

Advancing women in science and engineering: how does Australia compare?

Public lecture and forum organized by Joanna Sikora, presented by Professor Sharon Bell, Charles Darwin University; Dr Lisa M. Frehill, National Science Foundation

In November 2015 we had an opportunity to hear about the most recent research on the situation and future of women in science. The two hour forum took place on 12 November 2015 in Conference Room 1.02 , in Sir Roland Wilson Building (#120) with approximately 50 people who registered for the event. The attendees included students, academics, public servants and representatives of the ARC.



1 Fiona Jenkins, Lisa M. Frehill, Joanna Sikora and Sharon Bell

Both speakers focused on the policy effectiveness in this area and the Australian and international initiatives designed to bring about changes in institutional cultures in an effort to close the gender divide in science. Professor Sharon Bell, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Charles Darwin University, presented the findings from her ARC funded research on gender divides in biological and chemical sciences in Australia. Referring to her report 'Women in the Science Research Workforce' (2015), Professor Bell described the diverse professional pathways of female biology and chemistry graduates who work in a wide range of occupations in industry and government as well as in the science research workforce. Into her description she weaved in both important and sobering themes that highlighted the ongoing underrepresentation of women as recipients of the ARC funding as well as barriers in accessing senior academic positions. Professor Bell called for more attention to impending definitional changes to the equity reporting in Australia in the future.

The second speaker, Dr Lisa M. Frehill, of the National Science Foundation, emphasised the importance of intelligent and purposeful data collection and use to effectively inform organizational reform. She shared insights from a book, she co-edited, titled "Advancing Women in Science: An International Perspective" published in 2015 by Springer which analysed the outcomes of the attempts to implement organizational change to increase gender and ethnic equity in various countries. She also talked about the outcomes of the ADVANCE program funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation implemented to increase women's access to academic careers in science and engineering, of which she was one of implementers. Starting in 2000, the ADVANCE: Institutional Transformation Program has provided funds to U.S. universities and scientific societies to take stock of the status of women in science and engineering and to develop strategies to increase recruitment, retention, and advancement of women via positive institutional change. Dr Frehill finished by

emphasising the importance of cross-national learning for developing the understanding of what works and what does not when gender equity in science is concerned.



2 A lively discussion followed presentations given by Sharon and Lisa

Both presentations led to a lively discussion on ongoing gender stereotypes, organizational cultures and the success achieved by programs such as ADVANCE. This discussion was particularly valuable given the ANU's move to apply for the institutional Bronze Level Accreditation Award over the next couple of years.

On 11 November 2015 between 12pm and 2pm in Hedley Bull Theatre 2 Dr Frehill gave also a masterclass for junior and senior researchers ("Data, data everywhere, but not a drop to drink..."). The class focused on the challenges involved in the sourcing and use of data for informing gender equity policy. About a dozen participants included graduate students, public servants and also staff from the Office of Chief Scientist. This class was very productive and ended with participants exchanging emails and information to further their individual projects that involved data on gender or science.

Professor Bell was interviewed on national radio and television on the occasion of this event, which ensured a broader exposure and publicity to issues discussed during this event.