

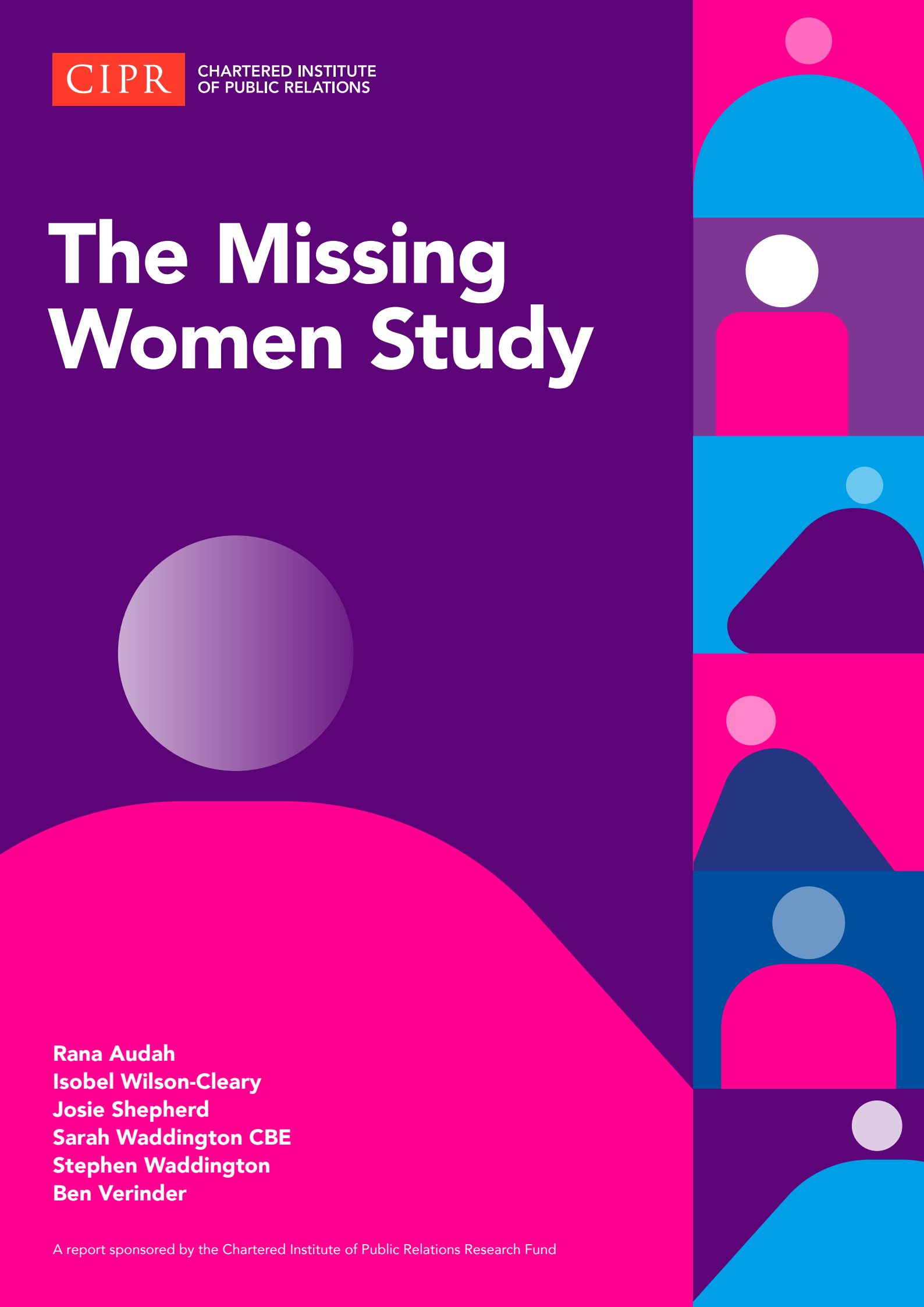
CIPR

CHARTERED INSTITUTE
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Missing Women Study

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A report sponsored by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Research Fund



Missing Women refers to the shortfall of 3,910 female public relations practitioners in England and Wales who have either left the industry mid-career or failed to advance to senior positions.

The result is a significant gender disparity between junior roles (where, numerically, women dominate) and senior roles (where men dominate).

Report citation

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Keywords

public relations, management, missing women, work-life balance, flexible working, professional development, career progression, structural barriers, leadership development, cultural barriers, societal barriers, workplace culture, gender inequality, ageism

“This groundbreaking research should be a wake-up call to industry leaders to ask what they are going to do to change the experience of women working in public relations for the better. In a profession built on its people, losing nearly 4,000 professionals isn’t coincidental, it’s a systemic failure. Every departure drains the industry of invaluable experience and weakens its future potential. This not only pushes experienced women out but also deters emerging talent. The time has come to dismantle these barriers and create a truly inclusive environment that benefits everyone in our field.”

Advita Patel

CIPR President 2025

“Women power PR every day but rarely hold the power. Despite 50 years since the Equal Pay Act, women still face outdated ideas of leadership and structural barriers that limit their progression and potential. This Missing Women research exposes how the PR industry ignores obstacles that allow experience, skills, and creativity to be lost.

The value women bring to PR is undeniable, and this talent drain damages our profession. It is not about lack of ambition - our industry must create inclusive workspaces where women can work flexibly without sacrificing pay or advancement. This isn’t about potential. It’s about retention.

When businesses increasingly need trusted PR counsel, this talent loss is unsustainable. Our industry’s credibility depends on retaining talent - failing to address this systemic issue undermines our collective professional ambitions.”

Avril Lee

Chair, CIPR Diversity and Inclusion Network

“The descriptions within this report highlighting the urgent need for systemic change within our industry are all too familiar from my conversations with peers. The findings clearly show that cultural and structural barriers continue to hinder women’s progress at more senior levels.

I welcome that this report moves beyond symptoms and diagnosis to offer some possible prescriptions. It is imperative that we implement comprehensive support and training programmes to dismantle barriers. By prioritising leadership development and promoting flexible work patterns, we can create an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive.

Let’s consider this moment a call to action for all industry leaders to champion these changes and ensure that our industry reflects the diversity and talent of its practitioners.”

Georgie Cade

Vice-Chair, CIPR Greater London Group

“At last, a report that puts a number to the many brilliant and talented women who we lose to our profession due to systemic and structural bias.

We’ve long said that women are the engine room of this industry yet all too often it’s men that end up in the driving seat. This report seeks to understand the reasons behind that and makes for hugely compelling reading.

It also doesn’t surprise us that women who do punch through to the C-suite have to be inventive, resilient and downright bloody-minded, often sacrificing their own work-life balance in the process.

At Women in PR, we will continue to push for increased diversity and numbers of women in senior leadership positions. But as an industry we simply have to do better at effecting change.

Bravo to the team at Socially Mobile for shining a light on such an important topic.”

Jo Carr

Co-founder, Hope&Glory PR
President, Women in PR

“This research highlights a silent crisis that has continued for far too long. When thousands of talented women are forced to abandon their careers before they reach their full potential, we lose important future leaders and diverse perspectives that are vital for authenticity and innovation. The creativity these women show in navigating the barriers and finding workarounds to stay in the game is remarkable, but they shouldn’t have to. This research is a wake-up call for real, systemic change.”

Nicola Green

Chief Communications & Corporate Affairs Officer, Virgin Media O2

“This research serves as an invaluable call to action that every public relations professional and leader should read. For decades, I’ve heard countless anecdotes from women who felt that traditional work structures just didn’t support them. So, where did they go? They became managing directors of their own companies, freelancers, or completely shifted their careers. In an industry where focus often lies on timesheets rather than outcomes, both women and men face immense pressure to be ever-present, fearing a missed opportunity.

The interconnected barriers highlighted in this research resonate deeply. It’s 2025 and our biggest social platform is calling for more ‘masculine energy’. Meanwhile, women, particularly those from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds or social mobility cold spots, face great challenges. Lived experiences couldn’t be more different.

Our industry reflects broader global trends - from the erosion of women’s rights to women choosing not to pursue their full potential because it feels too difficult and exhausting. The idea of “having it all” shouldn’t mean “doing it all.” Organisations need to do better by offering flexible working practices and providing access to senior role models. Women often carry the burden of being the default parent while shouldering expectations for caring for elderly parents, unpaid housekeeping and unrecognised office duties.

In a recent industry podcast, a male agency owner suggested that a desire to work from home signals a lack of ambition. This, simply put, is untrue. Leaders must recognise the issues surrounding gender inequality and commit to providing more mentoring and training to prevent the loss of female talent. The return to office mandates serve commercial property owners more than team morale.

Retaining women doesn't have to come at a high cost. Straightforward principles can make a significant difference. For example, avoid scheduling events, conferences, or key meetings during school holidays. Don't start in-person meetings before 9 a.m. Small changes that ensure only men or those with a nanny aren't the sole attendees. Be intentional and make inclusivity a priority. I love this industry and have had an incredibly rewarding career. But let's make it easier for two-thirds of our workforce - and half of the population.

I cannot overstate the importance of a strong professional network. That's why we founded Global Women in PR - to support, connect and champion women in our industry. It works. Find your tribe and nurture those relationships."

Sue Hardwick

Co-founder and President, Global Women in PR

"George Blizzard and I set up The PR Network in 2005 as a response to our discriminatory industry. One that we'd been encouraged to join as graduates, with boundless energy and no responsibilities to hold us back. However, it soon became clear that (by perception) there was a binary choice. Commit to the job - or constrain the time we were able to offer to an employer and have kids.

For all the reasons laid out, it was clear that it would not be possible for us to juggle career and family, so we set up an agency that wouldn't force anyone into an impossible compromise. In 20 years we've given exciting work opportunities to 100s of talented senior women globally who might otherwise have left the industry.

Far too little has changed. The report identifies several interconnected issues, some of which (societal, cultural) go beyond one industry's ability to resolve. There needs to be more incentive. If employers really want to retain women then we believe flexible working remains the number one way to achieve this."

Nicky Regazzoni

Co-founder and Co-CEO, The PR Network

“For far too long, the public relations industry has grappled with systemic barriers that hinder women from advancing into the highest leadership roles. The Missing Women study sheds additional light on the scale of this issue and the interconnected challenges that perpetuate this imbalance, offering invaluable insights to drive meaningful change.

We commend Stephen and the Socially Mobile team for their dedication to this crucial research, which marks a pivotal step toward dismantling the glass ceiling within our field.

The PRCA’s Equity, Inclusion Advisory Board remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering a more equitable, diverse and inclusive industry. Enhancing female representation at the senior level is not just a priority - it’s a necessity. This study lays more tiles in the important groundwork for collective action as we work to create a truly representative future for public relations.”

Ishtar Schneider

Chair, PRCA E&I Group

“The Missing Women study highlights just how complex the disparity between men and women at a senior level in the public relations and communications industry really is. Historic cultural and societal issues resulting in women over-compensating to prove their worth, or succumbing to expected ‘norms’, will likely take many years of unpicking discriminatory practices and biases.

However, the reform of employer support for women at various life stages, for example during and post-maternity leave, can result in much quicker gains on both an individual level and for the industry as a whole. While it won’t solve the multifaceted problem in isolation, it’s clear that employers have a moral obligation and a genuine opportunity, to set the standard in order to pave the way for longer term change.”

Alexandra Stevens

Head of PR & Communications Recruitment, Reuben Sinclair

Foreword

The Missing Women study unpacks the barriers to women working in public relations in England and Wales in senior roles. It uncovered a stark reality: women face three distinct but interconnected barriers that hold them back.

- 1. Culturally** - barriers persist through a “boys’ club” mentality in leadership and the devaluation of public relations as “soft” work
- 2. Structurally** - women encounter limited development pathways, poor maternity support and inflexible working patterns
- 3. Societally** - women shoulder disproportionate parenting and caregiving expectations and are more likely to make career compromises to justify the cost of childcare

Yet the research uncovered an important insight: successful women aren’t waiting for systemic change. Instead, they’ve developed creative workarounds, such as switching between agency and in-house roles, seeking progressive employers, freelancing or starting their own businesses and investing in professional development. Others leave public relations practice to pursue careers that better suit their lifestyle.

While these strategies are effective, they come at a personal cost, often requiring compromises between career advancement and work-life balance. While the women interviewed stood by their choice to prioritise their family, they often expressed regret about having to compromise their career.

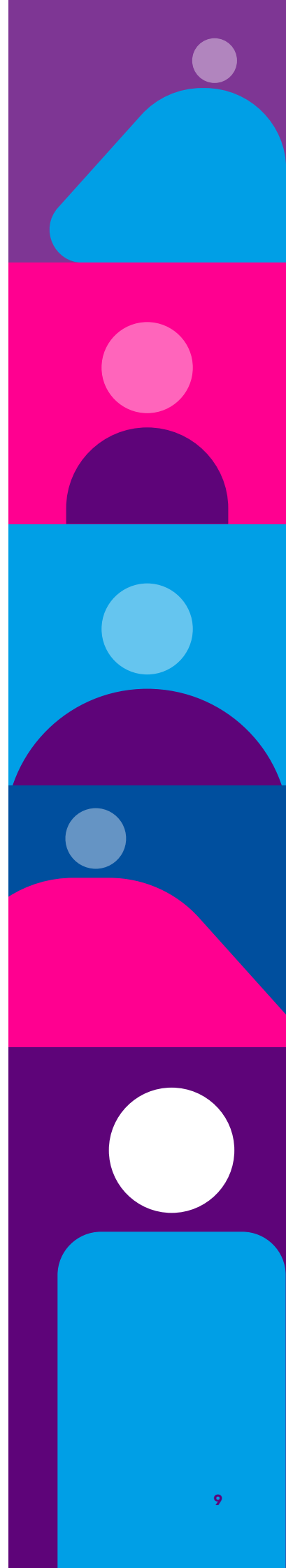
The study identifies five interventions for meaningful change: leadership development programmes, flexible work patterns, life-stage support, cultural transformation and structural reforms. The project emphasises that piecemeal solutions have failed in the past and aren’t sufficient to drive systemic improvement – only a comprehensive approach will drive effective and sustainable change.

This study would not have been possible without the support of the people and organisations we list in the acknowledgements, notably the research team of Rana Audah, Isobel Wilson-Cleary, Josie Shepherd, Sarah Waddington CBE and Ben Verinder.

We would especially like to thank the 233 women who participated in the study and the 30 participants who spent time meeting with the researchers. We dedicate this report to you and hope that it gives a much-needed voice to the issues that you raised.

Stephen Waddington

February 2025



Executive summary

The Missing Women study investigates why 3,910 female public relations practitioners in England and Wales left the industry mid-career or failed to advance to senior positions.

The study was developed from an analysis of Missing Women applicants to the Socially Mobile programme and modelling of the issue in the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) PR Population study based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 census data (Verinder, 2024; Waddington, 2024).

The study combines a literature review, a survey of 233 practitioners and in-depth interviews of 30 mid-career and senior female practitioners. The project was undertaken between April 2024 and January 2025. The interviews were undertaken by Socially Mobile graduates with lived experience of gender issues.

The key insight is that women who succeed in senior roles do so despite a variety of factors that would otherwise hold them back. They have found workarounds to develop successful and sustainable careers within public relations practice.

While there are isolated examples of supportive workplace environments, women who are successful in senior roles are generally creative and resilient and have found ways to adapt to systemic and structural bias.

The study identifies five interventions to improve the sustainability of women's careers in public relations:

- 1.** Leadership development and progression programmes
- 2.** Work pattern flexibility without career penalties
- 3.** Life stage and well-being support
- 4.** Cultural and behavioural change initiatives
- 5.** Structural and organisational reform

Meaningful change requires both cultural and organisational transformation. The research concludes that the issue requires multiple strategies and long-term programmes rather than isolated or piecemeal initiatives.

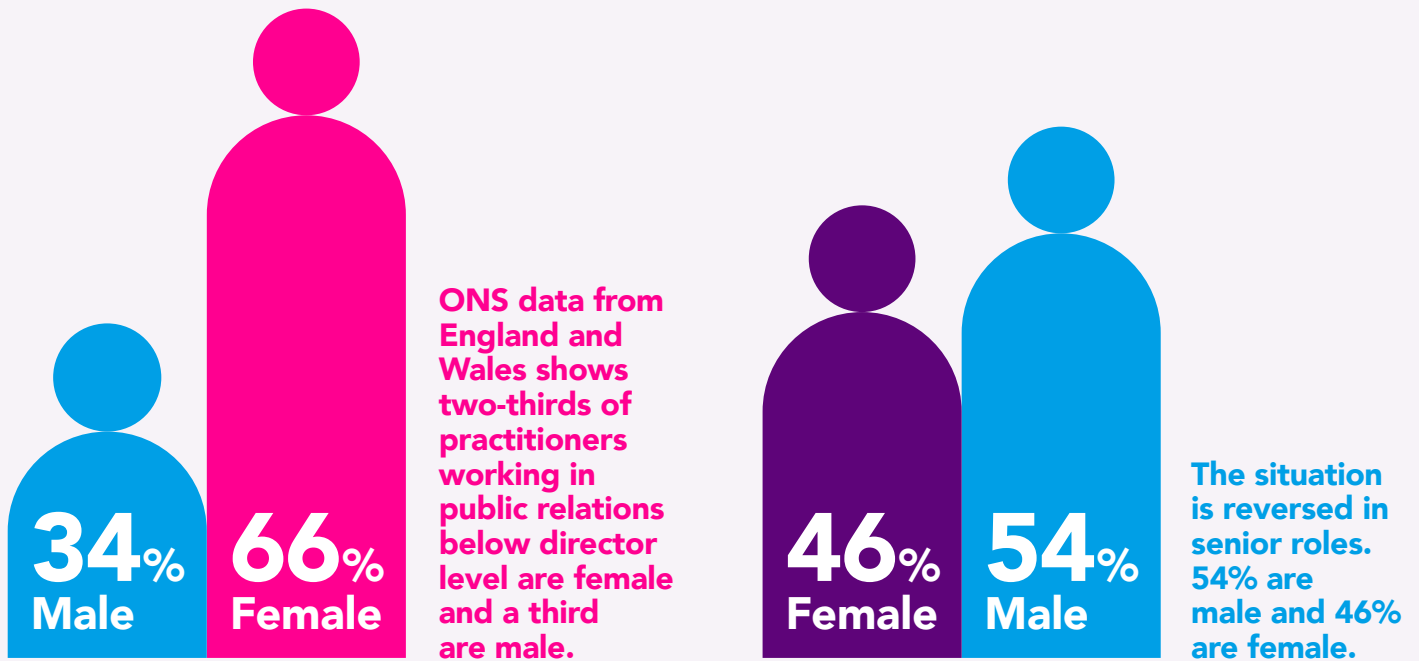
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The research question





Source: Verinder, 2024

In England and Wales (equivalent data is unavailable for Scotland or Northern Ireland), 63,563 people work in public relations practice; this gap accounts for 3,910 practitioners.

We call these the Missing Women.

The CIPR State of the Profession Report, CIPR Population study and PRCA Census data describe this mid-career talent-loss issue (PRCA, 2021; Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2024; Verinder, 2024).

Women practitioners leave practice mid-career or do not get support to progress to senior roles. We believe that there are three possible reasons:

- 1** The scale of the female talent drain within public relations practice is poorly understood or ignored
- 2** The industry has ignored the interventions identified over the past 50 years that are required to bring about equality
- 3** The interventions have not adequately addressed the systemic issues at the heart of the Missing Women issue

This project aimed to build on existing data and studies to understand the barriers leading female public relations practitioners to leave the field mid-career and the organisational and professional interventions that could help mitigate this loss of talent.

Methodology

This study uses mixed methods to investigate career progression barriers in public relations, focusing on mid-career and senior practitioners.

Phase 1 – Literature review

The first phase is a targeted literature review, concentrating specifically on existing research about career advancement in public relations. Literature highlights several longstanding issues, including non-transparent salary structures, insufficient training and development opportunities and inadequate support for those with caring responsibilities.

Phase 2 – Quantitative research

A survey instrument was developed to understand women's experiences in UK public relations practice, including those currently working, those considering leaving and those who have left the field. While this was a quantitative approach, it gathered more than 10,000 words of comment on the issues through open text submissions.

Phase 3 – Qualitative research

The third phase involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 30 mid-career practitioners. These participants were selected after self-identification in response to the initial survey.

Socially Mobile graduates were recruited and trained to undertake this activity, bringing their lived experience to this important data collection phase.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes, exploring themes identified in the literature review and survey, particularly professional attitudes, organisational support for skill development and the impacts of gender on career advancement.

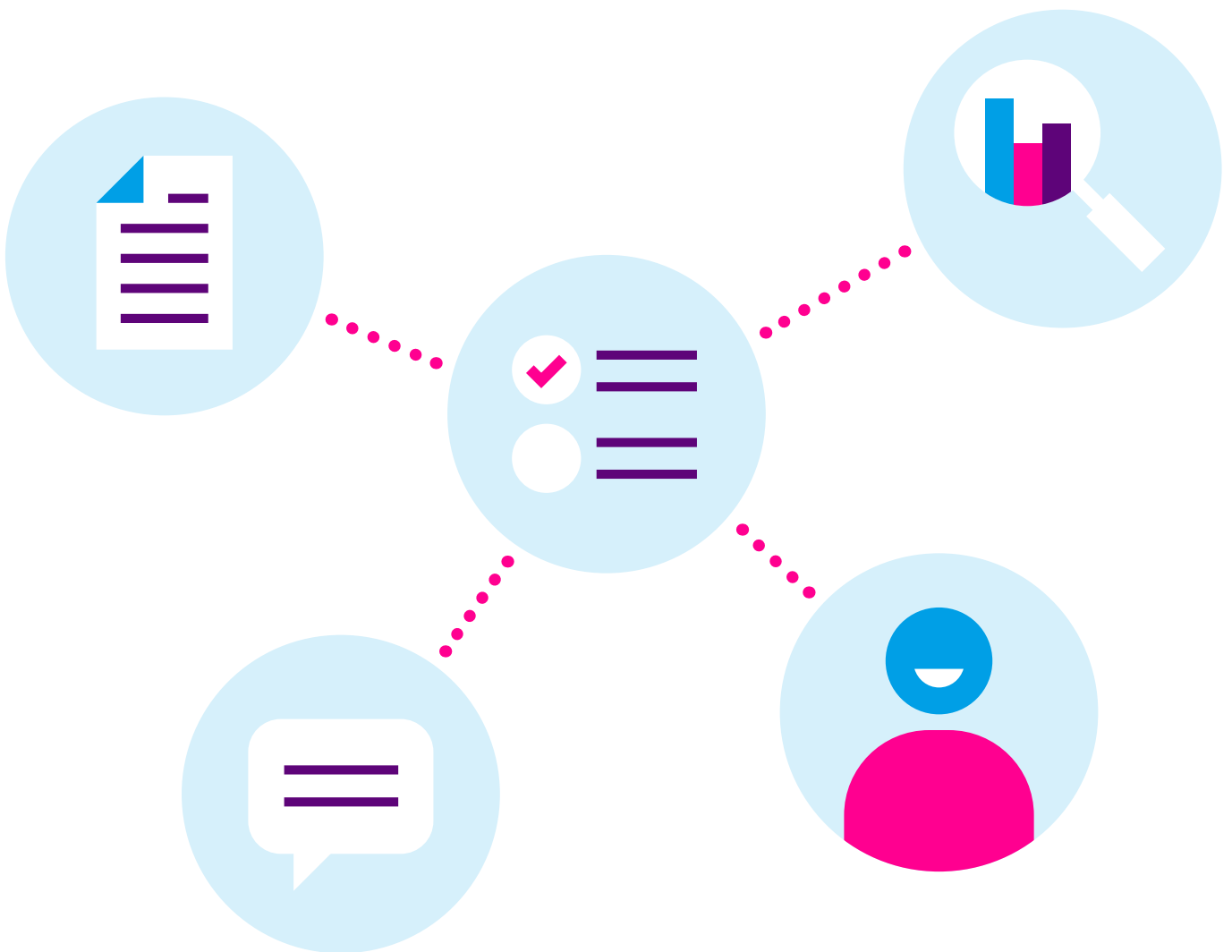
The interviews were undertaken via video conference, transcribed and stored in a secure cloud environment. Identifying characteristics were removed to ensure privacy. The dataset of more than 120,000 words will be kept for two years following publication of this report and will then be destroyed.

Phase 4 – Data analysis and reporting

The gathered data was processed and interpreted using statistical and thematic analysis. This analytical work identifies the barriers that impede mid-career progression and potential solutions to address these challenges. The analysis combines insights from the literature review and interview findings, aiming to provide actionable recommendations for improving career advancement opportunities in public relations.

Phase 5 – Participant feedback

A draft version of this report was shared with the research team and all participants for feedback. This resulted in more than 80 verbatim comments. These additional perspectives have been reflected in the findings.



Gender inequality in public relations: a literature overview



This literature overview draws from multiple data sources, including academic research, industry reports and national census data. It is intended as a summary of the knowledge relating to women working in public relations and is not an exhaustive academic-level literature review.

Industry data reveals a clear gender imbalance between practitioners working in junior and senior positions in public relations. Public relations is a feminised profession. The PR Population Report published by the CIPR found that 66% (28,848) of practitioners working in England and Wales in professional roles are female and 34% (25,399) are male (Verinder, 2024).

The situation is reversed in senior roles, where 54% (10,700) of practitioners are male and 46% (9,312) are female. The study adopts the Office for National Statistics' standard occupational classifications, using professional to describe a junior and mid-level practitioner role and director to describe a senior role.

Sex by occupation

Sex	Director		Professional		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Female	9,312	46%	28,848	66%	38,160	60%
Male	10,720	54%	14,679	34%	25,399	40%
Total	20,033	100%	43,530	100%	63,563	100%

Table: Public relations roles by gender from the PR Population Report (Verinder, 2024)

This gap represents a drop in representation of 20 percentage points between professional and director levels. This means that there is a shortfall of 3,910 women in senior roles to match the situation for junior and mid-level practitioners. We've called this gap the Missing Women. It is the first time the issue has been described in practitioner numbers and is larger than originally envisaged.

The PR Population Report is based on the ONS 2021 census data and is therefore the most accurate dataset available of the population of 63,563 practitioners working in England and Wales. Data for Northern Ireland and Wales was not available.

Structural barriers to advancement

This inverse relationship between seniority and female representation persists despite research indicating no significant differences in leadership abilities between genders (Hon, 1995; Neill and Meng, 2021).

Leadership and organisational culture

Research indicates that public relations leadership structures typically favour traditionally masculine leadership traits, creating systemic barriers to women's advancement (Yeomans, 2019). This bias manifests in promotion and hiring processes, limiting opportunities for women to reach executive positions despite possessing requisite skills and experience (Grunig et al., 2001). The persistence of male-dominated leadership perpetuates traditional power dynamics, making it particularly challenging for women to gain influence in high-level decision-making roles.

Economic inequality

Industry studies consistently demonstrate a gender pay gap of 15-20% in public relations, with men earning significantly more than women in equivalent positions (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2024). This economic inequality reflects a broader trend in gendered labour markets, where female-dominated professions frequently face wage suppression and slower career advancement (Grunig et al., 2001). The undervaluation of women's contributions is evident not only in salary disparities but also in restricted access to leadership training and developmental opportunities (Bridgen, 2022).

Career barriers and challenges

Emotional labour expectations

A significant barrier to women's advancement in public relations is the disproportionate expectation of emotional labour. Millette et al argue that women are expected to perform additional relational and emotional tasks beyond their formal responsibilities (Millette et al., 2023). Whilst these skills are essential to public relations practice, they are frequently undervalued in promotion decisions, creating a situation where increased responsibility does not translate to career advancement (Bridgen, 2022).

Work-life balance and flexibility

The public relations industry's "always-on" culture, characterised by unpredictable crises and tight deadlines, creates particular challenges for women who must balance career and personal responsibilities (Daymon and Demetrious, 2013). COVID-19 continues to challenge the workplace and the balance between remote and office work. There is currently a backlash against remote and flexible work with organisations seeking to get employees back to the office. This disadvantages practitioners with caregiving responsibilities.

Mid-career attrition

Factors contributing to women leaving practice

Women frequently exit the public relations industry during their 30s and 40s, when they typically transition into senior leadership roles. Research indicates three primary drivers (Topić et al., 2020):

- 1 Work-life balance challenges, particularly in managing demanding schedules with family responsibilities
- 2 High levels of burnout and declining mental health due to intense workload and pressure
- 3 Limited career development opportunities and leadership pathways

Impact on industry leadership

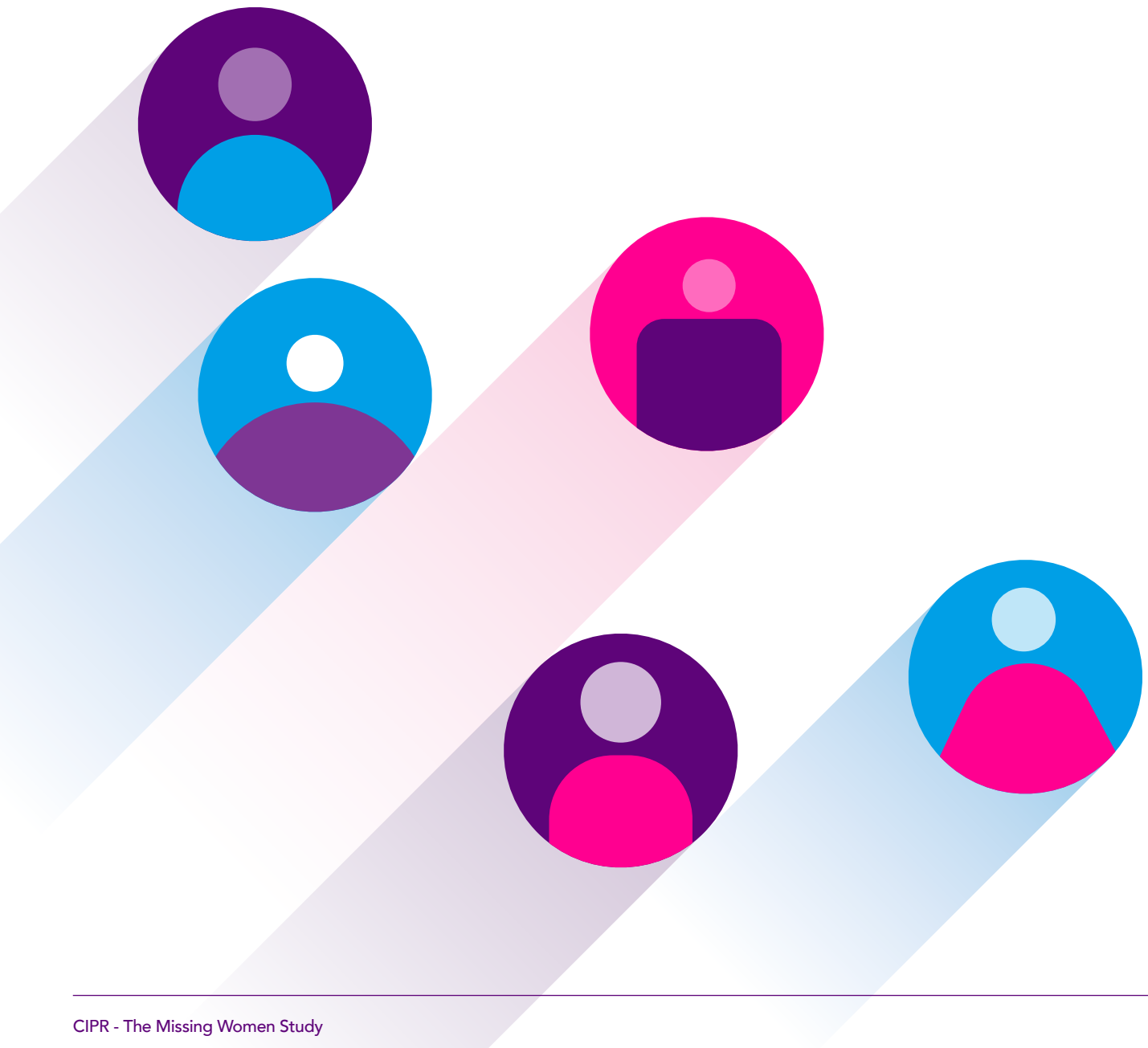
The high attrition rate among mid-career women creates a self-perpetuating cycle that maintains gender disparity in senior roles. Without adequate female representation in leadership positions, there are fewer role models and mentors for emerging female practitioners, further hampering progress towards gender equality in the industry.

Research discussion

The literature suggests several areas for further research. The persistence of gender inequality in public relations reflects complex structural and cultural barriers that require systematic intervention. While the industry has made progress in identifying these challenges, meaningful change requires comprehensive organisational reforms that address work culture, leadership development and compensation practices.

The challenges women face in public relations are multifaceted, spanning issues of discrimination, leadership barriers, pay inequities and identity struggles. These obstacles are amplified for women from diverse backgrounds, creating stark underrepresentation that further perpetuates inequity.

Addressing these challenges requires transformative change - shifting organisational policies, dismantling cultural biases and fostering inclusive environments. Only then can the field of public relations genuinely empower the women who play such an essential role in its success.

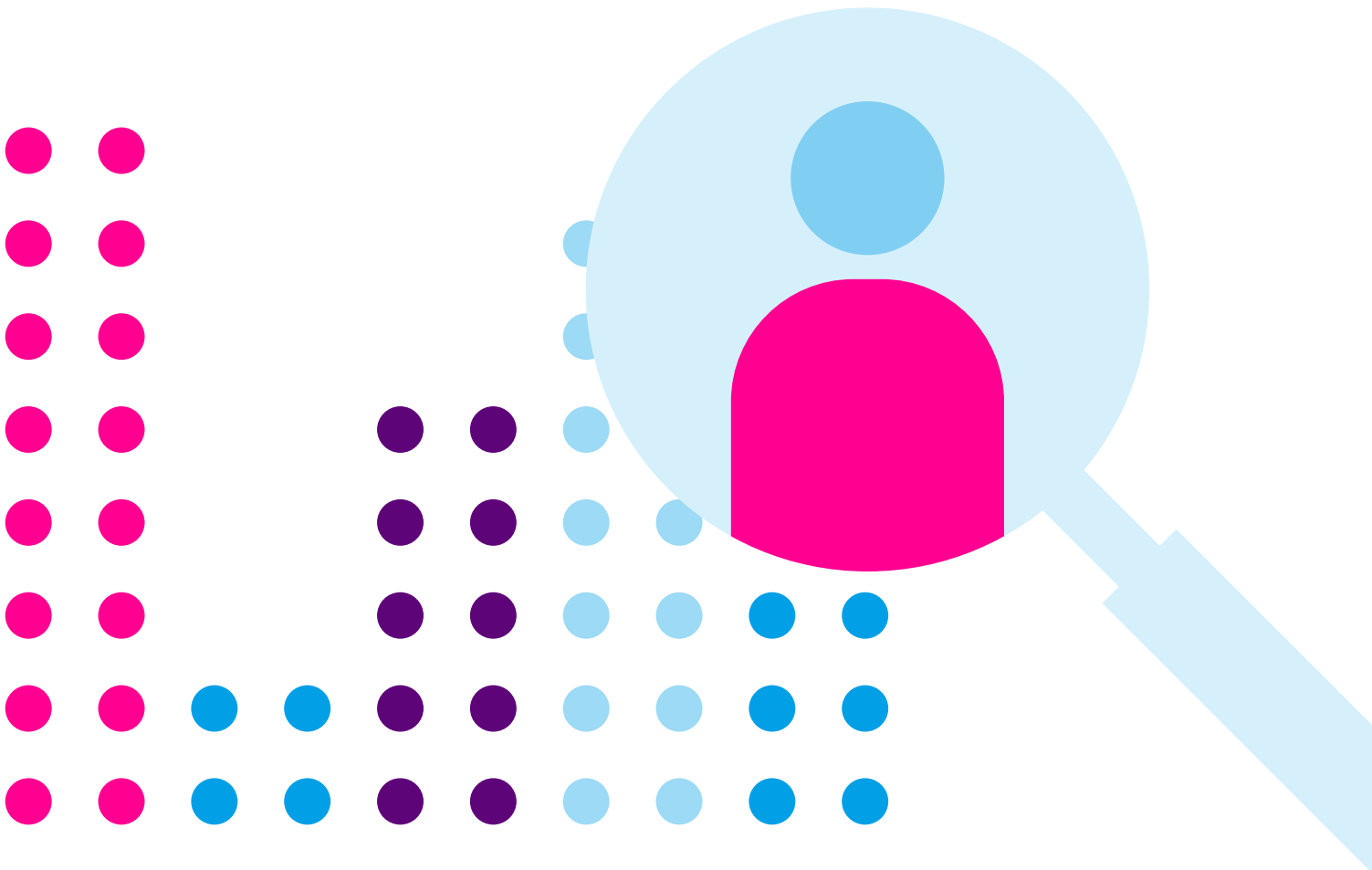


Snapshot of the issues



This section examines the quantitative data from the study. It finds that public relations is a field with significant structural challenges around gender equality, work-life balance and career development despite relatively high overall career satisfaction.

The high percentage of respondents reporting discrimination and unequal opportunities suggests persistent systemic issues, particularly affecting women in the industry. Each of these issues was explored through qualitative interviews.



Gender-based issues

- **63.5%** of respondents have experienced gender-based discrimination or harassment
- **55.8%** felt they did not have equal opportunities for advancement compared to male colleagues
- Only **18.9%** rated gender equality in their workplace as excellent

Working hours and work-life balance

- **71.7%** work more than 40 hours per week
- **22.4%** work more than 50 hours per week
- Work-life balance ratings show concern:
 - **26.2%** rated it poor or very poor (1-2/5)
 - **45.5%** rated it average (3/5)
 - Only **28.4%** rated it good or excellent (4-5/5)

Top career challenges:

- Burnout (**53.2%**)
- Limited advancement opportunities (**47.2%**)
- High-pressure work environment (**46.8%**)
- Poor workplace culture (**46.8%**)
- Lack of mentorship (**44.2%**)
- Work-life balance issues (**38.6%**)
- Lack of diversity in leadership (**33.9%**)
- Unequal pay (**29.6%**)

Career satisfaction

- Despite the challenges, overall satisfaction is moderate to positive:
 - **48.5%** rated their satisfaction as good or very good (4-5/5)
 - **43.3%** rated it as average (3/5)
 - Only **7.7%** rated it poor or very poor (1-2/5)

Study findings



Why public relations can be a rewarding career

It would be very easy to take a wholly negative viewpoint of gender in public relations, but despite the inequity of practice, women find many aspects of their roles deeply satisfying. Analysis of qualitative interviews with practitioners found consistent themes around elements that provide professional fulfilment and engagement.

This section explores these positive aspects, from strategic influence to creative opportunity, while acknowledging that access to these elements often depends on organisational culture and support. Public relations offers potential for rewarding career opportunities when women find roles that allow them to utilise their capabilities thoroughly.

Strategic impact and influence

The qualitative research found that women in public relations find satisfaction in making a strategic impact as trusted advisors. Many respondents highlighted their pleasure in seeing their public relations counsel create meaningful change within organisations, especially when their expertise is valued at senior levels. When trusted by leadership, the ability to shape strategic direction and make autonomous decisions provides significant job satisfaction.

“I love my job... I find it endlessly challenging, creative and fulfilling - but only when I can get on with it, trusted to use my experience and respected for my counsel.”

Creativity and intellectual stimulation

Another significant source of satisfaction that emerged was the creative and intellectually stimulating nature of public relations work. Women consistently expressed enthusiasm for the variety inherent in their roles, where there are consistent opportunities to learn new skills and tackle diverse challenges. When supported by their organisations, this continuous professional development provides both personal growth and career progression.

“I love the opportunity to constantly learn new skills, practices and ways of doing great comms.”

Relationship building and networks

Building and nurturing relationships with clients, stakeholders or colleagues brings considerable fulfilment to respondents. Many practitioners particularly value the collaborative aspects of public relations work, including mentoring junior team members and working within supportive teams. Strong professional networks, particularly with other women in the industry, provide valuable support and solidarity.

Leadership and development

The opportunity to lead and develop teams brings significant satisfaction, particularly when shaping organisational culture and supporting the progression of other women. Many respondents find fulfilment in mentoring and creating positive workplace environments that foster growth and development.

“I liked being a team leader and coach and being able to define the public relations strategy, try new things, [and] advocate for the strategic role of corporate communications and public relations.”

Professional development

Formal training programmes and opportunities to gain professional qualifications are highly valued. Engagement with professional bodies such as the CIPR and PRCA provides additional satisfaction through structured development and industry recognition. The chance to keep pace with digital innovation and new communication technologies offers ongoing learning opportunities.

“Now, more than 20+ years later, the agency continues to thrive and the flexibility extends to cover all needs. We have recruited new entrants into public relations aged 60+ and have juggled maternity leave, menopause, caring responsibilities and family crises without detriment to clients, colleagues or business success.”

Sector diversity

The variety of working across different industries and organisations provides intellectual stimulation and broad business experience. Learning about various sectors and tackling diverse business challenges keeps the role engaging and offers continuous learning opportunities.

Flexible working and autonomy

Organisations offering genuine flexibility in working arrangements significantly enhance job satisfaction. Some women found that moving into freelance or self-employed consultancy work provided better work-life balance and greater control over working patterns and deliberately pursued this career choice. Others praised employers who implemented effective hybrid working policies. This flexibility allows them to maintain both their career and personal commitments.

“My current workplace is heads and shoulders above so many agencies - bringing in a four-day working week and flexible working practices.”

Purpose and meaning

The purposeful nature of public relations work resonates strongly. Practitioners express satisfaction in contributing to meaningful causes and work that makes a genuine difference to organisations and communities. While challenging, crisis communications and reputation management provide opportunities to demonstrate strategic value.

“This is the most interesting and dynamic area of work you could do. The challenges are that it is a function that continues to shift in focus, capacity and expectation, unlike other functions like HR, IT and Finance. We are a more dynamic profession.”

Broader industry challenges around recognition, equitable progression and sustainable work-life balance often overshadow these elements. The study suggests that when women find roles that allow them to fully utilise their skills, receive appropriate recognition and access proper support, they see the fundamental nature of public relations work as deeply rewarding.

Why women question the sustainability of a career in public relations

While the industry offers creative and strategic opportunities, significant structural barriers impede career progression and job satisfaction, according to respondents. Key issues include unsustainable work-life expectations, particularly around the 'always on' culture and persistent gender discrimination affecting pay, promotion and workplace culture. Ageism, class barriers and limited support during key life stages such as maternity, caring for young children and children with additional needs and menopause compound these challenges.

The impact of these barriers intensifies as women advance in their careers, leading many to question their long-term future in public relations. This is particularly acute for those with caring responsibilities or who seek genuine flexibility. Financial concerns, including job security and pension implications, add further pressure.

Work-life balance challenges

The 'always on' culture, particularly prevalent in agencies, creates unsustainable pressure. Expectations of 24/7 availability make this incredibly challenging for those with caring responsibilities, who often have to choose between career progression and family life.

"I am only still in public relations because my current agency is very flexible and allows room for family life. However, I had to take a big demotion to find a role enabling me to do this."

"The news cycle is 24/7, but I'm increasingly aware of how unhealthy it is for me to be switched on at all times, yet that is the expectation."

Career advancement barriers

Career advancement is a persistent challenge. A total of 130 women (56%) reported feeling that they did not have equal opportunities for advancement compared to their male colleagues. Of these, 27 (12%) mentioned maternity-related issues such as pregnancy, motherhood, childcare, or returning to work as a factor.

Some have been forced to accept demotions to secure flexible working arrangements. The lack of senior female role models compounds this issue, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of underrepresentation at leadership levels. Women don't see other women in management roles.

“Maternity pay in most agencies is abysmal; taking time off for maternity leave hinders professional development.”

“Now I am a mother, lucky to have a well-paid part-time role. I think these opportunities are in the minority (particularly in-house) and I know many women who left public relations when they had children.”

Recognition and value

A recurring theme is the lack of recognition of public relations' value at a management level. Communications and public relations functions are frequently undervalued, and they struggle to demonstrate a return on investment compared to other disciplines. As a result, they are often first in line for budget cuts.

This systemic devaluation translates into poor compensation, which may be why salaries do not keep pace with inflation and why there are significant disparities compared to male colleagues. This issue lies at the root of the gender pay issue.

“I love the opportunity to constantly learn new skills, practices and ways of doing great comms, but I find it ever frustrating that comms is still not taken as seriously as other disciplines and is left out of the boardroom.”

Workplace culture

The workplace culture in many organisations remains problematic, characterised by male-dominated senior leadership and “old boys’ network” dynamics. Women report experiencing gender-based discrimination and harassment alongside toxic workplace behaviours that create hostile work environments.

“Too many agencies lack female role models at a senior level. It’s why I left my previous agency and so many peers have done the same.”

Industry pressures

Industry pressures create additional strain through high-stress levels and constant management or client demands. Many women describe an increasingly competitive, rather than collaborative, environment, where focusing on billing and targets overshadows well-being. This frequently leads to burnout, particularly in agency settings, where the pressure is most acute.

Ageism and life stages

The research reveals significant concerns about ageism, particularly affecting women over 40. The perimenopause and menopause are generally not understood by employees and there is limited support or understanding for these life stages. This creates additional barriers to progression and job satisfaction.

“Many women [working in public relations] are considered a spent force beyond a certain age, their experience irrelevant and there is little incentive to stay in the profession unless you love the work and make compromises.”

“Now, with perimenopause and menopause, I feel I have lost confidence in my ability to gain a more senior role.”

Professional development

There is widespread frustration among respondents about the lack of structured mentoring and development opportunities. Many women report having to self-fund professional development and qualifications. Support for returners after career breaks is often poor or non-existent, creating additional barriers to progression.

Class and intersectionality

Women from minority ethnic and working-class backgrounds or with neurodiverse characteristics report additional challenges in progression. The lack of diversity in senior roles extends beyond gender, creating compound barriers for many women.

“In pursuing director of communications roles, I not only faced gender discrimination but a significant class barrier.”

Financial insecurity

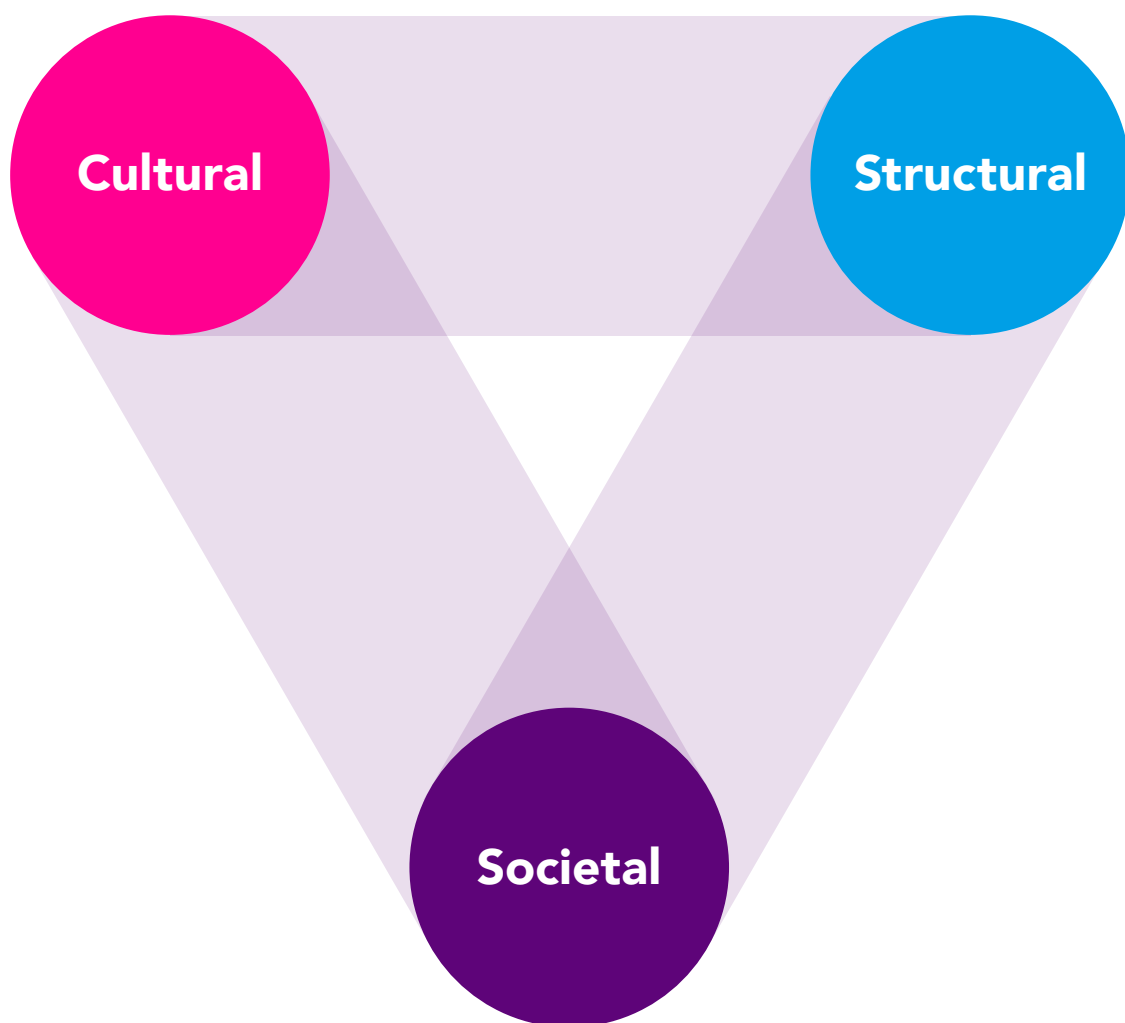
Women express serious concerns about job security, particularly during economic downturns. Those working part-time or flexibly often face challenges maintaining career progression while managing financial stability. The impact on pension contributions and long-term financial security is a significant worry, particularly for those who have taken career breaks.

“I am the main breadwinner for my family... As I’ve climbed the ladder and been in increasingly more male-dominated environments and closer to the perceived centres of power, I’ve suffered far more gender-related bullying.”

Intersecting challenges: cultural, structural and societal barriers

The challenges described intensify as women progress in their careers or take on caring responsibilities, often leading them to question whether remaining in the industry is sustainable long-term. The intersection of these issues creates complexity that impacts women's career progression and sustainability.

The study identified three interconnected barriers that drive women to leave the public relations profession.



Cultural barriers include a persistent “boys’ club” mentality in leadership, devaluation of public relations as a “soft” function and gender biases in everyday interactions. Women face constant scrutiny over their appearance and commitment, particularly after having children. The data shows that less experienced male colleagues often advance more quickly through informal networks, while toxic workplace behaviours are unchallenged.

Structural barriers systematically disadvantage women through limited development pathways, poor maternity benefits and inflexible working patterns. The scarcity of senior part-time roles creates a “part-time penalty” where women must choose between career progression and family responsibilities. Communication or public relations teams often face disproportionate budget cuts and limited management recognition, while women’s health issues such as menopause receive inadequate support.

Respondents told us that their menopause symptoms have made it difficult for them to function optimally in the demanding public relations environment. Menopause support requires employers to make reasonable adjustments in the same way they are legally bound to for neurodiverse or disabled employees.

Societal barriers reflect broader gender inequalities, particularly around caregiving expectations and childcare costs. Women shoulder a disproportionate mental load of household management alongside professional duties. Intersectional challenges affect women from working-class backgrounds and from ethnic backgrounds or with neurodiverse characteristics, while age discrimination particularly impacts women over 40. Despite surface-level acceptance, flexible working carries a persistent stigma.

Each of these barriers is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Cultural barriers

The cultural barriers faced by women in public relations reveal a profession struggling with deeply ingrained gender biases despite its predominantly female workforce. A persistent male-dominated leadership culture maintains a “boys’ club” mentality that shapes everything from casual interactions to career-defining decisions.

The devaluation of public relations as a “soft” function compared to technical or financial roles creates a double bind for women. Their expertise is frequently undermined in meetings and boardrooms, yet they’re expected to handle the pastoral care of teams and social-administrative tasks - responsibilities rarely assigned to their male counterparts.

This manifests in daily culture issues such as microaggressions and systemic disadvantages. Respondents (8%) describe being talked over in meetings, watching their ideas gain traction only when repeated by a male colleague and facing constant scrutiny over their appearance and “gravitas”. After having children, women report fighting against assumptions about their commitment to work, while male parents face no such prejudice.

The data reveals how gender bias infiltrates promotion decisions and leadership opportunities. Women describe watching less experienced male colleagues advance more quickly, often through informal networks and relationships from which women are excluded. These biases become self-perpetuating as toxic workplace behaviours go unchallenged, normalising discriminatory practices.

Perhaps most troublingly, some women who do reach senior positions perpetuate rather than challenge these discriminatory practices, having internalised the very cultural barriers they faced. This creates a cycle where surviving and succeeding within the existing system takes precedence over transforming it.

The result is a professional culture that exhausts women through constant pressure to prove their worth, manage impossible expectations and navigate gendered double standards. This cultural environment doesn’t just impact individual careers - it shapes the entire profession’s approach to leadership, value and success.

The data suggests that addressing these cultural barriers requires more than surface-level diversity initiatives. It demands a fundamental reimagining of leadership, value and workplace culture in public relations, challenging deeply held assumptions about gender, work and professional worth.

Structural barriers

The public relations industry's structural barriers create challenges that systematically disadvantage women throughout their careers. From the outset, the lack of formal development pathways and sponsorship programmes limits women's ability to navigate career advancement strategically. This is exacerbated by pay disparities that compound over time, creating long-term financial implications.

The industry's approach to parenthood is a critical point of failure. Statutory maternity benefits and inadequate return-to-work support force many women to make difficult choices about their careers just as they reach mid-senior levels. The limited availability of senior part-time roles and absence of job-sharing opportunities effectively create a "part-time penalty" - women must often choose between career progression and family responsibilities.

Working patterns remain rigid and traditionally structured, fundamentally incompatible with caring responsibilities. This inflexibility is particularly problematic as women typically shoulder the majority of caring duties. While flexible working policies may exist on paper, the reality often falls short, with women reporting pressure to maintain full-time presence and availability despite reduced hours.

The structural devaluation of public relations within organisations manifests in several ways. First, public relations departments are often the first to face budget cuts, indicating their perceived dispensability. Limited recognition at the management level further diminishes the function's strategic influence and, by extension, the career prospects of those within it.

Women's health and wellbeing issues, particularly menopause, receive inadequate support and recognition. This creates additional barriers during key career stages when many women are positioned for senior roles. The lack of accountability for improving gender equality means these issues persist without meaningful intervention.

These structural barriers form an interconnected system that becomes increasingly difficult to navigate as women progress in their careers. The cumulative effect pushes many talented women out of the profession, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that maintains gender inequality at senior levels.

The data suggests that addressing these structural barriers requires fundamental changes to how public relations organisations operate, from training and development to working patterns and health support. Individual initiatives risk becoming superficial solutions to deeply rooted problems without such systematic change.

Societal barriers

The societal barriers facing women in public relations reflect broader gender inequalities that exist in both professional and personal spheres. At their core lies the persistent expectation that women will serve as primary caregivers, an assumption that shapes career trajectories from the moment women enter the profession.

The financial burden of childcare presents a significant obstacle. Women describe making complex calculations about whether their salary justifies increasingly expensive childcare costs, particularly in the early years of their careers when wages are lower. This economic pressure combines with the mental load of managing household and family responsibilities, creating an exhausting double shift that disproportionately falls on women.

Class and racial barriers add additional layers of complexity. Women from working-class backgrounds report struggling with confidence and access to professional networks, while women with neurodiverse characteristics and from minority ethnic or working class backgrounds face compound discrimination. These intersectional challenges affect everything from career entry to progression opportunities.

Despite surface-level acceptance, the stigma surrounding flexible and part-time working remains entrenched.

Women report being overlooked for promotions and serious projects when working flexibly, reinforcing a culture prioritising presence over output. This stigma mainly affects those with caring responsibilities, creating a cycle where women's careers stall just as they reach mid-senior levels.

Age discrimination emerges as a significant barrier, particularly affecting women over 40. The data reveals a troubling pattern where older women face increasing marginalisation and their experience is often devalued or dismissed. This ageism intersects with gendered assumptions about leadership, where traditionally masculine traits remain the default model of senior capability.

The broader devaluation of communications roles in business reflects and reinforces these barriers. Despite its strategic importance, public relations is often viewed as 'soft' work, reflecting broader societal biases about female-dominated professions. This perception affects everything from budget allocations to management representation.

These societal barriers create a complex web that women must navigate throughout their careers in public relations. The data suggests that meaningful change requires addressing workplace policies and deeper societal attitudes about gender, work and value.

Career strategies: How women navigate success in public relations

The key finding from the study is that women who succeed in senior roles have workarounds to develop successful and sustainable careers within public relations practice. While there are isolated examples of supportive workplace environments, women who are successful in senior roles are generally creative and resilient and have found ways to adapt to systemic bias.

Strategic career choices

The most successful practitioners take a strategic approach to career path management, treating their careers as portfolios to be actively managed rather than linear progressions. Many deliberately move between in-house and agency roles at different career stages, using each environment's unique advantages to build their skills and networks.

Some practitioners find that taking on interim and freelance work gives them greater control over their professional lives, whilst others move into consultancy or self-employment to gain flexibility. The most adaptable professionals switch between full-time, part-time and freelance work depending on their life stage and personal needs.

"Over a 30-year career, I have chosen different paths at different points: full-time, part-time, self-employed, interim and permanent roles, in-house and agency. This has given me immense flexibility and variety."

Choosing progressive employers

Finding progressive employers emerges as another strategy to support sustainable careers. Forward-thinking women in public relations actively seek out organisations with genuine flexible working policies, not just those that pay lip service to work-life balance. They look for employers offering concrete benefits like four-day work weeks and supportive maternity policies. Many specifically target companies with female leadership, recognising that these environments often better understand and accommodate their needs.

Investing in professional growth

Professional development plays an important role in career sustainability. Recognising that waiting for employer-sponsored opportunities might mean waiting too long, many women take the initiative to self-fund their qualifications and training. They actively engage with professional bodies such as the CIPR to stay current and connected.

Building strong professional networks, particularly with other women in the industry, provides important support and opportunities. Many also take on mentoring roles, finding that supporting others' growth contributes to their own professional development.

The career compromise for senior women

However, these strategies often come with significant compromises. Some women accept demotions to secure flexible working arrangements that accommodate their life needs. Others make the difficult choice to prioritise work-life balance over career advancement, recognising that the traditional path to senior roles often demands unsustainable sacrifices. Many find themselves facing an unwelcome choice between pursuing senior positions and maintaining family life.

The reality is that whilst these strategies help women navigate successful careers in public relations, they shouldn't have to work so hard to succeed. The need for such careful navigation reflects deeper structural issues in the industry. Women are finding ways to thrive, but they're doing so despite systemic barriers rather than because those barriers have been removed.

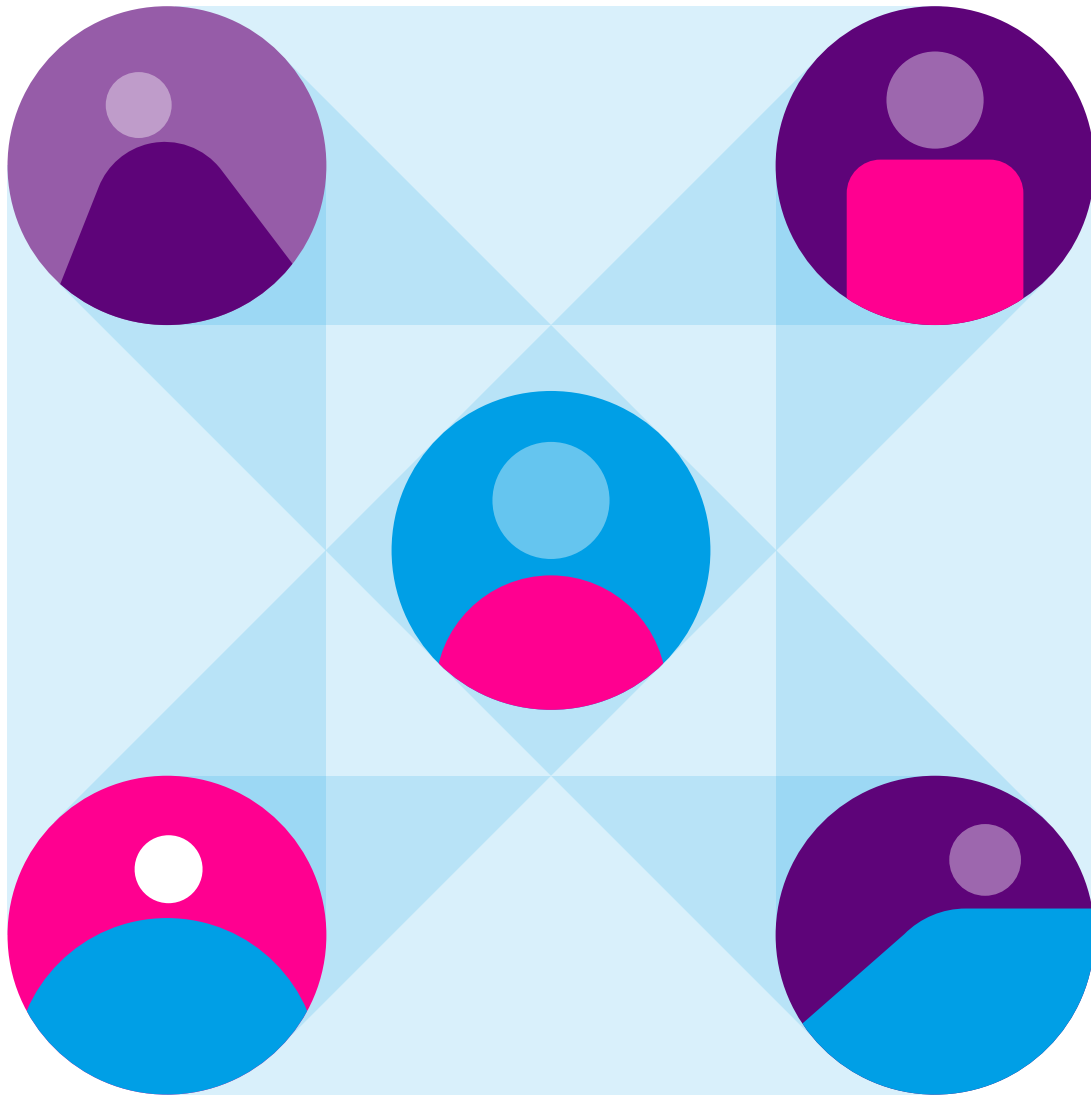
Yet these strategies reveal something powerful: women in public relations are not passive victims of circumstance but active architects of their careers. They're finding creative ways to build sustainable professional lives, even as they push for the broader changes needed to make the industry truly inclusive.

Their success stories provide both inspiration and a blueprint for others following in their footsteps whilst also highlighting the work still needed to create an industry where such careful navigation isn't necessary for success.

Discussion and recommendations



The research indicates meaningful progress requires a comprehensive and sustained approach rather than isolated initiatives. Organisations successfully retaining women implement multiple concurrent strategies supported by strong leadership commitment and cultural transformation. The study identifies five intervention areas, understanding that these must work in synergy rather than as standalone solutions.



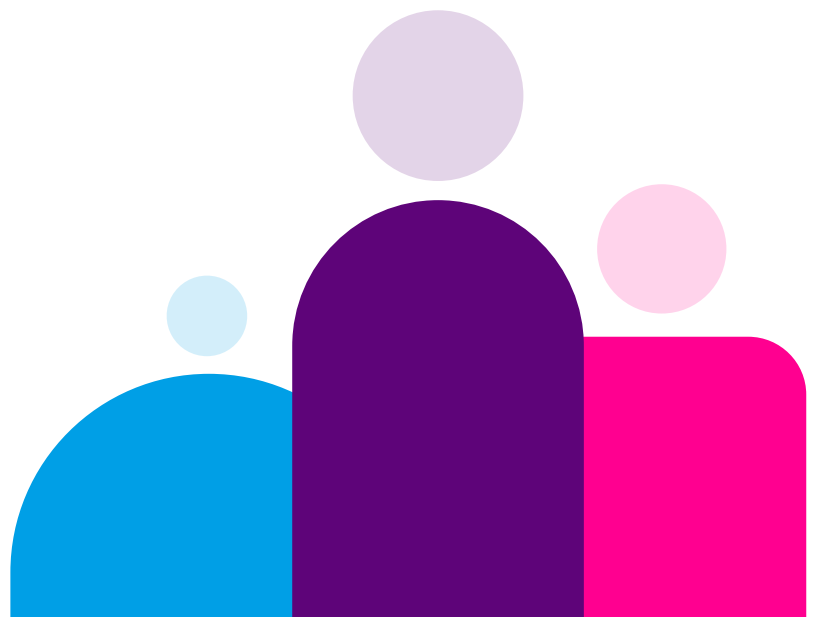
1. Leadership development and progression

Targeted development opportunities must be balanced with systemic change in how organisations approach leadership. This includes formal sponsorship programmes where senior leaders actively create opportunities for emerging talent, particularly those from underrepresented groups.

Organisations need structured career development frameworks with transparent progression criteria and regular salary reviews. Investment in professional qualifications and active succession planning helps build diverse leadership pipelines that reflect the profession at all levels.

Rather than requiring women to undergo additional training to compete, organisations should focus on creating balanced and equitable workplaces where different leadership styles are recognised and valued. This includes challenging implicit biases around working patterns and cultural expectations that can influence perceptions of colleagues' commitment and readiness to progress.

The interrelation between leadership development and other recommendations cannot be emphasised enough. While many organisations claim to offer zero-tolerance policies and DEI-related training, the differentiator lies in how comprehensively these connect to broader cultural and structural changes. The emphasis must be on targeted and tailored opportunities, balanced with management and organisational training, as interpretation of policies and gatekeeping of opportunities often lie with management teams.



2. Work pattern flexibility

Innovation in working arrangements is important for retention, but flexibility must be meaningful rather than superficial. This means offering job sharing at senior levels, establishing clear boundaries around availability and ensuring reduced hours come with proportional responsibility and pay. Organisations must move beyond simply having flexible working policies to creating environments where flexible working carries no career penalties.

Implementing hybrid and remote working policies should focus on output and impact rather than presenteeism. This requires a fundamental shift in how organisations evaluate performance and contribution. Research shows that progressive employers who implement genuine flexibility, such as four-day working weeks, see significant benefits in talent retention. However, this must be accompanied by a shift in client-related culture and expectations, which can otherwise be exclusionary.

3. Life stage and well-being support

Enhanced parental leave policies need to be complemented by structured return-to-work programmes that support talent retention during key transition periods. An explicit focus on parental leave should encompass both maternity and paternity benefits, recognising the importance of supporting caring responsibilities more generally. This broader approach helps challenge traditional gender roles and supports more equitable distribution of caring responsibilities.

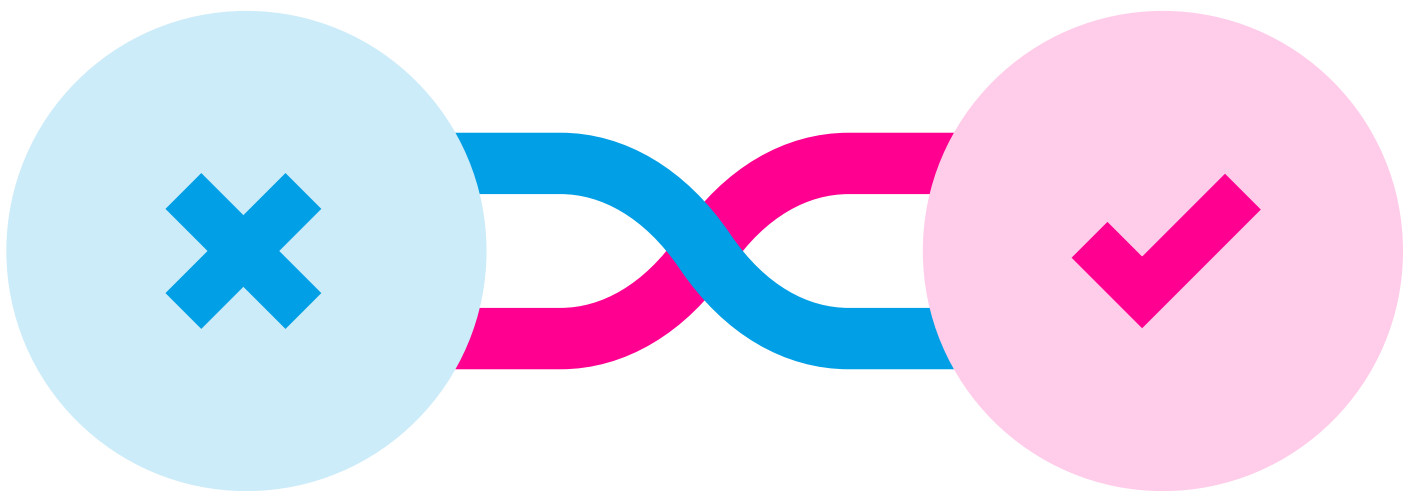
Organisations must provide comprehensive support for different life stages, including menopause, through workplace adjustments and increased understanding. Broader well-being frameworks should encompass carers' policies, mental health support and mid-career coaching to help women navigate different life phases while maintaining career momentum. This support needs to recognise the interrelated nature of personal and professional challenges.

4. Cultural and behavioural change

Cultural transformation requires sustained effort beyond standard diversity and inclusion training. Women should not be required to “build confidence” or undergo assertiveness training, which maintains the status quo. Organisations must create environments where everyone’s contribution is sought and valued and where softer skills are welcomed within the workplace. This includes actively recognising different leadership styles and celebrating diverse role models.

This represents a fundamental shift from requiring women to adapt to existing cultures towards creating truly inclusive environments.

Strong mentoring networks and peer support create communities that help women navigate career challenges. However, the emphasis should be on organisational change rather than requiring women to adapt to existing cultures. Zero-tolerance approaches to discriminatory behaviour must be consistently enforced.



5. Structural and organisational change

Securing management representation for communications functions helps challenge the devaluation of public relations work and ensures that the strategic value of practice is recognised. Regular equal pay audits with clear action plans address structural inequalities, while investment in technology enables genuine flexible working.

The business community needs to better recognise, value and invest in public relations as a strategic function. This requires both internal advocacy within organisations and broader industry-wide efforts to demonstrate the strategic value of communications work.

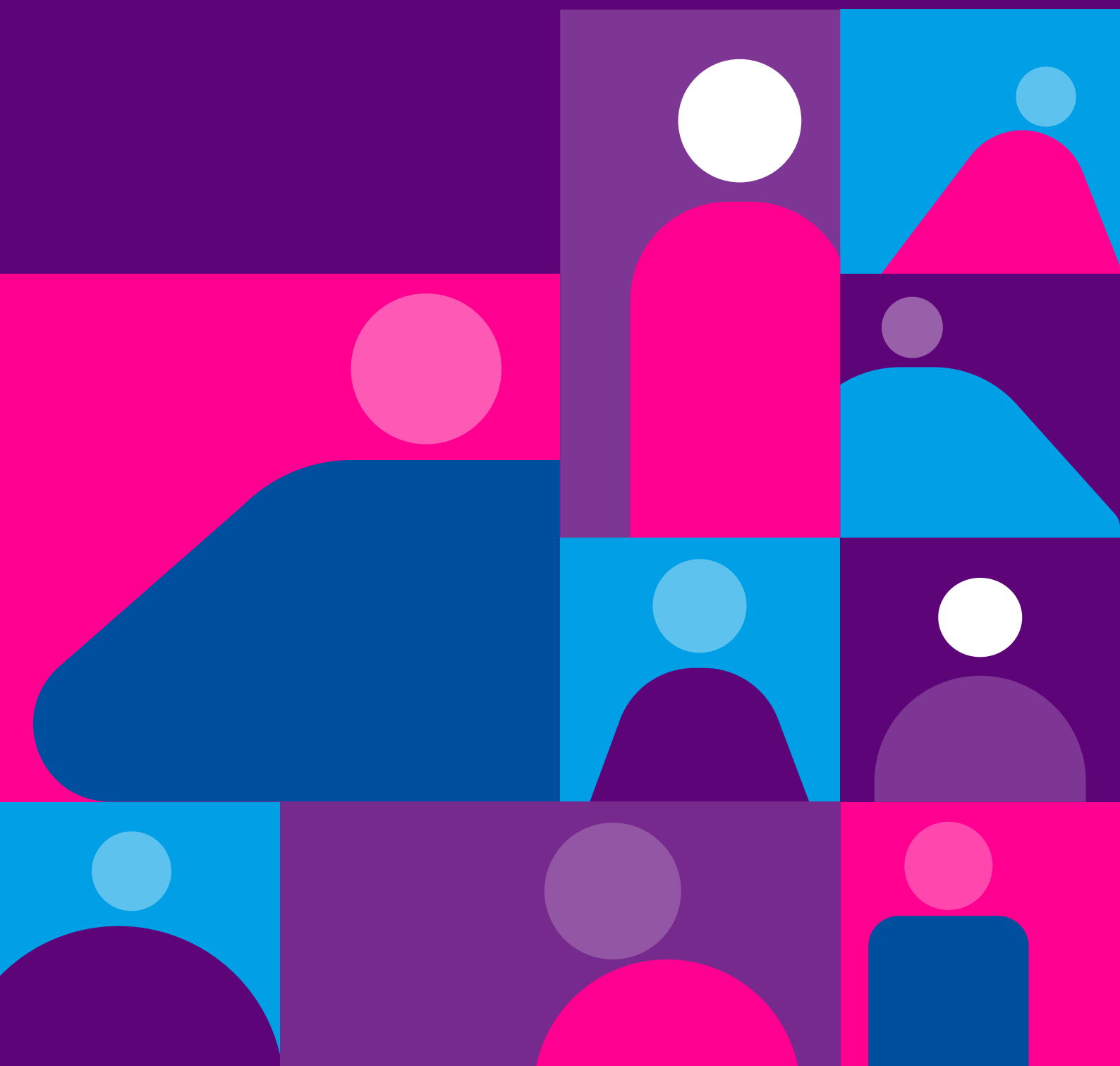
Organisations need robust accountability frameworks for diversity targets and regular culture surveys to monitor progress. This should include tracking how policies are interpreted and implemented, as gatekeeping of opportunities often occurs at the management level.

The research conclusively shows that piecemeal interventions do not succeed, explaining the limited progress made in the 50 years since gender inequality was first identified as an issue within practice. Organisations making genuine progress treat retention as a strategic priority, supported by senior leadership commitment, adequate resourcing and regular monitoring.

Most importantly, successful retention acknowledges that policy change alone is insufficient. It must be accompanied by genuine cultural transformation that challenges deep-rooted assumptions about gender, work and leadership in public relations. This requires addressing both explicit barriers and implicit biases that influence how policies are interpreted and opportunities are allocated.

The data suggests that organisations successfully retain women by implementing multiple strategies simultaneously rather than isolated initiatives. Successful retention of women in public relations requires interventions across these five key areas.

Population sample



Quantitative fieldwork

The study was undertaken in two phases. To identify viewpoints about the Missing Women issue, a survey was distributed via numerous channels, including the CIPR, the CIPR London Group, Parents in PR, PRCA E&I Group, PRogress, Socially Mobile and Women in PR, to ensure that it reached a population beyond the research team's network. There were 233 responses to this survey. The demographic breakdown is summarised below.

Employment status

- The majority of respondents (**74.7%**) are currently working in public relations
- **15.5%** are considering leaving public relations practice
- **9.9%** have already left public relations practice

Age distribution

The sample skews toward more senior, experienced professionals.

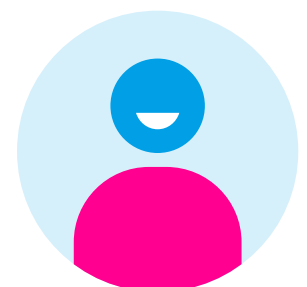
- 18-25: 3 respondents (**1.3%**)
- 26-30: 11 respondents (**4.7%**)
- 31-35: 29 respondents (**12.4%**)
- 36-40: 37 respondents (**15.9%**)
- 41-45: 56 respondents (**24.0%**)
- 46-50: 43 respondents (**18.5%**)
- 51+: 54 respondents (**23.2%**)

Gender

- Overwhelmingly female (**98.7%**)
- A minimal representation of transgender women (**0.4%**)
- Some preferred not to specify (**0.9%**)

Ethnicity

- Predominantly White/Caucasian (**85.4%**)
- Mixed ethnic background (**5.6%**)
- Black/African/Caribbean (**3.0%**)
- Asian (**3.0%**)
- Other ethnicities each represent less than **1%**



Professional experience

Respondents represented a highly experienced and educated workforce.

Years of experience

- 1 6-10 years: 33 respondents (15.0%)
- 2 11-15 years: 50 respondents (22.7%)
- 3 16-20 years: 54 respondents (24.5%)
- 4 21 or more years: 83 respondents (37.7%)

Current roles (main categories)

- Head of Communications/Associate Director: **66** respondents
- Director/Partner/Managing Director: **65** respondents
- Manager: **60** respondents
- Intern/Trainee/Assistant/Executive: **6** respondents
- Various consultant/freelance roles: approximately **12** respondents across different titles

Education

- **48.9%** hold Bachelor's degrees
- **34.8%** have Master's degrees
- **9.9%** have other professional certifications
- **2.1%** have Doctoral degrees

Qualitative fieldwork

109 of the **233** responses were willing to be contacted to participate in an interview. These respondents were split into three categories:

- Currently working in public relations practice
- Working in public relations practice but considering leaving
- Left public relations practice to pursue an alternative career

Ten respondents were selected at random from each group for interviews. These took place via video conference and followed a semi-structured format lasting approximately an hour.

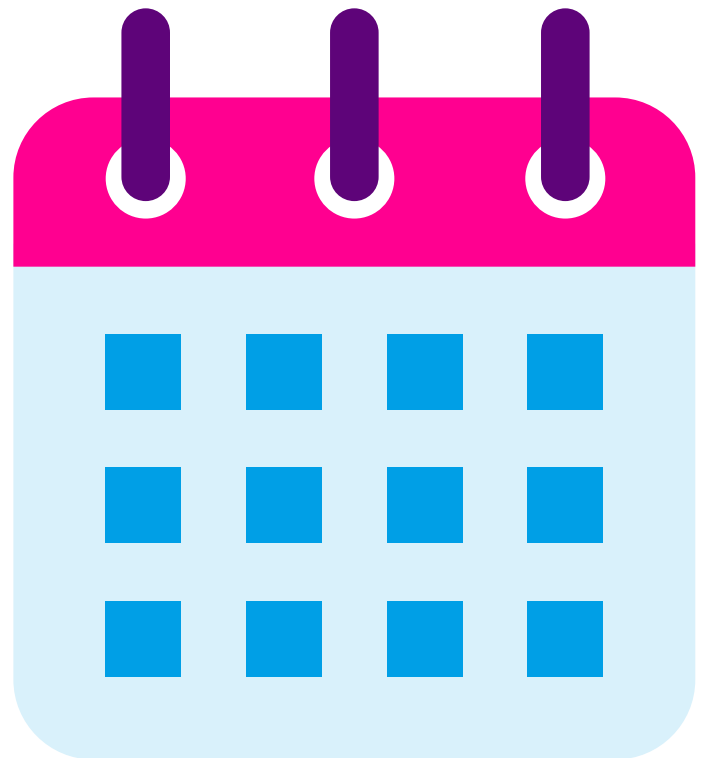


Timeline



The project was undertaken between April 2024 and January 2025. The timeline is set out below.

Activity	Date
Literature review and study design	April 2024
Survey development	May 2024
Recruitment of research team	June 2024
Qualitative research	September and October 2024
Quantitative research	October and November 2024
Write-up	December 2024
Participant feedback	January 2025
Revisions	February 2025
Publication	March 2025



Limitations of the study and areas of future research



This is an empirical research study. While best practice research principles have been followed wherever possible, the study has not been conducted to academic standards.

The study's findings provide instructive insights into the issue of Missing Women in public relations practice. However, it should be viewed as exploratory research that lays the groundwork for future, more rigorous investigations.

Regional, national and international differences and workplace context have not been considered as part of this study. It also omits the perspective of male managers and decision-makers who drive decision-making and have the potential to influence change. These should all be areas for future investigation.

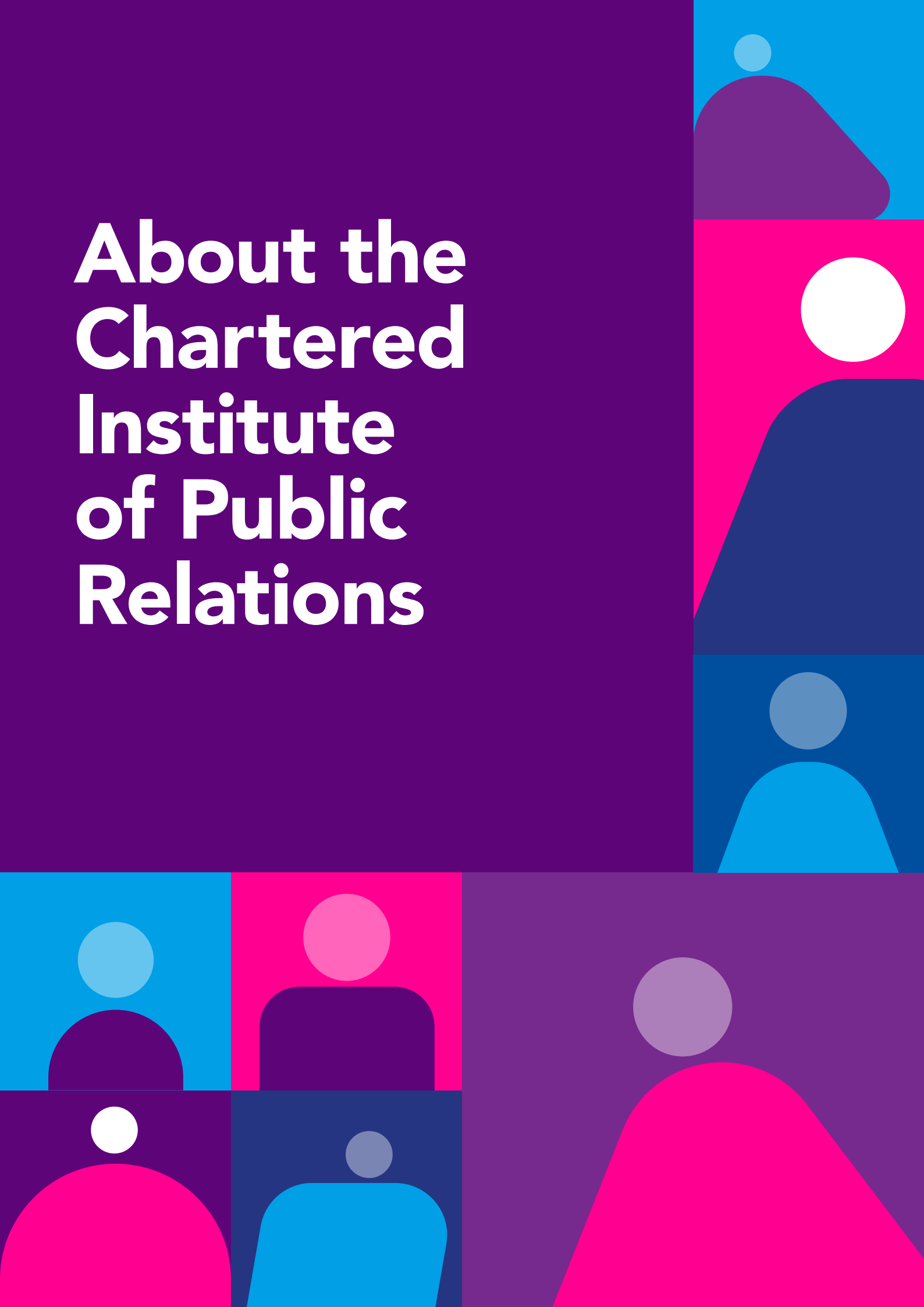
The research omits the male perspective. It's an oversight of all research in this area. A study from the point of view of male parents working in public relations or men in a leadership role would add a useful and original dimension to the issue.

The research team of Socially Mobile graduates with lived experience of gender issues significantly contributed to engaging with research subjects and the rich range of responses reflected in the study. The risk of bias was addressed via the literature review, critical review, the broad range of perspectives in the wider research team and participant feedback.

The PR Population report identified a gap of 3,910 Missing Women in England and Wales based on 2021 census date. This study engaged with a limited sample (233) of this population. The research team is confident that it reached a saturation through the mixed methodology; however, a more significant, more representative sample would strengthen the findings.

The study has not considered how other feminised professions tackle the missing women issue. An interdisciplinary study would make a useful contribution to understanding how the issue could be tackled within public relations practice.

About the Chartered Institute of Public Relations

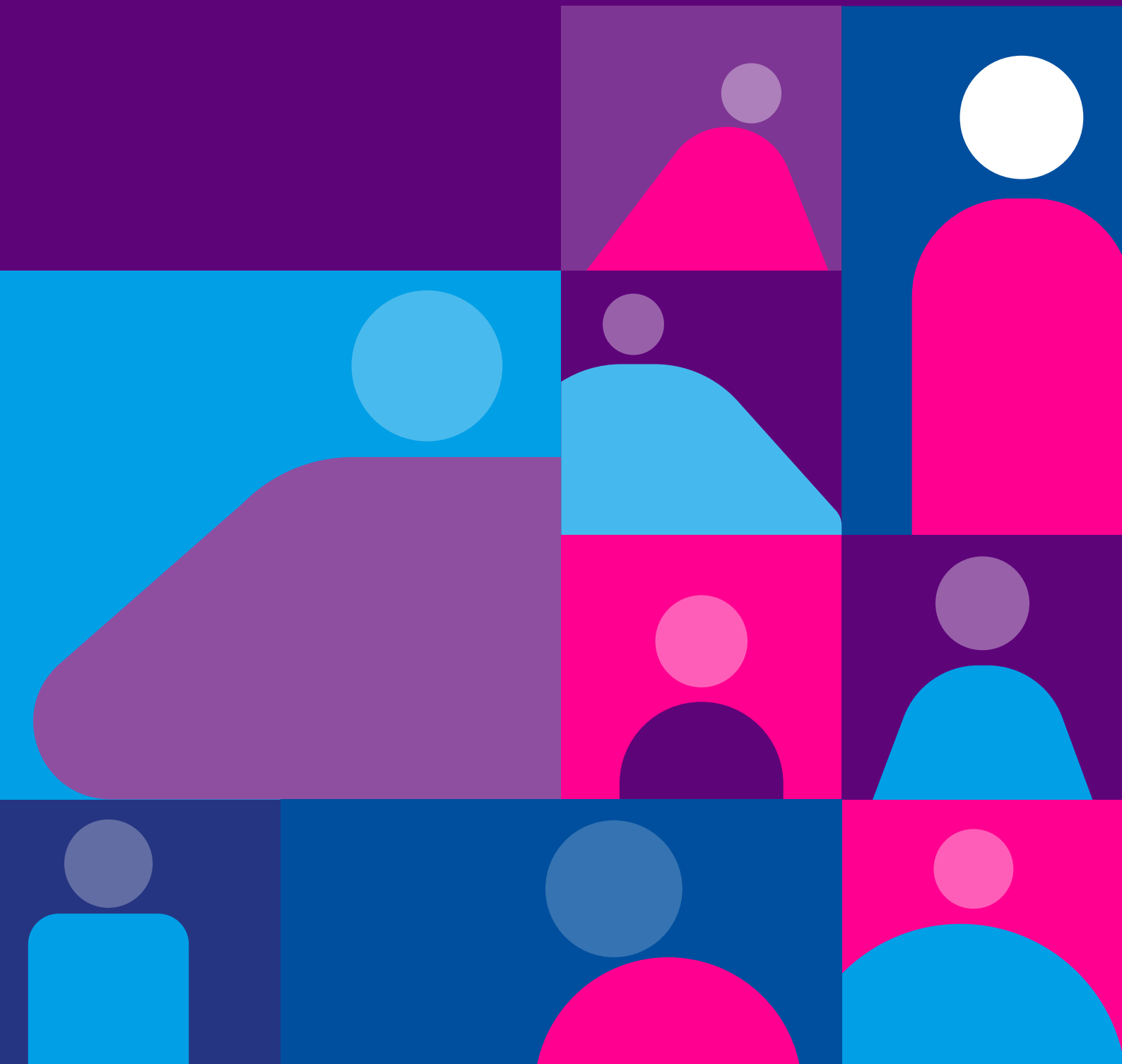


Founded in 1948, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the world's only Royal Chartered professional body for public relations practitioners with over 11,000 members.

The CIPR advances professionalism in public relations by making its members accountable to their employers and the public through a code of conduct and searchable public register, setting standards through training, qualifications, awards and the production of best practice and skills guidance, facilitating Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and awarding Chartered Public Relations Practitioner status (Chart.PR).



About Socially Mobile



Socially Mobile is a Community Interest Company (CIC) that supports and inspires public relations practitioners across the UK to increase their earning potential.

Socially Mobile delivers fully funded training to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as well as under-represented and under-served groups including Black and minority ethnic practitioners, the LGBTQ+ community, women returners and those with disabilities.

It also welcomes students sponsored by their employers or paying for their place.

The impactful ten-week programme is for future leaders:

- Aspiring to a management role
- Returning to work or moving into a new role
- Considering starting their own PR business

Students graduate with a Certificate in Leadership Communication, a powerful new network and access to true diversity of skills and thought.

Socially Mobile is accredited by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, the industry's highest recognised standard for public relations and management training and development.

If you know somebody who might benefit from the programme, please visit www.sociallymobile.org.uk



We support Socially Mobile and a truly representative PR industry

Research team and responsibilities





Stephen Waddington, lead researcher

Stephen Waddington is a professional advisor at Wadds Inc. and PhD researcher at Leeds Business School who supports agencies and in-house teams on a range of management, corporate communications and public relations issues. His agency career includes leadership roles at Metia, Ketchum, Rainier PR and Speed. He has worked for clients including The Economist, HM Government, Intel, Microsoft, The Press Association, NHS, Tesco and Virgin Media Business.

Stephen co-founded Socially Mobile, a social enterprise that supports public relations practitioners in increasing their earning potential. It delivers management training to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and underrepresented and underserved groups. He has written and edited ten books, including Brand Anarchy, Exploring Public Relations and Management Communication and Share This. He served as President of the CIPR in 2014.



Rana Audah, researcher

Rana is a chartered practitioner. She is the founder of Just Legal Marketing, which delivers strategic and tactical support to SME consumer law firms across owned, earned and paid media.

Starting her career in leading consumer public relations agencies delivering campaigns for FMCG and residential property brands, her 20+ year career moved to in-house roles within professional services, including Big Four accountancy and global law firms, before setting up her own business. Rana is also a trustee for a local scouts group. Rana graduated with Distinction from the Socially Mobile Leadership Communication programme in January 2023.



Isobel Wilson-Cleary, researcher

Isobel is a communications strategist, specialising in research and policy communications, stakeholder engagement and partnerships. She is currently Head of Communications and Engagement in the University of Birmingham's Business Engagement and Research Impact function. Before that, Isobel worked for a decade in global development, leading, advising and mentoring teams to create impactful campaigns and interventions to change behaviours and inform decision-making on issues such as early childhood education, gender equity in education and global health.

In her spare time, Isobel is a Board Member for We Don't Settle, a youth-focused arts and heritage organisation and an advisory board member for the University of Leeds' Horizons Institute, an interdisciplinary platform aimed at tackling the most significant global challenges. Isobel graduated with Distinction from the Socially Mobile Leadership Communication programme in May 2023.



Josie Shepherd, researcher

Josie currently heads up brand and communications for Homeprotect. She has led several transformation projects with this specialist home insurer, including delivering a rebrand and building a public relations function from scratch. Before that, she spent ten years in various brand and marketing communications roles in travel and aviation.

Outside of work, Josie is a musician with jazz fusion group, The Horntown Project and Kew Wind Orchestra, where she has also voluntarily organised European concert tours. On the weekends, she can be found chasing after her three-year-old son and cocker spaniel. She graduated with Distinction from the Socially Mobile Leadership Communication programme in May 2024.



Sarah Waddington CBE, project manager and reviewer

Sarah Waddington CBE is a non-executive director advising creative agency management teams on company direction, from start-up and scaleup to sale. She is the UK's only Chartered director and Chartered PR practitioner, offering a unique mix of governance and communications expertise. She has significant experience in diversity, equity and inclusion and ESG.

A pioneer of best practice, Sarah's CBE was awarded in June 2021 for services to public relations and voluntary sectors. She also holds the CIPR's Sir Stephen Tallents Medal for exceptional achievement in public relations and the PRCA's Outstanding Contribution in Digital Award. Sarah has completed the IoD's Diploma in Company Direction and is a graduate of Oxford Saïd's Executive Leadership and Cambridge Judge's Steering Complex Projects programmes. She is an IoD ambassador, a Past President of the CIPR and sits on the management board of the PRCA.

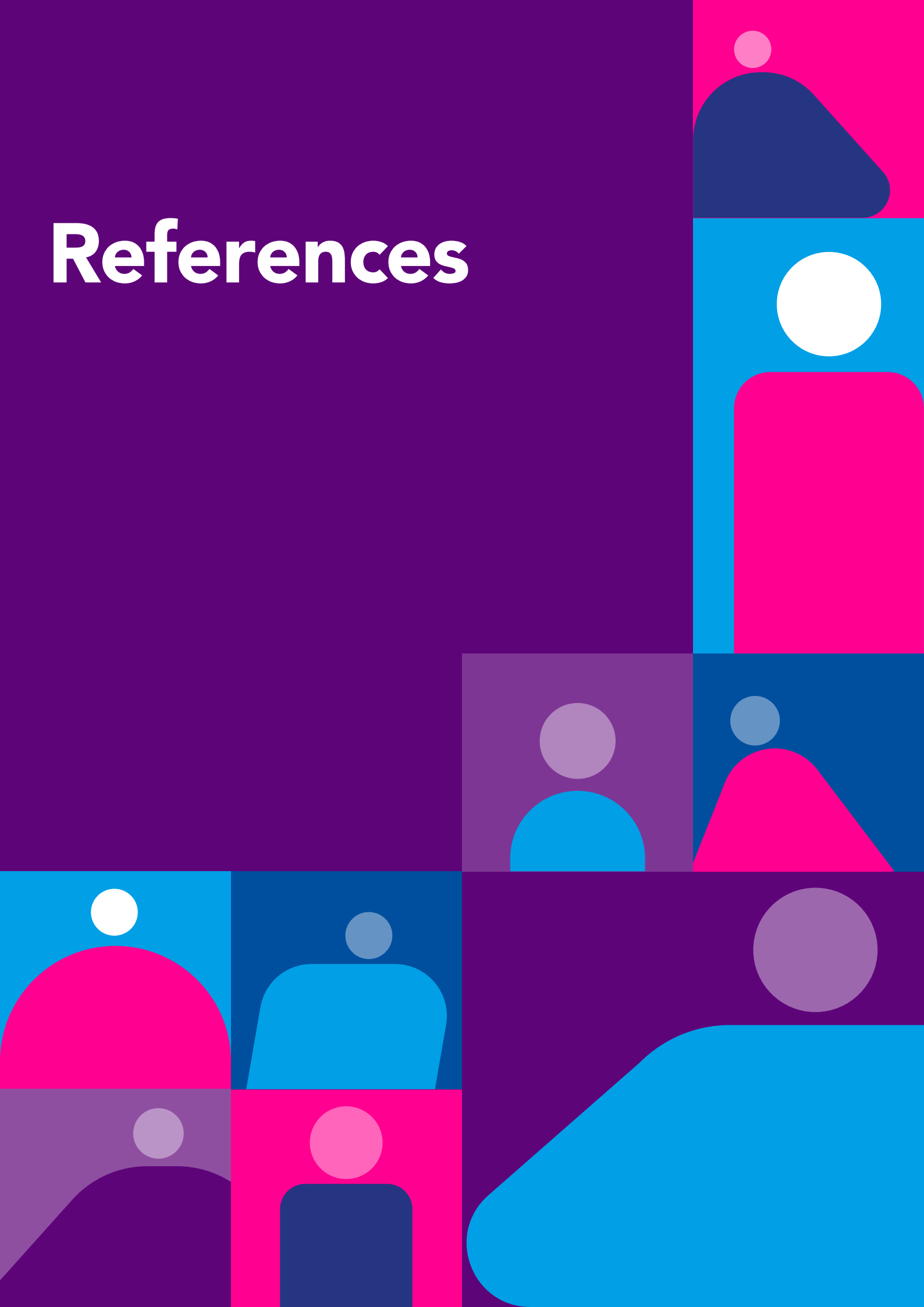


Ben Verinder, supervisor

Ben is managing director of Chalkstream, an agency specialising in reputation research. Since 2018 he has managed the 'State of the Profession' series, an annual study conducted by the CIPR to provide comprehensive insights into the public relations industry in the UK. He is also the author of a number of projects investigating the demography of UK PR practitioners using Office for National Statistics data. He has previously acted as advisor to a number of CIPR research studies.

Ben is also chair of the assessment panel for social mobility community interest company Socially Mobile. He mentors practitioners from under-represented groups in public relations and is an assessor for the chartered public relations practitioner programme. He is a Founding Chartered public relations practitioner and a pioneering authority on AI in PR.

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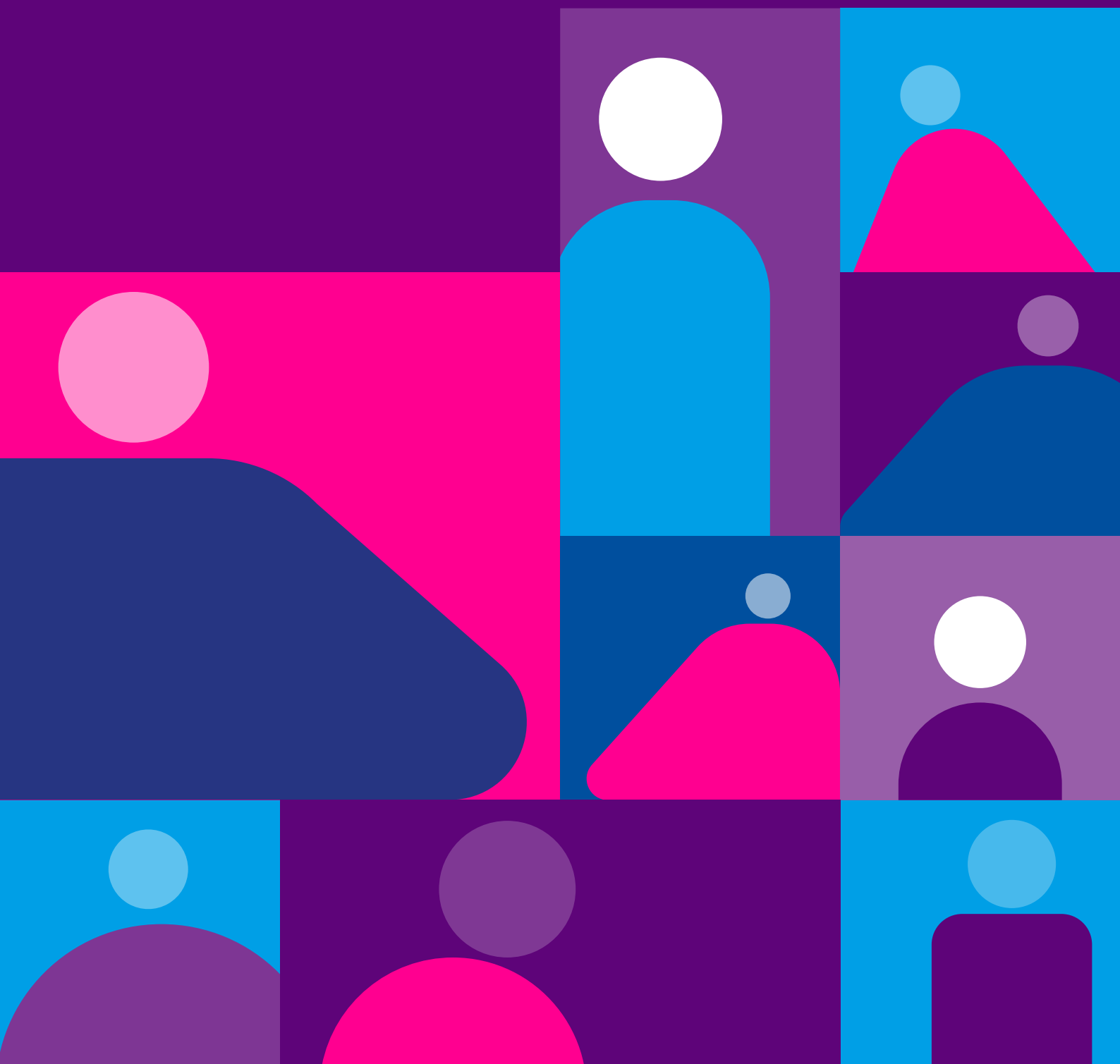
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Rana Audah, Isobel Wilson-Cleary and Josie Shepherd led the research interviews.

Ben Verinder supported the research design and he and Sarah Waddington CBE critically reviewed the project.

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