

swissuniversities

Chamber of universities

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Professorial Recruitment: Recommendations and Good Practices¹

1. Introduction

The Chamber of universities recognizes the strategic importance of professorial hiring for higher education institutions as well as for the Swiss society and economy as a whole. Quality assurance in professorial appointment procedures is a major topic of reform in both Swiss and European academic policy-making. The quality of a recruitment is also measured by its ensuring equal opportunities. The excellence of our institutions can only be achieved by promoting equality and diversity.

All Swiss universities are committed to gender equality and diversity. But in Switzerland today, less than 25% of professors are women and our faculty members do not reflect the diversity among our students and society as a whole. By improving the quality of the hiring procedures, we can improve the diversity among our professors, which is not only a matter of equity, but also beneficial for a university's performance and competitiveness. It strongly contributes to strengthen the excellence of our institutions.

With the following recommendations and good practices on the policy and process levels, the Chamber of universities aims to foster critical reflection on professorial hiring among its member institutions, so that they can find ways in accordance with their own institutional setting to establish standards for the appointment of professors, and, more generally, a culture more sensitive to diversity aspects. The document addresses mostly gender equality issues in hiring processes but will also have a positive impact on diversity policy in general. In order to prioritize and implement these recommendations and good practices, each institution should involve all stakeholders concerned.

2. Recommendations and Good Practices

On the policy level

These recommendations and good practices focus on hiring policy and are directed at university or faculty leadership.

¹ This document is based to a large degree on a first draft elaborated by the following equal opportunities experts: Carine Carvalho MA MPA (UNIL), PD Dr. Nina Jakoby (UZH), Dr. Alessandro Lazzari (UniLU) and Dr. Verena Witzig (UniSG). The Chamber of universities would like to thank them for their valuable input.

Professionalization of recruitment processes

- **Strategic development:** Gender equality and diversity are key considerations in the institution's strategic development concerning policy on professorial hiring. A strong commitment of the university leaders is essential.
- **Institutional regulations or recommendations:** Institutions should adopt university-wide regulations and/or recommendations for professorial hiring.
- **Recruitment support:** Institutions should take appropriate measures in order to provide guidance regarding professorial hiring. Where appropriate and possible, a responsible service or person within central university leadership or within the faculties could, for instance, discuss the respective procedures with all deans of faculties or heads of departments on a regular basis.
- **Data collection:** Institutions should collect at least gender-disaggregated key indicators on all aspects of professorial hirings and review these data at least annually at the highest level of leadership within the institution. Possible indicators include: recruitment type (open and closed recruitment procedures - e.g. direct appointments), composition of search committees, headhunting activities, applications, short lists, rankings, hires, promotions, etc.
- **Quality management:** Gender aspects of recruitment should be included in quality assessments; gender equality and diversity experts should be actively involved in accreditation processes.
- **Direct appointments:** Institutions should have clear and transparent guidelines on how direct appointments are conducted.
- **Training:** Institutions should ensure that appropriate training is provided to all persons involved in the recruitment process, including training on implicit bias.

Definition of target ratios

- **Performance targets:** Central university leaderships and faculties should define target ratios regarding hiring female professors. They should periodically review these targets and target ratios.
- **Definition of targets:** Flexible target ratios take account of the fact that women and men are not equally represented in academia, especially in senior positions like professorships. In cases where this may be unrealistic in the short-to-medium term, the *cascade model* enables institutions to define context-specific baselines until the target ratio can be reached. Within the cascade model, the actual ratio of women at a career stage is regarded as the minimum ratio for the next career stage.
- **Structural (planning) phase:** Structural planning should take gender equality objectives in consideration. The university leadership should not approve structural planning that fails to address this issue.

Research Assessment

- **Research metrics:** The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, DORA², should serve as a guide for rethinking research assessment. Universities should not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure for the quality of individual research articles. Universities should highlight their commitment to the DORA principles, promote and implement them.³

² <https://sfdora.org/> (11.09.2020).

³ DORA is also included in the National Open-Access-Strategy for Switzerland passed by swissuniversities in 2018, see: https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Hochschulpolitik/Open_Access/Plan_d_action-d.pdf (11.09.2020).

On the process level

Clearly defined and rigorously implemented hiring procedures are key to promote gender equality and diversity. The following recommendations and good practices, which focus on hiring practices, are directed at search committees.

Initial phase: search committee, job description and announcement

- **Committee members:** Institutions should ensure that the composition of search committees is appropriate in terms of diversity and that members of the committees explicitly represent equal opportunities. It seems advisable to systematically include one or several experts on equal opportunities for every single recruitment procedure, be it, for instance, the vice-rector in charge, a person from the equal opportunities Service or an equal opportunities delegation, who support and accompany the search committees. Their presence has also further positive side effects such as detecting possible inequalities and gender biases, and raising awareness of equal opportunities and excellency.
- **Headhunting:** Institutions should implement a strategy for the proactive search for female candidates. Search committees should proactively identify promising female academics and invite them to apply.
- **Job profile:** The position should be defined as broadly as possible. Requirements should focus on essentials and avoid additional desirable criteria that might unduly limit the candidate pool. Various criteria should be assessed in addition to the quality of the research (e.g., teaching and supervision, interdisciplinarity, innovation, leadership).
- **Position rank:** Open rank calls and assistant professorships with tenure track may increase the likelihood that women will apply and accept an offer that involves national or international mobility.
- **Assessment criteria:** The criteria applicants will be assessed against should be clearly defined and their relative weight established before evaluation begins. They should be formalized in an assessment matrix shared with the whole committee. Criteria excluding certain candidates from the outset, for example candidates with atypical backgrounds, should be avoided. That certain criteria, such as mobility or age, tend to disadvantage female candidates in particular should also be taken into consideration.
- **Language:** Job advertisements and all other documents about the professorship should be phrased in inclusive and gender neutral language.
- **Process monitoring:** If the target for applications by women candidates is not met, the person in charge within the university leadership should be informed, so that it can be discussed whether and in which way the hiring process shall be pursued.

Meetings, examination of applicants and pre-selection

- **Committee chair:** The chair of the search committee has the responsibility to inform committee members about the equal opportunities policy in place, and to intervene in cases of biased decision making. The chair can be supported by an equality officer, an HR specialist, or a regular committee member with special training in recruitment and diversity.
- **Structuring of evaluation:** A separate discussion of female and male applicants might be considered, starting with women's applications. Enough time should be allowed to do the evaluation. A shortlist of the best candidates of each group should then be established. However, there might be other useful ways to structure the evaluation process.
- **Academic age:** Only academic age (years spent in academia or relevant scientific role since PhD, converted into full-time years in case of part-time academically relevant work) should be considered when assessing and comparing academic achievements. Examples of time that is not part of academic age include: time spent doing any unrelated work, care work, travelling, military service, critical illness.

- **"Solo" and "token" effects:** The search committee should ensure that at least two highly competitive candidates of each gender are selected for the trial lecture and interview stage. This will avoid both the so-called solo effect and tokenism, which are linked to biased evaluation of the candidate.⁴

Trial lecture and interview

- **Trial lecture:** The search committee should ensure that all candidates are given comparable conditions and that the formal aspects of the lectures and discussions are uniform (length of lecture, Q&A and interview with committee, technical equipment and support).
- **(Semi-)structured interviews:** The search committee should ask all candidates the same questions, in the same order. The questions should reflect the hiring criteria.
- **Legally impermissible questions:** Committee chairs should ensure that all committee members are aware of legally impermissible questions (concerning family planning, pregnancy status) and that these are never asked or alluded to.

Final decision: hiring suggestion

- **Preference rule:** In case of equal qualifications for a position, preference should in principle be given to the candidate of the under-represented gender. Under-representation is to be defined by institutions. For example, one gender might be considered under-represented if it represents less than one third of the faculty.

⁴ The solo / token effect refers to being the only member of a social category in a group, for example, a woman in a group of men. The person in the minority group becomes particularly visible and is assessed more critically according to stereotypes (Sekaquaptewa & Thompson 2002, 2003). Research shows that if there is only one candidate who differs from the others in some aspect such as gender, chances to be hired decrease for this candidate (Johnson et al. 2016).