

GENDER EQUALITY IN ACADEMIC CAREERS – EVIDENCE FROM AUSTRALIA

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Themes and focus of this presentation

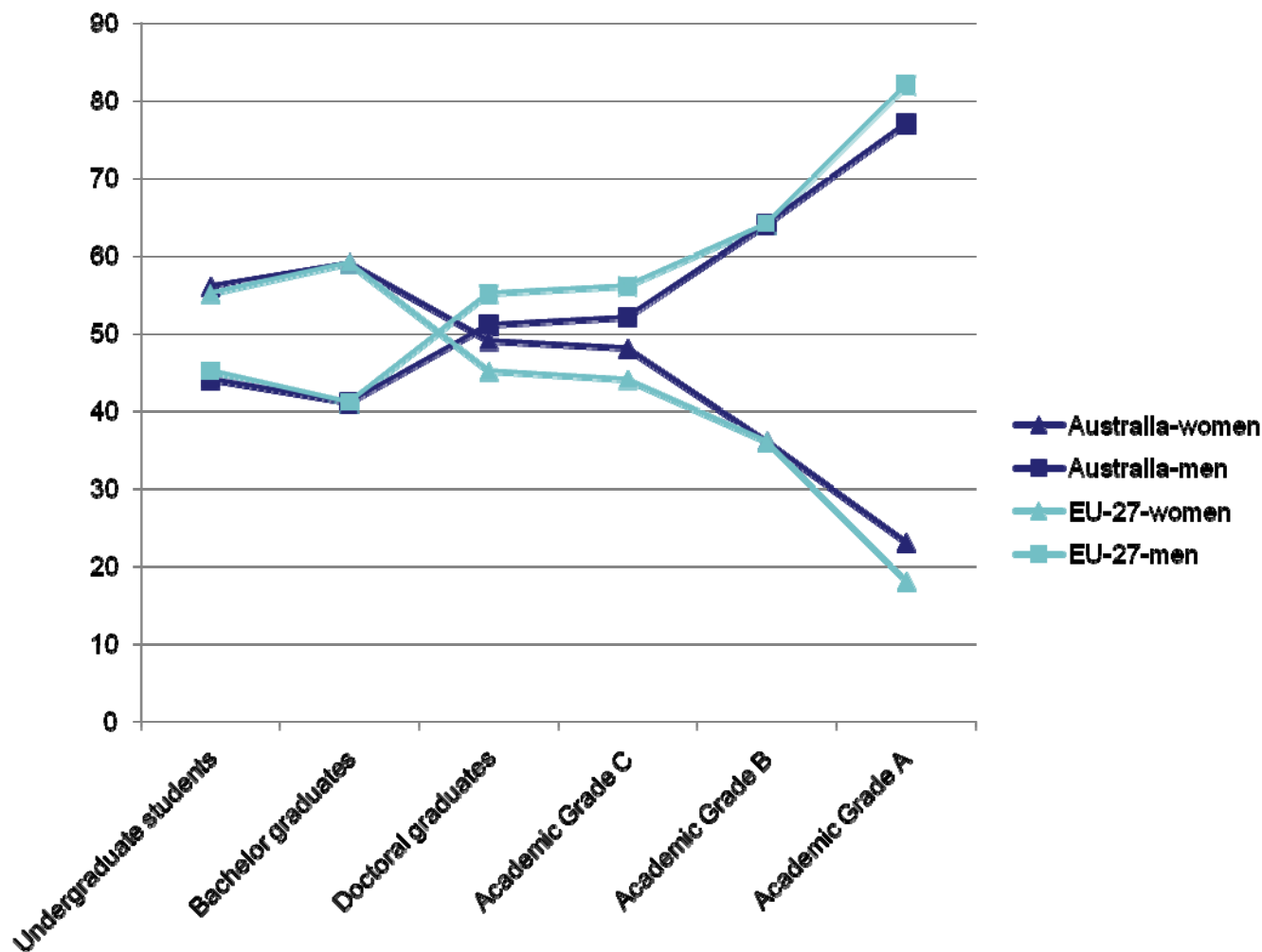
- Career progression (vertical segregation) as *one* aspect of the ‘women in science problem’ – given various labels, e.g. ‘leaky pipeline’, ‘labyrinth’...
- Academia as *one* of the main sectors of employment for women in science.
- Family responsibilities as *one* of the main barriers to women’s career progression (an area of considerable recent policy development, but ongoing resilience of gendered divisions of family care).
- Overall questions: Is Australia different? Can anything be learned from recent Australian experiences?

University study and academic career progression: comparing Australia and Europe

Figure 1: Australia and EU-27, 2006 figures

- The well-known ‘scissors pattern’ (in which women outnumber men in university study as a whole, particularly at undergraduate level; but men outnumber women among those who continue in academic careers, particularly at the higher levels) is evident in Australia as elsewhere.
- An important caveat that needs to be borne in mind in comparing Australian and EU data is that the categories of students, graduates and academic staff do not match precisely. In particular, the highest level of academic appointment in the EU (Academic Grade A - which includes only full professors) is compared in Figure 1 with Australian data for ‘Professor’ and ‘Associate Professor’. Hence the degree of dispersion at the top of the scale in Australia is likely to be wider than Figure 1 suggests, and other differences in category definitions may affect the comparison at other points.

**Figure 1: University study and academic career progression:
Australia and EU-27, 2006 figures**



Sources: European Commission (2009) *She Figures 2009: Women and Science – Statistics and Indicators*; Bell, S. (2009) *Women in Science in Australia: maximising productivity, diversity and innovation*, Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies; Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Higher Education Statistics.

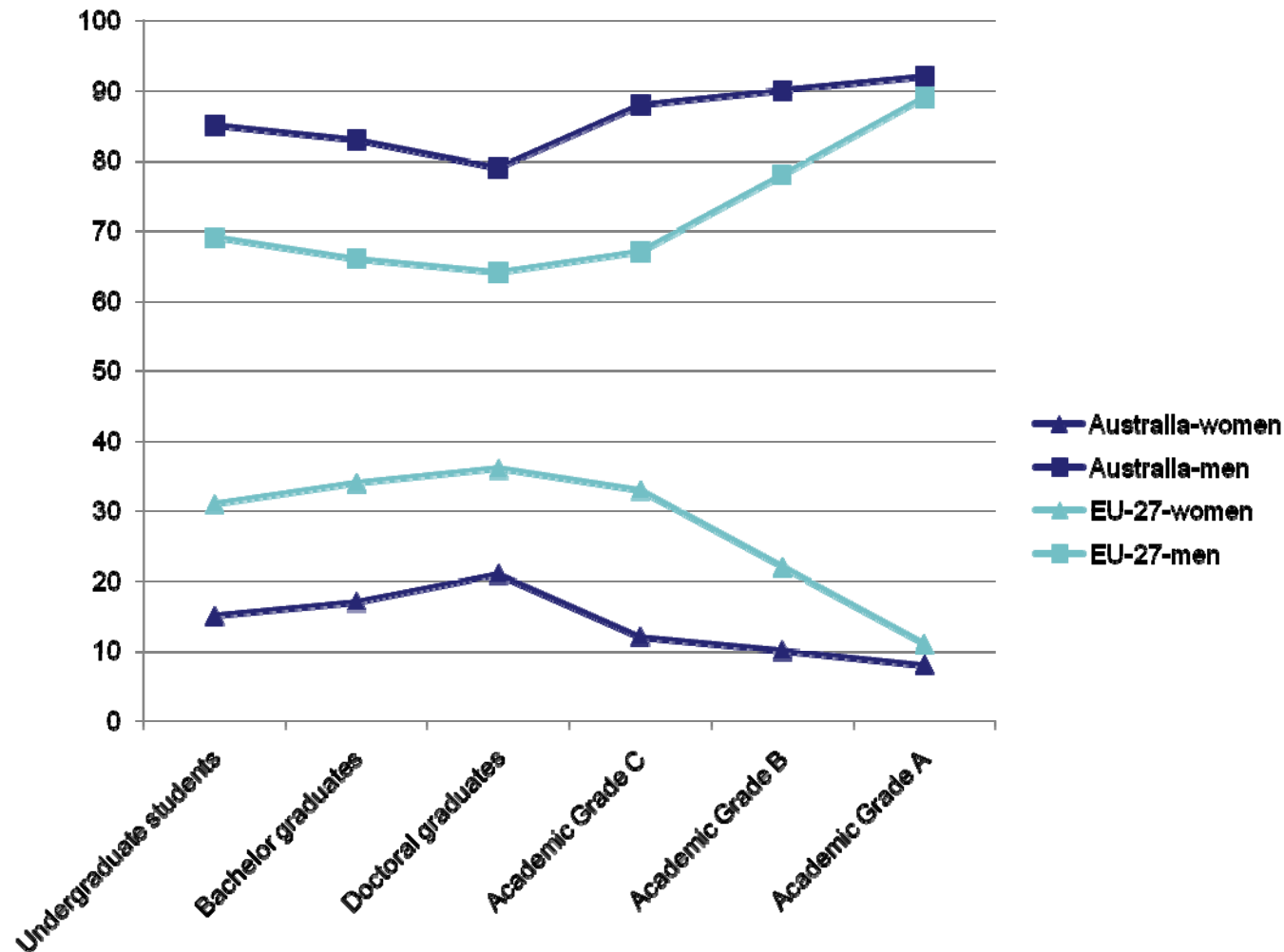
University study and academic career progression: comparing Australia and Europe



Figure 2: Australia (*Engineering and Related Technologies, 2007*); EU-27 (*Science and Engineering, 2006*)

- The ‘sideways hourglass’ pattern in fields of science and technology (in which men outnumber women in university study, the discrepancy narrows at higher levels of study, but widens again at the higher levels of academic employment) is also evident in Australia.
 - Australia/EU comparisons are also limited within fields of science and technology by the inability to match fields of education using readily available published data. The widest gender inequalities are typically found in the field of Engineering, with inequality less marked in general ‘Science’ categories. Differences between Australia and the EU in Figure 2 hence reflect the fact that the Australian data are for the field of ‘Engineering and Related Technologies’, while the EU figures combine ‘Science and Engineering’. Figure 2 thus simply shows the similarity of patterns rather than differences in levels of inequality between Australia and the EU. (Note also that the EU figures are for 2006, while the Australian figures are for 2007.)
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**Figure 2: University study and academic career progression:
Australia (*Engineering and Related Technologies, 2007*);
EU-27 (*Science and Engineering, 2006*)**



Sources: European Commission (2009) *She Figures 2009: Women and Science – Statistics and Indicators*; Bell, S. (2009) *Women in Science in Australia: maximising productivity, diversity and innovation*, Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies; Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Higher Education Statistics.

Academia – the current context in Australia

- 1) Funding restrictions, cost cutting – following a long period of conservative government, but little prospect of significant funding increases in the near future.
- 2) Increasing reliance on casual and short-term employment in this context.
- 3) Pressures for ‘performance’ (e.g. ‘research excellence’ agenda); constant measurement of ‘output’ and competitive pressures between and within universities
- 4) At same time, universities have comparatively well-developed policies for gender equity, parental leave and hours flexibility. Australian universities typically have good paid parental leave policies (many have 26 weeks on full pay) even though a national paid parental leave policy has not yet been implemented.

How effectively can policies to assist with combining employment and family responsibilities be implemented in this context?

Work/family context in Australia

- 1) Large ‘motherhood employment gap’ (gap of over 20 percentage points between the employment rate of mothers with child/children aged <6 years compared with women without children). In US and UK, the comparable figure is around 13 percentage points (2002 data)
- 2) High proportion of mothers of young children working part-time (in 2005, among those who worked full-time prior to the birth of a child in the previous 2 years, around 70% returned to work part-time)
- 3) Limited paid parental leave policy – 52 weeks unpaid leave only; new national policy will introduce 18 weeks paid parental leave from 2011 (although this won’t include a separate paternity leave component as recommended)

Policy → Practice at the organizational level: lessons from a University case study



The case study organization - a large metropolitan university with progressive gender equity policies including 26 weeks parental leave on full pay, flexible working time options

The policy under investigation - ‘Reversible fractional appointments’ (RFAs) – negotiated fractional arrangements on request for an agreed percentage and duration (normally 50-60% for 1-5 years), with a clear expectation that requests for RFAs will be granted. (*Consistent with PRAGES Recommendation 9: ‘Customizing work processes and organization – promoting flexibility’*. Note also that the policy predates moves in Australia to legislate for a ‘right to request’ flexible working arrangements for parents)

Has the policy assisted academic career progression for women?

(A research question addressed through in-depth qualitative analysis of organizational policy and communications, and interviews with academic staff and their managers. The research was conducted over a period of 6 months in 2006. The case is not one of the Australian initiatives included in the PRAGES database.)

Implementation barriers and impacts

Reasons for not using the policy:

- Impact on employment entitlements such as sabbatical and long service leave
- Capacity in academia to work flexibly anyway (by extension of work into family sphere)
- Seen by some as potentially the same work for less pay

Perceived impact on academic careers among users (who were mainly women, thus underlining the likely gendered impact of the policy):

- Acceptance of delayed promotion among women
- Forgone leadership opportunities for some
- Gendered impact seen within ‘choice’ framework, little questioning of whether men were confronted with such career/flexibility choices.

Implementation barriers and impacts...contd

Impact on workload:

- Tendency for managers to reduce ‘easy’ aspects of workload (e.g. repeat tutorials) and still expect 100% research effort
- Imprecision due to the output-based nature of the research component of academic workloads – one respondent contemplating a 50% RFA asked: “50% of what”?

Variability in implementation across organisational unit:

- Good management support in some sections, but variability in the degree to which back-up was provided, e.g. in replacing the missing ‘fractions’
- Support for fathers variable – one father seeking an RFA was seen by his manager as indulging a ‘lifestyle choice’, underlining the highly gendered view of parenting evident in that section of the organization. Overcoming gendered career penalties requires ‘normalization’ of the policy, i.e. its acceptance for use by both mothers and fathers.

Conclusion

- Australian patterns of vertical segregation in academic careers, both generally and in science/technology fields, reflect those in the EU.
- Australia's main 'differences' are around patterns of combining parenthood and employment
- National policy revision is under way, and there are examples of good policy development at organizational level – however these are likely to encounter implementation problems in the current context of funding and performance pressures on universities and where highly gendered notions of the appropriate division of paid and unpaid work are informing the actions of management.
- Need to assess the kinds of policies most likely to push the boundaries of 'ideal' (unencumbered) worker expectations and impact on gendered trajectories in academic career progression, within the counter-pressures of operational context. Policies are not without impact, and change can and does occur over time!