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Driving Ambition of Women in the IT Sector



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“ What we need is to encourage women to choose a career in IT and not believe the hype that it’s not a place for women – because it is. ”

Debra Lilley

UKOUG Member Advocate & Board Director

Evolution and UKOUG conducted a survey amongst IT professionals to examine their motivations and experiences. The survey also provided key insights to thoughts on the issues of diversity in the sector.

The findings generally support the documented and debated issues around gender inequalities. But there was another theme playing out alongside this.

The majority of women working in the sector are positive about their ability to progress. The headline finding supporting this? Over half of women surveyed believed that they will work in a more senior role within the next 5 years.

This ambitious outlook is against a backdrop of lower wages for women working in IT. The level of pay for female IT specialists is 19% lower than that of men¹. The representation of Women working across all levels of the sector is also poor.

The proportion of women that foresee career progression is actually higher than the share of men. In fact, a greater percentage of men felt that they faced a lack of career prospects.

With research and the experiences of women in IT suggesting more needs doing to encourage diversity, what is driving the ambition amongst women in the sector?

1. Source: e-skills UK analysis of data from the ONS Labour Force Survey, cited in Women in IT Scorecard Report

The Route into IT

There are two striking observations when looking at young women studying IT related subjects.

First, they are under-represented and account for only 29% of Computing/ICT A-level.²

Second, they outperform their male classmates as more achieve A* or A grade.³

Exam results alone indicate the IT industry would benefit from attracting more women to study IT at a young age. This in turn should increase the number of women interested in following a career in IT.

However, women were less likely to have considered IT as a career during secondary education but developed their interest in higher education. Female respondents to the survey were less likely to show an aptitude for IT in early life - 56% compared to 67% of men. 'Falling' into IT was also cited by more women than men as a route into the sector.

The biggest three drivers for men and women choosing a career in IT are the same. A genuine interest in the sector, the prospect of a well-paid job and an aptitude for the subject.

A higher proportion of women, 76%, cite a good salary as a factor for choosing to go into IT, compared to 68% of men. Their academic results alone suggest the potential to earn higher salaries.

Denise McDonough, director of IT⁴ at the Home Office, has recognised that more women need to make a move into IT through choice. Changes need making so a career in the sector becomes a viable option for women.

McDonough's own path into IT was 'not by design' but by 'happenstance'. With female interest in IT careers developing later, this reaffirms the need for earlier awareness.

One method to do this is to promote positive female role models from within the sector.

2. Source: e-skills UK analysis of data from the Joint Council for Qualifications, 2013, cited in Women IT Scorecard Report

3. 21.2% of females sitting A-level Computing achieve an A* or A, compared to 15.4% of males. 16.3% of females studying ICT at A level achieve an A* or A grade, compared to 10.3% of males

4. [Computer Weekly July 2012](#)



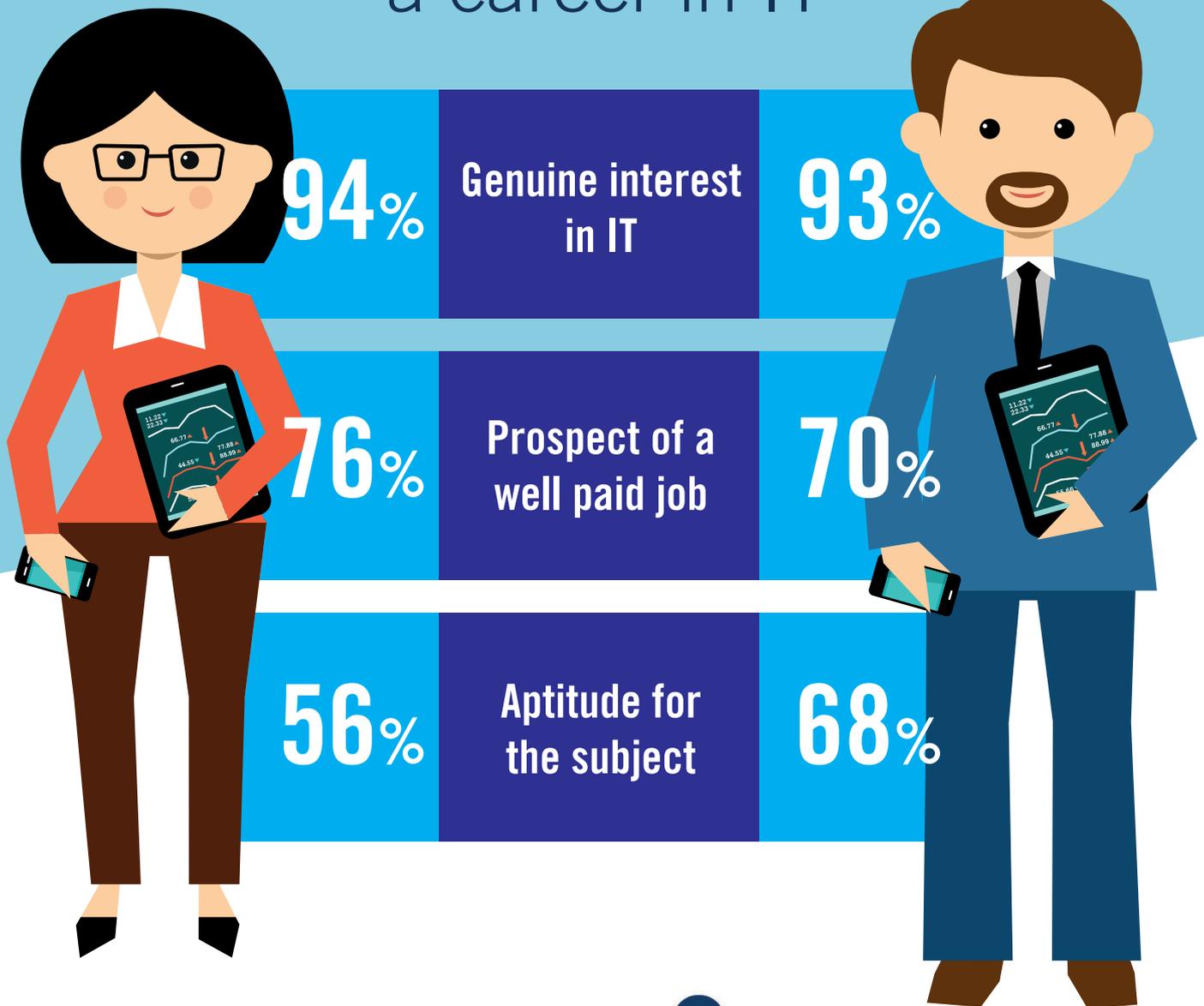
“Careers advice needs to get much better and be in place way before A-level stage. Girls aren’t given enough options and information. There needs to be better exposure to what computer sciences mean in terms of jobs – it’s not just about Minecraft. I have a daughter and IT was never mentioned as a career option – none of the girls in her year studied ICT. There is a push to encourage girls into sciences and maths, but not IT.

We are behind the curve in that respect. ”

Debra Lilley

UKOUG Member Advocate & Board Director

Top 3 reasons for choosing a career in IT



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The Working Reality

Women get paid less than men in IT. They are also less likely to be in 'professional' roles when compared to men. This is the current reality.

If women 'knew then what they now know', the lack of diversity would discourage entry to IT for a third of them. This is a staggering statistic.

65% of women surveyed felt that their salary was low when compared to that of their peers. Only 50% of men agreed with this. 15% of male respondents also stated that they were earning more than they would have expected.

The survey findings on salary levels support those documented by the ONS. More than half of female respondents had earnings of under £30k per annum, compared to a third of men.

There is little disparity between men and women in the £70k+ per annum salary brackets. This echoes the 2013 ONS data that 20% of female IT specialists work at management or director level.

Women are progressing to senior levels in equal proportions to men but from a smaller base of workers.

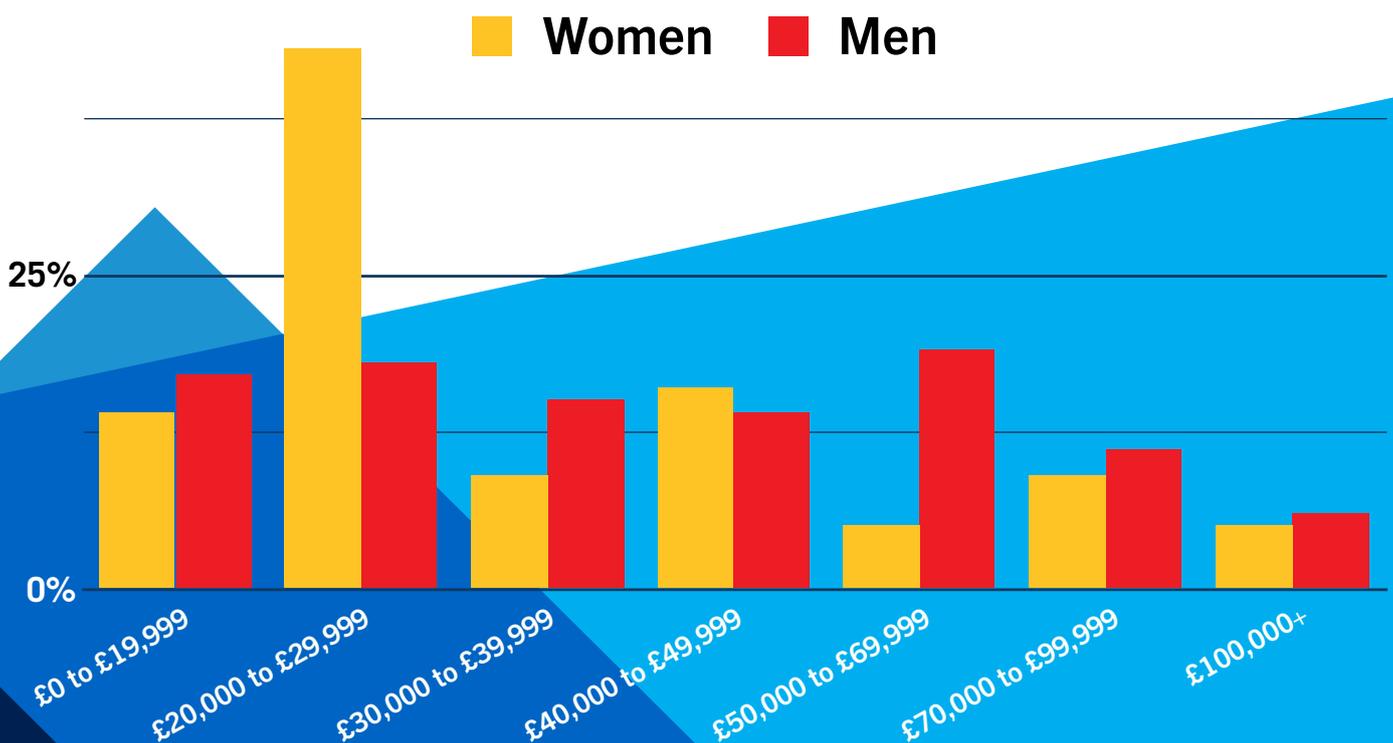
"I do think that men in the IT industry get paid more [than women]. It makes me more driven to work hard and prove that I can do it better."

"I am the only female in the IT team. In the UK, I have always been the only woman in the IT departments that I have worked in."

What is your current salary?

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50%



Upwardly Mobile

Over half of the women surveyed (56%) said they expect to be in a more senior position in five years. This included roles at their current employer or working for someone else.

This is a high and encouraging figure and is greater than the share of men (43%) who felt the same way. More women seem to feel positive about their career prospects compared to men. Less than a quarter feel that there is a lack of opportunity, compared to around 30% of men.

Women in IT seem to be more willing to move between roles and companies. Over 60% of women surveyed have worked for their current employer for one year or less. Men are more likely to have longer tenures – 20% had been with their current employer for 4+ years. This is compared to 12% of women.

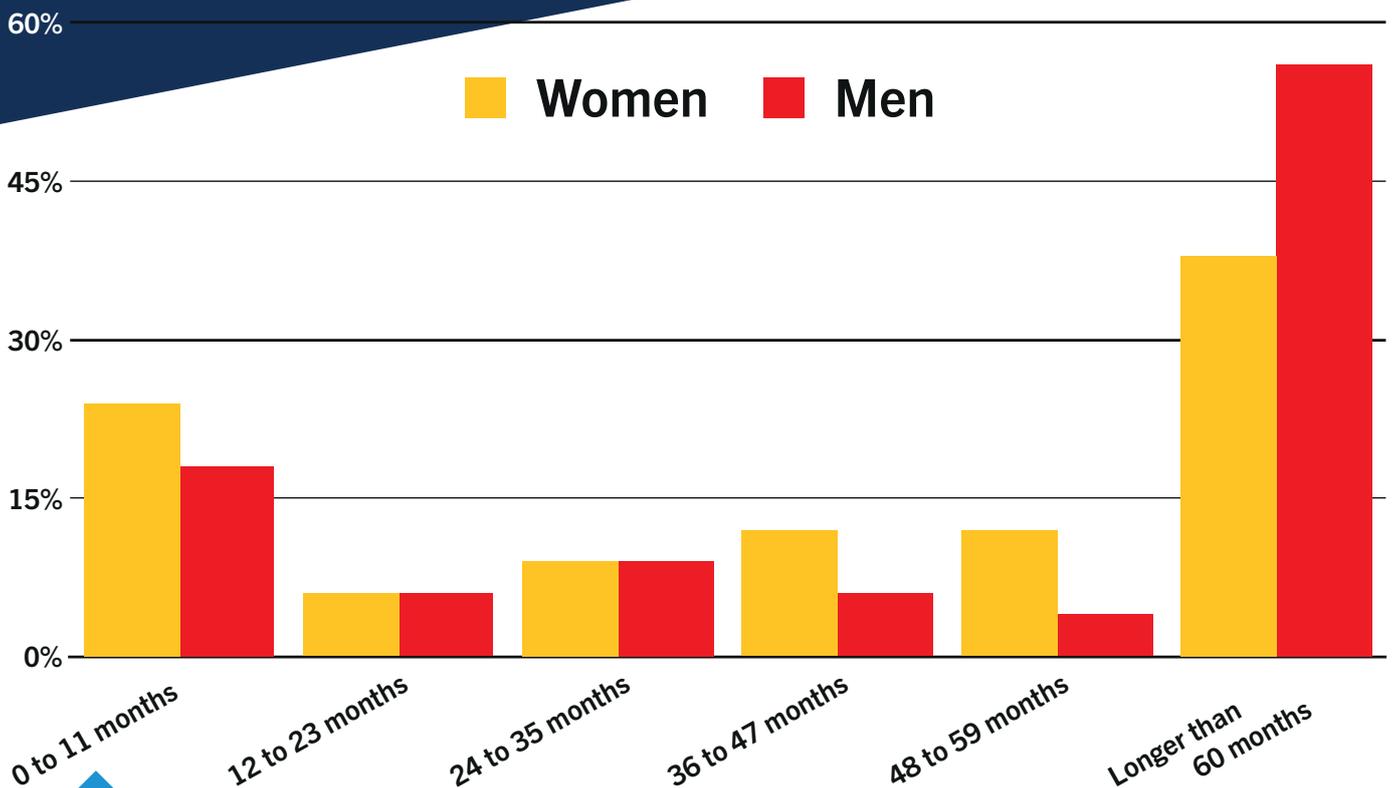
There is a similar trend with roles, almost 60% of men have been in the same role for 5 years or more. 60% of women had been in the same role for under 5 years. This suggests that they were more likely to move if they felt that they lacked career prospects.

Almost a third of men felt that they faced a lack of career prospects, compared to 24% of women surveyed. There is no difference between how valued men and women working in the sector feel. Around 70% of both genders feeling appreciated.

Is the positive outlook of women in IT linked with their willingness to move jobs and employers? There is a bigger risk of losing talented women if progression and reward is not on offer.

Years of Service

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Maintaining the Momentum

There are initiatives in place at all levels to encourage women into IT careers. But these initiatives must battle the undermining of women's abilities within the IT sector.

The 'Barbie: I can be a Computer Engineer' book required Barbie to get the help of two male friends. Barbie could only 'come up with the ideas' and not actually code a programme⁵. This was a recent publication - published in November 2014.

It is still early days for many of these initiatives. Will they be successful in changing the education and career choices of women? To do so they must combat the gender conditioning of 'male' and 'female' roles.

What can we do to support the 180,000+ women working as IT specialists in the UK now? How can we enable them to become the future norm?

Employer 'Women in IT' programmes can help, but almost a third of women don't know if their company has one. Many such programmes are aimed at the grass roots level of encouraging entrants. They must also support women along the career path.

The longer term fostering of career progression still seems to fall to the individual. They must negotiate the more complex landscape of discrimination and equality alone.

5. [The Guardian, November 2014](#)

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“ I think that some men have better professional networks – when there is a vacancy, or opportunity they think of people who they network with and will put them forward. This is why we need to better support women by creating those professional networks. The Oracle User Group wants to help to create that network – we share stories, best practice and offer help and guidance with some of the practicalities. If women have a good support network of other women or colleagues then they are more likely to be able to take the next step. We need more than just mentoring programmes – it needs to be bigger than that. ”

Debra Lilley

UKOUG Member Advocate & Board Director

ONS workforce data⁶ demonstrates that only 31% of female IT specialists work in the IT sector. This is in comparison to 45% of male IT professionals.

Women with IT skills might work in other sectors because of the approach to diversity. Are approaches geared to fair and transparent workplaces attracting IT skills away from IT?

A female respondent described IT as still having 'the same issues that existed 30 years ago'. It is no wonder that women in the sector feel their career advancement is a matter that falls to them to cultivate.

The trend of 'job-hopping' is an indicator that women understand this. They will look for opportunities rather than wait to be recognised in their current role. This poses a real threat to businesses who risk losing talented and ambitious employees.

There are steps that employers can take that would go some way to addressing this. Ensuring that there is a fair and transparent pay scheme. Championing women within the business. Offering mentoring to junior members of staff. And encouraging role models to undertake educational outreach. But these are only a starting point.

6. Source: e-skills UK analysis of data from the ONS Labour Force Survey, cited in Women in IT Scorecard Report

"I left my previous employer because I knew that I wasn't paid enough and because my male colleagues got all of the challenging projects".





“ I’m impressed that women do see that there is opportunity and that they can progress either by staying, or by moving to find better career prospects.”

Debra Lilley

UKOUG Member Advocate & Board Director



Driving Ambition

Women studying and entering IT are well qualified, ambitious and interested in their career.

This appetite for progression endures despite disparities in pay and under-representation of their gender.

Government and industry initiatives that encourage more women into the STEM related sectors are positive. There is also a need to nurture the progression of female workers once working in IT.

This will encourage more women to plan longer careers with their existing employers. A positive impact for both parties. From a sector perspective it will create a more diverse and skilled workforce. This will then attract increased numbers of women into the field.

Championing women at all levels of IT will challenge the norm that the IT sector is a 'male' domain. Promoting the presence and success of women in the sector will inspire young girls. Encouraging their interest is crucial for the future.

As a sector we must match the ambition of females in IT. Creating opportunity and fairness across the board to assist them. It looks like women are not going to be held back, and there is everything to gain from their progression.

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