



# MAPPING WOMEN'S CAREER JOURNEY

A Global Report for Chartered  
Accountants Worldwide

March 2023



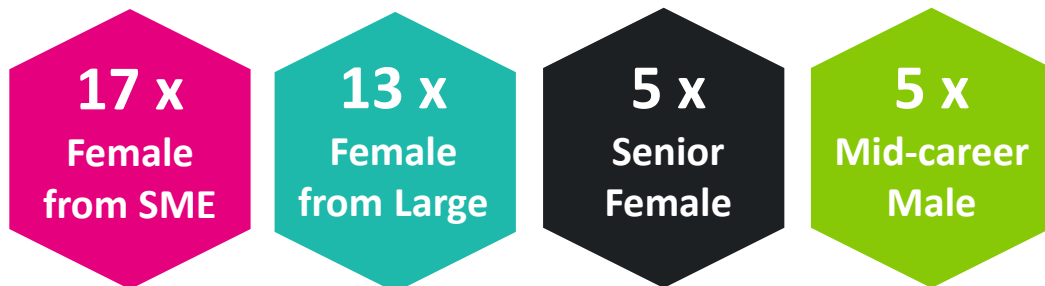
# STUDY OVERVIEW: QUALITATIVE



## 40 x 90-minute online interviews

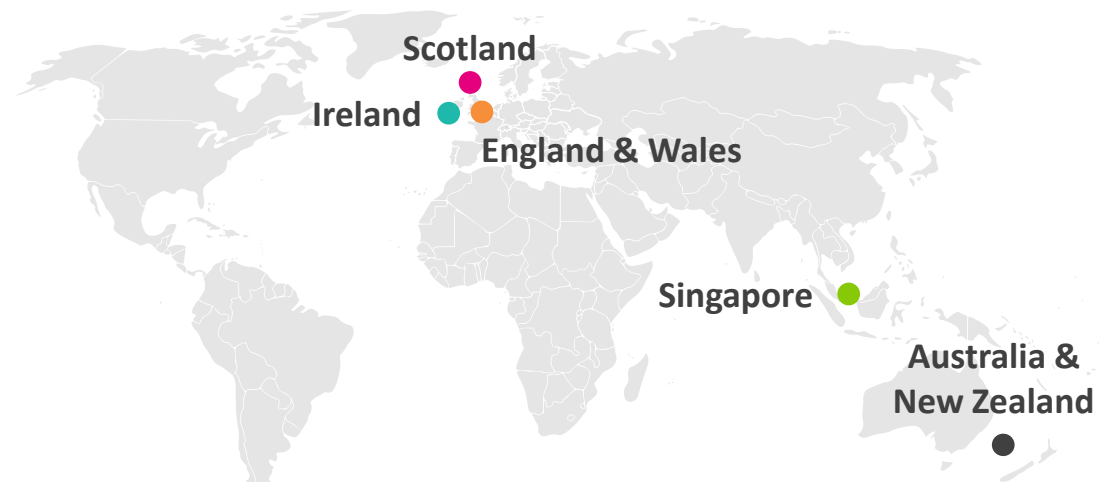
- 8 participants per market
- 5 markets: Australia & New Zealand, England & Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Singapore

## Sample composition per type



### ACROSS THE SAMPLE:

- All qualified as Chartered Accountants and members of local institute
- Seniority level defined as qualified in 2001 or before
- Mid-career participants qualified between 2002-2012
- SME and Large organisations definitions varied by each market
- Recruited from across the markets reflecting a good geographical and demographic spread



## Sample composition per market included:

### Australia & New Zealand:

4x SME, 3x Large,  
1x Senior Female, 1x Male  
(1x Māori & 1x Aboriginal heritage)

### England and Wales:

3x SME, 3x Large,  
1x Senior Female, 1x Male

### Ireland:

3x SME, 3x Large,  
1x Senior Female, 1x Male

### Scotland:

3x SME, 3x Large,  
1x Senior Female, 1x Male

### Singapore:

4x SME, 3x Large,  
1x Senior Female, 1x Male

**A note on our participants:** We would not classify many of the women we spoke to as 'mid-career'. Many had reached senior positions, were owners of businesses, or at a ceiling in their current place of work. In Singapore in particular, participants noted for being very atypical.



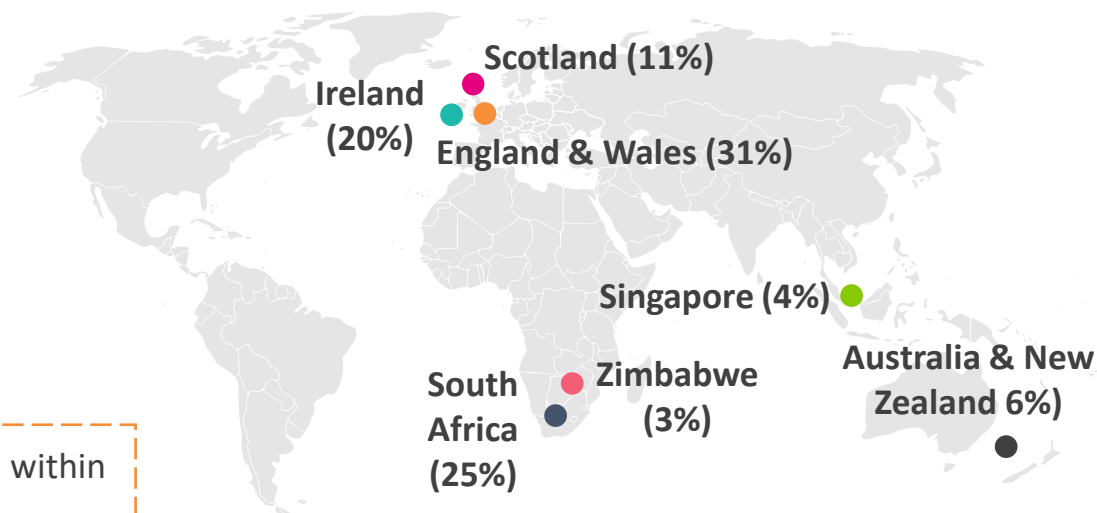
# STUDY OVERVIEW: QUANTITATIVE



## 3,553 responses across 7 markets

- 94% fully completed the survey
- Fieldwork: 23<sup>rd</sup> May – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2022
- Average time to complete: 12 minutes

**Market profiles:** There are significant differences in profiles due to natural bias within local markets and/or differences in recruitment methods and targeting.



	Global	Australia & New Zealand	England & Wales	Ireland	Scotland	Singapore	South Africa	Zimbabwe
Sample size	3,553	210	1,102	700	402	143	875	121
% female	56%	97%*	55%	54%	63%*	51%	49% <sup>^</sup>	36% <sup>^</sup>
Average age	44	43	47*	40 <sup>^</sup>	48*	47*	42 <sup>^</sup>	39 <sup>^</sup>
% mid-career	33%	43%*	20% <sup>^</sup>	50%*	26% <sup>^</sup>	32%	36%*	23% <sup>^</sup>
% have children 0-16 years	44%	57%*	31% <sup>^</sup>	61%*	40%	29% <sup>^</sup>	47%	61%*
% work full time	74%	63% <sup>^</sup>	66% <sup>^</sup>	83%*	66% <sup>^</sup>	75%	82%*	86%*
% work part time	13%	30%*	19%*	8% <sup>^</sup>	23%*	5% <sup>^</sup>	5% <sup>^</sup>	3% <sup>^</sup>





## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Understanding and mapping the career journey of mid-career women in the chartered accountancy profession.

01

Understanding women's lived experiences of their chartered accountancy career and identification of critical career moments.

02

Exploring the barriers to career progression  
identifying societal/systemic issues and those in direct control of the employer/membership body.

03

Identifying and understanding the solutions to break down the barriers for career progression.

To support CAW in identifying strategic 'opportunity areas' for organisations and professional membership bodies to break down barriers and open up career pathways for women to progress fairly into more senior positions.



# HOME TRUTHS: THE CONTEXT





# WOMEN ARE UNDETERRED BY A LACK OF WOMEN IN SENIOR ROLES

Accountancy appeals to many due to the stability, financial security and the lifestyle it provides.

## THERE ARE NO OBVIOUS BARRIERS TO ENTRY WHEN IT COMES TO GENDER

Intakes of graduates to accountancy firms are considered equal in gender distribution, perhaps skewing with more women. Although women acknowledge there are few women in senior positions within the accountancy industry, it doesn't deter them from entering the profession.

## INITIAL TRAINING IS HARD, FULL-ON, AND STRESSFUL FOR ALL

Irrespective of gender the training is hard, requires long hours, and achieving the Chartered Accountancy qualification is considered to be a big achievement. However, women can find this stage more stressful than men: **65%\* of all women felt stressed at the start of their career, compared to 54%^ of all men.**

All trainees are looking for a variety of experiences and want the opportunity to be involved with different types of projects. Resentments may develop if one trainee is favoured over another in terms of mentoring or exposure to opportunities but this isn't necessarily to do with gender.

*'I found it [training] hard. I wasn't ready for the pressure and expectations. Hadn't really thought about it. First set of exams, I failed them all.'*

**Scotland, Mid-Career, Male, SME**

*'I worked really hard at the beginning and I was extremely ambitious. I worked a lot of hours by choice, I didn't feel pressured I just wanted to get as much experience as possible.'*

**Australia, Mid-Career, Female, Self-Employed**

*'When I joined [large company] there were 4 girls and only 1 boy. We formed a really tight group and supported each other. We were competitive with each other and we all passed our exams first time which is unusual.'*

**Scotland, Mid-Career, Female, Self-Employed**

Q: Thinking back to the role when you were training for your Chartered Accountancy qualification, which of the following feelings / emotions did you experience within the work environment? Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level: \* indicates higher significant and ^ indicates lower significant.



# THE PRESENCE OF CHILDREN BOOSTS AMBITION TO REACH SENIOR POSITIONS

## BEING A PARENT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE LESS AMBITIOUS

Priorities change with a family and parents need to be able to accommodate last minute changes and ensure they're available at certain times.

- Nursery/school pick-ups mean parents are unable to work long hours and must be able to leave on time.
- An inability to travel for long periods of time or at short notice.
- Need to be able to leave work at short notice for an ill child.

Moreover, parents want to spend time with their children.

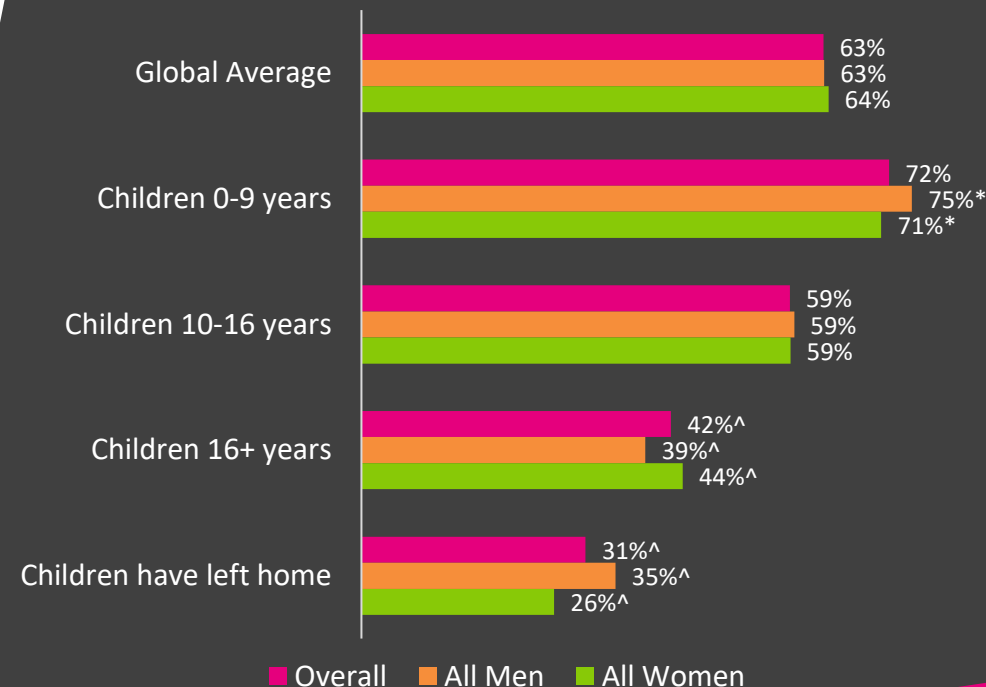
While some women are able to arrange shorter working weeks to accommodate childcare, the impact of this can limit their ability to build up a client rapport or have internal exposure.

## WORKING MOTHERS DESIRE INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION

While the issues are true for all parents, it is still the case in most instances that parenting mainly falls to the woman. Professional women are often keen to use their intelligence, be respected, and be known for something other than their children. While driven somewhat by age, the presence of younger children actually boosts ambition to reach senior positions, and the differences between men and women are minimal.

Q: Thinking about you career, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level: \* indicates higher significant and ^ indicates lower significant.

## % BELIEVE THEY CAN OBTAIN A SENIOR POSITION WITHIN CHARTERED ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION



*'My job typically involves a lot of travel but due to the pandemic this hasn't happened recently. Now I'm a mother I'm concerned how this will work as I don't want to travel but will that impact my career when women without children can travel.'*

**Ireland, Mid-Career, Female, Large Employer**

*'After the birth of my daughter I moved into an industry role. I had a great boss who was really open. I was able to negotiate good terms for my role including greater flexibility.'*

**Singapore, Mid-Career, Female, Large Employer**



# COVID HAS FORCED NEW WORKING ARRANGEMENTS THAT BETTER SUIT WOMEN

Mid-career women are significantly more likely to be able to work efficiently from home and have integrated new approaches to work into their day-to-day lives. Though 2 in 3 men also believe they can work efficiently from home, this is significantly lower.

## HOME WORKING

Has made working from home acceptable and viable. Prior to the pandemic companies were often resistant to allow home working. Having proved it can work well, there is now also greater acceptance of flexible working and hybrid working.

## WELLBEING

Wellbeing has risen up the agenda in the aftermath of COVID 19. It is much more common for people to talk openly about mental health and work places are now taking the wellbeing of their staff more seriously.

## HONESTY

People are being more honest about their lives and the everyday challenges they face. Women find it reassuring to see other women talk about the difficulties of being a working parent. Hearing other women being honest and saying they don't always get it right helps women feel better about themselves.

## APPRECIATION

Recognition by male partners of the amount of work it takes to keep a household functioning on a day-to-day basis.

## TIME

Removing the need for long commutes or travelling has given more time, a highly valued commodity. This time is often spent with their children e.g. having breakfast together or doing the school run, activities that are cherished but previously were not possible.

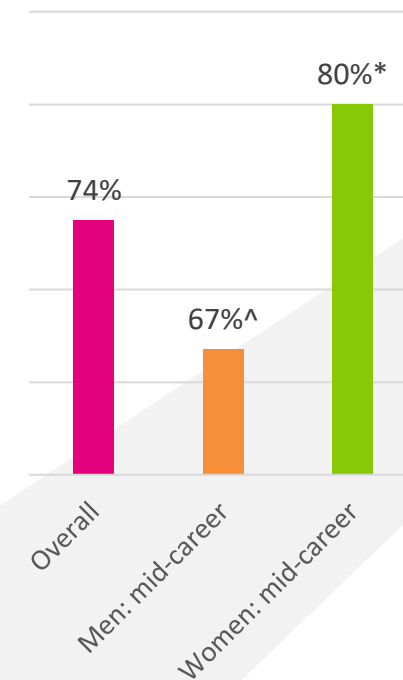
*'I used to spend hours travelling to one hour meetings and now I can do it over zoom which works fine and I feel so much more productive with more time on my hands.'*

**Australia, Senior, Female, Large Employer**

*'You are seeing so many more posts on LinkedIn about more personal issues and especially the challenges that women face. I think this is really helpful.'*

**Scotland, Mid-Career, Female, Self-Employed**

## % AGREE THAT THEY FIND IT EASY TO WORK EFFICIENTLY FROM HOME



Q: Thinking about the impact of the global pandemic, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level: \* indicates higher significant and ^ indicates lower significant.





# IT'S TOO EARLY TO CONCLUDE IF THE PANDEMIC WILL IMPACT ON CAREER PROGRESSION

While there are a lot of positives that have emerged, there are some warning signs employers should be mindful of that have potential to impact on mental health and career progression.

## WORK RELATIONSHIPS & PRESSURE TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE

Working from home provides a degree of invisibility that can impact on relationships with colleagues and clients, particularly if in a new role or company. While they can work efficiently at home, **the pressure to be seen in the office is significantly higher for mid-career women**. This pressure also feeds concerns about being less visible when working from home. However, centralisation of job functions means closure of local offices so when back face-to-face, there is additional travel time to get to the nearest office.

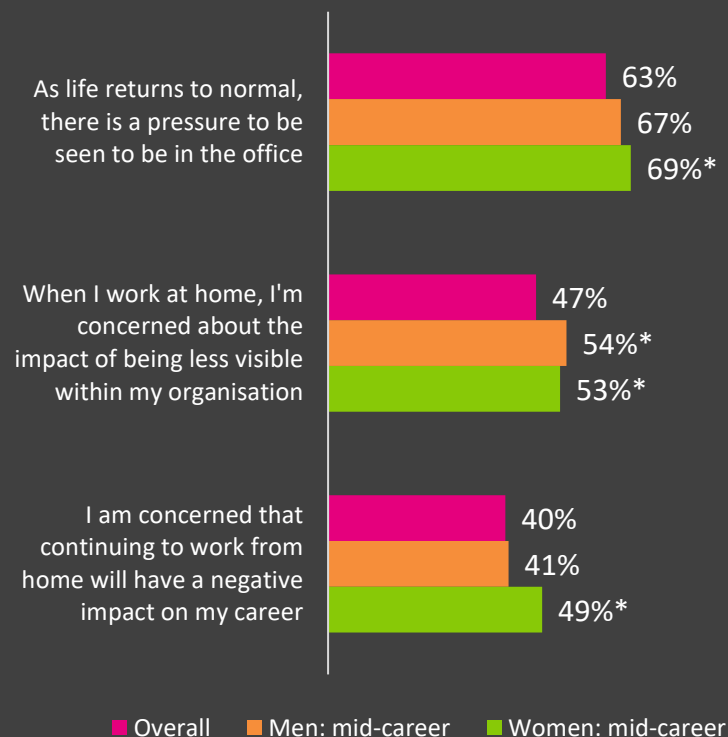
## MID-CAREER WOMEN ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE IMPACT ON THEIR CAREERS

While men may find other methods to counter-act their lack of visibility when working from home, **mid-career women are significantly more likely to be concerned about the impact of working from home on their career progression**.

## MENTAL HEALTH

A lack of face-to-face connection with colleagues has impacted on mental health and feelings of self-worth therefore impacting on confidence and ability to fulfil the role. Feelings of uncertainty and concerns of job security e.g. redundancy, restructuring.

### % AGREE WITH WFH STATEMENT



*'Companies are realising that happy staff are more productive so it is in the company's interest to care. I am now working to devise wellbeing policies and how to audit them.'*  
Scotland, Mid-Career, Female, Self-Employed

Q: Thinking about the impact of the global pandemic, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level: \* indicates higher significant and ^ indicates lower significant.



# MICROAGGRESSIONS ARE TURNED INTO MOTIVATIONS

All women have multiple experiences of microaggressions but while still trying to establish their career, they often lack confidence to call out inappropriate behaviours. Silent bystanders often reinforcing acceptance of unacceptable behaviour and there is often **nowhere to get impartial advice** or support when difficult situations arise.

Instead, they prefer to move roles or try to ignore indiscretions and turn the emotion into motivation. This can make many women feel they need to work twice as hard as male peers to succeed.

*'Working in environments where your individuality is stifled is exhausting and I now work in an environment where I can be exactly who I am and I truly appreciate that.'*  
South Africa, Early Career, Female, SME

*'As a woman you have to put up with more stuff and be more tolerant than your male counterparts.'*  
New Zealand, Mid-Career, Female, SME

*'Sexism from the male partners who dominate the profession. This is the key issue. I am fed up being asked how to make things better. Their attitude needs to change.'*  
Scotland, Senior, Female, SME



# NETWORKING CAN BE SUCCESSFUL WHEN CONDUCTED DIFFERENTLY

## CURRENT NETWORKING CAN BE EXCLUSIONARY

While women appreciate the need to make and develop personal relationships with clients, organised professional networking is not always suitable for women:

- Can take place in venues that women are not comfortable e.g. on the golf course, strip clubs\* etc.
- Often involves drinking alcohol.
- Typically takes place outside of working hours, often late nights when women have family responsibilities.
- Can happen on multiple nights in the same week, meaning it can be difficult to get childcare cover.

*'I've had conversations, you know, banter, with senior partners around cricket and sport. It's definitely helped build those relationships as we've something to connect on outside of work.'*  
New Zealand, Mid-Career, Male, Large Employer

\*This was not prevalent within Singapore

## TAKING HER CHILDREN TO NETWORKING EVENTS HAS BUILT MORE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

In Māori culture, any events or occasions are family inclusive, including professional networking. When industry networking events are organised amongst Māori colleagues, Maia will always take her children along and the kids play happily together.

*'You ask about how your family is doing and what you're doing. It might lead to business conversation, or it might not. You are catching up and meeting people. If you leave an impression on someone they will contact you later.'*

*'A major part of the role is selling accountancy services and they would organise networking events, always after work. I was invited to events 2-3 times a week. I asked my dad to babysit a lot. There was a lot of guilt. I felt like I should be at home, and I felt like I should be at the event.'*  
New Zealand, Mid-Career, Female, Self-Employed



# TO SUMMARISE

## MID-CAREER LEVEL WOMEN ARE AMBITIOUS

They may be juggling multiple responsibilities in work and at home and it is a stressful time, yet they retain a desire to be intellectually stimulate. 8 in 10 mid-career women believe they still have a lot to offer the profession.

## DOMINANT EMOTIONS CHANGE THROUGH A WOMAN'S CAREER

Early stage of career is full of mixed emotions: excited but overwhelmed. Mid-career is dominated by negative emotions of stress, and frustration. Late careers are largely positive, driven by confidence and feeling valued.

## CHARTERED ACCOUNTANCY OFFERS MUCH MORE THAN EXPECTED

The opportunities are often much wider than initially understood and women wish they had known the variety available earlier on in their career as this would have influenced the choices they made.

## COMPANY CULTURE IS EXECUTED BY SENIOR LEADERSHIP

While equality policies may be in place, lived experiences are often shaped by the attitudes and behaviours of those in senior positions, which consequently influences the way others behave and sets the culture of the company.

## IMPLICIT DISCRIMINATION AND MICROGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR FUELS MOTIVATION

All women can recount experiences when they feel they have been treated differently due to their gender. This causes frustration and anger but can sometimes fuels motivation to succeed.



# THROUGHOUT THEIR CAREER, WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE BARRIERS TO THEIR PROGRESSION

## AT EVERY STAGE WOMEN EXPERIENCE BARRIERS

Throughout their career **women are significantly more likely to experience barriers to their career progression**. Conversely, by the time men reach their late career, they are significantly more likely to claim that they have not experienced any barriers to their career (29%\*).

## MOTHERS FACE COMBINED GENDER BIAS AND FAMILY PRESSURES

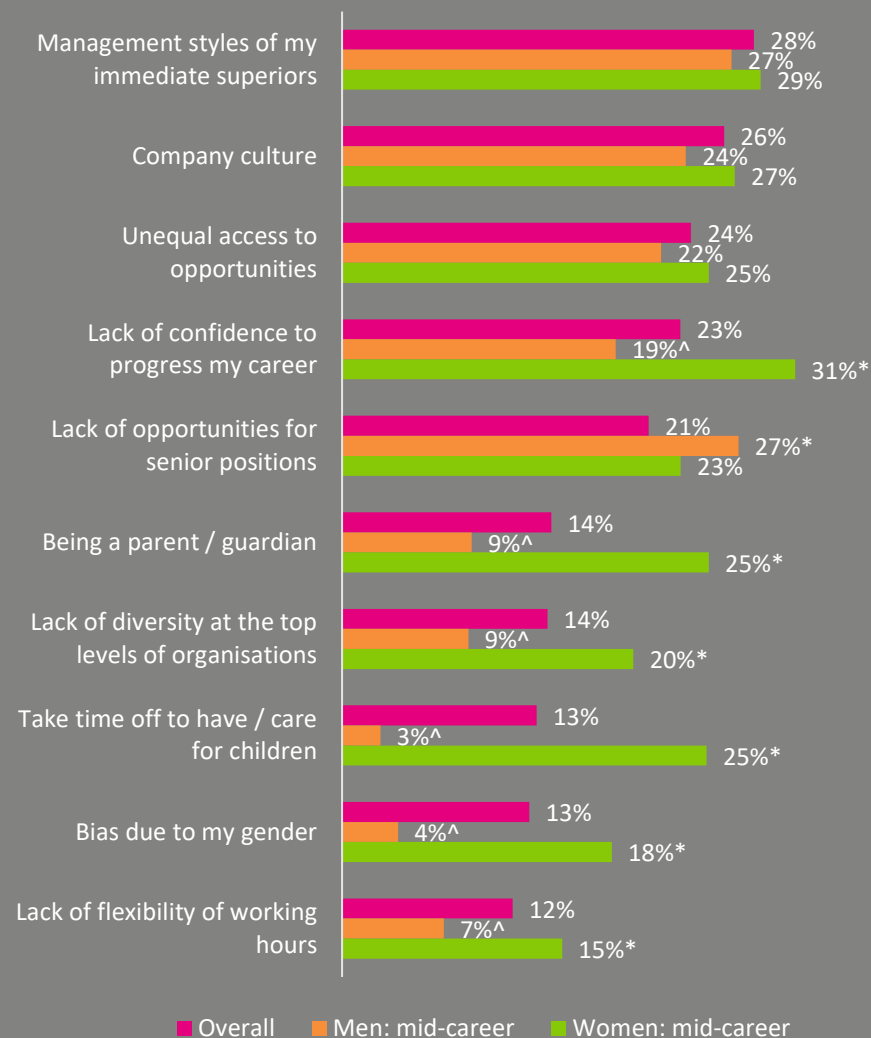
Being a parent (25%\*), taking time off to care for children (25%\*) and the inflexibility in hours (15%\*) combined with gender bias (18%\*) are creating a huge challenge for mid-career women to navigate. Subsequently, women lack confidence in the careers (31%\*) which is a barrier in itself.

## RESTRICTED TIME CREATES ADDITIONAL BARRIERS

Mid-career women are significantly more likely to face other barriers:

- Working part-time (15%\*)
- Lack of support when returning after a long absence (12%\*)
- Travelling constraints due to personal commitments (8%\*)
- Unable to attend external networking events due to personal commitments (8%\*)

## TOP 10 BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION



Q: Which of the following do you believe, if any, have been the biggest barriers to / restrictions on your career progression? Please select up to 5 that have had the biggest impact on your career progression.  
Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level: \* indicates higher significant and ^ indicates lower significant.



# SUPPORTIVE MANAGERS HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT ON CAREER PROGRESSION

## SUPPORTIVE MANAGERS THAT BROADEN THEIR EXPERIENCE HAVE THE BIGGEST IMPACT

3 in 4 mid-career women (75%\*) currently acknowledge that a supportive line manager and/or being given the opportunity to work on new projects as having the biggest impact on their career progression.

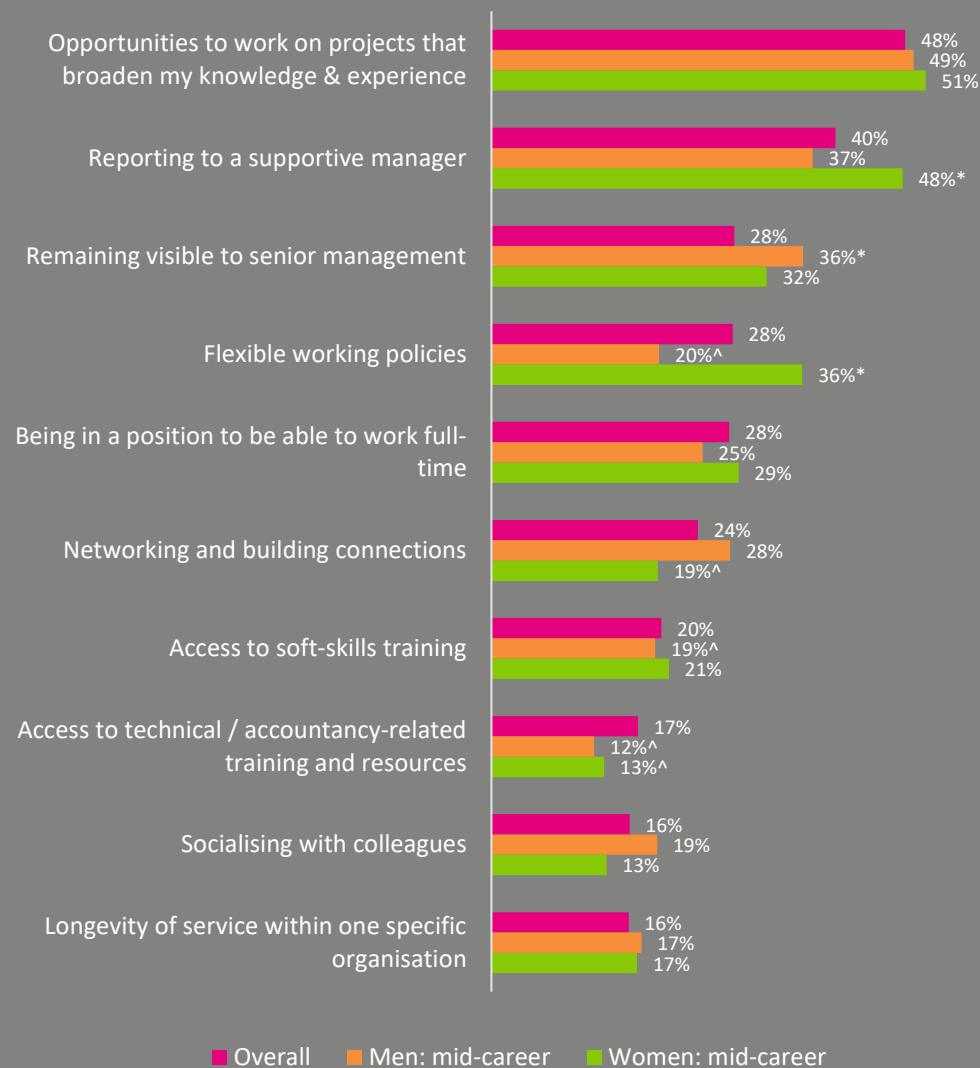
## FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICIES ALLOW THEM TO MANAGE THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Over 1 in 3 mid-career women (36%\*) highlight flexible hours or working location as an important enabler for career progression. Beyond these factors, many enablers are either below or at best, aligned with men which may be an indication that they are not being made available to women.

*'He would bring me into meetings and get me involved. He would pick out training courses that were relevant and encourage me to go on them. When he left the company, he suggested to management I replaced him.'*

**Ireland, Mid-Career, Female, SME**

## TOP 10 ENABLERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION TO DATE



Q: To date, which of the following have had the biggest positive influence on your career progression? Please select up to 5 of the biggest positive influences on your career progression.

Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level: \* indicates higher significant and ^ indicates lower significant.



# TO SUMMARISE

**BEING A WOMAN AND A PARENT IS WHERE MOST BARRIERS APPLY**

Being a working parent requires flexibility, adaptability and empathy from colleagues. Assumptions can be made about having less capability in work, yet the presence of children actually boosts ambition to reach senior positions.

**SUPPORTIVE LINE MANAGERS PLAY A VITAL ROLE, AND MENTORS ARE DESIRED**

Managers who talk to, listen and support women are highly valued and often shape the type of manager they become.

**INDUSTRY CAN OFTEN MEET MORE OF MOTHERS NEEDS**

With more supportive policies in place for working parents, and a culture that allows a greater work life balance, industry can empower mid-career level women as they move from being one of many, to being 'the one'.

**MID AND LATE CAREER WOMEN HAVE A STRONG DESIRE TO SUPPORT OTHER WOMEN**

Recognising the difficulties they've faced, mid and late career women want to see a change for those coming up behind them and are keen to be ambassadors for women in the chartered accountancy profession.

**THE BENEFITS OF THE INSTITUTE ARE RECOGNISED WITH EXPERIENCE**

As women progress through their career, the importance and role of their institute increases. Women seek greater emotional support as they navigate their career ensuring they feel supported and remain stimulated.

# DRIVING CHANGE





# SECURING THE TALENT PIPELINE

Spreading the opportunities and benefits of the accountancy profession to younger people who are still deciding what to do will enable them to make decisions to better support their entry into the industry.

## GREATER CONNECTIONS WITH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Presentations/case studies to raise awareness of the industry. Share information on what to do, what the training looks like and what job opportunities and lifestyle it can provide to encourage aspiration.

## INCREASE DIVERSE PRESENCE AT UNIVERSITY CAREERS FAIRS

Increase access to diverse role models who are at various points in their career and from diverse range of firms that students can openly talk to.

## PROMOTE WORK EXPERIENCE AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Facilitate an online portal for all students to access and apply for work experience and internship opportunities across a range of different companies.

## PROMOTE WIDER CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

It is not just about being a Chartered Accountant. Highlight the wide range of opportunities and career choices that are available across the profession and industry once they have their qualification.

# SUPPORTING WOMEN AS THEY LEARN

## FACILITATING MORE DIVERSITY IN RECRUITMENT

Training for staff to counter unconscious bias – focus on the abilities and experience of the candidate.

## ALLOW FLEXIBILITY FOR STUDY TIME

Consistent provision of study time within the working day to support the opportunity to learn and enhance the opportunity to pass.

## MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING SUPPORT

Support for those struggling with work and exam pressure and in particular, to support those who fail exams.

## ENSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AVAILABLE

Review and enforce equal access to opportunities and experiences for all staff.

## FOSTER A CULTURE OF SUPPORT

Create best practice protocols and develop a culture which empowers all employees the ability to call out inappropriate behaviour of unfairness without fear of it hindering their career.

# FACILITATING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

## EMBED GOOD PRACTICE

Across the industry, inclusive attitudes and behaviours need to be embedded as standard practice.

## FACILITATE WIDER OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT ROLES

Secondments in different parts of the industry.  
Job swaps/shadow opportunities allowing women to experience different areas of the industry.

## ESTABLISH A DISCRIMINATION EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR ALL

Ensure an ongoing (mandatory) program of education about discrimination in the workplace covering all its different forms, and ensure there is an appropriate policy and procedure for handling issues.

## CONFIDENCE DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

Empower and support women in self-promotion and being able to speak out about their skills, interests and support needs. This includes any observation of unfair opportunities. Confidential chat function, coaching and mentoring.

## REVIEW PROVISION OF NETWORKING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Ensure opportunities for networking and professional development are available at different times of the day and in a variety of settings that enable working parents to attend.

# SUPPORTING WORKING PARENTS AND THEIR NEEDS

## TRANSITION BACK TO WORK PROGRAMS

Comprehensive transition back to work programs which cover: time management, changes in tech, how to stay visible and in touch on shorter hours.

## NETWORKS FOR WORKING PARENTS

Buddy system/mentoring for parents to tap into for support and encouragement and comfort, to know they are not alone.

## NORMALISATION OF PARENTING NEEDS

Clear and overt encouragement of flexi-time for all. Valuing quality over quantity of hours.

## NETWORKING EVENTS IN THE DAY

Events that don't just take place after work with alcohol.

## CHAMPIONING SENIOR TEAMS WHO PARENT

Case studies and examples of successful leaders who also share parenting duties.



# DEVELOPING WOMEN

## SUPPORTING SELF-EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Information and guidance on how to become self-employed. This could include case stories of others' experiences and facility to ask questions and advice.

## FACILITATE COACHING AND MENTORING SUPPORT

Provide opportunities for women to understand what further career options are available to them through building a network of diverse ambassadors who are open to mentoring support.

## FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRY AMBASSADORS

Reach out to women in more senior roles for their support and provide training on how to become an effective ambassador.

## TRAINING

Subsidised training costs and provision and advertising of financial awards/bursaries.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & BROKERING RELATIONSHIPS

Facilitate job swop/shadow opportunities so women can fill gaps in their CVs. Create opportunities for networking events across the industry with diverse speakers in attendance.