

Diversity in tech

WHAT DOES A DEVELOPER
LOOK LIKE IN 2018?



Developers do a lot of great things. They solve complex problems, they design useful tools, they test and maintain software. It's a field that's constantly evolving. With new technologies and programming languages continually being developed, it's a fast-paced industry.

What's really lacking though, is its workforce. It's no secret that the IT industry isn't very inclusive. Years of championing Women in IT and encouraging minority groups into STEM careers hasn't paid off yet. The developer community is still a boy's club.

Developer Survey 2018

Stack Overflow carries out a yearly report of the developer community. It provides an insight into the core demographics, popular programming technologies, and more esoteric fields such as experience and belonging, and self-evaluation.

This year (the 8th iteration) had the largest number of respondents to date, with over 100,000 developers worldwide revealing how they learn, build their careers, and the tools that they use in their jobs.



Learning to code

To build a bigger picture, most of the respondents in the report were back end (59%) and full stack (48.2%) developers. Many developers are quite fluid and learn multiple programming and scripting languages. Software development is definitely a 'young' industry, with a majority of respondents learning to code less than 6-8 years ago, and mostly coding professionally for less than 5 years. Three quarters of respondents were younger than 35 - with Millennials steaming ahead in the 25-34 category (49.2%). The 'older' devs are starting to lag behind at 5.1% (45-54) and 1.5% (55-64).

Learning to code is like learning any new skill or language, it takes time. It doesn't always have to be through formal education though. A large number of respondents had a BSc in subjects such as Computer Science and Software Engineering, and 22.6% went on further to study an MSc. But lots of devs are self-taught - in fact 86.7% of respondents taught themselves a new framework or language without taking a course. Online communities are also hugely popular tools for self learning - sites such as Codecademy, Stack Overflow and official framework documentation. It really does show how open and accessible learning to code can be, so why is the industry still so exclusive?



Who are the developers?

The unsurprising outcome of the survey is the heavy bias of young (49%), white (74%), straight (93%), males (92%). And, sadly, this will most likely represent most businesses across the UK, US and worldwide. 92.7% of respondents of the survey were men. The number of female, non-binary, gender non-conforming and transgender respondents were in a tiny minority and most were students.

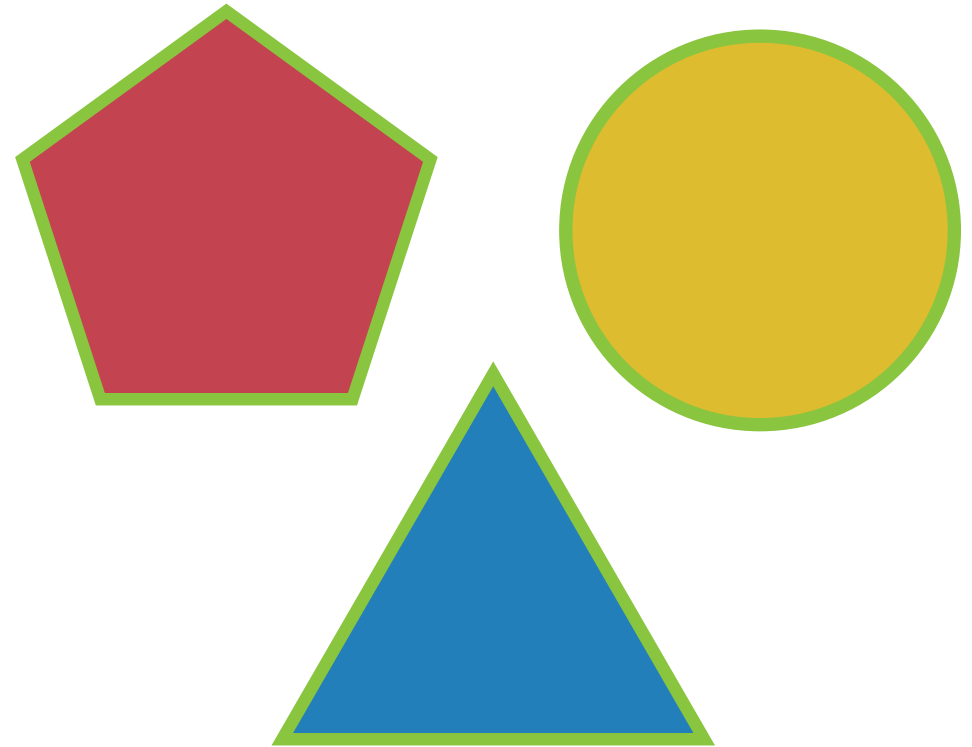
Throughout the entire report, the lack of diversity is obvious. It seems that this thriving, continually evolving industry is built almost entirely on the skills and ideas of a very restricted demographic.



Diversity matters

All of the big tech companies share their diversity statistics and their efforts to increase minority representation, but most of Silicon Valley (especially in leadership roles) is still ruled by white men. Age-old stereotypes about the industry just don't fit with the 'progressive' face of IT and technology.

To get women, BAME and LGBTQIA+ people into the workforce, things have to change. Companies need to be fully inclusive, and the change comes from within.



Recruitment drive

Don't hire someone to tick the 'diversity' box. There's not a weak talent pool. People shouldn't 'have' to fit with the company culture, they should make their own. Without diversity you end up with a monoculture, and again, the industry will never change.

Have a work culture that people want to be part of. How can they contribute to it? What benefits can you offer them? Diverse teams work better because it means that everyone has to challenge their own thinking more often. And that's a really good thing.

When asked about job priorities in the survey, men, women and non-binary groups had very different priorities when it came to looking for a job. The highest priorities for men were benefits (19%), professional development (15%), technologies used (17%) and office environment (13%). The report showed that the diversity of the company was their lowest priority.

For women and non-binary respondents, the office environment and company culture were the highest priorities (17% and 19%).



How do we solve this?

The report reveals a lot about the industry. It shows that a developer in 2018 is a white, straight, young male (based on the results). And the problem with the lack of diversity sits within the industry itself. Women and non-binary respondents value diversity in the workplace more than men. So, how can underrepresented groups crack the industry if the people working in it don't prioritise them?

Start from the ground, and move up. Encourage students from underrepresented groups into STEM subjects in schools, run mentoring programmes, offer internships and scholarships. Have men and women in the professional world championing underrepresented groups. This is why initiatives like Codebar, Girls Who Code and Queer Code London open doors for people who otherwise wouldn't pursue a career or interest in coding and development.

These groups are hugely successful and well attended, often with long waiting lists for places. So, perhaps this report isn't fully representative of developers working and studying in the UK? Maybe the underrepresented groups in the survey are using alternative places online to talk shop. But there's definitely still a really long way to go.

Does this give an accurate view of developers in 2018? We want to open a dialogue. Think about the company that you work for. Could your workplace be more inclusive?

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