



advancing gender
equality in science,
engineering and technology

Priority policy actions

Science, engineering and technology (SET), and their role in entrepreneurship and innovation, are key to economic recovery and growth. But the participation of women scientists, engineers and technologists remains low – in SET occupations, men outnumber women by more than seven to one.

This imbalance is damaging - not only for reasons of fairness, but because gender equality is good for business and important for the economy. The UK must value and nurture talent, address demographic changes and population ageing, build a more inclusive and diverse workforce, and so improve business performance.

The UKRC therefore welcomes the Government's emphasis on science and innovation linked to a commitment to a fairer society. The private, public and third sectors must work together to achieve these aims. Only a comprehensive approach can ensure the UK tackles the complex combination of reasons why full gender equality remains elusive in science, engineering and technology.

Based on extensive experience and on our data gathering and analysis, the UKRC has a track record of delivering practical results and identifying effective policy approaches to bring about change.

Our full list of policy proposals is available on the UKRC website.

About the UKRC

The UKRC is the UK Government's lead organisation for the provision of advice, services and policy consultation regarding the under-representation of women in science, engineering, technology and the built environment (SET).

We work with employers; professional bodies; education institutions; women's organisations and networks; policy institutes; sector skills councils; the government and many others to promote gender equality in SET. We offer tailored services and support for women at all career stages.

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The UKRC's priority proposals:

1. The government must set the standard in securing gender equality in science, engineering and technology (SET). The UKRC recommends the introduction of measures in all SET initiatives, and investment by government, to address barriers and drive up participation by women. By 2020 the proportion of women in SET professional, associate professional and technical occupations should have risen to 30 per cent, and in SET skilled trades to 5 per cent.
2. Progress on gender equality should be measurable and more transparent. The UKRC recommends that SET employers across all industry sectors are encouraged to collect and analyse gender equality data. This data should include pay and progression, and the provision of flexible and quality part-time work (especially at senior levels).
3. Skills shortages in SET are a major challenge to long term economic growth, yet barriers in education, training and recruitment practice prevent adult women from entering or returning to SET employment. The UKRC therefore recommends that the government establish clear and accessible pathways into and between training and work across SET (for technicians, the skilled trades and the professions), as well as improving the gender balance in SET apprenticeships and similar programmes. Issues of adult access and eligibility for funding should be addressed.
4. The new integrated adult careers service must meet the needs of adult women of all ages interested in a career in SET. The UKRC recommends the Next Step service ensures access for women, at all stages and levels of employment, including women wanting to return to a SET career path, whatever their qualification and benefit status. Specialist training and resources should be provided for the careers workforce, to cover gender stereotyping and SET labour market knowledge, drawing on the expertise of the UKRC, SET professional bodies and other sector organisations.
5. Change in the gender balance in SET requires leadership. The UKRC calls for widespread backing for an increase in the number of industry and academic champions and exemplar employers bringing about real improvements in education and employment practice. The UKRC is able to support such a drive through the provision of evidence, analysis, tools, resources and consultancy.
6. Less than 11 per cent of board directors of SET FTSE 100 companies are women. The UKRC recommends that SET companies should be encouraged to make a voluntary but public commitment to achieve a minimum of 30 per cent women board members by 2020.
7. The private, public and third sectors rely on expert analysis, products and advice, as well as leadership and networks, to strive towards equality. Therefore Government leadership, and investment in organisations such as UKRC, remain critical to support commitment and drive progress.

Background: In 2008, there were 674,000 women in SET occupations and 4,823,000 men. Women were 15.5 percent of the workforce in SET professional, associate professional and technical occupations (excluding health occupations) and only one per cent in SET skilled trades. The Female FTSE Board Report 2009 (Cranfield University School of Management) also makes the recommendation about the numbers of women on boards, originally proposed by the Financial Times.

More detail about the numbers of men and women working in SET can be found in Women and Men in Science, Engineering and Technology: the UK Statistics Guide 2010 (UKRC), on the UKRC website.