

***“Carry on networking!” says Margaret Hodge***

*Hosted by Executive Action and Davidson Partners, founders of Innovatus, the networking group for senior women in business and professional life, our latest event on 8 May was held in the magnificent Chartered Accountants’ Hall in the City of London. The Rt Honorable Margaret Hodge spoke to a group of 40 senior women over dinner.*

**On the face of it, chairing the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee would seem to be an unlikely place to change the world. But former Cabinet Minister Margaret Hodge doesn’t see it like that.**

**No stranger to controversy during a formidable local and national political career, Margaret told the gathering that the role gives her more impact than being a minister. Certainly, whether it’s in relation to corporate tax arrangements or pay levels for top executives, the work of the Committee is rarely out of the public eye. And, with a reputation for outspokenness, Margaret Hodge was never going to be a boring Chair.**



**The Public Accounts Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine whether public spending commitments represent value for money. Margaret was the committee’s first female chair, as well as the first to be elected rather than appointed. This gives her a special perspective. “The Public Accounts Committee is made up of politicians from a variety of backgrounds,” she told Innovatus. “Often we do high profile reports that are highly political. The skill is in ensuring that our reports are unanimous and provide value for money. Women bring a valuable different style to this process. We’re better at teambuilding and in promoting the strengths of others.”**



**A longstanding theme of Margaret’s career has been in pushing for childcare strategies and flexible working conditions to help support women balance working life and family commitments. When she was leader of Islington council it took several years to build the consensus needed to get later start times for meetings, to help women who also juggled family lives. She also worked to improve maternity benefits and help set up the first workplace nurseries – regarded as a policy from the ‘loony left’ at the time, but now accepted best practice.**

By the 1990s attitudes in politics were beginning to change, with people increasingly looking to women to represent them. Yet when she successfully stood in the 1994 by-election in Barking, she was still the only candidate to be asked about her childcare arrangements...

Once in Parliament, Margaret recalls as highlights successful campaigns on tax credits and flexible working hours. Parliament she summarizes as an environment in which there are very many capable women, including women ministers who have really achieved lasting change, but where there is still a need to see more women at the top of the tree.



At 69, Margaret told us she is “Full of energy. I am not in it for the short sprint but for the long haul. Age is not a barrier – it’s an opportunity to say ‘take me as I am’.”

Margaret was speaking at the fifth of our increasingly successful Innovatus networking events, and paid tribute to the importance of networking, especially for women. “Networking is hugely important and has helped me in my career. Women should always support each other, sharing problems, challenges and opportunities. Carry on networking!”

