

***Women in Physics: the
Institute of Physics Site
Visit Scheme***

Professor Peter Main
Director, Education and Science
PHEE
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peter.main@iop.org

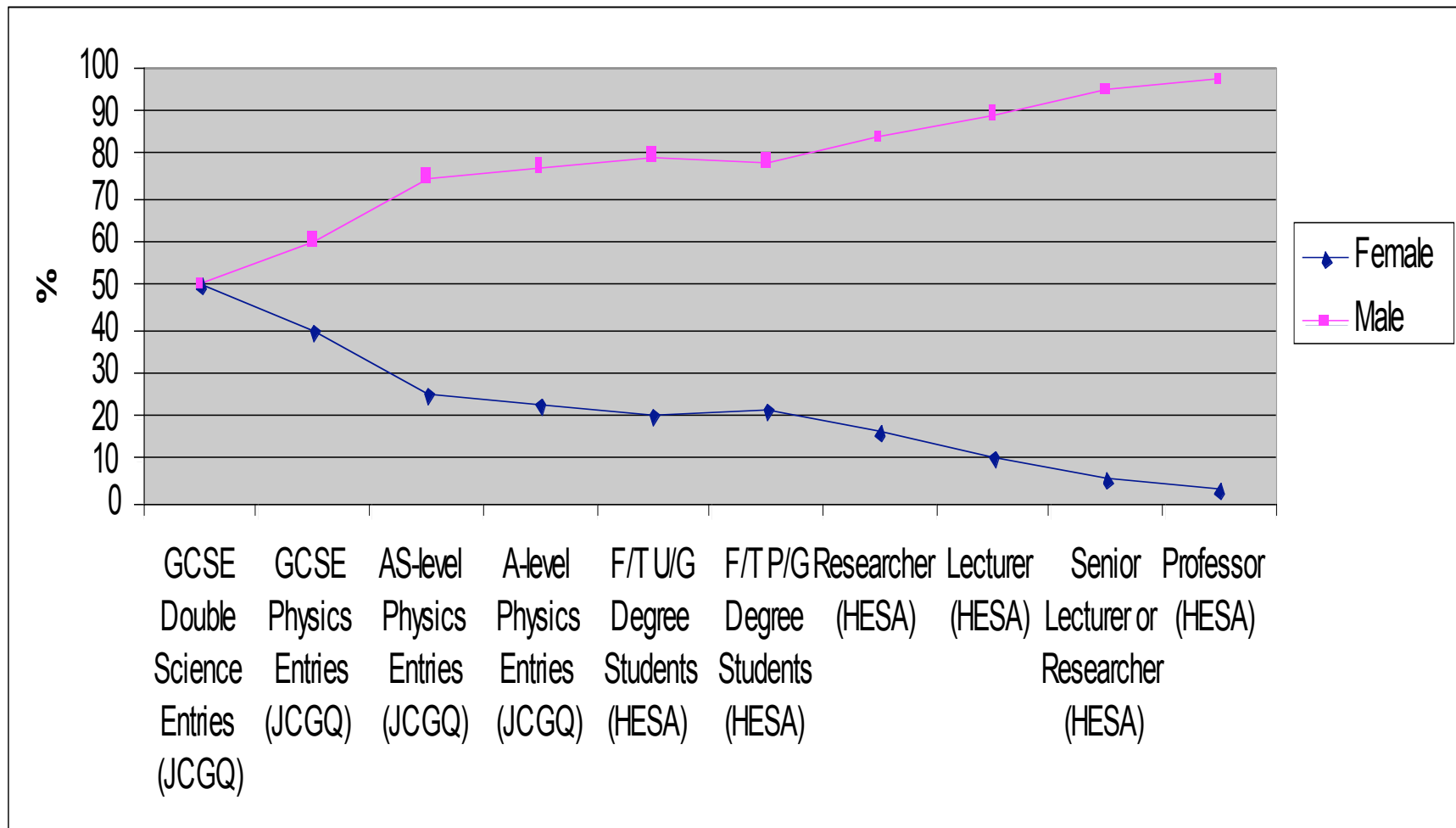
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Plan of Talk

- **Background to our Site Visits Scheme**
- **Description of the scheme**
- **What we discovered**
- **Reaction and further work**

Background

Background



Background

- **Based on a scheme operated by the American Physical Society to look at gender issues in physics departments**
- **The Institute was asked by the Standing Conference of Physics Professors to do something similar in the UK and Ireland**
- **No intention to operate an “accreditation” scheme**
- **Visited ~40% of physics departments by invitation only**

The Scheme

The Scheme

- **Paperwork (sent beforehand) included admissions statistics, gender disaggregated student numbers, pass rates, staff handbook etc.**
- **Panel of 5 (including 1 man) + secretary visit for one day**
- **Confidential written report sent to HoD with recommendations.**

The Visit

- **Meeting with departmental management , admissions tutor, director of teaching, HR representative etc**
- **Meetings with:**
 - Female academic staff (where there were no women physicists at all, we met with staff from cognate subjects)
 - Male academic staff
 - Female RAs and PGs
 - Male RAs and PGs

The Visit

- **Lunch with female UGs.**
- **Laboratory tour**
- **Informal feedback at the end from the chair of the panel to the HoD**

What we found out

Some observations from the data

- **Wide variations in ratio of female students between HEIs**
- **Ratio of women is higher in astronomy, mathematical physics and medical physics and lowest in applied physics**
- **Ratio of women higher in universities where a higher proportion of the students live at home**
- **In some places intake ratio is much lower than application ratio; probably not due to bias, but females applicants turning down offers**
- **Women PGs tend to cluster in certain research groups**

Observations from meetings

- **Departments without women suffer in many ways. Men are usually aware of this but reluctant to take action**
- **The fact that the visit took place meant that gender issues were discussed, perhaps for the first time**
- **Departments often had difficulty producing gender specific data and were surprised by what they saw in many cases.**
 - PhD completion rates
 - Ratio of female speakers in seminars
 - Intake vs applications etc
- **Conclusion was that the vast majority of departments were not monitoring statistics**

The “best” departments

- **Sympathetic head of department (they were all male). In some cases, it was clear that former HoDs had been biased.**
- **Male participation in family-friendly policies. Where they did not, women felt they were perceived as “letting the side down” by, for example, taking maternity leave or fitting their hours around the nursery.**
- **A high fraction of young staff. Young fathers appreciate the problems but younger men are generally more sensitive to gender issues.**

The “best” departments

- **Mix of people from different countries. Welcoming diversity is a positive step.**
- **Women involved in senior management. But women were often disinclined to get involved because they found the prevailing attitudes so unpleasant.**
- **Strong, informal social networks for women. (In some places found that men had unconsciously created an uncomfortable atmosphere by being so friendly among themselves).**

Important issues involving unconscious bias

Formal, transparent procedures at all levels:

● **Recruitment:**

- often there were no requirements for women on interview panels.
- existing staff were frequently allowed to air views in secret to the HoD about candidates
- no explicit policies on how to deal with applicants with career breaks.

● **Promotion:**

- career break policies
- Identifying candidates for promotion (one of the most common problems found)

Important issues involving unconscious bias

Formal, transparent procedures at all levels:

- **Workload allocation**

- transparent procedures
- active policies to ensure that women were represented on important committees.

- **Appraisal**

- career guidance; encouragement for what is required to get a permanent job

- **PG recruitment**

- often supervisors would target students they liked

Important issues involving unconscious bias

Even successful female RAs and PGs did not want an academic career:

- **Not consistent with starting a family**
- **Average age of academic appointment is ~ 35.**
- **Effect of multiple short term contacts**
- **Lack of a well-defined career structure**
- **Lack of good careers advice**
- **Lack of role models**
- **Long hours culture**

Important issues involving unconscious bias

Poor policy for those taking career breaks:

- **Few institutions offered guaranteed reduced work loads for those returning from career breaks: more likely to affect women**
- **Many institutions did not offer part-time contracts: affects women with young children (evidence for at least two women leaving altogether for this reason)**
- **Absence of policies to deal with applicants for posts and for promotion who may have had a career break**

Important issues involving unconscious bias

- **Childcare facilities were usually thought to be inadequate and, where they were good, did not have enough places. The best matched their hours to those of the university. More important in the science area than elsewhere on campus.**
- **Harassment. Although almost every place had a procedure for dealing with harassment, the panels were told of several cases, almost none of which had been dealt with in a satisfactory manner.**

What next?

The future

- **Completing a general report highlighting the issues and disseminating good practice**
- **Working with other professional organisations (including the IEE) to introduce a similar scheme in industry**

Working for physics and physicists

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