



WITS Membership 2006

WITS membership is open to women and men throughout Ireland who work, have worked or are working in any area of science, engineering or technology.

Please tick:

- a) New Member
- b) Renewal for 2006
- c) Corporate member yes/no

Membership fees: Individual €50
Concessions €20
(retired, unemployed and student members)

Name (and title if you like)

Job title/ company / profession

Do you want information send to home or work address?

Home Address

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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:_____

WITS are interested in hearing form members with training skills:
Training Skills (if any):_____

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

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WITS celebrate International Women's Day

WITS marked International Women's Day (8th March) with a lunchtime gathering of women representing business, science, media, public service and academia at the Digital Exchange. The three hours of celebration, networking and discussion focused on the importance of communication - *Women in decision making, communicating the message, to get what you want.*

Guest speaker was Minister Frank Fahey (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform) who launched the event. Other speakers on the panel included Aoibhinn Ni Shuilleabhain, Physicist & the current Rose of Tralee, Eileen Dunne, Owner, Dunne & Crescenzi Restaurants, Brid Carter, Director, Local Government Computer Services Board, Mary Kelly, Director, Environmental Protection Agency, and Natasha Fennell, Director, Stillwater Communications.

The Chair and Discussion Moderator for the session was Karen Coleman, Broadcaster and Journalist with Newstalk 106.

Minister Fahey got proceedings underway with a speech that addressed specifically the theme of this year's event. In his opening remarks he congratulated WITS for once again taking the lead in hosting an International Women's Day event which promoted open discussion and engagement on areas directly effecting women, particularly women in the workplace.

He urged women to put themselves forward as much as possible for senior positions within their organisations and made the point that it may be time for an over-arching women's organisations under which WITS and other groups could come together to push their interests forward.

The Minister went on to discuss the benefits to individual organisations and the economy overall where positive work practices encourage the recruitment and retention of women.

As an example he commended the television station TG4 for its record in the promotion of women and that it had performed better in this area than the national broadcaster RTE.

In summarising the Minister again encouraged women to 'put themselves forward' and communicate the message that there are talented, able women ready to take their place as leaders, in senior management and on boards.

Dr Ena Prosser, former Chairperson of WITS, reminded the Minister of the Talent Bank a reference directory of over 150 highly qualified women who are available to actively participate at the highest level of policy making on Boards of State agencies and other decision making bodies. It was now time to start 'naming and shaming' all government and state agencies that have few women on them. Suggesting now was an opportune time to study the various public agencies to ascertain the impact to the Talent Bank. In response the Minister agreed with Ena and stated that his Department would make funding available for such a study.

Karen Coleman, through specific questions to the panel and an open mike policy from the floor, elicited a lively debate and



Minister Frank Fahey addresses the WITS IWD event as Natasha Fennell, Mary Kelly and Aoibhinn Ni Shuilleabhain look on.

discussion. An interesting recurring theme was whether women should change the way they approach work or whether we should focus on lobbying to change the ways in which companies facilitate a work-life balance.

Both panellists from the Public Sector, Brid Carter & Mary Kelly, pointed out that within their organisations they have very good parental leave policies, so it's not all bad news.

Still, many other contributors drew attention to the lack of childcare facilities and a culture of 'presenteeism' in the private sector being an obstacle to women reaching the upper echelons. Another particularly interesting comment from the floor – was the way in which other carer situations (e.g. those with elderly parents) were excluded from the work life balance debate as this was seen as primarily the childcare issue.

It was perhaps no surprise that although the theme of the event was centred around 'communication', the overall discussion inevitably returned to the difficulties encountered by working mothers

The Minister, who stayed for the full discussion, intervened at the end to thank WITS for facilitating such a useful debate and extended an invitation to WITS to meet with him for a follow-up session.

The day of celebration - which included some delectable 'prosecco and crostini' - was reluctantly brought to a close by the hostess for the event Sadhbh McCarthy, European Policy & Programmes Advisor and closing remarks from our chairperson, Aileen McGrath.

Margaret Finlay
Sadhbh McCarthy

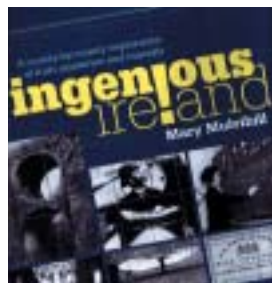
Mary Mulvihill wins heritage award

WITS founder and active member Mary Mulvihill recently won a prestigious award for her 2002 book *Ingenious Ireland* and for promoting a greater public awareness of Ireland's rich 'working' heritage.

The Industrial Heritage Association of Ireland (IHAI) presented the awards to people who have campaigned to recognise and conserve Ireland's 'working' and industrial heritage.

The awards marked the tenth

anniversary of the association being set up to promote greater public awareness of Ireland's industrial heritage



Mary's book *Ingenious Ireland* is a county-by-county tour of the country's industrial and scientific heritage.

It was the inspiration for an educational website to bring science and history alive for schoolchildren, www.ingeniousirelandonline.com.

WITS would like to congratulate Mary on her achievement.

WITS and TREO going in the right direction

In February, WITS committee member Claire O'Connell was invited to give a presentation about WITS to TREO, an organisation of third-level outreach and education officers in Ireland.

On the go for about two years, TREO is a relatively new organisation, so the committee members were interested to see how WITS has built itself up over the last decade and a half.

At the presentation in Dublin City University, they greatly admired the amount of work and the results that WITS has achieved - the Talent Bank was a case of particular interest - and they are keen to maintain links between the two organisations.

Individual outreach officers offered to raise the profile of WITS among young students and researchers at their institutes and the door is open for future collaborations.

The talk was also attended by senior research staff from DCU, who expressed their interest in WITS activities.

Girls' Education in Developing Countries: where do science and technology come in?

Eileen Kane

Good question. Women in technology and science are rightly concerned that their hard-won progress in Western societies be extended to girls and women in less fortunate countries.

And right now, somewhere in Africa, or somewhere in South Asia, there's a little girl who may be greatest scientific mind of the 21st century. Two hundred years from now, her name may be on par with Aristotle, Einstein, Curie, Galileo or Newton.

But will it? Not if she never gets into school to begin with. And that's the fundamental problem that we have to address first: getting girls in developing countries into primary school at all, and once in, keeping them there.

We know that around the world, nearly 120 million children are out of school. Sixty percent of them are girls. Close to 90% of the girls who are out of school are in Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia.

Even the girls who have managed to get into school are more likely to drop out than boys. Research shows that if you don't complete five grades of school, in later life you will lose everything you have learned, even the ability to read. And true enough, two-thirds of the one billion adults in the world who can't read today are women.

Why aren't girls in school? This is what I've been working on for the past fifteen years, using an approach called "participatory research", which helps local people, including non-literate people, to do their own research on the issues. It works: people do creditable studies that enable them to create action plans, help themselves, and when needed, get locally-relevant assistance from international development agencies.

My research and that of many others shows that the single biggest factor is direct costs: tuition, uniforms, books and materials, exam fees, and many others: typically, one child's school costs in Tanzania still take a fifth of the family's income, even after "free education" was introduced in 2001. If she goes on to secondary school, it will take four-fifths.

A family also incurs "opportunity costs" if a girl attends school: girls in developing countries work more hours than boys; in fact, in Zambia, research shows they even work more hours than adult men. The loss of their labour to the family, as opposed to boys' labour, is much more serious, and if the girls combine work and school, their school performance is affected (Blackden and Bhanu 1999).

Girls generally leave their birth families at marriage: their virginity, obedience and work value are critical, and school is a danger to all of those. Parents rightly fear for girls physical security in school: in Zimbabwe, over 80% of 200 school sexual abuse cases, mostly rape and intercourse, involved trained male teachers.

Distance from school is another problem: some girls have only a tiny window for education: in lowland Eritrea, for example, if schools are far away, children aren't sent until age seven or eight, and the girls might then be withdrawn at age ten or eleven to marry. In all of these situations, girls are unlikely to perform well, academically, and recent studies show that in many developing countries, girls perform worse on exams in almost all subjects.

So, all in all, when funds are scarce, some parents think boys are a better educational investment.

And today, we have an additional obstacle: Sub-Saharan Africa is home to an estimated 12.3 million children who have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. Girls then bear the brunt of caring for siblings; even worse, in parts of Africa and the Caribbean, the rate of HIV/AIDS among teen-aged girls is four to seven times higher than that of boys. Why educate girls? In 1992, Larry Summers, then Chief Economist of the

World Bank, and until recently President of Harvard, said, "Educating girls yields a higher rate of return than any other investment in the developing world."

Since then, research has shown, over and over, that girls' education increases a nation's economic growth; reduces child mortality and malnutrition; brings improved health to women and those they care for; delays the age of first marriage; lowers fertility rates; increases women's domestic leverage and political participation in the larger society; improves functioning in the wage labor force; and enhances family economic strategies.

Even when various studies define these effects differently, the findings hold true (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen 2002). Also, each of these benefits could be indeed be achieved by other interventions, but only girls' education achieves them all (Population Council 2001).

In 2001, 189 countries adopted eight Millennium Development Goals, including the achievement of universal primary education by 2015, and gender equality primary and secondary education by 2005, and no later than 2015.



Research shows that the goal of gender equality is critical: simply having a gender gap has serious national consequences. If the gaps were to be eliminated, the number of births per woman in developing countries would be reduced by 0.6. Child mortality would also be reduced: one more year of female education reduces child mortality by 18.1 per thousand. So, for example, if Mali were to eliminate its gender gap in 2005, 35,000 children a year would be saved; in India, 435,000 (Abu Ghaida and Klasen 2002.)

Will the Goals be met? At the current rate of progress, all the international agencies agree: no. In fact, if the current rates of progress for completion are anything to go by, universal primary completion cannot be reached until well beyond 2050. A big part of the reason is girls:

they and other disadvantaged children will be the last to be included and the hardest to reach. But the disadvantaged includes some boys too; most schools in developing countries were designed with a student in mind, and that student is a boy. So the boys who are still out of school, despite this, are a tough group to reach, but they, too, must be enrolled.

Recently, researchers have looked at the effects of girls education from yet another angle: what happens if countries don't improve girls' participation in education? The stark statement that gender inequality in education is bad for economic growth. Dollar and Gatti (1999) highlights the issue: research shows that the national economic and social costs of not educating girls and of not achieving gender parity in education are high; and higher, in fact, for Africa than for any other region. Some of the negative consequences will be evident by 2005, and will increase thereafter. (Abu Ghaida and Klasen 2002).

In addition, four of the other Millennium Development Goals' improvements in child mortality, maternal health, reduction of disease including HIV/AIDS, and environmental stability will not be met or will be severely hindered without progress in girls' education.

Resources are scarce and mistakes are going to be costly. What works to get and keep girls in school? In the next issue, we'll look at some strategies, and in particular, what can be done to get more girls to study science and technology.

Join us for lunch

If you haven't already come along to our monthly informal lunches, now is a good time to start. No need to book, just join us at the cafe in the National Library on Kildare Street in Dublin at 12.45pm on the last Thursday of each month.

It's an informal get-together that lets members catch up and bring along friends who may have an interest in WITS activities. If you are not based in Dublin, why not consider setting up a similar event in your area? Let us know at wits@iol.ie

The next lunch will be on Thursday June 29th.

Stars Shell and Bluebells

Due to frequent requests for copies, WITS plans to revise and reissue the book *Stars, Shells and Bluebells*.

Celebrating the lives and achievements of a selection of women who made historic contributions to science in Ireland in bygone centuries, WITS published the first edition in 1997.

That edition, which is now out of print, featured biographies of 15 inspiring women with Irish connections, including naturalists, astronomers and even a pioneering aviator.

A sub-committee has now been set up to produce a new, revised and expanded edition. Many thanks to all who have provided suggestions of women to be profiled.

AGM

Last November's AGM at the Mont Clare Hotel in Dublin was well attended, with around 40 members present, many of whom also enjoyed a tour of the National Museum after the meeting.

Long-standing and active member Jane Hanly retired from the committee and was presented with a token of WITS' appreciation for her many years of hard work and enthusiasm for the organisation.

The AGM for 2006 will be held on November 18th.

WITS at the International Women's Day event



Speakers at the WITS IWD event in the Digital Hub on March 8th (see front page)

Back row, left to right: Natasha Fennell; Frank Fahey; Aoibhinn Ni Shuilleabhain; Mary Kelly.

Front row, left to right: Brid Carter, Karen Coleman, Eileen Dunne.

References

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