

## **Inclusive Environments Attract Talent**

We caught up with Lindsay Patterson, a Senior Engineer of Operations providing Electrical Engineering Support to the Mariner Field, Mariner A Production platform and Mariner B FSU in the UKCS, based in Aberdeen to hear all about her varied working experience, and how an inclusive environment can make all the difference.

Lindsay has a BEng in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, a degree studied for part time whilst training as an Instrument designer and has been working in the O&G industry for 10 years, having previously worked in building services. She has spent time working in the UKCS, Angola and Norway.

***Hi Lindsay, thanks for meeting with us today and offering to share your working experience.***

***Can you please start by telling us about your role, and where your career has taken you to date?***

*I started out in the UK working as an Instrument designer with a service company, where I had my first offshore experience in the UKCS carrying out site visits and surveys.*

*I was in a Project Engineer role in Angola which was in an onshore and offshore capacity in Malongo. Based onshore but again carrying out surveys and site visits to several inner field and outer field platforms.*

*I didn't work offshore in Norway; I lived there for a year while my partner had a placement. While I lived in Norway, I was on a 3/3 rotation in the North Sea travelling to and from Norway. This was a core crew operations role.*

*When we moved back to the UK, I started working with the Norwegian company Equinor as an Electrical Operations and Maintenance Engineer in an onshore role with site visits offshore.*

***Did you find there were any significant differences between the different sectors and companies? Or was it consistent?***

*The industry was relatively consistent, it's slowly evolving, I can see more women in technical roles but there is a long way to go. Broadly speaking, the offshore culture in the UKCS is consistent. It's very different to Africa and I would imagine other areas, but I would assume that in those areas the behaviours are also consistent based on societal norms of that country. There are some exceptions to the rule, and some companies push their own company ethos and expectations of inclusion – for example Equinor.*

**You now work with Equinor: What have been the key differences between previous companies/offshore environments you've previously worked in, compared to the experiences you've had with Equinor and going offshore with them?**

*When I first went offshore men and women shared cabins, as long as they were on opposite shifts i.e., one was on day shift and one was on night shift.*

*I was always the only woman on the helicopter, I was the only woman out on the platform, and I was the only woman in the changing room. To get changed into PPE and overalls there were no female facilities, so I shared with men, and I had to use the male toilet which was located in the male changing rooms. This was the case on every North Sea platform I visited. Having more than one gender present was certainly not considered when these platforms were built.*

*Angola was culturally very different; I was the only woman working for the company in the area and I would have to be escorted to and from sites by a male colleague who would have to speak on my behalf to the local men on the platforms as most of them would not acknowledge my presence. When I first arrived in the office, the local planner who I shared an office space with also refused to acknowledge my presence and was not happy he had to share the space and work with a female engineer. The job required the Project Engineer (me) and the Planner to work closely together to ensure the scopes were executed effectively. With this in mind, I requested a meeting with him to figure out how we could work efficiently and collaboratively with each other; without this cohesion of our roles, jobs wouldn't get done, the company wouldn't be happy and ultimately we could both lose our jobs. It was in both our interests to work together, and work together well. Reluctantly, he agreed to work with me, though it was still tough. There was the same lack of facilities for women both offshore and in the onshore office. Another challenge was having little to no wi-fi available at the facility, the workplace or in the accommodation area, which made communication to home really hard, and left me feeling quite isolated and far away from my support network.*

*My core crew rotation role in the UKCS was on an older platform coming to the end of life, it wasn't initially designed or adapted with working women in mind. Again, male dominated changing rooms with no allocated public bathrooms for women, which initially made me feel excluded. However, being core crew on a small platform in this case, meant the crew soon became like family. A women-only wing of cabins was created for the few women that did stay there and the women would get together and have a spa night at the weekend with chocolate and facemasks, so the environment certainly felt more inclusive compared to my other experiences.*

*In other roles, where my offshore visits were on an 'as required' or adhoc basis, my planned offshore trips would often be cancelled at a higher frequency to that of my male colleagues. This was due to not having single cabins available for women and bed space was limited. It was very frustrating as it hindered me doing my job and I felt I often missed out on vital offshore exposure to enhance my learning at a crucial point in my career, something that my male counterparts didn't experience as often. It certainly meant my gender hindered my development with regards to time spent offshore.*

*One of the main attractions of Equinor to me was its reputation for excellence in Inclusion & Diversity. My hiring manager was a woman which I was very excited about, having a manager who was a woman was a first for me and I was delighted to have a female role model. When I started, I couldn't believe how many managers and leaders around me were women, including the Senior VP at the time; it was amazing to see and really inspired me.*

*When I first mobilised offshore in my current role with Equinor, it was the first time I came across female-issue overalls, which were available in a variety of sizes offshore. It was the first time I had been in a female changing room offshore - and it had sanitary facilities. There were sanitary facilities in my cabin. What a difference all of those things made to the ease and comfort in the workplace! Previously, I really had just "got on with it", and I didn't realise at the time the negative impact not having these facilities must have had on me. It sounds silly, but having PPE that fits, and sanitary facilities [that meet your needs] makes you feel like you belong, you've been thought of....*

*With Equinor, when it came to a situation where my planned offshore trips would be considered for cancellation due to bed space, my manager ensured my trip was prioritised. She was generally very supportive with my role and progression in every way, and my new manager is also supporting my development, ensuring my trips offshore are a priority.*

*In Equinor, there is a fantastic, open and collaborative culture and ethos. Everyone is open and friendly you would not be worried about speaking to anyone on any level of the organisation or sitting down with the VPs or senior management in the canteen; in fact, everyone mingles. This is part of the Norwegian culture - noted and appreciated too by my partner when he was working in his Stavanger office. There are none of the hierarchical divides that I have experienced in other companies.*

***Now you've had a more rounded experience with Equinor in a really inclusive environment, looking back what are your thoughts on the past behaviours and experiences?***

*I think looking back at the past behaviours and experiences, they have led to me encountering an element of imposter syndrome. Feeling ignored and/or not taken seriously, for example I would often give my male colleagues ideas and suggestions to bring up in meetings in order for them to be taken on board. This led me to think I didn't belong in this job, that I shouldn't be here despite being qualified and trained. At times, I questioned whether I'd been selected for a position to tick a diversity checklist rather than on my own merit. I think not having women around me to work alongside and to look up was a major factor in this, as well as the non-inclusive environment.*

*At Equinor there are many qualified women, like myself, from different backgrounds and cultures who are successful in their field, included and equal which has given me more confidence in my ability and helped me thrive. The Equinor Inclusion & Diversity ethos really helps everyone be the best they can be which in turn benefits business.*

***It's been great to hear all about your experiences, the good and the bad. Before we go, based on your experience, what are the 3 tips you would give a company who are looking to make their offshore offering more inclusive to everyone?***

*1. As far as the practical environment is concerned, I see there are some quick wins. I would like to see all companies providing women's overalls, women's changing areas, accessible sanitary facilities and products. A women's section of cabins in the accommodation would be more inclusive.*

*2. I think all employees, especially leaders, should have the opportunity to receive training on the importance and benefits of diversity and inclusion. This would include unconscious bias and real-life examples of both good and bad practice. Diversity and inclusion needs to be harnessed and embraced by all within the organisation. We all hold responsibility for creating an inclusive work environment.*

*3. I think everyone should be given the option to have an experienced mentor who has had unconscious bias awareness training and who can help, guide/navigate in the ways of working offshore and industry as a whole.*

***Thanks so much for talking with us, Lindsay!***