

By [Emma Haslett](#) Friday, 08 November 2013



## HSBC Boss: 'We're Too Male And Too Pale'

It's unusual for a banking boss to be so blunt - and so poetic - about his company's downsides...

It's not often you hear the chief executives of major banks baring their souls in rhyme, but today Stuart Gulliver had a go. At a conference run by the Women's Foundation in Hong Kong, the HSBC boss confessed that the bank is 'too pale and too male for our own good'. Lyrical, if depressing.

Gulliver, who took the helm at bank at the beginning of 2011, did point out that it has come a long way since he joined, when women weren't accepted onto its fast-track management programme because 'there was an assumption [they] wouldn't want to travel overseas... or that they wouldn't be taken too seriously in some markets.

'It's only really in the last 10 or 20 years that women at HSBC have been able to put all their talents to use.'

Nevertheless: although 22% of its senior management are women, that's still 3% below its 15% goal for 2015. And although it is in the top quarter of FTSE 100 companies when it comes to gender distribution in the boardroom, only four of its 17 board members are

women. Which just goes to show how dire the situation really is. (Banks on the whole have a surprisingly good record when it comes to this: both Santander and TSB have senior leadership teams with an unusually high number of women).

That Gulliver is even talking about it is good news: at the launch of the government's response to a June report on getting more women into senior roles, women's secretary Maria Miller [said changes in behaviour need to come from within organisations](#), rather than at the behest of government.

But it does, again, raise the issue of whether some companies need their hands forcing. Although more senior roles are going to women, following the departure of Burberry's Angela Ahrendts there are still only two female chief executives in the FTSE 100 (EasyJet's Carolyn McCall and Imperial Tobacco's Alison Cooper). Which suggests that, despite the good intentions of the government, some companies will cling to 'male and pale' at all costs.