

## MSP Briefing – Gender and the Workplace

Ahead of the Scottish Government debate on *Gender and the Workplace* scheduled for **Wednesday 29 June 2016**, Colleges Scotland wishes to highlight the work that colleges are doing to contribute to the creation of an increasingly diverse workforce. Colleges Scotland is the representative organisation for all colleges in Scotland.

The benefits of a truly diverse workforce are increasingly recognised. The challenge is to affect changes that will result in a real shift in the balance of the talent pipeline into the country's key sectors. As a critical route for young people into the workforce, colleges have a vital role to play to help diversify the workforce and encourage young people into professions previously dominated by one gender.

Scottish colleges continue to deliver high quality courses to meet the future needs of Scotland's young people and the economy. The sector is taking a leading role in the implementation of the Developing the Young Workforce Strategy by working with schools, universities and employers to ensure that young people have the necessary skills for the future.

We are seeking to address the gender imbalance in the workforce pipeline for industries such as construction, which is dominated by men (84.4%), and public administration, healthcare and education (70.3%), which are dominated by women<sup>1</sup>. Challenges still exist within the college sector to attract more women into courses such as nautical studies, construction and engineering, but progress continues to be made across the country.

Individual colleges are developing a range of initiatives to encourage men and women into sectors where one gender predominates. SRUC, for example, is currently conducting a project as part of the Attracting Diversity programme into gender balance in Veterinary Nursing, which is a mostly female dominated profession, and land-based Engineering which is mostly male. At West College Scotland, delivery of a wide range of construction and engineering programmes, such as schools, pre-apprenticeship, SVQ apprenticeship and HNC Construction Management are accessible to all and the college has enjoyed considerable success in attracting women into this sector.

### Case Studies

#### **Louise shows the boys how it's done following her HNC Engineering Systems course**

Louise Larkin always wanted to get into engineering but was not self-assured enough to go and do it. At West College Scotland, she gained the confidence and skills she needed to achieve her dream. Louise is now employed as an Apprentice Marine Engineer at Ferguson Marine shipbuilders.

*She said: "Returning to study was tough, juggling home life with the course work. However, support and guidance from the lecturers made my ambition a reality. With a lot of hard work I gained an A in my graded unit and managed to secure an Engineering job."*

*"Taking a chance at college is the best decision I ever made! I am now in a career I love and wake up in the morning happy to go to work. If there are any females doubting whether this is the career for them, go for it and show the boys how it's done!"*

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government, March 2015, *Maximising Economic Opportunities for Women Report*  
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00473060.pdf>

### **Male Care students encourage more men to follow in their footsteps**

Three male students on Ayrshire College's Early Education and Childcare course are encouraging more men to get involved in the predominantly female career. Lee Coates, John Hamilton and David McKenna are all in the same class, which is dominated by women, and have just finished work placements where they were the only men in their respective nurseries.

They believe the work they do is so rewarding and they now want to see more men look into following in their footsteps.

David said: *"It is a very female dominated industry, but that's not to say men can't make a big difference to education and early years. The women I've worked with are all extremely helpful and they want to see me progress. My friend's daughter has additional support needs, and I just found it incredibly rewarding to work with her so I wanted to further that and do it as a vocation."*

John joined the Care sector after working in a factory for all of his working life. He began by working with the elderly but now wants to work with younger people.

He said: *"There's often stigma you hear from friends when they find out what you do. But I don't let it bother me – if you enjoy it, why not? I think I take to it quite well as I've always been around nieces and nephews, I know what the children at that age like, what games to play."*

*"I just think more guys should go into early education. The difference you see in children when you go into a placement and they see it's a guy, they think it's amazing!"*

As key contributors of talent to such industries, colleges are investigating how to redress the balance. Part of this drive is the college sector's active involvement with Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), which works to extend and support equality in colleges and higher education institutions. Representatives from ten Scottish colleges attended the Attracting Diversity events on the 26th and 27th May 2016 held in Edinburgh and Dundee, along with universities, to share research findings and plan next steps in developing initiatives. The events are part of the wider work programme ECU, funded by the Scottish Funding Council aimed at working with Scottish colleges and universities over 2016-2018 to support them drive equality forward.

Scotland's colleges will continue to work with industry sectors across Scotland to help break down gender stereotypes and increase diversity in the workplace.

**Colleges Scotland:** This briefing has been provided by Colleges Scotland for MSPs' information. More information can be found on [www.collegesscotland.ac.uk](http://www.collegesscotland.ac.uk).

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