

VIEWPOINT

The generation gap

The **Music Week Women In Music Awards** shine a light on female achievement. But is the wider business doing enough to fix the problems highlighted by the gender pay gap figures? Gender diversity consultant and executive **Claire Singers** explains what needs to be done...

“We’re told there’s no silver bullet to create equal opportunities – in fact there are several”

CLAIRE SINGERS

Six months ago, major music companies reported their gender pay gap figures, and they made for unpleasant and embarrassing reading, revealing structural inequality at senior leadership level.

In April 2019, companies with over 250 employees will have to repeat the exercise, revealing pay gap figures filed last April. It may be the case that the gap won’t be significantly reduced due to timing, but what most companies did do last April was to file a report, alongside their dire pay gap figures, setting out their commitment to a gender equal and diverse music industry and laying out the policies that they would implement to create this.

Therefore in five months’ time, when the figures are revealed, the focus should be on monitoring/assessing progress with these policies, rather than obsessing about the numbers. The year to look for significantly reduced gender pay gaps will be April 2020.

Fortunately, UK Music’s Diversity Report, which covers the two years since the last survey in 2016, should mean we don’t have to wait until April to see if the industry has become less of ‘a boy’s club’, a charge levelled at it after the 2015 report.

When the pay gap figures were published, I heard a lot of stories about inquests, crisis meetings and accusations of competitors ‘cooking the books’. But, more importantly, did this angst translate to actions or, once the media moved on to another issue, did gender equality and diversity slip down the priority list? I’m hoping that perhaps a major policy announcement or report on, for example, BAME promotions, parental leave policies or flexible working for all will be announced shortly by a music major, ahead of the UK Music report. It just takes one to lead the way.

Ten non-music companies recently announced they would publish their parental leave and pay policies online. We know that ‘benefits’ are increasingly playing a big part in attracting top talent, we also know 50,000 women a year ‘lose’ their jobs when they start a family due to unsupportive work cultures.

This change has been driven by MP Jo Swinson, who is calling for all companies over 250 employees to publish this information alongside their gender pay gap reporting. I hope that music companies respond to this call by publishing their parental policies in April 2019, if not before. It’s a great opportunity to drop the inherent competitiveness in the industry and to encourage each other to adopt enlightened working practices.

Often, we’re told, there’s no silver bullet to create an equal opportunities music industry. But the fact is there are several – and the most powerful is flexible working for all. There are thousands of UK companies that offer all employees some form of flexibility, the most popular being either working one day a week from home or a four-day week with compressed hours: easy to administer, easy to roll out as company policy.

The current common practice of leaving flex working decisions to individual line managers is inept and iniquitous. The often resistant-to-change COOs or FDs need to wake up and realise that, for their organisation to attract and retain the best people,



Claire and concise: Claire Singers

they need to offer a modern working environment. They will discover it’s good for the P&L. They will discover it’s good for mental wellbeing. Flexible working is based on trust and output, rather than judging an employee’s commitment by the hours he or she spends shackled to the desk.

Accountability in senior staff’s annual appraisals is another game changer: ‘What have you done this year to progress the careers of BAME staff, women, LGBT, and people with disabilities? Are we recruiting the best person for the team? Who are you mentoring?’ I recently spoke to two senior women and asked them how they reached the top and, in both cases, they had active career support from a senior male, who saw their potential and actively encouraged them to aspire to the very top.

Sitting in the receptions of music companies, watching the comings and goings of staff, it soon becomes obvious that the industry is failing the BAME community. Investing in grassroots programmes where the industry proactively goes out to schools and colleges and tells students that the music industry is a career for everyone, regardless of colour and creed, is vital. The recently announced government consultation on mandatory ethnic pay gap reporting will be completed in January, with the important aim of improving career progression for ethnic minorities.

The good times have returned to the biz and channelling some of those revenues into creating an industry that works for everyone is surely a smart investment.