

Guidelines for active recruitment in appointment procedures

Results from the project

STARQ

Dr. Nina Steinweg, Kristin Poggenburg

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Preamble

Appointment procedures are an important field of action for personnel recruitment. Although there is a claim to select the most qualified candidates according to objective criteria, it has been proven that inequality-producing mechanisms to the disadvantage of female academics are still in place (Petrova-Stoyanov, Altenstädter, Wegrzyn, Klammer 2020: 56). Regardless of the question of how inequality-producing mechanisms operate in the procedures, the question arises as to why female academics do not apply for professorships according to their potential (cf. explanatory approaches Steinweg 2015: 15–28).

While debates on gender equality policy have so far focused on studies and research findings on appointment procedures in the narrower sense, i.e. on the work of the appointment committees, the focus is increasingly on the early phase of the appointment procedure, before the selection of applicants. The guidelines at hand are dedicated to this complex of topics, with a focus on the active recruitment of potential applicants. Active recruitment has established itself as an instrument for improving gender equality in appointment procedures. The professionalization and further development of active recruitment are primarily driven by practitioners. A conceptual elaboration that could contribute to standardization and professionalization is hardly available in the literature so far.

The recommendations for action at hand are intended to support those responsible for active recruitment in designing and implementing effective recruitment measures appropriate to the target group and embedding them in appointment regulations and guidelines, thus contributing to professionalization. After reviewing the relevant literature, the StaRQ project team developed a practice-oriented approach. For this purpose, an analysis of university documents (appointment regulations, appointment guidelines and handouts, recommendations, etc. on active recruitment) was conducted. Although the guidelines for action developed on this basis focus on the scope of application of universities, they are formulated in a largely open manner so that they can be individually adapted for use in non-university research institutions as well as in universities of the arts and universities of applied sciences. Nevertheless, some aspects are not readily transferable. For example, the market analysis recommended in 3.1. can be a suitable measure for designing gender-equal appointment procedures at universities, but because of the simultaneous requirements for academic training and professional practice, universities of applied sciences face the challenge of having to recruit from an unknown or less visible pool of applicants for professorships.

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1. Conceptual framework

1.1. Terminology

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to develop a uniform understanding of the specifications and activities for active recruitment (recruitment measures), it is recommended to use the term active recruitment across the board. Active recruitment is defined as the targeted, comprehensible search for suitable candidates, structured according to transparent procedural rules, as well as their positive, personal approach for a specific position or professorship.

EXPLANATION:

The practical evaluation showed that active recruitment is described with different but synonymously used terms, but the definitions and delimitations of the individual instruments for personnel recruitment differ considerably. The term active distinguishes person-oriented research and addressing from general recruiting, which is directed at an undefined group of people. General recruitment includes, for example, gender-sensitive marketing or the gender-neutral formulation of job advertisements. In order to contribute to a further standardization and professionalization and thus also acceptance of the recruitment measures nationwide, a uniform designation should be established.

1.2. Addressees

RECOMMENDATION:

It is advisable to explore and reflect on the extent to which active recruitment measures relate to decentralized and central organizational development goals, e.g. in the area of intersectional gender equality, internationalization, anti-discrimination and diversity. In principle, all those involved in recruitment processes should be sensitized to structural disadvantage or privilege due to different dimensions of inequality and their intersectional entanglement.

EXPLANATION:

Recruitment measures can fulfill different objectives in the context of university development. For example, the analysis of higher education documents revealed that, on the one hand, 42 percent present active recruitment as a gender equality tool, with the goal of increasing the proportion of women professors. On the other hand, however, about one-third of the universities also use this instrument independently of gender to recruit “outstanding researchers”¹. The phrases used indicate that active recruitment in the competition for the “best minds” can also be an instrument

¹ Phrasing based on § Section 6 (2) of the Statutes on the Conduct of Appointment Procedures at the Johann Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, as of November 2016, available online at https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/63813794/Berufungssatzung_final_2016_11_01.pdf.

within the framework of the universities' excellence strategy. Internationalization (13 percent) and diversity (8 percent) are rarely mentioned as objectives in the context of the university documents examined. Particularly with regard to the increasing focus on diversity in the higher education objectives, it should be reflected to what extent it makes sense to open up to other dimensions of inequality in order to do justice to social responsibility (Lorentzen 2017: 147–148).

2. Structures and processes

2.1. Requirements and binding nature

RECOMMENDATION:

In principle, it is recommended that active recruitment be integrated into the appointment procedure in a binding manner. This should be reflected in the relevant documents. It should also be examined to what extent threshold values for quotas can be defined, according to which the degree of bindingness for the individual process steps or recruitment measures is staggered. This may depend on the size and type of university as well as on the individual process design.

EXPLANATION:

Overall, only a low to medium degree of bindingness was found in the evaluation of the universities' appointment documents. Thus, these mostly remain with a reference to the possibility of active recruitment or a recommendation. However, if prerequisites for taking the measure of active recruitment are defined, it was found that this is accompanied by a higher degree of bindingness.

While in principle a binding embedding of active recruitment is recommended, the binding nature of the individual process steps or recruitment measures and the respective prerequisites can be defined on an organization-specific basis, in accordance with the organizational size, structure and type. The respective institution should reflect on and explore which degree of commitment is appropriate and realistic in each case.

PRACTICAL TIP: DEFINING THE REQUIREMENTS

Requirements could be defined in higher education documents as follows, for example:

If the quota of women in the department is less than 30 percent, active recruitment must take place before the announcement; if the quota of women applicants is less than 30 percent, active recruitment must take place after the application deadline. Exceptions must be justified in writing. If the quota of women or applicants is below 40 percent, active recruitment should be carried out. If there is parity among the professors in the department, active recruitment can nevertheless be a way of addressing qualified women in order to increase the theoretically suitable pool of applicants.

2.2. Structural embedding

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to achieve the highest possible level of commitment and acceptance, active recruitment can be mentioned in the appointment regulations. At the very least, however, it is recommended that a more detailed description of the measures be embedded in the appointment guidelines. In addition, further documents such as handouts or guides on active recruitment can be created, which contain more specific explanations on practical implementation.

EXPLANATION:

As the legal basis for the appointment procedures, the appointment regulations are a document with the greatest possible binding force, so that anchoring them there in principle is an important signal of the importance of active recruitment. In practice, however, the concrete design of processes, responsibilities and instruments is predominantly regulated in the relevant handbooks and guidelines.

An incorporation in the appointment regulations could be worded as follows:

In addition to public announcements, “active recruitment measures” should also be taken to recruit (international) applicants and, in particular, female academics who are eligible for appointment, such as a personal invitation to apply or an active search for information on institutes and professors working in the desired field. Active recruitment measures are to be carried out by at least one member of the appointment committee in consultation with the steering committee or by the steering committee in consultation with the appointment committee and documented in the minutes.

(Formulation based on § 3 para. 5 appointment regulations of Leuphana University of Lüneburg, as of October 2008.)²

2.3 Personnel embedding

Personnel responsibility

RECOMMENDATION:

The responsibility for approaching potential candidates depends on the time of contact (e.g. knowledge of the vacant professorship, approval procedure or appointment of the appointment committee). Depending on when the appointment committee begins its work, it may make sense to place responsibility in the faculty in advance of the first meeting of the appointment committee so that active recruitment can begin as early as possible. If the appointment committee is entrusted with active recruitment, the chairperson, in consultation with the committee, may assume responsibility himself or herself or delegate it to an internal or external member of the appointment committee. Depending on the personnel resources, the responsibility can also be distributed among several persons. These person(s) are responsible for coordinating activities

² https://www.leuphana.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Aktuell/files/Gazetten/Gazette_16_1.pdf

and/or researching and approaching suitable candidates throughout the appointment process, but may call in additional support.

EXPLANATION:

In order to take the complexity of extensive recruitment into account and to further formalize and professionalize the process, fixed responsibilities should be defined in advance. The establishment of a central coordinating role to increase the reliability of the process also makes sense due to the broad anchoring of active recruitment that is to be aimed for.

Personnel support and networking

RECOMMENDATION:

The involvement of the gender equality and, if legally required, diversity officer must be ensured throughout the entire appointment process. In joint appointment procedures, the gender equality representative of the non-university research institutions must also be involved. In addition, it is recommended that networking with the appointment management and the employees from the department or faculty takes place. Universities with a high number of appointment procedures can provide additional personnel resources to support the person responsible in the appointment committee, e.g. in the form of a full-time officer for active recruitment.

EXPLANATION:

A participatory and university-wide embedding of active recruitment serves the greatest possible acceptance of the measures and the commitment to the associated goals. In this way, all participants can act as multipliers of the recruitment measures. In particular, the inclusion of gender equality officers is important for the gender-sensitive design of the recruitment measures. Some federal states in Germany have diversity officers. Their participation rights in the context of personnel selection are still unclear in some cases. For active recruitment, an exchange and inclusion of the expertise of these persons is recommended in any case.

3. Practical implementation

3.1. Timing of recruitment activities

RECOMMENDATION:

In the approval process, the denomination of the professorship can already influence the potential field of applicants. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a market analysis in advance in order to consider gender-specific restrictions of the field and to adjust the denomination if necessary.

It is recommended to start recruiting when a vacant professorship becomes known or when a new professorship is conceived. At the latest parallel to the advertisement, suitable candidates should be researched and approached. In order to make the appointment committee aware of a possible

need for active recruitment measures, the chairperson should present the relevant figures on the current proportion of women or the underrepresented gender in the faculty/department at the first committee meeting. Reference can also be made to internal target quotas. It can also be determined that if the target quotas defined in the department (or faculty) are not reached, active recruitment should continue after the application deadline.

EXPLANATION:

By means of a market analysis based on a number of keywords related to the content of the professorship, an assessment can be made in advance of the approval process as to how high the chances are of finding sufficiently suitable candidates. If the search results indicate that there are not enough potential candidates in the field, the denomination can be adjusted or opened. The identified profiles should later also be included in the recruitment measures.

In a document from Bielefeld University (2018: 26) for the recruitment of women professors, there is a detailed practical guide on how to conduct the market analysis as well as a short checklist:

Check questions market analysis

- *Can 50% suitable female academics be demonstrated for a denomination on the scouting list?*
- *If not: How can the denomination be changed to increase the proportion of women?*
- *Who can give competent advice on this?*

Appointment committee members can be made aware of existing inequalities at the beginning of the process by presenting shares of women or shares of the underrepresented gender at the first committee meeting. Reference to other groups affected by inequality depends, among other things, on whether data is available on these.

Since a targeted search for qualified candidates takes time, they should be approached as early as possible and made aware of the vacant professorship. By actively approaching them in advance, the potential pool of applicants can be enlarged. This can reduce potential obstacles for female applicants and counteract homosocial recruitment of privileged applicants due to informal networks. The results of studies have shown that 77 percent of newly appointed women professors would not have applied if they had not been actively approached, as they apparently considered their qualifications and chances to be lower (Woelki, David 2015: 256–257).

3.2. Mode of the call for applications

Addressing the candidates

RECOMMENDATION:

The appointment committee or the person(s) responsible for approaching potential applicants should explore which form of approach is suitable and appropriate for the respective advertisement or the department/faculty/institute as a whole. Regardless of the chosen mode of application call, transparency and comparability of the approach activities must be ensured.

EXPLANATION:

Addressing potential applicants in writing and standardizing the cover letter within an appointment procedure serves to increase transparency vis-à-vis all applicants and increases comprehensibility in the further appointment procedure. By addressing potential applicants explicitly on behalf of the chairperson of the appointment committee and by a professor, the serious and official interest in an application can be emphasized. The address should be uniformly taken over by a person who also acts as a contact person for the potential candidates in the following.

Notes on contacting applicants**RECOMMENDATION:**

The contact and the invitation to apply must be characterized by appreciative and transparent communication and refer to equal opportunities with other applicants. As a rule, the invitation to apply is not in itself binding. Of course, only candidates who are considered to have realistic chances in the application process should be approached. In addition, the invitation can also name a trusted person to whom potential applicants can turn in confidence.

EXPLANATION:

Since the invitation to apply in the context of active recruitment is not a binding invitation or even an assurance of a place on the list, it must be clearly formulated in the cover letter that the candidates addressed are on an equal footing with other applicants. The aim is to encourage applications without raising false expectations. Confidential treatment of any application from the candidates approached and transparent information on the status of the procedure are also part of the communication standards. As part of appreciative communication, care should be taken to use appropriate pronouns or, where appropriate, a gender-neutral form of address.

3.3. Instruments of research**RECOMMENDATION:**

Various instruments should be used to research suitable candidates, such as databases, networks or headhunting by external service providers. It is recommended to additionally activate personal networks and to sensitize colleagues to systematically sound out suitable candidates at conferences and meetings as well as to evaluate relevant literature with regard to authors. In order to establish and expand contacts with outstanding academics in the run-up to the call for applications and to promote the university as an employer, they can be invited to events at the university, e.g. to guest lectures or search symposia. Information about the search tools should be easily accessible in the university documents as well as on the internet pages on gender equality and the relevant pages on appointment procedures.

EXPLANATION:

Databases are common and useful tools to systematically search for suitable candidates across disciplines. However, their usefulness may vary depending on the discipline as well as the respective

institution (e.g., in the case of artistic universities). Relevant national and international databases for female academics are for example [/femconsult](https://www.gesis.org/femconsult)³, [AcademiaNet](https://www.academia-net.org)⁴, femdat.ch⁵ or [Gage](https://gage.500womenscientists.org/)⁶. An international search increases the number of potential candidates.

Depending on which recruitment tools are used (e.g. headhunting), this may result in costs. In order to avoid uncertainties in the financing of active recruitment, it is recommended to clearly refer to the financing options and the necessary application formalities in the appointment guidelines. For this purpose, forms and applications can be made available on the university's internet or intranet presence. In order to ensure that the funds are made available as early as possible and at short notice, if required, and that the activities of active recruitment can begin immediately, any hurdles should be reduced as far as possible.

PRACTICAL TIP: SPREADING THE CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Accompanying recruitment measures are of great importance for increasing the proportion of women. While a gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory Internet presence of the department, university or institution can already contribute to an increase in the proportion of female applicants, a gender- and diversity-sensitive formulation of job advertisements and the choice of communication channels for its spread is also of utmost relevance. Although these are not measures of active recruitment in the narrower sense, they nevertheless serve the same goals. A wording as open as possible as well as a broad announcement of the call on a national and international level, e.g. via the distribution lists of the professional societies and relevant networks, can also contribute to an enlargement of the theoretical applicant pool. This reduces potential application barriers and increases the chance of receiving qualified applications from members of underrepresented groups. In this way, a gender- and diversity-sensitive design of the call for applications also represents a contribution to preventing informal recruitment by male-dominated networks and thus functions as an instrument for the implementation of gender- and discrimination-free appointment procedures.

3.4. Information and guidance for participants

RECOMMENDATION:

Appropriate information should be made accessible to all those involved in the process. For example, the appointment committee and all others involved in active recruitment should be able to access practice-oriented handouts. As a source of information for potential applicants, transparent information on the process and status of the appointment procedure and the procedure for active recruitment should also be provided on a publicly accessible portal.

³ <https://www.gesis.org/femconsult>

⁴ <https://www.academia-net.org>

⁵ <https://femdat.ch/>

⁶ <https://gage.500womenscientists.org/>

EXPLANATION:

By providing information and practical guidelines for action, the standardization and thus professionalization of active recruitment on the part of the university is to be further expanded. On the other hand, a high degree of transparency towards potential applicants is also part of an appreciative communication and can help to prevent obstacles to applications. General information (in English) on appointment procedures as well as on the status can prevent uncertainty - for example due to long waiting times - especially among international applicants who are not familiar with the German academic landscape.

4. Quality assurance in a narrower sense

4.1. Further education and training

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended to offer regular training and education for all persons involved in active recruitment, including useful background information on gender and diversity sensitization as well as practical advice on how to implement the measures. At the beginning of the first meeting of the appointment committee, an information block should also be scheduled in which the chairperson of the committee draws attention to the inequality-producing mechanisms in appointment procedures.

EXPLANATION:

The implementation of active recruitment requires a committed and appreciative approach, for which sensitivity to the disadvantages of various underrepresented groups is also necessary. To ensure that all members of appointment committees are equally addressed by training and education, such offerings should be made mandatory. In addition, the responsibilities and processes of the individual activities should be clearly distributed and formalized.

4.2. Documentation

RECOMMENDATION:

All activities within the scope of active recruitment must be documented in detail during the ongoing process and in compliance with data protection laws.

EXPLANATION:

A central quality feature for active recruitment is transparency, for which binding documentation is essential. This not only ensures intersubjective traceability in the further course of the procedure but can also be helpful in any subsequent recruitment or appointment procedures.

PRACTICAL TIP: ASPECTS OF DOCUMENTATION

The following aspects can be queried in the documentation:

Proportion of underrepresented gender (in the case of active recruitment as a gender equality tool):

- Postdocs and habilitations in the department
- applications
- invitation to lecture
- list positions

Active recruitment activities carried out:

- Search via professional colleagues of the own institution
- Search via professional colleagues on national and international level
- Inquiries with relevant professional societies and associations
- Research in databases
- Publication of the call in professional and expert associations
- Forwarding of the call to relevant networks
- Organization of search symposia or conferences

Number of contacted academics:

- Academics contacted
- Applications from contacted academics
- Invitation of contacted academics
- List placement of contacted academics

Data of the contacted academics:

- Name
- Institution & position
- Date of contact, communication channel, feedback or application

5. Literature

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