

Walking on the WILD side: Lessons from university women and a university wide leadership program

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Abstract

This paper was prompted by an Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) recommendation in the 2006 Murdoch University audit report, as well as our own perceived inconsistency between espoused equity values, and the realities for women academics. While the sector has had increasing government regulation more broadly, gender parity in governance for Universities has gone largely unnoticed by successive governments. This paper will explore some of these national higher education issues alongside the institutional and move towards a more multilevel analysis.

Introduction

In attempting to explain the lack of progress in raising the representation of women in senior academic roles not only in this particular university, but in Australia more broadly, a number of issues emerge including the importance of gender awareness and appreciation in the full range of professional development programs, the absolute need for cross-institutional coordination/alignment, and systematic approaches to achieving gender parity in universities. A 2007 report in the *Times Higher Education* suggested that while the number of women academics has steadily risen in the UK and will overtake that of men within two years (ie by 2009), it will be 50 years before equivalence is reached at the professorial level. Professor John Pratt's analysis showed that "the glass ceiling effect is still evident. Even if institutions stopped appointing male professors, it would be 15 years before there were as many female professors as males because the starting point was so low" (Tysome 2007). Despite the fact that change is needed, we explore whether the main culprit for the lack of women in senior positions is still the glass ceiling, or whether there is more. Alongside institutional and individual issues we begin to unpack some sectoral goals and strategies exploring to what extent targets and approaches align.

Louise Morley's (2006: 544) three levels of change provide a useful framework for this paper. These are the Macro (national and International), Meso (organisational and departmental) and micro (individuals and groups) levels. In addition, Bolman and Deal's (2003) structural, political, human resource and symbolic frames are also useful for identifying organisational needs, determining where change may need to take place, and developing appropriate actions, so this will be applied in the Meso section. Emphasis on one frame rather than all four may result in ineffectiveness, but "together, they capture a comprehensive picture of what's wrong and what might be done" (Bolman and Deal, 2003: 5).

Macro issues

Higher education is lagging in terms of gender equity for women despite commitment to equity, merit, and the education of the next generation of professionals. It is widely recognised that while women are often over-represented in junior positions (clerical and similar), they are grossly under-represented in senior positions (most especially professorial) in universities. Australian percentages for women professors appear to now be on a par with the United Kingdom, but behind the United States. An international snapshot of the low, but varying, number of women at higher academic levels is shown in Table 1 (reproduced from ETAN report 2000, p.10, and modified. Post 2000 data added to original table).

Table 1: Women professors: percentage of full professors that are women

Country	Year	% Full professor	Year	% Full professor	Year	% Full professor		
Turkey	1996/7	21.5						
Finland	1998	18.4						
Portugal	1997	17.0						
France	1997/8	13.8						
Spain	1995/6	13.2						
Norway	1997	11.7						
Sweden	1997/8	11.0						
Italy	1997	11.0						
Greece	1997/8	9.5						
UK	1996/7	8.5			2005/6	17		
Iceland	1996	8.0						
Israel	1996	7.8						
Belgium (Fr)	1997	7.0						
Denmark	1997	7.0						
Ireland	1997	6.8						
Austria	1999	6.0						
Germany	1998	5.9						
Switzerland	1996	5.7						
Belgium (Fl)	1998	5.1						
Netherlands	1998	5.0	2002	8.3	2005	10	2006	10.5
Australia	1997	14.0	2002	15	2005	17	2006	19.10
USA	1998	13.8					2006	24.4
Canada	1998	12.0					2006	20
New Zealand	1998	10.4						

Sources¹

Universities Australia (previously Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee AV-CC) data shows an increase from 1996 to 2002 of women above the senior lecturer level (D/E) of only 5% (13% in 1996 and 18% in 2002). Universities Australia (UA) set "critical targets and measures" for greater gender parity in higher education in their Second Action Plan as follows:

- to increase women at Level E from 16% in 2004 to 25% by 2010.
- to increase women at Level D from 24% in 2004 to 35% by 2010.
- to increase the number of women academics with PhD;
- to increase the proportion of women in senior leadership positions as deans, directors and senior managers
- gender ratios for all academic levels by discipline (AVCC, 2006:2).

These targets provide useful measure against which universities can measure themselves, and

¹ Source yrs 1995/8: ETAN report 2000, p.10.

Sources yrs 2002+: UK: Academic Staff at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): 2005/06 Excluding atypical, Universities UK [Accessed 11/7/08 <http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/facts07.pdf>]. Netherlands: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Association of Universities in the Netherlands, Accessed 11/7/08 <http://www.vsn.nl/web/show/id=98245/langid=42>; USA: West, M. and Curtis, J. (2006), *AAUP Gender Equity Indicators 2006*, p. 23 Accessed 11/7/08 <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/research/geneq2006.htm>; Australia: Universities Australia, University Staff Profile (1996-2005), Table 4. Female Staff: % Full-time and Fractional Full-time by Classification, 1996-2005 [Accessed 11/7/08 <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=/publications/stats/staff.htm>]. QUT Selected inter-institutional gender equity statistics (2007). Figure 17, p. 18. Canada: The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2007), Trends in Higher Education Vol 2, p. 4, accessed 11/7/08 http://www.aucc.ca/policy/research/trends/index_e.html]

benchmark against others. They can also provide external reference points for quality audits.

Meso (organisational) issues

In the latter part of 2006, the Teaching and Learning Centre at Murdoch University (MU) began the academic Women in Leadership and Development (WILD) initiative aimed at supporting academic women at the University, and to ensure a pool of women would be prepared to take on leadership roles (AVCC, 2006: 2). In 2007, we also began an associated research project to identify organisational issues and trends because despite gender equity laws, and University policies, equity does not necessarily translate to the everyday experience and there are a number of factors within organisations that disadvantage or impede women’s career progression. Louise Morley (2006) explains “gender discrimination can take place via informal networks, coalitions, and exclusions, as well as by formal arrangements in classrooms and boards rooms” (Morley, 2006: 543). By examining some of these factors, particular areas for change can be highlighted that may otherwise have gone unnoticed, and our study set out to identify some areas for action at MU. The study included a survey of academic staff within the university to gain an insight into gender perceptions and culture alongside structural conditions. The University’s attention to gender equity was also prompted by an Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) audit recommendation in September 2006, which now requires action.

Structural frame

In 2007, sixty percent of FTE academics at MU were male. There are of course difference in the gender balances within the Divisions (now Faculties) with Science and Engineering have the highest proportion of males (70%), while Arts and Health were both just over 50%. However, the University was below the national targets in the percentage of women in the category of staff above senior lecturer (level D/E) in 2005. Murdoch University remained below those national targets in 2007.

This all seems strange in a university that has had an enduring reputation for equity since it was established thirty years ago. We benchmarked ourselves against other universities in the Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRU Australia) group. While MU is below others, it is not the only one below Universities Australia targets, and it struck us as strange that so few universities received an AUQA recommendation relating to women academic staff (we return to this issue later in the paper). The data presented by Queensland University of Technology’s Equity Section (2007) for 2006 shows a range for the percentage of female academic staff FTE at Level D (associate professor) (excluding Bachelor College) from 9.52 at Central Queensland University, to 50.91 at the Australian Catholic University). At Level E (professor), the range is between 8.77 at Murdoch University (followed by University of Southern Queensland at 10.53 and University of Adelaide at 10.79) to 41.67 at the Australian Catholic University. Of the public universities, the University of Canberra has the highest percentage of women at Level D (47.50), and the highest percentage of women at Level E are at the University of the Sunshine Coast (37.50) followed by La Trobe University (32.08).

Source DEST data Table 7.

Table 2: Percentage of Female Academic Staff FTE at Level D and E, 2006

AVCC targets (2010)	Murdoch	Macquarie (no longer part of IRUA)	La Trobe	Flinders	Newcastle	Griffith	James Cook
Level D from 24% (2004) to 35% by 2010	24.66	31.71	30.00	37.25	20.25	30.08	13.70
Level E from 16% (2004) to 25% (2010)	8.77	21.93	32.08	16.92	18.75	27.40	23.44

Source: QUT Selected inter-institutional gender equity statistics (2007). Figure 17, p. 18.

One of the potential confusions from the available data is whether the data refers to the percentage of women FTE at a particular level, or whether it is the percentage of women in a category, for

example, percentage of women professors Level E of the total number of professors as in Table 1. This needs further clarification and investigation.

The Universities Australia Action Plan for Women 2006-2010 recommends the inclusion of “gender equity performance measures in the corporate plans” (AVCC, 2006: 3). As Winchester *et al* point out, universities in Australia have some way to go in achieving this. “There is not a clear picture of a thoroughly focused or sustained effort to achieve best practice. This is evidenced by the fact that only 5 of the 17 (29%) universities in the groups interviewed have a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for gender in relation to senior academic positions” (Winchester, Chesterman, Lorenzo and Browning, 2005: 2). Some Key performance indicators for women have been included in Murdoch University’s AUQA action plan, but the University may struggle to reach those targets.

In summary, on a national level, the data shows progress towards greater representation of women at senior academic levels has been slow. However, simply promoting women at MU to senior positions to ‘make up the numbers’ would not ensure sustainability, or address root causes. This is because “the processes which produce such distorted patterns of men’s and women’s employment are embedded in wider organizational structures which may either assist or constrain the opportunities for the advancement of women academics” as Janet Finch, Vice Chancellor of Keele University in the UK points out (Finch 2003:134). Thus, we need to examine how gender is imprinted in practices, and identify what might result in indirect discriminatory practices. If Murdoch University it to realise the vision for equity in relation to its academic women, it is important that we identify the barriers, and understand how they operate in order to remove them. Ideally this would be the case for all women and not just academic women.

Political Frame

The changing higher education environment, and financial pressure, has increased the involvement of non-academic and external influences through university governing bodies, and raises particular issues regarding the power balance between the institution and the female academic. Nationally, there has been a strengthening of executive power and the emergence of senior management groups, which are frequently dominated by men. This section examines (by gender) university governance through the governing council (or governing senate), and the academic board (also known as council or senate ie the peak academic body) as well as university committees at MU. Traditionally, academic culture has seen the role of academics include leadership and policy making – essentially through the firmly entrenched committee system and so we also examined committee membership by gender. There is also an element of symbolism attached to this – or a message of values inadvertently portrayed to the internal and external stakeholders that may be opposite to the intended values of the organisation. It is evident in a variety of forms.

During 2007, MU had 13 male members of the governing body (Senate), but only four female members (excluding secretary to senate). A male member’s term ended in late 2007 and an additional female member was elected. The Academic Council (chaired by a male) had 29 members: 16 male members and 12 female (one position vacant). This imbalance is partly influenced by the appointed positions in Senate, and the ex officio membership within Academic Council with only one of eight senior positions being female- a ratio of 7:1. MU had only one female member of the senior executive in 2007 and that remains the case. From 2008, the senior executive group was comprised of five positions, one of whom is female, making a ratio of 4:1.

In response to government reforms, the size of university governing bodies has been reduced. The Hoare review (1995) highlighted the role of council members as well and their long entrenched tradition of collegiality and internal representation within universities in Australia. It recommended a rationalisation of the size of university councils and memberships of between 10 and 15 [<http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/otherpub/hoare/hoare1.htm#summary>]. The National Governance Protocols linked to the Higher Education Support Act allows the government to exert

influence through funding arrangements despite the lack of legislative authority. In 2003 the National Governance protocols for higher education were released and universities had to comply with these protocols or risk losing additional funds. Most university councils now average 21 members. The Commonwealth aims to limit internal representation on the councils and external members make up a large component of the membership, unlike the peak academic body – the academic board or academic council. Despite the ‘obsession’ with the size of governing councils, Moodie (2003) claims that there is no relationship between the size of the council and university performance (Moodie 2003:3). Meek and Hayden (2004) argue that the increased focus on university councils is because of the “importance of the decisions they are increasingly being required to make. They are also becoming of considerable political interest, especially to the Commonwealth, because of the considerable delegation of authority to them by the States” (Meek and Hayden 2004:15). While there may be more women on boards in recent times, the overall number has been reduced thereby reflecting little change in gender parity in governance.

The other element to consider is the key committees of both the governing body and the academic board. Service on these senior decision making bodies is often considered an important path to promotion, as well as preparation for leadership positions in universities. Research by Hult, Calister and Sullivan (2005) of a university in the United States of America found that women were more likely to serve on committees. This was reported in somewhat negative terms in that the additional responsibility impacted on workloads and was less likely to be useful in promotion. This result must surely be related to which committees, and whether they are organisational level committees or lower level faculty and departmental committees? At MU, the situation is rather different than the findings of Hult *et. al* suggest. Fewer MU women serve on University level committees (ie key committees of both the governing body and the academic board) than men, and thus the under representation of women in decision-making continues. In 2007, there were 23 University level committees at MU: 104 male members of committees were listed on the website and only 64 women (some positions were vacant and so not included).² More males also served on multiple committees. More than twice as many committees were chaired by men (17), than women (6). Of the six chaired by women, three were chaired by the same senior executive woman, and two by appointed Senate members.

Chairing a program of study is one way in which academic staff can demonstrate leadership in teaching and learning – also an important component in promotion. An analysis of programs chairs by Divisions during 2007 (as listed on Divisional websites) reveals a significant imbalance in leadership by women. Significantly more males chair programs than do females in all Divisions overall. The percentage of women staff that chair is also lower than the percentage of male staff that chair. Arts and Health Sciences have close to twice as many males as program chairs. Not only do the figures indicate gender imbalances in leadership in teaching, but also raise concern regarding the number of programs some individuals are responsible for, and may warrant further investigation.

The low participation of women in governance and leadership more broadly in Australia signifies that most decision-making in many universities in Australia does not include a significant women’s voice. Indeed, if professorial status is a condition for election to chairs of academic board (and it is at MU), this will immediately reduce the number of potential female candidates. In those more traditional universities where professorial status still equals a place on the academic board, it will correspondingly translate into more male places. This indicates that gender parity ought to be an area of governance reform, leadership in all forms – including the nature of leadership by committee, which is distinct to university leadership. These forms of leadership and decision-making

² There were some minor inaccuracies as some staff listed as committee members had actually left the University

separates higher education from other businesses and are often overlooked but can certainly block or assist paths to promotion at various levels in universities.

Human resource Frame

The Murdoch University Women in Leadership and Development (WILD) is one Meso level initiative that also has a micro level focus. Whether this will constitute a pool of women ready to replace those currently in senior positions depends on many of the political and structural issues identified above. Staff or professional development alone will not generate change to organizational structures, politics or culture to increase women's representation at senior levels.

In the latter part of 2007, we conducted a survey to gain the perspectives of academic staff – male and female- that should more clearly identify some of the gender issues at MU. This survey was conducted on-line, and an invitation to participate sent to all staff via email. The survey design included both qualitative and quantitative questions. It had four sections to provide context for differences, comparisons, analysis, and possible trends. These areas were staff profile; work responsibilities; work culture; work life balance. It also included some of the questions used by Currie, Thiele and Harris's survey instrument in *Gendered Universities in a Globalized Economies* (2002) pp. 193-196. The response rate was low– and much lower than we had anticipated, which means we did not learn what we had hoped, rendering our evidence for university culture to inform organisation change strategies unreliable. However, the data is proving useful in other ways. The low response rate, especially from women, prompted us to start asking questions about a 'sticky floor'.

Mico-level: individuals and groups

A question of a Sticky Floor?

Rebecca Shambaugh's (2006) question of whether unconscious behaviours keep women stuck, and why some women don't build strategic relationships was interesting based on our experience. She says that despite the progress women deserve, some behaviours also need changing. Perhaps one challenge is that women are less likely to allow themselves the time for professional development that may benefit them?

The WILD program runs throughout the year, is supported by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), free to participants, open to a wide group of women rather than a select group, focuses the broad scope of academic work (teaching, research and administration/management), and ranges from short half-day sessions to up to 5 days. We endeavor to concentrate longer sessions in particular within the non-teaching breaks. However, participation has been lower than anticipated, although has improved to some extent in 2008. The increase may also have something to do with broadening the scope of the target group to include tutors, and general staff, as well as more sessions, and a new weekly University Events email to all staff.

In late 2007, a coaching program was launched. This was specifically targeted at developing high quality ARC grant applications in early 2008. Successful ARC grant recipients (male and female) from among the Murdoch community were invited to act as coaches, and a small remuneration was offered. Several responded positively, but there was less participation in the coaching program than hoped. Half the number of potential coaches approached did not respond to the initial email, or the follow-up. Only five women applied to have a coach to assist them in developing an ARC application.

WILD has been a success in the sense of positive feedback from female staff, gathered at the end of 2007. We invited feedback from women who had attended two or more sessions. However, again the sample we had to draw from those who agreed to be interviewed was small. Satisfied that we have done our homework in regard to WILD (and the survey), provided a comprehensive high quality program, paid attention to timing issues, responded to need, and reflected sufficiently on our approach and strategies, the important question for us is to what extent we are confronted by

'the sticky floor'. As Shambaugh recently pointed out, "women have not made the progress we deserve in the executive suite, and the glass ceiling is still the oft-cited usual suspect. But it is not the whole story – and by believing it is, we may be holding ourselves back" (Shambaugh 2006). However, the concept of a 'sticky floor' seems to have varying interpretations. Booth, Francesconi and Frank (2003) apply the 'sticky floor' to describe the situation where women are promoted to the same rank as men but at a lower level than men are appointed. In other words women are started at a lower level within the rank or scale. Research by Elloitt, Dale and Egerton (2001) suggests that the type of qualification (occupational or non-occupational) and not just the level may have an impact on career prospects for women. Currently we don't have enough evidence at MU to make judgements about a 'sticky floor', and will need more research over the next few years. Individuals' inhibiting behaviours or motivation aside, programs such as WILD will not significantly change the status quo in higher education overall. More is necessary.

Symbolic frame

We conclude that perhaps MU could pay greater attention to this area in regard to WILD. Executive support does exist but senior structural 'ownership' was a sticky point, and as a result the program was implemented 'under the radar' to some extent. That has now been clarified, resting with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), and more visible executive support for the WILD program and activities through celebratory strategies will assist. For example, a wider senior leadership developmental program, due for launch in August 2008 has been deliberately biased to include a majority of women. These have been selected from active participants in the WILD program and the new program will complement the WILD program for such women. We are optimistic that the specific WILD program coupled with the university-wide leadership program will assist in overcoming any potential 'sticky floor' that may exist at MU.

Broadening the perspective on Macro issues which affect Meso matters

Regardless of institutional efforts such as WILD, and on the basis of history, it is doubtful that Universities Australia's targets will be reached in many universities. As we have seen, representation of women at senior and professorial levels has not increased significantly over the past decade and entrenched skewed numbers of women at higher academic levels continue. Gender equity in governance, and decision-making, alongside positional leadership is an important area for reform in higher education. In addition to staff development initiatives, challenges of what might be a 'sticky floor', our study has highlighted areas that MU (and others) can focus on to effect change such as participation in and chairing key committees, as well as teaching leadership through chairing programs of study, which in time should provide a pool of women to take senior roles in the university and attain professorial status. Özkanli and White's (2008: 59) suggested strategies for senior female academic staff in Australian higher education include improving promotions processes and widening promotion criteria, looking for career development opportunity to also include external committee, staff development, and implementing policies that make professorial promotions more attainable.

We agree with Özkanli and White's strategies, however, the responsibility for gender parity in higher education is shared by the sector, and many years of directed strategies have produced slow change. Overlaying such strategies is a need for greater attention to change at the macro-level involving for example Universities Australia, Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, and the Australian Universities Quality Agency for a more nationally coordinated and aligned approach. We argue that as long as progress remains dependent on champions, and strategies in individual universities, it will be slow and piecemeal and will not achieve the UA targets set. This argument is supported by the fact that change has been slow globally as shown in Table 1 above. Coupled with this situation, is the well know financial depression of higher education in Australia.

Universities Australia

Universities Australia has set targets for universities on numbers of women in senior positions and the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) has taken some interest in gender balance as evidenced by the Murdoch University recommendation. Participation in such events as UA conferences and Staff Development and Training programs for women are heavily dependent on available funding (costs ranging from over \$1,000 up to about \$4,000). As such they can be prohibitive and exclude many women from accessing either. This is compounded for those from afar such as Western Australia when travel and accommodation are added.

If Universities Australia is serious about reaching the targets they have set, it really needs adequate resourcing. Universities simply can not do it alone. A 2006 media release was headlined “Minister supports advancement of women employed in universities” (Universities Australia 15 November 2006), with the announcement of \$190,000 of matched funding to support the Action Plan for Women, and advance women’s issues in universities. The funds appear to have been directed for the most part towards the Colloquium of Senior Women Executives in Higher Education, and research projects. While these may be important initiatives, research is not necessarily followed by change, and it is somewhat doubtful whether there has had much impact ‘on the ground’ for women academics. Moreover, initiatives remain dependent on champions and it is suggested that if UA is to take gender parity seriously, then ensuring a clear understanding of responsibilities by members of UA, systemic data reporting and review, along with sharing of good practice will assist in the move to mainstream of the Action Plan for women.

The Universities Australia Executive Women committee made up of senior women in Australian Universities meet annually. The UAEW constitution aims include “to consult with UA in the carriage of the UA Action Plan for Women Employed in Australian Universities [and] to assist, as appropriate, in achieving the objectives and targets in the UA Action Plan” (UAEW June 2008). However, despite being an issue of significant national importance, and having set targets for universities, the status of women in universities does not appear to be a regular item on the UA meeting agenda (eg UA General Meeting of 11 June 2008).

Responsibility for gender equity varies within senior executive portfolios. At MU for example, academic staff development (and the WILD program) is located with the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor, Academic, however equity rests with the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor, Corporate (within Human Resources). Only four universities have a senior executive whose title reflects equity. There are as follows:

- Edith Cowan University: Pro-Vice-chancellor Equity and Indigenous Affairs;
- La Trobe University: Pro-Vice-Chancellor Equity and Student Services;
- University of Melbourne: Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching, Learning and Equity; and
- University of Technology Sydney: Deputy-Vice-Chancellor Teaching, Learning and Equity.

While these universities have such portfolios, the responsibility for women staff may not necessarily rest with that office. UA has three committees – academic, research and international- and only one of the above senior executives is included in the UA list in the academic committee. Currently, there is no UA Director for gender equity listed. Such a commitment to women could be an initial starting point, as well as securing significant and sustained ministerial support of the new government, coupled with collaborating and lobbying with Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, and the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) for appropriate changes to ensure alignment. The UA Action Plan for Women states that leadership will continue to have a leadership role in five areas including “achieving gender equity in Australian Universities [and] working collaboratively with government and other agencies and with universities” (2006: 3).

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

The Australian Government’s Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) has the role of administering the Commonwealth *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act*

1999, through education and assisting organisations. Non-government organisations with Equal Opportunity programs can be recognised by EOWA with a citation as an Employer of Choice for Women (EOCFW) if they have achieved the requirements. Becoming an Employer of Choice for Women is an attractive proposition, and having received a citation organisations can then brand and promote themselves on that basis. In 2007, twenty-three universities had achieved EOCFW status including two Western Australian universities. While some had achieved the UA targets and/or are well on the way for 2010 targets that is not the case uniformly. One university, for example, achieved EOCFW in each year from 2006-2008, yet in 2006 was only marginally over UA, 2004 targets. Another was behind UA, 2004 targets in 2006 but received EOCFW status in 2006 and 2007. These universities serve as examples, but are certainly are not isolated ones.

EOCFW is input-based, some inputs can be problematic for universities (eg could achieve status while still having few women senior managers, above senior lecturer, or HEW level 10 or above), and perhaps it rather needs to be outcomes-based with outputs key performance indicators. It could be argued that for higher education, the EOCFW status provides the organisation with a false 'sense of security'. It is curious that despite so many universities achieving EOCFW status, higher education is still one of the least gender-balanced workforces (Hugo 2005:20).

Analysis of Audit reports from Cycle One reveals that apart from Murdoch University, only one other received a recommendation directly related to women staff (although two received a recommendation more broadly related to staff equity). Murdoch University has not been cited as an EOCFW. The University of Wollongong, however, has. Yet the audit report says "The University is currently recognised by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency as an employer of choice for women. The Audit Panel found, however, that the University has one of the lowest rates of participation by women in senior management" (AUQA 2006, Report of an Audit of the University of Wollongong, p.49).

Twenty-four universities had no mention of women, female, gender or equity in AUQA affirmations, recommendations or commendations. In twelve audit reports there was no mention anywhere in the report. Only three received commendations related to women staff, and six universities received commendations for equity more generally. There appears to be no discernable pattern that could relate this outcome to panel chairs. This raises the question of whether it might result from the nature of the conversations during discussions, and who is interviewed as to whether the role of women is seen as an audit issue. It is, however, interesting to note that there have been more male AUQA panel chairs (28) than female (11). More men (8) than women (2) chaired 2 or more audits, and four of those males were chairs without having been listed as observers or panel members prior to chairing an audit panel.

In the University of Wollongong's audit report "The Audit Panel chose to explore one particular issue, namely gender representation among senior staff. It reviewed a wide range of relevant internal and external reports on staffing and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) planning outcomes, including the University's Annual Report to the Director of Public Employment, which sets out the policy environment and provides a range of relevant performance indicators. The Audit Panel also discussed this matter with University management and staff" (AUQA 2006, Report of an Audit of the University of Wollongong, p. 49). Given the focus of AUQA audits has evolved to include external reference points and issues of "standards", the availability of UA targets may be of value to audit panels in consideration of fundamental quality issues across universities, including equity for female academic staff. In the themed approach to cycle two audits, this may not be appropriate for all universities, however, could be considered for those Universities with themes involving Human Resources or Equity. While AUQA operates independent of government, it is at the same time funded by, and responsible to, the Commonwealth, States and Territories ministers.

Conclusion

The Commonwealth has sought to influence universities for many years including regulation and funding. The National Governance Protocols linked to the Higher Education Support Act allows the government to exert influence through funding arrangements despite the lack of legislative authority. While Australian higher education has been subject to significant government intervention in recent years aimed at transforming both the sector and the institutions within it, the low participation of women in governance more broadly signifies that most decision-making in universities excludes a significant women's voice. This indicates that gender parity ought to be an area of governance reform on the national level as well. The High Court recently confirmed universities are considered corporations. The Commonwealth has the potential power to legislate on matters concerning corporations (Moodie 2007: 110). Therefore, the Commonwealth, if it so desires, has the power to legislate specifically on matters of equity, governance and quality. While the sector has had increasing government regulation more broadly, gender parity in universities appears to have gone largely unnoticed by successive governments. These issues all interrelate alongside institutional processes and initiatives.

Alongside institutional initiatives, a national approach is necessary with greater alignment between key agencies and for UA to facilitate universities reaching the targets they (UA) have set.

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