



Diversifying Real Estate: Gender

Guidebook commissioned by CPA & WPA NextGen
2026 edition

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.

The original edition was published in March 2021, the first edition of a series of themed diversity guidebooks commissioned by Westminster Property Association (WPA) and City Property Association (CPA) NextGen networks, produced by London Property Alliance and supported by our NextGen champion Gardiner & Theobald.

We hope the guidebook will inspire and inform WPA and CPA members, so that together we can make our profession more gender balanced, representative and successful.

Engage with the full Diversifying Real Estate series at londonpropertyalliance.com/category/diversifyingrealestate/

Foreword

Real Estate Balance is committed to building a UK real estate industry where everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or social background, can thrive. London remains the beating heart of our sector, and if progress on gender balance stalls here, we risk falling behind everywhere else. As a proud Londoner, I was delighted to collaborate with the CPA and WPA on this concise guide, aimed at making workplaces in our city more inclusive for women.

This guide is designed to help organisations understand the challenges women face and to offer practical steps to create fair, equitable and supportive environments. Drawing on research, industry insights and the lived experiences of women, it highlights barriers - from subtle biases and stereotypes to structural obstacles in career progression - while focusing on actionable solutions that can make a tangible difference.

Gender equality is not just a matter of social justice; it is essential to attracting, developing and retaining the best talent in a sector undergoing rapid transformation. As the built environment responds to technological innovation, evolving societal expectations and the pressures of a housing crisis, our success depends on workplaces where the very best men and women can contribute and lead.

I hope this guide serves as a practical resource and inspires organisations to take meaningful action, helping to create workplaces and cultures fit for the future of UK real estate.



Sue Brown
Managing Director
Real Estate Balance

The scale of the challenge

Real Estate Balance research shows that UK real estate is close to gender-balance at early career stages – including graduate, entry-level, support roles and qualified positions.¹ The imbalance emerges further up the ladder: representation drops noticeably at middle management and becomes most pronounced at the top. More than seven in ten senior leadership and Board positions are held by men, according to the research.

This lack of women at decision-making levels isn't just an equity issue - it may mean our industry is missing out. If leadership does not reflect the people who use, work in and live in our built environment, we risk creating places that don't work for everyone. We may also be overlooking talent, innovation and commercial value: McKinsey & Co research shows that gender-balanced organisations consistently outperform those that are not.²

Real estate may be reflective of corporate Britain overall. Women FTSE Leaders report that 35% of senior roles at FTSE 350 companies are held by women and 43% of FTSE 350 Board Directors are women.³

Key challenges in achieving a gender balance in real estate



Underrepresentation of women in senior levels



Pay and bonus gaps



Gendered biases and stereotypes



Fewer visible role models



Narrower networks



Less access to capital and entrepreneurial opportunities



Work-life balance pressures and caregiving responsibilities

10 ways to make our sector more inclusive for women

At Board level

- Set targets relating to women in senior roles and hold leaders accountable to them through KPIs and bonuses
- Increase the visibility and influence of senior women and strive for gender balance on panels you host and are involved with
- Encourage participation in anonymous company-wide surveys to measure diversity and inclusion

At middle management

- Strive for transparent promotion policies and practices
- Introduce structured mentorship and sponsorship
- Normalise fathers taking their paternity leave entitlement in full and enhance support for women returning from maternity leave
- Offer leadership skills development programmes

At NextGen

- Encourage gender balance at graduate, apprentice, and entry levels, while ensuring that learning and training opportunities are accessible to everyone
- Encourage NextGenners to make industry contacts and expand professional networks
- Open pathways for younger and newer colleagues to present to senior leadership and raise their profiles within the organisation

Women, the workplace and opportunity

For a range of societal, cultural and economic reasons, the responsibility for caregiving – both for children and older or dependent relatives – continues to fall disproportionately on women. At the same time, the proportion of women in the workforce is higher than ever, and there are more working mothers balancing paid employment with family responsibilities.

Women are seven times more likely than men to be out of work due to caring commitments,⁴ and UK mothers earn £302 less every week compared to fathers.⁵

Yet many organisations remain only partially aware of the challenges this creates, and the practical impact on women’s careers, progression and wellbeing. Without proactive policies and support structures, women are more likely to reduce hours, take career breaks or miss out on high-profile assignments – which can limit talent retention, reduce diversity in leadership and undermine the full potential of the workforce.

Forward-thinking organisations use a variety of approaches to keep women connected during maternity leave and to support a smooth return to work. These include offering ‘keep-in-touch’ days to maintain engagement and ensuring that time away does not negatively impact promotions, bonuses, training or access to high-profile projects. Many employers also provide phased return options to reduce the pressure of re-entering the workplace. Creating private, discreet spaces for expressing milk is a simple but meaningful step. Some organisations go further by subsidising childcare as part of their benefits package. Going above statutory minimums on maternity pay and length of leave is a common way for employers to retain working mothers.

1. Flexibility

In 2024, Granger Reis released The Legacy Project, a study backed by Real Estate Balance.⁶ Drawing on interviews with more than 170 women working in real estate, the research explored why women may choose to leave the industry. Strikingly, 80% cited a lack of flexibility as the key factor – signalling that the sector must adapt or risk losing talent.

Flexible working demonstrates that organisations value outcomes over presenteeism. The Employment Rights Bill (2025) requires employers to consult with employees before refusing flexible working requests and ensure that all such decisions

are reasonable.⁷ Flexibility does not have to be formal; small adjustments - such as allowing parents to start later or finish earlier for school drop-offs and pick-ups - can make a significant difference.

2. Mentoring and sponsorship

Many organisations pair women with mentors to provide advice, guidance and insights for navigating a successful career. It is one of the most powerful tools for supporting women's progression in the workplace. A good mentor will help women build confidence, expand networks and identify opportunities they may otherwise miss. Mentoring can increase visibility for talented women and accelerate their readiness for senior roles.

The Harvard Business School's 2010 research *The Sponsor Effect* posited that women are overlooked for promotions because of barriers such as bias and informal advancement systems and because they lacked sponsors – people who advocate for them in the rooms they are not in, put their reputation on the line for their advancement and connect them with influential assignments and decisionmakers.⁸ The study found that as well as sponsorship increasing retention and having reciprocal benefits, it is the most critical single differentiator in accelerating careers, particularly into leadership positions.

3. Pay gaps

The UK gender pay gap, while narrowing, is explained in part by the disparity in pay between older workers and the relative lack of women in senior roles.⁹ Fully closing the gap requires equal access to leadership opportunities and fairer promotion pathways. Although employers with fewer than 250 people are not required to report their gender pay gaps, many do as a commitment to transparency and accountability and as a visible way of showing their progress towards achieving gender balance.

4. Menopause

Women over 50 are among the fastest-growing demographic in UK workplaces, but many are leaving their roles, reducing their hours and passing up promotion opportunities because of menopause symptoms. Real Estate Balance has compiled a list of resources for employers to help reduce the risk of women leaving roles because of menopause.¹⁰

Case study: Hophop

Hophop is a networking platform creating meaningful professional connections through both digital and in-person engagement.

Newmark has launched and sponsored two thriving Hophop communities from across the real estate sector since 2022: *Women Property Professionals* and *Property NextGen*.

The Hophop platform enables members to expand their networks every other week by intelligently matching them with fellow property professionals for informal one-to-one conversations. These meetings are scheduled at a time that suits both parties, making networking flexible, accessible, and unintimidating. To date, the *Women Property Professionals* community alone represents over 137 companies and has facilitated more than 17,280 minutes of conversation.

In addition to the one to one conversations, Newmark hosts regular Hophop events at its offices bringing its communities together, strengthening relationships and reinforcing a sense of belonging. Overall, the Hophop communities support collaboration, career development, and long-term industry connections.

<https://www.hophop.chat/>

Gendered biases and stereotypes

The biases and stereotypes we all hold – shaped by culture, upbringing and lived experience – can influence how we perceive and interact with colleagues. In the workplace, gender bias often manifests subtly. Over time, these micro-behaviours and micro-aggressions can accumulate, affecting women’s visibility, opportunities and progression.

One well-documented example is [The Authority Gap](#), a term coined by author and journalist Mary Ann Sieghart. It describes the gap in credibility and respect often afforded to women compared with men of equal competence. Women are more frequently interrupted, questioned or overlooked in meetings and are given less credit for their contributions.

Leadership traits such as assertiveness and decisiveness are typically praised in men but can be criticised in women, who may be labelled “abrasive,” “bossy” or “difficult” for the same behaviours. This double bind means women are often told to be both “more confident” and “less strong,” creating an impossible standard.

Emotional expression is also judged unevenly. Women may be dismissed as “emotional” or “overreacting” if they show frustration, yet criticised as “cold” or “not passionate enough” if they do not. Men rarely face this contradiction. Appearance-based bias disproportionately affects women too. Clothing, hair, makeup and tone of voice are still scrutinised in ways that rarely apply to men, shaping perceptions of professionalism and leadership potential.

Bias also shows up in performance assessment. A study by Yale School of Management showed that men were more likely to be evaluated on potential, while women were judged on proven performance.¹¹ This can result in women receiving more vague developmental feedback, fewer stretch assignments and less access to sponsors.

Although motherhood bias is a major issue – with women sometimes being perceived as less committed, less available or less ambitious if they become mothers – gender bias extends well beyond this. Even women without children can be perceived as less available, less committed or more suited to “supporting” roles rather than strategic or revenue-generating ones.

Creating fairness means recognising these patterns, challenging assumptions and ensuring women are assessed, developed and valued based on capability – not outdated stereotypes.

Case study: LPA’s Empowering Women in Real Estate series

LPA’s Empowering Women in Real Estate series was established to showcase the immense and varied contributions women are making to London’s built environment.

The initiative highlights women working across the sector, exploring their roles, career journeys and lived experiences of operating within a traditionally male-dominated industry. By giving space to these voices, the series aims to improve visibility and provide advice to those starting out.

The series is built around in-depth interviews with women at different stages of their careers and across a range of disciplines, from those just starting out to senior leaders shaping the future of the industry.

One of the interviews featured was with Katy Ghahremani, DEI Committee Co-Chair, WPA Board member, and Partner & Director at Make Architects who discussed how having a strong male role model has supported and guided her development.

<https://www.londonpropertyalliance.com/empowering-women-in-real-estate-an-interview-with-dei-co-chair-katy-ghahremani/>

Training providers and networks for women

Industry bodies and membership organisations including Real Estate Balance, RICS and RTPI all provide training, events, committees, networking and more aimed at women.

Training providers and networks for women

- **Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)**
<https://www.rics.org/>
- **Royal Town Planning Institute**
<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/>
- **The Circle Partnership**
<https://thecirclepartnership.com/>
- **Diversity Talks Real Estate**
<https://diversitytalksrealestate.org/>
- **Black Women in Real Estate**
<https://www.bwre.org/>
- **Crew UK**
<https://united-kingdom.crewnetwork.org/>
- **Girls Under Construction**
<https://www.girlsunderconstruction.co.uk/>
- **MIPIM Ladies**
<https://mipim-ladies.com/>
- **Real Estate Women**
<https://rewomen.org/>
- **Women in Property**
<https://www.womeninproperty.org.uk/>
- **Hophop**
<https://www.hophop.chat/>

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