

The Jury special

Q Is there still a glass ceiling for women in the world of business?



Sarah Butler
Partner at private equity house Infinity

towards men. There is undoubtedly a change in the make-up of Manchester's professional community with a greater number of women breaking through the glass ceiling.

But, the imbalance that is there will undoubtedly remain until there's more flexibility in the workplace after women have had children.

The increasing amount of work that's done electronically enables women to work less rigid hours.

We're no longer tied to working in a traditional office environment as more work can be done remotely and, where necessary, we can work more flexibly from home.

As a result, I'm confident that in the next five years, we'll see a further shift towards a more equal workplace.

MAYBE

More and more women are achieving remarkable things in the business community, especially those coming up through the professional ranks.

I deal with advisers on a daily basis who are highly talented females, but unfortunately the top level is still heavily weighted



Sharon Fraser
Head of regions audit at Deloitte

therefore will promote women to the top table.

However, there are many factors that prevent women achieving their potential, many subconscious, that we have to tackle.

For example, understanding and valuing the differences between men and women, giving women equal access to the best opportunities (and at times positive action may be necessary to achieve this), supporting them through flexible working at key stages of their working lives, and providing encouragement and mentoring to give them the confidence to progress.

NO, BUT

Most business leaders see the value in having women in senior positions, creating a diverse and more successful enterprise, and



Lesley Cozens
Managing partner, Yorkshire Bank, Manchester

NO Being a woman hasn't held back my career and our UK CEO is also a woman. I think women are given the same opportunities providing they are perceived to have the right leadership style. The trouble is, especially in finance and law, is that it tends to only be females with 'male wiring' that get to senior positions. It's time to change this.



Hilary Meredith
Senior partner, Hilary Meredith Solicitors

MAYBE

If so it is very thin and can be shattered easily. I have always believed that you can achieve anything you set your mind to. Ignore the negative and absorb the positive messages around you. If someone says 'no' to me, (which is rare these days) I just find a way around it.



Janet Johnson
Partner at law firm Simpson Millar

YES Unfortunately, men still reach the upper echelons of management more frequently than women. Government initiatives to encourage workplace flexibility and home working have received a warm welcome but make it more palatable for women to remain responsible for the family rather than promote equality.



Joanne Cross
Marketing manager, D&S, Manchester Science Park

NO There are more than enough opportunities for ambitious women to succeed in business, especially within the growing biotech industry. I think the barriers that prevent women from going all the way in business are slowly being removed within organizations by flexible working schemes and services to promote a healthy work-life balance.



Lisa Raynes
Chairman of Women in Property North West branch

NO The path to the very top as a woman is usually much more challenging than a man would find, although women are always going to be at a slight disadvantage in their careers due to the years invested in bringing up children.

The increase in women's networking groups and associations highlights how women are supporting and encouraging each other's development and breaking through any form of restriction, even after a career break.



Charlotte Platts
Regional director for the north, HSBC Private Bank

YES I do think that the glass ceiling still exists in places, although it is improving slowly and there has been a significant increase in the number of women business leaders. It is key that employers embrace family-friendly policies and acknowledge that this does not always equate to a loss in productivity. Failure to address women's responsibilities at home as well as work, and ignoring the extremely valuable contribution women can make may potentially cost the economy dearly.