

Careers in the Northern Ireland Construction Industry



Construction - What is it?

The construction industry covers the design, construction and maintenance of buildings and infrastructure projects such as bridges, roads, tunnels, waterways, etc.

Construction boasts a wide variety of careers including skilled trades, IT, marketing, project management, design and much more.

Construction needs people with creative, technical, management and practical skills.

Whatever your role is in the industry, if it's a bricklayer or plasterer, civil engineer, architect or construction manager, every team member is as important as the next. So whatever your talent is, you can be sure there's a career in construction for you.

Choose a career in construction and you won't be starting out on your own. You'll be joining a team of specialist people all working together to build a strong, long-lasting future. Join one of Northern Ireland's largest industries and you'll have chosen a career that's challenging, exciting and rewarding.

What do I need?

There are many ways you can get into construction, and the industry welcomes everyone from newcomers to people with some experience to career changers.

The skills and qualifications needed vary by occupation and range from apprenticeships and NVQs to HNDs, degrees and professional qualifications.

The majority of trades require a minimum NVQ Level 2 or above and professional occupations usually require a degree level qualification or equivalent.

Whether you go to college, learn on site, or go to university you'll obtain specialist training for your chosen career.

Your career in any area in construction will require commitment and enthusiasm.

Contact your local training provider, further education college or university for course information and entry criteria.

Log on to www.citbni.org.uk/careers.aspx to find out more about careers in construction.

What are the opportunities?

5,200 that's the number of extra workers that will be needed to deliver the expected work over the next 5 years from 2024 - 2028 in Northern Ireland (NI), as highlighted in the latest Construction Skills Network Labour Market Intelligence Report¹ (CSN) forecast. That's 1,040 new workers each year! During this 5-year period the following occupations will have the strongest recruitment requirements:

- Non-construction professional, and technical office-based staff
- Wood trades such as carpentry and joinery
- Electrical Installation
- Civil Engineers
- Plant Operatives
- Labourers/General Operatives

High-demand roles will include construction supervisors, plasterers, roofers, plumbing and HVAC trades, architects, and non-construction staff like IT, HR, finance, and marketing. Surveys from the Construction Leadership Council² and FMB³ also note a shortage of bricklayers.

Future Skills

Green & Net Zero Carbon Skills

Construction News⁴ believes the UK is on track to become net-zero by 2050, with the construction industry, responsible for 40% of emissions, playing a key role. Achieving this will involve retrofitting old buildings and designing new ones with better energy performance. Rapid upskilling of workers in net-zero practices will be crucial, potentially leading to significant job opportunities.

Material & Digital Skills

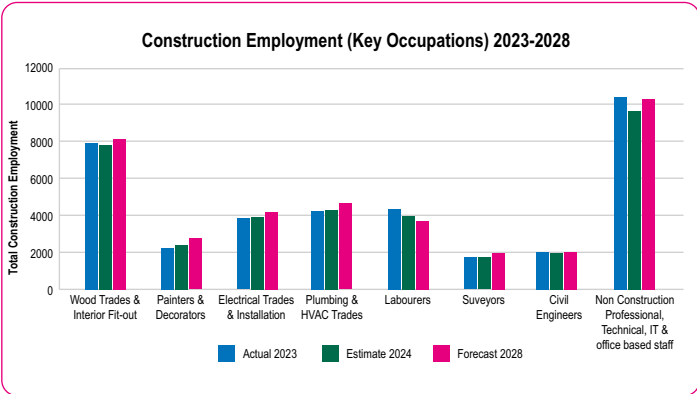
New materials and techniques are changing how we build infrastructure, making it cheaper and easier to maintain. We're seeing smart materials in action, like roads that generate solar power and can detect or charge vehicles. New kinds of concrete, like self-healing or low carbon, will make roads, bridges and tunnels last longer and be better for the environment. Also, 3D printing will allow faster and higher-quality construction, either onsite or in factories, reducing costs and improving efficiency. A greater standard of digital and IT skills will need to be developed across the entire construction industry.

Where are the opportunities?

Since devolution was restored and the 2024-25 Budget was agreed by the Executive, there has been £181m of support towards flagship NI construction projects such as the A6 road upgrade, Belfast Transport Hub and the new Learning Development Centre for the Fire and Rescue Service. Support for projects on the horizon include:

- £250m Royal Victoria Belfast new Children's Hospital that will consist of 10 storeys of clinical and support accommodation.
- £36.2m Sub-Regional Stadia programme that will modernise footballing facilities such as club grounds, grassroots facilities at every level in communities across NI.
- £140m York Street Interchange project which aims to provide a solution to the significant traffic bottlenecks in North Belfast between the A12 Westlink, M2, and M3.
- £73m for the Bangor Waterfront development project.
- £180m for the Central Riverfront/Strand Road, Walled City and Ebrington Regeneration and Tourism Projects.

- £500m Tribeca Belfast, an urban regeneration scheme that will provide residential, offices, retail, food and beverage space.



How is the Northern Ireland Industry currently performing?

In the last quarter of 2023, the construction industry grew by 0.8%, recovering from a challenging year that saw an overall decrease of 1.4% compared to 2022. However, there was a 4.9% increase over the year, marking four consecutive quarters of growth. Construction output in NI in Q4 2023 was 6.1% higher than pre-pandemic levels and 56.4% above the low seen in Q2 2020. This growth was mainly driven by new projects, infrastructure work, and other types of construction. The first quarter of 2024 showed signs of recovery in workloads, enquiries, and employment compared to the last quarter of 2023. In 2024 construction output in NI is forecasted to grow by 1.5%, which is better than the UK's overall expected growth of 0.2%. Over the next five years, NI's construction industry is expected to grow at an average rate of 2.8% per year, slightly above the UK average of 2.4%. This positive outlook positions NI as one of the strongest performing regions in the UK.

Workforce Forecast

The CSN reports the level of construction output growth in NI is expected to see an annual average increase of 0.8%, higher than the 0.6% UK figure. This forecast shows the 2023 NI construction workforce of 64,290 will decrease slightly to 63,910 in 2024 before increasing to 66,840 by 2028.

What are the Wages?

	Average Annual Gross Pay ⁵
Quantity Surveyor	£52,829
Architect	£53,478
Civil Engineer	£45,608
Joiner	£28,954
Plumber	£33,714
Painter & Decorator	£30,974

Above information correct at time of print.

Interested in a Career in Construction - What to do Next

Click on the following links for further information:

www.citbni.org.uk/careers.aspx

For more information on careers within the Northern Ireland construction industry.

www.goconstruct.org

'Go Construct' offers UK wide advice to people considering a career in the industry.

If you need help on choosing a career, going to college or university, training opportunities, or finding a job, contact the careers service:

Online: www.nidirect.gov.uk/careers

Telephone: 0300 200 7820

The Construction industry presents work that is full of diversity and challenges; with the changing face of construction, it's a great time to be able to make a contribution. What you get out of a career depends on you.

A day in the life of Diarmuid Mullan Site Manager, Heron Bros

How did you get into the construction industry?

My whole family is in construction and I always knew that I wanted to work with my hands. From a young age I would go out on site with my dad and I could not wait until the weekend or evenings so I could get out with my dad. I left school at 16 and became an apprentice joiner. I worked my way up over the years to become a foreman and then a Site Manager. I have always enjoyed working in the construction industry.

What does your job entail on a day to day basis?

As a site manager my job is very busy.

7:00am It is an early start for me on site. I sign in and put on the correct PPE and take a walk around the site to complete an early morning inspection before the work begins.

8:00am I call together the workforce for a site meeting. This includes a Toolbox Talk and safety briefing to ensure everyone understands what they are doing today. Any potential risks or dangers are discussed at the meeting to ensure that everyone will be safe on site.

9:00am It's time to answer my emails and make any necessary phone calls. I also stop by to check on the apprentice to make sure they have everything they need and check if they have any questions about the work.

10:30am I meet with local neighbours to keep them informed of progress and answer any queries or complaints. It is great to engage with local residents and build good relationships.

12:00pm I am back on site and carry out a perimeter check to ensure that the outside is clean and tidy. I also make sure that environmental factors are covered, such as waste material being correctly recycled and wildlife looked after. Once I am happy with this I eat a healthy snack from the canteen.

3:00pm As there is a new trade contractor starting, I have a short meeting to give them all the information that they need and show them around as part of their initial induction.

4:30pm I return to the site office to check emails, make phone calls and update my 'to-do' list. I also prepare my presentation and fun packs for the visit to the local school, which is taking place tomorrow.

5:30pm I carry out my final walk around site with the team and discuss any issues that occurred during the day and talk about how these were resolved. This keeps me updated with everything that happens on site. It also means that I have good working relationships with my workforce.

6:00pm It is the end of the day and I ensure that the site is secure for the night and hand over to the security guard. I then sign out and remove my PPE before going home.

What are the good and bad aspects of your job?

I get to build brand new buildings from start to finish and leave a positive legacy in the communities I work in. Working on a construction site can be tough when the weather is wet.

What skills do you need in your line of work and how have your employers helped develop these skills?

You need to have

- Methodical way of thinking
- Good knowledge of construction
- Good financial and numeracy management
- Excellent problem solving, communication and negotiating skills
- The ability to absorb complex information and assess requirements readily
- Computer literate

What advice would you give to young people considering a career in construction?

Construction is a career like no other career. I have always enjoyed working in the construction industry as every day is different and brings me new challenges. It has allowed me to travel the world and work on some very special projects!

Click on the video below to hear more about Diarmuid's journey in construction or log on to <https://bit.ly/3zM2s2j> to view.



Ellis Blee – My role as a Trainee Estimator with Gilbert Ash

How did you get into the construction industry?

I have always had an interest in the construction industry from a young age as my father was a bricklayer and contractor. I enrolled myself on an Ulster University Foundation Degree course with The South West College in Omagh. This course was a part-time Higher Level Apprenticeship Foundation Degree meaning to complete the course I would need to find employment within the Construction Industry. Fortunately, I was offered a role within Gilbert-Ash as a Trainee Estimator and for the past two and a half years I have been working and learning side by side with a team of Estimators. I am currently in the final stages of completing a Bsc Hon Degree in Construction Engineering and Management with Open University.

What does your job entail on a day-to-day basis?

I work as part of a team within a close-knit Estimating Department. As a student my knowledge of estimating was limited so there was much to learn on joining Gilbert-Ash. On a daily basis, I assist my co-workers on completing tenders; this can take many forms from simply printing, organising and checking the documents for each project, to creating and sending out enquiries for Tenders.

What are the good and bad aspects of your job?

Working in estimating I have learned to appreciate how much work goes into tenders and projects long before they reach a site. I get the opportunity to see the project completely dissected, from substructure to the finishes in the process of pricing. As a main contractor the average budget on the tenders we receive is £20 Million, and no two tenders are the same, so I assist on a wide variety of tenders ranging across Hotels, Educational Buildings, Offices, Theatres, Museums and many more which keeps the job very interesting.

What skills do you need in your line of work and how have your employers helped develop these skills?

In estimating I would say one of the most important skills to have is good time management. Meeting deadlines is critical, and this can be overwhelming if you are not prepared and organised. Each member of the Gilbert-Ash Estimating team may have their own different style on how they approach a tender but they have all taught me that prioritising each element is necessary, for example the larger packages need to be sent to Sub-Contractors promptly to ensure they have enough time to give an accurate quotation.

Another essential skill to have is good communication and people skills. The role of an Estimator means you are in contact with many people from Architects to Quantity Surveyors to Sub-Contractors, learning how to work collaboratively with everyone involved makes the process run smoother. Developing this skill comes with time and experience, and the more responsibility I am given the more I am developing this skill with confidence. I have also been given the opportunity to develop my IT skills in estimating software, I can now confidently and efficiently use the Company's Conquest system which is a great benefit.

What advice would you give to young people considering a career in construction?

My advice would be to take the HLA route, I have found it to be a real benefit to me. What you learn through a course is very relevant and necessary but being involved in the industry while learning is invaluable. It gives you the opportunity to complete real live tasks relevant to the area of study while helping to focus you on achieving your qualification. It also opens you up to the broader construction industry and the many career options available, so being an Apprentice gives you time to explore these and see which is the best fit for you. From a financial viewpoint it also has many benefits as you will be 'earning while you are learning' and on occasion the fees from your course can be supported through Government training schemes.

To hear more about Ellis' role **click on the video below** or log on to <https://bit.ly/3DkG7LN> to view.



Did you Know?

1. There are approximately 2.1 million construction workers in the UK.
2. There are over 170 roles in construction to choose from and exciting new roles are continually emerging with the introduction of new technologies.
3. Women are under-represented in construction, particularly within the trade occupations.
4. There is a GCSE in Construction & the Built Environment which is currently offered in over 50 schools in Northern Ireland. Some schools offer a BTEC qualification in Construction.
5. There are careers in built heritage, sustainable construction, and constructing sets for film, television and theatre.
6. Many Construction Managers and other professionals started their careers as apprentices.

Total Employment by Occupation - Northern Ireland

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION – NORTHERN IRELAND	Actual	Estimate	Forecast
	2023	2024	2028
Directors, executives and senior managers	3,190	3,240	3,710
Construction project managers	880	820	810
Non-construction professional and technical office based staff	5,960	5,730	5,670
Other non-construction office-based staff	4,240	4,220	4,480
Construction trades supervisors	900	830	790
Carpenters and joiners	7,850	7,800	8,060
Bricklayers and masons	1,380	1,350	1,410
Other construction and building trades	3,220	3,230	3,530
Painters and decorators	1,960	2,020	2,270
Plasterers	2,280	2,430	2,790
Roofers	580	600	660
Floorers and wall tilers	1,070	1,000	960
Glaziers and window trades	220	220	220
Scaffolders	230	220	200
Plant operatives	2,140	2,110	1,930
Plant mechanics/fitters	940	910	850
Steel erectors and metal workers	580	560	540
Labourers	4,350	4,050	3,680
Groundworkers	720	730	740
Electrical installation trades	3,850	3,900	4,170
Plumbing and HVAC trades	4,310	4,330	4,660
Logistics	880	940	1,020
Road and rail construction operatives	750	750	740
Non-construction trades and operatives	1,070	1,040	960
Total (SIC 41–43)	53,550	53,030	54,850

Civil engineers	2,040	1,980	2,090
Other professionals and technical staff working in construction	6,230	6,430	7,210
Architects	650	650	690
Surveyors	1,810	1,830	2,010
Total (SIC 41–43, 71.1, 74.9)	64,290	63,910	66,840

Source: ONS, CSN, Experian. ref. CSN Explained, Section 4, Notes 5 and 6

2. Workforce covers construction contracting, SIC 41, 42 & 43 along with supporting technical and professional workers in SIC 71 and 74.9.
3. The 28 occupational groups used in the report have been updated to align with the new Standard Occupational Classification: SOC(2020). Full details are covered in accompanying Technical Annex.

Data Sources

- 1 Construction Skills Network Labour Market Intelligence Report - 5 Year Outlook 2024-2028
<https://bit.ly/3SzkroB>
- 2 Construction Leadership Councils – Review of Shortage Occupations Report, May 2023
<https://bit.ly/4d4J9FH>
- 3 FMB, State Of Trade Survey Q1 2024, May 2024
<https://bit.ly/3SAfWdA>
- 4 Construction News, Construction Industry Article, October 2023
<https://bit.ly/3A7Wq1C>
- 5 What are the wages:
<https://www.adzuna.co.uk/jobs/salaries/northern-ireland/quantity-surveyor>
<https://www.adzuna.co.uk/jobs/salaries/northern-ireland/architect>
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All information correct at time of print

