

Women in Applied Mathematics Retreat Round Table Discussion

Careers in Academia

Helen J Wilson
Department of Mathematics, UCL

Outline

- My career history
 - Decision points – factors and influences
 - Confidence / impostor syndrome
- Appointments
- Promotions
- What does an academic look like?

My career pathway

- PhD 1998 (Cambridge)
- 2-year postdoc in USA
Long-distance relationship
- Lectureship (Leeds) 2000–2004
Married 2002, still split-site
- Moved to UCL in 2004, stayed forever
Solved two-body problem
Children 2009, 2012

Key Decision Points

- Postdoc – worth the long-distance?
- Lectureship: when to stop postdoccing
- How to solve 2-body problem
- Pressure points
 - Seeking funding
 - Leading research
 - Impostor syndrome

Academic appointments

- Research statement

 - Comprehensible but do include equations

 - Brief summary of achievements so far

 - Mostly forward-looking

 - 2–6 pages unless specified

- Cover letter

 - Address essential & desirable criteria explicitly

 - Explain any odd things (career breaks etc)

- CV

 - Grants: include unsuccessful if close

 - Teaching: make clear whether lectures or tutorials, class size

 - Get project supervision experience now if you can

 - Include some outreach / WP / EDI activity if you can

Academic interviews

- Same headline questions asked of all candidates
- Typical:
 - Why do you want to work here?
 - Who would you collaborate with?
 - What would be your first research grant application?
 - Which courses could you teach?
 - Which new course would you add?
 - What projects would you offer?
 - Have you done any admin jobs? Describe.
 - Have you worked towards EDI? Describe.

Academic promotions

- Most institutions now have clear objective (ish) criteria
- Areas to hit:
 - Research
 - Education
 - Enterprise / KE / Outreach
 - Institutional Citizenship
- Annual(?) appraisals should guide you on where you need to develop further
- Decent institutions will recognise extraordinary achievement in one category to allow for weakness in another
- Hardest step is **getting the job**

What does an academic look like?

- Passionate about teaching and students and pedagogical theory
- Passionate about research and knowledge exchange and pursuit of funding to support it
- Good citizen

What does an academic look like?

This is impossible!

- It's OK to care without being passionate
- It's OK to be great at some of these and decent at the rest
- You don't have to talk maths all evening

Over to you!

- Your own academic career:
 - Which parts of the job attract you?
 - Which parts will you just live with?
 - Are there routes that get you more of the first?
- Academia of the future
 - What changes would you like to see?
 - How could you drive them?
- Selection for diversity
 - How can you preferentially select allies?