

Equal opportunities for women in science -- new strategies of the German Federal Government

HELGA EBELING

One of the policy objectives of the new Federal Government in Germany is equal opportunities for women. It is to be a guiding principle in all programmes and projects in education and research, and it is to be understood as a means to improve quality and performance and to make more efficient use of existing potential. This paradigm shift requires rethinking by all those responsible in politics and industry, as well as in science and research.

Equal opportunity is also a top priority at the European level. In the face of international competition, Europe can no longer afford not to fully exploit women's great potential for innovation in science and research. It is therefore a primary goal of the Federal Government to increase the participation of women in science and research, and particularly their share of leadership positions at universities and research institutions. The forthcoming generational shift -- more than 50 per cent of present positions on professorial level will become available because of retirement until 2005 -- at universities and research institutions will provide a good opportunity for improving participation by women. Above all, action must be taken to increase the proportion of women holding both professorial posts and leadership positions in non-university research institutions. In 1998 only 9.5 per cent of all professors in Germany were women, in non-university research institutions only 3.7 per cent of all persons having leadership positions were women.

The amendment of the German Framework Act for Higher Education -- enacted in 1998 -- provided a broad legal basis. It is the task of the universities to support the implementation of equal rights. The law mentions the universities' commissioners for women's affairs and equal rights. It introduces an evaluation and performance-orientated funding of universities. The appropriation of government funds will be orientated to the universities' performance in teaching and research, their support for young scientists and the enforcement of gender equality. 'Habilitation' is a specific qualification after a doctorate which had to be acquired by persons aspiring to become professors, and which includes the writing of a scientific paper which has to be defended and approved by an academic commission. This is no longer the standard criterion in the appointment of professors, and this change facilitates access to professorial posts by women and shortens their qualification marathon. Last year, of all persons reaching this qualification, only 15 per cent were women.

Research institutions

The 1999 budget authorizes the Hermann von Helmholtz - Association of German Research Centres (the largest German research organisation) to provide within their regular budgets 100 permanent employment opportunities mainly for women, which should be used to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions. In addition, for the first time, the 1999 budget includes the possibility of allowing research institutions to provide child care without placing a burden on their budget.

The implementation of equal opportunities for women in science is a very complex long-term project. In Germany, our experience has shown that lasting progress can only be achieved if various measures are combined, such as: reporting systems, continuous information and awareness-raising up to the highest government level, equality of opportunity as a management task, changes in legal framework and structure, the improvement of overall

conditions, the establishment of equal rights structures in the institutions and supraregional networks.

The central points in the implementation of equal opportunities are the following.

- **Increasing the share of women in leadership positions**; this can contribute to a change in the gender bias of certain subjects and the future design and organization of science. Cases in point are the posts programmes for higher professorships (C3/C4) for women scientists of the Max Planck Society and the provision of permanent employment opportunities within the regular budgets of the Helmholtz centres.
- **The promotion of young scientists**; above all, alternatives to the habilitation procedure have to be developed. The Emmy Noether programme, which the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft launched this year, provides for a reorganization of the postdoctoral phase. After a period of successful research abroad, the postdoctoral student heads his or her own research group.

In the medium term, special funding programmes will be indispensable for accelerating developments. With a special item in the 1999 budget entitled 'Strategies for implementing equal opportunities for women in education and research' and equipped with DM 35M (\$19M) for the next four years, we now have a basis for systematically supporting relevant developments. Such developments include the establishment of an 'International competence centre for women in science', which will support developments, provide data and maintain an international database of women experts for appointments to professorial posts and committees.

To stimulate competition between the institutions and to improve transparency, we shall apply to universities and research institutions the 'Total E-Quality' label, which was introduced in industry for an independent voluntary audit of equal opportunity measures. Participation by women in science and technology will be promoted by our initiative 'New impetus for technology by women', which covers networks and systematic information strategies and measures also aimed at raising awareness. The International Women's University for Technology and Culture within the framework of Expo 2000 is to provide 1,000 women researchers from all over the world with the opportunity of cooperating and exchanging experience at an interdisciplinary level for 100 days. This is to demonstrate the contribution by women researchers to the future development of science.

It is a matter of enhancing quality and performance, of broadening the range of subjects and methods. We are therefore planning to integrate equal opportunity measures into all research areas of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and to monitor the implementation of these measures at regular intervals within the framework of a progress report.

Helga Ebeling

Women in Education and Research, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Bonn, Germany