

DTI announces successful consortium in SET to provide National Resource Centre for Women

Science and Innovation Minister, Lord Sainsbury today announced that the JIVE consortium lead by Bradford College has been chosen by the DTI to host the new UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET).

The initiative recognises that women remain the UK's single biggest, most undervalued and underused human resource[1] and that this is particularly true of the Science, Engineering and Technology Sector, where barriers to greater female involvement need to be overcome.

The DTI will provide £0.8 million per year for 3 years to fund a Resource Centre which aims to improve the participation and position of all women in SET employment across academia, industry and public service in the UK including those from black and ethnic minorities, women with disabilities, caring responsibilities and those disadvantaged in accessing the labour market.

Principal of Bradford College, Alan Hodgson says:

"I am thrilled for the College and our partners that we have won this bid. It's excellent for the College and for Bradford to host the National Resource Centre for Women in SET."

The bid has been won by JIVE (Joint Interventions) consortium of which the lead partner is Let's TWIST, a joint initiative between Bradford College and Sheffield Hallam Universities part of which is located within the College's Department of Engineering Construction & Computer Technology. The JIVE Consortium is also includes, the Open University (Faculty of Technology) and WiSETI University of Cambridge.

Annette Williams, Project Manager of Let's TWIST / JIVE Partners enthuses:

"This is an acknowledgment by the government of our significant work over the past six years to create change for women and girls in the SET fields. It is an opportunity for us to build on our own work of Let's TWIST, the JIVE Partners and others whilst coordinating and promoting good practice nationally."

In being chosen to host this Resource Centre, the DTI has recognised the consortium's commitment and expertise in encouraging and supporting women into what are still considered to be non-traditional areas of work. Although based at Bradford College, the Resource Centre will provide a national facility accessible to all in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland with a large proportion of the services delivered through new technology.

This will be supported by the partnerships with Sheffield Hallam, Open and Cambridge Universities. In the future however the consortium hope to build a

dynamic centre of excellence located in the heart of Bradford, which will offer a range of conference and training facilities to employers, professional bodies, Sector Skills Councils, careers professionals and learning providers.

The work of Let's TWIST and JIVE Partners is ongoing and the web site for the new Resource Centre will be up and running early in the new year allowing the national service to develop quickly whilst maintaining high standards. Currently Let's TWIST and JIVE Partners organise promotional events for girls, mentoring, training for colleges and careers professionals and this will continue whilst the services of the Resource Centre are developed.

This exciting development is an asset to the City of Bradford and it's College and is national recognition of our excellence in this field and the depth of understanding, services and good practice that Let's TWIST already delivers to Bradford, Yorkshire and Humber and nationally.

JIVE's plans for the Centre embrace many of the recommendations outlined in the 'Strategy for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology' April 2003 and in the SET Fair Report. JIVE will also run the Centre representing all sectors where there are high levels of occupational segregation for women.

The type of women who benefit from the Consortium's work so far:
One example of the type of women who benefit from the work of the consortium and would continue to reap benefits from this new Centre is Elise Horsfield who successfully completed the National Certificate in Construction at Bradford College this year in half the normal time whilst single-handedly raising her two children aged two and seven.

Since leaving school Elise held various jobs, including administrative posts and also studied various courses. "In more recent years I undertook an Autocad course (Computer Aided Design), for architectural design and got some work in an architects' office - this spurred my interest in construction related work." She enrolled last year on the Bradford College fast track course, completing it in one year rather than the usual two and gaining 3 distinctions and 5 merits along the way.

The course suited Elise's need for stimulation, "it gives confidence seeing people who are already doing it especially women with children. The course tutors have been helpful for my studies and Let's TWIST staff gives support, encouragement and understanding on a one to one basis with problems. It can be challenging being a one-parent family, so help with childcare costs and travel expenses have also helped a great deal"

"I always looked forward to each day and can't wait until I start on the HND in Building Studies at Bradford College this September. There are so many options

open to me in the future such as site management, surveying or architectural work.”

The course entry requirements are minimal, with access courses available, and there are still places for entry in September 2002. Elise advises any one interested to have a go and to ‘stick it out no matter what and don’t let anything intimidate you, people do help you, it’s all worth it in the end’

Another main activity of JIVE Partner’s is a National Mentoring Programme. Lis Merrick National Mentoring Coordinator for JIVE is delighted about the news of the DTI Centre.

“JIVE has already created one of the most extensive mentoring programmes for women in science, engineering, construction and technology and our vision is to harness the vast experience of existing programmes already operating in these areas and build on our joint expertise. In addition mentoring will be the lynchpin of our women returners strategy for the resource centre” - Lis Merrick, National Mentoring Co-ordinator

Stefanie Hird (28) is a project manager and a Mentor to two undergraduates on the Masters in Medical Engineering at the University of Bradford.

“I have learned how to be a mentor. It is important to be neutral and to listen rather than to tell. My mentees don’t need another teacher but I believe they have benefited from the opinions and thoughts of someone who has been there, not too long ago. I also hope that I’ve shared thoughts on looking at things from different perspectives. Claire and Rachel keep in touch more if there is something they’d like to pick my brains on and less so, when things are going well, which is fine. We agreed on email as the way we’d keep in touch.

“I’ve enjoyed dusting off my technical knowledge in their areas and finding out about what they are doing. Aside from this, it is good to give a little bit of something back and I’d also recommend this to women in my position because it’s fun meeting up with other mentors who are from similar professions and were in the same year and sometimes courses as yourself.”

“Prior to joining the national mentoring programme for women in construction I have also been considering leaving the industry. Since last June and with the support I have received from both my peer mentors and other participants I have decided to remain in the industry which I feel is a positive outcome” - anon quotation from one of mentors in the ICE/JIVE Mentoring programmes

Editor's Notes

·Digital images and more information about the work of Let's TWIST and JIVE Partners are available upon request, or you can visit the following websites:

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

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

·Images of the women mentioned above are available.

·Women in Science, Engineering and Technology Initiative (WiSETI) - is a Cambridge University project.

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/wiseti/>

For further information please call Faye Parkin (Bradford College) on 01274 433385 or email fayep@bilk.ac.uk

[1] The Rising Tide Report (1993)