Society does not change quickly. Entrenched views can take decades to overturn, sometimes requiring the changing of the guard to a more enlightened generation before true impartiality can be embedded – and even then it is clear that bias has a long and durable tail. But we are heading in the right direction. Half a century ago ingrained discrimination on gender and ethnic grounds was common. Sadly elements still exist, but progress is undeniable. What is more is the recognition of prejudices that in the past ran so deep they were not even recognised – for example ageism, bias against those with disabilities and against those who can’t simply be classified as heterosexual. Now the awareness and the language around such issues means minorities are no longer being ignored or repressed.

Tackling such issues is undeniably ‘the right thing to do’, but now there is a different imperative driving change. The technology sector is suffering from a skills shortage – often quoted as the most important factor limiting a company’s growth. So far from being a discarded or ignored chunk of a potential workforce, this huge swathe of diverse people represents a real opportunity for smart companies to develop the pool of talent they so badly need. Some companies have realised this, developing programmes to create inclusive workforces and discovering that their businesses have become happier, more unified and more successful as a result.

The following pages highlight some technology companies leading the way. They have embraced the theory and practicality of having a diverse workforce, recognising the talents of an individual irrespective of age, sexuality, gender, physical or mental disability, or ethnicity. It is no longer just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.