



MEASURING UP: Quantity surveyor Alison Ahmad struts her stuff at a construction site in Kraaifontein, where a new showroom for a car dealership is being built.
Picture: IAN LANDSBERG

Managing project costs

WHAT does your job entail? A quantity surveyor is responsible for managing the costs on construction projects from the initial planning stages through to completion. My job description includes costing, planning and control, taking care of contracts and tenders, and preparing budgets.

I have been involved in many exciting and different projects throughout my career including shopping centres, offices, warehouses, motor dealerships and schools. The construction industry is dynamic and, in addition to carrying out the traditional duties, you need to understand current market conditions and keep abreast of new products and trends.

Although the construction industry is traditionally male-dominated, more and more women are making careers for themselves as quantity surveyors, architects and engineers.

Describe your average work day: This can vary depending on the stage of construction of the projects. Tasks could include preparing estimates, bills of quantities for tender – which entails measuring all the activities such as brickwork, painting and plastering – remeasuring for final accounts or monitoring and reporting on variations to the project. This is interspersed with meeting clients and other consultants or having site meetings with the project team. At month-end, the days become very busy with assessing contractors' claims for monthly valuations.

Best part of the job: I really enjoy working to make a project finan-

cially viable and it's very satisfying to see the project through to completion to the client's requirements and within budget. Many years ago, I was involved in renovations to Nelson Mandela's Houghton residence and got to meet him – twice.

Worst part of the job: It's uncomfortable being in a site office when it's either extremely hot or cold.

Why did you choose this career? I wanted to do something different that wouldn't have me office bound all day, and the career prospects seemed to be good.

What else would you have liked to do? When I started studying I decided to give quantity surveying a try and thought I could always change if I didn't like it, but after several years I am still here.

Are you paid enough? Yes. I have worked my way up to become a partner in my practice, but even before that I was always satisfied with what I earned.

Rate your work stress on a scale of one to 10: It's on the high end of the scale – around nine. The position carries a lot of responsibility – you are always dealing with someone else's money and there is constant pressure to keep control of the budget. Month-end can also be demanding when preparing valuations.

Travel opportunities? This depends on who you work for and how far afield they are prepared to work. Some South African firms work only locally, others take on work nationally and others regularly go into Africa and beyond. However, South African qualifications are recognised internationally.

What you need to be a top quantity surveyor

YOU need to be hard-working, must be able to work to deadlines and have strong ethical values. You need to have a good understanding of buildings, a head for figures (although you don't need to be a mathematician), and be able to negotiate.

Qualifications needed: A four-year BSc (QS) degree is preferable if you want to be employed by a firm of consulting quantity surveyors. You will then need to have a three-year in-training period before being able to register as a professional quantity surveyor.

Where to train: Recognised quantity surveying degrees are offered by University of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Wits, Pretoria

Real jobs, real people

By Sarah-Jane Bosch



Every Monday Sarah-Jane Bosch interviews real people at work in Cape Town.

- **Today:** Alison Ahmad
- **Job:** Consulting quantity surveyor
- **Qualifications:** BSc (QS)
- **Place of work:** O'Mahony Peel Rowney Consulting Quantity Surveyors

University, Free State University and University of KwaZulu-Natal. There are also a number of universities of technology (formerly technikons) that offer national diploma and B Tech courses in quantity surveying.

Expected earnings: A starting salary for a university graduate

could average R200 000 a year and will increase depending on your level of experience.

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