

# Jobs in Edinburgh for the girls...not just the boys

✘ Female technology stars of the future were treated to a careers event aimed at encouraging more women in to what is a predominantly male industry.

Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology organised the 'Your digital future' event that was held last month in Edinburgh Napier University.

The event aimed to dispel the myth that technology jobs are "for the boys" and encouraged female school pupils from across Edinburgh to challenge stereotypes by considering a career in the industry.

Malcolm Barron, SDS's Head of Operations for the region, said: "Women continue to be massively under-represented in science, technology engineering and mathematics jobs (STEM careers). Not only is this limiting to the women themselves, but the skills shortages in these fields are detrimental to economic growth.

"It has also been documented that when women do pursue a STEM career, they often leave the role to move in to another industry.

"The event we organised offered the opportunity for girl pupils to hear from women who not only pursued a job in the technology industry but who have gone on to have highly successful careers."

The 'Your digital future' event followed on from an Ofsted report that highlighted the need to develop 'better opportunities for young women to meet professional women working in non-stereotypical roles'.

Among the school pupils attending the event was Royal High School pupil, Jenny Martin who commented that it was: "Good to hear about the career paths of the three speakers."

Fellow Royal High pupil, Soffi Keenan added: "It was really interesting to meet the speakers and the other professionals during the networking."

The professional women speaking at the event included senior staff from IBM, Harvey Nash Plc and Interface 3

Fiona Hunter, a Project Manager with technology company Sopra Group, was also among those sharing her experience at the event.

Fiona – who has a First Class Honours Degree in Applied Computing from the University of Dundee – said: "I was very keen to take part in this event and my company was delighted to support me.

"Both Sopra Group and I are very aware of the need to encourage people to think about a career in the IT sector. We need a good strong channel of potential new recruits for the future and particularly see the need to increase the numbers of females coming through to offset the diminishing numbers who are currently studying IT in our universities."

She added: "If my participation in the event entuses a few girls in to our industry then this will be a win/win for everyone."

Breaking from the crowd to pursue a career in engineering was a tough decision for Elise Littlejohn but one that she does not regret.

While her friends were training to be hairdressers, Elise, from Edinburgh, was applying to a Fabrication and Welding course at her local college knowing that she would be the only girl in the group.

“I loved it,” she said. “At first it was difficult being the only girl but I soon settled in and was seen as just ‘one of the guys’.”

On her tutor’s recommendation, Elise (19) then decided to complete an Access to Engineering course before applying to carry out a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) with the company Selex Galileo – a leader in the defence electronics market.

Elise said: “I had doubts about pursuing a predominantly ‘male’ profession but I quickly realised that workplaces don’t discriminate because of your sex. There are more female engineers in Selex Galileo than I expected and I was happily surprised.

“I have also been told by some of my older colleagues that there are more women working as senior and specialist engineers than when they were apprentices so that is definitely a good thing and shows that things are slowly changing.”

Elise is currently in her third year of training and is working to achieve a level three engineering MA.

“I wake up in the morning not knowing what I’ll be doing that day because no two days are ever really the same which keeps the job interesting,” Elise explained. “My family are all really proud that I chose a career that I love and I have no regrets about going this route.”

During her time with Selex Galileo, Elise has proven that she is an outstanding and dedicated worker. Her skills have also led her on to training new Modern Apprentices within the company.

She added: “The only thing I would change would be to have more female apprentices alongside me so I don’t have to listen to football chat all the time. So hopefully I’ll inspire more women to pursue a career in engineering.

“I would tell any young girl considering a future career in a predominantly male environment to just go for it. If you have your heart set on doing something, don’t let stereotypes or anyone else say you can’t do it.”

Chris Simpson, Apprentice Training Manager at Selex Galileo has overseen Elise’s work since she joined the company in August 2009.

He said: ““At Selex Galileo we visit many schools to promote engineering to girls as a career. We aim to change the perception that all engineering is a manual job where you get your hands dirty. Our engineers experience clean room environments and many are based in offices dealing with product design.

“Elise has had both manual experience and hands on experience. Elise now works in the quality department where she experiences the best of both worlds. She is a credit to the Modern Apprenticeship programme and a valuable employee who goes to show what women are capable of in engineering.”