



Left to right: Former World Cup alpine ski racer, Chemmy Alcott, is pictured with Abigail Brierley and Deputy Editor of the New Civil Engineer, Belinda Smart.

Jan 10, 2024 10:07 GMT

Award honours research on gendered experiences in engineering

A Civil Engineering graduate from Northumbria University has won the *Rising Star – Contribution to Gender Diversity* award at the 2023 Inspiring Women in Construction and Engineering Awards.

Northumbria alumna, Abigail Brierley, was recognised at the event held in London for her work on producing a comparative study of the experiences of male and female engineers at different stages of their careers in both the UK

and USA.

Abigail's research was inspired by her awareness of the continuing struggle to attract women into civil engineering, despite drives for equality in Britain and the US. Her work collected feedback during interviews carried out with men and women in both countries, ranging from students and graduates to those with long-established careers, to understand some of the key themes around their influences, decision making and different experiences once working in the industry.

After forming part of a dissertation for Abigail's [Civil Engineering](#) degree at Northumbria, the study was recently developed into an academic paper with support from Dr Vikki Edmondson, Head of Subject for Civil Engineering at the University, and Dr Fred Sherratt, Associate Director of Research at The Construction Safety Research Alliance, University of Colorado.

Abigail was then invited to present the paper, [Is it different across the pond? Exploring gendered experiences in civil engineering in the UK and USA](#), at the Association of Researchers in Construction Management ([ARCOM](#)) conference, held in September.

“As part of my degree I was able to take a sandwich year in industry, and spent a year working for a construction firm in California. So I suppose that's what got me thinking about the differences for men and women doing the same job in both countries,” explained Abigail. “There may be a perception that things are levelling out and that more women are pursuing a career in civil engineering than there used to be, but we're not quite there yet. There's still more to be done in terms of outreach and inspiring young people at the right age.

“It was a real honour to receive the award and fantastic to see something I've worked on recognised.”

Having graduated in 2021, Abigail now works as a Graduate Construction Manager with the international engineering and construction company, [Laing O'Rourke](#). A video of Abigail accepting her award can be viewed [here](#).

Dr Edmondson, from the Department of [Mechanical and Construction Engineering](#) at Northumbria, said: “The study aims to update understandings

of why and how women continue to be underrepresented in civil engineering and uses evidence from both countries to make suggestions to enhance gender equality in the space.

“Abigail’s determination to highlight how this issue plays out on a global scale, and what we can continue to do to address it, made her very deserving of the Inspiring Women in Construction and Engineering Award.”

[The awards](#), which celebrated the role models and organisations empowering women in construction and engineering, were jointly hosted by *New Civil Engineer* and *Construction News*. In total, 15 winners were crowned during a glittering ceremony, recognising the women and teams that stand out as exceptional while showcasing both individual and organisation-wide initiatives.

The judging panel said of Abigail’s achievements: “She has true wow factor and is an excellent example of someone who has the drive and passion needed to achieve change in our industry. Abigail’s commitment and actions to raise the issues for women in the sector with wide audiences are truly impressive.”

Discover more [here](#) about construction and engineering study options at Northumbria.

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