

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES AT AUSTRIAN UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR EVALUATION: DEVELOPMENT, RESULTS AND LIMITATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Since the 1980s several measures have been introduced to promote women and gender equality in science and research in Austria. This article focuses on the development of this policy mix and the role played by evaluation in its ongoing development. First we describe the policy mix and its underlying design principles. By referring to three examples we illustrate the challenges and opportunities facing evaluation in the ongoing development of gender equality measures. In the conclusions the requirements evaluation must meet if it is to support the ongoing development of the policy mix are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender Equality Policies at Universities, University Reform in Austria, Evaluation of Gender Equality Policies

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### INTRODUCTION

Developments in access to university education and employment at universities in Austria really can be interpreted as a success story for women. The education expansion measures introduced in the 1960s have led to a clear rise in student numbers. While the originally anticipated opening up of universities to young people of working class background has not emerged, there has been a rise in the proportion of women among new students. Since the 1992/93 winter semester, more women than men have been starting university degrees, and women have been in the majority among graduates since the 2000/01 academic year. The number of women employed in universities has also risen. As of 31.12.2009, 46 % of all university employees were female, whereby the percentage is far higher for administrative (62 %) than for academic posts (40 %). In recent years, the proportion of women in such positions has risen slightly overall, a fact that can be attributed above all to the higher proportion of women in third party financed assistant professor posts (44 % of third party financed assistant professors are women, compared to only 21 % of lecturers). Recent trends also show that women still rarely hold professorships and management positions: at present around 19 % of professors are women. The image of the “leaky pipeline” (Berryman 1983) – in which the proportion of women drops as the career level rises – has therefore scarcely changed. Although the situation is far away from equal participation of men and women it has improved significantly during the last decade. For instance ten years ago about 10% of full professors were female.

To achieve this result a number of measures have been introduced since the 1980s to promote women and gender equality in science and research. This article focuses on the development of this policy mix and the role played by evaluation in its ongoing development. We begin by describing the development of this policy mix, its underlying design principles and the incisive changes brought about by the Universities Act 2002 (*Universitätsgesetz*; UG 2002). We then look at the challenges associated with the evaluation of gender equality measures and provide three examples of such evaluations in practice. While each of these examples addresses different issues and target groups, they all illustrate the challenges and opportunities facing evaluation in the ongoing development of gender equality measures. Finally, we close with a discussion of the requirements evaluation must meet if it is to support the ongoing development of the policy mix.

### 1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICY MIX TO PROMOTE WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Austrian government gender equality policies in the 1970s initially provided support to selected initiatives started by the women’s groups that were established in universities through the feminist movement. In the 1980s, there was an increased focus on gender studies, special summer universities and lecture series for women were introduced and the institutionalisation of gender research was expedited. In 1983, the then Minister for Science (Hertha Firnberg) established a special government quota of lecture hours for teaching posts in gender/women’s studies. This quota could also be used to provide teaching posts to the new generation of young female academics.

The late 1980s also saw the emergence of initial approaches to institutionalise women's studies and gender research. A women's group in Vienna organised a first Austria-wide meeting in the 1989 summer semester, which brought together representatives of women in university and non-university research and led to the formation of the Austrian Platform for Women in Research (*Österreichweite Plattform für Frauenforschung*). A catalogue of demands was drawn up and presented to the Minister for Science (Erhard Busek) in person in 1989 (Griesebner 1994: 63). Although not directly met, these demands were to shape the university debate in the years that followed and were taken up by the subsequent Symposium for Female Academics (see below).

A key step towards anchoring women's studies and gender research in Austrian universities was the establishment of the so-called coordination units. The concept for an inter-university unit to coordinate women's studies at universities in Vienna (or "coordination unit" for short) was developed by the same academics who had initiated the founding of the platform for women in research and was presented to the ministry in 1990. After a number of administrative and organisational hurdles had been overcome, the first coordination units were established at the Universities of Vienna and Linz in 1992 (Griesebner 1994, Saurer 2003).<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Seiser (2003: 20) describes the 1990s as a "juridification phase for women's rights", characterised by the passing of the Equal Opportunities Act 1993 (*Bundesgleichbehandlungsgesetz*), the introduction of the female advancement plan (1995) and the establishment of the equal opportunities working parties (1993). Particular attention was given to the recruitment process to ensure discrimination was avoided in the procedure. After the turn of the millennium, the legal gender equality strategy was expanded to include a gender mainstreaming strategy. The main goal of the gender mainstreaming strategy in the academic sector is to establish equal participation by both sexes in teaching, research and administration. A range of relevant detailed goals and proposed measures to increase female participation at all levels and to promote gender studies was prepared by a government working party (Seböck 2003: 253ff).

At the same time, a number of measures were introduced in the 1990s to promote the careers of individual female academics. The Charlotte Bühler Programme (set up in 1992) and the Hertha Firnberg Programme (set up in 1998) are examples of scholarship programmes created to support women who want to qualify as professors. The aim of these programmes was to give highly qualified female academics financial security for a fixed period of time (up to three years) to allow them to concentrate fully on their research. They should thus increase the pool of women with the necessary qualification (*Habilitation*) to take up a professorship. After the turn of the millennium, this form of individual financial support was extended by the ministry through the financing of innovative pilot projects, such as a coaching programme at the University of Graz, a mentoring programme at the University of Vienna or the establishment of childcare facilities in universities.

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<sup>3</sup> A similar unit was set up in Graz in 1994, while coordination units were installed initially on a project basis at the Universities of Innsbruck, Salzburg and Klagenfurt from 1999 and 2000.

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Specific information and public relations measures were also used to raise awareness of the discrimination of women in science and research and draw attention to the results of gender research. In addition, support was also provided for the publication of results from women's studies and gender research (a contribution to printing costs) or relevant conferences (a contribution to the conference costs). The Gabriele Possaner State and Advancement Awards<sup>4</sup>, awarded every two years since 1997, should also contribute to raising the visibility of outstanding female academics in the fields of women's studies and gender research.

### *Design principles behind the policy mix*

A key characteristic of the development of the gender equality policy at Austrian universities from the outset was the continuous involvement of the relevant stakeholders in both the formulation of gender equality goals and the development of concrete individual measures. A central role was played here by the Symposium for Female Academics (Seiser 2003). The first such symposium was initiated in 1989 by the Ministry of Science as an invitation to Austrian female academics to discuss their ideas and provide "external" input on university policy which has the support of dedicated women in the field and is put forward for implementation at a political level. At the end of each symposium, a catalogue of demands is drawn up by the delegates and submitted to the political decision-makers (primarily the relevant government minister).<sup>5</sup>

The design of the policy mix was also grounded on the "evidence based" principle. The Ministry of Science had already commissioned a range of studies in the 1980s which systematically addressed the situation of women (also in academia) and thus provided a key contribution to the establishment of gender studies at Austrian universities. The results of these studies also formed the basis of a number of specific measures designed to promote women and gender equality (Keplinger 1994: 25). In autumn 1997, the Ministry for Science and Transport (BMWV) finally launched its new "Politically Relevant University Research: Women in Science and Research" initiative. This research initiative centred on politically relevant research which was applicable to and could be implemented in Austrian academic structures. The focus lay on improvements to the academic base structures necessary to meet the government's commitment to equal opportunities for men and women in all areas of society (Knollmayer and Mossgöller 1997: 10). Under this research initiative, four projects were commissioned between 1998 and 1998 to study job histories, career patterns, working conditions, work quality and the mobility of female academics in Austria. In addition to the primary focus on the university sector, one project also examined the situation of women in non-university research organisations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Named after the first woman to graduate from university in Austria (in 1897).

<sup>5</sup> Symposia for Female Academics were held in 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2003, with each one organised by a different institution. The last symposium (in 2003), for example, was organised by the interest group for external lecturers (cf. Blimlinger and Garstenauer 2004) and the 2001 event by the inter-university coordination unit for women's studies and gender research in Graz (Hey and Pellert 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Buchinger et al. 2002; Hebenstreit et al. 2002; Nöbauer and Zuckerhut 2002; Papouschek and Pastner 1999.

A third central characteristic of policy design was the goal of using a multi-perspective approach to promoting the advancement of women and gender equality, i.e. addressing several problems at the same time. There had already been attempts to simultaneously promote these goals in the 1980s. In the 1990s, legislative gender equality instruments were introduced alongside individual advancement measures. These efforts were clearly reflected in the catalogue of measures (“White Book”) to promote gender equality at universities commissioned by the Minister for Science (Caspar Einem) and produced by a working party of university and non-university experts (BMWV 1999). The implementation of gender equality measures should continue to be primarily achieved through targeted programmes after the turn of the millennium. Consequently, a set of measures to promote women and gender equality at universities was formulated and implemented under the European Social Fund Objective 3 (ESF) in the 2000-2006 programme period. In 2002, the f-FORTE programme to promote women in science and technology was also developed and implemented by the Ministry for Science in conjunction with the Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology.<sup>7</sup>

#### ***Seismic change in gender equality policy through UG 2002***

The Universities Act 2002, which came into force on 1.1.2004, represented a seismic change for the whole university sector and for gender equality policy in science and research in particular.<sup>8</sup> With the implementation of UG 2002, three core structural decisions were taken to transfer tried and tested gender equality measures into the new system or implement successful pilot projects as standard practice (Ulrich 2004). These include:

1. Retention of the equal opportunities working parties and creation of a university arbitration commission as control body (a function assumed by the minister prior to UG 2002).
2. Inclusion of a general duty to the advancement of women in UG 2002 and the establishment of implementation instruments, like the obligation for universities to enact a female advancement plan and the anchoring of gender equality targets in the financial control system (performance agreements, formula based budget).
3. Establishment of a special organisational unit for gender related coordination tasks (women’s studies and gender research, activities to promote women) at each university.

UG 2002 also changed the role of the ministry (previously the central player in female advancement and gender equality measures) by according autonomy to universities in Austria. The universities themselves are now responsible for their own finances, personnel policies and the implementation of gender equality

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<sup>7</sup> Since 2006, the Ministry for Economic Affairs has also been involved in the f-FORTE programme.

<sup>8</sup> With the UG 2002 universities became autonomous institutions. This led to severe changes in different fields, for instance employment contracts changed as university employees are no longer civil servants (for a detailed analysis see Höllinger and Titscher 2004). However, in this context we focus on changes regarding equal opportunities policies.

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measures. This dramatically changed the role of the ministry and made the former steering mechanisms obsolete.

The central steering instrument under UG 2002 is a three-year performance agreement concluded between the Ministry for Science and the respective university.<sup>9</sup> This agreement details both the services to be provided by the university and the government's contractual obligations (in particular financing). In addition to their "core tasks" (teaching and research), the services to be provided by universities also include social goals<sup>10</sup>, such as the advancement of women and gender equality. Accordingly, each university defines its gender equality focus and formulates concrete measures to achieve these goals in its performance agreement. Since it is up to each university to define its own focus and measures, a broad spectrum of university gender equality policies has emerged in recent years (Wroblewski and Leitner 2010; Wroblewski et al. 2011).

In essence, the bulk (80 %) of the global university budget is distributed to the individual universities via the performance agreements. The remaining 20 % is distributed for performance in line with the so-called formula-based budget, whereby a university's performance is assessed and compared with the performance of other universities using a set of 11 indicators. Two of these 11 indicators relate to the advancement of women: the proportion of female professors (indicator 8) and the proportion of women completing doctorates (indicator 9, weighted by subject). UG 2002 (Art.14) also emphasises the significance of internal and external evaluations. Universities are now obliged to run their own quality management systems to monitor quality and performance achievement (internal evaluation). This monitoring system serves as the basis for the provision of evidence to the ministry that the targets laid out in the performance agreements have been met. In many cases, it is also used to transport the university's strategic goals to its own organisation. Here, internal performance agreements are concluded between the university governing body and its organisational units and monitored using the same system.

### **2. CHALLENGES IN THE EVALUATION OF GENDER EQUALITY MEASURES**

UG 2002 formulated the following gender equality goals: "a balanced representation of men and women at work in all areas of university activities" (Art.41) and "combating gender discrimination as well as discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion or conviction, age, or sexual orientation by university governing bodies" (Art.42). The concrete targets set for the female advancement plans focus on the goal of increasing the proportion of women in universities, particularly in senior

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<sup>9</sup> The first performance agreements were concluded for 2007-2009; the current agreements are applicable from 2010-2012.

<sup>10</sup> According to Art.13g, UG 2002: "Universities shall formulate their contribution to social progress. This includes measures to improve social permeability, to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions at universities, the promotion of female junior researchers in a targeted manner, the advancement of socially relevant areas of art, culture and research, and knowledge and technology transfers."

positions. However, this raises the question of whether it actually addresses the discrimination already faced by women in science and research. It also has different relevance and reach for different universities. In essence, it is no longer relevant in some arts based universities, which have already achieved a gender balance at all hierarchy levels. Indeed, with some individual institutes (e.g. in the humanities) dominated to a large extent by women (up to and including professorships), the gender equality goal should be formulated differently (e.g. to address the need to increase the proportion of men).

Aside from these “extreme cases”, an examination of how to measure success in achieving equal opportunities quickly reveals that increasing the proportion of women can only be one of several indicators, since an increased female participation does not automatically remove existing gender gaps in terms of income levels, resource allocation, contract terms, etc. In our opinion, the political debate does not explicitly answer the question of whether gender equality in universities should also go hand in hand with a breaking down of the segregation into typical male and female domains. Should it also attempt to change the traditional androcentric university culture? After all, this traditional concept of the university is viewed in literature as one of the main barriers to women seeking a university career (EC 2004; Lind 2004).

In addition to the challenges associated with the often loosely formulated targets, two further aspects must be taken into consideration in the evaluation of gender equality measures in science and research: (1) the complexity of the university context in comparison to other sectors, and (2) the specifics of the “university as an expert organisation” (Pellert 1999).

The effect of gender equality measures depends on a number of influencing factors, which can only be addressed to a limited extent by the actual measures themselves. Consequently, their effects can be neither quantified precisely nor interpreted in a causal way. For example, the effect of a career programme for women at universities can depend on the number of applicants, the availability of childcare facilities, the attitude of management to women in academic careers, the distribution of childcare duties at home or the applicant’s own role models. Even if attempts are made to change the situation at the university (e.g. by providing childcare facilities), individual measures of this nature only have a limited impact on the traditional role model images in the minds of academics – at least in the short run.

When it comes to relevant values, consideration must also be given to the fact that in the university setting the image of “good science” is to a large extent normatively loaded and oriented on a typical male career. The image of the scientist totally absorbed by his vocation, with the flexibility to work anywhere or at any time, often forms the basis of the assessment formula for academic performance. People with discontinuous or “typically female” career histories often cannot meet these criteria. The monitoring of gender equality goals is also hindered by the very nature of the university as an “expert organisation”. Specific monitoring instruments are required to handle what Ada Pellert (1999) refers to as the “art of managing experts”. In essence, academics find themselves confronted with different monitoring logics in their joint capacities as members of a particular discipline and members of the

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university as an organisation: demands for “good academic work” clash with organisational goals. Even if there is no such clash between the demands of the discipline and the organisation, it can still be assumed that they will be accorded different priority in everyday business, with intrinsic loyalties tending to lie with the discipline. In a gender equality or advancement of women context, problems can arise here when university targets (e.g. to increase the proportion of female professors) appear irreconcilable with the basic conventions or principles of the respective discipline.

The demands for “good science” and the situation regarding gender equality or existing gender gaps differ from discipline to discipline. This hampers the development of unified gender equality policies and unified monitoring mechanisms in the university setting. At the same time, it is evident that any assessment of the implementation of gender equality policies and achieving of related targets that does not include this context will produce distorted – or even incorrect – results.

### **3. EXAMPLES FOR THE EVALUATION OF GENDER EQUALITY MEASURES**

After the turn of the millennium, several evaluations of gender equality measures in academia and research were commissioned. Two particular aspects contributed to the increasing importance of evaluation in this sector. Firstly, external evaluation gained in relevance – both in Austria in general and in the field of gender equality – through the co-financing of measures by the EU. Measures in the university sector that were co-financed by the European Social Fund in the 2000-2006 programme period were evaluated in the defined programme evaluation process (Lutz et al. 2005). Secondly, individual measures also partly co-financed by the EU were increasingly evaluated, like the mentoring and coaching programmes at the Universities of Vienna and Graz (Buchinger and Gschwandtner 2003; Gerhardter and Grasenick 2009; Kastner 2003) or the “*GIL – Gender in die Lehre*” (“Gender in Teaching”) programme at Vienna University of Technology (Ratzer et al. 2007; Horwath 2008).

These evaluations all followed different goals and used different designs. Yet an overriding goal in all cases was that the results should contribute to developing existing policies further, i.e. deliver input for policy design. The case studies included in this article show that attempts were indeed made in the evaluation designs to walk the line between determining the effects and giving due consideration to the context. The first two of the presented studies examined the complete gender policy (implemented by the universities and the Ministry of Science), while the third focused on the evaluation of an individual measure, with attempts made at the university level to measure the overall complexity of the situation to open the way for a context independent discussion of the programme’s effects.



*Survey and evaluation of gender equality and advancement of women at Austrian universities*

In 2005, the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA)<sup>11</sup> was commissioned by the Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK), the Austrian National Union of Students and Universities Austria<sup>12</sup> to carry out a stock take of measures to advance women and gender equality and realize gender mainstreaming at 12 universities (AQA 2007). For the purposes of this survey, the universities were each sent two questionnaires (one targeted at the rectorate and the other at the equal opportunities working party). The questionnaires asked for details of concrete measures to advance women and gender equality, their intensity (e.g. the number of hours included in training measures), the resources provided and an estimation of their effects. At the time of the survey, all the participating universities had already implemented the legislative requirements, i.e. had incorporated a female advancement plan into their statutes and set up an organisational unit and a working party for equal opportunities in accordance with UG 2002 (Art.19). However, there were clear differences between the universities with regard to the goals and measures set out in these female advancement plans and the resources made available to the equal opportunities working parties and coordination units.

As a result of this heterogeneity, no overall report was produced for all 12 universities. Instead, individual feedback was provided to each university by the external evaluators (peers)<sup>13</sup> based on the survey results. In each case, individual recommendations for the further development of the existing set of measures were put together, summarised in a written report and sent to the participating universities. However, since this form of feedback met with only limited acceptance at the universities, the written feedback reports were supplemented by on-site meetings in an additional project phase.<sup>14</sup> This procedure was based on the assumption that a more intensive communication process between the universities and the evaluators would strengthen the benefits of the project and facilitate the joint development of concrete suggestions for improvements at the respective university (AQA 2007: 9).

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<sup>11</sup> AQA was established as an autonomous institution at the beginning of 2004 on the joint initiative of Universities Austria, the Austrian Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Austrian Union of Private Universities, the Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH) and the Ministry for Science. AQA is a non profit association, whose main focus is to conduct academic quality assurance and evaluation projects, as well as to research and document quality assurance methodologies in the tertiary education sector ([www.aqa.ac.at](http://www.aqa.ac.at)).

<sup>12</sup> Universities Austria is a non-profit association, whose purpose is to assist Austrian universities in the fulfilment of their tasks and responsibilities and thus to foster scholarship and research. Universities Austria handles the internal coordination of the country's 21 public universities; it represents them in national and international organisations and serves as their public voice. Universities Austria is funded through membership fees paid by the universities. These fees are graded according to the size of the universities ([www.uniko.ac.at](http://www.uniko.ac.at)).

<sup>13</sup> A female professor and gender expert from Austria and two university researchers with gender expertise from Germany.

<sup>14</sup> The peer evaluators held on-site meetings with representatives of university management, the working parties and the coordination units, as well as with gender studies staff in universities with gender institutes. The results of these on-site meetings were incorporated into reworked final versions of the feedback reports, which were then sent to the universities.

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The study design took the form of a self-evaluation in combination with individual feedback by external experts. Participation in the survey and the on-site visits by the peer evaluators was voluntary. Of the 12 universities which participated in the survey, eight also took up the opportunity to receive individual on-site feedback and advice. It would appear that a combination of internal evaluation (self-reflection) and advice from external experts – which allows people to think outside the box – is important for the development of the university policy mix. For the study to be accepted and its results put to use, it was essential that participation was voluntary, i.e. that the universities were prepared to reflect on their situation and were interested in improving their status quo.

### *Analysis of the effects of BMBWK measures to advance women*

Shortly before the implementation of UG 2002, the Ministry of Science commissioned a consortium of three research institutes to evaluate the entire set of existing measures to advance women and promote gender equality in the university and research sector (Wroblewski et al. 2007). Their brief was to provide an assessment of the effects of these measures. The study should also serve as the basis for the decision on which instruments should be transferred to the new system (UG 2002). The subject of the evaluation was a very heterogeneous set of individual measures successively implemented by the ministry since the end of the 1980s (see also section 2). In some cases, these measures differed significantly with regard to their reach, resources, goals and target group. They included the ministry's female advancement plan (a legal requirement set by the ministry which the universities as subordinate government agencies had to fulfil), scholarship programmes for women seeking to qualify as professors, support for women's publications, prizes for excellence by female academics in women's studies or gender research, the provision of childcare facilities in universities, etc. To accommodate the diversity of these measures, the first step taken in the study was to develop a typology that categorises these measures into four different groups:

- Programme measures, such as the Austrian programme planning documents for ESF Objective 3 (academic/science sector), the white book on the advancement of women in science and academia, or the f-FORTE programme.
- Legislative measures, laws and provisions (e.g. regulations relating to the advancement of women and gender equality in UG 2002 or the female advancement plan), as well as bodies established by law, like the equal opportunities working parties.
- Monetary and non-monetary individual support. Individual monetary support includes, for example, scholarship programmes for female doctoral students or women seeking to qualify as professors, prizes for excellent achievements by female academics and support for publications by women. Non-monetary support includes coaching or mentoring programmes.
- Measures to establish networks and associated structural measures, such as the establishment of coordination units for women's studies and gender research at selected universities, the promotion of academic events for women, the

symposium for female academics or the establishment of childcare facilities at universities.

A “typical” measure was selected for each group and an in-depth analysis of its effects carried out in a subsequent case study. These case studies and a series of expert interviews were used to produce an overall evaluation of the implementation and effect of these measures for each group. These were then consolidated to provide an overall evaluation of the complete set of measures.

The study provides an overview of the status quo of government initiated measures to promote the advancement of women and gender equality in the university and research sectors prior to the implementation of UG 2002. Even though empirical investigations were not carried out for all individual measures, the findings permit conclusions to be drawn on the factors which support or inhibit their successful implementation. The evaluation of the implementation of these measures and their results was based on a comprehensive context analysis and sought to determine the extent of the contribution made by each individual measure to eliminating the problems identified in the context analyses. At the overall policy mix level, it sought to identify any duplications of efforts and “blind spots”, i.e. to determine whether the policy mix adequately covered the problems. One specific “blind spot” was the fact that the existing policy mix primarily sought to address the situation in the university setting and barely touched the non-university sector. A further “blind spot” proved to be the appointment of women professors: as a result of consistent efforts to advance women, an increasing number of women had completed a *habilitation* and thus had the necessary qualification to become professors, yet the proportion of female professors had not increased accordingly. This gap was addressed in subsequent years by the “excellencia” programme (see below). The analysis also highlighted the complex interplay between the individual measures, making it impossible to causally apportion their specific individual effects.

One of the key measures in this policy mix proved to be the equal opportunities working party, which also formed the subject of a case study (based on document analysis and expert interviews).

### **Equal opportunities working party**

The equal opportunities working party is probably the most powerful instrument in this domain in Austrian universities and was established by a 1990 Amendment to the University Organisation Act 1975 (*Universitätsorganisationsgesetz* 1975, UOG 1975). Art. §106a UOG 1975 gave the equal opportunities working party the authority to submit complaints to the Minister for Science and Research in cases of discrimination in appointment procedures. Its function and scope was decisively extended in the University Organisation Act 1993 (UOG 1993): “It is the role of the working party to combat gender discrimination by university bodies, to advise and support university staff in issues relating to equal opportunities, to receive related complaints from university staff and to work in all personnel matters to ensure that a

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balanced representation of men and women is achieved in all areas of work.” (UOG 1993; translation by the authors.)

To be able to meet its legally defined role, the working party is accorded a range of information rights and options. For example, it must be granted access to all necessary documents and data relating to any personnel matters that fall into its realm. Likewise, it must be notified of all documents relating to personnel decisions prior to their execution. Should the working party have reason to assume that a decision taken by a university governing body is gender discriminatory, it can lodge an appeal against the decision and halt the personnel selection process. When personnel decisions are made by an appointment commission, a maximum of two members of the equal opportunities working party with advisory voting rights are also entitled to participate in commission meetings, submit proposals, lodge opposition and insist that specific contributions by members of the commission be put on record. The members of the working party must be invited to these meetings in writing in a timely manner. Should this not be the case, the respective collegial body (commission) must hold the meeting again, this time with the members of the equal opportunities working party present. The working party has the right to file a protest against an advertisement for a position if it has reason to suspect that this advertisement has been formulated either with a particular person in mind or in such general terms as to preclude an objective decision-making basis. Should no applications be received from female candidates prior to the deadline for submissions, the position must be readvertised unless the equal opportunities working party waives such need to do so. When the deadline for applications has passed, the working party should be supplied with a list of applicants without delay and involved in the selection procedure.

The equal opportunities working party is set up by the senate and must include representatives of all groups at the university (professors, assistant professors, administration, students). The number of members in the working party and their respective terms of office are to be defined in the university's statute. The university female advancement plan contains concrete details of the rights of the working party (e.g. the deadlines for the provision of any required information). The duties of the equal opportunities working party were not changed substantially by UG 2002. New in UG 2002 is that rulings on gender discrimination are no longer decided by the minister, but by an internal university arbitration commission<sup>15</sup>. As a final resort, the equal opportunities working party and respective university governing body have the right to appeal the ruling of the arbitration commission in the Higher Administrative Court. Contracts of employment issued by the rector during a pending arbitration process or despite a negative ruling by the arbitration commission are invalid.

The equal opportunities working party case study, which was carried out after this body had been in place for almost 15 years, revealed that its ongoing efforts and

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<sup>15</sup> The arbitration commission consists of six members, none of whom should be members of the university concerned. The senate, university council and equal opportunities working party each nominate one male and one female member to the commission for a two-year term of office. Two members of the commission must have legal training (Art. 43 UG 2002).

inclusion in all university appointment procedures has both significantly raised the professionalism of such procedures (e.g. through increased transparency, clearly formulated job profiles, broad advertising of positions) and dramatically raised awareness of gender issues. The fact that the equal opportunities working party can “rattle its sabre” and actually halt an appointment procedure strengthens the position of its members and allows their voices to be heard. In practice, the work of the equal opportunities working party is primarily preventive in nature, i.e. designed to help avoid potential discrimination and/or break down barriers to women prior to the procedure through informal meetings or participation in appointment commission’s discussions, and thus serves to prevent a situation reaching the appeal stage in the first place. This central function of the working party has not only contributed significantly to breaking down gender bias in appointment procedures, but has also served to sensitise people and raise enormous awareness of the issues involved.

The findings of the case study also illustrate the challenges facing the evaluation of gender equality measures indicated above. A successful rise in the proportion of female university personnel cannot be causally apportioned to the efforts of the working party, even if these have undoubtedly contributed to increasing the professionalism of recruitment procedures and had a strong effect in raising awareness of the issues involved. Efforts to raise transparency and accountability in decision-making processes reduce the influence of informal networks, even if they cannot fully exclude it. It is also not possible to state with certainty that the visible changes in day-to-day practices really are the result of an increased awareness of potential discrimination. We cannot exclude the possibility that the key players have simply learned how to deal with the working party and any potential intervention on its part without actually changing the images in their own minds. But it is evident that the working party is in many cases the linchpin of gender equality in universities, especially if it is involved in formulating the female advancement plan or developing gender equality measures.

#### *Ongoing evaluation of “excellentia”*

The “excellentia” programme was developed in response to the results of the evaluation of the ministry’s measures to promote the advancement of women, which revealed a “blind spot” in the promotion landscape between *habilitation* and appointment to a professorship.

The excellentia concept was presented in September 2004 by the Minister of Science. The programme was initiated by the Advisory Committee on Women’s Issues<sup>16</sup> who proposed a solution based on a similar programme implemented in Switzerland<sup>17</sup> in 2000. The aim of the excellentia programme was to double the proportion of female professors in Austria from 8 % (in 2003) to 16 % by the end of 2009 by taking advantage of the window of opportunity created by the age profile of

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<sup>16</sup> The Advisory Committee on Women’s Issues (Frauenpolitischer Beirat) at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research (BMWF) advises the Minister on academic, scientific and research policies from an equal opportunities for men and women perspective. Seven well-known female professors from different disciplines currently sit on the committee.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Bachmann et al. 2004 and Spreyermann, Rothmayr 2009.

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professors in Austrian universities. This is formulated in the excellentia strategy document as follows: “Over the next 5 years around 40 % of all existing professors will retire and vacate their posts. This situation permits the gentle, but effective opening up of hitherto predominantly unused human resources in teaching and research.” (BMBWK 2004: 6) The original excellentia concept foresaw a grant of € 33,880 to each university for the appointment of an additional female professor, with universities free to administer these grants as they saw fit (i.e. they were not earmarked for a specific purpose). To qualify for an excellentia grant, the appointment of a female professor had to increase both the absolute number and the overall proportion of female professors in a university. In other words, the appointment of a female professor to succeed an outgoing female professor (e.g. who is retiring) did not qualify for a grant. An annual budget of € 1,000,000 was allocated to the programme. Funding was provided by the Federal Ministry for Science on the basis of a recommendation of the Council for Research and Technology Development. The budget was guaranteed for the duration of the programme and should not be affected by any changes in political strategy that frequently accompany a change in government or the appointment of a new minister.

An ongoing evaluation process was incorporated from the outset, and the programme was adapted at the end of year one based on the recommendations in the first evaluation report. It subsequently underwent a fundamental redesign in 2007 – partly as a result of the appointment of a new minister (BMWF 2008). After three grant application periods (2005, 2006 and 2007), it was adjusted to treat the overall change at the end of the programme (end of 2009), not the annual change, as the determining factor. The goal of this adjustment was to accelerate the results already achieved (a moderate rise in the number of female professors). In addition, the Ministry of Science and Research (BMWF) introduced ambitious targets for each university: grants were no longer simply paid out as fixed sums for each appointment of an additional female professor; they were also linked to these targets. Three different levels of target achievement were introduced. Universities now received a basic grant of € 30,000 and a target achievement bonus for each additional appointment in a particular application period. The maximum grant paid for each additional appointment was € 100,000. A total budget of € 6,600,000 has been allocated for the 2008 and 2009 grant periods.

The evaluation of excellentia was designed as three-step accompanying process. In an initial step, an assessment of the acceptance of excellentia was carried out at six selected universities. The aim here was to determine how the programme had been embraced by the universities, identify the basic parameters which affected its implementation and establish which mechanisms were relevant in practice. The second step involved an analysis of implementation based on the monitoring system. Particular focus was placed on developments in the proportion of women among university professors, i.e. on determining which universities had participated in calls for applications, which had received funding and how this funding had been used. The third step took the form of case studies at all 22 universities in Austria designed to produce a deeper analysis of the basic parameters for the implementation of the programme.

Even in the case of the excellentia programme, causal effects cannot simply be assumed as a matter of course. In other words, an increase in the proportion of female professors at a university cannot be apportioned solely to excellentia. Instead, it can be assumed that this increase is also a result of the work of the equal opportunities working party (which should prevent all forms of discrimination) and/or the long-term effects of habilitation grants or mentoring programmes. The evaluation of excellentia assumed that the effects of such a programme would indeed depend on the basic parameters in place at individual universities, such as the anchoring of gender equality goals, the design of the appointment process or the general level of awareness and knowledge of gender issues (i.e. the university's gender culture). Consequently, as part of the case studies, university strategy documents were analysed for general gender equality goals, gender equality goals in the appointment process, the significance of gender equality goals in comparison to other strategic goals and the measures taken to achieve gender equality goals. Expert interviews were used to determine the relevance of gender equality goals in everyday university life and, above all, how they were incorporated into the appointment process. The relevance of these goals was contrasted on a strategic and an individual level to reveal any differences between strategy formulation and implementation.

The case studies provide a picture of the status quo of gender equality policies at Austrian universities some six years after the implementation of UG 2002 and focus in particular on the anchoring of gender equality aspects in the appointment process. The results show significant differences in the relevance attached to the advancement of women and gender equality at the individual universities, the scope and requirements formulated by university management, the policy focus and the available resources. In some cases gender equality plays virtually no role in everyday university life, and university management feels that the barriers to gender equality lie primarily outside the university domain and thus sees virtually no need for action on the part of the university. These are contrasted by the "good practice" universities where gender equality goals are firmly anchored at both a strategic and a practical level, i.e. universities who clearly practice what they preach.

The following section summarises the results of two such case studies (Wroblewski and Leitner 2010). In both cases, the universities have developed a strong gender culture, a fact which is also reflected in their appointment processes. Yet since these two examples of strong gender awareness also serve to illustrate the limitations of current gender policies, we feel that the findings are of greater interest to the debate than examples in which the basic requirements for a successful implementation of gender policies (e.g. awareness of the issues involved, support of university management) are lacking.

### **Case study university A**

University A is a full university with six faculties (Theology, Law, Social and Economic Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences and Environmental and Regional Sciences and Education). Its former Faculty of Medicine was made into a separate university in 2004. With around 25,000 students, 2,500 academic staff and

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150 professors, University A is one of Austria's larger universities. With the exception of Theology, women outnumber men in all faculties (62 % of students are female), and 51 % of the university's assistant professors are also women. However, the percentage of female professors still only lies at around 20 %, despite having almost trebled in the last ten years (2000: 6 %).

Gender equality, equal opportunities and the advancement of women are central aspects in the university's general principles and are described in all its strategy documents as a natural and obvious part of the university's profile. These goals are formulated very explicitly (and in some cases even quantified) in the performance agreements with the ministry and are also transferred to all internal steering/control instruments. The internal distribution of funds, for example, takes into consideration successful achievements by institutes and faculties with regard to the advancement of women and gender equality (internal incentive scheme). The goal of promoting gender equality is not only backed and promoted by the university management team, but is also given as a brief to all other players, who are required to deliver proof of corresponding results and activities.

University A has developed and successively extended a comprehensive set of measures to advance women and promote equal opportunities over the last 20 years. These include the establishment of childcare facilities, specific training and further education programmes for women (including a three-semester coaching course for female academics introduced in 2001 and corresponding mentoring programmes), the budget incentive system mentioned above, as well as bursary and grant programmes for female PhD students and women returning to work. To further secure gender issues in their teaching activities, University A and two other universities in the same city established a Visiting Professorship for Women's and Gender Studies, a professorial position appointed each semester on a one-semester basis. In 2009, University A invested around € 340,000 in measures to promote gender equality and the advancement of women, € 210,000 in gender specific teaching and research, as well as € 180,000 in childcare facilities.

The university's aspiration to consider gender aspects in all matters is also reflected in its appointment procedures. University A was the first university in Austria to systematically address structural barriers to women in appointment procedures as part of a research project. Particular emphasis is placed on transparency, legitimacy and accountability in the appointment process itself. Academic age, for example, is used by default to assess publication output, and the ruling that women with equal qualifications should be given preference over male candidates is accepted as a matter of course and not questioned.

All interview participants showed a strong level of gender awareness and a high degree of willingness to reflect on this issue. For example, the discussion of barriers to women differentiated between disciplines, programmes to advance women are critically examined with regard to potential stigmatisation effects, and there is active support for the inclusion of aspects to advance women in existing instruments. At the same time, they were all still aware of the subtle mechanisms that can lead to women being perceived differently to men. Some of the interviewees also take these issues into consideration in their day-to-day work practices (e.g. when setting



seminar topics, one female interview partner pays heed to whether these are more likely to attract female or male students). At a general university level, reflection on these topics is enhanced by comprehensive monitoring and a broad discussion of related developments. However, there is little reflection on these issues in appointment commissions. Indeed, the interview partners identified this as one specific area where the well-established measures to avoid discrimination and an immediate need for action cross. They unanimously stressed that the formal provisions are already well established and actively applied in day-to-day business, i.e. that additional provisions are not the solution to this problem. As one female interviewee aptly put it: "We have now reached a point where the change in awareness has to take hold in the heads of the members of the appointments commissions to achieve further progress."

The institutional provisions for gender equality and anti-discrimination in appointment procedures are universally viewed to be good and seen as standard practice in everyday university business. However, it is also evident that simply adhering to these provisions alone is not sufficient. Indeed, different examples show that discrimination can still take place, even when all formal provisions have been adhered to. What is now needed is increased effort to further raise the level of awareness and force people to reflect in greater depth on their day-to-day work practices.

### **Case study university B**

University B was founded in 1966 and has three faculties (Social Sciences, Economics & Business, Law and Engineering & Natural Sciences). It is one of Austria's larger universities with around 15,500 students. 46.5 % of students and 12 % of lecturers or professors are women. The share of female full professors increased significantly over the last decade from its very low baseline (from 3 % in 2001 to 12 % in 2009). Gender and women's studies have a long tradition at University B, and it was here that Austria's first Institute of Women's Studies and Gender Research was established in 2000/2001 (an inter-faculty Women's Studies Coordination Unit had already been in place at the university since 1993).

Over the last 20 years, a comprehensive set of equal opportunities measures have been put in place at University B. These are managed primarily by a dedicated department in the rectorate (established in 2000) and include specific continuing education programmes for female academics, individual grants for highly qualified young female academics (e.g. doctorate or habilitation grants), childcare facilities and the inclusion of gender related subjects in curricula.

One of University B's key goals is to follow a broad gender mainstreaming approach and establish a culture that recognizes gender asymmetries both at the university itself and in society at large (University B Annual Report 2007, p. 31). This goal and the concrete measures used to achieve it are laid out in the university's strategy documents. The provision of flexible childcare facilities for students and employees is one such permanent measure, but in itself forms only a comparatively small part of the complete spectrum. This is demonstrated, for example, in the fact

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that the university spent € 140,000 in 2008 on measures to help students and staff reconcile career/family commitments, yet also invested € 660,000 in measures to promote gender equality and the advancement of women and € 390,000 in gender specific training and teaching.

Equal opportunities at University B is a horizontal issue, i.e. is taken into account in all manner of different areas. Its appointment procedure, for example, places great emphasis on transparency to avoid the subtle discrimination of specific groups. Concrete criteria are formulated to assess the qualifications of applicants. These criteria are gender neutral (e.g. focus on academic age), specify the desired social skills and management qualifications (e.g. gender mainstreaming experience, personnel and management competence) and also serve as the basis for the comparative assessment reports.

The interviews reveal that this equal opportunities approach is not merely a stated policy, it is standard practice at the university. The interviewees were clearly able to differentiate and willing to reflect on these issues. When asked for their opinion, they differentiated between disciplines and different groups of women as a matter of course. The issue of structural barriers was routinely addressed, and the interviewees openly and critically discussed their experiences with different solutions. They were all not only familiar with provisions to promote the advancement of women (e.g. in the appointment procedure), they also consider them necessary and apply them with due "care". They were also all familiar with the rule that preference be given to female candidates if applicants are equally qualified when the percentage of women in a specific function is below 40 %. This rule was welcomed with the provision that it is indeed only applied in cases where candidates really are equally qualified.

On the whole, University B is characterised by a strong level of gender awareness, a general acceptance of measures to promote gender equality and the fact that these are not seen simply as matters for equal opportunities officers – they are part of university culture. The university also fosters a culture of reflection, which is as much a part of university life as its approach to equal opportunities. It is generally accepted that gender or disability barriers should be broken down, and the university sees it as its task to take concrete measures to do so. It is also common practice to think about and reflect on experiences with such measures. The rectorate has played a key role in establishing this culture by formulating and embedding corresponding goals in university strategy documents and structures. Likewise, the fact that the institutions responsible for these target groups are involved not only in carrying out the actual measures, but also in the scientific debate – and enjoy a strong national and international reputation in their respective fields – surely also plays an important role.

## CONCLUSIONS

The anchoring of gender equality policies at universities in Austria is shaped by a “good” legislative basis, which not only establishes a legal obligation to implement gender equality policies, but also provides effective instruments to meet this obligation. The instruments established by law include the requirements that all universities establish an equal opportunities working party and incorporate a female advancement plan into their statutes. This legal basis is a prerequisite for establishing gender equality, since it provides motivated people in the university landscape with options to intervene against discrimination. Another characteristic of the situation in Austria is the fact that this option to intervene or lodge an objection is used sparingly and serves more as a kind of “sabre to be rattled”. In practice, this “potential threat” allows possible discrimination to be avoided prior to the event in informal meetings or negotiations and prevents the situation from escalating into an open confrontation that might lead to a hardening of positions and stalemate. This anticipatory form of intervention by the working party is also linked to a high level of awareness of indirect discrimination. It puts the equal opportunities working parties in a position to support measures to advance women and gender equality and, at the same time, build on the results of these measures. This also emphasises the need for a well-matched, consistent set of measures which define not only the gender equality goals and instruments, but also the accompanying control mechanisms.

A further characteristic of the situation in Austria is the fact that the development of gender equality policies has been largely evidence based, i.e. based on a detailed analysis of the starting position. Several research projects were commissioned for this stock take, which examined different aspects of the situation of women in the university and research sectors. The relevance of evaluation must also be seen in the context of this traditional focus on evidence. So far, the goal of any external evaluations has been to provide input for improving existing instruments, and the results have been put to use accordingly. Yet internal evaluations are also gaining in relevance and are frequently used in the development of university gender equality policies. In such a scenario, internal evaluation is also linked to a process of self-reflection on the part of the university, which in turn plays a central role in sensitising the key players to the issues involved, particularly if several groups of players are included in these reflection processes.

If the potential inherent in evaluation is to be used to develop gender equality policies further, the players involved in implementing these policies must demonstrate a high level of willingness to reflect on the situation and embrace change. Consequently, appropriate control principles to encourage this kind of reflection must be implemented in universities. This will also ensure that gender equality goals do not simply remain the concern of a few individual players (e.g. university management or the members of the equal opportunities working party), but become a matter for everyone in their own individual roles and tasks. To reach this situation, university management will have to play an active role in formulating gender equality goals, anchoring them in all activities and demanding the participation of all concerned.

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Evaluators must also meet a number of requirements if evaluation is to realise its true potential. Firstly, an evaluation must concentrate on the possible use of the results, i.e. it must be designed in a way that will allow them to contribute to further development (Weiss 1972; Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980). In our case, a prerequisite is that evaluators have comprehensive knowledge of the university system and are accepted in their capacity as evaluators. In practice, attention must be paid in the selection of evaluators to potential rivalry between universities or between the university and the non-university sector. Similarly, for the evaluation to gain acceptance, its design must also accommodate the complexity behind the influencing factors and the impact of this complexity on the implementation and effect of individual measures or sets of measure. This allows the evaluation to make constructive use of the limitations of current gender equality policies or measures, i.e. to present them starting points for any further development. This in turn avoids these limitations being used as “killer arguments” which make any form of gender equality policy obsolete.

Experiences with the evaluation of gender equality policies in Austria show that it has great potential to contribute to the continued development of existing measures and policies if the targets of the evaluation are aware of the problems, prepared to reflect on the situation and have organisational development competences (e.g. with regard to the creation of effective control mechanisms). These are strong requirements that cannot simply be taken from the outset as given. This emphasises the fact that even when an established, consistent and widely accepted policy mix is in place, there is still a need to raise awareness and sensitize people to the issues involved to create a consciousness for the problem and encourage them to reflect.

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