Developing a Platform for Gender Equity in a Faculty of Science

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The Facts:

Women remain under-represented across science in general, especially at more senior levels, globally and locally.

Multiple factors impact women's entry, participation, retention and success in both STEM and academia generally[1]. Barriers range from the impacts of gendered role stereotypes and assumptions and implicit biases, through to inflexible and even hostile working environments.

Top-down policy/practice interventions are needed to dramatically improve the level and experience of women's participation in Science.

The Question:

What could we do to make the Faculty of Science at The University of Auckland more inclusive and supportive of women in Science, both in relation to numbers, and workplace cultures?

1st hit: Google image search for "scientist": http://sciencecouncil.org/scientists-science-technicians/

Understanding the Local Context

- Women are a recognized equity group at the university.
- 2012 data showed only 15.7% of senior academics (Professor; Associate Professor) were women in the Faculty of Science; across all academic levels, the percentage of women was 35.2%
- There is substantial numerical variability (overall and at senior levels) across the 9 Schools/Departments/Institutes within the Faculty (biological science; chemical science; computer science; environment; exercise sciences; marine science; maths; psychology; statistics).
- The Faculty of Science undertook focus group research to understand women academics' experiences[2]. It identified four 'types' of gendered impact or experience:
  1. Receiving non-gendered treatment
  2. A level playing field?
  3. A 'male' culture?
  4. Socialization and expectations of women academics

Designing the Platform

- Led by myself as Chair of our Faculty of Science Equity Committee
- Supported by Faculty Leadership
- Contextualized within UoA Equity/Policy framework.
- Focused on academic women
- Aimed to develop and implement a multi-pronged policy and practice platform that would provide a foundation for inclusive and gender-equity-driven practice.
- Evidence-based, pragmatic and aspirational
- The platform aimed to intervene from the very practical levels (e.g., funding opportunity) through to the ephemeral (e.g., the 'culture' of the workplace).

The Platform

Developed, adopted and launched in 2014.

Designed to commit to actions towards gender equity among academic staff, through targeting multiple domains:

1. **Operational Guidelines** that promote gender equity in Faculty practice.
2. **Training** that facilitate awareness, and removal, of gender-based biases across all aspects of Faculty life.
3. **Reporting** on gender equity within key domains of Faculty life.
4. **Mentoring** of academic women to achieve success.
5. Developing **cultures** of gender excellence across Schools, Departments and the Faculty.

Case Example 1: Post Parental Leave Grant

Developed to support 'return to research' following 6mo or more parental leave.

Up to NZ$10k available over 2-year period.

Wide range of *ways* research activity can be supported

Case Example 2: Anti—Implicit Bias Training for Faculty Research Committees

Developed centrally by our Equity Office; presented locally

Required before assessing committee allocates research grants

Case Example 3: 'Local Culture' Conversations

Local all-staff discussions about 'culture'/behaviour, acceptability/unacceptability.

Bottom-up initiation; Associate Dean input as relevant

Conclusions & Next Steps

The strategy is still in implementation mode; change takes time, energy and committed leadership!

No formal evaluation; anecdotally, some intangible 'culture' shifts are happening.
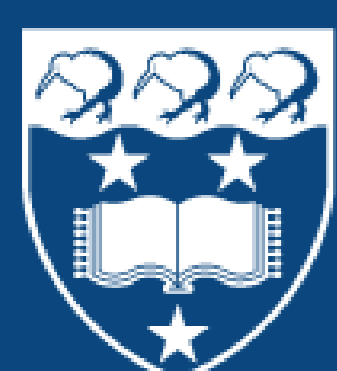
Need for top down leadership/structural change to dramatically shift gender-based inequity in STEM.

Support of leadership has been crucial; time is a challenge.

Importance of looking both internationally and to local context – both university/policy/strategy and sociopolitical (e.g., NZ as bicultural country).

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References
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2. Van Eden, K. An Examination of Gender Equity Within the Faculty of Science, University of Auckland, 2011.