



Recruiting and Retaining Female Digital Talent: Insights for Employers



**THE
GLOBAL
CITY**

**WOMEN
PIVOTING
TO DIGITAL TASKFORCE**

Who Took Part



The Women Pivoting to Digital Taskforce, in partnership with CAPSLOCK, **surveyed over 1,000 women** across the UK who have either **career changed to a digital role** or **are considering a change**.

The findings provide insight into the barriers and enablers shaping women's career journeys, **offering employers practical evidence** on how to better retain female talent, tap into a broader **pipeline of skilled professionals**, and address critical skills talent shortages.

Of the 1,013 women surveyed, we broke down the responses into three distinct categories:

155

Women not interested in a digital role

395

Female digital career changers

463

Women currently working in a digital role



Recruiting and Retaining Female Digital Talent



Recent research from the Women Pivoting to Digital Taskforce highlights the scale of the digital talent gaps in the financial services, professional services and tech sectors. In 2024 alone, organisations left **12,100 digital roles unfilled**, and **41% reported they were unable to grow due to talent shortages**. [1]

There is a clear opportunity for employers to make better use of an existing and largely underutilised talent pool to address digital talent shortages.

Women with non-technical career experience, returners, and women who have completed short, targeted digital training or career-change programmes have a wide range of skills, experience, and perspectives. Many are actively seeking to progress into or within digital roles, yet encounter barriers in recruitment practices, workplace cultures and unclear pathways to being promoted that prevent their potential from being realised.

Respondents describe both the opportunities digital roles offer and the challenges they face once they are in a digital role. Insights from this report should be used to better advertise digital roles and shape reskilling programmes to attract more talented women, while also strengthening career pathways to retain those already in these roles.

This includes improving progression routes and flexibility for women in digital roles, redesigning roles around transferable skills rather than linear career paths, and opening up entry routes through non-traditional pathways. Together, these approaches can help organisations fill talent gaps, reduce vacancy pressures, and build a more resilient workforce.



Executive Summary



This report highlights a clear opportunity for employers to address digital skills shortages by better attracting, recognising, and retaining mid-career women.



The survey of over **1,000 women from across the UK** shows a strong and engaged pipeline of talent, with 46% already working in digital roles, 39% interested in career changing to a digital role, and 15% not interest in digital.

The women in the survey are both motivated and proactive. **89% of career changers are willing to reskill** if supported by their employer, and **71% are already applying for digital roles or undertaking training**.

However, too often this effort is not leading to a role despite undertaking training and negative perceptions that are making it difficult to recruit ambitious women. For example, **36% of women not interested in these roles felt that it didn't suit their interests, skillsets, or strengths**. For employers, highlighting the purpose and real-world impact of these roles, varied skills used, and the diverse teams needed can be beneficial to recruiting more women.

However, hiring managers needed to better understand the value of transferable skills: **77% of career changers say their experience is dismissed or not properly understood by hiring managers**. Employers' recruitment processes are a key barrier: **59% of respondents say job descriptions are too restrictive**, and **66% struggle to present their experience in ways that resonate with employers**.

Those already working in digital roles bring valuable lived experience, offering employers insight into how careers develop in practice. **Over 40% of those in digital roles have more than 10 years experience**. The most significant challenge they face is linked to career progression, and **98% say they're unclear on how to move forward in their career or get promoted**.

Together, the findings point to a clear opportunity for employers to rethink how they recognise experience, design recruitment processes and support progression to better access and retain talent for digital roles.

Perceptions of Digital Roles

Women not interested in a digital role



Of the women we surveyed, 15% were not interested in digital roles due to a range of perceptions about the skills needed in these roles and the nature of the work. Here are their responses.

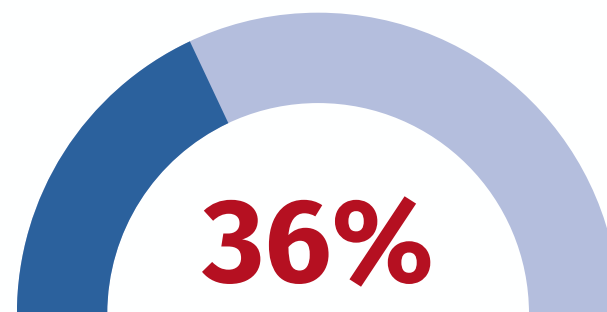
69%

Believe the skills for digital roles are too specialised or difficult

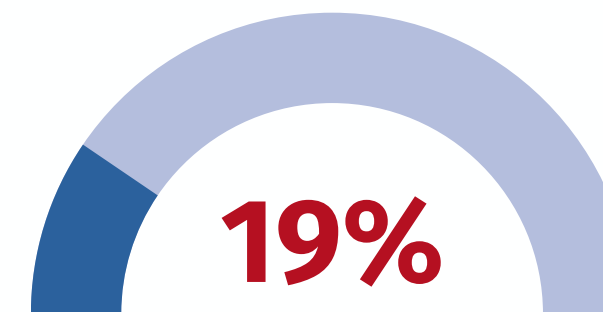
25%

Would career change if they were passionate about the subject matter

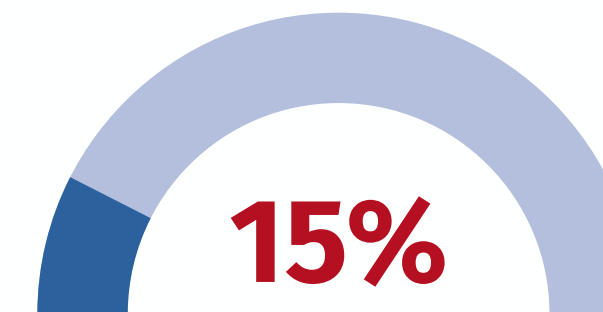
Why are you not interested in a digital role? Top 3 responses



It doesn't align to my skills, interests, or strengths



I don't know how to change careers



I don't find the work exciting or engaging

Common themes why roles aren't a fit

'Male dominated'

'For young people'

'I don't have the right skills'

'I want a strong sense of purpose in my work'

These perceptions point to a **misalignment** between how digital roles are presented and how women view their skillsets and interests.

These responses present a clear opportunity for employers to reshape how digital roles are defined and communicated to shift negative perceptions. By moving away from narrow technical criteria and **highlighting the need for transferable skills, connecting the impact to the role, and challenging outdated stereotypes**, employers can make roles feel more accessible and relevant.

Reframing roles in this way not only helps women better recognise their suitability, but also enables organisations to tap into a motivated talent pool that has a wide variety of skills and ambition if they knew more about what the roles entailed.

Motivated and Ready to Reskill

Female Career Changers



The survey shows that 39% of women are actively interested in moving into digital roles, of these, **297 are considering a career change, while 98 have already tried but are struggling to secure roles**, including returners and pivoters. Here are their responses.

Top Motivations (participants could select multiple options)



Women are motivated to move into digital roles for reasons including **interest in technology and innovation, the opportunity for progression, and the belief that their experience and skills are a good fit.**

What sits behind these motivations is not just interest, but action. Women are showing a high level of **curiosity and commitment to moving into digital**, with many already taking steps to reskill through training, apprenticeships, and self-directed learning. There is a clear **appetite to learn, adapt and explore new opportunities**, with respondents expressing a desire to apply their existing expertise in new contexts. For employers, this **represents a talent pipeline that is already engaged, motivated, and investing in reskilling.**

89%

of career changers are willing to reskill if offered training by their employer.

68%

were not given the opportunity to reskill or transition into digital roles within their organisation.

46%

would consider applying for a digital role in financial or professional services.

71%

are actively applying for roles, training, or are currently in training.

"I'm open to a complete pivot from my current industry. I'm motivated by the opportunity to use my experience in communications to make a difference for the next generation of women."

Experience and Transferable Value

Female Career Changers



This is an experienced talent pool bringing **valuable transferable skills, knowledge of other industries, and proven professional capability into digital roles.**

Women looking to transition are often highly qualified and working across sectors such as financial services and professional services. These sectors are rapidly evolving digitally, creating a timely opportunity to engage talent with relevant, transferable experience.

They bring experience from non-technical and operational roles where **skills such as problem solving, communication, customer insight and decision-making** have already been developed.

Evidence shows that individuals moving into digital from other areas of the business can strengthen outcomes by **bringing real-world customer insight and operational knowledge that technical hires alone may lack.**

77%
of career changers say their experience was either dismissed or not properly understood by employers.

"I have nearly 2 decades of Financial Services experience... however as I do not have 'specific' digital experience, I am not considered for roles where I would add value."

Industry Experience Prior to Pivoting



Value of Transferable Skills



Hiring from different parts of the business brings in varied expertise, helping teams apply broader perspectives to digital projects.



Ability to translate between business needs and technical solutions, bridging the gap between non-technical stakeholders and technical teams.



Transferable skills like problem-solving, communication, and collaboration remain relevant even as technical skills change.

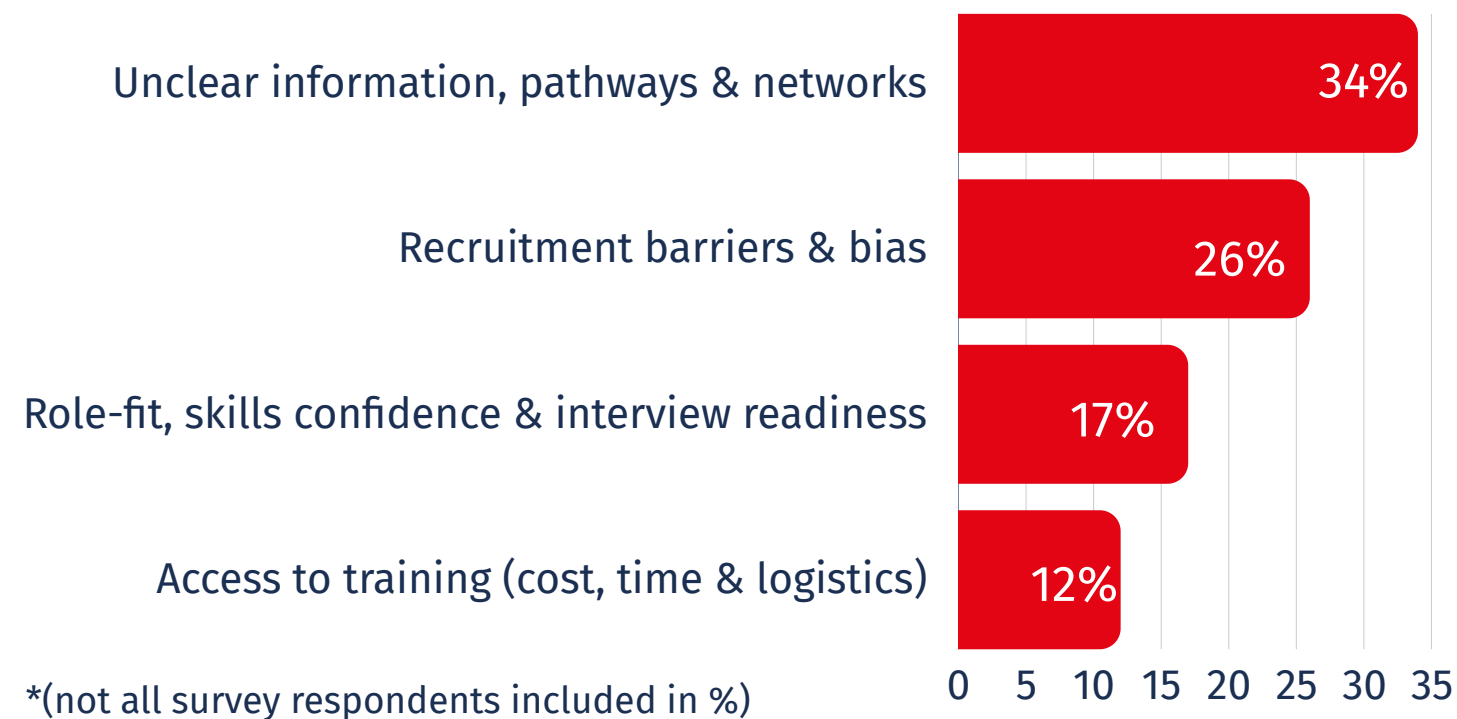
Barriers to Entering Digital Roles

Female Career Changers



As women begin to apply for digital roles, they are met with a range of challenges and it often becomes unclear how to effectively demonstrate their skills and experience. Barriers are **not driven by a lack of capability, but by gaps in how their skills are recognised and understood** by employers.

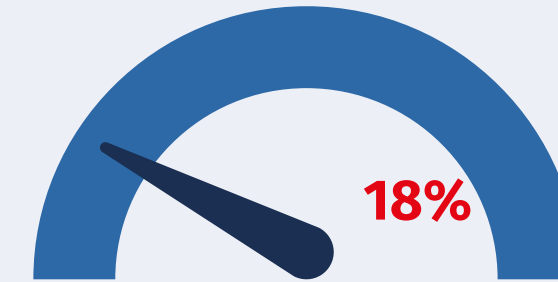
Top challenges faced by women seeking digital roles



Many struggle to present their experience in ways that resonate with employers and need **clearer support and opportunities to evidence their skills through employer-recognised methods** (such as practical assessments, work-based tasks, or structured placements).



Struggle to articulate their skills and how they relate to digital roles.



Have limited opportunities to practice or demonstrate their skills.



Are unclear on what their transferable skills actually are and how to apply them.

Another key barrier is the **disconnect between training and employment outcomes**, where **learning opportunities do not always align with the practical skills and experience employers are seeking**, making it harder for women to show their skills and experience when applying for digital roles.

“The job description reads sometimes like Santa’s wish list; employers always find tech tools or skills that are missing from my profile.”
- Career Returner

59%

of career changers felt that job descriptions for digital roles were unnecessarily restrictive or too narrowly defined.



56%

Said their training was either too theoretical or lacked the practical, job-specific skills needed for the digital job market.

Connecting Potential to Opportunity

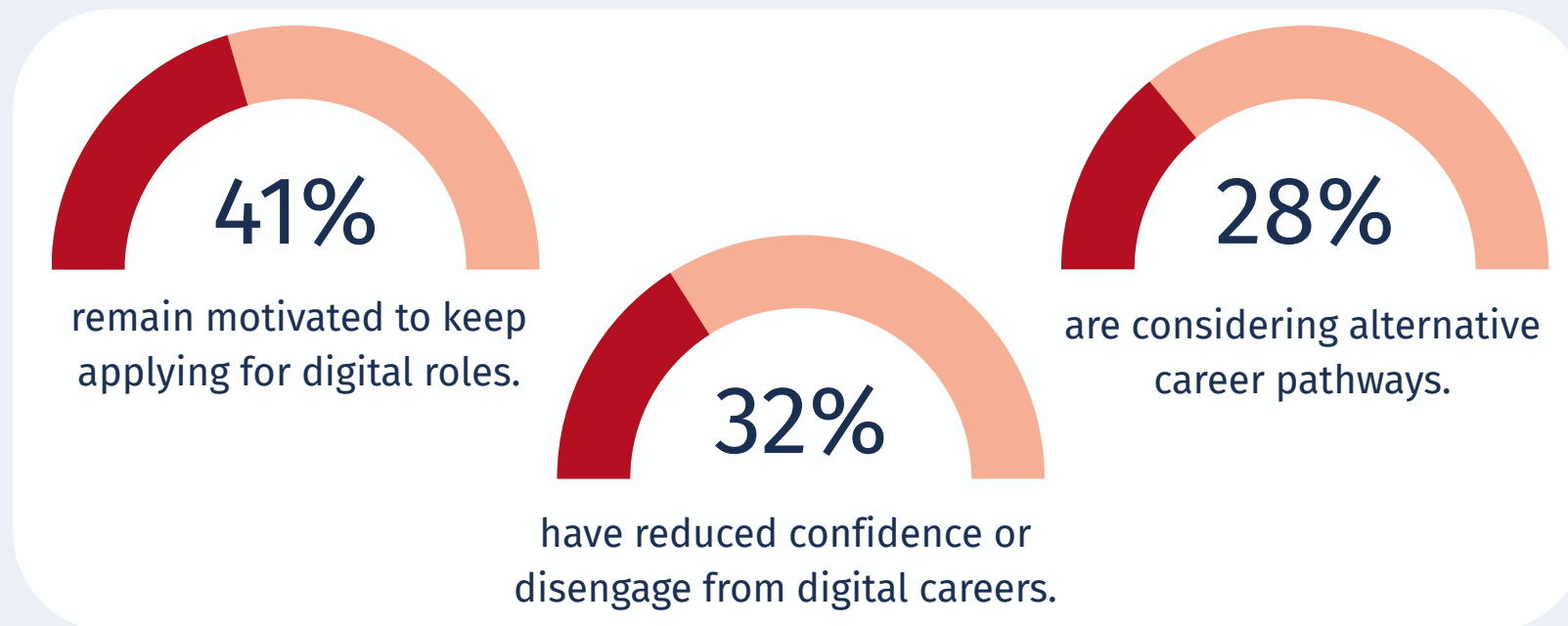
Female Career Changers



The findings show women are building skills and taking active steps towards digital careers but too often this progress is not recognised or translated into employment.

These recruitment experiences directly shape confidence.

Motivated and capable candidates are being lost, not due to lack of ability, but due to how opportunity is structured.



What's driving the disconnect



“Recent experience” is one of the top screening factors for recruiters ^[4]



Skills gained through training are not consistently recognised



Limited opportunities to demonstrate capability in practice

What works

Attracting, hiring, and preparing women for digital roles works when employers actively connect skills and training to real job opportunities. This requires a shift in how hiring is designed, not just who is hired. **Realistic and clear role requirements, designing hiring around skills and capability, and connecting training directly to real work** enables women to build capability and progress confidently as they pursue new pathways and navigate the next steps in their careers.

Employers already implementing this approach are seeing strong results:

Employers using deploy-to-perm models and structured ‘return to work’ programmes like Career Returners, which include substantial work placements, regularly convert 80% to 90% of participants into permanent roles. ^[5]

Aviva has a ‘Foundry’ model that supports employees in progressing from curiosity to role readiness through three levels of development. These include one-hour immersion sessions to spark interest, followed by either eight-week part-time bootcamps to build skills, or 14-week ‘Mastery Academies’ with protected learning time for full role-ready reskilling. ^[6]

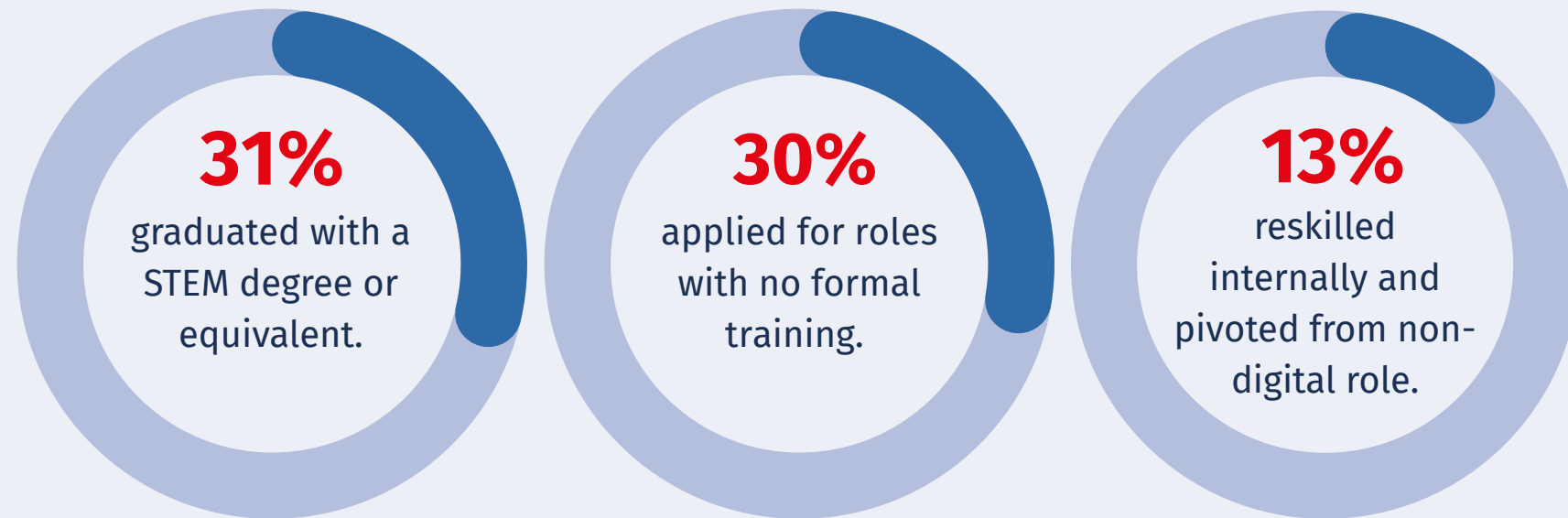
Retaining Female Digital Talent



Women currently working in digital roles

The survey shows that 46% of the women surveyed (463) are currently working in a digital role already. Here are their responses.

Entry routes into digital roles



Women enter digital careers through a wide range of pathways, and when given the opportunity, these routes can lead to successful and sustained careers. Most respondents have at least 4 years work experience in digital roles, with over 40% having more than 10 years' experience.

However, attracting talent is only one part of the challenge. Retention is critical. Women report significant barriers throughout their career and without addressing these challenges, organisations risk losing the very talent they have worked to recruit.

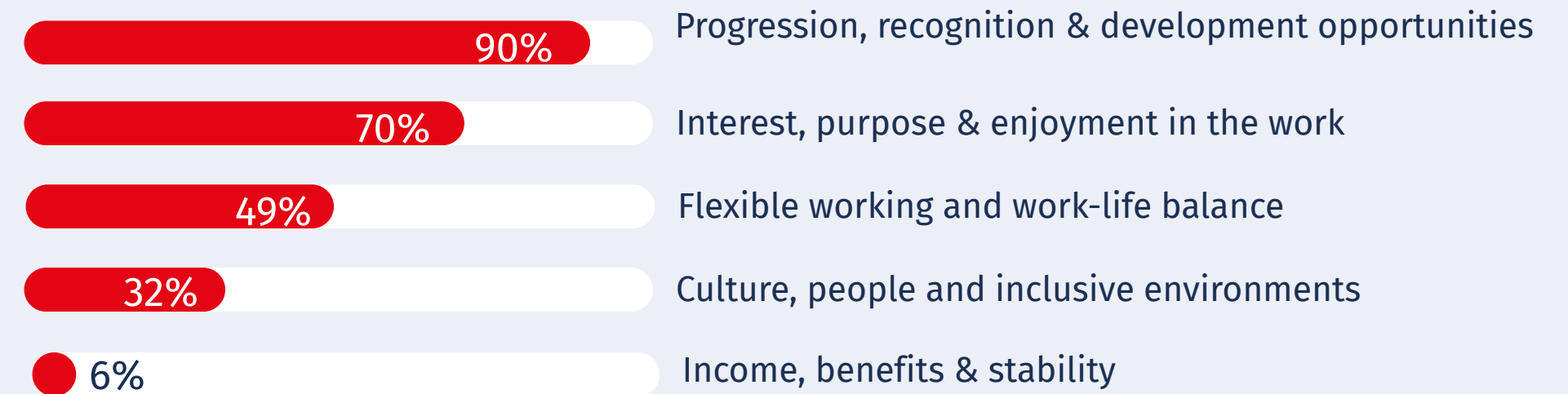
Top Challenges



These challenges are influencing retention. Around half of women have considered leaving not because they lack interest in digital careers, but because the workplace environment makes staying harder than leaving.

The other half are not considering leaving largely due to the factors highlighted below. When these conditions are present, they anchor retention.

What keeps women in their digital roles



Retaining experienced women in digital roles is directly linked to productivity and growth and is critical not only for today's skills shortages, but for future workforce resilience.

The data in this report points to a clear and practical agenda for change. **The actions that make the biggest difference are within every employer's reach:**



Redesign how you recruit. Move away from narrow technical checklists and an over-reliance on recent, direct experience. Define roles based on skills and capability, not previous job titles, remove unnecessary requirements that filter out career changers and introduce skills-based assessments to better recognise potential, not just experience.

Key Question: *Could someone with adjacent experience do this role with minimal training?*



Connect training to real roles. Training alone is not translating into employment. Link training programmes directly to live vacancies, for example by aligning course content to specific roles, offering guaranteed interviews, offering placements, project work or “try before you hire” opportunities.

Key Question: *Are you creating opportunities for candidates to gain real work experience before being hired?*



Create visible pathways into digital roles. Map entry routes into digital roles by outlining common transition pathways (including sideways moves), highlighting transferable skills needed, and showing how roles can be reached from non-digital backgrounds on job adverts, careers pages and internal communications.

Key Question: *Would a mid-career professional outside digital understand how to move into your roles?*



Invest in progression and support. Offer structured progression frameworks, provide mentoring and sponsorship, support confidence-building, and skills articulation.

Key Question: *What structures are in place to help individuals progress and build confidence once in the role?*



Make flexibility a standard feature of roles. For many women, flexibility is less about part-time work and more about hybrid working, predictable hours, and flexibility within full-time roles. Design roles with hybrid and flexible options from the outset and focus on outputs and outcomes rather than rigid working patterns.

Key Question: *Would your roles feel accessible to someone who needs predictable or flexible working patterns?*



Actively build inclusive environments within the workplace and recruitment practices. Over half of respondents reported experiencing bias, ageism or harassment. Train hiring managers to recognise transferable skills, review progression and promotion patterns, and create inclusive team cultures where different backgrounds are valued.

Key Question: *How are you actively creating an environment where people from different backgrounds can succeed and progress?*

Who Took Part - Demographics

The survey received 1,013 responses from women. Participants were based across the UK regions and were largely mid-career, with most aged between 25 - 54. Most participants were in employment (88%), predominately working full time (68%), and came from a wide range of industries, most commonly financial and insurance services, education, and professional and technical services.

The survey included women currently working in digital roles, those actively considering a career change into digital, and a group who had attempted to transition or return to digital roles but had experienced challenges securing employment.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to CAPSLOCK who sent the survey out to participants and partnered with the Women Pivoting to Digital Taskforce to develop this report.

Thank you also to all the Taskforce members who volunteered their time to reviewing and feeding back on the data.

Sources

1. [Untapped Digital Talent: the £3bn opportunity](#)
2. [Untapped Digital Talent: the £3bn opportunity](#)
3. [Untapped Digital Talent: the £3bn opportunity](#)
4. [Untapped Digital Talent: the £3bn opportunity](#)
5. [Untapped Digital Talent: the £3bn opportunity](#)



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THANK YOU

Download “Untapped Digital Talent: the £3bn opportunity”

This report spotlights the cost of digital talent gaps in the UK and how employers can meet the rising demand for digital talent by investing in new recruitment pathways.

