

Building Back Better: Securing the Future of Women's Employment

Annual Report 2021



women and work
all party parliamentary group

This report was researched by Connect and funded by American Express, Association of British Insurers, Barratt Developments, Montessori Group and Vodafone UK. 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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Foreword



Jess Phillips MP
Chair

Two years since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, our lives continue to be affected by it. Whether it's the way we work, the way we commute or live, we are existing in an everchanging situation requiring adaptability in every aspect. Given the Government's imperative about the need to 'build back better', as an APPG focussed on women and work, we have decided to focus our annual report on what needs to be done to ensure women's employment is at the core of rebuilding our economy and society, rather than an afterthought.

As we continue to tackle the virus and look to continue with our country's recovery, ensuring women are occupying a seat at the table is a priority. Economic policies alone will not lead to recovery; instead, we must recognise that the pandemic has had very real impacts on women's wellbeing, in particular in the workplace. This has led to clearer employee demands and the need for employers to invest in their workforce further and more transparently. Wellbeing within work life is now commonly seen as a minimum rather than an add on, so this report aims to bridge the gaps that exist between pre-covid and post-covid working life for women, with a particular focus on the post pandemic recovery.

We have also seen the jobs and skills landscape propel our workforce into the future. Now, it is essential that we ensure our workforce can keep up with the pace of change. Digital skills have become an essential requirement so ensuring that nobody is left behind is crucial to the Government's ambitions of 'Building Back Better'. We want to see women included in the conversation of 'Building Back Better', using this time to reflect on how we can ensure that a woman's place is in work and our policies, programmes and practices reflect that.

That said, a lot of great work is being done by many employers. For the final session of the year, we heard from industry representatives some of the best workplace policies that currently exist for women and have shared some of those examples in this report, with the hope that more businesses and industries look to adopting them.

We will continue to raise these issues with Government, engaging with stakeholders, listening to women and discovering and solving the problems that remain to tackle for women in work. We sincerely look forward to making progress on this important agenda in 2022.

Introduction

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.

In 2021, the Women and Work APPG's theme was **'Building Back Better: Securing the Future of Women's Employment'**. The Coronavirus pandemic exposed the fragility of our economy and brought to the fore problems surrounding women's employment which have persisted for years. Women were overrepresented in sectors that were shut down during the pandemic, with many being made redundant. At the same time, women often bore the weight of taking on additional caring responsibilities in the home. School and nursery closures added to childcare strains, while shielding and vulnerable relatives often needed extra support. Juggling work with these additional pressures had a real impact on women's working lives.

The unemployment problem that the Government faces is vast and without a gendered approach, investment in new jobs may not benefit women. Building on last year's work, this year's focus was on ensuring the Government's plans to 'Build Back Better' have women's employment at their core, and sought to address specific areas that need improvement.

The APPG held a series of online meetings examining the challenges women face in the post-covid workplace, sharing solutions and innovative new ways of working. One of the key findings from this year's work is that many of the recommendations apply not just to women but to many minority groups, and also extend to entire families and demonstrate the benefits of using a gendered lens to uncover new solutions to old problems.

From this work, we have produced a series of recommendations for Government and businesses to support women back into the workplace. While the pandemic has undeniably accelerated the shift to new practices in the workplace, including more hybrid and flexible working, it is now up to employers and Government to complete this transition.



Recommendations

1

Building on the progress made towards flexible working that has emerged during the pandemic, **the Government should include the right to request flexible working from 'day one' where possible within a future Employment Bill.**

2

To support and encourage this, **the Government should produce a toolkit for employers to support flexible working**, highlighting good practice and how the different forms of flexible working can operate in different industries.

3

The Government should also consult on making transparency over flexible working options a requirement of job advertisements, to remove barriers to entry that may be faced when applying to jobs.

4

The Government should increase spending on adult education, with a targeted focus on digital skills. This should be available to both those out of employment and in industries where upskilling is needed.

5

The Government should review SME grant funding based on gender and offer additional, targeted support and training to female entrepreneurs.

6

Industries that struggle with a reduced female talent pool at entry level should prioritise investment in **removing entry requirements, making those male dominated sectors degree agnostic.**

7

The Government should review the post-graduate visa length and employers' requirements to ensure that the UK is not losing talented young professionals, particularly young women.

8

The Government should consider developing a programme or communications campaign to link industry representatives with schools, particularly from those industries that are male dominated, to showcase career paths for young women.

Chapter 1

Post-Pandemic: the future of hybrid working for men, women and families.

The Women and Work APPG has long advocated for flexible working, given its importance in enabling women with the economic freedom to work around childcare or caring responsibilities. Flexible working has been thrust into the limelight following the shift towards working from home during the pandemic and whilst our last report focused on the potential of this, this year our discussions centred around how to make flexible working an effective futureproof reality.

Defining flexible working:

It is important to highlight that flexible working comes in many forms, it is not just working from home. Flexible working could be any of the following: **remote working, compressed hours, annualised hours, staggered hours, flexi- hours or even job-sharing.** For example, where previously women may choose to drop to part-time hours to manage caring responsibilities, with job-sharing or compressed hours, they could remain part-time but work around these responsibilities, thus not impacting their career development.

Flexible working: legislative demands

Since the pandemic, the return to the workplace has been gradual. Some remained out of work caring for children or relatives, others retrained to new industries as sectors became unstable, a few returned to full time and the majority entered a new form of hybrid or flexible working. Many, but crucially not all, employers have allowed staff to opt for 'hybrid' or flexible working patterns. According to research, 60% of the UK's adult population were still working from home in May 2021 and 26% of Brits plan to continue to work from home permanently or occasionally after lockdown (Finder, 2021). Societal norms have shifted significantly, seeing being able to work from home become an expectation rather than a luxury.

To support this shift, the Government has consulted on making flexible working a right from the first day of employment, expanding the existing legislation to capture more people into the policy and acting as an encouragement for employers to embrace new working patterns. Not only is this a welcome step in the right direction but a huge success for the APPG, who directly called for these measures in our 2020 annual report. Now we need to see this go further.

Flexible working should not just be a right for employees, but a statutory right for all workers, unless there is a genuine business need not to. Agency workers, part-time workers, and those on zero hours contracts, have been more likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic as opposed to those working full time. This group is disproportionately represented by women, with 38% of women in employment working part-time in 2020. There are a multitude of reasons for this, but for a vast number of women it comes down to having caring responsibilities.

The knock-on effect of this feeds into the gender seniority gap. When women choose to drop down to part-time or reduced hours to work around the requirements of childcare, their career progression slows. Currently, 58% of women work in entry level jobs and only 29% are at board level (ABI, 2021). Ensuring the right to request flexible working is an option for all workers will see women more likely to remain in the labour market through having children. Those who want to see career growth will no longer be held back by the restrictive 9-5 regime. Flexi-working therefore not only keeps women in the labour market but contributes to tackling the gender seniority gap.

As an APPG, we of course recognise that not all jobs can allow the flexibility above described, especially for people facing roles like hospitality and retail where women are overrepresented. In the UK, retail is the second largest sector for women's employment, accounting for 14% of all jobs held by women (House of Commons Library, 2021). Jobs such as retail do not have the options of flexibility, which are restricted by the requirement to be customer facing and by the set opening times of shops. Recognising that not all jobs can be flexible is equally important and the APPG therefore supports that flexible working should be an option 'where possible' in employment.

Significant progress on flexible working has been made in the past year, with the latest consultation on making the right to request flexible working a 'day one' right. The APPG wants to see future changes to flexible working included and enshrined within a future Employment Bill. The APPG wholeheartedly believes that flexible working should be a right for all workers to request from when they start in the role.

The impact on families, as well as women.

The APPG heard in discussions that these flexible working rights are likely to not just benefit women, but families, as a cultural shift has seen a new generation of men being more likely to be involved in childcare responsibilities than has previously been the case. During the first lockdown, women spent 55% more time than men on unpaid childcare. Though still unbalanced, this difference is smaller than before the pandemic, when women spent 99% more time on unpaid childcare than men (ONS, 2021). Whilst there is limited data available to measure the long-term effects on the balance of childcare responsibilities, the pandemic has seen more men opting to split childcaring responsibilities with a partner, since working from home allowed for this to be an option. This was echoed by those who attended our APPG meetings. Flexible working also crucially benefits those of all ages; many young people have equally taken on caring roles for family members and elderly relatives. By legislating for the right to request flexi-working from day one, the Government is not just supporting women, but families, as this would become an option for working fathers too.



Beyond legislative measures, nurturing cultural change.

Beyond legislative changes, additional measures should be implemented to support the changing attitudes towards flexible working. Where working from home or working compressed hours used to be a reward or 'luxury' for employees, it should be considered a genuine option when starting a new job. The balance of power between the employee and the employer has shifted as the rise in the number of employers offering flexible working as an option has seen flexible working become a cultural 'right' of employees. 60% of people said they want to continue with this degree of flexibility and if companies don't accommodate these needs, they will move on (APPG Women and Work, 2021). As attitudes change, it is important for businesses to reflect these to remain a desirable and competitive employer.

Redressing the balance of power between the employer and the employee from an offer, subject to terms, to a conversation will be crucial to negotiating the future of the work-life balance. Empowering employees to express their needs in the workplace and negotiate terms will be essential to the operation of this new way of working. The Government should play a role in encouraging and supporting that.

There is a cost of flexible working to an employer and progress can be limited by lack of trust. But making the shift will produce a return on investment over time. Nine in ten employees consider flexible working to be a key motivator to their productivity with 81% of those who have access to remote working believe it increases their productivity (The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2018). Increasing flexible working also helps employers to attract and retain better talent, reducing staff turnover and recruitment costs. Research also shows it leads to better employee motivation and increased productivity. The benefits of flexi-working for employers are there, but not necessarily visible, meaning better communicating the benefits, by sharing examples of firms that have made the transition successfully and producing a toolkit on how to effectively make the transition to a flexi-workforce.

Alongside this, there needs to be greater transparency over flexible working. Before employees enter into a contract, the options for hybrid working need to be clear. 70% of people worked remotely this year, but only 2 in 10 jobs reference flexible working in hiring posts (APPG Women and Work, 2021). For many with caring responsibilities, and women in particular, this lack of flexible option could turn people away from applying in the first place, both restricting options for workers and reducing the talent pool available to employers. In a 2019 survey on flexible working, 54% of individuals and 59% of businesses felt that improving the transparency of this information would ensure job applicants can make informed choices regarding employment (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021). The Government should therefore consider legislating to make it a statutory requirement for employers to say whether a job is open to flexible working in the advert, beginning with a consultation on this as a proposal.



Case study

Montessori Group - the future of hybrid working for men, women and families

“Working” should be seen as part of society’s infrastructure, a valuable contributor to its wellbeing if done properly. We should look holistically at the working environment for families as a unit not just individuals; consider an individual as a valuable contributor and not just a worker.

The ONS’s work “Families and the Labour Market, UK: 2019”, states that the rate of women entering the workforce has increased massively in the last 10 years. Between 2000 and 2019 employment rates increased more sharply for women with children than those without children and men with children. There are several reasons as to why this has happened.

However, there seems to be a “motherhood penalty”. The Centre for Progressive Policy’s (CPP) report “Women in the Labour Market”, published in October 2021, states that while maternal employment rates have risen, structural inequalities persist. Mums are more likely to be in part-time, precarious, and low-paid work with a variety of barriers that can impact their progression through their career.

During the pandemic, much was said of the impact on the family, predominantly working mums. Women were more likely than men to be furloughed or made redundant and were more likely to reduce their working hours or leave their jobs to take on home schooling and childcare. Looking forward, one transformational change has been the shift in focus to accessing quality childcare and early education, starting from birth to the mandatory school age, by all parents that want it. This is supported by the CPP report which states that “there is a strong link between the availability of childcare and women’s employment at the local level.” A number of recent research papers as well as surveys undertaken by organisations such as Pregnant Then Screwed and the Montessori Group found that parents struggle to find availability of early years services and for most parents, affordability is a barrier too.

According to CPP, “new analysis estimates that if women had access to adequate childcare services, and were able to work the hours they wanted, they would increase their earnings by between £7.6bn and £10.9bn per annum...generating up to £28.2bn in economic output”.

Presently, the system is incomplete and is failing parents across the board, with those in lower economic positions fairing worst. Both parents and children are the losers here. An e-petition requesting that an independent review of the early years operating model be undertaken was debated in September 2021. Whilst supported by cross-party MPS, the opportunity was lost by the government.

Case study (cont)

Montessori Group - the future of hybrid working for men, women and families

At Montessori Group, the following practices are in place to support families and women in the workplace.

- Since 2005 and the launch of our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), we have had “access” at the forefront of the student experience and continue to develop and innovate in response to changing needs. As such, every Montessori Group training course is through blended, connected, VLE-based learning - this is essential to our delivery commitment globally. Our students range from those straight out of school, further or higher education as well as those changing careers at a later stage along with educators working in practice. Most of the Early Years workforce is female. The flexibility allows families and working women to make the best choice for them.
- Through Montessori Group’s established bursary, we encourage everyone, including men, to enter the profession. A broad community of practitioners is most beneficial to the education of every child.
- Our free-access, well-established, Montessori Network provides families with free resources that can support a broad understanding of a child's education and provide inspiration for opportunities to nurture a love of learning and exploration at home. Our signposting enables families to have access to many resources that inspire innovative and creative ways in which families can support their children to be immersed in everyday activities and daily routines at home to support a love of learning and exploration.



ABI - How the #MakingFlexibleWork campaign is changing what 'good employment' looks like

Flexible working is key when looking to the future and thinking about 'good employment.' A new campaign, launched in April by the Association of British Insurers, aims to increase flexible working, unlock career opportunities for a wide range of people and narrow the gender seniority gap in insurance and long-term savings.

Earlier this year, the Association of British Insurers revealed data – gathered from its own members – showing that women make up 58% of new entrants to the insurance and long-term savings sector, but only 24% of those in executive teams. Its response? To launch a flexible working revolution in the form of a new campaign and charter for the industry, the first of its kind in UK financial services.

In the run up to International Women's Day in March 2021, several reports shone a light on some of the challenges faced by working women and how these have been exacerbated by the pandemic. In its own 2020 Annual Report, the Women and Work All Party Parliamentary Group highlighted that mothers were more likely to take on the bulk of home schooling and other childcare during lockdown, and those on the lowest incomes were more at risk of losing their jobs due to school closures. Considering this – alongside a lack of women on Boards and in other leadership roles – it is clear that the pace of change has been too slow. There is also a risk that we could even find ourselves going backwards.

Many ABI member firms are already leading the way in this space. For example, one of our members, Zurich, started advertising all jobs with 'part-time, job share or flexible working options' right next to the role title, resulting in double the number of both women and men applying for roles and the number of women securing senior roles increased by one third. The commitment to the Making Flexible Work Charter will enable the industry to attract and retain the very best talent while supporting more women to progress into senior roles, building on existing ABI research and industry initiatives that focussed on transparent parental pay and leave and returnships.

The last two years have completely upturned the way we think about work and how, where and when we work, and now is the time to redouble our efforts to create equality of opportunity in our sector. We can build back better by Making Flexible Work.

You can find out more about the Making Flexible Work campaign by visiting <https://www.abi.org.uk/flexible-working/>. If your organisation is interested in signing up to the campaign, please contact Stephanie.Kenyon@abi.org.uk.

In April 2021 – as many companies were starting to develop a longer-term approach to hybrid and flexible working – 27 firms signed up to be the first supporters of the ABI's Making Flexible Work campaign. In doing so, they've pledged to make three Making Flexible Work Charter commitments a reality within 12 months:

- Publishing details of their flexible working policy so that it is publicly available for employees and prospective candidates alike.
- Advertising the majority of roles as being open to flexible working, including part-time working (if appropriate) and / or as a job share if the role is full-time.
- Putting in place processes and guidance to support and promote different forms of flexible working, including job sharing.

Chapter 2

Upskilling women for the fourth industrial revolution.

A huge part of modern society and the workplace post-pandemic relies on technology. It is entwined into our personal and professional lives, required in every aspect of our lives from working from home on a laptop, to getting a virtual GP appointment, to programming machinery, or simply being able to search for a job online. Technology has become a crucial part of how we work and function in society. So, why do 52% of the working age population have no digital skills (Future Dot Now, 2021)?

The digital skills gap

The pandemic projected the issue of digital exclusion to the forefront of the agenda, as suddenly people became locked out of their own jobs as a result of being unable to access or operate technology effectively. During the pandemic, one and a half million more adults went online, and workplaces were rapidly modernised with 82% of today's jobs requiring digital skills (World Skills UK, 2021).

Lack of digital skills is particularly a barrier to women since of those with zero basic digital skills, 61% are women (Lloyds, 2018). When asked what the easiest way would be to receive digital skills support, over half (57%) said through their employer (Lloyds, 2018). Despite this, UK workers have some of the fewest opportunities to reskill through their employers, with 51% offered no opportunities at all (Digital Women, 2021).

We heard from APPG meetings that this largely contributes to a lack of confidence amongst employees. In order to apply for a job, women typically feel they need to meet 100% of the criteria, while men usually apply after meeting about 60% of the advertised skills (LinkedIn, 2019). Holding the right digital skills and having the confidence to use them can result into removing a significant barrier to women in the modern labour market.

Alongside the digital skills gap, there is also a complementary digital skills ceiling. As the demand for digital skills within businesses comes with a lack in supply of skilled workforce, this leads to a drive up in wages for those that hold them. Research has shown that roles that require digital skills pay 29% more over roles that do not (Digital Women, 2021). The effect of this is

a ceiling on job progression and wage growth which becomes particularly problematic in its contribution to the gender pay gap.

More generally, there needs to be a greater focus on upskilling the UK workforce, both in and out of the labour market as we move into the post-covid recovery. The Government should increase spending on adult education, with a specialised focus in digital skills. This funding should be allocated in two ways. Firstly, through grant funding to employers, to upskill those within a business so that they can access job progression and meet the greater needs of a business. Secondly, through support systems for those out of work, so that individuals not in employment can meet the digital requirements that are being demanded of 21st century employees. Since women represent the majority of those lacking in digital skills, this policy would directly support women in work.

Skills shortage at student/graduate level

Part of the solution to breaking down barriers to entry for women is targeting those at the start of their career. Discussion in the APPG meetings revealed that young women are much less confident in their abilities than young men, so engagement, encouragement and mentoring at school age is essential to breaking down those societal barriers that women face towards certain industries. Ensuring that young women are confident and equipped digitally will remove barriers to entry within the workplace.

A report by World Skills UK (2021) revealed that three in five young males are interested in a digital career, compared to just two in five young females. IT and tech are still considered subjects for boys to study as they are studied predominantly by men. Data from a Department

for Education survey shows that young males are four times more likely to say IT is their favourite subject than female and they are over five times more likely to take it at A Level (Department for Education, 2019). This creates a series of problems for young women; notably, a lack of confidence, lack of interest, and lack of access to the sector. This apparent lack of interest by young women in digital needs to be tackled head on, or we risk leaving women further behind in the workplace as we move to a more and more digital world.

One of the key solutions discussed in the APPG session was making jobs in STEM degree agnostic, so that any degree could be used to apply. Having to hold a specific set of skills when entering the job market creates huge barriers to entry; instead, there should be a greater emphasis on determining candidates that are interested and willing to learn, rather than focussing heavily on skills that they already have. This would not just benefit women, but all people that are locked out of jobs based on skillset. Entry level positions in STEM should focus on upskilling candidates to the requirements of the sector and be open to students from any course or degree. This would assist in increasing accessibility for young women.

The future of post-work: addressing the post-covid pension gap

Women in the workforce today have the best chance of saving for retirement, but despite this the gender pensions gap persists. The Gender Pension Gap is currently estimated to be up to 40%, with the average woman in her twenties on course to have £100k less in their pension pot than a man of the same age (Prospect, 2021).

It is also indisputable that Covid-19 will have exacerbated the gender pensions gap with those women in lower paid and more fragile employment being hardest hit. For example, whilst the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) was a welcome measure, due to the way it was structured, it will have unfortunately impacted pensions savings in two key ways:

firstly, by pensionable pay under the CRJS being reduced to 80%, and a further reduction as the pre-Covid lower earnings limit (LEL) was maintained at £6,240 – both of which will have compounded the impact on female pensions savers. It is therefore essential that efforts are made to increase female awareness of the pension gap and for employers and Government to support the bridging of this.

Individual awareness levels must increase to fully bridge the gap and reduce the imbalance for women in the workforce when it comes to pensions savings. As part of upskilling and equipping the female workforce, there needs to be greater focus on women's pensions. There are available resources such as MoneyHelper, which provides free guidance on financial matters, from debt, to pensions to the splitting of financial assets on divorce. Savers can also get in touch with their pension provider to find out more about their pension pot size and contribution level and start the process of consolidating their pension pots, either through their current provider or using the Government Pensions Tracing Service to track pensions from previous employers. The ABI has directly called on Government to increase the Pensions Advice Allowance so that more people can access paid advice and to increase the promotion of services such as MoneyHelper so that women are more aware of available support and guidance.

Employers also have a crucial role to play in bridging this gap, particularly through providing greater information to their workforce, for example, through provision of Day One Statements. A well thought through Day One Statement that tells employees everything their employers do to support their health and wellbeing helps to increase their awareness of their rights and make the most of benefits. This can be a challenge though, particularly for small businesses. The ABI has therefore developed a toolkit for employers to increase awareness of what's required of them and provide guidance on how best to support employees.

Case study

American Express – Supporting Women Leaders American Express Ambition Project:



More than half our global workforce, and (40.1%) executives and senior managers, are women. When women grow and thrive in their careers with us, our company thrives too. To support and retain women colleagues, we provide customised learning and engagement opportunities delivered through internal training and outside expert programs.

Through our Colleague Networks and global forums, we enable talented women to build stronger and more meaningful relationships across the company, which in turn drives their sponsorship, retention, and progression into leadership roles. One prominent example is our biannual Global Women's Conference which brings together our most senior global leaders.

In 2020, we launched the Ambition Project, an initiative focused on helping women embrace their ambition and pay it forward. This initiative followed a survey by our Executive Committee that revealed only a third of our most senior women had ever publicly described themselves as ambitious.

Getting Involved

We asked some of our women colleagues in the UK to share what ambition means to them:

Lucy Fenwick, Vice President, Customer Engagement Network:

"Ambition for me is wanting to achieve the best for yourself. My career took off after I returned to work having had my daughter. I've been able to balance being a parent and a working professional. I wasn't always consciously ambitious. As a leader it's imperative to be ambitious for others. It's about being honest, building confidence, giving guidance and opportunities."

Agnes Anning, Senior Account Manager, FX International Payments:

"Ambition for me is to challenge myself to have a positive and meaningful impact that enables my development and the development of others. This year, I aim to lead the conversation around diversity and inclusion in my business unit."

Yvonne Iwai Yim, Technology Graduate Engineer:

"Ambition for me means passion and optimism. Without ambitions, things stay unchanged and unimproved. As a graduate, my goal is to expand my technical knowledge as much as possible. My ambition is to reshape my narrative of how I see myself as an engineer and build confidence. I think it's important to ourselves that ambitions do not necessarily have to be world-changing, it is enough that they change you - for the better."

You can also read this [blog post \(https://www.womeninpayments.org/articles/why-weve-got-to-stop-being-embarrassed-talking-about-ambition\)](https://www.womeninpayments.org/articles/why-weve-got-to-stop-being-embarrassed-talking-about-ambition) from our UK Country Manager, Charlotte Duerden, on the subject of Ambition.

Tackling occupational gender segregation.

There are by nature some sectors and industries that are typically dominated by men. Whether this is due to the type of work being performed, the skills required in the sector, or the social perception surrounding them. Men and women being concentrated in different jobs and fields in this way is known as occupational segregation. This historic segregation leads to a series of challenges that women face when working or entering a male-dominated industry. This can range from societal expectations about women's leadership abilities, pervasive stereotypes being thrown around in the workplace, lack of mentoring and career development opportunities and risks of sexual harassment.

Male-dominated industries and occupations are particularly vulnerable to reinforcing masculine stereotypes that make it even more difficult for women to excel. It creates a cycle of deprivation and further reinforces the idea that an industry is male dominated. To tackle occupational gender segregation, there needs to be focus firstly on attracting female talent, developing it in positive workplaces and crucially, retaining it.

Attracting talent

When discussing tackling diversity in male-dominated industries with representatives from academia, construction, financial services and engineering sectors, the key challenge identified in each was attracting female talent to the sectors. Many people decide their career path at a young age; after leaving school you might enter a job, apprenticeship, or volunteer in an area of interest and generally develop a career in this sector. To encourage young women into male dominated sectors, it is key to reach them at an early level.

A recent study by the Department for Education found that female pupils felt that their best subjects were non-STEM subjects when compared to males, even though they outperformed male students in both STEM and non-STEM subjects (Department for Education, 2019). Academically, young men and women have equal opportunity at accessing a career in STEM, but young women are less likely to do so.

Part of the reason for this is a lack of female role-models in the sector leading to the assumption that STEM is a "men's industry". In a 2019 survey, just over half of respondents said that the gender balance of a company would be

an influencing factor when choosing a job (STEM Women, 2021). With women making up just 24% of all people employed in STEM industries, this creates a significant problem for the sector.

This can also lead to imposter syndrome amongst women who do want to take up a career in STEM. A recent survey of women in STEM showed that 54% of young women declined to answer if they had ever suffered from or experienced imposter syndrome, suggesting they are either are unfamiliar with what imposter syndrome is, or still don't feel comfortable talking about it (STEM Women, 2021). We know that a lack of diversity of thought limits the ability to problem solve and find solutions, and this poses a risk to corporate culture and talent attraction.

Even later in life, male dominated industries can struggle to attract female talent as a result of engrained stereotypes. For example, in a study produced by Openreach to understand why they were struggling to attract female talent, 4 in 5 women said they wouldn't consider working in engineering. In reality, engineering incorporates a variety of different roles and is not definable by one term. Openreach have subsequently committed to reviewing the use of the word engineering in job adverts and, where able, replace the terminology to broaden their attraction of female talent (APPG Women and Work, 2021).

To overcome this, many businesses currently use tools such as webinars or talks and school drop-ins to showcase the jobs available in STEM, encouraging students to take up a STEM degree. Industries typically have the resources to hire and train graduates into the sector, but it doesn't



have the access to schools to deliver cohesive campaigns. More needs to be done to link companies with the Department for Education and local authorities to enable students the exposure to the job market available to them. Targeting students before they make their subject and course choices is essential in ensuring more women are recruited into STEM.

Academic Barriers

For those that don't opt to study a STEM subject at further level, technical barriers come into place when trying to enter to the job market, presenting a further structural barrier for women into the male-dominated labour market. Currently just 35% of those studying a STEM subject in higher education in the UK are women (STEM Women, 2021), making it one of the worst subject areas in terms of gender balance. This directly impacts ability to break into the STEM sector, as the majority of entry-level jobs require a degree qualification. Post-pandemic, the Government has focused on the 'Build Back Better' narrative, targeting investment into infrastructure and green jobs, both typically male-dominated industries. To ensure that women aren't losing out on access to these opportunities, addressing the gender imbalance in STEM degrees is critical.

To broaden the entry pool of female candidates for jobs in STEM, in our APPG sessions we discussed the importance of businesses creating graduate programmes that are degree agnostic, with robust training in place for those entering the field without previous experience. This would enable more young women to enter the labour market without facing these academic barriers.

Retaining female talent

A further limit on the pool of female graduates is the visa system. Currently, 35% of women studying STEM at UK universities are women from the international community but visa restrictions mean they are required to return home after studying. Under the current system, students can apply for a graduate visa which gives them the right to work in the UK for 2 years after completing studies. A graduate visa must be obtained within 6 months of a student visa expiring, giving post-graduate international students an incredibly narrow window of opportunity to gain employment. Not only this, but they also face additional costs and the pressure of deportation. The Government should therefore review the visa requirements for international students who want to work and remain in the UK, making the process simpler for both applicants and employers so that more talented young people can enter the UK labour market.

Case study

Barratt Developments: tackling male-dominated industries

Construction is traditionally a male dominated industry and, like many organisations in the sector, Barratt Developments has a greater percentage of men than women both in terms of overall representation and in management positions.

Our vision is to build without barriers. This means focusing on gender equality and encouraging women to choose a construction career and removing the obstacles that might prevent them from achieving their potential.

Becky Nicholls, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, said:

“We have a way to go to balance our gender representation and we recognise the reasons for this are multi-faceted, but for the last three years we have seen our positive steps start to deliver results. We are now seeing more women across the business, including in management positions, and we have a higher percentage of female apprentices and graduates now than we ever have before.”

Our female leadership development programme, called Catalyst, has been running for three years. It is open to anyone to apply, through a self-nomination process, and this year we had more than 125 applications. Delegates attend workshops, seminars and join panel discussions on topics like high performance, developing resilience and personal brand. We also match delegates with a reciprocal mentor and this approach has proven invaluable for both delegates on the programme and leaders in the business.

Catalyst delegate and Sales Office Manager Giedre Kubiliute said:

“I never would have imagined such a development programme possible in a workplace. For once, we are not defined by our roles or responsibilities we have. Instead, the focus is on our strengths and development opportunities based on our true selves, and the potential we hold as individuals. At times it feels like a personalised TED talk, I have never experienced anything like this before.”

However, we know we need to create a positive culture as well as specific opportunities. We have always encouraged flexible working, but we now work in a much more agile way with many of our colleagues adopting our hybrid approach that suits their own needs and enables them to perform at their best. In 2018, we launched Under One Roof, our gender equality network, which is open to everyone in the business. An original group of ten people has now grown to more than 100 members.

Gaenor Aitken, Systems Trainer and Chair of Under One Roof, said:

“The network has gone from strength to strength and we have had amazing conversations on everything from living with cancer, to menopause, to the use of gender neutral language. The network has enabled us to start having a greater voice in the business and get our “seat at the table”. More than anything though, it has been the relationships we have forged with each other that is our biggest success. We are there to support each other and offer advice where needed.”

We had to pause our normal community outreach work because of COVID, but we have started to link up with schools again. Our Southampton division now have a “Becky The Builder” mascot who visits local primary schools and helps engage younger children and specifically girls to think about a career in construction.



BARRATT
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Chapter 4

Looking to the future, what does good look like?

Having considered in this report how industry and Government can improve ways of working for women, looking to the future, we want to strive for the gold standard of employment policies. In our final session of the year, we heard from industry representatives some of the best workplace policies that currently exist for women. To that purpose, we have shared them in our final chapter.

Before employment: good practice in job advertisement

One of the key methods of good practice that employers can engage with is publishing their employment policies and practices online. This is because transparency can lead to a plethora of benefits. For future employees, transparency over workplace policies removes barriers to entry for women in particular. Having to ask a potential employer what their maternity policy is can be daunting and off-putting. Even if a business offers the statutory minimum, making this information available online or as part of job applications removes the barrier of asking the question. For employers, being transparent will likely see the pool of candidates that they attract increase. For example, John Lewis Partnership recently conducted a piece of research with a behavioural insight team looking at trialling flexible working wording on job advertisements, and it found that in advertising this, it increased the number of applicants by 50%. Crucially, it increased the proportion of women applying from 38% to 51% (APPG Women and Work, 2021). Moreover, showcasing good policies creates healthy competition amongst employers. Those who do this will attract a wider pool of candidates and set a baseline of standards for industry competitors, thus improving workplace practices for many more.

Beyond transparency, businesses should also be mindful of unconscious bias they may engage with when advertising jobs. Research by Openreach (2021) found that 50% of women were less likely to consider roles that had a coded gender bias. This included the use of latent gendered phraseology, a more masculine skew in the language used and key skillset descriptors. This led them to develop a consciously unbiased job description that carefully selected language for roles to attract

male and female candidates equally. When they compared the revised unbiased adverts against the original adverts, the result saw a 200% uplift in the number of applications from women, demonstrating that even subtle changes to the way businesses advertise roles can make a huge difference.

The use of language as a barrier to entry for women is a relatively recent phenomenon that has sparked many businesses to review their potential gender bias. Researchers in the field have subsequently created a gender decoder tool where businesses can paste in their advert wording and analyse the use of gender-coded words. You can find the tool [here](http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/).

In employment: creating a culture of trust

When discussing employment policies ranging from flexible working to menopause support, the crucial foundation that underpins their success is trust between the employer and employee. For workplace practices that support an employee's wellbeing to operate in the best way, they must be nurtured in a culture of trust. Employers need to trust that staff will not abuse policies that are in place to support them. Employees need to equally trust the confidentiality of their employer to be able to discuss these workplace support mechanisms. Where people are comfortable having potentially difficult conversations with managers, when productive solutions are found, they reward a company with loyalty, thus creating a workplace culture that benefits all parties. This was something that was discussed as crucial in our APPG meetings.

Critical to forwarding the position of women in work that links to the importance of trust is male allyship. Having difficult conversations

about childcare responsibilities or support with managing menopause or returning to the office after maternity leave can be facilitated by creating a culture of male allyship in the workplace. It is important to remember that this doesn't just come automatically if you operate in line with good employment practices but can be facilitated by ensuring that male colleagues are part of the conversation about them. Ensuring that men are part of conversations when developing gender equity policies and why they are important or informing male staff on how to speak to female colleagues about support measures can all assist in creating a culture of male allyship. In our APPG meeting,

industry representatives highlighted the benefits of putting staff on external training sessions on masculinity in the workplace or discussing menopause helped to create an atmosphere where people felt psychologically safe to have these conversations.

Going above and beyond as employers/for employees

While this report has discussed what we see as standard practice employment measures to support women in the workplace, we wanted to share some of the best practice measures collected from the industry.

Equal Parenthood Policy

John Lewis Partnership recently introduced their equal parenthood policy. As we know, studies have shown that sharing childcare can be good for gender equality and reducing the gender pay gap within families, but affordability makes this difficult to achieve. The statutory entitlement of 2 weeks paid maternity/paternity leave is commonly considered not enough. John Lewis Partnerships have created their equal parenthood policy, which gives employees 26 weeks paid leave, broken down at 14 weeks full pay and 12 weeks at 50% of pay once you've worked at the Partnership for a year. Since introducing the policy, the result has seen an uptake in paternity leave, which they now call co-parent leave. On average, most employees are taking 16 weeks leave at the birth of their child and a quarter are taking the additional 12 weeks at half pay. This has demonstrated that affordability is clearly a barrier to men having time off.

Support for menopause, pregnancy loss and fertility treatment

Kellogg's have recently announced additional support for menopause, pregnancy loss and fertility treatment. They have introduced paid leave for those who suffer the loss of a pregnancy, including when it happens to them directly, to their partner or a surrogate. To support those going through fertility treatment, without the need for a doctor's note, Kellogg's will give employees three blocks of leave each year, as well as access to a private space to administer treatment if necessary. They have also offered managerial staff training on how to talk to employees about menopause and pregnancy loss.

Free hormone replacement therapy prescriptions

Timpson have recently announced their policy to pay for employees' menopause medication, enabling staff to claim for their Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) on company expenses. HRT is a hormone-based treatment commonly prescribed to provide relief for menopause symptoms, which can include flashes and sweating, heavy and painful periods, low mood and anxiety.

These organisations are not the only ones that offer these sorts of policies, but the Women and Work APPG has recognised them as examples of organisations championing good employment practices. As more organisations begin to adopt these types of policies, the stigma will reduce, and provision will become a societal norm.

Case study

Vodafone's 'Future Ready' way of working

During the pandemic, Vodafone kept society connected at a time when it mattered more than ever. To meet the pressing needs of our customers while keeping our employees safe, we changed the way we worked almost overnight with the vast majority of employees working remotely using technology and digital tools to serve our customers.

We have seen how well we can work together virtually during the pandemic and this flexibility enabled many of our employees to better balance and juggle busy lives. Therefore, as we developed our future workplace policies, our approach was based on the principles of trust, flexibility choice and balance. From September 2021 Vodafone UK colleagues, depending on the specifics of their role, work in one of three ways (subject to Government Covid guidance):

- 'Blended' working – staff, such as support and head office colleagues, who will be able to work partly from home and partly in an office, with the pattern being agreed by local line managers.
- At home – some colleagues work from home the majority of the time.
- At a specific site or in the field – e.g. retail store staff and network engineers, respectively.

As we developed these plans, our focus was on finding the right balance that works for us as a business, and that achieves the best of both worlds for the people who make our company the success it is.

This approach has also allowed us to tap into a wider geographic talent pool for a lot of roles, enabling us to support a more diverse workforce and attract talent from locations further away from our offices.

Spirit of Vodafone days – no meetings, just a focus on personal development and growth – have also been introduced and our employees now have the opportunity to work internationally from certain locations for up to four weeks a year.

We are trialling a range of new office designs to create more collaboration space and have developed an in-house app to allow employees to book desks and rooms.

We are just at the beginning of creating Future Ready Vodafone and will continue to ask employees for feedback to adapt and evolve our approach.



vodafone



Conclusion and Recommendations

This year's Women and Work report centred around post-covid recovery for women in the workplace, highlighting the challenges of the future of hybrid and flexible working, tackling male-dominated industries, overcoming the skills gap and showcasing what we think 'good employment' policies look like. In doing so, we touched upon issues such as barriers for female graduates, menopause and the gender pension gap, attempting to address the challenges faced by women at all points in their career. We also explored the topics of linguistics, male-allyship and creating a culture of trust as important soft policy steps that can be taken to support women in work. While our focus was on women, using a gendered lens enabled us to uncover problems and solutions that also affect a broader spectrum of people, with many of our policies likely to benefit all workers, including minority groups and entire families. The Women and Work APPG are therefore proud to suggest the following recommendations for both Government and industry:

- 1** Building on the progress made towards flexible working that has emerged during the pandemic, **the Government should include the right to request flexible working from 'day one' where possible within a future Employment Bill.**
- 2** To support and encourage this, **the Government should produce a toolkit for employers to support flexible working**, highlighting good practice and how the different forms of flexible working can operate in different industries.
- 3** **The Government should also consult on making transparency over flexible working options a requirement of job advertisements**, to remove barriers to entry that may be faced when applying to jobs.
- 4** **The Government should increase spending on adult education**, with a targeted focus on digital skills. This should be available to both those out of employment and in industries where upskilling is needed.
- 5** **The Government should review SME grant funding based on gender and offer additional, targeted support and training to female entrepreneurs.**
- 6** Industries that struggle with a reduced female talent pool at entry level should prioritise investment in **removing entry requirements, making those male dominated sectors degree agnostic.**
- 7** **The Government should review the post-graduate visa length and employers' requirements** to ensure that the UK is not losing talented young professionals, particularly young women.
- 8** **The Government should consider developing a programme or communications campaign to link industry representatives with schools**, particularly from those industries that are male dominated, to showcase career paths for young women.

We would like to also thank all those that contributed to this report. Notably all the speakers that shared their experiences and valuable contributions in our meetings, our sponsors for supporting and promoting the APPG and the Chairs and Officers of the APPG, for their continued interest and work in supporting women in work.

The APPG

The Women and Work APPG provides a forum to examine constructively and to 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 Government's ambitions for women and work.

The officers of the Women and Work APPG are:

Chairs:

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Vice-Chair:

Ms Kirsten Oswald MP

Officers:

Ms Laura Farris MP
Ms Deidre Brock MP
Ms Sara Britcliffe MP
Ms Helen Hayes MP
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Ms Liz Saville Roberts MP
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Baroness Uddin
Baroness Prosser
Baroness Garden of Frognal
Baroness Goudie
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Connect

The APPG secretariat is provided by Connect.

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

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January 2022

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