

Article for The Woman Engineer

Better Resources for Women in Science, Engineering, Construction and Technology (SECT)

A £2.4m three year contract to run a new UK national resource centre to promote women in science, engineering, construction and technology has been awarded by the DTI to the JIVE consortium led by Bradford College with partners at Sheffield Hallam University and the Open University and including Cambridge University.

The JIVE consortium consists of three members from the successful European EQUAL project called JIVE partners, which in turn evolved from the Let's TWIST partnership.

It is probably worth setting out a little of the history, in order to explain the acronyms, and the background of the main partners who have been given this task.

Let's Train Women in Science and Technology (Let's TWIST) was set up by women working in engineering and construction in 1998 to develop staff training for lecturers on strategies to increase and retain women on engineering, construction and technology FE and HE courses, as well as to build up a careers database and careers promotional materials. A partnership between Bradford College and Sheffield Hallam university developed to continue the work, and the training courses became very popular with over 150 lecturers attending courses between 1998 and 2000. In addition both centres have developed to provide courses and support to female students as well as working directly with schools offering taster days to girls, building up a national reputation for work in the field.

The JIVE (joint interventions) partners project is a major European project that commenced in 2002 that is trying to break down barriers in occupational segregation, by working with **all** those involved who influence entry and retention of girls and women across England and Wales. They now have hubs in London, South East and Wales as well as in Yorkshire and Humberside, and European partners in Finland, Germany, Denmark and France. JIVE has drawn together a range of partners consisting of women working across the sectors from craft, technician, professional and academic background along with their FE and HE institutions, the Women's Training Network, two sector skills councils and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

How do we break down those barriers?

These are some of the examples of what JIVE is doing already:

- a national mentoring scheme - the largest for women in SECT cutting across sectors and levels, from schoolgirls, apprentices, further and higher education and women in professional employment
- national CPD training for the whole range of learning providers, careers professionals and employers delivered by a pool of national Let's TWIST trainers
- working with the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board to increase recruitment and retention of women into this highly segregated sector of industry.

- working with SECT employers who want to improve their recruitment and retention of female employees
- offering ICT technical skills training to women to advance their career prospects.
- other initiatives include promotional campaigns, best practice guidelines, a cultural audit tool, research and evaluation...

The new UK Resource Centre will be based in Bradford with guidance and information accessible from anywhere in the UK through a new web-site (aimed to be up and running in February 2004) and a telephone help-line. The Resource Centre will:

- give practical help and support to girls and women in SECT, including those thinking of a career in SECT and those taking a career break
- give practical help to those working with girls and women including learning providers, careers workers and employers
- provide a comprehensive database of women in the sectors to be drawn on for role models and speakers
- gather and publish statistics about the progress of girls and women in SECT
- run a recognition scheme for good SECT employers
- set up a package of measures to support women returners
- provide good practice guides for employers and act as a base for promotional material.

The centre will also act as a co-ordinating focus for other women's groups in the sector, supporting the existing networks, and identifying any gaps that need to be filled, and working with stakeholders and government departments to improve the participation of the women already in SECT in decision-making and advisory bodies. In addition to the original contract, the DfES has awarded £200,000 to the Centre to try and support increased entry of female undergraduates to SECT HE courses.

The strength of JIVE comes from our established links across all the sectors and on a range of levels, this along with our infrastructure across England and Wales, and our depth of understanding of gender issues. The Resource Centre will provide an inclusive resource for women across academia, industry, public service and in education, including women from ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and caring responsibilities.

Julie Mellor, Chair of the EOC, said:

"The new resource centre will be a valuable source of information for women who work or want to work in science, engineering, technology or the built environment. It will also help employers, professional bodies, training organisations and others gain access to people with the skills they need, and so help deal with shortages of trained staff. Boosting the numbers of women in these fields will help the economy and help close the gap between women's and men's pay.

"The JIVE partnership has well-established links with relevant organisations, which should help it to challenge the barriers many women

still come up against in these sectors. I hope that the new centre will also support the EOC in disseminating the findings of our investigation into occupational segregation, which will continue over the coming year."

notes:

For images and information on the work of Let's TWIST at Bradford College and Sheffield Hallam University please visit:

<http://letstwist.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/>

<http://www.shu.ac.uk/schools/sed/witbe/>

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