

Positive action programmes for women

2. Practical application

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This article, which considers the practical implementation of positive action programmes for women in some Western European countries, follows on from the theoretical analysis of these programmes made by Professor Eliane Vogel-Polsky in the preceding issue of the Review.

Positive action programmes to counter sexual discrimination take varied forms and have focused on many different aspects of the question – vocational training, the more equitable distribution of occupational, family and social responsibilities, working conditions, the need to change people's attitudes and to make those directly concerned, and the public at large, more alive to women's problems – and it would, of course, be impossible to review them all. The following pages, therefore, will concentrate on a few that seem to hold particularly valuable lessons – not with the intention of throwing bouquets (or even brickbats), but simply in order to highlight some important issues connected with the implementation of positive action programmes both in the public service and in the private sector.

The national experiments described here, which are concerned mainly with employment and working conditions, have been carried out in Western Europe, where a fairly strong current has emerged in favour of positive action strategies since 1975 and where there is a wealth of research and experience on the subject to draw on.¹ In particular, the Council of Ministers of the European Communities, at the initiative of the Commission, has adopted three directives on equality between the sexes, which are binding on the member States. On 12 July 1982 it passed a resolution² endorsing the new Community action programme on the promotion of equal opportunities for women in the 1982-85 period,³ including measures to ensure equal treatment and to promote equal opportunities for men and women through positive action programmes, and calling upon the public service to set an example. While the declared policy of all the governments of EEC member countries is to draw up, encourage or promote positive action programmes, the measures that have been adopted in practice vary enormously – ranging from dissemination of information, collection of statistics and preliminary

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investigation of potential cases of discrimination to action of a specific and sometimes coercive nature. On 13 December 1984 the Council also adopted a recommendation on the promotion of positive action for women.⁴ In addition, the Commission of the EEC has commissioned and financed a number of research projects on the subject.

The first experiments in positive action were carried out in the United States, where the more commonly used term is "affirmative action"; these experiments have had a considerable impact on both theory and practice in most Western European countries.⁵ The legal framework for equal opportunities and affirmative action in the United States was established by the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964⁶ and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972.⁷ Two federal bodies are empowered to launch and implement affirmative action measures – the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). The EEOC is authorised to institute legal proceedings on its own initiative in case of a dispute where conciliation fails; it can also, in the course of conciliation proceedings, order an enterprise to launch an affirmative action plan. It is empowered to bring class actions relating to representative cases of discrimination suffered by a category of persons. Moreover, Executive Order No. 11246 of 1964 obliges contractors to develop affirmative action plans as a condition of eligibility for federal contracts. In addition, the courts, by invoking Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, may order affirmative action as compensation for damage suffered.

The United States now has more than 20 years' experience with affirmative action, which has aroused great enthusiasm, met with numerous difficulties, often been resisted and raised numerous questions. The whole system has an essentially legal basis, disputes being finally settled by the courts if an amicable settlement cannot be reached. Some disputes have had quite spectacular outcomes, with employers being ordered to pay out tens of millions of dollars in back pay and incentive bonuses to thousands of women and members of minority groups who had been refused wage increases or promotion. The publicity given to such victories induced many enterprises to launch affirmative action projects modelled on the guide-lines published by the EEOC. Over the years wider and deeper consideration has been given to systemic actions; thus reliable techniques have been evolved for detecting the occupational and pay implications of different employment systems.

However, it is no secret that the Administration which took office in 1981 put the brakes sharply on affirmative action programmes. The political will is wavering and the current emphasis of equality of opportunity campaigns is to take the problems outside the workplace by concentrating on such areas as the education, apprenticeship and training of minorities, particularly in non-traditional trades. It is symptomatic that the reports presented by the United States Department of Labor in 1984 to a United Nations seminar on the economic role of women in the ECE region cite no programmes more recent than 1978 except for a 1982 initiative in 45 cities to

create greater awareness among women of apprenticeship programmes and five projects initiated by the Women's Bureau to encourage young women to enter non-traditional careers.⁸ The courts, for their part, are handing down more and more restrictive decisions, and their interpretations of legislative texts are increasingly unfavourable to women. The fact remains that the American experience provides essential guidance for any action aimed at maximising the effectiveness of positive action programmes, by affording highly revealing insights into the reasons for their success or failure.

Let us now, concretely, examine a number of experiments carried out in Western Europe, first in the public and then in the private sector.

1. The public service

In Europe women are over-represented in the public service. What makes this all the more remarkable is that up to the 1950s a large number of public service jobs in many countries were still closed to women; but even though the proportion of women in public service employment has increased much more rapidly than that of men, women are still employed mainly in lower-level jobs. And while there has been a slight increase in the number of women occupying positions of responsibility, it has not been sufficient to correct a situation still strongly marked by sex segregation. Part-time work is another characteristic of women's employment in the public service in Europe: the statistics show that 85 per cent of all part-time jobs in the EEC countries as a whole are held by women.⁹

According to most of the studies carried out in those countries, the biggest barriers to equal opportunity for men and women in the public service are related to promotion rather than to initial recruitment. Over-representation of women in specific jobs reserved for them at the lowest grades and pay levels has prompted remedial action of various kinds in some countries. The generally accepted principle in the public service is that all jobs, at all seniority levels, including the very highest, should be open to both sexes. However, in practice the policies adopted are extremely timid, and most States have hardly gone beyond the initial stage of compiling reports and defining priorities for positive action programmes still to be adopted. Sometimes, too, certain laws turn out to have a boomerang effect so far as sex equality is concerned.

In *Ireland*, for example, two events took place in 1973 that were significantly to affect the legal position of women: the lifting of the obligation for women employed in the public service to resign on marriage and Ireland's accession to the EEC and the incorporation of Community laws into national law resulting in the adoption of two basic legal instruments – the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act of 1974 and the Employment Equality Act of 1977.¹⁰

Up to 1970 women had been concentrated in the lower ranks of the public service. There was even a rule that only women could be employed as

clerical assistants, the lowest grade on the ladder and the one comprising the largest number of junior posts in the civil service. The changes made in the legislation might have been expected to improve the situation radically; but in fact women, who occupied 100 per cent of the clerical assistants' positions before 1977, still occupied 80 per cent of them in 1983. One would have thought this percentage likely to drop much further, since the Employment Equality Act of 1977 gave men access to these jobs. According to one expert, however, the effects of this change were offset by the lifting of the provision requiring women to resign on marriage. The level of female employment in the public service was practically unchanged in 1984.¹¹

Be that as it may, a number of steps taken in Ireland to promote positive action in favour of women deserve to be mentioned:

- two public bodies have recently engaged equality officers to promote the employment of more women on their staff;
- the Government has asked each civil service department to pursue an explicit equal opportunities policy and advertise it clearly; it has announced that it will closely monitor its implementation;
- special training courses in management and supervision are being organised exclusively for female civil servants;
- a "career break" has just been introduced to enable civil servants to take leave without pay for up to three years, with the right to reinstatement thereafter.

In *France* the place occupied by women in the public service has been examined in depth by an ad hoc mission at the request of the Minister of the Public Service and Administrative Reforms. This move testifies to a political will to promote positive action for achieving equality of the sexes.

The pattern typical of female employment in the public service is illustrated by a breakdown of female employees in the ministries. In all, 88 per cent of women in established posts work in three "social" ministries: Labour and Health, Education, and War Veterans. The female employment pyramid exhibits two main features: first, the small number of women engaged in technical jobs and the large number doing work involving contacts with other people; second, the fact that, whatever the kind of work, the jobs in the lowest grades are more often than not filled by women whose share of jobs decreases the higher up the ladder one goes.

Equal pay for public servants is guaranteed by law for equivalent grades and jobs, and yet there is a 16 per cent gap, overall, between average male and average female remuneration. This is not due to discrimination against female public servants in respect of salary scales, but is simply the cumulative effect of inequalities in sex distribution within the various categories and status and age groups.

The report prepared by the ad hoc mission concludes that the top priority of a policy to promote equal opportunities and treatment in the

public service should be the elimination of female over-representation in the two lowest-grade categories and under-representation in all positions of responsibility, even though it recognises that worth-while improvements have taken place recently. Pointing out that the mere adoption of measures is not enough, and stressing the great importance of follow-up action, the report emphasises the need for regular collection and study of detailed statistics by joint bodies in which representatives of the staff and trade unions, acting on the views expressed by female officials about ongoing programmes, should play a dynamic role.¹²

Act No. 82-830 of 7 May 1982 establishes the full eligibility of women as well as men for recruitment for jobs in all branches of the public service: thus there is no longer any such thing as a job which is by nature closed to women. The public service departments have received specific instructions, e.g. to avoid mentioning in job descriptions any features likely to discourage would-be applicants, either male or female; to ensure that both sexes are represented on selection boards; to encourage, and indeed invite, applications from women for positions of responsibility and see to it that the administration is represented on joint bodies by persons of both sexes; and to establish sufficiently diversified promotion criteria to ensure real equality of opportunity. The lowest salaries, which seem to be an almost exclusively female "prerogative", have been raised and many permanent appointments have been made (a measure of special interest to women who accounted for the majority of non-established employees).

About 95 per cent of part-time jobs are still held by women, but the system has been reorganised and improved by Ordinance No. 82-296 of 31 March 1982 respecting part-time employment. Part-time work is now taken fully into account in determining an employee's entitlement to advancement, promotion or training: thus, during pregnancy, a female part-time public employee receives her normal pay throughout her maternity leave.

Both parents are equally eligible for leave periods of at least six months for bringing up young children, which they may alternate up to a maximum of two years. The leave is credited to the employee at the rate of 50 per cent in determining entitlement to advancement based on length of service. Since 20 July 1982 any state employee with a dependent child has been entitled to paid time off to look after a sick child. This entitlement is doubled in the case of a single-parent family or when one of the parents is not a public employee and does not have the benefit of such time off.

Thus in France the political choice has consisted in setting mandatory rules in the public service, aimed in the first instance at correcting past discrimination. Beyond that, flexible decentralisation arrangements leave it up to the administrative authorities at the local and département level to take what steps they deem most necessary. So far remedial action has been concentrated in the field of vocational training.

Interesting and instructive positive action programmes have also been conducted in the *United Kingdom*. It is at the local government level¹³ that

the most progressive experiments have taken place: the central Government has been less active. The results achieved by many local authorities show that, where there is a strong political will to achieve equality of opportunity, the necessary institutions, laws and psychological and sociological climate already exist and can be used to the full. For example, the 1975 Act banning certain forms of sex discrimination and discrimination on the ground of marriage¹⁴ gave legal sanction to demands emanating from women workers and their organisations. Thanks to the support of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), a better and more analytical understanding of existing situations has been gained through investigations conducted at the workplace. Public opinion, moreover, once familiarised with the issues, the grievances and the decisions in individual cases referred by the Commission to the industrial tribunals, has been ready to accept strategies of change.

In the field of industrial relations, the trade unions representing local government employees now make it a practice to include equal opportunity clauses in collective agreements. The employers have come round to the view that underutilisation of the abilities and skills of their female staff is a waste of human resources and that the needs of the local community they administer can be better served by promoting the employment and vocational training of women, as well as of ethnic minorities and disabled persons. Women themselves have helped to broaden the debate by calling attention to societal problems – how to dovetail their jobs with their family responsibilities, the struggle against cultural stereotypes, the choice of non-traditional careers, and so on. The media and research institutes, too, have played a decisive part in changing ingrained attitudes and identifying major barriers and hindrances to equality.

A matter of interest is the system of priorities established under these positive action programmes: they may be considered from two points of view, according as they are concerned with structures or with mentalities.

Let us look first at the programmes which constitute elements of structural policy. The workplace, as a living, complex and structured entity, is governed both by explicit rules and by more or less intangible management procedures and methods. A common feature of the equal opportunity policies adopted by various municipal authorities (Camden, Lewisham, Greater London Council) or public services (the Gas Board) is that their strategy of change is directed towards four major structural problems: personnel policy, management procedures and methods, internal organisational structure, and the segregation of functions or tasks by sex. The strategy involves significant changes in recruitment and selection procedures, in training arrangements for women and members of ethnic minorities, and in promotion and career policies. Special importance has been attached to the choice of those entrusted with the effective practical implementation of the programmes, as well as to monitoring activities. The Camden Borough Council, for example, has assigned direct responsibility for the programme to the Chief Executive and the directors of the various departments, while the

monitoring group, composed of both men and women, is highly representative: it comprises borough councillors, representatives of trade unions and the Camden Community Relations Committee, delegates of the Equal Opportunities Commission and officials from the personnel department. In each department an equal opportunity liaison officer is responsible for collecting information. In the central personnel department a special projects officer is assigned the task of developing equality policy and a training officer has been appointed to take charge of equal opportunities training for officials and employees. Let us now look at some specific aspects of this policy.

Recruitment. When advertising vacancies, the Council states in the advertisement that it is an "equal opportunity employer". The application forms make no reference to ethnic origin, sex, civil status or first name (replaced by initials). The applicant is given a document outlining the borough's equal opportunities programme and code of good conduct and the appeals procedure open to applicants who feel that they have been unfairly treated. A code of conduct has been drawn up for the use of interviewers, who must refrain from asking the applicant questions about his or her civil status, spouse's occupation, family intentions or domestic arrangements. The questions are couched in standardised and neutral language, avoiding stereotypes. Selection must be based solely on the abilities of the applicant in relation to the job description, as given in the vacancy notice sent to all applicants. Both sexes must be represented on the selection board.

Part-time work and job-sharing. Bearing in mind that two out of five economically active women in Great Britain are working part time,⁹ for the most part at unskilled and poorly paid jobs, the local authorities have generally adopted special measures to give part-time workers or those sharing a job access to higher positions and grades. Some borough councils (Lewisham, Camden) have laid down the principle that all positions, even the highest, shall be open to job-sharing arrangements. Exceptions are permitted only for valid reasons.

Combining a job with family responsibilities. Various measures have been taken concerning the extension of statutory maternity leave, crèches and child-minding arrangements (for children of all ages), centres providing information and advice for parents, financial assistance, job reintegration programmes for women having interrupted their careers for family reasons, etc.

Increasing vertical mobility. The Greater London Council has introduced a programme – which has stirred up much controversy – to provide accelerated training for employees in routine or low-grade clerical jobs, aimed at qualifying them for supervisory functions. Under this scheme 18 persons, mainly women belonging to ethnic minorities, receive regular training lasting 14 months.

Secondly, action designed to change mentalities and overcome attitudinal barriers is aimed at three target groups: the people in charge of and

responsible for implementing the programmes, the women themselves, and the trade unions. For the first group fairly traditional techniques are used: half-day seminars or workshops on legislation, methods of promoting equality of opportunity and the administration's goals in that respect; and role-playing techniques (exercises in chairing meetings, leading discussion groups, and preparing employees for the prospect of a more balanced sex distribution at senior levels, or even having to work under the authority of a woman). Sometimes the setting of quotas to increase the number of women at the various levels in individual departments, along with all that it entails in terms of recruitment, training and careers, is put up for discussion. Participation of those directly concerned, i.e. the female employees themselves, is ensured mainly by setting up women's discussion groups. For example, the Lewisham Council gives the women in each department a half day off every six weeks to discuss topics of their own choice with a view to taking concrete action, such as setting up crèches or child-minding facilities. Many programmes rely chiefly on special training courses for women. The trade unions contribute by providing special equality training for their members and encouraging women to play a more active part in trade union bodies.

Other countries such as Austria, Norway and Sweden have launched major equal opportunity campaigns in the public service, but lack of space prevents us describing them here.¹

2. The private sector

In most European countries positive action programmes for women in the private sector raise highly complex issues. From the legal point of view, there are no provisions in any European country obliging private employers to adopt positive action programmes. However, while the content of anti-discrimination legislation in the different countries is basically comparable, there are major differences in the procedures and machinery for implementing equality of opportunity.

In the Scandinavian countries, where the industrial relations system is based on collective bargaining and collective agreements, the law plays only an auxiliary role. In *Denmark* Act No. 161 respecting equality of treatment as between men and women with regard to employment, dated 12 April 1978,¹⁵ applies only in the absence of any collective agreement covering the question. The Act gives tepid sanction to positive action measures by treating them as permissible exceptions to the general ban on discrimination. Thus an employer wishing to promote equal opportunity, for example by taking special steps to facilitate women's access to employment or vocational training, must first obtain an authorisation from the Minister of Labour. The Act's impact in promoting equality has been rather limited, while very few collective agreements include positive action measures for women. So far, the emphasis has been mainly on placement and guidance, and since 1981 an

adviser has been assigned to each regional placement office to develop placement and guidance methods for promoting job equality between the sexes and facilitating the access of women to non-traditional trades. In four regions these advisers have set up "support groups" to help women; these appear to be playing a key part in the project. Positive action for women was advanced by the launching in June 1982 of a job creation programme for unemployed persons between 18 and 25 years of age, since beneficiaries of this programme placed in ordinary private-sector jobs must include a number of women proportionate to the overall number of female jobseekers in the region. The generally poor results achieved in Denmark are apparently due to insufficient political will on the part of both the State and the social partners.

In *Sweden*, on the other hand, the Act respecting equality between women and men at work, dated 17 December 1979 (which came into force on 1 July 1980),¹⁶ requires active encouragement of equality by employers. Its stated objective is to ensure that women and men at the workplace are as evenly distributed as possible in the different types of work and classes of workers. The record of the preparatory legislative discussions indicates that the distribution is regarded as even where each of the sexes accounts for at least 40 per cent of the staff. To reach this goal, an employer must make sure that the working conditions and environment suit both men and women (e.g. by adjusting machinery to the height of women and providing separate toilets and cloakrooms). When a vacancy occurs the employer must see to it that applications are received from both sexes. Where even sex distribution in a type of work or class of workers has not yet been achieved an employer must, when recruiting new staff, make a special effort to see that applications are received from members of the under-represented sex and try to ensure that the proportion of workers of that sex is progressively increased. However, this provision is not applicable where the matter is governed by a collective agreement concluded by a central workers' organisation. Of special interest is an original provision calling for the appointment by the Government of an Equality Commissioner and an Equality Board. Under the powers conferred on him by the Act the Commissioner may, if a party to a dispute involving discrimination refuses to comply with the law, institute judicial proceedings on behalf of an individual worker or jobseeker if he considers a judgement in the matter important for the application of the law.

A look at the record of the Equality Commissioner's activities will throw light on the extent of the employer's obligation to promote an active equality policy. Since 1980 the Commissioner has dealt with almost a thousand cases alleging discrimination based on sex or – in approximately 40 per cent of the cases – insufficient efforts by employers actively to encourage equality between men and women. As previously mentioned, the Act distinguishes between employers depending on whether they are parties to a collective agreement or not, and only employers who are not bound by collective agreement come under the Commissioner's jurisdiction. On receiving a

complaint, the Commissioner may conduct an investigation at the workplace, but in so doing he acts essentially as an equality adviser. He informs the employer of his legal obligations, carries out a survey of the workforce, including a breakdown by sex and occupational category, and, if necessary, conducts on-the-spot inquiries to obtain additional information, discuss further the problems that arise and suggest practical solutions. In so doing he must take account of comparable situations in the same industry and be guided by the positive action provisions of relevant collective agreements. The many concrete positive action measures taken at his instigation stand as an example whose value far transcends the limits of the enterprise in which they were originally suggested. The Commissioner is also entitled to act on his own initiative, as in the case of an investigation he conducted in 600 enterprises following the introduction of automation in office work: this revealed the existence of job segregation in a wholly new field of activity, and one in which young workers were employed. His report contains a variety of suggestions aimed at alerting management to the equal opportunity implications of new computer technology. In particular, it urges enterprises producing materials, systems and services connected with the new techniques to take care that any training instructions or methods related to the new processes should be geared to the abilities and skills of both sexes, thus giving the enterprises direct leverage over their clients' and users' personnel policies. The Commissioner has co-operated with the Office Data-Processing Equipment Trade Association in developing model positive action programmes, which have been sent to 1,100 enterprises in the industry; these were invited to send the Commissioner their equal opportunity plans in connection with staff reorganisation, rationalisation and reassignment problems involved in the introduction of new technologies. Other positive action experiments have taken place in Sweden under collective agreements or co-financing projects sponsored by the National Employment Agency.

In *France* Act No. 83-635 of 13 July 1983 lays down general rules governing sex equality in employment.¹⁷ Starting from the premise that women have to "catch up", it reflects a determination to make the widest possible range of jobs, including the most highly skilled, accessible to them and thus give them their rightful place in society. To achieve these objectives it places two obligations on enterprises: (1) the preparation of an annual report giving a comparative analysis of general employment conditions and training opportunities at the workplace, including a study, with figures and comments, of the respective situation of women and men as regards recruitment, training, promotion, and the organisation and conditions of work for each occupational category. The report goes to the works committee, where it is discussed with a view to defining specific equality measures; and (2) the introduction of equality plans, including specific measures for enabling women to "catch up", possibly with state financial assistance.

The original feature of the system lies in an arrangement whereby enterprises conclude contracts for the partial financing of their equality plans

directly with the Ministry for Women's Rights. This type of experiment is new to Europe, and it will doubtless open up new prospects, although it is still too early to attempt an evaluation. The procedure is an extremely flexible one. Unlike the Scandinavian legal system, France uses the law as a sort of launching pad for collective bargaining in the enterprise: the bargaining parties, in seeking agreement on specific action to remedy sex inequalities, are guided by the annual report, which is an informational and analytical tool imposed by the law.

A number of plans of this type have already been negotiated and signed, in particular by the Sofinco bank, Moulinex, SNIAS (the state aerospace corporation) and Crédit industriel de Normandie. Employers, however, still seem fairly reticent by and large. The plans that have been introduced are highly varied, reflecting the problems specific to the various enterprises, each of which sets its own priorities. Moulinex, for example, concentrates on training and skill diversification. Sofinco, a bank in the nationalised sector that specialises in the financing of sales on credit, presents a particularly interesting case in that its equality plan was introduced on the initiative of one of its top officials, a woman, and one of only three members of her sex to hold senior management positions in nationalised banking establishments. This plan covers: (1) remedying sex inequalities in remuneration, which ranged from 10 to 38 per cent depending on the job: various steps were taken to bring women's remuneration into line with men's and within a year the earnings of over half of the female staff had been adjusted (either through a change of staff category, or directly through a pay increase); (2) internal promotion: in July 1982 there were no women among the national or regional managers or even the branch or assistant branch managers; besides, some women occupied responsible positions without the corresponding grade or salary: an internal promotion plan for women was drawn up and a few women have already been appointed to the jobs in question; (3) training: the training plan provides for a series of measures designed specifically for female employees. Three types of instruction are given, aimed respectively at raising the general education level (292 participants and 4,618 hours), developing individual aptitudes (102 trainees and 3,385 hours), and training women for supervisory and managerial positions (a three-year course – 2,652 hours) catering for 20 women, selected on the basis of clear-cut qualifications (seniority, occupational group and age) known to all. The training takes place during working hours and accounts for a third of working time.

Another type of legal remedy is provided for by the law: this lies in the power conferred on the courts, in case of legal proceedings arising out of a dispute involving alleged discrimination, to order remedial action by the employer if the court deems that there has in fact been discrimination. So far as this author is aware, no such cases have occurred to date. The great merit of this procedure is the scope it affords for transcending individual cases by extending the solution applied in such a case to an entire category of persons, as in the class actions brought in the United States.

In the *United Kingdom* the 1975 Act to outlaw certain kinds of sex discrimination¹⁴ permits some forms of positive discrimination in that it authorises specific training activities designed for women only or men only. The initiative must come from an employer, the Manpower Services Commission or a vocational training body, and it must be motivated either by the comparatively small number of persons of the sex concerned recruited for the jobs in question over the preceding 12 months or by a desire to encourage members of that sex to take advantage of future openings in such jobs (sections 47 and 48). Apart from these legal provisions, all forms of positive action are voluntary. The Equal Opportunities Commission has devoted considerable effort to building up a climate of understanding and interest in optional and voluntary positive action.

The variety and originality of the voluntary programmes of positive action undertaken in the private sector in Great Britain preclude exhaustive treatment in the limited space available here. Two cases involving television companies, however, seem worth mentioning. These illustrate a two-tier strategy, in which the enterprise is considered as both (1) a place of work employing men and women in specific and differentiated functions; and (2) a cultural vehicle for projecting the female image, promoting a certain outlook and offering programmes likely to have a strong impact on patterns of thinking.

Thames Television is an independent television company which in 1980 launched a programme of positive action in employment, with the financial support of the Equal Opportunities Commission. This had been suggested by a militant political action body, the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL). A survey of the equal opportunity situation within the company was entrusted to an independent consultant, who submitted her report in 1981. The report disclosed a pattern of marked segregation, highlighted inappropriate personnel management practices, listed forms of open and indirect discrimination against women and quoted at length sexist statements by upper and middle management.¹⁸ The report proposed a positive action programme, which was accepted, and a statement was published containing a detailed description of studies and training activities to be undertaken, new recruitment practices to be introduced, and new arrangements to be made for child-minding and career development. The project was to last five years, and an executive director was made responsible for it. An equality committee was formed and in March 1982, when it became clear that the workload would warrant a full-time appointment, an equal opportunities adviser was designated from the personnel department. The results have been fairly satisfactory. New procedures have been introduced for recruitment, selection and promotion. Statistics have been refined and are reviewed regularly. Vocational guidance activities have been improved and expanded. Since 1984 management courses on recruitment and selection, with particular emphasis on equality of opportunity, have been organised for middle and top management. Programme production courses have been introduced and

some 150 women have already taken part in them. Preparatory technical training courses have been set up primarily for women and a new system of traineeships has been introduced. Financial assistance is granted for child-minding and parental leave is now available. The number of women in management positions has trebled since the start of the programme.

The arrangements made at the Channel Four Television Company, which started broadcasting in November 1982, marked a victory in the battle that had been waged since the 1970s by women in the British media and, in particular, the group known as "Women in Media". During 1979 a number of women working in the media formed a women's broadcasting and film lobby with the following objectives: to improve employment and training opportunities for female employees at all levels; to secure the appointment of a woman at the top management level to assume responsibility for a positive action programme; to achieve joint representation of men and women in the management and administration of Channel Four; and to review the image of women conveyed by television. None of these goals has yet been achieved but the commitment Channel Four has publicly made towards women with respect to employment and programming matters is unique in the annals of television in the United Kingdom. Right from the start the Chief Executive of the company, Jeremy Isaacs, accepted the view of the women's movement that television reflected a male outlook and appointed women to two of the three senior commissioning editor posts. Later female appointments to executive posts further strengthened the representation of women in top management. So far as programming is concerned, the first widely publicised initiative was the award of contracts to two companies composed entirely of women to produce weekly current affairs programmes. Channel Four's policy is an open one, with the stress on expanding and integrating women's contribution in the entire programming area, rather than on producing programmes designed specifically for them.

Channel Four contributes financially to the Women's Film, Television and Video Network (WFTVN) set up to carry on the work of the lobby created in 1979. The Network's main purpose is to increase the participation of women in media work at all levels, principally through the provision of training. It has compiled a register of women working in the United Kingdom in the film and television industry, giving their current skills and those they would like to acquire. Channel Four also subsidises film and video workshops around the country to encourage experimental film production by women. This is, of course, a relatively new and non-institutionalised experiment. It could be – and is – threatened by competing projects, since the company's policy has consistently been to innovate and avoid treading the same ground twice. It therefore remains to be seen whether women inside or outside Channel Four will succeed in developing effective strategies to consolidate their gains; for while a programme made solely by men is unquestioningly looked upon as normal, one made solely by women is regarded as radical and consequently as being addressed to a minority audience.¹⁹

There can be no doubt that changes in mentalities will open up a vast field of action covering not only the media but also education and training. Various initiatives have been launched in Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and other countries. A European seminar on women and television was organised in June 1985 by the Institute of Sociology of the Free University of Brussels, with the support of the Commission of the European Communities, to sensitise television executives to the problem by presenting them with the results of three studies on the place of women in television and the image of women it presents. The seminar's conclusions should constitute a sound basis for positive action to improve the status of women in broadcasting organisations and eliminate the sexist stereotypes that are still the stock-in-trade of too many producers.

Conclusions

It is hoped that, taken in conjunction with the discussion of positive action theory in the previous issue, the account of selected experiments given here will have served to bring out the major problems and obstacles encountered, and the necessary conditions for viable action programmes. A positive action strategy is by no means a panacea but it can, if properly applied, work wonders.

The people directly concerned, if properly motivated, hold in their hands the keys to success which, however, depends also on many other factors – financial and logistic support, which is essential; sound procedures and techniques for identifying and evaluating inequalities; an order of priorities determined in accordance with the country's industrial relations system; objectives agreed to by all parties; regular feedback and monitoring; specific training for members of monitoring bodies; supportive measures for the target groups throughout the duration of the programme; and, finally, arrangements for processing appeals and settling disputes. Each programme should aim at combining corrective action, new practices, and promotional measures. What remains fundamental, however, is a theme that runs through our entire discussion of positive action theory: that there are three dimensions to the question – political, psychosociological and legal – that must be borne in mind as a guide to action. I hope that the discussion in these pages may make a modest contribution to the struggle to foster a spirit of justice and equality among men and women of good will.

Notes

¹ Commission of the European Communities: *Study on positive action programmes as strategies to integrate female workers and other hard-to-place groups into the labour market*, Summary report by the Brussels National Centre for the Sociology of Labour Law, directed by Professor Eliane Vogel-Polsky (Brussels, doc. No. 34 - V/30/83-EN, Nov. 1982). *Equal opportunity in banking in the countries of the EEC*, Report drafted by Jacqueline Laufer (Brussels, doc. V/2455/1/82-EN final, Dec. 1982). *Les femmes et la mixité des emplois en banque: situation, rôles et changements*, rapport élaboré par Monique Chalude (Luxembourg, 1984).

² *Official Journal of the European Communities* (Luxembourg), No. C 186, 21 July 1982, pp. 3-4.

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