

Meet the Decision-makers! Launch of Talent Bank Directory

The WITS Talent Bank directory was officially launched on 15th November 2004 at the National College of Ireland (NCI).

The Talent Bank directory contains profiles of over 150 women, compiled following a nationwide trawl over a period of 18 months. Its aim is to dramatically increase the number of women appointed to boards in the scientific, technological and industrial arena, and overcome what some see as 'institutionalised sexism'.

Prof. Joyce O'Connor, director of the NCI, hosted the launch of the directory in the lobby of the NCI building. The event was attended by members of the Talent Bank, WITS members and other interested parties, including senior science policy makers and Assistant Secretary from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Sylva Langford.

Attendees enjoyed a reception followed by speeches from Eucharía Meehan, the Norwegian Ambassador, and the Chief Executive Officer of

Forfás.

The Norwegian Ambassador, his Excellency Truls Hanevold, gave an outline of the Norwegian position. He explained the public sector is no longer an issue but they have just introduced controversial legislation to have quotas on private sector boards. He emphasized the need for proactive measures to achieve change.

The Chief Executive Officer of Forfás, Martin Cronin, gave a speech in which he emphasized the economic importance of women in science, engineering and technology.

It was an enjoyable evening, and the occasion gave attendees the opportunity to network. The launch received plenty of media coverage, including a feature on the 9 o'clock RTÉ news on the 15th, numerous radio slots and a variety of articles in the press over the next two weeks.

WITS would like to express profound thanks to Elizabeth Creed, the project manager for the Talent Bank, for her dedication and hard work in making this directory a success.



EGM

WITS will hold an EGM on Saturday May 21st at 11.00 - 2.00 p.m. Venue to be arranged.

There will be a planning meeting for this EGM on Saturday April 9th at the Schoolhouse Hotel, 2-8 Northumberland Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, 10.30am-2pm. Parking along the canal at Percy Place is free on Saturday. The nearest DART station is Canal Dock. www.schoolhousehotel.com

We urge members to attend both meetings: this is an important time for the organisation and we welcome a full and frank discussion about the issues we face.

At the planning meeting, we will gather an EGM organising committee from attendees in order to facilitate a democratic and inclusive EGM. In addition, if you cannot attend the EGM, the planning meeting provides a forum for any issues you would like to raise.

We also welcome your input in writing at wits@iol.ie or WITS, PO Box 3783, Dublin 4.

Getting the Balance Right in Irish Science

Based on a press release by Mary Mulvihill

Huge sums are now being spent on Irish scientific and technical research. But men scientists received over 90% of the funding. With women scientists getting less than 10% of the money, Ireland, and Irish science, are losing out.

Analysing figures published by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI; all grants approved to January 2004, see: www.sfi.ie), WITS has also calculated that women scientists receive considerably less on average than their male counterparts: EUR1.78 million per research grant, compared to EUR2.04 million.

To redress this imbalance, WITS is calling for minimum targets and new initiatives, including return-to-work fellowships and childcare tax breaks.

As a first step, WITS welcomes the new EUR1 million Women in Science and Engineering initiative, something we proposed a year ago. These initiatives should encourage more women to stay in, and return to, careers in research, and help plug the so-called leaky pipeline.

A key problem is that so many women drop out of scientific research, leaving few women at the senior positions, and few women to apply for the major SFI grants. Although girls now account for 60% of all science undergraduates in Irish third-level institutions, there are only a handful of women professors

in the science and engineering faculties.

At WITS we welcome the new EUR1 million Women in Science and Engineering initiative, announced in January by Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mr Martin. The scheme, to be administered by SFI, will fund fellowships and scholarships aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of women in science, engineering and technology research.

WITS proposed these measures a year ago, and we are campaigning for: a junior scholarship scheme to attract young women students into engineering and, a return-to-work fellowship scheme for researchers, which would greatly benefit women scientists who take time off research to have children. Institutional changes (for instance, at colleges) may also be needed if these schemes are to be most effective.

Return-to-work fellowships and childcare tax breaks were among the measures identified by a high-level think tank convened by WITS a year ago ('Getting the Balance Right in Irish Science'). Senior scientists, policymakers, politicians and other stakeholders contributed to the think tank. It was prompted by a major UK government initiative, SET Fair, which led to several new and innovative measures there aimed at increasing the numbers of women in SET careers.

A co-author of the British study, Dr Gill Samuels CBE (executive direc-

tor of science policy at Pfizer's Global Research Laboratories, England, and keynote speaker at the WITS think tank), has welcomed the new Irish EUR1 million fellowship initiative. "This is an excellent first step. But, as the British experience shows, more is needed if we are to plug that leaky pipeline."

WITS chairperson Dr Ena Prosser said: "We need these interventions, and we need them urgently. Otherwise, it will take forever to change the system. We appreciate there are difficulties involved, and that there is no single answer. This is why we are proposing a portfolio of approaches. And now is the time to do something, with so much money going into Irish science."

The association also warmly acknowledges the support and leadership of SFI director, Dr Bill Harris, and of Mr Ned Costelloe, director of the Office of Science & Technology at the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment.

To read the Samuels report, please log onto the WITS website, www.witsireland.com

Impact Project - Looking backward to look forward

WITS is embarking on a project to look at the impact of our activities over the last decade. We are working on a proposal for the project, which will examine how our work has made a difference to Irish women in science, engineering and technology.

WITS Committee 2005

Co-chairs

Ena Prosser (Enterprise Ireland), Lisa Martinez (IBM),
Frances Buggy (former chair IIA)

Executive Members

Miriam Lee (translator), Claire O'Connell (biologist, writer),
Aileen McGrath (Analab), Jane Hanly (retired, UCD biology),
Ena Walsh (RCSI), Sally Cudmore (APC, UCC),
Hilda Martin (HSA), Margaret Finlay (QA Manager, DAFF)

*We welcome your comments and are happy to discuss issues.
Please mail contributions to wits@iol.ie or
WITS Newsletter Editor, PO Box 3783, Dublin 4.*

Minister calls for more women in boardrooms

The Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality matters, Mr Frank Fahey, T.D., has called for renewed efforts to increase the number of women on State Boards.

Speaking in January, the Minister welcomed recent progress towards the achievement of the 40% target for gender balance on State Boards but he noted persistent issues relating to the representation of women on State Boards and Agencies.

He called on all those in positions of power, whether in the public or private sectors, to use their influence to increase the number of women in the board rooms of Ireland.

You can see the full press release about the Minister's statements, in the Media section at www.justice.ie

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Can I have my bra back please? In Context

By Dr Paula Trench

Full text of article available from trenchp@eircom.net

I submitted the article 'Can I have my bra back please?' for circulation at the DIT conference 'Creating the Super Engineers of the 21st Century' on 21st October last. I wrote it simply because I got tired of hearing the same old explanations over and over again about the whole 'Women in Engineering issue', and yet for all our efforts, nothing much seemed to be changing and I still hadn't found answers to some key questions.

As a feminist, I had accepted the Sisterhood's explanation that our all-powerful society was to blame for channelling girls into more traditional roles. That was until I clocked up a bit of engineering experience myself (20 years of studying, working, lecturing and promoting), and realised that there had to be some flaws in this theory.

I still didn't understand how come I had found my way to engineering, given my totally girlie upbringing? I also wanted to really understand what was it exactly about engineering which appeals so much to us engineers, both male and female.

And so these questions niggled unsolved at the back of my mind and I felt there had to be a missing link out there. In fact, it is only in the last few years that new research and theories have emerged which I believe are finally giving us the answers.

My article opens with a review of some of the latest EU reports on Science and Technology Indicators, which show that female participation in engineering is still sitting stubbornly around the 20% level. We are all well used to seeing these numbers, but what I noticed is that these statistics were being used as a measure of gender mainstreaming, which is all about equality of opportunity (that's like using the number of smokers as an indicator of our equality of opportunity to smoke!).

I think that more relevant indicators are needed for a start because it has blinkered us into thinking that gender imbalance is equivalent to gender discrimination. So engineering, at 80/20, continually comes under the gender equality spotlight and initiatives are proposed to change the ratio to the more acceptable level of 50/50.

But when I questioned the basis for this 50/50 target, I discovered that it is based on the Blank Slate Theory that all men and women are identical and because we are evenly distributed within the population, then we should have 50/50 participation in all our activities. But as Professor Steven Pinker comprehensively details in his book 'The Blank Slate', it has been wholly discredited following decades of wide ranging research. The brain research in particular has highlighted that men and women display some innate differences. 'The Essential Difference' put forward by Professor Simon Baron Cohen is that 'the average female brain is predominantly hard wired for empathy and the

average male brain is predominantly hard wired for understanding and building systems’.

There is no implication that every male has a male brain and every female a female one. Neither is there an implication that one brain type is superior to the other. We all have systemising and empathising skills, it’s just a matter of how much of each have you got. Systemising is based on achieving controllability and that is the root of what we do as engineers, but empathising is what works with ‘uncontrollable’ people.

In the context of women in engineering, it is proposed that female engineers would exhibit higher levels of systemising than the average female and in balance, they would have slightly less spontaneous empathy. While I believe this theory underpins the equality of engineering women with their male counterparts with respect to systemising skills, there does appear to be some indication that we have different preferences when it comes to applying them, as evidenced by the numbers of women choosing the biomedical and environmental engineering disciplines.

But what about those majority of women who don’t choose Engineering? Certainly we are all aware of the importance of maintaining a supply of engineers to fuel our technology-driven economies, but in these days of girl power and political correctness, gender feminism, on the basis of the discredited Blank Slate theory, has brought us to the stage where we can’t seem to contemplate the thought that the majority of women out there simply don’t want to be engineers. It may take time, but

if we are to face up to the challenges of engineering in this new millennium, I believe we will all have to get a new grip on reality.

So that was the general gist of my article but I would like to mention the other reason I wrote it. The low level of women in engineering is an issue, but is it really a problem? Do we think that all the problems facing engineering in this new millennium would be solved if only there were more women? I think we have tended to distract ourselves with the idea that they might.

With the information that we may always be in the minority, perhaps the time has come to concentrate our energies on the bigger picture of **making us all better engineers, whether male or female**. I think this is the real challenge of this millennium and I think there are a few questions which lie at the heart of this development (I call it Engineering Intelligence)

- Who does the engineering?
- Who is the engineering for?
- Are engineers intelligent?
- How are engineers intelligent?

Until we understand these questions from the male/female engineering perspective and factor them into our engineering education and thinking, then we are all likely to keep undermining our effectiveness and productivity as engineers and I, for one, am not content to let that happen.

WITS Diary

WITS to co-host session at Opto-Ireland conference

Women in Optics Event

Monday 4 April • 9.30 • Royal Dublin Society

Hosted by Women in Irish Technology and Science (WITS) and SPIE Women in Optics (WiO)

WITS is to co-host an event at the upcoming Opto-Ireland conference at the RDS. This event is an opportunity to network with optics professionals, generate new contacts, expand resources and referrals and learn from others in the field of optics. No registration fee will be charged, but registration is required.

Agenda

- 9.30: Registration and coffee
- 10.00: Welcome **Eucharía Meehan**, Higher Education Authority, Dublin; **Nancy Pascall**, European Commission, Brussels.
- 10.05-10.35: **Susan McKenna-Lawlor**, Founder and Managing Director of Space Technology Ireland, National Univ. of Ireland/Maynooth
- 10.35-10.55: **Collette McDonagh**, National Ctr. for Sensor Research, Dublin
- 10.55-11.15: **Clivia Sotomayor-Torres**, Coordinator, Photonics Network of Excellence for the EU, Cork
- 11.15-11.35: **Orla McCarthy**, XSIL, Dublin
- 11.40-13.00: Lunch and networking

WITS to host session at the BA Festival of Science

On September 7th, WITS will host a session at the Festival of Science, which is being run in Dublin by the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BA). The theme of the Festival is "Setting the agenda in science".

WITS will host a session from 3-5pm called Women in Science and Engineering Making a Difference. The session is aimed at a general audience, particularly older schoolchildren.

It aims to highlight the impact of women in science across a range of fields and encourage young ladies to consider a career in science/technology. There will be plenty of time for interaction with and questions from the audience.

Co-chairs: **Dr Ena Prosser** and **Dr Eucharía Meehan**

Speakers

Ms. Sarah Flannery: Computer Science/Mathematics

Winner Irish and European Young Scientist Competitions, 1999.

Co-author of *In Code: A Mathematical Journey*

Dr Mary Bourke: Geography, planetary Science

She is currently funded by NASA to investigate landforms on Mars

Dr Catherine Godson: BioMedical Science

VP for Innovation at UCD

Ms Ann Graham: Engineer

Worked on the Dublin Millennium Spire and will talk about the "Wobble Effect"

Events

AGM

The 2004 AGM was held on Saturday November 13th at the Chester Beatty Library Dublin. A lively meeting was followed by a networking lunch at the Silk Road Cafe and an escorted tour of the Galleries. All agreed that the venue was one of the best ever for the AGM.

The AGM was attended by approximately 30 members. Eucharía Meehan, the outgoing Chairperson gave an address that stressed that 2004 had been a year of "consolidation and survival". She emphasised that much of the work of the executive had focused on completion of on-going project work. The Launching of the Talent Bank and continuation of the Samuels' and the Role Model projects had continued to increase WITS' profile, as had a very positive article in a Forfas Science and Technology publication.

Building on the progress made in 2004 Eucharía also announced that WITS had been invited to be an associate partner in the ICT Ireland "Champions Programme" and had been invited onto the organizing committees of two conferences in 2005, Opto-Ireland (April '05) and BA for the Advancement of Science (Sept '05).

Following the Chairperson's address the new executive was elected. It was proposed that a position of "rotating chair" be adopted for 2005, with Ena Prosser, Lisa Martinez and Frances Buggy sharing this role.

Following detailed reports of the progress of projects such as the Talent Bank, Role Model Project, Samuels' Project and reports on WITS interactions with the National Women's Council and the Interdepartmental Group on Participation in Science, a vote on a Rule change, necessitated by last year's motion to allow men apply for WITS membership. The following rule change was passed:

"Membership is open to women and men throughout Ireland, who work, have worked or who are studying in any area of science, engineering or technology."

Finally a very lively debate as to the role of WITS took place and the following motion was passed:

"The Executive is charged to hold an EGM to consider the future of WITS and to include a discussion on the possible winding up of WITS.

This EGM to be held within 6 months of the AGM"

Elaine Harris

AGM 2005:

The WITS AGM will be held on Saturday, 19th Nov, 05.
We plan to host a morning meeting at a Dublin venue

WITS talks to Women Entrepreneurs

Ena Prosser, co-chairperson of WITS, presented a talk to a group of Irish Women Entrepreneurs in January. She explained the origins and aims of WITS, emphasising the importance of promoting a culture where women can participate in science, engineering and technology (SET).

Ena presented Irish statistics about women in SET and their representation on decision-making boards and explained recent WITS initiatives to promote women's involvement in SET, including the Talent Bank directory (which was circulated for viewing), the Role Model project and the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) project.

The presentation was very well received by the newly established group of entrepreneurs. They were interested to hear of the WITS experience, and were particularly encouraged by the success of WITS as a forum for women to network.

The Women Entrepreneurs have invited Ena to join their group on behalf of WITS and act as a mentor.

Ms Colette Henry, Head of Department of Business Studies and Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship Research at Dundalk Institute of Technology, also spoke at the event.

Tallaght and Waterford ITs say Yes! To Role Model Days

It is heartening to see that the hard work put in by WITS members to produce the 'How To Run a Role Model Day' pack is paying dividends. This comprehensive pack, funded by the Dept. of Education and Science, is a guide for third level colleges to running an open day for female secondary school students in order to encourage them to take up SET courses. It is based on the concept of having female role models talk directly to students about their day-to-day lives and careers in SET. It is also an opportunity for the college to open its doors to prospective students, which is not to be missed in these days of gloomy demographics and dwindling student numbers.

Waterford IT held their second successful day on 9th December 2004, aimed at Transition Year students in the South East Region. One hundred and ninety students attended on the day and listened to the experiences of nine role models from a wide range of careers such as meteorology, mobile phone technology and forestry.

Tallaght IT also held a role model day on 10th February 2005. This was aimed at local Transition Year and 5th Year students and was held in conjunction with the Minerva

3rd Annual Open Day for Female Engineers. The fact that second level students could mix and chat with third level students already enrolled in or graduated from SET courses was an added bonus. Again, the range of role models was astonishing and left this particular SET graduate (DIT 1980) wishing that she was in college all over again, given the increased levels of opportunity and choice that are now available!

Any third level college interested in running a role model day should contact wits@iol.ie for a free WITS Role Model Day Pack.

Catriona Lambert



Wanted!

Articles of Interest for future WITS updates. Have any interesting articles or newsworthy items you wish to share? If you do, please contact Claire O'Connell at : wits@iol.ie

FUTURE PLANS

We are organising social outings for the summer months. Plans are afoot for a tour of lighthouses, and a separate visit to the Port Tunnel Works is in the pipeline.

WITS Bits



Congratulations to Prof. Jane Grimson on her recent appointment to chair the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering & Technology (IRCSET). The council oversees strategic funding in research infrastructure and training, under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science. It aims to promote excellence and the highest standards of research in the disciplines of science, engineering and technology. Prof Grimson is Vice-Provost of Trinity College Dublin, a member of the European Research Advisory Board, and a former president of the Institution of Engineers of Ireland. She is a long-standing member of WITS.

We extend best wishes to Eucharia Meehan, who has been invited to represent WITS on the

Irish Management Institute's Organising Committee. We are sure that such an august institute can only benefit from Eucharia's influence.

Congratulations to Caitriona Ward, who gave birth to her third child, Cara, on December 22nd 2004.

Congratulations to Helena Acheson, who is now Division Manager, Science, Technology & Innovation Policy and Awareness Programmes at Forfás. Helena has been a supporter and member of WITS for several years.

CORPORATE MEMBERS:

An Post, Dept. of Education and Science, Enterprise Ireland, ESB, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Forfás, Health and Safety Authority, Hewlett-Packard Galway, IBM-Ireland, Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Science Foundation Ireland, Roche Ireland, Sustainable Energy Ireland, Teagasc
If your company is interested in corporate membership, please contact WITS Corporate Secretary at WITS, PO Box 3783, Dublin 4, or wits@iol.ie.

WITS was at Science Friction

WITS members enjoyed a performance of Brecht's *Life of Galileo* by the Rough Magic Theatre Company at the Project Arts Theatre in Dublin's Temple Bar on February 26th.

After the play there was an enthusiastic discussion about science in the context of religion, ethics and society, which was organised by Rough Magic, Science@Culture and the Institute of Physics.

Barrister Dermot Gleeson chaired the discussion, which was led by panelists Lynne Parker (Artistic Director, Rough Magic), Prof. Antonino Zichichi (former president of the World Federation of Scientists), Dr Barry McSweeney (Chief Science Advisor to the Irish Government), Brian Trench (Head of School of Communications, DCU) and Prof. Emer Colleran (NUI Galway).

Following the discussion, WITS attendees enjoyed adjourned to a local restaurant for a well earned pizza. Many thanks to Jane Hanly for organising WITS member participation.



CHECK OUT THE NEW INFORMATION ON OUR WEBSITE AT www.witsireland.com.

THANKS TO FRANCES BUGGY FOR HER DEDICATION AND HARD WORK IN UPDATING THE CONTENT.

Membership 2005

Membership is open women and men throughout Ireland who work, have worked or who are studying in any area of science, engineering or technology

Please choose: a) new member b) renewal for 2005 c) corporate member

Name (and title if you like)

Job title/ company / profession

Do you want information send to home "or work address"

Home Address

Work Address

Contact telephones:home work mobile

Email (s)

Note: WITS send most communication electronically for cost reasons.
This membership information will be stored electronically by WITS for administration and circulation but will not be disclosed or circulated in accordance with Data Protection legislation.

WITS is a voluntary organisation and needs the membership to work together to thrive.

Are you interested in working on one of WITS "Current Projects" ?

- A Seat at the Table - Talent Bank Project
- Jobs for the Girls - Role Model Project in 2nd and 3rd level HEI
- Plaques Project – commemorating Famous Women Scientists
- The Future of WITS- impact assessment and future planning.
- Serving on the Executive committee

WITS will run 3-4 events in 2005.

Please tick if these interest you so that we can plan effectively, we would be also very interested in hearing from members with training skills:

- Career planning & finance
- Work-Life balance
- Dealing with difficult people
- A preview of the PORT tunnel
- suggestions

Membership fees: Individual €38 Concessions €12
(retired, unemployed and student members)

Please return 2005 subscriptions and completed forms to:
WITS PO Box 3783, Dublin 4