

A woman's place

The ever-dynamic Women's Foundation has unveiled another report on the condition of women. This time it commissioned the Economist Intelligence Unit to prepare the report which is entitled *Work To Do - Women in male dominated industries in Hong Kong*. The report examines the status of women in four traditionally male-dominated sectors; logistics and transport, technology, trading and hedge funds, and one we found surprising, luxury. Luxury you would have thought would be one area where women would excel. But apparently not.

While women are the major consumers of luxury brands, with LVMH reporting that they account for 85 per cent of its customers, they account for only 11 per cent of its board members and 28 per cent of its senior management. The figures are similar for the other leading luxury groups: L'Oréal, Richemont and Gucci Group (now owned by Kering).

Although higher than average numbers of women are attracted into the industry, it has difficulty in retaining them to management level. The biggest issue is work-life balance. The amount of after-hours duties and travel required in senior positions makes it difficult to juggle work and family life.

Another discouraging factor is cultural, with senior executives within the big European luxury houses tending to be dominated by men and it can be difficult for women to fit in.

The report quotes Joanne Ooi, chief executive and co-founder of Plukka, an e-commerce business focusing on designer jewellery, and previously employed at Shanghai Tang. "If you are accustomed to gender equality in the workplace, the world of luxury can be very, very harsh."

The report concludes that effecting change will be difficult. One important step is that companies need to be aware of the benefits of diversity.



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