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PRESS RELEASE

Putting women first In STEM industries

Employers in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) sector in Northern Ireland are being urged to sign up to a new STEM equality charter to demonstrate their commitment to improving gender balance in their business. The [Charter](#), which is a first for Northern Ireland, is being launched today at an event organised by the Department for Employment and Learning STEM business group and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Evelyn Collins CBE, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission, said: “The Equality Commission is delighted to be working with DEL and the STEM business group in the development of the STEM Charter and I congratulate the eighteen employers who are the first to place on record their commitment to taking the necessary steps to recruit and retain more women in their workplace.

“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.

“It is vital that bright young women with an aptitude for STEM subjects are inspired to see careers in the sector as an attractive option,” Ms Collins said. “This means being ambitious and determined in how we encourage girls and women to pursue the STEM subjects, and more importantly, in how we translate this into further and higher education and, ultimately, into the workplace.”

Northern Ireland businesses are already reporting difficulties in recruiting and retaining enough staff with the required level of experience and skills; and in high level STEM posts men outnumber women by more than three to one.

“One possible solution is to target those girls and women who are not presently considering STEM careers,” Evelyn Collins said.

Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary of the Department for Employment and Learning said: “Addressing gender bias in STEM was identified as an issue in the STEM Strategy, ‘Success through STEM’. My Department has played a leading role in the production and implementation of the Strategy.

“I commend the leadership example demonstrated by the participating STEM businesses today. By working in partnership to develop the STEM CEO Charter and in signing the Charter today, you, our business leaders, will be giving a strong public message to demonstrate your commitment to supporting gender diversity and equality, to increase the participation and progression of women in STEM.”

Ms Collins went on to say that the Equality Commission can offer practical support and guidance to any STEM employer who wants to get involved. “The Equality Commission views the development of the STEM Charter as an important aspect of its work on gender equality. It will be offering practical help by establishing a STEM employer network where good practice can be shared and specific advice and guidance on workplace gender equality issues will be given. Interested employers should contact the Commission’s Advice and Compliance team – tel: 90 500 600.”

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Notes for editors

- For more information on STEM strategy see DEL website <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills/stem.htm>
- Link to [“Addressing gender balance – reaping the gender dividend in STEM”](#) report by STEM business group
- Under sex discrimination law, employers and training providers are allowed to take positive action to encourage under-represented groups to take up training or employment opportunities. The Equality Commission can advise employers and training providers on appropriate and lawful positive action.
- Employers signing up to the STEM Charter at the launch are: Schlumberger, Allstate, Bombardier, NIE, Schrader, JTI, Atkins, SEMTA, PathxL, Michelin Tyre Plc, Specialisterne NI, Northern Regional College, Ulster Bank, University of Ulster, Seagate, Queen’s University, Diamond Recruitment and The Open University.