

Government breaks down barriers to help more women and girls enter the tech sector

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Women at every stage of their careers are set to benefit from new government measures announced today, aimed at boosting female participation in tech.

- Hundreds of women to get new opportunities in tech as government announces new programme supporting 300 tech roles across the country
- Thousands of 12 and 13 year old girls to experience what a future in tech could look like for them as new, expanded UK-wide girls tech competition prepares to launch
- Women supported to return to tech jobs after a career break, through new pilot jobs scheme for skilled tech talent
- Women in Tech Taskforce launch Call for Evidence to ensure the work they deliver today, builds a stronger tech sector for all tomorrow

Women at every stage of their careers are set to benefit from new government measures announced today, aimed at boosting female participation in tech.

Women remain significantly underrepresented in tech, and the cost is substantial with the economy losing an estimated £2 to £3.5 billion every year as women leave the sector - today's package is targeted at changing this.

The package includes paid tech placements and support for those returning after career breaks to re-enter tech jobs. As well as a new TechFirst Girls Competition to be delivered to thousands across the country later this year to get more girls considering a future in tech from their childhood.

The jobs programme will help 300 women advance their careers and unlock tech opportunities in SMEs through paid work placements, backed by a new £4 million TechFirst Women's Programme.

The programme will provide women with coaching and interview prep support, and work with SMEs across the country to identify at least 300, minimum 6-month placements, in tech roles for local women. This will help women open new career opportunities, and help SMEs adopt and innovate with AI and tech in their operations.

This comes alongside a new returnship jobs pilot scheme that will support skilled software developers to re-enter the workforce into senior tech roles in government after time away. The returnship scheme will be piloted with Home Office and Ministry of Justice and will be open to any software developers who have been away from work for 18 months or more - such as women who have been caring for children.

This will help bust the 'CV gap' barrier many returners face when trying to get back to work - a reality for many women who have put their career on hold for their families.

Fixing the talent gap means starting long before the workplace and girls need to see themselves in tech before they ever reach their first job. This year IBM delivered the CyberFirst Girls Competition to over 10,000 students, and IBM have confirmed they will be partnering with Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to deliver the new TechFirst Girls Competition,

launching later this year.

This competition will see thousands of 12 and 13 year old girls compete, using technologies like AI and coding to think creatively and problem solve to compete in challenges and win. It provides girls insight into how tech can be used to tackle problems, and what a future career in tech might be like.

Building on this package, the Women in Tech Taskforce have today launched a Call for Evidence to examine how we can better support women into the future around emerging technologies and AI and the inherent biases built into these technologies which continue to disproportionately impact women. This will ensure the Taskforce continues to use real, lived experience to shape its work and future government action.

Secretary of State Liz Kendall said:

Women aren't being given a fair shot in tech - whether that's getting into the sector, staying in it, or returning after time away bringing up their families. If we don't address these issues now, we'll still be having this conversation in decades' time and that isn't good enough.

We're acting through a skills and jobs package to get more women into tech quickly. These aren't warm words - they're real jobs, real placements, and real routes back in through a door that has been too hard to open, for too long.

But we're not just fixing today's problem. Through the Women in Tech Taskforce, I want to make sure women aren't just entering this sector - they're shaping it. Co-creating the technologies, the culture, and the future of an industry that for too long has been built without them.

Women leaving tech has real consequences for the technology being built, with inherent biases built into designs by an unrepresentative workforce - unfairly impacting women.

AI tools used in recruitment have been found to favour male names nearly 5 times more than females, and research uncovered AI models built to predict liver disease were twice as likely to miss the disease in women.

To tackle these generational challenges Secretary of State, Liz Kendall launched the Women in Tech Taskforce in December. Bringing together some of the most influential women from the industry, to join forces with the aims of getting more women entering, progressing, staying, and leading in tech.

A similarly bleak picture can be seen in the harms women and girls face online, where digital spaces regularly see them exposed to vile harassment and abuse. Earlier this week the Technology Secretary brought together major tech companies, and called on them to do everything at their disposal to stamp out violence against women and girls (VAWG) on their platforms.

Today's measures represent a clear signal that government is addressing these challenges to build a world-leading tech sector - backing women at every stage, from the classroom to the boardroom, and every point in between.

Notes to editors

The pilot Returnship programme will be trialled in Home Office and Ministry of Justice, to fill key software development roles. It will open for applications in spring to skilled candidates who have been out of work for 18 months or more – offering a route into senior government tech roles.

The TechFirst women's jobs programme will launch later this year. Details on how to apply for a placement will be made available on GOV.UK in due course.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-breaks-down-barriers-to-help-more-women-and-girls-enter-the-tech-sector>