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Continuity and Change in Academic Careers
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8.1 Introduction
In the previous chapter the four younger women in the WHEM Network reflected on their efforts to build academic careers in a period of rapid change in higher education (HE). Some elements of their career experience resonated with the narratives of the more mature women – the length of time taken to establish a career, and both overt and covert gender discrimination in HE. But there was evidence that the expectations of these women about their present and future careers were quite different, as discussed below.

8.2 Generation and gender in academia – Main themes
This chapter examines the generational issues for women in HE and highlights future challenges for younger academic women in the more corporatised university. It focuses on four main themes that emerged from the narratives of both the more mature and the younger women. These are national context; organisational context; family, class and location; and agency.

8.2.1 National context
The first major theme was the national context in which individual women try to build their academic careers. In our previous book (Bagilhole & White 2011) Anita Goransson (2011, p. 72) argued that for the eight countries in the WHEM Network ‘the general discourse and equality laws on gender are more important than the university’s organisational model, for women’s access to power positions’.
In the EU countries in the network there are more comprehensive Equal Opportunity (EO) frameworks than in those countries that are not EU member states. However, some member countries have been more successful than others in implementing equality legislation. Country differences in equality laws are evident, for example, between Sweden and Ireland. Sweden has strong policies ‘that are implemented at all political levels supported by the public discourse’, but in Ireland ‘such measures are few and the equality infrastructures and discourse have been weakened by the state since the 1990s’ (O’Connor & Goransson 2012). Goransson (2011) noted that in Sweden over the last 40 years gender politics has become an important political and administrative field. There has therefore been significant improvement in gender equality in Swedish universities, and ‘due to the strong equality discourse’ more women have been recruited to conspicuous leading positions than to lower, less visible ones (Goransson 2011, p. 68). This political context in Sweden and the relatively high representation of senior women mean that women are in powerful positions and can act as sponsors of younger women academics. In other countries outside the EU, such as Australia and New Zealand, the national context in relation to EO frameworks has been more politicised in a different way. Hence only in 2011 did Australia introduce a national paid maternity leave scheme. In South Africa gender equity remains a significant challenge, despite a strong legislative framework, as the emphasis is more on race than gender (Shackleton et al. 2006).

The national context in relation to equity in the workplace is important in the narratives in this book, because the most efficient mechanism for getting more women into leadership in HE is external pressure from public opinion and political forces (Goransson 2011). Our stories, while specific to individuals and not necessarily characteristic of particular national contexts, are making a contribution through reflective practice to the broader research field of gender and HE.

In these narratives national context was more important for the younger than the senior generation of women. Helen Peterson was fully aware, as described in Chapter 7, that she was in a privileged position in HE in Sweden, which has a reputation for supporting gender equality. Similarly, Teresa Carvalho saw herself as benefiting from the democratisation and massification processes in Portugal that produced a more egalitarian society. Initially the national context in South Africa thwarted Heidi Prozesky’s attempts to build an academic career. Despite democratisation, women more than men in academia in the 1990s often