

Changing the face of defence

Insight and Data 2025_



Introduction —

Defence has an image problem – so what do we do about it?

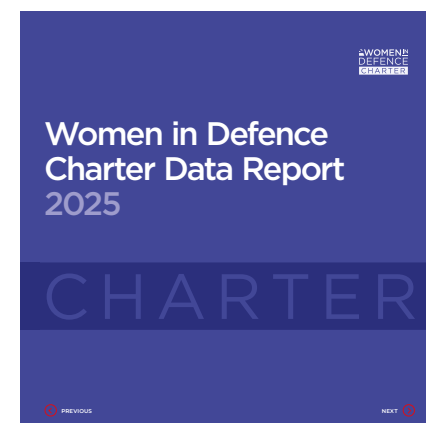
In a volatile world, where geopolitical tensions are high and technology evolves at lightening speed, Defence has a critical role to play. But to effectively navigate these challenges, it needs to attract diverse talent from people with skill sets not typically associated with Defence.

Reputation and image play a huge part in our sector's ability to attract the best minds, but we must also look at how we retain them, adopting new styles of leadership and challenging embedded assumptions and behaviours that get in the way of people working at their best.

This is an area where women thrive. Studies unequivocally show that women consistently outperform men in key leadership traits such as self-awareness, authenticity, and collaboration.

As Defence takes steps to reshape its image, women can help lead the charge to welcome the next generation of talent.

[2025's Critical Mass Report](#) showcases key data on the perception of Defence, alongside some of the practical steps we can take to change it.



Changing the face of defence

by recrafting the defence narrative



Critical Mass

—



Babcock

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Executive summary —

At our 2024 Critical Mass Summit, a workshop focused on the challenges facing the sector, the most difficult being seen to be that defence has an image problem. This year's Summit examined how that image might be re-crafted.

Tackling reputation and image as key themes, we were pleased to welcome Louise Atkinson, Chief People Officer from Babcock International, who spoke about the operational importance of women to defence. Elif Güvençer, from reputation intelligence firm RepTrak, shared insights on the impact of reputation on organisational outcomes. We were then shown how this intelligence could be used in practice, with Babcock's Group Strategic Marketing Director Ebru Ozguc sharing how the organisation has used reputational surveys to rework its image.

Air Commodore Jamie Thompson CBE spoke to us about 'Framing the Future', sharing ideas on allyship and how Defence can attract and retain the best talent to meet new challenges. And lastly, we heard from the Security Service on Shaping Perception, exploring the steps we need to take to attract and nurture female tech talent in the AI space.

Key takeaways from this year's summit:

- **Diverse teams are needed for the future of Defence:** new challenges demand diverse skills beyond those traditionally associated with the sector. This means changing our image to showcase an environment where everyone can belong.
- **Reputation has real-life impacts:** it can affect an organisation's ability to both attract talent and weather storms. Although Defence ranks highly in reputation for both men and women, less than 1 in 4 women want to work within this sector; understanding what people value is key to getting it right.
- **Brand and reputation are intrinsically linked:** once you understand your reputation, it's essential to take action at the brand level to present as you wish to be seen. You must also make sure to bring key stakeholders on the journey.
- **To prepare for the future, we need to change our leadership style:** female engagement can help us to better understand the perspectives and approaches of others to lead diverse teams effectively.
- **Changing perception requires action at multiple touchpoints:** from graduate recruitment and career entry, through to talent nurturing, mentoring, leadership and the celebration of successes.



Critical Mass

Critical mass – the size that something needs to reach before a particular change, event or development can happen

The business case for diversity is well known and well made. Diverse voices that can be heard in an inclusive culture bring economic and operational benefits. In the defence sector, women currently number just under 24%. The Women in Defence Charter has set an ambition that 30% of all roles will be filled by women by 2030. Our Critical Mass work supports that ambition.



Critical Mass: Community —

We have created a Critical Mass Community of our Partners who meet to share their leading practice in what they have found works.

The Community meetings have covered:

- 'Women's Empowerment' hosted by Costain
- 'Dealing with challenging situations to drive an equitable and inclusive environment' hosted by Frazer Nash Consultancy
- 'Attract, recruit, develop and train: How to get more women into the UK technology sector' hosted by Sopra Steria
- 'Men Advocating Real Change' hosted by Amentum
- 'Bring your Challenges to the table' – new legislation on harassment presented by Serco
- 'Strengthening the defence workforce – accelerating action on gender equality hosted by Accenture
- 'Allyship in action – building safer, stronger teams' hosted by PA Consulting
- 'SDR perspectives on technology, skill and workforce transformation' hosted by
- 'Breaking the barriers – a smoother transition into industry' hosted by Costain

Reshaping the image of Defence —

On her way into a recent meeting, Chief People Officer Louise Atkinson was incorrectly assumed to be support staff. This isn't unusual; it's common, and highlights the need for attitudes to change. As Chief People Officer at Babcock International, Louise shared her view on why diverse teams are important and how Defence need to change if it is to attract the talent the industry so desperately needs.

Why diversity is needed in Defence today

The world is becoming ever more volatile and innovation will be needed to tackle emerging challenges in Defence. But true innovation does not come from echo chambers. As an industry, we need to think beyond just STEM to attract people with different skill sets: marketeers, PR experts, HR professionals, project managers, accountants and leaders.

How can we fix Defence's image problem?

When people think about Defence they tend to think about men in uniform. To attract the best minds, we need to re-shape how people think of this sector in the first place. We need to reflect the values of those who we hope to serve: this means moving away from 'command and control' to a more collaborative approach as well as challenging ingrained behaviour to make sure everyone feels welcome.

How do we retain talent?

To retain talent, we need to create an environment where people want to stay and grow. This means changing our culture, making it less hierarchical, less bureaucratic, and more collaborative and purposeful. Crucially, we need to connect people to the purpose of this sector to help them see how their work matters.

// If we as an industry want to attract the talent that we desperately need, then we need to redefine who belongs in the room. It's not just about changing our image. It's about changing our language, our culture, about making sure every voice can be heard.

Women are operationally important to Defence

Research shows that women consistently outperform men in key leadership traits such as self-awareness, authenticity, and collaboration. Women are more likely to lead with a mindset of diplomacy, consensus, and openness to different ideas, as well as displaying empathy and emotional intelligence. Not only is this shown to help build stronger and more resilient teams, it also creates a buffer against the challenges and stresses of a high-impact environment.

KEY AREAS TO ADDRESS

- As an industry, we need to do more to attract people with different skill sets and from different backgrounds. To do so, we need to understand and connect to their values.
- Role models are important. Leaders and allies must support the platforming of role models through events such as The Women in Defence UK Awards, and the Critical Mass Summit.
- To retain talent, we need to focus on changing our culture, moving away from a hierarchical to a more collaborative approach and challenging behaviour to make sure everyone feels welcome.
- Helping all leaders to model empathy and emotional intelligence will help us to build stronger and more resilient teams.

Reputation & Perception: RepTrak Research —

Why does our reputation matter? And what is the current reputation of Defence? Elif Güvençer from reputation intelligence firm RepTrak shared key data on the importance of reputation and how we can use it to manage risks and reap rewards.

Why does reputation matter?

Reputation is the gut feeling you would have towards something or someone. That gut feeling has real life consequences. Companies with strong reputations outperform companies with lower scores in terms of stock prices. The propensity to buy and recommend them is increased. They attract talent more easily. And they are more trusted to adequately handle crises.



Why is reputation particularly important for Defence?

Stakeholders care about what the public thinks of you. It is up to you to actively manage your reputation, or else others will do it for you.

- **Secures and sustains government trust**
Governments base decisions not just on pricing or compliance but also on public trust, perceived transparency and fairness, and local impact.
- **Mitigates risk in a heavily scrutinised space**
Defence companies operate under media and regulatory magnification. A misstep in one region (e.g. a delayed project) can spread fast across media and erode trust.
- **Provides proof for contract renewals and expansion**
Government partners want evidence you deliver societal value. Be aware that reputation isn't uniform; each stakeholder group, region or business unit may value different things.

Key reputational insights for Defence¹

- In the UK, Capital Goods, the industry category where Defence sits, ranks highest by reputation for both men and women. Despite this, only a little more than 1 in 4 women state that they would want to work within this sector.
- In 2025, the UK public's leading concerns were economic instability – including unemployment and inflation – and geopolitical tensions. Yet when asked what they expect from companies, people emphasised customer experience, cybersecurity, environmental sustainability, and workforce care. This suggests that while the public might be looking to governments to address economic challenges, they see the role of business as fostering trust, stability, and wellbeing within the communities they serve.
- DEI is important to the general public, ranking fifth among company expectations (31%). It is also the top expectation from businesses in the UK among 18–34-year-olds. However, with only 57% of the public able to correctly identify what DEI actually means, it remains an under-utilised lever – suggesting that while people value this topic, greater context and clear communication are needed to deepen understanding and make efforts truly effective.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The defence industry is under the spotlight**
Defence is under increased scrutiny, creating opportunities to engage stakeholders on their role in the national economy, employment and community.
- **There are mixed stakeholder expectations**
In today's climate, Defence must be prepared to navigate complex and at times competing stakeholder expectations. To do so, they must define what matters to them, understand the expectations of key stakeholders and take steps to identify and mitigate risks.
- **CSR, when done well, can be a powerful lever**
Whether it is environmental sustainability or employee wellbeing, a strong corporate and social responsibility narrative can deliver significant value. Defence businesses must select authentic areas of focus, back them with credible evidence, and connect statements to concrete actions.
- **There is an opportunity for talent attraction**
The defence industry is growing faster than most sectors and offers diverse, well-paid and highly skilled roles in technology and engineering. To seize this opportunity, companies must sharpen how they communicate their employee value proposition, highlight DEI initiatives that break barriers, and demonstrate clear commitments to addressing the industry's historical conduct challenges.

1. RepTrak UK informed general public Q1 survey 2025.

Reputation & Perception: Changing the Brand Narrative

Understanding the position

Babcock International had been through a significant turnaround in recent years and as such its present reputation wasn't well understood. On joining Babcock in 2024, Group Strategic Marketing Director Ebru Ozguc took steps to tackle this by spearheading a project to understand how Babcock was perceived in the market and use reputational insights to reshape its brand.

Exploring different perspectives

Babcock started by conducting a reputational survey across customers, suppliers, partners, employees, and the informed general public, discovering great differences in perception between these groups. It then used this research to identify and explore specific topics and perceptions to inform discussions with key stakeholders.

Using reputation to influence brand strategy

Brand is defined within the company. It is how you choose to present yourself to the outside world and the unique promise a company makes to its stakeholders. Reputation is external: it's what the outside world thinks about you and is based on both your past actions and the degree to which you fulfil your promise in the eyes of your stakeholders.

Throughout its research, Babcock had asked questions around the perceived brand – was it traditional or modern? Was it technological? Confident? These adjectives were discussed and developed with key stakeholder to influence a new brand strategy. A new brand positioning statement was created to represent what Babcock wanted to stand for: 'Lifetime engineering'.

Bringing the brand to life

Once the brand strategy had been formed, Babcock moved to help itself stand out by establishing a new visual identity. It reviewed its content and thought leadership across key stakeholder channels to make sure all activities aligned with the new positioning and messaging.

Brand is more than just visual identity. It represents our core competencies, unique positioning, culture and personality. This includes having a voice in areas that are important to your brand. For Babcock, 'lifetime engineering' means we are with our customers for the long-term. It also means building a voice in areas that matter to us. We are looking more closely at innovation and technology in the context of SME engagement in our industry. We launched a research project with the University of Exeter to explore how we can unlock their potential – the findings of which will be published in a thought leadership report.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Reputation and brand are two sides of the same coin: reputation is decided externally, and brand is something you define. Your reputation is influenced by how well you deliver on your brand promise to your stakeholders.
- It's important to establish your current reputation and how it compares against sector benchmarks. You should also decide what business impact you want to achieve by changing it.
- Determine the reputational drivers for your audience and how you are currently performing against them. Assess which channels may provide the greatest reputational returns.
- Bring leadership and key stakeholders on the journey with you. You need to be clear about why reputation matters, and what you plan to influence through your actions.
- Revisit your brand strategy to align more closely to the reputational drivers of your key audiences. Think about how you will 'walk the talk' to deliver on your brand promise.

Framing the Future —

In Space Defence, different perspectives and diverse skills are crucial to operational effectiveness. Deputy Commander of UK Space Command Air Commodore Jamie Thompson shared his insight on how Defence can create the best environment to nurture them.

// Space operations are incredibly complex and because of that we need to demand a really diverse set of perspectives which are not found often in the traditional defence organisation.

Diversity as a strategic asset for operational effectiveness

Operational effectiveness must be at the heart of what we deliver for Defence. Our ability to understand the environments we are operating in during conflict is crucial to strengthening outcomes. In these situations, women have played a key role in navigating cultural divides to provide this understanding.

// It's consistently proven that mixed-gender teams offer greater efficiency, problem solving innovation and cognitive diversity and the ability to work in critical high-pressure environments. The ability to react, take leadership and think critically is absolutely essential.

When working in multi-national environments like Space, understanding each nation's approach, as well as other people's biases, is critical to operational effectiveness, particularly when working with unorthodox allies.

What is getting in the way of building more diverse teams?

The Armed Forces are still struggling to get the diversity it needs. The Atherton Report brought to light several hard challenges that need to be addressed and which have rightfully challenged Defence's position. We need to shake up the culture of the environment we're in, so that these types of problems do not manifest.

There's still work to be done. Women still face inappropriate behaviours from the establishment and ingrained cultural biases can be really hard to challenge. We must work hard to counter them and educate people against them.

How can we make sure we have the most diverse and effective workforce available to us?

Defence is a reflection of society and diversity gives us legitimacy. We need to show that we are a place where people can live, work and thrive. We need to give diverse voices a platform to speak. Having women in leadership roles is essential to this, with initiatives in place to provide the required platform across every part of the management and leadership layer.

Space Defence works closely with commercial industry partners, the Civil Service and other agencies to target the right people with the right skill sets. But retention is also key: we need to think about how we create the best environment for a diverse workforce to operate in and feel valued and feel challenged, with the right platform to develop.

Diversity is not about fairness. It's about operational excellence.

Building and retaining diverse teams is about building the future of Defence on widest possible foundation of talent. We can no longer go on with old models, ideologies and culture. The only way we will move forward is by modernising our approach and understanding that societal changes need to drive our defence and national security changes as well.



Shaping Perceptions —

AI skills will become crucial to the future of our industry, but AI development has a bad rep, often seen as the preserve of the 'broligarchy' and 'tech bros'. To challenge these perceptions, the Security Service has gone beyond its historic recruitment approaches in investigations, operations and analysis to target professions across the digital, data and AI tech career streams – and make moves to deliver an improved gender balance for tech grads.

A representative from the Security Service spoke about the challenges of perception and their efforts to re-shape their workforce alongside the tech revolution of AI.



Five actions to change perceptions

1. **Shape perceptions early.** The Security Service is focused on re-shaping perceptions of the office, but the landscape for the Security Service is a mix of stereotypes and an inability to have voice, which makes conventional outreach challenging. New and novel collaborations with academia and industry can help to deliver into National Security in a way that breaks from the past.
2. **Challenge Perceptions.** AI is transforming the workforce, but new AI tech entrants to the Security Service do not need to arrive in the building as the finished article with a high baseline of training and skills. By focusing on skills rather than education, we can deliver a richer talent pool with a gender balance for tech grads of 50/50.
3. **Create an environment in which your workforce thrives.** The Security Service is supporting women in tech by ensuring that internal recruitment campaigns address the fundamentals (like the gender coding of adverts), and that they open up new avenues for spotting and nurturing talent. They are also taking steps to tackle poor behaviours through allyship and peer support programmes, such as the internal 'upstander' campaign.

4. **Show up.** For the Security Service, female tech leaders have a responsibility to role model, and they need to show up. Support offered by allyship needs to be serious – and backed by mentoring from both male and female mentors in order to unlock people's potential. It is key to reinforce that women do not self-sensor when it comes to offering or requesting support.
5. **Champion success.** The Security Service has made deliberate efforts to recognise, call out and champion success and initiatives to champion wins are embedded in the day-to-day.

By creating a new perception, we can deliver a new reality. This takes more than a strong brand; the Security Service has sought differentiators that actively change perceptions to adapt to what the new generation needs.



Our current partners

A thought —

// As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we'll all be better off for it."

RUTH BADER GINSBERG
SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

Women in Defence Charter Data Report 2025

CHARTER

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Executive summary

5 years on, progress is stalling. Are there challenging times ahead?

The Women in Defence Charter was launched in 2019 and we've seen steady progress in female representation across the defence sector each year. This year, in our 5th annual data collection, **we have found the average female representation has decreased by almost 1% to 23.6%.**

As the geo-political landscape is shifting, we are finding that our signatories are having to adapt. The Charter now has over 120 Signatories and this year 70 organisations contributed data, however, the contributing organisations have changed slightly this year, and we were unable to capture data from some of our global/US based Signatories. Our sample size has reduced slightly and the submissions represent 429,334 people across defence (a decrease of c. 43,600).

41 respondents reported an improvement in female representation to 31st March 2025 and 20 signatories maintained their gender balance.

- The Armed Forces reported a 0.2% increase and is almost 13% female.
- The Civil Service is moving even closer to gender balance with an increase of 0.6% and credible representation figures of almost 44% female.
- The Private Sector saw a decrease of 0.8% and now reports an average of almost 28% female representation.

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



Photo © 2025 Babcock International Group PLC

We have found in the organisations that submitted data from the Private sector that representation at more senior levels is closer to our ambition and is increasing. Using earnings as a proxy, we found over 30% of the highest paid were female, occupying Director (31%) and Board (35%) roles. The Civil Service has reported a step on in senior female representation at each level – Managers are now 34% female (from 28% in 2024), Senior Managers are 36% (from 22%), Directors are 38% (from 22%) and Board level roles are 37% female (from 20% in last years submission).

As the political narrative around diversity and inclusion changes, progress seems to be slowing. Therefore, our ambition for a better gender balance across the defence sector remains as important as ever, and we must continue to work tirelessly to increase female representation.

Sam des Forges – MOD Charter Co-Chair

Katharine Sealy – Thales – Industry Charter Co-Chair

Angela Owen OBE – Women in Defence UK Charter Co-Chair

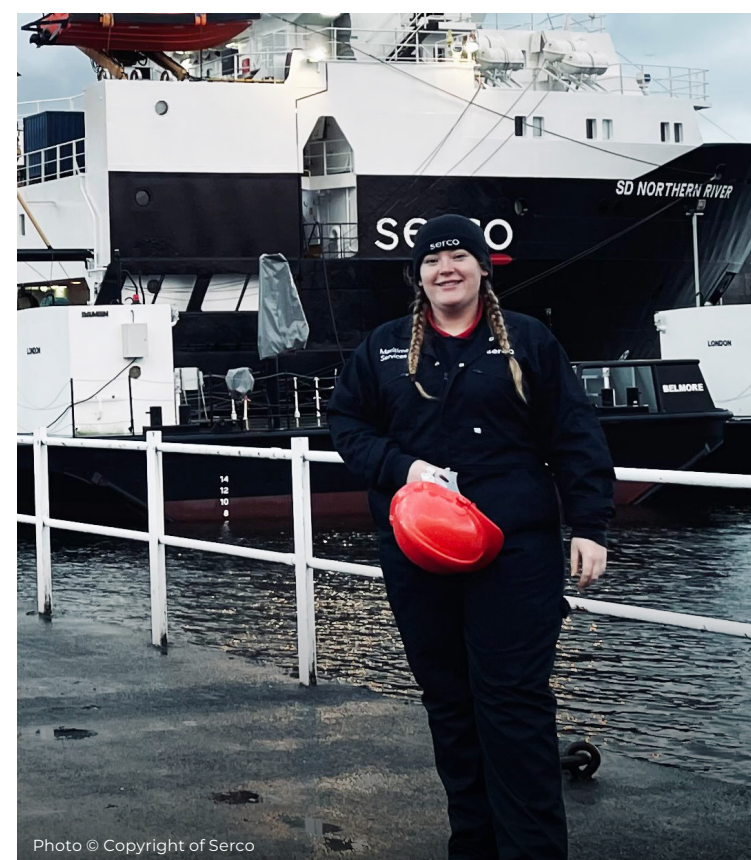


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2025 Highlights

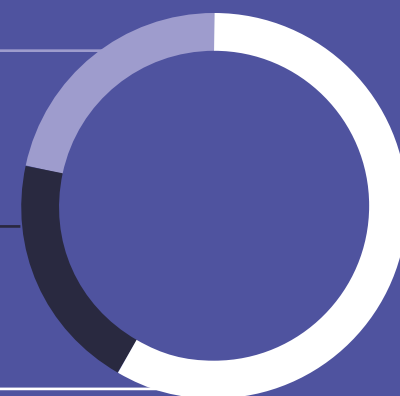
70↑

Signatories provided input to the report (vs 63 last year)

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

Medium employers
(50–249 employees) **14**

Large employers
(250+ employees) **41**



A smaller data set vs 2024 with

429,334

people being represented.

-1%

The gender balance has decreased slightly in comparison to our 2024 report.

24%

The average female representation in Signatory organisations is almost 24% (23.6%).

The Armed Forces and Civil Service have slightly

increased representation ↑

The Private Sector has seen an almost 1% decline – though data submissions have reduced from global companies.

-1%

Female Representation

From the 63 Signatories that submitted this data in 2024, we reported the overall representation of women in the sector was 25%. This year, 70 respondents submitted data and we have seen a reduction in **2025 female representation to almost 24%**.

We have to recognise this year that we were unable to obtain data from some of our international/American based signatories due to a change in policy and therefore our sample size is slightly smaller. Of those who did respond, 58.5% **(41 organisations) reported an improvement in female representation this year.** 28.5% (20 organisations) stayed the same and 13% (9 organisations) saw a reduction. In 2024, 65% saw an improvement, (14% stayed the same and 13% saw a reduction) which suggested progress is slowing.

With a similar sample size (429,334 vs 473,000 in 2024) we can see a reduction in the Private Sector from 29% to 28% female. The Public sector has maintained female representation overall at almost 20%. This this is another increase of 0.2% for the Armed forces and a smaller 0.6% increase for the Civil Service this year, who are moving closer to gender balance.



Photo: UK MOD © Crown Copyright 2023

Representation in 2025						
Percentage						
Area	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Change
Public sector	183,722	45,186	228,908	80.3%	19.7%	-0.1%
→ Armed Forces	154,570	22,584	177,154	87.3%	12.7%	0.2%
→ Civil Service	29,152	22,602	51,754	56.3%	43.7%	0.6%
Private sector	144,467	55,959	200,426	72.1%	27.9%	-0.8%
All	328,189	101,145	429,334	76.4%	23.6%	-1.0%

Representation in mission/business critical roles



Photo: UK MOD © Crown Copyright 2023

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 the 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 2025.



Photo: UK MOD © Crown Copyright 2022

The data revealed:

- **For the defence industry**, 64 companies submitted data this year on their top earners. The average percentage of women who were reported to be in the top 10% of the highest paid people in the company/Charter Signatory division was 11%.
- **For the MOD Civil Service** including Defence Equipment and Support and the Submarine Delivery Agency, 41% of the total population of members of the Senior Civil Service are female.
- **For the Armed Forces**, we used the proportion of women employed in Command roles, in essence roles that have disciplinary powers over others. Each Service defines a Command role in a slightly different way as shown in the caveat below.* Of the 528 females eligible for a command role, 7.6% or 40 were in a command role as at 31st March 2025. This compares to 377 or 11% of eligible male officers in a command role on the same date.

The methodology used is similar to last year but please see notes below. The delta between male and female of only 3.4% remains very promising, especially when you take into account the impact of historically heavily male dominated parts of the Armed Forces such as the Infantry and the Royal Marines, each forming about one quarter of their Service.

* Command Roles Clarifications (methodology similar to last year) –

Navy command appointment numbers were unable to be identified, therefore eligible command ranks from Commodore rank (OF6) and above have been provided instead.

Army numbers identified personnel in command appointments at rank OF4 (Lieutenant Colonel) and above based on their Command List including personnel transferred from GURTAM to UKTAP and excluding Gurkhas & Army Reserves (FTRS).

RAF numbers identified personnel in command appointments at rank OF5 (Group Captain) and above and excluded any command roles at ranks OF4 due to data limitations.

Average of total % of females at each level 2025					
Sector	Workforce	Manager	Senior Manager	Director	Board
Civil Service	28%	34%	36%	38%	37%
Armed Forces	12%	16%	10%	11%	3%
Private sector	32%	30%	28%	31%	35%
Overall	32%	30%	28%	31%	34%

Averages exclude null values and blanks but include zeros

Change from last year (absolute change in percentages, not a % change)					
Sector	Workforce	Manager	Senior Manager	Director	Board
Civil Service	-1.9%	6.8%	13.3%	15.7%	16.4%
Armed Forces	0.3%	0.1%	2.0%	3.0%	-3.9%
Private sector	3.3%	6.6%	6.5%	9.6%	10.9%
Overall	2.8%	6.4%	6.9%	9.8%	11.1%

Board and Director level positions are a small sample size where a single person changing will have a marked impact on the female %

Caveats –

Data is as at 1 April 2024 for headcount and 12 months to end March 2024 for intake.

Caution is advised when interpreting the senior civilian and senior military percentages, due to small numbers used in the percentage calculations.

Figures, unless otherwise stated, includes trained and untrained personnel.

UK Armed Forces includes Regular and Reserve (Future Reserves 2020) UK armed forces personnel and excludes Civilian, LECs and RFA personnel.

Civil Service includes staff in MOD Main TLB Areas, the major organisational groupings of the MOD directly responsible for the planning, management and delivery of departmental capability.

Senior leadership

We also delved a little deeper in to ‘management levels’ across the sector. We found that whilst overall representation is increasing, in the general workforce it has remained fairly static at 32% on average.

In terms of ‘senior leaders’, the overall average % females at Board level is 34%. We saw a reduction in the number of female Directors in Signatory organisations to 21% (from 25% in 2023), however **the female representation in the Manager and Senior Manager populations has increased from 20% to 23% and 21% respectively.**

As the sample sizes are small, we know that a single person change can have a marked increase on the female %, however promoting and retaining senior female role models is important for driving overall gender balance. It would appear this is improving at lower management levels in signatory organisations, and we need to keep a focus on Senior Leadership and Board roles to ensure female role models are visible.

Average of total % of females at each level 2025					
Sector	Workforce	Manager	Senior Manager	Director	Board
Civil Service	28%	34%	36%	38%	37%
Armed Forces	12%	16%	10%	11%	3%
Private	32%	30%	28%	31%	35%
Overall	32%	30%	28%	31%	34%

Averages exclude null values and blanks but include zeros

What activities work?

In terms of activity that attracts and retains female talent, there has been an overall decrease in the amount reported and also is reflective of the different organisations making up the signatory submission in 2025 versus 2024. This may be as some already have targets and policies in place. The most popular activity remains flexible/hybrid work with employee network groups and education /awareness programmes in place for over half of respondents.

What activity we are doing in 2025				
Measure	Number	%	% in 2023	Change
Setting additional targets e.g. recruitment or promotion ratio	0	0%	37%	-36.5%
Female mentoring programme/schemes	31	44%	62%	-17.6%
Education and awareness programmes	35	50%	68%	-18.3%
Flexible or hybrid working	52	74%	87%	-13.0%
New inclusive/gender policies	0	0%	60%	-60.3%
Gender balance or female affinity/ employee network groups	36	51%	59%	-7.3%
Childcare facilities or specific support other than vouchers	11	16%	38%	-22.4%
Female talent development programmes	26	37%	51%	-13.7%



Measuring progress



Photo: UK MOD © Crown Copyright 2024

The most popular ways to measure progress are employee surveys (64%), exit interviews (61%) and data collection (61%). 59% of organisations surveyed also use recruitment data.

How is Progress Being Measured in 2025				
Measure	Number	%	% in 2024	Change
Annual data collection/reporting	43	61%	75%	-13.2%
Gender Pay Gap reporting	36	51%	70%	-18.4%
Employee survey results	45	64%	78%	-13.5%
Talent attraction data	30	43%	56%	-12.7%
Recruitment data	41	59%	71%	-12.9%
Attrition data / leavers data	40	57%	76%	-19.0%
Exit interviews	43	61%	79%	-17.9%

Charter Commitments

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

1. To nominate one member of their senior executive team to be responsible and accountable for gender diversity and inclusion.
2. To set a gender balance target for their organisation.
3. Where appropriate, to set a target for gender diversity in senior management.
4. To have the intention to ensure the pay, or the objectives of the senior executive team, are linked to delivery of any internal targets on gender inclusion and diversity.
5. To share progress, how it is being measured and whether plans, policies and activities are in place to increase female representation.

The Signatories are asked annually to report on their progress against these commitments and share their current female representation.





1. **81%** have a nominated senior executive member be responsible and accountable for gender diversity and inclusion (57 organisations, which has increased slightly).

2. **49** organisations have set a gender balance target for their organisation (70% vs. 79% in 2024).

3. **42 Signatories (60%)** have set a target for gender diversity in senior management which is a decrease from 71% in 2024.

4. **44%** of Signatories now have the intention to ensure the pay, or the objectives of the senior executive team, are linked to delivery of any internal targets on gender inclusion and diversity (compared to 63% in 2024).


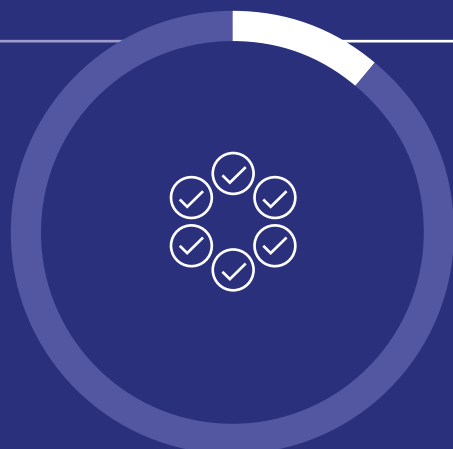


Photo © 2025 Babcock International Group PLC

In 2025, **only 11% are meeting all 6 commitments** which is a significant decrease from 27% in 2024.

89%

No (62)

**11%**

Yes (8)

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 to support them in achieving the goals they signed up to, to increase gender balance in their organisations.

Conclusion

Both Reports show that much work still needs to be done if the sector is to reflect the society it serves. To meet the SDR ambition of 'reconnecting Defence with society' and 'a whole of society approach', we must recraft the narrative now to attract new talent and take action to enable women to thrive and succeed at all levels and in all parts of the defence enterprise.

The 2025 Women in Defence Charter data report highlights both progress and persistent challenges in achieving gender balance across the defence sector. While there have been notable improvements in female representation at senior levels – particularly within the Civil Service and among the highest-paid roles in the private sector – the overall average female representation has declined slightly to 23.6%. This decrease, coupled with a reduced sample size and fewer contributions from global Signatories, signals a need for renewed focus and commitment.

Encouragingly, over half of participating organisations reported improvements in female representation, and the Civil Service is moving closer to gender parity at multiple leadership levels. However, the private sector has seen a small downturn, and

the overall pace of progress appears to be slowing. The data also reveal that fewer organisations are setting or meeting ambitious gender balance targets, and the adoption of activities proven to attract and retain female talent – such as mentoring and targeted development programmes – has decreased compared to previous years.

As the political and organisational narrative around diversity and inclusion evolves, it is more important than ever to maintain momentum. Achieving the Charter's ambition of 30% female representation by 2030 will require sustained effort, accountability at the highest levels, and a willingness to adapt strategies to changing circumstances. The sector must continue to champion visible female role models, invest in inclusive policies, and rigorously measure progress to ensure that gains are not only achieved but also maintained.

We hope these reports will inspire individuals and organisations to recraft the narrative, attracting and retaining women to the sector, driving a critical mass of female representation, and creating a more balanced and effective defence enterprise for the future.

Participants

The Charter has over 120 Signatories in 2025 and we are pleased to report an increase in participation in this report.

Organisations		
Accenture UK Limited	Frielle Ltd	QA Ltd
Aerospace & Airworthiness Consultancy Enterprises Ltd	Fujitsu	QinetiQ Ltd
Airbus Defence and Space Limited	Geometric Manufacturing Ltd	Raytheon UK
AirTanker	Helsing	Rheinmetall Defence UK
Aquila	i3Works Ltd	Rheinmetall MAN Military Vehicles UK
AtkinsRéalis	Impellam	Saab UK Ltd
Atos (UK Defence and Security Account)	Leidos UK	Safran
Babcock International Group PLC	Leonardo	Scientific Management International Ltd
BAE Systems Plc	Mace Group	SDA
BMT	Manpower Group	Serco
Boeing UK	Matchtech (part of Gattaca)	Sharing in Growth
Boyden Executive Search Limited	MBDA UK	Sirius Analysis
Capgemini UK / Capgemini Invent	Midlands Defence	Skyral
Capita plc / Capita Defence & National Preparedness	MOD Main Civil Service	Stellar Solutions Aerospace Ltd
Cervus Defence and Security LTD	Mott MacDonald	Turner and Townsend LTD
Cohort Plc	MRL Public Sector Consultants Ltd	UK Armed Forces
Costain	Northrop Grumman UK	UK Defence Solutions Centre
Cranfield University	Occam Group Ltd	VIVO Defence Services
Defence Equipment & Support	Oxfordshire Buckingham & Chilterns Regional Defence & Security Cluster	Vysiion Ltd
Defence Media Limited	PA Consulting	Walker Precision Engineering
Empyrea Consulting Ltd	Pearson Engineering Ltd.	Whitetree
Envitia	Plexal	WSP UK Ltd
FAUN Trackway Limited	Ploughshare	
Frank Shaw Ltd	PwC UK LLP	

Visit us at:

www.womenindefenceuk.com

www.womenindefenceuk.com/charter

Contact us at:

Criticalmass@womenindefenceuk.co.uk

Info@womenindefenceuk.co.uk

Charter@womenindefenceuk.co.uk

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