

# Former MP takes up position at Equate

Lesley Laird has been appointed Director of [Equate Scotland](#), the organisation which campaigns for gender equality throughout the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths sectors (STEM).

The former MP takes the helm at the height of the Covid-19 crisis, saying that the pandemic has positively demonstrated the way people can break down barriers and adapt to change in difficult circumstances.

Equate Scotland is based at Edinburgh Napier University and is funded by The Scottish Government. The body works to change cultures in industry and the academic world, supporting the recruitment, retention and progression of women in science, engineering and technology.

The organisation delivers confidence-boosting training and support for women at each stage of their career, develops their skills and expertise, provides networking opportunities, and works with employers to improve employment practices and behaviours.

Ms Laird worked in HR roles within the technology and financial services sectors before entering politics in 2012 where she held a number of senior roles, most recently as MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath.

She said: "I am delighted to join Equate as its new Director – albeit remotely for the moment.

"The way organisations and people have had to adapt to change

in recent weeks and months has demonstrated how barriers can be broken down.

“The glass ceiling of flexible work patterns and working from home has been well and truly smashed. Given what we have all been through, the old arguments of it’s too hard, it’s too complex, it’s too inconvenient, it will cost too much, won’t stack up. It’s not about going back, but about how we work together to go forward from here.

“Through Covid-19, Equate has been adapting too; refocusing on how best we can fulfil our purpose of increasing women’s participation in STEM, building and campaigning for equality in the workplace and society.”

Laird said the fantastic team at Equate had been helping employers by delivering high quality interactive on-line training, and consultancy support to develop ‘build back better’ strategies. She continued: “We’ve launched new programmes, as well as refreshing what we do and how we do it; continuing to reach out to future women technologists, engineers, scientists and construction workers; and the businesses who need all the talents of all our people to rebuild our economy and are prepared to embrace more open and inclusive work practices, so that we can all contribute to the challenges ahead. Equate recognise that we will have to continue to evolve and adapt the ways in which we support women into STEM and address inequality.”

Laird, who is joined at Equate by new team members Susan Lancaster, as Finance and Operations Coordinator, and Jenny Lester, as Events and Marketing Organiser, said that as an equalities organisation, they were also conscious of the current and historic discriminations experienced by people of colour.

“In May, we launched our research on the intersectional discriminations experienced by women working in STEM. Through

our work, we are committed to amplifying the voices of women of colour, who often face the greatest barriers to participating and succeeding in STEM workplaces. We will continue to draw upon and share our learning from this research.

“While it has been encouraging to see the number of employers add their voice to the Black Lives Matter campaign, it will be interesting to see what tangible actions they now take. Equate can undoubtedly support them as they consider what systemic changes they need to make to challenge the conscious and unconscious biases that create barriers and prevent Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women from entering and succeeding in the STEM sector.”

Her predecessor as Director, Talat Yaqoob, said it had been a privilege to lead Equate Scotland and to work with the talented team.

She said: “The organisation has made a tangible positive difference for women across the STEM sectors; by providing development opportunities for women, delivering placements to support skills growth and, crucially, challenging and changing inequality in workplace cultures.

“I am proud to be leaving Equate Scotland in a strong position to continue this work and wish the organisation all the best going forward.”