

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 2006 c) Corporate member yes/no

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

Name (title optional)

Job title/company/profession

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

Home Address

Work Address

Contact Telephones: home.....work mobile.....

Email address(es)

Note: WITS send most communications electronically. 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. What are your areas of interest'?

WITS will run 3-4 events in 2006. Any particular areas/activities you feel WITS should cover?

Suggestions: _____

At WITS we are interested in hearing from members with training skills:

Training Skills: _____

For Office use only:

a) New member b) Renewal for 2006 c) Corporate Member Yes No

Cheque/PO Received Date: _____ Receipt Sent: Y N: Date: _____

Please return 2006 subscriptions and completed forms to: **WITS PO Box 3783, Dublin 4**

A rosy outlook at the BA Festival

Last September the wonderful BA Festival of Science came to Dublin and WITS was in the thick of the action. Committee member Sally Cudmore from the Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre in Cork organised a session entitled "Women in Science and Technology: Making a Difference", which took place on Sept 7th.

The stellar panel of speakers in Trinity College Dublin that afternoon included an engineer, research scientists and the current Rose of Tralee, whose presentation to WITS was her first public engagement since being crowned.

The large audience heard about the thrill of discovery from Professor Catherine Godson, Vice President for Innovation and Corporate Partnerships at UCD, who cited examples from her own research into diabetic kidney disease.

We were mesmerised by images of Mars courtesy of Dr Mary Bourke, a UCD graduate who has discovered evidence for stores of frozen water in sand dunes on the Red Planet. She spoke of her positive experience as a female researcher in the Planetary Science Institute in Tucson, Arizona, where she currently studies the landscape of our planetary neighbour.

Former Irish and European Young Scientist Sarah Flannery came home from Chicago to bend our brains with chess-board puzzles, leading to many 'aha' moments in the crowd. She spoke of the beauty of mathematics, and the importance of young students following their interests in science.

Dublin City Council project manager Anne Graham brought us on a fascinating journey from the mire to the spire. She imparted tales of grime from her days of working as an engineer on the capital's sewerage system, which contrasted starkly with her work on the construction of Dublin's majestic spire, a project she oversaw as part of O'Connell Street's redevelopment.

Then to round off, we heard from recent theoretical physics graduate and Rose of Tralee Aoibhinn Ní Shuilleabháin, who was delighted to be part of the event. She spoke about her passion for maths and physics, her time at CERN and how she has also enjoyed the sociable aspects of being a scientist.

WITS received wide media coverage around the session, with reports on the radio and television and in the national press.

Many thanks to Sally, the speakers and all who helped make this such a successful and enjoyable event.



L-R: Sarah Flannery, Aoibhin Ní Shuilleabháin, Catherine Godson, Sally Cudmore, Anne Graham and Mary Bourke at the BA Festival in Trinity College Dublin.

WITS EGM

WITS should continue as an organisation, but there are areas we need to revise as we move forward. That was the overriding message from members at the EGM on May 21st.

The assembly of around 40 attendees participated in a facilitated workshop where groups discussed pertinent issues relating to the organisation and how best we can address the evolving needs of our members.

A plenary meeting followed, which allowed the smaller groups to share the outcome of their discussions and provided an opportunity for individuals to express their wishes for the organisation.

Following the meeting, the EGM sub-committee prepared a report detailing recommendations arising from the meeting covering membership, communication and governing structure. This will be presented at the forthcoming AGM.

WITS sincerely appreciates the involvement of all participants at the EGM, and the support of principal organisers Aileen McGrath, Miriam Lee and Frances Buggy, meeting facilitators Marian Vickers and Edel Moloney and workgroup mediators Anna Gethings, Jim Salisbury and Claire Devlin.

For more on the EGM, see "Visions and Revisions" on Page 2

WITS on the radio

Quantum Leap

WITS are taking over the airwaves! Tune your dial to RTE Radio 1 at 8pm on Thursdays to catch up on the latest science goings-on with WITS founder Mary Mulvihill in the weekly show Quantum Leap. You'll hear about the work of Irish researchers, the science and technology behind news stories, reviews of books and events, the occasional roving report from current committee member Claire O'Connell and a lot more besides. To receive a weekly e-bulletin about the programme, email quantum@rte.ie and put 'subscribe' in the subject line. You can listen to past editions on the show's website: www.rte.ie/radio1/quantum

Icons of Irish Science

The astronomer Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell, who discovered the first pulsar, was the featured scientist on the final edition of the series Icons of Irish Science, aired on Saturday September 24th. She has long been a friend of WITS, having given the guest talk to one of our early AGMs. You can listen to the programme through the website. Visit <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/iconsfirishscience/>

AGM alert

This year's AGM will be on November 19th at the Mont Clare Hotel on Clare Street, Dublin 2, followed by a tour in the National Museum of the "Gold collection". The nearest DART is Pearse station, a short walk away from the Mont Clare. The event is open to all paid-up members. Child minding will be available if required but we will need at least 2 weeks advance notice. Please note that we will not accept membership fees at the meeting, these must be posted in with a registration form.

New SFI Initiatives

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) introduced a number of initiatives this year to address the under-representation of women in Irish science and engineering research.

In September, SFI in partnership with Dell announced a Young Women in Engineering Scholarship aimed at encouraging young women to take engineering degree courses. Recipients of each €20,000 research-driven scholarship will also receive a Dell notebook computer to aid their study. Up to ten scholarships will be awarded next year when the scheme starts. SFI Board and active WITS member Dr Jane Grimson said, "There is a clear and unequivocal case for increasing the participation of women in science, engineering and technology in Ireland. The under-representation of women threatens our global competitiveness and requires a coordinated set of focused research-driven programmes".

In addition, SFI launched the Principal Investigator Career Advancement Award to support women in research careers who have taken time out of the workplace for maternity, adoptive, carers or parental leave. Targeted at individuals in fields of science and engineering that underpin biotechnology and information and communications technology, the programme offered awards up to €200,000 per year for up to 3 years full-time. The calls for these awards are now closed.

Finally, the Foundation also launched Institute Planning Grants and Institute Development Awards to allow research bodies to assess women's participation in science and engineering research activities and management and establish long-term sustainable initiatives in this area. The calls for these programmes are now closed.

For more information on these and other SFI initiatives, please see the website www.sfi.ie or contact WITS member Mary Kelly at mary.kelly@sfi.ie

WITS EGM: "Visions and Revisions"

Miriam Lee

At the AGM in November 2004, there was a motion from the floor, which was seconded, challenging the ability of WITS as an association to continue its existence, and urging that an EGM be called to assess this within 6 months. The Executive appointed a sub committee to organise this EGM.

In due course members received notification and the WITS EGM, a facilitated meeting, was held at the Royal St George Yacht Club (Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin) from 11am, May 21st.

Members were encouraged to attend to discuss and shape the future of WITS, and for lunch afterwards. All currently paid up members were sent notification and invitation by post and e-mail.

After the EGM, the subcommittee compiled a report about the event, and submitted it to the Executive committee in time for its October 8th meeting. The Executive committee will view the report in the light of the Constitution, to gauge whether, in order to implement a new strategy, any rule changes of the WITS Constitution are required. The Executive may then table this as an item at the forthcoming AGM on November 19th.

ICT Champions Programme

We've heard media reports about falling numbers of secondary school students taking physics and chemistry and soaring failure rates in maths. To encourage students back into these areas of study, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Ireland has set up a Champions Programme where technology graduates, or Champions, talk to transition-year students about life in the high-tech industry. ICT Ireland, which was set up by IBEC and represents groups within the ICT sector in Ireland, hosted a number of workshops around the country this summer. These meetings gave potential Champions a chance to learn what exactly is involved in presenting a talk to 15-17 year olds.

At the Dublin workshop on August 10th, ICT Ireland Executive Hannah Grene and the then STEPS Project Manager Ita McGuigan gave practical pointers about capturing the students' attention, driving home the importance of enthusiasm about the subject and relating technology back to everyday life. The mobile phone, ubiquitous in many classrooms, was one example of technology in action that could pique a teenager's interest!

Sixty schools have signed up to take part by hosting talks from a pool of 80 Champions in this first term, which is a start, according to ICT Ireland Director Kathryn Raleigh. She notes that the ICT Champions initiative, which had its official launch at Hewlett Packard in Kildare on October 5th, is a long-term programme. They hope it will make high-tech subjects, courses and careers more appealing to students. At WITS we are delighted to officially support the ICT Champions Programme. If you would like more information about the initiative, please see the website www.ictireland.ie and look under Information Centre, or contact Hannah Grene at Hannah.grene@ictireland.com.

Join us for lunch

This autumn WITS has started a regular monthly networking lunch for members and would-be members. The aim is to create regular informal ways for members to meet, stay in touch and network.

We do hope you can join us. And feel free to bring friends and colleagues who might be interested in joining WITS.

The lunches take place at 12.45-2pm on the last Thursday of each month, in the National Library of Ireland coffee shop, Kildare St, Dublin 2.

Members outside of Dublin city are of course most welcome to join us if they are in town, and better still, if they would like to start something similar in their own area, they should contact the committee at wits@iol.ie.

Dates: Thursday 27th October and 24th November.
Time: 12.45-2pm
Venue: NLI, Kildare St

Mary Mulvihill

The Inaugural WITS Lunch

The first WITS Lunch was held in the beautiful building that is the National Library of Ireland on Kildare Street (I parked in the Dawson car park). The number was small but we enjoyed delights such as Spanish omelette, quiche, baked potato, and an array of salads (the coffee was good too). The conversation was the perfect complement to the food. We look forward to welcoming more members to the next occasion. Hope to see you there...

Aileen McGrath



The Future Is Now – IWD Event

It was standing room only at the Digital Depot for a special International Women's Day gathering. The morning of celebration, networking and debate explored how technology affects society and our everyday lives, and celebrated women's pioneering contributions, both in the past, and in the new digital media . . . Everything from entrepreneurial women engineers, to questions of technology and marginalised groups.

Guest speaker was Minister Frank Fahey (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), who launched the event. TCD's vice-Provost and dean of engineering, Prof. Jane Grimson gave a spirited account of women's contributions to engineering down the decades, while architect Sue Weldon, of Douglas Wallace reflected on how new technologies impinge on people and communities.

Women were the backbone of Ireland's Tiger success, Minister Fahey told the audience, and "the reason we are having this celebration is there was a 50% increase in the number of women in employment over the last 10 years, highly talented women who joined the workforce when demand arose."

Yet their contribution was largely unacknowledged, and there remained issues of equality, childcare and inclusiveness. Childcare places were scarce, he said, and too expensive, and we have yet to achieve at least 40% female participation across State boards.

In a plea for a more inclusive society, the Minister said that "the women who have most impressed me are Traveller women. They have overcome tremendous adversity, and are not given a chance. If we are to have an all-inclusive society, then we must bring groups such as Traveller women into our hearts."

Traditionally, women are under-represented in engineering, yet many women have made a tremendous impact, Prof Jane Grimson told the meeting. Marie Curie made important contributions to steel manufacture, Englishwoman Catherine Parsons founded an engineering firm employing women in the late 1800s, and Admiral Grace Hopper of the US Navy was a pioneering software engineer. Prof Grimson reminded listeners that society often overestimates technology's short-term impact, and underestimates its long-term impact, citing the example of the printing press, which revolutionised society, politics and religion.

Architect Sue Weldon reflected on the all pervasiveness of modern technologies - - would you like to text your fridge? - - and the paradoxes they create. The Internet, for instance, can destroy existing social communities, but also build new online communities; digital technologies mean that half the world can be accessible anytime, anywhere, while the other half still has no electricity. The future may be now, Weldon said, but only a few people can afford it.

Online grocery shopping was, she suggested, ideal for old age pensioners, but many of them do not have Internet access. So, perhaps we need to provide internet services at retirement homes, just as in other social spaces: at airports to facilitate time-starved travellers, for instance; or the online pods in banks and shops that let customers view all products, not just those currently in stock. In this way, new digital technologies can affect how buildings are designed and used. Finally, Weldon referred to the '50:50 Programme', a new voluntary UK scheme where architectural practices strive to employ 50% men and 50% women.



Jane Grimson and Frank Fahey share a joke

A building's life-cycle, and linking the national spatial development plan with planning for information networks, were some of the issues raised in the thought-provoking discussion that followed the presentations. A recurrent theme was access and technology elites: how to feminise technology, for instance, and how to generate appropriate technologies for developing countries, instead of expecting they will want or be able to adopt technologies devised for Western societies.

The celebration - dare we say, party! - marked the 91st International Women's Day. It was co-hosted by Women in Technology and Science (WITS), Computer Staff Recruitment (CSR) and the Digital Media Forum.

Mary Mulvihill

WITS would like to thank Sadhbh McCarthy who organised the IWD event

WITS Bits

WITS committee member Miriam Lee was elected Vice President of the International Federation of Translators (www.fit-ift.org) at FIT Congress in Tampere, Finland. This is her second 3-year term on FIT Council, which draws its members from all over the world. The current term runs until August 2008 when the FIT Congress takes place in Shanghai, hosted by TAC, The Chinese Association of Translators.

WITS chairperson Ena Prosser presented a DIT lecture to Summer Graduate Students on the issues facing scientists around gender. About 20 people attended the lecture, including Chinese, Polish and Spanish undergraduates, and joined in a wide-ranging discussion. The lecture was part of an SFI-sponsored summer research project for undergraduates.

WITS was at...

WITS committee member Claire O'Connell attended the unveiling of a plaque at 9 Belgrave Road in Rathmines to commemorate physician and feminist Dr Kathleen Lynn, who lived there from 1903 until her death in 1955. Dublin's Lord Mayor Catherine Byrne unveiled the Dublin City Council plaque on the 1st of October. A revolutionary in many ways, Lynn was Chief Medical Officer to James Connolly's Citizen Army, commanded the City Hall Garrison in the 1916 Rising and played an active role in politics during the tumultuous Treaty years. She also campaigned tirelessly for public health, co-founding Ireland's first hospital for infants, opening the first Montessori hospital ward with educational facilities for children and pioneering the use of the BCG vaccine to combat tuberculosis in Ireland.



Plaque commemorating Dr Kathleen Lynn