

Boards fall behind in the drive to appoint women

Alex Spence: *The Times* February 6 2012

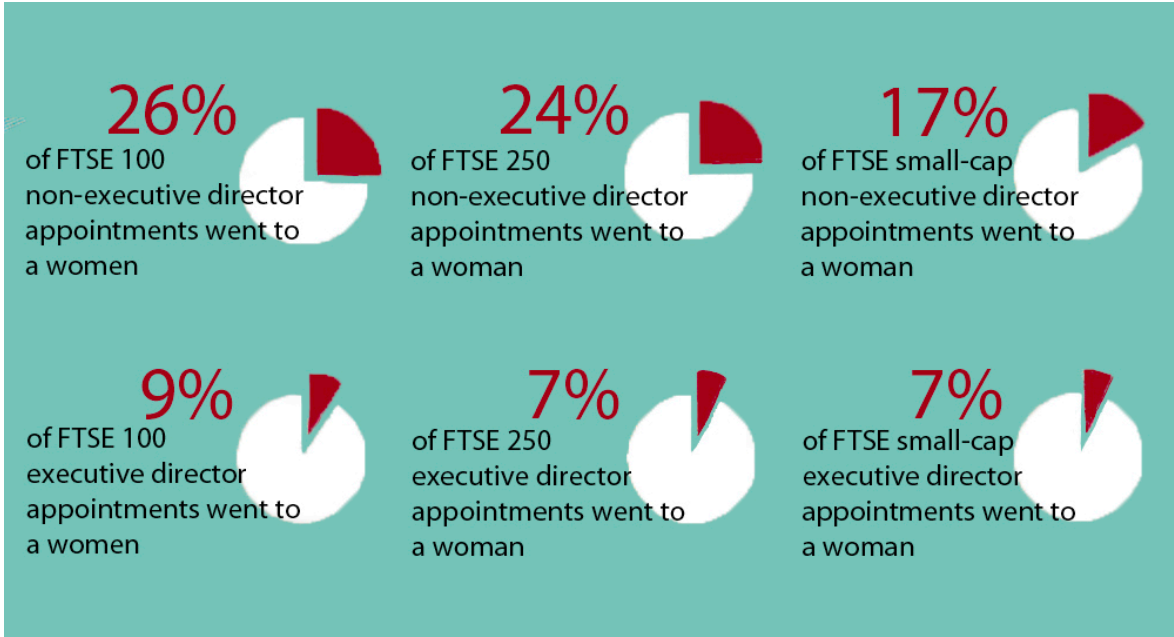


Britain's biggest companies will miss a deadline to have a quarter of their boardroom positions filled by women unless more is done to move talented female executives up the corporate ladder, recruiters have warned.

As things stand, the target of having 25 per cent of FTSE 100 directorships held by women will be met two years late, in 2017, the search firm Norman Broadbent said.

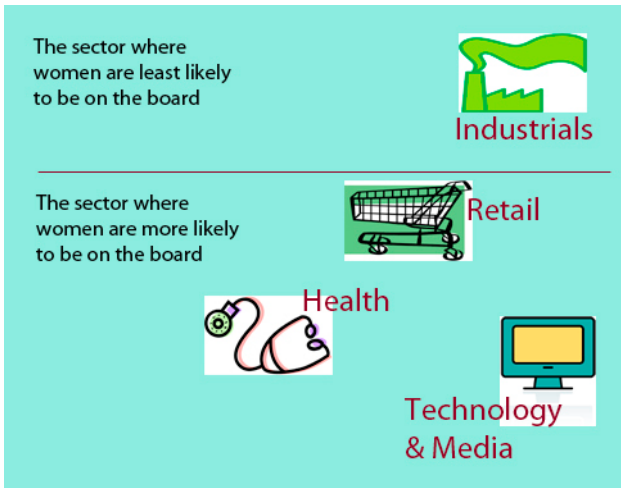


Although the female composition of FTSE 100 boards has risen from 13.6 per cent at the start of last year to almost 15 per cent, the supply of women executives and senior managers remained limited, it said. According to Neil Holmes, a consultant at Norman Broadbent: "Women are appearing on short-lists but the supply on the executive side is still lower than it should be and this requires companies to invest in long-term cultural changes."



In a report last year, Lord Davies of Abersoch challenged corporate leaders to cast the net wider in the search for directors and to break their dominance of their boardrooms. Twenty-six per cent of the non-executive directors appointed to FTSE 100 boards last year were women, with 24 per cent in the FTSE 250 and 17 per cent in smaller listed companies.

Women still lagged well behind their male counterparts in the top executive jobs at the biggest companies, accounting for 9 per cent of FTSE 100 executive positions last year, Norman Broadbent said. There was also a vast disparity between different industries, with women making up 17 per cent of boards in the health sector at the end of the year.



Women were also relatively well represented at retailers, utilities and consumer goods companies, but they made up only 7 per cent of the boards of mining and industrial companies. Eleven FTSE 100 companies have no women on their boards, although the total was 18 at the start of 2011.

Barry Dinan, a consultant at Norman Broadbent, said that there had been a drive to find more women who potentially could become non-executive directors but added that this was limited by the number who had experience of executive or senior management roles. Encouraging more women to move through middle management to senior roles should be "a clear element of a company's growth strategy", he said.

Lord Davies conducted a review of the make-up of corporate boards at the request of Vince Cable, the Business Secretary. The former senior banker and his panel recommended measures to shatter the glass ceiling, including making companies disclose annually the proportion of women in their senior ranks. Lord Davies resisted urging mandatory gender targets after discovering overwhelming opposition among business. These would result in "tokenistic" appointments, he said.

Men-only club

The following companies in the FTSE100 have male-only boards

Source: Board Watch

Aggreko
Amec
Antofagasta Essar Energy Fresnillo
Glencore International
Intertek Group Kazakhmys
Randgold Resources
Vedanta Resources
Xstrata