

14 October 2014

Positive steps to improve gender balance in STEM industries

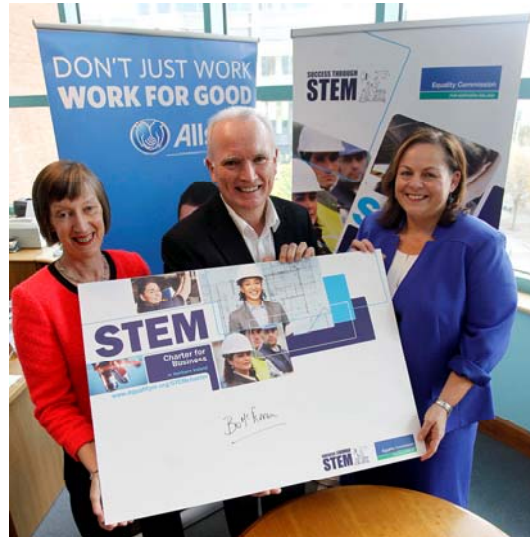
Dr Evelyn Collins CBE, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission, has welcomed a commitment by one of Northern Ireland's major employers to encourage more women to take up scientific and technical jobs in its workforce.

Allstate NI, one of a number of companies which has been working with the Equality Commission and the STEM Business Group to improve the gender balance in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) industries, has signed up to a STEM Equality Charter. Allstate NI is the largest IT company in Northern Ireland and currently has over 2,200 employees in its Belfast, Londonderry and Strabane offices with continued growth plans into 2016.

Evelyn Collins said: "The Equality Commission is pleased to be working with Allstate NI and I congratulate the company on its commitment to taking steps to recruit and retain more women in this field.

"The current 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."

Bro McFerran CBE, Managing Director of Allstate NI said: "We still need to encourage more women to take STEM subjects at GCSE and A Level so we're pleased to sign up to this charter today. Many of the jobs in the STEM or IT sector provide great career opportunities for women, allowing them to have work-life balance whilst working on interesting projects and developing their skills. We have introduced a number of initiatives and policies to encourage women to work for us including flexible working patterns, working from home, condensed working patterns, emergency time and duvet days. This helps us have an excellent return rate after maternity leave and a high number of female senior managers. It was also great to see so many female IT teachers at a recent training course that we delivered for the new A-level in Software Systems



Dr Evelyn Collins CBE, Chief Executive Equality Commission NI, Bro McFerran CBE Managing Director of Allstate NI, Joanne Stuart, Chair of STEM Business Group

Development, we hope they will inspire the next generation of females into the industry.”

Joanne Stuart, Chair, STEM Business Group said: “I am delighted that Allstate NI, a company which has won many awards for its innovative personnel practice, has decided to commit to the STEM Charter. The Charter was only launched in June and Allstate NI becomes the twenty-seventh signatory. The support that Allstate NI and the other STEM organisations have given to this initiative is very heartening. There is a recognition that companies that wish to grow must appeal to the widest possible pool of talent and encourage everyone, but especially young women, to realise what great opportunities are offered by the STEM industries in Northern Ireland.”

Dr Collins said that the Equality Commission can offer practical support and guidance to any STEM employer who wants to get involved. “Working with the STEM Business Group, we have established a STEM Employers Equality Network (SEEN) where good practice can be shared and specific advice and guidance on workplace gender equality issues is given. If you are interested in signing up to the Charter or would like further information employers should contact the Commission’s Advice and Compliance team – tel: 90 500 600.”

Ends

Notes for editor:

- For more details about the STEM initiative and to view a copy of the STEM charter visit: www.equalityni.org/STEM
- For more information on STEM strategy see DEL website <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills/stem.htm>
- For employers seeking to attract women into STEM careers the Sex Discrimination Order allows some 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 can advise employers and training providers on appropriate and lawful positive action
- Employers who have signed up to the STEM Charter are:
Allstate NI, Atkins, Asidua, Belfast Metropolitan College, Bombardier Aerospace, CITB Construction Skills NI, Diamond Recruitment, Engineering Training Council (NI), Intel Corporation (UK) Ltd, Liberty IT, Magellan Aerospace (Greyabbey) Ltd, McAvoy Corry Ltd, Michelin Tyre PLC, Moy Park, NIE, Northern Regional College, Open University, PATHXL, Queen's University Belfast, Schrader Electronics, Seagate, Sci-Geist, Sentinus, Terex GB Ltd, Ulster Bank, University of Ulster, Women's Resource & Development Agency