

Women in Computing: 28th February 2014

Following our very popular networking event for senior women in computing in Scotland last summer, the SICSA modelling and abstraction theme organised a second research strategy meeting at Glasgow Caledonian University. This time we opened the invitee list to all women in computing from research assistants to professors. There were 23 attendees, from nine institutions.

The meeting kicked off in great style with an audience with Prof Pamela Gillies, the principal and vice-chancellor of Glasgow Caledonian University. Pamela had some very wise words to impart on the importance of developing the careers of women in academia. She was well placed to talk about this as GCU have improved their balance of female:male in the professoriate to 34% (well above the national average of 21%). This has been achieved in part through mentoring schemes, but also in an adjustment of the promotion processes to encourage more women to apply, and to put greater value on collegiality and activity for the common good.

The rest of the meeting was focussed around two talks on research strategy (We had planned a third, but unfortunately one of our speakers, Dr Lesley Thompson from the EPSRC, had travel difficulties and could not attend.). Prof Muffy Calder, professor of Computing Science at the University of Glasgow spoke about the path she had taken to become Chief Scientific Advisor to the Scottish Government. Muffy described how her research interests had evolved over time, although research with impact, in terms of applying computing science to problems of societal value, has been a constant theme. She also encouraged us to stand up for Computing as a discipline: who else is going to explain this in our institutions, or to the wider world? She finished with her top tips for researchers. After a networking break, Prof Lynne Baillie, director of the Interactive and Trustworthy Technologies Research Group at Glasgow Caledonian University, moved us from personal strategy to institutional strategy with a forward look to REF 2020. Lynne coordinated the GCU REF 2013 submission and talked to us about lessons learned, not least of which were the need for a strong team to support the main REF author, and the need to start collecting evidence for impact now. Lynne strongly encouraged the senior women there to take up that baton for REF 2020, despite the difficulties she described. Around these two talks there was plenty of opportunity for participants to express their own thoughts about research strategy, career options, and gender balance in higher education.

The meeting was held on Friday 28th February 2014 at Glasgow Caledonian University, organised by Lynne Baillie and Carron Shankland.