



Apollo Project - Submission Form

Genesis Housing Association

Women into senior leadership

Overview

Genesis is a business that is socially hearted and commercially minded, our mission to provide quality homes and services to enable our customers to build better futures. We provide homes and services to tens of thousands of people, one of the largest and most diverse housing groups in the UK owning and managing more than 27,000 homes.

We are part of a sector where 60% of the workforce is female but only 17% of CEO's are female. In 2009 17% of our senior managers and 20% of our Executive team and Non-Executive Board were female. Our challenge was to support and develop female talent and attract and retain senior women. We worked with women in the organisation to identify the barriers that were holding them back in career progression. We also consulted with senior male managers on what would support them to develop female talent in their teams. We worked in partnership to create a cultural shift by implementing a series of interventions including development programmes targeted at women, creating conversations about gender equality and its value to the business and setting targets for female recruitment for senior managers and non-executives.

The initiative became part of our Diversity and Inclusion strategy and was championed at an Executive level and by the non-executive board.

Strength of Business Case

Our Corporate Business Plan and D&I strategy focuses on improving customer service to our diverse customer base. Valuing and understanding the diverse need of our customers is critical in evidencing to all our stakeholders that we will deliver services that are accessible to all and tailored to individual need.

Stakeholders include those commissioning public services.

With 60% of our customer base being female it is critical that we have diversity of thought at senior management levels to bring better understanding of customer service. We also recognise the importance of positive female role models within communities where we work to inspire women in their own career aspirations or set up their own enterprise. Senior role models also motivate and inspire women to develop their careers with Genesis.

Innovation

Initial feedback identified the following key interventions:

- A mentoring programme
- Learning and development that specifically addressed the skill needs of women to improve performance and career development opportunities
- Flexible working policy and practice

What quickly became apparent was how valuable women found the networking opportunities at the learning and development seminars. These were delivered in an all female environment. We decided to set up a women's network, which we thought would help us to engage with a wider circle of women by:

- Increasing the profile of gender equality
- Providing an opportunity for women at all levels to fully engage with and shape the agenda



- Providing learning and networking opportunities
- Providing opportunities for women to network with senior male and female staff to help them build their brand
- Acting as a consultation forum on policy and practice

While these interventions may not be new concepts. Both men and women challenged our initial proposals on the grounds that it was not needed; excluded men and showed bias in favour of women. It raised a debate around gender equality, what it meant and was it still relevant. This debate reinforced the belief that we needed wider organisational buy in to ensure that we have a culture where gender equality is valued and actively pursued and supported. The risk for us was that if the debate and the articulation for the business case were not handled well then the network and the interventions to increase gender equality would not gain the support of staff, and in particular senior male staff, across the organisation.

The network was formally launched in 2012 and was championed and supported by the Head of Diversity and Inclusion and the Executive Gender Champion. The network has taken ownership of the learning and development agenda for themselves delivering a range of evening seminars including:

- Getting Women on Boards
- Self Confidence
- Personal Impact and Brand

To increase access to seminars for more junior women and those based outside London, the network introduced lunch time sessions. These are linked by videoconference to all other offices. All sessions are videoed and made available on the intranet building up a resource library online.

The women's network, its activities and purpose have been promoted widely across the organisation using the company intranet, staff magazine and Yammer. This has been a great way to discuss current topics around gender equality and encourages interaction from men and women.

In addition to creating learning and networking opportunities for women through the network, we have also put into place the following:

- Promoted the organisation as an employer of choice through recruitment advertisements and also the information we have made available on our website. This details our performance on gender equality and the interventions we have in place to support the career aspirations of women.
- We have been proactive in recruiting female non-executives instructing recruitment companies to provide diverse candidates
- We monitor the gender profile in each of the area of business as well the levels at which women are employed. This information can be found in the public domain
- All staff restructures have to be accompanied by an equality impact assessments along with any actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impact
- Workforce planning requires managers to highlight what action they will be taking to recruit a diverse workforce
- Promotion of flexible working

Outputs

Female staff were recently surveyed about the activities and impact of the women's network. The results were:

- 56% said that it was a positive addition to life at work
- 44% said that it supported them in their personal development
- 37% said that it provided opportunities to meet women they wouldn't during a working day
- 44% said that it provided opportunities to meet senior women



- 52% said they had been inspired by speakers
- 48% said that they had attended an event
- And 67% of men said the network was a positive addition to life at work.

Outcomes show the network has been highly effective in raising awareness of gender equality issues across the organisation, providing networking opportunities and personal development in a space that understands and supports women’s needs. The success and the support shown by both male and female staff shows how well the debates have been handled and the business benefits of gender equality promoted across the organisation.

We have increased the proportion of women at senior levels since 2009 to 2013 by the following:

- Senior Management 17% to 37% (target 35%)
- Executive Team 20% to 60% (target 50%)
- Non-Executive Board 29% to 50% (target 50%)