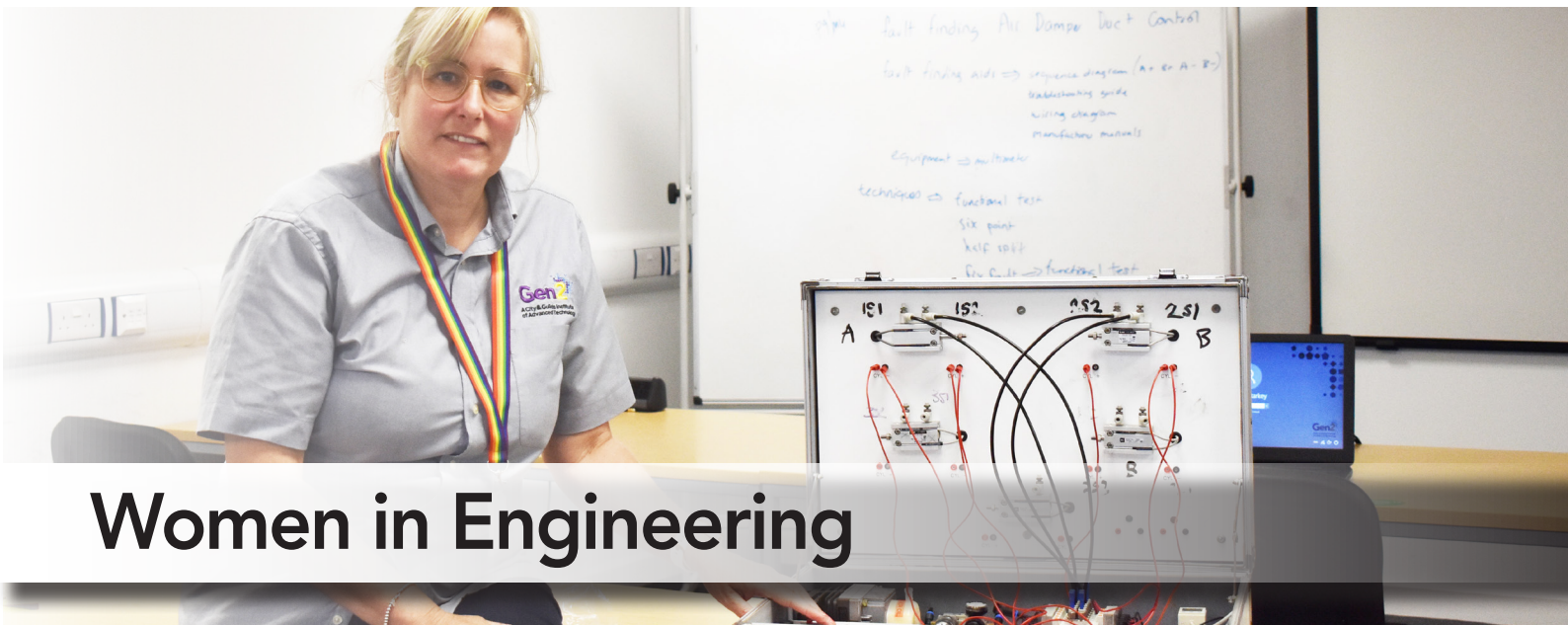




Women in Engineering

Helen Riddle Gen2 FE Delivery Tutor



How did you become interested in engineering?

From a young age I used to help my Dad with wiring jobs as he was an electrician and I really enjoyed it. Engineering became something I was interested in as a potential career but in the 1980s the only study choice at school was Design and Technology. I took the Design and Technology O-Level course and was one of the first girls at secondary school to take the subject. I really enjoyed the course. I hand-made silver jewellery as my exam piece which involved forming and soldering by hand and using the machines to polish the metal and finish the piece, I achieve a Grade A (the highest possible grade).

The piece was used as part of a school display for employers. An engineer from Albright and Wilson attended the event and was really impressed with my exam piece and advised me to apply for an apprenticeship. I applied and was delighted to be accepted on a 4 year apprenticeship programme. I chose instrumentation.

What did your apprenticeship involve?

For the first 12 months of my apprenticeship I did basic skills in bench fitting, machining, welding, electronics etc. I was only the second female apprentice at my company so I worked with around 300 craftsmen on site.

After my basic training I spent a further 3 years on the Albright and Wilson site learning the instrumentation and plan maintenance trade, whilst studying for my BTEC National and HNC in instrumentation and control.

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How has your career progressed?

After completing my apprenticeship I worked for a year as a maintenance craftsperson and completed my HNC qualification. I was sponsored by my company and was given 3 years unpaid leave to undertake a degree in instrumentation and control. I achieved a 2:1 BEng(Hons) Degree.

After completing my degree I transferred with the same company to their Birmingham site to work as a control engineer, which I did for 4 years. I relocated back to West Cumbria and worked for two local engineering companies, with 12 years as a project engineering and EIC Engineer. As an EIC Engineer I was involved in installing new equipment, fault finding, supporting plant breakdowns and was on 24 hour call, 7 days a week for technical support. Following my experience in process / manufacturing industry I joined Gen2 as an E&I instructor as I wanted to pass on my knowledge and experience to others. I am now in the Technical Delivery Team and have completed my foundation degree in teaching.

Would you recommend engineering as a career to other females?

Yes, it's an interesting career and is very varied. Engineering can be both challenging and rewarding. I have met some very inspirational engineers during my career who have designed and engineered new processes to hugely improve efficiency and save time and money for their company. Engineering is also an excellent route to managerial roles.

What would you say has been the most difficult thing about being a female engineer?

In the 1980s it was unusual to be a female engineer but now it is common and at Gen2 especially we have more than triple the national average of female engineers. I wouldn't say that I have found anything particularly difficult about being a female in engineering. Everyone throughout my career has been supportive.

What advice would you give to a female who is thinking of becoming an engineer?

Go for it! Engineering offers lots of opportunities and is typically a well-paid job. I am married with children and have been able to enjoy a successful engineering career whilst juggling a busy social and family life.

Engineering is a great career and it would be great to see more females enjoying the benefits.



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