

Treasury Committee

Oral evidence: Sexism in the City, HC 240

Wednesday 13 December 2023

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Members present: Dame Angela Eagle (Chair); Dr Thérèse Coffey; Stephen Hammond; Keir Mather; Siobhain McDonagh; Anne Marie Morris.

Questions 131 - 181

Witnesses

[I](#): Amanda Blanc, CEO, Aviva Plc and Women in Finance Charter Champion; Nishma Gosrani OBE, Partner, Bain & Company.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Amanda Blanc and Nishma Gosrani.

Q131 **Chair:** This afternoon we are pursuing our inquiry into sexism in the City. We have two distinguished guests to give us some evidence today. Welcome to the Committee. I wonder if you would introduce yourselves for the Hansard reporters.

Nishma Gosrani: Thank you, Chair. I am here in my capacity as co-author of the women in finance charter blueprint, a pro-bono initiative led by Bain & Company where I am a financial services partner.

Amanda Blanc: I am Amanda Blanc. I am the group CEO of Aviva in the UK and I have been the Government's women in finance charter champion since March 2021.

Q132 **Chair:** Thank you for giving us your time today to give evidence on this extremely important issue. I want to start with Amanda. What do you see as your biggest achievement as the women in finance charter champion?

Amanda Blanc: I have been doing the role since March 2021. First of all, thank you very much for doing the inquiry. It is much appreciated and it is good that we follow up from the inquiry that was done in 2018. A number of things have happened. If we have a look at the data from the women in finance charter, we have 400 signatory firms representing a million employees from financial services. The percentage of women in senior roles, in the two years that I have been in the role, has moved from 33% to 35%.



The thing I am most proud of is the blueprint, which Nishma and I authored last year. We pulled together a group of accountable executives into a taskforce. All of the major financial services firms were represented and one of the key things that came out of that was that people did not know what best practice was. Everybody was trying lots of initiatives. Nobody really knew what was actually delivering major success.

We surveyed 100 representative accountable executives of firms and we produced the blueprint, which came out with a document with four pillars of things that we believe are best practice in firms we have surveyed. It is, in essence, a good guide to what good firms should do to move the dial. I am incredibly proud of that. We have also held events for women in finance accountable executives and brought the industry together on what is clearly a very important topic.

Q133 Chair: Nishma, do you have anything to add on the importance and significant of the initiative that you are a part of?

Nishma Gosrani: There are a couple of things I would add to that. Between me and Amanda, we have been speaking to in the region of 40 executive committees across the large global merchant banks, the UK retail institutions as you would imagine, such as NatWest and Lloyds Banking Group, the large insurers and the asset managers, as well as the market infrastructure firms.

As Amanda said, we have covered a large footprint there and a large workforce across the UK financial services industry. Many of these institutions have been disseminating elements of the blueprint, taking each of those pillars and marking themselves against each of the five areas that we have outlined in the work programme. A number of trade bodies—you heard from the ABI a couple of weeks ago—have also taken the blueprint and looked at how they might spread that across their members.

There has been huge uptake of the blueprint this year and, as Amanda pointed out, this came from realising that there has been an improvement in the numbers—as you have pointed out in the various sessions—of 1% to 2% CAGR, which, in my view, is very modest and insignificant.

Q134 Chair: What can you achieve by pursuing this initiative in your remaining time as charter champion, Amanda?

Amanda Blanc: Genuinely, we have to keep moving on those initiatives that we actually believe are going to make a real difference. Too often, in many aspects of life, everybody is looking for a silver bullet to fix what is clearly a difficult problem. The issue here is that, clearly, there is not a pipeline of women who are coming through to senior management roles. We have to systematically look at all the component parts of what needs to be addressed, whether that is in recruitment, in the way we retain and



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promote women, in the culture and the behaviour or in the way that we then measure it. I would be continuing to push on that point.

Aviva, for example, has 40% women in senior management. We have 46% women on our exco and 42% on our board. We have implemented a large number of these initiatives and we believe that they are actually making a difference. In many respects, that is proof positive that, if you do implement the initiatives, you can make progress.

Q135 Chair: Nishma, do you have anything to add?

Nishma Gosrani: Through the accountable executive taskforce meetings that Amanda has referred to, we often found that many institutions were collecting data—60% of signatories collect data—but only 20% of those qualitatively and quantitatively analysed that data. Having this collaboration across the industry, where we are able to share best practice, was hugely beneficial, particularly for smaller institutions.

Amanda and Aviva hosted an event attended by many of the smaller charter signatories and we were able to share a lot of these best practices. We recognise that collecting data can be an expensive process if not managed effectively or outsourced, so this enabled them to ask some of the bigger houses to aid them in doing that. On the back of that consultation, we also developed an industry-first dashboard, which enables organisations to track and measure data.

To give you an example of that, what we found from conversations we were having with the global investment banks with large footprints in the United Kingdom was that they were doing lots of initiatives, but did not have enough executive sponsorship over those initiatives. There were lots of fantastic, glossy initiatives that were not giving return on investment. We were suggesting that actually you need to track and measure these initiatives, and probably do fewer of them. You are much more likely to achieve better investment as a result, if they are managed effectively.

This process of consultation, through the work that Amanda has done and set up as part of the accountable executive taskforce and beyond, has been hugely beneficial, in my view. Through the data and research, we can see that laying out the four pillars for these institutions has been incredibly helpful for them.

Q136 Chair: Colleagues of mine are going to come on and ask in more detail about the blueprint, but I wanted to ask you a few more general questions. As part of this inquiry, we have taken evidence privately from groups of women who have told us about some of the difficulties they face working in the financial services sector. That is across the board. It is not only banks. It is across the entirety of financial services.

I have to say, we were extremely shocked by some of the evidence that we heard in those roundtables, up to and including sexual assault, bullying, sexual harassment, a general impunity for the perpetrators and a requirement, for example, that those who have been subjected to this



should have to make a complaint and perhaps give up their career as a result of it. There is a series of well-known bad apples that nobody ever does anything about. Even if they are moved out of a particular department or from firm to firm, the same behaviour is perpetrated.

Does this sound familiar to you? Increasing the number of women who are in financial services and increasing the seniority of the jobs they do, one would hope, would have some kind of answer to this in the long term but, meanwhile, we are losing vast numbers of women who experience this and have to leave the industry, give up their career and go elsewhere. What should we be doing about this?

Amanda Blanc: I did my own research as well. I put out a LinkedIn post about two weeks ago saying that I was going to come to the inquiry, and I have been inundated with hundreds and hundreds of private messages from women who have had, I have to say, predominantly poor experiences. That is incredibly disappointing and some of the stories were incredibly sad. Some were absolutely appalling around unwanted advances; when they announce that they are pregnant, people saying things like, "Well, that is a bit inconvenient, isn't it?"; being followed to hotel rooms and things like that.

I do genuinely believe that, from a behavioural perspective, we do need to act and we need to act authoritatively to avoid the situation you have just described, Chair, which is that the man stays and the woman leaves the organisation. What is the answer to that? First, there are a lot of very positive male allies in financial services and I have experienced that myself. I have been in a situation where I have had a pregnancy test in one hand and a job offer in another, and a boss who says, "You still join".

I have had very positive experiences. However, many women do not. Part of this is about the way that firms deal with a speak up. Every individual firm has to be accountable for any allegations such as this. The women in the firm have to know that there is a process for speaking up, that that process will be acted on, that everything will be investigated and that the actual person who did wrong will leave the organisation and not the woman.

We have had experiences like that at Aviva, where the woman has stayed and the man has gone. I genuinely believe that it is about firms making sure that they do behave appropriately and take accountability, as well as, of course, being backed up by regulation and various other things, which I would agree definitely have a role to play here. The numbers, when we did the survey for the blueprint last year, showed that physical abuse was around 28% in financial services, in the firms that we surveyed, and verbal abuse was 43%. Those are 10 percentage points higher than in other industries. Clearly, there is an issue here.

From my own personal experience, at my own AGM a number of years ago I experienced verbal abuse as a woman. I have also worked in sport and had very misogynistic comments and behaviour directed towards me



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there. We have also seen the example of the CBI and various others. We are dealing with a societal issue, which is definitely amplified in financial services.

Q137 Chair: Nobody is denying that there is sexism, abuse, sexual assault, misogyny, or bullying in other areas. This inquiry is about its prevalence in financial services and you have pointed out that it is worse in the financial services sector than more generally. In the course of this inquiry, we are trying to discover what we can do and how we can bring together the entire financial services industry to have an effect on the outcome, rather than bemoan it.

We can all bemoan it. Our predecessor Committee bemoaned it in 2018 and it has not changed. Certainly, talking to women, nothing seems to have changed very much in reality for the last 20 years. It is lagging behind. Nishma, what can we actually do, apart from bemoan it and wish that individual companies had better ways of dealing with it?

Nishma Gosrani: The two hearings prior to this have talked a lot about culture and I do have to come back to that today. A culture of senior management making bold interventions to remove unacceptable behaviour is the way forward. As part of the blueprint, we have had that conversation with a number of chief executives who strongly advocate for zero tolerance towards exclusionary behaviour. I know it is much harder in practice to implement than to say it.

There are two other things that have come up in the work we have done around the blueprint. One is additional regulatory intervention. Chair, I am aware from the conversation that took place yesterday with Mr Rath and Mr Alder that they are looking into this. Thank you for your robust questioning there. I do believe that the regulator, through the diversity consultation paper, is now taking this seriously. I strongly believe that the UK regulator has a tough regime and, if it is taking this seriously, it will take action, but I do think, in the way that Mr Rath said yesterday, it needs the backing of the courts.

A combination of three different things is applicable here: a culture of senior management making bold interventions; additional, targeted regulatory intervention; and a role for boards to play in challenging their chief executives and the executive committees. Looking at the skillset of boards, some culture expertise across boards, not just financial expertise, will be instrumental in making changes here.

Q138 Chair: If the FCA does develop a more robust approach to this—although, again, its approach seems to be about collecting data rather than doing anything—you would end up with a situation where an individual victim or their supporter in a firm would have to whistle blow to the regulator about what was going on in the company. That is asking an awful lot of someone who wishes to have a career, lasting a long time, in financial services, if they are known as the whistleblowers who told the FCA what was happening in their company. That is not something you are



going to want to put on your CV, is it?

Amanda Blanc: No, absolutely not, but that is why I believe that the individual accountability has to rest with the board of the firm and with the management of the firm to create the right culture. The process of whistleblowing has to be and is confidential to protect the whistleblower, so that there is a proper investigation, and where it is a more serious matter, whether it is racial discrimination or sexual harassment, you have experts who help, to make sure that that comes to the right conclusion and there are consequences for those individuals for bad behaviour.

I have and I chair an individual accountability review panel, which deals with those allegations and deals with the consequences for the individual who does that. It should not be that the woman has to leave the organisation, because the process should be run confidentially. The regulator should be the backer to that, should that not work.

Q139 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** I am new to this Committee, but it is great to see you both. Thank you, Amanda and Nishma, for what you are doing in this. I really appreciate that it is probably quite a significant extra to the standard day job. It feels a little bit déjà vu. I apologise to my colleagues if I stray a little bit into pipeline. A decade ago, I led an inquiry with a colleague at the time about the executive pipeline of talent. Amanda Mackenzie from Aviva gave evidence at the time and a variety of others.

The charter is focused on increasing female representation in senior roles. To what extent has it had an impact on improving that gender equality more broadly in financial services firms? The pipeline is going to be key to who is going to reach that level. I will try not to stray too much into the pipeline, because my colleague is going to go into that.

Amanda Blanc: The pipeline is absolutely critical to getting more women into senior roles. When we have done research into this, we have found that we are losing women much earlier in their careers than we originally thought. Many firms have interventions for senior women. They have sponsorship programmes, senior leader programmes, mentoring—you name it. Firms have lots of initiatives.

When we looked at the data and did some data analysis, using the Aviva cohort of data, we found that women were leaving the organisation in much more junior roles. Why was that? It was because they felt that, when they were taking breaks—often maternity breaks—when they came back, they were not being supported. When they came back, they came back in less senior roles or part time and then were written off by the middle management.

It is very, very important that the interventions you put in place support the women when they come back, but also support middle management and lay out the rules around the fact that women have to be progressed, especially very capable women. It is about identifying your talent much earlier on and tracking it right the way through. We all know that, at a



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graduate level, the intake is pretty much 50/50. It is just two steps on from that that the problem happens.

Q140 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** That seems to reflect perhaps why female representation in senior management of signatories of the charter, the people who are really thinking about this, has only moved from 33% to 35%. It is a blip, really. Is there another reason why progress may be slow?

Amanda Blanc: Since the charter was put in place in 2016, it has moved from 27% to 35%. I do believe that, if you are going to move senior women into senior financial services roles, they have to be not only behaviourally capable, but also technically capable. To become a senior manager, to run an insurance firm or a bank, you have to go through a regulatory process to test your regulatory competence.

You are not going to be able to jump from one role to another role without going through a series of other roles in between. It is not going to be fixed overnight. You have to make sure that you keep the women in the organisation through all of those different layers.

Q141 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** I am going to share with my Committee colleagues a link to the report I did with another former MP.

You are spending a lot of time and of course lots of firms are signed up. There are over 400 signatories now and people are still joining every year. I want to understand, Amanda, in particular, what you have been able to do to try to expand the list of signatory firms. Frankly, are there any firms on there where you either had to twist their arm or no amount of twisting means they are coming on? What can we do to encourage them as a parliamentary Committee?

Amanda Blanc: It is a very good question. The number of firms is 400 with a million employees. There are 2.5 million employees in financial services, of whom two-thirds work outside of the City. In all of this, we also need to remember there are lots of women who work outside of London and are also subject to some of the things that we see here today.

All of the major firms have signed up to the initiative. They do not need their arms twisted. If you look at the data in the charter, they all see it as strategically important. By the way, even if you just look at it from a financial perspective, the recent BlackRock survey says that firms with diverse workforces have better profits by 2% per annum. McKinsey's work supports that. There is a financial rationale as well as it being the right thing to do.

The focus has been on improving those firms that have willingly signed up and that really want to improve. What we have seen is that many of them have actually improved and are very close to their target. I think something like 70% of these signatories have a target of 40% and are pretty close to that. We have moved from something like 33% two years



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ago to 40%. It can be done, but you have to be absolutely laser focused in the way that you do it.

There is no non-diverse hire at Aviva without it being signed off by me and the chief people officer, not because I do not trust my team, but because I want to make sure that the process followed for that recruitment has been diverse, has been properly done and is not just a phone call to a mate to say, "Would you like a job? Pop up and we will fix it up for you". A lot of work has been done to make sure you get those numbers right.

- Q142 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** The 2022 Treasury review of the charter suggests that just over a third of signatories covered all of the points the Treasury expects to be included in the annual updates on their websites. Some people may then think perhaps signing up is just a tick-box exercise. What can be done for people to perhaps take that element more seriously?

Amanda Blanc: One of the biggest challenges is the link to pay, which is the fourth requirement of the charter. Firms struggle a little more with that. Some firms have done that and other firms have not. The report is taken seriously. When we annually review, we have the opportunity to point out those that are struggling.

The bigger issue is that those that start off struggling tend not to recover. My view would be that the focus of effort needs to be on those firms that are signed up, want to do good things, but perhaps do not quite know how to do it. That is why we produced the blueprint, because we felt that many firms did not know what the right thing to do would be in recruitment, in retention, et cetera.

- Q143 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** Some other colleagues are going to come on to the blueprint shortly. As you say, one of the principles is about ensuring that pay is linked to delivery against internal targets on diversity. We all know in business you get what you measure. Tell us more about how we can help reinforce that as being a positive rather than being something that is a bit too complicated.

Amanda Blanc: It is definitely not complicated. In my long-term incentive plan, I have an objective to hit the 40% and I do not get that proportion of the long-term incentive plan unless I do that. I have cascaded that to my senior team and they are all very focused on that. We discuss this at every exco meeting that we have. Once a month, we deep-dive on the numbers and we look at how many recruitments and promotions we need to make to get to the target.

You are so right that, in financial services, what gets measured gets done. This needs to be treated just like any other business issue. If it was, we would get better outcomes.

- Q144 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** Nishma or Amanda, what is the extra tool in the toolbox that we should be inserting to help pull that lever, so we get the



senior executives working on it?

Nishma Gosrani: As Amanda said, it is pretty simple and formulaic. This has to be treated like any other business problem and any executive should be measured in the way that it would be measured to solve a business problem. Both non-financial and financial metrics ought to be included as part of their key performance indicators and the way that they are remunerated. This would make up part of that compensation package.

Q145 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** Is this a push for investors or NEDs?

Amanda Blanc: It is a combination of all of them.

Nishma Gosrani: It is across the board.

Q146 **Dr Thérèse Coffey:** As an aside, I know it has been said that, with young people and more senior people not being in the office, they have not been able to absorb. Do you see that as a potential reason for the slowing of progress on some of the measures in this charter?

Amanda Blanc: In a way, Covid has had pros and cons. It sanctioned flexibility because, prior to that, you would find that women would be working flexibly and men would be in the office. Post-Covid, it is much more balanced. The bigger issue we need to watch—and the data does not show this yet—is that, over time, women might go back to more flexible working while men reappear in the office more frequently. Obviously they would be disadvantaged by that.

On the whole, it was a great leveller. We need to make sure that it is maintained. Certainly, the absorption of experience is something that is done in a physical way. You do not do that in a Microsoft Teams meeting, as enjoyable as they are. You gain a lot more by listening. I was an underwriter listening to other underwriters. That is how you learn. That physical presence is very important.

Q147 **Stephen Hammond:** Good afternoon and thank you for coming this afternoon. Can I go back to some of the evidence you have given, both in written and oral form, this afternoon? In your written evidence to us, you said that it will be 27% to 35% over seven years. You explicitly say that progress has been and remains too slow.

There are two questions that I wanted to ask. Thérèse has already asked a little bit about the pipeline. In terms of the gaps of what could be done to make sure that that pipeline is fuller, you talked about training, monitoring, mentoring, et cetera. Is there anything else missing that we should be really looking at?

Amanda Blanc: One thing that we have not touched on is equal parental leave. If you have a really good equal parental leave policy where the men take up the parental leave in the same proportion that the women do, it makes a very, very big difference in terms of allowing other women



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to come back to work, but also showing that you are an organisation that takes these things seriously.

Aviva introduced equal parental leave in 2016. Since 2019, over 80% of the dads, the men, in Aviva have taken six months' parental leave. I do believe that that makes a massive difference. Those policies around flexibility of working and parental leave make a really, really big difference in terms of making it an environment where women feel there is a shared responsibility of childcare, because that is one of the very, very key things.

Nishma Gosrani: There are two things that I would add to that. The first is proactive, formal sponsorship for women, sponsored at the executive level. We have 100% take-up of that at Bain & Company and it has been hugely effective across the organisation. The second is conducting frequent pulse surveys. At the moment, we are seeing a number of financial services institutions still using annual surveys for their employees, which, frankly, are very outdated. Employees have left by the time that you see the survey results, as you know.

At Bain, we do that on a weekly basis. When I have conversations with executives and committees about that they said, "That is very expensive, isn't it, to run that process on a weekly basis?" but, if you look at the cost of hiring an individual and retaining the individual, you will know that it makes a lot of sense to do that. Those are the two that I would certainly point to.

Q148 **Stephen Hammond:** Again going back to your written evidence, you said that, in terms of the pressures on the business, there needs to be a clear business case on cultural issues. You also said that intensified effort from Government is needed in terms of the pay. What are we missing and what should we be telling the Government they need to do more of?

Amanda Blanc: From a Government perspective, simplifying some of these parental policies and encouraging the implementation of these policies is very important. At the minute, quite often a woman will be pregnant and she will not even be able to find the maternity policy when she is looking for it on the website. Making these things front and centre, and encouraging firms to be very clear and very fair, is very important.

Nishma Gosrani: I would not have anything else to add to that.

Q149 **Stephen Hammond:** You also spoke about it being 50/50 at graduate and lower at middle management. Would it make any difference if the charter explicitly referred to middle management, in terms of its scope, as well?

Amanda Blanc: I do not know the answer to that. I would expect that firms monitoring at a senior level would have to be monitoring the middle management, in order to know whether they are going to achieve the pipeline. In many respects, looking at one bit of it in isolation is not really



going to help you. I guess firms would say that that is just more data being submitted. I do not know. We would be happy to do it, obviously.

Q150 Stephen Hammond: I would like to raise that I am new to this, so I have not heard some of the previous evidence but, from what I have read from our Clerk's notes and the Committee preparation, a number of people have suggested that the target of 37% for senior management, which we have talked about, becomes an even bigger problem if you are disabled or from a non-white racial background. What improvements does the charter need to alter that target and get it changed, so that people are more careful about abiding by it?

Amanda Blanc: We believe that, as women are 50% of the population, if you address the women problem, you will hopefully also address some of the other issues around ethnicity and disability. We do believe that there should be a natural improvement as a consequence of that.

One of the other areas we need to look at is the socioeconomic data. One of the things we will feed back to the regulator on the D&I consultation is that it is a missed opportunity to not capture, on a mandatory basis, socioeconomic data. I do feel that that is a group that is not really captured at the moment and, really, we should be looking at the profile of the individuals who are getting through to senior management roles. That is another area of real focus, but naturally by dealing with the women issue you will get a natural uptick in the other areas.

Nishma Gosrani: The recent survey from the Financial Services Culture Board told a very nuanced story, as you will know, around ethnicity versus gender and the issues and challenges were amplified. One of the things we did not look at as part of the blueprint was the intersectionality focus around some of this, but we should certainly think about that as we review the charter principles.

Q151 Stephen Hammond: In terms of improvements to the charter, there are two other areas I wanted to ask about. One is that firms can make their own definitions and you rightly said that, to make this work, firms have to buy in. Therefore, sometimes they have to have their own monitoring, et cetera. Are you concerned that, as there is no standard definition, certain firms will use definitions that are looser, allowing them more scope to meet targets than they should be allowed?

Amanda Blanc: It depends on the size of the firm. We have 17,000 people in the UK. What would be a senior manager to Aviva might be very different to a firm with 250 employees. We will write to you to confirm this, but I think, if somebody changes their definition of senior manager, that that has to be made clear.

Nishma Gosrani: In the brief consultation that we had with the regulator as part of the accountable executive taskforce, we looked at the definition of senior manager and how that would translate across the investment banking industry versus the other industries. We concluded



that it would be C-level, C minus one and MD, and then stop there, but, as Amanda points out, it is slightly different for some of the other industries, particularly in payments and fintech, et cetera.

We have, in the blueprint, defined senior manager based on the conversations that were had and the dialogue that was had at the time.

Q152 Stephen Hammond: There is a definition for the SMR. If you broadly standardised that, dependent on the size of the firm, that might be helpful.

One of the other people who gave evidence, which, again, I am sorry I did not hear, but I have been able to read, said that there was no evidence that the commitments firms are making and the changes they are talking about are actually happening. Do you agree with that?

Amanda Blanc: No, I do not agree with that. If you look at the data, it shows that the number of women in senior management roles is increasing. We know, through interaction with the accountable executives—and we have regular update meetings with them—that they are all taking the initiatives to a greater or lesser extent and implementing the changes.

I can speak for Aviva to say that our senior leadership proportion has moved from 33% to 40%. It would be incredibly unfair on those firms that are working really hard to make progress to say that the charter and the blueprint are not driving change within organisations, because I believe it is.

Q153 Stephen Hammond: I suppose I ought to ask the one open-ended question. We talked a little bit about improvements. Are there any firms that you are concerned about that have altered their targets? We talk a lot in other areas of life about greenwashing. Is there any washing of statistics that you have come across in this area?

Amanda Blanc: There is an independent team at New Financial that goes through all of the statistics. We are very confident that the data is properly submitted and properly looked at by that team before it is reported back. They are independent of the process.

Nishma Gosrani: I am not aware that that is the case. In fact, I have some very positive cases from a number of institutions that have been working hard in this space. As Amanda alluded to, Citibank is reskilling women technologists in Belfast with the Irish Government, for example. Mastercard has made very targeted interventions around the gender pay gap, to reduce the pay gap to six.

There are some really fantastic examples. We are not seeing the progress we would like to see, but we are hoping that will cultivate and move forward, and we will see the progress we want in the next three or four years. Of course, implementing the blueprint will get us there as well.



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Q154 **Chair:** We heard at our roundtables in the private evidence that women were often being picked out for redundancy when there were jobs shed at companies. Do you have any evidence or data on that? It might be worth looking at something like that.

Amanda Blanc: Absolutely not, because the HR processes, when firms go through redundancy processes, are incredibly robust. You have to be able to show that the process for selection is based on set criteria and be able to prove that. Again, I can only talk about my own experience.

Q155 **Chair:** Is that for larger rather than smaller firms? I suspect quite a lot of this goes on at the smaller firm end.

Amanda Blanc: I cannot really comment on the smaller firms, but I can say that, certainly in all the organisations I have ever worked in, that has always been the case.

Chair: There might be a size issue there.

Q156 **Siobhain McDonagh:** In one of our previous evidence sessions, Fiona Mackenzie, the CEO of The Other Half, told us about the experience of working mothers in finance.

She said, "Faced with the choice of part-time working in a role where they are either totally unsupported or in a backwater, they could up their hours by accessing childcare, but they choose not to. They choose to leave altogether. That is where we have this crushing loss of talent, which means that, genuinely, our financial services companies cannot retain the best talent in their organisation because they have this total blind spot when it comes to the working patterns that are required to deliver these senior roles".

Do you agree with that characterisation? Are women left totally unsupported and is that what is leading to the retention crisis?

Amanda Blanc: Clearly, the reason that women are leaving the workforce at this earlier level—to the point that I just made—is definitely around the lack of support or the feeling that they are not going to be able to progress. Organisations can, and have, put in interventions to prevent that being a real problem. For example, all roles can be advertised flexibly, with flexible working for everyone, so that you do not have to fight for it. It just an automatic, "You can actually do that".

We have to make sure that, when women return to the workforce after pregnancy, that is a gentle entry back in, rather than just, first day, "Here are all your files. Off you go". There needs to be a recognition and understanding of what that woman is potentially going through and a slow re-entry. Then she is more likely to stay.

All the training that needs to go on, and does go on, for middle managers has now much more of a focus than perhaps it has ever had before, which will prevent this from happening. It is a very general statement. What I would say is that recognising that the pipeline is lost at a much



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earlier stage has meant that there have been more policies put in place to prevent that from happening.

Nishma Gosrani: The thing that I would add is that, as part of the survey that we initially conducted, and then when we assessed the various questions for the blueprint, we did find that many individuals and institutions were referring to the need for comprehensive, wraparound parental care on site and going back to the creche environment on site.

The challenge that we had at the time was the hybrid environment. How do you meet that with a hybrid environment? We have put some recommendations in. A lot of this research, I have to say, did come from the global merchant banks and there were certain options outlined there, including tax regimes and benefits, where the Government could get involved, but we did not actually conclude some of that and are yet to do that.

Q157 **Siobhain McDonagh:** I would just like to come on to childcare. We see women in finance as earning huge amounts of money and therefore the cost of childcare not being the issue, but clearly that is not the case, particularly earlier in careers. Childcare costs are just north now of an average £2,000 a month for a full-time place. Is the big problem access to childcare that is affordable and of a quality that means a mother is happy to carry on in her role?

Amanda Blanc: We have done some work on this recently. It is the thing that we are working on at the moment with the accountable executive taskforce. Right at the very beginning, there was an assumption that this was not the issue. As we delved into it, we realised that actually it was much, much more of an issue, and that came through in the feedback that I got.

There is the affordability point, but there is also the availability point. As Nishma quite rightly pointed out, in a hybrid environment, if you are potentially working two days in a city centre and three days at home, how do you have your childcare match that? Where do you have it? Many childcare facilities did close down during Covid and did not reopen. There is an availability point and then, of course, there is an affordability point. If I take the Aviva workforce, 59% of women work in the lower quartile of our pay band and 55% in the next quartile up. You are talking about women who are working part time or are on contact centre roles. Effectively, their salaries are not as great.

That is combined with things like equal parental leave. It is not just you, the mum, who has to think about this, but you, the couple, who have to think about how you manage this and how you balance your roles. Sometimes the dad does the pickup or does the work from home, and sometimes the mum does it. There are all the environments you need to create to make sure that women do not feel that they have to give up their role.



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Nishma Gosrani: We are also looking at some of the other schemes across other jurisdictions, which have been very effective, particularly in Singapore, to see whether there are areas of that that could be replicated by organisations, alongside us making the necessary recommendations to the Government as well. We have not concluded that part of our work yet.

Q158 **Siobhain McDonagh:** I would now like to look at women retiring early. According to the Women's Budget Group, older women have seen the largest increase in economic inactivity compared to before the pandemic, with 250,000 more older women becoming economically inactive since 2019. That is driven by long-term sickness and early retirement. To what extent do you see older women being long-term sick or taking early retirement having an impact on representation at senior levels in your industry?

Amanda Blanc: I do not have any industry data on that. We have seen the countrywide data on the number of long-term sick, which we would recognise. We would identify with that. This all goes down to the inclusivity of the workforce and encouraging those women to stay in this workforce, particularly because there is a vital role that they play. It is very, very important that we have a diverse workforce.

I do not see this as being a particular issue in insurance. I certainly do not see it as an Aviva-specific issue, but maybe it is an area we should look at. We have not looked at it.

Nishma Gosrani: Some of the work that we have done does not quite go to the age bracket that you are referring to, but we have done a lot of work around returners programmes, for women who have been out of the workforce for a significant period, and the integration process of bringing them back into the workforce with a view to then keeping them in the workforce for a longer period of time.

We have seen, across a number of institutions led by Aviva, led by BlackRock, that these schemes have been extremely successful, if managed properly and if the individuals are integrated properly into the institution.

Q159 **Siobhain McDonagh:** Finally, can I just look at carers? Often, in a woman's life, that becomes a responsibility. The Carer's Leave Act reached Royal Assent earlier this year and gives employees an entitlement to be absent from work on unpaid leave to provide care for a dependent with a long-term care need.

Do you think this will have a positive impact on women in the finance sector? How should finance companies prepare so that employees feel able to make use of it, if they need to?

Amanda Blanc: At Aviva, we have a policy that anyone can take 35 hours' paid carers leave per annum automatically. This could sit on top of that. The caring responsibility is very important and often women have



not only the childcare but, at the same time, parental care. We would encourage our men and women to use this carers leave opportunity, which is paid. I do think that is the right way to do it.

Q160 Keir Mather: Thank you very much for both taking the time to come along to answer our questions today. I wanted to begin by asking a bit about the charter blueprint and embedding DEI into the charter. The blueprint discusses the role women's networks can play in fostering diversity and inclusion. I just wondered, in the first instance, whether there is a bit of a risk of not drawing men, particularly those who are not in senior leadership roles, further into those sorts of conversations and really engaging them, from early on in that process. I just wondered if you had any thoughts on that.

Nishma Gosrani: Women's networks play a hugely important role across the industry. It is quite an isolating industry in many ways, with very male-dominated roles, as you know. They have played a crucial role. Subjects like fertility and menopause have been very important, where women have had the ability to discuss them openly in these sessions. We have seen more and more of that in the recent past.

We did, with Amanda's sponsorship, launch what we call Stratos, which is Bain's female CEO club, and a level below that the Stratos Academy for C-level and below executives. We have found that they have been hugely beneficial in tackling a number of issues and a number of skillsets that many women need to go out and acquire in order to get to the role they want, such as investor relations, which are not open to them in other forums.

Overall, they have been very inclusive. We found as well, if you look across a number of institutions, that a lot of these women's networks actually encourage men to be there and male sponsors to be in the room. Many of them learn lots by being in these sessions and encourage others to come along. We have certainly not found that to be the issue, but obviously it is open to who would like to come, and that is what we have seen at Bain & Company.

Q161 Keir Mather: That is great. I was also concerned to note that the autumn statement said that the Government are considering introducing a presumption against external equality, diversity and inclusion spending and increasing ministerial scrutiny of EDI spending, while streamlining EDI training and HR processes, with a view to getting value for money for the taxpayer. Have you detected any weakening of the Government's support for the women in finance charter at all?

Amanda Blanc: We have had support from the Treasury for the charter for the whole of the time that I have been involved. We have been actively supported by the Treasury at the accountable executive taskforce and by Baroness Penn at the event that we talked about earlier. We have had good support.



Q162 **Keir Mather:** I am glad to hear that. The third and fourth pillars in the women in finance charter blueprint are to create an inclusive culture and embed diversity, equality and inclusion into the organisation. Could you just speak a little bit about why it is beneficial to create clear space between those two pillars and what the key differences are?

Nishma Gosrani: Pillar number 3, culture and behaviour, as you rightly point out, is very much around the more subjective areas, as we would describe it: changing the culture, looking at inclusion sentiment, asking the difficult questions in the boardroom and at the executive committee, and ensuring the culture is part of values and purpose. It is about making targeted interventions around the right culture, the culture that is right for the organisation and that it is advocating out to the external marketplace and to its employees.

The difference between that and the fourth pillar, which is focused on the data, is then having the data to manage that. As we said earlier, what gets measured gets managed, in financial services. Robust data and robust governance is a really important part of the process. We have found that, across the industry, while lots of data collection happens, as I said earlier, the qualitative and quantitative analysis that is required is not happening.

A very small proportion of organisations are putting that forward to their boardrooms, to their executive committees, which is making it much harder to manage. It has to be managed like a business problem, as we said earlier, not a compliance exercise.

Q163 **Keir Mather:** I would like to turn next to the issue of harassment and misogyny but, before I begin my questions, I would like to say, as the register shows, that I was actually an employee at the Confederation of British Industry when a lot of those appalling cases came to light. I have seen how important this is.

I would just like to begin with an open-ended question about how widespread you would say that misogyny within financial services is. How often have you heard of or witnessed cases, building on the Chair's question earlier about these sorts of cases taking place?

Amanda Blanc: We have heard and I have received many, many inputs from women in financial services, not just over the last few weeks since I asked for the information but over the last number of years. We cannot deny that this is absolutely an issue. We have to, in that case, go back to what we were talking about earlier: how do you deal with that?

Some of the examples that we have are what I would call predatory behaviour. I would split them into two. We see predatory behaviour, which tends to be focused on much younger women: comments about what they are wearing, sexist comments to them, belittling them and that sort of thing. Then there is behaviour that, if you like, is slightly more subtle: exclusion from being at meetings where they could benefit and progress their career; exclusion from being put forward for promotion;



snide comments that mean they do not participate in a meeting and they do not speak up when they would normally do that. Those, for me, are the two buckets that I saw when I did the research.

The first needs to be dealt with through a zero-tolerance approach, as Nishma and I have talked about, in dealing with the perpetrators and exiting them from the business. There have to be consequences. The second is often around education and management, for example dealing with microaggressions. "Do you realise how that made me feel?" We have implemented bystander training, because quite often people observe this behaviour and do not do anything about it.

For our leaders, we have said, "This is what you should do in this situation". We have made sure it is clear, if you are at an event and something happens, who you should speak to and what you should do about it. For me, there are those two things and, sadly, we do see them and we need to make sure that they are dealt with appropriately.

Q164 Keir Mather: We were told by the Chartered Management Institute that, in its work undertaken with the Fawcett Society, 40% of women reported experiencing workplace harassment across the economy. Do you feel that the scope of the charter as it presently stands is sufficiently wide to be able to deal with those behaviours specifically?

Amanda Blanc: The scope of the charter is to get more women into senior management roles, isn't it? That is what the charter is there to do. My belief is that, if you have more women in senior management roles, a lot of this behaviour will go away. If I am in the room, somebody is not going to say that because they know I would call it out. More junior women sometimes do not feel confident enough to do that. I have the confidence to do it. You do need to address that particular issue.

Nishma Gosrani: I would concur with Amanda on that. There are two things there. First, if you have more women at senior levels and change the makeup of your exco based on all aspects of diversity—not just protected characteristics, but diversity of thought—you are less likely to have some of this. It is still going to happen. We know that, but you are less likely to have some of it.

Then it comes back to the earlier points around culture and zero tolerance. There is a role for the board to play here and that is certainly a recommendation I hope this Committee takes forward.

Q165 Keir Mather: The Committee has also heard evidence of the widespread use and abuse of non-disclosure agreements in harassment cases. It suggests that their use often results in victims being silenced and perpetrators going unpunished. What are your thoughts on the use of NDAs and about obligations on firms to report the incidence of NDAs they have within their organisation?

Amanda Blanc: On NDAs, I have never used an NDA to silence a victim, for sure. I am sure you are aware that NDAs are used in organisations for



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lots of things, from M&A to when you are exchanging data. To say that firms do not use NDAs would not be right, but, even if you have a settlement agreement with a colleague, that is to protect both them and you. In those instances, they would always be free to speak to their family, the police, the regulator or any other authority that they want to. They should never, ever be used to silence and I do not see them used in that way.

Q166 Keir Mather: Would reporting the incidence of NDAs that firms have and offering a breakdown of data surrounding ethnicity and gender in relation to their use be useful in digging further into any of these issues across the City?

Amanda Blanc: I do not see that as an issue, but more data and looking at it is never unhelpful.

Q167 Keir Mather: I have one final question, if that is okay, and it is just a little bit about culture. We have spoken previously about how having a culture of complicity, cover-ups and allowing bad apples to stay in the organisation produces these adverse affects. Could you comment on whether there are negative consequences to the inverse of that being the case?

Lots of firms in the City are keen to demonstrate their ethical thinking and ESG compliance, and make the case that they are positive organisations to work in. Does a culture that says, "Things like that do not happen here", actually encourage people not to come forward when they have experienced things like this? Does that offer unique challenges in terms of how we deal with these issues in the City going forward?

Amanda Blanc: I do not think any firm is saying, "Things like that do not happen here". I certainly do not say that. What firms are saying, or what I am saying, is that there has to be a process, if something like that happens, for it to be dealt with fairly and confidentially, so that the victim is protected. I do not see that there is any gender washing, or whatever you want to call it, in that.

Q168 Keir Mather: The thing I was more getting at was that, if the ethos of a company is very much that, "These are the standards we hold dear and this is what we would try our best to adhere to", it can be an enormous thing for somebody to seek to disrupt that perception of the firm externally. I wondered if you felt that had an impact on people coming forward at all.

Amanda Blanc: That is something that you test as part of your engagement surveys, what we call Voice of Aviva. Do people feel free to speak up? Do they think that, if they saw something, they would feel confident in speaking up? That is the way of measuring that. I do not believe that people would say, "Because this is an ethical organisation, I do not feel comfortable to speak up". You would have to test that in the way that you assess the survey to your colleagues.



Q169 **Anne Marie Morris:** About the pay gap, PwC analysis shows a huge difference between the pay gap in financial services and other industries. I think it is 23.7% in financial services, against 11.7% in other industries. Why is there such a big difference? Is there a safety in numbers, with a sense that, "We do not need to change. We are in this elite group. We pay a lot and people want to work for us; therefore we can afford to not rectify this position"? They have also been slow in trying to move, quite apart from the huge disparity. What is your thinking on what might be the reason for that huge difference? Nishma, you look like you are in agreement.

Amanda Blanc: She is an expert.

Nishma Gosrani: There are lots of different parts to your question. I will try to take each one of those separately. The financial services gender pay gap is greater than any other industry outside of technology. We know that. The PwC report that you quote is correct from that perspective. There are a couple of ways of looking at this.

We know that salary history perpetuates the gender pay gap. In this country, we are able to ask individuals for their salary history. That is not the case across the rest of the continent. In other jurisdictions, they have legislation that prohibits this, which is what we ought to adopt. The reason for that is that salary should be based on a candidate's skill as well as target pay. That is the first thing, the bottom rung of it.

You then have a couple of other specific areas that need to be looked at. Having pioneered gender pay gap reporting many years ago and implemented it, I know there are flaws with the system. When you look at the graduate pool that we discussed earlier with Mr Hammond, we have 50% there. We do not want to lose that. If you then do not have the representation at the top levels, we know that that gap widens, so we want to close the middle management level and then have greater representation at the most senior levels.

The other thing that is perpetuating that gap, as we know, is the bonus pay culture in financial services. Much of the senior pay package is based around performance bonus pay. We also need to think about what we might do and how we make that more formulaic so we still retain a bonus culture, but the comparables are much easier to look at. Those are three or four things that we ought to look at to start closing those numbers.

I mentioned earlier that some institutions, like Mastercard, have made very targeted interventions. They have looked at target pay for their women across the board, globally, and have moved it to reduce the pay gap. It requires really bold leaders like Amanda and Ann to want to make some of those moves, but, if we find that some of the larger institutions are able to do that, we will start seeing that pay gap close more quickly.

Q170 **Anne Marie Morris:** It is partly a cultural thing.

Nishma Gosrani: Yes.



Q171 Anne Marie Morris: Your solution, which makes sense, is largely around transparency. I guess the challenge you have rightly identified is where you have bonuses at play. If we tried to adopt the sort of thing they are doing in the EU, how would you actually word any form of guidance and legislation to deal with that? Do you think, as a country, we are ready to go that further step? Do you think that transparency would work, and would we be able to articulate what transparency meant, to deal with, as you rightly explained, these rather different ways that people get paid?

On top of bonuses, there are benefits in kind. These days, working for a PwC, or whatever, there is a smorgasbord of things that you can have. Actually, it is not just, "This is your pay". There are lots of bits to benefit, if you like. How would we go about dealing with that? Are we ready for it?

Nishma Gosrani: I actually think we have moved a step further than the EU pay directive, which I think is what you are referring to, if I can clarify.

Anne Marie Morris: Yes.

Nishma Gosrani: We have one of the toughest regimes in the UK around some of this actually. We should applaud ourselves for that, although we could go a step further. I have not worked out what that could look like, but I think what you are referring to, Ms Morris, is a menu of options that many firms now offer their employees, which it is extremely difficult to then work back from.

There are ways in which we might want to bring a very consolidated view across the industry. If Amanda allows, we might want to take that to the taskforce, along with childcare and other things that we are contemplating at the moment, and to think about whether there is one way of looking at a formulaic process, to enable us to move forward on pay. I do think we are ahead of the game versus the EU on this.

Q172 Anne Marie Morris: That is interesting and good to hear. Someone suggested that, maybe, if we required reporting on a number of characteristics, not just the gender piece, we would give a context that would help the reporting and help us really see where the societal problems are. Do you think there is a merit in broadening the scope, or is that getting into a level of complexity that is difficult and, as a consequence, unhelpful?

Nishma Gosrani: There has been much discussion about the ethnicity pay gap over the past 24 months, but I think there is a view not to move forward with it just yet. There are other characteristics that we could absolutely look at, but would that make a significant impact or difference? Forced publishing of course has helped in many ways, because we are a very competitive sector. That has certainly helped, but we do need to deal with the one that we are dealing with at the moment. As you alluded to, we need to look at the bonus piece, as part of that, and then perhaps look at ethnicity and the other characteristics on the back of that, too.



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Q173 **Anne Marie Morris:** Reporting is only part one. You can report it, but then what are you going to do about it? Some commentators have suggested you actually say to somebody who is in the bottom quartile, “Okay, we need you to put in place an action plan”, which is then monitored, measured, et cetera. Do we have the culture to achieve that? Is that deliverable? Is it a good idea? Is it over the top? Is it too unrealistic?

Nishma Gosrani: I think the work programme that we set out at the blueprint helps you to move what you are describing forward. In the areas that we describe around recruitment, but particularly in the retention and promotion section of the pillar, asking executive committees each of those questions that we have outlined would certainly help us to move forward. It needs to be done in a timely and sustainable manner, and very quickly, to be able to move the dial in the way that we want to by 2030.

Q174 **Anne Marie Morris:** What you are saying to me sounds a bit more like more detailed reporting rather than, “I want to see a plan that moves you towards a particular outcome by a particular date”. Is that going too far?

Amanda Blanc: In many respects, you would expect the board to do that. The board has to sign off the gender pay gap report and also the ethnicity pay gap report. Within that, you would expect to see the board asking the organisation what is happening about that and what it is doing to improve it.

This is a very important point that we need to make clear. On things like the bonus pay gap, effectively, if you have many women who choose to work part time and flexibly, their bonuses are prorated. Therefore, using the mean to look at the average bonus pay gap is a flaw in the way that that is calculated. You do have to look at how these things are reported and make sure that you are really dealing with the actual facts.

The other thing on the pay gap is that everything here is connected. More women into more senior roles means you have more women in the upper quartile so that, when you calculate the mean, you will get less of a gap between men and women. In essence, if you solve the problem of getting equal numbers of men and women in each of the quartiles within your organisation—because you cannot differentiate between what a man and a woman get paid; it is set—you deal with the issues Nishma talked about around publishing targeted salaries when you publish a role so that people know what the banding is, and then you make sure that somebody comes in on that targeted salary, those are all things that will really help here. The data sometimes is not telling the full story.

Q175 **Anne Marie Morris:** This is a mixture of being blind when you are recruiting, but full-blown data when you are looking at the reporting, because you are trying to get a neutral picture and remove the bias at both ends. Where are we? All this takes time and is complicated when you get to the very smallest of businesses, if we are talking about those



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that employ fewer than 250. Is it realistic to sweep them up? How far down the food chain would you actually go, in terms of complexity? With a smaller organisation, you do not have the same ability to make sensible judgments. Averages, et cetera, are a bit meaningless when you have a really small organisation.

Amanda Blanc: I think the argument has always been that, once you are under 250 employees, one individual, or a number of individuals, can skew the data significantly. I would say that there are many organisations, such as hedge funds, private equity firms and boutique investment firms, with under 250 employees that you probably would want to have a look at and probably would be worth putting a little more scrutiny on. There is a careful balance to be struck between asking for lots and lots of data from firms that basically are trying to make ends meet and those firms that are, if you like, systemically important and make a very big difference, in which some of these issues could be more prevalent. You could probably differentiate it by industry sector.

Q176 **Anne Marie Morris:** Your cut would not necessarily be by size. You would get to 250 and then, below that, you would say specific industry sectors need to comply too until, presumably, there would be a de minimis, below which it would not make sense.

Amanda Blanc: You could do that.

Dr Thérèse Coffey: Or a salary threshold.

Anne Marie Morris: Yes.

Q177 **Chair:** Are you making that argument to the FCA, which is confining its current consultation to firms of above 250 employees and missing out what might be very important pockets of practice that we might not approve of, if I could put it that way, in particular sectors and the smaller companies? Odey Asset Management is a prime example. Are you making that case to the FCA, which is currently consulting on its approach?

Amanda Blanc: We are just completing our response to that consultation at the moment. That is one of the factors that we are looking at.

Q178 **Chair:** You do recognise then, and you have implied with your answer, that there are some sectors where this may be a prevalent problem, that are too small to be caught up with some of the requirements which the FCA is thinking of putting into place and may not involve themselves in your charter, such as hedge funds and private equity.

Amanda Blanc: We do see that in the data, I think both in the blueprint and in the charter. If you look at it, the average is 35% of senior women in financial services, but in some of the firms, like the investment firms, it is much lower than that. I think we already have that data, so we know where to look.

Chair: You know where the problems might be.



Amanda Blanc: Yes.

Nishma Gosrani: We are seeing a number of fintechs and start-ups coming forward voluntarily, wanting to publish their data and get it right from the outset. There is obviously a generational shift there as well. That is really positive news.

Q179 **Stephen Hammond:** Can I just come back, please, on your explanation about part of the gender pay gap and the bonus culture? Obviously, I listened carefully to what you said about part time being part of the explanation, and that would be because you would be effectively rewarded on commission, a bonus, whatever you call it. Should we also then be concerned not just about the percentage of women in senior management roles but what those roles are? Operationally, bonuses are usually bigger than non-operational roles. They both may be senior management roles, of which there may be the same salary, but the opportunity to earn more might be because of that. Should we be looking at that, particularly in the bigger firms, or am I misunderstanding what you said?

Amanda Blanc: I know that, in insurance, for example, if you were to open the Aviva report and accounts, you would see what my bonus scorecard is. It has all the metrics, and it assesses my performance. That scorecard is cascaded through the whole organisation. There is very little of commission-based sales bonuses in financial services firms. Effectively, what you are talking about here is that you do a different type of role and, therefore, depending on the percentage of that role that you do—you may be in the contact centre, or you may be the CFO—you will have obviously a different base salary upon which to base that percentage.

Q180 **Stephen Hammond:** Yes, and I absolutely get that point, but if your board has a chief executive, a CFO, and then two people who manage operational, and then someone who manages a non-operational—

Dr Thérèse Coffey: It might be head of training or head of HR.

Stephen Hammond: Yes, or in big investment firms, middle management functions, which, frankly, the operation could not work without. What I am asking you is whether we see bigger variations in bonus in the operational roles than the non-operational roles, and is there a predominance of men in the operational roles with the opportunity to earn that extra bonus, which explains part of the bonus gap? That is the question, just so we are clear about the data. Have I got that right?

Nishma Gosrani: Indeed, it is fair to say that most of the P&L or business roles across the institutions are still very male-led. The operational roles, such as HR operations or what we call functional roles, are still female-led. That is the case across the industry. There is more scrutiny that can take place across the board to look at some of that. It is not work that we did as part of the blueprint, and it is not something that the organisations have to publish as part of the charter, but it is certainly something that we should look at because you are going to see a



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discrepancy. Obviously, those roles are going to have bigger sections of bonus.

Q181 **Chair:** I just want to take up a couple of other things. Amanda, you were on the receiving end of misogynistic comments at Aviva's AGM in 2022, when people told you that you were not the man for the job and things like that. Can you relate what happened, how that made you feel, and what it said about the prevalence of these kinds of prehistoric views?

Amanda Blanc: If anybody has ever attended an annual general meeting, you will know that it is quite an affair. You have the board on the stage and shareholders in the audience. As a CEO, I got to present the performance of the business. The chair gave his view of the business. The first question that we were asked was préciséd as, "It is very nice to see so many women on the board because women are very good at housekeeping". That was the first comment that was made by one of the shareholders.

We then took a number of other questions, and one shareholder stood up and told me that I was not the man for the job.

Chair: No, clearly.

Amanda Blanc: There was a third incident, where I was asked why I was not wearing trousers. When you are at an AGM, you are really focused on all the different questions that you can get on investments you have made and the performance of the business. In many respects, you do not prepare for that sort of behaviour, and I had not experienced that before. As you are in the moment, I have to say that I did not really respond to it because I just thought, "Okay, this is weird".

At the end, the chair said that he felt that that behaviour was unacceptable, which was good on him. As I walked out of the room and into the room where my team were, they were all like, "That was outrageous". Obviously, they are a brilliant team, and they were like, "Amanda, you should not put up with that. That was unacceptable".

I was flying over to Canada that evening and I wrote a LinkedIn post as I was on the plane, which is now the infamous LinkedIn post. I posted it and landed. Within minutes, literally I was getting all of this feedback from women in Australia, in Japan, all over the world, who had experienced very similar events, quite often actually in the UK, from the same shareholders, other chairs, other CEOs. I really felt at that point that that was just completely and utterly unacceptable.

In this year's AGM, the chair started the meeting by saying that, if anybody behaved that way, they would be asked to leave the meeting immediately. We have set the tone right from the very beginning. You do not think that that is going to happen to you, as one of nine FTSE CEO women. You really do not. It is very disappointing.

Chair: It is almost as bad as being told to "calm down, dear", by the



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Prime Minister.

Amanda Blanc: It is almost as bad as that.

Chair: We have had a really interesting exchange and evidence session today. We are trying to focus very much on talking about solutions. You have clearly talked about the support of your board, including men, of course. We need male allies to help solve this, not least to let men who are behaving badly know that it is not acceptable to other men. We are very focused on trying to produce a report with solutions, but we want the solutions to be available across the board. Obviously, one size does not fit all when it comes to this. It is such a diverse sector, with different bits to it, some of which are better than others.

Please continue to stay in touch with us. If, on the way home, you think of some fantastic new thing that you think will work, please inform us about it because we are very focused on trying to produce a report that will make a difference. Thank you for all the work that you do in this sector, trying to make a difference too. Thank you very much.