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Skills Commission– Call for Evidence April 2018

Spotlight Inquiry: Gender & the Skills system – women in engineering

The Spotlight Project

The further education landscape is currently undergoing significant reform. With a strong government agenda focussing on apprenticeships, productivity, and cutting the national deficit, the reforms are expected to go further over the course of the next five years and considerable changes to the system and its structures are expected.

With the expansion of apprenticeships, and following the completion of the area reviews of post-16 education, there are many components moving simultaneously across the system. The preoccupation with reforms and changing structures risks pulling attention away from the needs of individuals, and marginalised demographics, as they experience the labour market and our skills and training system. We will focus attention on the needs of each of the following groups:

- Young people with below average educational attainment
- Older workers looking to retrain
- Apprentices & Social Mobility
- **Gender (Women in engineering)**
- SMEs

Women in engineering

In the 'Year of Engineering', the Skills Commission are conducting a 6 month inquiry as part of its Spotlight series, examining women in engineering and the skills system. This inquiry is co-chaired by Lucy Allan MP, Preet Gill MP and Professor Sandra McNally. The purpose of this inquiry is to investigate:

1. Why are women under-represented within engineering courses at levels 2-6?
 - What are the structural and cultural barriers to participation?
2. What has been done and could be done to try to improve the situation?
 - What has been tried and tested in the UK and elsewhere? What is the evidence on their effects? What could be tried in the future?
 - How could upcoming skills system reforms be used to support more women in to engineering?

Submit evidence

Please use the questions on the next page to frame your response to the call for evidence, but **do not feel restricted by the questions or compelled to answer every question.**

The Commission welcomes all types of evidence, from data including data analysis or internal studies your organisation has carried out, and personal or organisational views on these issues. Submissions of evidence will not be published. The deadline for submissions of evidence is **Monday 21st May**. Evidence can be submitted to **beth.wheaton@policyconnect.org.uk**. Please also get in touch if you would like to discuss this issue in further detail on **020 7922 8003**.

Call for evidence

1. Do you give permission for the Commission to quote from your submission?
2. Can we attribute the submission to you/your organisation?

General questions

1. What are the key barriers for women considering a career in engineering across levels 2-6? (including culture and aspects of the work environment)
2. Do you have any examples from firms or educational institutions with particularly good or bad practice as an environment for women in engineering? (Please share examples **without naming** the firm or educational institution)
3. What practical steps can be taken to address these barriers?
 - a. Do we specialise too early? Would introducing engineering from a younger age help?
 - b. Some universities have removed Physics as an A-level requirement for (some) Engineering Degrees. To what extent are such pre-requisites (at all levels) a practical barrier for students entering engineering courses? Should they be removed?
 - c. Is there a role for government policy in relation to the recruitment and/or retention of women into engineering courses and/or engineering occupations? (and if so, what should this role be?)
 - d. Is there a case for introducing gender-specific quota or targets for over-subscribed programmes that receive government funding? (e.g. apprenticeships)

Employer/sector-led initiatives

1. Do you have suggestions for initiatives that might be piloted to encourage more women to apply for engineering courses?
2. If you currently run your own programme/initiative, please outline this:
 - a. What was the rationale behind its development?
 - b. What do you find hardest about engaging women and what challenges have you faced?
 - c. Have you conducted any evaluation on the success of your programme?
 - d. Is there any key learning that you would like share with any other organisations?
3. Are there ways some large employers could support members of their supply chain to encourage the recruitment and/or retention of women? Would it make sense for government to incentivise this in some way?
4. Would it make sense for some form of kitemark or charter (with similarities to the Athena SWAN Charter in education) to be applied to private sectors firms with reference to gender?

Careers, Advice Information and Guidance

1. How can CAIG be used to support women into engineering? (e.g. initiatives that have been tried; ideas you have that could be piloted)
2. What are parents' perceptions of the sector? How influential are parent's opinions and how can these perceptions be changed?

Skills Policy Reforms

1. How can recent and upcoming reforms to the skills system be used to support more women in to engineering?
2. How can the design of T levels be used to encourage more women to enter the sector?
3. As degree apprenticeships grow, how can we support more women to take up these opportunities in engineering?

Thank you for your contribution