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Network Concept for Female*¹ Academics in the R3 Phase and Newly Appointed Women* Professors at Goethe University Frankfurt

1 Background and Rationale

Strengthening top-level research and the international reputation of the German higher education system also includes recruiting excellently qualified academic staff. For many years now, equality and diversity have been key management tools for Goethe University. Increasing the share of women in leadership positions, especially in professorships, is an important goal that is being intensively and successfully pursued. This is evidenced inter alia by the share of women among newly appointed professors, which – at 48% in the three years from 2018 to 2020 – is considerable.

Since 2017, Goethe University has been focusing increasingly on tenure-track (TT) professorships in order to make career paths from the early postdoc phase onwards easier to plan and more transparent and to establish the TT professorship as an independent career path to a tenured professorship. Paths to professorships such as W1 professorships and TT professorships are attractive for women because they offer relative planning certainty in a life phase in which a family is often founded and decisions to have children are made. TT professorships can open up lucrative prospects and, in particular, keep talented female* researchers in the research system in the long term. Goethe University aims to achieve a share of 25% TT professorships in the future, and in so doing to also significantly and sustainably increase the share of women in professorships.

The network will supplement the existing arrival and welcome culture at Goethe University with a focus on equality and diversity. Two research findings that identify needs for action are striking: a) because of unconscious processes and existing co-optation structures, women find it harder to access research networks; b) network presence is key to successful positioning in the research system, especially in professorships, senior academic roles at higher education institutions and as spokeswomen* in top-level research.

This is where the network concept comes in.

2 Target Groups

The network will be directed at two specific target groups of female* researchers:

¹ Here and in what follows, the asterisk at the end of the word indicates that the word refers to anyone who identifies as a woman or is transitioning to a woman.

- **newly appointed women* professors** (i.e., women* professors appointed in the past five years) in the orientation phase;
- **R3 female* researchers with several years of independent research experience** after completing their doctorate (female* leaders of junior research groups, women* junior professors, women* tenure-track professors in the scientific qualification phase, female* holders of fellowships from prestigious programmes [e.g., Heisenberg], female* researchers who have achieved their habilitation, female* postdoctoral research assistants with achievements equivalent to the habilitation who are employed at higher education institutions and non-university research institutions and are working in research and – if employed at higher education institutions – usually also in teaching).

3 Needs for Action

The network will provide the target groups with a specific offering comprising strategic networking, tailored workshops, and peer consulting. It will focus on the critical transitions to a professorship or on further career steps in a professorship:

- **The transitions of researchers in the advanced postdoc phase to a professorship** must be organised and supported in a needs-based way; women* have a particular need for orientation and qualification in this transition phase. It has been shown that the research system is still losing a disproportionately high number of qualified female* postdocs in various disciplinary cultures.
- The **process of settling into a professorship** (especially a TT professorship) requires researchers to quickly establish themselves at the new university in order to distinguish themselves as professors and further develop their academic excellence there. Especially in the STEM subjects and in medicine, they are less able to fall back on female role models when doing so.
- For female* researchers in the R3 phase with a professorship, **support for processes of promotion** from a W1 to a W2 professorship or from a W2 to a W3 professorship is key because promotion is not automatic, and TT professors, in particular, must make good use of the development time from the very beginning in order to achieve promotion to a tenured professorship.

4 Objectives

The objectives are:

- to build a professional network for the promotion of the career advancement of female* researchers by female* researchers as social capital for female* researchers;
- to enhance female* researchers' personal strength and to give them trustworthy support in the context of competition in the research system;
- to provide a structure to compensate for power and availability deficits and for obstacles to promotion;
- to establish a network identity (national, international, inter-disciplinary) and to mobilise resources.

5 Measures

Network meetings and possible topics:

- reflection on (gender-typical) barriers and the development of strategies to dismantle them
- reflection on dealing with power and hierarchies
- reflection on own leadership competencies
- dealing with possible “career killers”: fixed-term contracts, children/childcare/family/care in conjunction with mobility/internationality, working hours/scientific understanding

Qualification offerings:

- supporting direct transition to a professorship
- optimising entry processes
- strengthening competencies in dealing with power arenas

Peer consulting groups

6 Network Coordination

- The Equal Opportunities Office of Goethe University will be responsible for getting the network off the ground and managing it until 10/2023 (project-based). In the long term: a primarily self-supporting network structure affiliated to the Equal Opportunities Office.

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The launch of the network took place (virtually) on 8 December 2021 between 18:00 and 20:30 hrs.