

Equal representation in applications



Women represented in all rounds of applications

Different specific initiatives have recently been implemented at the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) related to processes of announcement of vacant positions, recruitment and assessment of applications. For instance, UCPH is currently requesting at least one applicant of either sex before a vacant post can be filled and, similarly, there has to be at least one person of each sex in all appointment and review committees. UCPH has also begun to reassess the way position vacancies are announced, and they have introduced the use of search committees, which are to look carefully for promising candidates (inter)nationally, prior to the filling of research positions.

Addressing the underrepresentation of female professors through monetary incentives

Effective approach, but very much criticised

Most Danish universities suffer from the problem of retaining female researchers, especially when it comes to their further career advancements. The University of Copenhagen (UCPH) is no exception. Throughout time, and especially since 2007, UCPH has been particularly addressing the low rate of female professors.

This concern gained visibility in the university's gender equality plan for 2008-2013, in which UCPH focused on ensuring a bigger share of female researchers. After having obtained a dispensation from the Danish Equal Treatment Act, the university was allowed to give its faculties economic incentives to meet this goal. Hence, faculties, which hired a specific number of female professors, were awarded with an extra professorship (M/F), and the faculties that increased the ratio of newly appointed female professors by 5 % received funds from a bonus pool.

This approach was debated by some people because of what they saw as positive discrimination of women. The most common argumentation was that this might entail a preference of gender over scientific accomplishments and competence.

Work on the plan and especially the reactions and speculations especially attaching to the financial incentives have shown that it is extremely important to constantly stress that the original plan was based on the University appointing the best qualified candidates, regardless of gender. Creating a more diverse University by getting the best qualified individuals, regardless of gender, to apply for and get the scientific posts at the University has been maintained right through the process as a basic precondition and objective of the plan.

The financial initiative among others in the first action plan led to an increase in female professors from 15.3 % in 2007 to 22.8 % in 2013.

During the period with this first action plan it was found that female professors were more frequently appointed as professor MSOs (i.e. typically posts with five year tenure) than their male colleagues. With respect to the men, during the period there was also an increase in appointments as professor MSOs but the increase was not so marked as for the women.

Considering women's share of the other role categories, generally speaking more women still leave the University the higher up in the role category one goes. The greatest decline occurs when transitioning from the level of assistant professor to associate professor, i.e. at the level where the normally unrestricted tenure positions are appointed. Here, women fall from 51% of the assistant professor group to barely 35% of associate professors. Termed the "leaking pipeline", this continues to be the reality at the University.

Despite the results of the first action plan it was still considered nowhere near adequate. Furthermore, an analysis of the university's statistics revealed several problems in recruitment procedures. It was found that every third professor position only had one applicant, and that 36 % of the positions were filled without any female applicants (and 17 % without male).

A new approach to increase the number of female academic staff

Having this analysis in mind, in January 2014, a new action plan was delineated and originated the university's new gender equality plan for 2015-2017. The main aim of ensuring a bigger share of female academics remained the same; yet, the means to achieve this goal were different.

This time a specific focus on the recruitment process was emphasised. After changing the internal hiring rules, there has to be at least one applicant of each sex for professor, associate professor and assistant professor positions before these positions can be filled.

In certain cases, the Rector can grant a dispensation when no qualified applicants of both sexes can be found. The measure is simply a matter of ensuring that an effort is made at finding applicants of both sexes. In order to remain in compliance with the law, UCPH has applied for, and been granted, a dispensation from the Equal Treatment Act.

Similarly, there also has to be at least one person of each sex in all UCPH appointment and review committees.

Furthermore, UCPH has also begun to reassess the way position vacancies are announced. It is considered important that both female and male applicants can see themselves in the described position, and are made aware of the announcements. Accordingly, the university has reasserted the use of search committees, which are to look carefully for promising candidates (inter)nationally, prior to filling research positions. These candidates can then be given a hint about the opening. This should not only ensure a higher application rate, but also make the recruitment process more open.

To sum up, this initiative aims at ensuring that the university gets more applicants, particularly female, as the low female application level is perceived as a waste of good talent.

"The University of Copenhagen does not want to make it easier for women to get through the review process or to obtain a position at the university, but we wish to ensure that more talents get the opportunity. Talent must be the decisive factor – not gender (Rector Ralf Hemmingsen)."

Assessing the impact of the initiative is planned

Based on the overall gender equality action plan, each faculty had to develop their own plan. These plans should be publicised on the faculty homepages, and the results of their compliance with the targets must be reported to the Rector and the Board on an annual basis. The first annual report has been issued in June 2016.

The report from the year 2015 reflects the fact that the plan is being phased in, as a number of initiatives will take time to implement in its entirety, just as the effect of the overall initiatives may not be measured in just one year. In other words the new action plan is working to create more lasting changes and must to an even greater extent be integrated in the daily practice in the research environments. There are, to a great extent, talk about changing the culture, and that kind of initiative will take time. The action plan emphasize the need to work with the recruitment process in the form of, e.g. search committees and width in the field of applicants have already in the first year of the action plan had an effect. All faculties have been working with the search for candidates. The faculties report that they have used search committees to all or the majority of jobs, which are advertised.

The action plan introduced a rule that there should be at least one applicant of each sex to all faculty positions. Overall, since 2013 there has been a positive development, so that in 2015 less faculty positions were filled where applications came from one gender.

In the first year there has not been a change in gender balance among the population of professors. The women's share of professors in 2015 is in other words more or less the same as in 2013, namely overall 22.2 % in 2015 against 22.7 % in 2014. On the other hand there has been an increase, when looking at the women's share of newly appointed professors: here, women make up 24.6 % in 2015 against 20.3 % in 2014. Women's share of associate professors has been increasing slightly throughout the entire period from implementation of the first action plan, and it also seems to continue with this new action plan, as the women in 2015 was 38.5 % against 36.7 % in 2014.

It has been announced that the effect of the action plan will be evaluated in 2018.

Contacts/Further Information

Contacts

Charlotte Autzen (Senior Consultant)


University of Copenhagen, KU Communications

Nørregade 10, Postboks 2177, 1017 København K, Kommunitetsbygningen, opgang C, 2. sal,
Bygning: 4.2.06

+45 35 32 42 64

chau@adm.ku.dk

Further information

UCPH. (2014). "Krav om ansøgere af begge køn til forskerstillinger til debat" (UCPH debating: at least one applicant of each sex for researcher positions) (Danish) 

UCPH. (2015). "Nyt mål: Kvinder i alle ansøgningsbunker" (A new target: Applications from Women for all research positions) (Danish) 

More good practices

EIGE's collection of good practices 

EIGE's approach to good practices 

Downloads



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EN (PDF, 299.68 KB)

Metadata

TOOL: Self-regulation, Gender Mainstreaming infrastructure