Women and academic workloads: career slow lane or Cul-de-Sac?

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Abstract   Career progression for women academics to higher levels is not in proportion to their representation within the profession. This paper looks at theories about this and relates them to current practices within universities for allocating work. The management of workloads can disadvantage women through a number of interactive factors. Interruptions in continuity of employment and fractional contracts can work to exclude or hinder research activity, an area pivotal for higher progression. The issue that many models for allocating work exclude research from their calculations exacerbates this. Additionally this feeds off expectations that research work is conducted after hours at home, a feature that women may find more difficult. Lastly a lack of transparency can allow areas of, often unwitting, discrimination to go undetected through the skewed allocation of types of work not strongly associated with promotion. The paper suggests a series of measures that might improve this situation.

Keywords   Career progression · Higher education · Workload allocation

Introduction

Recent research (ECU 2009. Statistics for 2007/08) within UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI) reveals that, although the picture is slowly improving, women make up 42.6% of the overall academic staff population, but only a much lower proportion (18.7%) are at head of school or professorial level. Further men are more than twice as likely to be in the top salary bracket in the UK. A similar trend is found in the USA where 'male faculty maintain a salary advantage over women faculty across all ranks and in all institutional types' (Glazer-Raymo 2008, p. 9). This paper aims to provide insights into this issue of women's career advancement in UK HEIs by taking the particular perspective of the management of academic workloads. Then, from this position, the aim is to set forward some practical steps that could be adopted to assist in the vexed area of career progression for women in academia.

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The statistics go some way to show the complexity of the issue in UK Higher Education. For example, 42% of women academics work part-time compared to 27% of men (derived from Table A5, ECU 2009), which is sure to have an impact on rates of progression. However, the type of work done introduces a further complication. For example, in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE now termed Research Excellence Framework), of submitting UK university departments, 58% of women were submitted compared to 74% of men (HEFCE 2006). This difference has increased in the 2008 RAE to 67% for men to 48% of women (HEFCE 2010). This still implies a strong gender differential in the research element of the work done.

Parker (2008) in his investigation into UK university promotion criteria looks at, what he defines as, the three primary work areas of teaching, administration and research. His analysis clearly shows the exclusive requirement for research excellence in the promotion criteria to higher university levels. It would seem from this that despite affirmations of the benefits of the teaching: research nexus (Taylor 2007) and changes allowing parity between teaching, administration and research for the first rungs of promotion, research is still central for higher career progression. Interviews with staff in the sector (Barrett and Barrett 2008) also found strong staff perceptions that research performance is pivotal for promotion.

In addition the UK Higher Education (HE) context can be seen to have changed significantly over the last two decades. This has come about through processes such as: the creation of the new universities, the rise of student numbers, quality assessment exercises and the shift towards, what is seen by some, as corporate management strategies (Graham 2002; Shattock 2003; Middlehurst 2004; HEFCE 2009). The pressures on all staff deriving from these general trends is reflected in the finding that working during the evenings and at weekends is accepted as normal and practiced regularly by 42% of academic staff (Kinman and Jones 2004). The result of this has been that, in HE in the UK, all bar one of the job related stressors used by the Health and Safety Executive exceed their stipulated benchmarks (Kinman and Court 2010). The impact of such contextual pressures on women has been investigated covering areas such as: the extent to which women respond by adopting 'masculinist' values, or resist them or attempt to transform practice; and the degree to which these responses are mediated by structural and cultural factors (Goode and Bagilhole 1998, p. 161). However, Poole et al. (1997) international study of academic work suggests that the workforce is rather fixed and immobile and that this creates a stability in networks and structures that impedes the possibilities for progress and change.

The evident complexity of the issue of career progression for women might suggest that improvements in this area would come from action on many fronts. This particular investigation will begin by scoping the issues by reviewing some relevant research. It will then go onto focus on a specific perspective by presenting details of typical sector practice in managing academic workloads (MAW), followed by a discussion of specific workload issues that can be especially problematic for women and their career progression. It will conclude by suggesting improvements that could result through actions in relation to MAW, with implications at school and organisational levels.

Background

Whilst this paper focuses on the UK practices for allocating work and relating them to women's career advancement some studies from other countries provide interesting insights into how different factors may affect progression.

Various frameworks have been used, for example, Probert ([2005](#)) suggests that under representation of women at senior levels can be divided into two main frameworks. The first of which relates to unequal treatment of men and women at work and the second focuses on work outcomes resulting from gendered choices, such as from parenting and career roles. Looking at the first category the process of on may be subtle. For example Toren's ([1993](#)) examination of the dynamic operation between merit and seniority criteria for promotion, suggests that perceptions within organisations create a culture that has differential expectations of progress for women. An example of the second framework in operation has been investigated in Australia, where caring responsibilities within the home have been linked to *slower* career progression, with peaks of academic activity being 5 years later for women than for men (Ledwith and Manfredi [2000](#)). However, Probert argues that the data available on appointments and pay describes the pattern of female under-representation, common to Australia, the UK and US, but does not account for them, nor is there sufficient evidence on the different kinds of workloads involved. Although there are indications of broad areas of gendered difference, such as from the UK RAE data, investigations (Barrett and Barrett [2007a](#), [b](#)) into workloads in the UK show a lack of consistency around descriptions and assessment of roles and workloads. Although some individual schools have methods that promote consistency this rarely occurs across a whole HEI and certainly cannot be seen across the UK sector as a whole. This lack of consistency means it is very hard in practice to access the sort of evidence to which Probert alludes.

Le Feuvre ([2009](#)) describes another useful framework for theories about the processes for entry by women to prestigious professional groups. These are categorised into: firstly, theories of vertical segregation, with women excluded from processes of recognition and reward (subordination), which may be acerbated by other factors such as the widespread use of fixed term and hourly paid contracts (Harley [2003](#); Bryson [2004](#)) and part-time and non-tenured positions (Glazer-Raymo [2008](#)). The second group of theories includes ideas on niche and gender differentiated roles. Where this works positively there can be 'equality in respect of difference' (p. 12), however, in the context of workload allocation this might include a skewed emphasis and pressure from pastoral care/advising/mentoring type roles (Glazer-Raymo [2008](#)). Thirdly, Le Feuvre argues, there are theories about the degree to which women take on and conform to masculine values and norms in order to advance, for example by working unsocial hours. This response has been described by researchers from a variety of standpoints (Saunderson [2002](#); Knights and Richards [2003](#); Knights and Kerfoot [2008](#)). Lastly Le Feuvre notes theories that look to a radical vision where men and women change in both professional and domestic arrangements. A prospect for such development is seen for example by Ledwith and Manfredi ([2000](#)), whose research reveals there are substantial generational differences between older and younger women in their confidence in seizing opportunities. This issue of confidence is a recurring aspect (Asmar [1999](#); Saunderson [2002](#); Fletcher et al. [2007](#)). Further, as others note (Poole et al. [1997](#); Bryson [2004](#)), networking and mentors are not seen to be greatly available to women, but have been demonstrated in long term studies to help increase research productivity and promotion prospects (Gardiner et al. [2007](#)).

One can conjecture that the interplay between the processes described by some of these theories will be played out in relation to annual workload allocation decisions. For example from the first and second categories, subtle gendered divisions in modes of employment and between certain roles and work areas could assist/hinder progression. The consequences of this process could then relate to the third category of theories about masculine values embedded within organisational practices/demands that determine career advancement (Currie et al. [2000](#)). In practice Probert's ([2005](#)) findings, from a large

Australian national survey, reveal that women are less likely to apply for promotion than men, but the reduced sub-set who do are just as likely to be successful, a finding similar to that of Goode and Bagilhole's (1998) case study research in the UK. Probert (2005) also found that, whilst little difference was found in teaching loads between the genders in Australia, research outputs and completion rates for PhD studies were lower for women. This finding is similar to Asmar's earlier research, also in Australia (1999), that found average completion ages for PhD studies being thirty-three years for men, 5 years earlier than that for women at thirty-eight years old. However, looking at science groupings in the USA, and using regression analysis and controlling for discipline, marital status, number of children and years since highest degree Corley (2005), found gender not significantly related to the total number of publications produced. In fact the major factors were only discipline and number of years since highest degree. However, as noted above from the Australian experience, women do actually tend to gain their PhDs significantly later than men. Corley's results also show that traditional career strategies and work environments tend to lead to higher levels of scientific productivity and that more male scientists aligned positively with these factors. This resonates with Poole et al. (1997) international study of eight countries into the gendered nature of academic work that reveals patterns of difference across all of the countries in perceptions about work. For example, women exhibited a more positive orientation towards teaching than was the case for male academics, and men seemed to have a better appreciation of the importance of research in terms of: achieving tenure, gaining a favourable evaluation within faculty and for attracting resources.

Another issue is revealed through Terosky et al's (2008) cross-discipline, 3 year longitudinal investigation in American universities. It looks at the features that recently tenured women academics meet in their work that draw them away from their scholarly learning. They found that 80% of women, compared to 26% of men, found an intensification of "service" related work. For some this created a clash with their research work and for others with their teaching scholarship. The question of research outputs, already touched on above, is complex and as Poole et al. note (1997), there exists little in the way of conclusive results. This issue seems complicated by, for example, factors such as institutional demands (Carvalho and Santiago 2008), discipline differences (Poole et al. 1997; Asmar 1999; Fletcher et al. 2007), possibly compounded by patronage issues (Finch 2003), the evaluation of research outputs (Poole et al. 1997), and routes taken into academia (Fletcher et al. 2007).

Whatever the causes, it would seem that changes in UK promotion criteria have been helpful in reducing bias towards research-based activity. However, Parker's (2008) study in the UK, as noted earlier, has shown that this is not the case for the higher levels of Professor or Reader, and this is especially prevalent in the Pre 1992 Universities. Further, the long hours working culture seemingly required to succeed can run contrary to a university's espoused equality principles (Ledwith and Manfredi 2000). Yet there does not appear to be a gender divide in terms of the preferred choices surrounding teaching and research activity. Dever and Morrison's (2009) interviews in Australia found women equally enjoying the stimulation offered by a variety of work. However, what seemed to be particularly important to them was how the work time was divided up, with 'fragmentation of available time' working as an impediment to progress in research (p. 54). One example of beneficial approaches to research work that they found was to concentrate teaching into one semester of the year, however, the scope to do this may be reduced with part-time contracts. The danger seems to be that if research activity is limited or interrupted for

practical reasons, such as career breaks, it may not limit promotion to begin with, but could prove debilitating later in a women's career.

As Dever and Morrison (2009) found, whilst women that they interviewed welcomed the flexibility that academia often affords to work from home this 'flexibility had its flipside' (p. 56) with broken home-work boundaries intensifying working conditions. Researchers in Ireland (Russell et al. 2009) looking at different varieties of employment modes, such as part-time and flexible and home working, have found that home working actually increases pressure and home life conflict as it occurs 'in addition to, rather than as an alternative location to, work done at their employers' place of work' (p. 86).

Through all the diversity of views the issue of time does seem to be a recurring theme in many of the studies including: years taken to complete studies, how research time is fragmented, whether that time for research occurs at home. It would seem, that given the perceived importance of research to career progression, how time for it is allocated, and accounted for, within workloads might be an important element of the issue of career progression for women. However, this also concerns a dynamic with other roles taken on or allocated. This could relate to the presence of managerial/leadership roles in a workload or relatively hidden, but time-consuming, mentoring/welfare roles. Through annual allocations of work this mix cumulates over time into outcomes and achievements that ultimately support or confound promotion prospects. The next section sets out an overview of the practice of academic workload allocation in the UK HE sector and then the section after that assesses the implications for the promotion of women against the ideas summarised in this section.

Management of academic workloads: UK sector practice

As others have noted (Ringwood et al. 2005; Vardi 2008) research into workload planning and allocation has been limited and often relates to the development of specific models or policies. Burgess et al. (2003) in their review of his earlier case study work (Burgess 1996) looking at practices within a department of a, then, Polytechnic business school and an 'old' university acknowledges that it may be criticised as being 'overly technical rational' (p. 219). They extend their work on these cases by recognising the academic staff as co-developers of the system and to suggest a set of differentiating dimensions to classify the approaches used, for example looking at features such as the level of detail, formality and units of measure used. They then go onto comment on the various approaches, identifying key criteria such as equity and transparency. Research (Barrett and Barrett 2007a) carried out into the processes used for allocating academic workloads involved in depth interviews of fifty-nine individual academic staff at a range of levels of seniority, in seven diverse (size, grouping and geographical location) UK universities, and two from Australia, covering in total seventeen disciplines. It found that workload allocation is characterised by great diversity of practice both within and between institutions irrespective of the subject area. However, as others have also noted, there is a drive towards increasing formalisation of practice in workload planning (Burgess et al. 2003; Hull 2006). Current work (Barrett and Barrett 2009a) with another similarly diverse group of twelve UK university partners has confirmed this variability in practice and extended the understanding of the processes and implications of implementing change.

Figure 1 (Barrett and Barrett 2009a) illustrates the range of UK institutional approaches found to the management of academic workload (MAW) systems. This diversity crosses the contextual differences between the Pre and Post 1992 UK sectors and the latter's
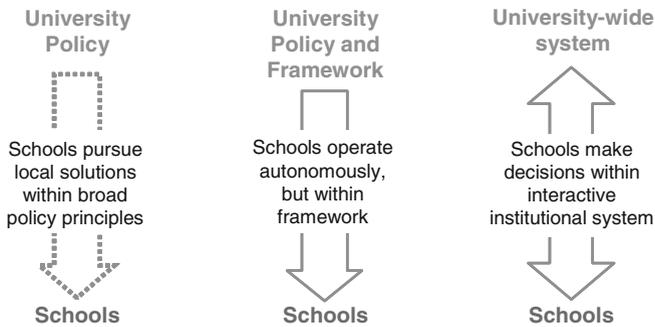
Fig. 1 Range of institutional approaches to the management of academic workloads

national employment contract agreements in areas such as staff teaching contact hours. Figure 1 indicates that some universities provide broad policy guidelines, whilst allowing considerable discretion to heads of school. Others go a step further and adopt a framework that, whilst still allowing local discretion, provides a few common guidelines, for example on the use of units of measure. A few institutions have an integrated university-wide system. Even this last approach can allow local discretion, for example on weightings of various aspects of work, but the recorded data is collected at a university level. Further experience (Barrett and Barrett 2009b) in implementing and maintaining such university wide systems, dating back to 1998, shows the need for reviewing and updating of processes in response to contextual changes.

Besides this diversity between UK institutions there is typically great variety in the methods used to manage workloads within universities. This variation is of course more limited in those universities that adopt a university wide system. Because of the diversity of practices in workload management at school or department level it is helpful to categorise the main approaches taken. Some have used numerous dimensions to categorise the broad characteristics of possible approaches as mentioned above (e.g. Burgess et al. 2003). Others have looked at very specific methods used within one institution, such as the use of contact hours or points based models, and categorised these (e.g. Vardi 2008). Using a grounded approach across nine institutions (Barrett and Barrett 2007a), the triangulated categorisation of MAW approaches that emerged was: informal, partial and comprehensive. The first group has been typified as those that collect background information, consult and then divide the work informally, balancing school needs with staff preferences and expertise. The 'partial' group actually combine a limited focused range of activities (usually solely teaching) formally/numerically, for example using contact hours and student numbers for assessment aspects of taught work, to give an output in terms of points or hours. The last group covers those approaches that include a comprehensive scope of activities into a model, including administration and research elements, albeit the latter is often capped and funded and unfunded work distinguished. The partial and comprehensive approaches to workload management tend to use metrics to formally quantify tasks. Research (Barrett and Barrett 2008) has found that this is often a practice adopted in larger schools, typically when the number of academic staff within a school is above about thirty members and where the assessment of loads is complex.

Case study research (Paewai et al. 2007) found that the degree to which a model had an (implicitly positive) impact on workloads was associated with the level of involvement by staff in the development of the model. The success of any of these methods, as judged by

the staff involved (Barrett and Barrett 2008), also varies depending on factors such as the skills of the work allocator and the work context. For example in a small school with an experienced, fair, head of school an informal approach to allocation can work well, allowing individual preferences and skills to be flexibly matched with resource demands. However, for each approach there are some disadvantages and those related particularly to women and career progress are discussed below.

Potential problem areas in workload management systems

Looking at these methods of allocating work in UK HEIs it can be seen that all of the approaches to managing workloads have potential problems. For example 'comprehensive' methods can become so complicated that staff find difficulty in using them (Hull 2006; Vardi 2008). However, 'informal' approaches can be the most problematic where the division of loads is complex and problems can occur in assessing the equity of allocations, and this can be related to issues around transparency of the process and outcomes (Ringwood et al. 2005). More specifically, informal approaches may allow discriminatory patterns of allocation to go undetected or unchallenged. For example, there is evidence from Probert's (2005) large-scale survey that women spend more time on pastoral care and also Barrett and Barrett (2008) found a tendency for women in some schools to be routinely allocated more mentoring/welfare roles. The latter is an area that is felt to be time intensive, but not very helpful for career progression (Lafferty and Fleming 2000). The potential danger of this type of informality in systems is recognised in European law (the European Court in Danfoss C—109/88) that anticipates, in relation to pay, that informal workplace systems will tend to favour men, and that transparency is necessary if there is to be a shift from the status quo. By analogy, transparency of the information in workload systems is essential to help raise general awareness and sensitivity to the above type of issues when allocating work.

Although trends towards larger sizes of schools have brought with them more formalised approaches to recording and allocating work, including the use of spreadsheets to calculate loads, this practice is often 'partial' or focused and only extends to the teaching aspect of the work allocation (Burgess et al. 2003). This leaves research activity to occur in any residual time and excludes it from the workload assessment. Reasons given for this are diverse. Some suggest that this is because research is felt to be harder to quantify, but also there is a fairly widespread belief that academics are motivated to do this work anyway (Barrett and Barrett 2008). This incomplete assessment of overall loads often requires staff to work in their own time at weekends or evenings, because the work allocated for teaching and administration duties fills the formal time available at work. Thus certain groups may find themselves disadvantaged in a work culture that favours those who are able to work for long and unsocial hours (Fletcher et al. 2007). Taking this together with Parker's (2008) findings on the influence of research on promotion, one could anticipate this being especially problematic for women and their career progression.

Even when a 'comprehensive' approach to workload allocation is in place, the above issues can still arise, albeit the implicit transparency should mitigate the most extreme effects. However, for the substantial number of, especially women, on part-time or fractional contracts there is an additional risk. This is namely that their work can become concentrated around teaching roles and activities, often excluding, at least for a period, management/leadership roles and activity in research. Thus, although it is recognised that, for many, part-time work can offer flexibility (Cotterill and Letherby 2005; Dever and

Morrison 2009), opportunities for promotion can be affected through the resultant difficulties in building a balanced Curriculum Vitae (McDonald et al. 2009) and moving into full-time or tenured positions (Glazer-Raymo 2008).

To focus on staff in "traditional" academic career grades and to see if the combining together of all staff was masking any interesting effects, a special analysis was requested of HESA[1] that restricted the data only to UK academic staff on open-ended/permanent contracts[2] (i.e. excluding staff on "researcher" or "other" grades). This approach reduced the number of staff involved from a grand total of 174,945 to a sub-population of around half this figure at 88,311. Analyses of the data for this sub-population were then provided by employment function and mode of employment. The resulting figures within these categories are given in Table 1, together with the percentage build up of the elements to the total in Table 2.

For staff on open contracts, excluding those on research contracts, i.e. focusing on what could be thought of as a traditional academic career track, it can be seen that 38.3% are female and 61.7% male. This compares with 42.6 and 57.4% respectively for all academic staff—that is the 'gender gap' opens by a further 8.6% as the analysis tightens to traditional academic roles.

The definition of this sub-population does include 'teaching only' contracts, however, these only accounts for 12% and is pretty evenly spread across the genders. It also includes some other roles, but the numbers are negligible. The vast majority of the sub-population (86.8% of the total) is employed for "teaching and research" functions, with a predominance (75.8% of the total) on full time contracts, which is built up of females (25.3%) and males (50.6%). Or in simple terms, of those staff in HE on traditional contracts (full time, open ended, covering teaching and research), one-third (33%) are women and two-thirds (67%) are men. These are the contracts that carry a general expectation and, to varying degrees, opportunity for staff to follow their own research interests. Here it would seem that, on the face of it, women have a much-reduced opportunity.

One stark aspect of this is that staff not on open contracts may find difficulties in being submissable to the Research Excellence Framework (formerly the RAE), which is widely believed to help promotion, despite moves by universities to broaden promotion criteria. Further, whilst the REF may help women by rendering their work more objectively visible, the productivity demands from it may run contrary, in the longer term, to many women's mode of working and act to reinforce existing gendered patterns (Harley 2003; Fletcher et al. 2007). For example, findings from Australia HE show that women have been 'disproportionately concentrated in areas and institutions with the lowest levels of research funding' (Lafferty and Fleming 2000).

However, problems for career progression can also occur for those involved in research only, or teaching only, work that tends to involve fixed term contracts. Bryson (2004), whilst quoting Beatson's (1995) argument that fixed term contracts may help to increase opportunities to enter the profession and allow variety of experience, actually finds that there are disadvantages from these fixed term contracts, deriving from insecurity of employment and lack of career structure. Bryson's (2004) survey of staff, including those on fixed term contracts, reveals that 95% of woman of the latter group would prefer to be on a permanent contract and enjoy the opportunities for career progression that it offers.

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[1] Using Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for academic staff employed in UK HE for the year 2007/08. Focusing on Full Person Equivalent (FPE) statistics, as do Equality Challenge Unit reports.

[2] Specified grades were: 01,02,03,04,31,32,33,34,40,41,42,61,62,63,71,72,73.

Table 1 Academic staff FPE by mode of employment, academic employment function and gender 2007/08 (whose term of employment is open ended and restricted to specified grades, Source: HESA Staff Record 2007/08)

Academic employment function	Mode of employment	Gender					
		Female	Male	Unknown	Total	F (%)	M (%)
Teaching only	Full-time	1787.1	1801.8	0.0	3588.9	50	50
	Full-time, term-time only	17.0	16.0	0.0	33.0	52	48
	Part-time	2738.8	2378.8	0.0	5117.6	54	46
	Part-time, term-time only	928.7	1116.6	0.0	2045.3	45	55
Teaching only total		5471.6	5313.2	0.0	10784.8	51	49
Research only	Full-time	142.0	254.0	0.0	396.0	36	64
	Full-time, term-time only	1.0	1.0	0.0	2.0	50	50
	Part-time	43.3	50.9	0.0	94.2	46	54
	Part-time, term-time only	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	0	100
Research only total		186.3	306.9	0.0	493.2	38	62
Teaching and research	Full-time	22302.9	44654.3	1.0	66958.1	33	67
	Full-time, term-time only	41.1	17.9	0.0	59.0	70	30
	Part-time	5666.2	3930.5	0.0	9596.7	59	41
	Part-time, term-time only	22.4	35.0	0.0	57.4	39	61
Teaching and research total		28032.5	48637.7	1.0	76671.2	37	63
Not teaching and/or research	Full-time	106.7	208.7	0.0	315.4	34	66
	Full-time, term-time only	3.0	0.0	0.0	3.0	100	0
	Part-time	25.8	17.7	0.0	43.5	59	41
Not teaching and/or research total		135.5	226.4	0.0	361.9	37	63
Total		33826.0	54484.1	1.0	88311.1	38.3	61.7

The potential cumulative effect of some of these gendered aspects can be seen in Fig. 2 to, at least in part, explain the reduced career progression of women in HE.

Potential contribution of management of academic workloads systems

In the above context, this section turns to an examination of the ways in which more transparent and consultative approaches to workload allocations could start to address the problems highlighted.

Whilst decisions made at an individual level on workloads and roles may seem appropriate and defensible, analysis at an organisational level can highlight particular

Table 2 Percentage build up—academic staff FPE by mode of employment, academic employment function and gender 2007/08 (whose term of employment is open ended and restricted to specified grades, Source: HESA Staff Record 2007/08)

Academic employment function	Mode of employment	Gender			
		Female	Male	Unknown	Total
Teaching only	Full-time	2.0	2.0	0.0	4.1
	Full-time, term-time only	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Part-time	3.1	2.7	0.0	5.8
	Part-time, term-time only	1.1	1.3	0.0	2.3
Teaching only total		6.2	6.0	0.0	12.2
Research only	Full-time	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.4
	Full-time, term-time only	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Part-time	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
	Part-time, term-time only	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Research only total		0.2	0.3	0.0	0.6
Teaching and research	Full-time	25.3	50.6	0.0	75.8
	Full-time, term-time only	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
	Part-time	6.4	4.5	0.0	10.9
	Part-time, term-time only	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Teaching and research total		31.7	55.1	0.0	86.8
Not teaching and/or research	Full-time	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.4
	Full-time, term-time only	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Part-time	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Not teaching and/or research total		0.2	0.3	0.0	0.4
Total		38.3	61.7	1.0	88311.1

trends and areas of unwitting discrimination. To help address this, risk and impact assessments can create a focus and prioritise action. But, to do this information on workload allocation needs to be visible, so that an institutional view can be gained. However, a danger from more formalised processes to manage workloads could be a greater emphasis on managerialism. This can be seen in various ways. For some (Lafferty and Fleming 2000), it is seen to bring about a shift in climate that works to undermine the principles of gender equity, arguing that it can work to consolidate a smaller, more impermeable core of managers. The latter can then control using 'market derived princi-ples, with a 'concentration of power paralleled by a concentration of finance' (p. 261) that entrenches the gendered divide in power relations. However, others examine how new strategies might 'create spaces' and opportunities for women workers (Goode and Bagil-hole 1998). In this paper it is argued that the risks of more formal approaches are justified by the benefits that could flow, but that genuinely working towards consensus around perceptions of equity is more important than the pursuit of spurious mathematical equality
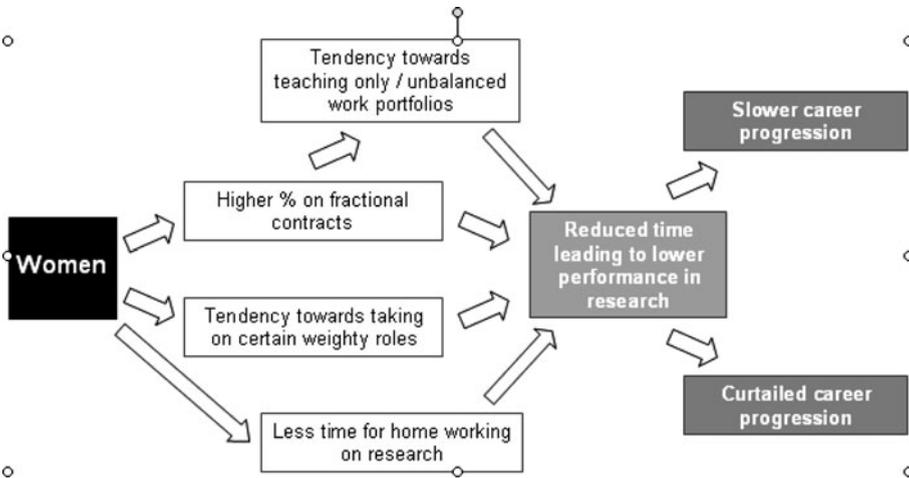
Fig. 2 Academic workloads and potential cumulative impacts on women and their career progression

in allocations. This process, as has been argued elsewhere (Barrett and Barrett 2009a, b), involves interplay of both social and technical elements. Thus, irrespective of the systems used, integrity in their operation is crucial to the trust that staff can place in them.

Table 3 sets out several ways in which making MAW more explicit and consensual than is typical has the potential to contribute to the equality challenge of career progression for women.

To support the principles of equity in MAW processes within schools a university policy that outlines its stance on transparency, equity and equality requirements needs to be disseminated widely through a training and development programme (Paewai et al. 2007). This can be supported by human resource departments, which can then monitor for equitable processes and outcomes. Action on this front could then start to change the institutional context, making decisions and outcomes more generally visible. Strike and Taylor's (2009) research, that involved interviews with a variety of staff, found a disjuncture between national and institutional policy discourses and the concerns that academics actually raise. They suggest the need for more of a policy focus on issues such as career planning, workloads and diversity. Some of the authors' current work is looking at how data from university systems for allocating work can be used to help inform equality impact assessments. This involves looking at issues such as the make up of the workloads of part-time and hourly paid staff.

Implicit in any approach that seeks equity is the notion that all legitimate work is included. Although it is fortunate that academic staff are motivated and interested sufficiently in their work to continue working at it after routine university hours, a system that relies on this, by allocating work that cannot be completed within work hours, may tend to facilitate inequalities of career progression, with certain groupings, such as women and careers, more vulnerable in the face of such an approach. So, assessment of work allocations needs to include all the work expected from, or allocated to, staff members, so that there can be some evaluation of the time and opportunities given to staff in the different areas. Transparency of both the decision making process and the outcomes can help improve the fairness in allocations and opportunities for career progression. A greater awareness brought through these processes could help women to shape their career planning and assist

Table 3 The contribution of enhanced MAW systems to equality, women and career progression

Issue	Potential problem	MAW Contribution
Allocated roles	Apparent tendency for women to be allocated (Barrett and Barrett 2008), or spend more time on (Probert 2005), certain roles such as pastoral care, which although often heavy in work terms do not facilitate career progression/promotion Incomplete assessment of workloads leading to necessity for extensive 'after hours' working to ensure high quality work outputs and career progression	Consultations in the development of a model and transparency of its outputs may raise awareness of potential problems/trends leading to more equitable distribution of roles and defensible decisions Linkage to the appraisal process that informs on training and development needs Assessment of loads to include all work elements, so that high levels of home working are not required for career progression
Transparency	Lack of clarity often resulting from methods used to balance work. For example an informal system of allocating work with limited ability to assess equity in the size and distribution of roles will allow any discriminatory process to go undetected	Transparency in both criteria and outcomes of allocation, through agreed process/model, will highlight any areas of unfairness and discrimination Planning for and providing a more equitable distribution of work
Fractional contracts	Difficulties in creating a balanced CV with a portfolio of activities necessary for career progression	Staff on fractional contracts fully incorporated into work planning model, leading to provision of balanced work portfolio, incorporating other work areas in proportion to overall contract time Consultation & discussion on the above and work patterns e.g. flexibility and availability, to inform work planning model Linkage to appraisal process—training and development needs

those on fractional contracts to ensure they maintain continuity of involvement in all their areas of interest.

Whilst changes to criteria for promotion for Senior and Principal Lecturer level may seem to be helpful it might be worth investigating whether this promotes a short progression path, encouraging a focus on activity that prevents later movement to the higher levels accessed through research. The latter short promotion path for women wanting to access senior management positions has been found to occur in other industries (Guillaume and Pochic 2009) and is, surely, an unintended consequence in HE of moves to facilitate progression at the lower levels.

Recommendations

Career progression for women in HE is a stubborn, complex, equality issue. The scale of the problem has become well known through headline statistics, but the underlying reasons are complicated and have proved rather intractable so far. It is suggested in this paper that practices of academic workload allocation may be a significant factor both in the problem and its resolution. This can be seen in that promotion broadly follows individual achievements that are an outcome of the work done. Workload allocations, usually annually by heads of school, are the practical way in which the diet of activities for

individual staff is created. Although not usually seen as a strategic matter, this low level activity is actually cumulatively pivotal to staff promotion prospects.

By promoting more equitable and transparent approaches to academic workload allocations, it is argued universities can go beyond an aspiration to improve matters and take very practical steps to address career progression for women in HE. For example:

- By making the allocation process more explicit and consensual any tendency to give women a disproportionate amount of time on roles less connected to promotion, will be more visible and less likely to occur. This should help address the 'Danfoss' discrimination assumption;
- Conversely, by including all work elements in allocation decisions, time for promotion related activities, such as research and management/leadership roles, will be more likely to be granted equitably to all;
- Within more open systems, and within a context where staff are more aware of the long-term impacts of omitting the above elements from their work, the opportunity will arise to maintain a more balanced workload for individuals on part-time contracts.

Schools understandably tend to be driven by shorter-term imperatives. However, to address this issue in institutions, (no matter how an individual school chooses to allocate work) the adoption of certain policy principles across the university should help to improve the current inequalities in career progression between the genders. It is suggested that these principles should include guidance on the following areas:

- Planning and consultation on work allocations to ensure proper consideration of choices and their longer-term consequences for career progression. This would include encouraging *all staff* to have balanced portfolios of activities.
- Linkage of the above to Development and Performance Review processes
- The equitable distribution of work—using an agreed model/process to facilitate the fair sharing of all tasks/roles, and prioritisation of work to ensure that loads are reasonable and do not require extensive working outside the normal working week.
- Transparency of outcomes that through increased awareness encourages defensible process.
- Supportive practices—for example through using work planning models to maximise flexibility of work patterns.
- Training to support heads of school, and all of those involved with the management of workloads, to ensure that practices align with university policies and equality legislation/audits.

A stronger appreciation of the longer-term implications of choices and greater transparency over allocations could assist, not just those women who choose to progress to higher levels in academia, but also academics generally to achieve equity in the balance of their work roles and other activities.

It may be inevitable that some women will have slower progression in HE owing to personal choices that result in career breaks and/or a higher incidence of part-time working. However, the danger of this being exacerbated by inequitable treatment, even if unwitting, in the informal allocation of workloads can be mitigated by the use of more explicit methods. Linked to a greater awareness of the longer term impacts of the mix of work taken on (especially in the context of many women holding part-time positions) promotion to the highest levels may also be facilitated and the career cul-de-sac effect, born of the pragmatic early career choices of many women, may be eased.

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