

Parallel evolution?

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The establishment of building surveying in Malaysia is comparable with its development in the UK but it has yet to achieve quite the same level of recognition, as the third in the series on building surveying degrees highlights

The discipline of building surveying is well established in the UK and in some world regions, but the ways in which it has evolved internationally have displayed some marked differences. Nevertheless, the direction of travel for the profession, globally speaking, shows some coherence, as is exemplified by a comparison between practice in the UK and in Malaysia.

Building surveying in the UK emerged from the wider discipline of general practice, or what we would now call real estate. It was formally recognised by RICS when it established the Building Surveying Division in 1973.

At that time the differentiating factor was that building surveyors were shifting towards the technical aspects of buildings, such as maintenance, pathology, alteration and refurbishment, rather than the economic and managerial aspects of generalist surveyors, such as valuation, appraisal and property development.

Shifting from desk to drawing board, the building surveying profession sometimes brushed against the role of the architect, and through the 1980s there was some uncertainty about the future direction of the profession relating to the lack of distinct demarcation between the two roles.

Many were clear, however, that they viewed the expertise of the building surveyor to be in the domain of existing buildings. This encapsulated elements of building design, specification, procurement and capital projects, as well as focusing on maintenance, refurbishment and generic property advice to clients and some of the services that we would normally consider general practice. This sometimes resulted in the profession being considered a jack of all trades ? probably with some justification.

Turn the clock forward and the current landscape of the profession is rather different. To an extent the role of building surveyor has become even more broadly based, with their skill set allowing them to participate in a variety of professional areas.

Development monitoring, strategic property advice, energy management and sustainability have all been established as key spaces in which the building surveyor can define and perform an important role.

Perhaps the biggest areas of development since those early days of the profession are the establishment of the building surveyor as the primary practitioner in the field of dilapidations and the move towards what might traditionally be called facilities management. These are

reflected in current university curricula by the different focus of various BSc programmes in the overall building skills landscape.

The main distinction between the jack of all trades of the 1980s and the current building surveying practitioner is that, rather than having individuals or firms attempt to provide all services and skills across the building surveying spectrum, we are seeing the development of defined specialisms in the profession.

Modern practitioners are moving towards being specialists in dilapidations, refurbishment or maintenance, and so on. But perhaps the biggest shift is the level at which the role of the building surveyor has been recognised.

The strategic nature of the role is now well accepted, and their advice can have considerable impact in the boardroom.

As we now face growing skills shortages, increasing technological development and the digitisation of industry and practice, the next phase of the development must be the establishment of 'building surveyor 4.0', in response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution that these trends represent.

Malaysia

The profession was established in Malaysia in the 1950s in the local government of Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. Since then, the role has been included in the building control division of the two local authorities, and building surveyors manage, monitor and approve plans for new buildings, renovations and modifications. The number of building surveying teams has also grown, with more than ten local authorities now involved in tasks such as development control and maintenance management.

Building surveying was also established at the national government's Public Works Department in 2007. To date, more than 40 posts have been created throughout Malaysia, with their scope of work ranging from management and inspection of buildings to controlling the inventory of government assets.

Yet, due to the limited number of jobs in the public sector, only a few building surveying graduates can be recruited, so there are also those who work in different fields such as property management, building estimation, education and construction management.

In the private sector, several building surveying consultancies have been established and registered with the [Royal Institution of Surveyors Malaysia](#) (RISM) since 2010. Some RISM members also have RICS membership, and the number who have joined both organisations is growing.

As with some UK practices, private surveying firms in Malaysia focus mostly on building inspection and dilapidations. The Finance Ministry approved registration for building surveying services through RISM in 2012, which, in the Malaysian context, gives them equivalence to other professionals in the built environment.

Although building surveying is growing steadily, it has not yet received the same level of recognition as professions such as engineers, architects and quantity surveyors because there is no specific legislation to protect either the general public or the profession itself.

This regulatory process will be key to the recognition of the practice in Malaysia. The building surveying division of RISM has been canvassing the Ministry of Works, the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Finance for such legislation for more than 30 years, but an act has not yet been finalised.

The regulatory process will be essential to the recognition of building surveying as a practice in Malaysia

However, in order to ensure the sustainability of the profession in Malaysia, the government has introduced building surveying programmes at bachelor's degree level through several public universities.

The first was at [Universiti Teknologi MARA](#) in 1993, followed by the [University of Malaya](#) in 1996. With growing demand for graduates of these programmes, Universiti Sains Malaysia also introduced a programme in 2009. To date, the number of graduates produced by these universities exceeds 2,500.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency also issued a standard for building surveying programmes, to ensure a consistent curriculum at these universities.

In Malaysia as in the UK, formal qualification involves successful completion of an appropriate academic course, supplemented by work experience and assessment after graduation. Building surveying practitioners must be full members of the building surveying division of RISM and pass the professional competency assessment before they can offer services to the public.

However, due to the lack of legislative control, practitioners such as engineers, architects, quantity surveyors and non-certified building surveying graduates are also practising, although this is without RISM certification.

This is likely to be detrimental to the integrity of the profession by diluting the unique identity of the building surveyor. One of the ways to secure the future of the profession in Malaysia is to finalise the legislation that will formally validate building surveying at the national level and through this create a binding regulatory framework to govern the profession.

Michael Riley is professor of building surveying at [Liverpool John Moores University](#) ; Azlan Shah Ali is professor of building surveying at [University of Malaya](#) , Kuala Lumpur

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