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Equality of Opportunities at Spanish Universities?: Learning from the Experience

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Abstract

The relationship between women and universities began in Spain little more than a century ago, the moment in which the first female students enrolled on university courses- women who decided to break with the taboos of their era and to accede to this education level. From that moment onward, the incorporation of women in the university sphere has been a continual process that has been accompanied, in the last few decades, by measures based on the principle of equal opportunities between men and women. In this article we present a historical review of the presence of women in the Spanish university sphere, and the case of the measures taken by one specific university (the University of Cantabria) in the wake of this principle. We consider that in order to recognize the wide- reaching effect of the arrival of these kinds of actions, it is necessary to know the important process of change undergone in the higher education of women in the last one hundred years.

Keywords: history of women's education, universities, equal opportunities, gender studies, Spain, equality plans

¿Igualdad de Oportunidades en las Universidades Españolas?: Aprendiendo de la Experiencia

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Resumen

La relación entre las mujeres y las universidades se inició en España hace poco más de un siglo, el momento en que las primeras mujeres estudiantes se matricularon en cursos universitarios -mujeres que decidieron romper con los tabúes de su época y acceder a este nivel de educación. Desde ese momento en adelante, la incorporación de la mujer en el ámbito universitario ha sido un proceso continuo que ha ido acompañado, en las últimas décadas, por medidas basadas en el principio de la igualdad de oportunidades entre hombres y mujeres. En este artículo se presenta una revisión histórica de la presencia de las mujeres en el ámbito universitario español, y el caso de las medidas adoptadas por una universidad específica (la Universidad de Cantabria) como consecuencia de este principio. Consideramos que con la finalidad de reconocer el efecto de gran alcance de la llegada de este tipo de acciones, es necesario conocer el importante proceso de cambio experimentado en la educación superior de las mujeres en los últimos cien años.

Palabras clave: historia de la educación de las mujeres, universidades, igualdad de oportunidades, estudios de género, España, planes de igualdad



A century has passed since women's access to Universities in Spain was legally recognized for the first time¹. Throughout these hundred years, universities, places created, maintained and secularly frequented by men, have seen changes to some of the arenas where men shaped the established status quo, yet in reality we still see how in universities there are still behavioral models, patterns and forms that take us to a world tainted by relationships of unequal power, explicit and implicit sexism, and in short, the invisibilization of part of our society. This is a situation that, although we focus in our article on how this is applied to the case of Spain, can be extended to all western societies, including those where gender equality is a reality in other spheres. Let us take Finland as an example, an archetypical society in this field, where no more than 18% of its university professors are women (Ion, 2011).

Although the most advanced countries in Europe with gender action plans, which are present at almost all universities, are Denmark and Finland, women are not sufficiently represented in research and science while the majority of university students since late 1990ies are women (Langberg, 2006; Helsinki Group on Women and Science, 2000).

Universities can be defined as a place for equal opportunities based on a meritocratic system of operation. This concept of equality, converts them, in principle, into a more democratic space than other social institutions, and hence women have made great tremendous efforts to invert educational trends, at this and at other levels of education, as a means by which they may increase their possibilities of social and professional success. However, under the apparent notion of universities as an equal space, therein lies a reality, in some latent cases and in other more obvious ones, which is still discriminating against women (Currie, Harris & Thiele, 2000). In this sense, research such as that carried out in different contexts by Currie, Thiele & Harris (2002); Chanana (2004), Leathwood and Read (2009), or Tomàs i Folch; Castro, Bernabeu Tamayo, Feixas & Ion (2011), among others, shows us how in universities there are situations that continue "supporting" the invisibilization of women: the different use of images of men and women on websites when it comes to presenting aspects such as governing bodies, research or students; the time dedicated to establishing informal contacts (networking) between teaching staff or the valuing of ways of acting (individualistically, competitively, etc) more present in the male socializing

process than the female one, and much is made of the so called new *managerialism* that dominates organizational culture of higher education.

Women's access to university is now a confirmed fact in many parts of the world, with this being one of the most important changes experienced in higher education institutions. However, with the first phase of access achieved, and even en masse, just as has occurred in recent decades, it is now worth questioning the situation of women in these institutions: have women been able to come into power in universities, are they powerful in these institutions? Just as Quinn (2003) states, it all depends on how we interpret this power: therefore, if we conceive power as being the capacity to think for ourselves, to transform, to deconstruct what has been established, then this has certainly been achieved by women. Witnesses to this change have been the creation of Women and Gender Studies, facilitators of a new way of looking at the world and scientific construction, as well as revealers of the social construction of knowledge; or the changes observed in the way of carrying out management, research and teaching, where women have incorporated a different approach or way of tackling such areas: greater teamwork, less individualism, more collaborative leadership (Tomàs & Folch, 2011). Nevertheless, if by power we understand control and status, women have hardly achieved this. We need only consider one piece of data to back this statement up: women receive 45% of all doctorates in the EU but represent only 30% of researchers, and only 16% lead research projects (European Commission, 2009).

In an attempt to combat this situation, higher education institutions have seen how the principle of equality between men and women has become part of the way they function (García Lastra & Díaz Díaz, 2011). Actions of differing bearing have been undertaken for its development, affecting both legislation as well as aspects linked to teaching or research. Although authors such as Brooks (1997) have noted the limited effectiveness of these types of measures, we consider that setting up these kinds of strategies is most certainly a cornerstone in constructing the path to achieve more egalitarian and, in short, fairer universities.

Thus, to understand the extent of the effect that the establishment of these types of measures has had, it is necessary to cast our eyes back. Hence, we will use a general historical background, that is to say, the Spanish historical context, to then move on to focusing on a much more specific environment,

that of the University of Cantabria (UC), a university that in recent years has set in motion a number of measures such as the Equality Plan for Men and Women.

This way, the article will be structured in two parts: in a first part we will look back in time at the evolution of women in university in Spain which we will divide in three periods, and a second part that, linked to the last of the three periods described, will set out the application of the principle of equality of opportunities in the UC.

The historical review of women in universities

The little more than a hundred years that have passed since the first Spanish women enrolled on university courses, to the present day, can be divided into three periods, marked by different laws, historical situations or changes in the social attitude towards women. Nevertheless, the three periods are linked by one idea: the linearity of a process (yet unfinished) that starts off in a hostile environment to women and which places us today in a context in which “the female revolution of the 20th century has brought about a radical change in the university of today: the majority of students are female, and there are more and more women lecturers and researchers who work at universities” (Arnaus & Piusi, 2009, p.131).

First stage: from the 18th century to the 1910 Law

The presence of the first women in university lecture halls in Spain can date back to the last quarter of the 19th century, specifically to the 1870s, thirty years after North American women, pioneers of this process, did the same in their universities (Flecha, 1996). This way, the passing of the 1910 Law did no more than legalize the way forward shown by those women who decided to break with the model secularly maintained for them and to which they were unavoidably destined, in other words, the role of wives and mothers. In fact, women who decided to break with the taboos of the period and to reach university did so for a combination of interrelated reasons (intellectual curiosity, the desire for professional training, preparation for a future profession, and so on) and with an ultimate goal: to distance themselves from a situation that was beginning to suffocate some of them. Thus, the

decision to prove their independence as opposed to the dependence on and subordination to men, and for once and for all, to promote a change in the patriarchal order that accompanied societies, became the *leit motiv* behind this “daring” decision.

Something that was in fact changing on the education stage of the country would result in a revolution in power relations, a fact that caused alarm bells to go off with the authorities faced with the possibility of the subversion of the secularly established order. Reaction moved from one of surprise and resentment to one of prohibition and regulation. Thus, after the first enrolments (and with the subsequent debate that set in throughout the country), university education for women was prohibited between 1882-3 and 1888-9, the moment when, for the first time, women’s access to the university world began to be regulated. Specifically, the Royal Order (11 June 1888) was passed recognizing the right to study at university, albeit with restrictions or constraints such as the need to seek permission from a superior so that this person would be who decided whether, in terms of the circumstances of the interested party, the enrolment on a university course could take place (Flecha, 1996)². As we may venture, the fact that a law should lay down for the first time the conditions of enrolment for women on university courses highlighted the idea that this was starting to be seen as a *problem* in the eyes of society, and as a consequence, certain authorities, armed with the image of the female linked to the codes of conduct of the period where subordination to man and the lack of economic independence were the basis of a discriminatory situation (Calvo, Susinos & García Lastra, 2008). In previous periods of history the prohibition of their presence in university lecture rooms was not even contemplated as a possibility, given the fact that women worked and were instructed in what Pilar Ballarín (2006) has defined as education “appropriate to their sex”: *to obey, to sew and shut up*. It is at the moment when women decide to gain access to this education level, when measures are put in place to first forbid and then later regulate the new situation.

We must not forget that the Spanish feminist movement, without the magnitude of other European feminisms, started to grow in this country from the last decades of the 19th century (Cabrera Bosch, 2007). Despite the fact that the *feminine question* which the first feminism tackled, continued to be impregnated with the idea of women’s subordination to man, women’s

education was placed as one of their fundamental demands (Arce Pinedo, 2008). Therefore, during the last third of the 19th century, and at the same time that the debate on the right of women's education was high on the agenda, certain actions were set in motion (associations, conference cycles specially aimed at women, and so on), that even though they sought to increase the education level of women, they did not, at any time, question the role women played in society (García Lastra, 2010b).

Second stage: the first decades of the 20th century to the 1970s

From this moment onwards, the presence of women in the university world has been characterized by continuing growth. Nevertheless, just as in the case of any other process of social change, the different social and political situations which were present in the country, were determinant factors in the pace and cadences of the development of such changes. Thus, this progressive “normalization” of female presence in the higher education sphere was aided by the arrival of the Second Republic 1931-1936), a period which was especially fructiferous for the situation of women which made their presence in the education world and labour market, albeit incomparable with the situation in other countries, increase on a significant scale (the presence of women in the labour market was a trend that began to be felt from the first decades of the 20th century due to the industrializing process implanted in Spain and the demands of countries involved in World War I.)

In the university sphere the rate of female enrolment continued upwards, representing 9% of students in the 1935-6 academic year, a figure that compared with the 0.1% at the time the 1910 Law was passed (Ballarín, 2001). Their presence was concentrated in specific areas of study: Pharmacy, Sciences, Philosophy and Arts or Medicine, although the fundamental milestone of this period would not be preservation of the rates of female students but rather the final acceptance of the relationship between the title conferred and professional development (Del Amo, 2009). Elsewhere, it is necessary to consider that it was in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and as a consequence of the process started from the beginnings of the century, when the presence of women in the university sphere is not only noticeable in terms of students but also in teaching staff (Capel, 1999). Thus, by the 1928-

9 academic year seven female professors were teaching in Spanish universities, with Barcelona being the first centre to offer women this possibility (Vazquez Ramil, 1989).

All these circumstances produced the development of new roles more in line with the situation than this period in history demanded, which were, however, soon suffocated by the triumph of the Franco regime, set on the idea of reviving the figure of a traditional woman more reminiscent of the decimononic situation where the university experience did not enter her life plans. However, despite the fact that the dictatorial regime explicitly vetoed the presence of women in certain jobs and returned to present the ideal woman, stuck in her role as wife and mother, female presence in higher education centers continued to rise during the first decades of the regime; in fact, by the mid 1950s 18% of university students were women.

University thus became a different option to that which the Franco regime, in an unavoidable way, had envisaged for women, where their role as “the angel at home³” took them back to bygone eras. This group of women, who would exercise their profession once they had finished their studies, would be the one which demonstrated, despite the attempts of the regime, that paid female work was an irreversible phenomenon that would do no more than follow the trends observed in western society reborn after World War II (Capel, 1999).

Third stage. From the 1970s to the present

Despite the fact that the Franco regime would extend into the mid 1970s, a decade before, an important social change began to be detected which would bring about significant changes in the mindset of the Spanish population. It is in this context in which a new presence was noted of the conception of women’s role in society, so much so that even though some years were to pass for women to secure basic rights, their social situation would start to be perceived in a different light from how it had been considered till then (Calvo et al. 2008). Thus, progressively, women were to obtain basic rights removed by the Franco regime and to accede to positions previously vetoed.

It is precisely from that moment when the number of women enrolled at Spanish universities started to become significant. If in the first decades of the 20th century women represented no more than 5% of university students,

in the 1970s this number had already reached 20% (García de León, 1994; Ballarín, 2001; Del Amo, 2009). From that moment on, an intensive process of incorporation began, so that in just two decades the registration of women would pass from mere representation to meaning more than half the student body, a situation that appeared in the mid 1980s. Currently, there are more women than men at university: specifically, fifty-five of every one hundred students are women⁴.

However, despite the gains made by women in universities, a double process would take place that can be considered as horizontal and vertical segregation (Author, 2010b), a situation that with more or less similar characteristics to that found in other contexts (Leathwood & Read, 2009; Wagner, Acker & Mayuzumi, 2008; Wilson, Marks, Noone & Hamilton-Mackenzie, 2010). Thus, the first of these dynamics attends the unequal presence of women on degree courses or areas of knowledge (both in the case of students as well as teachers) and the vertical to the scarce representation of women in positions of responsibility, a reality that reinforces what is happening in lower levels of education.

On the one hand the *horizontal segregation*, that is to say, the unequal presence of men and women in different academic specialized areas, demonstrates the conditioning that gender, even today, imposes on individuals when it comes to choosing their studies. The reflection of university centers shows the image of a heterogeneous reality where women represent the majority in Health Science studies or in Social Sciences and Legal studies (74% and 63% respectively over the total student body), but they represent barely 30% in architecture studies or the different areas of engineering. This is a situation that, lest we forget, entails an unequal starting point when it comes to entering the labour market, where studies in which the number of women is the highest, are those of less symbolic and market value, and as a consequence, women will have fewer possibilities of employment, will be worse valued socially, and furthermore will receive lower salaries (García Lastra, 2010b).

On the other hand, *vertical segregation* demonstrates how despite the increase in the number of women among university teaching staff, they continue to hold posts of a lower academic level: professorships continue to be held by men (only 15 of every hundred teachers of this category are women), whilst the presence of women increases as the professional

category falls⁵. However, these data must also be considered in the light of the situation of the new teaching figures that have appeared in the last years, fruit of the latest education laws that maintain a balanced situation between man and women that will decisively influence the change in university teaching bodies. Elsewhere, and still with the hope placed on this new perspective, currently the infra-representation of women in positions of responsibility at universities is clear: only 6% of Spanish universities are actually governed by a woman and the average presence of women on the governing boards of these centres is in the region of 29% ([Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 2008](#)). This situation, we must not forget, apart from depriving society in general of the vision and contribution of a part of it, also sets a pattern that does little more than impede girls and young women from constructing a female model linked to these positions (Author, 2005).

The application of the principle of the equality of opportunities between men and women in university: the experience of the University of Cantabria

The historical review explained in the previous pages can be used as a general framework within which we can understand the relevance that the application of the principle of equality of opportunities has had in University in Spain. The fact that in little more than a century we have passed from what we could well term “the silenced voice” to “the respected voice” when we refer to the relationship between women and the university environment ([García Lastra, 2010a](#)), demonstrates the speed of the social change undergone in university. In order to understand this change we will analyze the specific scenario offered by the University of Cantabria (UC)⁶, a university which in the last few years has seen how the principle of equality between men and women has impregnated its structures and basic documents.

As is well-known, equality between men and women is a fundamental and universal legal principle, which is laid down in the most relevant international texts on human rights. In Spain, the *Organic Law 3/2007, 22 March, for the effective Equality of Men and Women* establishes the regulatory framework for the development of initiatives with this goal.

In particular, article 45.2 of the said Law establishes the obligation for companies of more than 250 workers, to create and apply an Equality Plan. In turn, article 46.1 defines the Equality Plans as an ordered set of measures, adopted after carrying out a diagnosis of the situation, and with the aim to reach equality of treatment and opportunities between men and women. These plans will fix the objectives of equality to be reached, the strategies and practices to be adopted for their achievement, as well as the establishment of efficient follow-up and evaluation of the objectives laid down. In order to achieve these objectives, the Equality Plans could contemplate, among others, the themes of access to employment, professional classification, promotion and training, retributions, organization of working time to benefit, in terms of equality between men and women, the reconciliation of work with personal and family life, and the prevention of sexual harassment and harassment for reasons of gender.

The elimination of inequalities between both sexes is an objective that must be pursued from all areas of society, and especially from those, that owing to their influence and social impact must be used as an example for others, as is University.

Specifically, in the university environment the *Organic Law 4/2007, 12 de April, modifying the Organic Law 6/2001, 21 December, on Universities* incorporates equality in a various number of its articles. The Law promotes the balanced presence of men and women in the different organs of the university, signals student rights including non-sexist treatment and the equality of opportunities and establishes the creation of equality units in the organizational structures of universities. Likewise, in the teaching sphere, the *Organic Law 2/2006, 3 May, on Education* contemplates equality training. In this context, almost all the universities in Spain have approved an Equality Plan or have established an Equality Unit or an equivalent organism (Fundación Isonomía, 2010).

Background and calendar of action for the elaboration of the University of Cantabria Equality Plan

The University of Cantabria (UC) is one of the first Spanish Universities to undertake and implant an Equality Plan. In fact, understanding that one of the ways to be able to implant effective equality of opportunities between

men and women in the working sphere, is through the implantation of measures that can reconcile working life with family life, since 2004, various initiatives have been developed in this sense, that have been widely valued by the university community and which have served as an example for other Universities and businesses⁷.

With the desire to develop and broaden the measures mentioned, as well as to implant other more novel lines of action to reach the objective of effective equality between men and women both within the university as well as in the relationships between the university and the society, the Equality Plan was started in 2008.

Thus, in March 2008 the Transversal Equality Committee (CTI) was created, as an organ with a consultative, participative and assessorial nature, with representation from all areas of the university, and which was charged with drawing up, approving, and implanting the Equality Plan.

The Commission is made up of thirteen members representing teaching staff, students, administration personnel, management, unions, and political organs⁸ of the University. The first action of the Committee consisted of publicly accepting a set of commitments, which are to:

- ✓ Integrate the equality of opportunities between men and women in the University of Cantabria as a basic and transversal principle;
- ✓ Include this principle in the political objectives of the University and particularly, in the human resources management policy;
- ✓ Promote teaching and research on the significance and reach of equality between men and women;
- ✓ Facilitate the necessary material, as well as human, resources, for the creation of the diagnosis, definition and implementation of the Equality Plan and the inclusion of equality in collective negotiation.

Seeing that the objective was to have an Equality Plan with specific measures, which would encompass the different areas of university life and which would be applicable, a diagnosis of the situation was carried out in terms of equality, which covered a year (from March 2008 to March 2009). The diagnosis represented a quantitative analysis of data and the regulations in force, as well as a qualitative analysis through group dynamics, in depth interviews and visits to the centres.

The stages of the Equality Plan are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Stages of the Equality Plan



Diagnosis

The diagnosis of the situation demonstrates the need to develop an Equality Plan having revealed the presence of inequalities between men and women, both in terms of the representation level of women in higher ranking positions and in the decision-making organs, as well as in terms of retribution, without excluding the problem of gender violence in the university area.

Some of the results obtained were as follows:

- The University of Cantabria has 1772 employees, where 1188 persons are Teaching and Research Staff and 584 are Administration and Services Personnel (ASP). Only 30.72% of the Teaching and Research staff are women while in the case of ASP the presence of women is higher (56.68%).
- With regard to the Teaching and Research Staff, Spanish Universities in general, and the UC in particular, are characterized by a “scissors model” in terms of the evolution of its students towards higher-ranking positions in teaching and research. Figure 2 shows how despite the fact that the percentage of women enrolled in the UC is the same as that of men, the higher ranking positions in teaching and research (professorships) are occupied by men (89.7%). These differences are accentuated even more so, depending on the teaching disciplines, where we see the greatest inequalities in the case of technical teaching areas. Figure 3 shows how the level of women’s representation in the organs of government and management of the University is still very limited.

Figure 2

Academic and Research evolution in The University of Cantabria: scissors model

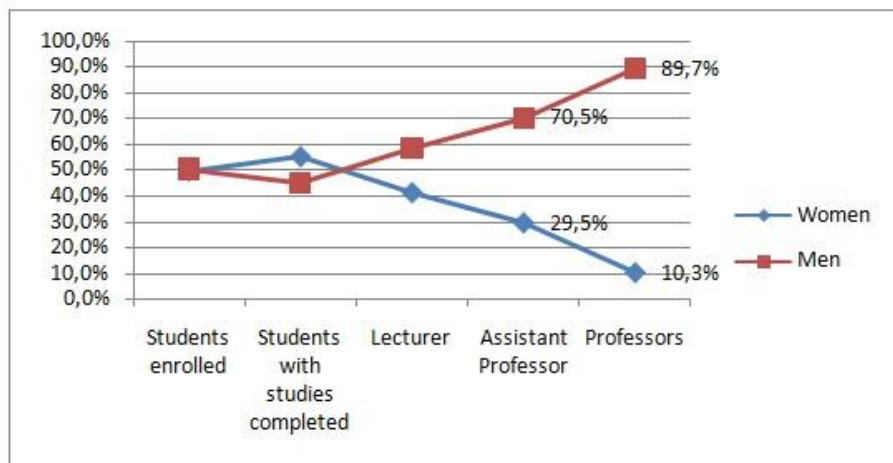
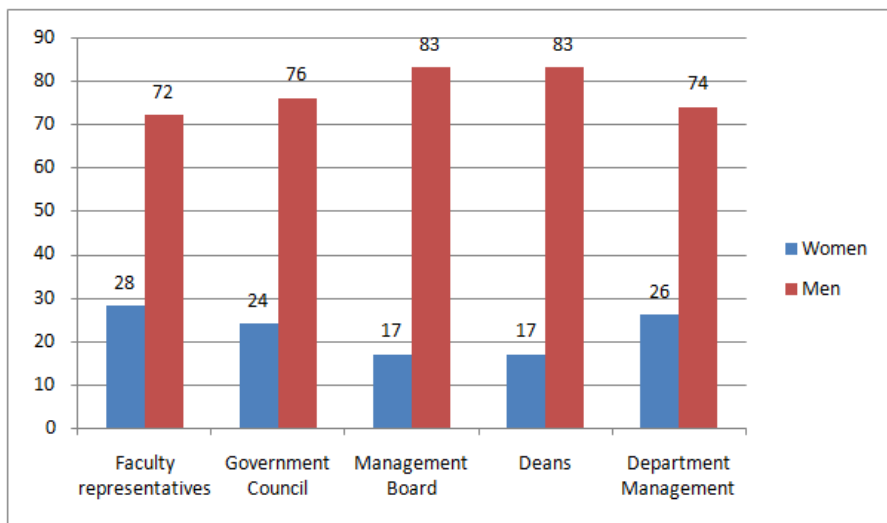


Figure 3.

Representation level of women and men in the government and management organs of the University of Cantabria (%).



- In terms of Administration and Services personnel (ASP) we see clear differences in the level of representation of women, according to the functions they carry out, noting a clear concentration of women in administrative areas and library services and men in information technology and maintenance and construction, as can be seen in table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of men and women in different functions (only public employees that represent 62% of the total ASP)

Category	Women	%	Men	%
Administration Personnel	181	74.18%	63	25.82%
Library staff	44	70.97%	18	29.03%
Information Technology Staff	9	18.75%	39	81.25%
Maintenance and Construction Personnel	1	14.29%	6	85.71%

- However, the problem is not only one of level of representation but also there is a difference in financial remuneration between men and women in the same work post, which reaches 19% in favor of men in teaching and research posts. The reasons which justify this difference in financial remuneration are related to the number of years' service in the job, which is much less in the women's case. This has implications on other factors that reduce the obtaining of financial complements such as:
 - The obtaining of three year and five year bonuses
 - Occupation of management posts
 - Participation in research projects
 - Six year bonuses for research projects

- Participation on courses as speakers

Finally, the UC is not detached from the results found in certain research work that has explored the presence of gender violence in the university context. On an international level, the data obtained shows figures that between 13% -30% are victims of some kind of aggression or undesired sexual situation in the university period of their lives.

This context firmly suggests the need to implant an Equality Plan with the objective that the principle of equality between men and women becomes a reality and that it makes better use of human resources possible, by not excluding 50% of the population.

Areas of action of the Equality Plan

The Equality Plan developed in the UC compiles 53 specific actions framed within ten areas of activity and which attempt to resolve the problems detected in the diagnosis, and to advance towards shaking up the so-called social “masking” of women, encompassing not only actions that reconcile working life with family life but also other actions such as language and conditions of the job position:

1. Equal Opportunities policy
2. Equality as an element of social responsibility and the measurement of its impact on society
3. Communication, image and language
4. Representation of women
5. Access, selection, promotion and development
6. Financial retribution
7. Harassment, sexist attitudes, and the perception of discrimination
8. Work conditions
9. Reconciliation of work with family life
10. Physical conditions of the work environment

Without wishing to enumerate all 53 areas of action, it is felt necessary to highlight the most relevant, which areas follows:

1. Visibilisation
 - Creation of the Equality Unit in order to comply with the reform of the Law and to generate a stable structure in the time imposed to

evaluate the compliance of the Equality Plan and to enhance this as the context changes.

- Actions tending towards the visibilisation of gender studies and aid for research into these areas.
- Recognition for those who stand out for defending women's rights (both on a regional level as well as within the university sphere).

2. Training

- Actions related with training which includes training in equality, the use of neutral language, reinforcing the role of leadership, management and decision-making or the elimination of sex stereotypes and roles.

This training is aimed at all groups in the university sphere. In the case of teaching staff and administration staff this training is included in their annual training program. For the student body, the UC has set in motion the Training in Values, Competences and Personal Skills Program that represents 6 compulsory ECTS within all degrees awarded and within which courses related to equality are run.

It is worthy to highlight that the general guidelines for the elaboration of the new grade programs in the UC in the framework of the European Credit Transfer System, most of which began in the course 2010/11, consider a series of recommendations in equality matters proposed by the Transversal Equality Committee. These recommendations include: the promotion in all grades of the knowledge of the Equality Law and its implications; the inclusion, if it is possible, of aspects related with gender perspective in the course syllabus; the introduction, if it is possible, of the gender variable in statistics or other material used in class; the show of the contribution to knowledge made by women in each discipline; the introduction of mechanism to guarantee the fulfillment of this guidelines in Grade Programs.

3. Language

- Since 2009 the UC has a Guide for the use of non-sexist Language, which it is hoped will be broadened and disseminated in all its areas of action.

4. Representation of women

- With the aim of achieving equality in the government organs, balanced presence in the freely designated positions will be guaranteed.
- Selection committees are requested to have a balanced number of men and women represented⁹.
- A quality indicator is perceived in the constitution of balanced team soft men and women in research projects or the organization of postgraduate courses.

5. Gender violence

- With regard to gender violence, the following actions are set down :
 - a) The creation of a procedure of action for the prevention, detection and action against gender violence and also in the face of situations of sexual harassment, harassment for reasons of sex and work harassment.
 - b) Boosting the mobility of workers who have been victims of gender violence or sexual harassment within the university or towards other universities.
 - c) The exemption from paying tuition fees for victims of gender violence and their descendants.

6. Reconciliation

On the subject of reconciliation, the UC has been working since 2004 implanting certain innovatory measures which it is hoped will be enhanced with the Equality Plan and that have proved to be crucial in improving working conditions of the University workers (mainly the female workers).

Some of the actions that have taken place are:

- a) Playschool for children between 0 and 3 years old: despite the fact that the idea was fundamentally based on the setting up of a childcare as a service for the university community, the project was enriched by placing it in the hands of a work-team belonging to the Department of Education which ran it from a broader perspective: ranking higher than the right of mothers and fathers to the Reconciliation of work with family life, is the right of children of both sexes to quality education.

Many achievements have been made by the Playschool in these years, but in brief the highlighted successes have been:

- The possibility to reconcile work with family life
 - The offer of quality education from 0 to 3 years
 - A commitment to students with special education needs
 - The creation of jobs mainly for women
 - Training of students of both sexes from the Faculty of Education
 - A reference model in Spanish Universities and in the Region
- b) Children's Campuses: these are run during periods of school holidays in conjunction with the Physical and Sports Activities Service of the UC. This activity is aimed at boys and girls between the ages of 3 and 12 and consists of a complete training program that includes recreational and sports activities, as well as excursions to different places of interest in the region. Since 2004, the demand of 1984 applications for places on the campuses has been satisfied.
- c) Along with these initiatives, in the last few years two new projects have been set up with the aim to help reconcile work and family life. These are: the Summer Camp (aimed at children between 7 and 14 years old), which has been enjoyed by 90 persons; and the Skating school with the participation of more than 150 users.

The actions of reconciliation and the development of an Equality Plan would not be possible without the permanent support of the University financial department, which has made it possible to allocate resources for these initiatives, in such a way that the users pay only 30% of the real cost. Within the total budget of the University, which amounts to 75 million Euros, these initiatives represent an annual net cost of 0.24%.

The Equality Plan, maintains these actions and contemplates, among others, activities relate with the flexibilisation of timetables, the reduction of the working day and the granting of leaves for reasons of birth or adoption of children, which as well as complying with the regulations established in the Public Administration Reconciliation Plan or the Law on Equality, it actually goes beyond it in certain aspects, as Table 2 shows. Among other activities, timetable flexibility is increased by two hours, paternity leave has

now been increased to 30 days since the passing of the Equality Plan (in Spain, the paternity leave was increased to 15 days by *Law 9/2009*, which came into force the 1st of January of 2011) and there is the proposed objective to design, construct and set in motion a Day Care Centre which will permit personnel with elderly persons under their responsibility to reconcile their work with this responsibility¹⁰. Other important actions are the adjustment of meeting timetables to avoid damaging conciliation, the creation of mechanisms that ease personnel substitutions or the implementation of a grant program for personnel who has child under 12 years or elderly or disabled person under their charge.

Table 2.

Activities contemplated in the UC Reconciliation Plan and the Equality Plan, that improve those included in national legislation.

	National Law on Equality and National Reconciliation Plan	Improvements made by the UC Reconciliation Plan (2007)	Improvements made by the UC Equality Plan (2009)
Working day and flexibility of timetable			
- Flexibility of timetables for the Administration Staff.	Yes		
- Reduction of working day for personal reasons (from 9.00-14.00, Monday –Friday, earning 75% of salary).	Yes		
Childbirth or Adoption			
- Paternity leave 15 days	Yes		Extended to 30 days
- Substitution of breastfeeding leave for leave which transforms the corresponding time into working days.	Yes		
Child under 12 months old –4 weeks			
- Accumulation of paternity leave/maternity leave with holidays even after the natural year has finished.	Yes		

Table 2.

Activities contemplated in the UC Reconciliation Plan and the Equality Plan, that improve those included in national legislation.

	National Law on Equality and National Reconciliation Plan	Improvements made by the UC Reconciliation Plan (2007)	Improvements made by the UC Equality Plan (2009)
Childbirth or Adoption			
- Premature birth of children or who must remain hospitalized: father's right to be absent from work for 2 hours/per day.	Yes		
Lengthening of maternity leave to a maximum of 13 weeks.			
- Artificial insemination: right to be absent from work for treatment.	Yes		
- International adoption: up to two months leave receiving basic salary.	Yes		
Care of children and dependent persons			
- Reduction of working day as legal guardian: from 1/3 to 1/2, receiving 80% to 60% of salary respectively.	Yes	Improves salary received	
- Reduction of working day first degree care of first degree next of kin family member due to serious illness: 50% reduction in working day, and salary maximum one month.	Yes		
- Medical appointments of children and first degree next of kin family member: right to absence.		Yes	
- Flexibility of 1 hour per day to attend to dependent persons	Yes		
- Flexibility of 2 hours per day for disabled children. Right to be absent.	Yes		Flexibility of 2 hours in all cases with defined action protocol
- Flexibility of 2 hours for the Reconciliation of single parent families (exceptional).	Yes		
- Sabbatical absence for care of children and dependent persons: up to 3 years.			

Table 2.

Activities contemplated in the UC Reconciliation Plan and the Equality Plan, that improve those included in national legislation.

	National Law on Equality and National Reconciliation Plan	Improvements made by the UC Reconciliation Plan (2007)	Improvements made by the UC Equality Plan (2009)
Care of children and dependent persons			
- For the first 2 years with the right to return to the same job. Later, the reservation of a position with similar level and salary. Computable period to three year bonuses and promotion.	Yes		
Right to on-going training			
- Right to attend training courses during leaves or sabbatical periods. Preference during 1 year for those who have returned following maternity/paternity leave or a sabbatical period.	Yes	Preference awarded	
- Leave for sitting final exams or other evaluation tests in official centers		Yes	
Protection against gender violence			
- Absence from the work post.	Yes		
- Reduction of working day with proportional reduction in salary.	Yes		
- Sabbatical period: for 6 months right to the reservation of the working position (computable for 3 year bonuses).	Yes		
For 2 months full salary is received.			

Thus, the objective of the University must not merely be of adapting to a binding Law but more of going beyond it, prioritizing social policy measures that some years ago lacked any relevance in the activities developed by the University, but which are crucial when inequalities continue to exist. The University, as a social reference point, requires clear and efficient policies

that bring about the closing of the gap for reasons of gender in the working environment and hence requires strong support at an institutional level. The presentation of the UC Equality Plan brought two of the main ministers involved, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Equality, and which established a milestone in the creation and passing of Equality Plans in the Spanish University sphere.

However, although all the way run, there is still aversion to the inclusion of positive measures in favor of women in Equality Plans with the aim to reduce the inequality in the representation in the higher categories. The internal promotion from assistant professor to professor at the University of Cantabria is based on a scale that considers as a merit the number of years the person has been working at the University, although during these years his/her productivity has been low. As has been shown in this paper, women has arrived later to the University than men, and in particular at the University of Cantabria more than 28% of men has been working at the UC for 25 years or more while only 15% of women has this merit. Trying to correct this bias, the Equality Plan suggested to value the women's representation in the organs of government and management more than men's representation, but the Government Council didn't passed this suggestion. Therefore, it will take time to achieve equality although all the measures adopted by the Equality Plan.

Conclusions

The last century has seen a spectacular advance in the incorporation of women to teaching and research in universities. Nevertheless, horizontal segregation (differences according to areas of knowledge) and vertical segregation (access to positions of responsibility) continue to exist. Thus, the legislation that has been developed in recent years in Spain, as well as the obligation to create Equality Plans, makes it necessary, on the one hand, to demonstrate and unmask the possible differences between women and men in the workplace, and on the other hand, take steps for reducing it.

In a global and competitive world such as the one we live in, special emphasis must be given to innovatory business management practices that produce an appropriate working environment and which ensure that professional development is not hindered for reasons of gender. Indeed, the

businesses that are implanting these practices are in general valued greater both by their workers and their clients and society. Universities must not be detached from social and business evolution. Universities are important institutions for not only production of knowledge but for establishing education and creating socio-cultural values for future generations as well, and therefore are obliged with social responsibilities to demonstrate that they are organizations which recognize specificities of each gender, make efforts to close the gap between men and women, and where every member is allowed to make the most of its individuality and abilities.

The first step has been taken with the creation of Equality Plans by some Spanish Universities, but the coming years will be vital in order to assess the true commitment of institutions to equality, as we will be able to verify the extent of fulfillment of the actions contemplated by the Plan. Spanish Universities, and in particular de University of Cantabria, should not make the same mistake that Italian ones, where the scarcity of control and sanctions has caused the inefficacy of gender action plans. Since the legislative decree n° 198/11.04.2006, all the public and private companies in Italy, including universities and research institutions, which employ more than one hundred persons are obliged to draw up a report at least every two years, about the situation of male and female employees and aspects such as professional promotion, category changes or actual pay. However, the gender action plans adopted by Italian Universities are just a list of objectives to be achieved.

The current economic context, marked by the crisis, does not appear to be the most appropriate to promote equality actions that require important financial investment, but not all actions of the Equality Plan, and more specifically that of the UC, require economic expenditure, but a change in philosophy in business management.

Notes

¹ Feminist 8 March 2010 marked the centenary of the Royal Order dictated by the Ministry of Public Instruction which authorized women access to higher education in Spain without the need for special permission.

² Thus, along with the more tangible limitations represented in the legal stipulations, women had to overcome other, no less difficult barriers, such as the opposition of families, reactions of professors and fellow students, or the difficulties to exercise their profession (Del Amo 2009).

³ An extended explication of the concept of “angel at home” can be found in Arce Pinedo (2008).

⁴ Source: Fuente: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (2010): Data and statistics of the university system Academic year 2009/10. <http://www.educacion.es/dctm/ministerio/educacion/universidades/estadisticas-informes/datos-cifras/2009-datos-y-cifras-09-10.pdf?documentId=0901e72b8009f6bb>

⁵ Source Ministry of Science and Education (2010): *Statistics of personnel at the service of Universities: University teaching and research staff* Available at: <http://www.educacion.es/dctm/ministerio/educacion/universidades/estadisticas-informes/estadisticas/curso-08-09/2010-pdi-08-09.pdf?documentId=0901e72b8020fd15>

⁶ The University of Cantabria was founded in 1972. It currently has 12,000 students, more than 1200 lecturers and almost 600 persons working in administration and services. It offers 27 officially recognized degree titles and 31 master degrees (www.unican.es).

⁷ Among others, the *Reconciliation Plan*, passed in 2007 compiles a set of measures related with the flexibilisation of timetables, the working day, caring for families and protection against gender violence.

⁸ The Equality Plan was started, promoted and developed from the Vice-Chancellor Department for Campus and Social Development of the UC under the Vice-Chancellorship of D. Jorge Tomillo Urbina and the Directorship of Dña. Belén Díaz Díaz.

⁹ In Denmark, since 2000, gender action plans in Universities go beyond this measure and establish that selection committees just determine if applicants are qualified for a position or not, but they do not give a priority. This permits the management of the research institutions to actively employ the candidate that fits into their actual needs. This includes a more equal balance of men and women.

¹⁰ All these measures made the UC one of the first academic institutions in Spain to receive the *Alares National Prize for Reconciliation*, in 2009.

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