

NATIONAL NEWS BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Mentors to help women on to boards

Moving on up

Percentage of women on FTSE 100 boards*

- **Executive directors**
3.7 per cent female (up from 2 per cent in 1999)
- **Non-executive directors**
11.8 per cent female (up from 10.8 per cent in 1999)
- **All directorships**
8.6 per cent female (up from 6.3 per cent in 1999)

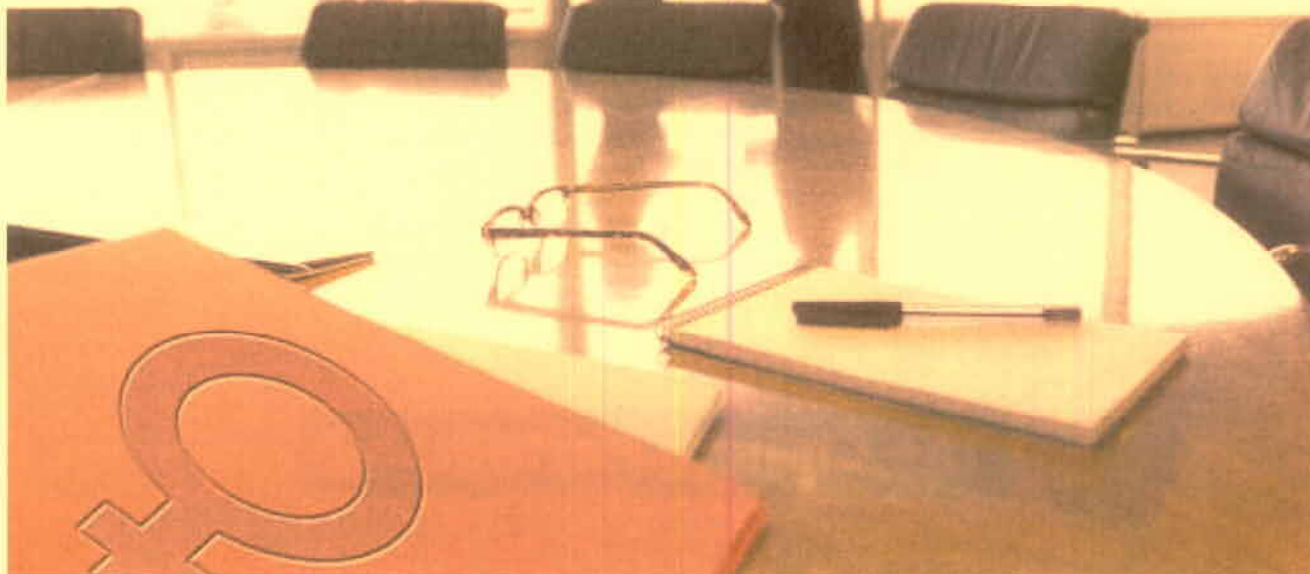
* All figures are 2003. Source: Cranfield University

Percentage of directors who are women in all companies**

- 2004: 13.2 per cent
- 1999: 6.1 per cent
- 1974: 0.6 per cent (when survey began)

** Survey covered 21,987 directors and managers in 354 companies across the UK

Source: Chartered Management Institute & Remuneration Economics



By Alison Maitland

The chairmen and chief executives of 20 of Britain's largest businesses have agreed to mentor senior women from other companies in a ground-breaking programme to increase female representation in the boardroom.

The scheme, being closely watched by ministers, comes in response to last year's Higgs and Tyson reports that highlighted the white, male dominance of boardrooms and called for directors to be drawn from

a larger talent pool.

Among the FTSE chairmen taking part are Maarten van den Bergh, of Lloyds TSB; Charles Miller Smith, of Scottish Power; Gerry Robinson, of Allied Domecq; and Baroness Hogg, of 3i. Other companies involved include BAE Systems, HSBC, National Grid Transco and Pearson, owner of the Financial Times.

"Corporate Britain has taken the Tyson report and found a practical way to push things ahead," said Mr Miller Smith.

Participating companies have identified a dozen high-potential women who could benefit. They are typically in the "marzipan layer" one or two levels below the main board. Each is being, or will be, mentored by a chairman or CEO of a non-competing company.

"It is vital that women can feel confident that if they have the ability and drive there is a clear route to the top," said Sir Roy Gardner, chief executive of Centrica, who is one of the programme's mentors. "If I can

help someone to manage their career to achieve this it will be well worth the effort."

The programme is part of an initiative called Women Directors on Boards, run by senior women from the government, Cranfield University, PwC and The Change Partnership, an executive coaching specialist.

It sprang from a meeting last year between ministers, captains of industry and business schools to address the shortage of women, who account for only about 9 per cent of FTSE 100 directors.

"It is unique," said Peninah Thomson, a director of The Change Partnership, which is coordinating the project with Jacey Graham, former head of diversity strategy at Shell International. "It has the potential to have a material and beneficial impact on the breadth and variety of skills and leadership styles available to UK boards."

Research shows that board-level appointments are still largely made through introductions,

which has traditionally meant the old boys' network. Companies complain they cannot find suitable external women for directorships and Ms Thomson said some had asked for assistance in identifying women in their own ranks to take part in the scheme.

"The cross-company aspect helps bring different people to the attention of chairmen and chief executives, so that as appropriate career opportunities arise they may be able to intro-

duce mentees to others," said Ms Thomson.

Mr van den Bergh, who is mentoring a woman from the mining sector, said he was prepared to put as much time as necessary into listening and offering advice. "It will be a two-way process," he said. "It may help some of the chairmen to better understand some of the issues faced as women come up through the ranks."

Mr Miller Smith said he had learnt a lot about senior

women's experience from his wife, Debjani Jash, former company secretary at ICI, and from his two successful grown-up daughters. He hoped to be a detached source of advice to the woman he was mentoring from the consumer goods sector. "This isn't a box-ticking exercise or a Financial Services Authority requirement. It's a human investment in human beings."

RELATIONSHIP THAT MEANS THE SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM IS JUST A CALL AWAY

Lois Hedg-peth, head of US operations for Centrica, the energy supplier, looks forward to a mentoring relationship that will be both cross-company and transatlantic, writes Alison Maitland. Her prospective mentor is Bryan Sanderson, chairman of Standard Chartered, the bank.

"Bryan comes over to the US frequently and I'm in the UK three to four times a year," she said. "Once we've established an initial

rapport it will be easier over the phone. When I've got a specific issue or problem, I'll just call up."

Ms Hedg-peth, an American, is two levels below the main Centrica board and is keen to become a director, initially of a smaller company. "Boards are filled through personal referral more than anything else," she said. "Women haven't been networking quite as long as men. This will be very useful to get us connected."

Ms Hedg-peth, 48, hoped to learn more from Mr Sanderson about running businesses, doing deals and leadership.

Most of the dozen women in the programme were unwilling to be identified because they felt publicity could generate pressure. "I like my invisibility," said one, who accepted, however, that visibility was the key to a directorship. An external mentor would help women market themselves better.

"Women of my generation, in our 40s and 50s, don't tend to push ourselves forward in the same way as men tend to," she said. "The working environment 20-25 years ago was very different. You had to be very careful about the way you acted so that older men didn't feel threatened by you. It's stayed with us too long."

The Change Partnership

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