

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

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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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