

Attrition in Tech

Why women leave tech
jobs and careers

Tech Talent Charter (TTC) undertook research with research and data partner, Attest, to understand what causes women to leave tech jobs and the tech workforce.



Contents

- Key findings
- Introduction
- Previous research
- New findings
- Why is there attrition?
- Career progression
- Pay and remuneration
- Cost of living/childcare
- Work-life balance
- A need for flexibility
- Flexibility and retention
- Company culture
- Summary



Over a third of women who are planning to leave their tech role are leaving for a job outside of tech



Find out why women are leaving tech jobs and careers

Key findings from the report include:

01

One in three women are planning to leave their tech job.

02

One in four women who left a tech job in the last few years left for a non-tech job.

03

Only one in six women who have been in their tech role for more than a year are planning to stay.

04

Four out of five women said that dissatisfaction with their career development impacted their decision to leave their tech role.

05

Work-life balance was ranked the most important factor in women's decisions to leave their tech role, often linked to challenges managing caring commitments.

06

Women in tech with flexible work arrangements had significantly higher retention.

07

Nearly 40% of women agreed that caring commitments influenced their decision to leave their tech job, but only 11.4% of them actually left the workforce to do this.

08

Pay dissatisfaction is one of the top factors motivating women to move jobs, and was often linked to the cost of living crisis and childcare high costs.

Introduction

What is the Tech Talent Charter?

The Tech Talent Charter (TTC) is an industry-led, government-funded membership network (775+ organisations), committed to driving diversity and inclusion in tech and securing the future of the tech talent pipeline for all. The TTC was created because solving the diversity problem in tech requires a collective effort across organisations, industries, and sectors. Our broad base of Signatories includes companies and industries of all sizes, non-profit organisations, charities, leading UK educators, and government departments.

TTC provides concrete measurement and insights into diversity in the tech ecosystem, and actionable ways forward, by gathering, curating, and distributing innovative practices, techniques, and ideas. We are focused on action and measurable insights, so we require TTC Signatories to make a number of commitments. This includes providing a senior-level sponsor, having a plan in place to improve inclusion, collaborating with our membership, and submitting annual diversity data. With this data, and through other research projects with our partners, we surface new insights to inform diversity and inclusion (D&I) practice in the UK tech ecosystem.

Context

Tech Talent Charter (TTC) undertook research with research and data partner, Attest, to understand what causes women to leave tech jobs and the tech workforce. According to research conducted by Accenture in the US in 2019, 50% of women who take a Tech role leave by age 35, citing non-inclusive cultures as the main reason. DCMS labour force analysis from 2022 also found that in the UK, women are disproportionately more likely to leave a digital sector role than men, and at a significantly higher rate than in other industries.

TTCs new research, based on data taken in March 2023, is intended to provide an updated perspective on women's experience of the UK tech landscape and the factors that influence them to leave tech roles and occupations.



Tech Talent Charter's previous research on women's perceptions of tech careers



2020

Women's appetite for tech careers - 2020

In our 2020 Diversity in Tech report we released the findings of research undertaken with consumer insights platform, Attest. We surveyed 500 working women in the UK on their feelings about switching to a career in tech. More than half told us the key to convincing them would be for them to have more knowledge or training in tech. A quarter told us that if tech skills training was provided as part of their role they would consider switching and a further quarter said more knowledge about the sector would convince them to consider a tech role.

Blockers to career progress for women in tech - 2021

In 2021, we partnered with Ipsos Mori and [We Are Tech Women](#) to conduct a [survey](#) aimed at understanding the experiences of women working in tech. We found that one in five respondents were thinking of leaving their current role, and more than half felt their gender had held them back in their career. Only a third of those surveyed said that support was in place to ensure they could develop the right skills for promotion, and only a fifth of those surveyed said there was a clear promotion process in place.



Barriers for aspiring women in tech - 2022

Working with [Code First Girls](#), TTC co-produced a report - D&I For Tech Leaders - that surveyed 1,200 women on their experiences of attempting to enter the UK tech workforce. This sample group focused uniquely on women who already had an interest in undertaking a new tech role, were taking steps to obtain tech skills, and were not already in such roles. The top barriers this group identified included: a lack of confidence (73%); the preconception that the tech industry is still 'for men' (59%); sexism in the workplace (55%); and lack of education and upskilling (53%).

Informing this 2023 research

In light of our previous findings, and other industry research on this topic, TTC sought to learn more about the specific experience of women in the UK who left, or intended to leave, a tech job or a tech career. In partnership with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and our Research and Data partner, [Attest](#), we also sought to validate the significance of certain key factors that repeatedly emerge in other research, such as the presence of caring responsibilities, or issues with work life balance, company culture, skills gaps, remuneration and progression. We also sought their views on what can be done to change the narrative for women working in tech now.

New findings

Who did we survey?

For this report, Tech Talent Charter conducted a survey in the UK in collaboration with Attest on 15th March 2023. The total sample size was 500 women working in (or recently working in) digital, IT or tech roles. Within the digital, IT and tech categories, 35.6% of respondents worked in IT operations, 20.2% were in software engineering/development roles, 16.8% were in data roles, 11.8% were in digital product and project delivery roles, 9.2% were in digital UX design roles and a further 3.2% each were in QA and testing or other types of tech role. They were spread across all age groups from 18 to 70. Respondents were spread across the UK, with the largest segment based in London (22.6%). Women with degrees were more likely to work in "Digital, IT, Tech" roles, than the general population of survey respondents, with 170, or 34%, holding a university degree.

Education level amongst respondents	
Method of learning	Proportion of respondents
Below GCSE	1.8%
GCSE level or equivalent	12.1%
A Levels or equivalent	16.7%
Further qualifications between A Level and university	17.6%
Completed some university but not the whole degree	12.8%
University degree	21.2%
Masters or professional degree	16.7%
Post-graduate degree or PhD	0.9%
None of the above	0.2%

Please note that the table does not add up to 100% because some respondents declined to provide this demographic information.

How bad is the attrition of women in tech?

Our survey asked UK-based women in tech whether they had left, or were planning to leave a tech job. We found a high degree of job mobility amongst female tech role holders. This appeared to be a result of both push factors (for example dissatisfaction with work life balance) in existing tech roles, and pull factors from other tech and non tech job opportunities (for example, the ability to work more flexibly or the availability of higher salaries elsewhere).

Job changes appear to be common across all ages of women in tech, with 64.8% reporting they had changed tech jobs in the last five years. However, job changes were significantly less common in women over the age of 45. This suggests that there is a window during which retention of women in tech is less stable, and this corresponds with years during which women may be more active with caring responsibilities.

In terms of future outlook, around one in three women (32.2%) said they were planning to leave their current tech job. Only half that number (16%) had been in their tech role for more than a year with no plans of leaving. Through a geographical lens, women working in London and the South East are more likely to have changed tech jobs (39.2%) than those working in the rest of the UK (32.5%). Factors driving this are likely to include London's status as a major tech hub providing more opportunity for job mobility, and the cost of living associated with the city.

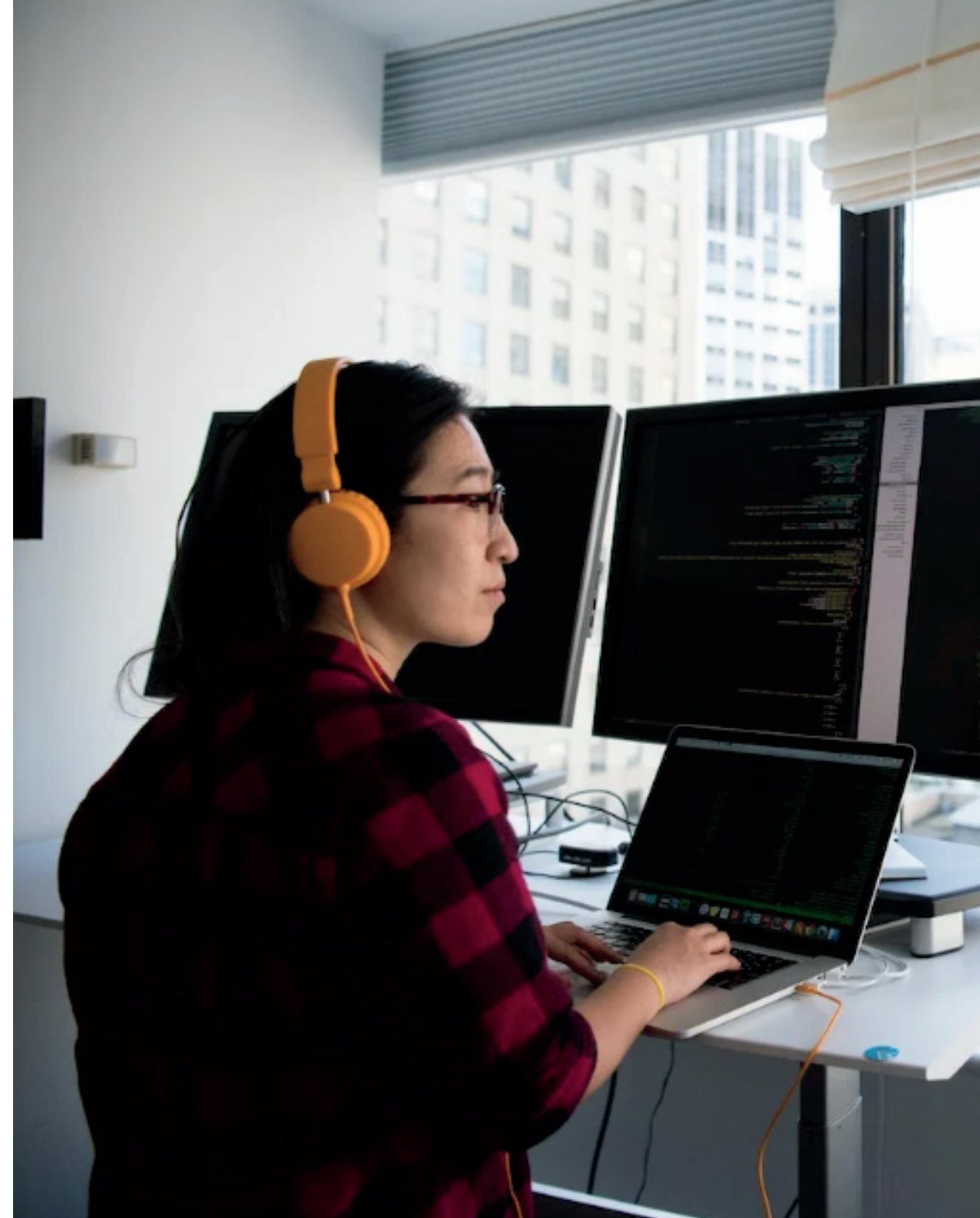
Around one in three women (32.2%) said they were planning to leave their current tech job.

Amongst those who are currently planning to leave a tech job, 34.8% are planning to leave for a non-tech role.

Where do women go when they leave a tech job?

Whilst more than half the women who took our survey (55.4%) left a tech role for another tech role, we found that a sizeable 36.2% of our total respondents had left or were planning to leave without going on to another role in tech. Some of this can be attributed to conflicting work and personal responsibilities, with 11.4% of women leaving a tech role going on to focus on caring commitments rather than another job. However, around 1 in 4 of our total sample (24.8%), stayed in the workforce in a non-tech role instead.

Amongst those who are currently planning to leave a tech job, a higher percentage of them (34.8%) are planning to leave for a non-tech role. This finding highlights that women in tech aren't turning away from work, but something about their existing tech occupation does not align with their needs for staying in the workforce.



Why do women leave tech jobs

To understand more about why women are leaving their tech jobs, we asked our respondents whether they agreed with certain statements about the factors that contributed to their decision to leave a tech role.

These included:

- Found the technical aspects of the job boring
- Found the technical aspects of the job too hard
- Had to leave to prioritise family care
- Was unhappy with the salary
- Was unhappy with the work-life balance
- Didn't like the company culture
- Was not getting the career development they wanted
- Had to leave due to a health condition or disability

We also asked our respondents to rank how important various factors were in their decision to leave their tech role.

These included:

- Work-life balance
- Salary/remuneration
- Career progression
- Benefits (not salary)
- Activities of the job
- People/culture
- Family care responsibilities
- Health reasons or a disability
- Felt they lacked the skills to do the job
- Retirement

Career progression

The factor with the highest trend of agreement was related to career progression. 4 out of 5 respondents (79.9%) agreed that dissatisfaction with their career development had an impact on their decision to leave their tech role. In our recent report, TTC found that many businesses are struggling to improve diversity levels amongst senior tech talent; it was reported to be one of the most pressing challenges most businesses faced. With the gender pay gap also sharpening focus on the progression of women in tech roles, many organisations are turning their attention to how to progress women internally. Despite this, the women we surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that the lack of career progression in their role was a factor in why they left.

Capability and education amongst women in tech do not seem to be the problems in this context. Women in digital and tech roles were more likely to hold degrees than the wider survey population, and 4 out of 5 of our survey respondents also actively disagreed (55.2%), or had no feelings (21.5%) that the difficulty of their tech occupation played a role in their decision to leave. Women in junior tech jobs were also less likely to find technical aspects of their job too hard than the overall population of respondents.

In light of businesses wanting women to progress in tech roles, and women asserting that they want better career progression opportunities, there appears to be an opportunity to address how organisations can create visible and effective career progression for women to progress to more senior roles, before employees reach the decision to seek progression externally.



“Offer more structured development opportunities and progression / promotion - perhaps opportunities to swap into other teams to gain additional experience. I feel the opportunities for internal development just aren’t available.” - survey respondent

A note about tech jobs being too difficult...

When asked about how specific factors affected their decision to leave their tech role, 21.3% of our respondents either strongly or partly agreed with the statement "I found the technical aspects of my job too hard". It is important to consider this in the context of several points.

First, we are not comparing this data to an equivalent group of male tech role holders and therefore cannot draw any conclusions as to whether this figure is aligned with the overall tech workforce. Secondly, there is evidence to show that women and men perceive their ability to do a job differently, with women more likely to select themselves out of a job process than men, based on their perception of their skills.

Therefore, this finding may not reflect the level of skill amongst female tech workers, as much as other factors such as their self-perception of their skill level and the importance with which they consider their perceived skill level in career decisions

Pay and remuneration

Open text responses highlighted that women's concerns with career development were not only to do with learning, but closely interwoven with opportunities to grow in their company in order to unlock greater earning potential with their existing employer.

Unsurprisingly, more than two thirds of respondents (67.9%) also agreed that salary dissatisfaction had an impact on their decision to leave their tech job. This factor had the third highest trend of agreement and aligns with other research, where salary is frequently listed as one of the top three factors affecting career decisions.

According to the Times, tech roles are estimated to pay a salary 64% higher than the UK average. The economic opportunities in the sector are significant but in order to realise them, women need to be reaching the most lucrative occupations and seniority levels. TTCs recent Diversity in Tech Report found that there is more to be done on this issue, with gender diversity in senior tech roles dropping by 6 points compared to the overall workforce. Similarly, our previous report highlights that women in tech are typically in less highly-paid tech occupations, such as design, testing and data, rather than engineering.



“I would [...] encourage employers to give women a progression plan and transparency with salary to ensure they are in a competitive role.”

- survey respondent

Cost of living crisis and childcare



“Due to the cost of living crisis I can't continue to work the hours I do for my current pay.”

- survey respondent

For many of the women we surveyed, the drive for higher salaries and progression were linked to the issue of childcare. Many respondents specified in their open text responses that the cost of living crisis was exacerbating existing challenges with childcare. Whilst some women may be part of a two-parent household where the childcare burden is technically shared between two workers, many women gave responses that indicate that they perceive their childcare costs to be their sole responsibility, whilst some specifically referenced the challenges of being a single parent.

We also noted that the importance of salary as an influencing factor was not consistent across different age groups. We asked women in tech what was the most important factor in their decision to leave their tech job and then analysed these by age group. (Ages 18 - 24 prioritised work life balance; ages 25 - 34 prioritised salary; ages 35 - 44 prioritised work life balance; ages 45 - 54 prioritised career progression; and ages 55 - 64 prioritised non-salary benefits).

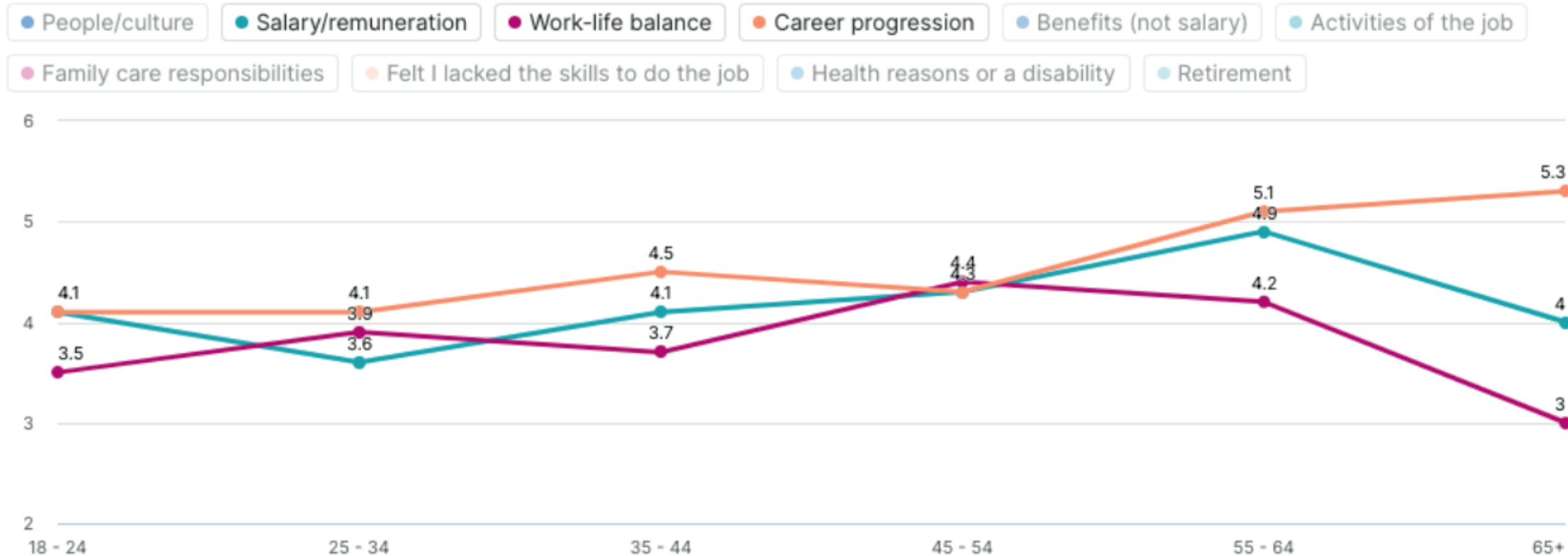
Women in tech over the age of 50 who left or plan to leave a tech role are less likely to be doing so because of their salary (a 13.2 point difference). Salary was ranked as the highest priority amongst workers between the ages of 25 and 34 and lower amongst those over 55 and those under 24.



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*“Cost of childcare was so high it made the amount I’d have left from my salary pitiful.”
- survey respondent*

Thinking about what led to your decision to leave the tech role, rank these factors in order of importance:



The lower the line is on the graph, the more important it was ranked.

Visualising the changing importance of the top three factors in women's decisions to leave tech roles, we can see a correlation between how these are ranked and the likely life stages women are moving through. During prime family-forming years, women are far more likely to be seeking a higher salary and better work-life balance. During likely child-rearing years, women are more likely to be influenced by the need for better work-life balance and flexibility.

Work-life balance

Work-life balance emerged as a key issue for women, with 72.5% of respondents agreeing that this had an impact on their decision to leave their tech role. This factor had the second highest level of agreement amongst respondents, after dissatisfaction with career development. Although work-life balance had the second strongest trend of agreement as a reason why women left their tech role, it was ranked as the most important factor contributing to a decision to leave a role overall.

“Work-life balance” - a proxy for family and caring needs

There is a strong thread in our respondents' answers, that the conflicting demands of family and work life affect their career decisions. Amongst those who selected “work-life balance” as the main reason for leaving a tech role, many went on to specify that this related to their caring responsibilities, despite not overtly listing caring responsibilities as a cause. Although 39.36% of respondents said that caring responsibilities were a factor when asked whether or not they agreed with the statement, the proportion that referenced this in their open text responses was over half the sample (51.6%).

A possible reason for this is that women who leave a role due to unmanageable conflicts of caring and work responsibilities may be less likely to attribute the cause of their situation to their families over an employer, and therefore a work-life balance problem may resonate more. Feeding this is the tech industry's reputation as a bastion of flexible work, and these expectations are not necessarily being met by employers. In any case, through the open text responses of our respondents, we see that caring commitments and work-life balance are closely intertwined and feature heavily in the reasons women gave for leaving their tech role.

What's most important in women's decisions to leave a tech role?

Factor	Trend of agreement	Rank of importance
Work-life balance	72.49%	1st
Salary	67.87%	2nd
Career progression	79.92%	3rd
Benefits	-	4th
Activities of the job	40.36%	5th
People and culture	49.6%	6th
Family and care responsibilities	39.36%	7th
Health reasons or disability	17.07%	8th
Lacked skills to do the job	21.29%	9th
Retirement	-	10th

Diverse family and caring responsibilities

Respondents frequently highlighted parental responsibilities in the context of caring commitments, but many also referenced more nuanced types of caring responsibilities and their conflict with work. 5% of respondents said their caring responsibility was not for children, but either elderly adults or adults with disability or health conditions. Respondents also referenced the challenges of supporting children with special educational needs. Some respondents reported that their aspirations to start family-forming were being hindered by poor work-life balance. There were also a small number of respondents who referenced the desire to be able to care for pets.

These concerns validate activity in the tech ecosystem to better support new lenses on family responsibility and family-forming, for example in relation to fertility and infertility experiences, LGBTQ+ identity and dependents with disabilities or neurodivergence. Women are not only facing challenges of how to manage work if they start a family, but also how to navigate through increasingly complex family-forming and caring experiences.

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“I am recently engaged and we are interested in starting a family soon but work takes up most of my life including weekends.”

- survey respondent



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“My parents are ageing, and having a job with a more separated work and home life balance allows me to be there more reliably if anything were to happen.”

- survey respondent

A need for flexibility

The need for meaningful flexible work arrangements repeatedly emerged as a theme amongst our respondents in relation to work-life balance. We asked respondents what they would want to say to their employer to help people in their circumstances, and what it would have taken to change their decision to leave their role. The results in our text analysis clearly endorse the importance of flexible work arrangements.

Our respondents frequently referenced flexibility in relation to childcare. However, the issue is not monolithic and several factors within the wider issue emerged. Beyond the challenges with being able to afford childcare, women expressed difficulties with managing wrap-around childcare:



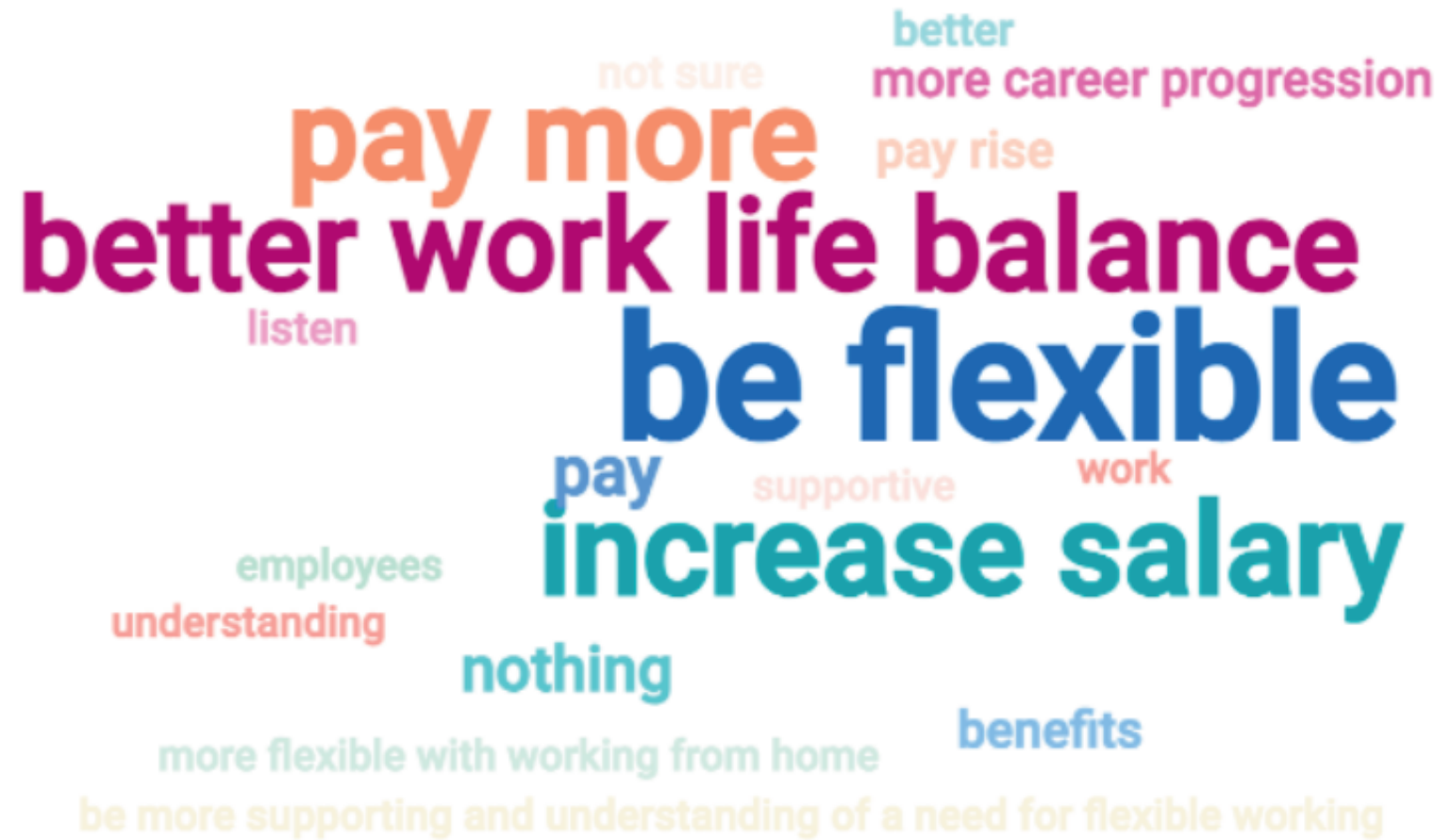
“When a job offers little flexibility, you need to choose between work and family/caring responsibilities and that isn’t always easy to do. Companies should try and offer more flexibility or WFH opportunities.”

- survey respondent



“I have a small child of preschool age. He was not yet eligible for funded childcare and would require full-time placement to allow me to work 40 hours per week. The times of this childcare also overlapped with scheduled work hours, and were unforgiving when it came to transport back and forth within this time.”

- survey respondent



The availability of flexible working is not the only problem. Although flexible working might be available, it sometimes comes with hidden costs that disadvantage those who seek to take them up. Women specifically called out the need for meaningful and promotable flexible work:



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“I have a young child and I do feel like this job in some ways isn’t great to work around things like childcare. I work 4 long days so [I’m] still classed as full-time however [it] does often feel like if it’s not 5 days it’s not enough to progress.”

- survey respondent

Flexibility is correlated with better retention

With many women calling for greater flexibility, we examined whether flexible work arrangements were correlated with greater retention, and found statistically significant differences. Women employed part-time in a tech role were less likely to have changed tech roles in the past five years (27.5%) compared to overall (35.6%). Alarming though, despite the tech industry being regarded as one of the most flex-work friendly industries, we found that women in tech and digital jobs were significantly less likely to work part-time than in other industries, including ones commonly regarded as less gender diverse, such as finance and manufacturing. So in spite of greater flexibility in areas like remote working, women in tech may still be facing less visible challenges around the type of flexible work they may need.

Though not strictly a flexible work arrangement, self-employment was also correlated with better retention in tech work and fewer intentions to leave an existing tech role, with 67.6% of women saying they had no plans to leave a tech role they had been at for more than a year, when they were self-employed. Ultimately the higher retention amongst part-time and self-employed women in tech underlines the fact that women who are able to secure work arrangements over which they have more control, are more likely to stay in that employment.

What can companies do to improve flexibility and work-life balance for women in tech?

In our recent reports, TTC has highlighted ways that organisations are supporting gender diversity in tech through flexible working policies. At a surface level these address the availability of flexible working and the ability to address child care challenges, but also extend to how easily employees can make use of these policies and how those employees are managed and progressed in the workplace. Examples of these include:

- Seasonal working weeks that are shorter during school holiday periods.
- Flexible hours to accommodate time away during the school run hours.
- Ability to work remotely, to enable parents to be located closer to their children's schools and childcare.
- Fair work allocation policies that measure and review how promotable work is being distributed amongst all team members, especially those on part-time contracts.
- Using systems to analyse and identify various types of data, including pay parity, bonuses, work allocations and benefits and ensure distribution across flexibly working employees.
- Training managers in inclusive leadership, to better understand and manage co-located and asynchronous teams.



“I would encourage an enthusiastic attitude to working parents. Normalisation of childcare vouchers and benefits within the role, and also flexibility around childcare and school times that could allow for unconventional or blocked periods outside of normal hours.”

- survey respondent



“I need a role which has some flexibility in work location and/or allows me to book time off with fairly short notice so I can support parents but I have not found this to be an issue due to hybrid/remote working being more accepted now post-Covid.”

- survey respondent

The good news is that forward-thinking tech companies (the TTC Signatory base is a self-selecting group who are already invested in diversity in tech) are well set up to offer highly flexible opportunities to women. In our recent report TTC found that 47% of tech workers, from a sample of over 210,000 UK tech employees, have the ability to work remotely as much as they like without restrictions. Similarly, hybrid working following the pandemic has remained common and this can offer a valuable opportunity to women who want to stay in the workforce.

As organisations navigate changes to their work policies since the pandemic, it's crucial that the gains made towards deep-rooted cultural acceptance of flexible working, are not lost.

Company culture

Though not one of the top three most cited factors in why women leave tech roles, a mention must be made on company culture. Across the business community the dialectic around diversity and inclusion has evolved away from focusing on diversity metrics and now centres strongly on inclusive company culture. A US study by Accenture identified that poor inclusive culture as the reason why 50% of the women in tech leave by the age of 35. Our research continues to validate its importance in whether or not women stay at a tech role.

Culture appears to play a significant role in women's job decisions. Half of respondents agreed that they had left their tech role because they did not like the company culture. This trend is lowest in younger age groups (18-34) and highest in older age groups (35+). It also appears to be more important amongst women without children, coming in as the fourth highest ranked factor after career progression for this group.

Notably, women who left tech roles for non-tech roles tended to rank People and Culture as more important in their decision-making than women who moved from one tech role to another tech role. A counterpoint to this is that women who move from one tech role to another tended to rank caring responsibilities more highly. This suggests that if businesses want to attract and retain female tech talent, focusing on family-friendly work culture offers potential. However, to improve the overall retention of women in tech, we need to look holistically at inclusive culture more widely across the tech ecosystem.

What's influencing women to leave tech roles?

Factor	Rank amongst women overall	Rank amongst women without children
Work life balance	1st	1st
Salary	2nd	2nd
Career progression	3rd	3rd
Benefits	4th	6th
Activities of the job	5th	5th
People and culture	6th	4th
Family and care responsibilities	7th	7th
Health reasons or disability	8th	8th
Lacked skills to do the job	9th	9th
Retirement	10th	10th

Summary

Overall, our data suggests that there is a significant opportunity to retain more women in the UK's tech ecosystem, by stemming the loss of 1 in 4 female tech workers to other occupations. Individual businesses can also do more to retain their female tech workers. Focusing on cultivating authentic, deep-rooted inclusive company culture across the tech ecosystem can address both of these lenses. In all the findings we identified, there is a repeating lesson for the need to take a deeper, more nuanced look at how positive yet overly broad interventions need to be refined to become more effective at retaining women.

Providing meaningful flexible work culture is the key to enabling women to manage a tech career and a family responsibilities concurrently. In order to do so, organisations must invest beyond policy and seek to embed flexible work culture amongst their teams, management hierarchy and leadership. Companies should focus explicitly on achieving a positive and healthy work culture that recognises and protects work-life balance and fairly rewards and progresses employees who adopt work patterns that differ from a full-time, 9am-5pm, on site shift. Efforts to create an inclusive work culture, must explicitly address the gendered uptake of specific types of flexible work, such as part-time work. Improving the retention of women in tech also hinges on creating progression development frameworks that are transparent, embedded into the wider organisation and well-resourced.

The tech sector naturally aligns to some of the most in-demand work arrangements that women in tech - and other underserved groups, such as people in socio-economic cold spots and disabled people - would benefit from. If we can develop more robust inclusive work practices around flexibility, childcare, culture and career development, it is entirely possible we can stem the tide.

To find out more about flexible working practices, inclusive culture, tech skills and career development, and other topics on diversity and inclusion practice in the UK tech ecosystem, please visit the Tech Talent Charter D&I Toolkit, which is available for free and collates practical resources and examples from over 800 UK tech organisations.

