

# engineering change

a good practice case study on raising the profile of gender equality in SET businesses



# foreword

This guide is the product of three years of positive partnership between JIVE and international civil engineering firm Halcrow Ltd.

Halcrow's motivation in working with JIVE was to drive up their competitiveness by independently demonstrating to their public sector clients their commitment to gender equality. They also wanted to address the skills shortage in their area of industry and build on an impressive track record of attracting and retaining high calibre employees of both sexes.

JIVE (Joining Policy Joining Practice) is a UK-wide partnership that aims to challenge the under-representation of women in science, engineering, and technology (SET). It is led by the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET, a centrally funded Government initiative. JIVE in Wales consists of a team at the Wales Resource Centre for Women in SET (WRC) located in Women's Workshop, a long-established and award winning training centre in Cardiff Bay.

JIVE's team in Wales was able to offer Halcrow a dynamic response, tailored to meet the needs of a large scale, multi-sited company in a highly competitive market. The guide illustrates, amongst other things, just how influential one key employee can be in raising the profile of the business case for equality in Welsh industry, and how one personal contact can escalate into full corporate commitment across an international enterprise.

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# background

Halcrow is a long-established civil engineering group specialising in the planning, design and management of hundreds of projects in 70 countries all over the world.

Their projects range from designing flood prevention schemes in South Wales, to technical support on a billion-dollar bridge project in South Korea. Halcrow has over 6,000 employees in 70 offices and an annual turnover of over £250 million. There are 24 offices in the UK, including one in central Cardiff.

Sally Sudworth, now an Associate Director, is based in the Cardiff office and is JIVE's key contact in the company. She says:

*"There were good business reasons for getting involved with JIVE. Jive helped us to verify the delivery of our policies, and doing this independently gave greater credence to our messages in tender documents when competing for work."*

*"We also have to address a longstanding skills shortage. In today's commercial climate, it's more important than ever to ensure Halcrow continues to provide the kind of working conditions that attract – and keep – high calibre people."*

Contact with JIVE was initiated through a professional connection – employer liaison manager Milada Williams of the Wales Resource Centre for Women in SET knew Sally Sudworth through the Women's Engineering Society and had been her mentee.



## drivers for change

The main external drivers for change as far as Halcrow was concerned were:

- The Gender Equality Duty legislation
- Skills shortages in engineering

## gender equality duty (GED)

The new legal duty to promote gender equality came into force in England in April 2007, and is soon to be rolled out across the UK. This legislation is causing waves of change across the whole public sector and beyond.

The duty affects public bodies such as local government, the police, the NHS and many other organisations. It also affects private companies fulfilling 'public functions'.

Under previous laws, action could only be taken against public bodies after they discriminated on grounds of sex. Now they must take steps to proactively promote equality between women and men. This means they must take account of their different needs when making policies and providing services and not just react to complaints when things go wrong.

Although GED applies only to the public sector, it affects the whole supply chain of industries who contract to carry out work for public authorities, lending a competitive edge to firms who can show a positive track record on pro-active gender equality. Since Halcrow is a competitor in the increasingly keen public sector market (for example, in the design of flood risk management schemes), it welcomed the opportunity to have independent confirmation of its commitment to being a 'great place to work' for women and men.

## skill shortages in civil engineering

The Institute of Civil Engineers (among other bodies) reports that many sectors of civil engineering are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit enough suitably qualified people, and to retain them. An example of an area with a serious skills shortage is Flood Risk Management - the assessment and minimising of the risk of flooding before it happens.

A report commissioned by the Government from the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE) in November 2001 estimated that the skills shortfall in river engineering amounted to at least 20% of what was needed.

Major employers like Halcrow know that they must adopt a range of strategies if they are to recruit and retain the people they need. Those strategies include broadening the range of potential recruits (such as women who are planning or already have taken career breaks) by providing appropriate working conditions, as well as taking positive role models into schools and colleges to encourage more young people to enter the profession.



# the culture analysis tool

The Culture Analysis Tool (CAT) is a unique resource devised by the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET and JIVE Partners.

*“CAT is a questionnaire designed to assess workplace cultures and how they affect gender equality,”*

explains Milada Williams, JIVE's employer liaison manager.

*“The survey assesses both 'hard' tangible factors like conditions and policies as well as 'softer' (less tangible) factors that affect how women feel in the workplace.”*

Sally Sudworth of Halcrow convinced regional director Barrie Jones that the company would benefit from accessing the Culture Analysis Tool, and it was piloted as a questionnaire survey of all 80 female and male employees in the Cardiff office in 2004.

Barrie Jones recalls:

*“The offer of access to a tried and tested tool, which would allow us to gauge the success of our policies in the workplace, was an attractive one.”*

A prize draw was held to drive up responses which secured a creditable participation rate of 48%. 75% of the women and 38% of the men who were sent questionnaires filled them in.

JIVE's analysis of the results revealed a mainly positive gender equality situation within the office. In particular, those surveyed cited:

- An employment package aimed at attracting and retaining the best people, including benefits such as flexitime, options to buy additional annual leave and childcare vouchers

- Active engagement of employees in projects to promote women in engineering, such as the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) Ambassadors scheme where female graduates from Halcrow visit schools to promote engineering as a career, and CIBT's 'Girls Allowed' week when girls shadow female engineers at work
- Support for schemes such as MentorSET which aim to attract and retain female engineers and scientists in industry

There were also areas where there was 'room for improvement', including a perception that gender equality had too low a profile in the company and difficulty sourcing safety equipment such as hard hats and boots in appropriate sizes for women.

JIVE team members Milada Williams and Cath Leggett went about devising an action plan of recommendations based on the survey results, which they helped build by inviting a smaller group of staff to a 'speed dating' style information exchange.

Sally Sudworth was then able to present the pilot survey results and action plan to Halcrow's senior management team, who decided to roll out the CAT across all 24 UK offices in the group.



This time the survey used an online tool called Websurveyor, which was tested at the Bristol office prior to going live nationwide. A presentation of the collated findings followed to the senior management group, and a tailored report and action plan was produced on request specifically for the Glasgow office, following a site visit from Milada Williams.

Scottish Regional Director Donald Bell comments:

*“The JIVE CAT is a powerful tool for independently assessing just how well we are performing as an equal opportunities employer. It enables us to address issues proactively long before they impact on our ability to recruit and retain the high calibre people we need for continued commercial success.”*

## outcomes

According to Halcrow, involvement with JIVE has generated a range of positive outcomes, which include:

- Independent, demonstrable compliance with the new Gender Equality Duty now available for inclusion in tenders for public sector contracts
- Improved awareness and implementation of existing policies
- A higher profile for gender equality across the company and at board level
- Availability of correctly sized safety gear to all employees via a well-publicised website

## the future

JIVE has ongoing involvement with Halcrow through active participation in company and industry events. Sally and members of her team have appeared in a promotional DVD about JIVE's work in Wales.

The results of the CAT serve as a benchmarking exercise for employee perceptions of gender equality in the company. They are likely to be revisited in the light of future developments within the company.

