

UNLOCKING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL IN WALES





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Foreword by Katie Spackman, Associate Director of CBI Cymru

CBI Cymru and University of South Wales are proud to present the findings of the Women's Leadership in Wales Survey. This comprehensive research initiative, conducted in partnership with the University of South Wales, aimed to shed light on the barriers hindering women's advancement to leadership roles within Welsh businesses.

By gathering insights from employees and employers across the nation, we have identified key challenges and opportunities for fostering a more equitable workplace. The survey's results offer valuable data-driven recommendations to support women's career progression and promote gender equality.

The report highlights both areas of progress and persistent disparities, providing a clear roadmap for businesses and policymakers to take action. We believe that by addressing these challenges and implementing effective strategies, Wales can create a workplace culture where women are empowered to reach their full potential.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all participants who contributed to the success of this survey. Their insights have been invaluable in shaping a more inclusive and equitable future for women in Welsh workplaces.



ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS



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CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Flexible working	8
Caring responsibilities	11
Gender discrimination and unconscious bias	15
Developing 'Emerging Leaders'	18
The role of government	21
Recommendations	25
Methodology	26
References	27

INTRODUCTION

Women in Wales who want to follow leadership and management career pathways face barriers which present a complex and multifaceted challenge for not just them as individuals, but organisations and policymakers alike.

From a policy perspective, the Senedd created the Advancing Gender Equality Plan (2020) to outline how their beginning steps towards pan-Wales gender equality. However, the recent State of the Nation report calls for a “renewed focus, resource and commitment to drive change” (WEN Wales, 2024, p.3) after finding that the pace of change is slow and, in some areas, moving in reverse. This is particularly pertinent for working women when the Welsh Government aims to eliminate the gender pay gap in Wales by 2050 (2022, p. 32).

It should be acknowledged that over recent decades, there have been significant strides towards gender equality. However, structural, cultural, and institutional obstacles continue to hinder women's career progression. These barriers are further exacerbated by disparities in access to support mechanisms such as flexible working, childcare, and mentorship opportunities, as well as persistent gender biases in the workplace. This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of these common challenges, offering evidence-based recommendations to senior leaders to create more inclusive, equitable career pathways for women.

Drawing on data collected from people across a variety of sectors in Wales, this report highlights the lived experiences of women who aspire to, or currently hold, leadership and management positions. Key issues such as the impact of caring responsibilities, unconscious bias, and the availability of flexible working arrangements are explored in detail. The report also considers how these barriers intersect with other factors, including age, geographic location, and the specific industries in which women work, providing further context to the challenges women face.

Considering these findings, the report offers actionable recommendations for both organisations and policymakers to foster a more inclusive workplace culture. By addressing the identified barriers and implementing targeted interventions, organisations can unlock the leadership potential of women, driving innovation, productivity, and gender equality across Welsh businesses.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

Flexible working arrangements have become increasingly prevalent in modern workplaces, particularly hybrid working. Welsh Government strategy seeks to have 30% of the Welsh workforce working remotely on a regular basis as a way of creating fairer workplaces (Welsh Government, 2022; EHRC, 2023). Although flexible working has advantages, it can also prevent challenges for women who are balancing work and home lives. Our data highlights how the industry a woman works in can affect her feelings about flexible working.

FLEXIBLE WORKING ADVANTAGES:

Flexible working has many potential advantages, and we find no significant difference between women's and men's opinions on this topic. However, our data clearly demonstrates that the industry a woman works in can affect how she feels about flexible working:

Work-Life Balance

Women were overwhelmingly positive about whether flexible working could benefit their personal lives. A resounding 96% of respondents believe flexible working improves their personal lives, showing consensus across sectors. This benefit is especially important for women juggling career aspirations with family responsibilities. The industries most likely to disagree were Accommodation and Food and Utilities (both 17% disagreement).

Colleague Relationships

Overall, 50% of women felt that flexible working improved relationships with colleagues, however, 31% were unsure. IT and Communications (73%) were most satisfied, with Business Administration and Support (60%) next. Some industries had particularly high rates of disagreement, such as Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (67%), Utilities (50%), and Construction (43%).

Career Progression

Many women across industries felt that flexible working could benefit their career progression (80% overall agreement). Indeed, women who worked flexibly were more likely to be emerging leaders (83% of emerging leaders versus 45% of career stabilisers), suggesting that flexible working can help remove perceived barriers to leadership and management. The industries that are most likely to appreciate the potential of flexible working for career progression are Public Administration and Defence (70% agreement) and Professional and Technical (65% agreement). However, some industries remain more wary of flexible working, such as Construction (43% disagreement) and Manufacturing (40% disagreement), and Accommodation and Food (33% disagreement). Women had noticeably more mixed feelings about how flexible working would allow more people to take on leadership (54% agreement) or management (53% agreement) roles.

Gender Equality

Finally, 68% of women believed that flexible working could help to promote gender equality in the workplace. Real Estate (100%), Professional and Technical (87%), and Retail and Wholesale (86%) were the most optimistic, while Accommodation and Food and Utilities were the most likely to disagree (both 33%).

Additionally, recent data shows that those in the highest income bands and those in professional occupations are most likely to be able to undertake hybrid or home-based working (ONS, 2023). However, women in Wales are 2.5 times more likely than men to be working part-time and overall part-time work is concentrated in low skilled, low-quality jobs (WEN Wales, 2024; ESRC, 2023). Furthermore, our data specifically shows that 75% of the women working part time had caring responsibilities. Therefore, it is imperative

that suitable initiatives are focused on this area as a way of increasing gender equality. Our data shows very clearly that 95% of people who believe flexible working promotes gender equality also support government initiatives aimed at increasing women's leadership roles.

FLEXIBLE WORKING DISADVANTAGES:

There are some potential downsides of flexible working for women too. Our data shows that the industry a woman works in can affect whether she perceives downsides to flexible working, either for herself, or others. There is also a noticeable gender divide in perceptions of how flexible working affects women's household responsibilities. Men were far less likely than women to see flexible working as a source of additional burdens:

15% of men felt that flexible working increases women's caring responsibilities, compared to 32% of women.

11% of men believe that flexible working forces women to multi-task household chores, compared to 39% of women.

14% of men thought that flexible working leads women to do more than their fair share of household tasks, while 29% of women agreed.

The difference in opinion highlights the importance of considering a gendered perspective when looking to implement policies around flexible working, as lived experiences can differ significantly. It may be especially necessary in industries like Transport and Storage, Construction, Retail and Wholesale, and Business Administration and Support, the industries where women were most likely to report feeling they had additional home or caring responsibilities due to working flexibly.

Certain industries were more likely to feel positive about flexible working, with Finance and Insurance and IT and Communications generally not feeling they had additional responsibilities due to flexible working. Women in Real Estate are the least likely to agree that flexible working is causing women to take on additional home and caring responsibilities, while sectors such as Education and Professional and Technical provided more mixed responses, suggesting the experiences of women here are very varied.

CARING RESPONSIBILITIES



Caring responsibilities are important to consider because they can significantly affect a person's experiences in the workplace, particularly when it comes to stress, career progression, and perceptions of bias. Recent data shows that women are 3.5 times more likely to be economically inactive due to caring responsibilities (WEN Wales, 2024). Additionally, caring responsibilities continue to be a very common barrier to women's careers with 25% of women unwillingly giving up work and 26% of women unwillingly reducing hours due to caring responsibilities, which more significantly impacts women with children under 11 years of age (UN Women, 2024). Therefore, for working women, it is imperative to understand how these responsibilities can shape women's ability to lead or manage effectively, as well as how they are perceived by colleagues.

TYPES OF CARING RESPONSIBILITIES:

Almost 70% of women respondents described themselves as having caring responsibilities either now (50%) or in the past (19%). Of these, two-thirds were the primary caregivers (67%). There were a wide range of caring responsibilities among the sample, but it did not significantly affect how likely a woman was to want to lead or manage. Interestingly, 47% of women with current caring responsibilities felt it had negatively affected their ability to lead, but women with previous caring responsibilities were somewhat less likely to still feel this way, meaning the effect diminishes over time for some women.

Women in Wales are more likely to be unpaid carers compared to men (EHRC, 2023). However, a woman's type caring responsibility did not necessarily affect how likely she was to put herself forward for a promotion. However, it did sometimes affect how likely she was to think unconscious bias would impact her chances of getting one promotion. The women most affected are those looking after children or vulnerable adults:

- **Childcare:** Only 4% of women with current childcare responsibilities thought it would not affect the likelihood of a promotion.
- **Care for vulnerable adults:** Only 23% of women who currently care for vulnerable adults thought it would not affect the likelihood of a promotion.

Overall, the findings highlight that women with caring responsibilities are very aware of the potential biases that would affect promotional opportunities and leadership roles.

PARENTHOOD

Our data found that men and women have significantly different experiences of being working parents:

- 58% of women felt their career had been negatively affected by having children, compared to only 13% of men
- 51% of women felt childcare concerns would prevent them from applying for leadership roles, versus just 14% of men
- Men were significantly less likely to say they had been judged negatively for leaving work early or arriving late (7%) compared to women (42%).
- 80% of women with caring responsibilities agreed that they have experienced increased stress, compared with 37% of men reporting the same.

The disparity between these figures clearly highlights the stark difference between the lived experiences of working mothers and fathers. Our data also shows that motherhood has an impact on whether a woman feels she has been discriminated against. Women with childcare responsibilities disproportionately felt that they had 'been discriminated against in the workplace because of my gender' (39% of women with current childcare responsibilities and 30% of women with previous childcare responsibilities agreed with this statement, compared to 24% of women without childcare responsibilities). Balancing professional and caring roles can be a source of pressure, and these responsibilities can shape perceptions of competence and opportunity in the workplace. We found that evidence of this in our data with:

- 83% of caring women feeling judged for having caring responsibilities
- 80% feeling judged for leaving work early or arriving late.

This is particularly evident for parents, and mothers specifically, and may be the result of unconscious bias. Our data reveals that parenthood had a significant impact on whether someone believes unconscious bias will impact the likelihood of a woman being given a promotion, with 96% of mothers and 80% fathers believing it would, versus 86% of women and 60% of men without children.

Those without direct caring experience might underestimate the biases women face in their career progression. Interestingly, people who had previously experienced caring responsibilities in the past, but did not have them now, were no more likely to agree or disagree with people who had never experienced caring responsibilities, suggesting that the impact of caring responsibilities fades over time.

Across Wales, women report poorer mental health outcomes than men (EHRC, 2023). Our data reveals that caring responsibilities often exacerbate stress and hinder professional development. Women currently responsible for caring reported higher levels of stress, with 77% agreeing that having less time for themselves increased their stress. Many felt less able to focus on professional development (76% agreed). Furthermore, 68% of caring women reported being unable to focus on work due to these concerns, and 70% sometimes found themselves unable to attend events outside of work.

Overall, being a working parent in Wales can lead to negative experiences in the workplace regarding discrimination and bias. However, the lived experience of working parents varies greatly by gender, with working mothers in Wales continually at the greater disadvantage.

VIEWS ON CHILDCARE

Childcare has been raised as a significant barrier to gender equality in employment in Wales (EHRC, 2023). We asked all respondents about their views on childcare:

- Childcare availability should not put people off applying for leadership roles (77% agreed, 13% disagreed).
- There is good availability of childcare options for people in leadership roles (24% agreed, 54% disagreed).
- Childcare affordability should not put people off applying for leadership roles (66% agreed, 17% disagreed).
- Childcare options are affordable for people in leadership roles (19% agreed, 54% disagreed).
- Childcare considerations would not prevent me from applying for leadership roles (40% agreed, 39% disagreed).

We looked more closely at just the views of mothers and found some clear differences between mothers and those who were not. Mothers were more likely to think the following:

- 63% of mothers disagreed that there is good availability of childcare options for people in leadership roles.
- 63% of mothers either said they would not apply for a role based on childcare or said they were unsure about applying due to childcare considerations.
- Only 18% of mothers felt that the affordability of childcare options would not put people off applying for leadership roles.

This shows that childcare affordability and availability can create a significant barrier with the result that women who are mothers may be judged negatively by colleagues based solely on their caring responsibilities. Many of the women who felt they had been judged negatively also disagreed that there was good availability of childcare options for people in leadership roles, suggesting this may be the cause of some of these issues (Choudhary, 2022).



GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Gender discrimination and unconscious bias are critical issues in the workplace, particularly when it comes to leadership and career advancement. Although a recent initiative for FTSE 350 companies to achieve at least 40% female board representation was reached 3 years early (FTSE Women Leaders, 2023), many women in Wales continue to experience gender bias and discrimination that can hinder their professional growth and affect their confidence, opportunities, and willingness to pursue leadership roles.

In our survey, we asked women whether they had experienced gender discrimination in the workplace, and the responses highlight the prevalence of these issues.

- Over half of women (54%) had been subject to negative remarks in the workplace due to their gender.
- 40% felt they had been unfairly allocated tasks based on their gender.
- 38% of women felt they had been viewed negatively in the workplace because of their gender, while 49% disagreed.
- 37% of women expressed concern about advancing in their career due to their gender.
- 34% of women reported that they had been discriminated against because of their gender, while 54% disagreed.
- 29% of women believed they had been overlooked for leadership or management positions because of their gender.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Men were much less likely than women to report negative career impacts related to gender:

- Men were overall more confident about their ability to advance their careers, with 100% of men saying they felt comfortable negotiating their salary and benefits.
- Comparatively, 61% of women said they held the same confidence
- When asked about being passed over for opportunities due to gender, only 11% of men reported this experience, compared to 48% of women.

Looking women's experiences in more depth, we found that age plays a significant role in shaping how women perceive gender as a barrier to career advancement. Women aged 25-44 had mixed opinions, with those aged 30-34 being 16% more likely to worry about their gender affecting their career progression. Women aged 45+ were less likely to be concerned, with less than a third of them expressing worries about gender as a barrier. Unfair task allocation is another area where gender has a clear impact.

- Across most age groups, over 50% of women felt they had been unfairly allocated tasks due to their gender
- There were exceptions for those aged 25-29 (38%) and 60-64 (35%).

This suggests that gender-based task assignment persists throughout much of a woman's career. This remains an issue for women in leadership positions, where 44% reported being unfairly allocated tasks based on their gender (45% disagreed, suggesting mixed experiences). Leadership also brings more scrutiny: 63% of emerging leaders (those aspiring to leadership roles) reported having been subject to negative remarks compared to only 21% of career stabilisers. This indicates that women, even those moving into leadership positions, continue to face gender-based barriers that impede their progression.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN CAREER PROGRESSION

Unconscious bias significantly impacts women's career prospects, but men are less likely to view it as a barrier. While 90% of women agree that unconscious bias affects a woman's likelihood of putting herself forward for promotion, only 72% of men share this view. Additionally, 91% of women believe bias affects their chances of being promoted, compared to just 69% of men. This highlights the need to address unconscious biases that hinder women's career advancement. Age also influences these perceptions:

- Women aged 40-44 are the most likely to believe that unconscious bias impacts promotions (100%).
- Women aged 50 and older are more sceptical. 16% of women aged 50-54 and 21% of women aged 55-59 believe bias doesn't affect a woman's decision to pursue promotion.
- 29% of women aged 55-59 felt bias wouldn't impact their promotion chances.

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THE ROLE OF MENTORS

Access to mentors and leadership advice is critical for women's career development. However, women who experienced gender discrimination were less likely to seek out advice and guidance on leadership. 42% of women who had experienced discrimination reported that they rarely, or only sometimes, felt confident seeking advice from leaders within their organisation.

Similarly, 57% lacked confidence in seeking leadership advice more broadly, and 52% felt they did not have official or unofficial mentors to support their leadership journey. These women were also less likely to know who to approach for help with leadership development (52%). This suggests that women who have experienced gender discrimination may need more proactive support and encouragement to seek help and mentorship in their leadership paths.



DEVELOPING 'EMERGING LEADERS'

Our data revealed two groups of women not currently in leadership and management roles. We call them emerging leaders, who aspire to lead, and career stabilisers, who do not. Understanding the aspirations and motivations of potential future leaders can guide strategies to strengthen the leadership pipeline.

HESITANCY TO LEAD

98% of emerging leaders felt that unconscious bias could stop a woman from putting herself forward for a promotion versus 61% of career stabilisers. Further, 98% of emerging leaders felt that unconscious bias could stop a woman from being given a promotion, while only 57% of career stabilisers agreed. This suggests that women with leadership aspirations are very aware of unconscious bias and how it could affect their career progression.

Our data showed that there are two age groups who are much more hesitant to lead or manage, and it may be caused by different things.

Women aged 25-29

- Strongly agree that flexible working can benefit careers
- Not worried about unconscious bias
- Not too worried about caring responsibilities

Younger women prioritize work-life balance and adaptability for leadership pathways. Their low concern about unconscious bias may stem from limited exposure or optimism about career progression, while care responsibilities are less of a concern due to their life stage (Kalev and Dobbin, 2022).

Women aged 50+

Women aged 50+ who are more aware of unconscious bias in the workplace are less likely to pursue leadership roles. Their accumulated career experiences, age-related barriers, caring responsibilities, and health issues like menopause can affect their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, reducing confidence and self-esteem. These intersectional factors heighten their concerns and discourage them from seeking leadership opportunities. (CIPD, 2023).

MOTIVATING EMERGING LEADERS

We asked our sample (66 women) who were not currently leading or managing if any of the following benefits made them feel more interested in leading or managing in future. Interestingly, there were some clear differences between women who wanted to lead in future versus those who were not currently interested.

Most desired benefits for emerging leaders:

- Better salary (85%)
- Increased autonomy (66%)
- Increased flexible working (63%)
- Increased professional development budget (61%)
- Better benefits (59%)

What could help interest career stabilisers in becoming leaders?

- Better salary (45%)
- Increased flexible working (40%)
- Better benefits (25%)
- Increased professional development budget (15%)
- Increased autonomy (5%)

These findings play a vital role in talent development and retention strategies as they give an insight into motivational factors for emerging leaders and women who are stable in their careers. Higher salaries are a top motivator for both groups with increased autonomy in more demand for emerging leaders as well as career development opportunities. However flexible working was important for both groups and should be a key consideration for women in workplaces.

VISIBILITY OF FEMALE LEADERS

98% of emerging leaders felt that the visibility of women in leadership is important, with 80% agreeing that organisations have a responsibility to highlight their female leaders, and 61% of these feeling that female leaders themselves should make themselves visible in the business community. This stipulates a strong need for gender representation at higher levels of organisations, suggesting that emerging leaders expect proactive efforts from companies to showcase women in leadership roles (Stainback, et al., 2024).

FUTURE MANAGERS AND LEADERS

Women who wanted to lead in future were slightly more likely to agree that 'I have been subject to negative remarks in the workplace because of my gender' (62% of future leaders versus 18% of those who do not want to lead). They were notably more likely to agree than women who do not want to lead that 'I have been allocated tasks unfairly because of my gender' (33% of future leaders versus 13% of those who did not want to lead). This highlights the need to address gender discrimination, especially for organisations aiming to nurture female leadership talent, as these challenges could hinder their career progression.



THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

We examined the role of the Welsh Government in reducing barriers to leadership and management for women because policies play a critical part in shaping workplace equality. Effective policies can guide future initiatives that support women throughout their careers and life stages, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable workforce in Wales.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Our data shows that factors such as age, geographic location, and gender significantly influence how people perceive government-led gender equality initiatives. For example:

- Younger women were generally more optimistic about these initiatives, with 71% of women aged 25-29, 84% of women aged 30-34, and 71% of women aged 35-39 believing that such initiatives could positively impact their careers.
- In contrast, women aged 40 and above were more cautious, with only 39% of women aged 40-44, 52% of women aged 45-49, and 40% of women aged 50-54 agreeing that government-led gender equality initiatives would benefit their careers.
- Support decreased further among older women, with only 26% of women aged 60-64 in agreement.

This highlights the need for a tailored approach that addresses the specific concerns women face at different career stages.

Geography also played a significant role in shaping women's views on government initiatives:

- Women in South and West Wales expressed higher levels of disagreement with the Welsh Government's declaration as a "feminist government," with 50% of women in Swansea, 47% in Rhondda Cynon Taff, and 42% in Cardiff expressing disagreement.
- Women in North Wales exhibited stronger support, with 100% of women in Flintshire and 75% in Anglesey agreeing with the government's feminist stance.
- Mid Wales showed more balanced views, with 44% of women in Powys agreeing, 22% disagreeing, and many expressing uncertainty.

These geographical differences suggest that gender equality policies need to be regionally nuanced to reflect local attitudes.

Men's perspectives also contribute to the complexity of gender equality initiatives. While 92% of men reported being equally or more comfortable reporting to a female line manager, compared to 76% of women, they were less supportive of efforts to make female leaders more visible in the business community. Only 62% of men agreed that female leaders should make themselves more visible, compared to 85% of women. Furthermore, men were more sceptical about the personal benefits of gender equality initiatives. A notable 61% of men disagreed that organisational gender equality initiatives would benefit their careers, while only 30% of women shared this view. Similarly, 69% of men disagreed that government-led gender equality initiatives would benefit their careers, in contrast to just 25% of women.

These findings underscore the importance of gender equality policies that resonate with all demographic groups. While many men express comfort with female leadership, their scepticism towards visibility initiatives and government-led policies suggests that unconscious biases may persist. The disconnect between men's stated support for gender equality and their underlying behaviours or attitudes, as noted by Baker and Rumen (2024), indicates that policies must address not only overt but also unconscious forms of bias. It is essential for government and organisational strategies to tackle these biases and foster broader acceptance of gender equality.

IMPACT OF CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Women's caring responsibilities significantly shape their views on government gender equality initiatives. Those with experience caring for the elderly, disabled, or sick was generally more cautious about these initiatives. For example, women who had cared for the elderly were 19% more likely to agree that "any government policy or programme that focuses solely on one gender undermines equality and diversity," with 64% agreeing compared to 48% of those who had not. Additionally, women who had cared for the elderly were 17% more likely to strongly agree that the Welsh Government should create more support for those seeking leadership roles.

Similarly, women who had cared for the disabled were more cautious about initiatives focused on bringing more women into leadership, with 73% expressing caution compared to 94% of those without such experience. Women who had previously cared for the sick were also less supportive of government-led initiatives, with 67% agreeing that such initiatives were positive for organisations in Wales, compared to 95% of those who had not cared for the sick. These findings highlight the need for gender equality measures to be inclusive and responsive to the diverse caring burdens faced by women, ensuring that policies address the specific needs of all caregivers.

FLEXIBLE WORKING AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

The report found a strong alignment between women's support for flexible working and their views on government-led gender equality initiatives. A resounding 96% of women who believed that flexible working promotes gender equality also supported government initiatives aimed at increasing women's leadership roles. Conversely, 21% of women who did not believe flexible working supported gender equality were more likely to oppose government involvement in leadership and management initiatives.

These findings emphasize the importance of flexible working as a cornerstone of broader gender equality policies. To foster greater workplace equality, government initiatives must continue to champion flexible working as a critical enabler for women to progress into leadership roles.

IMPACTS ON EMERGING LEADERS

Our data shows big differences in how emerging leaders and career stabilisers feel about the role of Welsh Government in promoting women's leadership. Emerging leaders were much more likely to agree with the statements:

- "The Welsh Government should create more support for people who wish to obtain leadership positions." (88% versus 56% of career stabilisers)
- "I feel that my career would benefit from government-led initiatives on gender equality in leadership roles." (73% emerging leaders versus 28% career stabilisers)
- "I feel that women working in Wales would benefit from initiatives that are focused on bringing more women into leadership roles." (58% versus 34% of career stabilisers)

EMERGING LEADERS SHOW STRONGER SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVES PROMOTING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AND GENDER EQUALITY, SUGGESTING TARGETED POLICIES MAY RESONATE MORE WITH THEM.

Career stabilisers may need broader strategies for engagement. Despite UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG, 5) global efforts of gender equality in leadership is far behind schedule, with estimates suggesting it could take 140 years to achieve equal representation of women in leadership roles (United Nations, 2023).





RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has highlighted common barriers women in Wales face as they progress into and through careers in leadership and management. Despite the increasing focus on gender equality, women continue to encounter obstacles such as unconscious bias, caring responsibilities, and mixed access to flexible working. These challenges hinder their professional development, limit career progression opportunities, and reinforce gender imbalances in leadership positions. To create more equitable workplaces, a series of targeted actions are required by both organisations and policymakers. The following recommendations provide clear, actionable steps that can help remove these barriers and empower women to thrive in leadership and management roles across Wales.

I. ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE WORKING

To achieve the Welsh Government's ambitions and reduce gender inequality, implementing targeted initiatives that encourage flexible working practices, particularly in industries with low uptake, would assist in addressing gender disparity. The Welsh government could play a vital role in promoting gender equality initiatives that adopt a holistic approach, addressing intersectional issues faced including factors such as age, caring responsibilities, and geographical location.

2. DECREASING GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Our data clearly shows a continued need for tackling unconscious bias within the workplace, particularly for working mothers. All training should be holistic and designed with key stakeholders to ensure that women's lived experience, along with all protected characteristics, is being explored in a meaningful way. Organisations should also consider implementing in-house support networks for their staff to increase all forms of ally-ship within the workplace.

3. REMOVING CHILDCARE AS A BARRIER TO EMPLOYMENT

A pan-Wales review of available childcare provision and affordability would assist with more women being able to work full-time and remove barriers they face within their careers. This review should be looked at in a "from birth" perspective to account for the pervasive impact maternity leave can have on women's careers.

4. DEVELOPING AND MENTORING 'EMERGING LEADERS'

All women should be offered mentorship instead of organisations "identifying" emerging leaders. This would ensure parity and negate the reluctance of those who have experienced gender discrimination. Additionally, this can ensure visibility, enhance self-belief, and build confidence which may have been reduced by any form of unconscious bias or discrimination. Mentors do not need to be gender specific as long as the skillsets are appropriate. Efficacy of schemes should be monitored on a longitudinal basis.

5. INCREASED SUPPORT FOR WORKING FATHERS

The views and experiences of men, particularly working fathers, needs further study to better understand their unique lived experiences and perspectives. However, both organisations and the Welsh Government should consider initiatives that promote the vital contribution of fathers to their families. This should include promoting and supporting men to undertake more caring responsibilities and removing social stigma surrounding men taking dependency leave. Finally, strong consideration needs to be given to increasing paternity leave in Wales to increase gender parity within working families.

METHODOLOGY

Our survey collected data from 342 people between 18th June 2024 and 31st July 2024. We recruited participants primarily via LinkedIn, and newsletter communications, including from both CBI Cymru and the University of South Wales. Volunteers from CBI Cymru's Women's Leadership Group and USW were able to suggest questions for inclusion and had the opportunity to feedback on a draft of the survey, ensuring that it is representative of the concerns of as many Welsh organisations as possible, regardless of industry or size.

Our respondents aged between ages 18-70+ and the gender split was 92% female, 8% male, and 1% other. They had a diverse mix of backgrounds, experiences, and career stages, and we sincerely thank them for the time they spent completing the survey. The data collection was approved in line with USW's ethics policy, and following informed consent, respondents' data was processed under the legal basis of 'a public task in the public interest.' If you have queries about the methodology, or any other part of the survey, please contact the lead author.

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