

Getting Girls Into Engineering – Lighting the Spark

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The number of women in engineering – of lack of them – ultimately comes down to our ability to persuade girls in schools that engineering is a career that is suitable for them, and not one that is only accessible to 'brainy boys'. The reasons why we want them are becoming more apparent, and not least is the fact that we are facing a serious skills shortage in engineering and manufacturing that we are going to need to fill with as much talent as possible, but in addition to this is the other compelling reason that diversity is simply 'good for business'.

But how do we go about increasing the number of girls who choose an engineering career? One of the ways that we at the Women's Engineering Society feel is really important is the provision of a 'mechanism' for keeping girls who have shown an interest in engineering as a career 'on track', and not letting their interest be derailed by unhelpful or uninformed teachers or parents. We use the analogy that initiatives to get girls interested in engineering are like lighting a spark, but if you don't provide any oxygen then the flame will just go out. This isn't generally the case for boys, as society, school and parents are so geared up for boys to choose engineering that this pathway is wide and easy to find, but for girls the opposite is often true, and girls need some extra help in order to ensure that the outreach activity, school trip or visit has an equal chance of success. After all, the same action performed on a different group of people will not always have the same impact. Our initiative 'Sparks' aims to address this, by providing a repeat contact mechanism for girls that reinforces the idea that engineering is a suitable career for them, and that the industry needs and wants their diverse range of talents. This mechanism would involve the use of social media to ensure that the girls get visibility of role models, competitions, activities, interesting facts, games, summer schools, work experience placement and careers advice – and we aim to provide this in a way that young people relate to. If you are interested in further information on this initiative, or how you can ensure that your hard work in attracting girls into engineering doesn't go to waste, then get in touch with Dawn Bonfield on office@wes.org.uk.

www.wes.org.uk/sparks