

# THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

SURVEY RESULTS &  
CALL TO ACTION

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# FOREWORD

I want to say a big **thank you** to everyone who took part in the survey. You have been very generous both with your time and with sharing your thoughts on important issues. We are very grateful for your collaboration and participation. Your voices have become more familiar as we have worked to impose order on the survey results. In your replies, we have identified several main themes, both general and very specific. It is great to hear about your backgrounds and how people have coped through the previous year, and it is especially interesting to read your requests and wishes for the future.

We hope this document can serve as a springboard for discussion about issues on which women have long campaigned; equality and equal pay, childcare and work/life balance, flexible work and shorter hours, recognition and respect.

We also hope this report will shed light on some of the other work and life challenges that make women uniquely able to contribute to architecture.

We want to support you by sharing this information, influencing policies and decisions, and creating events that will allow us to continue sharing and making a difference together.

**Anna Schabel, Chair of Women in Architecture**



# INTRODUCTION

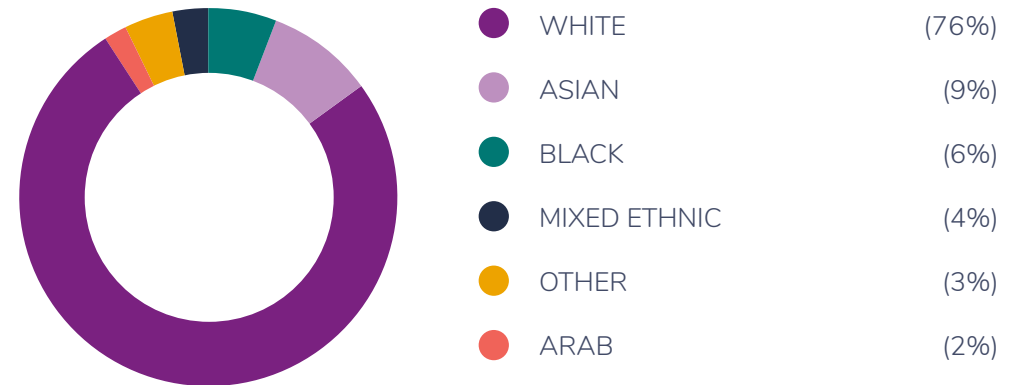
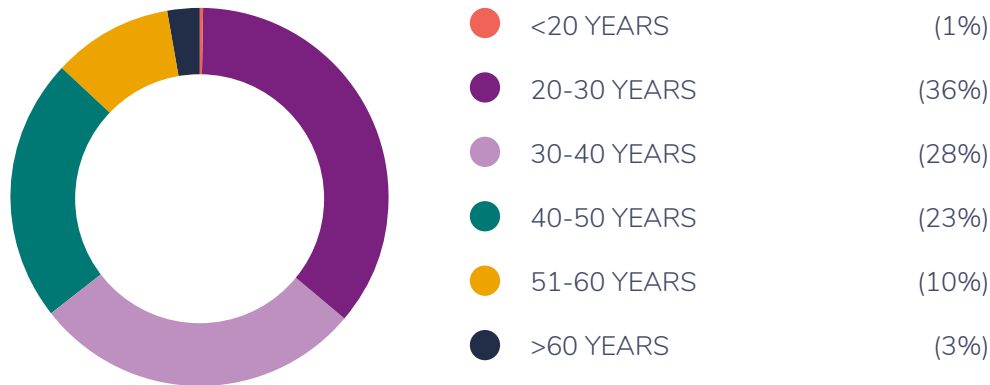
In early 2021, Women in Architecture UK launched The Future of Women in Architecture Survey. We wanted to find out where we currently stand, what works and what is missing, and what is most important to take into the future. We hope the resulting report will be used by those shaping our future to inform, influence and help create a post-pandemic work environment that supports women in achieving their full potential, both in the workplace and in society.

The survey was made available to both members and non-members through our website and on social media links. We received 265 responses. All quotes are taken from the survey response.

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# 01 WHO ARE WE?

*To understand the demographics of the community of women in architecture, we first asked a range of questions that included information on gender, ethnicity, location, age and role.*



## AGE

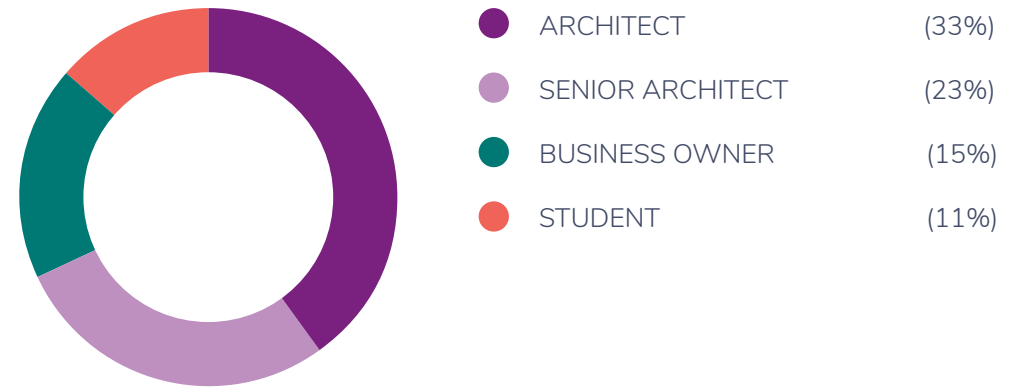
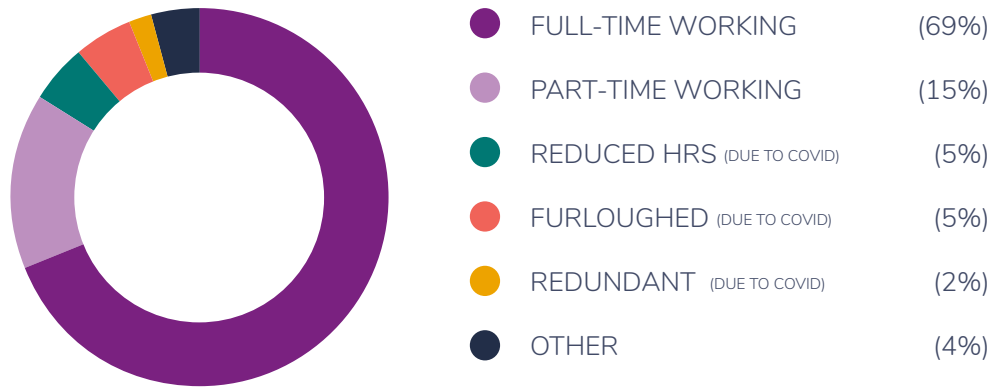
Nearly two-thirds of our respondents are under 40. This age group is considered 'young' in a profession that requires a minimum of seven years of training. These are the voices of people who should be future influencers and leaders. We know the profession is failing this demographic and are pleased that this survey gives voice to their concerns.

## ETHNICITY

Three-quarters of our respondents are white, half from the UK, a quarter from other countries. This number compares with around 83% of people who identify as white in the Architects Registration Board's Equality and Diversity (ARB) Survey. Ethnic minorities are well represented in this survey in comparison to the ARB Survey results.

With a response rate of 18.5% (ARB 10%) from ethnic minorities, we want these communities to be heard; 8.5% identify as Asian (ARB 7%), 6% identify as Black/Black British (ARB 1%), 4% identify as mixed (ARB 2%). Whilst the nuances of the categories differ slightly, the survey represents a higher proportion of people than ARB's survey who do not identify as white. This survey is closer than other surveys we have seen to represent ethnic minority populations, which is 14% in the UK, and 40% in London, according to Diversity UK.\*

\*<https://diversityuk.org/diversity-in-the-uk/>

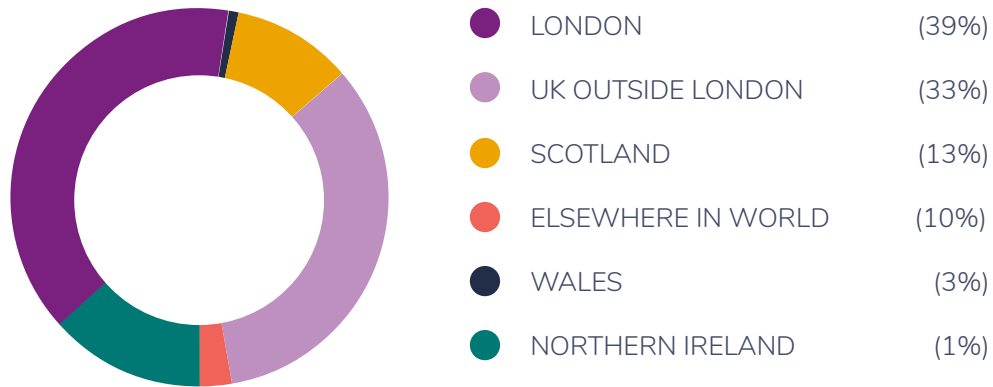


## EMPLOYMENT

69% of the respondents are working full time, 15% part-time. A minority of 12% had their roles affected by Covid, either by redundancy, furlough or reduced working hours. The redundancies were minor - 2% - and evenly distributed across the age groups. Of the furloughed 5%, half were in the 20-30 age group. Those respondents working reduced hours were mainly in the 31-40 age group, suggesting that child care might have been a factor.

## ROLE

A third of the respondents described themselves as architects and almost a quarter as senior architects. Business owners were well represented, as were students. It is interesting to see a plethora of other roles; apprentices, project managers, technicians, BIM professionals, lecturers, tutors, academics, writers and carers amongst them. These less visible individuals risk marginalisation and their voices must be heard too.



## LOCATION

Given that Londoners generate £2 in every £3 of architects' revenue, it's no surprise that 39% of our respondents are based there. However, it is very heartening to see a strong showing from elsewhere; 33% from the regions, 13% from Scotland and 10% from overseas. This survey captures information from people who we believe are harder to reach than Londoners.

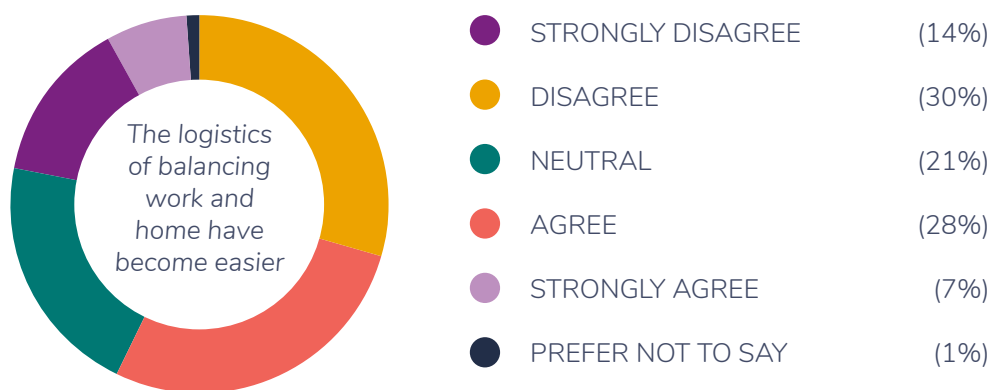




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# 02 WHAT DOES OUR WORK LIFE LOOK LIKE?

*This section asked a range of questions about respondents' working and living conditions, mental health, financial security, the boundaries between work and home and their ability to work effectively. We also asked how the pandemic had affected these issues and questioned if the pandemic affected respondents' interest in remaining in the profession.*



## LOGISTICS OF BALANCING WORK AND HOME

Some of the themes that emerged here are poor mental health, inadequate compensation, and logistical difficulties balancing work and home. The logistical difficulties seem linked to not having good mental health. For most, this balancing act had not become easier. The majority of women who felt negatively about this were students and young professionals between the ages of 20-30, many of whom would be living in shared accommodation. Strikingly, 12% of the women who disagree that balancing work and home have become easier want to leave the profession.

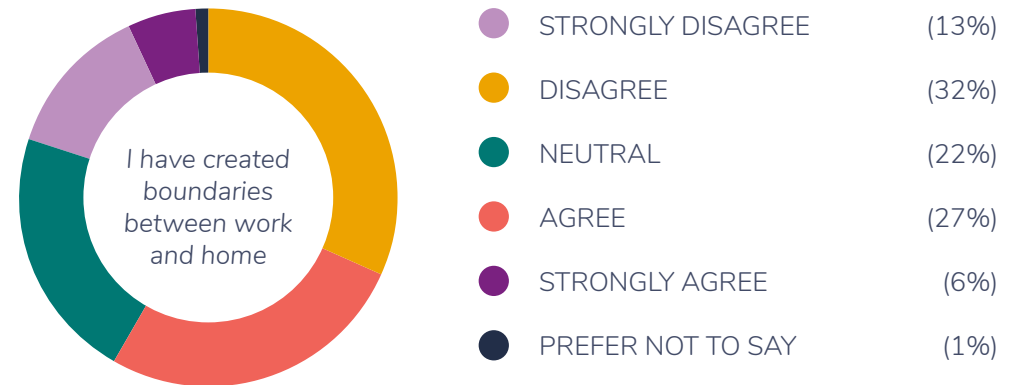
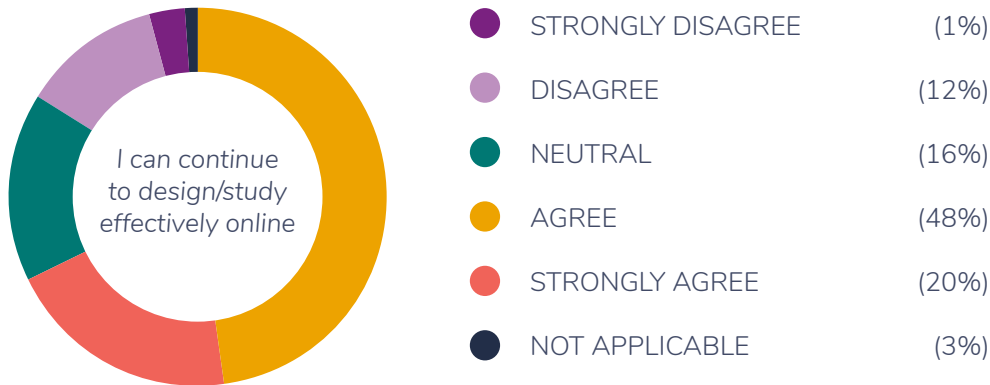
**“I recently qualified as an architect shortly after being made redundant, but I feel so pessimistic about the opportunities in this industry, both in terms of pay, time (work-life balance) and security. I have been looking for positions outside of the industry, for instance in the civil service as a project manager etc., because the pay, work-life balance and job security seem much better.”**

We asked respondents if they intended to remain in the profession, and to expand on their answers. Gender played an explicit role in some women’s fears. For others, it is the ratio of pay to hours worked. There are comments such as these:

**“Have concerns about my earning potential as a female architect.”**

**“Over-stretched, overworked, underpaid, and not openly appreciated or thanked verbally for increased efforts. Overall feeling undervalued.”**

Many of the comments in our survey chimed with what we know already about poor pay and working conditions within the industry. Research has shown that our profession loses women due to a lack of support around childcare. Poor working conditions lead to an inability to balance life and home and are another reason for the loss of women from the profession at an early stage in their careers.



## OPTIMISM VS CONCERNS

A large majority of respondents felt optimistic about working remotely during the pandemic. Not only did they feel they had access to the right technology, but they believed they are able to contribute and design effectively. Despite this, significant concerns arise: balancing the demands of children and work, the needs and difficulty of working at home, lack of collaboration with colleagues and lack of support from the workplace.

**“I’m disillusioned, overworked and exhausted; desperately trying to combine a 60 hour plus work week with homeschooling on 90% of an already poor salary.”**

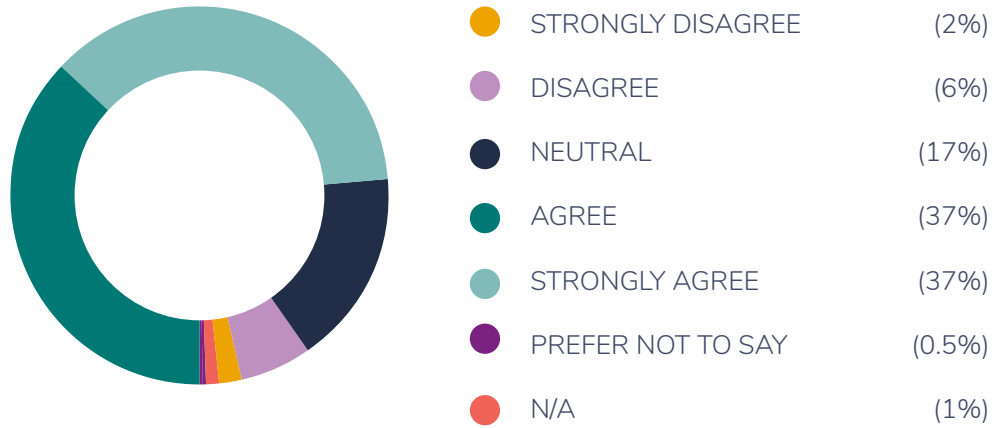
## BOUNDARIES

Almost half the respondents were able to create boundaries between work and home. A similar proportion reported having space and time to recharge. Nearly half said that the logistics of balancing work and home had become easier. However it is noted, this group also correlates with the younger demographic, many of whom, perhaps, have not had to juggle work and childcare/caring responsibilities.

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# 03 WHAT ARE THE MAIN CONCERNS NOW?

*Working from home during the pandemic and working alongside home-schooling during lockdown periods have added to some existing pressures and created new ones. The overall themes that emerged around change were: home/work balance, compensation, mental health, opportunities and diversity.*

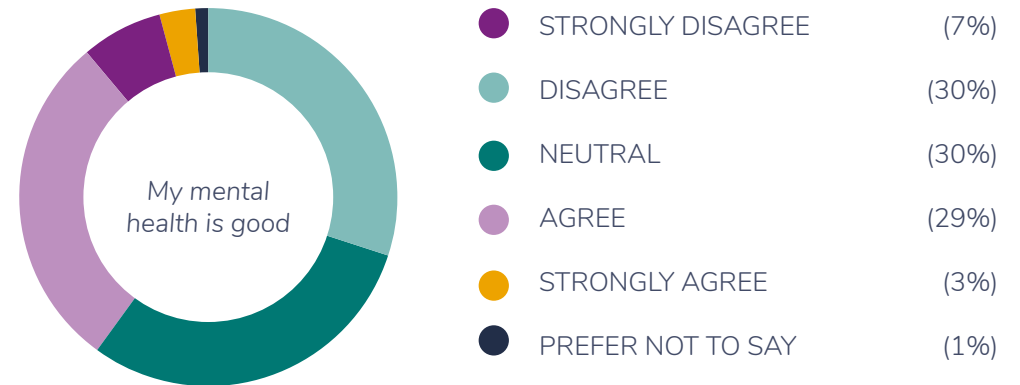


## I WANT TO REMAIN IN THE PROFESSION

An encouraging and strong consensus of 74% want to remain in the profession. Respondents valued having supportive management and having more time to spend with family and children. However, the women who wish to stay are not free of concerns, ranging from finances, work/life balance and wider-sector problems like diversity and mental health.

**“In part, one creates a career that is flexible around family life, that flexibility is pushed to extremes in times like these.”**





## JUGGLING DEMANDS

The pressures of combining school, home, working and childcare responsibilities provoked many negative comments. Some respondents felt pushed to the brink by the pressures of juggling demands. It's not hard to see why women envisage difficulty when planning to have a family. A frequently raised concern was the additional challenge of home-schooling children, especially for those in senior, managerial or sole practice positions.

**“The pressures of homeschooling three children whilst teaching disengaged students and running a small architectural business is nearly impossible.”**

**“... desperately trying to combine a 60-hour plus work week with homeschooling...As a working parent, life has become impossible during lockdown.”**

## MENTAL HEALTH

Respondents expressed concerns about their mental health and well-being, feeling that adequate support was not available.

**“The health of many young architectural designers who are too scared to speak up is not being taken into consideration.”**

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## LONG HOURS/ POOR PAY

For the women who could not see themselves remaining in the industry, their biggest concerns were around the long hours, poor pay and cycles of redundancies. Many respondents commented that their pay was not commensurate with the hours they expended on work or the workload they shouldered.

**“I have concerns about my earning potential as a female architect.”**

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## CAREER PATHWAYS

Respondents wanted opportunities to move into pathways related to architecture and access to the entrepreneurial skills they would need to remain resilient in a changing industry.

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## DIVERSITY

Affirmingly, a strong consensus of respondents expressed a desire for greater diversity and role models in the profession, particularly women.

**“The profession itself is changing as is the climate, and our role may extend to activist /citizen duties to work closer with [the] public realm when we are restricted to our homes. We need to figure out how this can work in the future. We can no longer work in silos, nor should we remain ignorant to larger challenges to the profession. No longer business as usual but different models of practice, co-operative, progressive and more in touch with the needs of society.”**

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# 04 WHAT WILL WE TAKE INTO THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURE?

*Our survey asked respondents what they want to take into the future, what will be most important for them and how their design approach will change. Several themes emerged in this section concerning the work environment, design practice and the wider world.*



During the pandemic and lockdowns, we have all changed our working practices. Many of us had time to reconsider old habits and learn about new trends - personal responsibilities and work overlap in new ways. Global movements like the Black Lives Matter protests have highlighted the urgent need to change. International and national inequalities vis-a-vis the pandemic and its economic consequences are becoming more and more apparent. Changing work patterns are affecting the actual fabric of our cities. As architects, we are front-line workers in implementing some of these changes.

Respondents overwhelmingly want to be able to work from home part-time rather than full-time. They want recognition of how work and life are intertwined and request more appreciation of their multiple and often conflicting professional and personal responsibilities. Plus, most want a higher priority on health and well-being in the workplace.

Drawing on our environmental consciousness as architects and designers, there was a strong emphasis on dealing with the climate emergency. Many respondents see a future focus on community-minded design. They would also enjoy and welcome greater opportunities to be clients' first contact and advisors.

In the broader context, people expressed a desire for real action around racial inequality, understanding issues around social justice and designing with more empathy.

We asked two further questions: how design approaches might change and the other an open question about what people considered to be important going forward. We had high response rates, 136 and 130 comments, respectively, to these questions.



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## DESIGN APPROACH

Diving deeper into our responsibilities as architects, we asked for comments specifically on how people's design approaches would be different in the future. A quarter of the respondents said they would have a greater emphasis on designing for the environment.

*“There has been an intentional change in the way we design to consider sustainability and social value of our schemes.”*

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## WORKING PRACTICES

Another quarter is concerned with working practices like collaboration, connection and the use of new technology. On the one hand, people find online meetings have been normalised, and we can work with people abroad and use technology to better effect. But on the other hand, people miss personal contact and chats with their colleagues and collaborators.

*“I will collaborate as much as possible - I took it for granted before but am hugely missing the interaction of colleagues as part of the process.”*

One fifth mentioned more flexibility, work/home balance and mental well-being. They were keen on a workstyle 'blending' direct contact and working from home.

*“A big shift onto mental health and well-being is required to ensure people are connected physically and mentally.”*

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## COMMUNITY AND INCLUSION

Inclusion, equality and empathy are all cited as important issues. Design should have more understanding for all people, especially the end-users.

*“I'm moving towards doing more participatory co-design with end-users.”*

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## URBAN AND HOUSING DESIGN

Respondents told us that the pandemic and lockdown had shown them the importance of generous spaces, natural light, walkable neighbourhoods and bigger outdoor spaces.



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## CHILDCARE

One of the themes most mentioned was childcare. The main demands were more maternity rights, paternity leave, better/ more affordable childcare and greater gender equality. There was a widespread call for more flexibility and opportunities to work from home.

The responses suggest that women have suffered more than men as a result of the pandemic. This is supported by stories of those losing their jobs, leaving the profession, missing out on promotions or having to take on more childcare and household duties. It is flagged up that many women leave the profession or restrict their careers to have children. Women have to deal with hurdles at different stages of their careers; for example, young mothers are given less responsibility at work when viewed as the primary caregivers.

The trend towards flexible working is seen by most as a great opportunity both to improve balance between work and life (commitments) and how to practice architecture in the future.

**“The conversation should shift naturally with the new generations of men and women being more inclusive. The challenge of work/ family balance is one that needs to be supported through government and company policies on equal maternity/ paternity rights.”**

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## RESPECT

Respect is the next theme with the most mentions. Many respondents asked for organisations and companies to recognise women’s expertise and skill by providing more opportunities. Companies should celebrate the qualities women can bring to the conversation and their value in enriching the profession.

Respondents would like to see more role models and have more mentoring opportunities. Many responses focused on women being more visible and being heard; in a profession where respondents are often the only women in a room full of men, they need to work extra hard, and being listened to is a struggle.

They ask for a space or platform for women to speak with confidence and acceptance. Respondents also ask for better peer recognition and a more supportive community. They request that women not behave competitively towards each other and instead look out for one another. They want to encourage those seemingly left behind and call for more empathy, praising the support women could offer each other and the benefits that this could bring to creating a more fair and inclusive workforce.

**“It is that businesses continue to provide opportunities for inspirational women throughout the practice and support and inspire all staff not just because of their sex, gender or age.”**

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## EQUITY

Most respondents expressed a desire for greater equity, recognising that racial and gender hierarchies are still predominant. Particular criticism is that intersectionality is not recognised. They request the profession, as a whole, be more open and inclusive and ask for practical and immediate action from institutions, companies and individuals.

There is concern about the low representation of women in the profession and a call for more women in academia: more teachers and researchers and a greater awareness of education options.

Respondents also criticise the profession in having fewer women over thirty-five, let alone in senior positions and in academia. Promotion is a problem, and there isn't enough support for women to become partners in their practice. Companies need to be held accountable for their yearly promotions of women.

Some voices described trend of predominance of older, white males in architecture and the high drop-out rate for women. Others expressed a belief that a new generation of women would be more inclusive and routinely include men in conversations about the future of women in architecture.

Respondents also recognised that by removing discrimination, a more level playing field for everyone would result. Finally, respondents urged everyone to speak up for equal rights.

The survey respondents demand that women should be paid the same as men and paid for overtime. The gender pay gap is still a problem; women get paid less than their male counterparts in similar positions, even if they have more experience.

*“We've got to help ourselves with both words and actions - and clearly ask for targeted, practical and useful support.”*

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# CONCLUSION

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the stresses of balancing work and life, the desire for financially rewarding roles, the need to maintain good mental health and an emphasis on supporting our communities and the environment.

One of our key goals is to provide a platform to get your voices heard and increase visibility and agency. Currently, architecture is not a diverse or inclusive profession and is suffering from a brain drain as women leave early in their careers, often due to the low pay, long hours and the lack of flexibility and support around childcare.

In this survey, women architects have voiced their concerns and desires on issues ranging from the personal to the practice to the wider world. Now it is time to take them on board and create a profession that works for everyone promoting equality, inclusivity and diversity in real-time. This survey is a call to action.

**“The pandemic has thrown a lot of the unwritten rules about how we practice up in the air. There is an opportunity now for us all to reshape how we practice architecture and balance our home life.”**

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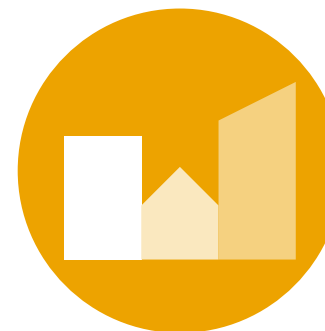
# OUR CALL TO ACTION

- *Take practical and immediate action towards inclusion and equality*
- *Challenge existing hierarchies*
- *Include men in conversation*
- *Acknowledge including more women in academia*
- *Advocate for flexible working paid overtime and shorter hours*
- *Commit to (publicly reporting on progress of) closing the gender pay gap*
- *Commit to driving change for maternity rights/paternity leave/more affordable childcare/unpaid caring responsibilities*
- *Create awareness of intersectionality*
- *Support women by creating a space for women to speak out and find mutual support / provide more mentoring opportunities / give better peer recognition*





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## THANKS

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