Her supporters claim that Lady Thatcher’s success should be considered a boon to all feminists. President Obama even commented that it showed ‘our daughters that there is no glass ceiling that can’t be shattered’. However, her critics argue that succeeding as a woman in a man’s world is not enough, and that Thatcher’s policies did little to help the advancement of ‘ordinary’ women in arenas of power. This is a common debate among feminists and the evidence here is mixed.

The number of senior UK female judges since Thatcher’s time is also growing (Table 1). But there is only one woman (out of 12) on the Supreme Court and women are still heavily under-represented in other senior judicial positions. The story is broadly the same elsewhere. So, sociologists might argue that Thatcher’s visibility and success as Prime Minister from 1979 — her agency — did have a positive impact, at least for some women. But it also seems clear that serious structural barriers to female success in the UK remain entrenched.