

Senior Women's Strategy Meeting, 29th July 2013, University of Edinburgh

Inspired by Karen Sparck-Jones, who said "Computing is too important to be left to men" the SICSA modelling and abstraction theme organised a research strategy meeting at Edinburgh Informatics for "senior" women in computing in Scotland. We defined this to be senior lecturer level and above, including senior research fellow. There were 19 attendees, from nine institutions. Over afternoon tea we discussed the problems of setting a research direction for ourselves, for research teams, for a whole department or faculty. Computing is perhaps more difficult than other disciplines because there are more opportunities to change direction and do new things. Moreover, there is a requirement to change direction: Hamming says "You've got to work on important problems. ... If I really believe the action is over there, why do I march in this direction? ". Planning for anything more than five years in computer science would really be counter-productive because it is difficult to anticipate where the action is going to be. By holding this event for Scotland's senior women in computing research we brought together people who don't otherwise meet, to look for perspectives that might not emerge from other approaches to research strategy. At the very least, the meeting allowed this diverse group of women to share their experiences of working in Scottish computing departments, and fostered connections between groups.

The meeting was focussed around two talks on research strategy. Prof Sheila Rowan, director of the Institute for Gravitational Research in the School of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Glasgow brought a different perspective on research: it can take years for research projects to come to fruition. Sheila had useful guidance about how to maintain your core interests but still satisfy external demands (from your students, your group, your University, your research funders). Prof Ruth Aylett from Mathematics and Computer Science at Heriot-Watt University presented a view from a computing researcher, displaying her mathematical background by viewing research strategy as a game, in which we have to balance our own needs with those of others. Ruth's take home message was to remember to have fun in our research. Around these two talks there was plenty of opportunity for participants to express their own ambitions, ideas and concerns for research strategy, in the context of many conflicting demands on academics.

The meeting was held on Monday 29th July 2013 at the University of Edinburgh, organised by Jane Hillston, Ursula Martin and Carron Shankland.