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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Belfast event addresses the Gender Gap in STEM industries**

How can we address the gender gap – and with it the skills gap - in our science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) industries?

That's the issue discussed at an event in Belfast today for employers in traditionally male-dominated fields such as science, engineering and ICT. Gender Diversity-Promoting Good Practice in STEM Industries aims to show the value of championing women in STEM and why and how employers should encourage, nurture and support women in those industries.

Dr Stephen Farry, Minister for Employment and Learning, was a keynote speaker, joined by Regina Moran, CEO, Fujitsu UK and Ireland; Rachael Ryland, Head of HR Projects & HR Business Partner (Transportation), Atkins and Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission.

The Minister said: "Northern Ireland recognises that it needs an increasing number of skilled workers with qualifications in STEM subjects, if we are to drive forward the economy and raise levels of productivity and competitiveness. Much work is being done to promote gender diversity in these careers and industries.

"Traditionally, STEM careers have been seen as a predominately male preserve, but if we are to meet the forecast demand for these skills, it is essential that we can draw from the greatest pool of talent by increasing the number of women choosing a STEM related education and career path.

"My Department's policies and strategies aim to ensure that everyone is able to pursue the study path which is best for them and I have ensured that STEM skills remain an important aspect of skills provision whether the individual chooses an academic route through higher and further education or avails of the new higher level apprenticeship route. Indeed, this afternoon, I will be launching the Skills Barometer tool which will support the better matching of skills supply and demand with employers by providing a clear indication of current, emerging and long-term skills needs.

“I have also been encouraged by the participation and commitment of employers in the area of STEM gender. I hope that the business sector will be prepared to take up the ongoing challenges within the wider skills agenda and that we can work together to create a dynamic and prosperous economy, with STEM at its heart.”

Chief Commissioner Dr Wardlow said at the event: “We are working alongside the STEM Business Group and DEL to help companies think about gender equality in their workforces and how they can sign up to making equality a reality for women in science, engineering, technical and digital workplaces.

“Bridging the skills gap will need the widest possible pool of talented and well qualified applicants possible, so it’s important not just that girls are encouraged to think of a STEM career by their schools and their families, but that they know that rewarding careers are genuinely open to them, with the reassurance that they will be supported at work to contribute to their fullest potential.

“We’re here today to hear from some of the best in the business how that works in practice, and what the benefits have been to their organisations.”

Further information about STEM is available online at [www.equalityni.org/STEM](http://www.equalityni.org/STEM)

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### **Notes for editors**

#### The Gender Gap:

- In NI, high level STEM posts currently constitute over 11% of the workforce, with men outnumbering women by nearly 3 to 1. Contrast this with the overall employment situation in NI, where women comprise 47.3% of those aged 16-64 currently in employment, similar to the rate of 46.5% in GB, and it is clear that we need to take a proactive approach to address the gender balance within the STEM industries. (‘Addressing Gender Balance - Reaping the Gender Dividend in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics’, STEM Business Group, 2013
- 27% of science and engineering technicians are women, 15% of ICT professionals and 5.5% of engineering professionals. (‘Women in STEM’, Institution of Engineering and Technology, 2015

## The Skills Gap:

- 15% of businesses with employees in NI report difficulties in recruiting STEM graduates. Across the UK, including NI, there are problems at every level – 20% report difficulties with new entrants to train as apprentices, 32% have difficulty recruiting people with 5 years or more STEM experience and more than half (52%) foresee a shortfall in recruiting STEM skilled staff. (CBI, Education and Skills report, 2015)