

Client: Women In Property
Source: Property Week (Main)
Date: 21 November 2008
Page: 47
Circulation: 23567
Size: 207cm2
AVE: 668.61

My big break

Women in Property chair **Maria Francké** explains her rise

I FINISHED UNIVERSITY in 1991, in the midst of the recession.

Along with my fellow graduates, I was desperate to find a job.

So, winning a three-month planning contract with an architectural practice called Baxter Clarke & Paul was definitely a big break.

Now, 17 years later, I am national chair of the Association of Women in Property, which offers support to women entering the industry by providing mentoring and networking opportunities.

Its National Student Awards have been running for two years now, and we help participants gain work placements and learn about opportunities. I know from my early experiences just how important this is.

My career in planning started when I studied town planning at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, but the course was not my first choice. I wanted to be a landscape architect. Heriot-Watt told me that I would need to complete the first year in town planning while studying biology O-level, to be able to transfer on to the landscape architecture course.

But I enjoyed the town planning course, so I stuck at it, and I am so pleased that I made that decision.

SCOTTISH POWER

During my degree, between 1988 and 1989, I completed a sandwich-year placement at the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland, which is the Scottish equivalent of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

At 22 years of age I was asked to present the commission's case to the Braehead public inquiry, which was, at the time, the largest retail-led regeneration project in the Central Belt of Scotland.

After university, I worked for Baxter Clarke & Paul for nearly four years and was involved in schemes such as the 140 acre Kingdom Gateway development programme in east Dunfermline. It whetted my appetite for large-scale regeneration schemes.

Then I joined property services firm Chesterton, where I had greater exposure to the commercial markets and clients. As principal planner I was involved in regeneration projects such as Ravenscraig and Edinburgh's South East Wedge.

My next stepping stone was a two-year MBA at Middlesex University. Coming to the end of an MBA forces you to consider your career. I had achieved a distinction and, after five years at Chesterton, it was time for a change.

I was approached by Drivers Jonas and thought: 'This is exactly what I am looking for.' With its then managing partner, Rory Joyce, a chartered town planner, the company was very committed to developing a planning business in Scotland and wanted me to kick-start it.

I joined as an associate in 1999. I was promoted to partner in 2003 and I am now head of planning and development for Scotland.

I became involved in Women in Property's central Scotland branch in 2000. Since then, the organisation has gone a long way in recognising the women coming through into the industry.

