

# Women in Construction 2022

## A Pandemic Setback



**CSQ's Women in Construction report is an annual snapshot of the participation of women in Queensland's construction industry across all roles, but particularly trades and labourers. This year's report highlights the continued importance of encouraging more women into construction. It remains a key priority for an industry grappling with labour shortages.**

### Females quietly exiting trades

The COVID pandemic has led to a range of unpredictable results in the economy. One of them has been a reduction in the female construction workforce.

Prior to the pandemic we were celebrating the start of a trend toward greater female representation in construction. The numbers were small, but the trend was clearly upward - doubling over 5 years.

Something happened during the pandemic.

In November 2020, the number of women in construction trade roles in Queensland was around the highest point on record - above 5,500, or 4.2% of construction tradespeople. A year later, that number had fallen to around 3,000 (2.1%).

It is not only women 'on the tools.' The rising trend of female participation in non-trade roles has also been interrupted by the pandemic - down more than 10% on pre-pandemic levels.

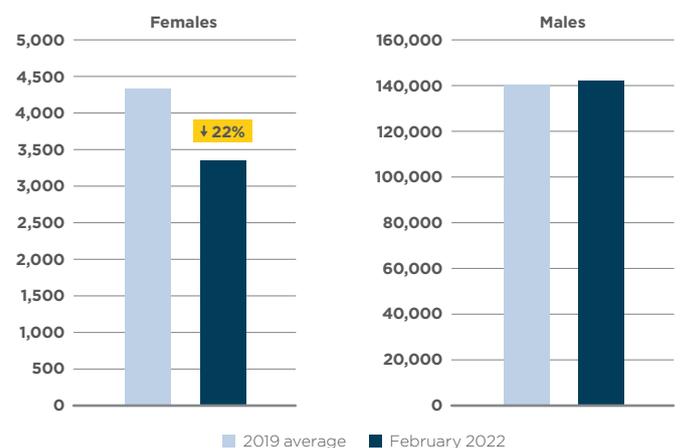
These numbers have historically been quite volatile, but the decline is deep enough to indicate that it is a real signal.

The male trade workforce, by contrast, has remained largely unchanged during the pandemic.

This trend is particularly noteworthy given female employment in Queensland has actually performed better than male employment during the pandemic.

While the total number of women employed in Queensland has regained its pre-COVID trend—sitting nearly 10% above the 2019 level—male employment sits only 6% above its 2019 average.

**Female trade participation declines during pandemic**  
Construction trade employment, Queensland



Source: ABS

### The substitution theory

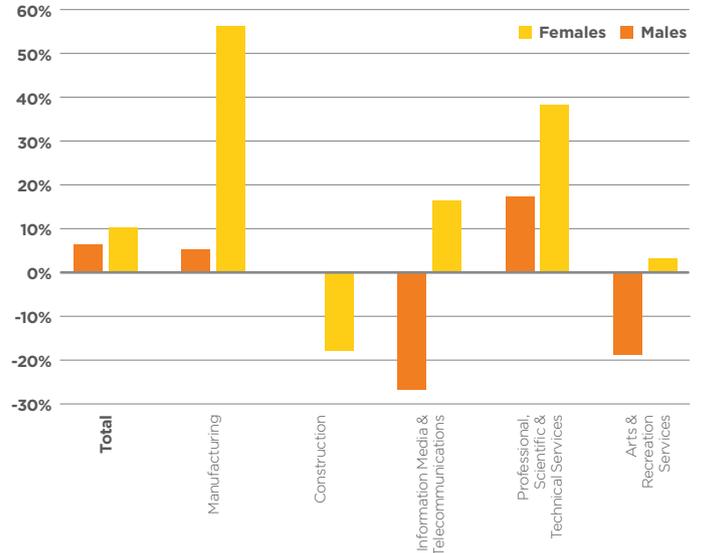
One possible explanation is a substitution from construction to other industries. While the typically female dominated industries such as healthcare and social assistance saw a solid increase (18%), some unexpected sources of growth emerged in other sectors.

One industry stands-out: manufacturing, which saw an increase in female employment of 56% compared to only 5% for men. Substitution to this industry is consistent with the relatively high skill transferability between construction and manufacturing. Both industries have high shares of middle-skilled occupations that generally do not require large investments in training or certification.

Put simply, Queensland manufacturers created over 26,000 new jobs during the pandemic. More than three-quarters of them were filled by women. That labour had to come from somewhere, and it certainly wasn't from overseas or interstate. Instead, it is likely that a portion of this demand has been met by women leaving other industries - including construction.

### Women flock to manufacturers

Employment change during pandemic, selected industries, Queensland



Note: Feb 2022 compared to 2019 average

Source: ABS

### Apprentices: a silver lining

Apprentices are one segment of the workforce that have fared particularly well during the pandemic. Wage incentives from the federal government, coupled with an unprecedented housing building boom, saw that of apprentice commencements soar by as much as 156%.

Thankfully, this trend has not missed women. An extra 540 women signed up for a construction apprenticeship in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20.

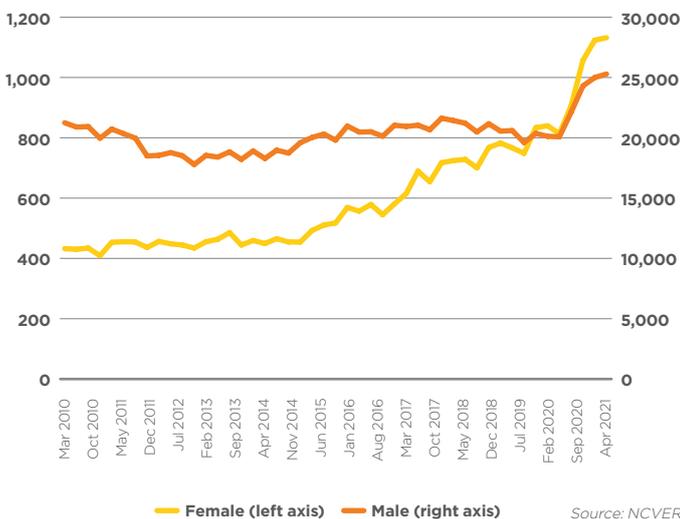
As a result, there are now over 1,100 female construction apprentices in-training in Queensland. This represents an increase of 45% over pre-pandemic levels.

The upshot of this is that, despite the general downturn in female participation in the industry, the pipeline of future tradeswomen has never been stronger in Queensland.

It is also encouraging that this growth in apprentices has been geographically very broad-based. Every region has experienced growth in female participation in construction apprenticeships. Mackay - Whitsundays, Central Queensland and Darling Downs - Toowoomba stand out as shining examples for women.

### More females taking up apprenticeships

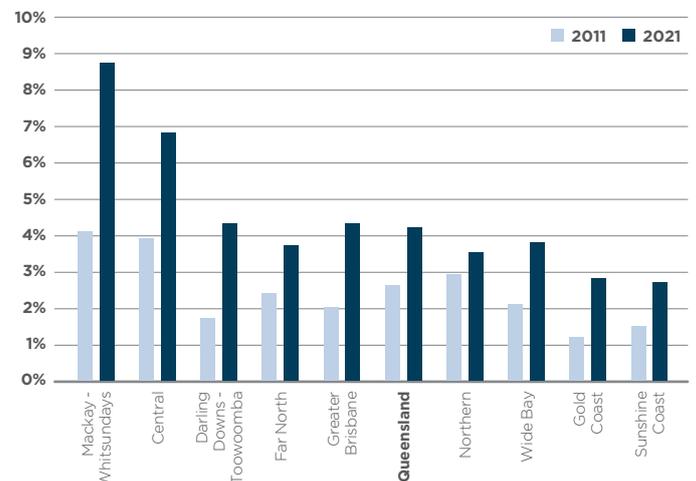
Construction apprentices in-training, Queensland



Source: NCVET

### Regions outperforming on female apprenticeships

Female share in construction apprenticeships, Queensland



Note: Figures are annual averages

Source: NCVET