Women encouraged into technology

Some of Scotland's biggest businesses will, on Tuesday 7th September, launch a group to encourage more women to take a leading role in the technology sector where women account for just one in five of the workforce.

Businesses, including Cisco, Dell, IBM, HP, Scottish Enterprise and Oracle, will launch the Scotland Women in Technology group at IBM's Greenock site.

Keynote speaker, Lena Wilson, Chief Executive, Scottish Enterprise, will address the meeting under the subject of 'inspiring role models'. Eileen Brown, Chairwoman of Intellect Women in Technology group, and CEO of Amastra, a key advocate for the advancement of women in technology, will discuss the benefits of networking with the group.

The aim of Scotland Women in Technology is to attract, inspire, empower and retain women by developing a community and network to help grow women's contribution in IT businesses. It is intended the group will grow to include more females from other business in Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy First Minster of Scotland, and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, is supporting the new group and said, "I support and encourage the development of women in industry and the opportunity to share experience and examples of good working practice in the promotion of issues which impact on women.

"Through good working practices, Scotland Women in Technology will contribute to, and benefit from, an efficiency and understanding of practical working which can only be a positive step for the future."

The group is the brainchild of Silka Patel, an executive assistant at Cisco. Silka was involved with a similar group in London and could see the benefits of encouraging women into technology in Scotland too.

Silka Patel commented:

"Technology businesses really encourage flexible working styles that are more family friendly and very productive. For example, my line manager is based overseas, but I can communicate and work with him effectively using technology. This has been a real benefit at the moment as I am six months pregnant!"

"This sector is a brilliant place for women to work and progress, yet we are very much in the minority. With this group we hope to encourage more women into this exciting area, to develop their skills and so maximise the contribution to our economy."

In Scotland, women still account for less than 20% of the workforce in science, engineering and technology. This is despite the flexible working styles, career and economic opportunities this sector represents. In the UK 1.2 million people are employed in the IT workforce, so has doubled since the early 1990s, yet the representation of women has steadily declined and continues to do so.

Interestingly although females taking IT related qualifications in secondary education are low in number, they consistently outperform their male counterparts. The supposition is that if females were more inclined to participate in IT careers then the pool of talent available to IT employers might improve noticeably, with a positive effect on the economy.

The ICT industry is key to our economy in Scotland. According to eskills, fully exploiting technology is the single most powerful lever the UK can employ to achieve a wholesale

productivity gain right across the economy.

Lena Wilson, chief executive, Scottish Enterprise, said: "As a nation it's important that we encourage women to raise their aspirations and really grab the exciting opportunities that exist within IT and the wider technology sector. By offering this kind of support, SWiT can provide women with the mentoring and networking opportunities as well as the confidence and skills that are needed to take on a leading role in the technology sector.

"It's networks such as these that can help women build a successful career, think globally and really fly the flag for Scottish businesses."

As well as offering networking and mentoring opportunities amongst the members, the group will reach out to schools and universities to influence young women to consider a career in IT. Mentoring will be organised to assist young females already working in the sector to raise their aspiration and be bold in their career plans.

Almost 100 women will attend the first conference. The event will also include a panel group with executive speakers from each of the member companies.

Linda O'Donoghue, IBM Greenock Site Executive, hosting the event, said: "It is recognised that we are seeing a gradual increase in the number of women appointed to Executive positions, but still there are barriers, real or perceived, in place for women looking to grow in the their career and reach the boardroom. The Scotland Women in Technology group will encourage women to build relationships and use those relationships to drive business opportunities and their careers