

GENDER-NET Analysis report: Award schemes, gender equality and structural change

Summary report



Equality Challenge Unit



GENDER-NET

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND
INTEGRATION OF THE GENDER DIMENSION IN RESEARCH CONTENTS

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Further information

Gary Loke/Ashlee Christoffersen
info@ecu.ac.uk

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Executive summary

Introduction

The report summarises research undertaken to understand the impact of national and regional award schemes aimed at creating greater gender equality, and their ability to stimulate gender equality and enact **structural change** with regard to gender equality in research institutions. The focus of this report is award schemes that recognise individual higher education/research institutions and/or departments, and which can be expected to have some impact in their aim to affect the institutional environment for academic researchers with respect to the representation and retention of women. This report considers whether each of the gender equality award schemes delivers structural change, and identifies elements of successful gender equality award schemes that could form part of a transnational award.

As defined by the European Commission (EC, 2012A), the preconditions for, and essential elements of, structural change, are:

- = the creation of an evidence base, for instance through gender disaggregated data on recruitment, retention, promotion, pay, and committee representation, gender impact assessments and staff surveys
- = top-level support
- = beginning to develop management practices that recognise and aim to mitigate or overcome gender barriers

Structural change means:

- = making decision-making more transparent
- = removing unconscious bias from institutional practices
- = promoting excellence through diversity
- = improving research by integrating a gender perspective
- = modernising human resources (HR) management and the working environment

This research was undertaken as part of the GENDER-NET ERA-NET project, a pilot transnational research policy initiative funded by the European Commission under the Science in Society work programme of the seventh Framework Programme (FP7). GENDER-NET is designed to address the common challenges still facing European research institutions in achieving gender

equality in research and innovation. This European Research Area Network (ERA-NET) brings together a balanced partnership of 12 national programme owners from across Europe and North America (for example ministries, national research funding agencies or national organisations) with a shared commitment to gender equality and synergistic expertise in gender and science issues. Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) is a GENDER-NET partner. ECU is also the owner and manager of Athena SWAN, one of the award schemes considered in this research, and has an interest in ensuring that this scheme is successful.

Eight different award schemes were assessed. Six are specific to higher education/research; two are more general; three are specific to certain disciplines; one is a Europe wide scheme that is not gender specific, but includes consideration of gender equality amongst other criteria. Some of the award schemes considered have a limited number of potential recipients, while others do not; three have three progressive levels of award.

Some award schemes considered reward actions that have already been implemented, and some provide a framework where research institutions commit to adopting actions. One award scheme provides funding to implement actions. Award schemes may exist in the absence of strong legislative directives on research institutions to work toward gender equality among researchers; or they may reward practice that goes beyond what is required by law; or they may act as an incentive or strategy for better compliance with the law.

Within one award scheme, holding an award is a requirement for certain types of research funding.

Methodology

The methodology combined desk research, analysis of evaluations of the award schemes considered where they existed, and interviews with those involved in applying for, managing and sponsoring award schemes. The research explored questions such as:

- = What national/regional gender equality award schemes exist within Europe and internationally that are related to research careers?
- = What has been their impact? What are the differences in impact across the award schemes?

- = What are the key characteristics of gender equality award schemes?
- = Do the respective award schemes enact structural change?
Are certain characteristics of award schemes more/less effective in doing so?
- = What elements of existing award schemes are transferrable?
- = What are common shared features of successful award schemes that should form part of a transnational award?

Award schemes

All of the gender equality award schemes that were found to exist in Europe have been included in the research, as have two further international examples to add a different perspective.

Athena SWAN (UK and Ireland)

Athena SWAN is one of just two award schemes considered that has had a robust evaluation. It was evaluated when it had been running for eight years.

Athena SWAN has achieved a high participation rate in part because it has been linked to research funding, unlike the other award schemes considered. Impact has been demonstrated in terms of women's perception of improvement in their career development, achieving top-level support, positive change in the work environment and culture change. It is unique in the comprehensiveness of its data requirements and in awarding at both institutional and departmental level. Particular impact has been demonstrated at departmental level. It also encourages benchmarking to individual institutions and departments, rather than to the wider sector or to a prescribed set of measures. Athena SWAN is significantly resourced by its sponsors.

HR Excellence in Research (Europe)

While the EC HR Excellence in Research mark addresses gender in its principles, there is inconsistency in whether gender is addressed in action planning among institutions that hold the mark. No impact has yet been evidenced in terms of structural change for gender equality. Impact in individual institutions may emerge from the external evaluation process which is ongoing at the time of writing. Across eligible countries, participation in the scheme is relatively low. Information on the extent of resourcing of the scheme by its sponsor was not available.

Gender Equality Award (Norway)

The Gender Equality Award was the only award scheme considered that awarded funding for measures to achieve structural change for gender equality. It was reliant on significant resourcing from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. During the course of this research, the award was discontinued. No overall evaluation of the award scheme was conducted. Some award winners used the funding for direct measures to improve the representation and retention of women. Impact has been demonstrated in terms of achieving concrete top-level support.

In Norway, some of the components of structural change are addressed by other programmes.

Gender Equity in the Workplace Award (Australia)

In the absence of an award scheme that is specific to higher education and research in Australia, the Gender Equity in the Workplace Award is one of several more general schemes that have seen participation from research institutions. The scheme has been running only since 2012 and information on its impact across research institutions is not available.

The Pleiades Awards (Australia)

This is a new, discipline-specific scheme that is inspired by Athena SWAN which has emerged in the absence of an award scheme specific to higher education and research. No impact has yet been demonstrated. It is intended that this scheme operate with a low level of resourcing.

Project Juno (UK and Ireland)

Project Juno is one of two award schemes considered that has been subject to a robust, external evaluation, completed when the scheme had been running for five years.

Project Juno is a discipline-specific scheme. While it has not been concretely linked to research funding in the same way that Athena SWAN has, the research funding environment has provided an impetus for engagement with the scheme in some institutions. Impact has been demonstrated in terms of securing top-level support, improving transparency in decision-making, positive change in the work environment and culture change. The scheme is offered at no cost to applicants, and is resourced by the Institute of Physics (IOP). The scheme stands out among those considered in prescribing a specific set of measures that institutions should

work towards implementing in order to achieve an award, and in the significant support provided by the IOP.

Total E-quality Award (Germany)

Gender equality is integrated into some research funding criteria in Germany, which may influence participation in the Total E-quality award scheme, as may the federal government's support for the scheme. In contrast to some of the other award schemes considered, Total E-quality is not academic led, and academic involvement is limited. The scheme has not been formally evaluated, so the impact that has been demonstrated is limited. The scheme is considerably resourced by its sponsors.

Proposed Gender Equality Award (Iceland)

In 2011 the government of Iceland published a parliamentary resolution on a four-year gender equality action programme in which it committed to establishing a gender equality award in the university sector. There is a more general gender equality award that operates across sectors but no university has received it. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture did not receive as much funding to implement this as was hoped. It was intended that there would be awards in 2013 and 2014. However, to date the gender equality award is still in development.

Desirability of a transnational gender equality award scheme

On balance, the evidence indicates that award schemes are an effective means of driving, and together with gender equality measures, creating structural change in the context of research institutions. Elements inherent to awards such as prestige, recognition, competition and reputation, which are valued by HEIs in diverse national contexts, come out positively and strongly in the literature and interviews.

External benefits

In 2009 the report *Gender equality awards and competitions in Europe* (Wiesemann et al 2009) shared research conducted as part of the development of the Total E-quality award, on European awards for organisational and HR activities that improve equal opportunities. This research found that 'a central idea in most of the awards is the desire to honour and generate publicity for outstanding organisations that are examples of good practice', with awards generating a positive external image and a sharing of good practice.

Internal benefits

Awards can provide an impetus and increase the pace of change and the process of applying can be itself motivating (Munir et al 2014), if continuous progression and monitoring are built in. In some cases an award scheme is the primary motivator for senior managers to progress gender equality.

The schemes considered also largely motivate, value and reward practice that goes beyond national legal requirements, and schemes remain relevant in contexts where gender equality legislation is relatively strong.

Award schemes provide a framework in which ongoing gender equality work can be documented, discussed, measured, celebrated and shared with other institutions.

Award schemes that operate across institutions can also be viewed as cost effective. For instance in the context of austerity and a retrenchment in funding, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Ireland was keen to enhance the impact of investment in education through sharing services between institutions. Athena SWAN fits the shared services approach, in terms of rolling it out on a national level.

Context

National context is important to consider as it is evident from the experience of Athena SWAN that factors such as funding criteria influence participation in award schemes.

Interest in a transnational award scheme has been evidenced by research. The survey of Total E-quality award holders found that 'there is interest expressed by a large number of those surveyed regarding a European award for equality of opportunity for both sexes; this interest was particularly marked among the academic institution award holders' (Feldmann and Goldmann 2009). Universities consulted were in favour of a transnational award because they felt it may help them to achieve European research funding and it would give incentives to women academics from elsewhere to work at their institution, thus assisting mobility.

Additionally, the EC recently commissioned a feasibility study for the extension of the EC HR Excellence in Research mark into a certification scheme. The consultation that was conducted found 'widespread support for the further promotion of good practice

in HR management at the European level, with a majority of respondents in favour of the introduction of a new certification scheme' (Technopolis Group 2014). Furthermore, the respondents in this GENDER-NET WP2 Task 4 project, together with others contacted over the course of the research, when told that the project was considering a transnational award, expressed interest and support.

According to one of the organisers of a workshop of award-giving institutions connected with earlier research into European gender equality award schemes, it was felt that it was not possible to proceed with a transnational award at that time (in 2009). The award-giving institutions present felt they did not have enough resources and it was difficult to achieve consensus around what elements of which award scheme would be extended transnationally. It is worth noting that several of the awards considered in the research are no longer in operation, due to a lack of long-term resourcing. The report, written following the workshop, stated however: 'it would... be conceivable that organisations that so far have only offered national awards could extend their radius of action to other European countries.' (Wiesemann et al 2009). This funding is supported by this GENDER-NET research.

Conclusions

Conditions for impact

It has been demonstrated that support from governments, and particularly, conditionality for research funding are positively linked to participation in award schemes. This will be an important consideration going forward in considering the development of a transnational gender equality award scheme.

Where gender equality is not the primary focus of an award scheme, little action or impact has been evidenced and therefore this report recommends that any transnational award scheme must have a gender focus.

Impact has been demonstrated within schemes that are adequately resourced, and so consideration must be given to how a transnational gender equality award scheme is resourced to be sustainable.

Creating structural change

In terms of structural change, the impact of some award schemes has been demonstrated on certain indicators of women's representation and retention; for example, women's perception of improvement in their career development. Impact has been demonstrated in terms of:

- = achieving top-level support
- = positive change in management and the work environment
- = improving transparency in decision-making
- = cultural change

Key characteristics for impact

Based on the available evidence, in terms of achieving structural change impact has been demonstrated within schemes that have the following key characteristics:

- = are specific to higher education and research
- = have significant academic involvement
- = have an emphasis on continuous progression
- = necessitate departmental-level action
- = require a self-assessment based on data, action planning, and monitoring of progress and impact
- = take a culture-change approach

Recommendations for a transnational award

The evidence presented in this report indicates that award schemes are an effective means of driving and creating structural change. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the creation of a transnational award, results which have been replicated by prior studies.

Based on the analysis, evidence and impact assessments shared in this report, it is recommended that a joint transnational award or incentive on gender equality be developed jointly by representatives from across Europe, with regard to the following:

- = conditionality of EU-level funding to holding the transnational award
- = a focus on gender and specificity to research and higher education

- = appropriate resourcing for sustainability
- = consideration of extending existing successful award schemes Europe-wide to maximise impact
- = guiding values and/or principles, rooted in the specific issues that exist across Europe in terms of gender equality in research careers, including student progression into research careers, and women's representation in high-level positions
- = continuous progression: levels of award, two-year duration, stringent renewal process, requirements to progress, merit based, with multiple awards conferred
- = awards conferred at both institutional and departmental level, and across all disciplines
- = academic lead involvement
- = aim to create structural change:
 - requiring comprehensive gender disaggregated quantitative data, together with qualitative data concerning experiences and barriers, including data on gender balance in committees, boards, and other decision-making structures, and data on pay, with reference to the indicators that the GENDER-NET project will develop
 - in consideration of promoting excellence through diversity, requiring data with attention to other equality characteristics, where permitted within national legislative contexts, in order to ensure that the award scheme and associated gender equality measures involve and benefit all women across ethnicity and other characteristics
 - requiring top-level support: this could be measured by the proportional allocation of institutional resource to gender equality work
 - requiring a flexible self-assessment of management practices and the work environment, that strikes a balance between recognising the unique context of each institution/department/discipline, and providing measures which indicate and prescribe what some expectations around good practice are, including unconscious bias training for staff involved in recruitment, appraisal and promotions processes, and measures around parental leave, for example support for returners

- assessment to include the extent of recognition of academics' work on the award scheme in the workload model or equivalent
- = require action planning based on the self-assessment, and a monitoring of progress and impact
- = require publication of action plans
- = take a culture-change approach
- = assessment by peer review: this was also recommended by the EC-commissioned feasibility study as a pragmatic solution to legal and institutional compatibility issues

Based on these recommendations, in work package four of GENDER-NET, work will be done to draft a possible framework for a transnational award. This will also include consideration of whether the award scheme should include the integration of gender analysis in research contents and programmes, based on the work carried out in work package three.

For more information about GENDER-NET please visit www.gender-net.eu

Equality Challenge Unit

ECU works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK, and in colleges in Scotland.

ECU works closely with colleges and universities to seek to ensure that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged because of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or through any combination of these characteristics or other unfair treatment.

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Equality Challenge Unit

7th floor, Queen's House
55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London, WC2A 3LJ
T 020 7438 1010
F 020 7438 1011
E info@ecu.ac.uk
www.ecu.ac.uk

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