

The Girls in IT initiative

Objective

Like many other nations, the UK has a largely untapped IT talent potential in the form of girls and young women. Also, like many other nations, the UK needs to develop and muster as much talent as it can into 21st century tech-based careers. Our female youth is currently *not* choosing to come into corporate IT careers in large enough numbers, which is a missed opportunity for them and a major weakness in our technical workforce.

The reasons for this may be complex and deep-rooted, but at the local level they are at least in part due to the lack of exposure and access to corporate IT of the girls themselves and of the people who guide them in their career choices. Companies can help to fix this at the local level, which creates a great opportunity both for the local girls and for themselves.

The primary goal of the "Girls in IT" initiative is simply to present 11-14 yr old schoolgirls with female role models able to inspire them by speaking from the heart but with authority about their own careers in IT. This is designed to open the eyes of the girls to the many attractions of information technology as a career before they are asked to make their GCSE choices. Evidence to date suggests that the initiative is very effective in achieving this.

There are also positive side-effects: the female role models in the scheme report that giving these presentations to 11-14 yr old girls (and boys inevitably) is both fulfilling and developmental to themselves. The process of engaging and working with schools forms a relationship that both the schools and local employers can use positively.

Finally, the initiative is run on a not for profit basis and is staffed entirely by volunteers doing real jobs in commerce and industry.

History

The initiative was born in 2010, through the collaboration of a passionate group of female IT executives involved in British Computer Society workshops. Goldman Sachs and Unilever decided to take the challenge on board and the initiative became entirely corporate IT driven, mainly through the support of Goldman Sachs.

From 2014 CIO Development Ltd, an IT executive development business serving the needs of corporate IT leaders, has agreed to give the initiative a new home and drive it forward on a not for profit basis. The aspiration of this change is to reach out further to present many more school girls with female IT professionals as role models.

Strategy

The primary strategy for placing female IT professionals in front of 11-14 yr old girls has been to identify and register female corporate IT professional role models, to equip them and train them in the use of materials for a 40 minute "lesson" on IT careers for women, to support their building relationships with schools local to them, to keep track of where and when the presentations have taken place and to collect feedback.

CIO Development is proposing to use this strategy to scale the initiative to reach the widest possible audience, through a re-launched initiative that will go live in September 2014, the start of the 2014-15 academic year. Between now and then we shall be refining the development and distribution process and recruiting and preparing many more role-models.

Roll Out

CIO Development will engage more of its corporate IT clients in the initiative throughout 2014. Each organisation will provide a point of contact to co-ordinate the role models within their organisation, to arrange the training and support and to report back results to CIO Development.

Orientation and training will be arranged by CIO Development for each role model. This may be on a “train the trainer” basis through approved organisations. Eventually, training material will be available online.

Role models reach out to schools in their area, where they may already have a relationship (child at the school, friend as a teacher, governor etc). CIO Development can allocate schools if required but this is not as effective as when an existing relationship is in place.

Materials provided by CIO Development

- Information which is used to introduce the initiatives and engage the school.
- Presentation – an interactive presentation with speaker notes and embedded videos which the role model builds on by the addition of her personal experience and anecdotes.
- Parent hand-out for the children to take home
- Feedback form to assess the impact of the presentation on the children’s career options.

On a monthly basis CIO Development collects summary information from approved organisations on the presentations they have made in schools in their catchment area.

FAQs

Does it have to be a female role model?

Ideally Yes. Males can have the relationship with the school and take part in the presentation. The main objective is for young girls to physically see women who have a career in IT as role models.

Does it have to be an all-female audience?

No. It is great if boys are in the audience too – the role model just needs to mention that this presentation is focussed on getting more girls to choose IT which will be good for all of us.

Do the role models need to be CRB checked?

No. As long as you are a guest speaker at the school and there is always a teacher with you, you do not need a CRB or background check. You should not be left on your own with any children. This ensures a teacher is present to keep discipline too!