

Women's Business Council seeks to tap women's potential

On 2 May, the Home Secretary joined the new Women's Business Council's first meeting as it started its year-long mission to help Government unlock women's contribution to economic growth.

Foreword

Ruby McGregor-Smith CBE,
Chair of the
Women's
Business Council



It is a great honour to have been asked by the Home Secretary to chair the Women's Business Council.

As the Home Secretary has said, 'Women are at the heart of Britain's future economic growth and we need to do all we can to help them achieve their full potential.'

The Women's Business Council will focus on increasing economic growth by optimising women's contribution to enterprise and the work place. Members of the Women's Business Council are all business people who are committed to driving this agenda forward – working to provide practical solutions for businesses, Government and individuals alike.

In the year ahead we will discuss the challenges that face women in business and in the workplace. I very much look forward to sharing, in due course, the practical options that we come up with.

The UK would be better off by £15-23 billion per year if we fully used the skills and talents of women who are currently out of work. The Women's Business Council has the task of investigating how to tackle the challenges to women's full contribution – challenges such as returning to work after maternity leave, and getting more women into executive positions. Its recommendations will be considered at the highest levels of Government.

The WBC chair and council members are high-fliers, chosen for their

achievements in the business world and their commitment to diversity in the workplace. They are: Ruby McGregor-Smith (CEO, MITIE), Eddie Gray (President, GSK), Sue Langley (Director, Lloyds of London), Sue O'Brien (CEO, Norman Broadbent), Jill Shedden (HR group director, Centrica), Joanna Shields (VP/MD, Facebook Europe, Middle East and Africa), Cilla Snowball (Group Chairman, Group CEO, AMV, BBDO), John Timpson (CEO, Timpson), and Fiona Woolf (Consultant, CMS Cameron McKenna).



Further information, including the work programme can be found on the [Women's Business Council's webpage](#).

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Army of women boost business

Thousands of successful women have joined the Government's drive to kick-start growth by encouraging more women to start or expand their own business. Nearly 5,000 women have been signed up to become voluntary business mentors, as part of a scheme to recruit 15,000 mentors by the end of September. Inspirational mentoring champions include Specsavers founder Dame Mary Perkins and Dawn Russell, a cancer survivor who runs her own foundation aimed at boosting self worth in young women.

Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities **Theresa May** said:

"Women are vital to Britain's economic future and the support of a mentor will help even more of them fulfil their true potential."

The Government is working hard to help women make the most of their talents, but we cannot act alone. I'm delighted by these mentors' commitment to helping budding businesswomen succeed – and to making Britain prosper."

If women started businesses at the same rate as men there would be an additional 150,000 start-ups a year, and if female entrepreneurship reached the same levels as the US it would contribute an extra £42billion to the economy.



If you have experience of setting up or running your own company and would like to share your experience and expertise then please register on the [Get Mentoring website](#), where free training is available to help you become a mentor. If you have an idea for a business but aren't sure how to turn that idea into reality, find a mentor on the [Mentorsme website](#).

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Business support for women in rural areas

The Home Secretary has announced further details on help available to women in rural areas to set up or grow their own businesses. £2m has been allocated to five Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) chosen to pilot rural growth networks which will help strengthen local women-led businesses.

These pilots will provide tailored support where it is needed most, which could include business advice, networking opportunities, skills development, virtual office assistants and start-up space.

Among the many women who could benefit are garden designers, holiday cottage entrepreneurs and women who have turned their passion for food and drink into a business. Case studies are available from the Home Office press office.

Environment Secretary **Caroline Spelman** said:

"Women who want to go back to work or set up their own company should not be held back by living in remote places. We want to help all women across the country turn their great business ideas into profitable rural businesses. Rural Growth Networks will create thousands of new jobs and hundreds of start-up companies by fixing problems rural businesses face, like a shortage of work premises and limited internet access."

Childcare Review announced

The Prime Minister this week announced that he has asked Sarah Teather, Minister of State for Children and Families, and Maria Miller, Minister for Disabled People, to undertake a review that will examine the evidence about childcare costs for working families and the burdens on providers.

The work will draw on the knowledge and views of a wide range of experts in this field, together with the evidence from across the world of what makes for high-quality affordable childcare.

Particular focus will be given to childcare for the over-5s – the

wrap-around childcare that so many families need after school and in the holidays. In addition, ensuring that regulation and inspection genuinely drives up quality and ensures safety, and doesn't lead to unnecessary costs or discourage people from setting up childcare businesses will also be prioritised.

A new programme aims to bring more diversity to the STEM workforce

The Royal Society, the UK's national academy of science, recently announced a new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)-funded programme focused on increasing diversity in the scientific workforce.

Despite some progress, there are still too many groups under-represented in this sector. The programme, which is expected to run over four years, has total funding of £700,000. It will join a parallel programme being run by the Royal Academy of Engineering and will now provide an integrated diversity programme for the Science Technology, Engineering and Maths workforce.

The new stream of work will focus on understanding the character and

make-up of the scientific workforce, and look at ways to remove barriers to entry and progression so as to lead to an increase in diversity in both academia and industry. The Equality and Diversity Advisory Network (EDAN) were consulted in devising the programme and as a result, it will be focusing on gender, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status. A steering group has been setup to drive the work led by Professor Dame Julia Higgins DBE FRS FREng.



You can read more about this programme on the [Royal Society website](#).

Equal pay audits: a step closer to eliminating the gender pay gap

On 14 June, the Government published its own response to a question posed in the Modern Workplaces Consultation on whether employers who lose an employment tribunal equal pay case should be required to carry out a pay audit.

The Government has considered all views on this very carefully, and decided to proceed with the proposal. This will mean that an Employment Tribunal which finds that an employer has discriminated on grounds of sex, in contractual or non-contractual pay, will be obliged to order the employer to conduct a pay audit in cases where continuing discrimination is likely. An audit would not be ordered if an audit has been completed in the last three years, the employer has transparent pay practices or the employer can show a good reason why it would not be useful. Micro businesses (those with fewer than 10 employees) will initially be exempt from the proposals.

The Government intends to issue a further consultation later this year on the exact details of how the audits will operate and what publication requirements will apply. We will work closely with business organisations and other interested stakeholders throughout this process, and we will seek an opportunity to bring forward legislation when Parliamentary time allows.

This proposal will supplement the Think, Act, Report initiative, which provides a voluntary, incremental approach to developing gender equality.



The response is published on the [Home Office website](#).

Responses to other elements of the Modern Workplaces consultation will be published in due course.

Think, Act, Report update

Equal pay audits will help tackle the growing number of pay claims to tribunals but, in most cases, we believe the best approach is a voluntary one. Think, Act, Report provides a framework to help companies think about gender equality issues in the workforce, focusing on recruitment, retention, promotion, and pay.

The scheme encourages firms to take action to promote gender equality and – crucially – to share their progress publicly. While it is up to individual firms to decide what information to report, they share a common desire to be more transparent and to share best practice.

Last week, Nomura Bank became the latest major company to publicly

commit to providing gender equality by signing up to Think, Act, Report, joining others including Tesco, BT and DHL.

A growing number of companies understand that championing equality can help boost diversity, retain valuable female staff and even attract more business from women consumers.



More information, including case studies showing how promoting gender equality can help boost business is available on the [Home Office website](#).

Improving women's access to finance

The Government is making sure businesswomen have the access to finance they need with a review into claims that women are being discriminated against by banks in their lending decisions.

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg commissioned the Equalities Minister, Lynne Featherstone, to review the claims made by a 2011 IPPR report called 'Women and Banks – are female customers facing discrimination?' Lynne Featherstone is working with the British Bankers' Association, the Council for Mortgage Lenders and other industry bodies to identify actions to address this critical area and ensure female entrepreneurs are confident they have the same access to funds as their male counterparts.

Minister for Equalities **Lynne Featherstone** said:

"It is completely unacceptable if banks are discriminating against women. Women should receive exactly the same service in accessing financial help as their male counterparts. We are working with the British Bankers' Association and other industry representatives to identify what can be done by the financial sector to support women and to set out an action plan. Greater transparency by lenders in the way they go about their business is needed to ensure women have confidence to access the finance they need without the fear of being discriminated against."

A parallel review on business lending to ethnic minority entrepreneurs and businesses is being conducted by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

UK backs business-led approach to boosting women on boards

On 28 May, the UK Government responded to a European Commission consultation on what action should be taken to address gender imbalance in corporate boards in the EU.

The Government's response argues that quotas and burdensome legislation are not the answer to boosting the number of women on boards. Instead, the UK supports a business-led approach, using levers for change like publicising best practice, role modelling, and voluntary gender equality reporting.

Recent figures show this approach is working, with more women than ever in the UK's boardrooms.

Just one year ago, Lord Davies' business action plan to increase the number of women on boards was launched. According to research by the Cranfield School of Management, the number of women on boards will exceed 25% by 2015 and may reach 37% by 2020. Indeed, unprecedented progress has been made over the past year, with 16% of senior positions now being held by women, up from 12.5% last year.



The IPPR Report can be accessed on the [IPPR website](#).



To read the Government's response, visit the [BIS website](#).

Age discrimination ban extended

A ban on age discrimination in the NHS will ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. The Government will provide extra protection for the old and the young from October following a Home Office consultation which examined the way that age affects how people are treated by public and private services.

Age discrimination is already banned in the workplace, and extending this to include services like the NHS means that everyone should receive fair treatment. Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities **Theresa May** said:

“We want to make sure everyone can realise their potential; part of this means ensuring people are treated fairly, regardless of their age. Having consulted widely and considered the evidence carefully, we have found that there are some areas where older people are at particular risk of unfair treatment. So we are acting to put that right.”



Read more on the [Home Office website](#).

The Queen's Birthday Honours 2012

The Queen's Birthday Honours List was published on 16 June, marking the achievements of extraordinary people across the UK.

This year, 498 women were honoured, 41% of the total. Six per cent of the awards celebrated the achievements of black and minority ethnic people, and 72% of award recipients were honoured for charitable or voluntary work in their local communities.



Further details and the full list of award recipients are available on the [Directgov website](#). Do you know a woman worthy of being honoured? Find out how to nominate on the [Directgov website](#).

EU study on domestic violence

A major new study has been launched on domestic violence in a bid to establish the scale of the problem across the EU.

The research will be carried out by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and aims to address what is said to be a lack of regular and comparable data on violence against women.



Read more on [the Parliament website](#).

Listening to women's voices



In the past month, Minister for Equalities Lynne Featherstone chaired two further roundtable events where she listened to the views of key organisations that represent women.

On 10 May she met with UK NGO representatives who participated in the 56th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to discuss this year's outcomes and preliminary plans for next year.

On 12 June, she met with representatives of organisations to discuss the work of the Women's Business Council and how women's economic contribution can be supported and developed. Discussion focused on how we can reframe workplace equality and flexible working as mainstream good business, and how senior men can be enrolled in this effort.

Also up for discussion were childcare (especially for those working atypical hours, and for older children), supporting women into employment, promoting self-employment and shared parental leave.

Asian Women of Achievement Awards

On 16 May, the Home Secretary attended the Asian Women of Achievement Awards to celebrate the wealth of female talent in Britain.



Home Secretary, Theresa May, with the AWA in Business winner Vicky Shu, lead project engineer, Shell UK



Read more at the [Asian Women of Achievement website](#).

Have your say

We welcome your views

Call for evidence: EU women on boards proposals

The European Commission has announced that it is considering proposing legislative quotas to improve the representation of women on boards across the EU, and recently held a consultation into the matter. The House of Lords European Union Committee intends to examine the case for European intervention in this area.

Contributions are invited from all individuals and organisations with an interest in this issue. Particular questions to which you may consider responding to are below; however, respondents need only reply to

those questions which they consider relevant to them. The Committee's call for evidence, published today, asks specifically:

- Are quotas the only option? What other measures could the EU employ?
- Can or should gender diversity be incentivised?
- What are the positive and negative effects of legislative quotas? What impact have quotas had elsewhere in Europe?
- What does success look like in this area?



For information on submitting evidence, please visit the [UK Parliament website](#).

The deadline for written evidence is Tuesday 10 July.

Equality Act 2010: consultation on employer liability for harassment of employees by third parties

This consultation seeks your views on the Government's proposal to repeal the provisions in the Equality Act 2010 which make

employers liable for harassment of their employees by third parties over whom they do not have direct control, such as customers or clients.



The consultation closes on 7 August 2012 and is available on the [Home Office website](#).

Pass on our newsletter and sign up

Please pass on our newsletter to anyone you think would be interested. We want to ensure that as wide a range of women and organisations have the chance to receive it. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, [unsubscribe here](#).