

HOW TO RECRUIT WOMEN FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Toolkit and Annual Report 2018



women and work
all party parliamentary group

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Foreword

In our jobs we hear time and time again about the importance of recruiting more women into the workplace – whether inside Parliament, or outside. We are all familiar with the facts and figures around the benefits of employing more women. A more diverse workforce is better for companies, societies, and the economy.

But too often, organisations question how best to achieve this result and are reticent to make the necessary changes to the way they have always recruited. We know through our work with the APPG that often simple, low-cost changes to the recruitment process can have a big impact, and our work this year has sought to highlight this.

Our meetings have been revealing, informative, and useful. We have heard evidence from many different individuals: young women just starting out in their careers, leaders of global companies, grassroots campaigners, academics, civil servants, politicians, entrepreneurs, and many more.

Each person who has contributed to our work has brought different experience, showcased different expertise, and put forward different opinions. This diversity has bolstered the APPG's work and strengthened our recommendations, and we would like to thank everyone who has been involved.

We are calling on employers and policy-makers to act now to shift the persistent obstacles that women face when entering, progressing in, and returning to the workplace. We look forward to continuing the conversation in 2019.

Introduction

The Women and Work All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is a cross-party group that constructively examines the role of women in the workforce, bringing together Members of Parliament and interested stakeholders to consider the role that employers, policy makers, and others can play in delivering gender balance within the economy. Since the APPG was formed we have consistently heard from employers that, whilst they appreciate the benefits derived from a gender balanced workforce, barriers to recruitment which make delivering on this difficult still persist.

During this year's programme of work the APPG has sequentially examined the recruitment process from start to finish, with a view to identifying some of the unique challenges faced by women and learning about ways in which these could be overcome. Out of this work we have produced a toolkit of practical suggestions, hints, and tips for employers wishing to improve their recruitment process and attract and recruit more women. In addition, the APPG has developed a series of recommendations for Government on policies which can support this ambition. This report aims to go some way towards bridging the gap between the willingness to commit to a more balanced gender distribution in the workplace and the challenges of achieving this.



Gillian Keegan MP
Co-Chair



Jess Phillips MP
Co-Chair

Getting women through the door

Employers across different sectors report that they often struggle to attract female applicants, particularly when recruiting senior roles or into a male-dominated sector. Attracting the right talent is a way to stay ahead of the competition and boost organisational and financial performance.

Evidence presented to the APPG suggests that, right at the beginning of the recruitment process, aspects of job-design, advert placement, and wording can either encourage or discourage female applicants, as can the way that recruitment is managed.

Flexibility

At the design stage, it is important to review the degree of flexibility that a role can accommodate. For example, rather than defaulting to traditional working patterns, consider how a role could work in a part-time, job-sharing, flexible hours or work from home arrangement. The '2018 Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark' report from Working Families found that across the 63,000 employees interviewed, the percentage of top performance ratings for part-time and reduced-hours workers is higher than the percentage of top performance ratings across all staff, at 34% compared to 14%.

However, the APPG heard how flexible working is often seen as a 'privilege' which is granted only after passing probation or working with the company for a certain amount of time. This year, the University of Sussex announced its 'Flexible by Default' policy, meaning all new jobs are advertised as open to flexible working from day one, across all levels. In order to implement this, they did not need to change their working policies, just how they were being used. Their default answer to flexible employment requests is now 'yes', unless there is a genuine business reason to say 'no'. Yvonne Greeves, Head of Women in Business at NatWest, told the APPG that, as long as targets are being met, it should not matter where the work is done. She cited technology as a huge advantage in this area, allowing people to work remotely with ease. A simple change could be to make use of the Working Families 'Happy to Talk about Flexible Working' logo for inclusion on job adverts.

Wording

Wording is also important: common words that are used in job descriptions can have male or female associations, changing who applies for a job. The writing platform, Textio analysed over 78,000 jobs and found that the use of gendered language in a job advert predicts who will be hired for the job.¹ Employers should routinely assess the language used in their job adverts to ensure that it is neutral and unbiased.

"We use an online augmented writing platform to ensure the language in our job adverts appeals to all audiences. All our application forms are blind shortlisted – all personal details including the name of educational institutes are removed. In the latter stages of recruitment, we want to ensure managers have a more constructive approach to assessment and know how to effectively use the scoring structures."

Andy Livingston

Resourcing and Inclusivity Manager, Historic England (REC Good Recruitment Campaign signatory)

In which of the following ways, if any, does your organisation recruit permanent members of staff and temporary or contract workers?

Method of recruitment used	Permanent staff	Temporary staff
Word of mouth	73	64
Advertise on our own website	58	53
Internal referrals	58	50
People approach us	61	53
Social media and professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn)	57	52
Online job boards (e.g. Monster)	54	47
Recruitment agencies / Search firms	46	57
Advertise externally in newspapers / trade press	29	25
Jobcentre Plus / Universal obmatch	26	25
Talent pools / Staff banks	19	20
Other	4	4

¹ Language in your job post predicts the gender of your hire, Textio, 2016.

Case Study

Job sharing

Alice Ingall and Anna Ford are Media Relations Managers at the University of Sussex who work in a job share promoting academic research and the activities of students.

The two have different and complementary backgrounds: Alice's career-to-date has been in arts and education PR, while Anna's background is in government and legal media relations. Together their professional experience of over twenty years spans a spectrum of journalist contacts and media styles, meaning that their 'clients' - the academics, schools and students - can tap into an especially wide range of expertise. Anna and Alice were each keen to continue working at the same high level as they had done before having children, but within part time hours, and an agreement was reached for the role to become a job share. This is a working pattern that has traditionally been seen as challenging within a PR career where meeting the needs of clients and journalists is of key importance.

Both Anna and Alice feel that the job share provides them with a stimulating work environment and career, whilst enabling them to care for their children in their formative years, in the knowledge that the one working will be across all responsive and proactive work. They work cooperatively to provide support when the other needs it; both are committed to drawing on each other's strengths, to celebrating individual and joint successes, and to presenting a united front. A weekly in-person handover, as well as a separate written handover, is fundamental. The two are also in regular contact throughout the week and frequently have evening phone catch-ups.

Head of Communications, Alex Fulton: *"The University benefits significantly from this flexible working arrangement: Anna and Alice frequently collaborate on key projects, bringing two experienced minds together."*



Interviewing

Examination of the potential for unconscious bias must extend to the sifting and interviewing of applicants; hiring “*in one’s own image*” is a common phenomenon². In unstructured settings, interviewers tend to vary their questions based on their own personal experience to the person in front of them, leading to different results. The APPG heard evidence from the Behavioural Insights Team, formerly within the Cabinet Office, that pre-set interview questions are fairer. Name-blind applications should be encouraged as a first step, and employers should determine impartial, skills-based selection criteria and mark candidates against these. Where possible, a task-based assessment at the interview stage can be a better indicator of performance and a way to tackle in-built biases.

“You don’t hire a chef by asking them “are you good at cooking”, so why rely on this approach for other roles?”

Tiina Likki

Principal Adviser, Behavioural Insights Team

Salary

The question of salary history is problematic across the board. Asking for current salary can exacerbate the gender pay gap, and for returners, salary history is not an accurate indicator of current market worth, particularly for those who may have had an elongated career break. In a November 2018 survey undertaken for the APPG by The Return Hub, out of 254 female candidates looking to return to work in financial services following a career break, almost half lowered their salary expectations by 20% or more. To encourage real diversity across the labour market, greater salary transparency is needed throughout the recruitment process. By advertising using a salary bracket and/or being clear about what the role will pay, employers can attract and embrace a wider pool of talent.



² *The role of good recruitment in gender diversity*, Recruitment and Employment Confederation, 2018

Building the pipeline and building confidence

Building a strong female talent pipeline at all levels is key to improving female recruitment, particularly for those sectors in which women are currently under-represented, and when looking to increase the number of women in senior roles.

Too often, efforts to do so can be undermined before they even begin, with women discounting themselves from the running for certain jobs or careers at a very early stage. Girlguiding UK's Girls' Attitudes Survey, which looks at the opinions of girls and young women aged 7-21, indicates that a "self-belief slump" affects girls during their teenage years. In 2016, 86% of girls aged 7-10 said girls and boys have the same chance of succeeding in future jobs. But for girls aged 11-16, that figure falls to 54%, and for girls aged 17-21 just 35% thought that girls are as likely as boys to succeed in future jobs.

"We can all remember those science talks where all of the '10 greatest scientists in history', or inventors of the '10 discoveries that changed the world' were male, those news reports where we notice that all the expert opinions are from men, or those films or cartoons where the Dad goes to work while the Mum stays at home. Well it turns out, these have a very real impact on girls' lives. In 2017, 47% of girls aged 11-21 had seen stereotypical images of women and men in the media in the past week that made them feel less confident about doing what they want."

Juliet Dowley
Girlguiding UK Advocate

Other research supports this. City & Guilds research has shown that when young women found an application process difficult, 49% said it knocked their confidence and at least a quarter said it made them less likely to apply for other jobs. In addition, the findings showed that 30% of young women do not receive feedback after a job interview, compared to 18% of young men. The same research showed an even bigger disadvantage for NEETs, with 40% found to not receive feedback, compared to 29% of all young people.³

Data from the Young Women's Trust found that 53% of women aged 18-30 worry about their abilities, compared to 43% of men. 54% of young women agreed they lacked self-confidence, compared to 39% of men. 84% of young women said they had applied for jobs but not had any feedback, hampering their ability to improve applications for future job searches. Just 60% of young women are confident in their ability to write a good CV or job application and even fewer (44%) know where to get support and tailored advice on their CV.⁴

We heard many suggestions of how to address this. Carole Easton, CEO of the Young Women's Trust, told the Group about Work It Out, a programme they run to build knowledge, skills, confidence and employability of women on low or no pay to help them to become more financially independent. Work It Out delivers free coaching which is tailored to suit the needs and reality of women's lives. Volunteers with relevant experience can provide detailed feedback on job applications and CVs. Evaluation has shown that around 42% of participants last year came from the most deprived households, and 41% were unemployed. 84% of participants last year reported a positive change in their employment situation or employability.

Pipeline should be considered when reviewing recruitment, as it will help widen the pool of talent applying to jobs. Employers can participate in pipeline-building through outreach programmes, mentoring initiatives and ensuring women role models are visible.

³ 9 City and Guilds (2016) 'Young women far less likely than young men to get feedback after a job interview' 13 April 2016. <http://press.cityandguilds.com/pressreleases/youngwomen-far-less-likely-than-young-men-to-get-feedback-after-a-job-interview-1370876>

⁴ Young Women's Trust (2018), *It's (Still) a Rich Man's World: Inequality 100 years after votes for women* https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0000/9913/It_s_still_a_rich_man_s_world_-_web_report.pdf

Case Study

Work It Out

Priscilla was jobless and homeless before she participated in the Work It Out programme, living in a hostel and on benefits. She said that she thought her life would not get better, but the Work it Out programme helped to transform it. She now has her own apartment in London.

Priscilla said that she now recognises she had all the skills she needed but did not believe it at the time. Her coach reminded her that she is a capable, strong woman who can do anything. She suffered from depression and anxiety, but said her coach understood and did not make her feel like a failure. The first step was to work on a morning routine, then look at education, then job prospects.

She told the APPG that she took on a youth work role at a centre in Brixton, and her coach advised her on how to perform well and take the next steps in her career. Priscilla knew that it would be a valuable investment in her future. She said that targeted, personal programmes like Work It Out are important for young women like her. She never believed she could get a job and earn a living, never mind have her own apartment, and Work It Out has helped her to achieve these things.



Double discrimination

As part of its examination of the recruitment process the APPG looked at ways to improve recruitment for those who face double discrimination, by examining the multiple barriers that some women face.

“Intersectionality means that a black woman’s experience of the workplace may be different to that of a white woman. A middle-class woman may face inequality, but it may differ from that of a working-class woman. A disabled woman’s experience of exclusion may not be the same as that of a woman who is not disabled.”

Same But Different Campaign
Business in the Community

A study by the Institute for Social and Economic Research in 2016 found that British ethnic minority graduates are between 5% and 15% less likely to be employed than their white British peers six months after graduation.⁵ Research by Gingerbread has shown that one in ten working single parents have taken last resort steps to get by, such as using payday lenders, ‘doorstep’ lenders and foodbanks.⁶ Women at 20 are five times more likely to be employed than women over 55, and the majority of professionals who report experiencing discrimination in an interview say it was due to their age.⁷ Evidence presented to the APPG by Shaw Trust highlighted that the disability pay gap in the UK is 13.6%. On top of that, disabled people are significantly more likely to be unemployed, lose a job and be in low-paid work than non-disabled people. The employment rate for disabled people in the UK has remained below 50% for the past decade.

The APPG heard how women in each of these groups face additional barriers when it comes to recruitment. Most prominent was the stigma attached to certain groups.

For example, we heard that myths persist about disabled people in the workplace, with many employers assuming that they are “fragile” and will spend less time at work. In reality, disabled people take fewer days of sick on average and are less likely to have accidents in the workplace. A Shaw Trust mental health awareness report on employers’ attitudes shows that mental health at work remains “the last taboo”.

For single parents, the environment in which the labour market operates is a key concern, and external factors such as the high costs of childcare and a lack of genuinely flexible or part-time work. Some groups may be triply discriminated against, or more. For example, evidence submitted to the APPG from the Muslim Women’s Network UK highlighted how Muslim women “are simultaneously viewed as weak/ submissive and disruptive/trouble-makers and both sets of stereotypes restrict their abilities to enter and remain in the workplace”.

“If one million more disabled people entered the workplace, the UK economy would get a £45 million boost...and building a workforce that is representative of a company’s customer base has a positive impact for businesses and workers alike”.

Clare Gray
Disability Advocacy Adviser, Shaw Trust

The APPG is calling on employers to recognise that changes to recruitment processes can provide opportunities for women across sectors and from different backgrounds. Often, measures to tackle some of the barriers outlined above cost little or nothing.

⁵ <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/working-papers/iser/2016-02.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/policy-campaigns/publications-index/one-four-profile-single-parents-uk/>

⁷ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/uk-workers-age-discrimination-common-workplace-of-fice-young-majority-a8103511.html>

Case Study

Shaw Trust

In 2016, Shaw Trust introduced a central fund to pay for equipment, assistive technology and other support for anyone who requires adjustments. The budget has been set aside centrally by Shaw Trust to cover the costs of workplace adjustments to encourage line managers to make the necessary adjustments for their staff without there being a detrimental impact on their own project budgets. Shaw Trust also supports staff and the employers we work with to engage with the DWP Access to Work scheme to fund workplace adjustments.

I have dyslexia and what dyslexia means to me is that it is a lot harder for me to spell things and, in terms of timing to get things right. The reasonable adjustments that I have in the workplace are for someone to proof read my work and to set prioritisations with me. I also have specialist contextual grammar checking software.

Gemma Jaimeson
Digital Content Officer, Shaw Trust

I have had funding from Access to Work for a special chair that has a back support. This enables me to be comfortable in the office without experiencing pain, reducing tiredness and improving my productivity. I use tools like WebEx to communicate with my colleagues and also other online tools to source vacancies with other employers. I also have a parking bay at the office to save me rushing around and finding a place to park when I am at work.

Sean Ojeniyi
Inclusive Employer Consultant, Shaw Trust

I am blind and my job requires me to wear headphones that cover my ears. This means that I sometimes feel isolated from the rest of the team. To take a more active part in office life, I asked for a workplace adjustment: bone headphones. The headphones enable me to hear what is coming through the headphones via a bone conductor straight to the eardrum, while leaving my ears to pick up any information in the office.

Alan Sleat
Accessibility Assessor, Shaw Trust

Breaking the pattern of occupational segregation

The APPG explored how recruitment can help diversify the workforce in traditionally male-dominated sectors, such as STEM, and in traditionally female-dominated sectors like care.

According to the Office for National Statistics, women are much more likely than men to work in low-paid sectors like care and leisure, as well as in administrative and secretarial jobs. Four out of five full-time care and leisure roles are performed by women, but these women earn 9% less per hour, on average, than their male counterparts. Men hugely outnumber women in “skilled” trades, like farmers, mechanics, electricians, solicitors and chefs. In this occupation group, there is a larger pay gap (25%) in favour of men. These disproportions are widely recognised to negatively impact productivity.⁸

Several submissions to the APPG focused on how to recruit more women into sectors in which they are under-represented. For example, in 1975 less than 1% of those working in manual trades were women. Even now, that percentage has only risen to 2%. In the shipping industry, women account for less than 2% of seafarers and ashore 0.17% of executive leadership teams are women. Initiatives such as face-to-face or virtual networks, mentoring and sponsoring schemes, and PR campaigns have been used to encourage more women into these industries. The APPG encourages all sectors with similar gender imbalances to recognise these imbalances and take action, using this report as a starting point.

In the context of apprenticeships, the percentage of female engineering apprentices declined from 4.6% in 2002 to 3.1% in 2015. In construction there are just three females to every 98 male apprentices; in Information Technology (IT), there are just 35 women to 186 men⁹. Data collected by the ABI (The Association of British Insurers) revealed that while equal numbers of women and men join the industry at junior and graduate levels, the proportion of women reduces by over 60% when looking at senior levels. The Women and Work Commission

(2009) estimated that removing barriers to women in gender-segregated sectors could be worth between £15 billion and £23 billion to the UK economy.

The APPG heard from Susan Bowen, Chair of Tech UK's Skills and Diversity Council. She said that women have the opportunity to bridge the “digital skills gap”, but these roles are not attracting female talent. Adam Tickell, Vice Chancellor at the University of Sussex shared the example of the university's self-declared “robo-girls”, who go into schools to encourage young women into STEM subjects. Beverly Sawyers, Head of Operational Excellence at American Express (Amex) told the APPG that her company has a gender pay gap which is better than average. They build support networks for mentoring and informal talks, and host specific workshops to look at encouraging women into tech roles. Amex also runs programmes in the community, such as Code Girls, seeking to get young women and girls interested in technology.

Positive action

For many employers, positive action can be used to recruit more women. However, research conducted for Young Women's Trust by Professor Chantal Davies, Director of the Forum for Research into Equality and Diversity at the University of Chester, suggests that positive action is being chronically under-utilised due to a misunderstanding of what it is and how it can be implemented. This in turn acts as a barrier to addressing the under-representation of women in key sectors within apprenticeships and beyond. There was a significant lack of understanding about positive action and measures that could be used under existing legislation to provide a greater range of opportunities to women.¹⁰

⁸ How do the jobs men and women do affect the gender pay gap?, Office for National Statistics, 2017

⁹ Skills Funding Agency (2015), *Apprenticeship Achievements by framework code, level and gender 2002/3-2014/15* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-libraryapprenticeships#apprenticeship-starts-and-achievements>

¹⁰ https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0000/9388/Equality_at_work_Positive_action_in_gender_segregated_apprenticeships_-_Summary_report.pdf

Case Study

Movement To Work programme

Oriana initially joined Centrica through the two-week Movement to Work programme in 2017. Across the two weeks, she spent time with a range of Centrica employees, including customer service teams and shadowing engineers. These experiences helped her gain new skills and experience, whilst also improving her self-confidence and team working skills. Following the completion of the two-week programme, Oriana was guaranteed a telephone interview for a permanent role within the business and following the recruitment process was successful in her application.

Oriana has now been with Centrica for a year and a half. During that time, she has held numerous roles, including working as a team manager. She is currently a Moving Home Advisor in Centrica's Manchester office and has also taken on the responsibility of being the Engagement Champion for the whole site.

Programmes such as Movement to Work are vital in providing an alternative entry route into work. Centrica has so far provided over 1,000 high-quality work experience placements via the partnership. From the 2017 cohort, 44% of those hired post-scheme were women.

Centrica is a founding member of Movement to Work, which seeks to tackle youth unemployment through high quality work experience and vocational training for young people that are not in education, employment or training.



Supporting women to break out of the low-pay cycle

Women are more likely than men to become stuck in a cycle of low pay and precarious work. We received evidence on how making wages fairer and placing an emphasis on learning and training could help to break this pattern. Research from the Resolution Foundation shows that while the proportion of women getting stuck in the low-pay cycle dropped from 48% in 1981-1991 to 30% in 2006-2016¹¹, overall just 1 in 6 low-paid workers managed to permanently escape from low-pay in the last 10 years.

Economic inactivity

There is an upward trend in the number of young women who are economically inactive. Between July and September 2018 there were 390,000 women aged 16 to 24 who were economically inactive (not working or currently able to look for or immediately start work) and not in education or training. This compares to 365,000 in the previous quarter – a rise of 25,000 – and 343,000 in July-September 2017 – a rise of 47,000, or 13.7%¹². A lack of good quality, genuinely flexible or part-time work that can accommodate caring responsibilities was often cited to the APPG as a key reason why women may become trapped out of work, or in precarious, low-paid roles.

Childcare

The APPG has also often heard evidence of the implications of the high cost of childcare, which is particularly difficult for parents on low incomes. Government policies to cover a proportion of the costs for some parents, such as those on Universal Credit, are welcome but are capped and often do not go far enough to alleviate these burdens.

Self-employment

One group particularly affected are self-employed women and freelancers, a growing proportion of the UK labour market. The APPG heard how pay rates for the self-employed and freelancers are on average 16% higher for men than they are for women. Evidence from the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE) indicated that learning, development, and training can help to tackle this issue, as the greater the skill, the lower the pay gap. However, accessing such resources can be difficult for the self-employed who often struggle to take an unpaid day off work, pay for training themselves, or find flexible learning platforms. These barriers prevent women from upgrading their skills and therefore being able to increase their rate in response.

Evidence from Caroline Reilly from the Living Wage Foundation focused on the “living wage dividend”, whereby if just a quarter of those on low incomes saw their pay rise to the real living wage in ten of the UK’s major city regions, this would result in greater productivity and spending and could deliver £1.1 billion economic boost to major UK cities. Jocelyn Hillman, Founder of Working Chance, a recruitment consultancy for women leaving the criminal justice and care systems, told the APPG about breaking the low-pay cycle for these groups of women in particular. She highlighted the need for 21st century skills training in prisons, rather than just focusing on jobs such as cleaning, hairdressing and waitressing.

“There is a ripple effect that occurs when women are in quality paid employment. Their children are more likely to have good school attendance and go on to further education, mothers can save and provide for their families, and children are less likely to get involved in crime and gangs.”

Jocelyn Hillman
Founder, Working Chance

¹¹ D’Arcy, C, Finch, D. 2017. ‘The Great Escape? Low pay and progression in the UK’s labour market.’ Resolution Foundation

¹² https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what_we_do/media_centre/press_releases/877_14_rise_in_economic_inactivity_among_young_women

Case Study

Training and development for the self-employed

In October 2017, one year after starting out as a self-employed graphic designer, Mandy joined the Natwest Accelerator in Newcastle (then Entrepreneurial Spark) – a programme designed to empower, support and develop entrepreneurs.

Mandy had made a steady start to her freelance career but had big ambitions and saw the programme as a way to realise them. The programme was free to join, and not only did it provide a supportive network, mentoring and the platform to boost her confidence, it also included regular workshops and training sessions which taught her more about finances, pitching, marketing, and health and wellbeing.

Mandy feels that the programme has helped her develop immeasurably, overcome her “imposter syndrome” about being a business owner and made her more adept at overcoming any barriers and challenges of being self-employed. Indeed, she has now increased her pricing brackets and is in a position of strong financial health.

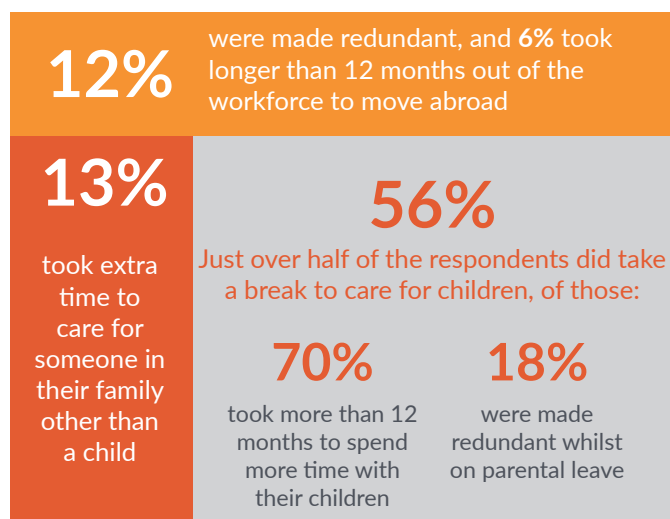
Without the programme, Mandy believes she would still be working on small projects from home, but now she is pitching for, and subsequently winning, bigger projects. Through the networks she has built, she has offered work experience, collaborated with other freelancers and been invited to speak at events to inspire other women and young girls.

Mandy has recently grown from a sole trader to register as a Limited Company and is in the process of hiring her first employee. Mandy has always had big ambitions to grow and nurture a small team who can enact positive social change through graphic design; and thanks to the training and development she received on the programme, she is now doing that.



Successful second careers

The APPG heard how women who want to return to work after a career break, face barriers from the offset. In their survey of women returning to the workplace, The Return Hub found that the assumption that women take a career break to care for children is often not borne out. For 44% of their 254 candidates, this was not the case. Of these:



We heard many times that it can be difficult to return to work after an extended career break. For many who spoke to the APPG, a lack of confidence was one of the biggest issues that they felt prevented them from returning to work successfully. The Return Hub's research highlights two other key barriers: employers' reluctance to hire someone with a CV gap, and the lack of clear paths back to work through traditional recruiting channels.

Economic research commissioned by Vodafone from KPMG indicates the potential economic benefits associated with bringing back into the workplace all women on a career break with experience at middle manager-level and above, could be in the region of £151 billion per year, and the cumulative financial boost for those women's households could be approximately £419 billion a year.

Research shows that there is a sharp decline in women's earnings after the birth of their first child – with no comparable salary drop for men. The effect is huge: women end up earning 20% less than their male counterparts over the course of their career¹³.

The evidence is clear: figuring out how better to tackle these specific barriers to recruitment will benefit employers, and many women who currently face difficulties in returning to work.

Candidates believe the main barriers to women returning to work are:



Retraining and reskilling

When recruiting for returners and those who have taken a career break, access to retraining and reskilling is essential. Employers should offer refreshment training and learning programmes to ensure that they are up to date with the latest progressions in the field. Naomi Cooke, Head of Workforce at the Local Government Association told the APPG that returner programmes reduce risk for businesses, reducing the time and resources spent on external providers or new recruits. Effective returner programmes are particularly vital in sectors which employ predominantly women. They also offer clearer paths back to work – although of course are not a solution in and of themselves. Mentoring schemes, networking, and one-to-one coaching can also boost confidence and support women returning to the workplace. Evidence submitted to the APPG also suggested that sponsorship may be even more effective than mentoring.

¹³ Kleven, H, Landais, C, Sogaard JE. 2018. 'Children and Gender Inequality: Evidence from Denmark', National Bureau of Economic Research, Paper no. 24219

“Many more people need to be retrained or else businesses aren’t going to survive in this economy.”

Baroness Goudie
Officer, Women and Work APPG

“Sponsors actively advocate for their sponsees, ensuring that they are visible to managers at the next level up...women tend to be over-mentored and under-sponsored.”

Working Mums

However, employers must also change their perceptions and processes in relation to women returning to the workplace in order to deliver change. The skills which are developed during a career break can often be overlooked, but are nonetheless valuable for employers, and should not be discounted in the recruitment process.

What skills do you think you have developed during your career break?



Photo by Asierromero/ Freepik

Case Study

Returning to work

Following seven years in banking and completing an MBA, Yvonne Greeves, now Head of Women in Business at NatWest, took a five-year career break following the birth of her second child. When she started looking to return to work in 2007, she came encountered multiple barriers including a lack of confidence, comparing herself with her husband's career progression and difficulties of setting up her own business.

She targeted RBS and was interviewed for a Business Development job and after an initial meeting she was invited back for a competency-based interview that asked for recent examples. Without any up to date experience, she scored badly and failed the process. However, Yvonne wrote to RBS requesting an unpaid month-long internship followed by another interview. If the job was still available she could be considered for it and if not, then at least she would some experience to draw upon for future interviews.

The internship was successful, and Yvonne has now worked for RBS for nearly eleven years across four different roles and divisions in the bank. Each one has meant learning new skills and self-development along with formal training. She has seen a huge cultural change within the bank's culture, supported by new technological capabilities, which means she can often work from home. Yvonne has found she is more productive now due to an improved work life balance.

Yvonne's story is an example of overcoming the barriers faces by women returners and shows the importance of a structured returnship with a real job opportunity at the end. RBS now runs its 'Comeback' programme for women returners, offering paid work placements with training, mentoring and flexible working arrangements.



Employer toolkit: top tips

Designing your job

Best practice is to regularly review your normal recruitment processes. Research shows that many jobs are still recruited through word of mouth or by hiring old employees.

When designing a job, review and refresh the advert and/or job specification that has been previously used.

Consider the degree of flexibility that the role can accommodate, do not default to the traditional way the role has been carried out. Could it be part-time, job-share or work from home? Could elements of different jobs be combined to make a new role?

Advertising your job

In job adverts, and at all touch points through the recruitment process, offer employment adjustments or different ways of working clearly and up front.

Review the hiring process to mitigate against unconscious bias, for example:

- Introduce name-blind and context-blind applications;
- Reconsider the language used in your job advert and think about key words which will come up in search terms;
- Vary the placement of a job advert and track how this impacts applications.

Include salary bands in job adverts and avoid asking applicants how much they earn. These steps can help to close the gender pay gap by making it harder to pay differential rates and keep women's earnings down even as they change jobs or get promoted.

If using a recruiter, ensure they are signed up to a code of professional practice which supports diversity. The REC's code of professional practice includes a principle on diverse recruitment to which all REC members must adhere, as part of their membership. This principle emphasises the importance of not only complying with Equal Opportunities legislation, but also seeks to raise awareness and compliance with the business benefits of actively promoting and applying the values of equity, diversity and corporate social responsibility in recruitment practice.

Technology can help to ease administrative burdens and make recruitment fairer and simpler. Applied, a digital platform developed by the Behavioural Insights Team and Nesta, uses behavioural science to help organisations find candidates based on their talents. Visit www.beapplied.com for more information.

Ensure that job adverts are in accessible formats and use inclusive language that encourages under-represented groups to apply.

The selection process

Ask applicants to include references to experience outside of the work environment, such as personal responsibilities or voluntary work, and to talk about this experience during the interview process. Valuable transferable skills are often overlooked when this information is omitted.

Those responsible for hiring decisions should receive training for their role, including specialised training in interviews. Unconscious bias training can be useful but should be regular, repeated, and in-depth. One-off training often only sheds light on issues without tackling the problem.

Consider alternatives to interview to encourage a more diverse range of applicants to apply. For example, using a competency-based test or task, or work trials. However, it is important to allow candidates to draw on experience from throughout their life, without a time frame requirement. Those who have taken a career break or who are new to an industry will not have recent sectoral experience but will have developed other skills that may otherwise be overlooked.

If using interviews, indicate that there is scope to arrange a date and time convenient to the applicant, rather than having set dates, and offer to have initial interviews online or over the telephone. This will appeal to a wider range of applicants, including those with caring responsibilities.

Use a set of pre-defined, structured questions during the interview to help ensure that all applicants are treated in the same way and given the same opportunities to show their suitability for the role.

Set a strict time-limit so that each candidate is treated the same, and make sure that your hiring panel is diverse.

Further your understanding of how to use positive action during the recruitment process. For example, visit Citizens Advice for guidance on how, when, and why an employer can take positive action under the Equality Act 2010. Visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk for further information.

- See here a step-by-step guide from the Government Equalities Office on using positive action in recruitment and promotion to improve diversity in your workforce at www.gov.uk/government/publications
- The Young Women's Trust has conducted research into positive action and apprenticeships. Further information can be found here: www.youngwomenstrust.org/positive-action

Always provide feedback for unsuccessful candidates if at all possible, especially if they reached the interview stage.

Improving the pipeline

Consider backing or implementing outreach initiatives to encourage young women and girls into a sector that they may not have considered previously. Consider reaching out to young women and girls earlier on in their education and targeting your advertising to ensure they are fully aware of these opportunities. Outreach in schools is often overlooked in favour of engagement with higher education institutions.

If already running outreach initiatives, review partner institutions and whether they can be diversified. For example, many companies only work with a short-list of Russell Group universities.

Seek out and provide backing to mentoring and sponsoring initiatives, women's networks, and other similar groups within an organisation and/or in industry to support the talent pipeline. If these do not exist, work to set them up.

Encourage women in all roles and at all levels to talk about their professional journey to create visible, real-life, relatable role models.

Actively tackle harmful gender stereotypes in the language and imagery used across your organisation or industry and ensure that successful women are visible. For example, on a website, in press releases, on social media profiles etc. Representations of women should be diverse and intersectional.

Build up a reputation which encourages all types of workers, with the policies that support them made visible and promoted internally and externally.

Senior figures should model a genuinely flexible working culture within an organisation, to inspire cultural change. Flexible working arrangements should be offered for all staff from day one, rather than post-probation or after a certain length of service.

Progression

For freelancers or self-employed, the following resources are useful for further information on training and upskilling:

IPSE Academy: training for the self-employed and freelancers

www.ipse.co.uk/ipse-resources/ipse-academy.html

Udemy: Online training courses connecting students and instructor

www.udemy.com/

Pluralsight: online training for software and informational technology

www.pluralsight.com/

Busuu: online language learning

www.busuu.com/

Introduce a systematic approach to managing employees' return to work after long periods of absence such as sickness or parental leave, for example, schedule "keeping in touch" days where possible. Returning to work: a guide for employers (www.nct.org.uk/sites/default/files/ReturningToWork-Employers.pdf) by Working Families and NCT provides a useful checklist to use for employees taking maternity leave.

Government toolkit

Policy recommendations

It is key for employers to examine and change the way they recruit. Government must be ready to support organisations with resources, advice and where appropriate, policy change. Following the APPG's meetings and open call for evidence, the APPG is making a series of recommendations to Government:

The Government should ensure that companies publishing gender pay gap data must break this down to look at other groups, for example age, ethnicity, disability etc. In the future, smaller companies could be required to report their gender pay gap data too.

The Government should consider how to fund a diversity fund to enable SMEs to offer coaching and mentoring to support women to access and progress within the workplace.

The Government should commission or publish new guidance on the effective use of positive action and other measures that can be taken under the current legal framework aimed at levelling the playing field for underrepresented groups.

The Government should take steps to remove barriers for young women to enter apprenticeships, including:

- Creating an apprenticeship bursary fund to provide access for the poorest young women, and other under-represented groups;
- Honouring its manifesto commitment to fund apprentices' travel costs;
- Broadening the apprenticeship levy into a skills and training levy to improve training opportunities for female contractors, freelancers and agency workers.

The Government should collect better data on people who are economically inactive and conduct further research into who makes up this group, and why numbers of economically inactive young women are increasing. Often this group is overlooked when it comes to employment support services, and a better understanding of the data is a first step towards getting them the help they need.

The Government should look at strengthening the Equality Act 2010 to better protect disabled people and those with health conditions from discrimination on the basis of more than one protected characteristic, particularly gender.

The Government should incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into domestic legislation.



Gathering evidence

In compiling this report the APPG heard evidence from a variety of organisations across the private, public, and voluntary sectors. A selection of panellists at each APPG meeting presented their thoughts on the barriers to attracting and recruiting women, and suggestions on how to overcome them.

Each meeting also heard from audience members, who questioned panellists and joined in with discussion and debate around the topics considered. In addition, the APPG held an open call for written evidence throughout the year, welcoming submissions on a single topic and/or on recruitment more generally.

Each of these sources of evidence have informed the findings and recommendations in this report. We are grateful to all those who have contributed to our meetings throughout the year, as panellists and audience members, and to all those who submitted written evidence.

Please find a list of all those who submitted written evidence below:

Association of British Insurers
AXA
Bright Blue
Business in the Community
Centrica
Chiara Cargnel
Conservative Women's Organisation
FDM Group
Girlguiding
The Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE)
Muslim Women's Network UK
RBS
The Recruitment and Employment Confederation
Shaw Trust
Spinnaker Global
The Investment Association
The Return Hub
University of Exeter
University of Sussex
Vodafone
Women in Property South-West
Women on the Tools
Women Returners
Working Mums
Feminine Vitae
Young Women's Trust

The Women and Work APPG provides a forum to constructively examine and debate the role that policy makers can play to deliver gender balance within the economy.

It also allows Members of Parliament and interested stakeholders to examine the responsibilities of employers and explore what more is required from the private, public and third sectors to deliver the Government's ambitions for women and work.

The officers of the Women and Work APPG are:

Co-Chairs

Gillian Keegan MP
Jess Phillips MP


Vice-Chairs

Tracy Brabin MP
Deidre Brock MP
Baroness Burt of Solihull
Baroness Garden of Frognal
Baroness Goudie
Kirstene Hair MP
Baroness Prosser
Baroness Uddin

The APPG secretariat is provided by Connect.

To discuss supporting the Group or to be added to our mailing list, please contact:

womenandworkappg@connectpa.co.uk
or tweet us [@womenworkappg](https://twitter.com/womenworkappg)



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