

# Numeracy for Gender Equality

Recommendations for Employers  
from the Gender Taskforce of the National Numeracy  
Leadership Council  
March 2025



# Executive Summary

Independent charity National Numeracy and a pioneering group of organisations launched the Gender Taskforce on International Women's Day 2024. The Taskforce is part of the National Numeracy Leadership Council.

As a nation, the UK's numeracy levels are significantly below the average for developed countries. Nearly half the working-age population has the expected numeracy level of a primary school child.

- **Numeracy is a driver of social mobility:** Low numeracy holds millions of people back from achieving their potential.
- **Numeracy is a driver of gender equality:** Many women do not apply for jobs that involve maths or data skills, blocking their entry to careers and whole employment sectors. This has far-reaching effects for their lives, livelihoods and families.

Too often women face negative stereotypes suggesting that they are not 'good with numbers'. National Numeracy's research shows women tend to have lower number confidence than men, which has far-reaching consequences for employability.

Nearly three times more women (59%) than men (21%) report that their earnings have been negatively impacted as a result of not having a Level 2 maths qualification (equivalent to a GCSE pass), [according to the charity](#).

To enable better opportunities for women and girls, the Gender Taskforce has set out below four recommendations for employers. The Taskforce hopes robust collective action will follow to tackle this pernicious issue.

## The principles driving these recommendations are:

- Closing the gender number confidence gap is a shared societal responsibility – every employer has a responsibility to act.
- The challenge of low numeracy is intergenerational and lifelong. Employers should engage their workforce at all stages to drive change for now and for future generations.
- Change requires a shift in attitude and an increase in opportunity. Employers can support and benefit from both.
- We must meet people where they are and focus support on practical solutions.



**Lucy Marie-Hagues, CEO of Capital One UK and Chair of the Gender Taskforce said:** *"I am determined to make sure that girls and young women recognise their own immense potential when it comes to working with numbers. That's why I'm delighted that we, Capital One, are partnering with National Numeracy and other businesses to help to inspire them and build their confidence. We need collective action to address the gender gap that exists when it comes to number confidence, so that everyone can achieve their fullest potential at school and in the workplace."*

**Sam Sims, CEO of National Numeracy said:** *"Low confidence with numbers is holding people back – disproportionately affecting women and girls – and this acts as a barrier to learning, financial independence, careers and broader life opportunities. We believe that everyone can improve their numeracy, but we cannot improve the numeracy of the nation without addressing the yawning gender divide when it comes to number confidence. We are delighted to be working with the country's leading businesses and organisations to tackle this pervasive problem and open up opportunities for all."*

# Recommendations

## 1. Breaking the intergenerational cycle of low numeracy

**Improving number confidence benefits employers ' talent pipeline in both the short- and long-term. Employers should mobilise, or create, workplace groups/networks (such as women's, families or diversity, equality and inclusion groups) to stimulate the generational shift needed to build a number confident workforce of the future. The groups should have a strong focus on addressing the gender number confidence gap.**

- The strongest factor affecting the attitudes of children are the adults that support them – and helping their own children is the biggest motivator for improving their own numeracy. In other words, focusing the efforts of workplace networks on the next generation benefits both adults and children. Number confident adults are the most powerful lever towards a more number confident and skilled next generation as they will pass on positive attitudes and language to the children in their care.
- Employers might consider using National Numeracy's tools and resources within their groups/networks to offer individuals practical help with everyday maths. They may also consider joining National Numeracy's Corporate Volunteering scheme to get their staff networks into local schools as positive role models, with a focus on boosting the number confidence of girls.

## 2. Creating number confident recruitment and retention practices

**Acknowledging the role number confidence plays in recruiting and developing staff could help employers attract and retain a wider pool of talent. Employers should conduct numeracy-friendly hiring processes – such as offering support for anyone who may have low confidence with numbers and asking for the appropriate level of maths qualification required for the role in job descriptions.**

**By focusing on the skills needed and using the wording 'or equivalent' alongside necessary qualifications, as well as by providing learning support, greater numbers of skilled applicants will be attracted to apply and supported to develop the confidence to be successful.**

**Employers should also invest in post-hiring opportunities for numeracy confidence development, and align with principles of diversity, equality and inclusion by showing that opportunities are available to all, regardless of socio-economic background.**

- This approach would benefit those seeking work, those in work and employers. It would reduce the barriers facing jobseekers and improve the recruiting pipeline. It would help employers achieve their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) equality objectives by supporting employees who may be systematically disadvantaged. And it would increase employee retention as employees would receive appropriate development to improve their numeracy confidence and skills.
- Good practice includes expanding entry requirements to include equivalent qualifications and alternative ways to evidence skill level. For example, where a GCSE/Level 2 qualifications in Maths is a stated requirement, employers should also consider accepting applications from candidates who have achieved the 'Essentials of Numeracy' on the National Numeracy Challenge, in place of a formal qualification. And where a numeracy test forms part of the recruitment process, employers should signpost resources to help candidates prepare, provide pre-test sessions designed to help candidates build their confidence and share tools and resources to unsuccessful candidates for future skills and confidence building. Examples of all such sessions, tools and resources are available from National Numeracy.

- Employers might consider signing up to new National Numeracy's new Numeracy for Equality Pledge, a marker of recognition awarded to employers who are strongly committed to numeracy development, including inclusivity in hiring and within the workplace. See Recommendation 4.

### 3. Prioritising and championing the cause

**'Walking the walk' in addressing the gender number confidence gap will help industries counter entrenched gender inequalities, from career entry to career progression. Employers should place a real emphasis on the gender number confidence gap in their internal and external communications and activities.**

- Internally, the issue should be embedded into organisations' diversity, equality and inclusion programmes and owned by senior leaders, in order for it to be connected with other social issues being tackled at a strategic level. For example, senior leaders could help colleagues understand the level of numeracy required in their roles, addressing misconceptions in order to help boost progression. Diversity, equality and inclusion professionals and networks could help make the link between addressing the gender number confidence gap and countering negative stereotypes. This emphasis should be at a strategic level and burden should be not placed on women to 'fix' the issue.
- Externally, raising awareness and encouraging positive action around gender and numeracy should become a staple topic for communications to customers and stakeholders. For example, employers should leverage the National Numeracy Day and Number Confidence Week campaigns, and provide positive role models.
- Employers might consider establishing trained Numeracy Champions in their workplace through National Numeracy's Continuing Professional Development (CPD)-accredited training programme, in order to support colleagues and embed positive practices.

### 4. The Numeracy for Equality Pledge

**Making a tangible commitment to gender equality will send a powerful signal that an employer is leading change to ensure opportunities for all. Employers might consider signing up to National Numeracy's new Numeracy for Equality Pledge, a marker of recognition awarded to employers who show a strong commitment to numeracy development in hiring and the workplace, including the gender and social mobility aspects of numeracy.**

- The Pledge is mutually beneficial for employers and employees and includes key practices covering numeracy-friendly hiring processes, investing in post-hiring opportunities for numeracy confidence and development and aligning with diversity, equality and inclusion principles.
- For job applicants and employees, the Pledge reduces barriers throughout the employment journey and helps boost numeracy confidence and skills. For employers, the Pledge improves recruiting pipeline and helps achieve ESG equality objectives (i.e. helping employees who may be systematically disadvantaged) and increases employee retention as numeracy-related issues are recognised and supported.

## Gender Taskforce members

- **Lucy-Marie Hagues**, Chief Executive Officer, **Capital One UK** and chair of the Gender Taskforce
- **Clare Francis**, Director of Savings and Investments in Barclays Wealth Management Business, **Barclays**
- **Dave Richards**, Head of CSR and Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, **Capital One UK**
- **Sarah Redman**, Head of Delivery, **Experian**
- **Naomi Burger**, Partner, **EY**
- **Matt Bentall**, Head of Programmes, **The Lord Mayor's Appeal**
- **Jules Buet**, Project Lead, **Maths4Girls**
- **Sue Macmillan**, Chief Operating Officer, **Mumsnet and Gransnet**
- **Perdita Fraser**, Chair of Trustees, **National Numeracy**
- **Kirsty Marsh-Hyde**, Senior Apprenticeships Development Manager, Workforce, Training and Education, **NHS England**
- **Jessica Smith**, Principal/Associate Partner in Public Policy, People and Organisational Performance Practices, **Oliver Wyman**
- **Rachel Proudfoot**, Workplace Savings Propositions Manager, **Scottish Widows**
- **Claire Bridel**, Chief Operating Officer of Liquidnet Division, **TP ICAP**
- **Cathy Prior**, previously Social Impact Programme Manager, **Vanquis Banking Group**
- **Lorraine Handley**, Social Impact Programme Manager, **Vanquis Banking Group**

## Gender Taskforce founding members say:



**Clare Francis, Director of Savings and Investments, Barclays Smart Investor:** "Lack of confidence in numeracy skills can really hold people back, disproportionately so for women, especially when it comes to securing career opportunities. Through Barclays LifeSkills we see how getting the right support has a significant, positive impact on things like money management and personal finance. I'm proud to be a part of the Gender Taskforce as we build on the partnership we have with National Numeracy and help empower women and girls with confidence they need, supporting them to take hold of every opportunity and reach their full potential."



**Sarah Redman, Head of Delivery, Experian:** “Experian’s goal is to provide financial health for all and a large part of that starts with numeracy skills. Experian has been a long-time partner to National Numeracy and at Experian we recognise the strengths behind a diverse workforce. It is with this in mind that we are committed to working with National Numeracy to improve number confidence within women, to encourage more women to step forward into STEM roles and to support universal financial health. And as a mother of two young children, I am passionate about their education and giving them a great start in life. I can see how confidence issues can stem from a young age, and I’d love to be a part of a task force that tackles this head on.”

**Naomi Burger, Partner, EY:** “I’m delighted to serve on National Numeracy’s Gender Taskforce to help build greater confidence with numeracy skills across the UK and open up opportunities to the broadest range of talent. This resonates with me personally and also supports the mission of our independent charity, the EY Foundation, which delivers paid employability programmes to young people from low income backgrounds. The National Numeracy taskforce brings together a broad spectrum of organisations to focus on an important issue.”

**Matt Bentall, Head of Programmes, The Lord Mayor’s Appeal:** “At The Lord Mayor’s Appeal we are committed to creating ‘A Better City for All’, one that is inclusive, healthy, skilled and fair. By joining the Gender Taskforce and addressing the gender number confidence gap, we hope to further our ambition of ensuring women are empowered, and equipped with the necessary skills, to make informed decisions about their careers and boost women’s confidence.”

**Jules Buet, Project Lead, Maths4Girls:** “Maths4Girls is a charity dedicated to working with 11 to 14-year-old girls to encourage them to pursue maths beyond GCSEs. One big aspect of our work is to boost the confidence in girls’ ability in maths, showing them role models that talk about their struggles, their failures and persevering nonetheless is an important part of the encounters we organise to show them that the vast majority of people have failed at some point in their lives and that this is a normal part of learning. Girls tend to also be much less aware of the importance of maths and numeracy in the workplace, this is something that they tend to find out too late: once they have left education and may be struggling to find work. While it is completely possible to bridge that gap as an adult, it is significantly more difficult than as a teenager. We are proud to support the Gender Taskforce to help close the confidence gap that exists in maths because it is a key part of the fight for gender equality that will have lasting effect on future generations as well: confident women tend to raise confident daughters!”

**Sue Macmillan, Chief Operating Officer, Mumsnet and Gransnet:** “Every day on Mumsnet we hear from women whose lack of confidence with numbers affects everything from their willingness to talk about finances in a relationship to their ability to help their children with homework. The gender number confidence gap isn’t an abstract concept – it has very real consequences for our users in everyday life. That’s why we’re joining the Gender Taskforce – to help confront this issue and tackle the negative consequences of low numeracy for women and girls.”





**Kirsty Marsh-Hyde, Senior Apprenticeships Development Manager, Workforce, Training and Education, NHS England:** “The National Numeracy research published in 2023 had striking significance for the NHS, where 77% of the workforce are female. It is crucial for us to address the issue of low number confidence among women, as it directly impacts their career progression and overall learning outcomes. As the NHS we have a responsibility to ensure that all our staff feel confident in their maths abilities. And this is why we are thrilled to be part of the National Numeracy Gender Taskforce, so we can work towards closing the gender number confidence gap in the UK and create an inclusive and supportive environment for our staff.”

**Jessica Smith, Principal/Associate Partner in Public Policy, People and Organisational Performance Practices, Oliver Wyman:** “Oliver Wyman is proud of its ongoing relationship with National Numeracy and the impact achieved together. We are also deeply committed to supporting women in their professional development across all industries. We believe the Gender Taskforce will be an excellent opportunity to further build on this commitment. Throughout my career I’ve always been excited about helping people build their confidence in maths and sciences and been grateful for having role models who have helped me build my own. From early in my career in engineering and as a maths tutor, to more recently working in organisational performance I’ve seen the huge impact targeted initiatives and support can have – and am excited about supporting this through the taskforce!”

**Rachel Proudfoot, Workplace Savings Propositions Manager, Scottish Widows:** “I am delighted to be part of the National Numeracy Gender Taskforce as this is an issue I am personally very passionate about. In this day and age, there is no reason for such a gap in skillset given the volume of resources that are available. However, more needs to be done to ensure these resources become more accessible to give people the support they need. At Scottish Widows, we aim to help people save for their future but recognise that a change in mindset and greater education is vital to this. We already do a lot to support women in retirement and raise awareness and drive change to close the gender pensions gap, which better numeracy education and confidence plays a key role in.”

**Claire Bridel, Chief Operating Officer of Liquidnet Division, TP ICAP:** “As a strategic partner of National Numeracy, and numbers people ourselves, we understand the importance of numeracy as a driver of social mobility. The gender number confidence gap is a barrier to opportunity for many women, that can impact their work and personal lives. As an employer in the financial services sector, we are keen to see more women forging careers in the industry. This begins with women and girls feeling confident with numbers. We are excited to join National Numeracy’s Gender Taskforce to work with partners across the industry and drive awareness and action on this issue.”

**Cathy Prior, Social Impact Programme Manager, Vanquis Banking Group:** “At Vanquis Banking Group, we are dedicated to boosting the numeracy rates of the nation and closing the gender number confidence gap to achieve social and financial inclusion for everyone. Having overcome my own struggles with maths, I want to empower other women to find the confidence to do the same and shape a banking landscape where everyone can thrive.”



### About National Numeracy

National Numeracy is a charity dedicated to helping people feel confident with numbers and using everyday maths. Our mission is to empower people to thrive by using numeracy to open up opportunities and access brighter futures, targeting communities where the need is greatest. National Numeracy is a registered company (company no: 7886294) and charity (charity no: 1145669).

**Find out more:** [www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk](http://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk)

**If you are interested in working with us, please email:** [partnerships@nationalnumeracy.org.uk](mailto:partnerships@nationalnumeracy.org.uk)

### About the National Numeracy Leadership Council

In September 2021 National Numeracy joined forces with government departments, business and experts together to find new ways to tackle the stubborn problem of low numeracy by forming the National Numeracy Leadership Council (NNLC). Chaired by Andy Haldane, Chief Executive of the RSA and Vice-chair of National Numeracy, regular meetings find new ways to tackle the stubborn problem of low numeracy.

**Find out more:** [www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/about-us/national-numeracy-leadership-council](http://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/about-us/national-numeracy-leadership-council)

### About the Gender Taskforce of the National Numeracy Leadership Council

Independent charity National Numeracy and a pioneering group of organisations came together to address the UK's gender number confidence gap, with the launch of the Gender Taskforce, launched on International Women's Day 2024 and chaired by Lucy-Marie Hagues, CEO Capital One UK.

**Find out more:** [www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/news/gender-taskforce](http://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/news/gender-taskforce)

### About the gender numeracy gap

[Numerous academic studies](#) show there is no gender component to maths ability, and despite lacking the confidence of boys in STEM subjects, girls [often outperform their male counterparts in maths and science subjects at GCSE level](#). Yet [fewer girls pursue STEM subjects at A-Level](#), and women consistently report that they are less number confident than men.

Having low number confidence affects aspirations, limits educational and career choices, and can prevent women from accessing learning and applying for jobs in key sectors of the UK economy. [The single greatest factor associated with successfully improving number skills is having a growth mindset](#) – in other words, believing that doing so is possible. But the numeracy levels of the nation as a whole cannot improve without addressing this key group.

Enabling better outcomes and opportunities for women and girls is a key priority for many employers and organisations, and indeed the world, with gender equality and empowerment enshrined within the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). By confronting the obstacles to maths learning and how we support those on their number confidence journey, brighter futures can be achieved for all.

**Find out more:** [www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/about-us/research-and-impact](http://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/about-us/research-and-impact)

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