BIEE 2018

Women in Energy

catherine.mitchell@exeter.ac.uk

IGov New Thinking For Energy

University of Exeter

EPSRC Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

General

- Thanks for asking me
- Both the sustainable energy industry and gender issues are better (in some ways) than when I was starting out (1980's)
  - My view is generational to some extent - so apologies
    - Far less direct, overt sexism now
  - But there is still a lot of sexism around
- Optimistic note to take away with you
  - I have made loads of mistakes in my life and it has (broadly) worked out

Personal Strategies

What are the 3 top recommendations for women's career advancement in the energy field (must and must-nots) and strategies for coping with failure

- I became independent as soon as possible
  - More difficult today (more on that later)
    - Alternatively, get yourself into a 'supportive' group
- Make choices – preferably based on understanding yourself – and know there will be consequences
  - I decided to be 'me' BUT I also wore 'suits and pearls' to meetings until I became a Prof
  - Understand exactly what a job entails and make sure you pick a job which suits you and your life wishes, for that time in your life, because you can change it
    - I don't think I really thought enough about it.
- I regret being the 'safe pair of hands'; the 'doer' that can be relied on to deliver the difficult / boring / important thing and I have put up with too much
- It may sound annoying to say this but I also regret working so hard…..

Corporate Culture

What more could universities, companies, the public sector and other organisations, active in energy, do to provide diversity in their organisational structures

- At the highest level, Government policy with respect to higher education means that universities are fixated on KPIs / league tables
  - All things being equal, academics who work harder will produce more papers, bring in more money and gain more impact
    - Harder for academics who want a sensible work life balance / family life
  - Moves to centralise around PIs who have permanent university posts undermines innovation and makes it harder for those who don't have a university post but lots of very good ideas
  - Marketisation of universities has (I would argue) undermined academic freedom / reduced time academics have for academic work
- So:
  - Universities / research councils should open up / keep open who can put in bids – ie not just those with permanent university posts;
  - There should be research career paths with permanent and flexible contracts in addition to 'lecturer' career paths rather than the divide between lecturers and post docs / phds
  - Research councils should give out a far higher proportion of money in smaller pots for research(ers) rather than the increasingly large grants
  - Universities / REF KPIs should be much more supportive for returning mothers; family friendly policies etc

Conference theme

What are the ops and challenges for women's career advancement arising from moving from a traditional fossil fuel based energy system to being a consumer-centred RE based one

- To the extent there are new entrants / things are shaken up, then it may bring in new working practices of transparency (for example openness about pay); being family friendly; not standing for sexism etc

The IGov research:

http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/igov/