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Northumbria inspires next generation of young women

Female leaders from the world of business, education, technology, journalism and the arts shared their knowledge and expertise with over 450 young women from schools across the region during the 3rd North East Women (NEW) Leaders conference, organised by Northumbria University and Newcastle High School for Girls.

The aim of the event was to supercharge the future of the next generation of female leaders by providing exposure to women who have reached the top of their professions.

Keynote speakers Kate Denby, Executive Director of Northern Stage (Arts) and Jacqueline De Rojas, President of Tech UK named in 'Europe's Inspiring Fifty', most inspiring female role models for 2017 (Technology) were joined by high ranking women including Lucy Winskell, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Employability & Partnerships) at *Northumbria University*. They talked to the girls about their rise to the top and what it took to get there.

Newcastle High School for Girls, hosted NEW Leaders at its new school premises in Tankerville Terrace, Jesmond in partnership with Northumbria University's Newcastle Business School. The Conference was also supported by lead sponsor North East LEP as part of its NE Ambition strategy.

Over 30 of the region's top female leaders ran mentoring sessions on the day giving girls an insight into what it takes to make it to the top in their chosen career.

A range of industries and roles were represented during these sessions providing a particular leadership focus. Successful women leaders from Ernst and Young, Nestle, The Trinity Mirror Group and other leading organisations all took part.

Conference delegates also had the opportunity to get creative and identify the characteristics that make a great leader, as well as learning more about their own personal leadership identity and brand. The individual assessments took place during a unique workshop developed for NEW Leaders and delivered by leading academics at Northumbria University, specialists in leadership and gender equality.

Natalia Blagburn, Senior Lecturer in Entrepreneurship at Northumbria University's Newcastle Business School, said: "It is a very important agenda to raise the aspiration of young women in the North East. Women make up around half the world's population, but if they are under-represented at the top levels then companies are effectively missing 50% of the talent pool.

"Research by Newcastle Business School shows that a shortage of female leaders is bad for the workplace and the overall economy. We have been working with a number of high profile organisations, including the seven North East County Councils, professional services company Accenture and other IT solution providers to help tackle the gender imbalance.

“Having more women in top positions is not only good for individual careers but can open up new growth and profit opportunities for businesses of all sizes and across all sectors.”

Organisers and sponsors are united in their desire to see more women in leadership positions over the next two decades. Together they have mobilised female leaders from inside and outside the region to share their knowledge and experience in the hope of combating gender inequalities and inspiring young women to strive for the top in whatever career or profession they choose. This is the third time the NEW Leaders Conference has been held, the first took place in 2011. While the format has changed the ambition remains the same, to raise the aspirations of young women in the North East and provide them with role models, mentors and career goals.

Five partner schools joined with Newcastle High to take part in this year’s event, St Mary’s Catholic High School in Newcastle, King Edward V1 School, Morpeth, Ponteland High, Whitburn Academy and Heaton Manor. Over 450 girls from the Sixth Forms of these schools, years 12 and 13, were in attendance.

Hilary French, headmistress of Newcastle High School for Girls, one of 25 schools within the Girls’ Day School Trust, said:

“NEW Leaders is 21st century careers advice for girls. At Newcastle High, we live by the mantra, ‘There is no limit to what can be achieved with determination’ and our conference will demonstrate this in abundance. It is so important to give teenagers real role models to learn from and crucial that women at the top of their professions extend the ladder back down to the next generation to create a female succession path.”

“Working alongside Northumbria University and with the support of the North East LEP, we have through NEW Leaders created an excellent vehicle to deliver this and we are delighted to be able to share this opportunity with girls from across the region. Through collaboration with others we are determined to challenge gender inequality, give girls the confidence to aim and achieve at the highest level as well as to celebrate the very many women who contribute so much to our economy and society”

Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director, North East Local Enterprise Partnership, said:

“Our ‘North East Ambition’ is for each and every young person to be able to access excellent careers guidance. We are supporting NEW Leaders because it will identify opportunities in areas where females are traditionally underrepresented, so we can map the full range of routes on offer.

“We want young people to be able to access inspiring information showing the breadth of opportunities in the North East, and are looking forward to NEW Leaders, which is a great example of independent and state schools working together to share experience.”

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