



women and work
all party parliamentary group

Women and Work APPG Report 2025

This report was researched by Connect and funded by Assystem, the ABI, and Women in Football, with the support of Evelyn Partners. This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the Group.

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About the APPG

The Women and Work All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is a cross-party group, which provides a parliamentary forum to constructively examine how we can deliver gender balance within the economy and improve career outcomes and opportunities for women. This includes exploring the responsibilities of employers and what more is required from the private, public and third sectors to deliver the Government's ambitions for women and work.

The APPG in 2025

This year, the Women and Work APPG centred its programme around the intersection of women, work, skills, and technology. This theme was chosen following Baroness Smith's maiden speech as Minister for Women and Equalities and Minister for Skills.

With responsibility spanning both women's equality and the national skills agenda, Baroness Smith's brief highlighted a pivotal moment to explore how these priorities overlap, and how government, industry, and Parliament can work together to ensure women benefit from the UK's growth ambitions.

The Government has placed technology, digital innovation, and AI as key constituents of its economic strategy, seeing them as central to boosting productivity, addressing labour gaps, and driving long-term prosperity. Against this backdrop, the APPG sought to examine how women can be fully included in this transition, and how emerging opportunities in STEM, entrepreneurship, and high-growth sectors can be unlocked for women at every stage of their careers.

Group Sponsors




Our focus and impact this year


Through this programme, the APPG examined how skills, technology, and workplace systems must evolve to ensure women are not left behind as the UK economy modernises. Across every session, a clear message emerged: achieving gender equality requires structural reform, inclusive design, and policies grounded in women's lived experiences, not simply individual resilience.

Why we explored additional themes

While the core programme focused on skills, and technology, reflecting the Minister's brief and the Government's growth agenda, the APPG also chose to hold three additional sessions on International Women in Engineering Day, Women in the Public Eye and one to mark Black History Month with 50:50 Parliament.

 **International Women in Engineering Day** was delivered in partnership with Assystem, one of the APPG's sponsors, to examine women in engineering and the opportunities presented by the UK's clean energy transition.

 **Women in the Public Eye** focussed on the escalating abuse and hostility faced by women in public roles, particularly in light of recent comments directed at MPs by high-profile figures such as Elon Musk and Andrew Tate, which have contributed to an environment of amplified misogyny.

 **The 50:50 Parliament collaboration** spotlighted the experiences of ethnic minority women in politics during Black History Month and encouraged greater representation to ensure Parliament reflects the country's diversity.

Together, these sessions ensured the APPG could explore not only skills and technology, but also the wider cultural, structural and visibility barriers that shape women's participation and leadership across public and professional life.



Foreword from the Co-Chair Baroness Karren Brady

The rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies is reshaping the world of work. The enduring gender pay gap and the continued lack of parity within the technology sector make clear that meaningful progress remains unfinished and that urgent action is still required. Encouraging women's participation in work is not only a matter of fairness, but of economic necessity. Women bring talent, leadership, innovation, and diverse perspectives that strengthen organisations, drive productivity, and underpin sustainable growth. Failing to fully harness this potential is a loss not only to women, but to the wider economy and society as a whole.

In 2025, the APPG's focus was shaped by Baroness Smith's maiden speech following the general election in 2024, which provided a timely opportunity to examine how women's economic participation may be affected by the Government's ambitions for growth, innovation, and digital transformation. With the government placing technology and skills at the centre of its strategy for economic renewal, it is essential that women are not only included in this transition but actively supported and protected throughout it. Encouragingly, there are signs of growing political will to address these issues. The introduction of the Employment Rights Act 2025, the ongoing parental leave review, and the establishment of a Women's Tech Taskforce all signal a clear commitment to improving outcomes for women in work and ensuring their contributions are properly recognised and valued.

These developments present a significant opportunity to accelerate change, but they must be accompanied by sustained focus and collaboration across Parliament, business, and wider society.

Over the past year, the APPG has sought to bring together diverse voices to shape this debate, highlighting the reforms needed not only to increase women's participation in the labour market, but also to improve retention, progression, and long-term career success. While our core sessions examined the impact of AI, skills, and technology on women's working lives, we also explored broader cultural and structural barriers through additional sessions on women in public life and the challenges facing ethnic minority women seeking to enter politics.

We are grateful to the parliamentarians, businesses, and civil society organisations who have engaged with our work, as well as our sponsors, whose support enables this APPG to continue to thrive. Looking ahead, we remain committed to championing the policies and workplace reforms necessary to ensure women are at the heart of the future economy and that workplaces across the UK enable women to thrive.

On behalf of the APPG, I would like to thank Catherine Fookes MP for her leadership of the APPG and for the significant contribution she made during her time as Co-Chair, prior to her appointment as Parliamentary Private Secretary. I am grateful for Catherine's work and look forward to working with Sarah Russell MP who is taking over from her as Co-Chair. Together, we look forward to continuing the APPG's work to ensure women are central to the future economy and fully supported to succeed at every stage of their working lives.

Baroness Karren Brady

Co-Chair, Women and Work APPG



Baroness Karren Brady
Co-Chair
Women and Work APPG



Sarah Russell
MP for Congleton
Co-Chair
Women and Work APPG

Recommendations



The APPG's recommendations for 2025 are based upon the findings from this year's programme.

All the sessions, from STEM skills and engineering to entrepreneurship, industry workplaces, and women's experiences in public life, ended with similar conclusions that women's full participation in the modern economy depends on building a skills system that includes them, workplaces that retain them, and an economic environment that enables them to innovate and lead.

The following recommendations are structured around three targeted pillars reflecting those priorities. They set out practical, evidence-based actions the government, industry, and wider society can take to ensure women are not left behind.

Policy priority 1: Build a gender-inclusive skills pipeline for the future economy to ensure women can access and progress through the skills pathways needed for AI, digital, engineering, and growth sectors.

To achieve this, the APPG recommends the Government:

-  Create a Women's Skills Plan aligned with the Post-16 Skills White Paper, setting clear targets for women in STEM.
-  Fund early intervention programmes so girls have regular access to female role models, mentoring, and hands-on STEM experiences from primary school onwards.



Policy priority 2: Make growth industries genuinely accessible and safe for women by removing the practical and cultural barriers that stop women entering or staying in construction, engineering, manufacturing, and other growth sectors.

The APPG recommends:



Updating workplace regulations to require sanitary provision, breastfeeding/expressing rooms, safe changing spaces, and well-fitted PPE in all site-based industries.



Embed gender inclusion standards into public procurement, so any company winning a government infrastructure or energy contract must demonstrate inclusive facilities and practices.



Introduce independent reporting mechanisms for workplace harassment, with clear employer accountability standards. Research from Women in Football shows that 26.9% of women do not report abuse or discrimination due to fear of career impact, 34% lack trust in the process or those handling the case and 36% believe that nothing will be done. Establishing safe, independent channels is essential to tackle this underreporting and ensure that women can work without fear of harassment or retaliation.

Policy priority 3: Unlock women's economic participation through fair investment and safe digital environments to ensure women can start businesses, lead in innovation, and participate confidently in public and digital life.

The APPG recommends:



Mandating gender-segmented investment reporting across banks, VCs and angel networks to expose biases in women's access to capital.



Embed childcare and parental provision in start-up loans, scale-up grants and entrepreneurial programmes.



Strengthen online safety for women, including enforced takedown deadlines, mandatory identity verification options, and ring-fenced platform fines for survivor support. Data from Women in Football shows that 76% of women report that the levels of discrimination they have witnessed online have either increased or stayed the same. The impact is even more acute for women from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds, 81% of whom report that online discrimination has remained the same or worsened. These figures highlight the urgent need to protect women online and ensure platforms are held accountable.

Empowering Women in STEM: Skills for the Future (May 2025)



Key 3 Findings:

1. Early exposure and role models are essential to attracting girls into STEM.

Participants emphasised the need for stronger early engagement in schools, supported by visible female role models and practical guidance on the wide range of careers STEM subjects can lead to. Without this, girls are less likely to pursue or persist in these fields.

2. Systemic reform is needed to support women's retention and progression.

Women continue to face structural barriers, that span from exclusionary workplace cultures to inadequate support systems, that prevent them from progressing in STEM careers. The discussion underscored that lasting change requires institutional reform, not greater individual resilience.

3. Workplace culture and harassment remain major barriers.

Persistent issues of sexual harassment and hostile environments continue to drive women out of the sector. Participants called for independent reporting mechanisms, leadership accountability, and zero-tolerance policies to ensure safety and inclusion at every career stage.

Summary of the session:

The session highlighted the ongoing gap between women's growing participation in STEM education and their unequal employment outcomes. Speakers emphasised the need for strong role models, mentorship, and sponsorship, alongside systemic reforms to workplace cultures, given persistent barriers such as exclusionary environments and sexual harassment. Contributors also stressed the importance of embedding women in the Government's emerging skills strategy, and the session closed with a call for a dedicated, women-focused approach to STEM within the UK's future Industrial Strategy.

Speakers:

Sonya Barlow

Award Winning Entrepreneur, Broadcaster and Author

Shraddha Kaul

Director of Growth and External Affairs, Progress Together

Summary of the minutes:

Our first session on 'Empowering Women in STEM: Skills for the Future' was opened by APPG Co-Chair Catherine Fookes MP, who noted that while more women are now studying STEM subjects, this is not yet reflected in comparable employment outcomes.

Keynote speaker Sonya Barlow (Award Winning Entrepreneur, Broadcaster and Author) shared her personal journey, reflecting on the lack of role models for girls and the limited awareness of the career opportunities STEM subjects can open. She emphasised the importance of mentorship and targeted workplace support, noting that many women leave the career ladder due to insufficient systems that enable progression.

Our second keynote speaker, Shraddha Kaul (Director of Growth and External Affairs, Progress Together) highlighted the opportunities and risks posed by AI for the STEM workforce, warning that an "opportunity gap" persists and only a small proportion of organisations have successfully scaled AI. She underlined sponsorship as a powerful tool to actively open doors for women, stressing the need to address systemic barriers and unconscious bias.

The discussion raised several critical issues: Prerana Issar of Sainsbury's highlighted the scale of STEM-related opportunities in retail, which employs four million people in the UK, and questioned how women would feed into the Government's skills strategy. Engineer Lydia Marquez drew attention to the gender imbalance in engineering courses, noting that the competitive and exclusionary culture of STEM can deter girls, particularly given the lack of visible role models. Dr Nina Burrowes of The Consent Collective raised the impact of sexual harassment on women's retention in STEM, while other contributors warned against systems that place the burden on women to self-advocate rather than reforming workplace structures.

International perspectives were also shared, with examples such as Saudi Arabia's inclusion of AI in its national curriculum, and participants called for stronger employer action to showcase positive practice and competitive salaries in STEM roles.

Catherine closed the session by welcoming the Government's wider commitment to halving violence against women and girls and called for a dedicated skills strategy to ensure women are central to the future of STEM.

Following the meeting, the Department for Education confirmed that it is developing a White Paper on the post-16 skills system, to be linked with the forthcoming Industrial Strategy.

Entrepreneurship and Investment: Breaking Barriers for Female Founders (June 2025)

Key 3 Findings:

1. Women entrepreneurs continue to face structural and cultural barriers to accessing capital.

Despite strong evidence that female-led businesses deliver higher returns, investment in women-founded teams has declined. Only 15% of investment committee members are women, reflecting deep-rooted biases in financial decision-making. Participants agreed that gender equity in finance must be treated as an economic imperative, not just a social goal.

2. Childcare, unpaid care work, and pay inequality continue to constrain women's entrepreneurial potential.

Participants emphasised that the UK's high childcare costs and lack of tailored support limit women's ability to start and grow businesses. Many female entrepreneurs underpay themselves or forego benefits such as maternity pay, underlining the need for integrated childcare support and fairer financial safety nets within entrepreneurial schemes.

3. The definition of entrepreneurship must broaden beyond the "Silicon Valley" model.

Speakers called for a more inclusive understanding of entrepreneurship that recognises social enterprises, small-scale ventures, and diverse motivations for business creation. Embedding resilience and wellbeing into support structures was seen as vital to sustaining women in entrepreneurship and addressing the mental health pressures of business ownership.

Summary of the session:

The session highlighted the widening gap in funding for women-led businesses, with all-female founding teams receiving just 1.8% of UK venture capital in early 2024. Speakers emphasised that despite evidence of strong returns from female-led enterprises, structural bias, limited representation on investment committees, and a lack of transparent data continue to constrain women's access to capital. The discussion explored how visibility, inclusive investment practices, and targeted policy interventions are essential to unlocking funding for women founders and enabling them to participate fully in the UK's growth economy.



Speakers:

Debbie Woskew OBE

Co-Chair, Invest in Women Taskforce

Jill Pay

Chair, The Gender Index

Stephen Welton CBE

Chair of Board, British Business Bank

Professor Ute Stephan

Professor of Entrepreneurship, King's College London

Overview of the meeting:

The session on Entrepreneurship and Breaking Barriers was opened by APPG Co-Chair Catherine Fookes MP, who highlighted the scale of the challenges facing women entrepreneurs, including lengthy funding applications and declining investment in women-founded businesses.

Debbie Woskew OBE, Co-Chair of the Invest in Women Taskforce, argued that despite evidence that female-led businesses deliver stronger returns, women continue to face declining access to capital. She pointed to the underrepresentation of women on investment committees and stressed the importance of viewing gender equity as an economic opportunity, not only a social good. Debbie welcomed Barclays' leadership but urged other banks and financial institutions to follow suit.

Professor Ute Stephan explored systemic barriers, from entrenched perceptions of entrepreneurship as male-dominated to the impact of childcare and eldercare responsibilities. She called for reforms such as expanding start-up loan schemes, embedding childcare support in growth programmes, and continuing Social Investment Tax Relief. She also emphasised the need for a broader and more inclusive definition of entrepreneurship, warning against adopting a one-size-fits-all "Silicon Valley" model.

Teresa Boughey focused on scaling female-led businesses, highlighting the influence of networks and biases on investment decisions. She argued that while mentoring is important, educating investors is critical, and called for reshaping the business environment so that women are not expected to rely solely on resilience.

The discussion covered a wide range of issues, including the impact of childcare costs and maternity provisions, the importance of disaggregated data, and international comparisons such as the European Investment Bank's dedicated funding streams. Speakers also drew attention to the exclusionary culture that still persists in business, with examples of women being turned away from professional events.

A recurring theme was the need for better access to information and resources. Attendees suggested a centralised hub to signpost funding and support opportunities, alongside reforms to create more inclusive workplaces and financial systems.

Catherine closed the session by noting the consistent challenges women face in accessing capital and support, and the importance of building stronger pipelines for female entrepreneurship.

Making Industry Work for Women (July 2025)

Key 3 Findings:

1. Workplace design and facilities remain fundamental barriers to inclusion.

Women in construction and other site-based industries continue to face inadequate facilities, including limited access to sanitary products, breastfeeding spaces, and appropriate changing areas. These basic shortcomings contribute to feelings of exclusion and hinder retention.

2. Poor work-life balance and childcare challenges are driving women out of industry roles.

Survey findings from the Building Balance campaign revealed that half of women in construction have considered leaving the sector due to poor work-life balance, with childcare costs and limited flexibility cited as key barriers. Greater flexibility and team-based support were identified as critical to improving retention and wellbeing.

3. Harassment, exclusion, and ill-fitting equipment continue to undermine progress.

Persistent issues, including harassment, lack of appropriate PPE, and hostile workplace cultures, continue to push women out of technical fields at twice the rate of men. Data-led tools, such as benchmarking dashboards developed by Speak Out Revolution, were highlighted as valuable mechanisms for tracking inclusion and holding employers accountable.

Summary of the session:

The session examined the practical barriers women face in construction, infrastructure and other non-office workplaces, ultimately a high proportion of the sectors central to the Government's growth and housing ambitions. Speakers highlighted that inadequate sanitary provision, lack of private spaces for breastfeeding or expressing milk, and poorly designed site facilities continue to undermine women's participation, wellbeing, and retention. The discussion emphasised the need for employers, unions and policymakers to modernise workplace design and standards so women can contribute fully to major national infrastructure goals without facing environments that were never built with them in mind.

Speakers:

Helen James

Associate at JLL and Committee Member of Women in Property South West

Barbara Ruffett

Associate Director of Assystem

Marie Hemingway

Founder and CTO of Speak Out Revolution



Overview of the meeting:

Overview of the meeting: The session on Making Industry Work for Women was opened by APPG Co-Chair Catherine Fookes MP, who highlighted the everyday challenges faced by women in construction and other site-based roles, from inadequate menstrual and breastfeeding facilities to isolation in male-dominated environments.

Helen James from JLL and Women in Property South West presented findings from the 2023 Building Balance campaign, which explored diversity and inclusion in construction. The survey revealed that poor work-life balance drives half of women to consider leaving the industry, while childcare costs and availability create significant barriers to retention. Greater flexibility and team-based support were identified as key to improving wellbeing.

Barbara Ruffett of Assystem shared her two decades of experience in construction, reflecting on exclusion, lack of facilities, and limited advancement opportunities. She described her efforts to improve parental leave policies, introduce a "buddy system" for returning mothers, and create women's networks to support career progression, emphasizing the importance of building workplaces where women feel they belong.

Marie Hemingway of Speak Out Revolution highlighted persistent challenges in engineering, including harassment, ill-fitting PPE, and poor workplace culture. She outlined the Liberating Campaign, which found women leave technical fields at twice the rate of men, often in their late 30s and 40s, and described the organisation's data-led benchmarking dashboard for improving inclusion in partnership with the Women's Engineering Society.

During the discussion, participants explored leveraging government infrastructure projects to enforce diversity standards, the risk of AI reinforcing bias in recruitment, mandatory reporting of inclusion metrics, and cross-industry collaboration to share best practices.

Catherine closed the session by stressing that meaningful change requires moving beyond policy statements to listening to women's lived experiences and implementing evidence-based, accountable systems to create safe and inclusive workplaces.

AI and the Gender Divide: Risk, Representation and Opportunity (November 2025)

Key 3 Findings:

1. Women face disproportionate risks from AI due to underrepresentation and sectoral vulnerability.

Speakers highlighted that women remain significantly underrepresented in tech, particularly in AI design roles, while being overrepresented in sectors such as administration. This combination leaves women with little influence over AI systems that may ultimately reshape or replace their jobs.

2. AI is already reproducing and amplifying gender bias, with inadequate safeguards in place.

Examples such as the downgrading of women's LinkedIn posts, Amazon's biased recruitment tool, and wider concerns about large language models demonstrate that AI is learning from and reinforcing existing inequalities. Without diverse training data, robust guardrails, and stronger oversight, these biases risk becoming embedded at scale.

3. Current policy and workplace structures are failing to protect women from AI-driven inequalities.

Participants warned that women, particularly those over 55, are often excluded from digital skills training, making them highly vulnerable to redundancy as AI reshapes work. Concerns were also raised about public-sector reforms, the absence of AI considerations in upcoming gender pay gap action plans, and the risk of AI-powered productivity monitoring creating punitive workplace cultures.

Summary of the session:

The session explored how women are disproportionately affected by the first wave of AI-driven automation, particularly in sectors like administration, healthcare, education and social care. At the same time, women remain significantly underrepresented in AI design, development and leadership, increasing the risk of biased systems and unequal outcomes. The discussion focused on how to ensure women are both protected from the risks of automation and meaningfully represented in shaping the technologies that will define the future of work.

Speakers:

Liisa Antola

Manager, DEI & Customer Outcomes at the ABI

Dr Sanchari Roy

Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Exeter Business School

Penny East

CEO of the Fawcett Society

Overview of the meeting:

Dr Lauren Sullivan MP opened the session by stressing both the opportunities and risks AI presents for women, noting reports of gender bias on platforms such as LinkedIn and arguing that without strong guardrails AI could deepen existing inequalities. She then introduced Liisa Antola from the ABI. Liisa emphasised the importance of early exposure to STEM, investment in reskilling and upskilling, and inclusive workplace cultures so that women who enter tech are supported to stay. She highlighted the need for training to be accessible and offered equitably, including for those with caring responsibilities, and noted the relevance of this for Government skills reforms.

She also referenced the ABI's Allyship Awareness programme and good-practice guidance on responsible AI, stressing that diversity in training data and product design is essential if AI is to serve users fairly.

Dr Sullivan then welcomed Dr Sanchari Roy from the University of Exeter, who outlined how AI systems can replicate gender bias and warned that women in mid-level administrative roles may be especially vulnerable to displacement. She noted that while AI has the potential to complement women's work, it could also exacerbate inequalities without deliberate design choices. Dr Roy described her efforts to widen participation among young women in economics and stressed the need for better data to understand which interventions genuinely shift outcomes.

Penny East, CEO of the Fawcett Society, highlighted the persistence of the gender pay gap and warned that AI is already shaping recruitment and public-sector reform in ways that may disadvantage women, particularly those over 55 who are often excluded from digital training. She expressed concern that forthcoming gender pay gap action plans omit any reference to AI, calling this a missed opportunity to build protections into emerging policy.

In the discussion that followed, MPs and participants raised concerns about the speed of technological change, the risk of AI amplifying existing biases in hiring and evaluation, and the need for legislation and trade unions to keep pace with developments. Contributions also highlighted the lack of relatable female role models in tech and the challenges posed by biased training data in large language models. Dr Sullivan closed the session by underscoring the importance of equipping unions, employers, and policymakers with the knowledge needed to ensure AI supports, rather than sidelines, women in the workplace.



Celebrating International Women in Engineering Day (June 2025). Engineering the Future: Women Leading STEM

International Women in Engineering Day was delivered in partnership with Assystem, one of the APPG's sponsors, to examine women's underrepresentation in engineering and the opportunities created by the UK's clean energy transition.

This theme was particularly significant because increasing female participation in engineering is not only a matter of equality, but also a strategic workforce priority.

The UK's transition to clean, secure energy systems will require rapid expansion in engineering capacity, from nuclear to renewables, grid modernisation, and advanced digital systems, and current skills shortages threaten to constrain progress.

By highlighting pathways for women to enter and thrive in engineering careers, the event underscored how diversifying the talent pipeline strengthens national energy resilience and accelerates delivery of key infrastructure projects.

Key 3 Findings:

1. Women face disproportionate risks from AI due to underrepresentation and sectoral vulnerability.

Speakers underscored that women's full participation in science, engineering, and technology is essential for driving national productivity and ensuring the UK's clean energy transition is both inclusive and effective. Achieving parity is not only a matter of fairness but a strategic economic priority.

2. Early education and visible role models are key to inspiring future generations.

Panellists agreed that increasing girls' participation in physics and maths requires inclusive teaching, accessible curricula, and greater visibility of women succeeding in STEM. Encouraging engagement at school level is critical to doubling the number of women entering engineering degrees.

3. Cultural and structural reform is needed to advance women's leadership.

Despite growing awareness, women in STEM continue to face barriers to progression. Sponsorship by senior leaders, targeted retraining opportunities, and inclusive workplace policies were identified as essential to building gender-balanced leadership pipelines, particularly in high-growth sectors like nuclear energy.



Summary of the session:

The Engineering the Future: Women Leading STEM event, held in partnership with Assystem for International Women in Engineering Day, focused on the opportunities created by the UK's transition to clean energy and major infrastructure projects. Speakers highlighted the urgent need to increase the number of girls studying Physics and Maths at A-level, which are critical gateways to engineering degrees, and to ensure women can progress into leadership roles, particularly in the nuclear sector. The session explored practical actions to break long-standing cycles of underrepresentation and to secure a 50/50 stake for women in the technical and leadership roles central to the UK's low-carbon future.

Overview of the meeting:

To mark International Women in Engineering Day, the APPG partnered with Assystem, one of the Group's sponsors, to host Engineering the Future: Women Leading STEM in Parliament. The event brought together industry leaders, parliamentarians, and experts to explore how to break down barriers for women in STEM and ensure women play a central role in the UK's clean energy and infrastructure transition.

The event opened with remarks from Simon Barber, Assystem UK Managing Director, who set out Assystem's commitment to achieving gender parity in STEM, particularly as new opportunities are created through the low-carbon energy transition. Mims Davies MP, Shadow Minister for Women and Work, welcomed attendees on behalf of the APPG and underlined the importance of women's leadership across STEM to the UK's economic growth.

Keynote speaker Chi Onwurah MP, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, reflected on her own journey into engineering and spoke of the urgent need to address systemic barriers that continue to deter women from entering and staying in the field. She highlighted that gender equality in STEM is not only a matter of fairness but also of unlocking the UK's full innovation potential.

The first panel, Breaking Stereotypes: Inspiring Girls to Pursue Physics and Maths, chaired by Dr Alice Bunn, CEO of IMechE, explored how to encourage more girls to study STEM subjects at A-level. Speakers including Trudy Harrison, Professor Priti Parikh, Dr Hilary Leever, Hannah Thompson, and Catherine Atkinson MP emphasised the importance of relatable role models, inclusive teaching practices, and practical career guidance. The panel called for action to double the number of women embarking on engineering degrees by making physics and maths more accessible, relevant, and engaging.

The second panel, Zooming In: The Nuclear Industry and Advancing Women's Leadership, chaired by Virginia Crosbie, highlighted how the nuclear sector can lead the way in advancing gender parity. Speakers including Tilly Spencer, Leanne Coleman, Mark Rouse, Lynne Matthews, and Katie Jarman reflected on their own leadership journeys, the barriers they faced, and the need for targeted support to open mid-career and retraining routes for women. Sponsorship by senior leaders, structural workplace reforms, and cultural change were identified as critical to enabling women to progress into senior roles across the nuclear industry.

Across both panels, speakers concluded by setting out clear calls to action, from industry commitments to reshape workplace cultures, to policy reforms that support women through education, retraining, and leadership progression.

Closing remarks were delivered by Simon Barber, who thanked speakers and attendees and reiterated Assystem's commitment to gender parity in STEM. The event concluded with a networking reception, offering an opportunity to continue discussions on how to achieve a 50/50 stake for women in the workforce of the future.

Speakers

Simon Barber

Assystem UK Managing Director

Mims Davies MP

Shadow Minister for Women and Member of the APPG on Women and Work

Dame Chi Onwurah MP

Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West
Chair of Science and Technology Committee

Chaired by Dr Alice Bunn

CEO, IMechE

Trudy Harrison

Former Minister and nuclear energy advocate

Professor Priti Parikh

Professor of Infrastructure Engineering and International Development, UCL

Dr Hilary Leever

Chief Executive, Engineering UK

Hannah Thompson

Business Unit Director, Assystem

Catherine Atkinson MP

Derby North

Tilly Spencer

Technical Director Sizewell C

Leanne Coleman

Business Unit Director, Assystem

Mark Rouse

Nuclear Sector Skills Team Director and Co-chairman

Lynne Matthews

Programme Director of Destination Nuclear

Katie Jarman

Assistant Chief Engineer, Rolls-Royce



Women in the Public Eye (September 2025)

Key 3 Findings:

1. Gendered abuse poses a growing threat to women's participation in public life.

Speakers highlighted that rising levels of online and offline abuse against women in politics, media, business, and sport are not only personal attacks but systemic efforts to silence women's voices. This trend undermines democracy, equality, and social progress, demanding urgent and coordinated action.

2. Stronger regulation and platform accountability are urgently needed.

Participants called for robust enforcement of the Online Safety Act, mandatory user verification options, and the redirection of fines from social media companies into survivor support services. Recognising misogyny as a hate crime and introducing clearer legal redress mechanisms were seen as key steps toward ensuring accountability and deterrence.

3. Cultural change and collective action are essential to creating safer spaces.

Beyond legal reform, speakers emphasised the importance of shifting societal attitudes through early education, improved media standards, and greater representation of women in leadership roles. A victim-centred approach, supported by cross-sector collaboration, was identified as critical to building safer and more inclusive environments for women in public life.



Summary of the session:

The session examined the rising levels of harassment, hostility and safety threats faced by women in politics, business and the media. Speakers highlighted how online abuse, discriminatory cultures and aggressive media narratives disproportionately harm women, deterring them from entering public roles or forcing them out of them. The discussion focused on how societal norms, platform behaviours and workplace practices contribute to gendered abuse, and explored the policy, regulatory and organisational reforms needed to protect and support women in public life.

Overview of the meeting:

The session on Women in the Public Eye was a timely session, examining how societal norms, media framing, and platform dynamics contribute to gendered abuse, and explore urgent solutions, from policy reform and platform accountability to workplace protections and support mechanisms, to safeguard women in work and public life.

It was chaired Baroness Karren Brady, who described the rising levels of abuse faced by women across politics, business, media and sport as a deeply concerning trend that threatens democracy and society as a whole. She stressed the urgent need for reform to ensure women can step into public roles and thrive.

APPG Co-Chair Catherine Fookes MP reflected on her own experience of harassment, stressing that such abuse is intended to silence women and must not be allowed to succeed. Kim Leadbeater MP spoke movingly about the murder of her sister Jo Cox and her own experience of intimidation during her by-election, highlighting the wider rise of hostility facing women in public service and the urgent need to restore civility in public life.

The panel also heard from Christine Flack, who gave a powerful account of the devastating impact of online and media abuse on her daughter, the late Caroline Flack. She described the ongoing failure of both the press and social media platforms to take responsibility for the harm caused. Heather Smith, CEO of AXA Health, highlighted rising levels of mental health claims among women and research showing that sexist abuse is driving female athletes away from sport. Leomie Anderson shared her perspective as a model and presenter, describing the worsening climate of online misogyny, particularly for young Black women, and the failure of platforms to enforce their own standards.

Discussion focused on the responsibility of both media and social media platforms, with calls for stronger regulation, industry standards, and accountability under the Online Safety Act. Participants debated reforms including recognising misogyny as a hate crime, redirecting fines levied on platforms into survivor support services, and requiring identity verification for social media users. Others stressed the need for cultural change, early education, and greater representation of women in leadership roles across technology and finance.

Attendees from across sectors, including sport, law, academia, and business, emphasised the importance of coordinated action. They also highlighted the urgent need for victim-centred approaches to online abuse, stronger international cooperation on regulation, and the creation of safe spaces for women in public life.

Closing reflections centred on resilience and the importance of collective action. Speakers urged against despair and emphasised the need to build momentum for change.

Speakers

Kim Leadbeater MP

Spenn Valley

Christine Flack

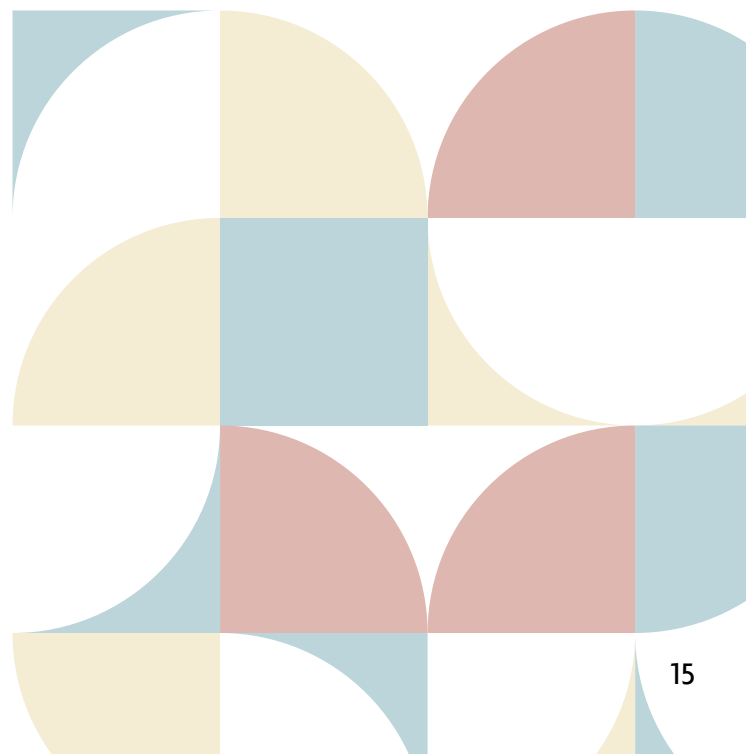
Campaigner and Mother of Caroline Flack

Heather Smith

CEO of AXA Health

Leomie Anderson

Model, Television Presenter, and Activist



Connect and Reflect: Empowering Ethnic Minority Women in Politics (October 2025)

Key 3 Findings:

1. Visibility, mentorship, and representation are vital to participation in public life.

Speakers emphasised that seeing women of colour in political and leadership roles can have a transformative impact, inspiring others to believe they belong in those spaces. Mentorship and community support were highlighted as essential in building confidence and creating pathways into politics for underrepresented women.

2. Structural and cultural barriers continue to limit inclusion in political institutions.

Contributors reflected on the enduring lack of diversity across Parliament and the challenges faced by women from ethnic minority and working-class backgrounds. Hidden hierarchies, exclusionary traditions, and discriminatory language were cited as key obstacles that perpetuate inequality and fatigue among those who constantly have to “stand out.”

3. Education and cultural change are central to long-term progress.

Speakers stressed that improving representation in politics must go hand in hand with broader societal change. Inclusive education, such as integrating Black British history into school curriculums was identified as critical to fostering understanding, belonging, and ambition from an early age. Empowering ethnic minority women in politics requires tackling systemic inequalities across both the education system and the workplace.

Summary of the session:

The joint Women and Work APPG / 50:50 Parliament session, held during Black History Month, focused on empowering ethnic minority women to pursue and thrive in political roles. Providing a safe and inclusive space, the discussion explored the lived experiences of women of colour in public life, highlighting the structural and cultural barriers they face as well as the resilience required to navigate political institutions. Panellists shared insights into the intersection of race and gender in elected office, aiming to inspire and support more ethnic minority women to step forward and lead.



Overview of the meeting:

This collaborative session with 50:50 Parliament was opened by Kate Osamor MP, who reflected on the barriers that persist within politics and stressed the importance of visibility, mentorship, and collective action to ensure women from all backgrounds can participate fully in public life.

Natasha Irons MP spoke next, sharing her personal journey into politics. She reflected that she, like many others, did not grow up in a family where entering politics was expected. Seeing a woman MP of mixed heritage gave her “permission” to believe that she too could belong in political spaces. Natasha described how she joined the Labour Party, became a councillor, and later an MP. She encouraged attendees to “put themselves out there,” support colleagues, and have the courage to step outside their comfort zones, noting that “confidence builds competence.”

Dame Chi Onwurah MP reflected on her fifteen years in Parliament, acknowledging that while progress had been made, “the job is never done.” Before entering politics, she worked as a chartered electrical engineer, a profession where she was often the only woman, working-class person, or person of colour in the room. She shared that she had expected a lack of diversity in engineering but had not anticipated how tiring it would be to constantly stand out. She recalled being asked whether “Newcastle was ready for a Black MP” and whether she would “only represent Black people.” Dame Chi noted that while representation matters, what mattered most to her constituents was that she came from Newcastle. She thanked Harriet Harman for championing all-women shortlists, which had enabled many women, including herself, to enter Parliament. She concluded by emphasising that political language which marginalises or “others” people of colour creates real barriers to participation and must be challenged.

Baroness Young of Hornsey described the House of Lords as a “strange body” with hidden rules, traditions, and cultural codes that can alienate those from non-traditional backgrounds. She admitted that, had she known the extent of these challenges, she might have thought twice before joining. However, she later realised that many others were also masking their insecurities behind a façade of confidence. Baroness Young shared her personal story of growing up in care and feeling a lack of confidence that she initially attributed to that experience. Despite not achieving the grades to attend university immediately, she entered academia and discovered new routes into public life. She stressed that one does not need to be in Parliament to be political or make change, observing that her political education began as a child, when there were few visible Black Britons and little discussion of racism. Her “call to arms,” she said, was the pursuit of knowledge.

Atonte Semira highlighted the importance of representation at all levels of government, from local councils to Parliament, if real progress is to be achieved. She explained how 50:50 Parliament exists to support women through that journey, creating a sense of community and collective strength. “Coming together,” she said, “is how we help Black women into politics.”

Elisha Soanes, educator and diversity advocate, spoke about the importance of “holding space” for Black women and embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in all areas of life beyond the workplace. She emphasised the power of storytelling in driving change and shared her own experience of rarely seeing people who looked like her in senior roles. Only 0.7% of top managerial positions, she noted, are held by Black individuals, and as recently as 2020, the UK’s largest exam board did not feature any Black authors on its curriculum. With 75% of Black women reporting experiences of racism in the workplace, she argued that it is vital to challenge the status quo. She called for a broader and more accurate teaching of Black history, pointing out that schools often focus solely on the slave trade and civil rights, omitting Black Britons’ contributions to events such as the Second World War. Elisha described her work integrating Black history into national and international curricula, helping students build confidence, belonging, and ambition.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the need for representation, education, and cultural change. Speakers agreed that improving diversity in politics and public life must go hand in hand with tackling systemic barriers in education and the workplace. The importance of mentorship, inclusive language, and collective empowerment was emphasised throughout.

Kate closed the session by reaffirming the importance of visibility, solidarity, and the ongoing effort to create a political culture where women from all ethnic backgrounds can thrive.



Case study

The ABI Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Blueprint

As part of the APPG's commitment to highlighting and championing good practice, this report is proud to feature the [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\) Blueprint*](#) from the ABI. The Blueprint provides a strong example of how an industry can take strategic, evidence based action to improve workplace equality and inclusion.

As a longstanding sponsor of the Women and Work APPG, the ABI has played a meaningful role in advancing this agenda. Its DEI Blueprint demonstrates how sector wide leadership can move beyond individual initiatives to create sustained, collective change.

By sharing this Blueprint, the APPG aims to spotlight an effective, scalable model that other sectors can learn from, adapt and implement to strengthen outcomes for women and under represented groups across the economy.

An award winning, evidence based approach

The award winning ABI DEI Blueprint is a multi-year, industry wide strategy designed to make the UK insurance and long-term savings sector the most diverse, equitable and inclusive in the economy. It is underpinned by evidence, data collection and ongoing evaluation, ensuring that action is informed by insight rather than assumption.

The Blueprint is structured around three interconnected themes:

Attract – broadening access to the industry and removing barriers to entry

Grow – ensuring individuals can develop, progress and thrive

Advance – measuring progress, sharing learning and embedding accountability

A defining feature of the Blueprint is its intersectional, holistic approach. It recognises that individuals experience the workplace in different ways depending on multiple, overlapping characteristics and lived experiences. Rather than treating inclusion as a series of disconnected initiatives, the Blueprint seeks to embed DEI across the employee lifecycle and across protected and non protected characteristics.

Transparency, accountability and shared learning

Central to the Blueprint is a commitment to transparency and accountability. Progress against the Blueprint is tracked through annual industry data collection, allowing the ABI and its members to understand where change is happening and where further action is needed.

To support this, the ABI has established a DEI Hub, where stakeholders can access the Blueprint alongside regular progress updates. These updates reinforce the ABI's commitment to being held to account and include practical case studies from firms across the sector, enabling shared learning and continuous improvement.

This open, collaborative approach reflects the strong business case for DEI, linking inclusive cultures to improved innovation, performance and long term sustainability.

Turning strategy into practice through Allyship Awareness training

Alongside structural change, the Blueprint's work programme focuses on behaviours and culture. A key example is the ABI's industry led Allyship Awareness training, developed to provide practical guidance on how individuals can be effective allies in the workplace.

The training supports participants to better understand bias, practise active listening, and promote inclusive behaviours. Designed to be flexible, it can complement existing organisational DEI initiatives and reach audiences across different roles and levels of seniority.

By leading this work at an industry level, the ABI helps shift responsibility away from individuals having to self advocate and towards reforming workplace structures and cultures. This is particularly relevant given wider APPG evidence on issues such as sexual harassment, bias and unequal power dynamics, which continue to affect women's retention and progression in many sectors.

This case study illustrates how coordinated, evidence based action can drive meaningful progress, and how industry bodies can play a vital role in creating fairer, more inclusive workplaces that work better for everyone.

The **ABI**
Together Driving Change

Conclusion

Over the past calendar year, the Women and Work APPG has continued to explore the structural, cultural, and technological barriers that limit women's full participation in the workplace. Through our programme of roundtables and panel discussions, we have brought together diverse voices to examine how gender, technology, and opportunity interact in a rapidly evolving UK economy.

Across every discussion, from STEM and entrepreneurship to industry and public life, a clear message emerged that progress relies on systemic reform rather than individual resilience. Real change depends on inclusive workplaces, policies grounded in women's lived experiences, and leadership that reflects the full diversity of society.

This year's focus on artificial intelligence and digital transformation has underscored the urgency of ensuring that women are not left behind as new technologies redefine the future of work. Representation in the development and governance of AI is essential, not only to prevent bias and exclusion, but to shape innovation that reflects the experiences and potential of the whole population.

The APPG's recommendations set out practical steps to achieve this, including a skills strategy that puts women at its centre, stronger investment pathways for female founders, more inclusive workplaces and industries, and protections that ensure women's safety both online and offline. Delivering these reforms will require cooperation across government, business, and civil society, supported by continued parliamentary scrutiny and engagement.

Looking ahead to 2026, the APPG remains committed to ensuring that women's voices are heard, their contributions valued, and their opportunities equal in the modern workplace. With Baroness Karren Brady and Sarah Russell MP at the helm, we will continue to drive progress toward a fairer and more inclusive economy where every woman can thrive.

