



Embracing equity

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Hello everyone and thank you for the invitation to speak today. In particular, thank you Lord Popat of Harrow for bringing this group of people together.

12 years ago, I joined bp. When I looked up at the leaders above me, there were not enough women. To my surprise, the executive leadership team had precisely zero women.

Today, as head of people & culture, I am proud to say I am now one of six women on the executive team – in fact, women currently outnumber men – 6 out of 11.

That's definite progress.

But there's more to this story. Our leadership team backgrounds are changing too, with several of us coming from untraditional or working-class upbringings.

Our head of Innovation and Engineering, Leigh-Ann Russell, grew up on an Aberdeen council estate.

She was one of the first in her family to go to university – as was our CEO, Bernard Looney.

And then there's me. I am the daughter of a former dockworker. When the dockyard closed in the 1980s, my father got his degree at night school and became a teacher.

He was my role model – and gave me the courage to pursue a different type of career path. I left school at 16 to become an apprentice at an insurance company. I worked my way up the career ladder and managed to get my A-levels and even an MBA.

Because of my own journey, I understand what it is like to question your ability to get ahead when you have a different start. And as a mother of two strong daughters and a teenage son – I want them to see that gender and background aren't reasons for anyone to be held back.

This is why amongst the great work we are doing in diversity, equity and inclusion, we have been really focusing on improving social mobility.

We know that the challenges faced by women and girls, are only further enhanced when you consider the impacts of class inequality.

Research shows that progress both in school and in the workplace can be tougher for girls and women as well as for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

And despite an awareness on the need for more diversity, there is still a long way to go.

At bp, we have made progress – but we are aiming to do better.

We aspire for women to make up half of our top 120 leadership roles by 2025 – an ambitious goal.

But it's not enough to have strong gender ambitions alone.

If we are truly to embrace equity, we must create workplaces where individuals have a chance to thrive, regardless of their backgrounds. That's why bp has strong aims around social mobility too.

A diversity of backgrounds is something we want to see reflected across the whole of the company. Not only is it the right thing to do, but diverse teams perform better.

So, what are we doing?

We're aiming to increase representation of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

We're adding more work experience placements, so we make careers at bp accessible.

And we're aiming to double our apprenticeships globally by 2030.

We already have some incredible apprentices in bp, with brilliant stories – I'd like to share Hibah's.

Hibah describes how given her family background, as well as being a woman, opportunities did not always come easily.

Financially university wasn't an option for her - so, after a conversation with her brother about one of our apprenticeship schemes, she joined our scheme and is now learning practical skills in mechanical engineering in Aberdeen.

Her goal is to become a bp Mechanical Technician.

We want to help create more of these stories.

For me, our work in Teesside in the Northeast has really brought our efforts on social mobility to life.

This is an area that was historically an industrial heartland. Then it went into decline, experiencing high levels of deprivation and unemployment.

This is where we are developing the UK's first decarbonised industrial cluster – with the world's first gas-fired power station with carbon capture and storage.

We're aiming for these efforts to bring new jobs and help regenerate the area.

And we're investing in the broader community, funding to build a new education hub tailored to the local economy's needs. Giving others the opportunity reskill – just like my father had.

International Women's Day is both a day to celebrate the amazing accomplishments of women – and it's a reminder.

A reminder that no woman should be left behind in our progress – no matter what your socioeconomic background.

There is work still needed to create more diverse teams.

But we can use our voices to challenge the status quo.

It is often said that you can't be what you can't see. And together, we can role model the teams we want the world to see.

Thank you.