DSIT Call for Evidence: Building a Future Tech Sector That Works for Everyone - April 2026

About CCUK

1. Comms Council UK (CCUK) is a membership-led organisation that both represents and supports telecommunications companies that provide services to business and residential customers in the UK. We keep Britain talking in its various guises by providing or reselling voice services over data networks (VoIP) as well as other "over the top" applications including instant messaging and video.

2. The membership is a mixture of network operators, service providers, resellers, suppliers and consultants involved in a sector that is diversifying rapidly. CCUK represents its members at a policy level, builds coalitions to collaborate on industry initiatives and provides a platform to help members prepare for change, learn about new trends and develop new business relationships.

About Women in Telecoms (WIT)

3. Women in Telecoms (WiT) is an industry network within Comms Council UK that supports women across the telecoms and connectivity ecosystem, including network operators, technology vendors, channel partners and managed service providers (MSPs), enterprise IT teams, and consultancies and infrastructure organisations. The network amplifies women's voices across the telecoms and connectivity sector, supports career development and leadership visibility, enables cross-sector mentoring and peer support, contributes evidence to policy consultations, and collaborates with major infrastructure stakeholders.

4. Women in Telecoms represents a community of more than 250 professionals. Because telecoms and connectivity roles are distributed across many different organisations and value chain positions, cross-industry communities such as Women in Telecoms play a vital role in ensuring workforce experiences are heard in national tech policy discussions.

Introduction

5. Women in Telecoms, part of Comms Council UK, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's call for evidence, building a future tech sector that works for everyone. Our response focuses on how emerging technologies are affecting skills, roles and career pathways in telecoms and connectivity, and what this means for women and under-represented groups.

6. Telecoms and connectivity underpin the UK's digital infrastructure but are often under-represented in wider technology workforce debates, which tend to focus on software, AI or cybersecurity. Evidence from the Women in Telecoms community indicates that many women build long-term careers in telecoms, yet structural barriers remain around awareness of the sector, visibility of career routes, inclusion and progression into leadership.

7. To inform this submission, Women in Telecoms gathered evidence from professionals across operators, vendors, managed service providers, consultancies and industry bodies. Respondents were predominantly experienced, mid-career and senior professionals, offering insight into long-term progression patterns, leadership representation and the impact of emerging technologies on real career journeys.

8. In this response we address questions 7 to 17 of the consultation. We highlight where emerging technologies are reshaping skills and roles in telecoms, identify the stages at which support is most needed for women and under-represented groups, and set out practical interventions that have helped, or could help, to build a more inclusive future tech sector in which telecoms and connectivity are fully recognised.

9. This response draws on evidence gathered from the Women in Telecoms community, including a short industry survey of professionals working across operators, vendors, managed service providers, consultancies and industry bodies. Among respondents, 68 per cent have worked in the sector for more than ten years, 60 per cent are in mid-career roles and over one third occupy senior leadership or executive positions. This provides strong insight into long term progression patterns, leadership representation and the impact of emerging technologies on real career journeys.

Responses to consultation questions

7. To what extent, if at all, are emerging technologies changing the skills required in your organisation or sector?

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

10. To a great extent. Emerging technologies are reshaping skills requirements across telecoms and connectivity, with software, cloud, data, AI and cybersecurity capabilities increasingly required alongside traditional network engineering and customer facing skills.

8. Please describe the specific changes you are seeing in the skills required in your organisation or sector as a result of emerging technologies.

11. Across the Women in Telecoms community, members are seeing specific changes in five main areas. First, technical and engineering skills now combine classic telecoms knowledge with software and automation. Network roles increasingly require scripting and automation skills in addition to RF and fibre expertise. Providers need people who can design and operate virtualised and cloud native networks, and who can integrate telecoms infrastructure with cloud platforms, edge computing and enterprise IT

environments.

12. There is greater demand for data, AI and analytics skills. Data engineering, analytics and machine learning capabilities support network optimisation, predictive maintenance and customer insight. Staff also need the capability to use AI based tools for monitoring, diagnostics and customer support, while applying critical judgement to their outputs.

13. Cybersecurity and resilience skills have become more important. As threat surfaces expand, the sector needs stronger security architecture, incident response and compliance expertise. Awareness of cyber risk, privacy, safety and resilience is now required in a broader range of roles, not just in dedicated security teams.

14. Customer, product and commercial skills have become more technically demanding. Product managers, solution architects and commercial teams must understand how to translate complex capabilities, such as network performance characteristics, AI based features and security options, into customer propositions that are clear and trustworthy. They also need to explain the implications of emerging technologies for privacy, security and reliability in accessible language.

15. Leadership and management capabilities need to keep pace with these changes. Leaders are increasingly responsible for multi disciplinary teams that combine infrastructure, software, data and commercial expertise. Change management, inclusive leadership and support for continuous upskilling are now critical capabilities, particularly in small and medium sized enterprises that may not have formal learning and development functions.

16. Without equitable access to training and development, these shifts risk widening existing inequalities, as women and under-represented groups are less likely to have had early exposure to coding, data and advanced technical education.

9. To what extent, if at all, are emerging technologies leading to new or significantly changed roles in your organisation or sector?

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

17. To a great extent. Emerging technologies are creating new roles in areas such as automation, cloud, data and security, and are significantly changing existing roles so that many now combine classic telecoms skills with software, analytics and cross functional responsibilities.

10. To what extent, if at all, are emerging technologies reshaping traditional career pathways in your organisation or sector?

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

18. To some extent. Traditional pathways from field or network engineering into senior technical roles are still important, but emerging technologies are enabling more lateral moves between functions and organisations, and more non linear careers across the connectivity value chain.

11. In your experience, to what extent are changes to skills, roles or career pathways due to emerging technologies affecting who applies for, or succeeds in, tech roles within your organisation or sector?

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

I have not seen changes to the skills, roles, or career pathways in my organisation or sector due to emerging technologies

19. To some extent. New roles in software, AI and data can reinforce existing imbalances if candidates are drawn mainly from already male dominated parts of the digital sector, but where inclusive upskilling and support are in place, emerging technology roles can also open progression opportunities for women already in telecoms.

12. To what extent, if at all, are the following factors affecting inclusion and progression in your organisation or sector?

Training or upskilling opportunities

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

20. To a great extent. Rapid technology change means access to training is critical, and where opportunities are limited, staff can be effectively locked out of new roles in areas such as AI, cloud and cybersecurity.

Team or organisational culture

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

21. To a great extent. Everyday culture, including whether women feel heard, supported and visible in technical teams, is a major determinant of whether they stay and progress, and most respondents do not yet see the sector as fully inclusive.

Access to leadership roles or decision-making spaces

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

22. To a great extent. Limited representation in senior roles and constrained access to strategic projects and decisions are key barriers to progression and to women influencing how emerging technologies are deployed.

Funding or resources

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

23. To some extent. Resource constraints, particularly in small and medium sized organisations, limit what can be done on internal programmes, so many women rely on external networks such as Women in Telecoms for development and support.

Policies or regulations (inside or outside organisations)

To a great extent

To some extent

Hardly at all

Not at all

Don't know

24. To some extent. Internal policies on flexibility, parental leave and promotion, along with sector level expectations and programmes, shape who can enter and progress, but these levers are not yet fully used to support inclusion in telecoms.

13. At which stages in education or work do you think support is most important for helping women and people from under-represented groups enter, stay in, and progress within the tech sector?

At school (e.g. subject choices, early exposure to tech)

Further education or training (college, apprenticeships, bootcamps)

Entering the tech sector for the first time

Early-career development

Moving into management for the first time

Progressing into senior leadership roles

Returning to work after time out (parental leave, caring responsibilities, illness)

Experiencing major life or health transitions (e.g. menopause, disability-related changes)

Later-stage careers

Don't know / None of these

Other (please specify)

25. Support is most important at school, in further education and training, when entering the tech sector for the first time, during early career development, when moving into management and progressing into senior leadership, when returning to work or

experiencing major life or health transitions, and in later stage careers. In telecoms and connectivity, action at all these stages is needed to improve visibility of the sector, prevent early attrition and enable experienced women to move into and remain in leadership roles.

14. Which initiatives and interventions, if any, have helped women and people from under-represented groups develop and progress in their tech careers?

26. Across Women in Telecoms, several types of initiative have been particularly helpful. Cross industry networks have played an important role. Women in Telecoms itself provides peer support, mentoring, leadership visibility and a space to share experiences across operators, vendors, managed service providers, consultancies and infrastructure organisations. This is especially valuable for those in small companies who may be the only woman in their team or function.

27. Structured mentoring and sponsorship programmes have supported progression where they are explicitly linked to development goals or moves into new areas, such as leadership, product management or AI related roles. Mentors and sponsors from different organisations can also broaden networks and perspectives.

28. Leadership development pathways tailored to telecoms and connectivity have helped women move into and succeed in management and executive roles. Programmes that focus on strategic, commercial and people leadership, in addition to technical depth, are particularly valuable.

29. Flexible and hybrid working arrangements have supported development by making it more feasible to take on demanding roles while managing caring responsibilities or other commitments. In a sector where travel and on site presence have historically been seen as essential for progression, rethinking these expectations has a significant inclusion impact.

30. Return to work and returnship schemes, where they exist, have facilitated re entry into technical and leadership roles after parental leave, caring responsibilities or other career breaks. These initiatives help rebuild confidence and update skills in a structured way.

31. Visibility initiatives, including conference speaking, case studies, media profiles and internal recognition for women in telecoms, have also supported development. Seeing women in senior and technical roles makes those paths more tangible and encourages others to pursue them

15. Which initiatives and interventions, if any, have helped women and people from under-represented groups influence decisions or shape emerging technology areas?

32. Several types of initiative have helped women in telecoms influence decisions and shape emerging technology areas. Participation in strategic and technical forums has been important. Women in Telecoms members contribute to vendor advisory boards, operator working groups, standards discussions and cross industry steering committees in areas such as fibre deployment, 5G rollout, security and service design. These forums

provide direct routes to influence how emerging technologies are developed and applied.

33. Roundtables and knowledge exchange sessions convened by Women in Telecoms have allowed professionals from operators, vendors, managed service providers and infrastructure partners to discuss the impacts of emerging technologies on customers and the workforce. Insights from these discussions often feed into organisational strategies, industry initiatives and policy positions.

34. Formal consultation responses and evidence gathering, such as this submission, give women across the sector a direct voice in government and regulator debates on the future technology workforce and the use of emerging technologies in telecoms.

35. Partnerships between industry networks and major infrastructure stakeholders have created additional opportunities to shape new initiatives. When larger operators or infrastructure organisations involve Women in Telecoms in pilots, programme design or advisory work, women from a diverse range of employers, including SMEs, can influence decisions that affect the whole sector.

36. Recognising and supporting these forms of engagement helps ensure that emerging technologies are designed, governed and deployed in ways that reflect diverse user needs and workforce experiences.

16. Which, if any, initiatives or interventions that have previously been used now feel less effective as the tech sector changes, and what changes or alternatives would you suggest?

37. Members highlighted several initiatives that feel less effective in the current context. One off awareness events or generic campaigns that promote women in tech in broad terms, without linking to sustained pathways, training or measurable outcomes, have limited lasting impact. They may raise short term visibility but do not change structures or behaviours.

38. Internal women's networks within large technology organisations can be valuable for employees there, but they do not reach many people working in small and medium sized firms across the supply chain. Given how distributed the telecoms workforce is, this limits impact at sector level. Unstructured mentoring without clear objectives or links to progression opportunities can provide emotional support but often does less to change career outcomes. Without alignment to specific skills, roles or steps, it is difficult to translate mentoring into tangible advancement. Standalone unconscious bias training, without accompanying changes to recruitment, promotion criteria, data collection and accountability mechanisms, has not shown strong evidence of shifting outcomes. Participants may become more aware of bias, but processes and decisions often remain unchanged.

39. In place of these approaches, we suggest a shift toward more sustained and systemic interventions. First, telecoms and connectivity should be explicitly included in national STEM and digital careers initiatives. This means clear references to telecoms roles and pathways in school and college materials, outreach campaigns and careers guidance, rather than subsuming them under generic technology categories. Second, structured

cross industry mentoring and sponsorship programmes should connect women at different career stages with leaders across operators, vendors and managed service providers, with a particular focus on emerging technology specialisms. These programmes are likely to deliver a stronger impact than isolated internal schemes. Third, sector wide returnship programmes focused on connectivity, infrastructure and emerging technology roles would help retain and re-engage experienced professionals after time out, addressing both skills shortages and leadership gaps. Fourth, embedding flexible working in engineering and infrastructure environments is essential. This includes investment in remote tools, rethinking travel and on call patterns, and designing roles so that flexibility does not automatically exclude people from progression opportunities. Finally, industry networks such as Women in Telecoms should be recognised as delivery partners. With modest support, they can deliver outreach, mentoring, evidence gathering and programme delivery at scale, particularly for SMEs that lack internal capacity.

17. Is there anything else that you would like to share to inform the work of the Women in Tech Taskforce?

40. Telecoms and connectivity are foundational to the UK digital economy but are often overlooked in broader tech workforce debates. Evidence from a recent Women in Telecoms survey that only 8 per cent of respondents believe telecoms careers are sufficiently visible, while 68 per cent believe telecoms careers are not visible enough to women and girls. Sixty per cent have experienced barriers to progression, and 96 per cent regard the sector as only somewhat inclusive or not inclusive. There is a clear opportunity to improve both the visibility of telecoms careers and progression into leadership roles for women.

41. Cross industry communities are an essential part of the inclusion infrastructure in a fragmented sector like telecoms. The workforce is distributed across many small and medium sized organisations, suppliers and channel partners, many of which do not have internal women in tech groups, dedicated diversity teams or formal leadership and returnship programmes. Independent communities such as Women in Telecoms provide peer networks, mentoring, leadership visibility and a route for engagement with policymakers and regulators, extending support to professionals who might otherwise be isolated.

42. There is also significant scope for partnership between the Women in Tech Taskforce, Women in Telecoms and Comms Council UK. Potential areas for collaboration include national initiatives that make telecoms and connectivity careers visible in schools, colleges and early career programmes, cross industry mentoring, leadership development and returnship schemes that explicitly include connectivity and infrastructure roles, and co design of inclusion measures and evaluation frameworks that reflect the realities of supply chain based sectors dominated by SMEs. Women in Telecoms and Comms Council UK would welcome ongoing engagement with the Taskforce to help build a future tech sector that works for everyone, in which telecoms and connectivity are fully recognised as core components of the UK inclusive digital workforce.

Acknowledgements

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Conclusion

44. Telecoms and connectivity underpin the UK's digital infrastructure yet remain under represented in wider discussions about the tech workforce. Evidence from Women in Telecoms shows that careers in this sector are not sufficiently visible to women and girls, many women experience barriers to progression, and most do not perceive the sector as fully inclusive. At the same time, a high proportion of respondents have built long careers in telecoms, indicating strong commitment and a significant pool of experience to build on.

45. Emerging technologies are reshaping skills, roles and career pathways across telecoms. Software, cloud, data, AI and cybersecurity capabilities are increasingly required alongside traditional network engineering. These changes create both risks and opportunities: without equitable access to training, mentoring and flexible working, existing inequalities may deepen, but with the right support they can open up new routes into higher value and leadership roles for women and under represented groups.

46. The evidence gathered by Women in Telecoms highlights the importance of action at multiple stages of the pipeline, from early awareness in schools and further education, through entry routes and early career development, to leadership progression, return to work and later careers. It also shows that cross industry communities play a vital role in a sector dominated by small and medium sized organisations that often lack internal programmes.

47. Women in Telecoms and Comms Council UK would welcome continued collaboration with the Women in Tech Taskforce to ensure that telecoms and connectivity are fully reflected in future initiatives. By working together on visibility, mentoring, leadership development, returnships and practical guidance tailored to the realities of infrastructure and SME dominated environments, we can help ensure that the future tech sector genuinely works for everyone.