

The Position of Women in Higher Education in the UK

Introduction

Although there have been marginal improvements in British Universities over the last ten years or so, progress is extremely slow, and there is still a very long way to go. The proportion of academics who are women has been steadily increasing overall, but the number in the highest positions is still very low, and the gender pay gap across the sector remains stubbornly high.

Staff Structure

In the UK, there are considerable differences in all respects, including staff structure, between the “pre-92” and “post- 92” universities. 1992 was the year when the polytechnics were redesignated as universities. Roughly speaking, the pre-92 universities are more elite and traditional. For ease of reference I will use widely-understood terms, such as lecturer and professor for both types of institution.

One of the biggest divides in all universities is between those on permanent-full-time contracts, and those on part-time and/or fixed-term contracts. There is clearly a gender divide here, but I will save all the statistics for the next section.

Roughly speaking, there are three types of employment function for UK academics – teaching-only, research-only, and teaching-and-research. The vast majority of teaching-only contracts are part-time. The majority of researchers are on fixed-term contracts. The contract regarded as the norm for full-time academics is teaching-and- research.

The hierarchy within the teaching and research career path can be defined as: Junior Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Principal Lecturer, and Professor/Head of Department. Within the research career path the hierarchy is: Research Assistant, Research Fellow, Senior Research Fellow, Reader, Professor. There is some movement between these career paths. At the top of the tree comes the Chief Executive, usually called the Vice-Chancellor. Needless to say there are gender issues in all these areas.

Current Data

In the UK, there is a body called the Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA], and all the figures quoted come from that source unless otherwise stated.

The number of academic staff employed in British Universities has gone up steadily year – by year, from 127,000 in 1995 to 175,000 academic staff (excluding atypical) in 2007-8.

58,450, or 33.4%, were part-time in 2007-8. In 2007-8, 64.2% of all academics were on permanent or open-ended contracts; 24.5% of research-only academics were on permanent contracts (increased recently), 48.6% of teaching-only on permanent contract, 89.0% of teaching-and-research academics on permanent contract. In 2007-8, 45.9% of research-only academics were women. In 2007-8, 71.7% of total female academics were UK national, but only 60.7% of research-only academics were UK nationals. In 2007-8, 37.0% of full-time academic staff were female; 55.5% of part-time academics were female. In 2007-8, 50.0% of full-time teaching-only academics were female; 41.7% of full-time research-only were female; 33.8% of full-time academics were female. In 2007-8, 18.7% of professorial staff (both full- and part-time) were female; 38.6% of senior lecturers and researchers were female; 47.9% of lecturers were female; 45.9% of researchers were female.

The gender pay gap in British Universities remains distressingly high, and has barely shifted in recent years. According to the HESA statistics, based on the average full-time salary, it stood at 14.5% in 1995, and 14.1% in 2005. The HESA statistics for 2005 gave the average annual pay of full-time women lecturers as £35,250 and for men it was £41,053. Female average pay was 85.9% of their male colleagues. The Office for National Statistics, which publishes annual figures for earnings of all employment groups, uses a slightly different formulation, and leaves out researchers. On their statistics, published in November 2008, the gender pay gap for academics has actually slightly worsened over the decade, and now stands at 18.2%. Additional information is included in the appendix to this paper.

In 2004, the trade unions in the HE sector all signed up to a "Framework Agreement", on pay. All staff who work in universities, from professors to cleaners, have been assigned to a grade within the common framework. One of the declared aims of the agreement was to help to achieve equal pay, with a commitment to conduct equal pay reviews. This latter is only just starting to happen however, although the Framework was supposed to be implemented by 2006.

Very depressingly, so far the Framework seems to have had little effect on gender equality. The pay gap has not decreased, and evidence from the small number of universities which have already assimilated staff onto the new pay and grading structures show that the pattern of the proportion of female academics decreasing with seniority is continuing under the Framework deals, despite the use of job evaluation. The pattern shows about 50% of women at the top of the "researcher/junior lecturer" scale, 40% at the top of the lecturer scale and 20% at the top of the senior lecturer scale. A further cause for concern is that the pay grades under the framework agreement have additional performance-related contribution points on top, and data on performance-related pay before the introduction of the Framework Agreement showed that male academics were 1.5 times more likely than female academics to get performance-related pay.

One final statistic. Only 16% of Vice-Chancellors in Britain are women.

Career Perspectives

The first hurdle faced by many women in academia is getting on to [or returning to after a career break] a full-time permanent contract. The traditional male trajectory is to work full-time, strive to get as much published as possible, and be prepared to move anywhere in the country, or indeed even the world, to get promotion. In Britain, status within academia, and also your financial value to your university, whose public funding largely depends on the amount of high-status research its staff publish, is largely dependant on the amount of research you publish.

A survey undertaken by one of our predecessor unions, the AUT, in 2004, showed that only 19.3% of women academics were counted as research active, compared with 36.5% of male academics.

Most women, for some considerable portion of their working lives, have to balance their work commitments with caring commitments, either for children or elderly parents or both. Extensive published research tends to go along with very long working hours. An ability to move substantial distances only exists where the individual's career development is clearly the first priority in life. Many women are simply not in that position, having to put the needs of their children, or sometimes the career of their male partner, first. In the years when getting promoted is most likely, many women academics are not in a position to prioritise their career development. By the time they might be, they may face age discrimination, or not be taken seriously after years of part-time work, or of little published research.

Obstacles

Most of the obstacles faced by women in British universities relate to the patterns described above.

Being a mother is a major obstacle to success at work for all British women, whatever sector they work in. Although many universities have quite generous maternity leave and pay provision compared with many other employment areas, the problem comes on return to work.

Child-care provision in Britain is still very poor compared with much of Europe. It is nothing like universal, and it is very expensive. Some universities will provide crèches, but often it is the needs of students rather than staff which are prioritised. UCU is currently campaigning alongside our sister unions against the number of workplace nursery closures in higher education institutions.

There are obstacles not connected with being a carer, however. For the whole of their existence, British Universities have been dominated by men. The tendency to value what is

traditionally regarded as men's work above what is traditionally regarded as women's work is not absent from academia. For example, research has shown that average salaries in subject areas which are very male-dominated, such as engineering, physics and chemistry, are higher than those in which there is a high proportion of women lecturers, such as nursing and health and community studies.

The tendency to appoint people like yourself to jobs is also evident. As men still dominate the senior positions in universities, they are likely to have the power of appointment more often than women do. Although most universities will have paper policies on Recruitment and Selection which look as if they take equality issues seriously, it is astonishing how often the appointment procedures lead to another white, middle-aged man being appointed to a senior job.

For very senior positions, there is growing evidence of the use of head-hunters. In November 2007, the trade paper "The Times Higher Education Supplement" published an article showing that four head-hunting firms are being used across the HE sector when there is a vacancy for a Vice-Chancellor, and that this very much limits the pool of those who will apply, as people wait to be asked to apply, rather than putting in an application in response to an advertisement. Needless to say, most of those who are head-hunted are men who fit the approved mould. The article can be accessed here:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=311295§ioncode=26>

Academic Culture

The predominant culture of most universities is still largely based on male work patterns and values.

One advantage that university work has for most women is that it does offer a fair degree of flexibility. There are few academic jobs where there is a regular need to be on the premises from nine to five. Holiday periods coincide to some extent, though by no means absolutely, with school holidays.

But this flexibility comes at a price. There is a very strong "long hours" culture. You are not expected to say "I have put in my thirty-five hours this week, and I'm not going to write another word". In a survey of our membership just carried out for UCU, over 53% of our HE members said they worked more than forty hours a week. Meetings, virtually compulsory social events, and sometimes teaching all take place at the weekend. Residential courses and conferences, often at weekends, are regarded as a standard part of the job.

If you want to get on, you need to be seen be around.

Certainly, if you work part-time, don't expect to be taken seriously, or considered for promotion.

The male-dominated nature of universities may have something to do with the fact that the management style in many universities can be extremely aggressive and bullying. Whenever we do surveys, or have meetings of members, what always emerges as a prime concern is work-based stress, often linked to bullying. The financial pressure to publish research adds to a frequently very competitive and cut-throat culture in many universities. This is not an environment in which the values traditionally seen as female, such as caring and co-operation, can flourish and be valued.

Support

Now for the good news!

There is in fact a great deal of support available to women in Higher Education in this country, some of it from legislation, some from the HE system, and some, we would like to think, from UCU.

In Britain, there has been an Equal Pay Act in force since 1970, and a Sex Discrimination Act since 1975. The latter has had some impact, but the former has been of very limited use.

In April 2007 a new piece of legislation came into force, which has a truly radical potential. This is the Gender Equality Duty, which applies to all public sector bodies, including universities. This does not focus on individual acts of discrimination, but instead puts a positive, anticipatory duty on institutions to promote equality between women and men. It means that all universities have to publish a gender equality scheme [applying to both staff and students], that they need to do gender equality impact assessments on all policies and practices, especially new ones, and that they have to look at the causes of any gender pay gap. There must be an action plan, with specific targets and dates and assigned responsibilities. They have to consult with trade unions.

More information, including UCU advice and guidance on the gender equality duty is available at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2308>

Until October 1st 2007, support and enforcement for gender equality was provided by the Equal Opportunities Commission. In October 2007 it was closed down, along with commissions for race and disability, and a new body, The Equality and Human Rights Commission, came into being. It also has responsibility for equality on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief and age. It is very early days, and it is too soon to say whether it will be as useful to women as the Equal Opportunities Commission was, which produced much excellent material and advice in its day.

Within the HE sector, the HE funding councils, concerned by the criticisms about the lack of equality in university staffing structures, set up a body called the Equality Challenge Unit in 2002. This was originally purely to forward equality for staff in HE, but it has recently extended its remit to students. It employs about 15 staff, and I know of no other sector

which has such a resource dedicated to equality. It works with university management, equality and diversity specialists [which most universities now have on their staff] and with the HE Trade Unions. It will advise individual universities if requested. It produces a wide range of really useful materials, which can be found on its website at

www.ecu.ac.uk

UCU, alongside our sister unions, has negotiated national guidance on Work Life Balance. This agreement sets out the statutory provision that all universities must adhere to, but also sets out good practice examples of where local terms and conditions go beyond the legal minimum. The agreement covers maternity, paternity and adoptive leave and pay and flexible working arrangements. It is available at:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/5/f/jnches_worklifebalance_feb08.pdf

The UCU commentary is available at:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/t/7/ucu_jncheswlbguidance_feb08.pdf

I referred to the Framework Agreement on Pay earlier. This was produced by a body called JNCHES [Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff.]. This consists of representatives of the HE employers and of all the unions recognised in HE, and is where national negotiations go on. The Framework Agreement was intended, amongst other things, to start to address the gender pay gap, and includes a commitment to undertake equal pay reviews. As stated earlier, this has been slow to happen. However, a sub-group of JNCHES, the Equalities Forum, revised a previous agreement on equal pay reviews and organised joint union/management seminars on conducting equal pay reviews. It is very much to be hoped that over the next few years, this will start to bear fruit, and that the gender pay gap in universities begins to decline. The revised agreement, called "JNCHES: equal pay reviews guidance, March 07" can be found at

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/k/m/jnches_equalpayguidance.pdf

UCU takes the issue of equality [for women, but also for all the other disadvantaged groups] very seriously, and we consider it to be at the heart of our work. Our main activity in relation to gender has been producing advice [both general and specific to individual universities] and delivering training on how to make the best use of the gender equality duty.

You can find a whole range of equality related materials at

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2131>

UCU only came into being in June 2006, formed from a merger of two previous unions.

Our new structures allow for women's issues to be dealt with specifically. We have five reserved seats for women on our National Executive, but in fact women are slightly in the majority on our National Executive, although they make up only about 45% of the membership.

UCU holds an annual conference for women members, which all branches are entitled to send a delegate to, and this elects a Women's Committee, which meets four times a year, with election taking place every year.

There are still many obstacles to full equality for women and men in Higher Education in Britain, but UCU intends to play its full part in working towards that equality.

Initiatives promoting good practice

Athena SWAN

The Athena SWAN Charter is a scheme which recognises excellence in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) employment in higher education. The Charter was launched in June 2005. Any university or research institution which is committed to the advancement and promotion of the careers of women in SET in higher education and research can apply for membership.

Athena SWAN awards recognise and celebrate good practice on recruiting, retaining and promoting women in SET in higher education. The awards process runs every year and the deadline is 31 May. Universities can only apply for awards if they are already Charter members.

Universities must achieve a Bronze award before individual departments can apply for recognition at silver level in their own right. The logic behind this is that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a department to sustain the level of a Silver award without university support and underpinning university good practice policies and processes.

At silver and gold levels, a substantial number of departments must hold individual awards before the university applies for an institutional award at that level.

Award winners can use the appropriate Bronze, Silver or Gold logo in their recruitment and publicity materials. Awards are valid for 3 years.

The 2009 awards process highlighted the innovative work going on in institutions to advance the Athena SWAN principles. University College London (UCL) won four silver awards and renewed one bronze award. The Athena SWAN Awards 2009 booklet sets out some of the good practice highlighted in the awards submissions. You can access the booklet here:

http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/downloads/1907_Athen_SWAN_Citations_Book.pdf

Examples of good practice by previous winners (whose recognition awards are still valid) are also available on the Athena SWAN website. For example, Queens University Belfast was awarded a silver SWAN which is valid until December 2010. A successful flexible working hours scheme was piloted by the university and has now been mainstreamed. A childcare package includes after school and summer holiday provision, a voucher scheme and salary sacrifice scheme, and a register of childminders. There is also a carers' package. More information about the initiatives at Queens University Belfast is available here: http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/downloads/Athena/QUB_mar_07.pdf

Further examples of good practice identified via the Athena SWAN scheme are listed here: <http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/html/athena-swan/good-practice/case-studies/>

UCU conditions of employment database

UCU, working with the Labour Research Department, runs an online database of conditions of employment in UK higher education. This is available to members online.

The topics come under the main headings of pay, working time and leave, allowances and benefits, working parents, contracts and procedures, health, equality and related items. There are nearly 50 topics, ranging from mileage allowances and parking, to maternity leave, bullying and harassment, and promotion procedures.

Members can find out what local agreements are in place at different universities and how these compare with the statutory minimum legal requirements. There is a whole section on working parents. This covers maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, adoption dependency leave, flexible working and childcare.

Future legal developments

The UK government is proposing to replace existing equality legislation with a single Equality Bill. The new bill will have very great significance affecting all aspects of equality legislation

The intention is to review, simplify and modernise discrimination law. The new law will consolidate and clarify the existing discrimination legislation concerning sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age, and seeks to adopt a single approach where appropriate.

The Bill will contain a power to require reporting on the gender pay gap by employers with 250 or more employees, but this only covers the private sector. Also, this would not take effect until 2013 and very limited information is required. UCU believes that this clause of

the Bill should be strengthened to require all employers to carry out regular, comprehensive equal pay audits.

UCU also believes that the Bill should allow the use of hypothetical comparators in equal pay cases where no actual comparator exists. This measure would be particularly helpful for women in female dominated occupations. The absence of a male colleague currently bars women from taking a case, despite the fact that occupational segregation is one of the key contributors to the pay gap.

The Bill follows more than four years of reviews, discussions and consultations. UCU has responded to a number of these consultations. Details are available here:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4136>

It passed through the House of Commons and is currently being read in the House of Lords.

It is expected to receive Royal Assent in spring 2010 and to come into force in October 2010, with some public sector provisions being delayed until April 2011.

The new law will have effect in England, Wales and Scotland.

The Government Equalities Office has more information about the Equality Bill here:

http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_bill.aspx

Charlotte Nielsen, January 2010

APPENDIX

Pay gaps

Gender pay gaps (ASHE)

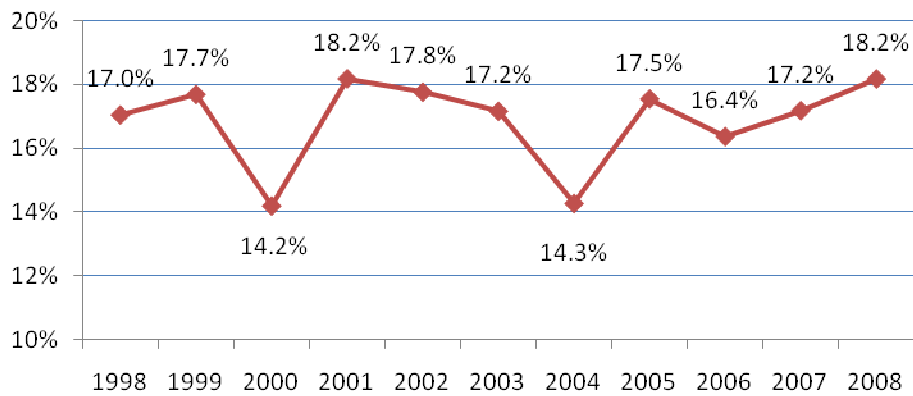
The figures in the table, from the government's Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), indicate the extent to which mean average earnings for females lags behind that of males. Data for higher education teaching professionals excludes research-only academics. ASHE data are based on a sample taken in April.

Gender pay gaps, UK

Year at April	All employees	Public sector	Higher education teaching professionals	Further education teaching professionals
1998	28.1%	20.3%	17.0%	8.7%
1999	27.0%	19.8%	17.7%	9.8%
2000	26.9%	18.5%	14.2%	8.6%
2001	26.4%	18.6%	18.2%	11.4%
2002	26.1%	17.9%	17.8%	14.6%
2003	25.7%	18.2%	17.2%	12.4%
2004	24.3%	17.5%	14.3%	8.9%
2005	23.5%	19.0%	17.5%	12.8%
2006	23.3%	19.3%	16.4%	11.2%
2007	23.6%	19.2%	17.2%	11.1%
2008	23.1%	18.7%	18.2%	8.6%

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence. Data based on the mean average. Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), table 14.1a 'Weekly pay - Gross (£) - For full-time employee jobs: United Kingdom'; percentage calculations by UCU.

HE teaching professionals gender pay gap, UK (ASHE)



Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence. Data based on the mean average. Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), table 14.1a 'Weekly pay - Gross (£) - For full-time employee jobs: United Kingdom'; percentage calculations by UCU.