

Gender certification



Gender certification: a road to change?

The aim of the project is to increase the knowledge on gender issues and to create conditions for a possible 'gender certification' at the departments of Physics, Earth Sciences, and Energy Sciences at Lund University in Sweden. This project was initiated in 2007 at the Department of Physics and consisted of three steps: 1) Education, Information and "Infiltration", 2) Realising ideas and 3) Evaluation. A working team has been appointed to share information about the project within the departments and to discuss, initiate and implement various activities. The gender certification group (the working team) meets regularly since the beginning of 2010.

This project assisted the departments in understanding gender assumptions in their teaching and research. This led to rethinking teaching, changing concepts and languages, and possibly also changed research questions and priorities.

A pilot project to assist in the implementation of gender equality policies of the university

The AKKA leadership programme promoted by Lund University interviewed leaders at various levels of academia (including rectors, deans, and heads of departments) to discuss their perceptions about the gender equality policy of the university. They often expressed willingness to work for the realisation of the policy, but at the same time were very uncertain on how this could be done. This finding suggested that it is not enough to formulate policies, plans or lists of core values, and expect them to be implemented – they have to be accompanied by active support and information.

As a result, in 2007, a gender certification pilot project was initiated by the Vice Chancellor of Lund University. A project group was appointed to investigate the feasibility of using certification to accelerate a broad inclusion of relevant gender perspectives at Lund University. The group consisted of representatives from all faculties, along with representatives from the union, students and administrative personnel.

The group prepared a final report and presented it in March 2008. This report thoroughly investigated the concept of gender certification and provided suggestions, in the form of questions, of criteria for certification. The concept of certification was interpreted as some form of quality assurance. It stressed that self-assessment is important to create activity and dialogue, but it also needs to be extended in order to involve a third party evaluation.

The criteria for certification listed suggestions on how to implement the self-assessment by answering questions in four areas:

- 1 | *Gender awareness*, which concerns the culture in the institutions. Examples of questions for this criterion are: Is everybody given the same opportunity to be seen and heard? Are exams anonymous? Are different forms of examination used?
- 2 | *Gender Perspective*, which concerns the subject matter. The following questions were used for this particular criterion: Are teachers given the opportunity to learn about gender research linked to their subject of research and teaching? Are concepts in and the content of a course or research problematised from a gender perspective?
- 3 | *Plans and strategies*, which raises questions on how gender equality is introduced, followed up and implemented.
- 4 | *Protection against discrimination*, containing questions about how the department works to prevent harassment and discrimination.

After the final report was submitted, the Vice Chancellor invited the departments of the university to participate in the certification project. Three volunteered: the Department of Physics, the Department of Earth Sciences and the Department of Energy Sciences.

In December 2008, as a kick-off of the pilot project, the Department of Physics organised a symposium with renowned international famous sciences from different universities to share and exchange about gender issues and gender certification. In 2009, the pilot project was financially supported by the Delegation for Equal Opportunities in Academia (Delegationen för Jämställdhet – DJ).

Gender certification at the Department of Physics

Since 2007, the Department of Physics has been undertaking the following the steps to implement the 'Gender Certification' project.

Step 1: Education, Information and “Infiltration”

The understanding of how gender theories could be combined with physics was low. Therefore, it was necessary to introduce the subject through a number of different activities:

- A workshop about discrimination 'See the Human Beyond' (Se Människan). The Swedish Discrimination Act was discussed from a norm-critical perspective. This workshop also included a presentation of research in the field, and used bias tests, case studies and assessments to create discussion on the culture of the institute.
- A symposium with experts on Gender and Science: 'What does Gender have to do with Physics?'.
- A reference group with people representing different divisions and categories of personnel. Information meetings about the project were held and questionnaires were distributed.
- A course on 'Gender in Science and Technology' both for students and teachers (this course is still being organised nowadays).
- A symposium on 'Gender Perspectives and Gender Awareness – how can we implement change of culture and subject at the Physics department?'. The first half-day introduced the topics and the second brought up possible activities to be implemented in the second step.

Step 2: Realising ideas

In the second part of the project, ideas brought up during the “education-phase” were carried out, such as:

- A brochure with a credit-card-size for wallet with information about Gender and Physics which was distributed to students. It also contained information on where to turn if a student had experienced discrimination or harassment.
- A new type of questions was included in course evaluations, regarding gender and equality issues.
- A symposium on ‘Gendered Innovations’ by Londa Schiebinger.
- A bookshelf with Gender and Science literature in the Physics library. This bookshelf was also sent around the lunchrooms of the Department.
- A Gender Coach was employed for a year, acting as a resource for the Department in its gender work. The coach was invited analyse the Department’s budget from a gender perspective.
- A parental leave reform for PhD and Post-docs was conducted. It was decided to give a double extension of the appointment when parental leave was used (e.g. if a PhD is on parental leave for four months, one can apply for an extension of up to eight months).

Step 3: Evaluation

The final step included both a “Book of Methods” and an evaluation of the outcome. These are available upon request in Swedish and soon summarised in English.

Aftermath – what happened?

This project has changed the atmosphere of the participating departments. It became clear from the project’s experience that the existence of a goal – a certification – focussed the work. The fact that criteria gave suggestions on what to work on was an important support for the organisation and helped reaching a larger group of people. On the other hand, in the end of the project, the reward in the form of a certification was not so relevant for the participants: the focus was on changing the institute.

A brief analysis, using techniques from the 'Gender Certification' project, shows that they worked on understanding gender assumptions in their teaching and research through workshops. This led to rethinking teaching, changing concepts and languages, and possibly also changed research questions and priorities. This change is currently being investigated by collecting statistics and by conducting interviews. The purpose is to better understand the process and to be able to give advices for the future.

Another change concerns the gender group. It started with only male researchers and students. A few years later, they have employed a senior female researcher and attract a significant number of women as PhD students. Currently, projects for change are appearing spontaneously, and seminars focussing on gender are still being organised.

The 'gender certification' working team

In 2010, a working team has been appointed to share information about the project within the departments of Physics, Earth Sciences and Energy Sciences and to discuss, initiate and implement various activities. The gender certification group (the working team) was meeting on a regular basis to plan the projects' activities and to bring them further.

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Further information

Information available at the Department of Physics



Information available at the Department of Energy Sciences



“Core Value Project at Lund University” (to be published in 2016)

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EIGE's collection of good practices



EIGE's approach to good practices



Downloads



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EN (PDF, 396.64 KB)

Metadata

TOOL: Competence development, Benchmarking