

Good Practice Guide

Recruitment and Selection:

Competing in the war for talent



Foreword

Welcome to the Recruitment and Selection Good Practice Guide for employers of women in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET). This guide has been produced by the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET. It is also a good source of best practice for employers who are actively seeking ways to attract applications from highly talented female SET candidates.

It is often reported that the UK SET industry is facing a skills shortage. This shortage is exacerbated by the disproportionately high number of qualified women leaving SET careers and the diminishing number of (female) students choosing SET related subjects at school and further education. However, upon closer inspection, the perceived skills shortage can largely be rectified by simply encouraging more women into SET professions. This notion is reinforced by recent statistics indicating that at any point in time, 50,000 women with SET qualifications or experience were not working. Furthermore, of those who returned after a career break, only a minuscule 8,000 SET women re-entered the workplace into jobs that utilised their qualifications and expertise. Reversal of such a colossal wastage of talent is not only essential to the future success of SET industries, but to the UK economy as a whole.

This Guide provides invaluable insights into some of the recruitment strategies that high performing companies have adopted in order to successfully recruit and retain SET women. In all cases the key ingredients that underpin their success were commitment from the top (CEO and Director level) combined with a cultural change of behaviours within the work environment. This included addressing traditional hurdles and barriers which obstruct the entry of SET women into science and engineering jobs, notably: limited access and existing recruitment and hiring practices that make extensive use of traditional (male) networks which often overlook or exclude the available pool of women.

Additionally, best practice SET employers protected their recruitment investment by putting in place effective HR processes and procedures to help remove the inhibitors to career progression of SET women, such as: male paternalism, sexual harassment, different standards for judging the work of men and women, lower salaries relative to their male peers, inequitable job assignments and work-life balance issues.

Overall this Guide shows that employers who are serious about attracting and retaining SET women will need to actively demonstrate that they offer a welcoming and stimulating working environment for ALL their employees.

Talented SET women will aspire to work for a company that has a reputation for hiring, supporting and progressing SET women.



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Introduction

Recruiting people into sectors and roles where they are under-represented by gender, ethnic origin, disability etc., presents challenges to even the most forward thinking organisations; recruiting women into Science, Engineering and Technology employment is no exception. In general, the SET industries have traditionally relied on a supply of male labour and have developed recruitment policies and practices that reflect this. So, when applying for scientific, technical or professional occupations in the SET industries women can be faced with recruitment practices that severely disadvantage them and some employers can be at a loss as to know how and where to make improvements.

This guide, based on an analysis of existing employment good practice and real life experiences of SET women, aims to provide practical solutions for improving the recruitment of women in SET. If you want to be an employer of choice, read on!

Business Benefits of Employing more Women

'The best man for the job may be a woman'

There are severe shortages of appropriately skilled people in Science, Engineering and Technology in the UK. Encouraging and considering applications from women increases the size of the talent pool from which employers can draw, thus increasing the likelihood of recruiting the best person for the job.

Improved quality of service

Users of IT help-desks and call-centres have commented on the skill with which women, in particular, in these jobs have been able to demystify some of the technological jargon. This experience has alerted employers to the need for interpersonal and communication skills to be added to person specifications for IT workers. Similarly, many engineers and technicians now routinely interact with the public and with colleagues, and women are often better able to offer these skills alongside their occupational qualifications.

Reflecting the customer base

Many companies, such as the Ford Motor Company, feel that it makes commercial sense. In their case, with women making 60 per cent of purchasing decisions in the car market, it pays for the company's workforce to be more reflective of its customer base.

Having a reputation as an ethical employer

Companies are increasingly aware of their corporate social responsibilities, a commitment which is also fast becoming a key consideration for many job seekers.

What makes an Employer of Choice for Women?

Statistics from the Department of Trade and Industry indicate that young women are outperforming young men at A level in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and IT. So why is it that relatively few of them choose occupations in Science, Engineering and Technology?

The **Ford Motor Company** has recognised for some time that the issues around encouraging women to enter engineering start early, when individuals make choices about education. One part of their 'Engineers for the Next Generation' program is GETSET, an annual one-day event aimed at female year nine students. The girls are put into small teams with an engineer as a mentor to attempt a day of hands on problem solving challenges.

The following is a list of reasons women have given for not applying for jobs in SET, with examples of good practice which employers have taken to address these issues.

'I'd never even consider doing science, all the women in my family did arts and humanities subjects, I wouldn't know where to start.'

Develop links with schools, careers services, universities and colleges to demystify and promote SET occupations. These can include providing opportunities for work placements and periods in industry as integral parts of academic or vocational training courses

'I thought of applying for a job in an engineering company, but as far as I know, they don't employ women.'

Identify and use positive female role models and promotional materials to change women's perceptions

'There was a brilliant job advertised in a pharmaceutical company recently, but I've heard they do really long hours and I've got school-age children to consider.'

Ensure that existing and potential employees know about work-life balance commitments such as flexible working schemes, including flexi-time, job share, home-working etc.

'I never even seem to get an interview for jobs in IT, I think when employers see my [muslim] name, they assume I wouldn't be prepared to work alongside men.'

Ensure that all staff involved in interviewing and selection are trained to treat everyone as an individual and make no assumptions about individual beliefs and culture

'I was in engineering before I had my children, but I'm too out of date to go back, they all use CAD these days.'

Operate career break schemes to retain good women employees, including offering training either during or after their career break and support and encourage women returners to take up fellowship opportunities, such as those provided through the Daphne Jackson Trust

'The big telecoms company near here are looking for technicians, but as far as I can tell, women never progress beyond the low level jobs.'

Establish and publicise staff development opportunities, eg. mentoring, networks, training schemes to advise and support women in career planning and progression

'I was encouraged to apply for a job in a scaffolding company but to be honest I was worried about being the only woman and getting bullied and harassed.'

Ensure there are policies and procedures for dealing with bullying and harassment and that all employees and job applicants are aware of and understand them

Legally Attracting more Applications from Women

Confusion still exists around what is legal with regard to targeting specific groups in recruitment. UK law reflects a principle with which most employers agree - that they should be allowed to select the best person for the job, irrespective of personal traits. **Positive discrimination**, eg. recruiting a woman simply because she is a woman, with a few exceptions, is illegal. However, **positive action**, eg. taking action to encourage women to compete on equal terms with men, is legal.

Attracting more women into SET not only affects employers. Many schools, colleges and universities are also seeking ways of attracting more girls and women into school subjects, vocational training and academic courses in SET. Some employers, recognizing that they can't solve the problem alone, have found that working in partnership with educational institutions can be incredibly effective. The following are examples of the methods that some employers are using to attract more women into their organisations.

Contributing to Careers Guidance Events at Schools, Colleges and Universities *

CIBA Chemicals in Bradford have sponsored engineering initiatives through organizing fun and interesting site visits for year nine girls. The girls were introduced to the company by female control engineers and chemical engineers, and were given hands on exercises to engage them in the on site processes.

Assisting Schools, Colleges and Universities to Integrate Positive Messages about Women in SET into the Curriculum *

Chesterfield College ran training for teaching staff to consider how they could adapt the teaching methods and materials so as to encourage women into SET courses. Lecturers in engineering, science and technology reviewed textbooks and other resources and worked with employers to develop positive images of women and girls in these subjects. As part of this, lecturers in areas such as nursery nursing and beauty therapy adopted the same approach to attracting more male students.

Ensuring facilities and resources are suitable for everyone *

Many buildings which have been traditionally staffed by men have insufficient or inappropriate facilities for women. Simple actions such as creating female or unisex toilets or providing better lighting in car park areas could have a significant effect on the numbers of women applying to work for an organization.

Buddying and Mentoring Schemes for employees *

IBM is fully committed to mentoring as a means of assisting and supporting employees in the on-going development of their careers and skills and to provide a relaxed forum within which to discuss topics of importance to the mentee. Mentoring is actively encouraged at all levels in the company. IBM supports both formal and informal mentoring relationships, within and outside the company.

Championing and mentoring undergraduates *

Lockheed Martin in the USA has been a key sponsor of the INROADS program since 1985. INROADS aims to develop and place talented minority college students in business and industry and prepare them for corporate and community leadership. "When they complete their internships, we are able to hire new college graduates who have already proven themselves and who already understand Lockheed Martin's business. The investment we make in these interns comes back to us immediately as new hires who can 'hit the ground running' in a full-time position."

Running a 'Take Your Daughter to Work' Event / Organising a Girl's Day *

'Take Your Daughter to Work' and 'Girl's Days' have been extremely successful in many areas. These involve employers encouraging parents to take their children to work for one day, or arranging for local school girls to visit your site. This can expose many girls to SET occupations about which they may have had little previous knowledge.

Consulting existing female SET Employees *

The Vice Chancellor of **Queen's University, Belfast** was concerned at the lack of women in senior positions, so called a group of senior women to discuss the way forward and oversaw the establishment of the 'Gender Initiative'. Seminars consulting every female member of staff were organised, with recommendations developed by the staff themselves. Involvement in the women's forum is of fundamental importance to the University and it has been a huge success, with recruitment at lecturer level now 50:50 gender balanced and the number of women convenors of recruitment panels increasing by 900%.

Female-friendly recruitment campaigns *

BT started to advertise job vacancies in women's magazines to maximise its chances of gaining applications from women. In its ads it gives details of policies on childcare and caring, as well as information on maternity and adoptive leave provision.

* The UK Resource Centre can provide practical advice, guidance and/or support.



Reference to benefits of particular interest to women in advertisements can significantly increase women's confidence to apply. For example:

- Wording the advertisement in a more personal way and, if cost allows, including positive images of women in SET occupations

Food processing company is urgently seeking qualified food hygiene technicians to deliver government funded research project.

OR

Do you want to contribute to improving food safety? If you have food hygiene qualifications and want to work in a family-friendly environment, we'd like to hear more from you.

- Including Equal Opportunity and Equal Pay statements

Trained computer programmers and troubleshooters required for work in Zanex.

OR

We have vacancies for posts which will involve helping our clients to deal with hard/software problems with their Personal Computers. We welcome applications from women, minority ethnic communities etc.

- Explaining how the employer is taking positive action, for example, family-friendly policies, flexible working schemes, (re)training

CAD operators required by large motor manufacturer.

OR

New technology means that jobs in engineering are cleaner and less physically demanding. If you want to learn how to use CAD, we will train you.

- Indicating that the employer takes responsibility for ensuring protection for employees from harassment and bullying

Civil Engineer required by large construction company.

OR

Opportunity for a qualified Civil Engineer. We are an equal opportunity employer and we operate a 'dignity at work' policy to protect our employees from workplace bullying and harassment.



Genuine Occupational Qualifications, Skills and Experience

Following the positive action principle, although it is not legal to appoint a woman simply because she is a woman, it is allowable within the law for employers to take steps to level the playing field, an example of which would be to conduct a job evaluation when a vacancy arises. Jobs change so rapidly that many employers find it valuable to do this regularly to ensure that they are getting applications from people with the right skills, experience and attitudes.

As well as eliminating unjustifiable requirements, employers reviewing job descriptions and person specifications often need to introduce new requirements, for example, computer literacy and good interpersonal and team-working skills, which are now recognised as valuable additions for job and person specifications for SET occupations. Their inclusion can be a positive signal for some women who possess these skills and feel that they will be valued by an employer.

Having established genuine occupational requirements, they should be included in the job description and person specification, and should form the basis of decision-making criteria in the selection process.

In the 1930's, the Police Force in Britain copied America and introduced a requirement for officers to be of a certain height. This had been introduced in America because police officers had to be able to shoot a gun over the top of a car. This was justifiable in the case of the U.S., however, police in Britain did not carry guns at that time, but even so, anyone under that height would automatically be excluded even if they were capable of doing all aspects of the job. In the UK this requirement would therefore have been unjustifiable. This principle of justifiability is a useful one when deciding what requirements should be included in person specifications and job descriptions.

Finding the Right People

Most employers spend the majority of their budgets on wages and salaries, so mistakes when selecting new employees can be expensive. Below are a number of reasons used by recruiters for selecting candidates:

- a) 'I appointed her because she was friendly and likeable and therefore more likely to get on with other employees'
- b) 'I appointed her because she had been working for me for some time in a more junior, less well-paid position, and I wanted to reward her for her loyalty and patience'
- c) 'I appointed her because she had the skills and experience described in the job description and person specification'

Employers are often tempted to appoint people because they know them already or because they believe they will fit in well with others already working for them, but this does not guarantee that they will have the necessary skills and experience to perform the job. Good employers set up selection activities to ensure that they are getting the best person for the job.

Leeds Metropolitan University decided to include in its application pack guidance on how applicants should address the requirements of the person specification when completing an application form. This had been identified as an area where applicants in general – but particularly women – let themselves down. In their experience, “women often undersell themselves by failing to give a full account of their skills and experience”.

Ensuring Interviews are Fair

Interviews are a vital tool to identify the candidate with the best skills and experience for a particular job, regardless of who they are. It is unfair and illegal to ask a female candidate questions which you would not ask a male candidate. Questions must be designed which are fair to everyone, whilst at the same time assessing who the best person for the job is.

Consider the following questions from the perspective of a woman applying for a SET job:

1.a) Who will look after your children while you are at work?	1.b) You will be required to report for duty during the summer period. Can you comply with that? *
2.a) You're quite young, are you sure you're not planning to start a family in the next couple of years?	2.b) We're looking for someone who can see the research project through to the end of the year after next, can you commit to that? *
3.a) We will want you to lift heavy weights, but your supervisor will show you how to do it safely. *	3.b) There's a lot of heavy lifting, you're quite small, can you manage it?
4.a) We have a dress code which involves all women wearing business suits. Would you be able to comply with that? *	4.b) I notice you're wearing traditional dress, that might cause some problems.
5.a) You would be the only woman in the department, would you be able to cope with that?	5.b) We've put in place some policies and procedures to make sure there are no difficulties about your being the only woman in the department. Have you familiarized yourself with our Equality and Diversity policies? *
6.a) We run an induction for all new and returning staff and we'll pick up any training needs you might have so that you can be sure you are up to date with technology and systems and procedures. Would you be prepared to attend a training course, if needed? *	6.b) You might find you're a bit out of date professionally after being off for five years. How do you plan to deal with that?

* Those shown in purple were considered to be fairer by women seeking jobs in SET, as the others make assumptions based purely on gender and appearance.

Recruitment and Selection Processes

Actions speak louder than words

Whilst interviews are an important method of assessing the skills and experience of job applicants, being able to talk about a job does not necessarily translate into being able to perform it. Research conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management has cast doubt on the value and benefits of selection interviews. In particular, it has been shown that interviewers can be hugely influenced by their prejudices, likes and dislikes without realizing it. For this reason, some employers have introduced greater objectivity by allowing women applying for SET occupations to do a practical test, demonstration or a job trial. In this way, in addition to talking about them, women can have an opportunity to show their skills and experience in SET occupations.

When inviting candidates to attend an assessment centre, **National Grid Transco** ensure that their arrangements do not disadvantage any candidates in terms of accessibility to the location and their health and safety. Their recruitment and development programme is competency-based and all assessors are well brief and trained to deliver a process that is transparent, auditable and non-discriminatory.

Constructive Feedback

Employers are of course within their rights not to select a woman for a SET occupation if there is another candidate with more suitable skills and experience. However, given the under-representation of women in the sector, female applicants can often feel discouraged and disinclined to take their search for a job in SET further. Employers therefore need to carefully consider how they provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates. Feedback must be based on job requirements and it should be positive and constructive.

The following are genuine examples of responses and feedback given by employers to unsuccessful candidates:

A	B
We regret to inform you that you have been unsuccessful on this occasion.	We were impressed by your qualifications, but we felt you needed to be able to demonstrate more experience of laboratory techniques. If you are able to gain the necessary experience we would be pleased to hear from you again.
We did not feel that you were suitable for this job.	The job requirements state that you should be able to install a range of different applications. In your application form and interview you were only able to give us evidence of one application. We suggest that you try and gain further experience with these.

The responses in column B clearly refer directly to job requirements and give constructive feedback and encouragement to acquire further relevant skills and experience.

Welcoming and Supporting Women in the Workplace

A woman entering a SET occupation may be doing so in her first job, may have re-trained mid-career or may be returning after a career break. In each case, entering SET occupations, where typically there may be few other women, often requires a lot of confidence on the part of the women concerned. Employers can help by providing support and encouragement to these women once they enter the workplace, for example:

Induction and training

Ensure that new or returning employees participate in an induction process, enabling them to become familiar with workplace systems and procedures, including providing any relevant training as well as other forms of support. Employers who are sensitive to the circumstances of women in SET occupations should specifically include information about the organisation's Equal Opportunities and Diversity policies, so that new and returning employees are aware of their rights and responsibilities for these issues in the workplace.

In order to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues among the senior leadership team, **Pfizer** is currently developing specific training for their scientific managers. Through the use of case studies, role plays and group exercises, managers will be asked to consider theoretical, but realistic, situations such as a senior female employee returning to work after a career break. The managers will be asked to choose a plan of action and give their rationale for their choice. As a group, they will then be asked to assess what learning can be taken from the proposed plan of action.

Positive Action

It is possible within the law for employers to take action within the workplace for women in SET Occupations to be able to operate effectively on equal terms with others, this includes having the support required to balance domestic responsibilities with work responsibilities as well as being able to compete for promotion on equal terms. The kinds of positive action which employers can provide for this include:

- Mentoring/buddying/shadowing
- Flexible working
- Professional development, eg. encourage high achieving SET women to undertake junior board membership within the Company or at a charitable organisation
- Networks/Support groups
- Childcare schemes/vouchers
- Women-only training
- Returners/Career break schemes

Protection from Harassment and Bullying

Some women in SET occupations fear that they may become the victim of workplace bullying or harassment. UK law is very clear about this:

- Employers (and individual employees) are legally liable if an employee can show that by being subjected to bullying or harassment in the workplace they have suffered detrimentally.
- Importantly, the burden of proof in such cases is on the employer to prove that they did NOT discriminate, rather than for the employee to prove that they did.

This legal principle has provided a strong incentive for employers to put in place policies and procedures to stop workplace bullying and harassment. These policies should:

- be linked to workplace disciplinary and grievance procedures
- provide support and assistance for the victims of bullying
- include systems for disciplining perpetrators
- include clarification of the roles and responsibilities of staff appointed to manage the implementation of policies

BAE SYSTEMS re-wrote their 'Offensive Behaviour' policy to shift the focus to promoting 'Respect at Work'. The new policy was communicated across the entire UK workforce through a series of roadshows, at which all employees were made aware of their own responsibilities and what can be construed as bullying or harassment. The organization has specially trained Contacts at all of its UK sites and has also trained a number of its most senior Directors to act as Investigators when such complaints are raised.

Avoiding a Backlash from other Employees

Employers often have concerns that if they create policies and practices that take account of women's needs and responsibilities, this may lead to disgruntlement among other employees. A way to address this is by ensuring that, where possible, measures put in place can be of benefit for all employees. For example:- a 'Dignity at Work' policy is equally beneficial for employees who might be experiencing homophobic or racist bullying and harassment; flexible working options can benefit all employees and have delivered significant improvements in productivity and absenteeism when well introduced. Similarly, positive action with respect to encouraging applications from groups who are under-represented can benefit men wishing to enter traditionally female oriented jobs, such as HR or admin.

Checklist

We conclude our Guide with a short checklist which employers may find useful as a summary of the issues covered herein and a guide to the practicalities of recruiting, selecting and supporting women in SET occupations.

- Have you ensured that the job description and person specification is an accurate representation of the skills and experience required for the job?
- Do you know whether women perceive you to be supportive to and flexible for women in SET occupations?
- Do you co-operate with schools, colleges and universities to encourage women to consider SET occupations?
- Do your advertisements for SET occupations contain positive encouragement for women applicants?
- Are your selection procedures fair to women wishing to enter and progress in SET occupations?
- Do the questions you ask in interviews treat women equally?
- Do you create opportunities in the selection process for women to demonstrate their skills and experience in SET occupations?
- Do you provide constructive feedback for women who are unsuccessful in their applications for SET occupations?
- Do you make women in SET occupations aware of their rights and responsibilities with respect to Equal Opportunities and Diversity in the Workplace?
- Do you operate positive action to assist women to overcome any domestic or other barriers to effective working and promotion?
- Have you put in place measures to prevent and deal with workplace bullying and harassment?
- Have you created a workplace environment and culture where all employees (including women in SET occupations) feel that equality and diversity benefits them?
- Do you monitor and review the promotion trends of SET Women relative to the average within your company?
- Do you have a senior company executive/managing director championing Gender and Diversity issues?

Useful Websites

Women in SET Groups:

AWiSE – Association for Women in Science & Engineering
www.awise.org/

British Council: Women in Science
www.britishcouncil.org/science-women

Equalitec
www.equalitec.org.uk

WiTEC – European Association for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology
www.witec-eu.net

DTI Promoting SET for Women Unit
www.set4women.gov.uk

Gender Equality:

Equal Opportunities Commission
www.eoc.org.uk

Opportunity Now
www.opportunitynow.org.uk

Women and Equality Unit
www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk

Daphne Jackson Trust
www.daphnejackson.org

Aurora – where women want to work
www.www2wk.com

Recruitment and Legislation:

CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
www.cipd.co.uk

ACAS
www.acas.org.uk

Work Smart
www.worksmart.org.uk

Further Reading/ Case Studies

Breakthrough Project – gender equality in SME's
www.business.mmu.ac.uk/breakthrough

Athena Good Practice Guide
www.scenta.co.uk/uploads/athena/athena/report16.pdf

Advancing Women in the Workplace
www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/women_work/conference_downloads/good_practice_handbook.pdf

Mentorlink – advancing women in engineering
www.mentorlink.ie/equality/workplace_equality.php

Searchable database of case studies worldwide
www.best-practice.com

About the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET

The mission of the UK Resource Centre is to establish a dynamic centre that provides accessible, high quality information and advisory services to industry, academia, professional institutes, education and research councils within the SET and built environment professions, whilst supporting women entering and progressing in SET careers.

The UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) is a partnership of four organisations: Bradford College, Sheffield Hallam University, Cambridge University and the Open University, working on behalf of the DTI.

One of its primary aims is to provide information, support and advice to employers who seek to improve the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in SET and to raise their profile.

Information and support ranges from:

- Good practice guides
- Employer networking opportunities
- Culture analysis and benchmarking (gender specific)
- Women returners schemes
- Expert and role model databases
- Mentoring scheme support
- Gender specific statistics
- Recognition scheme for good practice employers
- Employer advice and consultancy

Resource Centre Contact Details:

Web: www.setwomenresource.org.uk

Email: setwomenresource@bilk.ac.uk

Helpline: 01274 436485

This guide was written on behalf of the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET by Ann Simpson





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