



Gender Diversity in STEM:

How can your
business do more?



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Why is gender diversity & inclusion important?

Gender diversity is paramount to ensuring fair representation of different genders, binary and non-binary, across your business.

By ensuring that the teams within your business are gender diverse, you will benefit from different points of view and increase the creativity and innovation on your team. It will also help your business to challenge gender stereotypes, which will, in turn, promote your brand as gender-inclusive!

According to EngineeringUK's 2018 briefing 'Gender disparity in engineering', only 12.37% of all engineers are women in the UK and only 46.4% of girls aged 11-14 would consider a career in engineering, compared to 70.3% of boys.

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How has COVID-19 impacted diversity in STEM?

The Fawcett Society recently conducted a survey of 8,400 adults and found that many women are worried about their job and promotion prospects as a result of COVID-19.

According to EngineeringUK, young people felt their career choices had been constrained by the pandemic, with 62% agreeing that finding a job in the future has become more difficult. That's why now, more than ever, it's vital that businesses inspire young people of all genders and offer work experience so they can feel more positive about stepping into a STEM career.

According to EngineeringUK, young people felt their career choices had been constrained by the pandemic



How has COVID-19 impacted diversity in STEM?

EngineeringUK wrote:

'Our results suggest that the pandemic is deepening these already existing gender differences in STEM career aspirations, with a higher proportion of girls/young women (43%) than boys/young men (28%) saying they would be more likely to work in healthcare because of the pandemic, and a higher proportion of boys/young men saying they'd be more likely to work in engineering or technology.'

...the pandemic is deepening these already existing gender differences in STEM career aspirations...



What are the benefits of inclusion for your business?

'Diversity' is much more than just a buzzword.

In fact, there are many great benefits to having a diverse and inclusive workforce as it allows people from a range of different backgrounds to share ideas that are more 'outside the box' than if everyone were to have had the same life experiences.

The proof is in the numbers. Research conducted by Mckinsey, a global management company, found that teams with equal numbers of men and women generate on average 41% more revenue for their employer.

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How can your business be gender inclusive?

There are a number of things you can do to keep gender diversity on your business' agenda and a priority in the engineering and technology industries across the UK.

We need to be encouraging more women to choose a career in STEM and, to do this, we must review how we teach young girls in school, progressing through to higher education and beyond.

- 1. Reach young women sooner**
- 2. Educate pupils and their parents**
- 3. Target undergraduates early**
- 4. Inclusive candidate attraction**
- 5. Strong retention & inclusion programme**



1) Reach young women sooner

By talking about engineering and technology with girls early on in their school years, it can help to prevent common misconceptions about STEM careers. Similarly, the engineering and technology industry also has a responsibility to help schools educate young women about the opportunities available to them by providing access to STEM awareness programmes.

Alysia Haughton-Nicholls, Head of Student Futures at Harris Academy in Sutton, believes that it's important to increase pupils' awareness of careers in STEM by making links to the curriculum and running virtual webinars where every volunteer speaker is a woman. As a teacher, Alysia likes to ensure that women are at the forefront of promoting STEM careers. For example, she has displays of famous female scientists in her classroom.

Alysia's best advice is to start them young, and there are four main factors that play a part in this are:

School | Parents | Local community | National perspective



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2) Educate pupils and their parents

According to Professor Averil MacDonald, of Reading University, getting women to study science at university isn't the issue, with female students outnumbering their male counterparts across the board in many subjects such as medicine, biology and psychology. The real issue lies within engineering and physics where, Professor MacDonald argues, barriers aren't just presented to the girls themselves and that it goes beyond that:

‘The biggest barrier for girls studying physics & engineering is her mother.’

Professor MacDonald explains that mothers, quite often, hold more stereotypical views: *‘If she’s cautious of sending her daughter into what she sees as an unfriendly, male-dominated, dirty, unpleasant working environment, she will caution her daughter against it. So if we’re trying to inspire the girls, we’re wasting our time if we don’t equally inspire their mums.’* By engaging the parents and reassuring them that it definitely can be a happy working environment for women, Professor MacDonald believes that more progress will be made.



3) Target undergraduates early

It isn't enough to simply get women to study engineering or physics at university, because there's no guarantee they won't drop out or choose a different career path after they graduate. In fact, each year, around 75% of female students choose what they consider to be 'better' offers, usually within the banking & finance sector. This is because companies within these sectors are advertising themselves as a great career opportunity to women in their first year of study, whereas engineering and technology companies often do this much later when these women have already made up their mind.

Nerys Thomas, Head of Inclusion & Diversity at Leonardo, is well aware of this competition and the work that needs to be done to retain these female students and professionals in STEM fields. According to Nerys, having someone to look up to is one of the most important factors in inspiring the next generation of female scientists and engineers as she states, 'they can't be who they can't see.'

One of the ways businesses can do this is by offering work experience at university level, rather than waiting until women have already graduated. This can play a crucial part in a woman's future career.

4) Inclusive candidate attraction

There are many things businesses can be doing to attract women to their workforce, and that doesn't just have to mean STEM graduates. It's important to focus on all departments within your organisation.

Even something as simple as the way in which a business writes a job description can have a huge impact on whether or not a women will apply. When looking at a job advert, men will apply for the role if they believe they have 55% of the skills required, in comparison to women, who will only apply if they believe they have 85% of the skills.

Here are some other things to consider to help in attracting women to your business:

Being open to women
returning to work
from maternity leave
or other career breaks

Creating a
friendly and
flexible working
environment

Being vocal
about your
diversity goals –
e.g. equal pay

Propose
clear
progression
opportunities

5) Strong retention & inclusion programme

Once you've attracted women to your business, it doesn't end there. Much like at university level, it's vital that you retain them in order to have a successful diversity and inclusion programme in place. In many cases, you need to maintain the aspects that first attracted women to your business; for example:

- **Equal** pay and opportunities for progression
- A pleasant working **environment**
- A streamlined **onboarding** process to check-in with new employees
- **Return to work** schemes
- **D&I initiatives** to help address imbalance. Why not run a 'Bring your daughter to work' day? Make it even more powerful by encouraging them to bring a friend who doesn't have family in a STEM role

These are really basic initiatives that your company should be doing anyway, for all of your employees, but they can make a big difference in retaining women with STEM skills.

Implementing a successful D&I programme

Diversity & inclusion can feel like a huge challenge to overcome. The first basic steps to get your business to address gender diversity in particular are as follows:

- 1. Agree the starting point:** What is your current state of play? Have you got the tools in place to measure diversity to be able to understand this?
- 2. Set diversity & inclusion goals:** Set achievable targets to address some of the key challenges – however that may look for your business.
- 3. Identify internal sponsors** who can support your programme
- 4. Drive change and adapt business practice**
- 5. Track the benefits** the business see from improved diversity





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