



International Women's Day 2019 – How your workforce can achieve equality for women

As we celebrate International Women's Day today (#BalanceforBetter), it's a perfect time for organisations to reflect on what they are doing to recognise women's achievements in the workplace, to check their own progress in promoting equality at work and to set some action points for achieving an equal balance between men and women.

Supporting mothers in the workforce

Women now account for almost half of the UK's workforce, the majority of whom are mothers who work on a part-time basis. Working mothers, in particular, encounter their own challenges in creating the right balance between their family and work life, as they juggle a whole host of different commitments each day. Those organisations that support women in maintaining a work-life balance reap the rewards through having a diverse workforce.

Equality of pay

The focus of much attention is equal pay. In general terms, equal pay is men and women being paid the same for equal work. The Equality Act 2010 standard is the reliable measure in assessing whether your organisation truly has the balance right between men and women. If you evaluate jobs on a regular basis, perhaps as part of your annual pay review process, you will be well placed to re-balance pay as needed or otherwise remain confident that you are promoting equality of pay.

Of course, you may also fall within the 250+ employee bracket for publishing gender pay gap figures. These are average figures which are far less reliable than an equal pay evaluation, but reported figures for 2018 so far suggest that the overall gap has only reduced very slightly, and clearly, there are still real issues when it comes to differences in pay between men and women.

Closing the pay gap

How can we create a better balance and further close the gap? The Government has [launched some initiatives](#) to assist organisations.

Examples include improvements to recruitment and career progression paths, encouraging salary negotiation by advertising salary ranges and promoting flexible working for both men and women.

Statistically, women are less likely to try and negotiate their pay. Publishing and communicating salary ranges will encourage women to have full and proper discussions about what they should be paid.

Career progression

Many women are also less direct when it comes to career progression, whether going for that internal promotion or a new role elsewhere. With the number of employed women on [FTSE 250 boards](#) has fallen from 7.7% to 6.4% during 2018, and with the number having flatlined at 9.7% for FTSE 100 companies, these UK companies are a long way from successfully re-balancing their boards, though the increase in female appointments to part-time non-executive directorship roles does show some positive improvement. An audit of your own organisational management structure will help you to identify and promote balance as appropriate.

There is a saying that one should walk in another person's shoes before making any judgment about them. Boards need to consist of a diverse range of people in order to be confident that balanced decisions are reached, as well as to protect against unconscious or even conscious bias.

Make your organisation agile and flexible

Having criteria which show the organisation is flexible in terms of work patterns and hours, which focuses on outputs rather than presenteeism, will help to make roles more attractive to women in particular. However, if we are truly to get things equal, I suggest that promoting an agile and flexible workforce for men as much as for women is the best way of normalising such working practices for both sexes and achieving equality overall.

Need further advice?

If you would like advice and assistance on equality and diversity, including equal pay, policies and procedures and discrimination, please do not hesitate to contact [Kevin Barnett](#) or any other member of our friendly [Employment team](#).