GENDER MATTERS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

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From left to right: Elizabeth Walsh, Department of Human Resources; Josephine Boland, Department of Education; Sinéad Ni Fhaoláin, Computer Services and Vivienne Batt, Women’s Studies Centre.
INTRODUCTION

The conference *Gender Matters in Higher Education* was held in the National University of Ireland, Galway on November 8th and 9th 2002. It was organised by the Department of Human Resources and the Women’s Studies Centre of NUI, Galway. The conference left no doubt that gender does still matter in higher education. The proceedings covered a range of topics and highlighted the diverse ways that gender impacts on areas such as teaching, career development, policy and practice as well as detailing initiatives that seek to redress obstacles and open pathways to change. This publication includes a collection of papers presented at the conference. Others, for various reasons were not submitted for publication. However, they also played an important part in encouraging discussion and in highlighting the depth and range of issues that are current in the sector.

Early in 2002 the Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU) consulted with personnel working in the higher education sector throughout the country, to inform their submission to the National Action Plan for Women 2000-2005. Various issues were highlighted through this process and it became increasingly evident that the position of women within the sector, and gender issues generally, warranted the attention of yet another dedicated conference. During its lifetime the HEEU had organised conferences on *Equal Opportunities at Third Level* (1993), *Sexual Harassment at College* (1994), *Women Staff in Irish Colleges* (1995), *Equal Opportunities Policies in Third Level Institutions* (1995), dealing specifically with gender imbalances within the sector. However, information gleaned from the consultation process in 2002 indicated that inequalities ingrained in accepted customs and practices were still all too common.

*From left to right: Chris McNairney, Department of Human Resources; Prof. Ruth Curtis, Vice-President for Development & External Affairs; Prof. James Ward, Vice-President for Human & Physical Resources, NUI, Galway; Prof. Aine Hyland, Vice-President, University College Cork.*
The conference aimed, therefore, to highlight current gender discriminations for staff and for students and to discuss initiatives to address them. However, after its ten years of existence the HEEU was disbanded by the Higher Education Authority in November 2003, and so the Unit was not in a position to proceed with the conference. The Department of Human Resources and the Women’s Studies Centre, National University of Ireland Galway stepped in as organisers allowing this important event to take place.

The conference began with keynote speeches by Professor Áine Hyland (University College Cork), and Ms. Ailbhe Smyth (Women’s Education Research and Resource Centre, University College Dublin). Their presentations inspired much discussion throughout the two days of the conference. Áine’s image-based presentation painted a tradition of male domination within the sector. She drew on recent research to highlight factors inhibiting women from achieving senior positions, and highlighted the consistently low representation of women in professorial positions, oscillating around 5% since the early part of the twentieth century. Ailbhe deviated from her original script to present an animated and discerning presentation on the dynamics of being a feminist activist and an academic working within and outside of the sector. This heart-felt presentation focused on the complexity of women’s engagement with higher education and the personal cost of being a committed feminist activist. It questioned the acceptance of gender equality as an organising principle within the sector in the light of only marginal shifts in the material position and status of women, despite the initiation of a range of policy developments.

Professor Pat O’Connor (University of Limerick) discussed the embeddiness of gender in organisational culture. She highlighted the position of women as academics and as professionals, working in academia in Ireland. She drew on her considerable experiences and observations of three academic organisations in which she has worked over the past 30 years. She primarily focused on types of resistance in which faculty women engage, and differentiated seven types of resistance to male dominance within academic life. She outlined the limitations and potentials of each of these. Her presentation highlighted the significance of the price that is paid for participating in resistance, in personal as well as career terms and questioned the efficacy of resistance in the context of organisational culture.

Dr. Bridin Cannon (Institute of Public Administration) discussed the necessity for flexibility in medical training. Her presentation focused on the position of Senior House Officers (SHOs), a grade within medical training in which women dominate. All doctors ‘in training’ compete as SHOs and it is from this position that promotion and access to specialised training is secured. Dr. Cannon presented the results of her study on demands for flexibility, and succinctly highlighted the contradictory positions that mothers experience in meeting the diverse requirements of caring and occupational structures. Working weeks for SHOs range from 48 to 100 hours, in addition to ‘on-call’ hours, and one is expected to allocate time for examination preparation. Additionally, training schemes often require doctors to change jobs and residences at three to six month intervals. Such a combination of requirements

1 This paper was not submitted for inclusion in these conference proceedings.
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restricts the choices mothers make in accepting positions, choosing specialities and balancing unpaid caring commitments.

**Dr. Ivan Gibson** (National University of Ireland, Galway) provided information on the number of women entering engineering education in Ireland and focused on enrolment data at the National University of Ireland, Galway, highlighting the relationship between subject choice and traditional gender stereotypes. The paper drew on the content of an international seminar held in Oulu, Finland in May 2002 *Improving the gender balance in engineering education using ICT methods and contents*. It suggested that developments in Information and Communication Technologies may counteract biases in traditional engineering education and so facilitate greater choice and scope for women in the future.

**Dr. Averil Meehan** (Letterkenny Institute of Technology) focused on the under-representation of women in computing in Ireland. Her paper analysed data on the gender balance in Certificate, Diploma and Degree level computing courses at Letterkenny Institute of Technology, concentrating on students who have successfully completed courses. She discussed issues of under-representation and under-achievement of female students in the area. Her conclusions led her to question the interaction between pedagogies employed in undergraduate computing and such under-representation.

**Dr. Ann Wickham** (Dublin City University) discussed the experiences of nursing students on the distance education, *Nurses and Degree Studies* programme. She explored their choice to engage in distance education in the context of their work and life contexts. Her paper examined the potential impact of higher education experiences in this female dominated profession. Nursing has been traditionally subordinated within the medical profession, and has operated in a hierarchal working culture. She suggested that challenges are posed to accepted patterns through the presence of graduate nurses whose educational experiences promote independent thought and autonomy.

**Ms. Mary O’Reilly-de Brún** provided us with a positive focus in examining an example of outreach education working well. Mary detailed the work of the joint initiative of FORUM, Letterfrack and the Women’s Studies Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway in successfully delivering a Diploma in Women’s Studies to a group of rural women in Connemara. Her research into the aspects of this project was itself an extraordinary example of a feminist-informed participatory research process. The research suggests that community-based outreach initiatives, modelled on principles of participation, equality, support and mentoring, are capable of providing positive and far-reaching lifelong learning experiences.

**Ms. Eve Phillips** (Ballyphehane/Togher Community Development Project) highlighted the contradictory positions of being a mother, wife, friend, community worker and student. She discussed the process of becoming a stranger in her own community as her studies and skill development progressed. This personal account of a journey highlighted the complexity of navigating diverse roles, expectations and changing perceptions of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. It drew attention to tensions of class, age and gender and their interaction with participation in higher education.
Mr. David Kahundha Muhwezi (Makerere University, Uganda) offered a perspective on gender budgeting as an accounting practice currently used in universities in Uganda. (Gender budgeting is an accounting analysis method employed to highlight differences in public spending on women and men. It examines spending levels and priorities.) David explored the limitations of practices now in place and made a range of suggestions to counteract these limitations.

Mr. Joe Wallace (University of Limerick) set equality issues in a wider context of emerging university procedures, with special attention to developments in the University of Limerick. He noted that there has been a highlighting of equality issues in the universities in recent years and changes have also take place or are underway in a number of the universities in relation to both the policies and practices of recruitment, appointment and promotion. In effect, the policies now being developed in universities will, along with other factors, influence the gender profile of our universities in 20-30 years time.

Ms. Imelda Byrne (National University of Ireland, Galway) described how the Access Course is a specific action designed to increase the number of mature students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the University. Her paper examined the experience of the students on the course and the issues generated for the Access initiative and the University. She spoke of the effects higher education had on the lives of these men and women from the early days of the Access course, to undergraduate studies in various faculties, and, finally, to graduation in the university.

Dr. Paul Conway (University College Cork) addressed the role of gender in the context of teacher education and the broader cultural politics of gender in contemporary Irish society. Drawing upon a recently completed research report on the Exploring Masculinities Programme he focused on the ways in which paying attention to gender relations in teaching and teacher education challenges some existing structures and practices in second-level schools and university departments of education. He made a case for pedagogical practices in pre- and in-service teacher education that may enhance teachers’ capacities to critically examine their practices by situating him/herself in contexts of culture and history.

Mr. Andrew Doherty (South East Men’s Network) looked at the experiences of men involved in the South East Men’s Network Education Initiative. He suggested that the combination of negative early school experiences and being a working class male in the school system, underpins cultural, psychological, role and financial barriers that working class men face in participating in further and higher education. Suggestions were made whereby higher level institutions can encourage, support and retain more working class men in colleges.

Ms. Cora Cregan (St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra) discussed the impact of higher education on the personal lives of mature students. She highlighted the interaction there sometimes is between mature students’ participation in higher education and personal relationships. Her research indicated that returning to education interacts with gender role identification. The negative impact on women mature students was

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often far greater than their male compatriots. Tensions arise through changing self-perceptions as well as resulting from attempting to meet diverse demands of work, family and study. She suggested that the interaction of psychological and cultural factors played a large part in the consequent outcomes.

Ms. Laura O’Sullivan (Institute of Technology, Tallaght) discussed her work with Ms. Martha Burton and Ms. Lucy McAuley on the Mentorlink project which was initiated in 2001. Mentorlink aims to address the under-representation of women in engineering, from issues of entry and retention of women students, to equality of opportunity and support structures in the workplace. Measures that seek to support women students are often viewed as indicative of the unsuitability of women for rigorous course-work. Such perspectives problematise the minority group, in this case women, and serve to conceal male bias inherent in the sector. A growing awareness of women students throughout the course alleviates gender isolation and facilitates openness to networking opportunities provided by Mentorlink.

Ms. Rhona Mc Sweeney (Gender Equality Unit, Department of Education and Science) highlighted the work of the Gender Equality Unit (GEU) established under the National Development Plan and co-funded by the European Union Structural funds. Equality programmes, including publications, awareness-raising and the promotion of gender equality in the teaching profession, were initiated at the Department following the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) report Schooling and Sex Roles in 1983. Following on from these initiatives the GEU was formed. Its goals include building on and progressing these initiatives in order to move beyond a perception of gender neutrality. With a remit to work throughout all levels of education it aims to introduce a gender perspective throughout the sector. Its work includes the planning and design of curricula, syllabi, programmes, evaluation, reporting and the development of models of good practice. Currently it is working on developing its web page, preparing equality guidelines for schools and colleges, and analysing the underachievement of boys and girls in the junior and leaving certificate examinations. Representatives of the GEU participate in a range of committees, conferences, training programmes and work on compiling baseline information on gender data.

Dr. Myrtle Hill (Queen’s University, Belfast) discussed the Queen’s Gender Initiative set up in 1999 to investigate gender issues at Queen’s University, Belfast (QUB) and to address gender imbalances at the institution. Statistics were first gathered indicating that gender imbalance is, in fact, an issue within the institution and provided a starting point from which the initiative aims to effect change. For instance, women make up 12% of senior management, 11% of professors, 22% of Senior Lecturers, and dominate in clerical positions at QUB. Dr. Hill referred to the difficulty of putting policy into practice, as well as the necessity to prioritise gender as an issue at all levels of the institution. She stressed the importance of a process-driven programme with commitment from all levels of the institution and the necessity for constant and widespread communication.

As is obvious from this range and scope of papers much work remains to be completed in the goal of achieving gender equality within the higher education sector. The diverse range of experiences of staff and students attested to the motivation there is for change within the sector. We were offered examples of higher education
reaching out to and interacting positively with communities, offering support and challenging male bias within the sector. However, systematic barriers to full gender participation in higher education and career development were also identified and suggestions were made that will assist in breaking down these barriers. A number of papers suggested that in order for policy developments to be put into practice there needs to be a willingness to change at all levels of the institution. Widespread support needs to be put in place in order to facilitate openness and problematise the bias within the system, rather than the currently ‘problematised’ groups. This publication contributes to our understanding of what is now required, what are the current issues and the current obstacles to effecting change. The conference proceedings of the Women Staff in Irish Colleges conference 1995 contained an aspiration. This aspiration reads:

[i]t is to be sincerely hoped that we will not be organising another conference in five or ten years time, asking, yet again, why nothing has changed.

I now reiterate this aspiration.

Jacqui O’Riordan
Higher Education Equality Unit
FACULTY WOMEN: MAKING OUR MARK....

Professor Pat O'Connor
University of Limerick

Introduction

The reality of discrimination within the university system has been recognised by, for example, the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals in the UK (CVCP, 1991), and the President of MIT in the US (MIT, 1999). In a classic article, Acker (1980) suggested that wage differences were only one indicator of the reality of such discrimination. She highlighted three ‘subtle problems’ faced by women academics: firstly, their relative powerlessness as minorities within academia; secondly, male domination of knowledge, and thirdly, the conflicting demands of greedy institutions, (viz. work and family). More recently, it was still being noted that: ‘A conscious effort needed to be made by academic institutions to address the underlying structures and systems, which disadvantage women’ (European Commission, 2000, p.30). Typically, however, even if this is recognised, it is seen as a ‘woman’s problem’ rather than one arising from the nature of academia itself or from wider socially created disjunctions (Beck, 1992). Issues surrounding women’s position in the academy have been raised in the Republic of Ireland (subsequently referred to as Ireland) since the 1980s (Smyth, 1984; HEA 1987). Indeed, Ruane and Dobson (1990) showed that, controlling for academic discipline, qualifications, research output, teaching, administrative experience and career breaks (some of which could in fact also be regarded as indicators of discrimination), Irish women academics were still paid 10 per cent less than their male counterparts.

However, very little qualitative data is available on women’s experiences in the Irish academy. In this article, the concept of resistance is used in exploring some of the ways faculty women respond to a situation of hierarchical and numerical male dominance. In a late modern or post modern world, the possibility of resistance is increased as individuals ‘come to acquire partially or even wholly conflicting identifications’ (Benton, 1981: 181) and come to reflect on disjunctions between ‘practical’ and ‘discursive consciousness’ (Haugaard, 1997). Resistance is understood ‘in terms of consciousness or action, whether structurally or subjectively determined, either collectively or individually engaged’ (Gottfried, 1994, p.109). This definition encompasses, but is not restricted to, the kinds of resistance typically associated with industrial labour conflicts. A broadly similar concept of resistance is implicit in Scott’s (1990) work where he suggested that subordinated social classes within a class-divided world, resist not only the material conditions of their situation, but also their daily humiliations and indignities, in a context where the powerful attempt to maintain and extend their material and symbolic power.

This article starts from a recognition that gender is embedded in organisations (Acker, 1990 and 1998) and that once we accept ‘that staff bring their personal interests into

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6 This paper was published as ‘A Bird’s Eye View…..Resistance in Academia’, Irish Journal of Sociology, (2001), 10, 2: 86-104: and is a revised version of the paper previously published in Higher Education in Europe (O’Connor, 2000b)
organisations and that these shape the way they discharge their functions, we must also accept that gendered perceptions, practices and attitudes will be present too (Halford, 1992, p.172). It assumes, drawing on Connell’s work that although only a minority of men actively subordinate women (hegemonic masculinity) the majority benefit from the patriarchal dividend ‘in terms of honour, prestige or the right to command. [They] men also gain a material dividend’ (1995a, p.82). This dividend is facilitated by the fact that hegemonic masculinity is used as ‘an organising principle’ in such structures (Cheng, 1996, p.xiv). Thus, effectively, men and women are not treated the same within such male dominated structures.

Clegg (1994) suggested that the consciousness upon which resistance was based could be inhibited (‘outflanked’) at various levels. He suggested that individuals might simply accept the existing social order because it was seen as ‘natural’ or ‘inevitable’, or because they were unaware of the social organisation of power: ‘It is not that they do not know the rules of the game so much as that they might not recognize the game, let alone know the rules (Clegg, 1994, p.290). Resistance could be inhibited by the fact that exploitation was less salient than other daily realities or identities (with the costs of resistance far outweighing any likely short-term benefits). Isolation and/or lack of awareness of potential allies (or lack of solidarity with them), meant that resistance was often seen as individual deviance. Finally, he suggested that resistance was most likely to occur ‘if a subjectivity formed around a will to resist’ existed; if individuals were able to draw on family or community networks or on the ‘consciously organised resources of a social movement or collective organisation in the pursuit of their agency’ (Clegg, 1994, p.288).

The absence of women in senior positions in academia is, of course, only one symptom of patriarchal dominance. Such dominance is also reflected, for example, in the content of the curriculum and in the relative value attached to science and technology (‘male’) as opposed to arts and humanities (‘female’ subjects’: see Lynch, 1999). Nevertheless, male numerical and hierarchical dominance within academia is seen as highly significant. Firstly, it ensures that ‘the production of representations of the social world, which is a fundamental dimension of political struggles, is the virtual monopoly of intellectuals’ (Bourdieu, 1993, p.37) - in fact of male intellectuals. Within a gendered society, a whole realm of experiences and representations is thus marginalised. Secondly, in a context where roughly half of the undergraduate and post graduate population is female, the under-representation of women in senior faculty positions raises issues related to cultural imperialism, indeed to colonialism. Thirdly, in this context, young women are deprived of a range of female role models within the academy: with American work showing that such same-sex models were important in facilitating female students’ professional development - including their career-orientation, their confidence and success (O’Leary and Mitchell, 1990). Indeed, the persistence of academies as ‘bastions of male power and privilege’ has been seen by Hansard Society Commission (1990), amongst others, as ‘wholly unacceptable.’

It is important to stress that resistance is not seen as reflecting a biological reality – although it clearly reflects gendered social and cultural realities. Focusing on faculty women, then, within the hierarchically and numerically male dominated structures of academia, seven types of resistance are identified. Prior to outlining this, the Irish trends as regards the proportion of women in academia will be compared with those in other countries.
Context

Ruane and Sutherland (1999), using Irish data derived from the Higher Education Authority (and including two primary teacher training colleges), found that women constituted 28% of the faculty and just over 5% of those at professorial level. Somewhat similar patterns exist in the UK: women constituting 31% of all full time faculty and 9% of those at professorial level (Bagilhole, 2000). Recent dramatic changes in academic structures in the UK have not substantially altered the gendered nature of the faculty profile there (Davies and Holloway, 1995; Morley, 1999; Hearn, 1999). Very similar trends exist in other European countries (European Commission, 2000). In the US, women constitute 20% of those with full professorial status (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999, September:14); but only 8% of those in the Eight Ivy League and the ‘Big Ten’ Universities. The proportions of women at (full) professorial level in Australia, Canada and New Zealand is also low (10-14%: European Commission, 2000). In Finland - widely seen as ‘the promised land’ (Husu, 2000) – only 18% of those at professorial level are women. Toren (2000) found similar patterns in Israel. Such patterns cannot be explained by a country’s level of economic development (Malik and Lie, 2000); by the proportion of women in the labour force, or by their educational levels. In fact, the proportion of women at professorial level in Ireland is virtually identical to the situation before the Marriage Bar was removed in 1973 (this obliged women to withdraw from paid employment on marriage in a variety of occupations and created a context where there was social pressure to do so in a variety of other areas: O’Connor, 1998a and 2000). In Ireland, as in these other countries, the patterns at faculty level contrast strikingly with the increasing feminisation of the student body. Thus, Irish women constitute roughly half of all undergraduate and post-graduate University students (O’Connor, 1999; Ruane and Sutherland, 1999). They are out-performing boys educationally in State examinations and constitute just under two thirds of those in professional occupations (O’Connor, 1998a).

Resistance, as Clegg noted, is facilitated by the existence of a social movement: a ‘conscious collective activity to promote social change, representing a protest against the established power structures and against the dominant norms and values’ (Dahlerup, 1986, p.2). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Irish Women’s Movement generated a heightened consciousness as regards the reality of women’s exploitation, oppression and marginalization. Given the low proportion of married women who were in paid employment in the early 1970s (7.5%) the focus of the Women’s Movement in the area of paid employment was on access to paid employment and on the removal of legal and traditional barriers to equal pay. Nowadays, expectations concerning the long-term nature of married women’s participation in employment, as well as women’s high educational and achievement levels have increased the relevance of women’s position in such structures.

Methodology

It is important to stress the methodological limitations of this paper. It draws particularly on personal observation of the position of faculty women in three of the five academic organisations in which I was employed at various times over the past 30 years (i.e. in the early 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s, respectively): initially at
research assistant level and more latterly at professorial level. It thus can be seen as a personal account: there are 'no empirical findings in the positivist sense' (Lentin, 2000). Observations were not recorded systematically over the years and the possibility that they constitute a highly idiosyncratic perception of the academy cannot be eliminated. A focus on reflexivity and autobiography is part of an epistemological challenge to positivism (Lentin, 1993 and 2000; Goode, 1998) albeit one that has been viewed with considerable scepticism by many sociologists. Nevertheless, in a context where there are considerable sensitivities around the collection of qualitative data (because of the size of the country; the small number of academic institutions, and strong norms involving institutional loyalty) this kind of approach can arguably be an important source of insight. Similar reflective and reflexive accounts have been given by other academic women (e.g. by Burke et al., 2000 in relation to black women).

The insights on which this paper is based have crystallised over the past ten or twelve years. Their seeds can be traced to observations and reflections on the gendered nature of power that go back to the early 1970s (before the Marriage Bar was removed) when I had no framework within which to locate them. At that time, I was struck by the spatial location of the women in one of the organisations I worked (i.e. they became increasingly invisible from the ground floor upwards). Throughout my career, my research interests have focused on women, but unconsciously avoided power. It was not until the late 1980s, when I was exposed to a series of events, personal and professional, that my sensitivity to the gendered nature of organisations began to move to the level of ‘practical consciousness’ and ‘discursive consciousness’ (Haugaard, 1997).

As Lynch (2000) has noted the position of women in the academy is a contradictory one: with women academics being simultaneously part of a privileged class and subordinate to men within this class. Such contradictory positions have characterised most of my life - sometimes generating a heightened awareness of the possibility of resistance and sometimes a kind of paralysis in terms of action. An important milestone in this perceptual transformation (Kelly, 1984) was the undertaking of an empirical study of the barriers to women’s promotion in the Health Boards (O’Connor, 1995 and 1996). In listening to over 160 women, my own questions and observations became re-awakened. This coincided with my experience as Course Director of an MA in Women’s Studies, an experience that sharpened and deepened my awareness of gendered power. Nevertheless, until the mid 1990s it simply did not occur to me to examine the patriarchal structures of the academy (Byrne and Lentin, 2000 have observed a similar phenomenon amongst feminist academics; and such patterns are consistent with Luke’s (1974) views on power). At that time, equal opportunities emerged as part of a total quality management exercise undertaken by Richardson for Women’s Studies (see Richardson, 1997). This led me to look at documentary evidence on the position of women in the academy; to revisit the turning points in my own consciousness and to try to understand some women’s apparent complete indifference to the issue.

Raising issues publicly about any organisation is widely seen as problematic and involves questions of institutional loyalty. The size of the academic sector can be illustrated by the fact that there are eighteen women at professorial level in the entire academia (Smyth, 1996; Ruane and Sutherland, 1999). Hence, the specific
characteristics of the three organisations will not be described nor the differences between them referred to. This puts demands on the reader’s trust. I can only echo Sennett’s (1998) hope that this deviation from normal methodological practice is seen for what it is: a device that enables ideas and observations to be presented in a delicate situation.

This article comes from the perspective of a faculty woman within the predominantly male structures of academia. The academy is privileged in class terms, with the majority of the students coming from middle class backgrounds, and arguably, an even larger proportion of the faculty (Lynch, 1999). This class issue is important but it lies beyond the focus of the paper. Equally the extent to which similar kinds of resistance might exist amongst men is not explored (McCullagh, 1999). Neither is the situation of part-time faculty nor of the (predominantly female) administrative, secretarial and library staff explored, although their position clearly raises related issues about the value of ‘women’s work’ within such structures. Finally, it is recognised that the kinds of resistance used by women may also vary across faculties or departments, depending on the gender balance within those areas, although only brief references will be made to these situational factors.

Types of Resistance

Focusing on the micro-politics of organisations (Morley, 1999) analytically separate kinds of resistance are described below and are speculatively located on a continuum in terms of their potential for organisational transformation. In the interests of anonymity, specific examples are not included. However, in presenting this paper nationally and internationally, women’s recognition of these analytical types suggests that they have a degree of validity.

1. Apparently Accepting the Current Social Order
It is arguable whether this can be seen as resistance at all - since in a sense, the possibility of resistance has been undermined by what Clegg (1994) has called outflanking. This pattern is colloquially referred to as ‘keeping your head down.’ As Clegg (1994) has noted, it may reflect a perception that the existing social order is ‘natural,’ ‘inevitable’; it may reflect the prioritising of other areas of one’s life and/or a lack of awareness of the social organisation of power. At an individual level, this approach involves social, emotional and/or physical withdrawal from the wider organisational structure and a focusing of energies on that limited arena where the maximum level of control can be exerted (viz. the lecture theatre or one’s own desk). For those adopting this approach, face-to-face student related activities are typically prioritised (for example, lecturing, supervising undergraduate theses, tutoring and counselling students). Such activities are compatible with a gendered concept of self, revolving around caring (O’Connor, 1998a). They are however, the elements that are least valued within academia (being seen as a kind of necessary, but not prestigious ‘housekeeping activity’). As such, they are least likely to increase one’s promotion prospects. In predominantly male areas, women’s ‘natural’ abilities as regards this kind of work were evoked by (predominantly male) heads of department in explaining its disproportionate allocation to women.
Until the possibility of change emerges, it is difficult to differentiate between those who actually do accept the existing situation and those whose acceptance is redolent of Scott’s (1990) tactical public deference or Faith’s (1994) muted protest and pragmatic adjustments to situations. In some cases, (such as, for example, the farm wives in O’Hara’s 1998 study) the apparent acceptance of the status quo was associated with passing the challenge on to a new generation. The very nature of teaching is such that it is eminently suitable to this. This can be done directly through the content of the teaching material used. At a more general level, the pedagogic style adopted can be more or less facilitative of developing a radical critique of institutional realities. The creation of awards and bursaries that validate the academic achievements of young women can be seen as a similar kind of resistance, since it recognises the responsibility of a new generation to keep the issue alive. In all three academic institutions, women’s withdrawal from the wider organisational context was simultaneously an act of individual resistance and was used as evidence that they were not promotable. It is seen as the least organisationally transformative type of resistance.

2. Creating or Maintaining a ‘Separate’ World

This type of resistance was largely used by women within predominantly female areas of activity, in predominantly female departments or faculties. Such areas of predominantly female employment are typically characterised by a chronic shortage of resources (Davies, 1995). In such areas women who did not wish to see themselves as victims resisted by collectively creating their own ‘separate’ world where a gendered sense of identity was valued (Kilduff and Mehra, 1996). Such relationships with other women offered a definition of identity, which enabled them to critique the definition of self as the ‘Other’: ‘In these places of women-among-themselves, something of a speaking (as) woman is heard’; ‘In suffering, but also in women’s laughter. And again: in what they “dare”- do or say - when they are among themselves’ (Irigaray, 1985, p.135 and 134).

This kind of resistance provoked little negative reaction when the areas involved were seen as trivial. Where they were seen as subversive, invisibility was not an option. ‘Slagging’, bullying, isolation, the undermining of professional identity and stymieing of task achievements were then used to discredit the area and those involved in it. Attempts to sustain a non-stigmatised identity and a collective worldview in this situation were only possible through frequent retreats to a bunker (Telford, 1996). The existence of Women’s Studies in adult education and in undergraduate and/or postgraduate levels within all the universities from the early 1990s constituted an ongoing structural challenge since it implicitly valued a gendered sense of identity and suggested that what purported to be a gender neutral education was not so (Lynch, 1994 and 1999; O’Connor, 1998a). The sheer existence of Women’s Studies was perceived as a source of resistance within academia, although its structural transformative potential was associated with the extent to which the underlying ideas permeated the wider college community, and/or underpinned resistance in other areas. Furthermore, the very marginality of Women’s Studies meant that it was difficult for those in this area to attain the kind of visibility that is important as regards promotion. Thus, very few individuals from it came through to the wider management structure, thus limiting its transformative potential.
3. Challenging the Socially Created) Opposition between Work and Family

Beck has argued that the contradictions which flow from this socially created opposition can ‘only be overcome if institutional possibilities for the reunification of work and life are offered’ (italics in original) (1992, p.124). There is little evidence of this occurring within academia. Child-care facilities for staff in academia are, even yet, very limited (HEEU, 2000). This reflects, and reinforces, a perception of the ‘normal’ academic as a (child free) man. In this kind of organisational culture, there is considerable pressure on women to behave as ‘token men’ (Kanter, 1993). The socially created opposition between paid work and children can be dealt with by women remaining single not having children. National data is not available, but there is some evidence that faculty women are more likely than faculty men of similar age to be single and/or childless (McCarthy, 1996).

Limited maternity leave has only been in existence in Ireland since 1981, so that faculty women in their forties are likely to have had to ‘manage’ without it. Arrangements as regards ‘cover’ for maternity leave were typically left to the discretion of individual heads of department: essential teaching commitments being covered by colleagues or by a mosaic of part-timers - with considerable pressure on faculty to arrange their childbearing to coincide with the summer vacation. Not surprisingly in this kind of context, there was a lack of a ‘sense of entitlement’ (Lewis, 1997) even to statutory maternity leave. Byrne and Keher Dillon (1996) noted that faculty women did not even take advantage of their full statutory rights as regards maternity leave. There is no evidence as regards the use of parental leave (1998). In any event, it is unpaid and the EU has already had to instruct the Irish State to extend its coverage (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2000).

Because of the nature of academic work, family friendly employment policies, such as part-time employment, flexi-time or job sharing, have little relevance to full-time faculty. Conflicts between paid work and family responsibilities were negotiated on a grace-and-favour basis by ‘helpful’ heads of department. This in turn increased women’s feelings of indebtedness to them and reduced their ability to negotiate as regards the allocation of the low status ‘housekeeping’ activities. Paid sabbaticals were seen as privileges to be given to high status academics (who were unlikely to be women). Unpaid career breaks, like many other kinds of family friendly initiatives can be seen as facilitating individual women’s attempts to reconcile work and family but do ‘not challenge traditional work structures’ (Lewis, 1997, p.21). If anything, in a context where being a woman was problematic, even mentioning the socially created tension between paid work and family was widely seen as counter-productive since it offered a rationale to predominantly male managers for not appointing or promoting women. Hence, resistance at this level treads an uneasy line, and one that was viewed with considerable ambivalence by many men and women. Nevertheless, in its implicit refusal to accept equality on male terms, and its re-envisioning of ‘institutional possibilities’ (Beck, 1992) it constituted a potentially more transformative type of resistance.

4. Creating a ‘Subjectivity Formed around a Will to Resist’

Although women were (and are) severely under-represented at decision-making level in the three academic organisations, the majority did not ‘see’ it. Thus, despite the Women’s Movement, there appeared to be an absence, especially amongst younger women, of ‘a subjectivity formed around a will to resist’, a lack of coherent
organisation of their own subjectivity ‘as a reflexive agent in power relations’ (Clegg, 1994, p.288). The educational and occupational systems relentlessly encourage this illusion: one which is very re-assuring for those who benefit from the patriarchal dividend but are ‘bashful about domination’ and like to feel that the privileges they enjoy are given to them ‘by nature or convention or by women themselves’ (Connell, 1995b, p.215).

It has been shown that in various Irish contexts, even amongst well-educated women, a widespread lack of confidence and organisational naïveté appears to be common (Dorgan et al., 1994; O’Connor, 1995a). There is no evidence that these do not continue to exist amongst women in academia. Low levels of self-esteem have been shown to appear very early in Irish women and to exist even when class background and ability are controlled for (Hannan et al., 1996). In this context, references to women’s interests were perceived (by men and women) as ‘sexist’ and effectively as attempts to demean. The lack of a ‘will to resist’ amongst junior faculty women in the three Irish organizations may reflect the fact that discrimination is more muted in the case of such women than in the case of more senior faculty (MIT, 1999). Equally of course, it is possible that those with the strongest will to resist simply do not enter academia at faculty level or leave it rapidly, so that effectively the end of a continuum is missing in terms of an individual will to resist. There was some evidence of this kind of self-selection within these organisations.

Meyerson and Scully have suggested that those who were most likely to have ‘a subjectivity formed around a will to resist’ were ‘tempered radicals’(1995, p.586). These were ‘individuals who identify with and are committed to their organisations, and are also committed to a cause, community or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organisations’. In the three Irish organisations, some of these were feminists, while others were those who were concerned with particular issues that were seen as problematic by their organisation at a point in time. They created change both through incremental semi-strategic reforms (‘small wins’) and through ‘spontaneous expressions of authenticity’ (Meyerson and Scully, 1995) - heir courage creating ripples of resistance within these organisations.

Overall, within academia, women faculty are typically in a minority within a male controlled organisational context. Organisational culture is the concept that is typically used to refer to ideas about ‘women’s place’ and to what has been called the complicated fabric of myths and values that legitimise their position at the lower levels of the hierarchy and portray managerial jobs as primarily masculine (Hansard Society Commission, 1990). A variety of work has adverted to the existence and importance of such an organisational culture in ‘chilling’ women out (Deem, 1999; Husu, 2000; O’Connor, 1996). Bagilhole found that nearly two thirds of the women in her study became convinced that ‘the concept of a woman academic is a paradox. They become convinced that they do not belong’(1993, p.446).

A non-woman friendly organisational culture was also reflected in the organisational procedures within these organisations. Thus, for example a requirement to ensure a gender balance on the interview board was sometimes met by including only one
Subtle discrimination was also reflected in the allocation of senior posts to particular gendered areas; in the framing of advertisements; in the importance attached to vague criteria at critical access points; in loose marking schemas. It was implicit in general assessments of a candidate’s ‘style’ at interview as well as in ideas that men are more ‘natural’ management material or that they ‘needed’ promotion more. At a more fundamental level, it was reflected in the differential value attached to predominantly ‘male’ as opposed to predominantly ‘female’ work; in the better ratios of senior to junior posts and the differential allocation of research resources to such areas. Halford et al. (1997) noted that, in the organisations they studied, it was very unlikely for men, to be in the most junior positions, other than at the very start of their careers, while these latter positions were filled by women who stayed there for most of their careers. Similar patterns are referred to by Heward (1994) and could be seen within the Irish organisations.

Publicly naming such a culture and identifying procedures and structures which are not woman-friendly in a variety of internal fora (at Departmental, Faculty, Management Co-ordinating Group; Promotion Committee; Governing Body and Union meetings) was seen as a form of resistance. In some cases, doing this was seen as indicative of an inability to accept authority, with the consequent demonization of those raising such issues, thereby undermining their attractiveness as collaborators, reinforcing their status as not being ‘team players’ and so increasing their structural vulnerability. It was also common for the accuracy of the figures to be challenged; for such concerns to be seen as feminist and divisive and for claims to be made that the trends would change ‘naturally’ in the future. Nevertheless, it is suggested that this form of resistance, particularly when it was used by a number of women in different areas, departments or faculties was at the more potentially transformative end of the continuum.

6. A Positive Strategic Approach: Creating/Mobilising Allies and Targeting Key Structures

Various studies have shown that faculty women in academia are unlikely to be included in male networks (Bagilhole, 1993; Kettle, 1996). Yet, because of the gendered nature of academia, women are often dependent on men for references; are interviewed by predominantly male interview boards and have men in positions of authority over them. For the most part within the three Irish organisations, men at the
most senior level had more potential than those at middle management level as allies (a point also made by Barker and Monks, 2000). This reflected the fact that they were less threatened by women, more accountable to wider institutional forces and more sensitive to the performance of their organisation on a variety of externally defined indicators. Such support was reinforced by their ‘buying into’ a ‘female’ agenda through participation in gendered projects to raise the profile of their area. In this way, they became stakeholders in the wider gender project: exemplifying Foucault’s observation (1980) that ‘resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.’ Their receptivity at a personal level to such initiatives seemed to be related to their own experience of discrimination, and their willingness to identify across gender (a willingness which, it has been suggested, was related to their ideas about their own sexuality: Maile, 1999). Their support was crucial and meant that resistance was indirectly legitimated. Many men at the middle ranks of these organisations had ties to male colleagues rooted in their common identity as men, in patterns of sociability and past indebtedness. The limit of such men’s support frequently consisted in not actively opposing any proposal that might benefit women (although there were, of course, some pro-feminist men: Hearn, 1999).

Kanter (1993) has been amongst those who noted that, for that minority of women who moved above the ‘glass ceiling’ (i.e. that part of the career hierarchy that women can see but not reach) the price of women’s acceptance by the ‘boys’ was being hard on the ‘girls’. This obviously created a context that was not helpful as regards solidarity between women. Nevertheless, a tenuous but effective form of solidarity between women did exist in these organisations. The transmission of information and the creation of a feeling of collective strength and identity amongst what is a very scattered and fragmented community was facilitated by electronic networking. Strong visible ties between women were sometimes informally ridiculed, and in other contexts were seen as subversive. The quiet support of various kinds provided by women in the administrative structure, many of whom were in junior positions, was also crucially important for faculty women in many situations.

It was striking that in these organisations, once women recognised that they were unlikely to be either sacked or promoted, their co-operation with structures which disempowered them became problematic and they took steps to become increasingly represented in union structures, on key committees and representational bodies. Thus, a decision to introduce quotas on certain key representational structures in one organisation created a context where women were more willing to put themselves forward, so that the imposition of quotas became effectively unnecessary and was simply ‘the structural stuff that gives women confidence’ (O’Connor, 1996). In some cases the sheer paucity of women, especially at senior level, and the requirement that senior staff be involved in key committees, made the support of pro-feminist men critical. The importance of the support of men at the very top in encouraging such pro-feminist men, in validating women’s efforts and legitimating gendered resistance was critically important.

7. Use of Negative Power, Whistle Blowing and Industrial Action

Handy (1993) defines negative power as ‘the capacity to stop things happening, to delay them, to distort or disrupt them’. This power is available to everyone regardless of position although many women in these organisations had only begun to be aware of its potential. However, individual women and groups of women were involved in
‘whistleblowing’ - disclosing ‘illegal, unethical or harmful practices in the workplace to parties who might take action’ (i.e. to those further up or outside the hierarchy: Rothschilde and Miethe, 1994, p.254). Rothschilde and Miethe noted that typically whistleblowers were highly competent employees, although the typical response was to depict them as troublemakers, ‘whingers’ or crazy people (if they could neither be got rid of nor intimidated into silence). The personal and financial cost of attempting to raise gender related issues through whistleblowing are usually considerable. In this context, the public action of eight faculty women in University College Dublin in publicly highlighting the position of women in that organisation was remarkable. A case was subsequently taken by the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations on behalf of all women faculty within that University. Legal action was not unique. Women in at least four of the seven universities in Ireland have been involved in such action in the area of discrimination in the past five years.

Various kinds of industrial action are a collective form of negative action. In University College London, the Association of University Teachers was effective in the 1980s in developing good practice in the equal opportunities area- arguably reflecting the historical position of that university as a mould breaker in the gender area (being the first university to admit men and women on an equal basis: Heward and Taylor, 1992). In the hierarchically and numerically male dominated Irish organisations, it was extremely difficult to get the union to negotiate on measures which are seen as even predominantly in favour of women. Quite simply, the membership would not support them. Individual male representatives (particularly those who had some personal experience of discrimination) were frequently personally supportive, but there were clear limits to that support. The perceived timidity of women whose ‘frontier of control’ (Gottfried, 1994) was a personal and professional commitment to the students further inhibited industrial action. The importance of credible trade union women in supporting gendered issues was very important in ensuring some degree of union support. Industrial action is seen as the most potentially transformative type of resistance since, for various reasons, in its absence, such issues ‘become too easily submerged in the day-to-day concerns of policy makers who do not view that particular policy preference as central to their activities’ (Mc Crudden, 2000, p.10)

The Way Forward?

A number of recent national developments have underlined the importance of equality. Thus, pressure from the EU (including the requirement to gender audit EU funds: Mulally, 1999) as well as a national commitment to equality proofing (Mc Crudden, 2000) has generated a context that is potentially sympathetic to the under-representation of women at the higher echelons of all structures. At national level, The Employment Equality Act (1998: S 24(1)) allows (but does not require) positive action. It does define positive action very broadly to focus on ‘removing existing inequalities which affect women’s opportunities in areas of access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions.’ However, it lacks specificity (Barker and Monks, 2000) and, in any event, the inadequacies of legislation as a way to promote equality have been widely noted (Bercusson and Dickens, 1996 and McCrudden, 1993). Nevertheless, positive action is now seen as necessary to deal with gender inequality in the public service (Humphreys et al.,
The European Court of Justice suggested with certain caveats that where male and female applicants were equally qualified for a post in the public sector, a woman should be promoted because of deep-seated prejudices against women (Marshall v Land Nordrhein - Westfalen: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1999). Case law from the European Court of Justice also established for the first time that it was sufficient to prove that a practice bore more heavily on one sex than another to constitute indirect discrimination, (which had been virtually impossible to prove under previous Irish legislation (Honan, 1997; Fourth Report of Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee, 1996).

The Universities Act (1998) has specified obligations as regards equality. The Second Progress Report (1996, Department of Equality and Law Reform) noted that the Higher Education Authority was responsible for monitoring equality and 'for providing appropriate support at national level'; with all Third Level institutions under the aegis of the H.E.A. being required to 'publish policies to promote gender equality.' These were to include 'policies for the promotion of equal opportunities and associated action programmes' and 'encouraging and facilitating women to apply for senior academic and administrative positions' (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1996, p.128). Action plans typically include the identification of targets as regards staffing profiles, the provision of training targeted at increasing women's skills within managerial areas, the encouragement of women to apply for posts especially at senior level, etc. The Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) noted that without such measures to address ‘imbalances arising from past discrimination’, equal opportunity legislation will simply offer an ‘equal chance to become unequal’.

Such measures are completely legal, and perfectly compatible with Government and E.U. policy. However, Pemberton (1995) and Brown (1995) have argued that any attempt to bring about change in the position of women within organisations is doomed to failure unless an attempt is made to understand and to devise strategies to deal with the organisational culture. Voluntary targets have been seen as an appropriate and legal way of increasing awareness and as a way of giving responsibility to line management for gendered organisational change. In the case of the Universities, the Hansard Society Commission in the UK suggested that: ‘Their function would in part be that of consciousness raising’(1990, p.67). Indeed, the failure to identify such targets and the reliance on monitoring mechanisms was related to the poor performance of the Irish civil service in terms of gender equality (Callan and Wren, 1994; Department of the Taoiseach, 1999). As part of the Strategic Management Initiative in the civil service there is now a commitment to ‘the adoption of strategic objective setting at individual Department/Office level, including the setting of increasingly specific equality goals to be achieved over a stated period of time’ (Department of the Taoiseach, 1999). Such targets are simply objectives and, hence are very different from quotas. As such, they are intrinsically no more problematic than objectives as regards student admissions. They do, however, imply a managerial responsibility as regards organisational change.

Many of the initiatives required to create genuinely ‘woman friendly’ structures have long been recognised (Cann, 1991). Many require a shift in the practices and attitudes of those in positions of power within these structures. Muller (2000) found that despite obligatory procedures and practices, an active implementation of a gender
equality policy in the institutions of higher education in North-Rhine Westphalia only occurred in a quarter of these institutions. Where it occurred, it was associated with the location of gender equality in the context of long-term planning for innovative change; having ‘an eye on the promotion of young qualified female talent’ (Muller, 2000, p.158); defining gender equality as one of the criteria in distributing resources and providing child care facilities and supports for those with child care obligations.

To date no attempt has been made to use economic leverage to achieve equality goals in Ireland, (for example, ‘by awarding public contracts to those who further a basic policy aim [such] as equality’ (McCruden, 2000, p.5). However, a Change Management Fund (co-funded by the Department of Finance and the sponsoring Department) has been established in the civil service to facilitate such change, including funding affirmative action for example, in the areas of training, development, promotion, work and family responsibilities (Department of the Taoiseach, 1999). Such a model offers possibilities, although it still presumes that originating departments with their male dominated structures will be aware of, and interested in co-funding the kinds of activities that would promote gendered organisational change. To-date, no such initiative exists in the Irish Universities. Indeed academia as an organisational context seems uncertain, if not actively hostile, to the extent and nature of the change which is required (a pattern which is not atypical: see Clare, 2000).

Conclusions

Resistance is a painfully slow and extremely time consuming process (Price and Priest, 1996). The extent to which change is brought about by faculty resistance is difficult to assess. In one or more of the organisations referred to, equal opportunities policies were formulated; structures created to deal with equality issues; directives issued as regards the composition of interview boards and the use of search procedures; a women’s academic network was formed; gender awareness workshops were undertaken by senior management and a commitment was given that line management would identify time-specific targets as regards redressing gender balance and ways of dealing with an organisational culture which was not ‘woman friendly’. It is important to recognize that these changes may have occurred anyway. Change in the proportion of women at senior level has been minimal.

Resistance was most effective when it occurred across a variety of fronts, involved a range of faculty across a number of departments or faculties, where it was ultimately rooted in an intellectual and/or ideological commitment, and where it received at least some support from the union and was validated by senior management. However, where resistance occurred, counter resistance became a reality. The most obvious counter resistance strategies were the stigmatisation of any initiative in favour of women; the demonization of prominent women; the starving of women of resources (individually or collectively); the establishment of organisational ‘roadblocks’ and the rendering of hard-won procedures irrelevant by the introduction of new ones containing implicit positive discrimination in favour of men. Lynch (1999) has argued in this context that any kind of positive action is essentially remedial and limited in impact and typically fuels a backlash, which completely offsets any improvements that may have occurred. This has provoked her to stress a more radical model for
academia. Resistance within the existing parameters does seem to be useful in generating an ongoing awareness of gender amongst both women and men. Such awareness is not enough, of course, since it may simply increase women’s frustration and the intensity of the backlash. It remains to be seen if the changing national and legal context will create a context which is more conducive to the efficacy of such resistance.

References


STUDY OF NEED/DEMAND FOR FLEXIBLE TRAINING AT SHOS (SHO) LEVEL FOR MOTHERS IN IRISH MEDICINE

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Introduction

The Medical Manpower Forum Report (2001) identified problems with Irish hospital medical manpower to include significant gender imbalance in career development as well as ‘too many trainees, too few trained staff … (bulges and) bottlenecks in the career structure’ (p.7). It recommended that we should move to a consultant-delivered service in our hospitals.

This paper explores the work experience of mothers in Cork hospitals who have combined work and training as doctors at SHO (SHO) level with parenting. Their experiences in terms of career choice and development is analysed. Access to postgraduate medical training, achievement of postgraduate qualifications and promotional opportunities are explored, along with problems associated with working hours, child care needs and quality of patient care. Current availability of flexible training was also surveyed.

Background

In Ireland, 62% of Irish medical undergraduates and 55% of all Irish non-consultant hospital doctors (NCHDs) are female. Although the percentage of female undergraduates has increased steadily from 45% in 1984, only 23% of general practitioners and consultants are female. The percentage of fully qualified women doctors in employment varies considerably between specialities with a significantly greater proportion of women in specialities such as Psychiatry (48%) and Paediatrics (35%) than in Surgery (4%) or A & E (10%). (Postgraduate Medical & Dental Board, 2002), 46% of NCHDs in Ireland are non-national (Postgraduate Medical & Dental Board, 2000), 16% of these doctors are female. Although it has long been recognised that there is a gender imbalance in career development in medicine, there has been little study of training needs of women or parents in medicine.

SHOs were chosen as candidates for this study as the SHO is a key post in which a doctor commences work in her chosen speciality, does competitive professional examinations and competes for Specialist Registrar Posts (SRP), numbers of which are aligned with projected consultant posts.

There are well-defined postgraduate training requirements for permanent medical posts in Ireland in line with international standards and EU legislation. For those who are unfamiliar with the complexities of the medical postgraduate training and work structures a synopsis of these follows.

The number of medical students of EU origin entering medical school in Ireland annually is limited to 320. While a doctor may be legally permitted to practise
medicine privately on completion of a 1 year internship, this is highly unusual. Doctors, from General Practice (GP) trainees to would-be consultants, work and compete as SHOs. Training in General Practice currently takes 3 years with 2 years as SHO in Initial Specialist Training (IST) on an approved vocational scheme and 1 year as a GP Registrar. A GP Registrar then takes an examination for Membership of the Irish College of General Practitioners. For other specialities following a 2 year period of training in SHO or Registrar posts approved by the relevant Colleges and on passing membership examinations a doctor can compete for 3 to 6 years of training on Specialist Registrar Programmes (consultant training programmes). Pass rates for membership examinations range from 10% (Member of the Royal College of Obstetricians (MRCOG) part 2, Ireland and UK) to 70% for the Member of the Irish College of General Practitioners (MICGP).

Women are in a majority at Intern, SHO and Registrar level (57.5%) but in a minority at Specialist Registrar level (46%), suggesting that there is an obstacle to female career progress at the transition from SHO to Specialist Registrar.

SHOs compete for one of three types of post in the health service. The most prestigious SHO post is on a ‘recognised training scheme’ organised from a university hospital. These schemes generally involve a 1 or 2 year contract and include rotation every three months through subspecialities and three or six month rotations through peripheral hospitals. The second type of post is the ‘recognised post’. Depending on the variety of experience and amount of supervision available in a particular hospital posts are recognised for a period of 6 months to 1 year. The other 50% of posts are essentially service posts, with six monthly or yearly contracts and are not currently recognised for IST. Doctors are appointed to Registrar posts on the basis of experience and performance at examination. These Registrar posts has been dropped from UK work and training structures, but still exist in Ireland and none of the 950 Registrar posts are approved for training (personal correspondence Mr. John Gloster PGMDB). They carry a significant level of responsibility.

Just 50% of the 1,500 SHO posts in Ireland are approved for training (October 2000). All 550 (approximately) Senior Registrar posts are currently approved for training purposes. As there are many more SHO and Registrar posts (2,450) in most specialities than required to feed into Specialist Registrar programmes, this means built-in failure or delay for a large proportion of trainees. The reason for the excess of SHO posts and for Registrar posts is the need to cover the service, but the consequence is time wasted in false starts for many, and prolonged time at basic training level with little prospect of ever achieving secure working conditions for others. It is recommended that consultant training take place over 6 years. The average consultant on appointment in Ireland is 38 years, indicating 14 years spent in training grades.

Working hours in medicine have traditionally been long. As well as working a basic 39-hour week doctors are required to work overtime to cover on-call at night and weekends. The PA working hours study (2000) demonstrated that doctors were working 77 hours per week on average. In areas such as Surgery, Anaesthetics and Obstetrics and Gynaecology, the average working hours were higher at 89, 84 and 83 hours per week respectively. The shortest working week of 51 hours was in A & E where shift working has become the norm. At the 8 sites in this study (including Cork
and recognised training scheme posts), 2% of actual working time, or 22 minutes per day were spent studying or in receipt of training. The Taskforce on Medical Staffing due to report by the end of this year is currently developing a framework to develop Irish training and reduce working hours to a 48 hour week by 2010.

While my study addresses the training needs of mothers, many of the issues are of equal relevance to fathers. However, as many families have two parents in medicine, double counting (counting the same family twice) would have complicated the analysis of the study if fathers had been included.

This study is of interest to students and doctors at a personal level, as it raises consciousness about the choices others have had to make, how problems have arisen and how they can be been addressed in trying to achieve work-life balance. It is also relevant at the level of strategic human resource management. The effectiveness of our healthcare system is an important national political issue and effective management of our professional and diverse medical workforce is a key element of delivery of a quality, equitable, people oriented service.

**Literature Review**

**Legislation**

Equal opportunities have been a central pillar of European policy since the Treaty of Rome. EU directives of particular relevance to this paper include:

76/207/EEC: on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions.

93/16/EEC: provides for the provision of part time training in medicine for doctors, ‘when training on a full time basis is not practicable for well-founded individual reasons’.

2000/34/EEC: Amending directive 1993/104/EC concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time to cover, amongst other sectors, doctors in training, excluded from that directive.

The Employment Equality Act, 1998 outlaws discriminatory practices in relation to and within employment. The Act prohibits direct and indirect discrimination and victimisation in employment on nine grounds which include gender, marital status, family status, age, disability and race. All aspects of employment are covered including equal pay, access to employment, vocational training, and conditions of employment, work experience, promotion and dismissal. Indirect discrimination occurs when practices or policies which do not appear to discriminate against one group more than another actually have a discriminatory impact.

**Workforce Planning**

The implications of feminisation of the workforce were noted in 1984, but were not acted upon. A paper by Deirdre Kelly *et al.* on ‘Medical Graduates of the Seventies’ in the *Irish Journal of Medical Science* in 1982 demonstrated clearly that Irish female
medical graduates with children had difficulty combining parental responsibilities with medical training to the point that one-third of them were not working (p.34). At the Postgraduate Medical and Dental Board (PGMDB) Symposium on Part Time Training and Job Sharing in 1984 (Postgraduate Medical & Dental Board, 1984) the Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health, Dr. A. Walsh, made the point that Ireland was overproducing doctors (probably twice as many as needed) and suggested that ‘part time training … could be availed of by any doctor whose domestic commitments (or personal circumstances) were such as to make training on a whole time basis very difficult or impossible’.

Recommendations were made for actions by professional bodies and employing authorities. Just last year (2001), 17 years later, a coordinator for part time training for Specialist Registrars was appointed.

It is a core policy of the Medical Council (Medical Council of Core Policies, 2000) that by 2003, non consultant hospital doctors should no longer hold posts that are not approved for training.

The Postgraduate Medical and Dental Board career guidance website (www.pgmdb.ie) on General Practice gives some insight into current attitudes towards flexible work:

Would General Practice Suit Me?
The average working week (scheduled hours) for a General Practitioner is 80 hours.

What are the Career Opportunities?
Jobs are plentiful in Ireland at the moment. There is increasing recognition of the need for part time posts, including part-time partnerships, and there is plenty of sessional work available in existing practices. This may be suitable for those with family commitments …

Some members of the Irish medical profession support the argument of Dr. Holden (Moore, 2002) of the BMA’s General Practitioners committee that medical schools should discriminate in favour of male applicants when he stated ‘it is time to be politically incorrect. You do not get 35-40 years service from the women’ (Moore, 2002, p.754).

Cost Containment
The recent ‘Value for Money Audit’ (Deloitte & Touche, 2001) of the Irish Health Service states that the culture of cost containment in the Irish Health Service has focused on economy rather than efficiency or effectiveness.

Control of supply of physicians is a known macroeconomic supply side cost containment technique, popular since the 1970s (Saltman & Figueras, 1997). As physicians are more expensive to employ than nurses, ideas like ‘nurse-doctor’ substitution (Richards & Maynard, 1995) are very attractive to health financiers and economists. The number of EU students entering medical school in Ireland has been fixed since 1970, and the number of consultant appointments to public posts is closely controlled. Expenditure on undergraduate and postgraduate training is also limited.
Chafetz and Hagan (1996) argued that men are able to rationally achieve their employment goals without necessarily going without a family life, but this is not the case for women:

In a world still substantially structured on the basis of separate and incompatible spheres for the pursuit of these two goals by women...increasing numbers of them will attempt to function according to the logic of ‘satisficing’, that is achieve a reasonably high level in respect of both goals rather than maximising one or the other (p.200-1).

Rosemary Crompton and Fiona Harris (1998) performed a comparative cross-national study of medicine and banking, two feminising higher-level occupations, and showed that women in medicine tend to ‘satisfise’ and also that ‘satisficing strategies are reinforced by the wide availability of flexible and part time work in medicine’ (p.306).

Women in Employment
In Ireland the average working week has fallen from about 44 hours (women:38 hours) in 1983 to about 38 (women: 34 hours) in mid 1999 (Wickham, 2000). Over three quarters of women aged 25-34 are in the workforce (76.4% as opposed to a European average of 72.5%). The growth in women’s employment has been overwhelmingly in full time work, especially in ‘short’ full time jobs of between 35 and 40 hours per week (Collins & Wickham, 2001).

A six-year follow up study of third level graduates in Ireland from 1992 (Gash & O’Connell, 2000) showed that the effect of having children on work practices was much stronger for women. Whereas only 3% of the female graduate population were working part time, 10% of women with children work part time; there was also a relationship between number of children and number of hours worked, women with more than one child being more likely to work part time.

Part time work is often associated with low commitment and no opportunities. It is often thought that the commitment of full time workers to work is stronger than that of part-time colleagues. Part time work can also mean high commitment - women are grateful for the chance to work shorter hours (Rapp & Sundin, 2001).

Women in Professions
In professional workplaces attitudes to family-friendly working tend to be positive. However, the fact that there is also an overtime culture in these workplaces undermines positive policies and attitudes (Drew et al, 1998.). We are moving from a hierarchical culture in Irish healthcare to a culture of teamwork. L. Hojgaard distinguishes two behaviour patterns with respect to cultural characteristics and gender differences. The first, corresponding to our hierarchical system, is highly competitive internally. Prestige is ascribed to certain tasks and the ways of performing them and gendering processes are embedded in the ways that prestige is allocated. This creates a gender hierarchy with few women in leadership positions. By contrast, in a team culture everyone’s contribution counts. There are no prestige areas, the culture is result-oriented. This culture is highly competitive in the outside market. There is little internal competition, but there is a high degree of work pressure.
proportion of female leaders is above average. High work pressure makes it difficult
to use the available family-friendly measures, but actual use does not have gender-
differentiating effects.

Current Flexibility Arrangements
The Handbook and core curriculum for SHOs in general internal medicine and the
medical specialties from the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland has contained a
paragraph on flexible training since 1998:

The college encourages flexible training, where appropriate, on an individual basis.
SHOs who for personal or other reasons, wish to undertake part-time or split
training will have their training recognised in the same way as other trainees.

Consultants and Specialist Registrars do have flexible options available.

International Solutions
Structures have adapted in other countries to allow women to combine work and
family life. In Germany, physician numbers were not controlled and while this has led
to unemployment among doctors, it has also led to much flexibility in medical posts
with part time and flexible working options becoming the norm.

The medical profession and the UK Department of Health are actively addressing
work-life balance issues in their comprehensive policy document Improving working
life for doctors. This valuable document addresses flexible working, professional and
personal support, new ways of working, new support roles and better working
environments.

In Northern Ireland and Great Britain (Hastie, 2001) flexibility is an option at all
training and career levels with ‘less than full time’ training, retraining and retainer
posts available. In Scotland (McEwan et al., 2001) it is acknowledged that:

too many doctors are forced to give up conventional medicine because of other
commitments…retention of these doctors is regarded as an urgent priority. The
nature of training and career structures of doctors working in hospitals is such that
if a doctor leaves the conventional career pathway because of domestic, health or
other reasons it can be very difficult to return.

Methods
Twenty female doctors in Cork who have combined parenting with work as SHOs
(SHO) in the past four years were identified. Four were excluded, three who have now
completed training in General Practice and the author. The remaining fifteen doctors
working in hospitals in Cork between January and June 2002, along with one other
Irish doctor at SHO level (not now working), formed my study group.

This is a baseline qualitative study using an opportunistic sampling technique. It was
initially intended to use a semi-structured interview format with all candidates. This
was difficult to arrange given that these doctors work an average 73.6 hours per week
and also have family and examination commitments. Also, some of the questions
asked were of a confidential and sensitive nature and it appeared that a questionnaire would be a better approach in the first instance, followed by discussion on the basis of the questionnaire.

Candidates for the study were identified through word of mouth. NCHDs and personnel management at the six hospitals in Cork helped identify study candidates. This method was reliable for identifying all working and non-working doctors from Cork Medical School, still resident in Cork and who qualified since 1995. The same names kept coming up as enquiries were made. As doctors have to arrange on-call rotas in groups of three to seven they become aware of constraints on colleague’s availability. Direct inquiry also identified the majority of graduates from other Irish schools and non-Irish mothers working in Cork. This study does not include any non-working doctors resident in the Cork area who qualified from Cork Medical School prior to 1995 or from medical schools national or international other than Cork.

The questionnaire was designed on the basis of personal experience in this field from 1993 to 2000, on the basis of conversations held with four of these doctors over that period and on reading of relevant medical, management and sociological literature. Given that the study group was small, the questionnaire was not officially piloted. There are some ‘leading’ questions and it was possible to compensate for some of the defects of the questionnaire on discussion.

The current situation nationally with respect to the availability of flexible working and training conditions for NCHDs, was also explored, largely by email. NCHD colleagues and hospital medical human resource managers nationally were asked if they were aware of flexible working at this level in Ireland. The Postgraduate Medical and Dental Board, the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP), the General Professional Training Committee of the Irish College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons were all emailed requesting data on numbers of flexible SHO positions and asking if they knew of any doctors undertaking training on a flexible basis.

Results

Sixteen doctors were given questionnaires; there were thirteen replies (81% response rate). Analysis was performed on twelve, as one questionnaire was mislaid. Responses were received from all specialities involved in the study group.

The doctors studied fall into three main groups. There are four Irish doctors, three of whom are working. Six doctors came from India and Pakistan to Ireland with their husbands to complete their postgraduate medical training. There are two other doctors currently working as Registrars in Cork who had combined parenting with their SHO training in the UK and Germany.

Ages ranged from 28 to 45 years with a mean age of 36 years. Seven were from India, Pakistan and Africa (mean age 37 years); five were European (mean age 34), four of whom were Irish (mean age 33). They qualified from medical school between the years 1981 and 1998 (Irish between 1995 and 1998). Three doctors had primary degrees other than medicine, one also had a PhD. At least two doctors had significant
publications. Mean age at birth of first child was 28.3 years. Two had three children, one of whom was the mother not working currently. The remainder had one or two children (total mean: 1.7; age range: 1 to 14; mean age: 6). Three had their first child while at university.

The average working week of participants ranged from 48 to 100 hours (mean: 73.6) per week, depending to some extent on speciality. The longest career average working week ranged from 75 to 138 hours (n: 11, mean: 105, there are 168 hours in a week). The shortest career average working week ranged from 30 to 80 hours (n: 12, mean 51.4 hours):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speciality</th>
<th>Weekly Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paediatrics</td>
<td>90 (80/100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstetrics and Gynaecology</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatry</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiotherapy</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency medicine</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eleven worked on-call, nine from hospital, the two doctors in Psychiatry and Radiotherapy worked on call from home. Shift work is the norm in emergency medicine.

Four (two of the three working Irish doctors and two doctors in Obstetrics and Gynaecology) stated that they were the main earners for their families, and for two of them this will continue to be the situation in the foreseeable future.

Career Choice
There was a series of questions designed to analyse the impact having a family had on a doctor’s career plan:

What was your original career plan?
Has this changed because of family or for other reasons?
Do you think you will achieve this ambition?
Current ambition?

*Paediatrics/General Practice*
Both doctors in Paediatric posts were Irish, one doing Paediatrics as part of the first year of a GP training scheme. She had originally planned to do medical membership examinations, travel and do aid work. As she is not ‘prepared to sacrifice her family for her job’, she does not see herself achieving her ambition within the next fifteen years. She initially chose posts in A&E because of shorter hours but in the longer term General Practice appears the most family friendly option, (Training in General Practice is completed in three years). Her current ambition is to complete her GP scheme and, controlling her working hours, spend time with her child.

The other doctor had her first child in her third year at medical school, so this affected her early planning. Before she had children she saw herself in hospital medicine as
‘open to anything’. She perceived that having children had restricted her choices enormously:

I refuse to uproot my family with every change of job or take on jobs that have very unsociable hours e.g. surgery. I have not done membership exams as they are too time consuming and put a strain on the family. I want that time with the kids.

After having her second child she initially decided on A&E as a speciality because of manageable working hours. She does not now see herself achieving this ambition and is considering General Practice or Public Health as more realistic and family friendly options.

**Obstetrics and Gynaecology**
Four doctors (mean age: 38.5) came to Ireland from India and Pakistan with specific aims of passing the MRCOG and getting further training. They appeared quite focused, and aimed to become consultants in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Having a family had not changed this, and their current ambitions are to get their membership examinations or, having passed examinations, Specialist Registrar posts (there are 5/6 Specialist Registrar posts available annually). The German doctor had completed her training in Germany.

**Radiotherapy**
This doctor had initially hoped to become a surgeon and is quite sure she would have achieved this ambition had she remained in India ‘because of fantastic family support’ for childcare. In Ireland, she modified her ambition for family reasons and would now like to work as a ‘middle grade radiotherapist’.

**Psychiatry**
Although this doctor felt she would be able to train in Psychiatry to membership level in Cork, she envisages problems at Specialist Registrar level because she would have difficulty coping with the stress placed on her family by rotational posts. She would lose family support for childcare, her husband’s job is based in Cork and she does not wish to move her children repeatedly.

**Emergency Medicine**
The original ambition of one doctor was to be a consultant in A&E. She had trained in the UK, is well positioned to get a Specialist Registrar post in the UK, and she believes she will achieve her ambition ‘as she hopes to return to the UK’. Expecting a second child and her current ambition is to work as a part-time A & E consultant.

**General Medicine**
This doctor had spent four years in Ireland, studying at home while looking after her children and had passed the first part of her membership examinations before taking her first clinical post in preparation for the second part of her MRCP.

One doctor is not working currently. Initially, she thought of doing surgery, but after having a child she ‘did not plan beyond finishing university’. She then had a struggle to finish her internship - with a gap of five years between her medical and surgical internships. She is now unsure as to whether she will ever return to medicine:
‘Half of me tells me that I will never again return to medicine and the other tells me that when my children are old enough I will return to medicine and continue to consultancy level’.

**Career Progress**

None had achieved a Specialist Registrar post. Five were working as Registrars.

**Choice of Post**

Doctors were asked to rank in order of importance to them the factors that they considered when applying for a post: speciality, quality of training, recognition for training, proximity to home, working hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to home</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition for training</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training quality</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speciality</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eleven answered this question. Five chose working hours as the most important factor when looking for a post and two chose working hours as the second most important factor. The possibility of limiting working hours in A & E and General Practice was of major importance in influencing the choice of speciality for doctors who considered these speciality options. Proximity to home was the most important factor for two doctors when applying for a post (one other doctor said that she would not apply for a post outside of a thirty mile radius of Cork). Recognition for training was the most important factor for only two doctors. Quality of training was the most important for one, speciality the most important factor in applying for a post for just one mother.

**Postgraduate Training**

*Do you apply for training scheme posts?*

One Irish doctor was on a General Practice training scheme, another was on a training scheme in Psychiatry. The third Irish doctor had applied for a General Medical Training scheme for her first SHO post, was accepted but then refused it: ‘I was definitely put off by having to rotate through different locations, medicine just seems to go on forever. I felt I could do my own thing in Cork, choosing jobs locally.’

The doctor in General Practice said that, prior to entering General Practice, she had never considered schemes: ‘with children your priorities change completely, I never thought of my A & E jobs in terms of training.’

There are no training scheme posts approved for training pre-membership in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The only approved posts in Radiotherapy are in Dublin. The GP trainee will have to leave her child with her parents to go to Tralee for six months of Psychiatry training (although it is possible to do Psychiatry in Cork) and will then be dependant on the goodwill of her co-trainees to avoid going to Kerry for a further one year attachment in General Practice.
Posts approved for training
Two were in posts approved for their training in Ireland, including one non-national in her first post in medicine. All had spent time in posts not approved for training (locum posts to six years). Neither of the part time posts held were approved for training. The doctor working as A & E Registrar believes that her current post may be approved for one year’s exemption on a UK Specialist Registrar scheme, but appears less likely to be approved for exemption on an Irish Specialist Registrar scheme.

How much time do you spend training per week?
Time spent in training per week ranged from 1 to 8 hours for the 6 doctors who answered this question. Mean: 5 hours; median: 1.5 hours.

What do you think of the quality of the training received?
Answers ranged from ‘poor, nobody is interested to train’ to ‘reasonable in a service oriented job’, to ‘poor before I started in General Practice’.

Examinations
Of the four Irish doctors, one had completed part one of her professional examinations, two said they had not done examinations because they would be too time consuming and put too much stress on their families, the fourth was not working or studying. The German doctor had completed her training in Germany. The other doctors were all doing professional examinations. One working doctor (with three children) initially said that she had postponed examinations indefinitely, on discussion a week later she had started training and preparation for Radiotherapy examinations. Table 3 shows the rate of progress of the six doctors who have passed at least one part of their professional examinations.

Table 3: Rate of Progress in Professional Examinations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speciality</th>
<th>Year of qualification</th>
<th>Year arrival in Ireland</th>
<th>Years to part 1, after qualification</th>
<th>Years to part 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O&amp;G</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O&amp;G</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O&amp;G</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatry</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MRCOG: Member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; MRCP: Member of the Royal College of Physicians; MRCPsyc.: Member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, AFRCS: Associated Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons. In emergency medicine it is advisable to have MRCP and AFRCS.

Do you have access to a mentor formally or informally?
Both doctors on training schemes have access to mentoring. The doctor in emergency medicine had informal access to her consultant as a mentor and had met him in that capacity twice yearly. The others did not comment on access to a mentor formally or informally.

Issues Around Working Hours
To explore further the significance of medical working hours, I asked a series of questions.
How many hours/week would you like to work?
This ranged from 20-48 on ten replies: (mean: 37.1). The doctor not working would like to work 8 hours/ per week.

Have you ever requested part time work? What was the response?
Five had requested part time work, one had put out ‘feelers’. Two in A & E (with the same consultant, different posts) had a positive response. One had a positive response in Radiotherapy and is due to start a forty hour week: ‘when I say part time I mean forty hours’.

Less than full time training (LTFT)
In the UK, flexible training - working for doctors is described as ‘less than full time’ reflecting the fact that while a doctor may be unable to work the average medical week for their speciality they may be able to work variable proportions of a full working week. 76% of Irish mothers work currently, mostly in ‘short fulltime’ (38 hour week) work.

If less than full time training were an option in Cork, would you avail of it?
All but the German doctor replied ‘yes’. The doctor not working replied that she would like LTFT training ‘eventually’. The German doctor had completed her training on this model. She had done all of her training in a single large hospital, and took her 8 years rather that an estimated norm of 5 years.

Pregnancy
Two doctors discussed pregnancy, on-call work and changing posts. One worked shifts in A & E and negotiated not to do night shifts in the later months of pregnancy. The other doctor found it difficult that no allowance was made for her pregnancy in the on-call rota. She worked up the nights she would be expected to do in her later months of pregnancy in advance. She also found that to get her choice of post at changeover in January she was unable to take her full maternity leave.

What do You Think about the Following Statements?
Part time work is often associated with low commitment and no opportunities; part time work can also mean high commitment - women are grateful for the chance to work shorter hours.
There was general agreement with the second part of this statement with some important qualifications:

It was much better, in my experience with part time work I had more time to study, read and attend meetings. The pay was very poor though. (about £700 per month – 30 hour week).

Part time work is best suited when one has young children. But not for life long-loss of continuity in medicine, in my opinion leads to avoidance of responsibility.

Women with children often hope to give more to their careers after their childrearing years.
Five agreed with this statement, four disagreed, there was one ‘don’t know’ and two did not reply. In the context of medical working hours this statement did not always meet with enthusiastic approval:
Yes, you see people who have done so much you want to catch up.

I don’t. I don’t believe that brutal marathon working hours are of benefit to anyone. What we are currently calling part-time or job-sharing hours in medicine would be most person’s working week.

Most women assume that once the children ‘are reared’/in school they will have more time to devote to their careers, however, I am not so sure that this is so simple. Most women just want to work a ‘normal week’ and should be given the opportunity to do so.

After child-bearing years one is getting old and family commitments never stop.

From the doctor not working:

Yes, definitely, but I don’t know if at that stage one becomes so ‘isolated’ from the working environment that to return becomes such a huge ordeal and if there is no pressing necessity (e.g. money) that one just doesn’t do it.

What do you think of retainer jobs?

Replies were generally positive with some reservations:

difficult to arrange, inconsistencies and lack of continuity of care.

useful for the doctor to maintain skills.

Working Hours and Quality of Care

The change to a 48 hour week is on foot of an E.U. ‘Health and Safety’ Directive. Do you think that a reduction in working hours (provided there is adequate staffing) will have a positive impact on quality of patient care?

All twelve agreed:

Less fatigue, better able to do job more time to complete work properly.

Definitely. You concentration is better, you are less agitated and you can listen.

Most definitely. It would give doctors more time to talk to patients as well as doing their medical work.

Childcare

There is no workplace childcare, but if available, nine would use it. While many need to use a combination of childminding facilities, family members are almost invariably cited as main childminders for weekends, nights and when children were ill (the only exception has an ‘adopted family’ living next door) because as one doctor repeated ‘in this job you have to be one hundred per cent.’ Partners, grandparents and older children were all cited as childminders. Two partners had put their own careers on hold to look after their children, another was under stress as his career was suffering. One grandmother had come from abroad to look after the child, in another case the
children were living abroad with grandparents. Four with partners who are also doctors with similar time schedules arrange their tight rotas to ensure that one parent is at home at night time or at weekends.

A doctor described her difficulties with accessing early morning training which started at 7.00 am:

A local crèche used open at 7.30 am and this was convenient. When this closed I tried leaving my five year old daughter with a neighbour, who would put her on the bus to school. The bus driver would leave the child off on a main road.

Clearly this was unsustainable and the mother could not attend her morning training.

**Parental Needs**

*How does your consultant react to your needs as a parent?*

There were ten responses, two positive e.g. ‘understanding and quite accommodating’, others indicated indifference or no communication on the topic: ‘most are unaware, I don’t bring it up’.

*How do colleagues react to your needs as a parent?*

Colleagues were mostly supportive and were ready to change nights on call or change shifts in A & E. Some doctors took care to point out that they were very aware of not being seen to use parental responsibilities as an excuse to get out of work.

*Have you been able to take time off when children were ill?*

One doctor’s child was quite ill and her husband was abroad. She was distressed that hospital management asked her to find her own locum.

**Non-working Doctor**

*Why did you leave work? Do you intend to return to work? What would encourage you to return to work? Would more training or retraining help?*

One participant left work because it was too stressful on her partner and children and she was unhappy with that. She was unsure if she would return to work. ‘The right hours’ would encourage her to return, training or retraining would appeal only on the condition that the hours were right.

*If you were the sole provider for your family how would you choose to provide for them financially?*

She considered that the hours she would have to work in medicine could only be justified if her partner were at home at least 50% of the time. She would look for work in teaching or run a ‘bed and breakfast’.

This question also came up in discussion with the doctor in A & E, although well qualified in comparison to many of the rest of the study group she would certainly hesitate before working in medicine to support her family if she were alone.
Would you choose medicine again if you were to start your career again?
Ten replied to this question, seven would choose medicine again, of the three who
would not choose medicine again, two were Registrars. All of the Irish doctors said
they would choose medicine again.

Availability of flexible working at SHO level in Ireland
No NCHD colleagues were aware of any flexible or part time training posts at this
level. Responses were received from medical human resource managers in all health
board areas outside the Eastern Regional Health Authority. None of them was aware
of SHOs doing flexible training. The Postgraduate Medical and Dental Board had no
data on numbers of flexible SHO positions and stated that no organisation had
responsibility for flexible training at SHO level.

In reply to my query asking if they knew of any doctor undertaking training on a
flexible basis, the General Professional Training (GPT) committee in internal
medicine, responded that they were:

..not aware of any trainee registered with the GPT committee who is undertaking
part time or flexible training at present…The GPT committee is not involved in the
creation of posts but only in their accreditation and inspection. Therefore while we
support flexible training we are not in a position to promote it directly, since the
creation of posts is the business of hospitals and employers.

The Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) replied that they:

accept the need to introduce flexible training modules but that it has not been
possible to introduce then to date due to operational/logistical and resource
implications.

There was no reply from the Royal College of Surgeons.

Discussion
These mothers have made a considerable investment in medicine in their
undergraduate medical training and in their working lives. It is a fact of life that the
most important child-rearing years coincide with a most demanding period of medical
training. Often female doctors delay child-bearing until after their SHO years
(personal observation), for those who do not, this study demonstrates how difficult it
is for them to establish a satisfactory work-life balance. Although the average age of
these doctors is 36 years, only one, the doctor trained in Germany is within 2 years of
her current career goals and stable employment.

Career Choice
While two Irish doctors had initially considered careers in Surgery and A & E they
saw their choice of post and career constrained by a need to earn their living, control
working hours and a lack of mobility. In their eventual choice of career the Irish
doctors appeared to ‘satisfice’ as described by Rosemary Crampton.
Overseas doctors had selected their career options and goals before they came to Ireland, and did not change those goals after arriving in Ireland. Doctors from India and Pakistan generally remained true to their original goals but progress towards those goals is slow if achievable. The doctor in Radiotherapy had originally hoped to do Surgery. It is interesting that she feels she would have achieved this goal had she remained at home. She has now ‘satisficed’ and aims for a ‘middle grade job’ in Radiotherapy. In contrast are the 2 doctors who had followed their original career plans to a higher level in Germany and the UK in situations where they were able to control their working hours and advance their training in single centres.

**Career Progress**

Of the 4 Irish doctors, one is on track to complete her General Practice training in 2 years time. Another could complete her training in Psychiatry in approximately 6 years time. The third was completing her Initial Specialist Training. None is in line for secure posts in the immediate future.

Of the doctors in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, one Registrar aims to get a Specialist Registrar Post, another has just passed the second part of her MRCOG at the age of 45, and can only now apply for a Specialist Registrar Post for 2003. The other 2 doctors from the Indian subcontinent still have to pass part 1 and 2, respectively, of their MRCOG before advancing further.

The 2 doctors who had trained in Germany and the UK can see their careers advancing in Germany and the UK, but only with significant difficulty in Ireland. Although these doctors have experienced slow progress in their careers, they are continuing to progress. Over the course of this study (approximately 6 weeks) one passed the second part of her membership examinations and another commenced work for membership examinations in her speciality. One major concern would be that having spent so many years trying to pass their membership examinations, they will not be viewed as competitive for Specialist Registrar Posts.

**Access to Training**

Four mothers were on posts approved for training during the study. All have worked in unapproved posts. All eligible doctors answered the question on ‘less than full time training’ and all answered that they would avail of LTFT. As 2 doctors said ‘what is currently called part-time in medicine is most people’s normal working week’.

Doctors had little access to mentoring and did not appear impressed by the quality of training. This data on time spent in training and career progress is supported by the PA working hours study where doctors reported spending 2% of working time on training, either self-directed or classes, and also by the fact that doctors in Ireland spend so long in training grades.

Currently it is exceedingly difficult in a dual career family in Ireland for both parents to develop their career potential and care for their children. This is true for both Irish and non-national families. Many parents need to work a shorter day perhaps over a longer period, probably in a single major centre, without prejudice, to complete training. This constraint on families is ignored in training scheme structures and discriminates against parents availing of training scheme posts.
Education and training are generally advanced as the key for a single parent to escape poverty. Stability in employment and financial security are priorities for single parents, yet these are practically unachievable without flexible training. Separated parents have similar needs to single parents. However, the separated parent may be older, have more children than the single parent and may have deferred training because of child rearing.

Medical Council policy that, by 2003, junior doctors should no longer hold posts unrecognised for training purposes, raises many questions. The taskforce on medical staffing should address the needs of the medical graduates who have served the Irish health service throughout the years. We should not just increase the number of admissions to medical schools and continue to ignore those who have served in Irish hospitals for years who have had considerable difficulty in furthering their education to international standards. Without the recognition of flexible training as a right, many mothers and particularly the more vulnerable, will find themselves without either training or employment.

**Working Hours**
This is the first time that a study has reported that some doctors in Ireland want to work a normal working week. These doctors would like to work from 20 to 48 hours per week, thirty seven hours per week on average, the same hours as other mothers in Ireland. This desire to work a normal working week was supported by comments on the statement that ‘women with children often hope to give more to their careers after their childbearing years’. Responses were quite definite: ‘most women just want to work a ‘normal week’ and should be given the opportunity to do so’.

It is of interest that so many doctors rank working hours and proximity to home over training recognition, quality and even speciality as being the most important factors when they apply for posts. The German and UK trained doctors also ranked these first and second, but they had been able to fulfil their ambitions with their original choice of speciality within these limitations.

The job description of a General Practitioner on the Postgraduate Medical and Dental Board website nominates ‘working 80 hours per week. There may be a possibility of working sessions if doctors want to work less hours’. This job description for a General Practitioner does not reflect the amount of time that these mothers have to commit to their work. It is in excess of national working norms and safe working hours for any working group.

**Quality**
The issue of working hours has not been addressed in the quality debate. It was significant that all doctors answered this question in the affirmative. They felt quite simply that quality of care would improve with a reduction of working hours.

**Childcare**
Childcare needs in medicine are possibly more complex than in any other employment sector. At a practical level, doctors on-call often carry a cardiac arrest bleeper and so cannot absent themselves from the hospital during their on-call. These doctors are regularly on call for 30 hours at least once a week and 56 hours over a weekend. Their children have to be looked after for that period. In the UK, under the
NHS childcare strategy, ‘childcare coordinators’ are planned and parents will be able to consult their childcare coordinator for support and advice on all issues to do with childcare.

**Mobility**

Training scheme posts are generally structured so that doctors rotate through different hospitals. This was regarded as unworkable for two of four Irish doctors.

Three reasons were given for this lack of mobility. An important one was exceptional childcare needs secondary to long and atypical working hours; secondly, doctors did not want to uproot their families with every change of job. The third reason was that the partner’s career was based in Cork. This is a two-edged problem. One doctor volunteered that in the future she may well have difficulty reconciling family responsibilities and career goals if her husband has to travel around the country to access posts in his speciality.

**Conclusions/Recommendations**

This study demonstrates that doctors are required to work excessive hours at the expense of their training, career advancement and families and that in that context they have concerns about the safety and quality of their work.

These doctors who also have responsibility for young families would like to work a 37 hour week, working hours aligned with the norm in Irish and European society. Management and trainers need to recognise the needs and rights of parents in training and employment in medicine. The working time directive does not take effect fully until 2010. Equality legislation and legislation with respect to flexible training is currently in force.

Consultants, management and colleagues should recognise the needs and rights of parents. There should be a prioritisation of effective career guidance and mentoring for doctors who are parents.

All are in a position to avail of ‘less than full time training’ or ‘retainer’ posts with flexibility to suit their needs. Some of the doctors in this study have advanced slowly in their career pathways and with current training structures are unlikely to achieve Specialist Registrar Posts and their original career goals. Their commitment to healthcare is not in question. Why waste talent? The structures and demands of postgraduate training currently allow no flexibility for parents to complete their training along with rearing children. No matter what way a mother turns there are significant obstacles to the reconciliation of training and family life. In an open culture with a commitment to equity it must be possible to address the needs of mothers in training while managing our human resource needs. We should address ways of training and employing all our doctors in an imaginative and fair manner, and pay particular attention to vulnerable groups within the profession.

Training bodies should examine their training policies for inflexible policies that militate against parents availing of training to completion in the speciality of their choice. To realise their potential, parents often need to have access to ‘less than full
time training’ in conditions that do not discriminate against their age or family status. Long working hours and a requirement to move home while on training rotations appear to be major constraints on the career development of parents. The training requirements of ‘dual career’ families should be looked at sensitively and training bodies should co-operate so that the training of one parent does not prevent the training of the other. Retraining posts and schemes and ‘retainer posts’ have their role in the maintenance of skills and retention of doctors. Access to training opportunities and grants for parents on career breaks should be examined. Training should be effectively resourced.

Local management need to be accountable in the control of working hours. They need to address the concerns expressed by these doctors of the impact of long working hours on safety and quality of work. Health boards in which doctors are required to work illegal rotas should be penalised. Pro-active transparent locum policies need to be developed. Flexible working options including ‘less than full time’ training posts and ‘retainer’ posts should be facilitated. They should communicate needs and concerns on these issues to national management.

National management is responsible for workforce planning and funding of appropriate training and staffing in specialities aligned with national health strategy. Successful workforce planning depends on accurate data. There is urgent need for baseline information on doctors’ work status and plans they may have for less than full time training, taking a career break or returning to the medical workforce. It is ultimately responsible for compliance with national and European legislation.

References


ICT AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE THE GENDER BALANCE IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

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Introduction

This paper begins by presenting data on the numbers and proportion of women entering engineering education in Ireland, which is then expanded to provide enrolment data from the Engineering Faculty at the National University of Ireland, Galway over the past five years. It is clear from the available data that women have specific preferences that confirm traditional gender stereotypes. These stereotypes are cultural and/or social in origin – as is illustrated by available UNESCO data.

The second part of the paper looks at the new opportunities offered by the rapid development and adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) within higher education. The paper provides a brief summary of the content of an international seminar held in Oulu, Finland in May 2002 with the theme: Improving the gender balance in engineering education using ICT methods and contents, which was organised under the general umbrella of activities of the European Society for Engineering Education (SEFI).

It is clear that the trend away from traditional teaching methods and a concentration on narrow technical contents is being replaced by a more holistic pedagogy that involves extensive use of ICT to provide both content and context of the material being learned by the student. The intrinsic advantages of ICT-based teaching is that it permits comprehensive use of resource-based learning, provides flexibility in learning, and facilitates wide support for individual communication and networking. These features are particularly attractive to women.

Irish Enrolment Data

The enormous growth in Irish economic development over the past ten years is quite a contrast to the preceding decades – the heavy reliance on agriculture activity, public service and the tourism industry is being augmented by an enormous growth in engineering activity. Yet, Ireland remains a rather conservative country in many respects by comparison to many of its European neighbours. The traditional male/female stereotypes are simply a fact of life, particularly in rural areas. Nevertheless, there are signs that Irish society is changing rapidly: how women perceive their role and how others perceive that role is an essential part of this rapidly changing social and economic environment.

Against this background, it is of little surprise that women tend not to choose engineering as a profession – it is seen as a dominantly male preserve. To illustrate this point, Table 1 presents recently available national data, which indicates the number of full-time undergraduate degree students in engineering at university level:
Table 1: Full-Time Undergraduate Degree Students In Engineering At March 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male:Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University College, Dublin (UCD)</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>3.3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity College, Dublin (TCD)</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3.8:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin City University (DCU)</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5.1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University College, Cork (UCC)</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.7:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Limerick (UL)</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>6.4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National University of Ireland, Galway</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>4.9:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both DCU and UL offer some programmes with a large element of vocational content and this may be a factor in their lower than average female participation rates. There is also a question mark over the method of compiling these figures at a national level – an issue outside the scope of this paper. There is, however, one clear message from this table: **women are under-represented by a factor of approximately 4 to 1.** By comparison, the gender balance nationally is approximately even.

**NUI, Galway Enrolment Data**

Whilst the national data provided above may not be entirely trustworthy, data available from NUI, Galway is accurate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male:Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996/1997</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.8:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/1998</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/1999</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/2000</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/2001</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3.7:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 illustrates the dominance of male enrolment rates in engineering programmes over the past five years. The data does show, however, that female participation rates have increased since 1996 to a level that probably reflects the rapid industrial development of the past decade. The table also indicates a gradual growth in intake over the five-year period and a sudden increase in female intake from September 1998. This steady increase in total student intake has gone against the national trend, which – in common with many European countries – has shown a declining demand for mathematics, science and engineering programmes. The general decline in popularity of these subjects is further exacerbated in Ireland by the reducing cohort of school leavers due to the steady decrease in the national birthrate since the 1980s.

An interesting observation might be made by a comparison of Tables 1 and 2. The total enrolments in the four years from 1996/97 to 1999/2000 are 568 male, 134 female from the data in Table 2. However, Table 1 indicates the actual number registered in March 2000 was 564 male, 115 female. There must, of course, be several factors at work here, but it does seem unusual that there is a disproportional reduction in female participation rates as they progress through the four-year undergraduate degree programmes. The reasons behind this should be examined.

It had been clear for some time that the falling Irish birthrate would impact on student enrolment at third level institutions. The Engineering Faculty at NUI, Galway
anticipated this trend and began reorganising its undergraduate degree offerings in the mid 1990s. In any case, the Faculty was keen to review its activities: the country was showing strong signs of continued economic growth and the climate was ripe for the introduction of new entry streams.

The Faculty has offered four direct-entry undergraduate degree programmes for the past twenty years or more. Table 3 provides the total number of students on each programme as male to female ratios in these four established programmes over the past five years.

Table 3: Male to Female Enrolment Ratios In Four Established Engineering Disciplines At NUI, Galway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>46:8</td>
<td>40:11</td>
<td>33:10</td>
<td>37:7</td>
<td>34:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Engineering</td>
<td>24:6</td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>14:3</td>
<td>12:2</td>
<td>15:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>35:5</td>
<td>33:6</td>
<td>32:1</td>
<td>22:5</td>
<td>28:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of students in each discipline is small. As a consequence, it is rather difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions in the relative popularity of each programme amongst female students. Nevertheless, some programmes do not seem to appeal to women. Table 3 may help clarify this observation – it provides information on new undergraduate entry streams introduced from September 1997 onwards.

Table 4: Male to Female Enrolment Ratios In Five New Engineering Streams At NUI, Galway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electronic and Computer Engineering</td>
<td>8:1</td>
<td>28:10</td>
<td>22:4</td>
<td>24:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Engineering</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>10:6</td>
<td>5:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Engineering and Language</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>3:2</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-denominated</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25:10</td>
<td>24:13</td>
<td>41:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Engineering</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4:3</td>
<td>6:0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most unexpected aspect of this data is the popularity of the non-denominated stream in which students choose, at the end of First Year, the denominated programme they prefer (excluding Management Engineering). It is equally clear that women are well represented on the non-denominated stream at entry. Whilst it is outside the scope of this paper to examine these trends more closely, it would certainly pay dividends to survey incoming students to determine exactly what factors influenced their decision at entry.

Table 4 also indicates the relative popularity of the new intake streams and helps explain the decrease in numbers on some of the more established programmes from 1998 onwards. The data show that Biomedical Engineering is particularly popular amongst women, which is encouraging even though it might seem to strengthen the stereotype of women preferring the ‘medical’ or ‘biological’ aspects of the programme rather than the hard engineering content (there is no survey data to quantify this observation). It is also clear from the data that women are well represented on the new Management Engineering programme. However, the total numbers opting for this programme may not be sustainable in the long run.
Unesco Data

The participation rate of women studying engineering programmes worldwide varies considerably, as the following table illustrates.

Table 5: Enrolment in Courses Leading to First Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Natural science</th>
<th>Mathematics/Computer science</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>% female</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1593</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>41158</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>70898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>39541</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3425</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6504</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

na= not available
[source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1993]

From this data it is possible to extract two main points:

1. Women tend to be less well represented on engineering programmes in comparison to the sciences, the single exception being Zimbabwe
2. Cultural or social differences represent the most striking differences in participation rates. Zambia, for example, yielded only 1% female engineering students whereas Kuwait yielded 39%. By comparison, the 21% participation rate for Sweden seems to represent a fairly typical figure for northern Europe (see also discussion below).

Clearly, the figures will have changed somewhat over the past ten years but, even so, the general observations remain unchanged.

The Oulu Seminar

An International Seminar was organised to examine the new opportunities offered by the rapid development and adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) within higher education. The seminar was held in Oulu, Finland in May 2002 with the theme: Improving the gender balance in engineering education using ICT methods and contents. It was organised under the general umbrella of activities of the European Society for Engineering Education (SEFI) and attracted sixty-seven participants from thirteen countries and resulted in the presentation of fifteen papers
from eight countries. Several keynote speakers addressed the audience on different aspects of the seminar theme. The bound proceedings are available from SEFI HQ, Brussels and a short paper summarizing individual presentations and conclusions of the event was presented at the SEFI Annual meeting in Florence (Gibson & Alha, 2002). A second and more detailed paper is currently under preparation for publication in an international journal and the following text is taken largely from this, as yet, unpublished document (Alha & Gibson, in prep.).

Presented in the paragraphs below are three broad themes regarding ICT as a subject or as a media of technical and engineering studies, which dominated the presentations and discussions during the seminar. The first section looks at national, cultural or social differences in participation rates of women in technical education at third level. The second sub-section concentrates on actions taken to change the present situation and on the attitudes and experiences of students. And finally, an evaluation of the main issues identified by speakers and participants is presented.

**National, Cultural and Social Aspects**

Essentially, the situation in Europe today is the same as stated in the 1993 UNESCO report, i.e. there are far more men than women studying engineering. Current trends in European countries show an increase in female participation rates in some countries and a decrease in others. Social and/or cultural reasons seem to offer at least a partial explanation for these trends.

A study conducted in Germany on enrolment rates in Computer Science programmes pre- and post-reunification showed clearly that far fewer women from the old East Germany were now following these programmes and participation rates had dropped significantly to levels prevalent in West Germany. Similar effects have been seen to occur in Hungary, although not in all former communist/socialist countries. One conclusion of the study is that the communist ideology that drove people towards technology and gender equality are not generally accepted and, combined with the removal of the widespread provision of free kindergartens, women have adapted to the new social reality that effects them (Shinzel, 2002; Shinzel & Ruiz-ben, 2002).

Italian statistics show that at secondary level of education the percentage of girls in technical schools was 47.5% and schools specialised in scientific studies 18.8% in the year 1998. But at the university level, only 8% of engineering graduates were women in 1998 (Gatti, 2002).

An Irish survey examining male/female enrolment ratios relating to undergraduate engineering programmes offered in the west part of the country (University of Galway) in 1996-2001 showed a sharp increase in female participation rates over that period due to the expanded job opportunities offered by the technology/engineering sector in that country (Gibson, 2002). Currently, approximately 20-25% of engineering students are female across a broad range of traditional programmes. Some recently introduced programmes (Biomedical Engineering and non-denominated entry stream, for example) seem to be particularly attractive to women, as noted above.
The number of women participating in engineering and technical careers traditionally reserved for men in Spain is increasing, although not as sharply as in Ireland. Data from Andalucia (University of Granada) covering years 1996-2002 illustrate a gradual increase in female participation rates in the IT sector (Cara et al., 2002). However, data presented for Civil Engineering over the same period show a similar and constant participation rate (20/25%) as that shown earlier for Ireland, tending to confirm the influence of specific cultural dimensions to the participation of women in engineering (Ireland and Spain are both rather conservative in comparison to other European countries).

In addition to social and cultural factors influencing girls’ choices, the role of career advisors at school is important. Gibson’s study (2002) about the situation in Ireland was complemented by a survey amongst secondary school students and female engineering students in order to determine just what influenced these groups in their career choice. Feedback indicated that traditional gender stereotypes were well established in secondary schools at 16 years old. In choosing a career, these students indicated that their in-school career advisers played a large influence. However, a survey of female students who were actually on engineering programmes at third level indicated that careers advisers usually advised them against choosing a career in engineering. In the ensuing discussion during the seminar, several participants identified the same kind of situation in their own countries.

After Graduation – A Career

The issue of female participation rates within the higher educational sector was just one aspect discussed as part of the overall seminar theme. But of equal significance is the question: how is the low female participation rate in engineering and technical programmes reflected to the labour market?

A Swedish study on gender balance in the IT sector, conducted in connection with the WiTEC project (see more detailed discussion below), showed that women do comprise a significant proportion of those studying IT but that they tend to be overly represented in the administrative end of the teaching spectrum and significantly under-represented at the professional end of the market.

In Switzerland women have improved their position in the employment market. There is, however, a distinct imbalance in the professions where a high level of education is a prerequisite. And this seems to be the case especially in ICT-area. Furthermore, traditional Swiss family values seem to force a large number of women to work part-time; in order to pursue a full-time professional career the alternative for women seems to be to choose not to have children. To help improve this situation mentoring and the introduction of more flexible work arrangements are suggested (Debrunner, 2002).

To gain an insight from an employer in the ICT sector, a Vice-President of a Finnish company (ProWellness Ltd.) was asked to address the question: does it make any difference to a company whether engineers are male or female? In response, he made it clear that there are no significant gender differences in professional skills and that from a corporate perspective it is important to create a healthy interactive work
environment, which needs a variety of individual input as part of a team. In recognising acknowledged physical, psychological and emotional differences between men and women there is really no difference between the professional activities of either group. He concluded that a more even gender balance helped deliver products that produce higher consumer satisfaction and also contributed to a happier and more productive work environment. He did note, however, that his experience was largely of software design/development and acknowledged that gender stereotypes are often more pronounced in other business sectors (Siurua, 2002).

The present situation in Astrakhan, Russia, provides an interesting point of reference or comparison to the situation and recent development in Europe. In brief, Astrakhan women are strongly motivated towards a career in IT because it offers them a prestigious job and a good salary that will give them independence. A survey was conducted to determine the background of female undergraduate students and examine the factors that influenced their choice of IT as a speciality and their satisfaction after a few years of studies at the Astrakhan State Technical University. The results showed that the female students were convinced of IT as a career path mostly through a Faculty open day, media advertisements and career advice, and they were motivated by the perceived attractions of a prestigious career, potentially high salaries, and parental or peer influences. Furthermore, 80% of the respondents were mainly or very satisfied with their choice of technical studies (Zaripova & Gulina, 2002).

It should be noted that Astrakhan State Technical University draws its large student population from a local population with a wide mix of ethno-cultural backgrounds: 64% Russian, 15% Kazakh, 12% Tatar, 3% Ukrainian, 3% Chechen, and many more. Student intake takes a fair proportion of students from each ethno-cultural group. In other words, the cultural influences on gender stereotypes in Astrakhan seem to be secondary to the social context.

How to Improve the Gender Balance/ Actions Taken to Improve the Gender Balance

Three different approaches to improve the gender balance were presented during the seminar:

- Actions taken on courses (or a set of courses). For example, bringing in more aspects of the subject, using study methods which ICT makes possible.
- Projects and networks, which aim to promote female-friendly tertiary education and address more than just courses within engineering or technical programmes
- Research on gender-related concepts with respect of technical education

Courses
In the Open University, UK, the content and presentation of most of the ICT courses have been changed with a result that they are now significantly more attractive to women (Bissel et al., 2002). The development of these new courses was based on the positive results and feedback provided by a highly innovative course on Information Technology and Society that had been introduced during the 1990s. The
innovativeness of this course stemmed from a new interdisciplinary content consisting of technology and social sciences, and the introduction of new course delivery methods, which included computer-mediated communication and resource-based learning.

In the seminar, a summary of the contents and development of three courses was provided:

- You, your computer and the Net
- Communicating Technology
- Digital Communications

In comparison to conventional universities, the number of students (700-900) on each course is relatively large, students are also older, and more-than-likely are working full or part-time. From the information presented, it is clear that the contextualised nature of the courses appeals to a greater number of people; each course showed an increase in both male and female students and the dropout rate was reduced. Some interesting gender differences do seem to be emerging from the Digital Communications course in some areas; questions on specific features of the course produced the following notable differences:

- Computer conferencing: 82% of women were positive compared to 58% of men
- Use of world-wide-web: 91% of women compared to 50% of men
- Key skills were 'a worthwhile use of time': 45% of women compared to 25% men
- Key skills 'prompt you to think about how you learn': 81% of women compared to 35% of men

These early observations are qualitative only and further research is required in order to separate the numerous variables involved. For example, has enrolment been influenced by specific enrolment strategies, have the pedagogical changes attracted more women to these courses, and how do these early positive indications translate into subsequent progression to higher level courses in the courses offered by the University?

An Austrian survey from FH-Joanneum described issues arising from the replacement of traditionally taught courses in Business Administration and Science of Information by on-line products. The study identified the characteristics of a ‘good’ on-line learner: be able to communicate through writing, be self-motivated and self-disciplined, and be able to accept critical thinking as part of the learning process. The on-line software used in the study featured user tracking. By this means it was possible to determine that the pattern and content of on-line communication was different between male and female students: women seemed to require more time for initial reflection before starting communication and also kept the content of their discussion on their study topic. Overall, it was concluded that women enjoy ICT-based learning environments, which offer them more flexibility in learning (Gfrerer & Pauschenwein, 2002).
It is worth noting that the UK Open University and FH-Joanneum found that women felt positively about ICT-based learning even though the students, themselves, were quite different in respect of age, full-time or part-time, and study programmes followed.

Not all women, however, are positive towards ICT-based courses. In a project financed by the German Ministry for Education and Research aimed at improving the delivery of a course on Computer and Law by implementing web-based teaching methods it was found that women can be more critical towards ICT-mediated forms of learning; the experiences in the project RION for online teaching of law (traditionally 50% of students are women) show that as soon as law is offered in virtual form, female enrolment decreases 10-20%. The explanation for this was not evident. One reason might be that the software is in the early stages of development. The author also stressed the importance of recognizing and avoiding andocentric terminology in tele-teaching software (Shinzel & Ruiz-ben, 2002).

Research on ‘Feminine’ Engineering Style
What is meant by the expression ‘gender balance in engineering education’ is not always clear. ‘Facts’ about gender balance in engineering are created through the use of different concepts (figures, sense or content). Dr. Udén from Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, noted that gender balance is not a feature of the engineering profession even though advances have been made in other fields (Uden, 2002). She suggested that the vocabulary and referents of engineering tended to be male dominated, which reinforce traditional stereotypes. For example, ‘soft’ or social aspects of engineering are associated with women, whereas ‘hard’ or technical aspects are associated with men. The belief that ‘women engineers will bring a softer worldview to the technology' was questioned by reference to studies about Masters degree theses written by female engineering students. She concluded that there is nothing such as a specific feminine engineering style in qualitative terms; the author’s personal judgement was that ICT offers opportunities to open up new aesthetics, study environments and new contexts in which to carry out engineering studies and, in this way, prepare the way to redefine engineering studies themselves.

Comprehensive Approaches
At Helsinki University of Technology, Finland, a project named TiNA was started in 2001 to promote female-friendly education where women’s preferences (so far as they are known) are taken into account. The TiNA project is financially supported by the European Social Fund and the State Provincial Office of Southern Finland and is being conducted in the Department of Electrical and Communications Engineering where only about 10% of students are women, less than 2% of women are professors, and teaching and learning at the University is along traditional lines (Putila & Knuutttilam, 2002).

At this early stage of the project’s development TiNA has concentrated on the early years of study, and has introduced new organisational methods to assist students with group assignments and tutorial sessions, has introduced a mentoring system that involves links and contact with women who have graduated from the Department, and have organised seminars and discussion groups to support female students and help them find contacts with one another. These activities have produced ample evidence to support the view that women prefer a broad approach to technical education than
that currently provided at the University. As a result, new degree titles and new courses are being introduced, for example in Organisation Behaviour, Bioelectronics, and Computational Systems Biology. Further information on TiNA can be found at http://tina.tkk.fi/.

There are numerous network initiatives to encourage more women to prepare for careers in science and engineering which utilize ICT and Internet in their operation. Two networks, CONNECT which is based in Italy (Merlog & Bolcano, 2002), and WiTEC Sweden, were introduced and described in the seminar:

A European project CONNECTing women and new technologies has been established to strengthen a trans-national network focussed on equal opportunities and new technologies, and also to conduct comparative research in this area. The aim of the project is to gather and make available experiences and good practices on the issue of young women and new technologies. The project involved a network of eight partners across Europe together with other organisations that formed additional knots or reference points. In addition to establishing the network, participating partners conducted a survey amongst schools and universities to determine the type and objectives of programmes they offer that are directed at equal opportunities training. Results of the survey and all information pertaining to the project is available at http://www.euproject.it/connect

Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (WiTEC) is an international network that was established to support women in technical and scientific areas within training and industry. In Europe, WiTEC operates in sixteen countries. The main activities of WiTEC Sweden are:

- Arranging placements and scholarships for female students
- Initiating and producing courses and training material
- Working for a European dimension in training and industry
- Running international pilot projects
- Arranging courses and seminars for professionals and employees, e.g. Equal Opportunity Training for Career Advisors and courses for Women Entrepreneurs in Smaller Organizations

Further information and links to other WiTEC websites can be found at http://www.hh.se.witec/

In addition to the projects and networks presented at the Oulu seminar there are, of course, many initiatives in other countries. In the UK, for example, there are several: Women in Technology and Science (WITS), Women’s Engineering Society (WES), and Women in Science and Engineering (WISE). In the USA, MentorNET has been established for a number of years and is currently expanding its activities into Europe: http://www.mentor.net. And following these trends, an initiative named Mentorlink was established in Ireland in 2002: http://www.mentorlink.ie.
Women Already Studying Engineering and ICT: Why?

About 20-25% of engineering students are female. Why have they chosen engineering?

In the seminar, a third year Finnish student, Tiia Sutinen, at Oulu University, and a fifth year French student, Pauline Huard, on Socrates study exchange at Oulu University, presented their personal views on choosing electrical engineering. Both indicated that they had enjoyed and showed a good ability in Physics and Mathematics at school. They had also seen that engineering offered the opportunity to pursue a career that combined both interests and, in addition, promised financial rewards. Pauline pointed out that in France there are significant barriers to discourage women to pursue a career in engineering, whereas Tiia indicated that there was always good support for women at Oulu University. They suggested that the engineering profession should target secondary school children at an early age to explain the career paths and intrinsic attractions of the profession, i.e. before they make choices for mathematics and science courses at secondary level.

How Female Students Perceive ICT-Based Teaching

A fourth year engineering student, Elena Gatti perceived the impact of ICT-based teaching as very positive on women’s point of view. She claimed that ICT facilitates gender-free teaching and in that way helps to break down traditional stereotypes. She stressed that the studying becomes less dependent of a certain place and time, for example, and one can ask questions, express opinions and study in teams without the need of physical presence. This helps to overcome women’s fear of being treated unequally with respect to male classmates. She argued also that the field of traditional engineering intersects ecological, economical, social and aesthetical areas, which makes the present-day engineering problems very complex. This complexity does not allow the separation of problem by excessively simplifying the real conditions that, in turn, promotes a feminine way of tackling problems (Gattle, 2002).

A study into the reasons why female students chose technical studies within the Department of Information Processing Science in Oulu University showed that female students on these programmes perceived them to offer job-enhancement opportunities and provided a flexible learning environment that they preferred. In the year 2001 the Masters in Digital Media attracted 51% (of 105 students) women and the Masters in Information Technology attracted 64% (of 75 students) women. The study was conducted through an e-mail survey followed-up by focussed interviews. The female students also noted, in passing, that the ‘nerd’ element of IT studies was no longer present. It should be noted that the students surveyed already held first degree qualifications (or equivalent) and were taking the Masters programme, in part, as a re-orientation exercise (Isomursu et al., 2002).

Conclusions

From the student enrolment data presented it is clear that undergraduate engineering programmes attract, on average, about four times as many males as women – and this proportion is broadly in line with average participation rates across Europe. At NUI, Galway, in particular, this proportion has changed from about 7:1 to the current 4:1
within a very short period of time and may be attributed to the greatly increased opportunities for employment provided by the rapid expansion in industrial activity in Ireland over the past decade.

Some recently introduced programmes do seem to attract a larger proportion of women than these averages suggest. Biomedical Engineering, for example, was first offered in 1998 and the intake for Academic Year 2000/2001 showed a bias in favour of women in the order of 1:3. It seems that women tend to have a more than average preference for the non-denominated entry stream, which was also introduced in 1998. As with their male counterparts, this may simply be due to a desire to delay a final choice of their area of specialisation until later. However, there are many factors involved here and it is strongly recommended that a comprehensive survey be conducted amongst women engineering undergraduates to determine the relative importance of the various factors that have influenced – and currently do influence – their career choices.

The subject matter covered by the Oulu Seminar was wider than the original theme, which aimed primarily at the use/impact of ICT on women in engineering education. As it turned out, papers were presented on engineering and technological education (particularly in the ICT sector) and on initiatives that have been developed to encourage and support women studying and working in these areas. In retrospect, this might have been anticipated since many, but certainly not all, European countries include their computing and/or IT departments under the general umbrella of engineering faculties.

It is clear from the input of students that a career in engineering and technology is strongly influenced by their ability at secondary level in mathematics and science subjects, particularly Physics. This is confirmed by school surveys, which also emphasise that secondary school students are strongly influenced in their career choice by in-school career advice and by school visits from university and professional engineering organisations. It remains a fact that gender stereotypes are well established in children by their early teens and that engineering and technology are strongly perceived as male preserves. It is recommended (and not for the first time) that the engineering profession develop a strong and influential presence in the early secondary school years in order to inform and encourage students of the wider career opportunities offered by an engineering or technological education. It is important that the interdisciplinary and innovative aspects of engineering be emphasised in addition to the technical content. This approach will not only attract more students to engineering, the wider context of engineering activities seems to particularly appeal to women. Very positive indications are beginning to emerge that point the way forward: ICT offers a new pedagogy that permits the delivery of course content in a much more flexible and contextual way than traditional chalk-and-talk methods. It seems that women prefer a more flexible approach to study and enjoy the confidentiality of teacher/student communication that e-learning offers (it should also be noted that this new pedagogy also attracts more men to these programmes). In addition, it is evident that some new course titles and new degree programmes appeal to women (in Biomedical Engineering, Bioelectronics, General Engineering, for example) perhaps also because the dynamic nature of the job market demands more flexibility in career advancement than heretofore. These trends are probably not only
of significance to women, since, it is also important to recognise that men are also
motivated by good job and highly remunerative career prospects.

The provision of support through mentoring and networking offers enormous scope
for development through the Web. Links can be quickly established, queries answered
almost immediately, and the results of survey work and other research into gender
issues can be made instantly accessible. The development and extension of such links
is commended.

Very few critical comments about ICT-based teaching and learning were presented
during the seminar – ICT in learning was perceived to be something especially
suitable for women. But could there be a caveat in this? Is it possible that ICT-based
delivery of courses somehow becomes ‘a feminine way’ of studying? Keeping in
mind that many instructors feel that ICT-based teaching requires more work and time
than classroom teaching, the most qualified teachers (who are likely to have more
options) might be discouraged to take on ICT-based teaching. And if so, is it possible
that ICT-based courses will be rated as kind of second class learning, something for
such people who cannot afford to come and live on-campus and attend regular face-
to-face teaching?

Finally, it is clear that the trend away from traditional teaching methods and a
concentration on narrow technical contents is being replaced by a more holistic
pedagogy that involves extensive use of ICT to provide both content and context of
the material being learned by the student. The intrinsic advantages of ICT-based
teaching is that it permits comprehensive use of resource-based learning, provides
flexibility in learning, and facilitates wide support for individual communication and
networking. These features are particularly attractive to women.

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This paper describes a quantitative analysis of gender balance in both attendance and success at certificate, diploma and degree level computing courses, in one third level college, over a period of several years. The results are discussed in the context of the current literature in this area.

It is concluded that simply encouraging more women to take up computing courses is not sufficient to address the problem of under-representation of women in the Irish computer industry. While these measures are valuable, it is also important to address inequalities that arise from the pedagogy of undergraduate computing. To this end more research is needed to identify what aspects of the teaching environment are relevant. This would provide a solid basis on which to develop recommendations for best practice.

Introduction

While the under-representation of women in the Irish Computing industry is not as severe as in many other countries in Europe (CEPSIS, 2002), it is still too low and gives cause for concern (Irish Jobs Column, 2002; Expert Group on Future Skills Need; Irish Software Association, 1999; 2000). The low percentage of women on undergraduate computing courses suggests that this trend will continue. Forbairt reports (Forbairt, 1997) show that only a quarter of Irish computer graduates are women. Marriott (1998), and Larmour (2000) also note the low percentage of female graduates. This is especially serious in the context of the finding of the Third Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs which predicts a serious skills shortage in IT skills over the next five years: ‘A total shortfall of some 3,000 IT graduates’ (p.4)

Simply encouraging more women to apply for computing courses may not be enough to solve this problem. The further complication of ‘pipeline shrinkage' i.e. the increasing withdrawal of women at each stage of academic education (Widnall, 1988; Leveson, 1990; 1991; Camp, 1997), results in fewer women available to apply for senior computing posts in industry and in third level colleges (Camp, 1997; Committee on Equality of Opportunity, 1994). This lack of female role models within computing has a discouraging effect on women either from choosing computing in the first place, or from progressing within the discipline (Cohoon, 1999; 2001; Haller & Fossum, 1998; Brown et al., 1997; Salminen-Karlsson, 1997). The key to reaching a balance within the computing industry lies with undergraduate computing.

This paper uses a quantitative approach to investigate gender balance on computing courses in the Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) over five years. LYIT is a third level college with almost 2000 students studying to certificate, diploma, degree and masters level. The first section is an in-depth examination of the current situation in undergraduate computing.
The rest of the paper looks at the gender balance in computing courses at LYIT over five years to determine the extent of the problem and to see if any trends are evident. An analyses is made of the gender balance of marks awarded to students who completed a computing course at LYIT during the study period. The results are discussed in the context of current research literature.

**Gender Balance on LYIT Computing Courses**

The gender balance in computing courses at LYIT was examined over five years from the academic year 1997-1998 to the year 2000-2001. In this period, LYIT has increased the number of computing courses offered at certificate, diploma and at degree level.

Table 1: Gender Balance in LYIT Computing Courses 1997-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NC 1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC 2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND (N&amp;S)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students increased from 267 (166 male and 101 female) students in 1997 to 414 (330 male and 121 female) students in 2001.

Table 2: Gender Balance in LYIT Computing Courses 2001-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NC 1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC 2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND (N&amp;S)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc</td>
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<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the gender imbalance of students on some courses is above the national average, the low participation of women is still a problem in most years of all courses. Increasing the number of courses has not solved this problem. The courses with the most even gender balance are those courses which do not have an intake through the
CAO. The add-on degree has an intake mostly from students from the diploma course at LYIT. The skills initiative courses are comprised mostly of mature students. It is likely that the recent severe job losses within the textile industry, an employer of large numbers of women, has been a factor in the high proportion of women applying for this course.

The rest of this section tracks the attendance of students through their certificate, diploma and degree courses to see if any trends can be identified when a class is considered as a single entity. Students apply for the National Certificate in Computing through the CAO, and this course takes two years to complete. Progression from certificate to diploma and from diploma to degree requires an average of 55% or over. The BSc in Applied Computing (BSc AC) is an add-on degree for students who gain 55% or over in all subjects of the National Diploma in Computing. The gender balance of students on these courses is shown in tables 3, 4 and 5 below, for classes which graduated with a BSc in 1999, 2000, and 2001 respectively.

**Table 3: Gender Balance of Class which Graduated with BSc in 1999**

(The only class which has more female students on National Certificate and National Diploma. At the degree the gender balance of those who graduated has become equal)

**Table 4: Gender Balance of Class which Graduated with BSc in 2000**

(This class is typical of the national average)
In Tables 3 and 5 the difference between the percentage of each sex is quite small (20 or less) and in these cases, the gender balance of the class becomes more equal by the time they reach the degree. When the initial gender balance is very uneven, with a difference of over 40, then this gets worse as the class progresses.

In each case, changes are very small in gender balance as the class progresses through to the diploma and then the degree. This suggests that the gender balance which starts on the certificate course will be of the same order as that found on the diploma and degree for a particular class of students. Encouraging more secondary school girls to consider applying for the computing certificate course will benefit all three courses.

Increasing the number of female students is only one aspect of the solution however. It is also important to make sure that female students who do choose computing have the same chance of progressing as do the male students. The next section examines the gender balance of the marks gained by students on these courses.

**Gender Balance in Attainment**

Attainment here is taken to mean achieving enough marks to progress to the next level: merit or distinction in the certificate or diploma, first or 2:1 in the degree. In this section, the gender balance of male/female students in the group who gained enough marks to progress to the next level are considered.

For male students this is: \[ \frac{MP}{MP + FP} \times 100 \]

Where \( M \) = Total number of male students in a class
\( F \) = Total number of female students in a class
\( MP \) = Number of male students able to progress
\( FP \) = Number of female students able to progress

Similarly the percentage of female students is: \[ \frac{FP}{MP + FP} \times 100 \]
Table 6: Gender Balance of Certificate Students with Marks > 55%

At certificate level, female students performed similarly to the male students in 1999 and in 2000, slightly worse in 2001, and a lot worse in 1998. The only year that female students perform better than male students is in 1997.

When compared to the gender balance of the classes as a whole, some interesting facts arise. 1997, the year the greatest percentage of female students do well, is the only year when the number of female students to finish their course (Bernstein, 1997) is greater than that of male students (Haller, 1998). The year that male students do best is 1998, the year when the gender imbalance is greatest with only 13 female students compared to 33 male students. If these years alone were considered, this would suggest that when there is a gender imbalance of students in a class, then the sex that is in the minority do not perform as well as the sex that is in the majority. The situation is more complicated than this, however, as the years 1999, 2000 and 2001 also have a gender imbalance, yet there is not as obvious a difference in results between male and female students. In these years the class size is much larger, so there would still be a large number of students (20 or over) of the minority sex.

Table 7: Gender Balance of Diploma Students with Marks > 55%

At diploma level, different results are found than with the certificate students. The female students do better than the male students in the years 1998, 1999, 2000, and only slightly worse in the years 1997 and 2001. This does not seem to bear any relation to either class size or gender balance of the class as a whole. The female students have the greatest increase in achievement in the year when the gender
balance has more female students (1998), but they also do better in other years. 1997 is the year with a small class size, but the success of female students is in proportion to that found in 2001, which has the largest class size of the sample.

To explain the difference between these figures and those found for the certificate students, it is important to realise that the students who enter the diploma class are students who have already achieved more than 55% in the certificate. This gives them external validation of success which could increase confidence. Low confidence in ability is something that has been found among female undergraduate students on courses where the degree is followed straight through. The only way to ensure that this is the case would be to interview the students themselves. Unfortunately, it is too late to do this for these particular years, but it would be worth doing with future students.

Table 8 below shows the gender balance of attainment in the BSc in Applied Computing. This time the measure for attainment is the achievement of a first class degree or a second class degree upper division, because these are the students who can progress to Masters level if they chose to.

Table 8: Gender Balance of Degree Students with 1\textsuperscript{st} or 2:1

Here the year that female students do best in is 2000 which is the year when the percentage of female students in the degree class as a whole is at its lowest. In 1999, when the gender balance of the class is even, female students achieve less well than male students. All degree classes are small, but those of 1998 and of 1999 are the smallest. Class size and gender balance of the class as a whole do not in themselves explain the figures for gender balance of success at degree level. Other factors need to be taken into account.

When the percentage of a particular sex in the class as a whole is compared to the percentage of that sex gaining sufficient marks to progress, similarities become more evident. This is illustrated for the certificate students in tables 9 and 10 below, for male and female students, respectively.
Table 9: % of Female Computing Certificate Students Compared to % of Female Students with Enough Marks to Progress to the Diploma

Table 10: % of Male Computing Certificate Students Compared to % of Male Students with Enough Marks to Progress to the Diploma

The results for degree students were not as closely aligned. Table 11 shows the results for the female degree students.

Table 11: % of Female Computing Degree Students Compared to % of Female Degree Students with Enough Marks to Progress to Masters Level

The next step is to track classes over from the certificate, through the diploma and on to the degree to see if gender plays any part in the marks gained when the class is
looked at as a single entity. In the next tables, the gender balance of male/female students who gained enough marks to progress to the next level are considered.

For male students this is: $MP/M \times 100$
Similarly, the percentage of female students is: $FP/F \times 100$

Table 12: % of Female Computing Students in Certificate, Diploma and Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Female Students with Enough Marks to Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a sharp rise performance of successful female students in the diploma and a drop in the degree year.

Table 13: % of Male Computing Students in Certificate, Diploma and Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Male Students with Enough Marks to Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>90</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In each graph for a particular year, the male students do better than female students at degree level. In two of these cases, the males continue on the degree with the increase found at diploma level. In the other case, the decrease is less than that found with the women in the same class.

Reasons for this are not clear. It may be significant that there has been good gender balance of academic staff on both the certificate and diploma for most of the five years studied, but the degree is taught mostly by male lecturers. Another factor may be class size. When the number of students of a particular sex is very small it may affect the formation of support networks within the class. Clearly, gender balance of students within a class is not the only significant factor in success, but more research is needed to identify what the other factors are, as well as their relative importance.
Discussion of Results in the Context of the Literature

The study here found that female students were in the minority in most computing classes examined, and that gender imbalances which started in the certificate class, were carried through to the diploma and degree classes by students who progressed. This suggests that increased efforts to encourage girls to take up a certificate in computing will benefit all three courses.

Female students performed best during the diploma year, with a drop in their degree year. It is unlikely that there is a single causal factor in this. Gender imbalances within lecturing staff and having a group of female students that is very small were two factors identified here, but the relationship to student marks is not simple, suggesting that other factors are involved. This is in keeping with research in this area.

Concern for the low percentage of undergraduate women as well as their high drop out rates is world wide. Margolis Fisher and Miller (2002) documented the Carnegie Mellon Project on Gender and Computer Science, a longitudinal research project over several years. They found that students from a computer intensive family were less likely to drop out, but other factors such as developing a support environment with other students were also important.

Bernstein (1999) points out that the masculine basis of the language and culture of computing is not helpful and may alienate female students. Gender variations in student interaction is another factor. Male students will discuss technical problems with each other, but do not do so with female students (Bernstein, 1999; 1997), therefore ‘women students have to depend more on lecturers and written instructions to solve their various computing problems. (Bernstein, 1999, p.26)’

If the number of female students is very low, a female student has very few people within the class to discuss problems with. In this study, having less than ten female students was found to affect their performance. In classes with very small numbers of female students the gender bias of lecturing staff may be even more significant than it is with classes that are more balanced.

This difference between approaches to discussing problems would be less serious in traditional subjects, but computing, and especially programming, is not something that can be simply learned by rote. Not enough is known about how computer skills are learned, but the process is often practical involving trial and error at the computer, with information found in a wide variety of sources of varying usefulness. In addition, the software packages used are constantly being updated, or changed entirely. The programming language taught within an undergraduate course will change to reflect what is required within the software industry. Wetzel points out that ‘a high importance has to be assigned to pedagogical effects in computer-related education.’(Wetzel, 2002, p.76).

More needs to be known about how computer skills are acquired, and also how to take into account gender related differences in modes of learning. Margolis and Fisher (2002) advocate giving attention to the pedagogical aspects of good teaching which ensures that the diverse learning needs of all students are met, while at the same time
developing communication between third level computing departments and high schools.

It is likely that no single aspect of undergraduate computing contributes to the gender gap in progression, but rather it is the result of several factors. A decline in confidence and interest is found to be associated with the decision to drop out of a computing course (Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Seymour and Hewitt (1997) found that when a student decided to leave a course, an average of 4.2 factors contributed to this decision.

Conclusion

It is concluded that simply encouraging more women to take up computing courses is not sufficient to address the problem of under-representation of women in the Irish computing industry. While these measures are valuable, it is also important to address inequalities that arise from the pedagogy of undergraduate computing. To this end, more research is needed to identify what aspects of the teaching environment are relevant, especially within the Irish context. This would provide a solid basis on which to develop recommendations for best practice.

References


NURSES AND DEGREE STUDIES THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION

Dr Ann Wickham
National Distance Education Centre

Introduction

The National Distance Education Centre has been presenting a Bachelor of Nursing Studies programme for registered nurses for the last five years. The first three cohorts from the programme, drawn from nurses throughout the country, have now graduated.

This paper outlines the experience of the students on the programme. It examines how typical the students are of the nursing profession as a whole and analyse the particular constraints placed on the programme in terms of the distinct demands of this set of students. It explores the reasons why higher education through distance education was a preferred option for this set of students and how this relates to their work context and other constraints. It also reflects on the effects of the programme on individuals and also their career patterns and workplace experiences.

Background

Nurses make up the largest group of persons employed in the health services. In 1996 there were 53,641 nurses recorded on the register and, of these, 44,822 were active and eligible to practice nursing in Ireland. In the profession as a whole, 93% of those registered were female (Report on the Commission of Nursing, 1998).

Until recently, nurses were trained under a traditional or ‘apprenticeship’ system dating back to the nineteenth century. In this system, theoretical and practical instruction were provided in the hospitals. In the last few years this traditional system has undergone a transformation and there has been a move to a diploma-based pre-registration education programme. In this system the universities and the hospitals were in partnership. A further one year optional study at university level gave nurses a university degree. This new system is itself changing. Responsibility is being moved into the universities completely. Students now apply for nursing through the CAO rather than the hospitals, and in future all student nurses who successfully complete training will receive a university degree.

These changes in the Republic of Ireland bring the system of nurse education more into line with that operating in many other countries: countries that often employ numbers of Irish trained nurses. In Australia and the USA, for instance, there have been third level college based pre registration degree programmes for a number of years.

In a world where nursing is increasingly integrated into third level education and degree programmes are increasingly common it is far from surprising that the Republic of Ireland has initiated changes in nurse education. However, the changes bring to the fore the issue of existing registered nurses within the Republic and the
extent to which there are opportunities for them to achieve educational qualifications in line with the new diploma and degree level nurses.

In 1997 Oscail, in co-operation with An Bord Altranais, began the presentation of a Bachelor of Nursing Studies degree aimed at existing registered nurses. At the time there were very few opportunities open for existing nurses to get a degree. It was felt that an Oscail programme could meet this need. Subsequent events have shown that many nurses could not attempt to gain educational qualifications even when on-campus programmes did develop and that Oscail has an important role to play in meeting these needs for academic advance.

Oscail

Oscail is the National Distance Education Centre of Ireland. Established in 1982 on the campus of Dublin City University, its mission is to provide adults with access to third level education regardless of location, employment, domestic or personal circumstances, or prior qualifications. It offers students the chance to achieve an Irish university qualification without dramatically changing their existing lifestyle. Students study in their own time, at their own pace and wherever is most convenient, with the help of specially written self-instructional course texts. They don't attend any formal lectures, although optional tutorials are provided, and they can structure their study timetable to fit their individual lifestyles. As adults are experiencing more and more demands on their time, both at home and at work Oscail offers students the flexibility to study for a university qualification while meeting these work and domestic commitments.

By using regional centres Oscail offers students the opportunity to attend locally based, optional tutorials. This removes the need for substantial travel for many of them and also allows them to meet other students and develop their own support networks. From the centre they are further supported by a student information & advisory service.

Through increased use of the Internet Oscail is providing even more customised support for all students. Oscail maintains its own web pages and each student now has a personalised student Internet portal page as well as e-mail access. Each student can check that they are registered correctly, that their address is correct and receive urgent messages. From their own page they can access information on all schedules including tutorials, assignment and examinations.

Pages carrying forms allow them to download necessary items when required, such as change of address forms or applications for deferrals. Students can also check their assignments and requisite assignment dates. They can read assignment and examination regulations or look for other supporting data. Elements such as previous exam papers are also posted on the site for their use. Outside of the formal areas there are also services such as a bulletin board.

Using their own portal page, students can monitor their progress, check assignment marks or recover any misplaced information on tutors and tutorials.

The Bachelor of Nursing Studies programme presented through Oscail follows this general format, providing a flexible alternative to on-campus programmes. The
programme offers a series of modules with a set of core subjects and a selection of optional modules. Students can choose the number of modules they study a year, thus adjusting their workload to suit their circumstances, even where this varies from year to year. During the academic year they can also control their own study periods, being able to adjust them to their own circumstances and the demands of the nursing profession. The programme is presented on a national basis. As no attendance is compulsory this also allows even the most geographically disadvantaged to participate in the programme.

Bachelor of Nursing Studies Participants

In presenting a Bachelor of Nursing Studies programme for registered nurses Oscaíl is providing a service to a predominantly female profession. The Bachelor of Nursing Studies programme students match the general profile of nurses in that the majority of them are female (Table 1).

Table 1: Gender Profile of Nurses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National</th>
<th>Oscail 1999</th>
<th>Oscail 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If, in this respect, our students follow the national profile of the profession, the areas of work from which our students come seems to demonstrate that distance education appears to be meeting the needs of particular groups within nursing. In particular, the students show a higher percentage drawn from mental handicap and from the ‘other’ sectors, which may reflect current opportunities available to them and more restrictive conditions in smaller institutions, clinics or with agencies (Table 2).

Table 2: Students’ Professions (Expressed as Percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Figures</th>
<th>BNS Students 1999</th>
<th>BNS Students 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick Children</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Handicap</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwifery</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of those working in nursing homes, private hospitals, for agencies or as practice nurse with GPs cannot have access to or afford the time off work.

Because they are registered nurses with substantial practical experience, and often with much educational experience, the members of the distance education programme for nurses fall into older age brackets (Table 3).

\(^{7} \textit{ABA Report 1996}\)
### Table 3: Age Profile of Students (Expressed as Percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-25 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40 years</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61+ years</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As they are older than the normal undergraduate body this means that this set of women is likely to have far more other commitments that may affect their ability to avail of conventional educational opportunities. Many Oscail students have found themselves able to reconcile study with family commitments, whether these are to children, partners or ageing parents. The flexibility of the programme has also enabled them to deal with unexpected events, such as serious illness, without destroying study opportunities. Many mature students cannot afford to take the time out of work and the subsequent loss of income that an on-campus programme might require. The availability of the distance education has let many continue in paid employment whilst also studying.

Although students on the BNS are to be found in all four provinces, by far the greatest number of students are in Leinster and most specifically around 36% of the students are situated around the country, including more isolated areas such as Donegal, Leitrim and Kerry. However, by far the greater number of students on the programme is to be found in Dublin and County Dublin. The plethora of on-campus opportunities that now exist in this area confirms the analysis that the distance education Bachelor of Nursing Studies is providing opportunities for students who are constrained from participation by reasons other than geographical ones. This nursing degree also allows students to progress academically whilst dealing with other issues such as child rearing or severe family illness.

The lack of formal study since initial qualification can also be a drawback for many mature students, as those on the BNS are. Whilst some have pursued a number of courses since their qualification and registration there are many others who have had little chance to do this. These students are often very fearful of third level education. To support such students who may not have studied for some time Oscail offers further options. Students, when applying for the degree, may be allocated to or choose for themselves to participate in an access programme aimed at those with less up-to-date educational experience. The modules in this programme are specifically constructed to give them experience and support before they enter the full degree modules. For those who do not take the access programme, an Introductory module makes sure that all students have sufficient study skills.

**Impact**

It is clear, even from this brief outline that Oscail’s distance education Bachelor of Nursing Studies programme is opening third level educational opportunities to many women who would otherwise not be in a position to avail of them. In doing so Oscail
is also contributing to the future development and transformation of the Irish Health service.

The future for Irish nurses looks to be very different from that of the profession in the past. Nursing has been characterised by the dominance of the medical profession and the perceived subordination of the nursing profession. Yet the move to an all degree profession for nurses, led by nurses themselves, must necessarily challenge this picture in the future. Nurses of the future it is said must be highly educated and ‘autonomous, experienced, competent, accountable and responsible for (their) own practice.’ (National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery, 2003).

The development of degree programmes for nurses is part of this pattern of development. Yet at the same time this vivid picture of the nurse of the future is far from the subservient role inherited through the development of certificated nursing in the nineteenth century. In transforming nursing educational qualifications must also have a role to play in challenging the medical and nursing relationships rooted in this tradition. This must lead to the formation of new, improved and collegiate relationships between all the partners in the health care process ((National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery, 2003). In providing educational opportunities for nurses, Oscail is also a participant in this transformative process.

References


MOVING MOUNTAINS
WHEN OUTREACH EDUCATION WORKS

Mary O’Reilly-de Brún

Introduction

Is third-level outreach education for women living in rural areas merely a dream or a real possibility? In 1998-1999, a joint initiative undertaken by FORUM, Letterfrack, Connemara and the Women’s Studies Centre, NUI Galway, successfully delivered a Diploma in Women’s Studies to a group of 19 women in North-West Connemara. A case-study participatory research project, informed by feminist principles, was initiated in 2000 in order to explore the question as to what processes made this particular outreach education initiative work so well, especially from the perspectives of the participants. Participants themselves were involved in an iterative design and research process. Key areas of enquiry were identified and explored: What made it possible for participants to access the course? What does ‘access’ mean? How can access be improved? What sustained and supported participants as the challenges of third-level education mounted? Are appropriate educational progression routes available to rural women?

The research suggests that community-based women’s outreach education initiatives, modelled on the principles and practices outlined in this case-study, are capable of providing unique lifelong learning opportunities to women living in rural areas. Such opportunities can also create stepping stones to enhanced futures for many participants.

Taking the Initiative: Shaping Education in the Community

In 1998-1999, an extraordinary outreach education initiative took shape and form in North-West Connemara. A team drawn from FORUM Letterfrack and the Women’s Studies Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway designed a Diploma in Women’s Studies. They believed that higher education should, and could be made available in outreach form. They advertised in local papers, on local radio, in the churches, in the shops, through the schools, by word of mouth – specifically aiming to reach women who lived well beyond the traditional reach of the university.

From among the mountains and valleys of North-West Connemara, 19 women, filled with trepidation and insecurity emerged to take places on the Diploma course. Many had not attended secondary school. One woman described how, as a young girl coming to the end of primary school, she secretly harboured the hope of continuing on, only to be informed that she was ‘too stupid to be given any more education’. Another dreamed of someday having what she had worked for years to help provide for her children: a third-level education. She sat and watched graduation after graduation, and then realised that the nest was empty and, in some respects, so was her life. She signed up for the Diploma. Another had ‘jumped over the convent wall’...
at fifteen and by twenty had decided that education had simply passed her by – until now. She, too, signed up.

For two years, through rain, hail and snow these women battled their way to a small draughty schoolhouse in the village of Recess. They also battled more intangible and enervating forces: lack of confidence, social disapproval, inadequate family support, gender-bias and self-doubt. They never faltered. They never allowed each other to falter. They created solutions to their problems. They moved mountains to achieve their dreams of higher education and self-development.

At the end of those two roller-coaster years, all 19 participants graduated from the National University of Ireland, Galway. They showed me a graduation photograph – filled with beaming faces, brimming with confidence and self-possession. They now describe their lives as transformed in both small and staggering ways – several are completing the final year of their degrees here in the University; others have entered the workforce (many in community development and education) and others speak animatedly of new opportunities they would otherwise never have reached out to embrace. For some, it has been the key to putting long social and personal histories of disadvantage behind them, and moving on.

The Government Calls For Research to Fill the ‘Gap’: How and Why are Community-Based Education Initiatives so Successful?
At this time, the Department of Education and Science estimated that there were over one thousand community-based groups providing education at local level across the country. The presence, sustainability and growth of these groups was acknowledged and documented, but little was known about why and how they were actually so successful. There was also a dearth of research on women’s participation in education. In the White Paper on Adult Education Learning for Life, 2000, the government called for research to help fill the gap and illuminate the processes involved in community-based adult education.

Responding to the Call: Commissioning Participatory Case-Study Research
The management team who had designed and delivered the Diploma decided to respond to that call – they commissioned a piece of research to explore the learning experiences of the Recess group. This is where I came in.

The team wanted the research to be:

- Informed by feminist and community development principles
- Qualitative in approach and method
- Capable of actively involving participants from the Diploma course.

We agreed that a Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approach was capable of achieving those aims. PLA is a set of methodological strategies and techniques that places ‘local experts’ – in this case, the course participants – at the centre of the research process.

As we were concentrating on a single case, the research was a case-study. Case-study research provides us with what Robert Stake calls a unique ‘opportunity to learn’, to develop an in-depth understanding of a particular case in a specific context. Case-
study research, then, does not attempt to speak to statistical representativeness or significance of findings. It is designed more as a catalyst for ‘conversation’: as an addition to the fluid body of knowledge we continue to create about women and higher level education in our communities.

*Generating Knowledge – A River Of Thought, Questions, Ideas, Possibilities, Interactions*

In the past we have conceived of ‘knowledge’ as a static body of information, produced by ‘experts’ and processed and packaged until it is handed ‘down’ to those who wish to learn from it. But we tend now to conceive of knowledge as a fluid river of thoughts, questions, ideas, possibilities and interactions which generate more knowledge, deeper knowledge, more diverse and even conflicting ‘knowledges’. This makes the learning process very exciting – we never know where the river will take us or what we may contribute to the journey. When we tell our story, as in a piece of participatory research, we generate and construct knowledge during the research encounter. Usually we produce a research report, sometimes, as in this case this includes a range of diagrams and charts and maps which people can respond and react to. In these ways we present our story for interaction. We pour our generated knowledge into the river and watch it merge and flow.

Therefore, we can claim, and it is a modest claim, that this case-study, via its illustrative power and its interaction with readers and listeners like you here today, may legitimately present ideas about how and why women’s education groups may be successful in the community-based sector. A case-study is also capable of highlighting areas of potential or actual crisis or failure within an education initiative, and reflections from local experts on these can help us to design and deliver education more effectively in the future.

*Acknowledging Multiple Forms of ‘Intelligence’ – Finding Multiple Ways of Expression*

The 11 women who were available to participate in the research also helped to design and redesign it as we proceeded. As the story began to unfold, we were able to identify new avenues we needed to explore. We made diagrams, maps, pie charts, matrices; we ranked and sorted, discussed and assessed. We laughed and drank endless cups of tea. Some women created beautiful narratives which illuminated many of the results with a special kind of poetic insight. We found ways to explore the learning experiences of participants that respected the intellectual, emotional, affective, visual, imaginative and other forms of intelligence we as humans possess. We had great fun.

*Entering the World of the Participants*

A research process like this one ‘ends’ in one respect as a written report. Some people may read the report and interact with it on that level. Others, attending a conference, may hear about some aspects of the research results and will interact with the information by questioning, wondering, thinking, proposing, developing. As the story unfolds, others respond, resonate, react. By the end of today, this story will be different. It will be richer for your questions, ideas, additions, combinations. In this way, even a modest case-study can speak to a wide audience because that audience, readers and listeners alike, are entering into the world of the participants as they
describe it, hearing their language, their terms, their reflections. So now let’s look at some of the key results that emerged from the research.

**Research Results**

Three key issues are typically addressed in research on education: *access, retention* and *progression*. In this case-study, we did not adopt already established definitions of these terms and ask how the participants ‘fitted into’ them – participants created their own definitions from the outset. This expanded traditional notions of what access may mean for participants. First, they described practical processes and dynamics that enabled them to access the course itself:

- The recruitment and interview procedure was open, friendly, and supportive.
- Eligibility criteria were broad and did not exclude on the basis of age, absence from the live register, or lack of second-level examination qualifications.
- Provision was made for practicalities such as child-care, travel costs, transport and fees, any or all of which might have constituted insurmountable barriers to access.

But access to education is not simply a moment in time when a learner crosses a threshold into the learning space or place. Participants also described barriers to access which were experienced at a deeply personal level and had to be overcome. There is, first, the moment when a woman sees the advertisement and has to choose to ignore it or allow its message to impact upon her. There is the moment when she describes to family members what she hopes to do. Then the interview and waiting to hear if she has been accepted. Then the acceptance, elation, turning inexorably to nervousness, perhaps indecision. Arrangements have to be made for a new lifestyle. Others will be affected by this. Not everyone supports her desire. This was vividly described as an interior journey that women have to make which has elements entirely specific to women’s lives. The research participants identified three key factors that enabled them to make that interior journey:

- Personal determination to ‘get an education’ – DESIRE in capital letters.
- Supportive relationships, which developed very swiftly among participants, enabled many to maintain their resolve.
- Positive interdependent relationships developed very quickly also between participants and the management team and tutors – this enabled participants to move quickly from low self-esteem toward self-possession and confidence.

So we must remain aware that access to higher-level education is not confined to predominantly practical issues at the outset of a course; it becomes entwined with concerns about retention and remains an issue throughout the duration of the education process.

**Some Brief Comments on Retention**

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What Processes and Dynamics Sustained and Supported Participants as the Challenges of Third-Level Education Mounted?

On the upside: Women ‘stayed the course’ because they received support in practical and emotional ways from each other and their co-ordinators, tutors and team. Participants described with deep respect the feminist pedagogy which underpinned the course. They considered this to be the formative basis upon which the support structures they experienced were built and maintained.

- Course delivery was down-to-earth and characterised by equality of relationship, participation, inclusion and mutual respect.
- The learning process was perceived as an integrated, interrelated dynamic whole. This had impact at many levels but most deeply at the level of personal identity and growth and was described as being of paramount importance in keeping women involved in the course.
- Women-friendly timetables were particularly helpful.
- There was an obvious commitment to ensure the learning environment was co-operative.

The accredited status of the Diploma conferred a certain recognition and engendered some social respect for the participants. As a balance to negative social forces this also supported the retention process.

On the downside, the greatest challenges to women’s persistence and retention seemed to be inadequate familial and social support. This is a well-documented experience – when women begin to expand their horizons, they are often forced to accept loss in the shape of fading friendships and strong social opprobrium.

Progression: Are Appropriate and Adequate Educational Progression Routes Available to Rural Women?

While the Diploma in Women’s Studies opened several important doors to participants, the educational progression route to undergraduate degree level and beyond is difficult to access. An adequate range of clear educational progression routes does not yet exist. While it has been possible for a stunning 40% of participants to follow the ACCS route into the university - this is the crunch point – they must be able to travel to the physical buildings in the city of Galway. For many, this is simply impossible. And yet it is impossible to meet these women and not be forcibly struck by their energy, their vision, and their desire to see more outreach education programmes delivered into the hearts of their communities. It is impossible to ignore the positive impact higher education has made on their lives and the lives of their families and communities:

Completing the Diploma in Women’s Studies was a wonderful achievement for me. This was made possible because the Diploma was delivered at Recess…I am now IT literate, I was offered office work which I really enjoy as it involves me working within my community here in Connemara. I would have gone on to do my degree if it could have continued at Recess.

It is unfortunate that the Women’s Studies Programme or other outreach University programmes have not been repeated. There are so many people who, because of the inaccessibility of university courses, will never reach their full potential.
So, while community-based third-level outreach education is not exactly a dream, it is only a reality to a point. It is disturbing that women who were fired up by the completion of a Diploma in Women’s Studies cannot progress further. It is disturbing that the Diploma has never been repeated. It is disturbing that we are still thinking centrally, not peripherally. When will we begin to say: the university is too far away from these women, instead of saying these women are too far away from the university?

In these days of technological advance, when will we see the development of online degree courses? The models are there and available for assessment and adaptation. In these days of video conferencing, when will this way of delivering education be matched by the will to reach out from the centres to the peripheries? There are some moves here in the university to ‘translate’ community development training programmes into online format, so valuable work has begun. Outreach courses have been made available in other areas. But five years on, all seems curiously quiet on the Western front.

Finally, as an anthropologist, I find myself asking questions about the culture of the university. Is it a culture that has the necessary flexibility to respond to the needs of women, particularly rural women, to undertake degree courses in modular format at local venues? Universities are imagined communities – how will they imagine themselves into the future? As sources and resources for higher education that flow like rivers among widespread communities?

George Eliot wrote that:

>If we had a keen vision of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence.

Women know what it is to live on the other side of silence. Women know what it is to roar, to move mountains, to break through the silence. Do we know how to respond? Can we listen to how they might guide us?
Mother, wife, friend, community worker, student. This paper is about the roles named here and how they fit together with great difficulty, compromise and conflict. The order given outlines the role of women as primary carers and the importance that is placed on that role usually because those being cared for are more vulnerable and are deemed as our responsibility. It is interesting how I have put the role of student as last, as a consideration, acknowledged, but only just, even though becoming a student took a huge amount of my energy and time, and entailed slotting in and out of my other roles. In the course of this paper I hope to reflect and honestly evaluate what this means to me today, where I now stand as someone who has graduated with a degree and works as a community worker, both as a volunteer and paid worker. The work role I have chosen is supporting working class women in third level education in their placement practice and most of my voluntary work is also around support, encouragement and development in communities through community education.

I had never intended that neither being involved with education, firstly on a part-time basis, then as a full-time student, nor my role as a community worker would interfere with the roles I have or change my life. This has been a grave misunderstanding on my part, that has caused me much turmoil, guilt and energy over the past number of years, to the extent that I have tried not to acknowledge that part of my life, even though it has become an important process in my development and learning. This has led me to some degree to deny who I am save for the few safe places, chosen carefully, where I can discuss, argue and debate my thoughts and ideas, with people who are like-minded. The reasons for the various roles becoming an issue is, firstly, one of gender, where being a mother and wife I have certain commitments and responsibilities that do not match well with the role of full-time student, or community worker.

Initially, the first year of the degree course was a huge shock to my family and myself, in terms of time. I had worked full-time when single and then as a married women with a child, but had worked shift work at night, which had eased the burden of child-care costs and my availability in the home. This changed to a part-time basis, house cleaning and bar work when my second child came along so, again, even though I was working, I was available at home when my son came home from school and able to bring my daughter during the day to my house jobs. This created a false climate at home where I was seen to be around the important hours of the day as at night-time my children were in bed when I worked in the bar. When I started the course my children were aged 18 and 10, and though my daughter still needed childcare, I really thought the disruption would be minimal. However, I did not take into consideration the amount of study time or essay writing, which is extra to the course time and placement.

I found myself working into the night and weekends, running around trying to still be a mother and a wife as I had been before and wondering how I could manage everything. The first Christmas I felt that what I had taken on was too much and
spoke to my supervisor telling her I thought it was better to quit now rather than later. She advised me to take a week off to reconsider and I realised I would be giving up something that belonged to me and was for me, so I decided to stay. Each year brought new challenges in how I would manage without feeling guilty about all the time I spent on the course and not with my family. There were many times I was not sure if it was worth it and I have to say after the first year my family became very supportive and they kept me going on with it. But I did have to compromise and let go of many thoughts I had of how I should be as a mother and wife. Along with the strain of the course I had added burdens from these thoughts and constantly trying to fit things in, in order that I would not seem to be neglecting those I cared about deeply. This is an issue of gender and how as women our roles are defined for us and assumed to be acceptable to us. The hidden value of the work we do, unless there is a wage involved, means that for many women who are partners and mothers, this work is totally undervalued and ignored.

Madeline Leonard, in her study on mature female students in higher education in Belfast, says that:

mature students are often at greater risk academically, psychologically, financially and socially in adapting to the higher education environment. These difficulties may be more pronounced among female mature students who may find that the private world of the household impinges more dramatically on their entry into the public world of higher education compared to their male counterparts.

I also felt that my friends did not altogether agree with me becoming a student as I also spent less time with them and if I felt I was not seeing either my friends or family, I would use precious study-time to make it up to them. This meant that I seemed to be on a constant time-management exercise, weighing up the pros and cons of everything I did. Which brings me to the second issue that has been a cause of much reflection for me through college and today. I never wanted to become a ‘stranger in my community’ or excluded from the social networks that have also formed my experiences, thoughts and ideas and given me a sense of belonging. I have a strong commitment to my community that has been built up over the last twenty-three years that I have lived there. This has not been easy as I came originally into my community as an outsider and even today would be known as the ‘girl with the English accent’ when being described to people, though I hasten to add, today the term is perhaps used affectionately.

I would also stress that the term ‘community’ can be used to conjure up visions of warmth, safety and compatibility, but this is rarely the case, since, even within the community I live, there are issues, needs and struggles that people face daily where many are also living on the margins within the community. However, as a community worker, I feel strongly that there are issues we can identify and work towards addressing in a collective way that will also strengthen the capacity of the community. This is not an easy task, but indeed a challenging move to include those who have been excluded and have not been part of the elitist structures that operate in communities. This was one of the reasons I decided to go on to third level education and take part, not in second chance education as it is often referred to, but a first chance at accessing third level education. In my practice I was familiar with the inadequacies and inequalities that exist in society through my own experiences and
others I related to. However, I did not understand how to move beyond those experiences to make them visible and express their reality to those who make the decisions and ultimately hold the power. This is the real challenge in community work today and supports the move from the personal to the political. The route that I chose to take was to go and do a degree, where I could examine the theories and ideologies and where I was placed within them. Third level education did not offer many new ideas for me, but consequently cemented those I already owned and gave me a chance to reflect critically on my own practice and how I could serve them best. As Paulo Freire states:

[Education]…….becomes the ‘practice of freedom’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

I have felt over the past three years that there is a difference in accessing education on a part-time hobby basis compared to a full-time degree course. I have got away with being a bit different from my peers because of my nationality and my involvement in voluntary work has also been tolerated. But I sense that I have stepped over the line of acceptance with those peers who now feel I am no longer a bit different, but perhaps very different. This is not necessarily true in many respects, but I would be foolish not to acknowledge there are some differences. However, I would also argue they were always there, just not as visible as perhaps some people view them now. Not only have I acquired a third-level degree, but my confidence has increased greatly and I have a job which would be classed as professional. Therefore, I now have access and opportunity to become socially mobile. This is an issue that I have fought strongly on in my role as a voluntary community worker, as it is generally perceived as a right that the middle classes have taken as legitimate and natural, yet something that the working classes have to struggle to achieve, if they ever do. I have also learnt that class is not the only oppression; race, sexual orientation, disability and gender are also used to oppress people and many people have to deal with multiple discrimination, especially women. However, this is rarely acknowledged within communities, within education or within the structures of power.

Through this journey, not all of the women I have met who have engaged in the same roles as myself have considered themselves to be feminists or have wanted to be a feminist. Indeed it has taken me many years to realise for myself that I am a feminist, though I tend to use the ‘I am a feminist but…..’ to explain what I mean, mainly because feminism is viewed by my peers as something educated middle class women are associated with, but having very little to do with their lives. It is true that my role in education has been heightened by knowledge on feminist issues and the women I have met who hold feminist views would not come from my peer group. My own peer group like it when I argue points with their husbands, but ultimately see it as scoring points against the men, not as something relevant to their lives. Or why sometimes they struggle with issues, like parenting and it seems to fall as their responsibility and they are blamed if it goes wrong. This is not something that I relate lightly or condescendingly around my peers and their lives, this is just a simple fact of reality, for in our world we have not been taught or indeed encouraged within our educational experiences to analyse or critically understand our position as women. It is just how it is and has always been for them, their mothers before them and possibly their children in the future.
During a poetry workshop in a rural community, Evan Boland asked of the women present if any of them would claim to be poets in their own communities. One woman replied: ‘If I said I was a poet in that town, people would think I didn’t wash my windows’. Boland describes the effect this had on her, hearing vividly ‘one woman’s sense of enclosure’ and knowing this was a dilemma shared by many, of having their creativity stunted by the ‘collective obligation’ of denial and sublimation imposed on women. (Boland 1995, p.6).

It is important for me to acknowledge that my roles of mother, wife and friend are very significant in my life. I hoped to be able to mix them with my involvement in education, and understand those roles better and challenge them, especially as the role of mother and wife can be seen as contradictory in terms of working class women accessing further education unless it takes the role of improving skills in areas like cooking or parenting classes. Thompson looks at the gender implications in the adult education sector where classes are provided in ‘close allegiance with their traditional roles. They service the ‘vocation’ of home-maker, wife and mother.’

The path of education has not been a path that is travelled well in working class communities, possibly because of the scepticism with which these communities view academic institutions and those who come from them. In honesty, harm has been done by the formal education system in many working class communities and the lack of access to that education, which rather than building communities, only serves to dismantle them. Education, whilst it has proven to be the way individuals from the working classes can improve their life chances, I would argue as many have before me, is not the ultimate tool of liberation. It has been used to condemn the working classes to the lower paying jobs, the menial services and in many ways to highlight their inadequacies and failures. I hear teachers talking about the pupil failing in education, not education having failed the pupil, which I believe is a truer picture. Drudy and Lynch highlight very well the issues of inequality in education for the working classes, but especially women.

These views have indeed been views that I also share with my peers, however, whilst I still consider myself as their peer, this might not be the case for them. Is this because my education changed me, or is it because my peers now view me as having crossed the line into the professional arena? Communities like mine are used to the professional who comes into their community with no strong ties or bond, and works among them, but not with them. Even though I still live in my community, there is a belief that I can move out of the community with ease if I chose to do so. This is a dilemma that is complex and contentious in working class communities. It is complicated by the fact that good versus bad, black versus white, or professional versus non-professional are supposedly simple concepts, where people are placed on one side or the other. However, I am now seen as the professional who is an insider in the community and though my loyalties lie within the community, the path I have taken places me outside of my community. I believe it is the definition of professionalism and how it has been used in communities to assert the professional as the expert. Whelan suggests that:
The word ‘professional’ is sometimes used in a sense which conveys responsibility, reliability and skills and as such, it is applicable to all forms of community development work, paid and unpaid. What we need I believe, are high standards in practice without any accompanying implication that only certain people can achieve them. (Whelan, 1990, p.156).

I can fully accept this situation, but I wonder can my peers, as I have found since starting the degree course that my peers did not ask me how it is going, how was I coping. They are happy for me to be part of their group once it is on their terms and I have accepted this even though I am not normally a person who would accept those terms for anyone else. This is the difficulty of accessing education as an individual and the consequence can mean isolation, unlike belonging in a group that offers support. This is perhaps the solution in the future for people like me; I went into third level education as an individual and came out as an individual, though with a strong sense that getting things done would have to be as a collective response.Whilst I have met allies along the way, those that speak the same language, we were not encouraged to develop as a group, but to gain a degree that was in competition with each other, the points and the grading system. The main difficulty has been that I was involved in community education before I went into higher education and worked in groups around the issues we faced in our community. There was a common bond and acceptance of who we were, no matter what issues faced us, this required a common language that we all understood and we were fighting a common enemy, usually the state and its departments of power. This was built on by what Jane Thompson calls ‘really useful knowledge’:

- tools that we use to understand our world and our position in it. In community development work we call it capacity building and use what is accessible and useful to further our knowledge and participation in society.

The gap between third level education and community education is wide, in fact they can be poles apart in their outcomes. The formal institution equips individuals with the right qualifications to access good job prospects, and community education equips groups with the capacity to effect change in their lives, hence their communities. Whilst I agree that not all community education is covered by that definition it appears in Ireland that any kind of adult education that is not a part of full-time third level education is classed as community education. However, I believe that there is a need to define community education within a context that includes experience, theory and practice. I have never imposed the view that third level education is the pinnacle of achievement on my family, peers or community. Nevertheless, it has without a doubt opened up access to new areas that I can work in and be part of, but I also believe this has been at a cost to the social networks that I enjoy. People like me will have to work hard at justifying the routes we have taken whilst at the same time trying to prove we have not become ‘strangers in our communities’ without denying a part of our life that could benefit our communities, not be in conflict with them. This is a
fight that I will continue to fight and will battle to show I have not sold out, nor do I believe that a qualification is a justification of who I am. I believe I am a person in my own right with all the many roles I play, regardless of my higher education.
Introduction

There has been concern over gender inequalities the world over, Uganda inclusive. When it comes to resource allocation in government departments and private institutions the situation leaves a lot to be desired. Gender Budgeting would be the answer, but it is advisable to first understand what a budget is and why budget? How are budgets constructed and controlled, before we embark on Gender Budgeting.

A Budget

This is a plan relating to a period of time expressed in quantitative (monitory) terms. The Certified Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) of London defines a Budget as ‘a financial and/or quantitative statement, prepared prior to a period of time of the policy to be pursued in that period for the purpose of attaining a given objective.’ The features to note here are the monitory and futuristic nature of the definition which signify a Budget.

The Objective of a Budget

i. Planning
ii. Coordination
iii. Control and optimum use of Resources

Steps of Preparing a Budget:

- Determine the goals and objectives of the organization for that period
- Determine the activities, which need to be carried out to achieve the established goals and objectives.
- Determine the cost able activities from the list of activities.
- Determine the nature and available resources required to carry out the activities
- Cost the activities
- Determine how the activities will be funded
- Establish the flow of funds
- List the costed activities and the flow of funding in the format required.

Pre requisites for a Successful Budgetary System

It should be re-emphasised that there are pre requisites that must exist for a successful budgetary system to work efficiently. These pre requisites/essentials are:

- Management attitude
- Organisational structure
- Managerial approaches necessary for the efficient and effective application of the budgetary system.
Gender Budgeting

Different distinguished personalities and schools of thought have defined gender budgeting differently. Though using different approaches, the central point is that of equal rights in resource generation and utilization.

Gender budgeting is a method of analysis used to highlight differences in public spending on men and women. It looks at spending levels and spending priorities. It does not, however, mean a separate budget for men and women. Budget priorities should address gender concerns if Gender Budgeting is to be realised: ‘your budget decisions rely on your policy priorities. You can say your priority is poverty but it’s your budget decision that shows whether that priority is matched by spending’ (Govender, 2000).

The Evolution of Gender Budgeting

Gender Budgeting first developed in Australia as shown in Box 1 below.

Box 1: Leading by Example in Gender-Sensitive Budgeting in Australia

The first Gender-sensitive budget initiative was a government led initiative carried out in Australia between 1984 and 1996 (although some preliminary women’s impact statements had been introduced in the early 1980’s). In addition to carrying out the exercise at Federal level, six Australian states and two territories have also implemented women’s budgets during the past two decades. The Australian case, even though largely abandoned, has been an inspiration to other initiatives such as the women’s budget initiative undertaken in South Africa and the Commonwealth Gender Budget initiative (Sharp and Broomhill 1999). The Federal Australian Women’s Budget was a comprehensive statement analyzing the Government Budget, although its focus was by and large confined to analyses of expenditures and not Revenue. Within each budget cycle, Government Departments were asked to produce expenditure analyses for their gender impacts. The treasury usually published these analyses as official budget papers. The analyses involved separating expenditure into three categories;

I Expenditures targeted to groups of men and women, or boys and girls, such as expenditure on women’s health or training of specific groups.
II Equal employment opportunity expenditures by Government agencies and their employees
III General budget expenditures to be analyzed for their gender impact.

While it is relatively easy to assess the allocation in the first two categories, the real challenge to gender sensitive budgets lies in the analysis of general expenditures, as most government expenditures fall under this category.

In Australia, the analysis of 1985-86 South Australian women’s budget showed that direct allocations specifically targeting women and girls amounted to less than one percent of total allocations. The challenge of focusing on general expenditures helped raise awareness in the bureaucracy about the general expenditure’s impact on women even though initially some agencies claimed that their policies and budgets were Gender-neutral. In fact the budget statements provided by the agencies improved over time. The Australian women’s Budget also helped to bring gender issues into economic policy debates in unprecedented ways (Sharp and Broomhill, 1999). Source: UNDP/SEPED (2002)

The concept which started in Australia later spread to other countries as shown in boxes 2, 3 and 4 below. In all the boxes, the evolution gives us the real feel of what Gender budgeting advocates would wish to see wherever it is practised. So, in the study under discussion, we borrow from these experiences.
Box 2: Fulfilling Beijing Commitments: Philippines

The experience in the Philippines with Gender sensitive Budgeting offers a somewhat different model from the Australian case and it combines advocacy with budget analysis. Although gender mainstreaming efforts and policies have been in effect in the Philippines since the mid 1980s, there were no reliable and definite funding sources set aside for this purpose. One of the lessons from the Philippines Gender and Development Budget Policy is the role that a vibrant civil society movement can play in the adoption and monitoring of gender equitable policies, including in the area of budgets. Another lesson is the need to focus on a result oriented framework. Such a framework was formulated in order to assess the progress towards the implementation of the Beijing platform of action.

Initially, challenges to the policy included low compliance on the part of government agencies due to a number of issues such as the need for technical assistance, lack of adequate tools and instruments for gender and development planning; lack of a clear system of monitoring agency performance; and resistance from budget officers. Strategies adopted to address these problems included mass briefing of focal points with budget officers in government agencies, the development of tools to facilitate the implementation of the budget policy, conceptual-clarity sessions among the budget department and the national women’s machinery and multi-level checks along critical points in the budgeting process. Performance - based budgeting was introduced in 1999. Those agencies not in compliance stand to lose at least five percent of their funds.

Source: UNDP/SEPED (2002)

Women who attended the Beijing Conference went back home with renewed resolve, new ideas and new strategies to advance their struggle. Gender advocacy and initiatives, not only in the Philippines, but the world over took on a new dimension after the conference. However, most of these initiatives just like the Philippines’ case seem not to have reaped the desired effects.

Box 3: Government and Civil Society in Co-operation, South Africa

Perhaps the best known gender sensitive budget exercise is South Africa’s women’s Budget Initiative (WBI), which has been adopted in a number of countries, especially in Southern Africa. A distinguishing characteristic of the south African case is that it contains outside - government and - inside government components. The former is the WBI, which began in 1995 after the first democratic elections in South Africa as a joint venture between some newly elected Parliamentarians and NGOs. In 1997, the government started a parallel initiative, the pilot project of the Commonwealth Gender Budget initiative to promote gender sensitive macro-economic policies. The south African Department of Finance leads this component.

The WBI has published analyses of the sector budgets at national level as well as some analyses of the provincial budgets. There are four steps in the sector analyses (e.g. Health and Education). The first step is to examine the position of women and men or boys and girls in each sector. WBI usually disaggregates data, not only by gender and age, but also by race, location and class. The second step focuses on whether government policies adequately address problems identified in the first step. The step looks at whether adequate resources have been allocated to implement gender sensitive policies. The fourth step investigates the effectiveness of the use of resource in reaching the intended targets and goals (Budlender 1996,1997,1998, 1999).

Source: UNDP/SEPED (2002)

South Africa seems to have made tremendous steps towards Gender Budgeting following the abolition of the apartheid era. It appears that respect of other hitherto denied Human Rights somehow had a spill-over effect into the gender inequality arena. It also seems that gender advocates took advantage of this abolition to gather more steam for their struggle. But apparently similar efforts are yet to take root in other countries surrounding it.
Budgeting is a very important tool for resource allocation within a country, but rarely does it consider gender. The East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) analyses national budgets to see their effects on gender disparities and inequalities. The Gender Budget initiative exposes the gendered nature of the economy and economic decision-making. It also tries to transform the decision-making process so that it will benefit women and men equally. By permitting better-targeted and more efficient use of government resources, advocates argue, Gender Budgeting benefits men and women alike. To date, three African countries South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania have analysed their budgets for gender impact.

‘Women must be more involved in analysing Budgets’ says Ugandan MP Winnie Byanyima. An early target of the initiative, explained the Ugandan MP and Gender Budget advocate is the budget process itself. ‘It was very exclusive, even Parliament was only coming in at the tail end. It was an unimportant player in the budget. As women advocate in Uganda we have got Parliament to pass an act giving itself a role in the earliest stages of budget formation’. In that sense she noted, ‘we’ve been part of the advocacy towards democratising the budget process’.

Nationally, Uganda seems to be making positive steps towards gender equality in general and gender budgeting in particular. However, most of the progress seems to be in the realm of legislation and advocacy by the civil society. Some of the provisions and regulations are not followed with the seriousness they deserve and when it comes to Gender Budgeting, a lot remains to be done.

According to UNIFEM (2000) there are many ways in which discussions on budget initiative can be approached; these include:

- Distribute justice and equity
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Efficiency or sustainability.

In some countries, like South Africa, the analysis has focused on three major areas like:

- Gender specific expenditures
- Employment opportunities
- Mainstreaming expenditures.

In recent years, Gender Budgeting initiatives have been practised in 18 countries. These are: Australia, the Philippines, Sri-Lanka, St Kitts, Switzerland, Tanzania, Uganda, USA, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

An essential component is that budgeting needs to be people-centred if it is going to achieve meaningful results. But how can one determine people-centred budget initiatives?
UNDP/SEPED (2000) stresses that people centred budgets have to address:

- Social and economic vision, political context and specific concerns which relate to gender and poverty,
- Whether there is emphasis on expenditure and/or revenue or a combination of both. Specific outputs to be realised
- The process to be used is participatory in nature i.e., involving all stakeholders.
- Policy framework issues.

When analysing Gender budgets, (Rahman, 1999) stipulates that four approaches can be used. These are:

- Public revenue incidence analysis
- Benefit incidence analysis, i.e., who benefits from Government/ institutional initiative services
- Gender awareness policy appraisal, which analyses the ways in which specific policies and allocation of resources are likely to reduce or increase gender inequality.
- Analysis of impacts of budget on time use patterns by both men and women.

The methods and tools used in a budget initiative are closely linked to the process and the actors involved. Budget initiatives are more than a technical exercise (Rahman et al., 1999).

Public budgets are usually presented as gender-neutral policy instruments and therefore have the effect of ignoring the constraints women face when contributing to or benefiting from public revenue and expenditure frameworks. For example, a budget will not reflect the hardships the cashiers face in collecting the revenue universities earn or the hardships students pass through to earn their tuition or even pay for it. So one would be interested in knowing and documenting how boys and girls manage to get their tuition.

Guy Hewitt (2000) says that ‘Gender Budget initiatives provide a framework for linking commitments to gender equality directly to the generation, use and distribution of public resources’. A good Gender Budget, therefore, should be evaluated on whether institutional policies and their associated resource allocations are positively correlated to reducing or increasing gender inequalities.

Kuteesa (2002) poses pertinent questions as to why gender does not always get priority? Why is Gender Budgeting becoming an issue at this point in time? What is wrong with the current system, and what needs to be improved? In her view, Gender Budgeting concerns have become important due to several reasons, which include:
Interdependence between the market and household i.e. unremunerated house-work which is usually done by women and is never paid for:

- Increasing awareness of gender inequalities in homes, ministries and institutions
- Trickle down effect which relates to who gets what and the sharing of institutional/national cake
- Efficiency costs attributed to gender inequality whereby gender inequalities impact negatively on the performance of Government and society in general
- Promotion of democratic governance whereby the public is aware of their rights and have demanded accountability of resources used.

The CEDAW report of 1998 says: ‘in relation to the Budget, due to the key government commitments in the Beijing platform for action in 1996 was to decrease and reallocate military spending to support women’s Economic advancement’. But especially in Africa, defence spending is on the rise contrary to the Beijing agreements and this has raised concern among gender equality advocates who have started advocating for Gender Budgeting initiatives demanding to know how national budgets relate to gender performance.

According to the Human Development Report (UN, 2002) released in July 2002, Uganda ranks 150 in terms of the Human Development Index and its Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is not reflected, though the reason is not indicated. GEM uses three dimensions to assess how women in a given country are empowered and these are:

- Percentage of women holding parliamentary seats
- Women’s share of Administrative, Managerial, Professional, and Technical posts
- Women’s share of National income.

The last two parameters are vital to this discussion of Gender Budgeting. One needs to analyse whether these theories are adhered to in Ugandan Universities.

Mukunda (2002), a Gender Budgeting initiative Program Officer at FOWODE emphasises that gender differences and inequalities are not and cannot be addressed by gender blind budgets. In practice, they tend to affect both boys and girls differently. Although the intention may be good, the outcome may be negatively or positively skewed to one sex group and this is bad. He continues to argue that ‘if the budget is gender blind, then this does not only contravene the goals of gender equality, it also makes it more difficult for the budget to have more positive impacts on the economic growth and human development’.
UNDP (2001) emphasises the mainstreaming of gender equality goals in all its activities which presupposes transformation of the organization. In its policy document, it emphasises Gender Mainstreaming which it defines as:

Taking into account gender equality concerns in all policy programs, administration and financial activities and in organisational procedures thereby contributing to a profound organisational transformation. Transformation means recognizing that gender is not just about programs, policies and personnel balance, but also about institutional culture. It is about caring, flexibility and empowerment, which affects behaviour, rules, programs and impacts. Each individual stands to benefit and each individual must take responsibility.

In short, universities need to borrow a leaf from the UNDP by developing an institutional culture of transforming all their faculties and departments, and work ethics and tailor make all these to gender equity.

**The Position of Gender Budgeting in the Accounting Profession**

Most Accountants and Economists believe that a budget is a budget and it is for all people so there is no need for Gender Budgeting. According to Gender Budgeting advocates this has caused a setback to the progress of this new thinking since Accountancy should be the premise of this new development in budgeting.

Gender Budgeting has its premises with gender advocates other than the accountancy profession much as budgeting *per se* is an accountancy term and function. Also the terms gender and budgeting are common in the profession, but they exist singly.

The Institute of Public Accountants of Uganda (ICPAU) has little to show on record and in the practice of Gender Budgeting. Most of the professional Accountants affiliated to ICPAU who were interviewed did not have knowledge of what it is and yet they head accountancy, practice it, audit accounts in all Public and private organizations of Uganda and would have been the right people to enforce Gender Budgeting in these organizations, universities inclusive. In fact to some of them it is a myth/illusion.

**Gender Budgeting and its Practice in Universities of Uganda**

In all these universities visited, 75% of the respondents urged that a budget does not have to specifically benefit women or men, but all people. One respondent said that ‘a budget is a budget, we do not need to look at it from women’s or men’s perspective’ in short he meant that they are practically gender-neutral budgets. However, this gender neutrality is more accurately described as Gender blindness according to Gender Budgeting advocates.

Most Faculty Deans, Heads of Departments and Top Managers in most universities of Uganda are not numerically comfortable when you talk about figures and some are not conversant with financial management, budgeting, accountability and taxation so
they look at understanding Gender Budgeting as another burden altogether. Some people even believe that Gender budgeting is donor driven, so it is not their business.

Gender Initiatives in Universities so Far
Some universities in Uganda have taken strides forward as far as gender empowerment and emancipation are concerned and some initiatives have been started such as:

Plans to mainstream gender in the university curriculum and structures of Makerere University, the oldest and biggest public university in Uganda are in progress although the impact is still negligible:

- Establishing a Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University is a step forward
- Offering Scholarships for girls from poor families for admission into Makerere Universities by Carnegie Corporation of New York is another achievement recorded
- Gender disaggregated data is being produced in some Universities
- Hosting the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women at Makerere University in July 2002 the first of its kind in the whole of Africa is an effort to appreciate
- Gender Mainstreaming Research funding in the Department of Women provided by SIDA SAREC.

The above efforts really are positive steps towards Gender Budgeting so one can simply say that Gender Budgeting is a reality in these universities to some extent.

The Unfinished Agenda
- Structures for Gender mainstreaming are still missing
- Limited funding of gender mainstreaming programs in some Universities
- Lack of institutional framework in most universities apart from Makerere University where the policy is still on paper
- Gender mainstreaming has not yet started looking at the university Budgetary process.

With the above scenario it would be correct to say that Gender Budgeting is a myth or still a long way from being a reality in Uganda’s universities.

Gender Composition of Top Management in Universities of Uganda
In all the nine universities studied, only one of them was headed by a female Vice Chancellor. It was only in the recently created public university (Gulu, Northern Uganda) that the Deputy Vice Chancellor was found to be a woman.

All other senior university officials like Secretaries, Bursars, Academic Registrars, Dean of Students, Director of Planning, Auditors and Librarians were found to be men. It was only one private university, which had a female Academic Registrar, and one Public University (Kyambogo), which had a female University Secretary.

There has been a deliberate effort to enable more female students to access university education by Government giving them 1.5 more points for university admission. In
Makerere University alone, the trend for women admitted has moved from 20% to 37% from 1991 to 2001, respectively, but there has not been a corresponding increase in terms of women recruited in the university employment system where women are non-existent in top management positions.

If one were to use South Africa as an example according to UNDP and the UN, their percentage of women to men in employment as a measure of Gender Budgeting, then one would conclude that it is nearly non-existent considering top University Management.

Limitations to Gender Budgeting in Universities of Uganda
The study revealed that there was:

- Limited gender disaggregated data for decision-making, which is mostly attributed to low levels of computerization.
- Lack of skills and understanding of gender analysis and budgeting since most staff that sit in budget board-rooms are not numerically comfortable and have limited understanding of Accounting and Finance.
- Lack of institutional framework for monitoring and enforcing Gender Budgeting in nearly all universities studied. For example no university had gender focal points in their Faculties and Departments.
- There are fewer women in the professions of Accountancy, Finance and Economics, yet these are the professions that teach and house fundamental budgetary planning, controls and management.
- Negative attitude towards women and their concerns by society.
- Limited Gender budgeting awareness among top university officials.
- Inabilities by technocrats to design, appraise, monitor programs, plans and budget performance from a gender perspective.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions
Gender Budgeting is still a new concept in Uganda and it is only recently that the National Parliament and Regional/Local Governments have started talking about it. In some universities most men have treated the whole program of gender emancipation with some suspicion as a hullabaloo to capture leadership, and their belief is that a budget is a budget for students whether they are male or female. To them what is fundamental is social justice and the ability not to discriminate against any one and that merit is supreme whether man or woman.

Under-funding of Ugandan universities like many other sectors of the Economy due to poverty and insufficient funds, also has precipitated the struggle for resources among university Departments and Faculties. It is not surprising, therefore, that gender concerns have been ignored in this competition for scarce resources where men have the upper hand and use arguments such as survival and basic needs provision to sideline gender concerns.

In short, gender mainstreaming is still an illusion in Ugandan universities. Nevertheless, there is a ray of hope that gender mainstreaming, which is slowly being
introduced in some of the universities, will eventually introduce and lead to gender Budgeting in the universities.

Gender blindness in general and lack of Gender Budgeting in particular, should be fought to enable policy makers to comprehend the benefits accruing from a gender sensitive Budget to Management, staff and the Institutions.

**Recommended Gender Budgeting Interventions**

- Effective interventions require gender sensitisation on public policy, a change of attitude towards women, institutional capacity building and policy advocacy on gender issues and these are lacking in all universities covered by the study. There is a need to form structures in these institutions to address all the issues raised above.
- There should be gender analysis/Audit and advice on policies, procedures and programs in all Universities in Uganda.
- Capacity building in gender issues, negotiations, gender analysis skills, Budgeting and Accountability are a must if progress is to be achieved.
- Developing strategic alliances and networking within and without the universities. Most importantly, men should cease to be looked at as aggressors, but as partners in this struggle.
- Gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation of the budgetary process and performance.
- FOREIGN AID and technical assistance should incorporate gender sensitive budgeting as a requirement of aid and technical assistance to universities.
- Integrating gender equitable policies in men’s activities
- Donors need to integrate empowerment concerns in funding guidelines. But this should not be done to oppress men, but to benefit both men and women meaningfully and equally.
- An all-inclusive participatory approach by all budget stakeholders in all the budgetary process from planning to control should be emphasised at all budgeting stages.
- An effort by university and Government in conjunction with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics to produce gender disaggregated data, which would help planners, and implementers of policies to monitor and enforce gender concerns should be prime on the National Agenda.
- There should be a deliberate policy by Government and universities in particular to promote women’s education in Accountancy, Economics and Finance professions since these are the benchmark of gender budgeting.
- 52% of Uganda’s National Budget is financed by a donor community, so the appeal to the UN, World Bank, IMF and other development partners is to make it a requirement that 26% or more of this should target women expenditures and programs nationally and equally so the trend should be the same in universities.
- Gender mainstreaming Departments should be part of the body that evaluates and monitors the university budget performance against priorities and plans for which the budgets were intended.
- Recruitment in universities, especially top management posts should conform to a third constitutional requirement of local council posts so that a third of top management posts should be filled by women who meet the academic and
professional requirements of those positions without losing the tenet of merit in recruitment.

• Gender focal points, gender audits, appraisals of budget, finance committees, tender board committee and all other committees of university councils in all the universities of Uganda should adhere to the principle of gender equity i.e. in sex composition, priority and meeting the targets.

• Universities should be urged to submit their budgets and final accounts alongside gender awareness expenditure statement to organs that evaluate these budgets, for example national Parliament and Auditor General.

• Universities should have their tender guidelines changed for all contractors/suppliers to submit their gender awareness expenditure statement in order to ensure that these companies also adhere to gender concerns. This will widen the scope of the Gender equity.

• Gender budgeting initiatives in universities should re-emphasise reprioritization and reorientation of expenditures rather than increasing overall institutional expenditure funding.

• Gender Budgeting advocates need to move faster and find out the effects of donor funding on gender-targeted spending and also set up financial monitoring focal points in all Faculties and Departments of the universities.

It is high time all gender advocates re-examine the reasons why there are few men in the struggle for women’s emancipation. We need more men on board if we are going to realize tangible results in the near future. Gender mainstreaming has to be popularised and imparted to all stakeholders, especially men, since the findings showed that men are in most of the top positions that matter in the universities of Uganda as far as budgeting is concerned.

I do recommend concessions and rebates of tuition for female students in universities so that they can pay 50% of university fees in case they are private students.

References


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UNIFEM (2002)

Winnie Byanyima, *Member of Parliament and Women Activist in Uganda*

**List of Abbreviations**

NUIG: National University of Ireland, Galway  
CIMA: Certified Institute of Management Accountants  
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme  
SEPED: Social Development and Poverty Elimination Division of the UNDP  
WBI: World Bank Initiative  
EASSI: East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women  
NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations  
CEDAW: Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women  
GEM: Gender Empowerment Measure  
FOWODE: Forum of Women Organizations in Development  
ICPAU: Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Uganda
THE IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE PERSONAL LIVES OF MATURE STUDENTS

Cora Cregan
St Patrick's College, Drumcondra

Introduction

Since 1992 I have been working with mature students in higher education. During the course of my work, it became apparent to me that the decision to return to education necessitates a considerable degree of adjustment for the mature student and his or her family. Whilst in many cases the adjustment appears to be achieved without too much difficulty, others encounter obstacles and intransigence from those closest to them. In 1996 I commenced an MA in Women's Studies and decided to research the impact of higher education on the personal lives of mature students as a topic for my thesis. The aim of my research was to establish the nature of the change in the self concept of mature students in Ireland (as this was likely to have an impact on relationships), the extent of relationship strain and the factors involved, and to establish if social class and gender figured significantly amongst these factors. This paper is a summary of my thesis.

Background to the Research

Several studies in the UK and elsewhere (Cocklin, 1991; Desmachelier, 1994, Edwards; 1990; James, 1995 and Wray, 1996) cite returning to study as a major source of conflict between partners. A number of reasons have been put forward to explain why the return to education may place a strain on personal relationships: the change in the student's self concept, role and status conflict, involving sexual politics (Edwards, 1993) and the internalisation of the habitus and language of the elite which can distance the student from partners, are the most frequently cited reasons. Wray (1996) is at pains to point out, however, that it may well be that ‘the ambition to enter higher education is driven by, and symptomatic of, a previously troubled relationship.’ In contrast, research by Davis (1994) and research in Ireland by Fleming and Murphy (1997) O'Sullivan (1989) and Heslop (1996) found that many mature students received enormous support from partners and family, though Heslop did find that as students' perspectives’, began to change, arguments within families increased.

Theoretical Background

My research was grounded in both sociological and psychological theories using Bourdieu's (1971) theory of cultural alienation, Marcia's (1980) theory of identity status and formation and Labovivie-Vief's theory (cited in Mezirow, 1991) of perspective transformation. Theories of psychological development and role balance expounded by Mac Dermid and Marks (1996) and the personality factors which contribute to the formation of successful relationships, were also explored.

Bourdieu views human behaviour as an expression of a class ethos which is instilled in the process of habitus and is represented as cultural capital. Bourdieu maintained that the cultural capital of universities embodies the high culture of the elite of society and that students had to adopt the dominant code in order to succeed academically. Bourdieu concluded that those students whose habitus replicated the cultural capital
of the university were unlikely to experience alienation from their families, but where a discrepancy occurs between members of a family who have acquired cultural capital through education and those who have not, the result can lead to estrangement. One of the most significant pieces of research conducted into the impact of social mobility upon mature aged and traditional students of both genders and their families was carried out in Sydney, Australia between 1987 and 1990 in conjunction with research in Minnesota, USA in 1990/1991 with reference to the theories of Pierre Bourdieu.

The researchers found that lack of partner support was most evident amongst partners and families which felt threatened by the rise in status of the student, therefore, resistance to the study process was most evident in the families of students from a working class background, particularly in the families of the mature aged students (Desmachelier, 1994: 16). The sample population in both countries experienced marital separation rates that were 5-8 times their national average and interviewers identified, among 90% of the maritally unstable male and female population, an emerging lack of salience between the partners as the course progressed. Desmachelier attributes the deterioration in the personal relationships amongst the students from working class backgrounds in the study to the alteration in their habitus. She concludes that the greater the divergence in background between partners, the greater the potential for alienation, however, she found that families which accepted the internalisation of the dominant code (encoded in the curriculum in higher education) were a) where the student concerned was a male head of household, b) where the female student's education did not rival that of the male head and c) families where egalitarianism was truly being expressed. I felt it worth researching whether Desmarchieler's findings applied to Ireland and if egalitarianism within relationships was a crucial factor in enabling mature students and their partners to withstand the level of alienation and estrangement which might result from the return of one partner to education. To do this it was necessary to explore the dynamics of egalitarian relationships and the interplay of sociological and psychological factors which enabled couples to establish such a relationship in the first place. An understanding of this dynamic, I felt, would enable one to predict the type of relationships likely to break down under the strain, it might also enable staff in higher education institutions to devise some means of alleviating the strain on relationships.

Research into the dynamics of personal relationships has found that high marital satisfaction occurs most frequently amongst egalitarian couples. MacDermid and Marks (1996) cite the importance of maintaining role balance in relationships, and cultures which socialise individuals into placing undue emphasis on one role identity deny people the opportunity to achieve this balance. Research shows that to establish equality and role balance in a relationship requires a strong sense of identity or self which incorporates both masculine and feminine identification.

Bourdieu thought that individuals construct the self within the parameters of social culture and class (Bourdieu, 1971). My review of the literature on personality formation and identity led me to conclude that the construction of the self is a much more complex process and whilst influenced by class, it is not entirely determined by it. Our sense of self is influenced by race, gender, class, culture, history, family and our own psychological construct and identity tends to mediate the influence of class and culture (Steward,1980). So it is necessary to turn to psychological theories of identity formation to get a more comprehensive picture of the process.
Marcia (1980) expanded Erikson's (1959) theory of identity formation during adolescence as involving the assumptions of positions in-between bipolar extremes of identity achievement and role confusion. Marcia thought that there were a variety of resolutions around identity issues which people can opt for as well as a range of ways of being confused. He developed an ego identity status model which suggested four types of identity status: identity achievement, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity diffusion. Identity achievement is represented by those who have experienced a period of decision-making prior to pursuing their life's goals. High identity achievers have high self-esteem, a high level of moral reasoning and are internally directed towards independence. Foreclosures are those who are committed to goals that are usually chosen by others without experiencing a decision-making period or crisis. They tend to be accepting of authoritarian values. Diffusions are those who have set no goals or directions in life. Moratoriums are struggling with decisions regarding their life's goals or dreams, they are in an identity crisis, have a high level of moral reasoning, take personal responsibility for their lives and have high self esteem. Identity achievement and foreclosure individuals may demonstrate a sense of commitment to various roles and values, but, in Marcia's description, the achievers will have arrived at the commitment in their own way, having explored a number of options, the foreclosed individuals, on the other hand, have assumed their identity-defining commitments without considering alternatives. They take on parental roles and values as their own to resolve the identity question.

Kroger and Haslett (1993) among others, have conducted retrospective research on women using Marcia's framework. Identity statuses were analysed by Haslett and Kroger (1993) in relation to types of family interaction, development patterns over time and personality variable associated with each identity model. The results indicate that identity achieved adolescents were generally located in families which emphasised connectedness and individuality in parent-child relationships. The researchers noted that the role of the father appeared to be crucial in identity achievers' lives. Kroger (1993) found that foreclosure adolescents' family of origin were more authoritarian and conformist themselves, stereotypic in their relationships, employing conventional rather than reflective reasoning. Kroger (1993) also found that diffusion adolescents frequently reported parental rejection or disinterest. She noted that different identity statuses create their own life context, so foreclosures choose to remain in highly structured situations and to enter into relationships with a hierarchical power structure. Identity achievers may seek more challenging opportunities in which to develop. Their relationships tended to be more egalitarian. Josselson (see Mercer, 1989) observed continuity in identity status over time, except where some crisis or educational intervention precipitated a transition. Josselson (1997) found that foreclosed women were very family orientated, dominated by the need to feel loved and cared for. Foreclosures had bypassed the adolescent task of individuation; their growth has been through identification rather than individuation. Josselson (1997) also emphasised that it was the psychological structure of identity achievers that differentiated them from foreclosures, not the content of their lives.

Bourdieu (1971) thought that knowledge acquired through education creates extra facets to the self which allow individuals to display different aspects or facets of themselves. Pascell and Cox (1994:164) described female students whom they interviewed ‘using education to assert the primacy of the self.’ They noted that the
new or recovered parts of the self, which education coaxed into being, altered the relationship between the self and the world. This transition, which involves perspective transformation, has also been observed by Mezirow (1991) and O'Sullivan (1989) amongst mature students. As Schutz (1973) observed, mature students bring to the education process multiple realities. Kroger (1993) noted that moratorium identity status was prevalent amongst women enrolled in university liberal arts programmes. Others are likely to have a foreclosed identity status or are entering a transition from that status and have chosen, like the moratoriums, to enrol in higher education as a deliberate attempt at personal growth. The resultant development or recovery of the self of foreclosures would represent a greater transition than for other mature students. This transition could precipitate a serious crisis in a relationship, bearing in mind that the married student with this identity status is likely to have entered into an authoritarian relationship. A major change in their identity status would be likely to provoke serious status conflict, which may be exacerbated by cultural alienation.

Hypothesis
My review of the literature and theories of alienation, role balance and identity formation, therefore, led me to form the following hypothesis:

- The return to education leads to a change in the self-concept of mature students.
- The return to education can enhance but can also place strain on the existing primary relationships of mature students.
- The interaction of psychological and cultural factors determine the outcome of the strain.

Conducting the Research
The research was conducted between 1997 and 1998. Two research methods were employed using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. One hundred and fifty eight mature students in three colleges of higher education in Dublin were surveyed, using a structured questionnaire. Ninety-four of the students surveyed were undertaking full-time primary degree programmes and sixty-four were studying degree programmes on a part-time basis. One hundred and twenty five completed questionnaires were returned (see Table 1 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Surveyed</th>
<th>No of Students</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>No. Returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final year full-time 1997</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd &amp; final year full-time 1998</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final year part-time 1998</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Research
All of the students surveyed were invited to participate, with their partners, in a follow-up interview so that they could expand on the issues raised in the survey.
Survey Questionnaire
As with the American and Australian study (see Desmachalier, 1994), the issues examined included the students' age and gender, rationale for enrolment, social class origins and education of both students and partners (where relevant), reactions by significant others, awareness of self development and altered attitudes, relationships with partners and/or children, siblings and friends and the support which students received from their partners and marital stability.

The Interview
Fourteen respondents to the survey agreed to be interviewed. Amongst this group were students whose relationships had survived intact and students who had experienced difficulties. As the partners of the respondents who had experienced serious strain and breakdown in their relationships were unlikely to agree to participate in the interviews, I decided to confine the interviews to the students themselves. Ten of the fourteen volunteers were selected for interview. The selection of interviewees was based on varying social class backgrounds, gender and the quality of the primary relationships of the respondents as reported in the survey. Each volunteer was interviewed alone, using a structured open-ended questionnaire. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and lasted for one hour. The focus of the interview was on the developing self-concept of the student and relationships within their family of origin and with their partners.

Research Findings

Full-time Students Questionnaire Responses

Background Information
The sample of respondents was predominantly female, middle class (71% middle or lower middle class, only 8% manual) ranging in age from 23-65. Their previous level of education was quite extensive (31% had previously attended, though not completed, some third-level course, aside from a foundation course) with just over 9% having left school without completing second-level education, confirming the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey (1998) of a strong co-relation between previous education and participation in adult education. Over half of the male respondents had been employed outside the home prior to coming to college, less than half the female respondents had. Almost half of the respondents were single and had no children (64% had no children under 18). The partners of the respondents were well educated, over half with a third-level qualification and over half were in professional or employer/management occupations, suggesting little risk of alienation.

Table 2: Gender Breakdown of Respondents & Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>With Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partners' Socio-Economic Status and Education
Just over 48% of the respondents' partners were professional or employers/managers, 20% were intermediate non-manual and approximately 17% were skilled or semi-skilled. Eight partners had left school without completing second-level education (this includes two female partners), 48% had either some third level or professional
qualification. The possibility of status conflict and alienation was therefore likely to be low.

**Motivation for Entering College**
Most cited career and personal development as reasons for entering college. Those working in the home or unemployed placed greater emphasis on personal development.

**Support from Partners**
The majority of partners were supportive, especially with regard to financial and domestic support, but were less supportive emotionally and academically, especially the male partners. The male respondents received more domestic, emotional and academic support than the women (half had been unemployed before returning to education). This confirms Desmachelier's (1994) findings that a male head of household would be supported if he were perceived to be upwardly mobile.

**Change in Self Concept**
Self-concept improved for all of the respondents with most reporting increased self-confidence, self-awareness, sense of personal authority and assertiveness and increased insight into others. This indicates some perspective transformation as Mezirow (1991) suggests.

**Alterations in Primary Relationships**
Participation in third-level education had much more impact on the women's lives, especially with regard to their relationships, and this was mostly positive. They reported increased feelings of equality, power, improved communication and domestic support. Those who had worked in the home experienced the greatest improvement in their relationships, but the respondents whose relationships deteriorated were also in this group. Almost half in this category encountered difficulties as opposed to less than a third of those who had been working outside the home. For the men, improved communication with their partners was the most significant change.

**Difficulties Encountered**
Female respondents in general encountered more complex reactions from their partners than males, for whom time was the greatest issue, this applied especially to students who had not previously attended third-level education, confirming the problems of role re-negotiation as referred to in previous studies. It also suggests that these relationships were less egalitarian to begin with.

**Adjustments Which Students Felt They Could Have Made Regarding Relationships**
Over half the respondents said they would not make any changes, but approximately 40% felt that they could have adapted better to changes or difficulties encountered in their relationships. There is much more evidence of guilt and obligation amongst the female than the male respondents, evidence of more traditional family values noted by Whelan (1994).

**Outcome of Difficulties**
Five of the female students' relationships broke down (two of whom were unmarried) two of those had been experiencing serious difficulties prior to coming to college. The
students whose relationships broke down were from different social backgrounds. One of these relationships terminated completely, two resumed happily and two (in the 40-49 age group) on a very uncertain basis. The breakdown rate for this age range amongst the students was 16.9% (no =12), the marital breakdown rate for this age range in the general population was 9.7% (1996 census), almost double the general population - but much less than Desmachelier's findings for the US and Australia. As expected, there was some connection with the level of support provided to the student and the subsequent breakdown in the relationship. Four of the five respondents described above were amongst ten respondents who were interviewed in order to arrive at some understanding of the changes which are taking place in the students' themselves and in their relationships.

**Alterations in Relationships with Others**

The female students recorded a much greater alteration in their relationships with others than the males. Over half of respondents with children felt that going to college had a positive effect on their relationship with their children; 31% felt their relationship with siblings had improved and 11% felt that it had declined, with women recording the greatest change in either direction; 26% felt their relationships with parents improved, just four (all female) recorded a negative reaction. Of note is the deterioration in relationships with friends, 30% of women recording a deterioration, especially for students who had formally not attended third-level. Only two of the male students reported a negative effect.

**Part-time Students Questionnaire Responses**

**Background Information**

The respondents in this sample were again mostly middle class (48% professional/managerial, 42% intermediate non-manual and 8% skilled or semi-skilled). Most (80%) had partners, though 30% of female students had no partner. The age range was broadly similar to full-time respondents but more concentrated; 70% were in 31-45 age range and no respondents were over 50. Almost all were employed full-time outside the home. Women with children were barely visible in this group also, though 57% of the men had children under eighteen. The respondents had a high level of previous education with just 12% having left school without completing second-level. Most of the respondents had been involved in their current relationship for less than twenty years, 14% for less than five years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>With Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Partners' Socio-Economic Status and Education**

Just under 40% of the partners in this sample were in professional, employer/managerial occupations, less than the full-time group. More partners - 33% (mainly female) were in the intermediate non-manual group and 16% were in skilled or semi-skilled occupations. Just over 23% of partners had left school without completing second-level education and 41% had a third-level or professional qualification. This again suggests little risk of alienation for this group.
Motivation for Entering College
Career and personal development were cited as the reasons for entering higher education, with slightly less emphasis on exploring other roles in this group.

Support from Partners
The male partners in this group were much more supportive on all fronts than their counterparts in the full-time group. The female partners were also supportive, but less than the full-time group, suggesting a normative change for this slightly younger and economically active group. The partners in the intermediate non-manual and skilled manual were more supportive domestically than the managerial or professional group. In general, respondents received more emotional than domestic support with almost all partners either very supportive emotionally or supportive, regardless of social class. None of the male partners in this group were not supportive emotionally. Whilst a third of the male partners in the full-time group were not supportive academically, only three (12%) in the part-time sample fell into this category, three non-supportive partners were female. With regard to social class background, five of the non-supportive partners were from a lower professional or intermediate non-manual background; just one was from an unskilled background. Again this suggests a normative change for this age group with both male and female partners appearing to support upward mobility.

Change in Self Concept
Improvement in self-confidence was most evident in this group, followed by increased self-awareness and greater insight into others, with men showing a greater improvement in this case. The respondents increased more in assertiveness than the full-time group.

Alteration in Primary Relationships
As noted above, the respondents in the part-time group indicated a sharp decline in the distribution of domestic tasks, and a sharp decline in communication, this was in direct contrast to the full-time group. Pressure on time and role strain were the main factors cited here rather than gender or social class as both students and partners were working full-time and had young children. Partners were otherwise supportive. Equality and the balance of power in the relationships were the least subject to change, but where there was a change, it was in a positive direction, students with partners in a managerial occupation showed most improvement but also some deterioration with regard to balance of power. Improvement in domestic support was attributable to male partners, 40% of students with female partners reported deterioration in this sphere.

Difficulties Encountered
The students in this group were under severe time pressure and role strain, with male respondents encountering more problems in this area, but 57% of the men had children under eighteen whilst almost none of the women had. Like their full-time female students, the part-time female student encountered a greater variety of problems than the male students did, but to a lesser extent, suggesting that role re-negotiation, as anticipated, was not such an issue for this group.
Adjustments Which Students Felt They Could Have Made Regarding Relationships
Whilst the respondents made adjustments to their study schedules, etc., they were less accommodating than the full-time students and while the female respondents had to grapple with some guilt feelings, it was the men in this group who were more afflicted. There is evidence here of much more egalitarian relationships, with the female respondents displaying more agency and the males more connection.

Outcome of Difficulties
There was no marital breakdown in this group. The contrasts in the length of relationships and the presence of young children may have been factors in this but the relationships themselves had been more satisfactory to begin with. Two current non-marital relationships were terminated by both parties - college was cited as a factor, not the main reason (one was a homosexual relationship). Two previous relationships had broken down, partly as a result of college. Five marital partners threatened to terminate their relationships, the difficulty of allocating time to be together was the main factor cited in all this: all of these relationships survived the experience. Four of the students were male, and the partners’ socio-economic status varied.

Alterations in Relationships with Others
Relationships with parents and children improved, though to a lesser extent than the full-time students, time again was a factor here and daughters’ relationships with parents deteriorated more than sons. Slightly less of the part-time students experienced deterioration in the relationships with friends and gender was not such a significant factor here. Relationships with siblings showed less change - both positive and negative than the full-time students, with women reporting a more negative and males a more positive effect.

Interviews
As noted in the literature review, culture, gender, family and class mediate in the establishment of an identity status. A closer examination of the family backgrounds of a number of mature students provided a broader picture of the factors which contributed to their identity status and the change in their relationships. Eight female and two males students were interviewed. All of the interviewees, with the exception of the two women whose relationships had broken down, enjoyed relationships which were fairly egalitarian. Most of the interviewees appeared to have a fairly well defined sense of self and to have established an achieved identity status. They were determined to balance their own needs as well of the needs of others. Many of them, especially the younger women, had continued to work or study after they married. A number of those women had partners who acted as mentors to them and encouraged them to study. One of the male students was encouraging his wife to study.

The two women whose relationships had broken down seriously, however, had clearly come from authoritarian and unhappy homes. They held more traditional views than the other women did about parenting and their roles as wives, and both had given up work, either when they married or when their first child arrived. They were both studying full-time. Both came from working class backgrounds, the partner of one of the women was working in a skilled manual occupation (though he owns his own company) and had not completed second-level education. The partner of the other student was working as a salaried employee and had a third-level qualification. It was apparent that both women had entered into authoritarian relationships with a
foreclosed identity status. One of the woman, to use her own words, had bypassed her adolescence when her father died when she was sixteen and she had to take responsibility for the family, the other woman's father was an alcoholic and her mother was extremely authoritarian. Both women reached turning points in their lives which caused them to reflect on themselves - one through the birth of her first child and the other when she entered hospital with suspected cancer. Both were subsequently drawn to education. One of the women described entering college as ‘reaching toward me.’ The development of a more assertive identity in these women altered the balance of power in their relationships. Both partners left the relationship as a result, one has subsequently returned, the other relationship has since been terminated.

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to reach an understanding of the impact which participation in higher education has on the self concept and relationships of mature students. The following conclusions have been drawn from my analysis of the data.

The data confirms that mature students enjoy increased self confidence, and personal authority. They develop greater insight into themselves and others and become more assertive, confirming my first hypothesis that participation in higher education changes the self concept of mature students.

The results of the research demonstrate that the personal relationships of mature students are affected by participation in higher education. For most students, the effect is a positive one. Students enjoy improved communication with partners and children, they experience a greater sense of equality and balance of power in their relationships and they become more independent. These positive effects are most evident in female students who have been working within the home for some time and for students who were unemployed prior to returning to education, though there is evidence that the change for women from the private sphere of the home to the public sphere did cause some difficulties around role re-negotiation.

However, participation in higher education places a serious strain on relationships when the following circumstances apply:

- Part-time mature students who are employed in full-time occupations, are married with young children and have partners who also work full-time. These students may be subject to role strain and the pressures on their time will impact negatively on crucial aspects of their relationships, such as communication.
- Mature students who were experiencing difficulties in their relationships prior to returning to education.
- Mature students in stereotypical, traditional relationships, with a hierarchical role structure which is resistant to change. These findings confirm my second hypothesis that the return to education may, in some instances, place strain on an existing primary relationship.
One of the most significant factors in predicting the outcome of the strain on primary relationships is the identity status of the student prior to returning to education. Female students who married young with little time to explore other aspects of the self and who established an early foreclosed identity which was supported by a traditional stereotypical relationship, will experience a profound change in self-concept in higher education. The extent of the change will have very serious consequences for their primary relationships and these may be exacerbated by cultural alienation. This conclusion confirms my third hypothesis that the interaction of cultural and psychological factors will determine the outcome of the strain which participation in higher education can place on existing primary relationships.

Caution needs to exercised regarding a more general application of this last conclusion, since the interview sample was small and further research is needed to corroborate the findings.

Young married women, employed outside the home, seem to be enjoying much more egalitarian relationships than women of the previous generation.

Evidence of cultural alienation and the role of social class as a factor in difficulties which students encountered is not conclusive and does not support the findings of Desmarchelier (1994). The low representation of students from lower socio-economic groups in higher education in Ireland, the high value placed on education here, and gender roles within relationships in Ireland may all be factors in this.

References


DARING TO DREAM:
BARRIERS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR MEN RETURNING TO EDUCATION
FROM A LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED BACKGROUND

Andrew Doherty
Men’s Education Project, South East Men’s Network

Introduction

In this paper I will explore some of the issues affecting long-term unemployed working class men who dare to dream of accessing third level education. Throughout the paper I will draw on my own experience of unemployment and as an adult education returnee. To illustrate my points I will refer to a course which I co-facilitated with a colleague, Paul Clifford, a leader with the Kilkenny Men’s Group, to highlight the barriers as reported by men from the South East area. I will complete the paper with some recommendations about how long term unemployed men could be engaged and supported in their choice of returning to education and maintained within the college system. Supporting men to access education is one aspect of my present work with the South East Men’s Network. This is funded under the Education Equality Initiative of the Department of Education and Science.

Although much of the information contained in this paper is from personal experience it draws heavily on the experience, encouragement and advice of my immediate family and the friends that I have made over a number of years. Breda Murphy and her colleagues in the Waterford Women’s Centre, Maevé O’Grady at the Adult Education Department of WIT and Glynis Currie of Framework, the S.E. Support Agency for the Community Development Programme; especially, however, those friends within the Network over the last six years and the shared learning from the process of the work of the South East Men’s Network. I wouldn’t be standing here without them and this paper would not be the same without their input.

Considering Educationally Disadvantaged Men: Who are They?

When I consider this topic I think of men who are unable to read and write, men with disabilities who have had to fight for the level of education they have, travellers, unemployed, underemployed, refugees, asylum seekers, men with psychological problems, the homeless and elderly, and men that have left school early for whatever reason. I could add more to the list.

The majority of men I work with at present come from a long-term unemployed working class background. They often consider themselves looked down on by other working class people. Their experiences in school were generally poor for a variety of reasons. These experiences have been internalised as being their fault. They would feel it was their failure not the system’s.

However, there is an expanding body of research which shows that the Irish educational system has failed working class people for generations (Inglis & Murphy 1999). The majority do worse than middle class people because they lack even the
equality of access. They lack the financial resources to be able to benefit from the experience of school. Worse still, middle class values and attitudes are attributed and expected within the education system denying working class children’s own way of living. The issues and solutions have been shaped by middle-class academics and researchers (Drudy & Lynch 1993; Anthony O’Halloran, Irish Times, Sept 2002).

Through working with the people in the Network, a clear picture emerges of these men; A high level of mistrust of the educational system, bad memories of school, poor self-confidence and low self-esteem. They have a history of unemployment or under-employment, and most find themselves with no clear direction. This paper concentrates on how long-term unemployed men could be encouraged to consider, apply to, and be sustained within, the third level sector.

**Barriers to Participation: a Closer Look**

In November 2001 Paul Clifford and I facilitated a workshop and education development group for men who had returned to education or were thinking about it. Paul, like myself, was a mature student, who had recently started a third level course in WIT. He also had a long track record of working with men spanning six years, much of it as a leader with the Kilkenny Men’s Group. We also shared a history of unemployment. One of the sessions examined the barriers these men faced, including themselves. These responses were then used within the broader activity of the Network to develop a fuller understanding and perspective. For the purpose of this paper I have categorised the responses into four main areas: Psychological, Cultural, Male Conditioning and Financial.

**Psychological**

Previous school experience was a major barrier which affected not just returning to education, but also to life in general. The most common issue which emerges is the implicit, and more often than not explicit, messages men got in school about their abilities. Men spoke about not being good enough, being a failure in both the teachers’ eyes and their parents: ‘Nobody gives a shit about what I want – I’ve never been asked what I think I need, or what I’d like to do’ (Harland, 1997 p24).

Fear is also a major factor. Fear within class-rooms which led to being incapable of taking part or getting things right. ‘the big one is fear. Am I able for it? There’s no one to tell you you’re good enough’ (Owens, 2000, p 26). As one of the men in the Men’s Education Project put it ‘I was at the back of the class. As long as I shut my mouth and kept my head down I was alright. I’m still trying to undo that thinking’. Men also speak of an atmosphere of fear. Men speak of sitting there waiting for the verbal abuse/violence to start. In many cases this tension was as bad if not worse than the event itself.

Many of the men state clearly that they were forced out of school; they weren’t wanted, they were disruptive or ‘too thick to be taught’. ‘They (the teachers) either ignored me or humiliated me. It’s only now I really see that I wasn’t wanted there, but I knew it on some level at the time’ (Men’s Education Project).
Violence was also a huge factor in these men’s experiences. Being beaten or psychologically threatened by teachers was a constant reality. For others, it also came from their classmates. In certain cases it also included the Guards and home. Some men turned to violence to vent their frustration. As one man from the MEP put it recently: ‘It was a cycle of fear. Fear of what the teachers would do, of what would happen at home and the response of the guards. I just exploded’.

What has emerged through the Men’s Education Project is that more often than not this anger, fear and frustration is directed at themselves. Again it was their fault. Something they did, or did not do: ‘Most often, however, the convulsions of anger are directed inward. Thus, the poor, the needy, the misfits of society implode. After the debris settles, they appear to the onlookers as dry husks of hopelessness’ (Maya Angelou, 1997).

These negative effects on men as young students have emerged time and again within the present EEI initiative as significant barriers. They are well known in the context of the work of the South East Men’s Network. They are also very familiar to my own experience. But these negative effects don’t explain the difficulties alone.

Cultural Barriers
Looking back over the stories we’ve heard and more clearly understanding our own stories, it is clear that social position or class culture has a very definite impact on progression into education and the extent to which this progression stems:

A person’s social class heavily influences their life chances. The poor are unlikely to get speedy access to healthcare. Elites who commit wrongdoing rarely go to prison. Prison places are apparently a privilege reserved for citizens from marginalised communities. Poverty is not a middle class phenomenon. Employment opportunities are like-wise heavily influenced by an individual’s social class position. Educational participation rates will obviously reflect these broader societal patterns. From the moment an infant enters primary school, social class will be a major factor. (Anthony O’Halloran. *Irish Times*, 23.09.02)

Where you came from was a big factor. From personal experience in secondary school, class mates from particular housing estates being singled out for abuse and ridicule. The phrase ‘sure nothing good ever came from there’ was often used by teaching staff.

I remember well clearing the dinner table for homework which was completed in front of the telly and amid the normal activities within the home. There was no other heated room. I also remember calling to neighbours who might have a dictionary or encyclopaedia to assist in completing homework.

I also remember being asked to step out into the corridor with the principle after he announced to the class that certain parents hadn’t paid the ‘quarterly donation’ to the sports hall and that he’d need to speak to pupils about it. Through his actions he had made it obvious that my family was a guilty party. He might as well have announced the names from the top of the class. ‘For it is hateful to be young, bright, ambitious and poor. The added insult is to be aware of one’s poverty’ (Maya Angelou, 1997).
Another factor in my education that always intrigued me was that my class was made up of students from the same social background as my own. I thought that it was something particular to my class in school until I came across the term ‘streaming’. What is now clear is that students from particular backgrounds were grouped together. In our school at the time classes in a particular year were numbered one to eight. My class was one near the bottom. The teachers were never considered as good or the classes as comfortable as for those boys in the classes higher up. ‘Their schooldays were predominantly depicted as fraught with a struggle to preserve their dignity in the face of streaming, labelling and class discrimination’. (Owens, 2000 p.25)

A family’s educational history is also significant. My father had a Leaving Certificate, one of very few in his generation, and his view was that his sons should have the same. This was always encouraged at home. However, college was never spoken about and I didn’t even realise such places existed until years after doing the Leaving Certificate. Just as well, as there would have been no money to send us to college in any case. This attitude compares with the situation of another man I spoke to recently who has difficulties reading and writing. His father kept him home from school so that he could help him with work. His father’s opinion was that not attending school had no adverse affect on him, so why should it on his son.

Information, and the lack of it, is also an indicator of culture. There is a dearth of information within working class communities in relation to education and so much more. This is often overlooked or worse, diminished. There is a reaction that people on the dole know all about their entitlements. Of course many of them do. It’s essential to survive. It’s part of their cultural capital, a valuable knowledge, something which people need to know. Information about education is considered much less important and as such has little currency.

Effects of Male Conditioning
Although linked to everything that was listed previously it is worth distinguishing male conditioning as a barrier. Men still have an expectation of themselves as the breadwinners within Irish society. Even within families where some of the gender conditioning has begun to be reversed, men still battle with their own implied understanding of their manhood and the overt messages they get from society.

Even when unemployed, it is as if any other avenue bar a job, no matter how menial, is out of the question. Any spare money would be used for the kids or the house or the pub rather than self development. One man put it plainly: ‘school is something you do when you’re young, then you work’ (Men’s Education Project). When their partners are in full-time employment men may be required to stay in the home childminding and doing housework. Admitting this may prove difficult.

Reading Men on the Move, a study of the barriers to male participation, shows strong evidence of the role masculinity plays in holding men back and creating what is termed in that report as a ‘taboo zone’.

In society we ‘…equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control…’. Men are expected to conform to this ideal, particularly within their own peer group. Any deviation runs the risk of being labelled, ‘sissy’ or ‘gay’. This then ‘forecloses possibilities of different ways of being…’ (Owens, 2000, p.27). For men
to admit a weakness takes a huge step. Although they may yearn for a return to education they may perceive this as a weakness and so conform to the stereotype rather than challenge their self identity or the peer group.

The peer group is relevant because:

…the ability for fluidity and creativity in the construction of one’s identity and reality is diminished by the debilitating impact of the experience of exclusion in school and wider society. The data suggest that loss of belief in the self through these experiences strengthens reliance on peer group approval as a source of affirmation of identity. (Owens, 2000, p.27)

In other words, people who have already experienced difficulties within the school system tend to cling to their peer identity even when they realise it is not what they want. In a sense they have found a place to belong, somewhere they fit in, they’re safe and secure, they have an identity and a degree of personal pride: ‘I was the only one in my area that passed the 11+ and I felt like shit because they all slagged me and all-so I left that school and went to the same school as my mates’ (Harland’ 1997, p.24).

Financial Barriers
As stated previously men have an expectation of themselves as breadwinners ‘If your work allows you only to survive you are judged to be not much of a man. To be poor in a consumerist society is to have failed the manhood test’ (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1999, p.123). Money is seen as essential for the family or the home. Anything left over is a luxury. For many of the men we work with the thought of spending what is left over on education would be a waste. But even where the education is free problems arise.

A commitment is required to going to college or onto any course. Many of the men would be in part time or occasional work. Their flexibility is what matters and is expected by employers. Where any initiative gets in the way of this work flexibility problems arise. Men would generally prefer to avoid such clashes, but, where they arise work usually wins out.

Considering Appropriate Provision

In this section I want to divide the topic into two main parts. Firstly, awareness-building which includes predevelopment work. Secondly, learning provision and support. This is written from the perspective of what I would consider best practice within the SEMN Men’s Education Project, and a dream of what third-level education might look like in the future.

Awareness Building
Considering the above barriers for long term unemployed men there seems to be little value in mail shots or advertisements in papers to engage with them. Education is not seen as a viable alternative. At a personal level it is feared and mistrusted. For many their experience is one of powerlessness, they are ordered rather than listened to, not consulted and undervalued as human beings. This needs to be acknowledged and dealt with before we can proceed.
Acceptance of these barriers raises serious questions. An approach informed by these issues needs at every stage to undo the barriers and experiences of the target group and provide the type of service that values and empowers the individual or group towards a point where personal choice, responsibility and decision-making can take place. It should have no agenda save to raise awareness and be prepared to support an individual.

This awareness-raising must begin from the perspective of respect for the person. A face-to-face contact is a prerequisite. Building a relationship is essential, leading to a level of trust which allows openness and meaningful dialogue to take place.

Our present approach within the South East Men’s Network has been successful, in that it works in the community where these men live, it builds a relationship based on mutual respect and its purpose is principally to undo much of the negative experiences, focusing on the inherent skills and abilities of the man and bringing about a process of personal growth and value. 8

Individual men reach a point where they are willing to move on. For some it may be education, but not for all. For those that do make this decision, the Men’s Education Project provides a course which explores the issues which came up for them at school and begin the process of undoing some of those that were negative. As part of the process there is also the need to explore what it is that they enjoy doing or feel passionate about. This provides clues as to what they would like to pursue in college. Gardiner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences is used as a means to identify their preferred learning style and what that means in terms of the course delivery that would suit them.

Using the knowledge gained from this process we may recommend a visit to Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults based in Waterford City. There they could look at the options which are available, have professional guidance and advice and bring back the information they need to make an informed decision. Their decision would be their own, but made with all the relevant information. The most important aspect being that it is something they themselves are interested in, want to pursue and can see an outcome at the end that interests them.

**Learning Provision and Support**

Once men make the decision to go on to college, the following provisions are essential:

**Access:** Any adult proceeding into third-level deserves a fair and equitable system of admission. For this purpose I would consider an application and interview process as the best means of choosing candidates. Where candidates are unsuccessful I would like to see a feedback system which provides some level of guidance and support so that candidates don’t feel that they have failed, but rather have identified areas for improvement. I would also like to see a user friendly APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) process (Maeve O’Grady WIT., 2002) that relates to the individual’s life.

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8 For more on our approach see a talk delivered by the Director of the SEMN Alan O’Neill at the Aontas Millennium Conference; Celebrating Difference: Gender Equality and Life-long Learning. Aontas 2001.
experiences and personal abilities, affirming these and valuing their uniqueness in relation to the overall learning environment of college.

**Financial**: Courses need to be **free** for these men. That should be a starting point. Adequate provision of finance is also required so that they would neither be out of pocket nor losing a day’s pay. This also has an impact with regard to their families; that they are not losing out on making money by doing the course. It also has a resonance within their communities making it easier to stand over their decision within the peer group.

**Course delivery**: I would see several course requirements. It would be beneficial if courses, whether part time or full time, were **modular** in delivery, **flexible** in the scheduling and location and which would allow them to take up particular modules as they are free to do so rather than having to fit the schedule of the college. **Ongoing assessment** would be a necessary aspect to awarding returnees. Another aspect would be a built in **review** of the modules which would focus on the relevance of the material, style of delivery, responsibilities of the returnees and other issues which arise. The process of this should be open and allow for class discussion around the issues that come up leading to a breaking down of the isolation often felt by adult returnees. This should be done by a person with a good knowledge of the overall course who is willing/able to effect changes where necessary. A **mentoring service** which allows people to bring other issues, perhaps more confidential, or that are felt to be private, would also be a requirement.

**Course Tutor**: Tutors of such programmes would have an **understanding of the issues** faced by adult returnees and an ability to respond to the process within the class as well as the task. **Feedback** would be provided on a regular/as needs basis with the students and an ability to identify and either **handle or refer difficulties** would be essential. Another essential element is to see the learning experience as a **two-way process**. Adult returnees bring a whole life experience with them, unique abilities, experiences and perspectives. A tutor that fails to understand and appreciate this resource is failing to appreciate some of the most basic intelligences of these individuals. This failure also denies the learning institution an opportunity to learn and grow of itself. Given the type of commitment this would take, **adequate payment and timetabling** for the tutor recognising the time involved would be essential.

**Peer support** People need somewhere to bring up the struggles and name the issues that emerge from returning to college. Within the Network we provide an **Education Development Group** for the men to discuss openly the difficulties, share them with others, take time to acknowledge the struggles and recognise and own their progress. This process is something we have found to work with all the students who have approached us, whether adult or mainstream, vocational, secondary or third level. Of course, it is also something the men would have to choose for themselves.
Conclusion

In this paper I have looked at the situation of long-term unemployed working class men with regard to educational disadvantage. I have highlighted some of the barriers to returning to education and suggested a way of working to undo the barriers and promote a successful experience in third level education.

The ultimate conclusion drawn is that the system that was and is in place serves to keep these men in a marginalised place. It ignores their values, undermines their abilities and serves to alienate them from society.

Provision for long term unemployed men returning to education should recognise the damage already done by the system and seek to redress this through a process that values, respects, affirms and rewards adult returnees. I believe that this would create a system that is honest, respectful, inclusive, understanding and open itself to challenge, growth and change.

References

Inglis T & Murphy M. (1999). No Room For Adults. UCD. Dublin

Other Publications /Writings Which Have Informed the Paper

*North Leitrim Men’s Group.*

NEHB


GENDER IMBALANCE IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

Laura Sullivan, Martha Burton and Lucy McAuley

There is a growing acceptance within the engineering community that there needs to be major changes in the culture of engineering and as part of this, a greater participation of women (McClean et al. 1997)

Introduction

Engineering remains the one major area in third-level education in Ireland where women are grossly under-represented (McAuley & Looney 1996). This paper attempts to raise awareness about the lack of female participation in the world of engineering, suggests possible reasons for the deficiency, highlights the classification of various problems that may arise due to gender imbalance and puts forward suggestions as to how this imbalance may be corrected. It also explores the factors that influence career choice at 2nd level and then goes on to consider the impact of being a minority at 3rd level.

Factors Affecting Career Choice at 2nd Level

One major contributing factor is that engineering is perceived as a dirty, oily, rough, working environment where heavy manual work is required (Greek 1994). This misconception is held not only by students, but also by their parents, teachers and career guidance counsellors. With this view in mind, females tend to be veered away from studying technical subjects at Junior Certificate level in secondary school such as Metalwork, Materials Technology (woodwork) and Technical Graphics and sometimes Science subjects such as Physics and Chemistry, and are therefore much more likely to study subjects such as Home Economics, Art, Music, Languages and Business Studies. At Leaving Certificate level, males are over-represented in subjects such as Construction Studies, Engineering and Technical Drawing, whereas females show an over-representation in Home Economics (social studies) (Dept. of Education (1993/1994). While there are significant differences in the subjects chosen by males and females, these choices do not appear to have a negative impact on female academic performance. It is, however, very likely to have a significant impact on the types of courses taken at third level and the careers that young women are likely to pursue in the future (Clancy, 1995a).

Another factor relating to the low number of females attracted to engineering courses could be a result of the lack of technical subjects available at Leaving Certificate level in single sex (female) schools. A lot of single sex (female) schools do not offer technical subjects such as Technical Drawing, Construction Studies or Engineering which are more readily available in male-only schools and mixed schools. Therefore, attendees of all-female schools are missing out on the opportunity to gain a valuable insight into the world of engineering. Since 1992, some single sex schools introduced Technology as a Junior Certificate subject, with a content that reflects the modern technological world (McAuley & Looney, 1996). In many cases, though, these
schools do not have any follow-up subjects and the students are therefore faced with having to pick non-technical/engineering subjects for the Leaving Certificate. The problem here is obvious. Some students who may have developed a keen interest or discovered a natural talent/liking for engineering are then denied the opportunity to pursue preferred interests. Not only are engineering/technical subjects not offered in some single sex (female) schools, but it is also the case with science subjects. Certain schools lack the facilities to offer subjects such as Physics and Chemistry and these subjects offer a base for studying engineering.

Further possibilities as to why females find themselves distanced from the engineering profession may include:

- Whether through media advertising or biased parenting, ‘little boys toys’ have always and continue to generally include such mechanically orientated gismos as Meccano, Lego, My first toolkit and the likes. Little girls, however are nearly always the target of non-mechanical toys such as Barbie, My little pony, My first tea-set etc…
- Girls are less likely to be exposed to examples of engineering professions and to be encouraged to view themselves as potential engineers (Henes et al., 1995). For example, girls are more likely to want to follow in their mother’s footsteps, whereas boys generally want to follow in the father’s footsteps.

Gender Divide in 3rd Level Education
A study entitled ‘Intellectually Interesting or Interesting because of One’s Sex’ completed at the University of Oulu, Finland gives an insight into the experiences of female and male students in varied disciplines and suggests that the attitudes of certain lecturers do differ clearly on the base of one’s sex (High Heels to High Tech 2001). From these findings, it was decided to further investigate how gender affects the way one is treated in the field of engineering. This may have a greater impact where there is a large gender imbalance, as is the case in engineering. Due to the fact that the percentage of females in engineering is quite low, one cannot draw valid conclusions, however, classified below are some of the problems that can arise for female engineering students at 3rd level.

Classification of the Problems

Classroom Environment:
- Can be related to the feeling of isolation of being one of few females or being alone.
- Jokes/remarks made about being a female in engineering or sexual comments from male peers.
- Being afraid to ask questions for fear of being ridiculed.
- Not been taken seriously by lecturers at the beginning of a college course and feeling the need to prove oneself by working extra hard to attain the same respect as the male counterparts. (Also the further one progresses i.e. to diploma or degree status, the more respect one receives).
- Not standing up for yourself because its you against the ‘rest of them’.
- Can be a very competitive environment.
• Having one’s ideas ignored (during lab sessions) by the other students in their group, only to have another male in the group repeat the idea and see ‘everyone jump on it’ (Madden, 1997).

• If women are in an environment in which they perceive differential treatment, but their male counterparts do not, it can sometimes serve to increase the gender divide between the males and females. For example, females may be reluctant to express their concerns about differential treatment from men because of the likelihood that their perspective will be disregarded (Heyman et al., 2002).

• Being referred to as Miss X, whereas the male students are referred to on a first name basis.

• Being conscious of male counterparts ‘checking them out all the time’. Having to carefully choose the clothes one wears when making presentations. Wearing a skirt or dress, and being subjected to comments such as ‘trying to gain extra marks by showing off a bit of leg’.

**Personality:**

• Personality can play a large part in how females perceive the way in which they are treated by both their male classmates and lecturers. More extrovert female engineering students do not express feelings of being singled out and treated differently in comparison to their male counterparts. However this could be due to the fact that they don’t pay attention to remarks passed and are ‘willing to give as good as they get’.

• Women tend to be very sensitive and take things to heart more easily than their male counterparts.

**Background Knowledge/Skills:**

• Absence of mechanical activities prior to college which can lead to a lack of self-confidence or a fear of failure. Nowadays, males have as little hands-on experience in labs as women, but are less likely to see it as a weakness or to display ignorance of it.

• Lack of physical strength

• Some lecturers are very protective of female students, treating them more like a daughter and using different language around them.

• Boys usually blame an academic problem on the teacher, textbook or external factor, whereas girls tend to blame themselves. Boys also tend to openly mock others who show any sign of weakness. (McMurdy, 1992).

**Lack of Role Models:**

• Female students generally don’t have access to a large number of female staff, who have shared similar experiences and whose very presence says ‘stick with it, you can do it!’ as their male counterparts do. One study found that no heads of engineering departments in the IT system were female, on average between 4.4% and 5% of lecturers were female (depending on grade), and that only 5% of engineering technicians were women (Women Staff in Irish Colleges, Conference Proceedings, 1995).
Statistics of Female Engineering Participation and Grades Obtained in I.T. Tallaght

Figures 1 to 3 below represent the difference in numbers between the male and female participation in Mechanical/Manufacturing Engineering courses. There is also quite a significant difference in the number of females continuing their studies from Certificate to Diploma and then on to Degree.

Fig 1: Comparison of the number of Males and Females at Certificate Level in Mechanical Engineering

![Number of Male / Female Students Graduating in Mechanical Engineering at Certificate Level versus Year](chart1.png)

Fig 2: Comparison of the Number of Males and Females at Diploma Level in Manufacturing Engineering

![Number of Male / Female Students Graduating in Manufacturing Engineering at Degree Level versus Year](chart2.png)
Fig 3: Comparison of the Number of Males and Females at Degree Level in Manufacturing Engineering

For example, in 1996, six women completed the Certificate. In 1997, this number reduced to 3 for the Diploma and then only one female student went on to complete the Degree in 1999. The experiences described previously may be a factor contributing to the low level of female engineering students entering and advancing to Diploma or Degree level.

Figures 4 to 6 below represent the grades obtained by the female students participating in Mechanical / Manufacturing courses at Certificate, Diploma and Degree Level.

Fig 4: Grades Awarded to Female Students at Certificate Level in Mechanical Engineering

Statistics of female students in Mechanical Engineering at Certificate Level in terms of Distinction, Merit and Pass

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
<th>Merit</th>
<th>Pass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>[5]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>[1]</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>[6]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>[3]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>[4]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Total Number of Females]
Fig 5: Grades Awarded to Female Students at Diploma Level in Manufacturing Engineering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Females</th>
<th>% of Dist, Mer and Pass Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>[4]</td>
<td>0% 20% 60% 80% 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>[0]</td>
<td>0% 20% 60% 80% 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>[3]</td>
<td>0% 20% 60% 80% 100%</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>[3]</td>
<td>0% 20% 60% 80% 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>[5]</td>
<td>0% 20% 60% 80% 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>[4]</td>
<td>0% 20% 60% 80% 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>[2]</td>
<td>0% 20% 60% 80% 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 6: Grades Awarded to Female Students at Degree Level in Manufacturing Engineering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Females</th>
<th>% of 1.1's and 2.1's Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>[1]</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>[1]</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>[1]</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>[4]</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that the female engineering students who proceed to Diploma and Degree Levels are performing equally well and are proving to be very capable in a discipline which is typically dominated by males. For example, in 2001 at Degree Level, seven students were awarded 1st class honours, two of which were female. Ten students were awarded 2nd class honours, two of which were female. Six students were awarded pass grades, all of which were male.

Solutions to Counteract the Negative Experiences Faced by Females During College

Mentoring
Mentoring of young women is ideal for a number of reasons:

- Young people often make career decisions because of shining examples, so it is important that girls in secondary education become acquainted with young female engineers, and with their environment. This can be achieved through ‘role model days’, where female engineers visit schools and talk about their careers or where second level students get the opportunity to spend a day accompanying an engineer to get an insight into the world of engineering.
• Young people are more open to information coming from a person who is close to themselves in age and experience.

Mentorlink is a three-year project funded by the Equality for Women Measure under the Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan, 2000 – 2006 which has been proposed and developed in the Institute of Technology in Tallaght.

The overall aim of the project is to develop and implement a structured mentoring programme in order to:

• Address the lack of women entering engineering programmes.
• Improve the retention of female students in engineering courses.
• Promote equality and career advancement for female graduates entering the workplace.

The following are measures and initiatives to be taken as part of the project:

• Mentoring of female school-leavers by third level students
• Formation of a student network of female engineering students: MINERVA
• Setting up of a structured e-mentoring programme where third level students and recent graduates are mentored by female technicians and engineers in industry
• Development of a training program for mentors
• Research into the experiences of women working as technicians and engineers

Networking
• A network for female engineering students allows them the opportunity to get to know other female engineering students in different years in their own college and in other colleges. This can help to remove the feeling of isolation as previously discussed.
• Raise awareness of the difficulties faced in common

2nd Level Education / Subject Availability
• Educate parents, second level teachers and career guidance counsellors as to what engineering actually is and to illustrate to them just how valuable women are in the engineering industry and how female engineering students consistently outperform their male counterparts
• Introduce technical / engineering and science subjects in all female secondary schools
• Organise school trips for students to visit large engineering companies to gain a further insight into engineering as a career (e.g. STEPS Program)

Lecturer / Gender Awareness
• Incorporate gender / friendly examples in course material
• Ensure that the curriculum development process is gender proofed i.e. move away from courses being designed ‘by men for men’
• Give consideration to how course delivery and assessment methods can be developed to suit female students as much as male students e.g. project based assessment

Equality Issues
• Raise awareness of equality issues among lecturing staff and students
• Since the Equality Authority was set up in Ireland in 1998, all 3rd level institutions are required to have an equality policy. This responsibility is not just to fulfil a written requirement but to promote equality education and awareness in all areas of the institution. This can make a significant difference to 3rd level students not only in terms of gender, but disability, race and other inequalities in 3rd level education. It is therefore necessary to make these equality policies readily available to both staff and students and to summarise the benefits of implementing and maintaining these policies for all.

Conclusion

This paper was written in an attempt to raise awareness about the lack of female participation in the world of engineering and to suggest possible solutions to correct this imbalance.
Even when 50/50 gender balance is achieved in engineering, societal gender issues will still remain. Educators cannot expect to solve these issues alone but they have an important role in encouraging and establishing measures that can be taken to raise awareness and address this imbalance. It is vital that the awareness of equality issues across the board within institutions/universities be acknowledged and that proper procedures are outlined if such problems occur. Mentorlink can tackle some of the afore-mentioned problems but it is evident that there needs to be some interventions made at Departmental Level, within Institutes of Technology and Universities ‘to start the ball rolling’ in changing the culture of engineering so that it is more friendly which in turn will result in a greater number of females in the engineering profession.

References


‘Intellectually Interesting or Interesting because of One’s sex’ (2001) High Heels to Hi-Tech, The International Conference, Oulu, Finland, pp66.


The Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science

Rhona MacSweeney

The Past

- The Department has had an equality programme for 18 years – established following the publication of the ESRI Report “Schooling and Sex Roles” (Hannan 1983).
- Specific interventions and positive actions at primary and secondary levels only.
- In the 1990s 18 projects were undertaken or supported by the Equality Committee

Types of Interventions

- Eliminating Sex-Role Stereotyping in Education - range of publications, posters and videos
- Awareness raising of educational choices for both male and female students
- Promoting Gender Equality in the Teaching Profession
- In-Service training
The Present

- Under section 5.155 of the National Development Plan, the Department of Education and Science was provided with funding for a Gender Equality Unit to coordinate and monitor the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all areas of the education system.
- The Unit is co-funded by the European Union Structural Funds.
- Positive Actions will continue to complement mainstreaming.

Goals of the Unit

- Assist the Department to move from a perceived gender neutral to a gender visible position in all areas of education.
- Introduce a gender perspective into the planning and design stages of all curricula, syllabuses, programmes and into all actions undertaken by the Department.
- Move from dispersed unrelated actions to strategic programmed integration of gender.
- Develop measures for evaluation and reporting and models of good practice.

Data Collection

- Statistics Section Review of the current indicators under which data relevant to gender issues are collected.
- This review will provide a baseline of information as well as identifying gaps where new indicators may be required in order to monitor progress in achieving equality between the sexes.
Further Education Management Information System

When it is operational it will give information on participants in:
1. Youthreach
2. Vocational training Opportunities Scheme
3. Senior Traveller Training Centres
4. Adult Literacy Programmes
5. Access, outcome and benefit

Education Services Interactive – 12 months

Additional Support for the Unit

- National Advisory Committee - stakeholders, gender balance
- Research Committee - NCCA, 2 gender experts from university sector
- Panel of Experts - for research and training (40)

Current Activities

- Discussions with Information Technology Unit – develop web page.
- Equality Guidelines for Schools and Colleges of Further Education – Equality Authority
- Gender Maths and the Classroom
- Analysis of the Achievement of boys and girls in the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations /...
Slide 10

- Boys, Men and Masculinities
- Exploring Masculinities Review
- Report on the Launch of the National Development Plan Gender Equality Programme in Education

Slide 11

**What Else does the Unit do**

- Sit on Committees - internal, gender, equality and national
- Participate at conferences - national, EU and international
- Planning and publication of materials
- In-service training
- Internal and external reporting
- Contact and information service

Slide 12

**The Future**

- Statistics Publication
- Guidelines for Gender Impact Assessment and Gender Mainstreaming
- Target females to consider courses and careers in science and technology
- Target males to consider teaching, particularly primary teaching
- Develop work with the Further Education Sector
- Develop work with the Third Level Sector
Slide 1

Dr. Myrtle Hill
Director, Centre for Women’s Studies
&
Member, Women’s Forum
QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Slide 2

Queen’s Gender Initiative
2000

This initiative arose from the Women’s Forum, set up in September 1999 at the request of the Vice-Chancellor, to investigate gender issues at Queen’s University Belfast (QUB).

Slide 3

Women’s Forum
Core Aims and Objectives

Aim:

To address the issue of gender imbalance at QUB by improving the profile and position of women within the University.
Slide 4

Senior Management by Gender as at 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Dean</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Institute</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Administrative Unit</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>60 (83%)</td>
<td>12 (17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EO Unit Statistical Information

* The post of Academic Registrar has since been filled by a woman

Slide 5

Academic Staff by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof (17:141)</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader/ Senior Lecturer (69:179)</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer B (68:171)</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer A (91.61)</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>75.9% (175:552)</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic Staff by Gender - February 2000

Female

Male

Slide 6

Academic-Related Staff by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 (9:12)</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5 (11:20)</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 (12:19)</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 (11:41)</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 (22:50)</td>
<td>51.49</td>
<td>48.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 (10:7)</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>54.2% (130:154)</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Slide 7**

**Clerical Staff by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 2 (98:2)</th>
<th>Grade 3 (192:4)</th>
<th>Grade 4 (147:3)</th>
<th>Grade 5 (78:2)</th>
<th>Grade 6 (24:4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total 97.3:2.7% (539:15)**

**Slide 8**

**The National Picture - Bett Report 1999**

- Provision of a clear statement of policies on equal opportunities and of the specific steps taken to ensure equality for women
- Provision of developmental training so that women are ready to pass through present glass ceilings
- Development of clear mechanisms and criteria for promotion
- Adoption of objective job evaluation schemes
- Consideration of the use of targets appropriate to the particular institution
- Provision of active policies to deliver equal opportunities for ethnic minority staff

**Slide 9**

**The QUB Approach**

- Not just women at the top - improving life for all!
- Not just academic women - all categories of staff!
- Not just women in SET - in all faculties and units!
- Not a single issue - changing the culture!
- Not imposed solutions - what the women actually need!
Slide 10

The First Steps

- 8 seminars in the course of Spring 2000
- Appointment of Gender Champion - July 2000
- Setting up of Gender Initiative Office - Summer 2000

Slide 11

Process

- Support from the top
- Communication with the workforce
- Place in the structure of the organisation
- Identification of the weak links
- Broadening ownership
- Monitoring

Slide 12

Impact - The Recommendations

1. Work/Life Balance

- family-friendly policies re-launched with booklet and website - October 2000
- flexible working for clerical staff mainstreamed for all units from 1 August 2002.
Impact - The Recommendations

2. Central Maternity Cover
   - to allow women staff anxiety-free maternity leave
   - set up from 1 August 2001
   - maternity the only criterion
   - 34 women have been able to benefit so far
   - to be mainstreamed from 1 January 2003

Impact - The Recommendations

3. Staff Childcare
   - audit completed February 2001
   - short-term implementation achieved 2001-02:
     - longer hours in existing facilities
     - 3 extra weeks in summer scheme
     - extended activities - basketball/netball/computers/languages
     - voucher scheme
   - new house identified for 50 children
   - Pro-Vice-Chancellor identified to oversee a joined up policy
   - went to Senate July 2002

Impact - The Recommendations

4. Clerical Staff
   - internal trawl for all posts above Grade 2
   - two papers from clerical sub-group to be integrated into Human Resource policy document.
   - appraisal to be instituted 2002-03
5. Academic Women – Mentoring and Networking
   - mentoring at bottom half of Lecturer B - 2001-02
   - mentoring at bottom half of Senior Lecturer - 2002-03
   - networking: Professiorial dining group
   - overhaul of promotions, discretionary points, professorial banding
   - advancement Group

6. The Women’s Forum
   - meets once per month
   - membership is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is representative
   - visits of national champions to advise us
   - joint meetings with the University of Ulster
   - first regional launch of the Equality Challenge Unit
   - targeted seminars
   - Athena projects and LAWN
   - sub-groups of the Forum with a champion for each recommendation

7. Equal Pay
   - sub-group examined current state of play
   - one anomaly in one Faculty was examined and targeted for correction
   - specifically recommended monitoring to be mainstreamed from 2002-03
8. The Culture
- unveiling of the first portrait of a woman Professor in the Great Hall
- major art commission (£24,000 from the Vice-Chancellor’s Fund) to celebrate the achievements of women from the foundation and into the future
- Honorary Degrees - 33% women 2001-02 (0% - 2000-01)

9. Resources
- Queen’s Gender Initiative Office
- Director for the Gender Initiative
- Administrator
- Secretary
- Budget: £64,000

10. A Voice
- register of women willing to serve on University committees
- women conveners of Appointment Panels increased by 900%
- Advancement Group
Impact - The Recommendations

11. Targets and Timetables
- seminar with Susan Atkins
- Human Resources Strategy 2001-02
- to be finalised 16 October and taken to November Women’s Forum.

Impact - The Recommendations

12. Research and Publicity
- Opportunity Now Best Practice Visits
- Athena-funded research project with Loughborough
- internal, local, national coverage

Listening to the Women of Queen’s
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Professor Pat O’Connor
University of Limerick

Pat O’Connor is Professor of Sociology and Social Policy and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Limerick (UL). She has worked as a teacher and researcher for over thirty years in five educational institutions in Ireland and the UK. Prior to becoming a Professor she was Course Director of the MA in Women's Studies at UL. Her research interests include the sociology of contemporary Irish society; organisational culture; women's friendships and more recently, the relevance of gender in young people's lives. She has published widely on women's issues in Ireland, the UK and America. Her fourth and most recent book is Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society.

Dr. Bridin Cannon
Institute of Public Administration

Bridin Cannon is from Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal. She was educated at Loreto College, Milford, and qualified in Medicine from University College Dublin in 1982. She then went on to do a BSc in Immunology in Nice, followed by a career break to get a start on rearing 3 children before returning to hospital medicine in Cork in 1993. She is now working as area medical officer in West Cork. Bridin’s paper is based on her dissertation for an MA in Healthcare Management.

Dr. Ivan Gibson
National University of Ireland, Galway

Ivan S. Gibson, BSc, PhD, FIMechE, FIED, CEng, specialises in teaching and consultancy work in engineering design and is based at the National University of Ireland, Galway. He is currently Secretary of the all-Ireland Branch of the Institution of Engineering Designers (IED) and Chairman of the ICT Group of the European Society for Engineering Education (SEFI).

Dr. Averil Meehan
Letterkenny Institute of Technology

Averil Meehan is a computing lecturer at the Letterkenny Institute of Technology. She teaches Object Oriented Programming on the BSc in Computing with Data Communications, is responsible for the Diploma computing projects, and supervises Masters research students.
Dr. Ann Wickham  
Dublin City University

Ann Wickham co-ordinates the BNS programme in Oscail, the National Distance Education Centre, Dublin City University. Her research interests focus on social policy and occupational change, often with a historical dimension. Her recent publications have been on the relationship between nurses and new technologies and on the history of nursing in Ireland.

Ms. Mary O’Reilly de Brún

Mary O’Reilly-de Brún is a consultant anthropologist and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) research practitioner and trainer. She specialises in gender, female education, anti-racism and social policy. She has extensive experience in research project design and management, planning, monitoring and evaluation. Mary completed her MA degree at NUI, Maynooth. She lectured there in the Department of Anthropology from 1989-1996. From 1993 to 1998, she conducted extensive participatory research in East and West Africa, and from 1995-1998 she designed and managed the Norwegian Regional Work Programme for Female Education in sub-Saharan Africa. Mary returned to Ireland in 1998 to direct the National Women’s Council of Ireland’s Millennium Project, a nation-wide PLA research and analysis programme concerned with key social issues: women’s poverty, education, health, work, local development and violence against women. This project culminated in the publication of seven policy reports, published in July 2001.

Ms. Eve Phillips  
Ballyphehane/Togher Community Development Project

Eve Phillips is a mother, a partner, a volunteer, and has been a community activist for the past eight years. She has been a member of the voluntary management committee at Ballyphehane-Togher Community Development Project in Cork for the past four years and an active participant in the Community Education Sub-Committee, and in the City-Wide Parents Support Group. She has just completed a BSoc Science Youth and Community in the National University of Ireland, Cork, which was for her, part of an eight-year investment in community education. She has recently been appointed as Placement Co-ordinator for the CIT/CWEI National Diploma in Humanities (Community Education and Community Development).

Mr. David Kahundha Muhwezi  
Makerere University, Uganda

David Kahundha Muhwezi, BCom, Dip.Educ, MBA in (Finance & Accounting) is Senior Assistant Bursar (Chief Accountant) of Makerere University. His recent works include a capacity building project in financial management and basic accounting for faculties and departments of Makerere University. He is author of a paper on gains and challenges of sponsoring women's education in Uganda presented at the Women's World Congress in Uganda 2002.
Ms. Cora Cregan
St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra

Cora Cregan was a student in University College Dublin from 1965 to 1970. She subsequently worked as a Careers Counsellor in Dublin and in Edinburgh’s Social Work Department. In 1992 she was employed by the National College of Ireland to establish access courses for mature students. Since 1996 she has been employed in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra as the College Careers Officer, and in 2000 was appointed Co-ordinator of the Unit for Adult & Continuing Education. She completed an MA in Women’s Studies in 1998.

Mr. Andrew Doherty
South East Men’s Network

Andrew Doherty works with the South East Men’s Network based in Waterford City. His work is to support men who are considering returning to education. The work is funded through the Education Equality Initiative. He lives in a rural fishing community and commercial fishing was his first career on leaving school. He became unemployed and following numerous dead-end schemes and courses was invited into a new initiative in his village – a community development group. The confidence he got from this coupled with the support from the Men’s Network, enabled him to return to education. He completed the National Certificate in Adult Community Education in Waterford Institute of Technology this summer and is looking forward to doing the Diploma.

Ms. Laura Sullivan
Institute of Technology, Tallaght

Laura Sullivan works for the Mentorlink Project in the Institute of Technology (IT), Tallaght. She graduated from IT, Tallaght in June 2002 with a first class honours degree in Manufacturing Engineering. She coordinates the new national female engineering student network (Minerva) whereby female engineering students can network, raise awareness of the difficulties faced in common and promote informal mentoring. She is currently researching equality issues for women in engineering and hopes to further her career by completing a Masters degree.

Ms. Lucy McAuley
Institute of Technology, Tallaght

Lucy McAuley is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Mechanical Engineering in the Institute of Technology, Tallaght. Since graduating from DIT Bolton St. she has gained many years experience in engineering education in the University of Limerick, Kingston University and IT, Tallaght, where she has lectured since 1992. Her technical expertise is in the area of automation and robotics. She is a member of WITS (Women in Technology and Science) and SEFI (European Society for Engineering Education) working group on Women in Engineering.
Ms. Martha Burton  
Institute of Technology, Tallaght  
Martha Burton is a Lecturer in the Department of Mechanical Engineering in the Institute of Technology, Tallaght since 1996. She holds a primary degree in Mechanical Engineering and a Masters degree in Environmental Engineering (major thesis on clean technology in the machining area). She has carried her interest in environmental issues for engineers through to her teaching career. She is a member of WITS.

Ms Rhona Sweeney  
Gender Equality Unit, Department of Education  
Rhona McSweeney works in the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science. Before that she was one of the team that developed the White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life. She has a BA in History and Politics from University College Dublin and an MA in Women's Studies from University College Cork. She is a single parent of two half Maori boys. She is national President of her trade union, the Public Service Executive Union and represents the union on the National Women's Council of Ireland and the ICTU Women's Committee.

Dr. Myrtle Hill  
Queen’s University Belfast  
Myrtle Hill is Director of the Centre for Women’s Studies at Queen’s University Belfast, and a senior lecturer in the School of Sociology and Social Policy. She is a founding member of Queen’s University Women’s Forum, and is currently involved in a collaborative research project on Women and Higher Education in Northern Ireland and Bangladesh.