DIVERSITY IN TECH
AND ITS ROLE IN
FUTURE EQUALITY

A report by Wiley Edge

Please note: Wiley Edge rebranded to ‘mthree’ in June 2024
Despite extensive coverage in the media on the lack of diversity in tech, it remains a significant problem, with only around 15% of the tech workforce from BAME backgrounds, and gender diversity currently sitting at around 19%, compared with 49% for all other jobs.

This is something that needs to be taken seriously: income inequality remains rife in the UK, and improving the situation will require an ongoing collective effort to find ways to help more women and people in minority groups to gain employment in secure, well-paid roles and industries.

This is why achieving greater diversity in technology should not simply be a box-ticking exercise for businesses looking to improve their DE&I credentials. With many tech roles offering above-average salaries even at entry level, encouraging and enabling a broader range of people to consider pursuing a career in technology could make a real difference in the fight for equality. However, when we asked businesses why they are conscious of the diversity of their workforce, the most widely cited response related to improving the business’s reputation (36%). Far fewer (23%) said that it’s because it’s the right thing to do.

In 2021, we published our inaugural report highlighting the relationship between tech diversity and equality in the UK, detailing why encouraging a wider range of young people to consider careers in tech was crucial amidst the economic uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This follow-up report explores how the industry has changed – if at all – in the past year, and outlines the steps businesses can take to improve and mobilise DE&I in the workforce.
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Key findings

In order to ascertain the barriers that are still preventing a broader range of young people from pursuing a career in technology, we surveyed 2,000* 18-24-year-olds to find out how perceptions of the technology industry and the opportunities it offers are changing, and how those already working in tech really feel about their careers so far.

We also spoke to 200* senior business leaders in key industries, including financial services, insurance and pharmaceuticals, to establish what is currently being done to actively improve diversity in their tech teams, and where more work is still required.

* For more detail on the survey participants, please see the report methodology on page 25.
When asked why they are conscious of the diversity of their workforce, only 23% of businesses said that it’s because it’s the right thing to do.

**Many workers have negative perceptions of the industry:**

More than one in 10 (11%) of those surveyed said that they believe the tech industry is too male dominated, rising to 19% of women.

**The prospects of a promising tech career are not as well known:**

Only around a quarter (26%) of 18-24-year-olds who are not currently working in tech said that they believe it offers excellent career opportunities.

**Working in tech remains an uncomfortable experience for junior staff:**

Nearly half of young tech workers (48%) have felt uncomfortable in a job because of their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background or neurodevelopmental condition.

**Companies are struggling to retain a diverse workforce, despite current efforts:**

64% of businesses surveyed admitted they are struggling to retain diverse employees, despite 65% stating that they work hard to foster an inclusive company culture.

**Focusing on a small talent pool is limiting diverse hiring efforts:**

While 55% of businesses said they struggle to recruit diverse entry-level employees, 60% said they are more likely to hire—or that they exclusively hire—graduates from top universities.

**The majority of hearts may not be in the right place:**

When asked why they are conscious of the diversity of their workforce, only 23% of businesses said that it’s the right thing to do.
PART 01

Why tech diversity and equality go hand in hand
Technology and the pay gaps

It’s no secret that salaries in technology are amongst some of the highest in the UK, thanks to the combination of a global digital skills gap and rapidly growing demand for skilled technology professionals, not just within technology companies themselves but in businesses across almost every sector. According to Tech Nation, the average tech salary is currently up to 50% higher than the average for all vacancies in the UK, and is increasing, whilst the average salary for all jobs in the UK decreased in 2021.
At the same time, many organisations are still grappling with a pay gap problem. As of 2017, gender pay gap reporting is mandatory for employers with a headcount of 250 or more. Although the gender pay gap has been declining slowly over time – over the last decade it has fallen by approximately a quarter – in 2021 the gap among full-time employees was still 7.9%, up from 7.0% in 2020.

However, our survey revealed that only 31% of UK business leaders believe they have a gender pay gap problem, despite the latest ONS data suggesting that around 78% of reporting employers said median hourly pay was higher for men than for women in their organisation.

Meanwhile, awareness is also growing around the issue of the race and ethnicity pay gap. Over the last two decades, the working population in the UK has become increasingly diverse, with employment rates rising across all ethnic groups. Yet a 2021 report by PwC found that, after holding personal and work-related characteristics constant, white British people earn more on average than people from almost all other ethnic groups.

Our research found that only 25% of businesses admitted to having a race and ethnicity pay gap problem, however it also revealed that more than a quarter (26%) of businesses are still failing to collect data on the demographic composition of their workforce.

While pay gaps cannot be solved by businesses alone, there are many actions that businesses can take that will have a significant positive impact. For example, by implementing strategies to increase the diversity of employees in higher paid and senior-level roles, businesses should find that their pay gap challenges naturally start to improve. Indeed, according to our research, businesses with diverse tech teams were 21% less likely to say they have a pay gap problem.
Tackling board inequality from the bottom up

As awareness of the importance of DE&I grows, one issue that has increasingly come to the forefront is the historical lack of diversity on corporate boards. While progress has overall been slow to improve this issue, there has been some momentum.

For example, the latest Parker Review revealed that FTSE 100 businesses’ boards are more ethnically diverse than five years ago: **in 2021, 74 companies had a BAME representative on their board while another five were expected to appoint directors from minority backgrounds imminently, compared with 51% in 2017.** And in April 2022, the FCA finalised rules requiring listed companies to report information and disclose against targets on the representation of women and ethnic minorities on their boards and executive management.

However, there is still more to be done. **Only three in 10 board seats are held by women in UK,** with 48 companies in the FTSE 100 having met the Hampton Alexander Review’s 40% target for women on boards.
Immediate action needs to take place to continue rectifying these issues in the short term with new senior hires and new board members. But there is something else organisations need to do: plan for the future.

To successfully increase corporate board diversity in the long term, it is essential to ensure there is a pipeline of diverse talent starting now, allowing employees to build their careers from the bottom up and instigate change all the way through their careers to lead businesses and boards.

Since 2000, the number of technology companies in the Fortune 100 has risen by 62%. Furthermore, the number of CEOs of Fortune 100 companies who have an educational background in tech has quadrupled, and the number of CEOs who have held professional technology roles, including CIO and CTO, has risen from four to 11. This trend is likely to continue, as technology plays an ever increasingly prevalent role in society.

Encouragingly, Wiley Edge’s research revealed a high level of ambition among young tech workers. 62% of young men and 61% of young women currently working in tech said that they aspire to one day be in a senior leadership position.

And with Wiley Edge’s research revealing that 73% of businesses try to develop people internally when recruiting for senior tech roles, only by developing and nurturing a diverse pipeline of tech talent can the lack of corporate board diversity be improved in the long term.
What is behind the racial and gender talent gap?
Lack of awareness

Improving diversity in technology is arguably one of the key tactics when it comes to tackling employment inequality, and will only become more important as the number of tech jobs continues to rise. However, in order for businesses to increase the diversity on their tech teams, and hopefully subsequently improve the diversity of their senior leadership teams and boards, it will be essential to attract a wide range of young people to careers in the industry by educating them about the breadth of possibilities.

Worryingly, the data suggests that awareness of the benefits of careers in tech remains low. In our latest survey, around a quarter (26%) of 18-24-year-olds who are not currently working in tech said that they believe it offers excellent career opportunities. Only 29% said that they think that it offers a wide range of career choices, and 24% believe tech careers are likely to be among the most futureproof. 14% said that they don’t know anything about careers in technology.

Just over one in 10 (11%) stated that they wished they had decided to pursue a career in technology, and 15% would still like to.

However, the results also show that there is still a marked difference between men and women in this regard; women were 55% more likely to confess not knowing anything about careers in technology, while men were 56% more likely to say that they wished they had pursued a career in technology.
Not only does the technology sector offer highly paid careers, but also a huge range of roles and specialisms, many of which are secure even in times of great uncertainty.

Our 2021 report revealed that more than three quarters (78%) of businesses continued hiring for entry level and graduate tech roles from March-September 2020. Of those, 44% continued hiring at the same level as usual, and 24% at a slightly reduced rate. Furthermore, 92% of businesses surveyed confirmed that they were planning to recruit for entry level and graduate tech roles in 2021, with 46% of those planning to do so at the level they usually would, and 46% a slightly reduced number.

This was in stark contrast to the wider recruitment market; research by the CIPD showed that just 60% of private sector organisations recruited 16-24-year-olds in 2020, and less than half (43%) had plans to do so in 2021.

“It’s clear that this message is still not reaching a wide enough audience. Current tactics are not effective enough, so we must find other ways to increase not only awareness of, but interest in careers in tech.

Daniele Grassi, VP, Chief Operating Officer at Wiley Edge
In addition to this general lack of awareness, the research unfortunately also shows that there are still a number of pervasive misconceptions about the industry that are preventing people from considering a career in tech. Many of these revolve around the required skills and qualifications.

Nearly a fifth (19%) of those surveyed said that they think they would need a degree to enter the tech industry. Similarly, 29% of respondents said that they don’t have the right qualifications to pursue a career in tech, 17% said that they don’t have the right educational background, and 11% don’t know how to get the right qualifications.

Women were more likely to have doubts about their potential to succeed in the tech industry, with 23% saying that they don’t believe they’re good enough at maths and science, compared with 13% of men, and 19% saying that they don’t feel they’re intelligent enough, compared with 13% of men.

18% of those surveyed said that they don’t know how to break into the industry, while 15% were not aware of any entry-level programmes that are available to help them do so.

However, the research also highlighted a number of negative perceptions of the tech industry and its culture among certain demographics, which may be more difficult to overcome but require an equal level of commitment on the part of organisations.

More than one in 10 (11%) of those surveyed said that they believe the tech industry is too male dominated. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this figure drops to only 4% when only looking at men, and rises sharply to 19% of women. Interestingly, 14% of women cited a lack of role models as a deterrent, compared to only 8% of women.

While only 5% of those surveyed said that they would be deterred from pursuing a career in technology because the industry is not ethnically diverse enough, this increases to 9% of mixed-race respondents, 10% of Asian respondents, and more than a third (36%) of Black respondents. Black respondents were also the most likely to highlight the issue of a lack of role models (23% vs the average of 11%).

Kat Snodgrass, Director, Talent Pool, at Wiley Edge

“Many of the deterrents cited by young people can be addressed simply by making accurate, helpful information more widely available and accessible. For example, while some technology roles do require a degree, many positions are available via other routes, such as apprenticeships, or with alternative qualifications, such as those awarded by vocational programming courses.

And although a certain amount of maths aptitude may be required for some tech jobs, this does not necessarily correlate with the maths studied in secondary and post-secondary education. It’s clear that this is not being conveyed effectively to young people, who could be assuming that there isn’t a suitable career path for them within the industry when that may well not be the case.”
Diversity and employee retention

Listening to the experiences of underrepresented groups working in tech is vital; tackling the lack of diversity facing the sector in any meaningful way requires not only attracting more people to pursue careers in technology, but also providing adequate support to ensure that new recruits stay within the industry long term.

Failing to create a truly inclusive, welcoming environment contributes directly to poor retention rates. When asked why they had ever left or wanted to leave a tech role, young tech workers’ most commonly cited reason was a lack of sense of belonging (27%).

At the same time, nearly two-thirds (64%) of businesses surveyed admit to struggling to retain employees from underrepresented backgrounds, despite 65% stating that they work hard to foster an inclusive company culture. Furthermore, 18% admit to receiving complaints about diversity and inclusion from current and former employees, suggesting that current attempts are not necessarily successful.
According to the research, more than half (55%) of businesses have a mentorship programme for younger employees to support their professional and personal development. However, fewer businesses (47%) have a system in place to identify whether additional support may be needed for graduates, apprentices, and other entry level employees from different backgrounds.

Only around a quarter (26%) of businesses have employee resource groups (ERGs). ERGs are voluntary, employee-led groups whose aim is to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with the organisations they serve. They are usually led and sustained by employees who share a share an affinity, whether it’s gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, lifestyle, or interest, and exist to provide support for personal and/or career development.

Interestingly, just 25% of businesses have an onboarding process that takes into account exit interviews and historical feedback from employees. Without input from employees themselves, businesses will find they are continuing to make the same mistakes, and potentially missing some easily actionable improvements.

Until these issues around company culture are adequately addressed, employees are more likely to continue feeling out of place and unhappy, which will ultimately lead to continued poor retention rates and limited progress when it comes to improving diversity.
What could businesses be doing better?
The extent of the lack of diversity in tech has been widely publicised and discussed for some time now. And yet, despite this attention, diversity remains a key challenge for the sector, with only 15% of the tech workforce from BAME backgrounds and gender diversity currently sitting at around 19%, compared with 49% for all other jobs.

According to our research, this attention has translated into awareness amongst employers. We found that 87% of businesses are aware of a continuing lack of diversity in their tech teams: 42% have noticed a lack of gender diversity, 44% a lack of ethnic diversity, 35% a lack of neurodiversity, and 35% a lack of socio-economic diversity.

Of those, more than half (53%) are actively trying to address the issue. 9% said that their tech teams have always been diverse, and 10% claim that they did have a lack of diversity but have successfully improved the situation. On the other hand, 13% stated that they are aware of a lack of diversity but are not currently trying to address it, and 11% don’t know how. Only 5% have never considered whether there is a lack of diversity.

However, the persistent lack of diversity in the industry would suggest that current efforts to tackle the problem have not been sufficient, despite many businesses seeming to believe that they are already doing their part. Tellingly, less than half (43%) of those surveyed currently have diversity targets in place, suggesting that most are still failing to take it as seriously as they could be.
According to our research, the majority of businesses have trouble recruiting diverse tech talent at every level – only 15% said that they have no difficulties at all. However, it’s clear that entry level talent is the most difficult to find. More than half (55%) said that they struggle to recruit diverse entry level employees, compared with 28% for mid-level positions, and 17% for senior roles. And yet, despite a definite awareness of the problem, the survey also revealed that many businesses are still recruiting entry level talent from a very narrow pool.

For some of the UK’s largest and best-known companies, competition for entry level roles and graduate schemes can be extremely fierce. It’s clear that this has resulted in many being extremely selective about the applicants they accept and consequently hiring a disproportionate number of candidates with prestige bias who they assume are automatically the most qualified.

Of those businesses surveyed, 21% said that they exclusively hire graduates from top universities, and a further 39% said that they are more likely to hire graduates from those institutions. Only 28% said that they consider applications from all universities equally, with even fewer (8%) stating that they consider all types of higher education qualifications.
According to the research, hiring predominantly from top tier universities in fact makes it more difficult for businesses to fill entry level and graduate technology roles. Where 35% of businesses which consider all applications equally said they struggle to recruit entry level software engineers, this rose to 62% of businesses who focus their recruitment on more prestigious universities. Similarly, businesses with narrow talent pools were 23% more likely to struggle to recruit entry level data scientists, and 28% more likely to find it difficult to source entry level cyber security specialists.

Scott Coleman-Allan, North America Talent at Wiley Edge

“With it shown that the Russell Group universities have their own ongoing struggle to improve diversity – for example, less than 4% of students are Black compared with the UK average of 8% – it will be almost impossible for businesses to improve the diversity of their junior tech employees while only accepting graduates from these institutions.

In order to achieve greater diversity at a junior level, businesses must actively work to widen their talent pool, publicising their roles to a wider variety of people and encouraging them to apply. Businesses should consider partnering with universities with more students from underrepresented groups, attending a greater number of university job fairs, as well as paying more attention to job fairs and other events aimed at non-graduates.”
Crucially, businesses must also take a close look at their recruitment processes to ensure that unconscious bias is not causing people to miss out on opportunities they would be well qualified for.

When asked if the company they work for is making a concerted effort to increase the diversity of its tech teams, only 27% of young tech workers said that diversity is a big focus during recruitment. Encouragingly, more than a third (35%) have noticed more efforts recently to improve diversity, but 10% said that current efforts are unsuccessful and 12% said diversity is not a priority.

This was reflected in the survey of business leaders, which found that there are a number of well-established anti-bias hiring practices that many businesses are yet to introduce.

Only two-fifths (40%) of businesses currently invest in anti-bias training for hiring managers, without which the risk of potential employees being unfairly judged - however unintentionally - at the interview stage is increased. It’s important to enable those responsible for recruitment to recognise their own unconscious biases and give them the tools they need to approach the process more objectively.

Of those surveyed, 61% do not use deliberately neutral job descriptions. If not worded carefully, job adverts can be inadvertently off-putting. For example, certain language can create the impression that employers are exclusively interested in candidates from particular backgrounds. In order to avoid this, businesses should make use of proofing tools which can effectively identify words or phrases that may discourage applicants from certain groups.
Even fewer businesses (32%) currently anonymise CVs. Removing all potentially identifying information, such as name, age, and educational background, makes it impossible for recruiters or hiring managers to make subconscious judgements about an applicant. They are more likely to judge a candidate only on their qualifications, skills and experience, which should ensure that those best qualified for the role are invited to interview rather than those who fit a particular profile.

Only (38%) said that they request diverse shortlists from recruiters: if chosen carefully, recruitment consultancies and other talent partners can be an invaluable tool in the quest for equality and greater diversity. However, this is only the case if businesses deliberately choose that share their attitude and values when it comes to diversity, and have their own comprehensive strategies or frameworks to ensure equal opportunities and access for all.

More positively, only 4% said that they have no anti-bias hiring practices in place at all, compared with 9% in 2021. Of those that do, the vast majority (88%) have noticed an improvement to some extent. More than half (51%) said there has been a significant improvement, while 37% have noticed an improvement but still have more work to do, showing that anti-bias hiring practices are essential in the fight for greater diversity in the tech industry, and could make a marked difference if adopted by more businesses.
Conclusion

Technology jobs offer excellent opportunities for young people, particularly now amidst economic uncertainty. It is also likely that senior roles, including CEO positions both in tech companies and non-tech companies, will increasingly be held by those with a background in technology in the years to come, making it even more important to improve the diversity of our entry-level tech workforce.

In order to ensure that these opportunities are not enjoyed by only a select group – and thus perpetuating existing, persistent inequalities – we must all work to encourage a more varied cross-section of emerging talent to consider pursuing a career in the industry.

While there are some myths surrounding the industry amongst young people, it’s also apparent that not all of their misgivings are completely unjustified. Many of those who have already started working in the industry have found their experiences to be not entirely positive. Businesses need to do more to retain employees from all backgrounds, or they will never be able to make any real improvement.

By working to develop an inclusive and welcoming company culture, coupled with more widespread implementation of anti-bias hiring practices, we should start to see positive changes that will ultimately make a big difference to the long-term prospects of many ambitious young people, and go a long way to improving equality in our society.
Many businesses surveyed said they have trouble recruiting historically underrepresented tech talent at the entry level, and this increased among those who hire predominantly from top-tier universities. In order to achieve greater diversity at a junior level, businesses must actively work to widen their talent pool, publicising their roles to a greater variety of people and encouraging them to apply. Business should consider revising their job descriptions to prioritise skills, mitigate prestige bias and not rely on university credentials, attending a greater number of university job fairs, as well as paying more attention to job fairs and other events aimed at non-graduates. This can expand the demographics that businesses reach and get diverse workers in high-demand tech jobs faster.

Summary of recommendations

Focus on potential rather than prestige:
Many businesses surveyed said they have trouble recruiting historically underrepresented tech talent at the entry level, and this increased among those who hire predominantly from top-tier universities. In order to achieve greater diversity at a junior level, businesses must actively work to widen their talent pool, publicising their roles to a greater variety of people and encouraging them to apply. Business should consider revising their job descriptions to prioritise skills, mitigate prestige bias and not rely on university credentials, attending a greater number of university job fairs, as well as paying more attention to job fairs and other events aimed at non-graduates. This can expand the demographics that businesses reach and get diverse workers in high-demand tech jobs faster.

Retention is as important as recruitment:
In addition to focusing on recruitment, businesses need to ensure they have a range of initiatives and strategies in place to enable people of all backgrounds to feel comfortable at work and thrive professionally. They should be offering mentorship programs for entry-level employees to support personal and professional development, which will make it easier to identify any additional needs. Employee resource groups can be a great way to give employees a safe space and a collective voice. It’s also essential to give employees the opportunity to provide feedback, and ensure key points are actioned, to make a meaningful impact on employee retention.

Companies that challenge unconscious biases will be more successful:
Companies must take a close look at their recruitment processes to ensure unconscious bias is not causing young people to miss out on opportunities for which they would be well-qualified. Something as simple as anonymizing resumes to remove all potential identifying information such as name, age, and educational background ensures candidates are judged based upon their qualifications and experience alone. In addition, companies should use neutral job descriptions and carefully select advertisement language to avoid deterring candidates from applying. These strategies will help them build a more diverse talent pipeline and workforce.
Employee:
The employee sample consisted of 2,000 respondents comprising individuals ages 18-24. Individuals working in a tech or IT based role represent 44% of respondents; individuals not working in a tech or IT based role represent 56% of respondents. To recruit for the employee/consumer sample within the UK, a panel of consumers from across the nation were asked to participate in an online survey. All respondents resided in the United Kingdom at the time they participated in the survey.

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Employer:
The employer sample consisted of 200 respondents who were serving in leadership roles within the financial services, healthcare, pharmaceutical, insurance, or life sciences industries at the time they completed the survey. Respondents needed to be serving in C-suite, director-level or HR manager positions in order to participate. To recruit for the employer sample within the UK, a panel of consumers from across the nation were asked to participate in an online survey. All respondents resided in the United Kingdom at the time they participated in the survey.
About Wiley Edge

Wiley Edge is the talent development solution for leading global employers.

Wiley Edge’s Hire-Train-Deploy graduate and reskilling programs work to bridge the skills and competencies needed to futureproof an organization’s workforce. Wiley Edge helps more than 40 institutions in North America, EMEA and APAC, from technology companies to tier one investment banks, meet the growing challenge of talent shortages.

With a focus on technology, banking and business, Wiley Edge connect education to the working world. Industry-aligned Academy curriculum adapts to meet the needs of today’s organizations in this era of exponential change.

The graduate program provides custom-trained emerging talent to give clients the edge. As pioneers of the hire-train-deploy model, Wiley Edge equips university graduates with social and emotional competencies and company-specific skills to succeed in a role from day one. Students are placed to join a client’s team for up to 24 months, with potential to join full time at no extra cost. The vast majority continue their careers with the clients.

Wiley Edge can also help organizations unlock the potential within their existing workforce. In the Reskill program, Wiley Edge delivers custom training for a client’s employees to upskill existing talent and socialize valuable industry knowledge to enhance employee retention and recruitment efforts – a goal exacerbated by the Great Resignation.

Strengthening diversity underpins everything Wiley Edge do for clients. The graduate population is 31% female and 51% BAME, while team reskilling can tackle biases from age to education.

wileyedge.com/employers