Universities Australia Strategy for Women: 2011-2014

November 2010

Further inquiries should be made to the Chief Executive Officer:

Contents

Statement of Commitment

Universities Australia is committed to fully utilising the skills and capabilities of all members of its workforce and to continue to address the challenges facing women who enter and contribute to higher education. It will support ongoing efforts by its members to bring about employment equity and an inclusive culture, building on the equity achievements of past years.

Background

The first Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) *Action Plan for Women employed in Australian Universities 1999-2003* and *The Second AVCC Action Plan for Women employed in Australian Universities 2006-2010* set the directions for improving the representation of women particularly at senior academic and administrative levels.

In 2004, 28% (or 11 of 39) of Vice-Chancellors were women, 26% of Deputy Vice-Chancellors were women and 39% of senior administrative staff (>HEW 10) were women. In late 2009, 18% (or 7 of 39) of Vice-Chancellors were women, 34% of Deputy Vice-Chancellors were women and just on 40% of senior administrative staff were women. Progress has been made but it is slow and not evenly distributed. Just as with our students, there are distinct patterns of clustering of women in certain administrative portfolios and academic disciplines as well as certain leadership roles (Bell 2009).

There are compelling productivity, governance and social justice reasons for Universities Australia to continue to pursue its focus on achieving gender equality at all levels and addressing persistent patterns of gender inequality. Some of the reasons are:

- The aging profile of the Higher Education workforce and the foreshadowed shortage of staff over the next five years will challenge current employment, retention and promotion patterns across the sector (Hugo 2005 & 2008).

- The pressing question of attracting domestic students - the future academic and research workforce - to PhDs, and the importance of women's participation in terms of current and future trends (Edwards et al. 2009).

- There is evidence that the career paths of academic women and men are different, with those of men being quite linear and those of women often being more labyrinthine (Stephens-Kalceff 2007, Diezmann 2009). These different patterns need to be taken into account as new members of staff are recruited in a highly competitive environment (Eagly and Carli 2007).

- In Australia, in 2008, 55.2% of student enrolments were women, with 55.8% of commencing enrolments being female (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)). This gender composition is not reflected in representation of academic women especially in senior leadership across the sector, nor is it reflected in significant changes in the distribution of women across broad fields of education. This picture raises questions about the role models that are being provided to students, especially those in the PhD cohorts who represent the future generation of university leaders (Dever 2008).

- Innovation and creativity are the lifeblood of universities and are fostered when diverse perspectives and life experiences are brought to bear on issues and problems (Cutler & Company 2008; Gratton et al. 2007). Gender equality contributes to the diversity of universities at all levels and confers access to a wider pool of expertise, knowledge, and leadership styles and skills.

- A recent Global Reporting Initiative Topics Paper 'Embedding Gender in Sustainability Reporting' noted that:

> *The tone of an organisation's public policy is established by its governing principles. Respect for gender equality and transparency on social, environmental, and economic factors have been widely recognised [by groups including UNCTAD and the OECD] as essential components of corporate governance* (www.globalreporting.org).

At the 2006 Annual Meeting of the AVCC Colloquium of Senior Women in Higher Education (now Universities Australia Executive Women (UAEW)) the need for a strategic interventions approach to increasing the representation of women in senior positions in the tertiary sector was identified (Scoping Paper February 2007). Three target areas were identified:

- Women in Leadership

- Women in Research (SET)

- Workplace/IR

Initiatives have been undertaken in each of these areas. To better understand and address the issue of women in leadership UAEW has significantly increased its data analysis to identify persistent gender patterns and has reported on findings to Universities Australia.

The UAEW Mentoring Program was also established in partnership with the LH Martin Institute in 2008 (see www.mihelm.unimelb.edu.au/mentoring/uaew/index.html).

UAEW has funded three research projects to contribute to our understanding of gendered patterns of leadership and how they intersect with the research environment (Dever 2009, Diezmann 2009, Bell and Bentley 2005). UAEW also actively participated in the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS)-sponsored project, Women in Science in Australia, (Bell 2009), and sponsored a well-attended workshop for women in engineering (Developing Your Networks for Female Academics in Engineering, University of Wollongong, 2009). This workshop was attended by 38 women from a wide range of universities, and has generated excellent feedback and measurable impact (Post Program Evaluation, 2010).

To provide focus to the third target area, Workplace/IR, a major study on Gender Pay Equity (Strachan et al. 2009) has also been funded with partners UniSuper and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), and this has formed the basis of a successful Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grant.

The Strategy for Women: 2011-2014

Consistent with international studies that document the many small yet cumulative factors that impact on women's careers (National Academies 2007), this latest plan outlines a series of broader strategies that focus on the career trajectories of women. Recent research (Dever 2006, Stephens-Kalceff 2007, Diezman 2009) identifies a range of non-traditional career profiles for women.

> *The unintended consequences of seemingly minor differences in the impact of practices and policies established in the context of a traditional career path can adversely impact on and reverberate throughout a non-traditional career* (Stephens-Kalceff, 2007).

Based on the findings, the plan looks to strategic interventions at critical points in women's careers.

Typical career paths for women are identified in the research: Continuous, Linear, Delayed, Multiple, Disrupted (Diezman 2009). Except for the first, some critical pressure points include combining family and career, compression in duration of academic career, and transition between industry and academia. Stephens-Kalceff (2007) notes:

> *The difficulty of establishing of a research profile for most Physics women relates to their non-standard career path, where breaks for child-rearing, lack of opportunities to do postdoctoral fellowships and take sabbatical/study leave have impacted throughout their careers.*

This finding is likely to be able to be generalised to many other discipline areas. Diezman (2009) identified catalysts and inhibitors in career development. Catalysts include equal employment opportunity policies and mentoring. Inhibitors include negative discrimination, 'boys' club' culture, tension between personal and professional life, and isolation.

Further, the research shows that for both male and female academics, success is seen as incremental progression. However, women are likely to enter the academy with less human capital (formal qualifications and work experience) than men and *"do not seem to attack the career structure as vigorously as men"* (Probert 2005) BUT whilst women may have less specific career plans than men *"there is no evidence that women are less committed to their careers than men"* (Probert et al. 1998).

Other research points to under-representation at the more senior levels in particular discipline areas and administration fields (Bell 2009).

This plan identifies selected areas as a focus for further research about career aspirations to identify potential intervention points and appropriate interventions based on evidence of success.

Goals and Measures

Goals and Targets

- Encourage universities to continue to take responsibility for ensuring equitable work practices and to incorporate equity strategies and targets in their strategic planning, with unambiguous leadership by the Vice-Chancellors.

- Increase the recognition of the contributions of women to the productivity and advancement of Australia's universities (FASTS recommends *a stronger business case linking diversity and innovation*).

- Improve representation of women in Higher Education at all levels to more strongly reflect representation in society, including Indigenous women.

- Increase the proportion of women in senior leadership positions particularly at the Vice-Chancellor level, and including Deans, Directors and Senior Managers and in a wider range of portfolios and discipline groupings.

- Identify women in middle management and mentor them as the future senior leaders in Higher Education (Nature, June 2010, p1107).

- Test the effectiveness of interventions at critical points in women's careers.

- Showcase senior executive women via media profiling at strategic points throughout the course of the plan.

Measures

- Gender ratios for all academic levels by discipline.
- Gender ratios for senior administrative roles, by portfolio.
- Promotions at all levels.
- Gender ratios in enrolment and completion of PhDs and breakdown by discipline.
- Participation in career development programs including sabbatical leave.

Activities 2011-2014

Universities Australia Commitments

Universities Australia will continue its leadership towards:

- Achieving gender equality in Australian Universities
- Publicising the issues for women in universities
- Promoting the achievements of individual universities
- Monitoring, promoting and regularly reporting on fair and effective representation of women on committees and external bodies to which it nominates members or representatives
- Working collaboratively with government, other agencies and universities
- Actively promoting the Strategy for Women within the broader education context including related stakeholders such as professional bodies and government
- Highlighting the activities of UAEW and senior women in management on the Universities Australia website
- Supporting UAEW in the implementation of this plan through appropriate resourcing.

Universities Australia Executive Women Commitments

Through the UAEW, Universities Australia will support the following activities:

Interventions

- Career paths and interventions – reflecting the research, a pilot strategic career planning program, targeted at female PhD students, and women new to the academy, is proposed to be trialled in three Australian universities in 2011
- Taking the lead in interventions and mentoring future senior women leaders in Higher Education via sponsoring arrangements and executive development processes
- Make the mentoring framework, developed in conjunction with the LH Martin Institute, more widely available through conducting workshops to increase institutional capacity to develop their own mentoring programs
- Transition to leadership training and career development programs for women Professors and HEW10 staff to be trialled in three universities in 2011
- Facilitate workshops for women academics, based on the successful Women in Engineering workshop conducted in 2009, aimed at fostering relationships between researchers and potential external partners

Advocacy

- Providing input to national consultations on significant women's executive development activities
- Ensuring appropriate input is provided so that Universities Australia is able to lead the community on equitable employment practices

Publicity

- Provide information to key stakeholders including Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Senior Administrative Staff on the actions to be undertaken throughout the course of the Strategy
- Conference presentations including to Equal Opportunities Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia and to the Staff Development for Women network
- Providing comment in the media on employment equity

Research

- Identify and disseminate good practices in Equal Employment Strategies at Australian Universities including maternity leave, family-friendly workplace practices, career development and mentoring
- Review promotion policies and procedures at Australian universities and assess their effectiveness in supporting equitable and merit-based promotions
- Career tracking of senior women in administrative roles (similar to Diezman New Professors report – to be commissioned)
- Replicate the Stephens-Kalceff report in different disciplines and other institutions (one new study to be commissioned in 2011)

Evaluation

- Continue to monitor progress and evaluate and report on the impact of funded projects against appropriate criteria

Reporting Against the Plan

UAEW will provide Universities Australia with the following feedback on the activities and outcomes of the Strategy for Women 2011-2014:

- An annual report on the finances of UAEW, with specific detail of the use of Universities Australia funding
- An annual report on the activities of UAEW, including any research reports commissioned by UAEW, outcomes of pilot career programs and other activities organised or commissioned by UAEW

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