POWERful WOMEN

Hosted by the Energy Institute

Leaders' Coalition Report

2026

In collaboration with

NORTH HIGHLAND



Image Credit: ©Shell



"We are fortunate and humbled to lead in a sector so essential to people's lives, national prosperity and security, and with such potential to create good jobs.

We face the immense challenge of transforming our energy systems and infrastructure at unprecedented pace. AI, used responsibly, will help us deliver that transformation, yet technology often develops faster than organisations can adapt. As leaders, we must think critically and systematically about where AI and other technologies can add value, and where human capabilities will make the difference: creativity, judgement, empathy, collaboration and the ability to connect ideas across complex systems.

The scale of the task is enormous. We must recruit, train and upskill accordingly, drawing on every available pool of talent. We will need all talents to succeed. The Leaders' Coalition is committed to ensuring they can contribute and thrive."

Miya Paolucci
POWERful Women
Leaders' Coalition Chair
and UK CEO, ENGIE

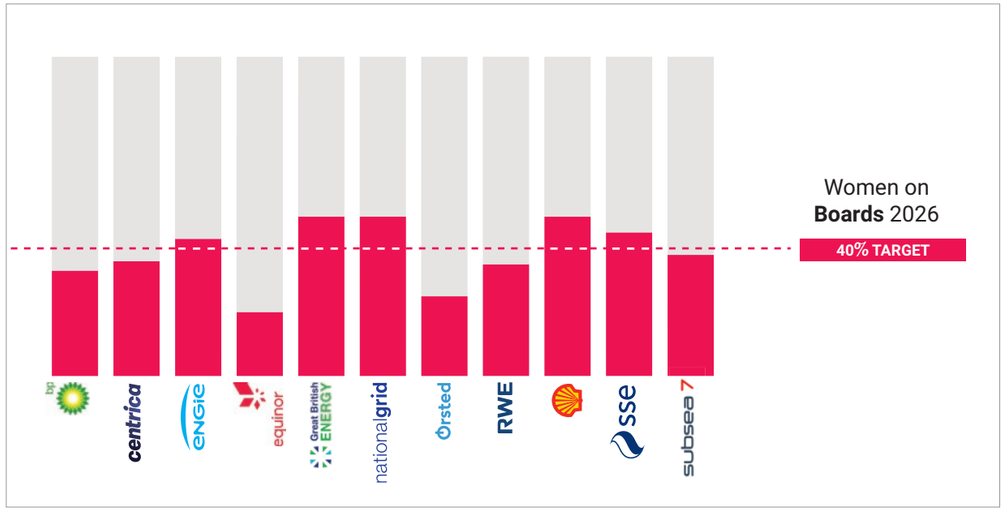
Leaders' Coalition 2026 Annual Report

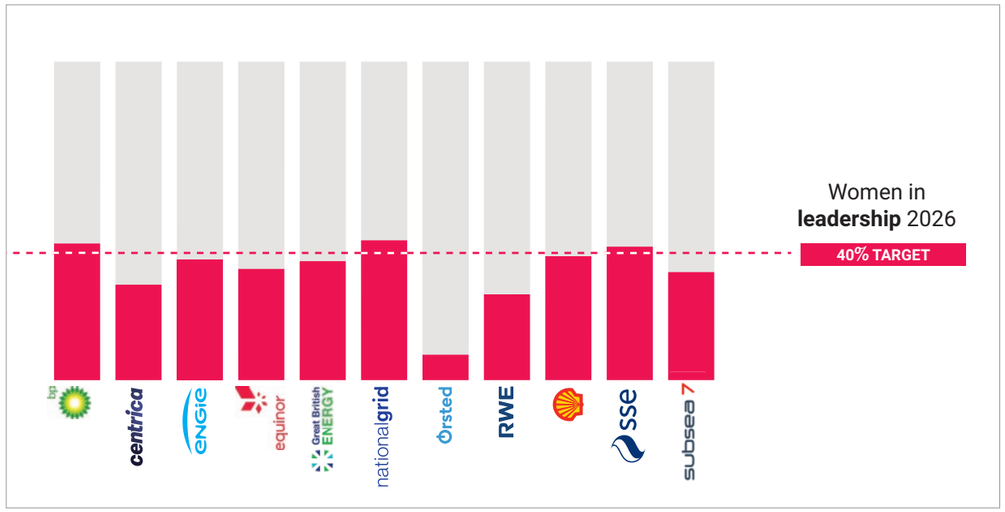
Foreword

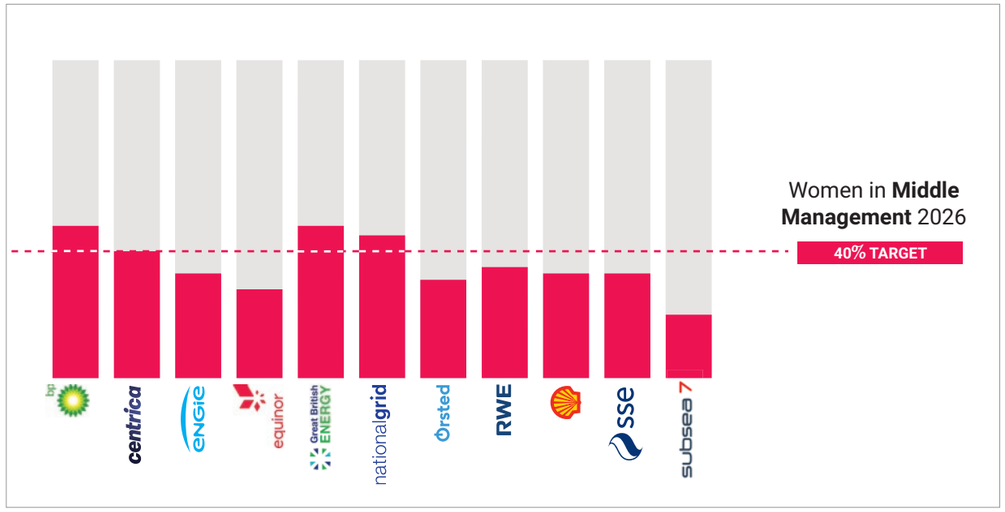
POWERful Women's Leaders' Coalition was established in May 2018, when eight companies publicly committed to improving gender balance within their organisations and across the energy sector. Almost a decade later, that purpose remains unchanged. Yet, as the sector's infrastructure has transformed, one priority must remain at the heart of its future: the people who make that transformation possible.

Central to POWERful Women's mission and the Coalition's commitment is the target for women to hold at least 40% of leadership and middle management roles in the UK energy sector by 2030. As we look towards 2030, the opportunity is to use what we have learned to accelerate what comes next. The experiences of Coalition members show where progress is possible, where barriers persist and where action at one stage of a career can unlock opportunity at another.

As the charts on the right show, many of the Leaders' Coalition companies have met our target at some or all levels, demonstrating what is possible when organisations and senior leaders commit to change. Sustaining that progress means learning from experience and keeping the workforce at the centre of transformation: attracting people into the sector, supporting them throughout their careers and creating opportunities for them to thrive.







This year, the Leaders' Coalition has recognised that meaningful progress requires deliberate choices.

We cannot build the workforce of tomorrow while leaving today's barriers to talent unchallenged. Nor can we assume that ambition, policies or isolated initiatives will, on their own, deliver lasting change.

The Coalition has therefore focused on the full career journey: how women come IN to the sector, get ON in their careers and move UP into positions of leadership and influence.

This report brings together practical experience from across POWERful Women's Leaders' Coalition to explore how commitments can translate into meaningful outcomes for people and organisations. The case studies show these challenges in practice, bringing together actions, outcomes and lessons that others can adapt to their own workforce. The accompanying toolkits turn those lessons into practical starting points, from actions organisations can begin now to approaches they can grow and scale.

The examples shared here demonstrate why that journey must be considered as a whole. Widening recruitment matters, but so does the experience people have once they join. Flexible working creates opportunities only when employees can use it without compromising their progression. Development programmes must connect to sponsorship, career opportunities and fair access to the experiences that prepare people to lead.

A consistent message runs through these pages: progress depends on changing systems and everyday decisions, rather than simply asking women to navigate them differently. Leaders must examine how talent is recognised, how work is organised and how opportunities are allocated, and take responsibility for the outcomes. Keeping people at the centre means making these commitments part of everyday working life.

The report also recognises the limits of action within individual organisations. Employers alone cannot remove the barriers that shape education and career choices, develop the full range of future skills or align national workforce planning with the ambitions of the energy transition. Competing for the same limited pool of talent is no substitute for growing it together.

This is where the Coalition's collective role is essential: sharing learning, connecting effective approaches and bringing employers' experience into stronger partnerships with government, education and the wider industry.

Responsible AI adoption is part of this same agenda. The challenge is not simply to embrace new tools, but to ensure they support the human workforce and widen opportunity rather than reinforce existing inequalities. AI poorly implemented can reinforce biases and polarisation of the debate; it can lead to obvious disruptions and diverse risks ranging from loss of competence to cyberattacks. As organisations reshape how work is done in the future, transparency, meaningful human oversight and access to new skills must remain central. Technological progress must go hand in hand with investment in people.

We thank the Coalition members who have shared their experiences and learning. Their openness gives others a practical foundation to adapt, test and build upon, not as a single blueprint, but as a starting point for meaningful action.

Our invitation to readers is simple: Use this report to identify what you can change now, what you can strengthen next and where working together can achieve more than acting alone.

The next chapter must go beyond demonstrating commitment. It must translate that commitment into careers, opportunities and leadership, with the human workforce at the heart of every decision. By acting together and investing in people, we can build an energy sector equipped for the future.



Image Credit: Ole Jørgen Bratland / ©Equinor

POWERful Women Leaders' Coalition
A unique collaboration.

When leaders act with conviction, change accelerates. The POWERful Women Leaders' Coalition brings energy organisations together around a shared commitment to a more representative and inclusive energy sector.

Every commitment is more than a pledge. It is a personal promise from the leaders of organisations to be visible, accountable and vocal, sharing experience, challenging barriers and helping turn ambition into action.

Thank you to all Leaders' Coalition members who shared their insight, evidence and learning for this report, with special recognition to **bp, ENGIE, Great British Energy, National Grid, RWE, SSE, Subsea7** and the other organisations whose stories bring these lessons to life.

POWERful Women also thanks North Highland for its partnership in developing and producing the report, translating collective learning into practical insight and action for the wider sector.



Image Credit: Ole Jørgen Bratland /©Equnior

PART 1

IN, ON and UP

Evidence-backed case studies organised around the Coalition's IN, ON and UP framework, showcasing how member organisations are attracting, retaining and advancing women across the sector by:

Bringing more women **IN** to the sector

Supporting women to stay **ON** and thrive

Accelerating progression **UP** into leadership

Image Credit: ©National Grid

Reimagining how women enter and re-enter the energy sector

01

UP

IN ON



Image Credit: ©Equinor/Dogger Bank Wind Farm

The greatest loss of female talent in the Energy sector happens well before women reach the top, The World Economic Forum finds the steepest decline occurs early in the career pipeline.

2026 data shows women are also 55% more likely than men to take a career break and more than 4x as likely to take one for full-time parenting[41]. With the sector-wide need for 312,300 new workers, nearly a third more than today's workforce, by 2030[25], continuing to recruit from a narrow and familiar talent pool will constrain both gender representation and the sector's ability to deliver the energy transition.

Across the POWERful Women Leaders' Coalition, members are showing how this can change. Their experience points to this central lesson: widen the definition of talent and design the route IN with early and mid-career talent in mind.

1.27 MILLION
VISITS TO **SSE's WOMEN IN POWER** CAMPAIGN

343 HIRES
INFLUENCED BY AUTHENTIC CAREER STORIES



Recruitment processes only work when women can see that the opportunity is relevant and attainable. SSE's Women in Power campaign was created to showcase visible female role models and authentic career stories. Between January 2023 and June 2024, the campaign generated more than 1.27 million campaign impressions, 41,000 unique visits and influenced 343 hires. The campaign continues today showcasing the power of connecting inclusive hiring mechanics with a clear, credible invitation.

Coalition members are increasingly recognising that attraction alone is not enough. Awareness must be connected to tangible opportunities. Great British Energy is partnering with schools and youth organisations, including through an energy hackathon in Aberdeen designed around a real industry challenge: building a sustainable wind farm while balancing energy generation, biodiversity, local communities and land use. Students used mathematics to calculate the same trade-offs faced by energy companies every day. The outcome was striking. While each participating school selected a winning team, every group progressing to the regional final was female.

Those early interactions become significantly more powerful when they connect to meaningful work experience.

RWE's Year in Industry programme combines paid placements with real project responsibility, mentoring, development and exposure across engineering, operations, development and construction. By removing traditional barriers such as grade thresholds and university targeting, the programme has widened access while maintaining high standards. Female participation reached 44% in 2024 and after a dip is projected to reach 50% in 2026.

The experience creates more than a line on a CV. One operations engineering intern described being trusted to lead meetings and take ownership, adding: "Their passion, encouragement, and willingness to invest in me has given me the confidence to see a real future for myself in this industry."

Many participants have gone on to graduate roles within RWE, while others have moved into the wider offshore wind sector, strengthening the industry's future talent pipeline. Alongside these career outcomes, both the programme and its participants have received external recognition, highlighting its success in developing technical capability, confidence and long-term industry engagement.



"Their passion, encouragement, and willingness to invest in me has given me the confidence to see a real future for myself in this industry."

Lexie Biddlestone
Operations Engineering Intern
RWE



Photo: credit: ©RWE

Coalition members are also seeing sustained results in challenging long held assumptions about what makes someone qualified for a role. Skills based recruitment opens opportunities to people who have the capability to succeed but may lack a traditional qualification, recent sector experience or a familiar job title. SSE has reduced job adverts to five essential requirements, removed unnecessary jargon and increasingly focused on transferable skills. Supported by hiring manager toolkits and inclusive recruitment practices, this approach demonstrates that widening opportunity does not require lowering standards. It requires identifying talent differently.

The same principle applies to experienced professionals returning to work. Career breaks often conceal valuable capability rather than diminish it. Coalition members including Subsea7 and National Grid have partnered with STEM Returners programmes to reconnect experienced talent with opportunities in the sector, recognising that a nonlinear career path should not become a barrier to future progression.

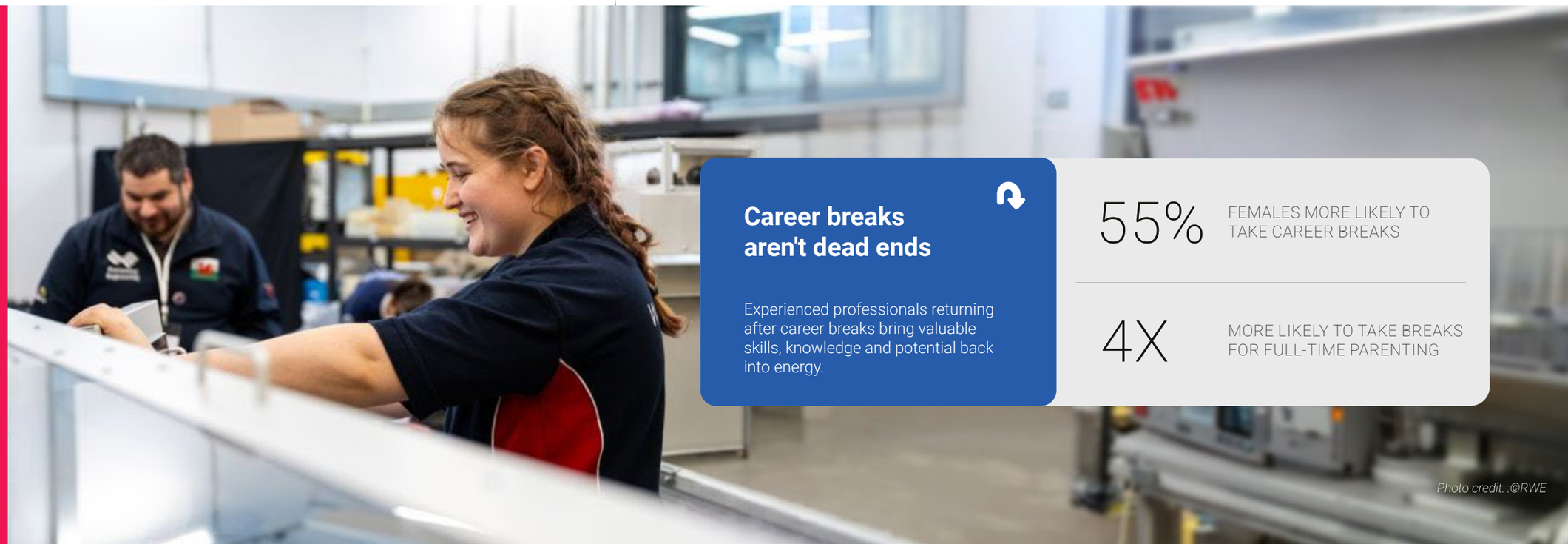
Viewed individually, these initiatives may appear disconnected. Together, they form a connected system. School outreach builds the future pipeline. Internships and apprenticeships turn potential into capability. Skills based recruitment widens eligibility. Returner programmes reopen pathways for experienced talent. Employer branding and campaigns help women see themselves in the sector.

The Energy sector already knows how to attract more women when barriers are intentionally removed. The next opportunity is to connect, measure and scale these practices, growing the talent pool collectively rather than asking organisations to compete for the same limited group of women already working in energy. For more on this flip to page 28 in Part 2.

"I'VE LEARNED SO MUCH ABOUT THE RENEWABLE ENERGY INDUSTRY, MET INCREDIBLE PEOPLE AND GAINED CONFIDENCE IN MY OWN ABILITIES."

Madeleine Warburton
Apprentice Wind Turbine Technician with RWE

RWE



Career breaks aren't dead ends

Experienced professionals returning after career breaks bring valuable skills, knowledge and potential back into energy.

55% FEMALES MORE LIKELY TO TAKE CAREER BREAKS

4X MORE LIKELY TO TAKE BREAKS FOR FULL-TIME PARENTING

Photo credit: ©RWE

Toolkit: Turning wider access into sustained impact

Top 3 conditions for change

01 Remove barriers that do not predict success

Focus roles on the skills and capabilities required to perform them. Review qualification requirements, career history expectations and recruitment processes that may unintentionally narrow the talent pool.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

People are more likely to apply when they can see themselves succeeding. Visible role models alongside simplifying criteria reduces self-selection out of opportunities.

02 Create multiple routes into the sector

Build a portfolio of entry points, including school outreach, internships, apprenticeships, returner programmes and skills based recruitment. Different talent needs different routes in.

When people can see a pathway that reflects their experience and circumstances, they are more likely to take action. Multiple entry points increase participation by making opportunity feel relevant and attainable.

03 Measure progression, not participation

Track movement through the pipeline, from application to hiring, retention and progression. Organise and collect data, build metrics and use the evidence to refine interventions and focus effort where talent is being lost.

What leaders review and discuss becomes what organisations prioritise.



Image Credit: ©Engie

Responsible AI: opening pathways without encoding old barriers

AI can help widen pathways into the sector by identifying transferable skills, improving recruitment consistency and democratising access to learning and development[40].

The opportunity comes with responsibility. AI models trained on historic workforce data can replicate existing patterns in who is sourced, screened and identified as high potential[28].

Uneven access to AI skills can also create new inequalities, while some roles with higher female representation may be disrupted more quickly than traditionally male dominated operational roles[27].

WHAT ORGANISATIONS CAN DO NOW:

- **Use AI to widen access, not narrow it:** Focus AI applications on skills identification, learning access and removing recruitment bias rather than replicating historic hiring patterns.
- **Keep people accountable:** Ensure workforce, recruitment and talent decisions remain transparent, explainable and subject to human oversight.
- **Measure outcomes, not intent:** Monitor recruitment, progression and learning outcomes by gender to understand whether AI is creating opportunity or reinforcing existing gaps.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

People are more likely to trust and adopt new technology when decisions are transparent, explainable and open to challenge. Trust drives adoption, and adoption determines impact.

Avenues to begin, mature or grow impact

		LESSON LEARNED
BEGIN Remove one barrier from every job advert	Review qualifications, years of experience and "nice to have" requirements. Keep only the criteria that genuinely predict success. Coalition members found that focusing on essential skills and transferable capability widened access without lowering standards.	The quickest gains often come from redesigning recruitment, not launching a new programme.
MATURE Follow talent beyond recruitment	Track what happens after someone enters the pipeline. Measure conversion into roles, retention and progression, not just applications or participation. The most effective organisations connected outreach, recruitment and development into a single talent journey.	See where momentum is gained or lost. Tracking the full talent journey helps organisations scale what works and address the points where progression stalls.
GROW Add a new route into the sector	Introduce one additional entry point, such as a returner programme, internship, apprenticeship or school partnership. The strongest results recognised that talent does not arrive through a single pathway and created multiple ways to enter and re-enter the workforce.	Different talent needs different routes in.

WANT TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION? Reach out to POWERful Women at info@powerfulwomen.org.uk

Flexible working that works in practice

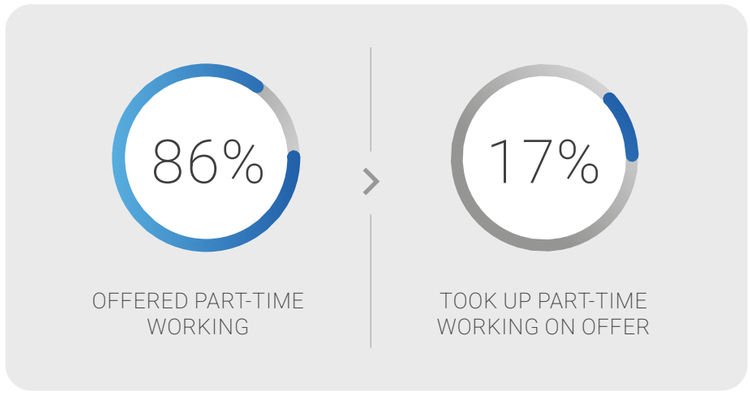
02



Image Credit: Einar Aslaksen/ ©Equinor

In the energy sector, flexible and family friendly working policies are increasingly present, an important foundation in a changing workforce and volatile global climate.

Practices now span hybrid and part time working, job sharing, enhanced parental leave and carers' leave, alongside a growing range of arrangements designed around different life stages, working patterns and roles. Yet a persistent gap remains between having flexibility and feeling able to use it without stigma or consequence: POWERful Women and Bain research found part-time working was available to 86% of respondents but used by just 17%, while over 38% believed flexible working could harm their career[35]. Nearly one third of carers in Employer Action Plan guidance research have also reported withholding their caring responsibilities from employers because they expected little support. While nearly half of working carers (47%) are considering reducing their hours or leaving work altogether according to Carers UK reporting[3].



Across the Coalition, members are moving beyond policy, changing the everyday practices, manager behaviours and working norms that determine whether flexibility actually works. Providing real answers to the questions women and men alike are asking: Can people use flexibility without limiting their progression? Are managers equipped to make flexibility work fairly across different roles, teams and life circumstances?

Managers sit at the point where policy becomes experience, they shape workloads, meetings, access to opportunities and everyday expectations. External evidence and POWERful Women research repeatedly identify line management as a determining factor in employees' experience of flexibility[36]. Centrica brings this challenge to life. Flexible working is available through a formal request process, including part time and flexible hours, and sits alongside additional paid leave for carers and dedicated working parent and carer networks. Yet the experience shared with POWERful Women also highlighted the practical tension that can arise in operational roles, where managers must reconcile individual working patterns with performance and service requirements. Making flexibility work therefore requires manager judgement and capability alongside policy.

Flexibility in action at SSE

The Flexible First approach, formalised in its current form in 2021 after more than a decade of flexible working practices, shows the possibilities with intentional design. In its Great Place to Work survey, 80% of colleagues said Flexible First works well for them and the business, rising to 89% among women. The model is built around clear principles, including examples such as: performance is measured through output rather than presence, teams create environments based on trust and inclusion, meetings consider when colleagues are available, and internal meetings are concentrated within focus hours.

sse

99%

WOMEN RETURN FOLLOWING MATERNITY LEAVE

Crucially, flexibility is framed around the realities of different jobs. Office based colleagues are generally on site around half the time, while frontline teams are encouraged to identify ways to flex their working week. That matters because visibility can still shape opportunity. McKinsey and Lean In's 2025 research found 53% of women working on site three or more days a week had been promoted in the previous two years, compared with 37% working mostly remotely. Sponsorship showed the same pattern, at 54% for women with more presence in office versus 37% for those mostly remote. The figures reinforce the importance of embedding flexibility into everyday working practices and monitoring whether flexible workers continue to access the same opportunities.

SSE's results provide encouraging evidence of what happens when flexibility is embedded in the employee experience. 86% of employees are in roles that support flexible working and 88% of advertised roles are eligible for it. SSE also reports that currently 99% of women return following maternity leave.

Policies create possibility

This is an important frontier for the sector. As shown above, a single model of flexibility cannot reflect the realities of office, field, shift and offshore work, or overlook the value that purposeful face to face interaction can bring to collaboration, learning and connection. Coalition evidence already includes annualised hours, compressed hours and shift swapping, demonstrating that flexibility can extend beyond where work takes place to when and how work is organised.

There is also a strong case for making flexibility visible before employees need to ask for it. Research reviewed for POWERful Women identifies flexibility by default as an effective intervention. Advertising roles as open to part-time working or job-sharing increased applications from women to senior roles by 19% at Zurich Insurance and 35% at John Lewis [1][43].

The message from the evidence is increasingly clear; policies create possibility. The next chapter for the sector is making flexibility ordinary, trusted and compatible with progression, equipping managers to make it work across different roles and measuring success through the careers women are able to build.

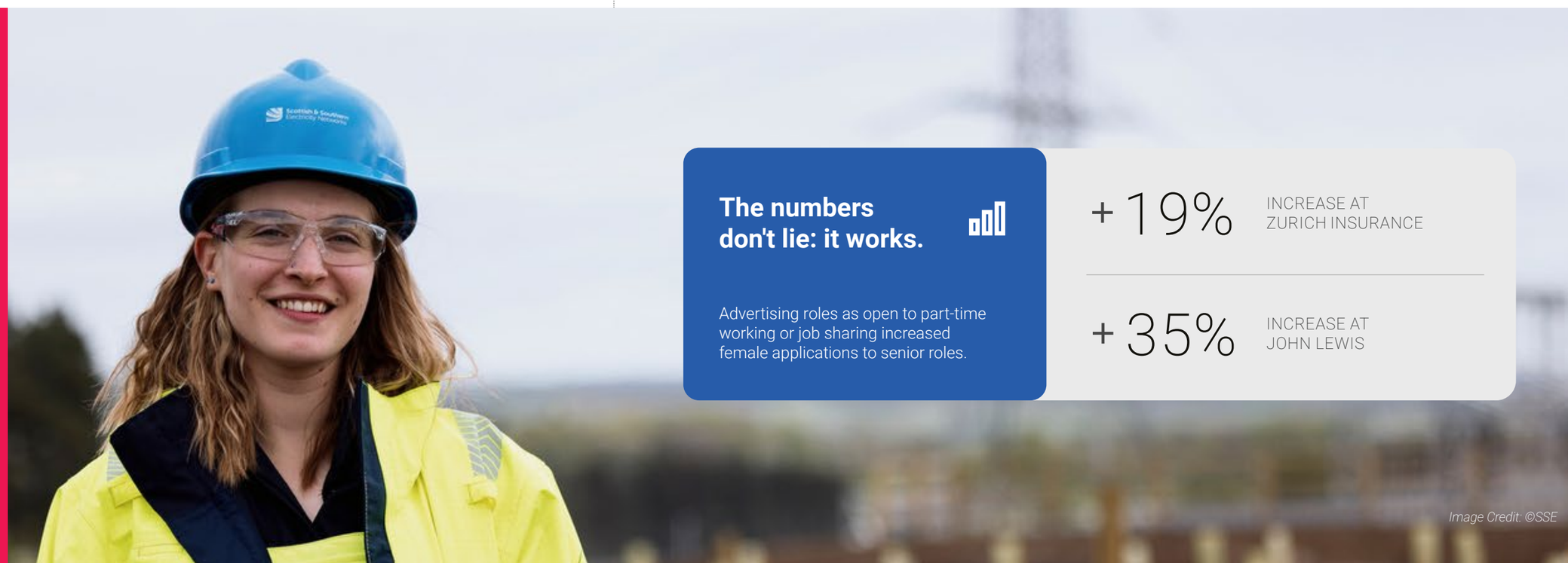


Image Credit: ©POWERful Women

sse

89%

WOMEN SAID FLEXIBLE FIRST WORKS WELL FOR THEM AND THE BUSINESS.



The numbers don't lie: it works.

Advertising roles as open to part-time working or job sharing increased female applications to senior roles.

+19% INCREASE AT ZURICH INSURANCE

+35% INCREASE AT JOHN LEWIS

Image Credit: ©SSE

Toolkit: Turning flexible working into everyday opportunity



Top 3 conditions for change

01 Make flexibility normal, visible and safe to use

Design flexibility as a normal way of working, rather than an accommodation for carers or women. Make options visible, encourage leaders to model them and focus performance on outcomes rather than presence.

02 Equip managers to make flexibility work in practice

Give managers practical tools to navigate workload, availability, performance and individual needs fairly. Use realistic scenarios and conversation guides to build confidence for the moments where policy meets judgement.

03 Measure what happens when people use flexibility

Track uptake alongside employee experience, retention, development and progression. Look across gender, working pattern and role type to identify where access to opportunity changes. As AI accelerates skills change, monitor returners closely: time away from the workforce can create an additional catch up challenge as roles, tools and expectations evolve more quickly.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

When flexible working is visible and widely used, social norms shift. People feel greater permission to use it without signalling lower commitment.

Clear expectations and opportunities to practise reduce ambiguity, helping managers turn intended behaviours into everyday habits.

What leaders regularly see, discuss and act on becomes salient, reinforcing accountability and focusing attention where experience and outcomes diverge.

Responsible AI: enabling flexibility without recreating presenteeism

AI can support flexible working by improving rostering, helping managers navigate day to day inclusion questions and giving employees greater access to support wherever they work. The opportunity is to use technology to make flexibility easier to manage and more consistent across different working patterns.

The same technology can reinforce old behaviours in new ways. Digital monitoring may place greater scrutiny on remote workers, while scheduling tools optimised around coverage or cost can reduce employee control and predictability. With four in ten employers using software to monitor home workers' productivity and 73% of employees saying monitoring would damage trust, responsible adoption needs to protect flexibility from becoming digital presenteeism[4][5].

WHAT ORGANISATIONS CAN DO NOW:

Use AI to enable choice: Apply technology where it can improve scheduling and access to support, while involving employees in how new approaches are designed.

Design for trust: Review monitoring and scheduling tools for their impact on different working patterns, focusing on outcomes rather than digital presence or activity.

Keep people accountable: Maintain meaningful human judgement and regularly review whether technology is changing access, experience or progression for flexible workers.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

Flexibility works when people have trust and a sense of control. Technology that increases autonomy can support everyday uptake, while technology experienced as surveillance can undermine the behaviours flexible working depends on.

Avenues to begin, mature or grow impact

			LESSON LEARNED
BEGIN	Make policy usable	Pick one flexible working or family policy and test the employee experience from start to finish. **Ask:** Can people easily find it? Do they understand who can use it? Does the manager know how to support it? Would an employee genuinely feel safe asking?	A policy people hesitate to use has limited practical value.
MATURE	Build manager confidence	Equip managers with realistic scenarios, conversation guides and clear principles for workload, meetings, performance and development.	Managers need practical judgement as much as policy knowledge.
GROW	Follow flexibility into careers	Move the dashboard from "Do we offer it?" to "What happens when people use it?" Track uptake alongside retention, promotions, access to development and employee experience. Cut the data by gender, working pattern, seniority and role type where appropriate.	Measure career outcomes, rather than treating policy availability as the outcome.

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Leadership accountability for outcomes

03

UP

IN ON

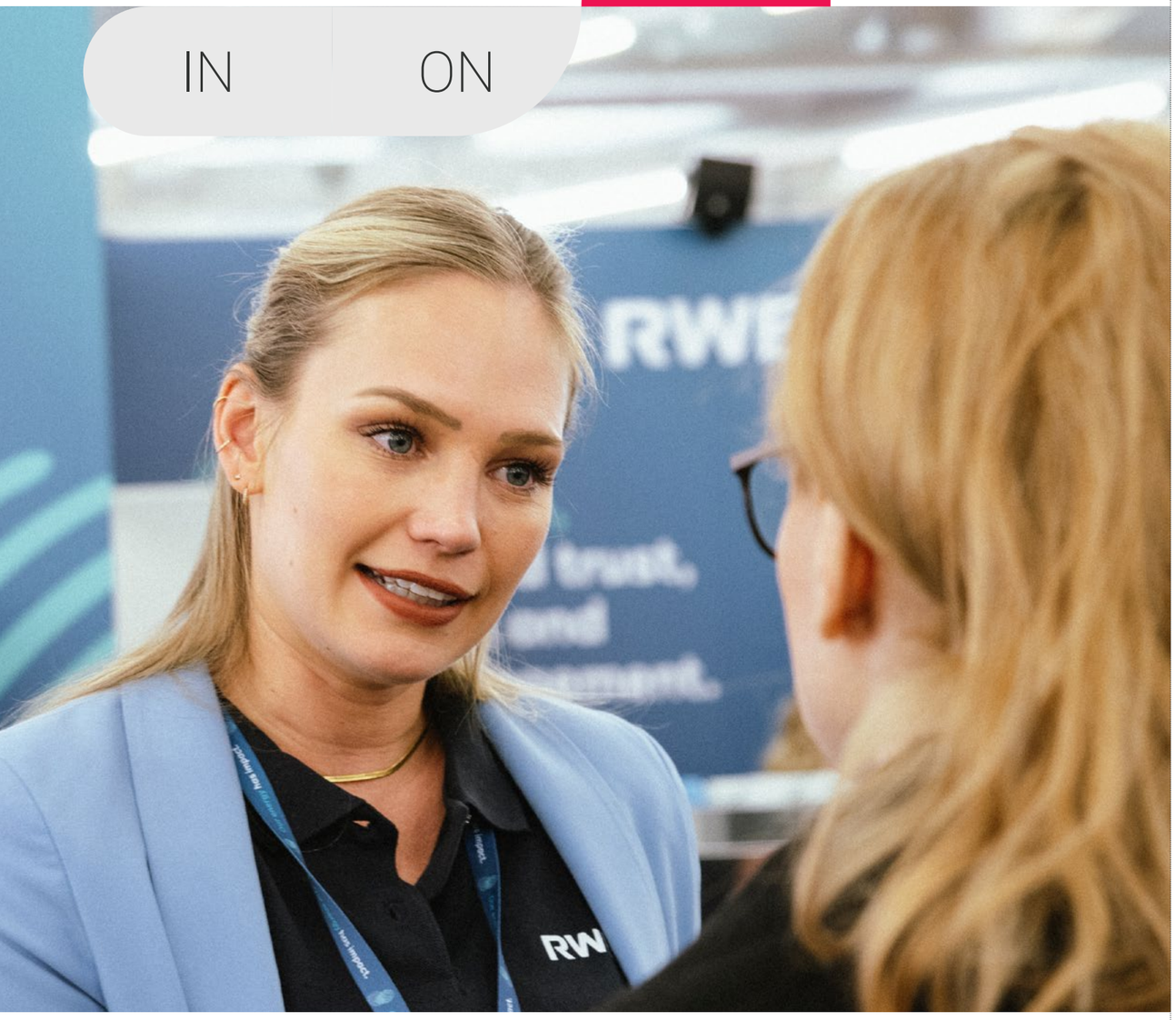


Photo credit: ©RWE

The UK has shown that sustained leadership attention can shift representation.

The voluntary 40% target for women on FTSE 350 boards was reached three years early, yet women hold only 15% of Executive Director roles[20]. Energy reflects a similar pattern. The 2026 POWERful Women Annual State of the Nation puts women at 36% of leadership roles, yet only 21% of Executive Directors[33][34]. Progress is also uneven across the roles that shape enterprise decisions and future CEO pipelines, with representation rising among CTOs while falling among CFOs and COOs[34].

The ambition extends beyond reaching 40% women in leadership. Sustainable progress means who holds influence, who gains the experiences that lead to the most powerful roles and whether those pathways remain equally accessible over time. Leadership accountability makes that real through visible commitment, sustained scrutiny and deliberate talent decisions.

For Juergen Maier, start-up chair at Great British Energy, that starts with the signal leaders send. When establishing the organisation, he was intentional about creating a representative organisation from the outset. Following an open recruitment process, women secured six of the ten positions on its startup board. His experience since has reinforced the wider effect visible leadership can have:



Juergen Maier, Start-up Chair
Great British (GB) Energy

> *"By casting that shadow, by sending that signal, the people you recruit the next level down and the next level down, they look at the board and they go, 'this is the sort of organisation I'd like to work for. This looks truly representative and inclusive."*

His experience at Siemens demonstrated the effort required to change an established leadership model. As Siemens became more digital and technology focused, the board recognised that its historically male dominated leadership would limit its ability to attract the talent it needed. That recognition gave internal advocates greater permission to champion change and coincided with women being recruited onto the board. His lesson for established organisations is strikingly simple: leaders first have to acknowledge where the organisation needs to change, then visibly stand behind that change.

> *"You've just got to admit you've got it wrong."*

That provides an important starting point for accountability. Leaders need an honest view of where representation is breaking down, followed by enough structure to act on what they find.

Coalition members are increasingly bringing representation and inclusion closer to the mechanisms leaders already use to run their businesses. SSE brings workforce representation, senior hiring KPIs, inclusion scorecards and employee experience into leadership governance, while ENGIE UK links 5% of its leadership team bonus to a female representation KPI and maintains diverse succession pipelines. Coalition examples include reviewing women who have remained at middle management for five or more years to understand what is blocking progression, examining succession pools through a diversity lens, testing whether high potential programmes have representative pipelines and reviewing the top ten women and men within each business.

With 76% of the promotion gap between women and men explained by women being less likely to put themselves forward, seemingly small decisions about who is automatically considered, who appears on a succession slate and who receives a stretch opportunity are meaningful leadership interventions[2].

Yet systems only go so far without leaders owning their part in them. 51% of DEI leaders cite business leaders failing to take ownership as their top challenge[20]. Accountability therefore has a personal dimension too, understanding experiences beyond a leader's own and using that insight to make better decisions.

National Grid is recognising the significance of ensuring leadership accountability directly by turning inclusive policy into everyday practice through Big Respect, a practical approach to creating a respectful, inclusive and high-performing culture. More than 900 leaders have taken part in full day workshops, working through realistic scenarios performed by actors and exploring how everyday workplace behaviours are experienced by others.

The programme is reinforced through Leadership Labs and practical dialogue toolkits that help teams continue these conversations in the flow of work, including around psychological safety and creating an inclusive culture. 96% of leaders attending the most recent tranche of full day workshops said they felt inspired to make a difference in their day jobs. Employee survey results have also shown improved favourability around feeling safe to speak up. For women in traditionally male dominated environments, this matters. Stronger psychological safety and greater confidence among leaders to address inappropriate behaviour help shift responsibility from women navigating the culture to leaders actively shaping it.

Building perspective is another part of that accountability. Across the Coalition, mentoring, sponsorship and reverse mentoring are bringing leaders closer to the people and experiences their decisions affect[2].

nationalgrid

96%

LEADERS FELT INSPIRED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR DAY JOBS.

Making leadership accountability real

Subsea7's reverse mentoring programme was designed around precisely that principle. Senior leaders, vice presidents and executives are paired with colleagues whose experiences differ from their own, across themes including gender, generation and neurodiversity. Now in its second year, 93% of survey respondents said the relationship had helped them become more inclusive.

One mentoring relationship brings that purpose to life. A senior leader from a predominantly male engineering environment wanted to better understand how more women could gain access to senior roles. He partnered with a colleague approaching maternity leave, gaining greater insight into the barriers around maternity leave, returning to work and continued career progression helping him understand how leaders could better support people through that experience.



Image Credit: ©POWERful Women

It is a powerful shift in perspective: developing women but also developing leaders' understanding of the systems women experience. Reverse mentoring builds understanding, sponsorship opens access to opportunity, and programmes such as Big Respect build the capability to translate intent into everyday leadership behaviour.

Across these examples the lesson is clear, leadership accountability is bigger than setting the target. It means owning the decisions that determine the outcome. For the energy sector, reaching 40% will depend on making that leadership intent visible in the decisions that matter most: who is seen, who is sponsored and who gets the opportunity to lead.

ENGIE

5%

LEADERSHIP BONUS LINKED TO FEMALE REPRESENTATION

Connecting leaders with lived experience

Mentoring, sponsorship and reverse mentoring are bringing leaders closer to the people and experiences their decisions affect

51% DEI LEADERS SAY LEADERSHIP BUY-IN REMAINS A BARRIER

93% SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAY MENTORING IMPROVED INCLUSION

Photo credit: ©Engie

Toolkit: Turning leadership accountability into outcomes

Top 3 conditions for change

01 Put the data where leaders make decisions

Bring representation, progression and succession measures into existing leadership governance. Look beyond overall representation to where women sit in the pipeline, including access to operational, commercial and senior decision making roles.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

What leaders repeatedly see, discuss and are held accountable for becomes more salient in everyday decisions.

02 Examine the decisions underneath the number

Review succession lists, high potential populations, stretch opportunities and promotion decisions to understand who is being considered and where women are dropping out.

Make consideration for progression the default rather than relying on people to put themselves forward. This can broaden who enters the talent pipeline and reduce the impact of differences in self-nomination.

03 Bring leaders closer to the experience they shape

Use mentoring, sponsorship and reverse mentoring to connect senior leaders with experiences outside their own, then translate that insight into leadership behaviours, talent and workplace decisions.

Direct exposure to different experiences makes abstract issues more immediate and gives leaders richer information for decision making.



Photo credit: ©Engie

Responsible AI: supporting better talent decisions without automating old patterns

AI creates an opportunity to help leaders identify patterns in talent data, surface skills and widen visibility of people who may otherwise be overlooked. The leadership responsibility remains critical: technology used in promotion, succession or performance decisions can also reproduce patterns contained in historic workforce data.

WHAT ORGANISATIONS CAN DO NOW:

- **Use AI to broaden the field of view:** Explore how AI can surface skills and talent beyond familiar networks and traditional career patterns.
- **Test the outcomes:** Review who is recommended, shortlisted and progressed through AI supported talent processes.
- **Keep leaders accountable:** Maintain meaningful human judgement over progression and succession decisions and make clear who owns the eventual outcome.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

Decision support can change what leaders notice, but it can also create automation bias. Keep active challenge and human accountability within consequential talent decisions.

Avenues to begin, mature or grow impact

		LESSON LEARNED
BEGIN Put one progression measure into leadership governance	Choose one point where women are being lost, such as promotion into senior operational roles, succession readiness or access to high potential programmes. Give it a named leadership owner and review it through an existing governance forum.	Accountability becomes stronger when inclusion measures sit alongside the other outcomes leaders already manage.
MATURE Challenge one talent decision differently	At the next succession or talent review, actively examine who is missing. Look at who has remained at the same level, who is receiving stretch opportunities and who is being considered for influential operational and commercial roles.	The headline representation figure shows the outcome. Talent decisions reveal where leaders can change it.
GROW Turn senior leaders into active advocates	Move beyond development alone. Use sponsorship and reverse mentoring to give leaders direct responsibility for understanding barriers and opening access to opportunity.	Senior involvement matters most when it changes opportunity. Use mentoring to deepen understanding, sponsorship to create access and reverse mentoring to challenge how leaders see and shape the system.

WANT TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION? Reach out to POWERful Women at info@powerfulwomen.org.uk

PART 2

Systemic barriers requiring collective action



The case studies in Part One show that organisations can accelerate progress through stronger recruitment, clearer progression pathways, inclusive working practices and visible leadership accountability. Yet progress across the sector has slowed.

The 2026 State of the Nation shows women's share of middle management unchanged at 34% for a second year, and board and executive progress flattened in 2024[34]. The same issues, including the STEM pipeline, government engagement and leadership representation, have appeared in every Coalition report since 2019. This points to a harder truth: some of the most persistent barriers sit beyond the influence of any single employer.

These barriers are shaped by the talent pipeline, the way new technology is deployed and the relationship between national energy ambitions and workforce planning. AI is the newest of them. It reaches the workforce through vendors, models and rules that no single employer controls. AI adoption is accelerating across the sector, but evidence of how it is being used intentionally to improve gender equity outcomes remains limited. The Coalition will help shape what responsible, inclusive AI adoption looks like before practices become embedded.

Addressing these barriers will require organisations to act together, and to work with government, education and wider industry partners to change the conditions every employer operates in. A relatively small group of large employers can shift practice across the whole sector in a way no single organisation can. The Coalition has engaged consistently with government and will now build on that engagement through specific, shared asks. As the Coalition's 2025 report put it, the skills gap is the system gap.

Image Credit: ©Shell

Barrier 1: Expand the future talent pool, not compete for the same talent

The energy transition cannot be delivered by competing for a limited pool of women already working in engineering, technology and energy. Demand for these skills reaches well beyond the energy sector, so moving talent between employers won't fix the underlying shortage. The sector needs to work together to expand and diversify the pipeline into energy careers.

The challenge

The challenge starts before people reach employers. According to EngineeringUK, women make up just 17% of the UK's engineering and technology workforce, and by age 18 only 26% of people on engineering and technology education pathways in England are female[15][16]. Interest diverges much earlier: only 29% of girls aged 11–18 are interested in engineering careers, compared with 63% of boys[17].

The same gap shows up across specific subjects and routes into the sector. In 2026, female students made up 24% of A Level physics entries, 19% of computing entries and 33% of design and technology entries[13][17]. On FFT Education Datalab's extrapolation from the last three years, girls would not make up half of A Level physics entrants until around 2070[32]. Women also accounted for just 20% of engineering and technology apprenticeship starts in 2024/25.

Why no organisation can solve this alone

Employers can improve how they attract women, but none of them can create the talent pool they all recruit from. The choices and perceptions that lead people into engineering begin years before employment, influenced by education, careers guidance and wider views of what engineering careers involve. Some of the biggest levers sit in schools: over half of GCSE physics classes in England are taught by non-specialist teachers[24].

A Government Office for Science roundtable, published in October 2026, supports this. It found that gender stereotypes affect whether children go on to technical STEM subjects and careers from a young age[19]. It called for action from primary school onwards, better access to careers resources and role models, and whole-school approaches to gender equity[19].

The Coalition has raised the STEM pipeline in every one of its annual reports since 2019, and has described fierce competition for a limited talent pool since 2020. That competition shows up as churn: under-35s make up nearly 40% of people leaving energy employers, and they may simply be moving to another employer in the sector[11]. When organisations compete harder for the same people, they move existing talent around rather than growing the pipeline.



Image Credit: ©RWE

The Coalition's role: Act and influence

The Coalition will act collectively to grow the talent pool and use its collective voice to influence the wider education and skills system.

INSPIRE
Make Energy Careers Visible

OPEN
Widen routes into the sector

COORDINATE
Plan the pipeline together

ACT TOGETHER
What the Coalition will do

Develop a shared narrative about modern energy careers and pathways. Purpose motivates women: 83% of young women say working for an organisation committed to tackling climate change is important, yet 63% of young people have never heard of green skills[42]. The Coalition has the opportunity to build on initiatives such as Empower Her in Energy to create greater visibility of the breadth of careers and pathways into the sector, and strengthen how impact is tracked through to applications and hires.

Expand programmes beyond individual companies. The Coalition can connect with and support cross-sector initiatives such as EngineeringUK's Gender Pathways collective, while identifying opportunities to scale member approaches that grow the wider talent pool[17]. RWE's Year in Industry offshore wind placements provide one example: women made up between 36% and 44% of recent cohorts, and RWE deliberately recruits more interns than it can retain, so alumni can build careers across the sector[37].

Coordinated outreach. The Coalition will explore greater coordination to members' outreach, reducing duplication, sharing what works and strengthening outcome tracking across activity. Young people who attend one or more STEM careers activities are 3.4 times more likely to consider a career in engineering, yet consistent evaluation of STEM outreach remains important to understanding its impact[14].

INFLUENCE
Use our voice to change the system

Support earlier engagement in education. The Coalition may use its collective voice to support the Gender Pathways collective's 40 by 40 asks of the Department for Education, including better STEM teaching for girls, gender-equitable careers guidance, enrichment and work experience[15].

Link energy transition goals to skills planning. Many of the occupations and skills needed for clean energy, and the sector as a whole, are also in demand across other sectors[38]. The Coalition will work with Skills England and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) to strengthen women's participation in the training routes that feed these roles.

Improve workforce forecasting and talent data. The Royal Academy of Engineering has called for a cross-sector approach to tracking skills supply and demand. The Coalition will advocate for gender to be embedded in this cross-sector approach to workforce forecasting[29][30], creating a clearer view of where women are represented and where action is needed.

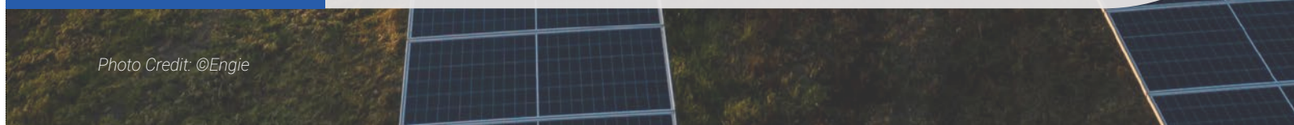


Photo Credit: ©Engie

Barrier 2: Ensure AI creates opportunity, not inequality

AI is becoming part of recruitment, development, performance and workforce planning. As shown throughout Part One, if used carelessly, it can deepen existing inequalities at scale. Used well, it could widen access and help more women build careers in energy. The Coalition will help shape that direction, working to ensure AI creates opportunity rather than reinforcing existing gaps.

The challenge

AI is already shaping workforce decisions, often in ways employers can't see. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) found that many employers it reviewed believed AI was only supporting their recruitment decisions, when in practice human involvement was not meaningful and the decisions were therefore solely automated[23]. That matters because, without meaningful human checks, any bias in the tool passes straight into the outcome, and there is growing evidence of bias. In one study of open-source AI screening models, CVs with female-associated names were preferred in only 11% of comparisons[39].

Women also face a double risk. In high-income countries, women's jobs are nearly three times as likely as men's to fall into the highest GenAI exposure category, and the 2026 State of the Nation also warns that support roles, predominantly held by women, may be disproportionately affected[26][34]. Yet women are less likely to use generative AI at work, which could leave them behind as roles change[22]. The opportunities are real but less proven: early evidence on AI career and learning tools is promising but still limited.

Why no organisation can solve this alone

Employers typically buy AI rather than build it, so the tools reach them through vendors and models that no single organisation designs or can audit alone. Simple fixes don't work on their own either: removing names, relying on human review or running one-off audits all fall short, and people can be influenced by biased AI suggestions even when they are warned about the bias[6]. Nor is there a workforce standard to guide employers. Ofgem provides ethical AI guidance for the energy sector, but it is not a workforce-specific standard. The UK also has no AI-specific employment law[31].

Members are investing heavily in AI, but Coalition research found published evidence of an inclusion-focused AI tool at only one of 13 members. A shared standard and a collective voice with vendors and regulators would carry far more weight than any one employer acting alone.



The Coalition's role: Act and influence

The Coalition will act collectively where members can drive change directly and use its collective voice to influence the wider system. Together, the Coalition will work to ensure AI opens doors to energy careers rather than narrowing them.

SHARE
Learn together

GUIDE
Set the standard

CHAMPION
Grow women's AI careers

ACT TOGETHER
What the Coalition will do

INFLUENCE
Use the Coalition's voice to influence the wider system

Share emerging practice. The Coalition will continue to create opportunities to test, share and build on emerging approaches, such as RWE's Inclusion Guide AI companion which supports inclusive language and bias mitigation.

Track AI's impact by gender. The Coalition will advocate for Skills England and the Office for Clean Energy Jobs to report how exposure to AI differs by role and gender.

Develop practical guidance for Talent teams. The Coalition will translate emerging good practice into practical guidance for AI-enabled workforce decisions, including visibility of where AI is used, testing outcomes by gender, meaningful human review, candidate transparency and clear expectations of vendors.

Establish clearer guidance on fairness and transparency. As regulators develop their approach, the Coalition will offer support to Ofgem and DESNZ to strengthen guidance around AI-enabled recruitment, progression, performance and workforce planning.

Champion women in AI, data and digital careers. While girls' participation in A Level computing is growing, they still make up only 19% of entries[13]. Coalition members will champion visible role models in AI and data and broaden access to AI upskilling, particularly for women in roles most exposed to automation.

Support programmes that bring more women into digital and AI careers. Closing the digital skills gap for women could add around £4 billion a year to UK GDP[9]. The Coalition will explore working with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and other skills bodies to increase women's participation in publicly funded digital and AI skills programmes.

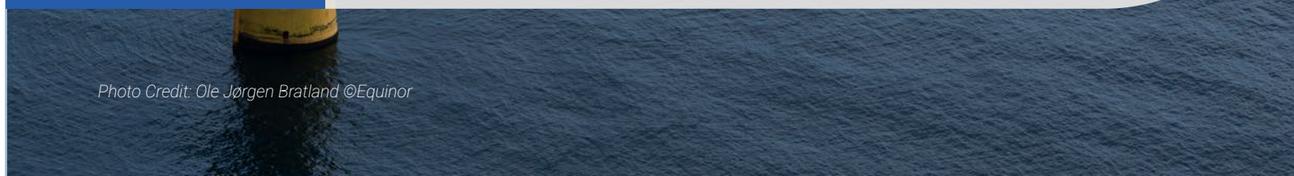


Photo Credit: Ole Jørgen Bratland ©Equinor

Barrier 3: Creating a stronger partnership between industry and government

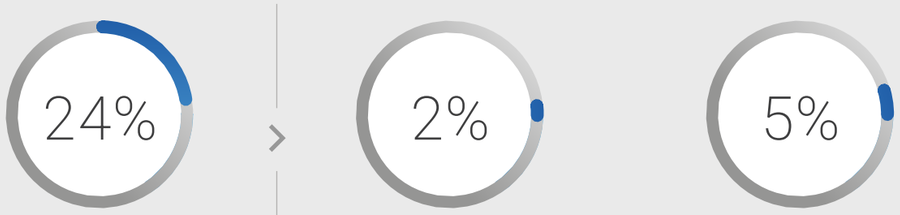
If the UK has an energy strategy, it also needs a workforce strategy. Growing the talent pipeline, enabling women to access emerging roles, develop future skills and progress across the sector and ensuring new technologies create opportunity all need to connect to a shared view of the workforce the transition will require. The UK has set out how many energy jobs it needs, but not yet how women will fill a fair share of them. The Coalition will work to put gender representation into workforce planning from the outset, rather than addressing it after roles and pathways have already been shaped.

The challenge

As cited in Part One, the sector requires 312,300 new workers by 2030[25]. The Energy Security and Net Zero Committee heard evidence that targets will not be met without further intervention in workforce planning[21]. The energy transition will create demand across a wide range of roles, from skilled trades and engineering to digital, commercial, operational and leadership roles. Representation challenges exist across the workforce, but remain particularly acute in a number of technical occupations. Women make up 24% of the energy sector, but only 2% of construction trades, and 95% of heat pump installers are men [7][8]. Without intentional action, rapid workforce growth risks reproducing today's representation gaps at much greater scale.

Why no organisation can solve this alone

Employers can't plan a national workforce on their own. Most of the 2030 workforce is already employed elsewhere, 15.9% of today's workforce is over 55, and employer training investment per employee has fallen 19% since 2011[8][10]. The government's planning machinery is still thin. The Office for Clean Energy Jobs has around 20 staff and focuses on analysis rather than delivery[12][21].



The Coalition's role: A leading voice

The Coalition frequently engages with ministers and regulators. It will now build on those established relationships with a stronger, more specific voice on the workforce conditions needed to deliver the energy transition, bringing employer evidence into policy conversations early enough to shape decisions rather than respond to their consequences. Together, Coalition members employ more than 140,000 people and hold evidence that can complement government's view of the workforce. The Coalition will use that collective experience to connect the issues explored in the previous barriers, from growing the talent pool to navigating AI-driven change, with the workforce planning needed to deliver the energy transition.

With 2030 approaching, the Coalition will use its collective evidence, reach and voice to help shape a workforce that can deliver the energy transition and better reflects the society it serves.

Connects

- Energy transition ambitions
- Future workforce requirements
- Women's representation and progression
- Skills and talent policy
- Inclusive workforce transformation

What the Coalition will do

01 Make workforce a core part of the energy transition conversation, demonstrating that clean energy targets depend on people and skills as much as infrastructure.

02 Bring employer evidence on the full range of future roles, skills and shortages into government workforce planning, identifying where women's representation and progression remain weakest.

03 Put gender into workforce planning, using State of the Nation evidence to strengthen understanding of where women are represented, where gaps remain and how those patterns are changing.

04 Shape skills and talent policy, working with government and skills bodies to strengthen pathways into clean energy careers for women and build workforce planning capacity.

05 Turn proven practice into policy insight, using evidence from Coalition members to inform national workforce programmes, skills investment and funding approaches.

Photo Credit: ©National Grid

From organisational progress to system change

The evidence in this report shows that progress is possible. Across the sector, organisations are changing how they recruit, develop and progress women, and there is much to learn from what is already working.

But organisational action alone will not deliver the scale or pace of change required. The next phase must also tackle the conditions around employers: growing the future talent pool rather than competing for it, ensuring AI expands opportunity rather than inequality and connecting workforce planning more closely to the ambitions of the energy transition.

The Coalition will lead that shift by combining the experience of its members, its evidence base and its established voice with government. It will build on what is already working within organisations and use its collective influence to help shape the wider conditions needed for progress across the sector.

> The next chapter is not simply about measuring change. It is about acting together to create the conditions for change at scale.



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The next chapter's in your hands.

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