

Ensure transparency in recruitment and application processes

What

Ensure transparency in relation to recruitment and application processes.

Why? – Gender perspective

Female applicants can face stereotypes when applying for PhD positions in male-dominated areas and disciplines. Transparency is one way to reduce the effect of stereotypes on recruitment decisions.

From contexts and experiences in the FESTA-project

A female professor stated that although she had significantly more publications and received more third party funds, a male researcher with less merits got the position. Although publications and funding are easily measured criteria, there was a clear preference towards the male candidate. Applicants to PhD positions are not assessed on such criteria, which facilitates more individual interpretation within the assessment.

Recommendations for good practice

- Establish a systematic recruitment and application process – perhaps there are guidelines or rules regarding recruitment and selection at your institution. Apply the same process to every candidate.
- Design a job profile before advertising. Check if the job profile encourages applications from both female and male researchers?
- Design a list of criteria which have to be applied to all candidates. Check if there are gender biases. For example the criterion of being available 24/7 is more problematic for female researchers in societies where they are responsible for family care.
- Are the criteria explicit, transparent and weighted in a standard way? Are they fixed for the entire process?
- Advertise the job in public, post it in scientific networks. Look also for existing female networks and advertise there. Do not only rely on applications which are initiated by students themselves (this is the common way in Germany).
- Is more than one person involved in the jury?
- Unconscious biases may disadvantage female scientists in the evaluation process. Are there gender awareness initiatives or briefings in place for jury members? Is every person involved in the process aware of gender equality issues?

- 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?
- Some decisions may be made within groups. Are these groups gender-balanced?

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

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).

One reason for this effect is that biases which interfere objective decision making are "more likely to occur if assessments are based on obscure criteria and the evaluation process is kept confidential (ibid.)."

The assessment of applicants can be influenced by stereotypes. Current research shows that stereotypes are particularly relevant 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 associated with masculine characteristics, 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.

Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, Tamkins (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, S. and Manfredi, S. (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.

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.

Other useful resources

Handbook “Gender-sensitive Design of Criteria and Recruitment, Appointment and Promotion Processes in Academia”. <http://www.festa-europa.eu/sites/festa-europa.eu/files/5.1.2.%20Gender%20Issues%20in%20Recruitment,%20Appointment%20and.pdf>