

Science: it's a girl thing - Q&A

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Why has the Commission launched this campaign?

Women continue to be under-represented in research at a time when Europe needs more researchers to foster innovation and bolster its economy. The overall goal of the campaign is to attract more young women to research careers in order to increase the total number of researchers in Europe. The European Union has set itself the goal of increasing R&D spending to 3 per cent of GDP by 2020, compared with around 2 per cent now¹. Some businesses already complain about a lack of researchers and skilled technical workers.

There is a growing pool of female talent in Europe from which research and innovation should benefit. There are many factors at work explaining the lack of women in research in general and in some sectors in particular. Some are linked to the practices of research institutions and others to persistent preconceptions which affect the culture and image of science. The aim is to give science an attractive, modern face in the eyes of girls and young women who might otherwise not consider it.

The first phase of the campaign targets teenage girls aged 13-18. Indeed, within this age range, young people tend to choose major school subjects that will influence their future career. At this point in their education they orientate towards or away from science and technology studies.

For statistics and background information, check the [press release](#) and [MEMO](#) published on 21/06.

Who is responsible for this campaign?

The European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Innovation.

How was it developed?

A pool of communication and gender experts was involved in the preliminary discussions about the concept, the target and the goals of the campaign; they were not been involved in the production of the trailer.

The campaign itself was developed with the help of 3 external contractors.

The contractor designing the campaign looked into the characteristics of the target group (girls aged 13-18), their interests and preferred communication channels. Their findings were supported by Ipsos Belgium who carried out for them a qualitative study using focus groups in 6 countries to assess the slogan, visuals and website of the campaign, following usual standards and methodology. Two focus groups were organised per country. They were structured according to two different age groups (12-15 year olds and 16-18 year olds), with a mix of socio-demographic profiles.

What is the place of the trailer in the campaign?

The campaign for teenage girls includes a lot more than the trailer which is a minor component of the overall set of activities:

- an informative and dynamic website, including video portraits of role models, a quiz to discover their 'inner researcher', the description of the many careers that can spring from studies in science, a photo contest, etc.
- a Facebook page which will enable chats with scientific role models and includes daily posts on science (quotes from women scientists, photos, videos, events)
- activities in EU countries. In 2012, during the pilot phase there will be events in six countries. In the autumn, a 'Science: It's a Girl Thing!' mobile expo truck will wind its way through Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland. The truck will offer on-the-spot scientific activities demonstrating the connection between science and everyday life (music, food, and more). The idea is to show teenagers that science is everywhere. In addition 'Science Café' will be organised for schools to meet inspirational role models: female researchers from the country, who will talk about their careers and the great opportunities for women. Participants will also have the chance to take part in a flashmob-style 'Chain Reaction Dance', take the 'Discover Your Inner Researcher' quiz on a tablet and pick up goodies/giveaways.

Why are you directing the campaign at girls?

Recent studies show that girls and boys have roughly the same ability in science and technology at school but many more boys go on to further study science, technology and engineering. The campaign aims to change the perception of science among girls and show them that a career in science and research can be fascinating, including the possibility of being 'social' such as working in a team, working on societal problems.

Do you exclude boys?

Although the visuals and slogan are clearly addressing girls (the reason for that is that the focus groups have specifically highlighted the need for the campaign to talk to them directly), it is not our intention to exclude boys from the other activities. Studies show a positive correlation between mixed teams and research performance. The world of research should fully integrate gender equality. Therefore, boys are welcome to take part in the activities for the schools and online which would give them the opportunity to also reflect on the added value of working in mixed teams.

Why is there a lipstick in the slogan? Why is it pink?

The contractor designing the campaign used the results of the focus group which showed that the lipstick was well appreciated by the target audience and would make the campaign more eye-catching. It catches the attention and forms a contrast with the "dry" and factual character of science. The idea of writing the slogan with the lipstick was considered as fun and original.

Based on the results of the focus groups which considered the original colour (red) too adult, the slogan is pink for the moment but other colours such as orange and burgundy have been developed and will be used on the website.

How much did the trailer cost?

The trailer cost 102 000 euros, a fraction of the budget of the campaign which includes the development of the concept of the campaign, the visual identity, posters, videos, the website, the road-show in 5 countries, the media advertising and the launch event in Brussels.

Who is responsible for this trailer and how was it developed?

The European Commission takes all the responsibility for this video. We understand the reaction and apologise to those who felt offended. It was never our intention to offend professionals - researchers and teachers – already working in science. The role models were not consulted on this trailer and had not seen it before the launch of the campaign.

According to the focus groups, teenage girls associate science with people isolated in their lab having limited contact with society. They also think they lack interest and/or ability to do science, many preferring the idea of creative or social work. These aspects are addressed in a rigorous way on the website and with the role models.

The 45-second clip was intended to put this in a lighter context, to grab the attention of teenage girls aged 13 to 18 who have up until now been very hard to reach with messages about science. The goal was to attract their attention so that they might look at the campaign in detail, visit the website where there is lots of information on science and careers in research, including video-profiles of role models.

The concept of the trailer was to combine images of science (such as electronics, mathematics, chemistry, physics) with images closer to cosmetics and fashion to show teenage girls that science is already part of their life.

Will you stick to the campaign despite criticism of the video?

Yes. We accept the criticism of the video but the campaign is vital to get more women into science. The video was a minor component of the campaign and does not reflect the overall tone of the other activities. Activities will continue in the autumn in cities and schools in five countries (Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, Italy, Poland). The video has prompted many spontaneous suggestions and we will look at all of them. We count on the support of all to help us meet the challenge of getting more girls interested in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects.

How can I get involved in the campaign?

We would value all contributions. We will in particular create a place for discussion for #realwomeninscience on the Facebook page.

We are receiving a lot of requests to be a role model for the campaign and we really appreciate it. Role models, by transmitting their passion for science to teenagers, are a key part of the campaign. According to their availability, they can take part in national activities, chat with young girls on the web to describe their careers and/or do written interviews.

If you are interested in becoming a role model, please contact us at rtd-wiri@ec.europa.eu.

We are looking for two kinds of role models in the STEM fields, in all EU countries:

- role models aged 18-25 with whom young girls could identify; still students or already researchers;
- more experienced role models who are researchers