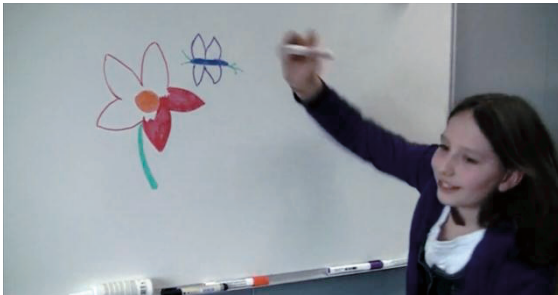


How Jan Karel made CWI more attractive for female researchers

This year, CWI has reached its 65th birthday, just a few years older than Jan Karel himself. During this time CWI has seen many female researchers and programmers come and go in its staff. In CWI's fields of mathematics and computer science, only a small percentage of the workforce is female. This can be viewed as at most unfortunate, given the fascination the subjects hold, but not necessarily something that should be changed. The true problem, as shown by the statistics, is that the percentage of female researchers becomes smaller at each step in the career ladder. Jan Karel has been active in attempting to redress this imbalance throughout his period as director. Among the positive actions that he has carried out during his directorship are the signing of the "Talent to the Top Charter" in 2010, the creation of a short video to highlight the role of women at CWI (<http://www.cwi.nl/general/room-for-women>) and the appointment of a female researcher to the scientific management team.



As part of maintaining the high quality of CWI as an internationally recognised institute, Jan Karel has deliberately attracted excellent talent to the institute. The selection of this excellent talent, however, often occurs at

the "natural age" of starting a family, with the subsequent consequences for the selection of male or female candidates based on their CVs. The small numbers make it difficult to draw conclusions from the choices made at CWI, but they do show that there are no new permanent female members of the research staff since before Jan Karel joined as director. The dilemma is how to select an individual who excels in his/her research area, while at the same time ensuring a balanced mix of genders over a longer period of time. Selecting a female with a shorter track-record is, from the institutes's perspective, more risky, but if only males are selected then the current imbalance will remain.

The problem is of course larger than CWI itself. In recent years, both NWO and the European Research Council have introduced a way of comparing CVs of male and female research personnel. Specifically, that the post PhD experience of a CV for female researchers is reduced by 18 months per child. This gives, to some extent, a way of compensating for the tendency for mothers to be less productive in their early postdoc years. While this construction has been introduced, those who review and compare CVs of researchers have to learn how to weigh up these differences, and the women themselves are often reluctant to be treated differently. This learning process of how to “equalise” the gender issues in CVs is individual, cultural and institutional.

This is just one example of how the assessment of female researchers is changing. Not only is the awareness of the role of women within the institute changing, so too is the role of other cultural diversity factors



within CWI. Just as the sustainability of a species is dependent on the genetic diversity of its population, so is the creativity of an institute dependent on the intellectual diversity of its personnel. This applies not only to issues of gender, but also to cultural diversity. While CWI is home to researchers with highly varied backgrounds, the vast majority of the senior permanent staff is still Dutch and male.

These issues are not unique to CWI and are being addressed at different levels throughout the academic community. For example, guidelines for selecting professors in the Netherlands have been developed to give practical tips for ensuring the openness of the selection procedure, which can only be beneficial for candidates of both genders. It is now up to our new director to continue the efforts introduced by Jan Karel, so that upcoming female researchers will be ensured proportional representation throughout their career.

Lynda Hardman