

Philippa Saunders

**Professor and Principal Investigator
College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine**



My role

My two main areas of responsibility are:

1) to lead a large research endeavour focussing on the role of sex steroids in women's health (primary focus the endometrium) 2) to oversee the training of postgraduate research students for the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (I am Director of PGR). There are ~1000 PGR students in the College and my primary role is to ensure they have an excellent experience and to develop strategies to increase student numbers.

A typical week involves...

Management of teams, chairing meetings, attending committees – dealing with enquiries from students, senior staff and supervisors and training.

Development of new research directions, applications for funding, management of finances, dissemination of research data in the form of papers, presentations etc.

National and local committees, reviewing and input into policy.

My career journey

I obtained a PhD from the University of Cambridge and then undertook postdoctoral fellowships at the University of Florida and the Institute of Zoology in London. After coming to Edinburgh I established an independent research group within the MRC Human Reproductive Sciences Unit exploring the mechanisms that underlie steroid-dependent impacts on reproductive health in men and women. I served as Head of the University Centre for Reproductive Biology from 2007-2011 and Inaugural Director of the MRC Centre for Reproductive Health (2011-2012). In 2012 I was appointed as Dean of Postgraduate Research for the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.

Supportive people

My PhD supervisor was very supportive and offered advice even after I left his lab. I learnt some tough lessons whilst working in the USA which made me more assertive. I never had a formal mentor and the Unit Directors I worked for did nothing to help me advance my career – I gained support from peers and from other women scientists and clinicians with whom I collaborated.



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Personal qualities needed for success

Tenacity. Some degree of luck and self belief. I found it terribly tough keeping my career afloat whilst I had small children and was not encouraged to work either part time or take time off to be with them.

I volunteered for some leadership roles and this definitely helped me increase my visibility and get credit for work I was already doing but not being recognised for.

The rewards

Seeing students and staff I have mentored succeed and move forward with their lives/careers.

The challenges

Email overload. People expecting a 'busy woman' to manage administrative tasks without enough support.

Getting research funding.

Taking the next steps would require...

Administrative support!! More hours in the day....

Supporting others

I talk to them about what they want, we work together to develop their CVs so that they are rounded and competitive. I encourage them to network, to go to meetings, to give talks and publish good papers.

I help them apply for grants and practice interviews for fellowships. If they do not want an academic career I encourage them to explore other avenues.

