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Tapping All Our Talents Review 2018: Women in STEM
Academic & Research Employment Roundtable
12 April 2018, 10.00 – 12.00

Note of Meeting

Roundtable Participants
Morag Campbell, Assistant Director, Scottish Funding Council
Karen Chapman, Personal Chair of Molecular Endocrinology, University of Edinburgh
Mary Doherty, University of the Highlands and Islands [member of Working Group, but representing UHI here]
Susan Duthie, Associate Head of School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, Robert Gordon University
Morag Ferguson, Assistant Head, Learning, Teaching and Quality, Glasgow Caledonian University
Jon Issberner, Associate Dean of Science, University of St Andrews
Jessie Kennedy, Dean of Research & Innovation, Edinburgh Napier University
Annie McLaughlin, Gender Equality Officer, University of Strathclyde
Ruth Meyer, Senior Policy Officer (Research and Innovation), Universities Scotland
Stephanie Millar, Senior Policy Adviser, Equality Challenge Unit
Alan Miller, CEO SUPA
Amir Siddiq, School of Engineering, University of Aberdeen

Working Group Members:
Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell DBE, Former RSE President; Visiting Professor of Astrophysics, Oxford University.
Professor Polly Arnold, Crum Brown Chair of Chemistry, University of Edinburgh.

Secretariat:
Morven Chisholm, Fellowship and Young Academy Manager, The Royal Society of Edinburgh
Ashleigh Thow, Membership Assistant, The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Introduction:
Notification that the roundtable will be run under Chatham House Rule (participants will be free to refer to the discussion, but they should not attribute comments to any individual or organisation). A report of the discussion will be taken and will be used to inform the working group's deliberations, and the final report. Participants were invited to feed in written comments after the meeting.

Resources / Reports mentioned:
The Elizabeth Garrett Mentoring Programme, University of St Andrews:
https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/staff/ppd/elizabethgarrettmentoring/

LERU (League of European Research Universities) Report on Implicit Bias in Academia:
https://www.leru.org/files/implicit-bias-in-academia-full-paper.pdf

ASSET Survey:
https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/asset-2016/

ECU research shows women in STEMM academia are underrepresented in senior posts:
https://www.ecu.ac.uk/news/new-ecu-research-shows-women-in-stemm-academia-are-underrepresented-in-senior-posts/

AcademiaNet:
http://www.academia-net.org/

Discussion Topics

1. What are the biggest challenges that are yet to be tackled in addressing gender inequality in academia and research? What are the barriers to tackling these?

    - Transparency around progression into leadership positions can be a problem.
    - Open and transparent processes are happening more, and we're seeing more women in senior management.
    - Intersectionality might be worth looking at (gender and disability, gender and race, economic and social background etc.).
    - Men have networks of support and for talent spotting, but these aren't transparent.
    - New networks for women within some institutions, but these are not yet the norm.
    - Is there a difference in attitude around talent spotting for men and women? Are the discussions by women seen almost as gossip?
    - There can be a difference between perception and reality – can be seen as a 'girls club'.
    - Men's networks are more natural; whereas women's networks can feel contrived.
    - Women's networks are being set up, but there can be the perception that this is unfair (despite the fact that men's networks already exist).

- It's unfortunate that we have to overcompensate, rather than fix the underlying problem.
- There can be a backlash and a feeling that this is political correctness gone too far.
- Can addressing intersectionality problems help with these perceptions? (i.e. talk about disadvantaged men too?)
- We shouldn't shy away from the fact that some people will lose out, but there is overall benefit. We need to avoid protecting men, or tokenism. Need honesty, even when it's unpalatable for some.
- We had our first events for International Women's Day. One man turned up. Important to have buy-in from senior male management.
- Need recognition that this benefits everyone, not just women.
- We need to move away from a 'them and us' view.
- The pipeline into university is important, as culture and attitudes are determined early on. This is relevant given the role of universities and academics in supporting school outreach activities, for example. This will be discussed at a separate roundtable.

2. How does leadership of the university/institute/department impact on the experiences of women?

- Leadership sets the culture and tone for the whole organisation (or department). It can have a huge impact and can transform the agenda. However, it can easily revert when management changes.
- Is it different in a university lead by a woman? It's difficult to know what is because of gender, and what's down to individual leadership styles. But seeing more women in senior roles, on key committees etc, is a positive development.
- Noticeable that people without lived experience don't necessarily appreciate the issues.
- The team that surrounds the Principal is important too.
- Strong female leadership has changed culture. There's a focus on policy, so we've seen tangible changes, as well as the wider impact of having a female role model.
- There may be policies in place, but often people are only interested if it directly affects them.
- Does your university have core hours? In theory it's 9-5, but in reality meetings get scheduled outwith these hours. Remote working helps here. Core hours are thought of in terms of flexible working, but not in

terms of when meetings can/should be scheduled. Some institutions are moving ‘consensus hours’ for meetings. Some activities are outside core hours, but their purpose may necessitate this. Important to have consensus, and for people to feel comfortable speaking out if activities outside core hours aren’t suitable.

3. Has there been any improvement in institutional policies that can facilitate a better work-life balance for women in STEM research posts e.g. maternity leave, shared parental leave, family leave, flexible working?

   - Parental leave has made a difference. Take-up is slow, but it has changed perceptions. However, the gender pay gap can reduce take-up.
   - More awareness of flexible working would be useful. And the more men that take it up, the more acceptable and normal it becomes.
   - Experience of policies not being flexible enough to support people properly.
   - Raises the issue of career breaks and route back in to employment, particularly in research as people are judged on publication outputs.
   - Trying to reduce the impact of career breaks in REF, but still some institutional/internal bias.
   - Still feel under pressure to publish at the same rate.
   - Difficult to know which initiatives (including elements of Athena SWAN) are actually making a difference. Noted that a review of Athena SWAN is being undertaken.

4. Has equality become a more visible central focus within HEIs/research institutes over the past five years e.g. better monitoring of data (female representation at all levels and across sectors, pay, numbers of women applying for and being appointed to posts); establishment of equity committees; mandated equality training?

   - When equality training was made mandatory, take-up was 60% (only 20% when it was voluntary)
   - Feeling that respect and dignity training should be a key element of university induction (in the same way that plagiarism is)
   - Unconscious bias training is making a difference to behaviour. It’s compulsory for staff on recruitment and selection panels. But want other ways to build it in and remind staff regularly. It’s most effective when it’s built into processes and attached to something specific. A recommendation of LERU report (link above) is to have one external

person on the committee focusing on Unconscious Bias. One of the most effective unconscious bias training sessions was for Deans in the US, where actors acted out a committee meeting with typical biased behaviours. Entertaining but also encouraged people to face up to their own actions.

- Lack of self-awareness can be an issue. 360 degree feedback has helped.

5. What initiatives have been taken to increase the numbers of women STEM researchers in HEIs and research institutes in Scotland? Have these been perceived as successful or otherwise and why?

- Issue of women having less confidence.
- Issue using words such as ‘exceptional’ when they’re not measurable.
- Societal impact of a role can be more attractive to female applicants.
- Including information on flexible working etc. helps. As does having someone central to review job adverts.
- Wording of adverts is clearly important. Research is being done in Cambridge and Edinburgh on this.
- Athena SWAN has definitely helped, but it has also been a burden and is very time consuming.
- One of the biggest impacts of Athena SWAN was seeing the evidence and realising the extent of the problem.
- International Women’s Day activities are now being run by subject departments, not by the Equalities department. This has helped integrate activities.
- International Women’s Day activities have more impact if they’re seen as university strategy, not just driven by the communications team.

6. What has been the impact of the roll out of Athena SWAN in recent years?

- Problem is that Athena SWAN and all the other initiatives ask for different types of information. Requirements need to be standardised.
- Athena SWAN has highlighted issues with (or lack of) data. Has forced more robust processes and better evidence.
- Athena SWAN doesn’t have the traction in FE that it does in HE.

- Athena SWAN bringing in non-academic members of staff has been useful to get better buy-in.
- Asset Surveys are not as well-known as Athena SWAN, but are very revealing (focusing on people's opinions and feelings). They also shine a light on intersectionality. Goes to all HEIs for completion, but only a 5% response rate.

7. Has there been any tangible/intangible culture shift over the past five years that has led to better (or worse?) experiences for women in STEM research posts? If so, what have been the drivers of this?

- There seems to have been an increase in the numbers of Fellowships, but increasingly with no guarantee of a permanent job after. Perception that you're being used as part of the REF cycle (brought in to produce publications, but not kept on beyond that).
- Fellowships tend to coincide with time when women are having children. 3-year Fellowships are too short as they don't allow time for a long-term vision, and don't provide time to 'catch up' after parental leave. Need to ensure there is bridging funding to support career breaks.
- The Royal Society University Research Fellowships are 5-year Fellowships with a second interview to extend to 8 years. The RS Dorothy Hodgkin scheme has moved to 5 years.
- RSE Research Fellowships are 5 years (following a review, which agreed this was crucial)
- The Review of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers may raise issues around this.

8. What, if anything, have major research funders done to address gender equality in the research projects they fund? To what extent are equality audits being carried out and how are any issues identified through audits being addressed?

- UKRI is looking to offer diverse grants. As a new organisation, this provides us with an opportunity to feed in what would be helpful.
- It will be important for UKRI to monitor the impact of its policies.
- UKRI is talking of ring-fencing some of its funding for underrepresented groups. But it should be looking at why this is necessary and tackling those issues.
- Funding can rely on sponsorship letters. Men's support networks can be better established to provide these. A move to a focus on

applications (without sponsoring letters) followed by interview would be fairer.

- References for women are more likely to focus on organisational skills and service to the community, rather than research strengths.
- Good diversity training should flag these issues.
- Women are increasingly being diverted into non-research activities.
- Does de-gendering applications help? It can cause problems if there has been maternity leave and this isn't flagged up and if women (as is common) undersell themselves. Need to train women to sell themselves better.
- The need for women to conform to the male norm is an issue being discussed (typical male patterns of management etc.) Different management styles can be equally as valuable.
- Sessions on imposter syndrome can be useful (and worth noting it's not just women that suffer from this).

9. Case studies of best practice?

- Maternity leave support for PhD students.
- Young Academy of Scotland gender balance.
- Flexible use of shared paternity leave – for example a senior male member of staff who worked week on/week off.
- Senior management mentoring schemes.
- Caring responsibilities are also an issue. Caring for Carers Policy.
- Is there a case for giving examples of (anonymous) poor practice? Or poor practice that has been improved?

10. Additional Issues for Discussion

- Important to be explicit about the amount of work initiatives currently create for women. These are institutional issues and shouldn't just be for women to work on.
- Policy to get women on panels (e.g. 50% policy for boards) can put huge pressure on a small number of women (particularly in areas where women are significantly underrepresented).
- Is there research re. senior women and whether they are single/married/mothers/other caring responsibilities?

- There can be resentment towards policies if they are seen only to benefit women with children. Using the broader category of ‘caring responsibilities’ would address this.
- There can be cynicism from those that have succeeded without Athena SWAN or other support.
- Is there longitudinal data following a particular cohort?
- Social media campaigns are starting to provide more visibility on the issues.
- AcademiaNet is another useful resource for increasing visibility.