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**EDI 2013 Doctoral Colloquium Abstract**

Equality and Diversity issues in the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework exercise.

This research explores the equality and diversity issues in relation to the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise as a vehicle for evaluating research quality. The REF is surrounded by controversy and the particular focus in this study is what the REF holds for greater equality and diversity in academia. Presently, it is clear that women are under-represented in senior level academic positions. For example, only one Russell Group university has a female head (Dame Nancy Rothwell at the University of Manchester) (Grove 2012). Given the significance of research, it will consider the role of the REF and its predecessor the RAE in the making of academic careers with a particular focus on female academics. Fletcher (2007: 279) argued that despite resistance on the part of many academics to the ‘practices of managerialism’, the audit and benchmarking of research provided by the REF exercise might actually benefit some women.This research aims to provide greater insight into the barriers and constraints faced by women and other ‘minority’ academics and into how a fairer and more inclusive system might be created.

Whilst there is much available literature surrounding various past runs of the RAE[[1]](#footnote-1), in general, the availability of formally published works regarding equality and diversity issues within this topic is limited. This research seeks to address this substantial gap in existing research and literature by focusing on REF 2014. The analysis of the equality implications of the REF will be situated within a broader discussion of the sociology of professions and careers (example REFS needed).

Methodology

The research is at an early stage, but it is anticipated that a mixed methods approach will be adopted to allow for the comparison of qualitative interview data with the findings of quantitative data derived from published REF data and possibly participating case study universities. This will provide greater insight into what the key issues are and how they are being addressed quantifiably by HEFCE.[[2]](#footnote-2) The inclusive nature of a mixed methods approach is in line with true research-inclusivity in academia, as well as being an innovative methodological approach for this specific research. As Johnson and Turner (pg. 297, 2003) note *‘methods should be mixed in a way that has complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses’* though an inter-method mixing approach is most appropriate: ‘*it may be more beneficial to see the two as interwoven, that one element stimulates new ideas for the data collection for the other’* Bowling (pg. 236, 2005)

This research will make an empirical, timely contribution to knowledge about equality and diversity within academia, in particular how the structures of research quality evaluation impact on the making of women’s careers. The research will have clear policy implications and will provide evidence for those who want to see the creation of a more level playing field in the UK academy. In particular, findings could be used to form strategic recommendations for HEFCE.

Word Count (ex. References): 301

References:

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Johnson B, LA Turner, (2003) *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioural Research*, Sage Publications, London.

1. Research Assessment Exercise [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Higher Education Funding Council for England [↑](#footnote-ref-2)