

Press release: Female engineers at Sellafield – it's a family affair

Sellafield Ltd is proud to employ hundreds of female engineers, all contributing to the site's mission.

While they started their careers over 30 years apart, mother and daughter duo Eleanor and Georgina can find a lot to agree on when it comes to being a female engineer.

Eleanor is part of the site's project delivery team and Georgina works in the Highly Active Liquor Evaporation and Storage plant team.

Despite the family links, Georgina laughs when asked whether it was her mother who inspired her to pursue a career in engineering.

Honestly, not really! If you asked me at 15 whether I wanted to be an engineer like Mum then I would have said no.

Her interest in engineering was sparked by the Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) programme carried out by Sellafield Ltd at her secondary school.

It was actually the engineering education scheme I got involved in at 16. . It was a mechanical engineering programme that I really enjoyed and from there I started looking into different types of engineering and ended up doing a chemical process engineering degree at Newcastle University.

It was Sellafield that initially got me interested through their STEM programmes and then, when I was about 18, I went back to Mum for advice. When I was looking at what to do at university and what courses might be useful for a career she was really helpful.

By contrast, there were few programmes to encourage females into engineering when Eleanor began her career in 1981. She said:

When I first joined engineering I was the only female mechanical apprentice.

Going into engineering was quite daunting, I had come from an all girls' school. There was no engineering at school, it was just needlework and cookery, but I really enjoyed pulling motorbikes, car engines and bicycles to bits from about 15. I really felt like I wanted to go into something like that.

Walking into an apprenticeship where there were 96 males and one other female was quite daunting. When I started university seven years later there were only two other girls and they both dropped out.

By contrast, Georgina's course was around 20 per cent female, also with female lecturers – something which was unheard of when her mum was studying.

And both agree one of the vital things for encouraging more girls into the sector is to have positive role models, encouragement and education at school.

Georgina said:

For me, it's got to be done at 16.

I am so grateful for getting the input from really, really good teachers – all of them female really – and Sellafield with their STEM work, which really changed my perception of what engineering was.

For Eleanor, it is important there are independent professional role models that youngsters can look to for inspiration. She said:

It's very difficult for parents to directly tell their children what to do.

You need young people to be influenced by adults who have the right relationship.

I was an active member of the STEM programme and now I mentor young engineers in the company. I didn't want to tell my children what to do, but I introduced them to things. I have helped lots of other females through STEM and mentoring and it's almost like giving back for what other people did for Georgina.