

Women in Senior Academic Positions

Task Group Report

Introduction

During 2002 the Equity Committee established a task group to look specifically at one of the identified high priority areas of the University equity strategy, that of increasing the representation of women in senior academic positions. The task group, consisting of Ms Janice Rickards, Professor Rosemary Hunter, Dr Liz Jones, Associate Professor Gillian Bushell, Dr Linda Conrad, Dr Lyn Stockhausen, Ms Daina Garklavs, Professor David Moss, Ms Janine Walker, Dr Ian Holland and Ms Heather Cameron, met on several occasions to determine the parameters of the work to be undertaken, and to set tasks.

Issues Considered

The task group considered a range of factors that might influence the slow progress towards the targets set in the Equity Strategy. In terms of meeting the outcome, of improvement in the number of women securing senior academic positions (Levels C – E), it was deemed useful to separate the two issues of recruitment and promotion, as strategies relating to improvements differ.

- Some recruitment statistics were obtained, but were not comprehensive enough to indicate whether women were applying for academic vacancies in numbers comparable to men, nor whether they were being short-listed or appointed on a representative basis. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women may be underrepresented in applicant pools, shortlists and appointments to vacancies, particularly at more senior levels.

The task group discussed ways in which women might be attracted to vacancies and retained in senior positions.

- Qualifications of academic staff were collated and analysed, looking at whether there were significant differences between male and female PhD attainments. While it became apparent that there were differences between the percentage of female academics who had PhDs, depending on the area or faculty in which they worked, there were no obvious gender differences within faculties or discipline areas. (*See attachment 1a*)
- Statistical data relating to the success ratios in recent promotion rounds were analysed. From this analysis it is apparent that, with the exception of promotion for women from level A to level B, women are successful in gaining promotion at rates that compare favourably with their male counterparts. I.e., when women apply, they are as successful as males, however they are not applying at the same rate as males. (*See attachment 1b*)

The task group determined that greater in-depth probing and analysis of factors affecting women's opportunities and attitudes towards senior academic positions was

required. It decided to do this by surveying all academic staff, both females and males.

Identifying Encouragers and Inhibitors

Focus group discussions for academics were conducted on Nathan and Gold Coast campuses. Separate female and male groups were facilitated, discussing the general questions of what things encouraged and inhibited people from applying for promotion and academic management positions. Participants were also asked to nominate the most significant factors from the lists generated.

The information from the focus group discussions was collated and developed into a survey form that was distributed to all academics (excluding sessional and research only staff). 920 surveys were distributed and 330 returned in time for analyses. (*See attachment 1c*)

Survey Results

The report of the survey results considers both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Most of the questions in the survey asked respondents to indicate their agreement or otherwise to a series of statements using a five-point rating scale. In two sections of the survey respondents were invited to make suggestions about what might improve the situation, and almost all respondents took this opportunity to make comment.

Demographic data has also been analysed in the quantitative analysis (*See attachment 1d*)

There are some clear statements and indicators for action that go beyond gender/equity parameters. Many respondents, both male and female, made statements that have implications for human resource management per se. Other issues clearly relate to gender inequities.

It should be noted that while a focus on policies is important, the influence of individuals cannot be underestimated. In interpreting the results of the survey, and developing recommendations for action, the two should not be separated in importance. The results are reported under three headings; those that were clearly the major issues in terms of the number of responses; the most significant issues relating to promotion, and the most significant issues relating to undertaking managerial positions.

The Equity Committee will take some of these issues up. Others have wider implications, and have been highlighted in the section on “HR Issues”. These need to be addressed through avenues beyond the province of the Equity Committee.

1. Key Issues Overall

- The impact of personal interaction, through coaching, Head of School encouragement, mentoring, etc, as a significant encourager for women was highlighted.

- The value of the teaching portfolio, in relation to promotion applications, was queried.
- The lack of reward and recognition for taking managerial positions, and the impact they have on research was a common theme.

2. *Promotion Related Issues*

- Both male and female academics thought that a transparent process would be a significant encourager.
- Mentoring, support, encouragement, coaching, etc, was a more significant encourager for women than for men. A supportive Head of School was cited as a more significant factor for women than for men.
- Not feeling ready or confident inhibits women more than men, with the corollary that active encouragement through the Professional Development Program and academic supervisor would counteract this – ie, someone telling women that they are ready for promotion would be an encourager.
- Women perceived that their teaching responsibilities and pastoral care roles were inhibitors.
- Women felt that promotion committees disregarded equity issues, and that there is a culture that resists advancement of women.

3. *Management Related Issues*

- The need to reconceptualize academic leadership was considered important, with women placing more importance than men on this as an encourager.
- Opportunities to get to know the system better, through involvement in decision-making forums, shadowing opportunities, leadership development programs, etc, were important encouragers for women.
- The perceived futility of applying to be in a “closed club, or “boys’ club” was highlighted, with comment that only particular people (ie, those who fit the mould) may apply. Men and women shared this perception.
- The fact that women are under-represented in the higher academic levels, and therefore these women spend more time on committees, etc, (to provide gender representation) was an important inhibitor for women.

Implications for HR

Many of the issues identified are applicable to both women and men, and as such have broad HR implications. The need to review roles, policies and processes on a University wide basis is implicit in these issues.

- Many people believed that the promotion process lacked transparency and consistency, both within and between areas.
- There is a perception that teaching is not viewed as important in promotion processes. Data obtained from 2002 promotion processes neither supports nor refutes this perception.
- The impact of career breaks for family responsibilities, particularly related to caring for children is significant. The issue of career breaks and undertaking of part-time work for women, and the consequential implications on research output is an unresolved policy issue. Promotion policies do not specifically refer to this as an equity issue, and it needs to be addressed.

The data on promotion rates demonstrates this, in the difference in success rates for female and male academics seeking promotion to Lecturer B. This is the time at which career breaks would generally have the most impact on women.

- The role of the Head of School, in terms of general management capabilities, and rewards and compensation for undertaking the position, requires attention.

Recommendations

All information collated by the task group was taken into account in formulating a set of recommendations. These have been grouped under three main headings of Policy Changes; Role Clarification; and Selection Processes.

I Policy Changes

Recruitment of suitable women applicants, particularly to academic levels D and E, requires particular focus. More rigorous and creative search processes prior to applications closing will be encouraged through the recommendation that:

- R1. The University's Recruitment Policy be amended to include the statement that all shortlists for positions should contain at least one woman. Where an extensive search process has been unsuccessful the Group PVC, in consultation with the PVC (E & CP) and the DHRM may waive this requirement.*

To support more equitable application of promotion criteria the Promotion of Academic Staff Policy should be amended to more explicitly address the issue of career breaks and part-time employment often experienced by people with carer responsibilities.

- R2. The section "Criteria for Promotion" in the Promotion of Academic Staff Policy be amended to "Non-traditional patterns of achievement, such as may be demonstrated by women, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities and people from non-English speaking backgrounds will be taken into account.*

Particular consideration will be given to the impact that career breaks and part-time employment have had on applicants with carer responsibilities, and accomplishments determined relative to opportunities provided, rather than solely on a quantitative basis.”

II Role Clarification

The role of Deans and Heads of School is critical to the provision of academic leadership, support and development for individual academics. With the adoption of a new academic management structure in the University, and an academic career-profiling project underway, the following actions are recommended.

- R3. *The role of Head of School be clarified and redescribed, and selection for future Heads of School be based on criteria that require demonstrated ability to provide academic leadership and support, and on demonstrated potential to successfully manage and develop people.*
- R4. *A range of incentives for attracting suitable people to undertake academic management roles such as Head of School be explored and incorporated into role statements and Promotion Policy as appropriate. Such incentives may include recognition and credit for successfully performance in the role and a broader range of compensations.*
- R5. *Orientation and ongoing development programs for Heads of School, Research Centre Directors and academic supervisors be developed and implemented to ensure the roles actively support individual and personalised academic development through personal development plans, mentoring and coaching.*
- R6. *A program of orientation activities for Deans and ongoing discussions for Academic Group Management Teams be developed and implemented to ensure that responsibility for equity and diversity is clarified and actioned appropriately.*
- R7. *A Leadership Development Program for Women be developed and implemented as part of a University wide Leadership Development Program.*
- R8. *Guidelines clarifying what constitutes “outstanding teaching” and the explicit role of pastoral care in the teaching and learning environment be developed for staff committees and incorporated into the Promotion of Academic Staff Policy.*

III Selection Processes

Geographic mobility and family responsibilities are sometimes seen as barriers to securing the attraction of desirable candidates to key positions, including women to senior positions. These barriers may be diminished if they are actively addressed through the recruitment process.

R9. The University clearly indicate in search processes that it will provide support to resolve issues that may impede employment, such as partner employment, family education and other associated concerns.

The application of promotion criteria needs to be consistent and equitable within the parameters described in the Promotion of Academic Staff Policy.

R10. Prior to the commencement of each promotion round information sessions for eligible staff be more widely promoted and all staff committees and senior selection committees hold information sessions relating specifically to equity and diversity issues.

R11. Staff committees articulate and promulgate the explicit standards used for promotion within that faculty, and against which individual academic development plans and feedback may be established.

R12. That following the academic career profiling outcomes the variability in teaching workloads across and within Schools and Faculties is explicitly acknowledged and taken into account in promotion processes.

R13. The University returns to annual promotion rounds for all levels and the Promotion of Academic Staff Policy be amended accordingly.

R14. Copies of the survey responses and findings be provided to all PVCs, Deans, Directors and Heads of Schools, and to be made widely available to the University community via a website, to be advertised in a VC email.