

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Sweden

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

In Sweden, the operations of research organisations are regulated by the laws and statutes that apply to the area of higher education, primarily the Swedish Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance. According to the Swedish Higher Education Act (Chapter 1 Initial provisions (Section 5): “Equality between women and men shall always be taken into account and promoted in the operations of higher education institutions”. As government agencies, the research organisations are also subject to administrative and labour market legislation, for example the Parental Leave Act (1995: 584) protecting the rights of pregnant women and parents. Equality of opportunity and treatment in relation to work, employment, working conditions and further training is mainly regulated by the Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567). It aims to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. The Discrimination Act allows for moderate preferential treatment of the underrepresented gender when hiring for positions, if this is regarded as promoting gender equality and if it does not conflict with EU regulations. The act states: “When the distribution of women and men is not more or less equal in a certain type of work or in a certain employee category at a place of work, the employer is to make a special effort when recruiting new employees to attract applicants of the under-represented sex. The employer is to attempt to see to it that the proportion of employees from the under-represented sex gradually increases” (SFS 2008:567, chapter 3, section 9).

It is also mandatory by the Discrimination Act for all workplaces in Sweden, including research organisations, to have an Equality Plan outlining positive measures to prevent discrimination (regarding all the above-mentioned grounds) and to actively promote gender equality. Before 2008 the GEPs were supposed to be updated annually and it was mandatory for workplaces with over 10 employees. In 2008 the Act was amended and the obligation to draw up a gender equality plan does not apply to employers who employ fewer than 25 employees. The obligation to draw up an equality plan annually was also amended. Instead, the employers are to draw up a plan for their gender equality work every three years. However, a Government Bill was passed in October 2015 suggesting that the old requirements should be reinstated as an investigation from a Swedish labour union showed that the work on equal pay suffered negatively after the changes were made. The GEP is also to contain a summary account of the action plan for equal pay that the employer is required to draw up. An account of how the planned measures have been implemented is to be included in the next plan.

It is relatively easy to find sex-disaggregated statistics about Swedish Higher Education. The Swedish Higher Education Authority collects and reports this yearly as part of the Swedish Government's instruction to this government agency. Monitoring and reporting of gender equality at these research organisations are thus parts of the annual reporting that they are obliged to deliver to the Swedish Higher Education Authority regarding their activities, such as the financial data – including (sex-disaggregated) person statistics for students, doctoral students and staff.

Policy framework

Most public sector research organisations in Sweden are public agencies in their own right and report directly to the Swedish government (Swedish Higher Education Authority 2015).^[1] According to the Swedish Government Bill (2005), all government agencies (including research organisations) are required to help achieve the general gender equality objectives about equal gender representation in governing organisations. Although quotas are not mandatory, there is an expectation that decision-making boards, committees and panels involved in peer reviewing, recruitment etc. should have at least 40% of the underrepresented sex. Gender mainstreaming has been a strategy since 1984 and is a binding policy approach and the main strategy the Swedish Government uses to achieve the national gender equality policy objectives, meaning that the gender equality perspective should be included in all decision-making and in policy development in general in government agencies.

As government agencies Swedish higher education institutions also adhere to the so-called Shared Values for Civil Servants, which are the fundamental legal principles for civil servants. These values include objectivity, impartiality and equal treatment as government agencies must treat all persons equal.

To complement the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance, the Swedish government has adopted a system of so called Regulation Letters (regleringsbrev) or annual public-service agreements to the higher education institutions, where the Government lays down directives for operations of the higher education institutions. To encourage a rise in the proportion of women professors these regulation letters contain set targets for the recruitment of professors at 34 Higher education institutions for the period 2012–2015. The regulation letters thus stipulate requirements for 34 of the HEIs regarding recruitment targets for female professors, based on the recruitment base (senior lecturers and post-doctoral research fellows). These types of recruitment targets have existed since 1997 (although were not used during 2009-2011) (European Commission 2014). The recruitment target for 2012-2015 has been that women must comprise a minimum of 36 % of the professors appointed (Bergman 2013). Although the regulation letters and the recruitment targets are not sanctioned in any way from the government they have been assessed as an efficient steering instrument (SOU 2011:1).

[1] Sweden has 16 universities (14 public universities and two private/independent ones) and 18 public university colleges (and one independent university college). In addition to these there are a number of smaller private/independent HEIs without an entitlement to award PhDs and entitle for qualifications in more specific fields as the fine, applied and performing arts (Swedish Higher Education Authority 2015).

Other stimulatory initiatives

The Delegation for Gender Equality in Higher Education was a fix-term committee established by the Swedish Government in 2009 to audit the position of gender equality in Swedish higher education and tasked with supporting efforts and proposing measures to promote equality in higher education. The Delegation was composed by gender equality experts, stakeholders and practitioners in the field of gender equality. They investigated education, research and the structure of higher education. The work of the Delegation included identifying on-going activities and measures for gender equality in higher education, organising conferences and seminars and publishing expert reports on gender equality in this sector. They also distributed over 47 million SEK to 37 research and action projects at local level in higher education institutions aiming to increasing gender equality. In January 2011, the Delegation submitted its final report. Here the Delegation suggested that the Swedish Government should introduce a 50 million SEK gender equality bonus to be distributed yearly as a reward to higher education institutions that implement extensive gender equality efforts or manages to improve gender equality. This kind of financial incentive has not been realised. However, other suggestions from the Delegation have been carried out, for example increased emphasis on gender mainstreaming in the operations of the higher education institutions.

The University of Gothenburg and the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research will be commissioned to lead the work of mainstreaming gender in higher education. This is suggested in the Swedish government's new budget bill for 2016. The budget for the increased mainstreaming efforts is suggested to annually five million SEK for the years 2016-2019.

Also suggested by the Delegation for Gender Equality in Higher Education was for example a more thorough evaluation of the distribution of funding from a gender perspective. The funding organisations also work with stimulatory initiatives through integrating the gender perspective in their operations. One such example is VINNOVA's Programme Gender and Diversity for Innovation that aims to develop and enhance gender equality research in order to promote long-term sustainable growth. Another initiative is the first study analysing how higher education institutions allocate their research appropriations from a gender equality perspective – performed by the Swedish Agency for Public Management in 2014. The results indicate that fewer women carried out research funded by research grants and pursued third-cycle studies than men. In 2013, 39 % of appropriations funding was used for women's salaries and 61 % for men's salaries. The use of external research funding was generally more gender equal. The study also highlights that gender equality rarely was among the criteria used when higher education institutions allocated their research appropriations.

In May 2015 the Swedish Government (Minister for Higher Education and Research Helene Hellmark Knutsson) commissioned an expert group for gender equality in higher education that will work until December 31st 2016 to develop suggestions for actions and measures to be included in the next Government Bill (due Fall 2016). The expert group is expected to contribute with reforms that will increase the proportion of women professors; that will increase gender mainstreaming in the operations of Higher Education Institutions; and that will contribute to gender equality in the distribution of research funding.

The Swedish Equality Ombudsman has developed, in collaboration with Nyckeltalsinstitutet, a Gender Equality Index, called JÄMIX, building on nine different performance indicators that illustrate important elements of equality (such as leadership, career opportunities, salaries, health, part-time work and parental leave). Each year, Swedish workplaces, including higher education institutions, are evaluated according to this index and the most gender equal workplaces in each sector is paid tribute to.

Several higher education institutions have established their own prizes promoting gender equality in research. One such example is Uppsala University where the Equal Opportunity Council annually awards the Equal Opportunity prize (25,000 SEK) to an individual or to a group in the university that has contributed to increased equal opportunities concerning equal recruitment, leadership, teaching or otherwise prevented discrimination. Umeå University awards every other year the so called Görel Bohlins' prize (30,000 SEK) for excellent gender research. Lund University awards every year the Gunilla Jarlbro-prize to employees and leaders who have worked towards increased gender equality at the university. The Swedish National Union of Students has also awarded their gender equality prize to researchers and teachers dedicated to gender equality.

Key actors

The Equality Ombudsman (DO) is the government agency and legal body that focuses on gender equality and anti-discrimination in the labour market in general (including research organisations), by providing guidelines and carry out inspections of the work on gender equality plans in workplaces. In February 2013, DO was commissioned by the Swedish Government to perform an inspection of 48 Swedish higher education institutions and their work on equal opportunities and gender equality plans. These inspections were performed during 2013 and 2014 and in early 2015 DO reported back to the Swedish Government.

The Ministry for Health and Social Affairs is responsible for promoting gender equality in society and the Ministry of Education and Research is specifically in charge of the higher education institutions as government agencies.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) is a government agency that is responsible for monitoring the effective use of resources by the higher education institutions. They analyse the operations of the higher education institutions and their report provide the material for the Swedish Government to base decisions about higher education. They are responsible for the official statistics from the higher education institutions, for instance distribution of the teaching staff by age and sex, as well as the higher education institution's financial reporting.

The Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) is another government agency whose responsibilities span across the education sector. One of the main focus areas is the preventing discrimination and promoting equal treatment at universities.

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for a number of government agencies with the field of operations being to promote, support, organise and fund basic and advanced research. One of the most important of these funding agencies is the Swedish Research Council which has a remit that includes to promote gender perspectives in research and working for equality between men and women in the research community. Another government agency devoted to funding research is VINNOVA, working under the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communication, and promoting gender equality research for long-term sustainable growth. There is also the government-funded National Secretariat for Gender Research at Gothenburg University, which takes responsibility for monitoring research policy from gender perspective and to inform on gender research.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

All research organisations in Sweden are obliged, according to the Discrimination Act, to set up their own equality plans. Usually, these plans do not focus only on gender equality but also on other grounds for discrimination such as ethnicity, disability, class, sexuality and religion, according to the discrimination grounds in the Discrimination Act. As the latest Equality Ombudsman (DO) inspection showed, most institutions have done this although some exceptions did exist. The inspection highlighted that all of the major research organisations had set up equality plans, but three of them had to submit improved and updated plans after the inspection. DO considered that 19 of the equality plans were not implementing the planned measures. Seven research organisations had not reported how they had implemented the measures, in eight cases it was noted that monitoring of the measures had existed but without information about detailed implementation. Four equality plans lacked monitoring and evaluation.

A common theme in the plans is ensuring that there are equal opportunities at the boards, staff meetings, nominating committees and liaison groups). The plans often target the areas of working conditions, recruitment, harassment and discrimination. The strategies used in order to reach the objectives in the plans often consist of practices concerning mapping, action plans, follow-ups and evaluations. Some more detailed examples of objectives and measures involve to actively work to achieve an equal distribution between the sexes (60/40) regarding positions in a particular subject or department where there is an unequal distribution between the sexes and that more women should be recruited to appointments to professor and senior lecturer. Results from the follow-up work for equal rights and opportunities reveal in many cases that although local equality plans exist at the Department level, measures and actions have not been completed.

Many of these equality plans contain initiatives to increase the proportion of female professors, for example the plan at the University of Gothenburg. The Government's recruitment goal for Gothenburg stated that 40 % of new professors being recruited should be from the underrepresented sex (i.e. women) by no later than 2015. The specific measure used in order to reach the goal is the so-called Qualification Project that gives female senior lecturers (at docent level/associate professors) the opportunity to qualify for promotion to professor within the framework of a two-year period. The budget for this project during 2012-2015 has been 13 million SEK (50 % being university-wide funds and 50 % set aside by each faculty/department). Similar projects have been implemented at Linköping University and Stockholm University. Stockholm University received a recruitment target from the Government stating that 35 % of the newly recruited professors should be women and here also another strategy has been used in order to increase the proportion of women professors – inviting women guest professors in the natural sciences. Also Luleå University of Technology has been recruiting women guest professors and women adjunct professors. The same strategy has been adopted by Örebro University (recruitment target 39 % women professors) where the action plan also includes measures such as mentoring and career support in order to increase the recruitment base for women candidates for professorships. The plan at Örebro University also emphasises the importance of transparency in the recruitment processes and the need for standardized procedures concerning how positions are advertised and recruitment committees are composed. Karolinska Institutet received one of the highest recruitment targets: 47 % recruited women professors between 2012 and 2015. In addition to inviting women guest professors for one to two years, and hoping that they will stay after their guest professorship is over, the Institute is also making sure that a gender perspective is present in every step of the recruitment process, for example when selecting experts and peer reviewers in order to counteract the existence of unconscious bias.

Another theme that recurs in the equality plans concerns the distribution outcome for grants based on sex. The GEP thus involve measures related to the goal to create equivalent conditions for carrying out research for women and men. The first step in these measures is usually to investigate whether inequalities exist and propose measures to make equivalent conditions possible.

In addition to the equality plans, five Swedish universities are partners of EU-funded structural change projects: Gothenburg University (GENDERTIME), Luleå Technical University (GENOVATE), Chalmers Technical University (DIVERSITY), Uppsala University (FESTA) and Blekinge Technical University (GENIS LAB). Generally the approaches in these structural change projects are/were limited to Department level rather than University level although they are/were also developed in support and collaboration with the University's on-going gender equality work. They also primarily focused gender equality work in Departments within the STEM fields. None of these projects worked with "traditional" gender equality plans similar to the ones at central level described above. Instead, they have developed specific actions and measures that sometimes were integrated into the local equality plan (as in the case of FESTA) or seemed more ad hoc in relation to the central plan (as in the case of DIVERSITY). The funding from EU provided them with the opportunity for further development of gender equality tools and methods in close collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. It seems that the approach in the structural change projects is more creative, innovative and ground-breaking than the more traditional equality plans.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

AKKA programme at Lund University

AKKA is a gender integrated leadership programme offered university wide at Lund University. Between the years 2004-2014, five AKKA-programmes have been offered at Lund University and 150 senior scholars have participated. The first two programmes were so called women-only programmes; to the following programmes also men were invited to participate (in all 37/150). Reports from the programs are continuously published. The programme aims at raising gender knowledge and awareness, provide methods and tools for structural change in order to achieve sustainable gender equality in the university. AKKA's basic concept is that leadership can be learnt and developed and focus on the individual's competences, not on personal characteristics. The programme runs over a year with monthly meetings. The programme structure is built with three blocks: seminars, workshops and a project work. The problems addressed in the programme are gender structures in the academic gender regime or culture. The following issues are discussed: Why are there so few women leaders at Lund University? How does gender operate in the academic culture? What are the effects of the gender structures on academic organization and activity? In what ways is leadership gendered? Do women and men at the university enjoy equal opportunities and conditions?. In the latest programme (2013-2014), the gender perspective evolved to include gender in knowledge production. A gender sensitive leadership also contributes to an intersectional understanding of the gender concept. The following results and effects of the programme have been recognised:

- Increasing the number of women in leading positions:

- Increasing the number of women in leading positions;
- Raising visibility of women as potential leaders;
- Increasing willingness of both women and men to assume leadership;
- Raising gender awareness among academic leaders – men and women;
- Contributing to networking and collaboration within the university;
- Raising knowledge of university politics and activities;
- Developing tools to deal with resistance to gender issues, and for change management;
- Contributing to highlight discrimination;
- Developing concrete change projects.

Code of Practice at Luleå University of Technology

The Code of Practice is prepared as part of the structural change project GENOVATE at Luleå University of Technology. The Code of Practice is a set of recommendations designed to facilitate a change process at the university in terms of improved gender equality and to promote equal opportunities for women and men in research and innovation. The Code includes examples of gendered structures and conceptions at the university to assist staff to understand how academic discourse is gendered and how to avoid reproducing stereotypes. The Code is designed to enhance gender-awareness of participants, challenge and transform gendered conceptions and stereotypes and contribute to equal opportunities for women and men in research, innovation and scientific decision-making bodies. The Code of Practice has been used in interactive collaborative workshops and dialogue seminars where participants collaborate on equal terms in a joint learning and knowledge sharing processes. It is supposed to inspire university staff to put gender issues on agenda, enhance gender-awareness and find ways of promoting the gender equality perspective in research, innovation and decision-making. The basic principles of the Code of Practice deal with transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity and they are supposed to contribute to excellence in research and innovation through gender equality and diversity. The recommendations concerns four different areas: 1) Organization and evaluation of research, 2) Innovation systems, 3) Recruitment and promotion practices, 4) Culture, values and structures.

Gender Sensitive PhD Supervisor Toolkit at Uppsala University

As part of the activities organized within the structural change project FESTA at Uppsala University a Gender Sensitive PhD Supervisory Toolkit has been developed. These activities are part of an objective to minimize the negative effect of gendered interactional patterns in academic environments on the career opportunities for women researchers. More specifically the activities target the supervisory relationships by addressing the socialization of PhD students and by improving supervisory practices. In particular in order to help women at the beginning of their careers, in a male dominated research environment, to find ways of surviving and competing. This will advance women's academic careers in two ways: 1) they will become more fully integrated in the community and therefore more motivated for an academic career and 2) the visibility of their specific value to the research community will be improved. During Fall/Winter 2014/2015 study circles on gender awareness in PhD supervision for PhD-supervisors were performed to ensure equal opportunities for you women and men at the beginning of their academic career. These activities have now become part of the Equal Opportunities Plan 2015-2017 for the Faculty of Science and Technology, adopted by the Board of the Disciplinary Domain/Faculty of Science and Technology 2015-01-20.