



**Proudly supporting diversity in the plastics industry**

## From STEM graduate to Quality Manager

Gender disparity in STEM careers is well documented, with various studies showing that women represent around only 25 per cent of STEM professionals, following a drop from around 41 per cent of female undergraduates studying STEM subjects.

Even after the hurdles of achieving a STEM education have been successfully jumped over, this points to issues of early employment and how to harness those graduate roles that can positively shape a rewarding career in STEM for the women that will benefit the organisations that recruit them.

Oksana.jpg

Oksana Nefedova is one of the 25 per cent. Oksana graduated from the Moscow State University of Applied Biotechnology with a degree in Process Engineering, specialising in polymer packaging, in 2006. Crucially, she also gained her first graduate role directly from university straight into a STEM position, thanks to joining global plastic packaging manufacturer RETAL as a junior chemical engineer.

Oksana explains, "I joined RETAL immediately after graduating and I have now been here for nearly 14 years. I initially started working as a chemical engineer in the quality department and have been promoted and given increasing levels of responsibility ever since; I am now the Quality Manager and I am responsible for my team and the whole department at RETAL's largest Russian facility. It is an interesting and exciting job, with constant challenges."

These challenges are what Oksana describes as 'the daily mobilisation of both regular and globally significant tasks', with privately-owned plastic packaging manufacturer RETAL operating 19 plants worldwide and maintaining a close relationship between all plants at senior management level. It is this global management approach that helps to support the company's ability to recruit and identify the potential long-term employees across its factories, which in turn shows how offering a rewarding career to STEM graduates is a win-win situation.

Mutually beneficial

WIP - Keep In Touch

Get the latest updates direct to your inbox  
To make sure you're the first to get the latest news, views and upcoming events information, sign up to our free monthly newsletter. By doing so, you'll be joining the Women in Plastics community and will benefit from being part of a unique growing network of professionals.

HR Manager for RETAL PA Elizabeth Giecek explains how this approach is mutually beneficial, saying, "As a company, we have seen time and time again that recruiting highly promising STEM graduates and giving them the opportunity to progress within a focused team environment rewards us with long-term skilled employees and provides our employees with a positively challenging career. Our statistics show that gender is of no interest to RETAL; we only recruit on character, skill and potential. Our latest Sustainability Report illustrates that, with four out of nine of our EU & US plants lead by women and an overall 31% of management positions held by women. While we have a 27% female workforce across the whole company, this is skewed somewhat due to the production workers; as we increase automation across our production facilities, so too can we increase our female workforce in this department too."

These statistics are backed up by Viktorija Griziene, General Manager of RETAL Baltic, who says, "RETAL is a results-driven company where competence and performance are the only criteria for career development. In my 11 years at RETAL, gender has never been a hurdle in my progression from sales manager to General Manager of RETAL Baltic. Alongside my fellow factory directors, we now focus our efforts on increased automation in production to eliminate the remaining gender bias and ensure equal opportunity employment in every department."

