



# Discover... Women in Tech

WOMEN IN TECH 2022 Q&A GUIDE

**DISCOVER**

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# WOMEN IN TECH 2022

## Q&A Guide



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### Have you had to overcome any barriers or adversities as a woman in the tech industry?

**Shenel, Salesforce** - When I started applying, I had the experience where a lot of people applying were female, with some male candidates as well. Since I started the apprenticeship, a lot of us are female and about 40% are male. So that's really

positive and reflects the company I work for as well. A lot of companies have equality groups, the one we have at Salesforce is the Salesforce Women's Network, which I joined straight away because I wanted to connect with other women in different roles in the company and share experiences. Both my managers were also female and that was positive to see some role models.

**Zoya, Cisco** - I had a similar experience when applying virtually, everyone in my assessment centre group were all female and my programme is quite diverse in terms of gender.

**Vivian, Vodafone** - My experience was also similar, I wanted to make more female friends in a male-dominated sector. When I applied in the beginning, I was trying to see the other females I could relate to and I had some reach out to me as well.

## Do you feel like you have to do more work to get recognised or do more in general, as a woman?

**Shenel, Salesforce** - I think it depends on the people you have surrounding you and the network you build up around yourself. My personality is that I'll do a bit too much work sometimes and step outside of what I've been asked, but I think this is more of a personal a society thing. It's about putting yourself out there and being your own advocate, shouting about the things you've done. It's something you've got to do for yourself otherwise other people won't know what you're doing and won't be able to talk about how amazing you are!

**Zoya, Cisco** - That's a really good question too. Right now, I don't feel like I need to do more as I'm lucky in that my apprenticeship programme is very diverse. But, once I leave, it might not be as diverse. And especially being a woman of colour, you're always going to have to work harder to be recognised or put on the same level as your counterparts. It's about training yourself to, not show off, but show yourself. And it's something you have to learn to do, being a female.

**Vivian, Vodafone** - At Vodafone, there are plenty of opportunities to get recognised. Right now, we're doing our third quarter recognition across the business for what everyone has done during the year. I've actually never put myself forward as it's easy to get shy, but there's a lot of encouragement from others to speak up. There are also options for bonuses and promotions if you go above and beyond, even for apprentices.



## Have you ever faced imposter syndrome, as a minority in a male-dominated industry?

**Shenel, Salesforce** – Yes 100%. Even when I was applying for tech apprenticeships, I'd never done anything with technology or computer science before, so it was a bit daunting. I thought I'd never get it because I didn't have experience, but now I'm at a position where I'm doing really well and I've learnt on the job. There are still times I feel imposter syndrome, because I don't feel like an expert but it's important to acknowledge those feelings. And be realistic – you don't really need to know, or be an expert, on everything. Having those conversations with other females about their experiences makes you feel like you're not the only one.

**Zoya, Cisco** – For me, it's low-key always there. But I think that's part of my personality and being shy too. I also joined the apprenticeship straight after sixth form at 18, so I think this contributed to it more as I was working with lots of older people, and some non-apprentices. And I had that idea of them being more experienced because of this. But now I'm in my second year it has gone away a bit, even though

it's definitely still there. I think it's something that goes away with more experience and familiarity. At Cisco, we have a Women's group and one of the sessions was around imposter syndrome and how to get over it.

**Vivian, Vodafone** – I totally agree and I experience it all the time. I don't think it will go away for me, but I have ways of not letting it impact me negatively. I have noticed being a software engineer, and still learning to code, being around more experienced people makes me realise there is always going to be someone better. So having my personal projects at Vodafone helps me focus more on my strengths and the outcomes of what I want to do, rather than thinking about others around me.

## What are the main skills needed to break into tech, apart from coding?

**Shenel, Salesforce** – From my experience, curiosity is a big one. So, being curious about things, wanting to learn new things, wanting to ask questions and being that person who puts their hand up and asks why. Even if you haven't got the tech skills, if you're curious, you'll be willing to learn

and have that support around you to ask questions and get the help you need. Also, a willingness to learn and resilience is good; you might not always know the answer to everything, but if you try, you're on the way to succeeding in tech.

**Vivian, Vodafone** – I definitely agree with that too. You hear people say to ask questions, but there is a stigma of annoying people and it being negative. But, in my team they actually get worried when I'm silent and they want to help. Asking questions and reaching out is the best way forward to improve your learning. I wish I'd known it wasn't a big problem sooner.

**Zoya, Cisco** – It depends on the apprenticeship you're applying to as some do require certain skills. But having a motivation to learn is a big one. In my experience, coding is important if you're applying for roles like software engineering. But, it varies depending on the company and the level of the apprenticeship; sometimes bigger companies do ask for more. But I would say, don't worry if you don't have coding skills, especially if you don't want to get into those roles. My recommendation would be to do some courses on what you're interested in and

show your knowledge. This can also help with imposter syndrome too as you feel like you do belong.

## **What subjects have you studied and how have they helped you in your career?**

**Shenel, Salesforce** – I did GCSE's and A-Levels in Business Studies, English Literature, and Sociology, then a year in university on a Foundation Degree; this is just before your first year. I did this because I wanted to get a qualification and experience uni to see if it was for me. But it also gave me time to apply for more apprenticeships. The programme I am doing now is Digital and Technology Solutions, with the Technology Consultant pathway. As Zoya mentioned, there are different apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships to apply for, but for mine I didn't need any STEM subjects.

**Zoya, Cisco** – I did GCSE's and A-Levels in Sociology, Psychology, and Computer Science which was a bit of an odd mix. But I had an interest in Computer Science, so I applied for apprenticeships and also uni. My main goal was an apprenticeship, but the university places were my backup.

I'm also on the Digital and Technology Solutions programme, but I haven't chosen my pathway yet.

**Vivian, Vodafone** – I studied extended Computer Science as a BTEC and Graphics Communications as an A-Level at college. I also chose Computer Science as a GCSE at school and the class was very small as it wasn't the most popular option. But I'm glad I did it because now I'm also on the Digital and Technology Solutions programme doing the Software Engineer pathway.

What attracted you to the tech industry and has it met your expectations?

**Zoya, Cisco** – Technology has just always been my interest, I can't say why. I liked the endless opportunities in tech and the fact the jobs are always in-demand and high paying. It has lived up to my expectations and also surprised me. It's very different to school in that you have more freedom; I wasn't expecting my workplace to not have a hierarchy, but this turned out to be a really good thing.



## What advice would you give to your younger self applying for your first tech role?

**Shenel, Salesforce** – When I first started applying, I was only looking at Business Management because this was all I knew. I underestimated the transferrable skills I'd built that would help me apply for tech apprenticeships. Looking back, I wish I had started applying for more tech roles during my first year of university. But luckily, I connected with someone at Salesforce who encouraged me to apply. My advice would be to not underestimate yourself and look at your transferrable skills, as you might surprise yourself.

**Vivian, Vodafone** – I would advise my younger self to put myself out of my comfort zone more, as companies always want people willing to learn. I wish I'd done a deep dive into more areas I thought were out of my league and pushed myself to do more technical projects.



## Do you have to code to be in tech?

**Shenel, Salesforce** – For the company I'm in, no you don't have to. You can be in tech and learn, but a lot of people do think you need coding skills to start with. Most companies will give you the training and opportunities. But if you really enjoy coding you will want to go into those types of roles.

**Vivian, Vodafone** – I agree and most people don't know that project management is a tech role too. There are lots of misconceptions about what a tech role looks like.

## How do you maintain a good work/life balance?

**Zoya, Cisco** – There hasn't really been a struggle for me. Employers these days, from my experience working at Cisco, put an emphasis on work/life balance and leaving work 'in the office'. Most days I

don't even work my hours 9-5:30, because there is more focus on getting your work done rather than on the hours. I think there's a work/life balance and there's a uni/life balance, so if you do a degree apprenticeship it will require more work than a non-degree apprenticeship. But this isn't to do with the job, it's more to do with the studying and things like uni module deadlines.

## What's the hardest thing about working in tech? And what is the most rewarding?

**Shenel, Salesforce** – The most amazing thing about working in tech as an apprentice is how much trust I've been able to have with my colleagues and customers. Part of my role is going to customer meetings and talking to them about their tech problems, which is why curiosity is so important. I then present them with a solution that is fitted to their business, through storytelling. Recently, I worked with an apprenticeship provider's and it was interesting to see the other side of how apprenticeships work. One challenge for me is how fast-paced tech is and keeping up with new releases and advancements, so it's important to stay on top of this.

## How do you feel about the future of women in tech?

**Vivian, Vodafone** – I think there's definitely more awareness of the opportunities for women and knowing they're capable. I don't think they should be limited by the male-dominated industry. I talk to other women about it all the time and I see a lot of women celebrating their achievements on social media. I do see it being more equal as to how women contribute through more female managers and mentors.

Are there any female tech leaders or communities you recommend following? (LinkedIn, Instagram, Podcasts, Influencers etc.)

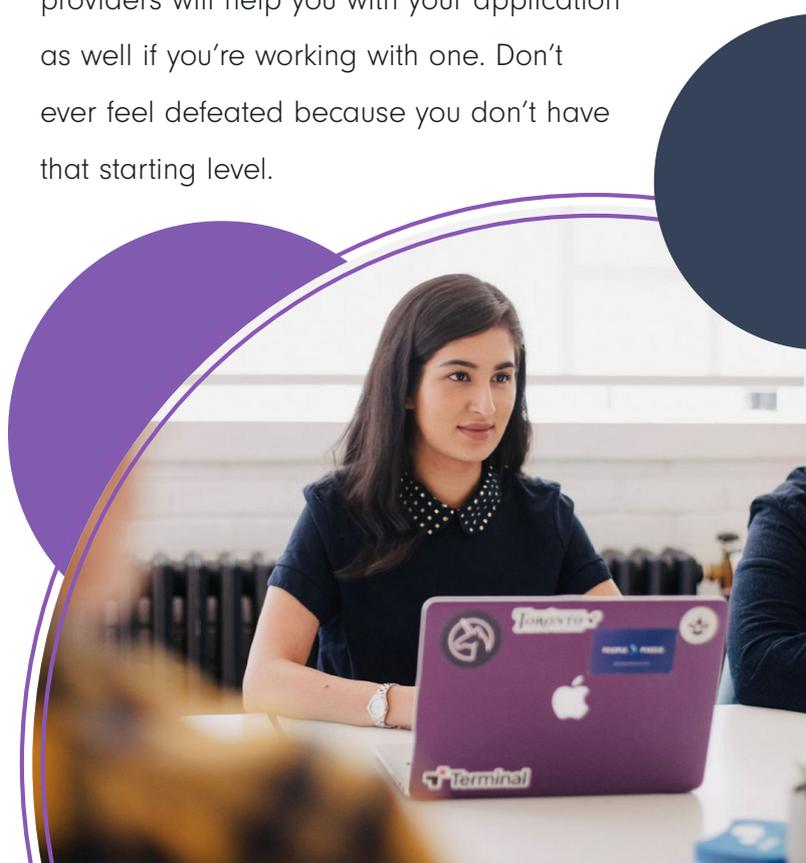
**Vivian, Vodafone** – I follow a lot of people on LinkedIn and you can find different news and networks on there. This is the main platform I use, but there isn't a specific person for me.

**Shenel, Salesforce** – I really like Brené Brown and would recommend her to other women, even if they're not in tech.

**Zoya, Cisco** – I'm more into finding what comes up on YouTube, rather than any specific people.

## What kind of qualification should we have for a Level 5 or Level 6 apprenticeship?

**Tracy, Firebrand** – It depends, there will be set criteria for levels 5 and 6 in terms of capability. At these levels, the area of study and what you're studying will be different to the entry levels. But it will depend on the apprenticeship you're applying for, and the employers might have their own additional criteria. If you go to the [instituteforapprenticeships.org](https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org) and look at these levels, you can find some more information about what you'll need. When you're looking for an apprenticeship, you'll want to include a good opening statement about yourself and why you want to do it, as well as your capabilities. Most training providers will help you with your application as well if you're working with one. Don't ever feel defeated because you don't have that starting level.





## Do you have any chance of getting into this industry if you're not a native English speaker?

**Tracy, Firebrand** – If you live in the UK, you can apply for an apprenticeship programme. You do need to meet eligibility requirements, but these depend on the employer and the apprenticeship. Training providers can help support you with this though, so I would recommend looking into your options and asking them for support.

## Are you self-taught apprentices or did you study at uni?

**Shenel, Salesforce** – My apprenticeship is a degree level. So, this means I'm studying towards a university degree for three years, whilst doing my work. We do six weeks of working and then one week of studying. I didn't have any experience before, so I learnt on the job rather than teaching myself.

**Vivian, Vodafone** – I know people who have done different routes, including someone who dropped out of uni and chose the apprenticeship instead. I also know of someone who did a gap year and got enough coding knowledge to go straight into an apprenticeship after sixth form. I came from sixth form and went straight into the apprenticeship, so I learnt as I went along.

## Are there many older females starting as apprentices?

**Shenel, Salesforce** – For me I started a year after sixth form, so I was nineteen. Because I have university time and mix with people from other companies as well there are some at a similar age. But there are also some older and they might even have degrees already, unrelated to technology.

**Tracy, Firebrand** – Bear in mind that if you've done some pre-learning or a degree in something else, there will be some consideration on your apprenticeship. It might mean that you don't need to study the full duration or your learning modules may be different. There's no higher limit and no age limit, it's more about how your existing knowledge will affect your future studies or opportunities.

## What apprenticeships are available if you already have a master's degree?

**Tracy, Firebrand** – That applies to bootcamps as well, so you can't really join one if you're already qualified. This is because you have to show that you have learnt and progressed from the training.

**GMFJ** – You can apply for an apprenticeship if you have a degree, but it can't be in the same field as your qualification.

## Can you apply to a bootcamp with pre-settled status?

**Tracy, Firebrand** – As long as you have eligibility to work in the UK it won't be a problem. The focus of a bootcamp is to find you a role at the end of it.

## Where can we access the bootcamps?

**Tracy, Firebrand** – Bootcamps are available through various training providers, but you can visit the Firebrand website to register your interest on ours. However, you can also search for Government Bootcamps

for more information and to find a full list of providers.

## What kind of reasonable adjustments can be made for an autistic applicant, for the interview and assessment process?

**GMFJ** – There are lots of reasonable adjustments that can be made for any candidates who need them! Don't be afraid to ask for what adjustments you feel that you need, and the employers will work with you to offer as much accommodation as possible.

## I was wondering if apprenticeships could be part-time? And are there any modifications for people with autism or those who struggle with exams and presentations?

**GMFJ** – Some employers do offer apprenticeships with reduced hours, however, the majority are done as full-time roles. It's worth checking with your local training providers or colleges to see if there

are any employers looking to recruit on a part-time basis. With an apprenticeship, there is usually only one exam which is your end point assessment. The date for which will be agreed upon when you've completed the other parts of the qualification, which is just evidencing that you have completed the duties required. It's really nothing to worry about and your training provider or college would support you every step of the way!

### **What about people who want to do an apprenticeship, but have a different country's qualification? How do they qualify for that?**

**GMFJ** – You can have your international qualification converted via the UK NARIC system, although this is a paid-for service. However, some training providers will just take the international qualifications without conversion. Your training provider will ask you to complete a BKS (Basic and Key Skills Builder) assessment prior to beginning the apprenticeship anyway, which will let them know the level you are currently working at and, if needed, you can complete a Functional Skills qualification alongside your apprenticeship.

### **I used to work in a different industry, but I am trying to transition into data analytics. However, even though I have completed a bootcamp it has been difficult getting a job. There seems to be an age limit of mostly 18-24 years. What should I do?**

**GMFJ** – The only age limit for an apprenticeship is that you have to be over the age of 16, unless there is a legal limit that prevents you from doing the work, e.g. 18+ for selling alcohol. Many employers are now looking for applications from career changers with transferable skills, such as problem-solving and teamwork. We would recommend you continue applying for the opportunities you're interested in. And if you need any support, would like our Recruitment Team to take a look over your CV/Cover Letter, or if you would like to complete our Mock Video Interview and receive full feedback then get in touch via [opportunities@getmyfirstjob.co.uk](mailto:opportunities@getmyfirstjob.co.uk)



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