



Women in Renewable Energy Scotland: How we succeeded together



In 2010 a group of women working in the renewable energy sector came together to create a Scottish network. They were concerned about the skills shortages facing the industry, and the lack of women at all levels across the sector. They sought to provide a forum, delivering local members events through which like-minded women working in, or aspiring to work in, renewables could share information, ideas and experience on overcoming barriers to their success in the workplace, while also addressing the gender imbalance.

In 2013, the founders of WiRES met with Close the Gap, Scotland's specialist partnership initiative on women and work, and it sparked an exciting project that would test the concept of women's networks. Women's networks have become internationally recognised as a way for women to support each other to succeed in workplaces and sectors where we may be in a minority.

To love what you do and feel that it matters – how could anything be more fun?

Katharine Graham

The project

Close the Gap secured a grant from Big Lottery to develop WiRES, and deliver a year's worth of intensive activity. WiRES created a programme of networking events, hearing inspiring renewable energy leaders in the Scottish Parliament, Glasgow Science Centre, and a host of local spaces around Scotland. It held technical skills events at renewable energy sites at Whitelee Windfarm, Gask Farm Biogas Plant, Pelamis Wave Power, and The Hydrogen Office. WiRES brought in mentoring expertise from Women's Enterprise Scotland to create a mentoring programme, which ran from July 2014 until January 2015.



Bringing women together to overcome challenge

The problem that WiRES was developed to challenge was that of women's workplace inequality. We know very little about women's experience of working in the renewable energy sector in Scotland, but the data we do have suggests that around a quarter of the sector's employees are women, and that most of these women work in back office and support roles.

The women who joined WiRES described a set of very familiar challenges. Only 39% said that flexible working was available in their workplace. 25% reported feeling out of the loop because of their gender, and 20% felt that their contributions were not valued as much as their male colleagues'. There were also worrying indications of further potentially unlawful behaviour on the part of some employers. 15% said that they had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace or onsite. 14% reported being paid less than male colleagues for the same work¹.

I've yet to be on a campus where most women weren't worrying about some aspect of combining marriage, children, and a career. I've yet to find one where many men were worrying about the same thing.

Gloria Steinem

WiRES set out to make a positive difference to women's sense of what would be possible in their careers, and to help them to develop a plan to realise their goals.

¹Close the Gap (2015) *WiRES evaluation report*



What happened

WiRES focused on two specific outcomes: building women's networks, and building women's career planning and strategising skills.

Most of WiRES' 553 members did not take part in the mentoring programme, but attended networking events and site visits when they could fit those around work and family commitments. 99% of networking event participants agreed or strongly agreed that WiRES strengthened their professional networks. Across the site visits, 98% agreed or strongly agreed that their professional networks had been strengthened, and 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge of the renewable energy sector had been enhanced. The fact that the mentoring programme would only be up and running for six months when it was evaluated prompted Close the Gap to avoid outcomes related to progression, promotion, or employment. The in-depth interviews with mentoring participants, of which five were with mentors and four with mentees, revealed some surprisingly positive stories about the immediate impact of the project.

[My mentee] was promoted twice during the programme.

(WiRES mentor)

After the second or third session she got a pay rise and more responsibility.

(WiRES mentor)

In the final survey of mentees, 50% said that they had made significant career changes following the programme.



What women can learn from WiRES

Women's networks work. They are not the only tool to support women to achieve our career goals, and not all women want to join one, but whether you create your own or join one in your workplace, professional body, or sector, they can make a difference to your career. Some practical suggestions:

- Many individual workplaces have mentoring networks. You could speak to your manager, to HR, or to any senior leaders about the possibility of setting one up. Businesses that are positive about attracting and retaining women often like to create women's networks to signal this to women in the sector, but most networks start with a suggestion from their employees.
- Networks don't have to be formal to work. Bringing women in your workplace or industry together for drinks or dinner every so often can create a valuable source of mutual support and encouragement.
- Mentoring programmes build value for employers by developing individuals to succeed in their current role. If your workplace doesn't have a mentoring programme, suggest that your employer supports you to find and meet with a mentor yourself.

"I hope you find true meaning, contentment, and passion in your life. I hope you navigate the difficult times and come out with greater strength and resolve. I hope you find whatever balance you seek with your eyes wide open. And I hope that you - yes, you - have the ambition to lean in to your career and run the world. Because the world needs you to change it."

Sheryl Sandberg



Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's participation in the labour market.

Partners include Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, Equality and Human Rights Commission, and Scottish Trades Union Congress.

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Building on the successes of the project to date, WiRES aims to continue to grow and deliver a programme of work under the stewardship of the existing steering group from April 2015.

For more information or to join, go to:
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