

Nancy Rothwell, UK

President and Vice-Chancellor of The University of Manchester

On working in a male-dominated environment: “I’m always disappointed when I turn up to a meeting and there are very few women. Sometimes I’m the only woman, or the only other woman is taking the notes. This is becoming less common. It’s a bad representation and a loss of talent. But, as I tell a lot of other women, there is a big upside to that because nobody will forget you. If there are 25 men in the room, I never remember most of them, but they will remember the only woman.”

On positive discrimination: “I don’t like it, but I think it’s caused a change. I don’t like it for two counts. One, I think a lot of women don’t like it because they don’t want to feel they’ve got a job because they’re a woman. And secondly, of course a lot of men don’t like it because they feel they’ll lose out. So I’m not keen on positive discrimination, but sometimes it’s the only solution.”

Advice for women entering academia: “Be a bit bolder, grab opportunities and don’t hold back. Look to seize whatever comes up rather than thinking, ‘Oh goodness, I’m not sure if I can do that.’ I think an awful lot is about confidence and about recognising your strengths and your weaknesses as well, and about being yourself.”

On her support network: “In my experience at least – and not everyone agrees with this – all the men I have encountered have been hugely supportive. Women as well, but men notably so. I think most academics and scientists are fair people who want diversity.”

Lessons: “Women quite often look at a new role and focus on the things they think they can’t do, rather than on the things they can do.”

“I chatted to a couple of people I trusted before applying to be Vice-Chancellor and said ‘What do you think?’ And they both said, ‘We think you’d be really good at it.’ I said, ‘That’s not my only question. Do you think I would enjoy it?’ And they thought I would and that was important to me. I would never go for a job just because it was a higher position.”

“I think the key thing is – which I often tell women – don’t try to behave like a man, if it’s not natural to you. Use your own style. Don’t try to be something you’re not.”



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