

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers: Opportunities for enhancing gender-equality efforts in the higher education sector

At a meeting on 8 April 2008 between the Committee for Mainstreaming – Women in Science (the KIF committee) and the Committee for Research under the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR), a discussion was held on the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (hereafter referred to as the Charter and Code). A gap analysis assessing the situation in Norway vis-à-vis the Charter and Code is now available. Please see the letter to the Ministry of Education and Research from UHR dated 22 September 2008 (08/444-1) in which UHR gives a brief summary of the work accomplished until now and the efforts that should be continued.

The cover letter to the gap analysis¹ explains the Charter and Code's objectives, which are interesting from the perspective of gender equality. Firstly, the letter points out that one of the document's most important objectives is to promote a common research culture. Secondly, the Charter and Code seeks to promote research, researcher recruitment and research training to a greater degree than is the case today, viewed as a whole. The KIF committee has argued on several occasions that it is precisely these areas which are vital for enhancing gender-equality efforts at the institutions, thus improving the gender balance. The KIF committee would therefore like to offer its input on the further efforts to implement the Charter and Code. With regard to the gap analysis, the KIF committee considers many of the working group's comments to be highly relevant in the context of gender equality although the committee does not address the gap analysis per se in its input here.

A gender-sensitive reading of the Charter and Code

Most of the points in the Charter and Code are formulated from a universal perspective. In general, this approach is positive since high-quality efforts in the areas addressed by the Charter and Code will attract both women and men to research as a career. The first KIF committee (2004-2006) pointed this out and believed that the document contains ideas that will help to improve the gender balance in academia.² It should be noted, however, that a universal approach could result in a failure to notice the gender differences that are significant for recruitment, career development and processes involving appointments to academic posts.³ Also, research recruits and researchers display different gender-related patterns related to their needs for career planning, views on the research and working environment, etc.

It is important to ensure that the Charter and Code is interpreted in a gender-sensitive manner during the implementation phase, i.e. a gender perspective should be integrated into future

¹ The secretariat for the working group is affiliated with the University of Bergen (2008/4956-BEKR).

² See p. 35 of "Gender balance in academia: Golden opportunities. Final report from the Committee for Mainstreaming – Women in Science 2004-2006" (*Kjønnsbalanse i academia – gylne muligheter. Sluttrapport fra Komité for integreringstiltak – kvinner i forskning 2004-2006*).

³ See "Science policies in the European Union. Promoting excellence through mainstreaming gender equality", ETAN report 2002. Also see Hovedhaugen, Kyvik and Bruen Olsen, "Women and men: Equal opportunities? Women's and men's career paths in academia" (*Kvinner og men – like muligheter? Om kvinners og menns karriereveier i academia*), NIFU STEP serial publication 25/2004.

strategies and policies. In this way, the Charter and Code will promote the institutions' own efforts to improve the gender balance among researchers. Although the document devotes a separate point to the challenges of achieving gender balance, in the committee's view this should not be an obstacle to applying a more integrated gender-equality perspective. Such integration might also generate interest in other countries involved in a process similar to that of Norway.

The most relevant points in terms of integrating a gender-equality perspective are those that deal with recruitment, career development and appointments to academic posts, such as:

- *Points 1.10 and 1.11 on relations with supervisors and others in leadership roles.*
- *Point 1.12 on continuing professional development.* Some universities and university colleges have had very good experience with qualifying grants for women. The grants have been awarded either in connection with mentor programmes or more generally to women who are pursuing education and training to qualify for professor-level posts.
- *Point 1.15 on the research environment.* Studies show that more women than men are dissatisfied with the research environment. It is believed that this is one reason women decide against a career in academia. The research environment should be viewed in connection with research conditions and the opportunity to engage in research collaboration in order to better understand the complexities of the gender differences identified in previous studies.⁴
- *Point 1.17 on stability and permanence of employment.* Another important reason that women choose not to pursue a career in research is uncertainty about their opportunities to obtain a permanent academic post. Although the relationship between permanent and temporary appointments is regulated, there is good reason to ask what the prevailing practice is regarding the use of temporary appointments in the higher education sector. This question entails a gender dimension. Studies show that even though more female than male research recruits plan careers in research, men are appointed to permanent posts more quickly than women. This might be explained in part by the fact that researchers in male-dominated fields are appointed more quickly to permanent posts.⁵
- *Point 1.20 on career development* (the working group has stated that consideration should be given to contesting this entire point) and *point 1.23 on access to career advice.* Studies show that female researchers generally want closer follow-up from their employer and

⁴ Elisabeth Hovedhaugen, Svein Kyvik and Terje Bruen Olsen, "Women and men: Equal opportunities? Women's and men's career paths in academia" (*Kvinner og men – like muligheter? Om kvinners og menns karriereveier i academia*), NIFU STEP serial publication 25/2004. For findings on the characteristics of good research environments that have been successful in recruiting women, see Vera Schwach, Ellen Brandt and Agnete Vabø, "The tension between research quality and demands for gender equality: A pilot study of research groups with a relatively high percentage of women" (*I spennet mellom kvalitet og krav til likestilling. En pilotstudie av forskningsmiljøer med relativt høyt andeler kvinner*), NIFU STEP working paper 8/2008.

⁵ Svein Kyvik and Terje Bruen Olsen, "PhD programmes and career opportunities: A study of two classes of PhD candidates" (*Doktorgradsutdanning og karrieremuligheter. En undersøkelse blant to årskull doktorgradskandidater*), NIFU STEP report 35/2007.

they cite lack of support as one reason that academia is not appealing enough as a career option. Some measures have produced positive results, such as closer follow-up in the form of performance reviews in which women's competencies are mapped with a view to further progression. Several points in the Charter and Code address the issue of career development and the responsibility of the employer.

- *Point 1.31 on appointment and recruitment.* It is crucial that recruitment policy is gender sensitive. A report on the tension between research quality and demands for gender equality (*I spennet mellom kvalitet og krav til likestilling*) from 2004 concludes that gender equality must be taken into account in overall recruitment policy. For example, a policy favouring younger recruits may prevent slightly older, highly qualified women from being recruited. The fact that women researchers are generally somewhat older than their male counterparts is due in part to the uneven distribution of care-giving duties between the genders.

Section 2: The European Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers

- *Point 2.1 on recruitment.* It is questionable whether vacancy announcements and recruitment efforts are designed in a manner that attracts the best candidates. Studies from Denmark show that the tendency in academia is toward rather narrowly defined announcements that usually generate very few applicants. Formal, transparent and broadly formulated announcements are generally known to increase the potential for more applicants of both genders. It would be beneficial to look closely at whether the employment process for researchers in Norway is successful at attracting good applicants of both genders.
- *Point 2.4 on the evaluation of qualifications.* The working group notes that Norwegian guidelines for evaluating qualifications are largely in keeping with the Charter and Code. Competition for posts in the higher education sector is keen, and more knowledge is needed about which factors ultimately play the greatest role in hiring decisions. One of the most positive aspects of the document is that it stresses the importance of the breadth of qualifications needed in research. This could lead to an acceptance of greater variation in a researcher's background than is the case today. The current debate on "public or perish" views academic publication as the most crucial factor in an academic career, whereas the Charter and Code presents this issue as much more complex. With regard to implementation, it would be beneficial to investigate how the process of evaluating qualifications for academic posts plays out in reality. More knowledge about this process would help to ensure that the intentions of the Charter and Code correspond to actual practice.

The KIF committee would like to wish the best to everyone involved in the ongoing efforts to implement the Charter and Code in Norwegian educational institutions.

Best regards,

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