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Sue Shepherd

Eastern ARC Workshop 1 April 2016

Why are there so few women leaders in higher education? Failing to live up to Benchmark Man



Research Focus

**First
Tier**

Vice Chancellor

**Second
Tier**

Deputy and Pro Vice Chancellors (PVCs)

**Third,
or Next,
Tier**

**Deans of Faculty or Heads of School
Directors of Professional Services**

Changing PVC Appointment in Pre-1992s

Internal Secondment

Appointment by invitation

Part time

Fixed term

Return to academic role

External Open Competition

External advertisement

Executive search agencies (ESAs)

Full time

Fixed term or open ended

Core Research Questions

1. Why is PVC appointment practice changing?
2. What are the implications of change?
3. What is the theoretical significance of change for the notion of managerialism in a higher education context?

Data Collection

Sequential, mixed methods design utilising multiple data sources

1. *Advertisement Monitoring Exercise (2006-2013)*

- Adverts in THE and jobs.ac.uk for all PVC posts in English HEIs (n=287)

2. *Census of PVC post holders (Aug 2012 and 2013)*

- Snapshot in time. Publically available online data. Pre-92s. (n=215)

3. *Online survey of 'next tier' post holders (Nov 2012)*

- Identifiable 'next tier' managers – academic and PS Directors - whose email address could be found. Pre-92s (n=132)

4. *Semi-structured interviews (May-Nov 2013)*

- Purposive sample of VCs, PVCs, Registrars and 'next tier' managers in those pre-92s that have advertised externally and ESAs active in HE. Predominantly face-to-face. Respondent validated (n=73)

What Is The Overall Profile of PVCs?



Predominantly white (96%), male (76%) professors (90%)

Gender Implications of Change (1)

- Counter intuitively, perhaps, the opening up of PVC posts to external competition has led to a *narrowing* of the profile of appointees
- Fewer women are being appointed via external open competition than an internal-only process

	Externals (n=71)	Internals (n=139)	All Pre-1992s (n=210)
Female	15.5	27.3	24

- Danger that recent (albeit slow) progress towards more gender balanced executive teams may be reversed

Gender Implications of Change (2)

- Female deans and heads of school don't lack ambition:
 - Almost as likely as male colleagues to express an intention of applying for a PVC post (43% versus 45%)
 - Higher proportion are *very* likely to apply (29% versus 22%)
- Moreover, aspiration is translating into action:
 - 14% of women compared to 16% of men had already applied for a PVC job in their own institution
- However, men are twice as likely to have applied for a PVC job in *another* institution (22% versus 9%)
- At PVC level too, though numbers are small, women appear no less likely than men to aspire to the top job

Three Explanations for Female Disadvantage

1. *Geographical mobility*: an increased desire to bring in external candidates places a premium on external career capital (Floyd and Dimmock 2011)
2. *Conservatism and Risk*: as perceived cost of a bad PVC appointment increases, so universities become even more risk averse, leading to the appointment of 'safer' candidates. A fixation on experience as the main indicator of quality
3. *Homosociability*: a tendency to recruit 'people like us'. VCs want PVCs they are comfortable with and who 'fit', leading to the appointment of "more of the same"

Result is a re-circulation of existing PVCs (39%) as part of a "self-perpetuating hierarchy"

Conclusions and Issues

- Findings challenge the notion of women's missing agency as an adequate explanation for women's under-representation
- So 'fix-the-women' initiatives (such as Aurora) are unlikely to be sufficient
- In fact, major structural issues and the gendered nature of the appointment process belies meritocratic rhetoric that the best person always gets the job
- Need more research into how VCs make appointment decisions, including how they define and evaluate merit. Sense that women are being compared with a phantom Benchmark Man (geographically mobile, work-all-hours, research star) and found wanting