

Towards a More Egalitarian Profession

Findings of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Committee on the State of Women in Architecture

August 1991

[retyped January 2012, images no longer available]

The Committee on the Status of Women is a working party of the RAIA National Education Committee and its membership is:

Anna Cunningham, FRAIA, Chair

John Webster, FRAIA

Judith Brine, FRAIA

Jan Robertson, ARAIA

Carolyn Ozturk, ARAIA

Sue Pilkington, ARAIA

Brit Anderson, ARAIA

Rachel Williams (recent graduate RMIT, and Graduate Member, RAIA)

Megan Morris (Office of the State of Women, Department of the Prime Minister)

Jane O'Donohue (Assistant Director, Women's Bureau, DEET)

Judy Vulker, RAIA National Education Director

Heather Olley, RAIA Research Officer

Summary

It has long been recognised that although many women have been educated to become architects, many choose not to participate in the profession nor seek registration or membership of the RAIA. A higher representation of women in the profession is a desirable objective as it will provide a balanced creative response and will also ensure the finances spent in education are used to the best possible advantage of the Australian community. The RAIA needs to be responsive to the needs of women as a professional body

representing all architects. Such positive action would ensure a greater participation and membership of women in the RAIA.

The Committee acknowledged that many of the reasons for the imbalance of male and female architects participating in the profession are a result of societal forces which are beyond the immediate control of the Committee (and indeed the architectural profession), and hence such issues have not been addressed. However, it is anticipated that this report and the resultant RAIA action will influence changes in the socialisation process.

The profession needs to accommodate particular and changing needs of not only female graduates but also male graduates. Male and female graduates may choose to take traditional or non-traditional career paths. Therefore, the Committee has identified the following features of traditional architectural practice which acts against architects (both female and male) working in non-traditional areas. Such features which can be addressed by the architectural profession include;

- lack of flexibility in working hours,
- long and irregular hours worked,
- little allowance made for family commitments,
- lack of female mentor support within offices for both female and male students,
- low salaries which cannot support childcare payments,
- restriction on types of work given to female architects, and hence limited experience and opportunities for female advancement,
- lack of female role models for both male and female students and architects
- lack of recognition and respect for the female creative response; (for example the collaborative nature of design).

It is clear that not all female architects suffer as a result of their gender, nor do all male architects benefit as a result of their gender. There are indeed many successful female architects, but statistics show that as a percentage they are a minority, particularly in senior positions in architectural firms and schools of architecture.

There are many in the profession who claim that sheer force of numbers will gradually, over time, create a gender balance. However, when the reasons for women leaving the profession are identified, there is little evidence that the gender bias in the architectural profession is being addressed at a fast enough rate to attract and maintain the increasing rate of women graduates.

The Committee has identified three areas as appropriate in which the profession can take action to achieve a more egalitarian profession: career advice, education and practice.

Careers Advice- Discussion

Society must make a choice as to the desired outcome of funding professional degrees. In the case of architectural education, an architectural course offers excellent education

combined with a skills-based training. However, if it is to be expected of architectural students that they eventually proceed to practice within the profession of architecture- that is, educational resources are maximised- much more thought needs to be given to appropriate careers advice and selection procedures. That is particularly so with women, as there are fewer female architect role models in society from which female students in particular can gain information about architecture as a career.

The Higher Education Council supports the establishment of broader admission policies and the development of guidelines for credit transfer encouraging a broader cross-section of students. This would benefit both male and female students.

Interviews of students and female graduates who were not practicing architecture often revealed that had they received better careers advice they would not have selected architecture - in fact 13% of students in the RAIA 1989 Survey of Architecture Students noted that architecture was not their first choice, whilst 59% stated they had not received any career counselling advice prior to commencing their studies. Architecture is often perceived as an enjoyable course, and the decision to study architecture is often made with little knowledge of the reality of practice.

With the likelihood of increased diversity of the range of models for architectural education will come increased flexibility in career choice, which should result in a lower attrition rate, and the maximisation of educational resources.

Careers Advice- Recommendations

- The RAIA must be more actively involved in providing structured, realistic, egalitarian careers advice to potential architecture students. Students should be informed of the time commitments and financial demands their study will make of them. The relationship between study and architectural practice should also be stressed.
- The RAIA should be promoted to potential students and current students as an important means of networking in the profession, and as a source of assistance in the practice of architecture.
- The RAIA should be promoted as a professional body with an ethical code dedicated to the advancement of quality in architecture.
- Collaboration with State and Territory Education Departments to develop more gender-balanced careers advice and promotional material.

Careers Advice- Policy

A new careers brochure be published in 1992 by the RAIA National Education Committee which stresses the time and financial demands of architectural study and which impresses the relationship between study and practice as an architect.

Architectural Education – Discussion

It is generally agreed that the single greatest factor in encouraging women students in schools of Architecture is the employment of female academic staff. This also brings male members of staff and male students a broader, more egalitarian experience and understanding of architecture.

Currently, women are under-represented in academic staff levels compared with student level, and many women work at a lower level in the academic hierarchy than is appropriate for their qualifications. Proportionally more women are employed on contract than men. In short, women, tend to occupy less influential and less secure positions in the academic hierarchy and are therefore not in a position to set education agenda in schools of architecture.

Many schools have already made some attempts to redress the imbalance. These have not always been successful and together with the static nature of academic staff movement at the present time there is limited opportunity for significant change in gender balance, at least in tenured positions.

Architectural Education- Recommendations

- Employ more women visiting staff in the studio, more women visiting lecturers and more women speakers at conferences promoted by academic institutions.
- Target specific women and encourage them to apply for positions at the appropriate time.
- Male and female architects should be encouraged to act as mentors to both male and female students to broaden their perspective and encourage them into appropriate careers paths and professional networks.
- Encourage schools of architecture to adopt a more flexible approach to staff workloads and working hours, allowing more flexibility for male and female family commitments.
- Schools of architecture should organise talks by architects, always ensuring that women are involved in such programmes.
- Professional Practice subjects in courses should include presentation of material on stress management, conflict resolution, negotiation skills and techniques, to enable all students to achieve a successful integration of professional and private demands.

Architectural Education – Policy

National Membership Committee ensure the RAIA membership is continually promoted to students of architecture, and that the National Education Committee ensures membership is promoted during annual visits to schools and through the five year Visiting Panel meeting with all students from the school.

All National Visiting Panels and annual Chapter Visits to Schools of Architecture comprise both male and female members.

Education Policy ensures that Practical Experience subjects include contents related to stress management, conflict resolution, time management, negotiation skills and techniques in relation to the successful integration of professional and private demands on all architects.

The RAIA National Education Committee work with Schools of Architecture to redress the current lack of female academic staff.

Architectural Practice- Discussion

In architectural practice, it is perceived that non-traditional work permits are dominated by women, who for various reasons are unable, or unwilling, to be unemployed in '9 to 5' offices on traditional projects such as commercial or office buildings.

The Committee considered that the profession, and the RAIA, is structured to recognise and utilise the resources of architects employed in traditional work patterns (predominantly male architects), and that architects (both male and female) employed outside these areas are disadvantaged in their access to career opportunities, child care arrangements, professional networking through such bodies as the RAIA, and in accessing appropriate professional support (for example, in terms of professional development material) appropriate to their employment circumstances. Measures taken to re-dress this narrow perception of what architecture is and how architects operate will advantage all architects in such non-traditional areas, and eventually enrich the profession itself, by taking full advantage of the contribution that all architects have to make.

Architectural Practice – Recommendations

- The RAIA must review the membership of all its committees and seek to redress the gender and practitioner imbalance on those committees. Female members in particular should be sought and encouraged to be involved, and male architects working in small practices, the public service and other non-traditional areas should be similarly sought out and encouraged to represent their experience of the profession on the committee.
- RAIA meeting times and dates should be given more consideration such that architects with family responsibilities, work commitments in small or sole practices, the public sector and outside the major capital cities can be involved in RAIA activities without having to make more than the usual time and financial commitments involved.
- The RAIA must develop policies which reflect and encourage female participation in the profession.
- Ensure that gender neutral-speech occurs in all documents produced by the RAIA.
- Recognise that for some practitioners, their participation in the profession is interrupted by family commitments and unemployment, family commitments, or time spent as a full-time educator in a school of architecture.

- There should be a conscious inclusion of the work of female architects when developing publication material, exhibitions and public displays of architectural work.
- Practices must be made aware of the need for flexibility in work practices, working hours and work opportunities. The RAIA should produce an ideas brochure which would be distributed to practices providing examples of successful alternative work practices such as:
 - job sharing
 - flexible working hours
 - working from home
 - use of computer technology to link the home and the office
 - equality in determination of staff roles (site inspection, project managers)

Architectural Practice – Policy

The RAIA develops a system of retraining which ensures networks and support schemes are available for architects wanting to re-enter the profession. The National Education Committee with the support of National Council will set up a working group to review and recommend action in this area.

A brochure be developed in 1992 by the RAIA Education, Practice and Marketing and Information Division which provides an outline to Directors of Architectural Practices of positive innovative alternatives to traditional employment of staff. The brochure would include information on job sharing, use of flexible working hours, the benefits of working from home, the use of computer technology to link home and office, and equality in determination of staff roles.

Gender-neutral speech is used in all documents produced by the RAIA.

All RAIA National and Chapter Committees are comprised of male and female members who represent a range of employment backgrounds.

RAIA publications, exhibitions and public displays of architects work consciously include the work of both female and male architects.

Sources

In coming to the conclusions outlined in this paper, the Status of Women in Architecture Committee has compiled a considerable body of knowledge and data on women in the profession. These are listed below:

“Women in the Architectural Profession”, RAIA 1984

RAIA Membership and Profile of the Profession Surveys, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990

Survey of RMIT Graduates, 1990

Submissions from members of the working party

Survey of Women Working in the Field of the Built Environment, 1989

Statistics from Schools of Architecture in Australia

Although lack of financial and other resources means that the RAIA does not have a complete body of statistical information on female graduates in Australia, particularly those who have never registered nor joined the RAIA, it is the belief of the Committee that the information from the above sources has provided a reasonably accurate picture of female participation in the profession.

Statistical Summary

- 1990, 6.5% of registered architects were female. 7.1% of registered female architects were RAIA members in 1990
- In 1984, 23% of all architecture enrolments were females. By 1989 37% of enrolments were females.
- In 1984, 19% of architecture graduations were females. By 1989, 31% of graduations were female.
- In 1989, there were approximately 7% of women employed as architects in academic positions in Schools of Architecture in Australia, yet there were 37% of female enrolments in architecture courses.
- In 1988, the average income for female architects was \$25,000- \$30,000 and the average for men was \$40,000- \$45,000. By 1990, the average female architect income was \$30,00- \$34,999 whilst the average income for male architects was \$45,000- \$49,999.
- The following charts exemplify the low percentage of women architects as members of the RAIA, despite the increase in numbers of women graduates since 1984.

(IMAGE: [Women in Architecture 1984-1990](#); [Men in Architecture 1984-1990](#))

TOWARDS A MORE EGALITARIAN PROFESSION

The following policy statements for consideration by the RAIA National Council have been developed by the RAIA National Education Committee as recommended by the Working Party on the Status of Women in Architecture. These policy statements were developed as an outcome of the recommendations of the Working Party in the document attached titled: *Towards a More Egalitarian Profession*, August 1991

RAIA POLICY STATEMENTS

The RAIA National Education Committee recommends to National Council:

That:

A brochure be developed in 1992 by the RAIA Education, Practice and Marketing and Information Divisions which provides an outline to Directors of Architectural Practices of positive innovation alternatives to traditional employment of staff. The brochure would include information on job sharing, use of flexible working hours, the benefits of working from home, the use of computer technology to link home and office, and equality in determination of staff rules,

and that:

Gender-neutral speech is used in all documents produced by the RAIA,

and that:

All RAIA National and Chapter Committees are comprised of male and female members who represent a range of employment backgrounds,

and that:

A new careers brochure be published in 1992 by the National Education Committee which stresses the time and financial demands of architectural study and which impresses the relationship between study and practice as an architect,

and that:

National Membership Committees ensure that RAIA membership is continually promoted to students of architecture, and that the National Education Committee ensures membership is promoted during annual visits to schools and through the five year Visiting Panel meeting with all students from the school,

and that:

All National Visiting Panels and annual Chapter Visits to Schools of Architecture comprise both male and female members,

and that:

Education Policy ensures that Practical Experience subjects include content related to stress management, negotiation skills and techniques in relation to the successful integration of professional and private demands on all architects,

and that:

RAIA publications, exhibitions and public displays of architects work consciously include work of both female and male architects,

and that:

The RAIA develop a system of retraining which ensures networks and support schemes are available for architects wanting to re-enter the profession. The National Education Committee with the support of National Council will set up a working group to review and recommend action in this area,

and that:

The RAIA National Education Committee work with Schools of Architecture to redress the current lack of female academic staff,