes to driving commitment to equality actions. Public bodies have obligations under the public sector equality duty to have regard to advancing equality, including through the services that they procure. Additionally the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public authorities to consider gaining additional benefits from their spending. Demands from public sector clients are therefore likely to become more significant, providing further business imperatives for contractors to engage with WiC. Project supporters at a strategic or policy level may have a role in encouraging public authorities to use the social value legislation to improve the social well-being of an area through setting employment targets that support unemployed or low paid women to gain better paid work in construction.
3. **Employability and social policy objectives:** the project contributes to wider social policy objectives of reducing the numbers of recipients of welfare benefits and increasing opportunities for those at a disadvantage in the labour market. The project has high success rates for supporting unemployed women into employment and a majority of project participants are ethnic minority women. Thus the achievements of the project in improving women's employment opportunities, particularly those facing additional disadvantage in the labour market, should be advertised more widely, and exploited to tap into funding streams addressing employability, gender inequality, social deprivation and inclusion.
4. **The growing reputation of the project:** the project has growing recognition for its achievements within the industry and at policy level. However there is more that can be done to raise the project's profile more widely across the industry, for example by encouraging engaged employers to promote the benefits to other firms, particularly to small and medium-sized contractors. The project website can be developed to publicise the project's achievements, with consideration given to the use of other media such as video and social media.
5. **Project development and growth:** the project is beginning the process of establishment as a community interest company, which will allow it to seek funding from a wider range of sources. However, support and financial commitment from

within the construction industry will remain important to both the operation and credibility of the project.

6. **Expansion outside London:** plans include broadening the reach of the project beyond London, to other areas of construction growth, particularly in social housing, for example. The focus is on expansion to Birmingham and Wales, where the project is developing its existing networks and collaborating with partners with shared objectives to increase women's numbers in construction. This will represent a significant new phase for the project, with the potential to provide many more opportunities for women to enter construction employment.
7. **Further support for women participants:** women participants in WiC valued contact with other women through the project, although the level of contact was variable. A self-sustaining support network of WiC participants – past and present – could provide further support and possibly reduce reliance on WiC project workers for support. A variety of formats could be considered, including use of the internet and social media. Additionally, the developing women's network within construction union UCATT may provide further avenues for support.
8. **Collaborative partnerships:** the project currently collaborates with a range of partners, for example in providing training and employment opportunities. To maximise this impact, there may be scope to strengthen collaborations with other compatible initiatives, such as the women's training offered through the UCATT learning centre, together with projects that seek to build employability and address problems of short-term and self-employment in the industry.
9. **Employer engagement with equality and inclusion:** the research identified business benefits to employers from engagement with the WiC project. These benefits could be promoted more widely to employers, including for example, through the BeFair Framework initiative, supported by CITB, which helps construction companies to achieve cultural change on equality and inclusion. There are opportunities for the WiC project to build links with employers involved in this initiative.
10. **Further research:** this small-scale study has identified some key questions and wider implications of the project that merit further investigation. These are: a) the impact of WiC activities on culture change within the sector, including the views of male workers and supervisors; b) the project's capacity for improving the employment opportunities for women at a disadvantage in the labour market and the longer-term employability of women participating in WiC; and c) a larger-scale evaluation of the impact of WiC project expansion on opportunities for women in London, Birmingham and Wales.

1. Introduction

Women are still a small minority of those working in the UK construction sector, representing only one per cent of craft and trades occupations and eleven per cent of those in the construction professions. These figures have remained persistently low, despite numerous initiatives over the past few decades to increase women's participation and, more widely, to urge the construction sector to address equality and diversity issues in relation to its workforce. A recent report, however, edited by Meg Munn MP (Munn, 2014) renews the call for the industry to address women's underrepresentation at a time of increasing demand for labour. The report highlights a number of current activities that have the potential to produce lasting change in the culture of the industry. One such initiative, as this report seeks to demonstrate, is the Women into Construction Project.

The Women into Construction (WiC) Project was originally established in 2008 to provide opportunities for women to work on the construction of the Olympic Park, as a way of increasing women's representation in construction. Due to the success that it achieved in providing work opportunities for women in construction, support for the project was extended after the completion of the Olympic Park, and the project has continued since 2011 with funding provided by the industry skills body CITB and hosted by Be Onsite, the charitable arm of construction company Lend Lease.

Although the project is relatively small, its effectiveness is starting to be recognised within the industry and beyond, with its results for supporting unemployed women into employment far in excess of similar government programmes (Lowe and Woodcroft, 2014). The effectiveness of the project has also been recognised at a political level. A report published last year following an inquiry into Women in the Workplace by the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee of the House of Commons recommended that the Government should set targets to encourage women to explore atypical work, particularly in sectors facing a skills shortage. Additionally, it recommended that the Government should use their procurement policies to promote better gender representation, building on the example of 'best practice' shown by the Women into Construction project (Business Innovation and Skills Committee, 2013: 67).

This therefore represents a good moment to assess the project's achievements to date, taking account of the views of those participating in it, and to consider the opportunities for its future. This report provides an independent assessment of the WiC project's achievements, based on a small-scale qualitative research study that explored the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders – women participants, employers, funders and those managing the project.

The report is organised in six further sections. An overview of the key issues facing women in construction work is presented in section two, based on existing research evidence.

Section three describes the research aims and methods adopted by the study. Section four explains the WiC project, outlining the background to the establishment of the project, followed by its current operation and results achieved. Section five presents the findings of the research in relation to the perspectives of employers engaged with the project. In section six, evidence from women project participants is presented of their experiences in the construction industry and their perceptions of the WiC project. An assessment of the WiC project model and its achievements, bringing together perspectives from employers, the women participants and other stakeholders, is provided in section seven. This also highlights some of the constraints and challenges faced by the project. Finally, section eight draws some conclusions and considers opportunities for the project for the future.

2. Women in the UK construction industry

There has been much evidence put forward to explain the reasons for women's low levels of participation in the UK construction sector, particularly in manual, technical and professional roles (women are more likely to be found in administrative or support functions). A summary of the problems facing women in the industry, together with suggested ways forward, is provided in a recent report edited by Meg Munn MP, published by the Smith Institute (Munn, 2014). A number of features of the industry explain why it remains unattractive to women entrants or fails to retain them. The poor image of the industry, which includes harsh and uncomfortable working conditions requiring physical strength (Gurjao, 2006) is one deterrent to women, in addition to long and inflexible working hours offering little support for working parents (Fielden et al., 2000; Watts, 2009). Additionally, when women do enter the industry, they encounter a male-dominated workplace culture characterised by 'laddish' behaviour, 'banter' and sexual harassment, still a fairly common experience for women in the manual trades in particular (i.e. Greed, 2006; Watts, 2007; Wright, 2013b).

Retention of women is therefore a problem, leading to a "leaky pipeline", contributing to the small numbers of women at the top (Lowe and Woodcroft, 2014). The reluctance of some employers to believe that women are suitable for construction work persists, alongside informal and discriminatory recruitment practices that exclude women (Bagilhole, 2014; GLA, 2007). Additional structural features of the industry disadvantage women in the manual trades in particular, such as the value placed on "on-the-job" learning, requiring access to work experience to consolidate college-based qualifications. Women typically have less access to such work experience due to informal recruitment networks (Byrne et al., 2005; Clarke and Gribling, 2008).

Despite the many difficulties identified here, accounts from women who remain in the industry report intense pride and satisfaction in the work, often commenting on their increased confidence outside the workplace too, suggesting the capacity to challenge gender stereotypes and build female empowerment, in addition to potential earnings benefits (Clarke et al., 2004; Munn, 2014; Smith, 2013; Wright, 2011a).

A historical perspective (Clarke and Wall, 2004; 2014) reveals moments when women increased their numbers in the building trades, for example during the two world wars of the twentieth century and in the 1970s and 1980s when local authority building departments took measures to recruit women. In London, this was due to a combination of campaigning (in particular through Women and Manual Trades), commitment from the then Labour-led Greater London Council (GLC), women's training workshops (supported by local authorities and the European Social Fund), the support of construction union UCATT and the equal opportunities policies of Labour-run local authorities (Wall, 2004). Many tradeswomen gained work in the Direct Labour Organisations (DLOs) of inner London

boroughs (Nelson, 2014; Wall, 2004). Public sector local authorities led the way in the employment of women in construction at that period, and there are indications that DLOs may be re-emerging and bringing women into new areas, such as low-energy social housing construction (Clarke and Wall, 2014).

Additionally, to address concerns about equality and diversity in the industry, including women's underrepresentation, there has been a "plethora of government initiatives" since the 1990s (Rhys Jones, 2006: 262), as well as industry measures to improve women's position. This has included initiatives led by the CITB and the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (Rhys Jones, 2006) and the development of a framework for action on equality and diversity by the Equality and Human Rights Commission on behalf of the Construction Leadership Diversity Forum (Peters and Allison, 2011). Skills shortages at various periods have prompted activity to increase the numbers of female workers.

Wider concerns about the effects of occupational gender segregation and its contribution to the persistent gender pay gap (HMSO, 2005; Women and Work Commission, 2006) have also led to measures to encourage women to enter male-dominated occupations, including construction (DCLG, 2007). However, many initiatives have typically only addressed either the supply or the demand side of the problem: for example, short-term projects with limited funding focused on supply-side measures such as raising awareness among girls and women of atypical careers or improving women's skills (Wright, 2011b); or demand-side measures to persuade construction employers of the business benefits of increasing the diversity of their workforces (CBI, 2009; Peters and Allison, 2011). In a current initiative that seeks to move beyond "isolated pockets of good practice" and to promote the necessary culture change across the industry, the CITB and Constructing Equality are working together on the BeFaIR Framework, a tool to support construction companies in mainstreaming cultural change (Lowe and Woodcroft, 2014).

There has been a renewed interest in using procurement processes to promote equality objectives in recent years from a legal (McCrudden, 2007; McCrudden, 2009), business (CBI, 2009) and policy perspective (EHRC, 2013; OGC, 2008). Indeed a report of an inquiry into women in the workplace by the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee of the House of Commons recommended that: "The Government should actively consider how they can promote better gender representation in their procurement policies, building on existing best practice as shown in the 'Women in [sic] Construction' project at the Olympic site." (Business Innovation and Skills Committee, 2013: 67). The report also advised the Government to set targets to encourage women to explore atypical work, particularly in sectors with a skills shortage.

3. Research methodology

This small-scale research study was conducted by the report author, with the co-operation of the WiC project managers and steering committee. The study used qualitative methods to understand the perceptions and experiences of a range of participants and stakeholders in the WiC project. This comprised: a) women who had participated in the WiC project; b) employers who had placed women in work placements or employment through WiC; and c) stakeholders and funders involved in the operation of the WiC project. The objectives of the research were therefore to explore:

- The experiences of WiC project participants of taking part in the project and of work placements and/or employment
- The motivations of employers for engaging with the WiC project and their experiences of providing a placement or employment to women participants
- The effectiveness of the WiC project model in achieving its aims, and to consider barriers and opportunities for expansion.

The research objectives, interview sample and questions were determined by the researcher in consultation with WiC project managers. The research design was limited by time, with fieldwork taking place between October 2013 and January 2014. Funding for research costs (including researcher time, interview transcription and travel expenses) was provided through the seed-corn fund of the School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University of London. The research proposal and methodology received approval from the Queen Mary University of London Research Ethics Committee.

3.1 Women participants

In total 21 women provided data on their perceptions of participation in the WiC project and work experience gained. This took the form of 11 individual interviews with women who had done placements or obtained employment through the WiC project (seven in the manual trades, four in professional occupations or studying for a degree) and one focus group with 10 women in manual trades and professional occupations working or on placement at the East Village site on the Olympic Park.

Women volunteered to take part in interviews or focus groups by responding to email requests from the project managers. Email requests were sent to those working or on placement through the project since its transfer to Be Onsite in 2011. Contact details of those who indicated they were willing and available to participate in the study were forwarded to the researcher, who contacted interviewees directly to arrange an interview in confidence. These took place at various locations convenient to the interviewees, mostly in cafes or the participant's workplace. The focus group, which took place at the East Village site, was organised by Project Manager Kath Moore, but no project workers participated in the discussion.

Interviewees broadly reflected participants in the WiC project in terms of representing both manual trades and professional construction occupations. They included a mix of women currently on placements and those who had gained employment, as well as one woman who was looking for work and two full-time students. Interviewees also reflected the ethnic diversity of project participants. Appendix 1 shows the occupation, work status and demographic characteristics of the women interviewees and focus group participants.

Guided by the ethical approval underpinning the project, interviews and the focus group were conducted in confidence and participants were reassured of the anonymity of their identities and that of their employers, to enable them to speak freely.

3.2 Employers

Interviews were carried out with seven individuals representing six employers of different sizes that have worked with the WiC providing work and placement opportunities for women. Companies involved included large building and management contractors, a civil engineering company and a painting and decorating contractor. Interviewees had a range of management responsibilities, including for employment and skills, corporate social responsibility and site and project managers (see Appendix 2). All but one of the employer interviewees was male, reflecting the industry composition.

The purpose of the interviews was to establish employer motivations for engagement with the WiC project, and their perceptions of the experience and benefits of participation. Employers were asked if they would be willing to participate in the research by WiC project workers, and volunteers then contacted the researcher directly who arranged to meet them for interview.

3.3 Project stakeholders

Eight interviews were conducted with other stakeholders involved in the WiC project, which included representatives of the project funders CITB and the host organisation Be Onsite (who comprise the WiC project steering committee). In addition interviews were conducted with a representative of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); a training provider and construction union organiser; and the WiC Project Managers (see Appendix 3 for list of stakeholder interviewees).

The purpose of the interviews with these selected individuals was to understand the objectives of the WiC project, how it operates and the perceptions of key stakeholders about its effectiveness.

3.4 Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed in full by a professional transcriber. The qualitative analysis software package NVivo was used to organise the data and support the process of coding

and analysing the interview material. Thematic coding was undertaken by the researcher, initially based on broad topics covered in interviews, and refined as key themes were identified. The NVivo software assists with the process of identifying key themes, and supports the use of memos to develop the analysis of emerging issues.

3.5 Limitations

The research undertaken was a small-scale, exploratory study limited by time and resources. The number of interviewees was relatively, and, as they were initially invited to participate in the study by WiC project workers, they could be said to represent only those supportive of the project. However, it is believed that participants generally appeared confident to freely express a range of opinions about their experiences of the project. It is felt that the study, therefore, provides a fair reflection of the achievements and constraints of the project as perceived by a range of its beneficiaries.

4. The Women into Construction Project

This section provides an overview of the activities and results achieved by the Women into Construction project. First it explains the background to the establishment of the project to meet the gender equality objectives of the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) in the construction of the Olympic Park, and then it proceeds to outline the project's main activities since 2011 when it moved from the Olympic Park to being hosted through Be Onsite.

4.1 Olympic Park engagement

The construction of the Olympic Park for the London 2012 Games was seen as an opportunity to address the traditional underrepresentation of certain groups in the construction workforce, specifically women, ethnic minorities and disabled workers. Targets were introduced for the employment of each of these groups, and were established from the start by the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA, 2007) in the tendering process for contracts. As a public body, the ODA was required to comply with the equality duties held by public authorities, requiring them to have 'due regard' to eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. However the ODA intended from the start to exceed its statutory obligations and establish a model of good practice in its construction programme (Thrush and Martins, 2011). Ideas about legacy were crucial to the London Olympics from the start, with clear objectives to achieve additional social benefits, in particular for the neighbouring boroughs, from the vast public investment going into the Games. To support the contractors in meeting the gender employment targets, the WiC project was established on the Olympic Park with funding from the CITB and the LDA. Furthermore, it was believed that increasing the number of women working in all areas of construction on the high-profile Olympic Park site would raise awareness of women's employment throughout the construction industry, resulting in a permanent change in the traditionally male culture of construction. This view was supported by the Olympic Minister at the time, Tessa Jowell, who visited the women working on site to help raise the profile (ODA, 2 December 2008). In its three years on the Olympic Park, the WiC project succeeded in more than doubling the percentage of women working on the site compared to the industry average, training 455 women in construction, placing 87 into work placements and 255 in employment. The project demonstrated that there are many women who are highly motivated and keen to find opportunities within the construction sector.

Equality targets appeared effective in producing change in the construction workforce, according to the ODA's analysis of its legacy on equality (Thrush and Martins, 2011). The target for employment of people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds was exceeded, reaching 24% of the workforce in June 2011, as table 4.1 shows.

Table 4.1: Targets and outcomes for Olympic Park and Athletes' Village workforce

Employee category	Benchmark/target percentage of workforce	Actual percentage of workforce (June 2011)
BAME backgrounds	15%	24%
Women	11%	5%
Disabled people	3%	1.2%

Source: Thrush and Martins, 2011, p.3

The 11% target for women was not met, achieving only 5%. However the report notes that the target included women in manual and non-manual roles, and only those actually working on the Olympic Park were counted, which excluded women based in headquarters of the contractors, few of whom had offices on site. Of the manual trades workforce, at its peak three per cent were women, an improvement on the national average of around one per cent. The WiC project also supported 28 women to gain apprenticeships, resulting in six per cent of apprenticeships on the Olympic Park going to women, compared to the industry average of 1.2 per cent (Thrush and Martins, 2011: 6).

4.2 The Women into Construction project since 2011

Following the successful results achieved on the Olympic Park, industry support for WiC was extended, through the CITB and Be Onsite, to continue to operate providing work placements and brokering employment across London. The challenge for the project then became engaging with a range of contractors and construction projects outside the framework of the carefully established structures and targets of the Olympic project.

The model operated by the WiC project involves both preparation for women wanting to enter construction roles and engagement with employers. In covering both manual trades and professional occupations, the WiC project is distinctive from other initiatives that are often focused on women in professional occupations, such as those seeking to increase women's numbers in engineering (Perkins, 2013).

Women are recruited to WiC from a variety of routes, including referrals from other agencies, such as JobCentre Plus (JCP) or construction colleges. Ongoing outreach activities include presentations to female students at construction colleges, attendance at jobs fairs and JCP events, participation in events such as National Apprenticeship week, and visiting schools. The project has had a firm relationship with JCP since its early days through the secondment of Project Manager Ranjit Samra from the DWP. Additionally good relationships are maintained with agencies such as LLABs (Local Labour and Businesses) run by local authorities to support residents into employment. The project also puts on taster courses to introduce women into the construction trades, run through local colleges, offering six to 10 week courses, typically three days per week. This raises awareness of construction roles

among women and allows them to assess their own suitability, before moving onto the next stages of the WiC programme.

On the employer side, WiC now has an extensive network of contractors with whom it works – currently totalling 52 organisations. This includes continued relationships with those developed on the Olympic Park, as well as new contractors. Large contractors engaged with WiC include: Ardmore, Lakehouse, Lovells, Mace, Mansells, Bam Nuttall, Morgan Sindall, Skanska and British Land. Additionally, strong relationships exist with some smaller specialist contractors such as painting and decorating firms Haslemere and K&M McLoughlin Decorating Limited.

The project continues to seek opportunities for women on large public projects, and has placed women with Crossrail, London Underground upgrade projects and has started to work with the Tideway Tunnels project, to place women into construction management and engineering placements and jobs involved in the planning process. Through Lend Lease, it has women working on the Stratford East Village development and the regeneration of the Elephant & Castle.

Women approaching WiC are first interviewed about their experience and career objectives by project workers. Once accepted onto the project they are offered appropriate training, for example in health and safety, working at heights, manual handling, and first aid, leading to various certifications including the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card necessary to work on a construction site and PASMA and IPAF cards. Workshops and individual support is available for CV writing.

A key element of the WiC model is the work placements, which support women who have trained in construction, but do not have site experience, into positions on site. This allows them to gain practical experience and exposure to job opportunities in construction. Placements vary in length from six to 13 weeks. Six-week placements are full-time, but 13 weekr placements require attendance two days a week, so that the hours are within the limits allowable for those claiming state benefits. Placements are unpaid, but expenses for travel, lunches and childcare are paid to participants.

The project also brokers women into employment, matching suitable applicants to opportunities that are notified to them by employers, forwarding CVs to employers and providing references.

Personalised support to women participants is ongoing throughout the WiC programme and beyond, and project workers undertake regular reviews of those on placement and entering employment, discussing progress with the women and their employers.

The project is currently completing its third year of operation since finishing on the Olympic Park, and has consistently achieved results beyond its targets. The total figures for numbers of women on work placements and placed in employment for years 1 and 2, plus the first 3

quarters of year 3, are shown in table 4.2. In addition, the project has provided training for 450 women and has 680 women registered on its database as having received support in employability skills.

Table 4.2: WiC totals July 2011 to March 2014

	Target	Achieved	Manual	Construction Professional
Work placements	132	135	55%	45%
Employment	110	195	48%	52%

Source: WiC project update reports

The majority of project participants are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Of those registered with the project (where ethnicity data is held): 36% are black or black British; 33% are white British; 17% are from other white backgrounds; 6% are from mixed backgrounds; and 5% are Asian or Asian British.

Of the women that have found work through the project, 78% were previously unemployed, split evenly between those claiming benefits, and economically inactive but not claiming benefits. Of the 22% who were previously employed, 49% went from part-time paid employment to full-time positions, 25% transferred from other full-time roles, 13% were previously students, and 3% were previously self-employed. This means that the great majority of women (94%) who gained employment through the project were previously either economically inactive, or transferring from part-time work, self-employment or student status to full-time paid work.

Two Project Managers undertake all the operations of the project. Office space and facilities are provided through Lend Lease. A Steering Group provides strategic level direction.

The project has started the process of growth and expansion of its operations outside of London. An initial stage of this growth is its establishment as a community interest company, which is in progress. Having an independent status will allow the project to seek funding from a wider range of sources, while maintaining financial support from within the construction industry. Work is underway on making a substantial application to the Big Lottery Fund which would enable the project to grow, with the appointment of two additional staff; a project manager and some much needed admin support. Plans also include broadening the reach of the project beyond London, to other areas where construction growth is happening, particularly in the building of social housing. Discussions have been taking place with potential collaborators in Birmingham and Wales.

5. Employer experiences of the Women into Construction project

The project has established links with a range of construction employers, some of whom it has worked with since an initial encounter on the Olympic Park, while others have become involved with the project since. This section analyses data from the interviews conducted with employers to understand their reasons for deciding to engage with the WiC project and their perceptions of the benefits gained from participation.

5.1 Motivations to engage with Women into Construction

Employers were asked about their initial motivations for becoming involved with the WiC project. The reasons given fell into two broad categories. Firstly, engagement with WiC was seen as consistent with and supportive of the organisation's commitment to the development of new entrants to the industry, including the desire to increase participation of women. Secondly, working with WiC was viewed as likely to aid the organisation in addressing its labour shortages and/or labour recruitment targets.

5.1.1 Commitment to training and development

Employers participating in the WiC project tended to view their involvement as part of the organisation's commitment to employee training and development. For some individuals this additionally stemmed from personal attitudes towards providing apprenticeship or development opportunities, recalling their own routes into the industry. The construction industry values work-based experience and has a tradition of learning on the job. This experience is typically harder for women to acquire as a result of informal, and often familial, recruitment methods commonly used, particularly in the manual trades. Engagement with WiC can provide an additional route for recruiting suitable new entrants to the construction industry.

I'm very pro helping people develop their careers, whether it be a graduate, undergraduate or someone through Women into Construction. It doesn't matter, it's actually about embracing someone who's in the early stages of their career who needs development and training and needs to be brought up. And to gain the experience, they're only going to gain it if they're actually on site or working within a team or working within the environment and getting the exposure. (Senior Project Manager, Project management and construction company)

The Managing Director of a painting and decorating contractor was committed to providing apprenticeships, stemming from a recognition that young people need opportunities, which his company can play its part in providing. He views it as: "Something that I'm investing in

now and someone will invest in my children in the future.” Furthermore the company is keen to widen the opportunities available to young women also.

People bang on about apprentices [...]. But they always go for boys, you never hear girls mentioned or anything like that. And I think what [WiC] is doing is an opportunity for girls to come into the industry. (Contracts Manager, Painting and decorating contractor)

Some of the employers involved with WiC may not be representative of typical employment structures operated within the industry, characterised by high levels of self-employment, in their employment of labour directly. The direct employment of labour at all levels, including the trades, affords a design and build contractor greater control over their recruitment and employment strategy, including placing women from WiC. The firm has offered approximately 20 placements to women and employed around nine of these. Similarly, a management contractor employs apprentices in the trades, then places them with their sub-contractors and recharges the cost, as a means of addressing the lack of control from sub-contracting and self-employment. This gives them greater scope to offer opportunities through WiC in a range of roles.

Thus for some employers, engagement with the WiC project fits with wider strategic decisions about the recruitment and development of their labour forces. This can additionally allow them to consider widening their recruitment channels to actively consider women.

5.1.2 Addressing skills shortages and recruitment targets

Some employers also described their interest in working with WiC as a way of fulfilling a business need to widen their recruitment pool. The painting and decorating contractor Managing Director had observed a skills shortage affecting painting and decorating because Eastern European workers were no longer coming to the UK as in the past, due to the improving work situation in Germany, offering employment opportunities nearer to home. He saw the recruitment of women workers as a potential solution to this problem: “Half the people available for work are female [...] we’ve got to tap into that half.”

Working with WiC can be very beneficial here, as the typical routes used by employers do not usually reach female applicants. The painting and decorating contractor, for example, relies on their existing database of contacts for recruitment, but as the Contracts Manager admitted, in the normal course of events: “We don’t get phone calls from women asking for work, it’s normally men. I wouldn’t know where to go to employ a woman as a decorator.”

Main contractors in the social housing sector or on other local authority contracts commonly have targets for employing local labour, imposed by the client as part of Section

106¹ planning requirements. Contractors can find these targets difficult to meet, with a shortage of skilled local labour resident in some inner London boroughs. On a Kings Cross site, for example, the Senior Site Manager encountered great difficulties in meeting the five per cent target for labour from the two local boroughs. There was a shortage of the skilled trades required.

Locally, the people aren't being trained, they're not within that skills set that want to come on a building site. They tend to be the very affluent people in the area, or it's completely [...] opposite and they are the unemployed. (Senior Site Manager, Building contractor)

Working with WiC provides access to a large database of women with London postcodes who have an interest in working in construction. Recruiting these women may help to meet local labour targets (discussed further in section 5.2.3).

5.2 Benefits of participation

Once involved with the WiC project, employers identified a number of benefits to their firms from participation.

5.2.1 Access to high quality applicants

The employers interviewed felt that WiC put forward high quality, well-prepared candidates for placements or employment. The project's 'vetting' and preparation of applicants was considered to be very valuable to employers. Preparation included assessment of women's personal qualities including commitment to working in construction, information about working conditions on site, as well as providing specific training. The readiness of applicants was appreciated by employers.

Because Women into Construction are focused on construction, so they will have vetted them and they will have talked to them and given them a good understanding of what they need on a building site. [...] So they know what's expected on a building site [...] and they know it can be harsh. It's winter and cold and they're working outside, I think they feed all that into them before they come. (Employment and Skills Manager, Design and build contractor)

¹ Under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 local authorities can enter into an agreement with the developer, that is attached to a planning permission, requiring contributions to offset negative impacts caused by construction and development. Such contributions can include the provision of affordable homes and employment opportunities and training schemes.

Women into Construction makes it easier for an employer because they've actually already got basic skills, they've gone for NVQ level 2, they've actually got IPAF qualifications which means they can use a mobile platform, which a lot of people we've got haven't got that. Women into Construction have invested in these girls and they're bringing to the market people who are ready, partly trained, willing to work, have got the right attitude. (Managing Director, Painting and decorating contractor)

Employers valued the skills and the commitment to working in construction demonstrated by women coming through the WiC project who were prepared to undertake unpaid work placements.

These girls are coming to work for a couple of days a week because they want to, they want a job and this is what I like about it. Because they're not getting paid, so someone who does that, to me, wants a job. (Contracts Manager, Painting and decorating contractor)

5.2.2 Work placements

Women placements are unpaid, with expenses met by WiC, allowing employers a 'free trial' of potential employees without any further commitment. Typically lasting from eight to 13 weeks, depending on the firm, placements enable employers to assess the skills, aptitude and attitude of the women, described by one employer as like an "an extended interview". It therefore gives women an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities for the work, and employers to make an assessment.

In many cases, placements led to employment, and all but one of the employers interviewed had offered paid employment to women who had undertaken placements with them. Employers emphasised that the decision to employ a woman was based on their assessment of the abilities that were shown during the placement, according to needs of the business. The three women taken on by the painting and decorating contractor after a placement had all "earned their chance", according to the contracts Manager.

The Senior Project Manager from a Project management and construction company noted that the interview process adopted before deciding to extend a placement into employment was "not a wishy washy thing", but a formal selection procedure involving consideration of several applicants.

Expenses-only placements can raise concerns about the exploitation of free labour, and one employer admitted that he had initially seen it as "an opportunity to have people on site and not have to pay for it." However, employers were clear that the placements offered valuable experience of real work:

With the right level of support and guidance and instruction a trainee can get a huge sense of responsibility and challenge. But we get the extra pair of hands doing the job that if they weren't there, we would be doing. (Senior Project Manager, Project management and construction company)

I certainly wouldn't want it to get to the point where people think it's free labour on tap. And you've got to be careful [...] which is why you've got to get your CVs and think ok what does this person want to do? Are these jobs I'm going to set them good and are they going to contribute towards their career? (Environmental Manager, Civil engineering contractor)

Employers, therefore, have a responsibility to ensure that placements offer valuable experience to the women. Placements are not always expected to lead to paid employment, but can be part of the experience that construction professionals need during their degrees to gain wider knowledge of the industry and the opportunities it offers. For employers, such placements can bring fresh perspectives:

In terms of what we get out of it [...] good, smart, hardworking people who can contribute to the project, bring ideas from outside [...] whether they're still at college or have the experience on other jobs, things they've done differently elsewhere. [...] So it's always very good to get fresh eyes on a project. (Environmental Manager, Civil engineering contractor)

The system of work placements operating through the WiC project, despite having some costs in terms of time to employers, was overwhelmingly felt by those interviewed to be beneficial for their businesses, and highly consistent with the staff training and development strategies of the firms, described above.

5.2.3 Competitive advantage

In addition to the recruitment benefits already highlighted, employers believed that participation in the WiC project gives their firms an advantage over other contractors in terms of company image and in winning business, notably in contracting for work from public sector clients. With requirements for workforce diversity increasingly being a consideration in tendering for work, participation in the WiC project is a clear indicator of efforts to improve women's representation in the industry.

Working with WiC can support a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda. This is particularly important for those seeking to win local authority or housing association contracts, where clients demand additional commitments.

There's a definite business perspective, so we work in some of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK and I think there was a clear understanding from the senior management team that our clients were interested in supporting those people in their communities, and getting people into work, being housing associations and local authorities. [...] The whole kind of ethos [...] is making an impact on not just the buildings but improving people's lives. (CSR Manager, Construction management contractor)

Contractors who are successful in winning local authority contracts – for housing especially, but also for schools, for example – can be expected to meet employment obligations contained in Section 106 planning agreements. Typically these set out target percentages of labour from the local borough(s) and often include a proportion of apprentices. However these are goals to aim for, rather than contractually-enforceable quotas. None of the employers, though, had been given specific targets for women's employment (unlike on the Olympic Park build), either by clients or main contractors. Involvement with WiC was helpful in meeting local labour targets, gaining access to a database of London-based women eager to work in construction. Additionally, engagement with WiC showed that they were taking steps to address the underrepresentation in the female construction labour force, which was also considered beneficial in demonstrating commitment to workforce diversity.

The benefits are seen by both main contractors and subcontractors. Where sub-contracting firms have employed women, this helps main contractors meet their obligations, as the Contracts Manager at a painting and decorating contractor found:

Since we've had the girls working for us, people like [contractor name] say to us 'you've done us a big favour' [...] And I never realised, but it helps the main contractor as well not just us as a subcontractor. [...] It's giving us the opportunity for more work.

While the labour force targets discussed by employers were mostly driven by Section 106 agreements, recent legislation on gaining additional 'social value' from contracts is likely to have an increasing impact on companies engaged in local authority work. In force from January 2013 in England and Wales, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public authorities to consider how the services they commission and procure can improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. The CSR Manager of a construction management contractor which operates social housing contracts had already seen the impact of this legislation.

Pre the Public Services Act, we saw social commitments come up in tenders. So clients ask what are you going to do for our local community? Or how many apprentices are you going to take? We very, very rarely saw it monitored afterwards. Since the Public

Services Act, not only have we seen a lot more consistent approach to clients asking, but they're also a lot more consistent in terms of monitoring.

These comments indicate that the social value legislation may result in more consistent monitoring than previous requirements, so it will be interesting to see the impact of this relatively new legislation in future, and whether it can be harnessed to promote greater diversity in the construction workforce.

In an industry built on competition, contractors keenly observe the activities of their competitors, which may stimulate initiatives on employing women, for example, where business benefits are perceived, as one manager noted.

If you hear down the road that they've got 10 points on their Considerate Constructors score because they've got a team of female electricians or something. So you can bet the project down the road will have a team of female electricians the following week."

(Environmental Manager, Civil engineering contractor)

Companies undertaking such employment initiatives were keen to showcase their efforts, and recognition for involvement in the WiC project was believed to be valuable. For example, WiC's annual awards to participating contractors were seen as positive for the company's image and public relations by the CSR Manager at a construction management contractor.

5.2.4 Improving the construction environment

It was a commonly expressed view among employer interviewees that having a greater presence of women created a better working environment for all, male and female. Some commented that men behaved with greater respect around women and swearing was reduced. This manager had noted a change in male behaviour:

On this project, which is of a very high standard, sexism, racism, it isn't tolerated.

Therefore, the guys are polite, if anything they are probably more polite with the women around, they're not gonna be rude. And it does, it seems to bring out the best in them so as far as that, looking at what we get out of it, it's nice to see a different side to the guys.

(Environmental Manager, Civil engineering contractor)

Women's presence changed the behaviour of male workers, in his view, but the organisation's zero-tolerance approach was also important. As a high-profile site in central London, the client imposed high standards in order to avoid negative perceptions from the public. Therefore the contractors took a zero-tolerance approach to sexist and racist language, which was enforceable because it was a high-profile job with higher than average pay, and was therefore easy to attract labour. Additionally, the manager pointed out that in

the induction process it was made clear that “these are the rules, if you break them you’re off”.

Having more women visible in construction roles should help to improve the public image of the construction workforce to the benefit of male workers too, as one manager hoped:

You’re walking on the street, you’ve got a pair of overalls on, people still give you dirty looks and stuff like that because they think you’re just a builder or whatever. And I think bringing girls into the industry, I’m hoping that it’s gonna change people’s minds. People are gonna start treating builders like human beings. (Contracts Manager, Painting and decorating contractor)

These changes also support the objectives of the industry’s Considerate Constructors scheme, and evidence of action to enhance corporate image is likely to be beneficial in competing for contracts.

Furthermore, it was suggested by the Managing Director of a painting and decorating contractor that women’s presence on site may contribute to improved compliance with health and safety regulations. He had noticed that their safety statistics on one site – which are monitored monthly for all sub-contractors – had improved since they had had more women on site. He believed that women were more conscientious about wearing their personal and protective equipment (PPE) at all times and were more likely to follow safety instructions. One explanation may be that as more recent entrants, women would have received more recent health and safety training, and given their high levels of commitment demonstrated, they may also be concerned to comply with the rules in order to retain their jobs. However it is conceivable that in general women may typically hold different attitudes towards safety from men.

This section has highlighted the benefits that employers perceive from involvement with the WiC project. Employer interviewees generally did not focus on the costs in staff time or other resources of participation in WiC, instead emphasising the business benefits discussed here.

6. Women's experiences of Women into Construction

This section examines women's experiences of participation in the WiC project, based on the interview and focus group evidence collected. First it describes some of the difficulties women face in getting into employment in the construction sector, and shows how the WiC placements, in particular, can help to overcome these obstacles. It demonstrates the preparation for employment provided by the WiC project, in a number of ways. Once in work, construction sites can be harsh and challenging environments for women, and evidence is presented of the working conditions and workplace relations that women encountered in heavily male-dominated workplaces. The section then considers the support provided by the WiC project which assists women in managing or surmounting some of these challenges to pursue a career in the construction trades or professions. Finally, the section illustrates the benefits and job satisfaction to be gained from working in construction identified by the interviewees.

6.1 Getting a "foot in the door"

Almost all the women interviewees talked of the difficulties they had encountered in getting employment or work experience opportunities within construction. Many possible reasons were suggested, such as the labour market conditions during a recession, or their personal CVs or characteristics, namely lack of experience, non-British nationality, age or gender. Some qualified women had been looking for work in construction for several years before finally getting an opportunity to put their training into practice. Women seeking to enter both professional and trades occupations encountered similar difficulties, and the quotes below indicate the frustration felt by those seeking to gain a foothold in the industry.

I just think I'm not really utilising the skills I've got because I can't really get my foot in the door. That's one of the biggest problems. [...] It's a catch 22 situation isn't it really? You've got the skills but you haven't got the experience and without the experience they're not going to employ you. (Interviewee 3)

There was no door opened to have that opportunity to get in anywhere. Everywhere just seemed closed really, I don't know why, if it was the recession, I don't know if it was just people not I don't know really. [...] It's been quite frustrating to be at home for years and feel you've got all the qualifications and nothing is just coming. (Interviewee 10)

It is always difficult for applicants to know for certain why they are unsuccessful in getting work, but several women believed that their gender was an obstacle. In part this is due to persisting attitudes among some within the industry that construction is not a job for a woman (see Bagilhole, 2014). But additionally recruitment methods, particularly for the

manual trades, are informal and tend to exclude women, as an electrician who is currently unemployed explained:

A lot of the problems women will find [...] is that you don't go down the pub mixing with a load of guys going, 'oh right, yeah, my mate's a plumber or my mate's a spark'. And so you don't have that connection there for work. [...] A lot of it's who you know in this industry really. [Interviewee 3]

While such recruitment methods exclude any newcomers without existing networks, not only women, the additional difficulty suggested here is that male-oriented social networks centred around the pub can exclude women, or women may feel uncomfortable participating. There may also be additional concerns for women about socialising with male colleagues for fear of friendliness being misinterpreted as sexual interest.

For older women seeking to move into the building trades, gender and age combined to make entry difficult. As well as attitudinal barriers, funding constraints limited the available opportunities, as found by a trainee electrician in her 40s.

It's so difficult; we are not given any opportunity for placements or even training. Even apprenticeships, it's very strict now with the age group, age limit, so it's very difficult. [...] They don't even look at you, and they just see a woman on top of this. (Interviewee 7)

With funding for apprenticeships focused on the 16 to 24 year-old age group, women aged 25 and over are less attractive to employers (Reynolds, 2014). Additionally, obligations included in Section 106 agreements that can be helpful in getting employers to engage with the WiC project (see section 5.2.3) typically focus on employment training opportunities for the apprentice age category.

Women commonly reported sending out hundreds of CVs, with no result. They simply wanted an opportunity to show what they were capable of, which was seen as a major benefit of the WiC placements, as noted by a construction manager who had been trying to break into construction work in the UK for five years since gaining her degree:

To get this position was really hard. How can I prove that I really want to do this? I can't just say, they have to see, so the internship, the placement with expenses was really, really helpful to get into it. (Focus group 3)

Having WiC project workers acting as an advocate was felt to be a crucial means of getting their 'foot in the door', as explained by a qualified environmental engineer who had endured a frustrating 18-month period of looking for work:

[WiC] are saying [...] we've got these women that are qualified, they can do the job, [...] we know they are hard-working so why don't you take their CV and give them this opportunity and see what they can do? (Interviewee 10)

In this case, having got through the door, she demonstrated her abilities during the work placement, impressed her manager, and was rewarded with a permanent job offer.

So after working for 14 weeks, my line manager kept shaking her head and saying 'I'm not gonna let her go!' [laughs] So she's basically just putting a lot of pressure and saying 'we need to have her back, she's hardworking, she's done this, she's done that'.
(Interviewee 10)

Work placements often do not lead directly to employment with the same company, but some believed that the experience gained was crucial in getting other work, for example this site engineer who had done a placement on the Olympic park:

I know that I only got this job because of my placement that I did with Women into Construction [...]. It was valuable because it gave me more experience in construction. It allowed me attain my CSCS card which I wouldn't have been allowed onto a construction site without, so that was like a key milestone for me as an individual. (Interviewee 11)

Not all interviewees had gained regular or ongoing employment, and the contractual and short-term nature of employment in the manual trades was proving very difficult for some (see 7.2.1). Nevertheless, the opportunities provided by the WiC project were considered to be valuable in building up the CV.

Without Women into Construction I wouldn't have got this far, absolutely without a doubt, because the experience I have obtained through Women into Construction I would probably not have got on any other job along the line. So at least it's on my CV, that's what people want to see really. (Interviewee 3)

For women studying degrees in construction subjects, work placements offered useful learning experiences and insights into the industry. This construction management student undertook an environmental project during her placement:

It's just a super great opportunity obviously because you've got so many different disciplines coming into one [...] environmental engineer, environmental manager. [...] And then you've got civil engineers, you've got the designers, you've got project

managers, so it's so vast. And the opportunity has been so great for me to work alongside those people and gain that experience and see how they work. (Interviewee 9)

There is however a risk that unpaid work placements may be misused by employers. One trainee electrician found her initial placement period extended for some time before she eventually gained paid employment with the firm.

After those eight weeks, the particular electrical contracts manager left to work somewhere else and I continued to be there as a trainee volunteer. [...] I started working there in February and it was in September that I finally started getting paid. So it was a very, very long while benefiting from Women into Construction's lunch, but also it came to a stage where I couldn't afford to not do it any more [...] I didn't have the courage to just stop and go and just say I don't want to do it any more. (Interviewee 6)

Although she was offered paid employment on completion of her placement, the firm dragged their heels and took six months to set her up on the payroll. Her position was finally resolved and she has now been with them for almost two years. This case, however, highlights the potential for employers to exploit unpaid placements, particularly when women have little work experience and feel their options for gaining other employment are limited, and have already invested time in a particular organisation.

In addition to offering placements, the WiC project gave women access to employment opportunities that they believed they would not have found otherwise. For example, this participant had been looking for work in construction in order to gain experience before starting an engineering degree:

I'd been applying for about eight months for different jobs and I'd sort of given up when Kath put me in contact with [company name]. [...] I don't think I would have got anything really if it hadn't been for Kath and Women into Construction. (Interviewee 8)

These comments from women highlight the value of the WiC project in providing a chance to demonstrate their skills and abilities to employers that they were not gaining without the project. Work placements, although unpaid, offered a valuable 'foot in the door' to gaining useful experience to enhance the participant's CV, and in some cases resulted in the offer of employment or an apprenticeship. Additionally, the brokerage or advocacy role of the project meant that women gained positions that they had been unable to secure via direct applications to employers. The following section examines in greater detail the preparation for employment provided by the project.

6.2 Preparation for employment

6.2.1 Training and certification

The WiC programme comprises a number of elements that women found valuable in gaining the necessary preparation for employment. Women participants in WiC get access to training that leads to certification required for construction work. In particular, the acquisition of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card was considered a key benefit. This demonstrated to employers that they were ready to work on site, and saved women the cost of the card.

Other courses were offered to women, depending on their occupation, which included first aid, driving particular vehicles, or working at height. Women in the trades found that having cards such as the IPAF (for using Mobile Elevated Work Platforms) and PASMA (working on scaffold towers) helped strengthen their CVs and often impressed employers.

I pulled out my card and here, and they were like 'oh my god, she's got one, I can't believe this!' Then I'd pull out another card and it was like, 'I must take this woman seriously'. (Interviewee 2)

The fact that women hold these certifications is likely to be welcomed by employers who may otherwise have to pay to put employees through the training themselves. Being in possession of such certification eliminates a possible reason for women applicants to be overlooked by employers. Furthermore it demonstrates a woman's commitment to pursuing a career in the occupation.

Some women had also attended workshops on CV writing run by the WiC project, which had been helpful learning how to present their skills and experience to most advantage, as well as improving women's confidence in how to put themselves forward.

6.2.2 Tools

Another tangible benefit of the WiC project for tradeswomen is the support with buying tools, particularly valuable for those starting out in their chosen trade. The allowance provided by the project was especially helpful to those on benefits who do not have money available for expensive items. A carpenter pointed out the necessity of having the tools of the trade:

Those nail guns, they use those for all the skirting and architrave and this that and the other, they cost five hundred quid each. It's like, no one will lend me theirs! Because it's way too expensive. [...] It means that you can't do any of that kind of work because you don't have the tools. [...] You can't turn up without, you'd get laughed off. (Interviewee 1)

Some women had found that men were unwilling to lend them their tools, although they would lend them to male colleagues. Funding was therefore provided through the WiC project to ensure that women had access to tools, placing them on a more equal footing in relation to male colleagues, and enabling them to gain experience of a range of tasks necessary to progress in their trades.

6.2.3 Placement expenses and childcare

Expenses are paid to women during placements to cover the costs of travel, lunches and childcare, where required. The expenses provided were essential for some in enabling them to take up the opportunity of a placement, especially as it often required travelling some distance to the site. Those who had been seeking work for some time found the travel expenses especially helpful:

I didn't have any money, I then got offered to go and do this placement, but I wouldn't have been able to do it if I didn't get my travel paid for. (Focus group 5)

Several interviewees had young children, and found help with childcare costs necessary to enable them to take up an unpaid placement. This was the case for an environmental engineer, whose placement led to paid employment with the organisation.

The childcare was even the main thing really [...] being able to leave the kids with somebody that will take care of them and then going off to work and not having to worry about how am I going to pay the childcare, because we won't be able to afford to pay for childcare and transport. [...] We wouldn't have been able to go for the placement if that support wasn't in place. (Interviewee 10)

In addition, the provision of childcare costs while on placement allows women to try out arrangements in preparation for paid employment, as WiC Project Manager Kath Moore pointed out:

For instance we had one single parent with three kids. In order to do her work placement she had to set up childcare for them. At the end of the placement, she was offered a job, childcare's all in place, so instead of going 'oh my god, I don't know if I can take it and how does this affect my benefits?' - the childcare's in place, she knows exactly how much it's going to cost, she knows how the travel works, how she drops one off and then the other. [...] So when she was offered a job she was able to just say yes.

This trial period is particularly beneficial if women have been out of employment for some time while caring for their children, and can be a way of trying out a working pattern to

assess whether it is compatible with childcare responsibilities. (Working hours are discussed in section 6.3.3).

6.2.4 Access to information and opportunities

Women all received regular communications from WiC informing them about placement and work opportunities relevant to their skills and interests. While these tended to be most frequent at certain periods of their involvement with WiC such as before entering placement or work, women also reported ongoing emails regarding relevant opportunities. In some cases it took a while before suitable vacancies arose and there were periods when women received fewer communications from the project, but generally interviewees were satisfied with the level of information received via WiC. The experience of this painting and decorating apprentice was common:

[Project worker] was always emailing me, letting me know what's going on [...] She was like 'trying to get you a work placement there, bear with me, I'll make sure I contact you next week and let you know where I'm going from there'. And she always kept me in the loop of what was going on step by step. (Interviewee 5)

When women's placements had ended, or a particular job had come to an end, women frequently remained in contact with WiC to gain information about job opportunities, which provided them with a sustained level of support. Women valued the access to the project's expanding network of employers, giving rise to placement and employment opportunities. Such access to vacancies provides an alternative to the informal recruitment channels that commonly exclude women, particularly in the manual trades (discussed in 6.1).

6.3 Working in construction

Comments from interviewees about their experiences of working in construction, either during placements or in employment, reflected many of the findings of other research on women in the construction industry, both positive and negative. This section highlights some key themes identified, covering working relations, conditions and hours.

6.3.1 Working relations

Working in a predominantly – or at times exclusively – male environment required women to develop strategies to handle the attention and behaviour they encountered from male colleagues. Women's experiences of relations with their male colleagues varied widely, with some finding supportive or protective interactions, with others facing exclusion and isolation. This electrician in her forties had felt isolated at times:

You tend to end up working on your own, where two guys will work together. And you're kind of at a bit of a loss [...] One of the other jobs I was on, it would be lunchtime and

they will be sitting at the table together and you'll be there sitting on your own. [...] And then they want to be talking men's things [...] So you can be excluded. (Interviewee 3)

In contrast, a painting and decorating apprentice in her twenties described her team of male co-workers as "really welcoming". She pointed out, though, that they had been unsure how to treat her at first:

Because they're not used to females being on site, they don't know how to act, so then you break the ice by going up to them and talking to them. And then they get to know you a little bit, and then, because they know what you're like, and they see how you work, they then try and push you to get you better. (Interviewee 5)

In her early twenties, this apprentice was younger than most of her male colleagues, and was generally treated in a protective fashion by them. Age appeared to be a significant factor differentiating how women were treated by male colleagues, with younger women, particularly those on apprenticeships, more likely to describe support from colleagues, both socially and with learning the job. On the other hand, older women entering the trades seemed to find it more difficult to gain acceptance, feeling they were perhaps seen as more of a threat to male colleagues, despite their lack of work experience. This trainee electrician in her forties had adopted a strategy of not challenging her colleagues, finding that relations were easier if you "knew your place":

They don't like it when you talk about college, for example, when you are told to do something and you say 'oh by the way, maybe...' – and they tell you, 'this is how it's done here'. Things like that. And when they talk you just listen to them, don't – I will not try to interrupt. (Interviewee 7)

While younger female apprentices may find positive working relationships, it was not necessarily easy for younger women with management or training responsibilities for men, as this independent certifier found:

Training people who are like 20 years older than you, men, they don't listen. They actually don't take you seriously. [...] For instance there's new people starting, I've got to train them how to do measures, how to undertake inspections, what to do, what not to do, why we're taking so and so approach. They just weren't taking me seriously and they would question me non-stop, putting me on the spot telling me I'm doing my job wrong. (Focus group 6)

Another issue facing women of all ages is the sexualised nature of workplace interactions and 'banter', in some instances amounting to sexual harassment, reported commonly in studies of women's experiences in the construction sector (Denissen, 2010; Watts, 2007; Wright, 2013b). Women participants in WiC were no exception and some had experienced sexual or bullying behaviour that they found unwelcome. Of course, the line between conduct that is considered acceptable and that deemed to be unwanted sexual harassment is a blurred and variable one. Women develop their own, different ways of managing sexualised male behaviour. This trainee electrician sought to maintain a distance:

So when they start talking about sex and jokes like that, I just switch off and I don't join, I don't participate. You have to be also mindful of what you say. (Interviewee 7).

For this apprentice carpenter, support from another female on site helped her to deal with the "heavy flirting" she encountered:

There was an electrician on the last site, it was great because [...] we both had a bit of a tough time on that site with just heavy flirtation. It just got a bit much, so we'd send little texts and then we'd just come together, have a little gaggle and then go our separate ways, go back to work. A bit of relief, moan to me and I'll moan to you and we'll be alright then we'll go. [...] It depends on how you take it as well, because if you can learn to brush it off and just make a joke of it, it's a lot easier. (Interviewee 1)

In other cases of unacceptable behaviour from male colleagues, women were able to call on WiC project workers for support (see 6.4).

Some interviewees commented on the increasing visibility of women on construction sites, although still in very small numbers, and several talked appreciatively of the occasions when they worked with other women. They felt more comfortable when female presence became normalised, as this site engineer commented:

I spent a year in an environment that I actually liked because there were a few more women in this area. So I felt a bit more comfortable, I felt I was amongst my own and it wasn't just men and it reassured me yet again that engineering is just really not that bad for women. (Interviewee 11)

Only a small number of women had been managed by a woman, but their presence was felt to be positive in changing male perceptions and the working environment:

It's good, especially [name], the project manager, we are proud of her. She's so young as well and you've got all these men, they are looking at her and she's good at what she does, very, very good. But she's strong and yes, she's very good. (Interviewee 7)

Some also commented that they would find it easier to talk to a female manager or supervisor about any problems, particularly concerning unwanted male behaviour, and believed that more women on site would change the workplace culture.

The women coming through the WiC project are those newly entering the industry, or women who have qualified but are only beginning to gain experience of the workplace. Therefore the issues discussed here are those faced by new entrants, learning to manage the particularities of the construction environment. In addition, the time-limited nature of construction projects means that moving from one construction site to another is a feature of the job for many, with the challenge, particularly for women, of establishing new workplace relationships each time. However, over time, this can get easier, as this carpentry apprentice found:

As you go on a site, then you will recognise some of the people from the one before, so then when I turned up to this site, then I knew most of the people. I'd say about least half of them already so, seeing us all rolling up, there wasn't the nervousness because I'm noticing faces and it makes it a lot easier. Then your reputation precedes you as well and so they know how you work and that gets round and you don't have such a tough time any more. (Interviewee 1)

The experiences discussed here indicate the particular challenges of working relations and interactions that face women entering highly masculinised work environments, and highlight the importance of the support offered through the WiC project.

6.3.2 Working conditions

Some interviewees who were entering the manual trades commented that they had found the physical demands of the work very hard at the beginning, referring both to the physical challenges of carrying heavy equipment and materials, as well as extremes of temperature and poor weather conditions. For this electrical mate in her forties, undertaking a placement during the winter was a big shock and a test of her stamina.

In January it was minus six at the time. I hadn't gone to a gym in about four or five months before that so I had no muscle at all. Stamina was weak, and two days a week almost killed me, it took me almost four days to recover from those two days. Because it was so cold, I couldn't sit down, I had to continuously keep moving, to keep warm. And it was just, it was battling the elements, it was battling my mind, trying to not get

frustrated [...] You know, grief, considering I was not being paid. [...] But I got stronger, and I got more aware. (Interviewee 2)

Work placements, therefore, represented a realistic test of the working conditions women could face. This interviewee learnt what clothing she needed to wear to keep warm, and how to survive the physical requirements of the job, gaining strength as she did so. Additionally as women seeking acceptance in a male-dominated occupation, there could be a struggle to find their own personal balance between when to accept help from men, and when to be self-reliant, as this apprentice carpenter found:

It was quite difficult getting used to, I'd be carrying my tools, arms full, a big old bag on my back and obviously I'm struggling because it's really heavy and there would be guys trying to take stuff off me. And it's like, I have to find the leeway, I'm struggling, I do need a hand but, you know, I want to save face. I've got a rule with it now where I'll let you carry materials, but no one carries my tools but me. (Interviewee 1)

Toilet facilities were still a problem for some women. Although most large construction sites now provide female toilets (according to the employers interviewed all their sites did), a few women commented on the poor standard of facilities, or misuse of them by male workers. This site engineer, the lack of proper facilities for women raised questions about women's status on site.

The only problem I've had, the only one that's really irritating me at the moment, and it's only on this site, is toilet facilities. So even something as small as like a sanitary bin, for example, to me that's ridiculous that there's a site, there are women who come on this site and there isn't a bin. And you have to make a big deal out of it. [...] And then, things like the toilet being used for a storage area, so little things like that. It's almost as though – it does make you think, I feel like I'm being disregarded here, so you have to kick up a fuss. (Interviewee 11)

This woman, though, was willing to make demands for improvements, indicative perhaps of the increasing expectations for provision of facilities for women within the industry.

6.3.3 Working hours

Consistent with working patterns in the industry, women typically worked an eight or nine-hour day at their workplace. For tradeswomen there was no flexibility in hours or location of work, whereas some professional women reported a small amount of flexibility, although none worked at home for any part of the week (although in some companies this was a possibility for certain roles). Women with childcare responsibilities also worked long hours,

although some firms allowed a little flexibility over start and finish times. For example, an environmental engineer had been allowed to work from 7am to 5pm, instead of the usual 8am to 6pm day, so that she could collect her child at 6pm.

Another mother was working from 8am to 6pm each day and hoped that when she was more established with her employer, she would be able to work more flexibly:

I don't permanently want the long hours because I imagine that as my family grows, I wouldn't want these long hours. But I also want to believe that I would have maybe built a good enough relationship with my employer to say look [...] can I maybe work from home on 'x' amount of days or whatever. And I believe that within construction they have those flexible arrangements that can be made. (Interviewee 11)

Other interviewees also indicated that in professional construction occupations, at least, employers are slowly recognising the need for more flexible working patterns for both male and female staff and some changes to hours can be negotiated.

6.4 Support

The high levels of support offered to women by WiC was one of aspects of the project most commented on and strongly welcomed by participants. Support took several forms, but included regular monitoring of placements, direct intervention with employers over problems, as well as advice, guidance, encouragement and contact with other women in working in construction jobs.

Women received regular visits and contacts via telephone or email when they started a placement or work, typically every couple of weeks, although this varied according to need. This helps to ensure that work placements are offering valuable experience to the women, and project workers may intervene if this is not the case, as indicated by trainee construction manager on placement:

So she comes to us to just see what we are doing [...] she becomes a spokesperson for some of us who can then go to the construction managers to say 'I am getting bored here, give me something stimulating'. In that sense she can then say to them, maybe can you give them more responsibility. I feel that helps because I don't have the confidence to be asking men who are busy. (Focus group 9)

This comment highlights the role of the project workers in building women's confidence to raise concerns themselves, while also intervening on behalf of women with their managers where necessary. Despite the generally positive experiences of work and placements offered through the project, some women recounted poor treatment by employers or male

colleagues. They found, though, that when serious problems were reported to WiC, firm action was taken to remedy the situation. In one case, a painter and decorator on placement found herself working alone late in the evening and rang WiC for advice. Following this incident, project workers met with the employer to raise their concerns and in the end decided to withdraw from working with the firm. Another interviewee, a carpenter, had encountered intolerable behaviour from a male worker on site, and sought support from WiC. In this instance, the support and advice offered by WiC enabled her to raise the problem herself with her supervisor and remain in the job.

I wanted to leave, I was in tears, I was gonna go. But I didn't have a job. [...] When she spoke to me I was like, no, this person shouldn't really speak to me like this. [...] I think I would have left that day, she helped me to calm down. (Focus group 2)

Aside from dealing with particular problems, women were very grateful just to know that there was backing there when they might need it, expressed here by a construction manager.

For me the biggest support was I knew – really when I started, I'm foreign, and working on there, sometimes it's stressful. And I knew I have the support behind me, that was most important for me to know. If I have some troubles, someone is gonna help me. (Focus group 3)

Where workplace problems are beyond the scope of the project to intervene, project workers advise women to contact the construction union UCATT.

The project and the individual career advice offered was also important in building women's confidence, which for those new to the industry, or who had been looking for work for some time, was crucial. Women were effusive in their praise for the personal support and help offered by the Project Managers. Their commitment to the women on the project was felt strongly by participants, who appreciated their personal qualities, in addition to the service offered by the project. Interviewees described the Project Managers variously as: 'angels', a 'mentor', a 'rock', 'strong women', an 'inspiration' and 'really cool'! The support offered was described numerous times as 'fantastic' and 'invaluable'.

The male-dominated construction work environment can be isolating for women, and many commented on the chance to gain support from other women that came from participation in the WiC project. This had a dimension of personal support, as well as the provision of information about other workplaces and opportunities, which was seen as useful by an electrician looking for work.

They're always running little courses or they always have days when everyone can come together. And that's quite valuable really because you get to talk to the other women and some have had it a lot smoother and some have had it a lot more difficult. So that's quite a good thing where you can all come together and – how are you getting on, you know. (Interviewee 3)

Experience of keeping in contact with other women participants in the project was variable, though, depending partly on which aspects of the project's training or programme they had participated in. Some felt that it would be beneficial to have more contact with other women who had been through the WiC programme. Women's positive response to the East Village focus group – many of whom had never met before even though they worked on the same site – highlighted the value of regular networking events for women involved in the project. While resources limit the ability of project workers to take on significant additional work in this area, it may be worthwhile to assist the establishment of networks among women that could be self-sustaining.

6.5 Satisfaction from working in construction

Despite the difficulties facing women in construction work identified earlier, women often spoke with great enthusiasm about their work, with the majority enjoying the variety it offered. Women spoke of the sense of satisfaction and achievement gained from their work, a feature noted in other research on women's experiences in construction (Clarke et al., 2004; Munn, 2014; Smith, 2013; Wright, 2011a). Comments from interviewees here show the wide-ranging appeal of construction work. The sentiments of this construction manager were representative of many women's comments:

I like it because every day I am learning something new, it keeps moving, every single day there is something new and new experience and no one gets bored. (Focus group 3)

The construction site environment was seen as exciting or "dynamic" by many, having "a buzz". Some, too, enjoyed the workplace 'banter' with the guys, and the potential for interactions with a wide range of people.

Some felt that their work had social or environmental value, for example in "creating communities". For this environmental engineer, saving resources for future generations was an attraction of the career.

Sustainability [is] about us leaving something for the future generation to have and to use. And so I told myself that I would love to be part of that, [...] a kind of occupational career, let's use less resources, less water, less energy so that we are saving stuff for those that are coming in the future. (Interviewee 10)

An appeal of the work for several women was the challenge to traditional gender roles that their presence represented, highlighted here by a carpenter:

Just to be appreciated really makes the job so much better and I think that goes back to the thing of people not expecting me to be able to do it because I'm female, and I think that comes into it a lot. I think if I was a guy doing the same thing, I don't think I'd enjoy it as much. I think there is that thing where, I'm special. (Interviewee 1)

Additionally, the practical skills and knowledge gained contributed to women's sense of confidence both at work and home. For example, this 20-year old had painted several rooms in the family home and gained confidence.

I decided to do painting and decorating at college and it's kind of broadened my horizon, I'd say and I've learnt a lot from college to now. I've learnt a lot and got more confident in doing what I'm doing. (Interviewee 4)

Others too described the sense of achievement and pride that their work provides, which can be personally empowering and broaden their sense of their own capacities as women. Indeed one construction manager joked that her understanding of buildings and practical skills gained meant that: "I don't need a man anymore!".

These comments represent not only women's personal sense of achievement gained through their work in construction, but also a wider sense of women's empowerment that comes from challenging gender stereotypes about the nature of women's and men's work. Their confidence in their own abilities has increased, while their visible presence in the world of construction is capable of challenging wider gender attitudes.

7. Assessment of the Women into Construction project model

This section draws together the evidence presented above from employers and women participants to assess the effectiveness of the WiC project in meeting its objective of improving women's participation in the construction industry. Additionally it introduces perspectives from interviews with project stakeholders to provide a broader view of the project's role and outcomes. It presents an analysis of elements that contribute to the achievements of the WiC project model, followed by some of the constraints and challenges that the project faces, whether stemming from conditions shaping the construction industry more generally or the operation of the project itself.

7.1 Achievements of the WiC project

A particular feature of the WiC model is that it addresses both 'supply' and 'demand' sides in its interventions to increase the number of women working in construction. On the supply side the programme ensures that women are skilled and ready for employment or work placements, while on the demand side it addresses barriers to women's entry to construction by recruiting employers and persuading them of the benefits of participation in the scheme. In this way it differs from previous gender equality initiatives in construction that focus either on building women's skills and employability, or concentrate on persuading employers of the business benefits of increasing women's employment. WiC brings both objectives together under one project, persuading employers of the business benefits, and linking them to qualified women eager to enter construction. Crucially, the project also offers personal ongoing support to women, both before entering employment and once on placement or at work.

7.1.1 Supported work placements

A key method adopted that links employers to women entrants is the provision of unpaid work placements, with participant expenses paid for by the project. The evidence presented here demonstrates that both employers and women participants found the work placements to be extremely valuable. Employers' exposure to the capabilities of female workers and women's chance to demonstrate their abilities beyond the qualifications on their CVs helps to challenge persisting attitudes about women's lesser suitability for construction work, particularly in the manual trades. Costs to employers of offering placements are limited, and as Be Onsite Managing Director Val Lowman observed: "It's the women who take the risk. It's the women that make the investment, not the organisations." Women gain a chance to prove their abilities, which in turn helps to break down stereotypes about women's capabilities for construction work.

The intermediary or 'agency' role of WiC offers an alternative recruitment channel to the informal, word-of-mouth routes commonly used in the manual trades, which tend to exclude women and other groups underrepresented in the industry. The project's role as

'advocate' or referee to employers was considered very valuable by women applicants, who had spent long periods looking for work through direct approaches to employers without success. Equally employers considered the screening and preparation of applicants presented to them by WiC to be one of its major benefits. Not only does the project offer access to women applicants they would not have reached otherwise, but the quality of applicants is generally considered to be very high.

Unpaid work placements, though, are open to abuse by employers seeking free labour. Interviews revealed only one case where an unpaid placement had developed into a longer period of 'volunteer' work, while a trainee electrician waited six months before gaining paid employment. Project Manager Kath Moore had initial reservations about the use of placements, believing that women should be paid for their labour. However she has been persuaded of the benefits of this strategy as offering a 'no-risk' trial period for both employers and women, and evidence from women presented in section 6.1 demonstrated that women were very positive about gaining the opportunity to 'get a foot in the door' which they had not found through other means.

The provision of expenses for lunch, travel and childcare costs meant that women could take up placement opportunities. For women with children, the chance to test out childcare arrangements while on placement could make the difference between accepting or declining an offer of paid employment afterwards. There was also evidence of employers offering some flexibility over working hours to accommodate working parents. Thus placements can be important 'trial periods' both for women and their employers, who find ways to accommodate atypical work patterns in an industry that is characterised by long hours and lack of working time flexibility (Fielden et al., 2000; Watts, 2009).

7.1.2 Engaging employers

WiC's extensive and expanding network of employers – now totalling 52 contractors – is one of its key strengths. Members of the WiC Steering Committee observed that the strong relationships of trust that the Project Managers had built up during the course of the project was one of the key factors in achieving the results that they had. This was confirmed in the interviews with employers, who trusted the project managers to put forward suitable applicants for placements or jobs (see 5.2.1). The Employment and Skills Manager at a design and build contractor described the relationship in this way: "They support me as well as me supporting them. It's a working partnership." These relationships have come about as a result of considerable time invested over the past six years in approaching employers, making presentations and arguing the case. The duration of the project has enabled relationships of trust to grow and develop, which would not have been possible during a short-term project. This raises an important issue about sustained funding for projects of this sort. There have been many examples of initiatives to support women into male-dominated work where funding has ended after a limited period, particularly projects driven by voluntary sector groups (see Rhys Jones, 2006; Wright, 2011b). In contrast the WiC

project is reaping the benefits of longer-term funding (which has been renewed annually since 2011) and is likely to be increasing its performance incrementally with each year.

Indeed, project workers and funders believe that the reputation of the project is starting to speak for itself, and word is spreading among employers about the benefits of collaboration with WiC. Employer Services Director at the CITB, Mike Bialyj, had noted a change in that these days the project was “not always chasing contractors – contractors are coming up now and getting in touch with them”. In a highly competitive industry, contractors closely observe the activities of their main rivals and will copy these where they see a business benefit from doing so.

This research has identified that requirements established within the procurement process are a key element of the project’s success in gaining engagement from contractors to offer opportunities to women. As WiC Project Manager Kath Moore explained:

We started off by targeting employers who were sympathetic to us and helpful on the Olympics and going on to other projects that they were doing. But the procurement is absolutely key, so what we’re doing is we’re going for projects generally that use public money, where there will be targets.

Evidence from employers shown in section 5.2.3 demonstrates that local authority and social housing client demands are driving activity from contractors on recruiting local labour and paying greater attention to equality and diversity objectives. Furthermore, efforts are being made to push these requirements down through the supply chain. Sub-contractors interviewed here talked of the benefits to their firms from helping the main contractors to meet employment equality objectives. Contractors operating in the social housing market were certain that engagement with the WiC project was one factor contributing to success in winning contracts with local authorities or housing associations. The construction of the Olympic Park had explicit employment equality targets for women, BAME and disabled workers from the start, and had staff dedicated to supporting and monitoring the implementation of these objectives through the supply chain (Thrush and Martins, 2011; Wright, 2013a). While none of the employers interviewed for this research were required to meet specific targets for women’s employment, they knew that they needed to demonstrate actions to promote workforce diversity when tendering for public sector contracts. Additionally, specific targets for local labour were included in Section 106 planning agreements, and access to WiC’s extensive database of women with London postcodes was very useful in meeting these targets.

Some of the employers interviewed supported the inclusion of targets for increasing women’s employment. A senior site manager wanted the client to impose enforceable percentages for female workers, which would require monitoring of sub-contractors throughout the supply chain. He explained:

It will filter down, hit them where it hurts, it's the money side and then they might actually wake up and say 'right, well we haven't had five per cent of ladies on site', whatever the figure is, and 'there's a penalty clause'. And then maybe they will wake up and do something about it. And then see the benefit of actually having some ladies there. And then it becomes normal. (Senior Site Manager, Building contractor)

Others shared this view, believing that targets are the only way to create change in an industry making very slow progress on employing women, and the current recovery in the industry offers a good moment to take action.

Construction is one of the biggest employers at the moment and for the next 10-15 years with regeneration [...] So, I think maybe if there was something more, that would push the numbers up, you would find more women filtering through. [...] Those contractors would be obliged then to try and fulfil that, wouldn't they? [...] And I think a lot of these contractors would see what women are capable of on building sites. (Employment and Skills Manager, Design and build contractor)

The views of these employers are not representative of the more common view that private sector employers are opposed to further regulation or 'burdens' on operating their businesses (for an example, see CBI, 2009). This is likely to be because employers here are already engaged in measures to support women's employment, and would like their own 'voluntary' activities to be more formally recognised and valued in tendering procedures, providing 'a level playing field' of equality activity. While their activities to support women's employment may be recognised in tendering for certain public sector contracts, this may not be the case in all tendering processes. Some fear that price can override other considerations, leading them to lose work to cheaper tenders that have not taken steps to improve their workforce diversity.

However, not all interviewees supported targets, and a coercive approach may have possible negative consequences for those already engaged voluntarily in supporting women's employment. If contractors find ways simply to 'tick the box', then the crucial commitment to encouraging and supporting women, currently displayed by many employers engaged with WiC, may be lost. One key strength of the WiC project approach is the low risk opportunity it provides for employers to try out women workers, and attitudes often change based on this experience. Project Manager Kath Moore gave an example of one contractor who had initially been reluctant to take women electricians on placements, but agreed to comply with targets set further up the supply chain.

He had those two women for 13 weeks on a work placement and at the end of it he was saying ‘they’re really good, I’d like some more’. So then he had a series of women doing work placements and he said ‘they’ve all been brilliant and if I had jobs, I’d give them all jobs. They’re showing up the guys, they’re so keen, they’re really reliable, they’re good at what they do.’ And so his mind was changed.

Equally, in such cases all women are judged by the performance of one or two women, and the outcome in some cases may be the reverse where a manager would decide not to employ women again. This highlights the importance of challenging gendered stereotypes, through providing opportunities for significant numbers of women to access male-dominated work. Thus legal requirements can be the necessary driver that prompts change in established practices, which results in attitudinal shifts. Although current UK legislation does not require the inclusion of targets for female employment in underrepresented sectors such as construction, there is legislation that has been used to push for change by those already committed to promoting equality. As noted in 5.2.3, local authorities are using planning requirements to impose workforce targets, and the obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (contained in the Equality Act 2010) were part of the impetus to establish and monitor employment equality targets for the Olympic Park construction. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 is also starting to have an impact on requirements in contracts let by local authorities. This means that clients should not only look at price when letting contracts, for example for housing maintenance, but also wider community benefits (Nelson, 2014). One employer, as discussed earlier, had noticed greater attention to monitoring as a result of the recent social value requirements.

7.1.3 Building confidence

Another important element in WiC’s success is the support provided to women participants. This starts with careful preparation for employment through screening, training and certification and continues when women enter placements or employment. Furthermore, the project continues to help women when their contract ends or if they lose a job to find further employment. As Val Lowman described, the support helps “not just to get that first rung on the ladder, but to support them until they’ve got a few rungs on the ladder”.

The WiC project helps women to build confidence in their ability to do construction work – which has often taken a knock from periods of unsuccessful job searches following the completion of formal qualifications. It also offers very practical intervention if there are problems at work, with project workers intervening directly with employers when problems with working conditions or harassment have been reported to them. Such issues can lead women to leave the industry, when they are left unresolved. WiC’s retention rates are impressive. According to CITB Deputy Chairman Judy Lowe, over 50% of participants are still in full time work a year after they started, which she believes may underrepresent the true picture due to the large numbers on shorter placements: “actually, the true retention figure

may be closer to 75%". Lowe attributes this to the personal attention and support provided by the project. Project Manager Ranjit Samra agrees that the "tailored individual service we offer" is a key feature of the project. She says: "It's not about getting 'x' amount of women through the door and ticking boxes". This was confirmed by project participants; an assistant construction manager commented that "from the onset like you feel like you're the only one, they give you that kind of attention" (Focus group 1). However, participants must also take responsibility themselves too, and fulfil the expectations of the project; as Samra pointed out: "this is not all about us doing everything, it's a two-way working relationship."

Lowe firmly believes that the 'holistic' approach taken by the project is key to its success in retaining women. A woman's whole situation is taken into account to ensure that she is equipped to enter and remain in work.

If this woman is going to come and work for the first time, we've got to deal with her lack of self-belief, her belief that she would never be accepted. We've got to make sure that we don't just give her the skills, we give her the confidence. And by the way, we've got to sort out her childcare if that's an issue. We've got to sort out her transport because she won't have the money and she won't have a car. [...] and can we use [project funding] to buy them their own tools?

Thus the specific focus of the project on the needs of women is a key part of its success. Lowe confirms the view expressed by women earlier that WiC's role as 'broker' or intermediary between the woman and the employer is essential to overcome women's lack of self-confidence and in providing reassurance to the employer.

Project workers are also well aware of what a nerve-racking experience turning up on a construction site for the first time can be. The project's growing network of women on site means that it is sometimes possible to introduce women to each other at the start, and a couple of interviewees said that they appreciated this initial support. A painting and decorating contractor had also adopted the practice of putting women to work together when they take women on work placements, in addition to allocating a dedicated supervisor to train and support the women.

An additional opportunity to build confidence and skills was offered to some WiC participants through its involvement with the Tools 4 Life project working with women in Swaziland. Tools for Life is a programme run by the charity, Positive Women, which collaborated with WiC to organise a group of female carpenters, mainly apprentices, from the UK to fundraise for tools and equipment to take to Swaziland, where they passed on their skills to Swazi women (see the project report for more details, Positive

Women/SWAPOL, 2013). A carpentry apprentice who went to Swaziland described the experience as “incredible”. She said:

The best thing about it was being with female carpenters; that’s just something I haven’t come across before. [...] Going there and sharing our passion and our skills in carpentry.

(Interviewee 1)

For others too, part of the confidence and support women gained from participating in the project was attributed to the opportunities to meet other women in the industry. This helped to lessen their sense of isolation, by comparing coping strategies and acquiring information about employment opportunities. Evidence from other studies of women in traditionally male sectors finds that women can be reluctant to network with other women, fearing that this may be perceived negatively by male colleagues and damage women’s attempts to assimilate as ‘one of the boys’ (Bagilhole, 2002). Interviewees, however, did not express such reservations, perhaps recognising that the benefits of participation in a project designed for women outweighed any perceived negative effects. A couple of interviewees observed that the perception of ‘positive discrimination’ attributed to the WiC model may seem unfair to male colleagues, for example to the male apprentices who saw women benefitting from financial help to buy tools. The perceptions of male co-workers in relation to the WiC project could therefore be a subject for further research. Women interviewees, however, were more likely to believe that more should be done in the form of positive action or targets for women in order to overcome the difficulties that women face in getting into construction employment.

Indeed, the evidence from this study indicates that the project’s focus on women seeking to gain opportunities in construction (rather than a broader remit in relation to under-represented groups or support for unemployed people into work, for example) is an essential element of the project’s achievements. It is able to address the particular barriers and difficulties for facing women entering the male-dominated construction environment, through appropriate preparation, work experience opportunities with the necessary support in place, and ongoing advice and support from project workers and a wider network of women.

7.1.4 Raising awareness of construction opportunities for women

Underlying the activities of the WiC project is an objective of raising awareness of opportunities for women of employment in the construction industry. When the project was established to operate on the building of the Olympic Park, it was anticipated that affording greater visibility to women working in construction roles on a high-profile build would raise awareness of the possibilities for women in construction.

The WiC project undertakes a range of outreach activities to highlight to women the opportunities within construction and to recruit participants to the project (see 4.2). An

important aspect of this element of the project's work is its relationship with JobCentre Plus (JCP). This is formalised through the secondment, since the early days of the project, of Ranjit Samra from the DWP to work as a WiC Project Manager. Additionally the project works with Tony Hyland, a Senior Employee Relationship Manager at the DWP, who describes his role in relation to the project as follows:

My role has really been to promote the WiC project to the Jobcentre plus network across London and the Home Counties, as well as surrounding areas. The positive thing about it for me is - and the real pull - is the idea of attracting women into the construction sector that would never have conceived of it before.

For Hyland, the WiC project provides JobCentre advisors with an additional option to offer to jobseekers and can broaden the employment possibilities considered by women. He adds:

It's interesting that a lot of women who have gone through the [WiC] project will say that they have often just been spoken to about retail or cashier jobs. Whereas deep down they've always wanted to maybe consider something different and obviously now they are doing something different.

Interviews with women suggest that there may be more work to do in raising awareness of the WiC project through JCP (a small number of interviewees commented that their local JCPs had not offered particular help with entering construction work).

The provision of taster courses in construction for women is a further element of the project's outreach and awareness-raising of construction opportunities for women. Currently run by the Building Crafts College in East London, the taster courses introduce women to the range of construction trades, running for a period of six to 10 weeks, typically for three days per week. In addition to giving women the chance to assess their own interests in pursuing careers in the construction trades, Project Manager Ranjit Samra highlights the opportunities for networking with potential employers:

So contractors come to the college. There will be that buy in from contractors to say: 'there's one of the women over there, she's 18 years old, let's offer her an apprenticeship, she's been brilliant on this course. She's attended on time, she's done the full six weeks, she hasn't had a day off'.

In the same way, the taster courses assist the WiC project workers in deciding the most appropriate support to offer via the project, for women who wish to pursue work in construction.

The WiC project has also built links with other organisations and initiatives pursuing shared objectives to promote construction work for women. For example, trainer and Learning Organiser for construction union UCATT, Karen King, runs five-week training courses to introduce women to construction work, and links up with the WiC project to promote the opportunities available to women. For King, the value of such courses is challenging women's preconceptions about construction work and providing information about the variety of roles on offer.

I think there's this fear of heights for a lot of them. Scared of the tools, power tools. So it was just taking that edge off for them and just saying that it's not all the time that you will be actually working at a height. It's not all the time that you may need to access scaffolding, you can do voids, there are so many different parts of construction that you can actually go into.

The WiC project, therefore, operates on a variety of levels to raise awareness of construction opportunities for women, with wide links to other agencies and initiatives that share their objectives. With more resources, there is the potential for the WiC project to take greater advantage of such links to maximise the benefits of collaboration.

7.2 Constraints and challenges

Alongside the considerable achievements and strengths of the WiC project already identified, the project faces constraints and challenges. Some relate to the nature of employment within the construction industry generally, while others are specific to the WiC project organisation.

7.2.1 Access to employment

While many women found employment opportunities as a result of WiC project participation, the nature of employment in the manual trades, characterised by subcontracting and self-employment (Thiel, 2012), made it very difficult for some women to acquire sufficient experience to establish themselves and therefore make a living. New entrants needed continuity of employment in order to gain experience. This unemployed electrician had been looking for some time for:

A job where I'm learning all the time and improving on my skills. But it's got to be permanent [...] But you see we're in a situation now where companies don't want to take you on permanently, they want you to be a contractor because they don't have to pay pensions, holidays, they don't pay sick pay. (Interviewee 3).

In her forties, she contrasted her situation with younger women who were eligible for an apprenticeship that would enable them to learn the necessary skills to develop their

careers. Thus for older women it seemed more difficult to make a career change to move into construction trades. Additionally, section 6.3.1 highlighted perceptions that male workers' attitudes to older women entrants differ from treatment of younger women; younger interviewees in the trades reported very supportive and at times even over-protective relationships with their male co-workers, which benefitted their skills development as well as the workplace environment. These experiences are confirmed by others in the industry; Reynolds (2014) argues that much more needs to be done to encourage women aged 25 years and older to enter the industry, as they bring work and life experience, as well as a strong motivation to succeed.

Within the industry there exist examples of initiatives to try and overcome the problems of sub-contracting and self-employment. The Be Onsite charity was established by Val Lowman to support people facing a disadvantage in the labour market into construction work, and provides direct employment to workers who are then charged out to sub-contractors. WiC is currently hosted by and works with Be Onsite, but there may be opportunities in the future to extend this relationship.

Despite the perceived value of work placements, some women accepted placements that were below their skill or qualification levels in order to get that sought-after "foot in the door" of the industry. In one case a woman with postgraduate qualifications in environmental engineering undertook a placement doing painting and decorating in order to "get out of the house". Some women were offered paid employment at a junior or assistant level, despite having graduate or postgraduate qualifications. This may be indicative of the value placed on experience gained on the job within the industry, above paper-based qualifications, but it is worth questioning whether male graduates are equally likely to start in lower level posts to gain experience, or whether there may be a different pattern of women's experience.

7.2.2 Local labour targets

It was seen above that employers could find it challenging to meet the local labour targets set under Section 106 agreements. This could present opportunities for the WiC project in acting as a spur to contractors to engage with the project. Nevertheless, in practice such targets can be problematic. While women with certain postcodes can benefit from opportunities, other suitable candidates felt they were passed over for living in the 'wrong' borough. Indeed one interviewee told of moving house in order to have the correct postcode for a placement opportunity. CITB's Judy Lowe also pointed to the challenge for firms of taking on apprentices from one London borough for a 30-month period, while a construction job may only last nine months, then when the work moves to the next borough, further demands for local apprentices are made by the next local authority.

Additionally, the WiC project managers felt that some contractors were focused only on meeting the required targets, and unwilling to consider any measures beyond them. Ranjit Samra commented that many Section 106 agreements provide for "only 10% of local

employment. It's not 100%, so what happens to the 90%?" She would like to see them considering more employment opportunities for women across the whole of their labour force, not only among the percentage of local labour required. Similarly, Kath Moore believed that targets could be limiting:

I've heard contractors say [...] we've hit all our targets now, that's it. [...] so for them it's about targets, rather than, I suppose, the kind of culture change that I would like to see, where they actually embrace what we're doing.

Nevertheless, the section 106 targets, low as they are, represent one way of engaging employers - sometimes reluctantly - with the project, which can result in a positive change in attitudes once they have observed women's capabilities for themselves, as seen earlier.

When appealing to contractors, therefore, the WiC project may need to place greater emphasis not only on the value of WiC in helping to meet local labour targets, but on the wider business benefits of greater workforce diversity, particularly relating to gender, but also recognising the ethnically diverse profile of WiC participants.

7.2.3 Project resources and growth

The report has identified that key elements of the success of the project are the work placements and the holistic and personalised support provided to women participants, as well as close engagement with employers. However the work of outreach to women participants; persuading and recruiting employers; organising the training and preparation for women participants; finding and matching women to placement and work opportunities; plus providing ongoing support to women, all demands intensive resources. Currently the project operates with only two project workers, who are believed to be highly effective in managing the variety of activities of the project. Steering committee members felt that the project was "punching above its weight" and offered "value for money". Head of Employment Services at the CITB, Matt Valentine-Pyle, believed that the project workers "use the funding in a very efficient way", relying on experience to direct resources where they believe they will be most effective.

However there was a general consensus among interviewees that the project could achieve much more with increased resources, and "we need more Kath's and Ranjits!" was a common refrain in interviews. Many stakeholders wanted to see the project build on its strengths and expand. Senior Employee Relationship Manager at JobCentre Plus, Tony Hyland, said:

"I think they've done a great job in terms of getting people into work. But I think if the project were to expand and if they had more arms and legs, I think there really is a role in getting out to all of the construction employers and putting them on the spot [...] and

saying ‘well you’ve just won that contract for that shopping centre over there, we’ve got an idea for women who are looking for work, ideally why can’t we work with you?’”

The experience and personal attributes of the project workers are highly regarded by the different parties interviewed for this research. The combination of Kath Moore’s background of working in the manual trades and Ranjit Samra’s experience in employment support was highly valued in building trust among employers, and in providing appropriate support to women participants. A variety of skills and abilities are brought to bear in the functioning of the project, with a shared commitment to the women participants in evidence. In considering the project’s plans for expansion, careful thought will have to be given to the required skills and capabilities of additional project staff. A redefinition of roles will also be required to enable the Project Managers to extend their strategic and managerial responsibilities.

In terms of physical resources, the project currently lacks an identifiable, single physical location from which to operate (currently hosted within Be Onsite and Lend Lease premises). The project managers believed that operating from separate, visible premises would assist in raising the project’s profile and identity and would enhance their effectiveness. While the project is becoming more widely known through word-of-mouth recommendations, its online identity as represented via its website is minimal and does not reflect the project’s range of activities or achievements. This could be substantially developed to raise awareness of the project’s outcomes, impact and engagement with a range of partners.

The project expanded its reach from the boroughs immediately surrounding the Olympic site in 2011, but is still currently operating within the London area only, where there are significant construction opportunities, including in the social housing sector. Several stakeholders expressed a view that they would like to see the benefits that the project can bring extended beyond London to other areas where there is construction growth.

8. Conclusions and opportunities for the future

The report presents evidence of the positive impact that the WiC project is having on women's opportunities to gain experience and employment of a range of occupations within the construction sector in London. Through analysis of data collected from interviews with a variety of participants and stakeholders engaged with the project, the report concludes that the WiC project, although small in scale, is operating a successful model that can assist in overcoming some of the barriers women face when trying to enter male-dominated construction occupations. Additionally, the project appears to be contributing valuable support for the retention of women in construction employment.

An assessment of the key elements that contribute to the project's achievements was provided in section 7, which also identified some of the challenges and constraints that it faces. This final section draws some summary conclusions about the success of the WiC project model, as well as those constraining its operation, before considering the implications of these findings for the future development of the project. It highlights some opportunities presented for the future and makes suggestions for how the project might take advantage of these.

8.1 The success of the WiC project model

Several elements have been identified in the report as accounting for the results achieved by the WiC project and the positive assessment of participants. The successful model draws on the following important components: careful assessment, preparation and training of women before being matched with employer opportunities; supported work placements that enable employers to assess women's performance and women to demonstrate their capabilities; personalised, ongoing guidance and support for women participants, before, during and after placements or employment; the brokerage and advocacy role of the project in finding opportunities and placing women with employers; and relationships of trust established with employers based on positive experience of applicants received. Additionally, the expertise, dedication and personal attributes of the project workers were felt by all interviewees to be a strong factor in the project's success.

Contractual compliance set by procurement tenders were important to employer decisions, so that underpinning the engagement of employers with the WiC project is the role of client requirements to consider workforce diversity, the use of local labour and provide training opportunities. Many of the contractors working with WiC are those operating local authority or social housing contracts, where the clients are seeking additional 'social value' for their spending.

A further strength of the project in addressing some of the traditional barriers to women's employment in construction has been identified by this report as the project's holistic focus

on the needs of women. It helps to build women's confidence in their abilities; offers financial support with expenses and childcare; provides employment or training opportunities that are often not readily available; intervenes or offers advice in cases of workplace problems; and introduces women to others in the industry. Indeed, the evidence from this study indicates that this specific focus on women (rather than a broader remit in relation to groups under-represented in the industry or support for unemployed people into work, for example) is essential to the project's achievements, and is key to its success in not only getting women into opportunities in construction, but also to their retention in the industry.

Women, however, are not a homogenous group and have a variety of different needs. The project model, however, offers opportunities both for women entering the manual trades and a range of professional construction roles. Interviewees from both groups expressed similar levels of satisfaction with participation in the project. The variety of roles available in construction was noted by several interviewees, many of which were unfamiliar to participants before encountering the WiC project. The project's engagement with a range of contractors working across many builds therefore offers varied work and placement opportunities, to match an individual's interests and skills.

The project succeeds in finding employment for high proportions of women who were previously out of work: more than three-quarters (78%) of women who gained work through the project were previously unemployed, half of whom were claiming state benefits. Of those who were previously employed, almost half (49%) moved from part-time employment into full-time positions. The project is therefore achieving substantial results in improving the economic position of its participants.

Participants in the WiC project reflect a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, broadly consistent with the population in London, although the greatest proportion of women are from black or black British backgrounds. Given the evidence of discrimination often faced by ethnic minority women in the labour market (Bradley and Healy, 2008), the project can be seen as contributing to improvements in the employment opportunities of those potentially experiencing additional disadvantage.

It has been noted that there have been a variety of initiatives in the past to increase women's participation in construction, with varying levels of success. Some initiatives have suffered as a result of short-term funding, and it has been argued here that the duration of the WiC project, now completing its sixth year, has been crucial in its success. Sustained funding from within the industry, via the CITB, has enabled relationships of trust to grow and develop with a range of contractors. Additionally the project has learned from experience of what is effective to build increasing results for women participants. The project appears to produce substantial results for the funding that it currently receives.

8.2 Constraints

Some of the constraints identified that impact on the WiC project relate to the nature of employment structures in the industry, characterised by subcontracting and self-employment, and are therefore not easy to address through a project of this type. Interviews showed that it appears more difficult for older women entrants, who are above the usual age for apprenticeships, to gain sustained employment in the construction trades. However, there may be opportunities to build on existing relationships with other organisations and initiatives that are seeking to overcome some of these problems through offering supported employment.

Local labour targets, contained in Section 106 agreements, were felt to offer both opportunities and restrictions for the project. Some women felt their opportunities were limited by living in the 'wrong' borough when contractors had borough-based targets to meet, while project managers believed that targets could limit the approach taken by some contractors who were focused only on meeting minimum requirements. When appealing to contractors, therefore, the WiC project may need to place greater emphasis not only on the value of WiC in helping to meet local labour targets, but on the wider business benefits of greater workforce diversity, particularly relating to gender, but also recognising the ethnically diverse profile of WiC participants.

The range of activities undertaken by the project require intensive time and effort, involving outreach to women, recruiting employers, running the project operations and offering high levels of personal support to women participants. The project, however, only has two full-time workers and the limited resources of the project have been shown by this research to be a major constraint. Its achievements in terms of placing women in employment and work experience are relatively small in numerical terms. However, given its limited resources, the project produces substantial results and is believed to offer good value for money. The assessment provided here suggests that the small but effective model that the project operates has the potential to achieve greater results with additional resources.

8.3 Opportunities for the future

The research has identified a number of opportunities facing the project that may be beneficial for its future development. Some suggestions for taking advantage of these are put forward here.

1. **Construction growth and skills shortages:** a number of high-profile construction projects in London will continue to demand skilled labour. With the increasingly high reputation of WiC within the industry, and well-established links with a range of contractors, the project is well placed to take advantage of new opportunities such as Crossrail 2, HS2 and other infrastructure projects, as well as continued housing development. Employers are already feeling the impact of skills shortages in the

industry, partly due to economic improvements in other parts of the EU resulting in fewer skilled workers seeking work in the UK. The CITB predicts that the industry will grow on average 2.2 per cent between now and 2018, the equivalent of 182,000 jobs (Lowe and Woodcroft, 2014: 73). This provides a significant opportunity for employers to look to women and other underrepresented groups to address labour shortages.

2. **Procurement and social value:** the report has noted the importance of public procurement processes to driving commitment to equality actions. This is increasingly being recognised at a policy level (EHRC, 2013) and by business (CBI, 2009), although the government's recent review of the Public Sector Equality Duty missed an opportunity for promoting these links further and instead sought to limit what it believed to be excessive equality activity by the public sector (Wright and Conley, 2013). However, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, in force since January 2013, requires public authorities to consider how the services they procure can improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. The research found indications that it was beginning to have an impact on the demands placed on contractors and the commitment given to monitoring the outcomes. This legislation therefore provides further arguments for WiC to use to persuade contractors to work with the project so that they can demonstrate additional social value during the bidding process (Nelson, 2014). There may also be scope for engagement by senior project supporters at a strategic or policy level to encourage public authorities to interpret the legislation in a way that recognises that the social well-being of an area can be improved through setting employment targets that support unemployed or low paid women to gain better paid work in construction (EHRC, 2013).

3. **Employability and social policy objectives:** the project contributes to wider social policy objectives of reducing the numbers of recipients of welfare benefits and increasing opportunities for those at a disadvantage in the labour market, such as lone parents, the long-term unemployed and those from areas of social deprivation, as well as NEETs (young people not in education or employment). The project has high success rates for placing unemployed women into employment (more than three-quarters of women gaining employment through the project were previously unemployed, half of whom were claiming state benefits) and in assisting women to move from part-time to full-time employment. A majority of project participants are ethnic minority women. Thus the project can effect sustainable improvements in the life chances of women facing multiple disadvantage in the labour market, and additionally raise their economic position through entering better-paid traditionally male occupations (the promotion of non-traditional occupations for women is one strategy for reducing the persistent pay gap between women and men (Women and Work Commission, 2006)). These achievements of the project could be advertised more widely, and exploited to tap into

funding streams addressing employability, gender inequality, social deprivation and inclusion.

4. **The growing reputation of the project:** the project has growing recognition for its achievements both within the industry and more widely at policy level, and has been invited to participate in a range of public events promoting women's employment. However, there is more that can be done to raise the project's profile more widely across the industry. Supportive employers can be encouraged to further spread the word about the benefits to other firms, particularly to small and medium-sized contractors. There is also a need to develop the project website to showcase achievements and success stories and consider use of other media such as video and social media to promote achievements of project.
5. **Project development and growth:** the project is already taking steps to be in a position to access greater funding, in the first instance by beginning the process of establishment as a community interest company. Having an independent status will allow the project to seek funding from a wider range of sources, while maintaining financial support from within the construction industry. Support and financial commitment from within the industry will remain important to both the operation and credibility of the project. Work is underway on making a substantial application to the Big Lottery Fund which would enable the project to grow, with the appointment of two additional staff, a project manager and some much needed admin support.
6. **Expansion outside London:** plans include broadening the reach of the project beyond London, to other areas of construction growth, particularly in the construction of social housing. Work is under way on plans for expansion to Birmingham and Wales, where the project is developing its existing networks and collaborating with partners with shared objectives. Some existing relationships with contractors will be useful. Expansion outside London will represent a significant new phase for the project, with the potential to provide many more opportunities for women to enter construction employment.
7. **Further support for women participants:** women participants appreciated the contacts with others going through the WiC project, although the level of contact was variable. Women relied heavily on support from the project workers, but could gain further support from a self-sustaining network of women WiC participants – past and present – using the goodwill already generated by project. Consideration could be given to the most appropriate formats for a network, including internet and social media. Information about, and links with, the developing women's network within construction union UCATT (Craig and Oates, 2014) can provide additional sources of support.

8. **Collaborative partnerships:** the project currently collaborates with a range of partners, for example in providing training and employment opportunities. To maximise the impact of the project's work and provide greater options for participants, there may be scope to strengthen collaborations with other compatible initiatives, such as the women's training offered through the UCATT learning centre, together with projects that seek to build employability and address the problems of short-term contracts and self-employment in the industry (for example, BeOnsite or Building Lives).
9. **Employer engagement with equality and inclusion:** the research identified business benefits to employers from engagement with the project. Additionally, a current initiative supported by the CITB, the BeFair Framework, is a tool to support construction companies in achieving cultural change on equality and inclusion. There are opportunities for the WiC project to engage further with construction employers developing their equality and inclusion activities.
10. **Further research:** this small-scale study has identified some key questions and wider implications of the project that merit further investigation. These are: a) the impact of WiC activities on culture change within the sector, including the views of male workers and supervisors; b) the project's capacity for improving the employment opportunities for women at a disadvantage in the labour market and the longer-term employability of women participating in WiC; and c) a larger-scale evaluation of the impact of WiC project expansion on opportunities for women in London, Birmingham and Wales.

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Appendix 1: Women participant interviewees

Interviewee no.	Occupation	Work status	Age	Ethnicity
	Manual trades			
1	Carpenter, apprentice	Full-time employment	20-24	White British
2	Electrical Mate	Full-time employment	36-45	White Irish
3	Electrician	Looking for work	46-55	White British
4	Painter and decorator	On placement	20-24	White British
5	Painter and decorator, apprentice	Full-time employment	20-24	White British
6	Trainee electrician	Full-time employment	36-45	White British
7	Trainee electrician	On placement	46-55	Black/Black British Caribbean
	Professional occupations			
8	Civil Engineering student	Full-time student, found employment through WiC	20-24	White British
9	Construction Management student	Completed placement, Full-time student	25-35	Black/Black British Caribbean
10	Environmental Engineer	Full-time employment	36-45	Black/Black British African
11	Site engineer	Full-time employment	25-35	Black/Black British African
	Focus group			
FG1	Assistant construction manager	Full-time employment	25-35	Black/Black British African
FG2	Carpenter	Self-employed	25-35	Black/Black British Other
FG3	Construction manager	Full-time employment	25-35	White Other
FG4	Design manager	Full-time employment	25-35	White Other
FG5	Document controller	Full-time employment	20-24	Asian/Asian British Indian
FG6	Independent certifier	Full-time employment	25-35	Asian/Asian British Pakistani
FG7	Plumber	Full-time employment	36-45	White Other
FG8	Trainee construction manager	Part-time employment	20-24	Black/Black British Caribbean
FG9	Trainee construction manager	On placement	25-35	Black/Black British African
FG10	Trainee project manager	On placement	25-35	Black/Black British African

Appendix 2: Employer interviewees

Role	Company
Employment and Skills Manager	Design and build contractor
Senior Site Manager	Building contractor
Contracts Manager	Painting and decorating contractor
Managing Director	Painting and decorating contractor
Corporate Social Responsibility Manager	Construction management contractor
Senior Project Manager	Project management and construction company
Environmental Manager	Civil engineering contractor

Appendix 3: Stakeholder interviewees

Name	Role	WiC Steering Committee?
Mike Bialyj	Employer Services Director, CITB	Yes
Judy Lowe	Deputy Chief Executive, CITB	Yes
Val Lowman	Managing Director, Be Onsite	Yes
Matt Valentine-Pyle	Head of Employment Services, CITB	Yes
Tony Hyland	Senior Employee Relationship Manager, Department for Work and Pensions	
Karen King	Learning Organiser, UCATT trade union	
Kath Moore	Project Manager, WiC Project	
Ranjit Samra	Project Manager, WiC Project	



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