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GENERA Gender in Physics Days in Europe

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Abstract. The GENERA European Horizon 2020 project aims at designing and implementing gender equality plans customised for physics. The three-year project started in September 2015. GENERA's activities include the national Gender in Physics Day in each European country participating in the GENERA project. Typically, at these days, national physics managers, human resources managers, and gender equality policy officers meet with senior and early-career physicists to review the status quo and formulate recommendations for improving the gender balance in the national physics community. We will report on the recommendations of the first GENERA Gender in Physics Day organised in 2016 in the Netherlands.

INTRODUCTION

In general the physics research community fosters the assumption that it is gender neutral. However, despite this, the under-representation of women in European physics research is a long-standing and persistent issue. With this in mind, an international consortium of research-performing and research-funding organisations have engaged in the GENERA European Horizon 2020 project [1], which aims at designing and implementing gender equality plans customised for the physics research community in Europe. The three-year project started in September 2015. GENERA's national Gender in Physics Days are among the most visible activities presented by this group. Typically, at these days, national high-level physics managers, human resources (HR) managers and gender equality officers meet with senior and early career physicists to review the status quo and formulate recommendations for improving the gender balance in the national physics community. Many national Gender in Physics Days have taken place since the first meeting in the Netherlands on 1 November 2016. The international organisations CERN, ESO, and NordForsk organised an international Gender in Physics Day at CERN on 27 January 2017. Of course, in their format and approach the meetings reflect the different cultures of the national or international physics communities. However, common to all of these meetings are the conclusions that the actions paramount for achieving a better gender balance in physics research are (1) firm and accountable commitment of management, (2) transparent and accountable selection procedures, and (3) training against unconscious gender bias at all levels in the community. In addition, the GENERA Gender in Physics Days turn out to be effective tools for monitoring the performance of gender equality plans in physics.

THE FIRST GENERA GENDER IN PHYSICS DAY IN THE NETHERLANDS

On 1 November 2016, the first GENERA Gender in Physics Day took place in the Netherlands [2]. Almost 60 representatives from every level of the physics community in the Netherlands actively participated in the event, with a ratio of 60/40 female/male. At the meeting the Dutch physics community was well represented: Among the participants were high-level physics and HR management and senior and early-career physicists of both the Dutch Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter (FOM) (since 1 January 2017, FOM is fully integrated in the National

Research Organization [NWO] in the Netherlands) and university physics departments, as well as representatives of the Netherlands Research Organisation (NWO), the Netherlands Physical Society (NNV), and the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts (KNAW).

The Gender in Physics Day was the first opportunity to introduce the GENERA project to the Dutch physics community and to make the connection between the objectives of GENERA and the situation in the Netherlands. In a plenary session, the status of several stimulation programmes for women in physics was presented. The session was followed by parallel discussion workshops to formulate recommendations for GENERA and for a future gender equality plan for physics institutes in the Netherlands. A total of 22 recommendations were formulated. Here, we list the most important ones, which were proposed by different discussion groups but shared by all participants in the meeting.

- *Awareness.* All participants recognised the need for gender and diversity training, in particular for those who opt to be involved in recruitment and selection procedures. Senior physicists recommended extending such training to all staff in a department or institute. Early-career physicists recommended making such training mandatory.
- *Stimulation.* High-level physics managers recommended to continue the personal grants of the FOM/f programme [3] and the tenure track programmes for women in science, but to regularly monitor their effectiveness for physics.
- *Accountability.* High-level physics managers recommended implementing top-down accountability of leadership to improve the gender balance in physics. They stated that a policy of accountability will force university or faculty presidents to comply with agreed quotas or targets for hiring or promoting women. They considered it necessary to have quotas for the number of women on short lists and the number of women appointed. It was recognized that the need to meet such quotas would prompt explicit discussions of possible gender bias within selection committees. Formal accountability was considered necessary to avoid informal procedures, because these can be applied inconsistently, and to ensure that assessment and selection procedures at the level of departments or institutes are public and transparent for staff, applicants, and committee members. Human resources managers agreed with the recommendations of the physics managers.
- *Monitoring.* High-level HR managers recommended that GENERA should define the key performance indicators for the success of gender equality plans for physics and ensure that a governmental body, such as a ministry, periodically (annually) harvests the data per discipline. Senior physicists recommended gender equality and diversity committees at faculty, departmental, or institute levels. They considered the Project JUNO or Athena SWAN committees prime examples. High-level physics managers recommended to investigate the possibility of introducing a project similar to Project JUNO in the Netherlands, with the Netherlands Physical Society (NNV) in the role of independent physics organization.
- *Transparency.* Senior physicists recommended creating public protocols to be followed for all recruitment, selection, and promotion committees and procedures. The protocols should include a step encouraging candidates to apply and should be clear about criteria and steps to be taken on a path to a professorship.
- *Work/life balance.* Senior physicists recommended including in a gender equality plan a “dual career” programme offering support for finding a job for a candidate’s partner. Early-career physicists recommended investigating the possibility of creating positions in the Netherlands that include the possibility for the researcher to work abroad to acquire the necessary international experience required for a permanent position. This structure could help the pressure of career uncertainty in a personally critical phase. They also recommended grants to provide postdocs an additional year to ease career preparation and getting settled in a new institute in a new country.

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