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"Structural disadvantages"

HRK event on women in academia

Women in academia are still subject to structural disadvantages. At an event hosted by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the University of Göttingen, female university leaders exchanged ideas with female politicians and business experts about causes and counter-strategies.

Around a quarter of professorships and university leadership positions are now occupied by women. In 2000, the number of women occupying professorships was still just ten percent. However, this positive trend cannot disguise the fact that women still have a comparatively hard time forging an academic career and rising through the ranks in university management. A clear disadvantage is also corroborated by figures from the Federal Statistical Office confirming a salary advantage of up to 650 euros per month for male professors compared to female professors.

"We must encourage gifted women through active mentoring and increase their visibility," President of the University of Göttingen and former HRK Vice President Prof Dr Ulrike Beisiegel said. "It is very important that we become aware of the stereotypes we carry around in our heads and overcome unconscious prejudices."

Participants all agreed on the need to break up structural rigidity within the university as an institution and to allow staff more flexibility. They emphasised that working conditions must become more attractive and make it possible to combine academic employment with family. It was pointed out that this factor can be decisive for future career development, in particular for typical stepping stone positions. There was also discussion about what can be learnt from other countries about these issues.

The female university leaders will continue their rounds of discussions and will feed their concepts into the HRK bodies.