

**Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn
Launch of Women in Science Campaign
Speech at the European Parliament
21 June 2012**

Members of Parliament,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe needs more female scientists and researchers. We need them to solve problems like climate change, energy and public health. We need them to help improve our economy and to help provide growth and jobs.

We cannot afford to waste any talents. We need all the best people working together, whether women or men.

So, I am delighted to be here today to officially launch the European Commission's Campaign on Women in Research and Innovation.

During my hearing at the European Parliament in January 2010, I made a firm commitment to improve

gender equality and the gender dimension in research and innovation.

To do this, we need to tackle both sides of the coin: by encouraging the employers - research institutions – to make structural changes that will encourage more women to pursue science careers; and on the flip side, by encouraging young women and girls to choose science and research for their studies and careers.

Girls and women have always wanted to be involved in science, but to do this they have always had to overcome bigger obstacles than the boys have had to.

Yes, we have come very far since the 1880s, when the Irish woman Annie Maunder was refused a degree from Cambridge despite coming top of her class in mathematics – because formal degrees were only awarded to men!

Today, there is a growing pool of talented women in Europe. They make up more than half the EU's student

population and 45% of doctorates (PhDs), but women account for only one third of career researchers.

In some sectors, such as engineering and computing this figure is even lower.

There are many factors at work in the discrepancy between women and men in research, such as a lack of female role models, gender stereotyping that begins in school and, later on, less family-friendly working conditions.

Let me pose you a few questions: when you think of a "mechanical engineer", do you think of a man or a woman? If someone is talking about a hydrologist or a meteorologist, do you imagine a man or a woman in a white lab-coat? And as for a primary school teacher or a nurse?

If you answer "a man" to the first two questions, and "a woman" to the third, there's probably a reason. And we

need to do something about that, we need to overturn assumptions.

That's what this information campaign is all about.

We want to overturn clichés and show women and girls (and boys too!) that science is not about old men in white coats.

The first part of the campaign is aimed at getting teenage girls interested in studying the STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and maths.

We also want to show that science is creative, innovative, as well as fun, and socially useful.

More than that, we start stimulating education systems towards getting girls interested in science. We should, dare I say it, make science 'sexy', make it cool.

If we want more women in research, we have to get girls interested in science at an early age - we need

education systems, schools, teachers and parents to encourage them.

Young people typically make career-critical decisions between the ages of 13 and 17. That is when they make the choices that will direct them towards or away from scientific subjects.

Recent analysis of education data from OECD-PISA¹ shows that at age 15, both girls and boys have roughly the same preference and ability in science and technology. Girls in many countries even outperform the boys in maths and science. But then a large percentage of girls drop out of science, engineering and technology to pursue other subjects.

That's why this first part of the campaign is aimed at teenage girls, with the slogan "Science: it's a girl thing". The second phase of the campaign will encourage older female students to pursue scientific careers.

¹ Programme for International Student Assessment

Getting young people, and especially girls, involved early in science at school is a key element. I began my career as a schoolteacher and I know how important it is to connect with young people, capture their interest, and help them develop a passion for science. Their imagination is the innovation of tomorrow.

Passion, imagination and connecting are what this campaign is all about. I invite you to join us on line and in the national events we will organise in the autumn and next year. I would also like to thank the role models who agreed to take an active part in the campaign and with whom you will have the possibility to talk later on.

A few minutes ago, I launched the video teaser for the campaign. It makes studying science look so cool that I wish I could turn the clock back a few years and choose science subjects to study! Then, perhaps, I could join those inspiring women scientists who made the leap into politics, such as Claudie Haigneré and Angela Merkel!

Thank you.