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Women occupy barely 30% of decision-maker positions in major media organisations

Evidence presented by an academic from Northumbria University, Newcastle at a House of Lords inquiry last week showed that men dominate decision-making positions across many major European media organisations.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications invited Northumbria's Professor Karen Ross to give oral evidence at their inquiry into women, news and current affairs broadcasting, on 21st October. Professor Ross' research, funded by the European Institute for Gender Equality showed

that women comprise barely 30% of decision-makers across major European media organisations.

Additionally, the research shows that an even smaller percentage of women are represented in the most senior positions within an organisation such as CEOs and COOs.

In other research carried out within the Global Media Monitoring Project, women are also less visible than men as the focus or subject of news, featuring in around 24% of news stories. While this percentage has increased by 7% since GMMP's first monitoring study in 1995, the rate of progress means news which represents the lives of 51% of the population will not be achieved until at least 2050.

Professor Ross said: "There is no one answer to the question of why women are under-represented in the media but reasons could be related to the cultural norms and habits which exist within newsrooms. For example, there may be a preference to recruit 'people like us' so if the people making selection and recruitment decisions are overwhelmingly male, then more men are more likely to be appointed and promoted.

"Additionally, the speed of news production today is so fast, that journalists often go to the same sources all the time, which makes their lives easier but doesn't provide diverse perspectives."

Lord Best, Select Committee Chairman said: "There are a number of studies painting a picture of concern about how women are represented in news and current affairs broadcasting. It has been said, for example, that in a typical month, 72% of Question Time contributors are men, as are 84% of reporters and guests on Radio 4's Today programme."

So how can Professor Ross' research influence change? She said: "How about mandating Ofcom to require public service broadcasters to include, at the very least, gender-disaggregated statistics in the annual report, showing who works where in their organisation, and how they are implementing and monitoring their equality and diversity policies? And how monitoring data informs their gender action planning on progressing gender equality?

"Or how about reading the research which shows that the most successful

organisations are those which have a significant number of women on their boards? Really, it's not rocket science. Using the talents of all your staff is not only good for gender justice but makes good business sense.

Research plays a critical role in Northumbria's teaching, with courses underpinned by contemporary research, such as the gender and media work undertaken by Professor Ross. Using research to both inform teaching and the national policy agenda means that students can be sure they are learning from leading experts whose reputation in their field is significant.

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