

Half of women cite a shortage of inspirational female figures in their workplace

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51% of female professionals in the UK experience a lack of inspirational female leaders in their company. This is despite the 2025 FTSE Women Leaders Review finding that women now occupy over 43% of roles on company boards, as well as 35% of leadership roles in 350 FTSE companies.

In light of this year's International Women's Day (Saturday 8 March 2025) theme of 'accelerate action' – global talent solutions provider [Robert Walters](#) releases new poll data highlighting the barriers women continue to face at work.

Habiba Khatoon, Director of Robert Walters Midlands comments: "While visibility challenges persist, the landscape is evolving. Companies are increasingly aware of the need for inclusive role models, and while they are beginning to implement strategies, this needs to be continued to ensure women's advancement is supported at every career stage."

Lack of role models

Half of female professionals say they lack inspiring female figures at work – with one-fifth saying they have no such examples, and 30% mentioning that they 'hardly ever' encounter them.

Visibility isn't the only hurdle; women face substantial obstacles in climbing the corporate ladder – captured by '[glass ceiling](#)' and '[broken rung](#)' theories.

Robert Walters' findings show over a third (37%) of women feel their hard work isn't equally recognised or

rewarded compared to male peers.

Habiba comments: “The increase in female leaders on company boards and leadership roles in FTSE companies is a sign of positive change. Yet more diverse voices need to be heard in senior leadership to attain greater equality in the workplace and ensure that all professionals feel represented.”

Corporate culture at a crossroads

Further hampering this, only last month Meta CEO, Mark Zuckerberg sparked controversy for his comments on corporate culture becoming ‘neutered’ and needing more ‘masculine energy’.

It is clear these comments symbolise a growing rift in many workplaces – in the Robert Walters poll, over two-fifths (48%) of professionals agreed with Zuckerberg’s comments that traditional corporate attitudes have become subdued. While 52% of professionals disagreed, thinking that corporate culture has evolved for the better.

Habiba adds: “Zuckerberg’s comments touch on an important discussion around the direction of workplace culture. However, making associations with ‘male’ and ‘female’ energies creates an ‘us vs them’ attitude rather than resulting in any meaningful improvements being made.”

Advancement stalled

Issues around culture and visibility aren’t the only thing holding women back. The UK’s gender pay gap currently stands at 13.1%, which means that on average, women work up to 7 weeks for free each year ([source](#)).

Yet when female professionals try to advance their position at work – many (46%) state they are met with inadequate opportunities or support from their employer.

Habiba comments: “The Government’s Employment Rights Bill has included greater checks on the efforts large companies are making to close the gender pay gap – doing so will not only ensure more women have equal access to fair pay but will raise GDP and overall work standards across the UK.”

Ramping up support

Research from Simplyhealth revealed that [3.5 million](#) women considered quitting their jobs due to a lack of menopause support whilst findings from the Fawcett Society, found that [one in ten](#) working mothers leave work due to challenges with balancing responsibilities.

Similarly, Robert Walters research found that the top three most important workplace benefits to female professionals were:

1. Relevant professional or personal development programmes – (40%*)
2. Childcare & family-planning benefits e.g. childcare allowance, flexi-work (34%*)
3. Menopause / menstruation leave (21%*)

*Percentage of women who cited this as a key workplace benefit for them.

Habiba comments: "Personal development plans should be designed to address the specific challenges faced by women at work. Aspects like providing flexible work options for caregiving responsibilities, setting realistic and achievable targets as well as providing women experiencing menopause leave options that don't jeopardise their career growth."