

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Denmark

COUNTRY: Denmark

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The Gender Equality Act^[1] entered into force in 2000. It states that public authorities (including universities and other research organisations) shall seek to promote gender equality and incorporate gender equality in all planning and administration within their scope. It also stipulates that boards, assemblies of representatives or similar collective management bodies within universities must work towards achieving equal gender balance, for example by requiring balanced representation of both sexes on councils and committees. In principle, the Gender Equality Act does not allow preferential treatment, but organisations can apply for a derogation on the basis of skewed gender representation where they wish to promote equality by favouring the underrepresented gender. Some Danish universities and research councils have used this exception to implement specific initiatives in recent years.

The Gender Equality Act aims to promote equality between women and men through equal participation, equal influence and equal opportunities in all functions of society, based on the equal value of women and men. Denmark's Equal Treatment Act stipulates that companies and employers may not discriminate against employees on the basis of gender.

Denmark has a Ministerial Order on the content of job advertisements for state officials (*Bekendtgørelse om opslag af tjenestemandstillinger i staten*) to ensure that positions that may be performed by women and men alike are advertised so as not to distinguish between women's and men's labour. Denmark's legislation on job structure for academic employees (*Lov om stillingsstruktur*) ensures that the maximum length of a given type of employment will be extended to accommodate parental or adoption leave. Denmark's whistleblower legislation from 2021 mandates that all employers with 50 or more employees must introduce a whistleblower practice to process incidents such as fraud, abuse of funds or sexual harassment.

All public institutions at all levels are required to report on their gender equality initiatives to the Department of Gender Equality every three years. Gender equality is outlined in the legislation as no less than a 60/40 divide between men and women. All state companies and state institutions (including universities and other research organisations) are also required to report: (1) the gender composition in the highest management body (the board) and all employee categories; (2) whether the institution has set specific targets for the underrepresented sex on their boards and other collective management bodies and if so, the nature of these and when the university expects to achieve these targets; and (3) other conditions that may affect the institution's gender equality initiatives.

The board of any institution primarily funded by the State must report target numbers for gender equality. In addition, the central management body of any institution with more than 50 employees must develop a policy for balanced gender representation if the management of the institution does not have a gender-balanced composition.

In early 2020, five of the eight Danish university boards met the criteria for equal gender balance. When examining the distribution of women and men in university management, numbers of women had generally increased in recent years, but the percentage of women in top university management remained low, at only 24 % (including rectors, vice-rectors, university directors, deans and heads of department). Only two universities had more than 40 % women in top management, with women making up 25 % or less in the other institutions^[2].

The Act on Universities entered into force in 2003 and was amended in 2011, 2014 and 2015. Since 2011, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science has entered into three-year agreements with the universities, known as Development Contracts (*Strategiske Rammekontrakter*). These Contracts define clear targets and objectives for the universities' activities. Gender equality may be included in the Contracts, but it is not mandatory. The Development Contracts for the period 2018–2021 included gender equality objectives for some of the institutions with skewed gender distributions. For example, the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) refers to attracting more women engineering students, while the IT University of Copenhagen (ITU) has chosen to train more women IT specialists and to monitor the dropout rate of women students. In recent years, the focus on the leaky pipeline has shifted towards diversity and inclusion more broadly, also emphasising student life^[3].

Policy framework

In 2015, the Ministry for Higher Education and Science published a leaflet^[4] of best practice initiatives and experiences at Danish universities.

In 2014, the Minister for Higher Education and Science appointed the Task Force on More Women in Research to evaluate and make recommendations on fostering more equal gender distribution among researchers at Danish research organisations. The Task Force completed its work in May 2015 and published a report^[5] with recommendations and potential initiatives.

The Danish Council for Research and Innovation Policy contributes to furthering the development of Danish research, technology and innovation to the benefit of society. One of its primary roles is to advise the Minister for Higher Education and Science and the Danish Parliament on research, technology and innovation generally. Some years ago, it initiated a comparative study to identify best practice initiatives and framework conditions in other countries. A report^[6] was prepared by an external contractor and published in 2015.

In 2017, the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science published the first of its annual reports on the distribution of women and men employed at Danish universities. The *Talentbarometer*^[7] is based on the pioneering statistical work by senior researcher Bertel Ståhle (who has published several reports on gender inequality in academia). That same year, the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science published a report^[8] on funding streams in Danish academia. Finally, in 2017, Rambøll Consulting published the Gender Equality Statements^[9] on behalf of the Danish Minister for Equal Opportunities, compiling recent gender equality statements from all public institutions.

The Damvad Analytic report, “Career Paths of Academic Staff”^[10], contributed to the Danish Council for Research and Innovation Policy [project](#) on career paths, recruitment and advancement processes. The Council published a brief^[11] confirming the leaky pipeline challenge and highlighting the increasing difficulties related to establishing and furthering an academic career, particularly for mothers. The Council’s latest report, “Careers in Research”^[12], concludes the Council’s project^[13] on research careers. It makes six recommendations to improve imbalances in researchers' career paths, including that career guidance for younger researchers should be directed more towards employment in the private sector and that these career paths should be clearly described at universities. Universities should also phase out professor positions with special responsibilities (MSO), introduce tenure-track programmes and recruit broadly, openly and internationally. Funding models should enable wider externally funded research by permanent scientific staff at universities to avoid extensive post-doctoral funding leading to dead-end careers.

Finally, in 2020, the Danish Accreditation Institution published a report^[14] on Danish and European perspectives on the interfaces between gender, equality, educational quality and quality assurance.

Other stimulatory initiatives

In 2013, the Danish Independent Research Council published the report “Gender and Research in the Danish Independent Research Council”^[15]. The report provides an overview of key topics and relevant data on gender distribution in Danish academia. It also takes a closer look at gender in the practices of the Council itself.

In 2014, an international evaluation panel assessed the Danish National Research Foundation and found a less-than-satisfactory gender balance among centre leaders and senior researchers at its Centres of Excellence. The panel recommended that the Foundation, Centre leaders and universities took active steps to address the challenges, such as developing a pipeline for future women leaders. These efforts resulted in the report “Getting All Talents in Play”^[16].

The 2018 McKinsey report, “Bridging the talent gap in Denmark: Insights from female representation in STEM”^[17], and the 2019 Boston Consulting Group report, “Wake up Denmark: Denmark is Forfeiting the Value of Workplace Diversity”^[18], also helped to raise awareness especially among men.

A closer look at the Danish policy framework requires accounting for developments in research funding mechanisms. Starting in 1999 and the early 2000s, the Danish Parliament and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science initiated (via the Danish Council for Independent Research) affirmative action programmes, such as Younger women Devoted to a UNiversity career (YDUN). That programme was discontinued following accusations of unfairness.

The Independent Research Fund and the Independent Research Council support specific research activities undertaken at researchers' own initiative. The Council advises the Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science, the Danish Parliament, the government and others on request. It monitors the gender distribution among its applicants and grant owners, the gender distribution of the Council itself, and the members of its external review panels. It also asks applicants to justify the gender composition of their team. The Fund factors parental leave (times 2) into their determination of an applicant's doctoral age (number of productive years since acquiring the degree). In 2013, the Fund published the report "Gender and Research in the Independent Research Council"^[19] on key challenges to gender equality in the research sector. Their Inge Lehman funding programme exemplifies attempts to expand the talent pool in Danish research and to address gender inequality. It does not, however, exclusively target women.

Each year, a partnership between the L'Oréal Foundation Denmark and the national UNESCO Commission, together with the Danish Royal Academy of Sciences, announces a "For Women in Science" programme call to recognise and promote talented Danish early stage women researchers to pursue their research projects within the natural sciences.

Most other national research organisations include gender equality measures to counter the leaky pipeline, such as accounting for how grantees will address diversity and gender balance, or monitoring and reporting gender distribution and/or diversity across its applicants, grantees, evaluation panels and committees. Generally, research organisations are moving away from a focus on representation towards greater inclusion and diversity. Other initiatives include:

Anonymous international peer review ensures that the focus is on the research idea, allowing researchers to think beyond their past research and try new things (Villum Foundation)^[20]; Potentially adjusting the length of an uninterrupted two-year period abroad to accommodate family and personal reasons^[21] (Carlsberg Foundation, in its latest report "Gender Diversity in Danish Research"^[22]);

Eliminating financial obstacles to career advancement for pregnant women and women on maternity leave by covering the difference between their usual salary and the reimbursement received from the State (Carlsberg Foundation);

Joining Diversity Commitment^[23] with partners from other research organisations and the private sector to integrate a diversity focus in funding grants (Innovation Fund Denmark);

Inviting former grantees and political stakeholders to share their knowledge of diversity in research^[24] (Danish National Research Foundation);

Two-stage evaluation process, where the first stage consists of the proposed scientific project description and the second includes a CV and publication list (Novo Nordisk Foundation);

Ensuring diversity in internal processes, e.g. clinical trials (Lundbeck Foundation)^[25].

Key actors

The department of gender equality in the Ministry of Employment is responsible for the government's activities on gender equality and coordinates the equality work of other ministries. It also advises the Minister of Employment and the Danish Parliament in matters of gender equality.

The Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science is responsible for research, innovation and higher education. It is responsible for monitoring the status and gender equality activities at the eight Danish universities.

Universities Denmark is an umbrella organisation that seeks to enhance cooperation, visibility and impact among the eight Danish universities. Here, management and staff come together to discuss issues of common interest, undertake joint initiatives, and communicate with politicians, ministries and partners. The Danish Rectors' Conference constitutes the board for Universities Denmark and each university is represented by its rector. The topic of gender equality in research has been discussed a number of times in the framework of the Rectors' Conference. Universities Denmark has recently established a task force (2021-2023) to exchange knowledge and experiences of institutional measures on gender diversity and equality in research. The task force will also develop suggestions for new measures and statements to elevate the universities individually or collectively.

Other national and local networks include:

Danish Centre for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity (KVINFO);
Network for Women in Physics (KIF);

Danish Society for Women in Science (DANWISE) is a non-profit organisation and national network for gender studies and research. It is committed to bridging the gender gap in Science, Technology, Education and Maths (STEM), the Humanities and Social Sciences in Denmark, by increasing gender inequality awareness, reducing gender bias and improving the hiring and promotion of women;

University of Southern Denmark (SDU) Centre for Gender and Diversity (KØD) is a platform for research, teaching and dissemination. Taking a contemporary and cultural analytical approach, the Centre deals with current issues related to gender and diversity at local and global level. It invites interdisciplinary dialogue on topics such as health, reproduction and climate;

Society for Gender Research in Denmark (*Foreningen for Kønsforskning i Danmark*);

GEAR:DK is a network for gender equality and diversity practitioners at Danish universities.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

In line with the requirements of the Danish Gender Equality Act, the eight Danish universities are preparing Gender Equality Statements (*Ligestillingsredegørelser*). The Statements are intended to take stock of gender equality efforts and collect examples of good practice across all public authorities and institutions. They will be reviewed every two years.

Each of the universities has a policy for working with gender equality, and some universities have specific targets for gender equality. In recent years, numerous universities have strengthened their overall efforts to promoting gender equality, often in combination with a focus on increasing diversity in other areas. Some have established special units that report directly to the principal or executive board, while another has a council that advises management on initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion^[26]. Some initiatives include student diversity and learning environments, while others focus on academic staff or staff in general.

Based on the Horizon 2020 Europe requirement, all Danish universities have recently stepped up their efforts in respect of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). For most, this task builds on previous gender diversity and inclusion initiatives, with the Horizon Europe requirements serving to build momentum.

All universities base their gender diversity and equality measures on data. Those data include gender differences in workplace assessment (APV), focus group interviews with scientific staff or heads of department, exit analyses, additional analyses of specific gender equality issues, gender-disaggregated data on illness, absence and pay differences, or search committees.

All universities focus on recruitment procedures, with initiatives to ensure participants of both sexes on assessment and recruitment committees, qualified applicants of both sexes, software solutions or training to ensure gender neutrality and inclusive job advertisements, transparency in recruitment procedures and training to avoid unconscious bias in decision-making.

Unconscious bias training is integral to gender equality measures at Danish universities. In addition to recruitment, it is a focus in management training, in workshops on sexism and sexual harassment, in communications (including expert lists) and in meeting notes^[27].

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

GenderLAB combines design thinking and norm criticism to create innovative, concrete and sustainable solutions to complex challenges and problems. The method was developed by Copenhagen Business School (CBS) and KVINFO, among others, and benefits large and small companies, organisations and institutions.

The Villum Foundation employs blind assessment to ensure that research funding is distributed across genders, nationalities, research fields and academic hierarchies, and to avoid assessment committee consensus based on academic profiles. Reviewers are asked to prioritise the ideas they perceive as real breakthroughs and are invited to flag one idea they judge to be genuinely extraordinary, regardless of the Board of Directors' rejection of the idea.

The SDU's GEP focuses on implementation, documentation and quality assurance of the university's collected equality endeavours for students and employees. It structures and supports ongoing initiatives, and provides a perspective on prevailing equality and inclusion issues. That focus ensures that initiatives and measures respond and reflect local and specific challenges. The GEP also seeks to further career opportunities and promote inclusive work, research and study environments.

SDU's GEP includes a new quality assurance model. Equality efforts will now be more firmly anchored across departmental and faculty levels, with a continued focus on local efforts, cross-cutting collaboration and collective annual reporting. These efforts will be documented in annual faculty and central administration-specific Gender Equality Action Plans, as well as in SDU's overall annual Gender Equality Action Plan.

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/5765>

[2] <https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2020/filer/talentbarometer-2019.pdf>

[3] *ibid.*

[4] <https://ufm.dk/en/publications/2015/filer-2015/publikation-kvinder-i-for...>

[5] <https://ufm.dk/en/publications/2015/filer-2015/recommendations-from-the-...>

[6] <https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2015/filer/international-study-on-gender-eq...>

[7] <https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2020/filer/talentbarometer-2019.pdf>

[8] https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/gender_equality/tal-om-forskning...

[9] https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/gender_equality/hovedrapportlige...

[10] https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/gender_equality/damvad-analytics...

[11] https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/gender_equality/dfir-brief-13-de...

[12] https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/gender_equality/dfir_karrierer-i...

[13] <https://ufm.dk/forskning-og-innovation/rad-og-udvalg/danmarks-forsknings...>

[14] https://akkr.dk/wp-content/filer/akkr/Til-web_ny-fil-marts-21-m.-korrig...

[15] <https://dff.dk/aktuelt/publikationer/kon-og-forskning-i-det-frie-forskni...>

[16] <https://dg.dk/en/other-publications/>

[17] <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/europe/bridging-the-talent-ga...>

[18] https://image-src.bcg.com/Images/Wake-Up-Denmark_tcm9-215573.pdf

[19] https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/gender_equality/kon-og-forskning...

[20] <https://veluxfoundations.dk/en/content/significance-anonymous-application>

[21] <https://www.carlsbergfondet.dk/en/Om%20fondet/God%20fondsledelse/Mission...>

[22] <https://www.carlsbergfondet.dk/da/Om-fondet/God-fondsledelse/Mission-sta...>

[23] <https://diversity-commitment.com/>

[24] <https://dg.dk/en/newsroom/meetings/dnrf-annual-meeting-2018/>

[25] <https://www.lundbeck.com/global/our-science/clinical-trials/clinical-tri...>

[26] <https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2019/filer/maend-og-kvinder-pa-de-danske-un...>

[27] *ibid.*