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PRESS RELEASE

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.

SQS, 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.

Evelyn Collins said: "The Equality Commission is pleased to be working with SQS 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."

Rob McConnell NI Regional Director SQS said: "The gender imbalance is a long running blight on Northern Ireland's highly successful and growing Digital/ICT Sector. With a global IT skills shortage, it is essential that we give our region the best chance of competing moving forward, but we do face a deep rooted issue in the industry of not being able to adequately attract enough women into a career in IT, which although changing needs further effort and support to resolve. It is important for all companies operating in the sector to work towards a healthy gender balance, thus I welcome the charter and see it as imperative in raising awareness and addressing the issue."

Steve Thomson, from STEM Business Group said: "The STEM Business Group launched the STEM Charter with the Equality Commission in June 2014. Since that time 28 STEM organisations, including several other major IT companies have signed up to the Charter to demonstrate their commitment to equality for women in STEM posts. To have SQS NI Market Director, Rob McConnell commit the company to this Charter in Northern Ireland is very heartening. It is very important that Rob McConnell, who is Chair of Momentum, the IT industry body, is today also endorsing the Charter on behalf of Momentum. The Momentum Digital Action Plan has stated that the number of jobs within the IT sector in NI could expand by 20,000 by 2018. It is therefore vital that women are able to play a full part in this growth sector. We in the STEM Business group believe that the Charter and the STEM Employers Equality Network, established with the Equality Commission, can both assist businesses to make their workplaces more welcoming and supportive for women and thus improve the

gender balance. We would like to encourage more STEM companies to sign up. The business case for employing more women is clear and for women themselves, STEM posts are generally both well paid and interesting.”

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 advice and guidance and examples of good practice on workplace gender equality issues can be shared. 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

For further information please contact Kelly McGinley, Communications Officer, 028 90890862.

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 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, Craigavon Industrial Development Organisation, 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