

Sex and power:

who runs Britain? 2006

This year's annual Sex and Power index, which looks at women's representation in senior positions across the public and private sector, coincides with the 30th anniversary of the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA). In the three decades since this groundbreaking piece of legislation came into force, there's no doubt women have made great strides.

Their numbers in Parliament, for example, have more than quadrupled. But at just under 20%, women's representation in the House of Commons is still glaringly unequal – as it is in top jobs across the board in business, media, politics and law. In the two years the EOC has been monitoring the index, there has been some progress in certain areas but generally little change.

It's time to face stark facts. Women will not make it to the top in significant numbers unless action is taken to remove the barriers that stand in their way. Without this, Britain will continue to miss out on women's skills and talents for another generation.

At the current rate, it will take...

Another **20 years** to achieve equality in civil service top management.

Another **40 years** to achieve an equal number of female directors of FTSE 100 companies.

Another **40 years** to achieve an equal number of senior women in the judiciary.

Up to **200 years** – another 40 elections – to achieve an equal number of women in Parliament.



Women. Men. Different. Equal.
Equal Opportunities Commission

The survey shows that women make up just 9% of the senior judiciary, 10% of senior police officers, and 13% of editors of national newspapers. While women are reaching critical mass in some areas, including as heads of professional bodies (33%) and national arts organisations (33%), in most fields there has been little change since the EOC first published the survey two years ago. What's more, there is considerable variation across Britain in the level of women's political representation – with some areas achieving a better balance than others.

The lack of women at the top is all the more striking given that girls now outperform boys at school, women account for nearly half the workforce, more women than men are entering higher education and high-flying professions like the law, and significant numbers of women are swelling the ranks of middle management (a third of managers and senior officials are now women).¹ Yet, only a few have broken through the glass ceiling. Of those women who have made it to the top, it is still too often the result of their exceptional strength of character and drive to achieve despite significant barriers. The barriers, however, remain very much intact.

As a result, everyone suffers. We know that the rigid, long-hours culture still makes it almost impossible for women – and an increasing number of men – to balance work and home. EOC polling² also shows that six out of ten people think balancing work and family life is harder for working women now than it was thirty years ago. While seven out of ten (69%) agreed or agreed strongly that women and men's lives are becoming more alike in terms of their need to balance work and family life.

Employers are missing out on women's talents and skills. We need to increase our productivity as a nation. Yet four in five part-time workers, overwhelmingly women, are in jobs below their potential,³ partly because of the dearth of flexible working at senior levels. Britain's politics are also failing to reflect the world we live in. So it's in the interests of everyone to play their part in removing these barriers by transforming the workplace and political life, delivering real and lasting change.

Thirty years after the SDA, it is time for proactive action by employers and politicians, and for a modernisation of the law. Change cannot be achieved by simply relying on individuals to push themselves forward or take legal cases when things go wrong.

The EOC is calling for:

- **All political parties to take positive action now** – before the next election – to improve women's representation in Parliament.
- **More high-quality, highly-paid flexible and part-time work** at all levels, including the highest ranks, to empower working mums and dads to have a real choice about the time they spend with their families.
- **A modernisation of the law** so that employers in the private sector are required to promote sex equality and eliminate sex discrimination, starting with a diagnostic 'equality check' to identify whether there is a pay gap and what action is needed. This change in the law is similar to a new duty on public sector employers expected to come into force in April 2007.

Social attitudes outpace change

The way we live our lives is changing dramatically, and work and politics have not caught up. Thirty years after the SDA, women are nearly half the workforce and half of women with young children now work.¹ The legislation has largely delivered women the right to live like men did three decades ago – with long hours, and caring and parenting undervalued. But increasingly, both men and women are beginning to question why they should have to sacrifice their family and personal lives to make it to the top and to question the traditional assumption that it is women who should carry out the caring role.

EOC research⁴ has shown that almost eight out of ten working fathers (79%) would be happy to stay at home and look after their baby, while almost nine out of ten (87%) men felt as confident as their partner when caring for their child. Two decades ago more than half of men (52%) believed a father's job was that of provider while the mother's place was in the home. That percentage has shrunk to just 20%.⁵

But these attitudinal changes are straining against the barriers that still exist for women and men at work and at home. EOC polling has shown that more than six out of ten people (62%) are concerned about spending enough time with their family, more than are concerned about the quality of their local schools and health services.² In short, the balance between work and family life is moving up the political agenda. The private choices that women and men make about the way they live their lives are becoming public policy issues. This will be a key factor driving the kinds of choices men and women are making, both when they look for a job and choose a candidate at the ballot box.

Ethnic minority women in 'top jobs'

- While 121 Directorships in FTSE100 companies are held by women, only four Directorships (3.3%) are held by women from an ethnic minority background.
- As of April 2005, there were five ethnic minority women (2.6%) in Senior Civil Service top management.
- Only 2.2% of women councillors in England are from ethnic minority groups.
- Out of 127 female MPs, there are only two ethnic minority women, and there are no Asian women MPs. Baroness Amos is the only member of the Cabinet who is an ethnic minority woman.
- Neither the Scottish Parliament nor the National Assembly for Wales has any ethnic minority women members.
- In England and Wales there is only one ethnic minority woman recorded in the senior judiciary, a high court judge. In addition, there are another 34 ethnic minority women at lower levels.

Sources: Cranfield University School of Management (2005) Make-up of UK Boards still not diverse enough, says new research, Press Release 23 November 2005; Cabinet Office; Employers Organisation for Local Government (2005) National census of local authority councillors' in England 2004: Results by gender, ethnicity and position; BBC News (2005) Record number of new minority MPs, News Item 10 May 2005; Scottish Parliament; National Assembly for Wales; Department for Constitutional Affairs (2005) Minority ethnic judges in post as at 1 October 2005.

Politics needs women

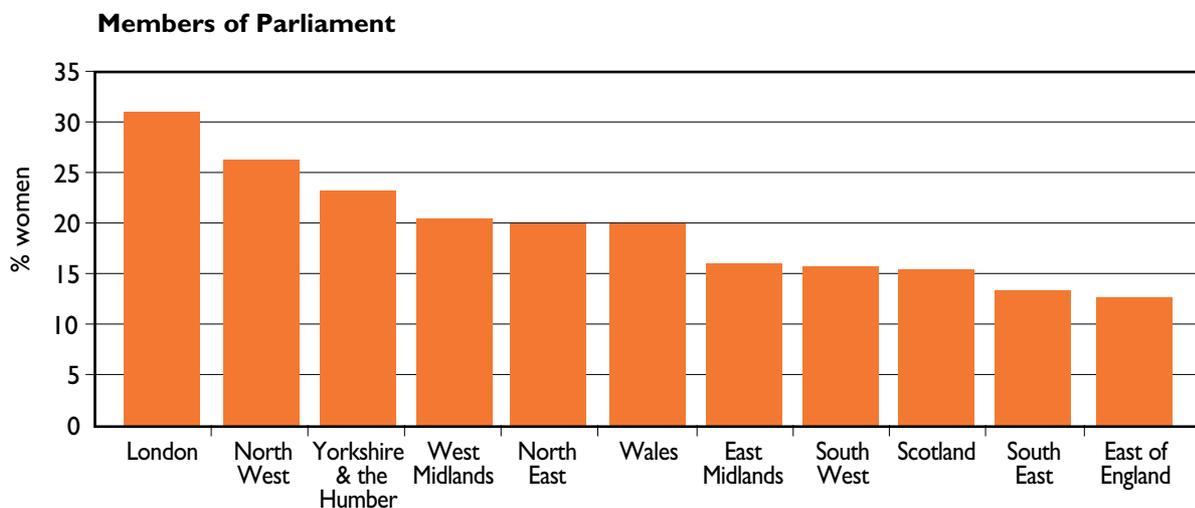
A healthy democracy is one which represents the interests of all of its people, and that is hard to achieve if sections of the community are relatively excluded. Perhaps this is one factor explaining why turnout in elections has been falling. A better balance also makes electoral sense for individual parties. Electoral Commission research showed that in seats where a woman MP was elected to Parliament in 2001 higher percentages of both women and men reported having voted compared with seats where a man was elected.⁶

Such findings are significant at a time when the main parties are battling for women's votes, and levels of cynicism are at an all-time high, while the engagement of younger voters is at an all-time low. That may be why the under-representation of women in the Conservative party has been one of the key issues beginning to receive urgent attention if they are to win back the thousands of female voters who first deserted them in 1997 and again in 2005.⁷ But all party leaders not only need to address the imbalance in numbers, they also need to engage with policies that will help them appeal to women.

Balanced representation won't happen without positive action. EOC research has shown that although women entering politics have similar levels of experience, 44% are aware of prejudice or sex discrimination in the selection process and more than half agree that male candidates are favoured by selection committees.⁸ There are a number of ways to tackle the problem, such as twinning, zipping⁹ and the use of quotas, as well as women-only shortlists. In 2002 the SDA was amended to exempt political parties' selection procedures in order to make it legal for them to take positive action. But the window of opportunity provided by the legislation expires in 2015, when a 'sunset clause' comes into effect. There is no guarantee that this legislation will be renewed.

If political parties want to deliver balanced representation, improve their engagement with the electorate and win women's votes they have to act now – before it's too late.

Women's representation: who's getting it right?



Source: Compiled by the EOC from listings on UK Parliament website and BBC News website.

The Labour Party has adopted women-only shortlists and, as a result, is significantly ahead of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats in terms of the equitable representation of women in Parliament. If this continues, the difference between Labour and the other parties will become all the more striking. Parties that do not take action risk suffering for it at the ballot box. Currently, 27% of Labour MPs are women (76% of all women MPs are from the Labour party).¹⁰ Only by adopting similar policies can the other two parties begin quickly to bridge the divide.

Both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats have begun to realise this. Of Liberal Democrat candidates in 'winnable seats' selected in 2005, 40% were women,¹¹ but still only nine of their 62 MPs are women.¹⁰ Before the last election the Conservative Party tried to institute a more objective and open selection process, but this has had little impact with fewer than 10% of their MPs now women.¹⁰

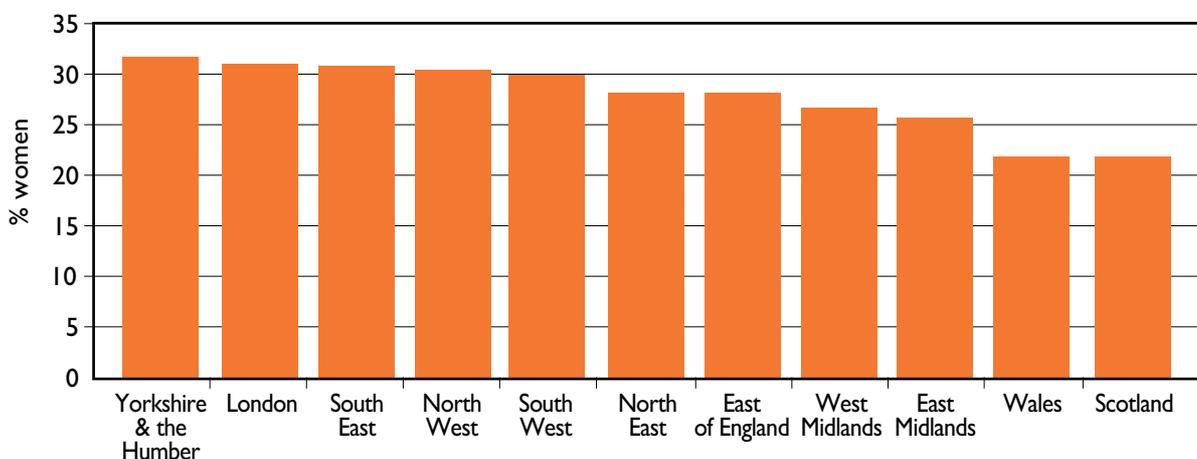
Both parties need to go much further. Similarly for Labour, this is no time for complacency, not least

because the diversity of the women candidates they have selected is still very limited: they only have two black women MPs and there are no Asian women MPs in the House of Commons. Despite progress, we are still a long way from balanced representation in Parliament. Only in the Welsh Assembly has gender parity been achieved. In the Scottish Parliament the proportion of women MSPs is now almost 40%, although there are no black and ethnic minority representatives in either the Assembly or the Scottish Parliament.

From an international perspective, it's clear that positive action works. **The UK, which currently ranks 54th, is outperformed by Rwanda, Iraq and Afghanistan in terms of women's representation.**¹² None of the countries topping the international list with a more than 30% representation of women in government has achieved this without positive action. The EOC wants to see a significant increase in the number of women, including black and ethnic minority women, disabled women, lesbian women, and women of different ages and faiths selected by political parties to stand for election to Parliament.

But 200 years is too long to wait.

Local authority councillors



NB Percentages of those reporting gender.

Sources: Employers' Organisation for Local Government (2005) National census of local authority councillors' in England 2004; COSLA (2003) Scotland's Councillors 2003, press release 5 December 2003; Welsh Local Government Association (2005) Census of local Authority Councillors 2004 – Wales an overview.

The bottom line: it's good for business

Sex inequality damages Britain's productivity. Women's skills are under-used in an economy which combines a growing number of low-paid, part-time jobs with increasing inflexibility and a long-hours culture at the top. Women, and an increasing number of men, are prevented from working at a high level on a flexible and/or part-time basis. Too many women, many of whom are working part-time, are in low-paid, low-skilled work. EOC research has found that 5.6 million part-time workers, many of whom are women, are working in jobs below their potential.³

Barrier breakers

Trade Unions (1985)

Baroness Dean became the first woman to head a major trade union when she became General Secretary of SOGAT '82 in 1985.

Law (1988)

Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss was the first woman appointed as Lord Justice of Appeal in 1988. She later served as President of the Family Division of the UK High Court, and was also the first woman to hold that position.

Politics (1992)

Baroness Boothroyd, a long-serving Labour MP, was elected the first woman Speaker in 1992. She held the position for eight years before stepping down in 2000.

Armed Forces (1995)

Cynthia Fowler became the first female Air Commodore in 1995, serving at first in Personnel and Training Command and then, from 1996, as Director of Recruiting and Selection. She retired in 2000 after 36 years of service.

Media (1996)

Rosie Boycott, founder of the iconic 1970s feminist magazine, *Spare Rib*, was named editor of *The Independent on Sunday* in 1996, and *The Independent* and *Daily Express* in 1998; she was the first woman to edit a national broadsheet.

Business (1997)

Dame Marjorie Scardino, the first female chief executive of a FTSE 100 company, has been the chief executive of Pearson, the international education and media business including the Financial Times Group, since 1997. Previously, she was chief executive of the Economist Group.

Our Pregnancy Discrimination Investigation¹³ found that 30,000 women each year are sacked, made redundant or leave their jobs due to pregnancy discrimination. Almost half (45%) of women who had worked while pregnant said they experienced some form of discrimination because of their pregnancy. Unless the current situation changes, one million pregnant women are likely to experience discrimination at work over the next five years. Yet only 3% of them lodge a claim at employment tribunal. This represents a massive loss to the UK economy in terms of wasted skills and talents, but also proves that the individual cannot be expected to tackle it alone.

Economic projections show women playing an increasing part in the workforce. To steal a march on their competitors, employers will need to be in a position to take advantage of the workforce of the future. Those who are ahead of the game will get the most out of their employees by creating the kind of workplace that allows them to fulfil their potential. But the UK has a long way to go.

In comparison with other high-skill, high-wage G7 economies, the UK's productivity is low. In 2004 the USA and France respectively had 24% and 11% higher productivity per worker than the UK.¹⁴ In an increasingly globalised economy Britain cannot compete with emerging competitors such as China and India as a low-wage economy. Equally, just as customers and clients are diverse, so too should be top management in order to anticipate best their needs and interests. The quality of the UK's workforce will be its competitive edge, and working practices have to change to ensure that everyone – men and women alike – can fulfil their potential, deliver business benefits and drive up UK productivity. Many forward-thinking employers are already seeing these benefits.

However, the pace of change is too slow. Britain's equality laws date back to the last century and are based on the idea that equality can be achieved by individuals taking Employment Tribunal cases. We are about to see the biggest step forward in sex equality for 30 years – a new proactive duty on the public sector to promote equality and eliminate discrimination between women and men both as an employer and as a public service provider. The EOC is calling for a similar requirement to be placed on the private sector but only in relation to employment. They would be required to start with a diagnostic 'equality check' to identify whether there is a pay gap and then take action where it was needed. Without a modernisation of the law, change is unlikely to happen. EOC research shows that employer action on closing the pay gap has stalled with two-thirds of employers having no plans to check whether they pay fairly.¹⁵

This change would turn best practice into common practice, ensuring that employers tackle the barriers to progress that don't just hold women back but hold back their businesses too.

The international perspective: how does the UK stack up?

- **The UK ranks 54th out of 187 countries** for women's representation in National Parliaments, behind Mozambique, Iraq, Mexico and Tunisia. Rwanda leads the world with 48.8% women in the Lower House.
- **The UK is in 12th place out of 30 countries in Europe,** behind Latvia, Poland and Bulgaria, for women serving in the highest level of the civil service.
- **The UK is 20th out of 26 countries in Europe,** behind Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia, in the percentage of women in the most senior judiciary in the supreme courts.

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2005) Women in National Parliaments, situation as of 30 November 2005; European Commission (2005) Database on women and men in decision-making.

Sex and power: who runs Britain 2006

Indicator	2003 % women	2004 % women	2005 % women	Average Annual Change 2003–2005*
Politics: women's average representation = 28%				
Members of Parliament ¹⁶	18.1%	18.1%	19.7%	0.8pp
The Cabinet ¹⁷	23.8%	27.3%	27.3%	1.7pp
Members of the House of Lords ¹⁸	16.5%	17.7%	18.4%	0.9pp
Members of the Scottish Parliament ¹⁹	39.5%	39.5%	39.5%	None
Members of the National Assembly for Wales ²⁰	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	None
Local authority council leaders ²¹	n/a	16.6%	16.2%	–0.4pp
UK Members of the European Parliament ²²	24.1%	24.4%	24.4%	0.1pp
Business: women's average representation = 12%				
Directors in FTSE100 companies (executive and non-executive directors) ²³	8.6%	9.7%	10.5%	1.0pp
Small businesses with women the majority of directors ²⁴	12.3%	14.4%	n/a	2.1pp
Media & culture: women's average representation = 17%				
Chief executives of media companies in the FTSE 350, and DG of the BBC ²⁵	7.4%	4.3%	9.5%	1.1pp
Editors of national newspapers, including the Glasgow Herald and Western Mail ²⁶	9.1%	9.1%	13.0%	2.0pp
Directors of major museums and art galleries ²⁷	21.1%	21.1%	21.7%	0.3pp
Chairs of national arts companies ²⁸	27.3%	27.3%	33.3%	3.0pp
Chief executives of national sports bodies ²⁹	14.3%	6.3%	6.7%	–3.8pp

Indicator	2003 % women	2004 % women	2005 % women	Average Annual Change 2003–2005*
Public & voluntary sectors: women's average representation = 23%				
Public appointments ³⁰	35.7%	35.9%	35.0%	–0.4pp
Local authority chief executives ³¹	13.1%	12.4%	17.5%	2.2pp
Senior ranks in the armed forces ³²	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%	0.1pp
Senior police officers (ACPO/ACPOS) ³³	7.6%	8.3%	10.2%	1.3pp
Senior judiciary, high court judge and above ³⁴	6.8%	8.3%	8.8%	1.0pp
Civil Service top management ³⁵	22.9%	24.4%	25.5%	1.3pp
Chief executives of voluntary organisations ³⁶	45.2%	45.4%	45.2%	None
Head teachers in secondary schools ³⁷	30.1%	31.8%	n/a	1.7pp
FE college principals ³⁸	25.8%	28.6%	n/a	2.8pp
University vice chancellors ³⁹	12.4%	15.0%	11.1%	–0.6pp
Health service chief executives ⁴⁰	28.6%	27.7%	28.1%	–0.2pp
Trade Union general secretaries or equivalent ⁴¹	18.3%	16.9%	22.4%	2.0pp
Heads of professional bodies ⁴²	16.7%	25.0%	33.3%	8.3pp

* The average annual change is the average change per year between 2003 and 2005 or, where statistics for all three years are not available, the change between 2003 and 2004 or between 2004 and 2005; the abbreviations pp = percentage points and n/a = not available.

NB The statistics in this index have been selected to represent positions considered to have power or influence in Britain. As far as possible these relate to Great Britain or the United Kingdom, with the obvious exceptions of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. For each statistic included, the percentage of women has either been taken directly from the source or calculated from the actual numbers of women and men. A summary index has also been calculated for each of the four areas: politics, business, media & culture, public & voluntary sectors. The summary shows women's representation in each area, calculated as a simple average of the most recent percentage figures for each indicator within the area.

Then & Now: 30 years of the SDA

In the 1970s

Only around half of pregnant women worked in 1979. Of those who worked, less than a quarter (24%) went back to work within eight months of giving birth.⁴³

Nearly half of women with dependent children were employed in 1973.⁴⁵

In 1975 the full-time gender pay gap was 29% and the part-time gender pay gap was 42%.⁴⁷

There were twice as many male as female students in higher education in 1970/71.⁴⁹

and now

Around two-thirds of pregnant women work. In 2002, around seven in ten women who worked during pregnancy returned to work for the same or a different employer in the first year.⁴⁴

Two-thirds (66%) of women with dependent children work.⁴⁶

The full-time gender pay gap is 17%, but the part-time pay gap has changed little and is now 38%.⁴⁸

There are now more women than men in higher education.⁵⁰

'Top jobs' in the 1970s

In 1974, 2% of managers were women and less than 1% of Directors were women.⁵¹

Following the October 1974 General Election, there were only 27 women MPs, or 4.3% of MPs.⁵³

Women could join separate 'women's services', but many jobs were only open to men.⁵⁵

There were no women senior police officers in 1975.⁵⁶

In 1971, 3% of Deputy Secretaries in the Civil Service were women, but there were no women Permanent Secretaries, Under Secretaries or Executive Directors.⁵⁷

There were no women editors of national tabloids or broadsheets.⁵⁹

and now

A third (33.1%) of managers are women. One in seven Directors (14.4%) is a woman.⁵²

There are now 127 women MPs, or 19.7% of MPs.⁵⁴

The first women were appointed to senior ranks in the RAF, Army and Royal Navy in 1995, 1999 and 2002 respectively. There are currently four women in these ranks.⁵⁵

One in ten senior police officers is a woman.⁵⁶

A quarter of top managers in the Civil Service are women.⁵⁸

Of 23 editors of national newspapers, three are women.⁵⁹

Notes and sources for main text

- 1 Hurrell, K (2005) *Facts about women and men in Britain 2005*.
- 2 ICM interviewed a random sample of 2015 adults aged 18+, by telephone between 26 and 30 October 2005. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Further information at: <http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/>
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Twinning: neighbouring seats are twinned, taking into account their winnability. Each pair selects one man and one woman. The members of the two constituencies select candidates together and can each vote for one man and one woman. The top man and the top woman are selected and decide between them who should have which seat.
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