

E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS**Is the glass ceiling an illusion?**VALERIE RANDLE

The so-called 'glass ceiling' has been defined by the (now defunct) Glass Ceiling Commission as 'invisible, artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organisation and reaching full potential'. I have recently examined the research literature on this phenomenon and discovered that not only is the associated imagery very powerful, but that the principal message, with only a few exceptions, is that there is a shortfall of women compared to men in top jobs, therefore a glass ceiling must be operating to hold them back.

In a recent article (The 'glass ceiling': an illusion?, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, vol.24 no. 2 p105-109, 1999) I argue the view that the glass ceiling perpetuates a notion which persuades women to expect to be unfairly treated. I develop this theme by considering male versus female attributes, evidence for male/female job satisfaction, the steadily rising participation of women at management levels, and women's aspirations. Some special consideration is given to women in science, engineering and technology. Finally, I discuss ways forward in terms of non-interventionist measures such as use of role models, mentoring and networking, since the non-competitive and cooperative aspects of these initiatives have proved to be successful in encouraging women to fulfill their potential.

Valerie Randle

Department of Materials Engineering, University of Wales, Swansea, UK,
SA2 8PP