

Dawn Bonfield, Presidential Blog November 2014

At the end of November 2014 I took over as President of the Women's Engineering Society, so have decided that during my Presidency I will write a monthly blog as a record of my year, and as a way of letting you know what I and WES get up to, that I hope will be of interest and use.

So this is the first.

Prestige Lecture and Karen Burt Award Presentation

The month of October ended with the excellent Prestige lecture given by our Patron Professor Dame Ann Dowling to a packed audience of over 200 guests, where she spoke about her research work on the silent aircraft project and her challenges as the incoming President of the Royal Academy of Engineering. We also awarded the Karen Burt Award for best newly qualified chartered engineer to Elaine Greaney from Qinetiq on that night, for her inspiring work as a space systems engineer, so congratulations to her. Photos of the event can be seen on our [Flickr site](#). A big thank you to Estelle Barrois, WES Hon Secretary, for organising this event, to Professor Dowling for giving it, and to Professor Isobel Pollock, WES Fellow, for chairing the evening.

Tomorrow's Engineers Week

3rd November saw the launch of Tomorrow's Engineers Week, and this is a great week for getting some much needed media recognition of the engineering profession, our inspiring role models, exciting careers and new projects. I attended the launch of the week at the Shell Centre in London, and was intrigued to hear from Vince Cable that there had been a 'sharp rise' in young people who would consider careers in engineering as a result of Tomorrow's Engineers Week last year. On closer inspection of the survey results, however, this is an extremely dubious claim, and anybody wanting to have a look for themselves at the real results from the 'Attitudes to Engineering: Before and After Tomorrow's Engineers Week 2013 Survey' should do so here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engineering-skills-perkins-review>. Sober reading indeed! Dr Cable has picked out probably the ONLY positive outcome from the survey responses from approximately 18 pages of results, and these results just highlight the need for us to do more to reach parents who have such an influential role in the choice of the children's careers.

Tata Steel Reception

Again in early November, I attended the Tata Steel reception at the Science Museum. This was a fabulously extravagant event which totally impressed me with its variety of entertainments, all based around the work of the Tata group, but what struck me most about the evening was the lack of women at the event. You will see what I mean in the photos here. <http://www.tata.com/media/releasesinside/Inaugural-Tata-Reception-held-at-Londons-Science-Museum>. Still, an excellent evening though.

Imperial College and the Science Museum

I found myself at Imperial College before the start of the Tata event where I came across a poster on the engineering noticeboard encouraging STEM women to attend a careers and networking evening hosted by the banking and finance sector - clearly trying to attract women out of engineering and into finance. Needless to say I took the poster down (but don't worry – the event had already passed). The question is, what can we as an engineering community do to ensure that we are equally attractive to these young women engineering undergraduates to ensure that they come into engineering and not into the finance sector?

On to the Science Museum, where I visited the new Information Age gallery, and was more than slightly disappointed by the lack of women in the display. Not even Ada Lovelace was there, apparently because 'she is somewhere else in the museum' and because 'women from such privileged backgrounds are not necessarily good role models for young girls today'. We have to remember though that these women were the only ones who had the opportunity to work in these careers at that time. I am looking forward, however, to the new Engineer Your Future opening in December, which is a look at careers in engineering for students, and is part of the Government's Your Life Campaign. www.yourlife.org.uk

House of Lords visit

The following week's highlight was a lobbying visit to the House of Lords where a group of - shall we say - activists - went to lobby Baroness Neville Rolfe, in order to try to get some support for a media campaign to change the image of engineering. A laudable initiative, and one based on an excellent paper by Professor Kel Fidler which can be found here www.wes.org.uk/reports. This didn't go quite to plan, but nevertheless a rebranding of engineering is still something that we see as vitally important, and one which we will continue to lobby for. Later in the week, however,

I learnt more about the Royal Academy of Engineering's plans to do just this - thank you Rhys Morgan, Director of Engineering and Education, for the whistlestop run through - and I wait to find out more about this, and offer my services as a representative of the 'women's perspective' to their campaign.

100YOWIT

Also that week I attended the launch event of 100 Years of Women in Transport, an initiative that WES is a partner of. This is a year long campaign to raise the profile of women in transport, and is a great initiative that you will hear more about over the coming year, www.wes.org.uk/100yowit. Take a look at the excellent 100 year timeline on the website with many of the major achievements of women in transport listed, including the start of WES in 1919.

WISE Awards

On the Thursday of that same week (13 November) were the WISE awards, which was a great event with lots of people in attendance, and the photos can be seen here http://www.satureyes.com/wise_awards_2014. I attended as a guest of Thales and sat at a table of Dawns - next to Dawn Ohlson and Dawn Gilbert - so thanks to Thales for the invite, and well done to WISE for a great night. We were sad to miss out on being shortlisted for our efforts on National Women in Engineering Day, but maybe we will try again next year....

WES Student Conference

That weekend of 14-15 November was the two day WES student conference at Aston University, and what a great event this was! With over 110 students and almost 50 speakers, exhibitors, chairs and guests, this was a very well attended event, with lots of buzz. Great effort by current WES President Carol Marsh and Jan Peters as Chairs, and Rachel Mason as organiser, and thanks to all of our corporate sponsors, exhibitors, speakers and event partners BAE Systems, Selex ES and IET. We have booked it again for next November, so if you are interested in getting involved do let us know.

Matchtech Roundtable

On Tuesday 25 November I attended the round table discussion around the results of the Matchtech confidence index survey. Matchtech are the UK's number one engineering recruitment specialist and Company Member of WES, and we discussed issues surrounding engineering, skills, the economy, Ed Milliband's promise to create 400,000 more engineers - or is it jobs - and the issues around how to increase diversity. Great discussion, great guests, and overall a consensus of opinion that things are looking positive in the engineering sector.

WES AGM

Finally, the WES AGM took place on 29 November and this saw the ratification of the new governance structure to reduce the number of council members to a more manageable 9 members, and the election of new council members and trustees. This was a relatively small event which took place at the IET in Birmingham, but we had a very interesting discussion and a good networking event. You can see further details of the Carol Marsh's presidential overview of the year, and my thoughts for the coming year here www.wes.org.uk/agm2014.

Other things that I haven't had time to mention in detail are the Diversity Leadership Group meeting on work experience placements for school students; the excellent everywoman Advanced Manufacturing career progression workshop; the great meeting with the construction consultancy company WYG; the Pilotlight meeting on good governance; the careers event for students at Parmiters School in Watford; and the Skills4Stem 'Women in the Built Environment Leadership event' at RIBA.

I look forward to my year as President, and please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any suggestions or comments. president@wes.org.uk