

IWED event summary and action plan

This document summarises the key themes and action points derived from our International Women in Engineering Day event notes, including panel discussions, workshop discussions and digital polls.

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Spotlight Conversation with Joyce Onuonga, Managing Director of John White and Sons, winner of the CeeD Women in Industry Award 2025.

Joyce Onuonga shared a powerful and deeply personal account of her journey as the first female manager at John White & Son, with Arthian team manager Laura Halliday. Coming from Kenya and not being an engineer herself, Joyce faced significant resistance—not only as a woman in a male-dominated industry but also as a Black woman navigating entrenched cultural norms. She emphasised that the answers to many of the challenges manufacturers face are already present on the shopfloor, if only leaders are willing to listen.

To earn the respect of her team, Joyce made a conscious effort to be visible and hands-on. She rolled up her sleeves and worked with the engineers, showing that leadership is not about hierarchy but about collaboration and mutual respect. She observed that men and women often approach decision-making differently, and rather than seeing this as a barrier, she highlighted it as a strength. In her view, it is precisely these differences that make diverse teams more effective. When people work together and bring their unique perspectives, better outcomes follow.

Joyce led a transformation in how the company recruits and inducts new staff. Recruitment practices were opened up to be more inclusive, and cultural change was embedded into company policy. During induction, employees from different backgrounds

are invited to speak openly about their experiences and challenges. This openness fosters empathy and understanding from the outset. The company also runs various training sessions, including unconscious bias training, and sets clear targets for inclusion.

One of the most impactful initiatives Joyce introduced was peer learning sessions. These sessions celebrate different cultures and provide a safe, non-judgemental space for staff to share and learn from one another. They give people permission to speak honestly and to raise awareness without fear of being judged. Joyce believes that such spaces are essential for building a truly inclusive workplace.

She also spoke candidly about the ongoing impact of racism, particularly on Black female engineers. Subconscious bias, she noted, continues to shape people's experiences in the workplace. Joyce stressed that learning about inclusion should not fall solely on those from marginalised groups. As a Black woman, she can speak to her own experiences, but it is vital that others take responsibility for educating themselves and being part of the change.

Joyce's leadership has already brought visible change within her organisation, and she expressed hope that this change would extend beyond the workplace into wider society. She acknowledged that her journey has not been easy. There were moments of deep emotional struggle—*"I cried sometimes but nobody saw my tears"*—but she never considered giving up. *"That is not in my DNA,"* she said, crediting the support she received from the company's owners and the practical help she had with childcare as key enablers of her success.

Her message was clear: presence matters. Being at the table, speaking up, and challenging the status quo are essential if real change is to happen.

Panel Discussion: Broadening the Dialogue

This panel explored how we can bring more men into the conversation, and the unique barriers faced by people from different backgrounds. Chaired by Mhairi Brown from Skylands Aviation, and joined again by Joyce as well as Kat Pohorec from Edinburgh Innovations, Poggie Murray Whitam from Equal Engineers, and Lewis Hoggan from Arthian.

Below is a summary of themes discussed and actions that organisations can take to help improve company culture to be more inclusive.

Culture & Inclusion

- Organisational culture often excludes women and marginalised people. Women are leaving due to this.
- DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) is often sidelined or delegated to marginalised groups to lead on and fix the problems, which leads to burnout.

- Tokenism and microaggressions are prevalent and often ignored when raised, with the excuse of “it’s just a joke” commonly heard.
- Women and minorities often do unpaid “office housework”, like training new staff members.

Actions

- Embed DEI into all policies, not as an afterthought. Bold cultural change needs to happen – it may be uncomfortable at first, so it is important to state the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce to everyone in the team. See appendix.
- Address microaggressions and tokenism through training. Listen to your staff when they raise an issue, even if it seems small to you.
- Promote psychological safety and open dialogue. All staff should use 'calling in' instead of 'calling out'. See appendix.
- Track and reward mentoring, onboarding, and training contributions. Make sure those taking on these tasks have their other workload softened or their KPIs lowered, to reflect the extra work. Do the same for those asked to work on DEI policies and practices. Recognise and reward this as leadership and management skills.
- Regularly review policies to ensure they are not just tick-box exercises.

Recruitment & Promotion

- Hiring practices favour current company cultural fit over diversity of experiences and thought.
- Job descriptions are often overly complex and non-transparent and can exclude diverse candidates.
- Soft skills and diverse experiences are undervalued.
- Reasonable adjustments and accessibility should be standard.

Actions

- Value soft skills and diverse experiences alongside technical ability. Make this apparent both in job descriptions and interview questions – not everyone has the same access to opportunities and backgrounds. Avoid gendered language in job descriptions, see appendix.
- Simplify job descriptions and disclose pay – whether a range or specific amount. Include team information and flexibility options.
- Standardise accessibility adjustments, do not add as an afterthought when asked. See appendix for suggestions.
- Outreach to different channels and find new ways to advertise roles, to encourage more diverse applicants. Positive action in recruitment is a must.

Education & Early Engagement

- Early STEM engagement is crucial, especially through teachers and schools. Teachers are key influencers but may lack industry connection. The industry knowledge in schools may be outdated.
- Industry needs to proactively reach out to schools; teachers are burned out and have no time.
- Role models and inclusive language matter in outreach.

Actions

- Build partnerships between companies and schools.
- Encourage engineers to visit schools and mentor.
- Use inclusive language in outreach and events.
- Promote diverse role models and career paths.

Leadership & Allyship

- Leaders must model inclusive behaviour and educate themselves.
- Allyship should be active (e.g., sponsorship), not performative. See appendix for benefits of sponsorship.
- Safe, judgement-free spaces are essential for learning and participation. Fear of saying the wrong thing prevents engagement.

Actions

- Train leaders on inclusive practices. Include accountability measures.
- Encourage sponsorship over performative allyship.
- Foster a “no judgment” and psychologically safe culture - normalize learning from mistakes.
- Encourage team members to share how they work best with their managers.
- Promote transparency and openness about diverse experiences.
- Train teams on inclusive communication and psychological safety.

Flexibility & Accessibility

- Lack of flexibility disproportionately affects caregivers, who are usually women.
- Accessibility adjustments should be proactive, not reactive.
- Workplaces need to accommodate different working styles and needs.

Actions

- Offer flexible work arrangements. Include these in job advertisements and team norms.

- Normalise discussing work styles and needs. Team leads should use onboarding and team check-ins.
- Create space for different working styles and communication needs.

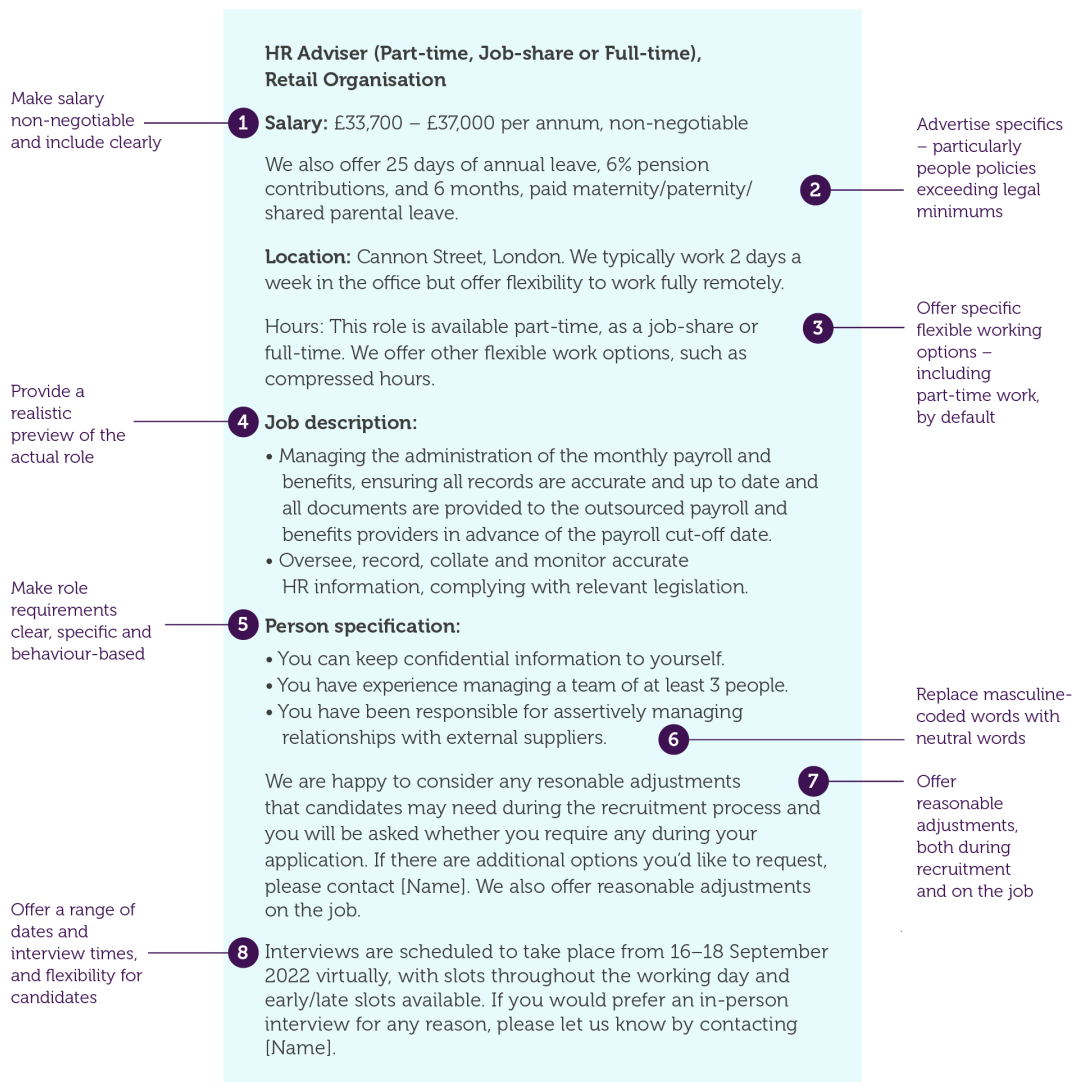
Appendix

[EDI Engine report: equality, diversity and inclusion in engineering](#)

[Why diversity matters even more | McKinsey](#)

[Calling In Vs. Calling Out: When and How to Use One Approach Over the Other in the Workplace - Inclusion Geeks](#)

[Inclusive recruitment: Guide for employers | CIPD](#)



Elements of a well designed job description, CIPD

[Accessibility at work - Acas](#)

[The Roles Of Allies, Mentors And Sponsors In Employee Development](#)