

Beyond the FTSE 350: 100 employers sought to test new approach to women's leadership progression

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Women's Leadership Group launches national consultation as it seeks 100 organisations to help test a practical framework for understanding women's progression into leadership

The [Women's Leadership Group \(WLG\)](#) is inviting organisations with 100 or more employees to take part in a national consultation aimed at improving the visibility of women's leadership progression across the wider UK economy.

The consultation is now open and closes on **7 October 2026**. Alongside the questionnaire, WLG is seeking **100 organisations to participate in a subsequent national pilot**, with the consultation and pilot recruitment running concurrently.

The initiative has been developed in response to a gap WLG says remains outside the FTSE-listed environment: while listed companies have benefited from structured gender representation reporting for more than a decade, there is no equivalent, consistent framework for understanding women's progression into leadership across much of the wider UK workforce.

The organisation's proposition is to make better use of workforce information employers already hold, rather than introduce another standalone reporting requirement.

Learning from the FTSE model

The UK has developed a strong international reputation for improving female representation in the leadership of FTSE-listed companies.

The Hampton-Alexander Review and the subsequent FTSE Women Leaders Review helped establish greater transparency around female representation at board and senior leadership level. The approach demonstrated the potential value of setting clear measures, reporting progress and maintaining accountability over time.

WLG believes there is an opportunity to apply some of those lessons more widely.

The majority of UK employees work for organisations that sit outside the FTSE reporting framework, including privately owned businesses, public sector organisations, charities and employers across a wide range of sectors and regions.

The question for the next stage of the WLG programme is whether a proportionate and practical approach can provide greater visibility of women's progression across this broader employer landscape.



From consultation to pilot

The programme has three phases.

Phase 1 — Research and discovery explored the barriers employers face in measuring women's leadership progression and whether there was support for a more consistent approach.

Early responses have indicated strong support for greater visibility, with **84% of respondents supporting mandatory gender representation reporting**.

The research also suggests that many organisations already hold relevant workforce and leadership information within their HR systems.

Phase 2 — National consultation is now underway. Employers are being asked to complete a questionnaire to test the proposed approach, assess its practicality and identify what information they already hold.

Phase 3 — National pilot will involve up to 100 organisations testing the approach in practice.

The two stages are running concurrently, with both the consultation and pilot recruitment closing on **7 October**.

Completing the questionnaire does not commit an organisation to sharing workforce data or joining the pilot.

What would the pilot involve?

A central question for the pilot will be whether organisations can use existing HR information to provide a clearer picture of women's progression through their leadership pipeline.

WLG is proposing that participating organisations explore the sharing of **aggregated, anonymised and non-personal workforce data**.

The intention is not to collect information about individual employees. Instead, the pilot will examine whether consistent, aggregated data can reveal patterns in progression and provide meaningful comparisons between organisations of similar size, sector or region.

Areas being explored include representation at different levels of an organisation, progression into leadership and where differences in progression may emerge.

The pilot will also test the practicalities: what information employers can provide consistently, how it can be collected without creating unnecessary administrative work, and whether the resulting analysis is sufficiently useful to support action.



That distinction is important for HR leaders.

The initiative is not being positioned as another mandatory reporting exercise. Its stated aim is to understand whether data already held by employers can be used more effectively to support workforce planning, leadership development and evidence-based action on gender progression.

Why visibility matters

For employers, understanding representation at a particular point in time is only part of the picture.

A workforce may have relatively balanced representation overall but show significant differences in progression at particular stages of the leadership pipeline. Without consistent data, those patterns can be difficult to identify.

WLG believes greater visibility could help employers understand where women are progressing successfully, where representation begins to fall away and where interventions may be most effective.

It could also provide policymakers and regional leaders with a clearer picture of how women's leadership progression varies between sectors and locations.

Victoria Brook, Founder and Chair of the Women's Leadership Group, said:

"For more than a decade, the UK has demonstrated that structured measurement can help drive meaningful progress in gender diversity within FTSE-listed organisations.

The challenge now is that most women do not work in those organisations. They work across the wider UK economy, where there is currently no consistent way of understanding women's leadership progression.

We have listened to employers, reviewed the evidence and learned from what has worked. We believe we have mapped a practical way forward. Now we need organisations to help us test it.

This is not about creating more reporting. It is about making better use of workforce data organisations already hold to improve visibility, strengthen evidence and enable better decision-making."

A role for HR leaders

For HR and people professionals, the initiative raises a practical question about the quality and usefulness of existing workforce data.

Many employers already collect information on recruitment, promotion, turnover, pay and workforce demographics. The challenge is often bringing that information together in a way that allows organisations to understand progression through the workforce and leadership pipeline.

Nicky Alger, Chief of People and Culture at Proceed Group and a WLG member supporting the initiative, said:

“I’m passionate about using evidence to drive better decision-making. If we can create a practical leadership standard that helps organisations understand their leadership pipeline and identify where support is needed, we’ll be giving businesses a tool that encourages continuous improvement rather than simply measuring performance.”

For WLГ, the objective is therefore not simply to produce another benchmark.

The longer-term ambition is to establish whether a common approach could help employers identify patterns, learn from organisations that are making progress and focus interventions where the evidence suggests they are most needed.

Technology and data

WLГ has appointed Inicio AI as its data partner for the initiative.

The partnership will explore how technology can simplify participation and help turn workforce information into consistent and actionable insight.

Rachel Curtis, Founder and CEO of Inicio AI, said:

“Progress starts with understanding where those barriers exist, and that requires better evidence. We’re proud that Inicio AI can support the Women’s Leadership Group by helping make the collection of that evidence simpler, more consistent and ultimately more useful in driving meaningful change.”

Caroline Walton, Chief of Staff at Inicio AI, said the partnership would also explore how conversational AI could help simplify participation and support the collection of consistent data.

What happens next?

The immediate priority is to hear from employers.

WLГ is inviting organisations with **100 or more employees**, across all sectors and regions, to complete the consultation questionnaire.

Organisations can participate in the consultation without committing to the pilot. Those interested in becoming one of the 100 pilot organisations can register their interest as part of the process.

The consultation and pilot recruitment will both close on **7 October 2026**.

The findings will be shared with participating organisations and policymakers and will help determine how the proposed framework should develop and whether a wider national pilot or implementation should be recommended.

For HR leaders, the initiative offers an opportunity to contribute to the design of a potential new approach before it is tested more widely.

The underlying proposition is straightforward: **if employers already have much of the data needed to understand women's leadership progression, can that information be used more consistently to provide better evidence — without creating another reporting burden?**

The next 100 organisations will help provide the answer.

About the Women's Leadership Group

The Women's Leadership Group is focused on improving opportunities for women in work through evidence-led research, white papers, campaigns, collaboration, events, workshops and mentoring.

Its current programme focuses on improving the visibility of women's leadership progression across organisations outside existing FTSE reporting frameworks, with the aim of helping employers and policymakers better understand where women are progressing into leadership, where barriers remain and where targeted action may have the greatest impact.

To participate in the consultation or register interest in the 100-organisation pilot:

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