

Executive summary

LGBTQ+ professionals bring immense talent, resilience, and leadership to workplaces across the UK. However, our survey findings reveal that most LGBTQ+ workers have experienced barriers to career progression, from a lack of representation in leadership, to biases in hiring and promotion.

At the same time, many LGBTQ+ professionals draw strength from their identities, developing key skills such as empathy, adaptability, and leadership that enhance their careers, mentoring others and engaging in voluntary leadership roles.

This report presents both the challenges and successes experienced by LGBTQ+ professionals and provides actionable recommendations for businesses, policymakers, the LGBTQ+ community, recruitment companies and researchers.





1. Career-enhancing skills

For many LGBTQ+ professionals, their identity and experiences have helped develop key career-enhancing skills, including empathy, interpersonal skills, creative thinking, resilience and emotional intelligence.



2. Barriers to career development persist

Over 70% of respondents reported a lack of LGBTQ+ role models in leadership, half experienced uncomfortable or hostile work environments, and 42% felt unsupported by HR when facing LGBTQ+ issues. Barriers were greater for trans people.



3. Confidence & identity impact career choices

Many LGBTQ+ professionals experience imposter syndrome, hesitation in pursuing leadership roles, and fear of discrimination influencing career decisions. Many find an organisation or level of seniority at which they feel safe, rather than fulfilled, and do not strive for more senior roles in their current organisation, or elsewhere.



93%

4. **Recruitment & progression lack transparency**

93% of people interviewed believed bias may have played a role in hiring practices. Of those, 77% were unsure, whilst the remaining 16% of respondents believed they had missed out on job opportunities directly due to being LGBTQ+. This suggests a lack of transparency and confidence in recruitment practices, where discrimination may exist but is difficult to evidence.



5. **Mentoring is a critical missing piece**

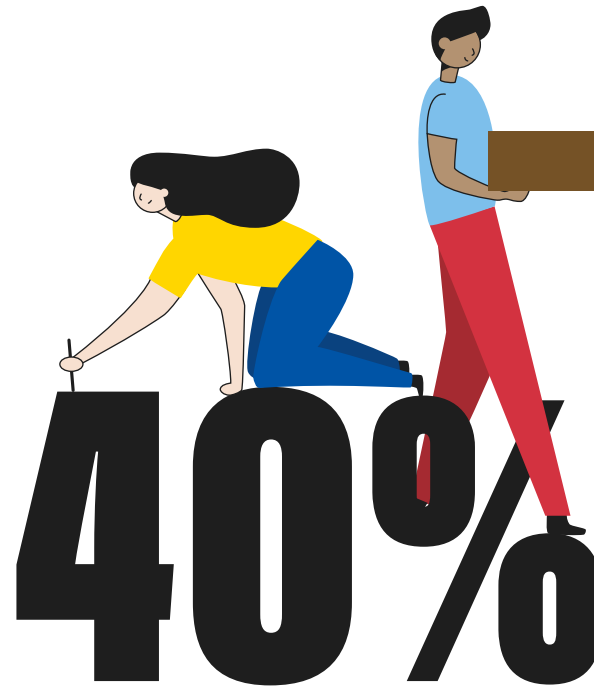
Many LGBTQ+ professionals felt that mentoring with other LGBTQ+ leaders would significantly improve confidence, career clarity, and leadership readiness. However, most corporate mentoring schemes fail to consider LGBTQ+ representation.



82%

6. **Organisational support varies widely - structural change is needed, not just acts of visibility**

While 82% of respondents said their organisation marks Pride Month, fewer felt their employer was taking substantive action, such as funding LGBTQ+ leadership training (37%) or supporting career progression through mentoring (31%). This can lead to a feeling that allyship is merely performative.



7.
**Intersectionality
compounds career barriers**

LGBTQ+ professionals who are disabled, from ethnic minority communities, working class backgrounds, and women and non-binary identities often face additional barriers in leadership progression, workplace discrimination, and pay equity.

8.
**LGBTQ+ professionals
contribute significantly
outside of their roles**

A striking 40% of respondents serve as trustees, non-executive directors, or volunteers, highlighting a high level of civic engagement beyond their core jobs.

9.
**Pay gap and reporting
transparency remain
unaddressed**

Unlike gender pay gap reporting, there is no legal requirement for LGBTQ+ pay gap reporting, leaving many unaware of whether pay disparities exist. The lack of intersectional pay data also means that LGBTQ+ professionals who face multiple layers of discrimination remain invisible in workforce analytics.

This report is not just about identifying problems – it is about driving real change. We propose practical steps for five key groups:



For organisations:

Organisations across all sectors shape workplace culture, set industry standards, and influence societal attitudes. By embedding genuine inclusion into leadership, policies, and career development opportunities, organisations can remove barriers for LGBTQ+ professionals and ensure that talent determines success. We make recommendations around:

- Moving beyond performative allyship and embedding LGBTQ+ inclusion in leadership, policies, and training.
- Supporting LGBTQ+ staff by creating and protecting a culture that respects LGBTQ+ people, backed up by policies that enable HR teams to act when breaches occur.
- Supporting LGBTQ+ colleagues when the opportunity for travel arises, not compelling them to travel to places where they may not feel safe.
- Increasing LGBTQ+ representation in leadership through mentoring and sponsorship programmes. Encouraging LGBTQ+ people in leadership to be positive role models.
- Reporting on LGBTQ+ pay gaps and leadership progression to improve transparency.
- Supporting LGBTQ+ staff networks within organisations and giving them the necessary resources and time to make a difference. Working with them to drive change.

For policymakers:

Enabling everyone to achieve their potential is good for the national and regional economy. Policymakers set the framework that determines fairness, equality, and economic opportunity. We make recommendations around:

- Dialling down the ‘culture war’ discourse, and having a cross-party objective ‘to enable everyone to thrive’.
- Extending gender pay gap reporting, firstly to include non-binary and trans categories, and secondly to also show the pay gap between LGB+ and straight colleagues.
- Strengthening employment protections for trans and, especially, non-binary and gender-fluid people (regardless of if they have, or intend to go through, gender reassignment) by strengthening legal protections against transphobia and discrimination, ensuring that HR policies and workplace laws are truly inclusive.
- Preventing a return of damaging Section 28-style restrictions and protecting LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools, careers guidance, and workplaces.
- Improving access to healthcare for LGBTQ+ young people, while implementing a full trans-inclusive ban on conversation therapy.
- Investing in research on LGBTQ+ career progression and workplace experiences.

For the LGBTQ+ community:

The LGBTQ+ community is a powerful force for progress, resilience, and leadership. By supporting one another, advocating for workplace equality, and challenging exclusionary practices, LGBTQ+ professionals can help shape industries, mentor future leaders, and drive inclusion from within. While businesses and policymakers must play their part, the community itself has the power to influence change, create networks of support, and redefine careers for the next generation. We make recommendations around:

- Having the courage to apply for promotion or a new role.
- Joining or creating an LGBTQ+ staff network and using it to drive real change.
- Finding and supporting LGBTQ+ role models; if you can’t see one, be one.
- Engaging with LGBTQ+ professional groups, mentorship schemes, and leadership programmes.
- Buying from LGBTQ+ led businesses and organisations.
- Seeking coaching, training, and other professional development opportunities.
- Supporting each other. Advocating and supporting other LGBTQ+ with their careers.

For recruitment companies:

Recruitment companies play a critical role in shaping career opportunities for LGBTQ+ professionals. As gatekeepers to job roles (including more senior roles), they have a responsibility to ensure that bias and discrimination do not limit LGBTQ+ career progression. We make recommendations around:

- Challenging client bias, persuading them of the business case for diversity and inclusion, and pushing back on discriminatory practices.
- Understand and promote the concept of 'culture add' versus 'culture fit' to enhance diversity in hiring
- Working closely with clients to ensure they offer a genuinely inclusive and supportive environment.
- Creating pathways for LGBTQ+ leadership in the long term.
- Reviewing all job-related communication to ensure inclusivity and LGBTQ+ representation.
- Ensuring inclusive candidate shortlists.
- Ensuring that recruiters' own procedures mitigate bias, and tracking the success of LGBTQ+ candidates at different stages of the recruitment process.
- Building connections with LGBTQ+ professional groups, mentoring schemes, and leadership initiatives to proactively identify and support LGBTQ+ talent.

For future research:

Researchers shape how LGBTQ+ workplace experiences are understood, evidenced, and addressed. However, meaningful research on LGBTQ+ career progression remains scarce, with most studies focusing on general workplace discrimination, bullying, or young peoples' experiences. We make recommendations around:

- Prioritising inclusion of manual and retail workers, and those less likely to work with or have a computer but who are potentially more likely to be exposed to tougher working environments.
- Recognising the complexity and sometimes non-linear nature of coming out.
- Strengthening outreach to ethnic minority LGBTQ+ communities.
- Finding new ways to engage closeted or questioning individuals.
- Exploring stagnation in the workplace, often caused by feeling 'safe', not just career progression.
- Examining the role of LGBTQ+ employee networks.
- Exploring the impact of work-related travel on LGBTQ+ professionals.
- Benchmarking LGBTQ+ career progression against general workforce trends to strengthen the case for targeted intervention.
- Tracking how LGBTQ+ career experiences evolve over time.

Who we are

Pride in Leadership is a not for profit CIC that works to elevate, connect and support LGBTQ+ leaders and aspiring leaders across all sectors, and make them more visible.

With over 3,000 members, it hosts regular events both online and in cities across the UK, bringing in high profile LGBTQ+ speakers, and creating spaces for connection, learning, and inspiration. It also offers a free mentoring platform to help individuals grow, share experiences, and support one another on their leadership journeys.



Claire Ebrey is the Director of On The Level, a dynamic micro-consultancy dedicated to transforming leadership and advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

Through On The Level, Claire empowers leaders to drive meaningful change at individual, organisational, and regional levels. She works with major organisations to tackle key strategic challenges, such as improving diversity in leadership and building inclusive, high-performing workplaces. Her work includes strategic consultancy, conducting research into the barriers facing minority groups (including LGBTQ+ people, women, and ethnic minorities), as well as designing tailored EDI training programmes that support diverse talent and create environments where opportunity and prosperity are accessible to all.

Beyond her work with On The Level, Claire co-founded and runs Pride in Leadership, is a trustee of Forever Manchester, and an active volunteer with Stockport Race Equality Partnership (SREP). She was awarded Diversity and Inclusion Leader by The Business Desk in 2025, and Northern Gamechanger in 2024.



Matt Haworth is a dynamic force at the intersection of technology and social impact.

As the Co-Founder of Reason Digital, an award-winning social enterprise, Matt is committed to empowering mission-led organisations – such as charities, social purpose brands, and philanthropists – by leveraging digital tools to broaden their reach and bolster their support. He also co-founded Impact, a software company that helps businesses measure and manage their social and environmental value.

In addition to co-founding and running Pride in Leadership, in his spare time, Matt serves as a Trustee of akt, the UK LGBTQ+ youth homelessness charity, and is a member of the General Assembly of The University of Manchester.



www.prideinleadership.co.uk