

Women into transport and engineering

Finding suitable apprentices is a key challenge for the transport and construction sectors. Pre-employment programmes give businesses the chance to meet potential candidates, while participants gain valuable skills

Catalyst is a suite of flexible pre-employment programmes designed to assist people in under-represented groups into meaningful careers, as well as tackle workforce shortfalls and develop the skills needed within the transport sector.

One such programme is Women into Transport and Engineering (WiTnE), run by TfL, which encourages women to consider careers in the transport and construction industries through training and work experience. Each WiTnE programme is tailored to the specific needs of three to four industry employers.

The College of North East London delivers training of up to two weeks, covering a range of certified courses, including Level 1 health and safety and business administration, plus specific technical skills relevant to the opportunities offered.

It has been a joy to watch our placements grow and develop in confidence, knowledge and skill

Rebecca Empey, BAI Communications

This is followed by a minimum of two weeks' work placement with one of the participating employers.

TfL also works with the Department for Work and Pensions and Women into Construction to deliver overall support throughout the programme, especially with childcare and travel.

Candidates have a personal styling consultation with charity Smart Works, plus a one-to-one session with an expert interview coach. This boosts their confidence and helps them make the most of their work placements. Candidates who secure permanent positions return to Smart Works for a second styling session and receive an additional working wardrobe to last until their first pay cheque.

Candidates who are not selected to join WiTnE, or who have not secured a job at the end of the programme, are directed towards opportunities in other organisations.

WiTnE programmes 2022/23

Three TfL suppliers, ADComms, Alstom and BAI Communications, took part in WiTnE 4. All were very keen to encourage women back to the workplace, while two were new to pre-employment programmes.

Several of the participating women were employed as a result of the programme, in roles such as assurance assistant, network ops engineer apprentice, graduate structural engineer, document controller and project manager.

WiTnE 5 involved four TfL suppliers – Riverlinx CJV, FM Conway, TKJV and MTR Elizabeth line. The programme delivered a wide range of field- and office-based opportunities covering roles such as customer service assistant, mechanical engineer, pump engineer, assistant project manager and workflow assistant.



Employers value the programme for the access it offers to talented women who may not otherwise have considered their industry

During their two-week placement, the five women hosted by MTR Elizabeth line shadowed customer experience assistants, toured Elizabeth line stations and helped run an event for local schools. Following interview, three were offered roles as customer experience assistants.

'It's a great initiative, as it allows candidates to experience what specific roles are like in reality,' said Paul Siniacki, Strategic Labour Needs & Training Manager.



Michelle

Michelle worked for Network Rail for 16 years, before leaving due to ill health. Following a four-week programme, she is now back at work as a Customer Experience Assistant for MTR.

'The programme was amazing. I shadowed for two weeks in the office and on the stations. We were made to feel like we were already part of the company. I was passionate about getting this role and was helped along the way by the team,' she said.

Construction company Kier hosted three women working within technical departments for two weeks. The company had been trying to attract more female employees into its technical and engineering operations.

'This scheme offered a great pathway for a joint initiative with like-minded organisations to encourage more women into the engineering and technical design industries,' said Dave Beggs, Senior Maintenance Engineer.



Lina

Lina hadn't considered transport as a career option but, following the programme, she is now a Workflow Coordinator at Kier.

'The fact that the programme is specifically made to benefit women and help them with their career path was key for me. This experience opened my eyes and made me aware of what happens on London roads every day,' she said.

The initial programme with ADComms was for two weeks, but the company offered continuing work experience placements to seven women, together with financial support.

'Following interviews, we were delighted to offer roles as project management assistant, support engineer, document controller and assurance assistant to six women,' said Carl Pocknell, Managing Director.



Anita

Anita was working as a carer when she heard about WiTnE and joined the programme. She is now a Support Engineer at ADComms.

'I really enjoyed the programme and met so many other women in similar circumstances. We were able to share experiences and motivate each other. Everyone in the team has been very helpful and welcoming. It changed my view for the better about working in the construction industry as an Asian woman,' she said.