

AI AND THE GENDER DIVIDE: RISK, REPRESENTATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Minutes



Date	25 November 2025
Time	16:00 – 17:00
Venue	Portcullis House Meeting Room T and via Zoom
Chair	Dr Lauren Sullivan MP, Member of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee and Chair of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology Board
Speakers	<p>Liisa Antola, Manager, DEI and Consumer Outcomes at Association of British Insurers</p> <p>Dr Sanchari Roy, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Exeter Business School</p> <p>Penny East, CEO of the Fawcett Society</p>
Theme/ Background information	<p>As AI transforms, and in some cases disrupts, multiple sectors, its impact is not gender-neutral. Women are disproportionately represented in roles most exposed to automation (including administration, healthcare, education and social care) while remaining underrepresented in the design, development and leadership of AI systems. This raises concerns about bias and representation in the future of work.</p> <p>At the same time, AI offers real opportunities by opening new career pathways in data, technology and AI safety, which enable flexible and remote working through productivity tools, and expanding access to reskilling and upskilling.</p> <p>Approached thoughtfully and inclusively, AI can be a powerful driver of progress.</p> <p>This session explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where AI is most likely to disrupt women’s employment, and how to mitigate harms• Practical steps to reduce bias and improve representation in AI development• Policies and workplace practices that unlock AI’s benefits for women’s progression

Dr Lauren Sullivan MP opened the session by emphasising the importance of the discussion and noting her previous experience at the Daphne Jackson Society. She observed that women often juggle multiple roles and suggested that AI could potentially help alleviate some of these pressures. While recognising AI's considerable potential, she also warned that without appropriate guardrails in place, its development is cause for serious concern. She highlighted reports that women's posts on LinkedIn are being downgraded or censored, illustrating how gender bias can already manifest in digital spaces.

Dr Sullivan then introduced Liisa Antola from the Association of British Insurers, noting the ABI's work on its DEI blueprint. Liisa began by stating that AI's impact is far from gender-neutral and that women are disproportionately represented in sectors most exposed to technological disruption. She explained that in 2024 only 21% of the tech workforce were women, falling to 17% in software development, which means women are largely absent from the design and shaping of AI systems. She also stressed the importance of considering intersectionality in assessing the risks and opportunities posed by AI.

Liisa noted that children form their career aspirations by around age seven, shaping their sense of which jobs are possible or desirable. While she did not propose introducing them to the technicalities of AI at that age, she argued that early exposure to the breadth of opportunities in science and technology is valuable. She discussed how women may be disproportionately at risk of redundancy as AI reshapes certain roles and urged organisations to implement reskilling programmes to support colleagues in vulnerable positions. However, she cautioned that attracting women into tech is not sufficient on its own; if workplaces are not welcoming and supportive, they will not stay. She highlighted the ABI's allyship programme, which emerged from a select committee inquiry and aims to shift responsibility for cultural change from those affected by discrimination to the wider workforce.

Liisa also underscored the importance of inclusive product design, including who receives training time and who is involved in feedback and development processes. She referred to the ABI's 2024 AI guide, published to ensure positive and equitable user experiences. Diversity in training data, she said, is essential, as models trained on homogenous datasets will inevitably reproduce existing biases. She encouraged employers to engage with their trade bodies to help strengthen collective advocacy and noted that the Apprenticeships Levy could be used more effectively for reskilling women.

Dr Sullivan acknowledged these points and referred to her conversations with the Secretary of State for Science, which had highlighted concerns about how women are affected by AI. She then introduced Dr Sanchari Roy, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Exeter Business School.

Dr Sanchari began by discussing the ways in which AI systems learn from and reproduce gendered biases. She noted that technological transitions have historically

had gendered effects, often disproportionately impacting men, but that the dynamics surrounding AI require careful examination. She argued that AI development must be consciously designed with gender considerations in mind. If not, the sectors in which women are concentrated, often cognitive and administrative roles, may face heightened exposure to automation-driven risk. She outlined the concept of AI complementarity, questioning whether AI will enhance women's productivity or instead contribute to job displacement.

Dr Sanchari explained that women sit at both ends of this spectrum: they stand to benefit from AI's potential to support certain roles, but they are also vulnerable to being replaced, particularly in mid-level administrative and office-based positions such as secretarial or legal administrative work. She emphasised the need to closely examine which sectors are at highest risk and how these overlap with female-dominated occupations, noting that not all such sectors face equal exposure.

Reflecting on education, she agreed with Liisa that introducing AI concepts in primary schools may not be feasible, but highlighted her work at the University of Exeter and collaborations with institutions such as the University of Bristol to introduce young women to economics and demonstrate the breadth of opportunities beyond finance and banking. She stressed the need for better data to evaluate which initiatives are effective. Many programmes generate enthusiasm at events and careers fairs, but without aggregate, firm-level data it is difficult to assess longer-term outcomes. She reiterated the importance of a data-driven approach in developing policy responses.

In the discussion that followed, Sarah Russell asked whether the educational initiatives Dr Sanchari referenced extended beyond the South West. Dr Sanchari confirmed that the work is UK-wide, although those were the institutions she was most closely involved with. Sarah welcomed this and offered her connections at the University of Manchester, expressing her desire to encourage more outreach into schools in the North.

Dr Sullivan next introduced Penny East, CEO of the Fawcett Society, who outlined the organisation's work and noted that Equal Pay Day in 2024 fell on 22 November, slightly later than the previous year but still highlighting persistent disparities. She explained that the average gender pay gap is 11%, but that this varies significantly by region, reaching around 30% in some parts of the North. The gap also differs considerably by age and ethnicity. While younger women experience a smaller gap, structural inequalities remain entrenched.

Penny observed that at the 2025 Labour Party Conference most AI-related events were led by men. Although the Secretary of State acknowledged the need to bring more women into AI and tech, Penny stressed that such efforts will take years to have an impact, while the changes driven by AI are happening now. She raised concerns about how AI is being used in recruitment, citing Amazon's decision to abandon its hiring tool after it was found to favour men. She also noted that the Department of Health and Social Care's ten-year plan places heavy emphasis on technology and AI,

yet insufficient consideration has been given to how such approaches might marginalise women.

Women over 55, she said, are the most excluded from AI training and digital literacy initiatives. If women in this age group are made redundant from long-held roles without retraining, their employment prospects become severely limited. Penny welcomed the Government's planned mandatory pay gap action plans, due in 2027, but expressed concern that they currently include no provisions relating to AI. She argued that this presents a significant missed opportunity.

Dr Sullivan then opened the floor. Sarah Russell MP asked Penny to expand on her next priorities. Penny called first for an impact assessment of public sector workforce reform plans, including the DHSC ten-year plan, to understand how technological change might create redundancies or job transitions. Her next request related to the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill, particularly provisions on flexible working. She argued that AI could play a transformative role in enabling flexible working for both men and women, which is essential for challenging default assumptions about caregiving. However, she warned that AI-driven productivity monitoring tools, for example, tracking mouse movements or email output, risk recreating outdated and punitive workplace cultures reminiscent of the 1980s and 1990s, with little regard for the quality of work or workers' responsibilities outside the office.

Anneliese Dodds MP raised concerns about gendered impacts on self-employed women and referred to the rise of "AI slop" degrading online creative platforms traditionally used by women, such as recipe-sharing sites on Pinterest. She also cited evidence that students often prefer male lecturers and that biases influence perceptions of taxi drivers, questioning whether similar dynamics may shape AI-mediated evaluation systems.

Iqbal Mohammed MP, drawing on his background as an IT business consultant, emphasised the importance of AI safety and inclusivity. He thanked the speakers for their insights and noted how quickly the discussion had deepened his understanding. He described attending a protest outside Google DeepMind concerning the dismantling of internal safeguards and asserted that governments must ensure AI systems reflect the diversity of society, including women across all ages, racial backgrounds, sexualities, and seniority levels. He argued that any emerging risks should be brought to government attention early and that the APPG has an important role in amplifying these concerns.

Kerry Halfpenny raised issues with large language models, noting that their openness and the vast amount of poor-quality material used in their training data make it difficult to fully eliminate bias. She questioned who the role models for the sector are, arguing that young girls are unlikely to look to figures like Elon Musk and aspire to follow in their footsteps.

Rachel Arthey from the Digital Futures Research Centre asked how legislation can keep pace with rapid technological evolution. Unlike the industrial revolution, she said, the speed of AI development poses a significant challenge for regulatory frameworks. She emphasised the need for a laser-focused commitment to addressing equality and inequality in AI, alongside an appreciation of industry-specific contexts. She noted that trade unions have been slow to engage with the issue and argued that they must have a seat at the table as AI-driven changes reshape workplaces.

Dr Sullivan concluded by agreeing that trade unions have historically been strong negotiators, but observed that without adequate training on emerging technologies they will struggle to protect workers effectively in the AI era.

Comments from the chat:

Jane Portas: Perhaps the APPG can consider how to give confidence to women re AI to support engagement and also highlight/create opportunities for women in AI? Governance, risk management, research are areas where women often excel and will be critical skills in trusted/ethical approaches to AI. It's essential women have a seat at the table when AI is being developed and discussed and for the reasons stated by others on the call.