

# Inspiring others

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## Sophie Smith outlines her part in the campaign to attract more women into the profession

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As a young woman working in the surveying profession, I have been refreshed and enthused by the surge in publicity addressing diversity and social inclusion in the profession over the past year (see *Building Control Journal* September/October).

With only 13% of RICS membership female (15% in the UK), the need for change is clear. This was voiced by the 2014 President, Louise Brooke Smith, the first woman to hold the post in the organisation's 144-year history.

'Chartered surveying is a globally recognised profession and we must ensure that it is open to all, whatever their background, or gender. We are a proud industry, but have lagged behind others in terms of making the most of a diverse workforce,'

she said.

Attracting more women is high on RICS' agenda, in the shape of the Surveying the Future campaign. This was hugely influential for me, launching at a time when I was making important career path decisions in my final year of BSc (Hons) building surveying at the University of the West of England on day release, while working full time in the profession.

Not only did it inspire me to aim for chartered status and take on the APC as soon as I graduated, but it also encouraged me to promote the profession to other women.

### Diversity campaign

The campaign gives recognition to the need for social inclusion in the profession and gives a framework of how this can be done. This includes:

- national press coverage
- social media hashtags
- targeting schools
- women on panels
- Visible Women lunches
- accessing national career events
- mentoring schemes.

It has taken a lot of hard work by RICS to organise and prepare women to join panels at often short notice. This ensures both men and women are seen as the face of the profession, thus hopefully inspiring girls to step forward.

The result is a wide group of men and women engaged and supporting the campaign within RICS and beyond. This can be as simple as tweeting, using the hashtag #surveyingthefuture when approaching the local press for publicity. There is no limit to spreading the word.

Coverage in the national and regional media has had a positive and important impact, showing that building surveying is a career for both sexes.

My contribution to this is a weekly column in my local newspaper, the [Gloucestershire Echo](#) . I have also spoken about getting more women into the profession on BBC's [The One Show](#) ; BBC 2's [The planners](#) and Channel 4's [Come dine with me](#) . It was amazing how many men and women approached me afterwards about possible career opportunities. I have also been working with UK company [Amblers Safety](#) to design a female-friendly safety shoe, to be worn in the office as well as on site.

## Clear direction on diversity

Encouraging greater diversity in the profession is a great way of driving innovation and variety. However, it is important to recognise that this is not just a challenge for RICS but also for the built environment as a whole.

In 2010, the Equality and Human Rights Commission set up the Construction Leadership Diversity Forum to provide a clear direction on equality and diversity issues within the construction industry. But in the built environment, women still only make up 13% of the total UK workforce according to statistics in [Phil Bishop's article](#) .

Taking part in one of many Visible Women lunches, run by RICS to discuss how to attract more women, reinforced to me as a young professional both the rich variety of job choices available and the importance RICS places on addressing this gender gap.

The benefits to becoming a surveyor include:

- diverse range of job choices
- combination of technical and practical skills
- opportunities to change career paths
- flexible working
- an environment of continuous learning
- high job satisfaction
- office based and on site.

## Career history

I have always had a keen interest in the built environment and had a great curiosity in how buildings have developed over history. Although I was aware there were not many women in the profession, it did not scare me. Studying at Gloucestershire College for a HNC in construction while working, I was the only female in a class of 30.

I started my career in building control, which enabled me to learn and understand good building practice. I saw many different building types and application in a short period of time, which helped me to develop my body of knowledge very quickly. After four years, I took a step into contract management in the housing sector, where I was able to combine my skills from building control with building surveying, budget and contract management, thus further building on my knowledge.

After graduating from the University of West England in July, I am now able to begin the APC. With a degree and 8 years' relevant experience I can follow the 12-month diary route and have enrolled for next November's interviews.

I have taken steps to create a training agreement with my employer and have had the support and advice of South West RICS Training Adviser Steve Rea to explain the process. Behaving in line with the 5 ethical standards has stood out throughout my conversations with other members and RICS advisers on what it means to be a professional.

I joined my local RICS Matrics group to meet practitioners from different backgrounds. For example, my day-to-day role contrasts greatly from land and valuation surveyors and the group allows us to have a better understanding of the wider industry and careers, along with reading the various RICS journals. The local group has been brilliant at meeting training needs, with APC training for example having a turnout of more than 30 budding candidates.

The success in attracting women to the profession can only truly be measured over the long term by assessing the next generation's career choices. It requires the support of all members to drive change collaboratively across the industry to ensure we attract and retain the very best talent.

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## **Further information**

This feature is taken from the RICS *Building Control journal* (November/December 2015)