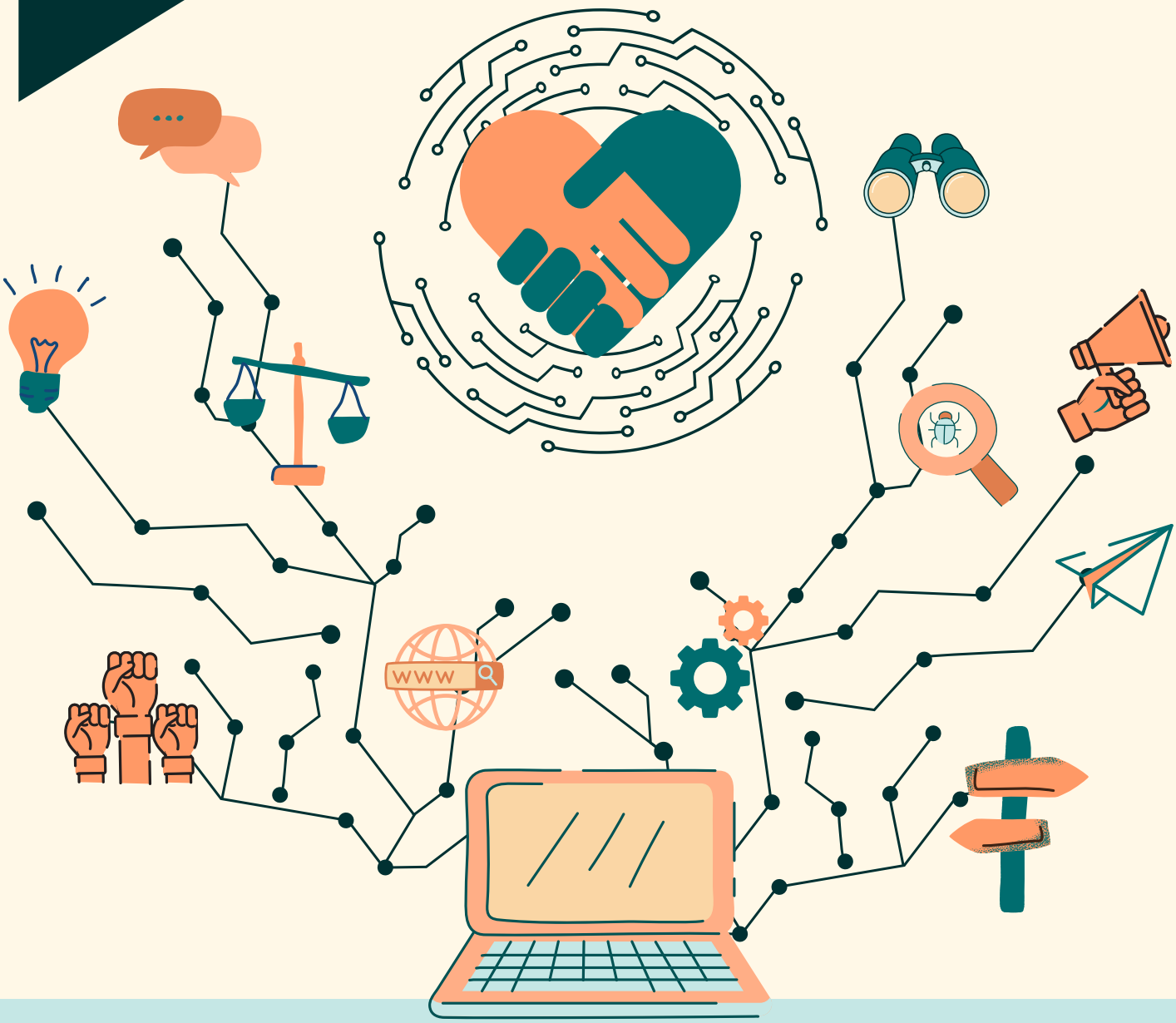
Do Beta:

Recommendations on Recruitment and Retention of Women in Cyber Security



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EMPOWERING YOU

Contents

Introduction and About Us

The Problem: Recruitment

The Problem: Retention

Stats, stereotypes, and support

Start Early and Stay On It

Considering Career Changes

Recruiting, reframing, and reconsideration

Championing Culture & Diversity

All About Allyship

Breaking Down Barriers

Promoting Flexible Policies

People, policies, promotions, and prosperity

Sources and Thanks

Note: While these resources are mainly focused on women in cyber, we also highlight the need for more overall diversity in cyber security, and *how active accommodation, encouragement and welcoming of diversity in all its forms is beneficial to all.*

* Where quotes have been included, these are each person's own, and may not necessarily reflect those of their organisation.

About Us

Hi! We're Do Beta - a group of cyber security / tech leaders and aspiring leaders, bought together through the **Empowering Women to Lead Cyber Security** Program by Empowering You.

What's with the name?

Designated team 'B' for group presentations, we've riffed on this - merging beta testing (testing before going live) and do better - resulting in a name that works on many levels and encourages continual improvement.

The Program

"Empowering Women to Lead Cyber Security" are unique, cross sector leadership development programs, run regionally and supported by industry and government, which aim to develop a sustainable community of empowered and empowering female leaders in cyber security and InfoSec roles across the UK.

2025
Southern England
- Spring/Summer

The Challenge

Recruitment and Retention Challenges for Women in Cyber

The latest UK Govt survey shows only 17% of cyber roles are held by women and 12% of leadership roles. While some improvements have been made, these numbers remain mostly unchanged over recent years.

We'll be looking at:

- Barriers to entering the industry
- Career changes & return to work
- Addressing retention issues
- Diversity, equity, culture and policies
- Actions for individuals and businesses

THE PROBLEM: RECRUITMENT

Encouraging women and girls into cyber security careers has long been an uphill battle. Campaigns and diversity initiatives in recent years have helped, however we still have a long way to go to achieve true equality.

The lack of new entrants is often exacerbated by the absence of mentors, opportunities and clear pathways, along with existing preconceptions of the industry, which disproportionately affect women's career trajectories into cybersecurity.

There are a number of reasons girls and women may be reluctant to pursue careers in cyber security:

EARLY SCHOOLING

Gender stereotypes, few role models, lack of awareness and opportunity.

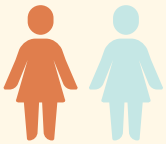
CAREER CHANGE

Lack of work/life balance, limited mentorship opportunity, no career progress.

OVERALL PERCEPTION

Unconscious bias, discrimination and harassment, 'boys club' vibe.

50%

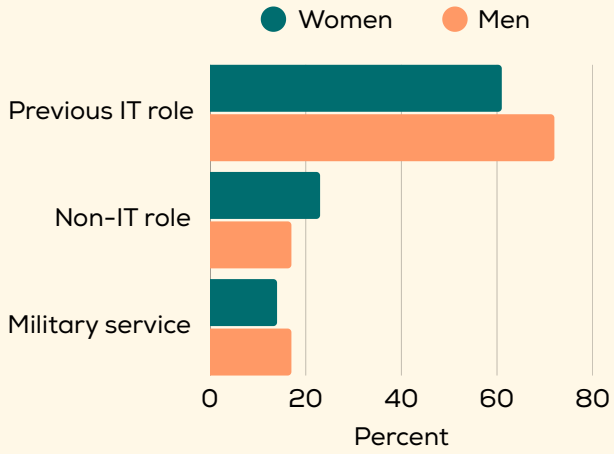


Women who are interested in pursuing a career cyber security but believe they lack sufficient knowledge about the field.

Lack of visibility in the cyber security industry

- **22%** Women as % of global cyber workforce
- **17.9%** Women as % of UK cyber workforce
- **12%** Senior cyber roles held by women
- **3%** Women in UK CISO positions

Different pathways into cyber security

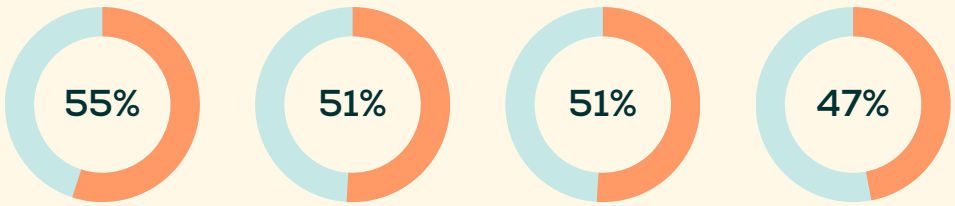


The biggest barrier I see is perception. Cyber still often seems like a dark room full of hoodie-wearing hackers when actually, it's a **wonderfully wide field** with space for creative thinkers, communicators and collaborators, not just coders.

We need to showcase role models who **break the stereotype** and highlight how cyber impacts the real world in meaningful ways.

- Amelia Hewitt, CNI Cyber Advisory and Founder of CybAid

Perceived barriers preventing entry



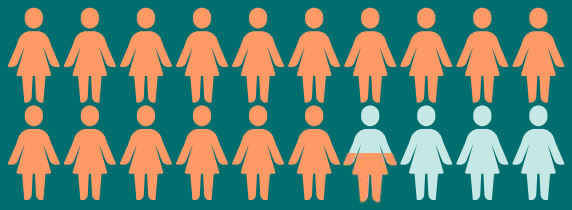
- **55%** I think cyber security could be an intimidating industry for me
- **51%** I don't think there's room for someone like me in cyber security
- **51%** I don't think I would fit in or be myself in cyber security
- **47%** I don't think people in cyber security would take me seriously

THE PROBLEM: RETENTION

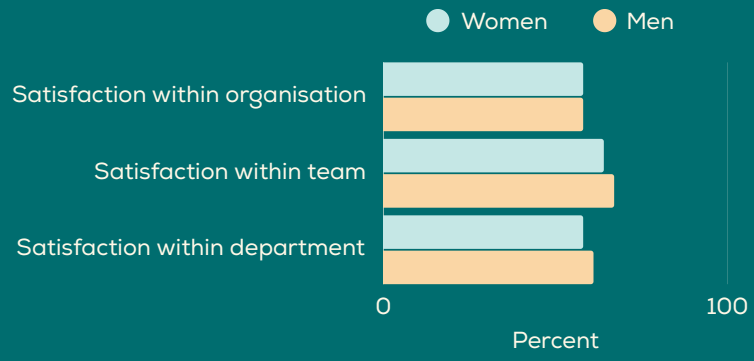
From lack of flexible policies and fewer opportunities for growth, to outright harassment and difficult working environments - the cyber security industry faces an issue with retention. Despite increased focus on bettering workplace policy and culture, women are still leaving the industry at much higher numbers than men, leaving an increasingly wider gap that remains difficult to fill.

83%

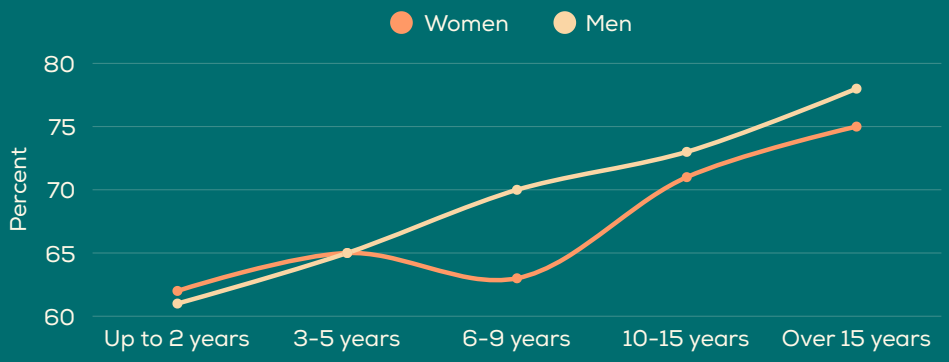
Female security professionals who have experienced exclusion at least once, in areas such as career growth, respect, recognition, access, and in workplace policies.



Lower satisfaction within teams and departments



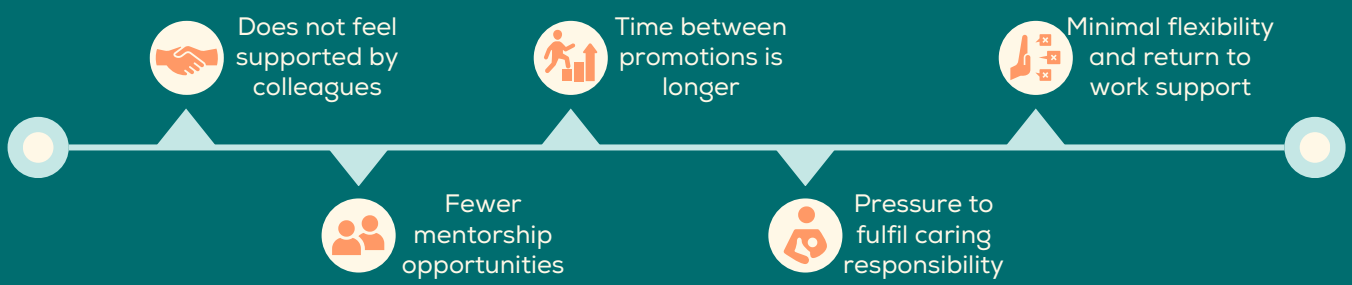
Lower feeling of competency throughout career



27%

Gender pay gap between male and female cyber security professionals, median gross hourly earnings.

A timeline of cyber security retention issues



Companies should create a culture of inclusion by implementing policies that support work-life balance and conducting regular salary audits to ensure pay equity. Establishing clear pathways for career development and offering leadership training specifically targeted at women can also help retain talented professionals.

- Rebecca Taylor, Threat Intelligence Knowledge Manager & Researcher

I think the more diverse a team can be in background, experience, exposure and approach, the better. Then of course you need to engender a sense of freedom and trust, where opinions and suggestions are welcomed and listened to.

- Gordon Adam, Mastercard Manager - Cyber Threat Intelligence Relationships

STARTING EARLY AND STAYING ON IT

At a time when many young girls and women are still steered away from education in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) by outdated and incorrect ideas about their capability and suitability for it, it is crucial to intervene early in order to encourage higher uptake of opportunities, and to pursue careers in STEM/cyber security.

Introduce IT Early

Starting in schools, at home, or in other educational environments - introduce girls to coding, technology, safety online, problem solving, project management, and overlooked but underutilised soft skills that contribute to careers in cyber security. Let them follow their passions, learn at their own pace, and help them discover all the different skills and roles available within the industry - and that they can succeed in them.

Spotlight Role Models

A 2018 survey by the Geena Davis Institute showed two-thirds of women in STEM credit Gillian Anderson's X Files character, Scully, for inspiring them into their chosen careers. In cyber security and the wider tech field, women from all over the world - with different backgrounds, experiences and skills, are succeeding as professionals and leaders. Show the young women in your life that someone like them can be a trailblazer, an innovator, a leader, an expert.

Change the Narrative

Changing the narrative means changing actions, behaviour, and language. From little but impactful changes such as steering away from genderised terms like 'IT guy', to structuring programs in a way that encourage wider participation, we open the doors to a much more inclusive and less intimidating industry.

Engage schools with panels, competitions like capture the flag, and stories from diverse professionals. Change the narrative. Cybersecurity is human-centric – it's about problem-solving, ethics, and communication.

- Sidra Mobeen, Global Cybersecurity Manager, IAM & Risk Strategist

Make and Facilitate Opportunities

In schools, offices, libraries and community halls across the country, programs are taking place - coding bootcamps, cyber security initiatives, tech projects, hackathons, and more. Encourage involvement as a student or teacher, provide funding or sponsorship, or run your own. No matter what, these can be crucial stepping stones for young people to discover passions, make connections, and develop the skills and confidence that give them an edge in their future career.

Keep the Momentum

Starting early is the best approach, and the second best is starting now. Advocacy, opportunity, learning, and driving change takes continual effort, and we won't see lasting change until we all do our part to keep encouraging young women and girls, and showing them that not only can they succeed in a career in cyber security - but that we are actively working to make the industry more diverse, accessible, equitable and empowering.

We need to start this conversation early, in schools, by showcasing female role models in technology and promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects to young girls.

Rebecca Taylor

Outreach should start early and be honest about what cyber security work actually looks like, because it's not all firewalls and phishing emails.

Amelia Hewitt

Action Point

Does your company sponsor or take part in programs that encourage or teach young women and girls about skills and careers in cyber security?

CONSIDERING CAREER CHANGES

Along with encouraging those entering the workforce for the first time, there is untapped potential in women looking to make a change in their career - from lateral movement across departments, through to an entirely new and different opportunity and everything in between. How can we promote the cyber security industry and all of its facets to career changers?

Recruiting Internally

Take a look around your organisation, and you'll find skills the cyber industry is crying out for. When recruiting for a role, don't just look within the team or department, but throughout the business.

Share job listings through all internal channels, and be available to answer questions or discuss the role and its responsibilities in more detail.

Top Tip

Holding company-wide, cyber security-based competitions or problem solving contests not only provides new ideas and perspectives, but helps identify talent and skills where you may not have looked for them previously.

Non-Technical Backgrounds

Many women believe they must already possess proficient technical skills to work in cyber security. While it may be a requirement for some roles, many businesses are missing out on a talent pool of people that, while their diverse educational and experience backgrounds may not fit a 'typical' cyber career path, are rich in skills like problem solving, analysis, critical thinking, instinct, curiosity, communication, and collaboration.

Top Tip

Where possible, make job listings more inclusive - highlighting soft skills, or reframing - for example, threat hunting as pattern recognition, puzzle solving, investigation and research. Call attention to any training you currently or are willing to provide.

We need to **normalise different entry points**. Not everyone needs to be a hacker or come from a STEM background. Highlighting varied roles, showing real stories, and making space for curiosity without gatekeeping can go a long way. Confidence often comes after exposure, not before, so helping people take the first step matters. But, at the same time support women who want to pursue deep technical roles.

- Glenn Wilkinson, hacker turned speaker and founder

Gordon Adam

Women are **incredibly good at solving problems**. They approach, deal with and communicate a problem or situation, really differently from men. The real win comes when we deploy our full armoury against any given issue or adversary, we need as many ways of looking at a situation as possible.

Technical, Non-Cyber Backgrounds

For those coming from technical backgrounds outside of cyber security, there are countless transferable skills that lend themselves to success in cyber. However, even here some may have doubts they possess the 'right' technical skills. Whether a technical background or not, the perspectives, skills and experiences bought from these different careers and industries are what contribute to a dynamic and resourceful team.

Top Tip

Similarly to recruiting from 'non-technical' areas, ensure the language in job listings are inclusive and approachable. Clearly state that you're open to providing training or certifications, or that you welcome transferable skills.

Helping Take the First Step

If you know someone considering a change into cyber security, but who may have doubts or does not know where to start - the first step doesn't always have to be a leap. Start with free resources, introductory courses, offer to connect them with relevant industry contacts, or have them shadow a colleague.

Most importantly - your support, confidence and advocacy is key.

Top Tip

Create shadowing schemes or "cyber champions" within your organisation to support and guide newcomers, or those interested in learning about or joining your department. Increased collaboration for your team and approachability for others? Win win.

CHAMPIONING CULTURE & DIVERSITY

It should come as no surprise that a diverse organisation is stronger, more adaptable, resilient, flexible and open. Yet despite recent progress and increased awareness, we still have a long way to go to make cyber security truly representative, welcoming, and accepting.

In a time where DEI initiatives are increasingly being rolled back, we must push to engrain diversity, equity, inclusion and culture within organisations - and to continually monitor and make improvements, just as we do with other crucial business functions - because they are just as integral.

Cyber security teams with at least

30% women

experience

40% fewer

security incidents

If every company had a culture like the top 20% more inclusive ones, it's estimated that the annual attrition rate of women in tech could drop up to **70%**

More inclusive workplaces drive better experiences than less inclusive ones:

Say they love their job	85% Vs 28%
Have been promoted	66% Vs 42%
Heard/read inappropriate comments	15% Vs 54%
Likelihood of leaving tech	1% Vs 21%

And increased likelihood of advancing to management:

+77% Women of colour

+61% Women

What's The Situation?

Unconscious Bias in Recruitment:

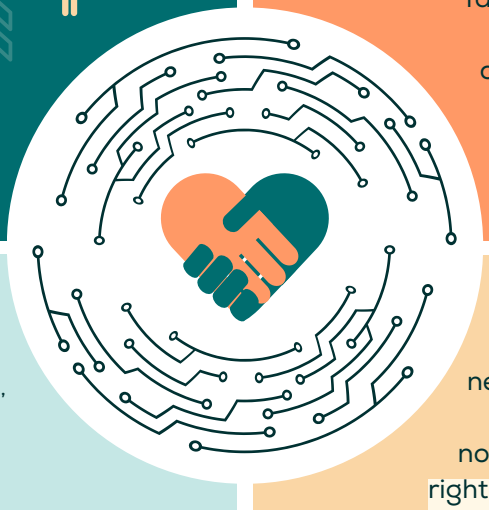
Studies show that despite equal qualifications, men are often favoured over women for technical positions, indicating unconscious bias in hiring decisions.

Risk of One-sided Solutions:

Without a diverse and inclusive workforce, the industry risks creating solutions that *only work for a specific subset of the population* or fail to address the needs of others, thereby increasing the evolving cyber-threat landscape.

Talent Loss:

People from underrepresented groups often face environments where they must work harder to be heard or prove their value, causing burnout and prompting them to leave the field altogether.



What Do We Do?

Successfully implementing DEI programs or shifting company culture requires change, discomfort and commitment. While lasting results can take time to effectively measure, ***progress can still be made***.

- Implement cultural sensitivity and anti-bias training.
- Document clear advancement practices and implement performance metrics to track success.
- Champion equitable pay structures.
- Hire diverse leaders at all levels.
- Create mentorship and community-building initiatives.
- Get real-time feedback through continued conversations on gaps and needs.
- Ask for advice and guidance from diverse communities.
- Pivot recruitment focus away from assessing how someone would fit into your culture, towards an understanding of what they would add.

★ This is by no means an exhaustive list - consult the experts and keep making positive progress.

Attackers don't all think the same way, so why should defenders? Welcoming neurodiverse individuals, people of colour, LGBTQ+ professionals and those from non-traditional backgrounds is not just the right thing to do, it's smart risk management.

But inclusion isn't passive. Organisations need to be deliberate about inviting in that difference, adapting where needed and making sure everyone has what they need to contribute fully.

Amelia Hewitt

Intersectionality Matters. Women of colour, the LGBT+ community and those with neurodiversity and disabilities face compounded challenges - representation and inclusion efforts must reflect this.

Use Metrics - track and share data on hiring, promotion, and attrition to stay accountable. Diversity is a cybersecurity imperative. Diverse teams detect risks faster, innovate better, and better reflect the people we protect.

Sidra Mobeen

ALL ABOUT ALLYSHIP

When workplaces aren't inclusive or are lacking in representation across backgrounds, diverse voices are often silenced or sidelined, leading to missed ideas, knowledge gaps, and high attrition. This is where (along with a business culture change) we need allies: people who actively involve, amplify, and raise up the people who, despite hard work and expertise, may not get opportunities for having their voices heard, being promoted, or being recognised,

Why Is Allyship Important?

Research has shown that firms with more women in senior positions are *more profitable, more socially responsible, and provide safer, higher-quality customer experiences* – among many other benefits.

However:

WiCyS data shows that women are 4.5 times more likely to be excluded from acts of recognition as men, 2.5 times more likely to be excluded from acts of respect and 2.4 times more likely to be excluded from career and growth opportunities.

When Is Allyship Important?

Always! But especially supporting:

- ✓ Early-career or new starters
- ✓ Pregnancy or maternity leave
- ✓ Promotion or new role
- ✓ Health challenges
- ✓ Facing bias or discrimination
- ✓ Perimenopause

> Allyship must go beyond intent to action. Male allies should challenge sexist norms and share domestic responsibilities to help level the playing field. It's time for organisations to move from performative allyship to real, systemic change.
>
> *Sidra Mobeen*

How Can We Be Good Allies?

Step Back

Make space for others to speak, contribute, or lead - especially those who are often overlooked. Listen actively, don't interrupt, and avoid dominating discussions.

Speak Out

Don't let discriminatory behaviour or language go unchecked. Call it out and let people know it's not ok, and it's not tolerated.

Stand Forward

If someone is actively being harassed or discriminated against, stand forward physically and vocally - show support, and offer assistance.

> It's about listening and supporting. Being a good ally needs that too, but then I think it's about knowing when to stand behind colleagues to show support, when to stand beside colleagues to help amplify their voice, and then unfortunately, knowing when to stand in front of colleagues, to help protect them. Its me using my personal brand, which includes being a 52 year old white man, to help others understand the issues we face around this.
>
> *Gordon Adam*

> For me, it's mostly about being aware of the dynamic in the room. Who's being interrupted? Who's being dismissed? Sometimes it's calling that out, sometimes it's making space for someone to lead or speak. And sometimes it's just shutting up and listening properly.
>
> *Glenn Wilkinson*

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Whether entering the workforce, changing careers, working towards a promotion, accessing opportunities, or simply trying to progress - women and other divers professionals can face a number of barriers which impede progress, contribute to burnout, and drive lower rates or retention and satisfaction. This is particularly evident where intersectionality comes into play, and a number of barriers may overlap and/or compound. So, what barriers to people face, and how can we address them?

What Are The Barriers?

In 2021, (ISC)^2 conducted a study revealing the distinct obstacles faced by diverse cybersecurity professionals globally.
Feedback from surveyed professionals included observations such as:

Women often face higher standards, being judged on their experience, while men may be chosen based on potential.

> Diverse professionals frequently occupy entry-level roles but seldom progress due to a lack of supportive culture, leading to their premature departure.

Unconscious bias significantly hinders the advancement of diverse individuals into leadership roles.

Other Barriers Include:

- Structural or patriarchal expectations
- Pregnancy or maternity breaks and related stigma
- Lack of mentors, visible role models or early positive reinforcement
- Male-dominated culture
- Imposter syndrome

Plus:

Human Resources Offices and other senior leaders often underestimate how hard it is for women to thrive in tech roles. They are twice as likely as women themselves to say it's "easy for women to thrive in tech":

44% HROs Vs **21%** Women

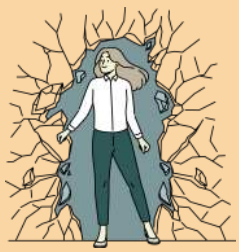
If organisations believe they're doing well without evidence or input to back it up, ***they won't realise they need to make improvements.***

What Can We Do?

> Barriers such as gender bias, lack of awareness, and limited access to networking opportunities often hinder women's entry into cyber security. To overcome these, companies need to foster inclusive recruitment practices and provide targeted support and resources to women.
>
> *Rebecca Taylor*

- **Identify and alleviate:** Find the barriers in your organisation, and take active steps to mitigate them.
- **Persist & advocate:** Raise issues with allies, build support networks, engage with diverse communities.
- **Push for change:** Implement and encourage the uptake of inclusive policies and benefits.
- **Elevate and educate:** Foster mentors/sponsors, or host targeted events.
- **Curate culture:** Boost confidence via leadership training, networking, and collaboration programs.

Factors that help women thrive in cyber security



- **Bold leadership:** A diverse leadership team that provides role models and publishes targets.
- **Comprehensive action:** Policies and practices designed to level the playing field.
- **Empowering with respect and autonomy:** Diversity and individuality are actively encouraged. Employees are given flexibility over how, when, and where they work.

PROMOTING FLEXIBLE POLICIES

As with diversity initiatives, cultural improvements, and accommodations, flexible policies benefit everyone. However, many organisations have been slow to implement these, and others have refused completely - citing cost, complexity, or inability to adapt, amongst other reasons.

Luckily, it's right there in the name. Flexible policies work both ways - allowing flexibility for both employees and businesses, as well as the ability to implement and adapt policies tailored to the needs of employees, whilst balancing business operation and resourcing or workloads.

The Stats

The largest gaps between male and female participation occur during key childbearing years, demonstrating the impact of the 'motherhood penalty'.

PWC research shows better supporting returners could raise UK women's earnings by **£1.1 billion per annum**

Continuing progress on female participation rates of 0.8% per year over the next five years could contribute an additional £43.5bn to the UK GDP by 2030

If all organisations globally were as inclusive as the top 20%, by 2030, it could help retain **1.4 million women in tech**

Which Flexible Policies?

The following are examples of flexible policies that enable higher satisfaction, belonging, productivity and retention:

Flexible Working

- Remote working
- Hybrid working
- Flex time
- Job share / part time
- Compressed workweek

Time Flexibility

- Swaps - eg. swap Christmas to take Eid or Diwali off.
- Additional leave days for mental health.
- Flexible childcare hours.
- Time off or flex time for prayer, fasting breaks, etc.
- "No-meeting" blocks or quiet hours.

Environmental Flexibility

- Provide prayer rooms, nursing rooms, and sensory environments.
- Provide or subsidise ergonomic or assistive tech support.
- Be flexible in location or format for onboarding, training, and performance reviews.

Career Flexibility

- Provide extended parental leave beyond statutory minimums.
- Implement return-to-work schemes after maternity/paternity leave or extended time away.
- Allow job carving (tailoring job responsibilities to individual strengths).
- Encourage dedicated hours or days for self-directed upskilling or learning.

Implementing Flexible Policies

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to implementing flexible policies.
However, there are a number of ways to ensure they work as well as possible:

- Assess organisational needs and preferences to determine priority and demand.
- Promote a culture of trust and communication, enabling employees to feel empowered and informed.
- Test and learn - trial policies with smaller groups and iterate based on feedback and experience.
- Be transparent, set standards, and ensure accountability - to guarantee fairness and maintain output.
- Ensure psychological safety; employees won't take advantage of policies if they do not feel safe to do so.
- Continually gather feedback, and implement clear tracking and progress metrics.

IN CONCLUSION

Despite the journey ahead, we're positive about the progress being made. Programs like Empowering You, and those provided by WiCyS, TechUK and others are paving the way for women in cyber security, while working to encourage other businesses to become more diverse, flexible, and accommodating.

More women and diversity in cyber security and the tech industry is crucial for its ability to adapt, transform, and develop solutions that work for everyone.

But this can't come from just women and diverse communities pushing alone - we need allies and organisations to step up to the mantle to drive change and foster inclusion, safety, equity, and belonging.

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