

Dear Editor,

Dr Banerjee is quite right in highlighting the roadblocks to success for women in academia. The reality for academic success depends on papers and grants and everyone, mother or not, works long hours on the way, and now that I am 60 I still put in the hours. Ideas come at different times, and bench and clinical research do not respect 'normal working hours'. Of course if one was a genius in research, or very good in churning out grants, the time expended will be less. Job-share will work in teaching but less well in original research. Postdocs in my lab have had, in the past, the support of a technician, and that allows the mother to be flexible, including being able to do some of the reading, writing and thinking at home. At higher levels, delegation to postdocs, technical and administrative staff would be one way for a woman to progress. The main roadblock would be whether she has learnt to delegate and make strategic decisions. As for there being no woman in the

UCL committees, that is not true. There are female vice provosts, and also women in other 'high level' committees. Committees are not regarded as 'boring', rather, most academics have their time mapped out so that a committee which involves a good deal of navel-gazing is not regarded as efficient use of time by the hard-pressed. But we recognise which committee meetings we can miss and which we must attend for the department, for the unit, and for the research. At the Academy of Medical Sciences, there are many fine examples of women scientists. The academy also has a mentoring scheme.

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