Women valued for technology roles

A woman who uses a robot dog to get others excited about technology and its potential as a career has been named best woman in technology for her work.

Jackie Edwards, a lecturer from De Montfort University, won the overall prize at the inaugural Blackberry Women and Technology Awards on Thursday.

Hundreds of women gathered in London to celebrate their achievements.

The awards were aimed at recognising women’s significant professional contribution in fields of technology.

Even though women make half of the UK’s overall workforce, the number employed in technology industries fell from 27% in 1997 to 21% in 2005, according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Meg Munn, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, said at the awards ceremony that a lot more work had to be done to ensure women were being encouraged to join and remain in technology industries.

She said that the under-representation of women in technology was a problem and that younger women in particular needed role models to encourage them to think about careers in the profession.

No extra muscles

Glenda Stone, chair of the judges and head of the professional women's networking and advocacy group, Aurora, welcomed the awards, which will be repeated next year.

"They reinforce the reality that women make a significant contribution to technology and use technology in every aspect of their personal and business lives," she said.
Best woman in private sector technology: Gillian Kent, MSN

Best woman in public/non-profit sector technology: Annette Vernon, Department for Constitutional Affairs

Best woman in SME technology: Vicky Reeves, Chameleon Net

Best woman in technology academia: Jackie Edwards, De Montfort University

Best woman technology mentor: Sue McDougall, IBM

Best woman technology writer: Jo Best, silicon.com

Best company advancing women in technology: Accenture

Champion of champions: Jackie Edwards

contribution to bridging the gender divide and encouraging women in her community to pursue technology careers.

She said she was "gobsmacked" to have won the overall prize because of the calibre of the rest of the six finalists who each won their individual categories.

Praising the contributions women all over the country make to technology, she said: "It doesn't require extra muscles or testosterone to operate a computer and I think more women should be here."

The lecturer recently won £130,000 funding for De Montfort University to run a project to raise information and communication skills for men and women in deprived areas of Leicester.

Part of her approach when she goes into communities is to take along a robot dog in a bid to make technology more approachable.

Other winners on the night included Gillian Kent, managing director of MSN, who has been an influential crusader for child protection online.

Accenture was chosen as the best company advancing women in technology.

Sue McDougall, commercial and business controls executive at IBM, took home the prize for the best role model in technology.

A recent DTI report highlighted the importance of role models and mentors for women in technology industries.

It said that the main reason women in the 40s leave technology professions is because of poor work-life balance, and a pervasive culture within the technology industry that does not value the skills women have.