inno
vate X *Don't be Shy*
<her>

GENDER EQUALITY X CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY

A BRITISH BUSINESS PULSE-CHECK

FOREWORD.

Chelsea Slater, CEO, InnovateHer

For nearly a decade, gender equality has been at the heart of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). Encompassing three core elements – economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection – gender is woven throughout, the empowerment of women and girls central to equitable, sustainable development.

It's a huge topic, and one that we at InnovateHer are deeply invested in. Our work focuses on opening up opportunities for women and non-binary people, for the obvious ethics, and because we know that gender equality benefits businesses too.

From ensuring diversity of perspective, to talent acquisition and retention, to improving performance and productivity, and even enhancing brand image - gender equality plays a significant role in promoting sustainable development and, in turn, business resilience.

Calling on responses from almost 200 professionals across the UK, this report offers a pulse check of gender equality in businesses today: their awareness of EDI, what they're doing to support it, and whether it's enough.

STEPS, RATHER THAN LEAPS, FORWARD.

Our report reveals the reality UK businesses face today. Sustainability is a top business priority, gender representation is equal, the next generation of talent is flowing through, and women are supported career-long.

Or, at least, that's what the surface shows… It doesn't take much scratching, however, to uncover more familiar dynamics and discrepancies. Although there's encouraging movement in the right direction, female respondents are largely unconvinced their businesses are as progressive as their male counterparts suggest.

There's little evidence that certain long-standing prejudices have been thrown out, with attributes such as objectivity identified as the least feminine, while being the most influential on employability. Crucially, the overall majority of business people report sustainability as a top priority, but only around half understand that it's unattainable without gender equality.

Still, there are greenshoots. In particular, the male/female split of those making final recruitment decisions is relatively even. In fact, management roles rank as the most gender-diverse in businesses, albeit short of senior leadership and the board. Meanwhile, recruiters' prioritisation of interpersonal skills over traditional education qualifications opens up the playing field beyond the inherent elitism of those able to pursue a university degree.

We may not yet be basking in a bright new dawn of EDI, but light is getting through the cracks.

Who we surveyed:

GENDER

50% Male (95)

50% Female (96)

AGE

40% 35-44 (76)

—— **38%** 25-34 (72); **15%** 45-54 (28); **5%** 18-24 (9);
3% 55-64 (5); **3%** 65+ (5)

LOCATION

28% North-West (53)

—— **17%** London (33); **12%** SE (23); **11%** West Midlands (21);
6% Yorkshire & The Humber (12); **6%** East Midlands (12);
6% East of England (11); **5%** SW (9); **4%** Wales (8);
2% Scotland (4); **2%** NE (3); **1%** Northern Ireland (2)

OCCUPATION

48% Intermediate professional (91)

—— **25%** Higher managerial (48); **23%** Senior leader (43);
4% Professional (8)

PROFESSION

22% Technology (42)

—— **13%** Manufacturing/engineering (19);
12% Finance/law (22); **10%** Marketing/advertising/PR (19);
8% Retail (16); **7%** Education (13); **6%** Healthcare (12);
6% Public services (11); **5%** Transport/logistics (10);
4% Recruitment/HR (8); **3%** Other (5);
2% Charity/voluntary work (3); **2%** Hospitality (4);
1% Science/pharmaceuticals (2)

SECTION

01

SECTION

02

SECTION

03

01

Corporate sustainability: A priority that's missing a crucial piece of the puzzle

It's the zeitgeisty buzzword of the moment. CTRL + F 'sustainability' in any business plan or 'about us' page, and it's sure to ping up.

But, for some businesses, that's where it stays. Whether too caught up in firefighting industry challenges, or viewing sustainability as a climate emergency rather than a corporate one, not every sector is looking at securing its longevity. Most put their future first, but it's a smaller majority who know their future depends on gender equality.

57%

Only around half of all respondents are aware of gender equality's critical role for business sustainability.

The **headlines:**

25%

Schools need schooling
Only a quarter of educators are aware of the connection between gender equality and sustainability.

100%

Stand-out sustainable sectors
Sustainability is the foremost business priority for every scientist and charity worker.

80%

The long game
Sustainability tops the agenda for the majority of businesses.

Is sustainability a **top priority?**

It's not a clean sweep. Although the overall majority (80%) believe it's their business's top priority, 1 in 5 either disagrees (18%) or doesn't know (2%). Men carry the conviction, with 14% more men than women seeing sustainability as the driving force.

And it's a priority for almost all respondents in London – the hub of big brand HQs and epicentre of government initiatives and sustainability goals – while a third in the south disagree.

Sustainability as the top priority, by region:

Midlands
88%

North
77%

London
90%

South
71%
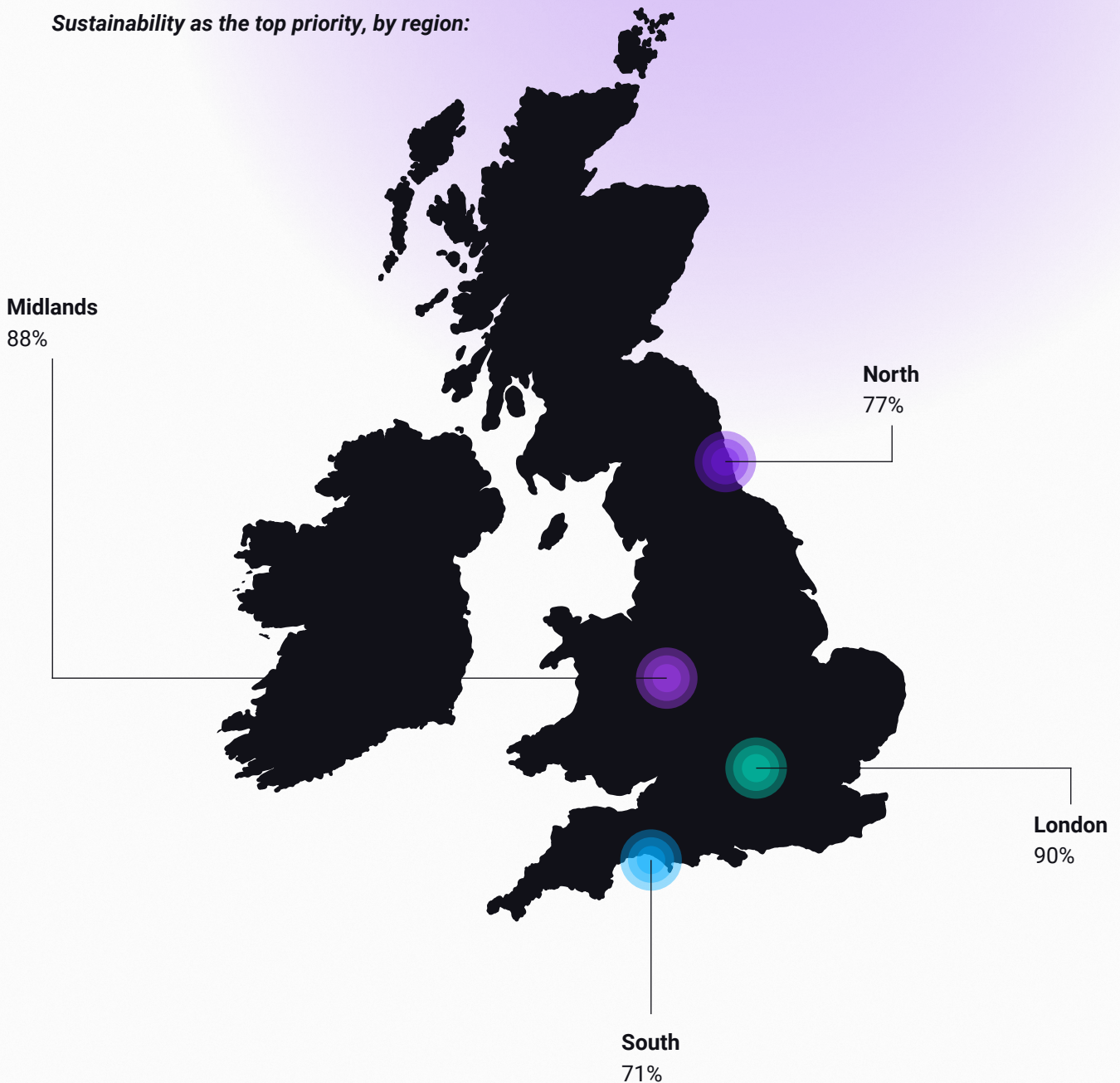
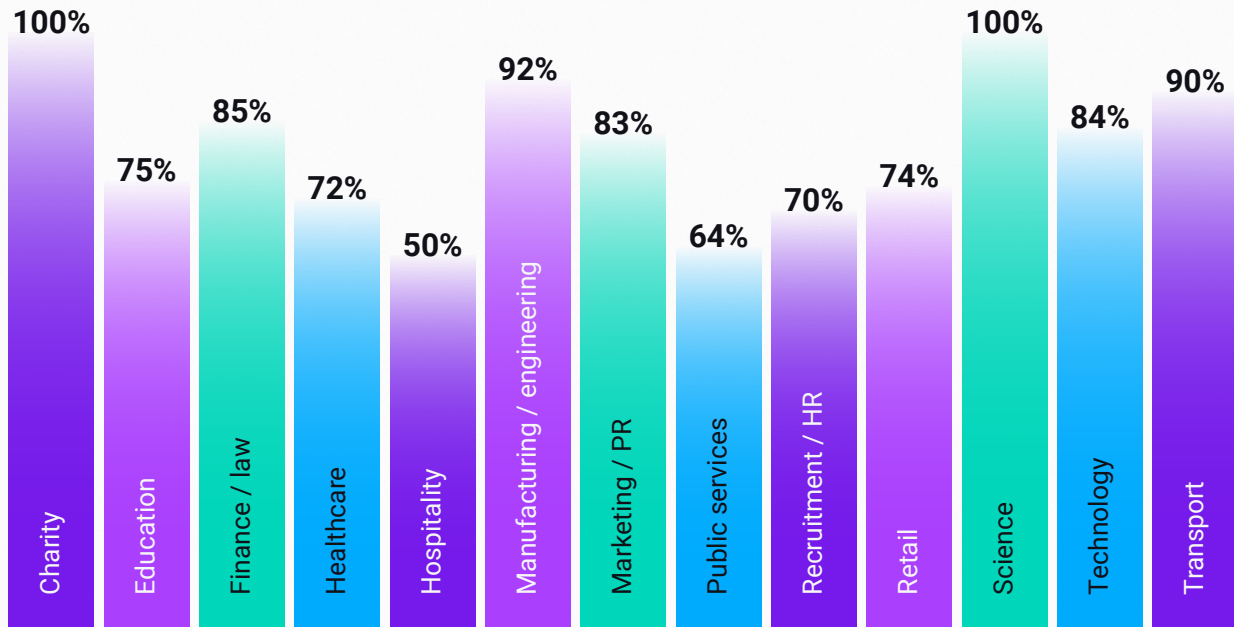It's unsurprising that the front-running sectors are either: A) operating under regulations on their footprint, such as science, manufacturing and transport; or B) charities with corporate images under particular scrutiny, and that exist to make the world a better place. It does, however, expose how far others are trailing behind: as low as 50% in hospitality.

Sustainability as the top priority, by profession:

Charity	Education	Finance / law	Healthcare	Hospitality	Manufacturing / engineering	Marketing / PR	Public services	Recruitment / HR	Retail	Science	Technology	Transport
100%	75%	85%	72%	50%	92%	83%	64%	70%	74%	100%	84%	90%

It's also underscored by a generational divide. The youngest demographic most believe sustainability is their business's guiding light, while those who've been in business for longer recognise it the least.

Are businesses aware of the connection between **gender equality and sustainability?**

Sustainability might be given due priority, but a far slimmer majority (57%) know that becoming a truly sustainable business requires sufficient support and representation of their female workforce.

Although in the overall minority, over 2 in 5 respondents (44%) are unaware that business sustainability is contingent upon the voice and agency of women as active stakeholders.

Awareness of the connection, by region:

Midlands
66%

North
56%

London
55%

South
50%
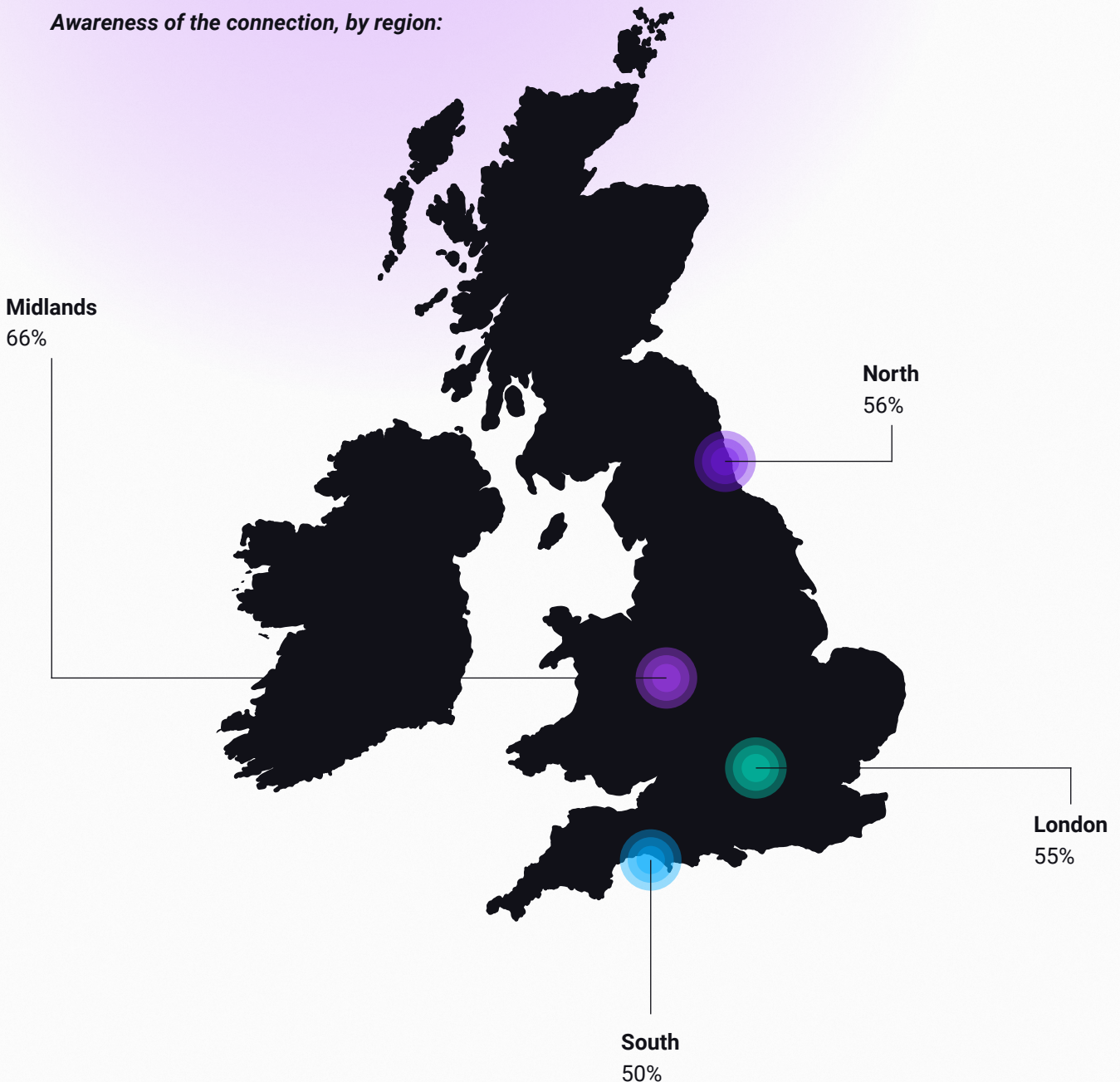
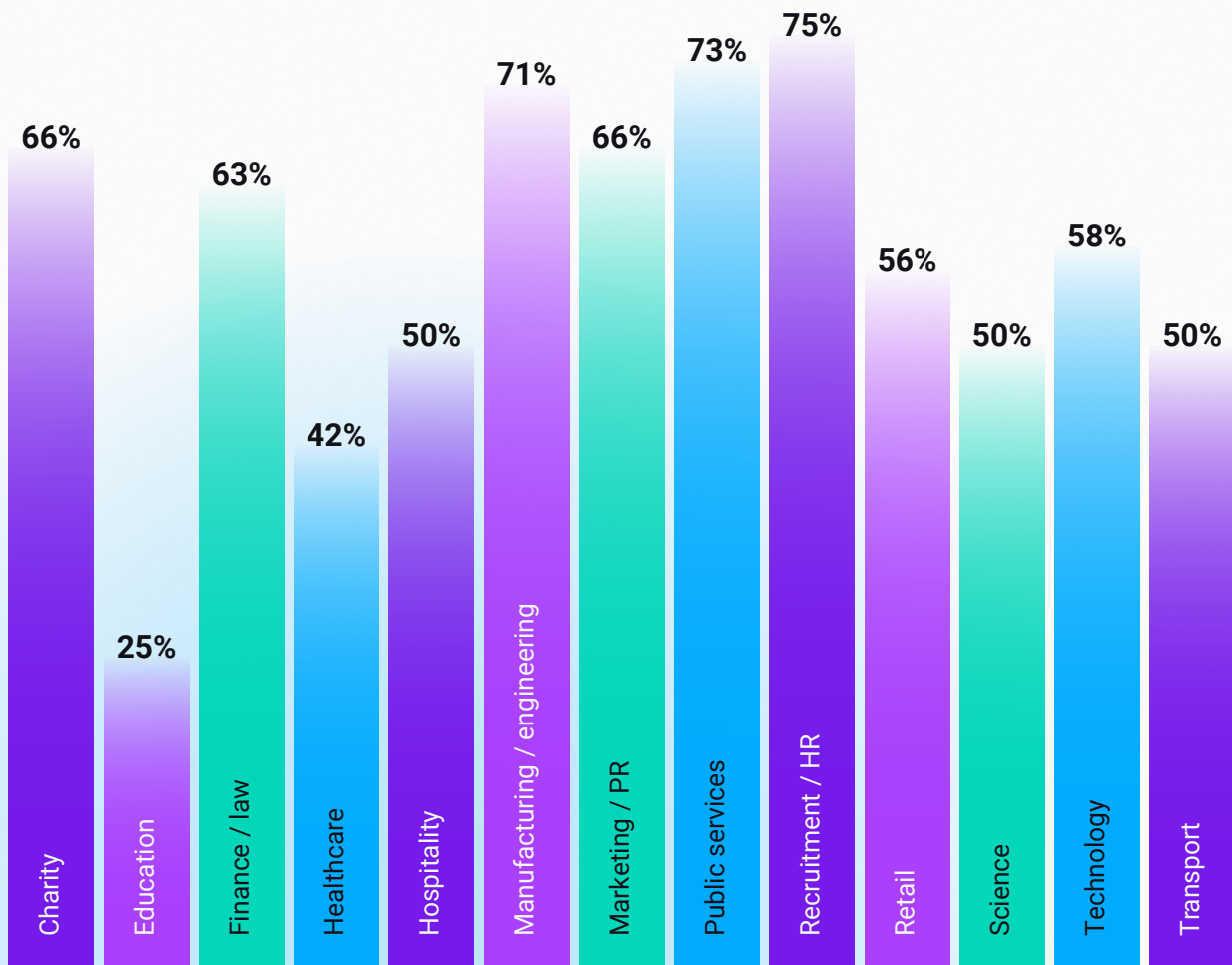Recruitment and HR – business functions most invested in improving EDI – lead the way. But, alarmingly, only 25% are aware in the education sector – those responsible for shaping the vision, values and future of the next generation. Grassroot growth of support available to the tech leaders of tomorrow depends on this awareness increasing.

Awareness of the connection, by profession:

Profession	%
Charity	66%
Education	25%
Finance / law	63%
Healthcare	42%
Hospitality	50%
Manufacturing / engineering	71%
Marketing / PR	66%
Public services	73%
Recruitment / HR	75%
Retail	56%
Science	50%
Technology	58%
Transport	50%

While the youngest age group is the most certain that sustainability holds the top spot, it's the oldest respondents who are most clear on how gender equality can deliver that ambition.

Our later findings will show how an awareness of the connection isn't being instilled in young people within the education system.

02

Sustainable recruitment: Basic perks and the search for soft skills

The make-up of the workforce – and businesses' diversity profile – inevitably comes down to who's in the interview room. Once upon a time, it was almost always men. Now? That's less of a certainty.

Great news for the business resilience that depends on it. Yet, despite tech recruiters prizing candidates' values and behaviours over degrees, a sizable proportion report difficulty future-proofing their tech talent pipeline by drawing in the next generation.

48%

Just under half of women are responsible for final hiring decisions.

The **headlines:**

65%

Soft skills supremacy
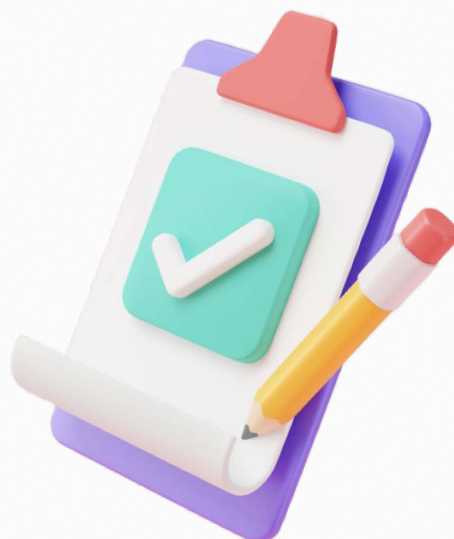Problem-solving is recruiters' most-desired quality in candidates.

42%

Fountain of youth
Nearly half of businesses say they struggle to recruit Gen Z.

54%

Equal pay shortchanged
A commitment to pay equity is only promoted by just over half of businesses.
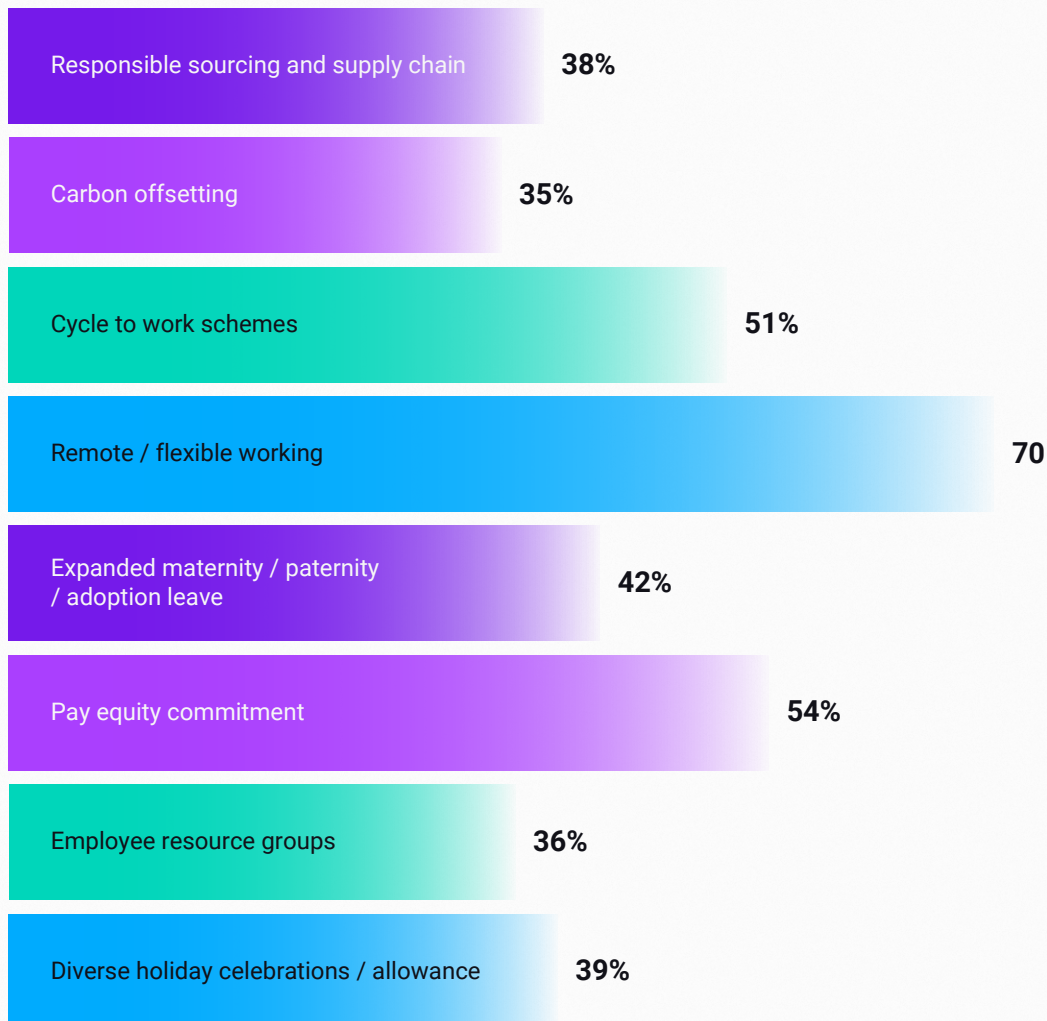
Which sustainability initiatives do businesses **promote during recruitment?**

The problem lies in promotion. While almost every business presents at least one of these initiatives, the most common – remote/flexible working – is more of a pragmatic necessity, forced by lockdown circumstances beyond businesses' control. Alongside standard offerings such as cycle-to-work schemes, it suggests fewer businesses are independently motivated towards more forward-thinking measures.

Positively, the gender-related initiatives – expanded maternity/paternity and pay equity – emerge as some of the most common, but barely more than half promote a commitment to pay equity.

Sustainability initiatives promoted during recruitment:

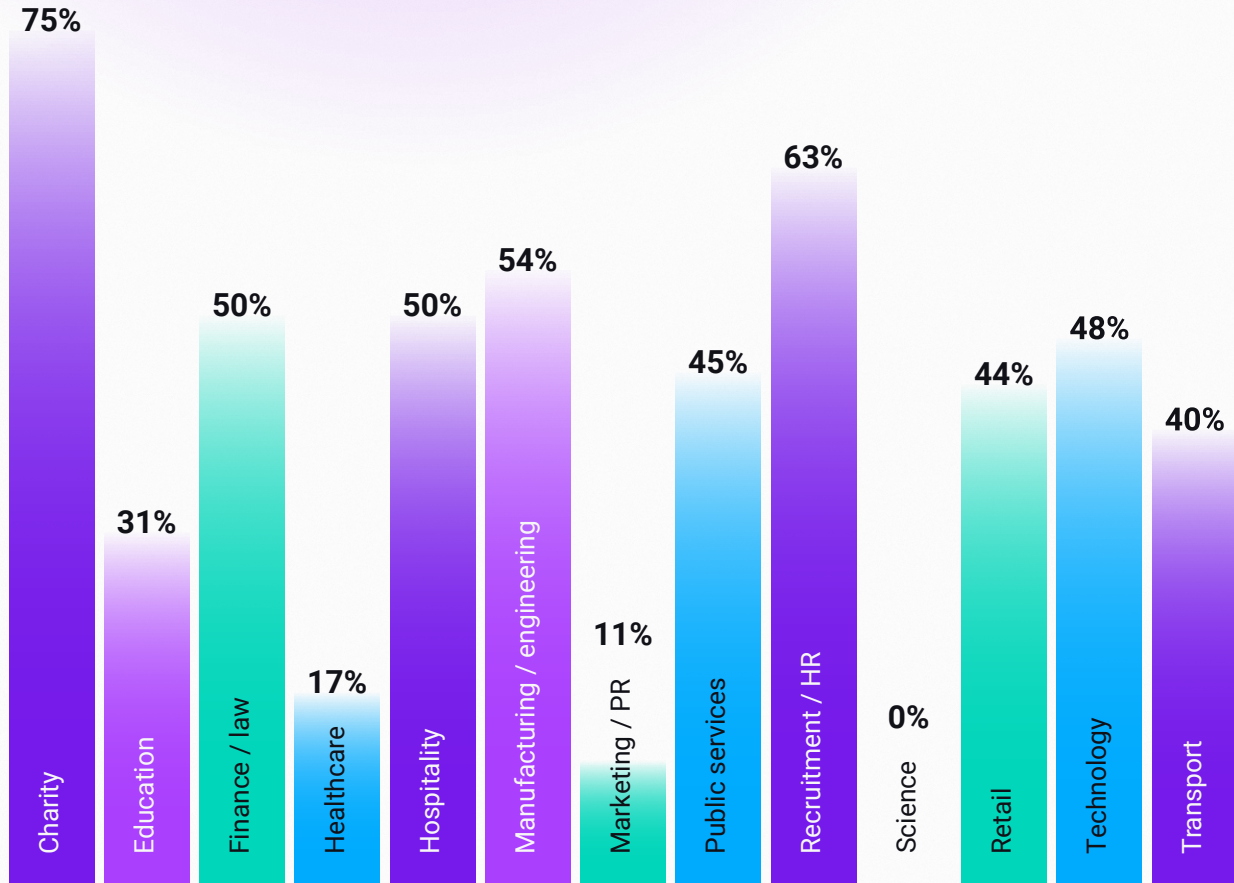| Initiative	%
Responsible sourcing and supply chain	38%
Carbon offsetting	35%
Cycle to work schemes	51%
Remote / flexible working	70
Expanded maternity / paternity / adoption leave	42%
Pay equity commitment	54%
Employee resource groups	36%
Diverse holiday celebrations / allowance	39%

Do businesses struggle to **attract and recruit Gen Z talent?**

Gen Z currently comprise 20% of the UK workforce, and as more enter the workplace, attracting and retaining this demographic to build a strong talent pipeline is key to business sustainability over the long term. While just over half (58%) are confident or content that their recruitment is reeling them in, 2 in 5 (42%) disagree or feel they could be more successful. That struggle is more prominent in the south than the north (48% and 35% respectively),

and for charities in particular – reflecting a sector-wide recruitment challenge where fewer people feel able to devote themselves to not-for-profits during a cost-of-living crisis. Science, marketing and healthcare find it the easiest, suggesting these traditional paths still enjoy a foothold in career aspirations.

Professions that struggle to attract and recruit Gen Z:

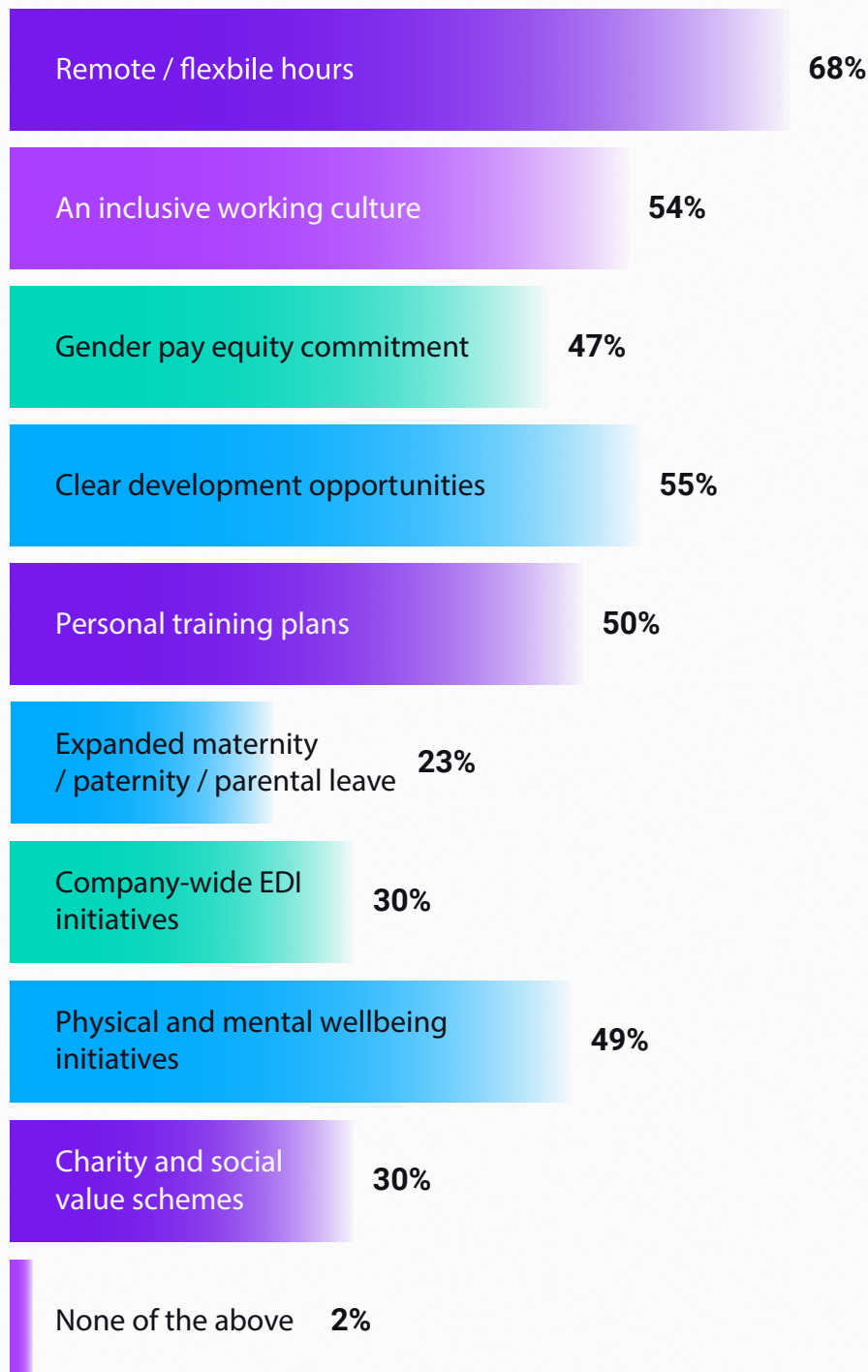| Charity	Education	Finance / law	Healthcare	Hospitality	Manufacturing / engineering	Marketing / PR	Public services	Recruitment / HR	Science	Retail	Technology	Transport
75%	31%	50%	17%	50%	54%	11%	45%	63%	0%	44%	48%	40%

So what would help? Most believe flexible working and clear development opportunities. And they're not wrong. Research from **Virgin Money** and **Deloitte** confirms these benefits dominate Gen Z's workplace wishlists. However, our respondents largely underappreciate the significance of company-wide EDI, which a **Monster study** found to be important to 83% of Gen Z when choosing an employer.

Factors businesses believe would help attract Gen Z talent:

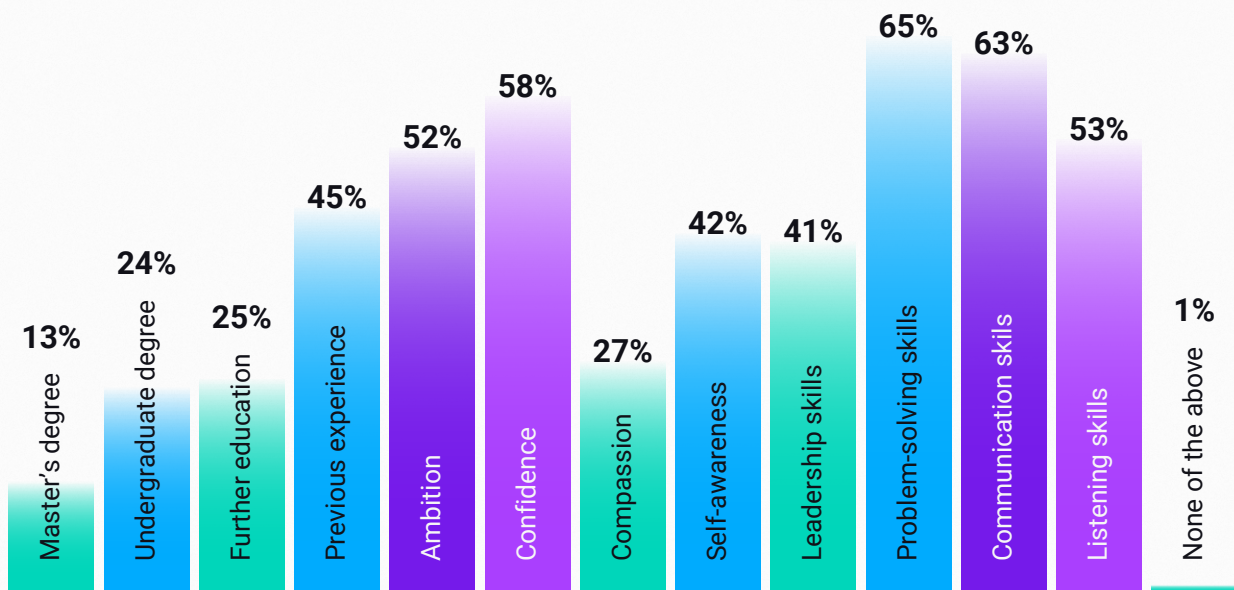| Factor	
Remote / flexbile hours	68%
An inclusive working culture	54%
Gender pay equity commitment	47%
Clear development opportunities	55%
Personal training plans	50%
Expanded maternity / paternity / parental leave	23%
Company-wide EDI initiatives	30%
Physical and mental wellbeing initiatives	49%
Charity and social value schemes	30%
None of the above	2%

What qualities and qualifications do businesses **look for when recruiting tech talent?**

It's another of our report's biggest business seachanges. Once considered a guaranteed entry pass into a job, our respondents now deem a university degree their least important candidate quality. With interpersonal soft skills impressing instead, it could propel diversifying the pipeline, opening up opportunities for a more socio-economically diverse workforce.

However, if we peek ahead at our later findings on gender perceptions, the workforce might not look so diverse in terms of gender. Ambition and confidence are two of the most sought-after attributes, but both score low in what's considered 'feminine'. Recruiters are likely to picture a male candidate before they even start looking at CVs.

What businesses look for in tech recruitment:

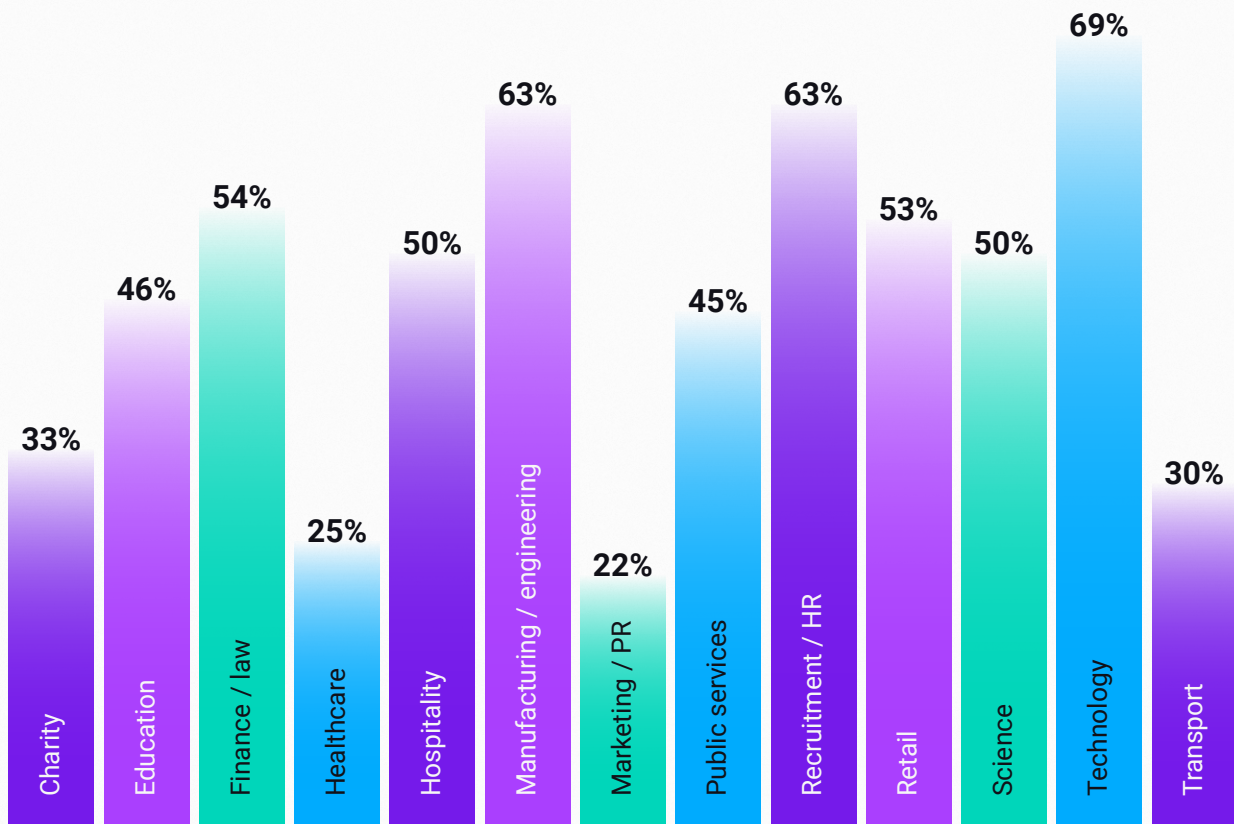| Category	Percentage
Master's degree	13%
Undergraduate degree	24%
Further education	25%
Previous experience	45%
Ambition	52%
Confidence	58%
Compassion	27%
Self-awareness	42%
Leadership skills	41%
Problem-solving skills	65%
Communication skills	63%
Listening skills	53%
None of the above	1%

What gender is the person responsible for **final hiring decisions?**

It's much less certain that the person clutching the recruiter's clipboard is male. Things have significantly improved for women, with 48% now enjoying responsibility.

Men call the shots the most in technology, while women take the reins in marketing and PR.

Following the Gen Z findings, it's another sign that the marketing industry models progressive business sustainability practices, but even some regulated sectors follow their lead here.

Men responsible for hiring decisions:

Industry	%
Charity	33%
Education	46%
Finance / law	54%
Healthcare	25%
Hospitality	50%
Manufacturing / engineering	63%
Marketing / PR	22%
Public services	45%
Recruitment / HR	63%
Retail	53%
Science	50%
Technology	69%
Transport	30%

03

Gender equality: Simplistic support and polarising perceptions

It's the ultimate acid test of how far businesses' EDI has come. When asked, candidly, how they perceive their female colleagues, what do respondents reply?

There's more male/female crossover and less conflict than has characterised our research, albeit with some differences that need ironing out for gender equality to truly thrive. Encouragingly, some management roles emerge as the most diverse department in terms of gender equality. As strong a sign as any that the tectonic plates of business are finally shifting.

95%

Almost all men believe their workplace does enough to support women throughout their career.

The **headlines:**

27%

Back to business
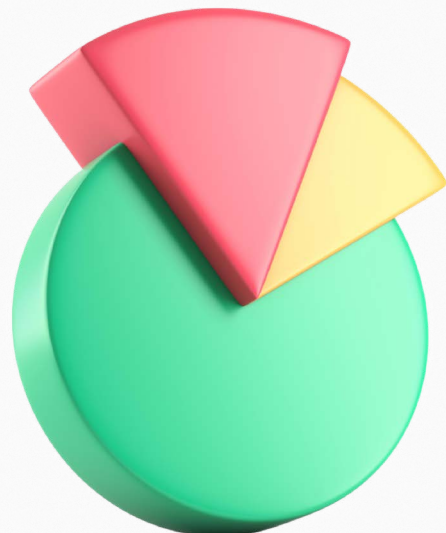Returning mothers display increased productivity more than anything else.

58%

Women in words
Sensitivity is viewed as the most feminine attribute.

48%

Making their mark
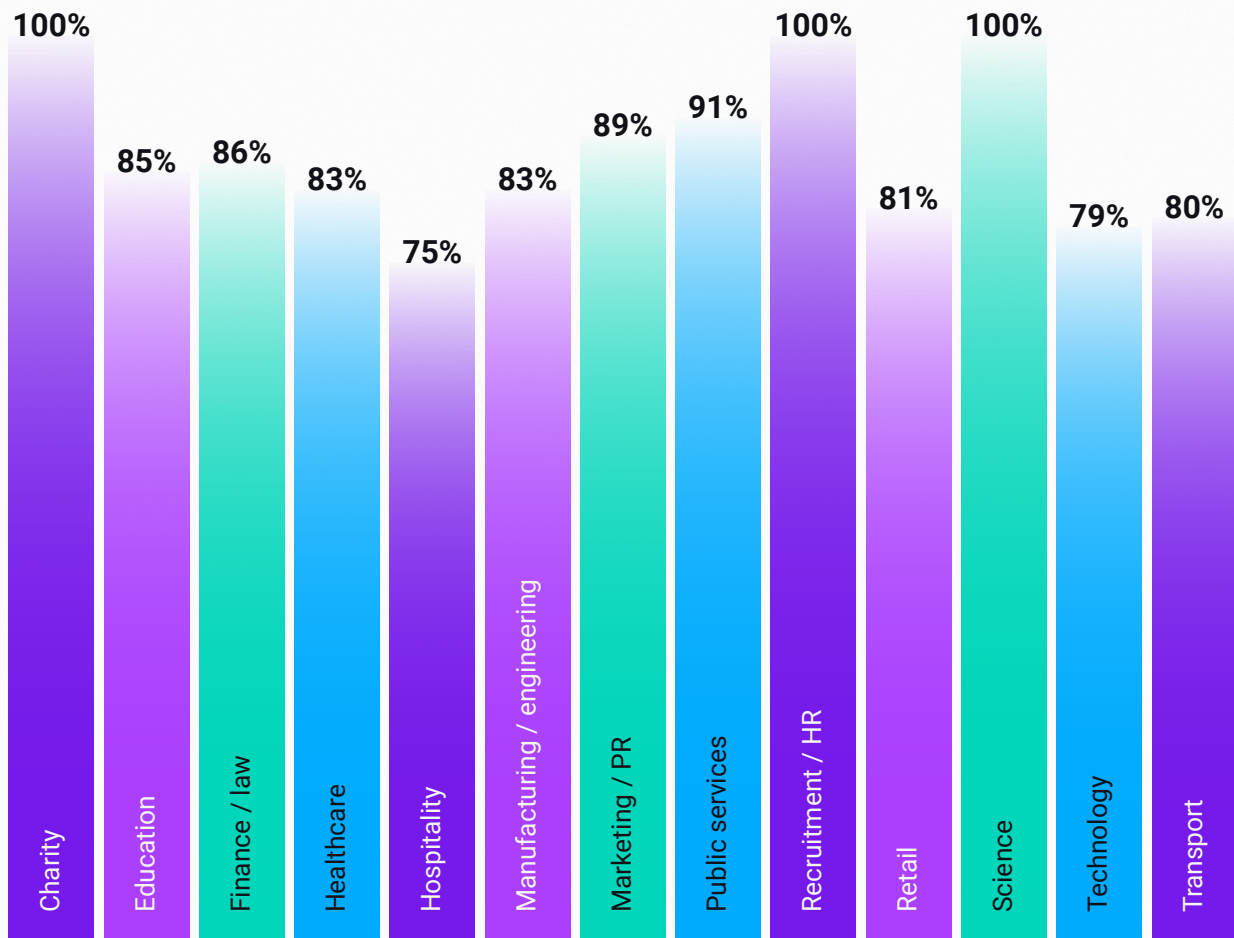Management has the most equal gender representation.

Do businesses do enough to **support women throughout their career?**

Yes, say an overall 84% – but hold the sigh of relief. The headline might look encouraging, but there's a yawning disparity beneath it.

The 27% of female respondents who disagree are starkly juxtaposed against only 5% of equivalent male respondents. It's even more apparent in Wales where no-one – of any gender – thinks businesses do enough.

A sign of differing generational expectations, everyone aged 55-64 feels their business does enough to support women. But that's not the same for those starting out, with a third of 18-24-year-olds feeling their business falls short. It could explain why so many struggle to recruit Gen Z, since these younger workers will look for a company that meets their standards of supporting gender equality.

How many employees feel they do enough to support women, by profession:

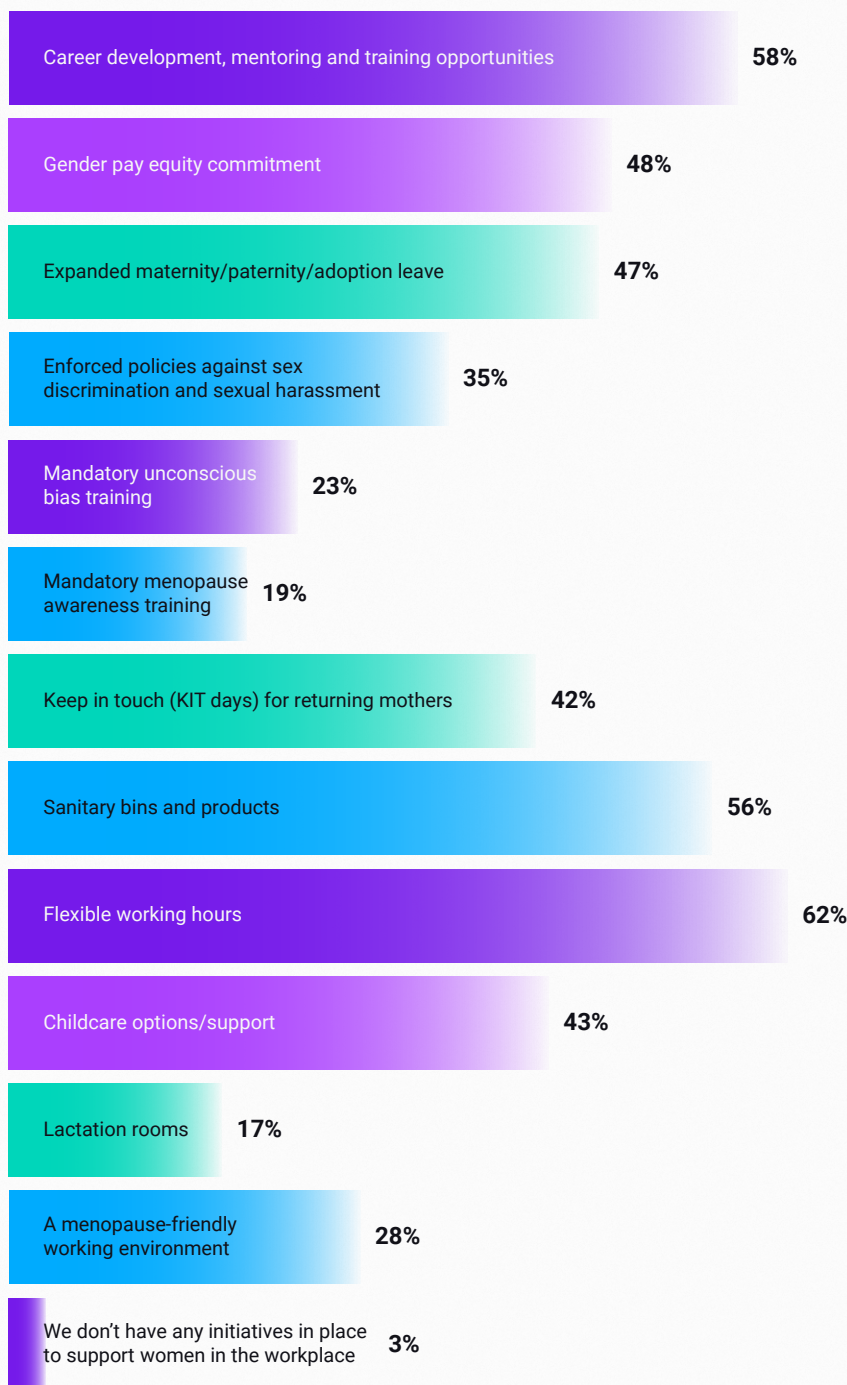| Profession	Percentage
Charity	100%
Education	85%
Finance / law	86%
Healthcare	83%
Hospitality	75%
Manufacturing / engineering	83%
Marketing / PR	89%
Public services	91%
Recruitment / HR	100%
Retail	81%
Science	100%
Technology	79%
Transport	80%

So what initiatives do businesses have in place to back it up? Not enough of the basics. Only a third have enforced policies against sexual discrimination and harassment, just over half have sanitary bins or products – a legal requirement – and fewer offer childcare options or support. Similarly, providing a safe place for breastfeeding people to pump at work is an employment regulation requirement, but is fulfilled by 17% of companies.

It all casts doubt over the almost-100% of male respondents who believe their workplace does enough to support women, unaware of what's legally expected. Along with one respondent's view that "Men should be treated the same as women and get all the extra benefits that they do." What those extra benefits are is hard to pinpoint in our data, which shows a lack of essential provisions.

Initiatives businesses have to support women:

Career development, mentoring and training opportunities — **58%**

Gender pay equity commitment — **48%**

Expanded maternity/paternity/adoption leave — **47%**

Enforced policies against sex discrimination and sexual harassment — **35%**

Mandatory unconscious bias training — **23%**

Mandatory menopause awareness training — **19%**

Keep in touch (KIT days) for returning mothers — **42%**

Sanitary bins and products — **56%**

Flexible working hours — **62%**

Childcare options/support — **43%**

Lactation rooms — **17%**

A menopause-friendly working environment — **28%**

We don't have any initiatives in place to support women in the workplace — **3%**

"As a small team, we are constantly adapting to **the needs of our team at any given time.**"

Female, 35-44, North-West
High Managerial, Technology

What are the perceptions of **returning mothers and femininity in the workplace?**

Awareness and empathy of different gender experiences are prerequisites for an inclusive workplace. Positive perceptions go hand-in-hand with a culture where employees feel supported by their peers and able to contribute – imperatives for diversity of perspective and EDI. There's general alignment across gender demographics about their understanding of 'feminine'. Most male respondents identify sensitivity as an intrinsically feminine quality, which could be read positively or negatively. What's more clear-cut is far fewer men associate resilience and objectivity with femininity. However, women agree that objectivity is their least definitive characteristic, with most choosing empathy and compassion as their hallmarks instead.

Those who believe nothing on the list qualifies as a feminine attribute are marginally more male (12%) than female (9%).
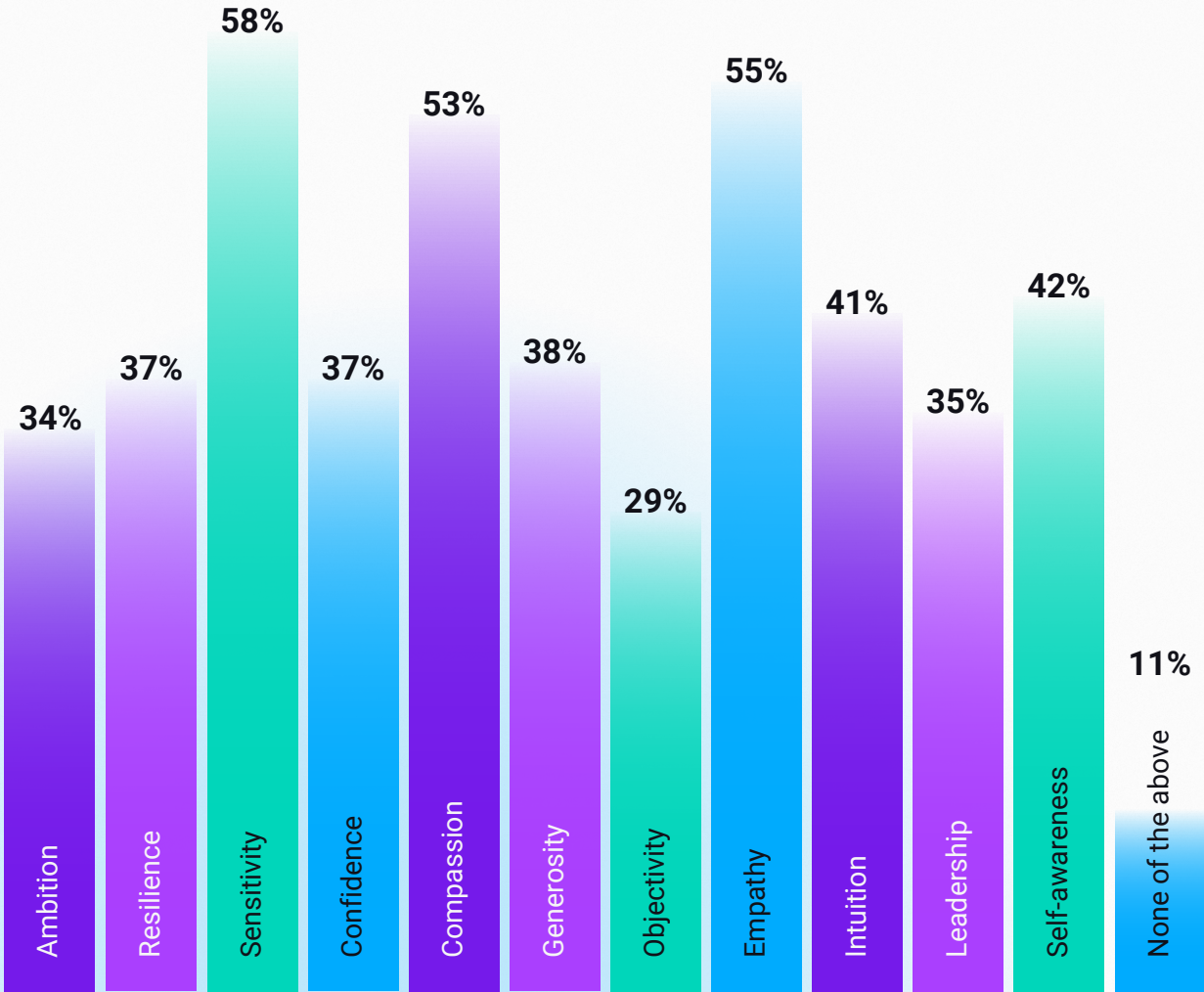
"We do a lot to help women in the workplace but there are still a lot of **stereotypes and unconscious bias surrounding women in leadership unfortunately.**"

Female, 24, North west,
Intermediate professional, Recruitment / HR

Attributes considered 'feminine'

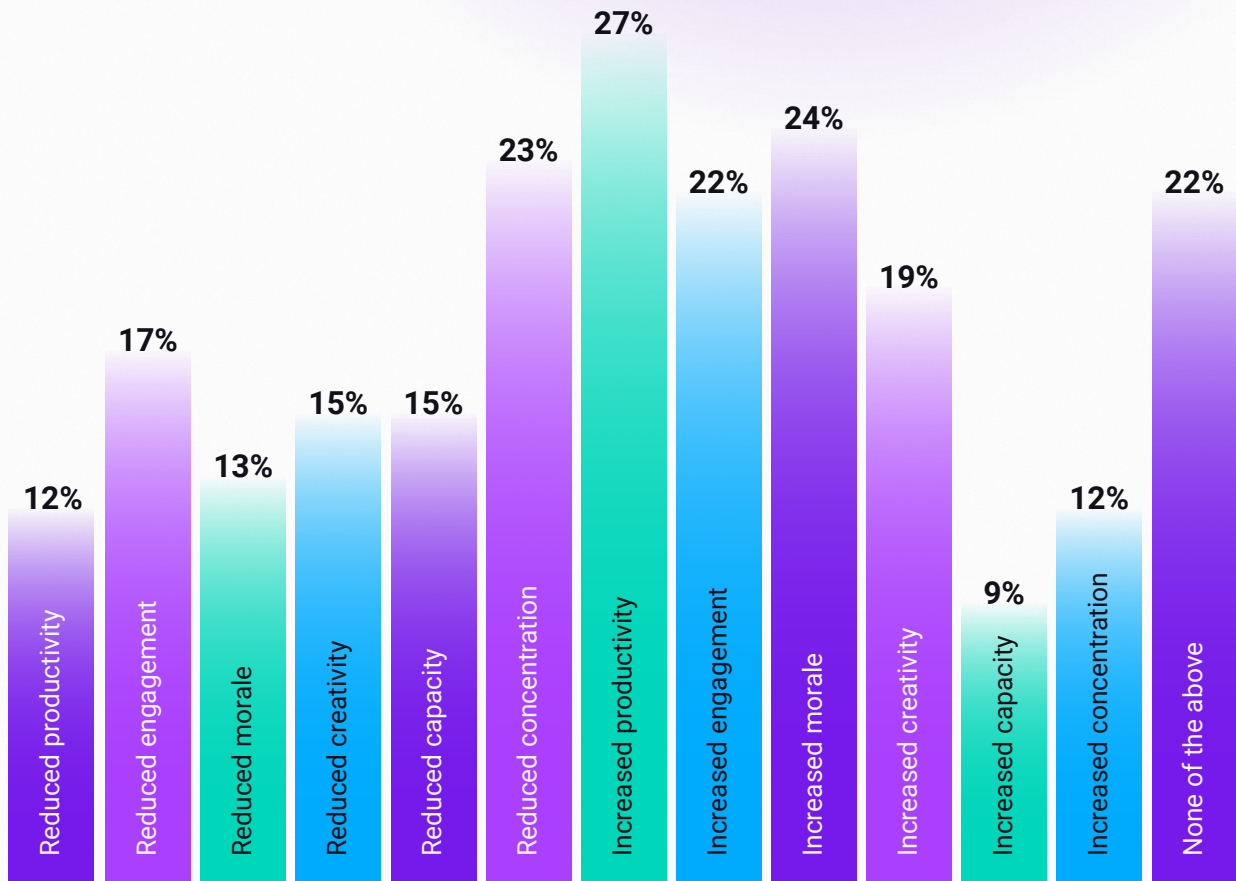| Attribute	Percentage
Ambition	34%
Resilience	37%
Sensitivity	58%
Confidence	37%
Compassion	53%
Generosity	38%
Objectivity	29%
Empathy	55%
Intuition	41%
Leadership	35%
Self-awareness	42%
None of the above	11%

For returning mothers, specifically, it's a limited but generally complimentary picture. Productivity is reported to increase on the return from maternity leave, suggesting women are just as effective – and more efficient – with their time. While most male respondents pick out increased productivity, reduced concentration comes second and the

fewest sense increased capacity and increased creativity. In almost diametric opposition, most women notice increased morale and creativity, while the fewest observe reduced creativity and productivity. And it's caveated further by an overall 22% who fail to recognise the effort and experience reintegrating in the workplace.

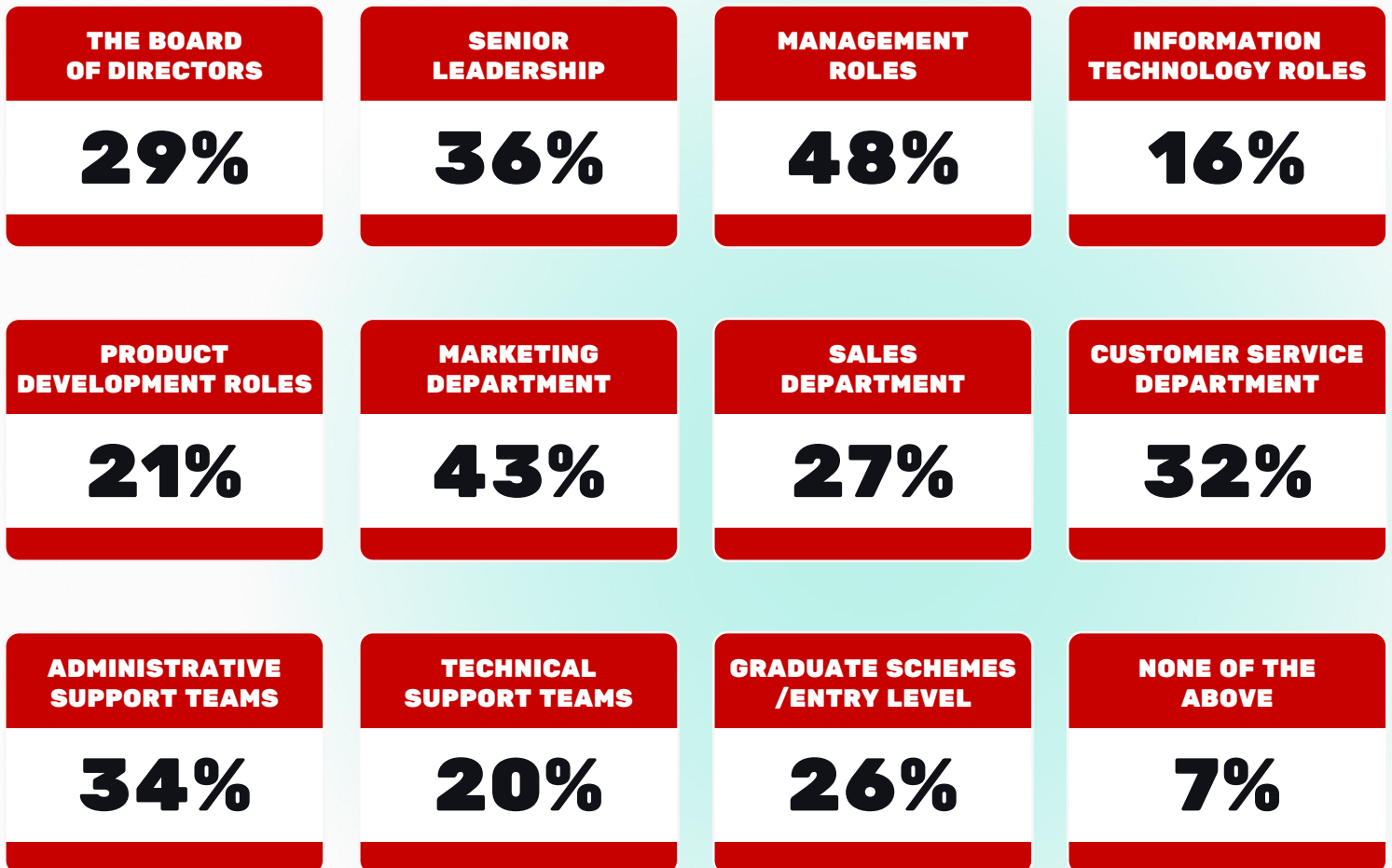**What mothers demonstrate when they return to work after having a child:**

Category	Value
Reduced productivity	12%
Reduced engagement	17%
Reduced morale	13%
Reduced creativity	15%
Reduced capacity	15%
Reduced concentration	23%
Increased productivity	27%
Increased engagement	22%
Increased morale	24%
Increased creativity	19%
Increased capacity	9%
Increased concentration	12%
None of the above	22%

Which business areas have **equal gender representation?**

Progress, at last. With the largest consensus telling us that middle management has the most equal gender representation, more women are reaching positions of power than kept to clerical or back-office roles. Their influence over how businesses serve women both inside and outside their workforce is a significant stride towards gender equality and corporate sustainability. Nevertheless, they remain a minority presence in senior management roles, especially the board.

Information technology departments and technical support teams rank lowest, highlighting the need to get girls into tech careers and roles. It's not just about authority – the shortage of women in product development, for example, will mean products targeted at women will be designed mostly without their involvement. We need women in tech to ensure that we create solutions that are safe, sustainable and suitable for everyone.

Business areas with equal gender representation:

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS	SENIOR LEADERSHIP	MANAGEMENT ROLES	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ROLES
29%	**36%**	**48%**	**16%**

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT ROLES	MARKETING DEPARTMENT	SALES DEPARTMENT	CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT
21%	**43%**	**27%**	**32%**

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT TEAMS	TECHNICAL SUPPORT TEAMS	GRADUATE SCHEMES /ENTRY LEVEL	NONE OF THE ABOVE
34%	**20%**	**26%**	**7%**

FINAL THOUGHTS.

The increased representation of women is a galvanising positive note to end our report. Middle management roles have not only reached inflection point for gender equality, but actually lead the way. It's one of several positive notes, in fact, that together prove business EDI is no longer a remote, unrealistic, forever-elusive possibility.

But there's further to go. Our findings are shot through with tensions, conflicts and fundamental disagreements between male and female responses. They need to reach a joint understanding on where they are and where they need to go, if businesses are to meaningfully enhance their sustainability and resilience. Continuous communication and open dialogue will be key to that.

And the conversation needs to evolve, too. A blindspot over non-binary experiences presents an immediate danger that they'll remain sidelined. Gender equality can't become a pendulum that swings from one group to another. It's critical for businesses trying to strengthen resilience and a sustainable future against a tough economic outlook.

So what can businesses do to stride ahead? As a social value enterprise, InnovateHer partners with organisations to help them enact tangible internal and external change. With several packages available, businesses big and small can benefit. Don't be Shy is one example of a business that's seen improved EDI performance as a result. You can be the next.

Join the conversation!

Share the report and the findings you found most interesting.

*#Britishbusinesspulsecheck
#Genderequalityxsustainability
@innovateheruk @dontbeshyb2b*

About the **teams** behind the report

Don't be Shy is a digitally native, creative B2B marketing agency working primarily with medium and large tech clients. From insights to creative to content to activation. Guided by strategy, empowered by automation. Always.

InnovateHer is a social enterprise on a mission to create inclusive, equitable workplaces for tomorrow's generations to thrive within. They work closely with their partner community to embed EDI into individual tech organisations, and therefore enable social change across the entire tech industry.

For more information about Don't be Shy, please visit *dontbeshy.com* or contact *Lisa Crowther* at *lisa.crowther@dontbeshy.com.*

For more information about InnovateHer, please visit *innovateher.co.uk* or contact *Chelsea Slater* at *chelsea@innovateher.co.uk.*

innovate
vate
<her> X Don't be Shy