

# ***Nuclear Skills Strategy Group***

## **Parliamentary Science & Technology Committee**

### **Call for Evidence - Diversity in STEM - January 2022**

The Nuclear Skills Strategy Group (NSSG) is the nuclear industry’s employer-led strategic partnership for skills planning.

Members include:

- major employers who have the plans and the expenditure to drive the major developments in the nuclear sector
- government departments responsible for nuclear development and skills leadership
- a representative of the trade unions in the nuclear industries

The NSSG sees workforce diversity as a key part of its strategic planning, to address current imbalances and to recruit the best possible people for its future.

[www.nssguk.com](http://www.nssguk.com)

For further information, please contact:

Martin McManus, Standards & Policy Manager

[Martin.McManus@CogentSkills.com](mailto:Martin.McManus@CogentSkills.com)

<b>The nature or extent to which women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are underrepresented in STEM in academia and industry</b>
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The nuclear sector has undertaken research through the Nuclear Skills Strategy Group (NSSG) and partner organisations into the diversity of its workforce. Data on certain aspects of diversity, such as the proportion of women, has been more readily available than other aspects such as ethnic background, disability or sexuality.
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Female participation in the UK nuclear workforce currently stands at 20%. ( <i>Nuclear Workforce Assessment, NSSG, 2021</i> ). There is a marked difference between STEM occupations (14%) and non-STEM occupations (47%). Gender diversity is increasing through recruitment of younger women entering the workforce, such that for example 33% of engineering apprentices in the sector are female, compared to 7% of the older engineering workforce in the sector. Diversity statistics are to an extent affected by the workforce involved in construction of new nuclear facilities (and dismantling and decommissioning of older ones.)
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The sector has committed through the Nuclear Sector Deal to a target of a 40% female workforce by 2030, and further work needs to be done to ensure that this target is met.
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<b>The reasons why these groups are underrepresented</b>
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The NSSG’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy ( <i>Equality Diversity and Inclusion in the Nuclear Sector, NSSG, 2019</i> ) sets out key drivers of improving diversity. These include:
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<i>Recruitment</i>
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Although the makeup of recruits into the sector is more diverse than the existing workforce, as set out above, it is not yet at a level that would meet the sector's target of at least 40% female workforce by 2030.

#### *Retention*

Anecdotal reports from employers show that a greater proportion of women leave the workforce when starting a family, and do not return for some years if at all. The sector has an ageing workforce, with 20% being over 54, meaning that its composition reflects the legacy of recruitment and retention of several decades ago. Relatively low staff turnover rates also means that the composition of the workforce is taking considerable time to change.

#### *Advancement*

Legacy issues above have an impact on the diversity of people at more senior levels. Women are better represented at occupational levels 1 to 4. There is a notable worsening of the gender balance at levels 7 and 8, and among Subject Matter Experts, which are often linked with senior roles within the sector.

#### *The "pipeline" of young people entering the workforce*

While employers in the nuclear sector are taking steps to improve the diversity of recruitment, they are to an extent limited by the composition of applicants. For example, women are underrepresented in studying engineering, technology and computing (relevant study areas for many jobs in the nuclear sector), and make up only 20% of graduates in these areas. (*Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2019/20, Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021*). This indicates the need to intervene earlier in the education process to open up the choices of young people and encourage diversity before they even become potential applicants for careers in the sector.

### **The implications of these groups being underrepresented in STEM roles in academia and industry**

The nuclear sector recognises that a lack of diversity potentially holds back employers from a range of tangible benefits for their organisations. A diversity of people brings diversity of thought. The sector works with cutting-edge science and technology that are essential to meeting its new challenges, so without a supportive culture, innovation struggles to break through and new ideas are lost.

The NSSG Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy points out a range of evidence that diverse organisations are more productive, have greater innovation, and are more able to do things differently. As well as being the right thing to do to support individuals and society, increased diversity makes good business sense.

### **What has been done to address underrepresentation of particular groups in STEM roles**

#### *Strategy*

The NSSG, in partnership with Women in Nuclear, has developed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy (*Equality Diversity and Inclusion in the Nuclear Sector, NSSG, 2019*), which has been used to raise awareness of diversity issues within partner employers at senior levels and throughout their organisations. This Strategy is underpinned by the *Nuclear Sector Gender Roadmap* that sets out plans for improving gender diversity as a first step to wider diversity in the sector.

#### *Gender Commitment*

To support this, there is also a *Nuclear Sector Gender Commitment* which has been signed by senior representatives of nuclear sector employers, government departments and partner organisations to demonstrate their commitment to addressing this issue.

#### *Data*

The NSSG's ED&I Group has been reviewing the various ways in which employers gather and present data on diversity, and the limitations placed by lack of data or inconsistency. They have explored how more data can be provided, more consistently, to improve analysis, changes over time, and comparison between organisations.

#### *Organisational Self-Assessment*

NSSG members have assessed themselves against an ED&I Maturity Matrix, showing where their existing actions and organisational culture already incorporate diversity issues and where they can focus their efforts. This is supported by benchmarking against other organisations' practice.

#### *NSSG ED&I Sharing Forum*

The NSSG has created an ED&I sharing forum with voluntary membership from across the sector, providing opportunities to exchange knowledge, share and showcase good practice, and learn from shared challenges. This forum helps to ensure that ED&I issues are kept active within member organisations as a core part of doing business.

#### *Organisational recruitment*

Individual employers in the nuclear sector have worked with local schools and colleges to encourage applications from all sections of the population.

For example, at EDF Energy's new Hinkley Point C plant they have built diversity planning into their major projects, clarifying roles and skills in demand and looking at the regional socio-demographic mix to support aspirational but realistic goals for diversity through collaboration with local partners. Their recent cohort of L2 Hinkley Support Operatives has had an above average proportion of women and ethnic minority employees.

Urenco, an international supplier of nuclear enrichment services and fuel cycle products, has worked on inclusive recruitment principles that will be rolled out globally this year. Inclusive recruitment involves fair internal and external candidate attraction processes that are welcoming to all candidates, including those from under-represented backgrounds. They are also participating in the "10,000 Black Interns Programme" to improve ethnic diversity of young recruits.

#### *Engagement with schools and colleges*

The sector has strong involvement with STEM Ambassador programmes, with employees going into schools and colleges to help students see the range of opportunities in STEM careers and recognising that it can be applicable to them.

The NSSG has also partnered with the Developing Experts organisation, funding a programme of curriculum support for schools and colleges providing material showing the applicability of STEM subjects to the nuclear sector workplace, mapped to the National Curriculum.

### **What could and should be done by the UK Government, UK Research and Innovation, other funding bodies, industry and academia to address the issues identified?**

The nuclear sector is committed to continuing and expanding the actions set out above to improve diversity in its own workforce.

The sector would encourage government and funding bodies to:

Facilitate and co-ordinate data gathering on diversity issues to enable consistent measuring between organisations and over time

Encourage and facilitate organisations to develop comprehensive plans to build diversity-related actions into their businesses

Provide support and funding for STEM employers to work with schools and colleges to help a diverse range of young people to see STEM careers as suitable options for them.