

# A Gender for Change: The Future for Women in Surveying

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## ABSTRACT

Women now make up 50% of the working population in the UK, with similar figures reflected across Europe (Williams et al, 2000). Despite this growth, the number of women entering and working in the surveying profession remains consistently low, estimated at 9% of the total of RICS membership in 1999 (Ellison, 1999).

So what is preventing the surveying profession in mimicking the law and medical professions in increasing the participation of women? Is it the lack of awareness of the profession in Schools, Colleges and Careers Education? Is it a traditional perception of a gender-biased profession? Is it the lack of role models for young women? Or is it plain discrimination? If it is one or more of these, then what action should be taken to address the barriers?

The paper describes the results of two studies exploring barriers to female entry to the surveying profession and progress made in the profession by women in the UK. The methodologies included questionnaires and interviews with school leavers and with surveying practitioners, male and female, at varying stages of their career.

The studies undertaken by female surveying students found that barriers exist at different points in surveying - at entry and employment, and that some of those barriers are being addressed by the profession in different ways. At the entry point to surveying there is still a lack of awareness of the profession as a career for girls and women. This can be addressed by greater liaison between schools and surveyors in the profession and by increased information and awareness of career advisers. Within the profession there are still barriers for women surveyors to overcome, including work-life balance issues and traditional attitudes of some male surveyors. There are, however, signs of positive change within a number of surveying firms in the UK. The RICS has been identified as an institution that needs to re-examine its attitudes to gender in a number of aspects.

The paper also outlines the work of a project in the UK (which has developed from a European funded project) that is involved in actively addressing the remaining barriers at all levels. The partnership aims to mainstream good practice in recruitment, teaching and learning and employment. Let's TWIST has recently (November 2001) been successful in gaining funds from EQUAL (funded through European Social Fund) with other partners for a major three year project. The aim of the project is to break down gender desegregation in target sectors of employment, and address cultural and attitudinal barriers that promote discrimination by building on the work already developed. Change is clearly happening, and Let's TWIST is one of a number of active groups in this area who are moving things forward towards mainstreaming which, according to the Equal Opportunities Commission (2001)

*"builds equality openly and actively into policy -making processes at all levels and at all stages. It ensures that policies, programmes and actions specifically seek to achieve equality and do not put any group of people at a disadvantage."*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Demographic Changes, Education and Women's Work**

There has been a continuous rise in the number of women in employment since the 1950's (DfEE, 1998). An increase in women's participation and a decrease in men's means that women now make up 50% of the working population in the UK (Williams et al, 2000). A similar pattern can be seen across the European Community. However the pattern of employment is not equal across all sectors. Women represented just 7% of those within the engineering and technology occupations in 1994 in the UK, which is a mere 1% rise since 1979 (ONS, 1995) and only two-fifths of those in professional occupations (EOC, 2001). In France nearly half of the female active population are concentrated in twenty occupations out of a possible 455, with 75% concentrated in the service sector, a situation mirrored again in Austria (EC, 1997).

The number of females entering surveying degrees in the UK is well below the University Central Admissions Service (UCAS) national average of females entering higher education courses generally (54% for 98/99) (HESA, 1999). Less than one in ten students in the construction disciplines is female, yet one third of female school leavers are going to university each year (Smith, 1999). With girls outperforming boys in most subjects at GCSE level and women achieving proportionally higher degrees than men do (EOC, 1999), the surveying profession is losing out on a quality skill base.

There are over 100,000 members of the RICS worldwide with the percentage of women at approximately 11%. The population of women within the RICS has increased slightly within the last three years at a higher rate of increase (some 2%) than the previous ten years (approximately 5%) (Ellison, 1999). Other professions appear to be making progress more quickly, for instance women made up 35% of solicitors holding practising certificates in 1999 in England and Wales compared with 21% in 1989. Women comprised 53% of new entrants to the roll in 1998-99. Women comprised 46% of those called to the bar in 1999-2000 (EOC, 2001). In medicine, women comprised 34% of hospital medical staff in England in September 1999, compared with only 26% in 1989. In 1999 in England 34% of General Medical Practitioners (GPs) were female compared with only 25% in 1989 (EOC, 2001).

Progression rates however are still slow, and comparisons at higher levels still show a considerable disparity - in 1999, 82% of partners in solicitors in private practice in England and Wales were males, while women form the majority of assistant solicitors. Only 8% of practising Queen's Counsel (QCs) the leaders of the law profession in October 2000 were women. In medicine 79% of consultants (the highest grade of medical staff) were male, but as many as 95% of consultant surgeons were male. Within the surveying profession by 1999 (Ellison, 1999) only 300 female members had taken up fellowship status of the RICS.

In the past, women have been an under-represented group within the decision making process, and it is important that Surveyors, as key sustainability decision-makers reflect and understand the communities they work with. The increase in participation in the work place and the economy by women, together with the continuing improvement in educational attainment clearly demonstrate that their recruitment and retention is fundamental to maintaining the quality and sustainability of the surveying profession.

## 2. THE STUDIES

The studies were undertaken by final year undergraduate female students on surveying courses, having declared a personal interest in the topic area. The introduction of the second study explained how the researcher was influenced to choose the topic.

*"Attending a seminar on the Development of the Brownfield Site conducted by a male Fellow of the RICS brought to my attention that although employment trends are changing, there is still not an equal presence of women within the workplace and in particular within the surveying profession. The speaker opened his seminar welcoming only the males and failed to acknowledge the female participants within the audience. Throughout the seminar any practical example was portrayed as 'he' with a closing comment of 'thank you gentlemen.'*

Both studies have since been praised by chartered surveyors with an interest in the topic area, and the first study was awarded the Prout Tilbrook Dissertation Prize in 2000.

### 2.1 Study 1: Building Surveying as Career Choice

The first study aimed to discover the reasons for the lack of women entering the career of building surveying as a career. Within the RICS of 6,653 Chartered Building Surveyors in 1999, women were only 3% (RICS, 1999). The lack of role models has been identified as a barrier to entry to construction related professions (Srivastava, 1991 and McGregor, 1999). By means of questionnaires (40) the study explored the views of a range of practising women building surveyors at various stages of their career with a response rate of 58%. The questionnaire covered the following areas:

– Why they chose building surveying as a career

The results illustrated that there was a broad range of reasons why women chose a career in building surveying. The majority of responders chose to include alternative responses to those listed in the questionnaire. The largest section of responses (43%) had observed the work of building surveyors and had found it interesting, either through work experience or through talking to other building surveyors. The second largest group (26%) said that they had transferred from a construction-related profession to building surveying. There were a number of reasons for the transfer, such as observing what building surveying involved or through talking to someone who was in the profession. It was clear that having actual contact with those in the profession had had a positive effect in encouraging entry to the profession, and had helped to counteract the negative general image of the industry (Court and Moralee, 1995)

– Importance of role models and mentors

The results indicated that role models had not been present for the majority of those entering the profession. The women commented that they did not have female role models available,

but his did not deter them from entering the profession. The lack of role models and (women) mentors has previously been identified as barriers to entry to male dominated professions (Srivastava, 1991; Beattie and McDougall, 1994, Athena Project Report, 1999; EOC, 2001) However the question did not take into account the effect of positive male role models. From the previous question it was clear that existing building surveyors had some influence in attracting entrants to the profession, this would indicate some element of being a role model and influence on career decision. A later question asked about the need for support groups. There was a mixed response, with those having progressed further in their careers (as fellows of the RICS) seeing this as more important than those at an earlier stage of their careers. This may indicate that there now exists a better support structure for women entering the profession.

– The role of Careers Adviser

The largest group (42%) of responses indicated that they did not have any career advice. The second largest group (29%) felt they had been wrongly advised or that the Careers Adviser had no knowledge of what a Building Surveyor was. Previous research undertaken for the CITB (Court and Moralee, 1995) had found that Careers Advisers and Teachers, as well as parents were the main influence on career choice. The findings might indicate a change in influence on career choice away from "Career Advisers" per se. However if Careers Advisers and teachers are not aware of the profession, this has clear implications on the numbers entering. The results support other findings that lack of knowledge of construction careers is a barrier to entry (Court and Moralee, 1995).

– Views on how to encourage more women into the profession

The views of the responders suggest that education about the profession and marketing of the profession is the best way to encourage more women into building surveying. Promotion at school level and work experience placements for girls was seen as positive steps to promote the profession to girls. It was felt that careers education for females should begin at an early age, as the Equal Opportunities Commission (1999, p6) have confirmed.

– Leaving the profession

This question asked if women were considering leaving the profession. The overwhelming majority (76%) was not, and stated that they were content with their occupation. The women who were considering leaving were doing so because of promotion difficulties and the "glass ceiling".

– The final part of the questionnaire allowed respondents to add open comments about their experiences and views. There were some comments that add another aspect to the study, that of the male focused activities of the RICS etc. The following comments support this view:

*"Adverts sometimes / frequently male focused - reference to sports being important. Local RICS Branch events that are more likely to attract the boys."*

*"I think the RICS could help more - its not quite so bad now, but it certainly used to be full of social pages of rugby matches, golf tournaments etc. - very much members and wives approach. Even now the Rules are all written in the male gender. It sounds petty,*

*but other organisations (e.g.RIBA) manage to write their genders neutral; I think it reflects an ingrained attitude of the Institution."*

The second questionnaire (50) sought the perceptions of a group of school students between the ages of seventeen and eighteen at a school in Nottinghamshire who were considering career and university course choices. The students were chosen as they were involved in the act of applying to university, and the researcher had ties with the school and the staff, being a former student. The response rate was 78%. The questionnaires covered the following areas:

– Reasons for degree choice and career choice

Work experience was the highest influencing factor for the male students (37%), whilst knowing someone in the profession was the highest influencing factor for the female students (25%). Other factors that showed significance included lifetime ambition (21% male / 25% female). The least influencing factors were Careers Teacher, hobby and own research. The students exhibited a range of methods of learning about their chosen career from hearing from a relative, watching television programmes about the profession, and looking at university prospectuses.

– Impressions of the construction industry

A third of both male and female students believed the construction industry is an expanding industry with opportunities for a professional career, but similarly a third of both female and male students had a negative view of the industry as a career for women. There were 22% of the male students and 18% of female students who felt that the industry was "no place for women." Their general perception of the industry appears to concur with the DETR view (1998,p1) *"that the industry's poor image and less than welcoming approach is responsible for the lack of interest."*

– The importance of role models

Almost half of the students felt it was not important to have a role model in their chosen profession, however a third felt it was important to know someone in the profession, to know how they manage their career. Perhaps there is a lack of understanding as to the meaning of role model.

– Ways to inform students about non-traditional professions.

The questionnaire tried to establish what understanding the school students had of the role of a building surveyor. There was little evidence of understanding of the role, e.g. *"Building Surveyors look at buildings."* Over 70% of the school students had never heard of the RICS. The students themselves felt that the best ways to learn about building surveying would be through visits by building surveyors to their school. Almost two thirds of the students said they would not be deterred from entering a profession that was dominated by the opposite sex. This should be encouraging to those trying to break down the barriers.

There are a number of interesting findings from the study, some of which confirm other research, and others that appear to contradict it. It must be noted that this was a small study, and as such the generalisability of any findings to a wider context is fraught with difficulty. However having acknowledged this it is a useful snapshot of opinion.

## 2.2 Main Findings

The main findings indicate how important it is for women to experience "non -traditional" professions such as building surveying and to be able to speak to someone about the profession in order to discover what building surveying is about. The current methods of promotion and marketing of the profession was not having any effect on career choices. Those women already in the profession had generally come to that choice by methods other than professional career advice. Work experience placements, liaison between schools and surveyors, and increased information were clearly seen as an effective way of informing and encouraging more women into surveying. Women in the profession did not generally view the female role model as an important influential factor, however role models of either gender were clearly influential in promotion of the profession as a positive career.

## 2.3 Study 2: The Future for Women in Surveying

The second study aimed to discover if there are still barriers for women in a traditionally 'male' profession, to explore the concept of the 'glass ceiling' and to find out how barriers are being removed by 'good' employers. The study of women in male dominated professions has identified a number of factors that can serve to exclude and marginalise women including male and female stereotyping, lack of female role models, and work life balance issues. Ellison (1999) found that by the age of 35 there were distinct differences in the characteristics and progress made by women surveyors compared with their male colleagues. As Ellison concludes in her research, with so few women reaching senior management roles it is hardly surprising that women have a negative view of making a career in the profession. The study used a combination of questionnaires and interviews to collect data from surveyors working in private companies in the north west of England. Initial questionnaires were sent to personal contacts, and the personal contacts distributed further copies amongst their own contacts. In this way 85 surveyors received a copy of the questionnaire. Response rate within the deadline was 33% (28), with 20 from female surveyors and 8 male responses. There was a range of age and length of qualification in the responses from newly qualified through to qualification over ten years. In addition those who returned questionnaires included additional material related to the subject and expressed a clear interest in the topic area. Four interviews were carried out with Senior Managers (2 male / 2 female) from a large Property Company to further explore the topic area and gain insight on the issues concerned'.

The questionnaire covered the following issues:

- Barriers to women surveyors

The questionnaire identified a number of barriers taken from a literature search and asked the respondents to rate them. The barriers identified were pay discrimination on the basis of gender, age discrimination - would it be less for young women, traditional male values and dominance, lack of role models, work life balance (career breaks / childcare) issues. The male respondents rated all the barriers considerably lower than the female respondents did. The greatest barriers perceived by the male respondents were the lack of role models and work life balance issues. There was minimal recognition of pay discrimination as a barrier. This is in direct contradiction to recent findings that women continue to be paid less than 82% of the

average male wage (ONS, 2000) and support an EOC report (2001) that the underlying issue is employer complacency.

The greatest barrier seen by the female respondents was the lack of female role models, but the female respondents to a varying extent perceived all barriers as significant.

– Perceptions of gender issues in surveying

This section asked a number of open questions about equal opportunities within the firm and within the profession including equality of promotion opportunities, the challenge of male domination, under-representation of women in the future, gender specific areas of surveying, clients views of women surveyors and childcare issues. The questions allowed the respondents to express their views, but also to qualify some of the responses to the first section of the questionnaire. There was a general acknowledgement of the lack of equality in promotion, but it was perceived by a number of the males that this was due to a simple lack of numbers of women, and with the increase in entry, opportunity for promotion would equalize. Males and females see male dominance of the profession as a challenge, but a number of females did not feel it influenced their choice of profession. A section of the female sample believed that being in a minority could create advantages in their favour, *"if for example you mention a deal you are involved in, it is remembered more than if a male counterpart mentioned the same deal."* The under-representation of women was seen by the respondents to continue unless the profession can do more to attract career women from the other higher paid professions. There was a mixed response regarding the gender specific aspects of surveying. Whilst it was acknowledged that Building Surveying had the lowest number of females, some respondents believe that they are not necessarily gender specific, but others believe that women are pushed towards certain areas of work. The acceptance of female surveyors by clients was perceived by respondents to be more of an age issue, in that older 'traditional' clients found it harder to accept the word of a female surveyor. An example was given of a client unwilling to accept the authority of the female, and proceeded to clarify the instruction with a male colleague. Childcare and career progression was seen by all respondents as an issue, but many respondents recognised a change in society's view. As one male respondent said *"but in general women are still perceived as the mothers to the next generation, however many couples are finding ways to fulfil both careers."* Some younger women respondents felt they had to have more drive at an early stage in their career, *"It's a race against time in a way to manoeuvre yourself to a senior level that you can resume after taking time out for a family."*

Respondents were asked to predict the growth of female membership, and all predicted a healthy growth of females for the future.

The interviews allowed further expansion of the points raised from the questionnaires, together with a view of a company that had a high percentage of senior female surveyors, with three out of seven senior positions being held by women. The following points were extracted from the interviews:

- Additional barrier to overcome identified in fear of redundancy - cut backs were usually employees at the lower end of hierarchy - often more women.
- Issues regarding maternity leave and childcare responsibilities were becoming to be issues for male employees, and there was concern that males need to be given such rights,

not just women. *"I think that if they want to be at home with the children and the wife's the breadwinner then so be it."*

- Attitudes to women and progression have changed. *"When I started it was full of old boys, and they didn't really want women in the workplace, but the people I started work with were people of my own age and people they had gone to college with, and treat you as equals."* Class was seen to be a segregation issue as much as gender in promotion to senior levels. *"I think in the past no doubt gender played a part, but I think the old golf club scenario of men only is changing all be it slowly, there will still be pockets of companies that are still very much male orientated."*
- The male dominant culture of the profession - *"There are two types, the wild boys who go out once a month, drink about 15 pints, if you cannot match them, don't play. There are women who join in with this. The second are the networkers who work on a one to one basis, in a small environment where a lot of business is discussed and the back-scratching still goes on."* *"I think the RICS holds the profession back...for example if you go on maternity leave you still have to pay full fees, there's no reduced fee and it is unclear when you phone up. I had a friend who went on maternity leave and then had depression so was off for two years and was told to take her APC again!"*
- Attracting new school leavers to the profession - *"probably the best way to attract more females into the profession, is by having young female surveyors attend careers fairs as teenagers are more likely to listen to young people rather than a member of the RICS some 30 years older."*

## 2.4 Findings

This study produced a great deal of rich data from willing participants. The main findings confirmed Ellison's (1999) study that barriers still clearly exist for women surveyors to overcome in the career progression. The findings also confirmed that many male surveyors do not perceive the barriers for female surveyors. The lack of female role models was seen as significant. However there were a number of positive aspects of change in views evident from the study, particularly from younger surveyors and for the future. The resisters to change are seen as being from the old school and changing attitudes to family life are having a positive effect. The RICS is identified as an institution that needs to make progress in its attitudes to gender in a number of aspects, not least the RuleBook.

## 3. LET'S TWIST (TRAIN WOMEN IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, CONSTRUCTION & TECHNOLOGY )

The Let's TWIST partnership started as a European Community funded project in 1998, aiming to increase recruitment, retention and progression of women in traditionally under-represented areas. The initial main strands to the project, development and delivery of staff development training for lecturers and trainers of women on SECT (Science, Engineering, Construction and Technology) courses and a careers support and materials strand to encourage girls and women into SECT. The staff development training was delivered in a number of places in the UK to FE tutors, Community Tutors, Trainee Teachers, and HE tutors and also in Lisbon, Portugal for tutors who were to deliver the first Welding Training

Course for Women in Portugal. The evaluation of the training material and the delivery was very positive, and when the project finished in September 2000, Bradford College and Sheffield Hallam University agreed to support the continuing development of the work of Let's TWIST. Since the completion of the first project, Let's TWIST has continued by winning funding from Europe, and gaining commissions and consultancy from various bodies in the UK. The partnership works on a model of holistic tackling of the barriers, working on all aspects of the factors that limit the participation of girls and women in non-traditional areas of employment of engineering, construction, technology and now surveying. The partnership aims to mainstream good practice in recruitment, teaching and learning and employment. Let's TWIST has recently (November 2001) been successful in gaining funds from EQUAL (funded through European Social Fund) with other partners for a major three year project that aims to break down gender desegregation in target sectors of employment, and address cultural and attitudinal barriers that promote discrimination by building on the work already developed. In practice the partnership has been involved in and is developing the following initiatives:

- Careers Work - staff development training for careers workers in gender equity guidance and information; offering taster days for careers teachers to experience courses in engineering, construction and surveying; production of promotional material specifically aimed at girls and women; working with schools on activity days for girls to promote careers.
- Staff Development Training - continuation of the delivery of training to FE tutors across the UK; further development and delivery of training to HE tutors in universities across the UK; developing modules on the topic for teacher training courses.
- Mentoring Work - disseminating and initiating mentoring projects across the UK based on a framework developed at Bradford College whereby females in industry mentor female undergraduates, and female undergraduates mentor schoolgirls.
- Employers Work - advising and working with employers to increase recruitment and retention of women, developing cultural audits and good practice guides; assisting in upskilling of females employed in administrative roles or low paid occupations - in particular this is being applied to surveying firms in the UK, and IT occupations.
- Policy Influence - to engage with policy makers and professional bodies to encourage and influence change by taking part in working groups; general dissemination at conferences etc.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

It is clear that women have now progressed significantly in their involvement in education and employment such that girls and women make up at least half the population entering higher education and in employment in the UK (DfEE, 1998, HESA, 1999). In other professions such as medicine and law their have been significant inroads made to the traditional male domination (EOC, 2001) yet the surveying profession has still not been able to make any significant progress. Surveyors are a key global profession with their involvement in decision making in all areas of land and real estate and their influential position in advising on sustainability. The surveying profession therefore needs to address the barriers to entry and retention of women, if it is to maintain its influence and viability within the UK and the rest of the world. Sustainability, as discussed in the RICS global manifesto

(RICS, 2001) needs to ensure that decision making involves all stakeholders. In the past women have been an under-represented group within the decision making, process, and it is important that surveyors, as key sustainability decision makers reflect and understand the communities they work with.

Two studies undertaken by female surveying students found that barriers exist at different points in surveying - at entry and employment, and that some of those barriers are being addressed by the profession in different ways. At the entry point to surveying there is still a lack of awareness of the profession as a career for girls and women. This can be addressed by greater liaison between schools and surveyors in the profession and by increased information and awareness of careers advisers. Within the profession there are still barriers for women surveyors to overcome, including work-life balance issues and traditional attitudes of some male surveyors. There are, however, signs of positive change within a number of surveying firms in the UK. The RICS has been identified as an institution that needs to re-examine its attitudes to gender in a number of aspects. Change is happening, and Let's TWIST is one of a number of active groups in this area (e.g. Women in Property, Women in Science and Engineering etc.) who are moving things forward towards mainstreaming which (according to the Equal Opportunities Commission (2001)

*"builds equality openly and actively into policy-making processes at all levels and at all stages. It ensures that policies, programmes and actions specifically seek to achieve equality and do not put any group of people at a disadvantage."*

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

**Pat Turrell** is a Chartered Building Surveyor and a Fellow of the RICS with over twenty years of experience in the construction industry. She has spent the last ten years as an academic at Sheffield Hallam University and has completed a MPhil in maintenance of school buildings. She is currently carrying out research in linking teaching with research, and is involved with the Let's TWIST partnership in mainstreaming of gender in surveying, construction and engineering. She has published refereed conference papers in all three areas of research, and has commenced an EdDoc with gender and culture as her dissertation topic.

**Sara J Wilkinson** is a Chartered Building Surveyor and a Fellow of the RICS, and is a Principal Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University. She completed her MPhil in 'green buildings' and has furthered her research towards her Ph.D. into energy efficiency requirements of buildings both commercial and residential, along with energy aspects of refurbishment writing a number of papers, articles and presenting at conferences. She has recently won a teaching fellowship at Sheffield Hallam to develop interactive learning materials for dissertation students.

**Vanessa Astle** completed her BSc Hons Building Surveying at Sheffield Hallam University in 2001 and is now employed as a Graduate Building Surveyor at the Thomason Partnership, Building Surveyors in Leeds, west Yorkshire. She won the Prout Tilbrook Dissertation Prize for her dissertation A Gender for Change.

**Samantha Yeo** completed her BSc Hons Business Property Management at Sheffield Hallam University in 2001, and is now employed as a Graduate Surveyor with a major company. Her dissertation has produced a great deal of interest from a number of female chartered surveyors in practice throughout the country.