

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR STARTING POINT - HOW TO IMPROVE GENDER BALANCE



Highlights from the Major Projects Association event held on **1st February 2016**

From the incoming gender pay gap reporting legislation to the growing need for additional major projects professionals to serve the major projects market, companies are under increasing pressure to ensure that their diversity and inclusion policies are supporting the recruitment and progression of women. Although female staff account for 47% of the UK jobs market this drops to just 11% for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) related occupations – yet research from government shows that engineering and IT related professional roles dominate the UK's top ten future skill requirements.

It is therefore critical that firms attract more women into their companies, and in recognition of this the Major Projects Association launched its Gender Balance Initiative in November 2015. This saw the Association endorse the **Industry Led Ten Steps**, co-founded by **WISE** and the Royal Academy of Engineering, and announce a series of events to be held throughout 2016 – 'Understanding your starting point' was the first of these.

Clyde & Co gave a professional services perspective on gender balance as well as a useful legal update on the **gender pay gap reporting** legislation.

## STARTING OUT

A good starting point for diversity and inclusion is the **Equality and Human Rights Commission website** said Suzy Firkin of WISE, who also sought to reassure participants that collecting data was not only legal but in some cases required by law. However firms should be aware of disclosure issues to ensure that the data is used appropriately.

## REVEALING TRENDS

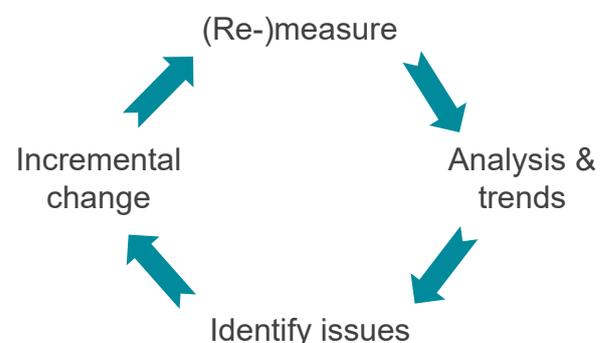
In order to reveal trends and issues affecting people in the organisation, it can be helpful to measure 'protected characteristics' (gender, age, sex, sexual orientation, race, religion, marital status, maternity and pregnancy, disability and gender reassignment) against other data such as:

- workforce size
- grade
- salary
- satisfaction levels
- promotion rates
- recruitment data
- retention rates
- reasons for leaving
- absenteeism
- disciplinary action

The results can be highly revealing, from showing drops in male to female ratios at certain grades to a lack of women in the succession pipeline. Discrepancies throughout regional offices or business units can also highlight issues, as can levels of absenteeism among certain groups, or discoveries of disproportionate levels of disciplinary action being taken against people of the same protected characteristic.

## VITAL STATISTICS

Mace began measuring key factors in 2013, driven by the appointment of chief executive Mark Reynolds. Armed with better data about its workforce the company immediately began analysing the figures to reveal where it needed to focus its attention. The numbers revealed a drop-off in women progressing through the company and going on to hold senior positions. From this and staff surveys the company identified the key issues it needed to tackle, and implemented an extensive series of improvements. In the future Mace plans to drill deeper into the data to continue improving as a company and ensure that it retains and attracts more women.



(Shirin Iqbal, Senior Communications Manager, Mace)

## CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Participants heard from Thales, which has used the **WISE Culture Analysis Tool** to survey its staff and get better qualitative information on the business cultures and practices which need to be addressed to support diversity and inclusion policies.

*'We had the quantitative information, but we wanted to back it up with qualitative information to understand the attitudes of our different businesses.'*

Laura Shrieves, UK Engineering Performance Associate, Thales

Having worked on diversity objectives for a number of years, Thales was seeking to better understand the cultural behaviours throughout its 10 key UK sites and 20 satellite offices. Working with WISE, the company undertook a diagnostic evaluation using the Culture Analysis Tool, which gauged individual views on gender diversity. Having tailored the questions to personalise it for Thales, the survey was then rolled out to employees, with results from 1,000 participants highlighting both positive and negative practices. Coupled with the quantitative data on diversity collected at six-monthly intervals the company was able to identify where more focus was required, and this fed in to its diversity and inclusion strategy.

### LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR

For 5,000-strong consultancy and construction company Mace, the starting point on its journey to creating a more inclusive workplace was to gather data. By recording information on gender across grades and business units, studying recruitment data, exit data, salaries and promotion statistics, the company held up a mirror to see where it was on diversity. Analysis then identified a 'leaky pipeline', where high levels of women were being recruited but not retained to reach senior levels. Furthermore the most common reason for leaving was not childbearing but rather was limited career opportunities.

*'We looked into a mirror and we didn't particularly like what we saw; we saw that there was a massive challenge for us to meet our business objectives.'*  
Shirin Iqbal, Senior Communications Manager, Mace

A series of initiatives and improvements from creating new career paths, increasing transparency around promotions and raising the profile of senior women in the company put Mace in a much stronger position to meet its 2020 business plan targets – including a need to hire over 2,000 more staff. And improving maternity and paternity benefits is positively impacting on both men and women at Mace.

*'This is all about driving change, but don't reinvent the wheel. There are lots and lots of examples and information available from organisations such as WISE, the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation, and the Royal Academy of Engineering.'*  
Suzy Firkin, Development Director, WISE

### SUMMING-UP

Clyde & Co Partner Charles Urquhart pointed to research from the firm showing there had been no increase in female high-earning taxpayers in the UK over the past four years. Statistics also highlighted that women were more likely to work in lower paid industries rather than higher paid sectors such as infrastructure and construction, meaning that a lack of diversity in these areas is contributing to the gender pay gap. With the reporting legislation coming into force in March, firms will soon find themselves under more scrutiny than ever before. It will also provide an opportunity for those that are taking the lead on diversity and inclusion to promote their efforts.

*'The percentage of female higher earning taxpayers in the UK has not increased at all in the last four years, reinforcing the point that not enough women are going through to the top and/or they are not being remunerated appropriately.'*  
Charles Urquhart, Partner, Clyde & Co

### POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Is the self-sacrificial nature of working in major projects deterring women from seeking this as a career path?
- How can industry ensure that getting more women into higher paid sectors will reduce the gender pay gap and not lower the average salaries in those fields?
- Is there more that should be done to work with schools and universities where numbers of girls in STEM subjects remain low?

With grateful thanks to [Clyde & Co](#) for hosting this event.

#### Seminar Chair:

Liz Jenkins, Partner, Clyde & Co

#### Speakers:

Suzy Firkin, Development Director, WISE

Shirin Iqbal, Senior Communications Manager, Mace Group Ltd

Keith Purves, Non-Executive Director, WISE

Laura Shrieves, UK Engineering Performance Associate, Thales Group

#### Participating Organisations:

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