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Gender Pay Gap

Awareness is rising but is anything really changing?



Recent studies report gender equality at work has barely improved in 10 years, with young women potentially not realising real workplace equality before retirement. Today's young women will be waiting decades to see a real difference. With progress so slow, young women will be retired before equality in the workplace becomes a reality.

The Gender Equality Index 2017, published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) published earlier this month, revealed that gender equality at work across the EU as a whole had improved little between 2005 and 2015. The report measured gender equality at work using several factors, including the proportion of women in full-time employment, the availability of flexible-working arrangements and career prospects. Yet despite these disappointing conclusions, the UK was placed fourth for gender equality at work out of all 28 EU member states, only being outranked by Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands.

The report also found that, when taking into account a range of issues such as money, free time and power, the UK had made little progress on gender equality overall during the last 10 years. The UK's gender equality for knowledge, which considers participation in education and training, was found to have declined over the 10-year period, although the country still ranked third on this overall.

Director of the EIGE, Virginija Langbakk said 'we are moving forward at a snail's pace, still a long way off from reaching a gender-equal society and all countries in the European Union have room to improve.'

Meanwhile, the women and equalities minister, Justine Greening told parliament earlier this month that more could be done to improve the UK's gender pay gap. Speaking in the House of Commons, she said: 'The gender pay gap is the lowest it has ever been, but we can do better. We have introduced mandatory gender pay gap reporting for the first time and large employers now have six months left to report their gender pay gaps.'

Since April, organisations with more than 250 staff must publish details of their gender pay gap. However, only 128 employers out of an estimated 9,000 have published their figures so far. Last month, Greening told the Financial Times Women at the top summit that she would like businesses to expedite their plans to report their pay gaps.

A study published by Mercer in August revealed that the biggest reason businesses are discouraged from revealing their pay gap is because the rules are too complicated. 41 per cent of the 165 companies surveyed said they found the process complex, while 28 per cent said the rules were misleading.

One in 10 employers admit to paying women less than men for jobs of the same level, a survey by YouGov revealed. The survey, carried out on behalf of the charity Young Women's Trust, suggests that gender pay differentials span all levels of employment, with female apprentices paid, on average, 21 per cent less than their male counterparts – leaving them £2,000 a year worse-off.

The media spotlight has been fixed on the gender pay gap issue after the BBC revealed details of employees who earn more than £150,000 per year which highlighted a huge difference between the men and women carrying out similar duties, and the number of men in more highly paid roles than women. However, nearly half of the 800 HR decision-makers questioned in the YouGov survey said publishing pay gaps would not make a difference to pay, while a fifth said equal pay will never be achieved. The findings also revealed that, despite there often being an air of secrecy around the discussion of pay, 10 per cent of respondents in the private sector and 13 per cent in the public sector said they were aware of women being paid less in their workplace.

Chloé Chambrud, gender research and policy manager at Business in the Community, said the survey findings were 'shocking, but sadly not surprising, although unequal pay has been illegal since 1970, our research shows that nearly half of female

employees believe that it is currently happening in their organisation,' she added.

'While it is understandable – if disappointing – that employers may have a gender pay gap for various reasons, such as women being concentrated in lower-paid roles and sectors, it is unacceptable to see that so many employers are still tolerating unequal pay issues in 2017.'

Chambrud said publishing pay data would help employers to understand where and why any gender pay gaps existed, and enable them to take action. 'However, simply publishing a set of figures is not a magic bullet,' she admitted. 'Employers need to understand those causes – including whether unequal pay is a contributing factor – to tackle it.'

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