

Gender Balance at Work: A Study of an Irish Civil Service Department

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EVENT
Report launch

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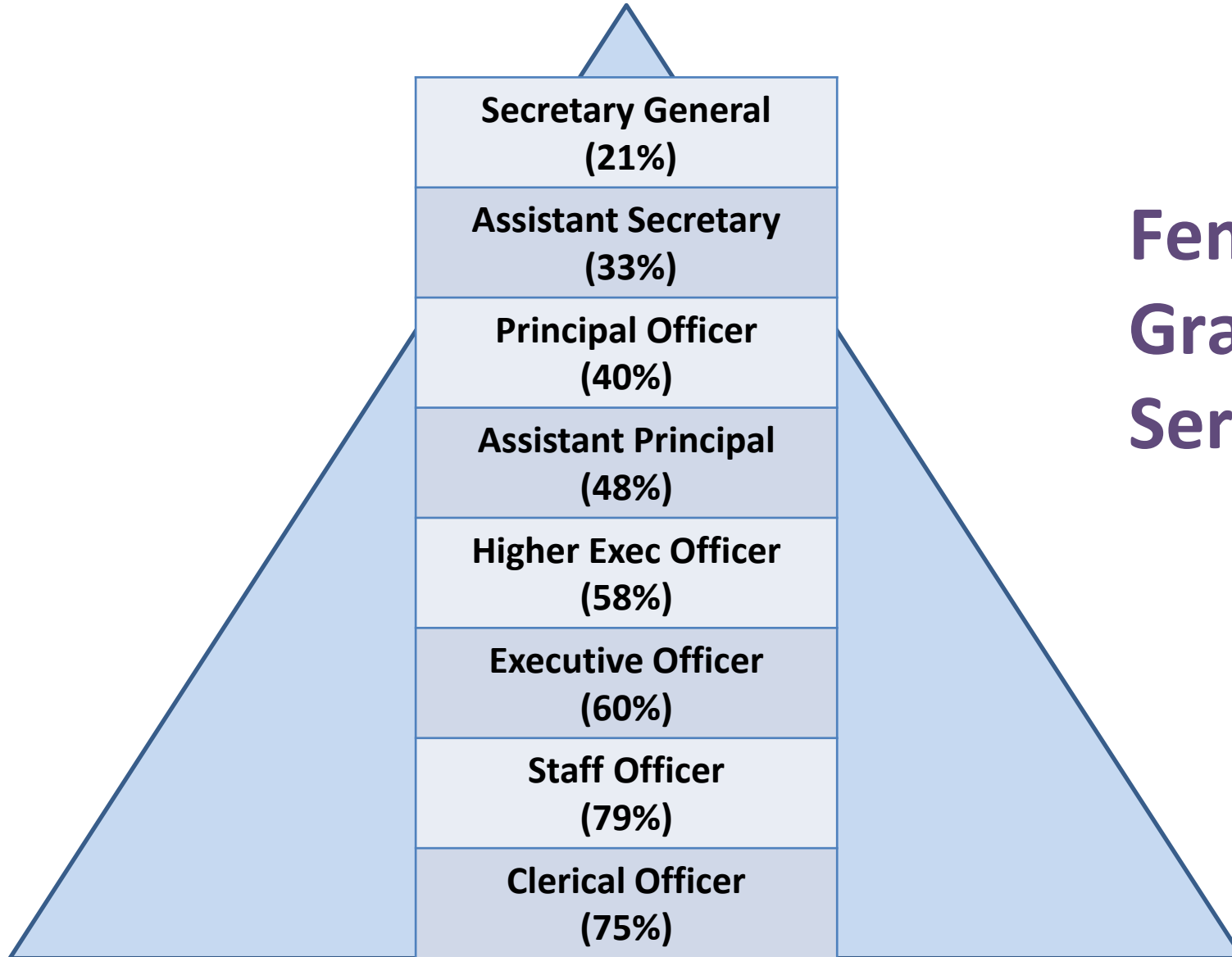
**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



Background



- Significant gender differences in senior civil service positions.
- Variation across departments and DAFM has a relatively low proportion of women at higher grades.
- Relevant for employees, organisational efficiency and society.
- Survey was part of wider initiative to increase gender balance
 - Builds on previous study carried out across civil service



Female Share of Grades in Civil Service, 2016

Source: Russell et al 2017

Research Questions

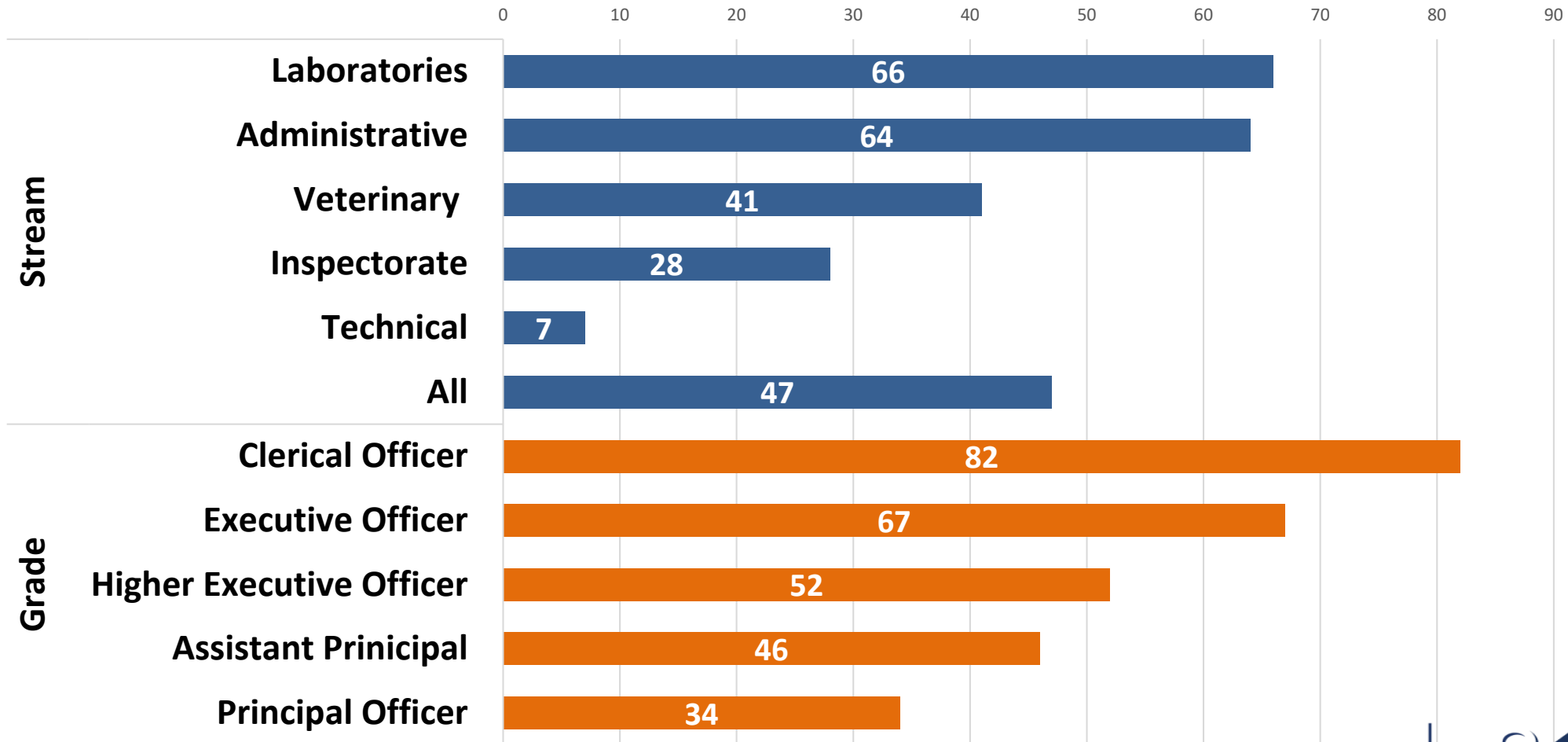
1. Is there a perception of gender bias in the department?

2. Are there gender differences in factors relevant to advancement?
 - Flexible work practices
 - Absence of flexibility a barrier to promotion (Russell et al 2017)
 - But can also contribute to inequality if only taken up by women (Leslie et al. 2012; McIntosh et al., 2012)
 - Training
 - Professional networks

Methodology

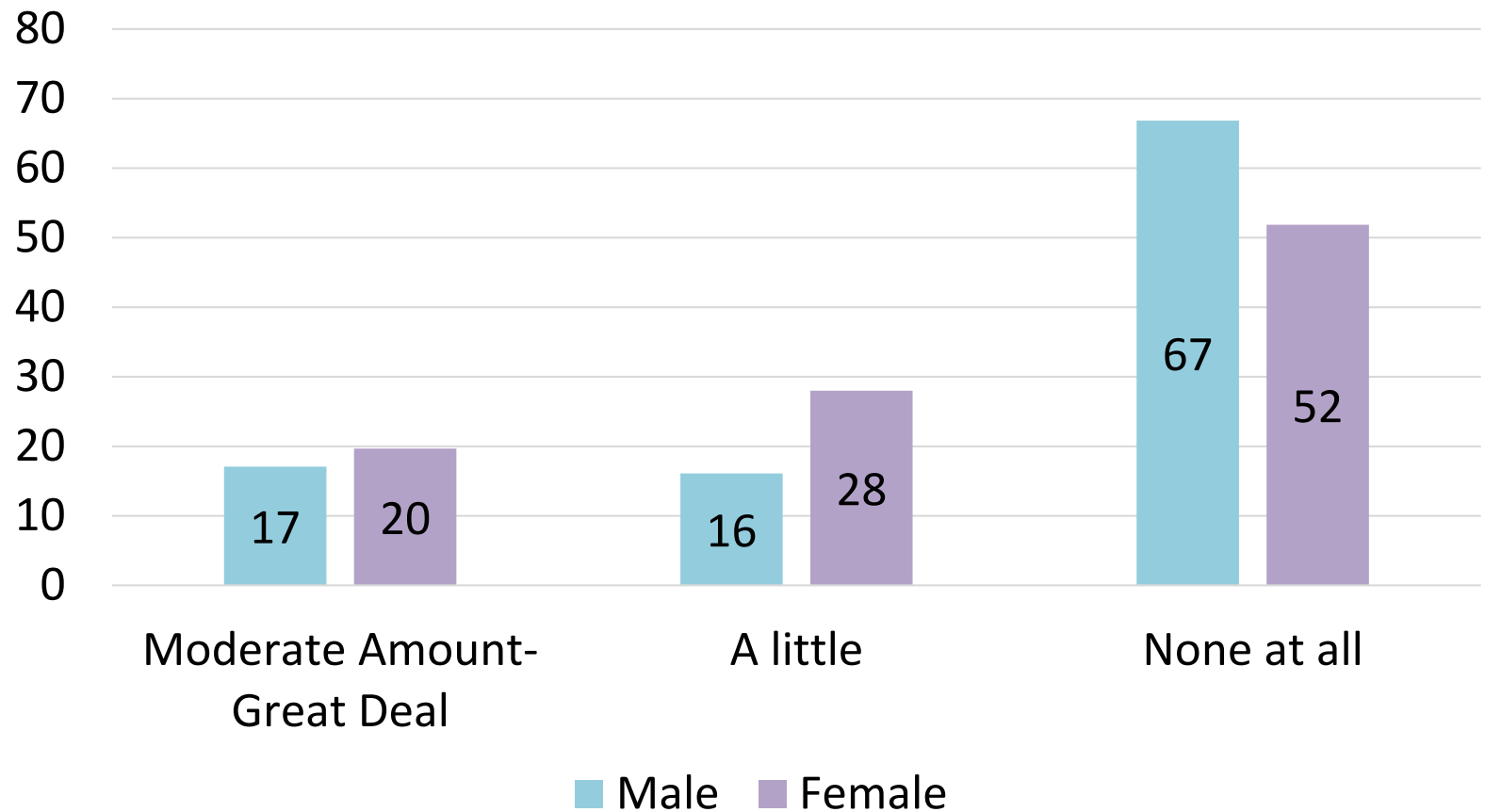
- Based on staff survey (circa 3300) carried out in fourth quarter 2018.
- 933 responses circa 28% response rate (904 in analysis)
- Use statistical models to compare like with like
- Analyse results of recent promotion competitions

Female Share of Occupational Stream DAFM (2019) and Admin Grades (2018)



Experiences of Gender Bias in the Department

- 48% women and 33% of men said they had experienced bias
- Controlling for other factors the odds ratio of experiencing gender bias was almost twice as high for women than men

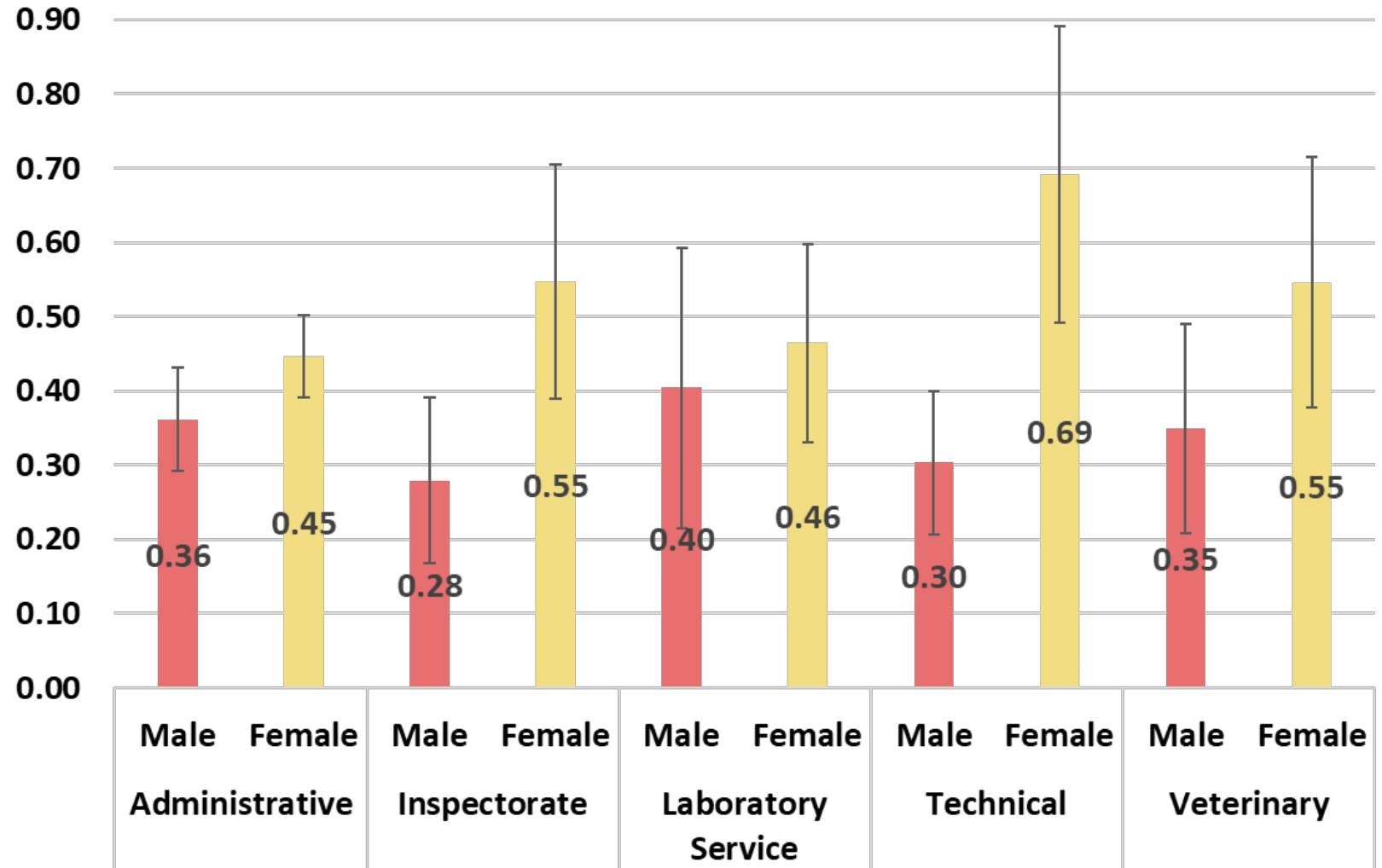


Experiences of Gender Bias differs across streams



Highest gender gap in technical & inspectorate streams.

Both more male-dominated streams

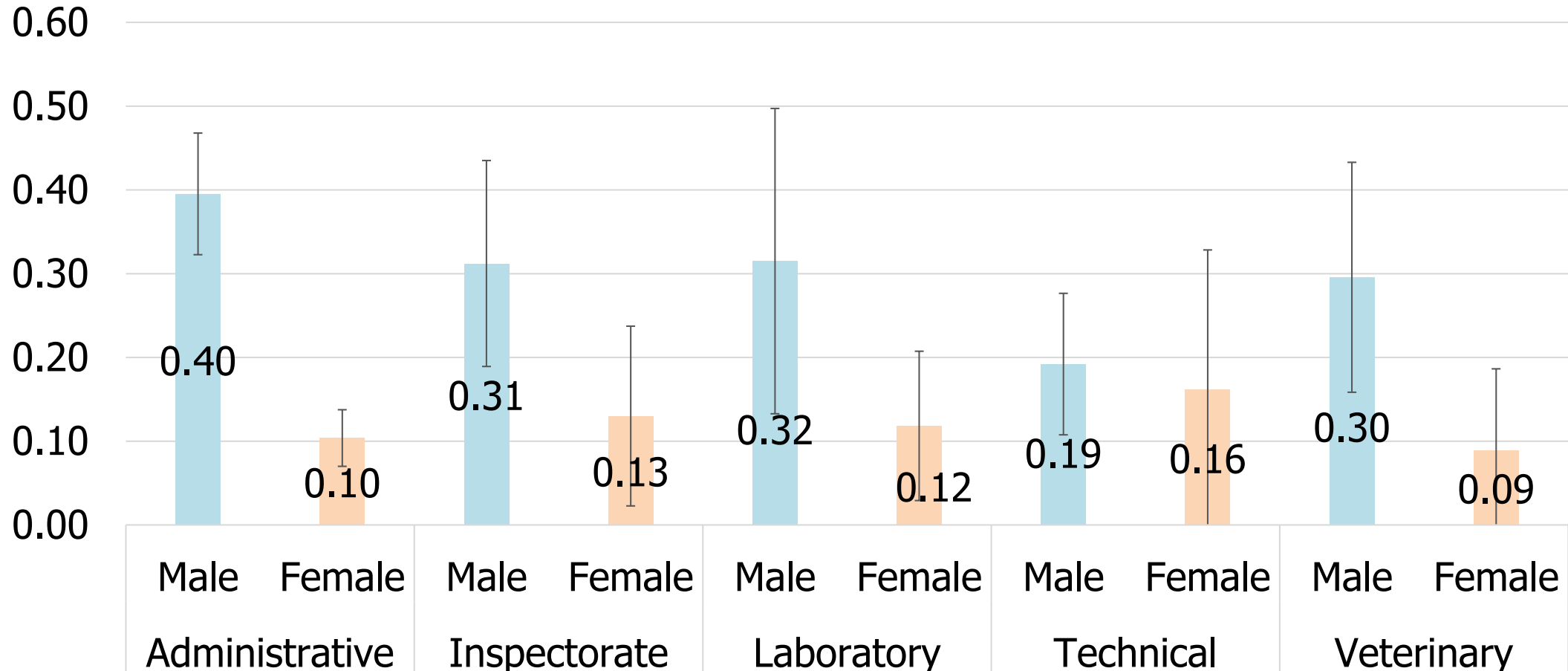


Perceived Gender Bias in Promotion Competitions



- Men more likely to believe there is bias in promotion
 - 32% of men
 - 11% of women
- Lower among new recruits (< 5 years)
- Did not differ by flexible working patterns, child or adult care
- Lower for those in the technical stream

Widest Gender Gap in Administrative Stream



Respondents Comments

- *‘Competitions biased in favour of females now rather than ability’ (Gender not Listed)*
- *‘There is an ideological bias towards gender which can ignore merit’ (Male)*
- *‘I think people should only be promoted on their skills not the(ir) sex’ (Female)*
- *‘I think there is a positive discrimination towards female candidates to address gender imbalance. I disagree with this and believe each post should be filled by the best candidate’ (Male)*

Gender Balance Target

- In January 2017 introduced target of 50/50 gender balance in senior appointments
- Preference is to be given to a female candidate only when deciding between two candidates who have **equal merit** and where women are under-represented on the management board of the department or office in question

Perceived Gender Bias in Promotion

- This could also be due to lack of understanding of gender balance initiative.
- Pushback to initiative common when an in-groups lose some of their privileged status (Eibach and Keegan, 2006)
- Perception could be influenced by stereotypes surrounding women's suitability for senior roles.
- 'Lack of fit' between the demands of senior roles and the attributes of women (Heilman, 2012).

Analysis of Recent Competitions

- PO competition 2017 & 2019: 11% of male applicants and 18% of female applicants successful.
- EO competition: 17% of male candidates and 11% of female candidates successful
- Chi Square & Exact Binomial Tests showed the differences were not significant

Take up of Flexible Work Options Past & Present



- 36% of respondents currently participate in flexible work options.
- Highest in administrative stream lowest in technical and inspectorate.
- Childcare and adult care responsibilities significantly increased take up of flexible work options
- Women have higher levels of participation in both flexible working and leave, even when age, childcare & stream held constant

But Unmet Demand....

- Almost half of those not participating would like to avail of flexible work
- Also support for new forms of flexibility:
 - 73% of men and 68% of women wanted to work from home
 - 64% men and 74% women wished to work compressed hours

Perceptions of Flexible Work

- Participation linked to more positive attitudes about Department's support work-life balance
- But 36% believe flexible work negatively impacts promotion opportunities.
- Those who previously availed of leave schemes more likely to believe there was a negative impact.
- Those currently working flexibly were more optimistic.
- Belief that flexible working limits chances of promotion did not differ significantly across streams or between men and women

Gender Differences in Training, Network Building and Promotions

- Training Participation
 - Lower for women controlling for stream, age, length of service, and family characteristics
 - Lower in admin stream
- Building Professional Networks
 - 46% agreed or strongly agreed it was easy to build professional networks
 - Those in the administrative stream found it most difficult
 - Women in admin stream found it more difficult than men
- Promotion
 - Women less likely to have applied for promotion controlling for stream, length of service and family characteristics
 - Higher for admin stream

Policy Recommendations I

- Perceptions and Experiences of Gender Bias
 - Transparency with employees around how gender balance initiative is implemented
 - Analysis and dissemination of competition results in anonymised form
 - Frame initiatives in terms of improving diversity
 - Departments should consider implementing voluntary diversity task forces.
 - Implementation of regular surveys to assist in identifying barriers to gender equality the civil service

Policy Recommendations II

- Flexible Work Options
 - Extend flexible work options to more employees where possible
 - Extension of options to predominantly male occupational streams
 - Normalisation of working flexibly for male as well as female workers
 - Covid has had unintended consequences here!
- Differences in Experiences
 - Ensure women are encouraged & facilitated to participate in training
 - Further develop mentoring as well as peer-to-peer networking opportunities

Thanks for listening!

Report is available to download at www.esri.ie/publications

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