

Q&A: Sean Tompkins on how the industry can do more to boost the role of women

3 November 2016 | By [Helen Crane](#)

Sean Tompkins, the chief executive of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, recently made a pledge to avoid speaking at property events which do not also include women among the panellists, whenever possible.



The RICS boss is on a mission to promote greater gender diversity – Source: [Shutterstock/Bikeriderlondon](#)

His decision was prompted in part by a YouGov study commissioned by RICS, which found that 29% of young women aged between 13 and 22 thought that the property sector was “purely for men”. Here, speaking to *Property Week*, **he explains why he thinks diversity on panels is vital to redressing the gender imbalance in property and what fellow chief executives can do to raise the profile of women in the industry.**

Were you surprised that 29% of young women thought property was ‘purely for men’?

In some ways if I’m honest it doesn’t surprise me, but in some ways I think it’s worth thinking about the fact that **this profession has been on a journey of change**. If you look back five or 10 years, we are seeing a gradual growth in the number of females entering the profession, and it’s probably a

matter of time in many ways. Certainly in the last five years, the emphasis has been significantly greater and as a result we are seeing more women joining the profession.

How long has gender diversity been a focus for RICS?

It's been a subject since about 2003 when we launched a campaign called Raising the Ratio. There was a recognition then that the number of females coming into this profession was woefully inadequate, and that as the markets changed and the nature of customers changed, this would be an issue that needed to be dealt with.

Change takes time, and the important thing is it really takes role models to change something

Over the past 10 years various initiatives have been in place and you can see some results from that: globally, the number of RICS-qualified females in our profession is 15%, but if you add in trainees then that becomes 20%, so you're already seeing a gradual change. But it takes time, and the important thing is it really takes role models to change something.

Why have you made this pledge on speaking at events?

Having been in the role of chief executive for the past six years I've been to a number of events and conferences – which tends to be the way in which profile is gained, image is built, networks are built and so on – and I've just seen a lack of females at these events.



Sean Tompkins – Source: Trent McMinn

I think the time has come for chief execs to say, we really need to lend a hand to this, so that we really do see more females representing this profession.

Why do you think women have been so under-represented?

I think that maybe the industry of events organising has had its network of people from the past, and that network needs to be refreshed for the future.

There are many high-profile females in this industry. I'd like to challenge event organisers to reach out to them as much as they would reach out to all of the famous names from the industry who happen to be men.

There is also a challenge in terms of the ability of women to immediately put their hands up and say, I want to speak at this event.

What can chief executives do specifically to boost diversity?

As chief executives I think we need to help women feel confident and comfortable in coming forward. And when they are presented with a list of names for a panel or a conference, I think they should at least ask the question, why am I not being joined on this panel by another female?

As chief executives I think we need to help women feel confident in coming forward

It's the same thing a lot of us are doing now with recruitment: when a headhunter brings me a list of people for a director-level role, if there isn't a female on there I will go back and ask why. I'm not saying that the events industry or recruitment is lazy, but I do think it needs challenging.

Do you think diversity is as important to clients as it is to the property profession?

No doubt. Clearly they're not just looking for diversity, they're also looking for the professional skills that come along with that. Increasingly, as we begin to trade in different capacities, I think this whole issue of diversity and inclusion will be clearly coming through in the nature of how clients will perceive employers and the companies they do business with.

What other work is RICS currently doing to promote the inclusion of women?

A lot of this fits with the work that we're doing on our [RICS Inclusive Employer Quality Mark](#), which is about making sure firms have up-to-date data on the make-up of their organisations. As businesses it is important to take a really hard look at that, and as chief executives we need to ask ourselves where we need those figures to be given our changing clients and changing trade conditions for the UK around the world.



Source: [Shutterstock/YanLev](#)

How important is diversity to RICS?

This is a really serious business subject for me: the work that we're doing on the quality mark, the work that we're doing on apprenticeships, opening up this industry to a whole new talent pool of people which previously would have been closed... I think it's all going to continue to expand the pool of talent that's going to be available.

Are there enough role models for women in property?

Materially, if we're really going to move to the next level of changing this perception and dynamic, we've got to really encourage the female role models in the industry to come forward. That's an important aspect that sits below this pledge, and I do think it's important for generations coming through. I have a number of networking lunches with mid-level females in the profession and it's really important for them to see in publications and at conferences the women that are succeeding.

What finding stood out to you most from your survey?

The piece of data that really encouraged me is that 41% of girls compared with 4% of boys believe that their gender is going to have a negative impact on their career. If that's not a call to action for chief execs to think about how we start to pull through the next generation of females and ensure that they're getting high-profile in our industry, I don't know what is.

What will happen if they don't?

The issue that we're going to have is that we won't be able to recruit in a very big talent pool. This is an industry that constantly suffers from skills shortages. If we permanently fish in a very small pool, we will permanently have a business problem.

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.



e