



AUSTRALASIAN INSTITUTE
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A week in the life of Stella Walter, professional surveyor

I HAVE been asked to write an article to showcase the different types of work that a surveyor – and, more specifically, a female surveyor – undertakes in her professional role.

Growing up in the island State, I attended the University of Tasmania and completed the surveying degree in 1992. After graduation, work was scarce and I did a backpacking trip around Tasmania, visiting as many survey firms as possible, to see what might be available but without success. I applied for positions across Australia and finally secured a position in Windsor, New South Wales.

I packed up all my possessions and drove my car north, across Bass Strait on the ferry, to NSW, where I started a new stage in my life.

I am fortunate to have a varied role as a Registered Surveyor covering all the topics that are assessed in the registration process: cadastral surveying, strata, engineering and town planning, in addition to project management and contract administration.

Many surveyors, following registration, will become specialised in one particular area of surveying but I have always been happy to take on different projects and learn during the process. I have become more of a generalist and this certainly makes for an interesting career.

My work as a Registered Surveyor today is very different to what it was like earlier in my career, when I was mostly in

the field. Over time, as responsibilities increase, it is natural to find yourself spending more time in the office coordinating projects, managing clients and overseeing delivery.

An example of a typical week for me might look something like the following.

Monday

A regular client contacts me, as they are looking to purchase a development site and need to know what subdivision yield they can achieve and understand the likely cost of development.

I spend time looking into planning controls to determine lot sizes, widths, etcetera, site constraints such as bushfire, flooding and ecology, and engineering factors such as site drainage and road-width controls. Armed with all this information, a lot layout evolves, which is then the basis for starting a costing.

Tuesday

I have a site meeting for a new subdivision under construction. As the superintendent, I am reviewing the progress of the construction to ensure that claims by the contractor represent what has been completed, and at the meeting we discuss any site issues, potential variations or delays.

Having the dual role as the project manager, I am ensuring that all the required servicing plans are coordinated and approved and that all items covered in the development consent are being actioned

to ensure final signoff by Council at the completion of the works. This means liaising with multiple consultants and statutory authorities as well as the contractor and the client.

Wednesday

As another subdivision is close to completion, I need to check the final “Deposited Plan”, administration sheets and “Section 88b” to ensure they are compliant with the regulation and ready for lodgement with council and then LRS. I check the “Work as Executed Plans” and prepare the necessary “Surveyor’s Certificate”.

Thursday

Today it is a problem-solving session with the engineers to work out the area impacted by temporary on-site detention and water quality for a subdivision and how to satisfy safe traffic flow with the use of temporary roads and turning heads until adjoining land is fully developed.

I contact neighbouring consultants to share engineering designs and prepare plans to show what consents may be required from adjoining owners.

Friday

After several weeks of coordinating multiple external consultants, as well as our inhouse surveyors and engineers, I have put together the package of documents required to submit a “Development Application” for a subdivision.

The “Statement of Environmental Effects” is



Stella Walter.

finalised bringing together all the information to demonstrate the compliance and merits of the proposal to Council. Finally, everything is uploaded onto the planning portal and the “Submit” button is pressed.

This is obviously an idealised version of my working week, where I am able to focus on one job at a time each day. Of course, in the real world, each day is also punctuated with phone calls, emails, questions from colleagues, continuing professional development, completing time sheets, invoicing and business development matters.

For most professional women, the path of their careers does not follow a straight upward

trajectory. For those who choose to, and are lucky enough to, have children, there is inevitably an impact on their careers.

In my case, I was fortunate to be offered the flexibility to come back to work gradually after the birth of my children, increasing my number of working days over time and maintaining my connection with the profession. I was invited to become a director in the business when my children were still very young, and I am grateful to my fellow directors who gave me the flexibility to balance motherhood and business ownership.

If the profession wants to retain women in surveying, it is important to take a long-term strategic view. Supporting capable young female surveyors through the years when family responsibilities are high is an investment in the future leadership of the business.

While caring responsibilities are becoming more equitable, women are still often the ones who take time off when a child is sick or who manage school and day-care logistics. That may mean a female employee is not always able to stay late but it does not mean a lack of commitment.

In many cases, women in this phase of life work efficiently within the time available and develop strong organisational and project management skills.

A Treasury Working Paper prepared in March 2023 found that women with less access to flexibility in the workplace were more likely to exit the labour force entirely.

This challenge is not unique to surveying but the profession must ensure that it not only attracts women but also retains and develops them over the long term. Recognising and valuing the skills and experience gained during care-giving roles, offering flexible working arrangements, encouraging a culture of work-life balance, and providing a clear pathway for career progression for women are all ways that employers can assist in the retention of women in surveying.

Diversity of experience strengthens our profession, and thoughtful support at key life stages can make a lasting difference.

Stella Walter
Senior Registered Surveyor
and Project Manager
SDG

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