# Enhancing Equality & Diversity in Early Career Development

Professor Dianne Berry,
University of Reading
Chair REF E&D Advisory Panel

# Outline

- Three uncontroversial statements
- Contrary evidence
- Why imbalances
- What can be done
- REF
- Final messages

# Three uncontroversial statements ??

- Early career researchers are vital to future success & international competitiveness of UK HE sector and knowledge-driven economy
- To realise success, need to recruit and retain most promising researchers from widest possible pool of talent
- Our HEI policies & practices should not bias in any way against ECRs or subgroups within this population

# So why ?

- Why do individuals from traditionally disadvantaged groups find it harder to secure & develop established positions in HE
- Why do we have such big drop-out rates in research careers, with entry level jobs often seen as precarious and unsuited to family life?
- Why cultures & practices in place that make it harder for those in certain groups to progress

# More than just rhetoric: backed up by data

- Women
  - 38% full-time academic staff
  - 19% professors (10% in SET subjects)
  - Lower median pay: (£39K vs £46K)
  - Proportion earning over £50K less than half that for males
  - More on open contracts
  - Less likely to be selected for RAE (48% vs 67%)
  - Less likely to be highly cited

# Data Cont.

- Ethnicity
  - BME under-represented in PGR population
  - Less likely to be selected in RAE
  - Make up only 0.4% of British Professors (if black female – 0.08%)
  - Report feeling marginalised
- Disability
  - Very low disclosure rates (fear of discrimination)
- Sexual orientation
  - One-third lesbian & homosexual staff report receiving homophobic comments

# So why imbalances ?

- Are our Universities full of biased and prejudiced people ?
- Many reasonable excuses
  - Systemic;  deeply rooted differences ….
  - But excuses won't result in progress
- And pressure to compete internationally,  and pressure on funding, likely to reinforce status quo

# Tensions and realities

- Competing at highest levels: leading UK University strategy
  - "aspire towards achieving 45 highly cited staff"
  - "if not possible to appoint such staff, positions will be left vacant"

  Does this provide equal opportunity for all ??

- Pressure on funding
  - Risk of benign neglect

# Are we reinforcing existing biases ?

- Long hours / blurred work – home life boundaries
- Out of hours formal & informal meetings (pub culture)
- Power of informal networking
- Deeply ingrained assumptions / expectations
- Recruitment and promotion processes
- Leadership and management training

# What can be done ?

- Drivers
  - Institutional commitment at all levels
  - Explicit value, recognition, reward
  - REF
- Tools
  - Mentoring, positive role models, training, appraisal, workload models
  - Sharing good practice, within & between HEIs.
  - Vitae,  Athena Swan
  - REF

# Using REF to promote E&D

- Across sector
  - Improved support and promotion via REF
  - EDAG and EDAP
  - Codes of practice on selecting staff
  - Environment template
  - Strict messages re citations
- Within institutions
  - Reinforces importance and drives change

# What more can Funding Councils and Research Councils do?

- Funding Councils
  - Keep using REF to shape sector and advance E&D: Stronger more direct link to funding.
- Research Councils
  - Protect funding for early career schemes
  - Ensure funding linked to good practice & adherence to Concordat. Deliver on strategies.
  - NIHR model ??

# Final messages

- Advancing E&D in research careers not just matter or political correctness or legal compliance
- Health & international competitiveness of our research base depends on how successfully we attract most talented, or potentially talented, researchers and make it possible for them to stay and thrive in our institutions.