

**POWERful** WOMEN

# **POWERful Connections:** **A Brief Guide for Mentees**

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## Introduction from Baroness Sandy Verma



It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to POWERful Women's mentoring programme, POWERful Connections.

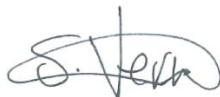
In case you have not come across us before, POWERful Women was originally founded by myself and Laura Sandys in June 2014, when I was Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Energy & Climate Change. A little while after arriving at DECC in 2012 I found myself wondering: where are all the women and why is it that so few seem to be reaching the top of the energy sector?

As time went by, I found that many others, across the industry and across the political spectrum, shared this growing concern. Since launching, the initiative has continued to build momentum. Many people like yourselves recognise that, in order to face the challenges of the future, and meet our obligations to the public and society, the energy sector needs to have a better gender balance. So that we can have the right people, with the right talents in the right places.

POWERful Connections aims to help women navigate their way to the top table and overcome the barriers to progression. It does this by matching aspiring future leaders with the most senior and influential people in the sector – CEOs, board members, executive directors: our “POWERful Connections” - who provide guidance and support over a six – nine-month period.

Our hope is that the programme will play a part in changing the energy sector in a way that is long-lasting and to the benefit of everyone. We hope that those taking part will enjoy and learn from the experience and that the programme will help our mentees to take forward their next steps towards the top table.

We are looking forward to hearing your feedback so that we can continuously improve the programme and to seeing the careers of our mentees develop. If you are not involved in POWERful Connections now, but want to be in the future, please do get in touch!



**Baroness Verma**

# Introduction

## ***What is POWERful Connections?***

A key element of the POWERful Women initiative, POWERful Connections pairs some of the most influential people working in energy today (our 'POWERful Connections') with female professionals who are aspiring to move into senior leadership positions within the next 5 years.

It aims to give leaders of the future support in taking their next steps by giving them one-to-one time with those who have already trodden the same path and are now at energy's top table. Powerful Connections is about matching the experience of one person with the potential of another.

Applicants to the programme will need to identify the areas of their career progression and personal development they want to work on with a Powerful Connection. They will also need to be prepared to 'own' the process, making sure that they use the time on the programme well by preparing in advance for meetings, coming with ideas and taking time to reflect on the issues and action points coming up in discussions. They will need to be open and honest about strengths and weakness and willing to be challenged on their current thinking and approach to career development. The aim is to help equip them with some of the tools they will need to move on to the next stage in their career, and an action plan for taking their next steps.

POWERful Connections is not a 'traditional' mentoring programme – those who are partnered under the scheme will usually meet three or four times over the six-to-nine-month period, and so the relationships we are setting up will be short term (though we hope that those involved will want to stay connected). However, for ease of reference and clarity about the nature of the relationship we have stuck with the term's 'mentor' and 'mentee' throughout the guide.

## ***About this guide***

This guide describes how POWERful Connections works. It gives guidance on who does what and when, as well as explaining what we think POWERful Connections should be about for participants and the value we hope they will get from it.

We know that many of those joining POWERful Connections will have previous experience of mentoring or being mentored, coaching, or being coached, challenged, or supported by others. For this reason, we have kept this guide brief, and structured it in a way that will hopefully give you guidance where you need it but allow you to dip in and out where you are simply looking for clarification or ideas. We hope that it will provide you with a useful structure for working together.

# Applying to join POWERful Connections

## ***Who can apply?***

You can apply to be mentored under the POWERful Connections programme if you are a woman currently working in energy and intend to continue to develop your career in the sector.

You will need to

- have a minimum of 15 years' work experience, at least 5 years of which has been in energy
- already hold a senior management position in energy, and
- aspire to become a director, board member, or take on some other senior leadership position within the next five years or so.

## ***Your commitment***

POWERful Connections presents you with a unique chance to look at yourself honestly, explore your thinking on your next steps, explore real or perceived hurdles and opportunities, working with one of the most senior and experienced people in energy.

This is a significant opportunity and so, if you are thinking of applying, you will need to make a commitment to the scheme from the outset. You will need to show that you have thought carefully about the areas you would like to develop and what benefit you will get from collaborating with a mentor.

As POWERful Connections is about achieving real change, you will need to agree to work on an action plan on your next steps after the scheme has ended. You will also be asked to make a commitment to in turn mentor at least one other woman in energy within 12 months of completing the scheme and provide us with an update on how your career has developed.

We hope that you will also participate in the POWERful Women network, signing up to our LinkedIn pages, getting involved, and promoting POWERful Women and POWERful Connections to others.

## ***Making your application***

To apply to join POWERful Connections, you will need to complete the *Mentee application and profile form*.

The form asks about your experience to date, where you hope to be in five years and the areas you would like to work on with a POWERful Connections mentor. It also asks you to provide an up-to-date CV and/or LinkedIn profile.

## ***Nominating a proposer***

The application form asks you to provide details of a proposer. This should be able to know you well, your work and your potential.

Your nominated proposer should preferably be your line manager or, if you prefer, a more senior colleague or outside sponsor who is able to know you well. Your proposer will be endorsing your application, so they will need to read it and sign it.

Some mentees may be applying to POWERful Connections having been specifically put forward by an employer, but if you are applying to the scheme independently, you should advise your employer of this and provide them with a copy of this booklet.

### ***What could you work on with a POWERful Connection?***

The topics for discussion will be up to you to decide, working with your POWERful Connection mentor - and chances are they will evolve over time as your relationship develops and you begin to develop new perspectives and strategies and reframe your way forward.

However, we do ask that you come to POWERful Connections with some ideas about the areas you would like to work on, and so you are asked to tell us about your current thinking in the application form. Please try to explain your current position and why these areas are important to you rather than simply providing a list.

Areas you would like to work on with a POWERful Connection might include some of the following

- **Career decisions**  
Clarifying and prioritising your career aspirations and positioning yourself for moving forward; developing your skillset; moving out of your comfort zone; developing the experience and track record required for board level positions
- **Promoting yourself:**  
Developing your network; promoting your brand; ways of creating opportunities and making an impact beyond your immediate sphere
- **Leadership style**  
Developing your style as a leader and strategist
- **Working as a professional woman in the energy sector:**  
Strategies for steering your way through the corporate world; overcoming or reframing potential barriers and setbacks to progression; challenging stereotypes; dealing with difficult people, management dynamics and work politics
- **Personal issues**  
Overcoming personal barriers to progression and identifying opportunities; confidence; personal presentation; making an impact in the boardroom; work life balance as a senior professional; understanding your personal working style and strengths and areas for development

### ***What happens next?***

Once we have received your mentee profile and application form, we will check that it is complete and that you are eligible for the programme. We will also contact your nominated proposer to verify their support for your application.

When we have everything, we need we will then pass a summary of your profile and CV to one or more potential POWERful Connections, with a view to obtaining a match and welcoming you to the programme.

Many of our POWERful Connections will be mentoring two people, which might include someone from their company and someone externally from outside. Where you are being mentored on an external basis, we will endeavour to match you with a mentor who works in a different sector of energy, to avoid any potential conflict of interest. We will also endeavour to match you with someone who is close geographically but please bear in mind that the nature of the sector and the scale of the scheme means that this may not always be possible.

If a POWERful Connection confirms that they feel able to support you in working on the areas you have outlined and you have confirmed you are happy with your 'match,' we will provide each of you with one another's contact details. We will also give you a little more information about your POWERful Connection and their background, and practical details about the scheme, including confirming the period over which you will be mentored.

You should then go ahead with arranging your first meeting.

If we are not able to match you immediately, we will endeavour to pair you with a mentor as soon as possible.

## **Working together -Roles and expectations**

It is important that you understand the opportunities and limitations of your relationship with your mentor from the outset.

The groundwork for your relationship will be explored in your first meeting, and your relationship will also develop over time. However, it is important to start out with a clear understanding of what it is reasonable to expect from your POWERful Connection mentor, and what your mentor will expect from you.

### ***What can you expect from your POWERful Connections mentor?***

For your mentor to

- keep all information disclosed in your meetings, and during your relationship strictly confidential
- listen to you and focus on what you are saying rather than imposing their own views
- be motivating, encouraging and constructive
- be open and honest and share their own experiences with you
- explore issues with you and where necessary, challenge you on your current thinking
- help you understand any developmental needs
- help you identify next steps to achieve your goals, and prioritise

### ***What you should not expect***

For your mentor to

- have all the answers – your mentor will be an experienced professional with extensive experience of the sector - but they are not the oracle! They will only be able to give you the benefits of their own knowledge and experience
- tell you what to do – your mentor will help you explore issues and, where necessary, reframe your options, but the process should be ‘owned’ by you. The choices you make are for your development and your career: they are yours and yours alone
- do all the work - your mentor is there to listen, support, guide, and challenge, to help your development as a leader, not to do all the thinking for you

### ***What will your POWERful Connections mentor expect from you?***

For you to

- be committed to the process
- bring ideas to each session and come prepared so that you can both make the most of the time you have together
- reflect on what has been discussed at each meeting
- carry forward any action points you have agreed
- be open and honest about your strengths, weaknesses, successes, and failures
- recognise that moving forward may involve you taking risks or moving away from your comfort zone

It will also be your responsibility to arrange meetings. These should ideally be fixed in advance over the period you will be mentored.



Not all meetings necessarily have to be in person – virtual meetings are acceptable too. However, we recommend that you meet in person whenever you can, especially at the beginning of your relationship, as this helps with establishing rapport and feeling at ease in one another's company.

## Getting Started

### *The first meeting*

Once you have been matched with a POWERful Connection your next step should be to arrange the first meeting. The POWERful Women team will have provided you with your mentor's contact details and any special requests from the mentor as to how best to get in touch.

The aim of the first meeting is to begin to get to know one another, set the scene and establish how you will move forward together.

### *Establishing the relationship*

Ideally you should arrange to meet in a setting where you can both relax, and you can be sure that you will not be interrupted.

As it is about starting off a new relationship, the first meeting may feel like a social occasion in nature. It should be used to find out more about one another, your backgrounds, how you got to where you are, and might include a little about your interests and passions outside your working life.

You should move on to discussing how you see your current position and where you would ideally like to get to in the next five years or so, and areas on which you have indicated you would like support and guidance. You should also discuss how you plan to work on these areas over the six to nine months of POWERful Connections.

### *Setting the ground rules*

It will be particularly important to establish some basic ground rules during your first meeting so that you are clear about the way you will work together. The mentor and mentee should discuss

- How you will work together over the coming 6-9 months.

POWERful Connections mentors have agreed to spend a few hours of their time with mentees over a 6-to-9-month period, but the scheme is not intended to be prescriptive – how this is arranged, timings and length of meetings is very much down to you and your mentor to agree.

For example, will all your discussions be in person, or virtually? How (and how often) will you communicate between meetings and how many meetings will you have? When is the best time for you to meet? How long will your meetings last?

- How you will approach issues such as confidentiality.

A good mentoring relationship depends on openness, honesty, and trust and so the simple default position should be 'what is said in the room, stays in the room.' The issues that POWERful Connections focus on are about working life and relationships,

personal development and effectiveness and so there should be no reason discussions should enter business sensitive areas.

At the end of the first meeting the mentee should recap on any action they have agreed to take ahead of the next meeting. You should also agree a date for your next meeting.

***If it does not feel right...***

Within the POWERful Connections scheme, we will do our best to match mentors and mentees who are a good 'fit.'

However, it is important that you are open and honest with one another. Having met with your mentor, it is possible that you may feel that, for one reason or another, you will not be able to work well together. An outcome of your first or early meetings may therefore be that one or both of you do not wish to move forward with a mentoring relationship. Sometimes two people do not click; this is perfectly normal and is a better outcome than struggling with a relationship that is not working.

If you have doubts about the relationship, please discuss this with your mentor during or after the meeting. If you decide not to continue, please contact POWERful Women to let us know that relationship will not be going forward.

We will endeavour to arrange for you to be paired with another mentor.

## Moving forward

### ***Developing your discussions***

Ideally no topic should be off limits during mentoring sessions, and as a mentee you should expect to be challenged as well as supported.

The issues you decide to work on together should fall out of your discussions as your relationship builds over time. Often, they will be about

- building confidence in particular areas
- determining your options in each situation and managing consequences
- making tough decisions, and strategies for maximising your success in the pathways you choose
- creating new opportunities and broadening your CV
- making the most of your strengths and working on your perceived weaknesses

At the end of each meeting, you should recap on the issues that have been raised and any actions agreed.

### ***Action planning***

In the confusing words of Yogi Berra, *‘if you do not know where you are going, you might wind up somewhere else!’*

Ideally you should begin working on an action plan with your POWERful Connections mentor from the beginning of the process.

Action plans are an intrinsic part of leadership and business management and so will be familiar to most people at varying levels of complexity. In terms of your personal and professional development they are not set in stone but can give focus to your activities and help you identify gaps you need to fill to move forward, as well as helping you to commit to actions within a timescale.

At its simplest, your action plan will be a simple statement of your objectives, broken down into sub objectives, as necessary. You then need to identify the steps you will need to take to get there – your strategy – prioritise and set dates.

Your overall goals will need to be realistic and achievable, and it may be useful to map out several paths to your goals. It can also be helpful to make a note of problems you feel that you might face and how you will overcome them, which may in turn help you identify further actions which need to be included.

You should review progress and seek to refine your action plan at each meeting with your POWERful Connections mentor.

## Wrapping it up

POWERful Connections brings the most senior people in energy together with those aspiring to join the top table within the next 5 years for 6-9 months of one-to-one support.

At the end of the programme, it will be very much down to you and your POWERful Connections mentor to decide whether you will continue to stay connected in any way. Some mentors and mentees will decide to draw at least the more formal part of their relationship to a close at the end of the six-to-nine-month period, but we hope that most mentors and mentees will stay in touch and that mentors will continue to follow their mentees careers and celebrate in their successes.

At the final meeting, you should review your progress with your mentor and agree the action points you will take forward after the relationship has ended.

As part of our evaluation of the scheme, the POWERful Women team will ask you to complete a short questionnaire to ask for your feedback on the programme. We will also contact you twelve months after completing the programme to see how your career has moved on.

## **More about mentoring - useful resources**

There is a wealth of information on mentoring currently available. We have found the following publications and websites helpful in the preparation of this guide.

The Mentoring Pocket Book – Geoff Alred and Bob Garvey

The Art of Mentoring - Mike Pegg

A Practical Guide to Mentoring - David Kay and Roger Hinds

Mentoring Works! <http://mentoring-works.com/>

## Contact POWERful Women

For more information about POWERful Connections and POWERful Women please contact:  
[info@powerfulwomen.org.uk](mailto:info@powerfulwomen.org.uk)

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Join in the discussion on Linked In <https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=8132431>

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