

Women in Welding: Bec Cameron

Bec Cameron has over 15 years experience working in the welding industry. She kick-started her career as an apprentice, undertaking a Certificate III in Engineering. Since then, she has gained in-depth experience across just about all aspects of welding, from welding supervision and inspection, through to sales and lecturing at TAFE. Bec took the time out to answer some questions about her welding career so far.

Describe your job.

My current position is the Fabrication Quality Coordinator for Liebherr-Australia, based at the head office in Adelaide. I work in the Fabrication department where we manufacture new excavator buckets and refurbish excavator buckets and attachments (sticks and booms) that have been in service.

I am one of the control points for the high standard of quality Liebherr is known for, including progressive and final weld inspections, coating inspections, and quality inspections on both incoming materials and outgoing products. I am also responsible for the development of Procedure Qualification Records (PQR), Welding Procedure Specifications (WPS) and qualification of welders.

Liebherr-Australia's fabrication department in Adelaide has recently secured certification for AS/NZS ISO 3834.2 – *Quality requirements for fusion welding of metallic materials* – so a significant part of my role is carrying out the various quality assurance and quality control functions required to support the department in their certification from a welding coordination perspective.

What inspired you to choose a career in welding?

I was always interested in trades at school and opted to take metalwork and woodwork classes as electives. I found these suited my learning style and I found myself really enjoying the practical, hands on aspect. As I engaged in post trade study, I found that the passion I developed allowed me to be successful in both the practical and theoretical aspects of welding.

My Dad was the person who first suggested I begin a career in welding, and I guess he is the person who taught me that I was capable of anything I chose to do, regardless of gender. I was extremely lucky as he always promoted that women were no less capable than men, and believed they make brilliant welders due to their attention to detail. Growing up in that sort of environment results in strong females who generally don't question their capability or suitability for something based on their gender, but rather embrace an attitude that they can achieve anything they set their mind to.



Image: Bec Cameron, Fabrication Quality Coordinator for Liebherr-Australia.

Why do you think women should consider a career in welding?

If you have an interest in welding, like working with your hands, and solving complex problems then there is no reason not to get involved. Often, we are our own limiting factor by assuming we can't—or shouldn't—do something because it isn't considered the norm. There are some amazing opportunities in the welding industry, and many different paths that you can take.

Do you have any advice for women considering a career in welding?

It is an incredibly rewarding industry with amazing opportunities to create a fulfilling career for yourself. From my personal experience, the good has always outweighed the bad.

However, the reality is that you will be a minority in the industry and, with that, comes challenges. For the most part, people are accepting and supportive. Occasionally, there may still be the odd person who doesn't necessarily think you belong, or who may make inappropriate gestures, comments, or act inappropriately. You will need to set your own boundaries on what you will and won't tolerate and stand up for what you don't accept as appropriate behaviour. What I have found is that those people are becoming harder to find. For example, in my current workplace, I have had nothing but support and respect from nearly every person I interact with.

Have you found working in a traditionally male-dominated industry difficult?

I have been in this industry for 16 plus years and there have been significant changes during that time regarding the way females are treated. I think that is no longer unusual to see a female in a male dominated industry and therefore the shift to becoming commonplace is occurring.

Throughout my career I have had many different roles, from welder and lecturer, to supervisor and inspector. With each role came a new set of challenges. The challenges of starting out as a welding supervisor and inspector six years ago were not just because I was female, but also because I was considered quite young for the role. This meant I had to work even harder to prove myself and remove any doubt that I deserved to be there.

I always made sure that I understood everything I was talking about and undertook as much training as I could. I guess that has been the biggest challenge throughout my working career—I have always felt I had more to prove than anyone else in the room.

I have worked in workshops and worksites across the country, and I can honestly say for the most part people I have met haven't really viewed me as

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different because I am female, just another person. I have also always had amazing work colleagues who have always treated me as an equal.

What is the most interesting project you've worked on?

I have been very fortunate in my career to travel the country working on various projects in different workshops and worksites. It would be impossible to pinpoint to just one. However, the projects, standards, and materials that were outside status quo have been the most enjoyable due to the challenge of working with something new. Any project where I have had the opportunity to learn something and increase my knowledge base and experience is always a positive.

Who has inspired you professionally?

I have tried to carve my own path in the industry and have been lucky enough to have had some amazing people along the way who have guided me and taught me different skills, whether they be practical, theoretical, or even how to treat your customer. Ultimately, however, everything I have achieved is because I set a goal and worked hard to meet that goal.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge for the welding industry?

I believe we are headed into a significant skills shortage, with a coming boom in the defence space, particularly in South Australia. Over the next few years we will struggle to secure competent tradespeople in the required numbers. Unfortunately, this will put pressure on industry and the training sector. We need to prepare for this sooner rather than later.

What do you believe is the biggest opportunity for the welding industry?

There are so many developing areas within the welding industry; mining, construction, and defence being the driving forces. I believe that automation and robotics present amazing opportunities for the welding industry, and for people in that industry to get in and develop as the area grows. This also links back to skill shortages, and I believe will provide people the opportunity to build a strong career.