

Top ECU experts say stereotypes are holding women back in the workplace

A panel of six esteemed academics shared their experiences and advice for advancing women in the field of science and technology in front of eighty guests at an event hosted by The United Nations Association of Western Australia (UNAAWA) - Women's Committee and Edith Cowan University (ECU) on the Joondalup campus, 26 February 2018.

The event entitled 'Advancing Women in STEMM – Celebrating our achievements and working towards gender equality', encouraged women to consider careers in science and technology and boasted an impressive panel including ECU's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategic Partnerships), Professor Cobie Rudd; Associate Dean for Medical and Exercise Sciences, Professor Rob Newton; Associate Dean of Psychology and Criminology, Professor Julie Ann Pooley; and Associate Professor Mary Boyce from the School of Science. They were also joined by ECU Alumni Samantha Ridgway and Baila Shah.

When asked what she thought was causing the disparity between men and women in STEMM, Professor Rudd suggested that the issue begins in formative childhood years:

"We know that stereotypes are already beginning to form as early as five years of age. Children learn, too frequently, that the male is in charge and the decision maker. We need to pay more attention to how we are, often inadvertently, creating those early beliefs and attitudes" she said.

ECU Alumni and Australia's first female certified Level 3 Rocketeer Samantha Ridgway shared a memory of stereotypes at a young age:

"I was 19 and had decided I wanted to be a fighter pilot, so I went down to the recruiting office and said 'I'd like to enrol, I've got the grades and they just looked at me and laughed me out of the office'" she said."

Fellow ECU graduate and BHP Control Systems Engineer Baila Shah encouraged the women in the audience to make themselves known and actively seek opportunities, to take control of career choices. Professor Pooley highlighted the importance of women supporting each other and Professor Cobie Rudd agreed adding:

"There is negative self-talk that goes on that is not helpful and holds women back. We have to equip people with the tools, resources and scripts they need to call out biased and discriminatory behaviour when they see it."



Picture: Vice-President of the UNAAWA, Dr Sandy Chong (centre) moderated the panel discussion for the community-wide event, 26 February 2018