Panel Report: Researchers for the Future

Engineers Academic Network (EAN) Annual Congress, Cardiff (UK), 11-06-2024, 12 pm

Report by Rhythima Shinde

Panelists:

- Dr. Livia Ribero de Souza, Co-founder of Mimicrete Ltd.
- Andy Lawrence, EPSRC
- Jenny Read, Programme Director at ARIA

Introduction

The panel session at the EAN Annual Congress, titled "Researchers for the Future," brought together key figures from different scientific backgrounds to discuss the future of engineering science and how it can foster a robust research culture in the UK. The session was aimed at exploring strategies for managing the UK research landscape over the next decade, enhancing research and industry collaboration, improving the public perception of engineering, and developing co-creation strategies for potential research.

The panelists introduced themselves, highlighting their diverse backgrounds. Andy Lawrence, a physicist, emphasized on EPSRC approach to multidisciplinary research designs. Dr. Livia Ribero de Souza, a chemist and co-founder of Mimicrete Ltd., discussed industry-specific research challenges. Jenny Read, also a physicist and Programme Director at ARIA, focused on ARIA's approach to funding diverse and high-risk research.

Key Discussions

1. Managing the UK Research Landscape
    - Andy highlighted the importance of identifying future challenges through shared insights from a recent exercise that involved defining future challenges and roles of engineers in a workshop involving environmental scientists, economists, and physicists. Key areas included AI, well-being, systems and data research, and net-zero sustainability. The session emphasized the need for multidisciplinary teams and diverse problem-solving abilities.
    - Jenny stressed the importance of diversity in research and ARIA's unique funding approach, which includes supporting researchers outside their expert fields and funding high-risk projects.
    - Livia pointed out that while UK companies are at the forefront of research, much of the testing and prototyping happens outside the UK. She also emphasized the need for more local testing and funding for UK-based companies.

2. Sustainable Research and Industry Collaboration
    - Andy advocated for identifying the right research topics and maintaining a balance between guided research and researcher freedom.
    - Jenny highlighted the importance of collaborations between academia and industry, mentioning initiatives like Catapults and modern apprenticeships.

- Livia discussed the laborious process of policymaking and the need for iterative changes to support technological demonstrations in the construction industry.

3. Public Perception of Engineering
   - The panel agreed on the need to elevate the public perception of engineering, moving away from the stereotype of it being a mundane "job in a factory." They suggested better storytelling and outreach, including fiction stories involving technologies, school events, magazines, and podcasts.

4. Co-creation of Potential Research
   - The panel discussed the strategy for co-creating potential research in engineering, with an emphasis on inclusive and multidisciplinary perspectives. They noted that industry partnerships with academic labs need to be more accessible and affordable.

Conclusion

The session underscored the importance of fostering a multidisciplinary research culture, enhancing industry collaboration, improving the public image of engineering, and adopting inclusive co-creation strategies. The diverse perspectives of the panellists provided a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities in shaping the future of engineering research in the UK.