



Surveyors' Salaries - Where to from here?

The recent period of strong economic growth and the associated skills shortage has seen rapid salary growth across most industry sectors. As much as any other profession surveyors have benefited from this. In this article, I explore the connection between young people entering the profession, their salaries and the potential impact of the economic downturn.

Undoubtedly there are many factors students consider when selecting a career path:

- Financial reward
- Working environment - indoors, outdoors, academic, technical...
- Risk - Secure, challenging, predictability...
- Social Conscience - Environmental, Health, Community support.
- "X" factor, public perception of profession ...

However all indications are that salary in particular remains an important influence, especially given the focus on "graduate salaries" by Universities and the media as an arbitrary benchmark. **To increase numbers entering our profession it is essential that the financial rewards and career paths are comparable with other sectors.**

The current economic times will result in many of us facing a range of challenges including some commercial pressure to offer "competitive" fees in order to ensure winning work. This may in turn put pressure on salaries. In confronting this issue, it is worth considering the positive work that has occurred in developing the new generation of surveyors in the past decade. For the future health of the profession, I believe it is critical that both the younger and senior members be well rewarded for their considerable expertise.

When I graduated in 1981 surveying salaries were, in my view and those of my fellow graduates, surprisingly low. Cadastral surveying it seems, was all about "doing your time" through the articles process and waiting for an opportunity to progress within a firm. To be fair, I suspect that this wasn't dissimilar in other professions such as law.

As a young person seeking to earn some money, I opted for the construction industry. Yes, the pay was better, but I was still one of the lowest paid people on site! After a number of years in the construction industry I was drawn back to cadastral surveying, where I accepted a lower salary, albeit enjoying the challenge and setting a longer term goal.

The 1990s saw the introduction of Surveying Awards (culminating in the current Land Surveyors General Award 1998), which I believe, over a period of time, raised the salary levels across the board for younger surveyors and, in turn, probably impacted on senior surveyors. The strong economic growth, together with a shortage of surveyors in recent times, has seen salaries move above the award although it appears they are still below comparable professions.

What might be the effect of an economic downturn? Recent discussions with a Human Resources manager in a large multi-disciplinary company indicated that there has been an immediate response to the global economic uncertainty in the mining and building sectors where redundancies have occurred. However this has not directly transferred to a drop in wages in engineering and construction as yet in the private sector. Rather, large companies are looking carefully at discretionary spending in areas such as travel whilst trying to retain their key staff. There is a perception that employees understand the current circumstances and that wage growth will be modest in the 2009-10 financial year although there are industries locked into quite large increments through EBAs. In the immediate future there will still be demand for surveyors, engineers, and other skilled professionals although the period of rapid salary growth will retract. The Australian Government infrastructure spending and other recovery programs also indicate that surveyors will be in demand.

For a healthy profession I would identify the following attributes:

1. Attract diversity of young people into the profession (academic, entrepreneurial, innovative ...)
2. Dynamic industry groups (ISV & ACS)
3. Continued Professional Development to maintain minimum levels of competency
4. Broad leadership within the community

To assess the above attributes I suggest we consider the following points:

- ✓ Like others we are experiencing difficulties, however the Surveying Task Force is focused on broadening the appeal and image of the profession. (The current shortfalls include a lack of graduates and

[cont on Page 3]

Patron
 Professor David de Kretser, AC
 Governor of Victoria