

Gender and academic promotion

A case study of Massey University

Executive summary

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Introduction

In 2004, the Association of University Staff (AUS) commissioned the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) to undertake a case study of gender and promotion at one New Zealand university. It addressed two core questions:

1. Do male and female academics have different experiences and perceptions of promotion?
2. If male and female academics do have different experiences and perceptions of promotion, what factors may be involved?

A case study approach was chosen to enable the perceptions and experiences of male and female academics within one institution, but across different disciplines, to be explored. Massey University was selected because of its size and its willingness to participate in the study. The primary method of data collection was a structured questionnaire sent to all academic staff members. The case study also draws on contextual information provided through the analysis of promotion documentation and data, and interviews with key people involved in the promotion process.

Massey University

At the time of the survey, 44 percent of the academic staff at Massey University were women. Women were under-represented at all ranks above lecturer, and over-represented at the lecturer level, and the level below. They were slightly under-represented among those who had permanent positions, and were thus able to apply for promotion.

There is an annual promotion round with three levels of promotion: Level 1, Level 2, and Professorial Level. Each level has a separate committee, and includes observers. The criteria for promotion were jointly developed by the University and AUS and are available on the university intranet. Promotions can include both accelerated movement across salary increments within a rank, and, from the rank of lecturer up, movement into a higher rank.

Survey respondents

There were 619 respondents to the survey sent to academic staff at Massey in March 2004, a response rate of 40 percent. Compared with all Massey academic staff, women were slightly over-represented (300 responses, 48 percent), and men were slightly under-represented (306 responses, 49 percent). Another 13 respondents (2 percent) did not state their gender.

Three of the five colleges had distinct gender profiles among respondents: Humanities and Social Sciences (almost 40 percent of the women, 18 percent of the men); Sciences (15 percent of the women, 40 percent of the men); and Education (14 percent of the women, 8 percent of the men).

Rank: The overall response rate was highest among professors (49 percent). Fifty-four percent of all women at professor or associate professor rank responded, compared with 41 percent of their male peers. Female lecturers were over-represented in the responses, compared with the proportion of women at this rank on Massey University staff (32 percent, compared with 24 percent). Those in positions below the lecturer rank were under-represented (22 percent of female respondents, compared with 38 percent of female academic staff, and 9 percent of male respondents, compared with 19 percent of male academic staff). This was probably because they cannot move to a higher rank through promotion, but only through application for a new position.

Full-time/part-time: Full-time staff were 83 percent of the respondents, the same proportion for Massey academic staff as a whole. In the lowest rank, 44 percent of respondents worked part-time. Women were twice as likely as men to be working part-time, with the gender difference most marked at the lecturer level.

Permanent employment: Overall, 63 percent of the women responding were permanently employed, compared with 74 percent of the men. Women were twice as likely as men (27 percent, compared with 15 percent) to have probationary status. There was no gender difference in the proportion (8 percent overall) employed on limited term contracts.

Qualifications: Overall, men were more likely than women to have a PhD as their highest qualification (58 percent, compared with 40 percent), but the differences within each academic rank were not statistically significant. At the lowest level, 69 percent were undertaking postgraduate studies, as were 40 percent of the lecturers, 19 percent of the senior lecturers, and 2 percent of the associate professors. Women were almost twice as likely as men to be currently enrolled in a postgraduate programme to advance their academic career (41 percent, compared with 22 percent). At senior lecturer level, 27 percent of women and 12 percent of men were doing so. Women were more likely than men to be undertaking postgraduate studies in all the colleges other than Education. Women were also more likely than men to have completed a research-based qualification in the past two years (20 percent, compared with 13 percent). Female senior lecturers were twice as likely to have done this as male senior lecturers (19 percent, compared with 8 percent).

Age: Half of the men were aged 50 or over, compared with 38 percent of the women. This difference was most marked at senior levels. At the level below the lecturer rank, women were older on average than their male peers; their average age was almost the same as for female lecturers.

Academic career experience

Women were more likely (54 percent) than men (45 percent) to have begun their academic career at Massey University. Men were more likely than women to have begun their academic career at a New Zealand tertiary institution other than a university (23 percent, compared with 9 percent). Those at professor or associate professor level were the least likely to have begun their career at Massey (39 percent), whereas those below the lecturer level (where women outnumbered men by almost three to one) were the most likely to have done so (67 percent).

One in three men had spent more than 20 years in academic employment, compared with one in 10 women. More than one in five men had been employed for more than 20 years at Massey, compared with one in 20 women. Among women, 31 percent were in their first, second or third year there, and 37 percent had been in academic employment for no more than five years, compared with 22 percent and 20 percent respectively of the men. Women in the senior ranks in particular tended to have had shorter academic careers than their male peers, reflecting the increasing participation of women in the academic workforce in recent years.

More men (50 percent) than women (41 percent) had begun their academic careers at lecturer level. More women than men had begun below the lecturer level, and they were more likely than men to have been employed for longer at that level: 6 percent of females at this level, but no males, had been employed at that level for more than 20 years. This was the only rank at which the mean length of time in academic employment was longer for women than for men.

Just under a quarter of respondents - 26 percent of the women and 21 percent of the men - were still in their first academic position. Respondents had spent an average of four years in their first academic position, with no difference between men and women. Length of time in first academic position was unrelated to people's current position.

Women were less likely than men applied for any kind of promotion while they were in their first academic position (35 percent, compared with 42 percent). Of those who had done so, men were marginally more likely than women to have succeeded (67 percent, compared with 56 percent). Women were more likely to have partially succeeded (15 percent, compared with 7 percent). Partial success includes outcomes such as moving to a higher step on the applicant's present salary scale, when the application was to move to a higher scale.

Respondents had made their next career move in a variety of ways. Women were considerably less likely than men to have applied for promotion within the same university, and only half as likely to have applied for a similar position in another country. But they were similarly likely to have completed a research-based qualification as their next career move, or applied for a higher position at another university in the same country.

Academic work

Hours: Full-time academics employed by Massey spent an average of 49 hours a week on their work. The higher the position, the higher the average time spent on work. There were no significant gender differences in relation to time spent on work, either for those employed full-time, or for those employed part-time. There were some small gender differences within academic ranks.

Activities: Teaching was the dominant activity in academic staff workloads, followed by research and administration. Women spent a slightly higher average proportion of their time teaching than men did, and men spent a slightly higher average proportion of their time in administration and service to the university than women did. There were some small gender differences in time spent on activities within each rank.

Changes to teaching: An increase in EFTS was reported by 46 percent of respondents, and a decrease by 12 percent, with the rest reporting no trend, no change, or that they did not know. Women were less likely than men to know what changes there had been to their teaching area since 2000, in keeping with women being more likely to have joined the Massey staff since 2000.

Research: Men were slightly more likely than women to have completed research projects, published from recent research projects, been the primary researcher, contributed to research projects, and presented more than three papers at international conferences. This difference may be related to the fact that women were more likely than men to have completed a research based qualification in the previous two years, and to be at an earlier stage in their career.

Pastoral care: This generally took less than 10 percent of academics' time. Women in probationary positions were more likely than their male peers to spend more than 20 percent of their time on pastoral care.

Service: Less than a fifth of the academics responding thought they had no opportunity to contribute to the university as an organisation. Paper co-ordination, administration, providing course advice and student support were the three areas where around half or more of the academics reported an ongoing involvement. Women were slightly less likely to be involved in implementing established policies, or representing the university on external bodies, which were more likely to occur for those in senior positions. Senior academics were also more likely to have ongoing involvement in contributions to their discipline or profession. Women were more likely to say they had no opportunities to make such contributions. This was related to there being more women in the lower ranks; within each rank, there were no gender differences.

Service to the community was less pronounced than service to the university or to one's discipline or profession. It was most likely to occur on a regular or ongoing basis in relation to providing professional expertise to public information, results of work to community life, and involvement in community organisations. There were some small gender differences here.

Satisfaction: Main sources of satisfaction were the area of teaching or research academic staff were engaged in, their current position, and support from colleagues. Main sources of dissatisfaction for around half of the respondents were salary levels relative to peers in other organisations, and salary in relation to the demands of their job. Around a third expressed dissatisfaction with their time for research, and their mix of teaching, research, and service.

Men were more likely than women to say they were very dissatisfied with their salary, relative to their peers in similar roles (21 percent, compared with 11 percent). Among those with positions below the lecturer level, women were much more dissatisfied than men with their salary in relation to the demands of their job (42 percent, compared with 23 percent). Among senior lecturers, women were much more likely than men to be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the time spent on teaching undergraduate courses (26 percent, compared with 13 percent).

Promotion experience at Massey University

The 2003 promotion round at Massey University: Data from Massey University showed that women were somewhat less likely than men to apply for promotion of any kind (whether within the same rank, to a higher rank, or to obtain a new position). In the 2003 round, 14 percent (59 of 417) of the permanently employed full-time women applied, compared with 17 percent (108 of 651) of the permanently employed full-time men. Application rates varied by rank, with those employed below the lecturer rank (86 percent) and senior lecturers (45 percent) the most likely to apply. The higher the rank, the lower the proportion of applications coming from women. Academics employed part-time (of whom a higher proportion were women) were less likely to apply than those employed full-time, but they had similar results if they did.

Success rates were similar for women and men: 43 percent obtained the promotion they sought, and a further 30 percent obtained some of what they had sought. The success rate (both full and partial, and including applications for new positions) was greatest at the lecturer level and the level below.

Respondents' aspirations: This area showed some marked differences between women and men. Women were only half as likely as men to feel they had reached the level they aspired to, either at Massey (12 percent, compared with 26 percent), or in their academic career (10 percent, compared with 18 percent). This was particularly marked for female senior lecturers and those at the level below.

Women were more interested than men in having mentors who could provide them with some guidance in progressing their careers, and role models. They were also more interested in attending workshops on career progression.

Respondents' applications and outcomes: Among respondents, 59 percent of the women had made at least one application for promotion at Massey University, as had 67 percent of the men.

Overall, 49 percent had experienced only success; 40 percent had sometimes experienced failure, and 10 percent had never succeeded.

Women and men had had similar experiences of success, although men were more likely than women to have had mixed success, and to have applied for promotion a greater number of times.

Women with successful application experience were more likely than men to have been promoted only once or twice (77 percent, compared with 61 percent), as were women with mixed success (75 percent, compared with 56 percent of men). This may be related to a shorter length of academic employment for senior female academics.

Within each academic rank, male and female respondents were similarly likely to have made applications, and their results were also similar. More senior academics had applied for promotion at least once. Only 9 percent of professors/associate professors and 17 percent of senior lecturers had never applied for promotion at Massey, compared with 61 percent of both lecturers and those at the level below.

This may in part reflect incremental salary scales. At the lowest level it may also reflect the lack of opportunities for promotion. Complete lack of success was much more common among those lecturers and those at the level below who had applied (32 percent and 25 percent respectively) than among those senior academics who had applied (4 percent).

Applying for promotion is not a frequent process for many academics. This would indicate the value of having clear criteria and processes for when people do apply.

Understanding the promotion process and criteria

Despite the Massey promotion process giving equal weight to teaching and research, both men and women viewed research as the most important criterion in promotion decisions. They also gave more weight to university administration than to teaching, though they spent much more of their time on teaching than on research or administration. These views were unrelated to gender, or differences in promotion experience.

Women were more likely to see promotion criteria as an incentive to enrol in a research-based qualification, perhaps because fewer women had doctoral degrees. This was also true of those who had yet to apply for promotion, or those whose applications had failed. Men were somewhat more likely to look at increasing their involvement in teaching because of its inclusion in promotion criteria.

Around half would step up their involvement in research because of its perceived weight in promotion decisions. More than half the academics responding thought that the PBRF would impact on promotions and on academic careers, with women seeing more impact than men, partially because they were less likely to be in senior positions.

Views of the promotion process

Satisfaction: Levels of satisfaction with the Massey promotion process did not reach 50 percent for any of the aspects asked about. This may be because many respondents did not have personal experience of applying for promotion at Massey University.

Satisfaction levels were highest in relation to the support and advice that academics had from their own teaching areas. Dissatisfaction levels were highest in relation to the opportunities for promotion, the recognition given to teaching and pastoral support, and overall satisfaction with the current Massey promotion processes.

Fewer women than men expressed overall satisfaction with the promotion processes (13 percent, compared with 24 percent). Women were also somewhat less likely than men to report satisfaction with their opportunities for promotion (20 percent, compared with 29 percent), or with recognition of their service to the university (11 percent, compared with 19 percent). They were marginally less likely than men to report satisfaction with the support and advice that they received from within their own department or teaching area.

Dissatisfaction: The main points of dissatisfaction with the Massey promotion process were lack of opportunity, and teaching workloads. Even 30 percent of those who had been successful expressed overall dissatisfaction with the process. Women who had had mixed success expressed more dissatisfaction with a wide range of aspects than their male colleagues.

In terms of rank, satisfaction rates were highest for professors, followed by associate professors. Senior lecturers showed the highest dissatisfaction overall. Male lecturers were much more likely than female lecturers to be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their personal experience of the promotion process, and with the recognition of their research for promotion purposes. Among professors and associate professors, 27 percent of the women were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the support they received from colleagues, compared with 10 percent of the men, and 45 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the support or advice they received from their department in relation to promotion and progression, compared with only 14 percent of the men.

Barriers to promotion: More than half the academics responding identified the lack of time or opportunity to develop their research profile, or the extent of their teaching workload, as barriers to getting promoted. Just over a third identified their Head of School's level of support for them, or their non-completion of a doctoral degree.

Women were more likely than men to identify barriers they had experienced in relation to promotion. In addition to those mentioned above, they were also more likely to think they did not have time to put together an application or lacked knowledge about the application process, and to see their programme's campus profile as a barrier.

Women were over five times more likely than men to say that having time out of their career for family reasons had been a barrier to their promotion, and three times as likely to mention lack of affordable childcare.

Disadvantage/discrimination: Around a third of the Massey academics responding to the survey felt they had been disadvantaged or discriminated against in relation to promotion. The main reasons were to do with lack of time to develop a research record, or perceived lack of recognition for teaching, or personal differences with heads of school or department. Those whose applications had had mixed or no success were more likely to think this than those who had succeeded. Women whose success had been mixed were more likely to think they had been disadvantaged or discriminated against than men whose success had been mixed.

Views of university support for promotions

Women were much less likely than men to think that Massey University was doing a good or very good job in addressing perceived discrimination, or promoting a climate free of discrimination. This gender difference was particularly marked at the senior levels. Women who had had mixed success or had been successful were more critical than men with these experiences of efforts to address disadvantage or discrimination in relation to promotion.

Academic staff were more positive about the university's provision of information about promotion procedures, and training and development related to career progression, than they were about its efforts to provide informal mentoring or help, or addressing perceived discrimination. This is consistent with other responses that indicate some deeper and less direct issues around the promotion process other than information – primarily a sense that research is valued more highly than teaching, yet teaching workloads erode the time needed to complete research-based degrees and undertake and publish research.

Not surprisingly, those who had succeeded or had some success in their promotion applications were most positive about information about the promotion process and career development, and support. However, less than a third of these thought the university was good or better at providing training and development to enhance career progression, or supporting informal mentoring or help.

Conclusions

The study reported here addressed the relationship between gender and academic promotion. This is important for two reasons.

First, while New Zealand has done better than other countries in addressing the uneven distribution of men and women among the academic ranks in New Zealand universities, there is still a clear imbalance.

Secondly, many academics in senior ranks are now 50 years of age or older. This “graying” of the universities is also occurring in other countries. New Zealand universities will need to develop

strategies to develop those in the lower and middle ranks to take the place of those likely to retire in the future. The increasing emphasis on research outcomes through the introduction of the PBRF also underlines the importance of institutional strategies to make the most of the potential existing in lower academic ranks.

Women are now commencing academic careers at Massey and in other New Zealand tertiary education institutions in at least equal numbers to men. The lower ranks of Massey University are increasingly female, the senior ranks are ageing and male.

The low numbers of women in senior academic positions mean that there are too few to be effective as role models and to provide the kind of informal support which has helped academics win promotion in the past. This indicates that universities will need to develop institutional mechanisms. Massey University instituted a pilot mentoring scheme in 2004.

The findings of this study indicate a number of strategies to improve the representation of women in senior academic ranks, and women's level of satisfaction with the promotion process:

- clear criteria for workloads, so that there is greater opportunity for those at the lower academic ranks to complete research-based qualifications and publish from research
- monitoring teaching workloads and support, particularly for emerging researchers
- an examination of positions at the lowest level, and possible new pathways from that level to the lecturer level
- making promotion application exemplars available within each college
- including workshops tailored to the needs of senior academics in TDU support
- providing written feedback to all unsuccessful candidates for promotion
- expanding the mentoring programme
- giving more recognition to career mentoring in the promotion criteria
- ensuring that lack of good quality, affordable childcare is not a barrier to women's aspirations and promotion.

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