

Women's Experiences in the Recruitment Process

Collecting The Gender Dividend

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A Survey by E2W for the Financial Services Sector

The E2W logo is a blue circle containing the white text 'E2W'.

E2W

Executive Summary

In a world where financial institutions are signing the Women in Finance Charter and those same institutions are making commitments such as a 50/50 male/female workforce by 2020, can you believe that almost a third of women applying for positions in financial services feel disadvantaged because of their gender?

This is an example of the feedback that we, E2W, received in the survey of our community of women in financial services in July 2017. Within this report we would like to share our findings which shed some light on the health of the diversity landscape in, primarily, London based financial institutions.

Diversity

“The basic finding is that the encouragement of debate – and even criticism if warranted – appears to stimulate more creative ideas. And cultures that permit and even encourage such expression of differing viewpoints may stimulate the most innovation.”

Charlan Nemeth featured in “Black Box Thinking” by Matthew Syed.

Innovation is just one result of a diverse workforce, as stated by Nemeth, but we know now that there are many more benefits both commercial and social. We live in a diverse society and to attract a diverse client base, rather than limit themselves to one or two socio-economic groups, organisations need to be able to demonstrate that their employee base reflects society as a whole.

Socially, a diverse workforce creates sound role models for younger generations, helps employee morale and retention.

To remain competitive, diversity isn't a 'nice to have' these days; it is essential.

E2W

E2W is the go-to place for women in financial services, and has been representing their interests since 2002. We provide a full range of support for women pursuing careers in this sector, wherever they are in their career trajectory and whatever their aspirations may be.

Over 7,000 women working in mid and senior positions in London, New York and Singapore make up the E2W community. We provide support through our membership, offering coaching and career advice, aiming to help women achieve their career goals. We hold business focused events designed to help members collaborate and network, whilst many of our members have benefitted from priority access to career opportunities.

E2W partners with financial institutions to assist them in their gender specific recruitment strategies, striving to help them yield the gender dividend. We have strong relationships with the recruitment and talent teams at HSBC, Barclays, Deutsche Bank, UBS and Investment Managers M&G, BlackRock and LGIM, collaborating to bring their diversity targets to fruition.

We are a signatory of and work on the board of the Women in Finance Charter.

The survey

During conversations with our members, E2W started to realise that there was a potential disparity between perception and reality – the perception of women’s careers in the financial services’ industry versus the reality of the day-to-day. Thanks to our 7,000 strong community of such women, we identified that we were well placed to try to understand how the land really lies for women within the Square Mile.

The results of the survey are interesting and show that a great deal of progress has been made within recruitment processes. The majority of women found that role advertisements were not gender biased in their wording; they found the interview process ‘good & fair’ and were not asked any gender biased questions. As a result, our respondents’ impression of the financial institution benefitted from a boost post interview.

At the other end of the spectrum, some respondents were left feeling as though they wanted to walk out of the male dominated interview as they were asked their age and whether they were planning on starting a family, and not introduced to, nor interviewed by a female employee. In some cases, flexible working was not mentioned in the job advertisement and nor was the subject welcomed during the interview process.

The results highlight some areas of progress but demonstrate that there is more to be done. At E2W, we have identified three salient recommendations: access to flexible working, more female employees involved in the recruitment process and the importance of senior management delivering the diversity message.

Background & Objectives

Most firms in the financial services’ sector understand the business and social case for greater gender diversity, and have made public and internal commitments to improve the proportion of women that they employ at all levels, but at mid and senior tiers in particular.

Many surveys have been carried out and reports produced on this subject but very little, if anything, has been done to ask female candidates about their experiences in the recruitment process.

Due to our extensive community of over 7,000 women, all pursuing or returning to mid and senior tier roles in the industry, E2W are well placed to address this gap in the industry’s knowledge and to help it understand precisely where practices need to be improved.

The objective of the survey was, therefore, to understand the recruitment process experiences of our E2W community of women.

The data reveals the real issues that female candidates are facing. E2W will use this valuable information to be able to continue to educate the City about the benefits of collecting the gender dividend, and the whys and wherefores of doing so.

Methodology

During July 2017, E2W asked members of its community who had recently been through an interview process to complete a short online survey sharing their experiences. E2W thanks those who responded and wishes those that secured career moves the very best; to those that weren't successful, we will continue to support you in your search.

The respondents were equally candidates at investment and retail banks, investment and asset managers, and other financial institutions. They were applying for roles in a variety of departments including, but not limited to: front office, risk, regulation and compliance, technology, and business change.

64% were candidates for a permanent role, and 36% contract. Nearly all work in mid and senior tier roles with a salary expectation above £100,000 p.a.

62% reported working in the industry for more than 10 years, and 50% had taken a career break at some point in their working lives. 8% were returning to the industry following a career break.

46% of respondents were offered the position.

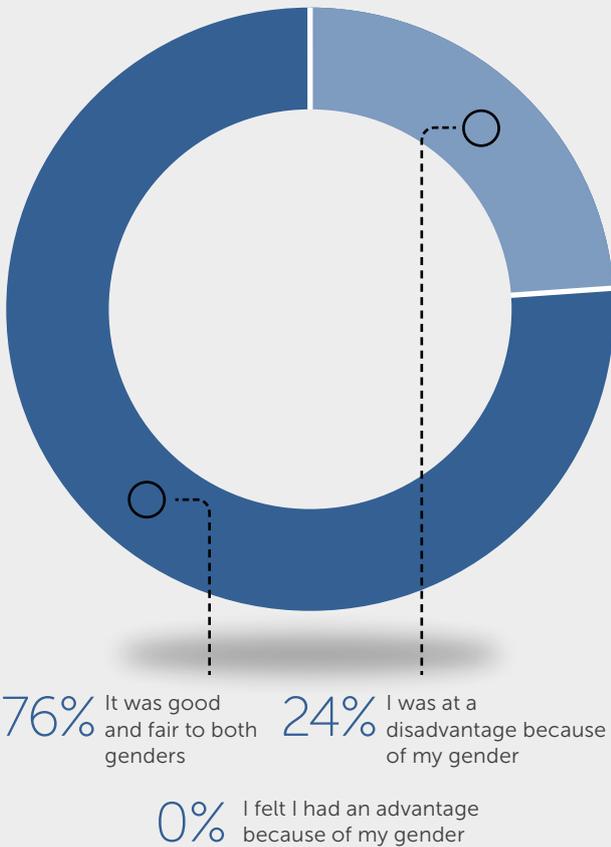
Survey Results

Interview process

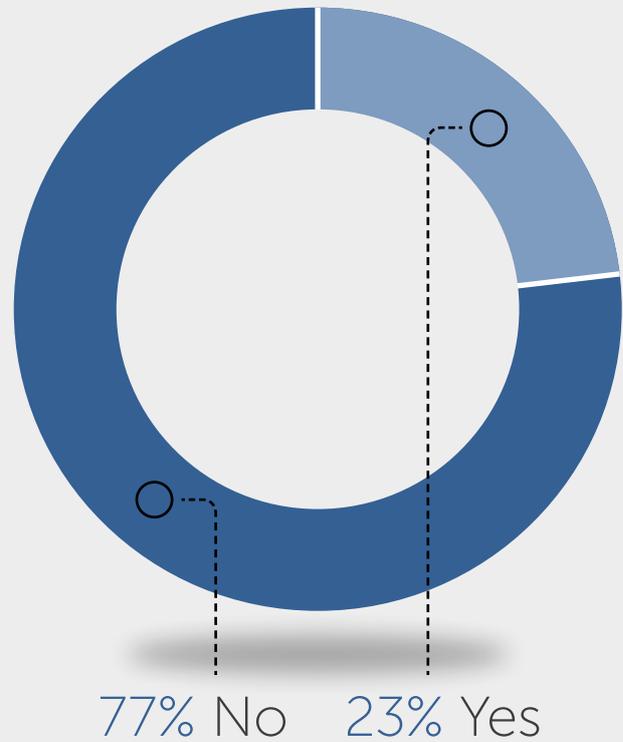
Respondents were asked about the interview process, the hiring manager and questions at interview. Additionally, they were asked about whether their impression of the firm as a place for women to work had been changed positively or negatively, and how they felt about the experience as a whole.



Q. How would you describe the process?



Q. At interview were you asked any inappropriate gender biased questions?



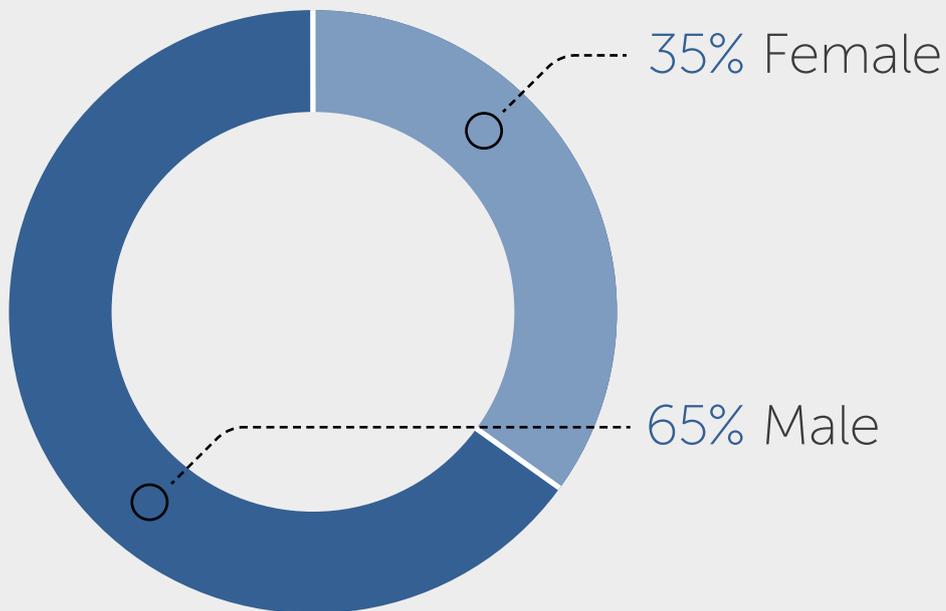
The majority of respondents found the process to be 'good and fair'. However, 23% of respondents reported being asked inappropriate gender-biased questions at interview.

The following are a few examples respondents gave of such questions:

- "How do you think you can do this job now you have a child? I've had women working for me before that have decided not to come back after having a second child."
- "[I was asked] if I was married, had children, or planned to have children."
- "I was asked how old I was and if I was married."
- "They pre-empted it with comments such as 'this isn't somewhere you'd be able to fit in if you had commitments outside the 9-5'. Then they ramped it up, and talked explicitly about the previous person that had left because of childcare commitments. They then outright asked me if I had children."

In the majority of cases the hiring manager was male and respondents were not interviewed by nor introduced to female employees.

Q. Was the hiring manager female or male?



65% of the hiring managers were male, and 35% female. When looking at the breakdown of answers between those who had a male hiring manager and those who had a female hiring manager there are some differences to be noted.

With a male hiring manager:

- 29% were asked inappropriate questions
- 31% felt at a disadvantage because of their gender
- 58% felt their impression of the firm as a place for women to pursue careers had changed positively
- 37% were offered the job

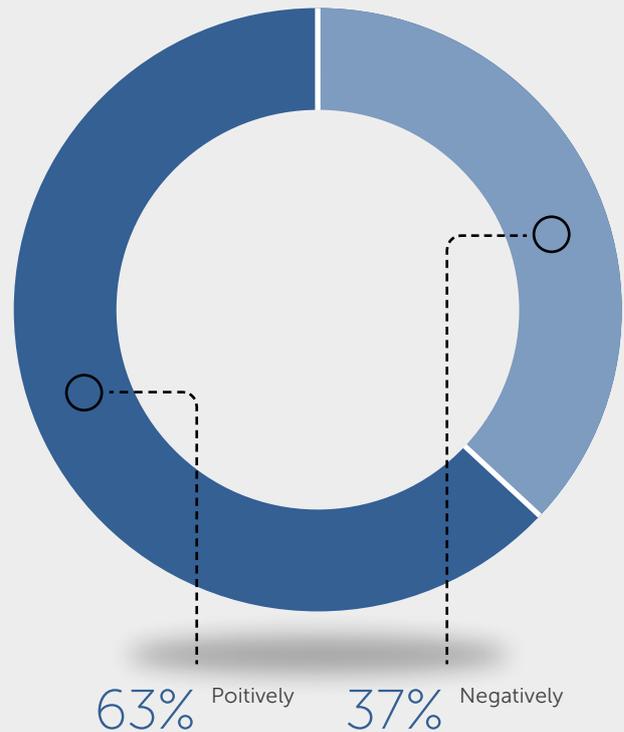
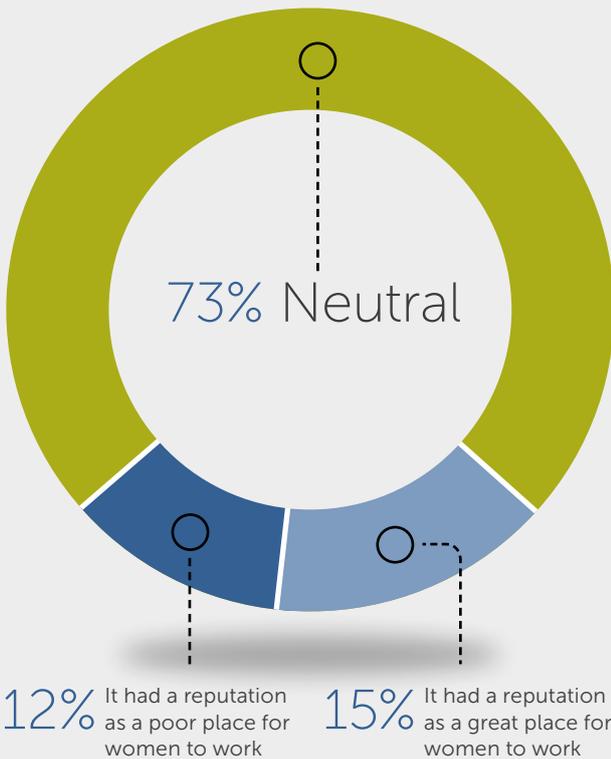
With a female hiring manager

- 11% were asked inappropriate questions
- 11% felt at a disadvantage because of their gender
- 71% felt their impression of the firm as a place for women to pursue careers had changed positively
- 67% were offered the job

Notably, those with a female hiring manager were less likely to be asked inappropriate questions, less likely to feel at a disadvantage because of their gender, more likely to have a positive impression of the firm as a place for women to pursue careers post-interview, and were more likely to be offered the job.

Q. Prior to interview, what were your impressions of the firm's reputation as a great place for women to pursue careers?

Q. After interview had your impressions of the firm's reputation as a place for women to pursue careers changed:



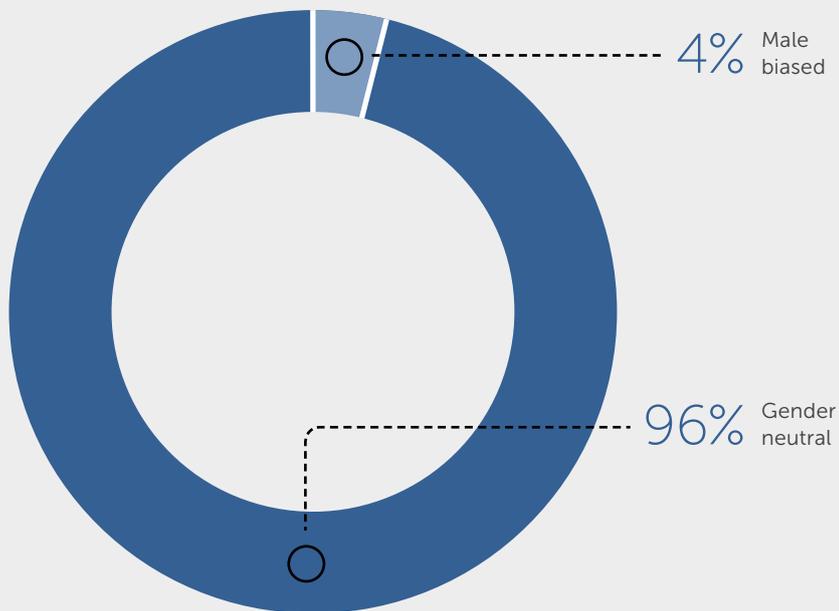
62% felt their impressions of the firm's reputation as a place for women to pursue careers had changed positively, and 38% felt they had changed negatively. Some who felt negatively about the process clearly felt strongly:

- "I should have walked straight out of there."
- "When I asked about flexible working...this was pretty much closed down. They didn't give any positive or promising indication that it would be a real possibility. They asked me to return for a second interview but I said no."
- "It seems some firms are very far behind."

Those who felt more positive about the workplace said the following:

- "Able to work from home at least one day a week – lots of senior women manage the building."
- "It seemed they are keen to hire more women in senior positions."
- "Interviewers talked about the success of a female career changer in their team and how they helped her develop."

Q. Thinking about the job specification and advert, do you think that the wording was:

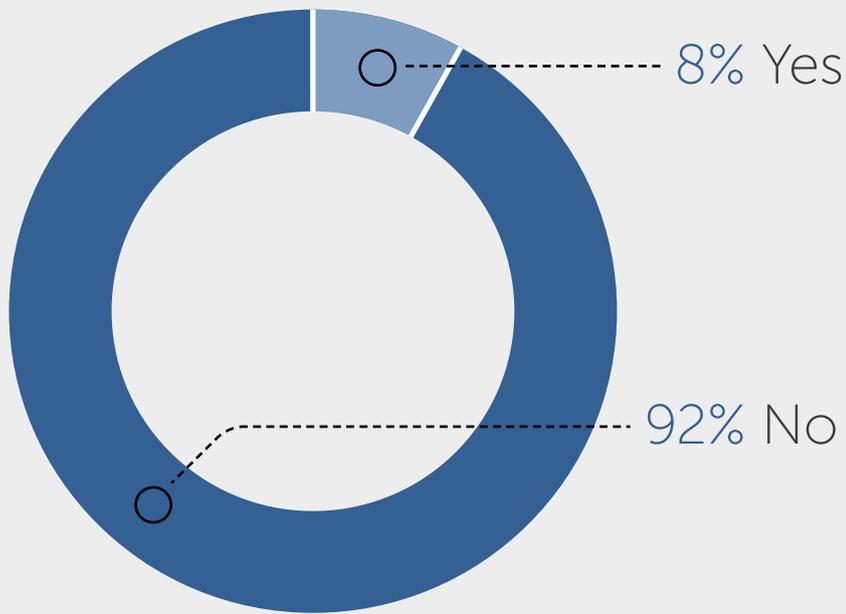


Research has shown that job specifications which could be perceived as having a masculine bias tend to deter significantly women from applying for a role, even when they are fully qualified for it. Such specifications might include descriptions of a “competitive” or “dominant” candidate.

By ensuring that job specifications and adverts are gender-neutral, businesses do not risk losing out on talented candidates who deselect themselves from the process.

Respondents were asked whether the wording of the job specification and advert was gender-neutral, female biased, or male biased. 96% of respondents felt they were worded in a gender-neutral way. The industry seems to have tackled this issue.

Q. Did the job specification or advert include any indication that the role would be open to women returners or include flexible working?



The survey asked whether the job specification or advertisement included any indication that the employer offers flexible working. 92% reported that the role included no indication of the availability of flexible working.

Recommendations



Flexible working

A significant proportion of respondents indicated their frustration at the lack of flexible working as an option. 92% of job descriptions made no indication that it would be a possibility, and some described the negative attitude towards flexible working when it was discussed.

- *“Given the clear negative attitude towards flexible working in both face-to-face interviews I virtually stopped answering fully as I had no intention of working in that team.”*
- *“I was asked how I was able to manage to perform my current role with any level of success while working flexible hours, as it was unlikely to be considered in the role I was interviewing for, as both interviewers didn’t believe it to be an option.”*
- *“Flexible working was clearly not considered an option. Unsocial and long hours were repeatedly dropped into the interview. Not somewhere I would consider working.”*

If firms are going to collect the gender dividend, and truly diversify their workforce at all levels, they need to commit to certain changes. The widespread availability of flexible working would signify considerable progress.

E2W has found that many firms are offering flexible working but are failing to advertise it. The lack of office space and cost cutting has meant that many firms are asking employees to work from home one or two days per week, but rarely is this flexible working mentioned in an advertisement or job specification.

More female employees involved in the recruitment process

The survey points to the need for more women to be involved in the recruitment process. Those who reported having a female hiring manager tended to have a more positive experience in the process: they were less likely to be asked inappropriate questions, more likely to feel positively about the workplace post-interview (regardless of whether they were offered the job or not), less likely to feel at a disadvantage because of their gender, and were more likely to be offered the job.

Senior management living and breathing the diversity message

It is concerning that 23% of respondents were asked inappropriate, sometimes illegal questions at interview and sometimes by women too. These questions often related to their marital status and family plans, and as a result all respondents reported having a negative impression of the firm as a place for women to pursue careers post-interview – some even reporting that it was no longer somewhere they would consider working. Such questions, especially coming from women, don't suggest a nurturing working environment where individuals can prosper and achieve career aspirations. It's taking just say, thirty minutes for these organisations to be alienating a talent pool that would ultimately contribute to their diverse employee base and generate all the benefits that we know diversity brings.

This survey suggests that some financial institutions still need guidance on how to create a diverse workforce. The recruitment and talent teams may be aware of legislation and best practice, but as we have shown, in some cases, this does not seem to be percolating through to hiring managers. For the likes of flexible working and more women's involvement in the recruitment process to become standard, senior management must actively endorse and advocate a diverse staff in order for it to be embedded in the company's culture.

Final Thoughts by Mark Freed – E2W CEO

Whilst the survey has brought up some good pointers on how recruitment practices can be changed once capable female candidates are in the process, perhaps the biggest challenge faced by the industry is to ensure that there are a balanced number of female candidates in the recruitment process from the outset.

Essentially, there is a greater need for firms to find more capable women to be involved in the process than there is a need for fundamental changes to the process. Some firms at the forefront of meeting diversity challenges have already implemented gender recruitment strategies. They have realised that doing things in the same old way will still produce the same old results: for example, unhelpful 'time to hire' and 'cost of hire' targets that don't incentivise to recruit more women.

Instead they are increasingly working with external recruitment partners, including those like E2W, with access to diverse pools. Releasing roles to traditional external partners when in-house teams have failed to find enough, or any, candidates regardless of gender will not move the gender needle. Demanding a gender diverse candidate pool from normal candidate sourcing mechanisms all too often results in adding just a few women to the list to make up the numbers.

The industry has been quick to spend comparatively large sums of money on initiatives, ranging from unconscious bias training, to support for external and internal diversity forums, marketing and PR. Now it needs to increase its investment in working strategically with suppliers with access to capable and diverse talent pools. Doing so would help them source skilled female talent to recruit, and do much more than other initiatives to move the needle and help firms collect the gender dividend.

If you would like further information on this survey and its outcomes or need help in collecting the gender dividend then please contact E2W.

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