

"Love what you do" - LIKAT alumni talk about their research and career paths

They study, do their doctorate, sometimes they habilitate and then the question arises: where to next? Young chemists were given answers at the Alumni Meeting 2025 at the Leibniz Institute for Catalysis in Rostock at the end of last week (May 22 - 23). They learned from "alumni" of different years what they can do after graduation and qualification and what research trends await them in industry and medicine. This exchange between former and current doctoral students is indeed one of the most important goals of this biennial meeting, as Robert Franke, Scientific Director of LIKAT, said in his welcoming address.

From trainee chemists and entrepreneurs to long-standing company bosses - a good dozen alumni had accepted the invitation. Many of them left the institute only a few years ago, while some of them left LIKAT a quarter of a century ago. Their professional biographies are diverse, and they are all happy to share their experiences with young colleagues.

Thomas Leischner, for example, reported on his first two years as a senior scientist at AstraZeneca. The experience report also included his application to this global player: two rounds of interviews and an hour-long discussion with managers. The audience listened with rapt attention.



Fig. 1: The alumni's contributions were met with great interest among the current staff. (Photo: LIKAT)

Where is Schwarzheide located?

Thomas Fessler, still a postdoc at LIKAT in 2024, proudly presented the company in Schwarzheide where he ended up, earning laughs with his question: "Do you know where that is?" In the 1930s, lignite was liquefied into fuel there, among other things, and this is by no means unknown at LIKAT. After reunification, BASF took over the plant and developed it into one of the largest sites in Europe. Today, it is open to young specialists at all levels.

Marek Checinski, founder and Chief Technology Officer of C1 Green Chemicals AG, Berlin, explained to the audience how an idea and computer simulations can be turned into a start-up. His idea was a process for synthesizing methanol that is considerably milder than the classic process, is many times more productive and uses green synthesis gas as a raw material. Last year, the company put the pilot plant into operation. Marek Checinski's "theorems" on success also found an extremely attentive audience. And one of these phrases is: "Love what you do!"

Courage to doubt and make mistakes

Paul Pellny, Managing Director of ACRIS Feinchemikalien GmbH Heidelberg, completed his doctorate at LIKAT more than 25 years ago and counts himself as "old school", as he says with a grin. With a short essay on doubt, he showed the philosophical side of a scientist, quoting, among other things, Brecht's Mr. Keuner, who was asked what he was currently working on. His answer was: "I'm having a lot of trouble, I'm preparing my next mistake."

Stefan Oschatz from the Institute for Biomedical Engineering in Warnemünde and Marie-Luis Hölzel from Kiwa GmbH in Kessin showed that you don't have to leave the region for a career. Oschatz presented the development of materials for implants. And Marie-Luis Hölzel encouraged the young participants of the Alumni Meeting to apply with her report on the Kessin-based company, a testing laboratory for environmental analysis.

She herself would have liked to have had such an opportunity to gain an insight into possible career paths, she said during a conference break. Marie-Luis Hölzel was already talking to the first interested parties at the barbeque in the evening.



Fig. 2: Our alumni visit LIKAT. (Photo: LIKAT)