



Girls' Outreach Programme

The initiative was established in 2008 by IBM's UK Women's Leadership Council (WLC) to address the declining pipeline of female talent. Whilst research by e-skills UK shows that girls consistently outperform boys in IT-related subjects at school, they rarely continue with these studies or choose careers in technology. It was recognized that in order to encourage more girls to think seriously about technology and business we needed to reach out and dispel the myths associated with the industry.

The programme aims to dispel the stereotypes associated with the IT industry and encourage girls to consider a career in IT and business; and longer term, to positively influence the representation of females on our intern, apprentice and graduate schemes.

Since its inception the initiative has developed into a highly successful programme for girls aged 15-16 years old. Organisationally it is recognised as a core programme, with every school matched to a mentor, drawn from across the business at all levels, and supported by the graduate and intern community. The significance of the programme is demonstrated by the regular participation of the UKI CEO in the annual event which sees 120 girls invited to our London office to learn about the breadth of opportunities; take part in activities; and hear from inspirational women at different stages in their career. The event is followed by work experience for 100+ girls, delivered across four weeks in two locations.

Preparation for the work experience begins in class, with girls submitting CV's to their teachers for nomination - those selected then experience a mock interview with mentors and other company representatives. During the week the girls participate in a variety of individual and group activities, shadow employees and gain practical experience to increase their knowledge and skills.

Mentors also work with their school to develop a tailored programme of activities, for example:

- CV and interview workshops
- Career events
- Inspirational speakers
- Dragon's Den style activities
- Insights into science and technology

Whilst the programme is still sponsored by the Women's Leadership Council, leadership now resides with the UK Foundation Manager who has responsibility for the overall orientation, learning and career development of all new hires joining from school, college and university. This has resulted in greater integration of the programme within the business and an increase in the number of girls who are inspired to join the apprenticeship and placement schemes. Feedback indicates that two-thirds of girls who have attended events or work experience are likely or very likely to consider a career with IBM in the future.

In 2012 the programme extended its scope to include all 300+ placement students who have been challenged to return to their own school or college – with the aim of informing, inspiring and encouraging more young people, regardless of background, to consider a career in business and technology. This year, the programme has been extended further to include schools with high percentages of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students.

Benefit to the girls can be seen in the feedback:

“The Schools Outreach Programme is proving invaluable in developing students’ business leadership development skills. This is a programme we would highly recommend to other schools and companies”.

“The girls really liked hearing about the backgrounds of the speakers - it gave them a sense that they could do anything they put their minds to”.

"The shadowing was great to look at real life work in the natural environment".

"I enjoyed the presentation skills master class - I used to be petrified but this has given me more confidence!"

“Thank you for all your work and support with the work experience - it provided students with a unique and quite outstanding learning opportunity.”

“I have realised there are so many different and exciting aspects and careers with this IT company.”