

Key Findings

Employers have a crucial role in encouraging and sustaining gender balance in apprenticeships.

Diverse businesses are more successful. They enable broader perspectives and expertise from a wider pool of talent, encourage diverse thinking, develop a better understanding of customers, and improve staff retention.

Barriers to greater gender equality can arise from workplace practices which may not recognise the gendered constraints on women's lives; and from the gender stereotyping of career aspirations and preferences which begins early in a young person's life.

Achieving greater gender balance in apprenticeships is complex and action is required to change individuals' attitudes and societal practices. Employers, parents and carers, schools, colleges, careers advisers, unions and government all have a role to play.

Gaps are evident in the evidence base on apprenticeships. Improved reporting of apprenticeship recruitment, retention and progression would inform future action.

Benefits of gender diversity

Gender diversity broadens perspectives and expertise within businesses, delivering business benefits including improved organisational performance, improved access to resources, and increased financial value. Increasing gender balance in sectors which are imbalanced can deliver business benefits for employers, including increased profitability and productivity and enhanced company reputation.

Barriers to achieving gender balance

Although the benefits are clear, there are many barriers to achieving diversity. Children have already formed gendered expectations of employment in their early years and these ideas persist as they move through education, leading to gender segregation in subject

choice in school, further and higher education, apprenticeships, and the labour market.

One of the main causes of gender segregation in the workplace – reflected in apprenticeship uptake – is continued acceptance of traditional cultural norms and stereotypical views among the main influencers on young people's careers choices, including parents, teachers, and employers. Young people can be influenced by negative and stereotypical views about apprenticeships, including that they are mainly for men. They may develop perceptions that they are not welcome in some sectors and have little chance of being successful. These gendered ideas can become ingrained.

Employer practices do not always recognise the gendered constraints on women's lives which can both create and perpetuate gender imbalances. For example, the likelihood that

women carry out most childcare and domestic work alongside their paid work. Such employer practices can include: offering limited, quality part-time and flexible working opportunities; using exclusive recruitment practices such as word of mouth and recommendations, which can exclude non-traditional entrants; and implementing development and progression practices which reward stereotypically male traits, privilege male experiences, and fail to recognise women's skills and attributes.

Employers' can have their own biases, including believing women are not interested in or suited to particular sectors simply because they are women; or not wanting to upset the male workforce by encouraging change. They can lack access to equality and diversity training; believe that the work is not suited to flexible working and cannot be adapted. Positive action is rarely used in apprenticeship recruitment because employers lack awareness and / or confidence to implement effective positive action measures.

Addressing gender segregation

Employers can use a range of practices to address gender imbalance in apprenticeships.

Take action on a range of fronts: the barriers to achieving gender balance are complex and multifaceted and will need a range of action including changing attitudes and societal practices. Employers have a critical role, but joint action is necessary to realise lasting change.

Start early: Parents, carers and schools need to start early in challenging traditional and stereotypical views about certain occupations being gendered. Employers can support this through outreach activities in schools, colleges, and universities to support the female pipeline into male-dominated sectors, raising awareness of

opportunities and challenging stereotypes while children are still young.

Make this a critical element of skills for work education: Many employers already work with schools helping to prepare young people for the world of work and addressing gender balance should be part of this.

Actively promote diversity strategies: Employers should be embedding equality and diversity into their ethos and strategy, as well as implementing relevant training across all levels of staffing including senior management.

Look at recruitment practices: The number of applications from women into male-dominated apprenticeship frameworks and from men into female-dominated ones needs to increase. Apprenticeship recruitment practices must be non-discriminatory and could be enhanced by widening recruitment searches, outreach activities, and explicitly welcoming applications from under-represented groups. **Positive action** could be used more extensively as it can have an impact on recruitment.

Provide progression routes: Women are less likely to complete apprenticeships in male-dominated occupations and men are more likely to leave care work due to a lack of clear progression and development opportunities. Networks, mentoring and role models can also support retention.

Offer fair work for everyone: Women remain under-represented in apprenticeships which provide the greatest returns to individuals in terms of pay, employment and skills development. Apprenticeships which are high-quality, offering genuine skills development, fair wages, employment opportunities and career progression are beneficial for all apprentices, but will also make them more attractive to women.