



## **Lisa Garrett - Health and Safety Officer**

Degrees of change: A decision to switch careers has seen Lisa Garrett experience one of the greatest gender equality shifts in engineering and construction in recent years.

The Attymass native is the first to admit she never imagined herself donning a high vis jacket and hard hat for a day at work on site, but the 32-year-old is playing a leading role as the industry evolves.

When her degree in Business and IT landed her an administrative job in a UK utility company, she got a taste for the health and safety side of the business but wasn't happy with just watching from the sidelines.

"I was carrying out administrative duties for the Health and Safety department but quickly realised I had a keen interest in the role and signed up for a degree in Occupational Health and Safety in the UK."

With her qualification under her arm Lisa often found herself as the only female on site when she began her career as a Health and Safety Officer in 2017. But the tide has turned, and more and more women are taking up engineering and construction related roles.

"For my first two years I didn't work with another girl on site. There were women in the office but it was male dominated on site. But as the years have gone out there are a lot of women in roles as Health and Safety Officers, Engineers and Contracts Managers."

She's "proud" to have been part of that shift.

"If you want a role in engineering then don't let anything stop you from doing that. The fact that you're a woman does not matter. It's a rewarding industry and I'm so proud of how far I've come."

"I knew it would be a tough industry to break into, I knew it was male orientated but there's a real comradery when you are out working on a project."

Her role has seen her travel the length and breadth of the UK and Ireland, working on some large-scale tunnelling and road infrastructural projects.

Ward and Burke was her first employer, giving her “great on-site experience on a range of different projects including tunnelling, major utility work and deep excavations”.

“I was lucky to work on some challenging projects and learned a lot along the way. It’s a nice feeling when you are travelling around the country and you can point out the projects you worked on. It’s a great sense of achievement.”

In 2018 she sought a transfer to Ward and Burke’s Irish operations. With her family and boyfriend back home, Lisa had become one of Ireland West Airport’s most frequent flyers, but she was ready to put down roots.

“I travelled to Boston after my Business degree and from there to Manchester, so I had been 8 years away from home.”

But instead of travelling around the UK she now found herself travelling around Ireland and the trip home on a Friday afternoon was sometimes longer than that from North West England.

After ensuring the health and safety of workers on some of Ireland’s best-known projects, including water projects, work began on the N5 upgrade from Turlough to Westport and she made it her goal to secure work on the job.

“I wanted to get home but I also wanted to gain experience on a road project. It’s one of the largest infrastructural projects in the and it was on my doorstep. I was appointed as Health and Safety Officer with Wills Bros, a Foxford based company working on the project.”

With large numbers working on site and the pandemic to deal with, there was never a dull day.

A year later she took up her current role as a HSQE (Health, Safety, Environment and Quality) Officer for Irish Water. Every day Lisa works to ensure the safety, health and welfare of workers on Irish Water projects is a top priority.

She’s a regular visitor to Irish Water’s sites – plant upgrades, pipe laying projects, and new developments are all on her must see list. She’s in constant communication with on-site teams and provides a support system for health and safety inspectors.

“Safety has to be at the forefront of everyone’s mind. It’s my job to ensure it never get neglected and if an issue arises that it’s reported, dealt with and actions are taken to ensure it doesn’t happen again. The aim is to reduce accidents and incidents as much as possible and put control measures in place to reduce risks.”

Not one to rest on her laurels, Lisa wasn’t content with her UK degree and conferred with First Class Honours in Occupational Health and Safety from UCC last year.

She’s proving to be an inspiration for young women who want to work in what was traditionally a male-dominated industry.

“There’s a great support system in Irish Water. The company is continually striving to improve on diversity and inclusion and balance the historic gender inequality in engineering. The workplace is changing for the better and more opportunities for women in engineering and construction will be available for the next generation.”