



# **Views of Prospective Graduate Surveyors on their Professional Career Plans**

## **Final Report**

A Survey of the Final Year Undergraduates of the Surveying  
Courses Conducted by the University of Ulster

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**Northern Ireland**

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### Appendix 1 – The Questionnaire

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **1 Executive Summary**

The RICS NI have identified that there is a reduction in membership conversions from RICS accredited degree course in Northern Ireland. The problem is severe as the graduate numbers are increasing whereas the membership conversions are reducing. In order to investigate this issue a survey was carried out on the final year surveying undergraduate of the RICS accredited degree courses conducted by University of Ulster.

The survey aims at establishing the views of prospective graduate surveyors on the role of the RICS and the future directions of their professional career. A total of 145 final year undergraduates were surveyed. The survey achieved an 84% response rate using a web-based questionnaire.

The survey examined the views of prospective surveyors (QS, PID and BS) on three major themes.

1. The reasons for selecting a surveying degree
2. Career Plans upon Graduation
3. Value of RICS Membership and Its Role

### **The reasons for selecting a surveying degree**

It was clear from the analysis of responses that the overwhelming majority (63%) of surveying undergraduates had a very good understanding of the role they would play as graduate surveyors in the industry. This positive outcome indicates that the career guidance programmes are generative positive outcomes. However, the views of the undergraduates may have been influenced by the knowledge and experience gained at the university and during placement.

### **Career Plans upon Graduation**

The following are some of the key findings with respect to career plans of prospective graduates.

1. 92% of respondents wish to remain in the construction industry. This is a positive outcome indicating the success and growth of the industry.
2. 28% wish to be employed with a contractor. This figure further increase to 62% when the QS group is examined. This is highly significant and an important outcome to note.
3. 61% of respondents expects to work in NI while further 34% undecided. It clearly indicates that the RICS NI has a significant role to play in the near future.
4. With respect to career opportunities outside NI, 61% chose rest of UK and 64% chose ROI. 54% also indicated Australia and New Zealand as probable alternatives. This also indicates that RICS in general has a wider role to play in nurturing the professional careers of young surveying graduates.

### **Value of RICS Membership and Its Role**

This section of the survey examined the knowledge and perception on the role of RICS in the development of the respective surveying professions. The key findings are outlined below.

1. 91% of respondents valued being a Chartered Surveyor. This indicates that majority still prefers and value being a professional surveyor and they associate that with having the Charter.

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2. The survey clearly indicated that respondents prefer RICS membership as their first choice. However, there were several other competing alternatives. SCSl and CIOB were identified as the other main professional bodies.
3. 41% indicated that they would take up RICS membership irrespective of whether the employer supports the application or not. 24% was undecided or responded negatively. This is not satisfactory and at the same time clearly identifies the need for employer backing for membership commitment.
4. 88% have obtained student membership of the RICS. This figure drops to 80% for the QS group. It is important that this level could be sustained or improved in conversion to full membership. On the analysis of APC enrolments it was clear that the QS group had the least interest and involvement.
5. The respondents generally agreed that the RICS has a clear role to play in the international construction/property industry. Again the significantly lower level of acceptance of this view was demonstrated by the QS group.
6. Only 61% believe that RICS is the professional body that represent Contractors' Surveyors and 30% believe it represent Project Managers.
7. Greater professional recognition and greater employment opportunity were identified as the two main benefits of being a chartered surveyor. Greater promotion prospects and international recognition are also seen as the next two most important benefits.

## Recommendations

The key recommendations of this survey are as follows:

1. RICS investigate the views of contractors' surveyors identifying their level of satisfaction of the membership of the RICS. Identify the needs of the contractors' surveyors and to enter in to dialog with the current membership.
2. RICS to recognise contractors' surveyors as a distinct group within the surveying professions and develop career development paths for that group.
3. RICS to promote and encourage universities to develop quantity surveying courses specialising in producing graduate surveyors suitable to be employed by contractors (builders).
4. RICS to carry out a similar survey of all accredited surveying courses within all regions of UK to identify the needs and views of prospective graduate surveyors.
5. RICS to proactively promote membership to all graduates during second year of the courses and actively engage with the undergraduates during their year of placement through CPD activities.
6. Educate and enlighten prospective employers as to the benefits of RICS membership and encourage them to employ graduate surveyors fully engaged in RICS membership career development route.
7. Carry out activities aimed at averting the further alienation of the QS graduates.

## **2 Introduction**

The Construction Group of the RICS NI decided to investigate the reasons behind the reduction in membership conversions in recent years compared to high numbers graduating from RICS accredited courses in NI. As a result a detailed survey of all final year students of the surveying courses conducted by the School of the Built Environment, University of Ulster was carried out in late March 2006. This report presents the finding of this survey of the prospective graduates in surveying. The survey looks at the issues affecting students/graduate decisions to pursue a surveying career in the construction industry and its implication on RICS membership.

## **3 Aim and Methodology**

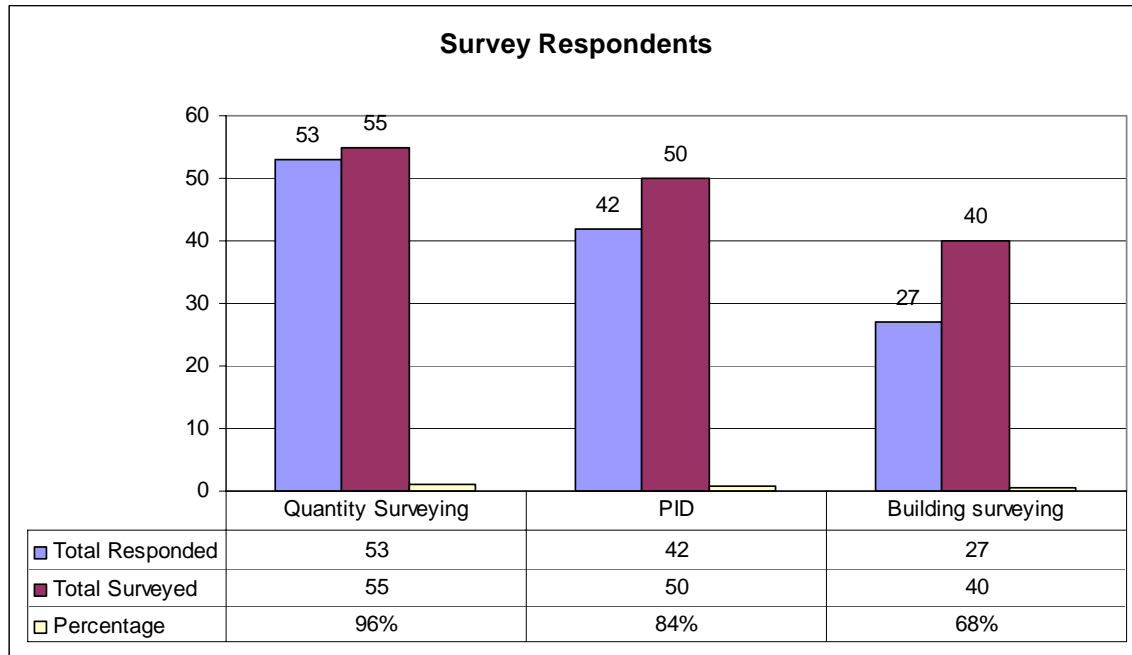
This investigation aims at establishing the views of prospective graduate surveyors on the role of the RICS and the future directions of their professional career.

The investigator developed a questionnaire with 14 questions and used PHP Surveyor™, a web-based survey management tool for the conduct of the survey. The survey investigated the respondents' career plan, the perception on the role of RICS and how they rank the relevance of RICS as a professional body.

The survey and its analysis are presented as responses to each question taking the combined view and the views of the individual groups.

## **4 The Survey Population Characteristics**

There are 3 surveying related courses conducted at University of Ulster, viz: BSc Honours in Quantity Surveying (QS), BSc Honours in Building Surveying (BS) and BSc Honours in Property Investment and Development (PID). The survey population details are provided below.



A total of 145 students were surveyed and 122 (84%) responded. The high response rates received provides greater degree of validity for the findings of the survey.

## 5 The Analysis of the Survey

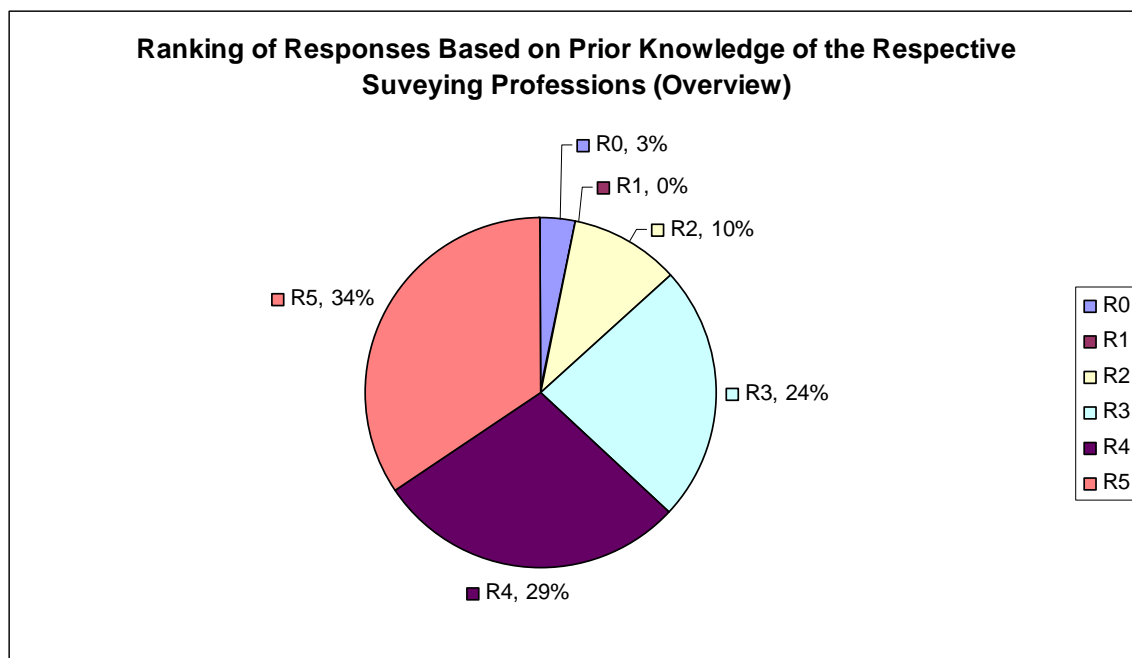
### 5.1 The reasons for selecting a surveying degree

The first question was aimed at getting an understanding of their level of knowledge of their chosen career path at the point of entry to the respective degree course.

#### 5.1.1 Why have you chosen a Surveying degree?

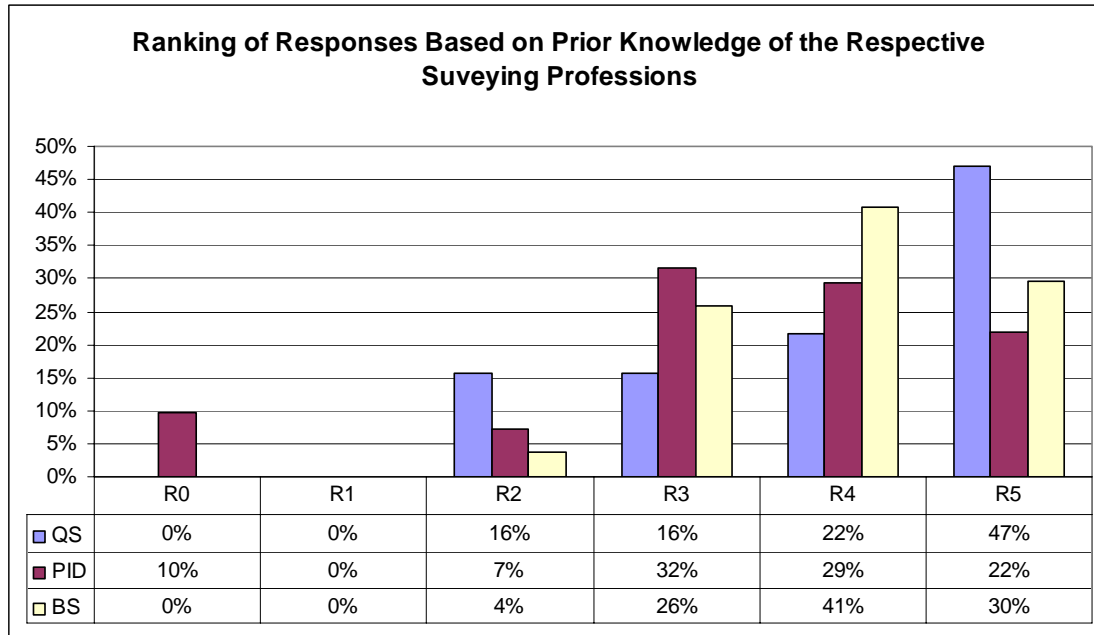
The answers given were ranked 0 to 5 where 0 represents no understanding and 5 represents a full understanding of the role of the respective surveying professional.

The combined response indicates that there was very good prior understanding of the role of the surveyor. One third of the respondents had a very good understanding of their chosen professional career. This also indicates that there is a good career guidance programme for the prospective entrants to surveying professions and a reasonable public awareness of the surveying professions. However, the results should be read with a degree of caution as these are responses given by the final year undergraduates and that their perception on the profession would have changed during the tenure of undergraduate studies.





The results of individual categories indicate that there is some variability in understanding demonstrated by the individual groups.



With almost 70% combined rank of 4 and 5 both QS and BS groups demonstrated fairly good understanding of their professional role compared with PID respondents scoring 50% for the same.

## **5.2 Career Plans upon Graduation**

This section of the survey intended to investigate the future career plans for the prospective surveying graduates. Five questions were used to investigate the career plans. These are explained below.

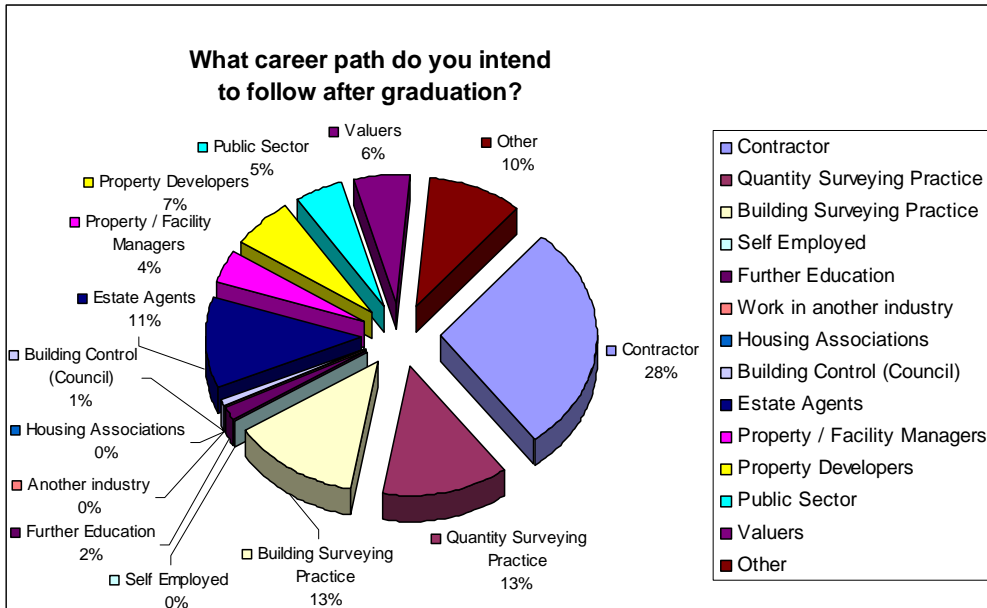
### **5.2.1 Upon Graduation do you intend to remain in the Land, Property and Construction Industry?**

92% responded with a definite yes to the question. This indicates that the overwhelming majority intends to remain within the Land, Property and Construction industry. Only 7% indicated that they would leave the construction industry. 10% of PID respondents indicated that they would leave the Land, Property and Construction Industry while this figure was down to 7% and zero respectively for QS and BS groups.

### **5.2.2 What career path do you intend to follow after graduation?**

The most important finding here is that Construction Contractors stand out as the most important single employment group preferred by prospective graduates. 28% opted for employment with contractors. Employment with property

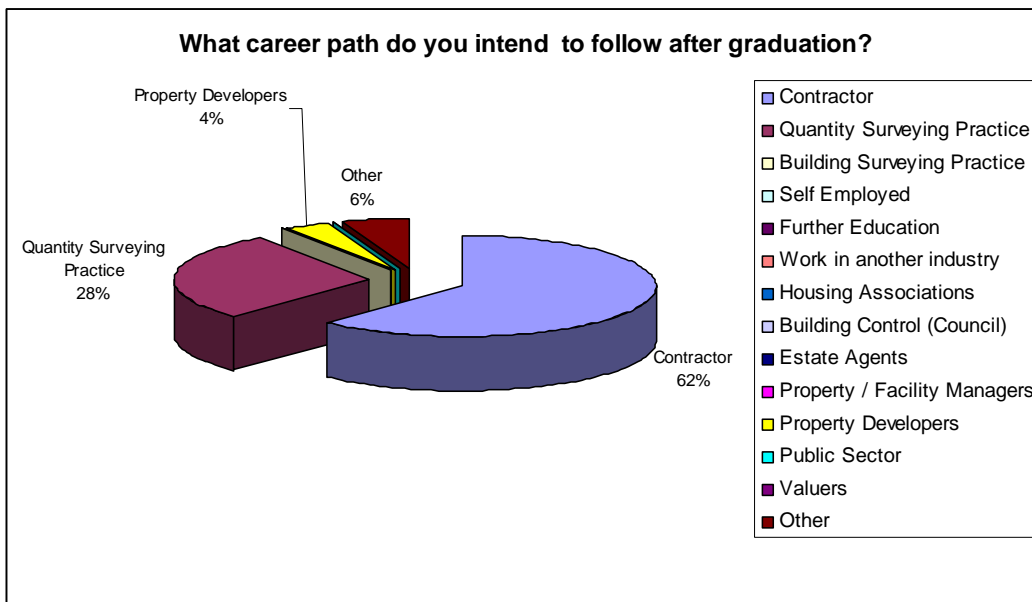
consultants remains the largest group when Quantity Surveying, Building Surveying and Valuation consultancy practices are added together, as the combined group accounts for 32% of prospective graduates.



It is important to analyse preferences of these groups individually.

### QS Group

The analysis of the QS group indicates that the overwhelming majority (62%) of the cohort prefers employment with a contractor while only 28% prefers employment within a Professional QS practice.

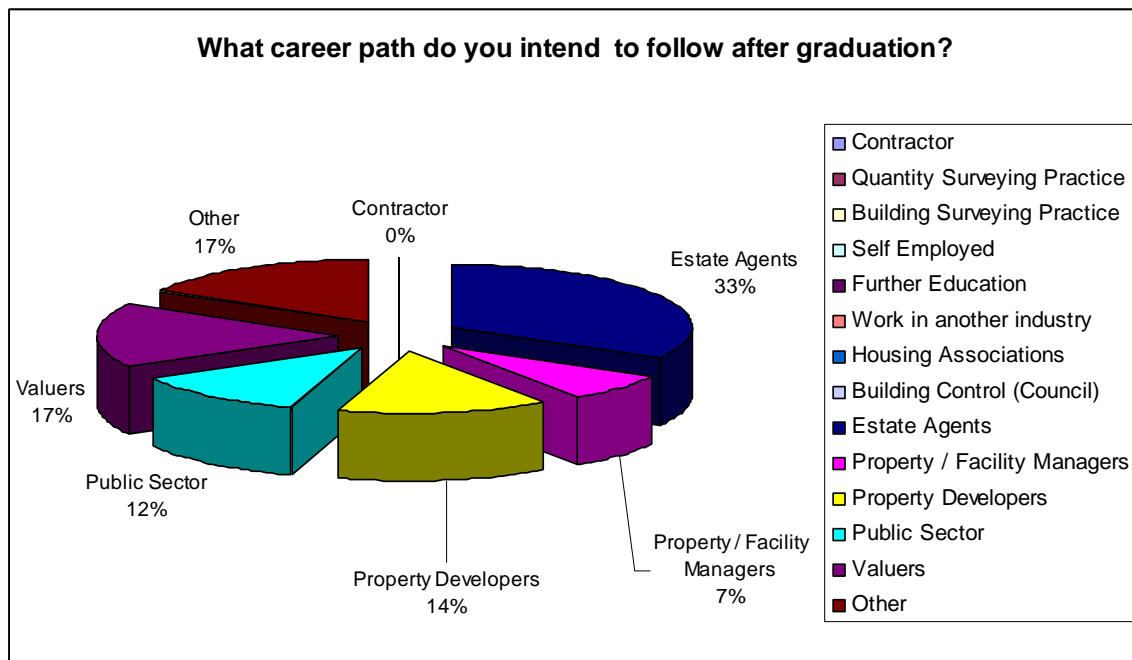


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This is a significant finding as it indicates that quantity surveying employment future lies with contracting. It indicates that RICS needs to address concerns of this category in future if it is to improve its new membership uptake. In theory RICS can expect 94% of the QS cohort to attain membership of the institution.

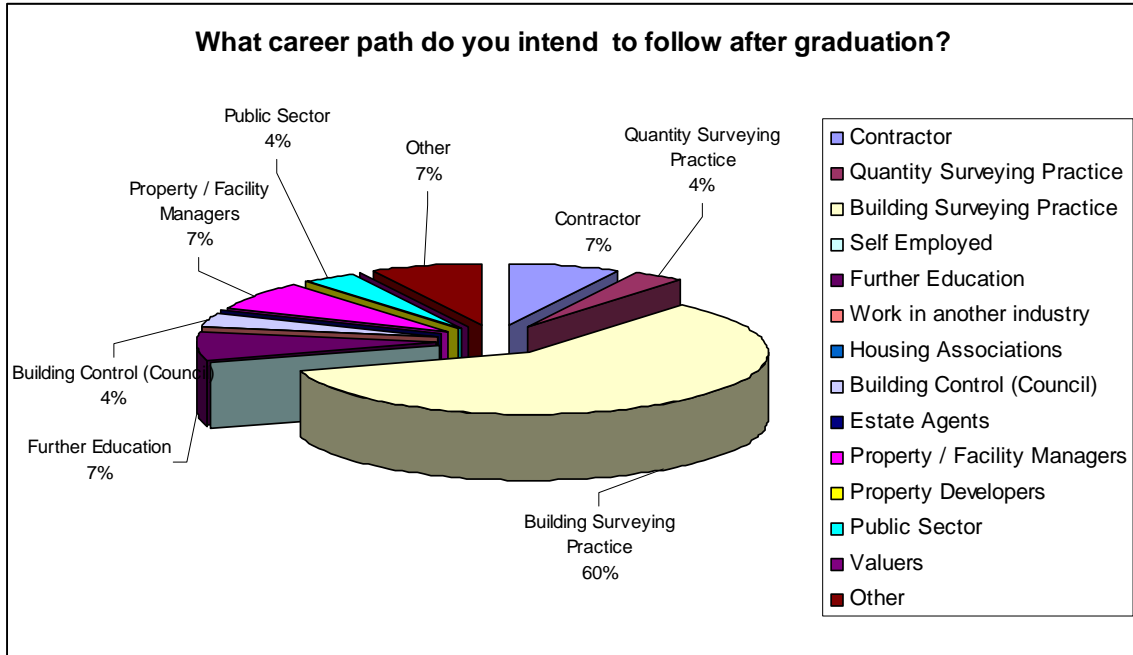
### PID Group

This group has the greatest employment diversification. As expected with 33% preferring Estate Agency, it is the most popular option of employment for this group. 17% preferred a valuation career while 14% refers employment with a property developer. With further 17% indicating 'Other' as an option more greater levels of employment diversification can be expected. With the exception of this 17% (Other), RICS can expect to attract 83% of this cohort to its membership.



### BS Group

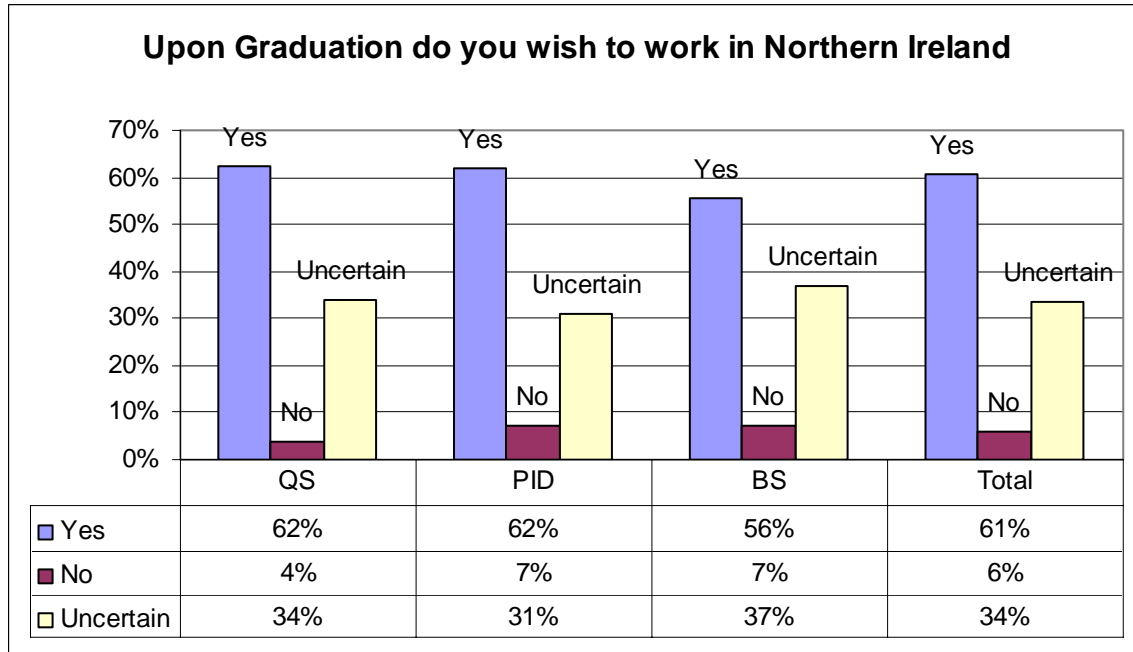
The BS group employment preferences are dominated by BS Practice (60%). Other sectors are almost evenly distributed and there is no other major employment sector.



The RICS can expect to attract 93% of this cohort to its membership.

### 5.2.3 Upon Graduation do you wish to work in Northern Ireland?

Overwhelming majority (61%) indicated that they wish to remain in Northern Ireland upon graduation while 34% remain uncertain. Only 6% were certain that they would want to leave Northern Ireland.



In the short term this provides a good opportunity for NI employers. This also implies that there will be a significant growth in RICS NI in the foreseeable future if majority of graduates value RICS membership.

### 5.2.4 Would you envisage taking up career opportunities outside Northern Ireland?

The aim of this question was to establish their views on possible foreign employment. All three groups expressed almost identical views. As such the combined output is presented in the following graph.



Majority prefers employment in the UK (61%) and the Republic of Ireland (64%) as their foreign employment options. The only other significant preference indicated is for the Pacific (Australia, New Zealand), i.e. 54%.

### 5.3 Value of RICS Membership and Its Role

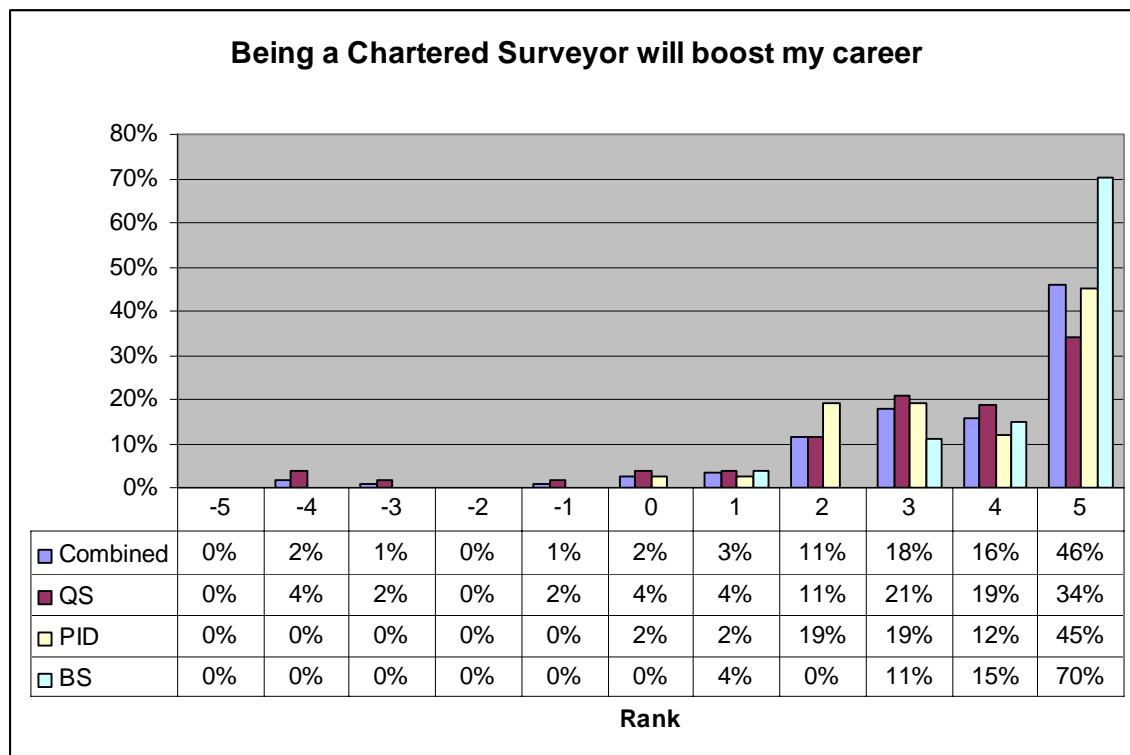
This section of the survey aims at establishing the respondents' knowledge and perception on the role of a chartered surveyor, its value and how they rank RICS among other professional bodies. All together nine questions were used to evaluate their views on these aspects.

### 5.3.1 Value of being a Chartered Surveyor

#### 5.3.1.1 State how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statement: "Being a Chartered Surveyor will boost my career"

In the combined analysis of all groups 62% felt that being a Chartered Surveyor would boost their career. Further 29% felt it would benefit but to a lesser degree. But in overall terms they all knew and believed that being "Chartered" is a boost to their career.

This is a good revelation as it indicates that 91% of the respondents' value chartered status.



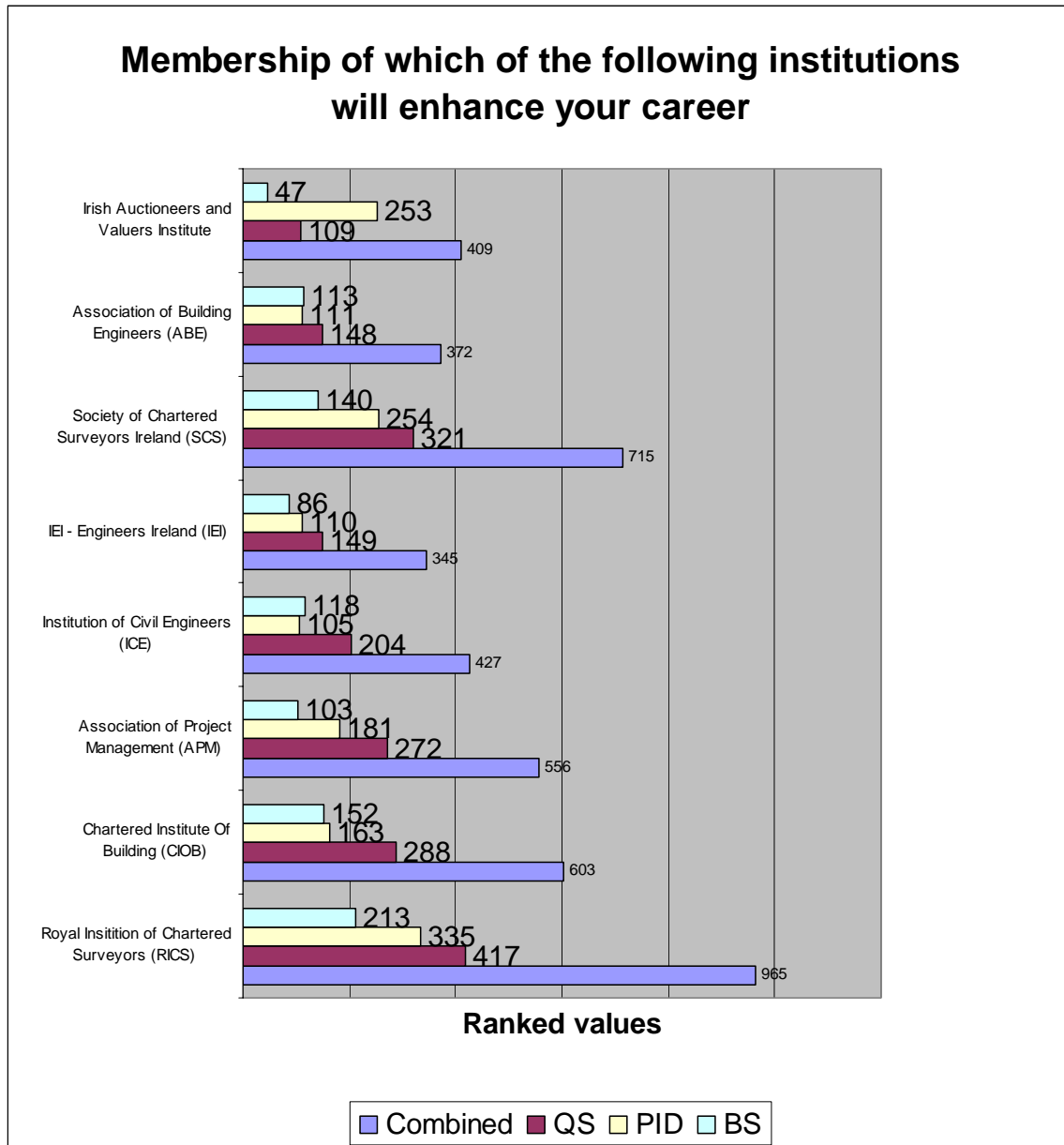
The only exception to this combined behaviour was shown by the BS group where 85% clearly highly valued chartered status. The rest of the group valued it to some respect. There were none who felt that it as a negative attribute.

### 5.3.2 RICS Membership Prospects

The following four questions aimed at understanding the prospects of attracting new membership to the RICS.

**5.3.2.1 Membership of which of the following institutions will enhance your career. Rank them in order - best first**

This question aimed to evaluate how RICS is ranked among other professional bodies for which the survey population may have interest in joining.



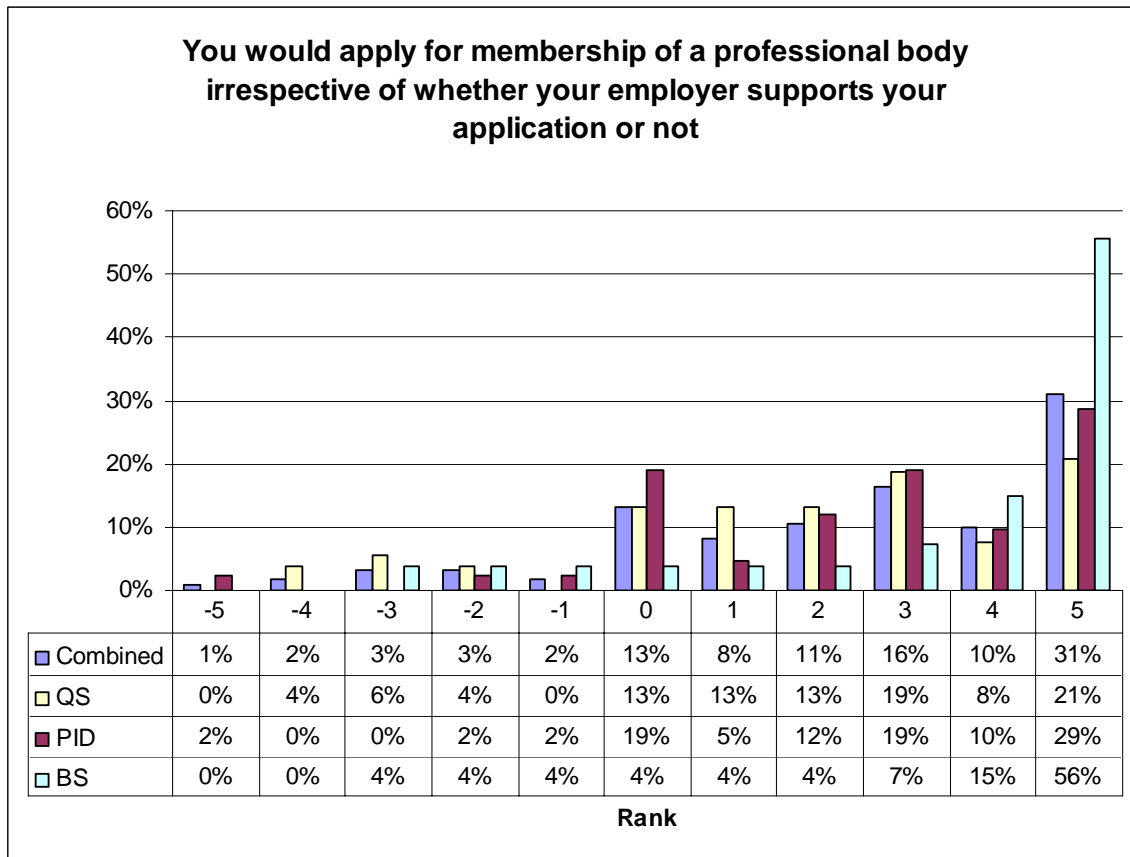
The survey clearly indicates that the respondents prefer membership of the RICS over any other professional body. The Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) follows second with CIOB coming to the third place. This conforms to the expected standard behaviour. Even though the majority of surveyors preferred employment with contractors they have indicated that their first choice of membership is with the RICS. RICS has scored 965 out of 976 the maximum

possible. It indicates that almost every prospective graduate surveyor considers RICS as the key professional body that they prefer to become members of.

The combined results are heavily influenced by the majority in the survey, the QS group. Analysing individual categories it still conforms to expected standard behaviour. The QS group has RICS, SCSi, CIOB and APM in the order of preference. The PID group has RICS, SCSi, IAVI and CIOB in order of preference. The BS group has RICS, CIOB, SCSi, and ICE in the order of preference.

**5.3.2.2 You would apply for membership of a professional body irrespective of whether your employer supports your application or not**

This question aims to establish the certainty of membership with a chosen professional body. As almost all respondents selected RICS as their first choice of membership it can be concluded that this is a test of certainty of membership with RICS.



A total of 76% of respondents have indicated that they are likely to take up membership of the RICS even if the employer does not support their application.



However, the number of respondents who would definitely take up membership of the RICS even if their employer does not support their application drops considerably to 41%. A further 35% would prefer to take up membership to a lesser degree. 13% are undecided on the issue while 11% have responded negatively.

The overall results are not much encouraging. Employer support seems a crucial factor as 59% are almost dependent or highly likely to be influenced by the employer support factor.

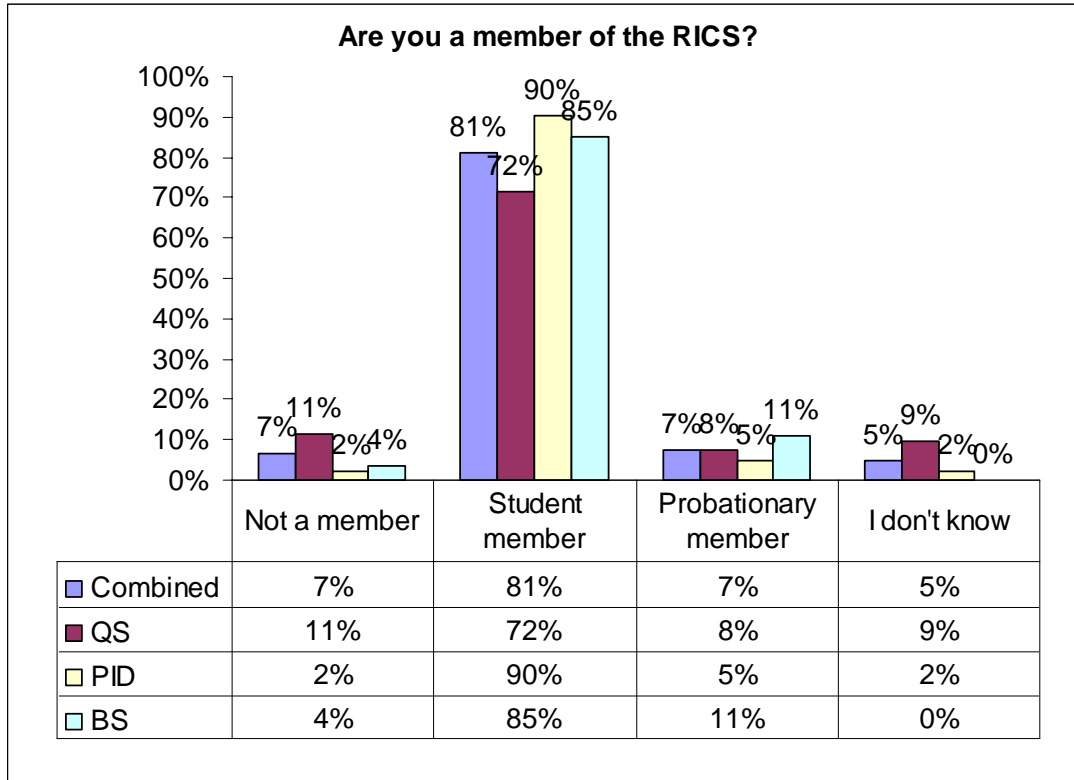
On detailed analysis of the individual groups only the BS groups strikes out different in their views. A total of 84% BS group respondents have indicated that they are positively considering membership irrespective of employer support. Out of this 71% have indicated with greater degree of certainty that they would take up RICS membership. Only 4% are undecided and 12% responded negatively.

This would indicate that the BS group has greater confidence in RICS than the QS or PID groups. However, the overall conclusion is that most prospective members are highly influenced by the support of the employers on uptake of membership of the RICS.

### ***5.3.2.3 Are you a member of the RICS?***

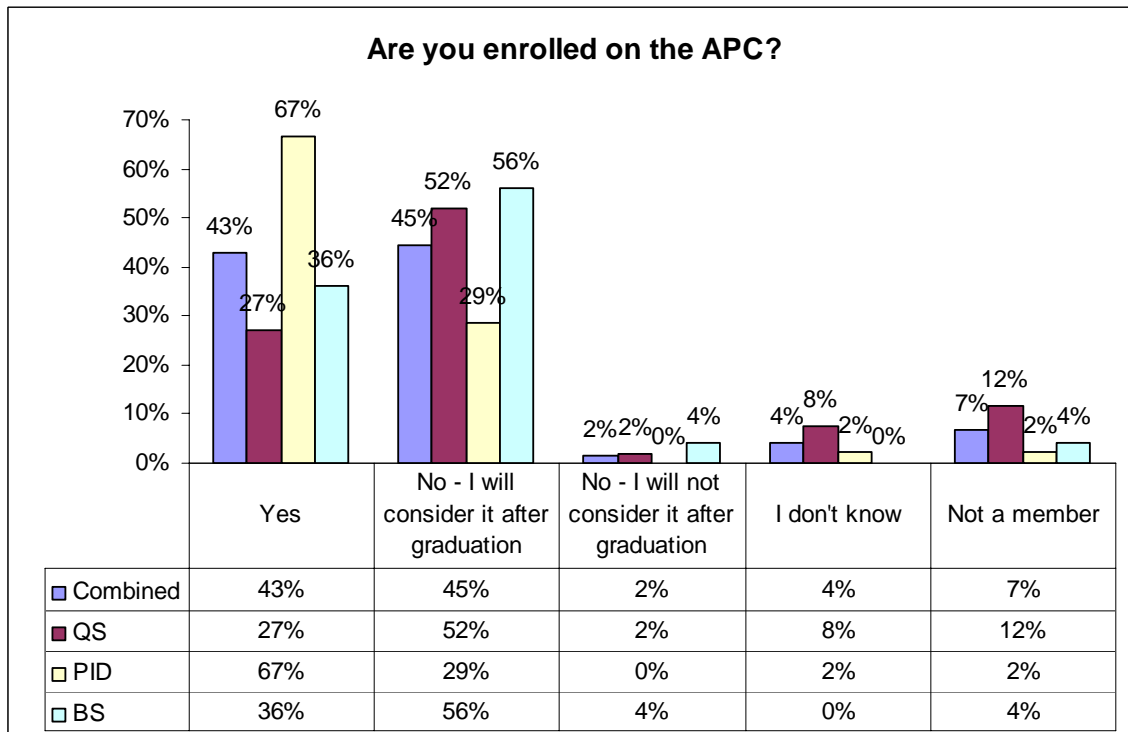
This question tries mainly to establish the membership states with respect to the survey groups. On average 81% have already taken student membership with the RICS and a further 7% has already converted to Probationary membership.

On further analysis of the individual groups only the QS group stands distinctly different. Only, 72% have taken student membership even though it is offered free at present. This also indicates that the QS group is somewhat dissatisfied with the RICS or relates less with the RICS.



### 5.3.2.4 Are you enrolled on the APC?

This question aims to establish how many have definite plans to become professionally qualified surveyors.



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43% of the respondents have indicated that they have already taken steps to enrol for the APC. This is entirely in line with the previous finding under 5.3.2.2 where 41% expressed that they would take up membership irrespective of whether the employer supports their application. Therefore, it is clear that this is the probable membership conversion that can be expected after graduation. However, the fact that further 45% have indicated that they would consider APC upon graduation is encouraging.

The picture in relation to individual groups is somewhat different to the combined view expressed above. The analysis is given below.

### **QS Group**

Only 27% have enrolled on the APC. This is inline with the previous finding that the QS group has indicated the least likelihood of obtaining RICS membership. 22% have indicated negatively on this aspect.

### **PID Group**

In contrast to the other two groups 67% of the PID group indicated that they have already enrolled for the APC. This is somewhat contradicting to the views expressed by the group at 5.3.2.1 where only 39% indicated that they would take up membership of the RICS irrespective of employer support. Hence it is difficult to make a definite conclusion on this group as there is possibility of possible misunderstanding of the question related to APC. Alternatively, as 75% responded positively to 5.3.2.1 it could be concluded that continuation of APC may be less of a career goal and be more dependent on employer support at a later stage.

### **BS Group**

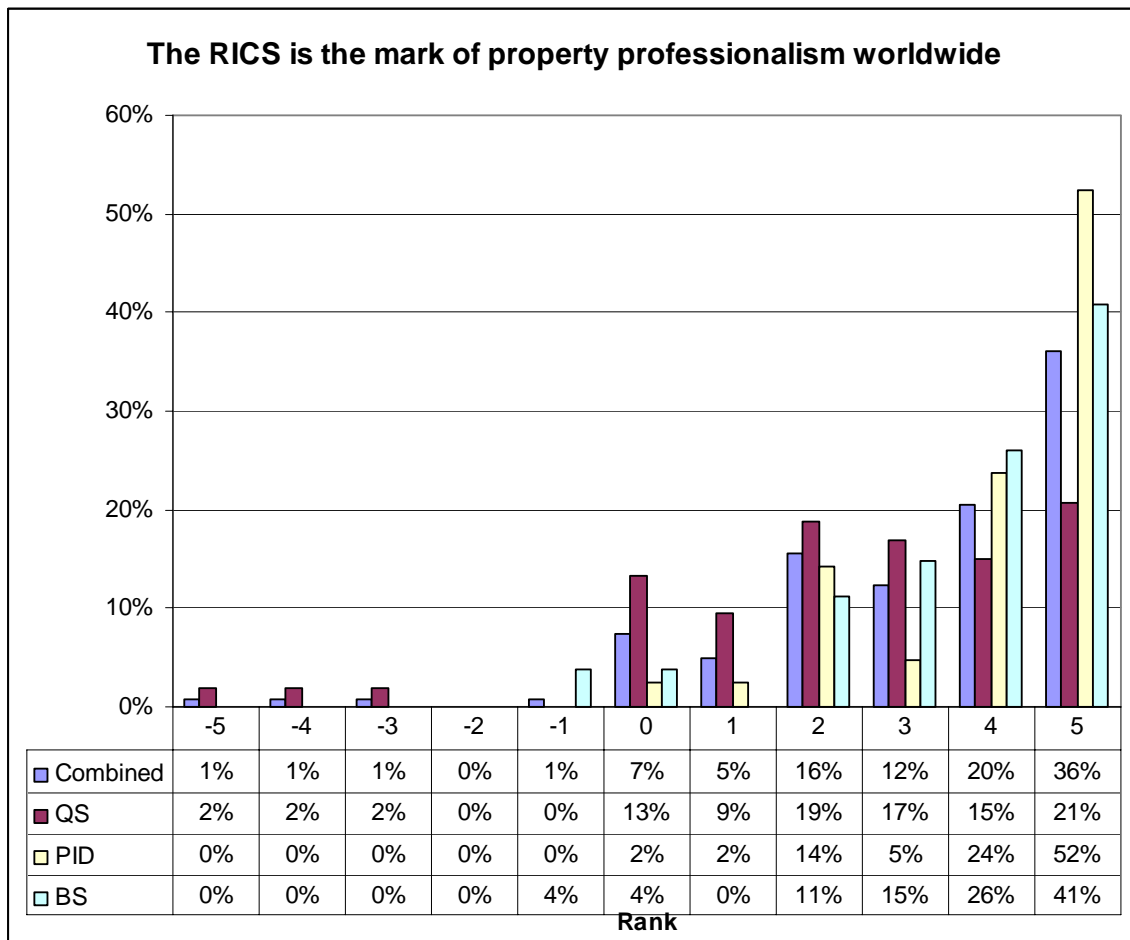
Only 36% of the BS respondents indicated that they have enrolled for the APC. This again is different to the views expressed at 5.3.2.1. There 71% expressed that they would take up membership irrespective of employer support. However, the plausible explanation for this would be that most will consider APC after graduation and thus take up membership of the RICS as indicated before. This is further backed up by the fact that 56% have indicated that they would consider APC upon graduation.

## **5.3.3 Perception on the Professional Surveyor & RICS**

The final four questions on the survey aimed at establishing the views of the survey groups on the professional surveyor, their perception on role of RICS towards achieving greater professionalism and the benefits of being a Chartered Surveyor.

**5.3.3.1 State how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statement: "The RICS is the mark of property professionalism worldwide."**

This is one of the key statements promoted by the RICS. The survey tested the acceptability of this statement for the survey groups. This indicates whether the respondents view RICS as the main professional body that represent property professionals worldwide.



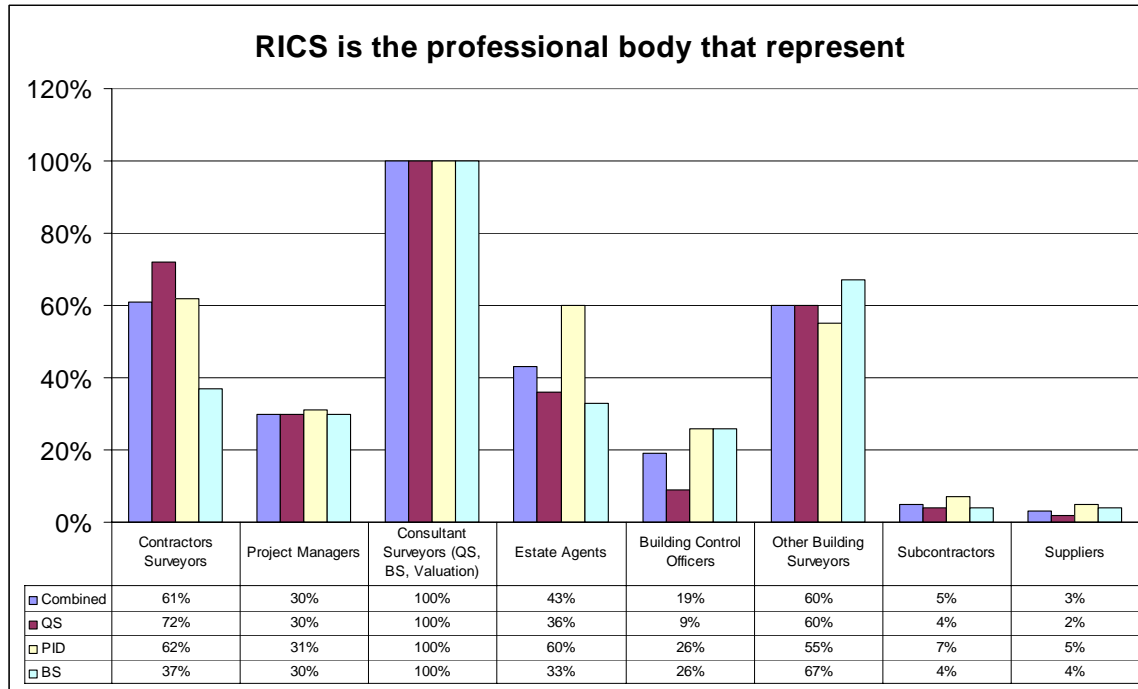
89% of the respondents felt that this statement is correct to some extent while 56% feels that is highly pertinent. This reflects that the majority view towards RICS is positive. However, considering the fact that the survey group only includes Surveyors it is questionable whether this level of acceptance is adequate. 11% clearly do not support this view. However, detailed analysis of the individual groups reveal that the combined negative outcome has been heavily influenced by the QS group. 19% of this group have not positively responded to this question. This is significant and it reinforces the view that QS group is the most disillusioned of the RICS.

The views of the QS group are very important as majority of future surveyors come from this group. In keeping with what should be expected from such an

evaluation the other two groups seems to overwhelmingly approve this statement.

### 5.3.3.2 *RICS is the professional body that represents*

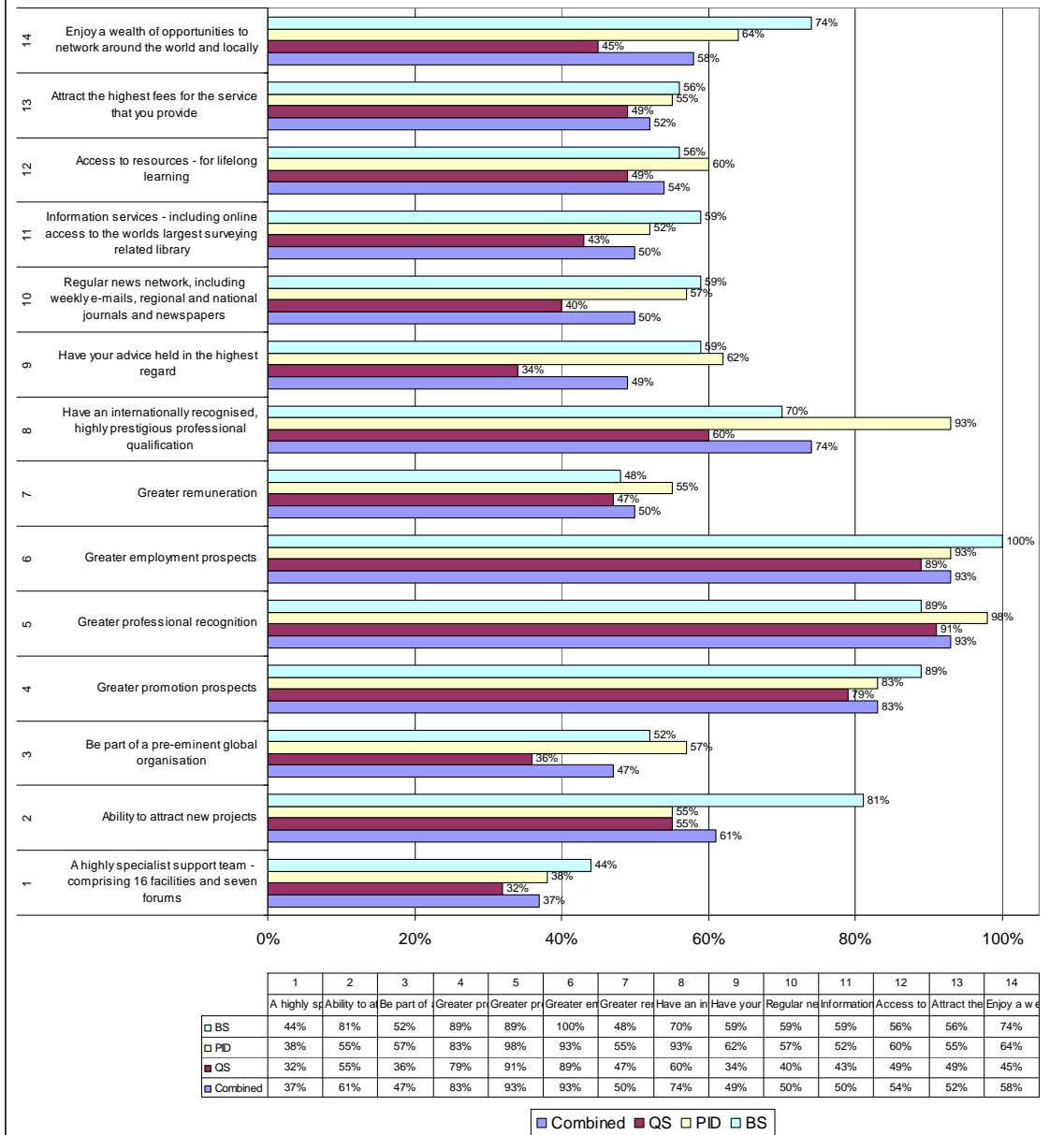
This question indicates the views of the respondents on which of the professions are most represented by the RICS.



All respondents believe that RICS is the professional body that represent Consultant Surveyors (QS, BS and Valuation). This is important and encouraging. It clearly indicates that the respondents believe that there is a major role for the RICS for these professions. The most interesting views come in the fact that only 60% views that RICS is the professional body for Contractor's Surveyors. Even though there is a separate Project Management faculty within RICS the only 30% of the respondents view that RICS has a major role for the Project Management profession.

### 5.3.3.3 *What do you see as the benefits of becoming a Chartered Surveyor*

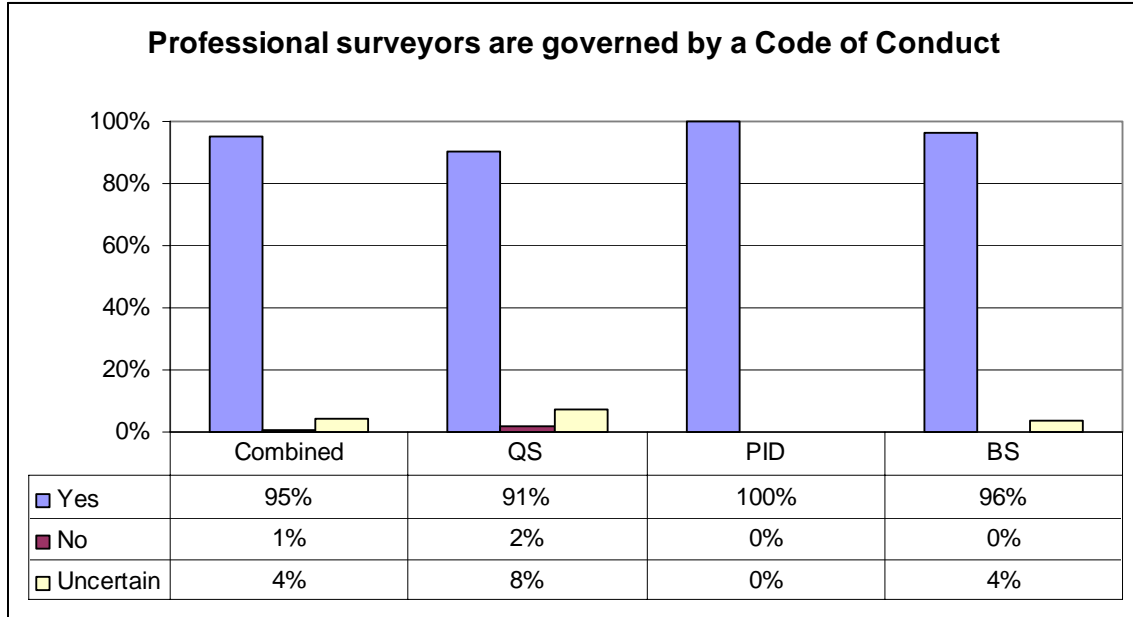
This question aims at identifying the views of respondents as to the major benefits of becoming a chartered surveyor ([RICS, 2006](#)).

**What do you see as the benefits of becoming a Chartered Surveyor**


The respondents see greater professional recognition and greater employment opportunity as the two main benefits of being a chartered surveyor. Greater promotion prospects and international recognition are also seen as the next two most important benefits. All other factors have a similar lower ranked status. There is not much variation in the individual group views.

### 5.3.3.4 Professional surveyors are governed by a Code of Conduct

The final question of the survey evaluated respondents' knowledge and perception of being a professional.



Responses to this question clearly indicate that there was a good understanding of the definition of professionalism among all graduates. Approximately 10% of QS group did not know a professional is bound by a code of conduct.

## 6 Conclusions

The survey was aimed at analysing the views of prospective graduate surveyors on their career development plans as professional surveyors. It surveyed final year undergraduates from the surveying courses conducted at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. The target population was 145 students following three RICS accredited degree programmes. The survey achieved an 84% response rate.

The survey consisted of 14 questions and was primarily divided in to three main sections for analysis purposes. The main conclusions for each part are given below.

### **6.1 The reasons for selecting a surveying degree**

All surveying groups demonstrated a very good understanding of the role of the respective surveying profession to which they would be attached upon graduation. Out of the individual groups the QS group had the best knowledge about their profession at point of entry to the degree course. These also indicate that there is a good carer guidance programme at secondary school level and at university entry levels. The RICS career guidance programmes at these levels could be considered successful.

### **6.2 Career Plans upon Graduation**

This section of the survey was aimed at establishing the main career plans for the prospective graduate surveyors.

The respondents clearly indicated that upon graduation they wish to remain in the Land, Property and Construction Industry. A 92% rate of retention was indicated. This is very good and the prospect of improved employment opportunities may result in further improvements in actual results.

61% of respondents also indicated that they would remain in Northern Ireland while 34% were undecided at present. This indicates that one third of the surveying graduates have the propensity to leave Northern Ireland upon graduation. This will have a significant impact on the demand and supply balance of surveyors in the NI Land, Property and Construction Industry.

On the analysis of prospective employment sector, employment with contractors remains the most popular single option with 28% selecting this option. The analysis of the individual groups is more important here. It revealed that 62% of the QS group wish to be employed with a contractor and only one third of the



population wish to be employed within a PQS practice. This clearly indicates that the Quantity Surveying employment future mainly lies with contractors. The RICS has to provide greater recognition for Contractors' Surveyors if it is to attract and retain membership of ever increasing numbers of Contractors' surveyors.

With the PID group Estate Agency remains the most popular employment option (33%) while 17% preferred employment as a Valuation Surveyor and 14% with a Property Developer.

60% of the BS group preferred employment within a Building Surveying practice. There again further 7% wishes to be employed with a Contractor further increasing the importance of Contractors as a major form of employment to professional surveyors.

### **6.3 Value of RICS Membership and Its Role**

This section of the survey was primarily aimed at understanding the views of prospective graduate surveyors on RICS, its role, membership and perception on being a Chartered Surveyor.

#### **6.3.1 Perception on being a Chartered Surveyor**

The prospective graduate surveyors (91%) believed in overall terms that being a chartered surveyor will boost their career (5.3.1.1). 62% of these respondents believed this strongly. This is a positive finding that suggests that there is a greater role for the RICS in nurturing them to professional status.

On the question of benefits of becoming a Chartered Surveyor, 'greater employment prospects' and 'professional recognition' came as the strongest followed by 'promotion prospects' and 'international recognition' respectively (5.3.3.3). The identification of these factors as the most important indicated that the prospective graduate surveyors directly link RICS and Chartered status with positive career development. This is very encouraging and is in line with the core aims of RICS.

#### **6.3.2 Views on the RICS and its Role**

89% of the prospective graduate surveyors believed that the RICS has a greater role in fulfilling the role of the professional body for the surveyor (5.3.3.1). Only 56% strongly supported this view. The important finding here is that 11% of surveyors does not believe in the role of RICS in property professionalism worldwide. This figure greatly increased to 19% with respect to the QS group. This indicates a lack of confidence on the role of RICS mainly by the prospective graduate QS.

On detailed analysis (5.3.3.2) it was found that only 60% believed that RICS is the professional body for Contractors' Surveyors. This coupled with the fact that 28% of all surveyors and two thirds of Quantity Surveyors prefer employment within a contracting firm does not augment well with the possibility of increased membership conversion in future. The RICS should take steps towards attracting and winning the confidence of Contractors' Surveyors.

### **6.3.3 RICS Membership Prospects**

All prospective graduate surveyors view RICS as the professional body for the advancement of their careers (5.3.2.1). Being in Northern Ireland, they also consider the relevance and advantages of being a member of the Society of Surveyors Ireland. This is highly encouraging for the RICS as it indicates that all prospective members clearly understand and identify the relevance of RICS to their professional career. The fact that CIOB has earned the third rank indicates the increased awareness of prospective Contractors' Surveyors of the relevance of CIOB to their profession. It also indicates that both the QS and BS groups see CIOB as a possible alternative to RICS especially when promoted by the employer (often by contractors).

A total of 76% indicated that they would consider RICS membership even if the employer does not support their application (5.3.2.2). However, this figure drops to 41% where there was a definite "yes" for the RICS membership. It leaves with 59% prospective surveyors' membership with RICS in doubt. Furthermore, 24% have either responded negatively or was undecided.

As to the current status of membership, the picture is much better (5.3.2.3). Across all groups 81% have already taken student membership (offered free of charge) and further 7% has converted membership to Probationary status. That leaves with the fact that 19% of the undergraduates have not even taken up the free membership offer. This leads to the question that 'can the RICS sustain these levels with 100% membership conversions'.

The survey also investigated the APC enrolment rates (5.3.2.4). It shows that only 43% have enrolled for the APC. This is in line with the previous finding of only 41% indicating with greater certainty of possibility of future membership. Therefore, it can be concluded with a high degree of certainty that approximately 40% of these prospective graduate surveyors would finally take up membership with the RICS. These figures further drop down considerably to 27% and 29% respectively when the largest surveying group, the QS group is examined. This is a significant problem that needs to be addressed immediately by the RICS. The solution mainly lies in winning the confidence of prospective QS graduates and Contractors surveyors.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

The key recommendations of this survey are as follows:

1. It is recommended that the RICS investigate the views of contractors' surveyors identifying their level of satisfaction on the membership of the RICS. It will give an opportunity to identify the needs of the contractors' surveyors and to enter in to dialog with the current membership.
2. RICS to recognise contractors' surveyors as a distinct group with in the surveying professions and develop career development paths for that group.
3. RICS to promote and encourage universities to develop quantity surveying courses specialising in producing graduate surveyors suitable to be employed by contractors (builders).
4. RICS to carry out a similar survey of all accredited surveying courses within all regions of UK to identify the needs and views of prospective graduate surveyors.
5. RICS to proactively promote membership to all graduates during second year of the courses and actively engage with the undergraduates during their year of placement through CPD activities.
6. Educate and enlighten prospective employers as to the benefits of RICS membership and encourage them to employ graduate surveyors fully engaged in RICS membership career development route.
7. RICS to carry out activities to avoid further alienation of the views of the QS graduates. A detailed investigation should be carried out to review the perception of the QS members of the RICS to identify methods of improving the image of the QS within RICS as well as in the industry.