

Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report 2025

Version 1.0 April 2026



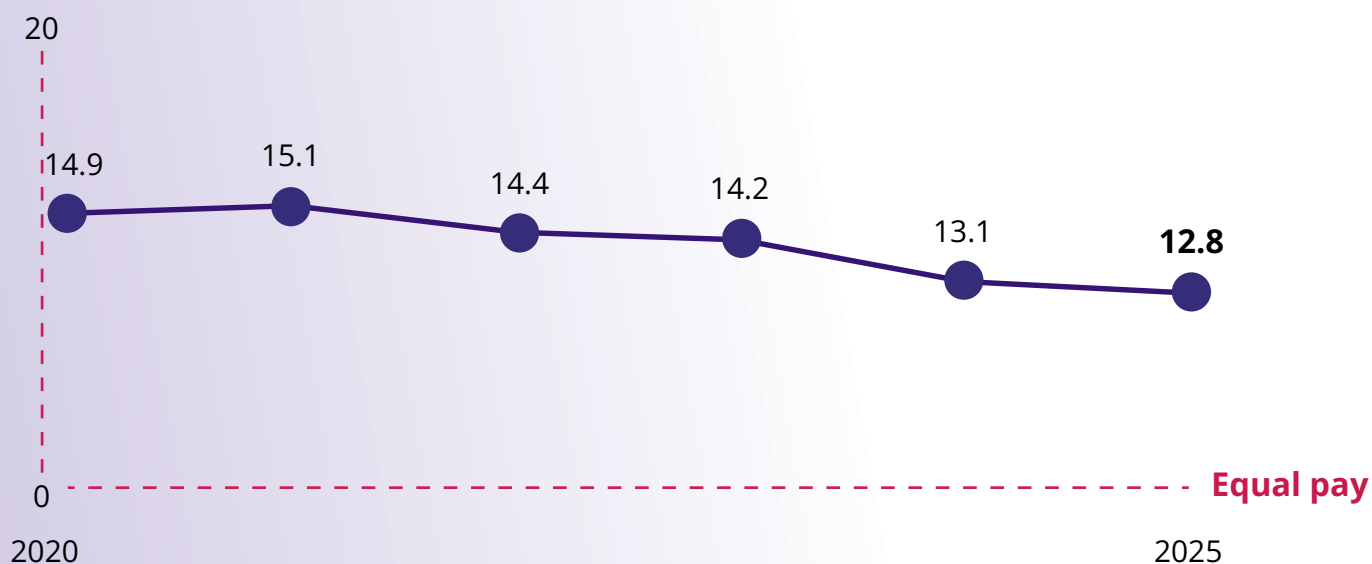
Executive Summary

At AQA we continue to demonstrate our commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace where all colleagues can thrive as their authentic selves. Last year we developed an extensive and ambitious Diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategy which sought to help our people to reach their potential by building a culture of inclusion, trust and authenticity whilst ensuring that our workforce better reflects the diversity of the working population.

Our Diversity and Inclusion strategy

In 2025, pay inequality remains a persistent issue across the UK labour market, with national benchmarks showing only incremental improvements. According to the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) data released in October 2025, **the median UK gender pay gap stands at 12.8%**, down slightly from 13.1% in 2024. This figure reflects the difference in median hourly earnings (excluding overtime) between men and women across all roles. [ons.gov.uk]

Gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime), UK, April 2020 to April 2025



Ethnicity pay gap reporting, though not yet mandatory across the UK, continues to grow as an important indicator of workforce equity.

AQA's own results, set out in this report, should be interpreted in this wider UK context. While the national picture shows slow progress, it reinforces the importance of targeted, evidence-based action to reduce structural inequalities in access to progression, reward, and representation.

This report presents our 2025 Gender and Ethnicity pay gap figures, comparing them with previous year's data and outlining our ongoing initiatives to address these disparities. Whilst we acknowledge there is still plenty of work to be done, we are optimistic that our organisational D&I strategy is beginning to have a positive

impact on both our culture of inclusion and our representation across all levels of the organisation.

About us:

Since 1903, AQA has been designing fair and inclusive assessments. In 2025, 1.1 million students sat 3.6 million AQA GCSE, AS and A-level exams. These contained around 10,000 questions on 106 different subjects.

But AQA is more than an exam board. As an independent education

charity, AQA reinvests all income into research, innovation and growth that improve assessment worldwide.

From funding cutting-edge studies to supporting best practice in education, AQA is committed to making assessment fairer and more impactful for teaching, learning and society.

We believe in transparency and accountability when addressing pay disparities. Our policies and practices aim to promote fairness across all levels of the organisation. It is important to distinguish between a pay gap and equal pay –while equal pay ensures individuals performing the same work receive equal compensation, a pay gap reflects broader disparities in representation and progression within an organisation.

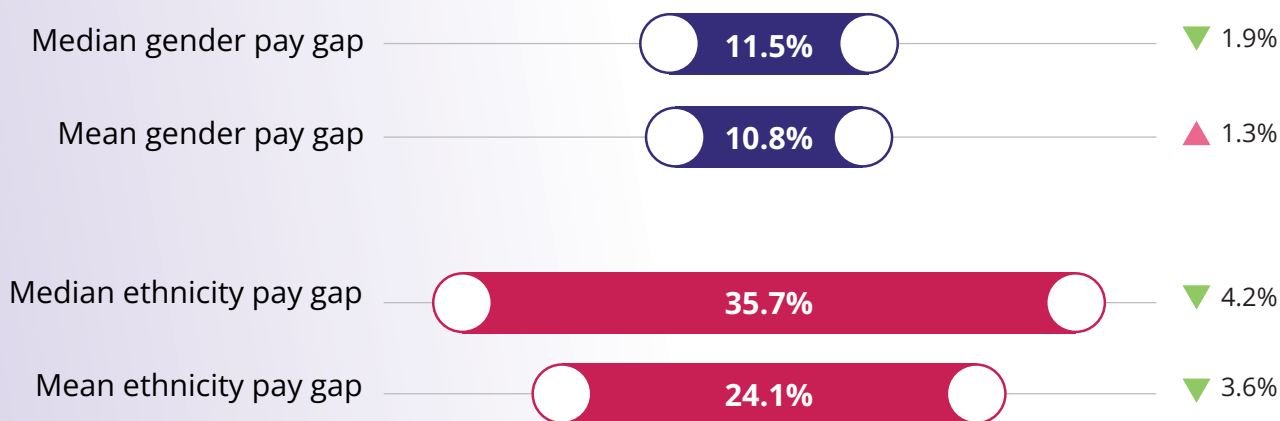
This report outlines:

- AQA's current gender and ethnicity pay gap figures.
- Contributing factors to these gaps, including representation in senior roles and changes in hiring activity.
- Actions being implemented to reduce disparities and create opportunities for all colleagues to thrive, regardless of their background.

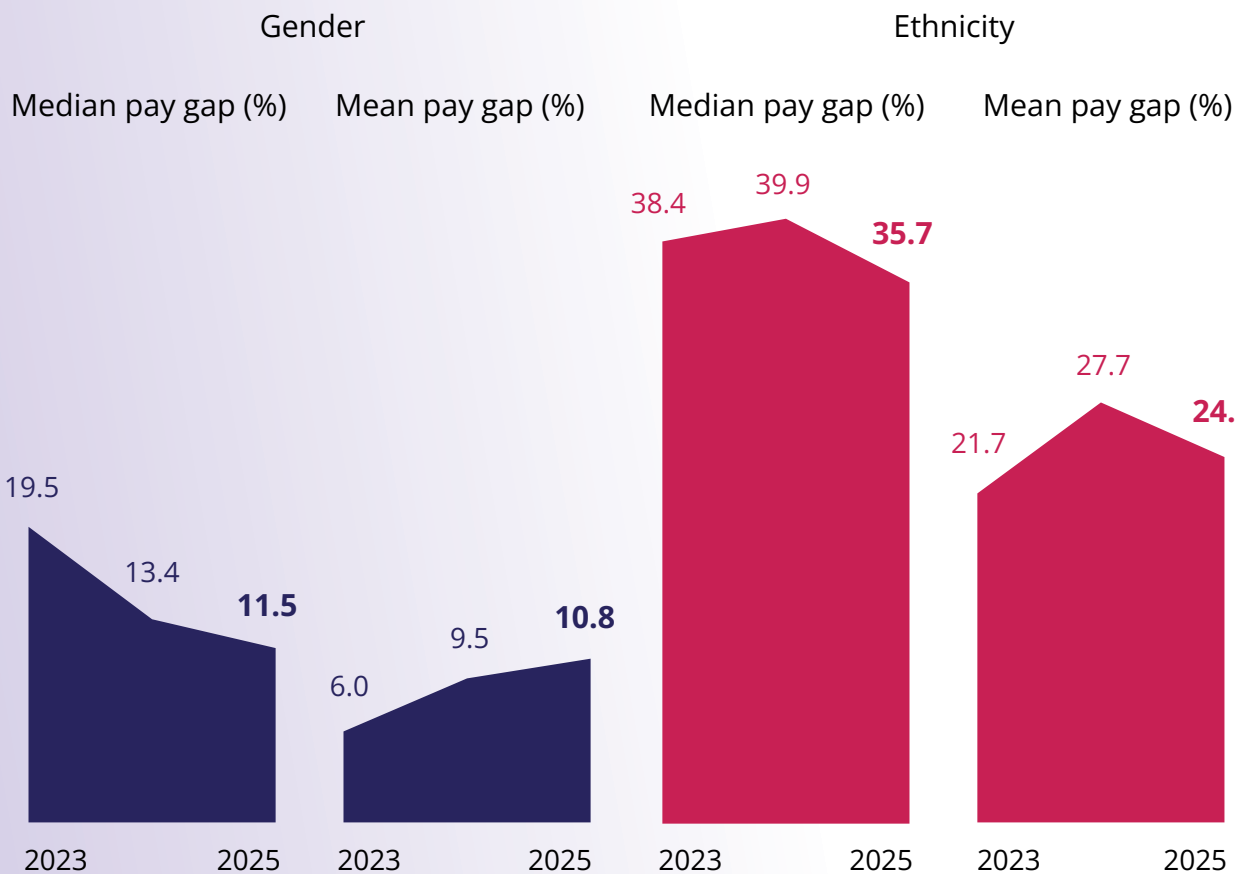


Pay gap 2024/2025

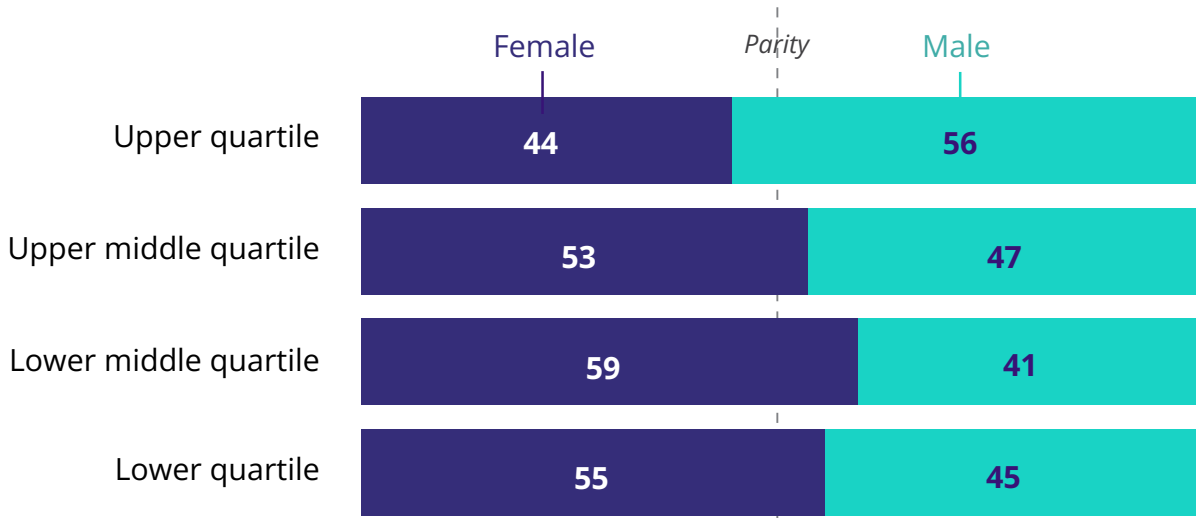
Change since 2024



Pay gap progress



AQA staff composition (%)



AQA staff composition (%)



Methodology

Employee level data is collected at the snapshot date (5th April), and hourly rates are calculated using ordinary pay and contracted weekly hours. Pay elements are reviewed and categorised in line with statutory guidance to ensure only ordinary pay is included in hourly pay calculations. Eligibility rules are applied so that only employees receiving full ordinary pay during the pay period are included. Any necessary exclusions such as new starters after the payroll cutoff, leavers, or individuals on unpaid or reduced-pay leave are recorded for audit purposes. The pay gap calculation includes both full and part-time employees.

Once the eligible population is established, hourly pay figures are used to calculate the mean and median hourly rates for men and women. The pay gap is expressed as the percentage difference between these values. Equivalent processes are followed for bonus calculations and for determining the distribution of men and women across pay quartiles. All data validation steps and assumptions are documented to ensure accuracy, transparency, and compliance with pay gap reporting requirements.

Understanding our pay gap data

Gender representation and its impact

Across the 12-month period between the previous Gender Pay Gap Report and this reporting cycle, the proportion of women in the mid-level pay grades and above increased consistently where previously this has been an area where female representation has been lower. Each month saw a net rise in the number of women at these levels, reflecting both ongoing recruitment activity and the fact that any leavers were more than offset by new female hires.

Between May 2024 and April 2025, we appointed 68 women in our mid-level pay grades and above. The month-to-month increases were modest, but the upward trajectory remained throughout the year. This consistency points to a meaningful shift in our hiring practices, supported by stronger scrutiny of shortlists and more intentional considerations during recruitment decisions. We increased our focus on the diversity of our candidate-pool and revisited shortlists which had limited representation, to ensure a more equitable and inclusive selection process at the higher level pay grades given that the data indicated this was an area to target.

Overall headcount has increased for both men and women, with the number of women rising by 62 and the number of men by 42. The most notable shift is at the start of the more senior level pay grades, where the average monthly headcount indicates a reduction in men and a corresponding increase in women. While the precise figures reflect averaged monthly data, the direction of travel at this level is consistent and positive. The number of women in more senior level roles increased by 46 compared with an increase of 33 men, demonstrating steady gains in female representation at higher organisational tiers.



Overall headcount increase (2024-5)



Senior level headcount increase (2024-5)



These figures are based on AQA's worker data, comparing average monthly headcounts between 1 April 2024 and 1 May 2025. This method provides a reliable month-on-month view of workforce composition and minimises seasonal or short-term fluctuations. The data is therefore a strong indicator of sustained movement rather than isolated variance.

At the uppermost senior levels, movement remains limited. There has been no significant change in the number of women at the most senior level, which aligns with expectations given the low turnover in senior leadership roles. Within the more senior level pay grades we have seen a reduction in the number of women, which

will require continued monitoring and further scrutiny to understand underlying drivers.

Our gender and ethnicity pay gaps exist primarily due to insufficient representation of women and ethnic minority colleagues at the most senior levels. While we maintain equal pay for equal work, these gaps reflect some imbalances in leadership opportunities. We have begun to address this disparity through the development of a comprehensive D&I strategy that is designed to encourage an 'inclusion-first' mindset across the organisation, focusing on the key transition points of the colleague cycle from attraction through to progression.

Part-time work and its impact on the pay gap

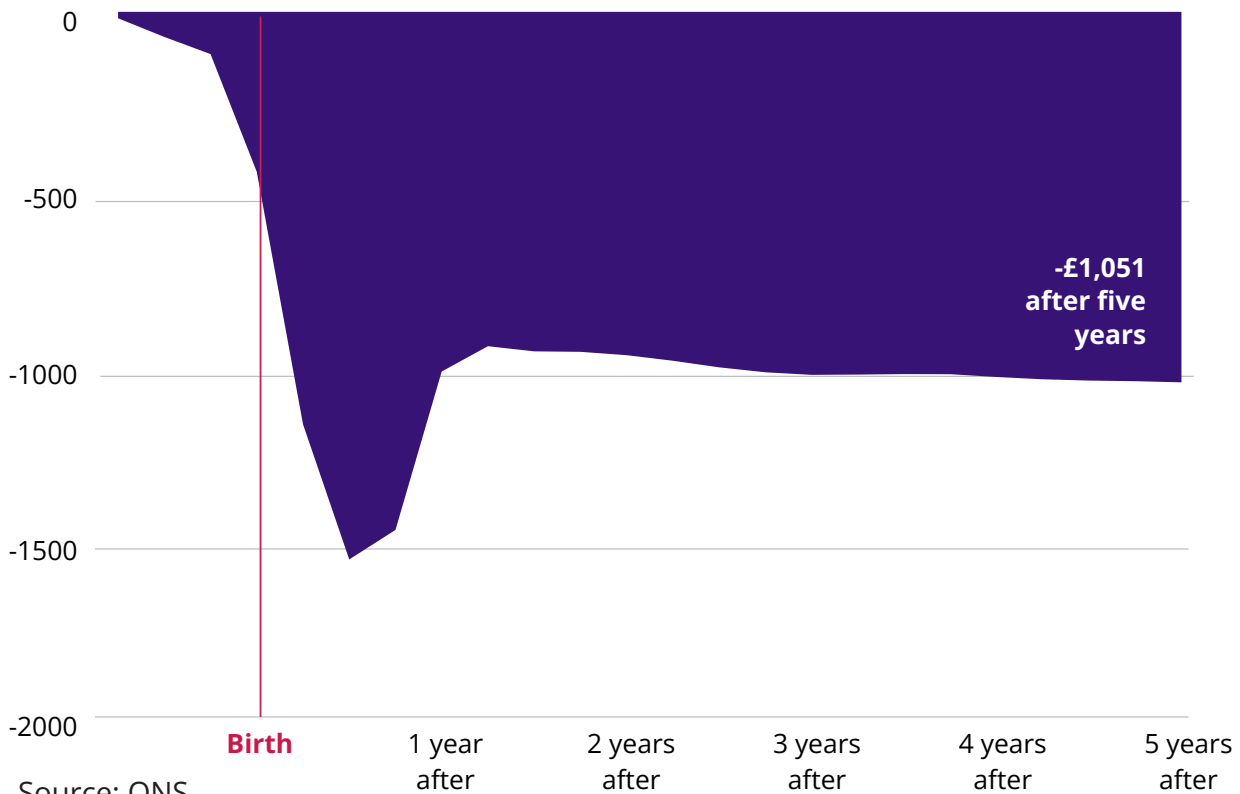
The distribution of part time work at AQA highlights a significant gender imbalance: 92 women work part time compared with only 12 men. This disparity is particularly visible in our lower pay quartiles, where 27 women in the lower pay grades are part-time compared with just three men, and this volume difference can directly influence median pay gap outcomes.

Part-time workers in AQA, 2025



National evidence also shows that part-time working is closely linked with the wider “motherhood penalty”; ONS analysis (2025) found that five years after having their first child, mothers’ monthly earnings were on average 42% (£1,051) lower than before childbirth.

Effect of having a child on a mother's monthly earnings (£), estimated



Source: ONS

In addition, research cited by Personnel Today notes that women's working hours typically reduce after having children, with the Institute for Fiscal Studies reporting a 90% employment rate for women without children, compared with 75% for women with children – demonstrating the structural factors that underpin gendered patterns in part-time work and pay – this is something we are committed to reviewing this year.

Ethnicity representation patterns

Colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately represented in the lower grades across all business areas. While external hiring and

internal promotion rates into higher grades are lower for ethnic minority colleagues compared with those from White British backgrounds, this pattern is influenced by a net effect of both hiring and leaving behaviour.

Our initial analysis also shows that application rates for internal promotions are lower among ethnic minority colleagues than among their White counterparts. Further work is underway to understand both the application and success rates for external ethnic minority candidates, and dashboards have been developed to help our recruitment teams monitor the diversity of shortlists and work towards more balanced representation in candidate pipelines.

Progress since our last report

D&I strategy delivery

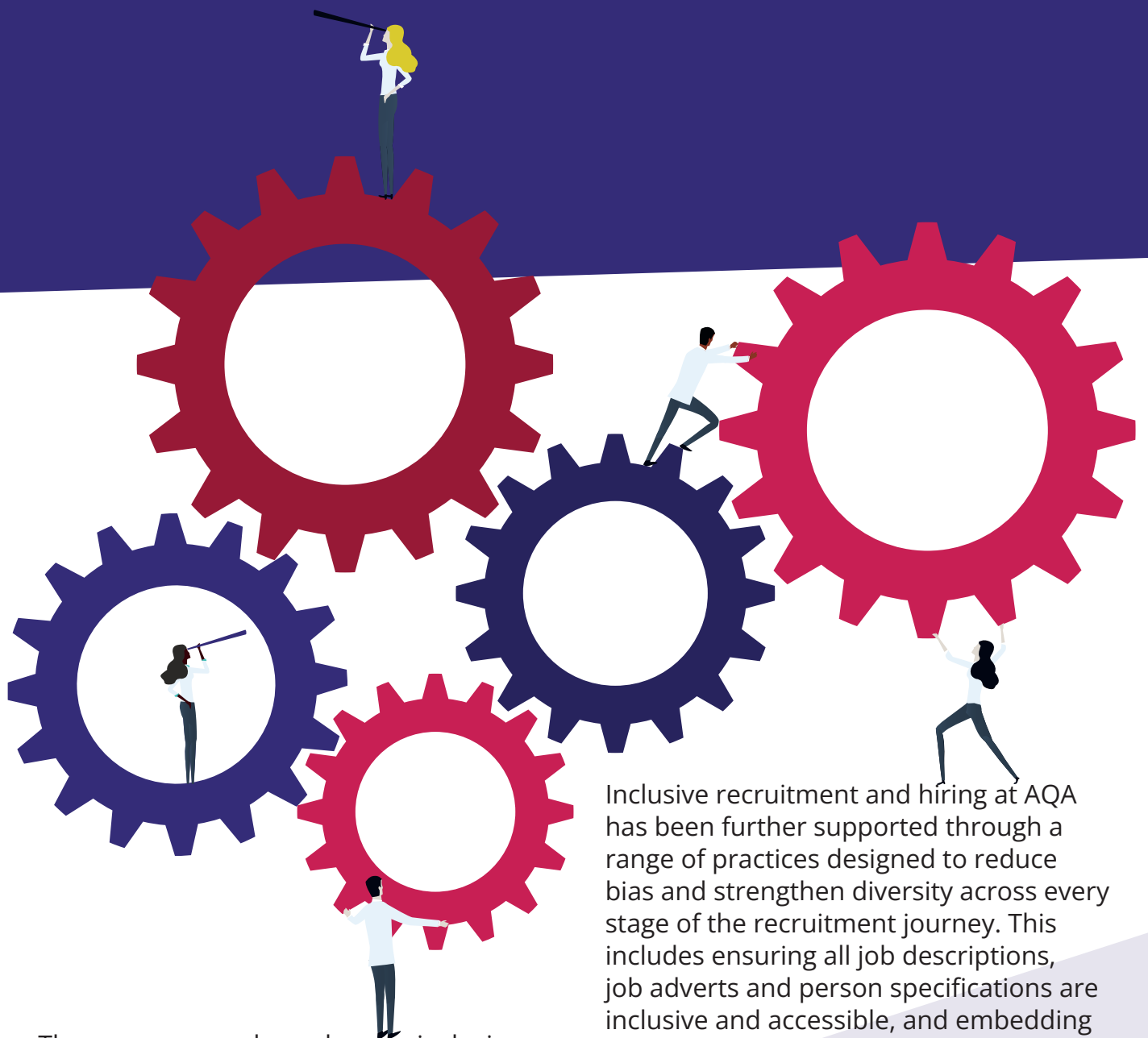
Almost all twelve workstreams spanning the entire colleague cycle are now in delivery, with strong engagement from colleague networks, senior leaders, and business areas. Strategy development has taken an inclusion-first and intersectional approach, ensuring we seek to understand both the lived experience and demographic makeup of our workforce –including leadership. We know that change takes time and embedding an inclusion first mindset amongst the business requires leadership to understand the scale of the challenge while being equipped with tools to build good practice which is why we will continue to introduce further learning and education programmes into the business in order to provide ongoing support to our colleagues.

Inclusive processes

This year has seen stronger collaboration with our People Partner teams, Recruitment, Learning and Development, and Workplace teams to embed inclusive practices into policies, communications, and systems for all colleagues. An example of this is AQA's new Hiring with Impact programme which has been introduced since the last pay gap report to drive better and more inclusive hiring behaviours.

The 'Hiring with Impact' programme plays a central role in strengthening AQA's wider inclusion ambitions by equipping hiring managers with the knowledge, behaviours and tools needed to make fair, consistent and evidence-based decisions. Through its blended learning approach – including eLearning, practical workshops and simulated interviews – the programme builds confidence in using structured models such as ORCE and BARS, which reduce reliance on gut instinct and help managers focus on observable evidence rather than assumptions. This shift supports more objective assessment, mitigates unconscious bias and ensures a level playing field for all candidates, particularly those from underrepresented groups.





The programme also enhances inclusion through its focus on candidate experience. Workshops explore the impact of language, communication and process design on different candidate groups, encouraging managers to identify and remove barriers that can deter or disadvantage applicants. By embedding inclusive practices at each stage of the hiring cycle – from writing job ads to structured evaluation and feedback – Hiring with Impact directly supports AQA’s commitment to a more representative workforce, a stronger employer brand and a recruitment approach that aligns with our diversity, equity and inclusion objectives. All managers must meet a minimum ‘pass’ bar once they have participated in the Hiring with Impact programme and where this is not the case, additional support is available.

Inclusive recruitment and hiring at AQA has been further supported through a range of practices designed to reduce bias and strengthen diversity across every stage of the recruitment journey. This includes ensuring all job descriptions, job adverts and person specifications are inclusive and accessible, and embedding D&I expertise into the development of our Hiring with Impact modules. We also review homogeneous candidate shortlists and provide organisation-wide guidance to encourage greater diversity in attraction, selection and onboarding. Diverse hiring panels are now standard practice, incorporating diversity of gender, ethnicity, and neurodiversity wherever possible. In addition, we are conducting a full end-to-end review of the recruitment process through a D&I lens, including assessing the extent to which our recruitment technology mitigates bias from the outset.

Data, insight and business area engagement

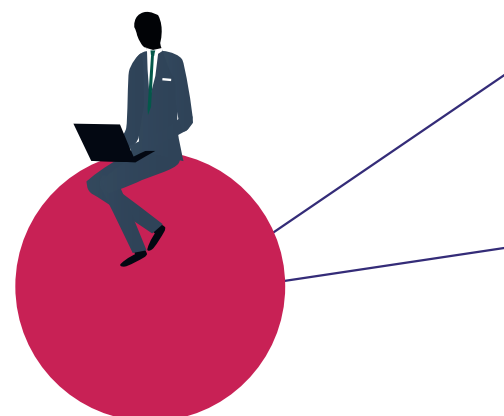
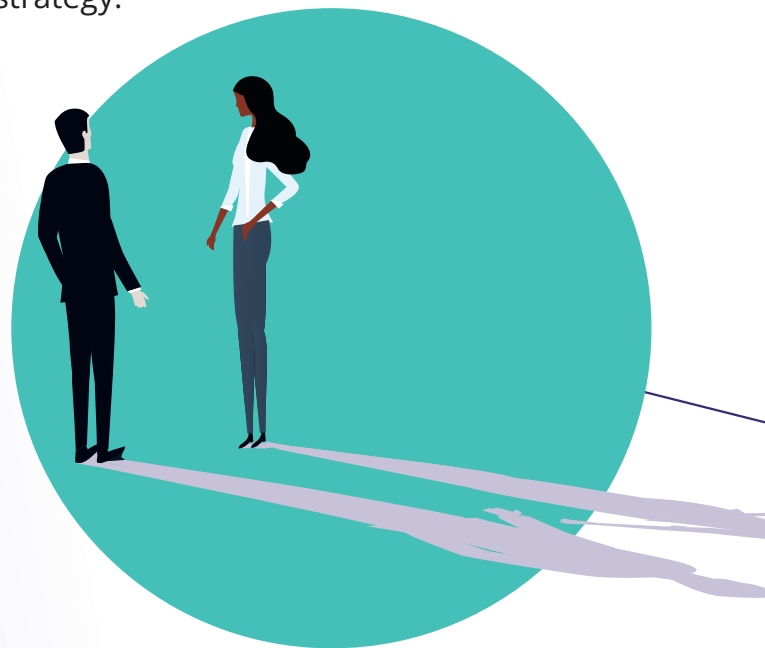
Since the last report we have seen more intersectional diversity data tracking and reporting, enabling more informed decision-making and transparency across the organisation. All business areas across AQA now have D&I objectives within their strategic people plans and continue to engage with the D&I team to shape both the objectives and subsequent plans for delivery. We are committed to reviewing a broader range of data to understand the experiences of our underrepresented colleagues in the coming year and this will extend beyond gender and ethnicity.

Reverse mentoring and network engagement

Year one of the strategy has seen the delivery of the organisation's first Reverse Mentoring scheme. This has led to powerful, organic learning moments for senior leaders, fostering empathy, allyship and in positive action for under-represented colleagues across the business with the second iteration of the scheme underway this year.

Network Engagement has continued to grow, with increased participation, the formation of new colleague networks, and closer collaboration between network leads. This has enabled the development of both identity-specific and intersectional delivery plans, for example, joint sessions during an organisation-wide D&I celebration and awareness raising week driven by the network voice.

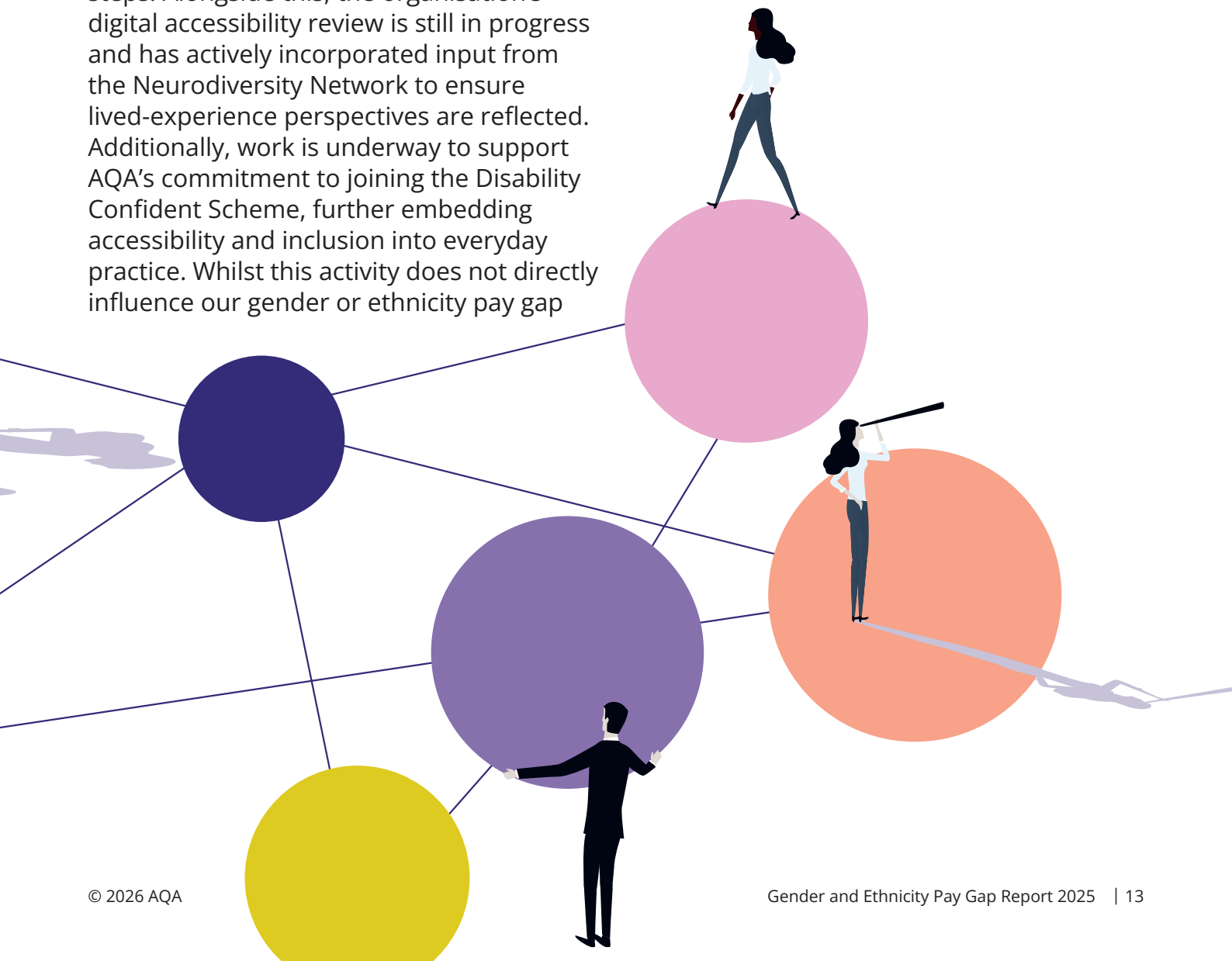
Over the past year, the Colleague Networks have redefined their purpose, accessed training to strengthen their effectiveness, refreshed their individual and intersectional Terms of Reference, and raised their visibility across the organisation. Each network now has a strategic plan to guide the rollout of key initiatives aligned with the broader organisational strategy. In addition, sponsors have been equipped to provide meaningful support, ensuring their guidance aligns with the emerging D&I strategy.



Physical and digital workspaces

We are working to strengthen the accessibility of its physical and digital workspaces. Goss Consultancy Ltd has been commissioned to conduct Access Reviews across the Manchester, Milton Keynes, Guildford and London offices, with the final reports now reviewed by both the D&I Lead and the Workplace team, who plan to meet in September to agree next steps. Alongside this, the organisation's digital accessibility review is still in progress and has actively incorporated input from the Neurodiversity Network to ensure lived-experience perspectives are reflected. Additionally, work is underway to support AQA's commitment to joining the Disability Confident Scheme, further embedding accessibility and inclusion into everyday practice. Whilst this activity does not directly influence our gender or ethnicity pay gap

figures, it does contribute to a broader culture of inclusion. Our intersectional approach recognises that improving accessibility, belonging and equity across AQA makes us a more attractive employer to candidates and colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds. Over time, this inclusive culture may indirectly support a more diverse workforce at all levels, which in turn can have a positive long-term impact on representation and our pay gaps.

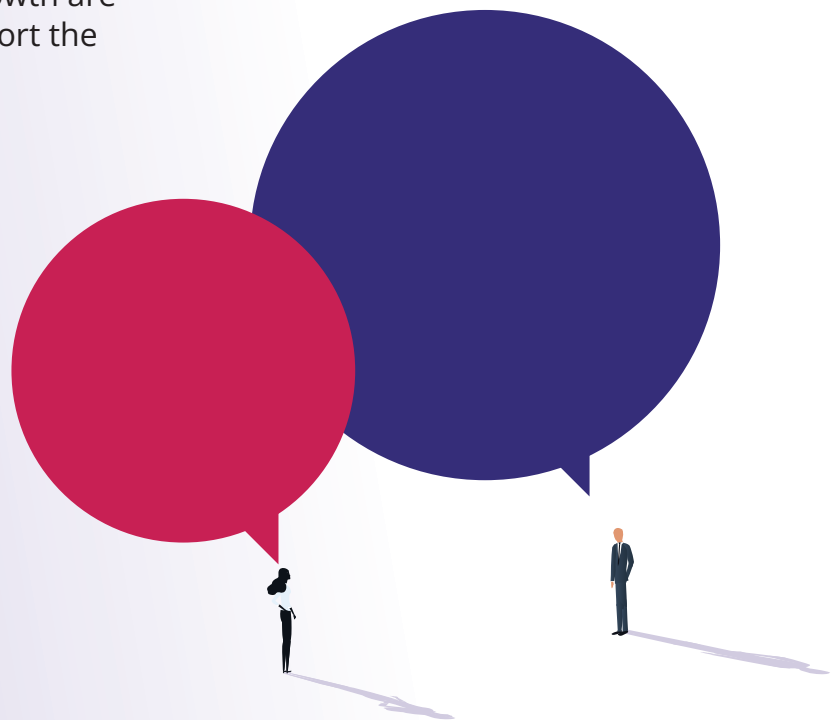


Inclusive talent strategy, including conversations around career development and progression

AQA's inclusive talent strategy focuses on ensuring that all colleagues (including those who are underrepresented) have equitable access to career development and progression opportunities. This includes tailored leadership and mentoring programmes for under-represented communities as part of a wider suite of support available to all colleagues, such as leadership development, coaching, mentoring and broader career guidance. The organisation is also reviewing its performance evaluation process to identify and mitigate unconscious bias, helping to ensure fair and consistent assessments. Alongside this, clearer pathways for promotion and professional growth are being developed to better support the progression of internal talent.

Flexible working and support initiatives

We have enhanced our flexible working and support initiatives to promote work-life balance and strengthen retention, particularly for under-represented colleagues. This includes an ongoing policy review focused on supporting colleagues with differing needs, enhanced maternity and paternity leave policies, and the introduction of new colleague networks such as the working parents and carers network. AQA is also building partnerships with network groups across other education organisations to share learning and strengthen collective impact. In addition, a new wellbeing strategy is being developed with an intersectional approach to ensure that all colleagues feel supported and included.

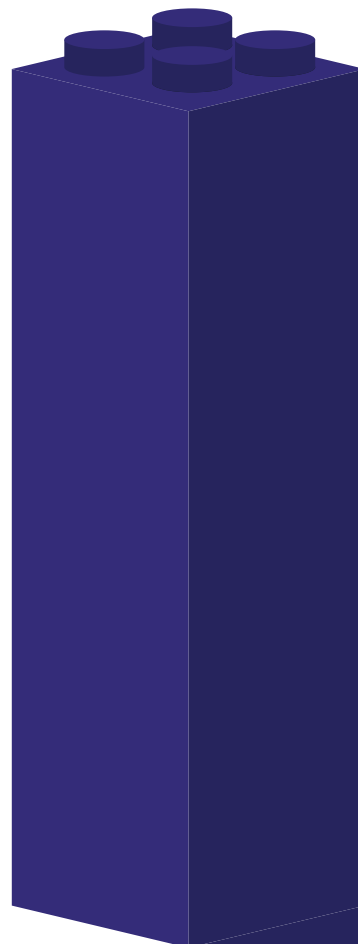
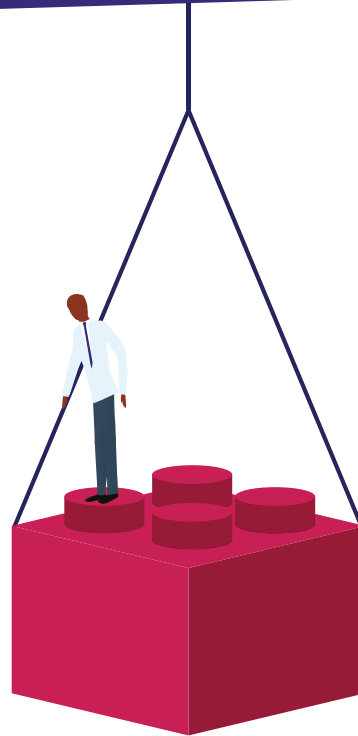


Workplace culture and education

There has been a major focus on workplace culture through a comprehensive programme of D&I education designed for colleagues at all levels, supported by a review of leadership behaviours through an inclusion lens. The organisation's reverse mentoring pilot has encouraged organic learning moments, deeper understanding and stronger allyship from senior leaders. This work has been further enriched by Off Mute Week, a new colleague-led event featuring film screenings, external speakers and Network-led sessions. In addition, follow-up actions are being shaped by feedback from the organisation-wide colleague engagement survey, ensuring the voices of under-represented groups directly inform ongoing improvements in culture and practice.

Monitoring and leadership accountability

We continue to strengthen monitoring and leadership accountability by embedding measurable D&I goals and annual progress tracking as standard practice across the organisation. A targeted data-disclosure campaign, with a particular focus on improving disability-related data, is planned for launch in 2026 to enhance the quality of insights that inform decision-making. The Executive Team has also made publicly stated commitments that reinforce sustained investment in D&I work, signalling clear top-level accountability.



Looking ahead

As part of our ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion, we have appointed a D&I specialist to work alongside our Head of D&I to ensure that the strategy can be rolled out at pace.

We recognise that meaningful change requires proactive measures. Through our continued focus on D&I we will actively work to remove barriers, create equitable advancement opportunities, and build an organisation that better reflects the increasingly diverse learner communities we serve.

Our D&I strategy focuses on progressing inclusion at every level, fostering a culture where diverse talent is recognised, supported, and empowered. It directly addresses our pay gaps by tackling the root causes—most notably, the lack of diverse representation in senior roles. Through the work cited above, we are actively working to remove barriers and create fair opportunities for all.



We remain committed to reducing our gender and ethnicity pay gaps by improving gender and ethnicity representation at senior levels and embedding inclusive hiring and promotion practices across the organisation. We will also continue our work to ensuring equitable access to development and progression for underrepresented groups and strengthening our data insight to drive accountability and meaningful action whilst maintaining full transparency in our reporting measures.

“

We acknowledge that meaningful progress requires time and sustained effort, and we reaffirm our commitment to closing the gender and ethnicity pay gaps as a key priority within our broader D&I strategy. Achieving pay equity goes beyond numbers it requires creating a truly inclusive workplace where all colleagues have equal opportunities to progress and succeed. ”

Hannah Jepson,
Head of D&I

“

Leading the Ethnic Diversity Network at AQA has been incredibly rewarding, especially as I've seen engagement grow, collaborations strengthen, and a genuine sense of community flourish among colleagues. Looking ahead, I'm excited to build on this momentum by driving more inclusive initiatives across our colleague networks, creating long lasting meaningful impact and fostering spaces where everyone feels valued, represented, and truly able to belong. ”

Adwoa McBruce,
Co-chair of the Ethnic Diversity network

“

The Empowering Women Network amplifies voices from across AQA, highlighting lived experiences, championing community and celebrating individuality. Hearing so many people's stories is a wonderful reminder of how unique we are, and just how valuable connection can be. I'm proud to be part of such a diverse network of colleagues who listen, engage and support each other with authenticity. These contributions, our collective voice and our passion form the cornerstone of real change, so let's be bold and continue to strive for a fairer, equitable future for everyone. ”

Gina Barham,
Co-chair of the Empowering Women's network

Appendix: Methodology

Data Collection:

- Worker profiles extracted from our Core HR/CRM system (Workday) using custom-built reports as of the snapshot date, including Sex, Ethnicity, Hire and Termination dates, Time Off, and pay-impacting leave
- Payroll data from iTrent Payroll system, filtered to include relevant pay types (ordinary pay, bonus pay, Salary Sacrifice types)
- Data combined and hourly rates determined using government guidance

Guidance References:

- Overview: Overview - GOV.UK
- Data preparation: Preparing your data - GOV.UK
- Calculation methodology: Making your calculations - GOV.UK







[aqa.org.uk](https://www.aqa.org.uk)

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