In November 2018, the second ENABLE conference for young researchers finally took place in Copenhagen, Denmark. Academic research may be frustrating sometimes, with an uncomfortable feeling of isolation creeping into every personal scientific niche. ENABLE represents the first opportunity for young scientists to experience scientific research in connection with science communication to society and interaction with the pharmaceutical world. This initiative stems from the will of the new generation of scientists to open academia from within. For this reason, 30 volunteers among PhD students and Postdocs from four European research institutes joined forces to organise the ENABLE 2018, with the support of the institute coordinators and of an innovative science communication agency.

The conference in Copenhagen turned out to be a huge success, with 162 young researchers participating from 21 countries within and outside of the EU. Our 7 sponsors were enthusiastic of this initiative and their contribution allowed us to support a total of 50 travel grants. ENABLE 2018 demonstrated the determination of this consortium to continue organising unique high-level conferences, different from the classic scientific symposia to which we are used to, and with a special focus on the young generation of scientists. This newsletter looks back at what we have accomplished so far and glimpse at what we hope to achieve in the future, in particular with our 2019 ENABLE conference in Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
162 attendees

- 62% women
- 38% men
- 1% Undergrad students
- 2% PIs
- 25% postdocs
- 72% PhD students

7 sponsors
17 companies to the job fair
50 travel grants
90+ children & teenagers

Australia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States
EVENT RECAP

OUTREACH

Besides facilitating networking and sharing of new scientific knowledge between researchers and the industry, the ENABLE team engaged with the general public and shed light on the role of science in society. Children, teenagers and adults were invited for different activities. A group of around 50 nine-year-olds visited the scientists at CPR to help diagnose two fictional patients. The children had the chance to see how science is used on an everyday-basis at the hospital to identify diseases and in this way treat patients. “The activity was well thought-through. The students felt seen and well helped along the way, very adequate time was allowed to answer all of their individual questions” – said Gertrud Brandt, school teacher for one of the visiting classes. Both kids and volunteering scientists fully enjoyed the activities!

That afternoon, some 40 teenagers visited CPR to hear about current protein research and get insights into the technologies used. In addition, they had the chance to talk to a broad range of researchers from the centre in smaller groups and ask about their career path, daily life and generally what it is like to work in academia. “We really enjoyed visiting you [CPR], and my class was very impressed with your facilities. Many mentioned that they thoroughly enjoyed the chance to talk to real working scientists.” said Christina Høier Ricke, teacher of one of the high school classes visiting.

Our cross-disciplinary discussion, called “Truth in the Age of Information”, comprised a panel of mixed members, including scientists and a political journalist. They discussed in English how information is often skewed in today’s media as well as the role of science in fighting misinterpretation and miscommunication about new findings. During the “Ask-the-Scientist” panel discussion the audience was heavily involved in the discussion, in Danish, with a panel including scientists, a doctor and politician about what can be done from different sides to fight the increasing waiting lists for organ-transplants. Last, but not least, a subset of symposium participants presented their research to the general public at four local bars around Copenhagen. All four bars were full, and the audience challenged the scientists to explain and make their research easily understandable.
“There is always a way”, remarks Helen Lee, keynote speaker and career chatter at the ENABLE 2018 symposium. She got the point of our career day. We aimed precisely at providing a picture of the wealth of possibilities that a career in science offers. The classic academic path may not be the right choice for everyone holding a PhD degree, but to choose, it is crucial to hear what experienced people from different fields have to say. At ENABLE 2018 we made sure to cover the aspects we believe are critical, especially in our career chats. Twenty inspiring professional figures, including PIs, scientific directors and company specialists from different fields, accepted to entertain intimate chats with attendees about their career paths, answering also queries about their personal life choices and opportunities.

Participants had also the opportunity to join our job fair where seventeen companies’ representatives were available. They did not only give insight into career paths to consider, but also helped in finding out what companies require from prospective applicants, and to network with contacts directly within them. We also offered eight workshops where attendees got intensive training on different topics ranging from transferable skills to intellectual property and gender balance in science.

To grow as a scientist, it is very important to stay up-to-date with the latest scientific discoveries. For this reason, eight eminent scientists were invited to participate to the ENABLE scientific symposium as keynote speakers. They presented their state-of-the-art research, spanning between several topics like new drugs discovery, targeted therapies in cancer, the fight against infectious diseases and biomarkers for diagnosis.

Moreover, participants had the chance to interact directly with the speakers, either during career chats, coffee breaks, lunch sessions, or the successful event Nordic Tapas with the Speakers, during which people could discuss their scientific interests in an informal way while having a beer.

We also gave the opportunity to 15 young researchers, among all the PhD students and postdocs present at the conference, to show their scientific results through short talks during the keynote scientific sessions. In addition, more than 100 different research projects were discussed during four very crowded poster sessions. It was amazing and inspiring to see the enthusiasm with which everyone took part in the networking and science sharing and, at the end of the conference, prizes for best short talk and posters were awarded.

We look forward to seeing as much much passion and energy at the next ENABLE event that will be held in November 2019 in Nijmegen, The Netherland.
During the event, we interviewed two of our most inspiring speakers about academia, industry, and ENABLE.

1. You probably get a lot of invitations to participate in conferences. Was there anything in particular about the ENABLE conference that jumped out at you to accept our invitation?

One thing was that it is organized by the students and for the students from very diverse backgrounds. Generally, I tend to go to highly specialized meetings in immunology or vaccines yet the work we do is quite interdisciplinary, and so I was really quite excited about meeting students coming from very diverse backgrounds so that was an attraction. Plus the fact that it was in Copenhagen.

2. Do you think there is a lot of importance in these multidisciplinary meetings?

I think so. I think they can catalyze new areas and introduce you to new areas that you wouldn’t have thought of otherwise. So I think it’s a good thing.

3. One of the focuses of the ENABLE conference is on bringing science to the broader public here in Copenhagen via outreach events. Do you think there is any way that scientists could engage with the community better, and is this something that you think is important?

I think it is absolutely important for many reasons. A very fundamental reason is that science is all about discovery and the search for answers, and I think bringing that joy of that process to the wider public and sharing that process of discovery is important. We, scientists, have a responsibility to the public to reach out and communicate with them effectively. This is a critical aspect of becoming a scientist. I think the days where scientists are confined to their laboratories or ivory towers are over. I think increasingly the public is becoming interested in science and its implications for society and I think really we should consider this our responsibility to open up a dialogue. I think this is particularly important in the modern age with issues such as climate change are being debated and very often misunderstood.

4. Another focus of the ENABLE conference is for students to interact with leaders such as yourself. Is this something you think is important and is there anything you yourself would like to take away from ENABLE?

Students interacting with leaders in the field is extremely important. I think that it is a two-way street. On one hand I would hope that the students learn about some new area of science, expand their network of potential colleagues and collaborators. But for us scientists too it is refreshing to meet young people with new ideas and vibrant energy. They can be invigorating to talk with even though they are not experts in your field. They often ask very perceptive and probing questions and I think that is very crucial.
1. What convinced you to accept our invitation and become a keynote-speaker of the ENABLE 2018 conference?

I have always felt that sharing whatever experience I have had with young scientists is not only a worthwhile use of my time, but also a pleasure. Therefore, I never hesitated for a moment before accepting the invitation. In fact, I was very glad to have attended the meeting and found my interactions with the young scientist at the meeting both interesting and worthwhile.

2. ENABLE is a conference that is organized by and for young researchers. What do you think of this concept?

I think it is a terrific concept and should be a model for other parts of the world.

3. ENABLE offers students a career day event with so-called career chats that provided the possibility to interact with professors directly, in almost informal settings with smaller groups of students. You participated in several of these career chats. How did you like these very direct interactions between you and the participants of ENABLE?

I have found the sessions to be both exhilarating and worthwhile. The participants expressed their concerns and experiences frankly in a very supportive, open and sometimes humorous atmosphere. Everyone, including myself, learned a great deal from each other and I am sure will carry the new insight and perspectives forward.

4. You have (co-) founded several companies, like Diagnostics for the Real World Ltd (DRW). What kind of skills do you need to do this? And do you have some advice for young entrepreneurs?

It may sound old fashioned, but I think the will to serve society in a meaningful way should be at the core of what we do. However, any idealism must be accompanied by persistence and ability to deal with failures because all worthwhile undertakings will test the strength of our will over and over again.

5. What do you think have been your best and worst decisions in your career?

My best and worst decision was to start a company!

6. You are a great example for a female leader and I know that women in science is a subject of great importance to you. What do you think are the biggest challenges for women in science? And how would you suggest women to tackle these challenges?

The biggest challenge to women in science is how to navigate their career during the child-bearing age which can last 4-8 years. It is clear that during this period, despite the lip service of our institutions, there are not enough flexible, high quality but also low-cost childcare services. Therefore, women still carry most of the burden and hard work — although also joy — that come with raising children at a young age. It is very difficult keeping up both the career and motherhood because most of the burden still falls on women.

7. Do you think society and the scientific community have to change in order to encourage female scientists to take leadership and executive positions?

Yes, I absolutely do. However, women in science should also be very cognisant of the needs of their work place and strive to meet the challenges that come their way.
1. You probably get a lot of invitations to participate in conferences. Was there anything in particular about the ENABLE conference that jumped out at you to accept our invitation?

I liked very much that it was a meeting of young people. They are very important for research. What I also liked is that the young people were organizing the meeting, which is fantastic. I think we need more of that. What I also found attractive was that it was a European effort, as I feel we have excellent research programs going on in Europe and we need to have the younger generation believing in the European spirit.

2. One focus of ENABLE is its multidisciplinary focus of the symposium. How do you feel bringing people from different scientific areas together to exchange science is important for the students or yourself?

I think it is very important. It is not now like the old days where you had a single investigator with one or two students that could make a whole paper. We need technologies and multidisciplinary input from biologists, bioinformaticians, biochemists and also translational researchers who work in the clinic and actually treat patients. In my field [liquid biopsy] it is vital for success. Particularly to develop a common language and understand each other.

3. ENABLE also has a focus on bringing science to the broader public here in Copenhagen. Our outreach events showed that the public is interested in science, but often does not know enough about it. Do you think scientists have a responsibility to reach out to the public?

Absolutely we can do better. The public is not so well informed as to what is going on in the laboratory, what are researchers doing, and what are the challenges and opportunities of modern research and also of the teamwork that is required. Absolutely there needs to be more exchange because the public are providing the resources. They are more motivated if they know more about us [scientists]. There are no sitcoms about researchers but there are so many sitcoms about medical people.

4. ENABLE offers students the possibility to interact with professors directly, in almost informal settings in small groups, do you feel this is mutually beneficial for students and leaders such as yourself? What do you hope to get out of ENABLE?

It is very motivating to see so many young people interested in science. We need to motivate the next generation of scientists to get the smartest people into science. It is very motivating for me as a professor to see that. It is also important for me to hear what are the thoughts of young scientists for their career, their fears and if there are any bottlenecks keeping them from being successful and staying in science. That is a very important issue.

5. What is your opinion about interaction between science, academia and industry?

We have a lot of collaboration with industry. We have large European networks where industry partners are involved. Industry often gets our best people as they make very attractive offers. Not so much in terms of financial offers but in that they provide a secure working environment. We as professors need to do more to ensure the universities also offer a safe working environment.