



# International Women's Day 2022 – How Employers Can Help 'Break the Bias'

AUTHOR / KEY CONTACT



**Emma Starmer**  
Senior Employment Law and HR Advisor

✉ [emma.starmer@la-law.com](mailto:emma.starmer@la-law.com)  
☎ 01202 786276

[International Women's Day](#) (IWD) falls on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. It is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality. This year the campaign theme for IWD is #BreakTheBias.

IWD asks us all to:

- Imagine a gender-equal world.
- A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination.
- A world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.
- A world where difference is valued and celebrated.

You may recall that the IWD theme last year asked us to '[Choose to Challenge](#)'. Did you use that opportunity to make changes in your own workplaces or challenge gender bias and inequality? If so, this IWD is an opportunity to review the changes you made and the impact they have had.

It is clear that the positives of getting equality and inclusion right are numerous, including increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, reduced employee relations issues, improved recruitment and retention and higher staff satisfaction.

Creating an environment where women feel that they fit and belong is an important step to creating a positive experience for everyone.

Workforces that include individuals from a variety of different backgrounds will better represent a wider customer base and can bring different experiences, talent, and skills to the workplace.

## What can you do this year to support gender equality and remove bias, stereotypes and discrimination?

Staff surveys, equality committees and working groups can really help identify areas that need improvement and help ensure that changes have a positive impact and continue to evolve and adapt in line with the organisation's goals and values.

We know that employers are already legally obliged to take steps to ensure that women are paid and treated equally in the workplace. Business leaders must be demonstrating a clear zero-tolerance approach to all forms of discrimination and harassment.

### Get to know your data

If you notice you are not getting many applications from women for certain vacancies, ask why this might be. Have you unintentionally written your recruitment adverts to be more attractive to male candidates? Although each individual is unique, much research has been carried out suggesting that overuse of words such as 'competitive', 'aggressive', 'confident' and 'independent' can be off-putting to some female candidates, even where they share those characteristics themselves.

Another way to attract a wider range of candidates (meaning that you reach the very best applicants for your roles) is to offer part-time, home-based or flexible working where possible. This also helps show just how inclusive your business is. So take time to consider what your business needs are, and how flexible you can be.

The pandemic forced many organisations to introduce home and flexible working at a much faster pace than they ever expected. In many instances, both employers and employees have risen to the challenge extremely well, and have shown how flexibility can assist businesses in creating a more agile environment.

Whilst flexibility is likely to be attractive to women, promoting an agile and flexible workforce for men as much as for women is the best way of normalising such working practices and achieving equality.

Assessing your employee data can also highlight any 'cliff-edge' points in careers when women tend to leave your organisation. Research shows that mothers are more likely to leave full-time roles compared to fathers after having children, so you may be able to link these points to, for example, a lack of support for those returning to the business.

Current research has highlighted that for some women menopause can be one of those 'cliff-edge' points where they consider leaving the business. Organisations should now be taking steps to support women at this stage in their working life to ensure talent is not lost.

Publishing your commitment to flexible working and family-friendly leave on your website is a helpful way to

show that you care about the wellbeing and diversity of your workforce.

## Role Models

Managers and business leaders have an important role to play in creating and maintaining a culture where women feel confident and able to openly discuss their salary and career ambitions.

Alongside formal training, coaching, peer support and mentoring can be powerful tools. Where you have successful female leaders who are demonstrating the correct behaviours at work, encourage them to help other members of the workforce to reach their potential by sharing their knowledge and experience.

Senior leaders working flexibly, taking family leave and maintaining a healthy work-life balance, will encourage others to feel confident in doing the same, opening up opportunities for a range of individuals.

## Bias

It may not be immediately clear how bias impacts women's ability to progress and succeed in organisations. Bias can be unconscious and may occur even before a candidate is offered an interview.

To help reduce bias in the early stages, avoid the temptation to continue to recruit 'like for like' candidates. Just because a person has filled a role successfully for some time, doesn't mean a very different candidate could not do the same whilst bringing additional skills and diversity too. It can be helpful to include a range of suitably qualified people in a recruitment exercise to avoid a fixed opinion.

When promoting within the business, ensure that all your employees know that gender will not be a barrier to enhancing their careers. Be consistent and fair, ensure that everyone is made aware of opportunities that arise and set out your commitment to gender equality in your policies and procedures.

Ask yourself whether you are favouring one candidate over another because:

- They are like you
- They fit with everyone else already doing that job
- They are the closest match to their predecessor
- The 'halo' effect, focusing too much on one perceived positive aspect of a candidate (for example, their gender) and overlooking any negative aspects
- The 'horns' effect, becoming overly focused on one negative aspect of the person, hinders the ability to

see the positive aspects.

## Policies, Procedures and Training

To achieve an environment 'free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination' business leaders and managers must lead by example, proactively tackling conflict or inappropriate behaviour, and taking formal disciplinary action where necessary.

It is important to ensure that all your staff and managers are aware of your equality, diversity and inclusion policies and how they will be implemented. Training (both at the induction stage and regularly throughout the year) will be an important step in ensuring that everyone understands what is expected of them, and how to deal with any issues that may arise.

## Equal Pay

Many people will think of equal pay first when they think of gender equality. In general terms, equal pay is men and women being paid the same for equal work. The Equality Act 2010 standard is a reliable measure in assessing whether your organisation truly has the balance right between men and women.

There is still work to be done in this area, and it will be interesting to monitor the impact of the pandemic, home working, homeschooling and furlough on the data available.

Statistically, research shows that women are less likely to try and negotiate increases to their salary and are perceived as less direct when it comes to their own career progression. Publishing and communicating salary ranges will encourage women to have full and open discussions about what they should be paid. Regular job evaluation exercises can be a useful way of enabling you to identify barriers and are often carried out as part of the annual pay review process.

If you would like further information about the topic discussed above, or any other employment or HR-related matters, please contact our [employment law and HR](#) team. Get in touch by emailing [online.enquiries@LA-law.com](mailto:online.enquiries@LA-law.com) or call 01202 786332.

#IWD2022 #BreakTheBias