



A personal perspective on challenges that face women scientists

Katharine Cashman

University of Bristol, Bristol, UK (glkvc@bristol.ac.uk)

Gender equality has been a topic of discussion throughout my long (now three decade) career. This alone illustrates the complex nature of the issue, and the lack of a simple solution, particularly as many of the daily challenges that women face are institution or discipline-specific. For this reason, I will summarize some of the issues that appear to me to be more general, and therefore ones that may have general solutions. The first and foremost relates to demands on women's time. One way that academic institutions have sought to overcome gender bias has been to require that every university committee have a female member; in departments, schools and faculties where women represent a minority, this necessarily means that women shoulder an inequitable share of the service duties. I have experienced this myself, seen it in promotion files at all levels, and observed it with regard to my female colleagues. Clearly time spent doing service is time not spent doing science. There is also an easy solution to this problem, which is to re-think the underlying assumption that men are necessarily gender-biased if they don't have a woman sitting in the room! Additional time demands can come from informal mentoring of both students and younger colleagues, particularly in cases where senior male colleagues are viewed as too important, or too intimidating, to be consulted on personal issues. Although I suspect that this problem may also be widespread, it is more difficult to quantify, and is therefore more difficult to factor into time allotments of departmental duties. A final thought relates to hiring practices. I have now worked in both the US and UK educational systems, which have very different interview and hiring protocols. I will review both, highlighting components that I think are most likely to promote equitable hiring practices.