

Transparency drives cultural change



Think, Act, Report
Two years on



Think Act Report image

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Think Act Report

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In brief

Think, Act, Report is a voluntary initiative which was launched in 2011 by the UK's Government Equalities Office (GEO), part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DfCMS). It provides a simple step-by-step framework to help companies think about gender equality in their workforces, particularly in relation to recruitment, retention, promotion and pay. The initiative is embedded in government equality policies and the 2010 Equality Strategy.

The initiative targets companies employing over 150 people, and 230 of them have so far signed up, representing some 6.7% of the workforce. It aims simply to encourage companies to:

- Think: identify any issues around gender equality

- Act: take action to fix those issues
- Report: on how the business ensures gender equality

The result has been publicity for a wide range of practices ranging from equal pay audits to flexible working hours, programmes for returning parents, mentoring, role models, diversity forums and leadership programmes for women.

Think, Act, Report aims to drive greater transparency about women in the workplace. Countries that have limited options for supporting work-family reconciliation would benefit from the flexible working and career support initiatives that have been adopted as part of the *Think, Act, Report* initiative, in order to support women returners and promote gender equality more generally.

Encouraging good practice among larger companies

The *Think, Act, Report* initiative is part of the 'Creating a Fair and More Equal Society' policy, which is part of the British government's 2010 Equality Strategy. This policy aims to prevent discrimination, whether based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. It also aims to support and protect the rights of women by helping them to reach their potential in the workplace and helping businesses get the full economic benefit of women's skills. The government envisages this as partly achievable through the *Think, Act, Report* initiative, which was designed by the Government Equalities Office and brought about following the 2010 Equality Act. Numerous organisations and stakeholders are involved in the initiative including the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Confederation of British Industry (CBI), British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF), Arbitration and Conciliation Advisory Service (ACAS), National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Trades Union Congress (TUC), Unite, Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

Think, Act, Report targets medium and large private sector organisations (of over 150 employees). Based on a step-by-step framework, the initiative has been designed to encourage companies to think about gender equality in their workforces, particularly in relation to recruitment, retention, promotion and pay. The aim of the initiative is to encourage companies to:

- Think: identify any issues around gender equality
- Act: take action to fix those issues
- Report: on how the business ensures gender equality

It is hoped that by adopting this framework, companies will become more transparent about workforce issues and disseminate best practice.

A wide range of activities revealed

The main activities that some companies have undertaken as part of the *Think, Act, Report* initiative have been:

- Equal pay audits
- Establishing an equal pay policy statement
- Equality impact assessing all employment policies
- Showcasing flexible working throughout the business
- Holding open discussions with returners from maternity leave to ensure they are able to balance their work and family life
- Implementing a 'Parental Transitions Programme' to ensure successful returns from maternity and paternity leave, which includes a range of support from a buddy system for new parents through to career coaching
- Unconscious bias training
- Exposing women to inspirational leaders from a range of business sectors
- Launching a female mentoring scheme
- Introducing senior management gender and BME (black and minority ethnic) appointment targets
- Establishing a representative diversity forum to ensure business ownership of the diversity agenda
- Implementing a 'Women in Leadership' programme to retain, develop and increase the number of senior women in the firm

The following are case study examples of some of the methods and tools that have been used:

- 1 | Npower is a leading UK energy company that employs over 9,000 staff. It has set gender targets for recruitment staff that make sure it highlights the benefits of its working culture and environment, such as its flexible working policies, inclusive practices and corporate responsibility, to attract diverse candidates. Its hiring managers' toolkit provides guidance

tools and where feasible, it ensures a woman is on the interview panel for all senior roles. It has also set a target of 25% of executive roles to be filled by women by 2018 (GEO, 2013).

2 B3 Living (formerly Broxbourne Housing Association) has introduced a flexible working policy to improve work-life balance in the organisation. This includes holding open discussions with returners from maternity leave to ensure they are able to balance their work and family lives. Thirty-one of the company's 169 staff are now part-time (GEO, 2012).

3 Nomura International plc introduced the Parental Transitions Programme to ensure successful returns from maternity and paternity leave. This programme is tailored to individual requirements, and covers a range of support from a buddy system for new parents through to career coaching. Their emergency child and elder care support services makes Nomura an industry leader for holistic back-up care. The programme has been running for over six months. It has had universally excellent feedback and led to higher rates of staff retention (GEO, 2012).

Better gender strategies and measurement

The *Think, Act, Report* initiative demonstrates good achievements. Some 230 companies have signed up to the campaign since it was launched in 2011. This means the scheme covers 2.1 million employees across the UK. Two-thirds of the companies that have signed up have confirmed they are doing more to encourage female talent within their company such as introducing mentoring and sponsorship schemes, putting in place targeted development programmes, and encouraging women to take high-profile jobs. Of these, 80% are gathering more data on gender equality in the workplace; 60% have developed a planned approach to promoting gender equality and 63% are measuring the impact of internal policies and procedures on the gender balance of their workforce. Nearly half (48%) had completed an equal-pay audit in the last year.

The two progress reports published by the GEO (2012, 2013) state that the *Think, Act Report* initiative encourages organisations to think about their own circumstances, draw on the experiences of others, take steps to encourage the recruitment, retention and progression of talented women, and then report their progress widely. The emphasis is on encouraging transparency, which the government argues helps to drive cultural change in order to improve women's position in the labour market. It gives businesses an opportunity to learn from one another about what works by sharing best practice, and helps to publicise their success and promote informed debate about the role of women in the workplace.

The government publishes an annual progress report to monitor the success of the initiative with some case study examples of what measures have been implemented and how successful they have been. (Government Equalities Office 2012, 2013).

As a concrete example of a positive result, Deloitte identified it was losing women at Assistant Manager level, particularly between the ages of 26 and 30, so it introduced Transition Coaching to help women plan their departure from and return to the workplace. It also launched a 'Women in Leadership' programme to retain, develop and increase the number of senior women in the firm. As a result, retention rates in 2011/12 increased from 82% to 93% for women returning from maternity leave, and Deloitte has been recognised as one of the *Times* newspaper's Top 50 companies where women want to work.

Scheme covers 6.7% of workforce

The *Think, Act, Report* initiative has helped to raise awareness of gender equality in pay, recruitment, retention and progression as well as the low number of women in senior positions. Most companies that have signed up to the scheme have taken action in some or all of these areas as a result. This is a positive step towards improving women's position in the labour market and goes some way towards addressing the gender pay gap.

At the same time it should be noted that there continues to be a high degree of occupational segregation within the UK labour market, which perpetuates the gender pay gap and the undervaluation of women's work. Further efforts should be made to promote the initiative and encourage more companies to sign up and adopt the *Think, Act, Report* principles (conduct equal pay audits, etc.) particularly given only 230 private sector companies across the UK have so far signed up. The government states that two million employees in the UK are covered by the scheme, but this only represents 6.7% of the workforce (30 million people aged 16+ were in employment in the UK in 2013). The scheme excludes public sector bodies as well as small business and start-up companies.

Small business, start-up companies and public bodies should be encouraged to sign up to the scheme and adopt some of the good practices, for example in recruitment, training and implementing support networks. The scheme could include more initiatives to encourage men to make use of leave and family-related working time adjustments, thus reforming the organisational culture and norms so that reconciliation and care responsibilities are seen as a gender-neutral joint rather than a female-only responsibility. Further monitoring and evaluation of the initiative could be carried out, by stakeholders and the signed-up companies themselves.

It is important to continue monitoring take-up and gender equality outcomes. Good practice workplace examples and sharing best practice is a positive tool for change. Softer measures, such as monitoring gender equality, diversity training for recruitment staff, unconscious bias training and flexible working are more likely to be introduced by companies than harder measures such as equal pay.

The issues the scheme addresses are relevant to all EU countries. Occupational segregation and the gender pay gap persist across the EU labour market with women continuing to take the most responsibility for childcare, which impacts on their career and earnings progression as they are more likely than men to reduce their hours or exit the labour market after having children. In addition, some countries have no or very few flexible working time options to support work-family reconciliation. Such countries would benefit from the flexible working and career support initiatives that some companies have adopted as part of the *Think, Act, Report* initiative.

Though many companies are reluctant to discuss the results of their equality audits in public, a private roundtable is planned to enable them to debate the issue confidentially. The government intends to continue encouraging companies to sign up to the scheme in order to build up a culture where opening up, promoting and reporting on equality for men and women in the workplace becomes the norm for all businesses.

Contacts/Further Information

Contacts

Jane Dawson

Think, Act, Report

Government Equalities Office

4th Floor, 100 Parliament Street

London SW1A 2BQ

UK

jane.dawson@geo.gsi.gov.uk

+44 20 7211 6444

thinkactreport@culture.gsi.gov.uk

Further information

Website



Two annual progress reports since the launch of the initiative in 2011: • Government Equalities Office (2012): Think Act Report: One year on, London: GEO



• Government Equalities Office (2013): Think Act Report: Two years on, London: GEO



Case study reports, which demonstrate how the initiative has been implemented in particular companies:



• Government Equalities Office (2013): Think, Act, Report: Marks and Spencer



• Government Equalities Office (2012): Think, Act, Report case study: Royal Bank of Scotland Group



The GEO has also released an annex document describing the framework to be adopted in order to comply with the initiative: Government Equalities Office (undated): Addressing Gender Equality: Think, Act, Report



Department for Media, Culture and Sport and the Government Equalities Office (2013) Creating a Fairer and More Equal Society



HM Government (2011): The Equality Strategy: Building a fairer Britain, GEO: London



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