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Prince Charles meets female engineers future



Prince Charles joins the primary seven girls to find out what they're learning about engineering. Picture: PA

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'DO you like my nails?' 11-year-old Demi Brammer puts down her screwdriver to flash her pink, sparkly false fingernails, "they're for the school prom tonight, and I've had my fake tan done."

She's grinning as she turns back to the robot-on-wheels she's putting together with her Forthview Primary school pal, 12-year-old Murran Campbell. She's busy connecting a circuit to make the motor run and talk of nails and party dresses is soon forgotten as they focus on the serious task of getting the thing going.

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The pair in their red school sweaters are hard at work in the atrium of the Selex ES building – formerly known as Ferranti's – at Crewe Toll, part of a larger group of primary seven girls, invited in yesterday to mark National Women in Engineering Day and, possibly, to be inspired to study science and technology at high school perhaps carve out careers as engineers in the future.

Nearby, other girls are making simple circuit boards and another group is learning how just air and paper make a rocket which can be propelled high in the air. There are excited shrieks and shouts as the rocket higher and higher... it is not quite what you expect from one of the world's leading electronics companies

Which is the point, says Carol Marsh, the company's International Electronics Design Process Lead and former president of the Women's Engineering Society. "Days like this are about getting to girls early to show them that STEM [science, technology, engineering and maths] subjects are not just for boys, that they are and that they can be creative."

It's a view fully supported by the Duke of Rothesay, who was also visiting yesterday to discover what the company does to encourage young people – girls in particular – into engineering.

Only six per cent of UK engineers are women and there is a massive shortage of engineers – so much so it is estimated that the UK economy could miss out on £27bn over the next ten years if not enough young people train in the right areas. Around 180,000 engineers are needed every year to complete projects all being worked on – and a large proportion are heading for retirement.

As a result Prince Charles has been championing engineering as a career, even launching the Morphy Richards Engineering Education Centre at Dumfries House in east Ayrshire two months ago – in partnership with Selex ES – to boost the uptake of STEM subjects among children. He has said that engineering has become a "dirty" word in Britain.

"He is a great supporter of engineering and getting young people involved, especially girls because why do you rule out half the population?" says Carol. "There is an unconscious bias in schools when it comes to subjects. It's that whole idea of give people exactly the same CVs but one is John's, the other Jennifer's, most would give John the job because he's a man and engineering is a man's job."

"Yet when girls study engineering you find they're best in class, because they have to prove themselves also because they know that is what they want to do so they're more focussed."

"The other issue is that at nursery children see mostly female staff, the same in primary, and then they go to secondary and the first male staff they encounter are technology or science teachers. So it's a 'man' thing role stereotyping from day one."

Current Young Woman Engineer of the Year, Naomi Mitchison – who designs aircraft laser warning systems at Selex ES – knows only too well how few women go into engineering. "When I started at university I suddenly realised how fascinating it was, how creative and how practical and relevant – how do you supply power to a city, how does wifi work?"

"It's great to bring these girls here and show them what's possible."

[Young girl speaks out about her life-changing trip to the Arctic with other pupils from Bathgate Academy](#)



After Prince Charles takes the controls of a Rampaging Chariot – a robot on wheels – and expertly guides it through an obstacle course, Beatrice Nicholas, Engineering Director for the Airborne Space Division, tells of her own inroads into opening engineering up.

“We need to change the language around engineering, to stop making it sound so technical, to make people realise how creative it is, how exciting it is to bring together ideas and try and make them work.

“I find my job incredibly exciting, especially when talking to the team working on space elements in Italy. One of them worked on the Rosetta project [the spacecraft orbiting a comet] and a drill they designed for the comet lander will be taking soil samples.”

Meanwhile the schoolgirls are steadfastly building their rockets and testing their robots, unphased by the presence of royalty.

Courtney Conville, 11, and Lucy Dowdenwell, 12, from Craigroyston Primary and Hollie Speirs, 11, from Pirniehill Primary are delighted with just how high their paper rocket can fly.

“Prince Charles was really interested in how we were making them and how high they could fly,” says Courtney. “He asked us if we’d got them up to the first floor yet,” laughs Hollie. “We’re still trying”.

“He said it was really amazing that rockets could be made from simple materials like paper,” adds Lucy. “It was very nice.”

All three say they’re interested in science – and a recent open day at Craigroyston High School showed just what might be possible there.

Demi – who is busy crashing her newly constructed robot into every obstacle on the course – adds: “We always thought I might be a beautician, but this has been such a lot of fun.

“I think it will make me want to take these subjects when I go to secondary.”

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