

Ensure transparency

Why? – Gender perspective

Transparency and accountability foster fair decisions. This also supports gender equality in the context of PhD processes.

From contexts and experiences in the FESTA-project

In the context of WP4.1 [gendering decision making and communications processes] interviews were conducted on decision making processes and transparency. In the Italian organization, one decision maker noted that more transparent processes are perceived to reduce the power of decision makers

“The problem is that it will take time to make people understand that there must be a big mental shift... I think it is right and important to do it [be transparent] ... We are not stealing anyone’s power but we are helping people to work better. They have to understand that I’m not inventing forms of control but tools that work in their favor” (IT/41/X/M/5; Report 4.1.1, p. 63).

Recommendations for good practice

Recruitment and application processes as well as assessments in the context of research funding differ widely on an international and even national level. Nonetheless, there are processes which can foster transparency and gender equality in decision making processes.

Administration can establish clear processes as well as definitions of criteria and assure that the processes are equally applied to all. As there are subject specific criteria it might be helpful to set the definitions and interpretations in cooperation with the faculties or departments.

Some aspects that can be considered and adapted according to the specific process are the following:

- Is there a defined decision making process that defines the steps and who has to be included in which step? Are gender equality officers etc. involved from the beginning?
- In general, a group decision can lead to more transparency than a decision made by one person. But persons with strong positional and/or symbolic power can easily influence the decision making process. Is there a strategy to ensure a meeting culture that allows open discussions and involvement of every participant? Are the decision-making groups gender-balanced?
- Unconscious biases may disadvantage female scientists in evaluation processes. Are there any gender awareness initiatives or briefings for the decision makers, in particular for influential persons? Is every person involved in the process aware of gender equality issues?
- Are the criteria explicit, transparent and weighted in a standard way? Are they fixed for the entire process?
- Are the criteria assessed with respect to potential inherent biases? When defining the criteria in the beginning, are there any measures which define criteria in a new, unbiased way?

It is important that only the stipulated criteria have an impact on the decision and are applied equally to every candidate. Is there a routine process to ensure this?

Other useful resources

More on informal decision making and communication processes: <http://www.festa-europa.eu/public/42-methodologies-and-measures-analysing-informal-decision-making-and-communication-processes>

More on gendered decision making processes <http://www.festa-europa.eu/public/deliverable-411-gendering-decision-making-and-communications-processes>

From literature and other sources

Transparency is said to enhance women's chances of promotion and decreases the chance of gender-related bias (Ledwith and Manfredi 2000; Rees 2004; Academy of Finland 1998; Allen 1988; Husu 2000; Ziegler 2001; Martin 1994) cited in Van den Brink, Benschop and Jansen (2010). Transparency can lead to positive effects; among them are the willingness to accept decisions, decision making procedures and the perception of legitimacy that can increase people's sense of control by making decision makers accountable for their actions (O'Hagan et al 2015). Although micropolitics can reduce the effect of transparency (van den Brink et al 2010), clearly defined processes or a defined set of criteria are some techniques that can be used to improve transparency and accountability of decisions. However, interpretation of criteria is very relevant in decision making and unconscious gender bias can be relevant (ibid.). Current research shows that stereotypes have particular relevance, when criteria are not properly defined and the assessors use their own individual and personal images of an ideal candidate (Heilman et al. 2004). As technical subjects still are male-dominated, and stereotypically masculine, female applicants in many STEM subjects might face unconscious biases that disadvantage them in assessment processes.

Academy of Finland (1998): Women in academia: Report of the working group appointed by the Academy of Finland. Helsinki: Academy of Finland.

Allen, N. (1988): Aspects of promotion procedures in Australian universities. *Higher Education* 17, 267–280.

Heilman, M., Wallen, A., Fuchs, D., Tamkins, M. (2004): Penalties for Success: Reactions to Women Who Succeed at Male Gender-Typed Tasks. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, 3, 416-427.

Husu, L. (2000): Gender discrimination in the Promised Land of gender equality. *Higher Education in Europe* 25,2, 221–228.

Ledwith and Manfredi (2000): Balancing gender in higher education. *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 7/1, 7-33.

Martin, J. (1994): The organization of exclusion: Institutionalization of sex inequality, gendered faculty jobs and gendered knowledge in organizational theory and research. *Organization*, 1/2, 401–431.

O'Hagan, Lübke, Aye, Wolfram, Apostolov, O'Connor, Chizzola, Sağlamer, Tan, Çağlayan (2015): FESTA expert report: Gender Issues in Recruitment, Appointment and Promotion Processes – Recommendations for a Gender Sensitive Application of Excellence Criteria.

Rees, T. (2004): Measuring excellence in scientific research: The UK Research Assessment Exercise' in *Gender and Excellence in the Making*. EUR 21222. Brussels: DG-research, European Commission.

Van den Brink, M., Benschop, Y. and Jansen, W. (2010): Transparency in Academic Recruitment: A Problematic Tool for Gender Equality? *Organization Studies* 31, 12, 1-25.

Ziegler, B. (2001): Some remarks on gender equality in higher education in Switzerland. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 21, 1–2, 44–49.

