

## News

## Government failing to 'effectively tackle' causes of gender pay gap, committee says

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By **Annie Makoff**

D&I experts reject claims that right to request flexible working is 'adequate' to address inequality

The government will not eliminate "structural causes" of wage inequality if it does not address issues such as flexible working and supporting older women back into work, a cross-party committee of MPs has warned.

In a damning report published today by the Women and Equalities Committee (WEC), **MPs raised concerns over the government's latest rejection of the committee's recommendations** and called on the government to justify its rejection.

Committee chair Maria Miller said: "The government says there is no place for a gender pay gap in modern Britain and has restated its pledge to end the pay gap within a generation. But without effectively tackling the key issues of flexible working, sharing unpaid caring responsibilities and supporting women aged over 40 back into the workforce, the gender pay gap will not be eliminated."

The report's 17 recommendations – **first published in March 2016** – included supporting parents in sharing childcare, supporting women to return to the workplace after an employment break and addressing low pay in "highly feminised sectors" such as catering and cleaning. The committee also specifically urged the government to make all jobs available for flexible working unless there was a clear business case not to do so.

But while the government's response in January 2017 acknowledged there were persistent "structural factors" contributing to the gender pay gap issue, it rejected most of the committee's recommendations, insisting that current policies, such as the right to request flexible working, remained "adequate".

Sarah Jackson, chief executive of Working Families, said: "The gender pay gap remains a stark reality. The government needs to take bolder action if we're going to change things for the next generation of mothers and fathers.

"The right to request flexible working isn't a panacea, and hasn't delivered change for those on modest incomes. At the same time, many parents tell us that working flexibly just means putting in long working hours flexibly. Half of fathers are ready to downshift their career because they can't achieve the balance they need. This conundrum is even more acute for younger fathers – rather than 'wait and see', the government needs to tackle gendered ideas about who works and who cares."

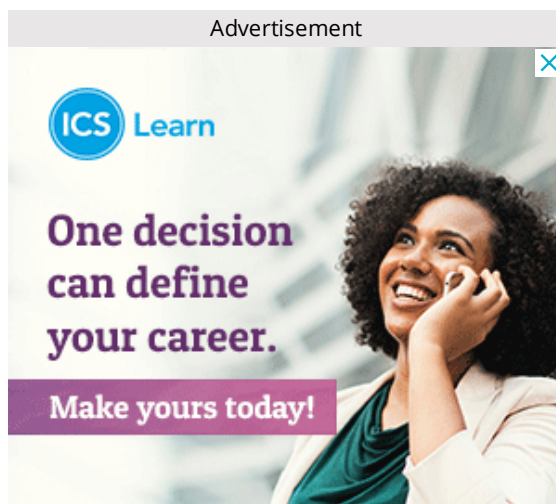
Diversity and inclusion expert Charlotte Sweeney told People Management: "The WEC created a pragmatic

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According to the data, the UK now outperforms the average for OECD and G7 economies for opportunities for women in the workplace, but it could still take until 2041 to close the gender pay gap. The west Midlands has the furthest to go in eliminating pay inequality, while Northern Ireland has made the most progress.

Yong Jing Teow, economist at PwC, commented: "It's positive news that women in the UK have benefitted from the improving economy and there are now more women in work than ever before, but we still have a way to go. By fully closing the gender pay gap we could boost women's earnings by £85bn, which is an average of £6,100 per woman per year. It's not just about getting more women working, but also about getting more of them into high-quality jobs that offer career progression and flexibility."



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