

A group of four diverse individuals (three men and one woman) are smiling and posing together. The woman on the left wears a pink hijab and a brown blazer. The man behind her has dark skin and is wearing a green sweater. The man on the right is wearing a brown blazer. The woman in the foreground has dark hair and is smiling. A dark blue diagonal banner covers the bottom left portion of the image.

BUSINESS
IN THE
COMMUNITY

REPORT

OPENING DOORS PROGRESS REPORT 2026

Inclusive Recruitment in Action

Foreword

The UK labour market is undergoing significant change. Employers face persistent skills shortages, evolving workforce needs and the growing impact of technology, while too many people remain excluded from good work. With almost one million young people not in education, employment or training, widening access to employment has never been more important. Against this backdrop, the progress achieved through Opening Doors is encouraging. Since its launch in 2022, the programme has grown to 177 employers across more than 40 sectors. Together, they have taken over 1,300 actions, helping to make 1.67 million jobs more accessible to untapped talent. This demonstrates what is possible when businesses turn ambition into meaningful action.

This year's findings show that inclusive recruitment is becoming increasingly embedded in business practice, with employers removing barriers, placing greater emphasis on skills and recognising the wider benefits. Almost three-quarters of respondents say Opening Doors has helped strengthen their recruitment practices and organisational accountability, alongside reported improvements in workforce diversity, addressing skills gaps and filling hard-to-recruit roles. Yet there is more to do. Progress remains uneven, particularly in reaching disabled and neurodivergent candidates, building partnerships with organisations supporting underrepresented groups and making recruitment processes more accessible. Addressing these gaps must remain a priority. This commitment to continuous improvement has shaped our refreshed [Opening Doors Framework](#), developed with employers and partners throughout 2026 to reflect the changing labour market and support further progress.

We have built strong foundations, but our ambition must extend further. By bringing more businesses with us, we can make inclusive recruitment standard practice and help create an economy where opportunity is determined by potential, not background or circumstance.

Steven Cooper CBE
Chief Executive Officer
Fairstone Group

Ola Kolade
Director of Employment & Skills
Business in the Community (BITC)

Building on progress

The 2026 Opening Doors Progress Report marks an important milestone for the campaign. For the first time, two consecutive years of survey data allow us to identify emerging trends and build a richer picture of how inclusive recruitment practices are developing across the Opening Doors network. The findings provide both a snapshot of current practice and an early indication of changing employer priorities, challenges and successes.

Asked about the impact of Opening Doors itself, nearly three-quarters of employers reported that the campaign has helped them implement inclusive recruitment practices and strengthen organisational commitment and accountability. Employers also highlighted the value of Opening Doors in showcasing progress, sharing practical experience and learning from peers facing similar challenges.

Overall, respondents reported strong levels of implementation across the framework. Among survey respondents, 21 of the 25 Opening Doors actions were partially or fully embedded by at least three-quarters of employers, suggesting that inclusive recruitment is increasingly becoming embedded within recruitment practice rather than being delivered through isolated initiatives.

21 of 25 actions, were partially or fully embedded by at least 75% of respondents

Since its launch in 2022, Opening Doors has continued to grow as Business in the Community's flagship campaign for inclusive recruitment. At the time of publication, the campaign brings together employers from over 40 sectors, collectively working to make employment opportunities more accessible to people from underrepresented backgrounds. Survey responses continue to show that employers increasingly view inclusive recruitment not as a standalone diversity initiative, but as a practical way to access talent, address skills shortages and build a more resilient workforce.

Opening Doors employers demonstrate resilience and confidence, although the wider outlook remains challenging. This year's findings remain encouraging: 71% expect their workforce to remain stable (40%) or grow (31%), while 29% anticipate a reduction. Overall, the

results point to workforce stability rather than widespread growth, with expansion expected by fewer than one-third of respondents.

More than one-third of respondents (36%) also completed the survey in 2025, providing a degree of continuity in understanding how employer priorities, challenges and progress are evolving over time. At the same time, the majority of respondents (64%) participated for the first time, bringing fresh perspectives from across the growing Opening Doors network.

Alongside measuring progress, 2026 has been a year of reflection and consultation. Through engagement with signatories and partner organisations, focus groups and a dedicated section of this year's Progress Survey, employers have helped identify emerging issues and opportunities that should be reflected within the Opening Doors Framework. An [updated framework](#), published alongside this report, ensures Opening Doors continues to provide relevant and practical guidance that reflects employers' evolving challenges and priorities and considers new technology such as artificial intelligence.

Recruitment landscape

To provide context for the progress and evolving priorities highlighted in this year's findings, the UK recruitment market is showing early signs of stabilisation despite ongoing challenges.

Permanent staff appointments stabilised in July 2026 after 45 months of decline, while demand for temporary workers increased. AI is also creating opportunities for employers to innovate and invest in workforce skills. The Government has committed to equipping 10 million workers with AI skills by 2030, while evidence highlights AI's potential to drive productivity growth. However, UK vacancies declined to 702,000 between June and August 2026, remaining below pre-pandemic levels, with reductions across 10 of 18 industry sectors. Nevertheless, rising starting salaries and temporary wages suggest continued demand for skilled workers.

Supporting young people into employment remains a priority. Between April and June 2026, an estimated 981,000 UK 16 to 24-year-olds were not in education, employment or training (NEET), down from over 1 million the previous quarter, but around 3% higher than in 2025.ⁱ Research links time spent NEET to long-term unemployment, lower earnings and reduced labour market participation, reinforcing the importance of accessible employment pathways.ⁱⁱ

The Opening Doors Framework

Built around five keys to inclusive recruitment and 25 actions, the Opening Doors framework encourages employers to remove barriers, widen access to jobs and create more inclusive candidate experiences.

In 2026, Business in the Community undertook a comprehensive review of the Opening Doors Framework, engaging signatories, employers, partners and wider stakeholders through consultation activities, peer learning discussions and dedicated survey questions. This process explored both progress against existing actions and emerging recruitment challenges, helping to identify where the framework could further support employers to embed and deliver inclusive recruitment in practice.

The refreshed framework, published alongside this report, retains the core principles of Opening Doors while introducing five new actions that reflect evolving recruitment trends, including the growing use of AI, increased expectations around transparency and the need to create more opportunities for skills development. Together with the merging of some existing actions, these additions bring the framework to 27 actions.

At the time of publication, 177 employers had signed up to the campaign and had collectively implemented more than 1,300 actions, making 1.67 million jobs more accessible to diverse talent.

Who are the Opening Doors signatories?

Opening Doors continues to attract employers from a wide range of industries, and sector participation remains broadly similar to last year's signatory base. Financial institutions remain the most represented sector, accounting for 18% of signatories, followed closely by support services at 17%. Utilities and public services and retailers each account for 10%.

Large organisations continue to account for around two-thirds of signatories (67%), while medium-sized employers have remained stable at 13%. The proportion of small and micro-organisations has grown to 20% of campaign signatories, supported by increased engagement with local employers through place-based initiatives and targeted efforts to broaden participation across communities and sectors. This diversity is reflected throughout the survey findings, particularly in the different implementation journeys, priorities and challenges explored later in this report.

Opening Doors Progress Survey 2026

The 2026 Opening Doors Progress Survey provides insight into signatories' progress against the campaign actions, the business drivers supporting inclusive recruitment, and the benefits and challenges experienced by employers. This year's survey also explored the impact of Opening Doors itself and broader areas of practice, including governance and accountability for inclusive recruitment.

For the first time, employers were asked where responsibility for inclusive recruitment sits within their organisation. The findings suggest that Opening Doors signatories recognise inclusive recruitment as a strategic priority: 80% of respondents reported sponsorship or formal accountability at senior leadership or board level. However, only half of these organisations have formal accountability mechanisms, while the remainder rely on senior leadership advocacy without defined accountability.

80% of Opening Doors employers treat inclusive recruitment as an organisational priority rather than solely an HR responsibility

As respondents are all Opening Doors signatories, these findings are likely to reflect a more mature approach to inclusive recruitment than may be found across the wider employer population. Nevertheless, they demonstrate how inclusive recruitment is increasingly becoming a leadership issue rather than sitting solely within HR and recruitment teams. Reflecting this insight, governance and accountability have been incorporated more explicitly into the refreshed Opening Doors Framework.

The findings in this report draw on responses from 42 Opening Doors signatories, collected between June and July 2026 and combined with campaign-wide data to provide insight into progress, priorities, challenges and emerging trends. The results are not statistically representative of all campaign signatories. However, the responses account for 27% of signatories eligible to participate in the Great Britain survey, excluding Northern Ireland signatories, who receive a separate survey, and provide a valuable indication of the experiences of employers committed to inclusive recruitment.

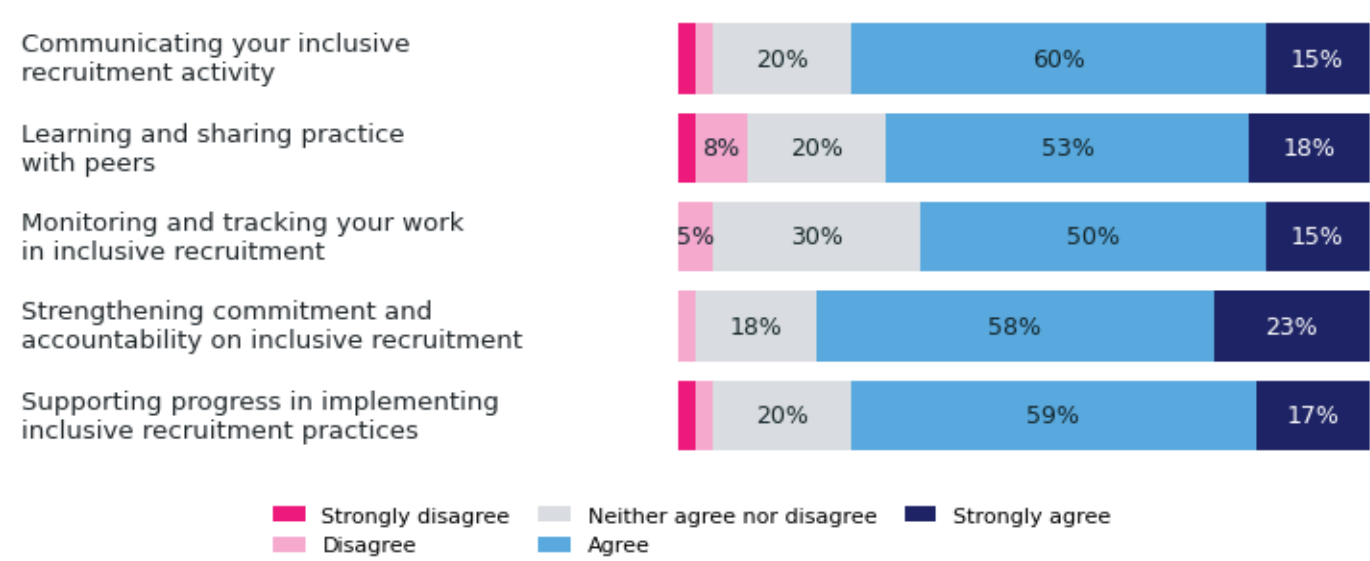
The impact of Opening Doors

Three-quarters of respondents (74%) agreed that Opening Doors had supported progress in implementing inclusive recruitment practices and strengthened organisational commitment and accountability. Almost seven in ten (69%) reported that the campaign had helped them communicate their inclusive recruitment activity, while two-thirds (67%) said it had supported learning and the sharing of practice with peers. Support for monitoring and tracking inclusive recruitment activity was less pronounced, although nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) agreed that Opening Doors had strengthened their approach.

74% respondents agreed that Opening Doors has helped them implement inclusive recruitment practices, and strengthen organisational commitment and accountability

Overall, the findings suggest that Opening Doors is particularly valued for helping employers turn ambition into action, strengthen organisational commitment to inclusive recruitment, and learn from the experiences of other employers. The relatively low levels of disagreement across all measures further reinforce the positive contribution the campaign is making to employers' inclusive recruitment journeys.

Table 1. How employers feel Opening Doors has helped them progress.



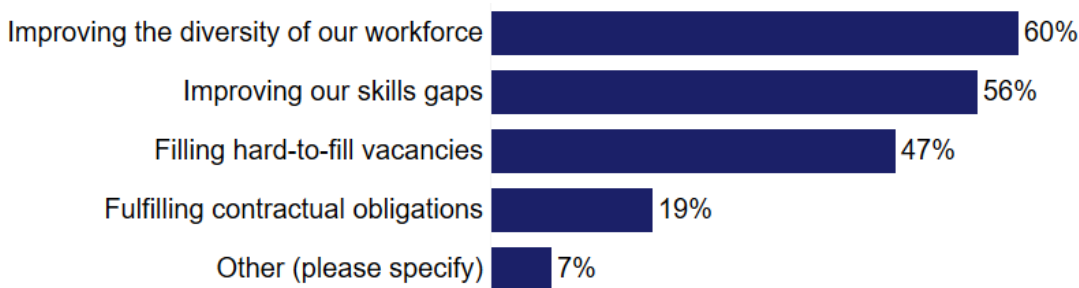
Impact of inclusive recruitment on key business drivers

While the previous section explored the impact of Opening Doors on signatories, employers were also asked whether implementing inclusive recruitment practices had contributed to progress against the campaign’s key business drivers. The most cited outcome was improving workforce diversity (60%), followed closely by addressing skills gaps (56%). Almost half of respondents (47%) also reported progress in filling hard-to-fill vacancies, while 19% identified progress in fulfilling contractual obligations. This suggests that employers continue to associate inclusive recruitment with both diversity objectives and broader workforce and talent priorities.

The overall pattern remains broadly consistent with the findings from 2025, with workforce diversity, skills and talent attraction continuing to be the areas where employers most frequently report benefits. Notably, addressing skills gaps was the only driver to increase compared with the previous year, suggesting a growing role for inclusive recruitment in helping organisations access and develop the skills they need for the future.

While year-on-year comparisons should be interpreted with caution given the relatively small survey samples and the fact that respondents are all Opening Doors signatories, the findings continue to demonstrate that employers see inclusive recruitment as delivering value beyond diversity objectives alone. For many organisations, it is increasingly supporting broader workforce priorities, including accessing talent, building future skills pipelines and strengthening organisational resilience.

Table 2. Percentage of employers who saw progress in business drivers in the past 12 months.



Top insights

Respondents were asked to assess progress against each Opening Doors action using four categories: fully embedded, partially embedded, planning but not started, and not planning to progress. Employers were also asked to identify their priorities for the next 12 months. Assessing future priorities separately from implementation status provides a clearer picture of both current progress and intended areas of focus.

Overall, the findings suggest that inclusive recruitment is becoming firmly established across many Opening Doors organisations. Respondents had partially or fully embedded an average of 21.7 of the 25 Opening Doors actions, equivalent to almost 87% of the framework. Furthermore, 21 actions were embedded by at least three-quarters of respondents, indicating that inclusive recruitment is increasingly part of routine recruitment practice rather than a series of isolated initiatives.

The strongest levels of implementation were seen in Key 3: Clear and Inclusive Job Adverts (94%) and Key 4: Essential Skills (91%). These findings suggest employers are focusing on practical steps that make recruitment more accessible, help candidates understand opportunities more clearly, and ensure people are assessed on the skills they can bring to a role.

Key 1: Talent Partnerships recorded the lowest average level of embedding (76%) but was also the most common priority for future action. This reflects a growing recognition that widening access to talent often depends on strong partnerships with external organisations. While these partnerships can deliver long-term impact, they typically require more time and coordination than actions employers can implement within their own recruitment processes. Comparisons with other Keys should be treated with some caution, however, as Key 1 contains a single action while the remaining Keys contain multiple actions.

Progress across all actions

To provide a comprehensive view of progress across the framework, implementation has been assessed through two complementary measures: the proportion of respondents reporting each action as fully embedded, and the proportion reporting each action as either partially or fully embedded. The report also presents the full distribution of responses across all four implementation stages for every action in Table 3, showing where actions are well established, where progress is emerging and where employers do not currently intend to act.

Opening Doors Progress Report 2026: Inclusive recruitment in action

Top actions for progress overall



Top 5 fully embedded actions



The most fully embedded actions all contribute directly to creating a clearer, more accessible and more inclusive experience for candidates, suggesting that many Opening Doors signatories have embedded inclusive practices into the recruitment journey itself. The strongest-performing actions achieved full implementation between 64% and 76% of respondents, demonstrating that inclusive recruitment is becoming established practice in several areas of the framework.

Looking at the broader measure of progress, a slightly different picture emerges. Three actions achieved universal adoption, with 100% of respondents reporting them as either fully or partially embedded, while a further two actions were embedded by 98% of respondents (see infographic below). Together, these findings highlight the widespread adoption of actions designed to improve clarity, accessibility and skills-based recruitment. Progress is evident

across multiple stages of the recruitment journey, from how roles are advertised through to how candidates are assessed.

The full overview of responses also reveals relatively low levels of disengagement across the framework. However, actions such as providing information in accessible formats and languages (5f), advertising and accepting applications across different media (5d), and removing criminal record questions at the application stage (5a) show lower levels of implementation and higher levels of non-progression than most other actions. These findings suggest that actions requiring broader policy changes, additional resources or operational adaptations can be more challenging to implement, even among organisations strongly committed to inclusive recruitment. Nevertheless, the overall picture remains one of broad and sustained progress, with most actions now partially or fully embedded by a substantial majority of respondents.

Opening Doors Progress Report 2026: Inclusive recruitment in action

Table 3. Level of implementation for each action.

Colour key		Not planning to progress	Planning but not started	Partially embedded	Fully embedded
Key 1: Untapped talent partnerships	Partner with organisations supporting disadvantaged groups into work (1a)	5%	19%	44%	33%
Key 2: Commitment to inclusion	Ensure job adverts reach diverse talent (2a)	9%		44%	47%
	Provide training on inclusive recruitment (2b)	14%		30%	56%
	Engage suppliers & recruitment agencies on inclusive recruitment (2c)	14%	16%	35%	35%
	Publish value statements on website (2d)		28%	26%	44%
	Use diverse images in communications (2e)	7%	19%		74%
Key 3: Inclusive job adverts	Remove jargon (3a)			40%	60%
	Use neutral language (3b)			35%	65%
	Include all essential information in job description (3c)	5%		33%	63%
	Provide information about relevant HR policies (3d)	5%	5%	37%	53%
	Be clear about what the role entails (3e)			23%	74%
	Set out application stages and timeframes (3f)	5%	12%	33%	51%
Key 4: Essential skills	Ask for skills over experience or qualifications (4a)			65%	35%
	Ask only for skills really needed for each role (4b)	5%		37%	58%
	Recognise non-traditional work experience (4c)	7%		40%	53%
	Consider accepting non-UK qualifications (4d)	5%	14%	23%	58%
	Ensure each application stage appropriately assesses skills (4e)	5%	12%	33%	51%
Key 5: Accessibility and bias	Remove the question on criminal convictions (5a)	16%	7%	16%	60%
	Include diverse colleagues on interview panels (5b)	7%		60%	33%
	Ask all candidates if they need adjustments (5c)			21%	77%
	Advertise and accept applications across different media (5d)	26%	5%	21%	49%
	Specify role flexibility (5e)	5%	5%	37%	53%
	Provide information in accessible formats (5f)	21%	14%	40%	26%
	Ensure the application process is mobile-friendly (5g)	5%	14%	16%	65%
	Collect diversity data to identify barriers for jobseekers (5h)		16%	23%	58%

Future focus areas

Every respondent identified at least one Opening Doors action as a priority for the next 12 months, while 67% selected five or more actions, demonstrating a broad commitment to progressing inclusive recruitment across the framework.

67% respondents identified five or more actions as priorities for the year ahead

The strongest priorities centre on building sustainable pathways into employment and embedding inclusive recruitment more deeply within organisations. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) identified building partnerships with organisations supporting underrepresented groups as a priority, making it the most selected action for the second year running. This was followed by providing training on inclusive recruitment for those involved in hiring (69%). Together, the findings suggest employers recognise that long-term progress depends on partnerships, organisational capability and creating pathways into work.

Signatories also identified a focus on improving access to opportunities and reducing barriers within recruitment processes. Over half of respondents (52%) prioritised ensuring job adverts reach diverse talent through a range of channels, while half highlighted the importance of providing greater clarity about job requirements and reviewing whether skills requirements are really necessary for the role. These priorities help employers widen talent pools and ensure candidates are not excluded by unnecessarily restrictive recruitment practices.¹

Attention is also focused on the quality and fairness of assessment and selection. Reviewing assessment methods (45%), asking for skills rather than qualifications where possible (43%), including diverse colleagues on interview panels (43%) and removing jargon from recruitment materials (40%) all feature among the leading priorities. All five of the highest-ranked priorities in 2025 remain within this year's top ten, suggesting that inclusive recruitment requires sustained attention rather than short-term intervention.

¹ As skills shortages persist and demand for new capabilities grows, responding to changing skills needs is becoming increasingly important for employers. Skills England's analysis highlights projected growth in priority occupations and the need to equip people with the skills required for future jobs. Skills England, [Skills England annual skills report 2026](#) (2026).

Opening Doors Progress Report 2026: Inclusive recruitment in action

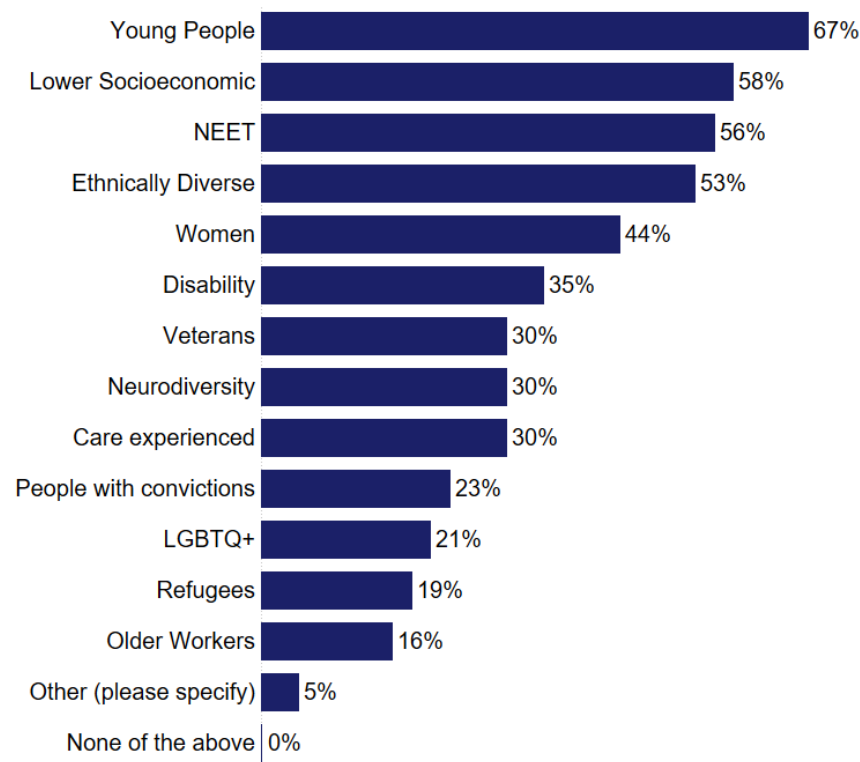
Table 4. Percentage of respondents prioritising each action for the next 12 months.

Priority Key 1: Untapped talent partnerships	Partner with organisations supporting disadvantaged groups into work (1a)	74%
	Engage suppliers & recruitment agencies on inclusive recruitment (2c)	35%
Priority Key 2: Commitment to inclusion	Ensure job adverts reach diverse talent (2a)	53%
	Provide training on inclusive recruitment (2b)	70%
	Publish value statements on website (2d)	37%
	Use diverse images in communications (2e)	44%
Priority Key 3: Inclusive job adverts	Be clear about what the role entails (3e)	51%
	Include all essential information in job description (3c)	30%
	Provide information about relevant HR policies (3d)	42%
	Remove jargon (3a)	42%
	Set out application stages and timeframes (3f)	42%
	Use neutral language (3b)	42%
Priority Key 4: Essential skills	Ask for skills over experience or qualifications (4a)	44%
	Ask only for skills really needed for each role (4b)	51%
	Consider accepting non-UK qualifications (4d)	26%
	Ensure each application stage appropriately assesses skills (4e)	47%
	Recognise non-traditional work experience (4c)	26%
Priority Key 5: Accessibility and bias	Advertise and accept applications across different media (5d)	30%
	Ask all candidates if they need adjustments (5c)	40%
	Collect diversity data to identify barriers for jobseekers (5h)	49%
	Ensure the application process is mobile-friendly (5g)	30%
	Include diverse colleagues on interview panels (5b)	42%
	Provide information in accessible formats (5f)	28%
	Remove the question on criminal convictions (5a)	21%
	Specify role flexibility (5e)	26%

Reaching underrepresented groups

Respondents were asked which underrepresented groups they target for support. Every respondent reported supporting at least one group, with four groups receiving attention from over half of employers, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Percentage of employers selecting each target group.



The findings demonstrate employers’ continued commitment to broadening access to employment and reaching talent that may previously have been overlooked. As shown in Table 5, young people were the most frequently targeted group (67%), up from 64% in the [Opening Doors Progress Report 2025](#), followed by people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (58%), unchanged from last year. The proportion targeting young people not in education, employment or training doubled from 28% to 56%, while ethnically diverse candidates remained among the four most targeted groups (53%), down from 72% in 2025.

Given the ongoing barriers to employment faced by young people who are not in education, employment or training, the rise in signatories targeting this group is a positive development. It highlights the importance of employers providing accessible entry-level opportunities and using skills-based recruitment.

Socioeconomic disadvantage also remains a key priority, with 58% of respondents targeting this group in both years. The Social Mobility Commission's *State of the Nation 2025* report found that young people aged 25–29 from higher professional backgrounds earned 19% more than those from lower working-class backgrounds with equivalent qualifications,ⁱⁱⁱ reinforcing the importance of tackling barriers to social mobility.

However, fewer respondents reported targeting disabled people (35%, down from 64%) and neurodivergent people (30%, down from 64%). This is particularly concerning given that only 52.8% of disabled people were in employment in 2024/25, falling to 34% among autistic disabled people, and highlights the continuing importance of accessible recruitment practices.

Overall, these findings show the important role employers can play in widening access to opportunity while helping ensure talented people are not excluded from the workforce because of barriers beyond their control.

Challenges and Benefits: Two Sides of the Same Journey

Unsurprisingly, many of the challenges highlighted in the 2025 report resurfaced again this year. Resource constraints, internal engagement and external labour market conditions remain common themes across organisations of all sizes.

However, 2026 insights also revealed something particularly interesting. Several topics emerged not simply as challenges but as areas where employers described a clear transition from initial difficulty to positive outcomes. What one organisation viewed as an obstacle was often described by another as a benefit achieved after sustained implementation and learning.

The following four themes illustrate these different stages of employer journeys:

From Speed to Inclusion: Balancing Recruitment Pressures with Fair Processes

Many organisations experience tension between recruitment speed and inclusive recruitment objectives.

Employers operating in high-volume environments reported pressure to fill vacancies quickly, while others described difficulties recruiting into specialist roles requiring particular skills, qualifications or operational experience. Respondents noted that inclusive recruitment practices can sometimes be perceived internally as adding additional steps to already stretched recruitment processes.

Yet the survey also highlighted examples where organisations found that investing time upfront ultimately strengthened outcomes. Employers reported broader and more diverse candidate pools, increased awareness of inclusive recruitment practices, and greater confidence in applying fair and inclusive recruitment approaches once inclusive practices became embedded in routine recruitment activity.

The experiences shared this year show that inclusive recruitment and recruitment efficiency are not opposing goals. Organisations that integrate inclusive practices into business-as-usual processes appear increasingly able to achieve positive outcomes while recruiting within required timeframes and meeting operational workforce needs.

Case study information was accurate at the time of publication.

Employer example:

Capita

From speed to inclusion: balancing recruitment pressures with fair processes

Capita highlighted the challenge of balancing inclusive recruitment ambitions with operational recruitment pressures. The organisation reported that speed of hire remains one of its biggest challenges, particularly where business areas are under pressure to fill vacancies quickly. While acknowledging that rapid recruitment can sometimes conflict with running a focused and inclusive process, Capita also described a positive shift in organisational awareness. The organisation reported that conversations about diversity and inclusive recruitment now take place throughout the recruitment process and are becoming more visible across the business. Rather than being treated as a separate initiative, inclusive recruitment is increasingly part of everyday recruitment discussions and decision-making. This shift is also reflected in Capita's wider recruitment activity. In its 2025 Annual Report, Capita reported introducing inclusive recruitment measures including a guaranteed interview scheme

for candidates with disabilities and improved processes for candidates requiring reasonable adjustments. The organisation also updated job adverts and inclusive messaging on its careers pages and introduced manager guidance on inclusive hiring. Capita maintained its Disability Confident Leader accreditation in 2025, using the scheme as a framework to review and improve how it recruits, retains and develops disabled colleagues. Candidates can request adjustments at any stage of the recruitment process, with examples including alternative application formats, accessibility technology, interview questions in advance and changes to the time, location or format of interviews. Capita's experience demonstrates how organisations can continue to prioritise inclusion, even when operating in high-volume and fast-paced recruitment environments. While challenges remain, the organisation identified increasing visibility and discussion of inclusive recruitment as an important step forward.

Turning Insight into Action: The Growing Importance of Data and Measurement

Data emerged as one of the most significant areas of attention during 2026.

Some respondents described challenges collecting robust diversity data, protecting privacy and adapting technology systems to support monitoring. Others highlighted difficulties evidencing long-term outcomes, particularly where outreach activity may not result in employment outcomes for several years.

At the same time, several employers highlighted the value of improved data collection, monitoring and reporting in understanding recruitment outcomes and identifying potential barriers. Improved disclosure rates, more structured monitoring and stronger reporting processes were reported as helping organisations better understand candidate journeys, identify barriers and target interventions.

A recurring theme was the growing emphasis employers place on measuring impact and using data to inform decisions. Respondents also reported becoming better able to demonstrate meaningful results, strengthening both recruitment strategy and internal accountability.

As inclusive recruitment matures, the ability to measure progress effectively appears to be becoming just as important as implementing recruitment actions themselves.

Employer example:

Standard Life

Turning Insight into Action: The Growing Importance of Data and Measurement

Standard Life highlighted the role that diversity data plays in understanding candidate experiences and identifying barriers within recruitment processes. The organisation reported that it has completed all of its Opening Doors commitments and identified data collection as an important tool for informing future action.

A key achievement was reaching a 79% disclosure rate of DEI data during the recruitment process. According to Standard Life, this has helped the organisation better understand its candidates and identify barriers that may affect different groups. The response demonstrates how data collection can help employers move beyond assumptions and build a clearer picture of candidate experiences throughout the recruitment process. Standard Life's experience highlights the value of using recruitment data to understand barriers, monitor progress and support evidence-based decision-making.

Standard Life's wider [recruitment approach](#) also demonstrates how diversity monitoring can be incorporated into recruitment while protecting candidate privacy. Candidates are asked to provide diversity information as part of their application for diversity reporting and equal opportunity purposes. This information is anonymised and is not shared with anyone involved in the recruitment process, providing a structured way to collect information for monitoring while keeping it separate from individual recruitment decisions.

This data-led approach extends to Standard Life's wider diversity and inclusion monitoring. As of June 2026, Black, Asian and minority ethnic representation was 15.7% across the group and 14.1% in senior leadership, exceeding its 13% target. Women represented 40.5% of senior leadership against a 42% target. This ongoing measurement demonstrates how data and targets can help track progress and

maintain accountability.

This aligns with [Standard Life's wider approach to DE&I](#), which emphasises data-led decision making, representation targets and social mobility initiatives. The company has highlighted the importance of understanding colleague experiences through data collection and was ranked as the highest-placed insurer in the 2025 UK Social Mobility Employer Index.

Evolving Recruitment Systems: Embedding Inclusion Through Process, Policy and Technology

Respondents noted that adapting recruitment systems and policies represented one of the most resource-intensive aspects of implementation.

Introducing new recruitment software, reviewing accessibility requirements, updating policies and redesigning assessment approaches often required substantial organisational effort. For some employers, these changes involved significant cultural shifts alongside technical implementation.

Nevertheless, employers that had completed these changes frequently reported tangible benefits. Recruitment training, updated guidance for hiring managers and redesigned assessment approaches were associated with greater consistency, stronger awareness and understanding of inclusive recruitment practices, more accessible recruitment processes and the removal of barriers that may disadvantage some candidates.

Although redesigning recruitment processes can be challenging, employers increasingly view this investment as foundational to fairer and more inclusive recruitment. Organisations that review their policies, systems and approaches are beginning to report greater consistency, accessibility and inclusion.

Employer example

Ricoh UK

Evolving Recruitment Systems: Embedding Inclusion Through Process, Policy and Technology

Ricoh UK highlighted the challenge of embedding inclusive recruitment practices into everyday processes while also implementing a new recruitment application platform. The organisation noted that introducing new approaches can sometimes slow recruitment activity while changes become established. Despite these challenges, Ricoh UK reported positive outcomes from its approach. By actively promoting its commitments and showcasing its inclusion activity, the organisation reported an increase in diverse candidates applying for roles, as well as an increase in diverse new starters. Ricoh UK also highlighted improvements in line manager understanding of inclusive interviewing and candidate support, demonstrating how changes to recruitment processes and practices can contribute to wider recruitment outcomes.

Ricoh's [wider approach](#) also shows how inclusive recruitment practices are reviewed and adapted over time. The organisation states that it regularly audits, reviews and evaluates its progress on inclusive recruitment, using inclusion and diversity data to identify where barriers exist, understand the impact of initiatives and make changes where needed. Ricoh also highlights its ongoing collaboration with Business in the Community's Opening Doors campaign as part of its approach to breaking down barriers for groups and communities that have traditionally faced disadvantage. This ongoing cycle of reviewing evidence and adapting recruitment practices demonstrates how inclusion can become embedded within recruitment processes over time.

"One of the most valuable lessons from our inclusive recruitment journey has been the importance of consistency and continuous improvement. While implementing new systems and ways of working can create challenges in the short term, the long-term benefits are clear. We've seen greater engagement from diverse candidate groups, increased awareness among hiring managers and stronger recruitment outcomes overall. Most importantly, we have built a framework that allows us to continually review, learn and adapt our approach, helping ensure inclusion remains embedded in how we attract and hire talent across Ricoh." Head of Talent Acquisition for Ricoh Europe and North Countries

Building Pathways, Not Just Vacancies: Outreach, Partnerships and Talent Pipelines

Partnerships remain one of the most powerful themes running throughout the Opening Doors network.

Many employers highlighted the challenge of reaching underrepresented talent, particularly in sectors facing skills shortages, limited local talent pipelines or historic underrepresentation. Building relationships with specialist organisations and community partners often requires time, resource and sustained commitment.

Yet among the strongest benefits reported this year were those associated with outreach and partnership activity. Employers described stronger candidate pipelines, improved awareness of opportunities among target groups and successful recruitment outcomes from individuals who may not previously have considered careers within their sectors.

Several organisations also noted wider benefits, including increased employee engagement, stronger community relationships and closer collaboration with local communities and partner organisations.

The experiences shared through this survey reinforce a key lesson of Opening Doors: effective inclusive recruitment often begins long before a vacancy is advertised. For many employers, outreach and partnership activity is helping to create pathways into employment by connecting with potential candidates earlier and broadening awareness of available opportunities.

Employer example

CBRE

Building pathways, not just vacancies: outreach, partnerships and talent pipelines

CBRE recognised that many barriers to employment exist before candidates reach the recruitment process, including unequal access to work experience, professional networks and careers advice. To help address these barriers, the organisation focused on outreach activity and partnerships designed to engage young people earlier and support pathways into employment. Through programmes including its partnership with Career Ready, CBRE reported supporting more than 150 students through mentoring, skills development and work experience opportunities. The organisation

stated that a proportion of participants progressed into internships and apprenticeship roles, helping to strengthen pathways into the business and increase awareness of careers within the sector. Career Ready reported in 2025 that 13 former Career Ready interns had gone on to apprenticeships at CBRE. CBRE described the partnership as helping it introduce young people to careers they may not previously have known about and demonstrate the longer-term career opportunities available within the organisation.

CBRE's experience demonstrates how outreach and partnership activity can help organisations engage future talent before recruitment begins and build pathways into employment for under-represented groups.

Conclusion

The 2026 findings reinforce the idea that inclusive recruitment is becoming increasingly embedded for Opening Doors signatories. While many employers continue to face challenges around resources, competing priorities and implementation, the overall direction of travel is clear. Across the framework, respondents reported high levels of progress, with inclusive recruitment practices increasingly woven into recruitment processes, candidate experiences and organisational decision-making.

The survey also shows how employers are broadening their understanding of inclusive recruitment. While improving workforce diversity remains a key outcome, signatories increasingly describe inclusive recruitment as a practical response to broader workforce challenges, including skills shortages, talent attraction and the need to build sustainable talent pipelines. The growing emphasis on partnerships, skills-based recruitment and governance reflects a more mature approach that recognises inclusive recruitment as both a people and business priority.

Importantly, this year's survey provided the first opportunity to assess the impact of Opening Doors itself. Signatories highlighted that the campaign is helping them implement inclusive recruitment practices, strengthen accountability and learn from peers, reinforcing the value of combining practical action with collaboration and shared learning. Alongside the consultation undertaken throughout 2026, these findings have helped inform the refreshed

Opening Doors Framework, ensuring it continues to reflect emerging trends, new technologies and evolving employer needs.

As the Opening Doors campaign enters its next phase, the challenge lies in sustaining momentum and scaling the practices that help employers reach, develop and nurture future talent. The experiences shared by signatories demonstrate that meaningful progress requires long-term commitment, strong partnerships and a willingness to continuously learn and adapt. By continuing to open access to opportunity, employers can help build a labour market that is not only fairer, but also better equipped to meet the skills and talent needs of the future.

Calls to action

Employers can build on the progress highlighted in this report through three practical next steps:

1. [Sign up to Opening Doors](#) and make inclusive recruitment part of business as usual by using the Opening Doors framework to embed actions that widen access to talent and remove barriers to opportunity.
2. Explore the updated [Opening Doors Framework](#) and identify which new actions your organisation can adopt, drawing on the support, learning and experience of the Opening Doors network.
3. Strengthen local pathways into work by working with schools, colleges, employability providers and community organisations to connect more untapped talent with career opportunities.

Thank you to the members of BITC's Employment & Skills Leadership Team for their continued leadership and commitment to Opening Doors. Their support helps drive employer action, strengthen collaboration across sectors and expand access to opportunity for people across the UK.



ⁱ Office for National Statistics, Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), UK: April to June 2026, August 2026. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/august2026>.

ⁱⁱ Department for Work and Pensions, Young People and Work: Interim Report, 2026. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Social Mobility Commission, State of the Nation 2025: Direct Effect of Social Origin on Earnings, December 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2025>.



Business in the Community (BITC) champions responsible business as essential for long term economic growth and resilience. We convene, campaign, and consult with business to tackle society's most pressing challenges—from climate change and place-based regeneration to inequality, workplace wellbeing, and inclusive growth.

Founded by His Majesty King Charles III in 1982, BITC has over four decades of experience in engaging business and delivering measurable impact in both business and in communities through evidence-based interventions. As a trusted partner to business and government, BITC convenes leadership, influences policy, and accelerates action—helping shape a future-ready economy that works for everyone.

Business in the Community

137 Shepherdess Walk
London
N1 7RQ

www.bitc.org.uk

020 7566 8650

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