Royal Institute of British Architects response to the Women & Equalities Select Committee inquiry on the Gender Pay Gap

The Royal Institute of British Architects champions better buildings, communities and the environment through architecture and our 40,000 members. We provide the standards, training, support and recognition that put our members – in the UK and overseas – at the peak of their profession. With government and our partners, we work to improve the design quality of public buildings, new homes and new communities.

1. The RIBA welcomes the decision of the Women & Equalities Select Committee to hold an inquiry into this issue and the opportunity to submit evidence.

2. In addition, we welcome the commitment of successive governments to tackle the gender pay gap. The continued gap in earnings has a negative impact across our economy and society and as such we welcome the recognition that tackling this issue is vital to the continued success of the UK economy.

3. Through its work, the Royal Institute of British Architects supports equality, diversity and inclusion within the architectural profession on two main fronts: by improving and encouraging access to careers in architecture for people from a diverse range of backgrounds and by promoting good working practices to improve retention and progression rates in the profession.

4. In recent years there have been a number of initiatives aimed at tackling the gender pay gap and addressing the lack of female representation in senior roles in Architecture and the wider employment market. From our own surveys, we believe that these are showing signs of progress, however, there is clearly much that needs to be done.

5. Female participation in architecture has risen in recent years, particularly in the number of women students that is approaching parity in many schools of architecture. However, while this is encouraging, data compiled by the
RIBA and other organisations suggests that proportionally more women than men decide not to complete their studies. As a result, progress towards full equality remains slow.

6. Female participation in architecture declines steadily as people progress through their careers. While women make up around 40% of the junior staff at architectural practices, that declines to less than 15% by the time you reach equity owning positions.

7. Our response to this consultation highlights our suggestions as to how the pay gap can be tackled at all levels. Many of the recommendations are particularly relevant to the situation highlighted by the committee whereby the pay gap between men and women increases from the age of 40.

The latest data shows that progress is being made – but it is far too slow.

8. Current RIBA membership shows that at student level entry to the architectural profession is broadly equal for men and women. This figure changes significantly during the seven years of study arriving at 17% of women achieving Chartered Status. Once in practice the situation is even worse at equity partner or shareholder director level where the percentage of women drops to 15% - an increase from 13% over the figure a year ago.

9. The table below sets out the gender breakdown across the RIBA's member practices. Further details as well as more breakdowns are available in the latest version of the RIBA Chartered Practice Benchmarking Survey which we will be publishing in mid-December. When the report is finalised we will be happy to supply a copy to members for consideration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equity partners, shareholders, directors or sole principles</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried partners or non-shareholder</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directors</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate Directors or Associates</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architects (5 years + ARB registered)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architects (&lt;5 years ARB registered)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technologists</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Assistants (Part 2)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Assistants (Part 1)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other Chartered constr. professional</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other fee earning staff</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
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**What are the barriers that need to be addressed to help older women?**

10. Barriers to women continuing their career in architecture include a culture of long hours, lack of support for returners and a lack of flexible working. We know that many female architects choose not to return to practice full-time after they start a family because they do not see the two as compatible. A challenge exacerbated by the lack of affordable child care.

11. The introduction of shared parental leave has been a positive step, however take-up remains low. Technological transformation that allows for more flexible working arrangements has the potential to drive further change. We believe that the Public Sector could play a role in driving greater uptake of both of these policies.

12. In addition, in an expanding construction industry, looming skills shortages mean that we would welcome a greater emphasis on promoting equality as an essential part of increasing the productivity of the UK’s economy.
Companies whose employment practices are restricting their appeal to staff to a subset of the working population are not just discriminating, they are harming their businesses and the wider economy by failing to recognize that talented staff are available from all sections of society.

**Professions need to play a role in driving change internally**

13. In addition to working practices that are often not conducive to flexible working arrangements, one of the main barriers to increased female participation in the built environment professions is the lack of information and role models for young women considering a career.

14. An increase in mentoring can form part of the solution. The RIBA will shortly release a Mentoring Toolkit which will provide guidance to practices and professionals on the benefits of formal and informal mentoring schemes, how to set these up, and how to maintain valuable mentoring relationships between mentors and mentees. This work will form the core of a new mentoring hub which will bring together the RIBA’s various other mentoring work, including the regional student mentoring schemes and FLUID Diversity Mentoring, run by Architects for Change.

15. For those who may not consider or be able to take up a mentoring scheme, we believe that promoting the work of successful role models may also be one way to increase participation. The RIBA Role Model Project 2015 was devised to show that architecture is becoming an increasingly inclusive profession, one that offers rich possibilities for a wide range of talented individuals. 12 role models, half of whom are women, demonstrate how they forge careers within architecture. In doing so they send a message to others who may share one or more aspects of their identity – such as gender, or background, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or education – that this could be a profession where they might thrive.
The Government is taking a number of positive steps – however the impact of the current proposals on the architectural profession is likely to be limited.

16. The RIBA is a strong supporter of the proposals to introduce gender pay reporting. In our response to the Government’s consultation on the issue we argued that information on pay which mandatory reporting would provide would provide a valuable tool to help boost efforts to increase the diversity of the architectural profession.

17. Despite recent progress, the most recent major survey on gender pay within the architectural profession found that women earn on average 25% less than men in similar roles.¹ For those reasons we argued that it was important that gender pay figures didn’t just cover the average pay of male and female employees, but went into more detail comparing staff in comparable roles.

18. In addition, as the architectural profession is dominated by very small businesses - more than half of the RIBA Chartered Practice membership is made up from practices with fewer than five employees and only 10% of practices employ more than 20 people - a very small number of architects in the UK would be covered by the proposed 250 person reporting threshold. All RIBA Chartered Practices are already required to submit data on pay – regardless of their size.

19. The RIBA would therefore recommend that a low threshold of 30+ employees be required for mandatory reporting for both private and voluntary sectors, as per the example already in place in Finland.

Government leadership can help change attitudes towards equality policies

20. The Government can also help by increasing the diversity of advisory panels. At present many of the advisory panels in the built environment are dominated by senior representatives from large firms and trade bodies –

¹ http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/gender-pay-gap-beyond-shocking/8662077.article
organisations whose membership is overwhelmingly male. Action to encourage more women, and representatives of smaller businesses to be put forward into these high-profile positions would be welcome.

21. The Government also has a strong role to play through its role as a major customer of the UK private sector. We would be interested in exploring mandatory gender pay reporting in procurement processes for public contracts or grants.

4 November 2015