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Samantha Beckett  
Director General, Economics & Markets  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

17 September 2015

Dear Ms Beckett,

**A public challenge – deadline for a response, 5pm 2 October**

Three months ago we sent Sajid Javid, Business Secretary, a public challenge with respect to the government's continuing initiative to force major companies into increasing female representation on their boards – specifically, currently, FTSE100 companies. I received a predictably woeful response – of a type I've come to expect from DBIS – but I went to considerable efforts to critique the response in forensic detail, and asked for an internal review of it. Today I received your contemptuous letter on the matter, failing to engage with key issues. The sequence of documents from beginning to end can be accessed [here](#). We shall be taking the matter to the Information Commissioner shortly.

In 2012, representing [Campaign for Merit in Business](#), which I led then as now, I presented evidence to House of Commons and House of Lords inquiries, and presented MPs and peers with evidence of a causal link between increasing female representation on boards and corporate financial decline – our short briefing paper on the matter, with links to five longitudinal studies, is [here](#).

A link to the video of the House of Commons inquiry session to which I gave evidence is [here](#). Another contributor was Professor Catherine Hakim, the world-renowned sociologist who published a paper on 'Preference Theory' in 2000. The important part of her paper, for the purpose of this challenge, was that her research uncovered that while four in seven British men are work-centred, only one in seven British women is. Gender-typical work ethic differences are the prime cause of gender 'imbalances' on corporate boards, in senior political appointments etc. In the former case, gender imbalances which the government is seeking to remedy through forcing FTSE100 companies to positively discriminate for women when appointing directors – women who they wouldn't appoint otherwise (or they would have, already). In the latter case, both David Cameron and Jeremy Corbyn have positively discriminated for women when selecting cabinet and shadow cabinet ministers.

[Professor Susan Vinnicombe](#) is Professor of Women and Leadership – what a ridiculous title, only matched by the Minister for Women and Equalities – at Cranfield University. She heads the [Cranfield International](#)

[Centre for Women Leaders](#), and is without doubt the world's most prominent academic exponent of 'more women on boards'. This brings us to an exchange with Professor Vinnicombe in the course of the same House of Lords inquiry to which I submitted evidence. Lord Fearn posed this question:

Is there a strong business case for improving the gender diversity of boards? If so, does it follow that there is also a strong business case for increased gender diversity on boards across the EU?

In the course of her rambling response, Professor Vinnicombe said this:

Thirdly, there has been quite a push in the past – indeed, we ourselves have engaged in such research – to look at the relationship between having women on corporate boards and financial performance. We do not subscribe to this research. We have shared it with chairmen and they do not think that it makes sense. We agree that it does not make sense. You cannot correlate two or three women on a massive corporate board with a return on investment, return on equity, turnover or profits. We have dropped such research in the past five years and I am pleased to say that Catalyst, which claims to have done a ground-breaking study on this in the US, officially dropped this line of argument last September.

Our blog post on the exchange, with her full response to Lord Fearn's question, is [here](#).

Given your position, you should be strongly challenging the government's 'direction of travel' on the matter of gender diversity on boards. I got no sense from your letter that you are doing so. You write:

In our response we also acknowledged that the academic literature is mixed in findings regarding the impact of gender diversity on corporate performance – while we accept that some studies have found evidence to support the hypothesis that an increase in gender diversity can be associated with a reduction in performance, *there are other studies that have shown the opposite*. [my emphasis]

Caroline Criado-Perez won the first of her three Lying Feminist of the Month awards for making precisely the same claim you have, 'there are other studies that have shown the opposite'. A link to the BBC radio programme in the course of which she lied about the matter is [here](#). Not long ago she and I were interviewed on the ITV programme *This Morning*. She laughed before admitting to [Phillip Schofield](#) that she'd won her award... because she'd lied.

I am not going to explain yet again the critical point that only longitudinal studies can demonstrate causal links (in this case between gender diversity on boards, and corporate financial performance) and that pointing to reports and studies demonstrating correlations – as the DBIS has done repeatedly for more than three years – is dishonest, disingenuous, and futile. You have details of the five longitudinal studies we cite. My public challenge of you, on behalf of Campaign for Merit in Business, could not be simpler:

I challenge you to inform me of the longitudinal studies you've claimed exist 'that have shown the opposite' by 5pm on 2 October. Please email me at [mike@j4mb.org.uk](mailto:mike@j4mb.org.uk).

The list of people who've failed to provide evidence of a causal link between increasing female representation on boards, and enhanced corporate performance, is a lengthy one – [here](#). If you don't supply details of longitudinal studies by the deadline, you will be a strong contender for next month's Lying Feminist of the Month Award. The full list of award winners is [here](#), and you may notice several have won their awards in connection with lies about gender diversity on boards. None have ever challenged the assertion that they'd lied, for a simple reason. They had no grounds on which to challenge the assertion.

I have put blog posts linking to this letter on the websites of our party, and that of Campaign for Merit in Business. I shall not be sending you a hard copy of this letter, and I hope to hear from you before 2 October.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Buchanan  
PARTY LEADER