

Aspire in Partnership (AiP)



Newsletter – October 2025



This report provides a quarterly summary of EDI-focussed activity, aimed at supporting employers to diversify their workforces.

Aspire in Partnership (AiP) is a Growth Company (GC) service designed to help businesses attract and retain best-in-class talent from a diverse range of backgrounds – creating a productive workforce and opportunities for all.

Overall Impact

Over the months of July to September 2025, we’ve proactively supported 23 employers to widen their candidate pools, placing 159 unemployed people into work in the process. All placements are with employers paying at least the Real Living Wage (RLW).

Below is a breakdown of the key D&I metrics:

RLW Job Starts	Male	Female	Non-binary	16-24	25-49	50+
159	50%	49%	1%	15%	59%	26%
Arab	Asian/ Asian British	Black	Mixed heritage	White		
3%	9%	38%	8%	42%		

Employer Case Studies

Capricorn Security

In a sector traditionally perceived as male-dominated, Capricorn Security identified a pressing need to diversify its workforce by recruiting more women into security roles.

Origins of the Initiative

The idea was sparked on International Women’s Day, when Cath Finlayson, Senior Training Manager at The Growth Company, was invited as Guest of Honour at a security industry event in Manchester. Cath’s commentary and experience of supporting employers to diversify through new approaches to recruitment quickly led to a discussion, with GC and Capricorn agreeing to design and deliver a bespoke training and recruitment programme aimed at unemployed women in GM.



Programme Design & Delivery

- A tailored Security Industry Association course was developed specifically for female candidates, addressing technical training and confidence-building.
- The programme was locally marketed to unemployed women, with a focus on accessibility and career progression.
- 12 women enrolled with The Growth Company and all 12 successfully completed the initial training.
- They progressed to a Capricorn-led SIA badge training course, where every participant passed and was offered a role within Capricorn Security.

Impact & Outcomes

- 100% completion and employment offer rate.
- A tangible shift in gender representation within Capricorn's workforce.
- A model for collaborative working between training providers and employers.
- A powerful example of how targeted interventions can break down industry stereotypes and unlock new talent pipelines.

Metroline

Following the introduction of the Bee Network in 2024, Metroline were successful in winning contracts to service 3 of the bus depots in Manchester (Hyde Road, Tameside & Sharston). Although Metroline have a lengthy track record of public bus service operation in Greater London, they were a new entrant in GM.

Support began at the tender writing stage, where GC worked with Metroline to understand the company and which Social Value areas it was best-suited to deliver and commit to as part of its bid to run parts of the new service.

Now that Metroline are operational, The Growth Company, Manchester City Council and Tameside Council are supporting the company to embed Social Value initiatives and to meet future workforce & skills needs through community engagement.

Activity to date

GC have supported the company with a Recruitment Process Review, designed to explore ways in which role profiles, job adverts and recruitment processes can be adjusted easily to make them more attractive to a wider candidate pool. Metroline have also: held a recruitment event in Wythenshawe Library; attended a range of community-based Jobs Fairs; taken part in an Employer Destination Day at the East Manchester Academy helping to inspire students about careers in public transport.

Work to recruit locally is about to shift up a gear with GC and Metroline set to run monthly Pre-Employment Academies beginning in November 2025 and continuing through 2026. The Academies will target local communities and under-represented



groups before providing pre-interview training designed to give candidates the confidence and skills needed to secure roles as Trainee Bus Drivers.

These activities mark the beginning of a long-term commitment by Metroline to embed within Greater Manchester's communities; not just as a transport provider but as a socially responsible employer, reflective of the communities they serve.

If you're keen to change your workforce demographic or attract candidates from under-represented backgrounds, contact Adrian Bird (details below).

Ban the Box: Unlocking Fairer Recruitment

Many employers miss out on exceptional talent due to a single tick box. For people with criminal convictions, this often means being excluded from job opportunities before they've had a chance to demonstrate their skills.

What is Ban the Box?

Ban the Box is a UK-wide campaign urging employers to remove the criminal convictions tick box from initial job applications. Instead of asking about criminal history upfront, employers assess candidates based on skills and suitability before considering past convictions. Launched in 2013 by Business in the Community, it promotes fair chance recruitment and helps people with convictions compete for jobs without automatic rejection.

Why It Matters

Over 12.5 million people in the UK have a criminal record. Many are skilled and motivated, but stigma (often from minor or historic offences) can prevent them from reaching the interview stage. By banning the box, employers can:

- Widen their talent pool.
- Reduce unconscious bias.
- Support rehabilitation and safer communities.
- Boost retention and loyalty.
- Demonstrate social responsibility.

CFO Evolution Programme

Alongside initiatives such as Ban the Box, the national CFO Evolution Programme supports offenders and people on probation to reduce reoffending and lead law-abiding lives. A key feature of the programme is support and training designed to help offenders to secure employment, whilst also helping employers to recruit.

How Employers Can Get Involved:

- Remove the conviction question from initial applications.
- Commit to fair assessment later in the process.
- Undertake a Recruitment Processes Review with Aspire in Partnership.
- Offer employment opportunities through CFO Evolution.



By banning the box, your organisation can play a vital role in breaking down barriers and building inclusive pathways into employment. Aspire in Partnership is here to support you every step of the way, from reviewing recruitment practices to connecting you with candidates ready to thrive.

To enquire about Ban the Box and/or CFO Evolution, contact Adrian Bird (details below).

Fair Hiring in the Age of AI

AI tools have become increasingly accessible over the last 18 months or so. Application volumes are rising and candidate submissions are increasingly polished (often to a point where a false impression is given). This shift presents new challenges for recruiters and hiring managers, who must now assess not just qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience, but authenticity too.

Yet AI also holds promise for equity in hiring. Research shows underrepresented groups are using tools like ChatGPT to overcome barriers, such as structuring applications to refining language and preparing for assessments. When used responsibly, AI can help level the playing field and offer opportunities to candidates who have historically missed out.

Employers are also embracing AI to streamline recruitment, but fairness demands that critical human touchpoints remain. Emerging best practices include:

- Use of AI to support, not replace, human decision-making.
- Clear guidance being provided to candidates and hiring managers on acceptable AI use.
- Candidates being informed if AI is used to screen or assess applications so they can prepare and adapt accordingly.
- Interview panellists being trained to probe beyond surface-level answers to check knowledge and understanding.

Aspire in Partnership's Inclusive Recruitment Workshop and Recruitment Process Review will help you and your teams to understand how to be inclusive at every stage of your hiring process and how AI might affect this.

To explore how to adopt AI usage in an inclusive way, contact Adrian Bird (details below).



Enquiries

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