

The Elephant in the Corner: Gender and Policies Related to Higher Education by Pat O'Connor, *Administration*, Vol 56, No 1: 85-110

Introduction

To date no attention has been paid to the 'gender mainstreaming' of policies related to Higher Education 'as these are developed, implemented and evaluated' (McGauran, 2005:1). Such gender mainstreaming involves ensuring that women's involvement in decision making concerning such policies; ensuring that factors relevant to men and women are considered; that policies are developed and implemented in ways that reflect gendered concerns and that they are evaluated using clear indicators to assess who is benefiting from them. In so far as one sees organisations as 'social constructions that arise from a masculine vision of the world and that call on masculinity for their legitimation and affirmation' (Davies, 1995:44), mainstreaming without addressing gatekeeping is likely to be ineffective (Carney, 2005; Benshop and Verloo, 2006). Gate keeping can involve explicit published policies and statements directly or indirectly related to gender, as well as rules and regulations as regards the recruitment of gatekeepers and the construction of criteria of eligibility and excellence. Husu (2006) differentiates between these and gate keeping practices, which are concerned with the application of policies and related individual and organisational practices. In this paper we are particularly concerned with policies, although brief references will be made to the gendered profile of gatekeepers inside and outside the academy.

In a context where the high educational achievers are girls who, in the Irish context, are not attracted to those areas seen by the State as of national significance (such as natural science and informatics) it makes sense to ensure that educational resources allocated with a view to increasing economic growth are gender mainstreamed. This focus reflects EU priorities as well as the State's commitment to address imbalances in gender representation so that 'each public sector entity will implement a structured programme to address imbalances in gender representation in management positions'

(Agreed Programme for Government, 2002:29). The *Report of the High Level Group on University Equality Policies* recommended that the Universities develop an equality action plan ‘which sets out explicit and challenging targets and timetables as well as the names of those responsible for delivery’ (HEA, 2004) although the Higher Educational Authority’s (HEA) failure to develop any structure to progress this issue following their closure of the HEA funded Equality Unit in UCC in 2003 suggests the absence of any commitment to gender mainstreaming.

This paper is particularly concerned with what Carney (2006: 4) calls ‘challenging the masculinist basis for policy making’ although it is also hoped that it will add to an emerging body of work on gender mainstreaming (Crowley and McGauran, 2005; Carney, 2005 and 2006; McGauran, 2004) and on academic gate keeping (Husu, 2006). The paper looks at the content of a small number of policy related documents related to higher education - the choice being made so as to arguably reflect the views of the key internal and external stakeholders, including the Nation State, the OECD, the HEA, the European University Association, Irish University Association and the Royal Irish Academy. It attempts to explain the patterns that emerge by looking at the underlying assumptions in such policies and the gender profile of the gatekeepers.

Gender and the Wider Societal Context

It seems important to locate this issue in a wider societal context: focussing on Ireland’s rank on a series of global gender indices and on changes in the extent and level of women’s participation in paid employment and state support for that.

Ireland is ranked 8th on the Human Development Index (HDI) and 11th on the Gender Development Index (GDI)- both of these indices taking into account life expectancy, educational and income levels- with the latter measuring inequalities between men and women in these areas. Ireland’s rank on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is lower at 16th (this measure taking into account the proportion of seats held by women in Parliament; the proportion both of senior officials, managers and professional and technical workers who are women; and the ratio of estimated female

to male income: UNDP, 2005). Over the past five years, the pace of change has been much greater in the HDI (from 18th to 8th) and even GDI (from 18th to 11th) than in the GEM (from 21st to 16th: UNDP: 2000 and 2005 respectively). The size and direction of the gap between the HDI and GDI/GEM contrasts with patterns in other economically successful countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark or Finland.

Because of Irish women's high level of participation in higher education, roughly half of those at Professional (48 per cent) or Associate Professional and Technical occupations (59 per cent) and just under one third of those in Managerial and Administrative positions are women (CSO, 2006a: 15). However women constitute less than one in ten of those at chief executive level (Coughlan, 2002). Thus despite its rapid economic growth in the 1990s (to a large extent facilitated by a reserve labour force consisting of women: O'Connell, 1999; O'Connor, 1998), Ireland is still very much a society in transition from its patriarchal roots (Mahon, 1994) with its policies and organisational structures remaining patriarchal. Thus although the number of women in paid employment rose by 140 per cent between 1971 and 2001 (as compared to a rise of 27 per cent in the case of men: Coughlan, 2002); with women's employment rate reaching 78 per cent for women in the 25-34 year age group, policies and practices facilitating such participation remain poor. Low levels of child care provision; high childcare costs as a proportion of average earnings and limited attempts to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family continue (O'Hagan, 2004 and 2007; O'Connell and Russell, 2005). Indeed, an economic opportunity index which included type of work, maternity benefits, perceived discrimination and government provided childcare (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005), ranked Ireland 51st out of 58 countries, its rank being broadly similar to Bangladesh (53rd) – and substantially lower than France (9th) or Thailand (39th).

Overall then, despite high levels of economic growth, driven effectively by women's participation in paid employment, and despite the fact that almost two fifths of women in paid employment are in professional/associate professional or management

positions, there is little suggestion that policies and/or organisational structures have facilitated such developments.

Methodology

In this paper we first look at the extent to which the policy documents relating to Higher Education, whether from the State itself or from key stakeholders make any reference to gender –either directly, or indirectly. In looking at these documents the focus will be on three issues: Firstly the extent to which they refer either directly to gender or indirectly to the current gendered nature of the faculty profile; secondly the extent to which they see educational policies as gendered; and thirdly the extent to which they reflect an awareness of mainstreaming in Higher Education and/or of the gendered character of the gatekeepers. We look at a small number of these policy documents- the choice being made so as to arguably reflect the views of the key internal and external stakeholders:

- OECD (2004) *Review of National Policies for Education: Review of Higher Education in Ireland - Examiner's Report*
- Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation (2006) *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006-2013*
- Report to the Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation (2004) *Building Ireland's Knowledge Economy: The Irish Action Plan for Promoting R and D to 2010*
- HEA/FORFAS (2006) *Research Infrastructure in Ireland: Building for Tomorrow*
- HEA (2007) *Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLII): Invitation to Applicants*
- Government Publications (2007) *National Development Plan 2007-2013: Transforming Ireland: A Better Quality of Life for all*
- European University Association (2005) *Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities: Sectoral Report*
- Irish Universities Association (2005) *Reform of the Third and Creation of the Fourth Level Ireland: Securing Competitive Advantage in the 21st Century*
- Royal Irish Academy (2005) *Cumhacht Feasa: Report of the Working Group on Higher Education*

The method of analysis will mainly consist of a content analysis of these documents, looking for direct references to gender at any level. In addition in this paper we will look briefly at the gender profile of what are seen as key stakeholder- including the

executive and administrative arms of the state, faculty particularly at the higher levels, and other key stakeholders.

Policies related to Higher Education in Ireland

Over the past three years, a large number of documents have been produced in Ireland relating to the future shape and importance of education and it will be shown that such documents have largely ignored gender. This kind of pattern is not of course peculiar to Ireland. Thus Delamont (2003) described the ways in which, with a small number of notable exceptions, male sociological scholarship in the UK and the USA has effectively ignored feminist insights and has failed to see its own scholarship as gendered.

The OECD report (2004:12) does note that women are more likely than men in Ireland (43 per cent versus 34 per cent) to have attained those tertiary education programmes which it describes as ‘largely theoretically based and designed to provide qualifications for entry to advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirements’. It notes that this is a pattern that is replicated across the OECD and the EU. However the authors do not attempt to interpret this trend or to explore its implications. In fact, they make no subsequent reference whatsoever to gender.

In the *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006-2013*, there is also only one reference to gender. This occurs in the context of a discussion of ways of increasing the proportion of students studying science at Second level, where specific reference is made to encouraging a ‘better gender balance’ in the take up of Physics. None of the proposed solutions, with the possible exception of a reference to ‘an emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of science in society’ (ibid, p 51) seem to take account of the gendered nature of that pattern.

The only reference made to gender in *Building Ireland’s Knowledge Economy* (2004) consists in a reference to the need to ‘encourage greater participation by women in science, engineering and technology research careers’ (ibid: 4.3.3). This can be seen

as simply reflecting an assertion of the value of ‘male’ areas of employment and a desire to attract high achieving girls into those areas. However its rationality can be questioned in view of the fact that (like the OECD Report, 2004) it notes that: ‘The Irish educational system is producing more science and engineering graduates as a proportion of third level graduates than most other countries’ (ibid: 17); and that Ireland has more than twice number of science and engineering graduates as a proportion of the population aged 20-34 years as compared with the EU average (ibid: 2.24). However, both the OECD (2004) and the SSTI (2004) report also showed that, despite the relatively high levels of graduates being produced (at very considerable cost) their employments levels as researchers per 1,000 of total employment has been low compared to the OECD average (ibid: 2.2.3). Furthermore, although the report also notes that 90 per cent of researchers involved in industry do not have PhDs it simply assumes that: ‘As Irish industry becomes more R and D intensive the relative demand for PhD scientists will increase’ (ibid: 21).

Thus this report operates to an extraordinary degree with an implicit (gendered) set of assumptions as regards the sources of economic growth and employment. It does not recognise that the jobs it seeks to create (with the Department of Education and Science contributing E156m one years’ budget alone) in ICT related disciplines, electronic engineering, computer science, material science and even possibly biosciences (ibid: 4.32) are overwhelmingly likely to be held by men given the gendered nature of the Irish educational and employment systems.

Unlike the report compiled by the International Steering Committee on *Research Infrastructure in Ireland: Building for To-Morrow* (2006) which makes no reference whatsoever to gender, the call for proposals under the *Programme For Research in Third Level (PRTL), Cycle 4* (2007) indicates that: ‘All programmes will require proofing having regard to Gender.....’ ‘A particular focus on Gender Proofing will apply to PRTL in forthcoming cycles. Institutions should be aware that the NDP Gender Equality Unit will require gender data on the composition of assessment boards from formulation of institutional proposals through to the recruitment of

researchers' (ibid: 15). However there is no indication of the extent to which failure to present data will impact on the marks allocated: and no reference at all to gender in the marking framework (ibid:23-25). No lessons appear to have been learned from the experience of gender mainstreaming in the National Development Plan 2000-2006, where extensive and basic failures were identified reflecting the fact that there was no incentive/sanction to encourage implementation, and that the Gender Equality Unit was peripheral to the central policy making processes in the civil service (McGauran, 2004 and Crowley and McGauran, 2005).

The National Development Plan 2007-2013 (2007) suggests that gender mainstreaming 'continues as a priority of the Government' and that the Plan 'will continue to focus on gender equality as a horizontal issue' (Government Publications, 2007: 43). However although the Plan (like the EU's Roadmap for Equality, 2006b) expresses concern that women still earn less than men; that they are less likely to move up to the most senior level of decision making in business or in the wider civil society, and although it recognises the usefulness of the equality proofing processes 'to identify any unintended impacts of policy (NDP, op cit: 269), the only references to gender in the context of Higher Education involves a reference to Women in Science and Engineering initiative. Hence it seems reasonable to conclude that although there is an apparent commitment to gender mainstreaming, this has not been translated into a wider understanding of the gendered implications of the policies related to Higher Education.

The omission of references to gender is not peculiar to policy documents produced by the state. Thus the European University Association (2005:23) again makes only one brief reference to gender. Thus having noted the fact that over half of current students in Ireland are women, it refers to the gender composition of staff, especially at senior academic levels noting that although it was mentioned only by a minority of universities: 'it appears to be emerging as a system-wide policy issue' (2005:23). However although it suggests that it might be 'important for universities actively to monitor this balance and other related gender issues in the lecturer rooms, the

laboratories and at senior management level' (2005:23), there is no recommendation made to this effect. Hence one can only conclude that the European University Association had little interest in this topic or little expectation that its concerns would be noted. Thus, it too implicitly promulgates the idea of universities as essentially gender-neutral structures.

The Irish University Association (2005) similarly makes no reference to gendered patterns in Higher Education. The Royal Irish Academy's Report (2005) does refer in passing to a gender parity index in a recent Canadian index ranking of Higher Educational Institutions in 16 countries. Apart from this, there are only two gender references: one to 'increased work participation by women' and the other to the fact that retention at second level is particularly acute amongst boys (ibid: 6 and 20)-neither specifically related to Higher Education.

Overall then what emerges is an almost universal failure to recognise the gendered nature of higher education policies or structures. The strongest reference is in the recent PRTLTI call and in the National Development Plan –although mechanisms to reward or to otherwise incentivize gender mainstreaming are absent in both documents. Policies emanating other stakeholders are effectively equally indifferent to the gender issue.

Explaining this Pattern: What is being problematised

In this paper the State's commitment to increase Research and Development expenditure as a percentage of Gross National Product is not being problematised (That expenditure is now .4 per cent of GNP- placing Ireland 14th out of 30 OECD countries: Brereton et al, 2005). However the effective ignoring of gender and the implications as regards the focus of these policies is being problematised.

Underlying Assumptions- and their relationship with Hegemonic Masculinity

Brown (1992) suggested that one of the modalities of state power related to its patriarchal character was what she called its prerogative dimension reflecting its

ability to define what policies are in the national interest. Similarly, Franzway et al (1989: 18) highlighted the fact that the priorities defined by the state, which are the basis for its social and economic policies, reflect its patriarchal character as 'part of the dispersed apparatus of social control which works as much through the production of dominant 'discourses', i.e. ways of symbolising and talking about the world, as it does through naked force'.

It is suggested that the underlying assumptions underpinning state policies as regards education and indeed employment is that natural science and technology are the keys to economic growth, and they are (implicitly) seen as the inevitable sources of innovatory ideas. At first glance this seems reasonable. However, 66 per cent of employment in Ireland is now in the service sector (CSO, 2006b). The Mid Term Report on the National Development Plan (Fitzgerald et al, 2005) saw future employment growth as lying not in manufacturing but in traded services-and noted that such services could just as easily be in history as in any other area. Furthermore, even in so far as one accepts that scientific or technological ideas are important for economic development, it is by no means clear that innovations in such areas are the exclusive prerogative of science or technology graduates. Indeed, insofar as a university education provides students with the ability to think analytically, to communicate effectively and to be effective problem solvers, such generic skills are arguably likely to be the best preparation for a volatile jobs market. Such an approach does mean that employers must be willing to invest in training employees- something that Irish companies seem particularly unwilling to do since the late 1990s (OECD report, 2004; Brereton et al, 2005).

A variety of explanations have been put forward for Ireland's phenomenal economic growth rates in the 1994-2000 period (in excess of nine per cent per annum- dubbed the Celtic Tiger although O'Connell, 1999 noted that that term 'had misconstrued the gender of the animal'). Such growth was achieved 'through a combination of 3.7 per cent annual productivity growth and an employment growth of 5.5 per cent' (Mc Loughlin, 2004), and it was largely met by drawing married women into the labour force. Turner and D'Art (2005) focussed on employment and concluded that lower

level skill occupations, particularly in the services sector contributed significantly to the expansion of the labour force and accounted for the greater proportion of the employment growth in the private sector in that period. This trend they suggest is likely to continue. Thus the sectors that they identified as experiencing considerable growth between 1997-2004 were in the health and education sector- both at a high skill level of teachers and health related professionals, and care assistants at a lower level; in financial services at the high skill level of financial accountants and clerks at the intermediate level; in the building industry with craftsmen/builders at an intermediate skill level and general labourers at the lower level; and in the retail industry sales assistants/representatives at the lower skill level. It is by no means obvious how such areas of employment growth create/reflect a demand for University educated science and technology graduates. They also noted that although four of the main science occupations (biological scientists, chemists, physicists and other natural scientists) increased by 45 per cent over the 1997-2004 period, scientists still constituted less than four per cent of the professionals in Ireland in 2004 (just as they had done in 1997) and that there was little evidence that these patterns reflected a shortage in the production of such scientists.

In attempting to understand why massive investment by the state in science and technology is occurring in the context of such contra-indicators, it seems useful to see policy making as regards higher education and employment as a crucial or 'saturated site' for the reproduction of gendered patterns (Hill Collins, 2006). Thus where hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) still involves the subordination of women, but where the basis for that subordination is being challenged (by the erosion of 'tradition' and of beliefs about the 'naturalness' of women's intellectual/educational inferiority), a focus on technical, high status disciplines that involve control over objects is obviously attractive. (Carney's 2006 respondents explicitly refer to this kind of culture amongst policy makers). When such disciplines offer the possibility of meeting the needs of new kinds of industries and where they appear to build on the success of Ireland as a high technology centre driven by a 'new technical middle

class...combining entrepreneurs and technical professionals' (O'Riain and O'Connell, 2000:324) then such a development seems all the more attractive.

Recent science and technology policies seem directed primarily towards research and development in multinational enterprises—a strategy that maximises our exposure to external developments and one whose sustainability has been questioned (Sheehan, 2005; Barry, 2005). The sustainability of the strategy can also be questioned because of the disinterest of high achievers (who are disproportionately girls) in such areas since 'as a result of the cultural construction of these fields as masculine, women can experience a conflict between their gender identity and the masculine culture of science, engineering and technology' (Power and Richardson, 2005:9- see also Wajcman, 1991). Thus only roughly one in ten applications to Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) by 2005 were from women researchers, and even in the SFI Research Frontiers Programme, less than one in five were from women researchers (Richardson, 2006). Attempts by SFI to tackle this have typically focused on organisational or individual factors rather than on the gendered assumptions in state policies related to higher education

This it is suggested that the prioritization of particular areas of Higher Education can best be explained by the compatibility between these and the priorities and concerns of hegemonic masculinity and the ability to pursue such agendas given the gendered nature of the gatekeepers—the topic to which we next turn.

The Gatekeepers:

Husu (2006:5) stresses that gate keeping has a 'dual nature': it 'can function as exclusion and control, on the one hand, and as inclusion and facilitation, on the other'. The gendered composition of executive and administrative arms of the state, the universities and other lobby groups will now be examined.

Executive and Senior Administrative Arms of the State

Connell suggests that each state has 'a well marked gender regime' that is a set of structures 'involving a gendered division of labour, power and cathexis, related to the

wider gender order in that society' (1994: 151). As part of division of labour, 'the elites of politics, bureaucracy' were 'almost everywhere entirely composed of men' with 'women's work' typically being seen as less central to societal economic and social well being. Bureaucracy was seen by him as the form of institutionalised power central to the modern state. As such, it was characterised by 'the cultural masculinisation of authority' and by 'forms of hegemonic masculinity oriented to technical knowledge and personal competitiveness' (Franzway et al, 1989:46). In such structures women can only move upwards, by 'ignoring difference, acting as equal' (Davies, 1995)- a fragile strategy since women's status as honorary males may be withdrawn at any time.

At present in Ireland although there is political and public acceptance of the need to ensure representation by geographical area, the need to ensure gender representation in the political system has evoked little support. Such representation reflects and reinforces the valuation of difference and potentially facilitates the mainstreaming of issues that are currently culturally defined as a special focus in women's lives in Irish society (viz. those relating to what Baker et al 2004 called 'love, care and solidarity'- activities that are still disproportionately carried out by women: McGinnity et al, 2005). Of course gender composition does not guarantee the existence of 'women friendly' policies. Nevertheless it is symbolically important in challenging the equation between masculinity and authority; in affirming women's existential value (Therborn, 2005).

In Ireland the composition of both the political executive arm (i.e. in the Dail, Senate, Cabinet, local government and European Parliament) and the administrative (i.e. the civil service) arms of the state are strongly male dominated. In the case of the political executive, with the exception of the European Parliament, women are still seriously under-represented in every area. Thus women hold only 14 per cent of the seats in the Dail (Lower House); under 17 per cent of those in the Senate (Upper House); roughly one in five of those at Cabinet Ministerial level (21 per cent); just under 20 per cent of members of regional and local authorities; and 34 per cent on State Boards (CSO,

2006a). There is no suggestion that these patterns are changing rapidly- with the National Women's Council (2005) noting that the proportion of women in the Dail has risen by one per cent over the previous ten years. Biological arguments as regards the inevitability of such patterns are challenged by, for example, Sweden where 45 per cent of the seats in the Lower House are held by women as are 52 per cent of Government Ministries (UNDP, 2005). They are also challenged by the fact that women made up 38 per cent of those elected from Ireland to the European Parliament in the 2004 elections (well more than double the proportion of women elected to the Dail). However 40 per cent of the women elected to the European Parliament were independents, as compared with under 10 per cent of the women elected to the Dail. Particularly small proportions of women were elected to the Dail from the two main parties (Fianna Fail and Fine Gael) implicitly suggesting that these parties are not interested in promoting gender representation and that this is reflected in the representation of women in national structures (Centre for the Advancement of Women in Politics, 2005).

Although it can be argued that policy direction is determined by the political leadership, the Civil Service is also important. In the Irish Civil Service there has been some weakening of the patriarchal structures, under the influence of liberal feminism, supported by the EU and reinforced by a Strategic Management initiative involving the linking of targets as regards gender equality with more broadly based management objectives, an agenda supported by the largely female Civil and Public Servants Union and the Public Service Employees Union (O'Connor, 2007). However, the top echelons of the Civil Service remain overwhelmingly male -with 90-94 per cent of those at General Secretary and Assistant Secretary being men.

Furthermore the proportion of women in General Secretary positions declined between 2001 and 2003 and declined further in 2004 (from 16 per cent to 12 per cent to six per cent) as did those at Principal Officer level (Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics 2005).

Table 1: Percentage of Women at each Grade in the Civil Service over time (1987-2004)

Grades	1987*	1995*	1997**	2003***	2004****
General Secretary	0%	4%	5%	12%	6%
Assistant/Deputy Secretary	1%	6%	10%	10%	10%
Principal Officer	5%	13%	12%	20%	22%
Assistant Principal	23%	23%	24%	34%	34%
Administrative Officer	26%	21%	37%	56%	56%
Higher Executive Officer	34%	37%	39%	47%	49%
Executive Officer	44%	51%	54%	64%	66%
Staff Officer	67%	75%	75%	79%	80%
Clerical Officer	68%	79%	79%	78%	81%
Clerical Assistant	83%	82%	82%		

*Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries, 1996:48, quoted in O'Connor 1998: 221; ** Humphreys et al, 1999: 53 and 55; *** CSO 2004; ****CSO, 2006a (.5 and above being rounded up)

Humphreys et al (1999: 191) expressed concern about the unsatisfactory nature of promotional mechanisms in the civil service and recommended affirmative action to tackle 'the gender stereotyped attitudes of management'. However no such mechanisms seem to have been put in place. McGauran concluded that resistance to mainstreaming 'certainly suggests the operation of patriarchy in the system'. Male 'champions' of gender equality did occasionally exist but 'collectively, men seem to be better than women at defending their interests, particularly in relation to employment' (McGauran, 2005: 87 and 84 respectively). With action plans and diversity targets, the UK civil service has increased the proportion of women in the most senior positions (WEU, 2002). However such comparisons need to be treated with caution since they may reflect relative levels of pay and conditions inside and outside the civil service.

In summary then in Ireland, the top of the political and senior executive arms of the state are still overwhelmingly held by men, with a mainstream political culture that is

deeply unsupportive of a focus on gender. In this context it is perhaps not surprising that policies which will generate employment for men are seen as the most important.

Faculty Profile

Carney (2005: 97) suggests that the absence of gender-differentiated data reflects what she calls the liberal, individualist conception of equality on which Irish policy has been built. However it seems plausible to suggest that such a depiction underestimates its patriarchal character since data is collected on the gender breakdown of staff at primary level, with concern being expressed about feminisation at this level. However the masculinization of faculty in Higher Education, especially at the higher levels, is not seen as a problem. Indeed, it is not seen at all, since the HEA has not produced any data on this since 2004, and no gender data on Higher Education has been published by the CAO (2004; 2006a) or returned to the EU since 2000.

In this section we focus on faculty data relating to the Universities only- since data on gender of faculty in the Institutions of Technology is not officially available at all. The most recent data (2004) produced by the HEA shows that 37 per cent of faculty in Irish Universities are women. This is roughly similar to the EU 25 average (EU, 2006a). This proportion cannot be explained by level of economic development, by the proportion of women in the labour force or by their educational levels (O'Connor, 1999). Thus, for example, the Irish level is lower than Finland and the UK (both 41 per cent) but higher than Germany (29%). Furthermore, there is a suggestion that the proportion is falling rather than rising in Ireland. This can arguably be seen as reflecting the effect of Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) monies in a context where the proportion of such researchers who are women is lower (at 29 per cent) than the proportion of women faculty (37 per cent). This is consistent with the fact that in 2004 academic faculty made up 35 per cent of the total number of higher education researchers, as compared with 55 per cent in 2002 (Brereton et al, 2005). These (often informally recruited) male research staff seem likely to acquire

permanent rights, given the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act, 2003. Furthermore, given the scale of HERD expenditure in areas of predominantly male faculty, combined with the effect of the indirect subsidy of them through the teaching budgets in areas of large student demand (Barrett, 2006), it is likely that promotional positions in the future will disproportionately accrue to them.

The gender profile of professorial positions is important because those in these positions are most likely to be gatekeepers in the sense of being able to influence the kind of research that is supported; in defining criteria of eligibility and excellence and formulating social and economic policy. Such a profile is of course also important in providing young people with role models: same-sex role models being important in female students' career orientation, confidence and success (O'Connor, 1999).

Table 2: Percentage of women faculty (full-time) in Irish Universities at each level over time (1975/76' 1984/85; 1993/94; 2002/2003; 2004)

	Women as % of those at each level 1975/76*	Women as % of those at each level 1984/85**	Women as % of those at each level in 1993/94***	Women as % of those at each level in 2002/2003****	Women as % of those at each level 2004*****
Professor	5%	2%	4%	7%	10%
Associate Professor	7%	5%	6%	12%	15%
Senior Lecturer	3%	7%	12%	24%	31%
College Lecturer	12%	23%	28%	39%	43%
Assistant Lecturer/other teaching staff**	26%	34%	39%	53%	47%
Overall	11%	15%	20%	39%	37%

*HEA 1987; ** HEA 1987; *** Smyth 1996; **** HEA 2005; *****HEA 2006

** Excluding 'unspecified' as well as part-time academic staff

The proportion of women at Professorial level in Irish Universities is now 10 per cent. This compares with an average of 15 per cent across the EU 25, and is half what it is in Finland and Portugal and less than half that in Turkey (26 per cent: EU, 2006a). An earlier EU report which included Irish data, concluded that the differential between

men and women's chances of promotion to Professor was one of the worst in Europe, with Irish men 'being at least five times more likely than women to obtain a full professorship' (EU, 2003). Women are most likely to be in Professorial positions in the Humanities, followed by the Social Sciences (EU, 2006a)- precisely those areas that have been relatively neglected in terms of state funding- a topic that lies beyond the focus of the present paper. However of the seven main Universities in Ireland, the three that are in the strongest position internationally (TCD, UCD and UCC: Shanghai Ranking, 2006) have the highest proportion of women at Professorial/Associate Professorial level.

The State (both in its executive and administrative arms) is lobbied and advised by a number of bodies, both national and international. Since 2004, these have included the OECD, the European University Association; the Irish University Alliance (formerly CHIU), the Royal Irish Academy as well as IBEC and FORFAS. It is difficult to ascertain their gender profile. However, what limited evidence there is suggests that these have been overwhelmingly male. Thus for example, the authors of reports as diverse as the OECD (2004) and the Royal Irish Academy Report (2005) were overwhelmingly male. The authors of the HEA/Forfas Report on Infrastructure (2006) appeared more gender balanced (40 per cent) - but if the associate member was excluded it fell to 25 per cent. It is not clear what was the gender profile of the authors of Irish University Association report (2005) but it is arguably not insignificant that the Presidents of the seven Universities are men; as are all the Vice Presidents Research-and up to 2006, both groups of men were overwhelmingly drawn from engineering, computing and hard science backgrounds.

Even the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) who recognised the importance of 'mainstreaming, benchmarking, targeting and engagement' in their review of the National Development Plan, simply recommended that initiatives to 'tackle barriers to equal participation to women in the workplace' be extended to groups other than women (Morgenroth and Fitzgerald, 2006: 118). It may be a coincidence but the authors of the latter but not the former were entirely male.

In summary then, the predominantly male faculty profile in the Universities, and particularly, its overwhelmingly male profile at Professorial level can be seen as part of the gate-keeping structure. It seems plausible that recent very substantial investment by the state in male dominated faculty areas will further exacerbate this gender profile. The predominantly male profile of other gatekeeper institutions and/or of the authors of key reports in institutions such as the ESRI copper fastens the failure to problematise gender, reflecting Connell's (1995: 82) view that: 'a gender order where men dominate women cannot avoid constituting men as an interest group concerned with defence and women as an interest group concerned with change. This is a structural fact, independent of whether men as individuals love or hate women or believe in equality or abjection'

Summary and Future Directions

The most effective exercise of power is in situations where beliefs and practices are such that its exercise is seen as 'natural', 'inevitable' (Lukes, 1974). Thus, for Connell (1995:82), male privileging is maintained, 'not simply by individual or group attempts to intimidate, oppress and exclude', but by women and men's 'realistic' expectations and an acceptance of a status quo that effectively perpetuates 'a structure where different groups are rewarded unequally'. This paper has focussed on what is seen as the elephant in the corner in the context of policies related to Higher Education viz gender. What emerges from a crude content analysis of these policies is an almost universal failure to even recognise gender as important. It is suggested that the ability to pursue effectively masculinist policies is facilitated by the gendered composition of the gatekeepers as reflected in male dominated nature of the political arena, the Civil Service and the Universities, and the strength of (male dominated) influential lobby groups endorsing the merit of such policies. Thus despite the occasional rhetorical references to gender mainstreaming in the more recent of these documents; and despite the HEA's (2004) recommendation that the Universities identify 'explicit and challenging targets and timetables', influential gate-keepers are disinterested in gender- arguably reflecting their own interest in perpetuating the status quo.

It is widely recognised that the task of mainstreaming gender in gendered organisations is difficult (Carney, 2005; Benschop and Verloo, 2006). However international experience offers some suggestions. Thus, for example, in Finland, the Gender Equality Act that lays down and implements quotas as regards gender representation on, for example the National Research Councils (although even in Finland male dominance continues to exist in private funding foundations: Husu, 2006). In Ireland State guidelines were put in place in 1991 requiring Ministers to ensure that at least 40 per cent of all nominations to State Boards were women, but no attempt has been made to translate this into University governance requirements. In Northern Ireland, institutions could be required to actively promote equality (rather than simply prohibiting discrimination) and to submit their plans to the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland (Hegarty, 2006). In Sweden, gender targets for each institution are set by the National Board of Higher Education, based on the number of female senior lecturers currently qualified to be professors in the country within each faculty and the distribution of professors within each faculty (Nilsson et al, 2005). Such approaches could be encouraged by the HEA as part of its focus on performance indicators and linked in to its budget strategy. However despite the references to gender targets in the HEA (2004) *Report of the High Level Group on University Equality Policies*, there has been no evidence of any willingness to actually move in this direction.

There are limitations in this paper in so far as it has not looked at the actual practices in the research funding agencies, universities, state departments and related stakeholder and lobbying organisations; nor at the gender profile of Governing Authority subcommittees responsible for University policy, of external panels for the allocation of research funding; or indeed gender differentiated definitions of excellence. However even the crude analysis undertaken here suggests that gender remains the elephant in the corner in the context of policies related to higher education.

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