

## Computer scientist and a woman?

Linus Torvalds, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Sergey Brin... what do they have in common? Geekiness? Money? The answer is probably yes to both but, just as importantly, they are all men. Why is this? Are there no women in high profile positions in computing science, academia and the enterprise?

Interestingly, in computer science, 33% of women aspire to leadership positions, whilst only 22% of men do. Despite this statistic, only 1 in 20 computing professors, 1 in 8 computing researchers and 1 in 4 PhD students are female. What can we do to shatter the frosted glass ceiling that prevents many women in computing from rising to the top of their profession?

I am one of the few female computer science academics in my department. I am also a parent and I work part time. Juggling the many roles that I have is not easy, but it is doable. I did not have female role models that I could look up to in my student years, because there just weren't any women that I was taught by. Now that I think back, I never felt that gender was an issue, neither for me nor for my fellow students. But just the fact that I wasn't taught by any female academics at all tells the story that all is not well. This became more apparent when I was finishing my PhD and was thinking of what next... I wanted to be a researcher and an academic, and I also felt that in the future I would have a family. But there were no other examples of women with similar plans and ambitions around me. Why is this? Can we do something to improve this damaging situation?

In order to redress the imbalance in computing research, and to encourage other women to do computer science research and stay in these jobs, Prof. Ursula Martin and I started a networking project called **women@CL** to provide local, national and international activities for women engaged in computing research and academic leadership.

At the local level we're aiming for a simple grass-roots model that is effective, replicable and sustainable across science and engineering departments in a complex institution. Our **women@CL** lunch talks provide an opportunity for everyone to network with early-career women role models in research, industry or start-ups. **women@CL** is also involved in a more formal positive action program in collaboration with the University Equality and Diversity Unit.

At the national level we support women in computing research, with a focus on interdisciplinary research, leadership and enterprise, through a programme of career development activities. This includes regional and national meetings, some with technical programmes, others are more career development oriented workshops. We are also involved with mentoring and provide networking opportunities.

**women@CL** has also started a childcare initiative scheme in order to alleviate the problem that parents face with childcare while going to research meetings, with the group willing to make a supplementary grant of £150 as a contribution to childcare costs. Grants are open to anyone employed in a UK University in a position whose duties include computer science research, or studying for a PhD in computer science in a UK University. Eligible candidates may apply for funding for childcare costs

incurred while attending any conference which is primarily devoted to computer science research.

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It is laudable and necessary that there are various initiatives to encourage more women to study computer science at school and university, but what about beyond?

**women@CL** at least partially addresses this by celebrating, informing and supporting women in the UK who are, or plan to be, engaged in computing research or academic leadership.

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You can get more information about **women@CL** from [www.cl.cam.ac.uk/women/](http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/women/).