

Penny Mordaunt sets out plan to empower UK women

- Women & Equalities Minister today sets out plans to financially empower women from school to retirement
- Measures will include a review of enforcement of equal pay legislation and improved information for parents around family friendly entitlements
- New chair and remit for the Women's Business Council will also be announced, working with sectors to tackle their gender pay gaps

Despite generally doing better in education, women are more than three times more likely to work part time – with less chance of seeing their wages grow, tend to work in lower paid industries and jobs, and have lower private pensions wealth.

Speaking to stakeholders this morning, the Minister for Women and Equalities will say:

“I want everyone in our country to be able to thrive in life. That means being able to be in control of the choices you make and have the opportunities you have to seize. We must be honest that many women do not have those choices or opportunities, and as a consequence are not able to be as financially resilient or independent”.

“This inequality is faced at every stage of a woman's life – from how she is treated in the classroom, to the caring roles she often takes on, and the lack of savings or pension she accumulates. This road map is intended to define and guide how we tackle the barriers women face as they journey through life.

“I'm confident today's announcement will be the first step in a long-term commitment by this government to empower everyone in this country, helping them truly reach their full potential, from birth to retirement.”

The decisions made at every stage of a woman's life – from the subjects she studies at school, to taking time out of work to care for relatives – accumulate over time and impact on her financial independence when she retires.

67% of girls aged 11-21 think that women do not have the same chances as men. 60% of boys aged 15-16 thought their best subject was a STEM subject, compared to only 33% of girls. However, in reality, girls tend to outperform boys in STEM subjects at GCSE. We will pilot different approaches to education about gender roles, spending £2 million so children will learn about different careers at primary school age and invest in programmes to increase participation in STEM subjects.

When they begin their working lives, it is important that both men and women are supported to balance their job and their home life. The government will therefore look at how we can continue to better support organisations in

delivering family friendly policies, through the largest upgrade to workers' rights in a generation.

The government recognises that carers play a vital role – 60% [2.7 million] of the estimated 4.5 million total informal carers are women. This government made a manifesto commitment to consult on a new right to carers' leave, as enjoyed in many other countries.

If a couple splits, we want to ensure women don't struggle when they retire. Sadly, 42% of marriages end in divorce, but only 36% of asset sharing agreements include sharing of pensions – this means women lose out on financial security later in life. Government will be updating the online divorce process to ensure couples are aware of the benefits of pension sharing.

Chartered Management Institute CEO, Ann Francke, said:

"Gender inequality is a complex issue with many causes rooted throughout education, society, culture and the workplace. The Government's Gender Equality Roadmap acknowledges this; and breaks down the problem into its many component parts, aiming to offer practical solutions and success measures for each.

"It's ambitious, comprehensive and collaborative. Well-executed it is a potential game changer and an excellent source of practical insight, policies and advice to help all UK organisations go further, faster to achieve gender balance."

Chief Operating Officer of FDM Group, Sheila Flavell, said:

"It's inspiring to see a cross-government initiative designed to address gender inequality in the workplace. This proactive approach is critical for tackling issues such as pay gap discrepancies, unconscious discrimination and the barriers which all too often prevent people from getting ahead in their careers. It's vital that these issues are addressed to ensure men and women can progress without missing out, whilst juggling a busy career and home life."

A refreshed Women's Business Council (WBC) will also launch as part of today's announcement, with a new chair, Fiona Dawson, the Global President of Mars Food, Drinks and Multisales. The WBC will focus on tackling individual sectors to ensure they are closing their gender pay gaps and that female staff have the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

New Chair of the Women's Business Council, Fiona Dawson, said:

"I am delighted to take over as Chair of the WBC, building on the terrific work led by Dame Cilla during her tenure.

"The plan announced by the government today gives us a fantastic opportunity to renew the fight for women's equality, and it will be my immediate priority to ensure that our partners are doing everything in their power to help women progress in the workplace."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The Government Equalities Office is also undertaking a piece of work with key representative bodies, business leaders and the thriving third sector to ensure continued activity to address the barriers outlined in the roadmap and to bring women's voices into the heart of policy making.

Statistics:

- Girls are slightly more likely to get a top grade in maths GCSE, but boys are over 50% more likely to take maths at A Level.
- On average women enter the labour market with higher qualifications than men – but earn less per hour from the start.
- By the time their first child is 12, mothers' average hourly wages are a third below fathers'.
- Women live longer, but women aged 55 to 64 are almost 20% less likely to have a private pension, and those who do have almost 40% less wealth in their pension.

To ensure women are safe in the workplace, government is also taking forward measures to tackle sexual harassment – shortly launching a consultation to ensure legislation is up to scratch. This will include strengthening and clarifying the laws on third party harassment, exploring whether protections need to be extended to interns and volunteers, and examining whether the three month time limit for workplace discrimination and harassment cases needs to be extended.

Sitting alongside the plan, an annual Gender Equality Monitor will bring together metrics from across government to monitor important gender equality issues in the UK and help hold all parties, including government, to account. An interactive tool to make the data more accessible will be launched next year.

The Government will be announcing further progress on implementing its Good Work Plan this summer, including providing support to working families and vulnerable workers. The Good Work Plan comes as the latest response to the independent Taylor Review of impact modern working practices (2017). The review found that the strength of the UK's labour market is built on flexibility but that a clearer focus was needed on quality of work as well as the quantity of jobs.