

## visNET Equality Impact Assessment

November 2019

The VisNET project is based in the College of Science and Engineering at the University of Glasgow.

### Description of the policy/project:

<b>Aims of the project</b>
Our aim is to identify key barriers to international collaboration for female STEM academics by designing and demonstrating interventions and new best practices in networking and collaborations to define a new and more effective normal. We are undertaking an intervention to determine and remodel the implicit 'rules' of networking and collaboration advocating a new approach to conduct these activities largely in situ (i.e. from the researchers' home institution). We will also support the female participants through peer group mentoring where they meet monthly to discuss a range of relevant topics with their peers and a mentor.

<b>Who is covered by this policy?</b>
It covers 31 female post-doctoral researchers at the University of Glasgow, University of Strathclyde and the University of Edinburgh. All participants have applied to take part in the project and are all able to withdraw from the programme at any point whereby the intervention will no longer apply to them.

<b>How often is this policy / practice reviewed?</b>
The project will be reviewed in after its completion (project lasts 1 year) as well as getting feedback from the cohort throughout the process. This feedback is gathered during research data collection (such as during interviews) and informal feedback to peer-mentors.

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Review of implications for protected characteristic group (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) in this (or the development of) policy/practice?

Characteristic	Tick all that apply	Impact
Age		
Disability	X	There may be a positive impact for this group as we are improving the use of virtual networking within the involved institutions as well as campaigning for better implementation of virtual attendance at conferences, meetings etc.
Gender reassignment	X	This project was open to those who identified as female and this terminology was used in recruitment materials.
Marriage and civil partnership		
Pregnancy and maternity	X	It is likely that there will be a positive impact for this group as activities should improve experience for women post maternity leave.
Race		
Religion or belief		
Sex	X	This programme is only open to those who identify as a woman. It is expected to have a positive impact on women.
Sexual orientation		

**What evidence do you have for this conclusion (potential implication for a protected characteristic group)?**

This project will take positive action by only being open to female post-docs, to provide this group with additional support to help alleviate attrition of female academics which is not apparent in their male post-doc counterparts. University of Glasgow AdvanceHE statistics show that female academic staff in STEM are less likely to hold professorial posts (5% for women compared to 15% for men) and a higher proportion fall within the lower grades (6 and 7). This intervention wishes to address this problem by improving collaboration and networking for female staff within the institution.

The project also wishes to alter the perceptions that an academic career is incompatible with work-life balance and family. By demonstrating that strategic networks and collaborations can be built and maintained without frequent travel, we believe academic careers will be more attractive to this group of

PDRAs and others. Travel has been identified as a barrier to collaboration and networking for female staff and this intervention wishes to reduce the need for travel by using virtual networking. It is hoped that a wider roll out of the project would also benefit others, including disabled staff and those with caring responsibilities.

Peer mentoring and mentoring have been found to have a positive impact on performance (Mayer et al., 2014) and retention for those in STEM (Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017). In Dennehy and Dasgupta's (ibid) study of undergraduate retention in engineering, it was found women-women peer mentoring was more effective, a further reason to take positive action.

**Does this evidence show a positive impact?**

Current informal feedback suggests that virtual networking has been useful for the peer mentoring by allowing flexibility for carers by removing the need to travel. The peer mentoring has been useful for developing introductions which have made the cohort feel more confident with networking.

**Does this evidence show a negative impact?**

No.

**Does this evidence show no impact?**

No.

**Does this policy/practice continue to promote good opportunity for all people?**

Yes - this project will promote activities that improve work-life balance for all staff (for example by promoting the use of virtual meeting software so that individuals can attend meetings remotely) with particular emphasis on women, those with caring duties (e.g. men and women with children) and those with a disability where face-to-face attendance may be difficult.

**When will this policy/practice be reviewed?**

This project will be reviewed in May 2019