



Press release
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The impact of implicit bias for women in academia – and what to do about it

Academia prides itself on being a merit-driven sector. Power, rewards and resources go to those who deserve it: that is how academics get jobs and get promoted, how they get funded and published, that is how they become leaders in their fields and in their institutions – through rigorous, rational and fair competition which drives the most excellent people to the top. But then why does academia have so few female university rectors and presidents? Why do women do less well in competitions for academic jobs and money?

LERU has been delving into how implicit bias potentially undermines the academic meritocracy, consulting with Europe's leading universities that make up its members to find out how they view implicit bias and how they deal with it. The findings are discussed in LERU's latest advice paper, which is released and presented today at an event in Brussels.

The paper focuses on implicit gender bias, although there are many other types of bias at play in our daily lives and in academia. And it is not about men being biased against women; women may be biased against women, men may be biased against men, and bias also affects our judgement of those with a different cultural, ethnic, sexual orientation, etc.

The paper does, however, argue– and shows the evidence- that implicit gender bias plays a role at many levels: in women's working conditions, that is in terms of their underrepresentation at the higher echelons, of their earning less, and of their holding more part-time positions and precarious contracts. Secondly, it looks at bias in recruitment and advancement mechanisms: how positions are advertised, how selection committees operate and how the language itself of evaluations can be biased. Thirdly, bias plays a role in research funding processes.

The evidence for bias is everywhere and impossible to ignore. But action can, should and is being taken. Says Prof. Jadranka Gvozdanovic, main author of the paper and the Rector's Envoy for Equal Opportunities at the University of Heidelberg: *"LERU universities recognise that bias must be tackled by the leadership as a way of changing culture. The university leadership should fully understand the impact of bias and possibilities to mitigate it; this should be part of general leadership training."*

There are many measures that can be taken to help debias universities, whether it is through providing bias training, using external evaluators and bias observers in selections, reviewing and debiasing job advertisements, etc. *"Crucially"*, adds Prof. Kurt Deketelaere, Secretary-General of LERU, *"measures to counter bias will only have an effect if they are supported throughout the university, with those in charge of faculties and departments taking responsibility and with universities regularly monitoring and transparently reporting about what they are doing."*

The paper has a separate section detailing various actions undertaken by LERU universities on bias. It also offers nine key recommendations on how to counter bias at universities and in other organisations such as funding organisations and policy makers.

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About LERU

The League of European Research Universities (LERU) is an association of twenty-three leading research-intensive universities that share the values of high-quality teaching within an environment of internationally competitive research.

Founded in 2002, LERU advocates education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; and the promotion of research across a broad front in partnership with industry and society at large.

The purpose of the League is to advocate these values, to influence policy in Europe and to develop best practice through mutual exchange of experience. LERU regularly publishes a variety of papers and reports which make high-level policy statements, provide in-depth analyses and make concrete recommendations for policymakers, universities, researchers and other stakeholders.

The LERU universities are:

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