

WOMEN AT THE TOP IN BRITISH HIGHER EDUCATION: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES IN ACTION?

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The introduction of equal opportunities policies is an important current trend in British universities and polytechnics and, in consequence, a growing number now advertise themselves as Equal Opportunity employers. In the summer of 1990 the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) circulated a draft Code of Good Practice on Equal Opportunities in Employment in Universities; a notable mark of its growing importance in one sector of higher education. Equal Opportunities policies have been adopted mainly by large organisations as good employment practice in compliance with recent legislation about sexual and racial discrimination and equal pay. They are increasingly concerned with a wide range of issues about the significance of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, marital and parental status for employment policies, and practices to improve the efficient use of staff in increasingly competitive labour markets. This paper concentrates on women in higher education, an emphasis justified by the growing proportion of women in the work force and the rapid increase in the numbers of women students in higher education. It presents and discusses evidence of continuing discrimination against women in different sectors and institutions of higher education in Britain.

Equal Opportunities Policies

The legal framework for Equal Opportunities policies comprises five pieces of legislation: the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts which came into force on 29 December 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976, the Equal Pay Amendment Act 1984 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1986. These Acts make discrimination, both direct and indirect, unlawful. Less favourable treatment in education, training and employment on the grounds of gender or race is equally unlawful. The Equal Pay Acts aim to eliminate inequalities in pay and other terms of employment including work judged to be of 'equal value' in terms of the demands made on the worker, measured under such categories as effort, skill and decision making.

To assist in enforcing the legislation the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality were established with a statutory duty to work towards the elimination of discrimination, to promote equal opportunities between the sexes and races and to keep under review the working of the relevant legislation. The marked gender and racial segmentation of the labour market with women and ethnic minorities concentrated in low paid work has made employment practices the major focus of the activities of both Commissions. Women are found in a much narrower range of jobs than men, being concentrated in clerical work and personal services. Women also predominate in the lower strata of occupations, such as school teaching, in which both men and women are employed. Patterns of gender inequality in Britain are changing as women continue to increase their participation in post 16 and higher education and the labour force. (Hakim 1979, Social Trends 1989, Walby 1988, Bradley 1989, Crompton and Sanderson 1990).

Both Commissions have sought to further equal opportunities through the promulgation of employment Codes of Practice. Within the Codes encouragement is given for employers to develop equal opportunities policies adapted to their circumstances. The CVCP draft Code is such an adaptation. Whilst employers are not obliged to adopt any elements of the Codes, failure to observe their recommendations can be used against them at an industrial tribunal. Codes of Practice are 'ideal types', sets of policy criteria by which empirical policies and practices can be evaluated.

The Equal Opportunities Commission Code consists of two parts, covering the role of good employment practices in part one, eliminating sex and marriage discrimination and, part two, promoting equality of opportunity. Part one outlines the ways in which discrimination can be eliminated from all aspects of

employment policies and practices. Part two recommends that employers formulate an Equal Opportunities Policy, which promotes equality by incorporating the recommendations of part one.

Clear recommendations are made about ways to monitor the policy and the workforce to highlight its effectiveness and identify any problem areas. The Equal Opportunities Commission Code also contains suggestions about positive action to counter discrimination as allowed under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. Encouraging women to apply for jobs where they are under-represented seeks to rectify imbalances and counter the effects of past discrimination. Providing facilities which make it easier for women to work, like work place nurseries, training specifically for women, flexible hours and career break schemes are also important in Equal Opportunities policies.

The introduction and implementation of Equal Opportunities policies in work organisations are the main means of realising the aims of the Commission for Racial Equality and Equal Opportunities Commission. Some may be little more than the briefest statement of intent on their advertisements, while others have hefty budgets and elaborate programmes of imaginative advertising, sophisticated monitoring procedures for staff recruitment, promotion and dismissal, management training for previously under represented groups and a creche.

While the introduction of an Equal Opportunities policy by an employer is entirely voluntary, a variety of factors are combining to increase the pressure upon them to move towards vigorous and effective policies with visible outcomes. Of these the reduction in the size of the age cohorts joining the labour market is the most widely publicised. The importance of the European Community Social Contract, in which equal treatment for men and women features prominently is growing, as the free movement of labour within the European Community after 1992 approaches. Aspirations, consciousness and self confidence among employees have also been raised. Cases of alleged discrimination such as that of Alison Halford, the most senior woman police officer in Britain, are increasing in number and attract considerable media attention. Equal value cases such as that in which supermarket check-out staff were successfully compared with warehouse staff, may carry even more significant implications for staffing costs. Equal Opportunities policies are now firmly on the agenda for the majority of politicians and employers.

Equal Opportunities and higher education

Two recent reports suggest that the progress of equal opportunities policies in institutions of higher education in Britain has been unimpressive compared with their counterparts in the USA, Australia and New Zealand and many business organisations in Britain. A survey carried out in 1986 for the Commission for Racial Equality by Williams, Cocking and Davies sent to 44 universities and 30 polytechnics found that such policies were more common and somewhat further developed in polytechnics than universities. The control of polytechnics until April 1989 by local authorities has clearly been influential in the polytechnics' introduction of equal opportunities policies. Twenty of the forty two universities that replied cited their charters as sufficient evidence of their commitment to equal opportunities. Three said they had no policy. Six said they had a policy but sent no evidence about it. Seven said their policy was being developed or in the early stages of implementation and five had equal opportunities policies about employment practices. Of the polytechnics, two had no policy, four said they had and gave no evidence, five cited the policy of their local education authority as their own, five were developing one or in the early stages of its implementation, six had policies on employment practices and one covered employment and student recruitment and experience. One university and three polytechnics cited policies in relation to one group of students only eg overseas students. This survey concluded that equal opportunities policies were poorly developed in institutions of higher education, polytechnics being more advanced than universities. Staff recruitment was the prime focus in institutions formulating and implementing policies, possible changes in staff monitoring, selection, interviewing and advertising being commonly mentioned. Williams et al found a view prevalent in universities and polytechnics that a statement of commitment to the pursuit of academic goals regardless of race, creed or sex, rendered equal opportunities policies otiose. Of the forty two universities in their survey, twenty three considered their questions irrelevant or cited the terms of their charter as sufficient evidence of commitment. 'Equality of opportunity is inherent in the concept of a

university' and 'The only criteria for entry is (sic) academic merit irrespective of colour, creed, sex and physical fitness. It has not been thought necessary to have any kind of policy which further interprets or modifies this objective' were two of the replies which they received (J. Williams et al, 1989, p 12).

The need for vigorous equal opportunities policies to counter the formidable barriers to the progress of women in academic and other careers was investigated by a Commission of the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Reform, chaired by Lady Elspeth Howe. Their report 'Women at the Top' was published in January 1990. It considered steps to improve the poor representation of women in the House of Commons seventy years after female suffrage. The committee considered the careers, in the media, judiciary, trade unions, corporate management, the civil service and academe which many MPs pursue before entering the House of Commons and found barriers, a 'glass ceiling', preventing women making progress to the top in Britain despite their much more rapid progress in other countries. The committee's report and the media coverage attendant on its publication was particularly scathing in its criticism of the universities. Ostensibly, academic careers would appear suitable and attractive to women. Yet women remain on the lowest grades in lecturing and research, constituting 14% of tenured lecturers and 29% of contract research staff. 'Even when in tenured positions, women are promoted less often than men and thus tend to be concentrated in lower grade posts.' (Hansard Society 1990, 65-66). In universities in 1984, out of 10,000 professors, readers and senior lecturers less than 500 were women. The composition of full time non clinical staff in 1988 was:

TABLE I

FULL TIME NON CLINICAL ACADEMIC STAFF IN UNIVERSITIES, 1988.

	Men	%	Women	%
Professors	3,454	97	95	3
Senior Lecturers	6,902	94	449	6
Lecturers	14,222	85	2,481	14

Source: Hansard Society Commission (1990) Report on Women at the Top, (London, Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government).

In general, the proportion of women promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer does not reflect the proportion available for promotion. Of those staff promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer/reader in 1986, 483 (90%) were men and 53 (10%) were women. Promotion rates vary significantly between disciplines. In 1985 and 1986, in Medicine and Dentistry 37% of lecturers were women but they received only 18% of promotions. In Language, Literature and Arts the data were 27% lecturers and 16% of promotions. 'Unless we are to believe that women are less able than their male colleagues, the fact that they are not promoted in numbers appropriate to their representation suggests that here, as elsewhere, barriers exist which prevent women from achieving their potential.' (Hansard Society 1990, 65-66). At Oxford and Cambridge the report found women confined to the short term contract staff, unable to gain college fellowships. The wide press coverage of the report drew particular attention to the report's strictures about Oxford and Cambridge and to the universities' enthusiasm for increasing numbers of women students and disinclination to promote women to senior levels.

The report concluded with suggestions for programmes of action. 'All universities should take steps to ensure women's fair representation and should monitor and publish information about women's progress.' (Hansard Society 1990, 68) 'All institutions of higher education should appoint an Equal Opportunities Officer who would produce regular audits on the progress of women within the institutions, and that this should be combined with the setting of voluntary targets. These targets would not be given any statutory force. Their function would in part be that of consciousness raising; and failure to achieve the target would give rise to questions about whether the institution is adopting the right approach to ensure that equal opportunity becomes a reality.' (Hansard Society 1990, 67).

Uptown University

Case study evidence from a polytechnic, a university and Oxford colleges elaborates the evidence and conclusions of these earlier reports. Uptown University has 6,000 students in four faculties. The university workforce, of 2,500, divided approximately equally between men and women is separated into four categories: academic and related, technical, clerical and manual. It displays characteristics typical of such organisations of horizontal and vertical gender segregation. 66% of the women are in the service sector of clerical and manual jobs. 91% of the clerical category is female and 40% of these work part time. In the manual category 75% of the women are on the lowest grade and 82% of the men are above it. Among the academic and technical staff the picture is a similar one of segregation, low status and pay. 64% of the women technicians and 22% of the men are on the three lowest grades. Of the women academic staff 80% are on the lecturer grade while only 55% of the men are on this grade. The Education Faculty with the highest percentage of women students shows the poor representation of women in top jobs starkly.

Table II

FACULTY OF EDUCATION 1989, UPTOWN UNIVERSITY

	Men	Women	Approx No.
Students	21%	79%	900
Lecturers	55%	45%	60
Senior Lecturers, Readers, Professors	88%	12%	30

The disadvantaged positions of women academics is well documented for Britain and other countries (Blackstone and Fulton 1975, DiNitto et al 1982, McAuly, J. 1987).

An Equal Opportunities policy was introduced at Uptown University in the summer of 1986, after the University Council agreed a statement of commitment to a 'comprehensive policy of equal opportunities in employment in which individuals are selected and treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities and are given equal opportunities within the University. The aim of this policy is to ensure that no job applicant or employee should receive less favourable treatment on any grounds not relevant to good employment practice. The University is committed to a programme of action to make this policy fully effective.' The following paragraph made it clear that the policy was designed to ensure that 'women, members of ethnic minority groups and disabled people are not disadvantaged through unjust treatment'.

The document explains the four courses of action proposed by the university in pursuance of its policy. The first is a review of policies and practices in recruitment 'to ensure that they are fair in design and application' and a computer data base was established to provide statistical information for this review. Secondly training was to be provided for staff with recruitment responsibilities 'to alert them to discrimination problems in employment.' Thirdly an Assistant Registrar was given responsibility for the computer data base set up to monitor recruitment. Finally it was stated that attempts should be made to involve unions and interested individuals in discussions of 'how best to make a reality of the University's intentions'. Uptown University's policy focused on recruitment practices, monitoring and training. Following the introduction of the policy, for the first time application forms were issued for all posts, not only academic and administrative as before. The forms are all headed with the statement 'Uptown University is an Equal Opportunities Employer and welcomes applications from suitably qualified and experienced people regardless of ethnic origin, sex and disability.' Thus one of the most significant consequences of the policy is the increased formalisation of recruitment procedures for clerical and manual workers. All advertisements are processed by the personnel department, who check for sexist or racist language. Uptown University now has a sophisticated data base on some 400 posts and 8000 applicants to which information about half of the existing staff, who replied to a voluntary questionnaire, has been added. The results of this monitoring are reported to the trade unions, Senate and Council by a Pro Vice Chancellor, who has been designated as the University Equal Opportunities Officer.

Interest in and attempts to promote greater equality between gender and ethnic groups within the university are extremely patchy. The sociology department has had some movement of staff and has both recruited and promoted women internally. It now has five professors, two women and three men. The history department on the other hand, with a majority of women students has never had any women staff at any level. The education department has recruited women in considerable numbers, among them one professor but none has been promoted.

It seems fair to conclude that the Equal Opportunities policy at Uptown University may have been the means of more women, members of ethnic minorities or disabled people getting jobs in the university by raising the consciousness of selection panels and formalising procedures. However, there is no evidence to support or refute this proposition. There are no published reports of the results of the monitoring of recruitment. No data are available about promotions. No imbalances have been identified and there is no programme of action as the University policy statement claims.

Downtown Polytechnic

Downtown Polytechnic is located in a manufacturing town with a large ethnic population. It has some 7,000 full time equivalent students and enjoys a high regional reputation in the provision of courses for ethnic minorities, mature and women students. Its staff composition is also divided into four types, academic, clerical, technical and manual and demonstrates a similar pattern of gender segregation to that at Uptown University. Its equal opportunities policies stem from its early attempts to respond to its local constituency. The decision to formulate a policy originated from a group in the School of Education examining multicultural and anti racist education and subsequently widening its concerns to other aspects of Equal Opportunities. An Equal Opportunities policy statement was adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Education in February 1986. This was given strong support by the newly appointed director and forwarded to the local authority. It was ratified by the Governing Council in March 1987. The 'community polytechnic' philosophy and policies were developed on the premise that inequalities in education and employment are strongly institutionalised and can be tackled by positive action. Starting from the under-representation of ethnic minorities and mature students in higher education, the polytechnic has developed policies specifically to increase their participation. Equal Opportunities policies are 'access led' and have a high profile in the polytechnic.

In July 1989 the newly incorporated polytechnic adopted a new Policy Statement on Equal Opportunities. The statement begins 'Nationally there is clear evidence of inequality in life chances, including inequality of opportunity in education.' The legislative framework for employment practices follows this commitment to positive policies to facilitate wider access. The general principles which follow make it clear that an integrated access and employment policy is the aim based on the elimination of discrimination and positive action to create new educational and employment opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups. The policy is implemented by means of guide lines and codes of practice on key issues such as appointments, sexual and racial harassment, the inclusion of responsibilities for particular aspects of the policies in the role definitions of management, precise monitoring of staff and student recruitment. The results of monitoring are reported to an Equal Opportunities committee which reports to the Board of Governors. A senior member of the academic staff also holds a half time post as Equal Opportunities Officer. Three levels of implementation are identified: 'the responsibility of all members of staff and students as part of their normal activities', 'the particular responsibility of the Board of Governors and the Directorate to initiate, oversee and monitor' and the Equal Opportunities Advisory Committee. The director is the chair of the equal opportunities committee. The committee, consisting of representatives from the Governors, departments, trade unions, students and local groups advises on policy and monitors its effectiveness.

Implementation of the policy involves advertising, selection procedures, and monitoring in both students and staff recruitment. A number of means of contacting and interesting potential students from under represented groups have been developed including a 'drop in shop'. All enquiries are monitored. All mature applicants are interviewed. All jobs are advertised and application forms and formal appointment procedures used. The number of women and ethnic minority applicants and the numbers shortlisted are noted by chairs of appointments committees. Previously many manual jobs were filled by less

formal means from people known to be interested in a job at the polytechnic. The measurable outcomes of these policies and procedures have been a rise in the numbers of mature students and the representation of ethnic minority groups among the students and the administrative, technical and secretarial staffs.

Although a woman has recently joined the directorate the number of women on the academic staff especially at senior levels remains small and the representation of ethnic minorities is very low with none at a senior level. Consequently the academic staff remains predominantly white and male, especially at the senior levels.

Oxford and Cambridge

One of the most notable changes in higher education since the introduction of the sex discrimination legislation has been at Oxford and Cambridge, where most of the formerly single sex colleges have gradually become mixed. By 1985 the Oxford colleges were admitting women undergraduates in varying numbers, Lincoln College having the largest percentage with 42 and Queen's the lowest with a modest 22. Between 1973-4 and 1984-5 the percentage of women undergraduates at Oxford has risen from 21% to 39% and that of post graduates from 20% to 30%. Integration of the senior members of the colleges has been more tardy. In the same period women fellows have risen from 13% to 14% and women lecturers from 14% to 15%. The integration of men into colleges that were formerly women's colleges has been rapid whereas that of women into the former men's colleges is glacial. At Lady Margaret Hall in 1985 53% of the undergraduates and 41% of the fellows were men, whereas in 1986, Lincoln College, the most integrated of the former men's colleges had 42% women undergraduates and 14% women fellows. (deWitt and Nixon, 1988).

Oxford University adopted an Equal Opportunities policy following its approval by the CVCP after the Commission for Racial Equality urged universities to adopt non discrimination policies in 1984. Its influence on the composition of senior common rooms has been minimal. The Women Tutor's Group, a pressure group campaigning for improved opportunities for women, found that even the policy's existence was unknown to all of twenty four college fellows questioned. The group set about making the policy better known, more comprehensive and effective. They put a resolution before Congregation in 1987 making the existing policy more explicit in relation to discrimination on grounds of sex and marital status in academic and academic related posts. It aimed to eliminate sources of direct and indirect discrimination from the recruitment process, by removing irrelevant conditions or questions asked at interview. Wherever possible bodies making appointments were to contain a man and a woman. The University was also required to appoint a full time Equal Opportunities Officer to undertake monitoring and oversee adherence to the policy. (J. Hornsby et al, 1987). One of the most difficult issues tackled by the Women Tutor's Group has been the ambiguity of the University's writ in college appointments. Again a resolution was laid before Congregation to ensure this. Despite its success, evasion of the recommendation that all appointing bodies should contain a man and a woman continue to exercise the Women Tutor's Group. (Hornsby et al 1989, Hornsby 1990). Cambridge has seen a similar trend from single sex to mixed colleges, with a rise in the percentage of women among the undergraduate students from 16.7% in 1973 to 34.5% in 1986. The percentage of academic staff who are women has risen in the same period from 4.7% to 8.2%. While that of demonstrators, assistant lecturers and lecturers has doubled, that of professors has increased from 2.2% to 2.6% (Whitehead 1987).

University College, London was cited by the Hansard Society Report as an example of good practice. At UCL, the local Association of University Teachers brought pressure to bear for an equal opportunities policy in the early 1980s in response to pressure nationally from the AUT Women's Committee. UCL has a tradition as a historic mould breaker in higher education. Firstly its foundation marked the success of the struggle to end the monopoly of Oxford and Cambridge in university education in England and it was also the first to admit men and women on an equal footing. The going may not have been so stony as at Oxford and their initiatives to increase the number of women at senior levels were sympathetically received. A half time Equal Opportunities Officer is in post. An Equal Opportunities Committee has been established which reports regularly to the College Council. The numbers of women

in different grades of academic staff is seen as a concern, actions have been taken to increase it, the outcomes are reported to the Equal Opportunities Committee and published. A measure of the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies in higher education is seen in the numbers of women in different levels of academic staff.

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

	Polys	Universities	UCL	Cambridge
Professors & Heads of Dept.	6.7	3.0	8	2.5
Readers & Senior Lecturers	18.7	9.1	17	6.8
Lecturers	22.9	19.5	24.6	8.7
Research workers	28.6	25.4	35	

Sources: A.H. Halsey, Times Higher Education Supplement, 9th April 1990; Whitehead, J.M. Cambridge Review, 1987; Private Communication from External Relations Officer, UCL.

In the summer of 1990, the CVCP circulated a draft Code of Good Practice on Equal Opportunities in Employment in Universities. The draft Code represents a very significant advance on the assumption that academic merit guarantees against discrimination and the preoccupation with sophisticated systems to monitor recruitment which provide statistics to support their premise. It recommends universities 'to take full advantage of those sections of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976 which allow for positive action.' This strong emphasis upon positive action is spelled out in three sections devoted to the employment of women, people from ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. Efforts to specifically increase the representation of people from ethnic minorities and the proportion of women in senior positions are called for. The Code stresses the importance of using data from monitoring systems to identify imbalances and inequalities in promotions and recruitment. The importance of breaking down rather than aggregating the data is stressed and possible comparisons such as that between men and women and their proportions in the relevant student intake suggested. The use of targets for the recruitment and promotion of members of ethnic minorities and women are advocated. Positive action in a number of other specific areas like flexible working arrangements, career break schemes and child care facilities are recommended. The draft Code draws attention to the need for training in Equal Opportunities. It also emphasises the crucial importance of official responsibility for equal opportunities and of adequate reporting procedures. The establishment of an Equal Opportunities Committee is essential as a consultative forum. A senior member of the University is to take responsibility for the policy and its implementation. An Equal Opportunities Officer with adequate time is to be designated. Following the recommendation of the Hansard Society Commission that 'universities should publish information about women's progress', the CVCP draft code stresses the importance of reports on Equal Opportunities. Most importantly the CVCP promises to monitor the universities' implementation of the code.

Rhetoric, reality and resistance

The evidence in this paper suggests that while many institutions of higher education in Britain have taken the step of declaring themselves equal opportunities employers, their practice is a long way from the CVCP draft Code and its circulation by no means ensures a meaningful level of conformity and measurable change such as increases in the representation of ethnic minorities and women in senior positions.

The main changes in institutions of higher education have come not in the composition of the workforce but in that of the student body, especially in the proportion of women. All institutions, Oxford and Cambridge being the most recent, now admit women, although their distribution is very uneven in terms of subject. A small number of institutions, mainly polytechnics, have been more receptive to the abundant evidence of inequalities and discrimination in educational and employment practices. These are seen in widening access for women, members of ethnic minorities, disabled and mature students, all hitherto under-represented in higher education. Steps to change employment practice are hardly developed. The evidence presented from a range of institutions of higher education, with that from the Commission for Racial Equality and Hansard Society reports, suggests that the adoption of equal opportunities policies in higher education is in its infancy. The CVCP draft Code addresses a fundamental and much neglected policy issue in higher education.

Various stages of development are demonstrated in the institutions discussed. Uptown University has a policy, and a sophisticated system monitoring recruitment. There are no data on promotions. No use is being made of the data to frame a programme of positive action. Reports on the recruitment data are made to the trade unions, Senate and Council in the form of aggregate data which do not enable interpretations to be made about whether there is discrimination and whether it is increasing or decreasing. Equal Opportunities appear to be a low priority. It has no Equal Opportunities Committee or officers with significant proportions of time for these activities.

Oxford University has a policy which a pressure group is seeking to implement in the university and more controversially in the colleges. A full time Equal Opportunities Officer is in post. The greatest single impediment to further progress appears to be the autonomy of the colleges in employment matters.

Downtown Polytechnic represents a well developed integrated access and employment policy with a strong commitment to positive action. Equal Opportunities have a high profile and considerable budget. There are strongly institutionalised lines of responsibility for the implementation of the policy. There is an Equal Opportunities Committee, Officer and reporting procedures. The results and the effectiveness of the policy are unknown.

University College London has monitoring, reporting, an Equal Opportunities Committee and Officer. A programme of positive action has been implemented and its outcomes as measured by the progress of women in gaining senior posts is published.

A comparison of these detailed cases shows a depressing picture of policies which have rarely progressed beyond the stage of rhetoric. It highlights the many formidable barriers to significant progress in the introduction and implementation of effective equal opportunities policies in institutions of higher education. The first is the lack of commitment by senior management, who are for the most part unwilling to envisage the possibility and consequences of discrimination against women, ethnic minorities or the disabled taking place in their own institutions.

There is strong resistance to many aspects of equal opportunities policies in institutions of higher education. Integrated policies on student access and employment practice are extremely rare. The profound and widespread belief that the criterion of academic merit used in student and staff recruitment and staff promotions is entirely and self evidently free of any kind of racial or gender bias is the most important single barrier facing the introduction of more vigorous and effective equal opportunities policies. The Commission for Racial Equality report found widespread complacency and the evidence in this paper suggests that opening a debate on the issue of potential discrimination in recruitment of students, staff and promotions in institutions of higher education is an important and difficult first step in equal opportunities. There is no doubt that the CVCP draft Code will help to change this climate. Once the need for a policy is established a comprehensive policy and effective monitoring becomes vital. A policy which is simply a statement that can be produced to satisfy enquiries from the Equal Opportunities Commission and Commission for Racial Equality is little advance on the appeal to an institution's charter as a sufficient safeguard against discriminatory activities.

Systematic monitoring of applicants, interviewees, appointments and promotions is the first step in implementing the policy. As the CVCP draft Code stresses, for equal opportunities policies to be effective the results of the monitoring and the imbalances they demonstrate, should be reported to a body with the responsibility for the implementation of the policy and the authority to introduce and implement a programme of action to take further steps to redress them. The reports of the Equal Opportunities Committee should be published. Without a full time equal opportunities officer reporting regularly on the effectiveness of the policy to an Equal Opportunities Committee, which is in turn accountable to a Council or Board of Governors, policies remain rhetorical. It is at the stage of publishing the results of monitoring identifying imbalances and initiating actions to redress these imbalances, that equal opportunities policies in higher education are foundering. Formulating policies, setting monitoring systems and a structure of reporting are the more straightforward and uncontroversial aspects of equal opportunities policies. The difficult and politically sensitive parts are funding and undertaking an action programme to bring about the kinds of changes indicated by the monitoring process. The crucial issue may well become the actions needed to improve the representation of women and minority groups among the academic staff, especially at senior levels.

The CVCP draft Code of Practice has come at a timely moment when equal opportunities policies have foundered at the rhetorical stage, for a variety of reasons from reluctance to stubborn resistance. The barriers to further progress are formidable. It is possible that despite their advocacy in the draft code, attempts to introduce positive action such as the adoption of targets will encounter stiff resistance. Targets are appropriate and legal as a way of increasing awareness and effectiveness. Straw defines a target as 'a guide-line - possibly also related to proportion. It is not absolute, more an indication of whether or not satisfactory progress is being made, in the same way that a sales target might be used to assess the performance of a sales person. No legal penalties or sanctions can be imposed through not meeting targets.' Because setting targets does not contradict the principle of selecting the most suitable person for the job, they are lawful. (Straw 1989, 70).

A further aspect of the problem of ensuring effectiveness, which is particularly acute in higher education, is that of institutional fragmentation and ambiguous authority structures seen in the uneven commitment to and implementation of equal opportunities policies and practices at Uptown University and at Oxford, where neighbouring departments and colleges observe or ignore the policy with apparent impunity. The CVCP draft Code does not address this problem.

Prospects and pressures

There appear to be few models in higher education of programmes of action. The CVCP draft Code of Practice recommends a number of ways of attempting to redress imbalances, including advertisements and training specifically for the under represented groups, flexible working hours and raising awareness among those responsible for hiring and promotion. Hitherto institutions of higher education appear to have been reluctant to regard themselves as sizeable employers with any similarity to such organisations as Marks and Spencers, where staff development and appraisal programmes may be linked to equal opportunities policies and action programmes. Management courses specifically for women and ethnic minorities have been used in some organisations as a means to increase opportunities for promotion for these groups. As yet no such strategies have been developed in higher education and there is no accumulated wisdom about their effectiveness in academic organisations. While progress is not dramatic, there is hard evidence that, in the one well documented area of discrimination against women attempting to pursue careers in academic life, this can be reduced but progress is not easy and change is comparatively slow. (Webb, 1988). The progress made at University College, London, in some polytechnics and in other countries, suggests that even in the examples of best practice there is a very long way to go before the staff composition bears any resemblance to that of the students. The most important change in gender discrimination in academic positions is to establish a culture and ethos in which there is such a large number of women in positions of authority that there are questions asked when they are unsuccessful in their quest for senior positions. Establishing such an ethos takes time as experience in Scandinavia, North America and Australia shows.

There is a possibility that in the tightening labour market and the present climate somewhere between reluctance and resistance among managements in higher education, equal opportunities will become a major area of conflict. Institutions of higher education may find such policies forced on them more by the pressure of legislation, the complaints that rising expectations engender, the desire to avoid costly discrimination and equal value cases amid the exigencies of rapidly changing labour markets. The preamble to the draft Code indicates that the CVCP perceives these pressures and the Code is a response to them. Like it or not, the managements of institutions of higher education are large employers and as new funding measures take effect, they will be under increasing pressure to adopt good practice to attract and retain staff. As the size of younger age cohorts contract and more women join the labour market, management and unions may experience increasing pressure to improve women's rights at work. With a growing lobby among the disabled for stronger antidiscrimination legislation, the European Community legislation on equal opportunities proliferating, the prospect, however remote, of a Labour government with a Ministry of Women's Rights and expansion of student numbers, resistance among managements in higher education to stronger and more effective equal opportunities policies may encounter increasing pressure for change.

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