Academia and the Reproduction of Unequal Opportunities for Women

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Despite the introduction of equal opportunities (EO) policies by many UK universities, academic staff continue to be male dominated, particularly at the higher levels and in the more prestigious universities. This paper draws on data from a qualitative research study undertaken in a pre-1992 UK university. The main aim of the study was to measure the effectiveness of its EO policies for women. It uses Ball's (1993) idea of problematising policies by looking at their 'underlife' in their 'localised complexity'. The paper argues that distinctive aspects of academia produce and reproduce gender inequality. These aspects include: professional autonomy, an isolationist culture, and lack of good management. It is concluded that pre-1992 universities in the UK prove to be sites, which are particularly resistant to the change demanded by EO policies because of the special conditions of academia.

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The Position of Women Academics in UK Universities

The quantitative under-representation of women academics in UK universities is well documented. Overall women hold only 35% of full-time academic posts (including both teaching and research). Also, whereas women hold 35% of lecturer posts, they account for only 10% of professors. The figures are even more revealing if we look at different disciplines; whereas 24% of education professors are women, only 2% of physics professors are women, and there are none at all in civil engineering (Universities UK, 2000). Latest figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency starkly show that the average female academic will earn four to five years' less salary than an average male colleague for the same number of years worked; 42% of women academics have full-time permanent positions compared to 59% of men; and women are 33% more likely than men to be employed on fixed-term contracts and 550% less likely to be professors (Guardian, 1999).

Because of the position of women academics, Opportunity 2000, the prominent national business-led campaign in the UK to increase the quantity and quality of women's representation in the workforce, have singled universities out as "under-performing employers" who had "signally failed to make enough progress in promoting women... which sends a bad message to the next generation". They argue that; "The higher education sector inevitably influences the student population and has a potential role-modelling effect. These factors mean that this sector must be exemplary in equal opportunity practice for staff and for students'. However, it also highlighted the fact that '[u]sing academic job titles... the campaign revealed very clearly that women in universities have not yet been able to overcome the obstacles that exist in long-established, very traditional environments" (EOR, 1997: 17).

The original Hansard Society[1] Commission Report (1990) hoped that the sheer numbers of women in junior and middle management positions in the work force would bring changes at senior levels. Their subsequent progress report, however, exposed this as erroneous: "generational change does not appear to have done the trick and the evidence suggests that waiting for it to do so may well take a long time" (McRae, 1996: 5). When writing about the lack of success of women academics, Helena Kennedy (1996: 2) stated that "Whenever the absence of women at the top of any area of public life is raised, the inevitable response is that it is only a matter of time. Like fish growing feet, women are apparently evolving into suitable candidates and will get there in the end but the process should not be forced." The evidence, however, points to the fact that women still face a combination of handicaps and prejudice: those who have been successful in achieving high office are frequently childless, but still take longer reaching their positions than their male peers, whilst eminent women who have children feel that they would have got further if they had been able to have worked longer hours and been more mobile (McRae, 1996).

Equal Opportunities Policies

As shown by a recent national study of universities' policies and practices (Commission on University Career Opportunity - CUCO), women academics continue to encounter disadvantage even though many universities in the UK have been active in the EO policy field. (Bagilhole & Robinson, 1997) The response rate from the universities was extremely good at 92%, and there were areas where there was evidence of substantial activity; 96% had an EO policy; 84% had an individual at senior level who had been assigned institutional responsibility for EO; 79% issued guidelines on recruitment and selection procedures; 69% had a consultative forum or committee to discuss EO and 51% had designated and dedicated staff members who dealt with EO on a day to day basis.

The study, however, raises concerns about effective policy implementation. Only 32% of the universities had an action plan, although a further 25% said they had action plans either under development or in preparation. Only 28% had a budget set aside for EO purposes, only 50% trained all their staff involved in recruitment and selection, and only

37% had EO awareness training for all categories of staff. Whilst 94% had a code of practice or established method of handling their personal harassment policy, only 52% monitored its effectiveness. Also, 80% of universities reported that no action was taken after monitoring. Only 31% of universities made use of the 'positive action' provisions of the EO legislation, mostly in women-only training and development, and advertising. In terms of obstacles to EO, 42% of the universities identified lack of resources, mainly financial, but also staffing, 14% mentioned EO's lack of status within higher education, and 12% a general lack of awareness and the subsequent need for training.

There is a gap between policies and successful implementation in the UK. Universities have been slow to embrace equality issues compared with other institutions and even other levels of the education system. Now, as can be seen by the CUCO survey little attention has been given to the evaluation of policies and their effective implementation. As Farish *et al.* (1995: 1) highlight, there is an "increased activity in the field of EO policy-making, though there is also a level of scepticism as to what it is possible to achieve". There is an identifiable gap between "principle, practice and interpretation" (Heward & Taylor, 1993: 76), and "rhetoric and reality" (Burton & Weiner, 1993: 57). In fact, Heward and Taylor (1993) argue that EO policies have little effect on women academics.

According to Davies and Holloway (1995) universities quite simply do not understand EO issues, and this can be witnessed in the effects on women academics (Bagilhole, 1993a; Davies, 1993). EO policies experience resistance and assessments of any change towards equality for women remain pessimistic (Heward & Taylor, 1992; Bagilhole, 1993b). Walsh (1995: 91) argues that: "If as embodied women, we represent danger and disorder, the potential undoing of men and masculinity, the question of our access, status and influence in the academy exceeds the reach of any Equal Opportunities policies".

It is important to analyse the effectiveness of EO policies, "the implementation gap" and the "vast discrepancy between policy intention, text and gendered practices" (Morley & Walsh, 1996: 3). As Walker (1997: 41) pointed out when examining a gender equality policy in a South African university, "any policy is constructed within a particular social, political and historical context and prevailing lines of power". In a similar vein, Müller (2000) in her study of the implementation of EO policies by German universities in North Rhine-Westphalia constructs a useful typology of three basic stages that institutions had achieved: active formation, reluctant opening, and passive toleration. These represent a spectrum of responses to state initiated policies by universities. Type one (active formation) is where EO policies have been fully implemented into both the structure and culture of the organisation. Type 2 (reluctant opening) is characterised by contradictory strategies with some implementation, but still allowing powerful actors to prevent them from being effective. Finally type 3 (passive toleration), the most negative of all, was where virtually nothing had been achieved.

In looking at the construction of state educational policies, Ball (1993: 11) usefully problematised the concept of

policy as a "product of compromises at various stages". This also contributes the useful idea of "localised complexity" and looking at organisations as sites of policy struggle, interpretation and reinterpretation where policies are "decoded in complex ways via actors' interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context". Ball argued that the translation of policy into practice and change involves "social action, productive thought, invention and adaptation". Thus the implementation of policies rely on things like "commitment, understanding, capability, resources" and ultimately power to effect change (Ball, 1993: 11-12).

Similarly, according to Wooding (1998) EO can only be effective if people in the institution are committed. To gain this commitment they need either *direct* experience of inequality, or *indirect,* e.g. through partners/daughters, or intellectual experience (training). It also requires an extra dimension, the interpretation of that experience as unjust. Ball argued that "different interpretations of policies... spread confusion and allow for play in the playing-off of meanings. Gaps and spaces for action and response are opened up as a result". Just as policies arrive with "an interpretational and representational history", they enter "a social and institutional context. Policies enter existing patterns of inequality... They 'impact' or are taken up differently as a result... Policy is not exterior to inequalities, although it may change them, it is also affected, inflected and deflected by them" (Ball, 1993: 17). Ball called this the "underlife" of policies. Therefore, using this useful concept of an "underlife", a study was undertaken by the author to examine the ineffectiveness of EO

policies in a pre-1992 UK university[2] with relatively well-established EO policies.

A University Case Study of Equal Opportunities

At the case study university, a personnel officer was appointed in 1994 with 50% of her time devoted to the role of EO Adviser. In this capacity she developed a detailed Action Plan with progress reported to the EO Committee. This committee met once a term and reported to University Council annually. The action plan covered recruitment, employment and promotion opportunities, including EO training in policy implementation, and enhanced access to training for under-represented or disadvantaged groups.

Since the appointment of the EO Adviser, progress had been made on a number of fronts, both inside and outside the University. A great deal of work had been undertaken on sexual harassment training; a number of practice guideline booklets had been issued to all staff on EO in general, on harassment issues, on disability, and on the use of gender-free language; a review of practices surrounding the employment of casual staff had been completed, and harmonisation of conditions of service undertaken where possible; recruitment and selection guidelines were developed for the use of Heads of Departments (HODs), as was a positive action statement for inclusion on advertisements, and training for selectors was underway; an appraisal booklet highlighting gender issues was also developed, and a questionnaire was issued to all Heads of Departments and Sections to evaluate their

perceptions of the need for EO training and to trawl for current good practice. In addition, monitoring of data on recruitment, on existing staff, on various discretionary awards, and on promotion was ongoing.

Methodology

The case study university can be seen as a relatively average university in terms of its gender balance of academics. In a breakdown of professors by gender it came joint 26th out of a ranking of institutions from one to 68, with 8.9% of its professors being women (Griffiths, 1997).

In 2000, 37 semi-structured interviews with roughly equal numbers of both women and men were conducted across this pre-1992 University and were analysed using the Nud*ist software package. The interviews included academic staff at all levels and across all schools (lecturers, senior lecturers, professors, HODs[3], Deans, and the Vice-Chancellor.

Staff at different points on the academic ladder were included; probationary staff, staff who might be considered eligible for promotion, and staff at professorial levels. HODs were seen as key figures in the production and reproduction of the 'culture' of the University as experienced by their staff. They are also key figures in the implementation of change, and were therefore likely to provide valuable insights into policy implementation. Selecting HODs from all of the Schools in the University ensured representation from the whole of the University rather than any particular departments or disciplines. All the respondents in the study were White and non-disabled[4]. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the focus of this study is on gender, and it is unmediated by the diversifying factors of 'race', ethnicity, and disability.

Whilst recognising the problems of the extrapolation of these case study findings to all institutions of a particular type within the higher education sector, it is contended that the data gives an opportunity to explore the complex, often hidden cultural barriers to women's successful careers in universities, and which form part of the everyday practices of academia.

Findings

Awareness of Equal Opportunities

There was a recognition by the academic staff interviewed that the university has taken the issue of EO "on board", and that it is "trying".

> "EO Policies? Well I know that it takes EO policies very much more seriously than it did in the past, and there's quite a lot of paperwork about it now in the way that there wasn't before. And there's been a lot of discussion about it. And I think just the fact of having discussion and raising it as an issue is very important". *Senior academic, female, 48 years old.*

But also a considerable degree of cynicism and disillusionment:

> "Until you've got women at senior levels, taken seriously at the senior decision-making levels in the University, I don't see anything changing". *Senior academic, female, 53 years old.*

> "I think this university is a long way behind. It has lots of nice glossy leaf-

lets about it, but as far as I can see, nobody actually checks up whether departments are following these things. Even short-listing for posts is not a standard procedure, even though the leaflets say it is, but no-one seems to take a blind bit of notice as far as I can see". *Senior academic, female, 39 years old.*

"The University hasn't ignored the issues, but it has to accept that just having lots of paper policies isn't enough - people think you've got an Equal Opportunities policy and then you can forget about it ... I think there's bound to be resistance". *Junior academic, female, 29 years old.*

There is a recognition on the part of those who would wish the EO policies to be more effective that, until women reach decision making positions in the university in sufficient numbers, there is likely to be little change in their disadvantaged position. The problem that is identified is that of the implementation of policies. Whilst it was recognised that policies existed on paper, and were even made into glossy leaflets, it was felt that they would remain ineffective without implementation strategies. These strategies would have to overcome the resistance to change required by EO policies in this sort of institution, and therefore needed to include monitoring and holding managers accountable for EO practices.

Professional Autonomy

A common theme, which emerged in interviews, was the notion of professional autonomy. Professional autonomy is one of the things that attracted many academic staff to the occupation in the first place. However, this very same profes-sional autonomy means that it is not easy to effect the changes demanded by effective EO policies. Academic staff in pre-1992 universities remain essentially autonomous and therefore difficult to manage. This is demonstrated by the traditionally more marginal role of personnel departments in pre-1992 universities compared to other institutions.

"I thought these guys were basically doing what they want to do, and dictating their own workload. Once the teaching and admin's out the way, the work's what you make it - and I like that freedom". *Senior Academic, male, 43 years old.*

It is accepted that the operation of academic autonomy means that it is not easy to effect change, as is ironically being portrayed here:

"... managing academics is like herding cats... fundamentally in academe the biggest problem by far is that there's no discipline within the system... what sanctions can you apply?" *Senior academic, male, 53 years old.*

"I think one of the big problems is the sense of, 'we're looking for the best person, we don't want to tie ourselves down beforehand in case the best person comes through the door, and we've ruled them out by being too prescriptive'. It also lends itself very much to 'the best person is someone like us' as well. And I think it's not even necessarily a sort of open resistance to it. I mean, I don't think anyone is stupid enough to be openly resistant to equal opportunities, but there is a very embedded culture of looking for the best person, that is - I wouldn't say is incompatible with equal opportunities - but can be in tension with it I think, and make it difficult". *Senior academic, female, 58 years old.*

This view of academic staff as essentially autonomous and therefore unmanageable is one, which can also be found within other sections of the University. Whilst the personnel section, for example, has some responsibility in staff recruitment and appointment procedures, their powers only extend so far. Non-Ordinance 6 posts, which currently include the appointment of contract research staff, and Professorial appointments, are dealt with at Departmental level, and are not subject to the same level of transparency as other appointments. This is one example of an "us and them" feeling between academic and personnel staff. It is something that should be seen in the context of the traditionally more marginal role of personnel departments in pre-1992 universities compared to other institutions.

Isolationist Culture

Although in many disciplines a collaborative mode of research in research groups is increasing, in the UK, academic life involves continuing and increasing individual competitiveness. The Research Assessment Exercise, the major, national inspection of academic output every five years, provides a strong incentive for individualistic endeavour. Each academic is entered as an individual (if at all), and therefore there is a lot of pressure to publish single, or at least first authored, articles in respectable refereed journals to establish claim to intellectual ideas rather than to share them with colleagues. This contributes to an essentially isolationist culture.

It is also, however, the case that women are less likely than men to be included in research groups (Bagilhole,

1993b), and the gender imbalance in universities, and the structural location of women within the institutions mean that women as a group are more likely than their male peers to suffer the disadvantages of isolation. In fact, because of their extreme isolation women need positive action not equal treatment. As one male manager commented:

> "... the question would be, do female members of staff have particular needs in a male-dominated academic community?... from what I can observe, in different departments, female members of staff feel very isolated". S*enior academic, male, 56 years old.*

According to Kanter (1977), the smaller a minority women find themselves to be in an organisation, the greater their chances of being isolated and marginalised. The gender balance in universities, the structural location of women within the organisation, and different disciplines, show that women as a group are more likely than their male peers to suffer the disadvantages of isolation. Prevalent, however, amongst men was the view identified by West and Lyon (1995) that academic women colleagues are just 'chaps' and must find their own way within the androcentric culture, like the other chaps. This outcome of isolation is not one which was appreciated by most of the male managers interviewed, who were reluctant to see women as different in staff development terms, especially since some female members of staff are perceived to "fit in" perfectly well as the following academic from a science discipline explained:

> "She fits in very well. She enjoys a good relationship with all of the technicians... she is very quiet, very undemanding, gets on with her job but eve-

rybody likes her". *Senior academic, male, 48 years old.*

Altering the gender status quo quantitatively by recruiting more women into the male environment does not, according to this perspective, imply the need to make any qualitative changes. In considering the implications of recruiting more women, the same academic's imagination only stretches as far as the loo or the locker room.

> "Why would we have to change anything? I don't think so. I mean, if we got that many, we might have to expand the ladies' loo. When I first came... they took a bit off the gents' loo and converted it into a ladies', because we had a female working down here. It's now a ladies-stroke-disabled... but I don't think we need to make any other changes. I mean, I don't know whether we should perhaps think in terms of a separate locker room. But if we're talking about equal opportunities, we shouldn't give them a separate locker room - we should say, We've got a locker room. So I don't think we should have to change anything". (As Above.)

The precedent set by other UK public service organisations, of women's groups and black staff groups, who meet in work time and are provided with resources to support their staff development activities, has not reached higher education, where liberal definitions adhering to the 'equal treatment' approach prevail. In fact, a mild attempt at positive action in the form of earmarking a studentship in an area of work which was under-represented in a department, and which would also mean that a female member of staff would be enabled to develop some research, was firmly resisted by an all-male departmental committee heavily weighted with professors:

> "I suggested earmarking one of these to areas, to people who had not really managed to get them, probably because they were doing such a heavy burden on the administration, and there's never been a research student in this area... the research committee didn't like that... [their objection] was that it wasn't equal opportunities – that whoever was the best student who came into the department should get the grant irrespective of area... My idea was to develop the department a little bit more in this area, and perhaps too to develop individuals that maybe the department was exploiting. You know, the role they were playing in the department's administration was significant, and prevented some other kinds of activity. In my mind, it was a pro-active thing, but I don't think it was viewed that way". *Senior academic male, 56 years old.*

Senior women academics accounted for lack of progress beyond the paper stage, towards thorough-going implementation of EO policies in the mainstream of academic practice, in terms of the need for positive action.

> "I think [what is needed is] a policy of positive action as far as the recruitment and retention and support of women students and staff go." *Senior academic, female, 50 years old.*

Management and Equal Opportunities

The effectiveness of EO policies demands good management, but pre-1992 universities do not have this. Management roles, such as the crucial role of HOD, are assumed on a temporary basis and then passed on to a new incumbent who has received no professional training. These managers make for moving targets. There is a general reluctance to accept that the HOD role includes

human resource management, and attitudes to EO policies include a lack of ownership and responsibility on their part.

It is acknowledged that there is certainly not universal agreement about what constitutes "good" managerial practice and there is a dispute about what delivers organisational efficiency (Halford *et al.*, 1997). Müller (2000: 161), however, identified that the implementation of EO policies is most effective in settings with a "transparency of its personnel development, self-evaluation, and self-regulation policies".

Thus it is argued here that it is possible to criticise management in pre-1992 UK universities. Sisson (1989) documents a failure on the part of universities as a whole to accept responsibility for managing the employment relationship. They note that although universities in the UK are legally the employer of their staff, most are not equipped to undertake this role effectively.

According to Keep and Sisson (1992) some institutions have progressed beyond this rudimentary state of development, but in general, the active management of personnel issues at a strategic level is relatively unknown, and the integration of personnel considerations into wider planning, within institutions and within the system as a whole, remains rare. The stunted growth of the personnel function and the failure of those in charge of universities to accept real responsibility for the staff they employ has combined to ensure that the development of sophisticated personnel management systems has generally not taken place. In contrast to industry and commerce whose employees the universities have responsibility for training, academics' own staff development has

remained the responsibility of the individual.

Reluctance by Heads of Departments to accept that their role included human resource management was common in the study, as the following comment illustrates.

> "This is the part of the job that I don't do very well, because I think it would take a lot of effort and time, and I still want to do research you see. I still want to maintain a hands-on activity in many areas 'cos at some stage I won't be Head of Department". *Senior male academic, 58 years old.*

Shortly before this research project, the EO Officer carried out a questionnaire survey of HODs to assess current levels of activity and experience of EO policies, and to gauge staff training needs in this area. Although less than half the possible respondents replied, returns came from ten academic departments - some from each of the four Schools. Responses from academic departments indicated that managers felt their staff had a "good" or "better than good" knowledge of gender issues. The exception to this was from a female lecturer, asked by her male HOD to fill in the questionnaire, who answered "poor", and who went on to express a hope that they could "develop a better awareness without further jokes being made about being 'politically correct'".

HODs were also asked to rank a list of nine EO training initiatives in the order in which they felt their staff would benefit. The responses to this task, which many felt unable to perform, were nevertheless revealing. There were comments that staff have "very little time for extra activities", that the "codes of practice leaflets, which have been issued are

helpful to use as and when the need arises", and that training may be "more relevant to other departments, where staff are not involved in so many activities", or "where they have new recruits".

These comments illustrated a conception of EO as an optional extra, or an "add-on" of some formula, which leaves other kinds of practice undisturbed. It implies a "problem-centred" approach, with leaflets being used "as and when the need arises". The suggestion that departments weighted with long-standing members of staff, as opposed to new recruits, are less likely to need training in EO is not borne out by interview evidence, and indeed, it is often those coming into academia from other settings who express surprise at the low levels of awareness of gender issues, and at how far behind the academic world was in terms of policy development and practice.

When asked for suggestions about how EO might be progressed further at departmental level, a mixture of apathy, caution, frustration and antagonism became apparent. There was a claim that such measures "are being progressed, so no more please at the moment!" A plea for progress to be "gradual", a request for a continued supply of written reference material, a plea for more concrete demonstration of support at senior management level, including increased funding. This reflected a "don't call us, we'll call you" message. "This is not a major issue for us and we would prefer to seek advice as and when a problem arises". Finally, there was also a note of resistance: "Numerous assumptions are being made here! This is a loaded question that assumes that EO needs to be progressed further!"

The final picture then is a mixed one, including a general lack of awareness, a failure to recognise that there are issues that policies still need to address, feelings that enough is already being asked of staff, pleas for more resources and tangible recognition of efforts already being made, and a single female voice asking for the development of further awareness in an environment free from ridicule. What is also apparent is that the greatest failure to acknowledge the importance of these issues comes from those disciplines where women are very much in the minority, and this was borne out by the responses to the exploration of these issues in the research interviews. It was clear that there was not a very sophisticated understanding of what the implications of EO policies were for academic managers, and that it was assumed that everything was generally fair, so that it was not a priority.

Therefore this case study university can be seen to fall into Vince and Booth's (1996) "active/avoiding" type of organisational culture, where there is a "confused commitment" manifested in both approaching and avoiding equality at the same time. This approach is illustrated by the following comment:

> "It is desirable to work towards equality, but we don't want to open a can of worms". *Senior academic male, 55 years old.*

Whilst this senior male academic seems to declare support for EO polices, in the same comment he implies that he would be reluctant to change very much to achieve their effectiveness. He feels that broaching the issues could expose potentially contentiousness, difficult and controversial issues; the 'worms' within the can.

Equal Opportunities for Women Academics: a Way to Go

Research on EO policies in UK universities show that the university in this study is certainly in the national mainstream of EO developments (Bagilhole & Robinson, 1997). Resources, however, were always inadequate for a comprehensive EO Action Plan, with only one half-time EO Adviser. The EO policy looked good on paper and that appeared to suffice for many.

Universities are different. de Groot (1997: 139) described the "mono-cultural inequities of the academy" continued by "restricted circles of power and control". Importantly, these restricted circles of power are male-dominated – if not all-male, as shown by UK national statistics on professors and positions above these. Therefore, as Glazer (1997: 63) pointed out, "women, who are largely powerless within the university organization, must rely on male leadership to bring about substantive changes in their situation". We can, however, see from the present study that academic managers with power (almost entirely men) appear to have remained largely untouched by EO initiatives undertaken in this university. Thus this study, using in-depth qualitative analysis of data, revealed invisible barriers to women's success that are part of everyday practices in academia and that the gap between the rhetoric and reality of EO is great. These barriers are maintained by the special dimensions of the academic profession, which include the three identified in the introduction: a still large degree of professional autonomy; its isolationist, competitive culture (especially disadvantageous for women); and finally, the nature of its

management at departmental level (at least in pre-1992 universities).

These barriers have rendered the realization of EO for women virtually unattainable. These all feed into and allow a limited 'problem-centred' approach to equality issues on behalf of managers, where intervention is only welcome when a problem has arisen. Until then, EO policies and their implementation and development are seen as the function of others. As Walker (1997: 55) pointed out, it is in this "arena of institutional culture and dominant male values and practices" that policies unravel. As Thornton (1989: 127) starkly commented, "the hegemonic, homogenising and institutional constraints which operate within the academy, the quintessence of arrant individualism and competitiveness, have rendered the realisation of action by and on behalf of women as a sex class impossible to achieve through a liberal framework".

Academic managers' attitudes towards EO initiatives can be seen as shaped by the perceived threat such initiatives presented to their professional autonomy, and the primacy they gave to being "academics" over and above "managers". Also, these attitudes remain unchallenged within the competitive, isolationist nature of the academic pursuit. There were tensions between academic managers and the equality specialist. Line managers in other types of organization in the UK have also been shown to resist EO initiatives, which they interpret as attempts by personnel to capture areas of power previously held by them (see Bagilhole, 1993c; Bagilhole & Stephens, 1999). Conflicts surrounding policies seem to be imposed from above without any apparent idea that operational im-

plications have a long heritage. It is argued, however, that they gain an intensity and added currency in academia, due to the special conditions of the profession.

The role of the equality specialist is always fraught with contradictions, having to try to control and appease managers at the same time. Certainly studies of rule enforcing and rule-breaking generally in organisations, and specific studies of EO implementation (Bagilhole, 1993c; Burton, 1991; Collinson *et al.*, 1990) have shown the limitations of approaches, which are interpreted as either bureaucratic or as policing. Furthermore, the adoption of formal policies is rarely enough, and standing alone, can actually be counter-productive, in that it leads, especially in the liberal context of academia (Cann *et al.*, 1991), to a conviction that EO "now exists".

In the present study, it was the women academics – the main stakeholders in change towards genuine EO, who commented on the gap between rhetoric and reality, and who demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of what EO meant in principle and in practice. They called for more radical interpretations of EO measures than at present existed, which would take them beyond procedures, and the policing of procedures, to more thoroughgoing cultural change. Recommendations to address some of these obstacles covered prioritising monitoring; making changes to the location of EO systems within the organisation, by devolving responsibility in order to enhance "ownership" of "the problem", training courses for key staff, to address both confused and resistant attitudes and to equip staff to follow procedures more rigorously; and the intro-

duction of long-overdue family-supportive employment practices to the university, in order to minimise structural obstacles to progress. It is therefore hoped that this study may offer insights, which help to construct a "less domesticated and tamed" approach to EO in universities (Marshall, 1996: 67).

Cross-cultural comparisons are useful here to show what can be done differently. Brooks (1997: xi) showed that "a policy of affirmative action is capable of reaching parts unstimulated by a less robust commitment to equality". Also, recently the Academy of Finland (2001) released a press release about their Equality Plan, on International Women's Day. This plan for 2001-3 contains a 40% quota for the minority gender in academic researchers (women). Where applicants are equally competent and qualified for the research posts, preference will be given to the minority gender. The plan applies to all researchers funded from Academy sources, and it is hoped to see the whole academic community in Finland and around the world follow suit. Research teams applying for funding will have to provide an account of their gender breakdown, and of any staff recruited when submitting their final report and when seeking new funding. Extensions will be granted to research posts and projects on the grounds of maternity, paternity and parental leave, and male researchers will be encouraged to make use of their legal right to parental leave. Also, researchers with children may be entitled to a 20% increase in scholarships for research training. Also, special grants are available for women and young researchers for periods of 2-6 months to prepare research plans. A caveat, however, must be added

to this information. As of yet, no data on the success or otherwise the implementation of the Equality Plan is available. Therefore, judgement has still to be reserved as to whether this initiative will be groundbreaking or merely a paper exercise.

Given the present ineffectiveness of EO policies in universities, it is argued here that such initiatives with effective implementation strategies are desirable for the UK, and possible with the appropriate political will and adequate resources.

Notes

1 The Hansard Society's aim is to promote the increased involvement of women in all aspects and at all levels of public life.It contains Members of Parliament from all the major political parties.

2 In 1992, the UK government converted all existing Polytechnics into Universities. Despite being named Universities, however, there still remains a division between these post-1992 institutions and the pre 1992 Universities. Pre-1992 Universities continue to concentrate on research, have fewer students, are more prestigious, and their academic staff are paid on a different and higher scale. Post-1992 Universities emphasise teaching, have larger students populations, lack status, and academic staff are paid less.

3 They included at least two Heads of Department from each of the four schools; Human, Economic and Social Sciences; Engineering; Pure and Applied Science; and Education and Humanities.

4 The university in the study has only 3% of academics who classified themselves as ethnic minorities (17 staff out of over 500), and only 0.4% who classified themselves as disabled (2 staff out of over 500) in their last monitoring exercise.

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