Account on the Information Event in Berne, March 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2015

SNF, Plenum 21, Wildhainweg 21, 3001 Berne

The Information Event of the “Fix the leaky pipeline” program took place in the SNF premises in Berne on March 31\textsuperscript{st} 2015 and brought together female scientists at PhD and postdoc level from the ETH domain (ETHZ: 30, EPFL: 9, PSI: 6, EAWAG: 5, EMPA: 3, WSL: 3 other universities: 8). Among the participants, 34 were PhD students, 23 Postdocs and 7 other young scientists. Including the coaches & trainers, invited guests, the members of the Equal Opportunities Offices of all ETH-domain institutions & the program management team, almost 90 female scientists signed in for the event.

The project manager, Dr. Mihaela Falub gave a welcome message and a general description of the program and its agenda. Alexandra von Schack, project coordinator for the Suisse Romande then briefly presented the events taking place in Lausanne.

On behalf of the whole Working Group for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men from the ETH Domain, Dr. Farnaz Moser – Equal representative from EPFL and Dr. Christiane Löewe – Equal representative from EMPA, were kindly acknowledged for their long-term commitment and their valuable contributions to the continuous development of the program. Dr. Farnaz Moser is the Director- of the Science Outreach Department at EPFL, and Dr. Christiane Löwe is the Head of the Office for Gender Equality at the University of Zürich.
The coaches and trainers of the program then presented themselves and explained their course offerings and their coaching philosophy. The majority of them have been working for this program since its pilot phase, 2007-2008, namely Dr. Pamela Alean-Kirkpatrick, Dr. Monika Clausen, Prof. Marcel Goldschmid, Dr. Sarah Shephard and Dr. Lille Springall. Suzanne Matuschek and Sandra Bajus joined the program in 2013 and 2014, respectively and allowed the program to further expand its offer of courses.

Just before the lunch break Dr. Marijana Mionic, scientist at EPFL came to give a testimonial on her experience with the program.

After the lunch & networking break, which allowed the participants to mingle and to have a first contact with the coaches and trainers, Dr. Sarah Shephard moderated a panel discussion on “Academic Careers for women” with four guests representing almost all institutions of the ETH-Domain:

- Prof. Chiara Daraio, Full professor, ETHZ
- Dr. Nele Schuwirth Group leader, EAWAG
- Dr. Anna Hersperger, Group leader, WSL
- Dr. Claire Villevieille, Group Leader, Paul Scherrer Institute

All panel members described their career paths. For some, the road wasn’t always clear on which way to follow. They described the major turning points in their career paths, the choices and compromises they had to do as women scientists. Gaining international experience and expanding their networks worldwide is part of the game, but some gave in that it wasn’t always easy to leave their home country or to face the fact of becoming a group leader. All described their ways of dealing with their work-life balance: having to decide between full time work and family, knowing which opportunities to take and which ones to turn down and learning to negotiate and how to become a leader.
Dr. Sarah Shephard moderated the panel discussion in a very respectful and lively way, using flip charts to pin down important ideas and milestones of every role model. The participants seemed to highly appreciate the sometimes quite personal issues the panelists were ready to share with them, and a lot of hands were raised to share comments or ask questions. During their talks, the panel members gave the audience several advices:

- Be pro-active, seize the luck!
- Be a good decision-maker, trust your guts
- Find the passion you really want to do
- Find pillars outside of work and within
- Don’t be afraid to ask
- Don’t restrict yourself with prejudice you might hear or have
- Be visible!

An animated discussion followed and plenty of questions were addressed from the audience to the panelists, prolonging the event well in the afternoon, until everybody had to run off to catch their train to Zurich or Lausanne.

This information event provided a good start to the “Fix-the-leaky-pipeline” program, which is now in the last round of its 3rd edition. It gave all the participants an insight into what they can expect during the next year from the coaching groups and the courses, and what they will be able to learn from these. The role models also emphasized how grateful they would have been if such a program had been available to them at this critical juncture in their careers.

Alexandra von Schack
Program Fix the Leaky Pipeline
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