

# Women deterred from registering as architects

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Australia is not making the most of its architecture skills base because gender-based issues appear to be deterring female graduates from completing their registration as architects.

A University of Adelaide study has found more than three-quarters of [women](#) graduates in South Australia over the past 13 years haven't completed their registration. Nationally just 21% of registered [architects](#) in Australia are women, despite making up 40% of graduating classes since 1999.

Dr Susan Shannon, Senior Lecturer in the University of Adelaide's School of Architecture and Built Environment, Shannon investigated the situation in South Australia from 1999 to 2012 and found 29% of those who had registered in this state during those years were women.

Because architects can register in any state or territory, she also tracked the status of all SA female graduates from 1999-2012 across Australia's eight registration jurisdictions - and found that only 23% had completed their registration.

"Women in architecture come from an historically low base but, with childcare availability today and more socially progressive views about women taking their place in the construction industry, I would have expected to see numbers of registrations to have risen to more closely reflect the higher number of female graduates we have now," says Dr Shannon.

She interviewed two groups of women in South Australia - women who had registered as architects in the past decade and women graduates who had not registered. She also interviewed architecture firms with records of high registration to discover how they successfully encouraged their employees to register.

"I found that gender was a huge issue," Dr Shannon says. "Women felt that in the still male-dominated [construction industry](#) they have to prove themselves every day. Fear of failure of the Architectural Practice Exams and the subsequent loss of face and authority in the office and on site was a major factor in their decision not to go ahead."

Dr Shannon also found that the "ticking biological clock" for women who had completed a long university course with a minimum of two years to meet the post-graduation practice requirements needed for registration was another factor.

"It was put to me that it came down to a choice between 'nappies or NATSPEC' (the national building specification which architects have to study and understand as part of their practice examinations)," she says.

The third major issue was that women with children want to work part-time - difficult in a project-based industry.

Working in architectural firms where there was a strong pro-registration culture and leadership, however, helped promote successful registration even for reluctant candidates.

"From a national productivity perspective alone, this is obviously an important issue that requires much closer examination on an Australia-wide basis," Dr Shannon says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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