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property and construction profession

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RICS Raising the Ratio's aim is to represent and effectively communicate the issues and challenges faced by women across the broad diversity of the property profession - to help shape future policy of female recruitment and retention within the property profession.

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Raising the Ratio Research:
What motivates women to leave the profession: a study of qualified surveyors
currently holding non-practising status with the RICS



About Kingston University

Research at Kingston University School of Surveying specialises in a range of subject areas including issues facing the professions, pedagogy and sustainability. The School is home to the only Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning led from the Built Environment subject area, C-SCAIPE, and offers a full range of undergraduate and postgraduate property courses.

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Introduction

Previous research carried out for the Raising the Ratio Task Force has identified a significant drop in the number of women members post age 40.

Whilst some progress has been made in recent years in increasing the number of women entering the profession, the impact of this progress in raising the ratio of women within the membership will be severely weakened if the majority of them leave half way through their careers. Furthermore, this perpetual loss of talented, experienced professionals is extremely expensive for businesses. Finding a way to reduce the exodus or attract these women back, makes business sense on many levels.

In light of this, the Raising the Ratio task force commissioned this, its third piece of research to investigate the major drivers behind women's decisions to leave the profession.

Raising the Ratio Research – what motivates women to leave the profession: a study of qualified surveyors currently holding non-practising status with the RICS

Summary

The data collected through this questionnaire confirms the results of previous research, generates more detailed information on issues already identified and also raises some new issues. In summary:

1

It is well known that the lack of flexible working conditions available within the sector is a significant barrier to women remaining in and then returning to work within the profession. Previous work carried out for Raising the Ratio suggested that working practices in this area are changing (RICS, 2005) flexible working is more available now, and also that part-time working is a potentially workable solution for surveyors (RICS, 2004). However there clearly remains a strong perception amongst potential women returners that flexible working conditions are simply not available. Indeed, those who have tried to return are finding this to be their experience.

2

For women, nearby location of workplace emerges as an important factor in encouraging them to return to surveying along with being able to work from home. For men respondents, better pay remains key as the second factor, but it only emerges as important to the women respondents when they are identifying the third of the three factors motivating their decision to leave surveying. Pay never really emerges as a strong factor in decision-making for women and is certainly far less significant than flexibility and the ability to work part-time.

3

Whilst the high level of attrition amongst women surveyors post age 40 is acknowledged, this is the first investigation of the career profiles of these women and what they go on to do. The data generated here shows the women within this respondent group have often reached relatively senior positions within the profession and have management responsibilities. These women are commonly moving into other areas of work rather than giving up completely. They are often retraining to become teachers in order to take advantage of family friendly working hours or taking administrative roles that enable them to fit family responsibilities around work.

4

The responses here suggest that private sector employers are being more affected by this drop out rate than the public sector by a considerable margin. There are two important points to draw from this. Firstly, this routine loss of qualified experience personnel represents a substantial business cost which deserves much closer inspection. It is difficult to reconcile the current industry concerns over the limited availability of staff with such a substantial and routine wastage rate. Secondly, this sector could benefit substantially through encouraging women back after a career break by exploring the practicality of offering more fully flexible and part-time working options.

5

One of new issues to emerge is the potential for local work opportunities in enabling women to return to surveying. Regional employers with local offices are clearly extremely well placed to recruit women if they are willing to accommodate flexible working practices.

flexible / part-time working conditions
location of workplace
reaching senior level positions with management responsibilities
family friendly working hours
returning after a career break

About our research methodology

Methodology

RICS has a non-practising membership scheme for qualified surveyors who are no longer earning an income from any activity related to the profession, but have sufficient interest to retain their membership, at a much reduced fee. This scheme has been highly valuable in providing a sample population for the research to focus on and made a questionnaire based exercise the most appropriate means of data gathering. Fourteen follow-up telephone interviews were also carried out with respondents.

The membership data base provides the age of the member and the date at which they switched from practising to non-practising. This enabled the research to divide the sample in order to assess whether the age of the member or the period of time for which they had been non-practising had any particular impact on their responses to the questionnaire.

Sample Population

Having analysed the database the questionnaire was finally sent out to 539 women and 502 men aged 25 – 50. It was considered important to question both men and women in order to understand the similarities **and** differences in the issues affecting the two groups. The women within the sample set were further subdivided as follows:

Group A: 146 women non-practising for 5+ years
Group B: 156 women non-practising for 3-5 years
Group C: 237 women non-practising for <3 years

Once divided in this way the figures within the database suggest that as time passes women who have opted for non-practising status eventually leave altogether, resulting in lower numbers in groups A and B.

The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed that explored four major areas:

- The respondent's career pattern up to the point of exit;
- What the respondent is doing now;
- What were the motivating factors behind their decision to leave; *and*
- Their views on the possibility of returning to surveying.

Of the 1041 questionnaires sent out 254 were returned, a very encouraging response rate of just over 24%. Of the total return 180 were from women (33.3% response rate), and 74 from men (15% response rate). The return rates across the three target groups of women were:

Group A 49 (33.5% response rate)
Group B 84 (54% response rate)
Group C 47 (20% response rate)

The Follow-up Interviews

Once the initial analysis of the questionnaire data had taken place fourteen semi-structure telephone interviews were carried out to explore further some of the issues raised within the data. This included their main reasons for switching to non-practising, what their experiences of trying to return to surveying had been, if any, what they are currently doing and if they were not planning to return to surveying, what had put them off.

About our respondent group

Such a strong response rate was extremely encouraging and provided sufficient data to support a meaningful analysis of what is motivating these respondents' decisions to leave the profession. All age ranges from 26-30 up to 51-55 were represented within the returns, with the majority falling within the 36-35 bracket. A broad range of professional areas was also represented (see table 1) with the majority having worked within the commercial sector as would be expected given that sector's strong representation within the profession as a whole.

Age profile of respondent group

| Age | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|
| 26-30 | 3 | 1.2 |
| 31-35 | 29 | 11.4 |
| 36-40 | 103 | 40.6 |
| 41-45 | 82 | 32.3 |
| 46-50 | 32 | 12.6 |
| 51-55 | 5 | 2.0 |
| Total | 254 | 100 |

Table 1: Age profile of respondent group

The high number of returns from Rural Practice was not anticipated (see table 2). This may be an anomaly within this particular data set but may also suggest that Rural Practice is struggling to retain qualified surveyors for the whole of their careers.

The most common reasons given for leaving by the men respondents from Rural Practice was a prior interest in the current area of work and working within a family business. The women cited flexible working and a location nearer to home as key reasons, similar to the other practice areas.

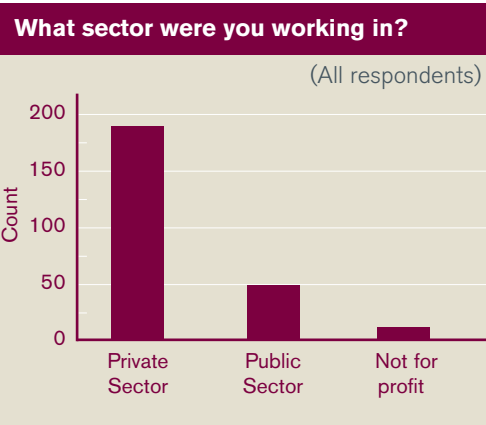
Practice areas represented within respondent group

What was also surprising was the high proportion of respondents who had worked within the private sector. Some 74% of the respondent group had worked in the private sector prior to moving out of surveying, as opposed to 20.5% in public sector and 5% in the not-for-profit sector. When the responses are analysed across gender the figures are equally strong with the vast majority of both men and women having left the private sector. This would appear to suggest that the private sector firms are suffering the most in losing qualified, experienced men and women approximately half way through their careers. This is clearly an expensive and very wasteful pattern of events.

| Practice area | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Commercial | 124 | 48.8 |
| RP | 32 | 12.6 |
| QS | 28 | 11.0 |
| Other | 25 | 9.8 |
| BS | 19 | 7.5 |
| Agency | 9 | 3.5 |
| Development | 9 | 3.5 |
| LS | 6 | 2.4 |
| Minerals | 1 | 0.4 |
| Fine Art/chattels | 1 | 0.4 |
| Total | 254 | 100 |

Table 2: Practice areas represented within respondent group

Figure 1: Sector split (all respondents)



| Sector | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Private Sector | 126 | 70.0 |
| Public Sector | 43 | 23.9 |
| Not for profit | 11 | 6.1 |
| Total | 180 | 100.0 |

Table 3: Sector worked in (women)

| Sector | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Private Sector | 63 | 85.1 |
| Public Sector | 9 | 12.2 |
| Not for profit | 2 | 2.7 |
| Total | 74 | 100.0 |

Table 4: Sector worked in (men)

It was considered important to gather contextual data on careers to give some indication of what sort of careers the respondent group were giving up. If little has been achieved in terms of promotion and responsibility the decision to leave and pursue an alternative career might appear unsurprising. However, where significant progress has been made with a career and where responsibility has been taken for other employees, that decision becomes much more surprising. It may also impact on the respondent's intention to return to the profession at some point in the future. The questionnaire therefore investigated the level to which respondents had progressed within their careers' prior to moving out of surveying and whether their role included people management responsibilities.

Career patterns up to the point of exit

The overall results show that the majority of respondents have reached surveyor or senior surveyor level. However, more women have reached senior surveyor status than men. Within the respondents who had progressed as far as junior partner, senior partner or director level, there are more men than women. Almost as many men had reached this level at the point of exit (27%) as had reached senior surveyor level (30%). It is sometimes argued that there is a reluctance to promote women as they have a propensity to leave in order to have a family. This may be the case, but these results suggest that men who are promoted are equally if not more likely to switch careers so selecting them on this basis is perhaps misguided.

Fewer women within the respondent group had progressed as far as junior partner and beyond (14.5%). The disparity is unsurprising given the low numbers of women reaching senior management positions within the profession generally. What is perhaps more interesting is that having reached this level they have nonetheless opted to leave surveying.

The respondents were asked whether or not they had people management responsibilities in their role prior to moving out of surveying work, and if so for how many. This line of enquiry is again investigating what sort of career has been given up. Being a line manager for other people suggests a high level of responsibility has been achieved that may be very much prized. It also adds a complicating factor to the decision to leave work as this will directly affect the people managed.

| Level attained prior to leaving Surveying | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Men | | | Women | | |
| Percent | Frequency | Level | Percent | Frequency | Level |
| 33.8% | 25 | Surveyor | 42.8% | 77 | Senior Surveyor |
| 29.7% | 22 | Senior Surveyor | 33.3% | 60 | Surveyor |
| 17.6% | 13 | Junior Partner | 9.4% | 17 | Other |
| 9.5% | 7 | Director/Senior Partner | 8.9% | 16 | Junior Partner |
| 9.5% | 7 | Other | 5.0% | 9 | Director/Senior Partner |
| .6% | 1 | Board Member | .6% | 1 | Board Member |
| Total100% (Frequency 74) | | | Total100% (Frequency 180) | | |

Table 5: Level attained prior to leaving Surveying

It is sometimes argued that there is a reluctance to promote women as they have a propensity to leave in order to have a family. This may be the case, but these results suggest that men who are promoted are equally if not more likely to switch careers so selecting them on this basis is perhaps misguided.

People management responsibilities

| Men | | | Women | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Amount of people responsible for: | | | Amount of people responsible for: | | |
| | Percent | Frequency | | Percent | Frequency |
| 1-2 person | 16.2% | 12 | 1-2 person | 21.1% | 38 |
| 3-4 people | 20.3% | 15 | 3-4 people | 18.9% | 34 |
| 5-6 people | 9.5% | 7 | 5-6 people | 8.3% | 15 |
| 7-8 people | 5.4% | 4 | 7-8 people | 2.2% | 4 |
| 9-10 people | 1.4% | 1 | 9-10 people | 1.7% | 3 |
| 11-15 people | 1.4% | 1 | 11-15 people | 2.2% | 4 |
| 16-20 people | 2.7% | 2 | 16-20 people | 3.3% | 6 |
| 26 people plus | 5.4% | 4 | 26 people plus | 1.1% | 2 |
| No | 37.8% | 28 | No | 41.1% | 74 |
| Total | 100.0% | 74 | Total | 100.0% | 180 |

Table 6: People management responsibilities

Of the total respondent group 60% had line management responsibilities for at least 1 other person prior to stopping work as a surveyor. This was evenly spread across both men and women respondents at 62% and 59% respectively. The male respondent group was skewed slightly towards having responsibility for more people but not significantly, even where responsibility was held for teams of 16+ people.

A significant proportion of respondents across both groups clearly had successful careers so their decision to move out of surveying is likely to have been a complex one. This is investigated further below where the research investigates what the respondents are doing now and what motivated them to change careers.

“...women are not necessarily leaving the profession to give up work altogether... so why have they left and not returned?”

Reasons for leaving Surveying

Top Responses from Men

| Percent | Frequency | Response |
|---------|-----------|--|
| 40% | 26 | The pull of new work |
| 26% | 17 | Restricted career progression and lack of opportunity |
| 23% | 15 | Poor pay/dissatisfied with salary |
| 20% | 13 | Other |
| 11% | 7 | Lack of variety in the work |
| 9% | 6 | Excessive bureaucracy |
| 8% | 5 | Redundancy |
| 3% | 2 | General inflexible working hours and conditions |
| 3% | 2 | Workplace in poor location/far from home |
| 2% | 1 | Hours and conditions inflexible with the need to look after children |
| 2% | 1 | To spend more time with children/family |
| 0% | 0 | Unequal opportunities and 'male chauvinistic culture' in the workplace |
| 0% | 0 | Concerned with lack of CPD |
| 0% | 0 | Lack of opportunities away from the city/rural areas |

Top Responses from Women

| Percent | Frequency | Response |
|---------|-----------|--|
| 43% | 26 | Hours and conditions inflexible with the need to look after children |
| 39% | 24 | To spend more time with children/family |
| 20% | 12 | Restricted career progression and lack of opportunity |
| 16% | 10 | General inflexible working hours and conditions |
| 16% | 10 | Other |
| 10% | 6 | The pull of new work |
| 10% | 6 | Lack of variety in the work |
| 10% | 6 | Workplace in poor location/far from home |
| 7% | 4 | Unequal opportunities and 'male chauvinistic culture' in the workplace |
| 7% | 4 | Redundancy |
| 5% | 3 | Excessive bureaucracy |
| 3% | 2 | Concerned with lack of CPD |
| 3% | 2 | Lack of opportunities away from the city/rural areas |
| 2% | 1 | Poor pay/dissatisfied with salary |

What the respondents are doing now

In order to investigate effectively what is motivating people to leave a career in surveying the research has to explore what they have exchanged this career for. It is generally argued that women often leave their surveying careers in order to have and look after a family. However, the career profiles of the women within this respondent group suggest this will not have been a straightforward decision and the fact that these people are not working as surveyors does not mean they are not working at all. If members are leaving surveying to pursue a different career the motivating factors behind that decision could be very important in reducing the drop-out rate amongst women post age 40. Furthermore, these respondents having retained RICS membership suggests they still have a significant interest in the profession and may consider returning to it. To explore these issues in more detail the questionnaire asked a series of questions looking at what the respondents are doing now and if they area working, in what field.

This respondent group was almost evenly split between those working in another field and those not working at all, at 51% and 49% respectively. When disaggregated across gender, the split changes with the vast majority of men (91%) working in another field. However 35% of the women respondents also indicated they were working in another field, the remaining 65% not working at all.

This proportion changes according to age range with 64% of women respondents aged between 46 and 50 now working but in an area unrelated to surveying.

Thus we can see immediately that women are not necessarily leaving the profession to give up work altogether. The resource efficiency argument that it makes economic sense for women to concentrate their efforts on caring responsibilities whilst their male partners who have higher earning potential concentrate efforts on providing financial support, does not stand up if women are leaving but to work elsewhere. Clearly their best earning potential should be within the career for which they have trained and qualified, so why have they left and not returned?

Number of respondents working in other sectors

Are you currently working in a business capacity unrelated to surveying?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|
| Yes | 130 | 51.2 |
| No | 124 | 48.8 |
| Total | 254 | 100.0 |

Table 7: Number of respondents working in other sectors

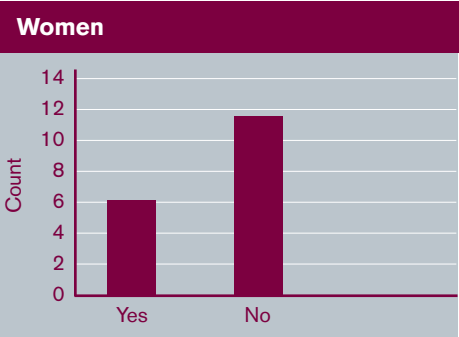


Figure 2: Number of women respondents working in other sectors

The questionnaire investigated what were the main reasons behind the respondents' decision to leave the profession. This was an open ended question with the responses collected into 13 categories (see table on left). The responses varied substantially according to gender. The major factors behind the male respondents' decision to leave surveying were:

- The pull of new work (40%)
- Restricted career progression and lack of opportunity (26%)
- Poor pay/dissatisfaction with salary (23%)

For the women respondents the main influencing factors were:

- Hours and conditions inflexible with need to look after children (43%)
- To spend more time with family (39%)
- Restricted career progress and lack of opportunity (20%)

This pattern of responses is not unexpected. Previous research done for Raising the Ratio and in other professions (Greed, et al 2003) has identified clear demand for more flexible working conditions from both men and women. What is perhaps surprising is the number of women citing lack of career progress and opportunity as a reason for leaving. Whilst flexibility would clearly encourage many women to stay, an unequivocal opportunity to make progress with a career and be granted the opportunity to succeed is also an important factor.

The follow-up interviews confirmed this pattern of responses. All except one of the interviewees had given up work in order to look after a family, five had also relocated at around the same time as having children. In one case this made it impossible to take up an employers offer of flexible working. Another had asked for reduced hours but been turned down flatly. She now feels the career she strived for has ended after 6 years.

What in particular attracted you to your current field of work?

Top Responses from Men

| Percent | Frequency | Response |
|---------|-----------|--|
| 24.5% | 16 | Career development and opportunity |
| 24.5% | 16 | Prior interest in current field of work |
| 22% | 14 | Better pay |
| 14% | 9 | Self employment, “be my own boss” |
| 12% | 8 | Variety of work |
| 11% | 7 | Wanted new challenge |
| 11% | 7 | Family Business |
| 9% | 6 | Flexible working conditions/hours in general |
| 6% | 4 | Working with people |
| 5% | 3 | Mind testing/mentally stimulating |
| 1.5% | 1 | Flexible working conditions/hours with emphasis on child support |
| 1.5% | 1 | Better location/nearer to home |
| 1.5% | 1 | Less bureaucracy in current work |

Top Responses from Women

| Percent | Frequency | Response |
|---------|-----------|--|
| 41% | 25 | Flexible working conditions/hours with emphasis on child support |
| 36% | 22 | Flexible working conditions/hours in general |
| 20% | 12 | Better location/nearer to home |
| 16% | 10 | Prior interest in current field of work |
| 13% | 8 | Career development and opportunity |
| 11% | 7 | Variety of work |
| 11% | 7 | Working with people |
| 10% | 6 | Self employment, “be my own boss” |
| 10% | 6 | Family Business |
| 7% | 4 | Mind testing/mentally stimulating |
| 7% | 4 | Wanted new challenge |
| 5% | 3 | Better pay |
| 3% | 2 | Less bureaucracy |

What types of work are our respondents doing now?

Industry now working

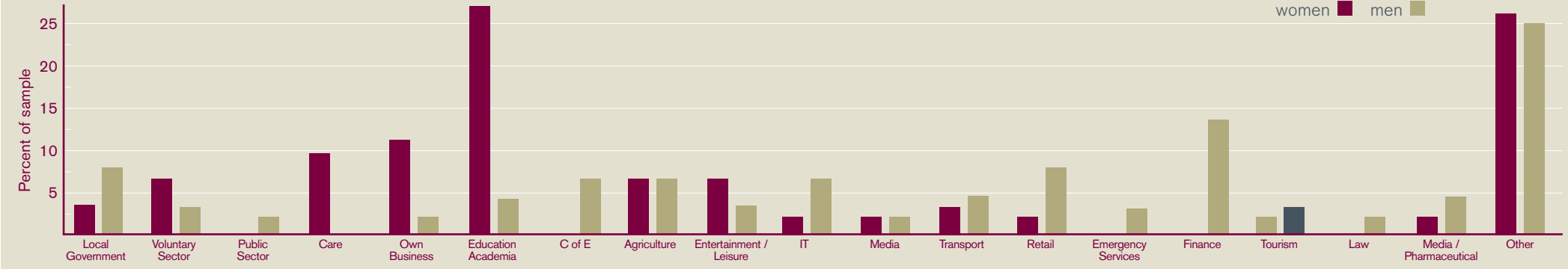


Figure 3: Industry currently working in

Having identified why they are leaving and that many of them are working in other areas, the next stage of the research investigated what those respondents who are working are actually doing. As identified earlier, many have given up apparently successful careers and all have invested time, money and substantial effort in becoming qualified. So where have they gone?

The returns showed the respondent group to be working in an enormous variety of sectors ranging from finance to the Church. Indeed four men respondents had given up their Surveying careers to be ordained. The variety of responses makes the analysis indicative only but even on this basis finance is the most common sector for men to have switched to and education the most common for women, followed by a role in administration. For women to retrain as teachers makes sense in light of their need to fit work commitments around family life and childcare,

indicated in the reasons many gave for leaving surveying. Likewise it could be argued for the male respondents that the finance sector offers a greater number of people potentially higher earnings than surveying.

The important point with regards the women respondents retraining as teachers, however, is that these people are clearly committed to working in some capacity, have already trained and gained experience as surveyors but are not coming back into the industry. The opportunity to work term-time only and school hours is worth the additional investment in training and the reduced earning potential of this switch in careers.

The second most common job title reported by the women respondents who are still working is 'administrator' suggesting there is a wealth of well educated, qualified and experience women

surveyors working at below their potential because they have not been able to make surveying fit with family life. The research pursued this issue further by asking what in particular attracted the respondents to their current field of work. This was another open ended question which produced a wide range of answers. These were grouped into 13 categories plus 'other' (see Table on left).

As might be expected the responses vary widely across gender. They also confirm the reasons given for leaving surveying, with flexible working conditions the major attraction for women and career development and better pay the major attraction for men. Two new factors emerged within this section of the work that were not given as reasons for leaving surveying; location of work and prior interest in current field of work.

Whilst flexibility would clearly encourage many women to stay, an unequivocal opportunity to make progress with a career and be granted the opportunity to succeed is also an important factor.

Views on the possibility of returning to Surveying

Having a prior interest in the current field of work has clearly attracted both men and women into different careers and is not something the profession can change. However, the emergence of a better location nearer to home as a significant factor in attracting women into their current work is interesting. Long commuting times are likely to be a major disincentive to continuing to work whilst looking after a family. Even if the decision is made to return to work, adding a substantial journey time to the working day may well tip the balance against returning to a previous city or town centre-based role.

This suggests that regional and local surveying firms would be well placed to attract experienced, well qualified women who are looking for work more locally. If they combined this with an offer of flexible working conditions these practices may find themselves able to select from a very talented pool of labour.

To follow up on the significance of flexibility the questionnaire investigated whether respondents were working part-time or full-time and whether they had flexible working conditions. As might be expected a high proportion of the women respondents work part time (74%). However, the majority of both groups have flexible working conditions: 66% of the men and 82% of the women.

Having explored what they are doing now and what attracted them to it, the final section of the research investigated the extent to which the

| Response | All respondents | | Men | | Women | |
|------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | Frequency | Percent* | Frequency | Percent* | Frequency | Percent* |
| Yes | 96 | 37% | 18 | 24% | 78 | 44% |
| No | 52 | 21% | 28 | 38% | 24 | 13% |
| Don't know | 106 | 42% | 28 | 38% | 78 | 43% |
| Total | 254 | 100% | 74 | 100% | 180 | 100% |

Table 10: Are you interested in returning to work within Surveying

| Response | Group A (out for 5+ years) | | Group B (out for 3-5 years) | | Group C (out for < 3 years) | |
|------------|----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | Frequency | Percent* | Frequency | Percent* | Frequency | Percent* |
| Yes | 17 | 35% | 42 | 50% | 19 | 40% |
| No | 10 | 20% | 11 | 13% | 3 | 6% |
| Don't know | 22 | 45% | 31 | 37% | 25 | 53% |
| Total | 49 | 100% | 84 | 100% | 47 | 100% |

Table 11: Women interested in returning to surveying split by time out of profession

| | Target group A | | Target group B | | Target group C | |
|-----------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | Frequency | Percent* | Frequency | Percent* | Frequency | Percent* |
| Now | 6 | 21.4% | 6 | 9.5% | 2 | 7.1% |
| 1-2 years | 6 | 21.4% | 22 | 34.9% | 7 | 25% |
| 3-4 years | 5 | 17.9% | 23 | 36.5% | 9 | 32.1% |
| 4-5 years | 11 | 39.3% | 12 | 19.1% | 10 | 35.7% |
| Total | 28 | 100% | 63 | 100% | 28 | 100% |

Table 12: When might you want to return to surveying?

respondent group was interested in returning to a career within Surveying. Overall 38% of the respondent group indicated they are interested in returning. Once this is disaggregated by gender it is clear that the women within this respondent group are much more interested in returning to the profession than the men, at 44% and 24% respectively.

There is also a distinct lack of certainty on this issue with 42% of the respondent group unclear as to whether they are interested in returning or not. This was more evenly split across gender (see table 10).

This question has been further analysed by disaggregating the data according to the length of time the women respondents have been out of the profession, i.e. across Groups A-C as outline on page 1. This analysis show those women most likely to be interested in returning to work are those in the middle group who have been out for between 3 and 5 years and that this interest wanes as women spend longer out of the profession, as might be expected. Those who have been out the shortest time, less than 2 years, show greatest uncertainty (53% don't know) but only 6% within this group were sure that they did not want to return. This rises to 20% for those who have been out for more than 5 years. (see table 11)

This data suggests there are significant numbers of qualified women surveyors who would like to return to work within the profession but have yet

to do so. It was necessary to determine whether this is because they have not yet tried or because, having tried, they have not succeeded. If the latter is the case it was also important to find out what that experience had been like and what barriers, if any, they are coming across.

The questionnaire asked when the respondents thought they might want to return to the profession. Approximately 30% of the women respondents were ready to return to the profession within the next 2 years, the rest expecting to be ready in between 3 and 5 years time. This fits in with many of the women respondents having left to look after children. If the data is disaggregated across the different groups we can see how the time scale for returning to work changes (see table 12 on left).

As might be expected, the respondents who have been out of the profession longest, those in Group A, are most likely to want to return to work now. However, the urgency with which some of the Group C respondents want to return is surprising. These women have only been out of the profession for up to 2 years.

Within the follow-up work two interviewees were considering a complete switch in careers but eight of the fourteen indicated that they would like to return to surveying. However, none considered it likely that they would be successful in finding a position that accommodated their flexible working requirements. One has returned to work as a secretary instead.

A number of these women are clearly ready to return to work now and many are anticipating doing so at some point. There is strong potential here for the profession to regain the active membership of these qualified and experienced people, if terms and conditions of employment can be offered that suit them. It was important therefore to understand what experiences these respondents had where they had made an attempt to return to their surveying careers.

The returns showed that 33 of the 78 women respondents who want to return to surveying had tried to do so (42%) and 8 of the 18 men (44%). Their experiences of this vary. Both men and women respondents found it hard to break back in and had struggled to find a suitable job (75% of men and 39% of women). However, the most common response from the women was that they found working conditions too inflexible to allow them to look after children. Whilst 10 of the 33 women had found a generally positive response to their attempt to find work within surveying again, lack of flexibility is clearly a major barrier for them.

The follow-up interviews again produced similar results. Two had asked their previous employer if they could return with flexible or part-time hours and been turned down, three had tried looking for part-time or flexible working positions without success. The three others who are interested in returning to surveying all considered it highly unlikely that they would find a position that suited them.

Whilst this is not exactly news, what is significant is that many of these women are finding the solution in alternative industries and sectors. There is substantial potential for Surveying as a profession to regain a lot of talented women if it can embrace flexibility and offer the part-time and other alternative working arrangements that many of these people need.

"...women within this respondent group are much more interested in returning to the profession than the men, at 44% and 24% respectively."

What is discouraging respondents who do not want to return to the profession?

Top Responses from Men

| | |
|------|--|
| 47% | Enjoy what doing now |
| 20% | Restricted career progression/opportunity in profession |
| 14% | Poor pay/want better pay |
| 11% | Excessive bureaucracy |
| 6% | Hours/Working conditions inflexible |
| 5% | Lack of variety in profession |
| 3% | Need flexible working conditions/hours to look after children |
| 2% | Lack of part time posts in order to look after children |
| 2% | Unequal opportunities/'Male chauvinistic culture' in the workplace |
| 2% | Concerned at lack of CPD in the work |
| 1.5% | To spend time with children/family |

Top Responses from Women

| | |
|-----|--|
| 43% | To spend time with children/family |
| 38% | Restricted career progression/opportunity in profession |
| 20% | Lack of part time posts in order to look after children |
| 12% | Enjoy what doing now |
| 9% | Concerned at lack of CPD in the work |
| 8% | Hours/Working conditions inflexible |
| 5% | Unequal opportunities/'Male chauvinistic culture' in the workplace |
| 4% | Restricted career progression/opportunity in profession for women |
| 4% | Poor pay/want better pay |
| 4% | Lack of opportunities in the rural environment |
| 3% | Need flexible working conditions/hours to look after children |
| 3% | Lack of variety in profession |
| 1% | Excessive bureaucracy |

Views on the possibility of returning to Surveying

Whilst flexible working conditions are clearly paramount, it was also considered important to understand what practical assistance respondents would find helpful in returning to work. The questionnaire offered the following 5 suggestions:

- Refresher courses;
- A mentoring scheme;
- Financial assistance with CPD;
- Training in interview/presentational skills; and
- Links with employers.

These all received positive responses amongst both groups with refresher courses the most popular suggestion amongst both men and women. It has been established anecdotally that there is demand for refresher courses, but very little is currently on offer. This data suggests there is currently an untapped market for refresher courses in surveying. Also popular were links with employers and mentoring schemes. This suggests that losing touch with people working in the profession is one of the barriers to re-entry. A practical solution could be the organisation of networking events that link employers with women wanting to return and mentoring schemes enabling returners to be supported through the process.

The figures show that the majority of non-practising members surveyed who do want to return to the profession have not actually tried to do so. It was therefore important to investigate what is discouraging them from doing so. For the men respondents the major

factors discouraging them from trying to return were that they are enjoying what they are doing now (47%) and restricted career progression opportunities with surveying (20%). Only 12% of women respondents identified enjoying what they are doing now as a contributing factor. For them the major factors were: needing to spend time with family, the requirement for flexible working conditions and the lack of part-time posts. There is clearly a strong perception amongst these women that the flexibility they need is simply not available to them from the profession they trained for.

The questionnaire investigated this issue again in a slightly different way by asking what three factors would attract respondents back into the profession. For the women respondents this reinforced the findings from previous questions. The first factor women identified as potentially encouraging them back into surveying was flexible working conditions and part-time positions. For the men, the responses were slightly different: the offer of a more interesting role emerges as the most common single response, followed by better pay.

In identifying second and third factors to attract them back some different issues emerge again. For women nearby location of workplace emerges as an important factor along with being able to work from home. For the men, better pay remains key as the second factor, but it only emerges as important to the women respondents when they are identifying the third of the three factors.

Pay never really emerges as a strong factor in decision-making for women and is certainly far less significant than flexibility and the ability to work part-time. This attitude is also possibly a contributing factor in the continued disparity between men and women's pay within the sector.

The follow-up interviews supported these findings with the ability to work locally as a key issue for respondents along with support in the form of refresher courses and updates. A key theme within the follow-up work was the barrier presented by respondents feeling out-of-touch with the workplace, 'rusty' in terms of their skills and that their age and amount of time out would make it very difficult to return. One described the professions as not so much have a glass ceiling as being 'a glass box with a hole in the bottom'. This may not be typical but the overwhelming impression given by these interviewees was that there would be very little chance of them returning to the profession however much they wanted to as the opportunities simply are not there.

The final question explored why the respondents retained their membership of the RICS (see table 14). The results show the importance both men and women respondents place on the investment they made in achieving their professional qualifications. However, they confirm for the women respondents that for the majority of them, keeping the option to return open is the key factor in retaining membership.

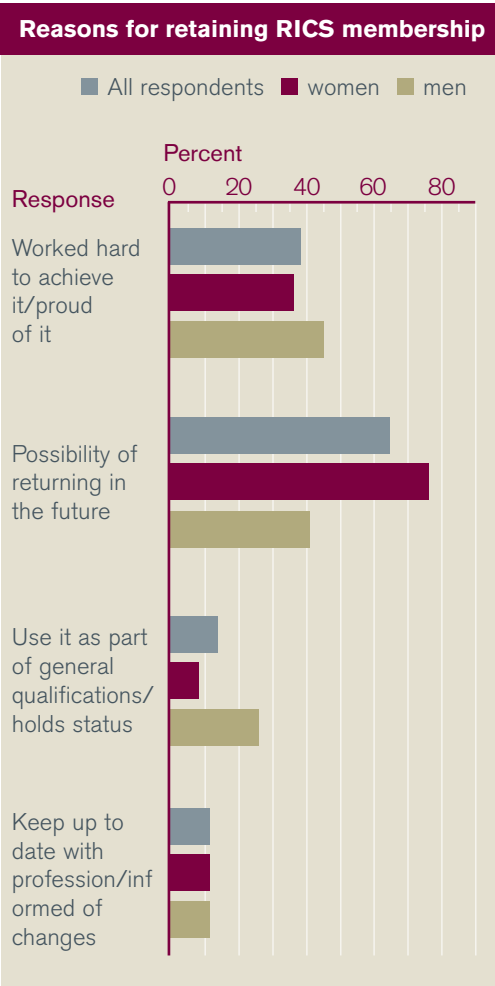


Table 14: Reasons for retaining RICS membership

Raising the Ratio Research – what motivates women to leave the profession: a study of qualified surveyors currently holding non-practising status with the RICS

Recommendations

The property sector could benefit substantially through retaining women surveyors or encouraging them back after a career break by exploring more fully flexible and part-time working options.

One of the new issues to emerge from this work is the potential for local work opportunities in enabling women to return to surveying. Local and regional businesses could benefit most effectively from offering positions with flexible working conditions to locally based women. Local networking events could generate good opportunities for both businesses and women returners.

Suggestions for practical help made within the questionnaire and follow-up work, all received positive responses amongst both groups. These included refresher courses, mentoring, with refresher courses the most popular suggestion amongst both men and women. It has been established anecdotally that there is demand for refresher courses, but there are very few currently on offer. This data suggests there is currently an untapped market for refresher courses in surveying.

Also popular were links with employers and mentoring schemes. This suggests that losing touch with

“...there is no single most effective answer other than being open to the potential for flexible working solutions to work.”

people working in the profession is one of the barriers to re-entry. A practical solution again could be the organisation of networking events linking employers with women wanting to return and mentoring schemes enabling returners to be supported through the process.

Successful examples exist of businesses that have recruited locally and offer flexible working conditions as a means of attracting and retaining highly qualified, experienced women surveyors (RTR brochure, 2006). Raising the profile of these examples would be a practical means of demonstrating to businesses the

recruitment opportunities that are available to them if they choose to take them.

One message that emerges from this work is the range of individual circumstances affecting women. To tackle the barriers they face in trying to return to surveying the industry perhaps needs to acknowledge that there is no single most effective answer other than being open to the potential for flexible working solutions to work.

