



Equipping tomorrow's women to *thrive*

There are few women at board and senior level positions within the pensions and investments industry. Dawn Turner, CEO at [Brunel Pension Partnership Limited](#), examines why and how this trend must change.

When Dawn Turner was invited to become CEO of Brunel Pension Partnership, she had a clear idea about the kind of company she wanted to head up. “Denise Le Gal was already in the role of Independent Chair of the Board, so it was clear we had potential to be a truly gender diverse business, and that was something that resonated with me,” she says.

From the early days of Brunel, which launched in July 2017, this meant a board with a fifty-fifty gender split, with four men and four women, with other strong females taking on key roles throughout as the company developed.

And yet, across the finance industry, there are significantly lower numbers of women in leading roles than men. Although figures have improved in the last decade, they remain at disappointing levels.

Turner believes much of this is due to perceived gender expectations in the so-called STEM subjects: sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics.

“A [survey conducted by Accenture](#) in February 2018 showed that girls go from describing STEM subjects as fun and enjoyable between the ages of seven and eleven, to regarding them ‘boy subjects’ when they reach secondary school,” says Turner.

The research also indicated that parents, teachers and societal biases steer girls towards more artistic and caring subjects. “The daft thing about it is that my job is both caring and creative,” Turner exclaims. “Yes, I bring 30 years’ worth of experience as a finance professional to the role, but I also need to make sure my workforce are at their most effective and that’s about caring about their wellbeing, creating an environment that allows them to be themselves and feel valued. I also need a creative side to find solutions to business problems and bring diverse perspectives together to enable innovation. Besides,

there is no basis for the idea that there are ‘girl jobs’ and ‘boy jobs.’ It’s our society that has made those assumptions.”

Turner is keen to encourage up and coming generations of women to consider the breadth of possibilities made available simply from continuing with STEM subjects up to and beyond GCSEs and A-Levels. “Whatever personal attributes you then draw on, these skills open up doors into a multitude of industries that are more commonly associated with men, from financial crime analyst to responsible investment officer. Why should the male half of the population be at the front of the queue for jobs with great salaries and benefits?”

This issue is particularly relevant at Brunel Pension Partnership, which manages the £30 billion investments of 10 likeminded Local Government Pension Scheme funds. “Our clients are at the heart of everything we do, and I think it’s notable that of our more than 600,000 beneficiaries, well over 70 per cent are women,” Turner comments.

A variety of skill sets

Furthermore, Turner points out that there are numerous possible routes into the investment world. “Wherever your strengths and interests lie, a wide range of degree and apprenticeship subjects can equip you to take your first steps into the industry,” she says. “We want women to be aware that this is a career that’s open to them, and that utilises many different skill sets. The roles and personality types are incredibly varied, making this an attainable goal for any young woman, or young man, to pursue.”



The task of retaining women and encouraging them to apply for senior roles presents a more systematic challenge.

“At Brunel it was important to me to establish a flexible working culture,” Turner says. “A positive working environment contributes to attracting and keeping valued staff, and flexibility regarding working hours and location enables greater productivity and contributes to employee wellbeing.”

Brunel Pension Partnership’s company culture promotes mobile working and sensible working practices that allow staff to manage their own hours. Laptops and mobile phones enable staff to work from anywhere that suits them, with conference calls meaning that important meetings need not be missed due to location.

“I hope this contributes to ensuring that staff who are parents, or who have other caring commitments such as elderly parents, are able to balance their home life requirements without their work life suffering, or vice versa.”

Work/life balance

Turner herself has brought up three children, one of which is in her final GCSE year, and has her 85-year-old mum living at home, as well as a Dachshund and a Giant Schnauzer. “At times I might need to take my mum to hospital appointments or attend my daughter’s dance classes, but if I take time out of the working day to do this I simply make it up when I can.” It’s a flexible viewpoint she’s instilled among her staff, which recognises their ability to make rational decisions about their working practices.

Brunel’s upper levels include non-executive director Freddie Pierre-Pierre, who has over 25 years’ experience in the banking industry and who started her career off in law, Chief Compliance and Risk Officer Laura Chappell, who has more than 20 years’ experience in Risk and Compliance within asset management and is a keen horsewoman, and Chief Responsible Investment Officer Faith Ward, whose background is in environmental science, and is regularly nominated for industry awards for her role in initiatives to improve standards in responsible investment, corporate engagement and diversity.

“I’ve surrounded myself with the best people, half of whom happen to be women,” Turner says. “We need role models who show us what we can achieve, and I’d say each of my top tier management and board members fulfil those criteria, regardless of gender.”

But rising to these heights can only happen if girls are encouraged to consider studying the school subjects that will equip them for these roles and are aware of the multi-faceted roles available within the finance industry, which includes pensions and investment.



With this in mind, for Good Money Week in October, which has a focus on women and finance, Turner and her team have arranged to head into Bristol school [Ashton Park](#). “We want to talk to sixth formers who are making decisions that will affect their futures. This is our chance to share our own stories and enthusiasm for STEM subjects, and talk through the opportunities they can lead to,” Turner

says. “STEM subjects don’t mean turning your back on caring or creativity – they open you up to different ways to utilise these aptitudes and have the chance to make a hugely positive impact.” You can watch an excellent video about [diversity in the investment management industry here](#).

Turner, who, along with Denise Le Gal and Faith Ward, is an [ambassador for The Diversity Project](#), credits her own upbringing in part for her success. “I was fortunate to have a mother and father who brought me up in such a way that I never thought I would be limited because I was female,’ she says. “As my horizons broadened, I began to realise that this wasn’t how the whole world behaved and the unfairness of this struck home strongly, and on issues wider ranging than gender. I became passionate about encouraging acceptance of difference and thinking and ensuring diversity and equality in the organisations I worked for and had contact with.”

About Brunel Pension Partnership



Brunel Pension Partnership (Brunel) brings together £30 billion investments of 10 likeminded Local Government Pensions Scheme funds. We believe in making long term sustainable investments supported by robust and transparent process. We are here to protect the interests of our clients and their members. In collaboration with all our stakeholders we are forging better futures by investing for a world worth living in.

Brunel is one of eight national LGPS pools, and will manage investment of the pension assets for the funds of Avon, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Environment Agency, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, and Wiltshire.

www.brunelpensionpartnership.org