UK Atomic Energy Authority

Gender pay gap report 2025

An introduction from our Chief Executive, **Dr. Tim Bestwick**

UKAEA remains a special group with a special mission – to deliver sustainable fusion power and maximise the economic and scientific benefits along that pathway. Our people are at the heart of everything we do. The 2025 Gender Pay Gap (GPG) analysis demonstrates meaningful progress for UKAEA; while underlining the continued structural challenge we must address to build a more balanced, inclusive, and high-performing organisation. This year, all headline indicators have improved, with the mean pay gap falling from 11.86% to 10.10%, the second largest annual reduction since mandatory reporting began and the median gap reducing from 25.66% to 23.78%.

The evidence is clear: our pay gap is driven not by unequal pay for equal work, but by the distribution of men and women across grades and functions. We continue to see disproportionately high numbers of women in lower grades, with Level 2, though improving, remaining a key structural driver. Conversely, women remain significantly underrepresented in engineering and technical roles that attract Market Premium Payments and Specialist Allowances. These roles remain predominantly held by men, reinforcing pay differentials.

Encouragingly, our recruitment and promotion data show a positive shift. 41% percent of new starters this year were women, with female candidates more successful than men at both shortlisting and offer stages across several grades. Promotion rates for women exceed those for men at most levels, demonstrating that recent pay discipline and strengthened governance at appointment and promotion are having a real impact without adversely affecting hiring.

However, without sustained action, the structural drivers of the GPG will persist. I am hopeful that the transition to a new pay and grading structure, with more grades and a more equitable distribution of roles across the organisation, will go some way to address this. We must remain focused on reshaping the talent pipeline, particularly into Levels 4, 5, and engineering job families, while ensuring our culture, policies, and leadership behaviours support long-term change.

The 2026 Action Plan focuses on strengthening UKAEA's support for women by enhancing menopause awareness, analysing retention and attraction data, and reviewing the effectiveness of initiatives such as the STEM Returner Programme and Working Families partnership. The plan emphasises building a more inclusive talent pipeline through improved outreach, targeted capability building for line managers, and benchmarking against comparable organisations. Alongside this, it includes creating an internally sponsored accelerator for women in certain grades. These actions reflect a shift from isolated initiatives to a whole system approach, one that integrates recruitment, development, reward, culture, and workforce design.

In summary, we are moving in the right direction, but the scale of the challenge requires a sustained, disciplined, organisation-wide effort. Closing the gender pay gap is not only a matter of fairness; it is essential to our future workforce resilience, our ability to innovate, and our credibility as a modern scientific and engineering organisation.

WRITTEN STATEMENT
I confirm that the information contained in this report is accurate and in accordance with the Gender Pay Gap reporting requirements.

Dr. Tim Bestwick
Chief Executive Officer, UKAEA

Mission

Our mission is to lead the delivery of sustainable fusion energy to maximise scientific and UK economic benefit.

The work we do

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) is the UK's national fusion energy research laboratory. It is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ).

It is responsible for researching and developing sustainable fusion energy, aiming to deliver commercial fusion power while driving economic growth and high-tech jobs.

Our scientists and engineers work with partners around the globe to develop fusion as a new source of clean energy for tomorrow's power stations.

The UK government's 2025 Industrial Strategy positions fusion energy as a cornerstone of its economic and energy policy.

To build the knowledge base of fusion:

- Our technical centres of excellence are the foundation for fusion power plant programmes.
- We operate world-leading facilities.
- We solve challenges across the full lifecycle of fusion, especially integration across disciplines.
- We provide thought-leadership for what will be needed for the widespread use of fusion power.

To deliver fusion power plants, we:

- use our skills, facilities and expertise and work with partners to develop fusion power plants.
- work with major industrial partners in a national programme to deliver the STEP prototype fusion energy power plant.

To enable the fusion community, we:

- create fusion 'innovation clusters'.
- grow a fusion industry.
- produce skilled people
- support the regulation of fusion.
- look for growth opportunities for fusion technology.
- establish fusion insurance practices.
- widely communicate the opportunity of fusion.

The Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production (STEP) Programme will design, develop and build, by 2040, a prototype fusion power plant at West Burton in Nottinghamshire. To deliver STEP, UK Industrial Fusion Energy (UKFE) has been formed as a delivery body, and a subsidiary of UKAEA. This body will drive performance at pace and engage with the fusion industry in delivering STEP. This report refers only to UKAEA and not its subsidiary.

We are working hand in hand with the private sector and academia to drive fusion forward towards commercialisation. Our initiatives aim to grow the capability of the UK industry and make the UK a global hub for fusion innovation.

Developing the talented, diverse people needed to deliver fusion is key to our mission. We depend on a wide variety of skills and skilled people at UKAEA to deliver our objectives. People are at the heart of every part of our business. Creativity, innovation, energy, and motivation are the driving forces of our success. We know that the contributions of our employees are key to the success of UKAEA, and that it is their demonstration of our organisational values – Committed, Trusted, Innovative, Collaborative – that enables us to achieve our mission.

We celebrate the diversity of our staff and are proud of having created a friendly and open environment, where everyone's opinion is valued, and curiosity and questioning is encouraged. We recognise that this requires effective leadership, management skills, resources and constant engagement and effort, and that there is always more we can do.

Gender Pay Gap Regulations

Gender pay gap regulations require UK employers with more than 250 employees to publish their gender pay gap. This report was prepared using data based on a snapshot date of 5th April 2025.

The regulations require UKAEA to report on the following:

- Mean and median gender pay gap. This is the percentage difference in the average hourly earnings for men and women irrespective of their role. The hourly earnings must include items specified in the regulations, such as basic pay, various allowances and shift pay.
- Mean and median gender bonus gap. This is based on all bonuses (defined in legislation) paid in the 12 months ending on the snapshot date.
- Mean and median gender bonus gap. This is based on all bonuses (defined in legislation) paid in the 12 months ending on the snapshot date.
- Proportion of men and women receiving bonus payments in the 12 months ending on the snapshot date.
- Proportion of men and women in each pay quarter (these are defined in legislation and are not based on UKAEA pay bands).

Key facts

UKAEA employees at 5th April 2025

No. employees included	Men	Women
2,036	1,489 (73%)	547 (27%)

What is the Gender Pay Gap?

The gender pay gap is a measure that shows the percentage difference in average hourly pay between men and women. Because different jobs are paid differently and the number of women performing these jobs varies, a gender pay gap may exist. This is different from equal pay. Equal pay compares pay differences between men and women in the same, or similar jobs. The gender pay gap does not show differences in pay for comparable jobs and so is not an indicator of unequal pay. UKAEA uses a recognised job evaluation system as a robust tool for establishing the size of different jobs to ensure that roles are correctly graded.

Mean (average)	Median (mid point)
10.10%	23.78%

Key facts

What is the Gender Bonus Gap?

The gender bonus gap is a measure that shows the percentage difference in average bonus pay between men and women. UKAEA's main bonus scheme is awarded fairly to men and women as a percentage of basic pay, but a gender bonus gap may exist because different jobs are paid differently and the number of women performing these jobs varies.

Mean (average)	Median (mid point)
13.74%	22.30%

Proportion of women and men receiving a bonus
(in 12 months ending on 5th April 2025)

- 80% Women
- 85% Men

Pay quarters

	2025	
	Women	Men
Lower Quarter	41%	59%
Lower Middle Quarter	28%	72%
Upper Middle Quarter	17%	83%
Upper Quarter	21%	79%

Our approach

EDI strategy

The UKAEA EDI strategy will be used to embed and measure progress against the following objectives, each of which includes actions in support of gender and intersection inclusion:

Objective One	To understand workforce needs through transparent data collection, reporting, and analysis to enable evidence-based, data-led decision making.
Objective Two	To build a diverse and inclusive workforce by attracting talent from a wide range of backgrounds and positioning UKAEA as an employer of choice. To ensure fair, inclusive, and transparent recruitment and progression processes that provide equity of opportunity at all levels.
Objective Three	To equip colleagues with the knowledge and tools to understand their responsibilities in ensuring equality and foster inclusive behaviours. To develop cultural awareness and confidence among managers to lead inclusivity and support diverse teams effectively.
Objective Four	To embed equity across UKAEA by identifying and removing barriers for underrepresented groups. To create a culture of fairness, dignity, and respect, engaging colleagues to contribute to inclusivity and continuously reviewing policies and practices to reduce discrimination and improve access.

To put the EDI strategy into practice, a one year action plan was created setting out priority delivery activity and illustrating how the strategy will be implemented. The action plan will be reviewed and refreshed annually in response to emerging insight, organisational priorities and available resources.

Inclusion Council

UKAEA's Inclusion and Wellbeing Council, chaired by a Non-Executive Director, provides senior oversight and governance for equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation. It acts as a strategic forum where insights, priorities and challenges related to inclusion are reviewed at executive level. The Inclusion and Wellbeing Council receives updates from the employee networks, and the gender pay gap working group, ensuring actions are monitored and sponsored at the highest level.

Employee Networks

UKAEA has seven active employee networks:

- Armed Forces Network
- Disability Network
- ENACT Network
- LGBTQI+ Network
- Parent & Carers Network
- Women's Network
- Young Professionals Network

UKAEA's employee networks are open to all employees, providing a space for employees to come together around shared experiences and interests. Each network is sponsored by an Executive Director, giving members valuable visibility and a strong platform for their voice. The employee networks provide feedback and deliver initiatives and workplace events that not only address the issues and challenges people face, but also embrace diversity, foster inclusion, and celebrate key awareness days and cultural events.

The employee networks aim to raise awareness, create inclusive spaces, and provide a supportive forum where employees can connect and feel a sense of belonging. They play an active role in educating the wider organisation on key topics, celebrating diversity, and promoting understanding across UKAEA. With sponsorship at Executive Director level, members gain valuable exposure to senior leaders, which helps amplify employee voice and strengthens their influence across the organisation. Alongside this, the networks work hard to provide opportunities for members to grow new skills and explore strategies that enhance personal wellbeing. In the past year, the networks have delivered a range of initiatives including:

- hosted an awareness event on the menopause.
- hosted the third annual Disability Expo.
- participated in Reading Pride.
- delivered a successful Women in Computing event.

Successes

Talent acquisition

Following the introduction of the STEM Returners Programme in 2024, UKAEA has continued to build on this success by welcoming six STEM Returners in 2025. Following the initial 12-week period 83% of our STEM Returners secured ongoing employment beyond the initial 12-week period, with the only non-continuation due to personal circumstances. UKAEA's Talent Acquisition Team actively promote the STEM Returners programme to all hiring managers across the organisation.

To support inclusive recruitment, all UKAEA job advertisements are reviewed using a gender decoder tool. This ensures all advertisements use inclusive, neutral language by identifying words that may unintentionally signal a preference for a particular gender. The tool supports by removing any bias within gender-coded language, which in turn enhances the attraction of vacancies to a wider range of candidates, diversifying our talent pools.

We continue to highlight flexible working arrangements, where appropriate and in accordance with business need, within our recruitment materials to attract a broader and more diverse range of applicants.

Inclusive and Family-Friendly Environment

UKAEA became a Dynamic Member of Working Families in April 2025, with membership running until April 2027. As part of this commitment, we have taken part in the Top Employers Benchmark and will continue to engage actively with Working Families to enhance our policies and practices. Joining the Working Families Index reflects UKAEA’s dedication to being a welcoming, inclusive, and flexible employer, and enables us to benchmark ourselves against leading organisations to ensure we continually improve the support we provide to our people.

UKAEA participated in the Onvero Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) to better understand the maturity of our inclusion and diversity practices, including those that influence gender equality. The assessment highlighted both strengths and clear opportunities to improve areas such as inclusive leadership, diversity data, and employee voice. These insights support our commitment to being an inclusive employer and creating an environment where everyone can thrive. UKAEA will complete the TIDE tool again in 2026 to track progress and ensure continued improvement.

During 2025/26 significant improvements were made to how we support colleagues who wish to take Shared Parental Leave. Our aim was to increase awareness, improve confidence in the process, and remove barriers that may discourage parents from sharing caring responsibilities. This included clearer and more accessible guidance, ACAS training and case-study workshops, and embedding better support for managers.

Development and support for women

UKAEA has continued to embed coaching as a key development tool available to all employees. Our People and Culture Team continue to promote the offer across the organisation, helping to build a strong coaching culture at UKAEA.

As part of a recent organisation Learning Needs Analysis, we have identified a suite of capability areas that will be built into our refreshed line management pathways and leadership development offering. These focus on strengthening managers' confidence in areas such as flexible working, workplace adjustments, family leave, career development, fair performance management, and fostering a compassionate, solutions focused approach. For leaders, the themes center on championing equity and nurturing talent to ensure progression opportunities are accessible and transparent.

This work sits within the Learning and Development Project on Leadership and Line Management Pathways, which will embed these capabilities in a cohesive, organisation-wide framework designed to support a more consistent and equitable employee experience.

Deep dive data

UKAEA is made up of nine directorates, each with a different balance of roles, skills, and culture. This year, UKAEA developed a tool that shows data on pay, bonuses, recruitment, promotion, and leavers broken down for each directorate by gender, skills areas, and other useful categories. This enabled each directorate to undertake a deep-dive exercise into their gender pay gap and its causes. This work has increased the understanding of the gender pay gap across our business and led to immediate and long-term actions at a local level.

Early career schemes

It is recognised that attracting women into technical graduate and apprentice roles is challenging. Despite some strong years (e.g., 38% in 2019; 40% in 2023), female representation fluctuates significantly and remains below 30% across most years. Given that early career roles are a major feeder route into technical and engineering pathways and disproportionately influence women's representation at Levels 3–5, this inconsistent intake acts as a structural drag on long term gender pay gap progress.

Year	Number recruited into the graduate scheme	Women	Men
2018	19	10%	90%
2019	32	38%	62%
2020	43	19%	82%
2021	44	15%	85%
2022	53	12%	88%
2023	54	40%	60%
2024	59	27%	73%
2025	66	28%	72%

Director of People and Culture

As we look ahead, our commitment is to take a consistently evidence-based and system level approach to reducing the Gender Pay Gap. Central to this is the adoption of our new hygiene and acceleration framework, which ensures that future actions are grounded in data, prioritised for impact, and aligned to the structural drivers of the gap.

This framework enables us to distinguish between foundational work that strengthens fairness over the long term and targeted interventions that can meaningfully shift outcomes within 12-24 months. By applying this model, we will focus our efforts on the areas where our data shows the most significant opportunity; pay allocation, representation in higher paid pathways, progression patterns, and retention dynamics.

Our renewed EDI Strategy and directorate level insight tools position us strongly to continue building a precise, data driven understanding of the gap across the organisation. We will strengthen this further through regular deep dive analysis, improved workforce data, and transparent reporting to ensure our decisions remain rooted in evidence rather than assumption.

Over the coming year, we will continue to embed equity into our people systems, while accelerating the actions most capable of shifting the Gender Pay Gap. This includes a continued focus on structural pay mechanisms, progression pipelines, and identifying barriers that impact women at key career stages.

Closing the Gender Pay Gap requires sustained, informed action. Our commitment is to maintain a disciplined, targeted approach that uses data, insight, and organisational learning to drive meaningful and lasting change.

Sharon Taylor

Sharon Taylor
People & Culture Director

Gender pay gap action plan

To continue driving meaningful progress in closing the Gender Pay Gap, UKAEA has developed an action plan that aligns closely with our EDI Strategy. This plan outlines the steps we are taking to foster a more inclusive and equitable workplace. The action plan will be reviewed and updated annually to ensure it remains responsive to our organisational priorities and areas of opportunity. Over the coming year, our focus will include:

1. Supporting employee experience and wellbeing

a. Implementation of menopause action plans and awareness sessions
b. Continuation of UKAEA's partnership with Working Families
c. Targeted line management capability building to support employees across the employee lifecycle

2. Increasing transparency and insight

a. Collate common themes from business area deep dives to be shared with the Gender Pay Gap Panel
b. Detailed analysis of female employee retention
c. Benchmarking against comparable organisations Gender Pay Gaps to be shared with the Gender Pay Gap Working Group and Panel

3. Talent acquisition

a. Complete a review of how UKAEA attracts female talent, including job descriptions, adverts, and channels
b. Review and determine the effectiveness of UKAEA's STEM Returner Programme
c. Review and align outreach & early careers talent pipeline strategy

4. Developing and promoting employees

a. Scope and create a sponsored internal talent accelerator for women at Levels 3–4, with tools to support progression to Level 5

The UK Atomic Energy Authority's mission is to lead the delivery of sustainable fusion energy and maximise scientific and economic benefit

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Find out more
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