Faculty Women in STEM committee meeting on 17 October 2017

Notes from the meeting:

1. ***Feedback on Maren Wellenreuther Faculty women in STEM seminar?***

Arrange catering beforehand or hold in a different venue to encourage more discussion. Good talk.

2. ***Updates and suggestions from SAGE***

Data packs summarising the gender ratios in each faculty have gone out to each faculty dean.

3. ***Items from our student members***

A request for early career workshops for HDR students as well as for postdocs – eg Q2Q and REP – send links
https://staff.mq.edu.au/research/resources-and-support/research-enrichment-program
http://physics.mq.edu.au/higher-degree-research/current-students/quarks-quasars/

4. WISE entrepreneurship scheme - new proposal - slightly broader in scope? deadline at Canberra is 15 November, so we need to aim for 8 November.

We are working on a new draft. Consultations with John Shi Nash of the Incubator – what do they do – do they need to include women? Judith had a useful discussion with Prof Alison Rodger about planning career pathways, and alternatives. Alison is a member of Plotina which is a EU network promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training. This can help us to disseminate our activities for WISE.
http://www.plotina.eu/

Questons that were raised….What is unique to the women in our group? What is the problem they face? Focus on women in STEM? What is your identified problem - why is it gender specific? How to connect jobs or employers with Phds? Our PhD graduates and postdocs are a national resource. What are we doing with them? Need to name events and demonstrate explicit support from MQPID (or perhaps Incubator?)

4. ***Proposed series of talks about people's (non) linear career progression - perhaps to stimulate us to think about careers more holistically. This idea was described in different ways recently by Lesley Hughes, Alison Rodger, Mariella Herberstein and our recent speaker Maren Wellenreuther, and by Wei Ji Ma, whose story is quoted below.***

Marie Herberstein: 'false sense of foresight and straight trajectory'

> …. Wei Ji Ma: New York University, 'Based on my CV, you might think my path to becoming a tenured faculty member was pretty smooth: master's degree, Ph.D., two postdocs, faculty position. The true story, however, is much more twisted. During my graduate work in physics, I was so out of my depth that, as an escape, I spent more time on online chess, political activism, and volunteering than on work. After my Ph.D., I almost left science for business consulting or politics. I ended up staying, but I changed fields. I published zero papers with my first postdoc adviser. In my second postdoc, I constantly felt inferior to a fellow researcher who seemed to come up with all the good ideas. All that time, I often thought that I was the only one struggling, and that everyone else was sailing smoothly along.

My 9 years as a faculty member at Baylor College of Medicine and now at New York University (NYU) have changed that view. Students and postdocs have shared with me their personal struggles with procrastination and impostor syndrome. They have also shared their frustrations with advisers—for not giving concrete guidance to go along with grand ideas, changing projects on a whim, being out of touch with modern methods, and more.

At the same time, I noticed that our community is not very good at talking openly about such personal challenges. So, in 2014, my colleague Cristina Alberini and I started a monthly event series at NYU called "Growing Up in Science." In 30 minutes, followed by a discussion, a guest tells their life story—with an emphasis on difficulties, doubts, detours, and failures. Emails announcing the events include both an "official" and an "unofficial" biography to highlight the difference. Faculty member guests have ranged from second-year assistant professors to the president of NYU. We have also featured alumni who left academia, including a journal editor, a screenwriter, and two neuroscientists-turned-data-scientists.

The series has made it abundantly clear that smooth and straight career paths are rare. An accomplished junior professor described how he felt aimless and unsatisfied early in his Ph.D. studies and only made it through because he "kept showing up"—a prescription reassuring in its groundedness. Another faculty member described the disheartening transition from star graduate student to underappreciated postdoc in a less supportive lab. We heard about the tolls of long-term long-distance relationships, how workaholism contributed to the failure of a marriage, and the challenge of unrealistic expectations from parents without college educations.

Some elements of each story are unique—one guest started his career as a theater actor, while another had to deal with the death of an adviser—but they all highlight the reality that almost everyone faces challenges and struggles. In response to a survey we conducted to evaluate the series, one person wrote, "It has reminded me that professors are actually human, and they go through the same pains as we do, and that's okay." Another student wrote that the events "made me feel more connected to the department and my peers."

To broaden the impact, for the past few years I have asked to give a "Growing Up in Science" talk whenever I give a scientific talk at another institution. Invariably, more people stay behind to speak with me after Growing Up than after the scientific talk, and several departments have started their own series after my visit. These events sometimes give me new perspectives on my own story. For example, a student at the University of Cambridge noted that although I tell students not to derive self-worth from outperforming peers, that is the mode of thinking that got her where she was. The comment made me ponder whether competition is destructive, healthy, or necessary in academia. I also delight in seeing attendees dare to bring up their own struggles, and the conversation continuing in the hallway afterward is a sign of a mission accomplished.'

Invite women speakers from engineering and maths and stats and men from biology***?***
Another issue which is being discussed: dual career couples. Diversity in a broader sense
We will aim to start these meetings next year – monthly with a theme or a speaker for each.

6. ECR women's lunch -
Current plan is to hold the lunch in MUSE building in the period November 13-24, Except for Tuesday 21st & Friday 24th. Probably try to book 15 or 16 November for lunch.
It is a new caterer – not Crunch - but they can offer a buffet lunch with sit down tables for 30 people. **I would appreciate suggestions for who to invite asap!**

No other items….
Judith