

Women in Agriculture: Approaches to Implementing Equality Commitments



AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE

Women in Agriculture: Approaches to Implementing Equality Commitments



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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the participants and advisors to this study for sharing their time and experience.

The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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List of acronyms

CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CV	Curriculum Vitae
D&I	Diversity and Inclusion
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EOS	Entrepreneurial Operating System
EU	European Union
HR	Human Resources
liP	Investors in People
IT	Information Technology
IWD	International Women's Day
MBA	Master of Business Administration
PAYE	Pay As You Earn
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PR	Public Relations
REA	Rapid Evidence Assessment
SCER	Scottish Centre for Employment Research
SG	Scottish Government
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
WES	Women's Engineering Society
WFH	Working from home
WIA	Women in Agriculture
WISE	Women into Science and Engineering

Highlights

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

The [Women in Agriculture Taskforce final report](#) (2019) identified cultural barriers and gender bias within the Scottish agriculture industry and recommended the mainstreaming of an Equality Charter into all agriculture and related policies. Further evidence was needed to underpin the development of an Equality Charter that could encourage long-term change across the industry.

What did we do?

The research involved an evidence review and six case studies to explore effective ways of bringing about greater gender equality within Scottish agricultural businesses and organisations with paid employees. We gathered evidence on gender equality initiatives and their effectiveness in other industries, produced case-studies of key actions and examined ways of monitoring their impact. A lack of accessible examples of actions in small to medium-sized enterprises led to the inclusion of larger businesses as case-studies. In total, we carried out 36 interviews with managers and women employed in traditional male-dominated occupations.

What did we learn?

We learned that to advance gender equality in agriculture requires:

- adopting inclusive approaches where gender equality is everyone's responsibility, but is especially so for key organisational decision-makers;
- ensuring that gender equality is embedded in the formal and informal values of the business, rather than focusing on standalone initiatives;
- focusing on transparency and fairness in the design and implementation of HR policies and practices that explicitly recognise the need to enhance gender equality in specific organisational contexts;
- providing appropriate training to support implementation;
- establishing clear accountability for delivering and overseeing equality outcomes;
- actively enforcing gender equality initiatives;
- and continuing to measure outcomes and impact.

What happens now?

Industry-based organisations and Scottish Government should work together to increase awareness, support and networking in agriculture and help businesses to access expertise and guidance. Businesses should improve their knowledge and understanding of equalities issues; build internal enforcement of change; identify priority actions; collaborate with staff on implementation; and build measurement of outcomes and impact into ongoing learning. Individuals should adopt a view that equality is everyone's business and engage with their employers in advancing equality outcomes where possible.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government to explore how best to bring about greater gender equality within Scottish agriculture.
- There are a diverse range of business types within Scottish agriculture, from small crofts and family farms to large estates, agri-businesses and farming enterprises. This research is aimed at agricultural businesses and organisations with paid employees.
- Gender equality commitments and initiatives have been developed across multiple industries in the UK, but there is a lack of robust evidence about their long-term impact and effectiveness.
- This research aims to analyse the success and impact of gender equality initiatives in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across male-dominated non-agricultural industries to identify any useful learning for agriculture.
- The research comprised an evidence review of gender equality initiatives and case study investigations in 6 UK-based companies. In total, 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers and women employed in male-dominated occupations.

Evidence review findings

- The barriers that women face in joining and progressing within male-dominated industries are well documented. These include discrimination, harassment and social exclusion; stereotyping as to women's suitability for certain jobs; social isolation, challenges in balancing long working hours and family life; and a lack of suitable facilities on work sites.
- Businesses have different motivations for undertaking gender equality initiatives: these are moral (the right thing to do); compliance-related (to avoid risk) and business case (diversity is good for business) motivations.
- There are multiple practices aimed at supporting greater gender equality and the report considered some of the most common, looking specifically at how effective these practices are in improving outcomes for women.
- Diversity (or unconscious bias) training focuses on increasing awareness of equalities issues and addressing implicit bias. Evidence that it improves outcomes for women is weak, however, and it can promote resentment and resistance from colleagues and managers.
- Flexible working can help address the challenges women face in balancing work and care, and can support better recruitment, retention and progression of women workers. Yet flexible working can also impact negatively upon women's career progression where it is viewed as signalling a lack of commitment to the business. Businesses must embrace and support flexible working, train managers in how to manage it and focus on job performance and results rather than just hours worked.

- Women's groups enable women to meet in safe and supportive spaces to discuss their experiences. While these groups can reduce feelings of social isolation, there is limited evidence of any measurable impact on women's outcomes in male-dominated industries. Women's groups risk focussing on how women, rather than organisations, might change.
- Mentoring provides women with opportunities to meet and learn from other successful women as role models who have overcome similar challenges. It can deliver measurable benefits in reducing women's isolation in workplaces as well as small improvements in income and progression. Mentoring is more challenging where there are few senior women available as mentors.
- Gender quotas are used to set specific targets for women's participation. These can help focus attention on gender equality, but businesses must also address underlying cultural issues that prevent women from progressing at work. Women often voice concerns that gender quotas create doubt that women's selection is merit-based.
- Formal human resource management practices designed to deliver gender equality can help address deep-seated cultural biases and unequal practices where there is transparency, oversight and accountability for how formal practices operate. This requires open procedures, clear designation of responsibility for oversight and training and accountability for line managers.
- Human resource processes in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are often informal but can be well aligned to the needs of individual employees. It is, however, difficult to ensure transparency and accountability where human resource processes are informal.
- Success in delivering gender equality is more likely where initiatives are underpinned by positive company values, have been developed in context, are flexible in their application and development, are enforced effectively and are evaluated in their impact.
- Many gender equality actions fail due to their sole focus on women, which can lead to resistance and resentment from colleagues and management. These actions can also overload women with responsibility for change that is rightly the responsibility of their employer.

Case study findings

- Case study businesses placed greater emphasis on business case motivations: addressing labour and skill shortages; responding to customer expectations; and enhancing products and services through diversity.

A wide range of gender equality actions and initiatives were identified by businesses, including:

- **Embedding gender equality in company values, culture and structures:** emphasising values during induction and appraisals; promotion of values and equalities approach in company branding and all communications; and developing an equalities strategy with designated teams (involving employees) responsible for their operation.

- **Gender Equality Action Plans:** development of priority areas for action; implementation plans; training on equalities issues and holding periodic equalities events.
- **Reviewing and revising policies to remove gendered language, and the development of new policies:** for example, in relation to flexible working, enhanced parental and maternity leave and menopause policies.
- **Recruitment and selection:** use of gender bias de-coding software and photos of women in job adverts; use of a wide range of recruitment channels to engage a more diverse workforce; gender blind CVs for shortlisting; mixed gender shortlists; new manager training; mixed gender and non-management panel members; focus on core values, attitude and willingness to learn as job criteria; and equalities-based social media and PR campaigns.
- **Work environment:** separate restrooms for women and development of informal breakout spaces to support employees in discussing personal issues.
- **Flexible working:** including working from home; formal flexible working policies; informal flexible working arrangements on an individual basis; flexible shift systems; part-time working arrangements following maternity leave; and active promotion of flexible working at recruitment, induction and on the company website.
- **Training and development:** transparent career progression routes; mentoring for new staff; opportunities to mentor; and training to support mentoring.
- **Progression:** efforts to ensure merit-based promotion; early Continuing Professional Development support for women to consider potential negative effects of care related leave; and secondment opportunities for women.
- **Improving equality in the talent pipeline:** encouraging women through graduate and apprenticeship programmes; Board training or equivalent for women; active recruiting of women at Board level; campaigns promoting women in the industry; involvement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Ambassadors programme; working with schools and community partnerships; equalities networking events; and working with supply chain partners to better embed equalities.

In terms of implementing change, monitoring progress and evaluating impact, case study businesses stated the following:

- In implementing change, case study businesses stressed the importance of: driving equalities awareness and action from leadership team level; ensuring accountability for actions; taking an incremental approach that promotes the business case for action; seeking views from employees and acting on employee inputs; avoiding a tone of 'enforcement'; providing appropriate training; using briefings and other communications; learning from internal and external sources; working with other supportive organisations, including those who accredit and recognise gender equality actions; and avoiding approaches that are only available to women.

- Case study businesses collected, monitored and analysed a wide range of relevant gender equality data; published this data internally; conducted general and equalities-specific surveys; discussed measurements at internal forums where employees are represented; encouraged feedback through a management open door policy, feedback email addresses and briefings; and discussed progress through yearly performance appraisals, including questions on whether employees feel they are treated equally.
- Assessing the impact and effectiveness of gender equality actions remains challenging. Case study businesses could point to many substantive improvements in their gender balance, more women in male-dominated occupations and in processes, such as recruitment and career progression. Employee engagement scores to diversity questions had improved and employees interviewed were able to highlight their own more positive experiences. Crucially, some businesses reported an absence of resistance to equalities actions as an indicator of the effectiveness of their gradual approach, and some reported a more positive external reputation through engaging with equalities organisations.
- Frustrations continue to exist: senior roles remain predominantly male; flexible working remains challenging for site-based work; some women are concerned about being the 'token female' and others have anxieties over having less time than men to invest in their careers; and women struggle to find time to participate in equalities initiatives. It was difficult to identify the effectiveness of business engagement with the wider education system on equalities issues.

Answering the research questions

RQ1. What can we learn from case studies of gender equality initiatives in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in other industries and how can this inform the development of a gender equality initiative for Scottish agriculture?

- The case studies show that progress in gender equality in male-dominated industries, while challenging, is possible. While some roles (particularly senior roles) are harder to adapt than others, change becomes easier over time as progress becomes visible.
- The key to successful action is an understanding of the business case for change; developing a strategic approach; embedding equalities within formal human resources practices; supporting individuals with caring responsibilities; recruiting young women through graduate and apprenticeship routes; and learning and sharing experiences with other organisations.
- What does not work is setting unachievable numerical targets or quotas, tokenism in showcasing individual women in traditionally male-dominated roles or any suggestion of discriminating in favour of women.
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face particular challenges in advancing gender equality and may lack the people and time to drive and implement change. Being small, however, can be an asset: establishing

strong trust relations with staff can support action on gender equality and may be easier in smaller firms. A respectful and inclusive culture led from the top can help deliver positive change and can be easier to communicate in smaller, less hierarchical organisations.

- Flexible working is key to enhancing gender equality and smaller businesses may have more options to offer this informally than larger businesses.
- While smaller businesses are likely to have fewer formal structures with regard to people management, taking a tailored, case by case approach to meet the needs of individual women can be effective, so long as attention is paid to transparency, accountability and consistency of treatment across staff.
- The opportunities to join equalities networking groups or educational webinars are open to members of small organisations and there is a range of freely available online resources that engaged smaller businesses can access.

RQ2. How can the impact and success of these actions be monitored?

- The impact and success of any actions to improve gender equality can be monitored through any or a combination of the following methods to improve business knowledge: collecting relevant data over time; tracking recruitment journeys by sex; conducting exit interviews; benchmarking against similar organisations; listening to staff views; consulting existing guidance and toolkits; and evaluating outcomes, independently where possible.

RQ3. How do we encourage meaningful engagement with gender equality commitments and bring about long-term sustainable change within Scottish agriculture and its organisations?

- Meaningful engagement requires that businesses change. It is not useful to focus on how women themselves might change. The importance of two-way dialogue over any change cannot be overstated and this must involve listening to the distinct experiences and needs of women.
- The strongest motivator of engagement in the case studies was the business case for change, tailored to the industry/individual organisation and focused on the benefits of taking action and the risks of failing to act. The business case can also engage supply chain partners and industry organisations.
- There is a need to accept that sustainable change is likely to be gradual. Care is needed to get the approach right and to learn. However, women employees and potential employees have the right to be treated equally now and some actions must be given urgent attention. These urgent priorities will differ across businesses.
- A business case for addressing the lack of career opportunities available to women in agriculture is essential to driving and delivering sustainable change. Greater diversity of thinking in industry bodies could help stimulate engagement more widely. This could include exploring the equalities profiles

of industry organisations since increasing diversity at board/senior levels helps to challenge ingrained group thinking.

- Case study businesses further ahead in their equalities journey may offer insight, training and guidance on how to make change happen. Advice from other businesses facing similar challenges is more likely to be trusted and compelling.

Conclusions

This research highlights evidence of progress that might assist stakeholders in agriculture. Shifting the dial on gender equality requires: adopting inclusive approaches where gender equality is everyone's responsibility, but especially so for key organisational decision-makers; embedding gender equality in values; human resource policies and practices that are transparent, fair and specific to organisational contexts; providing appropriate training to support implementation; establishing clear accountability for delivery and overseeing better equality outcomes; and continuing to measure outcomes and impact.

Recommendations

This research highlights a range of options open to agricultural businesses and organisations to improve gender equality. These options need to be considered by businesses, industry-based organisations and the Scottish Government.

Industry-based organisations and the Scottish Government

- Use the findings of this report to develop specific actions to enhance diversity of thinking, develop opportunities for discussions and work to increase the proportion of female leadership in industry organisations.
- Identify and work with organisations who are keen to enhance diversity and advance gender equality.
- Establish and support a business-led Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) network for agriculture.
- Work together to develop a gender equality initiative and to deliver engagement events for stakeholders to share and learn from good practice.
- Support business to business learning from other male-dominated industries.
- Work with the wider education system and careers guidance professionals to improve information on and awareness of the diverse range of careers in agriculture, with a specific emphasis on how women contribute to the industry and profiling successful women in the industry.

Businesses

- Follow a trajectory of improving knowledge and understanding of equalities issues, building endorsement of the need for change, actions to improve gender equality and measurement and evaluation of progress.
- Establish key baseline measures, including data on recruitment, retention, occupational segregation and gender pay gaps.

- Ensure that all workplace stakeholders have a voice in relation to equalities issues and understand that gender equality is everyone's responsibility.
- Consult women in the workplace on the barriers that they face in relation to traditional ways and hours of working.
- Audit human resource practices (formal and informal) to ensure transparency, oversight and accountability for equality practices and outcomes.
- Learn from other businesses through relevant networking events.
- Develop a 'business case' by working with business stakeholders to flesh out what this might look like.
- Make a clear leadership statement of commitment to gender equality.
- Consider the development of a gender equality strategy and enable people at different levels within the organisation to be involved in designing and driving it in order to ensure sufficient endorsement of priority actions.
- Focus on challenging problematic cultures, behaviours and practices rather than trying to change women to fit within these problematic cultures and equipping them to cope with problematic behaviours.
- Focus on actions that have evidence of effectiveness in producing positive change for women rather than actions that are currently popular.
- Identify an action plan to address priority actions within an ambitious but feasible timetable.
- Engage all staff in equalities actions and consider distributing leadership of specific initiatives to maximise engagement and endorsement.
- Establish periodic measurement of the outcomes of gender equality actions to allow for revisions where relevant, and share information on progress across the business.
- Use periodic measurement to evaluate the impact of initiatives and to generate a feedback loop that showcases success and concentrates effort on more difficult or long-standing problems.

The workforce in agriculture

- Adopt a view that equality is everyone's business.
- Women should request paid time to engage in a wider industry-led Equality, Diversity and Inclusion network.
- Women should develop and make a case for positive action to encourage women to enter and remain in the industry by sharing their experiences and challenges.
- Women should request support in relation to challenges that are specific to women as they encounter them to increase awareness and understanding of women's experiences.

1 Introduction

Research commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2017 identified that women face cultural barriers in the agriculture industry. In response, a Women in Agriculture Taskforce was established.

The Taskforce delivered a report that recommended the mainstreaming of an Equality Charter to support agricultural businesses and organisations in their commitment to gender equality.

Gender equality commitments and initiatives have already been developed across a range of industries in the UK. However, there is a lack of robust evidence about the long-term impact and effectiveness of specific initiatives.

The key objective of this research was to analyse the success and impact of gender equality actions in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across industries that are comparable to agriculture and identify any implications for Scottish agricultural organisations and businesses.

This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government to explore effective ways of bringing about greater gender equality at a structural level within Scottish agriculture.

The Women in Agriculture Taskforce was established in 2017 in response to research commissioned by the Scottish Government which found that women face cultural barriers in the industry (Shortall et al., 2017). The [Women in Agriculture Taskforce final report](#) identified key themes that would bring forward real change and practical solutions to some of the gender inequality issues that exist in Scottish agriculture. The report outlined recommendations relating to key issues around leadership, training, childcare in rural areas, succession, new entrants to farming, health and safety and crofting (Scottish Government, 2019).

The report also recommended the establishment and mainstreaming of an Equality Charter into all Scottish agriculture and related policies. The Charter would support participating agricultural businesses and organisations in their commitment to gender equality. Although the pilot phase of the Equality Charter indicated broad support for the principles of equality and diversity, creating commitments for businesses of all sizes proved to be difficult to implement. Further evidence was needed to ensure that any new gender equality initiative within Scottish agriculture is appropriately designed and implemented in order to encourage long-term change.

Beyond agriculture, gender equality commitments and initiatives have already been developed across a range of industries. Examples of initiatives include changes to recruitment practices, training and mentoring programmes and flexible working options. However, there is a lack of robust evidence about the long-term impact of specific initiatives, how successful they have been and whether their effectiveness

has been monitored and evaluated. This research addresses this knowledge gap by highlighting actions and commitments that have been implemented elsewhere.

Research aims and objectives

This research aimed to gather evidence on specific gender equality actions within industries that are comparable to agriculture. The key objective of this research was to analyse the success and impact of gender equality initiatives elsewhere and identify any implications for Scottish agricultural industry organisations and individual businesses.

This research has reviewed secondary literature and collected primary data through case studies of gender equality initiatives within UK small and medium sized Enterprises (SMEs)¹ in other male-dominated sectors such as fisheries and aquaculture, construction and engineering. A lack of accessible examples of actions in small to medium-sized enterprises led to the inclusion of larger businesses as case-studies.

The main research questions to be addressed were:

- RQ1. What can we learn from case studies of gender equality initiatives in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in other industries and how can this inform the development of a gender equality initiative for Scottish agriculture?
- RQ2. How can the impact and success of these actions be monitored?
- RQ3. How do we encourage meaningful engagement with gender equality commitments and bring about long-term sustainable change within Scottish agriculture and its organisations?

Taken together, the answers to these research questions can help shape the development of a new gender equality initiative for Scottish agriculture.

¹ The UK government definition of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) includes micro (less than 10 employees), small (less than 50 employees) and medium sized (less than 250 employees) businesses (Department for International Trade, 2020).

2 Research Design

This chapter provides a summary of the research design.

Stage One of the research involved an evidence review of gender equality literature and focused on identifying equality initiatives and evidence of their effectiveness.

Stage Two involved collecting case study data from six UK-based companies in male-dominated industries. Across all case studies, 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers and women employed in male-dominated occupations. Where available, company documents and policies were also reviewed.

Stage One of the research involved a literature review of academic peer-reviewed articles, policy reports and working papers. The review had a particular emphasis on identifying gender equality initiatives and evidence of their effectiveness. A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) was carried out with the search limited to peer-reviewed academic publications in English and readily accessible online. Table 2 in Appendix 1 summarises the research framework and provides further information about the search parameters and key databases used.

Stage Two comprised short case studies of six UK-based companies. Case-study methods are helpful in understanding the process, practice and effectiveness of gender equality initiatives and can offer genuine insight through analysing rich data from multiple sources in 'micro' organisational settings.

The case study design involved finding companies that were comparable to agriculture. Therefore, the focus was on small and medium-sized enterprises in male-dominated sectors that have structures and the budget to implement changes. Companies were identified through previous research contacts, an Internet search, or were identified as signatories of an industry Equality Charter or Pledge. After an initial focus on small to medium-sized enterprises, a lack of accessible examples led to the inclusion of companies with fewer than 1000 employees in the case studies, as outlined in Table 1.

The case studies captured the perspectives of 36 different stakeholders through semi-structured interviews. This included individuals involved in implementing equality commitments such as senior, mid-level managers and human resource (HR) managers where these existed. Topics covered included: the case for advancing gender equality; details of gender equality actions; the implementation process; the monitoring, evaluation and impact of these actions; and future plans. The research also incorporated the perspective of women working in male-dominated occupations to evaluate the effectiveness of equality actions. Interview guides can be found in Appendix 3.

The fieldwork was shaped by the public health regulations arising from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and, due to ongoing restrictions on face-to-face research interviews, were conducted online on Microsoft Teams. Semi-structured

interviews were conducted between February and June 2022 and lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded (where consent was given). A participant information sheet and consent form were shared prior to interview (see Appendix 2).

Company documents, policies and accessible administrative data were also collected where available, alongside any relevant information on the business's gender equality initiatives available in the public domain.

Table 1: Description of case study organisations and interview participants

Sector	Head office location	Organization size	Number and Type of participant
Aquaculture	Highlands, Scotland	SME (<250)	3 All Women: 2 HR, 1 director/working in male dominated occupation
Construction	North, England	SME (<250)	11 4 Management (1 male), 2 HR and training, 5 women working in male dominated occupations
Engineering	South, England	Large Employer (250+)	8 All women: 2 HR, 6 management/working in male dominated occupations
Engineering	South, England	SME (<250)	4 2 Directors (1 male), 2 women working in male dominated occupations
Engineering	North, England	Large employer (250+)	5 1 Director (male), 3 HR, 1 woman working in male dominated occupation
Engineering	Central Belt, Scotland	SME (<250)	5 All woman: 1 Director, 1 HR, 3 women working in male dominated occupation

3 Evidence review

This chapter reviews the existing evidence on gender equality actions in organisations. The key findings are:

Women face multiple barriers when joining and progressing within male-dominated industries which include discrimination, harassment and social exclusion; stereotyping as to women's suitability for certain jobs; social isolation; work-life balance challenges; and a lack of suitable facilities on work sites.

Businesses have different motivations for undertaking gender equality initiatives. These motivations are moral, compliance-related and business case. Motivations may overlap or combine, though the business case motivations have become increasingly prominent.

There are multiple practices aimed at supporting greater gender equality. The evidence suggests that these vary in their effectiveness. For example:

- There is limited evidence of the benefits of diversity training;
- Flexible working can address work-life balance issues but can also impact negatively on women's career progression;
- Women's groups can reduce social isolation but risk focussing on how women, rather than organisations, might change;
- Mentoring can reduce women's isolation in workplaces and can deliver small improvements in income and progression;
- Gender quotas can create doubt that women's selection is merit-based;
- Formal human resource management practices can help to address deep-seated cultural biases and unequal practices where there is transparency, oversight and accountability for how formal practices operate.

Success in delivering gender equality is more likely where initiatives are underpinned by positive company values, have been developed in context, are flexible in their application and development, are enforced effectively and are evaluated in their impact.

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of existing research evidence on gender equality actions in organisations. It highlights the key barriers that women face in male-dominated sectors and what motivates organisations' gender equality initiatives. It also reviews what form these take, such as diversity training, flexible working practices, the formation of women's groups, mentoring, quotas and formal human resource management practices aimed at supporting diversity. Finally, the chapter reviews the key considerations in designing and implementing actions to enhance gender equality.

3.1 Barriers to addressing gender equality

The barriers that women face in joining and progressing within male-dominated industries are well documented. These extend to workplace discrimination, social exclusion and harassment (Bridges et al., 2021); sexism, social isolation, long working hours (and the challenges this poses with regard to childcare) and the lack of suitable facilities on work sites (Clarke et al., 2005; Galea et al., 2015). In some industries, women are seen as less physically able than men (Clarke & Gribling, 2008), yet where technology can reduce the need for physical strength, this does not affect widely held perceptions that women are not suited to these jobs (Ackrill et al., 2017). Such perceptions encourage stereotypes and influence hiring decisions, starting a vicious cycle whereby a lack of female leaders, mentors and role models to support women entering these industries deters the entry of other women (Germain et al., 2012).

Other barriers prevent women's involvement even where gender equality initiatives are in place, including a lack of time for involvement, particularly from primary carers (Burdett et al., 2022), and perceptions that these initiatives provoke negative reactions from male colleagues and management (Sharpe et al., 2012).

3.2 Motivations to address gender equality

There are different motivations for undertaking equality initiatives (Baker et al., 2019), and these are important in shaping the nature of initiatives and any investment in them (Galea et al., 2015). These motivations include:

- Moral reasons – because it is the right thing to do – sometimes referred to as a 'social justice' motivation.
- Avoiding any legal consequences of not addressing gender equality – so their motivations are around compliance and risk avoidance.
- A 'business case' for intervention that recognises that diversity is good for business: enhancing innovation; increasing the available talent pool; better attracting labour and addressing labour/skills shortages and better serving customers' needs due to better mirroring the customer base (Baker et al., 2019; Ali, 2016).

These motivations may overlap or combine, though 'business case' motivations have become increasingly prominent (Johansson and Ringblom, 2017).

3.3 How to improve gender equality

There are a number of more commonly adopted practices to support greater gender equality including diversity training, flexible working practices, the formation of women's groups, mentoring, quotas and formal human resource management practices. Each of these practices is discussed below.

Diversity Training

Diversity training, or unconscious bias training, is a popular approach to enhancing diversity and equality in the workplace, and not only in relation to gender (Bielby et

al., 2013; Jones, 2019). Such training aims to improve understanding of diversity issues and to encourage people to acknowledge and address their own implicit bias. While diversity training can increase knowledge about diversity issues (Bezrukova et al., 2016), there is little evidence that it leads to improved outcomes for women, and in some instances it has been associated with increased feelings of resentment and resistance towards the minority group (Williams et al., 2014; Dobbin and Kalev, 2016). Moreover, diversity training that emphasises psychological differences between men and women can reinforce rather than challenge sex-based stereotypes and fuel the idea that it is women that need to change, not organisations (Williams et al., 2014).

While deeper engagement with the concept of diversity might have more impact, at present the evidence that diversity training helps women to progress is weak.

Flexible Working

Flexible working covers a range of working arrangements including flexible hours and location of work. Flexible working can be double-edged for workplace gender equality. It can help women balance the demands of work and home life and stay in the labour market (Maxwell et al., 2007; Chung et al., 2021). But it can also negatively impact upon women's career progression (Glass, 2004; Kelliher and Anderson, 2008) as there can be a stigma associated with using flexible working options that sees it as evidence of a lack of commitment to the organisation (Bornstein, 2013).

Stigma can relate less to the practice of flexible working than to the reason for it - working flexibly to better manage work and home life (which women are more likely to do) might be viewed as a lack of organisational commitment, while flexible working as a career development strategy (which is more associated with men's flexible working) is seen as a signal of commitment (Leslie et al., 2012; Lott and Chung, 2016). Further, the reason for working flexibly might be less important than how managers and decision makers perceive this choice, so that women are often assumed by employers to be working flexibly for family reasons regardless of their individual reasons and circumstances (Brescoll et al., 2013).

Working hours that are incompatible with caring responsibilities are seen as a real barrier to women joining and remaining in the construction industry (Clarke et al., 2005). Interestingly, while there is evidence of improved flexible working options in construction, this may be as a result of men requesting more flexibility as they take on greater responsibilities at home, not because organisations want to cater to the needs of women (Galea et al., 2015).

The key question is whether flexible working supports women's progression into more senior positions. A longitudinal study of Australian workplaces has shown that offering more work-life balance practices resulted in more women in management positions (Kalysh et al., 2015) but only after 8 years and where women made up at least 43% of the overall workforce. This time lag may account for some of the conflicting evidence on flexible working, but also shows that other gender equality actions that deliver results sooner are also required alongside flexible working.

There is evidence that flexible working options can be important in helping women balance the demands of home and work life. Any negative impact that can arise when women use these options is more influenced by employers' perceptions of women overall. Employers' perceptions need to be addressed, therefore, not just women's working hours.

For organisations, and supervisors specifically, to embrace and support flexible working (Villablanca et al., 2011; Bornstein, 2013) requires comprehensive training in how to manage it (Moen et al., 2016) and an explicit acknowledgement that job performance is about results rather than long or standard working hours (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). This may be challenging in specific industry contexts (including agriculture), but there is value in thinking about how best to focus on results achieved, not just hours worked.

Forming Women's Groups

There are many examples of individuals with a shared identity (from the same or different organisations) coming together to discuss their experiences and attempt to change the status quo (Williams et al., 2014). These are known as 'employee resource groups' (Jones, 2019), 'affinity groups' (Williams, 2014) or specifically in the case of women, 'women's groups'. These groups address gender discrimination in male-dominated sectors such as fishery and aquaculture (Soejima and Frangoudes, 2019), construction (Ackrill et al., 2017) and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) occupations (Papafilippou and Bentley, 2017).

Women's groups can be valuable in reducing women's feelings of social isolation, but there is limited evidence that they make a measurable difference to women's outcomes within male dominated sectors (Bridges et al., 2021; Dobbin et al., 2007). As Williams et al. (2014: 464) note, 'Women's affinity groups are not intended to criticize the corporation but rather to transform women to fit into and succeed in a male-dominated environment ... our interviews give little evidence that they are effective at altering the male domination of their companies'.

To deliver impact on, for example, progression, group members would need either to be in influential positions or able to influence those who are, but by their nature, these groups exclude (senior) men (Ackrill et al., 2017). This creates tension between the option to formalise these groups in organisations (Germain et al., 2012) and their operation as safe and supportive spaces for women to share experiences with those facing similar challenges.

Mentoring

Mentoring activities provide women with opportunities to meet other successful women who have overcome similar challenges and to benefit from their advice and experience (Williams et al., 2014). Mentoring is important as the lack of role models is often given as a reason why women do not enter male-dominated fields or decide to leave them (Neal-Smith, 2014; Simon and Clarke, 2016). Mentoring can provide multiple benefits, such as: reducing feelings of isolation for women working in male-dominated industries (Germain, 2012; Wright, 2016); improving subjective

outcomes such as attitude (Jones, 2019) and improving income and progression outcomes (Kalev et al., 2006).

In male-dominated industries it can be challenging to find female mentors for women, leading to some women being mentored by men in senior positions (Williams et al., 2014). While this can benefit women (Ramaswami et al., 2010), the gender dynamics at play might also reduce the potential attractiveness and impact of such an approach (Williams et al., 2014).

Mentoring seeks to help women navigate the challenges of working in male-dominated industries, as opposed to seeking to change their situation. While women mentors can identify the barriers their mentee faces and be able to help them work around them, they may not be in a position to help change the environment itself (Kay and Wallace, 2009).

Quotas

Gender quotas involve the establishment of a defined proportion of positions (in senior management or on Boards) to be allocated to women. Setting quotas can be a response to long-standing gender inequality where seemingly merit based approaches of recruiting ‘the best person for the job’ in reality drive selection based on similarity to the majority – that is, men (Baker et al., 2019). While quotas have a part to play in the journey towards enhanced gender equality, simply focusing on achieving targets may not resolve underlying cultural issues within male-dominated industries which prevent women from progressing at work (Burdett et al., 2022).

Quota-based systems can also be problematic in creating doubt that women’s selection is merit-based and raise concerns over potential positive discrimination that increases resistance and resentment from others, unintentionally increasing bias towards women. Women themselves report opposition to positive discrimination (which is of course unlawful in the UK) and to any policy that considers anything other than professional competence in hiring or progression (Williams et al., 2014: 454).

Formal Human Resource Management Practices

One potential solution to the limitations of the practices identified above is to develop formal human resource management practices that prioritise transparency, oversight and accountability. For example, there is considerable evidence that where organisations provide clear information regarding salary ranges, the significant gap between what men and women negotiate reduces (Leibbrandt and List, 2014). Similarly, formal career planning procedures can also reduce the pay gap between men and women (Abendroth et al., 2017). One longitudinal US study found that the use of formal job ladders (clearly set out progression criteria and pathways) and the practice of advertising all promotion and transfer opportunities internally before going to the external job market reduced the percentage of white men in senior positions, and increased the proportion of ethnic minority men and some ethnic minority women (Dobbin et al., 2015).

However, not all formal processes work in the same way. For example, the use of written performance evaluations has been found to be negatively associated with outcomes for women in career progression (Dobbin et al., 2015) and pay gaps (Abendroth et al., 2017). Even with the same performance ratings, men received more promotions, higher salaries and additional bonuses, with a stronger effect in male-dominated industries (Joshi et al., 2015). However, the negative impacts noted above disappear when oversight and accountability mechanisms are incorporated into performance evaluation. These might include a monitoring committee of senior members of the organisation with the power to change reward decisions; the introduction of annual pay data reporting requirements for managers; training on how to make effective and fair pay-reward decisions (Castilla, 2015) and explicit responsibility for oversight being given to senior organisational members (Jones, 2019).

Women face challenges in career progression, particularly to senior management and board level in most industries (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2021). They can face greater challenges in male-dominated industries (Clempner and Moynihan, 2020) where women are vulnerable to stereotyping about their 'fit' when it comes to promotion decisions (Kaylsh, 2015). Particularly low percentages of women progress to board and executive levels in mining (Baker et al., 2019), oil and gas (Williams et al., 2014) and construction (Galea et al., 2015).

Gender-based HR initiatives as outlined above can increase the representation of women in management and leadership teams (Baker et al., 2019). Having more senior women then signals to potential job applicants (in particular, women) that the company values equality and proactively manages diversity (Olsen et al., 2016).

Overall, while there is considerable evidence of formal human resource processes having a positive effect on women's outcomes, such benefits rely upon there being processes in place to hold decision makers to account (Jones, 2019).

3.4 Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Most research on addressing gender equality – and the adoption of formal equality policies and practices – takes place in large organisations. Research on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) suggests that fewer people involved in hiring receive equal opportunities training, and a significant minority admit to asking different questions and using different criteria when interviewing male and female candidates, being 'guided by instinct' when making hiring decisions (Woodhams and Lupton, 2006).

Yet there is also evidence in small to medium-sized enterprises of progressive yet informal initiatives tailored to the needs of individual employees. These include training interventions, reward packages and flexible working, representing '... an individual approach to the management of their female staff, using their personal knowledge of them to work with them on a one-to-one basis, train them and develop their strengths' (Woodham and Lupton, 2009: 208). This type of approach highlights a flexible and tailored investment in women's labour as an important business resource.

However, Woodhams and Lupton also reported a number of employers who were comfortable using language which stereotyped, sexualised and patronised women; where women were typecast into roles traditionally viewed as 'suitable' and where informal people management practices were used against women. These authors argue that there is a strong case for promoting and using formal policies and practices to deliver gender equality.

3.5 Success factors and key considerations

Success in gender equality actions is more likely where these actions are both robust and revisable (Galea et al., 2015; Lowndes and Wilson, 2003). Robust actions are underpinned by company values. Revisable actions have been developed, adapted from lessons learnt and are flexible in their application. Robustness has two key components. First, policies and practices to enhance gender equality should be well aligned with organisational values. This does not simply mean espoused values – what organisations claim – but also the values conveyed in deeply rooted practices. For example, if an organisation has deeply rooted practices of long working hours leading to promotion, this will likely undermine any flexible working policy that is implemented (Clarke et al., 2005; Kalysh, 2015). Second, robustness relies on effective enforcement, through both oversight and accountability (Ackrill et al., 2017; Jones, 2019), as this helps counteract 'organisational inertia' and 'wilful resistance from frontline supervisors' (Williams et al., 2014: 454).

Revisability is carried out through context-specific policies and practices (i.e. that meet the needs of specific locations and workforces) (Gopal et al., 2020) and that are flexible and adaptable over time in response to evaluation. The challenge, however, is that many organisations fail to evaluate their diversity practices. Baker et al. (2019) report that 50% of respondents in their research were unaware of any mechanisms in place that measured progress on gender equality.

Many gender equality actions fail due to their sole focus on women. In construction, Galea et al. (2015: 380) explains: 'Most interviewees associated the issue of gender equality with women, rather than an issue concerning both men and women'. This is problematic for three reasons:

- It can foster resistance and resentment in the wider workforce when equality actions are introduced, and women might disengage from these actions to avoid stigma and resentment from colleagues and management (Sharp et al., 2012). Avoiding this perverse outcome requires framing and communicating gender-enhancing initiatives in an inclusive way (Cundiff et al., 2018).
- Focussing only on women places the burden of bringing about change on women alone – sometimes referred to as a 'minority tax' – where underrepresented groups end up being responsible for attempting to change the unjust system to which they are victim (Burdett et al., 2021), despite lacking the power to drive change (Bridges et al., 2021; Galea et al., 2015).
- It suggests that women themselves need to change to fit male-dominated cultures rather than acknowledging the need for change at an organisational

level. This is evident from 'bottom-up' or 'employee-level' approaches to gender equality such as mentoring and women's groups. Formal human resource management practices are 'top-down' and can be more effective in driving positive change (Laver et al., 2018).

Conclusions

Enhancing gender equality in male-dominated industries remains a major challenge in many countries. Despite decades of work and the development of national, sectoral and organisation level initiatives, limited progress in shifting women's outcomes is evident. There is no silver bullet to deliver gender equality in male-dominated industries. There is, however, a wealth of evidence of what practices might drive positive change. This evidence highlights the potential benefits of:

- A focus on challenging problematic cultures, behaviours and practices rather than trying to change women to fit within these problematic cultures and equipping them to cope with problematic behaviours.
- Adopting inclusive approaches where gender equality is everyone's responsibility, but especially so for key organisational decision-makers.
- Ensuring that gender equality is embedded in the formal and informal values of the organisation.
- A focus on transparency and fairness in the design and implementation of HR policies and practices that explicitly recognise the need to enhance gender equality in specific organisational contexts.
- Appropriate training to support implementation.
- Clear accountability for delivering and overseeing better equality outcomes and active enforcement of gender equality initiatives.
- Measuring outcomes and impact.

4 Case Studies

This chapter presents the findings from the six individual case study companies, comprising one aquaculture company, one construction company and four engineering companies. The key findings are:

- A strong business case was seen as the most important driver of action on gender equality.
- A wide range of actions were adopted including on company values, culture and structure; recruitment and selection; flexible working; training, development and mentoring; career progression and improving the reputation of the industry through equalities actions.
- Successful implementation required senior leadership commitment; clear accountability for equalities actions; engaging the workforce, especially women; developing training and communications around equalities issues and working with other supportive organisations.
- Not all equalities actions are systematically monitored, with some being of recent origin, but reviewing equalities data was a feature in many of the businesses, as was feedback on the outcomes of monitoring.
- Businesses faced a number of challenges in evaluating the impact and effectiveness of their equalities actions but could point to improvements in gender balance and to more equality-proofed processes.

Introduction

The research findings are organised by individual case study company and include: one fisheries and aquaculture company (Case Study A), one construction company (Case Study B) and four engineering companies (Case Studies C to E).

The case studies are structured to provide:

- a short overview of the company;
- the drivers of gender equality actions;
- the key actions that have been introduced (and any actions in the pipeline);
- the implementation process;
- evidence of monitoring and evaluating progress, and the impact and effectiveness of actions.

These businesses were mainly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in industries where women are under-represented in the workforce. They were all at different stages of their journeys towards gender equality. These short case studies allow each business to be looked at holistically in its approach to gender equality. Chapter 5 draws out broader lessons from across the case studies.

Case Study A

Sector	Aquaculture
Key Stats	200 employees (49% men, 51% women) Leadership team (8 men, 2 women)
Overview	A company that does not focus on increasing gender equality specifically but rather aims to do the 'right thing' and ensure fairness for everyone and transparency in their approach.

Drivers of Action

- Industry skills shortages exacerbated by EU exit and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- A values-driven business doing the right thing with actions linked to values.
- Responding to high expectations of a major customer.

Key Actions

Recruitment: there are two recruitment panels with six members to reduce the possibility of bias and to increase fairness of decisions. One formal panel includes the line manager plus two other members of the organisation that will work directly with the individual. A second informal panel consists of three members who will not work directly with the new employee.

Reward and Recognition: a two-step process is followed for every decision to increase transparency and fairness. Line managers meet and discuss with their reportee, then a committee of line managers, members of the leadership team and a member of the HR team meet to discuss individual cases.

Parental leave: the business has recently reviewed and updated their maternity, paternity and adoption policies, including to deliver an increase in the amount paid to new mothers of £250 per week on top of statutory maternity pay. Parents are also permitted to take paid time off during working hours for antenatal care.

Work environment: some sites including staff areas (e.g. canteen) were refurbished 18 months ago, with others to follow. Key areas include separate restrooms for men and women to ensure their facilities meet women's needs. Changing areas and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provision all meet high standards. There is a plan to create more informal breakout spaces - quiet areas for a 'coffee and chat' where people feel more comfortable discussing personal issues.

In the pipeline

Menopause campaign and policy: Currently in development by the internal company forum in conjunction with line managers, this policy aims to reduce taboo and raise awareness. It will include extra time off for women at this stage in life.

Part-time/job sharing: previously only two types of contracts were available, working 20 or 40 hours a week; now more options are being considered to support the needs of the wider talent pool including women returning from maternity leave.

Flexible shift patterns: operational constraints when working with fresh produce saw shifts 'set in stone' but to address skills shortages these are now changing to a flexible shift system that gives people options to work in ways that suit them.

Implementation

As a 100% employee-owned company, actions taken (both formal and informal) are often a direct result of suggestions from organisational members. Where this is not the case, employees are consulted in the decision-making process. Decisions are also tested against the values framework which ensures actions are in line with the overall ethos of the company. This approach appears to help the company ensure that new policies and initiatives land well.

Measuring and monitoring

- The company keeps track of the gender balance in the whole organisation as well as in specific areas.
- As a supplier to one of the leading supermarkets, the company has access to the 'Better Jobs' survey which is part of a broader 'Better Jobs Programme'. This staff survey includes standard questions plus additional ones specific to the company.
- A key element of the company's approach is to ensure that all members of the organisation have a voice. In addition to the staff survey, there are three principal ways that individuals can raise issues or share ideas: monthly partnership council meetings, health and safety reporting forms (available to be filled in with a collection box in the canteen) and also a general suggestion scheme where ideas are then discussed at partnership council meetings.

Impact and effectiveness

- The company see their current gender balance as illustrative of the effectiveness of their approach to creating an inclusive environment, with women choosing to join and remain in the workforce.
- Research participants reported that the development of the recruitment process outlined earlier has increased fairness and is reducing potential gender bias.
- Research participants shared examples of women now being able to progress more easily within the company, though it is noted that senior roles are still predominantly male.

Case Study B

Sector	Construction
Key Stats	117 employees (16% women, 84% men) Leadership team (3 men, 2 women)
Overview	A family run business that is at the early stages of advancing gender equality. As the company has grown, more systems and processes have been introduced with a strong focus now on 'core values'.

Drivers of Action

- Difficulties in recruiting young people, EU exit and an ageing workforce have put a greater focus on recruitment.
- The increasing importance of adding social value into tender submissions.

Key Actions

Education: Both male and female staff actively encourage primary and secondary schools to look at company projects and actively engage with girls in schools to promote the wide range of construction jobs. The Managing Director (male) has formed a community partnership with a Youth Zone. The company is becoming more involved with career fairs and invites interested individuals in for work experience.

Recruitment: there is a greater focus now on core values, looking for the right attitude and willingness to learn as opposed to just technical experience. This may be positive in attracting women into non-traditional jobs. They ran a 'women in the industry' social media campaign, showcasing women in the company in a range of job roles. Job adverts are placed on LinkedIn and Facebook to attract a more diverse workforce, using more gender-neutral language. Job vacancies are shared internally and external job adverts include a photo of the female workforce.

Flexible working: there is no formal policy with flexible working agreed on an individual basis with a line manager. Opportunities to work flexibly are actively promoted to all employees at recruitment and induction, with plans to also promote flexible working opportunities on their website. They accommodate employees with childcare responsibilities by changing working patterns such as late start/early finish, job-share and offering part-time work following maternity leave. IT systems now enable working from home (WFH).

Implementation

- The business's approach is driven by the leadership team and the Business Development and Marketing team who engage with the community and schools.

- In 2021, the company introduced an Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS)² with a focus on accountability and having ‘the right people in the right seats’. This approach adds more structure to the employee lifecycle with an accountability chart, career path and visible job ladders.

Measuring and monitoring

The company collects personal data at the recruitment stage. Employee personal data is logged on Sage³ software but there is no formal process of monitoring or using workforce data to identify issues, patterns or trends. There are plans to start using employee data more strategically to inform business decisions.

Feedback is done through yearly performance appraisals, conducted in a more consistent way since the introduction of the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS). The company runs an annual staff survey and has recently introduced quarterly conversations. They offer a feedback email address and the Managing Director has an open-door policy.

Impact and effectiveness

- Employee research participants recognise that the company is moving in the right direction in terms of attracting more women into the company. In recent years the company has recruited several women into more traditional male-dominated occupations, such as joiners, a CAD technician, a wagon driver, welder/fabricator and quantity surveyors. Two women were also recruited into the leadership team (Head of Marketing & Business Development and Head of Finance).
- Employee research participants report positively about their experiences of managing work-life balance, career development and promotion opportunities. Although flexible working was perceived to be effective, participants recognise that this is particularly challenging for site-based work.
- Some of the workforce are more engaged in the equalities agenda than others because they recognise the importance of having a more diverse workforce (for example the leadership team and business development team) or it is important for their role, i.e. bid coordinators.
- As a smaller business, there are time constraints for employees to participate in driving the equalities agenda.
- Engagement with the education system is seen as effective in promoting work in the industry, however, it is difficult to measure impact and whether people then enter the industry. Applicants are asked how they heard about an advertised job and feedback is requested after school events and career fairs but this information is not systematically monitored.

² More information is available on the [EOS website](#).

³ Sage is a HR software platform that manages, for example, timesheets, employee data and performance management. More information is available on the [Sage website](#).

Case Study C

Sector	Engineering
Key Stats	500 employees (77% men, 23% women) 6 Board members (all men) Divisional Directors (4 men, 2 women)
Overview	An engineering company which specialises in secondment. ⁴ The company's approach to enhance gender equality (and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion overall) is to treat everyone equally and avoid singling out individuals/groups.

Driver of Action

The main driver of action is the skills shortage in the engineering sector. The company is keen to stay up-to-date with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) developments to ensure that they appeal to the widest talent pool possible.

Key Actions

Have set up a Diversity and Inclusion team: members of this team each focus on a key area of the agenda. Team members attend events (online and in person) and any training that is available in order to stay on top of developments in best practice and then put this into action in the company.

Policy Review: the in-house Diversity and Inclusion team examined all written policies, procedures, job adverts and training to remove all gendered language.

Recruitment: CV blind selection process where only qualifications and chartered status are visible to decision makers. New managers that are responsible for recruitment are provided with a stand-alone policy on recruitment. Job adverts have been updated to promote fairness across the board.

Merit-based promotion: a system that encourages fairness but does not favour women (or any other group).

STEM Ambassadors: women are offered a set amount of company time to be part of the UK wide STEM Ambassador programme⁵ to educate young people about the industry. This also contributes to social value in the business.

Company Rebrand: new values and behaviours (for example Dignity and Respect) and updated their website. The objective is to be more people-focused and aware of the employer brand, particularly for potential employees.

⁴ The company employs individuals and sends them into client organisations in the industry where their skills and expertise are required. This may be for varying periods of time depending on the needs of the client. During this time, individuals are employees of the original company but work as part of the team within the organisation in which they are seconded.

⁵ More information is available here: [STEM Ambassador Programme | STEM](#)

Implementation

The company works hard to ensure that every staff member is treated equally and avoid any policies or initiatives that are only available to women. This approach is greatly valued by women at the company.

Changes to policies such as updating and removing gender biased language in company documents or making changes to the recruitment process are reported to have been seamlessly worked on in the background and then well communicated to managers.

Measuring and monitoring

The company runs an employee engagement survey. This is viewed as being particularly important given the secondment business model because employees are placed in client organisations. The survey asks about priorities and also how people feel they are being treated in the companies they are seconded to, including if they feel they are being treated equally.

Impact and effectiveness

- Much of the targeted work that the company has done (for example changes to job adverts and updating its website) has happened too recently to measure impact. However, research participants were strong advocates for the company's overall approach.
- Research participants reported having experienced no resistance from organisational members to any equalities action that has changed or implemented and they believe that the company's subtle, inclusive approach is the reason for the positive response.
- The number of women in the company (23%) is considerably higher than the percentage of women in the sector more broadly (16.5%).
- Some research participants shared their frustration at being viewed as the 'token female' in previous employment, for example, being used on promotion material. They all agreed that this company's indirect approach based on equality for all is effective.
- Merit-based promotion is greatly appreciated by research participants. However, some concerns were raised regarding the potential for women to be inadvertently discriminated against due to time disparity (the challenge of women potentially having less time available to devote to their careers than men due to having household and caring responsibilities).

Case Study D

Sector	Engineering
Key Stats	85 employees (44% women, 56% men) Senior Management Team (8 men, 6 women)
Overview	A specialist geotechnical and geo-environmental consultancy. The company has always maintained a near even gender balance since the business started.

Drivers of Action

- A focus on retention to give women the best opportunities and flexibility to return to work after starting a family.
- Recruitment issues due to a small pool of suitable graduates and losing the European work stream.
- Recognition that women are under-utilised in the engineering sector.

Key Actions

Culture and ethos: embedded in the mission, vision and values when the company was small that they would be an employer that was committed to equality. The values are explained during induction, discussed during appraisals and are presented on a poster in the office.

Recruitment: CVs are reviewed through a gender blind process, introduced checks on gender neutral language and female friendly job descriptions, interview lists that are mixed gender, women and men on interview panels and also encourage applicants to talk to other female graduates in the company.

Promoting women in the business: the company produced a publication that showcases the careers of women in the industry. The publication was distributed to schools to encourage 14-16 year olds to become interested in engineering.

Development and progression: there is Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for technical staff to achieve Chartered Status, and is supported at the early career stage because the company recognises that starting a family can delay career progression. Secondment opportunities exist to support professional development, for example, two women spent six weeks working for a contractor.

Mentoring scheme: staff can be allocated a mentor when they join the company. Senior female role models can mentor people through their Chartership and female managers also have the opportunity to mentor junior employees.

Representation of women Boards: the company is keen to have representation of women on the Board and provide support for suitable female candidates by offering Board training or the opportunity to complete a Masters of Business Administration (MBA).

Flexible working: the company's policy allows any employee to apply for flexible working with all requests considered on an individual basis. The company has

always offered an official hybrid approach with a remote desktop system to support working from home. Flexible working patterns include a four-day week or a nine-day fortnight. There is support for part-time work following maternity leave (a two day or three day week) or to remain part-time due to caring responsibilities.

Implementation

- Gender equality commitments are driven by the Board, the Managing Director (male) and the Head of Human Resources (female) with encouragement for all levels of the organisation to take responsibility, for example, as internal and external role models.
- The company has developed a good working relationship with Women into Science and Engineering (WISE), participating in their award scheme that recognises achievements and commitments by organisations towards advancing gender equality.
- Communications about the company's gender equality actions are shared at the annual all company team day, at senior management meetings, and through regular Internet updates.

Measuring and monitoring

Data is collected and analysed by gender, for example, professional development activities and monitoring the time to promotion. The gender balance is tracked annually. Data analysis is shared on the company's project management system and used in award applications.

Employees participate in three surveys: an annual staff survey that is run by an external consultant with questions guided by the Investors in People (IiP) indicators, the WISE 10 steps metrics⁶ survey and also the Investors in People (IiP) survey. Feedback of the results is delivered at the annual team day.

Impact and effectiveness

- The company and Women into Science and Engineering (WISE) collectively raised the profile of the business, generating publicity around the company's gender equality initiatives.
- The company has been able to promote its work to clients on the basis of their achievements in advancing gender equality.
- Annual monitoring and reporting ensure that gender equality remains embedded in the company's culture.
- The company is able to attract talent by offering flexible working opportunities.
- In response to negative reactions amongst some men to the promotion of women, the company ran a light-hearted initiative called 'Men in Science and Engineering' which served to create awareness and eliminate any perceptions of positive discrimination.
- Long-standing challenge to have women represented at Board level.

⁶ [Create a culture of diversity and inclusion | WISE \(wisecampaign.org.uk\)](https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk)

Case Study E

Sector	Engineering
Key Stats	892 employees (15% women, 85% men) Leadership/director level positions (81 men, 10 women) The Executive Board: 11 Directors (one woman)
Overview	A family-owned firm that has grown significantly in recent years with a board of directors appointed 5 years ago and more structure has been introduced. This has included a structured, though subtly implemented Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy.

Drivers of Action

- Industry skill shortages: the main driver of action. The company became aware that they were not tapping into 50% of the workforce by failing to recruit and retain women.
- Client expectations: in order to get on tender lists and win work, the company realised they need to 'mirror' their clients on a smaller scale in their approach to equality.
- The company recognises that enhancing diversity creates a healthier business model, a better place to work and a more productive business as well as one that is more successful and sustainable.

Key Actions

Strategy: developed an overall Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy including 8 key areas such as recruitment, training and development and supporting people.

Working Group: the company invited nine individuals that represent all areas and levels of the organisation, lead by HR, to take part in a working group. This group meets every three months to share ideas and develop the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) approach, ensuring that messages land well.

Branding: the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) approach includes branding, with a name and logo used for all communications and work that takes place.

Mini Action Plans: the working group developed focus plans for each of the key areas in the overall strategy. These are then implemented gradually. For example, they revised job adverts by assessing the language used and changing any not deemed to be inclusive. HR are encouraging gender balance in shortlisting candidates and interview panels.

Graduate and apprenticeship programmes: one of the most successful elements of their approach so far has been the recruitment of young women through these programmes. They currently bring a 50/50 mix of men and women into the company through these routes.

Mentoring: available to everyone in the organisation but HR pay attention to ensure that women have access to this if they want it, particularly at an early career

stage. They have a short training programme for those interested in being mentored. There is a plan to have an under 30s mentoring scheme where young employees are matched with members of the executive team.

In the pipeline

Influencing their supply chain: the company is now keen to promote the business benefits of their approach to businesses in their supply chain. They believe this will not only benefit the industry but will also mean that their suppliers will be better businesses to work with.

Implementation

- **Getting the balance right:** key to their success has been a gentle, gradual approach that promotes the business case for action while avoiding jargon and enforced policies.
- **Taking an inclusive approach:** in order to get the balance right, the company has sought the views and expertise of employees from across the business via their working group which has been invaluable in ensuring messages and ideas are well received.
- **Learn and share:** the company is open to learning both from internal and external sources. Externally this has included attending webinars and joining industry Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) groups. Internally, this includes being open to challenge from all levels of the business, for example, the company learned early on to avoid singling women out and instead promote equality across the board. The company shares their learning by offering training to other organisations in similar sectors.

Measuring and monitoring

- The company conduct an annual engagement survey and they also monitor the demographics of the staff group. However, as employees are not obliged to share details with them, they do not get a complete picture.
- The company keeps track of the numbers of men and women being recruited through different routes.

Impact and effectiveness

The business is seeing results most obviously through their recruitment levels of women through their early career routes.

The logistics of having women on interview panels in a male dominated workforce can be challenging simply from an availability perspective.

Case Study F

Sector	Engineering
Key Stats	162 employees (40% women, 60% men) Company Directors 9 (7 men, 2 women) Non-Executive Directors 1 (man)
Overview	An engineering design consultancy with offices across the UK. Formed in 2009, the company has grown rapidly in the last 7 years from 30 to 162 employees.

Drivers of action

- To support the delivery of designs to be used by a diverse population.
- To prepare for regulatory gender transparency as the company grows.
- To sustain a diverse workforce at all levels with an aim to challenge industry norms of full-time work, traditional office hours and networking at events, all of which are challenging for women with caring responsibilities.

Key Actions

Culture and ethos: engineering designs are underpinned by the diversity of end users so the company works to reflect this mix in their own workforce. The company re-examined their values and worked with all employees to ensure everyone works toward the shared goal of an inclusive environment.

Recruitment: use of a gender bias de-coder⁷ website to write job adverts, social media posts and website news items that have balance in the number of masculine and feminine coded words used to appeal to everyone. Invitation to studio spaces to meet the team and showcase the inclusive workspace design and facilities as part of the recruitment process.

Promoting women in the business: female STEM Ambassadors, International Women's Day (IWD) articles published on their website and through social media, leading the way in challenging industry norms by introducing alternative networking events, addressing non-inclusive behaviours and championing flexible working.

Training and development: transparent career progression for all employees that is available immediately from graduate entry, support through mentoring and time to study for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to achieve charter status, and active bystander training⁸ instead of generic training around inclusivity.

Mentoring: 'pod' working has been introduced to create a new team structure that is more representative of the diversity within the workforce and to support learning from difference in design activity. As each pod includes difference by seniority of

⁷ See for example: [Gender Bias Decoder | Totaljobs](#)

⁸ Active bystander training asks participants to share examples and experiences from the industry to create better awareness of persistent issues and provides employees with the skills to challenge unacceptable behaviours directed at them or other colleagues.

role, they also support the professional development of junior employees. The gender ratio of pod leaders reflects the mix of men and women in senior roles.

Representation of women at Board level: two of the nine Directors are women. An organisation restructure has introduced the Head of People & Culture (female) and Head of Communications (female) to the Executive team so that there is a greater gender balance in leadership. There is recognition that female representation is needed at non-Executive Director level and the company is in the process of addressing this gap by appointing a second person (female).

Flexible working: the Directors support flexible working requests, which are agreed on an individual basis. There is demand from both women and men for flexible working, with women particularly interested in flexible working when returning to work after having a family. Flexible working practices included 50/50 hybrid working options as employees move back to the office post-pandemic. There is an enhanced maternity package available whereby the company match parental leave to try and make care-giving more equal.

Implementation

- The company created a Diversity and Inclusion team and reviewed all policies from a gender perspective.
- Training is provided at all levels of seniority on unconscious bias. Training is also provided to senior engineers on effective management to support flexible working.
- STEM Ambassadors are permitted a certain amount of work time to go into schools, colleges, universities and career fairs.
- Weekly office briefings and the company quarterly newspaper feature a regular 'people and diversity' section that celebrates difference. The quarterly practice presentations also offer a platform that is sometimes used to promote diversity.

Impact and effectiveness

Recruitment data has reported a positive change in the number of applicants since the gender bias de-coder approach was adopted for job adverts and social media posts. In the absence of systematic monitoring across all other initiatives, comments from team managers and employees interviewed reported positive feedback on the company's approach.

An annual employee engagement survey is used as a way of measuring progress. Inclusivity is highly reported in the survey results as is support for appropriate inclusive behaviours.

There is significant flexibility for both men and women with recognition that women are still doing more of the childcare.

Merit-based promotion is important although this could put some women at a disadvantage if they have less time available to work extra hours to secure promotion.

5 Conclusions

This chapter brings together the key findings from both the evidence review and case studies.

The main conclusions include:

- The benefits of adopting an inclusive approach where gender equality is everyone's responsibility but especially for key organisational decision-makers.
- The need for clear accountability for delivering and overseeing better equality outcomes and active enforcement of gender equality initiatives.
- The importance of ensuring that gender equality is embedded in the formal and informal values of the organisation. Implementing standalone initiatives that do not align with the existing culture is unlikely to have the desired effect.
- The benefits of focussing on transparency and fairness in the design and implementation of HR policies and practices that explicitly recognise the need to enhance gender equality in specific organisational contexts.
- The need to measure outcomes and impact. Well thought-out monitoring and evaluation practices are an important component of success in this area.
- The importance of encouraging meaningful engagement with gender equality commitments by focusing on challenging or problematic cultures, behaviours and practices rather than trying to change women to fit within these problematic cultures.

Introduction

This research draws on an evidence review of secondary literature and case studies of gender equality initiatives within UK businesses in other male-dominated non-agricultural sectors. This chapter brings together this evidence to address the main research questions:

- RQ1. What can we learn from case studies of gender equality initiatives in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in other industries and how can this inform the development of a gender equality initiative for Scottish agriculture?
- RQ2. How can the impact and success of these actions be monitored?
- RQ3. How can we encourage meaningful engagement with gender equality commitments and bring about sustainable changes within Scottish agriculture and its organisations?

These three research questions are answered below.

RQ1. What can we learn from case studies of gender equality initiatives in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in other industries and how can this inform the development of a gender equality initiative for Scottish agriculture?

What works:

Understanding the business case for action on gender equality

Developing a strategic approach to gender equality

Adopting formal approaches to human resource practices

Supporting individuals with caring responsibilities

Recruiting young women through graduate training/apprenticeship routes

Learning and sharing experiences with other organisations

Drawing on supply chain relations where large businesses can influence smaller businesses

A combination of patience and urgency - change in this area becomes easier over time but action is needed now

- Gaining clarity around the drivers of action, particularly the 'business case', is important and can help engage staff in gender equality actions. Key business drivers across the case studies include industry skills shortages, meeting client/customer expectations and the business value of more diverse thinking.
- Developing a strategic approach to gender equality, owned at the top of the business, is key. Real change requires high level commitment. Embedding gender equality in the business's formal and informal values can underpin an inclusive approach where gender equality is everyone's business.
- A focus on transparency and fairness in the design and implementation of human resource policies and practices that explicitly recognise the need to enhance gender equality in specific organisational contexts is crucial.
- Consideration is required to support people with care responsibilities to balance the needs of work and home. Managing the return to work for mothers is important, as is flexible working to retain female talent.
- Negative perceptions of male-dominated industries were widely highlighted. Businesses need to shift that perception to attract new entrants, but shifting perceptions also requires shifting practice. Evidence of how businesses have successfully taken action on gender equality can be effective in recruiting more women graduates and apprentices and this can be disseminated through industry wide initiatives such as the [STEM ambassadors programme](#).
- Engaging with sector activities can be valuable in accessing and sharing insight, measuring progress and enhancing gender equality. The case study businesses further ahead in their equalities journey have gone on to provide training, or showcase their actions and approach, to other organisations.

- Customer/client expectations were a key driver of action in some case study businesses. Correspondingly, case study businesses also intended to encourage companies in their own supply chain to take action to enhance gender equality, creating a ripple effect of action.
- Case study businesses experienced a tipping point in equalities action as the proportion of women increased, which made further actions easier. Increased visibility of senior women helped drive change, reduce women's feelings of isolation in the workplace, aided recruitment and retention and created greater diversity of people and thinking within teams.

What does not work:

Setting numerical targets or quotas

Actions that risk perceptions of discriminating in favour of women

Singling out women in traditionally male-dominated roles

Focussing only on the most difficult roles to change

- No case study business saw setting numerical targets or quotas for the number of women staff as a useful form of equality action.
- Perceptions of positive discrimination were unhelpful and undermine women. Setting out explicitly the difference between positive action to support women (lawful) and positive discrimination in favour of women (which is unlawful) is a useful way of pursuing both an equalities and merit-based approach to hiring and promotion.
- Tokenism, for example showcasing women in traditionally male-dominated roles through advertising campaigns, was an approach some of the case study businesses had learned to avoid. Women staff strongly opposed being made to feel different and found this approach patronising. This does create a challenge in terms of highlighting women role models sensitively, given their influence in attracting and retaining female talent.
- Manual, site-based work that involves anti-social hours continues to be more challenging to address. Case study businesses were beginning to think of ways around this, for example, rethinking shift patterns, in part as a result of skills shortages exacerbated by EU exit and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Some roles may not be possible to adapt to the level needed to be suitable for employees with significant caring responsibilities. This requires businesses to exercise sensitivity and creativity in deployment and redeployment within and beyond such roles.

Particular issues for small and medium-sized enterprises:

Business size doesn't need to matter

The importance of informal flexible working practices

Advantages and disadvantages of fewer formal structures

Fewer opportunities for progression

Accessing resources and networks

- Although smaller businesses may have less resource and capacity to implement change, smaller size may be an asset. Creating a respectful, inclusive culture led from the top of the organisation might be easier in smaller, less hierarchical businesses. Creating and maintaining the high trust relationships that can deliver and sustain change might also be more straightforward in smaller organisations.
- Flexible working is a key element of enhancing gender equality and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may have more options available in terms of offering this informally than larger firms, though care must be taken to ensure that informal arrangements do not mask unfair differential access to flexible working opportunities.
- While smaller organisations are likely to have fewer formal structures in place with regard to people management, taking a tailored, case by case approach to meet the needs of individual women can be effective, so long as attention is paid to transparency, accountability and consistency of treatment across staff. As businesses grow, however, formal systems can help ensure that progress on gender equality is appropriately monitored.
- Smaller businesses will naturally have fewer opportunities for progression which can limit career progression for all. For women, this can further increase a lack of representation at senior levels, so particular care is required to ensure that any available opportunities are equally available to women.
- The opportunities available to join equalities networking groups or attending educational webinars are open to members of small organisations in the same way as to large organisations and there is a wide range of freely available online/digital content that engaged small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can access.⁹

⁹ See for example: [Resources – WISE \(wisecampaign.org.uk\)](https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/resources)

RQ2. How can the impact and success of these actions be monitored?

Collect and analyse key statistics over time

Track successful recruitment routes for female new recruits

Conduct exit interviews for female leavers

Benchmark against similar organisations

Ensure staff have the opportunity to give feedback and share views through formal and informal methods.

Consult existing guidance and industry level toolkits

Consider external evaluation

- Monitoring key statistics (for example the total number of women or breakdown by job levels) is essential to monitoring progress and identifying areas for action. Analysis could include the following questions: Is there a level above which women tend not to progress? Is there a stage at which women tend to leave the company? Are there particular roles or areas that women tend to leave?
- Keeping track of the routes through which women join the business is also important. For example, companies may want to invest more resource or attention into successful routes and/or identify particular routes that do not seem to engage women.
- Exit interviews can provide useful information on what businesses could be doing better to deliver gender equality. An honest conversation with women leaving the firm can help identify blockages and barriers that can be addressed subsequently.
- It is often difficult for businesses to know how well they are doing on equalities actions. Where data is available, benchmarking against industry standards can provide insight on areas for action and can help in assessing the effectiveness of the business's approach to equality.
- Ensuring there are several routes through which staff can share detailed feedback on their experience of specific actions that have been taken is important, as well as listening to their more general views. This can be done formally (for example, through staff surveys) or more informally through line managers.
- Industry level toolkits, Charters and Pledges can provide useful guidance on how to approach the measurement of impact and success.¹⁰
- External organisations may be able to provide support in evaluating the impact of equalities action taken, though this is likely to come at a cost. Publicly funded business support services might be able to develop or make available appropriate tools and measures to help agricultural businesses.

¹⁰ Examples of resources can be accessed here: [Diversity and Inclusion Research \(raeng.org.uk\)](http://raeng.org.uk); [MAP \(measure, analyse, plan\) Tool | Women in Nuclear UK \(winuk.org.uk\)](http://winuk.org.uk) and [Resources – WISE \(wisecampaign.org.uk\)](http://wisecampaign.org.uk).

RQ3. How do we encourage meaningful engagement with gender equality commitments and bring about long-term sustainable changes within Scottish agriculture and its organisations?

Organisations need to adapt, not individuals

Focus on equality rather than singling out women

The importance of encouraging genuine two-way dialogue

Communicating a strong business case can deliver buy-in, engagement and sustainable change

Learn and influence within supply chains

Accept that change is likely to be gradual, but action is urgent

Highlight career opportunities in Scottish agriculture

Enhance diversity of thinking in industry organisations

Increase representation of women in leadership roles in industry organisations

Industry level initiatives to support women across (particularly small) businesses

Explore ecosystems of support available in similar industries

- It is crucial to recognise that it is organisations that must change in order to deliver gender equality, not women. The actions of powerful stakeholders are the key to creating more inclusive environments.
- Actions focussed solely on women can and do create resentment and resistance which hampers progress. Equalities actions need to be framed as everybody's business. While some actions such as highlighting individual women role models can have impact, there is a need for caution over 'singling out' individual women.
- Engagement with gender equality commitments requires dialogue across businesses, and specifically with women. This includes information sharing and listening to concerns and challenges.
- While gender equality undoubtedly is 'the right thing to do', evidence suggests that a strong business case is key to engaging people within businesses, including exploring the benefits of taking action (for example, meeting client expectations) and the risks of failing to act. Gaining a better understanding of the potential benefits of gender equality in Scottish agriculture is an important first step towards sustainable change.
- Exploring the supply chain within an industry and possibilities for larger players to influence smaller organisations could be a successful approach to delivering industry-wide change.
- Care is needed to develop the right approach to gender equality as well as time to adapt the approach based on feedback. However, realistic expectations of progress must also sit alongside recognition that women are entitled to action on equality now.

- This research highlighted a lack of understanding of career opportunities in male-dominated industries amongst young women and recognised the importance of engaging with the education and careers guidance systems. This has also been highlighted by the Women in Agriculture Taskforce in their [final report](#) (2019). The [STEM ambassadors programme](#) may offer a useful example that could be adapted for agriculture.
- Increasing diversity at board level helps to challenge ingrained group thinking. Improving Board level diversity in industry organisations could help create a ripple effect that stimulates wider change.
- All case study businesses struggled to achieve gender balance at leadership and board levels. There was broad agreement that better outcomes over time required taking the correct action now, including encouraging more women to join the industry and retaining them (through careful management of the particular challenges facing women) and ensuring fair and transparent career progression.
- Case study companies further ahead in their equalities journeys may offer insight, training and guidance on how to make change happen, and should be supported to do so by industry-level organisations. Advice from other businesses facing similar challenges is more likely to be trusted and compelling.

This research has identified significant challenges facing women in male-dominated occupations and industries but has also highlighted evidence of progress that might assist stakeholders in agriculture.

Shifting the dial on gender equality requires:

- adopting inclusive approaches where gender equality is everyone's responsibility but especially so for key organisational decision-makers;
- ensuring that gender equality is embedded in the formal and informal values of the organisation, rather than focus on standalone initiatives;
- focusing on transparency and fairness in the design and implementation of human resource policies and practices that explicitly recognise the need to enhance gender equality in specific organisational contexts;
- providing appropriate training to support implementation;
- establishing clear accountability for delivering and overseeing better outcomes and actively enforcing gender initiatives; and continuing to measure outcomes and impact.

6 Recommendations

Industry-based organisations and Scottish Government should work together to increase awareness, support and networking in agriculture and help businesses to access expertise and guidance.

Businesses should improve their knowledge and understanding of equalities issues; build internal support for change; identify priority actions; collaborate with staff on implementation; and build measurement of outcomes and impact into ongoing learning.

Individuals should adopt a view that equality is everyone's business and engage with their employers in advancing equality outcomes where possible.

This research has highlighted a range of options open to agriculture businesses and organisations to improve gender equality. These need to be explored in the specific context of the agriculture industry by businesses, industry-based organisations and the Scottish Government.

Industry-based organisations and Scottish Government

- Use the findings of this report to develop specific actions to enhance diversity of thinking, develop opportunities for discussions and work to increase the proportion of female leadership in industry organisations.
- Identify and work with organisations who are keen to diversify and advance gender equality.
- Establish and support an industry-led Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) network for agriculture. This could include an online hub to raise awareness, promote the Equality Charter and share good practice initiatives and resources. Deliver engagement events to bring the network together to share and learn from good practice.
- Support business to business learning from other male-dominated industries.
- Work with schools, colleges, universities and careers guidance professionals to improve information on and awareness of the diverse range of careers in agriculture, with a specific emphasis on how women contribute to the industry and profiling of successful women in the industry.

Businesses

- Follow a trajectory of improving knowledge, understanding, endorsement, action, measurement and evaluation.
- Establish key baseline measures, including data on recruitment, retention, occupational segregation and gender pay gaps.
- Ensure that all workplace stakeholders have a voice in relation to equalities issues and understand that improving gender equality is the responsibility of all.

- Consult women in the workplace on the barriers that they face in relation to traditional ways and hours of working.
- Audit human resource practices (formal and informal) to ensure transparency, oversight and accountability for equality practices and outcomes.
- Learn from other businesses through relevant networking events.
- Develop a 'business case' by working with business stakeholders to work out what this might look like.
- Make a clear leadership statement of commitment to gender equality.
- Consider the development of a gender equality strategy and enable people at different levels within the organisation to be involved in designing and driving it in order to ensure sufficient endorsement of priority actions.
- Focus on challenging problematic cultures, behaviours and practices rather than trying to change women to fit within these problematic cultures and equipping them to cope with problematic behaviours.
- Focus on actions that have evidence of effectiveness in producing positive change for women rather than actions that are currently popular.
- Identify an action plan to address priority actions within an ambitious but achievable timetable.
- Engage all staff in actions and consider distributing leadership of specific initiatives to maximise engagement and endorsement.
- Establish periodic measurement of the outcomes of gender equality initiatives to allow for course correction where relevant, and share information on progress across the organisation.
- Use periodic measurement to evaluate the impact of initiatives and to generate a feedback loop that showcases success and concentrates effort on more difficult or long-standing problems.

The workforce in agriculture

- Adopt a view that equality is everyone's business.
- Women should request paid time to engage in a wider industry-led Equality, Diversity and Inclusion network.
- Women should develop and make a case for positive action to encourage women to enter and remain in the industry by sharing their experiences and challenges.
- Women should request support in relation to challenges that are specific to women as they encounter them to increase awareness and understanding of women's experiences.

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Appendix 1: Research Design

To address the research aims and objectives a flexible methodological approach was required. The research combined the development of a desk-based evidential approach and empirical case studies of six UK-based organisations in male-dominated industries.

Evidence review

In November 2021 we conducted a comprehensive robust evidence-led overview of the gender equality literature and recent sources for and evidence of interventions. We carried out a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) with the search limited to peer-reviewed academic publications in English and readily accessible online. As part of the process we utilised the PICO research framework outlined in Table 2. It made practical sense to focus primarily on UK-based studies since this provides a consistent context on issues such as the legal basis for equalities, however studies from other regions were also included in order to gain an overall understanding of the topics in question. Initial searches were focused on articles from 2010 onwards to incorporate the most relevant critical reviews, however subsequent searches found some key contributions made in the area before 2010. Qualitative and quantitative studies were included as were original research studies and meta-analyses.

When considering the research included in this review, it was apparent that there are limitations in the research base, both in the quantity and quality of evidence. Many of the studies included in this review are qualitative in nature and while this is not a criticism in itself, it would be valuable to have more quantitative studies to draw on. In particular, it was difficult to find quantitative studies which evaluated specific initiatives, especially those in male-dominated sectors comparable to agriculture as well as evidence of research examining this issue in small and medium sized organisations (SMEs).

Table 2: Rapid Evidence Review

Framework	
Population Impact Control (context) Outcome Context	Female workers Organisational interventions to improve female progression All relevant Barriers/facilitators of progression Workplace
Search Terms	
Population	Gender OR women OR woman OR female OR sex
Impact	Intervention OR “organisation* polic*” OR mentor* OR flex* OR “work life” or “family friendly” or “work-life” or “family-friendly” or training or target* OR initiative OR practice OR diversity
Control	Barrier* OR inhibit* OR bias OR inequality OR sexism OR “Gender imbalance” OR “sex imbalance” OR “sex inequal*” OR “gender inequal*” OR “sex equal*” “gender equal*” OR stereotype
Outcome	Progression or development OR trajecto* OR leader* OR advancement OR promotion OR pay OR success OR “gender gap” OR “gender divide” OR “vertical segregation” OR “glass ceiling” OR “glass labyrinth” OR “glass cliff” OR “mummy track” OR “parent track” OR “sticky floor” OR “occupational mobility” OR “gender differentiation” OR “occupational achievement” OR “sex differentiation” OR “career opportunities” OR hierarch*
Context	Career OR workplace OR job OR employment
Boolean Operators	(All in Title or Abstract) Population AND Impact AND Control AND Outcome AND context
Restrictions	
Geography	None
Language	English
Time	2010-2021
Databases	Potentially: Proquest’s Social Science Premium Collection, EBSCOhost Business Source, Psycinfo and the Web of Science core collection. A pragmatic approach would be taken in terms of selecting studies to include within this period, given the time scale. Our sampling strategy is based on conceptual and sectoral saturation. That is, if we have included 5 studies on a particular sector and the findings are broadly similar, we may then omit previous studies of the same sector, but will continue to read studies of previously uncovered sectors.
Additional Comments	
	Search supplemented by ‘pearl-growing technique’, including following up on the references of key texts, and papers subsequently referencing them.

Case Studies

The second stage comprised short case studies of six UK-based organisations in male dominated industries. Case study methods are helpful in understanding the process, practice and the efficacy of gender equality initiatives and can offer genuine insight through analysing rich data from multiple sources in 'micro' organisational settings. Whilst this research aimed to address the knowledge gap about the effectiveness of gender equality actions and commitments, it is important to acknowledge and appreciate that short-term case study approaches will have some limitations on access to information and data available.

The case study methods blended a range of pro-forma (for example, organisational profile characteristics, workforce demographics, functional profiles, recruitment criteria) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews).

Case Study Design

The initial case study design incorporated 4-6 small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in male-dominated sectors with the aim of gathering evidence from the following sectors: construction; fisheries and aquaculture and; transport & storage and also ensuring an equal mix of small (10-49 employees) and medium sized (50-249 employees) enterprises. It was also important to include small to medium sized organisations which have the structures and budget to implement changes.

We used a number of channels to recruit potential case study organisations across the UK. These included an Internet search, social media (LinkedIn and Twitter) and our professional networks which included the CIPD, Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, Scottish Business Pledge, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, Business in the Community and trade unions. In addition to this we reached out to equality and diversity organisations such as the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion to distribute information about our research to their members. It also proved useful to find potential organisations that had signed up to pledges and equality charters across a range of male-dominated sectors such as construction, engineering, nuclear and rail.

During our search there were challenges accessing or finding companies that fit with the case study design so we broadened our search to include other male-dominated sectors such as energy, waste management and the automotive industry. After an initial focus on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), a shortage of accessible examples led to the inclusion of firms with up to 1000 employees.

Stakeholder in-depth interviews

Case studies capture perspectives of different stakeholders so a multi-respondent design was conducted. We aimed to obtain a representative range of views on the implementation and evaluation of gender equality commitments and initiatives within each case study where possible. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 key stakeholders who were either involved in implementing equality

commitments (for example senior management and human resource managers) or could evaluate the effectiveness of equality commitments as a woman working in the organisation, predominantly in traditionally male-dominated occupations. A participant information sheet and consent form were shared prior to interview (see Appendix 2).

The fieldwork was shaped by the public health regulations arising from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and due to ongoing restrictions on face-to-face research we conducted interviews online via Microsoft Teams. As well as avoiding potential negative health impacts associated with the pandemic, this method also minimises the 'research burden' and offered greater flexibility to potential research participants.

Interview guides (see Appendix 3) included questions that were informed by the evidence review and Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER) researchers' prior knowledge of evidence relating to the topics under investigation. Some additional questions were taken from evidence in the public domain that related to women working in male-dominated occupations and sectors.

Interviews took place between February and June 2022 and lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded (where consent was given) and the transcript produced through Microsoft Teams was checked for accuracy by the researcher who conducted the interview. A thematic analysis was undertaken – guided by the research objectives, the interview guides plus any key themes that emerged from the research.

Engaging with a range of individuals covered in this research allows for multiple issues to emerge and ensures that no single stakeholder view dominates the analysis. The data allowed for a wide-ranging assessment of the views from different groups on the implementation and impact of gender equality initiatives.

Company data and documents

In addition to the interviews we also reviewed company documents, policies and accessible administrative data where this information was available, alongside any relevant information on their gender equality initiatives available in the public domain.

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet



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Gender equality initiatives in male-dominated sectors

What is the purpose of this research?

The Scottish Government has commissioned this research to explore effective ways of bringing about greater gender equality within male-dominated sectors. There is a lack of robust evidence about the long-term impact of specific interventions, how their effectiveness has been monitored and evaluated, and whether these have been successful, or not. The research aims to learn from gender equality actions and commitments that have been implemented in SMEs operating in male-dominated sectors. The final report will inform the development of a new gender equality initiative for Scottish agriculture.

Why have I been asked to participate?

As a manager or employee, your participation is important as it will help us to better understand the effectiveness of gender equality commitments and initiatives within your business.

What will I have to do?

You will be asked to participate in an interview which will be conducted online via a digital platform, for example MS Teams, or on the telephone. With your permission the interview will be recorded. It should last approximately 45 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You will be asked to sign a consent form if you are happy to participate in this research.

What will you do with the information I provide?

The information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous and you will not be identified in any of the research outputs. Your data will be held securely on the University of Strathclyde's server and only accessed by the Innovating Works research team. Any use of the data will be governed by the ethical guidelines of the University of Strathclyde. Please also read our Privacy Notice for Research Participants v0.8.¹¹

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research, or the information in this form, then please contact Dr Eli Dutton at eli.dutton@strath.ac.uk

¹¹ [Information sheet & consent form | University of Strathclyde](#)

Consent Form



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Gender equality initiatives in male-dominated sectors

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and a researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of some personal information and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data:
 - Video recording that identifies me;
 - Audio recording of interview that identifies me;
 - My personal information from transcripts.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio and/or video recorded as part of the project (if I exercise my right to withdraw and I don't want my data to be used, any data which has been collected from me will be destroyed).

Name:	Job role:
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Please tick this box if you would like to opt-in to receive a one-page summary of the results after the report is published.

Appendix 3: Interview guides

Management interview guide

Background

Can you tell me about your role and responsibilities in this company? What attracted you to working in the [insert industry]?

Case for change

Can you give me a sense of the gender balance within your organisation? Has this changed over time? Women concentrated in particular occupations? Growth in the number of women in male dominated occupations? Leadership positions?

What are the key barriers that women face in terms of entering and remaining in this industry (or in particular occupations in this industry)? e.g. sexism, social isolation, long-working hours/lack of flexible working option, lack of suitable facilities on sites, perceptions around physical attributes such as strength, general conduct and behaviour.

What are the particular challenges you face as a business in attracting and retaining women into more traditional male occupations? (Prompt for perceptions of the industry, nature of work, working conditions)

What prompted you to take action in this area? (Prompt for moral, legal, business case) E.g. External pressure/recruitment challenges/skills shortages/innovation/doing the 'right thing'?

When did you begin to focus on this agenda? Where are you on your journey in addressing gender equality? Prompt for starting out (talking about the business case), further along (collecting employee feedback) well developed (responding to employee feedback with an Action Plan, mainstreaming into all activities)

What assessments do you make when designing gender equality interventions? Use of data (metrics and analytics) to identify issues?

At what level is change being driven – strategically? Operationally?

Is data shared with department/division managers?

Details of initiatives/actions to advance gender equality

What action (if any) is your organisation taking aimed at enhancing gender equality/increasing the number of women in the company?

- Formal Human Resource Management practices (e.g. standardised interview process, formal job ladders, transparency in promotion decisions etc.)

- Policies (e.g. maternity, paternity, menopause)
- Flexible working options (e.g. flexi-time, part-time, working time autonomy, the four-day working week, home-working) and leave options
- Women's groups/networks (company or industry level), mentoring opportunities
- Quotas
- Diversity/unconscious bias training
- Work environment/work conditions – physical spaces, safety, PPE, uniform, facilities
- Work behaviour – general behaviour, equality issues in dignity and respect (verbal abuse, humiliating treatment, bullying/harassment)
- Changes to the nature of work e.g. technological advancements, robotics
- Engagement programmes with schools, FE and HE. e.g. career fairs and the local community

Can you give us a sense of the timeline of action – when did you put things in place?

When did you expect to see results?

How did you determine the approach that you took? E.g. were staff consulted/were area experts consulted/did you explore the situation in your organisation and/or sector and tailor your approach? (were the barriers mentioned identified/explored and used as a basis for the action taken by the organisation?)

How do gender equality actions fit within the broader strategy of the organisation?

Are initiatives part of an overall strategy or are they stand alone?

Who is responsible for the action/initiatives? How senior are they in the organisation? Is it part of their role or is it a 'voluntary' addition? Are they women or men or a team of both?

Implementation

What was your experience of setting up their initiative(s?) did you face any challenges? E.g. resistance from staff at any level/participation challenges?

Are your initiatives targeted at women specifically or are they offered to full employee base?

What are people's perceptions of how the initiatives were received? (there is evidence that initiatives often result in stigma/negative perceptions – e.g. stigma around making use of flexible working) – if you've encountered any issues such as these, have they taken any action to address this? Has it worked?

Are managers provided with any training? (e.g. if there is a flexible working policy, are managers trained in how to implement and use this effectively? Or with hiring policies, is training in equal opportunity interviewing provided?)

Do you communicate your initiatives? E.g. through the website/career sections/other externally focused comms?

Do you feel there has been a strong and consistent level of buy-in across managers and staff within the organisation? Any groups difficult to persuade? Any groups/members of staff that played a key role in driving this agenda forward? Are there staff networks involved in driving/supporting this work? Are there any accountability measures built into these initiatives?

Do you have sufficient resources to support your initiatives?

Monitoring, evaluation and impact of initiatives

Do you measure factors related to gender equality? If so, how long have you done this? – what happens to this data?

Are you monitoring the impact/effectiveness of your initiatives? Do you seek feedback from participants (or staff more generally if we're talking about policies such as parental leave/flexi-work?) Are you tracking any impact on numbers such as applications from women/women being hired/women being promoted?

If you are monitoring/assessing action/initiatives – are they 'working'? What impact are they having? Any evidence of improvements?

If you are getting feedback from employees, what does this look like? Do they have ways of acting upon it?

How effective have these initiatives been? What has worked, or not, and why?

Do you think there were any particular factors that enabled the equality initiatives to become successful? E.g. good data, leadership support, funding, communication.

What would make them more effective?

Future Plans

What does the company plan to do going forward? Do you have plans in place to introduce any further initiatives/programmes/make any further commitments?

What advice would you give to other organisations in male dominated sectors embarking upon this journey?

Industry wide focus

Do you think the size of your company impacts on your approach and what you feel able to implement? – e.g. for SMEs, does the size of your company impact positively and/or negatively upon your ability to take action in this area?

Is your action in line with that of other organisations in your sector?

Are you part of any sector groups that promote action in terms of enhancing gender equality?

Are there any ramifications for not taking action in this area within your sector/industry? (for example, if we compare this issue to safety – within many industries there are serious ramifications if safety isn't taken seriously – but issues such as gender diversity often fall much lower on the priority list.)

What are the challenges you face to improve the gender balance within your business? [prompt for resources available, line manager buy-in]

Employee interview guide

Background: attraction to the industry, career aspirations & personal experience

Tell us about your current role?

What first attracted you to working in the [insert industry] or [insert occupation]?
How did you find out about the job and what qualifications did you require?

What are your future career aspirations? Do you see yourself staying in this job or moving on? Why/why not?

Have you encountered any obstacles in your career because you are a woman?

Have you encountered any obstacles you do not think a male in the same occupation as you would encounter?

Views on the business' approach to advancing gender equality

We want to understand what kind of efforts have been made within your company to advance gender equality. Prompt for awareness, endorsement, use and effectiveness for the following:

- Formal Human Resource Management practices (e.g. standardised interview process, formal job ladders, transparency in promotion decisions etc.)
- Policies (e.g. maternity, paternity, menopause)
- Flexible working options (e.g. flexi-time, part-time, working time autonomy, the four-day working week, home-working) and leave options
- Women's groups/networks (company or industry level), mentoring opportunities
- Quotas
- Diversity/unconscious bias training
- Work environment/work conditions – physical spaces, safety, PPE, uniform, facilities
- Work behaviour – general behaviour, equality issues in dignity and respect (verbal abuse, humiliating treatment, bullying/harassment)
- Changes to the nature of work e.g. technological advancements, robotics
- Engagement programmes with schools, FE and HE. e.g. career fairs and the local community

What are your thoughts on your company's approach to gender equality? Could more be done? What are the challenges in being able to do more? e.g. resource constraints, no individual responsible for driving the agenda.

Are there mechanisms in place for you to feedback and share your views on policies and processes relating to improving the gender balance?

Have you seen positive outcomes in terms of more women working in the business, particularly in male-dominated occupations? Promotions? Women in leadership roles? Retention?

Challenges in advancing gender equality within your industry/business

What are the key barriers that women face in terms of entering and remaining in [insert industry/business]? e.g. sexism, social isolation, long-working hours/lack of flexible working option, lack of suitable facilities on sites, perceptions around physical attributes such as strength.

Is [insert industry/business] a welcoming environment for women? Why/why not?

Why do you think women remain underrepresented in [insert industry/business]?

Would you recommend that young women seek out careers in [insert industry]?

What could the industry and wider society be doing to encourage more women to work in [insert industry]?

How does a diverse workforce benefit [insert industry] as a whole?



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This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.
ISBN: 978-1-80435-984-6

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
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EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS1163182 (10/21)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
October 2022



Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-80435-984-6

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS1163182 (10/22)