

EU Gender Summit: The Future of Gender and Innovation in Europe

Response by the Wellcome Trust

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1. The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health¹. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Clearly it is important to ensure that the most talented researchers (regardless of their gender) are supported to enable scientific advances and for innovation to flourish. We recognise that there are a number of existing challenges in this area and we therefore welcome this consultation and Summit on the 'Future of Gender and Innovation in Europe'. However, as presented we found it difficult to respond to the questions in the consultation questionnaire and therefore provide our comments below. We have highlighted our current practices and some key issues that the European Commission and GenSET may want to consider when formulating its Policy Manifesto on "Integrated Action on the Gender Dimension in Research" in Europe.

Wellcome Trust Research Career Schemes and Funding policy

2. **Flexibility:** As stated in our mission we support the best people at all stages of the research career path in our grant giving. We are not gender specific in any of our funding schemes. However, we do our utmost to provide flexible and fair funding that allows excellent applicants, whether male or female, to be successful. For instance, our Research Career Re-entry Fellowship provides an opportunity for those who have been away from research for over two years to re-enter the workforce².
3. In addition, time (full- or part-time) spent outside a research environment is taken into consideration when assessing eligibility to apply for support for all our funding schemes. Funds may be requested for the full- or part-time salary costs of fellows or staff that carry out the research and once awards are made, individuals can also change the full- or part-time basis of their employment. The Trust will supplement grants by the actual costs incurred in meeting the salary of those on maternity/paternity/sick leave (less any recoverable statutory pay). In all these situations, the tenure of the award can be extended as appropriate.
4. **Demographics of our Awards:** Our work to ensure a fair and balanced system is illustrated by our fellowship award rates that are very similar for men and women through all stages of research career. The proportion of women and men who are successful in our PhD and early career fellowships are generally equal (PhD studentships: 49% male:51% female; Early Career Fellowships: 52% male:48% female).
5. However, despite similar award rates, we see a decrease in the number of women applying for grants as the awards increase in seniority. For example, 140 male and 33 female researchers applied for an Investigator Award in 2010/11 (award rates after

¹ www.wellcome.ac.uk

² <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Biomedical-science/Funding-schemes/Fellowships/Basic-biomedical-fellowships/WTD004380.htm>

interview for these applications being 49% male:51% female). This 'leaky pipeline' in women's' research careers has been a widely documented issue for all STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) career pathways.

6. **Career Tracking:** We are obviously concerned by this trend and have developed a longitudinal prospective study to track Trust award holders' careers over time. The "Wellcome Trust Career Tracker" will allow us to gain a better understanding of the career progression and career choices that award holders make; this will help to inform the Trust's provision of research and career support.
7. **STEM Education:** There is no "quick fix" to the fundamental issue of the need to increase the pool of women in STEM careers. However, to improve the numbers of women coming through the system, it is vital that young women are not put off from taking science subjects at school and beyond. In addition, those wishing to pursue a career in STEM should be actively encouraged. We have a number of activities designed to help promote contemporary science in the classroom and to enable young people to engage with biomedical science, including support for high-quality professional development for those involved in science education. There is also a need to address perceptions that a science career beyond higher education is risky and not conducive to family life. These perceptions act as a key barrier to women's' appetite for a career in science.
8. **UK policy on career development of researchers:** As a funder we have taken action to ensure that our schemes are flexible and do not discriminate by gender. Because most of our funding supports individual researchers and their teams in universities, it is important that these organisations provide environments in which both men and women can excel at all levels of their research careers. We are a signatory to the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers³. One of the key principles of the UK Concordat is to promote diversity and equality in all aspects of career management for researchers. We expect all organisations where we fund research to abide by its principles.
9. Recently, a UK 'Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey' indicated that while a majority of research leaders believed their institutions are committed to equality and diversity, many female researchers still felt a lack of fairness in terms of promotion, reward and participation in decision making⁴. Clearly there is still work to be done. However, we hope that a forthcoming review of the implementation of the UK Concordat, since its launch in June 2008, will demonstrate progress in the sector.

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests.

³ <http://www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/1393-449461/Principal-Investigators-and-Research-Leaders-Survey.html>