

WITS

women in technology
and science

WITS UPDATE

SPRING 2004

WITS AGM 2003

November 15, 2003 - The WITS AGM took place at Chief O'Neills Hotel in Smithfield Village, Dublin. The WITS executive gave presentations on progress made throughout the year including The Talent Bank Project, The Role Model Project, WITS membership, both individual & corporate, and external liaisons. The WITS members were also given the opportunity to vote on whether to allow men into the WITS membership. It was voted in favour of allowing male membership into WITS and allowing men to serve on the executive committee. The main aim of WITS has not changed and all men who join WITS will be supporting the aims of WITS: The promotion of women in science, engineering, and technology.

WITS will sorely miss the input of members leaving the committee this year, but welcomes the new faces.

Leaving the Executive Committee: Caitriona Lambert - Caitriona will continue her involvement in the Role Model Project and is still actively committed to promoting both the project & WITS. Bernie Manning and Ciara Egan have also left the executive committee.

The New Executive Committee for 2004:

Eucharia Meehan

Lisa Martinez

Elaine Harris (Secretary)

Geraldine Cahillane (Treasurer)

Aoife McGovern

Ruth McMahan

Ita White

Sally Cudmore

Francis Buggy

Ena Prosser

There will be no chairperson or vice-chairperson for 2004, however, this position

will be rotated amongst the executive for the purposes of chairing each committee meeting.

After the AGM, WITS members met for a light lunch at Chief O'Neills to catch up with old friends and meet new members.

A hugely enjoyable wine tasting event, sponsored by www.thewineroom.ie, was held before the evening dinner for WITS members. Leslie Williams gave a tutored tasting of select wines from South Africa and went through the methodology behind evaluating wines to include sight, smell, and taste.

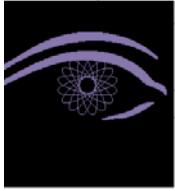
Following the wine tasting, the annual dinner was held at Kelly & Pings in Smithfield Village where both old and new WITS acquaintances met to enjoy a tasty dinner and lively chat!

WITS CHRISTMAS EVENT

December 11, 2003 - Dr. Gill Samuels CBE, was invited by WITS to attend a forum on *Getting the balance right in Irish SET*, and to give a public lecture in Trinity College that evening. She is Senior Director, Science Policy and Scientific affairs, Europe, at



Pfizer Global R&D. Gill is a physiologist and neuropharmacologist by training and has previously contributed to the discovery of several new medicines, now marketed. Her experience ranges from drug discovery to dealing with organizations at the highest level on science policy issues internationally, as well as in Britain. She is particularly concerned with enabling women to pursue high level scientific careers as evidenced by her role in the November 2002 *SET Fair* report commissioned by the British Government, which addressed the glass ceiling in particular, together with women's advancement more generally through a



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scientific education and career. Gill Samuels was awarded the CBE for services to the Bioscience and Pharmaceutical industries in 2002.

Forum

The high-powered facilitated forum, "*Getting the balance right in Irish Science, Engineering and Technology*" was held on the afternoon of December 11th in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, and was attended by 40 individuals, encompassing senior Irish SET policymakers and stakeholders. They heard about the British experience from Dr. Samuels and worked to identify and prioritise appropriate initiatives for Ireland. The forum was chaired by Mr. Brian Trench, Head of School of Communications, DCU. A shortlist of initiatives was presented to the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment, Mary Harney, at a separate meeting later on the same day.

This event was hosted by WITS and supported by the British Council, Enterprise Ireland Biotechnology Directorate, Higher Education Authority (HEA), and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI).

Public Lecture

Dr. Samuels gave a public lecture at Trinity College, Dublin on the evening of December 11th entitled "*Where Life and Death Intersect: Can science keep pace with disease and demographic change?*"

In this insightful lecture Gill addressed the impact of killer diseases such as the plague and cholera, and focused much of the talk on HIV. She pointed out that World War II was the first time that there were fewer deaths resulting from disease than from combat. This was largely due to the availability of penicillin, which was manufactured in bulk by Pfizer, supplying 90% of the antibiotic.

The plague of our times is HIV, with 40 million people infected with the virus. It is already far worse in terms of its impact than the Black Death during the Middle Ages. The HIV pandemic is still in its early stages, and if current trends continue is not likely to peak until 2050 to 2060. It is the 4th biggest killer globally, after Ischaemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, and acute lower respiratory infections.

Current therapies are successful in slowing disease but side effects and rapidly emerging drug resistance are major concerns. There is continued difficulty in developing a vaccine due to the virus's rate of spontaneous mutation, but this is seen as the way forward in managing the disease. HIV left to run its natural course will cause devastation on an unprecedented scale.

Discussions after the talk were spirited and raised the role of the multinational pharmaceuticals in contributing to the control and eradication of the disease.

Ann Westby- remembered

Ann Westby passed away on December 20th after a short illness. Ann had taken up the position of CEO with the Food and Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) 3 months previously. Prior to that Ann had a successful career in Nestle Ireland where she was Technical and Corporate Affairs manager. Ann was well known in the food industry as a result of her wide-ranging career which included food technology, quality management, product development, liaison with inspectorates and product development. She was also fellow, president and chair of numerous affiliates and working groups. On joining the FSAI, she had visionary plans to improve food safety, and to ensure that this remained top of the agenda with consumers, industry and government. Ann Westby will be greatly missed. WITS expresses its sympathy to her family and friends.



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British Association for the Advancement of Science and WITS

WITS has been asked to host an event at the British Association Festival of Science in Trinity College in 2005. This is one of the UK's biggest and most prestigious science festivals. It attracts 400 of the best scientists and science communicators from home and abroad who reveal the latest developments in research to a general audience. WITS is currently putting together an agenda, all suggestions are welcome!

FAS OPPORTUNITY DAY 2004

January 16-19 2004, Croke Park Exhibition Centre - WITS in collaboration with ICT-Ireland, WITI, and IBM gave presentations on careers in science, engineering & technology at the FAS Opportunity Day. Both Caitriona Lambert & Aoife McGovern spoke on behalf of WITS about their careers as an engineer and scientist. The sessions went very well and prompted interested young women, girls, and even their mothers to find out more from Caitriona & Aoife after the presentations. WITS and WITI also look upon this joint effort as the start of collaboration around such initiatives.

Madeleine Jacobs has been appointed as the new Executive Director of the American Chemical Society. As many of you may recall, Madeleine Jacobs, then Editor-in-Chief for the American Chemical Society's *Chemical News and Engineering*, performed the commemorative plaque unveiling in honour of Dame Kathleen Lonsdale in Newbridge, County Kildare on April 29th, 2003. Madeleine

then gave an inspirational evening talk on "Ten Lessons from a Lifetime of Communicating Chemistry" to WITS and friend of WITS members.



WITS is pleased to hear that Madeleine has been appointed as the new Executive Director of the American Chemical Society, the world's largest scientific society. Madeleine, a trained chemist and journalist, is well connected in both the scientific & chemical communities at all levels, including industry, academia, and government policy. She is known and sought for her dynamic and inspirational public speaking on issues ranging from gender and ethnic equality in science to challenges facing chemists in a global environment.

Interested readers can find out more about Madeleine at <http://www.chemistry.org> on their member central section.

WANTED! - Articles of Interest for future WITS updates. Have any interesting articles or newsworthy items you wish to share? If yes, please contact Ruth McMahan at Ruth.McMahan@tcd.ie