

cial support for the best places. Individual researchers or groups can apply for grants from Polish and foreign sources but they have to be ready to undergo a merit-based assessment of their track record and future potential. Those who are successful can find

similar conditions in Poland to those they have experienced at Western institutions. Most importantly, Poles working abroad must start to consider returning home; for who will push for changes in Polish science if we all stay away?



Marta Miaczynska

is head of the Laboratory of Cell Biology at the International Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology in Warsaw, Poland. She is an international senior fellow of the Wellcome Trust and an international scholar of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI).

ELSO's Career Development Committee

A Helping Hand

by Carol Featherstone and Margarete Heck

ELSO's Career Development Committee (CDC) is a group of around a dozen members at all stages on the scientific career ladder who are working together through ELSO to improve career opportunities for life scientists in Europe. The CDC organizes a range of activities at each ELSO congress and it has various ongoing projects running throughout the year.

The CDC was created very soon after the inauguration of ELSO and the committee members got together for the first time at the ELSO congress in 2000. It owes its inception very much to

the vision and determination of Italian cell biologist Daniela Corda, who brought together the first committee members under the guidance of Zena Werb, the chairperson of the Women in Cell Biology Committee of the American Society for Cell Biology.

The first committee included Mary Osborn and Nancy Lane, both respected senior scientists who were also centrally involved in Women in Science exercises in Europe and the UK – Osborn with the European Commission (EC)'s ETAN report

and Lane with the UK's Athena Project – so they naturally gave the CDC a strong interest in supporting women in science. However, the mixed-gender committee (there were two men, Robert Insall and Alex Pintzas, among the dozen-or-so original members) was united in its desire to gear its activities to the advancement of both women and men.

Due to its mix of junior and more senior scientists, during its early years the CDC was able to target its activities towards influencing science policy in

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Europe. In 2001, the CDC organized a letter-writing campaign to lobby Members of the European Parliament about the creation of a career development award in Framework Programme (FP)6, which contributed to the introduction of the Marie Curie 'Excellent Teams' award. Corda established a constructive dialogue with Raffaele Liberali, then Director of the EC's Marie Curie human resources programme. She helped to shape the Marie Curie activities in FP6 and has remained involved in the 'people' part of FP7 since her tenure on the CDC ended in 2004.

There is a natural turnover and renewal of the CDC's members, who join and leave the committee on a voluntary basis. Over the years, the balance has shifted towards a younger, more gender-balanced committee. The focus has also moved away from science policy and towards more activities that can directly help ELSO members and young researchers in general. The CDC has enlarged and consolidated the range of events it hosts at the ELSO congress, which include the ELSO Early Career Award presentation and lecture, a Career Mentoring Lunch, a session illustrating scientific career choices outside academia, a showcase session about funding sources (especially for early-stage careers), and a debate session that gives ELSO's grass-roots membership the opportunity to voice their opinions about science policy

issues. At this year's meeting we will also try a new idea giving young scientists the chance to hear about the career choices, decisions, and difficulties faced by one highly successful scientist – Nobel laureate Eric Wieschaus has agreed to be our subject for this 2007 'Meet a Mentor' event. More information about the CDC activities at the ELSO Congress can be found on the CDC's web pages (www.elseo-cdc.org).

Throughout the year, CDC members continue to develop these web pages as a resource for young life scientists. The pages currently provide directions to information about international PhD programmes, students' and postdocs' organizations, mentoring resources, funding resources, job op-



portunities and women in science resources. In addition, it organizes and executes the selection procedure for the annual ELSO Early Career Award. In 2005, the CDC also created the ELSO Database of Expert Women in the molecular life sciences in Europe, which currently contains the details of more than 400 expert women in this field. The database

is a resource that scientists, editors, granting agencies, etc. can use to find women with appropriate expertise. The Database of Expert Women owes its existence largely to CDC member Karla Neugebauer, who has worked tirelessly to ensure its functionality, to encourage appropriately qualified women to register, and to promote it to likely users.

You can read more about the database in Neugebauer's article in this issue and you can use the database online from the CDC web pages.

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One of the functions of the Database of Expert Women is to increase the number of women who speak and chair sessions at conferences. Women remain generally underrepresented on the platform at meetings compared to their participation in the audience. The CDC is trying to raise awareness of this issue by collecting data on women's representation among speakers at advertised meetings, and

by giving feedback to meeting organizers. If you want to contribute to this exercise you can download a feedback

form from the CDC web pages to send to conference organizers and to provide the CDC with the data you collect.

Like ELSO, the CDC is a new and youthful organization that is slowly developing a palette of activities and functions to promote the careers of ELSO members and European researchers in general. Its members are volunteers and it runs on a minimal budget. We therefore welcome all offers of help either with specific tasks or with its general activities. To volunteer your help, please contact the current CDC Co-ordinator, Margarete Heck (Margarete.Heck@ed.ac.uk).

Margarete Heck

is Professor of Cell Biology and Genetics and Wellcome Trust University Award Holder at the Queen's Medical Research Institute, University of Edinburgh. She is Co-ordinator of ELSO's Career Development Committee (CDC).

(Carol Featherstone, see p. 29)



The ELSO congress

Filling a Gap

by Carol Featherstone

As ELSO President, Kai Simons, recounts in his article in this issue, mounting a large congress for the molecular life sciences on European soil was the original driving force behind the

creation of ELSO. Every year, Europe's scientists cross the Atlantic in large numbers to attend the big US society meetings in their field (cell biology, neuroscience, etc.) but, until 2000, there was little or nothing

in Europe to meet this apparent thirst for an event that can, at once, provide a general update on the most exciting research of the moment, a specific session on one's personal field of interest, a great opportu-