

## SI Weston-super-Mare Skirting Science 2018

250 girls from 15 schools attended Skirting Science; an action packed day of Science and engineering held at Churchill Academy. Skirting Science, in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, is an initiative organised by Soroptimist International of Weston-super-Mare to open girls' eyes to the huge opportunities STEM careers can provide. The day opened with some well-chosen words from Churchill's head teacher, Chris Hildrew, who described himself as a feminist and explained how the school would be naming its new science block after a female scientist - Dame Athene Donald.

Young Woman Engineer of 2017, Ozak Esu, then gave an inspirational talk about her life which began in Nigeria where girls are not normally educated to the same level as boys. From an early age she wanted to be an electrical engineer because there were so many power cuts in Nigeria. She did her degree and PhD at Loughborough University then joined Cundall, an engineering firm in Birmingham, but she hopes to return home one day to sort out the power cuts!

The girls attended hands on workshops given by scientists from industry and academia covering a wide range of topics from sensory evaluation of crisps and cola, to building robots, the examination of blood, and extraction of the girls' DNA to using infrared technology to study our surroundings. The girls commented 'I really liked all the different experiences that you don't get at school.' 'Seeing what different things you can do with science.' 'Learning new things and different careers that I didn't know existed'. Teachers were equally positive noting that the girls were able to 'See a range of female role models to aspire towards'. And that 'it has opened their eyes to the range of careers available in the vast field of science and engineering. It was useful to hear about the career paths of different scientists and the reasons they enjoyed their field.'

Ruth Thomas, President of SI Weston-super-Mare and instigator of Skirting Science, says "Weston Soroptimists are proud to have started this event 10 years ago, to which schools still send their year 9 girls. We are doing our best to inspire girls to take up science by showing them how varied and interesting their lives could be in STEM subjects. There is still a gender gap in science and we are trying to change that".

Whilst the number of women attaining STEM vocational qualifications has increased dramatically from 8% when we started Skirting Science, to 24% there is still a long way to go. The UK still has the lowest proportion of women engineers in Europe.

Anne Graham, joint founder of Skirting Science said 'We are so proud to have had an impact on over 2500 girls since starting Skirting Science and would love to hear from any past attendees.' She added 'News of our success has travelled and we were thrilled to be mentioned at the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women at UN headquarters in New York.'

The girls were joined by: the President of Soroptimist International South West region, Daphne Dowsing, SI Great Britain and Ireland Federation's Programme Action Director, Barbara Dickson, the Mayor Councillor Michael Lyall and the Chairman of North Somerset Council Councillor David Jolley all keen to see some workshops in action.

Skirting Science is a great team effort and Weston Soroptimists would like to thank all the workshop providers, fellow Soroptimists and Churchill Academy staff and pupils for making the day such a tremendous success.