

Mainstreaming Gender Equality?

A new report by the European Commission examines the position of women scientists throughout the EU. The report draws the now familiar picture of low representation of women in academic science and concludes that this 'threatens the goals of science in achieving excellence as well as being wasteful and unjust'. It makes a series of policy suggestions, several of which may be of interest to those concerned with how UK economics might maintain the movement towards greater representation of women.

The Current Position

The position of women in science throughout the EU is similar to that in UK Economics and not dissimilar to the position of women in science at MIT (reported in issue 106 of the RES Newsletter). Although there are country specific differences in academic systems, the proportion of women holding senior scientific posts is consistently extremely small. Despite the fact that half the undergraduate science population is female, there is a progressive shedding of women at each level of the career ladder until at professorial level they constitute less than 7% of the total.

This problem is also reflected in other professional representation. In many member states the numbers of women serving on research council boards and other decision-making bodies and those who are members of learned academies is only 5 percent. This low number also translates into peer recognition in terms of grants and prizes. Both sexism and nepotism have, on occasion, tainted the ostensibly objective peer review system. Research in Sweden, backed by further research in the Netherlands, discovered that to gain research grants a female scientist had to have on average 2.6 times as many publications as her male colleague. And, as the table below indicates, the extent of women scientists' recognition by means of prestigious prizes is pitifully small and a poor model for women entering the profession today.

Recommendations

The report authors believe that institutions employing scientists (and by extension other academics) are old-fashioned in their attitudes to work and require modernisation. Recruitment and promotion is sometimes heavily reliant on patronage, the 'old boys network' and personal invitations for positions. A culture of long hours is pervasive, as is the view that research can only be done full time.

The report makes a range of recommendations for action by the European institutions, national states, individual employers and grant awarding bodies. Many of these suggest avenues of unilateral action by employers or funders.

The report makes four recommendations for legislative change.

An EU Directive requiring all organisations with more than 50 employees to keep gender-disaggregated statistics covering employment and pay. Gender monitoring is

regarded as key in getting significant proportions of women into the mainstream of academia and few organisations routinely keep sufficient data of this kind. (In fact, for Economics in the UK the RES Committee for Women in Economics started doing this over four years ago).

New Member State laws requiring a gender balance on the boards and committees of public bodies. Such legislation would cover grant awarding bodies, expert and monitoring panels. Targets are proposed of a minimum of 30% of each gender by 2002 and 40% by 2005 on all committees setting the research agenda. Further to this, a funding embargo would be placed on meetings or conferences without a sufficient number of women speakers, related to the stocks in that field.

New national laws requiring full access to public information.

The removal of national laws and regulations which indirectly discriminate by gender. Examples include upper age limits for applications for certain jobs or grants, which may discriminate against those who have taken a career break, and restrictions on the access to laboratories and other workplaces by pregnant or breastfeeding women.

In addition to the above legislative proposals the report also makes a number of suggestions for action by national governments and institutions. These include:

- ensuring recruitment and promotion processes are fair and transparent
- equality training is given to all involved in recruitment or promotion
- researchers on grants must be eligible for sickness and parental leave
- employers and governments should encourage balanced working lives by addressing the long-hours culture and adding childcare budgets to conference travel grants
- a pledge to abolish the pay gap between men and women in academia by 2005
- performing an annual gender pay audit and using the results as performance indicators for managers and as the basis of financial rewards and sanctions at the departmental level

There are some further proposals of direct action to improve stocks. These include establishing one-time grants for women; setting aside additional resources for networking groups; encouraging mentoring between women; directly helping women back into their careers after family breaks and ring-fencing some professorial and other positions specifically for women.

Finally, the report also proposes the establishment of a new prize for achievement by women in science (or for an existing prize to alternate between men and women).

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The report was prepared by the European Technology Assessment Network (ETAN) chaired by Mary Osborn. The report can be downloaded in full from http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/hp_women.htm.

Women and International Science Prizes		
Prize	Category	Winners
Nobel Prizes 1901-1998	Physics	2/158
	Chemistry	3/131
	Physiology / Medicine	6/168
	<i>Living winners in science</i>	3/167
The Crafoord Prize	Basic research in maths, astronomy, the biosciences, the geosciences and polyarthritis	0/31
Kyoto Prizes	Advanced Technology	1/17
	Basic Sciences	1/14
Lemelson – MIT Awards	For invention and innovation	0/6
	Lifetime Achievement Award	2/5
Japan Prize	For science and technology serving the cause of peace and prosperity	0/38
Charles Stark Draper Prize	For engineering contributing to human welfare and freedom	0/8
Bower Prize for Achievement in Science	Achievement in science	1/9
Lasker Awards	Basic Science	5/115
	Clinical	6/113
Louis Jeantet Prize for Medicine	Medicine	2/44
Jung Prize for Medicine	Medicine	0/48
Paul Ehrlich and Ludwig Darmstaedter Prize	Biomedical research	5/99
Prize Leopold Griffuel	Oncology	2/29
Prince of Asturias Prize	No female winner in the sciences	