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in
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STATE OF THE NATION

Data becomes powerful when every voice has the opportunity to shape the story it tells: Roisin McCarthy, Founder. Women in Data®



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This year's State of the Nation's findings reveal a Data and AI sector that has moved to navigating the complex delivery gap between AI experimentation and enterprise-scale integration. And whilst practitioners are generally feeling optimistic about the industry, this is selective with fundamental concerns remaining.

The UK AI market continues to expand at extraordinary speed. Government and independent estimates place its value at over £72 billion in 2024 and on track to reach £1 trillion by 2035. At the global level, AI adoption is becoming near-universal. Today, 77% of companies worldwide are using or testing AI tools, and since 2022, enterprise deployment of generative AI has grown by 400%. Research indicates that the trajectory is now firmly embedded in the UK with nearly one in six organisations having adopted at least one AI technology. Large firms are leading the way at 68% adoption, followed by 33% of medium and 15% of small businesses.

This rapid uptake in new technology has been driven by an explosion in accessible AI tooling, especially GenAI applications democratising advanced capabilities that once required specialised data teams. As solution providers compete for market share, organisations are rapidly embedding AI – from operational optimisation to customer engagement, risk management, and strategic decision-making.

Alongside this technical acceleration, Women in Data® continues to emphasise the critical importance of people, skills, and culture. As we continue to observe and assess the landscape of industry forecasts, technology reports and strategic frameworks, one absence remains striking. There is very little reporting of the human experience inside this AI revolution. How do practitioners perceive the pace of change? What opportunities and anxieties does it create? And, most critically, what are the specific implications for women working in Data and AI?

Methodology

Between the 20th Nov 2025 and 15th Dec 2025 Women in Data® distributed the State of the Nation survey and gathered insight from 1,125 data practitioners from within the Data and AI ecosystem – both men and women. This is the second annual State of the Nation from Women in Data® and we plan to repeat it every year to track progress and monitor the changing world of Data, Tech, and AI.

Traditionally research would define seniority based on job title but in our experience the range of job titles and the range of responsibilities are so vast that we decided to record seniority using the following question.

Despite a decade of well-intentioned initiatives, from government interventions to organisational programmes, alongside the persistent efforts of groups such as Women in Data®, the representation of women in the field has not significantly improved. Attraction to the industry is still lower than it should be and female attrition remains at 50% by the mid-point of their career. The gender pay gap persists at 15.83% even in this highly skilled, highly paid environment, and progress towards gender parity – particularly in leadership positions – continues to be slow, with fewer than 20% of leader seats held by women. As the AI landscape evolves, we see the risk of these disparities deepen.

By focussing on the human reality behind the data, the Women in Data® State of the Nation report highlights not only how practitioners are faring, but how they feel about their careers, their futures, and the rapidly shifting industry around them.

If the UK is to meet its ambitions as a global tech and science leader, it must ensure that the workforce shaping the AI future is inclusive, equitable and truly representative of the society it serves.

The time to act is now.

What quartile of seniority in your organisation would you place yourself?

- Quartile 1.** Entry level
- Quartile 2.** Practitioner, Team leader
- Quartile 3.** Senior leader
- Quartile 4.** SLT, Board level

These quartiles will be used extensively throughout the report to understand and contextualise our findings. These quartiles are also used by the ONS to report the annual Gender Pay Gap statistics.

Women in Data® Foreword



EDWINA DUNN OBE

It is a pleasure to contribute this foreword to the Women in Data® State of the Nation report. Throughout my career, I have seen first-hand how data can be a powerful force for progress, shaping better products, fairer decisions, and more inclusive outcomes. Yet the true potential of data will only be realised if the people building and interpreting it genuinely reflect the society it serves.

As we move further into this era of AI, we need women at the highest levels of leadership and influence. We need all the best talent to ensure that the UK sits at the top table. Without attracting and retaining 50% of our workforce, we will miss the mark.

The best data leaders have an inherent understanding of mathematical sciences and know where to find good data and what a good algorithm looks like. We need to ensure that our AI agents use a ground truth that reflects the world we hope for, not just a repeat of the past. I worry that data and mathematics is undervalued as technologists race to be the lead platform with the biggest data pool. This is important but not if the skills of data science are ignored or under invested. Bigger and faster may not end up being the smartest play.

Women continue to enter the data profession at significantly lower rates than men and often encounter structural barriers that limit progression and visibility. From the first step onto the career ladder to senior leadership roles, the journey for women is marked by friction.

This report provides a clear and evidence-based picture of where the UK data industry stands today. While the sector performs better than many others, progress is uneven and fragile. Representation alone is not enough. What matters equally is who holds influence, who shapes strategy, and whose perspectives are valued when critical decisions are made.

So, I celebrate the amazing talent and resilience represented in this community. Knowing how to turn messy, unformatted data into meaningful stories – and applying these to the business world in a meaningful and impactful way – takes great skill and a significant investment of time. My own experiences are built on a lifetime of learning, of a commitment to the culture and values of an organisation or brand and, above all, a desire to use data for good, not for reduction, exclusion or bias.

AI models need human expertise to frame the right questions and interpret results in context. Algorithms can process vast amounts of data, but it takes human judgement, grounded in ethics, experience, and strategic vision, to determine which patterns are meaningful, which decisions align with our values, and what outcomes we're hoping to achieve.

The Women in Data® State of the Nation provides the insights to leverage that judgement.

TECHNOLOGY AND AI ADOPTION



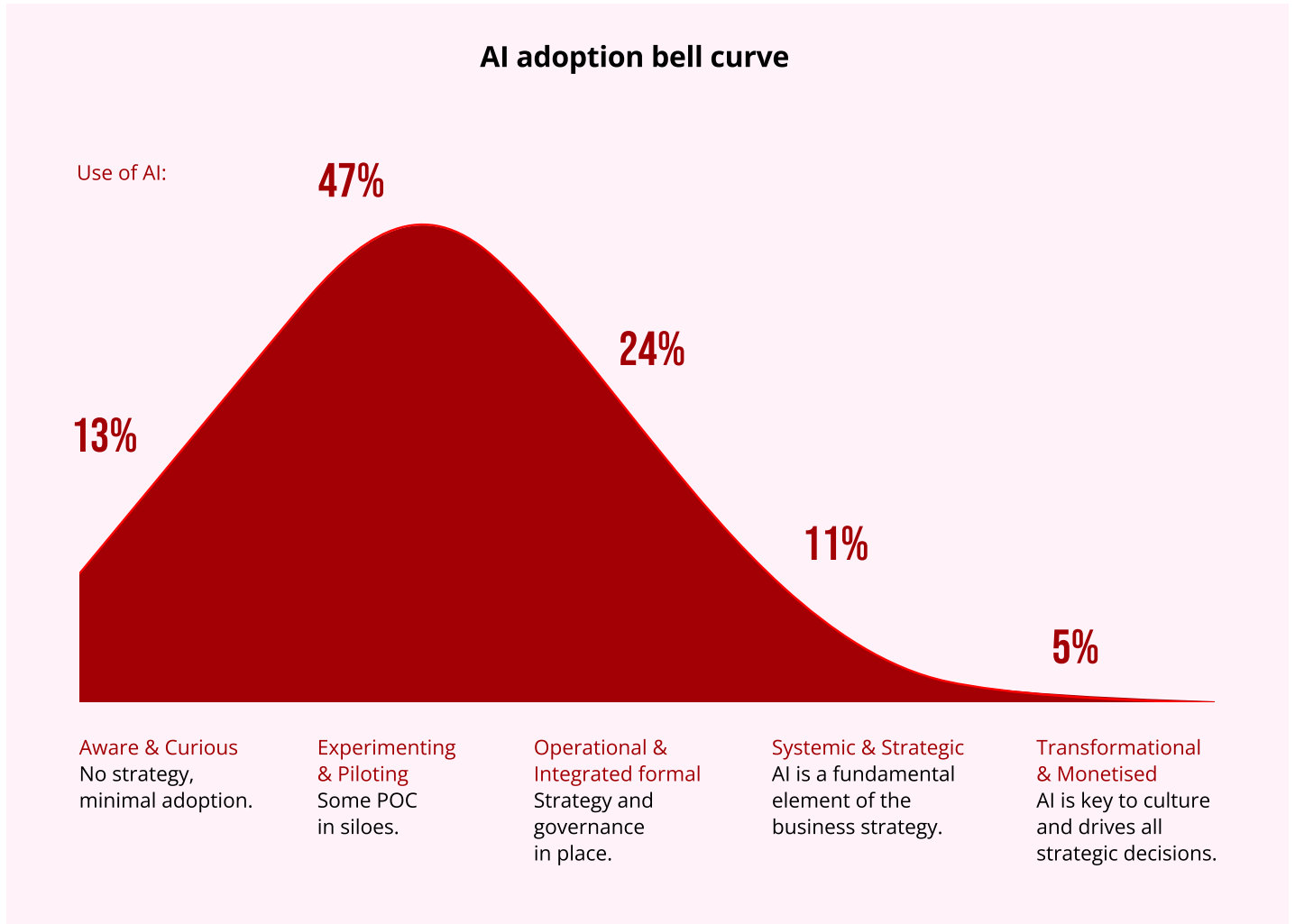
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Overview

To understand the landscape of technology adoption, we asked respondents to answer the following question: **“How advanced is your organisation’s current use of AI?”**

They were asked to place their business in one of the following quintiles, from the lowest to the highest level of AI adoption. This allowed us to better assess AI maturity across the industry and to understand and contextualise other findings within the report.

Use of AI



According to those responding to the State of the Nation survey, the use of AI in their organisations is now mainstream but remains largely tactical rather than strategic. Against the AI adoption curve we see that nearly half of organisations (**47%**) are in the Experimenting & Piloting phase, indicating widespread testing of AI use cases, but with limited enterprise-wide integration.

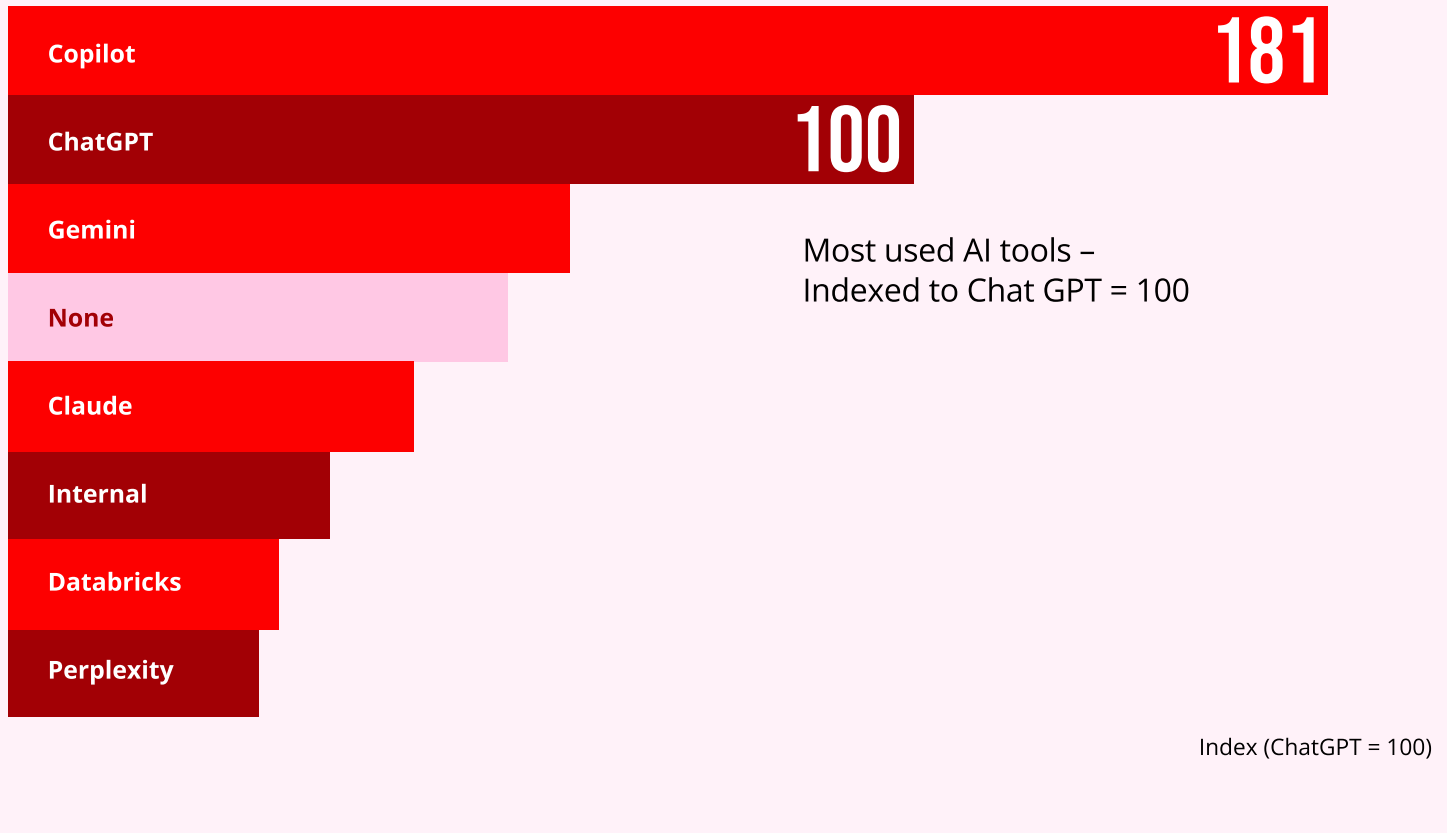
24% have progressed to Operational & Integrated, and just **16%** describe AI adoption in their organisations as either Systemic & Strategic (**11%**), or Transformational & Monetised (**5%**).

This shows that there is still a maturity bottleneck between piloting AI and delivering scalable, enterprise-wide adoption.

Organisation size is a key differentiator in the rate of AI usage. Smaller organisations are more likely to still be either at the Aware & Curious or Experimenting & Piloting stages, while the largest enterprises (10,000+ employees) are the most advanced, with **50%** of them operating at a higher than Operational & Integrated level. However, even among the largest enterprises, fully Transformational & Monetised AI use remains rare at **6%**, suggesting that most organisations are still early in realising AI’s full business value.

Overall, the data suggests a market that has moved past awareness and into action, but where scaling, governance, and value realisation remain the next major hurdles.

Which AI tools are people using?



“

If your current employer is behind and does not invest in AI, you are really going to struggle to secure the role in the next 5 years.

State of the Nation respondent

In last year’s State of the Nation’s findings, we saw that data practitioners were excited and highly motivated to embrace AI tools. However, widespread use was limited, compounded by senior leaderships’ concerns about potential negative impacts. In a very short, 12-month period we have seen both a dramatic shift in take up of AI tools and acceptance of their use, particularly of LLMs. To illustrate the speed of change, even during the data collection and analysis phases of the State of the Nation research, we saw a drive towards agentic AI and AI agents but this evolution will not be evidenced in this report.

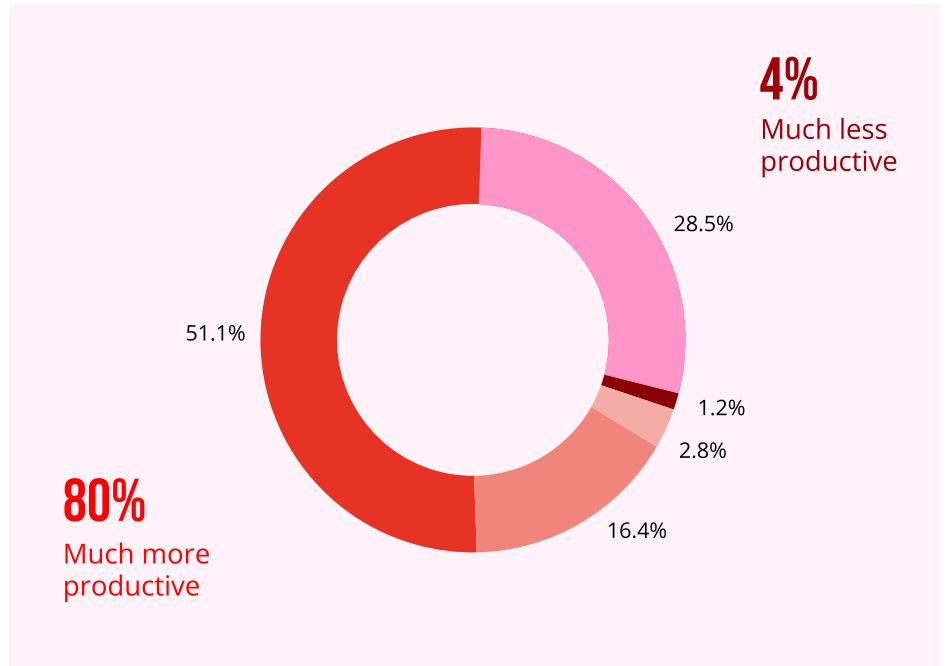
From the State of the Nation results, Copilot was twice as likely as ChatGPT to be highlighted as the tool most used in the respondents’ roles. ChatGPT, in turn, was twice as likely to be used as Gemini.

This usage pattern differs from the overall market shares generally quoted and most likely reflects the more ‘AI ready’ survey sample of Data and AI practitioners, as well as a landscape increasingly shaped by enterprise agreements.

It is interesting to note, however, that those in **Quartile 4** (SLT, Board level) are more likely to use ChatGPT than other quartiles. Nonetheless, Copilot still has the largest share of Quartile 4 users.

Productivity

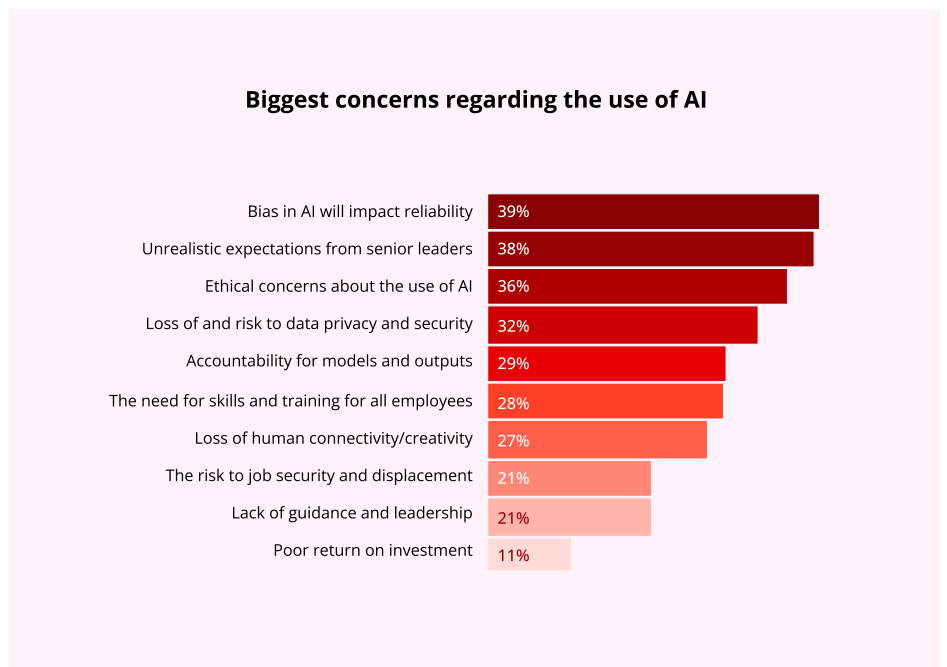
80% of those who completed the survey indicated that AI tools have increased their personal productivity, with only 4% finding themselves less productive as a result. These findings are consistent across organisation size and all levels of seniority.



Concerns over the organisational use of AI

The industry has seen great strides in the past year in the evolution and adoption of AI and productivity gains. However there remain significant concerns over the organisational use of AI.

Although 'Bias in AI outputs will limit reliability' is the most frequently cited concern (39%), respondents express almost equal concern about 'Unrealistic expectations of senior leadership' (38%). This concern increases with business size and seniority, with 46% of respondents in Quartile 3 and 44% in Quartile 4 highlighting it.



Ethical concerns remain very important to the respondents and although there has been some reduction since last year's survey, we should still take special note of this as the use of AI becomes ubiquitous. The concerns about ethics, accuracy and bias are more alarming to individuals than factors like job losses, lack of human connection, and poor ROI, which might feel counterintuitive given the way AI rollout is being reported in the media.

Women in Data[®] Point of View: What UK organisations should do now

UK organisations have moved beyond AI curiosity and into widespread experimentation, yet the majority remain stuck in pilots, unable to scale or generate enterprise-wide value. Women in Data[®] believes the industry must act decisively to break this maturity bottleneck and ensure responsible, inclusive, and value-driven adoption. The next phase of AI value creation will be led by organisations that are moving up the maturity curve.

Move from pilots to purposeful strategy

With nearly half of organisations still in the Experimenting & Piloting phase of AI adoption, UK businesses need to develop clear roadmaps that embed governance, measurable outcomes, and enterprise-wide standards.

Support smaller organisations to avoid a widening gap

While larger enterprises are advancing at speed, the industry must create partnerships, shared frameworks, and improved access to ensure SME inclusion in AI progress.

Invest in capability, not just tooling

High adoption of tools like Copilot shows huge enthusiasm, but maturity requires workforce enablement. Organisations must prioritise skills training, responsible AI literacy, and change management alongside organisational deployment.

Ensure leadership expectations match reality

Senior leaders must ground ambition in capability and readiness, with increased understanding of reality versus hype.

Strengthen ethical and risk frameworks

Concerns around bias, accuracy, and unrealistic leadership expectations highlight the need for transparent governance, cross-functional oversight, and diverse representation in AI development teams.



The UK's AI future depends on scaling safely, intentionally, and inclusively.

And our industry must lead that charge.

SALARY AND COMPENSATION



Salaries comparison

The Data and AI sector remains one of the highest-paying branches of the technology industry.

In the past 12 months, Women in Data® have seen that salaries in the sector continue to attract a significant 'AI premium' due to the scarcity and high demand for specialist talent.

In 2025:

The average salary for someone with a degree in the UK was:

£40,000

The average salary for an individual working in the Data and AI sector was:

£84,376

For those at the top of the career ladder (e.g CDO or Head of AI), the average salary was:

£156,100

Note: With a range of between £120,000 and £200,000 – often supplemented by significant bonuses and performance incentives.

But the salary trajectory is not uniformly upward.

We have seen a reduction in the average salary for Quartile 1, with entry level roles earning and average of **£41,691** twelve months ago to **£40,513** today. Whilst on the surface this is a relatively small change at **2.83%**, this should raise a red flag as the salary deflation is accompanied by a contraction in entry level role openings. This might be viewed as positive in the short term from a cost perspective. However, Women in Data® believes that knock-on effects are uncertain. A reduced skills pipeline could ultimately drive salary inflation, which is already evident in Quartile 2's average salary increases compared to the previous year.

There is a clear alignment between organisation size and higher salary in the Data and AI sector.

Large companies pay on average a **£15k salary premium**, equivalent to a **20% uplift** even when we exclude the very smallest companies. This suggests that the organisational giants are utilising their massive capital to secure the talent of the most experienced professionals. Anecdotally, organisations report being willing to pay this premium to maximise ROI, defend against poaching, and strengthen their IP advantage.

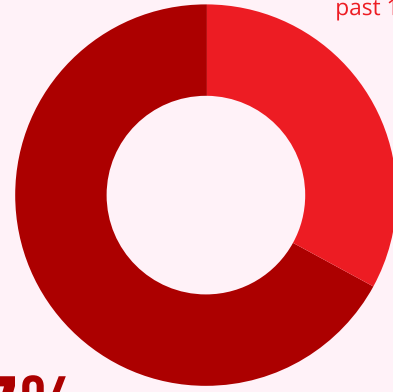
Salary increases

According to our insights, two thirds (**66.7%**) of respondents who expressed an opinion received a pay rise in the past 12 months, with men marginally more likely to do so than women. Interestingly, individuals in **Quartile 1** (Entry level) were least likely to be offered a pay rise, with only **56%** having received one, reinforcing our observation of a contraction in Entry level remuneration.

The results also indicated that those working from the office were more likely to have received a pay rise compared to those working from home (**68% vs. 59%**).

33.3%

No pay rise in the past 12 months



66.7%

Yes, a pay rise in the past 12 months

Working from home

We see that individuals working from home are generally more satisfied with their roles than average, however this comes at a significant financial cost. The difference in average salary between those working from the office and those working from home is **£15,000** per annum, creating a working arrangement pay gap of **17.24%**.

This difference is explained by fewer individuals who are in **Quartile 4** (SLT, Board level) who also work from home. This infers that WFH creates an earnings and promotion obstacle which our research shows disproportionately impacts women.

Average salary:

£87,000

Work from office

£72,000

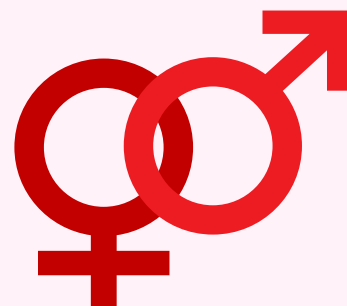
Work from home

Gender pay gaps

According to the ONS, the gender pay gap in the UK is 12.8%. This year Women in Data® tightened up its pay gap calculation methodology and we calculated a gender pay gap in Data and AI of **15.38%**. Our analysis suggests that this gap is mostly due to the lower number of women compared to men in **Quartile 4** (SLT, Board level) and reflects the findings from Women in Data® and other sources that women occupy less than 20% of the most senior roles in the industry.

Average salary for women and men

£100,000



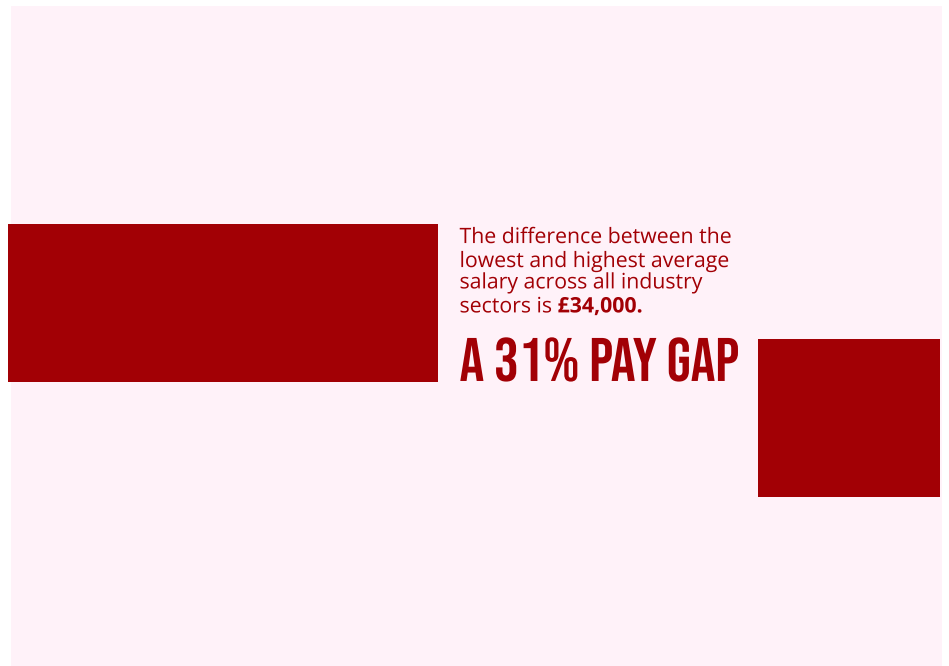
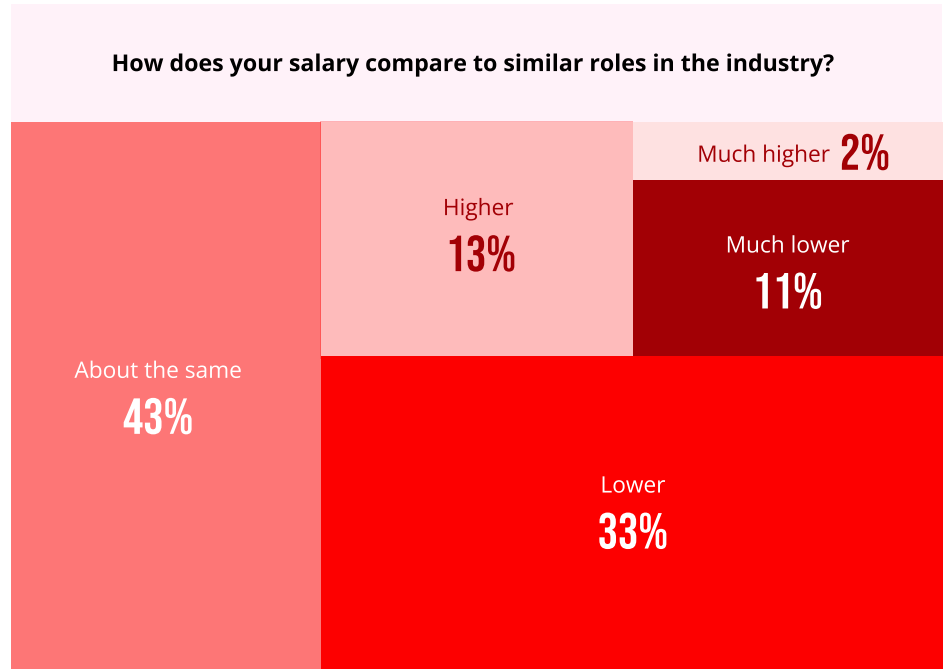
£83,000

Salary satisfaction

Given the high salary levels in the Data and AI sector, and the overall positive reporting around pay increases, it was surprising to observe that respondents have remarkably high levels of dissatisfaction when they compare their salaries to what they believe others were achieving in similar roles across the industry.

According to the State of the Nation findings, **43%** of respondents believe that their salary was lower or much lower than the salaries of others in similar roles in the industry. **43%** believe that their salary was about the same and just **14%** believe their salary is higher.

To better understand this sentiment, we looked at the average salary reported by respondents across industry sectors. We found that the difference between the lowest and highest average salaries is **£34,000**, representing a gap of **31%**.



We found that average salaries vary significantly across industry sectors:

Highest average salaries: Systems Integrators, Tech consultancies, Finance, and Manufacturing

Lowest average salaries: Public Sector, Defence, and Utilities.

Notably, the sectors with the highest average salary delivered the widest gender pay gaps.

The State of the Nation results also surfaced significant average salary differences depending on where organisations sit on the AI maturity curve. Interestingly, the organisations at the Systemic & Strategic stage (second most mature level) are paying the highest salaries, even compared to those at the Transformational & Monetised stage (most mature). This is likely due to their focus on hiring the most experienced and scarce practitioners to take them forward to the next maturity stage.

“

The salary is also very low in comparison to like for like roles in other businesses.

State of the Nation respondent



Satisfaction factors beyond salary

We wanted to understand the other factors that drive job satisfaction for practitioners in Data and AI.

By far the most important factors were in ranked order.

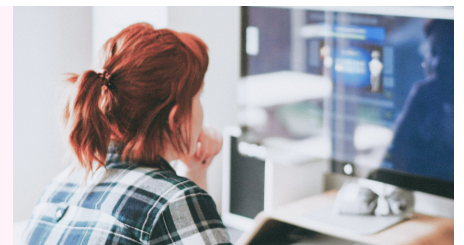
1. Flexible working arrangements



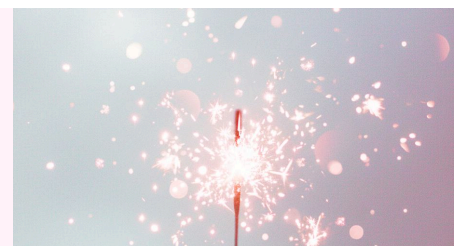
2. Meaningful, purposeful and impactful work



3. Intellectual challenge and stimulation



4. Recognition and feeling valued



5. Supportive team and collaborative culture



Women in Data[®] Point of View: What UK organisations must do now

The UK Data and AI sector continues to command exceptional salaries, yet the emerging contraction in entry-level roles signals a serious long-term risk. The industry must act now to protect the talent pipeline, close persistent gender and working arrangement pay gaps, and build an equitable, future-ready workforce.

Tackle gender imbalance at senior levels

With women holding less than 20% of senior roles, the 15.38% gender pay gap in Data and AI will not shift without targeted sponsorship of female talent, transparent progression pathways, and equitable access to high visibility, high impact work.

Rebuild and protect entry level pathways

The decline in Quartile 1 (Entry level) salaries and opportunities will constrict the future skills pipeline and intensify inflation at mid-levels. Companies must commit to structured early-career programmes and ringfenced junior-level hiring.

Address the working from home salary and promotion gap

A 15% working arrangement pay gap shows hybrid working inequality is real. Organisations must ensure flexible working does not limit advancement, particularly for women, who use those flexible options at higher rates than men.

Broaden what 'reward' means

Flexible working, meaningful work, intellectual challenge, and recognition are now core drivers of employment satisfaction. Firms that prioritise these factors will attract and retain diverse talent and benefit from the return this delivers.



Women in Data[®] urges the industry to use these findings

to build a fairer, more resilient UK Data & AI landscape.



LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

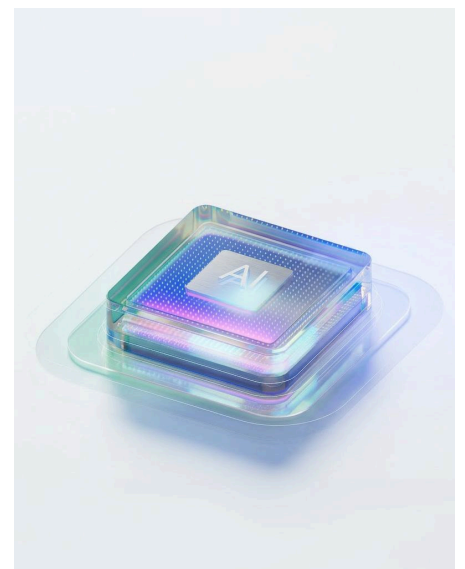


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As technologies, tools and methodologies emerge with increasing frequency, continuous learning is now a critical enabler for individuals and organisations to stay current, competitive and capable.

This year's State of the Nation research reinforces the strong link between Learning & Development and sustained career progression, delivering the knock-on effect of greater employee satisfaction. The findings show that acquiring new capabilities whether technical, behavioural, or leadership based, directly fuels career momentum. Individuals who continually develop their skill sets are better positioned to manage complex initiatives, step into leadership roles, and transition into increasingly specialised fields within Data, Tech and AI.

We have seen that the ongoing wave of technological and AI-driven change has intensified the industry-wide skills shortage. Organisations face significant challenges in sourcing experienced talent, particularly for specialist roles and we report the adverse effects that this has throughout this document. Recent surveys from across the industry indicate that over **75%** of IT leaders are struggling to recruit individuals with the necessary skills (up from **68%** last year), while attrition rates continue to rise.



Learning & Development provision

79% of respondents to the State of the Nation survey indicated that they intend to engage in formal learning, and 45% of these plan to do so within the next 6 months. These findings show little change from last year's results.

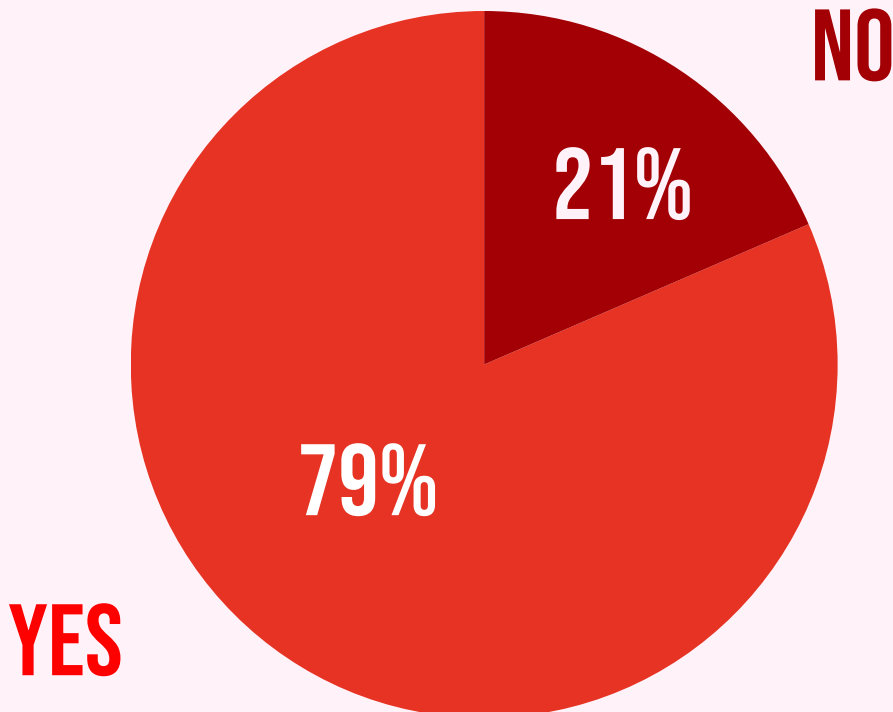
Applying a gender lens, women are not only more likely to engage in formal learning but are planning to do so with more urgency. Interestingly, as Data and AI practitioners rise through seniority ranks, they are less likely to consider formal learning. Only 69% of Quartile 4 (SLT, Board level) plan to undertake formal learning in the next 12 months, compared with the overall average of 79%.

“

We put a lot of effort in hiring women but forget about creating work environments and ways of working that work for them.”

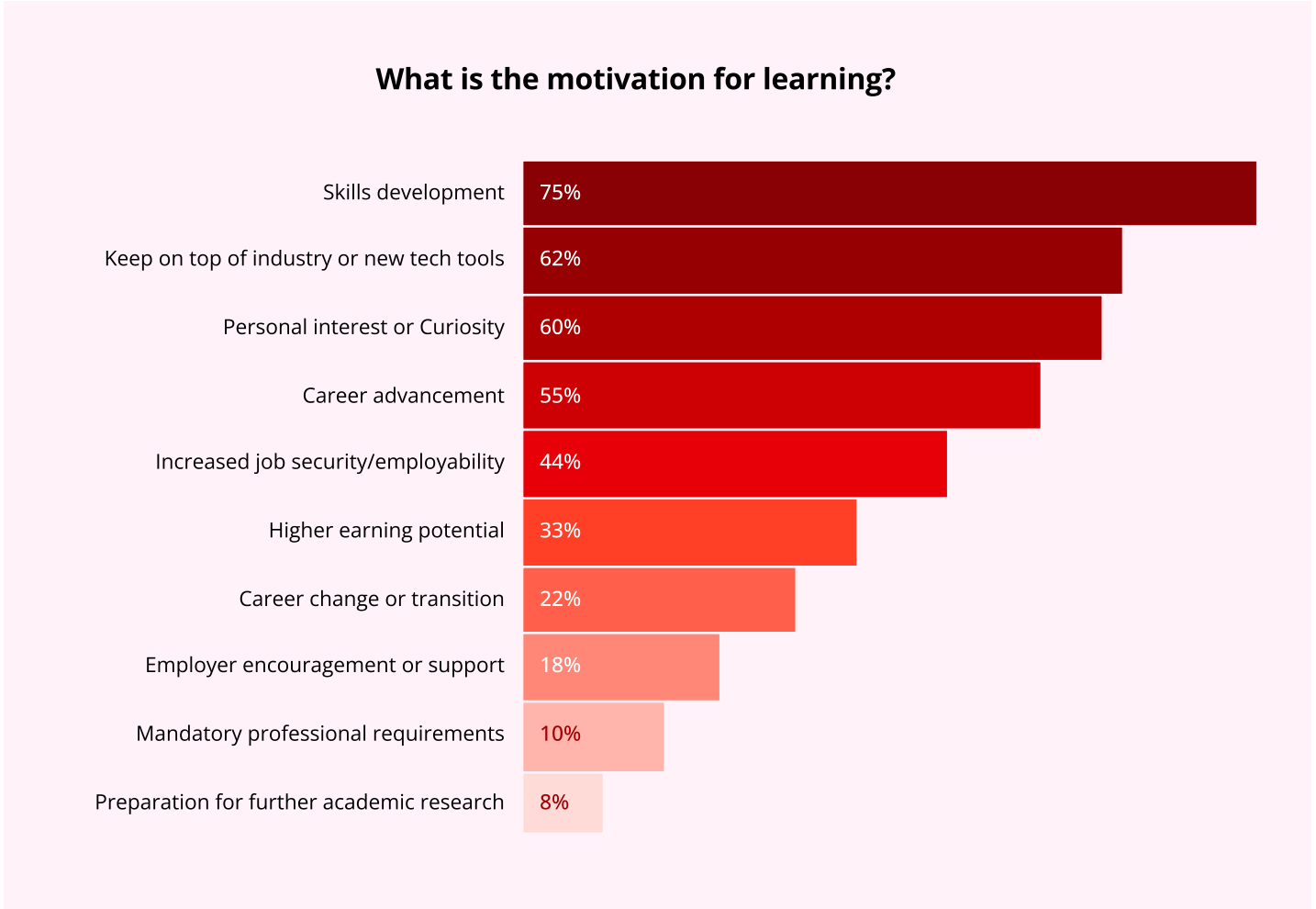
State of the Nation respondent

Intention to engage in formal learning



Reasons for engaging with Learning & Development

The reasons individuals give for wanting to engage in formal learning provide important insights for both Learning & Development professionals and those responsible for talent attraction and retention. The report findings show that individuals working in Data and AI are highly self-motivated and have strong growth mindsets.



The top 3 reasons individuals gave for embarking on formal Learning & Development are:

Skills development **75%**
 Keep on top of new tech tools **62%**
 Personal interest or curiosity **60%**

Next, individuals look at learning to support:

Career advancement **55%**
 Increased employability **44%**
 Higher earning potential **33%**

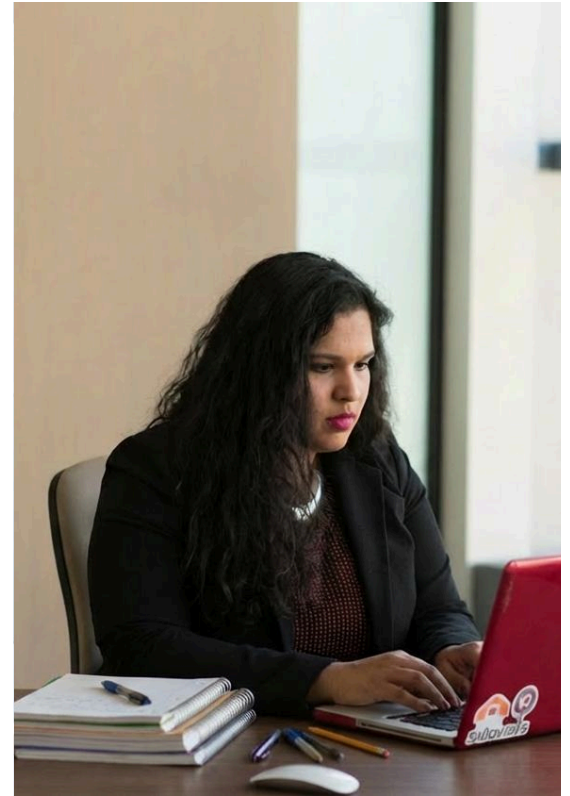
The least motivating factors for Learning & Development motivation are:

Career change **22%**
 Employer encouragement **18%**
 Mandatory professional or academic requirements **16%**

Interestingly, 'Employer encouragement' as a driver for formal learning falls away with seniority with only **14%** in Quartile 4 (SLT, Board level) citing this factor, compared to **32%** in Quartile 1 (Entry level).

Training budgets

Fewer than **12%** of all respondents who were aware if they had access to a personal training budget and for those that do, it is individuals in **Quartile 4** (SLT, Board level) who receive the most. And although our sample sizes were small, given that **69%** of this senior group are engaging in formal learning for 'Personal interest or curiosity', perhaps there is an opportunity to review the personal budget distribution, particularly to **Quartile 3** (Senior leader), giving them more autonomy around their learning activities, as we know that this stage is a flash point for attrition. These individuals are highly committed to learning and as we will see later in this report, are clearly demanding more leadership skills development.



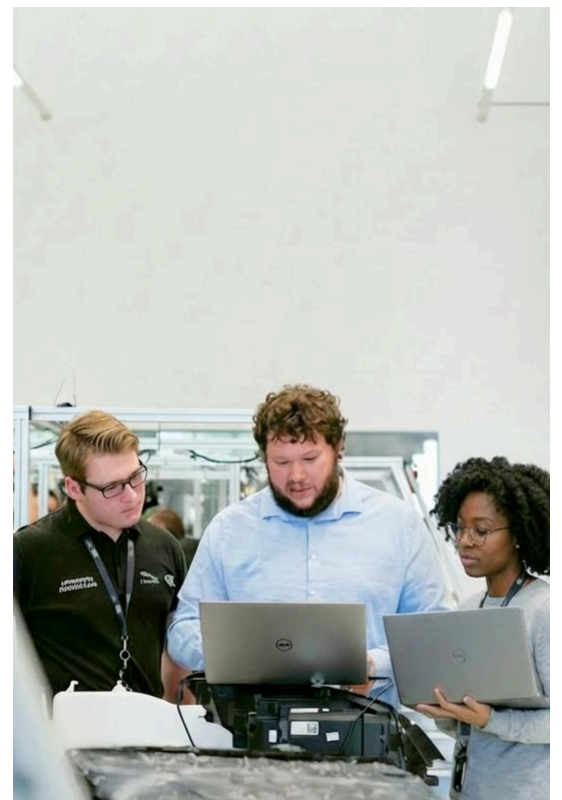
Training take up

When training is available, the take up is very high.

According to the State of the Nation respondents, the most common training available to them is 'Internal online training' at **87%** with **79%** saying they took advantage of this training avenue. Anecdotally, individuals indicated that most online training provided was mandatory and not specific to their role or skills.

Women in our sample indicated that they were more likely to look for mentoring, coaching, and leadership training, and they particularly value training provision delivered from external sources. This finding is in line with the results from last year.

When drilling down further into these findings, we uncovered that whilst individuals were generally aware of training provision, access was not always straightforward, and they often felt they didn't have the time or encouragement from senior leadership to optimise the provision.



Most valued training

The training most valued by employees in our sample is 'Technical skills training' at **56%** followed closely by 'Leadership development programmes' at **54%**. Individuals, particularly women, were looking to engage in 'Stretch projects' at **40%**, then 'Mentoring' at **39%**, and 'Coaching' at **34%**.

When considering how much individuals are focussed on acquiring skills beyond the technical, we see a workforce aware of the necessity to be up to date with the latest skills training, and one which is prepared to gear up for the next generation of Data and AI roles. Organisations that ignore this latent demand are very likely to lose this highly motivated cohort to organisations that do.

What training would be most beneficial to help your career advancement?



Conclusion

Highly motivated women accelerate innovation, strengthen team performance, and elevate organisational culture in the Data and AI sector. When companies fail to support their Learning & Development aspirations, the consequences reach far beyond individual career dissatisfaction to directly inhibit business competitiveness.

At Women in Data®, through our partnerships and from surveys like the State of the Nation, we see that women actively seek opportunities to expand their skills, contribute strategically, and drive meaningful change at a greater rate than men.

When these ambitions are blocked or overlooked, organisations risk losing exceptional talent to employers who recognise and invest in their potential. This attrition not only increases recruitment and onboarding costs, it also causes instability, slows delivery, and weakens institutional knowledge.

A lack of L&D support feeds a culture where women feel undervalued, reducing engagement and limiting the diversity of thought needed for decision-making in a sector where bias is a key concern for everyone. By contrast, organisations that intentionally nurture women's learning and career growth unlock a multiplier effect of stronger pipelines, more inclusive leadership, and greater commercial impact.



As a computer scientist, working with data is an essential part of the profession, and much of my knowledge has been developed through both practical experience and continuous learning in this area.

State of the Nation respondent

Women in Data[®] Point of View: What UK organisations must do now

The State of the Nation findings make it very clear that UK organisations cannot rely on recruitment alone to meet the accelerating demands of Data, Tech and AI. Learning & Development must become a strategic lever and not an optional benefit if businesses want to remain competitive, diverse, and future-ready.

Treat continuous learning as core infrastructure

With 39% of today's Data and AI skills predicted to be obsolete by 2030, organisations must embed structured, role-relevant learning that blends technical, soft skills, and leadership development at every level.

Redirect training investment to where it has highest impact

We see mid-career professionals (Quartiles 2 and 3) driving strong demand for advancement. They receive less autonomy in training budgets. Organisations should rebalance spend to support this critical, high-attrition cohort.

Remove cultural and practical barriers to development

High demand but low uptake of mentoring, coaching, and other external training indicates a lack of time, access and leadership encouragement. Companies must create protected learning time and make provision easy to access.

Prioritise development pathways for women

Women show the strongest appetite for formal learning, yet lack of opportunity and sponsorship continues to drive attrition. Organisations must meet this demand with targeted leadership pathways, stretch assignments, and equitable access to high-value training.



Investing in learning, especially for women is

a competitive advantage that
businesses cannot afford to overlook.

RECRUITMENT LANDSCAPE

women
in
data

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The UK finished 2025 with shortages of AI and data talent, particularly in advanced and applied roles.

London alone faces 50,000 unfilled AI and automation positions, with mid-level AI engineers earning £120k+ due to scarcity.

These shortages are slowing AI adoption. Research from within the Women in Data® community indicates that specialist AI expertise gaps are one of the biggest barriers to scaling AI deployment, with **72%** of senior leaders reporting difficulty filling roles.

Recruitment demand in Data and AI continues to rise even as the wider job market cools with data engineering, machine learning operations, cloud architecture, and AI governance roles in greatest demand, as UK organisations double down on efficiency and automation investments.

The State of the Nation and other research sources indicate that upward salary inflation reflects the pressure. Roles requiring deep AI skills command up to a **56%** wage premium compared with similar non-AI roles, affecting the ability of some organisations and industry sectors to attract and retain the talent so acutely needed.

Worryingly however, demand for entry-level and junior technical roles is declining as organisations believe these positions can be displaced by AI task automation. Research is showing that entry level technical roles like software engineering and data analysis are experiencing steep falls in postings (**up to 23.4%**), threatening long-term talent pipelines.



Early in my career, I realised that data was a way to answer important questions, uncover patterns, and help organisations make smarter decisions.

State of the Nation respondent

Why do people leave their roles?

According to the responses to the survey eight themes emerged as to why individuals considered leaving their roles in 2025:

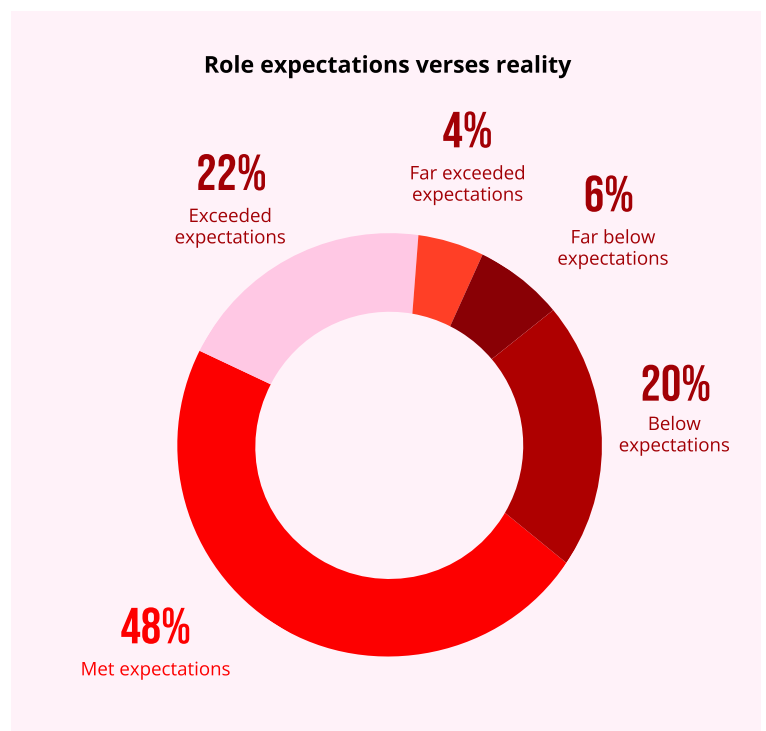
<p>1.</p> <p>Stress, Burnout & Unsustainable Workload</p> <p>People feel overwhelmed and under-supported.</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>Pay, Compensation & Financial Stability</p> <p>Compensation in their current role is not competitive for the workload or market.</p>	<p>3.</p> <p>Poor Management & Toxic Culture</p> <p>Management quality and workplace culture are major retention risks.</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>Lack of Career Growth or Recognition</p> <p>People leave when they can't grow.</p>
<p>5.</p> <p>Organisational Instability</p> <p>Change and uncertainty push people to look elsewhere.</p>	<p>6.</p> <p>Desire for New Challenges or Career Change</p> <p>People want roles that align better with their evolving interests.</p>	<p>7.</p> <p>Values Misalignment</p> <p>People leave when ethics, purpose, or priorities diverge.</p>	<p>8.</p> <p>Practical or Lifestyle Factors</p> <p>Practical and familial constraints influence decisions.</p>

Meeting expectations

Given the volatility that exists in the talent market for scarce Data and AI skills, we wanted to understand how individuals felt once they had accepted their new role.

Although **74%** of respondents reported that the reality of their role when they joined either met or exceeded their expectations, **26%** indicated that their expectations were not met, with over **6%** of them indicating that the reality of their new role was far below expectations. These figures were similar across all seniority quartiles with **Quartile 1** (Entry level) being **19%** more likely to have a negative gap in their expectations versus reality.

When the State of the Nation respondents rated their recruitment experience, **32%** indicated it was either poor or very poor. Although employers are investing significant resources in their EVP, many are still missing the mark – risking both reputational damage and compromising business outcomes.



Job satisfaction

The levels of satisfaction in the Data, Tech, and AI sector are higher than in most other industries. The State of the Nation results indicate no marked difference in the levels of satisfaction of women and men when it comes to their role, line manager, and organisation. Women in Data® believes that there are no physical reasons why the Tech and AI industry should not be an excellent space for women to work in, thrive, and reach their full potential. We continue to encourage more women into the industry and drive for them to have the support needed to maximise their career potential.

According to the respondents, **67%** of Data and Analytics practitioners are generally happy with the work that they do (up from **65%** last year) and **63%** are happy with their line manager (up from **56%** last year). However, only **59%** are happy with their organisation. These numbers carry a very strong call to action to employers to reevaluate their practices and improve the satisfaction levels of their employees, so that talent is retained and competitive value achieved.

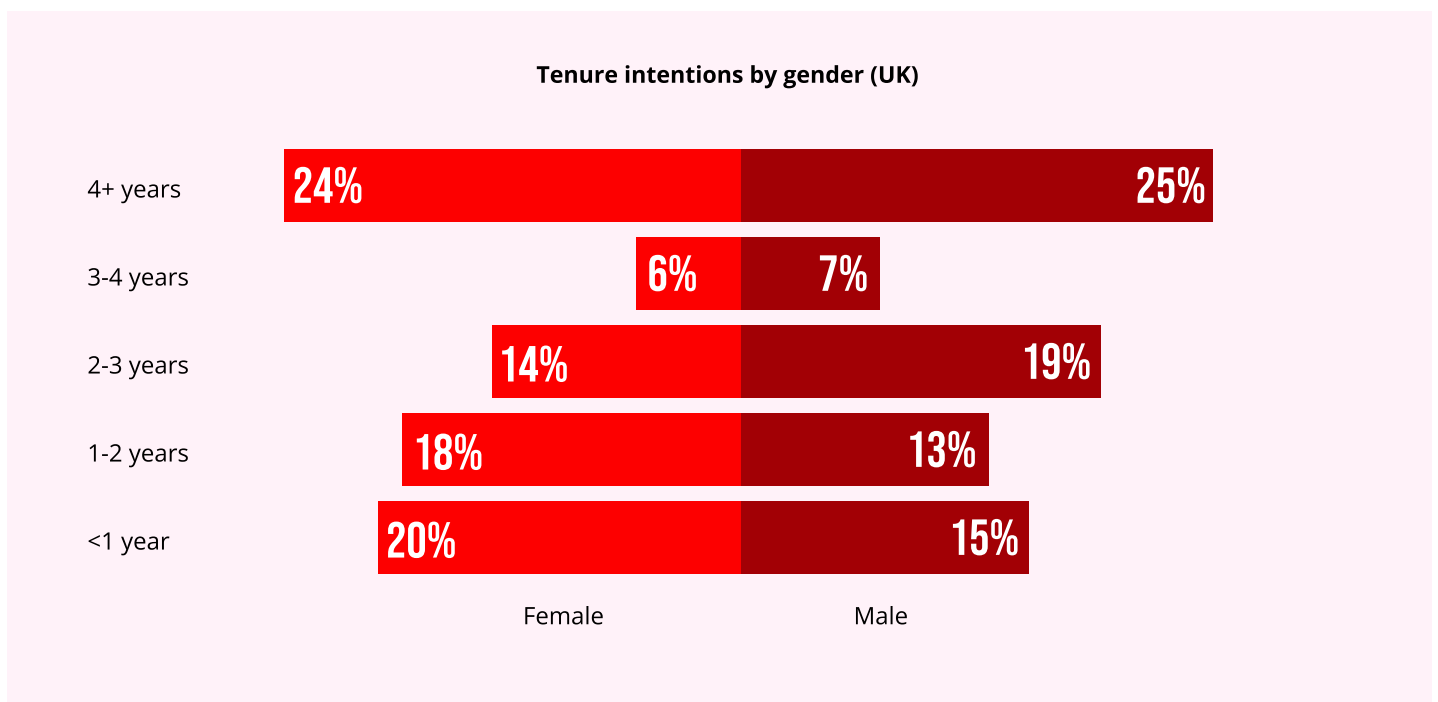


Although my line manager is extremely effective and supportive, the Exec level leadership above him is neither of those things. The lack of decision making and clear direction from the top makes it difficult to get things done. I am concerned that if my line manager leaves, the environment would no longer be tolerable.

State of the Nation respondent

Tenure

The State of the Nation survey results indicated some distinct differences in respondents' intention to stay or leave their current place of work. Women are significantly more likely than men to express an intent to leave their current organisation with **38%** of women hoping to do so within two years, compared to **28%** of men. From a gender perspective, the numbers of women hoping to leave in less than one year are even more pronounced at **20%** compared to **15%** of men.



Commentary

Talent teams should double down on their retention activity as we see that individuals are very likely to leave their jobs if they believe they can thrive elsewhere.

As we noted in the Learning & Development section of this report, commitment is not just about financial return, especially for women. Employees are motivated by salary but also by learning opportunities, the culture of the organisation, and the confidence that they are appreciated and can develop their career.

Although data professionals often found (and complained) that the recruitment process is overly long and complicated, we see clearly the first steps to leaving a job are now more simplified, with easy access and visibility on roles and opportunities driven primarily by personal recommendations and social media.



“ I entered the world of data by accident, but it quickly became my passion. Data fascinates me because, no matter how technology evolves, data remains the foundation. It's the lifeline in every innovation. That's why I am committed to building my career in data.

State of the Nation respondent

Women in Data® Point of View: What UK organisations must do now

The State of the Nation findings show that UK organisations face a critical talent challenge and recruitment landscape. Women in Data® believes organisations must urgently rethink how they attract, develop, and retain talent to remain competitive.

Rebuild early career pathways before the pipeline collapses

With junior roles declining due to AI automating entry-level tasks, organisations must review the long-term impacts and explore alternative routes such as apprenticeships, structured rotations, and reskilling to secure long-term capability.

Strengthen the employee value proposition (EVP)

Poor recruitment experiences and unmet role expectations undermine trust and drive attrition. Clear role definitions, transparent career paths, and authentic EVP delivery are essential.

Leverage community networks and employee advocacy

Personal recommendations are now the top channel for job moves. Engaged employees and communities such as Women in Data® significantly amplify talent attraction but also have a huge part to play in retention.

Support flexibility to sustain satisfaction

Those working from home report major benefits. Therefore, organisations should strengthen flexible options to maintain engagement, while ensuring that those working flexibly do not lose out on promotion and salary opportunities.



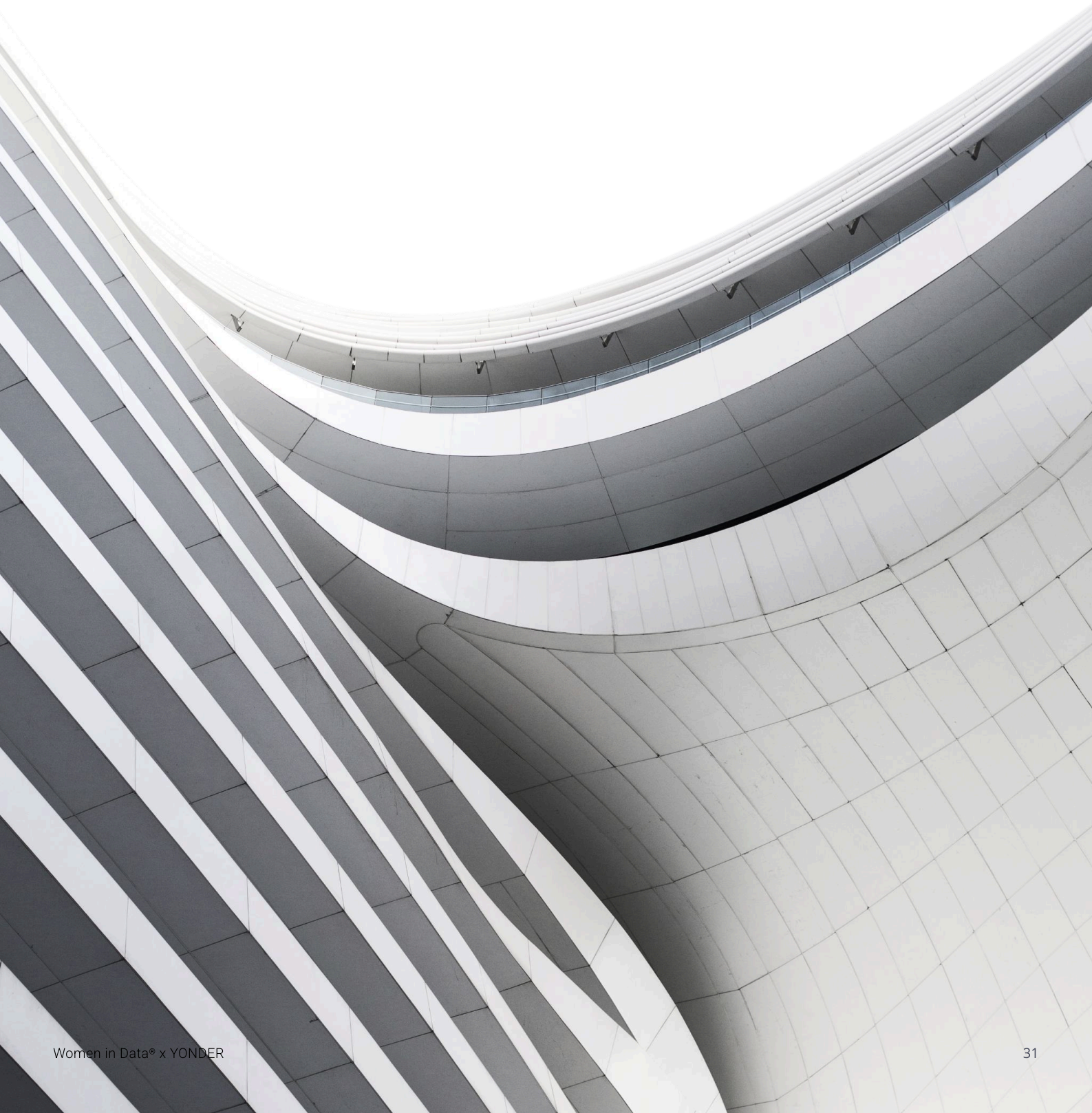
Organisations who reimagine their talent strategy will achieve
a competitive advantage
in the Data and AI sector.



DEMOGRAPHICS



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Academic attainment

Although there has been significant noise and investment to increase the pathways to roles in Data and Tech, particularly through apprenticeships, the norm is still that practitioners in Data and AI will hold a 3rd level qualification. The logic was that these new pathways would result in a more equitable and socially stratified industry, but this aspiration is not being realised at speed.

According to the State of the Nation report, **87%** of respondents hold a primary degree or above. This is a very small change from the **88%** we evidenced in last year's State of the Nation report.

This profile suggests the industry's continued demand for advanced theoretical knowledge, analytical capability, and specialised technical skills.

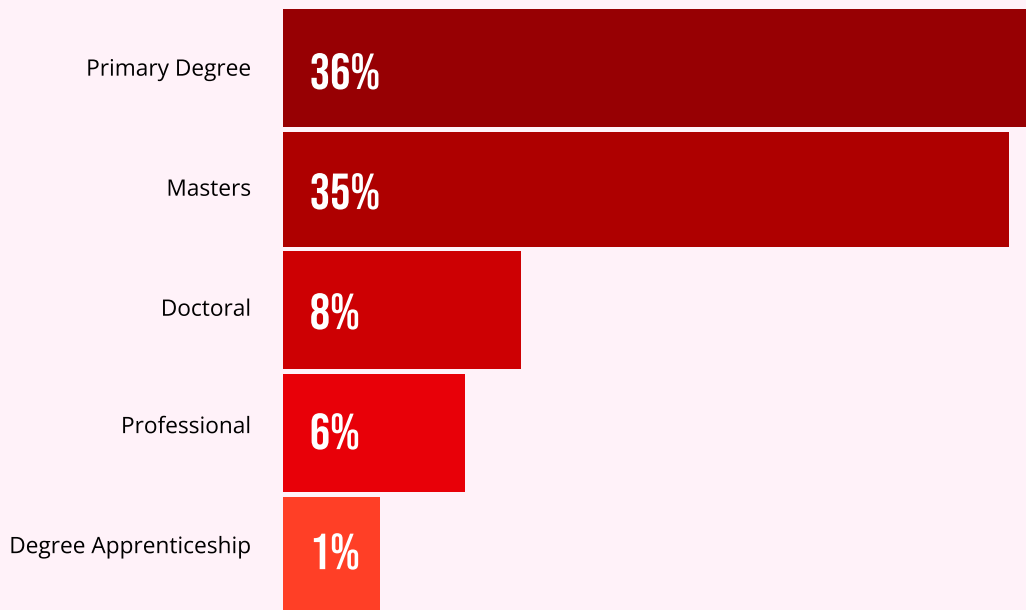
At the other end of the attainment spectrum, relatively few respondents report lower-level qualifications.

Only **2%** report having GCSE-level education and **4%** hold A-levels as their highest attainment, suggesting limited entry opportunity into the industry without 3rd level education. The representation of vocational and technical routes (**2%**) and degree apprenticeships (**1%**) implies that alternative pathways into the Data and Tech workforce remain less established and attractive to employers than traditional academic routes.

Overall, the data from the State of the Nation survey describes a sector that is highly academically qualified, remains structurally oriented toward degree-level achievement, and becomes even more specialised as individuals move further up the skill and seniority spectrum.

This is evidenced by the fact that across the seniority quartiles we see a strong relationship between educational level and career progression within the Data and AI industry.

Academic attainment – primary degree and above



I joined a data start-up initially on the admin side, but over my time there my role became data focussed. I didn't choose data, it chose me.

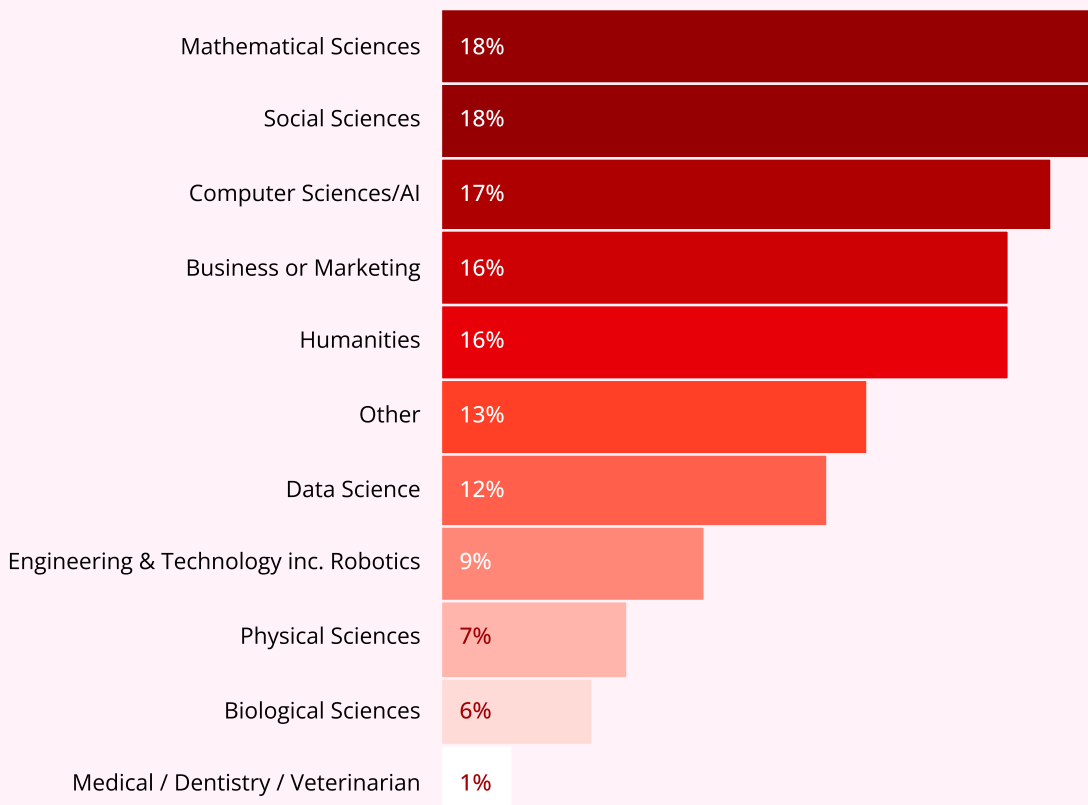
State of the Nation respondent

As individuals progress to **Quartile 3** (Senior leader), advanced academic qualifications become increasingly prominent, reflecting a shift toward roles requiring deeper expertise, leadership capabilities, or specialist knowledge.

In **Quartile 4** (SLT, Board level), postgraduate qualifications are most established. Those with master’s degrees (**31%**) remain the largest group, while doctoral (**8%**) and professional degrees (**13%**) form a substantial portion of the overall profile. Non-degree qualifications are effectively absent. **Quartile 4** (SLT, Board level) comprises a cohort whose progression is closely tied to deep technical expertise, strategic capability, and advanced academic attainment.

The State of the Nation results show, however, that the degree profile of people working in Data and AI is multi-disciplinary. The most significant degree disciplines represented are in Mathematical Sciences (**18%**) and Social Sciences including Economics (**18%**), and Computer Science/AI (**17%**). The evidence of Business or Marketing degrees (**16%**), and Humanities/Arts (**16%**), indicates that technical strength still needs to coexist with commercial acumen and more narrative driven mindsets, ensuring a balanced industry.

Degree disciplines amongst people working in Data & AI



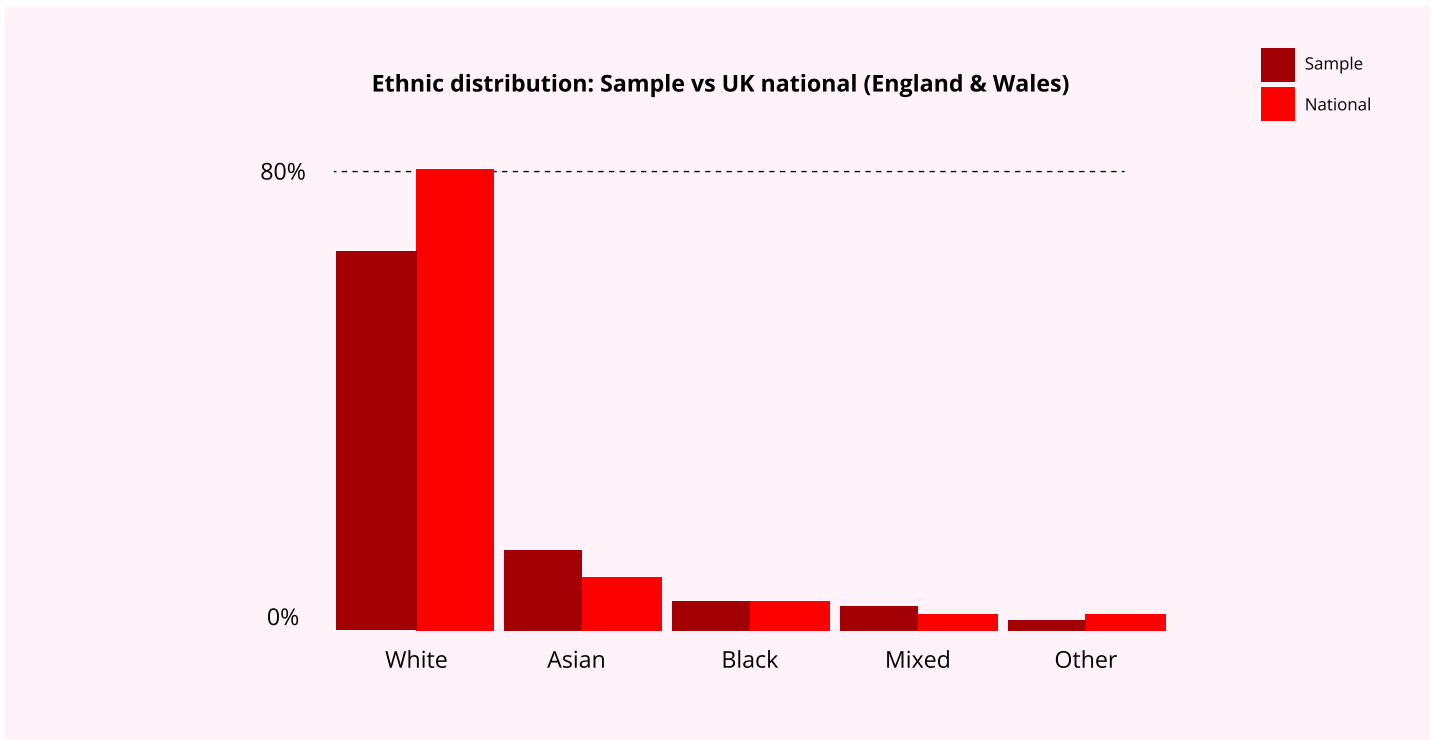
“ I enjoyed working with data because it matched my strengths in problem solving and investigative ability. Data is like CSI on a spreadsheet.

State of the Nation respondent

Diversity

According to the findings from the Women in Data® State of the Nation analysis, the Data and AI industry is more diverse than the national population.

Whilst White respondents are underrepresented, with the survey indicating **67%** penetration against the UK average of **81.7%**, Asian respondents are over-represented at 14% against the national average of **9.3%**. Other ethnic groups align fairly closely with the UK Census profile. This overrepresentation in Asian respondents is expected as previous research by Women in Data®, and validated by ONS, shows that girls from British Indian and British Chinese backgrounds are three times more likely to take STEM A-levels (like Physics, Chemistry, and Maths) than White British girls.



Promotion

It is an accepted fact that women are significantly underrepresented in Senior Leadership in the Data and AI industry, with just **17%** occupying the most senior roles. The State of the Nation research indicates that all women of colour have additional barriers that are not being addressed.

For example, when we look at **Quartile 4** (SLT, Board level), we see that the over indexing of female Asians in our industry is not carried forward into seniority. This suggests that these women are either being overlooked for promotion or are leaving the industry in higher proportions than their White counterparts. Despite being the most highly educated demographic in both the US and UK, Asian women are promoted into senior management at significantly lower rates than White women.

According to McKinsey & Company's Women in the Workplace 2024 report, for every 100 men promoted to manager, 89 White women were promoted, compared to 82 Asian women. And according to Lean.org, Asian women account for roughly 1 in 15 women in entry-level roles but only 1 in 50 women in the C-suite.

For Black women the situation is even more pronounced: for every 100 men promoted, only 60 Black women are promoted. This underrepresentation of women and particularly women of colour is both ethically and economically unsound.

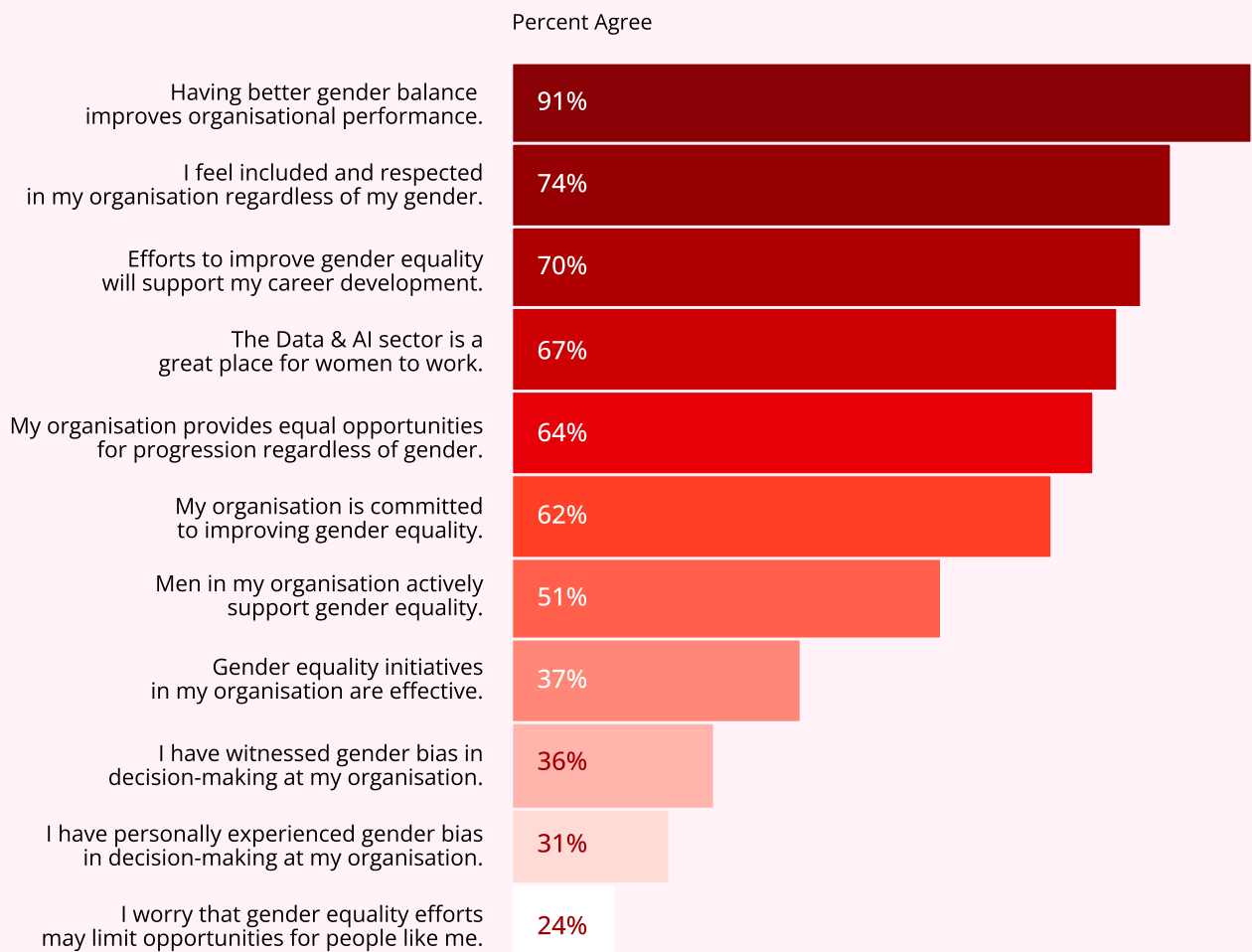
Attitudes to gender representation

The results from the State of the Nation report highlights broadly positive attitudes toward gender diversity, with strong majorities agreeing that gender balance improves organisational performance (**91%**) and that their workplace feels inclusive (**74%**). Whilst this suggests an encouraging foundation within the industry, the results also indicate important gaps.

Although most respondents feel respected (**74%**) and believe their organisation is committed to improving equality (**62%**), fewer agree that men actively support gender equality (**51%**) or that gender initiatives in their organisations are effective (**37%**). This indicates that the formal commitments of organisations do not always translate into lived experiences or visible allyship, creating a cultural divide which is not healthy.

Additionally, a significant percentage of respondents report witnessing (**36%**) or personally experiencing (**31%**) gender bias in decision-making.

Agreement with gender equality statements



Within organisations, policy and intent are not enough.

Strengthening leadership accountability, building active allyship among all employees, and addressing subtle decision-making biases are essential to converting positive sentiment into consistently equitable experiences across Data and AI functions.



“

Women face barriers to visibility, access to high impact projects, and fair evaluation. A lack of flexible policies and sponsorship further widens the gap. Real progress requires intentional inclusion, transparent pathways, and accountability

State of the Nation respondent

Conclusion

Throughout the State of the Nation report, we emphasise the importance of diversity in shaping the future of Data and AI, arguing that this industry's full potential can only be realised when those who build and interpret it reflect the society it serves.

Women in Data® stresses that women must be represented at the highest levels of leadership to ensure the UK remains globally competitive, and we warn that failing to attract and retain half the available workforce will limit progress. As an industry we need strong foundations in mathematical sciences, ethical judgement, and high-quality data practices. We should not be tempted to prioritise scale and speed over expertise and diversity of thinking.

Despite some progress, women still face barriers throughout their careers, and representation alone is insufficient without influence and visibility. This report offers insights to support change in our industry.

Above all, we celebrate the skill and resilience of women in Data.

Above all, we celebrate
the skill and resilience
of women in Data.



Women in Data[®] Point of View: What UK organisations must do now

Expand and legitimise alternative entry pathways

With 86% of practitioners holding degree-level qualifications and minimal uptake of vocational or apprenticeship routes, the industry risks narrowing its talent pool. Organisations must invest in high-quality apprenticeships, as well as vocational and reskilling programmes that offer credible alternatives to traditional degrees.

Address structural barriers to progression for underrepresented groups

Women enter the field in relatively strong numbers, yet do not progress to senior levels. This indicates systemic progression barriers and not capability gaps. Organisations must implement transparent promotion criteria, active sponsorship programmes and targeted leadership development to retain and advance diverse talent.

Value multidisciplinary skills as a strategic asset

With strong representation from social sciences, business, and humanities, organisations should design roles and career pathways that reward hybrid skills and not just technical depth.

Build inclusive cultures that retain talent

Diversity at entry is meaningless without inclusion at leadership. Organisations must track progression outcomes, intervene early, and hold leadership accountable.



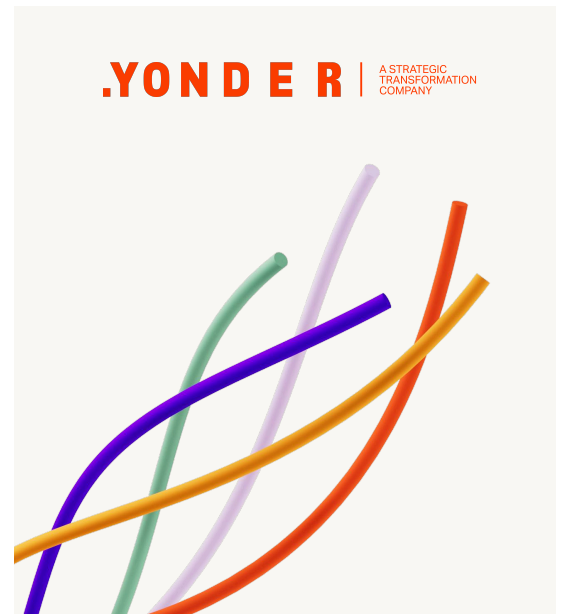
The UK's competitiveness in Data and AI depends on widening access and

ensuring that every demographic has an equitable route to the top.

In collaboration with Yonder

As insight partner to Women in Data®'s 2025 State of the Nation report, Yonder brought methodological rigour and analytical expertise to uncover the human story behind the UK's data, AI, and tech industry.

At a time when AI and automation are changing the sector fast, Yonder is proud to have helped shape this invaluable report. It keeps people at its centre, and shines a light on what's driving women out, what helps them stay, and what needs to change to build a fairer future.



About Yonder:

Yonder is a strategic transformation company where insight and **imagination** come together to create lasting impact in a rapidly changing world.

With teams in London, New York, and Riyadh, its unique mix of capabilities blends deep expertise in research, data science, strategy, and creativity to help businesses shape the future.

Driven by proprietary data and deep customer and market insights, Yonder uncovers the connections between human behaviour and transformative innovation and business growth. As an agent of change, it gives clients confidence in possibility – unlocking potential in every challenge.

Find out more by visiting yonderconsulting.com or by emailing hello@yonderconsulting.com

Women in Data®

As a member-first organisation dedicated to advancing gender equity in Data and AI, we empower women through personal connection, mentorship, and professional development, while partnering with like-minded brands to drive systemic change and promote equity at scale.

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CONNECT · ENGAGE · BELONG

Welcome to our 100,000 strong community of Women & Allies in Data

