

Breaking Barriers: Women Championing the OEM Engineering Apprenticeship

Engineering can be a very fulfilling career, with countless opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed. In a groundbreaking shift, women are making significant strides in the traditionally male-dominated field of engineering apprenticeships.

As industries strive for diversity, an increasing number of women are embracing apprenticeship opportunities, challenging stereotypes, and forging new paths in the world of engineering.

This is no different for the OEM Engineering Apprenticeship programme (OEM = original equipment manufacturing), which recently celebrated its first two female graduates, Alana Kernan from Combilift and Caoimhe Dennehy from Dennehy's Garden and Construction Machinery.

At the OEM Engineering Apprenticeship graduation event on 9 November 2023, Alana Kernan received an Academic Excellence award for consistently achieving outstanding results in all of her assignments and projects, achieving the highest overall grade in her class. When asked about her experience as a woman in engineering, Alana replied:

Working in the engineering industry for the last five years has truly been an eye-opener for me. The stigma that is wrapped around women working in engineering needs to become a thing of the past - there are many brilliant female engineers. In a way I am thankful for the myth that women can't work in engineering, as it has made us even more determined to prove that we belong here. It has inspired our creativity and made us bold in putting ourselves into situations that show off our knowledge and dedication.



Claire Rushe

Administration – OEM Engineering Apprenticeship, Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board

Women are increasingly embracing apprenticeship opportunities and forging new paths in the world of engineering. This short article shines a light on two such women, the first female graduates of the OEM Engineering Apprenticeship in Ireland. It highlights women's strengths in a male-dominated discipline, the challenges they face, and the importance of opening up engineering as a career option for more young women.

Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses, whether you are a man or woman, so we need to separate this issue with genders in this role and start looking at engineers as individuals. Having female engineers helps companies to think outside the box; they are risk-takers who are eager to take on new projects, as they believe they have so much to prove and especially with the fact that women are excellent at problem-solving. Now that I am a graduate of the OEM Apprenticeship, I am even more confident in my capabilities as a female engineer, and my future is limitless.

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Caoimhe Dennehy, who works for her family business in County Clare, also thrived during her time on the OEM Engineering Apprenticeship. Michael Dennehy, who is Caoimhe's father and employer, said:

Caoimhe possesses a natural curiosity, enthusiasm, and a willingness to challenge traditional methods. As a graduate of the OEM Apprenticeship, Caoimhe is now equipped with the latest knowledge and practical skills gained through her three years of training and is bringing fresh perspectives and insights to the business.



The first two female graduates of the Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) Engineering Apprenticeship Programme: **Alana Kernan** from Combilift and **Caoimhe Dennehy** from Dennehy's Garden and Construction Machinery.

The graduation event was also attended by three current female OEM Engineering Apprentices from Irish Rail, Moffett Automated Storage, and Johnson & Johnson, along with a female workplace mentor from Tanco.

The OEM Engineering Apprenticeship graduation event on 9 November 2023.



AnnaMarie Woods, OEM Apprenticeship programme manager; Grace Hickey, Irish Rail; Alana Kernan, Combilift; Karolina Tomczak, mentor, Tanco; Isabella Antonio, Moffett Automated Storage; Caoimhe Dennehy, Dennehy's Garden and Construction Machinery; Damian Walshe, National Apprenticeship Office. Missing from photo: Tatjana Udovicenko, Johnson & Johnson.

Programme manager AnnaMarie Woods said:

The OEM Engineering Apprenticeship is committed to increasing female intake on the programme. Despite much progress, female engineers represent only 12% of the profession in Ireland, so we must use positive role models such as Alana and Caoimhe to help young women in Ireland recognise engineering as a possible and very worthwhile career.

Although significant progress is being made, challenges persist, highlighting the importance of fostering inclusivity and supporting women who pursue careers in engineering. The shortage of women working in engineering roles is a global challenge, and Ireland is no exception. The engineering sector needs more women like Alana and Caoimhe: women with fresh ideas, new perspectives, varied experiences, and different approaches to innovation.

Career guidance counsellors are key in promoting engineering to young girls, and it is important that they are more aware of the range of engineering paths available, such as the OEM Engineering Apprenticeship. Female engineers need

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to be celebrated and could be brought into schools to inform students of the many routes and opportunities available in engineering. They could also show that engineering is an attractive and fulfilling choice of career for both male and female candidates.

The OEM Engineering Apprenticeship is a three-year QQI level 6 programme. It is suitable for those currently employed in OEM companies (manufacturing, servicing, commissioning, and installation), school leavers, career switchers, and mature applicants wishing to pursue a career as a qualified OEM engineering technician.

On-the-job learning takes place within the company, and the learner also attends off-the-job education and training on a block release basis at either Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board's (ETB) Monaghan Institute Campus or Limerick Clare ETB's Raheen Training Centre in Limerick.

For more information on the OEM Engineering Apprenticeship, please visit <https://oemapprenticeship.ie/>.

