

Gender Commission Evidence Review

The role of employers in improving
gender balance in apprenticeships

Rapid Evidence Assessment

February 2021

Evaluation and Research Team

Contents

Key Findings	1
1. Introduction	2
2. The business case for gender diversity	4
3. Barriers to achieving gender balance	5
4. Addressing gender segregation	9
5. Gaps in evidence	15
6. Implications.....	15
References	16

Key Findings

This report demonstrates the crucial role of employers in encouraging and sustaining gender balance in apprenticeships.

Diverse businesses are more successful, enabling broader perspectives and expertise from a wider pool of talent. Diverse businesses can be more successful through widening access to talent, encouraging diverse thinking, developing a better understanding of customers and improving staff retention.

Barriers to greater gender equality exist on both the demand-side and supply-side of the labour market.

- Employers' recruitment practices and workplace cultures may not fully recognise the gendered constraints on women's lives.
- Gender stereotyping of career aspirations and preferences begins early in a young person's life.

Specific barriers face SMEs, the STEM sector and the Care sector in recruiting a gender diverse workforce.

Achieving greater gender balance in apprenticeships is complex and action is required to change individuals' attitudes and societal practices. Employers have a critical role alongside parents and carers, schools, colleges, careers advisers, unions, and government.

Gaps are evident in the evidence base, especially around apprenticeships. Improved reporting of apprenticeship recruitment, retention and progression would inform future action.

1. Introduction

Although in recent years there has been an increase in female Modern Apprenticeship starts, there are differences in the types of frameworks and levels entered by men and women. These differences reflect gender segregation in the labour market:

- **Gender differences in sectors:** while traditionally male-dominated craft sectors have become marginally more balanced, the employment of women in traditionally female health and social care has become even more entrenched.
- **Gender differences in completion rates:** women are more likely to complete if they are in female-dominated frameworks, but less likely to do so if they are in male-dominated frameworks.
- **Gender differences in outcomes:** women who complete Modern Apprenticeships earn significantly less than men five years after completion. This is partly due to the higher number of men in occupational groupings with higher median earnings.

The Gender Commission was set up to address gender imbalance in apprenticeships. As part of this work, the SDS Evaluation and Research team were asked to conduct a review of evidence on the role of business in promoting and sustaining gender equality. The review was carried out between December 2020 and January 2021. The results will be shared with the Gender Commission and specifically feed in to the 'role of business' subgroup. Findings will be used in the final report from the Gender Commission.

1.1 Research Aims

The overall research aim was to review the literature about the role of business in encouraging and sustaining gender balance in apprenticeships. The specific research areas were:

- The business case for gender diversity, generally and in relation to apprenticeships.
- The barriers to businesses achieving gender balance in their apprenticeships, including the specific barriers for employers in the STEM and Care sectors.
- How gender imbalance in apprenticeships can be addressed. This included looking at the role of Early Years education and schools; and specific issues for SMEs.
- The characteristics of good practice.
- The main gaps in evidence.

1.2 Approach

The review used a Rapid Evidence Assessment method. This is a systematic approach to identifying and critically appraising studies¹. To ensure the approach is 'rapid', restrictions are placed on the breadth, depth and comprehensiveness of the search. Criteria limitations included English-language published sources after 2010 which looked at gender and apprenticeships. This approach was systematic and involved:

- Identifying sources by reviewing abstracts of all literature and focusing on those which were within the restricted criteria.
- Reviewing the full text of the studies included and sorting these into research question themes.
- Extracting the main data from each publication including author, year, population, method, research design and main findings. This information was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet.
- Critically appraising the publications based on the quality and relevance of studies.
- Summarising the main findings, for each research area focusing on the documents with the highest quality and relevance scores.

A total of 106 sources were reviewed for screening. 58 sources were excluded as they did not look at gender specifically. The remaining 48 sources were critically appraised based on their quality and relevance. Four of these were excluded due to low quality and / or relevance.

Ultimately 44 sources helped inform the findings of this report. Of these, four papers were based on international research with the remainder being UK-based. 14 of these were specific to Scotland.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Section 1** introduces the purpose, aims, and approach to this research.
- **Section 2** presents the business case for gender diversity.
- **Section 3** highlights the barriers to achieving gender balance.
- **Section 4** summarises methods of promoting gender balance.
- **Section 5** presents the implications of these findings for the Gender Commission.

¹ The National Archives (no date) 'How to do a REA'. Available: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140402163101/http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/resources-and-guidance/rapid-evidence-assessment/how-to-do-a-rea>

2. The business case for gender diversity

The business case for diversity was highlighted extensively in the evidence we reviewed. **Diversity broadens perspectives and expertise within businesses**, which in turn delivers business benefits including improved organisational performance, improved access to resources (especially human resources) and increased financial value.

In short, diverse businesses are more successful.

The literature shows that while women participate in the labour market, there are inequalities in pay and progression and gender segregation in certain occupations. Occupational gender segregation in Scottish apprenticeships is recognised as an issue, but the problem is not uniquely Scottish and occurs across economies where apprenticeships are used for work-based training (ILO, 2017).

Occupational gender segregation affects the way that the labour market works, constraining individual occupational choices and opportunities. This creates labour market rigidities and limits economic growth because the productive capacity of the workforce is not being used fully. This results in economic injustice for women and is also bad for businesses and the economy (Unionlearn, 2018; Campbell et al., 2013).

Evidence suggests that increasing gender balance in sectors which are imbalanced can deliver business benefits for employers, including employers who offer apprenticeships (Young Women's Trust, 2016). These include the following:

- **Widening access to talent.** If businesses tend to recruit only one gender, they are likely to be missing out on recruiting people with strong qualifications and skills that could help them reduce skills gaps and shortages and generate a better skill mix across the business.
- A more gender balanced workforce can increase the likelihood of **more diverse thinking** which can improve innovation and lead to improved team and individual performance.
- There is some evidence that more diverse and gender balanced workplaces can **improve staff retention**.
- More diverse and gender balanced workplaces have a **better understanding of customers** and enhanced customer relations.

These benefits can increase profitability, company reputation and productivity.

3. Barriers to achieving gender balance

Although the benefits of gender balance are clear, there are many barriers to achieving it. We looked at factors which contribute to gender imbalances in the labour market in general and specific factors relating to apprenticeships. We also looked at factors related to the STEM and Care sectors.

Inequality begins before women enter the labour market. Children have already formed gendered expectations of employment in early years educational settings and these ideas persist as they move through education, leading to gender segregation in subject choice in school, further and higher education, apprenticeships and the labour market (Close the Gap, 2020).

A useful perspective on the barriers can be gained by looking at those on the supply side - potential employees and apprentices; and on the demand side - employers, training, apprenticeship delivery (Newton and Williams, 2013).

3.1 Supply side barriers

On the supply side, parents, carers and wider society have views about 'appropriate' careers for young women, including negative perceptions of certain occupations. Some sources identify that the main cause of gender segregation in the workplace – reflected in apprenticeship uptake – is the **continued acceptance of traditional cultural norms** and stereotypical views among the main influencers on young people's careers choices, including parents, teachers and employers. As a result, women's confidence in their abilities can be negatively impacted by the gender-typing of different work and skills through stereotypes. For example, women are less likely than men to apply for a role if they don't feel like they meet 100% of the job specification, whereas male candidates may apply if they feel are able to perform as little as 60% (Hassan and Stock, 2020).

UK and international evidence suggests **young people receive limited practical information** and careers guidance about apprenticeships. This means young people can be influenced by negative and stereotypical views about apprenticeships, including that they are low-paid, hard work, mainly for men or for people who fail to get into university. Young people are not given enough opportunities to identify and debate gender stereotyping in the labour market. This can mean that they have few opportunities to change their attitudes. Young people may develop perceptions that they are not welcome in some sectors and have little chance of being successful. These gendered ideas about apprenticeships only being for one group can become ingrained. This can lead to young men and women working in jobs that they feel they 'should' be doing rather than ones they *could* be doing (Kashefpakdel and Rehill, no date; Learning and Work Institute, 2018).

Socioeconomic group, gender, and prior attainment are additional factors which impact decisions about starting an apprenticeship. For example, the Young People in Scotland survey 2019 (SDS, 2020) found that boys are more likely to want to do an apprenticeship, more likely to have received information about them, and more likely to see the benefits of apprenticeships compared to other routes. Other research (Walsham, 2017) has found that young people perceive apprenticeships as low-paid, hard work, and for people who fail to get into university.

However, there are mixed findings about whether women are less likely to apply for an apprenticeship or are less likely to succeed in their application. For example, one study found female Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (EMT) applicants submit just one application to the sector at a time, whereas men tended to submit two or more applications. There was little difference in success rates for each application submitted, the gender imbalance was a result of more men applying and making more applications on average. The study also found women are less likely to focus on the EMT sector than men: applying to a range of other sectors frequently unrelated to EMT: 40% of female applicants had applied only to the EMT sector, compared with 56% of men. Women are less likely to persist in applying for apprenticeships within the sector; only around 25% of women who unsuccessfully applied for an EMT apprenticeship subsequently made further applications to the sector, compared with 43% of men (National Learning and Work Institute, 2017; Egglestone, Jones, and Aldridge 2018).

3.2 Demand side barriers

On the demand side it is important to look at barriers which might influence perceptions of a sector, that affect recruitment, and which influence whether people will remain and progress in an occupational sector.

In a general sense, employer practices which do not take gender into account will create barriers. For example, **employer practices which do not recognise the gendered constraints on women's lives**, (for example the likelihood that they will carry out most childcare and domestic work alongside their paid work) both creates and perpetuates gender imbalances. These practices can include:

- Limited quality, part-time and flexible working opportunities (including apprenticeships).
- Using recruitment practices such as word of mouth and recommendations, which can exclude non-traditional entrants, or which indirectly are more likely to attract men.
- Implementing development and progression practices which reward stereotypically male traits, privilege male experiences, and fail to recognise women's skills and attributes.

Sources indicate that employers identify certain barriers to gender balance which reflect their own biases. These include believing that women are not interested in or suited to particular sectors simply because they are women; not wanting to upset the male workforce by encouraging change; lack of access to equality and diversity training; ineffective management; the belief that the work is not suited to flexible working and cannot be adapted; and workplace culture (Equate Scotland, no date).

Some workplace cultures create a hostile environment for women. There can also be forms of indirect discrimination, such as requiring specific qualifications / experience or having a lack of separate facilities.

Limited awareness and use of **positive action**² amongst employers, despite them feeling this could be useful, was mentioned in several sources. Some of the reasons for this include:

- Fear of the best person not being recruited.
- Fear of legal liability for 'reverse discrimination'.
- A belief that inclusive rather than preference-based practice is more appropriate (Davies, 2018).

Research that looked specifically at the use of **positive action in apprenticeships** found it is underused because of the reasons already mentioned, but also because employers lack awareness and / or confidence to implement effective positive action measures. Overall, positive action is rarely promoted as a mechanism for addressing gender segregation (Davies, 2019).

The review also highlighted that there can be barriers to **retention** in certain occupations. For example, although women are more likely to complete apprenticeships than men, this is occupation dependent. Being a woman in a male-dominated occupation increases the probability of dropping out significantly, so there is an interaction between gender and apprenticeship framework. From Scottish data, women undertaking apprenticeships in accountancy, automotive, construction, engineering and retail frameworks are all associated with lower probabilities of completion. Three of these (automotive, construction and engineering) are male-dominated (Greig, 2019).

3.3 Barriers for SMEs

There is very little literature on specific barriers for SMEs. Research (Newton and Williams, 2013) found employer recruitment practices are a particular concern in smaller companies where **informal approaches to recruitment** operate, such as word of mouth and the recommendations of existing workers. These approaches can serve to deliver 'more of the same', narrow the recruitment pool and as highlighted above exclude non-traditional entrants to sectors and occupations.

SMEs generally have fewer resources than larger businesses so may face some barriers to implementing activities to address gender imbalance. Davies (2018) found **lack of resources** was a barrier to SMEs undertaking positive action to increase gender balance. Her research found SMEs had very little awareness of positive action and that the potential consequences of gender disparity were unlikely to be a priority for most. Even where knowledge of positive action was perceived it was felt that SMEs would not be likely to have the resources necessary to implement effective positive action.

² Positive action is defined as voluntary and legal actions employers can take to alleviate disadvantage or under-representation experienced by those with protected characteristics. Government Equalities Office (2011) *Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? A quick start guide to using positive action in recruitment and promotion*. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85014/positive-action-recruitment.pdf

Nevertheless, SMEs have a critical role to play particularly as most businesses in Scotland fall into this category. SMEs are as likely to benefit from achieving better gender balance as larger businesses.

3.4 Barriers in the STEM sector

Demand and supply side barriers are particularly entrenched in the STEM sector. The under-representation of women in the sector is due to various factors. Sources highlight the importance of active promotion of diversity strategies in male-dominated sectors. Without this, there is most often a lack of positive female role models, reinforcing the idea that the sector is not for women.

Sources identify the need for changes to recruitment practices themselves. Recruitment practices such as stereotypically male-coded language in job advertisements, often leads to less job interest among women as they anticipate a lower sense of belonging in that environment. Requiring specific academic qualifications also makes the recruitment of women less likely as they are less likely to choose STEM subjects in school, college, and university. Furthermore, research on the construction industry highlights the need to engage more with young people who do not have connections or networks with the industry (CITB, 2018).

Sources indicate that the low level of representation of women in engineering apprenticeships is related to **stereotypical ideas** about what an engineering apprenticeship involves, rather than to the fact that it is a vocational route as opposed to an academic one (Engineering UK, 2020). The literature therefore highlights that stereotypes and a lack of information about vocational education and training is a considerable barrier to achieving gender balance in male-dominated areas (Struthers and Strachan, 2019).

3.5 Barriers in the Care sector

The literature suggests there are various demand and supply side barriers operating in the care sector. Men's under-representation in the care sector is linked to **stereotypical ideas** about care work being 'women's work'. Some male care workers may question their ability, or skills, to do work that is seen as being for women. They are often concerned about people reacting negatively to their choice of 'gender inappropriate' work. Clients are also more likely to refuse male care, especially intimate care, due to the fear of male violence.

Some men report **negative experiences** of working in female-dominated environments, including workplace discrimination and inappropriate comments (Moskos and Isherwood, 2017). The literature also highlights features of the care sector which affect male and female workers equally but may especially result in lower male participation and retention such as lack of career progression and part-time hours and low wages.

Attempts have been made in Norway to introduce a 'skilled worker' category to the female-dominated health and social care sector by encouraging vocational education and training. However, for various reasons this failed:

- apprentices recruited had little career progression after training, at best finding part-time roles;

- lack of a distinct job role and vocational identity.

As a result, fewer women applied for an apprenticeship, and more transferred to a traditional education route. This reinforced gender segregation in the labour market and there was little change to the percentage of women in the skilled worker category (Høst et al., 2015).

4. Addressing gender segregation

Below are a number of practices highlighted across the literature which employers can engage in to address gender imbalance in apprenticeships.

4.1. Action on a range of fronts

The sections above show that the barriers to achieving gender balance in apprenticeships are complex and multifaceted and as such need action on a range of fronts, including changing attitudes and societal practices. Employers have a critical role, but action by employers will not be enough to achieve change. Ideas about specific occupational sectors are formed early in young people's lives and are influenced by many factors. Gender balance will be achieved through **systemic, collaborative action** by employers, parents and carers, people working in the education system and in careers advice roles, unions and government.

4.2. Start early

Children develop gendered expectations of employment early in life. Apprenticeships are often seen as mainly for boys. Early years educators and schools need to start challenging traditional and stereotypical views about certain occupations being appropriate for a specific gender early.

Helping young people change their attitudes requires a multi-faceted, innovative and sophisticated approach, beginning as early as possible and extending into adult life and a move away from defining skills by gender (Fuller and Urwin, 2013).

Employers can use outreach activities in schools, colleges, and universities to support the female pipeline into male-dominated sectors. Doing so can **raise awareness of opportunities and challenge stereotypes while children are still young**.

The case study below shows an approach in schools to addressing gender issues, particularly in relation to STEM.

The Institute of Physics' 'Improving Gender Balance Project' aimed to address traditional cultural norms and out-of-date value systems, including stereotypical views among parents and teachers about young people's choices in school subjects and jobs at an early stage in school and embed an approach to tackling gender imbalance in subject uptake and education pathway choices. The project has encouraged schools to implement alternative ways of working that are gender neutral; to integrate gender work with other change themes in schools such as Developing the Young Workforce, STEM strategy, school improvement plans and ethical and moral standards. This produced sustainable change in the schools involved (SDS 2018).

4.3. A critical element of skills for work education

Many employers already work with schools helping to prepare young people for the world of work; addressing gender balance should be part of this. Employers can have an important role promoting apprenticeships in their industries and showing that different genders are welcomed.

Young people must be provided with opportunities to hear about different routes into the labour market and different occupations, as well as opportunities to challenge their attitudes.

Factors which can lead young people to have more positive perceptions of apprenticeships include:

- **Contact with employers who employ apprentices and with apprentices themselves.** This can promote the experiences of an apprentice more positively.
- Offering **work experience and internships** can help overcome stereotypes about roles and make them more attractive to prospective applicants. Evaluation of vocational courses in schools shows that these have a positive impact on young people's education, aspirations, and attitudes to work and learning, and create interest in working in particular sectors. Similarly, evaluation of Foundation Apprenticeships shows that young people view them positively. Nearly two thirds think that they can help them gain work experience and get a head start on their career path.
- **Working with employers to promote their industries positively.** The case study below shows a good example of this kind of work.

Equate Scotland (No date) highlights how Ayrshire College has been taking part in the This Ayrshire Girl Can campaign. It created videos featuring female apprentices employed in science and engineering companies and showcasing what they do at work on a normal day. Interviews with the apprentices and their employers provided insight into their experiences and ambitions and showed that the employers were committed to developing young women. The college used SDS Equality Challenge Fund to produce the videos which were used over 4 months including during Scottish Apprenticeship Week. The college feels that the videos are contributing to changing perceptions of industry and helping increase numbers of women undertaking engineering (and wider STEM) apprenticeships but recognises change will take time.

4.4. Employers need to acknowledge gender...

Employers are aware of some barriers women face. However, there is still too little recognition of the gendered constraints on women's lives, which affect their participation in the labour market and can create gender imbalances. Moreover, we highlighted how the care sector being designated as mainly for women has reduced men's participation in care jobs. Employers need to **recognise and understand the impact of gender** and do their part to address societal attitudes and change

workplace cultures which create a hostile or uncomfortable environment for men or women. Women should be heavily involved in the planning, running, and evaluation of initiatives.

4.5. ...and actively promote diversity strategies

The need for employers to be **proactive about addressing gender imbalance** (particularly in male-dominated sectors) is a strong theme in the literature. Employers should be embedding equality, diversity, and unconscious bias training across all levels of staffing including senior management. Equality, diversity and inclusion should become part of the workplace ethos, rather than being assigned to an individual. Listening to and understanding female perspectives and experiences will be crucial for this. The case study below shows a proactive approach taken by one employer.

Amey has been highlighted by the Young Women's Trust (2016) as a company which has been making strong efforts to increase the diversity of its workforce, setting targets to address gender inequality. These included reducing stereotypical images in their advertising and featuring more young women employees. They have supported National Women in Engineering Day and promoted women in the sector through the industry's social media campaigns #notjustforboys and #ilooklikeanengineer.

Furthermore, employers should be prepared for long-term action. Success is not achieved overnight and will not look the same for every employer. What success with regards to gender balance looks like should be carefully considered and reviewed throughout the implementation of any gender equality initiative.

4.6. Look at recruitment practices

The number of applications from women into male-dominated apprenticeship frameworks and from men into female-dominated ones needs to increase. Apprenticeship recruitment practices must be non-discriminatory. The review highlights several areas that could be considered:

- **Recruitment searches should be widened.** Employers can use outreach activities in schools, colleges, and universities to support the female pipeline into male-dominated sectors, as well as explicitly welcoming applications from women, or utilising positive selection of female candidates where there is a tie-break. SMEs will need support with this as they are more likely to rely on informal recruitment practices which exclude non-traditional entrants.
- **Recognise different approaches** used by women when applying for jobs – for example, submitting fewer applications to a sector or not applying unless they feel they meet 100% of the criteria.
- **Job adverts and descriptions need to be carefully worded** so that the language used does not perpetuate gender stereotypes and do not directly or indirectly discriminate against either gender. For example, adverts should not indirectly discriminate against women by using stereotypically male language. This can lead to less job interest among women, as they anticipate a lower sense of belonging in that environment.

- Ensure **salary information** is openly advertised and any employer methods for addressing the gender pay gap.
- All recruiters and panel members should be **trained to recognise their unconscious bias**.
- **Having diverse recruitment panels** can also support the elimination of this bias in decision-making. It is suggested that as standard practice all panel members should justify and evidence their decisions and refrain from relying on personal feelings of whether a candidate is a good 'fit', as this might reflect unconscious bias (Digital Scotland and Equate Scotland, no date);
- Having **gender-sensitive assessment** methods.
- **Anonymising application processes** can encourage more female applicants as there is less chance of a recruiter dismissing their application based on unconscious gender bias (Digital Scotland and Equate Scotland, no date).

BAE systems wanted to increase the number of female apprenticeship applicants and changed the way they usually select for interview. Their traditional approach involved online applications and tests with the top scoring applicants selected for interview on a 3:1 applicant:vacancy ratio. The gender initiative added interviews for all women who passed application screening and online testing but who did not make the initial pool of interview candidates. More women were interviewed, and more were offered positions. These apprentices have become female ambassadors to help encourage more women to apply (from Digital Scotland and Equate Scotland, no date).

4.7. Use more positive action

There is limited awareness and use of positive action amongst employers. Research has found that where positive action had been used, the percentage of women recruited in a cohort rose from less than 10% to 23% (Humphries-Smith, White, and Hunt, 2017). **Awareness of positive action should be increased, and employers should be supported in implementing it with confidence.** Examples of positive action that can be used in apprentice recruitment include:

- Outreach work to raise young women's **awareness of opportunities** in traditionally male sectors and challenge stereotypes.
- Outreach activities to **specifically attract women applicants** and / or encouraging applications to women-only initiatives or programmes.
- Explicitly welcoming applications from women.
- Setting **targets** for increasing women's participation or reserving places on training courses for women.
- Removing formal academic entry requirements for apprenticeship positions.
- Appointing female apprenticeship ambassadors as **role models**.
- Utilising **positive selection** of women candidates where there is a tie-break.
- Sustaining **female employee networks** to provide support, mentoring, and career progression are all means of improving recruitment and retention of women in STEM.
- Producing marketing material that **challenges gender stereotypes**.

Davies (2018) collected examples of positive action or inclusive provision as part of a research project. These included:

- Initiatives to address unconscious bias in recruitment.
- The use of 'blind CVs' - in one organisation this led to 17% more women offered interviews; removing psychometric testing from apprenticeship recruitment.
- One-to-one selection for a work experience programme where education providers needed to present equal numbers of boys and girls to be offered a work experience opportunity.
- Reviewing marketing material to ensure language and imagery was as inclusive as possible and would appeal to a female audience.
- Work experience packages targeting female targeted media campaigns such as blogs, videos, online resources aimed at encouraging women to apply for apprenticeships in gender segregated areas.

4.8. Retention: provide progression routes

More attention must be paid to developing career progression. Women are less likely to complete apprenticeships in male-dominated occupations and men are more likely to leave care work.

Practices that can help with retention include:

- Establishing and sustaining **women's networks** to provide support, mentoring, role models and recruitment.
- Mentors who have been shown to be effective providing in-work support to apprentices, reducing feelings of isolation, and also helping them to stay on in work (Newton and Williams (2013)).
- Supporting **enterprising women**.
- Improved **career progression** for women.

Career development and progression practices must also be reviewed so that they do not reward stereotypically male traits, privilege male experiences, and fail to recognise women's skills and attributes.

4.9. Fair work for everyone

Apprenticeships which are **high quality**, meaning they provide genuine skills and knowledge development for apprentices, full support in achieve learning goals, offer fair wages, and genuine employment opportunities and career progression will make them more attractive to women (Unionlearn, 2018). However, **women remain under-represented in apprenticeships which provide the greatest returns to individuals**, reflected in the fact that male apprentices are likely to receive higher pay, have greater likelihood of being in employment after completing an apprenticeship, and receive more formal training during their apprenticeship (IFF and Department of Education 2020).

Employers should also consider how **quality part-time and flexible working apprenticeships** can be offered. For those potential apprentices who need to work

and train part-time or flexibly – such as parents with young children, single parents, carers, care leavers, and disabled applicants – the options can be limited when most apprenticeship opportunities are offered on a full-time basis. Part-time and flexible apprenticeships have potential to widen the talent pool for employers and increase productivity. Employers need to understand the demand for these kinds of apprenticeships. Developing more part-time apprenticeship opportunities requires employers to understand their workforce needs and where part-time and flexible apprenticeships may be beneficial for the employer and individuals. A starting point could be a focus on sectors and occupations where part-time or flexible working is already established. It is crucial that these apprenticeships are high-quality and offer real progression and wage returns (Learning and Work Institute and Timewise, 2018).

4.10. Reporting and accountability

Greater emphasis should be placed on the collection and publication by employers of **data** relating to apprenticeships, including by gender, to increase **accountability and transparency**:

- Organisations offering apprenticeships should publish the number of apprentices they employ, number of applicants by gender, completion rates and destinations with the figures broken down by age, gender, ethnicity, disability, apprenticeship level and role.
- Employers should publish targets for the ratio of male to female apprentices along with a strategy for meeting these targets.
- Public sector employers should lead the way on setting gender targets as part of their plans to increase the number of apprentices (Young Women's Trust 2016).

5. Gaps in evidence

The evidence provides valuable information on improving gender balance in apprenticeships. However, there is a lack of specific research into several areas:

- The link between early years education and gender imbalance in apprenticeships.
- The factors which underpin girls' decision-making – why do they not follow apprenticeship pathways?
- The role of SMEs in addressing gender imbalance in apprenticeships.
- The challenges employers may face in implementing gender diversity policies, and continually evaluating these.
- Case studies demonstrating attempts to tackle gender imbalance in apprenticeships – what has already been tried and what were the results?
- The under-representation of men in female-dominated sectors such as care work, specifically in apprenticeships – how is this linked with gender imbalance in the wider labour market and what are the implications?

Much of the literature is also about gender imbalance in the labour market, without specific reference to apprenticeships.

6. Implications

This review demonstrates the following key implications for the Gender Commission:

- **Employers have a critical role** in encouraging and sustaining gender balance in apprenticeships but cannot do it alone. Parents and carers, schools and education providers, unions, and government have key roles to play.
- Gender equality and an awareness of the impact of gender must be **embedded in workplace ethos and strategies** rather than assigning responsibility to an individual. A focus must be placed on continuous measurement and evaluation of equality initiatives.
- **Work must begin early** with all children to challenge gender stereotypes about work and training. This should continue throughout their education, and employers can play an active role in this through outreach.
- Better **reporting and evidence** would further inform the debate and highlight good practice.

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