

A collation of responses to questions on gender and diversity issues in the research environment.



1230 to 1400
Tuesday 21st Sept 2010
Thomas Paine Study Centre
UEA, room 1.1



<http://www.resnet.uea.ac.uk>

ResNet is a contact, support and information network for women working in research at the University of East Anglia, the John Innes Centre and Sainsbury Laboratory, and the Institute of Food Research.

We welcome all women in research including PhD and MSc students, contract research staff, postdoctoral scientists, technicians, research assistants and those in project leader or faculty positions. The aims of ResNet include that of firmly encouraging talented women in their aspirations for promotion/progression and the overall development of their careers. Our specific aims are to:

- promote career development
- provide inspiration, information and support
- raise awareness about equal opportunities
- bring together women researchers with common interests

We run about 6 lunchtime events per year that are open to all women in research. Over the last couple of years we have improved what we can offer by strengthening our links to local businesses and with the equality and diversity agenda.

As part of this 10th anniversary celebration we asked for comments on a series of questions on gender and diversity issues in the research environment. Questions were provided on a printed sheet and displayed on the screen. Attendees networked over lunch and drinks in small groups around tables and gave their comments on post-it notes. All were aware that the intention was to collate and pass the responses on to the management and equality and diversity teams at UEA, JIC and IFR. All responses were given anonymously, though a couple of women discussed ideas with ResNet committee members. Following the meeting the questions were also posed via the ResNet email list (this includes women who have asked to join the emailing list and those who have attended recent ResNet meetings) to give those who were not able to attend a chance to input their opinions. However, no further responses were received by this route.

This collation was scrutinised by a representative of the UEA Ethics Committee who agreed that this finalised version could be circulated and included on the ResNet website.

1. Are you where you imagined you would be 2, 5 and/or 10 years ago?

There were a mixture of responses, some saying 'yes' some 'no'. One person said '*no but in a good way*'. For some it was hard to imagine where they would have been. One participant felt it had been hard work and wasn't sure she '*would have had same outcome if I had family to support*'. Other respondents felt they would have been in a better financial position or thought they would be more certain of their direction.

2. Do you feel your career progression has been hindered in any way? If so how and why?

Although some delegates felt that there had not been any hinderance to their careers, others clearly identified the barriers they had encountered. These included difficulty making the move from research contract to lectureships *in part due to informal male social networking*. Another participant reported that her line manager was '*actively managing my career advancement downwards*'. There may also be cultural factors, for example, academic careers progress differently in the UK to other parts of Europe. Another respondent felt that there were strict societal restrictions on women's careers (within her culture) which included dress restrictions, religious obligations and patriarchal societal structures. Another delegate felt that within her school, leadership styles and the overall culture were very masculine. Other delegates felt there were few opportunities for progression. There were concerns over the impact of childcare on careers, although one delegate reported that she '*was lucky because although I had a break (1 year off maternity leave) this is not obvious on my CV*'. Another commented that it was her active choice to look after her children.

3. Is there anything you feel RESNET could do to help the career progression of women at UEA, IFR and/or JIC?

Delegates had a number of suggestions which UEA, IFR and JIC could implement to assist the career progression of women, including, social events, increasing the opportunity for networking with senior men and women, conduct a gender audit, one on one coaching, ensure that a ResNet member is co-opted onto all committees, identification of gender balance at lower grades and softer skills training, such a raising self-confidence. One participant noted that self-belief is critical for setting and reaching ones goals and highlighted that many women need help and training to improve low self-esteem. A further suggestion was to update the ResNet website to include member profiles and using younger women in the group to '*drive the organisation forward*'. Another commented that ResNet should lobby for change.

4. Do you feel you have good female role models in your department? At UEA, JIC or IFR in general or outside these institutions?

Responses here were often dependent upon the discipline, for example, within Medicine there was a belief that there are strong women who act as role models. In contrast, within the science and other male dominated disciplines women role models were seen to be absent (at UEA and the research institutes) with few women projet leaders. Concerns were raised that women role models were small in number (e.g. few women Professors) and outnumbered by men. Concerns were expressed over masculine working practices that disadvantage and marginalise women. It was noted that there may be too few women science teachers in schools. One delegate felt UEA lacked senior women, whereas another said UEA was the first place she had worked with senior women.

5. Is there more that UEA, JIC and/or IFR could do to help the career progression of women?

It was argued that women's career paths may be different to men's and all Institutes should recognise and accommodate this. One participant stated '*So many jobs are still in the shape of a man's career*'. Training packages, such as management coaching, mentoring and personalised support were

recommended. There were suggestions that women need to get involved in committees that decide policy and that women need to help each other much more. One delegate felt that the relocation package offered by UEA assumed a male with a family to support, which does not take into account current cost of living and that women may also need to move and support a large family. The Institutes could do more to recognise softer inputs in addition to income generation and publication record. Flexible working was also seen as something which may help women. One delegate argued that a more strategic approach needs to be taken by the UEA to recognise women with potential and take steps to 'push' them forward through the career ranks. Another delegate felt that single mothers who are also mature students are penalised.

6. Would you agree that UEA / IFR / JIC has family-friendly policies? Can you suggest any improvements?

Overall the answer was no. Responses were rather dependent on the academic discipline, for example, science subjects may have a presenteeism culture, where as social science schools may be more accepting of working from home. There was concern that where such policies exist they may not be implemented or truly acceptable. Within the Research Institutes acceptance of flexible working was dependent upon attitudes of individual senior staff. The UEA Nursery does not accommodate the real needs of employees, for example, no care after school hours. The closure of the after school and holiday club at JIC was also cited. One participant said there needed to be a childcare advisory service. There needs to be Promotion committees may not take into account familial responsibilities. A participant from another European country simply stated that the UK is not family-friendly. The requirement to live within 50 miles of UEA can be detrimental to family life especially where both partners have careers, this should be repealed.

7. Is there career development and progression equality at UEA and/or your institute?

Mixed response, but a general suspicion of 'No'. Promotion criteria andro-centric and promotion may also be dependent on '*who you know and persistence*'. Women in science based roles may find career progress restricted. Women are more likely to be in research roles rather than faculty. Women '*suffer from the glass cliff – difficult high risk projects that are prone to failure*'. A concern that women have to act like men to progress. Other concerns included a belief that women have to be better than men to progress, that the standard for progression has increased (making the situation for women more problematic), and that the traditional progress route supports men.

PLEASE GIVE US YOUR IDEAS FOR:

Networking meetings, Inspiring local and national speakers, career development sessions, equal opportunities events, social events (happy hour get-togethers, meals, theatre etc).

Some ideas for future events etc included, a focus on junior women to offer networking and support. Getting speakers in with experience of institutional transformation to improve women's representation and advancement. A suggestion for more informal social networking (with the caveat that such events may result in women being perceived as different or 'girly'). Several suggestions for external speakers.

ARE YOU WILLING TO JOIN THE ResNet COMMITTEE?

New committee members would be very welcome especially from JIC, IFR and UEA schools and departments that are not currently well represented. Please speak to a current committee member today!

Unfortunately, there were no responses to this call for new ResNet committee members but more would still be welcome! Please contact s.payne@uea.ac.uk phone 01603 593849.