Written evidence submitted by F1 Recruitment Ltd to the Gender Pay gap Inquiry

Contribution to Inquiry on Gender Pay Gap for over 40 year old women

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Us

f1 recruitment specialises in marketing and communications recruitment at all levels (25k to 150k) for the London and M25 areas. We recruit for in-house marketing communications departments, such as Red Bull, Harrods, M+S, Sony Mobile, as well as marketing and communications agencies. We also recruit internationally (British citizens who relocate) for our clients in the Middle East, South America, Far East, Eastern Europe and Turkey. We are 11 years old and our founder Amanda Fone has worked in marketing and communications recruitment for over 30 years. f1 champions women’s careers and women back to work after a career break (see our blog on www.f1recruitment.com). We work with 50% men and 50% women.

Our programme for women returners over 40 years old

For the last 2 years we have run a Back2Businessship programme with partner Starcom Media (an international media company). This programme is for women who have taken a minimum of 5 years out of their marketing career to raise a family (so, most of the women are in their 40’s). The programme is a series of participative workshops about returning to work, with guest trainers and speakers across 3 weeks, 2 days a week between 10am and 2.30pm to fit around school pick ups, followed by an optional paid placement with f1 client companies to help bridge the gap back to work. The programme is free and everyone managing, speaking at, and facilitating the programme gives their time free. f1 does not charge clients or the delegates for arranging their placements post programme. The women we had on the programme this year were all interviewed at f1’s offices to test their commitment and motivation for returning to the workplace and to ensure that they were able to put good childcare in place for their return. There are many such programmes running currently in different sectors but ours is the only one for the marketing and pr sectors.

Our sector and the talent we are losing
The marketing, media and communications/advertising industry trains hundreds of women (and men) every year; at entry level there are as many females as males entering the sector and salaries are on a par. However 10-15 years into their careers, it is often the woman who will choose to work flexibly once they start a family. Over the past 10 years companies have made flexible working a lot more accessible to their current employees for fear of losing them out of their work force completely. Flexible working however often means 4 days a week in the office and leaving at 530pm not 7pm and picking up work in the evenings once the children are in bed.

However for those women who choose to leave a permanent job because they

a) can’t get their employer to look at their role on a flexible hours basis post maternity leave,

b) are made redundant during their maternity leave or

c) want time out to raise their young family but return to their career at a later date

it is almost impossible to return to the workforce after as little as 3 years.

**The hype**

The media talks about flexible and remote working as ‘the new norm’ but in reality there are very few NEW roles created in marketing and comms that are flexible working ie less than 4 days a week or with flexible working hours. Many returning women, who have children still of school age, want to work 3 days a week and a day from home or 2 days from the office and a day from home. In our experience, companies would rather wait for a full time person to become available than put a framework in place for a new flexible worker. At f1 we take on an average of 16 new permanent jobs/ vacancies a week and 0% of them are flexible working roles. We have to lobby very hard with our clients to get flexible workers (however good and experienced they are) onto a shortlist. It is virtually impossible to get anyone with a career break onto any shortlist even if they will work full time. We are known for championing flexible working. Most of our competitors won’t even interview a candidate who is looking to work part time or flexibly or with a career gap as they know there is no demand by employers for these candidates, particularly in the private sector.
The truth

We were oversubscribed for our programme by over 3 times even though our advertisement for applicants only ran for 2 weeks in the Guardian media section and Marketing Magazine online. Many of the women who gained a place on our programme had been unsuccessfully applying for jobs advertised for months, if not years. Most part-time jobs advertised (in London and M25) are poorly paid (25k-30k a year pro rata). The women who applied for our programme left the workforce on between £50,000 and £85,000 a year. They recognise that they need to get ‘job-fit’ again, and that technology has moved on dramatically since they began their break. They are prepared to go backwards in earnings and status in the short term to get back into their career. Employers in Marketing and Communications recognise that there is a wealth of talent out there at the + 40 age for women but they are not doing anything to entice this group back to work.

Being practical and honest to women (and men) about their (their wives) careers

Our message to women in their 20’s and 30’s who are in marketing and communications careers is a practical one. Don’t take a total break from your career when you have children. You won’t be able to get back in. You need to really plan for the ten years when you have your family and the early years of children. Make sure you have been with an employer for at least 2 years before you get pregnant so that you have currency with them. Negotiate flexible working arrangements for when you return from mat leave. If you are good and highly valued they won’t want to let you go. If you have to leave a permanent job eg, to relocate out of a City Centre to live, then ensure you carry on freelancing to keep your hand in. If you do take a break of more than three years then be prepared to drop your salary by up to 50% and to do paid placements to bridge the gap back to work.

The employer’s excuse used for not making more roles flexible

Most of our clients tell us that if an employee is in a service role - ie has clients – whether these are internal or external clients and/or running a team - then it is not practical for them NOT to be in the office at least 4 days a week.

What can be done?
Micro businesses teaching macro businesses

At f1 we run a flexible working and full time business. We use the 60/40 formula and it works well. For every 6 full time 5 days a week member of staff we have 4 flexi working staff. It seems that macro businesses can learn a lot from micro businesses. Our business has a 27 year old and the oldest is 55 years old. We span four decades. Most people in their 20’s and early 30’s want to work full time. To take advantage of an ageing workforce it seems sensible to plug the time gaps that the late 30’s to late 40 year olds want (to work from home) with women and men in their 50’s who are often happy to work full time again once their children have left home – the empty nesters. These people began their careers in the 1980’s and mid 70’s and have very good parenting skills that can help those in their 20’s get ahead!

Career planning for Girls & Boys

Lets recognise that women often have different career paths to men. Women’s careers tend to wiggle; men’s tend to go in a straight incline upwards. At 23/24 years old a woman’s career looks the same as a man’s. Their pay is very similar. It’s when they get to their childbearing years that the career line starts to wiggle. Priorities change. But not forever.

Encourage women in their 20’s and 30’s to plan much better about which industry sectors they join and careers they embark on. Choose careers where it’s possible to get back in after a break. Choose to work for a business that puts flexible and remote working at the heart of their working culture.

Accept that most parents do want to be ‘present’ for their children, especially during the first 10 years. This means once or twice a week being there for breakfast, school drop offs and school collections. It’s not just about weekends. Most parents really don’t want their children being bought up by after school clubs, nannies or grandparents all of the week time.

Get imaginative

Businesses should offer scholarships to women and men who choose to take career breaks to raise a family for 2 or more years. Make it easy for these people to come back on a flexible working basis with a re-orientation programme. If companies were known for enabling women and men to manage the pre school years effectively they
would retain more staff longer term. Part of the scholarship would mean that when an employee returned to work after a break they would have to stay a minimum of the time they were away post break - a bit like the scholarship programmes that businesses used to run for men going into the army post 2nd world war.

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/12024203/We-need-to-encourage-teenage-girls-to-aim-higher.html

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