

Press release: Penny Mordaunt's new mission for Government Equalities Office

Minister for Women and Equalities Penny Mordaunt will today (21 November) announce a fundamental shift in focus for the Government Equalities Office (GEO) which will include putting marginalised women at the heart of its work on gender.

In a speech today at Bright Blue's Women in Work conference Ms Mordaunt will set out that the GEO has made significant progress in working towards closing the gender pay gap, getting women into work and being a driving force behind getting more women on boards in top companies, but that often low-paid, low-skilled women were left out of the conversation.

Ms Mordaunt will highlight that in the UK today:

- Around 1.8 million women are currently economically inactive because they are caring for their home or family, more than 8 times the number of men in that position
- Women are disproportionately more likely to work in caring, customer service and cleaning roles, which tend to be less well paid, and three times more likely than men to work part-time
- Nine out of 10 potential returners to work in the UK every year are women. Nearly a third of all those women who could potentially return to work have GCSEs as their highest qualification, and 16% have no qualifications at all
- White British women have an employment rate of 73.3%, and Bangladeshi women have an employment rate of 32.8%
- The gender pay gap increases from over 6% for those in their twenties, to around 23% for those in their forties. McKinsey estimate that bridging the gender gap in work could add £150 billion to the UK economy by 2025

The shift in focus on gender is part of Ms Mordaunt's drive to put equalities at the heart of the government's work to tackle 'burning injustices', which will see it move to a permanent home in the Cabinet Office, from 1 April 2019. This move will enable the Government Equalities Office to have even more influence and leverage within government, working with the Race Disparity Unit, and the Office of Disability Issues, and others, to drive meaningful progress on equalities.

Minister for Women and Equalities Penny Mordaunt is expected to say:

"It will be our mission to ensure that every woman in the UK has as much freedom, choice, capacity, resilience, support and protection, to do whatever she wants to do.

“To do that we need to broaden out the work of the Government Equalities Office to focus on women at every stage of their lives.

“I will be shifting the focus of the GEO’s work to look at how we can help women who are economically inactive, women in low paid and low skilled jobs and women on legacy benefits – trapped into limiting their hours or income, and women facing multiple barriers to being independent.”

As part of the shift in focus on gender Ms Mordaunt today is announcing:

- A £600,000 fund to help women who are especially vulnerable to return to work when they are ready – a new phase of the returners programme to help people who have been out of work to care for others. Organisations from across England will be able to bid for grants from this pot of money to help women who have experienced issues like homelessness, domestic abuse and mental health problems. They will support these women back into the workplace through training, refreshing skills and facilitating work placements.
- This includes £100,000 to support women facing multiple barriers – such as limited English language skills – to becoming more independent, including those who have never worked. This fund will include women in integration areas of Blackburn, Bradford, Peterborough and Waltham Forest. Government is bringing divided communities together by boosting English language skills, increasing economic opportunity, and ensuring that every child receives an education that prepares them for life in modern Britain.

Notes to editors:

The Government Equalities Office has already provided funding to organisations across the country supporting marginalised women. This includes £95,000 awarded to Changing Lives, who support women suffering with homelessness, sexual exploitation, addictions, mental and physical health problems, long-term unemployment and poverty, to return to work.

Ms Mordaunt will be speaking at Bright Blue’s Women in Work conference in London.