

# What works to reduce the gender pay gap

## Women's Progression in the Workplace Action Note

One of the drivers of the gender pay gap is that women are not progressing in the workplace as fully as their talents would allow.

Women are less likely to progress out of junior roles or into senior roles and are more likely to be overqualified for the role they are in.

Women are also more likely to work part-time, which is associated with limited pay progression, and can face structural barriers and bias during recruitment, appointment, reward and promotion processes.

Supporting women to progress can help to make the best use of their skills and experience, help to attract and retain talent, and improve productivity and performance.

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**Evidence suggests that the following actions can support women in your organisation to progress and help to close the gender pay gap.**

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- **Create an inclusive culture**
- **Support women's career development**
- **Progression for part-time workers**
- **Improve recruitment and promotion processes**
- **Measure and evaluate policies to support diversity and inclusion**

### Create an inclusive culture

Women, ethnic minorities, disabled people and LGBT people can feel that they do not fit or belong in their organisation. This can lead to lower performance, lower work-life balance, lower ambition and higher intention to leave, despite them being equally as talented as other staff.

**Creating an environment where all employees feel supported and valued could lead to better outcomes for your organisation and help retain talent and reduce turnover.**

**To create a diverse and inclusive workplace, you could:**

- Ensure that senior leaders are accountable for addressing the barriers to women's progression and retention, and are open about what action they are taking.
- Senior leaders should role model positive and inclusive behaviour, such as working flexibly and sponsoring women with high potential.
- Communicate through line management and talent management processes that everyone has the potential to be successful in their careers and that those who want to progress will be supported to do so.



- Create guidance on the positive and inclusive behaviours everyone in your organisation is expected to demonstrate, and clearly define what behaviour is unacceptable and inappropriate. For example, when chairing a meeting, give everyone the chance to contribute to ensure that everyone feels that their opinion and expertise is valued, and support those who work flexibly by normalising dial-in and video-conferencing.



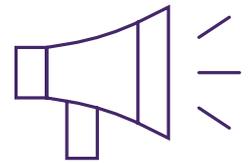
## Support women's career development

Evidence shows that women aren't given the same opportunities and development support as men. Women are more likely to receive generic feedback and can be encouraged to behave in a more masculine way or focus on short-term skills development, as opposed to building networks and following long-term development strategies.

They are more often asked to undertake tasks that are resource or time intensive, such as organising staff events, but are not as valued in promotion processes.

Women and men who work flexibly or have caring responsibilities can find it hard to find time for learning and development or networking outside of working hours. Sometimes, women who have spent time out of work or work part-time are not given equal opportunity to take on challenging work or more responsibility.

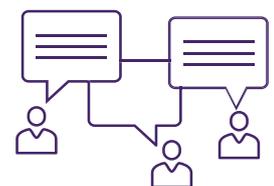
This can impact women's confidence and ambition, and mean that during reward and promotion processes, they can appear to have less experience or be less qualified.



**Ensuring that women's talents and achievements are recognised and that they are supported to access challenging work, networking and development opportunities, can help them to progress.**

### To create a diverse and inclusive workplace, you could:

- Regularly review how work is allocated, based on workload, skills and experience, in order to support development and progression.
- Offer formal and informal networking opportunities during working hours.
- Ensure that sponsorship programmes are transparent, with clear and measurable aims and objectives.
- Be proactive in identifying employees with high potential, and support them by providing equal access to stretching work and sponsorship from senior leaders.
- Provide training to line managers on how to support people to progress by:
  - holding regular, formal conversations about career development;
  - allocating stretching and interesting work;
  - identifying and allowing time for learning and development opportunities to build experience, such as shadowing;
  - providing good quality feedback that recognises the individual's potential, and focuses on both improving technical skills and acquiring skills required for progression into senior leadership, such as strategic thinking.
- Implement standardised performance management processes, such as using a talent grid, to measure performance and potential, with guidance on what potential means, and clear criteria on the skills and experience required at each stage of progression.
- Link your performance management processes with reward processes to ensure that those who perform well are fairly rewarded for their performance.



## Improve recruitment and promotion processes

When generic criteria are used in job advertisements, potential applicants can find it difficult to identify if they have the right skills and experience.

Traditional stereotypes of what characteristics “good leaders” should have, such as being assertive or having international experience, can disadvantage women during recruitment and promotion.

Informal and unstructured promotion and recruitment processes can lead to more bias in decision making, which can mean that the best candidates are missed. Once appointed or promoted, women are also less likely to negotiate their pay.

**Ensuring there is structure and transparency to recruitment, appointment and promotion processes can reduce bias and increase the number of successful female applicants.**

### To improve your recruitment and promotion processes, you could:

- When advertising jobs, consider what specific skills and experience are relevant to the role and clearly state that flexible working is available where possible.
- Use name blind, skills and competency-based recruitment to ensure that the best-qualified individual gets the job.
- Where possible, clearly indicate that the salary is negotiable or provide salary ranges on job advertisements.
- Use structured interviews for recruitment and promotion. This means that, for a given role, all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order, and their responses are scored according to pre-agreed criteria.
- Implement recruitment, reward and promotion processes where individuals are considered based on their experience and performance by an independent panel.
- Base pay decisions on the individual’s skills and experience, not their previous salary.
- Ensure that pay negotiation, recruitment, reward and promotion processes are clear and transparent to employees. This means having standardised, formal criteria around performance and reward that employees understand.

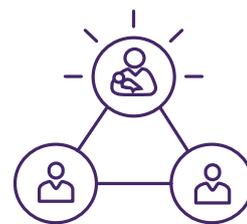
## Progression for part-time workers

Women who work part-time experience limited wage progression, and working part-time can sometimes be associated with negative perceptions about ability and ambition.

**However, part-time workers can be ambitious, skilled and experienced, proactive and flexible in managing their workload, and committed to their career.**

### To support part-time and flexible workers to progress, you could:

- Highlight senior leaders, including men and those who are parents and carers, who work part-time, to bust myths around the ambition and abilities of part-time workers.



- Clearly advertise that part-time and job-sharing is available on job advertisements, particularly for manager and senior roles.
- Train line managers to support employees who wish to work part-time, including:
  - Support those moving from full-time to part-time - explore reallocating work to account for reduced hours and allocate work that reflects their skills and experience;
  - holding regular conversations about career development - ask if they want to progress and support them to do so;
  - ensuring they are able to access networking, and learning and development opportunities, at a time that is convenient for them.

## Measure and evaluate policies to support diversity and inclusion

**It is important to measure and evaluate your policies and procedures to support progression, in order to identify progress and address problems.**

Setting specific, time-bound objectives that can be tracked will help you to achieve them. Openly publicising these objectives within your organisation lets your employees know that you are committed to supporting gender equality and encourages employees to work collectively to meet them.

### **To improve the implementation and evaluation of policies, you could:**

- Set specific, realistic objectives for diversity and inclusion across your organisation to create leadership accountability.
- Measure and evaluate the take-up and effectiveness of policies such as flexible working and talent development programmes, to identify problems and bottlenecks.
- Use exit interviews to understand the reasons people leave your organisation, and use this information to inform your HR processes and diversity and inclusion strategy.
- Use your gender pay gap data to understand the causes of your organisation's gender pay gap.
- Develop an effective, targeted action plan that seeks to improve policies and practices across the whole of your organisation, including work-life balance policies, and recruitment, progression, talent management and line management processes.

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The evidence for the actions in this report comes from the academic research contributed to the women's progression in the workplace theme of the Workplace and Gender Equality (WAGE) Research Programme.

For detailed sources, please contact [geo.researchprogramme@geo.gov.uk](mailto:geo.researchprogramme@geo.gov.uk)

