



The Pipeline Effect

A toolkit for enabling
gender parity beyond
middle management

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The Women's Business Council is a government-backed, business-led council that was established in 2012. This toolkit is part of the WBC Getting On action group, which aims to take real action to enable women to progress further and ensure gender parity at middle management level.

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Introduction



Fiona Dawson
Global President, Mars Food



Sue Langley OBE
Non-Executive Chairman,
Arthur J Gallagher UK

Fiona and Sue are joint owners of the Women's Business Council Getting On action group. As an inclusive, family-owned business, Mars has set out intentional plans to ensure the diversity of its workforce. As a company, Mars deeply believes that learning from others and working collectively creates the most value for all and as such – is a proud sponsor of this toolkit.

To learn more about Mars' efforts:
[www.mars.com/global/careers/
work-at-mars/enjoy/diversity-inclusion](http://www.mars.com/global/careers/work-at-mars/enjoy/diversity-inclusion)



It's widely acknowledged that businesses with a higher proportion of women in senior management are more profitable and successful. Yet despite the great progress in regulations and legislation, the UK lags behind the US, Canada, Australia, France and Sweden in the percentage of female managers.

There is no shortage of talent or ambition among women in the workplace yet, all too often, women's career progression comes to a standstill when they reach middle management – meaning organisations are missing out on the talent and skills of tens of thousands of women.

"At the current rate of change, it will take until 2043 for us to achieve a 50% gender balance of managers, directors and senior officials in the UK."

Achieving 50/50 leadership

By 2024, the UK needs
1.9 million
new managers

To achieve equal numbers,
1.5 million
of the new managers
need to be women.¹



¹ CMI analysis of UK Commission for Employment and Skills data, from Working Futures 2014–2024 (2016)

Currently, 73% of entry-level roles are occupied by women², yet only 34% of managers, directors and senior officials in the UK are women³. In the past six years, this proportion has only increased by one percentage point.

As business leaders, we know good people are hard to find. Women represent the most powerful, untapped talent resource we have. It's therefore vital that we change workplaces and organisational cultures to unblock the pipeline and enable more women to progress to a senior level.

In this toolkit, we identify the three key obstacles to women's progress:

1. A lack of role models
2. The need for more dynamic and flexible working
3. A lack of good line management.

We examine each area in turn and provide practical examples, advice and resources to help you remove the barriers and bring about positive change.

This toolkit is designed to help senior leaders retain and develop their female staff. We also hope the case studies and advice will inspire individual women on their journey to the top.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on this toolkit and any innovative working practices you have experienced. Please get in touch at WBC2@geo.gov.uk

Percentage of women

73%

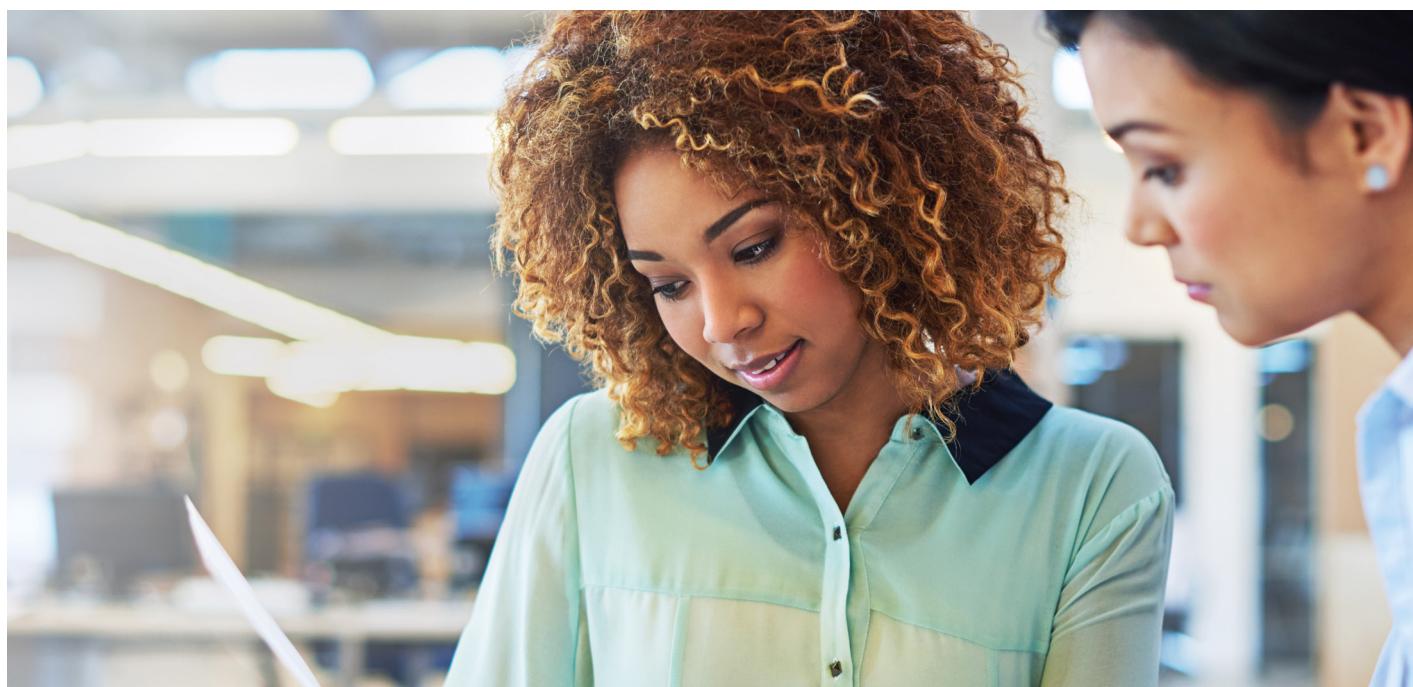
Entry-level roles

34%

Managers, directors
and senior officials

2 National Management Salary Survey, CMI, 2016

3 UK labour market statistics, ONS, May 2017



Role models and mentors: everywoman not superwoman

Women and men at all levels can provide the inspiration for women to succeed by sharing their stories and being open about challenges.

Out of reach

Female role models can provide a huge boost to women's career progression, as Anna Koukoullis's story on page 6 shows. Yet many women find it hard to relate to the few senior females in their workplace. Rather than being inspired by women at the top, the young women surveyed in Opportunity Now's Project 28–40 saw the senior lifestyle as stressful, with long working hours and a lack of work-life balance⁴. More than half felt you had to be 'extra special' to succeed in your career as a woman.

Approachable role models

To encourage them to pursue a leadership career, women need approachable role models who are willing to share their own stories, including honest assessments of the challenges they have faced. Women in the Project 28–40 research weren't interested in being 'superwoman'.

They wanted to hear senior women and men talk openly about their professional achievements as well as how they balance work and family commitments.

The value of mentors and sponsors

Access to a mentor or a sponsor can also have an enormous impact on women's advancement. By providing a sounding board in an open and trusting environment, a mentor can offer invaluable career guidance and support. And research shows that having a sponsor – a colleague who advocates for you in the workplace – can have a significant impact on women's progression, helping them to secure pay rises and gain important experience⁵.

Research from KPMG found that, while men tend to prefer informal networking, women feel most supported by one-to-one professional relationships and are twice as likely as men to find having a sponsor very helpful⁶.



Networking and mentoring resources

Business in the Community has developed a checklist for developing a network. See gender.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/womens-networks

The 30% Club Mentoring Scheme offers cross-company, cross-sector mentoring for women at all career levels. See 30percentclub.org/initiatives/mentoring-scheme

"By providing a sounding board in an open and trusting environment, a mentor can offer invaluable career guidance and support."



⁴ Project 28–40: The Report, Opportunity Now, 2014

⁵ The Sponsor Effect, quoted in The Power of Parity, McKinsey, 2016

⁶ Cracking the Code, KPMG, YSC and 30% Club, 2014

Multi-level mentors

Mentors and sponsors don't have to be part of a formal scheme and support doesn't always have to come from the most senior staff. In fact, women often value the accessibility of the female leaders at the level just above them, and often managers who supported women at an early stage in their career remain as important mentors⁷.

In interviews about their careers, female leaders at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) stressed that a key benefit of mentors and networks was being able to find support from role models at all levels⁸.

Networks for women

One study found that women in mid-career are less than half as likely as men to network frequently⁹. Employers can provide crucial support for women by creating and encouraging female networks, which offer access to role models as well as a chance to share experiences. A Cranfield University study highlighted that such networks can improve the recruitment and retention of women, and recommends that employers allow women time off to attend networking meetings¹⁰.

Tips for success

1. Encourage senior female role models to talk about their own challenges and how they balance work and home life.
2. Create a story-telling culture, allowing leaders and role models at all levels to engage and inspire more junior staff.
3. Ensure junior and mid-level women have access to mentors or sponsors.
4. Encourage women at all levels to become mentors or sponsors and to share access to their own professional networks.
5. Create and encourage networks and smaller communities to provide support and guidance.



Industry best practice

As part of its Women in Leadership initiative, Sky runs a sponsorship and development programme, matching high potential women with a senior sponsor to advocate for, advise and help women build their profile. Within just the first year, Sky has seen over 30% of senior women on the programme promoted or taken a challenging sideways move.

A campaign from Retail Week – Be Inspired: Role models for future female leaders – promotes female chief executives and senior leaders in retail as role models. See guides.retail-week.com/2083.guide

⁷ Cracking the Code, KPMG, YSC and 30% Club, 2014

⁸ PwC – the Leaking Pipeline 2008

⁹ Networking Survey Report, Trowers & Hamlins and fdu group, 2014

¹⁰ Breaking glass: strategies for tomorrow's leaders, CIMA, 2011



Role models and mentors

Real-life inspiration

Mentoring from the founder of Hallett Retail

Wendy Hallett founded her fashion business, Hallett Retail, in 1999. Since then, her ethos has been to enable women to achieve their full career potential without any restrictions due to gender or personal circumstances.

Wendy has developed various initiatives over the years to ensure the development of women into senior roles, but it is the culture of Hallett Retail, driven by the founder, that has truly enabled the women within her company to progress.

Wendy knows only too well the uneven playing field women face in their career progression, having struggled to find part-time senior roles on her return to work when her children were young. This is why she personally mentors participants of her MD development programme for managers and assistant managers. Running the programme herself, she focuses on creating a personal development plan, building confidence and teaching participants to manage upwards, both internally and externally.

The results speak for themselves. The company has long since exceeded its 50% target for senior females: 66% of the board and 80% of the heads of level are women, including the traditionally male roles of Finance Director and Head of Logistics. And the key to this success? According to one participant on the programme, Danielle Fisher, Head of Brands, it is Wendy's personal belief, energy and involvement. "Wendy is generous with the time she takes to develop female talent and is a motivating, inspiring, stimulating and compassionate person and mentor."

How an inspirational role model transformed my career

"Ever since I saw Alison Symmers, head of the Willmott Dixon Foundation, present at the opening of our trainee community challenge in 2015, she has been a true inspiration to me.

I was suffering from anxiety at the time, having recently joined the company as an administrator following a rather drastic career change – I originally trained as an opera singer! After hearing her speak, I cornered her, practically following her out of the room, as I was so inspired. Her enthusiasm for social value was infectious. This wasn't an area I was familiar with at all!

Alison is incredibly passionate about helping people and genuinely believes in changing people's lives. So often you see women at the top who think they need to be aggressive to get on; Alison isn't like that at all. She has been generous with her time over the years – taking time out to have informal chats, offering advice and praise where due.

She's been an inspirational force throughout my career. I've developed a real sense of authority and have grown in confidence. She always remarks how shy and timid I was when I first started as an assistant community manager. A year later, I have successfully developed a social value strategy, taking our part of the business from being the weakest division in social value to one of the top performers in our company. I confidently deliver talks on the importance of social value in front of 300 men from the supply chain!

I attribute my success in being promoted and winning several awards to Alison's inspiration and guidance. Without her as a role model, I would not be where I am today. She's a true role model."

"She's been an inspirational force throughout my career. I've developed a real sense of authority and have grown in confidence."

Anna Koukoullis
Assistant Community Investment
and Apprentice Manager

Dynamic working: making workplaces work for everyone

Dynamic, flexible ways of working can enable organisations to retain talented women, and ensure that family or other responsibilities don't remove women from the senior management pipeline.

Working women in the UK see balancing work and family as the biggest barrier to their career progression¹¹. Offering employees the chance of working dynamically – in a place and at a time that suits them – could transform women's careers and boost employee engagement and retention. Yet, in 2010, just 30% of working women were able to vary the hours they worked¹².

Even where opportunities are available, too often women don't make use of flexible working due to the belief that it will limit career progression. Two-thirds of women in the Project 28–40 survey believed work had to be their number one priority if they wanted to advance in their career¹³.



Certainly, women often find that, when they do take up flexible options such as part-time working, they end up in lower status roles with less chance of promotion¹⁴. And, where flexible working isn't possible, many women with outside commitments end up leaving the organisation. A survey of working mothers found that nearly one in five (18%) had been forced to leave a job because a flexible working request was turned down¹⁵.

Changing the pattern: agile working for all

Businesses are missing a trick. To retain talented women, senior leaders need to understand the benefits of flexibility and offer truly agile working opportunities to all staff.

Flexible working isn't just about part-time work and it's not just for women. Digital technologies make flexibility of hours and location a reality for many of us. By redesigning jobs and making use of technology and agile teams, leaders can remove any stigma around flexibility, while also benefitting business.

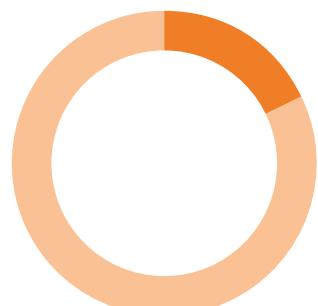


Resources

Business in the Community's Agile/Flexible Working Toolkit discusses agile working practice as not just a 'mummy' issue, but part of a robust diversity strategy. See gender.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/agile-flexible-working

The Agile Future Forum's toolkit outlines the benefits of agile working and how to implement it. See agilefutureforum.co.uk/agile-future-forum-tool-kit/

Working Families has a flexible working guide for employees. See workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/A-flexible-future-v08.pdf



18%

A survey of working mothers found that nearly one in five (18%) had been forced to leave a job because a flexible working request was turned down¹⁵

- 11 What holds women back? Women and men's perceptions of the barriers to women's progression: Opportunity Now, December 2010
- 12 Women and flexible working: improving female employment outcomes in Europe, IPPR, 2014
- 13 Project 28–40: The Report, Opportunity Now, 2014
- 14 The price of motherhood: women and part-time work, Resolution Foundation, 2012
- 15 Workingmums Annual Survey 2016, workingmums.co.uk/workingmums-annual-survey-2016-results/

Among employers that offer flexible working, 76% report improvements in staff retention, 73% in staff motivation and 72% in employee engagement¹⁶. When legal firm Eversheds gave employees the freedom to choose their own working model, 28% of employees reported increased productivity and 14% saw an increase in chargeable hours¹⁷.

Informal, individual arrangements

Flexible arrangements are often best created by a conversation rather than by a set of rules. A study by KPMG found that informal, individual arrangements were more helpful for women than formal, flexible working schemes¹⁸.

Flexible pathways and career breaks

As well as offering options about when and where a job gets done, it's vital to look at career paths in a more flexible way – recognising that women may follow unconventional routes and may take career breaks along the way. Many large companies now run return-to-work schemes to actively manage women during and after breaks, ensuring they don't lose career momentum on their return.

Tips for success

- 1.** Lead by example and encourage dynamic working by men and women at all levels.
- 2.** Support and train line managers and leaders to manage flexible workforces.
- 3.** Make the potential for flexible working clear when advertising a role.
- 4.** Focus on the expected outputs of a role, rather than where or when the job should be done.
- 5.** Enable non-linear careers and career breaks.
- 6.** Actively encourage and support women returning to work after career breaks.
- 7.** Consider how to develop the careers of high potential part-time staff.
- 8.** Celebrate examples of successful flexible working at senior levels.



Industry best practice

Back-to-work schemes

Barclays Back to Work programme for senior women who have taken a multi-year career break offers placements, mentoring, coaching, training and skills development.

HitReturn, developed by Centrica, Mars and Vodafone, offers 12-week professional internships for women and men returning to work after an extended break.



¹⁶ Flexible working provision and uptake, CIPD, 2012

¹⁷ Maximising women's contribution to future economic growth – Two years on, Women's Business Council, 2013

¹⁸ Cracking the Code, KPMG, YSC and 30% Club, 2014

Dynamic working

Real-life inspiration

Flexible policies boost female employment at Atkins

Engineering and design consultancy Atkins knew the industry had a problem. Back in 2011, the balance of men to women within the engineering industry was so distorted that the UK CEO set up gender balance focus groups to establish why and to unearth solutions. The groups revealed that women were frequently leaving engineering firms due to a lack of work/life balance.

The company responded by launching a women's development programme and offering more flexible working options, including part-time positions, job shares, mobile working, phased retirement, term-time only working, and career breaks. Atkins also offers a flexible holiday scheme, allowing employees to buy up to 15 extra days holiday, which 43% of the workforce made use of this year.

Women who take a career break are now supported by a returners programme which was introduced in January 2015. This offers dedicated training and support to help employees re-evaluate what they want from their career, with a view to having useful conversations with their manager on their return.

The initiatives have started to work. The proportion of female employees rising through middle management has increased each year – from 17% in 2011 to 21% so far in 2017. And the number of women leaving the business has decreased, while the number of women returning after a career break has increased by 4%. For the business, this means reduced recruitment costs and retention of valuable skills, as well as a happier, more balanced workforce.

Flexible solutions for a busy father at Greggs

"As a father of four small children, including a new baby, trying to juggle family commitments with a career as a senior manager was challenging.

My wife has her own career and it would be unfair to expect her to bear the brunt of care, plus I wanted to feel like a 'full parent' and spend quality time with my children. Thankfully my employer, the UK food on-the-go retailer Greggs, really supports a flexible working approach.

I drafted a simple proposal that outlined my wish to condense my working week to four days. I identified all eventualities and set out how my team would manage activities in my absence. My line manager and the People Director were hugely supportive. They accepted my proposal and my new way of working has been incorporated into my role.

From a personal perspective, I'm more engaged than ever. My own team accepts the reasoning for my flexible arrangements and know they can apply similar approaches in their own teams. My wife has been able to further invest in her career, allowing her to widen her opportunities safe in the knowledge that between us we have the right work/life balance to cover all eventualities. In terms of the business, they are really embracing flexible working as a strategic way to engage employees, making it an even better place to work."

Paul Rhodes
Group Safety, Health and Environment Manager

"They are really embracing flexible working as a strategic way to engage employees, making it an even better place to work."

Line management: open conversations and routes to success

Good line management is crucial to women's career success. Managers need to have honest and open career conversations with women to help them plan their individual routes to success.

A CIPD study found that the number one obstacle preventing women from achieving their hoped-for career progression was poor line management¹⁹. A good line manager should retain and develop the company's top talent and ensure that women don't self-select out of the leadership pipeline.

To do this, they need to understand and value the differences between men and women in the workplace. Women may follow a different career path from men, but a non-traditional route doesn't preclude a management position. Women do not lack drive or ambition, but may express it differently from men. Having children isn't a barrier to success, but, without proper planning and understanding from a line manager, it can stop women's careers in their tracks.

Authentic conversations

Line managers need to go beyond setting objectives, and have authentic conversations with women about what's important to them, both in their career and in their home life – whether this is having children, caring for a relative or fitting around their partner's career. Only then can they start to unlock individual routes to success and work out tailored career paths and opportunities. See Fiona's story, below, for an example of the difference an open conversation can make.

Interviews with female leaders at PwC also demonstrate the success of this approach²⁰. These women attributed their success to individual managers who had made it a "personal responsibility to secure the women's long term aspirations by having the right personal and career discussions at the right time, and by accessing the right developmental opportunities for these women".

Early interventions

It's vital for managers to initiate career-focused conversations early in women's careers as many women self-select out of a career path early on. One study found that women get less specific advice than men do from their managers on what they need to do to get promoted²¹. Managers need to encourage junior women into management career paths and to give them opportunities to develop the skills and experience that lead to promotion.

Setting the tone from the top

Many line managers end up in their role by accident, with no training or guidance. These 'accidental managers' can lack confidence and may focus on procedures and ticking boxes – which can get in the way of having real conversations. As part of the drive to support women's career progression, senior leaders need to prioritise excellent line management.

This could take the form of training for all line managers or an approach to managing performance, as in the Accenture example on page 12. Other companies are developing ways to measure diversity and include this in their organisation's scorecard. Just as importantly, leaders must create a culture of safety that gives line managers permission to talk openly with women about career aspirations and life plans.



Support for managers

Opportunity Now's Five Point Framework explains how to develop and embed inclusive leadership. See gender.bitc.org.uk/leading-change/LEC

CMI offers management training at various levels. See managers.org.uk/individuals/qualifications

CIPD provides a range of guides for managers. See cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/talent-management-overview.aspx

¹⁹ Why are there so few women at the top?
Submission to the Women and Equalities Select Committee, CIPD, 2016

²⁰ The Leaking Pipeline: Where are our female leaders?, PwC, 2008

²¹ Just about Managing, 30% Club, 2017

Tips for success

1. Train your line managers and don't assume everyone has what it takes to be a manager.
2. Provide line managers with the skills and resources to:
 - manage teams with diverse needs and aspirations
 - intervene early and have ongoing career conversations
 - give women access to the right projects, challenges and opportunities
3. Identify and communicate career paths and stepping stones for leadership roles.
4. Create a culture that values employees as individuals with unique needs.
5. Ensure that performance reviews are not just a 'tick box' exercise on key business objectives, but an opportunity to have a career conversation. Women tend to prefer more frequent coaching conversations to just an annual review.
6. Give guidance and support on conscious and unconscious bias in selection and promotion.
7. Build inclusive leadership into management and leadership frameworks.

The importance of line management

Opportunity Now asked women to name the one thing organisations could do to improve career development opportunities²². Overall, they felt excellent line management was far more important for career development than creating more female-only programmes. **These were their top five responses:**



Line management

Real-life inspiration

Accenture: Training line managers in the art of ongoing coaching conversations

As an increasingly diverse organisation, Accenture recognised that the approach it had used for the past 30 years to manage employees' performance was no longer fit for purpose. The company therefore took the bold step of scrapping the traditional performance review and overhauling its approach to performance management.

The new method, referred to as Performance Achievement, includes real-time, frequent, forward-looking coaching discussions that help people understand expectations, build on their strengths and achieve their career aspirations.

Instead of the traditional closed-door ratings meetings where managers talked *about* people, they now talk *with* people in frequent coaching conversations. The individual employee sets the rhythm of these discussions, with some wanting more frequent touchpoints than others.

Equipping line managers with the right skills and confidence to be able to have these conversations was critical, so the company provided all line managers with a full day's training session in the new approach. Tony Horan, Head of Human Capital and Diversity at Accenture UK, explains: "It's quite a different ask, suddenly going from having formal conversations twice a year to regular, more fluid ongoing dialogue in real time."

While the change has been a huge culture shift, feedback from employees has been overwhelmingly positive.

How supportive line management helped Mars Global President to succeed

Fiona Dawson joined the Mars graduate scheme in 1988 straight from university. Fiona explains how an important conversation with an understanding senior manager early in her career enabled her to reach the top.

"I had been asked to move to the Netherlands to take on a new role. I really wanted to take the job but I also knew I wanted to have children. I didn't see how I could do both without letting the company down – but I was too scared to articulate my concerns.

I remember having a conversation with the European President, who I was very fearful of at the time, and making excuse after excuse. He couldn't understand my reluctance. In the end, I blurted it out and he just said, 'Don't worry, it will be fine'. And it was! I still remember the relief at being able to talk about it.

So many of us have interests and activities going on outside work – whether that's having children, looking after parents or pursuing a hobby – that impact on how, whether and when we can take promotions. If we have a boss or an environment that's negative, where we can't have those conversations, it will drive everyone undercover.

Where the environment is positive, there's a ripple effect. My having that conversation and sharing that story with colleagues enabled other women to have similar conversations and make career plans that benefited the company as well as fitting into their lives."

"So many of us have interests and activities going on outside work – whether that's having children, looking after parents or pursuing a hobby – that impact on how, whether and when we can take promotions."

Fiona Dawson
Global President of Mars Food,
Drinks and Multisales

About us

The Women's Business Council (WBC) was set up in 2012 to advise the UK government on how women's contribution to economic growth can be maximised.

WBC members are convinced of the business case for taking action to ensure that women's talents are not lost to the economy. We aim to focus on those areas with the greatest potential economic benefit and on recommendations that have a clear economic case for action. We believe our recommendations can help to raise aspirations and allow talented people to reach their long-term potential – ultimately driving economic growth.

This toolkit forms part of the WBC's Getting On action group, which focuses on improving career progression and to ensure gender parity at middle management level. Our other key work strands are Starting Out, designed to broaden the aspirations of girls and young women; Staying On, which aims to remove barriers in the workplace for older working women; Enterprise, which encourages female entrepreneurs; and Men as Change Agents, which engages forward-thinking male leaders.

Over the past five years, WBC members have travelled the length and breadth of the country, as well as internationally, to speak at UK, EU and United Nations events. Our achievements include:

- driving important legislative changes such as shared parental leave and the right to request flexible working
- raising awareness of the need for tax-free childcare and an older workers' business champion
- promoting best practice within companies to tackle the gender pay gap and helping to shape the gender pay gap reporting regulations
- developing practical tools for business by business
- harnessing the power of scores of champion advocates to amplify best practice
- publishing more than 150 topical business case studies

The WBC is currently chaired by Dame Cilla Snowball DBE, Group Chair and CEO of AMV BBDO. Fiona Dawson, Global President of Mars Food, Drinks and Multisales, and Sue Langley OBE, Non-Executive Chairman of AJ Gallagher UK, lead the WBC's Staying On action group.

"The Women's Business Council understands the benefits of helping women to unlock their talents – bridging the gender gap in work could add £150 billion to the UK's annual GDP by 2025²³. Over the last four years, the WBC has advocated the importance of maximising women's contribution to future economic growth. To achieve this the WBC has helped to encourage more women to choose STEM subjects at school and university, highlighted businesses which are pioneering fantastic returner schemes and promoted initiatives that unblock the talent pipeline."

www.womensbusinesscouncil.co.uk/gender-pay-gap-reporting/





To find out more visit
womensbusinesscouncil.co.uk

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**These are the views of the
Women's Business Council
as an independent body.**