

NO MORE EXCUSES!

Why we need
to support
excellent Women
in Academia



Academia Net 

An initiative of the
Robert Bosch **Stiftung**
in cooperation with
Spektrum and **nature**
der Wissenschaft

BREAKING THE MOLD

How to take full advantage of the talent pool of excellent women researchers

Women are seriously underrepresented in key positions within the scientific world. Throughout the EU only 21% of professorships with the highest endowments are held by women; in some EU countries this proportion is even lower. It is the aim of AcademiaNet to increase the number of women in leadership positions in science. Created by the Robert Bosch Foundation and Spektrum der Wissenschaft, the excellence database provides profiles of outstanding women academics. Reputable science and research organizations vouch for their outstanding qualifications. A careful selection process on the basis of strict qualification criteria ensures that only the best researchers are nominated for and represented on AcademiaNet. Over the last years, AcademiaNet has grown considerably. Today, the site features more than 2,500 profiles of women researchers across disciplines from all over Europe, with numbers set to increase. So, if you are a decision maker from academia or industry searching for suitable candidates when appointing leadership positions and committees, or if you are looking for an interview partner or speaker, you can quickly locate recognized women experts on Academia-Net.org.

www.academia-net.org

"Science means relevance."

Interview with Anne Glover, Vice-Principal External Affairs & Dean for Europe, University of Aberdeen, Former Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission

Teachers and lecturers influence students' thinking in science. How big an effect do they really have?

Naturally, you are learning a lot from lecturers and teachers. They are experienced and are the first real scientists you meet. Not just people in books. The classical role models like Marie Curie, etc., are very important too, but they seem very removed. Whereas when you are actually at university and you meet lecturers, then the scientists feel very human: for example, they often have to run off to get the kids or they talk about a party they went to or their holiday plans. They are just normal people and that is what science is about – normal people that do great science.

There seems to have been a growing skepticism towards science in the last couple years. What can the individual scientist do about that?

As scientists, we enjoy a high level of trust. We should regard that as something that is important and that we continuously have to work at. We need to deserve people's trust. That means, when we speak about our research, we must be honest about what we know and what we don't know. We need to be clear when something is a consensus view or when something is still at the development stage. As scientists, we are often measured on



impact and that can easily lead to the trap of overstating the importance of our findings. This is dangerous, as we then lose the trust people have in us. We should value that trust and ensure that we keep it by staying honest and true to our findings.

Looking back at your career as a scientist, which advice would you

give to young scientists, especially young women, nowadays?

Don't try and do everything on your own. It's a sign of strength to ask for advice or opinions, or to discuss things with people. Don't always choose someone who seems to be like you and do what you are doing. I, for example, wouldn't just speak to another female molecular

biologist. I would, for example, speak with a male engineer. Or somebody who works in the industry. Then you get a real breadth of opinions and often different ways of thinking. Our worst enemy is getting into a narrow way of thinking and stopping to look at different possibilities. Simply: talk to different people and appreciate different approaches to what you do. That's really valuable.

"... so they can have families and still become scientists."

Interview with Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, President of the European Research Council

There still are only few women in science. Who needs to make changes so that we will see more women scientists?

Usually these kinds of global problems need global solutions. The solution is not going to come from one part of society but from it as a whole. We need better overall awareness of these problems in science. A first step would be to make gender balance a higher priority.

A lot of institutions already have standards and explicit goals to improve the situation of women in science. However, this must not be an abstract effort but one translated into practical measures such as taking into account the role of women scientists as mothers, acknowledging that taking care of children is often shared among parents, and realizing that better organized childcare is key for work/life balance. It will improve the situation for men and women with children. We need to accelerate this process, which is slow by nature, but we are moving in the right direction, I think. Yet more efforts need to be made towards dealing with the problem and we need to take every opportunity to progress on that.

Which aspects of AcademiaNet do you value most?

Altogether AcademiaNet creates a sense of community. A community of female scientists of really high quality. Any effort in such a direction is always welcome. Of course, AcademiaNet has a high ambition by being

pro-active for women, but such an effort is currently needed. We don't want to miss out on all the great female talent. A head count of women would be the wrong approach, but this talent should be given a real opportunity. If there are any obstacles preventing that, we need to remove them. I think this is where AcademiaNet helps because it recognizes female scientists for what they have achieved.

What advice can you give to young scientists?

Maybe primarily three things. First, it is very important that you try to come up with a vision of what you really want to do in your field. Don't just jump from one field to another, but create your own specialty. Of course, you will still have to try out a few things, but, as the possibilities are different nowadays compared to when I started my career, one thing remains the same: you have to come up with your own ideas early on.

The second thing is: you should take advantage of all possibilities to meet all the people you can have access to, in particular those in leading positions, use that. Not because they will help you directly, but because you can learn a lot from them.

And, last but not least, take every possibility and opportunity to learn new things, be exposed to new environments and to new people.



ERC communication unit

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