Gender Pay Gap

Professor Ian Wall

1. The most powerful recent research is:
http://www.pnas.org/content/109/41/16474.full

This research, conducted at Yale University, demonstrates that there is bias against women in science academia in Physics, Biology and Chemistry. Briefly, identical job applications different only in the gender of the applicant were sent to senior academics in physics, biology and chemistry, who were not aware that this was an experiment. The outcome expressed itself in decisions to hire fewer female scientists. This leads to the conclusion that it was not the best candidates that were to be appointed but that men were chosen solely because they are men. The problem for women scientists did not stop there for, if they were to be hired, they were offered lower wages and less mentoring. These last two points perhaps indicate elements of the process in which women do not continue to progress to senior levels in the same numbers as men although equally qualified.

An example of success in responding to this and other issues is ECU’s Athena SWAN Charter. This was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) employment in higher education and research. Take up was patchy until it was made important when the National Health Research Institute (NHRI) made research grant approvals conditional upon applicants having attained Athena Swan Silver Level and when the UK Research Councils announced in 2013 that, in determining grant awards, there would be an expectation that universities would demonstrate their progress by taking up the Athena Swan programme. Following this Athena Swan Awards in Scotland grew from 12 to 57. This demonstrates that setting formal targets that are required to be met rather than optional can be successful and serves as a model of what might also be achieved elsewhere.

Perhaps the failure to bring about substantial improvement over the past few decades has been a failure to treat the matter with practical discipline and sustained programmes, as Athena Swan does, that are necessary to effect substantial permanent change. Funding for short term projects that try to provide support for individual women, to detach themselves from the ‘sticky carpet’, avoid being expelled out of the ‘leaky pipe’ or break through the ‘glass ceiling’ whilst welcome are not going to solve the problem and can imply that the problem is for women rather than for society to address.

2. The STEMEC Report in section 6 touches upon some of the issues the Committee is covering, http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00505647.docx

The evidence appears irrefutable that without mandatory rules change will not come. This is a matter of justice and wellbeing but for those who need monetary reasons to adopt a policy it is cheaper than a continual flow of expenditure attempting, and failing, to deal with the problem at source.

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