



advancing gender
equality in science,
engineering and technology

WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

Why gender equality is essential in science, engineering and technology

Executive summary

This guide sets out the reasons why increasing numbers of employers in science, engineering, technology and the built environment (SET) are actively addressing issues of gender equality. It outlines some of the significant benefits that gender equality brings to these sectors.

The report draws upon published research and best practice to help organisations develop and communicate their own business case for gender equality and lists some of the steps they can take to create a work environment which is diverse, skilled and committed, and which includes a fair representation of women.

The report identifies **seven main reasons for building gender equality in SET:**

1. Become an employer of choice

In a competitive market for high calibre scientists, engineers and technologists, becoming established as an employer of choice will help SET organisations attract the most talented people from the broadest population, not just the traditionally available pool.

2. Improve business performance

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that improving gender equality leads to better organisational performance. Employing a more diverse workforce brings a wider range of talents, skills and perspectives into an organisation. This can translate into significant business benefits, including enhanced employee motivation, productivity and innovation.

3. Retain knowledge and experience

Some estimates put the cost of replacing an employee at equal to their annual salary. This is likely to be higher for SET organisations due to the costs of technical training. When the less tangible, but equally significant costs, of lost corporate knowledge and intellectual capital are taken into account, it makes sound economic sense for SET organisations to encourage women to remain and progress with them, including helping them to return after a career break.

4. Capitalise on workforce demographics

The UK workforce is changing. An ageing workforce means it will become increasingly challenging for organisations to maintain an adequate supply of skilled employees. As the workforce is also becoming more diverse, the issue will be particularly acute for many SET sectors where the workforce is still predominantly the traditional white male demographic. Organisations that anticipate the trends and adapt their policies and practices ahead of the rest to attract and retain more women will have a competitive advantage over those who do not.

5. Tackle skills shortages

Despite the recession many SET sectors are currently experiencing shortages of staff with the right skills and qualifications. These sectors have been identified by the government as crucial to economic recovery and growth. SET employers therefore clearly need more well-qualified scientists, engineers and technologists, and yet by failing to attract or retain women, many are not using the whole pool of skills and experience available to them.

6. Meet procurement standards and stakeholder requirements

Increasingly, customers, partners and other stakeholders expect organisations to demonstrate a tangible commitment to corporate social responsibility, including equality and diversity. This is strengthened by legislation, including the new Equality Act 2010 due to come into force in October 2010, which will put further pressure on employers to ensure equality of opportunity between women and men.

7. Comply with legislation

Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of equal pay and sex discrimination claims. Having effective equality and diversity policies and practices can help organisations avoid costly legal action, and the damaging publicity that can go with it.

Key facts and figures:

Women are under-represented in SET in the UK - of almost 5.5 million people working in SET occupations (including skilled trades) in the UK in 2008, only 12.3 per cent were women.

Women often do not use their SET- related degrees - over half a million women are qualified in science, engineering or technology, yet over 70.2 per cent of these do not work in SET occupations.

More women are needed in SET leadership - in 2008, women held only 9 per cent of board directorships in SET FTSE 100 companies, and all male boards still existed in 35 per cent of SET companies. In 2007-08, only 9.3 per cent of all full-time SET professors were female.

About the UKRC

The UKRC aims to improve significantly the participation and position of women in science, engineering and technology occupations, to benefit the future productivity of the UK and the lifetime earnings and career aspirations of women. It is the UK's leading centre providing information and advisory services to businesses and organisations in these sectors, and supporting women entering, returning and progressing in these fields.



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