

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Netherlands

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

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Policy framework

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Other stimulatory initiatives

The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) grant Aspasia is intended to encourage the promotion of female Vidi grant candidates to associate and female Vici candidates to full professorships. For female scientists who were evaluated as very good or excellent after the selection interview for Vidi or Vici but were not awarded a grant, universities may also receive a grant under certain conditions if they promote these candidates to either an associate or full professorship. A condition of grant is that the University or Executive Board must use at least 50,000 Euro of the premium to fund more generic diversity policy measures and link these measures to the institution's structural diversity policy. The measures funded by Aspasia can be at university or faculty level and are meant to increase the upward movement of female staff within the institution. Aspasia was set up together with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU).

The Talent to the Top Foundation was created in 2008 and focuses on facilitating and encouraging the government, employers and top female talent to be intrinsically motivated to promote the recruitment, promotion and retention of women at the top of organisations. The Charter is a public commitment, a code with clear agreements regarding the realisation of gender diversity at top and sub-top management levels. Employers, businesses, organisations and institutions commit themselves to clear, measurable gender diversity goals and allow their achievements to be monitored annually. Signing the Charter constitutes a voluntary commitment.

The Dutch Network of Women Professors (Landelijk Netwerk Vrouwelijke Hoogleraren - LNVH) began life informally in the nineties, and became a foundation in 2001. The LNVH is a network of over 850 female professors and associate professors. Together they represent every discipline and all Dutch Universities. The goal of the Dutch Network of Women Professors is to promote equal representation of women within the academic community.

Girls day, an annual event where technological companies, research- and educational institutes open their doors to young girls aged 10-15 years in order to awaken their interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). It is one of the activities of the Dutch National Expert Organization on Girls/ Women and Science/Technology (VHTO) to increase the participation of girls in science, technology and ICT in the Netherlands. During Girls day, more than 9.500 girls discover the world of science, technology and IT. The activities that take place during Girls day are diverse. More than 300 large and smaller companies organise hands-on activities, tours, workshops, quizzes, contests, pitches and speed dates with female professionals for girls in primary and secondary education. All with one goal: to awaken their interest in science and technology.

With the annual Athena Award, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) Chemical Sciences aims to put the spotlight on outstanding female chemists that perform excellent scientific research. NWO Chemical Sciences has, starting from 2015, transformed the Athena premium into an annual Athena Award. This award is meant for female researchers in chemistry, who obtained their PhD degree less than ten years ago. Researchers working in the chemical sciences are able to nominate one or more female researchers for the Athena Award. Additionally, a candidate can nominate herself for the award.

The FOM/f incentives programme of the Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter (FOM) is a funding programme to keep more female scientists in the Dutch physics community. It consists of two types of grants: FOM grant for Individual positions for postdocs and FOM Bridging grants. The individual positions for postdocs are intended for women who wish to develop a long-term career in Dutch physics. The advantage of the grant is that it gives women a position for a maximum of five years at a crucial and vulnerable point in their careers, thereby enabling them to develop a solid position for the future. The Bridging grants are intended to support faculties and research institutes during the appointment of a woman to a tenured position. FOM contributes for a maximum of five years. Examples of a bridging grant are a contribution to a tenured appointment as an assistant or associate professor (possibly after being employed at a foreign university) or financing the difference in salary between an associate professor and a professor.

The Minerva Prize is one of the other activities under the FOM/f incentives programme awarded once every two years to a female writer of the best physics publication in order to draw attention to the research of female physicists. The Minerva Prize is a conferred honour and the laureate is an inspiring example to other women. The prize consists of a bronze statuette as well as a payment of 5.000 Euro that the laureate is free to use as she wishes. There is considerable competition for this prize (about 30 submissions).

Key actors

The initiatives related to funding are mainly in the hands of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). They organise the funding and selection procedures. However, the selection committees predominantly consist of voluntary academic researchers employed by Dutch universities. In case of the Aspasia grant, the Executive Board of the university is responsible for using the part of the premium for either faculty or university measures, or for a combination of the two, and is requested to embed these measures in the structural diversity policy.

The promotion of gender equality in research is fully in the hands of the universities themselves. The Boards of the Universities are responsible for the strategic plans, which often include gender equality and diversity. The diversity officers at the universities are the main actors related to the implementation of gender equality measures.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

The Human Resources Departments of the universities are charged with the implementation of the charter Talent to the Top. They need to provide data and report annually to the Talent to the Top Foundation on the situation regarding gender diversity. The university boards are the main responsible bodies.

Most universities in the Netherlands have set up gender or diversity policies, although this is not always developed in a concrete gender equality plan, and even to a lesser extent a publicly available plan.

Many of the proposed and/or implemented measures refer to a gender sensitive approach for selection and recruitment. There are measures to ensure a minimum number of women in the hiring and selection committees, or the presence of a diversity expert who is expected to lower the influence of gender biases on the selection process. Other measures require for a more open and broad recruitment and for actively scouting women talents. The plan of Eindhoven University of Technology explicitly referred to quota for hiring new assistant and full professors: 50 % needs to be women.

Various measures relate to support for career development of women. For example, to look what individual women potentially need (to develop) in order to make it to the next career step and offer tailor-made support. There are also specific measures for women returning from pregnancy and maternity leave, e.g. temporary dispensation of teaching tasks to catch up with their research. Related to this, almost all gender equality plans included mentoring initiatives. Also networking was considered an initiative offering women career support and strengthening their position and skills. At several universities, networks of women academics were set up. These networks are also a way of increasing women's visibility. Another related measure proposed was to check that women are included in the images displayed in all types of publications.

There are different types of training programmes described in the gender equality plans: gender awareness or diversity competence training. This can be part of already existing training modules – especially in leadership programmes – or be offered as separate workshops. Some of the programmes target all academic and administrative staff, others are more specifically for deans and managers. Other types of training have a very different objective: to integrate gender in research. These are specifically for researchers to learn how to integrate a gender dimension in funding proposals, e.g. for Horizon2020, or in research design.

As an approach to monitor gender equality, universities work on systematically collecting and annually reporting data regarding the gender balance in different positions. This is also claimed to improve awareness of gender inequalities.

Other initiatives that were not found in the gender equality plans, but could be found on websites and in strategic plans were related to funding of women scientists. For example, Delft University of Technology, the Radboud University Nijmegen and the Erasmus University Rotterdam offer incentive grants for replacement of educational tasks or which provide temporary additional research time. Another example of the Radboud University Nijmegen is the travel grant for up-and-coming female PhD students to carry out research abroad.

Radboud University is part of consortia in EU-funded structural change projects, namely EGERA, STAGES and GARCIA.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Mentoring programme at the Radboud University Nijmegen

The Radboud University Nijmegen started, in September 2010, with a mentoring programme for female academic and administrative staff. After a positive evaluation, it was decided to continue the initiative. The aim of the programme is to provide practical support and advice for women talents, who want to develop their careers. The program organises mentoring groups for talented scientists and support staff to gain more insight into their current work position and what activities are necessary for them to progress on their careers. For academic and administrative staff together there is room for about 35 female participants. The mentoring trajectory is custom-made; mentees choose their own mentor (men or women, preferably from another faculty or department). In a series of meetings, it will often be the mentee who determines the themes and topics to discuss. The mentor can help the mentee with their personal and professional development, gaining a better understanding of the organisation, establishing useful contacts and gaining new access to networks. On average, mentees have five to six meetings with their mentor per trajectory, which maximally takes up to one year.

In addition to the mentoring programme, a career coach can be contacted within the HR department. Approaching a coach is based on the outcomes or specific needs of the mentoring programme. The goal of coaching is to deepen the themes from the meetings with the mentor even further. In addition, the programme includes several workshops and peer reviews with colleagues. Target groups are talented assistant professors, associate professors, and newly appointed full professors who want to actively develop their careers. For full professors, the career coach is specifically concerned with helping the professor maintain this position for a longer period.

Delft Technology Fellowships

Delft University of Technology is aiming to substantially increase the number of top female scientists. To help accelerate this, Delft Technology Fellowship (initiated in 2010) offers high-profile, tenure-track positions to top female scientists in research fields in which the university is active. The current situation is that 12 % of the current full professors are female. The goal is to increase the percentage in 2020 up to 20%. The five-year Fellowships are awarded to outstanding female scientists from any country and from any of the existing disciplines in the university, who are currently not employed by Delft University of Technology. The fellowships are awarded at the Assistant, Associate or full Professor levels. As fellow women will be offered the unique chance to establish their own research programme of international repute, including a generous start-up funding (assistant professor 100,000 Euro, associate professor 200,000 Euro and full professor 300,000 Euro). Candidates can write their own research proposal (not restricted by specific available positions). However, the discipline needs to be sufficiently related to the disciplines in the respective faculty to allow a strong embedding of the research field in the university after five years.

An informal mentoring scheme is available for Fellows to get to know the university and the Dutch (research) environment. Also, fellows participate in a university wide introduction program and participate in the Personal Development Programme. Following a positive evaluation at the end of (a maximum of) five years, the Fellow is awarded tenure. Having been awarded tenure, the Fellow will be following the regular career path for scientists at Delft University of Technology. Should the Fellow in the fourth year of the tenure track not achieved the expected goals for that period, the Fellow is offered career advice to help explore employment opportunities elsewhere.

In 2011 and 2013 there have been two recruitment rounds. The board of the university decided to have two other rounds, one in 2015 and one in 2017, to meet the goal of increasing the percentage of top female scientists. Regarding the success rate, 7.8 % women received the fellowship in the first round (10 candidates out of 128 applications) and 7.6 % in the second round (9 candidates out of 131 applications).