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THETALENTPEOPLE INSIGHTS

The IT Industry:  
The relationship  
between female  
candidates & their  
chosen pathways.

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## Summary

The UK is recognised as a “global technology leader,” as it is home to the third largest digital technology sector in the world.

UK technology businesses are the core of the UK economy as they underpin many industries, including the digital, healthcare, transport, creative, and financial sectors<sup>i</sup>. However, growth in the number of females in the Information and Technology (IT) industry has been stagnant, as the industry struggles to attract fair and equal numbers of all genders.

In this era of globalisation, diversity is more important than ever. The World Economic Forum has stated that a diverse workplace promotes a resilient and collaborative working environment, that has the capability to outperform organisations that do not invest in diversity<sup>ii</sup>.

It is believed that the national skills gap and the diversity and inclusion crisis could be resolved by tapping into the apprenticeship pool<sup>iii</sup>. Although, female apprentices accounted for just 12% of IT apprenticeship starts, in 2017/18<sup>iv</sup>, in our candidate database, we have seen a sustained increased in the number of females interested in pursuing a career in IT over the past four years.

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**Underlying trends in the IT industry**

The WISE Campaign found that in 2019, one million females were in core Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) occupations, accounting for 24% of the core-STEM workforce.

This marked a significant milestone in the fight for encouraging females to pursue STEM-related career paths, however, this progress has been slow, and the IT industry is primarily responsible for this. There has been very small growth in the proportion of females in IT-oriented roles, in comparison to other fields such as engineering. Females made up 15.7% of the total number of IT professionals in 2009, this has grown marginally over the decade to just 16.4% in 2019, while the total number of female engineering professionals almost doubled over the same period\*.

**1,000,000**

**In 2019, one million females were in STEM occupations.**

**16.4%**

**In 2019, females made up 16.4% of IT professionals.**

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**Underlying trends in female candidate behaviour**

A detailed analysis of the behaviour of 77,333 candidates (over the past year) has revealed a sustained difference in the number of male and female candidates actively seeking opportunities in the IT industry. In spite of this, throughout 2020, the proportion of females searching for IT roles has risen in comparison to previous years.

A part of GetMyFirstJob's approach is to track candidate intent using three discrete elements of data, including desired career pathway, opportunities viewed, and applications submitted. The first involves asking candidates to self-report the industries they have an interest in when creating their GetMyFirstJob profile. The second two are based on candidate behaviour on the GetMyFirstJob website, by looking at the vacancies they have viewed and the applications that have submitted.

When candidates state their preferences, they can also indicate whether it is a high or medium interest. Our database shows that the number of female candidates with a high desire in pursuing a career in IT has risen by 5%, from 2019 to 2020.

Additionally, female candidates are actively viewing IT-oriented opportunities on the GetMyFirstJob website. IT-related roles are within the 'Top 10' most viewed opportunities by young females in 2020, implying that females are actively exploring potential opportunities in the IT industry. A female's willingness to work in IT over the last few years has grown, and this is reflected in the number of applications submitted to IT-oriented opportunities. Our database shows that the proportion of young females actively applying for IT-related opportunities has grown by 26% from 2018 to 2020.

**#10**

**IT-related roles are within the 'Top 10' most viewed opportunities by young females in 2020**

## Is there a problem?

Our database shows that there have been improvements in the number of females attracted to opportunities in IT, actively exploring IT-related roles, and submitting applications to the industry, however, with females accounting for just 12% of IT-related apprenticeship starts in 2019, a clear problem remains.

Research by Kaspersky Lab found that the absence of female role models in STEM careers appears to be discouraging more than a third of young females from pursuing careers in STEM fields, such as roles in IT<sup>vi</sup>.

As mentioned, the number of females with an interest in IT rose by 5% but could the lack of gender equality in the industry be deterring this from growing further? The research showed that the proportion of females in the UK that were uncertain about pursuing a career in core-STEM roles, due to the gender imbalance, was a staggering 37% - this was higher than Europe by 3%<sup>vii</sup>.

If organisations fail to raise awareness of the careers females can have in the IT industry, there is the risk that the existing underrepresentation of females could lead to sustained underrepresentation in future months and years<sup>viii</sup>.

## How the industry does at attracting other sub-groups:

Diversity within the industry shouldn't just be limited to gender, it is also important to consider ethnicity and social mobility. The IT industry successfully attracts a large proportion of candidates belonging to different ethnic backgrounds than it did in previous years. In 2017, young people of a BAME background accounted for just 42% of the total number of applications submitted to IT-related opportunities advertised on GetMyFirstJob, this reached a staggering 57% in 2020.

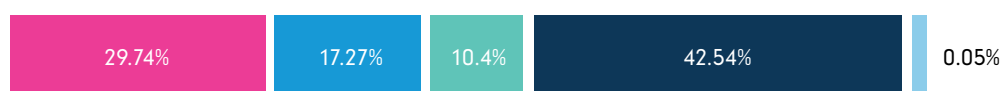
The most recent Census published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) highlights that in England and Wales, White/White British individuals account for more than 80% of the population aged between 16 and 24<sup>ix</sup>. Candidates of a White/White British background appear to dominate applications to the IT industry; however, it can be seen that the proportion of candidates of a BAME background applying to these roles has increased, implying the industry is not far-off achieving applications from equal numbers of all ethnic groups.

## Ethnic background of candidates in 2020

- Asian or Asian British
- Black or Black British
- Mixed or Multiple
- White or White British
- Other



Candidates registering on GetMyFirstJob



Candidates applying to IT opportunities

How the industry does at attracting other sub-groups:

In addition to this, the industry attracts a large proportion of young people belonging to the most deprived areas.

Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) can be used to measure social economic status (SES), it is made up of 7 elements including education, health, and crime; all of which have a direct impact on the lives of young people. The measure classifies geographical areas into one of ten groups of equal frequency, known as deciles, depending on its relative deprivation. Each IMD decile ranges from the 10% most deprived areas to the 10% least deprived areas, with decile 10 representing the least deprived and decile 1 indicating the most deprived.

It would be expected that candidates expressing a desire in pursuing an IT-related career would represent each decile proportionately, since IMD classifies areas into ten groups of equal frequency. However, this does not appear to be the case, as young people from more deprived areas have the strongest desire to pursue a career in IT.

According to our database, young people belonging to IMD decile 1-4 (the lowest in terms of SES) account for more than 50% of all candidates interested in an industry that has proven its resilience throughout 2020 and is projected to grow further in 2021<sup>1</sup>. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the issue of reduced or interrupted social mobility that both the government and society face. However, young people from the more deprived areas are a huge potential pool of talent whose SES could improve if they are exposed to the wide range of opportunities that exist within the IT industry.

## Proportion of candidates with an interest is pursuing an IT-oriented career



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## Recommendation

Organisations must broaden their recruitment strategies to reach out to a more diverse talent pool by targeting underrepresented groups, using role models as a tool to increase engagement.

They should work towards raising awareness of the opportunities in the IT industry, with the aim to attract more females in the hope to achieve greater gender equality.

Furthermore, organisations should combine existing objectives and hiring approaches to achieve greater diversity. Priorities must be made from a resource and underrepresentation perspective which presents challenges in hiring fairly and equally across the board.

## Sources

<sup>i</sup> Gov.uk - Department for International Trade: Technology <https://www.great.gov.uk/international/content/about-uk/industries/technology/>

<sup>ii</sup> World Economic Forum: The business case for diversity in the workplace is now overwhelming <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/business-case-for-diversity-in-the-workplace/>

<sup>iii</sup> Avado Learning: Mind The Gap - Could apprenticeships hold the answer to the diversity crisis? <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/511436/Mind%20The%20Gap%20One%20Pager.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> WISE Campaign: Women in STEM Apprenticeships 2017/18 <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/statistics/women-in-stem-apprenticeships-2017-18/>

<sup>v</sup> WISE Campaign: Annual Core-STEM Stats Round Up: 2019-20 <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/statistics/annual-core-stem-stats-round-up-2019-20/>

<sup>vi</sup> Teiss: Lack of female role models driving women away from STEM careers <https://www.teiss.co.uk/women-stem-careers/>

<sup>vii</sup> Computer Weekly: More than one-third of women deterred by lack of diversity in tech <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252457355/More-than-one-third-of-women-deterred-by-lack-of-diversity-in-tech>

<sup>viii</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU) - Taking Stock: Data and evidence on gender equality <https://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/EQUALS%20Research%20Report%202019.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> Office for National Statistics: Population by ethnicity, age and sex <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/populationbyethnicityageandsex>

<sup>x</sup> PwC: The tech sector in 2020: a resilient performance – but what's next? <https://www.pwc.co.uk/industries/technology/insights/tech-sector-in-2020.html>



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