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**Report on the systematic observation of potentially discriminating
behaviours and subsequent recommendations for action**

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This document reports on action 3.1.2 conducted at Birkbeck, University of London, as a part of the EU funded TRIGGER project, between January 2014 and February 2015. The report is composed of the following sections: a brief overview of the action and its aims; the background literature and rationale; the research design; the research findings; recommendations for policy makers and academics; conclusions and reflections on the overall research process.

1. About the action

The action 3.1.1, “Systematic observation of potentially discriminating formal/informal behaviours and subsequent recommendations for action”, is part of a series of actions led by Birkbeck to promote change in organisational cultures and behaviours. The overall aim is to understand the factors impacting on women’s retention and progression in those academic disciplines where they are underrepresented (mainly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields), and to provide recommendations (to Birkbeck but also to the other project partners) for creating a socially favourable environment for women scientists.

The action has been designed as an empirical research project aiming at collecting evidence to understand the underrepresentation of female academics in specific disciplines. Consistent with its main objectives, and to facilitate its promotion to its potential participants, this research has been named “Gender cultures in research and science”.

The research team conducting this project comprises four people with expertise in the study of universities and innovation, gender in organisations, and in-depth research methods: Prof. Helen Lawton Smith, leader of TRIGGER at Birkbeck; Dr. Wendy Hein, lecturer, expert in consumer culture theory, interpretive research and gender issues; Dr. Viviana Meschitti, research assistant for TRIGGER; Prof. Henry Etzkowitz, senior researcher at Stanford University, with recognised international experience in science studies and research on women in science and technology.

2. Background of “Gender cultures” research project

Horizontal and vertical segregation of women in academia constitutes the background for this action. Women are underrepresented in some disciplines (the “STEMM” subjects, i.e. science, technology, engineering, mathematics, medicine); furthermore, in nearly all disciplines, they are underrepresented at the most senior levels of academic ranks, this being known also as the “glass ceiling” phenomenon (European Commission, 2008, 2009a, 2012a, 2012b; Sonnert & Holton, 1996). The same patterns are replicated outside academia (European Commission, 2009b; OECD, 2012). It has been shown that the entrance of new female students in undergraduate programmes, and the increasing number of women gaining a PhD, are not enough for achieving an equilibrium (European Commission, 2012a).

At Birkbeck, women are especially underrepresented in the School of Science (in line with elsewhere in the UK) and in the School of Business, Economics and Informatics (BEI) (less in line with elsewhere). Birkbeck’s last Equality Report (Birkbeck Human Resources 2013) shows that, from 2009, the overall ratio of females to males is quite stable, with 52% women and 48% men overall. In the all College, women represent the 48% of the academic, research and teaching staff; among the professional staff they represent 55%. The data becomes interesting from a gender perspective when considering occupational groups and disciplines. Men are highly represented in senior management (70%) and among the professors (58%), while women are mostly present in the assistant and junior professional and administrative staff (66%). Regarding disciplines, women are especially underrepresented in the School of Business, Economics and Informatics (33% considering all the academic, research and teaching staff).

Considering professors, the differences become even more striking, with 30% of women professors in the School of Science, and 21% of women professors in the School of Business, Economics and Informatics. Largely because of their high representation in the most senior positions, men also represent the strongest percentage among those gaining the highest salaries: regarding the academic, research and teaching staff, 48% of men gain over £50,000 per year, against 36% of women; regarding the admin and professional staff, 10% of men gain over £50,000, against 5% of women.

This situation calls for further understanding of the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women academics. This issue can be better understood when referring to the “gendered” nature of organisations. Prominent scholars such as Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987), Judith Butler (1990), Joan Acker (1990), have shown that gender has a performative nature, i.e. gender is created and recreated through our daily routines and interactions, and organisations themselves are “gendered”. This means that society in general, and organisations in particular, tend to recreate and redefine gender identities: what is masculine and what is feminine; what is expected from men and what is expected from women. Organisations tend to privilege an employee profile that has specific connotations from the point of view of gender: this profile tends to coincide with that of a man (white middle or upper class) who is completely devoted to his own work, while the role of women is often marginalised independently of their position and the type of contribution they give.

Organisations present a gendered nature because of the broader presence of a gender bias in our societies, impacting on human action and shaping cultural frameworks, which are largely built around a masculine ideal. At the societal level, this affects not only the choice of professions (causing horizontal segregation), but it undermines career and progression opportunities (vertical segregation). At a micro level, if we consider everyday organisational routines, because of the gendered nature of organisations women are likely to be the ones who more often experience discriminations, and who more often encounter difficulties in contributing to important processes or in making their voice heard

(Etzkowitz, Fuchs, Gupta, Kemelgor, & Ranga, 2008; Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, & Uzzi, 2000; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001; Rosser, 2004; Valian, 1999).

Universities are not an exception to the concept of gendered organisation. In her study on the UK higher education sector, Deem (2003) investigates how the management of academic institutions is gendered in terms of power relations and career expectations, and how this impacts on the career trajectories of women and men. The existence of gender biases in the formulation of the criteria of academic excellence has been shown by scholars in different countries (Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Fassa & Kradolfer, 2013; Knights & Richards, 2003; van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; van den Brink, Benschop, & Jansen, 2010), and the negative effects of the persistence of male networks have been pointed out as well (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Furthermore, literature highlights the challenges related to high workload and work-life balance (Araujo, 2008; Bailyn, 2003), and mobility (Ackers, 2003).

Gender imbalance is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, involving more actors and depending on many contextual factors (such as the type of organisation and organisational structure, the specific activities being conducted, the composition of work groups and the type of leadership, but also regulatory frameworks at the organisational and national levels). This is exemplified by van den Brink and Benschop's (2012) metaphor of gender inequality as a "seven-headed dragon", a creature with a multitude of faces in different social contexts. For this reason, in order to investigate the underrepresentation of women in academia, it is worth using an in-depth approach and applying more methods.

3. Research design

3.1 Aims, methods and sample

The action has been designed as a research project, “Gender cultures in research and science”, guided by a holistic, in-depth, inductive approach inspired by interpretive research (Janesick, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2005). It started with a closer investigation of relevant literature about gender imbalance in academic careers, privileging literature from peer-reviewed international journals and institutional reports, as presented in section 2. The research project focuses on the two schools in Birkbeck where women academics are especially underrepresented, the School of Science and the School of Business, Economics and Informatics (BEI). It aims to understand not only career trajectories and personal experiences at Birkbeck, but also patterns of participation of women and men in scientific activities. Both women and men are part of the study to assure a diversity of voices and perspectives. The research questions the action addresses are the following:

1. How do professional and personal trajectories of Birkbeck members of staff unfold in the two Schools where women are underrepresented?
2. How are accounts of personal and professional trajectories gendered?

The methods envisaged to fulfil these aims, and constituting the two phases of the project, are individual in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions.

- Interviews privilege a narrative approach, which is widespread in literature on gender practices because it allows for an in-depth understanding of individual lived experiences; the sample comprises 15 people from the academic and administrative staff, across all grades.
- Focus groups should support understanding of how people construct together an account of their roles, experiences and trajectories; they involve 4-8 people each, from both administrative and academic staff, across all grades.

The two phases should inform each other and cross comparison among the different data and results from each phase should permit the maximum understanding of gender dynamics in scientific careers, this paving the way for formulating recommendations to Birkbeck and to other academic institutions.

The population for “Gender cultures in research and science” is composed of 281 members of academic and research staff (168 from the School of Science and 113 people from BEI), plus an additional 145 members of administrative and support staff (81 from the School of Science and 64 from BEI). Women are underrepresented across the entire academic staff in BEI, and at the professorial level in both Schools. The data are summarised in the table below.

Table I: population for *Gender cultures* research action

	Administrative and support staff			Academic and research/teaching staff			Professorial staff		
	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All
School of Science	45	36	81	77	64	141	8	19	27
BEI	35	29	64	30	50	80	7	26	33

3.2 Ethical issues

After elaboration of the research design, a proposal was drawn for obtaining ethical approval to conduct the empirical part of the project: ethical clearance is not only good practice but it is necessary at Birkbeck when conducting empirical research. Ethical clearance can be requested once a research project is fully designed and all the conditions are settled for starting with the empirical research.

Proposals for ethical review are first submitted to an ethical officer from the Department where the research is led (Department of Management in this case), and then they are reviewed by a College Ethics Committee composed of academic staff from more departments. The time required to get a feedback is variable, but during term-time usually takes from a few days up to 4 weeks. Further information about the procedures for ethical clearance is available on the Birkbeck website, Research Grants and Contracts Office: www.bbk.ac.uk/rgco/policy/ethics.shtml.

The proposal for “Gender cultures in research and science” was first submitted on the 3rd of April 2014. However, the ethical review process for this action turned out to be longer than anticipated. More rounds of review were requested from the research team: six versions were submitted (3rd of April, 4th of April, 30th of April, 23rd of May, 9th of July, 18th of July), with the third, fourth and fifth version involving significant changes. Ethics officers have been especially concerned by the issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and conflict of interest. Confidentiality and anonymity have been reputed to be a critical issue given the small size of the academic cohort at Birkbeck School of Science and BEI, especially when referring to women professors, thus implying the risk of identifying people even when not mentioning names. Another problem related to confidentiality, and underlined by the Ethics Committee, refers to the action to be taken in case some participant discloses sensitive information or episodes related to improper behaviour at work (such as bullying or harassment). Conflict of interest is present because the research team works in BEI, this potentially impacting and biasing recruitment, data collection, analysis, and presentation of the results. To overcome these issues, the research team agreed to undertake maximum effort to protect participants’ confidentiality and anonymity; research participants have been made aware of the possible risks, of the existence of a conflict of interests, and of the use of the data for policies recommendations.

During the fourth round of review, the College Ethics Committee had major concerns about the third phase of the research, i.e. observations of research teams. Ethics officers advised to ask approval for the first two phases of the research (interviews and focus groups) prior to asking approval for observations. As a consequence, the research team drew up a new proposal to ask clearance for interviews and focus groups only in the first instance.

The final version of the ethical proposal, approved on the 30th of July, allowed the research team to start with interviews and focus groups. Approval for conducting observations has only been obtained in January 2015. Consequently, it was not possible to apply this method within the timing set by the deliverable.

3.3 Collection and analysis of the data

Recruitment of interviewees across the School of Science and the School of Business, Economics and Informatics started in September 2014, just before the start of the new academic year; consistently with our research design, recruitment of participants for focus groups started in November, once preliminary results from the interviews had been elaborated. Overall, 25 people volunteered for the interviews, more than our expected sample, and 15 people have been invited for an interview. Regarding the focus groups, 10 people volunteered at a first call, and 7 at a second call opened in

January 2015. Below is a description of the actual participants in both the phases. Regarding the division between senior and junior, in the case of administrative staff we relied on their own definition; in the case of academic staff, junior comprises teaching and research assistants, PhD students, and lecturers; senior comprises senior lecturers, readers and professors.

Table II: Participants in individual interviews and in focus groups

	Women				Men			
	Academic		Admin		Academic		Admin	
	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior
Interviews	3	4	1	2	3	1		
Focus groups	I	1		1	1		1	
	II		1	2		1	1	

Interviews have been on average 1 hour and 15 minutes long (35 minutes the shortest interview, and 1 hour 40 minutes the longest one). Focus groups have been on average 1 hour 35 minutes long. Both interviews and focus groups took place in the College. Focus groups have been particularly challenging to organise: first of all, the volunteer rate has been lower than in the case of interviews; this has been carefully considered by the research team, and, following also the experiences of other researchers, it seems the community is less apt to participate in a group discussion than to take part in individual interviews. Second, finding a common time slot for most of the volunteers is also challenging, given that our focus groups aimed to bring together people with quite different time schedules. However, despite these challenges, the overall experience with focus groups has been positive and very rich accounts have been gathered.

Regarding interviews, participants have been presented with specific questions concerning their career path and experiences inside and outside Birkbeck, but they have been left free in developing their answers as they wish and in introducing new topics. Interviews have always been conducted by the same interviewer, the research assistant. The guidelines for interviews are attached.

Regarding focus groups, participants have been asked to describe their role and main activities at Birkbeck, and then had the opportunity to freely confront themselves in relation to the way they approach their work and the challenges they perceive. The first focus group has been conducted by two members of the research team, and the second by three of them. The guidelines are attached.

Following the hermeneutic cycle characterising interpretive research, analysis has been characterised by three steps: first, a careful reading of the transcribed data and of the notes taken just after the interviews; second, researchers looked for the main themes emerging in interviews and in focus groups; third, these themes have been compared to look for patterns. The first phase of reading of the data permitted to initiate a process of coding, which produced more codes very close to the participants' anecdotes and helped researchers to highlight, for each interview and focus group, the parts in which very dense accounts were developed. Subsequently, researchers decided to focus on the parts of the data highlighted in the first phase, to go through them, and to look for more interpretations; this permitted to find the main themes that have been developed by the participants all through our data; finally, to enhance the presentation of the findings, these themes have been compared and reassembled in the patterns presented in the following section.

Throughout this process, discussion among the researchers regarding the preliminary findings allowed for cross-checking and refining the results; the presence of a member of the research team who is not working inside Birkbeck gave the opportunity to look at the observed phenomena from a different

perspective. Comparison among the two types of data, discussion among the researchers, and knowledge of the context of the research, should enhance the validity of these findings (Sandberg, 2005).

4. Research findings

In this section, the main findings are presented. We will examine five different thematic patterns that emerged through our data: workload and work-life balance; the intersection of local and trans-local phenomena; the differences in career trajectories; indirect discriminations and gender bias; socialisation and training to new roles. Because of ethical issues, to preserve confidentiality and anonymity, the research team committed with College Ethical Committee not to report quotes from original data in this deliverable.

A first important consideration regards the dependence of our findings not only on the specific institutional and national academic context (Birkbeck, UK), but also on the considered Department. In our interviews, differences emerged among Departments especially regarding some perceived challenges in the present work routines and in the way academic careers are encouraged; this is also related to differences in the type of leadership, because the participants themselves stressed that some habits in their department depend on who is leading it. On the other hand, the Department is important because it provides the first hierarchical structure in which participants are embedded and to which they refer.

A second consideration regards the differences between being in an academic or being in an administrative position. Even if some patterns are present in both groups, it is clear that the two groups are in different professional and career structures. An important point to consider in our findings regarding the administrative staff is that in our group of participants we do not have men in administrative positions; in fact, because administrative positions, especially at the junior level, are dominated by women. Our volunteers were also women.

4.1 Workload and work-life balance

An issue that clearly emerges throughout the data is the high workload, something especially experienced by academics. It is interesting that, when asked to describe their role and activities, most of the academics refer to research first; but, throughout the interviews it emerged that often the time dedicated to research is really a little. The majority of the academics complain about the high administrative workload, and some highlight the amount of time invested in teaching, which, despite being a key activity in academia, tends to be more and more undervalued. Some of the junior academics complain not to have the time anymore to do their own experiments or to sit and analyse the data, and most of our interviewees would like to have more time for writing papers or for thinking about new research directions. The majority of our participants (and interestingly enough, the more senior academics especially), show a passion for teaching, but also awareness that it requires a lot of energy and does not make a difference in the academic CV. Probably both the wish to have more time for writing, and the frustration towards the undervaluing of teaching, are related to a more general trend that we will describe in more detail later, i.e. the relevance of publications in top international journals for building an academic career. However, the pressure seems stronger in some Departments where collaborations with University College London (UCL) are conducted. This shows how institutional differences have a significant impact on the life of the staff: UCL is a much bigger and more well-known institution in comparison to Birkbeck, and Birkbeck School of Science relies on UCL for using facilities that would be too expensive for a small College. Undoubtedly the collaboration with such a different and renowned institution makes staff from Birkbeck feel more under pressure to achieve the standards set by the international benchmarks in terms of publications and funding.

A topic related to the high workload, and thematised by women especially, is the struggle in having a work-life balance. While academia is praised for flexible working hours, on the other hand, the high workload does not make life easy for both academics and admin staff with young children. Furthermore, administrative staff very often cannot even count on flexible working hours. New technologies and the internet can help in flexible working; however, they make the borders between work and private life more blurred. In general, flexible working hours and the possibility of working away have both advantages and disadvantages, and most of the participants have their own strategies for dealing with that. Participants with children, and women especially, always mention the importance of childcare and flexible working hours. If one could object that there is nothing new in underlining the importance of childcare for families, and in stressing that the fast pace and high workload of today's scientific careers may discriminate against those with family obligations, it is nevertheless striking how both these issues are thematised by the vast majority of our participants, and by women especially. First of all, all those having familial obligations stress how balancing academia and family can be a constant struggle; for example, a male junior academic well stressed the huge amount of hours he has always dedicated to academic work, and how this started to become a problems once he got married and he needed more time for his own private life. More interestingly, part-time policies do not seem to be a solution since they tend to slow down the pace of one's own trajectory and seriously compromise an academic career; one senior woman underlined that she has always excluded the option of working part-time, even when she needed more time to take care of her family, because this does not pays-off in the academic environment (both in terms of advancing one own career and of salary). More interestingly, those not having any family obligation explicitly state that they are privileged; participants who now have young children or a partner state that they were in a much more favourable position when they were single, while one woman academic stressed she decided not to have children so to be able to travel and commit to her work. Actually, women academics underline especially the difficulty of travelling and assuring their visibility at international conferences during the first years of life of a child.

The issue of juggling family and private life with an academic career still seems to represent a burden for women: not only did most of the women interviewed mention it (independently of being a mother or not), but many of them introduced the topic spontaneously, extensively explaining their situation and the problems they face in this regard; this happened in interviews especially, where participants probably felt more at ease in going in-depth into the features of their personal life. A junior academic clearly expressed her worries: she admitted she even asked herself if she will need to leave her job once she becomes a mother. Such worries are also related to contextual issues, because childcare in London can be very expensive. All the accounts from young mothers show that organising a good covering for maternity leave is essential: academic tasks often are not the easiest ones to be delegated and covered for a small period (usually 6 months), but assuring an adequate covering of teaching and admin tasks is worthwhile for allowing mothers a smooth recovery from their leave.

It is worth stressing that, the fact that most of our participants, including men also, clearly expressed concerns in terms of work-life balance, shows that academia does not go hand-by-hand with childrearing or with other family obligations (such as taking care of the elderly). Undoubtedly, the pressure coming from the international benchmarks is felt in the everyday life of Birkbeck staff: these benchmarks assume that people are always able to perform at the best in all the different areas of academic life (but in publications and research especially), and this is contrasting with the idea of having a work-life balance.

4.2 Local, trans-local and international trends intersecting

It is important to stress that some of the recurrent topics we observed in the data refer to trends at a national and international level. The most important relates to the relevance of getting papers published in highly ranked international journals: all the academics, from the most junior to the most senior, spoke extensively about this, and some of them even showed frustration towards a system that seems to reward people in terms of metrics. Particularly interesting were the accounts from some junior academics speaking about the current trend to hire “stars”: people who achieved their doctoral degree in well-known institutions and published in highly ranked journals in an early stage of their career (despite the fact that publishing should only be one side of academic life). Even more senior academics showed some frustration towards a system that is giving more and more relevance to specific types of publications, and it is interesting that a woman academic underlined her willingness to publish in the journals she prefers, not necessarily in the ones ranked highly.

In relation to the relevance of publications, most of our academic participants, both women and men, underlined the importance of getting funding for research in order to enhance the opportunities of an academic career, and to be able to negotiate a better salary (this being a concern for men especially). Even if only a few participants suggested that higher education has become a business (this also being related to the high fees paid by students), it is clear that everybody was aware of the importance of attracting funding, and showed mixed feelings toward this.

The comparison with UCL especially caused interesting accounts about Birkbeck to emerge: Birkbeck staff seem to appreciate being part of a small institution, where the hierarchy is flatter and it is easier to have an understanding of the decision-making and hierarchical structure. As confirmed in the focus groups also, academic staff especially like being independent in pursuing their own research agenda and in organising their own time; Birkbeck is recognised as a place where relations are more based on collaboration than on strong competition, and this is appreciated by the participants.

The dynamics between local and international trends become more complex if we keep in mind that Birkbeck was born as a teaching institution, i.e. the provider of evening and part-time teaching to non-traditional students. This mission makes Birkbeck unique in the panorama of UK higher education institutions. However, this creates tensions with the national (expressed by the Research Excellence Framework¹) and international trend towards high impact research. This tension is experienced by some of our participants, both women and men, who underline how the teaching orientation of Birkbeck is difficult to reconcile with this type of research requirement.

4.3 Different career trajectories and different life experiences

The very different career trajectories of the participants at times make it challenging to find common patterns: different career trajectories have a different impact on life experiences. Features of the career paths emerged during interviews especially. Considering our group of interviewees, we can make two distinctions regarding career paths: being academic or admin, and being junior or senior. These two distinctions clearly emerge all across our data. It can look surprising that these distinctions emerge more strongly than a gender distinction, but this is the case if we analyze the career paths of our interviewees: each career path is very peculiar and it is challenging to find common patterns. The difference between academic and admin is particularly strong, while the difference in seniority tends to aggregate women and men’s experiences. Once considered these two distinctions, gendered experiences can be found, but they are often more related to specific events in time, or, they refer to

¹ The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a system for assessing research quality in UK, www.ref.ac.uk

very individual stories (and as a consequence it is difficult to find a common pattern); they are discussed in the next section.

Comparisons between academic and admin staff stress the different features of these career paths: while for academics, even for the most junior ones, it is generally clear what is expected from them and how they can build their own career, admin staff report more often to feel stuck in their own position and not to see career opportunities. The members of the admin staff who took part in our interviews are highly qualified or very experienced: the more junior ones express a wish to progress in their career paths, but often there is not a clear progression line in front of them, and they have few opportunities to participate in training courses. The juggling of work and family experienced by administrative staff is especially due to the fact that very often admin people have far less flexibility regarding working hours: while an academic working fulltime can basically decide when to come in to the College, members of the admin staff are supposed to come in everyday or to report or ask for special arrangements if they cannot do that.

The second distinction can be made by comparing accounts from more junior members with accounts from more senior members. Obviously, more senior members show a degree of awareness not only of institutional and higher education politics, but also of the impact of gender on careers; this is probably due to the fact that gender is part of us and our life, and its influence on life experiences may be difficult to ascertain, especially by those who are new to an environment or profession. More senior interviewees stress that gender has a role in shaping one's own career, and they especially underline the existence of indirect discriminations, biases, and different expectations towards men and women. Gendered expectations (e.g. women are more oriented to relations and care) intersect with behaviours (e.g. women tend to be less assertive) in complex ways; our interviewees underline how gendered expectations and behaviours often constitute a stereotype (e.g. women can also be assertive, or men caring); on the other hand, because these stereotypes are strongly rooted in our culture, not complying with them means being perceived as a sort of outsider and can be subject to criticisms. Among the more senior participants there are also three interviewees who reported having experienced, directly or indirectly, cases of bullying in their life (this usually involving people at a higher grade bullying staff at a lower grade), and the difficulties, at the individual and institutional level, of dealing with such cases.

It is also interesting to observe that the narratives by more senior members of staff more often underline the relevance of teaching in their career; this is probably influenced by the fact that teaching, as also underlined in the focus group, is being devalued as an academic activity, and it seems to have less and less weight on the academic curriculum; as a consequence, more junior members tend to focus more on research and publications.

4.4 Indirect discriminations and gender bias

Women in our group of participants report more often having felt discriminated against or victim of some stereotype in relation to gender. Even if direct forms of discrimination are very rare in our group, it is important to highlight how almost all the women interviewed showed awareness of gender differences and gender stereotypes. Our interviewees often report discriminations that have been expressed in an indirect form; in some cases they speak about old anecdotes. These indirect discriminations often are expressed through behaviours or jokes that undermine the position of women (women as the ones who will "prepare the tea" in a research team, maternity leave as a holiday, being ignored or being excluded from proposals without any plausible justification). In general, being active in more male-dominated environments, or in very competitive disciplines,

creates a potential terrain for unfair gender relations to take place (even if women active in more gender-balanced departments also experienced problems). One of our senior interviewees who has been active in a male-dominated sector experienced direct forms of discrimination and repeatedly being excluded from important career opportunities. Two of our women interviewees who are active in STEMM subjects report more senior women not being supportive or friendly, which is recognized by the literature as the “queen bee syndrome” (Ellemers, 2004; Staines, Tavris, & Jayaratne, 1974).

Female academics (and the ones active in STEMM especially) report gender power dynamics demoting both the image and the role of women, such as, for example: women are more often judged for their appearance (this issue being raised by both academic and admin); women are more often considered not to be able to commit to work when they have a family and children; young women are positioned as sexual objects, or women as subjects consciously use this positioning for their career. The pervasiveness of these power dynamics impacts on women’s accounts of their daily routines and of their professional ethos also: some of the women interviewed show concern towards their appearance or tell anecdotes in relation to that; others want to reject the stereotypes and power dynamics referred to above, and try to stress that they are, first of all, academics (as a consequence they, for example, prefer not to speak about their private life); a minority report having used such power dynamics to turn in their favour. Probably the willingness of women to stress they are academics first is at the base of the suspicion towards women-only initiatives, as thematised by some of our female participants.

Some of the women also report on behavioural differences between women and men that seem to reaffirm the social stereotypes (such as women being more focused on relationships, more willing to take care of admin duties and teaching, less inclined to “push themselves”, and men being more assertive); this is thematised also a couple of men academics. Interestingly, one of our male interviewees expressed concerns regarding the fact that presently, when selecting students for PhD programmes, some specific personality types are preferred (and especially “pushy” people). In his experience, being “pushy” does not have any relation with being a capable researcher; nevertheless, if “pushy” personalities will be selected more often, in the long term this could affect retention of women or of other groups.

It is worth stating that overall, male participants also showed a certain degree of awareness of gender. For example, a male academic clearly thematised the concept of “hidden” gender bias that could affect selection procedures, and underlined the importance of having more women on panels. Men also showed awareness of gender issues in relation to the way tasks are shared in a couple or career trajectories are conceived: interestingly, male participants in one of the focus groups stated that, despite being aware of gender stereotypes and trying to avoid them, the organisation of their family life and plan for the future fall in line with the most common stereotypes. This is probably because, as showed in the literature, gender roles are deeply eradicated in cultural and social structures, and even direct interventions are confronted with values and mind sets that are not easy to change.

4.5 Socialisation and training to new roles

All our interviewees have been asked about their first experiences in their role at Birkbeck, while participants to focus groups have been asked to reflect on how they think their role fits into (and gives meaning to) the overall College structure. Both academic and administrative staff showed themselves to be proactive in getting socialised to the new environment and tasks. Junior academic staff especially (independently of their Department and discipline), and women particularly, remember their first days in their position at Birkbeck as a very intense and challenging moment, characterised

by active searching for information, planning activities, and establishing contacts, all of which was mostly conducted individually. In fact, all across the participants, it is possible to notice that people deal with their task mainly by themselves: it seems that not only academic work, but also administrative work within an academic institution, is mostly a work to be conducted in isolation; this has been confirmed even more strongly in focus groups. Even if our participants showed a strong degree of personal motivation, working in isolation also renders difficult to learn how things work in the College, to know about expectations from colleagues and from line managers, and ultimately also to know about career opportunities. Working in isolation means also that, in the case some problem arises, the individual will more likely to experience it as a personal problem, or being unable to look for adequate support.

Some of our junior participants report having needed quite a long time before feeling part of the institution; others, who have been hired a few months before participating in our research, vividly tell about how they still feel “lost”. This was also because very often the start of their work at Birkbeck coincided with entering a completely new role, with new responsibilities (such as supervision responsibilities). It is clear that such adjustments require both time and effort. On the other hand, interviewees who attended Birkbeck as students or doctoral students reported being facilitated by their previous experience, since they already had some idea about the College structure and knew some colleagues. The majority of our participants are more used to refer to the Department than to the “College”, that remains a sort of evanescent image whose structure is quite opaque, especially to the most junior participants. Few of the interviewees had experience with mentoring and coaching, that can potentially facilitate transition into new roles and new structures, but the few who had showed satisfaction towards these initiatives.

What is worth stressing, as far as the broader socialisation and training for the academic discipline is concerned, is that the PhD supervisor has a great impact: the majority of our interviewees, and especially the most junior ones, did not hesitate to indicate their PhD supervisor (or even post-doc supervisor) as an important role model and source of inspiration.

Among the interviewees, two (one man and one woman) had past experience as HoD, and this permitted us to gather interesting insights: the role of HoD in the distribution of tasks, and also in solving any interpersonal or bullying issue (if this is the case), is key. However, as is the case for most new staff, HoDs do not receive any specific training in relation to their new role, and this has been pointed out as problematic by our participants. One of our interviewees having had experience as a HoD in different institutions stressed how training could be beneficial to academics in management roles, but this interviewee also highlighted how often academics are resistant to that.

At Birkbeck, Heads of Departments (HoD) have a very important role in assuring a smooth running of research and teaching activities, a fair distribution of tasks, and equal opportunities in getting promoted. For example, one of our interviewees, a woman in a male-dominated discipline, praised her previous HoD for having the habit of giving regular feedback to all the staff regarding their curriculum and for having motivated her to apply for promotion. Having the power of distributing tasks in the Department or in a research group clearly means also being in the position to assure equal opportunities for everyone and to avoid women being overloaded with administrative tasks and pastoral care, as was pointed out by a (male) senior academic.

One of our senior female interviewees highlighted how managing academics requires a lot of negotiation skills and ability in trying to convince others: often because reporting and hierarchical structures inside individual departments are not clear; moreover, being independent and critical are

intrinsic characteristics of academic work, and, as confirmed by the literature also, this makes the management of academics particularly challenging (Deem, 2010).

Training for academic management could be particularly strategic: such training could benefit both those who are in the position of managers, who could gain a perspective on the challenges of managing academics, on the features of the institutional structure, and on the expectations on them; but it would benefit all staff, who could count on competent managers. Furthermore, training could give a push towards creating a more gender sensitive environment. On the other hand, such training should be tailored to the features of academic work and of the academic profession, and should provide a clear added value to these work routines.

4.6 Summary of results

To give a brief summary of our results, we underline that the accounts we gathered have been very varied, and they can be classified along the following dimensions: being a man or a woman; being academic or admin; being junior or senior.

- Women are still the ones who, independently of having familial obligations or not, take most care of their work-life balance; when they have familial obligations, they are very often the ones taking (or expected to take) this burden; when they are on their career path, they are the ones more often experiencing discrimination, especially indirect discrimination that undervalues their role; and they are the ones who can be easily criticised because of futile reasons (such as their appearance).
- Academics experience the hardest workload, but can also count on flexible working hours and on more training opportunities compared to the admin staff; the problem for admin staff seems to be the absence of a progression structure in their career.
- Junior academics, even when they have already spent quite a few years in academia, seem to be less aware of both the impact of gender and the challenges of managing academics; moreover, they have a strong focus on their publication pipeline. Senior academics show a strong awareness of the complexities of gender dynamics, of the need to commit to a more gender sensitive environment, and of the benefits of training.

Overall, it is worth underlining how different Departments can constitute different worlds, each of them with their own culture, which impacts on personal experiences; and how the more general international trend towards a definition of academic excellence based on type of publication is strongly impacting the daily routines of our interviewees.

5. Recommendations

On the basis of the findings above described, we draft eight recommendations for academics, academic managers and policy makers willing to address gender imbalance in science. They relate to the following issues:

- 1) The impact of departmental and disciplinary cultures;
- 2) Fostering academic careers and creating new benchmarks;
- 3) Analysis of current situation and listening to staff needs;
- 4) Socialisation into a new environment, mentoring and coaching;
- 5) Bridging the divide academic/admin staff;
- 6) Training for leaders and academic managers;
- 7) Women-only and mixed-gender initiatives;
- 8) Addressing gender stereotypes.

For each of these issues, more specific recommendations follow: these recommendations are meant to be exemplary, and they arise from our research; however, we do not exclude that supplementary recommendations can be designed for each of the eight topics, depending on the specific institution and on what is already in place.

5.1 The impact of departmental and disciplinary cultures

A careful consideration of the specific departmental and disciplinary “cultures”, where the group to be targeted works, is essential. Different departments have different habits and values (valuing collaboration or competition, for example, or promoting junior researchers): if it is true that male-dominated departments and disciplines can constitute particularly difficult environments for the underrepresented gender, in our interviews we observed that women in male-dominated environments could have opportunities for growth, while women in disciplines where more female members are present also experienced problems. This means that it is worth targeting interventions to departments and disciplines, this especially to avoid reproducing what is already in place, and also avoiding to unconsciously reproduce the structures that constrain gender.

A first and relatively straightforward step for targeting interventions to departments consists in keeping a database permitting to have an overview of:

- Data about academic, administrative and research staff per gender and grade;
- Data on promotions, applications, and funding, with a focus on submission and success rate per gender;
- Existing initiatives for introducing staff to new roles (induction and socialisation initiatives, mentoring, coaching), together with participation rate and (if available) participants’ evaluation;
- Existing initiatives for supporting women, addressing gender, equal opportunities and diversity;
- Training opportunities for current staff;
- Training opportunities for leaders.

5.2 Fostering academic careers and creating new benchmarks

Following the previous consideration, it is worth being aware that local dynamics intersect with trans-local and international ones, i.e. priorities and pressures can come from outside an institution (e.g.

pressure for publications and high impact research) and heavily impact on daily academic routines. As a consequence, the design of interventions supporting gender equality should consider that some phenomena spread across and beyond a single institution, and that the current pressure for publications may not facilitate the path towards gender equality. A possible route can be supporting all the staff in having time for research, and, at the same time, creating new benchmarks that are more friendly in terms of work-life balance, support diversity, and award the variety of activities in which an academic is involved.

- Transparency in assessment and promotion criteria within the Department and within the College;
- Regular (one year) individual review, for all the staff, to discuss present achievements, career objectives, short and middle term strategies;
- Short research leaves (e.g. one month) for those with family obligations, or for those serving on more academic committees;
- More visibility to teaching awards, and assignment of awards also in the form of short research leaves;
- More visibility to doctoral supervision work and pastoral care, including teaching evaluation and students' completion rate in the evaluation of academic CVs.

5.3 Analysis of current situation and listening to staff needs

This recommendation is strictly related to the first two and follows them. Interventions for staff should follow some form of analysis of the current situation and should try to match the staff needs. Listening to and understanding staff needs are essential: this not only to understand which opportunities are already in place for them and which one could be built, but especially, to understand their workload and how initiative targeted to gender can fit into their commitments. : our interviewees reported a very high overload in their duties and adding one more piece of work to them can be detrimental; in academia, different work tasks seem to accumulate, and not to substitute each other, this being detrimental to people's time. Furthermore, the preference of academic staff to manage their own time independently also may work as a form of resistance to training opportunities. For these reasons, any new intervention should ultimately aim to support work-life balance, and strategies for remunerating or awarding participation in initiatives addressing gender should be considered. To make sure that any initiative is not clashing with high workload, and to avoid replication and proliferation of committees and working groups with very limited powers, the following should be investigated (through surveys or even informal interviews, depending on the size and features of a department):

- How much time women and men devote to specific tasks (for example, empirical research; academic writing; supervision; teaching, administration; committees);
- In which type of committees and working groups women and men are involved;
- Priorities for career and main challenges in actual role;
- Exit interviews to understand the challenges met by (former) staff.

5.4 Socialisation into a new environment, mentoring and coaching

Academic staff especially like freedom and independence; however, guidance has been quite poor, especially at the beginning of the career of our interviewees, and initiatives such as training for newcomers or mentoring could be beneficial to all staff. For example, mentoring could target specific groups and blend moments of one-to-one confrontation with a mentor, with moments of networking

and training within a larger group of mentors and mentees; this format would follow the formulas experienced in Aurora Leadership Programme and in Athena SWAN Mentoring Programme². Mentoring and training in relation to mentoring would make people more aware of the challenges of an academic career and of the need to consider gender equality when working with colleagues.

- Short induction (half day) for all new staff, and within the first month of contract, in order to have an overview of the College and Department structure and of the opportunities for staff;
- Mentoring/ coaching programmes for new staff; depending on the type of role or on the Department, different types of mentoring can be designed (peer mentoring or group mentoring);
- Mentoring with a focus on career progression: especially for staff having already some experience in the institution, targeted forms of one-to-one mentoring focused on career progression can be beneficial;

5.5 Bridging the divide academic/admin staff

A feeling of a divide between academic and admin staff has been reported by admin staff, and probably should be considered; common events and common socialization or training initiatives can help to bridge this divide. Furthermore, the feeling of administrative staff of being “stuck” in their position and not having progression or promotion opportunities should also be considered, and possible career paths for administrative staff should be designed.

- Including all staff in department meetings and in informal department occasions;
- Mixing admin and academic staff in induction days, in seminars and in training events;
- Design seminars and events that attract the interest of broader audiences;
- Design short workshops to bring together academic and admin staff from a single department to work together on specific tasks, so to allow an understanding of the implications of some recurrent academic activities (such as teaching, or students’ selection, organisation of events, just to mention a few) for both admin and academic staff.

5.6 Training for leaders and academic managers

Training for leaders and academic managers represents a priority. Our research shows that academics who find themselves in positions of important responsibility often lack specific training; issues related to distribution of tasks, gender bias and gender stereotypes, equal opportunities and diversity, discrimination, and bullying should be part of that.

- Training academic managers to leadership, gender equality, diversity;
- Training to new heads of departments, this including how to assure fair workloads, how to encourage junior staff careers, how to avoid gender stereotyping and unconscious bias, how to deal with bullying issues;
- Leadership training for junior staff who could be willing to take up leadership roles in their future.

² Aurora Leadership Programme is a UK-wide initiative launched by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (www.lfhe.ac.uk/): it aims to foster women’s careers in higher education and it targets both academic and admin staff. Athena SWAN is also a UK-wide initiative: it is sponsored by the Equality Challenge Unit (www.ecu.ac.uk/) and it awards UK higher education institutions which are particularly sensitive to gender equality.

5.7 Women-only and mixed gender initiatives

Often women do not appreciate “women-only” initiatives: when this is true, making both women and men work together on gender equality, or designing initiatives that comprise both one-gender and mixed-gender training, can represent a solution.

- Design “hybrid” training and mentoring initiatives, where women-only training or confrontation is blended with moments where gender mixed participation is planned;
- Demystify women-only initiatives, find champions for such initiatives, promote their success and build on the success of participants to make people understand the role and relevance of women-only initiatives.

5.8 Addressing gender stereotypes

Gender stereotyping and gendered expectations are a reality still greatly impacting on women’s experiences (and probably also on women’s self-esteem and definition of themselves); it is especially important to reflect on the long-term effects that this will continue to have (such as the risk of perpetuating horizontal and vertical segregation in professions); this could be targeted with training across all levels and in different formats (for example, it can be part of socialisation initiatives, or of mentoring or leadership programmes, or of training for managers, etc.).

- Include sessions on gender stereotyping in all induction and training initiatives;
- Include sessions on gender bias and stereotyping in selected undergraduate and post-graduate modules;
- Stress the role for gender bias especially in training for leaders and academic managers, make leaders and academic managers work on unconscious bias;
- Try to assure equal representation of both women and men in strategic academic committees, in promotion and application panels;
- Create a senior academic role of representative for equality and diversity, so to make sure that any issue or initiative related to gender and diversity receives appropriate attention even at the highest level, and to pave the way for institutional change.

6. Conclusions

This research permitted us to gather very rich narratives from women and men active at Birkbeck; because of the richness of these accounts, we will go back to them and conduct analysis at a deeper level, to check for possible new patterns.

Birkbeck represents just one local case, but we are convinced that some of our results, being related to phenomena beyond Birkbeck, could also apply to other higher education institutions. We have tried to guarantee transparency in our research procedures, so that other institutions can apply our approach. At the beginning of our research we planned to conduct observations of research teams: this has not been possible because of the late ethical approval, but, because this method could allow for going deeper in our understanding of how academic cultures and gender are intertwined, we plan to start with this phase.

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8. Attachments

- Interview questions
- Focus group guidelines

FP7 TRIGGER project - Gender cultures in research and science

Phase I

Guidelines for narrative interviews

Thank you for participating to our research. You have signed the consent form and, if you do not have any further question, we can start with the interview. This interview will have a narrative form: we would like to know about your personal and professional trajectory, your experience at Birkbeck. Our questions will serve as general inputs for discussion. You can develop your answers as you prefer: feel free to focus on anecdotes or events that have been important for you, either if they happened here at Birkbeck or in other places, either if they relate to your career or to your personal life. Feel free to introduce new topics of discussion. We are interested to know what you think is important for you when speaking about your trajectory.

1. We would like to start with your present role at Birkbeck, what are you doing, which are your current activities?
 - i. Can you describe us your “typical day” at Birkbeck?
 - ii. Do you often work with other colleagues? How would you describe these moments of collaborative work?
2. How did you get to your present position at Birkbeck? Could you tell us about your professional trajectory?
 - i. Which have been the most important steps for you?
 - ii. Which are the events you can better remember (why)?
 - iii. From who have you learned the most?
 - iv. Have you ever been inspired by some role model?
3. There are specific moments, in your professional or also personal trajectory, that have been especially rewarding for you?
4. Do you think you there have been some difficult moments?
 - i. Have you never experienced some type of discrimination? How did you overcome that?
5. Can I ask you about your personal life, your family, how does this influence you career trajectory (and viceversa)?
6. If you go back to look at all your experiences, how would you compare them with the experience you have now at Birkbeck?
7. Do you have some plans for your future? Would you like to progress your career at Birkbeck?

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Phase II

Guidelines for focus groups

Thank you for participating in this session. You have signed the consent form and confidentiality agreement and, if you do not have any further question, we can start with the focus group.

Feel free to share the information you feel comfortable with; do not feel obliged to give all the details about your current position, tasks and responsibilities at Birkbeck, or about the department you are working in, but focus on what you think is relevant for you.

1. We would like first to know more about your activities at Birkbeck. Could you briefly explain which are the main activities characterizing your life at Birkbeck now?
2. If you go back to your first days at Birkbeck, which was your experience at that moment, could you remember some anecdote?
3. What makes you happy about your work at Birkbeck, about your current role and tasks?
 - i. Are you experiencing some challenges in your current role? Which ones? How do they affect your daily life at Birkbeck?
4. There is something difficult about your role at Birkbeck, something that you do not like?
5. How would you describe Birkbeck, the culture/values/objectives guiding your work in your department? How would you describe the culture guiding your community / research community?
 - i. On which base do you think leadership is established at Birkbeck?
6. If you think to new potential members of the staff, starting to work at Birkbeck in the next few months: which advice would you give to a new colleague?