

Submission - Dr Victoria Basham, Reader in International Relations, Cardiff University

1. What are the main causes of a gender pay gap?

Unconscious bias in promotions, poor attitudes and policies towards maternity leave and a cultural aversion to paternity leave, certain sectors continuing to undervalue work traditionally 'feminised' such as care roles and to over-value masculinist forms of work and work cultures such as investment banking.

2. What initiatives can be undertaken to reduce a gender pay gap?

Better training on unconscious bias in companies but also widespread root and branch changes throughout society are also needed. Until women having babies is not seen as an impediment of some kind, until every institution in society in government can honestly say it doesn't draw on gendered language or value particular personality and leadership traits over others, there is a long way to go.

3. What are your views on making it a disciplinary matter if staff discuss salary?

Opposed. I think companies have in the past exploited a culture of silence and privacy around pay that means that those most exploited and marginalised often do not realise they are not alone and are subject to a culture of discrimination. We can only challenge systemic inequalities if we can see them.

4. Do you think companies should adopt "pay transparency" i.e. allowing staff to request information on pay levels broken down by gender?

Yes, absolutely. Without such data organisations can make all sorts of claims about fairness that are hard to back up but also hard to question. It is not for example necessarily 'fair' to put everyone recently promoted to a particular role on the same wage if there is clear evidence that women or ethnic minorities or others are not putting themselves or being put forward for promotion as often as white men are. Without clear data and clear transparency, it becomes harder for people to see if they are being treated fairly or not.

5. Do you think a pay gap is more likely in gender dominant industries i.e. construction, politics, nursing, teaching?

Not necessarily as it can be a problem in many fields but generally, work traditionally seen as 'women's work' (nursing, teaching etc) has been undervalued and roles associated with 'men's work' have tended to be more highly prized because our post WW2 economy was built on the notion of the male breadwinner and housewife which is not only sexist but heteronormative.

6. Do you think that the gender pay gap is exacerbated when employers base a starting salary on someone's previous earnings? Particularly in cases where a woman has taken time off to have children.

Absolutely. I think it's obvious why this is a problem and could even be indirect discrimination.

7. Do you think asking about salary history should be banned?

Possibly, yes.

8. How do you think closing the gender pay gap can help the economy?

People will have greater spending and saving power. They will be less likely to rely on state subsidies to supplement their incomes and freer to be as creative and productive as possible. Everyone loses out when there's a gender pay gap.

9. Is there any evidence that women face particular barriers to promotion?
Absolutely. There are multiple academic studies on this very issue. The glass ceiling is very real and very persistent. It's not only a matter of direct discrimination but unconscious bias towards particular working styles and women's own insecurities (not putting themselves forward) and how these are constantly reinforced in wider society that limit women's promotional opportunities.
10. Do you think paternity and maternity statutory rights factor into the gender pay gap?
Yes. Paternity take up is very low suggesting that gender norms are hard to shift and is so limited as to lack any substance. Maternity leave isn't great either and women often have less support in coming back to work than they ought to. The fact that their jobs are not necessarily guaranteed to be there for them when they come back to work, only equivalent roles, also often causes problems.
11. Do you think the reason for a gender pay gap is because women take on childcare?
It's one reason and an important one but not the only one. Studies also show that women also do more household labour (cleaning etc) and take on more caring responsibilities for family members other than children i.e. ageing parents. Women without children are sometimes viewed with suspicion or expected to do more to progress because they don't have children and are thus assumed to have more time.
12. Do you think within today's society that, in statutory terms, it is easier for the mother to be the primary care giver?

Yes and this needs to change and fast. There are also certain work cultures where men and women, often of an older generation, can make younger men who want to play a more active role in their children's care feel guilty and abnormal for wanting that so we also need to make sure we're not reproducing gender inequalities that negatively affect men's lives as well as women's.
13. Do you think paternity and maternity leave should be on a more equal footing so that there is greater choice for fathers who want to be the primary care givers?

Yes. This should be the decision of families not companies and states.
14. Do you think a culture change is required to encourage more men to take career breaks to look after children?

Yes, absolutely but systemic and policy change would help with that.
15. How long do you think women can take out of the work place before it starts to hit their future progression?

This is very dependent on sector and role. It can be a shockingly small amount of time though.
16. What barriers do you think women face in relation to promotion and progression in the workplace?

I've already touched on this above.

