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Dear Helen

We note, with interest, that you are calling for evidence about Women on Boards. The evidence from social enterprises is encouraging in that women are more likely to be involved at all levels. Half of the board members of the Social Enterprise Coalition itself are female.

Social enterprises are businesses with primarily social or environmental objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners. SEC was established in 2002 as the national voice of social enterprise. We represent a wide range of social enterprises, umbrella bodies and networks, with a combined membership reaching over 10,500 social enterprises.

Last year, the Social Enterprise Coalition conducted a survey of senior figures within social enterprises, the results of which were published in the *State of Social Enterprise Survey 2009*, the largest survey of its kind of social enterprises in the UK. One of the key findings from the survey was that social enterprises are a natural home for women entrepreneurs.

The survey found that the glass ceiling is being effectively challenged in the leadership of social enterprises, where 41.1% of all board members are women, which compares to just 11.7% of board members in FTSE 100 companies and 4.9% in Alternative Investment Market-listed companies. 26% of social enterprises could be described as 'women-led' – almost twice as many compared to small businesses (14%). Only 10% of boards had no female representation.

We welcome this opportunity to provide evidence from social enterprise on women on boards. Also included are a few examples of women-led social enterprises.

Yours sincerely

Peter Holbrook
Chief Executive
Social Enterprise Coalition

Examples of women-led social enterprises

A few examples of women-led social enterprises are presented below.

i) Julie Harris, Chief executive, COSMIC

Based in east Devon and working across the South West, COSMIC offers web design, ICT consultancy and training. It was originally born out of a venture in a youth club, where lottery funding was used to provide ICT training to young people and the local community. Cosmic was the first organisation to be awarded the Social Enterprise Mark. During 2008, over 700 adults received training from COSMIC.

ii) Sophi Tranchell, managing director, Divine Chocolate

Divine Chocolate is part-owned by the farmers in Ghana who produce the raw cocoa beans. They don't just get financial benefits from the business but are also involved in decision making. Divine has bought more than 7,000 tonnes of cocoa at fair trade prices since its launch in 1998. In 2008, Divine reinvested almost £300,000 of net profit back into the business.

iii) Gill Coupland, co-founder and director, Angels Housekeeping

Angels Housekeeping is a Leeds-based community interest company (CIC) set up in 2005 by Gill Coupland and her friends Sarah Thompson, Julie Hanlon and Susan Yule. It is a domestic service in demand, responding to an increasingly ageing population in an area where many services that were relied on by older people have been cut.

iv) Saeeda Ahmed, co-founder and head of diversity, Trescom

Trescom helps marginalised groups access employment through training and holistic support, and works with large organisations to improve the way they deliver services. In 2002 – its second year of existence – Trescom was a finalist for two categories in the 'Women & Equality Unit and DTI Castle Award'.

More information on these social enterprises can be found at <http://www.socialenterpriseambassadors.org.uk>.

The *State of Social Enterprise Survey 2009* is found at <http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/data/files/stateofsocialenterprise2009.pdf>.