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'I don't remember how I got involved': Narratives of academic staff involvement in equality charter marks in UK higher education institutions

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Narratives of academic staff involvement in Athena SWAN and Race Equality charter marks in UK higher education institutions

Abstract

In line with other national higher education systems, the UK has, since 2005, taken a formalised approach to improving gender equality in academia in the form of the Athena SWAN charter mark; in 2016, an additional charter mark focusing on race equality (the REC) was introduced. This article, based on data from a multi-site case study exploring the experiences of those in UK higher education who are working on the charter marks, looks at how academic staff become involved in this work. Using a narrative analysis based on the conceptual tools of policy enactment, the article sets out a typology of trajectories of academic involvement in charter mark work. This focus on how academic staff become involved in work on charter marks as policy translators is set alongside a chronological account of the development of the charter mark awards in the UK higher education sector. Through locating staff trajectories in their particular context, we are able to ask questions of how work that seeks to address serious and enduring inequalities in academia is currently allocated and implemented, and with what kinds of expertise.

Keywords:

Equality charter marks; Higher Education; Policy enactment; Gender equality; Race equality

Introduction

Given a growing evidence base of stark and enduring inequalities in the higher education sector (Advance HE 2008; 2019), the UK is one of a number of countries including Sweden (Keisu and Carbin, 2014; Powell, Ah-King and Hussénius, 2018), the Netherlands (Van den Brink and Stobbe, 2014) and Australia (Winchester and Browning, 2015) to introduce schemes designed to address these inequalities. In the UK, the specific initiatives have their roots in STEMM[2] disciplines, where there have long been concerns over the lack of women in senior academic positions. The Athena SWAN charter mark (ASC), which grew from these discussions, was launched in 2005. In subsequent years, a growing literature has sought to evaluate the impact of the charter mark on UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In the meantime, the scope of the charter mark has been considerably extended, and a second charter mark focusing on Race Equality (the REC) was launched in 2016. The evolution of the charter marks, as well as the processes involved in engaging with them, are explained in detail later in the article.

Rather than looking at the charter marks' effects on improving inequalities in HEIs, this article instead explores how a small number of individual academics within HEIs become involved in the production of these effects. These individual narratives, we argue, are crucial representations of institutional approaches to implementing charter marks. While the small sample size in this exploratory study does not allow a whole-sector representation, we see these initial findings as particularly important in developing analysis of institutional responses to charter mark policies, given the growing number of HEIs engaging with charter marks across the UK; a consequence

[2] Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine

of this growing engagement is a sizeable population of both academic and professional services staff for whom charter mark work is part of their role. By tracing the trajectories of some of these staff members, we increase understanding of how charter marks are interpreted and implemented in HEIs, and ask questions of how this interpretation shapes the possibilities for charter mark work as it progresses.

The article presents interview data from a qualitative multi-sited case study which explored the institutional experiences of those working on charter mark policy in six UK HEIs. The following sections explain the charter marks in more detail and summarise the research literature that has responded to them, before outlining the theoretical approach taken in this article using the conceptual tools of policy enactment. The methodology of the study is then explained before analysis of interview data is presented.

Charter marks in UK Higher Education

Equality charter marks: A brief introduction

A joint endeavour by the Athena Project and the Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN), the Athena SWAN charter was established in 2005 with the ambition of advancing representation of women in science subjects in higher education. In 2015, following a review, the charter was expanded to include faculties of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law, and to allow awards to be held by the whole institution as well as by individual faculties or departments. A second charter focusing on race equality (the REC) was introduced in 2016. Three aspects of the chronology of the charter marks are of particular importance to this article. The first is that although the ASC was introduced in 2005, its uptake by

universities was relatively slow until an announcement in 2011 by the UK Chief Medical Officer that only those medical schools holding a silver Athena SWAN award would be shortlisted for biomedical research funding. Award applications increased by 400% in the subsequent academic year (Ovseiko *et al*., 2017), and the connection of the charter mark to research funding continues to be an important driver in institutional decision-making with regards to diversity (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019a). The second factor in this chronology is that the charter marks, and the personnel working on them, were largely situated in biological and medical sciences for the first ten years of their existence as policy; their approach remains significantly influenced by this disciplinary orientation. The third notable aspect of this chronology is that the introduction of the ASC preceded that of the REC by some 11 years, and that the REC is not as yet connected to research funding. We have noted elsewhere that this chronological lag has risked a prioritising of gender over race in diversity work in HEIs (Bhopal and Henderson,, 2019a; 2019b); further implications are outlined in the discussion section below.

The charter marks take the form of frameworks that require participating institutions to conduct both quantitative and qualitative 'self-assessment' of the faculty, department or whole institution in response to a number of given measures of gender equality. The resulting document records, for example, the percentages of women and men at each level of career progression and pay grade in both academic and professional services roles, details of promotions processes, mentoring opportunities and support for those returning from career breaks, and results of anonymous staff surveys. In the case of the REC, the self-assessment also includes student-focused measures. The document is submitted to the external administering organisation,

Advance HE (formerly the Equality Challenge Unit) for peer review, and the HEI or faculty/department in question is allocated an award of bronze, silver or gold. Where the award is not given, the application is returned for revision and resubmission. If an award is made, that award is current for three years, after which the HEI or faculty/department must apply to renew or upgrade their award.

Of key importance in the process of award application is the establishment of a self-assessment team (SAT) drawn from a diverse range of roles and levels within the institution or department. It is this team that is responsible for gathering and interpreting data, combining the data into a coherent document according to the given framework, and planning and enacting an action plan in response to the data. Professional services staff with particular responsibility for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the HEI are usually (though not universally) involved in establishing and working with the SAT. In order not to conflate the experiences of two different career structures, we have focused our attention in this article on academic staff involved in charter marks. Of particular interest for this article are the processes through which the charter marks become intertwined with academic career paths; there are similar but distinct discussions to be had with regard to the effects of charter marks on professional staff roles.

In policy terms, it is difficult to classify the charter mark award system. Variously referred to in research literature as a 'framework', 'scheme' or 'plan' (see, for example, Ovseiko *et al*., 2019; Schmidt and Ovseiko, 2020) the system is nevertheless often cited as an example of a growing number of 'gender equality policies' at work in higher education globally (Schmidt *et al*., 2020, p. 2). The charter marks also have

as their remit a stated aim to examine and make changes to institution and department-level policies (Advance HE, 2020). It therefore occupies a position between the 'big-P' and 'little-P' of policy (Ball, 2013, pp. 8-9), where 'big-P' refers to legislature, and 'little-P' to institutional and local-level initiatives. While not enforced in legislative terms, charter mark application processes have become obligatory according to other powerful levers within the sector, not least the arbiters of research funding. In their aim to act upon localised institutional policy, the charter marks operate just above the 'small-P' level. They are policy-producing, and can be easily associated with the aim of education reform cited by Ball (2013) as a defining quality of education policy. The following section outlines how the conceptual tools of policy enactment are used in this article; first, the remainder of this section summarises current scholarship on the effects of the charter mark in higher education.

Equality charter marks: Research responses

A growing literature responding to charter marks and policies like them in other contexts can be separated into two distinct types. The first is evaluative, measuring the tangible impacts of the policies on institutional practice and representation of women and BAME staff at higher levels in HEIs. This research is characterised by findings that highlight the benefits of having an organisational remit to address inequalities on one hand, and the difficulties of shifting entrenched and intractable structures on the other hand (Barnard, 2017; Caffrey *et al.*, 2016; Gregory-Smith, 2015; Gregory-Smith, 2017; Munir, 2014; Munir *et al.*, 2013; Ovseiko *et al.*, 2017; Ovseiko *et al*., 2019; Schmidt *et al*., 2020; Ovseiko *et al*., 2020; Xiao *et al*., 2020). The second type of literature looks more critically at the policies as instances of neoliberal and managerial approaches across the academy which do not sit easily with

the principles of feminism and anti-racism they might be seen to espouse (Bhopal, 2018; Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020). A concern in this broader field is the extent to which a genuine challenge to institutional inequalities can ever be advanced from within the institution itself. This literature highlights the 'moderate feminism' required to mobilise gender equality initiatives across neoliberal academic institutions (Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019), along with questioning the capacity of diversity initiatives to succeed in conjunction with or as part of a managerialist orthodoxy (Deem, 2007).

Within this second, more overtly critical, set of literature responding to diversity initiatives are two further lines of enquiry. The first of these identifies the discourses produced by processes that aim to improve or reform. For example, Van den Brink (2014) uses the tool of paradox to explore a gendered discourse of 'support' for women in academia, demonstrating that the discourse seeks to solve a problem that it also reinforces, positioning women as in need of additional resource as compared to a masculine norm. Similarly, Garforth and Kerr (2009) use a Foucauldian genealogical approach to show how the documents used and produced through gender equality in science initiatives work to define women as problematic in the discipline. Ahmed (2007) also focuses on the documents involved in diversity initiatives, mobilising the concepts of performativity and non-performativity to explore the contradictory process of documenting racial inequality, only for the document to be used to represent work towards solving inequality. As Ahmed argues, this contradiction allows HEIs to simultaneously document and ignore racism in their organisations, all in the name of diversity work.

The second sub-set of critical responses to diversity policies focuses more explicitly on those carrying out the policies. This research demonstrates, for example, that diversity practitioners often embody the characteristics of the minoritised or disadvantaged group(s) that their work seeks to address (Ahmed, 2012; Swan and Fox, 2010); Hirschfield and Joseph's (2012) research in the US conceptualises this tendency as an 'identity tax' upon minority academics, and the trend has been particularly identified as one of the concerning consequences of charter mark policies in the UK; Munir *et al*. (2014, p. 9) noted in 2014 that between 73% and 80% of those working on the ASC in UK HEIs at that time were women. As this research highlights, there are three consequences of the tendency for diversity work to be carried out by those who embody minority characteristics. Firstly, academics sitting on diversity-related committees such as the 'self-assessment teams' required by charter mark application processes often do so at the expense of research or leadership work that would be more highly valued in terms of academic career progression in their field of expertise (Ovseiko et al., 2017; Bhopal and Henderson, 2019a). Secondly and relatedly, academics who do not embody minority characteristics are taking up this more highly valued work even as their minoritised colleagues participate in charter mark applications; in this way, policies such as the charter marks risk reproducing the very inequalities they set out to redress. Finally, diversity work in HEIs becomes performatively associated with those who embody minority characteristics as visibly female or BAME members of staff (Ahmed, 2012). The work is seen as being done by, and therefore to be the responsibility of, those who experience the effects of systemic sexism and racism in the academy.

These consequences of diversity work are complicated by the fact that as recognition of equality and diversity issues within the sector increases, engagement with this work offers its own career rewards, with institutions offering their own internal research funding schemes and creating new managerial positions related to diversity work. Involvement in institutional diversity work may therefore be both a move away from previous and externally-valued research interests and an opportunity for a different kind of career development. The connection between work on charter marks in universities and individual career development is explored further in the findings section on the 'marketised diversity work' trajectory later in this article. Given the constellation of factors affecting academic careers in relation to participation in diversity work, it is all the more important to establish the institutional processes through which involvement in diversity work takes place, and to begin to ask further questions relating to who is recognised for this work and in what ways, guarding against the reproduction of existing inequalities.

Taken together, current literature on charter marks in HEIs has a substantial focus on their tangible effects. Research has, as described above, looked at the ways that institutional policies and practices are adapted in response to schemes such as the charter marks, as well as the ways the schemes unearth the intractability of inequality in HEIs. Other effects are noted in analysis of the growing discourses and documents that are produced by and in the name of diversity work. The charter marks are a good example of the discursive production noted in this scholarship, in that an application for a charter mark award requires the production of a document that is itself the summary product of multiple other documents and data sources. Given the substantial workload involved in schemes such as the charter marks, it is unsurprising that a

second focus of the current literature is on the people participating in diversity work. Again, the charter marks with their required self-assessment teams are a good example of the personnel demands of diversity work. This article both builds on and takes a step back from the findings of current literature, asking *how exactly* it is that people become involved in institutional diversity work and therefore go on to become producers of policy changes and discourses of diversity. This focus moves beyond, for example, looking at the representation of minoritised staff on diversity committees, instead exploring the specific institutional processes through which those (and other) staff are approached or volunteer their participation in those committees. These processes are, the article agues, crucial to understanding more about how diversity policies are enacted, and by whom their effects are achieved.

Theoretical approach: The 'policy translator'

As discussed above, this article defines charter marks as policies on the basis that: (i) they are administered and enforced at a national, if not legislative, level; (ii) they are described as policies in cross-national research comparisons with other diversity initiatives in the HE sector; and (iii) they are intended as overarching frameworks through which to reform 'small-p' institutional policies (Ball, 2013, pp. 8-9). The article therefore draws on the theoretical framework of policy enactment as developed by Ball *et al*. (2011) in analysis of school behavioural policy, and adapted to the higher education context by researchers such as Sin (2014) and Evans *et al*. (2019). The framework highlights the complexity and messiness involved in moving from a written policy text to its enactment in an educational organisation. Sin (2014), for example, explores the Bologna process in European higher education as a policy object that is enacted differently in every institution, first interpreted according to a

contextually specific ontology, and then enacted according to the terms of that contextual interpretation. The framework therefore accounts for the ways in which external policies such as the charter mark policies are implemented within the individual institution. Firstly, the aims of the charter mark are interpreted by those deciding on its implementation; secondly, the implementation itself is done according to this interpretation of its aims. Evans *et al*. (2019) focus on the contextual specificity of any one HEI as national legislation on widening access is put into practice in Wales. Their research looks at individuals working on enacting widening access policies in HEIs, seeing these 'policy actors' as working to interpret nationally prescribed policy at a local level, each within their own specific institutional contexts.

These examples demonstrate how the tools of policy enactment make visible the processes of interpretation that accompany the shift from an external policy to its practice within an institution, as well as of the role of institutional actors in facilitating this shift. Ball *et al.* (2011) set out a typology of institutional actors, with each type of actor playing a different role in carrying out policy. The role is often based upon institutional hierarchy, so that senior leaders are seen as 'policy interpreters', having the responsibility of re-narrating a national or externally defined policy in terms that are locally specific and that encourage or necessitate action from those lower in the hierarchy (pp. 628-9). The figure of the 'policy translator' is particularly pertinent to this article because they rarely occupy the very senior positions in educational institutions, instead taking on or 'embodying' the policy as a key part of their practice (p. 630). These actors 'plan and produce the events and processes and institutional texts of policy' (pp. 630-1). Taking up membership of a charter mark self-assessment team means writing and carrying out agreed actions in response to the initial data

collection stage of the process. This is a process of translation because it takes the intended, institutionally-interpreted aims of the charter mark policy and transforms them into actions in the form of events, changes to policies, or forms of wider consultation. The lens of policy enactment in this process highlights that this translation is carried out by individuals with their own frame of ontological enactment, shaped by an institutional context with its ontological specificity (Sin, 2014).

Crucial to Ball *et al.*'s (2011) analysis of policy enactment is the concept of policy, in its textual and extra-textual form, as inherently narrative. The policy interpreter, as discussed above, has the role of re-storying external policy texts in ways that emphasise internal institutional responsibility. The policy translator has an equally narrative role, as can be seen clearly in the example of charter mark policies; the charter mark application document, constructed by a group of policy translators working as the self-assessment team, creates a narrative of the institutional response to the external requirements of the policy. As the policy translator organises the events and makes the adaptations to smaller institutional policies that are the agreed actions from the charter mark application, the accompanying rationale for these events and changes constitutes a narrative of what the institution is doing to respond to the policy. In visibly enacting changes as a result of the charter mark policy, the policy translator also becomes narratively associated with these changes in a chain of causally linked events – because the policy requires changes to be made, the policy translator is making these changes, and therefore both the policy and the person are responsible for the changes. As discussed above, this article takes a step back from exploring what the policy translator is doing, and instead looks at the equally

important but easily ignored narrative of their trajectory into the role of policy translator in the first instance. Given Sin's (2014) and Evans *et al.*'s (2019) arguments regarding the importance of context in the enactment of policy, the article argues that these trajectory narratives provide crucial contextual information about how the policy ultimately comes to be re-narrated by policy translators at institutional levels, and therefore how the policy is being enacted at a national level.

Project methodology

The data presented in this article are taken from a multi-site qualitative case study exploring the experiences of institutions working with the Athena SWAN and Race Equality charter marks in the UK. Six institutions were included in the project, of which three were selected based on their achievement of a bronze ASC award at whole-institution level, and three were either working towards or had achieved a bronze REC award at whole-institution level, with the intention of comparing experiences of working on gender and race equality respectively. The project aimed to access a range of elite and non-elite HEIs. We sought this variety in part as an acknowledgement that no two universities operate in the same way. The other reason was to explore how HEIs operating with differing resources, student populations and mission statements might incorporate the values and practice of the charter marks in different ways. HEIs were chosen from the lists of award holding and member institutions available on Advance HE's website; this site also lists a key contact for the institution's application process. A total of thirty-two HEIs were invited to participate in the project, and of this number only six agreed to do so. For many HEIs, the invitation to participate came at a transition point in the cyclical three year charter mark process, when there were changes being made to the personnel involved. In

other HEIs, there were personnel changes for other reasons such as the departure, parental leave or study leave of those without whom the diversity work of charter mark application had stalled. This considerable barrier to exploring the work of the charter mark awards acts as a reminder of the ways in which diversity work, often represented as firmly embedded and mainstreamed across the institution, in fact reflects the efforts of small numbers of individuals – the policy translators.

Across the six participating institutions, we conducted ten interviews and five focus groups with a total of 29 participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) managers and, where possible chairs of charter mark SAT teams in each HEI. Focus groups included between three and seven members of SAT teams. The combination of interviews and focus groups in the participating HEIs was intended to capture the range of institutional roles with diversity work as part of their remit, and in particular to capture the ways in which diversity work was understood as both a Human Resources and an academic responsibility (for further discussion of this issue, see Bhopal and Henderson, 2019a). Ethical approval for the project was gained through the University ethics committee, and BERA's (2018) ethical guidelines were followed. Due to the ease with which those working on charter marks in UK HEIs can be found using internet searches, we give no identity characteristics when describing participants in this article. In two exceptions, identity characteristics are named by participants in their own words as part of the narrative of their involvement in charter mark work. We are also aware that our own identity characteristics as researchers who identify as a White woman and BAME woman respectively, impacted on the data collection processes in ways that we do not have space to expand upon here. We have noted elsewhere (Bhopal

and Henderson, 2019a), for example, that the fact that the majority of data collection was completed by the White member of our team had considerable implications for the discussions of race with White members of staff in the case HEIs.

Interview and focus group data were audio-recorded and then transcribed. For the purposes of this article, relevant sections from each transcript were identified and extracted for further analysis. The sections in question were all taken from the same part in each transcribed interaction. In each instance, the data collection began with an invitation for the participants to explain how they had become involved with charter mark processes, or 'trajectory narratives'. Of the 29 participants, this sub-sample of academic staff comprises 15 participants, of which between 2 and 5 are from each of the 6 case study sites; while the sample is small due to the exploratory nature of the study, these narratives are illustrative of institutional practice across a diversity of elite and non-elite UK HEIs.

The trajectory narratives are, in each case, clearly defined narratives, presenting a chronological, causally connected series of events (Ricoeur, 1992) that explain the academic's shift into the role of policy translator. The narratives are categorised thematically in order to develop a typology of trajectory narratives; the typology was developed through an iterative process of moving between the literature (discussed above) and the transcribed data. The literature had identified the tendency for staff members who visibly embody female or BAME identities to be involved in work on charter marks, as well as a tension between the activist aims of anti-sexist and anti-racist movements and the managerialist environment of the contemporary HEI. The categories of the 'embodied characteristic' trajectory and the 'neoliberal worker'

trajectory explored in the analysis below represent an exploration of these tendencies and tensions in diversity policies through the lens of policy enactment. Categorising the narratives according to these themes from the literature involved identifying references to embodied characteristics or to career development in the narratives. A further category that emerged strongly in the data is the 'circumstantial' trajectory. Narratives in this category were identified through their use of passive grammatical constructions in contrast to descriptions of deliberate processes in the other categories, as well as by references to a lack of awareness as to exactly how involvement happened. It is this category that we explore first, in part because of its frequent occurrence across the data set, and in part because the subsequent categories of the 'embodied characteristic' and 'neoliberal worker' introduce important complications and questions to the 'circumstantial' narrative. A final trajectory type, that of the 'researcher', is unique in the data set and represents a possible alternative to the first more common trajectories. The below analysis of each of these trajectories first identifies common narrative features within each category, looking particularly at how causal links are discursively constructed; the discussion section then asks what these common features reveal about how the trajectory of the policy translator is bound up in the interpretation, re-storying and enactment of charter mark policies. The analysis is presented with awareness of the difficulties in drawing concrete or representative conclusions from a small and exploratory data set, but with the purpose of establishing the basis for further critical dialogue on the issues involved.

Findings: Policy translator trajectory narratives

Trajectory narratives typically begin with a first encounter with either diversity work in general or the charter marks more specifically, and represents a shift from lack of

awareness of this kind of work to direct involvement in it. This first encounter is followed by a sequence of events through which the academic staff member becomes more familiar with and responsible for charter mark work in the HEI. The conclusion of the narrative is frequently signalled by a summarising or reflective sentence such as, 'So that's how I got involved.' The narratives analysed below are divided into different 'types', with each type describing a sequence of events from first encounter to conclusion that emerged as common to the whole data set. The analysis explores the sequences of events through which an academic staff member becomes involved in charter mark processes, and establishes commonalities between narratives.

The 'circumstantial' trajectory

This type of trajectory narrative is characterised by an unexpected first encounter with the charter mark policy that could easily not have happened or that propelled the participant towards working on the charter marks without their deliberate intention. The following narrative, from an academic participant in a focus group, is demonstrative of this type:

> I actually *don't remember* how I got involved with Athena SWAN. *Somebody asked me*, did I want to be on the committee, I think. A senior member of staff in the faculty who was on it asked me. There was a space, and they asked if I was interested, so I joined the committee and *in doing so somehow also became the lead* of the local action group for the faculty. (emphasis added)

Features of what we found to be a common circumstantial diversity practitioner narrative are represented here; first, the initial moment of involvement in charter mark work is represented as unimportant in itself. This participant struggles to recall the moment, despite the extent of involvement precipitated by it. Secondly, there is a quick progression from an informal early suggestion to a formal, and in this case, substantial institutional role in the charter mark process. Thirdly, this progression is represented as having happened by chance, as demonstrated by the descriptor 'somehow' in the above narrative. Another participant recalled being 'invited to a meeting' about the REC, and this initial involvement led to a role as co-chair of the institution-level SAT. In both cases, then, an informal invitation was the first of a sequence of events that led to a role as policy translator, enacting institutional change in the name of the charter mark policy.

While in the excerpt above the participant is unable to recall what prompted the first suggestion that they serve on the institutional SAT, other participants cite an initial signal of personal interest as the catalyst for further and more official involvement:

> I came to some of the local events and *then was asked* if I would like to work in this area and that was just before we [the HEI] were putting in the institutional bid. That was very interesting, and *since then my role really is working within the faculty* and kind of co-ordinating and facilitating some of the activities (emphasis added).

Again here there is a lack of clarity as to the exact process through which an academic progresses from a cursory initial interaction to playing a more substantive role in the

charter mark work. The passive construction of 'I was asked' suggests that someone other than the participant caused the participant's involvement in the charter marks, rather than that the involvement was a result of their own initiative. This narrative construction is common across the data set; in another example, a participant recalls having been 'asked to be the faculty equality and diversity champion', and adds that, 'it was made clear to me from the beginning that Athena SWAN was a priority.' In the shift from 'attending an event' to 'co-ordinating activities', the participant in the above excerpt describes a trajectory into the role of policy translator, carrying out actions linked to and required by charter mark policy. The significance of this role in the enactment of the policy across the faculty sits in juxtaposition to the circumstantial and informal process of moving into the role. This type of trajectory has similarities to the informal processes through which academic staff participate in multiple aspects of institutional life, and in committee work and management roles (Deem, 2000) in particular. However, there are questions to be asked about the appropriateness of these processes to diversity work specifically. We return to these questions in the Discussion section below.

The 'embodied-characteristic' trajectory

Although the data excerpts above represent narratives of engagement with charter marks as seemingly random and circumstantial, it is also important to recognise the logic of embodiment that accompanies charter mark and other diversity work (Ahmed, 2012, Bhopal and Henderson, 2019a). Although the processes through which a member of staff engages with charter mark work might appear to be random and therefore equally applicable to any staff member, in fact there are particular staff members whose visible embodiment pre-figures the suggestion that they participate in

diversity work. A clear example of this is demonstrated below, where a senior academic in a STEMM discipline, now also a senior figure in diversity work across the whole of the HEI in question, sees the original suggestion of her involvement as integrally related to her embodiment of a recognisably gendered identity:

> What happened was that *the university began to get interested* in Athena SWAN because of the thing about medical funding and the requirement for Athena SWAN. So *I was actually contacted* by the HR director *as a senior STEMM woman* to be the academic lead in trying to do the university application (emphasis added)

This narrative has similar linguistic features to those of the circumstantial diversity practitioner; the participant was contacted by a colleague, initially taking part in charter mark work only at someone else's suggestion. Similarly, the participant cites 'the university' as having a growing interest in gender equality, without signalling her own personal interest. However, in this narrative, the direct relationship between the focus of the charter mark work and the embodied characteristics of the participant is seen to prompt the colleague's initial suggestion. The narrative establishes a causal relationship between the participant's lived experience as a 'senior STEMM woman' and her occupation of a key role in policy translation.

There are further complexities to the role of the embodied characteristic academic staff member; if an embodied minority identity might confer expertise, then the visibility of that identity in a charter mark role may also come to represent the authenticity of the HEI's commitment to the principles of the work itself. One

participant narrated his involvement with the REC as structured by awareness at the senior levels of policy interpretation that the SAT should not be chaired by someone without an embodied minority identity:

> The chair was this great guy but *I think the issue was* that he was white and male and middle-aged, and that's when *I got asked,* 'Would you like to be the co-chair?' So that's how it started (emphasis added).

Again, the narrative represents the participant as passive to sometimes unnamed or uncertain institutional processes that lead to the suggestion that he become involved in the REC process. As in the first narrative in this section, there is a causal connection drawn between embodied identity and involvement in charter mark work. Here, however, there is an informal sequence of events that couples the participant with a 'white' and 'male' and 'middle aged' chair in order that the committee may both represent and enact the work of the charter mark policy. Embodiment, first conflated with expertise on diversity, is then further conflated with the enactment of the charter mark policy itself; an academic with embodied minority identity characteristics already carries out the requirements of the role simply through their appointment to it, in much the same way as the documentation of racial inequality risks becoming seen as positive action taken against that inequality (Ahmed, 2007).

The 'marketised diversity' trajectory

In addition to the tendency to associate academic staff members working on diversity issues with minority identity characteristics, as noted in literature on diversity management, there are particular pressures associated with the performativity of the

university sector in the UK that we found represented in trajectory narratives. In the below narrative, multiple factors including the increasing diversification of the UK HE student body (Advance HE, 2018), international academic mobility (Kim, 2010) and a neoliberal discourse of self-improvement (Moore and Robinson, 2016) come together to provide motivation for involvement in charter mark work.

> I became involved with Athena SWAN personally *due to my own interest.* I volunteered for this. And the two reasons why I volunteered, one way because of the programme that I'm currently involved in, because it does have a lot of gender equality issues due to the nature of the workforce. And the other reason was because of *my international background*, I thought it was very important for me to get involved with it because obviously *it'll help me to know myself more* in terms of what is happening within the wider UK sector of HE (emphasis added).

This narrative demonstrates the currency, in the form of learning about the self or about one's field of practice, that can be accrued by the academic through their 'volunt[ary]' participation in charter mark work. This was a narrative pattern that emerged several times across the data set; a participant cited the institution's work on the REC as happening at a 'lucky' time for her, because it 'suited her needs' for further professional development. This type of trajectory narrative, with references to discourses of opportunity and personal development, captures the way that the role of policy translator in a policy such as the charter marks can cross over with the broader role of the academic, and even advance an academic career. As noted in the literature review above, there are multiple questions to ask of this type of trajectory, particularly

when the embodied characteristics of those who do and do not take up diversity work as a career development opportunities are taken into account (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019a; Ahmed, 2012). While increased investment in diversity work in HEIs is accompanied by more recognition for participation in this work, in this type of trajectory diversity work is enacted and understood according to the pressures to participate in marketized and individualized processes of self-development and career progression.

For another participant, a more outward focus on the importance of the diversity work for the reputation and maintenance of the institution itself provided key impetus in her trajectory narrative. The 'concern' this participant cites in the narrative below was directly related to the connection between Athena SWAN awards and medical research funding announced in 2011, and the narrative therefore draws out the instrumental rationale for charter mark applications in UK HEIs:

> I was in a REF[3] Health research meeting, and somebody mentioned Athena SWAN. And *I hadn't really paid much attention to it prior to that*, and I thought, 'Oh, this is really interesting. I'm not sure we're doing anything about this.' […] So with this in mind I went to see the VC that we had at the time and said, 'Look, I'm not sure where are with this. Is anybody doing this? Because *it's just suddenly come on my radar* and I'm a bit concerned. And actually *this looks like a really useful thing to be doing anyway*.' And he said, 'Oh, great.' You know, 'Crack on.' (emphasis added).

[3] The Research Excellence Framework is an assessment of research quality at universities, carried out nationally in the UK.

The sequence depicted in this narrative, from the participant having little awareness of charter mark work to her leading the whole-institution process, could be seen as another 'circumstantial' trajectory. In the narrative, an initial inquiry into whether 'anybody' is carrying out the charter mark work is taken as an offer to carry this work out, and the participant is propelled into the role of policy translator with responsibility for carrying out the institutional responses to the policy. This particular narrative was echoed almost verbatim by another participant, who reported having heard that the Athena SWAN would soon be linked to medical research funding and immediately contacting the PVC for research in her HEI: 'I said that we needed to look at this as an institution. So he asked me to take that forward.' Despite the features of the circumstantial trajectory in these narratives, however, both suggest that a concern for the research future of the HEI is a causal factor in their being allocated the role of policy translator. This concern lends the otherwise 'circumstantial' policy translator an acquired expertise about the charter mark's uses and effects for the institution as a whole. In a similar way to the narratives of individualised processes of career development associated with charter mark work identified above, this trajectory narrative highlights the role of marketized institutional self-positioning in charter mark work. The importance of this role has already been identified in analysis of increased take-up of charter mark participation following the connection between ASC and research funding (Ovseiko *et al*., 2017). As the above narrative suggests, there are further implications of this institutional trajectory into diversity work in terms of who is involved in its enactment, and how that involvement is structured.

The 'researcher' trajectory

In one of the HEIs included in the study, the academic staff member with overall responsibility for the Athena SWAN process was positioned in the institution as a Research Fellow, with the charter mark work as part of their research work:

> My job was a *new role* at the university, and I've been here since [date] initially on a three year fixed term *contract*. And I was brought in as ASC project manager but *also as a research fellow*, so *it was quite an unusual dual role* there (emphasis added).

This trajectory is fundamentally different to those described above in two key ways. Firstly, the role of policy translator is allocated a formal title, contract and application process. Secondly, the role is explicitly linked to research. Other examples in our sample where management of the charter marks as projects was formally acknowledged in job titles were universally in professional services staff; academic staff involvement in charter mark work was in addition to their often unrelated research, teaching and administrative role. The unusual nature of this particular instance serves to highlight the paucity of references to research or expertise throughout the remainder of interview and focus group data with academic staff.

Discussion

We have argued above that the trajectory narratives of policy translators provide vital contextual insight into the enactment of charter mark policy across the UK. In order to outline these insights further, we now look at the trajectory types in dialogue with the development of the charter mark policy as set out earlier in the article.

When seen in the light of the rapid increase in charter mark activity that followed its link to biomedical funding in 2011 (Ovseiko *et al*, 2017), the 'circumstantial' trajectory is hardly surprising. It makes intuitive sense that HEIs reacted quickly and without developing formal application processes or training requirements for those taking on substantial roles in enacting the charter mark policy, and that these roles were therefore allocated through informal and circumstantial means. However, these processes are of more concern when seen in combination with the origins of the charter marks in biological and medical sciences, and with the 'embodied characteristic trajectory'. When these factors are taken into account, a picture emerges of an increasing national workforce made up of academics from sciences disciplines (Caffrey *et al*, 2016) working on complex social issues of equality and diversity, qualified largely by lived experience as female academics rather than by expertise in these social systemic inequalities. Where HEIs have in recent years taken on the REC alongside the ASC, and where the REC as a policy is interpreted as requiring additional expertise for addressing issues of race and ethnicity, academics with embodied minority ethnic characteristics are added to existing charter mark personnel to provide supplementary lived experience expertise (Ahmed, 2012), again on issues of great complexity and sensitivity. According to the 'neoliberal worker' trajectory, the role of policy translator in the enactment of charter mark policy can be useful for the individual professional, but again the lack of formality to the process means that these opportunities for individual gain are reliant upon informal processes, initiative and circumstance; these circumstantial processes therefore add to the existing evidence (Hirschfield and Joseph, 2012; Van den Brink, 2014) that institutional equality and diversity policy enactment is not only fraught with inequality, but in particular is at risk of reinforcing the very inequalities on which it seeks to act.

The informality with which academics are assigned to policy translator roles, as described in these narratives, would suggest either that the HEIs have a lack of regard for the roles, and/or that the policy translators themselves are engaging in discourses of self-deprecation in order to distance themselves from the work of the charter marks. These potential explanatory factors, along with the extent to which the processes of committee recruitment in charter mark policy enactment is similar to or different from recruitment to other voluntary committees in HEIs are less important than the consequences of the processes themselves. The sector has taken up the charter marks policies in an effort to address serious, deeply embedded and ongoing institutional injustice (Bhopal, 2018) and yet the work to redress this complex level of social injustice is discursively associated in HEIs with happenstance and lived experience rather than as requiring academic expertise. While concern about levels of training and expertise in organisational diversity practitioners has been raised outside of academia (see, for example, Tatli, 2011), there is a particular irony that specialist knowledge expertise from inside the academy is often not sought, valued or reflected in the trajectories of those working on these issues within the academy. The possibilities and potential for redressing this irony are demonstrated in the final 'researcher' trajectory in the findings sections above; here, the ASC is formally understood as an academic research project exploring gendered experiences in the HEI in question.

Conclusion

This article builds on current research into gender and race equality policies in universities in several ways. Firstly, the article shifts the focus of enquiry from the

effects of the policies, instead looking earlier in the policy enactment process to the appointment of those carrying out the work of the policy, the 'policy translators'. The article argues that this focus provides crucial insight into the workings of the policy and its subsequent effects. Secondly, the article uses the conceptual tools of policy enactment (Ball *et al*., 2011) to highlight the role played by policy actors in the interpretation and re-narration of policies in specific institutional contexts. Finally, the article argues that the charter mark policy's particular chronology and development in the UK HE context must be taken into account in exploring the enactment of the policy. Developing a typology of common 'trajectories' into charter mark work, the article highlights a disjuncture in UK HEIs between the increasing resource and attention given to charter mark work and the informal and circumstantial processes through which academics are appointed to its most substantial roles. As a consequence of this disjuncture, we argue, increasing numbers of academic staff participate in processes that aim to address systemic sexism and racism in the organisation without the academic expertise that such complex issues require if they are to be comprehensively challenged.

The purpose of collecting these narratives together is to highlight the common structural processes through which charter mark work in universities is taking place, to raise concerns about the possibilities available for its success, and most significantly to demonstrate the divisions between critical research and scholarship and diversity work in practice. In an academic environment that seeks to fill diversity practitioner roles rather than to invest in them, and that uncouples research and practice in this area, there are significant limits to the ways that diversity can be understood and enacted; we argue that these limits are both damaging and yet, as our

final data excerpt demonstrates, possible to overcome. Engagement with the depth of scholarship on issues of inequality in social life, families, organisations and work that is produced in the very HEIs in which diversity work is practised, is possible through the linking of charter mark roles to research roles, and is essential to the enactment of the informed and critical work necessary to address inequality.

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