

# Spotlight

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**THE FUTURE OF WORK: GENDER BALANCE AND DIVERSITY**

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Marsha de Cordova MP / Caroline Nokes MP / Larissa Kennedy

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\*House of Commons Library Research Briefing: Youth Unemployment Statistics; published 10 November 2020  
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# An equitable future



**T**he future of work has “already arrived”, the World Economic Forum (WEF) declared in October last year. According to its *Future of Jobs 2020* report, the pandemic had accelerated changes to the world of work. With the workforce automating faster than anticipated, the WEF estimated that 85 million jobs would be displaced in the next five years.

Businesses and governments have long discussed the potential impact of AI and automation, but the Covid-19 “home-working revolution” proved that high-tech virtual jobs will be an enduring feature of this brave new world. Further, parallel conversations about the climate crisis raised the prospect of new, clean energy jobs as the world transitions to net zero.

But the economic impacts of the pandemic also laid bare underlying inequalities in the labour market and in the workplace. Women’s jobs have been 1.8 times more vulnerable to the pandemic than those of men, according to McKinsey, with women over-represented in vulnerable industries such as retail and hospitality. There has been an increase in automation in both sectors. Women have also taken on more of the unpaid care burden. Those from black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds have been particularly affected. According to the Fawcett Society, 50 per cent of BAME working women are worried about their job or promotion, compared to 43 per cent of working women in general (see page 12).

Last year, jobs and skills were a big focus of the government’s coronavirus response – from the furlough scheme to the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. As countries work to rebuild economies, there is growing consensus on the need for green and sustainable recovery. But if economic recovery plans, job creation schemes and the “new normal” of remote and flexible working do not proactively aim for equality of gender, race, disability and class, the future of work, however clean or automated it is, will look much like today when it comes to access and opportunity.

As the Shadow Women and Equalities Secretary, Marsha de Cordova, tells *Spotlight* (see page 4), unless government puts equality at the heart of policy as the world of work changes, “those groups that have been disproportionately negatively impacted” in the past will continue to be in the future.

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First published as a supplement to the *New Statesman* of 8 January 2021.  
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## Shadow Secretary for Women and Equalities Marsha de Cordova on systemic discrimination and the future of work. By [Alona Ferber](#)

# “I want to see disability equality in the workplace”

**W**hen Marsha de Cordova first became an MP in 2017, she faced more challenges than most newcomers to Westminster. Born with nystagmus – an involuntary movement of the eyes – she lives with visual impairment and is registered blind. In interviews during that first parliament, the 44-year-old talked about on-the-job frustrations, such as sometimes receiving papers late because, unlike other MPs, she needs a very large font to be able to read them.

“The fact is, if there’s a budget, I should have my budget papers the same time as any other MP,” she told me in a recent Zoom call. “What was really quite. ...disappointing. . .is the fact that it was still happening, but I’m really pleased to say there has been a great improvement.”

These days her papers, she confirms, are “generally coming on time”, but the pandemic has thrown up new problems. Like many of us, MPs have had to “jump on to Zoom and Teams” but “neither application [is] accessible for people living with a visual impairment”.

After her election as member for Battersea, de Cordova first served as shadow minister for disabled people. In 2020, Keir Starmer promoted her to shadow secretary of state for women and equalities. One of a handful of disabled MPs, and one of few black women in the House of Commons, she took on the role in a year when, as has become almost a cliché, a spotlight was shone on inequalities, both between the genders and in terms of racism, in health outcomes, in wider society, and in the workplace.

The pandemic has had a disproportionate economic impact on women, who have taken on more of the care burden, been at greater risk of losing their jobs, and are over-represented in high-risk sectors for Covid-19 – such as healthcare – and job losses, such as retail. At the same time, the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement following the killing of George Floyd led to greater acknowledgment of systemic racism. Various firms, from Facebook to Estée Lauder, made public commitments to tackle discrimination in their workforces. And these things intersect. According to a Fawcett Society survey, 43 per cent of working women, and 50 per cent of working BAME women are worried about their job or promotion (see our infographic on page 12-13).

“It was absolutely the right thing



for...businesses and everyone to really make [commitments] to wanting to do their bit in terms of reducing racial inequalities in workplaces,” says de Cordova, but she wants to see the practical outcomes of those pledges.

Labour’s 2019 manifesto made a series of promises on improving equality for workers. These included making the state responsible for enforcing equal pay legislation, pay gap reporting for BAME

## Businesses are right to pledge to fight racism

groups, requiring employers to be better trained to support disabled workers, and introducing disability pay gap reporting for firms of 250 employees or more.

Top of the list of things de Cordova wants to see the government doing now is to reinstate gender pay gap reporting, which was suspended in March due to the pandemic. According to a *Financial Times* analysis of data of the 5,822 firms that submitted their gender pay gap data regardless, the average difference between men and women increased from 11.9 per cent to 12.8 per cent.

But de Cordova would also like to see the introduction of mandatory ethnic pay gap reporting. Such measures “will really encourage businesses and employers to take more steps towards career progression, more flexible working, but also it improves

diversity and we all know that diversity at all levels within the business make business better”.

Covid-19 has changed the way people work, and brought a revolution in flexible working, she notes. “We really need to make sure that the way we think about the future of work... really is about being inclusive,” says de Cordova. “We are currently facing an economic crisis...we are pretty much in one and post-Brexit, post-Covid we really need to make sure that the response to government has to... place equality at its heart.”

In June, Boris Johnson announced a commission on racial equality that was due to produce recommendations by the end of 2020 (it still had not at the time of press). De Cordova has publicly criticised this latest initiative,

pointing out that the government already has plenty of yet-to-be actioned recommendations to choose from. The litany of reviews and commission into inequalities and racial injustices in recent years include the 2017 McGregor-Smith Review into race in the workplace and the Lammy Review into criminal justice that same year.

“We’ve got a wealth of recommendations that if implemented could go some way to reducing some of those inequalities,” she says. When it comes to this new commission she adds, “if there’s no plan for implementation then it just renders the whole process pointless”.

In December, equalities minister Liz Truss announced a new government approach to tackling discrimination. Truss said debate had been led by “fashion”, not “facts”, and that the government would take a data-driven approach not focused solely on race, religion, sexual orientation and disability.

In an email following our interview, de Cordova denounced this as “gratuitous provocation”, adding, “When Liz Truss dismisses ‘fashionable’ causes she actually dismisses the devastating impact of discrimination and unfairness in peoples’ day to day lives”.

Earlier last year, the government had made its views on the Black Lives Matter movement clear during a parliamentary debate on Black History Month in October. Equalities minister Kemi Badenoch caused a major backlash when she told the Commons that, “Any school which teaches these elements of critical race theory as fact, or which promotes partisan political views such as defunding the police without offering a balanced treatment of opposing views, is breaking the law”. Badenoch also said schools should not openly support “the anti-capitalist Black Lives Matter group”.

De Cordova was “really quite saddened by the government’s behaviour.” This was the first time that critical race theory – a framework for examining how racial inequalities



shape society – had been mentioned in parliament, she says, adding “it’s the government wanting to bring this into public space.. maybe stop with the culture wars and focus on the role of actually creating a fair and equal society for everybody”. In September last year, Donald Trump issued an executive order banning diversity training in the federal workforce and slamming critical race theory as a “destructive ideology”.

When Boris Johnson launched the

new commission, he was criticised for saying he wanted to “stop the sense of victimisation”. “If you’re being racially abused or discriminated against it’s not about you being a victim it’s about you being treated less fairly than somebody else,” she says. “Rather than wanting to take things out of the Trump handbook – and aren’t we glad he is no longer going to be president – they really should focus on tackling the structural inequalities and racism that exist.”

De Cordova read law and European studies at university and, before she entered politics, worked at a number of charities that support blind and partially sighted people. She set up her own, South London Vision, in 2014. That year, she was also elected as a Labour Party councillor in Lambeth.

When she first entered the workforce, and also in education, “my disability and

**“My disability was my biggest barrier”**



De Cordova, centre, with Keir Starmer, right, at the Museum of London during Black History Month last year.

my visual impairment was the biggest barrier, so to be honest I didn't have time to focus on... the racial challenges that I potentially was facing".

This is still a daily battle, she says. There is little awareness of the inequalities people with disabilities face at work. "When we talk about wanting to see better racial equality in the workplace and better gender balance in the workplace, I also want to see disability equality in the workplace," says de Cordova. "You think it's bad for gender, you think it's bad for race, it's even worse for disability, so much more needs to be done in that respect, and that's about changing attitudes and culture as well as ensuring the right support mechanisms are in place to enable disabled people to have a level playing field."

Beyond the immediate effects of

the pandemic, the world of work is changing. Research by the World Economic Forum in October found Covid-19 has accelerated automation. 43 per cent of businesses plan to reduce their workforce due to technology integration. And the transition to a clean energy economy, and the new green jobs this will bring with it, have been a major part of the discussion on post-pandemic recovery. Are we joining the dots on inclusion for the future of work, so that existing inequalities won't be perpetuated in the future?

"That is the big question," says de Cordova. Equality needs to be "part of your thinking in how you want to do things better". She notes president-elect Joe Biden's commitment to racial equity and action on the climate. In "any plans that you have for the future of work", without consciously bringing equality into the equation, "those groups that have been disproportionately negatively impacted throughout society... will continue to ingrain those inequalities if it's not formally part of shaping your thinking of your future and your vision, it just has to be".

When it comes to her own chosen career path – politics – she is optimistic about a more inclusive future. Keir Starmer's shadow cabinet is the most diverse to date. In the 2019 election, the parliamentary Labour Party was also more diverse than ever, with 41 black, Asian and minority ethnic representatives, and more women elected than men for the first time.

But she admits that there is room for improvement, including, from her own experience as a councillor, at local government level. "I do all I can to encourage people to think about [what]

## Labour could do better on diversity

they are doing, if they want to make a difference, which is what I want to do, that politics is one avenue to explore." Politics should be more representative, "not just race, ethnicity and disability, but also socio-economic background, class is [a] really important dynamic to this as well".

As an employer, the Labour Party could do better, too. On top of Labour's anti-Semitism scandal, last June HuffPost UK reported that Labour was losing black party members over concerns it had responded inadequately to allegations of anti-black racism. Keir Starmer has unveiled measures to boost equality in the party, including an audit into the diversity of Labour staff.

"If you're going to say you are truly representative, then there has to be good representation across your organisation, from a senior level all the way throughout the organisation. The party isn't doing very well there," she says. "I can't do my job as women and equalities [secretary] calling for organisations to have better representation and leadership when my own party isn't leading by example, so it really is about also getting our own house in order".

She "couldn't comment" on whether the anti-Semitism debacle has made the party a less welcoming place for minorities to work. "But what I do want to say is that I'm really pleased that the party has got their action plan in place and we will be tackling... any forms of anti-Semitism as well as all forms of racism," says de Cordova, "the Labour Party is the party of equality and so again it is about leading by example".

But is there a risk that her portfolio sidelines the key issues, rather than ensuring that equality really is at the heart of government policy as the world of work changes? Should her ultimate goal be for her job to become obsolete?

"Well I won't answer should I put myself out of a job," she says. Her aim is for equality to "be really interacting and threading through every department... My job is done when equality is embedded and part of everything we do." ●

## What the evidence says about improving inclusion in the workplace. By Samir Jeraj

# Why diversity schemes fail

**W**hen Sarah Cheung was in her penultimate year at university in the 1990s, she was looking for a start in investment banking. Having applied to dozens of graduate schemes, she was accepted onto a programme for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students at Midland Bank.

In the decades since, Cheung has worked in departments of banks which have been diverse and full of potential mentors. And yet, she says, a lack of diversity has been persistent throughout her career. “The trading people were still very ‘City Boy,’” she says.

Diversity has never appeared more outwardly important to government, business and society. This year, with the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement following the killing of George Floyd in May, many organisations made public declarations about their commitment to tackling systemic racism.

More diverse organisations, it is argued, better reflect the communities they serve and will be more likely to meet their needs; but recognising inequalities and working to address them is also the socially conscious and responsible thing to do in a liberal society. There is a strong incentive for organisations to avoid the negative publicity of being called out

over their lack of representation or the poor experiences of staff or the public. In the age of social media, our power to share experiences of discrimination has never been greater.

A look at the record of many of the schemes intended to diversify workplaces, however, shows that little progress has been made in addressing entrenched structural discrimination. A survey of more than 100 large businesses in the UK found that under half include action on racial equality as a performance objective at board level.

Why has this happened, and what can be done about it?

In 2019, the percentage of BAME board members at FTSE 100 companies fell from 9 to 7.4 per cent. Meanwhile, the 2017 Parker Review set a target that every FTSE 100 company should appoint at least one BAME person to their board. While the proportion of board roles held by women now stands at one in four, according to recent data analysis by the *New Statesman*, it will take until 2050 to reach parity with men.

In the film and TV industry, a study by the London School of Economics concluded that decades of policies to improve ethnic diversity had failed to create “real change”, with BAME people

relegated to secondary roles in front of and behind the camera.

“Companies want to blame individual managerial bias,” Frank Dobbin, a professor of sociology at Harvard University, told *Spotlight*. Dobbin has researched the impact of 50 years of diversity schemes in the US. He argues that this drive to individualise the problem leads companies to put their efforts into training on bias or into more bureaucracy when hiring, promoting and addressing grievances – but this ignores the system in which schemes operate. “Ultimately, [the schemes] will backfire,” he says, because they alienate the managers whose behaviour they seek to change, and they fail to address structural problems.

These issues are not confined to the private sector. The NHS, the single largest employer in the UK, has persistent gender and ethnic inequalities. Men are three and a half times more likely to be doctors than women, and 15 per cent of BAME NHS staff have reported discrimination by a colleague at work compared to 6 per cent of their white colleagues. Disparities were also revealed starkly during the coronavirus pandemic, when black and minority ethnic healthcare staff died in high numbers.



TOLGA AKMEN / AIP VIA GETTY IMAGES



The offices of major banks in Canary Wharf, London

Roger Kline, a research fellow at Middlesex University, says that in his experience the boards of NHS Trusts are far less rigorous when they are presented with a plan to tackle discrimination compared with plans to sort out a clinical issue. “They’ll be doing all sorts of stuff that the simplest look at the literature would say, ‘why on Earth are you doing that?’” he says. In particular, unconscious bias training – one of the more expensive options in an organisation’s diversity toolkit – has failed to produce significant improvements.

Changing hiring and disciplinary panels to include one person of colour or a woman has also failed to produce clear evidence that those panels make fairer decisions, he adds. Often people placed on a panel in order to increase diversity are junior staff and are not empowered to challenge more senior colleagues. “It’s useful as part of a wider strategy, on its own it’s not much use.”

Elsewhere in the public sector, the Fire Service has been working to improve its gender and ethnic diversity for years, but progress has been slow. In the decade from 2009 to 2019, the proportion of female firefighters increased from 3.6 to 6.4 per cent. Meanwhile, the proportion of BAME firefighters increased from 3.5 per cent in 2011, to 4.3 per cent in 2019.

Alex Johnson is the chief fire officer for South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue. When she joined the Fire Service in 1992, women made up around 1 per cent of the workforce. “We were unique, isolated,” she recalls. Since then, Johnson has been

working to recruit more women and black and minority ethnic people.

One of the challenges has been the public perception of firefighters and their role. While in the 1990s and before their work mostly involved responding to incidents that required physical strength, such as putting out fires and rescuing people from burning buildings, now their work is more about prevention. The job requires a range of communication skills to identify and help the most vulnerable before a fire breaks out. “One of our main roles now is about being able to engage with all people in our community,” Johnson explains.

The Fire Service routinely visits schools and runs community events targeted at women and black and minority ethnic people to raise awareness about the nature of a firefighter’s job and to challenge stereotypes. For Johnson, it is important to start in schools to ensure children have an open mind about their future. “By the time we get to people at an age where they’re going for a job, they’ve probably already deselected the fire service because they think it is a job for white men,” she says.

## Organisations need to learn from mistakes

“The most important thing is accountability,” says Kline. This was backed up by research he commissioned for the NHS’s Workforce Race Equality Standard, which showed that if staff are accountable for their decisions and there are consequences, such as having to explain their actions in a formal way to their superiors, they are much more likely to make fairer choices.

“If you know that conversation is coming, it’s going to change your behaviour,” he explains. The same was true of opportunities in the workplace for employees to “stretch” themselves through being involved in special projects and secondments.

Dobbin’s research across corporate and academic employers has found that engaging managers in solving problems, while also addressing systemic discrimination, works “very well”. Employers should be recruiting from diverse institutions, providing good workplace mentoring and establishing a team in the organisation that is specifically focused on identifying and tackling systemic discrimination.

These methods also expose senior managers to information that shifts their own biases and beliefs about meritocracy. “You’re getting people in power to look systemic racism and sexism in the face, every month,” he says. But instead of doing this, most companies tend to rely on consultants. “They fly in, suggest some stuff, they go away and they come back next year,” says Dobbin.

If organisations want to become diverse, recruiting and promoting talent, reflecting and serving the community, the evidence shows they will need to look again at what they have been doing, and learn from past mistakes.

Cheung, now decades into her banking career, is working on improving the diversity of South Cambridgeshire council, where she is an elected councillor. It is a struggle to find people in senior roles to mentor new candidates along the path into this career, too, she says. “We’re still stuck in the ‘let’s offer some unconscious bias training’ as our diversity tick box.” ●

# The future of work is flexible

How Covid-19 is breaking down barriers to flexible working.

By **Dr Sarah Forbes** and **Dr Holly Birkett**,

of the Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

**T**he UK has seen a steep rise in the number of people working from home during the pandemic. A recent survey showed 86 per cent of employees had worked from home during the first Covid-19 lockdown, with 75.3 per cent of parents reporting they would like to work flexibly in the future. Further research shows that managers have also had positive experiences managing staff remotely during lockdown, seeing increases in productivity and commitment, even in sectors where working from home has previously been unpopular. New data also suggests that the mass move towards flexible working during Covid-19 has broken the stigma around flexible working in the UK, and that where there have been performance management issues these have generally been ongoing issues, not a result of remote working.

So if organisations are keen to support flexible working in the future, and employees are keen on flexible working opportunities, where should we go from here?

**Start a dialogue**, now, between managers and employees who have worked flexibly during lockdown to identify what you can build on that is mutually beneficial, including ways of working and work location. There are opportunities to use flexible working to improve wellbeing and productivity, encourage more women into senior roles and access new pools of talent.

**Think creatively**; organisations can benefit from revised use of office space, while making the retained space a more flexible environment for teams to meet and ensuring that those who want to come into work more regularly still can, as findings show that working remotely over long periods of time can be isolating or impractical for some. Organisations can also make flexible working more inclusive by covering overhead costs for homeworkers using the existing HMRC scheme and training line managers in managing remote teams. This is also an opportunity for organisations to review flexible working policies, how they measure performance and what tools and support they need to enable inclusive flexible working.

**Change the culture**; as Covid-19 helps to break down stigma around flexible working and care, with shared parenting practices on the rise and more people engaged in caring responsibilities, policymakers should consider how this can be leveraged to support the labour market attachment of professional women, promote gender equality in the workplace and help reduce the gender pay gap. If men continue to work more flexibly, the ingrained gendered caring norms, which have negatively impacted the career progression of women, will begin to dissolve, levelling the playing field for men and women in the workplace.

Covid-19 has shown that moving from a mindset of presenteeism to a mindset of trust and flexibility improves results, employee wellbeing and loyalty. People respond best when they feel supported to work in harmony with their other commitments. They know they've got to produce results and meet targets, but it can be in a way that works for them. This can be achieved through measuring by results, rather than sticking to the old mode of working. ●

**For more information about the research, please contact:**  
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# In numbers: the gender gap

Data from across Europe shows that much still needs to be done to achieve equality. By [Jonny Ball](#)

Some 132 years ago, Clementina Black, the leader of the Women’s Trade Union League, won the support of the major trade unions for equal pay at the Trades Unions Congress. That same year, 1,400 female match factory workers – the matchgirls – went on strike in protest at poor wages and appalling conditions. The strike is widely regarded as a seminal moment in Britain’s social and labour history. Where previously so-called craft unions had been the exclusive preserve of skilled workers and artisans, the matchgirls dispute was key in the development of the “new unionism”, when unskilled and semi-skilled workers began to organise independently.

It was several generations later when in Dagenham and Halewood, sewing machinists at two Ford plants went on strike demanding equal pay with their male counterparts. This dispute halted production, and led to the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970.

Although slow but definite progress has been made as women have organised and attitudes have changed, the figures shown here are testament to how much still needs to be done. The Office for National Statistics has reported that the gender pay gap is close to zero for full-time employees under 40, but after middle age it widens considerably. Some have speculated that this is

the result of a lingering tendency for mothers to take on more responsibility for childcare than fathers, hampering opportunities for promotion. Discriminatory (and unlawful) hiring practices persist, as some employers fear periods of maternity leave.

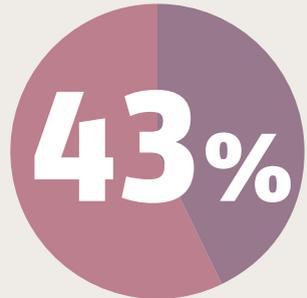
What is certain is that women are over-represented in low-paid professions in the hospitality, leisure and care sectors. Many have been on the frontline against coronavirus in hospitals and care homes. But for those in hospitality and retail, the Covid-19 recession is likely to hit particularly hard. Further progress on gender equality will be as much about raising salaries and standards for those at the bottom as it is about ensuring proper representation at the top. The data here reflects serious under-representation in the boardrooms of large companies, but it will be of little comfort to low-paid, female catering or cleaning staff that those responsible for their inadequate wages and insecure work are also female.

It is women workers who have felt the effects of austerity most sharply, and any post-Covid fiscal constraints may fall on women still further. The Fawcett Society, a charity campaigning for equal pay, has said that the UK is at a “coronavirus crossroads on gender equality”. Perhaps securing the livelihoods of those on the ground floor is now as important as smashing the glass ceiling. ●



was the Fawcett Society’s **Equal Pay Day** in 2020, when women effectively began working for free (based on a pay gap of 11.5%).

## Coronavirus crossroads in the UK



of working women and **50% of working BAME women** are worried about their job or promotion.

**1 in 3 working mothers** have lost work or hours due to childcare.



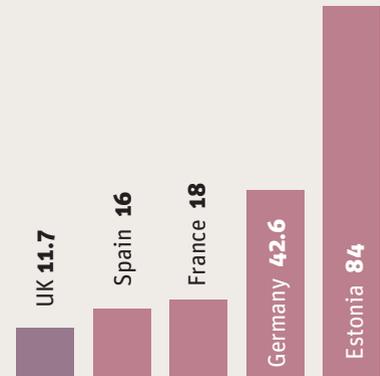
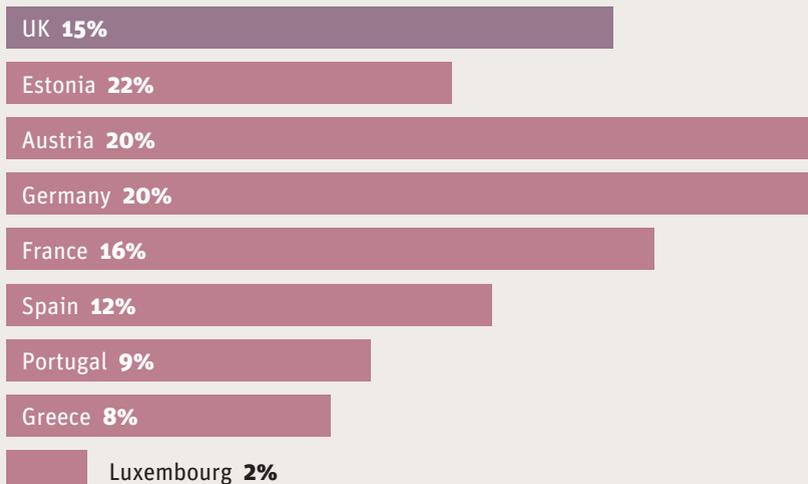
The **number of years** the Fawcett Society says it will take to **close the gender pay gap** at the current rate of reduction.

## Europe: The proportion of women on the boards of the largest publicly listed companies

France	44%
Italy	36%
Sweden	36%
Finland	36%
Germany	34%
Belgium	32%
Holland	31%
<b>UK</b>	<b>30%</b>
Latvia	29%
Denmark	28%
<b>Average</b>	<b>27%</b>
Austria	26%
Spain	24%
Portugal	22%
Poland	21%
Ireland	19%
Hungary	15%
Lithuania	11%
Greece	9%
Estonia	8%



## The gender pay gap by country



### Paid maternity leave at full-rate equivalent (weeks)

– The UK allows a full 52 weeks of maternity leave, but only pays a flat rate of **£151.20/week** for leave over 6 weeks. Leave over 39 weeks is unpaid.

# How to make your company a great place to work

Bringing together HR and strategic goals is the key to success, says **Dr Vishwanath Joshi**, chief people officer at Hexaware



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



**W**hat are the key issues facing IT and business process outsourcing (BPO) firms? How are opportunities for employees in the sector, particularly women, expanding? And how important is diversity and inclusion in building a successful and growing company? This Q&A is the first in a series of features, thought-leadership pieces, and insights from global IT and BPO firm Hexaware, which will explore these questions across the New Statesman Media Group.

**Spotlight:** Tell us about Hexaware and what it does.

**Dr Vishwanath Joshi:** Hexaware is an IT and BPO company that started in India and now has 42 global offices, a staff of 20,000, and is approaching one billion dollars in turnover.

**S:** How did you come to work there as chief people officer?

**VJ:** My journey at Hexaware started just over a year ago when I was brought in to replace the retiring chief people officer.



I saw in Hexaware an opportunity where I could bring my knowledge and experience in creating a fantastic workplace. I worked in human resources for over 30 years before I moved into teaching, consultancy and research. My passion is working with leadership teams and managers to develop a great workplace in terms of employee engagement and employee experience, and to align those initiatives to business goals and objectives.

**S:** How do you ensure an “employee voice” at Hexaware?

**VJ:** My 100-strong team and I work to ensure employees are at the centre of what we do. That means supporting dialogue throughout the company. We use online tools such as Yammer to provide a platform for our staff to communicate, something that has been critical during 2020 and the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our employees are encouraged to participate in discussions with people at the highest levels of the company. We have weekly meet-ups with our chief executive, R Srikrishna (aka “Keech”), coined “Coffee with Keech” to help employees have open discussions on the roadmap for the company.



Hexaware also has a “Leadership Lantern Series”, where our leaders share their thoughts, vision and actionable goals with employees to include them in these strategic and practical discussions.

**S:** Hexaware is known as an inclusive and diverse company. What have you done to make this happen?

**VJ:** Hexaware has diversity in its DNA, and we have worked hard to ensure our company is a leader on this front. Firstly, we continuously examine and scrutinise our hiring policies and practices, together with our policies on progression and opportunities within Hexaware. Removing unconscious bias throughout these processes is vital to ensuring a fair workplace, something which employees value greatly. Our focus as an employer is to nurture our talent, upskilling or reskilling our employees to see them progress. Secondly, we engage with our employees to seek feedback and act on it. Our employee “EmpPower” survey shows how effective this is – 84 percent of staff say that we are an organisation that practices non-discrimination.

Finally, we have specific programmes to encourage and support diversity across our organisation. One of them

is called “WeDifferent”, and it gives the Hexaware family an opportunity to rejoice in a sense of belonging and inclusiveness, which is such an important part of our brand identity. The theme this year was “We Celebrate Different”, and each global office has celebrated a festival from another country. The host country gets to score the celebrations on their passion, authenticity, spirit and knowledge. A team in Mexico took the honours for their Diwali celebrations, the festival of lights observed by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, showcasing why the organisation is such a great place to work.

**S:** Hexaware has many female staff and leaders in an industry that is usually dominated by men. How have you

## Diverse teams are better placed to meet client needs

supported women in particular?

**VJ:** Investing in our women leaders and their growth is an integral part of our work on diversity, and on the growth of the company. The Women@Hexaware (W@H) group is a leading voice in the company. They worked in tandem with the HR function to develop a leadership programme called Rising W@H that will mentor and support women who have the potential and desire to become business leaders. A group of 30 have been handpicked across different corners of the globe for this two-and-a-half-year journey. The programme comes with support from national and international business schools, projects, and development opportunities with women leaders inside and outside the organisation. Together with our more general work on employee engagement, this work on women leaders means Hexaware will continue to be at the forefront in the sector.

**S:** Given your growth plans, what does 2021 have in store for you?

**VJ:** The year 2021 is big for us. While 2020 has been challenging for many companies, we are expanding and will be aiming to hire more than 6,000 more staff globally next year. It is also the year of diversity for our company, and we will be marking this across our entire organisation. When we hire those 6,000 people, we will be looking across our 42 offices to get talented people into Hexaware, and nurture that talent as part of our journey of growth.

Diversity is strength, both in a workplace that employees value and for our customers who are located around the world. Customers have greater confidence and see the business opportunities in working with diverse companies like Hexaware who can understand and meet their needs.

This is something that will become even more important as we continue to grow. We are looking forward to doing this together in 2021, and to seeing the Hexaware family make an even bigger mark in the world. ●

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The home-working era raises new questions about gender balance in the labour market, says **Caroline Nokes MP**, chair of the Women and Equalities Committee

# How Covid-19 could be a great leveller



If one were forced to look for the positives of Covid-19 and the thoroughly miserable year we have all just endured, then surely the upside is that many of us have discovered that working flexibly, from home, is not only possible, but can also be successful. And it has been a feature of the workplace supported by men as well as women.

The pandemic has been a great leveller, and we have been in the same boat, or stuck on the same Zoom call, and those female employees who had previously had requests to work from home rejected by male bosses have suddenly been able to demonstrate that it could work. Productivity might go up, not down, as we ditch the daily commute, for example.

But – there is always a but – the home-working revolution did not apply to everyone equally. Yes, large numbers of both male and female employees found they could work from home, but

many could not. And juggling childcare responsibilities while conducting Zoom calls is not always easy; and during the course of the pandemic this burden has fallen predominantly on female shoulders. We may have laughed at the children that appeared in the background of Zoom calls, or interviews, but there were many times when women looked anxious, genuinely worried that colleagues would judge them for the inability to manage home-working and childcare responsibilities.

It did and does not stop there. For professional people, home-working is an option, but those in front-line public service roles, or working in retail, or transport, or a myriad of other sectors, cannot work from home. There is a requirement to be physically present at a workplace, which is all but impossible when your child's school, or nursery or childminder has been forced to shut

because of the pandemic.

The government, and the education sector in its widest sense, has worked incredibly hard to keep settings open in the second lockdown and regardless of tier, but there are still outbreaks of the virus where classes, or year groups, or bubbles have to be sent home to isolate, and as Mumsnet found in a recent survey, that is when the care was most likely to be given by a mother. Over three-quarters (76 per cent) of Mumsnet users indicated that they had not been able to work uninterrupted due to childcare commitments, and 35 per cent of them felt their partners had not been affected in the same way.

We know the sectors in which women are most likely to be employed are also the ones staring at a pretty bleak future. Fifty-eight per cent of retail workers are female, and we have already seen enormous redundancies from some high



## I fear we could slip back to the 1970s

GETTY IMAGES/OULSCARRE

street stalwarts, such as John Lewis and Boots, not to mention the collapse of Arcadia. Who would have ever thought that Topshop jeans would go out of fashion? But retailers have not been able to compete with the online offer of major fast fashion outlets. And hospitality is also on its knees: curfews, customers only being able to eat inside with their family or support bubble, and a total closure in tier three areas in the run-up to Christmas all mean the sector is suffering, and again it is a big employer of women, especially young women.

When we went into the pandemic female employment was at a record high. My big fear is that when we come out we will have slipped back to the 1970s. Those of us who revelled in home-working at the beginning might well be looking at the bleak employment prospects of our children and trying to help them plot a path through to recovery.

But it need not all be doom and gloom. Some of the schemes put in place have huge potential for giving young people the help they need: the Kickstart Scheme, for example, encouraging employers to give young people a hand on to the first rung of the employment ladder, and the initiatives around green growth and jobs in green technology. Apprenticeships, meanwhile, really do provide a sensible alternative to university, enabling young people to earn and learn at the same time. But how about setting some of these roles aside for girls, recognising the appalling impact the pandemic has had on their prospects.

Nearly a third (29 per cent) of women in work expect to see their earnings reduced over the next six months, as employers reduce their hours. The threat of redundancy is real, and as many firms are forced to make difficult choices, it does create the “cover” for those who might seek to terminate the employment of those who would otherwise be protected. Pregnant women and new mums are feeling especially vulnerable, and are not confident about their employment future.

I have no doubt the Department for Work and Pensions is already plotting its way through this challenge, and trying to find ways to make sure women get their fair share of the new opportunities which are being supported. For example, let’s try to make green technology attractive to women. Let’s make sure that when identifying those who finished their education without A-levels, and who are now entitled to funding for adult education, that there is a real effort to find the women among them.

Throughout the pandemic we know women have done the greatest proportion of caring, whether for the young or the elderly. We know they have been in front-line NHS roles in large numbers. We know they have been on the supermarket checkout enabling us to get our groceries. We know now there need to be solutions to make sure their employment chances are not disproportionately affected, because many of them are scared that they are. ●



**Kate Fergusson**

Head of responsible business  
at Pinsent Masons

The sudden introduction of mass remote working prompted a widespread cultural and behavioural change for many industries. For us, our transition to agile working prior to the pandemic, and approach to doing business in the right way, for the right reasons, has underpinned support for our people throughout the crisis.

Running more than 3,000 remote offices provides insight into people's home life, fostering an emotional connection and increased focus on mental health. We have provided a suite of support including home-schooling resources, flexible working options, wellbeing check-ins and embedding the Mindful Business Charter, which seeks to eradicate working practices that negatively impact our wellbeing.

The inequalities highlighted last year, not only as a result of the pandemic but by events such as the tragic killing of George Floyd, have underscored the need for change and open dialogue about racism. Alongside other firms, we signed up to Rare Recruitment's Race Fairness Commitment which commits firms to use data-driven techniques to monitor the legal careers of minority ethnic lawyers – from recruitment to senior promotion – with the aim of identifying and tackling the points at which minority ethnic lawyers unfairly fall behind their peers.



**Miranda Wayland**

Head of creative diversity  
at the BBC

The pandemic has been felt in all corners of the UK. Widespread home-working has accelerated the consideration of accessibility, while conversations about racism were in the spotlight throughout 2020. All organisations have had to confront these challenges with unprecedented urgency and there has been renewed recognition across our industry that we need to do better when it comes to representation.

At the BBC we have made good



# Learning lessons for diversity

**Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter movement and more, have made companies think differently about HR**

progress with regards to inclusive representation on-screen, but this hasn't been replicated at the same pace off-screen, and that is why we have amplified our efforts to accelerate change. This year, we are introducing our new workforce diversity plan that underpins our recently announced 50:20:12 diversity target – 50 per cent gender, 20 per cent ethnicity, and 12 per cent disability. This is supported by our new 20 per cent off-screen diversity target for all new commissions and a commitment to spend £100m of existing budgets on diverse content from April.

You can't solve problems that you don't know exist and you can't always do it alone. That is why we set ourselves targets, which we monitor, review and report, and it is why we are increasingly working with our partners to find solutions.



**Dal Darroch**  
Head of diversity and inclusion strategic programmes at the

Football Association

Last year was a difficult year for every industry, and sport is no different. While the pandemic has challenged businesses and individual health, many organisations have questioned working practices and how inclusive they really are, with the important conversation around diversity and inclusion rising in the public consciousness.

It has brought about honest discussions and we have listened to the views of our colleagues to better understand how we can embed inclusion and improve working experiences for everyone. We have enhanced our fight against discrimination, as part of our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, In Pursuit of Progress, which sets clear targets to drive meaningful change within the organisation and across the game.

We recently launched the Football Leadership Diversity Code, with more than 40 professional football clubs committing to tackling inequality across their senior leadership, team operations and coaching teams. Importantly, it will increase accountability and transparency,

encouraging recruitment from across society. While recruitment should always be based on merit, it's crucial the right candidate is selected from a diverse pool.



**Alessandra Bellini**  
Chief customer officer and executive sponsor of diversity and inclusion at Tesco

At Tesco, we treat people how they want to be treated and actively celebrate diversity. Our yearly colleague engagement survey shows that 88 per cent of colleagues feel we have an inclusive workplace. 2020 was a challenging year, but it provided a chance for us to listen and consider how we can ensure everyone feels welcome.

All colleagues complete mandatory D&I training, with additional training for managers, and we are proud to offer inclusive policies that use gender neutral language. Our colleague networks have executive sponsorship, and support our listening groups, career and mentoring programmes that focus on different ethnicities, sexual orientation and gender. To help shape future plans, colleagues can voluntarily share their personal diversity data. Our external commitments – including the Race at Work Charter, Valuable 500, and recent open letter in the *Sunday Times* – will hold us to account in supporting colleagues from all backgrounds. The importance of diversity should be embedded in every area of a business. We all have a responsibility to share learnings with each other, and to support a more inclusive Britain.



**Jihan Ahmed**  
Global head of employer brand and inclusion and diversity at TransferWise

Finance and technology, as a combination, are often perceived as being masculine industries. There's a legacy reputation of bro-culture, and priority of high-speed growth which can be intimidating and frankly unattractive for some candidates.

In order to understand where we can improve our diversity efforts, it is crucial to look at where we are going wrong. Roles that severely need more diverse

candidates, such as engineering, often have long and detailed requirements, and we know that often women and other minority and under-represented groups don't apply for roles unless they tick every box. There can be intimidating, masculine language, and not enough talk on growth, and development.

At TransferWise, we're analysing and improving the inclusivity of our job adverts and have published our career maps and salaries. This upfront change to the way we position our roles, and describe what it's like to work with us, should, over time, attract a much more varied and uniquely talented team.

Having diverse teams that reflect our customer base helps us build a better product. We want to make sure we leave no one behind on our journey to achieve money without borders, for everyone.



**Staynton Brown**  
Director of diversity, inclusion and talent at Transport for London

London is incredibly diverse and, as an organisation, it is important we reflect that. The major events of 2020, such as the killing of George Floyd, galvanised people across TfL to go further and faster in tackling discrimination. We continue to ensure we have an evidence-based approach to diversity and inclusion incorporated across our work – from hiring to inspiring, leadership to behaviour, wellbeing to talent management. We listen to our staff, are held to account by our board, and respond to our pay gap reports and annual staff survey.

There is always room for improvement. To become a more proactively anti-racist organisation, we held more than 100 "listening" sessions across TfL. Through creating safe spaces, and bringing people together to listen and learn, we are developing new approaches to meet our ambition. Our staff network groups represent different protected characteristics, and act on what we learn. This then improves the experiences of all our people and helps us better deliver for the city we serve. ●

# The future of work – modern, diverse, and fit for all

**Dr Matthew Connell**, director of policy and public affairs at the Chartered Insurance Institute, on how new ways of working can make financial services more productive and inclusive

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**T**he Chartered Insurance Institute is the professional body for insurance and personal finance. Our focus covers a large proportion of the financial services sector and our mission, as stated in our Royal Charter, is to secure the trust of the public in the profession. We believe in supporting our members to meet the high standards of the regulated market they work within, and showcasing best practice and innovative methods of tackling some of the toughest challenges in the market and in society more widely. As part of all of this, we are completely committed to ensuring our profession is open, inclusive, and diverse, so that it can truly be one which reflects the modern world it serves.

I wanted to reflect on how recent changes in the workplace can support the equalities movement, and why we should keep many of the flexibilities that have become the norm when we hopefully return to a state more akin to the pre-Covid world.

When it comes to these workplace initiatives, the changes and adaptations we have made over the last few months eclipse the changes we had made over the previous years. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted us all, and the workplace is one of the most visible examples of this change. For many



the reality of working from home has become the now exhaustively used “new normal”, while for others who still have to physically be in their places of work, new health and safety procedures, equipment or in some cases shift patterns, are being used to limit the likelihood of exposure.

Adapting to this change has largely been possible due to technology, with video conferencing, webinars and cloud-based systems all being used to keep processes going and keep businesses open. An interesting example of this was seen in China, where some construction workers were able to use remote technology enhanced by 5G connections to control

**We deserve a future built on trust, respect & compassion**



construction site machinery from the comfort of their home.

Fundamentally however, there is a belief that this experience has made us all reevaluate how we work and run our businesses. We have been able to uproot entire workforces and allow them to work from home anywhere in the country, and in some cases, outside of it too. But what does this mean for a future without a pandemic, particularly for the insurance sector, which is heavily customer facing?

Firstly, I think it is important to understand that many of the changes we have had to make in recent months have been big asks of the diversity and inclusion movement. Flexible working arrangements, remote working, job share programs and cultural adjustments have been some of the biggest recommendations for improving inclusivity in the workplace. Things that were sometimes seen as harmful to business or potentially reducing productivity, have since been proven to work and in some cases improve working environments, even if it is through difficult circumstances and government mandates.

Our own work on improving the workplace (as well as the way the profession serves its customers) is wide ranging and based on an intersectional approach. Our Insuring Women's Future's Initiative created two extremely important and popular pledges. One, the Financial Flexible Working pledge, focused on supporting female employees with financial advice when they make changes to their work structures. That was part of a wider set of recommendations for a more personalised approach to work culture. We have also partnered with Scope and published our inclusive workplaces guide for disabled people, as well as collaborating with insurers on guidance for managers with responsibility for neurodiverse employees. These guides focus on how businesses in insurance and personal finance can adapt their workplace, their work expectations, and their culture, to the needs of their employees, and the guidance in many cases is intersectional, as it focuses on improving the culture not just functions.

What this means for the future is that there is certainly hope that

employers will be more welcoming of less traditional working practices and actually be more open to working structures that suit their employees.

Secondly, we must keep driving forward the momentum on inclusion and focus on the intersectional nature of it to truly be diverse and welcoming. We have seen great strides in the gender equality movement among leaders, but we are still underperforming when it comes to disabled people (those with both seen and unseen conditions) and ethnic representation. The Black Lives Matter protests this year were a sobering reminder that the struggle for racial equality is still ongoing. I am also conscious as I write this article and we look ahead to an upcoming national strategy for disabled people from the UK government, there is still much to do for disabled people too.

As you read this article, our organisation is undergoing its own review and reporting process for diversity. We want to hold on to the positives we have seen come through this period, but also make sure we get to grips with where we are failing and where we can do better. I would certainly say that systemic change needs to happen, the catalyst is here and now, but we must be honest with ourselves and each other, we must build trust with our staff to ensure their voices and their lived experiences are heard, otherwise we will never truly change.

Finally, my vision for the future of work in the insurance profession – a profession where productivity is on the rise, barriers for access to careers and progression have been removed for everyone, and our board rooms and office floors (or virtual corridors) reflect the diverse talent of our country – is one where we embrace the role of technology in bridging the gaps in access, but value people and the benefits of empathy and other soft skills that are so needed. It might not be enough of a vision to find itself in a science fiction novel, but it is one built on trust, respect, and compassion, and it's certainly a future we all deserve. ●

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# Why this generation will fight for gender justice at work

**M**y generation will expect workplaces to go beyond diversity; we expect gender justice and we will fight for it. As students, we are constantly being told that so many of the roles we will take on in the future don't yet exist. So, we ask the question: why can't gender roles change at the same pace?

As we study, graduate, search for and find jobs, it will be all the more commonplace to demand gender justice at work, with a rejection of empty platitudes that merely attempt to mask sexist practices. There is, and will continue to be, increasing pressure to implement systemic changes that redress the historical exploitation and erasure of women and non-binary people.

We know that tinkering around the edges of change will never serve the most marginalised communities, and this surface-level appeasement does not interest us. A company whose viability depends on paying poverty wages to women of colour in the global South cannot quell us with an advertisement showcasing women "looking empowered". That is not gender justice. Nor is the existence of a lone woman on a board; representation at the top is meaningless if the lowest-paid women in an organisation are ignored.

This generation has grown up seeing the power of collective organising, whether on the Women's March or marching for Black Lives Matter. We know that change is well within our reach. We will not be absorbed by the neoliberal individualism to which older generations have been



**Representation at the top is meaningless if the lowest-paid women are ignored, says Larissa Kennedy, president of the National Union of Students**

conditioned, nor by its delayed and diluted advancement. We know that our collective power can, has, and will continue to transform the world.

Some would say that our education system is supposed to prepare us for the world of work, but what we are learning now will drive us to be the workplace trade union reps of the future. We have taken our organising might from our school strikes for climate to our university rent strikes and we, too, will organise in our workplaces.

Students fighting for equitable access to Stem courses today will be those fighting for gender justice in the workplace tomorrow, and all of this will take on an intersectional lens. In forcing workplaces to go beyond empty platitudes, we will push companies to publish disaggregated data on the pay gap, not only looking at gender divides but highlighting how this impacts women and non-binary folks at the margins – those of colour, those who are disabled and those who are LGBTQ+.

We will pick up the baton of the fight against sexual harassment in the workplace, the campaign against anti-black dress-code policies with hair requirements steeped in misogyny, and more. Where our aims cannot be realised within the workplaces available to us, we will create our own.

Living through the era of the Black Lives Matter movement, the climate justice movement and more, we are not only students of our courses, we are taking a crash course in organising for justice and liberation. These values will follow us to any job or workplace; wherever life takes us. ●



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