

Research Briefing

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# Women in politics and public life



## Summary

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- 2 Women in the UK Government
- 3 Women in other elected bodies in the UK
- 4 Parliamentary and political firsts for women in the UK
- 5 Women in politics: International context
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## Summary

In both politics and public life in the UK, women have historically been underrepresented. In recent years women's representation has increased, although in most cases men remain overrepresented, especially in more senior positions.

This briefing presents statistics on a range of positions in UK politics and public life held by women. Data on the demographic characteristics of different workforces tends to be limited, so it is not always possible to include intersectional analysis, for example, on disabled women or women from minority ethnic groups.

## UK Parliament and Government

In 2022, Liz Truss MP became Britain's third female Prime Minister, following Baroness Thatcher (1979-1990) and Theresa May MP (2016-2019).

At the time of writing, Women make up **31% of parliamentarians**. There are 225 female MPs in the House of Commons and 237 in the House of Lords. Female representation is slightly higher in the Commons than the Lords, at 35% and 29% respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The number of female MPs has been growing. Following the 2019 General Election, 220 MPs were women. At **34%**, this was an all-time high. The proportion of women grew slowly until a jump in 1997.

Between 1918 and 2023, 561 different women have been elected to the House of Commons; 55% were first elected as Labour MPs and 31% as Conservatives.

Seven ministers in the current Cabinet are women, representing 30%. The highest proportion of women in Cabinet was 36% between 2006 and 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> Members' Names Information Service

## Devolved legislatures and local government

43% of Members of the Welsh Parliament are women, along with 46% of the Scottish Parliament and 37% of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Around 41% of local authority councillors in England are women. In Northern Ireland, around 26% of councillors are women, in Scotland it is 35% and in Wales, 28%.

52% of members of the London Assembly are women.

## International comparisons

In February 2023, globally there were 19 women serving as Head of State and 16 serving as Head of Government.

With women making up 35% of the House of Commons, the United Kingdom is [ranked 48<sup>th</sup>](#) for the proportion of women in the lower (or only) house of parliament. Rwanda, Cuba and Nicaragua have the highest female representation.

The UK was the fourth country to elect women to Parliament, doing so in 1918, the same year as Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands.

The [global average share](#) of women in ministerial positions was 16% in 2022, compared with 30% in the UK.

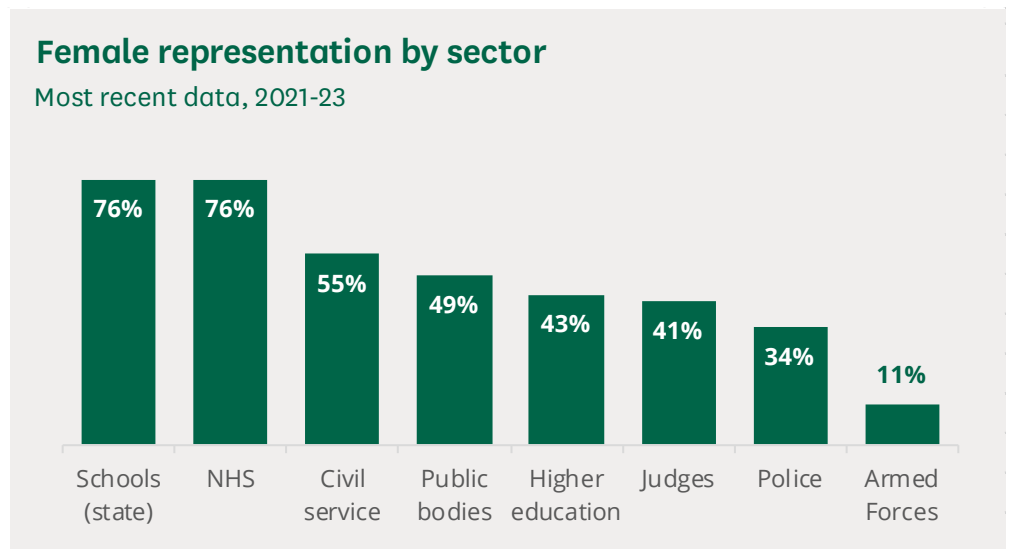
In the European Parliament, 41% of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected at the 2019 elections were women. However, after the seat changes due to Brexit, as of February 2020, 40% of MEPs were female.

## Women in public life

The proportion of women in public sector roles has increased in the past decades.

The most recent statistics, given in the chart below, show that 49% of public appointments were women, as were 55% of civil servants, 31% of judges, 11% of the Armed Forces, 76% of NHS workers, 76% of state-funded schoolteachers and 34% of police officers.

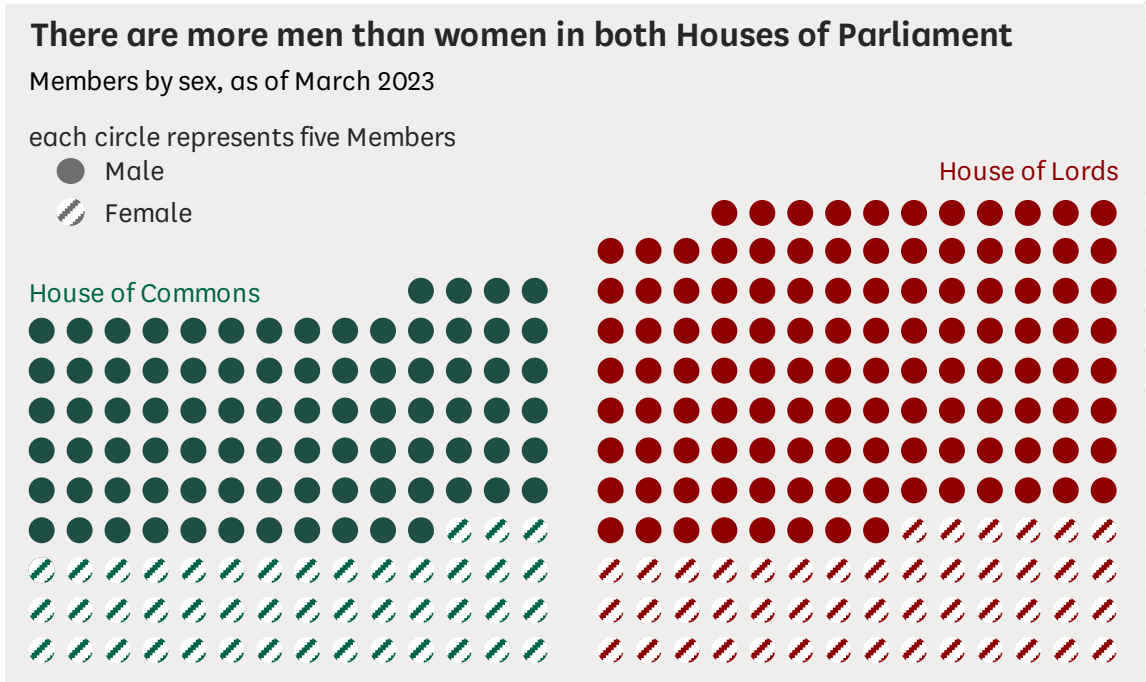
Across these organisations women tend to be in more junior roles, although the proportion of senior roles held by women has been steadily increasing.



Sources: Department for Education, [School workforce in England: 2021](#); NHS Digital, [NHS workforce statistics, September 2021](#); GOV.UK, [Civil service statistics, 2022](#); Cabinet office, [Public appointments data report 2020/21](#); HESA, [Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2021/22](#); Ministry of Justice, [Diversity of the judiciary: 2022 statistics](#); [Police workforce statistics 2022](#), England and Wales; Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: April 2022](#).

# 1 Women in UK Parliament

As of March 2023, there were 225 female MPs in the House of Commons and 237 in the House of Lords. This means that 31% of all parliamentarians are women.<sup>2</sup>



Source: [Members Names Information Service](#) (accessed 1 March 2023)

As of March 2023, 225 MPs are women, the highest number in history. This represents 35% of all MPs, the same number as in March 2022.<sup>3</sup>

At the 2019 General Election, 220 women were elected, which was the highest number of women to sit in the House of Commons. This was up from 208 women at the 2017 General Election, and 191 in 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Half of Labour MPs elected in 2019 were women, compared with a quarter of Conservative MPs, just under two thirds of Liberal Democrats and a third of SNP MPs.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [Members Names Information Service](#), accessed 1 March 2023

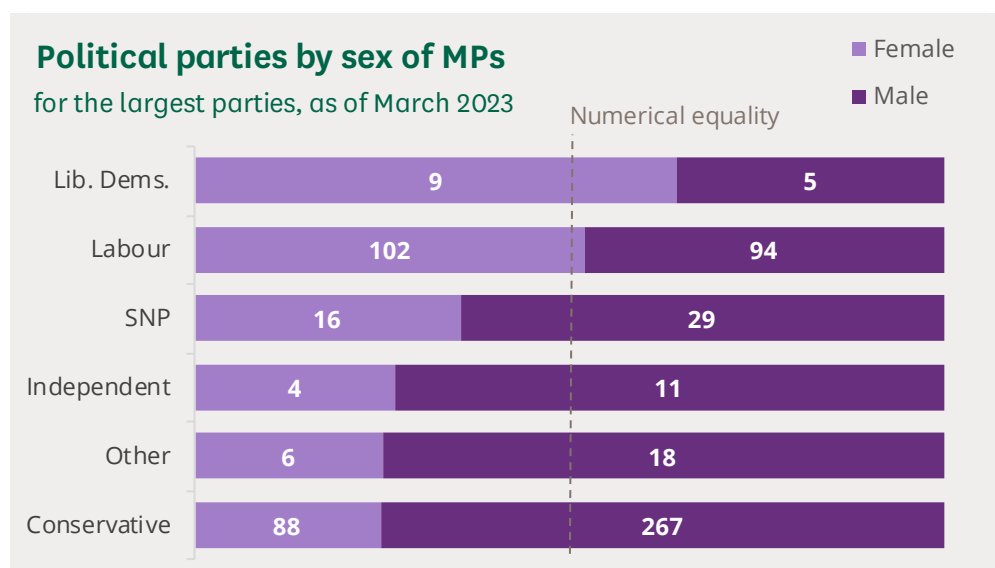
<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Library, [Female Members of Parliament](#), February 2023

<sup>4</sup> Since 220 women were elected in 2019, nine female MPs have been elected in by-elections and four have left their positions.

<sup>5</sup> [House of Commons Briefing Paper \(6652\): Women Members of Parliament](#); Library Briefing Paper, [General Election 2019: full results and analysis](#)



The chart below shows how many MPs are women and men in the largest political parties.



Source: [Members Names Information Service](#) (accessed 1 March 2023)

Women were admitted to the House of Lords following the Life Peerages Act 1958, this was 40 years after they had been permitted to stand for the House of Commons.

Baroness Barbara Wootton of Abinger was one of the first four life peers to be approved for admission to the House. Baroness Swanborough was the first woman to take her seat in the House of Lords as a life peer in 1958. Baroness Strange of Knokin was the first woman to take her seat by virtue of being a hereditary peer, in 1963.<sup>6</sup>

As of March 2023, 237 of the 823 Members of the House of Lords are women, making up 29%.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> House of Lords, Library Note, [Women in the House of Lords](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Members Names Information Service](#), accessed 1 March 2023.

## 1.1

## Members of Parliament since 1918

Since first being permitted to stand for election in 1918, 561 different women have been elected as MPs.<sup>8</sup>

Countess Constance Markievicz was elected to represent Dublin St Patricks in 1918, but as a member of Sinn Féin she did not take her seat. The next year Nancy Astor became the first woman to sit in the Commons after winning a by-election in Plymouth Sutton for the Conservatives.

Gwyneth Dunwoody broke Barbara Castle's record for longest continuous service as a female MP. She was elected in 1974 and served for thirty-four years until her death in April 2008.<sup>9</sup> Harriet Harman now holds the record for the woman with the longest continuous service as an MP, having served for over 39 years since the October 1982 Peckham by-election.

Of the 561 women ever elected, 310 (55%) were first elected as Labour and 174 (31%) as Conservative MPs. A full breakdown is in the table below.

Female MPs elected by party, 1918-2023		
Party	Number	% of all women
Labour	310	55.3
Conservative	174	31.0
Liberal Democrat*	33	5.9
SNP	27	4.8
Sinn Féin	4	0.7
DUP	3	0.5
Ulster Unionists	3	0.5
SDLP	2	0.4
Alliance	1	0.2
Green	1	0.2
Independent	1	0.2
Independent Unity	1	0.2
Plaid Cymru	1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>100.0</b>

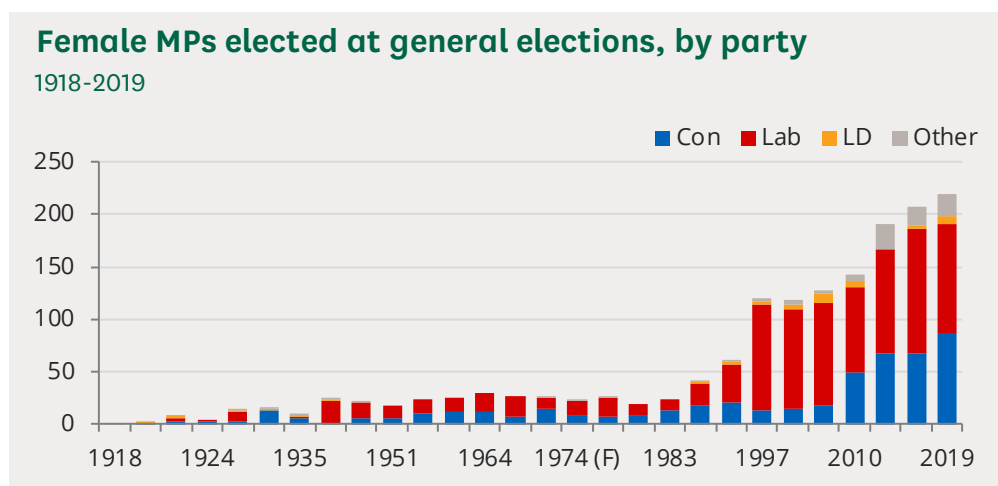
Sources: House of Commons briefing [Female Members of Parliament](#), 10 February 2023; UK Parliament website, [Members of the House of Commons](#) (accessed 1 March 2023)

Note: \* includes predecessor parties

<sup>8</sup> House of Commons Library, [Female Members of Parliament](#), 10 February 2023. All women aged 21 and over were permitted to stand for office

<sup>9</sup> Since Gwyneth Dunwoody was also an MP between 1966 and 1970, she served for thirty-eight years in total.

The chart below shows the number of women elected at general elections since 1918, by party.



Source: Rallings and Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2006, 2012*; House of Commons Library Briefing Papers (10/36) General Election 2010; (7186) General Election 2015; (7979) General Election 2017; (8749) General Election 2019.

Until 1997, women had never made up more than 10% of all MPs, and until the late 1980s the proportion had always been below 5%. The proportion rose to 18% following the 1997 General Election when 120 women were elected. The current level, 35%, is the highest ever.

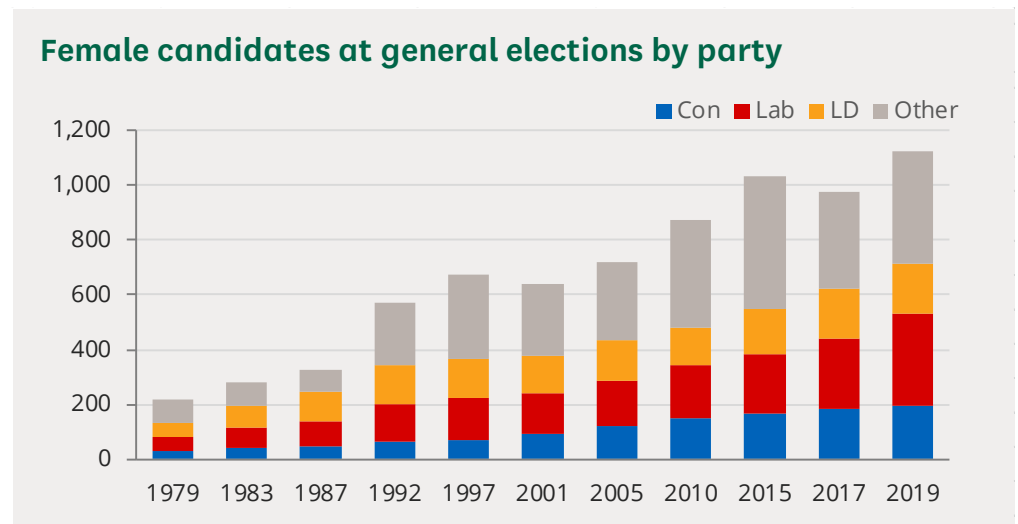
## 1.2

### Candidates in general elections

The number of female candidates has risen at almost every general election since 1966. The exceptions were 2001, and 2017. In 2017, however, the proportion of female candidates rose from 26% to 29% as there were fewer candidates overall.

In 2019, there were 1,123 female candidates which was the highest number and proportion on record (33.8% of all candidates).

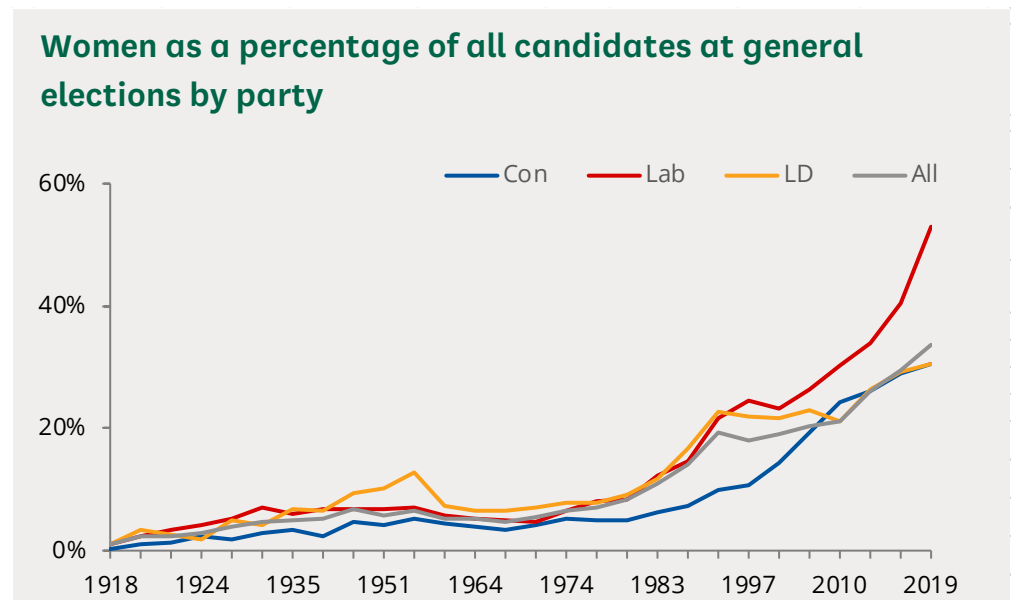
The charts overleaf show that the number of women standing for election has increased since 1979.



Sources: Rallings and Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2006*, 2012. House of Commons Library Briefing Papers ([10/36](#)) *General Election 2010*; ([7186](#)) *General Election 2015*; ([7979](#)) *General Election 2017*; ([8749](#)) *General Election 2019*.

The proportion of all female candidates that parties field has also increased, as shown in the chart below.

The Labour Party has had more female candidates, proportionally, than other parties since 1997, when it introduced all-women shortlists. Before this date, the Liberals/Liberal Democrats had usually had the highest proportion of female candidates.



Sources: Rallings and Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2006*, 2012. House of Commons Library Briefing Papers ([10/36](#)) *General Election 2010*; ([7186](#)) *General Election 2015*; ([7979](#)) *General Election 2017*; ([8749](#)) *General Election 2019*.

Women were first able to stand for Parliament in 1918, when 17 did so. There was one female Conservative candidate, four Labour, four Liberals and eight candidates for other parties.

Women did not make up more than 10% of candidates until 1979, when 11% of candidates were female. In 2005 the proportion of women reached 20% for the first time.

Further analysis of female candidates, including of the difference between the number of candidates and the proportion of elected MPs, is available in Library Insight [House of Commons trends: How many women candidates become MPs?](#).

## The 2019 General Election

In 2019, there were 1,121 female candidates standing across all parties, 34% of the total 3,320 candidates. This figure represents both the highest proportion on record, as well as the largest total number of women candidates in a general election.

Labour had 335 female candidates, the highest number of any party in any general election. For the first time ever for any major party in a general election, the majority (53%) of Labour's candidates were women, compared with 41% in 2017 and 34% in 2015.

There were 194 female Conservative candidates (31%), an increase of two percentage points from 2017 and the highest number in the party's history. The Liberal Democrats had 186 female candidates, making up 30%.

41% of Green Party candidates were women, as were 34% of Scottish National Party and 25% of Plaid Cymru candidates. Women made up 18% of Brexit party candidates.<sup>10</sup>

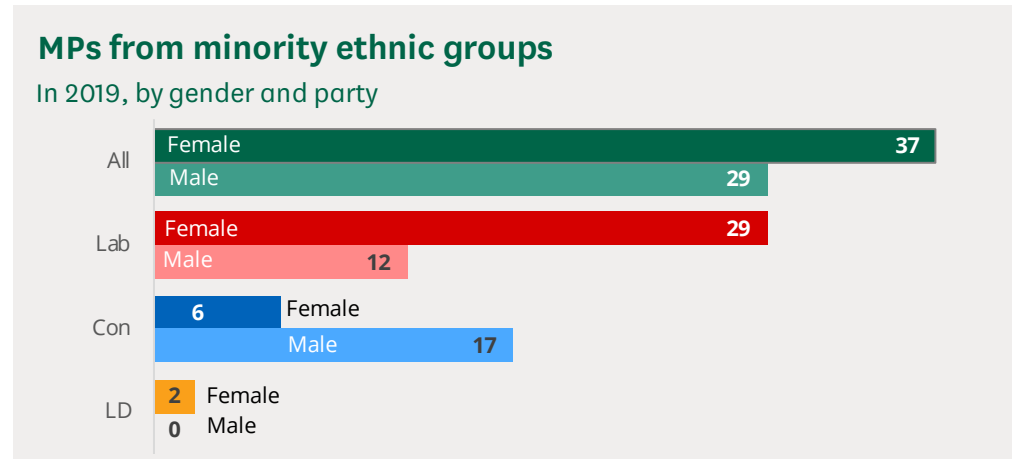
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<sup>10</sup> Rallings and Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2006*, 2012. House of Commons Briefing Papers [\(10/36\) General Election 2010](#); [\(7186\) General Election 2015](#); [\(7979\) General Election 2017](#); [\(8749\) General Election 2019](#).

## 1.3

## Women from minority ethnic groups in the House of Commons

The chart below shows the number of MPs from minority ethnic groups by gender and party elected at the last general election according to data published by Operation Black Vote.<sup>11</sup>



Source: [Operation Black Vote](#), House of Commons Library analysis

Before 2010, Oona King, Diane Abbott and Dawn Butler had been the only female MPs from any minority ethnic background.<sup>12</sup>

The first women of Asian heritage were elected in 2010: they are Rushanara Ali, Labour MP for Bethnal Green and Bow; Priti Patel, Conservative MP for Witham; Lisa Nandy, Labour MP for Wigan; Shabana Mahmood, Labour MP for Birmingham, Ladywood; Yasmin Qureshi, Labour MP for Bolton South East; and Valerie Vaz, Labour MP for Walsall South.<sup>13</sup>

Following the 2019 General Election, 37 women from minority ethnic groups were elected to the House of Commons. This is 5.7% of all MPs, 16.8% of the 220 female MPs, and more than half (56.9%) of all MPs from a minority ethnic group.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Operation Black Vote, [MPs and MSPs](#)

<sup>12</sup> According to analysis from [Operation Black Vote](#). Official statistics on ethnicity are not collected and ethnicity is a self-defined characteristic.

<sup>13</sup> Bdnews24, [UK gets its first Bengali MP](#), The Times of India, [Priti Patel is UK's first Gujarati woman MP](#)

<sup>14</sup> Library Briefing Paper 1156, [Ethnic diversity in politics and public life](#)

## 2

## Women in the UK Government

In March 2023, seven of the 23 Cabinet posts were filled by women (30%).<sup>15</sup>

In addition, there are eight ministers who attend Cabinet without being full members. Of these, one is a woman. Altogether, eight out of the 31 ministers who may attend Cabinet are women, just over a quarter.<sup>16</sup>

Of the 94 MPs to hold any government position, 28 were women (30%).<sup>17</sup> That means that 32% of female Conservative MPs held a government position, compared with 25% of male Conservative MPs.

Liz Truss MP became Britain's third female Prime Minister in 2022, following Baroness Thatcher (1979-1990) and Theresa May MP (2016-2019).<sup>18</sup>

Rishi Sunak appointed six female full Cabinet ministers following his reshuffle, two of whom were newly appointed to Cabinet. He also appointed Victoria Prentis who attended Cabinet but was not a full minister.

Liz Truss appointed seven women to her Cabinet during her premiership in Autumn 2022. Her predecessor, Boris Johnson appointed nine women to the Cabinet in total. When he took office in July 2019, he appointed five women to the Cabinet.

In March 2019, Theresa May's Cabinet included five women (including the Prime Minister). On taking office in 2010, David Cameron appointed four women to the Cabinet. He appointed 10 women to the Cabinet throughout his time in office.

Gordon Brown appointed five women to his first cabinet in 2007 and six in total. There were five women in Tony Blair's 1997 Cabinet, which was also the first to include more than two female ministers at one time. The highest number of concurrent female cabinet ministers was eight (36%), from May 2006 to May 2007.

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<sup>15</sup> The term 'full Cabinet post' refers to the 21 paid Cabinet Ministers as set out in the [Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975](#). More information on this can be found in the research briefing [Limitations on the number of Ministers](#)

<sup>16</sup> GOV.uk, [Ministers](#), accessed 1 March 2023

<sup>17</sup> [Internal MNIS API](#), excluding the post of Second Church Estates Commissioner which is not a government post

<sup>18</sup> GOV.uk, [Past Prime Ministers](#)

The table below shows the 55 women who have ever been appointed to full Cabinet posts (as of March 2023). The first was Margaret Bondfield in 1929. She was also the first female minister outside the Cabinet.

## Female Cabinet Ministers

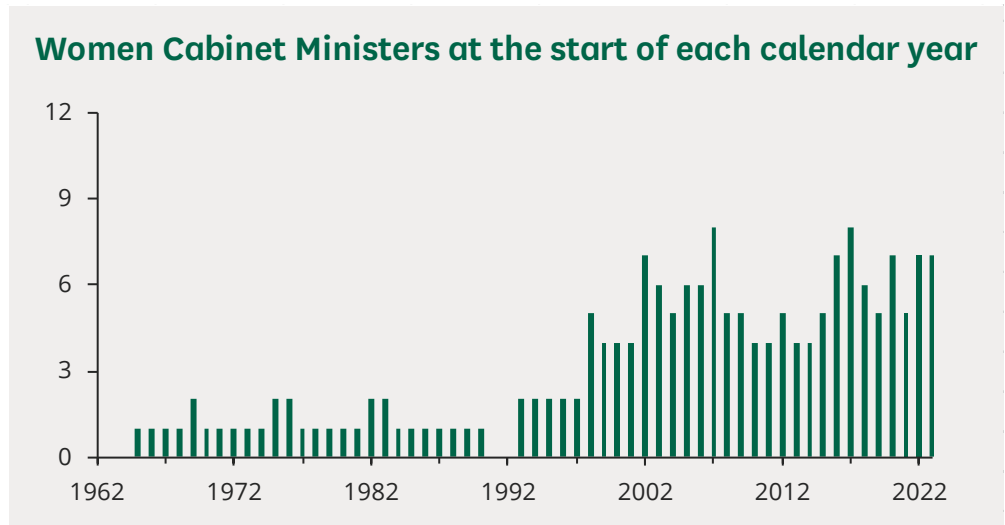
Minister	Years of service	Minister	Years of service
Margaret Bondfield	1929-31	Caroline Spelman	2010-12
Ellen Wilkinson	1945-47	Cheryl Gillan	2010-12
Florence Horsbrugh	1953-54	Baroness Warsi	2010-12
Barbara Castle	1964-70 & 1974-76	Theresa May	2010-19
Judith Hart	1968-69	Justine Greening	2011-18
Margaret Thatcher	1970-74 & 1979-90	Maria Miller	2012-14
Shirley Williams	1974-79	Theresa Villiers	2012-16 & 2019-20
Baroness Young	1981-83	Elizabeth Truss	2014-17 & 2019-
Gillian Shephard	1992-97	Nicky Morgan	2014-16 & 2019-20
Virginia Bottomley	1992-97	Baroness Stowell of Beeston	2015-16
Ann Taylor	1997-98	Amber Rudd	2015-2018 & 2018-19
Harriet Harman	1997-98 & 2007-10	Andrea Leadsom	2016-17 & 2019-20
Mo Mowlam	1997-2001	Karen Bradley	2016-19
Clare Short	1997-2003	Baroness Evans of Bowes Park	2016-2022
Margaret Beckett	1997-2007	Priti Patel	2016-17 & 2019-2022
Baroness Jay of Paddington	1998-2001	Penny Mordaunt	2017-19 & 2022-
Helen Liddell	2001-03	Esther McVey	2018-18
Estelle Morris	2001-02	Thérèse Coffey	2019-
Hilary Armstrong	2001-07	Anne-Marie Trevelyan	2020-20 & 2021-22
Patricia Hewitt	2001-07	Amanda Milling	2020-2021
Tessa Jowell	2001-07 & 2009-10	Nadine Dorries	2021-2022
Baroness Amos	2003-07	Michelle Donelan	2022-
Ruth Kelly	2004-08	Suella Braverman	2022-
Jacqui Smith	2006-09	Kemi Badenoch	2022-
Hazel Blears	2006-09	Chloe Smith	2022-22
Baroness Ashton of Upholland	2007-08	Gillian Keegan	2022-
Yvette Cooper	2008-10	Lucy Frazer	2023-
Baroness Royall of Blaisdon	2008-10		

Note: Does not include those who attended Cabinet without holding a full cabinet post.

Sources: House of Commons Library; Mortimore and Blick (Eds), Butler's British Political Facts, 2018



The following chart shows the number of women in full Cabinet posts at the beginning of each calendar year since 1960. There were three women in total who held Cabinet positions before 1960.



Notes: Does not include those who attended Cabinet without holding a full cabinet post.  
Data at 1 Jan each year.

Sources: House of Commons Library, Members Names' Information Service;  
Mortimore and Blick (Eds), Butler's British political Facts, 2018

The highest number of women in the Cabinet on the first day of the year was eight (2007 and 2017). There have only been two years since 1964 when no Cabinet Minister positions were filled by women, 1991 and 1992.

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## 3 Women in other elected bodies in the UK

### 3.1 Devolved legislatures and London Assembly

The proportion of female members of the UK's devolved legislatures and the London Assembly has risen over time. After the most recent elections in 2021, the London Assembly has the highest proportion of female members, at 52%.

The then-Welsh Assembly (now Senedd Cymru) is the only other chamber to have had 50% or more female members, when exactly half of members were female after the 2002 elections. The Senedd has had the most consistently high female membership; never lower than 40% since its foundation in 1999.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has had the greatest increase in female representation, rising from 13% in 1998 to 36% in 2022.

All devolved legislatures had a greater proportion of women elected at their most recent election than in the House of Commons.<sup>19</sup>

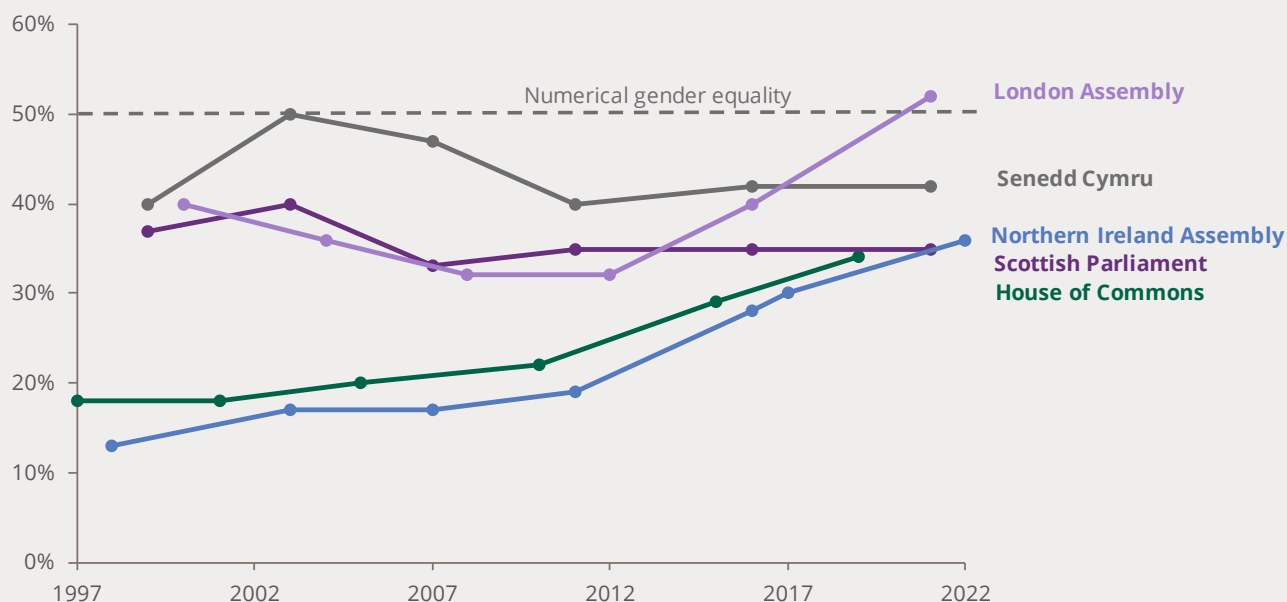
The chart below shows female members of the devolved legislatures following an election since 1997.

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<sup>19</sup> House of Commons Library: [UK Election Statistics: 1918-2022: A century of elections](#); [Northern Ireland Elections 2022](#).

## Female membership of parliaments and assemblies over time

Following elections



Sources: House of Commons Library: [UK Election Statistics: 1918-2022: A century of elections](#); [Northern Ireland Elections 2022](#).

The chart below shows the proportion of women elected to the UK parliaments and assemblies by party, as of March 2023. The Conservative Party has the lowest proportion of women in all elected bodies included in the table and the Liberal Democrats the highest, except for in the Scottish Parliament, where the Liberal Democrats have the lowest proportion and the SNP the highest.

## Women in UK elected bodies

Proportion of members who are female, by party

Party	House of Commons	Scottish Parliament	Welsh Parliament	London Assembly	Party	Northern Ireland Assembly
Conservative	25%	29%	19%	22%	Sinn Féin	56%
Labour	52%	45%	57%	64%	DUP	28%
Liberal Democrat	64%	25%	100%	100%	Alliance	47%
Plaid Cymru/SNP	36%	53%	38%	-	UUP	0%
Other	24%	63%	0%	67%	SDLP	25%
					Other	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>52%</b>		<b>37%</b>

Sources: House of Commons: [Members' Names Information Service](#), Scottish Parliament: [Current and previous Members of the Scottish Parliament](#), Senedd Cymru: [Find a Member of the Senedd](#), Northern Ireland Assembly: [MLA Search](#), London Assembly: [Assembly Members](#)

## 3.2

## Women in local government

### England

The table below gives Local Government Association figures showing that **41%** of local authority councillors in England were women in 2022 and the Green Party had the highest percentage.<sup>20</sup>

Councillors in England			
Gender make-up by party when last elected, 2022			
Party	Female	Male	Total
Conservative	32%	68%	5,902
Labour	52%	48%	5,005
Liberal Democrat	40%	60%	2,742
Independent	34%	66%	1,486
Green	53%	47%	654
Other	47%	53%	397
<b>Total</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>16,185</b>

Source: Local Government Association, [National census of local authority councillors 2022](#), 17 June 2022

### Wales

Following the 2022 council elections, **36%** of councillors in Wales were female.<sup>21</sup> In 2018, women held **28%** of seats in Wales, up from **26%** in 2012.<sup>22</sup>

### Scotland

According to research published in The Herald newspaper, **35%** of councillors in Scotland were women following the 2022 local elections.<sup>23</sup> This study did not provide a breakdown of the data by party.

**29%** of councillors elected in 2017 were women. Data for this year was broken down by party:

<sup>20</sup> Local Government Association, [National census of local authority councillors 2022](#), 17 June 2022

<sup>21</sup> BBC, [Election 2022: Welsh politics needs more women, new councillor says](#)

<sup>22</sup> Data provided by the [Welsh Local Government Association](#). Party breakdowns were not provided.

<sup>23</sup> The Herald, [Scotland's councils set to be dominated by men until 2037](#)

## Councillors in Scotland

Gender make-up by party, 2017

Party	Female	Male	Total
Scottish National Party	39%	61%	431
Conservative	18%	82%	276
Labour	28%	72%	262
Independent/Other	18%	82%	172
Liberal Democrat	34%	66%	67
Green	47%	53%	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>1,227</b>

Source: The Scottish Parliament, [Local Government Elections 2017](#); further analysis by Hugh Bochel for the Electoral Commission (unpublished).

## Northern Ireland

Following the most recent local elections in 2019, **26%** of councillors in Northern Ireland were women and the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland had the highest percentage with 40% of female councillors, as shown in the table below.<sup>24</sup>

## Councillors in Northern Ireland

Gender make-up by party, 2019

Party	Female	Male	Total
Democratic Unionist Party	19%	81%	122
Sinn Féin	35%	65%	105
Ulster Unionist Party	19%	81%	75
Social Democratic and Labour Party	36%	64%	59
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	40%	60%	53
Green Party	25%	75%	8
Traditional Unionist Voice	0%	100%	6
Independents/Other	12%	88%	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>462</b>

Source: Yvonne Galligan (Technological University Dublin), [The Northern Ireland local elections May 2019 – a gender analysis](#), Slugger O'Toole blog, 21 May 2019

<sup>24</sup> Data provided by the [Northern Ireland Assembly](#).

## 4

## Parliamentary and political firsts for women in the UK

The timeline below sets out significant firsts for women in UK politics.<sup>25</sup>

- 1907** Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act allowing women to be county and borough councillors – many stood in 1 Nov elections
- 1908** First Elected mayor in England (Elizabeth Garrett Anderson)
- 1918** First women able to stand for Parliament and those over 30 who met minimum property qualifications given the right to vote
- 1918** First MP elected (Countess Constance de Markievicz)
- 1919** First Member of Parliament to take seat (Nancy Astor)
- 1924** First Minister (Margaret Bondfield)
- 1928** Vote given to women on same terms as men
- 1929** First Cabinet minister and privy counsellor (Margaret Bondfield)
- 1948** First Chair of Committee of Whole House (Florence Paton)
- 1958** Life Peerages Act; first female life peers to take seats (Baroness Swanborough, Baroness Wootton)
- 1963** First hereditary peer to take seat in House of Lords (Baroness Strange of Knokin)
- 1964** First Parliamentary Whip (Commons) (Harriet Slater)
- 1965** First Parliamentary Whip (Lords) (Baroness Phillips)
- 1967** First Deputy Speaker (Lords) (Baroness Wootton)
- 1970** First Deputy Speaker (Commons) (Betty Harvie Anderson)
- 1975** First Leader of the Opposition (Margaret Thatcher)
- 1976** First openly lesbian MP (Maureen Colquhoun)
- 1979** First Prime Minister (Margaret Thatcher)
- 1981** First Leader of the House of Lords (Baroness Young)

<sup>25</sup> Central Office of Information, Women in Britain, 1996; [Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics](#); House of Commons Library analysis.

- 1981** First woman to co-found a major political party (Shirley Williams)
- 1987** First Black female MP (Diane Abbott)
- 1992** First Speaker of the House of Commons (Betty Boothroyd)
- 1992** Minister with special responsibility for women's issues (Gillian Shephard)
- 1997** First Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mo Mowlam)
- 1997** First Leader of the House of Commons (Ann Taylor)
- 1997** Full-time Minister for Women (Joan Ruddock)
- 1998** First Chief Whip (Ann Taylor)
- 2001** First Secretary of State for Scotland (Helen Liddell)
- 2006** First Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Margaret Beckett)
- 2006** First House of Lords Lord Speaker (Baroness Hayman)
- 2007** First Secretary of State for Home Affairs (Jacqui Smith)
- 2007** First Attorney-General (Baroness Scotland)
- 2008** First Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Yvette Cooper)
- 2008** First Serjeant at Arms (Jill Pay)
- 2008** First UK EU Commissioner and later (2009) first EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy (Baroness Ashton)
- 2010** First Secretary of State for Wales (Cheryl Gillan)
- 2010** First female MPs of Asian descent elected in Westminster
- 2014** First First Minister of Scotland (Nicola Sturgeon)
- 2015** Creation of the Women's Equality Party
- 2016** First Lord Chancellor (Liz Truss)
- 2016** First Minister of Northern Ireland (Arlene Foster)
- 2017** First Black Rod (Sarah Clarke)
- 2017** First female Sikh MP (Preet Gill)
- 2019** First Clerk Assistant (Sarah Davies)
- 2021** First Metro Mayor (Tracy Brabin)
- 2021** First woman from a minority ethnic group to be a member of the Welsh Parliament (Natasha Asghar)
- 2022** First woman to preside over an Accession Council (Penny Mordaunt)

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## 5 Women in politics: International context

Female representation in parliaments and governments varies drastically by country. This section covers female Heads of State and Government, ministers, speakers, and members of parliament across the world.

### 5.1 Presidents and prime ministers

In February 2023, there were 19 women serving as Head of State and 16 serving as Head of Government.<sup>26</sup> In comparison, in 2005, there were only eight female national leaders.<sup>27</sup>

The first non-hereditary female national leader was Sirimavo Bandaranaike, elected Prime Minister of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1960. Globally, women were elected to these positions infrequently until the 1990s.

By February 2019, 70 countries (just over a third of all) had had at least one female president or prime minister. A small number of countries have had several. Sri Lanka was the first country to have a female president and prime minister at the same time (1994-2005).<sup>28</sup>

### 5.2 Overseas governments

In 2022, the global average share of women in ministerial positions was 16%, an increase from 10% in 2006. In the UK, 30% of cabinet ministers were women.<sup>29</sup>

### 5.3 Overseas parliaments

#### Speakers of national parliaments

As of February 2023, there were 269 filled posts of Presiding Officers of Parliament (also known as speakers) or of one of its Houses worldwide. Of

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations, [Heads of State: Heads of Government](#) (PDF), 15 February 2023; Reuters, [Women leaders of the world](#), 26 January 2021

<sup>27</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in politics: 2017](#), 15 March 2017.

<sup>28</sup> House of Commons Library consolidated analysis.

<sup>29</sup> Source: World Economic Forum, [Global Gender Gap Report, 2022](#), p7



these speakers, 63 (23%) were women. Both the upper and lower Houses were presided over by women in Argentina, Belgium, Belize, the Bahamas, and the United States.<sup>30</sup>

In 1927 Austria became the first country to elect a woman to the presidency of a parliamentary chamber; the next was Denmark in 1950. The UK became the 27th country to achieve this when Betty Boothroyd was elected Speaker of the House of Commons in 1992.

## Women in national parliaments

The global average share of women in parliament was 23% in 2022, an increase from 15% in 2006.<sup>31</sup> The UK is ranked **48th** in the proportion of women in a country's lower or only house (as of February 2023).

Rwanda is ranked first, with over 61% of positions held by women. Cuba and Nicaragua also have a majority of female members, and exactly half the parliaments of the United Arab Emirates and Mexico, which have only one house, are made up of women. Yemen is the only country in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (the international organisation connecting national parliaments) ranking to have no women in their lower or only house, while 22 countries have fewer than 10%.<sup>32</sup>

The following table shows the top 50 countries by proportions of women in the lower or only house of Parliament.

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<sup>30</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women Speakers of national parliaments](#) (accessed 27 February 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Source: World Economic Forum, [Global Gender Gap Report, 2022](#), p7

<sup>32</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union [New Parline](#) (accessed 24 February 2023).

## Women in national parliaments

Top 50 countries by membership of lower or only House (February 2023)

Rank	Country	%	Rank	Country	%
1	Rwanda	61.3	26	Netherlands	40.7
2	Cuba	53.4	27	Austria	40.4
3	Nicaragua	51.7	28	Belarus	40.0
4	Mexico	50.0	=	Timor-Leste	40.0
=	New Zealand	50.0	30	Peru	38.8
=	United Arab Emirates	50.0	31	Ecuador	38.7
7	Iceland	47.6	32	Moldova, Republic of	38.6
8	Costa Rica	47.4	33	Australia	38.4
9	Andorra	46.4	34	Burundi	38.2
=	Sweden	46.4	35	France	37.8
11	South Africa	46.3	=	Slovenia	37.8
12	Bolivia	46.2	37	Dominica	37.5
=	Norway	46.2	38	Tanzania, United Rep. of	37.4
14	Senegal	46.1	39	Guyana	36.6
15	Finland	45.5	40	Monaco	36.4
16	Argentina	44.8	41	Portugal	36.1
17	Namibia	44.2	42	Albania	35.7
18	Denmark	43.6	43	Armenia	35.5
19	Mozambique	43.2	=	Chile	35.5
20	Belgium	42.7	45	Germany	35.1
21	North Macedonia	42.5	46	Luxembourg	35.0
22	Spain	42.4	47	Serbia	34.8
23	Cabo Verde	41.7	<b>48</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>34.5</b>
=	Switzerland	41.7	49	Cameroon	33.9
25	Ethiopia	41.3	50	Uganda	33.8

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union [New Parline](#), updated 1 February 2023

Not all countries have an upper house of Parliament. As of February 2023, Canada, Bolivia, Mexico, Australia and Antigua and Barbuda had 50% or more women in their upper house.

## Entry of women into national parliaments

Finland was the first country to have women sit in a national parliament; 19 women were elected in 1907, the first election after suffrage was extended to

women in 1906. These women made up 9.5% of the elected members, a level the UK had still not reached in 1992.<sup>33</sup>

The table below shows a timeline of the first women in national parliaments. The United Kingdom was the fourth country to elect women to parliament, in 1918, the same year as Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands.

First women in national parliaments					
First 50 by year of election or entry					
Rank	Country	Year	Rank	Country	Year
1	Finland	1907	26	Cuba	1940
2	Norway	1911	27	Philippines	1941
3	USA	1917	28	Dominican Republic	1942
4	Denmark	1918	=	Uruguay	1942
=	Ireland	1918	30	Australia	1943
=	Netherlands	1918	31	Albania	1945
=	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>1918</b>	=	Bulgaria	1945
8	Austria	1919	=	France	1945
=	Germany	1919	=	Hungary	1945
=	Luxembourg	1919	35	Italy	1946
=	Poland	1919	=	Japan	1946
12	Estonia	1920	=	Panama	1946
=	Lithuania	1920	=	Romania	1946
14	Belgium	1921	39	Burma	1947
=	Canada	1921	=	Pakistan	1947
=	Sweden	1921	=	Sri Lanka	1947
17	Iceland	1922	=	Thailand	1947
=	Russia	1922	43	North Korea	1948
19	Latvia	1930	=	South Korea	1948
20	Spain	1931	=	Venezuela	1948
21	Brazil	1933	46	Israel	1949
=	New Zealand	1933	47	Indonesia	1950
=	South Africa	1933	48	Argentina	1951
24	Portugal	1934	=	Chile	1951
25	Turkey	1939	50	Mongolia	1951

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union [New Parline](#) (accessed 8 February 2022).

The most recent country to allow women to be elected to the national parliament was Qatar, in 2017. However, no women were elected there in the 2021 elections. Before then, Kuwait elected women parliamentarians for the first time in 2008. In Saudi Arabia, parliamentarians are appointed by the

<sup>33</sup> University of Helsinki, [Centenary of women's full political rights in Finland](#).

King rather than elected, and the first women were appointed in 2013. Currently, 20% of the Conservative Assembly in Saudi Arabia are female.<sup>34</sup>

## 5.4 The European Parliament (European Union)

The proportion of female MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) increased from 16% to 41% from 1979 to 2019. This figure has declined slightly to 40% after the 73 seats held by UK MEPs were vacated when the UK left the EU in 2020. Since then, only 27 of these seats have been redistributed to other Member States.<sup>35</sup> As of the 2019 EU election, female representation across Member States varied from 0% in Cyprus to 55% in Sweden.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union [New Parline](#) (accessed 8 February 2022), [IPU Welcomes appointment of four women to Qatar's Parliament](#) 13 November 2017 (accessed 12 February 2022)

<sup>35</sup> European Parliament, [Members of the European Parliament from February 2020](#) (PDF)

<sup>36</sup> European Parliament, [2019 European election results, MEPs' gender balance](#)

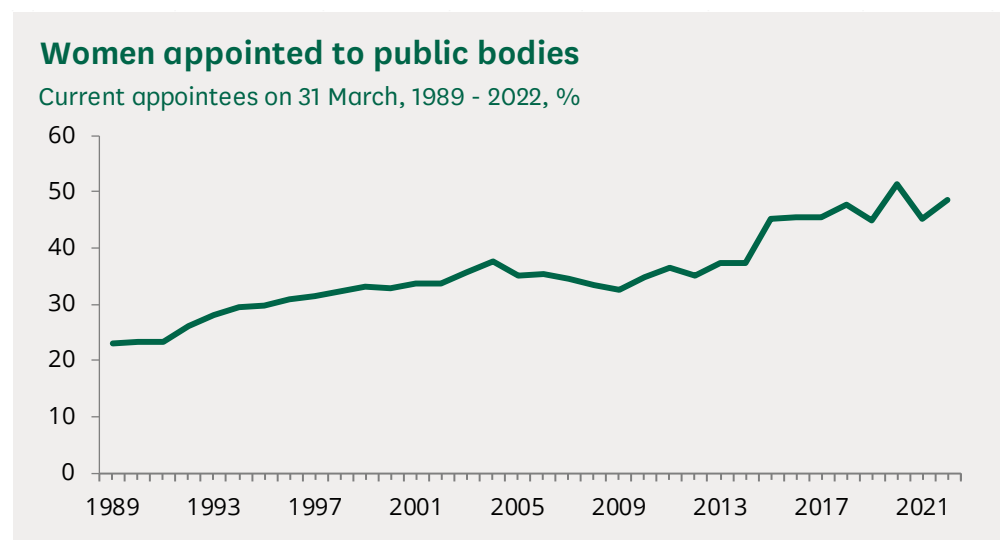
## 6 Women in public life

This section covers women working in the public sector. Information on women in employment more generally, including women on boards of directors of companies, is included in Library briefing on [Women and the Economy](#).

The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 permitted women to enter professions such as the law, veterinary medicine and the Civil Service. The Act also allowed women to enter any royal chartered society and ensured that no university could refuse entry to women.

### 6.1 Women in public bodies

Government ministers appoint people to the boards of public bodies. In 1983, 17% of appointees were women.<sup>37</sup> The last Labour Government's target was for an even balance of men and women on such boards.<sup>38</sup> As the chart below shows, this was not achieved.



Note: data from 2014/15 onwards is taken from the Commissioner for Public Appointments Annual report. This may not be comparable to data from the Public Bodies reports used for prior years.

Source: Cabinet office, [Public appointments data report 2020/21](#), 21 October 2021; [Cabinet Office, Public Bodies](#), various years; Commissioner for Public Appointments, [Annual report 2021-22](#), p44

<sup>37</sup> Equal Opportunities Commission, *Women and Men in Britain a statistical profile*, 1985

<sup>38</sup> Cabinet Office, [Public Bodies 2002](#)

The proportion of women holding positions on the boards of public bodies increased gradually from 22% in 1989 to 38% in 2004, it then fluctuated before reaching a high of 51% in 2019/20. The most recent data is for 2021/22, showing that on 31 March 2021, 48.6% of serving public appointees were women; this was an increase on 2020/21 and the second highest rate recorded.<sup>39</sup>

## 6.2

## Women in the Civil Service

### Women in the civil service

In 1914, the 53,900 women employed in the UK Civil Service represented 21% of the total. Following the First World War, the presence of women in the Civil Service increased dramatically. By 1919, 235,500 permanent staff were women.<sup>40</sup> However, as men returned from military service the proportion fell. In 1928 and 1938, women accounted for 25% and 27% of total Civil Service employees, respectively.<sup>41</sup> A contributing factor to these low figures was the exclusion of women from jobs that involved dealing with ‘foreigners’ (the Foreign Office) and officers (the defence ministries), and jobs concerned with animal breeding (agriculture) or sexual offences (law).<sup>42</sup>

Until 1946, the UK Civil Service operated a “marriage bar”, which forced women to leave their posts when they got married. Although the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act appeared to disallow such discrimination, this was not applied to the Civil Service: in 1921, an Order in Council limited posts to women who were either unmarried or widows. The Treasury justified this position by arguing, somewhat paradoxically, that a woman’s right to not be disqualified from holding these posts did not entail an entitlement to hold the posts.<sup>43</sup>

### Trends from 1981 to 2022

The chart below shows the proportion of full-time, part-time and Senior Civil Service grade positions held by women between 1981 and 2022. In 2022, more than half (54.5%) of all Civil Service employees (based on headcounts) were women. Women have tended to make up approximately 45% of full-time positions since 2010 (48% in 2022). In 1981, an overwhelming proportion of part-time civil servants were women (95.6%). This has gradually decreased to 79.6% in 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Commissioner for Public Appointments, [Annual report 2021-22](#) (PDF), p44

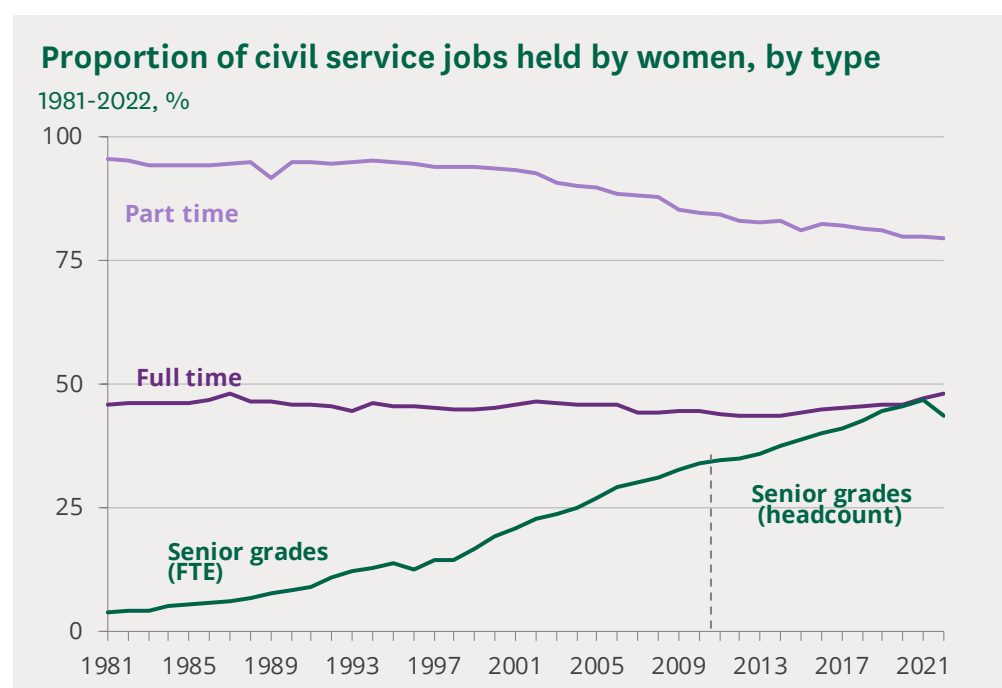
<sup>40</sup> Meta Zimmick, “Strategies and Stratagems for the Employment of Women in the British Civil Service, 1919-1939”, *The Historical Journal*, 27:4, December 1984, p912

<sup>41</sup> As above, p912

<sup>42</sup> Rodney Lowe, *The Official History of the British Civil Service: Reforming the Civil Service*, Routledge, 2011, pp75-76.

<sup>43</sup> As above.

The proportion of senior grade roles occupied by women increased to 47% in 2021 but decreased to 44% in 2022. Since 2010, this has been measured by headcount, so the figures before and after are not directly comparable. This is indicated by the dashed line.



Source: GOV.UK, [Civil service statistics](#), 2018-2022; ONS, [Civil service statistics](#), 2006 – 2017; The National Archives, [Civil service statistics](#), 1981-2005.

Notes: Before 2010, Senior grades were measured by full time equivalents (FTE).

In 1950, 8% of what was then called the “administrative class” – today’s Senior Civil Service plus principals and assistant principals – were women. In 1971, the Kemp-Jones Committee made recommendations to help women reach the higher echelons of the Civil Service.

Although the number of women in senior roles did subsequently increase, progress was relatively slow until the 1990s and particularly the 21st century, when the proportion of female senior civil servants increased markedly, reaching 33% in 2009 (on full-time or equivalent basis). The proportion of women in senior roles increased every year from 2009 until the drop in 2022.

The first female Permanent Secretary, Evelyn Sharp, was appointed in 1955. The number of grade 1 permanent secretaries had reached two in 1993.<sup>44</sup> Research by the Institute for Government shows that in October 2022, six of the 16 (37.5%) permanent secretaries were women.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Rodney Lowe, *The Official History of the British Civil Service: Reforming the Civil Service*, Routledge, 2011, p21

<sup>45</sup> Institute for Government, [Permanent secretaries](#), accessed February 2023

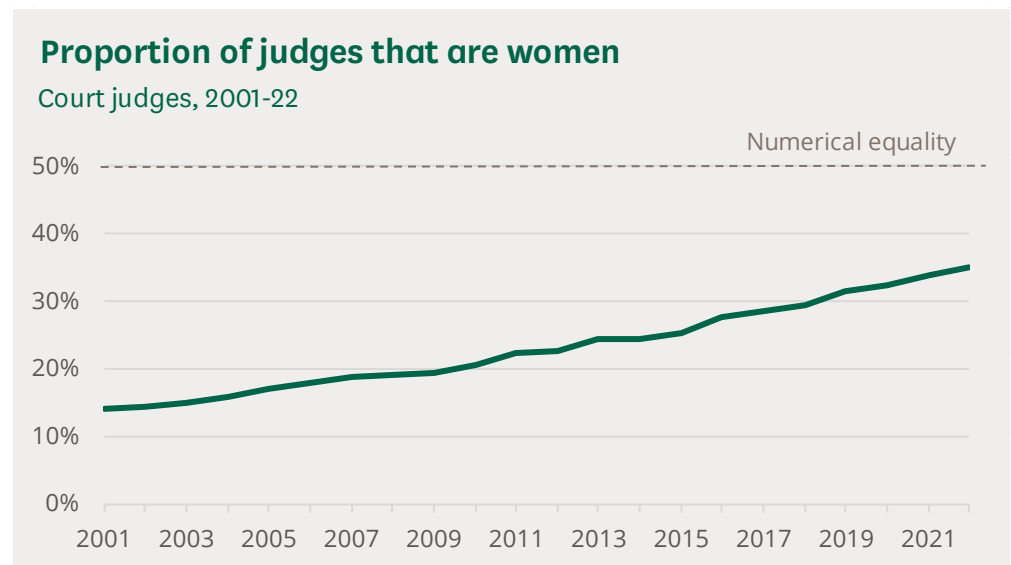
## 6.3

## Female judges

Although all judicial offices have been open to women since 1919, it was not until 1945 that the first female judge, Sybil Campbell, was appointed in England.

In March 2022, 41% of judges in England and Wales were women.<sup>46</sup> The proportion of female judges was higher in Tribunals (52%) than in the Courts (35%).

The chart below shows the proportion of court judges who have been women from 2001 to 2022.



Sources: Ministry of Justice, [Diversity of the judiciary: 2022 statistics](#); Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [diversity statistics](#), various years

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Diversity of the judiciary: 2022 statistics](#), July 2022



Female representation also differs by type of judge. The table below shows the proportion of female judges in post during 2022, by type of judge.

Proportion of women in-post by type of judicial appointment July 2022		
	Type of appointment	%
Courts	Court of Appeal Judges	27
	High Court Judges	31
	Deputy High Court Judges	23
	Masters, Registrars, Costs Judges	41
	Deputy Masters, Deputy Registrars, Deputy Costs Judges	23
	Circuit Judges	36
	Recorders	28
	District Judges (County Courts)	44
	Deputy District Judges (County Courts)	42
	District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)	35
	Deputy District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)	41
	<b>All court judges</b>	<b>35</b>
	Tribunals	Presidents, Chamber Presidents, Deputy and Vice Presidents
Upper Tribunal Judge		38
Deputy Upper Tribunal Judge		47
Tribunal Judge		54
Regional, Deputy Regional Tribunal Judge		30
Circuit Judges		*
Employment Judge		50
Regional Employment Judge		40
<b>All tribunal judges</b>		<b>52</b>
<b>All judges (courts + tribunals)</b>	<b>41</b>	

Note: '\*\*' means that the percentage is not given because the numbers are too small and so it may be misleading.

Source: Ministry of Justice, [Diversity of the judiciary: 2022 statistics](#)

There is typically a smaller proportion of women at the higher levels of the judiciary. Of the 12 current Justices of the Supreme Court, the highest position held, one is a woman: Lady Justice Rose.<sup>47</sup> Dame Rose is the fourth female justice of the Supreme Court, replacing Lady Justice Black in 2021.<sup>48</sup> Baroness Hale of Richmond was the first female judge of the Supreme Court and became the first woman to become President of Supreme Court in October 2017.<sup>49</sup>

The first female Lord of Appeal (Baroness Hale) was not appointed until 2004, and only one woman led a judicial division between 2001 and 2005.

<sup>47</sup> The Supreme Court, [Biographies of the justices](#), accessed 1 March 2023

<sup>48</sup> The Supreme Court, [Former Justices - The Supreme Court](#), accessed 1 March 2023

<sup>49</sup> The Supreme Court, [Lady Hale appointed next President of Supreme Court, alongside three new Justices](#), 21 July 2017

## 6.4

## Women in the Armed Forces

Until 2016, the UK Armed Forces were permitted to discriminate on gender grounds in their employment decisions. There was an exemption from the Equality Act 2010 for reasons of combat effectiveness, and there were restrictions on women serving in close-combat roles.<sup>50</sup>

Women were excluded from Ground Close Combat (GCC) roles such as the Royal Marines General Service, the Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps, the Infantry and Royal Air Force Regiment.<sup>51</sup>

After a 2016 review by the Ministry of Defence, then Prime Minister David Cameron lifted the ban on women serving in GCC roles. The Royal Armoured Corps were the first to allow women to serve in certain GCC roles from November 2016.<sup>52</sup>

The table below shows that as of April 2022, 11.3% of armed forces personnel were women, with the Royal Air Force having the highest proportion of women (15.4%).

Women in the UK Armed Forces					
At 1 April each year, %					
Role	2002	2007	2012	2017	2022
<b>Army</b>					
Officers	9.8	11.1	11.6	11.8	12.1
Other ranks	6.8	7.2	7.7	8.6	9.6
<b>All</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>10.0</b>
<b>Naval Service</b>					
Officers	7.6	9.0	9.7	10.8	12.3
Other ranks	8.7	9.5	9.1	8.9	9.8
<b>All</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>10.3</b>
<b>RAF</b>					
Officers	11.1	14.3	15.9	16.9	18.5
Other ranks	10.5	12.4	13.2	13.2	14.4
<b>All</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>15.4</b>
<b>Overall</b>					
Officers	9.7	11.6	12.4	13.0	14.0
Other ranks	8.1	8.8	9.1	9.6	10.6
<b>All</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>11.3</b>

Source: Defence Analytical Services and Advice, [UK Armed Forces Quarterly Personnel Report](#) (archived); Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: April 2022](#), Table 1

<sup>50</sup> GOV.UK, [Women in Combat: Policy Paper](#), 1 November 2010

<sup>51</sup> As above

<sup>52</sup> GOV.UK, [Ban on women in ground close combat lifted](#), 8 July 2016

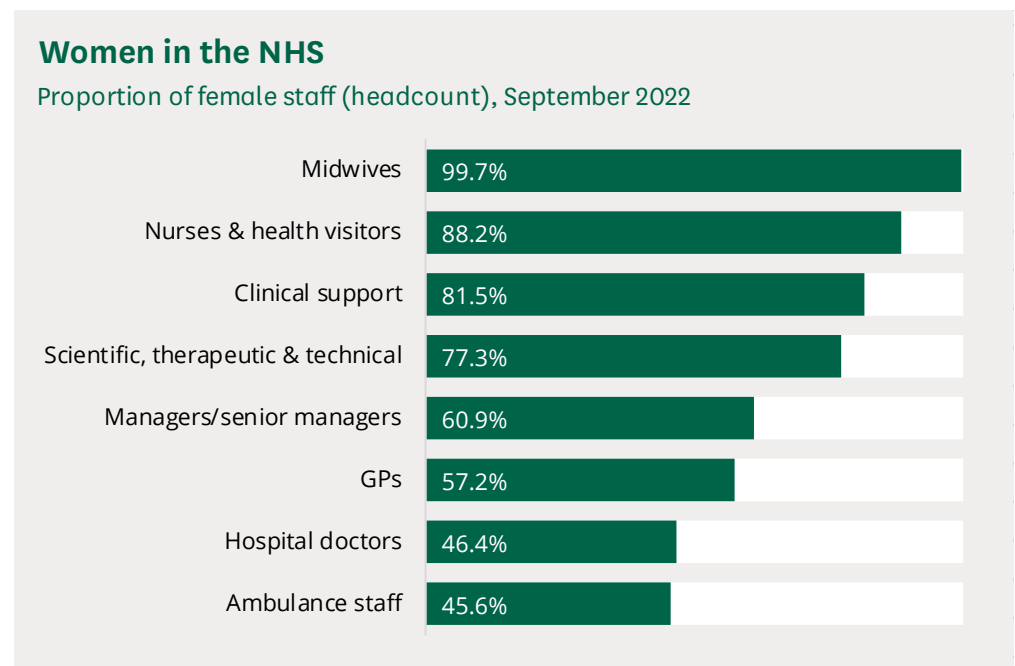
There was a higher representation of women among officer ranks (14.0%) than in other ranks of the Armed Forces (10.6%). However, within officer ranks, women were underrepresented in the most senior roles. In April 2022, there were just 27 women holding senior officer positions (rank OF-6 and above), making up 5.8% of senior officers.

The independent Service Complaints Ombudsman investigates complaints from armed forces personnel about matters such as career development; bullying, harassment and discrimination; and pay.

Figures published by the Ombudsman show that in 2021, women were 2.4 times more likely to make a complaint than their male counterparts. 23% of complaints were made by women, despite women representing around 11% of service personnel.<sup>53</sup>

## 6.5 Women in the National Health Service

As of September 2022, more than three quarters (76%) of the NHS workforce in NHS Trusts and Care Boards in England were women. The chart below shows this data for selected staff groups.



Source: NHS Digital, [NHS workforce statistics, September 2021](#), Equality and diversity in NHS Trusts and CCGs tables; NHS Digital, [General Practice Workforce](#)

<sup>53</sup> Service Complaints Ombudsman, [Annual Report 2021](#), statistical tables 2.2 and 2.3

In some roles, nearly all workers are women: over 99.7% of midwives were women each year between 2011 and 2022. Most nurses and health visitors are also women (88.2%). The proportion is lower for hospital doctors (46.4%), and lower still for consultants (39.3%). The proportion of hospital doctors, consultants and ambulance staff who are women has slightly increased since 2011. Women also make up over half of GPs, 57% in 2021, a six percentage-point increase from 2015.

While women make up 60.9% of NHS manager roles, the proportion of female senior managers is lower (58.0%). For the Very Senior Manager grade, the proportion of women is 49.0%.

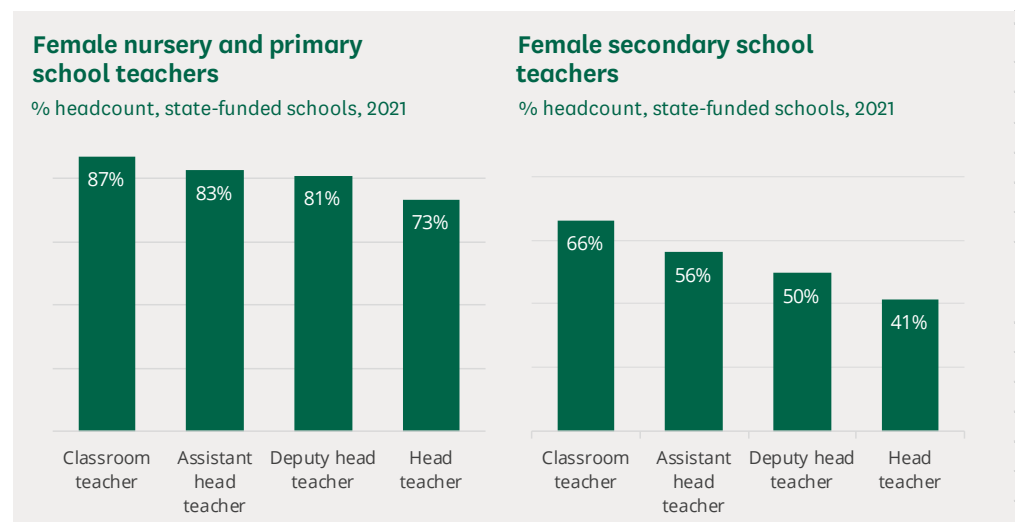
[Research by the University of Exeter](#)<sup>54</sup> shows that women are not equally represented in senior NHS roles. Women held 44.7% of executive and non-executive leadership roles across NHS trusts in 2020, which was up by nearly five percentage points since 2017.

## 6.6 Women in Education

### Schools

As of November 2021, women made up the majority (76%) of teachers in state-funded schools in England. The size of this majority varies by type of school. In 2021, 86% of state-funded nursery and primary teachers were women, 65% of secondary school teachers were women, and 74% of non-mainstream schoolteachers were women.<sup>55</sup>

The chart below shows the proportion of women at different grades of teaching staff for nursery and primary schools and secondary schools.



Source: Department for Education, [School workforce in England: 2021](#), 9 June 2022

<sup>54</sup> R Sealy et al, Action on Equality, Women on NHS boards, September 2020

<sup>55</sup> Non-mainstream schools include state-funded special schools and pupil referral units.

Since 2011 the proportion of female teachers at all grades has generally followed a slightly upward trend.<sup>56</sup> The exception is nursery and primary classroom teachers: the percentage of women in these roles has fallen from 89% in 2011, to 87% in 2021 (albeit from a high base).<sup>57</sup>

Women occupy a lower proportion of senior roles at nursery and primary schools and secondary schools. In 2021, women made up 66% of classroom teachers in secondary schools, but only 50% of deputy head teachers, and 41% of head teachers. In nursery and primary schools, the gap was narrower, and women made up 87% of classroom teachers, but 81% of deputy head teachers and 73% of head teachers.<sup>58</sup>

## Independent schools

[The Independent Schools Council](#) (ISC) is a member association that represents independent schools in the UK and some schools outside the UK.

The ISC annual survey found that in January 2022 around 63% of teachers working in their UK-based member schools were women (full-time equivalent basis).<sup>59</sup>

Not all UK independent schools are members of the ISC and so these figures should be treated as a rough guide for the independent sector.

## Higher education

Women remain underrepresented in higher education teaching, although there has been a significant improvement since the financial year 1994/95 across all academic roles.

Compared with 1994/95, the proportion of female staff was higher at all grades in 2007/08 (see the chart below), and by a substantial margin in some cases; for example, the proportion of female professors rose from 7% to 19%. The biggest increase, of 19 percentage points, was among senior lecturers and researchers, of whom 35.3% were female by 2007/08. Among the more junior positions, female staff continued to be less well represented in teaching staff at university level than at secondary and particularly primary and nursery levels.

New definitions of staff were introduced in 2008/09 so only the data on professors can be compared before and after this year. The percentage of professors who were female has increased gradually over time. In 2021/22

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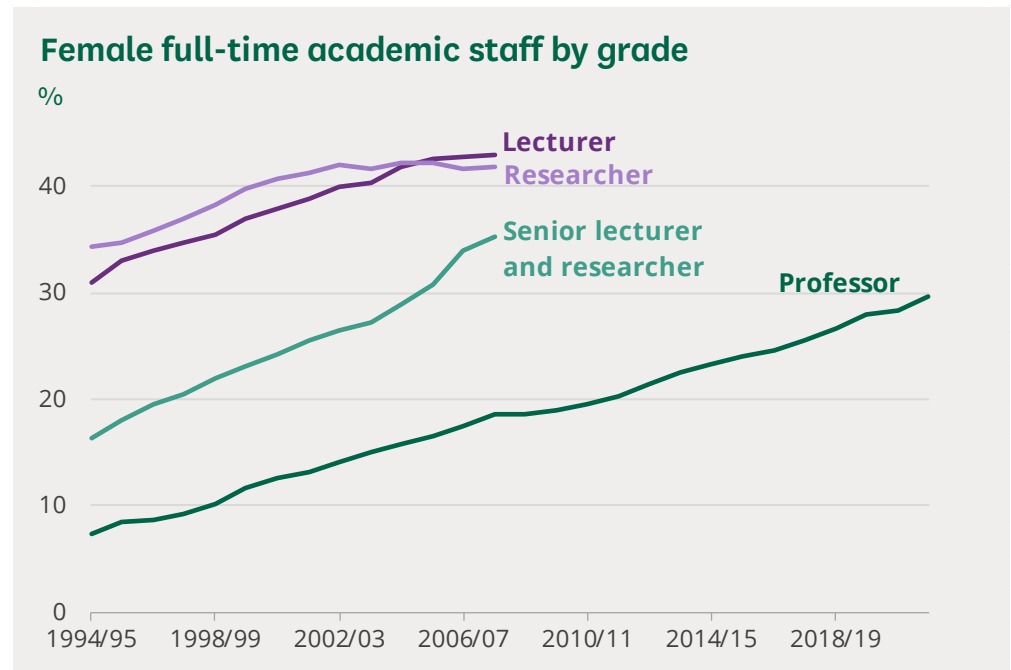
<sup>56</sup> Classroom teachers, assistant head teachers, deputy head teachers, and head teachers.

<sup>57</sup> Headcount basis, Department for Education, [School workforce in England: 2021](#), 9 June 2022

<sup>58</sup> Headcount basis, Department for Education, [School workforce in England: 2021](#), 9 June 2022

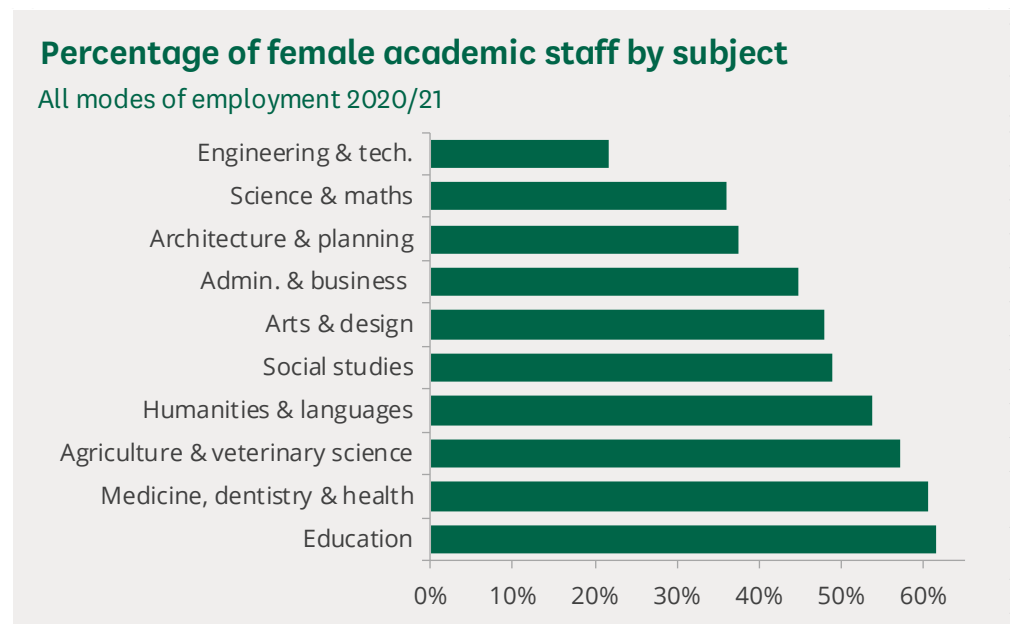
<sup>59</sup> “Full time equivalent” measures the number of teachers working, but adjusted for whether they work part-time or full-time. Independent Schools Council, [Annual Census 2022](#), 6 May 2022 (p21)

female staff made up 30% of full-time professors, 43% of all academic full-time staff and 56% of part-time academics.<sup>60</sup>



Source: HESA, [Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2021/22](#) (and earlier)

Although the proportion of female staff in higher education has increased since 1994/95, there is high variation between academic disciplines. The chart below shows that in 2020/21 just over 60% of academics in education and medicine, dentistry and health were female compared with only 22% of academics in engineering and technology.



Source: [Higher education staff data: What areas do they work in?](#) (Chart 5)

<sup>60</sup> HESA, [Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2021/22](#) (and earlier)

According to [research on the gender pay gap among university Vice Chancellors](#), around 6% of Vice Chancellors in 1995 were female. The authors created a dataset of 115 UK universities (in existence since 2000) for their research, which showed that 11% of these universities had female Vice Chancellors in 2000, rising to 20% in 2010 and 24% in 2019.<sup>61</sup>

## 6.7 Women in the police

As of 31 March 2022, 34% of police officers in England and Wales were female. The table below gives figures for 2003 to 2021, showing that the proportion of female police officers has steadily increased from 19% to 34% over the past 20 years.

Female police officers England & Wales, full-time equivalent, at 31 March			
	Total Strength	Female	
		Number	% of total
2003	132,509	25,139	19.0
2004	138,468	27,925	20.2
2005	141,059	29,940	21.2
2006	141,523	31,520	22.3
2007	141,882	33,117	23.3
2008	141,704	34,277	24.2
2009	143,778	36,122	25.1
2010	143,735	36,988	25.7
2011	139,110	36,532	26.3
2012	134,100	35,962	26.8
2013	129,585	35,401	27.3
2014	127,909	35,653	27.9
2015	126,818	35,737	28.2
2016	124,066	35,498	28.6
2017	123,132	35,842	29.1
2018	122,405	36,417	29.8
2019	123,171	37,427	30.4
2020	129,110	40,319	31.2
2021	135,301	43,762	32.3
2022	140,228	46,959	33.5

Note: Excludes British Transport Police and officers seconded out, includes officers seconded in and those on maternity/paternity leave and career breaks

Source: [Police workforce statistics](#), England and Wales, 31 March, various years

<sup>61</sup> Ray Bachan, Alex Bryson, "[The Gender Wage Gap Among University Vice Chancellors in the UK](#)" [online via ScienceDirect], Labour Economics, Volume 78, 2022.

While 36% of constables in England and Wales were women on 31 March 2022, the proportion of female officers in more senior ranks was lower. Only 29% of officers ranked chief inspector or higher were women, although this has increased from 14% in 2010.

Figures were similar for Scotland's Police Force; at the end of March 2020, 32% of police officers were women, including 27% of officers ranked sergeant and above.<sup>62</sup> As of 1 February 2023, female representation in the Police Service of Northern Ireland was 32%.<sup>63</sup>

All police forces except the City of London and Metropolitan Police Services are led by Chief Constables. The first female Chief Constable in England and Wales was Pauline Clare, who was appointed to Lancashire police force in June 1995. As of February 2023, there are 17 female chief constables in the UK, out of 44 police forces.<sup>64</sup> This is a record number.<sup>65</sup>

As of February 2023, there are 10 female Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales. In the most recent elections (May 2021), 22% of candidates were women, an increase of 7 percentage points from the 2016 elections, and 8 were elected (21%).<sup>66</sup>

Some police forces do not have Police and Crime Commissioners, so the function is fulfilled through other roles. Five of these posts are held by women:

- Sophie Linden, the Deputy Mayor for Crime and Policing in the Metropolitan Police Service, appointed to act on behalf of the Mayor of London
- Kate Green, the Deputy Mayor for Policing, Crime, Criminal Justice and Fire for Greater Manchester
- Tracy Brabin, the Mayor of West Yorkshire
- Angela McLaren, the Commissioner of the City of London police force
- Naomi Long, the Minister for Justice for Northern Ireland, responsible for the Police Service of Northern Ireland

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<sup>62</sup> Scotland Police, [Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming and Outcomes Progress report 2019/20](#) (PDF), Chapter 1

<sup>63</sup> Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Workforce Composition Statistics](#), updated 1 September 2023

<sup>64</sup> House of Commons Library calculations. This includes 41 territorial forces in England and Wales, the British Transport Police, Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

<sup>65</sup> [Third of chief constables are now women as police arrest 'macho canteen culture'](#), Telegraph July 2021

<sup>66</sup> House of Commons Library, [PCC Elections 2021](#), May 2021



## 7

## Firsts for women in UK public life

There have been various firsts for women in public life over the last 100 plus years:<sup>67</sup>

- 1913:** First Professor (Caroline Spurgeon)
- 1939:** First Black woman to join the UK Armed Forces (Lilian Bader)
- 1943:** First President of the Trades Union Congress (Anne Loughlin)
- 1945:** First Prison Governor (Charity Taylor)
- 1945:** First stipendiary magistrate (Sybill Campbell)
- 1948:** First university Vice Chancellor (Prof Lillian Penson)
- 1949:** First King's Counsel (Rose Heilbron and Helena Normanton)
- 1955:** First Civil Service Permanent Secretary (Dame Evelyn Sharp)
- 1965:** First High Court Judge (Dame Elizabeth Lane)
- 1973:** First Head of Mission in the British Diplomatic Service (Eleanor Emery)
- 1973:** First director of a national museum (the Science Museum, Dame Margaret Weston)
- 1984:** First General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (Brenda Dean)
- 1987:** First Court of Appeal Judge (Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss)
- 1991:** First Head of MI5 (Stella Rimington)
- 1994:** First Church of England priest ordained (Angela Berners-Wilson)
- 1995:** First Police Chief Constable (Pauline Clare)
- 2004:** First Lord of Appeal in Ordinary (Dame Brenda Hale)
- 2005:** First National Statistician & Registrar General for England & Wales (Karen Dunnell)
- 2006:** First disabled, female commissioner of the European Human Rights Commission (Baroness Campbell of Surbiton)
- 2009:** First EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy (Baroness Ashton)
- 2009:** First Poet Laureate (Carol Ann Duffy)
- 2011:** First Chief Medical Officer for England (Professor Dame Sally Davies)

- 2011:** First Royal Navy Warship Commander (Lieutenant Commander Sarah West)
- 2013:** First Royal Air Force Air Vice-Marshal (Elaine West)
- 2013:** First woman from a minority ethnic group to be Permanent Secretary at the Treasury (Sharon White)
- 2014:** First Dean of Norwich (Canon Jane Barbara Hedges)
- 2014:** First Master of the Queens Music (Judith Weir)
- 2015:** First Church of England Bishop (The Right Reverend Libby Lane)
- 2016:** First Chief Fire Officer (Rebecca Bryant)
- 2017:** First Metropolitan Police Commissioner (Cressida Dick)
- 2017:** First President of Supreme Court (Baroness Hale of Richmond)
- 2021:** First Command the British Army at 2 star level (Major General Sharon Nesmith)

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<sup>67</sup> Sources: COI Women in Britain 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1996, [Women In Diplomacy: The FCO, 1782-1999](#) [Women's History Timeline](#) BBC Radio 4, [Major General Sharon Nesmith on seeing around barriers](#) Global Defence Technology, [Centre for Advancement of Gender in Politics](#), Queens University Belfast.

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