Changes in the position of women in UK academia

Karen Mumford and Carol Propper on behalf of the CWE.

There have now been two surveys of the relative position of women in academic economics in the UK published on behalf of the RES Committee for Women in Economics (CWE). The first survey was carried out by Denise Osborn and reported on by Karen Mumford (KM, 1997), the second was commissioned to the Institute for Social and Economic Research and reported on by Alison Booth and Jonathan Burton (B+B,1999). Results from the second survey confirm the pattern found in the first: there is a clear pyramidal structure with women making up some 30% of the base and roughly 5% of the apex (see columns 1 and 2 of Table 1). Nevertheless, over the last two years women have increased as a proportion of all grades except Professor where they have remained pretty much constant. The extent of these increases grows as we move down the ranks until we get to the two most junior categories where the proportions of women who are fixed term lecturers has risen dramatically, as has the number of female PhD students. There appears to be either an increase in interest in becoming an academic economist amongst women and/or an increase in the propensity of departments to hire women at this level.

The changes in female academic staff and graduate students

Between 1996 and 1998 total full time employment fell some 9% in economics departments and virtually all of this loss has resulted in there being fewer lecturers. The total numbers of Professors and Readers/Senior Lecturers have shown little, if any, change over the two years. So either there has been (a) large scale retirement at these senior levels and the two hundred or so missing lecturers have been promoted (internally or externally) to fill the gaps or (b) the lecturers quit and took up jobs outside academic economics without being replaced by their departments. Our data suggest that both flows have occurred and, whilst we know little about those who have left academia[1], we do know about movements into higher grades.

Table 2 reveals a strong growth in external appointments across departments. In 1996, 6.5% of Professors were 'new staff' - in other words, those who had recently been appointed rather than promoted. By 1998 this figure has risen to 16.8% of current professors. Given that the second survey counts new hires over a two year period rather than the one year period of the '96 survey, we would expect the '98 value to be roughly double that of the '96. The higher figure found represents a growth in turnover at this grade of 60%. Carrying out a similar exercise for the other grades reveals a substantial increase in turnover at all grades with the exception of fixed term lecturers.

Women have taken advantage of these new job opportunities, which is shown by the proportions of women amongst new staff increasing (see the final two rows in Table 2). However, these rises are not overly dramatic at the higher grades and the biggest increases are amongst fixed term lecturers.

The rise in the number of female graduate research students is strongly linked to a continued demand from European students for our graduate programs and the large proportion of females amongst these students (some 38% in 1998). There has, however, also been a small rise in the number of women from the UK doing PhDs. In 1996 there were 246 UK full time PhD students, 61 of whom

[1] We can posit that the cohort of a workforce which saw major expansion in the 1960s is now entering the retirement phase. The forthcoming RAE exercise may be resulting in some relocation of those considered to be research inactive, and a growth in research grants resulting in more fixed term lectureships. The outflow in the lecturing ranks may be explained by low academic salaries (Oswald and Machin, 1999 and Seigfried and Stock, 1999).

were women (25%) by 1998 these numbers had risen to 255 in total and 77 women (30%).

Relocation across departments

We have found an overall increase in the proportion of female academics and students in economics departments. Which institutions have these women gone to? There is a complex pattern in our data. The higher ranked RAE departments (5 and 5*) have many more graduate students and fixed term lecturers, and the relative growth of women in both of these groups have bolstered their numbers of females. On the other hand, 5 and 5* are less likely to have women at the higher academic grades. The new universities and the lower ranked departments (below 4) still have more women academics in total but they are less likely to appoint to the highest levels than are the 4 and above ranked departments[2]. It would appear that the top ranked departments are attracting more women at the base levels but that there is little flow through to the higher grades, whilst the lower ranked departments are maintaining a core of women at the intermediate level. There is also an apparent association between the presence of a female Professor in a department (although all of the current group have been appointed since 1992) and the distribution of women at more junior grades. These interactions are amongst a series of issues which are currently being further explored by the CWE.

How does the UK compare?

Table 1 presents data on the position of women in academic economics is the UK compared to the US, Australia (Aus), Italy and Denmark. All of the countries, with the exception of Denmark, show a clear decline in the relative numbers of women as the seniority of the grade increases. We can see that the UK is not out of line. Figures for the UK are comparable to those for the US despite the considerable time and effort expended in the US in the last two decades to improve the position of women. A sobering lesson may also be learned from Denmark, which has had a strong body of female professors in place for over a decade and has still seen a decline in the numbers of junior women. Similarly, Australia has seen most of its female professors resign or move out of economics departments in the last 3 years, without replacement. Furthermore, their presence seemed to have little impact on the rise of women into intermediate grades.

In conclusion, the note of optimism in our introduction does not appear to be totally unfounded. On the plus side, the female graduate numbers are high and rising and may bode well for the flow of women into the discipline. On the negative side, the numbers at the highest academic grades are relatively low and there hasn't been much catch up at these levels in the last two years. However, the lack of movement at this level may reflect a cohort effect whose impact will diminish over time as younger staff enter into the profession.

References

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[2]The other obvious means of rising through the ranks is via internal promotion. According to our data, there were only 152 such promotions amongst full time staff in the two year interval, 18 of these went to women which is slightly less than their proportion in the workforce. What is perhaps more surprising is that internal promotion is rare for all (men and women) - on average, an individual is roughly twice as likely to get promotion from an external move than via internal advancement.

John Siegfried and Wendy A. Stock, 1999. 'The labor market for new PhD economists.' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13(3); 15-134.

Table 1. Gender by grade: The UK and elsewhere

	Percentage of the grade fema			
Primary Employment Function	**UK '96**	**UK '98**	**US '97**	**Aus '99**
Grade A Professors (UK, Denmark and Aus), Full Professor tenured (US), Ordinari (Italy)	4.19	4.06	6.50	2.94
Grade B Readers & Senior Lecturers (UK), Associati (Italy), Readers & Assoc. Professor (Aus), Assoc. Professor tenured (US)	9.56	11.24	13.40	4.46
Grade C Senior Lecturer (Aus), Lektor & Docent (Denmark) Associate Professor untenured (US)			11.10	11.80
Grade D Lecturers - permanent (UK), Lecturer (Aus), Assistant Professor tenured (US), Ricercatori (Italy)	15.99	17.13	17.90	30.94
Grade E Lecturers - fixed term (UK), Adjunkt (Denmark) Assistant Professor untenured (US)	23.47	28.11	26.00	
Grade F Assistant Lecturer (Aus), Non-tenure track (US)			38.00	38.71
PhD Students Grad research students (UK) PhD Students (US & Denmark)	28.43	32.35	25.00	

Sources: UK 96, Karen Mumford 1997; UK 98, Alison Booth and Jonathan Burton, 1999; US 99, CSWEP 1998 Annual Re
data generously provided by Annalisa Rosselli; Denmark 1999, data generously provided by Hanne Nexø Jensen.

Table 2. Changes in the UK academic stock

	Professors	Reader/SL	Lect. perm	Lect. fixed
Percentage of full time staff who were new staff				
Those hired between 1/12/95 and 30/11/96	6.5	3.1	5.85	36.74
Those hired between 30/11/96 and 30/11/98	16.8	9.3	18.78	73.60
Approximate growth in turnover	60	100	120	
Percentage of new full time staff who are female				
1996	4.6	16.7	26.5	27.8
1998	5.6	20.6	24.3	32.8

Raw data sources: UK 96, Karen Mumford 1997; UK 98, Alison Booth and Jonathan Burton, 1999.