

The Changing Research Landscape in Ireland and its Impact on Gender (0127)

Paper Outline

Statistics produced by the European Commission indicate that academic women in Ireland face one of the 'thickest' glass ceilings in Europe. Women are under-represented at senior levels and approximately 10% of professors in Irish universities are female. Promotions to senior levels are largely based on research performance, which raises complex questions around why male academics tend to do better in this category. In this paper I want to examine the Irish research context in order to explore some of the challenges that women academics face in terms of career progression.

Research in Irish higher education was given a massive boost during the Celtic Tiger years. From 1998, there were significant injections of funding into national research funding streams. One of the most important funding streams, which is still continuing today, is the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL). Other significant sources of funding are Science Foundation Ireland and the European Union. A lesser known but also significant source of funding came from philanthropic organizations, particular Atlantic Philanthropies.

In this paper I will consider the gendered impact of research funding and research policies, both at a national and institutional level. Some of the issues raised nationally concern the emphasis on the knowledge economy in Irish policy, and the possible impact on subject areas not deemed to be economically important. The greater concentration of women academics in the humanities and social sciences, and their reduced access to research funding in these subject areas, may be a factor within promotions to senior levels for academic women. It may also be the case that women tend to be more prominent within the research areas connected to social issues. As pointed out by Khoo et al (2007: 6): 'Irish research for the 'public good' has been substantially financed by private and mainly *overseas* sources, whilst national public funding appears to be directed towards corporate profit and accumulation.' It is in the latter areas where men might be dominant.

Although a report on Equality Policies in Irish Higher Education (2004) prepared by the Higher Education Authority in Ireland pointed to the above issues and called for more research on inequalities in employment opportunities, the gendered impact of research funding still remains relatively unexplored. It might also be argued that the situation has worsened in recent years during the economic crisis, as university budgets are reduced and a focus on efficiency means that there is less money for institutional research. There are, however, a few very significant pieces of research that explore barriers to women's

progression to senior levels in Irish education more generally (e.g. O'Connor & White forthcoming; Lynch et al 2009). In spite of these projects there are still large gaps in our empirical evidence for the reasons behind the slow progression of academic women in Ireland.

Recent research undertaken in one Irish university explored perceived barriers to academic women's career progression. A survey of 250 academics has provided a rich picture of the differences between the career progression of men and women, and the ways in which promotions processes operate. The emphasis on research outputs within the promotions process is a dominant concern, and the data reveal very different patterns of career development between men and women academics. The survey data has been analysed and used to make a series of recommendations to the senior management team of the university in order to improve promotion prospects for women academics.

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Khoo, S., Healy, C. and Coate, K. (2007) Development Education and the Development of Research at Third Level in Ireland. *Policy and Practice*.5:5-19.

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O'Connor, P. and White, K. (forthcoming) 'Similarities and Differences in Collegiality/Managerialism in Irish and Australian Universities' *Gender and Education*