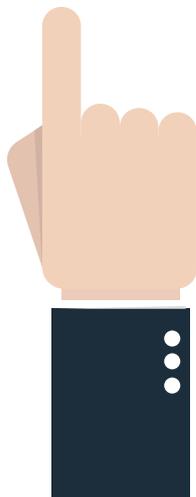


Academic hiring in Norway



**Does
excellence**



**include
diversity?**

The study

The study addresses how gatekeepers evaluate, rank and choose candidates for academic positions, the procedures they follow, and how they navigate within these.



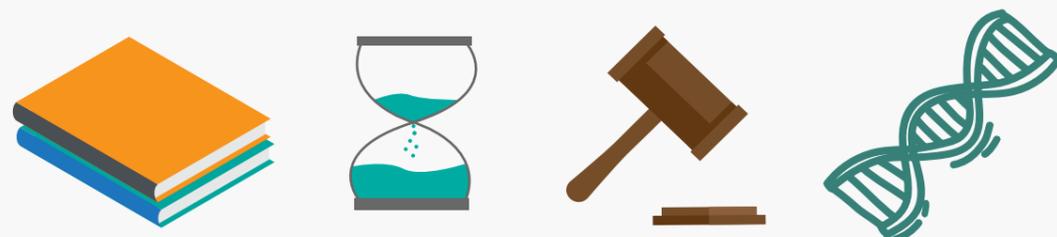
Recruiting new faculty members is one of the most important tasks a university can undertake. Universities depend on candidates who can both publish, obtain external funding, and contribute to the teaching and administration of the department. Selected candidates will be in positions of power, and contribute to further defining quality and competence. Hiring decisions affects the gender and ethnic composition of a department and a discipline.

How does the recruitment process shape standards of academic quality, and do recruiters consider gender and diversity in their assessment of candidates?

Despite high equality ambitions in Norway, our research question whether current norms of academic recruitment manage to consider diversity, or if the criteria for assessing quality benefit applicants with a certain profile.



We interviewed 52 recruiters, and studied 48 recruitment cases from the disciplines history, political science and biology. These disciplines are traditional university disciplines and have a high share of women in lower positions (e.g. among PhD-students), but are male-dominated at professorate level.



The Norwegian Context



53 %

PhD Candidates



50 %

Associate Professors



31 %

Professors

Percentage of female PhD Candidates, Associate Professors and Professors.
Source: DBH (2019), from all universities and disciplines in Norway.

Women increasingly occupy positions in academia, but Norwegian universities are still characterized by gender segregation.



Men predominate in the technical and natural sciences, while there is a high number of female scholars working in the fields of social science and health science. In all fields, men are overrepresented at top positions such as professorships.



Gender equality is a strongly established norm in research and higher education policies, and rooted in formal guidelines. There is also a stronger and more explicit focus on both internationalization and excellence.

In Norway the recruitment process can be characterized as transparent. All vacant tenured positions such as associate and full professors must be publically announced and the applicants have the right to access the scientific assessments.

The Recruitment process

Idealtypical model of the recruitment process

- 1 Announcement of the position
- 2 Sorting committee
- 3 Scientific committee
- 4 Committee for trial lecture and interview
- 5 Final hiring

The assessment of quality and the incorporation of gender and diversity concerns differ significantly between these steps.

1st step: The announcement (logic of inclusion)

Institutions promote inclusion in the first stage of the recruitment process. This first stage is characterized by open competition through public announcement between a large pool of diverse applicants.

Good teachers – The need for a good teacher is often emphasized as important at the first step, but the announcement often specifies that evaluation will be based on research production.



Gender balance emphasized – Women are in some cases encouraged to apply. Search committees are presented as a strategy to increase number of female candidates.

Internationalization – By announcing job openings in international channels one seeks to include a wider, international and more diverse pool of applicants.



2nd step: The sorting of applicants (logic of exclusion)

In the second step, the sorting committee narrows their definitions of quality, and apply a logic of exclusion.



Narrowing: The ambition is to reduce the candidates to a manageable list (10-15 candidates)



Focus shift: from diversity to excellence defined as efficiently publishing articles in high-ranking English-language journals.

Committees pay particular attention to the candidates' number of publications, channels of publication and the efficiency of their publishing. Teaching skills and administrative responsibilities are not significant in this step.

3rd step: Scientific committee (logic of exclusion)

Productivity first:

The members of the scientific committee mention a wide range of understandings of quality. However, most of these are disregarded and the ranking is primarily based on productivity in publishing in English-language journals.



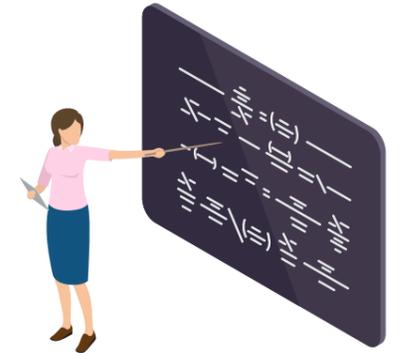
International scholars from the Global South are only considered relevant if they have an affiliation with a Western institution.

The second and third steps are crucial, as most candidates fall out here and as strict limits are set for what the committee in step 4 can do.

4th step: Trial lecture and interview

Teaching: The initial focus on teaching returns. An interview committee consisting of faculty members from the department will evaluate the candidate's pedagogical abilities.

The interview committee can only point to pedagogical skills among the candidates already selected based on their publishing skills (step 2 and 3).



5th step: Hiring



The top candidate is offered the job.

This step sometimes involves negotiation, as the top candidate may have several job offers to choose from.

The varying understandings of academic quality through the recruitment process

Gatekeepers do include diversity concerns in their evaluations of academic quality, but only in the initial step. In the crucial step two and three, the recruiters find it illegitimate to take diversity into account, only a narrow understanding of quality is accepted. The criteria for assessing quality, is reduced to quantifiable counts of published articles. This criterion outweighs the diversity consideration and wider understandings of quality in the crucial steps of the hiring process.

- 1 We need a good teacher and researcher
- 2 Productivity in English-language, competitive journals
- 3 Productivity in English-language, competitive journals
- 4 We need a good teacher, and a cooperative colleague
- 5 Excellence

Possible implications of gatekeepers' definition of quality

The logic of inclusion that characterises the action the committee member takes in the first step of the recruitment is crucial to ensure a diverse pool of applicants to choose from. There is acceptance for diversity initiatives in the first step of academic hiring.



Yet, the narrow definition of quality that characterizes step 2 and 3 is not adequate when it comes to revealing the potential and strengths of a diverse pool of candidates.

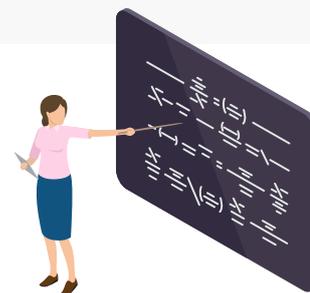


No institutional procedures ensure that specific factors for lower production (childbirths, parental leaves, number of children etc.) are taken into account in the assessment of candidates.

Previous research has illustrated how women and men have different career rhythms, where women more frequently have 'frayed careers' due to family responsibilities.



Quantifiable research production is favored over other criteria, such as teaching. Previous research has shown that women tend to take on more of the teaching activities and 'invisible' organisational responsibilities



Although an open competition in a global market is valued in the first step of the process, the scientific committee tend to exclude applicants from non-Western institutions in the proceeding steps of the hiring process.

The practical implication of this study concerns where in the process of evaluation policies or guidelines, that promote gender balance should be implemented in order to make them efficient: that is, it is not enough to target the initial stage of the recruitment process, as is often done currently. Measures and action that promote equality must also be integrated in the later and more decisive stages of the recruitment process. If men are favoured as a result of a narrow focus on a specific type of research output, one must consider broadening the array of academic merits taken into consideration.