

# GENDER BALANCE IN THE ARTS – A MATTER OF (E)QUALITY?

## Project Overview

The Tromsø-based project *Gender Balance in Art Education* aims to contribute to the discussion on gender balance in higher education in the arts. On the basis of two empirical studies the project develops new knowledge about major structural and cultural **challenges** with gender-equality work in academia. Furthermore, the project develops innovative **gender-equality measures** and **strategies** to promote gender balance in senior positions in higher education in the arts.

One of the central **premises** of the project is that leadership accountability is important to ensure successful gender-equality work. The project makes use of **action-based research** and a **mixed-methods** approach involving **qualitative interviews, policy analysis, text analysis, critical discourse analysis, and institutional ethnography**. Our findings indicate that a specific emphasis on awareness and positive feedback engages people at all institutional levels in gender equality-work.

## Aims of the Project

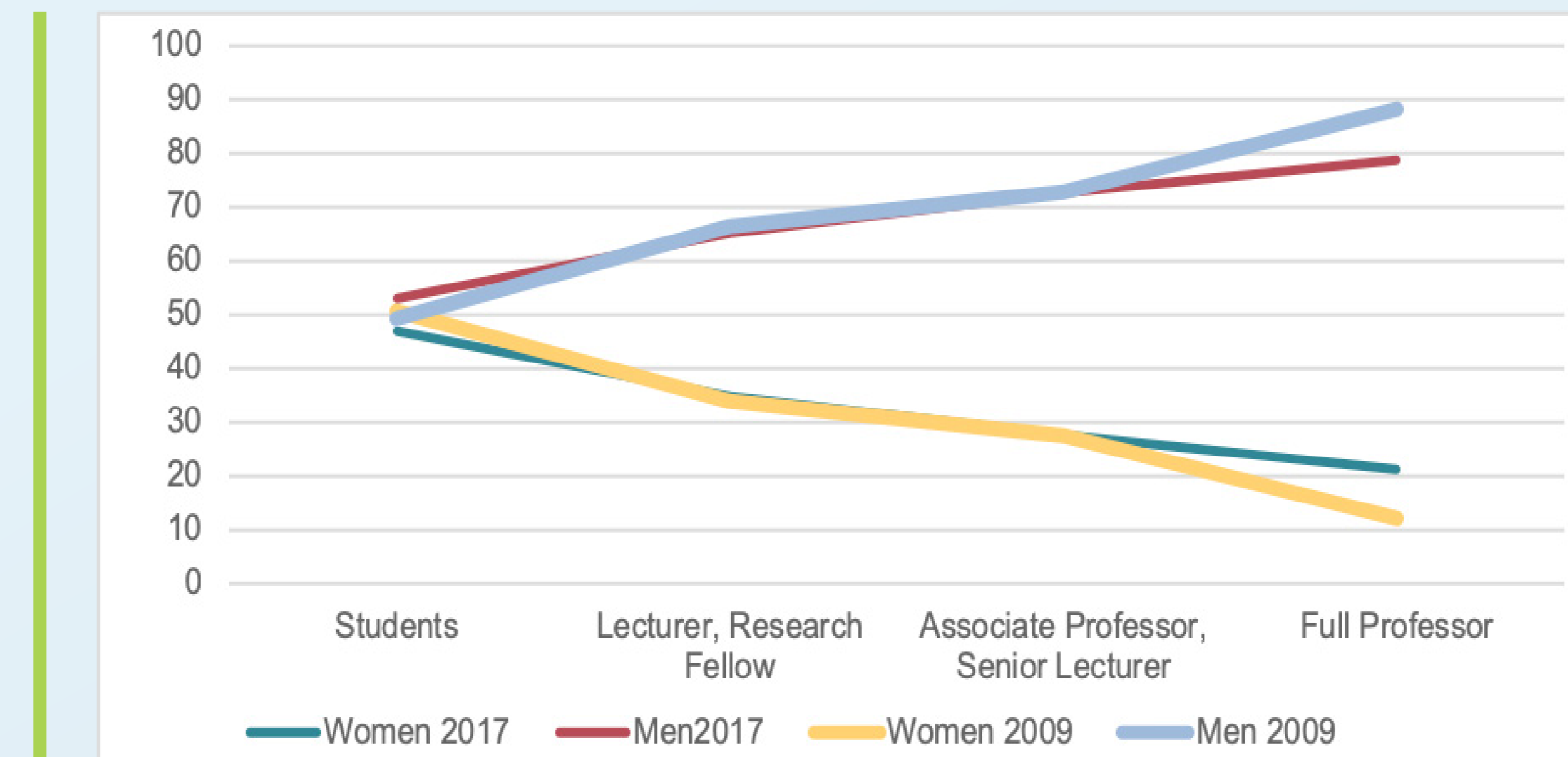
The overall aim of the project *Quality & Equality in the Arts* is to elaborate on major challenges in higher education in the arts and develop strategies to promote gender balance in top positions.

### The project has 4 research components:

- 1 mapping gender balance in the field of higher education in the arts
- 2 analysing leaders' attitudes towards gender equality work and how they frame gender
- 3 investigating how quality is assessed in the arts and how evaluation processes, academic and artistic criteria for excellence, and gender interact
- 4 identifying gender-equality measures and strategies

## References

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Proportion of women and men in typical academic careers in higher education in the arts in Norway in 2017 and 2009 (Source: DBH/NIFU)

## The BALANSE programme at The Research Council of Norway

The BALANCE project at The Faculty of Fine Arts at UiT is funded for a period of 3 years (2015–2018) within the BALANCE programme. The Research Council of Norway initiated the BALANCE programme *Gender Balance in Senior Positions and Research Management* in 2013. The aim of this national programme is to promote gender balance at the senior levels in Norwegian research through new knowledge, learning and innovative measures.



## BALANCE Strategies

- Implementing gender perspectives in artistic research
- Developing a strategy for knowledge dissemination in the field
- Raising competence at all institutional levels (lectures, seminars, courses)
- Raising consciousness at all institutional levels (suggest literature, organise workshops for leaders, highlight positive achievements)
- Giving positive feedback for those who engage in gender-equality work
- Acknowledging accomplished female artists and researchers
- Implementing routines and procedures to ensure gender-balanced working practices
  - Balancing invited speakers, substitutes, external examiners, supervisors etc.
  - Balancing semester plans, reading lists, repertoires
  - Nominating gender-balanced committees at all levels
  - Establishing procedures that encourage female applicants for senior positions

## Study 1: The Art of Balance in Music Education

**Purpose:** To investigate leaders' opinions of gender-equality strategies.

**Research Questions:** What opinions do leaders have on the causes of gender imbalance? How do they envision obtaining a better gender balance? What gender-equality strategies are in use at their institution?

**Method:** Qualitative interview study with leaders (n=15) and analysis of gender-equality policy documents at six music higher education institutions in Norway.

**Theoretical Framework:** A gender frame model developed within organisational studies (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Nielsen, 2017) is applied in order to analyse our data.

**Results:** The article presents a theoretical and empirical framework for further discussions on sustainable gender-balance strategies in music higher education in the arts. We find inconsistencies in the leaders' opinions about the causes of the inequality, their arguments for gender balance, and the type of gender equality strategies used by the institutions.

**Implications:** The inconsistencies represent a potential explanation for the slow changes in gender balance in music higher education.

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### Output

For an overview of the project's activities and further outputs visit the project website: <http://site.uit.no/balanse-kunstfag>

## Study 2: Quality Assessment in Promotion to Professorship in the Arts

**Purpose:** To provide new insights into discrepancies and grey areas within evaluation processes in the arts.

**Research Questions:** How is quality understood and operationalised in the assessment of professor competence in higher education in the arts? In what ways do committee members think gender plays a role in assessment processes?

**Method:** Qualitative interview study (n=5) with experienced committee members from the fields of higher education in the arts (music, drama, and visual art).

**Theoretical Framework:** We analyse our data with reference to professional communication studies (Mullany 2012), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2012), and feminist theory (Butler 2004).

**Results:** Based on the interview data we outline three discourses: a quality discourse, an elite discourse, and a gender discourse. Our findings indicate that the conceptual language used to administrate quality in art works is vague. This can lead to barriers in professorship promotions, particularly for women in an assessment culture that is dominated by men.

**Implications:** There is a demand for a more formalised conceptual framework on quality assessment in higher education in the arts.

**Forthcoming:** *Nordic Journal of Art and Research* (2019)