The 2026 WiHTL & DiR Impact Report: Performance with purpose

Featuring in-depth analysis from The MBS Group

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Introduction

I'm delighted to share this year's WiHTL & DiR Impact Report, a chance to reflect on what our Collaboration Community has achieved together, Summit to Summit, as a community that keeps innovating, and us with it.

With over 100 Members, our collective reach continues to grow: we have now positively impacted more than 4.5 million employees, 90% of our target of 5 million by 2030. A milestone worth celebrating, and proof of what's possible when organisations act together.

Behind that reach sits Project 10,000, our cross-industry commitment to invest in developing talent by 2030. This year we passed the halfway point, with over 5,000 participants engaged through our apprenticeships and Leadership Development Programmes. Member satisfaction remains strong, with an NPS of 72. Against a challenging economic backdrop, our continued growth and high levels of satisfaction are even more significant, demonstrating the enduring value of this agenda and our Members' commitment to it.

These numbers reflect a community that is maturing, not just growing. With apprenticeships now part of our offer, we can develop leaders from the front line to the boardroom. Interest in our Inclusion Maturity Curve has never been higher. Three years of insights are revealing a clearer picture of progress, while the introduction of a new Transformative level raises the bar for what meaningful change looks like.

We launched i-mag, our new quarterly publication for thought leadership from across our community, and our Chief People Officer Board has quickly become an important forum. Our Committees now number eight with the new Talent and LGBTQ+ Committees. Together with our Inclusion Summit and *inclusion in* Awards, they give Members even more ways to connect, share, act and recognise the organisations and individuals showing what Performance with purpose looks like in practice.

Looking ahead, our advisory work will evolve from *inclusion in* to Miratalent, working at the intersection of culture, inclusion and performance with leadership development at its heart: same people, same passion, wider impact. Our apprenticeships will keep growing, with cohorts across five programmes in 2027, and we will add even more value for Members through Committees, webinars, workshops and new research to turn insight into action.

The challenges ahead haven't changed, but we won't stand still. We will keep adapting, pushing and giving even more. Progress remains hard-won and at times contested, which is precisely why collaboration matters: no single organisation can shift this agenda alone. It's this focus on building for the future that will carry us to the next 5,000. I am especially proud of how our charity partnership with Team Domenica has grown, and we are thrilled to extend it for three more years.

As ever, none of this would be possible without the commitment of our Members, the guidance of our Advisory Boards, the support of our partners and sponsors and the dedication of the WiHTL & DiR team. Together, we are proving that performance and purpose are not a trade-off but a partnership, and I look forward to building on that progress with you in the year ahead.

Thank you all for another year of incredible progress.

Tea Colaianni MBE
Founder and Chair
WiHTL & DiR

Foreword

Since 2019, The MBS Group has had the privilege of partnering with Tea Colaianni MBE and her team at WiHTL & DiR to produce this Impact Report. Over that time, we have seen real progress alongside persistent challenges in the journey towards greater equity, diversity and inclusion across the hospitality, travel and leisure (HTL) and retail industries. This year's research draws on data from the top 200 businesses in each sector, together with conversations with Chairs, CEOs and Chief People Officers, and looks at what performance with purpose means for the people leading them.

There is much to be encouraged by. Two thirds of businesses progressed their D&I strategy over the last twelve months, and both HTL and retail sit meaningfully ahead of the wider FTSE 350 at executive committee and direct report level. In retail, 72% of businesses now have ethnic diversity on their board, whilst LGBTQ+ leader visibility has risen to 72%, the sharpest improvement of any characteristic we track. Apprenticeships are delivering too, with the majority of companies using their levy fully or as a strategic priority. These are achievements that reflect years of commitment and show what is possible when businesses make inclusion a priority.

The report also unveils some areas of concern, and the picture this year is a split one. HTL boards are moving backwards on both gender and ethnicity, and over half are all-white, an increase from last year. Women's representation at direct reports in retail has also fallen, alongside physical disability which now has the lowest representation of any characteristic we track.

Much of this comes down to leadership and accountability. At this stage, half of retailers still have no formal representation targets, and this number is even higher across HTL. Meanwhile, nearly two thirds of businesses across both sectors have no dedicated diversity and inclusion budget, with fewer than half fully tracking diversity through their promotion pipeline. It is clear that, despite some encouraging progress, there is still some way to go.

Chairs, CEOs, boards and executive teams must hold inclusion to the same standard as any other measure of performance, by setting clear targets, funding the work and following it through to results. The most successful organisations are those where inclusion is championed from the very top and protected even when other priorities arise.

There is much in this report to be proud of, and a reminder that progress is never guaranteed. As ever, our thanks go to Tea and her team for their energy and commitment, and to the Chairs, CEOs and Chief People Officers who contributed to this research. Their openness continues to drive progress across our industries. And finally, to my colleagues at MBS, who brought this research to life.

Moira Benigson
Founder and Chair
The MBS Group

2026: the difference WiHTL & DiR made

The WiHTL & DiR Collaboration Community

The Collaboration Community brings together over 100 industry-leading brands across hospitality, travel, leisure and retail, building stronger businesses through better leadership and more inclusive workplaces. We connect Members with each other, sharing best practice and benchmarking progress on the challenges we all face.

Progress on inclusion doesn't happen in isolation, it happens when businesses join forces, pool their strength and push further than they could alone. Organisations turn evidence-based insight from our research, and knowledge gained from each other, into practical solutions and real workplace change. That's how we accelerate progress and create workplaces where more people can thrive and businesses can perform.

The WiHTL & Diversity in Retail Collaboration Community

Year in review

The past year has been one of uncertainty on a global scale and has brought many challenges for our sectors. Yet guided by our mission and strengthened by our Members, we have continued to open up new opportunities, mark impactful achievements and push forward meaningful inclusion change.

Pro bono support

We gave more than 100 hours of support to individuals navigating career transitions, making professional choices or preparing for difficult conversations.

Apprenticeships

We deepened our impact by becoming certified apprenticeship providers, offering levy-funded leadership and professional development programmes.

i-mag

We launched i-mag, our digital publication designed as a platform for thought leadership, amplifying voices from across our Collaboration Community.

Events outside London

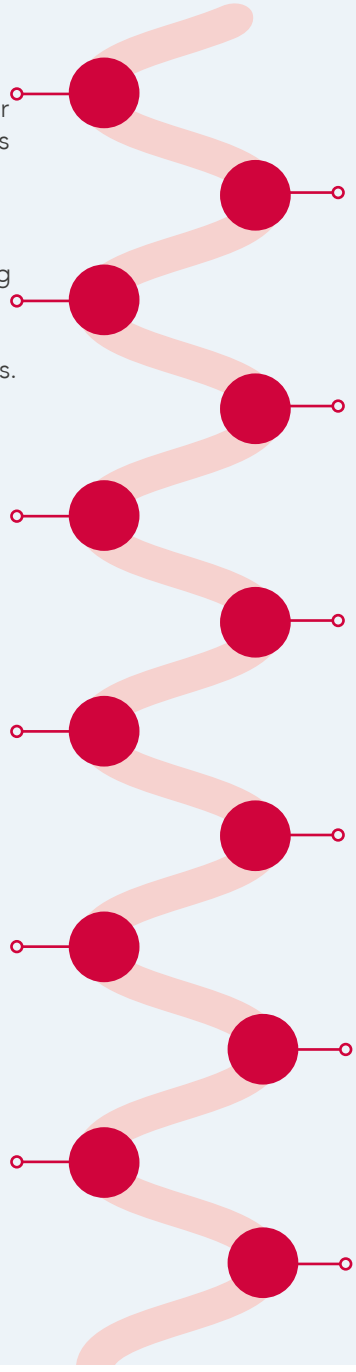
Members asked for more opportunities beyond London and we listened, with events in Leicester, Manchester and Birmingham.

Chief People Officer Board

We launched our CPO Board, a new forum for senior People leaders to share the challenges they face.

Research and reports

We published five reports this year, turning insight into action across the issues our Members face most.



Charity partnership

We continued to support our charity partner, Team Domenica, in its mission to create opportunities for young people with learning disabilities.

Leadership Development Programmes

Our programmes continue to reach new milestones and this year we passed 5,000 participants, over halfway towards our Project 10,000 goal.

Committees

Our Committees continued to grow with a new Talent Committee and the introduction of a new LGBTQ+ Committee bringing us to eight.

Indexes

We published the eighth edition of our Women to Watch in HTL & Retail Index alongside the Role Models for Inclusion in HTL & Retail Index, both in partnership with The MBS Group.

Inclusion Maturity Curve (IMC)

Our inclusion assessment tool grew further, adding a new Transformative level to help organisations track inclusion progress.

C-suite lunches and events

We continued to broaden the opportunities for CEOs and other C-suite leaders to come together, network and learn from others across the industry.

Our impact in numbers

Behind every statistic is a story of growth, connection and impact. From long-standing Member relationships to the leaders we've developed and the causes the community has supported, these numbers reflect a year of meaningful progress.

of our Members have been with us over four years

Our Members trust us for the long haul, building lasting partnerships that deepen year-after-year.

72 NPS score

A clear measure of Member trust and satisfaction, showing just how valued this Community is.

5,000+ participants have been through our Apprenticeships and Leadership Development Programmes (LDP)

We're growing the next generation of talent at real scale and over halfway to our ambitious goal to impact 10,000 by 2030.

9/10 Delegates who would recommend our programmes

Delegates don't just complete our programmes, they champion them.

4.5 million employees positively impacted

Our work reaches far beyond our Members, rippling out into the wider workforce.

£250,000 raised for Team Domenica in the last 12 months

Together, we've now raised over £400,000, a tangible commitment to inclusion, turning collective effort into real support for a cause that matters.

2,049 registered attendees at our webinars in 2026 to date

A community that keeps showing up, learning together and pushing each other forward.

9/10 average webinar feedback score

Consistently high marks that show our content isn't just attended, it's valued.

Our impact in practice

Numbers tell part of the story, but real impact is best heard in people's own words. Here, Members from our community reflect on what membership has meant in practice this year, the measurable shifts in their leadership pipeline and culture and the progress they couldn't have made alone.

Hilton

Steve Ryan
SVP Human Resources EMEA, Hilton

"WiHTL has helped strengthen our leadership pipeline by providing high-quality development programmes and external mentoring opportunities for our future leaders. Participants consistently report increased confidence, broader networks and valuable insights from peers and mentors. Through access to external mentors, cross-company learning, industry benchmarking and shared best practices, we gain perspectives and connections extending well beyond our own organisation."

SSP

Kari Daniels
CEO, SSP UK Ireland Netherlands

"Our long-standing partnership with WiHTL has helped turn our commitment to inclusion into tangible action, such as our four growing peer-to-peer DE&I networks. The confidence, connections and learning that colleagues bring back into our organisation from WiHTL sessions mean we're able to champion inclusion at every level from our executive to our frontline teams. WiHTL provides the opportunity to learn, collaborate and challenge your thinking."

McArthur Glen

Estelle Hollingsworth
Chief People Officer, McArthurGlen Group

"Taking part in the Maturity Curve has provided us with tangible evidence of how much progress we have made as a company in creating a culture where every colleague can thrive. This has given us confidence to continue to do more. WiHTL has given us affordable and inspiring leadership development and mentoring relationships, and a sense of being part of a special community of leaders."

iQ Student Accommodation

Erin Quigley
Head of People Development and Experience, iQ Student Accommodation

"For us, it's the access to a community outside of iQ. We can build great internal development and DE&I initiatives, but WiHTL gives our people exposure to different organisations, leaders, experiences and perspectives internally unavailable. The development programmes combine leadership development with peer networks and reverse mentoring, enabling iQers to build external relationships while developing their confidence and leadership capability."

stonegate PUB COMPANY

David McDowall
CEO, Stonegate Group

"At Stonegate, we are proud to partner with WiHTL, and to benefit from their support as we strive to build a values-first business, with inclusion and diversity embedded in our culture. It is more important than ever that companies step forward, make progress and do the right thing, building diverse talent pipelines for the future. WiHTL helps businesses all over the UK do just that."

ELIOR

Leni Savva
CFO, Elior UK Services

"WiHTL membership has enabled Elior to bring real focus and discipline to our diversity and inclusion roadmap. The impact is measurable: stronger female talent pipelines, more confident emerging leaders, and a culture that is visibly shifting towards greater inclusion and equity. The value of WiHTL lies in what no single organisation can build alone - access to a diverse, cross-sector community, external challenge and proven frameworks."

GREENE KING BURY ST EDMUNDS

Jonathan Fearn
Group CFO, Greene King

"WiHTL has provided a valuable forum for conversations about inclusion. The Maturity Curve gives us a clear way to measure where we are, while the network lets us share best practice and learn from others. Its leadership programmes for women and ethnic minority leaders have been valuable for attendees and mentors alike. As ever, you have to put something in to really get something out."

Dunelm The Home of Homes

Clodagh Moriarty
CEO, Dunelm

"Membership has given us access to a community that provides valuable insight, expertise and guidance, giving us the ability to network with other retailers to share ideas, challenges and best practice. The Maturity Curve Assessment has given insight into our inclusion journey status and industry benchmarking, giving focus to our plans and a measure we can track progress against."

Sainsbury's

Simon Roberts
CEO, Sainsbury's

"WiHTL & DiR membership has been really positive for us, helping us to strengthen both our leadership pipeline and our inclusive culture. Whether you're looking to strengthen your talent pipeline, improve inclusion outcomes or learn from peers across the sector, they provide both the expertise and the network to help accelerate progress. It is a truly collaborative organisation that balances the commercial imperative with the human impact of the inclusion agenda."

WARNER HOTELS

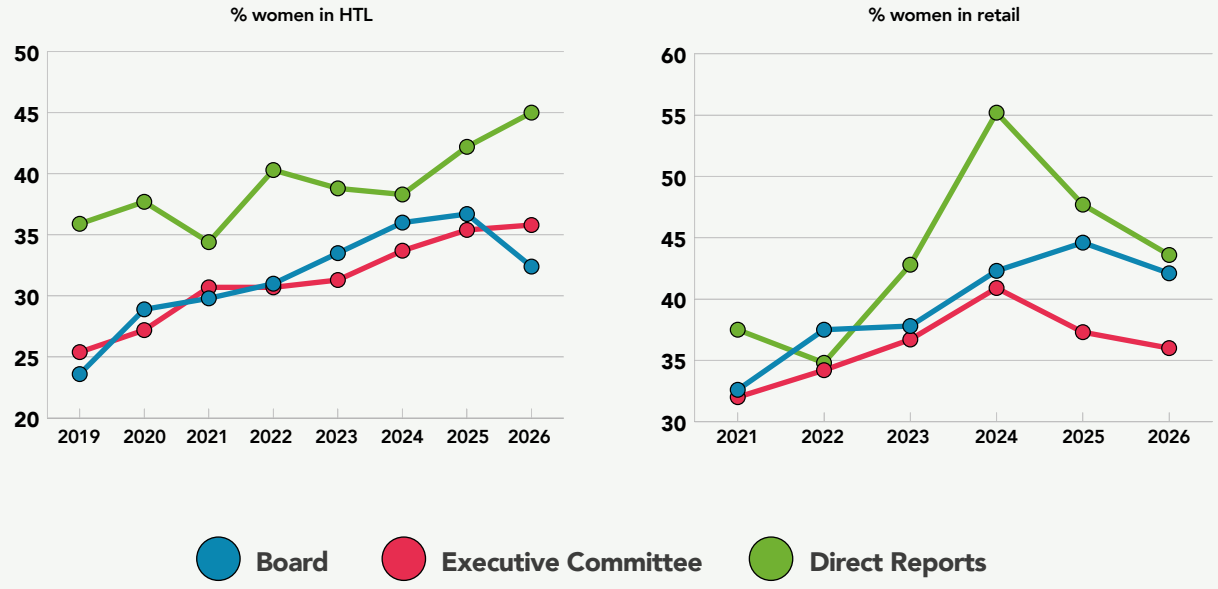
Paul Pomroy
CEO, Warner Hotels

"WiHTL gives us access to development opportunities and insights that support inclusion, which complements our wider focus on listening, recognising contributions and creating opportunities for growth. As an original Member, I've seen the community evolve, grow and go from strength-to-strength, connecting businesses and industries through a shared goal of accelerating and increasing inclusion. I value the opportunity both to contribute and to learn."

The MBS Group analysis

Inclusion in HTL and retail businesses

Proportion of women at board, executive committee and direct reports level



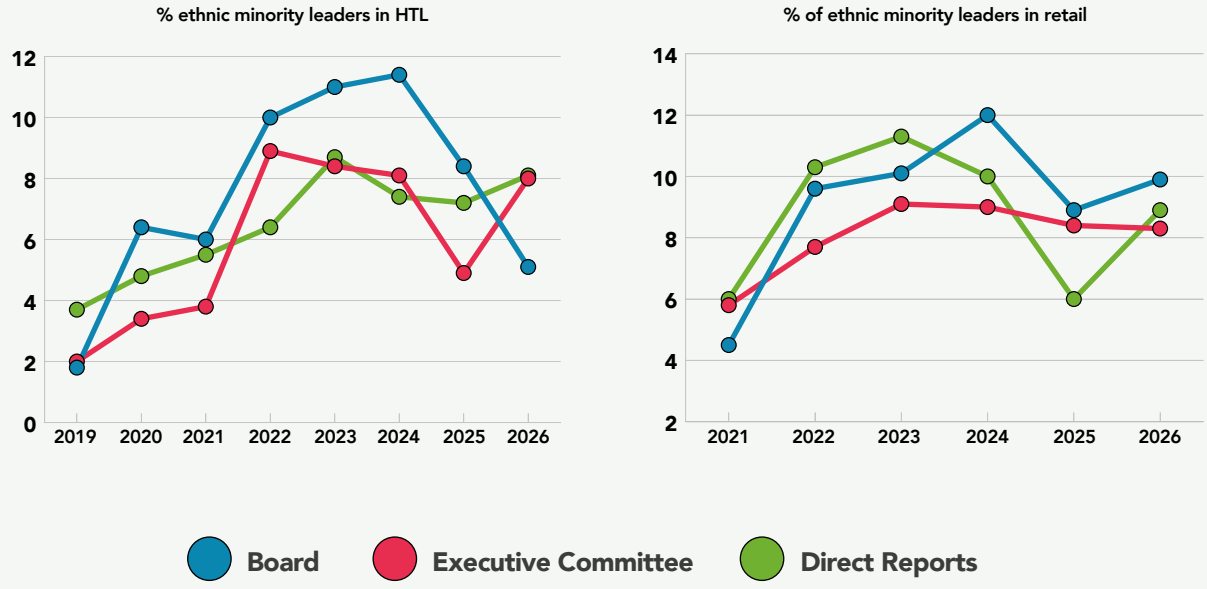
The data shows a split year, not a plateau

Last year we described progress as having generally plateaued. Comparing the numbers, this year we can see that ethnicity representation has inched forward at almost every senior level in both sectors, while gender representation has slipped back, particularly at board level meaning these two characteristics have moved in a different direction for the first time since we began this research in 2019.

Board is the only HTL level simultaneously down on gender and ethnicity this year, whilst representation of women actually improved at both executive committee and direct reports level. This shows there isn't a uniform decline across the top three tiers, but a board-specific regression sitting alongside genuine progress just below it.

Retail tells a similar story with women's representation down at board, executive committee and direct reports all at once, while ethnicity has risen at both board and direct reports level.

Proportion of leaders at board, executive committee and direct reports level from an ethnic minority background



A note on research

Each year, The MBS Group conducts detailed research to understand the progress of inclusion across the hospitality, travel, leisure and retail sectors. Our research combines data collected from the top 200 businesses of scale in each industry with qualitative data from conversations with dozens of Chairs, CEOs and Chief People Officers. The data we have collected has been combined with parallel data submitted by WiHTL & DiR member companies. Using this combined data, we look at inclusion trends within the sector and how it is being prioritised by companies.

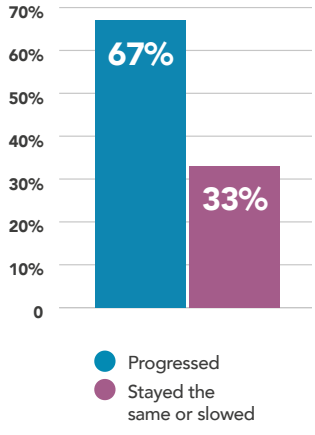
The numbers in detail

Board is now the only HTL level moving backwards on both gender and ethnicity in the same year. Ethnic minority representation at direct reports level is already more than 50% higher than at board, the clearest evidence that diversity thins specifically near the top rather than being evenly spread throughout.

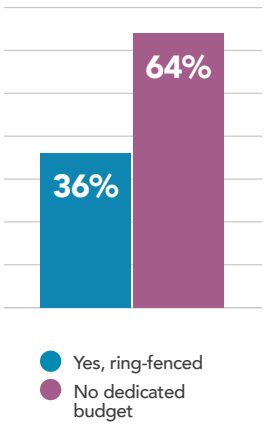
Looking at the trend since we began this research, no level in either sector has reached parity and held it, although retail direct reports briefly passed parity in 2024 (55%) before falling back for two consecutive years to 44% this year.

Elsewhere, HTL direct reports is closest to parity and, at its current seven-year rate of progress, would reach the 50% mark by around 2030. HTL executive committees and retail boards are on similar trajectories, and will reach parity by the mid-2030s if progress holds. HTL boards and retail executive committees are furthest away, with both on track for the early-to-mid 2040s at best, and with retail executive committees losing ground for the past two years, that date could easily slip.

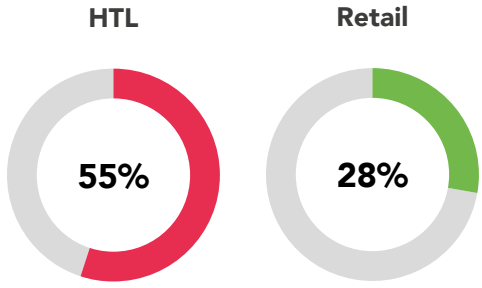
12-month D&I strategy status



Dedicated D&I budget



Companies with all-white boards



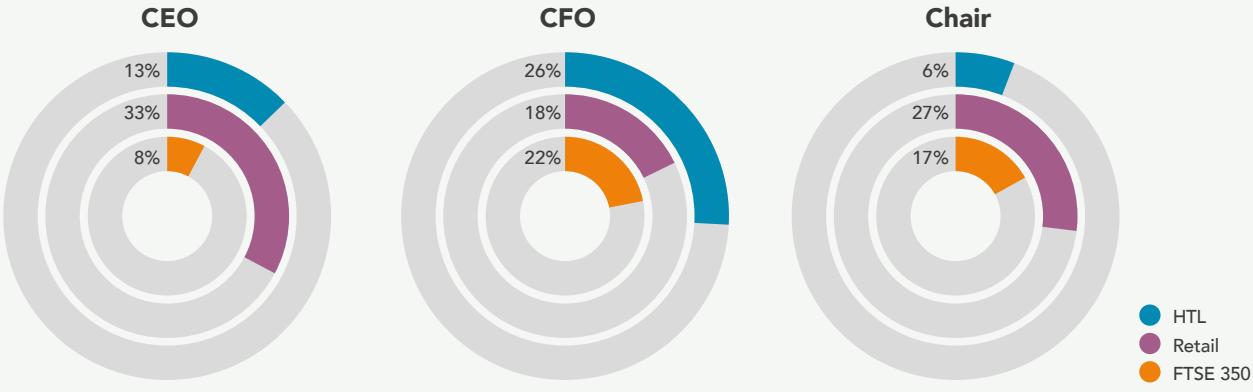
However, there has been a significant improvement in the number of all-white boards in retail with 72% now reporting ethnic diversity at that level. Conversely, HTL boards are tracking the other way, increasing from 42% last year to 55%.

This is notable when read alongside targets and board-level accountability, as half of retailers reported having formal representation targets in place, whereas less than a third of HTL businesses implement this.

When turning our attention towards other characteristics outside of gender and ethnic minority representation, we found that LGBTQ+ leader visibility has jumped from over 50% last year to 72% this year, the sharpest improvement of any characteristic we track, while, conversely, physical disability visibility has fallen in the same period, from 25% to 11%.

Benchmarked against the FTSE 350, HTL and retail both lag behind at board level but sit meaningfully ahead of it at executive committee and direct reports. Retail board representation has actually fallen for two consecutive years, from 45% in 2024 to 42% this year, yet retail's CEO and Chair figures sit well ahead of the

Women in senior strategic roles



FTSE 350's 8% and 17%, and far ahead of HTL's own CEO and Chair figures of 13% and 6%.

Even as retail's boardroom composition has softened, the sector has continued placing women in its very top seats, suggesting the dip lower down the board isn't yet translating into a weaker top of the house. HTL shows no equivalent cushion; its Chair figure in particular, at just 6%, is the weakest reading anywhere in this comparison.

What the data tells us about barriers to progression

Companies were asked whether they track diversity in their promotion and progression pipeline, and to describe any specific barriers identified for under-represented groups. Less than half have this fully implemented, a further 21% have it partially in place, and over a third are still at an early or non-existent stage.

A striking number of companies admitted, unprompted, that their data isn't yet good enough to draw conclusions from, arguably a more trustworthy signal than an unsupported confident answer.

This pattern - genuine investment in measurement paired with an honest admission that it's too early to draw conclusions - recurred often enough that it reads as a stage of maturity in itself.

72%

can name an LGBTQ+ leader

11%

can name a leader with a physical disability

How companies are approaching inclusion

70%

can name a leader who represents social mobility

56%

can name a neurodiverse leader

Social mobility and neurodiversity

Nearly 70% of respondents could point to a socially mobile leader, more than for disability or neurodiversity, yet almost none collect the data systematically. One CEO told us:

> "I failed all my A-levels and went to the biggest state school in the UK, and worked my way up from a waiter to a CEO."
>
> **CEO, casual dining group**

One global hotel group pointed to a similar pattern at the very top of its operations arm: the executive overseeing its largest regional operation - thousands of hotels - began at frontline level and now reports directly to the CEO. This is a rare example of social mobility showing up specifically within senior operational leadership rather than elsewhere in the business.

By contrast, adjustments for neurodiverse colleagues are far more practical, as managers are able to implement rota changes, or make onboarding tweaks. It could be as simple as a manager willing to talk openly about their own diagnosis. The likelihood of this being the case in HTL is high, as one Chief People Officer told us:

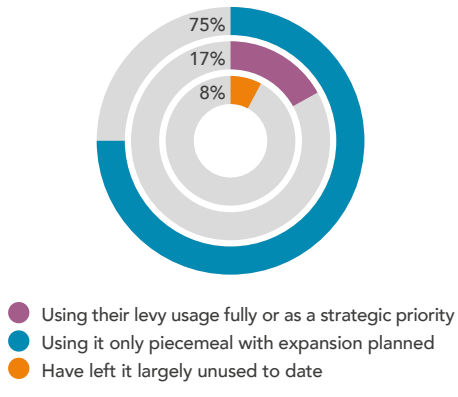
> "You've got a population where around one in five are neurodivergent in some way. In quick service restaurants, this becomes closer to one in two."
>
> **Chief People Officer, QSR chain**

Apprenticeships and pipelines

Several companies pointed to apprenticeships as their most concrete, measurable pipeline intervention. From our research we found that 75% of companies are using their levy usage fully or as a strategic priority, a further 17% are using it only piecemeal with expansion planned, and 8% have left it largely unused to date. The pattern suggests apprenticeships are one of the few levers companies can point to with a hard number attached, but usage varies enormously by company size and sector maturity.

For inclusion specifically, this is key because apprenticeships open a route into the industry, and eventually into leadership, for people who

Companies apprenticeship levy usage



72%

of retail businesses now have ethnic diversity on their board

28%

have hard representation targets in place

56%

can name a neurodiverse leader

45%

of HTL businesses have women's representation at direct reports level

wouldn't otherwise have access to it, making levy usage a concrete proxy for how seriously a company is investing in its diversity pipeline rather than just its diversity messaging.

AI and data

AI is reshaping employee relations before it reshapes jobs with early automation landing first in operational functions, raising fresh questions about bias in workforce decisions.

For leaders, this changes what running an inclusive workplace actually requires. Decisions that used to sit with a line manager are increasingly shaped by new systems, which makes it harder for leadership to know whether the outcome is fair. For inclusion these are exactly the decisions where bias has traditionally crept in unnoticed, and rather than removing this risk, automation could make it even more difficult to notice.

Almost none of the companies in this year's research have a bias safeguard attached to how AI is used in workforce decisions, which means the accountability inclusion strategies have spent years building into human decision-making hasn't yet caught up with the systems now making some of those decisions instead. We were told by one executive:

> "We use AI to support in putting together our outcomes."
>
> **Head of People, boutique hotel group**

Inclusion strategies depend on people believing the process is there to help them, and that trust is precisely what's being strained by tools that promise more precision but can just as easily produce less fair outcomes.

WiHTL & DiR analysis

A higher bar and a sector rising to meet it

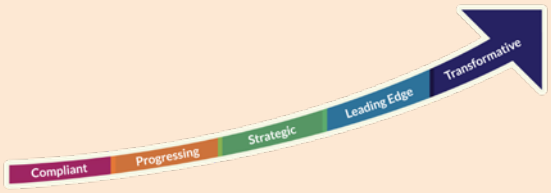
Now in its fourth year, the Inclusion Maturity Curve has become an industry benchmark for understanding how organisations across hospitality, travel, leisure and retail are turning their commitment to inclusion into meaningful action. Over 100 organisations have contributed since its launch, helping build a clearer picture of progress across the sectors. This year's findings draw on data from 95 organisations and a three-year analysis by AlixPartners, while a new Transformative level sets a higher bar for inclusion.

What's new in 2026

As organisations mature, the assessment must evolve with them. Shaped by Member feedback, the guidance of our Advisory Board and the analytical expertise of AlixPartners, the 2026 curve adds greater stretch throughout.

A fifth level: Transformative

Beyond Leading Edge, at the Transformative level, inclusion is embedded in to an organisation's purpose, strategy and culture. Leaders are accountable for outcomes, with their influence extending beyond the organisation to partners, supply chains and communities.

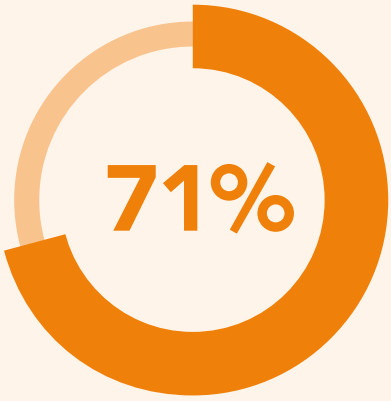


New questions in five areas

We introduced new questions focused on the key areas identified in our 2025 analysis as having a significant impact on inclusion.

1. **Intersectionality** in data and targeted action
2. **Social mobility** in recruitment and progression
3. **Financial wellbeing** and its effect on retention
4. **Onboarding** as the foundation of inclusion
5. **CEO engagement**, priorities and accountability

2026 industry benchmark



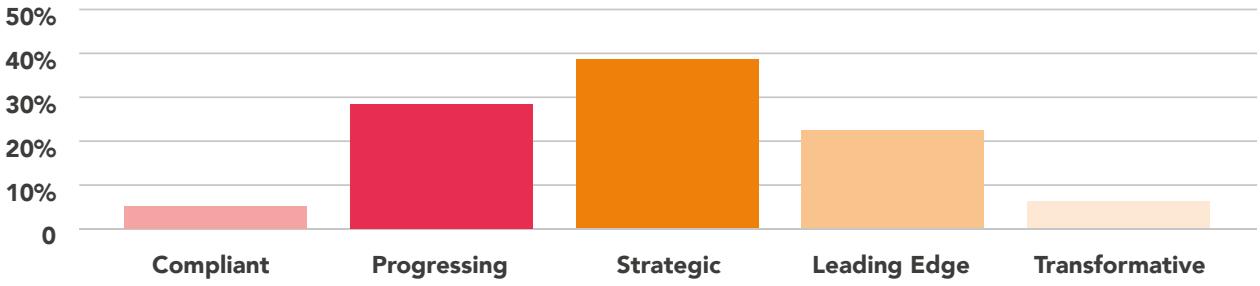
71%
Hospitality, travel and leisure

71.2%
Retail

Setting our sights higher

With a stretching benchmark for 2026, average scores are naturally lower than in 2025 (HTL 72.2%, retail 74%), reflecting our ambition to keep raising the bar for inclusion.

Share of organisations at each level in 2026



Strategic remains the most prevalent level, with **28% of organisations now reaching Leading Edge or above** and an encouraging 6% achieving Transformative in its first year

Source: Inclusion Maturity Curve 2026

What sets Transformative organisations apart

What sets organisations at the new Transformative level apart from those at Leading Edge is consistency, rather than individual initiatives. Inclusion is embedded in everyday decisions across the employee journey, supply chain and leadership. Our analysis highlights five key areas that distinguish these organisations and underpin their progress.

Data is reviewed across the whole employee lifecycle

Barriers to success are identified through analysis of recruitment, progression, reward and retention data. For example, every Transformative organisation reviews applicant demographic data, compared with 38% of Leading Edge organisations.

Employee Network Groups (ENGs) are trained and funded

All Transformative organisations invest in the capability and effectiveness of their networks through training, resources and funding, recognising them as strategic partners. In comparison, only 47% of Leading Edge organisations provide ENG training.

Suppliers are held to account

Organisations set clear expectations of inclusion for their suppliers and hold them accountable for meeting those expectations.

Social mobility is built into strategy

Active engagement with schools and colleges helps widen access to opportunities and career progression for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, driving positive social change and stronger business performance.

A visible, accountable CEO and Senior Leadership Team

Senior leaders, particularly the CEO, play an active role in championing inclusion, demonstrating visible commitment both internally and externally and taking accountability for progress against organisational priorities.

Where organisations are improving

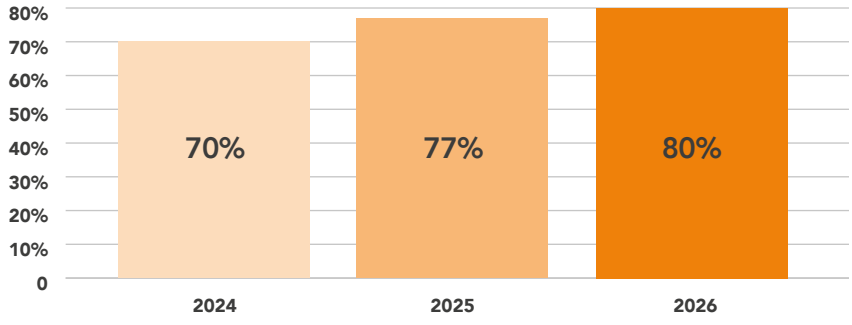
Progress was broad, with 74% of questions showing an increase in organisations reporting practices as fully in place. Wellbeing and workplace adjustments saw the greatest gains, demonstrating a growing commitment to creating workplaces where everyone can thrive.

Source: Inclusion Maturity Curve 2025 and 2026

Three years of sustained commitment delivers results, with smaller companies closing the gap

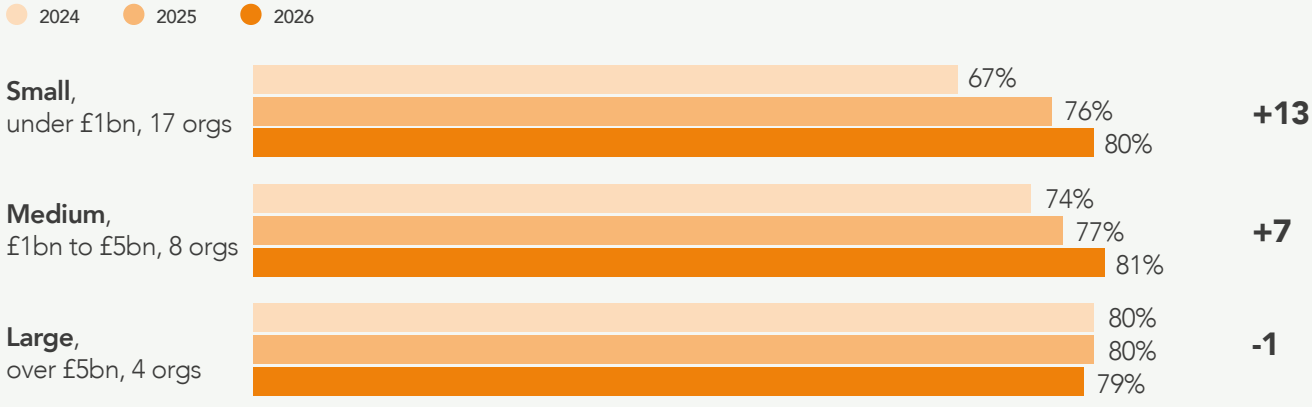
AlixPartners followed the 29 organisations that have completed the Inclusion Maturity Curve every year for the last three years. The results are striking, with **these organisations now averaging a score of 80%, nine points above the 2026 benchmark of 71%,** showing that organisations which complete the assessment every year achieve higher levels of maturity than those which do not.

Overall inclusion score, 29 organisations



Up ten points in three years, with an increase of seven points in 2025 followed by a further three points in 2026

Three year trend by organisation size, 2024 to 2026



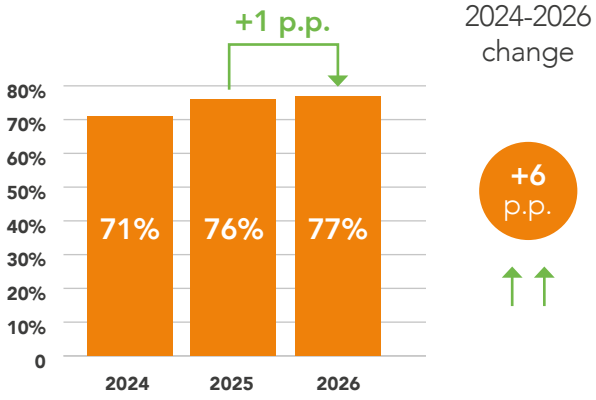
In 2024, small organisations trailed the largest by 13 points. By 2026 they had drawn level, while medium sized organisations moved ahead. Large organisations held broadly steady, as a fall in stakeholder scores in 2026 offset gains elsewhere.

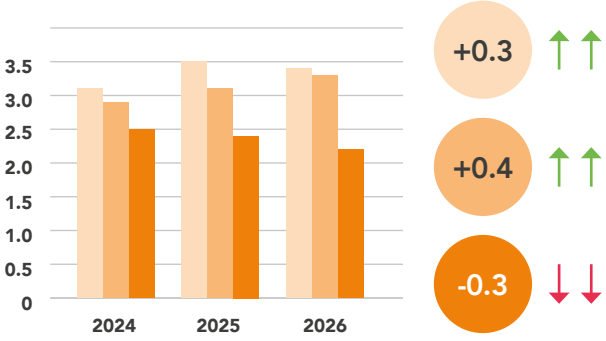
Scores are calculated like for like, tracking the same organisations over a three year period to distinguish genuine progress from changes in participation

Inclusion maturity is not about size or resources. It's about focus and consistency.

Hospitality, travel and leisure has overtaken retail

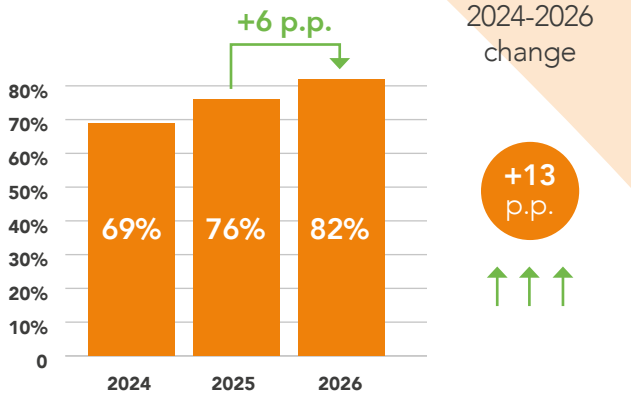
Retail sector – overall inclusion score evolution and breakdown 2024-2026

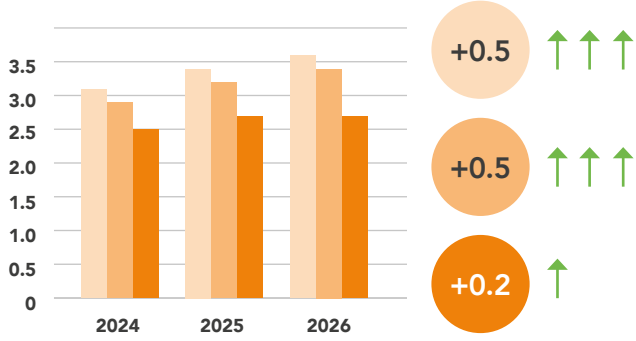




Leadership Employee journey Stakeholders

HTL sector – overall inclusion score evolution and breakdown 2024-2026





Leadership Employee journey Stakeholders

Over the past three years, HTL has moved from two points behind retail in 2024 to five points ahead in 2026, progressing at more than twice the rate and making gains across all three sections. Retail has also advanced in leadership and the employee journey. Stakeholder scores remain low across both sectors, with retail scoring lower in this section, partly reflecting the stretched 2026 benchmark and new questions on supplier diversity, an area where both sectors have further to go.

Source: AlixPartners analysis of 29 organisations, 2024-2026

Where progress is gaining momentum and where more needs to be done

Looking beneath the overall score reveals a more nuanced picture. Of the three sections of the curve, leadership and the employee journey have strengthened steadily since 2024, while stakeholder scores have remained the same.

Leadership

What has improved: Small organisations drove much of this progress. CEO messaging on inclusion is a relative strength, at 2.4, and inclusion features in leadership performance evaluations, at 2.3.

What needs improving: More visible leadership and accountability are needed. Financial incentives linked to inclusion score 1.4 for executive teams and 1.1 for their direct reports, no higher than in 2024, and large organisations slipped as these links weakened.

Employee journey

What has improved: The only section in which every size group improved, led by sharing interview questions in advance (1.1 to 1.8), tracking early leavers (1.5 to 2.0) and executive sponsorship (1.4 to 2.0).

What needs improving: Fair selection and pay transparency need greater focus. Job trials have slipped to 1.1 and very few organisations report on pension pay gaps.

Stakeholders

What has improved: More organisations can now reject suppliers who cannot demonstrate a commitment to inclusion, up 0.55 since 2024, and small organisations made modest gains.

What needs improving: Still the lowest scoring section, with large organisations falling from 2.8 to 2.4. Inclusion reporting and ESG linked finance remain uncommon, and supplier diversity is the clearest gap.

Supplier diversity practice, 2026 (Score out of four)

Supplier diversity is a newer area of the curve, with most questions introduced in 2025 or 2026, measuring how organisations extend inclusion through the way they select, support and work with suppliers.

1.8	1.5	1.1	0.8	0.5
Policy to reject suppliers	Collaboration with suppliers	Support for diverse suppliers	Training for purchasing teams	Formal programme with goals

Policies are the most developed practice, but the formal programmes and training needed to put them into practice are lagging behind.

Source: AlixPartners analysis of 29 organisations, 2024 to 2026

From insight to action

Drawing together our 2026 benchmark and the three year analysis by AlixPartners, this final section shows where organisations have advanced most, where more is needed and which actions will make the biggest difference.

Where organisations have prioritised

Over the past three years, organisations have made the greatest progress on these four practices. Each is scored out of four, and the figures show how far the average score has risen since 2024.

Setting targets for how many employees complete inclusion training

Tracking diversity in the promotion and progression pipeline

A policy to reject suppliers who cannot demonstrate a commitment to inclusion

Having at least one Employee Network Group

Where adoption remains limited

Leadership performance. Inclusion features inconsistently in objectives and performance management, with little use of financial incentives.

Recruitment and selection. Job trials remain one of the least used selection methods.

Supplier programmes. Formal programmes, procurement training and support for diverse suppliers are not yet widespread.

Data and workforce tracking. Intersectional data, returner tracking and pension pay gap reporting remain uncommon.

Six actions for employers

Drawing on both analyses, these are the areas where focused effort will have the greatest impact.

1. Keep measuring and measure more deeply

Maturity scores rise with continual engagement in the benchmarking process, from 60% for first time participants to 77% for returning organisations and 80% for those taking part three years running. Tracking intersectional data and pension pay gaps will deepen this insight.

2. Hold leaders accountable with clear consequences

Fewer than half link executive team objectives to inclusion and only 37% link it to financial incentives, so setting both for leaders and their direct reports is the clearest next step.

3. Give the CEO a visible voice

CEO messaging on inclusion is a relative strength, but more visible leadership is needed. In Transformative organisations the CEO owns progress and speaks about it regularly, inside and outside the business.

4. Widen access to opportunity

Job trials and paid, openly advertised internships remain among the least adopted practices, and embedding social mobility into inclusion strategy will open doors to a wider pool of talent.

5. Turn support into lasting impact

Adjustments rose sharply, yet only 26% of organisations check they work. Network groups also deliver most when Chairs and members are trained as well as funded.

6. Extend inclusion into the supply chain

Supplier diversity remains one of the least mature areas of the curve, and building on policy with buyer training, a formal programme and support for diverse suppliers will accelerate progress.

Inclusion maturity rewards commitment. Organisations that measure, act and return every year go further and faster, whatever their size.

Source: AlixPartners analysis of 29 organisations, 2024 to 2026; Inclusion Maturity Curve 2026

Case studies

Case studies from the WiHTL & DiR Collaboration Community illustrate how Leading organisations are embedding inclusion as a core driver of business performance, culture and long-term value. The following examples from Moto, Sainsbury's, The Gym Group, Wickes and DFS highlight how inclusive practices shape colleague experience, strengthen customer connection and support resilience in increasingly competitive markets.

Inclusion as a core business discipline

At Moto, inclusion is a non-negotiable part of our business strategy because our business is delivered by people, for people. Every customer experience depends on colleagues feeling respected, safe and able to be themselves, which is central to our ambition to be an Employer of Choice.

We treat inclusion as a business discipline. It sits within our People and Culture strategy, is sponsored at board level and is translated into measurable goals that leaders are accountable for. It is built into every stage of the colleague lifecycle, with inclusive leadership positioned as a core skill. Representation goals are informed by census and local site demographics, and we publish our monitoring to ensure transparency.

Inclusion shows up in how leaders run shifts and build psychologically safe teams. Our wellbeing charter and network of more than 600 wellbeing champions provide peer-led support across sites, while flexible working, improved roster visibility and shift-swapping help colleagues balance work and personal commitments. Our commitment to 'listening and acting' builds trust and encourages people to speak up.

Our 2025 'Have your say' score reached 88%, up five points year-on-year and 15 points on five years ago, and materially ahead of retail and hospitality benchmarks. We have also been repeatedly assessed as Leading Edge in the Inclusion Maturity Curve and named in the Sunday Times Top 10 Best Places to Work for two consecutive years.

Sainsbury's Inclusion as a driver of long-term performance

At Sainsbury's, inclusion is fundamental to how we lead, serve customers and deliver long-term performance. It is not an add-on to our strategy but woven into how we operate, because colleagues who can be themselves and feel safe to speak up build a resilient, high-performing business.

We have hard-wired inclusion into structures, systems and leadership expectations rather than relying on goodwill alone. Each Operating Board member sponsors an inclusion focus area, working closely with colleague networks so under-represented voices inform business priorities and policy design.

Data underpins our approach. We analyse recruitment, progression, engagement and psychological safety across different groups, linking inclusion activity directly to retention and performance outcomes. Day-to-day, inclusion shows in how managers lead and how our spaces and services are designed, supported by practical tools such as inclusive leadership guidance and manager resources.

The impact is clear: higher levels of engagement and psychological safety, supporting productivity and retention. As our CEO Simon Roberts has said, the strengthening of our business alongside a deeper commitment to inclusion "is not a coincidence." Senior leaders champion inclusion by showing up consistently and modelling the behaviours we expect. The Inclusion Maturity Curve gives us a credible way to track progress over time.

the gym group Inclusion as a commercial and cultural enabler

At The Gym Group, inclusion is a non-negotiable part of our strategy because it sits at the heart of our purpose: breaking down barriers to fitness for all. It shapes how we think about members and our people at every level, and it is a commercial and cultural enabler, not a 'people initiative'.

We treat inclusion as a business strategy, building it into leadership accountability, operational processes and how we design gyms, shape classes and hire, develop and progress our people. A key priority is improving representation in senior leadership, particularly for women and ethnically diverse talent, because diverse leadership drives better decisions and stronger innovation.

Inclusion comes to life in how our teams engage with members. We combine colleague and member feedback with data such as gym visit trends to shape decisions, for example introducing women-only workout areas and upskilling teams through our Female Health First programme. Our Inclusive Traineeships create meaningful opportunities while strengthening inclusive leadership capability.

94% of members rate us four or five out of five, and internal engagement scores are consistently high across inclusion, wellbeing and job satisfaction, influencing retention, productivity and consistency of delivery. Our senior team champions inclusion by setting expectations, modelling behaviours and taking part in reverse mentoring. Benchmarking through the Inclusion Maturity Curve shows our progression from Silver to Gold status.

Inclusion at the heart of culture, strategy and performance

At Wickes, inclusion is about ensuring every colleague feels valued, seen and heard. We bring this to life daily through our values, behaviours, responsible business strategy, D&I networks and people proposition, because every colleague is pivotal to our success and needs to feel at home with us.

Our people proposition is the foundation of our business strategy, built on Our Winning Values, Our Colleague Promise and Our Leadership Behaviours, all with inclusion at their core. Our Responsible Business Strategy, led by one of our Non-Executive Directors, includes long-term diversity and inclusion targets that will see us better represent the communities we serve.

True inclusion is about consistency and the day-to-day experience. Our six colleague networks drive awareness, education, policy and practice, acting as a sounding board for the business and flagging where policy or process gaps may appear. This has heightened awareness of the value diversity of thought brings, and of who is in the room when key decisions are made.

Our newly launched Leadership Behaviours, including Combine & Enhance, help leaders unlock the power of diverse and inclusive teams, and executive board members sponsor the networks. The Inclusion Maturity Curve gives us a consistent benchmark against the wider sector, offering challenge, relevance and a collective view as more organisations join.

DFS turns inclusive leadership into practical action

Over the last 12-18 months, we've been delivering Leading for Inclusion workshops across the Group, reaching 450+ leaders in our brands and functions with a combination of both F2F and virtual sessions. We close the workshop with a series of practical tools, covering acts of sponsorship, self-education and encouragement to connect with our thriving colleague networks and associated initiatives. Giving leaders space to do their thinking out loud in a psychologically safe setting, alongside valuable learning and actionable takeaways has delivered significant impact, seen in our shift to a more human-centric leadership style and reflected in the results of our colleague engagement survey.

We're already seeing the impact of this work, with DFS winning the Inclusion Maturity Curve: Most Progress in Retail Award in 2025. Our commitment to building a more inclusive culture also sits at the heart of our wider business success. We've seen strong results in FY26, with year-on-year revenue up 2.6%, gross margin reaching 58.1% and profit increasing by 49%. NPS scores also reached record highs, while our market leadership position grew to 40%. Looking ahead, we'll continue building on this progress, both for our people and for the business.

Amy Pandazis
Group Head of Inclusion & Social Impact, DFS

Developing talent

Project 10,000

Project 10,000
Invest in the Leaders of the Future

Project 10,000 reached its halfway point this year. Our ambitious initiative aims to positively impact 10,000 individuals through our Leadership Development Programmes by 2030, and over 5,000 people have now benefited through our apprenticeships and Leadership Development Programmes. Every one of them is helping to build stronger, more diverse talent pipelines across hospitality, travel, leisure and retail.

Getting here has taken more than 300 sessions: over 200 delivered virtually and more than 100 face-to-face in venues across the country. Each one has been an investment in someone's growth. And the impact reaches well beyond Delegates: mentors, line managers, executive sponsors and reverse mentees all contribute, creating a ripple effect that drives organisational change and accountability.

Behind every one of those 5,000 is a story. Delegates have found their voice, gaining the confidence to step up, rethink how they are perceived at work and define the kind of leader they want to be. A thousand mentors have reignited their purpose, and their organisations have gained fresh thinking and leadership growth.

For nearly a third of our graduates, the impact has been immediate and tangible: a promotion into a higher-level role, which many Delegates tell us is directly off the back of their programme experience. Project 10,000 spans a wide portfolio of programmes and apprenticeships that is building talent at every stage of a career. Organisations benefit as participants return with new skills, networks and ideas that strengthen succession planning and embed inclusion more deeply.

Reaching this target is a moment to celebrate and to thank every organisation and individual who has helped us get here. We are halfway and going strong, and we are only just getting started. Together, let's build the next five thousand.

Sean Biquette
Head of People Partnering, Haven and Ethnic Senior Leadership Graduate.

"My involvement with WiHTL's leadership programme and advisory board has been transformative, not just for my own growth, but in witnessing how this work creates a genuine ripple effect across organisations. With this project reaching an important milestone, I've seen first-hand the positive impact and the real power of intentional leadership development, as well as diverse talent pipelines. What's struck me most is how mentors, sponsors and participants are able to collectively drive organisational change and accountability; it's ultimately bigger than any individual journey."

The impact of our Leadership Development Programmes in numbers

Delegates consistently rate our Leadership Development Programmes very highly with feedback of nine out of ten, and 2026 has brought a new marker of success: a growing number of alumni choosing to pay it forward, stepping into cohorts as mentors, reverse mentees and executive sponsors, all increasing the ripple effect towards our Project 10,000 goal. This year, we're proud to share standout results across all nine of our programmes*:

626
Delegates

209
Executive sponsors

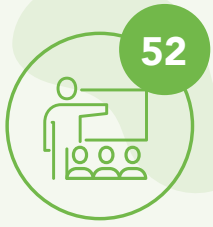
217
Reverse mentees

234
Line managers

294
Mentors

1580
Total participants

Virtual sessions



In-person sessions

*All figures include cohorts that have kicked off, graduated, are in progress or have nomination windows currently open in 2026.

From learning to impact: participant experiences

While our Leadership Development Programmes impact employees on many levels, nothing is more rewarding than seeing that impact translate into a promotion and since 2020, 30% of programme graduates have gone on to higher-level roles. Here, participants from the programmes share the impact their learning experience has had on their confidence and clarity in their career direction.

Reverse mentee:

"WiHTL has played a significant role in my career over the past three years, from taking part in the Women Leaders Programme, to being named a 2026 Woman to Watch and becoming a reverse mentee through the EFL programme. That experience has been particularly powerful, helping me recognise that being a woman from an ethnic minority background isn't something to overcome; it's part of my superpower as a leader."

Laila Abdin-Winter,
Brand Experience Director, Warner Hotels

Role model:

"Nearly a year after completing the Women in Leadership programme, I'm still using the valuable skills and tools I gained, such as being able to articulate my leadership narrative for an interview. Returning as a Role Model felt like coming full circle and it was a privilege to share the experience, skills and golden nuggets I've gathered on my journey to senior leadership. I hope I had the same impact as the role models did for me."

Andrea Beveney,
Head of Legal - Inquiry Team, Post Office

Mentor:

"Being a mentor is such a privilege, so I was delighted to be asked to take up the role in several Leadership Development Programmes. Having the opportunity to help leaders build their confidence and find their own answers and pathways is a wonderful feeling. I also learnt so much from our conversations: learning is a continuous journey, one that never stops."

Fran Merrylees,
Chief People Officer, European Tour Group

Ethnic Future Leaders Programme

"The programme has changed me as a person in the workplace. It's made me so confident to speak up and embrace my authentic self, because I now see that what I thought were my barriers are actually my strengths."

Rawa Hussain, Legal Counsel, Post Office

The UK&I Women Leadership Programme

"This experience has been hugely beneficial and enlightening. I have increased my network and relationships, and my confidence has grown. I am now clearer on the path I want to take and how I am going to get there."

Lauren Gaffan, Creative Design Lead, Greene King

The Global Women Leadership Programme

"It's helped me gain real clarity on the direction I want my career to take. I left the programme with greater confidence, a clearer sense of purpose and actionable steps to support both my career progression and the development of those around me."

Nicola Gittins, Senior Director, Sales Support & Customer Engagement, Hilton

Ethnic Senior Leaders Programme

"This programme doesn't ask you to just adapt to leadership, it prepares you to redefine it."

Silvia Riccardi, Head of Integrated Supply Chain Planning, De Beers

Non-Executive Director Programme

"For anyone considering whether a NED career is right for them now, or might be in future, this is an essential resource for learning, connection and inspiration."

Carol Campbell, Managing Director, Inspired Clarity

Aspiring CPO in HTL & Retail Programme

"One of the standout aspects of the programme has been the opportunity to build a fantastic network of peers. The relationships I've developed with the group have been invaluable, and the shared experiences and discussions have challenged my thinking and given me fresh perspectives."

Amy Dicastiglione-Gray, People Director, Hollywood Bowl Group

Apprenticeships

In early 2026, WiHTL & DiR became an accredited provider of Apprenticeship Levy-funded development programmes. Starting with three, we've just launched our fifth, a remarkable achievement for a new provider, made possible by Members who value our speed and quality and trust us with their learners.

Each builds technical and leadership expertise, with inclusion woven throughout. Our specialism lies in supporting diverse populations, including ethnic minority backgrounds, women, and low socio-economic backgrounds, with programmes delivered cross-industry, some of which can be tailored to individual organisations' needs. They give individuals across all levels the skills, confidence and credibility to progress into senior roles, while helping employers strengthen performance, retention and reputation. By combining practical, on-the-job learning with a focus on inclusive leadership, we're not just developing careers, we're building a pipeline of confident, capable leaders who reflect the diversity of the sectors we serve.

Imogen Woodhall

HR Business Partner, AIS

"The content has genuinely given me a fresh perspective of my role, because I'm looking in from an external governance perspective. The content in the sessions are conversation based and allow you to meet a variety of people of different roles across different businesses, adding a whole new layer of depth to your learning. It's taking me outside my comfort zone and it's enabled me to elevate my role as HR Business Partner which will ultimately support the business as well as my own development."

Brian Duffy

CEO, Watches of Switzerland Group

"We see apprenticeships as an investment in our people and our future success. They give colleagues the chance to develop skills, gain valuable experience and apply their learning with real impact from day one. Working with WiHTL & DiR, we're proud to actively support participants in the Corporate Governance Officer Programme, helping them build confidence and prepare for new opportunities. By investing in apprenticeships, we're helping our people succeed and keeping Watches of Switzerland Group well positioned for the future."

Corporate governance

NextGen Retail Manager

NextGen Hospitality

NextGen Talent Development Professional

NextGen Business Admin

Scan to find out more.

Women to Watch and Role Models for Inclusion in HTL & Retail Indexes

Showcasing diverse leadership talent across our sectors remains at the heart of what we do. Nowhere is this felt more powerfully than through our annual Women to Watch Index (2026 was our eighth edition) and Role Models for Inclusion in HTL & Retail Index, produced in partnership with The MBS Group. Both publications continue to shine a light on the careers of extraordinary individuals, and in sharing their experiences and insights, we've seen first-hand how they inspire others to thrive and reach their own potential. To mark the launch of the 2026 indexes, we hosted two celebratory events bringing together everyone featured, a chance to network, recognise one another's achievements and reaffirm just how deep and vital diverse talent runs across our industry.

Women to Watch

Tamima Choudhury
Business Systems Manager, Moto

"Being recognised is both an honour and a responsibility, reinforcing the value of non-traditional career paths and continuous learning. Most importantly, it is an opportunity to create space for others championing belonging, mentoring women into leadership and helping to build environments where diverse perspectives are valued."

Role Models for Inclusion

Adam Chater-Hannon
Senior Project Manager, Whitbread

"Being a Role Model for Inclusion means consistently leading by example, even when no one is watching. It is about active support, showing up for people when they are not in the room by using your voice to challenge bias."

Women to Watch

Margot Slattery

Global Head of Social Sustainability and Inclusion, ISS World Services

"This acknowledgement is not just about individual achievement. It reminds us that visibility matters: when women see others leading at senior levels, it expands what's possible for the next generation."

Role Models for Inclusion

Kai Bentley-Grey

Senior Technology Business Partner, DFS

"I am driven by the belief that visibility matters, not just for my own journey, but to pave the way for colleagues who may feel less comfortable coming forward."

The WiHTL & DiR Collaboration Community

Our Collaboration Community

No single company can move the inclusion agenda forward alone. Our Collaboration Community brings brands together across sectors to challenge, connect and learn from one another, turning shared experience into collective progress and into performance with purpose.

That change is built by our Members, from those just starting out to our Leading Inclusive Employers setting the pace. Through our Committees, webinars and events, including our Inclusion Summit and *inclusion in* Awards, Members connect with organisations at every stage of their inclusion maturity, testing ideas and turning insight into action. Whatever your starting point, membership gives you four ways to impact your practice and make progress:

Connect

Build relationships with peers and senior leaders across sectors.

Committees, CPO Board, C-suite lunches

Chief People Officer Board

Learn

Hear what's working, and why, from organisations at every stage.

Webinars, events, i-mag, reports

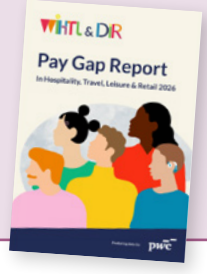
THE WiHTL & DiR INCLUSION SUMMIT 2026

Measure

Benchmark your progress and see where to focus next.

Inclusion Maturity Curve, indexes

Inclusion Maturity Curve



Develop

Grow talent through apprenticeships and leadership development.

Apprenticeships and Leadership Development Programmes

virgin atlantic

"Virgin Atlantic has remained a member of WiHTL & DiR because of the practical insight, challenge and connection the organisation provides. Over time, the relationship has developed from being primarily about access to research, events and benchmarking into a much broader partnership."

Committees

Our Committees are a standout benefit of membership, bringing Members together to drive progress toward inclusive workplaces and their impact shows. Members are engaging colleagues from across their business by opening up access to the Committees, translating shared best practice into real action and using peer case studies to shape their own strategies. Each of our Committees hosted discussions with expert guest speakers from Member organisations and Partners, alongside welcoming more external speakers in 2026 including RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People), Only a Pavement Away, and White Allies Network who all shared inspiring insights.

of our Members have put forward representatives

25
Sessions run

39
Speakers

Attendance at the Committees gives Members the opportunity to:

Connect to a network of peers who understand.

"It has helped me understand that other companies are experiencing the same challenges."

Member, Employee Network Group Committee (Travelodge).

"It has helped me create an external network of like-minded people in other organisations who I now speak with directly and share ideas with to help make the wider retail sector more accessible."

Member, Accessibility Committee (Primark).

Spread the knowledge back to the wider business.

"The tangible impact for us has been the ability to bring relevant allies into the committees to engage them and increase their support across the business."

Member, Data & Insights / ENG / Socio-economic Background Committees (Harrods).

"The Primark case study was useful to see how ERGs can have an impact commercially as well, so for awareness days in the year, we have started decorating our shop windows."

Member, five Committees (Age UK).

Act and turn peer insight into real change.

"The committee has effectively accelerated our progress by giving us access to real examples, peer learning, and expert perspectives that we could immediately translate into action."

Member, Race & Ethnicity Committee (De Beers).

"The Committee has been incredibly valuable in broadening my understanding of race and ethnicity topics and providing access to diverse perspectives and insights. It has encouraged us to rethink how we create awareness and engagement through our TMRG Group, helping us move beyond traditional approaches and deliver initiatives that are more impactful, inclusive and relevant to our colleagues."

Member, Race & Ethnicity Committee (QVC).

Learn and borrow what's working from other businesses.

"The conversations are really beneficial to see how we can learn from what different businesses are doing. So much can be learned from our lived experiences, as these can help shape what we can be working on in our own organisations."

Member, Race & Ethnicity / Accessibility / Socio-economic Background Committees (Wyboston Lakes).

"It's been invaluable in learning examples and hearing experiences of how other sectors are dealing with new legislation and challenges such as pay gap reporting."

Member, Data & Insights Committee (ETG).

With the introduction of our new Talent and LGBTQ+ Committees this year, we now have eight Committees, each focused on a different area of inclusion.

Accessibility

Data and insights

Employee Network Group

HR and Inclusion Leaders

LGBTQIA+

Race and ethnicity

Socio-economic background

Talent

Changing lives, creating futures: The impact of our charity partnership

Team Domenica's partnership with WiHTL & DiR shows what shared commitment to inclusion can achieve. Since it began, the community has raised more than £400,000 and connected Team Domenica candidates with 12 employer partners, helping young people with learning disabilities and autism gain work experience, complete Supported Internships and move into paid employment.

In June 2026, WiHTL & DiR renewed their support for a further three years, boldly aiming to raise £1 million. Candidates have accessed opportunities with employers including Watches of Switzerland, Hilton, Compass Group, Costa and Nando's, and 23 have secured work experience, internships or paid employment. The partnership has also contributed more than £137,000 towards Team Domenica's new Education Centre in Brighton, a dedicated space for skills development.

Baroness Monckton MBE, Team Domenica and **Tea Colaianni MBE**, WiHTL & DiR

Baroness Monckton MBE
Founder and Chair of Team Domenica

"WiHTL & DiR support goes far beyond fundraising. It reflects a shared belief that young people with learning disabilities and autism deserve the chance to develop their talents, build confidence and find meaningful employment."

Simon Lucas
General Manager,
Nando's London Road, Brighton

"Once we started working with Max, the whole process was smooth. We found it enjoyable on our side and Max came out of his shell extremely quickly. As a person, he's bright, friendly, and wants to do a good job. There is a drive he takes to work and for himself. He's a fantastic employee."

In his second year at Team Domenica, Max began a Supported Internship at Nando's, London Road Brighton. Although nervous at first, with the support of his Team Domenica Job Coach and the welcoming team at Nando's, Max grew in confidence, becoming an integral part of the restaurant. His job includes greeting customers, working on the till, preparing orders and supporting the kitchen team. *"I feel like I'm part of the team here. I like having a job because it earns good money and I also like working with the staff. They're all friendly, you can have a laugh with them. My proudest moment was when I won Nandoca of the Month. It felt great being nominated twice in a row."*

Celebrating our Community's impact

The Members in our Collaboration Community have been doing incredible work to identify obstacles and build their solutions to progress their inclusive journey and drive organisational growth. From neurodiversity and parenthood to leadership representation and youth employment, their stories show that inclusion has the greatest impact when it is practical, personal and sustained. Here, a few of our Leading Inclusive Employers share the initiatives they are implementing to develop diverse talent and make meaningful change.

Moto equips 500 leaders to turn understanding into action

An initiative we're proud of is the neurodiversity training we rolled out for around 500 leaders across Moto. Rather than a quick e-learning module, we made it a full day, so leaders could understand how neurodivergent colleagues experience work and what adjustments help. Co-developed with neurodivergent colleagues and an external trainer, it came from hearing that real barriers weren't about capability but how work is managed. With 20% of the UK population projected to be neurodiverse, this matters for much of our workforce. Leaders now feel more confident opening conversations about adjustments, and we've seen changes to meetings and communication.

Louise Hughes
Chief People Officer,
Moto

Compass Group recognises that every journey to parenthood is different

We're delighted with the response to the second edition of our Planning for Parenthood guide, which broadened our support for colleagues beyond traditional routes to parenthood. The updated guide includes practical guidance and resources covering IVF, adoption, surrogacy and baby loss, alongside advice for line managers on providing compassionate and inclusive support. By recognising that every journey to parenthood is different, we created a resource that truly reflects the lived experiences of our people and helps foster a culture of belonging. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with colleagues valuing the visibility, understanding and support it provides.

Melanie Aston
Diversity and Inclusion Manager,
Compass Group

Screwfix grows its Neurodiversity Network into a driver of change

Our Inclusion Networks are at the heart of our work at Screwfix, and the Neurodiversity Employee Network has grown particularly impressively this year, more than doubling to 479 members, with 267 new ones. What began as a colleague community has evolved into one of our most engaged Networks, shaping how we think about accessibility, inclusion and colleague experience. Through initiatives such as Neurodiversity Empathy Labs and a Colleague Curious Conversation panel event, we've reviewed our internal PowerPoint templates, Head Office business update and annual managers conference through a neurodiversity lens. The Network has played an active role embedding inclusive practices across the business, and created a safe space for colleagues to share experiences and build meaningful connections.

Michelle Tattersall
Inclusion & Wellbeing Manager, Screwfix

McDonald's opens the door to work for young people

With over one million young people not in education, employment or training, McDonald's Work Experience Programme was created to help tackle the root causes of rising youth unemployment and support young people struggling to get their first step on the career ladder. As the UK's largest in-person and paid work experience programme, participants get that important first taste of work. Offering 2,500 placements in its first year, the programme helps young people build confidence, develop skills and experience to take meaningful steps towards future employment. The five-day placement is delivered by our Franchisees and available in restaurants across the country.

Joe Nagle
Manager, Culture & Engagement (Safeguarding Lead), McDonald's

Miratalent

Miratalent

Miratalent is where talent, culture and opportunity meet. Powered by WiHTL & DiR, Miratalent draws on all our expertise, experience and insight to help organisations develop their future leaders and build strong, inclusive cultures.

Same people, same purpose, same passion, wider impact. The same team brings the same purpose and the same passion: a belief in inclusion, access to opportunity and progression and a conviction that how people develop and experience work matters personally, culturally and commercially.

The following projects look back on what we achieved in 2026 and look ahead to 2027 where we will go wider and deeper still, bringing leadership development and advisory together, with inclusion underpinning every service. Find out more at **www.miratalent.com**

46
companies

65
projects

Some of the brands we've worked with

Advisory services: turning insight into action

Our advisory work gives us a close-up view of what is really happening inside organisations, where progress is being made, where momentum slows and what helps move things forward.

During 2026, we worked with organisations ranging from global businesses to national retailers, alongside executive teams, senior leaders, emerging talent and colleague networks, on projects spanning strategy and diagnostics, leadership capability, employee networks and the progression of underrepresented talent.

Our work in 2026

Building confidence and capability in leaders

We partnered with executive and senior leadership teams to build confidence in inclusive leadership and strengthen the connection between trust, culture, inclusion and performance, while also developing employee network chairs and co-chairs and helping executive sponsors understand where they can add the greatest value.

Accelerating careers

Our work included designing and delivering bespoke development programmes for women and ethnically diverse talent, building confidence, visibility and greater ownership of career progression, while working with organisations to create the right culture, experiences and opportunities for that talent to grow and progress.

Turning insight into strategy

Some of our most valuable work this year has been helping organisations understand what sits behind the data and where to focus next. For one multi-brand organisation, that meant uncovering the drivers of a persistent gender pay gap and rethinking how women with leadership potential are identified and developed. For a national retailer and an entertainment business, it meant helping leadership teams agree the priorities that would shape their strategies.

Improving the colleague experience

Culture and inclusion are shaped through everyday experiences, from recruitment and onboarding to progression and succession. That was the focus of our work with one global organisation, where we reviewed the full employee lifecycle to identify where the colleague experience could be improved and more inclusive, while other projects focused on inclusive recruitment and building an anti-racist culture, helping leaders and colleagues in all cases to respond with greater confidence and consistency.

The themes shaping 2027

The work of the past year has highlighted several themes that we expect to become increasingly important in 2027, shaping where organisations are likely to seek support.

Developing leaders for an ever-changing world

Leaders increasingly need to navigate change, ambiguity and complexity with agility, inclusive leadership and sound judgement. As AI becomes more embedded in the way we work, human qualities such as curiosity, empathy and trust will matter even more. These capabilities will be increasingly important at every level of leadership, from the frontline to the boardroom.

A new chapter for our advisory work

Next year, our advisory work will evolve from *inclusion in* to **Miratalent**, an exciting next step for the work we have built. The team, passion and purpose remain the same, with a broader focus on developing the leaders of the future. Inclusion will stay at the core, alongside culture and colleague experience, helping organisations build stronger leaders, better workplaces and better-performing businesses.

Capability is not always the issue, confidence is

Building confidence will remain critical to progression, particularly for talented people from underrepresented groups who have the ability to move forward yet are less likely to put themselves forward or see themselves at the next level. Sponsorship, visibility and opportunity also play an important role in whether that potential is realised.

Treat the cause, not the outcome

Understanding root causes will remain critical. Getting underneath the issue helps organisations make better choices about where to invest, avoid spending time and money on solutions that will not shift the dial and concentrate effort where it can have the greatest impact.

Connect talent, culture and experience

Talent, culture, inclusion and colleague experience cannot be treated as separate agendas. Together, they shape how effectively organisations attract, develop and progress talent, and how well that talent is able to perform. The real test is whether the day-to-day experience of colleagues, particularly on the frontline, reflects the culture the organisation believes it has.

Case studies

Building a stronger pipeline for ethnically diverse talent

Selfridges found ethnic diversity at entry level wasn't carrying through to senior management, with representation dropping above Level 3 and sitting at 0% at executive level. With *inclusion in*, a working group co-designed Embrace Your Future Self: three sessions on culture and power, personal branding, career planning, imposter syndrome and confidence, using fair self-nomination.

Impact was immediate, delegates rated it highly, and managers noticed shifts in thinking. Selfridges is tracking promotions, moves and engagement, aiming for 18% ethnic representation in senior management by 2028.

Zahrah Al-Bejawi, Learning & Development Manager – Talent Development, Selfridges

Resetting colleague networks for lasting impact

SSP partnered with *inclusion in* to rebuild its colleague networks from the ground up, replacing an inconsistent model with clear purpose, governance and accountability. Rather than prescribing answers, the advisory approach used structured facilitation, challenged assumptions and tested ideas, helping SSP's team reach decisions they could own. New role definitions gave network leads clarity, while bespoke training prepared the UK Executive team to act as confident sponsors. A facilitated session with network chairs and co-chairs produced a shared "North Star" giving SSP a durable foundation for inclusion as a strategic priority.

Mellissa Bignell, People Director: Support Functions & Strategic Programmes, SSP

Tackling racism and harassment through targeted training

Facing rising racist and sexually harassing behaviour towards colleagues, including on National Services phone lines, Age UK responded with operational and policy changes, commissioning *inclusion in* to deliver a pilot anti-racism training programme for its National Services leadership team. Across two, three-hour interactive workshops, 36 colleagues explored racism, reflected on their responsibilities and built practical skills for responding in live service settings. All participants said they could apply the learning, and 92% said the workshop met expectations. Age UK praised the tailored approach and would readily commission again.

Elisha Augustin, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Age UK

Looking forward: into 2027 and beyond

We've passed the halfway mark on Project 10,000, grown our Collaboration Community past 100 Members and reached 4.5 million employees and now head into 2027 with real momentum behind us. As *inclusion in* evolves into Miratalent and our apprenticeship offer expands, 2027 is about building on everything we've achieved so far with even greater reach across our industries. The landscape continues to evolve at pace, bringing fresh challenges, but also exciting potential to innovate, expand our reach and deepen our impact. Here's a glimpse of what lies ahead for us over the coming months.

Apprenticeships

In early 2027 we will launch open cohorts in Governance, Retail and Hospitality. We can also work with employers to design bespoke cohorts shaped around their people and priorities. We are developing new programmes in Talent Development and Business Administration too. Inclusion runs through everything we deliver, with cohorts built to help under-represented managers progress and content that supports managers with wellbeing and leading a Gen Z frontline workforce.

Miratalent - Same people, same passion, wider impact.

Next year, our advisory work will evolve from *inclusion in* to Miratalent, with leadership development at its heart. Miratalent works at the intersection of culture, inclusion and performance helping boards, executives and future leaders build strong talent pipelines filled with highly capable leaders. This evolution reflects what we are seeing through our work. Developing the leaders organisations need for the future goes hand in hand with building the pipeline behind them and creating the culture and experience that enables talent to thrive, driving business performance.

Community

Next year we're focused on adding even more value for our Members. Opportunity is growing through our Committees, webinars and workshops, alongside new research, surveys and reports that turn insight into action. Together, these give Members even more ways to connect, learn from each other and benchmark their progress. Because progress is always stronger together, and we're committed to deepening that value for our Collaboration Community.

Project 10,000: the Next Chapter

With over five thousand lives already changed, we've passed the halfway mark, and our sights are now set on the next five thousand. In the coming year we're widening our reach further, engaging even more Delegates, Mentors, Line Managers, Executive Sponsors, Reverse Mentees and Learners. Every cohort and every session takes us closer to our 2030 target, creating a ripple effect that reaches further across the industry than ever before.

Team Domenica

This year we are thrilled to extend our partnership with Team Domenica for another three years, a relationship that has grown through shared values and trust. Together we've already helped 23 young people with learning disabilities and autism secure work experience with supported internships and paid employment. We have now raised £400,000 towards a bold £1 million target. Next year we're going further: bringing more employers into the fold, opening more doors, and proving that talent is everywhere, even when opportunity isn't.

Inclusion Maturity Curve

Following the addition of our new Transformative pillar, next year is about making the Inclusion Maturity Curve even more relevant to the organisations using it. We're refining the framework so it speaks more directly to where organisations actually are on their journey, with clearer guidance on what progress looks like at every stage. The goal is simple: helping the industry not just measure inclusion, but know exactly how to improve it.

The WiHTL & DiR Inclusion Summit and *inclusion in* Awards

This year's Inclusion Summit and *inclusion in* Awards ceremony are only made possible with the support of our sponsors and partners. Their generous support and valued insight reflect a genuine dedication and commitment to ensuring inclusion is kept at the very forefront of business.

THE WiHTL & DiR INCLUSION SUMMIT 2026

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The 2026 inclusion in Awards — Powered by WiHTL & DiR

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Sponsors

Our sponsors play a vital role in driving inclusion forward, and their support helps make the Inclusion Summit and *inclusion in* Awards possible. Below, some of them share what our partnership means to them and why these events are such a meaningful platform to support.

Claire Northover, Head of Training, Autism Unlimited

"Being a partner of WiHTL & DiR means being part of a community that is actively driving positive change, championing diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities across hospitality and retail. This partnership strongly reflects our own values around people, equality and opportunity."

Tim Adams, Sales & Marketing Director, Bidfood

"Creating a workplace where everyone feels valued, supported and able to thrive is incredibly important to us at Bidfood. That's why we're proud to support the *inclusion in* Awards and recognise and celebrate the people and organisations driving positive change across our incredible industry."

Leni Savva, Chief Finance Officer, Elior

"Partnering with WiHTL allows us to drive meaningful change across our organisation and the wider industry. Together, we are committed to creating an inclusive environment where every colleague feels valued, supported and empowered to thrive, reflecting Elior's belief that inclusion is at the heart of how we care for our people and serve our customers."

Tracy Riddell, Head of Age Friendly Employers, Centre for Ageing Better

"We've been grateful for the opportunity to partner with WiHTL to help raise awareness of the existence of ageism within the workplace and the role that older workers have in today's modern labour market."

Chloe Quinn, Chief People Officer, Connells Group

"We're proud to support the WiHTL *inclusion in* Awards and celebrate the people and organisations leading the way in creating opportunities for others to succeed. At Connells Group, we're committed to creating a culture where everyone feels they belong and can be themselves at work. We believe that by embracing different perspectives, investing in our people and helping colleagues reach their full potential, we build a stronger, more successful business for the future."

David McDowall, CEO, Stonegate Group

"Our partnership with WiHTL plays a vital role in helping us build a truly inclusive, values-led business. We're proud to sponsor the Outstanding Inclusion Professional in HTL award at the 2026 *inclusion in* and celebrate the individuals who are driving meaningful change across our industry."

Portman Wills, CEO, Stream

"Stream and WiHTL & DiR share a common goal of fixing systemic inequality in the workplace, and society at large. The work we have done together sheds light on the obstacles that are placed in the way of women, minorities and other marginalised groups. That visibility is the first step to effecting real, meaningful change."

Suzie Kalsi, Inclusion & Diversity Lead, Greene King

"Our partnership with WiHTL & DiR gives us the opportunity to help drive meaningful progress on inclusion across our industry. For us, that means creating pubs where every team member and customer feels welcome, valued and that they belong. We're proud to sponsor the *inclusion in* Awards and to celebrate the organisations and individuals who are making a real difference and leading positive change."

Imogen Seear, Head of Hospitality, Travel & Leisure, Redgrave

"Consumer is at the heart of Redgrave's heritage, so partnering with WiHTL & DiR felt like a natural fit. Through our work with boards and leadership teams, we see the importance of looking beyond who's ready to lead today, asking where the next generation of leaders will come from. As executive search consultants, we have a role to play in encouraging businesses to look more broadly at talent, challenge established assumptions and create more inclusive routes into leadership."

Oliver Cahalan, General Manager - UK, Bond

"At Bond, we believe that everyone deserves to feel safe, supported and valued. We are proud to sponsor the WiHTL & DiR Inclusion Summit and Awards dinner, celebrating leaders, organisations and individuals who put people first. Together, we can create workplaces where wellbeing, safety, inclusion and performance go hand in hand."

Leading Inclusive Employers

Celebrating this year's Leading Inclusive Employers: champions of change who put inclusion at their core and share their expertise with the Collaboration Community.

Partners

None of this happens without our partners. Thank you for standing with us, believing in our mission and helping WiHTL & DiR drive lasting, positive progress in our Collaboration Community and beyond.

"We are proud to have partnered with WiHTL & DiR since 2019. For us, the partnership is about helping to create leadership teams across hospitality, travel, leisure and retail that better reflect the customers, colleagues and communities they serve. At MBS, people have always been at the heart of what we do. Partnering with WiHTL & DiR is a natural extension of our values and our commitment to supporting inclusive, high-performing organisations across the sectors we serve."

Moira Benigson, Founder and Chair, The MBS Group

"AlixPartners upholds an unwavering commitment to diversity and inclusion, with a belief that both are essential for building stronger, more resilient businesses. Our partnership with WiHTL & DiR embodies our values of teamwork, commitment, personal respect, and communication, creating positive change where it matters most."

Mark Veldon, Co-Head EMEA, Partner & Managing Director, AlixPartners

"Being a partner of WiHTL & DiR means Q5 is actively contributing to creating positive change in people's lives, careers and opportunities. We are proud to support an organisation driving real impact for the millions of people employed across these industries, industries that touch all of our lives every day."

Daniel Upward, Global Partner Retail, Consumer & Leisure, Q5

"Our partnership with WiHTL & DiR is a natural extension of our commitment to helping employers create inclusive, high-performing workplaces where people can thrive. As employment lawyers, we work closely with organisations on a wide range of people issues, from workplace culture and inclusion to employee wellbeing, engagement and organisational change. Through WiHTL & DiR, we have been able to engage with an outstanding network of HR, DE&I and business leaders who are passionate about driving meaningful progress."

Alison Biott, Business Development Manager, IM

About us

About the WiHTL & DiR Collaboration Community

WiHTL & DiR is the only Collaboration Community devoted to increasing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the hospitality, travel, leisure and retail sectors. Our mission is to positively impact five million employees in these sectors by 2030. In working together, we can amplify the impact of member organisations' individual initiatives to create workplace environments that create opportunities for all.

For more information please contact:
info@wihtlanddir.com

or visit:
www.wihtl.com or **www.diversityinretail.com**

About The MBS Group

The MBS Group is a leading sector specialist B Corp executive search firm advising all consumer-facing industries. Clients consider us to be the partner of choice when searching for critical leadership roles that make a difference. We work at Board level and on Executive positions across all functions of strategic importance.

For more information, visit:
www.thembsgroup.co.uk

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If you require this report in Braille, large print, audio, or any other accessible format, please get in touch with us and we'll be happy to assist.

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