

SHAMEFUL SEXISM AND RACISM!

THE serious construction skills shortage has been well documented. Forecasters reckon that over 87,000 new construction workers, including 1,500 floorlayers, are needed annually. Many of these vacancies, as some tabloids continually remind us, are being filled by skilled immigrants from Eastern European countries, notably Poland, where vocational training is traditionally given a much higher priority than in Britain.

But, to be fair, training provision in the UK has improved significantly in recent years. Within the flooring industry, for example, FITA now offers a wide range of courses under the guidance of qualified and highly experienced floorlayers. The status of floorlayers has also increased immeasurably with the recognition of NVQ qualifications and opportunities for more 'mature' floorlayers through the Experienced Worker Practical Assessment route.

It has been pointed out that many young school-leavers are simply unaware of the multitude of avenues available in construction, especially floorlaying. But that's to do with effective improvements in presentation in schools.

The whole building industry must confront a much more serious issue if it is to attract all the recruits it urgently needs: Many of the indigenous British population feel bitterly alienated from construction, which shamefully has the lowest representation of women and members of ethnic minority groups of all major industries in the UK.

Of the two million people who work in construction only 10%

are women. The black and ethnic minority population who represent 8% of the national workforce comprise just 2% of the manpower in construction. The implication is that the building industry is run by a load of white male chauvinists!

Sexism on construction sites is a fact. The recent debate about wolf whistles clearly underlines this point. However, of more concern is abhorrent racism. The extent of this problem is exposed in a recent survey by the University of Salford. It reveals that one third of 'black and minority ethnic' building workers believe that race discrimination is a major obstacle to more people from their background entering the industry.

The Salford University survey concludes that 'the hidden wealth of talent in the UK construction industry can only be tapped and built upon if there is a greater diversification and acceptance of difference.'

This applies not only in construction, but in every type of business. Companies can profit significantly by proactively embracing diversity and rejecting racial and minority group stereotypes. Rewards include greater staff morale and loyalty along with improved productivity and overall performance.



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