TOP UNIVERSITY MANAGERS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse if the existence of equal opportunity legislative frameworks and affirmative action programs make any difference to the way senior managers perceive the role of top university managers in influencing women’s position in their institutions. A comparative study was therefore undertaken between a country with traditions in implementing AA in universities – Australia – and another which has no tradition in this domain – Portugal. A qualitative methodology was chosen to collect and analyse data. A total of 44 interviews with male and female university senior managers – 21 in Australia and 23 in Portugal – were conducted by the principal researcher in each country. When describing the role of top managers, gender equality was not often mentioned, suggesting that it may not be a topic on the current institutional political agenda either in Australia or in Portugal. When specifically asked about gender, respondents considered that Rectors and VCs in the two countries took opposite positions with Australian VCs being more aware of their role in improving gender equality. The study therefore concluded that the existence of equal opportunities frameworks and AA policies may have an influence in increasing top managers’ awareness of their roles in improving women’s representation in management teams.

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