

Emerging Diversity and Inclusion: New Zealand Steel Ltd

New Zealand Steel Ltd (NZS) has embarked on its diversity and inclusion journey, with a key focus of increasing the representation of women in its workforce.

NZS has more than 1200 employees and is the country's sole producer of flat rolled steel products for the building, construction, manufacturing and agricultural industries.

Its main site, based in Glenbrook in rural South Auckland is a 24/7 shift-work operation operated by a predominantly unionised workforce. The business faces ongoing challenges from its strong male dominance, company culture, geographical isolation, aging workforce, and a lack of supply of diverse talent. In 2015, it was found that these were inhibiting progress.

As a subsidiary of Bluescope, NZS has a strong governance model and framework but it needed to look at how it could integrate this strategy at a local level, and create true accountability for diversity and inclusion.

Several initiatives were developed and implemented in 2016.

A pilot programme at Pacific Steel, a NZS business unit, specifically addressed increasing the representation of women in operator and trade roles. Female facilities and amenities were upgraded as part of the programme, and female friendly personal protective equipment was introduced. The programme also included the rollout of unconscious bias training to first-line leaders.

HR introduced essential recruitment standards and KPIs to broaden the company's candidate pool to better reflect its communities and worked closely with hiring managers and leaders. NZS revised its Parental Leave Policy to foster a more positive family-friendly work environment. It now tops up primary caregivers standard weekly pay for 12 weeks and calculates annual leave at ordinary weekly pay if they become entitled to annual leave while on parental leave.

The company has also started a review of how it can further support pregnant employees based in operational areas. This includes flexible work practices, restricted duties and creating fact sheets to allow women to understand the exposure to risks in certain operational areas.

In April 2017, NZS set up a Diversity Steering Committee comprised of talented leaders from all levels of the business which is tasked with planning, promoting and implementing initiatives that support the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

The diversity initiatives have driven up the percentage of females in the NZS workforce, including Pacific Steel, from 11.9 per cent in April 2016 to 13.9 per cent in April 2017. The target for the business is 18 per cent female participation which will require it to hire 51 women in the next 12 months. This is possible with continued focus on recruitment and applying diversity standards, says People & Capability Business Partner Dana Toeke.

Female participation at operator/trade level has increased by 2.4 per cent to 3.6 per cent, exceeding the 3 per cent target set for the business.

Feedback from employees has been positive, Dana says.

Managers are influencing their teams to be more aware of diversity and inclusion through onboarding, devising plans as to how to accommodate female team members, and ensuring that their male counterparts are supportive in training.

More females working in operational areas have benefited the engagement and morale in some teams, resulting in increased productivity and performance, she says.