WOMEN IN DIGITAL

THE WOMEN IN DIGITAL ANNUAL REPORT

DRIVING CHANGE IN TECH

2026

CONNECT EDUCATE EMPOWER

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ABOUT WOMEN IN DIGITAL

Women in Digital is a national profit for purpose network addressing Australia's digital and technology skills gap by unlocking the potential of underrepresented talent.

For over 12 years, we've connected, educated and empowered women in digital and technology roles, helping more diverse talent build careers in technology and step into leadership. Today, our community spans more than 15,000 subscribers across Australia, brought together through events, education programs, research and the Women in Digital Awards.

Through our Corporate Partnerships, we help organisations to:

- Equip employees with future-ready skills and leadership development resources
- Attract and retain diverse talent in their digital and technology teams
- Strengthen employer branding through profiling and speaking opportunities
- Connect with a national network of industry decision-makers
- Provide opportunities for team member recognition with the Women in Digital Awards

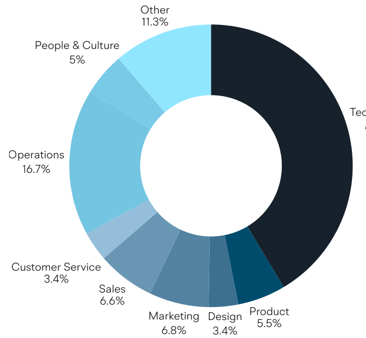
This report is our annual pulse point on the industry and the people within it. Behind every number and datapoint is a person: a woman stepping into her first leadership role, a career-changer breaking into tech, an ally championing change on their team. Data speaks volumes, and this report brings those stories to life, making the invisible experience visible and giving readers the evidence they need for the conversations that drive real change. It's part of our broader mission: a more inclusive and diverse industry for all.

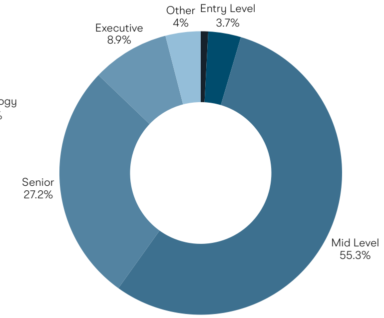
OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS INCLUDE:

OUR COMMUNITY:

15,409	2,440	54
Subscribers	Members	Events in 2026

OUR MEMBERS:





Become a Member

Find out more about our membership perks and how to join our community!

FOREWORD

HOLLY HUNT
Founder and CEO | Women in Digital

In 2026 it is hard to imagine a role or career path that is not impacted or underpinned by digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI). This means that almost everyone is working in digital, whether they realise it or not.

Our growing dependence on digital technology means that the industry is not only set to grow, but it is also set to define roles and career pathways that traditionally did not need digital literacy or AI fluency.

The human experience of using technology in all of our lives will be defined by those who build it. And the question of who builds it is defined by the conditions we set in this industry. It is the cultural norms, expectations and standards we hold ourselves to which define who enters, who stays and who exits.

This is a responsibility we all share, and for that reason the Women in Digital Annual Report has never felt more important. This pulse-point on the industry is a compass, a guiding resource highlighting the lived experience of those working within it. Holding the mirror up is not always glamorous work, but we believe it must be done to see the good, the bad and the ugly.

We must ensure our industry is inclusive and culturally sound to attract, retain and promote a diverse industry sector to continue building an Australia where everyone can belong. Women in Digital is committed to that work, and if you're reading this resource I'm fairly confident that you will be too.

This year we've seen huge progress alongside pervasive realities that highlight this truism: perfect policies on paper don't always translate into a culture in which people want to work. With 47% of all respondents saying they have considered leaving it, we have some work to do.

To me the most notable insights are the for those at the earliest stages of their career. These individuals are not only the most likely to identify an entrenched boys club, with 43% of early-career respondents agreeing that an entrenched boys club exists, (compared to 35% across the dataset as a whole), they are also more likely to report that they have experienced gender bias or discrimination (55%) and are the most likely to say they have frequently or occasionally considered leaving the tech industry (57%).

That tells us that any cultural work happening at the top of the organisation hasn't reached the people arriving, and this represents a huge risk to our industry talent attraction and retention needs. Closing the gap between policy and reality is critical work for us all.

Thank you to every person who gave us their time and their honesty in this year's survey. Your answers are what makes this report matter.

My hope is that this report serves as a valuable asset for conversations in the workplace, the ones that are overdue, and the ones that lead to real change.

Driving Change in Tech 2026

WOMEN IN DIGITAL

1,029 COLLECTED

72% FEMALE

53% STUDIED COMPUTER SCIENCE/IT

47% HAVE CONSIDERED LEAVING TECH

THE MOTHERHOOD PENALTY

41% Say having children has or will adversely impact their salary

40% Say having children hinders leadership, promotion, or new responsibilities

What motivated you to pursue a career in the digital/technology sector?

- 63% Passion for technology
- 53% Job security
- 34% Salary and benefits
- 27% Mentors / role models
- 20% Education / coursework

The Pipeline for Progress

Feel encouraged to apply for senior or executive roles from within their own company	55%
Can see a strong path of growth in their current role	62%
Still see part-time work as a barrier to career progression	47%
Say their workplace has clear policies enabling flexible or remote work	75%
Believe they're paid the same as colleagues with equivalent skills	62%
Have left a past employer over pay issues or discovering a pay gap	42%

YEAR ON YEAR INSIGHTS

Pay confidence gap persists

Only 35% of early-career women feel confident asking for a pay rise, compared with 61% of men.

Mentorship isn't enough

Only 27% entered tech because of mentor encouragement; senior women say sponsorship matters more.

The 'boys' club' starts early

39% of early-career respondents say a boys' club exists in their workplace.

AI adoption is becoming mainstream

77% say their workplace encourages experimentation with AI.

Parenthood still impacts careers

41% believe having children affects leadership opportunities, and 50% say part-time work slows career progression.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the third edition of the Women in Digital: Driving Change in Tech report, our national annual research into gender equity in Australia's digital and technology sector.

The 2026 report draws on 1,029 responses from individuals working across Australia. Throughout the report, findings are organised around three career stages:

- The Foundation (early career)
- The Turning Point (mid-career)
- Shaping What Comes Next (executive/C-suite)

Career stage is where policy, leadership and individual decisions are made, so this structure makes the findings immediately actionable.

Through analysis, we can see shifts that once felt years away are now showing up in the data. Flexible work is now standard for all genders, and parental leave is more widely available and increasingly shared.

Career confidence has surged for women: the share of respondents who see a strong path of growth and promotion rose from 51% in 2025 to 62% in 2026, driven largely by women, who recorded a 13-point gain compared to 9 points for men.

The most striking shift however must be considered. Perceptions of an entrenched boys' club, which grew stronger with seniority in 2025, have inverted in 2026. It's now early-career respondents who name it most, at 39%, compared to 35% of executive/C-suite respondents.

In 2026 the question of AI access and usage is a must and the data shows us access and encouragement to experiment is high - with 77% saying they are encouarged to experiment.

This report delves into these these trends and more to ensure the industry has the evidence it needs to act, not just observe.

We have spent years working alongside technology employers to build the policies and initiatives which support women. What the 2026 data shows us is that policy is not the same as culture.

You can have every policy on paper and still have a workplace that doesn't feel inclusive day to day. It's the lived experience, how people are treated, heard, and supported, that defines a workplace culture, not the policy that sits behind it.

HON. KATE JONES

Chairperson | Women in Digital
Vice President |
Paralympics Australia

KEY CHANGES FROM 2025

Career confidence is climbing, and women are leading the charge.

More professionals can now see a genuine path to growth and promotion in their current role, with women recording the strongest gain of any group this year.

CAN SEE A STRONG PATH OF GROWTH & PROMOTION

2025	51%
2026	62%

The confidence gap on senior roles is narrowing.

More people feel ready to put their hand up for a senior role without ticking every box, and women's confidence is growing faster than men's, closing a long-standing gap.

GAP BETWEEN WOMEN & MEN (%)

2025	15%
2026	10%

The pay perception gap just had its biggest turnaround yet.

The gap between men and women who believe they are paid the same as colleagues with equivalent skills has narrowed more this year.

GAP BETWEEN WOMEN & MEN (%)

2025	18%
2026	8%

More people are being told to go for it.

Encouragement to apply for internal senior positions is on the rise across the board, with women seeing the largest increase of any group.

ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED TO APPLY FOR SENIOR ROLE

2025	44%
2026	55%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leaders and Employers

1. Treat culture as a commercial priority

What the data tells us
35% of all respondents agree an entrenched boys' club exists in their workplace, and the retention stakes are direct: 66% of those considering leaving tech agree a boys' club exists, compared with 30% of those who intend to stay. The Tech Council of Australia's[1] puts that in national context, finding that workplace culture is a primary driver of mid-career attrition. The 2026 data shows a reversal from 2025, with the youngest people in the workforce now naming this dynamic first, with 39% of The Foundation respondents agreeing there is an entrenched boys' club in their workplace, compared to 35% of Executive/C-suite Level respondents.

At a time when Australia needs every available tech worker to hit its 2030 target of 1.2 million workers,[2] losing women from technical roles at twice the rate of men in a measurable drag on capacity.

WID recommends
Ensure that policies and statements move beyond publication and into the lived experience of employees within the organisation:

- Align measurement with the WGEA Workplace Gender Equality Indicators and the Champions of Change Coalition's annual progress reporting.
- Capture a cultural baseline through anonymous culture surveys to monitor and address organisational culture.

2. Close the pay transparency gap inside the organisation

What the data tells us
WGEA published 10,500 employers' gender pay gaps on 3 March 2026,[3] but the lived experience inside organisations remains uneven. Women report a 9 percentage point gap (62% vs 71%) with men on understanding how pay decisions are made. Under the WGEA Gender Equality Targets Scheme,[4] effective April 2025, organisations of 500 or more employees must select and meet three measurable equality targets across six indicators; pay transparency is the most directly accountable of these.

WID recommends

- Publishing salary bands for advertised roles.
- Communicating the criteria that determine pay decisions internally at least annually.
- Conduct gender pay audits at role-level (not just organisation-wide), and provide manager training on running pay conversations.
- The WGEA Gender Equality Targets Scheme should be a baseline of expectations, and organisations should focus on ensuring these targets are not only met, but exceeded.

3. Move beyond Mentorship to Sponsorship

What the data tells us
The qualitative data from the 2026 Senior and Executive cohort is explicit on this point. Senior women described what they want from the leaders they work with: "Help influence all leaders to adopt a sponsorship, not mentorship, model with women."

Mentorship advises, whereas sponsorship advocates. The distinction matters because only 27% of respondents cited encouragement from mentors as a reason they entered tech, but the qualitative data shows that those who advanced did so when someone in power named them for opportunities they were not in the room for.

The case for getting this right is commercially grounded. Research by the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre and WGEA[5] found that increasing women across key leadership roles adds between $52 million and $70 million in market value per year for an average-sized organisation, and that the association is causal. Women in leadership also generate a multiplier effect on the pipeline: ASX 300 companies with a female CEO have 46% women in their executive leadership teams, compared to a 31% average across the ASX 300.[6] Sponsorship is the mechanism that builds that leadership pipeline from within the organisation.

WID recommends

- Organisations should track sponsorship as a formal program, internally report the share of senior leaders who are actively sponsoring women, link sponsorship outcomes (promotions secured for those being sponsored, as well as retention) to leader performance reviews.
- Reference the Diversity Council Australia's Inclusion@Work[7] indicators for design guidance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Leaders and Employers

4. Invest in mid-career women deliberately, where retention risk is greatest

What the data says
41% of mid-career women believe having children would adversely impact their leadership opportunities. Additionally, half of mid-career respondents agree part-time work would hinder career progression.

WID recommends
Targeted interventions should include:

- A structured and flexible return-to-work program for those resuming after parental leave, with clear commitments about continuity of meaningful work;
- Reconsidering assumptions that senior leadership requires full-time presence
- The Workplace Gender Equality Agency's[8] "Designing and supporting flexible careers" guidance provides a tested framework, and Champions of Change Coalition's[9] data on parental-leave outcomes can be used as a benchmark.

5. Ensure equitable AI access across the workforce, including in how AI is used to hire

What the data says
This year we asked respondents about their AI access and found that 77% say they are encouraged to experiment with AI as part of their job. This is one of the strongest results in the 2026 dataset, against a backdrop in which AI is reshaping workflows.

Yet access is only half the equation. ACS[10] found that 51% of Australian workers lack at least one digital skill required for their role, with AI capability gaps among the most common, and warns that existing workforce systems are not equipped to keep pace.

Alongside this, University of Melbourne[11] research on AI-driven CV screening found that even when identifying details like names and gendered pronouns are removed, other language still signals gender to the AI and that human recruiters showed even stronger bias than the algorithms trained on their decisions. The same research found that employment gaps used as proxies in screening tools disproportionately disadvantage women who have taken parental leave.

WID recommends

- Audit AI training access and tool usage by gender, role level, and work arrangement.
- Ensure capability development isn't gatekept by proximity to leadership.
- Audit AI-driven recruitment and promotion systems for gender bias on a regular cycle, with specific attention to proxies such as employment gaps, which often penalise women for caregiving leave rather than any shortfall in ability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Individuals

1. Seek sponsors, not just mentors

What the data says
Only 27% of respondents cited encouragement from mentors and role models as a reason they entered tech. Mentorship is valuable, but the 2026 data, particularly from the Senior and Executive cohort, are clear: career progression accelerates when someone in power advocates for you in rooms you are not in.

WID recommends
- Identify two or three people in your organisation or network with the ability to name you for opportunities. Build relationships with those individuals and be specific with them about what you want next in your career.

2. Use data to drive career conversations

What the data says
National industry data, including this year's annual report findings, gives individual career conversations tangible reference points. National-scale data carries weight beyond individual experience.

WID recommends
- Take benchmark data into conversations on career progression, pay and flexibility.
  - On pay specifically, combine WGEA's published employer gender pay gap data,[12] industry salary benchmarking from sources like Hays, Robert Half, or Seek, and your own performance record to build a case grounded in evidence.

3. Name your ambition out loud, and to specific people

What the data says
The 2026 data shows 49% of respondents list advancing into leadership as a current career aspiration, 51% want to deepen technical expertise and 35% want to mentor and give back. Aspiration is alive at every career stage. What the data also shows is that aspiration can often go unsaid.

WID recommends
- Tell your manager what you want in the next 18 months. Tell your sponsor what role you are working toward. Tell your network what you would say yes to. Ambition expressed is an ambition that can be advocated for.

4. Build cross-seniority networks deliberately

What the data says
Isolation at any stage is common, with 58% of women saying they are significantly outnumbered by men in their workplace, and roughly a third at every career stage report they don't have strong female role models or mentors to draw on.

WID recommends
- Whether you are early, mid, or late in your career, seek out connections across seniority levels rather than only within your own.
- Join professional associations (Women in Digital, Tech Council of Australia, ACS, AHRI), industry events, and view professional networks as an enabler in your career.

5. Claim your space in AI and emerging technology

What the data says
The 2026 data shows 77% of respondents say their workplace encourages AI experimentation, with a limited gender gap in current AI access (76% female vs 80% male). The patterns set now will define who leads the AI strategy in five years.

WID recommends
- Volunteer for the AI project, take the upskilling course, or put your hand up for the new tool rollout.

THE THREE CAREER STAGES AT A GLANCE

The following sections explore what the data tells us at each career stage.

THE FOUNDATION

At The Foundation, early-career professionals are entering a sector that has invested in its first impressions. AI experimentation is high, with 77% saying they are encouraged to experiment with new tools or technologies, and 65% of Foundation respondents report having strong female role models in their workplace. But 55% have already experienced gender bias or discrimination in job interviews, and more than half have already considered leaving tech.

THE TURNING POINT

At The Turning Point, flexible work is the baseline, with 76% of mid-career respondents saying their workplace offers flexibility that meets their needs. But 34% of that same cohort agree that working flexibly negatively impacts their chances of promotion. 41% believe having children would hinder their leadership opportunities.

SHAPING WHAT COMES NEXT

At Shaping What Comes Next, the view from the top is the most optimistic in the dataset. 72% of executive respondents believe their workplace ensures equal opportunity to progress. But senior women report a retention gap, a pay transparency gap, and a qualitative pattern that repeats across the cohort: many are the most senior women in their organisation, with no-one above them to look to.

CASE STUDY

Data#3 cisco

Employer Support at The Foundation

Program: Brenda Conroy Future Leaders Internship Program (BCFLIP)

BCFLIP was created to honour Brenda's legacy by supporting career pathways for others, just as she did throughout her career. What makes the program so powerful is the combination of early, meaningful industry experience, strong partnerships and genuine support helping women see what is possible in their careers in technology.

TASH WICK

Chief People Officer, Data#3

The Brenda Conroy Future Leaders Internship Program (BCFLIP) honours the legacy of Brenda Conroy by creating early-career pathways for women in technology. A long-serving Data#3 team member, Brenda's career reflected dedication, adaptability and growth, which are qualities the program seeks to encourage in the next generation of technology talent. Delivered in partnership between Data#3, Cisco and Women in Digital, and in collaboration with leading Queensland universities, the immersive program places Information Technology students in real working environments. During the short paid placement, participants gain hands-on access to technical, sales and support teams, with mentoring and career guidance provided by Women in Digital, helping them build a practical understanding of how technology businesses operate.

Beyond employment outcomes, interns have strengthened their professional networks and personal brands through exposure to senior leaders and industry events, including speaking at Women in Digital International Women's Day panels like The Great Generational Debate.

A key focus of the program is building early career confidence through immersion rather than observation. By being embedded within teams and learning directly from experienced professionals, interns gain visibility into how roles operate in practice and develop greater confidence in their own capability and readiness for the next stage of their careers. Informal mentoring and exposure to visible role models play an important role in shaping this experience.

Now in its fifth year, BCFLIP continues to evolve through close collaboration between partners. Since the program commenced, 18 of the 29 students who have taken part have progressed into roles across Data#3, Cisco and Women in Digital, demonstrating how early, well-supported industry experience can translate into long-term career pathways.

Applications for the BCFLIP Program open in November each year, with successful applicants commencing placements in late January. Candidates can apply via the Data#3 Careers page or LinkedIn.

5

years successfully running

62%

of participants progress into industry roles

Paid

program with immersive industry placement

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

> Clearer path and plans for graduates once they come off the graduate program.
>
> **ANONYMOUS**

> I am just shy to ask for a pay rise.
>
> **ANONYMOUS**

> It is difficult to discuss any inequalities I face as it is not obvious and easily deniable.
>
> **ANONYMOUS**

THE FOUNDATION

Early career, entry-level, interns, graduates, and those new to digital and tech.

This section examines how people enter the digital and technology sector, what draws them in, and what they encounter in their earliest professional years. The Foundation is where first impressions of workplace culture are formed, where structural support either accelerates confidence or quietly signals who belongs and who doesn't.

KEY FINDINGS

1. 77% of early-career respondents say they are encouraged to experiment with new tools and technologies, including AI, as part of their job. This is the strongest result for any workplace statement in this cohort.
2. More than half of early-career respondents (57%) have considered leaving the tech industry frequently or occasionally, notably higher than the 47% seen across the dataset as a whole.
3. 55% of early-career respondents have experienced gender bias or discrimination in job interviews, compared to 42% across all career stages.
4. 43% of early-career respondents agree that an entrenched "boys' club" exists in their workplace, compared with 35% across the dataset as a whole.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

Our findings show that organisations are training and developing their newest people, however with over half (57%) saying they have considered leaving the tech industry, there are cultural warning signs worth noting.

CAREER CONFIDENCE IS STRONG ON CAPABILITY, FRAGILE ON VISIBILITY

Early-career professionals are confident in their place in the work, with 72% saying they feel supported to re-skill as technology changes, 70% say their training is practical and relevant, and 79% say access to training is equitable across genders and roles.

On the question of AI specifically, 77% say they are encouraged to experiment with new tools or technologies, including AI as part of their job.

But when the questions shift from capability to visibility, confidence drops sharply, and the gender gap widens. Just 40% of Foundation respondents feel confident enough to ask for a pay rise, compared with 74% in Director/Executive roles. This gap is not evenly shared. Among Foundation respondents, 61% of men feel confident enough to ask for a pay rise, compared with just 35% of women - the widest gender gap on this question at any career stage we measured.

It echoes a pattern already visible in the national data. The STEM Equity Monitor's[13] longitudinal tracking of 2011 STEM graduates found that two years into their careers, 67% of women were earning under $50,000 a year compared with 45% of men, and by the ten year mark, men were 1.8 times more likely to have reached six figures. Confidence and pay compound each other early. If women are entering the industry earning less and feeling less able to ask for more, closing that gap later becomes a much steeper climb.

ROLE MODELS MATTER, AND THEY ARE PRESENT, BUT UNEVENLY

The 2026 data shows 65% of Foundation respondents say they have strong female role models and mentors in their current workplace, slightly higher than the 62% across all respondents, suggesting that early-career women are actively finding and being supported by senior female colleagues.

Representation in leadership remains a live concern, with 57% of Foundation respondents saying women are represented at all levels and teams, 10 percentage points lower than the 67% across all respondents, showing that early-career professionals are paying close attention to diverse leadership representation from the start of their careers.

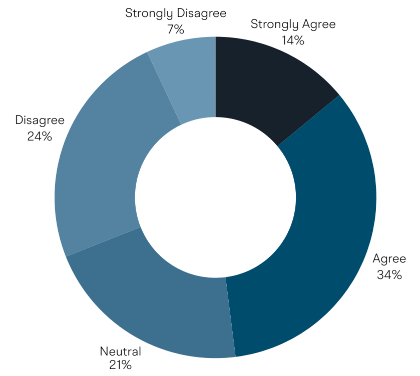
THE BIAS GAP: WHERE THE DATA TURNS SHARP

The most striking finding in the Foundation cohort concerns experiences of bias at the front door, with 55% of Foundation respondents report having experienced gender bias or discrimination in job interviews, compared with 46% of women across all career stages.

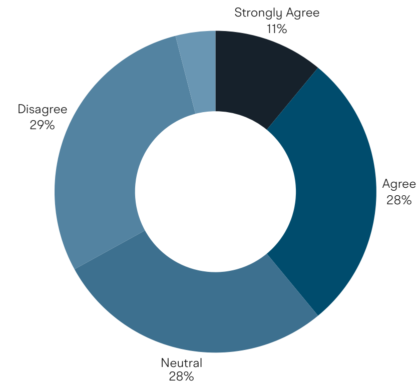
This finding sits alongside another that complicates the narrative of progress, with 39% of Foundation respondents agreeing that an entrenched boys' club exists in their workplace. In 2025, the research observed that boys' club perceptions intensified with seniority: 16% at entry level, rising to 36% at C-suite. The 2026 data suggests that the youngest people in the workforce are now naming the boys' club from day one.

One Foundation respondent put the difficulty bluntly: "I think in general it is difficult to discuss any inequalities I face as it is not obvious and easily deniable." That sentence carries the weight of the statistic and the challenge they face in addressing systemic inequalities.

Foundation Respondents* - Have you experienced gender bias and/or discrimination in job interviews.



Foundation Respondents* - There is an entrenched boys' club in my workplace.



***Includes respondents from all genders**

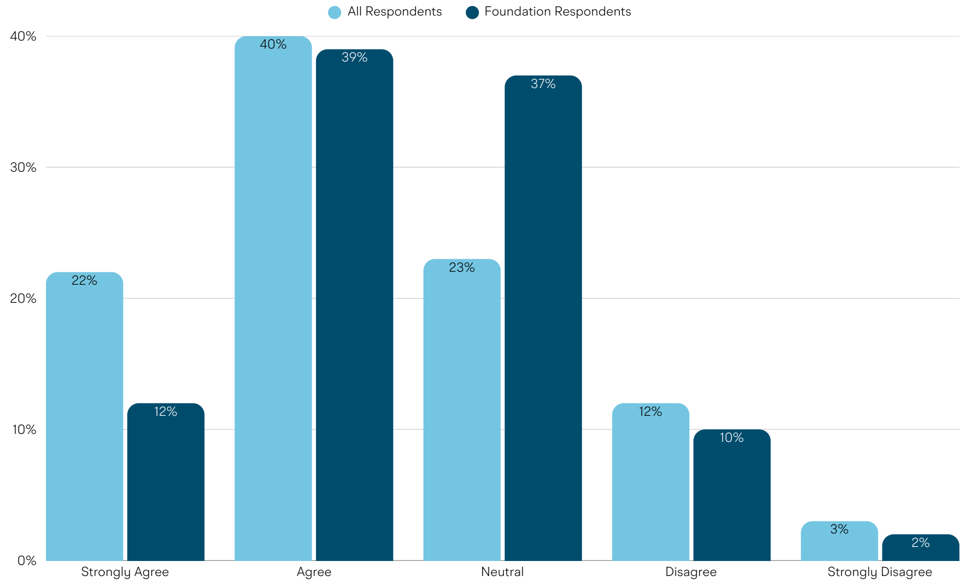
EXPANDING THE PATHWAYS: RETHINKING HOW WE HIRE EARLY-CAREER TALENT

As AI reshapes workflows and automates tasks traditionally given to junior team members, the value of entry-level roles is being questioned across the industry. The Deloitte 2025 Global Human Capital Trends[14] report warned that shrinking entry-level roles will disproportionately affect underrepresented talent, reducing future leadership diversity.

The 2026 data suggests the industry has not yet retreated from early-career hiring. Graduate programs are stronger than they were a year ago, with 64% of Foundation respondents agreeing their organisation has a strong and supportive graduate program, and confidence in AI access at the entry level is high, with 77% of early-career respondents saying they are encouraged to experiment with new tools and technologies. Simultaneously, only 50% of Foundation respondents say they are provided with mentoring, professional development and leadership guidance, 12 percentage points below the 62% recorded across all respondents.

With 50% of Foundation respondents having made a career change into or within tech, over half have arrived via a non-linear path. Access to rotational placements, project-based work, casual contracts, and defined pathways from non-traditional backgrounds would provide the additional learning and encouragement Foundation respondents are seeking.

I am provided opportunities such as mentoring, ongoing professional development and leadership guidance in my current role.*



***Includes respondents from all genders**

CASE STUDY

Employer Support at The Turning Point

Program: Westpac's EmPOWER UP Tech Returnship Program

At Westpac, we're committed to creating more inclusive pathways into technology and supporting women to build long, meaningful careers. Programs like our EmPOWER UP tech returnship help remove barriers for people returning to work, while giving them the confidence, support and opportunity to thrive. It's one of the ways we're turning our commitment to gender equity into practical action, alongside broader investment in flexible work, career mobility, inclusive leadership and development programs such as StepUP, Career Sprints and Illuminate.

KRISTINA BENNETT

Head of Strategy & Business Performance, Technology Group Business Units, Westpac

Since 2024, Westpac's EmPOWER UP program, run by the Technology Diversity Equity and Inclusion team, has created a structured tech 'returnship' initiative designed for people re-entering the workforce after a career break and who have prior technology experience.

EmPOWER UP helps tap into underrepresented talent pipelines, supporting individuals who may be overlooked by traditional recruitment processes. Candidates find out about our program from our website, LinkedIn, and for the first time this year, the Women In Digital jobs noticeboard. We also encourage our employees to refer eligible candidates to the program.

The program focuses on rebuilding confidence, capability and connection by providing tailored support to help participants regain professional confidence while navigating the practical realities of balancing work and life. This includes guidance on flexible working, wellbeing, and managing competing priorities as individuals transition back into a professional environment.

Westpac has also embedded leadership capability development within the program, ensuring leaders are equipped to support their participants with the skills, mindset and support networks needed to succeed over the long term.

This program fills roles within two weeks and attracts high calibre talent. Employees have between 10 to 25 years' of experience; have worked locally and globally; and been employed by major tech names. To date, EmPOWER UP has a 95% retention rate with employees reporting that they feel "very" to "extremely confident" post-program.

To date Westpac's EmPOWER UP has recruited 23 women since inception. EmPOWER UP reflects Westpac's commitment to creating accessible pathways and building a more inclusive and equitable future of work.

95%
retention rate for program participants

23
women recruited into tech roles since the program launched

2 weeks
the program fills roles within this window

THE TURNING POINT

Mid-career professionals, including mid-level and senior-level professionals.

The Turning Point is where cultural and structural barriers intensify, as women navigate growing responsibilities at work and at home. This is where the gap between what an organisation says it values and what it rewards becomes most visible.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **41% of mid-career respondents believe having children would adversely impact their opportunities for leadership, promotions or new responsibilities.**

2. **The pay perception gap widens at mid-career, with 61% of Turning Point respondents saying they receive similar pay rises and financial opportunities as their male colleagues, compared to 75% of men.**

3. **Half of mid-career respondents agree that working part-time would hinder their career progression.**

4. **48% of mid-career female respondents say their leaders encourage open conversations about pay and benefits, compared with 62% of male respondents. The conversations that close the pay gap are being had with one half of the workforce more than the other.**

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

Australia's digital and technology sector has built policies that offer flexibility, parental leave and DEI commitment. The 2026 data tells us that whilst the policies exist, the practical reality is inconsistent. Across our findings, mid-career women report similar capability, similar ambition, and similar access to flexible arrangements as their male peers. What diverges is what those things deliver.

THE FLEXIBILITY PARADOX

Flexible work is now the baseline, with 76% of mid-career respondents saying their workplace offers flexibility that meets their work-life needs, and 76% say there are clear policies allowing flexible or remote work. The 2026 data shows that respondents' work location is varied, with 56% in hybrid arrangements, 31% on-site, and 13% fully remote.

This flexibility has a hidden penalty, with 34% of mid-career respondents agreeing that working remotely or flexibly negatively impacts their chances of being considered for promotions. More than a third of the cohort can see the trade-off, even when they have not made it themselves.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

My workplace says all the right things, and follows that up with almost no action at all, which creates a real tension as it's very confusing to be verbally supported but then see no change being implemented at a senior level.

ANONYMOUS

A colleague returned from mat leave and her work/projects were taken away from her. She now worries she will lose her job. It is off-putting as I am considering children.

ANONYMOUS

Being part-time or remote for childcare means not being available 100%, [which] limits suitability for senior roles.

ANONYMOUS

What this means in practice was captured by one mid-career respondent: "Being part-time or remote for childcare means not being available 100%, [which] limits suitability for senior roles. Unfortunately, I feel it is still the case that a career requires full-time work capacity. I don't see any way around this." The policy permits flexible work, but the progression pathway often rewards full-time presence.

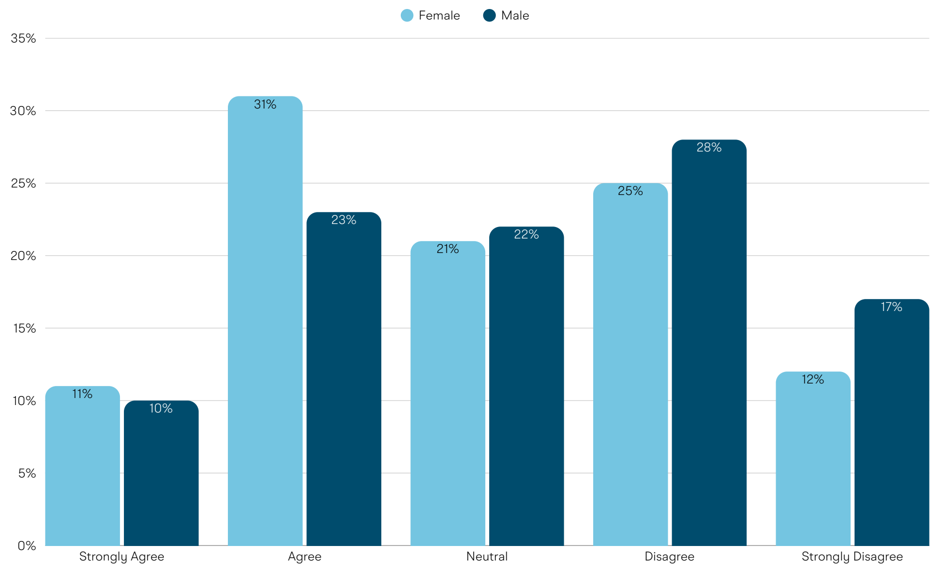
THE PARENTHOOD PENALTY

The most persistent finding in the Turning Point cohort is the perception that having children hurts progression. 41% of mid-career respondents agree that having children has, or would, hinder their career; the figure rises to 42% among women overall, compared with 33% of men. 40% of mid-career respondents believe children would adversely impact their opportunities for leadership, promotion or new responsibilities.

McKinsey's Women in the Workplace[15] research consistently shows that motherhood does not reduce women's career aspirations. What our data suggests is that mid-career women in Australia's tech sector are acutely aware of the career cost of caregiving.

The qualitative responses bring this into sharp focus. One respondent described being removed from a high-profile project because she worked part-time and wouldn't be available for certain meetings. The penalty does not need to be explicit; it is built into how decisions about visibility, project assignment and progression get made.

Having children has, or would, hinder my ability to progress my career.



PAY TRANSPARENCY AND THE GENDERED PERCEPTION GAP

The pay perception gap at mid-career is the most striking finding in this cohort. On every question about pay, men report more favourable conditions than mid-career women. On whether women receive similar pay rises and financial opportunities, 75% of men agree compared with 61% of mid-career women. On understanding how pay decisions are made, 71% versus 61%. On leaders encouraging open pay conversations, 62% versus 48%. On confidence to ask for a pay rise, 69% versus 55%.

Based on our data Men experience pay as a more transparent, navigable system. Mid-career women experience it as opaque, asymmetrical, and difficult to advocate within. The structural context confirms what our cohort is reporting. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency's March 2026 Gender Pay Gap Report found the private sector gender pay gap sits at 21.1%: for every dollar a man earns on average, a woman earns 79 cents, a difference of $28,356 per year.

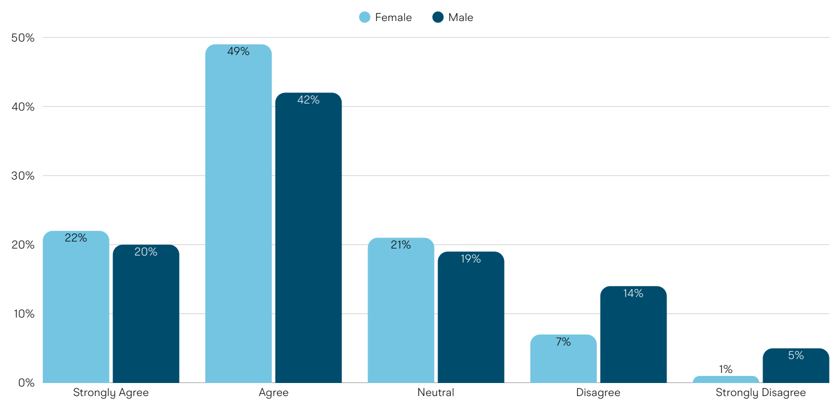
What our 2026 data adds is the experience layer. The pay gap is not just about what people earn; it is about who has the information and conditions to act on it. The qualitative data bring this to life: one respondent described being unable to raise unequal pay because unrealistic targets would be used against her; another reported that simply asking led to a promotion and a 20% increase. The pay system rewards those who know how to advocate within it.

THE PART-TIME TRAP

Part-time work remains essential for many caregivers. It is also, by the data, still a career-limiting choice. 50% of mid-career respondents agree that working part-time would hinder their career progression. Among all women respondents, that sentiment remains the same at 50%, compared with 43% of men.

Mid-career part-time respondents speak of being excluded from high-profile projects, missing the meetings where decisions are made, and being assessed against a full-time benchmark that no part-time worker can meet. One respondent put it this way: "Many employers are offering hybrid working arrangements, but not many offer completely remote working arrangements. Whether it is young children or elder care, remote working arrangements are essential for many women, and some employers and managers feel they have done enough by offering hybrid arrangements." In other words, Part-time and remote work is being framed by employers as concessions. For many employees, this is a condition of staying.

I understand how pay decisions and salary bands are determined in my organisation.



CASE STUDY

Deloitte.

Employer Support at Shaping What Comes Next

Program: Menopause Support

> *By making menopause visible at Deloitte, we have helped reduce the stigma around a life stage that has too often been kept silent. Women are feeling more confident to speak openly, seek support and have conversations with their teams and leaders in a way that feels respectful and understood.*

SUSAN BROWN
Partner, Deloitte Digital

At Deloitte Australia, we are committed to making menopause support visible, practical and accessible. In 2024, Deloitte became the first employer in Australia to achieve Menopause Friendly accreditation, recognising our sustained commitment to supporting women through this life stage.

Our approach brings together practical support, accessible resources and cultural change. A dedicated intranet hub provides menopause guidance, external resources, workplace policies and targeted learning for employees and managers, equipping our people with the knowledge and confidence to respond.

We have also embedded practical workplace adjustments, including access to desk fans and quiet spaces, alongside flexible working arrangements and wellness leave. Confidential support is available through the Partner Employee Assistance Program.

Small-group coaching has also supported more than 100 women navigating perimenopause and menopause at work, providing a safe space to build understanding and develop practical strategies.

We also take a firmwide approach to communication and awareness, helping to normalise conversations about reproductive health and ensuring our people, teams and leaders have the resources and information needed to strengthen access, awareness and support.

1st
employer in Australia with Menopause Friendly accreditation

100+
women supported through small-group coaching

2024
the year accreditation was achieved

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I am the most senior female within the organisation, which means I have no-one else to look up to from that perspective.

ANONYMOUS

Help influence the support male leaders to adopt a sponsorship not mentorship model with women, and acknowledge and understand how 'boys club' practices shape outcomes.

ANONYMOUS

Promotions and career opportunities are still too much driven by who you know, not what you know.

ANONYMOUS

It's always noticed if you have to leave early to pickup kids. Also most networking is done after work at the pub which I can not do because of childcare commitments.

ANONYMOUS

SHAPING WHAT COMES NEXT

Directors, VPs, Executives, and C-suite leaders - those who hold structural power and shape the culture for everyone else.

This section focuses on the people closest to structural power: those in director, VP, executive, and C-suite roles. Their decisions shape the policies, cultures and opportunities that everyone else in the organisation experiences. Shaping What Comes Next asks two questions. What does the view look like from here? And is the leadership pipeline genuinely changing the culture below it?

KEY FINDINGS

1. The view from the top is the most optimistic in the dataset. 72% of Executive and C-suite respondents believe their workplace ensures equal opportunity to progress for men and women, compared with 61% at mid-career and 51% at the Foundation stage. Yet seniority isn't the only divide, gender tells a sharper story: 57% of female respondents agree, against 76% of men.
2. Boys' club perception is now strongest at the entry level, not the top. 39% of Foundation respondents agree an entrenched boys' club exists, compared with 36% at mid-career and 35% at Executive/C-suite level. This is a reversal of the 2025 pattern.
3. 43% of Executive/C-suite respondents have experienced gender bias or discrimination in job interviews, compared with 32% of men. Bias does not fade with seniority.
4. Retention strengthens with seniority overall, but a gap remains at the top. 41% of Executive/C-suite respondents have considered leaving tech (frequently or occasionally), compared with 35% of senior men.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

Across our findings, this cohort reports more favourable workplace conditions than any other. Equal opportunity is more visible to them, pay feels more transparent, the boys' club seems less prevalent and flexibility is more available.

The 2025 report named a perception gap which persists in 2026: at the top, the Executive/C-suite cohort can largely agree on what their organisation is doing well, but they cannot agree on what it still gets wrong, and the gender of the senior person doing the looking changes the picture significantly.

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP: PERCEPTION VS REALITY

Across nearly every measure of workplace culture, the Executive/C-suite cohort reports the highest agreement that the system is working. 72% agree all employees have equal opportunity to progress, compared with 61% at mid-career and 51% at Foundation. 76% agree DEI policies are genuine and not tokenistic, compared with 67% and 64% respectively. 74% feel encouraged to apply for senior positions internally, compared with 51% at mid-career and 46% at Foundation.

Around 10 to 15 percentage points consistently separate the two ends of the career arc. Leaders are more likely to know how the system works, to have benefited from it, and to be responsible for what it produces. Without deliberate effort to integrate the lived experience of mid-career and early-career employees, organisational change efforts may not account for the experience at every level of the company.

One respondent at Director/VP level captured the structural condition behind this gap precisely: she was the most senior woman in her organisation, with no-one above her to look to. Senior women are often making leadership decisions without female peers, with reduced access to informal networks, and carrying the additional burden of representing women's interests while navigating the same systems that excluded those who came before them.

THE BOYS' CLUB INVERSION

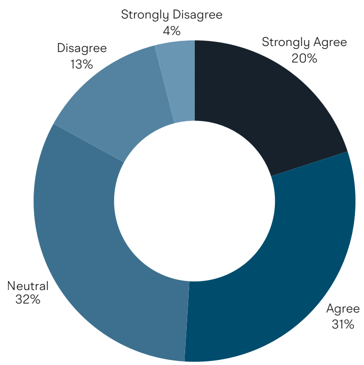
An interesting shift from 2025 to 2026 is how the boys' club is now perceived. In 2025, the research found that perceptions of an entrenched boys' club rose with seniority: 16% at entry level, climbing to 36% at the C-suite. The 2026 data shows the opposite, with 39% of Foundation respondents agreeing a boys' club exists, compared with 36% at mid-career and 35% at senior/executive level. The pattern has inverted.

Several explanations are plausible. Early-career employees may be developing a sharper awareness of workplace culture dynamics than in previous years.

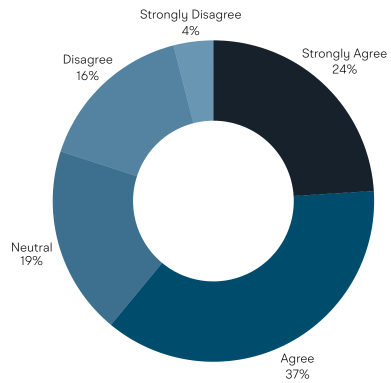
The shift to broader career-stage cohorts, rather than individual seniority levels, may also be shaping how this pattern reads.This finding deserves further research before a final causation conclusion can be drawn. It's a pattern worth watching as we continue to track this data year on year.

Women and men at all levels have an equal opportunity to progress their career within my current workplace.

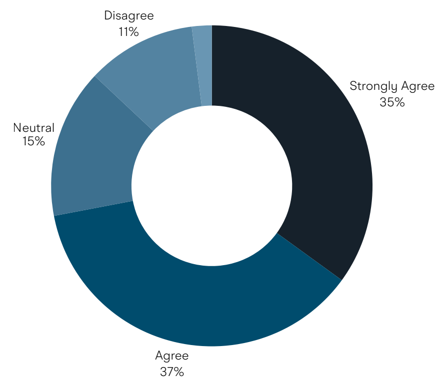
Foundation Respondents



Turning Point Respondents



Shaping What Comes Next Respondents



WHAT LEADERS ARE STILL REACHING FOR

Career aspiration does not plateau at the top. 59% of Executive/C-suite respondents aspire to advance further into leadership roles, the highest rate of any cohort.

What makes their aspirations distinct is not just where they are going but who they intend to bring with them. Mentoring and giving back is cited as a current aspiration by 46% of Executive/C-suite respondents, compared with 34% at senior level and just 20% at Foundation. The women most positioned to mentor the next generation are the ones who most want to do it.

Technical ambition is consistent across the career arc. The aspiration to gain more technical expertise sits between 52% and 54% across all three cohorts, virtually unchanged from Foundation to executive level, showing appetite for continuous learning does not diminish with seniority.

Finally, only 18% of respondents in this cohort want to transition to a different industry. The women who have risen furthest are the most invested in staying.

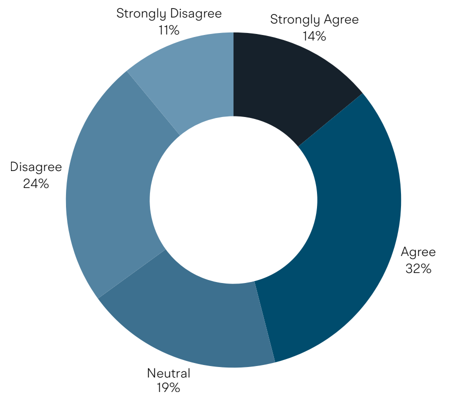
WHAT SENIOR LEADERS WANT TO CHANGE

The qualitative data from the senior and executive cohort show a clear awareness of what needs work and where the levers sit. When asked what they would change about their workplace, senior leaders named four consistent themes.

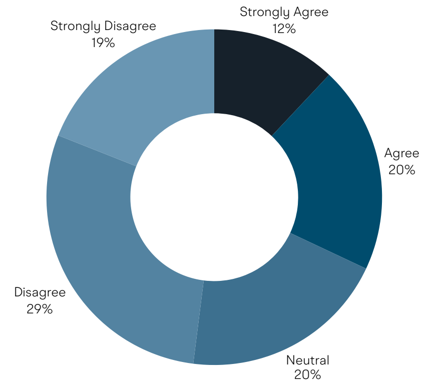
On sponsorship: "Help influence male leaders to adopt a sponsorship, not mentorship model with women." On structural transparency: "Be more deliberate and transparent in the equity and progression processes. Make feedback regular." On part-time viability at senior level: "The view that you cannot lead in a part-time role from the current management is wrong. Allowing and encouraging parents to work part-time without judgement, and where possible, financially supporting them to make part-time wages livable." On the cultural work that sits with male leaders: "Men go and learn about this, not just read certain headlines and go yeh it's a known thing. It's more about what they can do to show up in their everyday interactions."

The senior cohort is not asking for awareness. They are asking for the specific structural and cultural changes that they themselves are positioned to authorise.

Female Respondents - I've experienced gender bias and/or discrimination in job interviews.



Male Respondents - I've experienced gender bias and/or discrimination in job interviews.



WHERE POLICY COULD GO NEXT

Policy sets the conditions for change, but it doesn't guarantee it.

Across this report, we've seen a consistent gap between what's written into workplace policy and what people actually experience day to day. Government holds real levers here - gender equality reporting, procurement standards, childcare infrastructure, and how AI is regulated in the workplace - that shape the environment every employer and employee operates within.

The ideas below aren't formal recommendations in the way we've framed them for employers and individuals; they're provocations for policymakers to weigh up as this work continues, grounded in what the 2026 data is telling us.

1. Recognise and reward progress on gender equality targets

WGEA's Gender Equality Targets Scheme[16] requires employers with 500+ staff to meet three measurable equality targets over three years - and it's working in places worth celebrating. Organisations with 51–500 employees show 72% parental leave equity, ahead of larger organisations at 66%. There's an opportunity to build on this by creating visible incentives for genuine progress, making targets something organisations want to meet, not just report on.

2. Build on childcare reform momentum to close the access gap

The Australian Government's 2026 Three Day Guarantee - replacing the activity test with universal access to three days' subsidised early childhood education and care - and the $1 billion Building Early Education Fund are real steps toward treating childcare as economic infrastructure. Yet only 45% of respondents say they have access to childcare that supports their work. The Productivity Commission's 2024[17] inquiry has recommended availability outside standard hours; weaving childcare access into WGEA reporting could make the link to career progression more visible.

3. Extend the momentum on gender equity in government procurement

The Workplace Gender Equality Amendment Act 2025[18] ties WGEA compliance to government procurement eligibility, and the Office for Women's April 2026 review of the WGEA Procurement Principles builds on the precedent set by the Indigenous Procurement Policy.[19] As one of the country's largest technology buyers, government procurement sends a direct commercial signal, extending disclosure to representation data, pay gap reporting on tech contracts, and annual sector-level compliance data would make the link between public spending and industry progress visible.

4. Track and report on AI training by gender

Australia's National AI Plan[20] and the APS AI Plan 2025[21] both name gender as a specific consideration in workplace AI design, and with 77% of respondents saying their workplace encourages AI experimentation, the access baseline is encouraging. There's value in measuring gender-disaggregated AI training access across Commonwealth agencies, encouraging large employers to do the same, and establishing formal consultation to keep diverse representation embedded in AI-driven workplace change.

CONCLUSION

At Women in Digital, our mission is to build a workforce that's inclusive, skilled and ready for the future. Digital has stopped being a separate sector, it's the operating system for every industry now, and everyone is already working in digital, whether they realise it or not. This report sets out what employers, individuals and policymakers can do to close the gaps that remain.

This year's data shows genuine progress, and a caution. Career confidence is climbing and the pay perception gap has more than halved, yet it's our earliest-career respondents naming an entrenched boys' club most, a reversal from 2025. The cultural work happening at the top hasn't yet reached the people just arriving, and policy and culture aren't the same thing. Closing that gap is the work ahead.

Our vision remains a connected world where everyone can shape, contribute to, and succeed through technology and digital innovation, building the skills and confidence that let people of every background access opportunity, see a future, and lead with impact. It's why we hold tight to our values:

- You can't be what you can't see
- 1% better every day
- Lead with lasting impact
- Representation matters

To the leaders reading this: you have a powerful opportunity to shape the future of an industry that now touches every industry. We hope this report gives you the evidence for the conversations that are overdue, and the ones that lead to real change.

Note: The data presented in this 2026 Annual Report was collected from our community in Australia through comprehensive surveys. These surveys included a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions, enabling us to gather both measurable data and detailed feedback, providing a well-rounded understanding of the insights and experiences of the digital and technology industry.

BECOME PART OF THE CHANGE

Women in Digital memberships are open to every diversity champion and organisation working across Australia's digital and technology sector.

FOR INDIVIDUALS
Join a community of professionals and allies building genuine connections and real momentum for a more inclusive industry.

FOR ORGANISATIONS
Partner with us to advance your diversity goals, create equal opportunity across your team, and build a stronger, more inclusive employer brand.

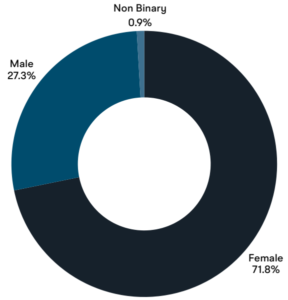
Learn more about membership

APPENDIX

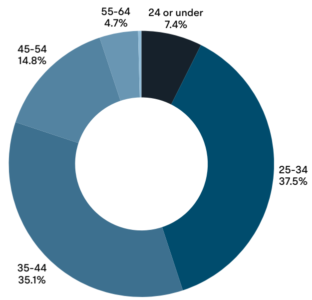
The following graphs present the full demographic data of the respondents, collected through the 2026 Women in Digital Annual Report survey. These visual insights offer a deeper look at those who are working within the digital and technology industry.

Access Full Dataset

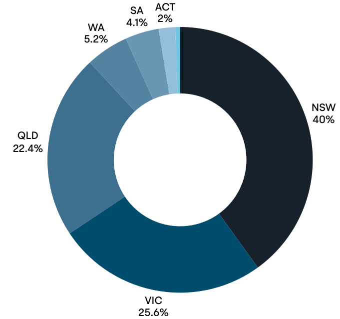
What is your gender identity?



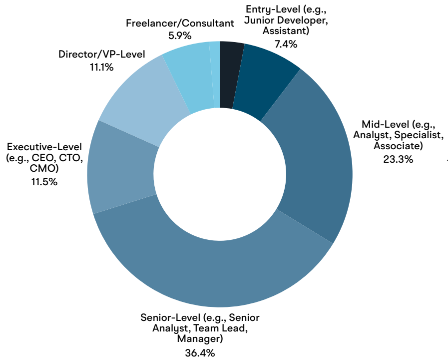
What is your age bracket?



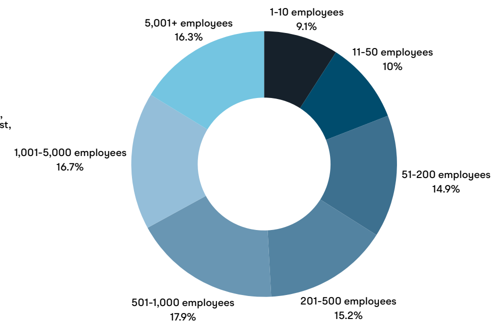
Which state or territory are you based in?



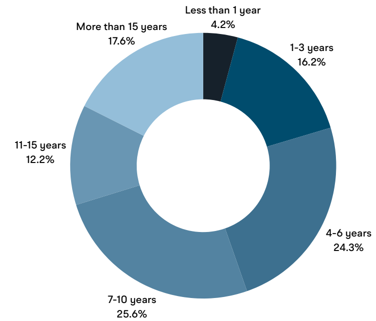
What is your current role or level in your organisation?



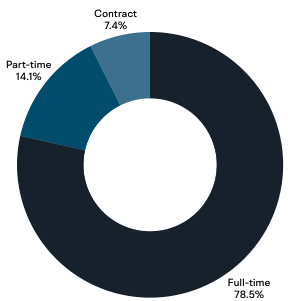
What is the size of your organisation?



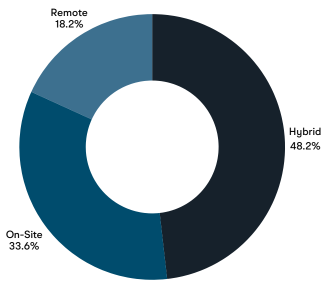
How many years have you worked in the digital/technology sector?



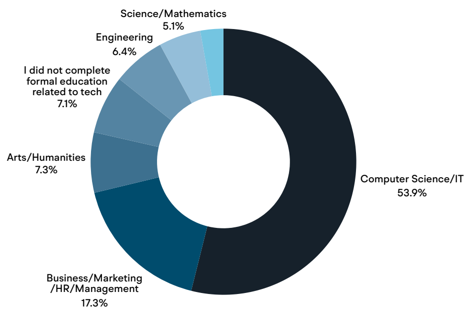
What is your primary work arrangement?



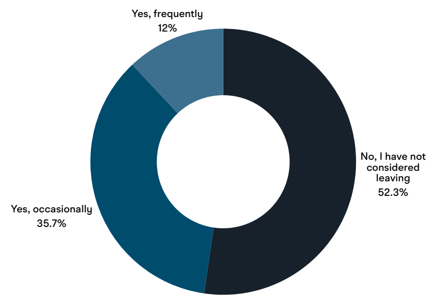
Describe your working from home environment



What was your field of study before entering the tech industry?



Have you ever considered leaving the tech industry?



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21. AI Plan for the Australian Public Service 2025

WOMEN IN DIGITAL

Women in Digital is passionate about creating a connected world where everyone can shape, contribute to, and succeed through technology and digital innovation.

To discuss the Annual Report findings, or to learn more about Women in Digital, reach out to our team.

CONTACT US

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CONNECT EDUCATE EMPOWER