

From construction to further education: meet the quantity surveyor building futures

Originally published in a paid partnership with the Guardian Labs

After 16 years in the construction industry, a chance encounter led Nikki Davison to a career teaching in FE – and she hasn't looked back

by [Georgina Fuller](#)



Quantity surveyor turned FE teacher Nikki Davison. Photograph: Christopher L Proctor/The Guardian

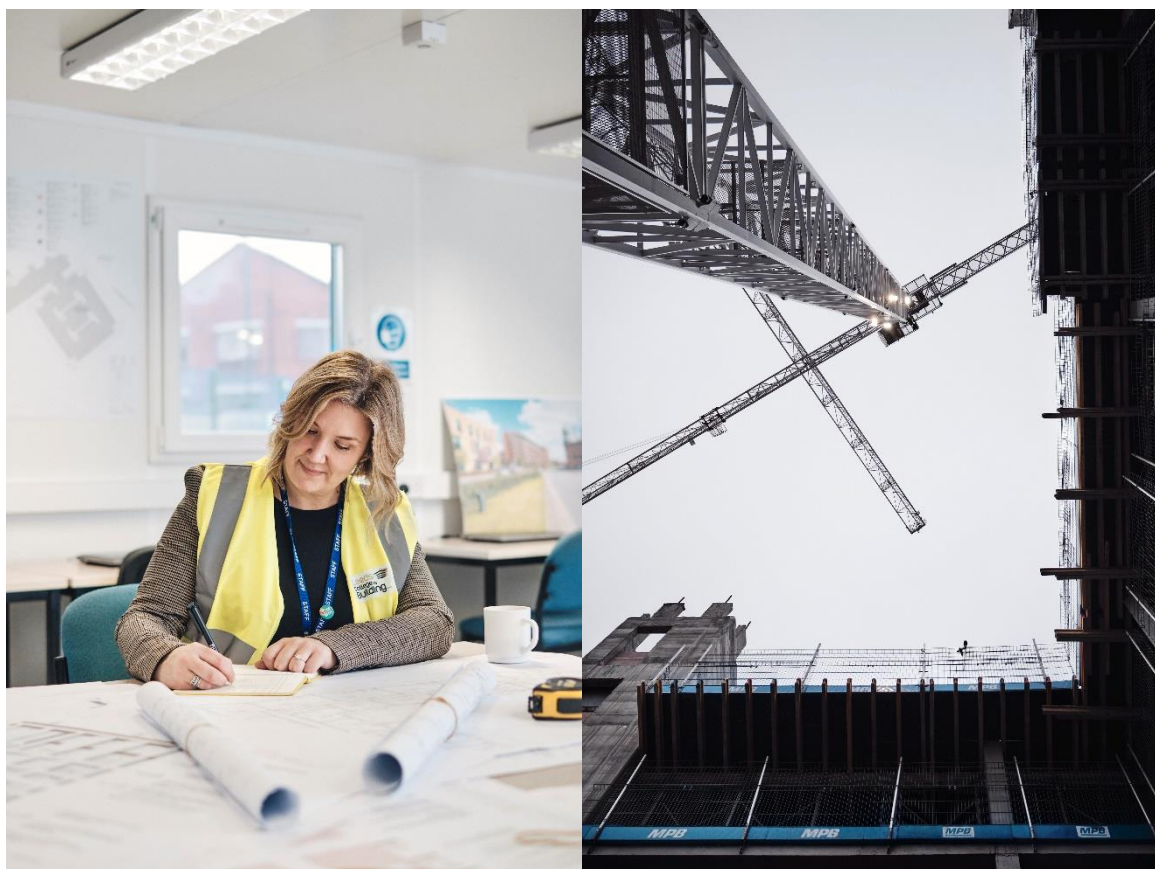
Nikki Davison never planned to teach in further education (FE). The 39-year-old spent the first 16 years of her career in the construction industry – initially as a quantity surveyor (QS) for a major construction company, then as a QS/estimator for a joinery business.

It was a chance encounter while still working full-time as a QS/estimator that set her on a new career path. She got chatting to a National Vocational Qualification assessor, who was there to monitor her apprentice; the

assessor made FE sound exciting, mentioning that Leeds college of building was recruiting for new teachers. “At first I thought it seemed too daunting – I had no experience and didn’t know where to start – but she sent me a link about the programme and how to apply to become an FE teacher and it went from there.”

Davison joined Leeds college of building in 2017, teaching quantity surveying across programmes in construction and the built environments, and civil engineering, and immediately realised the value in what she was doing. “We are essentially hands-on with shaping the next generation of skilled and professional employees,” she says. “What could be more important?”

Like many FE teachers, Davison’s first-hand industry experience has proved invaluable, giving her a wealth of real-life references to help prepare learners for the realities of the working world. “As a teacher, the ability to provide industry-related examples to the students helps to bring the textbooks and theory to life,” she says. “For example, if I am teaching measurement, I am able to relate the practice sessions to something they might be familiar with at work, like internal finishes or excavations. It helps the students visualise the work much more clearly.”





Davison's industry experience gives her real-world references for her students

Davison says that one of the biggest surprises of her job has been the fact that she's constantly learning too. "I want to be the best possible teacher I can, so ensuring continual growth of my own knowledge allows me to impart that knowledge on to the students," she says. "My background is in building construction as opposed to civil engineering or highways, but the students I teach specialise in a number of different subjects, so I learn from them along the way. They are hugely diverse in terms of their experience and they give me a new perspective."

Davison has been working in FE for five years now, but is as passionate about the construction industry as ever. "I did a survey among my friends where I asked them about working in construction," she says. "It quickly became apparent that they didn't realise the number of different jobs available, from quantity surveyors to estimators to architects and planners. Most of them were not aware of all these different roles. They thought of construction as mainly trade operatives rather than skilled professionals."

"I also do quite a few events for International Women's Week. Last year I looked at the experiences of young women in the construction industry, interviewing a number of students to hear what they had to say. I was glad to learn that their experiences, like mine, were largely positive."



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Spurred on by her new-found passion for education, the mother of two is now studying for a master's in construction law and dispute resolution with Leeds Beckett University. "I always wanted to do a master's but there was never a good time – until now. I tell my students how hard it is to come back to learning after taking a break, but I'm glad I've done it," she says.

In 2021, Davison was seconded into a position as the college's degree apprenticeship development curriculum manager, which she does alongside her FE teaching. She's clear about the benefits apprenticeships bring to both students and employers. "You can finish an apprenticeship with all the boxes ticked; the experience, the qualification, the knowledge of the systems and also the company values," she says. "Whereas sometimes with graduates, they have all the textbook knowledge but not that essential experience."

Davison is confident that her decision to share her skills with the next generation was the best career move she's made. "I like the fact that teaching gave me a different perspective," she says. "The challenge of it always appeals to me. In my mind, I still get to do what I trained to do but in a different, more exciting way.

"It sounds cheesy and people almost roll their eyes when I say it, but I love everything about my job. I just want to be the best I can be for my students."

Your skills are more valuable than you realise. If you have relevant experience working in industry, you can start teaching in FE with no formal teaching qualifications. To find out how you can change lives without changing careers, head to teach-in-further-education.campaign.gov.uk