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**Going Diverse: Innovative Answers to Future Challenges. International Conference on Gender and Diversity in Science, Technology and Business  
RWTH Aachen University, 29-30 October 2009**  
<http://www.idealeague.org/tandemplus/conference>

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**REVIEW**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Going Diverse Conference was the final event of a project, [TANDEMplusIDEA](#), which aims to support and encourage female post-docs in science and technology through mentoring. The project was funded by the EU and conducted by the IDEA League universities (Imperial College London, ETH Zurich, TU Delft and RWTH Aachen University). The aim of the conference was twofold: to present the results of the project; and to discuss the wider issues of women in science and technology as part of organisational development and diversity management in academia and industry.

On the first day of the conference, there were welcome speeches from RWTH Aachen University, the Ministry of Innovation, Science, Research and Technology of North Rhine-Westphalia and the European Commission. Luisa Prista, from the European Commission, highlighted a call for proposals for [EU funding on Science and Society](#), with an emphasis on implementing change within human resources management in universities and on women in science covering issues such as transparent recruitment, mentoring, leadership and consortia of sharing good practice.



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The conference programme, including further details of the presentations is available [here](#).

## **DAY ONE**

The first keynote presentation of the conference was given by Professor Teresa Rees, Pro Vice Chancellor for Research at Cardiff University, who gave a lively and interesting talk about the issues of gender mainstreaming, particularly at senior levels in academia. There is a clear need for universities to truly diversify in order to continue to be innovative on the world stage, and Professor Rees talked about some of the issues that often implicitly inhibit women's participation, such as cultural factors and the "male bonding" that women can lose out on. She gave the example of her keen interest in rugby, an extremely popular sport in Wales, which she developed in order to participate in the small-talk about rugby at senior management meetings in the university. The importance for women of mentoring – both being a mentor and a mentee – was highlighted, and she encouraged women at all levels to become involved in mentoring. Finally, she called upon the European Commission to ensure that the gender dimension is embedded and mainstreamed across all of its projects.

Other keynotes were given by Jean-Christophe Bas from the [UN Alliance of Civilisations](#), about the importance of diversity on a very global scale, and by Professor Londa Schiebinger of Stanford University, about her research into dual-career couples in the USA. Londa's research highlighted the increasing prevalence of hiring academic couples in the USA to retain excellence and to promote diversity, with universities starting to adopt protocols and policies on how to handle couple recruitment. Londa's report, *Dual-Career Academic Couples: What Universities need to know* is available for [download](#).

The afternoon of the first day involved two sets of parallel sessions and another keynote. The first set of parallel sessions focused on:

- International mentoring.
- Equal opportunities in companies.
- Gender and diversity in academic careers.

Each session followed a similar format: presentation by two or three people and then a group discussion about the issues raised.

In the session on gender and diversity in academic careers, there was a mixture of the practical and theoretical: the University of Vechta presented research on implicit career theories of men and women, Aachen University presented research they had undertaken which found that female professorial staff were awarded much less resource (money and staff) than their male colleagues and there was a final presentation on gender research theory. The ensuing discussion was dominated by the implications for women professors from the research at Aachen University.

The second group of parallel sessions of the day focused on:

- Gender-equal Human Resources Development.
- Institutionalisation of gender equality in Higher Education.
- Diversity management within the context of organisational change.

The session on Gender-equal Human Resources involved the [Institute of Physics' Juno Project](#), Imperial College London Postdoc Development Centre and their [work with women postdocs](#) and a presentation from LMU Munich on [research of factors that impact the success of a formal mentoring programme for female scientists](#). It was an interesting session and there was much discussion of the issues raised by Imperial College around the specific work they did with female postdocs to improve their CVs, interview techniques, etc.

The final keynote of the first day was by Talke Schroedter of BASF about the company's Diversity Programme, which was launched in 2008. As a global company, BASF takes diversity issues seriously and has established a [diversity programme](#) to promote an inclusive culture across the whole organisation. They have created an ambassador network to promote diversity, poster campaigns, a training portal on their intranet and learning events for staff.

There were poster presentations from a range of universities and organisations, primarily involved in mentoring and networking, such as

- Plan Mentoring in Science at the University of Bremen  
<http://www.chancengleichheit.uni-bremen.de/seiten/themen/mentoring/mentoring.html>
- GAIA Ambassadors Network in Holland  
[www.vrouwen.net/gaia](http://www.vrouwen.net/gaia)
- European network of mentoring programmes promoting women in academia and research  
<http://www.eument-net.eu>

## **DAY TWO**

On the second day of the conference, two keynotes addressed diversity in very different ways, from the very theoretical challenge of looking at diversity in French business schools to the very practical. Iris Kornacker from McKinsey & Company highlighted the company's ['Women matter' research](#), which found that businesses who have higher proportions of women in their top management have better financial performance. She also emphasised the importance of supporting women into leadership positions through mentoring, networking, coaching and using role models.

There were, again, two sets of parallel sessions. The first sessions were on:

- Work-life balance in academia.
- Gender and diversity policies in academia.
- Diversity management in practice.

The session on Work-life balance in academia had presentations from the Institute of Employment Research and VU University Amsterdam, who outlined an online survey on career breaks that they had undertaken into administrators and academics in two technical universities in Europe. This presentation builds on research reported in the publication '[Women in science and technology: Creating sustainable careers](#)'. This report summarises the work of the second Women in Science and Technology working group (WiST2). There was also a presentation from Vechta University on theories of achieving optimum work-life balance. The session concluded with a very lively discussion on female role models, whether they were normal women or 'superwomen', and about how we measure success, particularly as it relates to women.

The final parallel sessions were on:

- Heterogeneous Cultures in organisations.
- Intercultural competence.
- The Conclusion of the TANDEMplusIDEA project, for the mentees of the project.

The session of Intercultural competence looked at the importance of universities adopting a new approach to diversity as they become increasingly international and have a much more diverse range of staff and students as a result. This was a joint session with [Alexia and Stephan Petersen from ASPECCCT](#) discussing the work they have undertaken with students from Aachen. The session was very theoretical and the absence of any specific examples or case studies made it less useful for the audience than if examples had been used.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Going Diverse conference was interesting, lively, and encouraged much debate particularly around female role models, how to achieve gender mainstreaming and the importance of women taking advantage of initiatives, such as mentoring, to encourage them into leadership positions. Presentations from the conference ranged from the very practical to the extremely theoretical. However, it was clear from discussion with our European colleagues that we are all facing similar challenges in encouraging more women into leadership positions in science and technology. Networking and learning events, such as this conference, help to share good practice and address common concerns. One final thought... The audience was predominantly female with very few male participants and speakers. If a future conference is planned and we are really aiming to address the challenges of diversity a more diverse audience would be a good move forward!

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The conference organisers are planning the publication of an anthology with selected conference articles this summer:

Leicht-Scholten, Carmen, Breuer, Elke, Callies, Nathalie and Wolfram, Andrea (eds.) (2010) *Going Diverse: Innovative Answers to Future Challenges. Gender and Diversity Perspectives in Science, Technology and Business*, Budrich UniPress.

Interested readers could contact the editors at either their university [department's email address](#) or the [project email address](#)