

Anonymous Written Evidence Submission

I won't spend long on this submission, however I feel it is important to add an alternative view.

I have never experienced any gender-based problems in the military and am constantly surprised by those who say they do. Yes I have seen and heard sexist jokes – but both ways (about men and women, by men and women). Yes I've heard foul language – at least as much from me as from anyone else. Yes the military has a certain environment – of assertiveness, of banter, of practical jokes, of type A behaviour. The answer is not to prevent or attempt to remove that, but to allow those who want to work in that environment, of whatever background, to do so without feeling that they have to change themselves. I enjoy working in the military, have no intention to leave soon, and like the freedom to speak the way I want, I enjoy the military sense of humour and the work hard, play hard mindset. I don't want to see that changed because people believe that we have to lose all of that to work better, or to treat people fairly. I think we already do.

Those who claim the military is a pro-man or anti-woman environment, are, in my experience, just as likely to make stereotypes about men as they are to object to stereotyping or place setting on women. I don't want quotas, I am tired of surveys. I believe I work in a meritocracy and the RAF works very hard to ensure that. I have men and women work for me, I have worked for men and women. I genuinely don't notice the make up of a room, or an organisation; I judge someone on their work and I am confident I am judged on mine and not my gender. I am beginning to get tired of the assumption that there simply still must be institutional bias – that is not my experience. If people have experienced problems I honestly think these are isolated and not representative of the whole organisation. I absolutely, wholeheartedly, do not want to see the organisation I joined and enjoy working for, changed because of a few people. Furthermore, I do not believe that you can legislate these things out of existence. They will happen, and have to be dealt with, but ruining the system because of a few bad apples is not the answer. I also believe, that there has to be give and take – particularly in the case of offense. Yes, people have a right not to be offended – but others have the right to enjoy something that doesn't harm people without censoring everything they say.

I was recently asked to complete yet another survey on sexual harassment. An important topic – if it were done correctly. The survey was only sent to some men and all women – already making it statistically useless, and then they claimed that this was in order to balance the numbers as “gender has been found to be a significant issue for sexual harassment” – essentially deciding the answers before they got them anyway, while at the same time stating that only a sample was required rather than the whole military, and would be weighted appropriately over rank and gender – proving they didn't need to do the above anyway. By increasing the ratio of women to men in this way, they counterintuitively claimed “the sample structure does not reflect any assumptions about who is more likely to experience sexual harassment”, while in the same breath already knowing that “previous research does suggest that servicewomen are more likely to experience sexual harassment (in the US military)”, so they had already decided how to get what they wanted to see. They further claimed that “We do not have the resources to send a survey to all personnel” – which proves they are not doing it correctly as the right software would complete it for them. So I have been singled out as a women (technically sexism) in order to complete a survey about sexism – and they don't see the irony. Finally, they apologised for “any upset the research has caused”, further reinforcing the stereotype that women are a minority and get upset about things, and need protecting from things.

Women in the military don't need protecting, don't need saving, don't need endless flawed prescribed surveys to tell them that there are lots of other people in their boat and they

should constantly feel victimised. It's ok to be the only woman in the room, it's ok to be in the minority – it doesn't detract from your opinion, and your opinion is not linked to your gender. Your reasons for leaving the military, joining the military, taking a particular job, are not related to your gender. I don't think like that and I don't know any women that do. This top level down pigeon holing is artificial – and its that that needs to stop, not any behaviour at the coal face. The fact that only 12% of the military is fine – quotas don't help. If women want to join, that's fine, if they don't, that's fine too. The organisation doesn't need to be changed to make it fit them. Just be open and honest about what it's like and what we do and those who want to join will. Changing it will only alienate those that are already here.

Quotas imply that you are only here for what you are (gender, race, etc), not who you are, and how good you are, and it's the total opposite of what they are trying to achieve. I don't know any woman who wants to get somewhere based on her gender – the implication that you only got there because you're a woman and filled a quota, or were the first because "it was time for a first", rather than being actually good enough for the job, surpassing the requirements. Noone likes the idea that the bar was lowered for them. So stop implying it with lists, percentages and plastic. The RAF is a meritocracy, so stop trying to tell it its inherently sexist and just treat everyone the same.

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