

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Denmark

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The Gender Equality Act (in force since 2000, with amendments/revisions in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013) states that public authorities (thus, including universities and other research organisations) shall, within their respective areas of responsibility, seek to promote gender equality and incorporate gender equality in all planning and administration. Furthermore, the Gender Equality Act stipulates that boards, assemblies of representatives or similar collective management bodies within the universities must work towards achieving equal gender balance e.g. by requiring a balanced representation of both sexes on councils and committees. Even though in principle the Gender Equality Act does not allow the use of preferential treatment, organisations can apply for dispensation, if they wish to promote equality within their organisation by implementing measures that favour one gender. Some Danish universities and research councils have in recent years used this opportunity to implement specific actions/initiatives.

With the amendment of the Gender Equality Act in 2013, all public institutions at all levels are required to report their status on gender equality every second year to the Department of Gender Equality. With the amendment in 2013, all state companies and state institutions – which include universities and other research organisations – were also required 1) to report the gender composition in the highest management body (the board), if the institution does not have equal gender balance in the board (which means that there is not at least a 60/40 gender divide); 2) to set specific targets for the underrepresented sex on their boards and other collective management bodies and provide a time period in which the university expects to achieve these targets; and 3) to develop a policy for a balanced gender representation if the management of institution does not have gendered balance composition (not applicable for institutions with less than 50 employees). Six out of eight Danish university boards met in 2015 the criteria for equal gender balance. When examining the distribution of men and women in university management, in general, the number of women has increased in recent years but the percentage of women in top university management is only 21 % (including rectors, vice-rectors, university directors, deans and heads of department)^[1].

The Act on Universities has been in force since 2003 (although amended in 2011, 2014 and 2015). Since 2011, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and the universities have entered into three-year agreements, known as the Development Contracts, defining clear targets and objectives for the universities' activities. Gender equality may be included in the contracts, but it is not mandatory. Two of the eight Danish Universities (University of Southern Denmark and the Copenhagen Business School) have included targets on gender equality in their contracts for the period 2015-2017.

[1] Source: Ministry of Higher Education and Science (2015). Women in research – bringing all talents into play.

Policy framework

In 2009/2010 and 2014/2015, the Gender Equality Perspective and Action Plans respectively submitted to the Danish National Assembly explicitly mentioned the issue of gender balance within academia. In 2009/2010, the plan emphasised the need for greater diversity in research and university leadership. It was clearly stated in this policy document that recruitment of women to high-level research positions is understood as a vital part of a renewal process that is needed to bolster the strength and competitiveness of Danish research-based activities. In 2014/2015, the plan once again stressed the need to break down the barriers preventing women from furthering their research careers. The plan states the following measures to be initiated:

- Mapping existing initiatives and experiences at Danish universities, which could act as knowledge sharing and “best practice” cases. The Ministry for Higher Education and Science published a small [leaflet](#) in February 2015 (also available in English since May 2015).

- Appointing a Task Force on More Women in Research (December 2014 – May 2015) to evaluate and make recommendations on how to further a more equal gender distribution amongst the researchers at the Danish research organisations. The taskforce completed their investigations in May 2015 and published a [report](#) with recommendations and possible initiatives.
- Initiating a comparative study to identify best practices of initiatives and framework conditions in other countries to inspire the work being done in Denmark to promote gender equality in research organisation. The Danish Council for Research and Innovation Policy initiated the work and a [report](#) was prepared by an external contractor and published in October 2015.

When taking a closer look at the Danish policy framework on integrating gender equality into universities and other research institutions, it is also relevant to account for developments in the research funding mechanisms of the Danish research system. In recent years, the Danish Parliament and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science have, via the Danish Council for Independent Research, initiated a number of affirmative action programmes such as:

- The research-funding programme “Sapere Aude” (2010-ongoing) aims at having top research positions filled with an equal number of men and women. Female researchers were explicitly invited to apply for grants when the programme was first launched.
- The one year research-funding programme “YDUN” (an acronym for Younger women Devoted to a UNiversity career) launched in 2014 aimed directly at encouraging more women to seek research funding and to become research leaders in order to promote a more balanced gender composition in Danish research. As indicated in the [preliminary evaluation](#) of the programme, 17 grants were given.

Other stimulatory initiatives

Another stimulatory initiative to support gender equality in research in Denmark is a partnership between The L'Oréal Foundation Denmark and the national UNESCO-commission, together with the Danish Royal Academy of Sciences. Each year they announce a 'For Women in Science' programme call for applications in order to recognise and promote talented Danish early-stage female researchers to pursue their research projects within the natural sciences.

Key actors

The Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality (Department for Gender Equality) is responsible for the Government's overall activities in the field of gender equality and coordinates the equality work of other ministries. The ministry also advises the Minister and Parliament in matters concerning gender equality.

The Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science is responsible for research, innovation and higher education. The ministry is, amongst other things, in charge of monitoring the status and activities for gender equality at the eight Danish universities. The ministry mapped in 2015 the activities on gender equality in Danish universities and research councils and was the secretariat for the Task Force on More Women in Research.

There are three largest public research-funding councils/foundations in Denmark. The Innovation Fund Denmark is replacing, since 2014, the former Council for Strategic Research, Højteknologifonden, and the Danish Council for Technology and Innovation. Previously, the Council for Strategic Research (in 2013) has directed attention towards gender equality in research. In an internal 'note of principle' it was underlined that the Council should focus on securing equal opportunities for men and women. The Board also decided to inform the different programme committees that focus should be directed towards equal opportunities for male and female researchers in the application process and in the completion of the research projects. The Council for Independent Research funds specific research activities based on researchers' own initiatives. Moreover, the Council provides advice in all scientific areas for the Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science, the Danish Parliament, and the Government and others on request. The Council has a [specific action plan on gender equality](#) in place since 2013. The Council monitors the gender distribution among its applicants and grant owners as well as the gender distribution of the Council itself and the members of its external review panels. Furthermore, the Council asks the applicants to account for his/her considerations in relation to the gender composition of the team when applying for funding for research teams or similar collaborative projects. This requirement has been introduced in order to strengthen the applicants' focus on contributing to equal opportunities among men and women in scientific research. Finally, the Danish National Research Foundation is an independent organisation established by the Danish Parliament with the objective to promote and stimulate basic research. The Centre of Excellence (CoE) programme is the main funding mechanism, but also a number of other programs and initiatives are launched continuously. The Foundation has worked with gender equality to some extent, e.g. by putting it on the agenda as part of their annual meetings and by monitoring the gender balance among applicants.

The Danish Council for Research and Innovation Policy (replacing the former Danish Council for Research Policy) contributes to furthering the development of Danish research, technology and innovation to the benefit of society. One of the primary roles of the Council is to advise the Minister for Higher Education and Science and the Danish Parliament on research, technology and innovation at a general level. In 2014-2015, the Council was responsible for the comparative study to identify best practices of initiatives and framework conditions in other countries to inspire the work being done in Denmark to promote gender equality in research organisations.

Universities Denmark is an organisation comprising the eight Danish universities with the aim of enhancing cooperation, visibility and impact. University management and staff convene at Universities Denmark to discuss issues of common interest, to take joint initiatives, and to communicate with politicians, ministries and partners. The Danish Rectors' Conference constitutes the board for Universities Denmark and each university is represented by their rector. From time to time the Rectors' Conference has had 'gender equality in research' as a theme on meetings.

The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences embraces all branches of science and scholarship. The Academy is, in a partnership with The L'Oréal Foundation Denmark and the national UNESCO-commission, responsible for the 'For Women in Science' prize.

National and local bottom-up networks, like for instance KVINFO (The Danish Centre for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity (1982-ongoing), the national coordination for Gender research in Denmark, KIF (Network for female in physics (1992-ongoing) or the Gender Mainstreaming Network (2005-ongoing) actively try to keep gender equality issues in research salient on the political agenda.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Although the Danish legal framework does not require it, many Danish universities have gender equality plans (six out of eight). There are substantial variations in the degree to which these organisations have implemented their plans and the extent to which these plans merely contain 'symbolic' statements. The gender equality plans seem to be used as a way to address the state of affairs regarding gender equality at the individual institutions and improving the work on gender equality through different tools and initiatives. However, due to the lack of national requirements for setting up gender equality plans in universities and research institutions in Denmark, the plans and thereby also the tools and initiatives implemented are relatively limited. Few tools and initiatives are enforced and promoted on a systematic basis. The tools and initiatives tend to primarily represent gender equality as a problem connected to women rather than the organisation (fixing the number of women vs. fixing the organisations). This is reflected in the six identified gender equality plans.

However, some of the gender equality plans set up concrete targets and suggestions for both quantitative and qualitative initiatives. This include making use of statistical sex-disaggregated data on staff and students to monitor the work on gender equality, offering support programs for young female researchers, developing mentorship programmes, and/or offering further training in management, administration and grant writing.

Other gender equality plans address work-life balance issues and point to initiatives put in place in the effort on getting more women to pursue a career in academia and also for more women to apply for leadership and executive jobs. Examples of those measures or initiatives include a requirement for agreements to be made between local management and professors/associate professors on how the upcoming period is to be used prior to end of parental leave, or allowing researchers, who return from parental leave, to have a teaching-free semester.

Other kind of initiative listed in the gender equality plans is making vacancy postings appealing to different audiences with distinct skills and professional expertise. The aim of such measure is to receive more applications from the underrepresented sex. Particularly, the University of Copenhagen is requesting at least one applicant of either sex before a vacant post can be filled. The implementation of this initiative is being discussed at other universities.

Very few Danish universities report approaches for monitoring, evaluating, benchmarking or other follow-up measures regarding the implementation of their gender equality plans or other gender equality activities.

Three EU-funded structural change projects have been supporting gender equality work at the University of Southern Denmark (FESTA) and Aarhus University (WHIST and STAGES). In the current gender equality plan from the University of Southern Denmark (2014-2015), the work on gender equality done by the Faculty of Natural Sciences, which is part of the FESTA-project, is emphasised. A new gender equality plan is on its way at Aarhus University (2016-2020). The research team responsible for the STAGES project has provided assistance to the HR department in the preparation of this new plan.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Supporting work-life balance within the organisation and providing flexible career trajectories for young female researchers in particular

This gender equality initiative is implemented at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) (2012-ongoing). The internal guidelines regarding parental leave include different measures to tackle the reconciliation of work and personal life. This is considered to be a key element to achieve gender equality as research has shown that, to some extent, there is not only a 'glass ceiling' but also a 'maternal wall' hindering the career of female researchers.

Women represented in all rounds of applications

Different specific initiatives have recently been implemented at the University of Copenhagen (UCHP) related to processes of announcement of vacant positions, recruitment and assessment of applications. For instance, since 2015, UCHP is 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. UCHP 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.