WOMEN IN DEFENCE

WOMEN IN DEFENCE CHARTER

Changing the face of defence Insight and Data 2026

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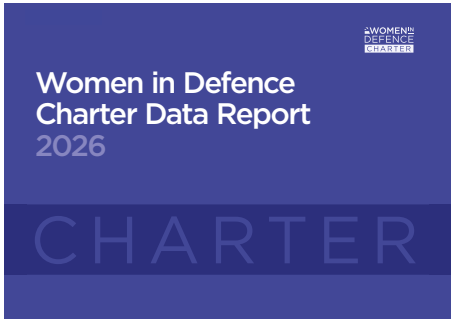
Introduction

As defence continues its work to transition to conflict, this combined report brings the latest gender data from the sector compiled by the Women in Defence Charter, with the insight on the future gained at the Critical Mass Summit hosted by Women in Defence UK.

The Charter data shows a growing commitment across the Charter community, with more organisations participating than ever before. Momentum towards the 30% by 2030 ambition has returned with a nearly 1% increase to 24.3%, driven largely by the private sector.

The Critical Mass Summit explored what the future of defence should and could look like. Drawing on the experience and hopes of early career women, informed by a vision of the future delivered by General Dame Sharon Nesmith, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, and tested by wargaming activity sharing possible future scenarios, the day brought together military, Civil Service and industry, early careers and more senior women to share experiences, expand networks and create opportunities.





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Changing the face of defence

The future

Critical Mass

Babcock

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Executive summary

The Women in Defence UK Summit 2026 brought together representatives from forty-four organisations ranging from early careers to senior management to explore a shared ambition: what the future of defence could and should look like.

Hosted in the heart of the City of London, the theme of the future reflected not only in the discussions on the day, but in the way the event itself was shaped. Drawing on the experiences and aspirations of a working group of early-career professionals from the Armed Forces, Defence Industry and the Civil Service, the Summit brought together leaders, emerging talent and industry experts to share insights, experiences and practical ideas for building a sector where all have the opportunity to thrive.

Discussions across the day explored the importance of visible role models, effective sponsorship and mentoring, and developing leadership skills from the earliest stages of a career. Delegates also reflected on how organisations can create cultures that encourage innovation, collaboration and belonging — ensuring that talented people choose to stay and build long-term careers within defence.

The afternoon was devoted to a war gaming activity 'Silent Cables, Swarming Skys'. This explored how defence operates in a crisis by running through potential scenarios. This brought together military and industry, early careers and more senior attendees, to discuss what might happen if, for example, underwater cables supplying power and data were cut.

One of the defining features of every Women in Defence UK Summit is the opportunity to connect. Conversations between established leaders and those just beginning their careers highlighted the strength of our community and the importance of sharing experiences across generations. These relationships continue long after the event, helping to build confidence, expand networks and create opportunities.

We are delighted that Babcock International Group are once again our Critical Mass Pankhurst Partner. Their continued commitment to developing talent and fostering inclusive workplaces reflects the values at the heart of Women in Defence UK.

Women in Defence UK would like to thank all our speakers, delegates, volunteers, and partners who made this year's Summit such a success. Together, we are shaping a stronger, more inclusive future for defence — one where all can build a fulfilling and impactful career.

Key takeaways from this year's Summit:

- Leadership begins with authenticity rather than conformity
- Confidence develops through experience, learning and support
- Diverse perspectives improve operational capability
- Mentorship and sponsorship remain fundamental to professional development
- Representation matters, but inclusive behaviours matter even more
- Defence reform depends upon culture as much as process
- Every individual has a role in creating workplaces where people feel they belong.



Building careers through curiosity and courage

The Summit's opening keynote set an optimistic and practical tone for the day, as Leanne Cann reflected on a career that has spanned more than twenty-six years within Babcock International Group. Her message challenged the misconception that successful careers follow carefully designed plans. Instead, she described a professional journey shaped by curiosity, adaptability and a willingness to embrace opportunities as they emerged.

Looking back across more than two decades, Leanne explained that many of the most rewarding stages of her career had not been anticipated. Rather than following a predetermined route, she continually developed new skills, accepted unfamiliar challenges and remained open to changing direction when opportunities arose.

> **Success is not about having every step planned, it is about remaining curious enough to take the next opportunity.**

For the large number of apprentices, graduates and early-career professionals attending the Summit, this message was particularly reassuring. Career development within defence rarely follows a straight line. Progress often comes through learning, experimenting and building confidence over time rather than having every destination mapped from the outset.

Her reflections echoed one of the Summit's central themes: confidence is built through experience rather than certainty.

Leanne also emphasised that career development is rarely an individual endeavour. Mentors, supportive colleagues and inclusive leaders all play an essential role in helping individuals recognise opportunities that they may not initially see for themselves.

As defence continues to evolve, organisations increasingly require people who are prepared to learn continuously, collaborate across disciplines and adapt to rapidly changing technologies and operational demands. These qualities, she argued, are becoming just as valuable as technical expertise itself.

Her keynote naturally introduced many of the discussions that would follow throughout the day, particularly around mentoring, representation, inclusive leadership and creating workplaces where emerging talent can flourish.

For young professionals entering defence, Leanne's story demonstrated that success is defined not by perfection but by persistence, curiosity and the courage to keep saying yes to new opportunities.



CAREER LESSONS

- Stay curious
- Seek opportunities rather than certainty
- Learn continuously
- Value every experience
- Build supportive professional relationships
- Don’t fear changing direction.



The voices shaping defence's future

One of the most distinctive aspects of the 2026 Women in Defence UK Summit was the decision to place emerging professionals at the centre of the conversation. Rather than simply discussing the future workforce, delegates heard directly from it.

Representing the Armed Forces, Defence Industry, graduate schemes, apprenticeships and early-career programmes, members of the Junior Working Group presented a collective reflection on what it means to begin a career in Defence today. Their presentations were grounded in lived experience, but together they painted a wider picture of an industry undergoing significant cultural change.

Although each speaker approached the discussion from a different perspective, several common themes emerged repeatedly: transparency, belonging, confidence, representation, leadership and allyship.

Collectively, the session demonstrated that attracting talented women into defence is only the first step. Long-term success depends upon creating organisations where people feel welcomed, supported and able to build fulfilling careers.

Looking towards 2030

The session concluded by reflecting on the sector's ambition to improve gender representation through initiatives such as 30 by 30.

While recognising the importance of measurable targets, delegates emphasised that genuine inclusion extends beyond recruitment.

The future workforce should be able to see itself reflected throughout defence leadership while also experiencing cultures characterised by respect, collaboration and opportunity.

Ultimately, success will not simply be measured by how many women join defence, but by how many build rewarding careers, progress into leadership positions and inspire the next generation to follow.

KEY INSIGHTS

The Junior Working Group identified eight priorities for the future:

- Improve transparency throughout recruitment and security clearance
- Increase visibility of women across all career stages
- Strengthen mentoring, sponsorship and professional networks
- Develop inclusive leaders who actively create opportunities
- Address imposter syndrome through supportive workplace cultures
- Recognise the value of diverse life experiences
- Continue improving gender representation through sustainable cultural change
- Celebrate success stories that inspire future generations.



The power and paradox of doubt

Dr Kate Goodger challenged one of the most persistent misconceptions surrounding leadership: that confidence is something people either possess or lack.

Drawing on neuroscience and behavioural psychology, Dr Kate explained that the human brain evolved primarily to keep us safe rather than comfortable. Throughout every day it continually scans for potential threats, asking unconscious questions such as:

- Am I safe?
- Can I trust these people?
- Do I belong here?

Although essential for survival, this threat detection system frequently activates in modern workplaces during presentations, meetings, difficult conversations or moments of visibility.

The consequence is that many of the physiological responses associated with danger — including increased heart rate, heightened anxiety and mental self-doubt — occur even when no genuine threat exists.

Throughout the session she returned to a central principle: our thoughts are not always facts.

Individuals preparing to present, contribute in meetings or undertake high-pressure tasks frequently create internal narratives that exaggerate the likelihood of failure. These stories, while persuasive, are often products of the brain's threat response rather than objective evidence. The brain responds to perceived social threat in much the same way it responds to physical danger.

Confidence is not the absence of fear

One of the keynote's strongest messages was that confidence should not be measured by how calm someone appears. Instead, confidence is demonstrated through action despite uncertainty.

Everyone, regardless of seniority or experience, experiences moments of self-doubt.

Those who continue contributing despite discomfort gradually develop confidence through repeated experience, while those who avoid challenging situations inadvertently reinforce the belief that they are incapable.

// Feeling nervous is not evidence that you lack confidence. It is evidence that your brain is doing exactly what it evolved to do.

Understanding social threat

Workplace interactions often feel disproportionately significant as humans possess a fundamental need for belonging and this is closely linked to survival. Consequently, the brain continues to treat social rejection as a meaningful threat. Fear of embarrassment, criticism or appearing incompetent activates many of the same neurological pathways associated with physical danger.

Rather than interpreting anxiety as evidence that they should remain silent, individuals can recognise it as a predictable biological response.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Confidence develops through action rather than certainty
- Anxiety is a natural biological response, not evidence of inadequacy
- Thoughts are not always facts
- Self-awareness creates choice
- Courage grows through repeated experience.



Recognition to reality, emerging talent shaping defence

Building on the themes of confidence and leadership explored earlier in the day, the Emerging Talent Award Winners Panel demonstrated how these principles translate into professional practice. While each panellist represented a different discipline, their experiences shared remarkable similarities. Progress had rarely followed straightforward paths. Instead, confidence had developed through mentorship, perseverance and the willingness to challenge established thinking.

Designing equipment around operational reality

One of the panel's most compelling discussions focused on personal protective equipment. One panellist described addressing a long-standing operational issue: personal body armour had been designed around male body dimensions.

Although widely recognised by female personnel as uncomfortable, the issue extends well beyond comfort. Poorly fitting equipment can reduce operational effectiveness and compromise protection.

Working alongside multidisciplinary research teams, engineers challenged traditional assumptions through evidence-based research, generating data that demonstrated the differing protection requirements of women. That research provided robust evidence that enabled defence to develop improved body armour solutions specifically designed to accommodate a broader range of body types.

Mentorship as a force multiplier

Mentorship emerged as one of the defining influences on career development. The engineering panellist described how an experienced mentor provided technical guidance while also offering reassurance.

Importantly, mentorship extended far beyond professional advice. It provided confidence. During moments when research attracted scepticism or when technical challenges appeared overwhelming, having someone who believed in her potential enabled her to persist.

This experience closely reflected themes explored throughout the Summit. Confidence rarely develops in isolation. Organisations that invest in mentoring create environments where talented people remain engaged, ambitious and resilient.

// Confidence is not perfection. It is the willingness to contribute despite uncertainty.

Operational leadership under pressure

Another panellist reflected on leadership within operational policing. She described the realities of making rapid decisions during complex incidents. Operational policing frequently requires immediate judgement based upon incomplete information.

However, she observed that many of the greatest leadership challenges occur after the incident itself. Explaining and justifying operational decisions to colleagues, supervisors and oversight bodies requires confidence, professionalism and integrity.

Her reflections resonated with delegates from both military and civilian organisations, highlighting that accountability is an integral component of effective leadership.

Experience creates confidence

Perhaps the panel's strongest collective message was that confidence follows experience. Rather than encouraging individuals to project certainty artificially, panellists emphasised trusting the training, knowledge and experience that had already earned them their positions.

As one speaker reflected, individuals are rarely invited into demanding roles by accident. Recognising this simple truth allows professionals to replace self-doubt with evidence.



Changing the face of defence — the future

The closing keynote of the morning belonged to General Dame Sharon Nesmith DCB ADC (Gen), Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, who shared her personal leadership journey while setting out a compelling vision for the future of defence.

Reflecting on her own experience of rising through the ranks, General Dame Sharon spoke about the transformation taking place across defence and why change is essential, not only for the betterment of serving women, but for the success of the whole force.

She said:

> **If there was ever a time when we need change, it's now. If we're to meet the challenge we now face in defence, more than ever, we seek commitment to the mission from across the nation. Service needs diverse teams, high performing, inclusive leadership, innovation and ingenuity. We need a challenge culture with less hierarchy and more multidisciplinary learning. A whole force in its wider sense — the military, Civil Service, strategic partners and Defence Industry. The mission we face is serious... the world is more uncertain and unpredictable than ever. We need the integrated force to be more ready today and to transform for tomorrow.**

Her message reinforced a theme that had resonated throughout the Summit: the future of defence depends on unlocking the full potential of people across the entire defence enterprise.

General Dame Sharon explained that meeting today's challenges requires new ways of working and delivering capability. This means empowering the whole defence supply chain and drawing together expertise from across every skill set to drive collaboration, innovation and pace. It also requires systems that embrace appropriate risk, enabling defence to learn faster, adapt more quickly and build greater agility. She continued:

> **For this reform we will build the right team to do differently. Through a new people system and a workforce plan... Whole force. Best talent, best for role, regardless of service or background.**

The keynote concluded with a powerful reminder that representation matters. Being visible, being willing to be different and having the confidence to lead authentically creates opportunities for others to do the same. Individual actions, when combined with collective confidence and allyship, have the power to change organisational culture and shape the future of defence.



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Silent cables, swarming skies — how defence operates

Jess Smith of PA Consulting led the final session of the day which brought the future into stark relief as attendees explored how defence delivers in a crisis. The fictional context was that Russia had been making increasingly bold incursions into NATO airspaces. Intelligence has also attributed several major cyber-attacks in NATO nations to the Russian state.

The first fictional scenario was that two underwater cables are deliberately cut causing an abrupt loss of internet signal and an unexpected power flow disruption. This results in abrupt internet slowdowns and outages affecting banking, government, and business networks in the UK and Northern Europe. Some of the shutdowns have triggered requirement for major system reboots, likely to take most of the day. The National Grid issues a warning of reduced import capacity from Europe and requests a grid adjustment to ensure stability.

The second fictional scenario was when three small, unregistered vessels off the North-West coast, launch a swarm of modified commercial drones, most of which make it to the coast. Some are then neutralised over rural areas, but several evade defences due to sheer numbers and pre-programmed evasive manoeuvres. Over 50% of the drones were intercepted but substantial damage was incurred at the power sub stations. This damage, exacerbated by the reduced resilience in the energy infrastructure, causes regional blackouts.

Moving tables to sit next to people from different parts of the sector, attendees discussed the impact of the scenarios commenting on:

- **The challenge of controlling disinformation on Social Media**
- **How defence should function alongside healthcare, education and the telecoms industry**
- **The increasing reliance by both the Armed Forces and industry on technology and the risk that brings**
- **Interestingly, no-one in the room was surprised by the scenarios, showing a level of readiness for the future.**

This session was unusual in more ways than one. Firstly, it's rare that a pre-dominantly female audience are able to engage in war gaming activities. Secondly, bringing together the Armed Forces, Civil Service and Defence Industry to explore how the whole force would deliver in a crisis paid huge dividends as different parts of the sector learned from each other. 'Deeds not Words' in action.



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Our current partners



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A thought

// I've learned that fearlessness is not the absence of fear, but surviving in spite of it.

MICHELLE OBAMA
FORMER FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED STATES







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A call to arms

Against the backdrop of transition to conflict, the Women in Defence UK Summit 2026 demonstrated that the future strength of Defence depends not only upon technological innovation or increased investment, but equally upon people.

Across every keynote, panel discussion and delegate conversation, a consistent narrative emerged.

Defence performs at its best when people are able to contribute authentically, challenge established thinking and support one another to succeed.

Whether discussing confidence, inclusive leadership, emerging talent or strategic transformation, speakers repeatedly reinforced three interconnected themes:

1. Confidence grows through experience and support.
2. Leadership begins with authenticity and inclusion.
3. The future of Defence depends upon attracting, developing and retaining diverse talent.

For delegates at every stage of their careers, the Summit offered more than inspiration.

It provided practical insights, meaningful connections and renewed confidence that they are active participants in shaping Defence's future.

As General Dame Sharon reminded the audience in her closing words:

// **Be in it to change it.**

WOMEN IN DEFENCE CHARTER

Women in Defence Charter Data Report 2026

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Executive summary

6 years on, momentum returns — but the pipeline remains uneven.

In this, our 6th annual data collection, the average female representation has increased by almost 1% to 24.3%, largely driven by increases in the Defence Industry. The Charter now has 134 Signatories and this year **93 organisations submitted data**, the largest number since we began reporting. Our sample size has grown and the submissions represent **446,035 people across defence** (an increase of c.16,700 vs 2025).[1]

51 respondents reported an improvement in female representation to 31st March 2026 and 15 signatories maintained their gender balance.

- **The Armed Forces remained static** at almost 13% female.
- **The Civil Service reported a reduction** of 2.3% and now has just over 41% female representation.
- **The Defence Industry saw an increase** of 0.8% and now has almost 29% female representation (vs 20% in 2021) — closing the gap to the Women in Defence ambition of 30% by 2030.

In terms of the talent pipeline — the percentage of women represented in the non-managerial workforce, in management, senior management/leadership, at Director and Board level shows a mixed picture:

- The Armed Forces shows an increase in the representation of women at some levels, most notably at Board level.
- In the Civil Service, the number of female managers rose to 37.3% (from 34.4% in 2025) and Board-level roles strengthened to 40% female representation (from 36.6%). However Senior Managers reduced to 32.5% (from 35.6% in 2025) and Directors to 35.5% (from 37.6%).
- In the Defence Industry, the overall workforce and manager populations were largely static, however each saw a positive shift vs 2025. Senior Manager representation rose to 33% (from 27.3%) and the Director level to 33.3% from 31.1%, whilst the Board level female representation dropped from 35.8% to 31.9% and the overall workforce reduced from 33.3% female to 31.4%.

To realise our ambition of 30% female representation by 2030, we must maintain our effort and focus on driving inclusion and diversity and providing opportunities for women to succeed at all levels in every area of the defence enterprise.

Zoë Bishop & Sarah Houghton — MOD Charter Co-Chairs
Katharine Sealy — Thales – Industry Charter Co-Chair
Angela Owen OBE — Women in Defence UK Charter Co-Chair

2026 Highlights

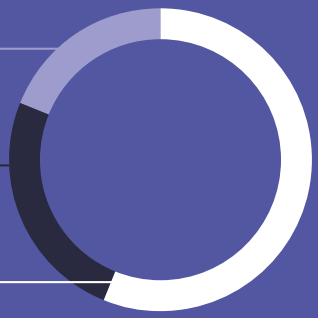
86 ↑

lines of data were used
(vs 70 last year)

Small employers (less than 49 employees) **15**

Medium employers (50–249 employees) **20**

Large employers (250+ employees) **45**



A larger data set vs 2025 with
446,035
people being represented

+0.8% Gender balance has improved in comparison to our 2025 report

24.3% The average female representation in Signatory organisations

The Armed Forces remain **static** →

The Civil Service has slightly decreased representation ↓

Defence Industry regained the almost 1% decline they saw last year **+0.8%**

[1] With batching, submission errors and late submission, 86 lines of data were used compared with 70 lines in 2025. Of these, 80 contained a complete set of data.

Female representation

In 2025, we reported the overall representation of women in the sector was 23.6%. This year, we can report an increase in **female representation in 2026 to 24.3%**.

The number of women working in the public sector (Armed Forces and Civil Service) has increased overall since 2025 by 1,104.

The public sector has maintained female representation, increasing slightly to 20.2%, though the Armed Forces remained static overall and the Civil Service saw a slightly lower representation at 41.4%. **Defence Industry increased representation by almost 1% to nearly 29%, which is moving towards our 30% by 2030**.

Representation in 2026						
	Total Headcount			Percentage		
Area	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Change
Public sector	183,169	46,290	229,459	79.8%	20.2%	0.4%
→ Armed Forces	148,346	21,716	170,062	87.2%	12.8%	0.0%
→ Civil Service	34,823	24,574	59,397	58.6%	41.4%	-2.3%
Defence Industry	154,345	62,231	216,576	71.3%	28.7%	0.8%
All	**337,514**	**108,521**	**446,035**	**75.7%**	**24.3%**	0.8%

Senior leadership

This year we continued to ask about female representation in positions of authority and influence — those in mission/business critical roles and/or decision-making roles. Each part of the sector is organised differently, so for Defence Industry we used the proxy of the top 10% of earners; for the MOD Civil Service, the number of female members of the Senior Civil Service (SCS); for the Armed Forces, the proportion of female officers employed in Command roles as at 31st March 2026.

- **Defence Industry**: we have much better data in 2026 with 71 responses compared to 37 responses in 2025. The data shows **an average of 28% of the top 10% of earners are women**. Interestingly, we notice that the smaller an organisation is, the larger the percentage of women in the top 10% of earners 'large' = 21%, 'medium' = 30% and 'small' = 39%.
- **The MOD Civil Service** including Defence Equipment and Support and the Submarine Delivery Agency: the total population of members of the Senior Civil Service who are female has **declined to 35%** (**from 41%** in 2025).
- **The Armed Forces**: the number of women in Command Roles (Navy OF6+, Army OF4+, RAF OF5+)[2] **has increased to 10.4%** (**from 7.6%** in 2025), closing the gap even more to their male counterparts, where 11.1% of male officers are in Command Roles.

% Women in Senior Leadership

	2025	2026	Change
Civil Service	41%	35%	-6%
Armed Forces	7.6%	10.4%	3%
Defence Industry	22%	28.5%	6%
→ **Large**	16.9%	20.6%	4%
→ **Medium**	21.7%	30.3%	9%
→ **Small**	65.4%	38.5%	-27%

[2] Command Roles Clarifications (methodology similar to last year):

- Navy command appointment numbers were unable to be identified; therefore, eligible command ranks from Commodore (OF6) and above have been provided instead.
- Army figures identify personnel in command appointments at OF4 (Lieutenant Colonel) and above, based on the Army Command List, including personnel transferred from GURTAM to UKTAP and excluding Gurkhas and Army Reserves (FTRS).
- RAF figures identify personnel in command appointments at OF5 (Group Captain) and above and exclude command roles at OF4 due to data limitations.

Representation at every level

The Charter is also interested in female representation at each level of an organisation, as promoting and retaining senior female role models is important for driving overall gender balance.

This year, female representation in the non-managerial workforce is 32% which is broadly level with 2025. The most significant movement was in the management layers and senior talent pipeline: female **Manager representation has grown from 30% in 2025 to 31%**, the biggest shift is in **Senior Manager representation which rose over 5% to 33%** and female representation at **Director level rose 2% to 33%**.

Whilst there has been progress at the Manager, Senior Manager and Director tiers, the 2026 picture suggests a continued focus is needed at Board level. The overall average percentage of females at **Board level is 32%**, which is a 3% reduction from 35% in 2025 — a small softening in a tier where a single Board change materially shifts the figure. Where sample sizes are small, we know a single person change can have a significant impact on the female percentage. However **we need to keep a focus on Senior Leadership and Board roles to ensure female role models are visible**.

Proportion of females at each level in 2026						
Sector	**Workforce**	**Manager**	**Senior Manager**	**Director**	**Board**	**Total Headcount**
Civil Service	43%	43%	28%	30%	39%	59,708
Armed Forces	12%	16%	12%	10%	9%	168,699
Defence Industry	29%	27%	26%	27%	28%	219,869
→ Large	29%	27%	25%	27%	32%	216,993
→ Medium	34%	28%	39%	27%	22%	2,530
→ Small	35%	33%	28%	37%	28%	346
Overall	**24%**	**26%**	**26%**	**27%**	**27%**	**448,267**

Averages exclude null values and blanks but include zeros.

What activities work?

In 2026, we used the Office for Equality and Opportunities list of **recommended, evidence-informed actions** that employers can include in their action plans for gender pay gap reporting.[3] The most common activities reported are **female mentoring programmes/ schemes and offering flexible or hybrid working**, with many Signatories setting targets to support increasing representation.

Nearly all respondents:

- Make job descriptions inclusive.
- Encourage applications from a wide range of candidates.
- Use fair and structured interview techniques.
- Encourage employee development through actionable steps.

The majority also actively:

- Reduce unconscious bias in CV screening.
- Advertise flexible working in job adverts and 58% advertise leave policies.
- Automatically consider eligible employees for promotion.
- Increase transparency for pay, promotions and rewards.
- Offering occupational health advice and workplace adjustments, and reviewing policies and procedures to meet the needs of employees experiencing menopause.

There is opportunity for half of our Signatories to explore setting up menopause support groups and networks, offering managers training and conducting menopause risk assessments in the workplace.

81 signatories also provided more insight into the action they are taking and they show **increasingly systemic action being taken** to increase female representation, through creating more inclusive cultures, policy reform and leadership accountability.

- Inclusive culture/training: **51 responses (63%)**
- Policy/pay/progression: **41 (51%)**
- Leadership/accountability: **36 (44%)**
- Networks/role models: **32 (40%)**

[3] The action plans will become mandatory in Spring 2027.

Measuring progress



We collect data at the Charter to be able to demonstrate progress against our ambition of 30 by 30. The enterprise wide data allows us to give a high level picture and identify where successes are happening. Within Signatory organisations, measurement against their ambitions and goals is also critical. In 2025, the most popular ways of measuring successes were:

How is progress being measured in 2026

Measure	Number	%
Annual data collection/reporting	75	87%
Employee survey results	72	84%
Talent attraction data	70	81%
Attrition data / leavers data	74	86%
Exit interviews	76	88%

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Charter commitments

When an organisation signs the Charter, they make 5 main commitments:

1. Having an empowered member of the senior executive team who is responsible for signing the charter
2. Setting internal targets, where appropriate, for gender diversity in all levels of our organisation and in all functional areas
3. Having an intention to ensure the pay or the objectives of a senior executive are linked to delivery of any internal targets on gender inclusion and diversity
4. Supporting the progression of women into senior roles in the defence sector by focusing on the executive pipeline and the mid and lower-tier levels across the full spectrum of roles within my organisation
5. Providing data annually to the Women in Defence UK Charter for anonymised use in the Women in Defence UK Charter Annual Report.

These commitments have changed slightly since the 2025 report, making comparisons less helpful. **In 2026, 21 or 24% of those who presented data met all 5 commitments**.

Number of Signatories achieving their commitments

	Signatories	%
Senior Executive accountable for gender diversity	82	95%
Setting internal targets	50	58%
An intention to link pay to gender inclusion/diversity	30	35%
Progression at every level	77	90%
Submitting data to the WID Charter annually	93	69%

We will continue working with Signatories over the coming year to ensure they understand their commitments, how they are performing against them, and what we can do to further support them in achieving the goals they signed up to, to increase gender balance in their organisations.

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Conclusion

In our 6th year of reporting with the largest data set since we began, we are pleased to see momentum returning, with an increase of almost 1% in female representation.

We recognise the talent pipeline remains uneven and this is an opportunity to focus effort. In asking Signatories about the challenges they face in achieving a better gender balance, the dominant barrier reported was the limited pipeline of women with relevant STEM, engineering, technical and defence experience. This is compounded by sector perceptions, a male-dominated image and under-representation in senior roles, though we were pleased to report this year that there has been positive movement in the management layers and an increase in the senior talent pipeline.

Almost half our Signatories suggested prioritising early-career and STEM pipeline development to engage girls earlier through education and apprenticeships. However, recruitment alone will not resolve representation without stronger retention and progression for women, supported by flexible working and roles, and an inclusive culture. There is also the opportunity to broaden the defence sector image through further female visibility and strengthening mentoring, progression and leadership accountability.

This report should be a catalyst for further action; turning evidence into measurable change, removing the barriers that limit women's advancement and accelerating progress towards improved gender balance at every level of the defence sector.

Participants

The Charter has 134 Signatories in 2026 and we are pleased to report an increase in participation in this report.

Organisations		
Accenture UK Limited	BT	Forces Employment Charity
ADS	Capgemini	Fujitsu
Airbus	Capita	Geometric Manufacturing Ltd
Allan Webb Ltd	Cervus Defence Ltd	Helsing Limited
Arondite	Civil Service (not agencies)	Hydro Group
Ascent Flight Training	CJ Cairns Associates	i3Works
Atkins	CMS Strategic	IBM Consulting
ATOS	Cohort PLC	IDE Systems
AWE	Costain	KBR
Babcock	Cranfield University	KBS Maritime
BAE Systems	CSOC	L3 Harris
BaxterStorey	CTS Logistics	Leidos UK
BMT	DE&S	Leonardo
Boeing UK	Defence Media	Metaverse VR Ltd
Brigantes Consulting Ltd	Empyrea Consulting	Marshall Aerospace and Defence
British Army	Envitia	Matchtech

Organisations		
MBDA UK	RDUK Rheinmetall UK	Skyral
MGNG UK	Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land	SQEP
Mind Foundry Ltd	RINA Tech UK Ltd	Squarcle
Mott MacDonald	RMMV UK Rheinmetall MAN Military Vehicles UK	Stellar Solutions
MRL Public Sector Consultants	Rowden Tech	Submarine Delivery Agency
Ncounter	Royal AirForce	Thales UK
Occam Group	Royal Navy	TKMA/Atlas Elektronic UK
Oxford Dynamics	Saab UK	Turner & Townsend
Oxley Group	Safeguard Engineering	Unify
PA Consulting	Safran	Vertage (formerly Impellam Group)
Plexal	Scan Associates	Verzon Engineering
Ploughshare Innovations Ltd	Scientific Management International Ltd	Whitetree
PWC	Scott Aerospace	WSP
QA	Serco	
QinetiQ	Sharing Growth	
Raytheon UK	Sirius Analysis	

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