Comment on the interview with Ken-ichi Arai in *EMBO reports*, July 2001

I enjoyed reading the interview with Professor Arai, the director of my former workplace. However, I would like to add a short commentary regarding the issue of women in science mentioned within it.

Two years have passed since I completed my postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Medical Science at the University of Tokyo (IMSUT), Japan. The Institute provided me with an opportunity to continue my scientific career during my family's stay in Japan. Moreover, by supporting the on-campus nursery, it enabled me and other mothers to continue living our private lives while advancing our careers. But despite this positive personal experience, I would like to add my concerns about the prospects of women scientists and other professionals in Japan.

I agree with Professor Arai that the number of female scientists in Japan is increasing. However, the reality is that postdoctoral fellowships, which are a fairly recent scheme in Japan, have absorbed a great deal of excellent female PhDs, and thus merely postponed the question of what to do with them. Upon completing their term, the prospects of becoming a staff scientist or university professor are very slim for these women, and I am afraid that this is not being addressed.

I do not enjoy hearing or saying that women scientists have to be protected as a minority. And I highly respect Professor Arai's opinion 'to encourage them as better scientists'. But I would like to stress that while I met several excellent young women scientists in Japan, I felt a lack of measures designed to support them in combining their scientific careers with their roles as wives and mothers. The Japanese way of life and professional working habits make the desire of women to combine these diverse roles almost impossible to achieve. I therefore think that something needs to be done, even if it is labelled 'applications of positive measures'.

Besides being professionals, women often have a family and are thus in need of a different way of organising work and everyday life. The contribution of women to modern society as well as to all fields of science is necessary. We are intelligent, educated, rational and well organized. We have good intuition and we want to contribute to the future of our children. These are indeed reasons for us to stay in science! We will do so, but have to be accepted as we are, even at the expense of changing prototypes in society, rather than making us change to fit. Simple changes such as addressing the question of maternity leave during fellowships, applying a 42 hour working week, allowing child-care vacation time for either the mother or father, would all make things better. Having shared Professor Arai's experiences of slow bureaucratic procedures, proposals for change have to be immediate in order for improvements to be realised in the near future.

I would not say that the position of women postdocs in Slovenia is any better, and so sharing these concerns about the Japanese situation is only debating what is an everyday situation for many women scientists around the world.

Irena Mlinaric-Rašcan

Institute Jozef Stefan, Ljubljana, Slovenia

DOI: 10.1093/embo-reports/kve214

Comment on Frank Gannon's article 'Searching for discrimination' in *EMBO reports*, August 2001

I was pleased to see the articles discussing the absence of women in senior positions in science in the latest issue of *EMBO reports*. One particularly telling part was your own survey of why men

seemed to be more successful in securing EMBO long-term fellowships than women. Your survey noted that their publications tended to be in journals with a higher impact factor than those of the female applicants. To get papers published in journals with a high impact factor it seems to be the norm to have to sell your story hard—perhaps even to oversell it, and to be prepared to argue your case quite aggressively with reviewers and journal editors. I think that female scientists are less prepared to do this, and are less comfortable with going through these hoops, and thus often settle for an easier ride in journals with a slightly lower impact. I have certainly noted that some of my male colleagues quite readily argue with journal editors over the telephone about their manuscripts—something that is certainly not in my nature.

Perhaps one way to address this problem is to take a look at the composition of journal editorial boards. *The EMBO Journal* and *EMBO reports* are not setting a good example, I am afraid to say. A cursory look at your Advisory Editorial Board shows a paltry representation of women scientists—a mere 6% by my reckoning—which is notably less than the European average representation of women in professorial posts.

Wendy Bickmore

MRC Human Genetics Unit, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, UK

DOI: 10.1093/embo-reports/kve213

Comment on Holger Breithaupt's article 'Losing them is not an option' in *EMBO reports*, August 2001

At 'The glass ceiling for women in the life sciences' meeting, I gave a short talk which I felt was misrepresented in the above article. I was quoted as attributing the comparably high number of female

correspondence

professors in Turkey to low salaries. This point was, in fact, not suggested by me but by the audience. I quoted the proportion of female academic staff and students in sciences and engineering at our university, which sparked a subsequent discussion on why Turkey had the highest female:male ratio in its academic staff in Europe. I mentioned several probable reasons for it, such as academic careers being popular among women, women receiving childcare support from their parents as they work and relatively more women daring to enter 'men's turf' in Turkey. The last point was exemplified by

the high proportion of women undergraduates in typical 'male' fields, such as electrical and electronic engineering. This department at the Bogazici University has 26 female undergraduates out of a total of 298 (9%) and eight female graduate students out of a total of 103 (8%). The undergraduates are accepted solely by their scores, which are among the highest in the country, in the nationwide entrance exam.

I would like to give another example of the high number of women in leading positions in Turkey: the high proportion of females in Turkish High Courts. Intriguingly,

one of the three High Courts in particular has a high proportion of females: both of the two vice-chairpersons, three of the 13 department heads, and 25 of the 67 members of the general assembly are females. They are selected from about 8000 judges, 1653 of which are women.

Aslihan Tolun

Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey

DOI: 10.1093/embo-reports/kve212