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# Diversifying Real Estate: Gender

Guidebook commissioned by CPA & WPA NextGen

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London Property Alliance

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This guidebook aims to help individuals and organisations make Central London's real estate sector more accessible and inclusive for women. It provides best practice examples, signposts to resources, and reflections on personal experiences.

We hope the guidebook will inspire and inform Westminster Property Association (WPA) and City Property Association (CPA) members, so that together we can make our profession more gender balanced, diverse and dynamic.

This is part of a series of themed guides commissioned by WPA and CPA's NextGen networks, produced by London Property Alliance, and supported by Gardiner & Theobald.

## Foreword

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It gives me great pleasure to write this forward to the London Property Alliance (CPA & WPA) Diversifying Real Estate: Gender guidebook.

When I reflect on the progress our industry has made on gender diversity, I feel both hopeful but also mindful that our work is far from over. Women make up 51% of our population and the proportion of women aged between 16 and 64 who are holding down jobs is fast approaching parity with men. Surely we should not have to keep banging the drum? But here we are. The sad truth is the World Economic Forum has predicted that, globally, most of us are unlikely to see gender parity in our lifetimes.

The UK has a better record than most countries, but we have nothing to be complacent about. Women are still under-represented in the real estate sector, especially at senior levels, but there is absolutely no reason why that should continue to be the case if we set about changing old habits.

That is where guides like this come in. Lifelong learning is best business practice and it is never a bad idea to take a long hard look at 'how we do things round here' and ask, 'can we do it better?'

The evidence base for the business benefits of diversity is growing all the time. Diverse organisations are more profitable, they attract and retain the best talent and, increasingly, they are winning more business as clients seek to work with partners who better reflect the values of the society we live in. If that does not make gender diversity a business imperative, I don't know what does.

So, even if you think you have nailed diversity, the chances are there is more you can learn and I urge you to read this guide, share it with colleagues and help to change the real estate sector for the better.



**Sue Brown**  
Managing Director  
Real Estate Balance

# The scale of the challenge

Research by Real Estate Balance<sup>1</sup> shows that whilst the proportion of men and women entering the real estate sector through graduate and junior jobs is evenly balanced, at middle-management and senior leadership levels women make up just 20% of the profession.

This 'brain drain' of female talent is bad for business and the lack of gender diversity means that real estate decision makers do not represent – and may not understand – the needs of the diverse communities they work in.

## Key challenges in achieving a gender balance in real estate



**Company culture**



**Lack of female representation at senior level**



**Work / life balance**



**Training**

Real estate's gender imbalance has arguably been made starker under the pressures of the Covid-19 crisis. Analysis from McKinsey & Co found that women, who make up 39% of global employment, account for 54% of overall job losses due to Covid-19<sup>2</sup> and are 1 ½ times more likely than men to be spending more than three hours a day on caregiving responsibilities<sup>3</sup> during the pandemic.

At an industry roundtable hosted by London Property Alliance and Real Estate Balance, many of the women in attendance said they had had positive experiences of working from home under Covid-19 restrictions. They welcomed the ability to work flexibly around caregiving needs, being heard in meetings, and the opportunity to show their colleagues how they manage the 'double shift' between work and motherhood.

# 10 ways to make our sector more inclusive for women

At Board level	At middle management	At NextGen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sign up to a framework and set of commitments to promote gender equality and ensure there are people within your company responsible for delivering them. To monitor change, using quotas that require mandated outcomes is more useful than using aspirational targets</li><li>• Encourage anonymous company-wide surveys to understand the experiences of your employees</li><li>• Ensure that events your organisation hosts are as diverse possible, with a range of different speakers from different backgrounds.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include everyone in the conversation about gender diversity. Men being able to take responsibility for caring (both legally and culturally) will help achieve gender equality.</li><li>• Provide managerial training for both women and men keen to progress their careers</li><li>• Offer individually tailored support for employees returning from long periods of leave (such as maternity leave)</li><li>• Offer younger staff opportunities and support to join networks and find a mentor or sponsor</li><li>• Accomodate the needs of staff who are working flexibly, and their colleagues, to ensure expectations and workloads are managed fairly</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Join or create a networking group to support your and your peers' career development</li><li>• Bring your diverse and creative ideas to senior management to make sure decisions being made represent junior colleagues</li></ul>

# Supporting working mothers

**A key reason for the female ‘brain drain’ at middle management and senior levels is women not returning to work, or returning in a part-time capacity, after having children or taking on new caregiving responsibilities. At our roundtable, female real estate professionals said they felt negatively judged for leaving the office or not attending work events for childcare reasons.**

The financial cost of childcare means that some working parents chose to sacrifice one wage, and often unpaid leave falls on women and can hinder their career development. This can leave some working mothers feeling as though their work is not considered ‘as important’ as their male counterparts. Measures outlined to address this imbalance would also benefit working fathers by providing the opportunity for them to play a greater role in a child’s upbringing, helping to create a more cohesive and supportive family structure.

## 1. Flexible working

Flexible working policies, and a shift in company culture to enable workers to fulfil caregiving responsibilities, can help support working parents as they progress through their careers. Such practices will have wider benefits for women and men across the workforce to help employees achieve a work-life balance.

**Resource:** FlexAppeal has campaigned for all organisations to offer flexible working to their staff, ranging from compressed hours, homeworking, flexitime, smarter shift patterns, and job shares. Research produced by Claremont, in collaboration with FlexAppeal and Sir Robert McAlpine, gives employers guidance of how to introduce flexible working practices and create trust with employees to work remotely or unusual hours.

[https://www.motherpukka.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Forever\\_Flex\\_report\\_FINAL-03.11.20.pdf](https://www.motherpukka.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Forever_Flex_report_FINAL-03.11.20.pdf)

## 2. Financial incentives for returning to work

Offering financial incentives to enable employees with children to return to work will help tackle the female ‘brain drain’ problem that occurs by middle management and senior level. Incentives such as a childcare grants or workplace nurseries can help working parents successfully return to work after parental or adoption leave, and will often be less expensive than the cost of recruiting to replace the role.

**Example:** Morgan Stanley introduced a near-site workplace nurse for up to 5,000 employees at their Canary Wharf office to support employees and their families. The benefit enables all employees to apply for nursery places via the firm’s salary sacrifice scheme.

## 3. Provide a network for returning parents...

Providing a support network within an organisation for colleagues returning to the workplace after parental leave can help re-build an employee’s confidence as they familiarise themselves with new routines. Conversations around the network can help shift company culture as employees recognise it is possible to balance the ‘double role’.

**Resource:** Real Estate Balance has launched the ‘Returning to Work Parents’ Network’ aimed at bringing together people returning from parental leave to share their experiences. It creates a supportive and cross-company network of real estate professionals to share practical advice, boost people’s confidence and help them reach their full potential upon their return to work.

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9032484/>

## 4. ... and for all women

Networks, both formal and informal, can be extremely useful to employees at all stages of their career development and life. Being a demographic minority at work can mean women don’t have someone they can comfortably turn to for informal career advice, or senior contacts to help ‘sponsor’ their career progression.

Women at our roundtable welcomed initiatives that supported in-company and inter-company women’s networks, and saw it as a powerful tool in supporting career development.

### Networks for women in real estate:

- Chicks with Bricks [www.chickswithbricks.com](http://www.chickswithbricks.com) | @withbricks
- MIPIM Ladies <https://mipim-ladies.com> | @MIPIMladies
- PropElle - <https://propellenetwork.com> | @peopellenetwork
- RE:WOMEN - <https://rewomen.org> | @rewomenorg
- Women Talk RE - <https://womentalkrealestate.org> | @womentalkRE
- Women In Property - <https://www.womeninproperty.org.uk> | @WiPUK

# Case study: Peer 20

**Peer 20 is a female-led networking, support and career development network founded by Lorna Walker (Modomo – Cofounder, COO and Head of ESG) when she was a young graduate at CBRE.**

The concept involves dinner parties for young industry professionals to connect, encourage and inspire. 10 guests are invited by the dinner's host, and each guest is encouraged to invite someone interesting from their own network, reaching a total of 20 people who form the Peer 20 network. After a keynote speech from an exceptional industry leader, the dinner's 20 guests are encouraged to share their own experiences and ideas, and connect with new people.

Following each Peer20 dinner, guests are invited to stay involved with the network through supportive 'Lean In Circles' with monthly meetings, a quarterly book club, and volunteering opportunities with partner organisations and charities.

This inclusive and organic network is open to both women and men, although female real estate professionals make up the majority of people at the dinners, book club and 'Lean In Circles'. Connections made through the network have led to new jobs, professional partnerships, career development opportunities and many friendships.

<https://www.peer20.com>

# Aiming for gender balance

**Organisations which do not seek to change a gender imbalanced workforce risk missing out on hiring talent and impacting their business performance. Research by McKinsey & Co reported that companies with an equal gender balance are 25% more efficient than organisations without one.<sup>4</sup>**

## 1. Inclusive recruitment

Setting quotas with mandated outcomes over aspirational targets may make it easier for organisations to both commit to and measure inclusive recruitment across the business.

Widening your recruitment practices by advertising roles amongst women's networking group's job boards, changing the language within job descriptions, and being flexible on interview timings has shown to encourage more women to apply for roles. In 2019, Zurich Insurance added 'part-time'; 'job share' and 'flexible working' to 80% of its UK job adverts and found that the proportion of female applicants rose by 16%, whilst female applications for senior management jobs rose by 19%.<sup>5</sup>

**Resource:** Real Estate Balance's Toolkit provides practical guidance and information on ways to increase gender diversity within your business. Key steps include developing a clear diversity policy at board level; appointing a senior executive responsible for delivering gender balance; and reviewing jobs designs, descriptions and recruitment briefs.

<https://www.realestatebalance.org/toolkit>

## 2. Addressing the pay gap

Gender pay gap reporting is a valuable starting point in addressing inequality and bringing gender equality conversations into the boardroom. Employers can improve this process by ensuring that data collected is published promptly so that it reflects current work practices and enables areas for improvement to be identified while relevant.

**Resource:** In 2020 the Government suspended its enforcement of gender pay gap reporting for 2019 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Colliers International continued to publish its gender pay gap reporting to align its publication with the period the data refers to. This decision aimed to create a more meaningful

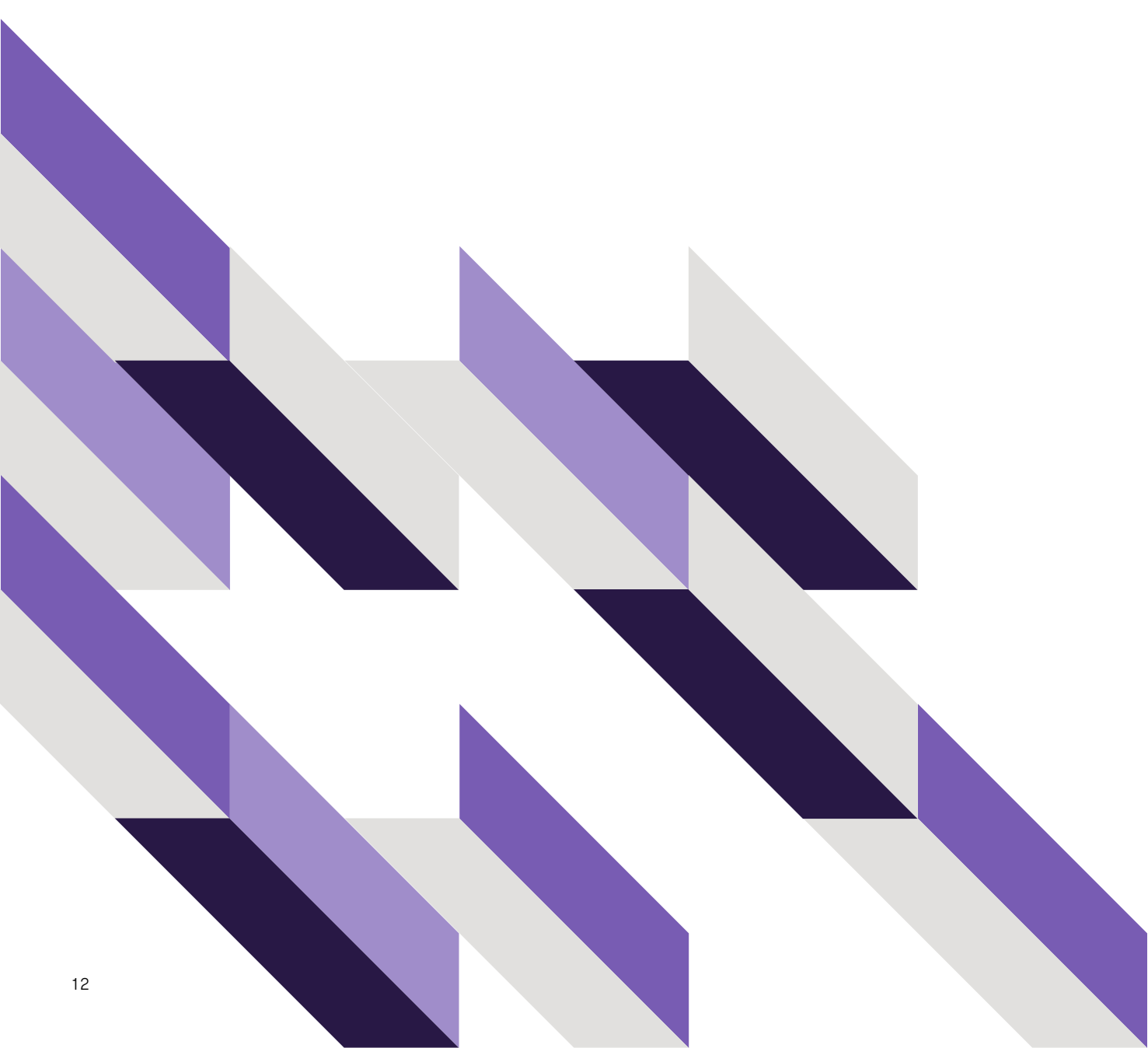
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link between actions and impact whilst giving a broader picture of the work the organisation had been doing to address the pay gap.

### 3. Training

Our roundtable participants had experienced not only a gender imbalance in terms of staff numbers, but also in terms of training and development opportunities. Lack of training and bespoke career coaching opportunities creates a further barrier for women to develop their careers and move into senior positions.

Line managers and HR managers should focus on a 50:50 balance in training opportunities and offering career coaching for female and male colleagues.



# Creating an inclusive work culture

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**At the Alliance's industry roundtable, it was agreed that creating an inclusive work culture for women to thrive has wider benefits – it encourages creative thinking, business innovation and attracts a wider talent pool. At our roundtable, participants said an increasing number of graduates and young starters seek out employers which prioritise supportive workplace cultures and diverse management teams.**

**Diversity should become a core part of a business' strategy, enabling wider voices to be heard and new talent to thrive.**

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### 1. Talking and learning about diversity

To better understand the unique issues around supporting and empowering women at work – and how gender intersects with factors such as race, religion and disability – employers can provide resources to staff as part of their CPD and at work training.

Making space and time to discuss these issues can be uncomfortable at first, but it will help create an open and inclusive work culture for staff and enable people to 'bring their whole selves' to the office.

You can help create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing challenging experiences and needs from their employers, such as company-wide surveys and mentoring programmes.

**Resources:** This training could include creating an internal 'Diversity Hub' where employees can access resources such as reading lists and podcasts, workshops, and educational sessions including BAME in Property's Lunch and Learn and RICS' Diversity and Inclusion online course.

<https://www.bameinproperty.com>

<https://www.rics.org/uk/training-events>

# References

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- 1 Real Estate Balance membership survey undertaken in autumn 2020
- 2 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>
- 3 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>
- 4 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>
- 5 <https://www.weforum.org/videos/this-company-put-6-words-in-its-job-ads-and-saw-applications-from-women-rocket>



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