Conference "Gender and Excellence: Challenges in Research Funding II", 21 June 2016

Abstracts

Panel 1: Gender bias in the perception of excellence

When scientific excellence meets gender: An analysis of discursive interplays

Julia Nentwich, University of St. Gallen

'Scientific excellence', 'gender' and their interplay have been on the political agenda for more than a decade. We have ample evidence for the existence of gender bias in selection procedures. Furthermore, what counts as 'scientific excellence' has been criticized as inherently problematic. The 'ideal researcher' at work in many disciplines still seems to be white, male, without family responsibilities and ready to sacrifice the full person to the 'greedy occupation' of academia. At the same time, the emphasis on excellence has pushed the need for formal procedures and transparency and hence also contributed to the development of gender equality. In my talk I will explore the different ways in which 'gender' and 'scientific excellence' come together in 12 qualitative interviews that we conducted with both gender equality experts and/or members of decision-making bodies in higher education in Switzerland. Based on a discourse analytical reading I will point out the different consequences resulting from these various meetings between gender and excellence in their talk.

"It's the elephant in the room!" – (gender) bias in ERC grant selection

Helene Schiffbänker, Joanneum Research Vienna

Success rates in ERC starting grants have been systematically lower, so to find out whether a bias exists and which potential reasons could explain it, various aspects have been analyzed, like the past performance of the applicants, the composition of the peer review panels, the formalization and the practice of excellence, factors explaining grant success and word use in evaluation reports. The findings suggest that the bias is closely related to an only vaguely defined concept of excellence that leaves space to different individual review practices. Although some gender awareness exists, reviewers lack competence for taking gender into account in the peer review practice.

Gender differences in grant applications and awards, some evidence from the UK

Paul Boyle, University of Leicester

This presentation considers the role of women in Higher Education, focusing mainly on analyses of data from the Economic and Social Research Council, which is the largest funder of social science research in the UK. The results compare favourably with some evidence from medical funders, and the previous results from the ERC. However, it is also clear that women do not receive as much funding as men because they are far less likely to be in senior academic roles. We argue that despite the increasing commentary and debate on gender disparities in science, equality will not be achieved without proactive support from key institutions.

Panel 2: Gender perspectives in research

Gender equality and gender dimension in academic research

Vera Regitz-Zagrosek, Charité, Berlin

Gender equality is a key priority of the European Research Area and should be implemented in all Higher Education Institutions, including Academic Medicine. However, Academic Medicine lacks behind other disciplines in implementing gender equality plans and the gender dimension in research.
One reason may be that Academic Medicine is characterized by specific highly competitive academic, professional and commercial missions and working conditions. It is usually organized in a double structure between Medical faculties, responsible for research and teaching, and University hospitals, responsible for patient care. Both have different needs, are targeting different stakeholders, have different governance structures and require different work profiles. Therefore, a double load exists for those that pursue a career in both at the same time. Medical faculties are characterized by very competitive research and training conditions, and a focus on early career development and networking that makes it difficult to combine time for children and work. They also require high a workload for teaching. Furthermore, their structures are very hierarchical and request early placement in networks. University hospitals are characterized by demanding work profiles: needs for night shifts, overly long working hours, high competition for access to specialized training and research facilities and career options, etc. Gender imbalance in decision making processes in university hospitals may prevent recruitment of women, particularly into leading faculty positions.
Equally high clinical as well as scientific, leadership and teaching competences are required to build a career in these two areas. Building it in the same time between 25 and 40 years is a very high competition for childbearing and family care.
Introducing Gender dimensions in research and teaching will improve consciousness for gender aspects and for leadership in medical care. It is important for the quality of medicine and for an optimal health care for women and men.
To advance medical progress in Europe for better health of the society, we need integrated concepts to promote gender in faculty development, in academic leadership, in university hospitals and in biomedical research.

Gender research in STEM fields: Change of perspective and/or diversity of perspectives?

Carmen Leicht-Scholten, RWTH Aachen

The talk will discuss the concept of responsible research and innovation taking into account the social embeddedness of technology and technological processes.
It is argued that such a concept is indispensably interrelated with the integration of gender and diversity perspectives. This integration has to be realized at different levels and in doing so will not only lead to a change of perspectives but support to realize sustainable and social responsible research and innovation. Referring to actual projects it demonstrates in practice what sustainable and social responsible research and innovation can mean within STEM subjects.

GRI or the gender dimension in research: Recommendations from and for universities, to funders and others

Katrien Maes, LERU, Leuven

This presentation explores the issue of “GRI” (gendered research and innovation), which is about integrating sex and gender analysis into the funding, content and implementation process of research and innovation. LERU regards this as an important albeit under-recognised issue. Although it is rapidly becoming better embedded in certain research areas - for example, in biomedical research - in general, GRI is still unfamiliar, or not practiced, or not well integrated into the design of the research. Yet, good GRI policies and practices are vitally important to ensure that research results are equally valid for people of all genders and sexes, to improve global citizens’ lives in many ways and to help ensure that research and innovation are in tune with universities’ responsibility to society. It is crucial that GRI questions are posed at the onset of research, so that potentially costly fixes don’t have to happen later.

LERU recently published a paper investigating how the LERU universities (21 research-intensive universities in 10 European countries) have started to address GRI. We found developing policies and interesting practices, but we also found there is much work still to be done. For sure, we need concerted and systematic efforts to raise awareness of and provide training on GRI to members of all research stakeholder communities. We also need to work on the integration of GRI with other gender equality initiatives at all levels: through inclusion of GRI in government policies and strategies, funders’ programmes, universities’ gender equality strategies or action plans, research activities and researchers’ projects.

The LERU paper on GRI offers twenty recommendations for various stakeholders, including universities, funders, governments and journals. For example, universities should create awareness of GRI, provide tools for researchers to understand and apply GRI, and emphasise that funding or publication opportunities will be missed if GRI is not considered. Funders should adopt GRI policies, create incentives for researchers and showcase GRI research.