

Quantum technologies: a chance for women to take their place in science?

Summary

Gender equality in STEM subjects was discussed at the European Science Open Forum (ESOF) Conference in Toulouse during a panel session organized by the COST Association and the COST Action MP1403 “Nanoscale Quantum Optics.” The session attracted an audience of more than 50 participants, with a balanced representation in terms of gender, age, area of expertise and provenance. Ruth Oulton - COST Action’s Gender Balance Advisor - gave an impulse talk on the activities devoted to gender equality carried out by the Action. Next, three panelists (Thomas Berghöfer, Maria Chiara Carrozza, Ruth Oulton) and the audience considered challenges and opportunities for women in science in the context of quantum technologies. The effectiveness of EU and national policies on gender equality in research and academia was the starting point of discussion. It emerged a consensus that policies of the past did not work as desired, although data are still being collected. Quotas, which are perceived to have an immediate impact, could be used more often to initiate the change. However, they should be seen as a temporary action and a culture change is necessary for obtaining long-term and durable results. The recent political developments in Europe unfortunately do not favor this. Gender unbalance is a failure of democracy and every scientist (and citizen) should feel the responsibility to take care of this. Moreover, more analysis is needed, with the aid of humanities, to identify historical and cultural reasons for gender inequality. Finally, more creativity and initiatives are required to make people comprehend that gender inequality is an issue to be addressed with priority. The Quantum Technology Flagship - a 10-years EU program on the deployment of quantum technologies - is an opportunity not only for innovation, but also for shaping the cultural landscape and as such it should contain vigorous plans for improving gender equality.

Participants

- Mario Agio - Moderator - Chair, COST Action MP1403 and University of Siegen, DE
- Thomas Berghöfer - Panelist - Coordinator, GENERA Project and DESY, DE
- Maria Chiara Carrozza - Panelist - Former Italian Minister of Education and Research and Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna, IT
- Ruth Oulton - Panelist - Gender Advisor, COST Action MP1403 and University of Bristol, UK
- Ralph Stübner - Organizer and Introduction - Science Officer, COST Association, BE

