

Towards disability sensitive organisations: lessons from Gender Equality Plans

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“Women with (dis) abilities“ RISEWISE. WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT.

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We suggest transforming and adapting a Gender Equality Plan, which has been tried and tested in academic contexts, into a “Disability Inclusion Plan” tailored to the academic sector. We believe a Disability Inclusion Plan could integrate regional and national disability inclusion strategies addressing the employment, the educational and the health sectors. This type of plan might be more useful than a Disability Equality Scheme: it is already tailored to an academic institution and has already tested other types of discrimination, reducing women’s access to and progression in academic careers. Finally, a GEP has a robust bottom-up approach and involves participants in active paths in planning, realisation and monitoring.

Structural change is recognised as a powerful strategy towards gender equality, and numerous EU funded projects show at what extent an all-encompassing cultural transformation is needed. Various processes and strategies sustain structural change, and Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are currently considered among the most powerful ones in the academic context.

GEPs focus on gender equality and Academies implementing them have started also adding activities aimed at promoting diversity. However, almost no mention is made in GEPs of the inclusion of disabled people, as usually, Academies have dedicated offices dealing with this target group.

TOWARDS DISABILITY INCLUSION PLANS?

If we wish to support collaborative research with subsequent benefits for disabled people and minimise the risk of exploiting their experiences conceptually, one problem which needs solving is the lack of academics who identify as disabled, people who would be fully entitled in the eyes of disabled people’s movements to carry out research in this area.

Not every country has professorships in disability studies – Italy is one of them – and this does not facilitate the training of disabled people who can carry out research to academic standards.

In order to foster training, recruitment and career development for disabled researchers, there are diverse strategies which might bring about organisational changes and help embed inclusion and diversity, more and more common in the academy.

A widespread strategy, assisted by funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme, is the promotion of gender equality through gender equality plans (GEP). GEPs are initiatives applied in both the public and private sectors to define both the legal framework and the operational conditions for implementing gender mainstreaming. To create a GEP, the organisations identify a set of strategic

actions which will allow them to achieve the expected results in terms of gender equality and balance.

In the specific context of research organisations and higher education institutions, the European Commission considers a Gender Equality Plan as a set of actions aiming at conducting impact assessment / audits of procedures and practices to identify gender bias, implementing innovative strategies to correct any bias and setting targets and monitoring progress via indicators¹ in the academic context. A similar set of actions could be implemented with the aim of counteracting biases towards disabled people, after establishing strategies and actions to identify them and, finally, to monitor their progress.

Just as GEPs usually begin by collecting gender disaggregated data, essential to defining the problem and identifying opportunities, in our case data would be disaggregated by the individuals' function and disability. The importance of disaggregated data stems from the need to present the case for intervention (showing imbalances/under-resourcing of inclusion-related activities), to address resistance and formulate GEPs. An analysis and review of policies, procedures and practices could help identify barriers to inclusion and draw up the actions necessary to address them. Collecting disaggregated data is becoming a widespread activity, and organisations now include a variety of underrepresented groups in their data. The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics and the Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences of the National Science Foundation, for example, collected disaggregated data for a report titled "Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering" in 2017²

We suggest to transform and adapt a Gender Equality Plan, which has been tried and tested in academic contexts, into a "Disability Inclusion Plan" tailored to the academic sector, thereby supporting regional and national disability inclusion strategies addressing the employment, educational and health sectors. This type of plan might be more useful than a Disability Equality Scheme: it is already tailored to an academic institution, and already tested on the basis of another type of discrimination – gender – which reduces women's access to and progression in academic careers. A GEP has a strong bottom-up approach and involves participants in active paths in planning, realisation and monitoring. In order to test the feasibility of this approach, we attempted to modify an existing GEP template used in the H2020 SAGE proposal. The aim was to consider its applicability

¹ Source: European Commission Communication on 'A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth' (COM(2012) 392 final).

² <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17310/static/downloads/nsf17310-digest.pdf>

in the same context – the academy – with a different but complementary aim, namely promoting the inclusion of disabled people.

Proposed steps: - Assign the role of Self Assessment Team to the existing committee/office/bureau for disability related issues. Aims: - Verify the feasibility of the following macro actions; - Define microactions and deadlines for each macro action applicable to the specific context.

Accessibility	Actions transversal to all topics and themes: verify the accessibility of the venues, rooms, any places in which events are organised and mention accessibility in the information paper/electronic documents. Verify the accessibility of websites and information about formal and informal events, celebrations, meetings, etc.
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N°	Topic	Theme	Stimulating reflection on macro actions
1	Knowledge about accessibility	Disability & Research Content	Protocols for researchers working on disability; Build Disability Awareness into Research Design & Practice; Creating Online Modules about Disability and Research
2		Culture & Curriculum	Disability & Organisational Change Course; Disability Module for Undergraduates & Postgraduates; Integration of disability related knowledge into teaching in all disciplines
3	Career progression of disabled staff	Inclusive Professional development	Early Career Disabled Researcher Supports; Tailored mentoring; Skills Training (Media, Funding, Management)
4		Raising profile of academics	External Lecturers & Visiting Professors from Disability Studies field; Academic/Administrative Leadership Programmes for disabled staff/staff working in disability sector
5	Work-Life Balance and Disability	Inclusive Culture & Management Practices	Staff Orientation; Inclusive Social Activities; Support for Carers and Flexible Working Arrangements
6		Policy	Extended Leave for Medical reasons; Sabbaticals for staff returning from extended Medical leave; Improve Childcare Provision
7	Inclusive Institutional Governance	Leadership & Management	University & Faculty Commitment to Disability Equality Plans; Unconscious Bias Training; Pledges from University Governance Supporting Equity in Disability
8		Monitoring, Policy & Practice	Disability-proof policies; Key Performance Indicators & Targets; Workload Models; Disability Pay Audit

As for what happens when implementing GEPs, it would also be important to promote parallel engagement opportunities in the form of: “cascading, networking, conferences and exchanges of experience, site visits, presentations of survey findings/recommendations for action and, most importantly, their adoption by governing bodies” (Drew et al, 2017, p. 330).

To sum up, adopting what we have called Disability Inclusion Plans, tools specifically adapted to Academies (similar in structure to GEPs but adapted to local situations and conditions), would favour the career progression of disabled researchers and researchers interested in disability studies at international and coordinated level, through mechanisms already tested and known to the Academies

which have adopted GEPs. Another benefit of this approach would be that, given the specific aim of GEPs, the structural changes would not risk excluding or not including in a proper way disabled women.

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