



# Women in Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management



## 5-YEAR STRATEGY

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# INTRODUCTION

The Women in Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (WiFCERM) initiative began life in 2018 as an open, honest and incredibly inspirational conversation. The conversation highlighted the commonality between the challenges women face across the sector.

The initiative has grown substantially in scale and ambition since it was first piloted at the 2018 Flood and Coast conference. We are now a large networking group of professionals set up to support and connect women working across the FCERM sector. We are focussed on women and those who line-manage them, but this is within a broader context of striving for gender equality for everyone, so our membership is open to all.

The initiative is run by 20 volunteers whose day jobs represent different parts of the FCERM sector. We now run a successful group mentoring programme; promote and celebrate individuals through our annual WiFCERM Awards; bring people together through our networking events; and work with Corporate Affiliate member organisations who want to be recognised partners in contributing to gender equality across the FCERM sector.

Yet, as women continue to face significant challenges across FCERM and related sectors, we need to do more.

For example, women remain significantly underrepresented in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) workforce. [In 2025 women represented just 25% of this workforce in the UK](#) —underscoring a persistent gender gap in one of the most critical sectors of the economy.

The situation in education offers mixed signals. Nearly [19% of engineering and technology degree applicants](#) are now female, indicating progress in attracting young women to the field. Yet these gains at the entry level fail to translate into workforce retention, particularly among women aged 35 to 64, where [66,000 fewer workers](#) remained in the sector between 2022 and 2023. Caregiving is **not** the leading cause for women leaving STEM. Only 3% cite this. Instead: 25% leave due to lack of career growth; 17% because of lack of recognition; 15% because of inadequate pay; and 8% because of a toxic culture.

We want to actively support an increase in these numbers, and improve the representation of women in these areas.

So, we've reflected where we've come from and where we want to get to in 5 years' time, and beyond. Using your consultation responses, this 5-year Strategy sets out the outcomes and objectives we want to achieve and the actions that need to be undertaken to achieve them.

We know that we can't achieve these on our own. This 5-year Strategy will require continuous conversations and partnership working across the FCERM sector to implement, embed, and be successful. Together we can be ambitious and stretch ourselves to do more to support women, making the FCERM sector an attractive place for women to work in, thrive in, and feel empowered to make a difference in the face of a changing climate.

# OUTCOME 1: ATTRACTING, INSPIRING AND RETAINING WOMEN INTO THE FCERM SECTOR

## Objectives

- 1.1 More women actively choose to enter the FCERM sector at all career stages
- 1.2 The FCERM sector is visibly inclusive and open to all women

## Actions

### Years 1-2

- a) Collect data on the barriers to women joining the FCERM sector and reasons why they leave, including data on any specific FCERM pay-gap.
- b) Analyse the skills needed across the sector to identify desirable skills and skills gaps.
- c) Engage with different sub-sectors of FCERM i.e. construction, contractors, to promote our initiative.
- d) Spotlight the range of positions held by women at all levels across the FCERM sector.
- e) Create materials and stories of WiFCERM for schools/college/university events.

### Years 3-5

- f) Review data and evidence collected in Years 1-2.
- g) Explore opportunities to link up with new and existing apprenticeship schemes to inform skills, knowledge and behaviours of those offering and taking up these opportunities.
- h) Link up with educational initiatives and opportunities promoting STEM.

### Years 5+

- i) Review data and evidence collected in Years 3-5.
- j) Explore opportunities to support and shape curriculum based of data collected.

# OUTCOME 2: INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

## Objectives

- 2.1 Workplaces across the FCERM sector are inclusive and supportive, offering flexible working arrangements and family-friendly policies to accommodate diverse needs.
- 2.2 Zero-tolerance policies towards discrimination and harassment are consistently implemented and effective, creating a safe and respectful environment for everyone.
- 2.3 Women in the FCERM sector have the safe spaces, facilities and equipment (including PPE) they need to feel supported and thrive.

## Actions

### Years 1-2

- a) Collect data and evidence through our Benchmarking Survey to understand what HR policies exist. For example, bullying and harassment, menopause, maternity and paternity, flexible working, compassionate/carers/dependent leave, new starters induction, and exit interviews.
- b) Collect case studies on what already exists to ensure women have safe spaces, facilities and equipment and what is missing.
- c) Work with the FCERM sector and our Corporate Affiliate members to explore 'good' examples of policies and practices which create a safe and respectful environment for everyone.
- d) Engage line managers and members of our network to become recognised allies of WiFCERM and set up an allies' network

### Years 3-5

- e) Review data and evidence collected in Years 1-2.
- f) Develop best practice guides / minimum requirements on what women need on site to feel safe and supported and what diversity goals could be built into FCERM projects design and build.
- g) Actively celebrate and spotlight organisations that work with us and make significant changes to their policies/working practice.

### Years 5+

- h) Reflect and build on learnings from years 1-5.

# OUTCOME 3: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

## Objectives

- 3.1 FCERM career development and promotion opportunities are free from bias and accessible to all women.
- 3.2 FCERM career development programmes are designed to specifically support women in advancing their careers

## Actions

### Years 1-2

- a) Collect data and evidence to understand what opportunities there are for women, and what barriers and gaps still exist for women’s career development at all stages.
- b) Collect data and evidence to understand what training and best practice is available regarding: recruitment approaches; career development and promotion; and reducing bias in recruitment.
- c) Actively spotlight diverse role models, squiggly career journeys, and experiences to inspire and educate others.
- d) Continue the annual WiFCERM Mentoring Programme to support career development, building in the feedback we seek and receive each year. This includes expanding our offer of additional L&D webinars.
- e) Expand our WiFCERM networking opportunities, working in partnership with our Corporate Affiliates, other organisations and initiatives to specifically support career development.

### Years 3-5

- f) Review data and evidence collected in Years 1-2.
- g) Work with the FCERM sector to create best practice guides for organisations, recruiters, and line managers that ensures development, recruitment, and promotion opportunities are free from gender bias and accessible to all women.
- h) Promote and share recruitment opportunities for our Corporate Affiliates who are actively contributing to gender equality across the FCERM sector.

### Years 5+

- i) Utilise our data and evidence, and work across the FCERM sector, to scope and develop a specific WiFCERM Career Development programme covering all stages of career and employment.

# OUTCOME 4: INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

## Objectives

- 4.1 Women hold more leadership positions at all levels across the FCERM sector, from field operations to executive roles and non-executive (board) roles, contributing diverse perspectives and innovative solutions.
- 4.2 FCERM leaders and the decisions they make are gender-balanced<sup>1</sup>, reflecting the diversity of the communities they serve.

## Actions

<p><b>Years 1-2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Collect data and evidence to understand the current leadership makeup of the sector and what barriers women face in reaching leadership and board roles in FCERM.</li><li>b) Spotlight best practice and benefits of inclusive leadership and gender balanced decision-making.</li><li>c) Grow our WiFCERM Corporate Affiliate membership so more organisations become recognised partners in contributing to gender equity and equality across the FCERM.</li><li>d) Explore opportunities to collaborate with other mentoring programmes specifically focused on leadership.</li></ul>
<p><b>Years 3-5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>e) Review data and evidence collected in Years 1-2.</li><li>f) Identify existing leaders that can advocate on our behalf.</li><li>g) Produce advice on what good governance and gender balanced leadership looks like in FCERM and how to achieve it.</li><li>h) Seek commitment from top leadership across the FCERM sector to adopt an inclusive approach to gender equity and promote our good governance advice.</li></ul>
<p><b>Years 5+</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Actively challenge and advocate for inclusive leadership, using our position and evidence to influence change from within.</li><li>j) Work with the sector (including our WiFCERM mentors, corporate affiliates, and other mentoring programmes) to scope and develop a WiFCERM leadership development programme.</li></ul>

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<sup>1</sup> Gender-balanced participation implies equal representation ie, the parity of participation of women and men.



# OUTCOME 5: A CELEBRATED, WELL RECOGNISED, AND SUSTAINABLE WIFCERM INITIATIVE

## Objectives

- 5.1 WiFCERM has the governance, resources and processes in place to build on our 5-year Strategy.
- 5.2 WiFCERM is well-recognised, valued, successful, and continues to grow.
- 5.3 WiFCERM has a long-term and sustainable future.

## Actions

<p><b>Years 1-2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Review the WiFCERM Governance model and ensure it is fit for purpose to deliver the 5-year Strategy.</li><li>b) Assess the resources (funding and time) required to deliver the WiFCERM Strategy.</li><li>c) Expand our networking and events offers across the FCERM sector.</li><li>d) Continue our WiFCERM Awards to celebrate professionals of all genders and organisations in the FCERM sector, who make a real difference to gender equality in the workplace and across the industry.</li><li>e) Develop a monitoring and reporting plan, which includes publishing an annual report of our achievements and progress towards our 5-Year Strategy.</li><li>f) Define and communicate our 'membership' offer.</li></ul>
<p><b>Years 3-5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>g) Publish a mid-point review of our monitoring and benchmarking surveys, and the progress towards achieving our 5-Year Strategy outcomes, objectives, and actions.</li><li>h) Develop a costed business plan for the future of WiFCERM that explores options and opportunities to gain financial independence and sustainability.</li></ul>
<p><b>Years 5+</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Be financially independent and sustainable in our operations.</li><li>j) Reflect on our 5-year strategy, publishing a report to reflect our achievements since year 1.</li><li>k) Start to review and consult on our next 5-year Year Strategy ambitions.</li><li>l) Explore opportunities for growing the geographical reach of the network.</li></ul>