

REPORT

OPENING DOORS PROGRESS 2025

Inclusive Recruitment in Action

Forewords



Steven Cooper CBE

Chair of BITC's Employment & Skills Leadership Team and Chief Executive Officer, Fairstone Group

Over the last few months, I've had the privilege of seeing first-hand the growing momentum behind the Opening Doors campaign. What began as a call for more inclusive recruitment has developed into a powerful and collective shift in how employers think about talent and opportunity. More than 160 employers have committed to over 1,200 actions that are now making 1.6 million jobs more accessible, but we must be honest about the challenge that still exists. Too many people are still shut out of the workforce, not because they lack potential, but because recruitment processes often reflect the same challenges of inclusivity in society. Entry-level roles are becoming harder to access, costs are rising, technology is advancing faster than many people can adapt and, in this environment, it's easy for inclusive hiring to fall down the list of priorities.

That's why responsible business action matters more than ever. When we improve access to work, particularly for those from underrepresented backgrounds, we unlock talent that strengthens our organisations and supports wider socio-economic mobility. Opening Doors gives employers a practical framework to start making those changes and many already are. But we still need more businesses to join, more actions to be fully embedded, and more openness to long-term change. If you lead a business, this is the time to act. Not just by signing up to the campaign, but by making inclusive recruitment part of how you do business - day in, day out.

Forewords



Ola Kolade
**Employment & Skills Campaign Director,
Business in the Community**

In the past year, the number of Opening Doors employers has more than doubled. Crucially, we are now seeing many of these commitments translate into lasting change across recruitment processes. The 2025 *Opening Doors* Progress report reveals that 72% of respondents have improved the diversity of their workforce, while 64% reported progress in filling hard-to-fill vacancies. The strongest areas of progress are actions that make recruitment more inclusive by design: asking all candidates if they need adjustments, ensuring applications are mobile-friendly, and writing clearer, more transparent job descriptions. Over the next 12 months, employers are seeking to focus on partnership with support organisations, focusing on skills over qualifications, diversifying interview panels, training hiring managers and widening job advert reach. At the same time, some actions remain underused such as removing questions about criminal records. In today's challenging recruitment landscape, the need for responsible, collaborative business action has never been more urgent. Assess your recruitment practices, embed what works and scale what's proven. The business case is clear, inclusive recruitment drives productivity, sparks innovation, and boosts social mobility. Now is the time to join this network of employers committed to Opening Doors.

A year of celebration: An overview of the campaign

Opening Doors is Business in the Community's flagship campaign to drive inclusive recruitment at scale across the UK. With a bold ambition to make 2 million jobs more accessible to diverse talent, the campaign provides employers with a practical framework to rethink and redesign their recruitment practices. By removing barriers and opening opportunities, businesses can unlock wider talent pools, strengthen their workforce, and play a leading role in improving social mobility across the UK.

Since its launch in 2022, Opening Doors has gathered significant momentum. In the 12 months leading up to this publication, the campaign has nearly doubled its number of signatories, welcoming 79 new employers, exceeding 80% of our campaign target. This growth marks a pivotal moment in the campaign's journey, from building awareness to driving deeper, sustained change.

The new phase is defined by stronger employer support, richer peer-learning opportunities, and a growing library of real-world [case studies](#) that show what inclusive recruitment looks like in practice. Opening Doors is not just a campaign—it's a movement for change, and it's accelerating.

About this report

Building on this momentum, the *Opening Doors Progress Report 2025* offers the first comprehensive assessment of how employers are turning commitments into action. Drawing on survey responses from 36 signatories between June and July 2025¹, the report provides extensive insights for responsible practices. It explores where inclusive recruitment actions are becoming embedded, where barriers remain, the business incentives, best practice examples and what employers plan to prioritise over the next 12 months.

For the first time in the campaign, progress has been measured across **all 25 actions** in the framework, whether organisations had formally committed to them or not, recognising that priorities evolve as inclusive practices mature. The findings highlight collective impact to date and point to opportunities for continued collaboration and deeper change across sectors. ☀️

¹¹ The number represents 27.5% of signatories at the time of the survey launch. Closely reflecting overall signatories, 75% of the survey respondents were large employers, 14% were medium-sized, and 10% were small or micro organisations.

The Opening Doors Framework

Employers signed up to the Opening Doors campaign are asked to identify and commit to at least 3 actions from the [Five Keys to Inclusive Recruitment framework](#). The framework lists 25 actions grouped into 5 Keys:

1. Create partnerships that connect untapped talent to your jobs.
2. Show candidates that you are committed to inclusion.
3. Use comprehensive job descriptions with inclusive language.
4. Focus on the essential skills needed for the job.
5. Prioritise accessibility and eliminate bias.

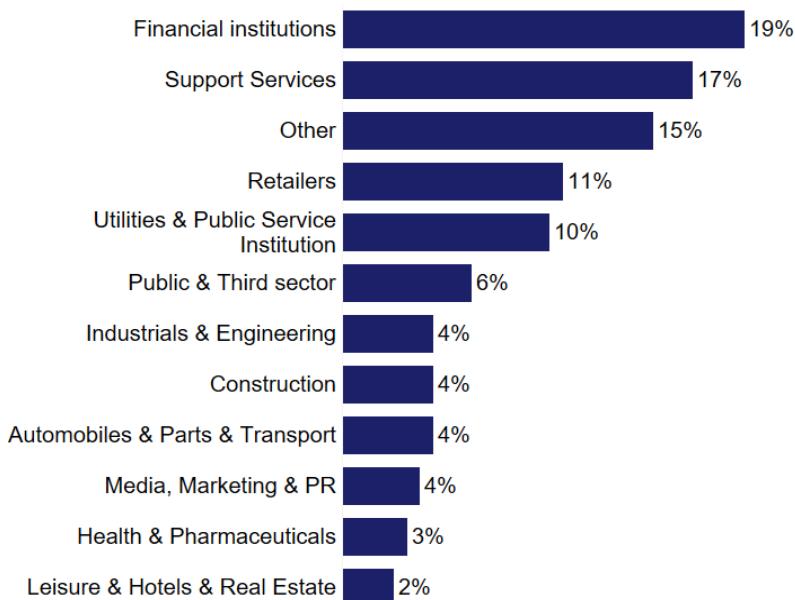
At the time of publication, **161 employers** had signed up to the campaign and over **1,200 actions** collectively implemented, making **1.65 million jobs** more accessible to diverse talent.

Who are the Opening Doors signatories?

Opening Doors employers come from a wide range of sectors – over 40 in total – with the largest being financial institutions (19%), support services (17%), and retailers (11%).

In terms of organisation size, 69.6% of Opening Doors employers are large organisations, 13.7% medium, and 16.8% small or micro-organisations.

Table 1. Opening Doors signatories by sector.



On average, signatories commit to progressing 7 actions when signing up to the campaign, showing that employers do not limit their commitments to the minimum requirement of 3 actions.

Opening Doors Employers are also asked at the time of sign-up to the campaign about the underrepresented groups they target to support in recruitment. The most common are ethnically diverse groups and young people (both at 51%), closely followed by those who are disabled (49%) and from lower socio-economic backgrounds (47%).

This list outlines the top 5 actions signatories commit to at sign-up.

Top 5 committed actions

1 Ensure job adverts reach diverse talent (2a)



2 Provide training on inclusive recruitment (2b)



3 Use neutral language (3b)



4 Collect diversity data to identify barriers for jobseekers (5h)



5 Ask all candidates if they need any adjustments (5c)



2025 Opening Doors Progress Survey Insights

BITC's first yearly Opening Doors Progress Survey provided insights into signatories' progress on campaign actions, business case incentives and benefits and challenges to inclusive recruitment. This report outlines the results.

Recruitment landscape

2025 has presented a complex landscape in recruitment, with job seekers facing a triple threat in today's labour market. Employers are grappling with spiralling recruitment costs, impending legislative reforms, and the rapid advance of digital technologies. Together, these pressures risk reducing particularly entry-level opportunitiesⁱ and inadvertently creating new barriers for people trying to enter or progress in the workforce.ⁱⁱ

While the Office for National Statistics (ONS) observed a 14% drop in the number of job vacancies for the 38th consecutive quarter, compared to the same period in 2024, wage growth remained relatively strong, suggesting pockets of tightness and opportunityⁱⁱⁱ. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reports that only 57% of private

sector employers plan to recruit in the next three months, down from 65% in late 2024, citing rising employment costs and policy changes such as increased National Insurance contributions.^{iv} All Opening Doors Survey respondents stated the intention to hire in the next 12 months, signalling confidence among the group of Opening Doors Employers.

For responsible business leaders, the challenge is clear: to break down barriers and widen access to work. Organisations need to redesign their recruitment practices to ensure that all jobseekers, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, are not left behind in this transition.

Top Insights

The following categories of progress were provided: fully embedded, partially embedded, not yet started, no longer planning to progress, and priority for the next 12 months. As well as the level of progress observed on each action, the report identifies which actions will be getting more focus going forward. Also, for the first time, respondents of the survey will receive a bespoke report with benchmarking on their own progress.

Overall, the results demonstrate strong progress, with respondents having fully embedded an average of eleven actions and partially embedded a further nine. This means employers have made measurable progress on 20 of the 25 actions, i.e. 80% of the framework, signalling a broad and sustained commitment to inclusive recruitment.

At a more detailed level, the survey results show significant variations across the framework, with some actions at very advanced levels, while others remain at earlier stages of implementation.

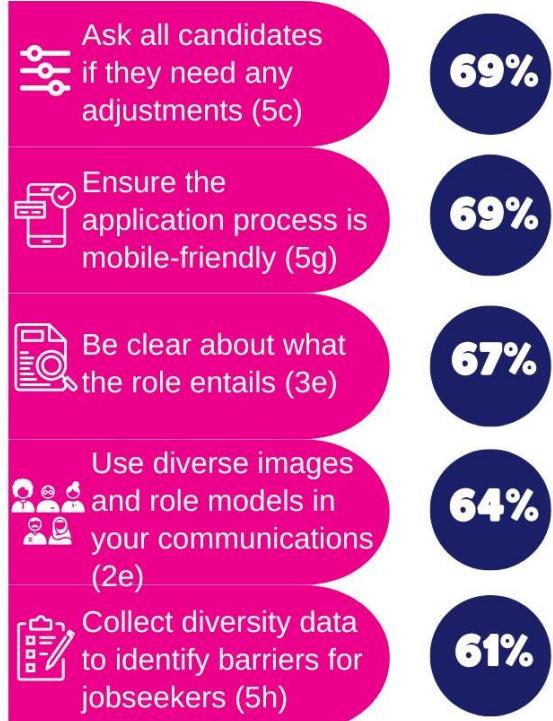
Key 3, *Use comprehensive job descriptions with inclusive language*, recorded the highest average of fully implemented actions, with 53% of employers reporting that they have fully embedded actions within the key. This highlights an emphasis on clarity and inclusivity in role design and communication, one of the more accessible areas for organisations to implement.

Progress across all actions

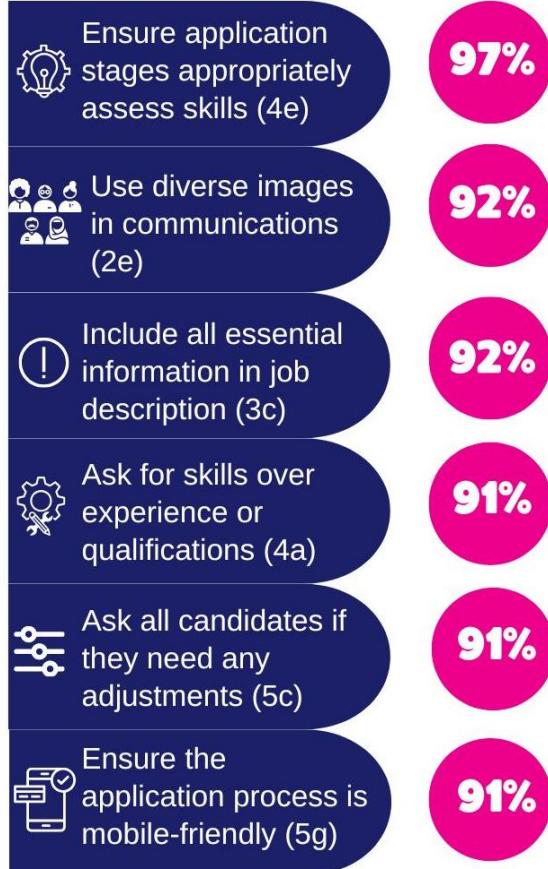
Progress was assessed through two complementary lenses across the full framework:

- **Most fully embedded actions** – where implementation is already furthest ahead.
- **Actions showing the widest progress** – where both full and partial embedding signal strong momentum.

Top 5 fully embedded actions



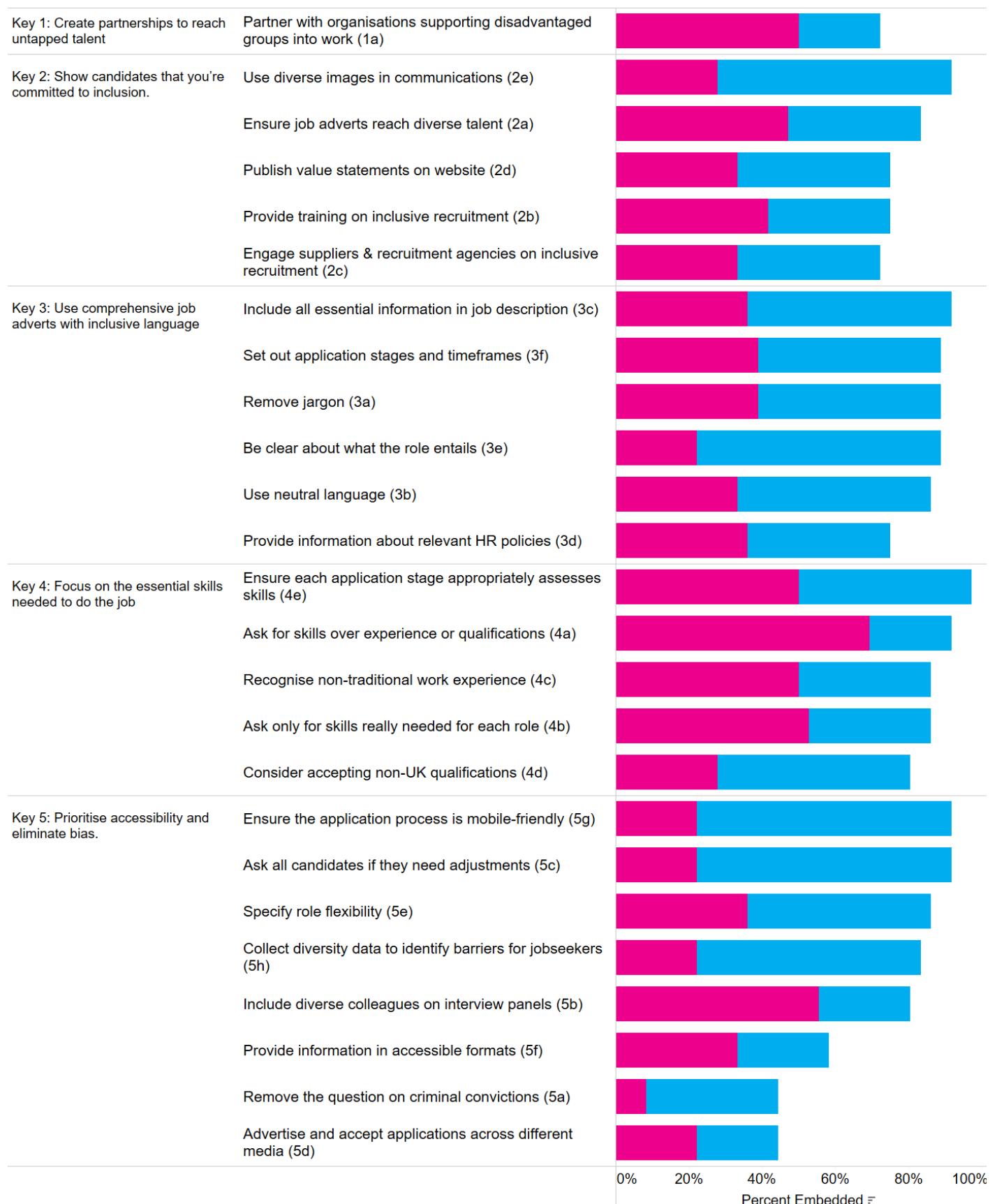
Top actions for progress overall



It is remarkable to see that a few actions have been fully embedded by two-thirds of respondents. When combining both fully and partially embedded actions, the list on the right shows even broader adoption. Action 4e leads overall with 97% adoption, even though it does not appear among the top five for full implementation. This highlights that while some actions are still maturing, they demonstrate strong organisational commitment and consistent progress across the framework.

Opening Doors Progress Report 2025: Inclusive recruitment in action

Table 2. Partial (magenta) and full (blue) implementation level for the framework's 25 actions.



Areas of disengagement

Two actions stand out for their high levels of disengagement, with more than one-third of respondents indicating they are either no longer willing to progress with them or consider them not applicable to their organisations:

- Remove the question about criminal records from application forms (Ban the Box) (5a)
- Advertise and accept applications across different media (i.e., not just online) (5d)

Both results are concerning. Removing questions about criminal records from application forms (5a) would help reduce barriers for the almost 70% of prison leavers who, on average, remain unemployed 6 months after release from custody.^v Where they can, employers must consider giving a second chance to people who have paid their debt to society.²

Similarly, a retraction on action 5d risks further excluding people without reliable internet access or digital skills from the job market. As access to the internet and basic digital literacy become essential for everyday life^{vivii}, businesses could help close this gap through partnerships that expand access in schools, libraries, and community spaces, or by rethinking recruitment approaches to ensure no one is left behind.

Future focus areas

The top five actions that signatories intend to prioritise in the near term (covering those recorded as partially implemented, not started, or planned for the next 12 months) reflect a shift of focus towards deeper cultural and structural change.

These five priorities suggest that businesses are looking beyond positioning and simpler process changes to strengthening structural elements of inclusion, partnerships, internal shifts towards skills and cultural buy-in.

Opening Doors case studies offer valuable insights into how signatories are implementing actions in practice. For the top future focus areas, these signatories showcase real journeys and examples of good practice:

² For guidance, refer to BITC's *Why Ban The Box?* factsheet, <https://www.bitc.org.uk/fact-sheet/why-ban-the-box/>, and the Fair Chance Business Alliance, fairchancealliance.co.uk.

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Partner with organisations supporting disadvantaged groups into work (1a): [Deloitte](#)
works with organisations, helping undergraduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds develop work-ready skills and providing them with employment opportunities. Young people access work experience, mentorship, and insights into the professional services industry.

Ask for skills rather than experience (4a): [Enterprise Mobility](#) draws out skills in recognising non-traditional work experience as it understands that many jobseekers, such as young people and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, can overlook valuable skills gained through hobbies or part-time jobs. Enterprise Mobility also applies a human touch to application review, proactively identifying the qualities and attitudes it seeks in future employees.

Future focus actions

 Partner with organisations supporting disadvantaged groups (1a)

91%

 Ask for skills over experience or qualifications (4a)

78%

 Include diverse colleagues on interview panels (5b)

75%

 Provide training on inclusive recruitment (2b)

72%

 Ensure job adverts reach diverse talent (2a)

67%

Include diverse colleagues on interview panels (5b): [Capita](#) launched an Inclusive Recruitment pilot introducing interview questions focused on inclusive leadership behaviours and involved Employee Network Group members to support interview panels and promote fairness and inclusion. Following the pilot's success, DEI questions are now embedded across all hiring, including for senior roles.

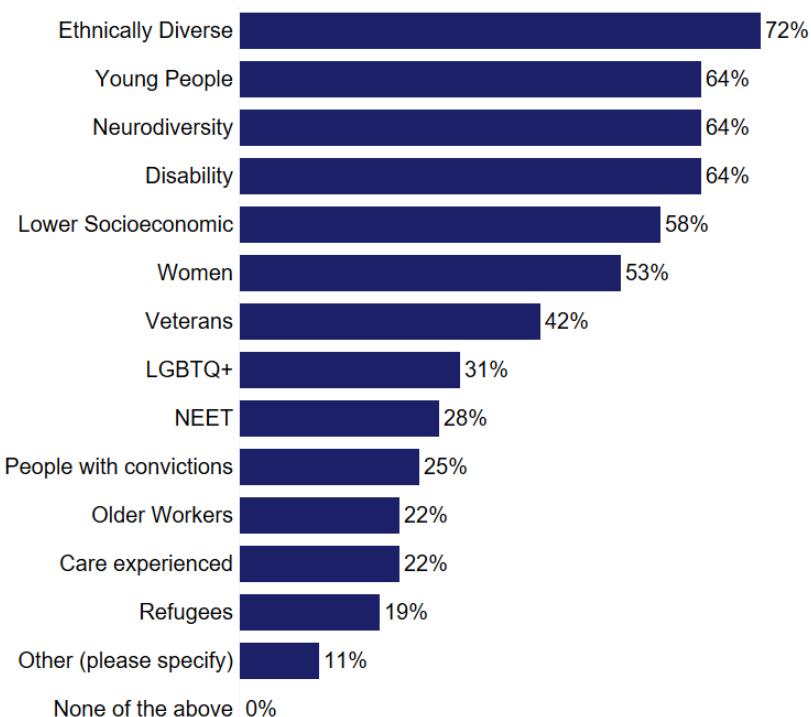
Provide training on inclusive recruitment (2b): [Phoenix](#) worked with a specialised consultancy to develop a bespoke training course for recruiters and hiring managers, covering all seven of Phoenix's inclusivity lenses: gender, ethnicity, age, social mobility, disability, neurodiversity and sexual orientation. Phoenix Talent Acquisition Partners are now all accredited, as well as the groups of hiring managers who frequently recruit.

Ensure job adverts reach excluded talent (2a): [Sodexo](#) ensures jobs are advertised to excluded groups by supporting the employment of people with criminal convictions through its Starting Fresh initiative. Sodexo has a dedicated recruitment team that builds pathways between prisons and employers, sets hiring targets for people with convictions, and runs information sessions in prisons and probation offices nationwide.

Reaching underrepresented groups

Respondents were asked which underrepresented groups they target for support. Every respondent reported supporting at least one group, with six groups receiving attention from over half of employers, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Percentage of employers selecting each target group.



While people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the UK continue to have lower employment rates than their White counterparts (69% vs 77% in 2022)^{viii}, it is positive that over 70% of surveyed employers report targeted support for ethnic minorities. This focus becomes even more meaningful when viewed alongside the second most supported group—young people.

Research from the Youth Futures Foundation shows that 13% of 16–24-year-olds (nearly one million) are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)^{ix}, a figure that has been steadily

rising.^x Despite representing only 8.9% of the youth population in England and Wales^{xi}—and far less in Scotland and Northern Ireland^{xii}—Black Caribbean young people account for one in four NEETs nationwide^{xiii}, over twice the proportion of their White peers. Encouragingly, 86% of respondents have fully or partially embedded the action to ask only for skills genuinely required for each role, which is key to removing unnecessary barriers.

Neurodiverse and disabled candidates face even greater challenges. Employment among disabled people stands at 54.2%, compared with 82% for non-disabled people, and falls to just 22% for autistic people.^{xiv} Supporting this group extends beyond recruitment to everyday workplace adjustments, as signatories describe in the survey. Eisai Europe, for example, worked with its disability employee group to identify improvements in reasonable adjustments, while Irwin Mitchell reported that partnerships with disability organisations have directly increased applications, interviews, and offers to disabled candidates.

It is also positive to note that nearly 60% of respondents target support to people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Socioeconomic background remains one of the strongest predictors of career progression and pay, with employees from working-class origins earning, on average, 12% less annually than those from professional backgrounds in similar roles.^{xv} By applying Opening Doors actions—such as focusing on skills rather than academic credentials—employers can help reduce this persistent gap and strengthen inclusion across their workforce.

Challenges & Benefits

Respondents were asked to reflect on the impact of implementing changes through the framework, including both challenges faced and positive outcomes achieved.

Challenges were highly concentrated in three categories:

- **Limitation of resources:** particularly expressed by small and medium employers, namely, lack of dedicated teams, balancing inclusion objectives with business priorities, and difficulty accessing tailored resources.
- **Insufficient internal buy-in:** respondents describe a journey to address resistance and change mindsets, supported by HR, that slows down progress and has meant employers have not reached goals in the expected timeframe.

- **Lack of diversity of existing talent pool:** respondents, especially in certain sectors with technical roles – e.g., legal, finance, technology, and utilities – point to external challenges of working with local talent pools that are not diverse enough in the roles they need to fill.

Similarly, the top **benefits** of embedding Opening Doors actions fell into three categories:

- **Increased diversity of colleagues hired:** respondents cite the impact of different actions coming through in staff data, including partnerships with organisations specialised in their priority groups, more focused job descriptions, and more strategic choices of job ads platforms.
- **Positive impact on internal culture:** respondents described a better internal culture coming from higher clarity of intentions, more targeted internal communication around inclusive initiatives and changes in practices that improved work for HR teams.
- **Improved expertise on target groups:** partnerships with specialised organisations are the main reason cited here, with organisations improving employers' access to diverse groups and improving understanding of lived experiences. Internal initiatives, such as forming groups of colleagues with lived experience, have also had a positive impact on recruiting and supporting colleagues for some respondents.

Case studies

The case studies below illustrate how three respondents of the survey address and overcome the barriers identified in the section above to deliver progress on inclusive recruitment.

Bishop Fleming: Scaling inclusive recruitment for sustainable growth

Bishop Fleming has made inclusion a strategic driver of its talent and growth agenda. As a dynamic mid-sized professional services firm, the business has embedded inclusive recruitment at the core of its apprenticeship and early careers strategy, ensuring access, opportunity, and development for a broad range of talent across the South West and West Midlands.

In September 2025, Bishop Fleming welcomed 73 apprentices, marking its sixth consecutive year of growth in apprentice recruitment. As an employer-provider, the

firm delivers bespoke, in-house training that enhances agility, autonomy, and cost efficiency. This distinctive model secured Bishop Fleming 11th place in The Sunday Times Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers 2025, outperforming larger competitors in the sector.

The firm's rotation-based apprenticeship programme provides exposure across multiple business areas, supported by coaching and mentoring. Partnerships such as the Strive Black Internship and Bristol Future Talent Partnership further demonstrate Bishop Fleming's commitment to social mobility and inclusive talent development.

Inclusive recruitment at Bishop Fleming is a core part of its business and people strategy. Leveraging internal expertise and infrastructure, the firm has built a sustainable model for scaling diverse talent pipelines while optimising HR and budget resources—ensuring inclusion underpins long-term workforce resilience and innovation.

Greggs: An opportunity to deepen understanding and share ownership internally

As part of their Greggs Pledge commitments, Greggs are working to better reflect the communities it serves by placing its people at the centre of its strategy. They are committed to an inclusive culture where everyone feels welcome and free to be themselves, believing diversity strengthens their business and helps better serve communities. That embedded focus supports genuine internal support for inclusive recruitment, rather than relying on top-down directives.

To encourage internal champions, Greggs invests in education. It shares the value of inclusive practices, like diverse interview panels, and creates space for open, constructive conversations across recruiting teams.

Leadership plays a key role. Chief Executive, Roisin Currie, leads by example, advocating for inclusion both publicly and within the business. Her commitment reinforces Greggs values of respect, inclusivity, and accountability, and helps make inclusive recruitment a clear business priority.

Amey: Broadening talent pipelines in technical sectors

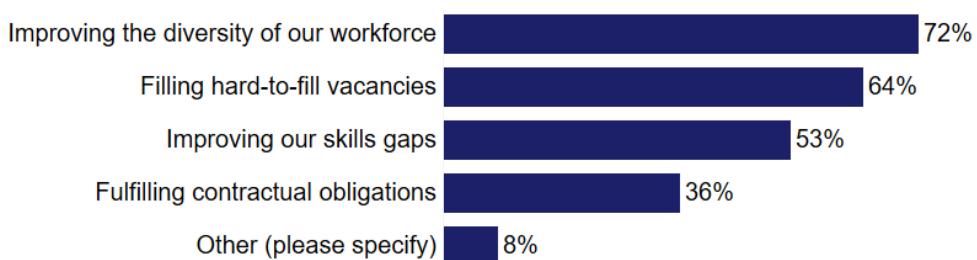
Operating in engineering and infrastructure sectors that often face a limited diversity of local talent, Amey has taken practical steps to widen access and inclusion. Through its Journey to Work programme, the company supports people who face barriers to employment—such as prison leavers, veterans, NEETS, and care leavers—creating new routes into skilled and technical roles. In 2024, 7.2% of new recruits came from these groups facing barriers into employment, with a 2025 target to reach 10% of all hires.

Amey collaborates with partners including the Department for Work and Pensions, the New Futures Network, and the Forces Transition Group to access diverse candidate pipelines and share best practice. They are signatories to the Care Leavers Covenant and One In A Million campaign, and active members of the Social Recruitment Advocacy Group. As the company notes, “External partners are key to brokering opportunities and providing insight on lived experience.” Internally, Unity and Lived Experience Groups support recruitment efforts, and champion a workplace where all feel included, valued and able to bring their whole selves to work. Together, these initiatives help Amey address external talent gaps, whilst bringing in new ideas and perspectives to strengthen and shape Amey's teams and projects.

Impact on business drivers

The Opening Doors campaign identifies four main business drivers for investing in inclusive recruitment: improving workforce diversity, filling hard-to-fill vacancies, addressing skills gaps, and fulfilling contractual obligations. Survey respondents were asked to identify which of these drivers they had observed the most progress on, as shown in the table below.

Table 4. Percentage of employers who saw progress in each business driver.



Nearly three-quarters of respondents reported progress in “improving the diversity of our workforce,” and almost two-thirds cited progress in “filling hard-to-fill vacancies” and “addressing skills gaps.” Only one respondent did not record progress against any driver.

Progress in filling hard-to-fill vacancies and addressing skills gaps is particularly notable given ongoing UK labour market pressures. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 37% of employers report hard-to-fill vacancies—rising to 52% in the public sector.^{xvi} Inclusive recruitment helps mitigate these shortages by expanding access to underrepresented groups, directly supporting the campaign’s mission to remove barriers to opportunity.

Research continues to demonstrate the business value of this approach. Companies with diverse teams achieve 2.5 times higher cash flow per employee, while inclusive teams are 35% more productive.^{xvii} Moreover, two-thirds of UK workers say inclusion is important when choosing an employer.^{xviii}

Conclusion

The 2025 Opening Doors Progress Report suggests that inclusive recruitment is becoming more established as standard practice among signatories, with many consistently progressing in or even completing most framework actions. By designing recruitment to be inclusive from the outset, organisations can widen access to talent, improve workforce diversity, and strengthen organisational resilience. Since its launch, Opening Doors has evolved from raising awareness and securing employer commitments to driving practical implementation and measurable change. The campaign’s growth, reflected in both the number and diversity of signatories, signals a shift towards deeper, sustained impact and a stronger culture of shared learning across sectors.

Respondents report clear benefits: more diverse hires, better internal culture, and stronger understanding of underrepresented groups, though challenges remain around resources, leadership buy-in, and systemic barriers such as digital exclusion and stigma linked to criminal records.

In a tight labour market, the Opening Doors framework continues to offer a practical, evidence-based route for businesses to fill vacancies, address skills gaps, and build future-ready workforces. Sustained progress depends on consistent, organisation-wide action rather than one-off initiatives.

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Building on this progress, employers are encouraged to keep embedding proven actions, deepen partnerships, and share learning. In doing so, Opening Doors will continue to help make fair access to work a standard practice and build more resilient, innovative businesses in the process.

Calls to Action

1. [Sign up to Opening Doors](#) and complete our yearly surveys to track your progress and contribute to campaign progress reporting.
2. Join [BITC's Talent Unlocked](#) and support young people's pathways into good work, including from ethnically diverse backgrounds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), as per commitment 1 of our Race at Work Charter.
3. [Speak to our expert advisers](#) to understand how they can support you on your priority actions.

Thank you to all members of BITC's Employment & Skills Leadership Team— the driving force behind Opening Doors— for enabling progress at a business level and strengthening our collective impact.



CIPD

Deloitte.



**McKinsey
& Company**



Aldermore



Capita

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