

**E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS****Remove age limits for posts, fellowships and scholarships**

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With the approach of the end of 1999, the awareness that the number of women in science and in managerial positions is so insignificant seems to trigger debates to inquire into the real reasons why this female drain of brain power is allowed to occur. Conferences and meetings are being held relating to this important issue.

Since many women have to give up their career while they are bringing up their children I suggest that the age limits for women when posts, fellowships and scholarships are offered is removed. This may sound like positive discrimination in women's favour but radical measures need to be taken to start addressing the problem. The moderator has pointed out that the EU did its best to be flexible on the issue of age limits for individual applicants.

It is the stated purpose of the European Commission to increase to at least 40 per cent the number of female recipients of awards and of women representatives on all panels, throughout the Framework 5 Programme. The members of most panels believe that to achieve the set goals, the best person should be appointed in the right place. So it is up to us women to come forward and be heard.

Male members of the panel that process the applications for Expert-Evaluateurs stressed that only 15 per cent of those who applied were women. I do not think that the low response from women is due to the lack of interest on their part. The real reason for the lack of response from women is their fear that they would not find the tools and the time to take up the challenge and at the same time stay within the norms expected of them by society in their environment. Besides following a career break some women may need help to regain their self confidence. It is a fact that owing to family commitments, many women obtain their qualifications at a later stage of their lives than men. In many cultures priority in career opportunities within a family is given to the husband rather than the wife. Rather than change the latter attitude, policies that will allow women to catch up later on in their lives will do justice to women. Employers stand to gain by using existing resources and employing qualified women's services. Lack of flexibility when setting up rules favours traditional male roles and necessarily discriminates against women. Associations with the mission to support women to find their place in the career market should be set up.

Women in science may be greatly helped by including them in joint scientific ventures and projects. Women and men in important positions who are in a position to monitor and influence research, should consider mentoring other women who have potential to improve their status. Women organisations should concentrate on self-support among their members.

From the number of requests I receive I gather that data-bases of the capabilities and fields of (relative) expertise of women scientists is being set up by a number of organisations. This will prove to be important to the extent to which respective organisations will publicise their data.

I suggest that organisations who wish to see an increase in useful input by women should help qualified women to return to the work force by offering a short period of retraining under the wing of a supervisor to progress in their career. Shortages in the labour market should be carefully watched and women's talents directed in the appropriate direction.

Some organisations that recently achieved help for women found their image

and financial gain improved as a result. Women who have experience managing a family - on the financial, time and human level - have a distinct expertise to offer other groups. Women are experts at motivating the young and at managing insecurity, through experience. Networks interested in the well being of women should lobby to influence the general opinion of women, who are surely experts in time management and in working under stress within a family. This sets up a multiplying effect so that women and their helpers would put forward a strong united voice.

It is not our purpose to create a model of a superwoman who can cope with all types of peer stress and culture tensions but rather to help set up instruments that will be available to women who are willing to take a step forward.

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