

**Consultation Paper
For Successor to
Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation**

Response from

Women in Technology and Science WITS

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Reviewing the consultation paper

The consultation paper aims to set the agenda for science, technology and innovation by articulating 'a vision for Ireland's research and innovation system and identify its defining characteristics' (Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation, 2015, p3).

Gender is a defining characteristic of Ireland's research and innovation system. The paper has two mentions of gender:

- p27 Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research
- p70 How can gender equality in publicly funded research activity be further enhanced?

On page 27 the report notes:

Ireland has a comprehensive employment equality legislation framework. A new SFI Advance Fellowship funding initiative assists female researchers to return to research. SFI has set performance targets for increasing women in research. Universities have gender balanced recruitment committees. (Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation, 2015, p27).

This is wholly inadequate. The report fails to note that women's participation in science, technology and innovation is low (EU Commission, 2015), that senior academics are overwhelmingly male (HEA, 2014) and that women and men participate at different rates in research at all levels (Forfás, 2013).

The pipeline issue of women in science and technology in Ireland is serious; it runs through undergraduate years to PhD level and postdoctoral researcher. While many interventions are possible at researcher stage which could have an impact, more deep-rooted interventions are essential. Without aggressive early intervention in terms of female participation and performance in STEM, later career intervention can only make a modest long-term impact.

The report also fails to note let alone endorse current actions to improve the situation such as the Irish Research Council's *Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2020* (2013), the Higher Education Authority's pilot Athena Swan project (Silicon Republic, 2015a) and the Aurora the women only leadership development programme (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, nd). The impact of Athena Swan is such that having an Athena Swan award at institution or department level is now often a requirement to access UK research council funding.

Full consideration of the systemic gender issues (including unconscious bias) in science, technology and innovation is required if the revised strategy is to identify 'key policy interventions required to achieve . . . strategic goals/targets' (Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation, 2015, p3) and to support open access to the Irish research environment. In its absence we will continue to need initiatives such *Women Invent Tomorrow* (Silicon Republic, 2015b) and we



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will continue to have major research centres founded by men only (The Insight Centre for Data Analytics, 2015).

WITS calls on the Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation to revise the consultation paper and to set out systemic actions to enable open access to science, technology and innovation for all. Gender equality in publicly funded research can be enhanced by adequate reporting of data in terms of gender, by requiring female participation along the lines of that required for state boards and by identifying the pervasive unconscious bias about science, technology and innovation.

About WITS

Women in Technology and Science (WITS) is an independent, voluntary membership organisation set up in November 1990 to actively promote women in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). We are 25 years old this year 2015.

Our VISION is a world where women have the freedom to reach their full potential through informed choices.

Our MISSION is people in STEM supporting women in STEM to reach their full potential through informed choices.

Our VALUES are fair play and sharing.

Projects have included a Talent Bank of expertise, return-to-work schemes, and 'role model' programmes for second-level school students. WITS is a strong advocate for celebrating the past and current successes of women in STEM through our books about historic Irish women scientists Stars, Shells and Bluebells (1997) and Lab Coats and Lace (2008) and our promotion of plaques for women scientists most recently Matilda Knowles at the Botanic Gardens (2014).

Full Membership is open to women and men from all areas of science and technology in Ireland. We have corporate members – including Silicon Republic, The Science Gallery and the ESB. Students can be affiliated members for free. Members range from the country's most senior scientists, technologists and academics to start-ups and students.

WITS was awarded the 2014 top role model for advocacy by Silicon Republic Women Invent Tomorrow campaign in June 2014.



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