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**From:** Alexandra Burns [ABurns@no10.gov.uk]  
on behalf of Alexandra Burns <ABurns@no10.gov.uk> [ABurns@no10.gov.uk]  
**Sent:** 13/04/2020 11:28:13 AM  
**To:** 'Helen MacNamara' [helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]  
**Subject:** RE: personal: women at the centre

Morning Helen,

I think this is wonderful. Thank you for doing it. I've made two suggestions in red below – one just to give concrete examples of ways I think men can do this well, and one which risks seeming a bit stark about learning women's names but feels important?... (I've inexplicably been called Katie and Rosie since being down here and sometimes just kind of vaguely gestured at. I also remember your point about getting women mixed up. Men can't bring women in to discussions if they don't know their names...).

Separately, I feel like there is an issue bubbling on another equality dimension – race. Lots of discussion starting publicly about the fact it seems to be hitting ethnic minorities harder. I don't know whether that's true or not (though it strikes me as not surprising if so given this has hit big cities first, and those who are on the frontline of care services being most vulnerable etc). But do you know if there is any work looking at this at all at the moment?

Alex

**From:** Helen MacNamara [mailto:helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]  
**Sent:** 13 April 2020 09:43  
**Subject:** personal: women at the centre

Hello all

Happy Easter! I'd be grateful for your thoughts on the below. Not urgent so please don't respond if you are taking time off.

I have bcc-d you in this as I have had conversations with some (but not all) of you and I felt a bit uncomfortable about naming you. Which is probably indicative of the sensitivity surrounding raising this as an issue. I do think it matters though - partly because the women we have in No 10 and the CO (you) are some of the best people we have around and we need everyone to be able to be their best in these challenging times. And also because I think that the lack of women's voices in decision making is causing a substantive problem - both because of the specific perspective and issues for women that are not being given enough attention (domestic abuse and abortion were good - bad - examples in the early weeks) and because there is insufficient humanity in decision making. Which is not a female sport! But there is something in the culture we are working in that makes it seem so and hard to make these points. It is really striking how little time women are speaking in any of the big meetings (at the 9:15 I think women spoke for 10-15 mins in total last week - out of 5+ hours - and that was mainly the Paymaster General on the policy she was responsible for or the magnificent Katherine Hammond going through the dashboard).

My concern is that at the moment the working environment/culture is too macho and egotistical. This isn't going to get the best outcomes and it's demoralising to work in. Personally since coming back I've found the gender issue more stark than I have experienced for a long time.

So - with many thanks to those of you who have talked about this - I am planning to raise with the senior team - see points in italics below. I'm not doing this as a shop steward! And you may disagree there is even an issue.

All perspectives welcome. Including that this is a stupid idea. But in particular would be v helpful to have thoughts on whether this is the right list of asks to make anything different.

H

*- I have heard a lot of depressing stories from women working in the CO & No 10 in the week I've been back: about women feeling and being excluded - not invited to key meetings, dropping off copy lists, making points and not being listened to, not being asked for views on something they normally lead on or are knowledgeable about, having their own work and insight played back to them. It happens to be the case that the Ministers leading are men but my observation is that the CS is either doing nothing to make sure women's voices are heard or compounding the problem in the way we are working too (in macro and micro ways).*

*- We don't normally have this issue. So there is something about this particular thing and the particular way we are working now. It's demonstrably problematic that we're not bringing a female and/or wider perspective to some of the decision making. We will get decisions wrong (domestic abuse and abortion were good - bad - examples in the early weeks). But this isn't a moan - it's an ask for help.*

*- There are some simple things you can do:*

*- find institutional ways of checking the diversity of your perspective and stick to them (what would this mean for a pregnant woman/woman with caring responsibilities/low paid women)*

*- check yourself - if there is an email chain or a meeting with no women involved who can speak or contribute ask yourself why and try to fix it*

*- create the space for women to contribute – **for example by explicitly bringing them into discussion, suggesting they lead a discussion which is within their expertise regardless of grade, or making literal space for them at a physical table (where they still exist!)** All the evidence shows that you (men) have to do this actively particularly with women at more junior grades*

*- give credit for the work your female colleagues have done. It's been striking to me that - even when I know that it is woman X who has come up with an idea or done some work - it's not signalled as such. This is contributing to the impression that women are invisible.*

*- **Make the effort to learn the names and roles of the women working around you (many of whom are, like all of us, working in different roles to usual during this time), and use them.***

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