

CROSS PARTY GROUP (CPG) ON SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

13.00 – 14.00 on Wednesday 06 December 2018, Committee Room 1, Scottish Parliament

Topic: Gender equality at subject-level

Note of Meeting

Present:

Ms Elizabeth Smith MSP (Convener)	Scottish Parliament
Mr Iain Gray MSP (Vice Convener)	Scottish Parliament
Ms Rachel Adamson	Scottish Funding Council
Ms Joanne Buchan	Colleges Scotland
Ms Lynne Currie	NUS Scotland
Mr Robbie Francis	Thorntons Law
Mr Christopher Kennedy	Unite the Union
Mr Kenny MacInnes	Forth Valley College
Prof Matthew MacIver	University of the Highlands and Islands
Ms Stephanie Millar	Advance HE
Mr Kenny Stewart	The Open University in Scotland
Dr Clare Taylor	Edinburgh Napier University
Mr Boab Thomson	Universities Scotland
Dr Heather Whitford	University of Dundee

Apologies:

Mr Steve Bargeton	University of St Andrews
Mr Gavin Donoghue	University of Edinburgh
Mr Rob Flett	Glasgow Caledonian University
Ms Anne Keenan	EIS
Mr Finlay MacCorquodale	Edinburgh Napier University
Mr Drew McGowan	West College Scotland
Mr Oliver Mundell MSP	Scottish Parliament
Ms Jane Scott	Queen Margaret University

1. Welcome and introduction from the Convener

The Convener welcomed members to the tenth meeting of the CPG on Colleges and Universities in session five of the Scottish Parliament, to discuss the topic of gender equality at subject-level. The Convener explained that the meeting scheduled for Wednesday 25 October 2018 had to be postponed as it clashed with an education ministerial statement, meaning there would be no MSP representation at the meeting. She further explained that under Scottish Parliament rules, this would make the meeting 'unofficial'. As this meeting was also the AGM, where office-bearers were due to be re-elected, the group was therefore not reconstituted. In order to address this, a short procedural meeting was held, where Ms Liz Smith and Mr Iain Gray were re-elected as Convener and Vice-Convener, respectively. The Convener apologised to the speakers for this postponement and thanked them for agreeing to speak again. The Convener then introduced the speakers: Dr Heather Whitford, Head of Studies, School of Nursing, University of Dundee; Mr Kenny MacInnes, Director of Engineering and Science, Forth Valley College; and Ms Rachel Adamson, Senior Policy/Analysis Officer, Scottish Funding Council.

The Convener thanked Universities Scotland for sponsoring lunch for the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were noted.

3. Approval of minutes from 25 October 2018 meeting.

Members approved the minutes of the previous meeting on 25 October 2018.

4. Introduction of topic: gender equality at subject-level.

The Convener invited the speakers to make their presentations.

Dr Heather Whitford, University of Dundee

Dr Whitford began by informing members that her presentation would focus on a recent report which she co-authored with colleagues from the University of Edinburgh, the University of the West of Scotland and Robert Gordon University. Titled *Men in Nursing*, the report explores the causes of under-representation of men in the nursing profession and sets out a series of recommendations to encourage more males to join the profession. Currently, only between eight and ten per cent of nursing students in Scotland are male. Dr Whitford continued, saying universities and colleges had been challenged, by the Scottish Funding Council's Gender Action Plan, to ensure that no subject should have an extreme gender imbalance of more than 75:25 by 2030.

Dr Whitford then progressed to discuss the phases of the study. Firstly, a literature review was conducted which analysed 19 studies concerned with the under-representation of males in the nursing profession. Interestingly, Dr Whitford explained that only one study was done in the UK, with her report being the first one in Scotland to look at the issue. Focus groups were then conducted with university and college lecturers to gather the views, experiences and attitudes to men in nursing in

Scotland. An online survey was also sent to teachers, particularly careers advisers, in secondary schools to better understand the demand for careers in nursing.

Dr Whitford then presented the composition of pre-registration cohorts by gender at each of the four universities conducting the study over the last ten years. The figures showed that the discipline was overwhelmingly dominated by females, as high as 94 per cent in one instance. However, all institutions were below the national average of a 9.4 per cent gender gap. Moving on to discuss retention rates, Dr Whitford explained that the study found that men were more likely to drop out of studying nursing than females and also more likely to take longer to complete their studies.

The qualitative findings of the study were then presented to the group and showed that focus group participants believed nursing to be a worthwhile, rewarding and financially secure career. The findings also showed that male nursing role models and personal experience of caring helped applicants overcome societal views of nursing, which was acted as a barrier. Furthermore, maturity was found to be a resilience factor in overcoming the female stereotype. However, barriers to the men entering the profession include the fact that it is inherently seen as a female profession, which Dr Whitford explained can be a powerful deterrent. She added that the absence of male presence in advertising or university recruitment materials is not helpful. Other barriers to the profession include the financial challenges of studying, especially for mature students, and the low earning potential.

In conclusion, Dr Whitford set out the recommendations of the report. She explained that a rebranding of nursing is needed, at a national level, in order to promote the profession to males. This includes utilising high-profile examples of men in nursing in recruitment campaigns and materials. She noted that education about nursing should begin as early as nursery, teaching children that the profession is both open and rewarding to males as well as females. She finished by recommending that guidance teachers and careers advisers should have realistic information about nursing as a profession, using gender-neutral language.

Mr Kenny MacInnes, Forth Valley College

Mr MacInnes began his presentation by informing members that he has worked at Forth Valley College for over eleven years. Gender equality is a subject very close to his heart and something which he has been working on addressing during his time at the college, specifically in engineering. The college works with a wide range of big employers to provide modern apprenticeships in engineering

Mr MacInnes then informed the group that Forth Valley College currently has 19 female apprentice engineers. He added that this might not sound like a huge number, but compared to past years, this is a positive and encouraging step. For example, this year TechnipFMC, with whom the college engages with regularly, took on 16 modern apprentices, of which there are eight males and eight females. The fact that there were eight females is particularly significant given that there was only four female apprentice engineers in the whole college last year. He then attributed this increase to the way in which TechnipFMC advertised the apprenticeship. Instead of focusing on specific disciplines within engineering, they instead communicated the structure of the programme more broadly. For example, they spoke of broad subjects such as 'technical business' and 'technical support', rather than specifics like 'mechanical engineering'.

Furthermore, they also changed the criteria for the skills test which applicants must undertake. Previously, applicants had to display their competencies in areas like maths, mechanics and physics:

subjects which tended to have low female representation in school. Mr MacInnes said there was a high dropout rate during the skills test stage of the application process. However, the college then moved to an average scoring system, which meant applicants could do less well in certain areas but still pass due to better performance in other subjects. This has resulted in a higher success rate of converting applicants into candidates, especially female in terms of female applicants.

Mr MacInnes then informed members about the integrated degree programmes with Heriot-Watt University. Both institutions identified that the uptake of physics with females at school is very low, which is then a barrier to applying for engineering courses later in life. They then conducted a programme review which looked at the content of the degree and what was required to progress and found that physics was not an integral part of the programme. They then decided to remove it as an entry requirement. The removal of this barrier has produced a positive increase in the number of female applicants to the programme. Mr MacInnes added that although the increase was not huge, it was still a step in the right direction.

Ms Rachel Adamson, Scottish Funding Council

Ms Adamson began her presentation by firstly speaking about the Funding Council's Gender Action Plan. She noted that she had been impressed by the way in which the further and higher and education sectors had embraced gender equality and felt institutions had been making good progress in this area.

The Plan was developed as a way to reduce gender imbalances in subject areas in joint action with Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Government. An extensive consultation was launched with a broad range of stakeholders, including institutions, and the Higher Education Academy was commissioned to engage with institutions to establish a baseline in which to measure progress.

The key ambition of the Plan is to ensure that no subject has an extreme gender imbalance, which is deemed to be greater than 75:25. Furthermore, the Plan also aims to reduce the gap between participation of men and women in undergraduate study to five percentage points. On the second aim, Ms Adamson noted that work in this area should be focused on applicants from the most deprived areas of Scotland. She added that this is due to there being an absence of a gender gap in the most affluent areas of the country.

Of the total fourteen aims of the Gender Action Plan, Ms Adamson stated that another important ambition was to enhance strategic oversight of tackling gender imbalances, in order to coordinate action and raise awareness of the activity in institutions. In order to achieve this, institutions were each asked to develop their own gender action plans in order to ensure change was embedded throughout the institution.

Ms Adamson then explained that the Funding Council identified certain subjects in both sectors which had a large gender gap and tracked progress over a five year period, from 2011/12 to 2016/17. Beginning with the college sector, Ms Adamson informed members that some subjects had made great progress. For example, the gender gap in subjects like Building Services and Engineering/Technology had decreased. However, over the same period, the gap had increased in Construction and Computer Science. For the university sector, Engineering had reduced the gender gap whilst subjects like Computer Sciences, Architecture and Nursing had gone backwards. Although

there has been progress across both sectors, Ms Adamson stressed that it's a mixed picture. She added that the targets have been set for 2030 for a reason: it will take some time.

Ms Adamson then gave the example of the City of Glasgow College, who introduced a positive action scheme, which was a course in Mechanical Engineering specifically for females, the gender gap for the subject reduced sharply. She added that this showed that women were attracted to women-only courses and that there were reasons for not choosing the mixed Mechanical Engineering course. Before the creation of the women-only course, females represented just three per cent of students undertaking Mechanical Engineering. After its introduction, this figure rose to 13 per cent. Ms Adamson although not a huge increase, this positive change has been brought about by bold action.

In conclusion, Ms Adamson asserted that the change seen in institutions is largely due to a greater awareness of gender imbalances at a senior level. She added that Gender Action Plans have helped senior management ensure there is a holistic approach to tackling imbalances and ensuring that change is embedded throughout the entire institution. Progress is being made, but there still needs to be a more consistent and coordinated approach across all colleges and universities.

5. Discussion and questions

Liz Smith MSP, Scottish Parliament

Ms Smith asked whether the Scottish Funding Council has made the 2030 targets part of the Outcome Agreements, which set out what colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for their funding from government.

Ms Adamson replied that institutions have been asked to identify the subject areas where they have underrepresentation and then set their own outcomes. The 2030 target is a national ambition, and not per individual institution.

Iain Gray MSP, Scottish Parliament

Mr Gray asked reflected on the findings of a focus group ran by Dr Whitford's study, which found that there was the perception that males tended to be more ambitious than females. He asked whether the study considered whether this reflected reality and if men dominated senior roles in nursing.

Dr Whitford replied that this was correct, senior grades in the nursing profession do have a higher percentage of men. She added this was similar to academia, with professors more likely to be male than female.

Mr Gray then asked about the women-only Mechanical Engineering course offered by the City of Glasgow College and whether the positive uptake indicates whether women were previously discouraged from applying to a course which they perceived to be overwhelmingly dominated by men; or whether they were more likely to apply to a course which they thought they were more likely to be accepted into.

Mr MacInnes replied that the College's positive action of introducing the course would have predominantly attracted women who wouldn't apply to a course if they were going to be a very small minority. However, he added that this action was not representative of reality as the majority of workplaces are not dominated exclusively by one sex. There are pros and cons but largely, the introduction of the women-only course did attract females who would have otherwise not applied to

the course. Ms Adamson noted that it was important institutions thought about the diversity of choice that they offer students and what might be right for one individual might not be right for another. It was vital to consider what was keeping people away and what was attracting them.

Stephanie Millar, Advance HE

Ms Millar commented that although positive action measures, such as single-sex courses, were proven to be successful, they were nevertheless short-lived measures. While the measure is ongoing, the issues which cause a need for action should still be addressed: there has to be a sunset aspect to it.

Christopher Kennedy, Unite the Union

Mr Kennedy asked about the retention rates of nursing degree programmes, specifically why the drop-out rate was much higher for men than women.

Dr Whitford replied that there is an ongoing study which looks precisely at this issue. She added that the root cause of this is currently unknown and could be down to a range of factors, including academic failure or personal reasons. She hopes the study can shed more light on the issue.

Prof Matthew Maclver, University of the Highlands and Islands

Professor Maclver began his question by informing members that he is from a teaching background and believes that the profession has become increasingly feminised over the last few decades. He asked whether the Funding Council had any long-term plans to prevent professions from dominated by a particular sex.

Ms Adamson replied that the Funding Council is trying to be as forward-looking as possible but she is mindful that there is only so much influence they can have over professions. She added that she is mindful that the focus has to be on colleges and universities and the partnerships they can develop with different parts of the education system.

6. Close

Ms Smith closed the meeting and thanked members for attending.

ENDS