



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

Equality, Diversity and inclusivity: a speech to accompany the launch of the RTPI Action Plan - CHANGE

25 February – Birmingham University

It is 106 years since the Institute was founded and 60 years since it was given its Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth II. During that time there have been 7 female Presidents – the first was Sylvia Law in 1974, it was then another 20 years before the second female president - Hazel Mackay in 1994. Janet O'Neill followed in 2008, with another 3 between then and 2015. Although both 2020 and 2021 will see female Presidents, I am sure that you will agree with me – we have a lot of catching up to do.

A career in planning is, in my view and indeed the view of many planners (as you will see from the slide), quite possibly one of the most important jobs that society can task anyone with.

I cannot think of many other professions where the decisions that we take, the policies that we put in place and the actions that follow, will have such a lasting influence on society, the environment and the quality of life for generations to come.

But we are all different – we all use spaces and places differently and it is important that we plan for everyone.

But would those spaces and places be different if the scales of power were more evenly balanced?

At the end of the 1970s I started my first job in planning at Birmingham City Council. At that time, the gender balance of the profession was very different to what it is today – for a start there were very few female planners, the majority of roles were held by white, middle class men, which was not reflective of society.

Just before I started, Margaret Thatcher had become the first female Prime Minister. I recall thinking at the time that this meant that the so-called glass ceiling was cracking and that women such as myself could and would have an equal chance of reaching the top of our chosen professions. At last, things seemed to be changing.

So, here we are 40 years later in 2020. How has the profession changed in terms of equality, diversity and inclusivity?

Let's start by looking at some statistics

- Just over 30 years ago in 1988 the split was 85% male : 15% female
- By the turn of the millennium in 2000 it was 75% male : 25% female
- By 2010 things had improved further with 66% male : 34% female

- And in 2019 it was 61% male : 39% female
- Licentiates today are 48% male : 52% female
- And Final year students: 45% male : 55% female

and who knows, in 20 years' time male planners may even be in the minority.

We are heading in the right direction. But looking at other aspects of diversity and membership things are not so good.

- BAME representation in 2019 stood at – 7% (the benchmark from the 2011 census is 14%)
- Fellows of the Institute are 83% male : 17% female – talent surely does not sit so disproportionately with one section of our membership.

Let's now look at how the planning profession compares with other related professions.

- Law Society (2018) – just over 50% of practicing solicitors are women and 60% of new solicitors each year are women – things are changing faster than planning.
- RICS (2018) - 14% of all chartered surveyors in the UK are female. There is clearly more to be done to improve the balance within RICS.
- RIBA (2018) – 28% architects are female – again planners are well ahead.

Clearly in terms of the built environment professions, we are leading the way, but when compared to other professions that we work closely with, we are not doing so well.

As always, statistics are interesting in what they reveal, but vital in what they conceal. And when you start to look at the higher levels of planning, the picture is not so good.

A survey undertaken by Women in Planning last year of 379 planning consultancies found that

- Only 17% of CEOs, MDs, Senior Directors and Directors were women
- The top tier (CEOs, MDs and Senior Directors) was worse still at 13% women
- RTPI Accredited Planning Schools didn't do too well either with only 22% of Professors female

A report in Planning last month painted a slightly better picture at the top 25 planning consultancies, where 23% of planning Directors were female. This did not however break divide Directors in the way that the Women in Planning study did – anecdotally, I suspect that little has changed in terms of top tier females.

This survey also reported a small fall in the number of female planners from 37% to 36% over the preceding year – at best things seem to be standing still – hopefully this is a 'blip'.

But is it any better in the public sector? Again, the evidence shows a mixed picture. Some English regions (West Midlands included) have less than 15% women at Head of Service level, others do better, for example the south east.

Work undertaken by Green Park on local government leadership in 2018 found that across Unitary Authorities, County Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, London Boroughs and District Councils 39% of senior positions were held by women.

They also found that women were most likely to make it to the top 20 level in London Boroughs.

Interestingly at CEO level the Metropolitan Boroughs are best with women now occupying 55% of CEO positions.

In essence – the higher you climb, the wider the gap. This cannot be right.

Let's look now at how the higher levels of the planning profession compare, in terms of gender diversity, with others? Just a few examples

- Welsh Assembly – In 2003 this was the first legislature in the world to achieve a 50:50 gender balance – currently 47% female
- NHS trusts, clinical commissioning groups and supporting organisation – (2017) 44% of CEOs were female
- Secondary School Heads – 39% female
- Hospital consultants – (2017) 36% female
- Scottish Parliament (2019) – 35% female
- House of Commons (2019) – 220 females (34%)
- Law Firms (2018) 31% of partners are women
- Planning – whilst things are improving, this picture is not one that we can be proud of as a profession.

The gender pay gap is a good measure of the degree of equality. Last year the gender pay gap for full time workers increased in the UK, rising from 8.6% in 2018 to 8.9% in 2019.

In the planning profession the picture is far worse. In 2018 the pay gap between male and female 'planning officers' was 28.6%. The pay gap increases with seniority.

The scales of power are tipped against women. This imbalance matters and it matters deeply.

Lack of female representation at a decision-making level materially affects the environment.

We are also losing 'top talent' from the profession to the disadvantage of society.

I am sure that you will agree talent does not rest with one particular section of society, nor does the ability to plan for those who lead different lives.

Planning matters - the legacy of the decisions that we take today will last for many generations and impact upon many lives.

Looking forward, it is really important that as a profession we are reflective of society.

There is still a long way to go in terms of diversity. But why is it so important that we address this issue.

We all use spaces and places but we all do it differently and the way that we do it changes throughout our lives.

Would the decisions that we take be different if the scales of power were more evenly balanced. And here I am not just talking about gender balance. I am talking about diversity in its widest sense.

Decisions taken within an 'echo chamber' will tend to reflect the views of those within that chamber. We feel good when others validate our views, we feel smarter when people tell us what we already know.

Planning is evidence based – but how often does the evidence reflect different views – all of which are equally important in decision making. Evidence tends to default to a white, middle class, male perspective. If the evidence does not fit perceptions, then the decision maker will often dismiss it.

With complex issues, such as those tackled by planners, it is simply not possible for one person, or a group of people from similar backgrounds, to have all the relevant insights.

Diversity is however more than a gender or ethnicity tick box – it is also about cognitive diversity. This form of diversity is often hidden. It is about a diversity of thinking, something that is not necessarily related to certain groups, backgrounds or upbringing.

You may recall England's defeat to Iceland in the 2016 European Football Championship. Why had it all gone wrong? I was listening to Matthew Syed just before Christmas talking about one of the solutions to this. It involved a new group – a technical advisory board – made up of people from different backgrounds including a founder of high-tech start-ups, an administrator in Olympic Sports, an educationalist, former head coach of the England Rugby team, Dave Brailsford a cycling coach, Lucy Giles first female college commander at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and Matthew Syed.

The make-up of the group was criticised by sports writers and others. None of the members were paid – what they brought to the table were unique insights into problems. For example Lucy Giles offered insights about building mental fortitude from her knowledge of the army, Michael Barber talked about turning abstract ideas into practice drawing on his time as head of the Prime minister's delivery unit under Tony Blair. The group was, to quote Matthew Syed, 'brimming with cognitive diversity'.

Would it have been effective if Harry Rednapp, Tony Pulis or others with experience of the game had been involved as pundits suggested? Whilst the room would have brimming with football know how – they all knew very much the same things. They socialised in the same groups – but crucially, they knew what Southgate already knew, so their presence would have added little.

Diverse groups express different views. In this case whilst some ideas were rejected, the process of considering them often led to divergent thinking and more sophisticated solutions.

In a similar way, the success of the Code Breakers at Bletchley Park during World War Two was a reflection of the cognitive diversity of the team, with mathematicians such as Alan Turing and the former bank clerk Stanley Sedgwick - a crossword whizz who could put himself into the mindset of the code writers – both men brought different ways of thinking to code breaking.

It is also worth noting that over 50% of those who worked at Bletchley Park were women.

Seeing things from different perspectives often may lead to different decisions.

As a profession we need to do better if we are to truly understand, and respond to, the diverse needs of society for whom we plan.

The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2018) recently heard evidence about women and the environment. Their report details the habitual 'safety work' that women perform, often unconsciously, such as taking particular routes, wearing headphones or looking down whilst walking. I am sure many of you recognise this in yourselves – I certainly do.

But it isn't actually women who are most at risk on our streets it is young men and the homeless – but what is good for one group is good for others – we just need to ensure that the issues are properly fed into the decision making process and fairly considered.

I would like to commend to you the article published in the March Edition of The Planner – which will just have landed on your doorstep. It is by Natalya Palit and it explores what UK Planners can learn about Gender Planning from the experiences of Vienna.

So how was it for me?

- Did I feel the need to be better to be equal? - yes
- Have I experienced gender discrimination – yes
- Has gender been a barrier to career progression – yes
- Did having a family hold my career back – yes

I do not want any planner to be answering 'yes' to these questions, or questions like them, in the future – it must be NO.

So what is going on in our profession and what can we do to improve equality, diversity and inclusivity?

A member survey in late 2017 garnered 4000 responses. 24% of women said gender was a barrier to career progress. The reasons cited included

- Lack of management development programmes (25%)
- Lack of career mentors (25%)
- Lack of role models
- Lack of family friendly and employer policies

The results of this survey fed directly into the RTPI Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2030 which was launched last month and which contains, as one of its four pillars, the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusivity.

This identified the need for an action plan - snappily titled 'CHANGE' - to address the issues that I have outlined thus far. More about this a little later.

In 2019 the RTPI also undertook its own research. Led by Aude Biquelet Lock and Jenny Divine. The research was driven by the RTPI view that a planning profession that is more representative of women and society at large is crucial to bring about inclusive environments that meet the needs of everyone. The results of this research will be published on International Womens Day, 8 March but I have been given permission to share with you some of the findings.

It took the form of interviews and questionnaires, with responses from 50 women and 2 men working in planning, across 6 countries.

The majority of women in study said they felt at a disadvantage in their workplaces that overwhelmingly reflected 'masculine cultures and norms of behaviour and argued that this was having a tangible effect on their careers.

Over half felt their opportunities for promotion had been limited by gender and close to half said they had experienced sexist or inappropriate comments at work.

The results suggested that women were especially at risk on return from maternity leave and when opportunities for promotion arise.

Those who said that gender had not been a barrier to their professional progress, on occasion had also experienced sexist comments or behaviour from male counterparts.

Such behaviours are equally likely from younger and older males.

Those who had moved between sectors considered that these behaviours depended on culture of workplace and not whether it was public / private / or academic sectors

Some women felt that advancement required adopting 'male' behaviour traits and that other women in more senior positions were the greatest barrier – 'Queen Bee' syndrome.

Some employers were felt to pay 'lip service' only to equality in the workplace – perhaps, it was suggested, to make themselves look modern, progressive employers.

The results suggest that sexism is sometimes accompanied by ageism, racism and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation

The research also contains 15 recommendations for improving gender equality. I commend it to you.

So, everyone needs to accept that there is an issue and agree the importance of correcting the balance

However, many male leaders believe the playing field is level and that gender parity no longer needs to be a priority. The data does not agree with this view and neither do women.

Those 'at the top' need to better understand the challenges that women – and others who are not like them – face.

They need to be confident that they can promote individuals from a 'different mould'.

We are not alone in facing the challenge of a 'Better Balance'. As Lady Hale, former president of the Supreme Court put it recently, the judiciary needs to be more diverse so that the public feel those on the bench are genuinely "our judges" rather than "beings from another planet".

How often have we heard that also said about planners?

So why have we not closed the gender gap yet? For a number of years now we have had policies in place that allow flexible working, we have quality childcare that can enable both parents to work, there are schemes in place to support for women and others in the workplace – but barriers to professional advancement still persist.

In our society cultural norms are strong – they define gender roles at home and at work.

Caring responsibilities, for children and the elderly are still seen as a woman's role. In the UK, according to the Office of National Statistics, men do an average 16 hours a week of unpaid work whilst women do 26 hours a week.

Women's lives are often more complex than men. Their journey's to and from the office often involve trips to the shops, to drop off and collect children, they are more likely to use public transport.

Women tend to say 'we' rather than 'I' – they are team players. When interviewing I am always struck by how women, when asked about a project they have been working on, refer to the 'team' – they have to be prompted to explain their role within the team. Conversely, men often talk about what they did and have to be prompted to explain how this relates to others in their team.

Many of our working practices, from interviews, office hours and networking, favour males and, as the RTPI research confirmed, the language and practices of the workplace often leave women feeling uncomfortable – “*I have to be better to be equal*”.

Closing the gender gap makes good business sense. Research by McKinsey showed that companies across all sectors with the most women on their boards significantly and consistently outperform those with no female representation.

Thomson Reuters found that companies with greater numbers of women leaders fared better in periods of greater economic volatility.

Whilst a Leeds University Business School Study showed that having at least 1 female director on the Board appears to cut a company’s chances of going bust by about 20%. Having 2 or more, lowers the risk further

Change can happen if we are determined to make it happen. Two weeks ago I was at the UN Habitat World Urban Forum and met with UN executive Director Maimunhah Mohd Sharif - Maimumah trained as a planner at Cardiff University. She had been given responsibility for the World Urban Forum and said that one of the challenges that she had set the organising committee was to ensure that they had 50:50 representation of male – female speakers. She had been told that this was not possible – she was clear in her response – well search the world then! She achieved 54% female speakers. If this can be done on the global stage, then it can be done in the UK. We should never see panels that do not reflect the society that they are speaking about.

And so to the RTPI Action Plan that I mentioned earlier.

In 2019, the RTPI commissioned specialist diversity and inclusion consultancy Brook Graham to look at how the planning profession currently performs and to identify a series of bespoke actions that could be taken forward to achieve a better balance.

They found that whilst the RTPI performs ‘above average’ in terms of equality, diversity and inclusivity, when compared to others in the built environment sector, there is still much work to do.

For us to be an effective and sustainable profession, we must be genuinely representative of the society in which we work. This includes recognising and addressing the need for broader visibility of diversity at all levels of the profession, from entry to the most senior. We need to be accessible and inclusive, adaptable to change and proactive in our support for members, wherever they may be.

An action plan – CHANGE – has been developed to help guide both members and employers as they work to achieve a more balanced profession. This bespoke action plan represents the means for the profession to achieve this.

This evening, I am delighted to be able to launch this action plan, I hope that CHANGE will be transformative and will not just benefit planners but will also positively impact on how people view the profession.

CHANGE is focused on 6 core areas:

1. A Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
2. RTPI Governance Structure
3. RTPI Standards
4. Education Sector
5. Leadership and Culture
6. Attracting and retaining diverse talent

Work is now underway to identify a range of detailed actions that can be implemented to ensure progress is made

Progress will then be measured using Brook Graham's 'Maturity Model' which has 4 stages –with key milestones and objectives to ensure progress can be measured

The six core areas are shown down the left-hand side of the table – the four Brook Graham stages are:

Stage 1 – shown in yellow – constructing foundations

Stage 2 – shown in pink – building infrastructure

Stage 3 – shown in green – momentum and integrating

Stage 4 – shown in orange – pioneering.

By the end of year 7, the high-level actions underpinning each of the six core areas should have been completed and the top level of maturity will have been reached.

The Action plan is an on-line tool which can be accessed via the RTPI website. (The website is currently undergoing an upgrade, but very shortly a new and significantly better one will be up and running – so bear with the tech specialists for a few weeks longer).

The Action Plan represents a strong and measurable commitment by the RTPI and its members to tackle the challenges of equality, diversity and inclusivity and to bring about real change.

Without wishing to pre-empt the detailed actions that will flow from this toolkit, I want to share one with you today – that is the need to address unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias refers to the way that people are denied opportunities not because of a lack of talent or potential, but because of arbitrary factors such as race or gender.

When recruiting to new positions, unconscious bias tends not to manifest itself when the difference between candidates is obvious – why would you chose someone who could

clearly not perform in the way required of the role – rather it happens when candidates are similar in ability.

Matthew Syed, in his book 'Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking' quotes a university study where students were given the task of deciding between candidates for a job. When black candidates were clearly superior to white they were almost always selected. The same was true of white candidates.

It was where the CVs were similar in quality that unconscious bias kicked in – there was a small but significant tendency for white candidates to be selected. Those making the decisions were surprised when the bias was pointed out. If these decisions had been challenged in court, it would have been almost impossible to prove.

Dismantling unconscious bias is not just the first step in creating a fairer system, but in creating organisations where there is better and more balanced decision making.

It gives people from all backgrounds a chance to pursue their talents, broadening the body of people with knowledge to our most pressing challenges. No-one should have to be better to be equal.

Unconscious bias training should, in my opinion be a must, not only for recruiters, but for also for the wider profession as we seek to engage equally with all sections of the community that we serve and properly balance the views that we hear in return.

Running alongside the RTPI Action Plan, I would also commend to you the work that is being done by Women in Planning, to provide support, gender specific CPD and networking opportunities. The West Midlands branch was established in 2019 and has already delivered some innovative and exciting events, with many more to come. These events are open to all, irrespective of gender.

Equality, diversity and inclusivity is more than an issue of morality and social justice, or box ticking, it is also about fairness and properly informed decision making.

Equality, diversity and inclusivity matters.

Talent is everywhere – opportunity is not.

I want every member of the RTPI and every new entrant into the profession to be able to reach their potential irrespective of their background and circumstances and in doing so to be able to contribute fully to shaping our places and spaces for the better.

There is great hope for the future – but it is our hands. I think that this was what I was trying to say at 8 months old and have continued to say ever since.



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Finally, I'm looking forward to playing my part in shaping a more equal, inclusive and diverse profession and one which is, in turn, better placed to take those key decisions that will affect the future of our country and the lives of those who live in it.