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WHAT WOMEN WANT

■ Finalists in the Association of Women in Property's National Student Awards 2008 tell **Lydia Stockdale** about their reasons for choosing property and their career expectations. Photographs by **James Winspear**

FAR FROM BEING YOUR SHY, RETIRING TYPES, the finalists in the Association of Women in Property's National Student Awards 2008 (see box, overleaf) know exactly what they want to achieve and are not afraid to be frank about it.

Property Week met seven of the nine regional winners, to find out why they decided on careers in property, their first impressions of the industry and how they believe it could change for the better.

Property Week You were all put forward to enter this award by your tutors, who identified you as the best female student in the second year of your degree courses. What made you chose your courses in the first place?

Anna Kirk, 20, studying real estate management at Nottingham Trent University

I started a chemistry degree, did not like it, then had to decide what to do next. I had enjoyed a week of work experience at King Sturge in Nottingham when I was at school, so I went back for another week and found I would be interested in doing it as a career. I like the fact that surveyors have a varied working day. After that, I applied to do my course.

Jo Bell, 21, studying building surveying at Glasgow Caledonian University

Originally I had no idea what building surveying was. I wanted to be a pathologist, so I went to university to study medicine. I did it for a year and thought, 'I hate this'. After that, I needed to get a job. Surveying seemed to have loads of jobs, so I went for that and really liked it.

PW So you both had false starts before finding your way on to your current courses. Did the rest of you go straight into property?

Marie Reaveley, 22, studying urban studies and planning at the University of Sheffield

I stumbled on planning when I was looking through the prospectus for the University of Sheffield. I was originally going to be an English student, but I read the Urban Studies and Planning course description and it sounded as though I could use all the skills and knowledge I had built up at school, so I applied for it. Once I got there it all just seemed to click.

Charlie Smith, 26, studying commercial management and quantity surveying at the University of Wolverhampton

I stumbled into property too. I didn't know what to do when I left school and joined the army. Then I got a job as a CAD – computer-aided design – technician. I am now going into the fifth year of my part-time degree course. For the past three years I have been working for a company called GPurchase Construction as an assistant quantity surveyor.

Ruth Manning, 22, studying civil and environmental engineering at Cardiff School of Engineering

When I was doing my A-levels, I thought about which professions really made a difference. I came up with doctors and engineers. I thought that it was a good time to get into engineering because of the problem solving that is involved now, with more and more people being aware of the environment.

Christine Saeverud, 21, studying building engineering at the University of Westminster
I chose building engineering because in Norway, where I am from, building engineering is like civil engineering, which is what I wanted to do.

Kathryn Timmins, 20, studying architecture at Manchester School of Architecture

I found out about architecture while I was at school. I did my own research and found out that architecture as a career is both massively creative and academic. I also like the fact that architects can help regenerate areas.

PW Did you know about careers in property

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before you left school?

Charlie It is an area that is overlooked when it comes to choosing careers. The salaries are good in comparison with other industries, but most people just do not know about it.

Kathryn The profession is not very well publicised. Most people just think of either being a doctor or a lawyer.

Anna I think that if we had been given more advice at school I would have gone straight on to the real estate course. People do not realise that property is such a big industry and there are so many different routes you can go down.

Christine I agree, there are so many disciplines in property and construction, but unless you tell young people about them, how are they going to know?

PW The Association of Women in Property hold workshops in schools. What advice would you give them?

Ruth I think they should speak to students before they choose their A-levels. I was just really lucky that I did A-levels in maths and physics. You are always told to just choose what you like doing, which seems like really bad advice.

Charlie Realistically, you need to go and speak to people before they choose their GCSEs.

Jo I went to a private school where they say: 'Would you like to do medicine, law or become an accountant?' Then you chose one of the three. I think Women in Property should go to private schools as well as state schools.

PW You are all on work placements, or have completed work placements over the past year. What have you noticed about the number of women in property?

Christine I am based on construction sites, so there are not many women. One day a couple of weeks ago I came to work and one of the labourers asked: 'What time do you start serving breakfast?' I had to explain that I do not work in the canteen.

The labourers are always saying, 'Hello darling' or 'Hello sweetheart,' but you cannot take it seriously. You just have to have a laugh and a joke, and if they say something to you, you say something back. It's fun.

PW You must need to be quite a strong character to put up with that.

Jo You need to be a strong character to work in the industry anyway.

Christine You are putting yourself out there by working in this industry, because we all know there are more men than women in property. There may not be many women, but the people I work directly with do not treat me any differently. It is about your talents rather than whether you are male or female.

Anna At King Sturge in Nottingham, there are three women out of around 25 surveyors.

← We do not get treated differently, but we are told to be aware of some of the more traditional clients. Being young as well as female means they think they can be a bit more intimidating and put more pressure on you.

Ruth When I started my placement at Arup, I was really surprised by the number of females in the group I work in. Women made up about a third. I think my boss really appreciates the difference women can bring to the group. It means it is more balanced.

Jo Where I worked, at building surveyor James Barr, there were more women than men in the team I was in. The oldest woman is around 30.

PW Did you all notice that most of the women were quite young?

Charlie There are definitely more young women. You do not see many in management roles. It must be a leaky pipeline.

Marie Our lecturers at university have said that five or 10 years ago, they did not have women studying planning at university, so no way were they going to end up in the workplace. Now 40% to 45% of the people on our course are women. You can just see how things are going to change in the next 10 to 15 years with more women coming up through the system.

Kathryn I will be 25 by the time I qualify as an architect. Rather than looking at starting a major career at the age of 25, a lot of women used to be looking to start a family. Now society has changed and there are a lot more young females coming into the property industry.

Charlie It is nice to think that by being part of these National Student Awards you could inspire more young females into the industry as well.

PW Do you and your course mates talk about job prospects in light of the credit crunch?

Anna I think it will make people work harder at uni in the third year, as people will be aware of the competition.

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Marie A lot of my course mates have said they are doing a planning degree because there is a reasonable chance of getting a job at the end of it. We feel a bit protected because there is a shortage of planners. We are nearly all paying the new higher fees, meaning coming out with around £24,000 of debt.

Ruth One of the good things about this industry is that you can also work abroad. My aim is to become an engineer for a charity, developing infrastructure for developing communities.

PW What would it mean to win the 'Best of Best' national final?

Kathryn Even so far, it has opened up so many opportunities. To be interviewed about what you are doing and why is a great opportunity, and it will be a really good thing to start talking about in an interview and to put on your CV.

Marie Winning would open up a lot of doors. Everyone thought I would go and be a teacher, so this was an unexpected career choice. So to not only go and do the degree, but actually get some recognition for it, vindicates my choice – and shows that women really can do well at these things. ■



Visit www.propertyweek.com to watch an interview with Cathy Stewart, one of the organisers of the WiP National Student Awards,

about why they are run and what the national finalists get out of the experience

ABOUT THE AWARDS

THE NINE REGIONAL WINNERS IN THIS, THE second WiP National Student Awards, competed against 38 other hopefuls put forward by universities in their regions.

They each had to give a 15-minute presentation before a panel of five judges.

As winners in their regions, they won £500, mentoring and a work placement.

Now they are all finalists, hoping to win the National Winner 2008 title at the Best of Best awards, to be held at Claridge's in London on 23 September.

During the day, each will undergo a 15-minute interview in front of a panel of six judges. The national winner will take away £1,000.

The other two finalists

■ South-west: Natalie Ponfield, studying civil engineering at the University of West England

■ Northern Scotland: Niamh Treacy, studying architecture at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen

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