

# Foreword

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“What is WISC?”, I asked a friend as we shuffled into the lecture theatre for a lunchtime presentation at a conference a few years back. At that presentation I learned that WISC is an organisation of (mostly) women (mostly) academics whose aim is to promote awareness and inspire action to address issues of equality and diversity in the supramolecular chemistry community. This is their first book. And for me, a white male professor in my late 50s, a Fellow of the Royal Society, it is an uncomfortable, unsettling, but important read. If I have to work late or leave when it’s dark, I do so without a second thought. If I’m invited to a conference that I wish to go to, I can generally go. If I have a grant or paper rejected, or find out that I earn less than the professor next door, I never have any doubts as to whether my gender had anything to do with it. That’s simply not the case for women in my field, or in my profession generally. It’s difficult – perhaps impossible – for me to fully appreciate what that’s like, how it impacts one’s career and confidence, how it affects day-to-day life. But this book brings it closer; one feels the authors’ frustration and shares their rightful sense of injustice. It is clear from the book that WISC also works as an effective support network for its members. It

was great to learn that everyone who has taken an active role in the organisation has seen an increase in research outputs, grant successes, or career progression.

Over my career I have seen many things change for the better in academia: Recruitment and promotion committees take genuine steps to avoid conscious and unconscious bias; schemes have been introduced that target women and other disadvantaged groups for independent positions; the increase in the number of women in chemistry departments has drastically changed the 'macho' culture that was prevalent 25 years ago. But the text and vignettes in this book, the latter composed from real experiences of women in supramolecular chemistry, paint a vivid, troubling picture that shows just why further significant change is still needed. The playing field is still not level. Whether that's the fault of society, academia, or supramolecular chemistry itself, I don't know. But I suspect it's all three.

In reading this book, the most uncomfortable part of all was the persistent wondering if and how my own behaviour contributes to the inequality and experiences I was reading about. What do I do, or not do, that makes academia less fair on my women colleagues? And my questioning of that is, perhaps, the best reason of all for this book.

What is WISC? It's a start.