Gender equality and representation within and beyond the University of the Highlands and Islands

A book in celebration of International Women's Day 2021 (Edited by Alexandra Walker)

Introduction

Observed annually every 8th March, International Women's Day is held as a worldwide day of celebration, protest and, in some countries, as a national holiday.

The first university wide International Women's Day (IWD) event took place at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) on 8 March 2018. From then the annual event has set out to explore and champion gender equality in education, raise awareness and influence initiatives to support women working and studying in education, and champion gender equality and diversity in learning and teaching and curriculum design. As well as acknowledging the international theme, the UHI organising group have identified an internal focus for each annual event since 2018.

The event in 2021 saw individuals and teams from across the university partnership[1] present short workshops and presentations exploring how they approach or promote gender equality within their own subject area, teaching or research practice, in supporting or leading the development of learning and teaching, or in curriculum design. These topics have been expanded on and explored in this book. Acknowledging the underrepresentation of men in some curriculum areas the book also provided the opportunity for colleagues to explore with the readers the ways in which men are encouraged into subject disciplines that are typically dominated by women.

In compiling this book, the various chapters have been organised into three broad sections. The first section presents chapters that have explored the

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[1] UHI is a geographically distributed tertiary university comprising 13 independent academic partner colleges and institutes across the expansive Highlands and Islands region.

wider context in relation to gender inequality for women in education and specific initiatives that the university has initiated or should consider to address these. In Section 2 'Personal experiences and professional outlooks' the book moves on to consider personal experiences and perspectives with the authors exploring their own position, role and outlook as women educators and researchers, while in Section 3 the book moves on to initiatives at UHI that aim to address gender balance and representation.

Section 1: Gender equality in education: the wider context and initiatives to champion equality for women

The first chapter in Section 1, following the preface and foreward, is titled 'Women's Networks in further and higher education: key considerations for cultural change, digital engagement and responding to COVID-19'. The chapter sees Alex Walker begin by

summarising literature around gender imbalance of women in leadership positions in universities and the masculinist working cultures that can 'other' women and create barriers to career progression. The chapter then explores the role and benefit of women's networks in education, alongside other gender equality initiatives intended to address gender balance and promote women to leadership. Importantly the chapter also outlines the limitations as well as the benefits of these initiatives to challenge and change working cultures for women and promotion to leadership. Finally the chapter focuses in on the University of the Highlands and Island's Women's Network, the role it has played supporting colleagues during COVID-19 and how it has been aligned to wider university wider events and initiatives.

The second chapter 'Advance HE Aurora leadership development programme for women' presents the outcomes of an evaluation report that aimed to

determine the extent to which UHI participants in the Aurora leadership programme were more encouraged to apply for senior roles within the institution. The chapter begins by summarising the origins of the programme, in response to the paper 'Women in Higher Education Leadership: Absences and Aspirations' authored by Professor Louise Morley and the aim of the programme to support women and their institutions to fulfil their leadership potential. The outcomes of the evaluation reported a growth in confidence in UHI participants leadership capabilities across both the two cohorts engaged in the programme since 2018. In the context of UHI other benefits highlighted in the chapter include networking opportunities, a sense of belonging, and the further development of understanding relating to leadership behaviours. In common with the first chapter, the author Ann Tilbury concludes that addressing gender inequality requires changes in cultures and structures and that approaches and initiatives should move beyond 'fixing the women'.

The third chapter of the book explores 'Distancing the (privileged) male from the machine: supporting gender balance and representation through acts of allyship in academic processes and practices' with respect to supporting gender balance and representation in academic processes and practices. Beginning with an exploration of some of the historical ways in which the male voice has been privileged in academic work and knowledge production, Keith Smyth then scrutinises gender bias in journal boards and learned societies, in peer review and citation practices, and in the context of the curriculum. Smyth then considers those acts of male allyship that male colleagues in positions of influence or leadership can embrace to support the amplification of the work and voices of women colleagues, including supporting women colleagues in their scholarship and research, and in shared and distributed approaches to leadership.

Our fourth chapter, and the concluding chapter of Section 1 is titled 'Larissa Kennedy: We're not settling. Because in many ways…we don't have much to lose'. This chapter takes the form of an interview between Ash Morgan, the Vice-president Further Education for the Highlands and Islands Student's Association (HISA) at the time of writing, and Larissa Kennedy the National Union of Students (NUS) UK president. The interview focused on women of colour and working class women, who were originally at the roots of International Women's Day, the student movement in the UK, and the role and value of unions and how they are of benefit to all women.

Section 2. Personal experiences and professional outlooks

Roxane Permar begins with the chapter 'The impact of feminist art practice and theory on pedagogical practices from a personal and institutional perspective'. This chapter takes a first person

perspective that follows the career of Permar, a feminist artist, exploring the challenges of being a woman practicing art and working in education, including the positive experiences and influence feminist theory and activism has played on that journey and in relation to the MA Art and Social Practice programme at UHI that she leads.

The sixth chapter of the book 'Attracting women into engineering – a personal reflection' finds the author, Lois Gray, providing her account of working and leading in engineering, realising her feminine qualities enhanced her impact as designer, teacher and leader and, furthermore, being a positive role model for women studying engineering. Although having had positive experiences working in a male-dominated industry, Gray also highlights where she has experienced male bias in the working environment, which she acknowledges values masculine traits. The chapter proceeds to explore how through Industry 4.0 there is potential to develop

the existing synergy between 4.0 skills and feminine attributes in order to balance the qualities valued in engineering. Gray highlights some existing initiatives that aim to balance the gender representation in the engineering workforce and in education before outlining other ways that she has identified that have potential to promote balance and her next steps in intending to implement some of the identified solutions.

Finally, for Section Two of the book Jay van der Reijden has authored the chapter 'Promoting autistic women in science: benefits for their own dedicated Society'. Stemming from personal experiences and extensive literature, van der Reijden begins by outlining how autistics are perceived by neurotypicals and the challenges people with autism face in entering professional fields, which for 'already oppressed' STEM women often leads to knowledge and expertise not being harnessed through publication. van der Reijden then focuses

on expressions of women with autism, before outlining the benefits of autistic traits to science, including patter association, lowered delusions of reality, and being unerringly ethical. van der Reijden highlights the lack of support groups for autistic women in science and the role that a professional organisation to support autistic women in science who are often marginalised might provide, and finishes the chapter by exploring how such a group could provide representation against behaviours of injustice and a safe space for autistic women to share experiences and consider action.

Section 3. Addressing gender balance and representation at UHI

Section 3 starts with the chapter 'Aiming for Awesome: improving perceptions of engineering amongst girls through a digital STEAM based intervention'. The author Blair Watson outlines an initiative on behalf of the STEM team working at UHI, who worked in partnership with Royal Air Force

(RAF) on a series of workshops aimed at encouraging students to explore engineering. Before exploring the workshops, Watson outlines the existing barrier to girls pursuing engineering studies and careers, which currently sees only 12% of women in the engineering sector. The RAF tasked the UHI STEM team with redesigning workshops aimed at Primary 5-7 students, with a focus on female, black and minority students and students in rural areas to address the leaky pipeline, whereby secondary school students begin to make decisions about their preferred career. Aligning the workshop to the Scottish 'Curriculum for Excellence' the STEM team designed through a STEAM (incorporating Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) approach, guiding students in discussions and critical thinking. The STEM team ensured the workshops also explored the variety of careers available in engineering and introduced the participants to women role models – an important leverage to encouraging more girls into engineering.

The ninth chapter in the book 'Highland Women in STEM' provides a 'snap' shot of the author's Chloe Rodgers photography project which aims to highlight the many inspiring women working in STEM in the Scottish Highlands. Rodgers has outlined her reasons for the project, and the importance of woman role models working in STEM to encourage more women into the workforce which currently stands at only 24%. As well as the photographs she shares in her chapter, Rodgers has asked the role models questions related to location of work, motivation and highlights to working in STEM and what could be done to encourage more women into the STEM workforce. The result is a visual and reflective project that highlights to girls and women considering a STEM career path the positive rewards that can bring.

The next chapter 'Gender Studies: library provision and support via a Gender Studies 'Libguide' is authored by Elizabeth McHugh, and outlines a

Gender Studies library guide (libguide) that McHugh created for International Women's Day 2021. The libguide aims to encourage the University to embed elements of gender studies in modules across the curriculum at UHI by providing access to online content and materials relating to gender studies. Using her expertise as the University's eResources Manager McHugh outlines the broader benefits of libguides that can be updated across subject disciplines, before focusing on the libguide she created exploring gender studies including content, structure and how content was sources to produce a valuable resource for the University.

Our penultimate chapter of the book 'In the Menority' recognises that there are subject areas that have under representation of male students, including in the UHI Applied Life Studies (ALS) Subject Network. Authored by colleagues working in the aforementioned network, and the UHI Equality and Diversity Adviser, the chapter explores UHI

initiatives to address this imbalance, acknowledging that in doing so can advance the causes of feminism by destigmatising normative gender roles. One successful initiative which is explored in the chapter is the design of a male only Children and Men in Practice (CHAMP) further education course, in recognition that early years and childhood practice is largely dominated by a 97% female workforce. Positive outcomes from the course has included the 2019 cohort progressing to positive destinations of further study and arise in males of 75% of males on varying early years courses in comparison to previous years. 'Softer' positive outcomes included the types of interaction that a male only cohort presented and is explored more in the chapter. Recognising the importance of role models in underrepresented subject areas the chapter also explores a second initiative currently being piloted at UHI called 'Menority Men'. Seven champions across subjects including childcare, nursing and psychology will work with staff champions, looking to

communicate with staff, students and employers to build a remit which challenges societal norms and under-representation at all levels, from pre-school to employment. Although the initiative is fairly new it follows a similar approach that proved highly successful at UHI, the 'UHI STEM Femmes', who were student champions and encouraged and supported women into STEM related courses thus raising aspirations and visibility of students in counter-stereotypical subject areas.

Finally, in our closing chapter for the book, Heather Fotheringham draws together the themes of the chapters to provide her closing thoughts for the book. Fotheringham reflects back to the theme for 2021 International Women's Day #Choosetochallenge and relates it to the topics covered by the authors. Fotheringham summarises that the chapters as covering initiatives that support and promote women, and men, in a single sex environment, which is dominated by the other sex,

or initiatives that relate to curriculum design and approaches, and role models, that offer a fairer and more representative approach to disseminating knowledge. To finalise her closing thoughts Fotheringham provides an overview of the societal view on what is valued in relation to gender roles in the workplace and how this relates to the topics covered in this book, and what remains to be done to achieve gender parity in education and wider sectors.

It is hoped that this book offers the reader a valuable variety of perspectives on gender balance and representation in education and research from personal, professional and sectorial viewpoints which are grounded in evidence- based practice, research and literature. The authors acknowledge the barriers and challenges for women working and studying in education and highlight areas of curriculum underrepresentation for both women and men. Furthermore our collection of chapters outline

positive initiatives that colleagues and teams at the university have successfully initiated to address gender balance, inequality and representation, and importantly acknowledge that there is still much to be done with many of the authors exploring what further progress might look like going forward.

Alexandra Walker, Editor
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