



An Interview with... Women In ITOPF



Here we talk to Amy Jewell, Lauren Fearenga, and Sue Ware about why the Women in ITOPF group was set up, and its aims and achievements to date.

ITOPF recognises the importance of fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace for long-term success and sustainability. It is keen to promote a welcoming and supporting culture where all employees can be who they are and feel included and valued. In 2022, members of the team established an internal Women in ITOPF group as a platform for sharing ideas and encouraging fresh perspectives in this important area.

What was the impetus behind setting up this initiative?

Amy: During a Personal Risk Assessment Briefing meeting, women’s safety issues were specifically raised in the context of travelling for work and it was apparent that there was an interest - and need -to set aside some time at ITOPF to explore these, and related points, further. This led to us holding a Travel Safety Workshop facilitated by travel safety company, Maiden Voyage, with a focus on Women’s safety in particular. We followed this session with ITOPF’s first ever ‘Women’s Group’ meeting in January 2023, where discussions centred around safety; workplace culture and language; networking and opportunities.

What has the group been working on?

Lauren: We recognised that we couldn’t do everything at once (as much as we’d like to!), so we polled the staff on what their priorities for the group were. The top area of interest was the company’s policies relating to flexibility, including part-time working, parental leave and providing menopausal and menstrual support. ITOPF currently has several policies for facilitating flexible working (including part-time working, working from home and a flexitime system), and the group has prioritised signposting and reviewing the existing practices, and understanding if any further actions can be undertaken to improve the policies for ITOPF and its employees.

The second priority that the group identified related to communication and, specifically, the lack of structured or formalised opportunities for providing feedback after attending a spill or completing a project. ‘Hot-wash’ sessions are now routinely conducted following spill mobilisations to identify weaknesses that need improvement or strengths that should be sustained. We are also looking at ways to build in non-technical ‘wash-ups’ at regular intervals to provide a forum for other issues to be voiced and communicated across the team.

Any other activities?

Sue: Safety was one of the primary topics that launched the initial women’s group, and ITOPF is currently reviewing self-defence providers with the aim of providing training across the organisation for anyone who is interested. It is also investigating training for situational awareness and allyship. We also discussed the importance of outreach and networking opportunities. We held a ‘lunch and learn’ event for International Women’s Day in March 2023 with guest speakers talking about their career journeys and obstacles they have faced as women in the workplace. As part of the event, the team also collected hygiene products to donate to The Hygiene Bank, a company working towards eradicating hygiene poverty – an initiative we have maintained. For International Women’s Day this year we had George & Rebecca from the Antarctic Fire Angels speaking to us about their experiences as they prepared and executed an unsupported expedition to the South Pole. We have also identified opportunities for participating in professional events and contributing to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) educational initiatives particularly in support of girls considering a career in these fields.

What else is in the pipeline?

Amy: We live in a fast-changing world, and our discussions are on-going. Anything that will help us champion wellbeing, opportunities and fairness is on the agenda!

