

The Power of Feedback

We recently met with Sarah-Alice Davies (Shell UK, Brent Charlie Wells Supervisor) and Jason Grant (Aberdeen Drilling School, Managing Director) to hear how the drilling school have recently adopted gender-inclusive language in their courses. For more on the importance of gender-inclusive language, we recommend the book *Invisible Women*, by Caroline Criado-Perez.

1. Can you tell us more about the issue, and how it came to light?

Sarah-Alice:

Over my 10-year career I have attended a number of technical training courses, some of which are mandatory requirements for all drilling personnel globally. The courses usually have extensive documents, presentations and various other written materials which are reviewed throughout the program. I had always noticed how in the 'drilling' world most of the technical references to team members were of one gender – male. For example: 'The driller went to get his team from the rig floor', 'He was empowered to close the well in using the BOP' and 'He inflated the life raft'. It made me chuckle a little, on board the Brent Charlie we were at one point an all-female drilling supervisory team, which one of us would complete these tasks if our training had specified one gender to complete the tasks?

2. Who brought it surface?

Sarah-Alice:

All jokes aside, I knew the material's intent and had spent 9 years glossing over the statements; It wasn't until I attended my last course at Aberdeen Drilling School for my bi-annual well control training and we had been as a group discussing how Brent Charlie was leading the way for women in operations that I felt empowered to do something. At the end of the course I was handed a simple feedback form and asked 'What can we do to improve training material?'. The driller in front of me said 'Hey Sarah-Alice, you should get those gender references sorted' and the light bulb moment was triggered.

3. What were the steps involved from the point of recognising the issue, to bringing about a resolution?

Sarah-Alice:

I simply wrote 'I am part of an inclusion group at Shell who are helping the OGUK D&I Task Force, I would love Aberdeen Drilling School to lead the way by updating their training material to be more gender balanced'.

4. How long did it take to resolve issue?

Sarah-Alice:

To my surprise, within two weeks I received a response agreeing with my views and detailing the actions and deadlines for responses:

1. Three different course's technical materials in Aberdeen were immediately reviewed with the specific focus of ensuring gender neutral language and subsequently updated.
2. The technical team in Aberdeen were instructed to implement a full review of the technical writing process to create the procedures and practices that would ensure that they would not fall back into bad old habits.
3. Once the review of the UK certification courses was completed, a full review of all ADS' global technical training, engineering and workforce development programmes would be initiated.
4. Once updated the new gender neutral courses would be rolled out to all ADS training centres in UK, Netherlands, Norway, Nigeria, Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Brazil and USA as soon as they are released.

5. Can you tell us more about who was involved?

Jason:

The Well Control Instructor of the course passed on the feedback form to the ADS Quality Control team for review, who highlighted your specific feedback as an “outlier issue” to the Aberdeen Drilling School senior management team.

6. How was the feedback received, and what actions did you take as a result?

Jason:

The feedback was initially received by our team with curiosity, as the issue of gender neutrality in our training materials had not been raised or considered previously. Overcoming gender bias has been taught by our teams within well operations crew resource management training, but we had never looked at our own internal training materials. A review of the course was carried out by our QC team and it was noted that there was indeed a number of statements and processes that highlighted the male in a lead role, or from the male perspective. We undertook immediately to change the terminology and the focus of all of our training material to make our training and consultancy gender neutral.

7. How has the solution been received by the individuals affected and stakeholders?

Jason:

We believe that every single point of contact within Aberdeen Drilling School was supportive of the process, from instructors, through QC and technical writing groups to our customer services team and the senior management group. We were all very supportive of Sarah-Alice’s point of view and were surprised that we hadn’t picked up on it ourselves previously. If you aren’t aware that an issue exists, you can’t fix it and this is why feedback and review systems are so important: at Aberdeen Drilling School we are continuously improving our products.

8. What was the outcome, was it measurable, and how has this step changed the gender balance taking part in the related activity?

Jason:

Aberdeen Drilling School are the largest well control training centre in the UK and have additional training centres in 10 locations globally, training thousands of students each year. All of our training material delivered in these centres is now gender neutral and the technical writing that we undertake for our industrial clients will also be gender neutral from now on. As thought leaders in our technical subjects, we are very aware that Aberdeen Drilling School are part of an industry that needs to update its values and engage positively with these issues. This process has helped us consider our part in supporting gender neutrality, and made our global teams focus on influencing the industry for the better.

9. What advice would you have for others?

Sarah-Alice:

Feedback can be hard to give and to receive, but if we didn’t do it then we would likely spend another 9 years glossing over the obvious! Embrace those feedback forms and have your opinion heard.

Jason:

From Aberdeen Drilling School’s perspective, we were happy that after 9 years of accepting the status quo Sarah-Alice felt that she was in an environment that the issue could be raised. I would encourage all of our delegates, never be afraid to raise your hand and disagree and always be confident that your opinion is valid and potentially a small step in changing our industry for the better!

Our thanks to Sarah-Alice and Jason for sharing their story - we hope it inspires others.