



**The Fawcett Society – Evidence for the Women and Equalities Committee’s
Consultation on Women in Executive Positions**

1. The Fawcett Society is the UK’s leading charity campaigning for gender equality and women’s rights at work, at home, and in public life.
2. Our vision is a society in which the choices you can make and the control you have over your own life are no longer determined by your gender.
3. We publish authoritative research to educate, inform and lead the debate; we bring together politicians, academics, grassroots activists and wider civil society to develop innovative, practical policy solutions and we campaign with women and men to make change happen.

Summary

4. Women remain significantly underrepresented at the top of our economy. This represents a loss to women who are currently prevented from achieving their full potential in the workplace and to British business, with employers missing out on the talent and contribution of the female work force.
5. Recent years have seen progress in the profile of this issue. Fawcett welcomes the results of the Davies Review. The Review brought focus and commitment to the issue of women on boards and demonstrated the potential for rapid change when there are concerted efforts.
6. However, we also note the limits of a voluntary approach. Whilst many FTSE 100 firms made significant progress during the five years of the Review others did not meet the target of 25% women on board. Additionally, the number of women with executive positions remained unacceptably low at 10%.
7. In order to change this balance and to ensure women are fairly represented at the top of our economy a comprehensive approach is required by the Hampton Review addressing both the pipeline of female talent and changes to dated workplace cultures and practices

8. Increasing the number of women in executive positions on boards and senior management is crucial for further productivity gains.

Fawcett recommends :

For Employers

- **Organisations should undertake a thorough gender audit** including pay, positions, hours, promotions, bonuses etc. to identify the roles women undertake in their organization and where underrepresentation begins
- Using the data derived from their gender audit, **employers should publish action plans** on how they will tackle gender inequality within their firms
- We recommend that firms adopt a policy of **proportionate promotion**. This means that they seek to ensure that promotions to each level of seniority right the way up their organisation reflect the gender balance of the level below
- **Training to tackle unconscious bias:** in order to overcome the ways in which gender stereotypes and prejudices can limit female progression
- **Consider the technological advances and changes to working practices which could allow the workforce to be more productive whilst working flexibly**
- **The Fawcett society also welcomes and supports the recommendations of the recent EHRC *Inquiry into fairness, transparency and diversity in FTSE 350 board appointments*[\[1\]](#).**

For Government

- **Legislate to ensure flexibility by default: employers should be required to advertise all jobs as flexible unless there is a strong business case against it**
- **Parental leave should be reformed further by the Government with the introduction of so-called “daddy months”, which are non-transferable allocations of leave to both parents**
- **The Government should continue to lead and coordinate targets for women in senior and executive roles generated in partnership with business**

- **In the case of Executive and non- Executive positions on boards the government should introduce a binding quote**

9. Fawcett notes that women’s representation in the most senior roles in our economy is an important part of achieving gender equality. However, this goal must be addressed in tandem with and as a complement to wider economic equality for all women, regardless of how high up the income spectrum they are. Many of changes required to ensure women are in positions of power in the workplace are also essential to achieving a gender sensitive economy more widely, but women at the top will not be enough alone.

The Current Context

10. There is a lack of clarity about the definition of an “Executive.” For the purposes of this response we use the term to refer to the most senior levels of management within corporate organisations as well as to Executive positions on boards. It is clear though that addressing this issue requires a much broader focus, and we welcome Sir Phillip Hampton’s commitment to considering the pipeline of women to these positions. We encourage the Hampton Review to create a tight definition of “Executive” to ensure progress can be effectively monitored. To ensure this is meaningful we recommend it relates to indicators of power and seniority in the workplace. For instance, those in a certain percentile of earners in a firm, or those who hold budgets over a certain size.
11. Even without a clear definition it is clear that women are underrepresented at the top of our economy. PWC has found that only women make up only 19% senior roles in financial services,^[2] only 19.6% of those on FTSE 250 boards are women^[3] and more widely women in the top 10% of earners earn an average of £15,500 a year less than the highest earning 10% of men.^[4]
12. This problem continues to persist despite the consensus that diversity is beneficial for profits and business performance. A McKinsey report from 2015 found every 10% increase in women on the executive management team in companies in Britain was associated with a 3.5% increase in earnings before interest and taxes.^[5] Likewise, the Government Equalities Office estimates that boosting women’s productivity and employment rates to exactly the same levels as men could add £600bn a year to the economy, and just equalizing participation could boost GDP 10% by 2030.^[6]

Barriers to Women in Executive Positions

13. There are a range of causes of women's underrepresentation in senior management roles. These echo the wider causes of women's economic disadvantage. Some prevent women progressing to a position where they have the experience or status to take on the most senior roles and some relate to the failure to recognise and promote female talent.
14. **Unequal Caring Responsibilities and inflexible work**
15. Women remain more likely to undertake caring responsibilities making it harder for them to conform to traditional working patterns. As a result, women are more likely to work part-time (42% of women versus 11% of men)^[7] and this likelihood increases as women get older. Half of women aged over fifty work part time^[8], exactly at the time when men start being appointed to company boards and the most senior posts. This dynamic means that women lose not just earnings from reduced hours, but also from lost progression and promotions.
16. Currently, working part-time or flexibly can mean freezing your career trajectory or even taking a step down due to the lack of good quality part-time work. Only 6% of jobs with a salary of over £20,000 per annum pro rata are advertised as flexible or part-time.^[9] The figure is likely to be even lower for the most senior posts. As a result, many women's development and progression is stunted as they manage responsibilities outside the workplace.
17. Research has shown that different sectors differentially incentivise and reward continuous hours.^[10] For instance, in certain senior business roles there are benefits in terms of performance of continuous presence. This is not the case in other professions such as pharmacy where there is a more linear relationship between hours and pay. The structures and working practices in some sectors require continuous presence in order to be successful.
18. However, this is not necessary. More can and must be done to modernise working practices to ensure that all members of the workforce can participate fully and that people are able to contribute effectively over shorter and more flexible periods of work. Technological changes can ensure that employees do not have to work exactly the same continuous hours as their colleagues in order to be equally as productive. Working cultures must also change so that those who work

flexibly and are as productive as colleagues are supported and recognised

19. Inflexibility has a triple effect on women's representation at the top. Firstly, it means that many women are not able to gain the experience required as they are held back as they take work which allows them the flexibility they need but underuses their skills. Secondly, it also prevents women with strong experience from applying for promotions as they perceive that they would not be able to conform to the expected working practices were they to become more senior. Thirdly, it can lead to women who are in the most senior roles dropping out as they find they have responsibilities outside the workplace which their employer will not accommodate.
20. Creating greater flexibility is vital to ensure a more diverse range of people are able to reach the top in our economy. But also to ensure that across the board our economy benefits from the skills and talent of the whole workforce. Businesses who do not adapt in this way are failing to exploit the full potential of their organisation. Getting this right will be good for women's participation but also support diversity more broadly, as men and women with different perspectives and from different backgrounds are able to participate more fully.

21. Discrimination

22. Discrimination remains an issue in the workplace. For example, the EHRC has estimated around 54,000 women have to leave their job early every year as a result of becoming pregnant or having a baby.^[11] This means that many talented women experience obstacles to their progression; it may take them additional time to reestablish themselves in a new role, or they may drop out of employment all together.
23. Fawcett research also reveals very different attitudes to male and female employees who become parents^[12]. Our representative survey found that 46% of people believe a woman becomes less committed to her job after having a baby, only 11% of people believe men become less committed. Furthermore, men appear to experience a fatherhood bonus: 29% of people believe a man becomes more committed to his job after having a baby, whilst only 8% of people believe the same of women. It's clear that stereotypes about parenthood and caring priorities remain very powerful. These are likely to impact upon employers' interpretation of women's commitment to their work - regardless of their actual levels of commitment - and therefore their opportunities to take on greater responsibility or gain promotion

24. Undervaluing Women in Work

25. Even where women are able to conform to traditional working structures there is evidence that their talent is less likely to be recognised and rewarded. For instance, women in similar positions continue to earn less: the average man in an executive role earned a basic salary of £40,325 over the 12 months to August 2012, compared to £30,265 for a woman in the same type of role, a gender pay gap of 25%.^[13] Women are also less likely to receive a bonus at work – and when they do it is likely to be smaller than one received by a man. The Chartered Management Institute found that in 2012 the average bonus for a male executive was £7,496, compared to £3,726 for a female executive, a bonus gap of 50%.^[14] More broadly, Management, Directors and Senior Officials face the largest gender pay gap of any employment sector designated by the ONS at 21.8%.^[15]
26. Fawcett research offers some insights as to what might be behind some of these differences. At the end of 2015 we conducted a representative survey of 8000 adults UK wide^[16]. The sample included 1422 people with recruitment and hiring responsibilities. Overall, this group were less likely to support equality of opportunity for women and more likely to oppose feminism than the population overall. These people are important gatekeepers in the process of promotion for women on their journey to the top and may represent a small but powerful group of barrier bosses. The research revealed:
- 14% of those with recruitment and interviewing responsibilities believe they would lose out if we achieved gender equality
 - 16% of this group believes women's rights have already gone too far, compared to 10% of those without recruitment responsibility
 - a quarter of recruitment decision makers believe gender equality will not be better for the economy, compared to only 9% of those not involved in recruitment
27. Conscious or unconscious bias against women in the workplace can prevent them from achieving the highest positions or being appointed to roles for which they are, in fact, the strongest candidates. Evidence shows that stereotypes about women's strengths and weaknesses can prevent them being appointed to roles, even when they objectively outperform men.^[17] Moss-Racusin et al. have found that when asked to

view CVs that are identical apart from the gender of the name used, reviewers were more likely to:

- identify male candidates as more qualified than female ones
- want to hire the male candidates rather than the female ones
- give the male candidates a higher starting salary than the female ones
- offer the male candidate more career mentoring.^[18]

29. These biases mean that women's talent often goes unrecognised or undervalued and that strong candidates are inappropriately evaluated as not appropriate for the most senior roles.

30. It is often argued that women are under-recognised because they are reticent to promote themselves and less likely to negotiate for better pay, conditions and development opportunities.

31. For instance, Experiments testing gender differences in salary negotiation find that women ask on average for \$7,000 less than men.^[19] However, the evidence base here also indicates that when a woman engaging in negotiation violates perceived gender norms it can generate negative outcomes. For example, Hannah Bowles of Harvard University conducted a series of studies^[20] which found that evaluators penalised female candidates more for initiating salary negotiations. Women who negotiated faced a much higher social cost as a result of being perceived as less nice and more demanding. Men who negotiated paid no such price; there was no significant decline in evaluators' willingness to work with them. Whether they were perceived as nice or demanding was found to have less impact. The same research found that women were more resistant to initiating salary negotiations with a male evaluator.

32. Consequently, to increase women's representation at the top it is not enough to encourage women to be more confident or put themselves forward for promotion. We must challenge the underlying stereotypes that mean women who do so are often perceived more negatively in the workplace.

34. Solutions

28. Fawcett advocates a number of policy approaches to respond to these inequalities and ensure women are more fairly represented in senior roles.

For Employers

29. **Organisations should undertake a thorough gender audit** including pay, positions, hours, promotions, bonuses etc. to identify the roles women undertake in their organization and where underrepresentation begins. For instance, they may find they recruit equal proportions of women and men at graduate level but that by senior management women's representation has fallen away significantly. Understanding where these drop out points are can enable employers to better understand the specific barriers to women progressing in their workplace. Fawcett welcomes the implementation of Section 78 requiring employers to publish their pay gap data and recommend this moment is used to explore these issues in more depth.
30. Using the data derived from their gender audit, **employers should publish action plans** on how they will tackle gender inequality within their firms. Organisations that can clearly identify where they are falling short and demonstrate their improvements will not just make the best out of their current workforce but will attract the best female talent over the longer term.
31. We recommend that firms adopt a policy of **proportionate promotion**. This means that they seek to ensure that promotions to each level of seniority right the way up their organisation at least reflect the gender balance of the level below. For instance, if a firm has an intake of graduates that is 40% female, they should seek to ensure that at least 40% of those promoted to the next level are also women. Should they find this is not happening, there is cause to investigate the barriers to women's progression at this stage. This should also include a commitment to a balanced intake so that in the long-term there is balance across all levels of the organisation.
32. **Training to tackle unconscious bias:** in order to overcome the ways in which gender stereotypes and prejudices can limit female progression staff at all levels of an organization should receive training on bias and how to overcome it to ensure fair employment and recruitment practices. Fawcett welcomes the Government's announcement that certain public sector organisations will use blind applications. Employers should adopt this as standard practice to ensure they genuinely select the best rather than the name that fits.
33. **Consider the technological advances and changes to working practices which could allow the workforce to be more productive whilst working flexibly.** This will not only ensure employers are better placed to benefit from the talent of their female employees but support diversity and productivity gains more broadly

34. **The Fawcett society also welcomes and supports the recommendations of the recent EHRC *Inquiry into fairness, transparency and diversity in FTSE 350 board appointments*^[21].** In particular we note the report's finding that the provision for "tie-breaks" are underused and recommend that firms fully exploit this opportunity to achieve better representation in boards. This should be done alongside ensuring recruitment practices reach beyond usual networks and reflect the skills genuinely needed for the role rather than specifying types of experience.

For Government

35. **Legislate to ensure flexibility by default: employers should be required to advertise all jobs as flexible unless there is a strong business case against it.** This will shift the mindset in business, encouraging employers to reflect on what is necessary to fulfil a role and what is simply the current way of working. At the same time it leaves control of working practices in the hands of employers, who remain free to choose a traditional working model.

36. **Parental leave should be reformed further by the Government with the introduction of so-called "daddy months",** which are non-transferable allocations of leave to both parents. This would encourage parents to split the impact of care more equally in the home, and help break the care-work dilemma many women in corporate management face. Current estimates of take-up amongst fathers according to the Government's own estimates are 2-8%, in contrast to Sweden's paternal take up rate of 90%, accounting for 25% of all parental leave taken in Sweden.^[22]

37. A case for quotas

38. Fawcett notes the impact of the Davies Review and the rallying power of a focused effort and target. It is clear that the review generated greater awareness of and commitment from many FTSE 100 firms to improving the gender balance of boards. The Davies Review met and exceeded the 25% target for women on boards that it set itself for 2015. Fears that the target would only be met by having a few female directors sitting on multiple boards; that there would be resistance from the business to targets; and that women who did end up boards were unqualified all proved to be unfounded.^[23] Broadly, the Davies Review reports that the attitude of firms to the targets has been favourable, and that there has been a sea change in the attitudes of corporates towards the importance of appointing women to boards. There is a strong case for the Government to continue to play this coordinating role for women's representation in business more widely.

39. **Fawcett recommends that this includes targets for women in senior and executive roles generated in partnership with business.** Fawcett notes the call from Director-General of the CBI, Carolyn Fairbairn for a 25% target for women in executive positions.^[24] This must be accompanied by a clear and consistent definition of “Executive”.
40. However Fawcett also draws the Committee’s attentions to the limitations of this approach. The average of 25.8% women on boards obscures variation between companies. By 2015 fifty-five FTSE 100 companies had reached or exceeded the 25% target, but 45 had not. Two-thirds (168) of FTSE 250 companies had also not met this target.
41. Some firms have made great progress, such as Old Mutual which increased the number of women on its board from 0% to 38.5%, but there have also been laggards.^[25] If financial firms such as Electra and Woodford can both reach 50% women on boards, then it is not clear how other investment companies such as Perpetual and Scottish Investment Trust could face such a severe lack of qualified women that they have 0%.^[26]
42. **Consequently, it is clear that whilst a voluntary approach can generate change it will not affect the structures and behaviour of all firms.** The argument that sharing more information leads to action within firms misses that many firms will not change as fast as the average, and it is precisely in these firms that action most urgently needs to be taken.
43. **The Government should consider the use of quotas for women on boards including for those in executive board positions.** There may also be a case for those in Executive positions more broadly. As mentioned, the success of firms in improving gender representation on their boards has varied significantly, with many firms still having less than 12.5% or even no women on their boards, and quotas are the ideal tool for closing this gap between firms. The imposition of a quota creates the imperative to change practices and identify the causes of underrepresentation. It will create the pressure for firms to identify, nurture and promote female talent and create greater flexibility to support a more diverse pool of talent.
44. Fawcett notes the success of quotas in other countries, in particular in Norway which has serious penalties for firms that do not achieve the 40% target^[27] ^[28]. In the first instance **Fawcett recommends the use of an ambitious quota** in line with that of Norway or that under discussion at the EU level. This should include time for firms to meet the target followed by clear and meaningful penalties for those who do not meet them.

45. Should a policy of this ambition not be considered achievable, as a second option we recommend the Committee consider recommending a much lower but rising quota to lift the worst performers and distribute changes throughout the FTSE index. A quota of 12.5% for directorships would only affect the forty-six lowest performing firms for gender representation in the FTSE 350, and would for thirty-one of them require the addition of just one woman onto the board.^[29] This quota could then be raised as firms comply and the overall average increases. A similar policy could be used for executive directors. However, we note that whilst this approach will ensure all FTSE firms improve their performance it will do so at a very slow rate. One which, arguably, women, and our economy cannot afford.
46. Research by Fawcett has shown that 6 in 10 people, including 55% of men, believe that men in the top jobs won't make room unless they have to.^[30] In contrast, only 19% of people believe that men will make room in firms voluntarily – the right kind of quota would therefore be a popular policy and a successful one at achieving gender equality.
47. There are a number of objections often made to quotas which should be challenged.
48. It is argued that quotas will lead to inappropriate women being promoted, or to women facing charges of tokenism. However, the rapid progress of firms such as Old Mutual which increased the proportion of women on its board from 0% to 38.8% between 2010 and 2015, Wolesley which achieved 30% women by 2015 from 0% in 2010 and Next who moved from 11.1% to 30% reveal that this is not the case. These organisations were able to find sufficient numbers of high caliber women that not only did they make substantial progress; they were able to go above and beyond the target. The EHRC's Inquiry^[31] also reveals that current recruitment practices mean that often firms are unnecessarily restricting the pool of candidates, through practices such as job descriptions which require experience of a FTSE 350 board rather than specifying particular skills. Evaluation of candidates also continues in some cases to rely on soft requirements such as "chemistry" or "fit" without clear consideration of how these will be assessed. As such it is likely that personal biases and prejudices continue to mean strong candidates are unnecessarily eliminated.
49. It is also argued that historic inequalities mean that time is needed for women with appropriate skills, education and experience to come through the system. However women have been equal participants in higher education since the early 1990s^[32] and have enrolled in degrees in equal numbers for over twenty years.^[33] Consequently, if the opportunity to access higher education was a barrier to women's

progression to the top of business we would expect the gaps to have narrowed significantly by now. The fact that they haven't indicates changes to working practices- rather than to the women in work- are required.

50. Conclusion

51. As is the case across our economy women are prevented from achieving their full potential by a range of barriers. These are bad for women individually but also for our economy, which currently misses out on some of the most talented potential business leaders. This is caused by a combination of the structures in the workplace which those with wider caring responsibilities cannot conform too, as well as attitudes to women which frame the ways in which their performance and ambitions are recognised and rewarded (or penalised) in the workplace.
52. As such, it is vital that we tackle both the rigid working structures which hold many people back but also challenge the deeply held gender norms which mean even women who are able to conform are held to higher standards than male colleagues.
53. Only a very small number of women and men will ever reach the highest levels of Executive Management. It is essential that these opportunities are genuinely offered to the very best. However, these efforts must be part of a wider commitment to reforming the workplace and the responsibilities of care to create greater equality at all levels of our economy.

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