Introducing Interconnect: the network for women studying science, engineering, technology & the built environment in Scotland

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I am interested in hearing from similar groups in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as from anyone in Scotland interested in the network. To find out more about Interconnect, please get in touch on tel: 0131 455 5130.

Interconnect is a 3 year project which is developing a network for women studying science, engineering, technology and the built environment in Scotland. To achieve this, we are working with universities, colleges, students, students associations, employers, qualified women and professional bodies.

What is the need?

Women students make up only 16% of the engineering and technology students in Scottish universities [1], and in colleges the gender segregation is even greater. As a result women in these subjects may be isolated.

Research demonstrates the importance of social integration in student retention. Krause [2] found that students are more likely to reach graduation when they form strong relationships within their peer groups. Encouraging social interaction and involvement in student groups, societies and social events will aid student retention. This is critical in an area where women are not being retained.

Research carried out at Edinburgh Napier University [3] indicated that women students in male dominated subjects want:

- social contact and support;
- contact with recent graduates and qualified women; and,
- careers advice and links with industry.

Even after graduation, many women struggle to maintain a career in SET. Having a well-established social network of like-minded peers, and meeting women who can act as role models and mentors early in their career, may help women sustain long-term SET careers.
Interconnect is, therefore, providing women students with:

- opportunities to meet female students in similar situations;
- opportunities to network with women professionals as role models; and,
- information on careers and recruitment, from an industry perspective.

The project also aims to:

- raise the visibility of women (both students and professionals) within science, engineering, technology and the built environment.

How has the project developed?

Since the project’s inception 10 months ago, Interconnect has established itself online and now has a website (http://www.interconnect.org.uk) and a presence on Facebook (theinterconnectnetwork) and Twitter (@theICnetwork). An e-newsletter keeps students informed about the Interconnect network, relevant news from across the world and opportunities and events which the students may wish to take advantage of.

What are we doing now?

Currently Interconnect is working with eleven colleges and universities across Scotland to establish student groups and networks at a campus level. A series of regional events this year will bring together students from different institutions together with women professionals.

Events will include “Meet the Professionals” networking lunches covering built environment, engineering and science sectors; “What Employers Want” interview skills workshops, hosted by industry recruiters and personal development workshops such as “Building Confidence”.

All this activity means that students can engage with the project in different ways:

- by signing up to the e-newsletter;
- joining the Interconnect Network on Facebook or Twitter;
- getting involved at campus level with Interconnect activities; and,
- attending regional events and workshops.

What are our plans for the future?

Over the course of the next year we want to engage with students across Scotland and get them involved in the network. We are looking to continue to work with academics and equality officers within institutions to achieve this. We are also looking to grow the network across Scotland and develop links with groups and initiatives in the UK.

References


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