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**The Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality**

# "CLASS OF 2023" INSIGHTS REPORT

**July 2023**

REPORT CARD

THE TIMES

2023

TOP 50 EMPLOYERS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

In partnership with

The Prince's Responsible Business Network

# REPORT

## "THE CLASS OF 2023" THE TIMES TOP 50 EMPLOYERS FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2023 INSIGHTS REPORT

## Introduction

The Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality is the UK's most highly profiled and well-established listing of employers taking action to create workplaces where everyone, regardless of gender, can thrive. This year saw the greatest number of applications in the award's history, with applicants combined employing 2.4 million people, 7.5% of the UK workforce.

2023's awards come at a pivotal time for gender equality at work, with the cost-of-living crisis hitting UK households struggling to recover from the pandemic. As a result, despite progress in some broad areas – more women in higher-paid occupations[i], greater political representation and more women going to university than men[ii] – for some groups we risk seeing progress on equality reverse. For example, research has found that women from Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups are at the greatest disadvantage on key metrics of workplace equality, compared with all other ethnicity and gender combinations.[iii]

Women are still paid less, earning 85 pence for every pound earned by a man.[iv] They also bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, carrying out on average 60% more unpaid work than men per week[v]. If this was assigned a monetary value, it would be between 10 and 39% of GDP.[vi] Women are less likely to be in full-time employment[vii] and twice as likely to be in severely insecure work as men. Over 2 million women, 14% of all women in the UK, are paid less than the real living wage (vs. 9% of men).

Women also continue to be underrepresented in senior positions, currently making up around 30% of senior management roles. Only 6% of CEOs of FTSE 100 companies are women and none of these are from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that one in three women from ethnically diverse backgrounds say they've been unfairly passed over for or denied a promotion at work, with 27% believing their manager was actively preventing this.[viii]

Furthermore, there are everyday experiences of harassment and discrimination at work and domestic abuse within the home. 52% of working women say they have experienced instances of bullying and harassment in the workplace, with reporting rates remaining woefully low.[ix] Data suggests that financial pressures caused by the cost-of-living crisis are forcing women to remain with abusive partners, after such incidences increased during the pandemic.[x]

As a result, we need employers to be bolder, braver and faster in their action to address gender inequality within their workplaces, or risk rolling back progress made so far. Business in the Community's (BITC) vision is a truly equal world of work where everyone, regardless of gender, can flourish and where businesses can harness the talent and experiences that women have to offer. A balanced and inclusive workforce leads to wider social and economic benefits, increased economic growth, a boost in public and private sector performance and reduced income inequality.

Data from this year's 'Class of 2023' provides a moment to take stock and reflect, celebrating action to date while continuing to drive progress.
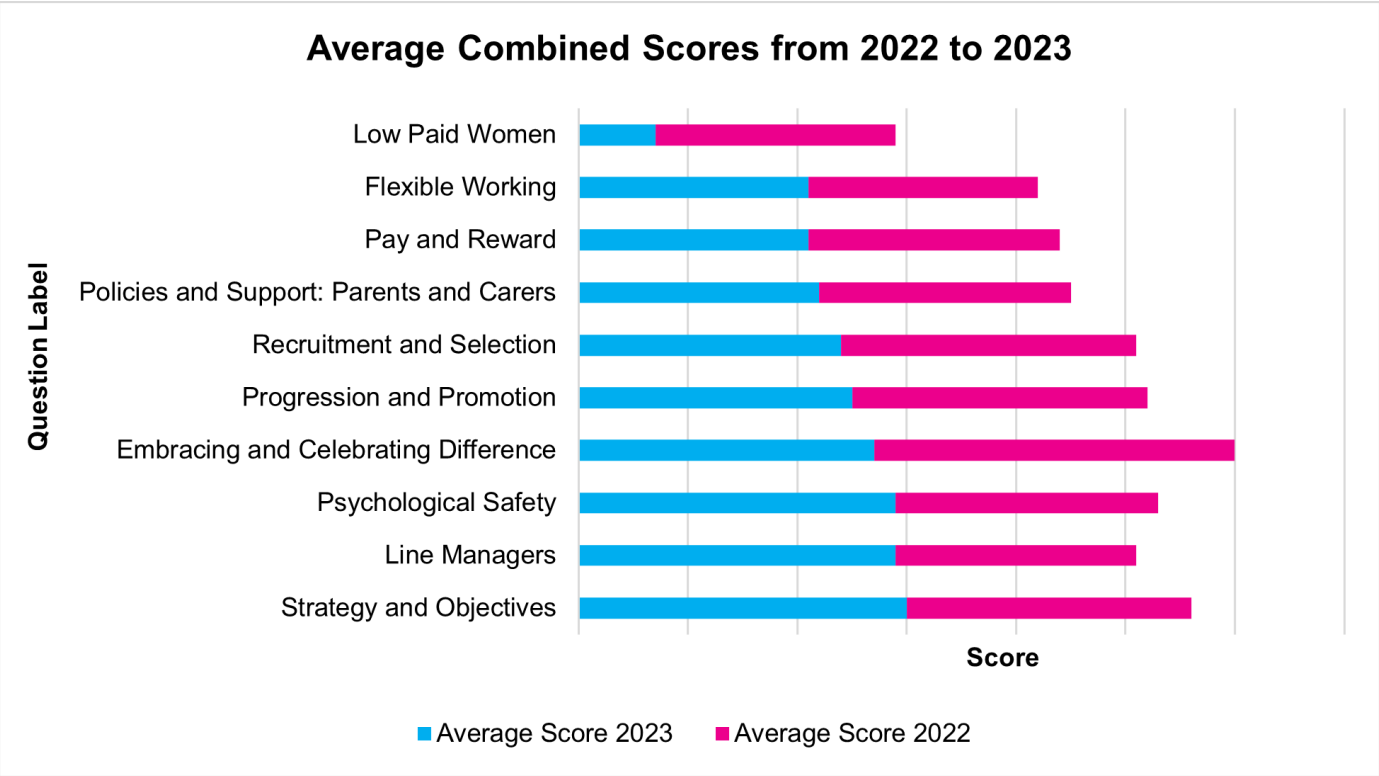
### *A note about the Top 50*

*Business in the Community has led the Top 50 Employers for Women for over a decade, each year adapting to reflect leading practice. Through the Top 50 listing we aim to promote and recognise an inclusive and intersectional understanding and approach to gender equality. To align with this aspiration, we have changed the name to* **The Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality***.*

*Regarding language, we use the term woman to include all people who self-identify as women and engage with their current or prospective employers as such. When we use the term gender equality, we take this to mean equality for all genders and those who do not identify as a gender.*

## "The Class of 2023': Headline Insights

The Times Top 50 Employers for Gender Equality, free to enter and open to all UK employers, asks organisations to share details of their activity, and any demonstrable impact, around key areas known to help or hinder progress towards gender equality at work. These can include their approach to recruitment (for example, including salary details as standard), how they apply an intersectional lens (for example, considering ethnicity pay gaps not just gender pay gaps), and efforts to support working carers (BITC research has found nearly half of the UK workforce is combining paid work with caring responsibilities).[xi] In addition, each year BITC identifies an area of specific focus where applicants are asked to share more detailed information in the form of a case study. This year focused on the cost-of-living crisis. In addition to reviewing anonymised submissions, assessors also speak with employees to gauge their real-life experience of working at applicant organisations.

Insights from this year's applications point to a renewed effort from employers to consider inclusive workplace culture as part of a refreshed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategy moving on from the pandemic. The highest performing areas were **Strategy and Objectives** (ensuring dedicated strategies are in place with senior-level accountability), **Line Managers** (equipping and holding line managers accountable to lead inclusively), and **Psychological Safety** (cultivating inclusive workplaces that encourage employees to speak out and challenge poor behaviour) Scores across all had increased from 2022. The biggest improvement was seen in **Line Managers**, which rose from 10th place in 2022 to 2nd place in 2023, with organisations offering greater support through updated training and performance management indicators that encourage establishing and maintaining diverse and inclusive teams.



**Average Combined Scores from 2022 to 2023**

Question Label (y-axis):
- Low Paid Women
- Flexible Working
- Pay and Reward
- Policies and Support: Parents and Carers
- Recruitment and Selection
- Progression and Promotion
- Embracing and Celebrating Difference
- Psychological Safety
- Line Managers
- Strategy and Objectives

Score (x-axis)

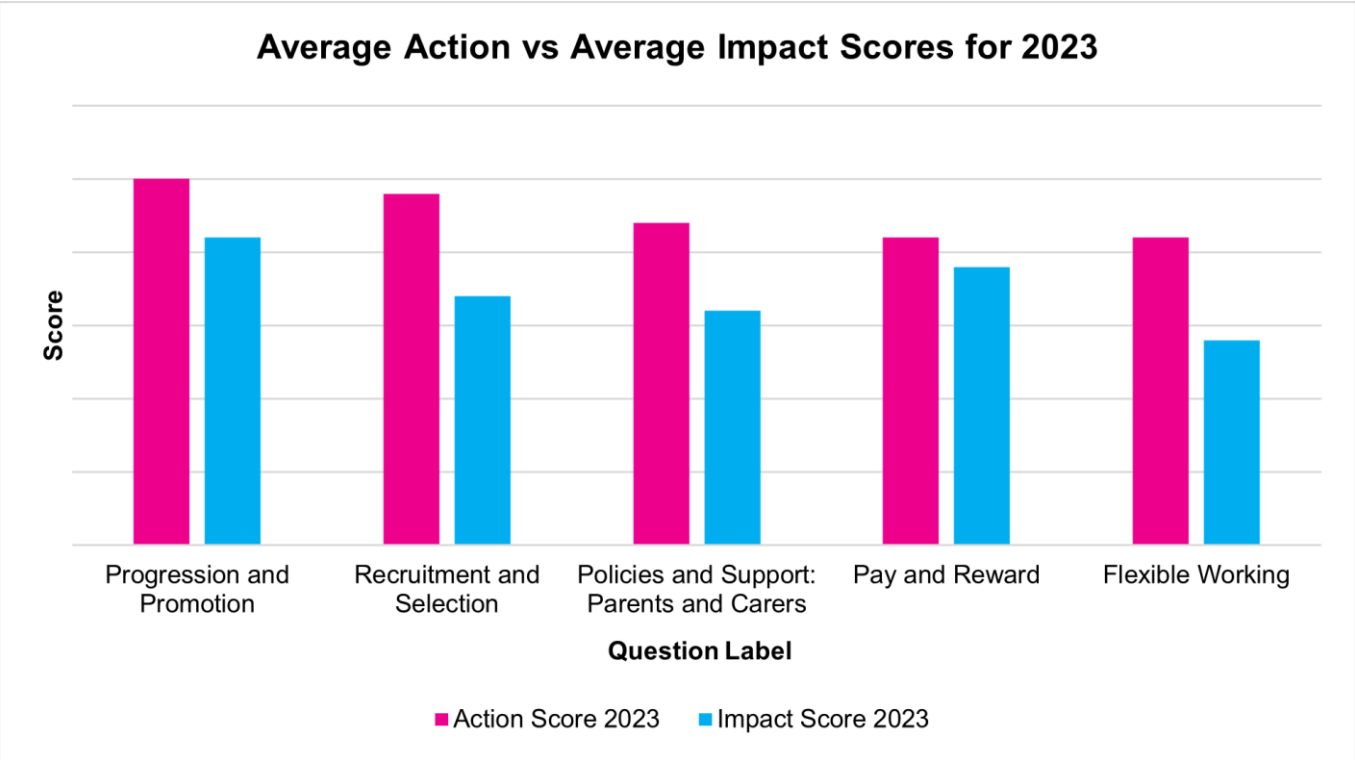■ Average Score 2023  ■ Average Score 2022

The lowest performing areas were **Women on Low Pay** (how organisations are supporting women in their lowest pay quartile), **Flexible Working** (enabling and empowering employees to work in different ways), and **Pay and Reward** (ensuring fair, equitable and transparent pay and reward processes), with performance across each decreasing from 2022. This was especially the case for **Women on Low Pay,** where the average score dropped by 30%. For the most part, employers did not have initiatives in place to support social mobility and women on low pay internally or externally, or if they did, this work did not have senior-level accountability.

On a more encouraging note, performance on the Case Study, this year dedicated to the cost-of-living crisis, increased.  It was the highest-performing impact question, showing that employers have been timely in their response to the crisis, as well as considering and mitigating its impact on gender equality.

The data monitoring questions revealed interesting trends around the external publication of flexible working policies and policies to support parents and carers, suggesting that organisations have become less transparent, compared to 2022. Given the intersections between gender and race equality, we would like to see more organisations tracking and reporting their ethnicity pay gap data, with 70% of Top 50 organisations doing this, but only 45% of non-successful applicants.

Read on for more detailed trends and a breakdown of best practice from each of the individual areas assessed.



## Average Action vs Average Impact Scores for 2023

(Chart with categories: Progression and Promotion, Recruitment and Selection, Policies and Support: Parents and Carers, Pay and Reward, Flexible Working. Legend: ■ Action Score 2023 ■ Impact Score 2023. Y-axis: Score. X-axis: Question Label)

## Part 1: High Performing

### 1. Strategy and Objectives

A dedicated gender equality strategy, aligned with business objectives and accountable to senior leaders for success, is one of the most powerful drivers of greater workplace equity. We consistently see that organisations that have this as core to their approach are more likely to do well in wider areas of the assessment. It is therefore encouraging to see this as the highest-performing theme across this year's cohort, with employers reviewing and reprioritising their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategies in the aftermath of the pandemic. It was clear from the data that more ambitious and time-bound gender-related objectives had been set, with clear accountability mechanisms established to maintain progress across different levels of the business. Progress was regularly monitored via taskforces/working groups and through the use of internal dashboards.

Best practice looked like:

- The setting of organisation-wide, time-bound targets supplemented with individual action plans for specific functions and/or divisions.

- Senior-level accountability for success *linked to pay*, with additional training and support for senior leaders to help engagement (e.g. reverse mentoring).

- Regular governance of targets and objectives through monthly/quarterly meetings and monitoring of progress through organisation-wide dashboards.

- The co-creation of strategies using employee feedback from different groups of women and embedding this work with the organisation's purpose and core values.

- Gender equality strategies to consider external partners, suppliers, and customers.

BITC recommends that:

- Strategies should take more of an intersectional approach, with targets, objectives and action plans outlined for specific groups if necessary.

- Feedback from workplace interventions should be actively fed back into strategy development.

- Link to pay and rewards for senior leaders should be more common, as the gold standard approach to driving progress.

*The DE&I objectives at **London Stock Exchange Group** are regularly reviewed using insights from the staff engagement survey, employee network groups, and diversity data. Fostering a culture of inclusivity and a sense of belonging is a critical strategic objective for the organisation, for which all our people are accountable. The DEI Working Group drives systemic change through senior leadership, accountability and ownership.*

*At **NatWest Group,** ensuring leaders are held to account is key, which is why our gender and ethnicity targets help to inform performance and reward decisions of our executive directors and senior management, with progress checked quarterly and reported annually at group level in our disclosures.*

### 2. Line Managers

Line managers are the gatekeepers of inclusive workplace cultures and play a powerful role in shaping individual employee experience at work. From facilitating psychologically safe spaces for people to be themselves, to enabling equitable access to policies and development opportunities, they are also responsible for building diverse teams and ensuring their decisions on performance and promotion are fair and free from bias.

The area of greatest improvement in this year's cohort, scores on **Line Managers** increased by 14% as the issue rose from 10th place to 2nd place,

recovering to pre-pandemic levels of performance. Huge organisational efforts have been put into providing enhanced training and support for line managers, to equip them to lead inclusively in this new world of work, on topics such as managing remote teams, financial wellbeing and supporting colleagues through key life moments. Clear accountability for progress was measured through line manager performance metrics and KPIs, as well as employee engagement and wellbeing survey scores.

Best practice looked like:

- Organisations empowering line managers to lead inclusively, supported by enhanced training and support to reinforce this as a priority.

- Bespoke training sessions/programmes for line managers based on real-life challenges and business needs, created with input from employees and networks.

- EDI objectives embedded into line manager performance metrics, such as increasing or maintaining representation within their teams, with cross-organisational support to achieve this (e.g. support or training from HR).

- The use of mentoring and reverse mentoring to drive further understanding and engagement.

- Formal and informal feedback facilitated through employee engagement survey scores and 360 feedback.

- Providing a safe space through regular calls, emails or group discussions for line managers to ask questions and share best practice.

- Ensuring diverse representation in line manager roles and recruitment to further drive inclusive leadership.

BITC recommends that:

- Issues identified as a concern (from networks, engagement surveys) should be actively fed into line manager performance and development plans where relevant.

- Organisations employ smarter methods of job design to continue to empower and enable line managers to lead more inclusively. For example, ring-fenced time to dedicate to line management duties.

> *Managers at **Centrica** complete mandatory training on unconscious bias, allyship, mental health, and anti-racism, with more tailored support available via an online portal to assist managers in responding to social challenges and life moments. The HR Team also supports managers to attract and promote diverse talent via vacancies, inclusive job design, and ensuring an inclusive recruitment process.*

> ***TLT** ensures colleagues' personal experiences inform guidance for line managers by empowering Women's Equality Network members to share their lived experience and shape the support we provide.*

### 3. Psychological Safety

This question considers what employers are doing to create psychologically safe workplaces where people feel able to bring their authentic selves, thoughts and experiences to work. The title of this question changed for 2023 to reflect the need for employers to take a more proactive approach towards surfacing and preventing non-inclusive behaviour, whilst recognising that reporting rates will remain low if employees do not feel safe to call it out. It encompasses everything from the prevention of non-inclusive behaviours (covering the full span of seemingly 'low level' microaggressions through to bullying and sexual harassment, to the promotion of inclusive cultures through leadership, role modelling and storytelling.

As with the other areas that performed well in this year's awards, it is clear that a lot of effort has been put into resources and training that reinforce a zero-tolerance approach to non-inclusive behaviour, with organisations proactively surfacing issues through employee engagement surveys, engagement with networks and the monitoring of exit interview material.

Best practice looked like:

- Zero tolerance policies (e.g. anti-bullying and harassment, sexual harassment), supported by annual mandatory training for all staff, accompanied by clear and accessible communications detailing processes and procedures to report an incident.

- The use of an external, confidential helpline made available to staff, clients, and third parties.

- Tailored line manager training, to include role-play scenarios based on relevant examples.

- The use of storytelling / intersectional voices in training videos and internal communication campaigns.

- Frameworks of additional support available through male allies, Respect and Inclusion ambassadors, Mental Health First Aiders.

- The monitoring of complaints and queries by gender (and other intersectional groups) with number of incidences shared internally.

- Dedicated workstreams looking at issues of concern i.e. women's safety.

- Working across sectors and/or with external organisations to raise awareness or offer further support regarding areas of concern (e.g. domestic abuse)

- The expansion of this work to consider customers.

BITC recommends that:

- Organisations should take more dedicated steps to address the fear of reprisal associated with reporting non-inclusive behaviour, further encouraging employees to speak out – for example showcasing the action an organisation previously took in response to reporting of non-inclusive behaviours.

- Organisations recognise the widespread nature of sexual harassment at work (estimates suggest up to 52% of women will at some point in their working lives experience this[xii]), creating dedicated action plans to prevent,

surface and address this, including ensuring people who speak up are robustly supported and recognising that harassment can take on different forms in the context of more online and hybrid working.

> *Network Rail* *responded to feedback from its female colleagues who experienced sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviours at work by creating a workstream focussed on women's safety across the organisation and wider industry. The workstream includes the development of a new lone working policy with supportive technology, an updated bullying and harassment policy, and new standalone sexual harassment guidance. Endorsed by its Executive Sponsor, Network Rail also plan to deliver a project aimed at educating, informing, and assisting its employees in challenging inappropriate behaviour and banter culture through a communications campaign and newly created training using a diverse and intersectional set of 'lived experience' videos.*

## Part 2: Steady Progress

### 4. Embracing and Celebrating Difference

Considering different lived experiences and intersections of identity is key to addressing gender equity and ensuring the effectiveness of the approach taken to drive progress. Failure to apply an intersectional lens can lead to a 'default' idea of what women can offer experience in and need to work effectively. Through this question we seek to understand employer action, to uncover and listen to different employee experiences, the dedicated support in place for specific groups and how progress against this is monitored and measured. As more openly diverse organisations are shown to be more inclusive, employer action to embrace and celebrate the differences of its people through storytelling, events and communications is key.

The highest-performing question in last year's award, it is positive to see employers continue to embed intersectionality in their approach and continue to emphasise employee voice and

listening strategies introduced in response to the pandemic.

**Best practice looked like:**

- Listening strategies including monitoring of employee experience, CEO townhalls, and collaborative network meetings, with adjustments made to gender equality strategies and action plans as a result

- Externally facilitated listening sessions to further understand the needs of certain groups.

- The introduction or expansion of workplace policies, for example on menopause or transgender inclusion, accompanied by training. The update of policy language to make it more inclusive (e.g. parental leave).

- Specific initiatives to support certain groups, for example, targeted recruitment activities for candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the use of menopause cafes to educate and support.

- A broader approach to collecting employee diversity data, allowing it to be analysed and tracked in an intersectional way. The monitoring of all recruitment and internal development programmes intersectionally.

- Awareness raising of different intersectional identities or issues through events, collaborative network activity and internal communications campaigns.

**BITC recommends that:**

- Employers embrace further storytelling where difference is recognised and celebrated.

- Enhanced training be provided for line managers and colleagues on areas not yet covered (i.e. neurodiversity, LGBTQI+ inclusion).

- Outcomes and learning from this activity are clearly fed back into the development of the organisation's gender equality strategy and/or action plan to ensure it is intersectional.

- More applicants monitor and publish their ethnicity pay gap to ensure any disparity in pay

is monitored; where possible this should be reconciled with gender pay gap data to take truly intersectional approach to understanding pay disparities.

> *Each of **Deloitte's** twelve diversity networks has a partner sponsor to ensure that leadership is not only a visible ally, but also has a good understanding of issues, and can build their inclusive leadership capability. There are monthly meetings between the diversity networks and the managing partner for people and purpose, ensuring underrepresented groups have a strong voice. This is in addition to an ongoing listening strategy which includes a twice-yearly people experience survey, and quarterly 'Ask the CEO' webinars and firmwide town halls. They also commission externally facilitated listening sessions to better explore their people's lived experiences, most recently through a gender, disability, and neurodiversity lens. Insights inform their priority-driven action plans. As a direct result of their listening over the past year Deloitte has introduced a menopause policy and guidelines, online neurodiversity resources for people leaders, and its new Future Leaders Programme providing development support and inclusive sponsorship for 500 women and ethnic minority colleagues.*

> *Santander UK has a continuous listening platform, with advanced ai, to provide real-time insight into culture, employee engagement and experience. The responses are anonymous but can be filtered by certain characteristics e.g. gender and gender identity, ethnicity and disability at an aggregated level. This enables Santander UK to segment insights from its people into intersectional views, providing a better understanding of the diverse experiences of women across its workforce to make more evidence-based decisions to build a workplace where everyone can thrive.*

## 5. Progression and Promotion

This question considers the action employers are taking to foster an inclusive organisational culture that removes barriers to progression for all and provides opportunities for women to learn and thrive. Despite great work taking place in this area,

strong intersectional differences can impact women's ability to progress, especially young women or those from Black, Asian, Mixed Race or other ethnically diverse backgrounds who are more likely to experience microaggressions in the workplace. To address this, development, promotion and performance management processes must consider women at every level of the organisation, and be fair, unbiased and transparent in approach. Performance in this area was consistent with last year's cohort.

Best practice looked like:

- Increased visibility of role models from different levels, functions and backgrounds, through shared stories.

- Professional development programmes, including sponsorship, mentoring and reverse mentoring for different cohorts (leadership, mid-level, function-specific).

- Education and support for employees and line managers on inclusive leadership, supporting employees through life stages and thriving when working in a hybrid way.

- Diverse representation and bias awareness built into promotion decisions, for example through diverse interview panels.

- Monitoring promotions and performance data, scrutinising inconsistencies and holding senior leaders accountable for results.

- Cultivating opportunities for informal career discussions and networking to demystify senior roles and educate about different career paths.

> *Line Managers at **Addleshaw Goddard** are supported by Inclusion Advocates who are asked to ensure a gender lens is applied to key decisions and communications. Advocates regularly meet with women within the organisation in "Ask Me Anything" sessions, aimed at providing a safe space to demystify and problem-solve opportunities for progression. This is supported by a female development programme 'Flourish', and more recently 'Altitude', which supports employees of all genders to demystify senior roles and offer practical skills.*

BITC recommends that:

- Employers analyse employee experience data intersectionally to ensure no groups are being left behind in their progression efforts, for example, part-time workers or employees on the lowest pay.

## 6. Recruitment and Selection

Beyond targeted action to create a gender-diverse workforce across different functions and levels, this question considers how organisations can be as inclusive as possible in their recruitment activity to create a level playing field for all. This is a vital element of any organisation's EDI strategy. Performance in this area was consistent with last year's cohort with employers using a range of approaches to ensure they recruit inclusively.

Best practice looked like:

- Mandatory training for resourcing and hiring managers to address unconscious bias.

- The use of de-biasing software for job adverts.

- The use of blind CV's.

- Taking a skills-based approach to applications and assessment centres, with shortlisting and competency scoring systems established up-front and consistent interview questions asked to all.

- Mandating gender-balanced shortlists and diverse interview panels.

- The use of targeted recruitment programmes (internal or external), such as:
  - Return to work or experienced professional programmes.
  - Development programmes for certain roles or skills.
  - Scholarships and apprenticeships for applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
  - Participation in social inclusion recruitment schemes, e.g. for refugees, ex-offenders.

- Advertising on job boards for part-time and/or flexible work.

- Monitoring recruitment data for equality.

BITC recommends that:

- The job design of all roles is evaluated to ensure they are accessible to all. For example, many working carers do not feel that they can access senior roles as this will not allow them to work flexibly.

- Employers publish salary information on job adverts and remove pay history from recruitment negotiations to address the gender pay gap.

- Employers publish key policies online for prospective applicants to review, such as flexible working or policies to support parents and carers.

> *National Grid has started to utilise new AI technology to further reduce bias in its selection process, alongside improved and accessible guidance and further support for hiring managers to make inclusive and equitable decisions. They are also trialling a new programme to encourage anyone with an interest in working for National Grid to submit their CV to be matched to a role straight to interview to increase applications from women or other candidates who may feel they do not meet all the requirements to apply.*

## Part 3: In Need Of Development

### 7. Policies to support Parents and Carers

Caring is the norm and not the exception, with BITC research showing that 44% of the workforce are currently combining paid work with caring responsibilities[xiii]. Individuals with caring responsibilities can find it harder to attain, retain and progress into good work, with women – who continue to carry out the majority of informal caring – and individuals from Black, Asian, Mixed Race or other ethnically diverse groups disproportionately affected[xiv]. Unequal parental leave drives up to 70% of UK workforce gender pay gap[xv], with some data

suggesting that the number of women leaving the workplace due to caring responsibilities is increasing for the first time in decades[xvi]. As a result, the importance of reducing the gender imbalance in responsibility for care cannot be overstated, with an increase in the length of parental leave taken by fathers estimated to result in a potential £260 million a year cost saving for employers[xvii].

This question seeks to understand what employers are doing to support their employees manage work and care, instilling a workplace culture that facilitates and supports this. Performance in this area was consistent with last year's cohort.

Best practice looked like:

- Access to parental and carers leave entitlement from day one.

- Equalised or enhanced parental leave (covering maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave). The updating of policy language to be more inclusive.

- The provision of paid carers leave which can be taken in hourly chunks if necessary.

- Supporting the provision of childcare through interest-free nursery deposit loans, near-site nursery places and emergency backup care for children and elderly adults.

- Initiatives to support employees when becoming parents and transitioning back to the workplace after leave, such as 1-2-1 and group coaching programmes, parental leave buddies/mentors and a phased return to work.

- Sharing parent/carer stories featuring all parent types/grades to reduce stereotyping and improve role-modelling.

- Providing a safe space for parents and carers via networks inclusive of gender.

- Support for employees and dependants undergoing IVF, or who have experienced miscarriage or baby loss.

- Workplace training to raise awareness noticing and mitigating potential stereotypes and microaggressions around working carers.

BITC recommends that:

- Employers consider care, in all its facets, a mainstream workplace issue, and recognise that the nature of employee's caring responsibilities can change throughout their careers.

- Caring policies are made gender-equal and actionable steps are taken to facilitate a workplace culture that supports this (Read our Who Cares? Report for more information on how to do this).

- Organisations monitor the take up of policies to support parents and carers to better track their impact and check for potential biases. For example, only 38% of applicants track promotion rates after periods of parental leave currently (-4% vs. 2022).

- Annual performance reviews, compensation and promotion recommendations are checked for any bias and stereotyping against parents and carers (including those on leave).

- Parental leave policies are published externally to demonstrate that supporting your people is a business priority (only 40% of applicants do this currently).

> *Linklaters encourages its male partners to take time out, act as role models for junior colleagues, and create a culture where it's 'normal' for men to have caring responsibilities. HR Managers support Line Managers to create effective transition plans that meet individual needs, and in response to feedback from working parents, 'adjustment days' have recently been introduced to enable colleagues to ramp down into, or ramp up from, a period of family leave.*

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> *In January 2023, **NatWest Group** introduced new enhanced Partner Leave policies which give all partners regardless of gender, (in the UK) up to 52 weeks leave, with the first 24 weeks fully paid (Equal Parental Leave) with the subsequent 15 weeks paid at the statutory maternity rate. The policy, which champions the potential of both parents and promotes wider gender equality, also includes a three-month phase-back period for new parents returning to the workplace where they'll receive full pay regardless of the hours they work. The roll-out includes intentional efforts to impact attitudes around parental leave via story-sharing to help address career bias.*

## 8. Pay and Reward

The gender pay gap is one of the most stubborn, entrenched inequalities at work. Analysis of pay gap reporting data finds that four out of five British employers still typically pay male employees more than female employees.[xviii] Most women spend a lifetime earning less than men, which has a knock-on effect on their financial security (when working and retired), life choices and even basic safety[xix]. Employers should take a wide and expansive approach to understanding and interrogating patterns in their pay structures, thinking beyond gender but also applying an intersectional lens. It is often when identities combine that the largest pay gaps can be found, for example, the disability pay gap is significantly larger for women than men.[xx] Addressing an organisation's gender pay gaps requires monitoring pay and reward for any discrepancies and targeted action to remove bias from the performance process, whilst addressing the cause of any pay gap in the long term through reporting and action planning (for example, too few women in senior roles).

This theme saw a slight drop in performance this year and is regularly amongst the lowest performing within the Top 50. Organisations struggled to evidence a sophisticated and sustained approach to monitoring their pay and reward policies, or steps taken to further embed transparency into their approach.

Best practice looked like:

- Setting and disclosing a goal or target to reduce (or eradicate) an organisation's gender pay gap, supported by an action plan to increase transparency and accountability.

- Ensuring remuneration policies are designed to mitigate the risk of bias when agreeing pay, such as using standardised (and non-negotiable) pay and salary ranges, based on a standardised method of performance assessment.

- Sharing compensation levels / salary bands with employees to promote a culture of transparency.

- Conducting regular equal pay audits that cover both gender and ethnicity.

- Increased monitoring and transparency of pay across the organisation via real-time dashboards, interrogated by specific steering/calibration groups trained in unconscious bias.

- Include gender and peer reviews to review all rates and processes, offering objectivity and fairness.

- Employer training on how pay is managed to raise awareness and drive an open approach.

- The development of action plans and initiatives to address the core drivers of the gender pay gap e.g. for recruitment, progression and performance management.

BITC recommends that:

- Employers, as standard, monitor and publicise their pay gaps via regular pay audits, considering both gender and ethnicity; develop time-bound targets and action plans to address these, with senior-level accountability for driving action – ideally linking progress to performance and reward for executive leadership.

- More generally that pay and reward policies are made more transparent, encouraging a culture of openness around this topic – a

culture of secrecy around pay has been shown to disadvantage specific groups including women and employees from Black, Asian, Mixed Race or other ethnically diverse backgrounds[xxi].

> *Aviva has reduced the gender pay gap for the fourth consecutive year by improving senior female representation (which has increased to 38%) while in parallel driving pay fairness through the organisation and into recruitment. For example by checking gender balance as part of the annual reward review and having briefer more accessible job ads that actively encourage female applicants and include salaries.*

## 9. Flexible Working

Availability and access to flexible working patterns significantly impacts gender equality at work For example, European-wide research found a strong correlation between flexible working and more gender-equal opportunities in the workplace.[xxii] Flexible working practices also support and enable other EDI objectives, such as driving greater attraction and recruitment, employee engagement and productivity and mental health and wellbeing,[xxiii] as well as supporting other intersectional groups, such as working carers, neurodiverse individuals and employees with a physical disability.

Whilst lots of employers have good policies (formal and informal) to support flexible working within their organisations, few are going above and beyond to enable their people to work truly flexibly and adopt a culture that supports this.

Best practice looked like:

- Making a wide range of flexible working options available, both formally and informally, and making sure employees know about and understand them.

- Taking a listening-led approach, giving employees and managers autonomy to find ways of working that work best for them, their team and business requirements.

- Including details of flexible working arrangements in job adverts, discussing it at the recruitment stage and making it available to all employees from day one. Support for recruiters and hiring managers on inclusive hiring.

- Line manager training and support to better equip them in implementing flexible working policies and having sensitive conversations.

- The establishment of working groups to consider flexible working through different lenses i.e. embedding new ways of working, generational differences in approach.

- Investment in homeworking infrastructure and virtual collaboration tools.

- Activity and social norms to support flexible ways of working, i.e. email signatures to reinforce flexible working culture, hybrid working charters, team rituals and digital etiquette.

- The use of job-share registers/networks to allow colleagues to meet people they may be able to job-share with.

BITC recommends that:

- More employers actively monitor the take up and impact of their flexible working policy, even if informal, to ensure equitable access to the policy and no disproportionate impact on those using it – addressing 'flex stigma' requires ensuring more diverse take up of different ways of working.

- More employers work to embed flexible working across relevant organisational processes, such as within job design, recruitment processes and challenging perceptions / bias regarding agility and performance.

*Sage believes there is no work without flexibility anymore, and it is committed to furthering its Flexible Human Work vision. Sage co-designed this model by listening to its colleagues about how they do their best work, with teams building team agreements to achieve personal and business balance between office and home working. The company is also experimenting with adaptable role design across the company as they seek to scale more flexible work patterns, while continuing to build on benefits like its Work Away programme.*

## 10. Women on Low Pay

Women who make up the majority of those earning low wages, can find themselves 'trapped' in lower paid roles, and still tend to dominate in functions that are often lower valued, such as caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical work.[xxiv] Some groups of women, those from Black, Asian, Mixed Race or other ethnically diverse backgrounds – or lower socio-economic backgrounds – are at further risk of low pay.[xxv] Lower paid workers can often find themselves locked out of progression opportunities and not able to access many of the workplace benefits more highly paid colleagues can experience, partly due to the nature of their employment – many low-paid workers will be classified as 'agency' or 'temp' staff in some way.

Introduced as a question in 2022 to reflect the disproportionate effect the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis had on an organisation's lowest paid workers, it is clear that the majority of organisations are doing little (if anything) to specifically target women in this group, with scores on this question dropping on average 30% from last year. To see positive outcomes on the gender pay gap (amongst other things) it is critical that employers consider addressing the disparity of women in both highly paid and lower paid roles.

Best practice looked like:

- Specifically targeting the recruitment and development of employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds, such as through the

provision of internships, scholarships and summer programmes in UK economic cold spots or targeted skill development programmes for support employees (i.e. executive assistants).

- Taking an intersectional approach when setting targets (e.g. women in entry-level technology roles), monitoring and reporting these to senior leadership.

- Expanding options for diversity data collection, to include, amongst other things adult/elder / child caregiver status, socio-economic background, neurodiversity and disability.

- Supporting the successful integration of employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds by dedicated training around inclusive management.

- Raising awareness around mitigating potential microaggressions or biases related to social mobility.

- Vendor code of conduct and diversity programmes to increase partnerships with diverse suppliers.

- Regular reviews of pay bandings and budgets and adjusting these if not in line with market value.

- External publication of flexible working and family-friendly policies.

- Incorporating flexibility into job design.

BITC recommends that:

- Employers pay the National Living Wage, and only work with contractors and suppliers who also pay this.

- Employers recognise that low or lower-paid women will be in contact with their organisations even if not primarily through official in-house payroll – and take targeted action to ensure this cohort has access to development, promotion and other career progression opportunities.

- Pay and reward is regularly reviewed against inflation to evaluate if there is any scope for improvement.

- Employers be supportive as possible in working arrangements, development opportunities and access to help and support (Employee Assistance Programmes) to help retain and progress socially mobile employees.

## Part 4: Case Study Insights

The cost-of-living crisis is affecting many employees in the UK with rising inflation, food and energy prices pushing many working people into poverty and financial stress[xxvi]. With women known to act as 'shock absorbers' at times of economic hardship, this year's case study sought to understand short and long-term interventions adopted by employers to mitigate the impact of the crisis on gender equality. As the best-performing question across both action and impact, it is clear that employers reacted promptly to the crisis by,

- Taking a listening-led approach, responding to what employees considered the most critical.

- Hosting internal events to raise awareness of issues such as financial wellbeing, burnout, stress and domestic abuse, signposting employees to further support if needed.

- Reviewing pay budgets and bandings, adjusting for inflation and introducing pay increases or one-off bonus amounts to support employees with costs.

- Reviewing the pay of suppliers, contractors, interns and apprentices to ensure this was above the National Living Wage.

- Launched packages and products to support vulnerable customers.

- Introduced additional benefits, such as free on-site health checks.

- Increased flexibility regarding childcare and eldercare. Extending paid time off policy to allow parents and grandparents to attend the first day of school, sports days etc with no loss in income.

- Supporting colleagues to work in a hybrid way to save on commuting costs and offering financial grants towards home working costs.

Whilst it is highly encouraging to see such a vast business response to the cost-of-living crisis, covering employees, customers and communities, we would encourage employers to develop longer-term action plans to address the disadvantages faced by these groups, for example, women within your organisation on low pay.

*Worldline has taken a holistic approach to the cost-of-living crisis by focusing on pay, flexibility, and support, and has achieved this through "leading by listening". As a result of this, employees received a pay budget increase higher than in previous years and were widely consulted in the planning process for benefits, which saw Worldline introduce menopause support choices, increased flexibility for carers (for example working from home 100% during key school holidays for all) and enhanced paid time-off for events such as school milestones. Worldline also reviewed its Paternity Leave policy to make it more inclusive by renaming it Family Leave and enhancing the time off from two weeks to six weeks.*

## Conclusion

Analysis of this year's Times Top 50 applicants shows that many UK employers are going above and beyond to make gender equality in their workplaces a reality. Improvements around strategy, workplace culture, navigating the cost-of-living crisis and building on learnings on how to survive and thrive during the pandemic, are clear evidence of progress. However, there is still work to be done and further improvements to be made, in this case in the areas that we know offer significant opportunities to shift the dial on gender equality – policies to support parents and carers, pay, reward and flexible working. Despite positive shifts in workplace culture and the engagement of senior leaders and line managers, this will only go so far if such structural elements remain unaddressed and underutilised.

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