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# If Rose has been chosen for the top job at RBS, then why the silence?

Katherine Griffiths, Banking Editor



Alison Rose has been in serious training for the top job at Royal Bank of Scotland for almost a year and was limbering up for some time before that. Yet in recent weeks her prospects appear to have weakened — because, despite the champagne being on ice ready for an announcement that she has clinched the post of chief executive, there has been silence.

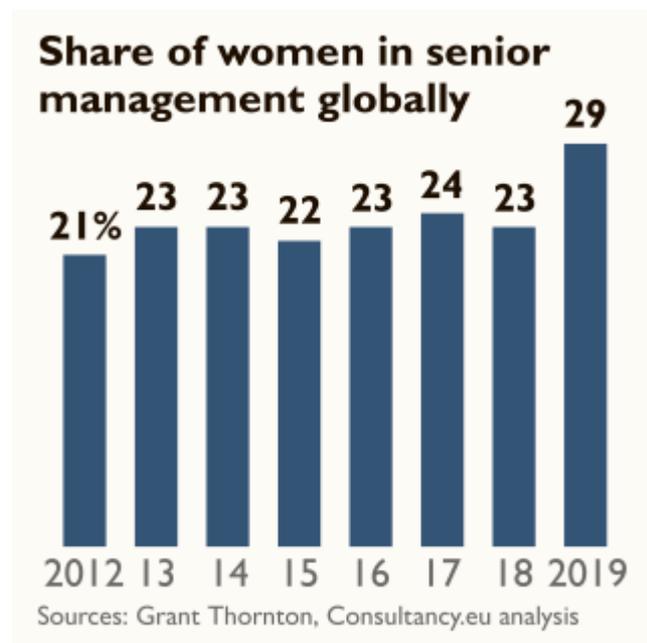
Some onlookers, noting that other names have surfaced as potential candidates, have wondered if RBS's board is not universally behind Ms Rose. Some have speculated that the regulator has questioned the breadth of her experience or has simply been too busy to approve her appointment, with everyone working flat out on Brexit. RBS also has had the problem of reconciling new best practice rules restricting pension payments to senior executives with a need not to be seen to be paying a female boss less than her departing male counterpart.

Ms Rose, 49, remains likely to become the bank's next chief executive, having seen off several rivals, but with no formal confirmation a month after rumours emerged that her promotion was in the final stages of regulatory approval, it's a poor start to what will be an extremely high-profile role. On top of the responsibility of running a complex financial institution amid the uncertainty of Brexit, Ms Rose will receive extra scrutiny as the first woman to run a large bank in Britain and one of only a handful of female banking bosses around the world.

RBS's board has emphasised the need for a proper recruitment process to replace Ross McEwan. But Mr McEwan, 62, has been thinking about his exit for a couple of years. That has given plenty of time for the bank to search discreetly before Mr McEwan confirmed in April that he would step down within a year, and then more formally after the announcement.

HSBC came a cropper by picking the wrong chief executive. Mark Tucker, its chairman, pushed out John Flint, a bank lifer but an unknown quantity to Mr Tucker, who had only just joined the group.

At RBS, Ms Rose is also a long-time employee, having joined Natwest, part of the group, as a trainee in 1992. She rose through the ranks under Fred Goodwin, but that has not held her back from high office. She was elevated to the executive committee in 2014.



Unlike at HSBC, Ms Rose is well known to Sir Howard Davies, RBS's chairman since September 2015. She was promoted to be deputy head of its ringfenced business, which contains its retail and commercial lending operations, last November, alongside her existing role running the commercial and private bank.

Some have pointed to her lack of experience in retail banking, but few candidates come with all boxes ticked. Indeed, Mr McEwan was well versed in retail banking when he became RBS's boss in 2013, but investment banking was unfamiliar territory. Some senior City women believe that there is always more emphasis on the areas missing from the CVs of women rather than of men, both among directors and at the regulator.

In contrast, JP Morgan Chase has been preparing for several years for the departure of Jamie Dimon by moving a small group of individuals between several senior positions. America's largest and most complex bank has a handful of contenders to succeed Mr Dimon, including two women, one of whom — Marianne Lake — is British.

RBS, 62 per cent-owned by the government after its £45.5 billion bailout, has done well on several fronts, investing in digital banking and improving its systems. Its most important decision now is who will take on the job of driving its efforts to become a normal lender. If Ms Rose has won the selection race, she should be swiftly announced and supported by the board.

**Katherine Griffiths is Banking Editor of The Times**