

## **Student perceptions of surveying and built environment professional bodies: An international comparison.**

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**Keywords:** built environment professional bodies, students, graduates, RICS.

### **SUMMARY**

Arguably a new generation of members are needed to join professional bodies in the built environment and surveying disciplines in order for them to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Zillante & Wilkinson (2006) identified issues linked to under recruitment and an ageing membership in the building surveying profession in Australia; at the same time there are other built environment professional bodies experiencing similar issues in other global regions. It appears that professional bodies need to recruit student members into the profession during their studies as well as convert these student members to full members after graduation. A survey of 661 Australian students perceptions of built environment professional bodies showed that students value professional qualifications but that there is a lack of understanding of the role of professional bodies (Warren & Wilkinson 2008). Furthermore, the second stage of this research examined the perceptions of Australian employers towards surveying, property and construction students and graduates and their membership of professional bodies. The study identified measures that were adopted by some in terms of encouraging professional body membership in the workplace.

This paper presents the third stage of this unique research project. The objective of this component was to broaden the original student survey to include students studying surveying and built environment courses from a cross-section of developed and developing countries. The aim of the research was to establish whether students have different perceptions of professional body membership either as a result of country of domicile, gender, age, course of study, or mode of study. The results of the surveys are reported in this paper along with the implications for professional bodies.

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## **1. Rationale**

Historically the professionals representing the land and built environment have depended upon and trusted their professional bodies both to uphold educational and professional standards among its members and also to regulate the profession for the benefit of members and broader society. Professions discharge a vital responsibility in society and much has been already published about these benefits (Grimshaw 2001; Friedson 1994; Barker 1968). A series of professional attributes identified by Grimshaw (2001) when examining the Facilities Management profession and, citing Friedson (1994) and Barker (1968) as the characteristics of a profession were:

*'specific and definable knowledge and skills base that has to be acquired and tested; a high degree of self-control of behaviour via codes of ethics; and a recognised social responsibility that gives a primary and selfless orientation to the community interest.'* (Grimshaw 2001;55).

The regulation of ethical standards by professional bodies is well documented as a basis of professional practice. In many global jurisdictions it is the professional bodies with their time-honoured codes of practice and ethical guidelines that provide a regulatory safeguard between the professional practitioner and the role of the state in protecting citizens. According to Jamal & Bowie (1995) the role of professional codes is to 'prevent professionals from exploiting the asymmetrical information that is a part of the professional-client relationship'. It is primarily for these reasons that professional bodies have grown in national and international contexts and the importance of the quality of membership and the ethical standards which they maintain is essential to their continued success (Warren & Wilkinson 2008; Grimshaw 2001; Jamal & Bowie 1995). Even though the importance of professional body membership has not changed, an ostensible change in the attitudes of young members towards professional body membership in the property and construction industry has been confirmed (Warren & Wilkinson 2008). A particular change with regards to the 'value for money' aspects of membership as well as the need to belong was identified. These findings were echoed in a paper published a decade earlier examining the role of accounting professions, where the value for money was succinctly brought into focus with the reference. At a more tangible level of services, when the value of their annual subscription is questioned, members of both bodies are scratching their heads' (Wilson 1997). This reluctance to join is echoed in the many professions where the benefits of membership are weighed against the financial costs to the individual or the organisation (Dalton & Dignam 2007). On the other hand other US research demonstrated an increasing membership of trade associations by generation X with a focus on 'what they can get out of the membership' in terms of career advancement and the benefits of networking that can be achieved (Amer 2006; Wallace 1995).

The findings of the Australian study in the property and construction professions with respect to the value of membership to young graduates revealed that students did value professional qualifications but that there was a lack of understanding about the role of the professional bodies (Warren & Wilkinson 2008). It was demonstrated that students increasingly sought to work overseas and pointed to a need for the professional bodies to service members in a global context. There was a student preference for local established professional bodies within Australia however there remains a role for institutions with a global perspective due to changing acceptance towards travel and working overseas. However with a number of professional bodies competing for limited graduate and their associated membership fees, changes may be required to sustain services and grow membership in the future. The study by Warren & Wilkinson (2008) concluded that although students in Australia state that professional bodies and professional qualifications are important, paradoxically the membership of professional bodies is less important. It appeared that membership was seen as taking too long to achieve, with a complex assessment process over two years and with excessively high fee levels (Warren & Wilkinson 2008). Moreover, the expectations of what membership offered in terms of career advancement and networking opportunities were not necessarily aligned with the priorities that employers might perceive of the membership organisations. The study concluded that graduates entering professional practice are focussed on career development but will join professional bodies only where membership delivers value for money in delivering career goals and opportunities for advancement (Warren & Wilkinson 2008).

As professions seek to become global organisations the need to attract new members is a quintessential element of the growth strategy. It should be noted that growth expectation is not being readily translated into student and early career professionals, where many students join when studying but fail to convert to full membership upon graduation. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) is a large international professional institution with over 140,000 members globally (RICS 2009). An office was set-up in Australia in 2000 to attract new members and grow its professional influence within the Asia-Pacific region. It was envisaged that young practitioners would be attracted to the global brand and a strategy to attract members was to offer free student membership. The strategy was successful with student membership rising from a few in 1999 to over 3742 at the start of 2010 (RICS 2007, RICS 2010). For the countries covered by this research, in the period from 2008 to 2010 student membership of RICS fell by 8.8% in Oceania, grew by 70.6% in South Africa, grew by 3.4% in the UK and grew 57.2% in Europe (RICS 2010). Does this indicate that students from these regions have different perceptions and attitudes towards professional body membership? This research sought to gain a deeper understanding of this issue. While the demand for free student professional body membership grew, the level of conversion to full membership has not been strong and the reasons for this lower than expected conversion might be a result of shifting attitudes to professional body membership and perceptions of value for money. The lack of understanding about these shifting attitudes has formed the catalyst for this research. Furthermore at time of writing the impact of the global financial crisis which occurred during 2008 and 2009 is unclear; it could either increase professional body membership as students perceive membership may help to secure employment, or the costs of membership and professional examinations may deter students/graduates from joining. It is clear that the global financial crisis affected different countries at different times and to different degrees but it was not possible to determine the impact or otherwise of this on the research population.

## **2. A survey of student attitudes to professional institution membership**

This paper reports on research supported by the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) into the perceptions of students and young practitioners to the professional bodies representing land, property and construction within Australia, South Africa, the UK and Sweden. The research was supported by the FIG sought to address the full range of professional bodies and was not influenced by any individual professional body. The study develops builds upon the preliminary findings of an earlier Australian study conducted in 2007 (Warren & Wilkinson 2008).

### **2.1 Research Methodology**

The research methodology was based on a written questionnaire which could be easily distributed among students studying land, surveying, property and construction courses in Australia, South Africa, UK and Sweden. The questionnaire survey in the preliminary study (Warren & Wilkinson 2008) was updated and expanded to include professional bodies representing the built environment and surveying in each country in the study.

In order to gain as wider spectrum of students as possible the survey was administered to a range of student cohorts in four countries. The researchers endeavoured to collect data from developing countries to determine whether attitudes varied between students studying in developed countries as opposed to developing nations. Whilst contact was made with surveying academics in the Pacific region and they agreed to participate in the research, the surveys were sent out however no completed surveys were returned from this region. In a similar manner the contact with eastern European surveying academics did not result in participation in the research. However students from five universities in total did participate in the research: one from South Africa, one from the UK, two from Australia and one from Sweden. Therefore it is possible to make international comparisons about student perceptions of professional bodies with representation from Europe, Africa and Oceania. This includes both developed and developing nations.

The universities selected to participate in this research included leading course providers in South Africa, UK, Australia and Sweden. The students were drawn from all year groups within the undergraduate program and from postgraduate students undertaking Masters level study. The surveys were administered by the students' professors in September 2008 and September 2009. Participation was voluntary and a total of 216 completed surveys were returned from Nottingham Trent University (NTU), University of South Australia (UNISA), Deakin University (DU), University of Natal, South Africa and the Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden. This is not a representative sample of surveying students in these countries but it does give some indication of the different perceptions across these countries.

The survey comprised three distinct sections as follows. Section one asked the respondent eight questions about their age, gender, the course they were studying, the level of the course (i.e. either undergraduate or postgraduate), their year of study within the course (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> year) and their intentions to work within their home country and or overseas during their career. This data enables the researchers to ascertain whether these respondents are more or less aware or likely to join professional bodies based on their age, gender and year of study. It is anticipated that

professional body awareness and perceived importance would increase in line with years of study. Professional bodies usually visit students in their first year of study at University in order to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of joining a professional group.

The second part of the questionnaire comprised six specific questions about the professional bodies. In this section respondents were asked whether professional body membership was important to them and also which bodies they were currently student members of. Respondents were asked which bodies they intended to join in the future. Importantly the respondents were asked in this section to rank their primary reasons for joining professional bodies. Furthermore they were asked about their expectations of professional bodies. This data was critical as it assisted to identify the drivers and expectations potential members and current student members have of professional bodies.

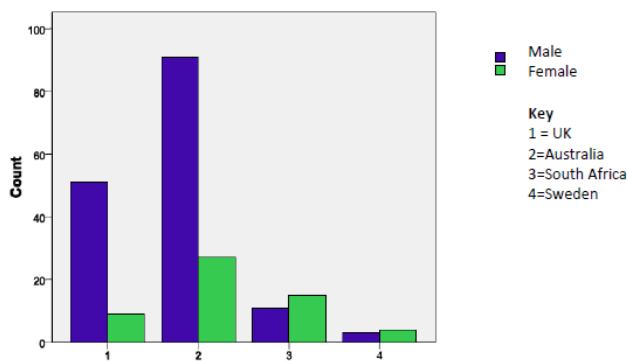
The final section of the survey asked six more detailed questions identifying a number of built environment professional bodies which operate in their country of study. For those students in employment, respondents were asked if employers paid their membership fees. Respondents were asked to answer questions about the length and duration of professional training prior to attaining full membership of professional bodies and their individual views on fee levels. Finally, respondents were asked to provide any additional comments if considered relevant.

### 3. Data analysis and results

#### 3.1 Survey demographic

Overall the gender balance of respondents was predominantly male (73.9%) although there was adequate female representation (26.1%). Note these balance was deemed to be generally representative of the gender balance on the built environment courses at the five universities. In Sweden and South Africa more females than males participated in the survey. The distribution of respondent gender and countries participating in the survey is shown in figure 1. Most respondents are Australian, followed by UK, South African and Swedish and this must be taken into account when interpreting the results of the survey.

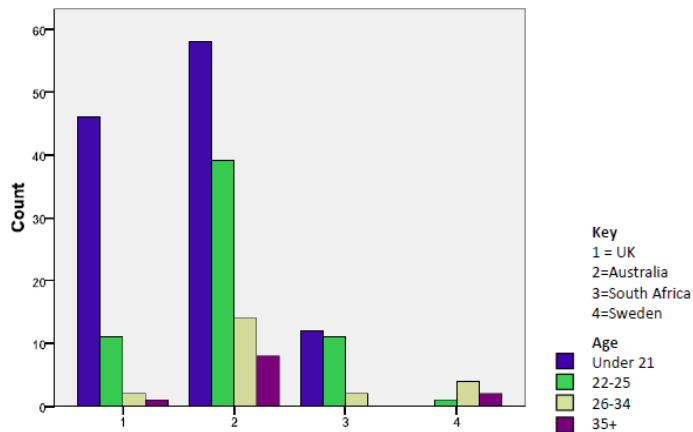
**Figure 1 – Respondents by gender and country.**



(source: Authors)

Figure 2 shows that the respondents to the survey were predominantly aged 21 year and under (55%), with 29.4% in the 22-25 year group and 10.4% in the 26-34 year group. Only 5.2% were aged over 35 years of age. The postgraduate respondents represented approximately 7% of the total survey population; as anticipated they were older than undergraduate respondents with 43.5% of the postgraduates in the 26-34 year age group and 21.7% over 35 year. By country the Swedish group had a higher proportion of older students. UK students were dominated by the under 21 age students, whereas the Australian students had a high proportion of students aged 22-25 and above.

**Figure 2 – Respondents by age and country.**



(source: Authors)

The break-down of courses studied at the five universities were as follows:

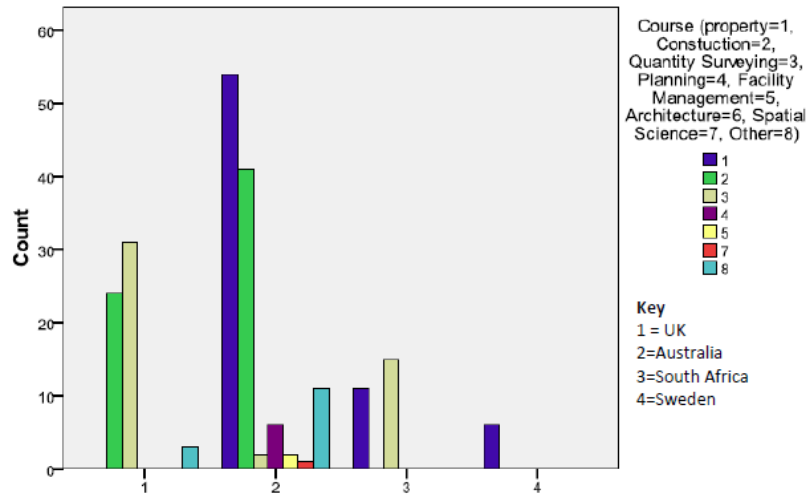
- 34.3% of the respondents were studying property;
- 31.4% were studying construction management (CM);
- 23.2% were studying quantity surveying (QS);
- 2.9% studying planning;
- 1% were studying facilities management (FM); and
- 0.5% were studying spatial sciences.

Note: a relatively small percentage (6.8%) studied combined double degree courses such as construction management/quantity surveying.

Figure 3 shows the respondents by course and country. This figure shows that respondents in the UK represent Construction and Quantity Surveying disciplines, and double degrees, Australian students present property and construction disciplines mostly, although FM and planning and architecture is also featured. The South African students are from the property and

Quantity Surveying and the Swedish students from the property discipline only. Therefore this group of respondents do not represent spatial science and land surveying students' views and perceptions.

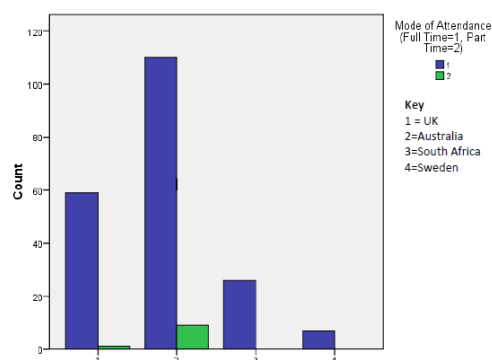
**Figure 3. Respondents by course and country.**



(source: Authors)

Overwhelmingly most respondents were enrolled on full-time courses (95.3%) with only 4.7% of respondents studying part-time. Figure 4 illustrates the respondents by mode of attendance and country and shows Australian students were most likely to be studying part time compared to Swedish, South African and UK students. There were no part-time students in South Africa or Sweden. When considering the level of study, 91.9% of respondents were enrolled on undergraduate courses with 8.1% studying at post graduate level. Most students (41.7%) were in the second year of their study; for the remainder 37.4% were in their first year of study with 20.9% collectively in years three, four or five of their study. In summary, the typical survey respondent was aged 21 years and under, undergraduate, studying predominantly in the disciplines of property and construction with relatively little exposure to either industry professionals or professional workplaces.

**Figure 4 Respondents by mode of attendance and country.**



(source: Authors)

### 3.2 Career Intentions

The respondents were asked to state their career intentions, particularly if they intended to work outside of the country of study or country of origin as this might have some bearing on the type of professional body the students might consider joining. The country in which these respondents intend to work revealed that 46.4% intend on working solely in their home country for the first two years after graduation (see table 1 and figure 5). Arguably this is a period during which they could, if motivated, complete training for professional body membership. Out of all respondents, Swedish students were least likely to want to work outside their home country however given the maturity of the Swedish group they may have other responsibilities that would keep them working at home. A substantial proportion (36.5%) did not know whether they would remain in the country of origin to work in the two years following graduation. The balance of respondents (17.1%) intended to work elsewhere within the two years after graduation.

**Table 1: ‘Is your country of origin the only country you intend to work in during the first 2 years after graduation?’**

Country	Count/ % of total	Yes	No	Don’t know	Total
<b>UK</b>	Count	18	14	27	59
	% of Total	8.5%	6.6%	12.8%	28.0%
<b>Australia</b>	Count	65	16	38	119
	% of Total	30.8%	7.6%	18%	56.4%
<b>South Africa</b>	Count	12	6	8	26
	% of Total	5.7%	2.8%	3.7%	12.3%
<b>Sweden</b>	Count	3	0	4	7
	% of Total	1.4%	0%	1.9%	3.3%
<b>Total</b>	Count	98	36	77	211

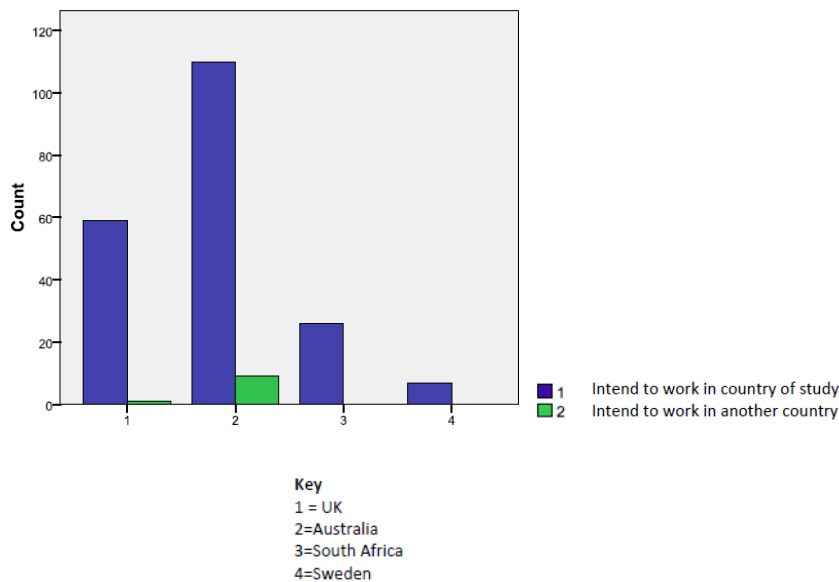


% of total	46.4%	17.1%	36.5%	100.0%
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Source: *Authors*

Where a preference for an overseas country was stated the respondents confirmed the most popular destination was UK/ Europe, followed by the Middle East and Asia, then North America and Africa. The results may be biased and reflect countries where students have an association due to an extended family rather than a country offers career development potential. Note the research did not explore this aspect further although this may be examined in subsequent research.

**Figure 5 Respondents by country and intention to work in country of study**



(Source: *Authors* )

With reference to the long term most respondents (70.6%) believed it was probable they will work overseas during their career. The remaining respondents (17.1%) did not know whether they would work overseas, approximately 2.8% of respondents stated they did not intend to work overseas and 9.5% stated it was not likely that they would (see table 2). These figures clearly showed that many graduates from surveying courses in the UK, Sweden, South Africa and Australia were contemplating working internationally at some point in their careers and a substantial proportion intended to travel overseas early in their careers. This result has implications for the recruitment of students into professional bodies and highlighted the need for

international links between professional bodies and the establishment of global professional recognition.

**Table 2: Respondents intentions to work outside your country of study**

Country	Count/ of total	%	Yes	Probably	Not likely	Definitely not	Don't know	Total
<b>UK</b>	Count		28	18	3	2	8	59
	% of Total		13.3%	8.5%	1.4%	.9%	3.8%	28.0%
<b>Australia</b>	Count		44	34	14	3	24	119
	% of Total		20.9%	16.1%	6.6%	1.4%	11.4%	56.4%
<b>South Africa</b>	Count		13	9	1	1	2	26
	% of Total		6.2%	4.3%	.5%	.5%	.9%	12.3%
<b>Sweden</b>	Count		0	3	2	0	2	7
	% of Total		.0%	1.4%	.9%	.0%	.9%	3.3%
<b>Total</b>	Count		85	64	20	6	36	211
	% of total		40.3%	30.3	9.5%	2.8%	17.1%	100.0%

Source: *Authors*

### 3.3 The importance of professional qualifications

A student's perception of the importance of professional bodies could provide a clear indication of their understanding of the role of professional institutions and the likelihood that they would seek to join at least one of these organisations. The responses were positive overall and confirmed that respondents viewed professional qualifications as very important to them. The results were that 95.2% of the respondents viewed professional qualifications as important, being either very important (64.9%) or of some importance (30.3%). Only 4.3% of respondents viewed professional qualifications as being of either no or limited importance and 0.5% were unsure. Figure 6 shows the distribution by country and shows that Swedes and South Africans had the highest esteem for the importance of professional bodies.

**Figure 6: Country and importance of Professional Qualification Importance**

Country	Importance of Professional Qualification					Total
	1 (very important)	2 (some importance)	3 (neutral)	4 (little importance)	5 (not all important)	
UK	45	10	3	1	1	60
Australia	66	46	5	0	0	117

South Africa	18	6	0	0	0	24
Sweden	6	1	0	0	0	7
	135	63	8	1	1	208

Student membership of professional institutions was found to be relatively high with most, where most students (65.09%) stated that they belonged to a professional body. South African students had the highest rates of membership, followed by the UK, Sweden and then Australia. At the same time a large proportion were members of more than one professional body.

Respondents were asked which professional bodies the respondents intended to join after they graduated. The proportion of blank responses fell was 20.28% and contradicted the previous response relating to the importance attached to the professional qualifications. Most students intended to join their local professional body in their area of study, with many indicating they will seek membership of more than one professional body. This result confirmed although there was a clear perception that professional organisation membership is important, a large proportion of students had not considered which specific institution they would join. The respondents who had made a decision tended to favour the local organisation over an international organisation, a statistic which did not fully reflect the proportion of respondents intending to practice overseas.

The respondents were asked about how important it was for them personally to join a professional body. The responses highlighted there was less importance attached to gaining professional membership in contrast to gaining professional qualifications. It is apparent there was a gap in the knowledge level of these respondents and that professional qualification and professional membership were not perceived as mutually beneficial or co-related. Results relating to the importance of actually joining a professional body the level of importance are shown in table 3. There are direct implications for future membership levels of professional bodies here and an imminent need to increase the level of importance for individuals to join a professional body.

**Table 3: The importance of joining a professional body**

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)
Very important	84	39.6	40.0
Some importance	87	41.0	41.4
Limited Importance	20	9.4	9.5
No importance	9	4.2	4.3
Don't know	10	4.7	4.8
Total	210	99.1	100.0
Missing	2	.9	

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)
Very important	84	39.6	40.0
Some importance	87	41.0	41.4
Limited Importance	20	9.4	9.5
No importance	9	4.2	4.3
Don't know	10	4.7	4.8
Total	210	99.1	100.0
Missing	2	.9	
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: *Authors*

Joining a professional body was seen as very important by many of the respondents (40%) where 41.4% viewed it as being of some importance. This compares to the vast majority of respondents (95.2%) who perceived professional qualifications as being very important or of some importance, although only 81.4% see professional body membership in the same way.

### 3.4 Reasons for joining professional institutions.

The next section of the questionnaire asked respondents a series of questions about what they perceived as reasons to join or alternatively the benefits of professional body membership. Respondents were asked to rank each reason on a scale of between one and five where five was the highest reason. The results shown in Table 4 highlight the primary reason and motivation for joining a professional body is as the perception of enhanced career prospects, followed by access to professional networks, keeping members up-to-date and increasing career progression/promotion. Employability was next, followed by remuneration, employability overseas and benefits paid by employers. It should be noted that professional body membership was not perceived as being a benchmark of professional skills and knowledge - this reason ranked 8 out of the ten reasons. Access to CPD (continuing professional development) was listed as the least important reason to join a professional body. In other words there is work to do in raising awareness of a professional body membership enhancing work opportunities outside of a home country and being a benchmark of a member's professional skills and knowledge. The rank order follows a very similar pattern to the earlier Australian study conducted by Wilkinson & Warren (2007).

**Table 4 Primary reasons for joining a professional body**

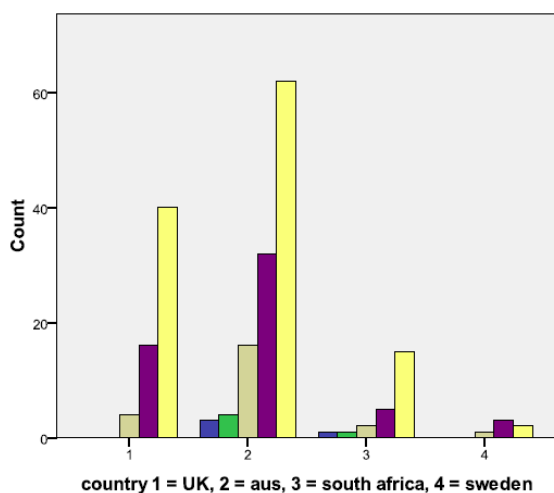
Reason	Mean	Rank
Enhances my career prospects	4.23	1
Provides access to professional networks	3.99	2
Will keep me up to date	3.98	3
Increases promotion	3.96	4
Increases employability	3.94	5
Improves my salary	3.81	6

Increases employability outside home country	3.80	7
Improves benefits paid by employers	3.69	8
A benchmark of professional skills and knowledge	3.69	8
Provides access to CPD	3.68	10

Source: *Authors*

On a ‘by country’ analysis it can be seen (see figure 7) that there are differences between nationalities with regards to the relative reasons for joining professional bodies.

**Figure 7: Respondents by country and professional body membership enhances career prospects**



Key:  
 1 Agree strongly  
 2 Agree  
 3 Neutral  
 4 Disagree  
 5 Disagree strongly

(Source: *Authors*)

Using ‘enhances my career prospects as an example, UK students did not agree that professional body membership enhanced career prospects whereas some Australian, South African and Swedish students felt that professional body membership was positive in this regard.

In the next stage the respondents were asked to rank their expectations of professional bodies (based on a score of 1 and 5 with 5 being the highest score). The results are shown in Table 5. Networking was the largest expectation that students have of professional bodies. The clear implication from this is that networking opportunities such as social events, training seminars and CPD activities are needed to raise their profile of institutions and attract young members. The second expectation is linked to career development and mentoring opportunities, where these students expected that professional membership will enhance their career progression. These results showed a disconnect between career development expectations (ranked 2) and

structured training (ranked 4). There is also a need for institutions to develop mentoring programs to guide students into full membership

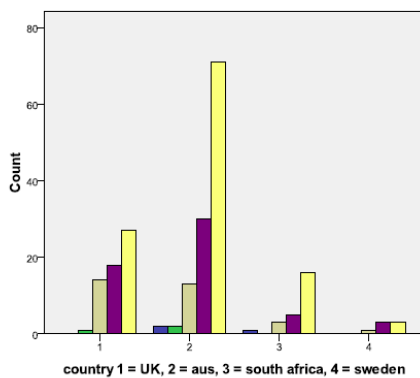
**Table 5 Expectations of professional institutions**

Expectation	Mean	Rank
Networking opportunities	4.28	1
Career development and mentoring opportunities	4.18	2
Access to state of the art knowledge	4.09	3
Structured training	3.99	4
Enhanced salary	3.83	5

Source: *Authors*

On a ‘by country’ analysis it can be seen (see figure 8) that there are differences between nationalities with regards to the expectations students have of professional bodies.

**Figure 8: Respondents by country and networking opportunity expectations of professional body membership**



Key:  
 1 Agree strongly  
 2 Agree  
 3 Neutral  
 4 Disagree  
 5 Disagree strongly

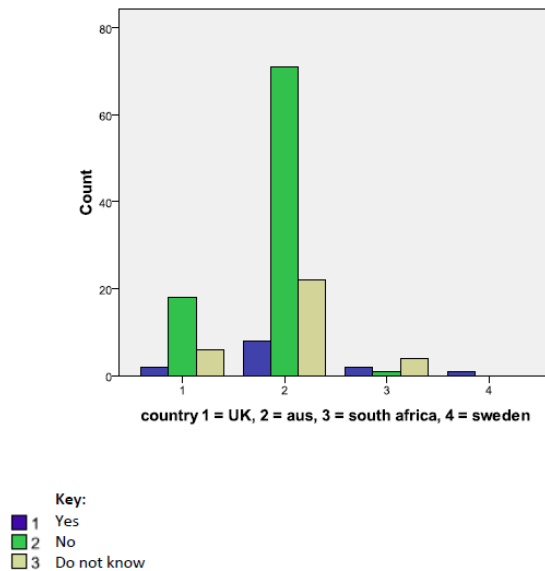
Using students’ expectations of ‘networking opportunities’ as an example, Swedish students did not agree that networking opportunities were a high expectation of professional body membership whereas some Australian, South African and UK students felt more positive about this expectation.

### 3.5 Perceptions of employers expectations

Respondents were asked whether they considered that employers expected them to join a professional body (see table 6 and figure 9). Given the high level of importance attached to professional body membership cited by the students (see table 3 above), it is reasonable to

expect that they might have investigated some of the detail of professional body membership requirements. However the respondents were largely full time students, although within Australia for example full time students are very likely to work for one or two days per week in professional offices throughout their studies which should bring them into contact with employers' attitudes and views towards professional body membership. The responses revealed a gap among students in knowledge and understanding about professional bodies.

**Figure 9: Respondents by country and expectation of employer to join professional body**



Source: *Authors*

A large number failed to respond (36.3%) and this is probably because of the high number of first year students who are unlikely to work in professional offices at this relatively early phase of their studies. Of those respondents who answered, 23.7% did not know whether their employer would expect them to join a professional body. The largest proportion (66.7%) stated they thought their employer would not expect them to join a professional body and only 9.6% thought employers would expect them to join. Only a relatively small minority of students perceived that employers would expect them to become professionally qualified.

On a 'by country' basis and as a percentage of responses within country, it was evident that Swedish, then South African students were most likely to consider that employers expected professional body membership. This was then followed by Australian and then the UK students.

**Table 6: 'Do employers require you to join a professional body?'**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	13	6.1	9.6

	No	90	42.5	66.7
	Don't know	32	15.1	23.7
	Total	135	63.7	100.0
Missing	System	77	36.3	
Total		212	100.0	

Source: *Authors*

A similar trend emerged when students were asked whether they thought employers would pay an employee's professional body membership fees. A large proportion (41.5%) failed to respond and 39.5% of those who did respond did not know the answer. Furthermore 35.5% of respondents replied the answer was 'no' and 14.5% replied the answer was 'yes'. Australians were most likely to perceive that employers would pay professional fees. A similar cloudy view of whether an employer would pay fees for an employee to be a member of more than one professional body is apparent in the sample (see table 7).

Overall there is a clear lack of knowledge in this respect since 41.5% of participants failed to respond and a further 49% respondents did not know the answer to the question. Nonetheless 8.5% of participants replied the answer was 'yes' and 20.8% replied the answer was 'no'. These results showed that students entering professional practice do not have an understanding of what might be expected of them in terms of membership of professional bodies or the likelihood or otherwise that their membership fees would be paid by an employer.

**Table 7: 'Do employers pay professional fees for employees?'**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	18	8.5	14.5
	Probably	13	6.1	10.5
	No	44	20.8	35.5
	Don't know	49	23.1	39.5
	Total	124	58.5	100.0
Missing	System	88	41.5	
Total		212	100.0	

Source: *Authors*

The entry requirements of professional bodies vary but typically most currently require potential members have an accredited tertiary qualification followed up by structured on the job experience before taking a professional assessment for full membership. For example RICS has an Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) requiring a minimum of 2 years experience before applicants are required to submit a diary, a critical analysis, a summary of experience and undertake an interview with 3 RICS members before they are able to join as a full member. This was used as a benchmark for the survey.



When surveyed about the current RICS APC 67.9% of participants did not respond to the question at all, possibly suggesting a lack of knowledge or interest in this aspect towards becoming professionally qualified. 1.5% felt it was not sufficiently robust whereas 6.1% felt the APC required 'too much work'. 14.2% of respondents thought that it was 'about right'. From these results, it is clear that student perceptions of the importance of professional qualifications is not aligned with the importance that professional bodies place on this period of practical experience. Current conversion rates of student members to full professional body membership is relatively low in some countries like Australia and the views expressed by respondents to this question may explain why this occurs i.e. students may perceive the work to be 'too much'. If student conversion to full professional body membership is to be achieved then considerable education about the need for and importance of this training needs to be undertaken by the respective professional bodies. This lack of knowledge with regards to professional bodies was confirmed with the question relating to knowledge of the membership fee levels, where 74.1% of respondents did not know fee levels for the professional body they stated they wanted to join. Thus the positive affirmative responses to the earlier question regarding the number of bodies students intended to join must be viewed as optimistic at best. On the other hand 15.6% said they did know their professional body fee levels and 10.4% did not respond.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The results of this international survey of student perceptions of professional body membership in the surveying and built environment profession, though not a representative sample, provided an insight into student knowledge and attitudes. It provides a useful resource for those educating and preparing students for entry to the profession and for those administering the professional institutions. It can be concluded from the study that overall students from all countries included in the study valued professional qualifications, however there is a lack of understanding about the role of the professional bodies.

The level of international outlook for students in their careers is encouraging and shows that professional institutions need to act on their ability to service members in a global context. The analysis shows that on a by country basis there are similarities and differences between surveying students views and expectations. However given the difference of some of the country groups in terms of age and mode of study and so on; it is unwise to draw hard conclusions from this sample. Some differences were that Swedish students were less likely to want to work overseas than other nationalities. Compared to UK and Australian students Swedes and South Africans had the highest esteem for the importance of professional bodies. Whereas South African students had the highest rates of professional body membership, followed by the UK, Sweden and then Australia. When it came to views about whether membership enhanced career prospects, UK students did not agree that professional membership did enhance career prospects whereas some Australian, South African and Swedish students felt that professional body membership was very positive in this regard. However in comparison, Swedish students did not agree that networking opportunities were a high expectation of professional body membership whereas some Australian, South African and UK students felt more positive about this expectation. Swedish, then South African students were most likely to consider that employers expected professional body membership from employees.

The area of most importance with this research and the major focus of why students have not been progressing to full membership of professional bodies has been clearly demonstrated at a number of levels. While professional qualifications are perceived as important, overall the membership of a professional organisation is less important. It is perceived that membership takes too long, such as via a complex APC process taking over two years where fee levels are relatively high. Furthermore, the expectations of what membership offers in terms of career advancement and networking opportunities are not necessarily the same priorities that employers might perceive of the membership organisations. The implications of this research can be summarised as follows; young surveying professionals entering practice are focused on career development and will only link themselves with professional bodies 'if' that membership provides value for money in delivering career goals and opportunities for advancement. These findings echoed those initially cited in the introduction concerning other professional areas and the challenges that member professional institutions will be required to address and overcome.

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