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PRESS RELEASE

Women are essential to growth of STEM industries

There are still too few women working in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) industries, participants at a seminar at Malone House, Belfast heard today (26 June 2013).

The seminar, organised by the Equality Commission and the Department for Employment and Learning, focused on showing employers what practical steps they can take to encourage more women to consider careers in STEM industries.



Speaking at the event, Anna Carragher, Equality Commissioner, said: “Males currently outnumber females by 3 to 1 in these industries, so it is vitally important that girls and women are made aware of the opportunities available to them. Too often, there are still underlying assumptions about what is “women’s work” or “men’s work” – and this can be true both of employers and of those considering employment.

“Given the need for development of our skill base in Northern Ireland in STEM industries, it is plain that the under-representation of women in scientific and technical jobs is not simply a gender equality issue; it is a broader economic issue that has huge consequences for our future prosperity and growth. The Equality Commission’s ‘Getting a fair share?’ initiative recognises that it makes good business sense for all employers to ensure they are able to recruit and retain females in the workforce. We welcome the

opportunity to work with DEL to help STEM employers make their businesses more attractive to women.”

Delivering the keynote address, Employment and Learning Minister Dr Stephen Farry MLA said: “It is vital that we enthuse and inspire our young people, both boys and girls, to study STEM courses and to progress to employment in the STEM industries. To do this we must ensure that these sectors offer attractive employment opportunities and that young people are aware of the diverse breadth of careers options available right here in Northern Ireland and that the workplace is welcoming to everyone.”

Brenda Bennett, Senior Personnel Representative with Schlumberger Oilfield UK plc also spoke at the event and explained why the company sees gender equality as a key issue. “Schlumberger recognizes the importance of diversity and considers gender balance key to future business success, as a global organization we aim to be 25% female at every level of the organization by 2020. We have focused on gender diversity since 1994. Locally Schlumberger Belfast has introduced some simple but effective Gender Balance outreach initiatives in recent years, such as our Annual Schools Open Day for female year 12 students and their teachers, which was launched in 2008, and a Female Engineering Scholarship Programme launched in 2012. We are committed to promoting the importance of STEM subjects by forming close links with local schools, helping students to relate STEM subjects to the world of work and raising awareness of the vast array of exciting STEM career opportunities”.

ENDS

Photo Caption: Anna Carragher, from the Equality Commission, Employment and Learning Minister, Dr Stephen Farry, and Joanne Stewart, chair of the STEM Business Group

Notes to editors

- Over the last 30 years women’s economic participation rates have increased from 42% in 1979 to 62% now. However, there is not fair representation of women at all levels of

employment, with a concentration of women in areas of work which are often undervalued, low paid and unskilled.

- For employers seeking to attract women into STEM careers the Sex Discrimination Order allows positive action measures. For example, they may provide encouragement or special training for one sex to take up work in areas where they are under-represented.

- The Equality Commission offers employers across all sectors practical support. This has included the development of initiatives designed to encourage more women into the construction sector and an initiative in the local government sector with councils to increase the proportion of women in senior positions.

- The Commission already facilitates networks of employers in NI, where employers with a common interest come together to develop and share good practice. The Commission is keen to partner with DEL, the STEM working group and employers to develop a specific Charter of Good Practice for Employers wishing to advance gender equality in STEM subjects in Northern Ireland.