



SETWOMEN

A not-for-profit community, resource and voice for women in science, engineering and technology at all stages in their career across academia and business.

This consultation document sets out the basis for the formation of a national community of women scientists, engineers and technologists. It has evolved in the light of preliminary discussions with interested parties, and will continue to do so. It sets out **why** it should be a national organisation, the evidence we have for the **demand** for such an organisation, **who** the members might be, the **aims** of such an organisation and illustrates how it might be **structured**.

In April both a national survey and the first of a series of podcasts of women in SET enterprise are being launched from the temporary SETwomen website. By mid May we will have considered the responses so far and issue an updated document incorporating your feedback. If there is the interest, support and endorsement that we anticipate, we will seek seed funding and keep you updated on progress via our newsletter.

The importance of your feedback cannot be emphasised enough. Please circulate this document, the url, www.setwomen.co.uk, and the survey to your friends and colleagues and ask them to give us their views.

Thankyou

Why a national network?

There are several reasons for establishing a national community, and the prime reason is because the concerns are not of a local or regional nature. The picture is familiar: we know that women are under-represented in SET, with many being deterred from entry. Few women rise to senior positions with the ability to effect changes in culture or policy, and female SET entrepreneurs who are also significant employers are rare. Only 20% of the IT workforce are women, and approximately 50,000 women with SET degrees not working at any one time, with little support to keep their skills and knowledge updated. Only 16% of returners use of their training or education.

Our country needs to have the best minds tackling both national and global challenges and increasing the UK's global competitiveness and innovation. Women nationally should participate in and benefit equally from the opportunities afforded by a vibrant, knowledge driven economy.

Secondly, because any government initiative can only go so far; the power of personal relationships are often crucial in enabling things to happen and women to fulfil their potential. Sometimes such relationships can directly make or break careers, as was most recently evidenced by Professor Julia Slingo, Director of Climate Research at the National Centre for Atmospheric Science at the UKRC conference in March. At other times, it is simply being able to call or email someone you've met at a network event and discuss issues or ideas.

Building and increasing women's social capital, our formal and informal networks or personal connections and friendships with other SETwomen, will help women to more effectively enable and support each other, regardless of geographic location.

A national network can help to deliver the economies of scale needed to assist sustainability. Small-scale initiatives and networks are often not very cost-effective and can be difficult to sustain. At the same time, the learning from best practice and excellent projects needs to be widely disseminated, and strategic alliances between similar activities fostered to reduce duplication and reinvention. Existing sector based organisations have much expertise, and bringing together the providers of support into this community will help raise awareness and increase their reach, to the greater benefit of SETwomen.

A SETwomen network, operating in a proactive, inclusive and collaborative way, and led by the views of its membership, is the most effective way to deliver change, provide a national voice, link and facilitate networks, and provide a streamlined cost-effective administration and IT infrastructure.

Evidence of Demand

The growth curve of Cambridge AWiSE demonstrates the increasing demand at a local level, and how funding support engenders a substantial increase in membership.

Jan 2003	6 volunteers
Oct 2004	30 attendees at the AGM
Sept 2006 - paid coordinator	30 paid-up members 120 on email list
Feb 2007	70 paid-up members 220 on email list

From its beginnings in 2003 with a few volunteers, the network has grown to 70 fully paid-up members and a community of 220 who receive regular news and updates by email. Approximately half of the members are from academia and half from industry.



See www.camawise.org.uk



On a county basis, evidence of a growth in demand has been repeated with the Norfolk Network, which exists to help stimulate the growth of the knowledge economy, the commercialisation of R&D and business innovation, and to provide a supportive community for academics, entrepreneurs and businesses.

Originally created and managed by YTKO, funding from sponsors, EEDA and membership fees support a full time manager and administrator, who deliver monthly network and special interest events, business clinics, training, promoting and connecting members, schools and university entrepreneurship activities, and a Women's Enterprise Forum for women both in business and in academia.

Launched in May 2003, it has grown from 40 to a paid-up membership of 200, and a wider audience of over 2000 for its newsletters.

See www.norfolknetwork.com

Lastly, on a regional level across the whole the East of England, the Enterprising Women community, launched in July 2006, and funded by EEDA and the European Social Fund, has already demonstrated how more significant impact can be made.



Enterprising Women aims to increase the numbers of successful women-owned businesses in the East of England, contributing to economic development through creating jobs and businesses, and increasing skills and business performance.

YTKO leads the partnership of seven specialist support organisations, building a dynamic online and face-to-face community, delivering personal and business training and support at all stages of the business journey, networking events, online discussion forums, promotion of members businesses and news, online resources and guides, and an e-learning leadership development programme. A fortnightly e-newsletter also features a quick poll to ensure the highest levels of member feedback and participation.

In just over nine months, nearly 2000 women have already benefited from the project. The business model - women-member focused, but also encouraging the widest participation from, and collaboration with, support organisations, local or specific networks, and a variety of stakeholders (150+ to date) - is one that we propose adopting for SETwomen.

See <http://www.enterprising-women.org>

In addition to this direct evidence base and experience of growing network communities, demand can be gauged in other ways, such as the public response to articles. For example, Ben Barres' Commentary article in Nature "Does Gender Matter" in 2006 generated the second highest number of blog responses in the whole year. The only article to generate more response was about creationism vs evolution.

Other countries have a national network of women scientists eg USA, Canada, Australia, Korea, France. The USA in particular has also taken the lead in increasing the support given to start-up and existing women entrepreneurs. This has substantially increased their sustainability, growth and volume, which Enterprising Women aims to replicate in the UK.

The series of SETwomen podcasts, funded by YTKO and EEDA as part of the Enterprising Women project, will help raise awareness and interest from a national audience. We would like to do similar series on SETwomen in industry and in academia, from across the UK. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly if you are interested in helping make this happen.

We also hope that this wider engagement will be of substantial benefit in increasing participation in the survey now underway, funded by the UKRC for Women in SET.

Who is it for?

We believe, and have seen repeatedly demonstrated in our network communities, that there are real benefits in building a community of women from academia, enterprise and industry. The more important point is that women in SET share more of the same sorts of experiences and challenges that often are not catered for by more general network organisations.

In addition:

1. Women often make career transitions within the course of their working lives. For example only 1 in 10 post-docs will stay in academia. They may move to business, or become self-employed or take a career break.
2. Facilitating networking between academic and business women can break down the barriers, increase understanding and knowledge, improve connections and ease career transitions.
3. Increasing relationships across boundaries may stimulate greater collaborations between the business and research base, and also help to raise the profile of enterprise amongst universities.

We see the following groups as indicative of where our membership might be drawn from and who will benefit from a national SETwomen network.

academia	employed in industry	enterprise	career-break	public sector
postgraduate students	large companies	self-employed/ freelance	return to original type of employment	NHS
postdoctoral researchers	small-medium sized enterprises	start-up	return to different type of employment	government
lecturers/ professors		high-growth enterprise business owner		

SETwomen aims

- **PARTICIPATION:**

Encouraging fuller participation of women in science and technology by identifying and addressing obstacles. Increasing and sustaining the involvement of young women in SET activities through interaction with schools, colleges and universities.

- **ADVANCEMENT:**

Improving the empowerment and participation of women at senior levels in academia, industry and enterprise.

- **VOICE:**

Giving women engineers, scientists and technologists a national voice and communications channel with which to influence public policy, employers' policies and public perceptions.

- **NETWORKING:**

Enabling more peer-to-peer support by helping women to meet in person and through online discussion fora. Through the building of relations, increasing knowledge exchange and reducing the barriers between industry, enterprise and academia.

- **INFORMATION:**

Providing relevant and timely news, resources, case studies, and positive images of the achievements of women scientists, engineers and technologists.

- **TRAINING:**

Promoting career and personal development training. Facilitating access to and awareness of the multitude of small initiatives and acting as a hub for these organisations. Identifying and addressing gaps in provision, particularly at local levels.

- **COMMUNICATION:**

Using technology to add value to, and improve interactivity between, networks and individuals, and achieve a high quality of proactive dialogue with all parties.

SETwomen activities

Our specific activities will be largely determined by the needs of SETwomen members as reported in the survey and by discussions and feedback received to date. We envisage that our activities will definitely include a national conference and regional/local networking meetings to build the face to face community, at a variety of venues on a range of matters of interest to members. If there is sufficient interest, special interest groups will be formed on specific topics as well.

Some meetings will allow women to voice their opinions about specific topics, and written up as a report to influence policy makers and employers. For example, CamAWiSE, in 2004, reported on women's experiences of part time and flexible working, and an upcoming meeting (May, 2007) will ascertain experiences of current policies for fixed term contract researchers. Online discussion fora will allow geographically-dispersed members to ensure their voice is heard. The community can also act as a formal response mechanism for women to government consultations.

The network also aims to increase mentoring activities, possibly playing a role in matching volunteer mentors and mentees. A women might need a mentor from outside her current employer, sometimes because there just aren't sufficient suitable women and sometimes because she may not feel comfortable discussing personal issues within a work environment. For women on career breaks, an employer-run scheme is clearly not an option.

This might be further supported by e-mentoring, enterprise mentors for women in SET business, short industry placements for researchers, and training for mentors and mentees to help the partnership succeed.

The website will provide information, resources, articles, interviews, case studies and podcasts to support, guide and inspire SETwomen. We are also keen to provide and increase access to high quality, top-value learning for those women who want to increase their skills - for example, in leadership, personal development, or real-world enterprise training. This might be of particular interest for women on career breaks or women who work for small businesses. If there is interest, we could also pilot a job share/part time/freelancing bulletin board to help women find employment that is flexible for them.

We also plan a geographical and resource map to help women easily identify support organisations and networks near to and relevant to them. Our proven IT infrastructure is cost-efficient, streamlines administration, improves efficiency and regular member communications, news and feedback. It also enables the building of a dynamic online community, supported by content and member management systems, and online event registration.

SETwomen organisation

SETwomen will be a not-for-profit organisation, guided not only by the membership but also by an Advisory Board and/or Sector Boards. This will be drawn from members working in science, engineering and technology, with representatives and supporters from industry, academia and enterprise.

We plan to adapt the proven business model of Enterprising Women, in essence, a national membership organization focused on women in SET, which is also fully open to existing geographic or sector organizations. We believe that success will be achieved through combining a national network with regional and local delivery, working in partnership with existing organizations and networks, or independently if no local resource exists.

The national SETwomen organization will also engage with regional stakeholders to facilitate setting up local or regional groups who will start to mobilise the community and help run meetings locally. These will feedback formally and regularly to ensure bottom-up input. Our ethos is to work collaboratively and in partnership with all entities who are helping advance the cause of women in SET.

In summary, we see that SETwomen can act as a responsive hub to bring together a substantial national community of women, and a variety of initiatives and other organisations. This will achieve economies of scale, a sum that is larger than its individual numbers, enabling effective progress to be made on our aims and make a real difference for our members.

If demand for SETwomen is proven, there will of course be further discussions with stakeholders and interested parties to evolve the best possible formal framework for the organisation.

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Consultation Version April 2007