



John Whelan
Human resources director, programmes and support BAE Systems



Amelia Gould
Head of engineering, naval ships combat systems BAE Systems



Ann Watson
Chief operating officer Semta



Deborah Richards
Head of diversity and inclusion IBM



Jenny Body
Past president Royal Aeronautical Society



Jenny Young
Head of diversity Royal Academy of Engineering



Dr Nina Skorupska
Chief executive Renewable Energy Association



Angela Owen
Senior adviser PA Consulting



Natasha Stromberg
Founder Genderbuzz & #connecttoher



Andy Shokar
Global staffing and recruitment manager Bechtel



Heather Farmbrough
Financial journalist and chair of the round table



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It's time to bridge the gender gap

At an industry round table it was agreed that the under-representation of women in engineering is worrying. Panellists urged companies to up their game in recruiting and retaining female staff amid a growing skills shortage across the sector. **Chris Price** reports

According to statistics from the Institute of Engineering and Technology, fewer than 10 per cent of the UK's engineers are women, the lowest percentage in Europe.

So what is being done to make engineering an attractive career option for women? And once we have got women into the industry, how do we support them to return to work if they leave to have children or care for elderly relatives? These were some of the questions posed to a panel of experts at a recent round table hosted by *The Daily Telegraph*, chaired by journalist Heather Farmbrough and supported by BAE Systems.

For John Whelan, human resources director, programmes and support, BAE Systems, the challenge of diversity and inclusion in the sector remains as great as ever.

"For BAE Systems, employing women in engineering isn't a 'nice to have', it's a business imperative," he told the panel. The company has focused on senior sponsorship of women and greater inclusion on its leadership programmes.

The company sets targets for the numbers of women, including 30pc of female graduates and 20pc female apprenticeships. "It looks like we will have to reset these because we should exceed them this year," added Mr Whelan.

Genderbuzz founder Natasha Stromberg thought targets were a good idea. "By setting targets, you are saying: 'This is really important. We are going to make it our focus,'" she told the panel.

Angela Owen, senior adviser at PA Consulting, said recruitment adverts are dominated by descriptors such as "bold" and "strong" rather than balancing with female-focused attributes such as "collaborative", "dependable" and "committed".

"We've started to emphasise the creativity required for engineering because I think that's been missing up until now," added Deborah Richards, IBM's diversity and inclusion leader.

For Bechtel's global staffing and recruitment manager Andy Shokar, corporate culture needs to change so women aren't afraid to ask: "Will I have the same job when I return from maternity leave?" More than 30pc of Bechtel engineers who have worked on Crossrail are female.

One initiative from the Royal Academy of Engineering and WISE (women in science, technology and engineering) aimed at getting more women into STEM careers is the Ten Steps campaign. Already supported

by nearly 70 signatories including Sky and the BBC, this campaign outlines 10 ways in which businesses can close the gender gap. "It's an improvement programme, just as if you were going to put in a new IT system," Dr Nina Skorupska, chief executive of the Renewable Energy Association, explained.

In education, BAE Systems runs a programme across 420 schools, covering 90,000 pupils. "Women going out into local schools to talk about their careers has a huge impact on the number of girls applying for apprenticeships," said Mr Whelan.

"A brochure of different female role models gives young girls something specific to google, rather than just searching for engineering jobs," Amelia Gould, BAE Systems head of engineering, naval ships combat systems, told the panel.

For Ann Watson, chief operating officer at Semta, many girls see engineering as a male world. "If you

have got a girl who is creative and likes solving problems, she wouldn't necessarily think she could make a good engineer, but she could." Jenny Young, head of diversity at the Royal Academy of Engineering, added that some children do not know they want to be an engineer until they are older.

The cultural reasons why female engineers are not valued were also discussed. "In Russia, girls are helped into STEM subjects because they lead to well-paid jobs," Ms Stromberg told the panel. "We need young girls thinking about their economic empowerment by selling the financial benefits of engineering jobs."

One problem that needs addressing is helping women engineers to return if they leave to have children or care for elderly relatives. "What we do which has been successful is provide women with a sponsor and a mentor, as well as education about what's changed in the industry since they left," Ms Richards told the panel.

According to Jenny Body, a former president of the Royal Aeronautical Society, added that women often move from industry into academia because it is seen as more flexible for young mothers.

However, Dr Skorupska said there are now some progressive working practices. "It's not just about maternity or paternity - it's about leave of absence and recognising how society is changing," she said. "Responsibility now falls on both men and women."

Companies also need to look at their job specifications. Mr Whelan said: "Unless we work with people to redesign their job, then they're trying to do a full-time job in part-time hours. That's just not fair."

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