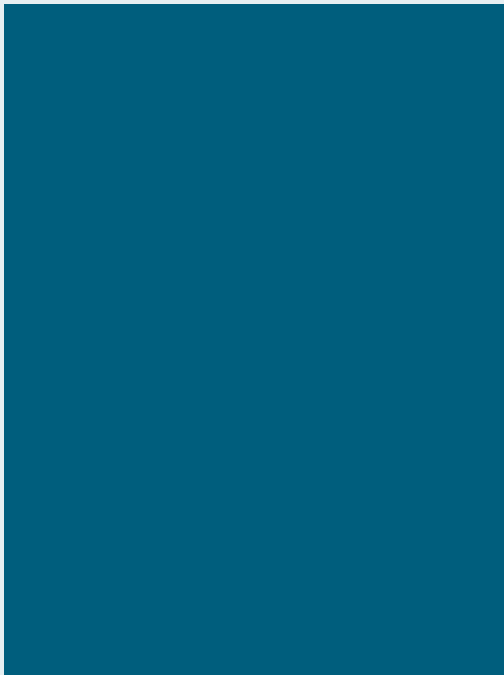
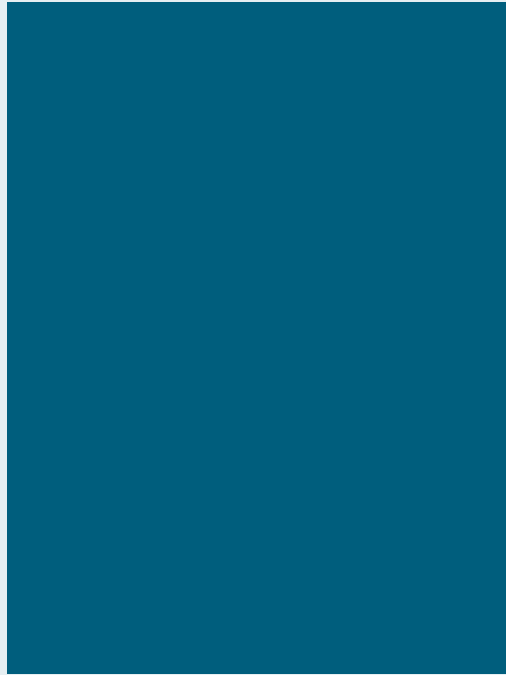




HM Government



Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise Taskforce



HM Government

Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise Taskforce



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01

Foreword by Anne Boden





Like all entrepreneurs, I delight in the new. There is nothing more exciting than watching a venture being launched and disrupting everything around it. Thanks to developments in tech, this is happening at speed. Looking back just ten years, it is astonishing to see just how much the world has changed in that time. When I made the decision to create a mobile-first bank, banking apps were in their infancy. High street banks had put a limited amount of their offerings online, but the apps were pretty basic and not very easy to use. Today, all that has changed. Nearly every financial institution has their own app and the facilities on offer are very sophisticated indeed. Starling Bank, the business I founded, led the way in that and helped create an entirely new category of fintech firms, many of which have grown larger and eclipsed their traditional rivals.

Imagine how much things will change over the next decade. Artificial intelligence and deep learning were barely spoken about until a few years ago, except by those deeply immersed in the tech world and among sci fi film fans. Yet, today, developments that would once have been unthinkable are becoming a reality, thanks to the advances in technology. The growth in the number of these advances is exponential too, with the capabilities of AI multiplying at an astonishing rate. We are in the early stages and can hardly even imagine what can be achieved in the next decade, but it will be extraordinary.

It was in this context that I was greatly intrigued to be asked to chair the Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise Taskforce, with the goal of encouraging the next generation of women entrepreneurs to start high-growth businesses. This was no small challenge, and high-growth entrepreneurship has not been looked at in detail before. Women routinely face multiple barriers in the entrepreneurial sphere, and when it comes to achieving high-growth, many of these challenges are compounded. For example, in 2022, of the UK's multi billion pound venture capital funding, female entrepreneurs routinely received less than a 2% share of the investments made each year.¹

¹ Treasury Committee, [Venture Capital: Nineteenth Report of Session 2022-23](#) (2023), page 12. Alternatively see, British Business Bank, [Small Business Equity Tracker 2023](#) (2023), page 8

Then, a thought occurred to me. Perhaps this was an extremely timely intervention. Ignore for a moment the scale of the challenge and instead look at the size of the opportunity. That opportunity lies in the changes that are coming. One of the reasons so often trotted out as to why women are underrepresented among the ranks of high-growth entrepreneurs is because they gravitate to less economically productive, people-oriented sectors, such as health, social care, and the environment. These skills, of course, will be at the core of solving some of the most pressing issues facing us today, from climate change to an ageing population. Combined with the immense capabilities of generative AI, women could be at the heart of disrupting these vital industries, well beyond the boundaries of previous technology waves. The more I looked into it, the more it seemed that the prospects for female entrepreneurs were aligning with what is coming next. The government has stated its ambition to become a science and tech superpower by 2030. Its goal is to build on the UK's already impressive technology and innovation heritage, which spans from Alan Turing's computer to the first DNA sequencing, to the invention of the world-wide web. Our tech sector, worth \$1 trillion in 2022, is the largest in Europe and the third highest valued in the world behind the USA and China.² We're not running short on ideas, either. The UK is home to 85,000 start-ups and scale-ups.³

We won't succeed in becoming a tech superpower by simply supporting a larger number of SMEs, however innovative. No, to become a tech superpower, we need to create the right environment for our own UK tech giants, so the next generation of high-growth businesses have everything they need to dominate their sectors both in the UK and abroad. But there is more than that. Our ambition should be to put women front and centre of the tech superpower aspiration. We are effectively starting this race with one hand tied behind our backs. It is because women have unique skills, aptitude and interests that will put UK PLC out in front.

It won't be easy or straightforward. As the female entrepreneur members of the Taskforce and I recognise, elements of the system are stacked against us. There will need to be some strong shifts away from some deeply entrenched working practices. While the number of women taking computer science degrees is growing faster than any other university subject⁴ and computing degrees have seen a 17.5% growth in applications from women from 2022 to 2023, we are still in the minority when it comes to studying STEM.⁵ While many women are already successful coders, the current reality is that the ratio of women to men in this space is still low. However, looking at it from a positive viewpoint, this is becoming less of an issue. In this new era of technology, the ratio and mix of skills required to design, develop and deploy systems that harness AI is going to evolve. It's not just coding that is needed to power the AI revolution – capabilities like communication skills, creativity and problem solving are becoming ever more central. To give just one example, AI-driven assistants working

² Department for Science, Innovation & Technology and others, [Plans to make UK an international technology superpower launched](#) (2023)

³ Department for Science, Innovation & Technology and others, [Plans to make UK an international technology superpower launched](#) (2023)

⁴ UCAS, [2023 cycle application figures - 30 June deadline](#) (2023)

⁵ UCAS, [2023 cycle application figures - 30 June deadline](#) (2023)

at the human machine interface rely on our empathy, personality and language as key inputs. When it comes to the next generation of major businesses, what will count will be the ideas and execution, rather than the coding behind the scenes.

There is, however, lots more that still needs to be done to make sure the next generation of female entrepreneurs are able to embrace the opportunities that lie ahead and take a major role in building the high-growth businesses that will transform all our lives over the next decade and beyond. There will be and, indeed already is, a huge amount of money floating around to fund innovative businesses that won't just add value for customers, but will transform all of our futures.

This Taskforce, made up of an innovative group of entrepreneurs and investors, all who have essential experience of this environment, have explored how we can not only embrace the changes that lay ahead, but make sure that women play the role they were always destined to have.

High-growth enterprises will fuel our future, unlocking growth and productivity in the UK, driving us towards the goal of becoming that tech superpower. We will, however, only meet that goal if all of our entrepreneurial talent is supported and allowed to flourish.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Taskforce members who have worked alongside me on this important agenda. I would also like to thank Starling Bank, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Wolff Olins, Portland Communications and Slaughter & May for their assistance and support in the delivery of this report.

Anne Boden, MBE

Chair, Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise Taskforce

02

Foreword by Maria Caulfield,
Minister for Women





Like most global economies, the UK has witnessed unprecedented challenges in recent years, resulting in significant business uncertainty. However, we have also seen that change can generate new opportunities for entrepreneurship.

New enterprises that improve healthcare, fintech, national security, our environment, and that drive new technologies, boost the UK's economic growth – and importantly, create a modern, vibrant labour market. Our challenge has to be economic growth built on the cornerstones of fairness, diversity, inclusivity and innovation, which foster strategic alliances across the UK, developing strong and sustainable regional ecosystems.

The UK is a growing science and technology superpower and we must capitalise on this. The pace of change is fast globally and we must remain competitive and dynamic. We can only do this if we utilise the talents of all to help us meet the demands of many.

As this report shows, the number of high-growth enterprises with at least one female founder is incredibly low and the picture is even worse for all-female teams.⁶ This represents a shocking waste of talent and innovation and understanding the issues and barriers behind it was something I was particularly keen to understand.

That's why I was delighted to hear that Anne Boden, founder of Starling Bank and the first woman to set up a bank in this country, had agreed to chair the Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise Taskforce. The Taskforce was established in 2022 with the aim of identifying areas for action to help increase the number of women setting up high-growth enterprises, particularly in the regions outside of London.

Under Anne's leadership, the Taskforce has focussed on identifying the main barriers throughout the journey to becoming a high-growth entrepreneur. They have looked at how we can increase the role models young people have in school and university, helping young women see themselves as potential entrepreneurs. Members shared the

⁶ Information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of Beauhurst data, using the OECD's definition of high-growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report

challenges they and other women faced in raising capital to scale up their businesses and looked at how increasing diversity in the investment sector may help. They also identified the areas in the UK where female entrepreneurs are thriving: examining the regional infrastructures that support them with the aim of replicating that support around the country. By using their convening power to influence investors alongside the wider business and academic community and by harnessing the power of regional networks, the Taskforce has identified new opportunities to drive change.

We know women have the skills and ambition to launch successful businesses and we want to make sure they have every opportunity to do that. It is vital to everyone that we use this untapped potential to help boost the UK economy. I welcome the findings of the Taskforce's work which will help us to achieve the government's target of increasing the number of female entrepreneurs by half – equivalent to nearly 600,000 entrepreneurs – by 2030.

I very much look forward to seeing the efforts and successes of the next generation of innovative UK businesswomen.

03

Executive summary



The Taskforce aims to boost the number of women-led high-growth enterprises across all regions.

Action to increase the number of women-led high-growth businesses complements ongoing work to fulfil government ambitions to increase the number of female entrepreneurs by half by 2030.⁷

The Taskforce, chaired by Anne Boden, has worked with entrepreneurs, campaigning organisations, and the investment community to gather data and identify the main barriers for women in starting and scaling high-growth enterprises. This report represents many months of work to determine strategies to break down these barriers. The ambition is that the actions identified by the Taskforce will assist in raising the profile of, and creating visible change for prospective female high-growth entrepreneurs from across the UK, from all backgrounds, starting from school through to university and beyond. The Taskforce has identified opportunities to significantly boost the prospects of all-female and balanced, mixed gender teams.

What is a high-growth enterprise?

The Taskforce uses the following definition:

A high-growth enterprise has average annualised growth greater than 20% per annum, over a three-year period, measured by number of employees or turnover, with at least 10 employees in the baseline year.

See section 4 for more detail

What constitutes ‘women-led’?

A ‘women-led’ high-growth enterprise need not be entirely led by females, but should have at least one woman in a top three position (CEO, CFO, CTO) and women should hold at least 25% of founders’ equity.

See section 4 for more detail

⁷ Government Equalities Office, Equality Hub and The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, [Government launches taskforce to boost women starting fast-growing companies](#) (2022)

Stagnant progress: high-growth businesses with at least one female founder stuck at 18%

As it currently stands, just 18% of high-growth enterprises include one or more women on the founding team – while all-male founding teams make up 82% of high-growth enterprises.⁸ Women are underrepresented compared to men in every sector. Even in the most equal sectors, Personal Services and Craft Industries, founding teams with at least one female founder constitute only 37% and 34% of total high-growth enterprises with gender data available. In other sectors, the picture is much worse.⁹

Closing the gender gap in high-growth businesses could help drive economic growth

The Rose Review found that up to £250 billion of new value could be added to the UK economy if women started and scaled new businesses at the same rate as UK men.¹⁰ The Taskforce also understands that high-growth enterprises are a critical driver of the UK economy¹¹ and play a key role in the country's future as a global leader. Despite making up only 1.6% of UK businesses,¹² high-growth enterprises account for £160 billion of turnover, which is 4.5% of the total turnover of UK businesses.¹³ Furthermore, they make a significant contribution to employment, at around 775,000 jobs.¹⁴ While the value of high-growth enterprises is clear, there is a missed opportunity to significantly increase their economic value due to the low representation of women. This is alongside the societal value and innovation that high-growth enterprises can bring, as well as the benefits from greater diversity.

Women entrepreneurs ideally placed to drive UK's tech superpower ambitions

The Taskforce has identified that women entrepreneurs can and should be at the forefront of UK ambitions to become a tech superpower by 2030. These ambitions, announced in March 2023 in the UK's International Technology Strategy¹⁵ by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, centre around a single mission: becoming the most innovative economy in the world, at the centre of 'Industry 5.0'¹⁶ or the fifth industrial revolution.¹⁷ To achieve this, five critical technologies have been

⁸ Statistical information in this section comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data, using the OECD definition of high growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

⁹ Statistical information in this section comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of data taken from [Beauhurst](#) on the number of high-growth enterprises (using the OECD definition) and the sector of high-growth enterprises by the gender of the founding teams. For more information, see Table 3 in the data pack published alongside this report.

¹⁰ HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019), page 19

¹¹ Pugh, D., and others, [Understanding the characteristics of high growth companies using non-traditional data sources](#), Data Science Campus and the Office of National Statistics (2019)

¹² Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data using the OECD definition of high-growth. Calculated using: the OECD figure of 4,175 high-growth enterprises and the [BEIS 2023](#) figure of 267,650 for UK businesses with at least 10 employees (Table C). This figure was used since the OECD definition of a high-growth enterprise requires a business to have at least 10 employees. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

¹³ See [Beauhurst](#). Calculated using: the OECD figure of 160,000,000,000 turnover of HGEs and the [BEIS 2023](#) figure of 3,556,631,000,000 turnover of UK businesses with at least 10 employees (Table C). This figure was used since the OECD definition of a high-growth enterprise requires a business to have at least 10 employees.

¹⁴ Statistical information comes from [Beauhurst](#), documenting the estimated total number of employees for OECD-defined high-growth enterprises at the time of data extraction.

¹⁵ Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [The UK's International Technology Strategy](#) (2023)

¹⁶ Opinion-piece by Kraaijenbrink, J. written in Forbes, [What is industry 5.0 and how it will radically change your business strategy](#) (2022)

¹⁷ Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [Science & Technology Framework - taking a systems approach to UK science & technology](#) (2023)

identified: Artificial Intelligence (AI), engineering biology, future telecommunications, semiconductors and quantum technologies.¹⁸ Part of the opportunities identified in this report is to create an environment where privately-led, high-growth businesses will create globally leading businesses using these technologies. Human-centric approaches are key in sectors where the UK plans to make its mark, prioritising businesses that work towards a sustainable environment¹⁹ and health and life sciences.²⁰ In addition, there will be extended opportunities for participation in STEM, to ensure a more diverse range of people enter the science and technology workforce.²¹ There have already been successes in AI and data science conversion courses, where the UK Government aims to invest up to £30 million by 2030 to help people from underrepresented groups join the UK's AI industry.²² Given the right access, resources and support, female entrepreneurs could help shape the next tech-led industrial revolution.

Opportunities for change

Women have historically been underrepresented in positions of power in business.²³ In the traditional workplace, this has led to limits on career progression, the so-called glass ceiling, fewer opportunities for professional growth and the gender pay gap.²⁴ While entrepreneurialism may help towards independence and balance, many of the prejudices that persist in the workplace have a detrimental impact.

Since its inception, Taskforce members have been focused on driving change, using their expertise and influence to explore the barriers to progress for female entrepreneurs seeking to scale high-growth businesses, and ways to break through those barriers.

Some barriers make it less likely that women will attempt to start a business in the first place, such as pervasive gender stereotypes and a lack of representation of female entrepreneurs and role models.²⁵ They take root at an early age, affecting girls and women throughout their lives. Some barriers mean that once women start

¹⁸ Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [Science & Technology Framework - taking a systems approach to UK science & technology](#) (2023)

¹⁹ Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [Science & Technology Framework - taking a systems approach to UK science & technology](#) (2023)

²⁰ Evidence from Buchanan, I., and others, [Women and the UK economy](#) (2023), suggests that women typically gravitate towards health and life sciences. For instance, 21% of all jobs held by women as of September 2022 were in health and social work, with over 1.5 million women working in professional, scientific and technical industries.

²¹ Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [Science & Technology Framework - taking a systems approach to UK science & technology](#) (2023)

²² Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [Science & Technology Framework - taking a systems approach to UK science & technology](#) (2023), page 11

²³ McKinsey & Company and LeanIn, [Women in the Workplace](#) (2023). The research undertaken by McKinsey & Company was conducted across corporate America and Canada, surveying more than 27,000 employees and 270 senior HR leaders. Alongside women's underrepresentation in corporate positions, the research highlights the intersectional barriers faced by Asian, Black, Latina, and LGBTQ+ women and women with disabilities.

²⁴ Jones, L. and the Government Equalities Office, [Women's Progression in the Workplace](#) (2019)

²⁵ McKinsey & Company and LeanIn, [Women in the Workplace](#) (2023), United Nations Development Programme, [Gender Social Norms Index: breaking down gender biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality](#) (2023) and opinion-piece by Enciso, F. [Why a lack of women role models hurts women in business](#) (2017)

a business, it becomes harder to scale pit to high growth. Women-led businesses receive less funding than their male-led counterparts and suffer from a lack of business focused networks.²⁶

These barriers are compounded further by the additional caring responsibilities that are often shouldered by women,²⁷ as well as an imbalance of resources and support across the country. Outdated structures and beliefs continue to hold many women back from reaching their full potential. This needs to change if we are all to reap the economic benefits of a modern, progressive society.

All women are different, and will experience barriers highlighted in this report in different ways. Attributes like ethnicity, neurodiversity, disability, sexual orientation, to name a few, can lead to women experiencing even greater barriers to starting and scaling high-growth enterprises.

Over the last 18 months, the Taskforce has been utilising the expertise and influence of its members to drive change. For each of the barriers identified, the Taskforce has recommended potential opportunities to break them down. The Taskforce has split the opportunities it has identified into three main sections. The first centres on the difference in the funding female and male-led businesses receive – ensuring investors evaluate entrepreneurial pitches based on merit, skills, and the strength of the idea, irrespective of sex. The second group of opportunities centres on providing the current generation of female entrepreneurs and their successors with the tools they need to succeed. The third group of opportunities recommends ongoing monitoring and putting processes in place to specifically highlight barriers to female entrepreneurship.

3.1 Funding and fuelling high-growth businesses fairly

When it comes to high-growth entrepreneurship, one of the most persistent barriers to progress for female entrepreneurs is access to funding.²⁸ Despite several initiatives to improve the outlook for women, not much progress has been made. For every £1 of equity investment in the UK, just 2p goes to fully female-founded businesses, representing no improvement in the past decade.²⁹ Fewer women apply for funding – and when they do, they are less likely to receive it, and tend to receive significantly less than men.³⁰ The first step in understanding this difference in funding is improving data to better identify women-led enterprises and track their funding journey.

Opportunity 1. Ensure that “women-led high-growth enterprises” are truly led by women

The Taskforce believes that a “woman-led” high-growth enterprise need not be equated with an all-female or even majority-female founding team. For a high-growth enterprise to be woman-led, the Taskforce believes that at least one woman should be in one of

²⁶ HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019)

²⁷ Office for National Statistics, [Time Use in the UK](#) (2023)

²⁸ HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019), page.45-46

²⁹ British Business Bank, [Small Business Equity Tracker 2023](#) (2023), page 8

³⁰ British Business Bank, [Small Business Equity Tracker 2023](#) (2023)

the top three positions in the organisation (CEO, CFO or CTO³¹) and that women must hold a fair proportion of founder and employee equity share (at least 25%). This ensures that the high-growth enterprise is truly “woman-led” and not just that there is a woman present, while leaving space for the proven value of gender diverse teams.

Work has been undertaken by the investment ecosystem to improve the distribution of funding to gender diverse companies, and this should be commended. For example, in 2021, the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (BVCA) published a paper in collaboration with the Rose Review: ‘The Diversity Investment Guidelines and Best Practice Examples for VCs, Private Equity and Institutional Investors’.

The paper highlights how investors can drive diversity and inclusion internally and in their portfolios.³²

The Taskforce recommends that consideration should be given as to whether there is value to this guidance being taken further, by suggesting that investors collect data on the roles of the founders and leaders of the businesses they invest in, to ensure that the organisations they deem ‘diverse’ meet the standards outlined above. Investors are encouraged to interrogate their diversity and inclusion performance on a deeper level, as well as sending a powerful message to founders and leaders of high-growth enterprises that true diversity is important to investors. This should be done in consultation with existing initiatives, such as the Investing in Women Code to ensure alignment. The Taskforce would like to see investment firms of all sizes drive this recommendation forward.

Opportunity 2: Improve diversity of senior investment professionals

Improving diversity in senior investment roles is a key driver in enhancing the funding pipeline for women-led, high-growth businesses. Taskforce members agreed that gender balanced investors offer a broader spectrum of perspectives and experiences, enriching the decision-making process, reducing group-think. Yet, gender diversity in senior investment roles remains an issue. Research by the BVCA and Level 20³³ shows that just 11% of such positions are held by women and 13% of firms lack a single woman in their investing teams.³⁴

The Taskforce considered the role of voluntary targets in helping to increase the number of women working in key senior investment roles. It was felt that, in the first instance, a better baseline and understanding of the data is needed before any firm conclusion could be made on targets. However, the Taskforce recommends that firms look to set their own ambitious voluntary targets for the number of women in senior investment professional roles and on investment committees, in line with industry guidelines. Details about their efforts in this direction should be made publicly available on their websites alongside their existing diversity data.

³¹ Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer or Chief Technical Officer

³² British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association (BVCA), [Guidance and Best Practice Examples for VCs, Private Equity and Institutional Investors](#) (2021)

³³ [Level 20](#) is a not-for-profit organisation founded with the aim of improving gender diversity in the private equity industry.

³⁴ British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association (BVCA) and Level 20, [Diversity & Inclusion](#) (2023), page 7

Opportunity 3 – Increase signatories to the Investing in Women Code

The Investing in Women Code³⁵ is a voluntary commitment from financial services organisations to support the advancement of female entrepreneurship in the UK by improving access to tools, resources, and finance. The Code is proving to be an effective mechanism to drive greater equality in entrepreneurship finance. For example, Venture Capital (VC) firms who sign the Investing in Women Code are significantly more likely than non-signatories to invest in teams with at least one female founder (at 35% versus 27%). At the end of March 2023 there were 204 signatories to the Code, up by 40% from the previous year.³⁶ The number of signatories is expected to increase further in 2024.

However, the Taskforce has identified three critical sectors which greater uptake of the Code could move the needle for funding flowing to women-led high-growth enterprises:

A) Limited Partners

To date, just two Limited Partners have signed,³⁷ but this group, with their position at the top of the investment food chain, is uniquely positioned to lead diversity change among high-growth enterprises.

B) Growth funds

Growth funds are underrepresented among Code signatories, with just 1% falling into this category.³⁸ Access to late-stage funding is a critical challenge for all high-growth businesses, but female-led teams are at a greater disadvantage.

C) Private Debt Funds

A funding gap may exist for high-growth enterprises that operate outside sectors traditionally attractive to VC fund managers. These enterprises may benefit from private debt funding.

The Taskforce suggests that the push for more signatories from all three groups should be led by the Department for Business and Trade, working in partnership with the British Business Bank and the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association.

Opportunity 4. Drive inclusive behaviour through regulation, monitoring, and action by investors

While investment firms will play an important role in improving the outlook for women-led businesses, there may also need to be changes made to regulation. The Taskforce welcomes the timely consultation launched by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) which is examining diversity and inclusion in the financial sector.³⁹

³⁵ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023)

³⁶ Calculated using the number of signatories as of March 2022 and March 2023, with the values of 146 and 204 respectively. See British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2022) and British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023)

³⁷ British Business Bank, Investing in Women Code signatories, [website](#)

³⁸ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023)

³⁹ Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), [Diversity and inclusion in the financial sector - working together to drive change](#) (2023)

Lack of funding creates a barrier to any high-growth business. If women-led high-growth businesses are treated less favourably by the firms that the FCA regulates, it creates a significant missed opportunity for UK investment.

The Taskforce has raised two key issues for further consideration by the FCA:

- The 250+ employee threshold above which most of the proposals in the consultation apply, is too high. It excludes virtually all the firms in the VC and private equity (PE) sectors where high-growth businesses typically look for equity finance.
- The proposals in the consultation are inward looking only. They concern Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) within firms and are not concerned with the broader D&I effects of the way that firms treat their customers and investee companies.

The Taskforce has responded in more detail to the consultation.

The private sector, notably VC firms, play a pivotal role in enhancing founder well-being.⁴⁰ As such, the Taskforce recommends investors adopt policies to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment and to support founder well-being for themselves and their families. We recommend that the financial sector leads and explores best practices on this matter.

In addition, while childcare is not part of the Taskforce's remit, its importance as an enabler is recognised. Members of the Taskforce are working separately with the government to better understand the specific challenges for high-growth entrepreneurs and to look at how support around caring responsibilities can be made more effective for self-employed parents.

3.2 A thriving ecosystem: empowering female high-growth entrepreneurs through regional support and role models

Opportunities for female entrepreneurs in the high-growth space are increasing, but there are still several unique challenges faced by women. To date, there are far fewer female-founded high-growth businesses than male ones,⁴¹ which means fewer role models to inspire future potential female high-growth entrepreneurs. For the same reason, it is also more difficult to connect aspiring female entrepreneurs with experts with a broad understanding of the challenges they face, who might be able to offer valuable support and advice. While there are multiple resources of help and information available to all entrepreneurs, very little tackles the very specific barriers experienced by women.

⁴⁰ This is based on research conducted by Balderton, assessing how founders can optimise their personal performance, looking at lived experience and the factors that contribute to productivity. In their report, [Optimising Founder Wellbeing and Performance](#) (2023), Balderton found that founders reported high stress, resulting in 90% working more hours with diminishing returns for effort (83%), routinely prioritising work over themselves (57%), with 81% believing that VCs can help to create a culture where entrepreneurs can look after their wellbeing, which directly affects performance.

⁴¹ Information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data, using the OECD-definition of high-growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

In this section, the Taskforce looks at ways to make high-growth entrepreneurship more accessible to women, exploring how to create a powerful ecosystem to offer advice and support to women at all stages of their entrepreneurial journey.

Opportunity 5. Roll out Female Founder Growth Boards across the regions of England

Outside London there is untapped potential, ambitious and talented women who could be the founders of high-growth enterprises. However, these women need better access to capital, networks, advice and acceleration, as well as a community of like-minded entrepreneurs and role models to catalyse and support their growth journey. By enabling access to the resources that these businesses need to grow, this potential can be unlocked.

The Taskforce has created a replicable blueprint to level up local ecosystems for women with high-growth potential. Female Founders Growth Boards will act as facilitators of positive change across the UK. These Growth Boards bring together groups of local public and private sector stakeholders to deliver change in the ecosystem, a process kept on track by the Female Founders Dashboards. The dashboards monitor the supporting data, identifying gaps that may negatively impact female entrepreneurs and the progress of their high-growth ventures. Following the success of a pilot in Leeds, the Taskforce would like to encourage sponsors keen to drive this agenda forward to roll out this model across further areas of the UK.

Opportunity 6. Inspire girls and women to become high-growth entrepreneurs

Eight out of ten young people are unable to name a single female entrepreneur and when they hear the word “entrepreneur” they are four times more likely to think of a man.⁴² It’s inevitable that such attitudes will have an impact, limiting women’s career choices, not least because they recognise what a tough battle it will be to start and scale a business. To combat these stereotypes and inspire future female founders, the Taskforce recommends two initiatives:

A) Inspiring girls at school

The Taskforce has been working with the ScaleUp Institute, Founders4Schools and the Careers and Enterprise Company to prepare literature which showcases women from around the country who have set up high-growth enterprises. This will be shared with schools across the UK, showing future generations of women that setting up a high-growth enterprise is a valid, rewarding and achievable career option.

⁴² Santander, [Eight in ten young people can't name one female entrepreneur](#) (2020). Research was undertaken by OnePoll on behalf of Santander UK in November 2019. The survey sample consisted of 2,000 British parents and 2,000 British children, aged 11-18.

B) Showcasing success stories of female high-growth entrepreneurs in universities

In partnership with Starling Bank and Swansea University, the Taskforce is developing a repository of success stories about women high-growth entrepreneurs, to balance the mainly male-led case studies currently available and create a new generation of role models.

C) Celebrating the success of female high-growth entrepreneurs

The BVCA has committed to scoping and setting up a female entrepreneurship award. The idea is that this new award from a key industry organisation will motivate and encourage the next generation of female entrepreneurs and will become a showcase for the talent, best practice, dynamism and innovation that is coming through, providing another crucial layer of visibility for female-led, high-growth ventures.

3.3 In pursuit of equality: ongoing research into women-led high-growth enterprises

During the course of this Taskforce, members uncovered a number of potential obstacles facing female-led high-growth business. Despite extensive investigations, certain aspects lacked sufficient clarity to form definitive recommendations. As a result, the Taskforce proposes further research to explore these issues to evaluate if changes need to be made.

Opportunity 7. Improve data collection and research in key areas identified

The Taskforce has identified three areas for further investigation:

A) Better data on directors and people of significant control

The Taskforce contends that for a high-growth enterprise to be genuinely women-led, women should have a fair proportion of equity share and one of the top three positions (CEO, CFO, CTO) should be held by a woman. In the absence of data on the sex⁴³ of key personnel in UK high-growth enterprises, the Taskforce propose that Companies House or another organisation, begin collecting sex data on directors and people of significant control. This data can then be matched with information collected elsewhere about who founded, or holds key posts in, high-growth enterprises.

B) Better data on who is using EIS/SEIS

The Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) and the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS) tax incentive are instrumental for successful early-stage fundraising and investor decisions.

⁴³ For clarity, the terms “sex” and “gender” are both used throughout this report. Reference to sex is done so where the data that has been collected explicitly uses the categories “male” and “female” or for the purpose of future data collection. Gender has been used in line with the terms of reference (see Annex B) and to reflect the different approaches to data collection taken by the various sources cited in this report.

In the absence of data on the sex of key personnel in UK high-growth enterprises the Taskforce proposes that, as a first step, Companies House or another organisation begin to collect sex data on directors and people of significant control. This data can then be matched with information collected elsewhere, including which companies are accessing EIS and SEIS and the sex of those companies' key personnel. MPs are also urged to promote EIS/SEIS, particularly to female founders in their constituencies.

C) Validate that gender differences in access to equity funding worsen at later stages of growth

Opportunity 3.B details the even greater funding disparity faced by women-led high-growth businesses at the later stages of growth. While the Equality Hub analysis detailed in this report provides an initial view that women-led businesses may be worse off at later stages, the Taskforce recommends that this gap is validated, and that the causes are explored in detail, so that the investment ecosystem can come together to form solutions. A dedicated push to increase the number of growth funds signed up to the Investing in Women Code is a great first step, but the scale of the disparity seen in the Equality Hub analysis indicates that further solutions may be required to close the gap. The British Business Bank will continue to publish data on gender differences in access to equity funding through the Bank's Equity Tracker and Investing in Women Code annual report. As a Code partner, the BVCA will continue to commit to encouraging firms to provide data to the British Business Bank and promote the report and findings.

Levelling the playing field of high-growth entrepreneurship

While there is no single solution that will increase the number of women starting and scaling high-growth enterprises, the Taskforce believes that these recommendations and opportunities will generate a significant step forward for female founders. Stakeholders engaged by the Taskforce have already shown great enthusiasm for the issue at hand. However, bringing these opportunities to life will require a concerted effort from all these stakeholders, and many more organisations across the public and private sectors. The Taskforce looks forward to seeing the results of these recommendations in practice.

04

Scope, Approach and Definition of a Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise



Over the last decade, there has been a growing emphasis on monitoring the advancements of gender equality in business, including representation on FTSE boards,⁴⁴ educational attainment in STEM,⁴⁵ and rates of starting businesses.⁴⁶ This has been necessary given the extent of the inequalities and lack of opportunities afforded to women in these areas. The old adage of ‘what gets measured gets managed’ has been exemplified, with British business and all other stakeholders really stepping up, rising to the challenge, reporting on progress internally and taking action where gaps are found.

We are now at the beginning of this journey for women-led high-growth enterprises.

The government has a target to increase the number of female entrepreneurs by half by 2030 (equivalent to nearly 600,000 more female entrepreneurs).⁴⁷ Previous work, including the 2019 Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship,⁴⁸ has made inroads into changing the landscape for female entrepreneurs, engaging stakeholders and kick-starting a real movement to improve opportunities for women in this area.

In 2022, the government wanted to build on this momentum by focusing on high-growth entrepreneurs. The Taskforce on Women-Led High-Growth Enterprise was set up to explore these opportunities and members soon discovered the scale of the challenge. There was a lack of comprehensive, robust data on this issue and, more generally, no consensus on what “high-growth” meant. Most importantly, no one had documented what the barriers were for women when it came to setting up and growing a large-scale enterprise. The Taskforce was set up to focus on these core issues,⁴⁹ starting from the ground up in an area which, to date, had not received focused attention anywhere in the world.

Gathering robust, granular data has been a priority for the Taskforce, who worked closely with Beauhurst – a provider of data on UK high-growth enterprises – to achieve this. This formed a baseline for the report and subsequent recommendations, helping to identify gaps.

4.1 The definition of a ‘high-growth enterprise’

The definition of “high-growth” was discussed at length. This definition had to be robust and objective to ensure that progress can be monitored over time, and hopefully in the future, between countries.

⁴⁴ FTSE Women Leaders, [FTSE Women Leaders Review: Achieving Gender Balance](#) (2023)

⁴⁵ UCAS, [2023 cycle application figures - 30 June deadline](#) (2023)

⁴⁶ Rose, A., and Kevin Hollinrake MP, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship: Progress Report](#), The NatWest Group (2023)

⁴⁷ Government Equalities Office, Equality Hub and The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, [Government launches taskforce to boost women starting fast-growing companies](#) (2022)

⁴⁸ HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019)

⁴⁹ Government Equalities Office, Equality Hub and The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, [Government launches taskforce to boost women starting fast-growing companies](#) (2022)

There are several differing but valid approaches to measuring high-growth enterprises. The Taskforce includes three of the most commonly cited definitions here:

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Definition: A high-growth enterprise has average annualised growth greater than 20% per annum, over a three-year period, measured by number of employees or turnover. With at least 10 employees in the baseline year.⁵⁰

Beauhurst

Definition: Identifies high-growth enterprises using eight “triggers”: those who received equity investment, underwent a Management Buyout/Management Buy-in, received venture debt, reached scale-up status, received a large innovation grant, spun out from an academic institution, graduated from a selected accelerator and/or featured on a selected high-growth list.⁵¹

ScaleUp Institute

Definition: Defines ‘scale ups’ as companies that:

- (i) met the OECD definition of a High-Growth Enterprise within the last five years of the report; and
- (ii) file full accounts at Companies House. UK companies are only required to disclose their turnover if two of the following are true: annual turnover exceeds £10.2m or assets exceed £5.1m or more than 50 employees.⁵²

It was decided that the Taskforce would use the OECD definition of high-growth. This is used in most of the Taskforce analysis throughout the report. However, there are some circumstances where another definition has been used, due to availability of data or to facilitate a superior analysis. The report clearly states which definition is used for each analysis.

4.2 The definition of ‘women-led’

Defining a “women-led” high-growth enterprise is yet more complex. The reality is that the high-growth enterprise ecosystem is currently dominated by all-male teams (at 82%),⁵³ which indicates that women’s leadership of high-growth enterprises is significantly below parity.

However, “women-led” does not have to mean an all-female or even majority-female founding team. For a high-growth enterprise to be women-led, the Taskforce believes that at least one woman should be in one of the top three positions in the organisation

⁵⁰ Equality Hub and Government Equalities Office, [OECD-defined High Growth Enterprises in the UK](#) (2023)

⁵¹ Beauhurst, [High-Growth Companies Innovating Without Equity Finance](#) (2022)

⁵² The Scaleup Institute, [The Scaleup Index](#) (2020)

⁵³ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub’s reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data, using the OECD-definition of high-growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

(CEO, CFO, CTO), and that women must hold a fair proportion of founder and employee equity share (which the Taskforce defines as 25%). This definition ensures that the high-growth enterprise is truly ‘women-led’ and not just that there is a woman present, while leaving space for the proven value of gender diverse teams.

However, the data that is available on the UK high-growth enterprise ecosystem does not currently enable this nuance to be captured. The Beauhurst data set that is used in many places throughout this report segments the gender of founding teams into: all-female founded, mixed founded (comprising female and male founders) and all-male founded. Taking an example, while a “mixed founded” team might look “diverse” when only considering the number of founders of each gender, in reality the women in the team could hold the less powerful positions. This is the case often seen on FTSE boards, where the overall statistics show that women make up 40.5% of FTSE 100 boards. However, women make up a significantly lower proportion of the most powerful roles: 9 CEOs, 19 Chairs, and 37 Senior Independent Directors.⁵⁴

Given the limitations of the data,⁵⁵ the Taskforce analysis throughout this report looks at the data through the available gender lenses, in the knowledge that this is a blunt instrument to measure a ‘women-led’ high-growth enterprise as defined by the Taskforce.

The Taskforce was also specifically asked to focus on regional disparities. Gathering robust, granular data was critical to understanding the differences in the number of women-led high-growth enterprises across the nine regions of England and how a more localised approach could be taken to tackle barriers for women with the aim of benefiting more local economies.

The Taskforce has utilised the outputs of the Rose Review where relevant and ensured that duplication was avoided. The Rose Review has a broader scope on women’s enterprise as a whole, focusing on start-ups and moving through to SMEs and beyond⁵⁶ whereas the High-Growth Taskforce has drilled down very specifically on “high-growth” enterprises only.

This report presents comprehensive data, identifies key barriers for women, highlights best practice and shines a light on the women who are leading the way in building high-growth enterprises despite the additional barriers which are presented to them.

⁵⁴ FTSE Women Leaders, [FTSE Women Leaders Review: Achieving Gender Balance](#) (2023), page 30

⁵⁵ See Annex C for information on the data source used in this report and its limitations

⁵⁶ HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019)

05

Untapped potential: the current landscape of women-led high-growth enterprises in the UK



Women-led businesses make up a very small percentage of high-growth enterprises in the UK. Exact estimates vary due to the differing methodologies used to measure high-growth enterprises, and it is challenging to capture when an organisation is truly 'women-led' with the current data available (see Section 4 for a full explanation of the definitions used by the Taskforce). However, there is one point in which all methodologies concur: there is a significant gender disparity. Between 18% to 25% of high-growth enterprises include one or more women on the founding team.⁵⁷ All-female teams make up just 7% to 13%.⁵⁸ Even using the most favourable definition (Beauhurst), 75% of high-growth enterprises are founded entirely by men. Estimates of the volume of women-led high-growth enterprises vary significantly depending on the definition of "high-growth enterprise" that is used. Figures range from 183 to 3,579 for high-growth enterprises that are wholly female-founded, and from 267 to 3,404 for high-growth enterprises founded by at least one woman.⁵⁹

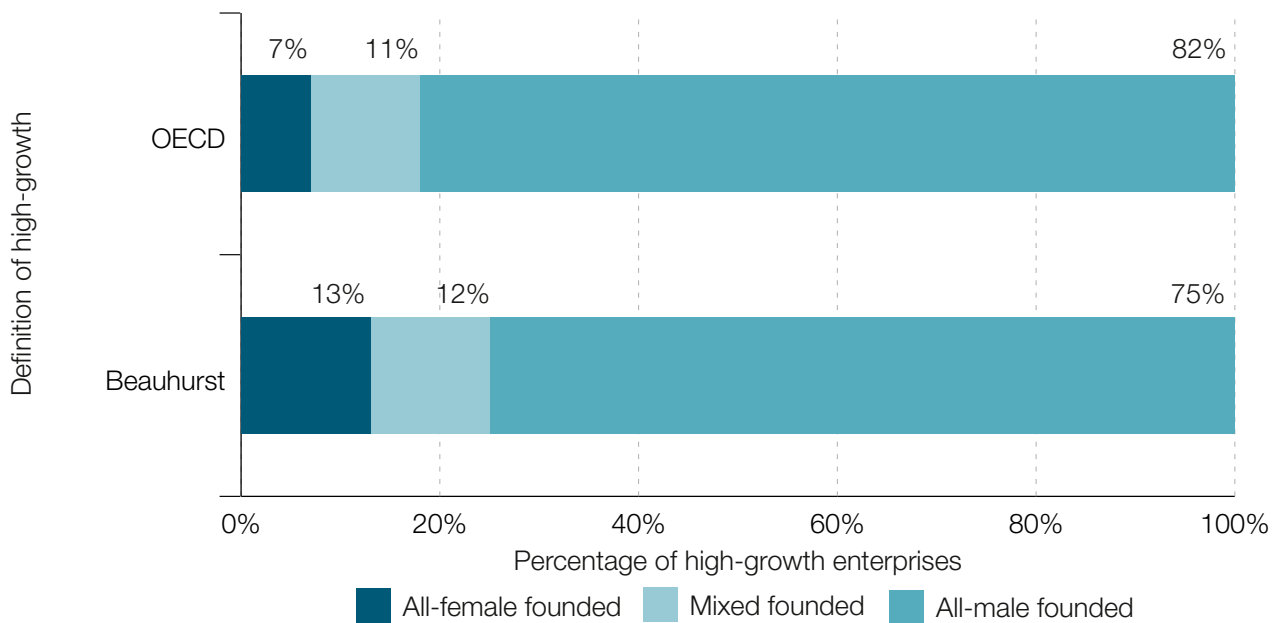
⁵⁷ The lower limit uses the OECD definition and the upper limit uses the Beauhurst definition.

⁵⁸ The lower limit uses the OECD definition and the upper limit uses the Beauhurst definition.

⁵⁹ The lower limit uses the OECD definition and the upper limit uses the Beauhurst definition. Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data, using both the OECD and Beauhurst definition of high-growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

Figure 1: 82% of OECD-defined high-growth enterprises are founded entirely by men.

Percentage of high-growth enterprises by the gender of the founding teams using the OECD and Beauhurst definition of high-growth



Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known.
 Companies are included where they meet the OECD definition of high-growth.
 Companies are included where they meet the Beauhurst definition of high-growth.

Source: [Beauhurst](#) data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub.

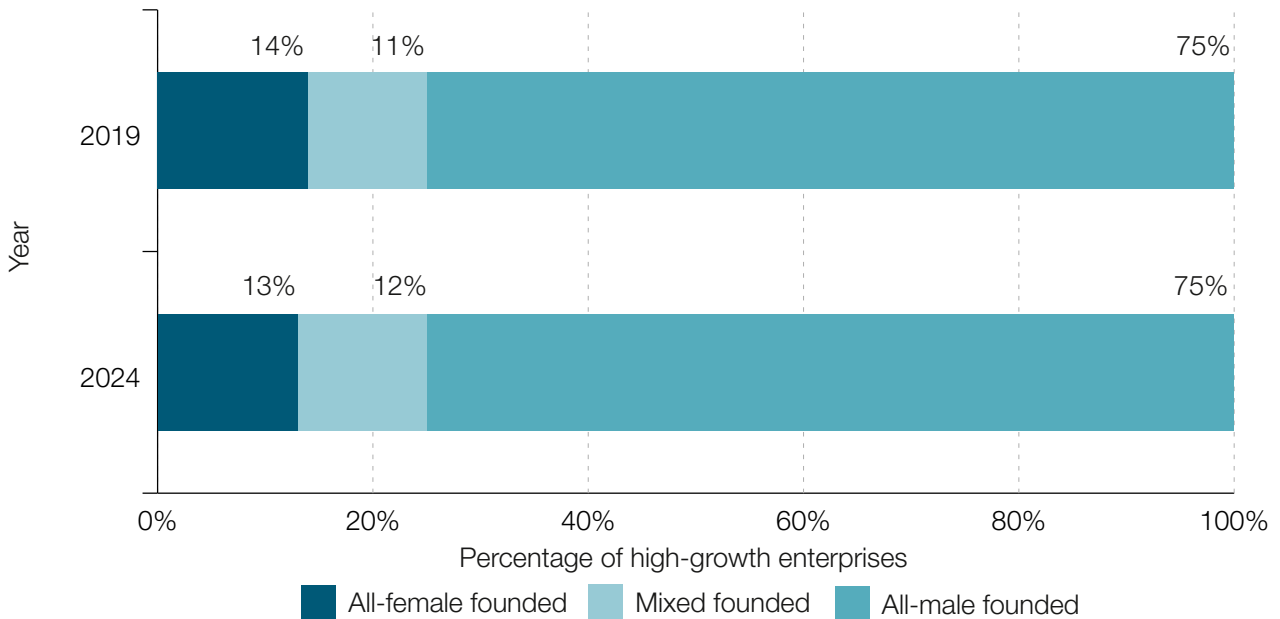
The figures do not appear to have materially changed in recent years. In 2019, all-female founder teams accounted for 14% of all high-growth enterprises. While the total number has risen (from 2,988 to 3,579⁶⁰) by 2024, the proportion of all-female founded high-growth enterprises has slightly reduced to 13%. A slight rise in mixed teams (from 11% to 12%) makes up this difference. This means that all-male representation on founder teams of high-growth enterprises has remained at a steady 75% in both 2019 and 2024.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub’s reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. For more information, see Table 2 in the data pack published alongside this report.

⁶¹ This analysis uses the Beauhurst definition of high-growth enterprises, since data following the OECD definition is not available on a time series basis.

Figure 2: The gender of the teams founding high-growth enterprises are relatively stable over time.

Percentage of high-growth enterprises (Beauhurst definition) in 2019 and 2024 by the gender of the founding teams



Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known. Companies are included where they meet the Beauhurst definition of high-growth.

Source: [Beauhurst](#) 2024 data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub. For 2019 data, see Beauhurst and Newable, [Female Entrepreneurs: gender diversity across the UK's high-growth ecosystem](#)

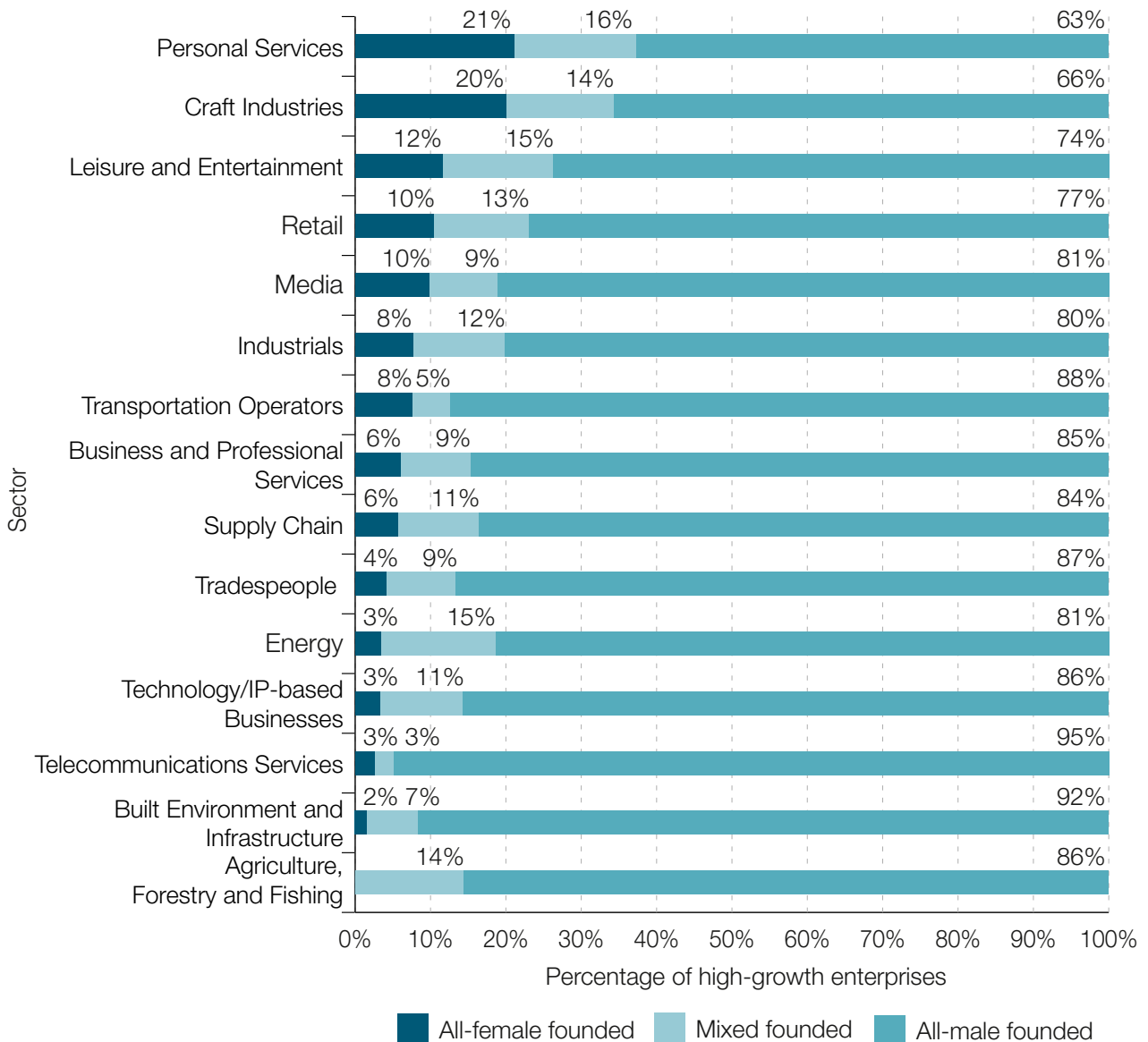
Women are underrepresented compared to men in every sector. Even in Personal Services, the sector least dominated by male-founded companies,⁶² founding teams with at least one female founder only make up 37% of all high-growth enterprises with gender data available. This is followed by Craft Industries⁶³ (at 34%) and Leisure and Entertainment (26%).

⁶² Personal services includes: nursing and care services, educational services, healthcare services, beauty services, other personal services. See [Beauhurst](#)

⁶³ Craft industries include: apparel and jewellery, fashion, textiles, stone, other craft industries, other needlework. See [Beauhurst](#)

Figure 3: There is a higher proportion of high-growth enterprises founded entirely by men in every sector. There is a higher proportion of high-growth enterprises founded entirely by women in Personal Services and Craft Industries.

Percentage of high-growth enterprises (OECD definition) in each sector by the gender of the founding teams



Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known. Companies can operate within more than one sector. Companies are included where they meet the OECD definition of high-growth. Due to rounding, the sum of the above percentages may not equal 100 or match those referenced in the text above.

Source: [Beaumur](#) data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub.

When considering the sector split of high-growth enterprises by gender, the highest number of all-female founded high-growth enterprises are in Business and Professional Services,⁶⁴ representing 26% of all-female founded high-growth enterprises. This is followed by Personal Services (at 18%) and Industrials⁶⁵ (at 14%).⁶⁶ Even in the most common sector for female-founded high-growth enterprises, Business and Professional Services, teams with at least one female founder only make up 15% of all high-growth enterprises.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Business and Professional Services includes: financial services, accountancy, consulting, marketing, legal, design, etc. See [Beauhurst](#)

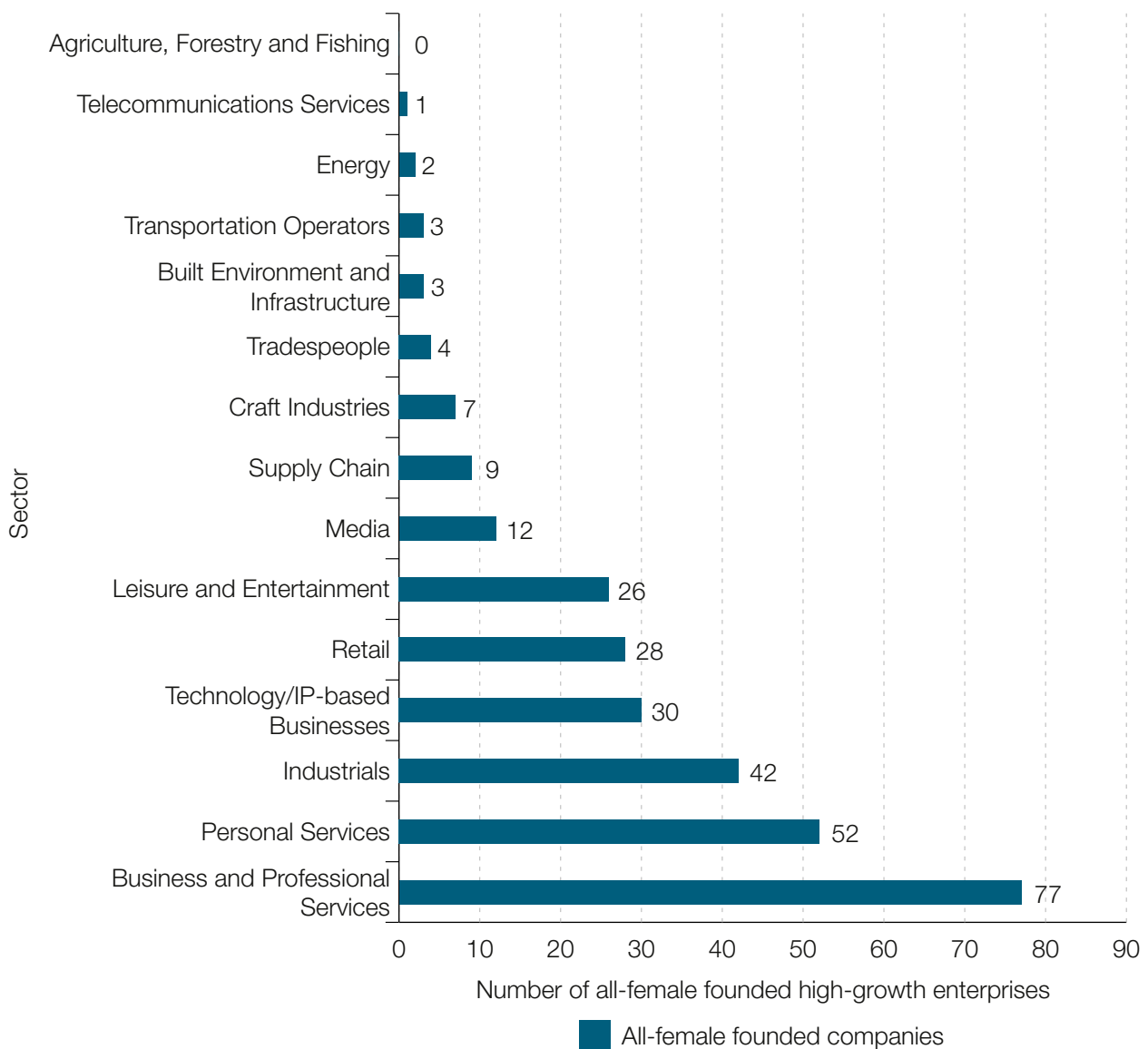
⁶⁵ Industrials include: automotive, machinery, metals, electrical components, healthcare products, furniture, etc. See [Beauhurst](#)

⁶⁶ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. See Table 4 in the data pack published alongside this report.

⁶⁷ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. See Table 3 in the data pack published alongside this report.

Figure 4: Most all-female founded high-growth enterprises are in Business and Professional Services.

Number of high-growth enterprises (OECD definition) in each sector for all-female founding teams



Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known.
 Companies can operate within more than one sector.
 Companies are included where they meet the OECD definition of high-growth.

Source: [Beauhurst](#) data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub.

Clearly, women are very under-represented in high-growth enterprises in almost every sector. The following sections of this report outline why it is in all of our interests to address this disparity (section 6), and the barriers behind the disparity with corresponding opportunities to break them down (section 7).

06

Driving progress: Why increasing women-led high-growth enterprises matters



6.1 Women-led high-growth enterprise as an engine of growth

High-growth enterprises are a critical driver of the UK economy,⁶⁸ and its future as a global leader. Despite representing only 1.6% of UK businesses,⁶⁹ OECD-defined high-growth enterprises account for £160bn of turnover, which is 4.5% of the total turnover of UK businesses.⁷⁰ They also make a significant contribution to employment, at around 775,000 jobs.⁷¹ While the value of high-growth enterprises is clear, there is a missed opportunity for economic value due to the low representation of women. If women were to start and scale enterprises at the same rate as men, £250 billion could be added to the UK economy.⁷² Putting strategies in place to work towards achieving this value is an obvious positive for the UK.

6.2 Advancing together: women-led high-growth enterprises and cutting-edge tech

Supporting women to thrive in high-growth entrepreneurship could also be a key driver in achieving the UK's ambition to become an international tech superpower by 2030. In 2024, the world is on the brink of another big shift in the entrepreneurial environment. Pundits are already talking about a 'fifth industrial revolution' or Industry 5.0, which will be at the centre of the next big shift in business.⁷³ The first industrial revolution was prompted by the invention of the steam engine, which vastly reduced the reliance on animal and human labour, bringing in a new age of manufacturing and precision engineering. A century later, petrol and electric power ushered in the assembly line and mass production. When computers arrived around the mid-20th century, they prompted Industry 3.0, with early developments in robotic and manufacturing automation. Most recently, we've seen the digital revolution, Industry 4.0, which has capitalised on developments in IT to bring us process automation, robotisation, big data analytics, smart systems and virtualisation, and the Internet of Things. This consumer facing technology has made our lives easier, whether it is running personal finances more efficiently, or ordering goods, or booking holidays. Like all the industrial revolutions before it, Industry 5.0 is expected to change everything – and at a faster, more scalable rate.

⁶⁸ Pugh, D., and others, [Understanding the characteristics of high growth companies using non-traditional data sources](#), Data Science Campus (2019)

⁶⁹ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data using the OECD definition of high-growth. Calculated using: the OECD figure of 4,175 high-growth enterprises and the [DBT 2023](#) figure of 267,650 for UK businesses with at least 10 employees (Table C). This figure was used since the OECD definition of a high-growth enterprise requires a business to have at least 10 employees. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

⁷⁰ See [Beauhurst](#). Calculated using: the OECD figure of 160,000,000,000 turnover of HGEs and the [BEIS 2023](#) figure of 3,556,631,000,000 turnover of UK businesses with at least 10 employees (Table C). This figure was used since the OECD definition of a high-growth enterprise requires a business to have at least 10 employees.

⁷¹ Statistical information comes from [Beauhurst](#), documenting the estimated total number of employees for OECD-defined high-growth enterprises at the time of data extraction.

⁷² HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019), page 19

⁷³ Opinion-piece written by Kraaijenbrink, J. written in Forbes, [What is industry 5.0 and how it will radically change your business strategy](#) (2022)

Industry 5.0 also represents a shift in focus from economic value to one of societal value.⁷⁴ The Taskforce believes that in a time of significant global and local challenges – such as climate change, long NHS waiting lists, people remaining in employment longer and a cost of living crisis – the private sector is needed now more than ever as an agent of change. This poses an opportunity for women, who already tend to be better represented in socially productive areas such as healthcare, education, climate change, and consumer-facing solutions.

The importance of the convergence of the women-led high-growth enterprise agenda and the UK advanced technology agenda cannot be understated. Without taking action, Industry 5.0 could develop along the lines of previous industrial revolutions, where women were shunted into the lower paid positions while men took management roles, with all the improved conditions and remuneration that went with them. Already, we are seeing greater disparity in high-growth enterprises in advanced technology sectors than the average: across all sectors, the average capital raised per deal by a female-founded company is four times lower than the average capital raised by an all-male founder team. When looking at AI, this drops to six times lower.⁷⁵

This will compound the challenges female entrepreneurs already face when building high-growth businesses. AI, machine learning and other advanced technologies must not be gendered from their inception. If it is, it will short-change the advantages these technologies offer, namely opportunities in business sectors already favoured by women entrepreneurs.

⁷⁴ Opinion-piece by Kraaijenbrink, K. written in Forbes, [What is industry 5.0 and how it will radically change your business strategy](#) (2022)

⁷⁵ Wajcman, J., and others, [Rebalancing Innovation: Women, AI and Venture Capital in the UK](#) (2023), page 12



As has been seen historically, high-growth enterprises tend to come from ideas that disrupt whole industries and radically change the way we live our lives. They tend to utilise technologies that enable scalability far beyond traditional labour-intensive industries. In the near future, innovation-powered high-growth is likely to centre around the rapidly developing advanced technologies of our age, including AI, quantum, immersive technology, engineering biology, and more.

“From Ada Lovelace (often credited as the world’s first computer programmer), to the thousands of women powering the Bletchley Park Enigma Code operation, women have always been in tech. However, women have clearly been historically underrepresented in this field. Even in 2017, PwC’s Women in Tech report found that just 3% of females said a career in tech is their first choice (compared to 15% of males).

“The current reality is that fewer women in the UK are trained in STEM than men. While there is lots of work ongoing to bolster the pipeline at a school and university level, it will take time for these women to come into the workforce, and to be ready to start businesses.

“But what it means to be ‘in tech’ is changing.

“In earlier phases of technology, technical knowledge may have been considered the most important factor for success. However, the natural language interface offered by GenAI is the latest step in a long trend of “abstraction” of the skills that are required to create great technology – away from bits and bytes as the programming language, to English as the programming language. This reduces the gap between the need to understand the nuts and bolts of the tech and the need for a very human understanding of the problem that needs to be solved. This opens opportunities for people not traditionally skilled in tech, to apply their knowledge and create industry-disrupting solutions using tech as the tool.

“Aside from this, GenAI has an impressive ability to create value in the “world of words”, an area in which women are traditionally thought to excel. Language, music, video and media are all set to be transformed. Other skills in which women are typically strong – empathy, personality, cognitive insight – also allow GenAI’s capabilities to be harnessed in domains which have very different workforce demographics from traditional tech landscapes.

“The way that people interface with tech to create solutions is changing, and it is abundantly clear that women have a lot to add.”

Charlotte Mitchell, Director in AI and Emerging tech, PwC

6.3 The imperative to support women-led high-growth enterprise

Driving gender diversity among the founders and leaders of high-growth enterprises will only serve to amplify the economic and societal benefits of high-growth enterprises. Diversity has been shown to contribute to better discussions, decisions and financial performance.⁷⁶ Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the bottom.⁷⁷ Also, companies with more than 30% female executives are more likely to outperform those that do not.⁷⁸ Male-only teams make up 82% of high-growth enterprises, so diversity in the decision-makers of high-growth companies remains low.⁷⁹ This leaves important value untapped.

Finally, the UK has a duty to its 34 million women⁸⁰ to level the uneven playing field of high-growth entrepreneurship. Starling Bank research shows self-belief in business skills among younger women (aged 18- 34) is equal to that of men (31% and 32% respectively) and women in this age group are more likely to see themselves running their own businesses than young men (48% vs 43%).⁸¹ Yet this future potential is at risk of being muted by the barriers set out in the next section. This Taskforce believes that it is of vital importance to break down these barriers and has set out opportunities to do so in Section 7.

⁷⁶ As discussed in an opinion-piece written by Gompers, P., and Kowali, S., [The Other Diversity Dividend](#), Harvard Business Review (2018)

⁷⁷ McKinsey & Company, [Diversity wins](#) (2020)

⁷⁸ McKinsey & Company, [Diversity wins](#) (2020)

⁷⁹ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data, using the OECD definition of high growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

⁸⁰ Calculated by adding together the population estimates for females in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Information taken from: Office of National Statistics's [Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021](#) (2022), National Records for Scotland's [Scotland's Census 2022 - Rounded population estimates](#) (2023) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's [Census 2021 Population and household estimates for Northern Ireland](#) (2022)

⁸¹ Starling Bank, [Reality lags perception when it comes to women in business](#) (2021). Research was conducted using a nationally representative sample of 2,000 UK adults who were asked using a variety of profile images whether they considered the person pictured to be capable of being an entrepreneur.

07

The road ahead: Strategies to break down barriers to women starting and scaling high-growth enterprises



The Taskforce members agreed that women navigate a myriad of challenges when starting and scaling high-growth enterprises. Some barriers make it less likely that women will attempt to start a business in the first place, such as still pervasive gender stereotypes and a lack of representation of women across the whole entrepreneurial landscape.⁸² These barriers may impact girls from an early age, as well as women throughout their lives. Other barriers mean that if women take the plunge and decide to start a business, they will find it harder to scale it to high-growth. These include the stubborn funding disparities faced by women founded high-growth enterprises and a lack of access to relatable business-focused networks that provide advice and support.

All of this is compounded further by the additional caring responsibilities often shouldered by women,⁸³ as well as an imbalance of resources and support across the country. Imposed by unconscious perspectives, systemic behaviours and structural barriers, these hurdles create additional difficulty for women compared to their male counterparts.

Women will experience the barriers highlighted in this report in different ways. Attributes like ethnicity, neurodiversity, disability, sexual orientation, to name a few, can present even greater barriers to women hoping to start and scale high-growth enterprises. In all cases though, outdated structures and old-fashioned beliefs continue to hold back many women from reaching their full potential – it is these that need to change if we are all to reap the economic benefits of a modern, progressive society.

For the purposes of this report, the Taskforce has divided the opportunities into three themes:

1. funding and fuelling high-growth enterprises fairly,
2. a thriving ecosystem: empowering female high-growth entrepreneurs through regional support and role models, and
3. in pursuit of equality, ongoing research into women-led high-growth enterprises.

The Taskforce has suggested a range of remedies that will usher in meaningful change and begin to correct the imbalance that has held female founders back for too long. These opportunities require action from a wide range of public and private stakeholders, and are detailed in the following sections.

⁸² McKinsey & Company and LeanIn, *Women in the Workplace* (2023), United Nations Development Programme, *Gender Social Norms Index: breaking down gender biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality* (2023) and opinion-piece by Enciso, F., [Why a lack of women role models hurts women in business](#) (2017)

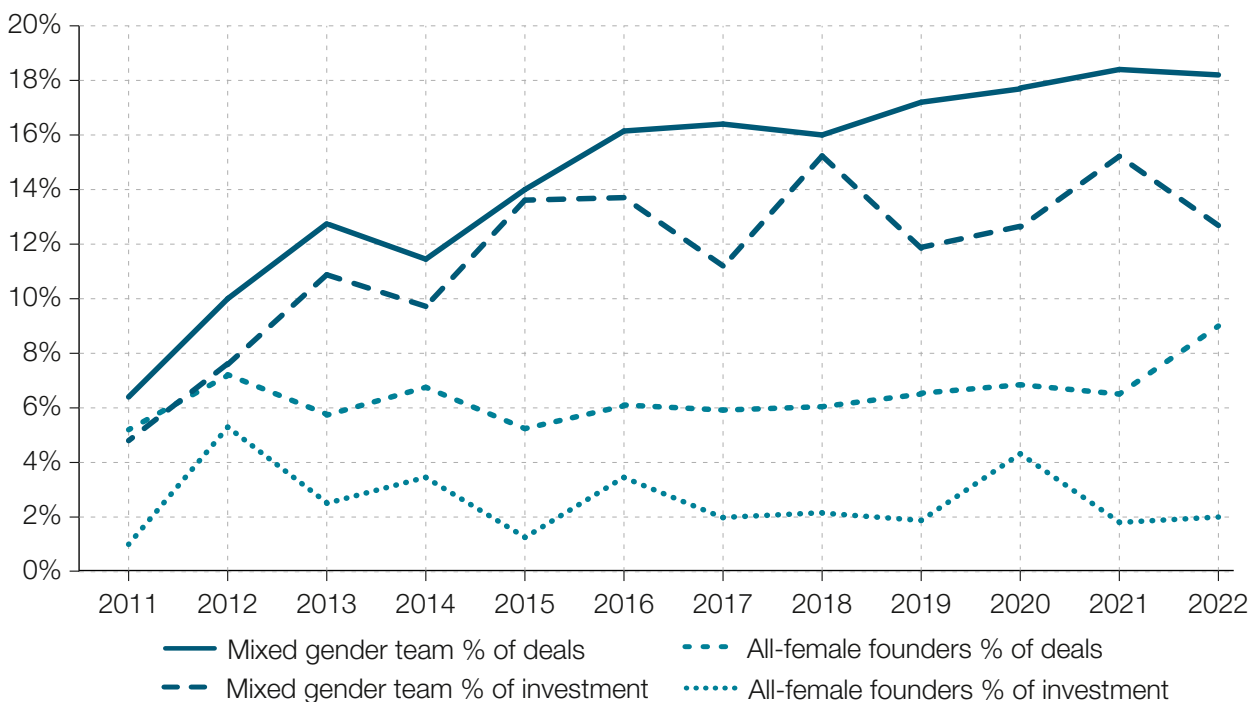
⁸³ Office for National Statistics, [Time Use in the UK](#) (2023)

7.1 Funding and fuelling high-growth enterprises fairly

Funding is one of the most vital ingredients in achieving high-growth, and there is a wealth of evidence showing that female entrepreneurs have received less funding than men over many years.⁸⁴ Around one-third (31%) of female business owners say that access to funding, and balancing business and personal commitments, are important barriers in scaling a business.⁸⁵ This is compared to just 22% of men.⁸⁶ Despite this, limited progress has been made towards closing this gap. For every £1 of equity investment in the UK, just 2p goes to fully female-founded businesses, and this is not improving over time.⁸⁷ The British Business Bank estimates that at current rates of progress, by 2045, all-female founded businesses will get only 10% of investment deals.⁸⁸

Figure 5: Mixed gender and all-female founder teams have had an increase (with variability) in deals and investments from 2011 to 2022.

Proportion of equity deals and investment received by all-female and mixed gender founder teams.



Source: British Business Bank, [Small Business Equity Tracker](#) (2023)

⁸⁴ British Business Bank, [Small Business Equity Tracker 2023](#) (2023), Extend Ventures [Diversity Beyond Gender](#) (2020) and HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019)

⁸⁵ HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019), page.46

⁸⁶ HM Treasury, [The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) (2019), page 46

⁸⁷ British Business Bank, [Small Business Equity Tracker 2023](#) (2023), page 8

⁸⁸ British Business Bank and others, [UK VC & Female Founders](#) (2019), page 14

Fewer women than men apply for funding. Only 5% of pitch decks come from all-female teams, compared to 75% from all-male teams.⁸⁹ A survey by SCORE found that over the lifespan of a business, 25% of women entrepreneurs will seek funding, compared to 34% of men.⁹⁰ When women do ask for funding, they ask for (and receive) smaller amounts: British Business Bank analysis shows that while all-female founders receive 9% of deals, this only equates to 2% of investment (in 2022).⁹¹



I've heard male investors say things like: oh, the valuation is too high, how is she ever going to grow into this valuation? Or, who is advising her on this? I always call it out and say: why does anyone need to advise her? That is the valuation she wants. Would they ever say the same thing to a man?"

Deepali Nangia, Taskforce member

The funding picture is even more bleak when it comes to female entrepreneurs from certain backgrounds. The UK's black and multi-ethnic communities comprise 14% of the UK population, yet teams from this background received an average of 1.7% of the VC investments made at seed, early stage and late stage between 2009 and 2019.⁹² Black female entrepreneurs experience the poorest outcomes. Between 2009 and 2019, only ten black female founders in the UK received VC funding. This equates to only 0.02% of total VC funding going to Black female entrepreneurs, which is the same as 0.02 pence for every £1 spent.⁹³

So why do fewer women apply for funding, why are they less likely to receive it, and why do they receive less than their male counterparts?

Language: The Harvard Business Review found that venture capitalists tended to ask men “promotion questions” about the potential of their business to make gains (focusing on hopes, achievements, advancement and ideals), while women were asked “prevention questions” about the potential for losses (safety, responsibility, security and vigilance).⁹⁴ Even female venture capitalists followed

⁸⁹ British Business Bank and others, [UK VC & Female Founders](#) (2019), page 22

⁹⁰ SCORE, [Women's Entrepreneurship, Part 2: Financing and Female Entrepreneurs](#) (2018). Information is based on survey responses from SCORE's clientele based in the US.

⁹¹ British Business Bank, [Small Business Equity Tracker](#) (2023), page 31. Also see British Business Bank, Challenges facing female entrepreneurs, [website](#)

⁹² Extend Ventures, [Diversity Beyond Gender](#) (2020), page 8

⁹³ Extend Ventures, [Diversity Beyond Gender](#) (2020), page 7

⁹⁴ Kanze, D., and others., [Male and Female Entrepreneurs Get Asked Different Questions by VCs - and It Affects How Much Funding They Get](#), Harvard Business Review (2017). This is based on a study of Q&A interactions between venture capitalists and entrepreneurs at the annual startup funding competition TechCrunch Disrupt New York City.

this pattern. The importance of language on funding outcomes should not be underestimated; those who were asked promotion questions raised twice as much capital as those who were asked prevention questions.⁹⁵

Pitching: A study from 2014 found that, regardless of the gender of the investor, investors preferred pitches presented by male entrepreneurs even if the contents of the pitches were identical.⁹⁶ As it currently stands, women may face barriers to access VC funding regardless of whether they display feminine or masculine characteristics. If they exhibit too much of what's typically seen as feminine characteristics they can be seen as not possessing the competence to run a high-growth enterprise. On the other hand, if they exhibit stereotypically masculine qualities, they are penalised for not fitting into gender expectations.⁹⁷

Connections: Deal sourcing is highly dependent on personal networks, with venture capitalists building their network and accepting recommendations to identify the next best investment. “Warm introductions” (a pre-existing relationship with a fund manager) improves the likelihood of securing funding. The British Business Bank found that mixed gender and all-male teams had a higher success rate in securing VC funding through warm introductions compared to all-female teams.⁹⁸

Investment is one of the most important factors that drives a business to high-growth. It is, therefore, vital that changes are made to the funding ecosystem to create a more level playing field.

Opportunity 1. Ensure that “women-led high-growth enterprises” are truly led by women

It is the belief of the Taskforce that a “woman-led” high-growth enterprise need not be equated with an all-female or even majority-female founding team. For a high-growth enterprise to be woman-led, the Taskforce believes that at least one woman should be in one of the top three positions in the organisation and that women must hold a fair proportion of founder and employee equity share. This ensures that the high-growth enterprise is truly “woman-led” and not just that there is a woman present, while leaving space for the proven value of gender-diverse teams.

⁹⁵ Kanze, D., and others,

[Male and Female Entrepreneurs Get Asked Different Questions by VCs - and It Affects How Much Funding They Get](#), Harvard Business Review (2017). This figure was produced through an initial comparison of the funds received by those who gave promotional responses to investor questions, compared to those who gave prevention answers. It was then corroborated through an experimental stimulation of the above Q&A session, using audio transcripts made during the event, asking participants (made up of VCs/angel investors and ‘ordinary people’) to listen to the exchanges between investors and entrepreneurs and to allocate hypothetical funds based on their reaction to the audio files. Outcomes on allocated funding based on the response strategy of venture capitalist were consistent across both approaches.

⁹⁶ Brooks and others, [Investors prefer entrepreneurial ventures pitched by attractive men](#) (2014)

⁹⁷ Williams, M., J., and Tiedens, L., Z.

[The subtle suspension of backlash: A meta-analysis of penalties for women's implicit and explicit dominance behaviour](#) (2022) and opinion-piece by Agarwal, P. written in Forbes, [Not very likeable: Here is how bias is affecting women leaders](#) (2018)

⁹⁸ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023)

At least one woman in a top three position. To use an example from another sphere of gender diversity, great progress has been made in female representation on FTSE boards. However, while women now make up 40.5% of FTSE 100 boards, they still make up a significantly lower proportion of the most powerful roles: only 9 CEOs, 19 Chairs, and 37 Senior Independent Directors.⁹⁹ This nuance is reflected in the FCA's 2022 requirements for listed companies to report information and disclose against targets on the representation of women and ethnic minorities on their boards and executive management, which go further than a simple percentage representation. The targets are as follows.¹⁰⁰

- At least 40% of the board should be women.
- At least one of the senior board positions (Chair, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or Senior Independent Director (SID) should be a woman.
- At least one member of the board should be from an ethnic minority background excluding white ethnic groups (as set out in categories used by the Office for National Statistics)

It is with a similar logic that the Taskforce has defined that a “woman-led” business should have at least one woman in one of the top three positions. These positions are defined as the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, or Chief Technology Officer.

Women hold a fair share of founder and employee equity. Equity in an entrepreneurial venture is about ownership and control, representing not only a financial stake, but also decision-making power. If female founders have a smaller stake, they are less able to make crucial decisions over the future direction of a high-growth business. They will also take a reduced pay-out upon an eventual exit or acquisition of the business. If female entrepreneurs in mixed teams face reduced equity and significant equity dilution at each funding round, they already have a built-in disadvantage versus their male co-founders. It is not only unfair, but can also be a significant impediment to innovation, progress and growth.

The Taskforce believes that a high-growth enterprise is unlikely to be truly “woman-led” if women do not hold a significant portion of equity. The Taskforce believes “fair equity” in high-growth businesses should be in line with Companies House definition that People with Significant Control (PSC), or “beneficial owners”, hold more than 25% of shares in the company and 25% of voting rights.¹⁰¹ Equity will, of course, see dilution over time, so the Taskforce defines this as 25% of the equity held by founders and employees at the outset.

⁹⁹ FTSE Women Leaders, [FTSE Women Leaders Review: Achieving Gender Balance](#) (2023)

¹⁰⁰ Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), [Diversity and inclusion on company boards and executive management](#) (2022), page 4

¹⁰¹ Companies House, [Guidance: People with significant control \(PSCs\)](#) (2022)

Work has been undertaken by the investment ecosystem to improve the distribution of funding to gender diverse companies, and this should be commended. For example, in 2021, the BVCA published a paper in collaboration with the Rose Review: The Diversity Investment Guidelines and Best Practice Examples for VCs, Private Equity and Institutional Investors.¹⁰² The paper highlights how investors can drive diversity and inclusion internally and in their portfolios.

The Taskforce recommends that consideration should be given to whether there is value to this guidance being taken further, by suggesting that investors collect data on the roles of the founders and leaders of the businesses they invest in, to ensure that the organisations they deem “diverse” meet the standards outlined above. This should be done in consultation with existing initiatives such as the Investing in Women Code to ensure alignment.

This commitment stands to fuel investors to interrogate their diversity and inclusion performance on a deeper level, as well as sending a powerful message to founders and leaders of high-growth enterprises that true diversity is important to investors. We would like to see investment firms of all sizes drive forward this recommendation.

Opportunity 2: Improve diversity of senior investment professionals

Women founders tend to gain more investment from women investors.

The British Business Bank found that when investment committees have 50% or more women, 17% of the teams receiving funding are all-female. When the investment committee is made up of fewer than 50% women, this figure drops to 7%.¹⁰³ The trend is corroborated elsewhere, with a US study of 57,000 VC investments showing that, at almost every round, female investment partners invested almost twice as much into female-founded teams as male investment partners.¹⁰⁴

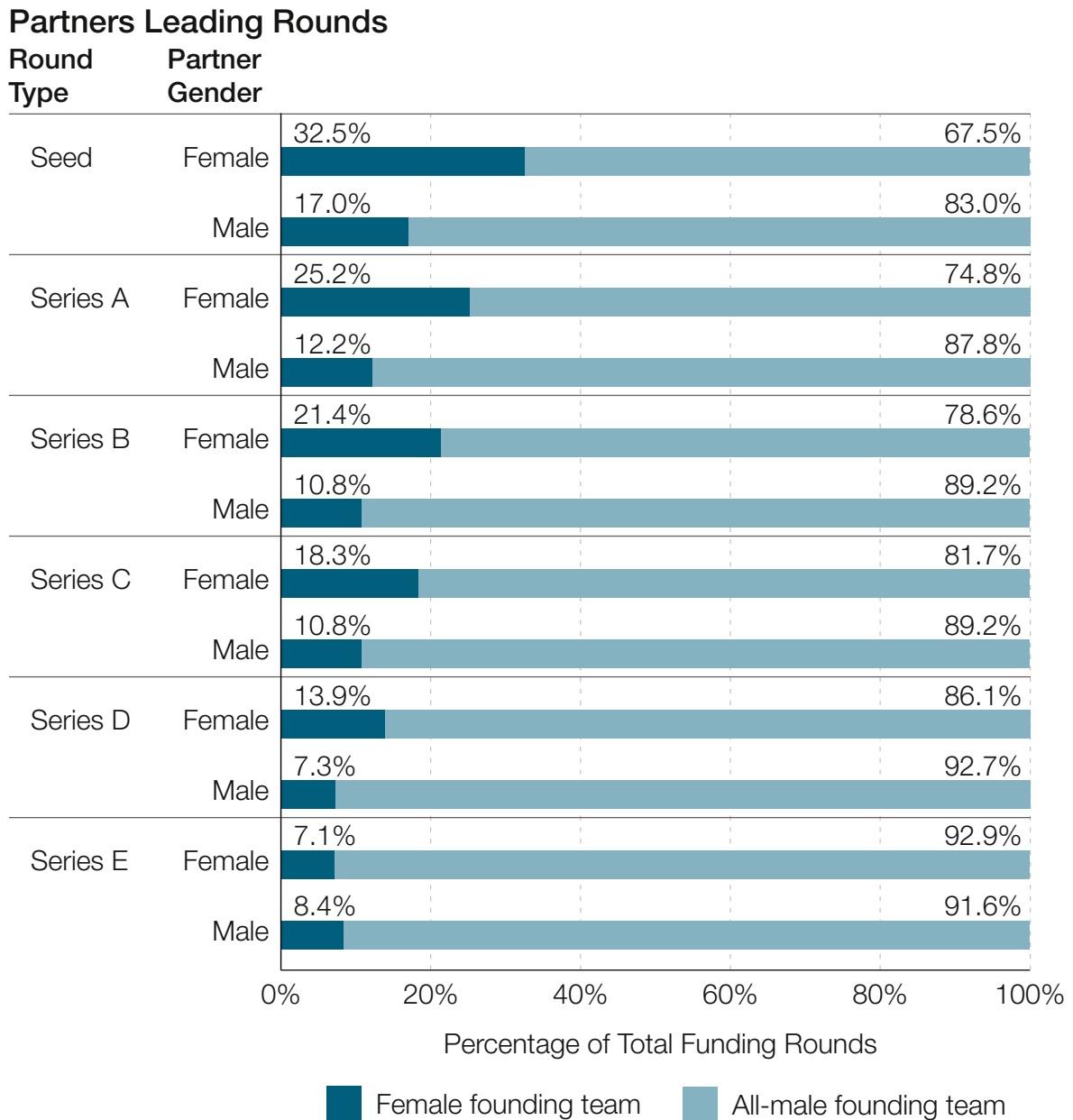
¹⁰² British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association (BVCA), [Guidance and Best Practice Examples for VCs, Private Equity and Institutional Investors](#) (2021)

¹⁰³ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023), page 38

¹⁰⁴ Kauffman Fellows Research Center, [Women VCs invest in up to 2x more female founders](#) (2020)

Figure 6: Female investing partners are more likely than male investors to invest in female-founded teams.

Percentage of total funding rounds by round type and partner gender and the gender of the founding teams



Source: Kauffman Fellows Research Center, [Women VCs invest in up to 2x more female founders](#) (2020)

Research has demonstrated that gender balanced teams bring a wider range of perspectives and experience to the decision-making process, leading to better informed investment decisions.¹⁰⁵ Once group-think is taken away, it encourages a healthier debate, enriched by diverse viewpoints, and that leads to better outcomes for the women entrepreneurs who are seeking funding for high-growth businesses.¹⁰⁶

Research by the BVCA and Level 20 shows that just 11% of senior investment roles are filled by women.¹⁰⁷ The figures are slightly higher at mid and junior levels (at 23% and 37% respectively). While representation appears to be improving gradually over time, 13% of firms still do not have a single woman on their investment team.¹⁰⁸ The British Business Bank conducts a similar analysis each year for those firms signed up to the Investing in Women Code; their research finds that only 4% of signatories have all-male investment teams.¹⁰⁹ This disparity could reflect the possibility that more gender diverse firms sign up to the Investing in Women Code, or (more positively) that signatories are working towards gender balanced investment teams. When it comes to investment committees, the British Business Bank found that 24% of signatory firms had zero women on their investment committees.¹¹⁰ If the investment team trend follows, this number could be even higher for the general population of non-signatories.

¹⁰⁵ British Business Bank, [Finding What Works: Pathways to Improve Diversity in venture Capital Investment](#) (2023)

¹⁰⁶ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023), page 38

¹⁰⁷ British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (BVCA) and Level 20, [Diversity & Inclusion](#) (2023), page 7

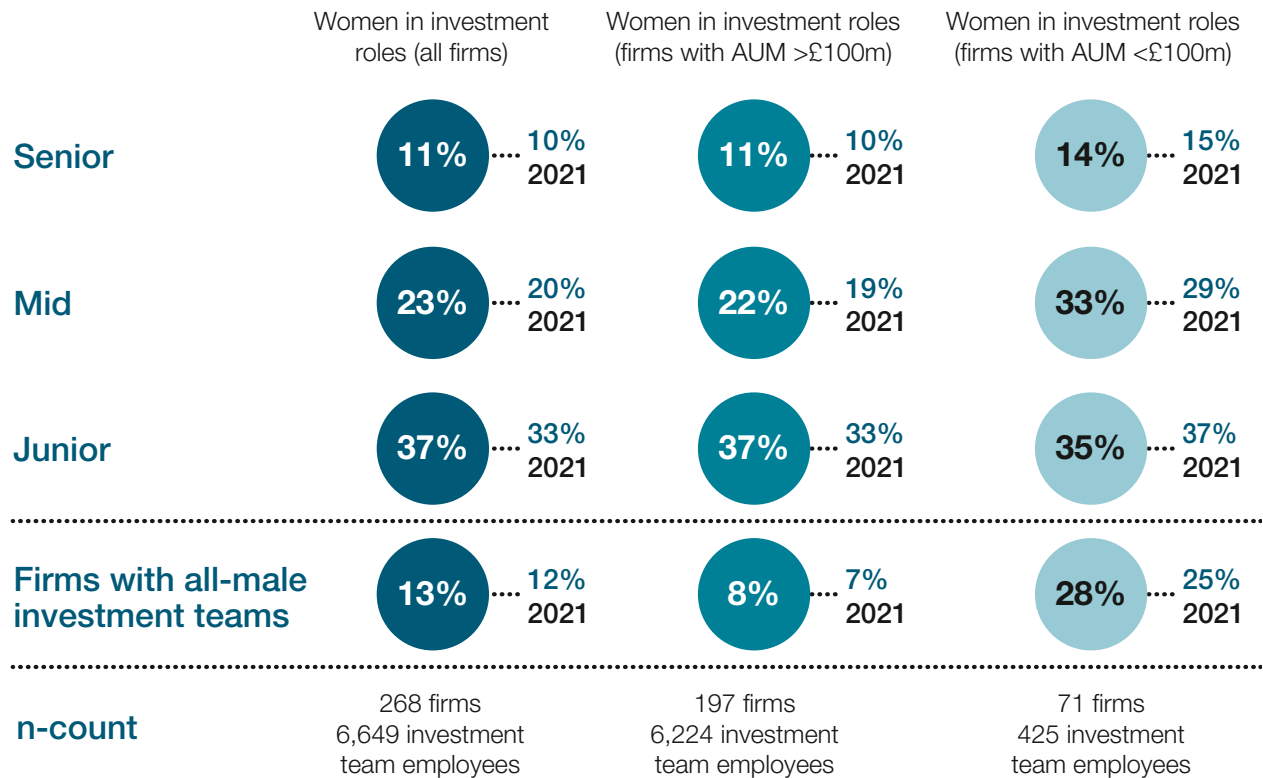
¹⁰⁸ British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (BVCA) and Level 20, [Diversity & Inclusion](#) (2023)

¹⁰⁹ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2022), page 26

¹¹⁰ See Figure 8. British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2022), page 26

Figure 7: 11% of senior investment roles are held by women. This improves for mid and junior roles. 13% of firms have no women on their investment teams.

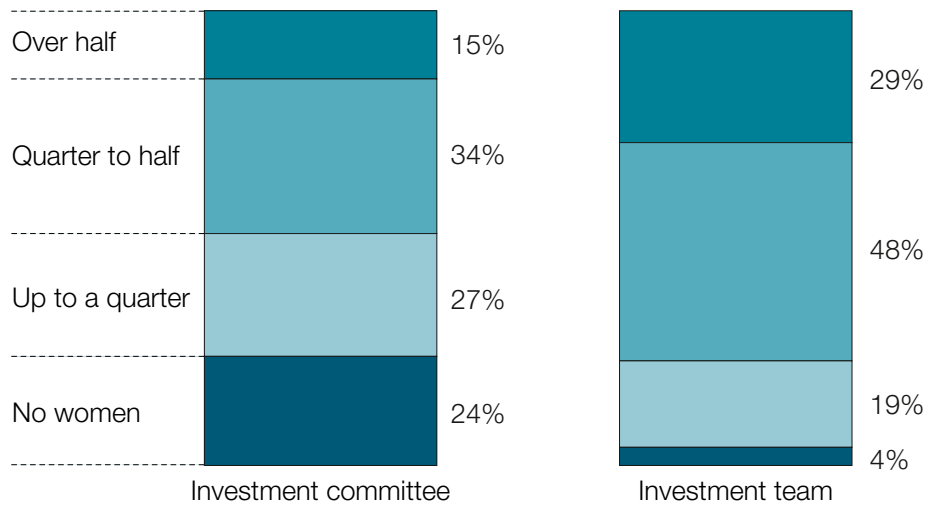
Percentage of positions in investment roles by gender in UK firms (including European offices)



Source: British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association (BVCA) and Level 20, [Diversity & Inclusion](#) (2023)

Figure 8: 4% of signatories have all-male investment teams and 24% of investment committees have no women on their teams.

Percentage of female representation at signatory firms.



Source: British Business Bank analysis of [Investing in Women Code](#) (2022) signatory data, excluding those where gender data was not known.

Case Study


Check Warner: CEO and Co-Founder of Ada Ventures and Diversity VC, and Taskforce member

“Venture Capital has enormous potential to drive economic growth. Seven out of the ten most valuable companies in the world today were funded by venture capitalists in their early days. The UK has one of the leading VC and technology ecosystems in the world, second only to the US and China.¹¹¹

“However, we know that we are far from realising the full potential of the sector because it is missing out on the breadth and diversity of talent that it could access. The lack of diversity at the senior decision-making levels of venture capital is holding the industry back. It has been proven that women investors are three times more likely to fund women-led businesses – and that diversity in decision-making groups leads to higher-quality decisions.¹¹² I have frequently pitched to all-white, all-male investment committees.¹¹³ I have also seen many great women founders struggle to convince all-male investment committees of the quality of their businesses and experienced major challenges in raising funding from homogenous organisations with my own business.

“Unless we urgently move to address this lack of diversity at the decision-making level we will struggle to deliver on the huge potential of VC and technology to drive wealth creation, economic growth and development for the UK.”

Progress in gender equality in the investment world has stalled. According to a report by Citywire, only 6% of funds held in the UK are run by solo female managers or all-female teams, with only 12% of fund managers running funds held in the UK being female. This number remains unchanged from 2022.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and Paul Sully MP, [UK tech sector retains 1st spot in Europe and 3rd in world as sector resilience brings continued growth](#), Press release (2022)

¹¹² Brush, C., and others, [Diana Report, Women Entrepreneurs 2014: Bridging the Gender Gap in Venture Capital](#) (2014)

¹¹³ This has also been discussed elsewhere (see opinion piece in the Harvard Business Review: DuBow, W., and Pruitt, A., [The Comprehensive Case for Investing more VC Money in Women-Led Startups](#) (2017).

¹¹⁴ Citywire, [Alpha Female Report: Tracking the progress asset managers are making towards gender parity in investment roles](#) (2023)

Case Study



Deepali Nangia: Partner, Speedinvest, and Taskforce member

“Speedinvest, started the MicroGP programme: a £3.5 million fund-of-funds that invests in primarily first or second time fund managers (sub £30 million) funds. At least 50% of this capital will go to female or diverse fund managers. We believe that actions like these will begin to drive more diversity in investment, and therefore more diversity in the businesses receiving investment.

In addition to capital, we want to help this generation of fund managers with learnings from having raised several Speedinvest funds, knowledge on how to build and scale a fund and access to other Limited Partners.

“We track how many female founders are moving through our pipeline, how many are getting to the investment committee, and how many are getting funded. To keep us accountable to our goals, a report goes out to partners every month to show what progress is being made.”

Diversity amongst investors will clearly play a pivotal role in fuelling the funding pipeline for women-led high-growth businesses. There is already some great work underway in the UK towards achieving greater diversity in investment roles.

Case Study



Level 20¹¹⁵ was founded with the aim of improving gender diversity in private equity. Its mission is to inspire women to join and succeed in private equity, and to work with industry leaders to make the changes necessary for diversity and inclusion to flourish. Level 20's goal is for women to hold at least 20% of senior positions, particularly investment roles.

- **Mentoring and development:** The Level 20 mentoring programme is aimed at supporting women currently working in private equity to succeed and progress within their firms. Senior mentors (male and female) are paired with mid-level women for a 12-month programme. This bolsters the pipeline of women reaching senior investment roles and investment committees.
- **Advocacy:** Level 20 creates a strong voice for women in private equity, promoting gender diversity as a strategic priority and working collaboratively with industry to effect change.
- **Networking and events:** Level 20 hosts a broad range of networking, training and discussion-based events that support women working in private equity to build their professional networks.
- **Research:** Level 20 conducts research to establish accurate and reliable data so that it can track progress towards its goals and produces data-driven insights to support the retention and promotion of women in the industry.
- **Outreach:** The Level 20 outreach programme targets universities and business schools as well as young professionals, offering career support, industry insight and skills development, with the aim of promoting private equity as a career option for women.

¹¹⁵ Level 20, What we do: Empowering women to succeed in private equity, [website](#).

Case Study



The British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (BVCA) is the industry body and public policy advocate for the private equity and venture capital industry in the UK. The BVCA represents a diverse community of long-term investors enabling them to speak with one clear and consistent voice to wider society, including the Government, media and MPs.

The BVCA engages with and supports the private capital community, connecting institutional investors, fund managers, portfolio companies, advisers and service providers. Its membership comprises more than 650 firms, including over 325 private equity and venture capital businesses, over 100 institutional investors and more than 200 professional services firms.

The BVCA uses its convening power and profile to champion and actively encourage diversity and inclusion within the private equity and venture capital industry. The BVCA supports the work of Level 20 and Diversity VC and the targets they have set for the industry. The BVCA has pledged to promote gender diversity by:

- having one member of our senior executive team who is responsible and accountable for gender diversity and inclusion;
- setting internal targets for gender diversity in our senior management;
- publishing progress annually against these targets in reports on our website; and
- having an intention to ensure the pay of the senior executive team is linked to delivery against these internal targets on gender diversity.

Case Study

DIVERSITY VC

Diversity VC is driving diversity, equity and inclusion in venture capital. Diversity VC has four core initiatives.¹¹⁶

- **The Diversity VC Standard:** an assessment of a VC's recruitment, culture, dealflow, and portfolio guidance policies compared to DEI best practices.
- **Pathways:** internships and career development for underrepresented candidates.
- **Resources:** industry reports, insights and guidance.
- **Community:** a diverse learning network of VC professionals.

¹¹⁶ Diversity VC, [website](#)

Case Study



The British Business Bank has the objective to “unlock potential”¹¹⁷ by getting finance to talented entrepreneurs whoever and wherever they are.

The British Business Bank openly champions diversity in investment, for example, through its paper addressing the VC industry, ‘Finding What Works: Pathways to Improve Diversity in Venture Capital Investment’. They found three effective actions (as defined by a survey of VC firms):¹¹⁸

- VC firms should ensure senior decision makers, including Investment Committees, are made up of people from a diverse set of backgrounds;
- VC firms should take steps to increase the diversity among those involved in the identification of potential propositions;
- Limited Partners should encourage venture capital firms to monitor and report progress in supporting diverse entrepreneurs.

The British Business Bank itself has committed to six key actions to increase diversity in investment.¹¹⁹

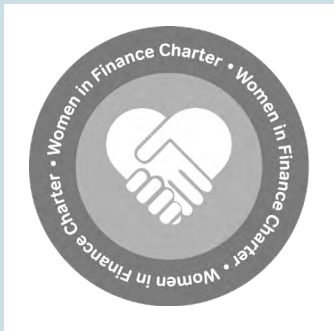
- **Dissemination and industry engagement:** the Bank will share the report findings with the venture capital industry and wider ecosystem. Support will be provided to partners and funds to adopt diversity and inclusion approaches.
- **Tracking actions through the Investing in Women Code:** the bank will track effectiveness adoption and effectiveness of actions through the Investing in Women Code.
- **Transparency in portfolio diversity:** the Bank will request its delivery partners to report on the diversity of their organisations and funding recipients. Starting from 2024, this data will be publicly reported alongside other market research and publications.
- **Diversity among senior leadership:** the Bank is committed to achieving and maintaining 50% gender diversity among senior leaders. New targets for ethnic diversity and diversity principles for Investment Committees will also be established, and voluntary ethnicity pay gap reporting.
- **Diversity in investment teams:** the Bank has implemented an inclusive leadership program and a Diversity Dashboard to monitor key metrics and promote diversity. We recruit for capabilities rather than experience.
- **Internal accountability and continuous improvement:** the Bank is committed to reporting progress on diversity objectives, assessing performance, and continuously improving its practices as part of our focus on unlocking potential.

¹¹⁷ British Business Bank, [Finding What Works: Pathways to Improve Diversity in Venture Capital Investment](#) (2023), page 4

¹¹⁸ British Business Bank, [Finding What Works: Pathways to Improve Diversity in Venture Capital Investment](#) (2023)

¹¹⁹ British Business Bank, [Finding What Works: Pathways to Improve Diversity in Venture Capital Investment](#) (2023), page 15-16

Case Study



In 2016, HM Treasury launched the Women in Finance Charter,¹²⁰ which asks financial services firms to commit to implement four key actions:

- having one member of the senior executive team who is responsible and accountable for gender diversity and inclusion;
 - setting internal targets for gender diversity in senior management;
 - publishing progress annually against these targets in reports; and
 - having an intention to ensure the pay of the senior executive team is linked to delivery against these internal targets on gender diversity.
- Over 400 firms – covering over one million employees – have now signed up to the Charter.

While there are many great initiatives that are having far-ranging impacts, UK senior investment professionals can always do more to champion diversity.

The Taskforce has discussed in detail the issue of targets and/or quotas for the percentage of women working in key senior investment roles, including on Investment Committees. We have considered the huge successes achieved on the FTSE Women Leaders agenda since 2011, when Lord Davies recommended targets for women on boards for the top FTSE companies. This saw the number of women on boards in the FTSE 350 go from 9.5% in 2011 to 40.2% in 2022.¹²¹

We would recommend that industry continues to lead the charge here and ramps up their public commitments to diversity by taking the following steps.

- (a) Private equity and venture capital firms should continue to support and engage with industry diversity initiatives, such as Level 20, Diversity VC and the Investing in Women Code (IWC).¹²² As part of these initiatives, private equity and venture capital firms should report on the percentage of women in senior investment professional roles and on investment committees, and also set ambitious voluntary targets to improve these percentages over time. Both the data and the target should be published on their websites.

¹²⁰ HM Treasury, [Women in Finance Charter: a pledge for gender balance across financial services](#) (2016)

¹²¹ FTSE Women Leaders, [FTSE Women Leaders Review: Achieving Gender Balance](#) (2023)

¹²² Diversity VC is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to increase DEI in the investment community, and provide tools and resources to foster inclusive cultures and more diversity at all levels within investment firms.

- (b) Institutional investors (Limited Partners), including new pools of capital, for example Defined Contribution Pension Plans that have signed the [Mansion House Reforms](#), should sign up to the Investing in Women Code. These institutional investors should encourage fund managers in their portfolios – especially growth capital and late-stage venture managers – to sign up to the IWC, or share a roadmap towards doing so.
- (c) A funding gap may exist for female-led high-growth enterprises that operate outside sectors traditionally attractive to VC fund managers and these female-led enterprises may benefit from funding from private debt funds. Issues with regard to female representation within investment teams and on investment committees may also be prevalent within the private debt fund sector. The Taskforce therefore suggests that a drive for signatories from private debt funds is spearheaded by the Department for Business & Trade, working in partnership with the British Business Bank, which delivers the Code on their behalf. The BVCA will also play a role in encouraging fund managers from this group to sign.

Opportunity 3 – Increase signatories to the Investing in Women Code

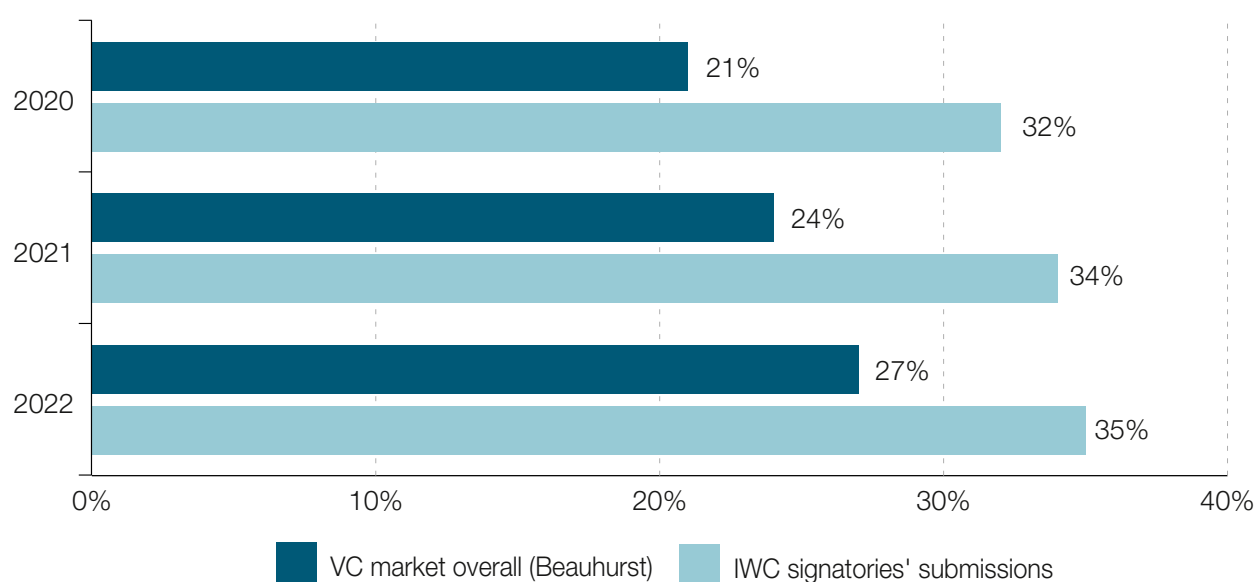
The Investing in Women Code, a voluntary commitment from financial services organisations to support the advancement of female entrepreneurship in the UK by improving access to tools, resources and finance, is proving to be an effective mechanism to drive greater equality in entrepreneurship finance. For example, VC funds who sign the Investing in Women Code are significantly more likely than non-signatories to invest in teams with at least one female founder (at 35% versus 27%).¹²³ At the end of March 2023 there were 204 signatories to the Code, up by 40% from the previous year.¹²⁴ The number of signatories is expected to increase further in 2024.

¹²³ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023), page 27

¹²⁴ Calculated using the number of signatories as of March 2022 and March 2023, with the values of 146 and 204 respectively. See British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2022) and British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023)

Figure 9: VC funds who sign the Investing in Women Code (IWC) make a higher proportion of their investments in teams with at least one female founder than non-signatories.

Percentage of VC deals made in companies with at least one female founder



Source: British Business Bank analysis of Beauhurst data and [Investing in Women Code](#) (2023) signatory data.

The Taskforce recommends a further dedicated push for more signatories from those organisations that stand to most benefit high-growth enterprises. We outline three such groups below: Limited Partners, Growth Funds and Private Debt.

A) Limited Partners

Limited Partners in particular are in a unique position to lead the way on diversity, as the gatekeepers of capital to VC funds. Limited Partners are already showing their interest in their wider contribution to society, with 70% having an Environmental, Social and Governance approach built into their investment policies, both for the benefit of being able to offer clear ESG communications to stakeholders, and because they believe it genuinely adds to investment performance.¹²⁵ The Investing in Women Code was opened to UK Limited Partners in 2022 and, so far, two Limited Partners have signed. The Taskforce would like to put a call out to all Limited Partners to sign the Code, to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and growth. Their position near the top of the investment food-chain serves to create a knock-on impact for the diversity of investments further down the chain.

¹²⁵ Lino, M. and others., [Limited Partners and Private Equity Firms Embrace ESG](#) (2022)

B) Growth funds

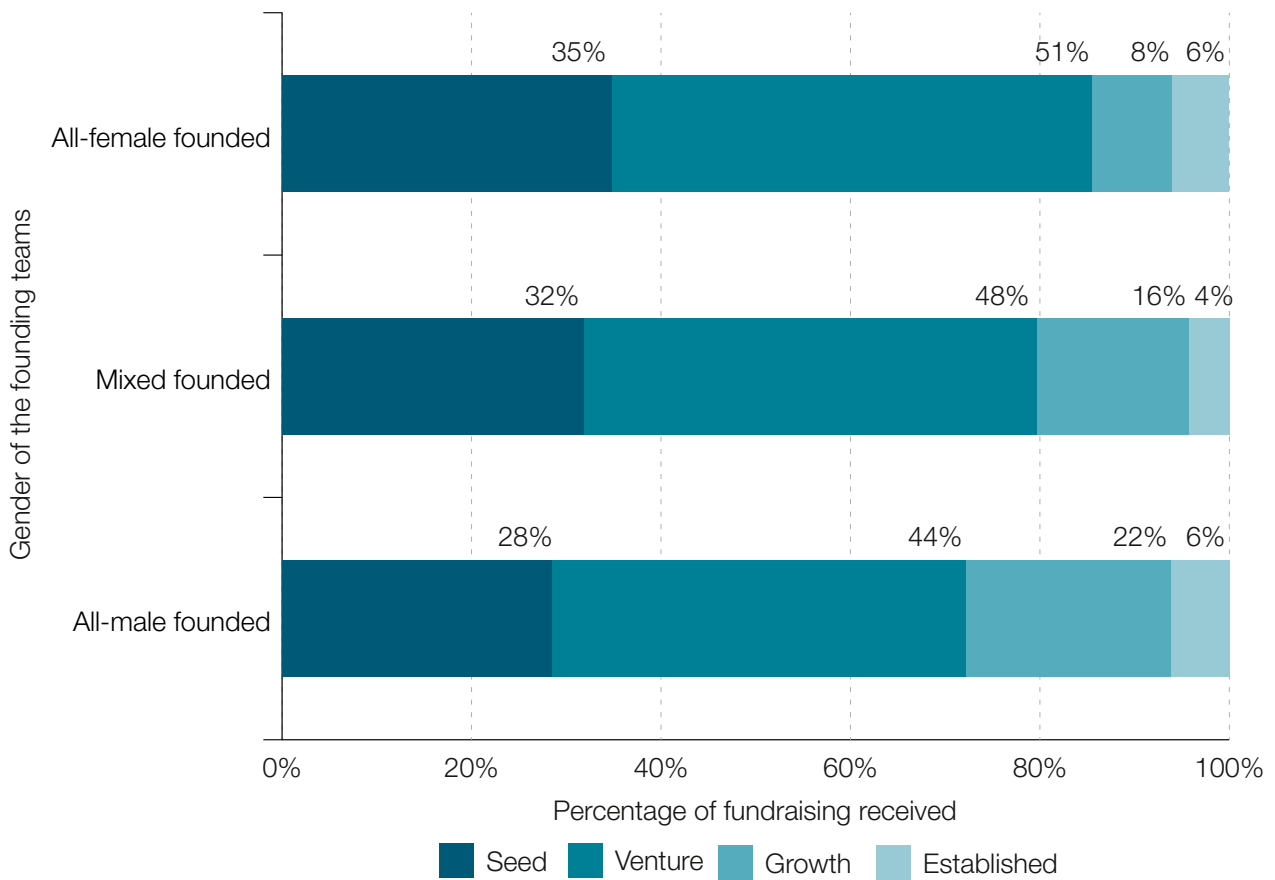
High-growth businesses often experience difficulty accessing finance as they continue along their scale-up journey, since gaps exist in many aspects of the UK small business finance markets – including at the start, the scale-up and the growth stages. Great work is already underway by early-stage seed funds, local/regional government bodies, and organisations like the Rose Review to address the start-up stage. However, it has long been recognised that high-growth entrepreneurs frequently struggle with access to later-stage funding.¹²⁶ While this can be an issue for founders of all genders, Beauhurst's data shows that this issue may disproportionately impact female founders, and therefore constrain growth at later stages. Of all fundraisings since 1 January 2011 (for which the gender balance is known), all-female founder teams received 1.6%.¹²⁷ For those all-female teams, 35% of their total fundraising was made at seed stage, 51% at venture stage, with successful fundraising dropping sharply at growth and established stages, making up only 8% and 6% of total fundraisings, respectively.

¹²⁶ ScaleUp Institute and others, [Scale-up UK: Growing Businesses, Growing out Economy](#) (2015)

¹²⁷ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. For more information, see Table 5 in the data pack published alongside this report.

Figure 10: All-female founded companies receive less fundraising in the Growth and Established stages compared to mixed and all-male founded companies.

Percentage of fundraising received by high-growth enterprises (OECD definition) since 1 January 2011 by the gender of the founding teams at each stage of business evolution



Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known.
 Fundings are included where the stage of the company at the time of the funding is known.
 Companies are included where they meet the OECD definition of high-growth.

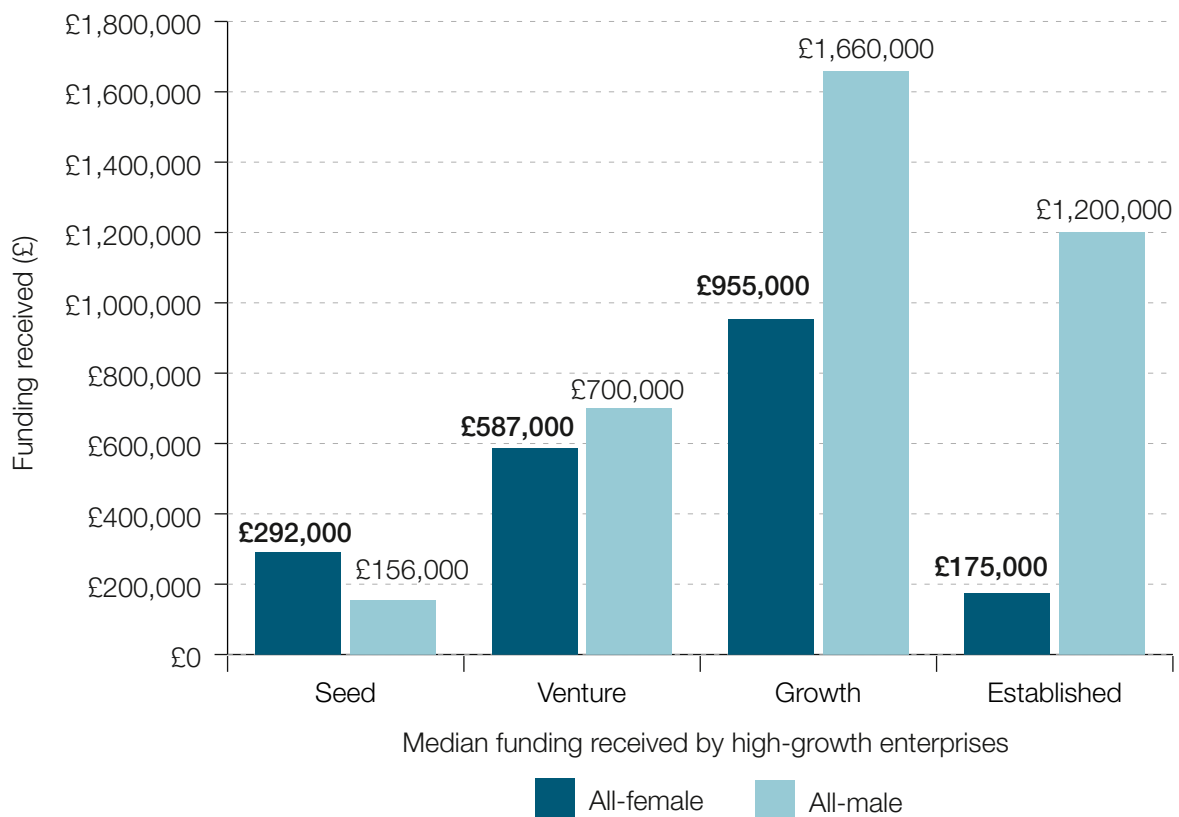
Source: [Beauhurst](#) data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub.

This disparity is more pronounced when considering the value of fundraisings. The available data is skewed by high performances in fundraising and as such looking at the median figure (and not the mean) allows us to more accurately represent the outcomes of fundraising for the majority of high-growth enterprises. At the seed phase, all-female founded high-growth enterprises receive more funding, on average, than all-male teams. At the venture phase, all-male teams receive more funding than all-female teams, on average, with the gap widening at the growth phase. At this stage, all-female teams receive only 58% of the funding secured by all-male teams. This represents a

fundraising median of £1,660,000 for all-male teams, compared to only £955,000 for all-female teams. At the established stage, this falls even further, with all-female teams receiving only 15% of the median funding raised by all-male teams.¹²⁸

Figure 11: The gap in fundraising between all-female and all-male founded companies rises at the Growth and Established stages of business evolution.

Median fundraising received (in £) by all-female versus all-male founded high-growth enterprises (OECD definition) since 1 January 2011 at each stage of business evolution



Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known. Fundings are included where the stage of the company at the time of the funding is known. Companies are included where they meet the OECD definition of high-growth.

Source: [Beauhurst](#) data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub.

¹²⁸ Statistical information in this section comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. See Table 6 in the data pack published alongside this report.

Explained: Beauhurst company evolution stages

Beauhurst marks every company's life cycle stage as one of: Seed, Venture, Growth, Established, Zombie, Exited or Dead.

Based on 30 metrics Beauhurst matches fundraisings held by businesses to these stages. This is because traditional life cycle labels like "Series A" or "First Round" may have inconsistent definitions. What these different series and round categories actually mean can vary hugely by sector, country or investor type. Meanwhile, many funding rounds are not categorised at all, either by a company or their investors. These end up being classed as "unattributed", "unallocated", "unspecified", "uncategorised" or "unclassified", and they fail to reflect where a business is in its growth journey.

Beauhurst defines the stages as follows:

Seed: a seed-stage company is a young start-up, with a low employee count, low valuation, and low total equity investment raised. There may still be uncertainty as to whether its product or service has an adequate market, or it may be working to gain regulatory approval. The most common sources of funding for this stage are grant-awarding bodies, crowdfunding platforms, and angel investors. Most seed investments are under £1 million, but this is not always the case.

Venture: venture-stage companies have developed their business models and technology over multiple years, typically securing investment and a valuation in the millions. They'll likely have some revenue, and may be expanding their initial product range. Venture rounds typically involve private equity and VC funds, although may tap into crowdfunding too.

Growth: when a company has been operating for more than five years, and has grown to multiple offices, they're more likely to have reached the "Growth" stage of evolution. A growth-stage company will also have regulatory approval and is likely bringing in significant revenue and investment, with a valuation in the millions. It will be continuing to expand its product range and international activities.

Established: an established-stage company has been trading for 15+ years, or 5-15 years with a three-year consecutive profit of £5 million or more, or a turnover of £20 million or more. These businesses usually have several offices and a widely recognised brand. Funding at this stage is often deployed by corporates, private equity firms, banks and specialist debt funds, or major international investors.

For more details, please refer to [Beauhurst's website](#)

The vast majority of the Code signatories are VC funds. However, these are predominantly VC fund managers targeting seed and early-stage investment opportunities. Currently, just 1% of VC signatories are growth funds, and just 11% invest at Series B and beyond¹²⁹ – two vital sources of finance to drive high-growth scale.

While not a complete solution to the late-stage funding gap for all high-growth enterprises, the Taskforce recommends a concerted effort by VC growth funds to sign the Code.

C) Private debt funds

In addition to the later stage funding gap described above, the Taskforce believes that there may be a further funding gap which affects a subset of high-growth enterprises. These high-growth enterprises are unable to access venture capital as they are: a) not operating in sectors that are suitably attractive to VC fund managers (i.e. finance or tech), and b) not sufficiently high-growth (i.e. above 100% YoY) to attract VC investment. Furthermore, if these high-growth enterprises have revenues below £10 million¹³⁰ and are not yet profitable, this further reduces the likelihood of such businesses being of interest to venture capital or private equity.

The Taskforce hypothesises that this issue may disproportionately impact women-led high-growth enterprises, because they are more likely to sit outside the finance and tech sectors which are typically of interest to VC. In Technology and IP-based Businesses, all-female and mixed-founded high-growth enterprises make up only 14% of companies (at 3% and 11% respectively). Within Business and Professional Services (which includes finance), this is just 15%.¹³¹ Many female-founded high-growth enterprises sit in the personal services (including healthcare, education, and beauty services) and retail, which are less likely to be of interest to VCs than finance or tech.

These businesses are nonetheless high-growth enterprises, still have the potential to grow and become commercially sustainable. A potential solution for these companies is seeking private debt.

Therefore, the Taskforce recommends a further push to gain signatures from private debt funds, who may service this type of high-growth enterprise.

The Taskforce suggests that the push for more signatories from all three groups is spear-headed by the Department for Business & Trade, working in partnership with the British Business Bank and the BVCA.

¹²⁹ British Business Bank, [Investing in Women Code Annual Report](#) (2023), page 29

¹³⁰ Enterprises must have a turnover of less than or equal to £10 million or a balance sheet total of £10 million to be defined as a small enterprise. For medium enterprises, this has to be less than or equal to £50 million in turnover or £43 million as a balance sheet total. See Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, [Small to medium sized enterprise \(SME\) action plan](#) (2022).

¹³¹ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. For more information, see Table 3 in the data pack published alongside this report.

Opportunity 4. Drive inclusive behaviour in the investment ecosystem, through regulation, monitoring, and action by investors

The Taskforce considers that improvements to the investment field, to support women and to generate opportunities, can be provided by changes to regulation, as well as initiatives by firms themselves. In September 2023, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) launched its consultation on diversity and inclusion in the financial sector.¹³²

The Taskforce welcomes the timely consultation as a step forward in bringing diversity and inclusion (D&I) issues closer to the centre of regulatory reform in the UK as its own work has found that women-led high-growth businesses have considerably less access than other businesses, to finance from the firms that the FCA regulates. The Taskforce believes that the FCA could help to increase the flow of funding from the companies it regulates towards women-led businesses.

Lack of funding is a significant missed opportunity for UK investment and means that firms that the FCA regulates – which allocate capital – are essentially ignoring a significant number of profitable investment opportunities and are, in many cases, treating women-led high-growth businesses less favourably. Whilst recognising the need for proportionality, and to avoid undue increases in the cost of doing business in UK financial services, when applying cost-benefit arguments more needs to be done to acknowledge the very real benefits for individuals and for the UK economy.

The Taskforce has raised two key issues for further consideration.

- The 250+ employee threshold above which most of the proposals in the consultation apply, is too high and excludes virtually all of the forms in the VC and Private Equity (PE) sectors to which high-growth businesses typically look for equity finance.
- The proposals in the consultation are inward looking only; that is to say, they concern D&I within firms and are not concerned with the broader D&I effects of the way that firms treat their customers and investee companies.

The Taskforce has responded in more detail to the consultation.

The Taskforce also considers that action by investors provides a critical opportunity to stimulate change. The private sector, notably VC firms, play a pivotal role in enhancing founder wellbeing¹³³ and the Taskforce recommends investors adopt policies to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment and to support founder well-being for themselves and their families. We recommend that the financial sector leads and explores best practices on this matter.

¹³² Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), [Diversity and inclusion in the financial sector - working together to drive change](#) (2023)

¹³³ This is based on research conducted by Balderton, assessing how founders can optimise their personal performance, looking at lived experience and the factors that contribute to productivity. In their report, [Optimising Founder Wellbeing and Performance](#) (2023), Balderton found that founders reported high stress, resulting in 90% working more hours with diminishing returns for effort (83%), routinely prioritising work over themselves (57%), with 81% believing that VCs can help to create a culture where entrepreneurs can look after their wellbeing, which directly affects performance.

In addition, while childcare is not part of the Taskforce's remit, its importance as an enabler is recognised. Members of the Taskforce are working separately with the Government to better understand the specific challenges for high-growth entrepreneurs and to look at how support around caring responsibilities can be made more effective for self-employed parents.

7.2 A thriving ecosystem: empowering female high-growth entrepreneurs through regional support and role models

Opportunities for female entrepreneurs in the high-growth space are evolving, but there are still a number of unique challenges faced by women. To date, there are far fewer female-founded high-growth businesses than male ones,¹³⁴ which means fewer role models to inspire future potential female high-growth entrepreneurs. For the same reason, it is also more difficult to connect aspiring female entrepreneurs with experts with a broad understanding of the challenges they face, who might be able to offer valuable support and advice. While there are multiple resources of help and information available to all entrepreneurs, very little tackles the very specific barriers experienced by women.

In this section, we look at a range of remedies to make high-growth entrepreneurship more accessible to women, exploring how we can create a powerful ecosystem to offer advice and support to women at all stages of their entrepreneurial journey.

Opportunity 5. Roll out Female Founder Growth Boards across the regions of England

Almost 45% of England's high-growth enterprises are located in London.¹³⁵ Considering that only 13% of the UK's population resides in London,¹³⁶ this represents a clear regional imbalance of high-growth activity.

London, the East Midlands and the South East and South West show the highest concentration of high-growth enterprises with at least one female founder, at 18%, 20% and 21% and 18% respectively, compared to an England average of 17%.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data, using the OECD-definition of high-growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

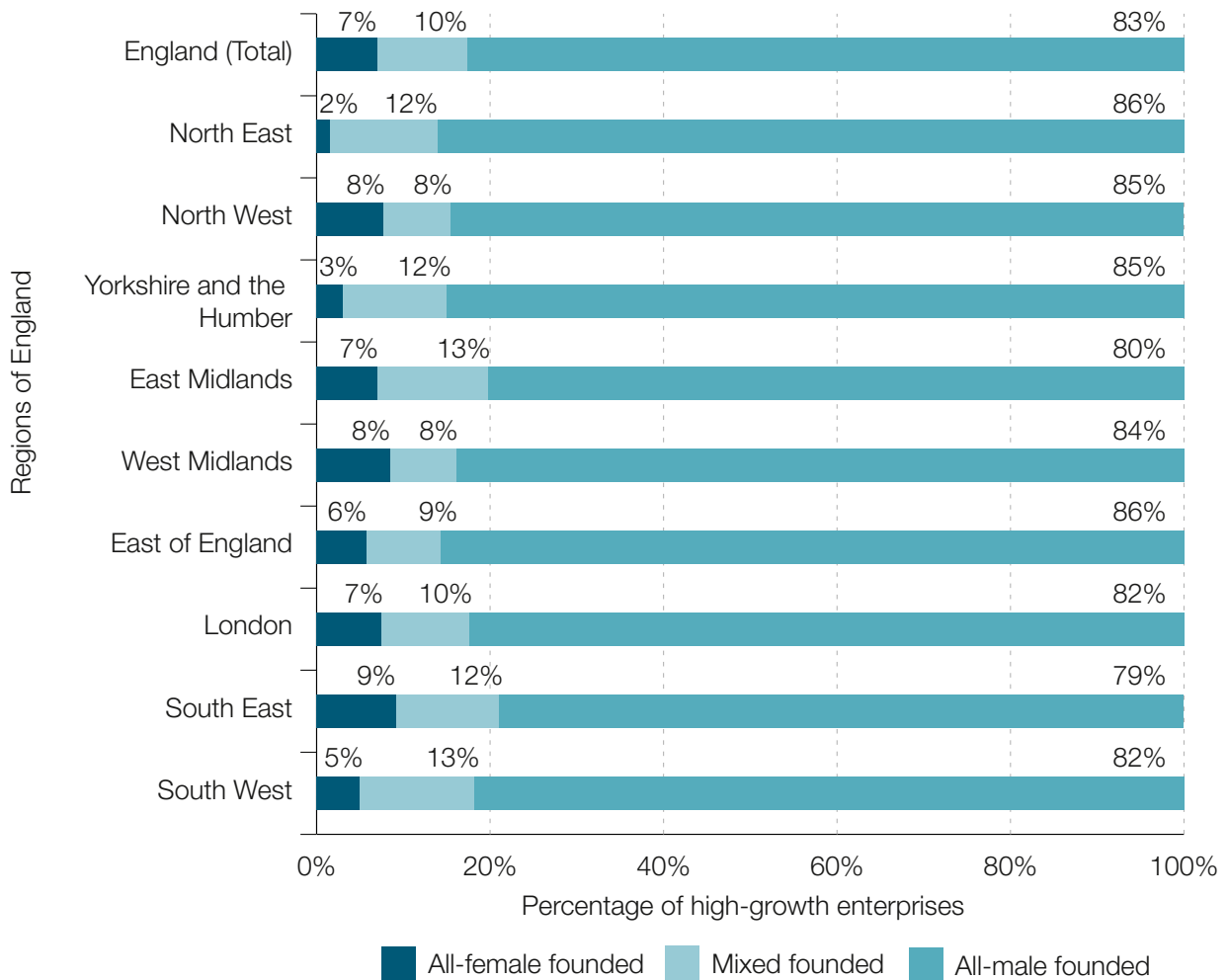
¹³⁵ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. For more information, see Table 8 in the data pack published alongside this report.

¹³⁶ Calculated using the Office for National Statistics, Population estimates from the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2021 (2022) and the Office for National Statistics, [Population by country of birth and nationality](#) (2021)

¹³⁷ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data. See Table 7 in the data pack published alongside this report.

Figure 12: There is a higher proportion of high-growth enterprises in the South East founded entirely by women than elsewhere in England.

Percentage of high-growth enterprises (OECD definition) by the gender of the founding teams in each region of England



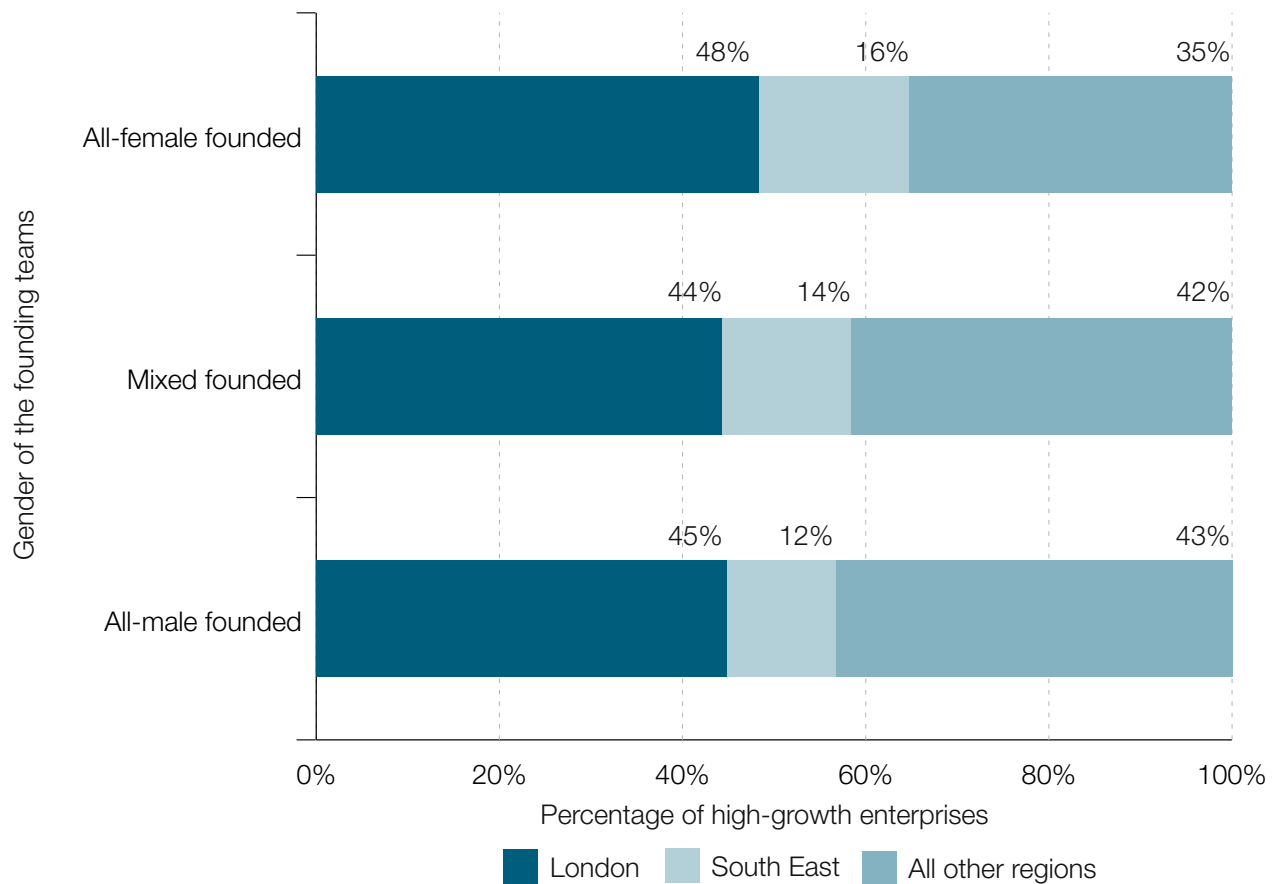
Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known.
 Companies are only included where the location of their headquarters are known.
 Companies are included where they meet the OECD definition of high-growth.
 Due to rounding, the sum of these percentages may not equal 100 or match those referenced in the text above.
 Source: [Beaumur](#) data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub.

In all regions of England, there are more all-male founded high-growth enterprises (comprising 79% or more of all high-growth businesses in each region) than both all-female and mixed founded teams. The representation of women within these high-growth enterprises differs geographically. 65% of all-female founded and 58%

of mixed founded high-growth enterprises are located in London and the South East, which is higher than all other English regions (with the representation of women on founding teams at 35% and 42% respectively).¹³⁸

Figure 13: High-growth enterprises are clustered in London more than in other regions of England.

Percentage of high-growth enterprises (OECD definition) by the gender of the founding teams and their location.



Notes: Companies are only included where the gender balance of the founders are known.
 Companies are only included where the location of their headquarters are known.
 Companies are included where they meet the OECD definition of high-growth.
 Due to rounding, the sum of the above percentages may not equal 100 or match those referenced in the text above.

Source: [Beaumur](#) data extracted on 15 January 2024 by the Equality Hub.

¹³⁸ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub's reporting of [Beaumur](#) data. For more information, see Table 8 in the data pack published alongside this report.

The reasons for this disparity are believed by Taskforce members to be multifaceted. Starting and scaling a business, and especially achieving high-growth status, can be significantly easier in an established cluster like London. Easier access to funding, connections, knowledge sharing, talent, and customer base all contribute to the uneven picture across the UK, which results in the disproportionate volume of high-growth enterprises founded in London.

Case Study



Zandra Moore: Co-founder and CEO of Panintelligence, and Taskforce member

Why I'm dedicated to supporting regional female founders

“As a female founder outside of London, you are faced with a double disadvantage. You already have to work harder than a man to sell yourself and your business, working through the countless barriers that we outline in this report. But you also have to sell your city as a place to grow and scale a business.

“Most of the support for high-growth enterprises is centred in London. 2023 was the first time we had an accelerator aimed at female founders in Leeds. To get the vital organisations that support high-growth enterprises to focus outside of London, they need to know that it's worth their time and resources. We need to do a better job of selling our regions, to prove that there is a critical mass of early-stage companies worth supporting.

“With a shortage of localised support for female-founded businesses, comes a dependency on role models and local investor networks for support. As a scarce resource, demand outstrips supply, which slows down progress. As one of the few high-growth female founders in tech in Leeds, I feel compelled to accelerate change, because I feel like a bottleneck in the local ecosystem.

“The ambition and talent are there in our regions. The support and access to capital is not. We need more investment into the local ecosystem in accelerators, incubators, networks, advisors and visible role models to ensure that the next generation of female founders get the support to start and grow their high-growth enterprises, and ultimately, create a thriving and self-sufficient flywheel of growth.”

In the regions outside London, sits untapped potential: ambitious and talented women who could be the founders of high-growth enterprises. Female entrepreneurs who could perhaps follow in the footsteps of Poppy Gustafsson, the founder of Cambridge-based Darktrace, which reached a \$1.65 billion valuation in under five years and was

named Europe's fastest growing super scale-up.¹³⁹ However, these women need better access to capital, networks, advice and acceleration, as well as a community of like-minded entrepreneurs and role models to catalyse and support their growth journey. By enabling access to the resources that these businesses need to grow, this potential can be unlocked.

Each region will have different strengths and weaknesses when it comes to cultivating female high-growth entrepreneurs, so the solution needs to take place at a localised level. The Taskforce has created a replicable blueprint to level up local ecosystems for women with high-growth potential. Female Founders Growth Boards will act as an orchestrator of positive change in the locality. Entrepreneurs will be supported by their Female Founders Dashboard, a sustainable data model that enables opportunities to be identified and progress to be monitored.

Female Founders Growth Boards bring together public and private sector stakeholders with a common goal: to increase the number of female-founded high-growth enterprises by 50% within three years. While the initial focus of the Boards will be gender, there is potential to expand provision to minority groups when the model is proven. The Board will map the strengths and gaps in the local ecosystem and identify initiatives to tackle them. Each Board should have members spanning the public and private sectors, as well as women who understand the specific challenges of growing a high-growth enterprise in the region:

- female founder(s) of a high-growth enterprise
- female founder(s) from a start-up
- member of the economic development team at the local council
- member of the enterprise team at the local authority
- female member from a local PE/VC firm
- leader of a women's business networking organisation
- leader from a university accelerator/incubator
- leader of a local start-up co-working space
- Regional Director from the IoD or Chamber of Commerce

The Boards will need a holistic view of the local environment to perform their role; live and interactive Female Founders Dashboards are a vital enabler for this. The Dashboards bring together multiple types of data, including: the landscape of female-founded businesses in the region, investment data, region-specific demographic and

¹³⁹ Crunchbase, [Poppy Gustafsson](#)

economic indicators, as well as support network contacts. This not only enables the identification of specific gaps and opportunities for the locality, but also enables the progress of any initiatives to be tracked over time and compared to other regions.

Case Study



The Pilot: Leeds Female Founders Growth Board and Dashboard

In 2023, the Taskforce began a pilot of the first Female Founders Growth Board and Dashboard. The first Board was established in Leeds, consisting of: Leeds City Council, British Business Bank, Lloyds Bank, Investor Ladder, Panintelligence, Bruntwood, North Invest and Data City.

At the Leeds Digital Festival in September 2023, the inaugural Leeds Female Founders Lunch took place, along with the launch of the first Female Founders Dashboard. The Lunch brought together a vibrant and supportive community of women: female founders of tech businesses challenging the status quo and pushing for change. Zandra Moore, founder and CEO of Panintelligence and member of the Taskforce, facilitated an insightful discussion on what the group needs more of to thrive. Female founders were connected with local advisors to build their network and support ecosystem.

The event energised the female founders of Leeds to continue a peer community, with the core aim to create a safe, trusted environment in which to learn from each other. It was noted that while men usually know other entrepreneurs, women often do not. One female founder said,

“Being a female founder can be lonely – sometimes it can feel like you’re the only one. It can be hard to know who to trust and who has their own agenda. This community will give us a licence to be vulnerable, which is a powerful way that women build connections.”

Following this launch event, the group will move forward with this community, as well as identifying and executing further initiatives for the female founder community in Leeds.

Following the great success of the Leeds pilot, and the sustainable blueprint for Female Founders Growth Boards and Dashboards set up by the Taskforce, the Taskforce encourages the establishment of a team of sponsors keen to drive this agenda. Going forward, the Taskforce would like to see the model rolled out across further areas of the

UK. These growth boards will then become a driving force for women-led high-growth enterprises across all regions of the UK, and they will evolve over time with the needs of women and other diverse groups.

Opportunity 6. Inspire girls and women to become high-growth entrepreneurs

Eight out of ten young people cannot name a single female entrepreneur. Children are four times more likely to think of a man than a woman when they hear the word “entrepreneur”. Over a quarter of parents said that entrepreneurship is more male-dominated because “men are more business-minded”.¹⁴⁰

It is inevitable that such attitudes will have an impact when it comes to women choosing a path and women will be aware from an early age what a tough battle they’ll face to prove credibility when setting out to start and build a business.

A) Inspire girls at school

Vital to the UK’s aims to vastly increase the number of female high-growth entrepreneurs, is a strong pipeline of girls who believe they can do it. The Taskforce has been working with the ScaleUp Institute, Founders4Schools and the Careers and Enterprise Company to prepare literature which showcases women who have set up high-growth enterprises from across the country in every locality. This will be shared with schools across the UK, showing future generations of women that setting up a high-growth enterprise is a valid, rewarding and achievable career option. Tackling gender stereotypes early is crucial and we hope that the greater visibility provided by this initiative will go some way in breaking these down and help inspire future women founders.

B) Showcasing success stories of female high-growth entrepreneurs in universities

Many universities lead the way in innovation, research, and spin-outs, and being able to support and help mould young people’s ambitions for enterprise is something which needs to be applauded – particularly those universities who ensure they engage under-represented groups. However, curricula are often left in a bygone age when it comes to gender representation, with case studies focussing on classic businessmen like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, but little mention of the few trailblazing women who have seen high-growth success.

The Taskforce has been working with Starling Bank and Swansea University to create a repository of women-led high-growth enterprise success stories, showcasing the success of individual female trailblazers and offering a learning experience to students and an insight into each entrepreneur’s own unique journey. These stories will be mostly in written form, illustrated with photography and made available via a microsite managed by the university, but available to all universities offering entrepreneurship courses. The homepage of the microsite

¹⁴⁰ Santander, [Eight in ten young people can't name one female entrepreneur](#) (2020). Research was undertaken by OnePoll on behalf of Santander UK in November 2019. The survey sample consisted of 2,000 British parents and 2,000 British children, aged 11-18.

may use short video content of one “hero story”, which will be regularly updated with new videos. Case studies will not shy away from discussing the challenges these women have faced when navigating gender bias, but the success of these entrepreneurs will be proof in itself that it is possible to scale a high-growth business despite the setbacks.

The objective is to highlight diversity and inclusion within high-growth entrepreneurship, showing that it is open to all regardless of gender. Showcasing these stories provides a sense of relatability and will encourage female students to think beyond the stereotypes to begin to imagine what they themselves can achieve. Case studies of women entrepreneurs who have made it, and created unicorns, are testament to the limitless potential women can bring to the world of innovation.

C) Celebrating the successes of female entrepreneurs

The BVCA has committed to scoping and setting up a female entrepreneurship award. The idea is that this new award from a key industry organisation will motivate and encourage the next generation of female entrepreneurs and will become a showcase for the talent, best practice, dynamism and innovation that is coming through, providing another crucial layer of visibility for female-led, high-growth ventures.

7.3 In pursuit of quality: ongoing research into women-led high-growth enterprises

During the course of its work, members of the Taskforce identified a number of potential barriers to female high-growth businesses but, despite extensive efforts, were not able to obtain a clear enough picture on some elements to make firm recommendations. Therefore, the Taskforce recommends that there should be further work to investigate the issues identified, to evaluate whether additional changes need to be made. Two issues that were identified as possible priorities are both in the area of investment and fundraising.

Opportunity 7. Improve data collection and research in key areas identified

The Taskforce recommends that further investigation is undertaken in the following four areas.

A) Better data on directors and people of significant control

In Section 4, we highlighted that even defining ‘women-led’ high-growth enterprises is a complex task. We know that the high-growth enterprise ecosystem is currently dominated by all-male founder teams (at 82%),¹⁴¹ clearly indicating that women’s leadership of high-growth enterprises is well below parity. However, “women-led” need not be equated with an all-female or even majority-female founding team. The Taskforce contends that for a high-growth enterprise

¹⁴¹ Statistical information comes from the Equality Hub’s reporting of [Beauhurst](#) data, using the OECD-definition of high-growth. For more information, see Table 1 in the data pack published alongside this report.

to be genuinely women-led, women should have a fair proportion of equity share and one of the top three positions (CEO, CFO, CTO) should be held by a woman. In the absence of data on the sex of key personnel in UK high-growth enterprises the Taskforce proposes that, as a first step, Companies House (or another organisation) begin to collect sex data on directors and people of significant control. This data can then be matched with information collected elsewhere about who founded, or holds key posts in, high-growth enterprises.

B) Better data on who is using EIS/SEIS

There have been question marks raised around the take-up of Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) and the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS) incentives, the major tax incentives for investing in early-stage businesses, utilised by 86% of angel investors.¹⁴² EIS gives investors 30% tax relief, and SEIS gives an investor 50% tax relief and loss relief, as well as capital gains exemption in both cases.¹⁴³ Since its inception, EIS has gone on to support 36,720 early-stage businesses, raising over £25 billion of investment during that period.¹⁴⁴

For entrepreneurs, success in early fundraising rounds is an invaluable stepping-stone on the path to becoming a high-growth business. While, for investors themselves, the schemes are often crucial to their decision to invest at all. Yet, although the positive impact of EIS and SEIS is clear, the incentives may be underused by women founders. The UK Business Angels Association (UKBAA) survey of 640 women across six European countries found that 90% were unaware of Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) tax breaks and had not been made aware of the schemes by advisers.¹⁴⁵ They found that women are also less likely to have access to the established angel investor network they need,¹⁴⁶ making them more likely to receive a “no” from angels and therefore need to spend more time and energy raising. Focus groups by Obu found that many eligible female founders (and particularly those across the regions) are not aware of EIS and SEIS.¹⁴⁷ Data is not, however, currently collected on the diversity of founders accessing EIS and SEIS, nor on whether they are seeking to create high-growth businesses.

The Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) and the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS) tax incentive are instrumental for successful early-stage fundraising and investor decisions.

In the absence of data on the sex of key personnel in UK high-growth enterprises the Taskforce propose that, as a first step, Companies House – or another organisation – begin to collect sex data on directors and people of significant

¹⁴² During the tax year 2018/19, see British Business Bank, [The UK Business Angel Market](#) (2020)

¹⁴³ HM Revenue & Customs, [Tax relief for investors using venture capital schemes: Guidance](#) (2016)

¹⁴⁴ Blog published by Growth Capital Ventures Ltd, written by Hall, H. [Why 2022 is proving a popular year for EIS investors](#). [Growth Capital Ventures](#) (2022)

¹⁴⁵ The UK Business Angels Association, [The Barriers and Opportunities for Women Angel Investing](#), [website](#) (2018)

¹⁴⁶ The UK Business Angels Association and Angel Academe, [The Barriers and Opportunities for Women Angel Investing in Europe](#) (2018)

¹⁴⁷ OBU, [What do you do when the odds are stacked against you?](#) (2021)

control. This data can then be matched with information collected elsewhere including which companies are accessing EIS and SEIS and the sex of those companies' key personnel. MPs are also urged to promote EIS/SEIS, particularly to female founders in their constituencies.

Research by The Entrepreneurs Network suggests that only 57% of MPs had heard of EIS (and 39% had heard of SEIS) in 2017.¹⁴⁸ This figure has not increased in recent years, which implies MPs could still do more to champion EIS and SEIS in their constituencies. The Taskforce worked with Government to prepare a letter sent to all MPs raising awareness of the schemes amongst MPs and calling to action their local advocacy to female founders. This letter was signed by the Minister for Women, Maria Caulfield; Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Enterprise and Markets, Kevin Hollinrake; and Victoria Atkins, then Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

C) Validate that gender differences in access to equity funding worsens at later stages of growth

[Opportunity 3.B](#) details the even greater funding disparity faced by women-led high-growth businesses at the later stages of growth. While the Equality Hub analysis detailed in this report provides an initial view that women may be worse off at later stages, the Taskforce recommends that this gap is validated, and that the causes are explored in detail, so that the investment ecosystem can come together to form solutions. A dedicated push to increase the number of growth funds signed up to the Investing in Women Code is a great first step, but the scale of the disparity seen in the Equality Hub analysis indicates that further solutions may be required to close the gap.

The British Business Bank will continue to publish data on gender differences in access to equity funding through the Bank's Equity Tracker and Investing in Women Code annual report'. As a code partner, the BVCA will continue to commit to encouraging firms to provide data to the British Business Bank and promote the report and findings.

¹⁴⁸ The Entrepreneurs Network, [Parliamentary Snapshot](#) (2017)

08

Conclusion



While a handful of inspiring women have been blazing a trail in high-growth entrepreneurship for some time, this is just the beginning of people and organisations taking notice of women-led high-growth enterprises.

Over the last 18 months, the Taskforce has built a better understanding of the UK landscape, and there is a striking gender gap. Just six percent of high-growth enterprises are wholly or majority led by women. This disparity is not improving over time, and women remain under-represented in every sector. It has also become clear what is at stake if we fail to support the UK's women to build high-growth enterprises.

We are facing a great opportunity as we move into a new era, punctuated by ever more imaginative use of technology, and the UK government has bold and ambitious plans to be a tech superpower by 2030, putting the UK on the map from a science-and-tech perspective. To achieve this goal, we will need to get behind all our resources and, finally, allow the full potential of our talented female entrepreneurs to flourish so they can create the high-growth businesses that will make a significant contribution to this goal.

As detailed in Section 7, the Taskforce has identified seven key opportunities to break down the barriers faced by women when starting and scaling high-growth enterprises, whether it is access to fairer funding, or to much-needed advice, role models, and resources. While there is no magic bullet that will close the UK's gender gap in starting and scaling high-growth enterprises, the Taskforce believes that by setting tangible goals these opportunities will generate a significant step forwards for female founders.

Stakeholders engaged by the Taskforce in the course of its work have shown great enthusiasm for the issue at hand. This will also be crucial to the success of achieving the goals set out in these opportunities because it will require a concerted and sustained effort from all stakeholders, across the public and private sectors. The Taskforce looks forward to seeing the results of these recommendations in practice.

09

Afterword by Anne Boden



While addressing the challenges that hold back women-led high-growth businesses is long overdue, and this report could not have come out at a better time. We are at a significant crossroads for high-growth business. The next generation of firms which shape Industry 5.0 will be started and scaled by entrepreneurs with an entirely different skillset from the ones that characterised Industry 4.0. As this report has shown, these are skills, behaviours and aptitudes that women have long excelled at. Whichever enterprises become the Googles, Amazons, and Starlings of tomorrow, the deciding factor should be ideas, creativity and a genuine desire to change things for the better for people and planet. Equally importantly, there needs to be an even playing field, so everyone, regardless of gender, is given a fair chance.

It won't be easy. There are still deeply ingrained practices and cultural stereotypes which can hold women back. But we know the changes that need to be made and recognise the scale of the opportunity on offer if we make them. This is not just an opportunity for women in general either, but something that will benefit the whole of the UK. If we want to realise our ambitions to become a tech superpower by 2030, we know what we need to do.

Top teams of any high-growth business need to be balanced. The right balance can only be found by opening up the talent pool and allowing everyone to reach their potential. This is why one of the key criteria in our recommendations centre around mixed teams and why I support the goal where *at least* one of the top three roles in any high-growth business is taken by a woman. When we reach the stage where this is emulated across the whole entrepreneurial landscape and mixed teams are not only *encouraged* by investors, but *expected*, this is when the real magic will begin to happen. This, alongside a new generation of balanced and fair investment teams, will change the landscape for female entrepreneurs, indeed all entrepreneurs, forever.

Our recommendations are ambitious, but I won't apologise for that. Making small incremental changes won't move the dial. We've been talking about this being a challenge for too long. Now we need to take big strides forward. I keep thinking back to 2011, when the Davies Report first proposed a target of 25% of female board representation by 2015¹⁴⁹. At the time, it felt like a huge stretch. Yet, that target was subsequently increased to 33% in 2016¹⁵⁰ and today, 40% of UK FTSE board positions are held by women.¹⁵¹ What this shows us is that ambitious targets can be achieved. It is in our power to make these crucial changes and this report outlines the roadmap to success.

On a personal level, I am fully committed to doing what I can to help more women in the next generation to start and scale high-growth enterprises in greater numbers. For that reason, I have produced a book to run alongside this report; *Female Founders Playbook: Insights from the Superwomen who made it'*, which was published by

¹⁴⁹ FTSE Women Leaders, [The Davies Review 2011-2015](#) (2015)

¹⁵⁰ Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, [Sea-change in UK boardrooms as women make up nearly 40% of FTSE 100 top table roles](#), Press release (2022)

¹⁵¹ FTSE Women Leaders, [FTSE Women Leaders Review: Achieving Gender Balance](#) (2023)

Kogan Page in February 2024. The book is a step-by-step, practical guide for high-growth entrepreneurs, featuring interviews with some of the UK most successful women entrepreneurs. It includes input from figures in the finance industry, designed to complement the opportunities for change outlined in this report. The experiences of these powerful role-models are hugely relatable, and I hope will help to inspire the next generation. Once again, I am hugely grateful to the members of the Taskforce who gave up even more of their time to contribute to this book.

Building upon the work of the Taskforce is in everyone's interest, regardless of their gender. The timing is right, the opportunities are there, and so is the will to help female entrepreneurs succeed in growing some truly exceptional high-growth businesses. Like everyone who has worked on this report, I am excited to see what female entrepreneurs can achieve when these barriers are removed.

Appendix



Annex A – Taskforce biographies



Anne Boden MBE (Chair)

Anne is the Founder of Starling Bank which she started in 2014 after a distinguished, 30-year career at some of the world's best-known financial heavyweights. She has been named by JP Morgan as the number one female founder in Europe for two out of the past three years.

Anne was awarded an MBE for services to financial technology in 2018. She is an Honorary Fellow of Swansea University and has been awarded an Honorary Doctor of Science by Middlesex University.



Angela Scott FRSE

A pioneer in regenerative medicine and globally-successful female entrepreneur, Angela is Founder of TC BioPharm – a Nasdaq listed manufacturing and clinical development company. TC BioPharm has a cell-based product pipeline capable of treating a variety of disorders including cancer and severe viral infections. Angela has over 40 years in oncology research and cell therapy, transitioned several products from concept to clinic, and was an instrumental part of the team that cloned 'Dolly the Sheep'. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a Global Scot.



Deepali Nangia

Deepali joined Speedinvest as a Partner in January 2022 with a focus on finding, funding, and supporting investment in underrepresented founders. Before joining Speedinvest, Deepali co-founded Alma Angels, a community set up to increase the number of women angel investors in Europe who fund women-founded companies. She has invested in and mentored multiple women-founded companies, including PensionBee, Planera, Kama Labs, Sano Genetics, Shell Works, SideQuest, Juno Bio, Flown, Okko Health, Vine Health, Vaayu, and Yhangry, among others.

In 2021 alone, Deepali won UKBAA's Angel Investor of the Year award and, as Venture Partner, led their partnership with Softbank's Emerge Program to fund underrepresented founders in Europe.

Originally from Kolkata, India with a background in investment banking, private equity, and operations, Deepali has a keen interest in technologies that are solving society's large problems in sectors such as Digital Health, Femtech, and Climate Tech.



Francesca (Check) Warner MBE

Check is the CEO and Co-founder of Ada Ventures, an early-stage investment fund supporting overlooked founders and Diversity VC, a non-profit made up of individuals working in venture capital who seek to increase diversity of thought in the venture and tech industry. Ada Ventures have invested in companies solving problems like affordable, flexible childcare, mental health support for employees and workers' rights.



Helen Steers

Helen is the co-lead manager for Pantheon International plc, a FTSE-250 listed private equity investment company. Helen is a member of Pantheon’s European, International, and Co-investment Committees. Pantheon is a global private equity, infrastructure, real assets and private debt investor. Helen is a past Chair and Council member of the BVCA and is also a co-founder of Level 20, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving gender diversity in the European private equity industry.



Jan Putnis

Jan is a partner and co-head of the Financial Institutions Group at international law firm Slaughter and May. He advises banks, insurers, asset managers and market infrastructure firms on strategic projects, and more generally on the adoption of emerging technologies and business models in the financial services sector. He is at the forefront of thought leadership on legal and regulatory reform in the sector.



Judith Hartley

For the past 15 years, Judith has worked within the public sector, delivering national access to finance initiatives on behalf of the UK Government. Most of this time has been with the British Business Bank, where, until late 2023, she was CEO of British Business Investments, which is a commercial investment company within the British Business Bank group, focussed upon improving the choice and supply of funding for the UK's small businesses.

Prior to that, she held several other senior positions within the British Business Bank group, including CEO of British Patient Capital, which is the largest domestic investor into UK venture capital, and Managing Director of the British Business Bank's UK Network and Lending Solutions teams. Judith joined the British Business Bank from Capital for Enterprise Ltd, where she had been Managing Director, Debt Markets.

Before moving to the public sector, Judith spent almost 20 years in corporate and business banking within the private sector, working for Barclays and Bank of Scotland.



June Angelides MBE

June is Investment Manager at Samos, a company which focuses on investing in companies at seed. June is also best known for starting the UK's first child-friendly coding school for mums, Mums in Tech, while on her second maternity leave from Silicon Valley Bank. She is a strong advocate for the rights of working mothers and is passionate about getting people from all backgrounds into careers in tech and helping more underrepresented founders gain access to funding. June was awarded an MBE for services to Women in Technology in 2020.



Sam Smith

Entrepreneur Sam Smith is the founder, former CEO and adviser to finnCap Group Plc. Sam is now an adviser to scale-up businesses and a non-executive director on the board of Sumer Group Ltd, Solid State Plc, 55 Redefined Ltd and Griffin Markets Ltd. She is an adviser to the ScaleUp Institute, the not-for-profit whose mission is to make the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a business, as well as a patron of The Entrepreneurs Network.



Zandra Moore

Zandra Moore is the CEO and Co-Founder of SaaS software firm Panintelligence. As a passionate tech leader and entrepreneur with over 20 years of experience in the technology sector, she leads a team focused on delivering analytics into the heart of SaaS applications, enabling users access to key information at the right moment and with the right focus. At the forefront of enabling more women in tech, Zandra founded LeanIn Leeds and is an active member of WiLD (Women in Leeds Digital). Her enthusiasm for encouraging more girls into coding led her to start the No Code Lab, the UK's leading community for No Code developers.

Zandra's commitment and dedication to the UK technology sector has led to numerous awards and industry recognition, most recently the IoD Director of the Year Innovation, Northern Power Women Mentor of the Year, and LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders.

Annex B – Terms of reference

The Taskforce will work to achieve the following:

- Influence venture capitalists, the wider investment community and the media to recognise the value of women's innovation and impact.
- Help to strengthen the data and evidence base, including building a better international picture, to develop a more comprehensive and robust understanding of women-led high-growth enterprise.
- Map activity by important stakeholders and create a pipeline blueprint for where interventions are most effective, starting from early years through to university and beyond.
- Galvanise action from professional services firms, financial institutions, support networks, and educators to increase accessibility to advice, guidance and financial support for women-led high-growth enterprises.
- Share best practice across private, public and third sectors, to ensure that women are able to access the support needed to start a high-growth enterprise.
- Work to influence regional organisations and consider geographical opportunities to deliver solutions that work for regions across the UK.
- use their profile and their credibility to encourage more girls and young women to see starting a business, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), as a valid career option with high-growth potential
- Promote case studies and inspirational role models in the media.
- Campaign to challenge and remove negative gender stereotypes attached to 'traditional entrepreneurs', building on Starling Bank's [initiative](#) and [research](#).
- Campaign to challenge the status quo culture of high-growth companies, which is traditionally dominated by men.
- Act as an 'innovation catalyst' providing strategic direction and advice, and championing a clear vision of women-led high-growth enterprises.
- Bring together diverse stakeholders to facilitate cooperation between the various initiatives across regional, local and national bodies, including combined authority mayors.

- Engage with and make representations to national, regional and local decision makers (such as local councils, combined authority mayors or the government), in support of high-growth women-led enterprises.
- Join up, complement efforts and increase the impact from existing initiatives such as the [Rose Review](#).
- Showcase sustainable solutions which support women from all regions to start a high-growth enterprise, including utilising the expertise and support of business incubators.

Annex C – Data Source and Limitations

Data source

The data used for figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12 and 13 is from [Beauhurst](#), an online database of fastest growing businesses in the UK.

Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12 and 13 show data by the sex (male and female) of the people who founded high-growth enterprises. The data has been combined into ‘all-female’, ‘all-male’ and ‘mixed’ founding teams. This decision was made to show any differences between female and male founded companies as clearly as possible.

The database is live and updated continuously. Data in the figures listed above were extracted on the 15 January 2024. The data within this report was accurate at that time but will have changed since then.

Search criteria

The data for some of the figures within this report was generated on the Beauhurst platform using a number of different search criteria.

For figures 1 and 2, where the Beauhurst definition of high-growth enterprise is used. The companies identified are ‘tracked’ by Beauhurst (and therefore must be actively operating at seed, venture, growth or established stages of business evolution) and meet at least one of the following 8 criteria: have received equity investment, underwent a Management Buyout/Management Buy-in, received venture debt, reached scaleup status, received a large innovation grant, spun out from an academic institution, graduated from a selected accelerator and/or featured on a selected high-growth list.

In addition to the above, for figures 1, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12 and 13, additional search criteria was added to identify companies that met the OECD definition of high-growth. This included filtering for companies that:

- Have had an annualised growth of 20 percent per annum in the number of employees and/or in turnover compared to three financial statements previously. Specifically, companies are required to have had to grow by 72.8% compared to the previous three years.
- Have a minimum of 10 employees at the beginning of the growth period compared to three financial statements previously. In this case, 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

The data used was also filtered for the:

- gender balance of the founders, (figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12 and 13)
- location of the companies’ head offices (figure 3 and 4)
- sectors in which the companies operate (figure 12 and 13).

Data limitations

Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12 and 13 show data disaggregated by sex (male and female). This data is generated by Beauhurst using, among other sources, the gendered titles (Mr, Mrs, Miss etc.) collected by Companies House, alongside other data resources, to verify sex as part of the process for registering businesses. Where sex cannot be generated, for example where people have non-gendered titles such as 'doctor', the data is left as 'missing'. Caution should, therefore, be applied to avoid extrapolating data in this report to 'all' businesses.

Similar to above, figures 12 and 13 show data based on the location of the head office. Where that is not known, data has also been left as 'missing'. Caution should, therefore, be applied to avoid extrapolating data in this report to 'all' businesses.

Some funding is announced and other funding is unannounced. While Beauhurst contains both, some funding may not be included in the data and caution should be applied when extrapolating that data. This includes fundraising prior to 2011 which is not included in the database.

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