

# NICOLA MCCRACKEN

Health and Safety  
Consultant, Nicola  
McCracken Safety  
Services Ltd.



**On leaving school, Nicola realised that she didn't want a desk job where she would be doing the same thing every day. Having heard the School of Building lecture at an Ulster University open day, she decided to undertake an HND in Building Studies.**

Her first post-graduate role was with John Laing Construction, who employed Nicola as a trainee in the Health and Safety Department – this was something that was really only getting started at that time, so she had not studied it as part of her course – it is now a fundamental subject with all construction qualifications. Nicola says 'I realised early on that I really enjoyed this type of work as it involved both being a team player and working on your own. I have John Laing Construction to thank for obtaining all of my safety qualifications as they signed me up for each of the health and safety courses offered by CITB NI at that time – Site Safety Supervisor, First Aid, Fire Warden, Plant Safety and many others. After about a year with the company I was then offered the opportunity to complete the Neboosh Diploma in Occupational Safety and Health. This led to me becoming one of the first Chartered Members of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health when the institute was awarded a Royal Charter in 2002. I am also an Incorporated Member of the Chartered Institute of Building'. Nicola has continued to complete relevant safety qualifications and also became a plant instructor for a period of time. More recently, as environmental issues become more high profile, she completed a Neboosh Environmental Certificate.

Nicola has had the opportunity to work all over the world with Lagan Construction Ltd, a

Belfast based company and visited places like Barbados, Puerto Rico and Jamaica in the Caribbean, Bermuda, Fiji and she also spent two years living and working in Islamabad in Pakistan to help manage a new international airport build.

Nicola is currently self-employed, having set up her own health and safety consultancy – Nicola McCracken Safety Services Ltd. in April 2017. She has two young children so she tends to work two to three days per week out with clients and then she can focus on paperwork from home at a time that suits her. This gives her a great work-life-balance and allows her to spend quality time with her children while they are young. Nicola's husband also works in the construction industry and he usually travels to England three days a week, so they work around each other with their childcare.

Nicola now works with clients from a range of industries as health and safety is a requirement for them all and the legal obligations are very similar – construction does have more legal requirements but that is just because of the nature of the work and the fluidity of sites. This means Nicola has to keep abreast of changes to legislation and advise clients accordingly. She is also on the committee (and a past chair) of the



## CASE STUDY

Northern Ireland Safety Group (NISG), a charitable body made up of companies and individuals who want to promote health and safety at work.

Nicola's role is very varied, and every day is different, one day she is working in her office and other days she is training, carrying out audits and inspections, or advising companies on safety issues. The benefit of self-employment is that she can set her own agenda.

Nicola says, 'I have loved my time travelling and meeting new people and seeing the world whilst at work – many times once a job was completed, I was able to extend my stay and spend a few days seeing a new country. I've worked on lots of different projects both commercial and residential and the work has included refurbishments, extensions, roads, railways, airports, ports, water and waste contracts, and wind farms. I've met some amazing people whilst working in the construction industry and it really allowed me to interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds when Northern Ireland was still a very insular place. I have some very close friends, who I got to know through my work, and we have remained friends even when either they or I have moved to a new business'.

Nicola has worked very long hours on occasion and has had to be away from home a lot, but she believes that she's been rewarded for this and now that she is self-employed, she can simply choose not to do it – she is still finding plenty of work locally! People also believe that travelling is glamorous, but it can be very tedious to travel for 12 hours to get to a site or have to sit in an airport when a flight has been cancelled. The weather situation can also be difficult to deal with – Nicola has worked in temperatures from -20oC to 50oC!

Nicola has always enjoyed being part of a team, and, with good health and safety vital to every construction site, she has always been regarded as a team-player. She has been able to change work situations to reduce the risk to personnel and she has helped to ensure that companies get the best from their people. In 2016, Nicola was a finalist in the WISE Award for Health and Safety, a recognition of her dedication to, and passion for, her career.

Nicola now does a lot of work to help promote women into the industry and tries to give examples of her experiences to help others understand how good it can be to work in the construction industry – her employers have always wanted to use her to help at careers fairs and with STEM initiatives and this is a part of the job that she still does in her own time as she believes it is so valuable.

Nicola's advice to young women thinking about a career in the industry is that, 'If you have an outgoing personality, are happy to meet new people, are not afraid to contribute in meetings, and enjoy thinking on your feet and being flexible, then this is a great industry to work in. Once you gain trust and put the effort in you can build up a successful career which can lead to great flexibility – when I started in the industry, I was one of only a handful of technically competent females, now the construction world is proactively recruiting female personnel in order to address the gender imbalance in most construction companies'.



**CASE  
STUDY**