WOMEN IN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

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Introduction

This ESF funded project sought, by examining a particular sector in depth, to improve understanding of best practice in implementing active gender equality policies from the perspective both of companies and the women they employ. Overall the project aimed to contribute towards raising awareness of the benefits of removing gender constraints in the workplace, in employment, career progression, training and income generating opportunities in the communication and media industries. The following summary describes the results of the first year of the project which was carried out in 2004.

Aim

The aim of this project was to explore the extent to which gender equality policies had been put in place in companies in the Scottish media and communication sector, and whether gender issues had been or continued to be encountered by those working in the sector.

Methodology

The project consisted of two elements: a postal survey of companies and telephone interviews with a sample of individuals employed in the industry. The postal survey aimed to identify uptake of gender equality policies within the Scottish media and communication sector as well as to examine the barriers relating to the introduction of these types of policies. Sixty-five companies responded to the survey (see Table 1 for a breakdown), while 99 companies provided reasons for not responding, most commonly because the company regarded itself too small for gender equality policies to apply or because the company was a sole trader.

Table 1: Sector and questionnaire sample

Sector	Total
Advertising	7
Book and periodical publishing	14
Film and TV	8
Marketing	12
Music	1
Media training	1
Press	2
Public Relations	16
Radio	4
Total	**65**

The second element of the research was more successful in terms of response, and consisted of telephone interviews with 138 (84 female, 54 male) individuals employed in the media and communication sector in Scotland as indicated in Table 2 below. The aim of this element of the project was to obtain the views of employees with regard to unequal treatment and barriers at work and the impact of gender equality policies on their working lives.

Table 2: Sector and gender of interview sample

Sector	Female	Male	Total
Advertising	6	0	6
Book and periodical publishing	5	5	10
Film and TV	33	22	55
Marketing	8	0	8
Music	1	6	7
Press	26	15	41
Public relations	3	1	4
Radio	2	5	7
Totals	84	54	138

What the Companies say...

Fifty-four percent (34 of the 65) of the companies responding did have in place gender equality policies, most commonly equal opportunities, flexible working, family friendly, and work-life balance as indicated in Figure 1. Most of these companies had more than one gender equality policy in place. However, significantly 46% (30 of the 65) responding companies had no gender policies in place, for many because they regarded themselves as too small to require a policy level approach or because they described themselves as having 'informal' or unwritten policies.

Figure 1 - The number of organisations with gender equality policies

Companies in the public relations sector and also companies with a higher proportion of female executives and/or managers were more likely to have introduced gender equality policies. Equally, such policies are more likely to exist in companies where more than 50% of the workforce is female. Interestingly, flexible working policies are unaffected by the gender characteristics of the responding company.

Companies felt that the benefits gained from the introduction of gender equality policies included: the creation of a culture of equality; ensuring processes of recruitment and promotion are built upon merit and ability; sustaining a sense of loyalty and trust amongst staff; and improved levels of staff retention.

'The policies ensure that regardless of gender, each individual has the same opportunity in all areas of an organisation and are treated equally in terms and conditions, pay etc.'

A significant proportion of responding companies had encountered negative attitudes amongst male employees towards maternity provision. One respondent interestingly felt so strongly about the issue that he/she 'will not employ women of child bearing age any more.'

Most responding companies had encountered no problems as a result of the implementation of gender policies, however small numbers acknowledged difficulties in raising awareness amongst staff and management and ensuring management buy-in to these particular policies, whilst three companies had encountered negative attitudes and resistance amongst staff.

'Men may regard it as unfair that women take time off to have babies and then step back in where they left off.'
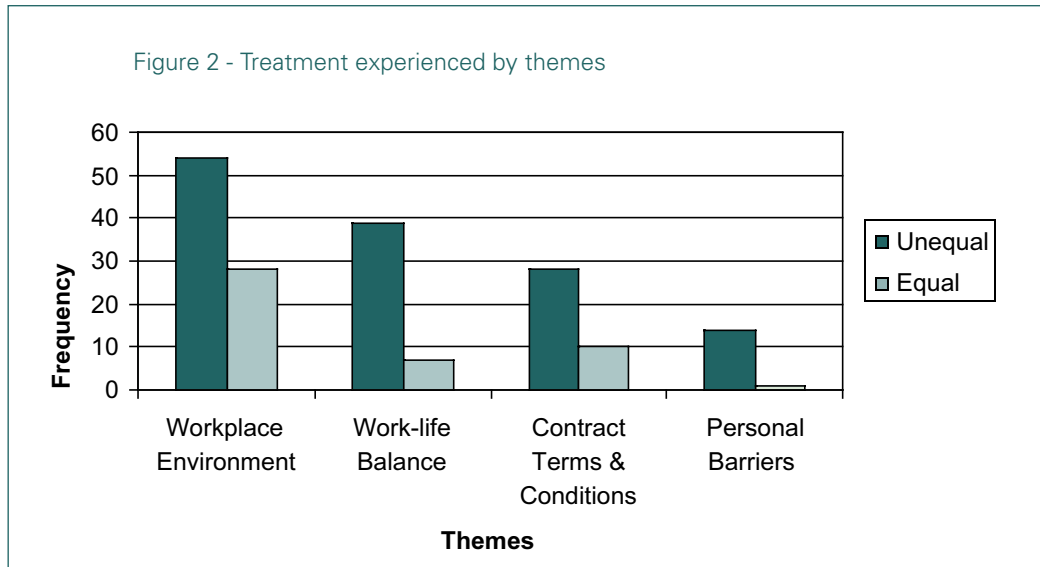
Small and micro-companies are less likely to adopt gender equality policies, often because they feel such policies are not necessary 'we are an extremely small firm and gender issues simply do not arise.' Indeed, small companies were more likely to have encountered barriers in implementing gender equality policies, largely as a result of the cost of such initiatives and the lack of resources to support, for example, flexible working or maternity, paternity or childcare provision, or to cover the loss of women on maternity leave.

The majority of companies (87%) felt that senior management fully supported gender equality policies and stated that policies are well publicised throughout the company through staff handbooks, induction and briefings. However, for 57%, gender equality policies form no part of the staff induction process, while only 22 companies consulted staff and only 3 consulted unions about gender policy issues.

What women say...

A highly significant 62% (54 of the 84) of female respondents have experienced unequal treatment and 56% (47 of the 84) have faced a number of gender related barriers in their working lives within the Scottish media and communication sector as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Treatment experienced by themes

A bar chart titled "Figure 2 - Treatment experienced by themes" with y-axis labelled "Frequency" (0 to 60) and x-axis labelled "Themes". Categories: Workplace Environment, Work-life Balance, Contract Terms & Conditions, Personal Barriers. Two series: Unequal, Equal.

'There are quite clearly prescribed roles for women in the media and if you fit into one of them you will do well!'

Several respondents felt that they had to adopt traditional female roles to survive in the sector. Similarly, many respondents reported a perception that women were not as effective as men in this working environment, in particular this was felt to limit women's involvement to dealing with women's themes. The existence of an 'old boys' network' was cited by 39% of respondents who felt that workplace gatherings and social events were very male oriented and excluded women. Indeed, many respondents noted personal experiences where women were accorded a lack of respect, status and recognition. Fifty-two percent noted management encouragement of a culture perceived as condescending towards women. Both male and female managers were felt to demonstrate this tendency.

Forty-one percent of the females interviewed highlighted work-life balance as a major barrier to career progression, because of the long and flexible working hours required of them, particularly in the media. Twenty-five respondents found it difficult to reconcile family demands with work in the press, PR, film and television. It was also felt that taking maternity leave might be a career setback, and promotional opportunities had been missed by many respondents while on maternity leave.

'I think it would have been really impossible to work in PR and have children.'

Women also found it particularly difficult to be flexible in terms of location working when they had a family, which limited their career options. Twenty-four of the 84 female respondents had never encountered gender barriers in the workplace, however, a number felt that they had been 'lucky' to avoid this. Two women noted they had benefited from positive discrimination.

Figure 3 - Experiences of women by age

A bar chart titled "Figure 3 - Experiences of women by age" with y-axis labelled "Frequency" (0 to 30) and x-axis labelled "Age". Categories: Under 20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, Over 60. Two series: Unequal, Equal.

Age was an additional factor for some women, predominantly in the film and television sector where females of a certain age can be sidelined for younger women (see Figure 3 for breakdown of treatment by age). Others noted that young women were particularly vulnerable in this sector due to their enthusiasm and need to acquire experience.

Thirty-one percent of female respondents had encountered problems with contract terms and conditions, with a significant 24% having personally encountered a gender pay gap, in particular for women between the ages of 31 and 40. Seven women observed that training available to male colleagues had not been made available to them, with a potential impact on their career progression.

Respondents also recognised that they may have put in place their own personal barriers which seem to thwart their job aspirations. They recognised that they tended to apply for posts that were securely within their competence or within sectors they thought more open to them, such as publishing, rather than striving beyond their expectations.

A significant number of female respondents were freelance workers, a pattern common to the industry as a whole. They reported benefits including flexibility and achievement of a work-life balance. However, it was also felt that men were better at negotiating terms and conditions in the freelancing environment. It was also noted that male freelancers tended to be characterised as ambitious and 'heading for something bigger and better' whereas female freelancers were doing it 'because of children.'

Less than a third of the female respondents (21) were aware of gender equality policies operated by their employer. Women only become aware of these types of policies if and when they require the provision. A number of respondents reported a general awareness of rights and legislation, although they had been given no information about their own workplace. Considerable evidence was found of women having to seek out information rather than being proactively supplied with the information. Some respondents were confident that the policies existed and information was provided by their employer although they had not been exposed to it personally.

Twenty-two female respondents felt that the existence of gender equality policies had had an impact on their working environment in raising awareness of gender related issues, particularly amongst men, and in beginning the process of creating equitable working practices. One respondent felt that these policies had, on the contrary, created resentment amongst male colleagues. However, the majority of respondents had noted no difference in their working lives (29), were unable to tell if there had been a difference (12), or were freelance and therefore had no policies upon which to draw support (12).

'While some lip service would be doubtless to be paid to it [policies] I have trouble believing that you could break up the entire culture of an industry [press] that easily.'

What men say...

Only 13% (7 of the 54) of the male respondents indicated that they had witnessed examples of unequal treatment of women throughout their time in the Scottish media and communication sector. Their comments related to examples of: patronising, sexist behaviour on the part of the men; sexual harassment of women by male colleagues and managers; and a general 'negative attitude' towards women in the sector.

The majority of male respondents believed that this particular sector was generally free from gender related problems and, indeed, that it is one of the more enlightened sectors. Of the 18 male respondents who were, or had been, in a position to employ individuals, 17 were adamant that ability, personality and availability were the key recruitment criteria.

'Of any occupation [the press] you could have possibly picked to look at for prejudice against women, it's the least prejudiced against women there is.'

Eleven of the male respondents highlighted what they believed to be positive discrimination towards women, particularly younger women. Seven of them noted an increasing trend of young, female television presenters, particularly news presenters, being appointed because of their physical attractiveness rather than their presentation skills, to the detriment of both males and older women. Physical attractiveness was also regarded as an advantage for women wishing to enter public relations. Perceived positive discrimination towards women, in terms of funding opportunities for individuals in the Scottish sector, was also reported by three male respondents.

Thirty-four (63%) of the 54 male respondents, from across all sub-sectors, pointed to individual examples of their own female line managers and other women in senior posts throughout the Scottish media and communication sector as evidence of there being few, if any, barriers to women's career progression. However, 12 respondents noted a disproportionate number of women occupying particular types of senior posts within the three individual sub-sectors of the Scottish media and communication sector: from the film and TV industries, six male respondents discussed a lack of female directors and line producers; from the press, five males noted the fact that there were fewer women in senior editorial positions; while from the publishing sector one respondent indicated that there were very few female heads of Scottish publishing companies.

'As you start to get above the level that I'm at, it does seem to become a more male-dominated world. But I don't know why that is.'

Only two of the male respondents, both from the film and TV industries, believed that women's career progression was handicapped by any form of discriminatory culture in the workplace.

Just one male respondent was aware of an incident when a woman in the Scottish media and communication sector had been paid less than a man for carrying out the same work. Ten male interviewees also noted that any gender pay differences would be difficult to identify, as individuals within the media and communication sector tend not to discuss their own earnings. The majority of the male respondents (40 of the 54) believed that there were no gender differences in terms and conditions. Rather, that terms and conditions are based largely on experience, time served, and the duties and responsibilities of individual jobs.

Ten (19%) of the 54 men interviewed were aware of the existence of any gender equality policies in their workplace; and only three of these respondents indicated any real awareness of the ways in which these policies operate.

In addition, ten of the male respondents, including three individuals who head their own company, believed that gender equality policies were unnecessary, because their company or organisation was too small, and/or because they already operated with unwritten equality policies.

Only 6 (11%) of the male respondents appeared to be convinced of the need for gender equality policies in the Scottish sector, not only in terms of good practice, but also for legislative purposes, particularly to avoid any potential charges of negligence.

> *'That's why papers are now recruiting so many young people, because they're cheaper.'*

> *'Smaller companies don't tend to be very great on quality initiatives and policies regarding equality and stuff like that. Although they probably don't discriminate, they won't have a written policy on it.'*

> *'You understand that, when you make a career in film, it's going to be tough to have a family life. Say, for example, I decided to have a family, I would probably have to take time out of work. It's just something that you have to accept when you take a job in this industry.'*

Over half (57%) of the male respondents, from across all sub-sectors, believe that maintaining a work-life balance in the Scottish media and communication sector can be extremely difficult for both men and women. A major factor here is the unsociable hours demanded by the industries; a problem exacerbated by the freelance nature of much of the work, which can require individuals to work away from home, often at short notice.

Continuation of Project

2005 marks the second year of the project with the scope of the research being extended to include the broader creative industries in Scotland. Case studies of 50 Scottish companies will be carried out where a period of fieldwork in each company will enable an in-depth examination of company policy, its implementation and operation and the attitudes and experience of the company's employees. A series of 12 focus groups will subsequently be held to enable discussion of the issues by a mix of professional, organisational and employee representatives. The virtual discussion forum currently in place will be adapted to provide an electronic notice-board and it will be reinforced this year by a web questionnaire to which participants will be directed and which will test the validity of some of the themes of the discussion to date.

We are currently recruiting participants for the year ahead so if, after reading this briefing, you are interested in taking part in either the case studies or the focus groups please contact the research team (details below).

Further Information

If you require further copies of the briefing and/or the poster please contact Lorraine on 01224 263477, l.illingworth@rgu.ac.uk or Graeme on 01224 263889, g.baxter@rgu.ac.uk.

To join the virtual discussion forum, visit http://campus.rgu.com/womeninmedia

The Robert Gordon University

The Robert Gordon University is a dynamic modern University with an international reputation for providing high quality education from Undergraduate to PhD level. Located in the city of Aberdeen, the University offers a range of courses across the arts and design, management, engineering and computing, health and social care and the applied sciences and technology.

The academic profile of the University at home and abroad is continually enhanced through the collaborative work undertaken with professional bodies, industrial organisations, government departments and research institutes. The University has earned a reputation for its pragmatic and innovative approach to higher education in Scotland. As a result, the University has one of the best graduate employment records of any University in the UK. In 2003, 98.1% of the University's students were in employment or further study six months after graduation.

Aberdeen Business School

Aberdeen Business School is one of the leading providers of management and professional education in Scotland with over 3,000 students studying a comprehensive range of courses. It is one of the largest Business Schools in the UK, and the subject expertise is broadly reflected in the structure of the School which comprises 9 departments encompassing such areas as accounting, communication, information management, marketing, economics and human resource management.

The School encourages all staff to engage in research and consultancy. Consequently, the staff have a good record in attracting research funding from

Research within the School has been rated as of 'national excellence' by the Funding Council. In addition, the School has obtained the highest level of available recognition from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for research student training in the subject of Politics. Academic excellence is enhanced by in-house journals and through external appointments. Several staff are also on the editorial boards of international journals. In addition, the Sch