

# Propelling a **gender balanced** industry



**Women in Aviation  
and Aerospace Charter**  
A pledge for gender balance  
across aviation and aerospace



# Executive summary

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At the Farnborough International Airshow in 2018, the Women in Aviation and Aerospace (WiAA) Charter was launched to drive demonstrable commitment by signatory organisations to improve gender balance across the sector. For several decades, the aviation and aerospace sectors and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) stakeholders have invested effort in attracting, retaining, and developing women. While some progress has been made towards gender balance, the pace of change has been slow. Clearly, more needs to be done.

There is no shortage of efforts, initiatives, and campaigns to raise awareness, commitment, and action. However, they are relatively scattershot. It is also now more than 10 years since the last sector-commissioned report was published with analysis and recommendations on policy, practices, and metrics.

By undertaking this new study, in partnership with the WiAA, Korn Ferry aims to focus on gender balance efforts and increase understanding of the factors that drive and impede progress.

For this study, we have set out to build on previous research and gain a deeper understanding of why previous recommendations have either not been adopted or failed to truly move the needle. To gain fresh insight, and learn how similar challenges have been overcome elsewhere, we have also examined the work done by the English Football Association

(The FA) to increase support, involvement, and performance within the girls' and women's game.

We found that in the aerospace and aviation sectors, despite much effort to date, there are still clear disparities in people's perceptions, lived experiences and opportunities to progress. In many cases, these are gender-related but they also extend to other under-represented groups. This needs to be investigated further.

Our report also highlights areas where efforts to achieve gender balance can be improved. These include core recommendations for strategy and action, short and long term, across the talent pipeline and throughout the sectors. We conclude that leaders need to find and communicate a personal passion for change and a purposeful vision for the future. All other recommendations fall into one of three key themes:

## **Don't start with a 'women's strategy'. Create a purpose for all.**

It is overwhelmingly clear that people need to unite behind purpose. Purpose must be fuelled by authentic passion. This is not sector specific. Passion for inclusion translates across personal identity and context. Knowing your passion and conveying purpose results in a shared and inspired movement. Benefits go beyond measuring an increase in numbers of women.

This does not rule out having dedicated strategies for specific challenges or investigating why women and other groups are under-represented. It's not where you start or where you finish. The purpose and outcome must go beyond numbers and include

benefits for all. This study demonstrates the undeniable positive impact of an authentic, openly passionate drive for inclusion and the negative impact of division.

## Key takeaways:

- Passion is deeply personal.
- Excite with inclusive ambition.
- Don't create a sense of exclusion.

## **Investment not tokenism.**

Ambition to increase gender balance must be backed up by sustained and coordinated investment in reshaping attraction, recruitment and progression within the aviation and aerospace sectors. Action planning requires dedicated focus and a detailed understanding of the conditions.

The issue of gender balance in particular has garnered significant attention within the sectors. However, we found that aspirations to address the issue are not currently being matched by investment in resources and funding. Lessons can be learned here from the world of women's and girls' football. Where The FA has succeeded in doubling support and participation as a direct result of increased funding and through the coordinated work of multidisciplinary teams who have been given a clear mandate to bring about change.

## Key takeaways:

- Start with a gameplan.
- Infrastructure is essential.
- Monitor closely and move.

## **Don't be a 'one hit wonder'.**

Entrenched norms and ways of thinking pervade the aviation and aerospace sectors. It will therefore be impossible to achieve gender balance overnight or through a succession of one-off initiatives or events. It requires sustained structural transformation at a sector-wide level.

It is critical that organisations within the aviation and aerospace sectors adopt a long-term commitment to transformation. This is because the sectors are particularly prone to uncontrollable impacts - for example, the Coronavirus pandemic - which have the potential to derail progress in the short-term.

## Key takeaways:

- Treat change as a long-term programme.
- Know your audience.
- Start a series of movements.

# A snapshot of our findings

Roughly half of women in the aviation and aerospace sectors felt that they had been treated differently due to their gender. For males, this drops to roughly one fifth. If one in two females feel that they have been treated differently, we know that affects engagement, ambition and the desire to persuade others to join their organisation or follow a similar career route. The good news is that we identified a number of steps that can be taken that can address perception, engagement and accelerate progress towards gender balance.

No woman wants to be a tick in the box in terms of D&I so whether you are a man or woman, consistent performance is what gets you noticed and should be what earns you your promotion.

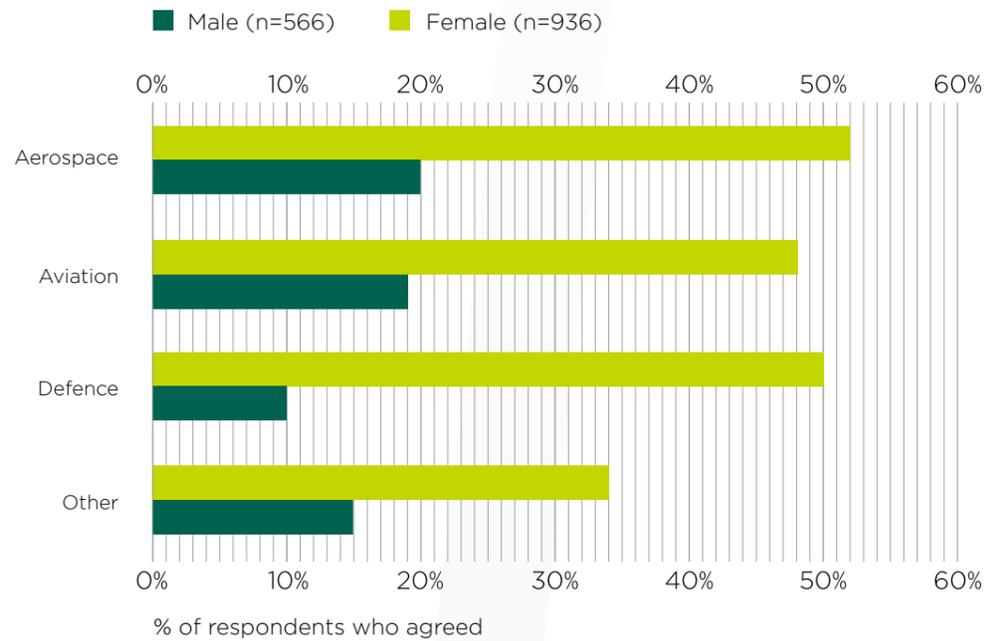
**Anna Keeling, Managing Director, Boeing Defence UK**

We explored other sectors that have made demonstrable progress looking specifically at football, not only traditionally a male dominated, but a sport where women were banned from playing on Football Association member pitches from 1921 until 1971. In the last few years in particular, the increasing level of participation, fan base and performance for the women's and girl's game has been impressive. We found that males were less likely to feel there is something in it for them to make gender balance a reality at less senior levels in the organisation.

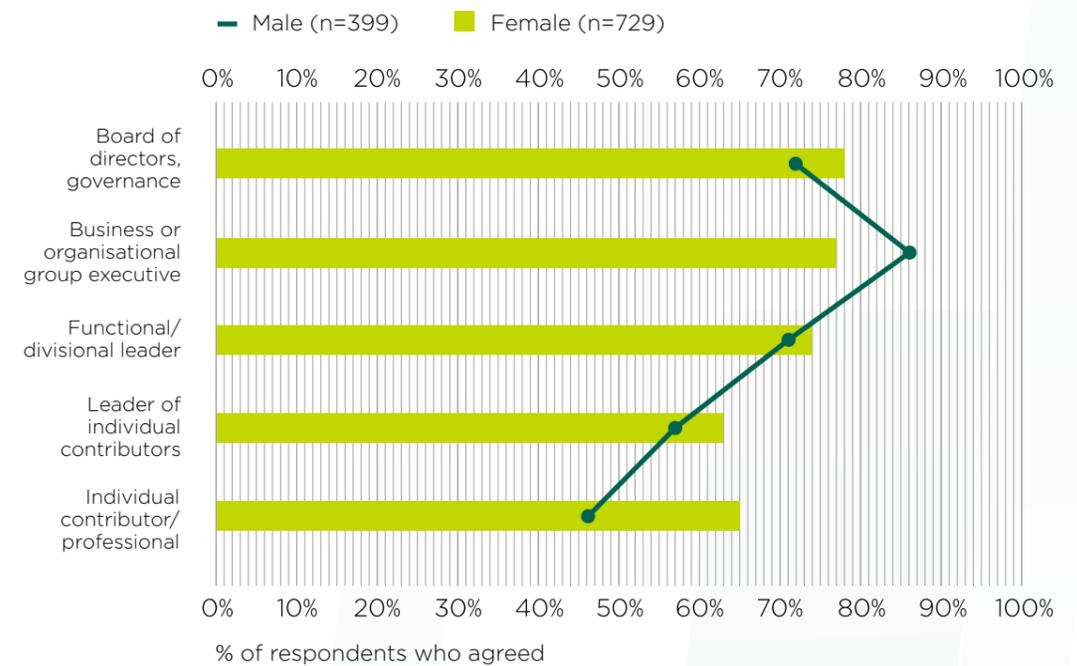
'If you want to be in the super league you have to have a full-time professional team. You can't be a super league club unless you are willing to invest in it.'

**Sue Campbell, The FA**

**I have been treated differently in this industry because of my gender**



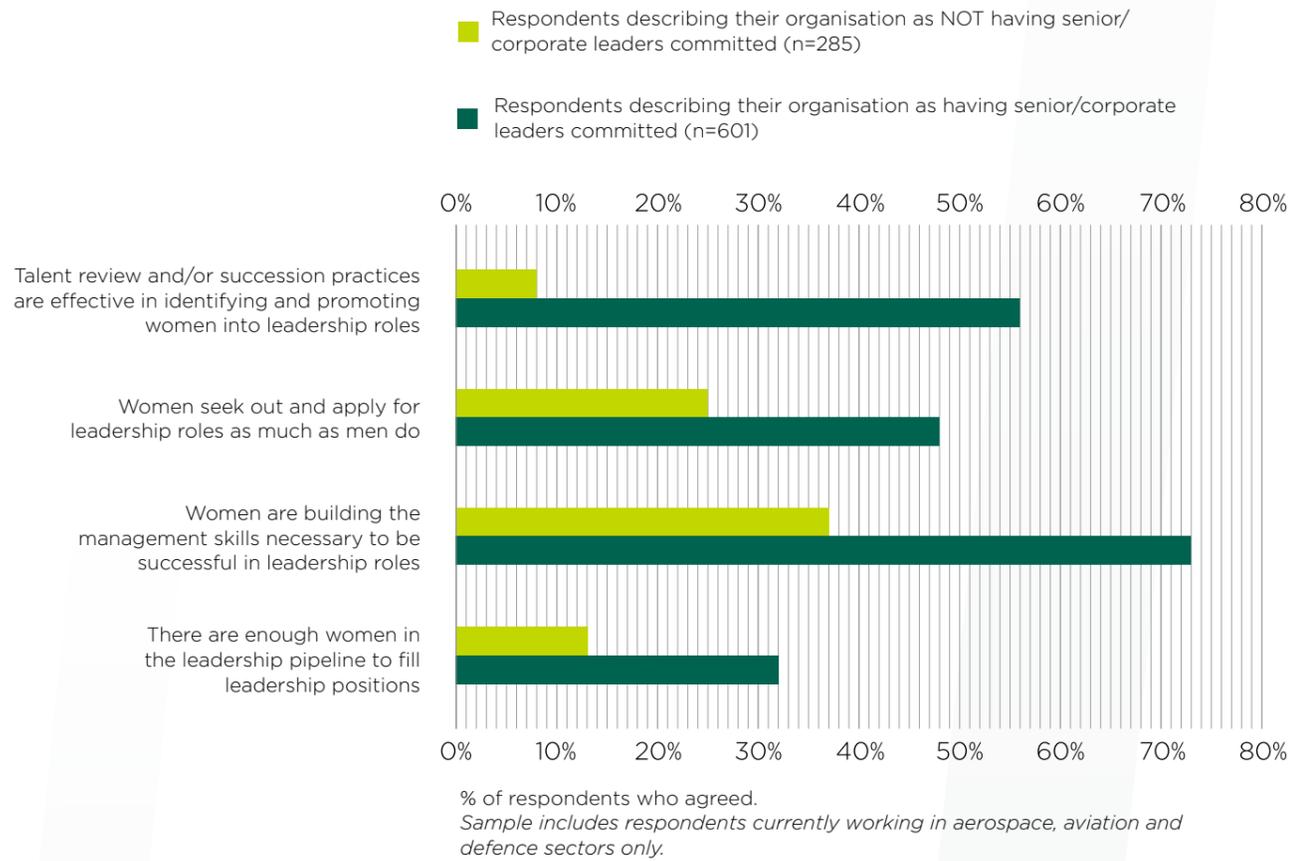
**I feel there's something in it for me to make gender balance a reality**



The positive impact of an authentic, openly passionate drive for inclusion and the negative impact of division demonstrated in this study is undeniable. We found that leaders sharing stories about what drives their purpose engages others, creates trust and ignites ambition.

'Everybody gets sucked into the world of today and there is less time to dedicate to the future and how to bring talent through. This can result in a lack of investment in addressing the gender imbalance. If everyone keeps the focus on the issues of today it can result in a risk-averse approach.'

**Organisations with Senior/corporate leadership committed to increasing the number of women in leadership roles versus those without**



Respondents describing their organisation as having Senior/corporate leaders committed to increasing the number of women in leadership roles were 6x more likely to agree that talent review and/or succession practices are effective

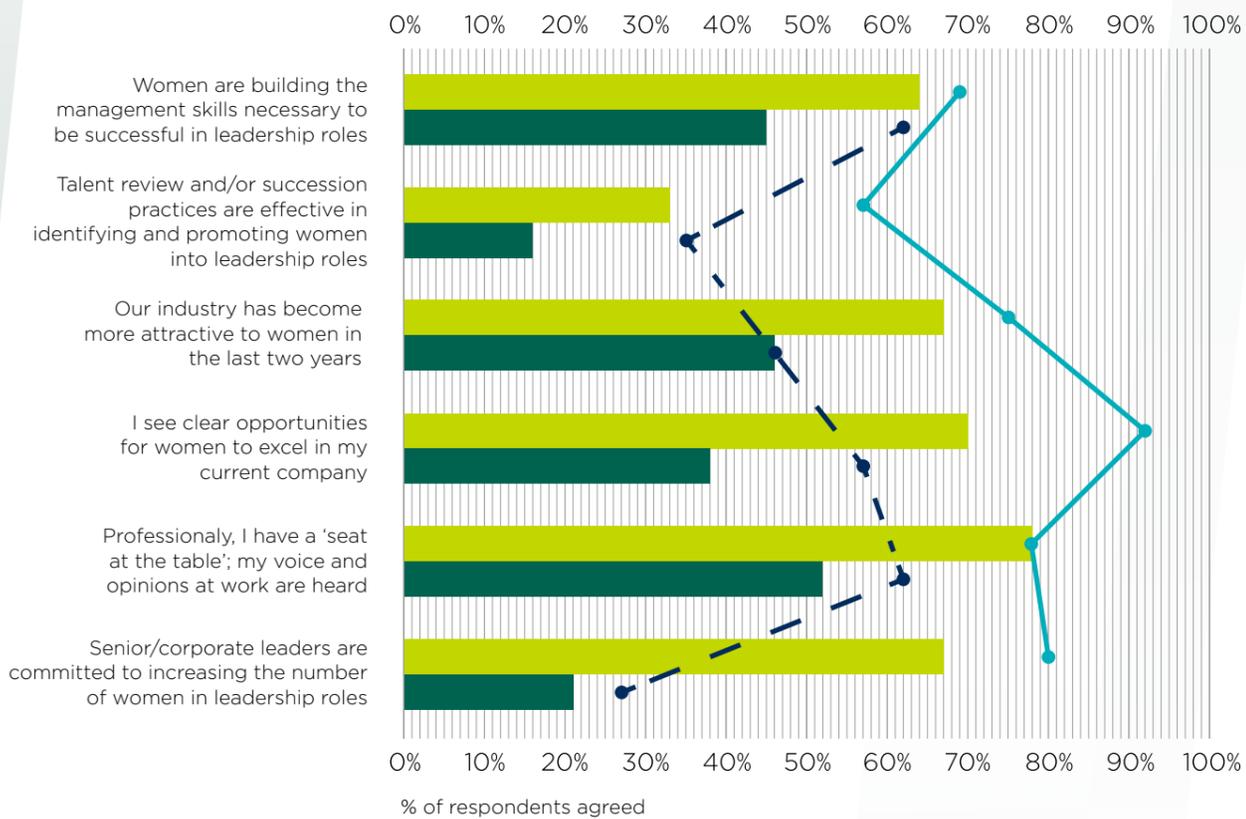
**Organisations who have Executive Committees who are role models for the messages, behaviours, and actions required to achieve balance versus without**



Female respondents who felt their executive committees are role models were 2x as likely to think the senior/corporate leaders are committed to increasing the number of women in leadership roles

**Organisations with top teams who have sent a clear signal that organisation is going to improve gender balance versus those who have not**

- Female respondents describing their organisations as having top team sending clear signal (n=261)
- Female respondents describing their organisations as NOT having top team sending clear signal (n=161)
- Male respondents describing their organisations as having top team sending clear signal (n=214)
- - Male respondents describing their organisations as NOT having top team sending clear signal (n=37)



Female respondents describing their organisation as having a top team that sent a clear signal that the organisation is going to improve gender balance, were 3x as likely to agree that senior/corporate leaders are committed to increasing the number of women in leadership roles.

Change can only be accelerated through a cohesive approach. With the launch of the Charter and the commitment of over 200 organisations, the first step towards industry-wide action is complete.

Next steps must include:

- Committing to the conversation - make time to discuss and understand the level of commitment and clarity of purpose by identifying personal passion for inclusion.
- Creating accountability - extend the concept of diversity and inclusion 'champions' and build a distributed level of accountability for achieving gender balance throughout levels and across functions and businesses.
- Coordinating the approach - the Charter and signatory organisations should agree on central funding and resource for measuring progress and collating and reporting on information concerning gender balance.

Crucially, organisations must identify a demonstrably committed, accountable executive or team, who will take responsibility for the success of the programme, advising on long-term change, influencing stakeholders, and dedicating time to galvanising support. As our look at the parallel universe of football teaches us passionate commitment to progress goes a long way to achieving gender balance, especially if it is underpinned by a focus on inclusion.

The most important lesson is that change cannot be put off any longer. Now is the time to start the conversation. Now is the time to take action. We all have a role in propelling gender balance forward in the industry.

# Women in Aviation and Aerospace Charter objectives

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The Charter aims to support the overall diversity of the sector and build a more balanced and fair industry. This isn't a piece of paper to sign and be forgotten about, but gives signatories real and achievable commitments to ensure that more women enter into our industry, and that it feels open and accessible for women to work in aviation and aerospace.

The Charter looks to support the progression of women into senior roles in the aviation and aerospace sectors, and aspires to see gender balance at all levels across aviation and aerospace. It recognises that a balanced workforce is good for business – it is good for customers and consumers, for profitability and workplace culture, and is increasingly attractive for investors. In becoming a signatory, organisations are pledging their actions to help make this a reality.

## About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global organisational consulting firm. We help companies design their organisation – the structure, the roles and responsibilities, as well as how they compensate, develop and motivate their people. As importantly, we help organisations select and hire the talent they need to execute their strategy. Our approximately 7,000 colleagues serve clients in more than 50 countries.