# Comparative Education

## All are equal, but some are more equal than others: managerialism and gender equality in higher education in comparative perspective

Christine Teelken [a] & Rosemary Deem [b]

[a] Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Organization Sciences , VU University Amsterdam , Amsterdam , The Netherlands

[b] Royal Holloway , University of London , London , UK
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# All are equal, but some are more equal than others: managerialism and gender equality in higher education in comparative perspective

Christine Teelken[a]* and Rosemary Deem[b]

[a]*Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Organization Sciences, VU University Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands;* [b]*Royal Holloway, University of London, London, UK*

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate what impact new regimes of management and governance, including new managerialism, have had on perceptions of gender equality at universities in three Western European countries. While in accordance with national laws and EU directives, contemporary current management approaches in universities should, in theory, stimulate equality of opportunities and diminish regimes of inequality, our findings from qualitative interviews across the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK provide a very different picture. Our data show that these new governance approaches actually re-emphasise the existing status quo in various ways and enable more subtle forms of discrimination despite the existence of a veneer of equality. Consequently, some women find themselves sidelined by the gap between formal procedures designed to deal with inequalities and the institutional cultures and practices towards selection and promotion.

## Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to investigate what impact new regimes of management and governance, including new managerialism, have had on perceptions of and policies about gender equality in universities in the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. While contemporary management approaches in universities should, in theory, stimulate equality of opportunities and diminish regimes of inequality in accordance with national legislation and EU directives, our findings from qualitative interviews suggest that this is not happening. Our data show that new governance approaches tend to re-emphasise the status quo and more subtle forms of discrimination still thrive, despite changes to formal procedures such as recruitment and promotion.

Attempts to shift the gender bias in European academia towards a more balanced position have been on the agenda for some decades (European Commission 2009). Given the importance of having a diverse employee population at universities in order to appeal to a wide cross-section of students, various policy programmes have emphasised positive actions and special opportunities for women and other underrepresented groups, whilst governance mechanisms have been changed to ensure that equality developments are pursued and monitored. However, in spite of all these developments, the results of the efforts have often been disappointing. Three important reasons for these disappointing results lie in the lack of knowledge about the factors

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*Corresponding author. Email: j.c.teelken@vu.nl

determining further career steps for women, the power relations that underpin these relationships and a failure to grasp the interaction between governance, and the day-to-day activities of academics and other university employees.

A comparative approach is used to investigate whether employees at 10 universities in the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK experience the current governance, management and policy contexts of universities as supporting or discouraging diverse university staffing and positive equality practices. The central question addressed is: how are recent managerial mechanisms experienced by academics at universities, and what kind of influence of managerialism on gender equality do academics perceive to be occurring?

Although the relationship between managerialism and gender equality has been addressed more broadly in previous publications, our data collection allows for a new perspective, as we are using an international comparative approach, and can take the actual implementation of these managerial measures into account. In addition, we intend to focus on the more subtle influences on (in)equality practices in academe on a daily basis.

We will elaborate on the theoretical and policy background of managerialism and gender equality in higher education before explaining our research methods and presenting the results of our study. The epistemological roots of 'governance theories' (e.g. Leisyte 2007), as well as inequality regimes (Acker 2006; Deem 2003) together form our theoretical framework, considering organisations and diversity as social practices, and connecting informal interactions together with institutional structures. The central issue for discussion is whether we should see 'managerialism' as an appreciative framework for further understanding of the institutional and organisational dynamics of the universities and one that can contribute to reducing gender inequality, or whether we will find that 'managerialism' is unable to overcome the stabilising forces of the 'dominant, male, white, middle-aged professionals', who ironically are often the main mechanism through which such governance is affected.

## Theoretical background

During the last 30 years traditional state-centred governing arrangements in Western publicly funded organisations such as schools, hospitals and universities have been critiqued and replaced by alternative modes of steering. There is no doubt that these shifts have modified the forms and mechanisms of governance, the location of governance, the governing capabilities and the styles of governance (Van Kersbergen and van Waarden 2004). In the current literature, a common view on governance is presented, with an increased focus on alternative, less direct forms of control (Hood 2005), which are replacing input and output control by performance-driven steering, as well as emphasising self-governmentality and networks. Management based on rules and procedures is gradually being substituted by a system founded on performance management and measurement, key performance indicators and decentralised decision-making but with attention to issues like equality and diversity. While some national governments aspire to become more accountable to their citizens, public and semi-public organisations are being required to demonstrate the results of their activities to their customers (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000; Teelken 2000).

Higher education is one of the public sectors where such shifts in governance have been witnessed (De Boer, Enders, and Leisyte 2007). Through the stronger role of government, universities feel forced to adapt their organisation strategies, structures and

values to include managerial characteristics, such as budget transparency, output measurement, fairness, increased competition and the use of private sector management influences (see Aucoin 1990; Hood 1991, 1995; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000, 2004), in order to meet the societal requirements for accountability of quality control. The shifts in governance manifest themselves in, for example, management of performances and accountability such as the Research Assessment Exercises (UK) and quality assurance through the accreditation scheme (the Netherlands). We perceive 'managerialism' in this article as both *ideologies* about the application of, as well as the *actual use* of, management and governance techniques, values and practices derived from the private sector (Deem 2001), effectively an extension of Power's (1997) audit society.

We know that the move in Western countries to develop new modes of academic governance, for example in relation to research where emphasis is placed on self-governmentality and changing funding mechanisms, has begun to significantly affect academic work (Kehm and Lanzendorf 2006; Leisyte 2007). These mechanisms include how researchers seek funding for their studies and what kinds of outputs they produce, so on the basis of previous investigations about gender and academe it is reasonable to assume that there are also gendered effects on research (Acker and Armenti 2004; Manuel 2008).

It is within the context of managerialism that we want to highlight the diversity of the employee population at universities, because ironically, while 'quality is audited, equality is not' (Morley 2003, 146). As explained, various policy programmes have emphasised equal opportunities, positive action and mainstreaming policies for women, in the context of greater emphasis on individual performance and achievement but the results of these policies have often been disappointing; see, for example, Deem, Morley, and Tlili (2005) on the position in the UK or Curtis (2011) on the USA. An important reason for these disappointing outcomes is inadequate knowledge of the full range of factors determining further career steps for women, as well as a perception in the general population that equality or its absence is a matter of lifestyle choice (Howard and Tibballs 2003). As the percentage of women in many disciplines drops considerably after the doctorate phase, women may feel (un)intentionally excluded from a further career at the university. Thus, women end up in temporary academic posts and feel marginalised by their experiences (Reay 2000), or alternatively find themselves in a minority and are judged differently by their peers when they ascend to management roles, even if they behave and ostensibly do the job in the same way as men (Deem 2003). Whilst universities claim to be meritocratic and to appoint academics on the basis of excellence, the definition of excellence is often a gendered one that can unintentionally exclude women, as research on professorial appointments in the Netherlands shows (Van Den Brink 2009, Van Den Brink, Benschop, and Jansen 2010).

Impediments in the university system itself may provide an explanation for the lack of employee diversity. We call these impediments 'inequality regimes', referring to 'systematic disparities between groups of organizational participants in control over goals and outcomes, work processes and decision, in opportunities to enter and advance particular job areas, in security of position and level of pay' (Acker 2006, 109). As in other public service and private sector organisations over the last two to three decades, European universities have moved from a conception of equality based on redistribution of power and resources to one based on recognition, which focuses on symbolism and tolerance of diversity but not political action (Fraser and Honneth 1998; Fraser 2000). Changing legislation and EU employment directives

encouraged this phenomenon. The dominance of meritocracy and a culture of excellence do not always sit easily with the idea of employee diversity, particularly amongst academics (Deem 2007).

Paradoxically, it appears that managerial ideology, in this case with an emphasis on transparency and non-discrimination, does not necessarily coincide with use of associated managerial techniques that ensure no discrimination takes place, perhaps because this is a complex matter that is not just solved by rationalising structures and processes. Beliefs and values also have to be tackled, but on equality the cultural turn in management has not been successful in dealing with deep-seated views about gender.

Although occurrences of sexist language or direct refusals to promote women can still happen, in general, discrimination is much less visible and buried in cultural practices and assumptions. The managerial shift from process to output control, perhaps unintentionally, makes the activities of university management less visible than before, which may lead to more subtle forms of discrimination thriving. Under current regimes of management and governance, women are encouraged to put themselves forward for new posts or promotion and are interviewed using techniques sensitive to inequality, but just do not happen to get appointed or promoted (Van Den Brink 2009). Alternatively, they may end up taking on demanding administrative and pastoral duties, which then prevent them from gaining more senior posts, as these activities are both exhausting and do not count for much in promotion and academic career building (Acker and Armenti 2004). Male colleagues sympathise, but are busy building their own research careers (Harris, Thiele, and Currie 1998). Research has demonstrated that some women in British universities have take a conscious decision not to compete in respect of research activities, leaving the field clear for other colleagues (Thomas and Davies 2002). A study of the way in which UK universities have responded to equality legislation and employment directives affecting their staff indicates that there is a predominant view from managers that gender equality has already been accomplished, whilst female academics report that the politics of gender in their institutions are now very subtly conveyed through micro-politics and thus very difficult to tackle (Deem, Morley, and Tlili 2005). In 2002, Saunderson warned us that equal opportunity policies at British universities should be assimilated into the underlying core of institutional cultures, otherwise the production of more robust academic identities and satisfying daily working lives for academic women will be sanctioned and 'the policy, practice and rhetoric of equal opportunities and equal treatment in UK higher education will remain little more than "lipstick on the gorilla"' (Saunderson 2002, 376).

Such 'subtle' experiences of discrimination may also beset academics from ethnic minority groups, those who are not heterosexual or those who have a disability (Deem and Morley 2006; Deem, Morley, and Tlili 2005). Employee diversity refers here to allowing equal opportunities for different social groups, which are characterised by specific features such as gender, ethnic minority background, age, handicap or sexual orientation (Kirton and Greene 2005). We have chosen to limit our conceptualisation of diversity to gender as it is part of the positive action plans of many international equality programmes and also the Dutch Research Council and the Swedish Science Board.

Aiming for workforce diversity is considered to be a positive approach, which allows for individual differences over group-based differences while downplaying discrimination and disadvantages. The ETAN (European Technology Assessment Network) report (2000) concludes that the underrepresentation of women threatens

the goals of science in achieving excellence, and is wasteful and unjust. 'Gender discrimination is a violation of human rights; the underrepresentation of women threatens excellence; and it is wasteful to educate and train young women scientists, but then not to use their skills in employment' (ETAN report 2000, 2). It can be argued that organisations *can* benefit in a number of ways from diversity policies (e.g. Benschop 2007), but that does not mean that conflicts, problems and dilemmas involved in implementing diversity policies do not exist (Kirton and Greene 2005).

## Policy background

In the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, the higher education systems have similar features in terms of governance, management, organisational structure and activities. Although the numbers concerning gender equality differ, all three countries show similar patterns. In the European Union only about 18% of the full professors are female, varying between 36% in Romania and 8% in Luxemburg (European Commission 2012). The current percentage in the Netherlands is 14.8% (Gerritsen, Verdonk, and Visser 2012), which increased from 11.6% in 2009, 19.8% for the UK in December 2010 (HESA 2012) and Sweden 20% in 2012. This means that the Lisbon Intention of 25% and even the Dutch objective of 15% by 2010 have not been achieved. The growth of the percentage of female full professors in the Netherlands is about 0.5% per year (Gerritsen, Verdonk, and Visser 2009); in Sweden the growth rate is slightly higher, about 0.8%, varying between 0.2% and 1.1% (Dryler and Gillström 2012). Even more importantly, the 'She figures' (European Commission 2009) suggest that women's academic careers remain characterised by vertical segregation. While the proportion of female students (55%) and graduates (59%) exceeds that of male students, the percentage of women drops to 48% for PhD students and 45% for PhD graduates. Furthermore, only 44% of the assistant professors (grade C) and 36% of the associate professors (grade B) are female. In 2009–2010, 44% of UK academics were women, but many of these are on short-term contracts and the percentage decreases as seniority increases. The difficulty of ensuring that women academics proceed to climb up the career ladder is sometimes called the leaky pipeline.

Several attempts have been made to achieve a more equal gender balance at higher levels. In 2001 the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science asked the Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT) in the Netherlands to formulate recommendations to increase the percentage of women working in universities. At that time the percentage of female students had increased up to more than half of the student population. However, the figures regarding the percentages of assistant professors, associate professors and full professors are still low. Over the last five years this situation has changed slightly, but at a very slow pace (Van den Brink and Brouns 2006). Even more importantly, the 'She figures' (European Commission 2006) suggest that the growth rate of female participation between 1998 and 2004 is lower than that of men, which means that the differential between men and women widens.

The Swedish policy study by Dryler and Gillström (2012) shows that since 1997 several efforts have been carried out in order to obtain more gender equality in Sweden. Examples of such efforts involve reporting the numbers of newly hired female professors, the percentages of women at full professor and associate professor level, setting targets and perceiving the recruitment of women as a part of their institutional policies. The report particularly encourages the setting and maintaining of

certain recruitment targets, and promotes the idea that within certain fields of science, the percentage of recruited women should equal the percentage of women obtaining their PhD.

In the higher education system in the Netherlands, with a lower percentage of female professors than in the UK and Sweden, quite a number of pro-active efforts concerning gender equality have been carried out. All Dutch universities have signed the 'Charter to the top' policy, which was set up in 2008 as a public commitment to create more influx, flow and conservation of female talent in Dutch organisations. More directive incentives are demonstrated by the Dutch research council and the Royal Dutch Academy of Science by providing upward mobility programmes for female talent in academic positions in general, for example the Aspasia programme or more specific programmes for women in the exact sciences. Many Dutch universities provide some kind of female-focussed programme nowadays, which can be divided into fellowships, special full professorships and coaching programmes. Examples are: the Rosalind Franklin Fellowship (Groningen), the MacGillavry Fellowship (University of Amsterdam) and the Fenna Diemer-Lindeboom chairs (VU University Amsterdam).

In the UK a number of initiatives have been undertaken to achieve gender equality and a national Equality Challenge Unit has encouraged research and development on appropriate policies and implementation strategies. In the sciences, university departments with policies and practices which support women academics to advance their careers can apply for Athena Swan Awards. The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education's leadership course (the Top Management Programme) for those who aspire to be university heads tries to ensure that each cohort on the programme has a gender balance.

## Explaining and investigating the research gap

As explained, several studies have been carried out to determine the reasons for the lack of diversity at higher levels in universities. Bosch (2007) used an historical analysis and found that most university women do not achieve a certain level of visibility, and if they do, their femininity is such an overwhelming feature that nearly all texts on women are characterised by their gender. Fletcher (2007, 272) uses institutional and gender theories to show that 'universities are particular sorts of gendered organizations', which is reflected in the views of research managers. They assumed that women deliberately choose a healthier work/life balance instead of a dedicated academic career. It seemed that these research managers were generally unaware of the gender issue amongst academics and were ignoring the importance of the organisation, its institutional context and the structural inertia. Gender equity was not seen as a problem until it was raised as a procedural issue involving the necessity to produce gender employment statistics, which highlighted the lack of women in responsible positions. But once the underrepresentation of women is acknowledged, research managers are 'putting the onus on women academics to change and refusing to take ownership of the issue of gender equity' (Fletcher 2007, 273).

Van Den Brink (2009) uses gender and organisation network theories to reveal that intentional policy measures to increase gender equality go astray in even stronger unintentional gender stereotypes which are often partly responsible for the (re)production of gender inequality across universities and organisations. Van den Brink's research demonstrates that there is sufficient mobility (3322 new appointments between 1999 and 2005) in the Dutch HE system to accommodate more diversity in appointments,

which includes on average 12% women. The percentage of female appointments is gradually increasing, but is still lower than can be expected on the basis of number of PhD graduates, assistant and associated professors. Female potential is generally underused. Van den Brink's analysis shows that a large percentage (64%) of the appointed professors involved 'closed recruitment', essentially a subjective search for suitable candidates involving formal and informal networks of academics in key positions, and which often proved gender-biased. The open recruitment procedures, as stipulated by formal policies, were often poorly implemented. This poor implementation could be explained by resistance towards more bureaucracy, the appeal to meritocracy and the lack of back-up by the university boards. Consequently, such policies are applied and interpreted in a flexible manner, as in some cases 'quick' decisions are being made in order to retain so-called excellent candidates. In such cases the policies should be seen as a 'paper tigress' and can even be considered as counterproductive, as transparency is faked in order to forward a favourite candidate. While scientific quality is, of course, taken into account by the promotion of such a candidate, in this context it cannot be considered as an objective, meritocratic and gender-neutral principle. This principle is an example of a wider problem about academic excellence, which is not easily judged in an objective way, yet it is often perceived that way and hence seen to be in tension with apparently more subjective equality measures than is actually the case (Deem 2007, 2009).

The work by Bird (2011) reveals that women faculty members in US academia continue to face systemic barriers to opportunity and advancement, particularly in science and engineering. However, it seems that university leaders still fail to recognise the institutionalised gender barriers, which disproportionately disadvantage women. Bird used a workshop, which was part of a broader university transformation programme, as an intervention strategy aimed at improving the opportunities for women scientists. In the UK, in addition to legislation on gender and other aspects of inequality, various strategies have been carried out, including mentoring, the establishment of equality units and committees, and a programme of equality projects financed by the UK higher education funding bodies in 2004. An example of these efforts is the Athena Swan Charter, which stimulates gender equality in science, engineering and technology subjects.

The relationship between managerialism and gender equality in higher education is ambivalent. The research by Smeenk et al. (2006a, 2000b), based on an international survey in six countries, showed that universities directed by administrative effectiveness, organisational control and a supply-oriented focus prove to experience more performance benefits (more commitment, better performances) than universities with more traditional values, emphasised individual autonomy, collegiality and professionalism and a demand-oriented focus (Bryson 2004; Stiles 2004). Although Smeenk et al. (2006b) did not find significant differences between men and women, we have reason to believe that women appreciate a supply-oriented organisation with closer knit structures and values (Van den Brink and Brouns 2006). This may persuade them to continue their academic career. It is possible that due to more emphasis on output and transparency, the impact of the 'old-boys networks' is decreasing, with less reliance on patronage and personal invitation to fill posts (ETAN-report 2000). But this has not occurred in all cases.

In the broader context, managerialism may have either an adverse or at best neutral impact on the promotion of gender equality in European higher education systems. Women have not been very prominent in senior management positions. It has also

been argued, for example, that academics have found themselves driven to spend longer periods at their places of employment and take more and more work home, causing disruption to their domestic lives, with women academic staff involved in dependent care more adversely affected than men (Barry, Berg, Chandler 2006; Barry, Chandler, and Berg, 2007; Deem 2003; Elg and Jonergård 2003; Thomas and Davies 2002). It seems that 'the individualistic and competition-based work culture in research institutions and the prevailing one-dimensional view of academic quality' (AWT 2001, 2) is not very appealing for certain groups of employees. Women may now feel less at home in the academic world, and on a subtle basis experience unfair treatments (e.g. Wennerås and Wold 1997) and exclusion from vital informal networks. It has also been suggested that the enactment of this managerialism is strongly gendered. Some authors reported 'a divisive atmosphere that valorizes competitiveness, instrumentality and individuality' (Thomas and Davies 2002, 390–391) associated with the 'new' managerialism drawing inspiration from managerial styles found in the private sector (Barry, Chandler, and Berg 2007; Clarke and Newman 1997).

## Methodology

In order to investigate the impact of managerialism, 48 semi-structured interviews were held in three countries (the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK) at 10 universities (Teelken 2012), in the spring and summer of 2007. To ensure comparability, interviews were performed by means of a topic list, were audio taped and transcribed fully. The texts were analysed with the help of Kwalitan, a software application particularly designed for investigating interview data. The respondents volunteered to participate in our research when they filled out a survey in a preliminary study in 2005.

We interviewed 17 women and 31 men in the functions of administrative officer, PhD student, lecturer, senior lecturer, (assistant and associate) professor, (associate) dean and vice-chancellor. Most respondents (80%) worked full-time and had a permanent contract. The age of the respondents varied between 28 and 67 years. One of the authors and three MSc students carried out the interviews in Dutch and in English. This

Table 1.    Overview of interviews.

| Country | University | Faculty | Number of interviews and codes used |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Netherlands | University 1 | Social and Behavioural Sciences | 5 (Nl1a–e) |
| | University 2 | Economics and Social Sciences | 4 (Nl2a–d) |
| | University 3 | Management and Social sciences | 4 (Nl3a–d) |
| Sweden | University 1 | Sociology and Pedagogy | 7 (S1a–g) |
| | University 2 | Educational and Economic Sciences | 5 (S2a–e) |
| | University 3 | Social Sciences | 6 (S3a–f) |
| United Kingdom | University 1 & 2 | Management Sciences | 6 (UK1a–d, UK2a, b) |
| | University 3 | Management Sciences | 6 (UK3a–f) |
| | University 4 | Social Sciences | 5 (UK4a–e) |
| | | | Total: 48 |

interview cycle formed a second round of data collection, which was a part of a larger study concerning managerialism and organisational commitment in higher education. However, while our first analyses distinguished a clear influence of managerialism in higher education in the daily work of the respondents (Teelken 2012), further study and re-analysis showed a relation with gender equality. We therefore decided to report separately on these gender issues.

Table 1 provides an overview of the interviews conducted. In order to make a distinction between the various respondents and provide some background on their situation, we used codes (e.g. S1a), and we have included their gender, profession and age.

**Findings**

We present here our findings concerning the relationship between managerialism and gender equality on the basis of our comparative analysis. We have structured the findings as three separate but interrelated issues, which we diagnosed inductively from the perceptions of our respondents.

(1) The university as a typical masculine organisation. The manner in which performances are measured and evaluated demonstrates and re-emphasises that the university can still be considered a typical masculine organisation. We define a 'masculine organisation' here as very similar to the way in which Connell (1995, 77) describes hegemonic masculinity: 'The configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'.

(2) The inequality practices through the paralysing and stigmatising effects of certain performance measures.

(3) The stigmatising and non-neutral effect of gender as an issue in research and teaching policies. Several respondents acknowledge that gender is an important research topic and can play an essential role in obtaining research funding, but such measures also (re-)emphasise the peculiar nature of gender-oriented research.

Our general findings are illustrated with quotes from our interviews. In a few cases we have altered these quotes slightly in order to make them more understandable but without changing their meaning.

*(1) The university as a typical masculine organisation*

Several respondents agree that the university should still be considered a typical masculine organisation. The masculine nature of the organisation is visible from the existing gender balance and is also highlighted by the performance-oriented focus.

I'm a woman and I do not join in the men's games … but it is still very much a male monastery, the university, but particularly this faculty … I believe we have four female professors eventually and only one female associate professor for a faculty of 400 people. So if you talk about role models and such, it is a glass ceiling, actually a concrete ceiling, a concrete enclosure, which you cannot exit. There are very few women … despite the efforts of our current dean. (Nl2a, female assistant professor, late 30s)

The general idea of more focus on performance and performance measurement can be seen as a 'masculine way' of managing the universities, a manner which does not coincide very easily with a strive for more diversity. One PhD student makes an explicit link between the measuring of performances and masculinity by stating: '… I think that all this scoring appeals strongly to "my penis is longer than yours", yes, it has a lot to do with macho behaviour' (Nl1d, male PhD student, 28).

The emphasis on performances influences men as well as women, and also men can experience disadvantages from a more performance-oriented organisational culture.

One respondent explains how a male candidate for a full professorship was allowed to compensate for his weaker areas with other capacities, whilst also implicitly suggesting that this avenue was not made available to women candidates as well:

> An example which should remain anonymous: recently a new full professor has been appointed, a young bloke at a crucial position, and he has been appointed after a long procedure, he actually had too few publications, he had a book, and in the corridors he was already spoken of as 'little Billy'. It all occurred ironically, while he was measured at other [organisational] levels. He is kind, has a constructive contribution towards the department, he can manage our group, he is smart, has interesting ideas. (Nl1d)

### (2)    Inequality practices

Inequality practices have been emphasised through the paralysing and stigmatising effects of certain performance measures which are supposed to be gender neutral. While increased emphasis on the measurement of research output is supposed to lead to more transparency, accountability and impartiality in terms of gender, our interviews show that this is not always the case in the perception of our respondents.

For some researchers, particularly if they worked part-time or had been away because of maternity or parental leave, the formulae for setting their performance targets can be extremely complicated. In the current UK Research Excellence Framework, equality guidelines indicate that maternity leave equates to needing one less output but does not address the cumulative effect on quality as well as quantity of output. Besides, although pregnancy and parental leave are taken into account when assessing research performance, working less than full-time often still works against certain groups of researchers in the long run. The respondents explain that achieving fewer publications due to working part-time leads to a judgement on the functioning of employees and not in a positive manner. The female respondents express more directly that they have to make compromises by combining their career with their home situation and do more teaching or pastoral care instead of research, while the latter is more rewarding in terms of career progress (Acker 2006). This group of respondents shows less explicit and direct career paths, which seem to be more influenced by daily work pressure ('running from project to project') instead of aiming to achieve international publications, which give more career opportunities in the long run.

A Dutch respondent explains that she finds the increased emphasis on performances as having nearly a 'paralysing' effect because it caused a lot of stress, particularly if other personal circumstances played a role as well.

> Two years ago, we had a female colleague, who was very good and had a lot of potential. But she decided to quit academia and find a job in the private sector. She considered the publication pressure as extremely paralysing. Her paper was eventually accepted by a very good journal, but at that time she had already resigned … And then there are always some

people who say afterwards that she was not talented enough [did not have it in her], and those are the men who say such things …. (Nl2d, female associate professor, 46)

However, some female respondents state clearly that they have decided to 'play according to the rules' and see how far they come, even though they do not consent to the publication targets.

> As you know, as a sort of extreme, you are managed through your publications, so you should take care of high quality research. I can only appreciate that. But in individual cases, there are always sad situations. It is impossible to develop criteria, which are fair or neutral, also in terms of gender, to everyone. That is not possible in a multidisciplinary world. It is all too vague and not very 'fixed'. However, for myself, I decided to go for it and try to become associate professor. (Nl2a, assistant professor, female, late 30s)

In other words, the so-called objective and quantitative criteria imply that exceptions to the rules are harder to be taken into account.

### (3)  *Gender as a non-neutral issue in research and teaching*

Whilst some respondents showed concern about the discriminatory aspects of gender, they also made it clear that gender is a fashionable and popular research topic in their departments as it assists in obtaining external research funding:

> It is actually so that on the application forms from the state scientific council it was a special box where you should tick whether your research has a gender perspective. And of course critics think about many other relevant perspectives, but that was particularly important. And I think that has changed a bit. (S2d, male full professor, 60)

To put it even more strongly, gender is being used as a statement as it is helping to draw attention to the nature of a research proposal. Such developments seem to make gender into a special issue, but perversely it could have a stigmatising effect as it may appear as if unfair advantages are being created for women.

> So it is very much the funders who are, who give the possibility for what to do your research on. But there are no restrictions on what you could send in an application. So we had one young career woman who framed her application very provocatively. She was interested in 'why young women did not have more public sex' and things like that. In her mind she was trying to get very clear what was the limit for what you could do or not do with morality, for the boundaries. (S1g, male senior lecturer, 63)

One Swedish senior researcher (S1f, female, 48) explains that is more difficult for women to obtain research funding, because networking plays an important role:

> They are judging your application and whether they think it is interesting. Your reputation is important and knowing the persons. They made a research on this and they said the most important thing is sex [gender]. Because they used to give more money to men than to women and they have done something about it and now …, it is very important to think about this gender issue.

Networking and reputation play a crucial role in achieving career progress, publications and researching funding. Such factors are emphasised even more strongly within managerialism.

Furthermore, gender and diversity issues also play a role in the actual management of the university, for example in the response to the accreditation reports composed by external examiners:

> The reports that we get from our external examiners would be four or five pages of closely written comment … they would talk about whether we were up to date with the literature, whether our teaching methods were appropriate, … whether we are paying attention to things like gender issues or aspects of racial culture. It could be almost anything. And we take them very seriously and the university takes them very seriously. (UK3f, male full professor, 64)

The various interviews provide us with evidence that the current emphasis on performance and accountability, particularly in terms of counting numbers of publications, is perceived to have strengthened a masculine manner of managing research and researchers. Performance indicators are not necessarily gender neutral even if they take part-time contracts and parental leave into account. On the contrary, several respondents indicate that certain measures, e.g. the stimulation of gender as an element in research projects, rather (over)emphasises gender differences and may have a stigmatising or paralysing effect. The clarity which performance management and measurement are supposed to promote, can lead to discrimination of a more subtle kind as it is harder to take individual situations into account. Sometimes this ends up discriminating against those who are part-time workers or care for dependants. We found in our study that, despite variations in structures, policies and procedures around gender inequality across universities in the three countries, the outcomes for women academics seemed similar, suggesting that EU directives on equality have been no more successful than national equality policies. This means that the potential clash between meritocracy and equality in universities across Europe gets in the way of reducing gender inequality.

## Conclusions

Whilst our data do not enable us to establish a direct causal connection between managerialism and diversity in higher education, we think that this paper can contribute to further insights into this complicated issue. Regimes of managerialism in publicly funded higher education institutions in Western European societies have increasingly come to the fore in recent decades, emphasising quality audit processes, performance management, targets and self-governmentality but also transparency and non-discrimination. These appear to have had some impact on academic work practices and cultures, for example by placing emphasis on the funding of research and how choices were made about where and what to publish but with due allowance for specific circumstances such as part-time working or disability. At the same time a whole raft of generic equality and diversity measures have been introduced into public policy, both at the national and trans-national level, particularly through EU employment directives, which whilst not completely at odds with new forms of governance, tend to be less effectively audited and bring into tension notions of academic excellence alongside considerations about employee diversity. The notions of quality and excellence so prevalent in higher education do not sit easily with those of equality and diversity and, as many Western European higher education institutions become increasingly resource dependent as public funding decreases, this tension is likely to

increase, with fewer posts and promotion opportunities. Even where governance explicitly includes attention to gender, its effects on overcoming all aspects of gender discrimination are often not evident.

Our starting question was: how are the recent managerial mechanisms experienced by the academics at universities, and what kind of influence on gender equality policies and practices do academics perceive? What our evidence suggests is that changing modes of governance in universities have not explicitly challenged issues of diversity. Although these modes of governance emphasise quality and excellence, they may also have unintentionally hindered gender equality of university staff, especially academics. Our paper demonstrates that managerialism has not demolished the masculine hegemony, and may even re-emphasise it, while inequality practices still persist, although in a less obvious way than in earlier decades. This has had the effect of rendering inequality either less visible or as something that has already been dealt with, whilst at the same time the mechanics of gender inequality have become more subtle and less easily detected or challenged. And as we are all aware, hidden discrimination is much harder to overcome.

Gender inequalities have been around Western European universities since their foundation and yet still persist despite the large number of measures attempting to eliminate them. Although the issue of gender is fully acknowledged and appreciated in some arenas, e.g. as the object of research funding, it is apparent that some women still feel discriminated against. Managerialism apparently assists in re-emphasising current inequalities; for instance, it seems easier for men than women to compensate for their weaker achievements with other qualities, while women are more easily overwhelmed by the targets imposed upon them, and for that reason some may decide to leave academic life or to focus only on teaching and not research.

As we have shown with our international dataset, female academics are often well aware of the pressures operating in relation to gender, but whilst some are prepared to work round this, others find themselves sidelined by the gap between formal procedures designed to deal with inequalities and the cultures adopted by institutions in respect of implementing selection and promotion procedures. Perhaps one way forward is to insist on similar audit procedures for inequality as there currently are for teaching, academic standards and research quality. Another option is for managers to realise that the existence of formal procedures for reducing inequalities do not, by themselves, either end gender discrimination or justify a lack of awareness of gender differences on a daily basis in academic work.

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## Notes on contributors

Christine Teelken works as associate professor at the VU University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Social Sciences. She specialises in research in higher education, particularly from a comparative perspective. Her publications have appeared in *Studies in Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *Public Administration* and many other journals. Currently she is working on a longitudinal study in three countries, involving more than 100 interviews.

Rosemary Deem is Vice-Principal (Education) and Professor of Higher Education Management at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is also Visiting Professor of Education at Bristol University and Visiting Professor of Management at Leicester University. From January 2001 until January 2009 she was Professor of Education and from 2007 to 2009, Research Director for the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, both at the University of Bristol. An academician of the UK Academy of Social Sciences, Rosemary is a sociologist who has also worked at Loughborough, York, the Open and Lancaster Universities and the former North Staffordshire Polytechnic. She was a UK Education Research Assessment Exercise panellist in 1996, 2001 and 2008, has twice chaired the British Sociological Association and was Vice-Chair of the Society for Research into Higher Education from 2007 to 2009. From 2001 to 2005 she was joint editor of the Blackwells international journal *The Sociological Review* and is currently on the Editorial Board of *Studies in Higher Education*, *Equal Opportunities International*, *Higher Education* and *Higher Education Quarterly*.

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