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The German Education Union
Units in Charge of Gender Equality and Higher Education and Research

Project
**“Work-Life Balance and Gender Specific Career Patterns
in Higher Education and Research”**

German National Strategy

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1. Foreword

This position paper is devoted to a proposal from the German education union GEW for a national strategy to improve Work-Life Balance in career patterns in higher education and research in Germany. This constitutes the GEW's contribution to the second joint workshop held by the education unions GEW (Germany), SULF (Sweden) and UCU (United Kingdom) on 1 and 2 February 2010 in London. The objective is to develop a cross-border, international strategy for the three partner unions.

Our paper takes as its point of departure deficiencies in career patterns in higher education and research and the negative conditions these create for achieving a Work-Life Balance, as described and analysed by Regina Weber in her study "The Academic Career: A Daily Adventure? Work-Life Balance and Gender Segregation in German Higher Education and Research". This study is already available; the author presented it at the first workshop in Stockholm.

The present paper is based on statements and resolutions issued by the GEW which have been prepared by its units in charge of Gender Equality and Higher Education and Research and adopted by the trade union assembly, executive committee or the executive board.

The structure of this paper reflects the catalogue of criteria for evaluating Work-Life Balance and career patterns in the academic communities in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom, which the three unions discussed and developed at their first joint workshop on 22/23 September 2009 in Stockholm.

2. Personnel structure and career patterns

The problem

The anachronistic personnel structure in higher education is not fit for purpose. Junior academics are kept in a state of artificial dependency and subjected to atypical and precarious employment conditions – even after they have completed their qualification phase and gained their Ph.D. As a result, temporary contracts have become the norm for the vast majority of academics without professorships, who perform the bulk of academic work. In the current framework, remaining and succeeding in the academic field effectively calls for self-exploitation, with formats and hours of work which are socially destructive.

There is no recognised position for academics beyond pursuit of a chair and professorial career. Universities consider retaining the classical corpus of non-professorial teaching staff to be obsolescent, while in the advanced technical colleges it never took root in West Germany and could not be salvaged in the East. Because of this, junior academics who are not granted a professorship often end up in a career cul-de-sac: they are considered overqualified in the open job market, but in the long term they have no employment prospects in higher education or research.

They are often left clutching at straws in the form of poorly paid guest lectureships. Contrary to the original purpose of guest lectureships, which was to bring practical experience into higher education, many universities have yielded to severe financial pressures by transferring much of their core teaching to supposedly self-employed guest lecturers.

Personnel structure that is fit for purpose

In response to this undesirable development, the GEW proposes a personnel structure for higher education and research which is fit for purpose, and which is simultaneously more flexible and less hierarchical. The GEW calls for a transparent division of labour between university lecturers, research assistants, technical and administrative staff, so that they can meet, as a team, the manifold challenges of research, teaching, continuous education, knowledge transfer and academic management.

The GEW is calling for negotiated individual time budgets for research, teaching and other tasks in institutional operations, without creating professional cul-de-sacs due to one-dimensional specialisations.

This also means that the current system of rigid and sweeping rules concerning teaching duties should be replaced by one that is more flexible for individual lecturers, based on collective bargaining agreements between employers and trade unions. The GEW is in favour of a significant reduction in teaching duties, especially for lecturers at advanced technical colleges.

Implementing the European Charter for Researchers

The recommendations published by the European Commission in the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers should be followed when designing the terms and conditions of employment and opening up career opportunities in the course of personnel planning. Both the Charter and the Code of Conduct call for greater continuity and better career prospects for researchers.

Permanent contracts for regular tasks

Regular tasks in higher education and research must fundamentally be carried out by staff in permanent positions, making it possible to plan one's life and career on a stable basis and thereby to pursue academic activity as a profession.

Trainee employment for doctoral students

Junior academics should as a general rule be offered a trainee post while they are engaged in their professional training. The post can be limited to the Ph.D. phase. Gaining a doctorate is not a period of study, but rather the first phase in the exercise of a professional academic career. People working towards their doctorate should be allowed to spend at least three quarters of their work time engaged in the independent acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Pension gaps need to be avoided in higher education and research career paths. This is another reason why funding for junior researchers should take the form of jobs rather than stipends. If it is necessary to resort to stipends in individual cases, their recipients should also be provided with effective social insurance including pension contributions. Periods of training and study must once again be fully recognised as contribution periods for pension rights.

Tenure track for postdocs

From the GEW perspective, the qualification phase for researchers ends with their Ph.D. The postdoc phase that follows is one of continuous training alongside professional academic work, which must be based on secure employment prospects. The recruitment of junior professors and other postdocs should be embedded in a tenure track which offers young researchers various career opportunities but enables them to remain permanently with the university, whether or not they are appointed to a professorship. The GEW calls for the abolition of the professorial thesis, or *Habilitation*, as an anachronistic rite of initiation, not least by international standards.

Anticipatory personnel planning

There is no compelling objective link between third-party funding for positions and limited term contracts: universities and research institutions must engage in anticipatory personnel planning to ensure maximum stability and continuity for any employment financed by third parties. Besides, effective personnel planning is essential to a well functioning tenure track which enables junior researchers to move without delay into a permanent job when they obtain the anticipated qualification.

In order to ensure that pregnancy and parental leave do not trigger the premature termination of a research project, resources must be made available to extend limited contracts during pregnancy and the care of children.

Professional personnel development

Universities and research institutions should pursue professional personnel development to optimise the career prospects of their staff. This must take into account the different conditions in which employees operate and their different life plans. This likewise calls for up-to-date procedures of transparent staff recruitment and leadership, which have long been a matter of course in non-academic professions. Hierarchies handed down from the past must be pruned back in favour of teamwork between peers.

Making precarious employment more secure

Guest lecturers who are paid per teaching session like day labourers are operating under especially precarious conditions. Wherever guest lecturers fulfil permanent teaching roles, these must be transformed into regular employment with paid up social insurance. Anyone who wishes to be involved in teaching as a part-time guest lecturer alongside another full-time job should be able to do so on a self-employed basis, in compliance with the statutory minimum standards with regard to adequate pay (including for preparation and post-lesson reflection), duration of contract (to include academic vacations) and with an option to extend. Guest lecturers must be recognised as full members of the institution, with all the usual rights and responsibilities.

It is no longer acceptable to exploit researchers who have completed their professorial thesis and not been given a professorship. In Germany, this is the dilemma of the “*Privatdozent*”, who is obliged to provide free teaching in order to preserve his or her opportunity of a professorship. This teaching must also be properly remunerated.

Collective bargaining agreements for every type of employment

The GEW stands by the fundamental principle of collective bargaining agreements for all public sector employees in a defined territory, including those in higher education and research institutions, and calls for their extension to cover all groups of employees including teaching staff, research assistants and students who take on paid tasks in the institution. In this context, the GEW advocates appropriate terms which reflect the particular requirements of working in higher education and research. Moreover, the GEW calls for a unified labour law to overcome the differences between staff categorised as public sector employees and those with civil servant status.

International mobility

Stays abroad should cease to result in a disadvantage with regard to academics' future old-age provisions. The GEW is calling for the portability of accumulated pension entitlements to be guaranteed without restriction, with analogous rules being achieved for private and company pension plans. For the countries outside the EU,

the union should reach bilateral agreements. Moreover, the establishment of a European retirement fund warrants serious consideration, which could help provide for a balance of the burden between guest and host countries as well as between more and less well-off countries. This would be an important step toward reducing the drawbacks of “brain drain” and striking a new balance.

Upgrading technical and administrative work

Administrative, technical, service and advisory work in higher education and research institutions is carried out by more women than men. The GEW demands that their work is recognised and valued in performing the indispensable related and support functions which enable a university to fulfil all its tasks. Universities and research institutions should themselves take responsibility for structuring this work around functional posts offering permanent contracts. This upgrading of the work must also be expressed in stronger rights for the bodies representing these workers, and collective bargaining agreements should be based on improved, non-discriminatory pay scales.

3. Gender equality in the academic community

The problem

Women in particular still face multiple structural and cultural barriers in higher education and research. This is already evident from the serious under-representation of women in leading positions in higher education and research institutions as well as in professorships.

The lack of stable, long-term career prospects within the academic field has an additional negative impact on women. At each stage of advancement, women opt *out* of academic life rather than rising *up* it. The vertical notion of career which underlies the existing personnel structure no longer adequately reflects social changes in the way people design their lives. Added to this is the cultural dimension to academic activity: the myth that the pursuit of knowledge is not a job like any other, but a lifestyle which requires total dedication to the exclusion of all else. The dominant principle of homosocial cooptation favours men; they are seen as more likely to fit into their prospective working environment than women.

Demystifying the academic workplace

The GEW supports any effort to demystify the academic workplace and generate a view of the profession that presents it as a normal field of work. It supports processes that educate and inform the public in this spirit.

The interplay between gender factors and the academic cultures of the various disciplines needs to be investigated in more detail. How do general social demands, higher education structures and these academic cultures combine to make women "integrated outsiders" in the academic system, simultaneously assigning them gender roles that do not seem compatible with academic careers? The GEW calls on scholarly associations to focus in their work on the entry barriers and career obstacles to women within their disciplines and to devise subject-specific strategies.

Flexible career paths

The GEW demands career paths in the academic landscape which will allow for horizontal and inter-sectoral mobility as well as work breaks. Research funding and support for junior researchers must take these requirements into account and offer suitable options.

Commitment to gender equality in higher education and research

The commitment to gender equity in higher education and research and the duty to pursue gender mainstreaming in university management, development planning and structural and personnel development must remain on a statutory footing. The same applies to the role of women's and equality officers, who still require a greater say in decision-making and more participation rights.

Agreed targets and quotas

The GEW urges universities, research institutions and research funding organisations to take effective measures to raise the proportion of women at all academic career levels, including professorships and other leadership functions, with a view to achieving a gender balance. In those fields where women are already under-represented as undergraduates, especially the natural sciences and engineering, the percentage of female students must also be increased. Safeguards are furthermore needed to ensure that the transition from a Bachelor to a Master course is not restrictive for women.

The GEW urges higher education and research institutions to commit to agreed targets for demonstrably increasing the proportion of women in fields where they are currently under-represented. These quotas must be linked to strong sanctions. Public research funding measures must also be made conditional on fulfilling these criteria.

Gender equality as a criterion of quality

The GEW demands that wherever there is talk of academic quality in higher education and research institutions, the criteria of quality and their provenance are made transparent, especially in any kind of evaluation of people, processes and institutions. The quality of higher education and research institutions should also be assessed according to how far and with how much success they practise active equality policies, create gender-fair conditions for study and work, support women's and gender studies, and consider findings of these in course design and incorporate them into teaching and study.

Funding independent of partner and age

The GEW demands that undergraduate and postgraduate funding of any kind should be provided without reference to partners, and that all age limits in higher education and research be abolished, especially in academic career paths.

Women's and gender studies

The GEW is supportive of all initiatives that seek also to measure the quality of higher education and research institutions by whether they produce findings in women's and gender studies and apply these themselves. The findings of women's and gender studies are essential in order to explore the mechanisms underlying the structural exclusion of women and to develop opportunities for action. The GEW urges the national and state governments, higher education and research institutions, as well as research funding organisations to give targeted and sustained support to women's and gender studies. Women's and gender studies must become an integral part of teaching and study in all disciplines, i.e. be incorporated in curricula and examinations.

Diversity strategies

Women academics are, at the same time, citizens or foreigners; they may or may not come from an immigrant family; they may be young or old, disabled or not, members of a cultural majority or minority, heterosexual or LGBT, and so forth. Against this

backdrop, diversity strategies must be developed to combat multiple discrimination and open up higher education and research institutions to all social groups.

4. Family-friendly higher education and research institutions

The problem

Difficulties in balancing family and academic life still predominantly burden female researchers, students and administrative and technical staff, thereby exacerbating the exclusion of women from the academic landscape. The notion of family that prevails in the operation of academic institutions is dated and is proving increasingly to be a barrier to innovation.

Equality oriented women's policies

The GEW advocates equality of opportunity for all university members and employees of research institutions irrespective of their family situation. The GEW calls for consistently equality oriented family policies addressing both women and men.

A broader definition of "family"

The condition for this is a definition of family which includes single parents, partners in same-sex relationships as parents, as well as other forms of household in which people take responsibility for each other. In addition, it must be remembered that academics live on their own also have a right to strike a balance between their work and their outside life.

Advisory service

Higher education and research institutions should provide their employees with free advice to help them find a balance between work and life, research and family.

Education and care facilities for all children

The GEW demands education and care facilities for all children, which are open to all university members and institution staff. Consideration for the particular concerns of workers in higher education and research who have children or family members in need of care must be anchored firmly in the structures and the culture of all academic institutions.

Flexible work time models

In order to ensure equality of opportunity, flexible work models must be implemented in the academic world and equal rights must be granted to part time students and workers as well as those on temporary contracts. The GEW supports the European Commission's call (in its recommendations for a European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers) for working conditions allowing researchers to combine family and work, children and careers. Consideration should equally be given to other workers with family members in need of care by offering them appropriate working hours. The right to part time work must – depending on the employee's wishes – be balanced by a right to full time work. Part time work must never constitute a hidden wage cut.

5. Summary

The GEW demands a personnel structure for higher education and research that is fit for purpose. Personnel structure must be oriented towards the profession, not the professor, and ensure that all researchers, regardless of whether they are granted a chair or not, have the opportunity of pursuing an academic career. Junior researchers must be offered reliable career prospects rather than precarious conditions of employment. Regular tasks in higher education and research must be carried out by staff in permanent positions. The GEW calls for an upgrading of the work performed by colleagues in administrative, technical, service and advisory capacities.

The GEW demands affirmative equality policies in higher education and research institutions, beginning with career path structures and staff recruitment. A gender balance at all career levels, including professorships and other leadership roles, is to be sought through binding quotas enforced by sanctions. The GEW wishes to see gender fairness anchored deeply within the HR and quality management functions of higher education and research institutions and the rights of women's and equality officers strengthened.

The GEW calls for a family-friendly orientation to academic work so that all university members and institution staff can enjoy equal opportunities in their studies and in their careers. This includes appropriate educational and care facilities for children, consideration for colleagues with family members in need of care, and the corresponding design of working hours and conditions of study.