

# Inclusive recruitment and retention in the STEM workforce

As part of the inquiry into equity in the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) workforce, on 24 February 2021, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Diversity and Inclusion in STEM held the third of four evidence roundtables. Titled *Inclusive recruitment and retention in the STEM workforce*, this closed roundtable convened experts in equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) and recruitment from across STEM sectors to discuss underrepresented communities within STEM.

The roundtable sought to collect expert insight on how to combat inequity within the STEM workforce and facilitate sharing of professional knowledge within STEM (and non-STEM) recruitment and retention to help build inclusive practices in the sector.

The views expressed and potential recommendations discussed have been recorded as contributing evidence to the inquiry and will help shape the final report, due for publication in summer 2021.

The roundtable used the following questions to prompt the discussion:

1. Where and what are the success stories for retention and recruitment of under-represented groups in the UK STEM workforce?
  - How important are staff networks as an approach?
2. What hasn't gone well and what can we learn from this?
  - Are you concerned organisations are participating in EDI on a superficial level because of the current climate?
3. What would be your ideal 'shopping list' of policies to implement to solve problems in recruitment and retention of under-represented groups in UK STEM?
  - What incentives would help encourage uptake?

The following points were highlighted, many of which could be applied more widely than the STEM workforce:

## Leading inclusion and improving retention

Employers need to be accountable to create an inclusive workplace. Recording data creates internal accountability. Organisations should supply in-depth training and coaching to all leaders. Accountability can be created through formal objectives and a supportive, rather than punitive approach.

Employers, especially in large organisations need to map out the data of their workforce. This gives an initial picture and a starting point from which to understand the inclusion work needed. Organisations should ring-fence EDI funding in budgets to ensure investment into people, communities, and staff as part of their inclusion work.

Procurement practices can advance diversity and inclusion in STEM through supply chain diversity monitoring. [HS2](#) embed equality and diversity standards into their contracts, [EDF](#) energy has a suppliers guide to equality and inclusion.

Awkward conversations should not be avoided in inclusion programmes addressing white privilege, racism, homophobia, misogyny and ableism in the workplace. Organisations should start from a listening and educational standpoint.

Mental health also needs to be considered in inclusion work. The [male suicide rates](#) in construction manufacturing and process industries are the highest by any sector in the United Kingdom according to the Office of National Statistics. Rolling out compulsory Mental Health First Aid training across the UK would help create parity between Mental Health First Aid and physical First Aid.

## Organisational and Staff Networks

Workforce and University diversity networks are effective when embedded into the infrastructure of the organisation. They should be rich, diverse, including a wide range of voices and not based on the deficit model.

To avoid diversity networks being used as 'talking shops' or 'echo chambers', there needs to be an intentionality when it comes to how they are used. Employees and participants need to be deliberate about what challenges they are trying to solve and where the challenges are. Organisations need to understand change and diversity work needs to take place across different departments and regions, rather than just at company level, and then be strategic and intentional on solving the issues identified.

## Reverse mentoring, role models and workplace culture

Reverse, reciprocal or peer mentoring forms allies in senior positions and works to improve workplace culture and address EDI issues. Seeing role models within the STEM sector and workplace increases representation, for example [Black in Immuno](#) which amplifies and supports Black immunologists and allies. [Shadow boards](#) that sit alongside main boards are helpful to improve diversity of thought and representation in organisations.

To address the recruitment pipeline in STEM, a workplace infrastructure that produces some of the role models that others want to be like, is needed. It is less about assuming there would be more diverse candidates coming through these pipelines if there were more diverse role models and more about changing institutional culture. Inclusion in the workplace should be designed at the policy and infrastructure level, efforts that promote inclusion for one identity also promote inclusion for others.

If organisations have accessible premises and flexible or remote working, this reduces the need for employees to disclose things such as disabilities, if they do not want to. Managers need to have the confidence to ask how they can help and have conversations with their direct reports.

## Diversity data monitoring

For organisations' EDI efforts to be successful there is a need for robust workforce demographic data across the STEM sector. This data needs to be intersectional, granular and a combination of quantitative and qualitative. The [EU Skills Index](#) measurement approach provides a good example of cross sector data measurement and tracking.

Workforce data monitoring needs to be consistent across all STEM sectors, it will only be successful for inclusion efforts if the whole STEM workforce is committed and able. There are a high number of SME's in

STEM, often with fewer available resources to dedicate to diversity monitoring. To help combat this, the Royal Academy of Engineering has created a diversity and inclusion [measurement toolkit](#) and [progression framework](#) for engineering employers, using quantitative and qualitative methods. [Athena SWAN](#) is a similar framework used in higher education to support and transform gender equality.

Demographic data collection in the workplace needs to look at hidden identities, such as neurodiversity and sexual orientation. When STEM sector employers start implementing data collection systems and mechanisms that collect data on more than just the gender binary and possibly ethnicity, we will start to broaden our understanding and confidence in reporting on data. Employee trust in an organisation is needed for good declaration rates.

Employee pay gap reporting should be expanded from gender to disability, ethnicity, and LGBT+, in due course with the appropriate data, across STEM. [Shell](#), [EY](#) and [Mott MacDonald](#) already publish their ethnicity pay gap, and [KPMG](#) measure their LGBT+ pay gap (based on self-reported employee data rather than assumptions).

## Recruitment techniques

Recruitment agencies are mainly incentivised by placing people in roles, STEM organisations need to challenge providers to be more inclusive in their shortlisting, but this requires incorporating incentives around diversity and inclusion. It is also important not to outsource accountability for creating diverse candidate pools to recruitment agencies, as they work within networks that can be part of the problem. Specialised agencies can overcome this problem. Recruitment should be a partnership with the agency, there is a lot of work organisations need to do themselves around diverse representation first.

In recruitment, [GSK](#) has started looking beyond qualifications, past solely Oxbridge candidates, to those from Post-1992 institutions, as well as utilising apprenticeships. Although STEM occupations often rely on academic backgrounds and qualifications, this is not necessarily where the best talent comes from. Exchange programmes and field trips make a difference in terms of engaging and inspiring non-traditional candidates without access to STEM.

Anyone responsible for hiring within an organisation needs to understand equality and diversity in that context. Hiring managers need to have been trained to unpack their assumptions and bias around what a 'good' candidate looks like.

Recruitment practices should not unwittingly disadvantage applicants, for example by screening those with gaps in their CV or without standard qualifications. Panel interviews can be intimidating to candidates and do not reflect true ability. Alternative assessments, such as work trials allow potential candidates to showcase their actual work and can be beneficial to [neurodiverse applicants](#).

## LGBTQ+ Workforce

[Stonewall research](#) has shown, one in five LGBTQ+ people feel discriminated against or at risk of discrimination when they are looking for work due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. One in ten LGBTQ+ people feel that they are disadvantaged for promotions.

LGBT people from minority communities or with disabilities experience a higher rate of discriminatory behaviors.

[There is a lack of research on LGBTQ+ representation within STEM](#), LGBTQ+ people are 20% less likely to be represented in STEM and gay, bi and trans men are much less likely to stay in STEM degrees than straight men. [LGBTQ+ scientists are also 30% more likely to experience workplace harassment](#). However

there are success stories with STEM organisations such as GSK and Vodafone who are [Stonewall top employers](#).

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships can be used to increase diversity in the workforce, [Kier](#) have circa 600 across the organisation and are aiming to recruit at least 30 from the [Kickstart scheme](#) aimed at young people on Universal Credit. The [Construction Talent Retention Scheme](#) was designed to retain and attract new talent into the industry.

[The BAME Apprenticeship Alliance](#) found that apprenticeships offer a good entry route to the workplace for minority communities who may not be exposed to the STEM sector. A STEM career is not available to everyone due to difficulties in accessing jobs and qualifications, faced by different communities. The BAME Apprenticeship Alliance works with organisations on their marketing and outreach strategies and created the platform [Apprenticeship Hack](#) for increasing diversity. They also run [the Apprenticeship Diversity and Social Mobility Forum](#).

The roundtable was chaired by Baroness Garden of Frognal and attended by the following participants:

- **Mayokun 'Mac' Alonge**  
Founder and CEO, The Equal Group
- **Cat Hudson**  
Strategic Planning and Partnerships Lead at GSK
- **Nancy Kelley**  
Chief Executive, Stonewall
- **Diane Lightfoot**  
CEO, Business Disability Forum
- **Katherine Mathieson**  
Chief Executive, British Science Association
- **Dr Mark McBride-Wright CEng MIChemE**  
Founder and Managing Director of Equal Engineers, Co-founder and Chair of InterEngineering
- **Isa Mutlib**  
CEO, The BAME Apprenticeship Alliance
- **Dr Laura Pallett**  
Secretary, British Society of Immunology London Immunology Group (LIG)
- **Paul Thornton**  
Head of Talent Acquisition, Kier Group
- **Professor Kiran Trehan**  
Pro- Vice Chancellor for Partnerships and Engagement Director of the Centre for Women's Enterprise, Leadership, Economy & Diversity University of York
- **Polly Williams**  
Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Royal Academy of Engineering

This roundtable was the third of four closed roundtable sessions, the closed format was chosen to allow participants to share their experiences more freely. The roundtables follow a [public launch event](#) at which a panel of speakers addressed key issues arising from the [Data Analysis Brief](#). The evidence gathered in these sessions supplements the open [Call for Evidence](#), which closed January 29 2021 and resulted in over [80 submissions](#) from across the STEM sectors.