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# Deconstructing the glass ceiling: gender equality in the Australian property profession

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to export the role of professional bodies within the property industry in Australia in bringing about gender equality. In particular the policy objectives of the various professional bodies is analysed and contrasted with the level of genres equality demonstrated within the governance structures of the organisations at national and regional level.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper analyses the annual reports of the leading property professional bodies in Australia to identify any gender equity policy objectives and to identify the balance between male and female representation in the governing boards of the associations.

**Findings** – The research shows that while a few organisations have made some statements regarding the need for change to a more inclusive property industry these objectives are not reflected within the governance structure of the organisations. It is therefore evident that significant attitudinal and structural change will be required to bring about equality within the property industry.

**Research limitations/implications** – The research is limited to the Australian property and construction industry and the relevant boards at national and state level.

**Practical implications** – The paper highlights the need to address gender inequality at the senior management level within the professional associations that govern the property profession. The professional associations are uniquely placed to show leadership in promoting gender equality and should be adopting policy within the organisations charter to being about a shift in attitudes to women within management roles in the property industry.

**Social implications** – The issue of gender equity is highly topical and this paper adds to the research in this area. It highlights the important role that professional associations could take in bringing about change, but reveals that many professional bodies have a worse gender balance at the governance level than many of their member firms.

**Originality/value** – The paper is the first to analyse the gender mix within the professional bodies in Australia which govern and advise the property and construction industries. As such it reveals that little progress has been made in bringing about gender equality in the profession.

**Keywords** Australia, Gender, Property, Construction industry

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

"We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal" this quote by Thomas Jefferson in the US Declaration of Independence, 1776 is perhaps the best known statement of equal rights for all, however when it comes to gender equality, in the words of George Orwell "some are more equal than others". The gender gap in terms of equal pay and opportunities, has received much attention over the past few decades, with numerous campaigns to promote gender equality in the workplace and in senior managerial positions.

The representation of women in senior management positions and on company boards has been a particular focus of governments to demonstrate the true equal status of women.

In many countries there has been active government intervention to increase the representation of women on company boards. For instance, leading examples of affirmative action include Norway, where the government set a target in 2002 of 40 per cent of women on private company boards by 2005. However, having failed to meet this target, the government legislated in 2006 requiring compliance by 2008 or face fines. Subsequently, full compliance was achieved in 2009 (Lord Davies, 2011). Spain legislated in 2007, the requirement for public companies to attain a 40 per cent share of each sex on their boards by 2015. Similarly, Iceland passed a quota law in 2010 for public companies to achieve 40 per cent from each sex by 2013 (Lord Davies, 2011). In the UK the government has adopted a voluntary scheme following the establishment of the Davie's Review into Women on Boards Review in 2011. Considerable progress has been made within the FTSE 100 reporting in 2015 that 23.5 per cent of board members are women, almost double the number reported for 2011 at the commencement of the scheme (Lord Davies, 2015).

Australia is ranked second behind Norway in the United Nations – Human Development Index for Gender Inequality, demonstrating a strong commitment to reducing gender inequality, yet there is still clear evidence of inequality in many aspects of the workplace (UN-HDI, 2014).

In 2010 the Australian Stock Exchange introduced reporting guidelines for all ASX listed companies. These guidelines require companies to implement a diversity policy, and to set measurable objectives aimed at achieving gender diversity (ASX, 2014). In 2012 the Australian Federal Government introduced the Workplace Gender Equality Act which applies to non-public sector employers with 100 or more employees in Australia. The Act requires such employers to submit annual filings with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) disclosing their "Gender Equality Indicators". The legislation which has not established any quotas currently publishes annual reports showing detailed analysis by industry sector the proportion of women in senior management roles and represented at board level (WGEA, 2015).

## Gender in the property industry

Building on the general industry initiatives outlined above it has been recognised that the property industry is a major contributor to the overall economy of the nation; and plays an important role with professional contributions across the financial, agency, management and construction sectors. While there have been a limited number of studies undertaken into the gender make-up of a number of industry sectors, the real estate industry has been largely overlooked. Pauli (2013) reports on a Swedish study by Cettner (2008) into the construction industry, which included property/real estate representatives, where this study concluded that the industry is historically male dominated and remains largely unchanged. This study went on to show that between 2001 and 2008, the directors of housing companies had changed their composition from 29 to 34 per cent women, respectively. However, in real estate companies the figure in 2001 was just 8 per cent, but by 2008 had reached 21 per cent (Pauli, 2013).

A study of the gender composition of boards of Australian property trusts, initial public offerings between 1994 and 2004, found that of the 58 trusts listed in this period identified just 12 female directors or 3.8 per cent of the total 320 directors. In the earlier part of this study, between 1994 and 1999, the number of female directors was just 7 or 3.3 per cent of the total 214 trust directors (Dimovski and Brooks, 2005). In a

similar current study Dimovski *et al.* (2016) examines 1,715 ASX listed real estate and development companies and reports that just 499 female directors or just 6 per cent were located out of a total of 8,360 individuals.

As identified in the introduction, the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 establishes a reporting regime for all private sector employers with more than 100 employees. Companies are required to report annually to the WGEA. The data submitted to WGEA is published annually as are examples of major organisations gender equity policies. The objective of this scheme is to publicly demonstrate the progress that is being made towards gender equality. The 2014 WGEA data with respect to the property industry reflect the results reported by Dimovski *et al.* (2016). The WGEA data are collated at several levels, initially at the industry division level within which property-related services falls under the definition of rental, hiring and real estate services. This can be further refined to the industry sub division level of property operators and real estate services and at the industry group level these can be isolated at the property operators or real estate services level. At each of these levels data are published for each year between 2004 and 2013. The most recent available report covers the financial year 2012-2013 and is summarised in Table I. This data clearly demonstrates that across the property operations and real estate services divisions, female employees represent about half of the workforce. In addition, the number of female managers is only slightly below the percentage of full-time employees. The stand out result however, is that there are only 5.9 per cent of female CEOs within the property operations division and no female CEOs within the real estate services division.

The significant under representation of females at the CEO level in the Australian property industry has been highlighted by the leading Australian industry association, the Property Council of Australia (PCA). The PCA commissioned an industry review in 2014, undertaken by Ernst and Young (2014) in which the authors summarise much of the research which supports the benefits of gender diversity to business including better decision making and improved overall financial performance. The report also includes interviews with senior executives within the property industry and identifies the current perspective on promoting gender equality in senior management positions. The findings reveal a willingness to improve equality, but also shows that progress towards achieving this is relatively low (Ernst and Young, 2014). What is missing from this evaluation of the Australian property sector is any analysis of the policy initiatives of the leading industry players. As this research will show there is much rhetoric around gender equality but to date this has not been encapsulated in any firm policy directive to address the imbalance at the higher levels of the organisations.

| Reporting division 2012/2013 | No. of orgs | % total females | % full-time females | % female managers | % of female CEOs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rental, hiring and real estate services | 60 | 44.7 | 38.7 | 32.7 | 3.3 |
| Property operators and real estate services | 35 | 50.8 | 42.9 | 34.7 | 2.9 |
| Property operators | 17 | 57.1 | 47.5 | 42.3 | 5.9 |
| Real estate services | 18 | 45.7 | 39.9 | 29.2 | 0.0 |
| **Source:** WGEA (2015) | | | | | |

Table I.
WGEA reported female employees 2012-2013

One issue identified in the Ernst and Young (2014) report was the perceived availability of suitably qualified applicants to fulfil senior roles within the industry. This observation is not supported by data presented in Table I which indicates that females represent approximately half of the real estate services workforce. It is also not supported by the findings of Poon (2016) who studied the employment outcomes of property and construction graduates within Australia. There is little research world-wide into the number of property/real estate graduates entering the profession. Devaney and Roberts (2012) evaluated the employment prospects of property and construction graduates from UK universities between 2005 and 2009. The results show that there are greater numbers of females undertaking property-related studies than construction courses, with 32 per cent females of the 1,635 graduates in the sample, compared with just 14.5-16.7 per cent of females in the building and construction disciplines.

The proportion of female graduates derived from the 2012 and 2013 Australian Graduate Survey in real estate and construction disciplines match exactly the UK figures in terms of real estate students at 32 per cent of the 991 graduates. However the construction discipline demonstrates a much higher level of female graduates at 37 per cent of the 5,907 graduates (AGS, 2015).

The results of both the UK and Australian graduate research demonstrate that females entering the property profession represent 32 per cent of the total number of graduates in the field. It would follow from this that the pool of tertiary qualified potential managers to fill senor positions in the industry should match this figure. Although Poon (2016) does demonstrate that the employment prospects for male graduates are greater than female candidates, the difference between the genders was not statistical significant.

The research commissioned by the PCA referred to above, highlights the importance of the gender issue in contemporary professional property practice. It also points to the fact that at least the PCA has recognised that there is an issue to be addressed within the property industry. Professional bodies and not-for-profit professional associations play a significant role in the development of the property industry and in nurturing the employment prospects of their members (Warren and Wilkinson, 2008; Wilkinson and Warren, 2008). Given this leadership role and public interest agenda it might be expected that the professional bodies that are linked to the property industry, would seek to be exemplars of good governance and ethical practice.

The first part of this paper discusses the literature on gender equality within organisations and the availability of executive management roles for women. This research seeks to evaluate the gender policy standing and board composition of the major property associated professional institutions in Australia. It is argued that these organisations play a major role in promoting gender equality.

## Literature review

As discussed earlier in the paper issues exist within the property industry with regards to gender equality in contemporary professional property practice. Gender equality has been debated for many decades, both nationally and internationally, and in recent times research has identified only a slight improvement. Therefore the literature review considers the misdirected perception of women's inability to undertake leadership roles; the assumptions that males are more suitable as leaders, digital imaging incorrectly stereotyping the portrayal of the women's role, and perception of the role of women in the working environment and professional industry.

During the last decade, researchers have also identified that whilst government can mandate gender equity, there is a lack of training and knowledge for managers to successfully implement the requirement. For instance, within the policy of the European Union, the UK has introduced gender mainstreaming into local authority planning departments. However, Greed (2006) argues that planning officers "lack the knowledge, skills and motivation" and are hindered by "ambiguous planning law" in regards to gender equity. Consequently, there is also the consideration that men must be willing participants to bring about these necessary changes, and in particular where there is an absence of policy and equity within executive leadership roles (De Vries, 2015). For instance if men are placed in positions of authority and power, they are best positioned to incorporate gender equity.

Traditionally the appointment of a CEO, or similar recognised leadership role, has been a male privilege. Therefore the argument arises, that if men are the decision makers for these appointments, there needs to be a conscious plan to provide both genders with the opportunity to participate in management roles. For instance, De Vries (2015) suggested a partnership model between senior men and women for leading the gender change.

Other solutions put forward include embracing inequality with "shared leadership" roles within various committees, and implementing strategies such as training members and allocating designated leadership roles on a formal basis. This approach would provide a basis for male and female gender to equally participate in their leadership role and minimise gender gaps (Mendez and Busenbark, 2015). However it has also been argued that the stereo type image and expectation associated with male gender, challenges the work environment to embrace women's ability to lead. For instance, management positions which are traditionally assembled for the benefit of the male gender, and with little consideration afforded towards the women's ability to undertake these roles (Kyriakidou, 2012). Similarly, whilst during the last decade, there has been an increase of women participating in the workforce in the UK (Haile, 2012) gender equity is not readily identifiable.

*The image of women as managers*
Strategic digital technology has also been recognised as a means to foster gender hierarchies. The perception of male dominance and their ability to lead and their acceptance as leaders by society, is further exasperated by ongoing image communication which helps to enhance the male image over the female image. This is evidenced in research undertaken by Kyriacou (2015) who considered gender equity within the Greek Accounting Professional Institute. The author analysed the way in which the image communication in the digital space was used to provide the male image of dominance within the accounting profession. Conclusions from the research noted that the use of strategic digital technology, was to "exclude and marginalise" women, and there was a decisive "lack of images representing professional accounting women". Interestingly, the majority of the female gender images communicated comprised of woman who were placed in roles of support, or listening, or other stereo types of female roles. The author argued that if the women's image was better portrayed and with the same emphasise and strategic leadership image given to their male counterpart, this would be a first step in changing woman's image as leaders in the Greek accounting profession. For instance, the use of repeated images of power to reinforce the male dominance and not providing women speakers the opportunity to be portrayed in their own right, was continuously undermining the capability of women.

*Work preferences and styles*

So whilst the issue of image communication and the power of the authorised decision makers has been considered, it is also important to discuss inherent work preferences of colleagues and their working environment. For instance, issues such as learning styles, work values, work interests, personality and temperament. In this regard, a small survey of students in three different business programmes at their different education institutions was undertaken by Gilbert *et al.* (2010). The research aim focused on the study of the participants work preferences of male and female professions from three different English-speaking countries. The conclusions identified that there were few work preference differences between male and females; however these differences were not consistent within each country. Additionally, the use of mechanical items appeared to have a moderate impact on the attraction of their working environment.

However earlier studies (Meyers-Levy, 1988; McClelland *et al.*, 1976) suggested that women, more so than men, prefer to work in harmony with others, whereas men prefer to "lead and control". These differences could be viewed as the changing nature of society over the decades; however competition, promotion prospects and achievement results can be a leading factor for self-motivation and drive. So traditionally whilst the man was considered the bread winner this self motivational aspect might have been heightened with the level of responsibility and expectation of their traditional role; and with the current trends of society, this expectation has possibly shifted hence the reason for differences in these research findings. In contrast, a survey which spanned from 1973 to 1990, comprising 7,345 full-time male and female workers from all general occupations and industries, concluded that work values were associated with a persons' age, education and occupation prestige rather than gender association (Rowe and Snizek, 1995). Therefore, the authors argued that since work values were negligible with regards to gender identification the traditional male dominated presence was unjustified.

As more women progress through the educational institutions and expand their knowledge, many professions will have access to an increasing pool of females. Therefore is gender equity missing because of a lack of "pools" or is this due to the historical male dominance for positions of authority? There is also the issue that many management roles require the male to travel interstate/overseas and the carer responsibilities usually associated with the female role at home, can be considered an interference with a management career pathway. Therefore, females are hesitant to apply for these management roles; hence their leadership skills cannot be grown and opportunities to sit on professional association boards are limited because females are unable to demonstrate suitable skills. In the recent decade there has been greater emphasis on work-life balance. Lingard and Francis (2005) considered project-based managerial employees' preferences with an emphasis on work-life balance via an empirical examination.

Results indicated that women, who were in the group with dependent children, were under represented in the construction industry; suggesting that policies and benefits can be offered to provide a more attractive work environment and provide the opportunity to maintain family structure and cohesion.

*The boys club*

At the other end of the spectrum is the notion that even though females might demonstrate their ability to take on the leadership roles in professional associations, the sheer fact of the male dominance and the "boys club" syndrome would make it very

challenging for a female to be appointed onto a professional association board. In a study undertaken by Kuhlmann and Bourgeault (2008), the public sector trends on gender diversity, using health professionals and academics as case studies were examined. The findings suggested that public policy played a pivotal role in the understanding of gender issues in the workforce and noted that new models for equality and diversity were required.

In this regard, the term "persistence of gender inequality" is discussed by researches who highlight the ongoing issue of gender balance representation in leadership roles (Kuhlmann and Bourgeault, 2008; Pesonen *et al.*, 2009).

There have been instances in established associations where due to the requirement for gender equity, work practices will change using an adverse approach. For instance, research undertaken by Parsons and Mills (2012) identified changes in the type of work undertaken within the organisation and a "lowering of the social status" within the industry, in order to provide the appearance of gender equity. Their research concluded that whilst there was the appearance of gender equity on the "surface" of the organisation, if one scratched below the surface it was discovered that below the surface, gender order was maintained and primary functions of the association which were happening previously were now being outsourced.

In conclusion, research readily identifies the lack of gender equity despite mandated calls within government policy to change the status quo. However situations where the traditional stereo type image for men and women is promoted does very little to portray gender equity and promote the competence and leadership skills within women. The next section of the paper, discusses the methodology applied to evaluating gender equity within Australia.

## Methodology and limitation

In order to evaluate the gender policy initiatives and management board composition of the leading property and construction professional bodies and not-for-profit associations, a desktop survey of the composition of the gender board membership, was undertaken.

Therefore, the research methodology was approached in three stages. The first stage related to the selection of property and construction professional bodies and relevant not-for-profit associations. In this regard in Australia, the real estate agents profession is represented by the Real Estate Institute of Australia (REIA, 2015). However the property profession is represented by two competing institutions, being the Australian Property Institute (API) and the global body the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). Membership with the REIA is primarily comprised of practising real estate agents; the API membership is predominantly made up of practicing valuers and land economists and, as such, is the most closely related to those working as valuers in the property industry. The RICS is an international organisation with a governing body located in the UK and with representation drawn from around the world. The RICS also incorporates both property and construction disciplines within the same organisation and, as such, is not purely a property professional body.

The Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (AIQS), the Chartered Institute of Building and the Australian Institute of Building (AIB), are the only other professional membership bodies in Australia, however these organisations are specifically related to the construction industry rather than land and property. The research has also included the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) and the Surveying and Spatial Science Institute (SSSI). These two professional bodies are associated with the built

environment but not directly related to real estate or the construction industry. They have been included as their area of professional practice is relevant to property and is also contained within the specialties included within the RICS.

In addition to the professional bodies there are a number of not-for-profit industry associations and related organisations. The major property industry lobby group and association is the PCA. The PCA is probably the largest and most influential association operating within the property arena. In addition the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) is a member of the World Green Building Council and represents the sustainable development industry. The Urban Development Institute of Australia represents the property development industry and has a particular focus in the residential development sector.

The second stage of the research, involved the collection of data representing the current gender board membership within each of these organisation. For this purpose, the current data which were available on the website of each nominated organisation was collected during the months June to August 2015. The structure of most property and construction organisations in Australia is one which has state-based governing committees with a national level governing body with members usually drawn from the state/territory governing boards. Therefore, each organisation was evaluated at both state/territory and national level, by listing the gender composition within each board membership.

However a limitation of the research during the second stage was the reliability of the web-based information available for public viewing, and in this regard, annual reports and minutes of meetings available on the organisations website were used as a basis to verify the accuracy of the information sourced. The findings of the analysis were compared nationally and discussed at both state/territory and national level.

The third stage of the research involved a review of published policy statements from each of the organisations who were selected within the first stage. The aim of this review was to identify any recognition by the organisation that female participation within board membership composition was being considered.

The findings on the data collected within each organisation, is presented in a table format representing a summary of state/territory and national board gender membership composition. In conclusion the research presents current data of gender board membership composition. The next section of the paper discusses the findings of the research.

## Findings board representation

In evaluating the gender equality of the professional bodies in Australia, it would be useful to establish a benchmark against which to evaluate each organisation. It might be assumed that an equitable representation may perhaps be 50 per cent of each gender. This would not, however, take into account the differing levels of graduates entering the programme where the research shows just 32 per cent of graduates in the property field are female. This figure represents findings from 2004 onwards and it could be argued, but not supported by any empirical research, that the number of female graduates in earlier years was lower. The UK Davie's Review into Women on Boards established a voluntary target of 25 per cent of board members to be female. This target is expected to be reached during 2015 with the current level at 23.5 per cent (Lord Davies, 2015). This rate is perhaps the most appropriate and eminently achievable target for any professional body to meet.

Analysis of the national boards of each of the professional bodies reveals that other than the PIA and the GBCA, no organisation meets the 25 per cent target rate. Indeed a number of organisations have representation below 10 per cent and in line with the figures for national reporting to WGEA shown in Table I. Indeed two organisations, the API and

AIB have no female members on the national board; and five organisations only have one female member on their national board. The results for each of the organisations included within this study are shown in Table II (SSSI, 2015).

Within many of the organisations studied, the national board members shown in Table II are drawn from the state board membership, and typically the president of each state group is a member of the national board. An analysis of each organisation at the state level provides additional data relating to the elected representation of the members at a local level. Therefore, table three below includes data at the state level together with a total level of all committee members.

From Table III it is evident that some regions do have higher levels of female representation, while others have less or even no female board members. For instance, the API in Canberra and South Australia, have attained the 25 per cent female board member target rate. Collecting together all board members across the various states once again shows that other than the PIA, no organisation studied has attained the 25 per cent female board member target rate. The relative levels of the state organisations female membership is shown in Figure 1.

The regional-level results demonstrate a reversal from the top-level results with respect to the API and RICS, which are the two leading property professional bodies. The RICS Oceania regional board has no female members, while the API has female regional board members in ACT, NSW, SA and WA with a total of 12.8 per cent of the board membership being female.

The findings of this analysis clearly demonstrate that the property profession is not managing to meet any reasonable target level of female representation on national and regional boards. This raises the question whether these organisations are actively trying to promote female participation in the decision-making processes of the organisation. The second part of this research looks at annual reports to members, and policy documents on the organisations website in order to ascertain if there is any stated objective to raise the representation of female members on boards.

### Findings – policy statements

A review of the most recent annual report to members, and policy statements from each of the organisations was analysed, with the aim to identify any recognition by the organisation that female participation was at a low level within the organisation, and if

| Organisation | Male | Female | Female (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| AIB | 14 | 0 | 0.0 |
| AIQS | 19 | 1 | 5.0 |
| API | 12 | 0 | 0.0 |
| CIOB | 14 | 1 | 6.7 |
| GBCA | 7 | 3 | 30.0 |
| PIA | 8 | 5 | 38.5 |
| PCA | 16 | 3 | 15.8 |
| REI | 7 | 1 | 12.5 |
| SSSI | 8 | 1 | 11.1 |
| RICS | 46 | 10 | 17.9 |
| UDIA | 11 | 1 | 8.3 |

**Sources:** AIQS (2014), PIA (2015), REINSW (2015), SSSI (2015), UDIA (2015)

Table II.
National board
membership 2015

|  | Male | Female | Female (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *AIB* | | | |
| ACT | 8 | 1 | 11.1 |
| NSW | 13 | 0 | 0.0 |
| QLD | 19 | 0 | 0.0 |
| SA | 10 | 0 | 0.0 |
| TAS | 9 | 0 | 0.0 |
| VIC | 12 | 1 | 7.7 |
| WA | 14 | 0 | 0.0 |
| All divisions | 85 | 2 | 2.3 |
| *AIQS* | | | |
| ACT | 9 | 1 | 10.0 |
| NSW | 9 | 2 | 18.2 |
| QLD | 13 | 0 | 0.0 |
| SA | 11 | 2 | 15.4 |
| VIC | 12 | 2 | 14.3 |
| WA | 14 | 0 | 0.0 |
| All divisions | 68 | 7 | 9.3 |
| *API* | | | |
| ACT | 9 | 4 | 30.8 |
| NSW | 14 | 2 | 12.5 |
| QLD | 12 | 0 | 0.0 |
| SA | 7 | 3 | 30.0 |
| TAS | 11 | 0 | 0.0 |
| VIC | 12 | 0 | 0.0 |
| WA | 10 | 2 | 16.7 |
| All divisions | 75 | 11 | 12.8 |
| *PIA* | | | |
| ACT | 11 | 3 | 21.4 |
| NSW | 9 | 7 | 43.8 |
| QLD | 9 | 8 | 47.1 |
| NT | 2 | 3 | 60.0 |
| SA | 12 | 6 | 33.3 |
| TAS | 8 | 4 | 33.3 |
| VIC | 13 | 6 | 31.6 |
| WA | 5 | 7 | 58.3 |
| All divisions | 64 | 49 | 43.4 |
| *PCA* | | | |
| ACT | 11 | 3 | 21.4 |
| NSW | 14 | 3 | 17.6 |
| QLD | 14 | 5 | 26.3 |
| SA | 14 | 2 | 12.5 |
| TAS | 12 | 3 | 20.0 |
| VIC | 12 | 3 | 20.0 |
| WA | 15 | 1 | 6.3 |
| NT | 14 | 1 | 6.7 |
| All divisions | 106 | 21 | 16.5 |

**Table III.**
Australian
professional bodies –
state boards

|  | Male | Female | Female (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *REI* |  |  |  |
| ACT | 6 | 2 | 25.0 |
| NSW | 10 | 3 | 23.1 |
| QLD | 5 | 2 | 28.6 |
| SA | 10 | 1 | 9.1 |
| TAS | 9 | 0 | 0.0 |
| VIC | 10 | 1 | 9.1 |
| WA | 7 | 2 | 22.2 |
| NT | 5 | 5 | 50.0 |
| All divisions | 62 | 16 | 20.5 |
| *UDIA* |  |  |  |
| ACT | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| NSW | 9 | 3 | 25.0 |
| QLD | 14 | 1 | 6.7 |
| SA | 15 | 2 | 11.8 |
| TAS | 0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| VIC | 9 | 1 | 10.0 |
| WA | 11 | 1 | 8.3 |
| All divisions | 58 | 8 | 12.1 |

Table III.
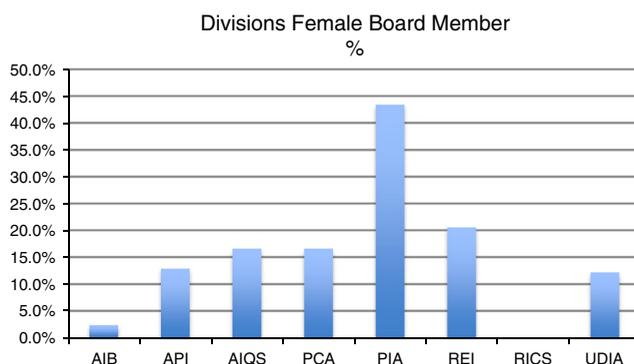


Figure 1.
State board
female member
representation

there was any policy to redress this imbalance. It might be expected given the
leadership role of the professional bodies and the lead given by government in
establishing the Workplace Gender Equity Act, that the bodies would incorporate some
measures to address gender equity into their policy documents. Analysis of the bodies
public documents reveals as follows.

*API*
The annual report identifies the number of members in each membership class,
but does not report on the gender of members. There is no reporting of gender diversity
or published policy within the organisation (API, 2014).

*RICS*
The RICS has in its annual report identified the need to address diversity issues
including gender with the statement; "RICS is keen to lead in this arena, firstly through

our diversity and careers campaign to attract a wider variety of candidates into the construction/property sector, and to spark meaningful debate on the trajectory of female professionals from classroom to boardroom" (RICS, 2014, p. 23).

While there is evidence of change both on recruitment of members, and in terms of internal staff gender diversity, there is no evidence of policy to address the lack of female representation within the governance structure.

*AIQS*
The annual report does not provide any detail as to the membership gender diversity, nor does it contain any policy statements or initiatives to raise gender diversity. The website does contain a link to grant funding for "Women in Construction Funding Grants" and this is an initiative to fund individuals obtaining leadership training.

*PCA*
Perhaps the most vocal property organisation on encouraging gender equality, the PCA has established a Diversity Committee and has launched a national initiative in 2014. The Property Champions of Change (PCC), the aim to increase awareness of gender issues in the property industry. In addition, the PCA's three year strategic plan 2015-2017 reiterates the objective of championing gender equality through its PCC initiative (PCA, 2015). There is, however, no clear policy to redress the imbalance within the governance structure of the organisation.

*GBCA*
The annual report does not specifically identify any gender equality policy. The organisations' website does however point to a number of initiatives promoting women in green building issues (GBCA, 2013, 2015).

**Conclusion**
Having identified that the professional bodies who represent their members in professional practice in Australia have an important role to play in guiding the future development of the property and real estate professions, it might have been expected that these organisations would play a major role in promoting gender equality. The literature review identified research where gender equity was examined from the perspective of perception in leadership roles, digital imaging stereotyping and working environment values. Interestingly over the recent decades research still concludes that gender equity has not been achieved. This is also evidenced in the research undertaken in this paper.

While it is not clear what the gender make-up of the various organisations membership is, it has been demonstrated that the mix of graduates entering the profession shows at least one third are female. It should follow that the same proportion of graduates enter the profession, and thus become eligible to seek representation on governing boards. Therefore the under representation of females is at odds with the professional graduates, and questions arise why women are not supported in these leadership roles.

The modest targets set for female company directors in the UK and other countries have not been repeated in Australia. The results of this research clearly show that there is a significant gap between the targets set for female representation on company boards of directors in other countries, and the representation of women on the governance boards of the leading property and construction professional bodies in Australia. However, there is some encouraging evidence that the industry is becoming increasingly aware of the

issue. In particular the initiatives of the PCA and RICS in raising awareness are to be applauded, however even these organisations have fallen short of establishing targets for female representation on their own governing boards.

Additionally, policy statements with the majority of these organisations analysed, provided very limited information or none at all, with regards to promoting gender equity within their governing board. Furthermore, women choosing a career path in property will struggle to understand the merits sought by employers who have the authority to place them on a career path which will foster their leadership skills. Since male and female graduates achieve the same educational qualifications, where is the justification of the imbalance with gender equity prevailing currently. Is the property industry sending out a message that women are not as competent as men to undertake these leadership roles; or is this a lack of planning within organisations and failing to recognise that women will have an interrupted career path due to their family responsibilities, however, provided with the opportunity, they would be able to demonstrate their leadership skills.

## Recommendations

This research has identified a significant gap between the rhetoric that many organisations present regarding gender equality and the practices demonstrated within their own governance structure and policy directives. Therefore, the research recommends the following actions, to improve the gender imbalance:

(1) Active government intervention to increase the representation of women on company boards, with for instance the introduction of minimum quotas.

(2) The adoption of a clear policy by not-for-profit professional and industry bodies to redress the imbalance within the governance structure. As a minimum such a policy should expect proportional representation at both state and national levels commensurate with the gender mix of the member organisation.

(3) Proactive policy initiatives introduced by professional organisations, which aid to promote and improve the gender imbalance. This could be achieved through a variety of measures, such as a mentoring assistance programme; workshops aimed at improving work-life balance and career prospects; and management training workshops so managers are aware of best practice policies which will improve gender imbalance.

It is time that the property industry recognised the contribution that female graduates make to the profession, and take steps to redress the significant under representation within the governance of the professional organisations. In conclusion, both the government and property industry must work together to achieve these outcomes.

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