GENOVATE

Transforming Organisational Culture for
Gender Equality in Research and Innovation

Gender Equality and Diversity Competent Research Excellence Standards: Guiding Principles

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Gender Equality in Research and Innovation

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The Guiding Principles on Gender Equality and Diversity Competent Research Excellence Standards were produced as part of the GENOVATE project.

GENOVATE[1] is a European Commission FP7-funded action research project, which operates across seven[2] European partner institutions with different institutional and national contexts for gender equality. GENOVATE sought to promote gender equality in research and innovation through the implementation in each partner institution of a context-specific Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAP).

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Contents

Throughout this document reference is made to the binary genders of men and women whilst acknowledging other forms of gender identities and expressions.

Introduction

The promotion of gender equality in research and innovation is a vital part of the GENOVATE project. The full participation of women and men in all aspects of research endeavour is key to positive career progression in academia. It is essential to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in access to promotion, research funding and decision-making positions in higher education institutions. This report seeks to provide higher education institutions, research bodies and funding institutions guiding principles on gender equality and diversity competent research excellence standards, ensuring in particular that the achievements of women and men researchers are assessed on the same basis. The report will help encourage a more systematic way of thinking about assessment of research excellence standards.

Rationale

These Guiding Principles emphasise the need to strengthen research excellence policies in the context of gender equality with the key objective of developing institutional codes of practice for assessing research excellence. This document synthesises institutional codes developed by the GENOVATE partners into a set of Guiding Principles to enhance research excellence through gender equality and diversity. These Guiding Principles were developed following reviews of existing assessment criteria and consulting with key stakeholders within GENOVATE universities and in external organisations. The Guiding Principles are underpinned by themes of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity.

Achieving meaningful and sustainable impact in the area of research excellence assessment will be supported by the wider activity of the project in transforming the culture and values of universities into more gender-aware and gender-competent environments and in increasing the number of women involved in setting the agenda and making decisions within the research enterprise as a whole.

Meritocracy and research excellence

The concept of meritocracy as a means of achieving academic excellence is widely challenged by scholars as being an ambiguous social construct that is fundamentally gender-biased (European Commission 2004; Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012a; Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012b; Gheaus, 2014; Knoppers et al., 2013). Critical analysis and scientific evaluation of the meaning, characteristics and the correspondent use of 'excellence' is lacking. While there are guidelines for excellence that have been found to vary across disciplines (Gheaus, 2014; Shen, 2013; Bevan and Learmonth, 2013), the question still lingers of whether such criteria are met by all gender groupings. Despite the growing concern of 'pure' meritocracy being impossible to achieve, universities and other organizations worldwide continue their efforts to utilize this phenomenon as a benchmark for excellence, to signify the highest achievement in academic performance (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012a). This minimises the impact of context (e.g. a single-sex interviewing panel) and culture (e.g. implicitly accepted gender normative expectations, such as that a scientist must be 'single-minded' - a characteristic associated with males – rather than 'dedicated', which is perceived as a female attribute) (European Commission, 2012).

Knights and Richards (2003: 213) argue that the very system within academia with its definition and measurement of performative indicators, such as uninterrupted research activity in a meritocratic institution is oriented towards 'a masculine approach to career success'. This point is echoed by Deem (2007); in a feminist analysis, she found research excellence to be closely co-related with male performance. Other studies show that performance indicators tend to emphasise areas where men excel. For example, women are disadvantaged by the emphasis on quantity rather than quality of outputs (Rice, 2013; Jacobson, 2013). The peer review process, when not anonymised, tends to favour men (Budden et al, 2008). The use of citations as a measure of impact can disadvantage women

as there is evidence that men benefit from the effect of 'same-sex citation' (Maliniak et al, 2013; Sugimoto et al, 2013). It appears that as long as quantity of publications and citation statistics, which favour men, remain as leading barometers of quality within academia and closely correlated with research excellence, that women will struggle to surmount the structural barriers to access funding and progress within academia (Jacobson, 2013; Rice, 2013; Jones, 2013).

In addition, males are perceived to exhibit self-confidence, certainty and clarity with regard to career goals, while women tend to lack confidence (Manfredi et al, 2014:34) and self-promotion skills (O'Connor, 2012:91). Males emerge as the 'stars' (Jones, 2013; Doherty & Cooke, 2011:11) of the academic firmament while women and minorities, in the main, take up less prestigious roles. As Rice (2012: 18) asserts in his review of academia, university systems cannot be hailed as meritocratic as long as prevailing attitudes on parenthood discriminate against mothers, unconscious bias remains unchallenged and women continue '… to meet stumbling blocks that their male colleagues don't..'

Evidence suggests that although assessment of academic excellence is of significance and does hold value, in reality it is not practiced with deep understanding of the complexities underlying gendered construction of academia, leadership and broader diversity issues in higher education (Manfredi, et al., 2014; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Gender-biased views, socially constructed criteria, and influences of power and control are all factors that need to be taken into consideration as inevitable subjectivities that will prevail in any decision-making arena.

Gender-based analysis and impacts are increasingly required as key considerations of research funding. Gender-based analysis is a core tenet of the European Commission's Horizon 2020 funding framework. Similar initiatives are also being implemented in Canada, Taiwan, Korea and Norway while there is growing evidence that editorial boards of peer-reviewed journals are considering the implementation of gender-based analysis when considering selected publications (Schiebinger, 2014:6-7).

Success comes from recognising non-biased methods of measuring performance and applying them to practices and procedures, including promotion, recruitment and selection, looking beyond the traditionally accepted measures of excellence such as journal rankings, citation indexes, peer review systems, grant applications, and lengthy publication track records (European Commission, 2012).

In order to get the best out of its research and innovation systems there is an urgent need for the higher education sector to advance on gender equality in the academy. The mainstreaming of gender in the assessment of research excellence standards offers an important competitive advantage for strengthening the scientific endeavour through more effective deployment of the human capital of all genders and increasing the international competitiveness of the higher education research workforce in general.

Development of the Guiding Principles

These Guiding Principles on gender and diversity competent research excellence standards were developed through focussed activities in the six core GENOVATE partner institutions in collaboration with key external stakeholders. The principles were tailored to the specific context of each institution but recognising that this is strongly influenced by other bodies at national and international levels, including research policy-makers, funding bodies and professional bodies. Members of the task coordinating institutions, University of Bradford and University College Cork, were available to provide advice to partners throughout the process of the development.

The development of the Guiding Principles involved several overlapping stages [see Figure 1]. Commencing with the preparatory stage, University of Bradford GENOVATE team delivered two online training sessions on Equality Impact Assessment and Analysis [EIAA] to other partners. To promote relevance of the product, each partner produced an outline of exactly how they saw the task of developing a code of practice for embedding gender equality and diversity into research and innovation excellence standards within the context of their broader institutional Gender Equality Action Plan. It was recognised that the specific areas partners would focus on in conducting their EIAAs and developing their institutional Code of Practice might differ significantly, depending on the local policies and practices in relation to research excellence standards. The methodology was viewed as a framework for guiding and coordinating these activities.

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Stage 1: Each GENOVATE partner organisation conducted a full Equality Impact Assessment and Analysis of their institution's research and innovation excellence standards, drawing on guidelines based on the University of Bradford's Equality Impact Assessment document. This ideally took the form of an institutional self-assessment and was contextualised to the local context and with reference to equality legislation in each country. Parallel to this, partner organisations developed strategic relationships with national level funding councils and professional organisations to share learning.

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Stage 2: Each partner conducted a documentary analysis of national-level policy in relation to gender equality in research excellence, which was informed by findings from EIAA, in order to assess how national policies impact on, or play out, at the local level.

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Stage 3: Drawing on Stages 1 and 2, partners identified gaps between national policies and institutional implementation and practice.

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Stage 4: This stage involved a buddy system for paired partners to review each other's EIAA and to provide mutual support in production of final Institutional Codes of Practice.

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Stage 5: This stage involved the synthesis and production of the Guiding Principles. Each partner developed a Code of Practice, along with key stakeholders, for gender and diversity competent research excellence standards for their own institution (and the sector), based on the principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity, ensuring harmonisation of key principles between partners. The Codes of Practice drew on the EIAAs; however work on this commenced in parallel with earlier stages, as relationships were being developed with key stakeholders. Institutional Codes of Practice have gone through extensive internal consultation with management and other internal and external stakeholders. The six codes of practice were synthesised into the set of Guiding Principles contained in this document.

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PREPARATORY STAGE

TRAINING ON EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS [EIAA]

IDENTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL RELEVANCE FOR THE TASK

STAGE 1

EIAA OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH EXCELLENCE STANDARDS

STAGE 4

BUDDY SYSTEM FOR EIAA WORK AND PRINCIPLES DEVELOPMENT

STAGE 2

DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL LEVEL POLICY

STAGE 3

IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS

STAGE 5

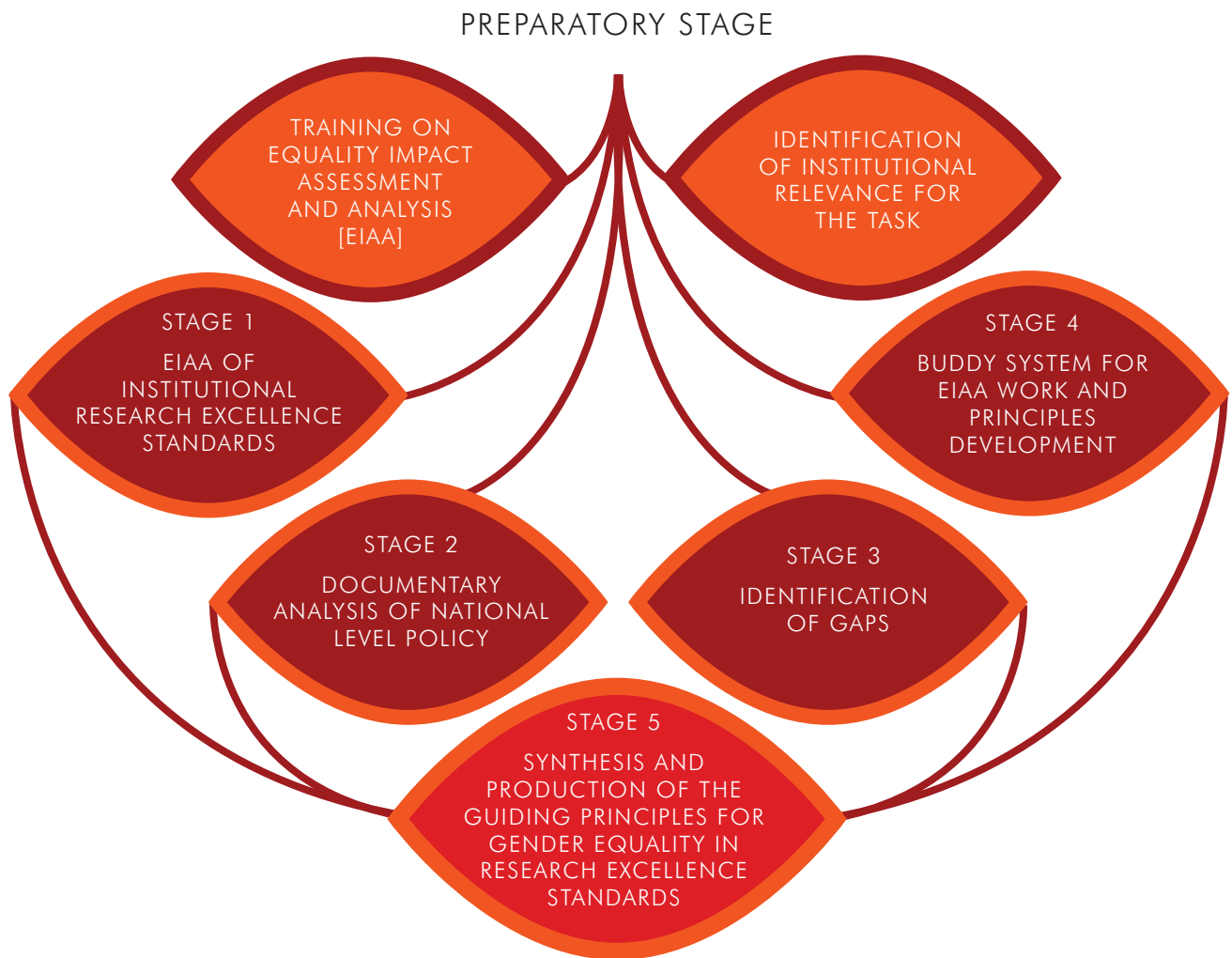SYNTHESIS AND PRODUCTION OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH EXCELLENCE STANDARDS

Figure 1: Process of Development of the Guiding Principles

How to use the guidelines

This document outlines a set of Guiding Principles for universities and other research bodies and organisations, which seek to promote research excellence in a gender-competent way.

This includes universities and research institutions as well as other higher education institutions, international and national-level policy-makers in the areas of research and innovation, research funding organisations, research councils and professional organisations.

Within universities and research institutions, these Guiding Principles may be applied to a wide range of policy and practice contexts where concepts of research excellence are assessed, such as:

- Staff recruitment, promotion, progression and retention processes
- Internal research funding schemes such as research support funds, internal postgraduate studentships, seed-funding schemes, conference travel funds and others
- Research achievement awards and prizes
- Applications for sabbatical and other research leave schemes
- Research quality review processes
- Staff performance review/appraisal processes
- Research, innovation and knowledge transfer strategic planning
- Research management processes

Institutions should explore where and how the Guiding Principles could be embedded within existing or new institutional policies and practices. In applying the Guiding Principles, or in developing their own institutional Codes of Practice, institutions are advised to conduct preparatory work to ensure equality impact assessment or gender analysis of institutional and national policies is undertaken. This will assist in contextualising the application of the Guiding Principles. The operationalization of these Guiding Principles will of necessity be contextually-specific and will need to take account of circumstances specific to each institution or organisation. Engagement with national stakeholders involved in research excellence standards is also crucial in the development and implementation of the Guiding Principles for particular contexts. The GENOVATE Methodology for developing institutional or organisational Codes of Practice as outlined above could be adapted to different institutional contexts.

Core Principles

The Guiding Principles on gender equality and diversity competence in research excellence standards are based on four foundational principles:

Transparency
All processes relevant to research excellence standards will be transparent, and information on how research excellence or quality is defined in any particular context will be made available to all staff, including those on leave arrangements;

Consistency
Research excellence standards and criteria will be applied consistently within any process, to promote and ensure gender equality and diversity competence in the application of research excellence standards;

Accountability
There will be clear lines of accountability and responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and review of research excellence standards to ensure gender equality and diversity competence;

Inclusivity
The Guiding Principles seek to promote an inclusive environment by enabling institutions to ensure gender equality and equality of opportunity for all those whose work is relevant to areas where research excellence standards are applied.

Operational Principles

The following practices, where appropriate and possible, facilitate the achievement of gender competent research excellence:

1. Gender Competence in Research Excellence Criteria

- Ensure criteria and evaluation procedures and practices in relation to research excellence are transparent.

- When assessing research excellence, use clearly-defined criteria, indicating on what basis judgements of strength or weakness are to be made, and how criteria should be prioritised.

- Communicate criteria to all potential applicants/nominees.

- Provide both written and verbal feedback on the outcomes of assessments.

- Make sure that assessments of research excellence are carried out in relation to clearly defined and published criteria.

- Use a range of criteria which reflect the diversity of research excellence and which go beyond standard metrics. Consider using criteria which recognise and reward qualities such collaboration, teamwork, mentorship, creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and inter-disciplinarity.

- Develop indicators of research excellence, which recognise the value to research and scholarship of strong achievement in the mentoring of early-career researchers, research students and other research roles.

- Use qualitative as well as quantitative indicators of research excellence, differentiating clearly between the two.

- Assess processes of research production as well as the products.
- Acknowledge disciplinary differences in the use of criteria, particularly in the use of bibliometrics.

2. Gender Equality in Evaluating Research Careers

- Develop inclusive eligibility criteria for internal processes relating to research awards, research funding, scholarships and prizes, etc, by allowing all research-active staff, regardless of contractual status, to participate.
- As evidence suggests that an emphasis on a cumulative and unbroken research track record over a long period of time may disadvantage women, use evaluations based on shorter time-periods or assessment on pro-rata basis to facilitate more equal comparisons.
- Clearly define individual circumstances[3] that should be taken into account in evaluating researchers' research profiles, such as periods of leave, workloads, and so on. Outline exactly how such circumstances should be taken into account in evaluations.
- Develop confidential and ethical procedures for taking into account more complex personal circumstances[4] in evaluating researchers' research profiles.
- Monitor gender ratios among applicants and successful candidates for internal processes relating to research awards, research funding, scholarships and prizes, etc.
- Monitor gender ratios among applicants and successful candidates for academic and research recruitment and promotion processes.
- Monitor gender ratios among applicants and successful candidates for sabbatical and other research leave schemes.
- Publish monitoring data on the gender ratios in relation to recruitment, research related awards, promotion, and research leave on an annual basis.
- Consider early-career researchers separately from other researchers in internal processes relating to research awards, research funding, scholarships and prizes, etc.

3. Gender Balance in Decision-making Processes and Structures for Research Excellence

- Aim for gender balance in the membership of all committees/panels tasked with making decisions based on ideas of research excellence and research quality. Document reasons for any lack of gender balance.
- Consider extending invitations to join such committees/panels to external female researchers and experts, where in-house expertise is limited.
- Ensure in-house women are made more visible so that their expertise is sought-after for membership of decision-making committees/panels.
- Provide equality training for all members of such committees and panels.
- Before decisions are taken, consider the effects on women and men.
- Make processes of nomination and membership of such committees/panels transparent.
- Create research group/department structures and systems that enable women and men to progress and continue in their careers.
- Aim for gender balance in research groups and teams.

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3 For example, periods of leave relating to family circumstances or illness, part-time working, career breaks, maternity, paternity or adoption leave, etc.
4 For example, disability, ill-health, constraining factors related to pregnancy, caring responsibilities etc.

4. Integrating Gender Perspectives in Processes of Research, Knowledge Production and Knowledge Transfer

- Develop, communicate and implement standards for the incorporation of gender and diversity analysis into basic and applied sciences as part of institutional research excellence standards.

- Ensure researchers consider gender dimensions in research design, methods, analysis, dissemination and knowledge transfer.

- Include a question on the gender and diversity dimensions of projects for applicants to institutional research funding schemes.

- Support specific research on gender and diversity to feed into all disciplines and research subjects.

- Emphasise added-value aspects of gender equality in research - such as creativity, expanded research arenas and more accurate and socially-relevant research.

- Support new perspectives and new research models.

- Create gender-competence in innovation support systems, for example, commercialization tools, technology-transfer offices and campaigns.

- Render visible, challenge and transform any possible symbolic links between masculinity and technology, innovation and science.

Training

In addition to existing training in equality and diversity, bespoke training and guidance on gender equality, diversity competence and unconscious bias will be available to every staff member who is involved in the assessment of research excellence standards.

Communication

Ensure that guidelines for gender equality in research excellence standards are communicated to all staff, including publication on institutional websites.

Ensure that all staff have an equal opportunity to familiarise themselves with and disclose circumstances that may have impacted upon their research productivity and outputs in processes where research excellence standards are applied.

Ensure that processes relevant to research excellence assessments are adequately communicated to all relevant staff and remain open for as long a period as possible to facilitate equal opportunity to apply and/or be nominated, whichever shall apply.

Provide an indication of consistent feedback mechanisms and processes.

Review, Monitoring and Equality Impact Analysis

Examine institutional processes periodically to ensure that they comply with guiding principles on gender equality in research excellence standards.

Conduct Equality Impact Analysis of institutional processes on a regular basis and identify actions to redress gender inequalities.

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