

How to Improve Women's Choices and Careers in IT

Women's Place in ICT Professions
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Why do women not choose ICT careers?

- Girls are under-represented in 'feeder' subjects at school (maths, sciences, computer science)
- They do not have accurate information about what is involved
- We do not find them put off by the technical aspects of IT work



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Enduring stereotypes of nerds The black-boxing of IT professions

“When you talk to women, going out to universities or whatever, and say ‘How do you envisage the work? What might my job be about?’, they say ‘You sit in front of a computer all day. You probably wouldn’t talk to anyone.’ They have this beard-and-sandals and men image. They don’t actually think about what we do.”



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What problems do women have in developing IT careers?

Structural problems

- Accessing a mixture of on-the-job training and development
- Working through opaque promotion systems
- Managing the demands of IT work with their private lives

Cultural problems

- Valuing and promoting their own skills
- Overcoming discrimination (from managers, from peers)
- Dealing with gender-blind organisational cultures



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Points of intervention to attract and retain women

- In schooling and higher education
- At the point of recruitment to the labour market
- Within organisations



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In schooling and higher education

- Careers advice and awareness of career options
- Giving girls' direct experience of IT work (company visits, daughters to work days)
- Establishing networks between schools, universities and employing organisations



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At the point of recruitment

- Widening the pool of applicants (relaxing technical selection criteria, drawing from other disciplines, offering conversion courses for arts graduates, identifying other skills requirements, reducing starting salaries!)
- Advertising jobs where women will see them
- Developing gender-aware recruitment processes (job specifications, interviewing procedures, mentoring potential women entrants)



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Within organisations (structural innovations)

- Offering mixture of formal training and informal learning opportunities
- Work-Life Balance/flexible working policies (promotion not based on visibility or long hours)
- Offering varied career paths (including technical careers)
- Developing gender-aware progression systems (transparent with clear criteria)
- Retaining women after maternity and in their 40s



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Within organisations (cultural innovations)

- Establishing peer support systems (mentoring, coaching, women's networks)
- Recognising women's problems of self-advocacy in career management
- Developing organisations' awareness of their established gender cultures (drinking clubs, exclusive male groups)



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