



INSIGHT PAPER  
**DIVERSITY  
IN STEM**



**PREPARED  
BY RMG - FEBRUARY 2022**

# SHOULD SMEs DO MORE?

BY GILES HAMPSON

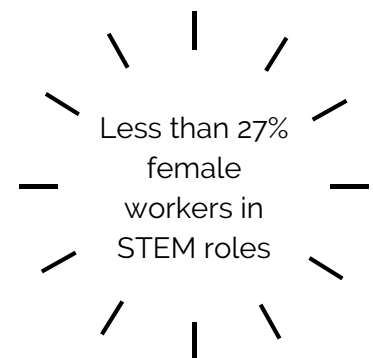
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As the CEO of a specialist search firm in the scientific market I find it frustrating that we don't seem to be making progress when it comes to equality and diversity within the scientific sector.

In a report launched by the All-Party Parliamentary Group ("APPG") published last year, "Inquiry into Equity in the STEM Workforce" the findings are staggering citing that inequity in the sector is still widespread. How can that be in 2022?!

## INEQUALITY IS WIDESPREAD

Prior to undertaking the Inquiry, the government's APPG analysed the Office for National Statistics' 2019 Labour Force Survey. The results show that STEM sectors have a much lower share of female workers (27 per cent versus 52 per cent in the UK workforce population as a whole).



## JANE THEAKER- CEO OF PBD BIOTECH A LEADING AGRI-TECH BUSINESS

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"There are two areas that I feel will support greater diversity firstly, visibility. If you can't see it, you can't be it! If young people see diversity within businesses that chimes with their own diversity, then they will know that there is a welcoming place for them. The more diversity the better. This starts with the boards and the leadership of companies; their talent identification processes and their appointment decisions.

The second area addresses board attitude to risk. For too long "diversity and difference" has been associated with "risk". Nothing could be further from the truth! You would never set up a football team full of goalies. Diversity represents organisational resilience, strength, and risk mitigation. You only have to look to nature to see the power of diversity in action. For this reason, I try to encourage as much diversity as possible in organisations and teams that I lead. Diversity is a sign of a strong organisation."



**"DIVERSITY IS A  
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# COVID AND THE STEM SECTORS

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The report also looks at the effect of COVID, underlining the case for the continued importance the UK plays in global medical discovery.

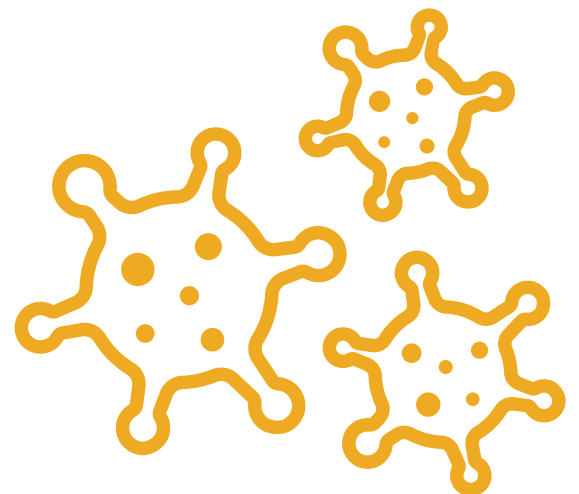
In fact, the pandemic has had a positive impact, demonstrating the value of high-quality science and made jobs in science, technology and engineering more appealing to young people in particular. According to career data from the British Science Association 2020, 37% of young people said the pandemic had made them more likely to consider a scientific career which has been a positive movement and a movement we should harvest somehow.

The Government's 'Build back better' plan for a strong COVID recovery, for instance, provides an opportunity to drive STEM and workforce equity. In the 2020 Spending Review, Rishi Sunak announced a national infrastructure strategy, delivering a 'once-in-a-generation investment' worth £100 billion. Government spending on research and development, R&D, in 2021 to 2022 will be £14.9 billion.

Recent public sector procurement initiatives have resulted in equality, diversity and inclusion standards being built into contracts which is an encouraging start. Despite what you may think of the rail debate, High Speed 2 is a good example of this strategy in action, along with the new deals for the Nuclear and Construction sectors.

Unfortunately, there is no standardised government model, so some sectors won't have the same positive impact. Within the private sector though SMEs could consider embedding similar standards into their own procurement plans.

**"YOUNG PEOPLE 37%  
MORE LIKELY TO  
CONSIDER SCIENTIFIC  
CAREER AS A RESULT  
OF COVID"**



# ENGAGEMENT AT A YOUNGER LEVEL

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The report called for science to be introduced to younger groups of children such as in early years and primary schools – rather than simply secondary school level. It stated:

"THERE IS CLEAR EVIDENCE OF INEQUITY AT EACH STAGE OF THE EDUCATION JOURNEY FROM EARLY YEARS EDUCATION TO THE WORKPLACE. THE 'LEAKY PIPELINE' IS OFTEN BLAMED FOR THE LACK OF DIVERSITY WITHIN THE STEM WORKFORCE...PEOPLES' CAREER DECISIONS ARE INFLUENCED BY A VARIETY OF FACTORS, AND INEQUITY CANNOT BE TREATED AS A PROBLEM CAUSED BY ASPIRATIONS, MOTIVATIONS, OR ATTITUDES OF INDIVIDUALS IN MINORITY COMMUNITIES."

Meanwhile, less than one per cent of the total number of UK engineering enterprises fall within the scope of the gender pay gap reporting requirement. Could this be extended so that more SMEs are asked to report their data?

## SMES NEED MORE INVOLVEMENT

I believe that SMEs that become more active and engaged with their communities can help reduce inequalities in their workforce. Practical sessions could be to introduce a programme of having their teams visit schools to talk about their own STEM careers and showing good representation of a diverse workforce.

Funding a positive action scholarship or similar is another positive move, or perhaps sponsoring school competitions for female-only engineering or scientific projects which will help to generate interest in the sector at an early age.

# SAM WESTGATE- CEO OF PERFECTUS BIOMED

## A LEADING CRO BUSINESS



**"WE ARE  
COMMITTED TO  
CONTINUE TO MAKE  
POSITIVE STEPS TO  
ENSURE EQUALITY  
AND DIVERSITY AT  
PERFECTUS  
BIOMED"**

Another great example of a North West business that has made great progress in this regard is Perfectus Biomed, a leading contract research organisation based at SciTech in Daresbury which is led by CEO Sam Westgate.

Sam said "At Perfectus Biomed, we have found that by recruiting to our Company Values at every level we have been able to offer roles to excellent candidates, with a 50/50 split in male to female team members and a 60/40 female to male split in our Senior Management Team. We pride ourselves on our ability to recruit and retain talent of any gender and we are committed to continue to make positive steps to ensure equality and diversity at Perfectus Biomed.

Within the microbiological sector at least we have found that by recruiting the best available person for the role we have successfully achieved a relatively equal gender split without the need to implement specialist recruitment actions. Coupled with our policy to promote internally where possible this has led to an even distribution at all levels of the company"



# INSIGHT PAPER DIVERSITY IN STEM



IF YOU NEED ADVICE ON  
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION POLICIES,  
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TEAM TODAY



## TALK TO US

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To access the full report visit

<https://www.britishtscienceassociation.org/equity-in-stem-education>



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