



GENDER IN WORK WINNING

A challenge that the bid & proposal
profession can no longer ignore



WHEN ASKED WHY HE DECIDED TO **APPOINT WOMEN** FOR HALF OF HIS CABINET, CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER, JUSTIN TRUDEAU, SIMPLY RESPONDED

“BECAUSE IT’S 2015”

He was right. A gender-balanced workplace should be the norm, not the exception.

Yet, in the bid and proposal profession, we have an issue. Repeated research in the UK has pointed to worrying gender inequalities in respect of salary and seniority. Building on this, this extensive 2016 survey by Strategic Proposals has dug deeper, revealing there to be significant challenges.

39% of women in bid/proposal roles have experienced discrimination in the past two years. Men are twice as likely to progress to senior roles. Men enjoy greater development opportunities. And ‘flexible working’ turns out, too often, to be relatively inflexible in practice. Many women reported that, due to their experiences, they’re seeking opportunities elsewhere.

Change on issues like this starts when all those involved acknowledge the problem. This report represents an important step towards this, and will – we hope – serve as a catalyst for a wider discussion on how we can best support all those in our profession.

With the UK Association of Proposal Management Professionals, we’ll now engage in a discussion to identify practical, focused next steps – starting at the Association’s annual conference in October. These could include guidelines and training, a mentoring scheme and other initiatives.

We look forward to engaging with you on the journey.



“ Gender balance is an important aspect of diversity. It provides access to the full talent pool, better decision making by bringing together different perspectives, better service to customers by better representing them, and a stronger economy, thanks to greater and more effective participation in the workforce by women.”

Oliver Wyman
Women in Financial Services

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Bid Solutions – the leading UK-based recruitment company in the bid/proposal profession – runs regular salary surveys. They provide a definitive view of the remuneration of those in our profession.

The results of their 2012 survey contained worrying statistics about gender inequality. When comparing basic salaries of those in similar roles, they found that men earned on average 29% more than women. By the 2015 survey, this differential had dipped slightly, to 24%. But, as Martin Smith (Managing Director of Bid Solutions) puts it: “This reduction by no means justifies celebration.”

The 2015 survey also pointed to inequality of opportunity.



Women accounted for **81%**

of those doing what might be viewed as more **junior** or **operational** roles in the profession (such as document management).



Yet **71%**

of heads of bid management were male

Faced with a clear issue, and in collaboration with Bid Solutions, Strategic Proposals decided that this needed more attention. A more detailed survey was designed by one of our consultants, with input from HR and survey design experts. It was launched in late May 2016, and ran until the end of July.



“As a profession, we simply have to strive for equality of opportunity. This survey will test and deepen the research that’s taken place so far, providing a springboard for practical action to tackle any issues.”

Jon Williams, Managing Director,
Strategic Proposals

The research also had active support from the UK chapter of the APMP - the trade body for the profession:

“The APMP is committed to gender diversity and inclusiveness across our profession, and supporting this important survey further illustrates our commitment to embrace equal opportunities.”

Richard Bannon (CEO) & Amanda Nuttall (COO), APMP UK chapter

The focus of the research was on gender disparities – as this was the issue that had been unearthed in the previous studies. That’s not for a moment ignoring that there are numerous other forms of discrimination, or downplaying those very real issues. Indeed, they could well form the basis for future research, and we’d welcome input.

OVER 600 SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



The survey attracted widespread interest, with 602 responses, 89% of which came from the UK.

That’s a statistically significant sample in a profession that’s estimated to employ around 7,000 staff in the UK.

70% of those who participated were women – allowing robust comparison of views between the genders.

As you might suspect, they were a fairly educated bunch: 75% have a bachelor’s degree or higher. 62% of respondents were in London and the South.

And a wide range of sectors were covered. The most vociferous sectors – with most responses from construction & engineering, IT & telecommunication and professional services & property. These were followed by defence, banking & finance, then health & medical.



DISCRIMINATION IS RIFE

The results make for concerning reading, confirming the suggestion in Bid Solutions' earlier research that there's a problem in our profession that simply can't be ignored.

22%

of female respondents report experiencing discrimination

39%

report having experienced discrimination in the past two years

69%

report having experienced discrimination at some point during their career

14%

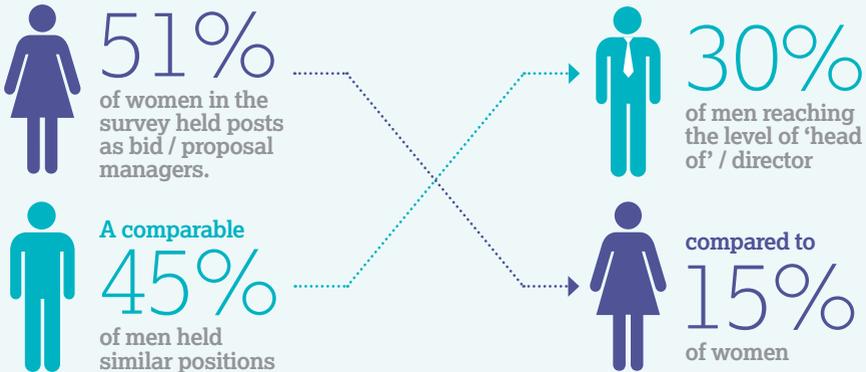
the number of those who have reported experiencing discrimination and have had it resolved to their satisfaction

MEN TAKE THE SENIOR ROLES

We work with brilliant women in this profession, at all levels of seniority – including numerous female heads of bid / proposal management.

Yet men are twice as likely to go on to more senior roles.

And that's despite the data showing that there are no statistically significant differences in educational levels between the genders.

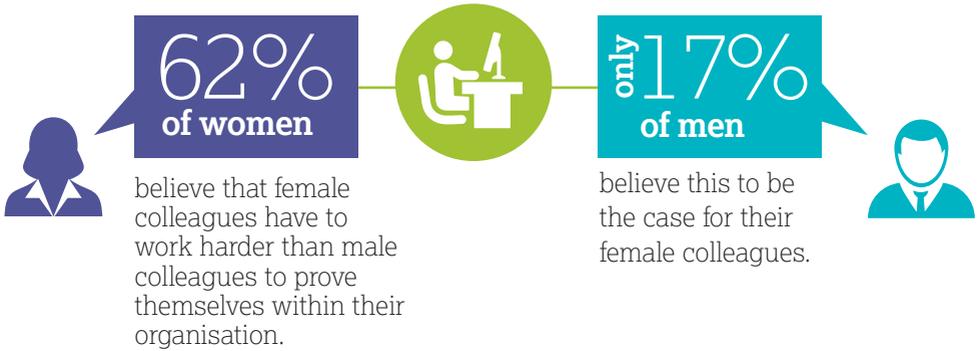


But men seem, on the whole, seem fine with that. 60% of them believe that there's **adequate female representation at senior levels** within the bid / proposal function in their organisation. Even – depressingly – 45% of women agree.

And while this survey was more about attitudes and experiences than specific salary data – as this had been more than adequately covered in repeated Bid Solutions research.



MEN ARE AFFORDED GREATER OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP



39% of women respondents believe that **men have greater opportunities to develop professionally** than female colleagues in their organisation. Only 9% of men agree.

“

The discrimination is not within the organisation I work for, it's when we engage with client organisations as an outsourced bid function. Once we prove our worth, we're respected. However I feel I should have their respect initially, as I believe a man would.

”

Over a quarter of respondents (26%) have witnessed **male colleagues being favoured over their female colleagues** to work on more strategic / high-value bids. That's over twice as likely to occur if the line manager in question is male (31% versus 15%). Oh, and by the way, only 6% of men have observed that to be the case.

But we must all have **equal opportunities to gain training**, right? The picture's better, but there are still differences: 66% of women believe this to be true, compared to 46% of men. (And, by the way, while 53% of those who responded have gained at least Foundation level in APMP's certification scheme. That means that nearly half still haven't started to gain the relevant professional qualifications for their discipline. Irrespective of gender, that's concerning.



55%
of females

believe that males in their organisation have **greater opportunities to progress** into more senior roles or be promoted – as, indeed, the data on job roles would suggest.



only
16%
of males
agree

“

...my role is perceived as ‘administrative support’, however when we work with teams to help develop a winning bid strategy and persuasive content, they see we’re more than just about producing ‘pretty documents’. Middle and senior management, both in the proposals team and wider business is quite static, and very old, white, male dominated.

”

Only **a quarter** of the respondents believe that there’s a clear path for career advancement in their current role / organisation

and that’s lower
for women

23%



than for
men

33%



And while a clear majority of staff agree that their **manager would support them if they sought a more senior role**, based on their skills, experience and ability, there’s still a difference between the genders: 54% of women agree, but that rises to 70% of men.

And a culture in which nearly half of all respondents (48%) agree that **female colleagues have to work harder than male** colleagues to prove themselves in their organisation can’t be healthy.

INFLEXIBLE WORKING

Slightly depressingly, only...



of us believe that we have a good work / life balance.

And there's a modest gender split here: 47% of women are fine in this regard, compared to 58% of men.

Perhaps that's because we feel that **“we need to be available 24/7”** – something that 47% of respondents felt to be true in their roles.

26%

of those who responded don't believe that their organisations **provide appropriate opportunities for flexible / part time working**. That's a quarter of us expressing concern – and roughly the same proportion for men as for women.

over 20%

of the respondents work part time. For those who do, 39% of women state that their **colleagues don't respect their part-time status** and expect them to be on call at all times), compared to 17% of part-time men experiencing the same issue.

“

Being a parent is an important job. Given the deadline driven nature of proposals, employees are frequently required to work late. It doesn't matter how effective your project management skills are, there will always be last minute changes. Unfortunately, my company has a preference for visibility in the office, and working from home is discouraged. There are few senior positions held by women with families.

”



A HAPPY CROWD?

66%

bid / proposal staff do feel valued in their organisation.

(Although pity the third of us who don't.)

Over half of respondents, feel that their role is overly perceived as an administrative support function

51%

And there's something of a gender split here:



58%
of females

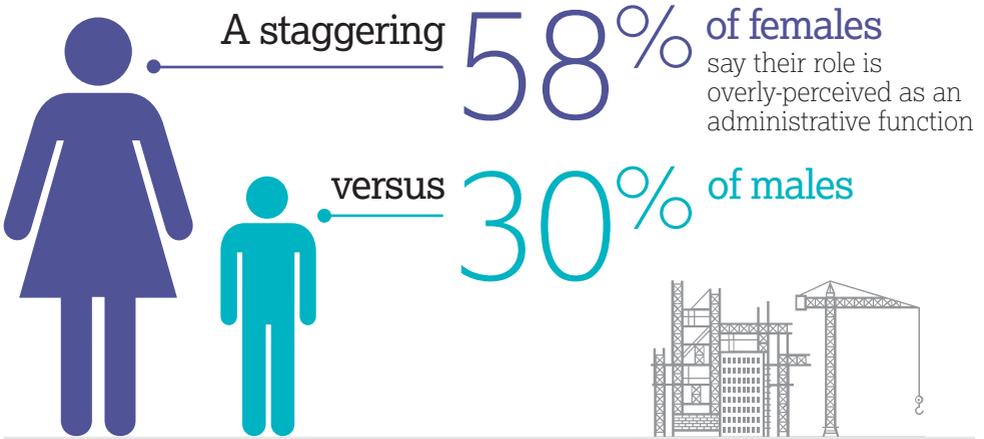


30%
of males

“I have been fortunate to be part of a team with a manager who has empowered me. She has pushed me to develop professionally, and has always been an advocate for the team. When stakeholders made ‘admin-type’ requests, there has been push-back.”

A PARTICULAR PROBLEM IN CONSTRUCTION

The largest number of respondents in the survey were from the construction and engineering sectors. Data in this sector was notably poorer than in the sample overall.



58% of total respondents **don't have a career plan**, while 35% of females don't believe their **manager / organisation would support their ambitions** (compared to only 8% of males).

Even more concerning is the fact that 73% of females believe that they have to **work twice as hard as males**

to prove themselves, while 65% (of females) **believe males are paid more** (versus 14% of males agreeing). And, to top it all off, 27% of females report that they are **currently experiencing discrimination**.

Clearly the construction and engineering industry needs to move faster to address these issues.

“

I am a female who has worked in the construction industry for over 20 years and over 10 years in a bidding capacity and have found it is twice as hard to be promoted as men. My ideas are discounted at meetings and then taken up when a male colleague suggests the same thing. In my current role, I am unable to make decisions and seem to be pushed to take on the administration role and remain unchallenged and feeling I am adding nothing to the work-winning process.

”

CORPORATE INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION AREN'T WORKING



66%

OF RESPONDENTS' ORGANISATIONS HAVE ACTIVE INITIATIVES IN PLACE TO COUNTER DISCRIMINATION.

only
51%

of respondents feel that these are actually effective in promoting equal opportunity

only
21%

have seen tangible changes as a result

41%

believe that 'many colleagues pay lip service' to diversity initiatives

While this research focused on a ‘deep dive’ on gender diversity issues, given that that this was the area in which previous studies had shown there to be an issue, we don’t for a moment ignore other forms of discrimination. We heard sorry tales of discrimination on grounds of age, gender, race and disability.

“

I am the most senior woman in the bids / proposal department and all other senior management above me are male.

Being younger than my colleagues and having joined the company as a

graduate, I feel I am seen as younger (than I am) and although I have extensive experience and the skillset, I believe the perception of my age overshadows what is important.

”



SO, WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

We'll present these findings in a workshop at APMP UK's annual conference this October (<http://conference2016.apmpuk.co.uk/>) – the largest and most prestigious event for bid and proposal specialists in the UK. We'll also bring in experts who have been involved in successful initiatives to address similar issues in other sectors.

We don't believe that there's anyone in our profession who consciously and deliberately behaves in a discriminatory way. But the evidence shows that, overwhelmingly, we do have a problem. And that problem can't be allowed to go unaddressed.

We asked survey respondents for their views on what might work. Feedback included:

- More diversity training and development on equality (for example, unconscious bias training)
- Close the pay gap
- Support flexible working
- Define clear career progression paths
- Promote the team internally
- Create a mentor programme
- Top-down commitment to diversity from senior management
- Support for APMP and similar training for bid / proposal staff

“

The proposal team function is seen as business critical and is fully supported by the Chairman and Board of Directors.

”

Based on this, we've put together a provisional list of ideas we might explore – mindful of the need for practical steps that are easy to implement and also mindful of the concern we unearthed that so many initiatives in this area seem not to work.



Provisional list of ideas

1. A simple audit and checklist, for those leading the work-winning functions in their organisations to use to assess their own performance in this area. (Do they, for example, pay men more than women, on average? What's the make-up of their team by gender, and are men taking more senior roles?)
2. A charter for organisations who can show that they've addressed these issues and operate in a non-discriminatory way, perhaps with some form of APMP UK 'kitemark'.
3. Guidelines for part-time work, helping managers to think about how they might construct suitable roles (in a function that's often deadline driven), and how they might better support those who do work part time to genuinely be part time.
4. Guidelines to help managers – and staff – think more actively about training and career development.
5. A mentoring scheme for women in the profession looking to develop their careers.
6. An APMP UK event on the topic to share experiences and tactics.
7. Profiling successful women in the profession – to help others gain inspiration and ideas.
8. Sharing the output and recommendations with colleagues in our profession internationally, via APMP and online forums.

But, as we say, this is provisional. We'd welcome suggestions on ways to take this forward.

And we're going to need help to make this happen. If the conference audience is in agreement, we'll be looking for volunteers to form a steering group

to address the issue and deliver the agreed activities. If you're interested in being involved, we'd love to hear from you – even in advance of the event: you can contact Krista, who led the survey, via kt@strategicproposals.com



IN CONCLUSION

A MAJOR ISSUE, THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

As work-winners, we're not alone in seeing inequality of gender opportunity. It's present, indeed sometimes rife, in numerous other professional disciplines.

Yet the overwhelming conclusion from this research, building on previous surveys, is that there's a very real problem in the UK bid and proposal profession – and that the time's come for us to stop sitting back complacently and start acting to address it. We look forward to working with you to tackle the challenges.

“ Bid services are only really valued once experienced – we are perceived by those who have not worked with us as being mainly administrative, and not specialists. Once they work with us however, they quickly become major supporters and recommend others to use us too.”

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