PART 2

The Faculty of Science and Engineering Women in STEM committee combined with the IEEE Women in Engineering to discuss career paths

Ruth Oliver (School of Engineering) asked our four panelists (Mike Heimlich and Stuart Jackson from the School of Engineering, Michelle Leishman from Biological Sciences, and Orsola De Marco from Physics and Astronomy) to talk about their career paths.

Planning

Do you have plans for your future career? Everyone should have dreams and plans! But you should expect to deviate from your plan.

You need to consider Life’s Three Anchors: partner, house, children – as you become attached, you are less flexible and less mobile. But keep a perspective on what matters to you and what is important for your partner and your family. Three of our panellists have crossed the world with their families to seek better career and life opportunities.

What are your career goals? Think carefully about whether you want to be a professor or something else. What are the rewards that you value? Peer recognition, money, the intrinsic satisfaction of making a discovery or innovation, or solving a difficult problem?

Think about how your track record suits various careers/goals. Have a plan B, a plan C. What do you need to build in your CV? Seek advice from your Head of Department, your supervisor or your mentors. More lecturing experience rather than demonstrating or tutoring? More applied research? More international links? Be strategic, not just highly published.

Early in your career, identify a big problem in your field and think how you can make a dent in that problem, and work hard to build your reputation. Later you can broaden your interests and work in other areas.

Volunteer for journal and proposal reviewing (in your department or more formally). This builds your awareness of current trends in your discipline, and helps you understand what makes a strong manuscript or proposal.

Find one or more mentors! Decide what you want to accomplish with your mentor and be proactive in developing an agenda and seeking meetings. Mentors can act as sounding boards, can help to identify opportunities. Listen to and be a mentor for someone else – you can learn a lot!

Opportunity and luck

“Fortune favours the prepared mind”. Louis Pasteur. Your career direction may depend on luck - a chance interaction. You need to recognise that and take advantage of opportunities – plan for multiple pathways in your career. Think of your life and your potential career as a landscape. Have faith that there are multiple pathways that are rewarding – enjoy each opportunity and embrace it. When you make a decision, decide to make it the right decision!

Have passion for your work and do it well. That will give you fulfilment and lead to more opportunities.

Thanks to Ruth Oliver and Naila Mukhtar from the School of Engineering for organising the event!