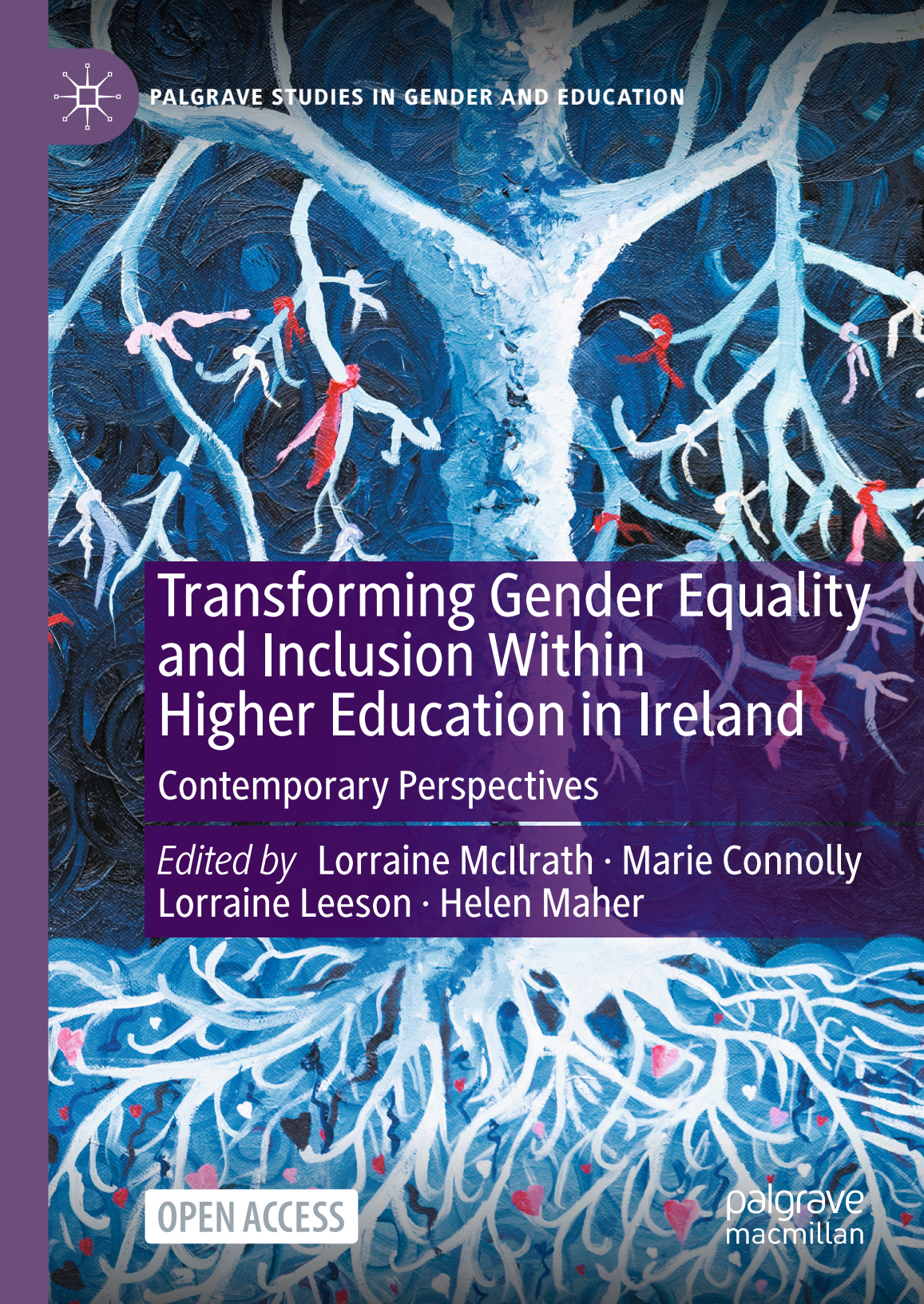

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN GENDER AND EDUCATION
Transforming Gender Equality and Inclusion Within Higher Education in Ireland
Contemporary Perspectives
Edited by Lorraine McIlrath · Marie Connolly
Lorraine Leeson · Helen Maher
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Lorraine McIlrath · Lorraine Leeson ·
Helen Maher · Marie Connolly
Editors

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Editors
Lorraine McIlrath
Mary Immaculate College
Limerick, Ireland

Helen Maher
University of Galway
Galway, Ireland

Lorraine Leeson
EDI Office
Trinity College Dublin
Dublin, Ireland

Marie Connolly
Human Rights, EDI
University of Limerick
Limerick, Ireland



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In a society where the rights and potential of women are constrained, no man can be truly free. He may have power, but he will not have freedom. Former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

This book is dedicated to all those who strive for pursuit of equality, diversity and inclusion within higher education and beyond, those who have paved paths before us and to all those who will come after us.

Acknowledgements

As editors of this book, *Transforming Gender Equality and Inclusion Within Higher Education in Ireland—Contemporary Perspectives,* we as editors, Lorraine McIlrath, Marie Connolly, Lorraine Leeson and Helen Maher, wish to graciously acknowledge the collective and individual efforts of so many people involved in this book project.

Firstly, we would like to sincerely thank the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and the HEA's Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, for their ongoing support for our collective work in ensuring that higher education in Ireland becomes a more equal, diverse and inclusive sector for all people regardless of background and identity. Our sincere appreciation to Sheena Duffy, Dr. Ross Woods, Dr. Jennie Rothwell, Laura Austin, Suzanne Walker, Julie Anne Young and Sarah Hurley. Funding awarded through the HEA's Gender Equality Enhancement Fund (GEEF) in 2022–2023 enabled the development of this book, facilitated the hosting of writing spaces and workshops for the authors to collectively engage and reflect on progress achieved, and the many challenges that still await us, within the broad area of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within higher education in Ireland. We also thank Professor Sarah Moore for her facilitation of workshop writing spaces that led to the design and structure of this book. These spaces have led the contributors towards more collegial, solid and enduring professional relationships that continue to grow and flourish across higher education in Ireland. The world of EDI within higher education in Ireland is open,

honest, transparent, and cooperative, where our experience has been of people and institutions working together, rather than apart, to achieve change. This book is a testimony to those practices and values. We also thank Nicola Brennan, Edel Foster and Karen Fisher at Mary Immaculate College (MIC) for all their help and support in organising the writing workshops and engagement with all the authors as well as the MIC Research and Graduate School Office.

We also acknowledge our 65 book contributing authors for their significant, critical and wise contributions to this book that are representative of all higher education institutions in Ireland. Through a series of invitations and an open call for chapter ideas, themes and abstracts, the following authors galvanised their support for the process of documenting EDI change and transformation in Irish higher education, and include; Tonye Benson-Olatunde, Elaine Berkery, Bernadette Brereton, Áine Coady, Marie Connolly, Rebecca Connolly, Aoife Cooke, Tom Costelloe, Veronica Crosbie, Christine Cross, Louise Crowley, Elizabeth Dawson, Sarah Dickinson Hyams, Marian Duggan, Karen Dunne, Nata Duvvury, Sarah Fink, Marcellina Fogarty, Edel Foster, Gavin Friel, Yvonne Galligan, Aoife Grimes, Gemma Irvine, Siobhan Kangataran, Allison Kenneally, Caitriona Ni Laoire, Lorraine Leeson, Margaret Linehan, Laura Loftus, David Loughrey, Nóirín MacNamara, Padraig MacNeela, Helen Maher, Patricia McCarthy, Jacqueline McCormack, Claire McGing, Fiona McGuill, Lorraine McIlrath, Charlotte Mclvor, Lucy Michael, Joanne Mulligan, Caroline Murphy, Patricia Murphy, Kinda Nassli, Mary Nestor, Lilian Nwanze-Akobo, Pat O' Connor, Ruadhán Ó Críodáin, Siobhan O'Higgins, Monica O'Mullane, Paul O'Reilly, Oluchi Porter, Vivian Rath, Tom Reilly, Eimear Reilly, Jennie Rothwell, Sarah Sartori, Colin Scott, Michael Sherman, Rachael Skelly, Liam Thornton, Declan Treanor, Ross Woods, Carol Wrenn and David Quinn.

These authors represent academics, scholars, professional staff, activists, government and policy makers, and members of community-based organisations that forged writing and reflective partnerships. We acknowledge that partnership is central to EDI change and transformation, and the crafting of this book emulates our practice on the ground. These writing partnerships have included; the HEA, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Members of the International Protection Community, ShoutOut, University of Limerick, University of Galway, University College Dublin, Places of Sanctuary Ireland, Dublin City University,

Edinburgh Napier University, University College Cork, Carlow College—St Patricks, Technological University of the Shannon, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Advance HE, Mary Immaculate College, Technological University Dublin, Munster Technological University, South East Technological University, Trinity College Dublin, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Lucy Michael Research, Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and Atlantic Technological University.

The author's experiences and wisdom have framed this book that evolved as a community of practice. The themes explored therein move from gender issues towards deeper intersectionality that respond to challenges that exist within the sector in Ireland. While this book is very much rooted within Ireland as a case study for EDI transformation, we all feel that the lessons and practices we have embedded are contextually and culturally relevant elsewhere. The narrative within this book is not utopian but one that is constantly evolving as we continue to challenge, renew and seek out of opportunities to address and transform inequality.

As we come to the close of this book, we acknowledge that there are more EDI directions with equally compelling narratives that are unfolding, and we hope that all authors in this book, along with others, will continue to share further wisdoms and scholarly reflections as the EDI landscape expands and deepens.

Finally, we also want to thank Barbara Morrow from Morrow Writing and Editing for her careful review and indexing and publishers Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education, that have generously and patiently supported the project idea towards final publication, in particular Alice Green, Editor for the UK Education Programme and TK Santhosh, Production Editor.

About This Book

Historically and culturally, the Irish higher education system was shaped by, and reflective of, the deeply inequitable gender relations and societal norms characteristic of Irish society. Inequality was pervasive in economic, political, social and cultural spheres and the struggle for equal rights and systemic change by women and minoritised communities has been a defining feature of the mobilisation for progressive change in the twentieth and early twenty-first century in Ireland. This edited book thematically reflects on and analyses the nature of change and transformation with respect to gender equality, inclusion, and diversity (EDI) across higher education in Ireland from the perspectives of those who are pioneering change. This book outlines the significant advances made in terms of overcoming inequalities, structural challenges promoting inclusion and advancing diversity. This book is unique as transformations within higher education are rarely articulated through academic publications given the applied nature of change.

The chapters in this volume, presented under four thematic headings, showcase pioneering practice to a national and international audience and represent a contemporary opportunity to reflect on the nature of change within the context of higher education in Ireland.

Part I **Contextualising Gender Equality Within Irish Higher Education**—The EDI agenda in Ireland commenced with an emphasis on gender equality and inequality and this section offers insights from the lived experiences, pioneering local and national efforts and rises to

systemic challenges with a series of chapters that respond to how equality, diversity and inclusion was mainstreamed.

Part II **Gender Transformations, Interventions, and Impact**—This part offers insights as to how new policy initiatives; collaborative funding arrangements and gender equality frameworks have been enacted on the ground from inter-institutional collaborations to advance and deepen equality underpinned by a reflective critique.

Part III **Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education**—This part introduces new evolved and wider EDI aspects that evolved from national discourse towards gender-based violence and harassment within higher education and highlights the research and evidence base that laid the foundations for several local and national initiatives to educate for consent and the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence.

Part IV **Gender and Intersectionality**—This part focuses on recent wider intersectional challenges issues and the complexity of identity as it pertains to race, disability, gender, sexual identity and orientation and beyond. The chapters consider aspects of inclusion and exclusion from the lived experience perspective with academic and student agents of change insights.

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Notes on Contributors

Tonye Benson-Olatunde is a senior university tutor, and a programme coordinator, and lectures in Social Policy in the Department of Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University for over ten years. She migrated to Ireland over two decades ago from Nigeria and has worked in Ireland since then.

Dr Elaine Berkery is Associate Professor in Management at the Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick. Elaine completed her PhD in 2017 in the area of gender in management. She also holds a Masters in International Tourism and Bachelor of Business Studies from the University of Limerick. Elaine has over 20 years teaching experience at undergraduate, postgraduate, and post-experience level, and has extensive experience of programme development at postgraduate level. She is an Alumnus of the International Teachers Programme and has been nominated for the Large Group Teaching Excellence Award at the University of Limerick (2009, 2013). Elaine's research and publication interests include the broad area of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Her research to date has examined areas such as gender in management; gender quotas; workplace flexibility; workforce experiences of international nurses; and talent management in healthcare organisations. Elaine regularly presents her research to international audiences and has published her research in International Journals such as European Management Review, European Management Journal, Journal of Nursing Management, Social Politics, and Gender in Management: An

International Journal. She is a Senior Associate Fellow of the Academy of World Business, Marketing and Management Development, and is a member of the Irish and British Academies of Management.

Dr Bernadette Brereton is an Irish sociologist, educator and researcher, with an active network of international colleagues. In August 2024, she was re-elected as Research Chair of the European Sociological Association (ESA), to continue mentoring and co-ordinating the research work of its 4,000 members. She is a member of the Editorial Board of the UK-based *Student Engagement in Higher Education journal (SEHEJ)* and a former member of the Editorial Board of the Irish-based *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education (AISHE-J)*. In 2021–2023, with Higher Education Authority (HEA) funding, she developed and launched the VISTA Self-development programme for women in higher education, which to date has worked with over 300 participants to build skills and confidence for success in HE. In 2023, she received the President's Award for Research Excellence. In 2022, she received the "Research Ally" award from the Royal Irish Academy (RIA), Ireland's leading body of academics. In 2021, she delivered a keynote speech at the UNESCO conference "Education and the Challenges in a Multicultural World" in Warsaw, Poland. In 2020, she was one of 9 final nominees for the *National Forum* Teaching and Learning Research Fellowships—the most prestigious individual teaching and learning award in Ireland.

Áine Coady (she/her) is Equality Projects Officer at Maynooth University. She has worked in EDI in Higher Education for the last 6 years, with a focus on inclusive gender equality. She previously worked in Local Government, SMEs & social inclusion. Prior to her current role she worked in various EDI project roles in South East Technological University, including delivering Athena Swan Bronze & HCI Pillar 3 CIRDAS to provide an EDI framework to the Insurance Sector. She has a MSc in Geography (NUIM) & BA in Arts (UCD).

Rebecca Connolly, BA in Sociology & Politics, is Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response Coordinator at the University of Galway. She leads on delivery, coordination and planning of education and training for staff and students in the campus community. For over three years, Rebecca worked with Active* Consent through the development of outreach strategies, educational resources, and programme

materials. As Outreach Coordinator, she managed and directed collaborative efforts with stakeholders across Ireland and the UK, and coordinated the *Sexual Consent Promotion: Skills & Practice* CPD module, First Point of Contact disclosure management training, and facilitator training for consent workshops for post-primary schools and Higher Education.

Dr Marie Connolly was appointed as the Inaugural Director of Human Rights—Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in March 2021. A proud Clare woman, and former graduate of UL Dr. Connolly has over 30 years' experience in leading, driving and implementing key change initiatives within the Higher Education and Semi-State sectors in Ireland. A UL graduate, Marie holds a Master's Degree in Education (M.Ed) from the University of Sheffield (1998 Distinction) and a Doctorate Degree in Business Administration (DBA) in Higher Education Management from the University of Bath (2018) where she was awarded the Richard and Shirley Mawdiff prize for outstanding performance. Since joining UL in 2006, Dr. Connolly has held several key roles, including leading the establishment of the Learning and Development function within the HR Division as a recognised critical resource and a Centre of Excellence in Learning and Development. Dr. Connolly is seen as a leader in the field on gender equality at both a sectoral and national level and successfully led the University's bid in achieving the prestigious Athena SWAN (AS) Bronze Institution Award in 2015, one of the first universities in Ireland to achieve the award, the institution's renewal to the AS Expanded Charter in 2018, and their successful Silver award (2023). She represents the university on external bodies providing an authoritative voice in the development of the national agenda in the area of equality and diversity. These include the National Athena SWAN (AS) Committee, the National Advisory Committee (NAC) of the National Women's Council, the IUA Vice Presidents Committee; the HEA Equality and Diversity Committee etc. She held the position of chair of the National Athena SWAN Committee and led the establishment of the National Athena SWAN Practitioners Network where she previously also held the position of chairperson. Marie is passionate about advancing the careers of women in Higher Education and to achieving gender equality for all across all disciplines. In her role as Director of Human Rights, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion she is committed to driving transformative, meaningful and sustainable change.

Aoife Cooke is Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion at University of Galway. As Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, she has more than 15 years' experience leading on and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in Irish Higher Education. Her role at University of Galway includes oversight of, and support for integrating the delivery of the EDI programmes of work. She has a BA, MBS in Strategic Human Resources Management, and Professional Diploma in Human Rights & Equality. She has co-published in internationally recognised peer review journals on the gender pay gap.

Tom Costelloe is a dedicated EDI Data Officer with a passion for promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion through data-driven insights. With over 15 years' experience in Data Analytics, Tom combines a deep understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion with advanced analytical skills to help support and drive meaningful change. At University College Dublin, Tom plays a key role in analysing demographics, identifying gaps in representation, and supporting the development of strategies to foster an inclusive workplace. Tom excels in creating comprehensive reports and visualisations that inform EDI initiatives.

Ruadhán Ó Críodáin (he/him) is Executive Director of ShoutOut. Since 2012, ShoutOut has been working to promote inclusion for LGBTQI+ communities through storytelling, dialogue, and instilling empathy in young people. Ruadhán oversees the charity's educational programmes, which work to end homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. Outside of ShoutOut, Ruadhán is a member of the Board of Directors of GAZE International LGBTQIA+ Film Festival.

Dr Veronica Crosbie was appointed the Chair of POSI early in 2022. As a former Assistant Professor in Migration and Intercultural Studies in DCU and outgoing Chair of the MA Refugee Integration, she was a key player in establishing DCU as the first University of Sanctuary in Ireland in 2016 and was the founding Chair of the University of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI) network. She has conducted Participatory Research projects on refugee integration and has supervised and examined PhD theses in related areas. Veronica contributes to refugee integration at a local level, through her leadership initiatives including establishing the Phibsboro Community Sponsorship and Phibsboro For All programmes, both inclusive community led initiatives to welcome people with migrant

and refugee backgrounds into the neighbourhood. Veronica is an able and vocal advocate for refugee rights in Ireland and beyond.

Professor Christine Cross is the Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar at Munster Technological University. Previously she was the Dean of The Business School at Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland and held a number of academic management roles at the University of Limerick. She has significant industry experience working for multinational organisations in both Ireland and the UK. Her research, consultancy and publication interests include the broad area of diversity, in particular, gender inequality and the workforce experiences of immigrants. Her work is published in leading international journals including Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Journal, Journal of Managerial Psychology, Economic and Industrial Democracy and the International Journal of Human Resource Management.

Professor Louise Crowley of the School of Law, UCC, is a national voice on intimate partner violence having published widely on the adequacy of legal responses to the challenges of gender-based violence. Louise was a member of the Government appointed expert group that developed the National Framework to End Sexual Harassment and Violence at Third Level and continues to advise on law and policy reform. Louise developed the campus wide UCC Bystander Intervention programme which educates and empowers staff and students to challenge the normalisation of sexual abuse and to recognise their role as active bystanders to effect change and bring about a new normal of safety and respect. This training is delivered across the sector and in workplaces and sporting organisations. In 2022, funded by the Irish Research Council, Louise developed a bespoke second level programme, piloted in 50 secondary schools nationwide. Louise has just completed a 9-month partnership with the Irish Defence Forces, where she delivered workshops on Sexual Ethics and Respect Relationships to members of the Army, the Air Corp and the Navy, reaching almost 40% of personnel.

Dr Elizabeth Dawson is lecturer in medieval history at Carlow College and an expert in medieval sainthood. She is co-founder of the *Irish Association of Professional Historians*, a member of the steering committee of the newly established *Women Historians Network*, and secretary of the Carlow College Athena Swan committee.

Marian Duggan is currently Vice President for People, Culture and EDI in Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), with responsibility for Human Resources (HR); Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) and Ending Sexual Violence & Harassment (ESVH) across all campuses. Marian was Dean of Flexible Learning & Vice President for Equality & Diversity for two years in Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) before serving as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Register, including responsibility for EDI, until formation of TUS. Previously, Marian was Dean of Faculty of Business & Humanities in LIT for 12 years.

Dr Karen Dunne, PhD, MA, Cert EM (StudMed), MVB. Background in veterinary education and training—currently the veterinary nursing programme director, Department of Agriculture, Food and Animal Health, Dundalk Institute of Technology. NFTL Teaching Hero. Research interests include clinical skills training and veterinary nursing competence, as well as technology-enhanced learning and student-centred teaching approaches. Assisted in the rollout of the VISTA programme at DkIT.

Dr Nata Duvvury, Associate Professor, University of Galway, is a feminist researcher and development expert with research interests in gender, labour markets and welfare state, gendered impacts of globalisation, economic costs of gender-based violence, civil society and global governance, and social mobilisation. Her work focuses on issues of gender equality, particularly in relation to economic rights and how to promote and sustain economic rights of women and ethnic minorities using an intersectional lens. She recently received a research grant from the Govt of Ireland to advance development of an index of intersectional discrimination in higher education.

Sarah Fink is Head of Athena Swan Ireland at Advance HE. She leads the strategy and operations for the development of the Athena Swan Charter in Ireland. Sarah updates Charter resources in response to sector changes, good practice developments and external policy context. She has expertise in supporting sector-wide and institutional progress on gender equality and broader EDI activity. She provides specialist knowledge and advice to Athena Swan applicants, develops training and workshops, and facilitates peer review assessment panels. She works with Irish higher education institutions and relevant external agencies, including the Higher Education Authority, to guide on issues and queries relating to Athena Swan.

Sarah has also worked in an Irish university, with responsibility for the development and implementation of EDI Strategy and Action Plans and supporting academic departments to apply for Athena Swan Ireland awards. She previously led on research activity for think tanks and was responsible for building partnerships in academia, business and government and authoring research reports on gender equality and inclusion themes. She has a Master of Arts in Gender, Society and Representation from University College London and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Saint Mary's College in Indiana, USA.

Marcellina Fogarty is Senior Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager in University College Dublin with over 25 years' HR experience including 10 years working in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion. Marcellina heads up the EDI Unit with a team of 8 people with specialists that work across all areas of EDI such as Gender Equality, Dignity and Respect, Anti-Racism, EDI Training and Awareness raising, EDI Data, Disability and LGBTI. The EDI Unit plays an important role in the mainstreaming of EDI throughout the University for students and works closely with Colleges/Schools/Units and stakeholders across the University to deliver the University's EDI strategy. She is responsible for leading out on the implementation of the University EDI Strategy and institutional Gender Equality Action Plan associated with the silver Athena Swan award.

Edel Foster (she/her) was appointed Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Interculturalism Manager at MIC in 2021. Previously she was the MIC Athena Swan Project Manager (2018–2021) and MIC School Placement Manager in the MIC Faculty of Education (2015–2018). Prior to this Edel worked in a range of roles within higher education, both private and public sector organisations. Edel is deeply committed to equality, diversity, inclusion and interculturalism both at MIC and across the higher education sector in Ireland. Edel is particularity motivated by supporting others and creating positive change that impact people's lives and careers.

Gavin Friel is a research associate with Active* Consent at the University of Galway. He is co-ordinator of the programme's theatre and performing arts initiative. He holds a BA in Psychological Studies and Theatre and Performance Studies, and Higher Diploma in Psychology. He has contributed to consent promotion since 2019, first as an actor on the original tour of the Active* Consent live drama before researching how audiences develop actionable knowledge to prevent sexual violence from

theatre. His research focuses on gender development and masculinity, and how to model behaviour through performance mediums.

Professor Yvonne Galligan is the founding Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Director of the Research Centre on Equity and Inclusive Cultures at Technological University Dublin. She was previously Head of School and Director of Queen's Gender Initiative at Queen's University Belfast. She has expertise in developing and implementing gender and intersectional equality plans in these institutions. Her research areas are comparative gender and politics, and gender equality in higher education. She is an Honorary Fellow of Trinity College Dublin and a member of the Academy of Social Sciences (UK).

Aoife Grimes is Education and Training Officer in the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre whose research interests include victim-survivor centred policy responses to sexual violence. She has an MA from the Centre for Women and Child Abuse in London Metropolitan University and was co-ordinator for the ESHTE (Ending Sexual Harassment in Third-Level Education) project from 2022–2023. In consultation with the ESHTE National Advisory Committee, she compiled *Towards a Zero Tolerance Approach* (2023), advising Higher Education institutions in Ireland on good practice connected to sexual violence prevention and response. She has previously held roles in sexual violence support and research in Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Her work in the Sexual Violence sector began when she was an undergraduate Law student in TCD and helped to organise and facilitate consent workshops.

Sarah Dickinson Hyams was Assistant Director for International Equality Charters at Advance HE until August 2024. Sarah was responsible for driving Advance HE's strategy around global diversity and inclusion and overseeing two internationally renowned, diversity intervention frameworks, the Athena Swan Charter (an international Charter for gender equality) and the Race Equality Charter, both highly successful, systemic change programmes recognised for their ability to positively affect cultural change and values. Sarah joined Advance HE (previously the Equality Challenge Unit) in 2012, and was responsible for the successful expansion of the Athena Swan Charter outside of higher education to include research institutes and outside of the UK to the Republic of Ireland, Australia and Cyprus, with sister charters in the US, Canada, India and Brazil, as well as the development of the Race Equality Charter

for higher education in the UK. Sarah has worked in EDI for 20 years, previously managing the WISETI (women in science, engineering and technology initiative) programme at the University of Cambridge and the diversity programme at the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Gemma Irvine is Vice President for Equality and Diversity in Maynooth University. She also has oversight of access/widening participation and Excellence in Exile. Previously she was Head of Policy and Strategic Planning in the Higher Education Authority, and Assistant Director of the Irish Research Council. Dr Irvine led the secretariat for the *National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions* (2016) and the *Gender Equality Taskforce* (2018). Prior to that Dr Irvine had completed her Masters and PhD in Neuroscience in New Zealand before coming to Ireland in 2004 to work as a Research Fellow in TCD.

Siobhán Kangataran is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager at Munster Technological University (MTU). After 11 years in the UK, successfully delivering complex multi-million pound projects in the rail, construction and property development industries, while undertaking key projects in equality and diversity within her roles, she returned home to Ireland to develop her work in the latter. Siobhan was the Chair of the Athena Swan Practitioners' Network from 2023–2024 and, along with Oluchi Porter, Siobhán was the first Co-Chair of the Athena Swan Race & Ethnicity Working Group from 2022–2023. She holds a BCL, LLM, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice and Leadership in Higher Education from UCC.

Dr Allison Kenneally (she/her) is Vice President for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion at South East Technological University. She has worked in Higher Education for over 20 years, having previously held posts as Head of Department and Senior Lecturer level. Allison holds a Doctorate in Higher Education Management from the University of Bath, along with undergraduate and postgraduate Degrees in Law from UCD. Her research focuses on inclusive and intersectional gender equality, organisational culture, change management and system reconfiguration in the higher education sector. She has published and consulted widely on inclusive gender equality.

Dr Caitríona Ní Laoire is Senior Lecturer in Applied Social Studies at University College Cork and a Research Associate of the Institute for Social Science in the twenty-first century. She has led a number of action-research projects focused on addressing gender inequalities in academia and has published in journals including *Gender, Work & Organization* and *Gender in Management*. She is currently Chair of the Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team in her School.

Professor Lorraine Leeson has served as Associate Vice Provost for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Trinity College Dublin since 2021, leading out on the university's silver Athena Swan application under the new Charter Framework for Ireland. Prior to this, she served as Associate Dean of Research at the university, with research integrity and open science as key elements of her portfolio. Lorraine was the inaugural Director of the Centre for Deaf Studies and served in this role from 2001–2018. She is also a first-generation Leaving Cert student and first-generation third level student from north inner-city Dublin who completed her masters and PhD in theoretical linguistics while working full-time. She also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Deaf Studies (Interpreting) (Bristol) and a Certificate in Women's Studies (UCD). With 30 years' experience working with Deaf communities and an international reputation in the areas of sign linguistics and interpreting studies, Lorraine also serves on the League of European Research Universities (LERU) EDI Policy Group Steering Committee and is passionate about inclusivity and access for all.

Professor Margaret Linehan is Head of School of Humanities at Munster Technological University (MTU), and Chair of MTU's Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team. Margaret is the author of over sixteen academic textbooks and has published over eighty articles in peer reviewed journals, together with presenting her research findings at many national and international conferences. Margaret was presented with an award of Companion of the British Academy of Management in "recognition for outstanding contribution to the field of Management". Her first book, *Senior Female International Managers: Why So few?* published by Ashgate (UK) was also translated into Slovene. She has published research in

various fields, including women in international management, expatriation and repatriation of female executives, higher education, work-based learning, human resource management, leadership and librarianship, and work–family conflict. Margaret's research has received various accolades, including the Literati Network for Excellence outstanding paper awards. Through her involvement in various working groups and committees, both in MTU and externally, she advocates for equality, diversity, and inclusion issues.

Dr Laura Loftus is EDI Programme Manager for Gender Equality at University of Galway. In her role, Laura has responsibility for driving the University's gender equality agenda through policy and initiative development, managing the creation and implementation of the University's Gender Equality Action Plan, and working with Schools and Units to increase gender equality, and EDI more broadly, across the institution. She has an MA in Gender, Sexuality and Culture and a PhD focusing on gender equality in Irish culture from University College Dublin. She has published in internationally recognised peer review journals on gender equality in Irish culture, equality, diversity and inclusion in Irish higher education, and the gender pay gap.

Dr David Loughrey is Assistant Professor in Community Health at the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy, and Community Health, based in Dublin City University. He earned his PhD in Psychiatry at the TCD School of Medicine, where he was funded by the Irish Research Council's employment-based postgraduate research scholarship in partnership with Chime, and by the Dr. Ciaran Barry Research Scholarship awarded by the Central Remedial Clinic. He is also a senior Atlantic Fellow for Equity in Brain Health at the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI), based at Trinity College Dublin and the University of California San Francisco, and at the Atlantic Institute based in the Rhodes Trust, University of Oxford. He has previously been a postdoctoral researcher at GBHI, in the Trinity Centre for Deaf Studies/Adapt Centre, and in the Trinity Institute of Neuroscience. He also completed a teaching fellowship at the Institute of Population Health, School of Medicine TCD. Dr. Loughrey's research focuses on understanding how social factors and disabilities, such as sensory impairment, may impact brain health and increase the risk of dementia.

Nóirín MacNamara is Postdoctoral Researcher at the Research Centre for Inclusive and Equitable Cultures (RINCE), Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin). She holds a PhD in political theory from Queen's University, Belfast. She has published on feminist political theory, reproductive justice and politics, advancing equity in higher education, and qualitative research methods.

Professor Pádraig MacNeela is Head of the School of Psychology at the University of Galway. He has created and collaborated on applied research topics since 1999, in nursing and medical decision-making, homelessness, youth mental health and wellbeing. He has secured over €10 million in research funding as PI and co-PI over this time, which includes support for the Active* Consent programme from Lifes2good Foundation, Rethink Ireland, the HEA, Cuan, the University of Galway and others. Pádraig is co-lead of Active* Consent, which emerged from collaboration with Rape Crisis Network Ireland in 2013. Besides research in these areas, he is a qualitative researcher specialising in phenomenological analysis.

Dr Helen Maher is Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Galway. Helen's experience has primarily been in the field of equality and social justice, working in a wide variety of contexts in higher education, civil society organisations and consultancy work. Helen holds a BA degree from University College Dublin, an MA in Peace Studies from the University of Bradford, and a PhD on the *Gendered nature of the Transition to Democracy in South Africa*, from the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University. Helen's career in higher education incorporates strategy, collaboration and change management. She has substantial experience in curriculum design, lecturing and programme leadership within the field of sociology inclusive of political theory, policy and practice to progress equality. Within the EU context, Helen has developed, implemented and evaluated projects under the Equal Programme, the Equality for Women Measure, Erasmus+ strategic partnerships and Irish Aid. These projects have focused on engaging with diverse constituencies to address issues of gender, citizenship, identity, equality, inclusion and social change. Helen also designed training programmes under the EU Grundtvig programme examining equality, inclusion and social justice concepts and pedagogical practices for participants working in the field of education across Europe.

Dr Patricia McCarthy graduated with a PhD from Trinity College, Dublin in 2014. Her thesis focused on the educational experiences and transition opportunities of vision impaired/blind young people. Patricia is Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Education, TCD where she coordinates the PME Sociology of Education module, contributes to the Disability Rights module TCPID, is a Master thesis supervisor and an active member of the research community. A key component of her research focuses on UD(L), inclusion and participation of marginalised groups; Patricia's ontological position as a disabled researcher has been instrumental in the development of her research and recent publications. She is the current Co-Chair of the Equality Committee—Staff Disability Working Group, TCD, Co-Convenor of the TCD Disabled Staff & Postgrad Forum, a member of National Disability Postgraduate Advisory Committee (NDPAC), member of Electoral Commission Research Advisory Group and member of the NCSE Consultative Forum.

Professor Jacqueline McCormack is Vice President with responsibility for EDI and Online & Flexible Learning at Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and Professor of Biomedical Sciences. She joined Institute of Technology Sligo (now part of ATU) in 2018, having previously been Associate Head of the School of Biomedical Sciences at Ulster University for 14 years. She is Fellow of the Institute of Biomedical Sciences and is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Institute for Bioprocessing Research & Training (NIBRT) in Ireland. She also undertakes and publishes scientific research within the area of the impact of diet on psychological function (some of which is in her previous surname of O'Connor).

Claire McGing is Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) and Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Manager at the Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), County Dublin. She chairs the IADT Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (SAT) and IADT Promoting Consent & Preventing Sexual Violence (PROPEL) Working Group. At a European level, she leads the EDI Office of the FilmEU—European Alliance for Film and Media Arts, of which IADT is one of eight partners. Claire's primary research focuses on women's political representation in historical and contemporary Ireland. She has published extensively in this area, including journal articles, book chapters, policy reports and opinion

pieces for the *Irish Times* and *Irish Examiner*. Claire also contributes to research projects on EDI in higher education and the creative and cultural industries. She co-leads a dedicated work package on EDI for IADT's TU RISE ELEVATE project.

Fiona McGuill works as Executive PA to the College President in Carlow College and in this role became involved in the College's evolving journey in fostering EDI within the College community. Fiona was a member of the College's initial Self-Assessment Team who developed the successful application and College Action Plan for Athena Swan Bronze Award. She has been influential in Athena Swan's aim of promoting a positive EDI cultural within the College and has driven the implementation of the identified actions within the College's Action Plan. She acted as Chair of the Self-Assessment Team and subsequently the EDI Team. She has represented Carlow College on the various national EDI committees.

Professor Lorraine McIlrath joined Mary Immaculate College in January 2022 as the inaugural Director of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Interculturalism (EDII). Prior to this appointment, Prof. McIlrath coordinated the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) that was funded by Atlantic Philanthropies at the National University of Ireland, Galway, where she was responsible for developing inclusive approaches to civic engagement across the University. She founded and was Principal Investigator of Campus Engage, the national Irish network to support civic engagement within higher education, and funded originally by the HEA. She developed the Youth Academy, a mini-university for 10–12 years olds in need of academic challenge at NUI Galway, working in particular with educational disadvantage. She is the current Chair of the University of Sanctuary Ireland Steering Committee and Co-chairs the Limerick Food Partnership. Prof. McIlrath has led, and been involved in, a number of EU and internationally funded partnerships to look at the advancement of tools, research and pedagogies that support equality, diversity, inclusion and interculturalism. Prof. McIlrath has published on the broad theme of civic engagement and the public good role of higher education in books and journals and has keynoted on her work internationally.

Dr Charlotte McIvor is Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Galway, and co-founder of the Active* Consent programme. In addition to writing for journals and

edited collections, she is the author of *Contemporary Irish theatre: Histories and theories* (with Ian R. Walsh) and *Migration and performance in contemporary Ireland: Towards a new interculturalism*. Charlotte is co-editor of a number of books, including *The Methuen companion to interculturalism and performance* (with Daphne P. Lei), *Devised performance in Irish theatre: Histories and contemporary practice* (with Siobhán O'Gorman), and *Staging intercultural Ireland: Plays and practitioner perspectives* (with Matthew Spangler).

Dr Lucy Michael is a sociologist in practice and consultant on equality and integration issues. Her work particularly addresses racist discrimination and violence, experiences of victims, and the roles of statutory institutions and civil society in combating hate crime and exclusion. She is the author (with Bryan Fanning) of Immigrants as Outsiders in the Two Irelands (MUP, 2019), and (with Samantha Schulz) of Unsettling Whiteness (Brill, 2019). She also authored (with Marta Kempny) the HEA Report on Race Equality in Higher Education. At Lucy Michael Research, Training and Consultancy, she leads a diverse team providing evidence-based training and services to support the development of effective policies and practices for equality.

Joanne Mulligan has a professional background in international development, global citizenship education, and equality, diversity, and inclusion. She has worked in the international NGO sector, Irish charities, and higher education. Joanne joined the DCU EDI Unit in April 2021 following six years in the non-profit sector both in Ireland and abroad. While working across all aspects of DCU's EDI work, a key part of Joanne's role is leading DCU's Athena Swan journey, and managing the Women in Leadership suite of initiatives at DCU. As part of this, Joanne coordinated the rollout of the VISTA programme on behalf of DCU, the lead institution on the project. Joanne holds a BA in Economics, Politics, and Law and an MA in International Security and Conflict Studies from Dublin City University, along with a Postgraduate Certificate in Equality Studies in Training and Development from Maynooth University.

Dr Caroline Murphy is Associate Professor of Employment Relations at the University of Limerick. She is also Chair of the Kemmy Business School, EDI Committee and led the faculty's successful Athena Swan Silver application. She lectures in Employment Relations, Human Resource Analytics, and Human Resource Management. Her research

interests include precarious employment, female labour market participation, equality, formal and informal care work, and employee representation. She has worked on a variety of research projects relating to precarious work, the impact of technology on work, gender equality in the labour market, and care work (formal and informal). She is a member of the management committee of the COST action Platform Work Inclusion Living Lab, and Associate Research Fellow at the Digital Futures at Work Research Centre (DIGIT, UK). Her work has received funding from the European Commission, Irish Human Rights and Equality Authority, Workplace Relations Commission, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, and the CIPD. She is a former Irish Research Council and Industrial Relations Research Trust scholar. She has published in *Economic and Industrial Democracy, Industrial Law Journal, Industrial Relations Journal, International Journal of Human Resource Management, Journal of Industrial Relations, Employee Relations, Irish Journal of Management*.

Trish Murphy is a qualified and accredited psychotherapist, supervisor, mediator and trainer. She is the Director of the Student Counselling Services of Trinity College, Dublin (www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling). She is also a regular contributor to the print media in national newspapers, including a weekly column in The Irish Times (email: tellmeaboutit@irishtimes.com). She is the author of two books- *#Love: 21st century relationships* (Mercier) and *The Challenge of Retirement* (Orpen Press).

Kinda Nassli is a former Syrian TV host with a passion for advocacy and education. She served as a peer researcher for College Connect in partnership with the Irish Refugee Council, supporting refugees in accessing higher education in Ireland. A graduate of Aleppo University with a bachelor's degree in English literature, Kinda discovered in Ireland that true identity lies in building cultural bridges and recognising those that already exist. As a University of Sanctuary scholar, Kinda completed a Master's in Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University while balancing her role as a working mother of three. She is an active volunteer with the "One Million Stars" initiative to end violence against women, facilitating multicultural women's groups. Kinda also contributes her time to the ODVSS Ethnic Minority Group, advocating against domestic abuse.

Mary Nestor has been teaching and researching in higher education for over twenty years. Her research interests include the inclusive curriculum,

EDI policy enactment and creating inclusive campus environments for students. Mary's current role as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager at Atlantic Technological University involves developing policies, practices and targeted initiatives that support and embed EDI and contribute to creating a safe and welcoming environment for all. Mary holds a BA (Hons), MA, MSc, Postgrad Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and Postgrad Diploma in Marketing. Mary is currently a doctoral candidate at Maynooth University.

Dr Lilian Nwanze-Akobo is a lecturer at the Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University. She is currently one of the Directors of the Higher Diploma in Further Education at Maynooth University. She migrated from Nigeria over a decade ago, where she qualified and worked as a barrister and solicitor for over seven years.

Pat O'Connor is Professor Emeritus Sociology and Social Policy, UL and Visiting Professor, Geary Institute, UCD (formerly visiting professor at London, Aveiro, Linkoping, Deakin, Melbourne). Her research interests include power, leadership, management, organisational structures, culture and micropolitics in higher education. A member of the *National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions* (2016), she was the first female professor of sociology in Ireland (1997); the first female full professor (1997) and female Faculty Dean (2000) in UL. Her 120 publications include nine books, 80 peer reviewed articles: most recently *A "proper" woman?* (Peter Lang 2024).

Dr Siobhán O'Higgins is a co-founder of the Active* Consent programme. As an education and training lead on the programme, she co-devised consent workshops and professional training designed to raise awareness and promote positive, respectful behaviour in relation to sexual intimacy. With a background in youth and community work, criminology and sexology, Siobhán has been promoting sexual health since 1990, working with parents, young people, teachers, educators, prisoners and professional groups. She has held roles including youth and community worker, lecturer, sexologist, and clinical researcher. She has worked at the School of Psychology at the University of Galway since 2010.

Dr Monica O'Mullane is Research Fellow in the School of Public Health, University College Cork, currently leading a project on Health Impact Assessment (HIA-IM) co-hosted between the School and the Institute for Social Science in the twenty-first century (ISS21). Previously,

Monica worked as a Marie Sklodowska-Curie Action fellow in ISS21 on her project *GendeResearchIreland*, which explored the process of embedding gender equality in higher education in Ireland through the Athena SWAN Charter. Monica has shared learnings from *GendeResearchIreland* with the Higher Education Authority Athena SWAN national committee and numerous Athena SWAN self-assessment teams in UCC.

Paul O'Reilly is a graduate of the University of Galway. He received his BA in Psychological Studies and English, Higher Diploma in Psychology (Conversion) and MSc in Health Psychology. He is currently undertaking a PhD investigating the effectiveness of online and app based psychological interventions on the reduction of postoperative pain interference in adolescents before and after spinal fusion surgery. He is also a researcher with the Active* Consent programme, contributing to research on the First Point of Contact disclosure management skills project.

Oluchi Porter is the Athena SWAN Project Officer at RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences. Her role involves managing the Athena Swan initiative as part of the University's EDI Assurance process, and driving strategic change for students and staff in the areas of EDI (with specific focus on gender equality, and race equality). She had oversight of the development of the RCSI Race Equality Action Plan (2021–2024), the first race equality action plan developed at an Irish University. She previously worked to design, implement and monitor international humanitarian programmes with Oxfam Ireland, and with other international development organisations. She is also a former Chairperson of the Board of AkiDwA, Ireland's national network of migrant women living in Ireland. Along with Siobhán Kangataran, Oluchi was the first Co-Chair of the Athena Swan Race & Ethnicity Working Group. She holds a BA in International Relations (DCU), BSc in Psychology, MA in Africa and International Development (University of Edinburgh) and Advanced Diploma in Immigration and Asylum Law (The Honourable Society of King's Inns).

David Quin has lectured in Animation in IADT since 1999, predominantly with the DL832 Animation undergraduate study programme. David is also involved in action research and international collaboration in the field of higher education, teaching and learning. His personal research work revolves around the exploration of animation as an experimental and expressive medium. David Quin has been a member of the IADT

Academic Council and IADT's Teaching and Learning Committee and is also a staff member on IADT's Athena SWAN SAT (self-assessment team). He has worked extensively on capacity building and EU mobilities in Ukraine and Armenia, as well as leading the Digital Learning Systems work package and FilmEU Without Borders activity on IADT's FilmEU European University. David Quin also works on international revalidation and programmatic review panels for agencies such as AZVO in Croatia, SKVC in Lithuania and NAKVIS in Slovenia.

Dr Vivian Rath is Research Fellow at the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) within the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Where he co-coordinates the disability rights module and supervises masters students. He has a background and expertise in human rights, student leadership, success and in creating inclusive environments where everyone belongs. He holds a PhD from Trinity College Dublin, a BSc in pharmacology and MSc in Management from University College Dublin. He is a Government of Ireland Ministerial appointee to the Board of the National Disability Authority, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Disability Advisory Committee. He is founder and Chair of the Trinity College Dublin Forum for Disabled Staff. An award-winning equality and civil rights advocate he has spoken in the EU Parliament and in the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament), national television and radio.

Tom Reilly has been working in the fields of Human Resources and Equality for over 20 years in higher education institutions in Ireland and the UK (Brunel University and University College London). His current role is EDI Manager at Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Sligo Campus where he has university wide responsibility for promoting gender equality, including supporting ATU's Athena Swan work. He is also a member of the HEA Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment. Tom is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the father of three young children.

Dr Jennie Rothwell is Senior Manager of the Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Higher Education Authority in Ireland since April 2023. The Centre of Excellence oversees the implementation of equality, diversity and inclusion policy frameworks for the higher education sector in the areas of gender equality, race equality and ending sexual violence and harassment. Jennie also leads the HEA's work

on the Horizon Europe GENDERACTIONplus project and participates in the ERA Forum subgroup on inclusive gender equality in the European Research Area.

Dr Sarah Sartori is Higher Education Strategic Project Lead in South East Technological University (SETU), where she leads the development of tertiary programmes that provide new access routes into higher education. Her academic background is in Adult and Community Education, and she has worked extensively through participatory and creative research methods to communicate some of the goals and concerns of groups experiencing educational disadvantage, including people with convictions, Irish Travellers and refugees. She is currently vice-chair of the Universities of Sanctuary Ireland committee and chair of SETU's Sanctuary Working Group.

Colin Scott currently serves as Registrar, Deputy President and Vice President for Academic Affairs at University College Dublin. He was initially appointed at UCD as Professor of EU Regulation & Governance in 2006 and subsequently held positions as Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Principal of UCD College of Social Sciences and Law, and Dean of Social Sciences and Dean of Law. He has previously held faculty appointments at the London School of Economics, the University of Warwick, the Australian National University and the College of Europe Bruges. He was appointed as Taoiseach's expert nominee to the National Economic and Social Council in 2022 and to the Advance HE Irish Strategic Advisory Board in 2024. He was previously a member of the Irish Research Council, the Board of the Institute for Public Administration and the Editorial Board of The Conversation UK. He has held editorial roles with the scholarly journals *Legal Studies*, *Law & Policy* and the *Modern Law Review*. Colin Scott's research and teaching expertise lies in the field of regulatory governance, with particular interests in issues of governance fragmentation and accountability.

Michael Sherman lectures in Theology at Carlow College, St Patrick's (2016–present). He is an Adjunct Researcher at the Irish Centre for Faith and Culture, Maynooth (2012–present). He was a founding member of the college's EDI team and is the current chairperson of the college's Civic Engagement Hub and co-chairperson of the college's Athena Swan self-assessment team.

Rachel Skelly is the current Dignity, Respect, and Consent Service Manager in Trinity College Dublin. Rachel leads a team of DR&C Support Advisors within the University who work towards achieving a positive, safe, and inclusive culture for all. Rachel previously led the development and rollout of Speak Out nationally, and led a number of animations projects, including Moving Parts, during her time in IADT.

Dr Liam Thornton is Associate Professor in the School of Law, University College, Dublin. Liam researches and publishes in the fields of human rights, asylum and refugee law, and law in welfare states. Liam was previously co-chair of the UCD Sancyutry Sub-Group and was Board of Director for Nasc.

Declan Treanor is Director of the Disability Service at Trinity College Dublin, where he is responsible for the vision, direction, strategy, and quality of the Service. His leadership has driven significant transformation, aiming to position Trinity as the top choice for disabled students in Ireland by delivering inclusive, high-quality, and cost-effective services. Declan advises the Provost and University Executive Group on disability matters and champions initiatives related to Equality, Diversity, Belongin and Inclusion. Currently, Declan is overseeing the community engagement strategy evolving in the new Trinity disAbility Hub in Printing House Square and is managing key strategic projects, including the disabled student internship programme, the development of a sustainability plan, TCD Sense, and the creation of universal design guidelines. In addition to his role at Trinity, he has contributed to publications on inclusive practice and the strategic direction of disability services in Ireland. He is also actively involved in national committees, such as the Department of Education National Access Plan monitoring committee and the FSD taskforce.

Dr Ross Woods is Senior Manager at the Higher Education Authority with responsibility for the HEA's work on the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, Healthy Campus, Mental Health and Wellbeing in Ireland. From 2019–2023, he led the HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion's work on gender equality and other areas of equality, diversity and inclusion. This included initiatives such as the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative, the first ever National Survey of Race Equality in Irish Higher Education and work to address sexual violence and harassment in higher education institutions. He was also a

member of the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation.

Dr Carol Wrenn (she/her) is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager with TUS (Midwest). Her PhD in Anthropology from NUI Maynooth focused on women's participation in decision-making structures in northern Odisha, India and she has over 15 years' experience working within the international development sector specifically on programming and policy taking an intersectional lens to women's rights and gender equality.

Abbreviations

AHEAD	Association for Higher Education Access & Disability
AS	Athena Swan
ATU	Atlantic Technological University
BAW	Black African women
DCU	Dublin City University
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
ESVH	Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resources
IADT	Institute of Art, Design and Technology
LIT	Limerick Institute of Technology
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MTU	Munster Technological University
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NUIM	National University of Ireland, Maynooth
SAT	Self-Assessment Team
SETU	South East Technological University
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TCPID	Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities
TU	Technological University
TUS	Technological University of the Shannon
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
UK	United Kingdom

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Lorraine McIlrath, Marie Connolly, Helen Maher, and Lorraine Leeson

Introduction

Historically and culturally, the Irish higher education system was shaped by, and has been reflective of, the deeply inequitable gender relations and societal norms characteristic of Irish society. Inequality was pervasive in economic, political, social and cultural spheres and the struggle for

L. McIlrath (✉)
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: lorraine.mcIlrath@mic.ul.ie

M. Connolly
University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: Marie.Connolly@ul.ie

H. Maher
University of Galway, Galway, Ireland
e-mail: helen.maher@universityofgalway.ie

L. Leeson
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: avpedi@tcd.ie

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equal rights and systemic change by women and minoritised communities has been a defining feature of the mobilisation for progressive change in the twentieth and early twenty-first century in Ireland. While this led to substantive legislative and policy changes, including the strengthening of employment equality, equal status and human rights, there remain deep-rooted cultural norms and practices that have continued to negatively impact women and minority communities in many areas of society. The progression of the equality agenda in higher education initially emerged in the context of women's agency in addressing discrimination in employment and is located in this wider societal context as well as being sectorally and institutionally specific. It is within this context that this edited book, *Transforming Gender Equality and Inclusion within Higher Education in Ireland—Contemporary Perspectives,* is positioned. This volume thematically reflects on and analyses the nature of change and transformation with respect to equality, inclusion, and diversity (EDI) across higher education in Ireland from the perspectives of those who are, and have been, pioneering positive change.

As co-editors, we feel that this book is both timely and important as work to systematically embed equality principles in the public and private sector despite pushback in so many regions globally in recent times. This book illuminates the wisdom and experience gleamed from the Irish higher education context that has applicability elsewhere and for other sectors. 65 authors collectively gathered to craft this book that stems from their lived experiences as academics, professionals and agents of change within the context of higher education in Ireland. The positionality that underpins the book is based on the recognition that power, gender dynamics and social relations can be challenged and altered through collective action, transforming the national policy framework, establishing a comprehensive evidence base, adopting new policies and approaches to promote equality in practice. This position is illuminated across the book, as we outline the significant advances made just over a decade in terms of overcoming inequalities, structural challenges promoting inclusion and advancing diversity. Gender inequity in the Higher Education (HE) sector has been a persistent issue in Ireland since the 1980s, as highlighted in the report *Breaking the Circle* (Smyth, 1984) and supported by Minister Gemma Hussey. Despite nearly four decades of attention, similar challenges remain. Progress in gender equality has largely been driven by external funding, such as from Atlantic Philanthropies, the EU's FP7, and Science Foundation Ireland's

Gender Project, with significant strides made only after the introduction of the Athena Swan Charter in 2014. This framework, alongside sectoral funding, pushed institutions to prioritise gender equality by integrating relevant Key Performance Indicators into institutional strategic plans and creating senior roles focused on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). In 2015, men held 81% of professorial positions in Irish universities, and 72% of the highest-paid professional, management, and specialist (PMS) staff were male, despite women making up 62% of this category. In response, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) commissioned a national review, resulting in the 2016 *National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions*. The review set forth key recommendations aimed at HEIs, government bodies, and funding agencies to address gender inequality. Since then, the Athena Swan Charter has become integral to the Irish HE sector, with institutions at risk of losing research funding if they fail to advance gender equality. Annual publication of gender-disaggregated staff data, via the HEA Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by gender, now serves as a key measure of progress.

This has been achieved by consolidating the activities related to gender review processes and practices, higher education policy, policy enactment at the local level and lessons learned from national policy, strategy, and funding models. The chapters in this volume, presented under four thematic sections, showcase pioneering practice to a national and international audience and represent a contemporary opportunity to reflect on the nature of change within the context of higher education in Ireland. We feel that this book is unique as transformations within higher education are rarely articulated through academic publications given the applied nature of change. The book is the result of a successfully funded Higher Education Authority (HEA)[1] Gender Equality Enhancement Fund 2022–2023 project. It is the culmination of almost two years of reflective work among the editors and authors as a community

[1] The Higher Education Authority leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system with the objective of creating a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions, which is responsive to the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland and its people and supports the achievement of national objectives. The HEA has a statutory responsibility, at central government level, for the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions and the higher education system (HEA, 2024).

of practice (Wenger, 1998). It has engaged processes of writing collectively to unearth lessons learned as to how Ireland, as a case study, with governmental focus and support, has transformed the EDI agenda in the context of gender equality within higher education. This book underpins the idea that knowledge should be 'made public' (Stenhouse, 1981, p. 104). Taking a cross-sectoral approach through a reflection on practice approach, the project brought colleagues from across Ireland together to document the challenges and transformations that they have led, researched, developed, and collaborated on. The writers are 'all insiders' and the knowledge they possess 'is rich and complex' (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, p. 60) on areas underpinned by EDI practices and processes. The book is also unique in that it brings together political actors, policymakers, scholars, professional staff, community stakeholders and students, including scholar-activists, into showcasing a holistic picture of change and advancement. The book showcases pioneering work that documents change from historic inequality and towards policy and strategic change, at national and local higher education institutional levels. EDI is now a strategic pillar for Irish higher education with all institutions having core staff and senior leadership in place to drive change, and this volume presents many examples of change and transformation within and across higher education institutions. This book presents a consolidated overview as to how gender equality and EDI can be nationally understood and how change can involve multiple stakeholders at all levels of the higher education system to achieve transformations.

Theoretical Aspects

While this publication is primarily focused on practice, theoretical and conceptual aspects are integrated through application of theory to practical case studies and sectoral developments and initiatives. Here we situate the theoretical foundations introducing key concepts, constructing a sociological framework pertaining to equality, diversity, and inclusion, with reference to the higher education context. These include elements of the conceptual foundation proposed by Baker et al. (2009) and Smith (2014) in addition to feminist agency and activism (Molyneux, 1998; hooks, 1984). These conceptual positions are further complemented by attention to the theory and application of a community of practice approach, informed by Lave and Wenger (1998, 2000). The book's development is framed by community of practice theory to collectively unearth

lessons learned and to address how Ireland as a case study, with a governmental focus and support, has transformed the EDI agenda in the context of gender equality and global applicability.

Several other chapters are framed theoretically including Chapter 4 'Mainstreaming Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Higher Education', considering the concepts which underpin mainstreaming; Chapter 6 'Perspectives of the Pioneers of Change: Mapping the Change Processes for Gender Equality through the lens of the Athena Swan Ireland Charter' draws on feminist institutionalism, particularly Waylen's work (Waylen, 2014), in conjunction with institutional change theory. The chapter theorises institutional change according to four distinct categories including displacement, layering, drift, and conversion (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009) and the analysis is informed with conceptual insights from Acker's (2006) inequality regime work and Ahmed's (2013) concept of resistance as institutional 'happy talk'. Chapter 7 'Transformative, Cross-Collaborative EDI Practices in the Irish Higher Education Sector: University College Galway, A Case Study' integrates theories of agency and change, drawing on political opportunity theory and the feminist conceptual distinction between strategic and practical needs; Chapter 15 'Human Development and Inclusion in Higher Education for those seeking International Protection in Ireland: Universities of Sanctuary' are informed by Boni and Walker's framework (2016) for a human development friendly university. Critical race theory is also an overarching consideration in Chapters 16 and 17, incorporating the conceptual and applied analysis of Crenshaw (1989), Hill-Collins (2000) and hooks (2009). The Conclusion chapter links to concepts and perspectives emanating from the chapters, through analysis of the key themes and evolving practice in the Irish higher education landscape. The vignettes present practical case studies and complement the chapters and offer short insights as to how equality is embedded within a variety of institutions picking up on nuances of the distinctiveness of locales.

Ethical Underpinnings

We have been working towards openness with respect to the challenges that arise in the sector. The Higher Education Authority has also adopted this approach, for example, by publishing evidence-based sectoral reports on areas of concern in terms of gender equality, race equality and sexual violence and sexual harassment in Irish HEIs, all areas which are explored

in this book. At institutional level, our work on Athena Swan (AS) has required us to undertake gap analyses whereby we identify challenges and concerns arising within our institutions. We have been working across the sector to increase the sharing of our work, and increasingly we see redacted AS applications and Action Plans and Race Equality Action Plans in the public domain. This book reflects the value of transparency that we are working with, highlighting positive change arising from intentional interventions undertaken and acknowledging the challenging contexts that gave rise to key elements of the work—which is also typically in the public domain. In addition, all cases identified in the publication are easily accessible in public domains and a Google search will easily produce case examples. However, boundaries relating to any live or sensitive issues are being kept to the fore and the editors have ensured that ethical sensitivity is adhered to. All the publication authors commit to the values of open and honest reflection through which positive change can manifest.

Ireland and Its Context Internationally

Ireland's unwavering commitment to gender equality in higher education positions it as an invaluable ally for global knowledge exchange. This book delves into the insights gleaned from the National Gender Equality Taskforce reports, offering a comprehensive blueprint that resonates with nations facing similar challenges. Amidst the diverse contextual landscapes of higher education worldwide, Ireland's collaborative efforts stand out, driving substantial progress in gender equality within academia. By showcasing Ireland's journey in this publication, we provide a compelling platform for international readers including regions such as the USA, Australia, and the UK. In these regions, initiatives like SAGE (Australia's equivalent to Athena Swan) are gaining momentum, and our insights can offer valuable guidance. Moreover, Ireland's experiences over the past decade hold significant potential for countries in the Global South. By sharing our knowledge on policy formulation, capacity building, integrating gender perspectives into teaching and research, and empowering female students, we aim to inspire readers worldwide. Ireland's example serves as a beacon of hope, offering tangible strategies for fostering gender equality in academia on a global scale. This book offers, we hope, offers readers a mechanism to catalyst processes and practices of genuine reflection on equality, diversity and inclusion within higher education.

Organisation of the Book

The book is structured around four thematic sections that align with the evolving Irish higher education equality, diversity and inclusion discourse and emergent strategic pillar over a ten-year period within higher education in Ireland. A series of exploratory chapters and case study vignettes go onto explore each section theme.

Part I—Contextualising Gender Equality Within Irish Higher Education

The EDI agenda in Ireland commenced with an emphasis on gender equality and inequality and that is the focus of Part I—*Contextualising Gender Equality Within Irish Higher Educatio*n. Part I offers insights from the lived experiences, pioneering local and national efforts and rises to systemic challenges with a series of chapters that respond to how equality, diversity and inclusion were mainstreamed. These perspectives come from a range of actors including high-profile women agents of change, policymakers and academics.

In Chapter 2, Galligan writes about *National Pioneers and Gender Equality.* This is a milestone chapter which sets out how high-profile and public women such as Maire Geoghegan Quinn, former Government Minister and European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science and chair of the HEA expert group; Professor Eileen Drew, Trinity College Dublin; Professor Jane Grimson, Chair of the University of Galway Task Force; and former minister for Higher Education, Minister Mary Mitchell-O'Connor, were stalwarts in driving such substantial change in the sector. The insights provided by these agents of change provide an honest overview as to the complexity of change within traditional male dominated structures.

Chapter 3, *National Policy as a Driver of Change: The Case of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Irish Higher Education*, traces the emergent focus on addressing gender equality in Irish higher education, picking up from the challenges documented by the key drivers of change in the previous chapter. The evolution of the EDI policy landscape in Irish higher education is described in detail in this chapter with particular focus on the actions of the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Rothwell and Woods, both currently and previously worked in the Centre for Excellence in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at the HEA, thereby providing

a uniquely policy-focused institutional perspective on the actions undertaken by Ireland's national higher education strategy, funding, regulation, governance and policy body. The chapter also considers the influence of key actors, namely women in academia and professional services, on the progression of the EDI policy agenda referring to some of the aforementioned pioneers. Tracing the development and subsequent embedding of EDI in Irish higher education, the chapter locates the stimulus for addressing gender equality in women's engagement in several major European gender equality projects. As with the previous chapter, the findings of the landmark legal case on gender discrimination at the University of Galway are also noted as being a seminal moment in transforming the national policy environment. The subsequent HEA *Review of Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions* (HEA, 2016) and resulting changes in policy and practice are discussed, along with innovative activities such as the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) introduced in 2019. The widening emphasis on EDI, up to and including the publication of research and national policy on ending sexual violence and harassment and race equality forms the basis for the latter part of this discussion.

Chapter 4, *Mainstreaming Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Higher Education,* addresses the specific challenges associated with mainstreaming the values of EDI in higher education through examining the processes, tools and techniques involved. Here, Scott and Fogarty discuss the meaning of EDI and the literature on mainstreaming at national, EU and international levels. Taking an applied approach, they consider the mainstreaming literature against the experience of implementing a range of mainstreaming techniques for EDI in higher education (HE) in Ireland inclusive of data collection and dissemination, national reports and policies, externally accredited charters, communication, competitions and behavioural measures. The difference between top-down, bottom-up and horizontal mechanisms are discussed. This chapter also specifically refers to the experience of developing, implementing and mainstreaming EDI policy and practice at University College Dublin. Scott and Fogarty conclude with observations and reflection on the multiple and overlapping measures to support EDI mainstreaming in institutional practices and culture.

In Chapter 5, O'Connor and Irvine examine the changing gender profile of higher education leadership since the appointment of the first female university President in Ireland in 2020, with consideration of the

possible implications for gender equality. This chapter, *Explanations for, and the extent of change in, the gender profile of Presidents of Irish universities* explores the potential causal factors and significance of the substantial increase in the number of women Presidents appointed between 2020–2023, using four different hypotheses to test their analyses. These range from 'glass cliff'; state interventions; the availability of qualified and interested candidates; and the characteristics and dynamics of specific institutions. Using secondary data to inform their analysis, O'Connor and Irvine posit that there is likely some merit in the glass cliff hypothesis and institutional context, with the national policy environment and increased numbers of female Professors also possible influencing factors. Concluding that the depth of change in terms of advancing gender equality is unclear, and the likely sustainability is tenuous, they argue that the disciplinary concentration of female Presidents from STEM and the persistence of significantly higher levels of males at full professorial level remains problematic. The possibility of a return to the status quo of male power is identified as a key concern.

Chapter 6, *Through the Lens of Critical Actors: Embedding gender equality in Irish universities through the Athena Swan Ireland Charter*, O'Mullane and Ní Laoire examine the implementation of the Athena Swan (AS) Ireland Charter in three selected HEIs. The study explores the institutional embedding of gender equality using feminist institutionalism and institutional change theory, focusing on the interaction between formal and informal rules and structures. The research, based on 32 interviews with institutional AS team members, reveals that while AS actions have fostered incremental change, the process tends to emphasise formal structures over informal ones, which may limit deeper cultural shifts. The study highlights that for the AS Charter to truly advance gender equality, informal institutional cultures that perpetuate inequalities must be addressed. The chapter underscores the importance of the perspectives of critical actors in uncovering institutional dynamics, and calls for national policymakers to take these voices into account to enhance the Charter's effectiveness as a change agent in Irish HEIs. While AS has triggered institutional change, the focus on formal structures risks undermining progress, as informal structures can obstruct more transformative change. Scholars argue that lasting gender equality requires tackling these informal cultural practices, which are often unaddressed in the AS process. Cultural change, including recognition of women's contributions and reflexivity around gender norms, must become a core goal. Though

AS has raised awareness and shifted organisational discourse on gender equality, its full potential for meaningful cultural transformation has yet to be realised.

The theme of feminist mobilisation and resistance is explored in Chapter 7 by Cooke, Loftus and Maher taking the previously touched on topic of the 2014 Equality Tribunal landmark decision in Ireland that posited that the University of Galway in Ireland has discriminated against women in academic promotions. This legal case and consequences of the decision were pivotal in transforming the equality landscape across the Irish HE and acted as a catalyst that is explored throughout Part I. In this chapter, *Mobilisation and Resistance at Galway: Impact and Wider Influence on Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education*, Cooke et al. explore the two-fold response from the University to systematically address inequality and at the same time demonstrate a resistance. They go onto o document the impact of this case in terms of policy transformations and how a political feminist perspective and standing can enhance the discourse and practice of progressing EDI.

Part I closes with Vignette 1, titled *Key learnings from Athena Swan Ireland 2014–2023*, by Fink and Dickson-Hyams, staff members at AS Ireland. Here they document the evolution of the AS Charter through a case study discussing the introduction of the Charter in higher education in Ireland. While initially introduced to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of academic women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine, AS subsequently expanded to a broader gender equality remit inclusive of arts, humanities, business, social science and law. The vignette draws on key data pertaining to AS Ireland applications and award holders and discusses the findings of a national survey conducted in 2020. The ongoing challenges and continued adaptation required to ensure that AS Ireland is fit-for-purpose and sustainable are also considered.

Part II—Gender Transformations, Interventions, and Impact

Part II offers insights as to how new policy initiatives; collaborative funding arrangements and gender equality frameworks have been enacted on the ground from inter-institutional collaborations to advance and deepen equality underpinned by a reflective critique.

In Chapter 8, *Advancing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Ireland's Technological University Sector*, six EDI leaders from five new Technological Universities outline the historic context and new EDI structures, processes and practices following the recent mergers of Institutes of Technology in Ireland. As Duggan, Galligan, Keneally, Linehan, McCormack and MacNamara outline, the formation of these new universities was first posited by the Irish government in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DES, 2011) and expanded upon within the Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape (HEA, 2012). The aims of these mergers were to develop deeper consolidation in the higher education sector and increase quality, efficiencies and economies of scale (Keneally, 2017, p. 15). In this chapter, the authors highlight their comparative work through a case study analysis and highlight possible future challenges and opportunities. Their analysis articulates that while all are at different stages of institutional development, in the main each has made significant progress in the embedding of EDI including further designation of Bronze AS Awards and gender parity in structures and staffing. However, the appointment of senior executive leadership in the new merged institution, such as Vice President with sole responsibility for EDI has weakened during the transition to TU status with a wider remit assigned to these roles. This is particularly worrying as the EDI agenda continues to expand, encompassing deeper intersectionality, leading to and concern that this area is slipping down the priority agenda. In Chapter 9, Nestor, Reilly and Costelloe *consider Approaches to EDI data gathering, management and systems in Irish HEIs*, outlining the rise of gender equality in higher education over the past decade and highlighting the close connection between this progress and the development of EDI data collection. While there were initial concerns that data gathering might become merely performative, these fears have been alleviated despite increasing reporting demands from the HEA. In key policy areas such as gender equality, combating sexual violence, and promoting race equality, data has been used to identify issues, guide evidence-based interventions, and track progress, driving and supporting meaningful advancements. To improve data collection, it is essential to revisit two key recommendations from the 2016 Gender Equality Review: Recommendation 1.15 calls for all HEIs to implement gender-disaggregated data systems, and 2.2 suggests that the HEA establish a staff database for HEIs. These recommendations aim to connect institutional and sectoral systems, enabling a sector-wide database that provides

comprehensive, usable data for evidence-based policy and practice development. The HEA, in partnership with HEIs, should create an integrated data portal capturing anonymised data across nine categories. This system would streamline reporting, allowing EDI staff to focus on data analysis and improvement. The authors purport that a sector-wide database with comprehensive data fields would encourage all HEIs to advance gender and equality-disaggregated data systems (Recommendation 1.15). The authors further propose a model based on HESA principles, allowing for analysis of sector-wide equality data and ensuring consistent reporting and alignment of policies across HEIs. This approach supports the recommendations from the Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) and Gender Action Plan (HEA, 2018), promoting a systemic method for data collection. Implementing these recommendations would enhance data practices and reduce inequalities through more informed analysis.

In Chapter 10, Connolly, Berkery, Murphy and Cross explore transformative processes and interventions to help women prepare and progress for academic advancement and highlight the rationale for these to be introduced stemming from the literature on the dearth of women in senior roles within higher education both nationally and internationally. The chapter, *Transformative Interventions to Supporting Gender Quality in Senior Roles within Higher Education*, through quantitative and qualitative approaches, highlights and evidences the successes of three interventions that engaged seven HEIs to help address gender balanced representation in senior academic roles. These include; Research Grant for Returning Academic Carers (RGRAC), Preparing for Academic Advancement Programme (PAA Programme) and the Vista Development Programme for mid-career academic and professional women (or those that identify as women). These interventions included a mix of mentoring, development of social support, funding opportunities and the broadening of academic networks outside of the normative connections. These are described in detail, and the impact of each in terms of proven value as documented by the authors through the perspective of the participants. While they evidence a range of successful outcomes from the interventions, they are cautious in terms of future aspirations and directions, and the need for structural change at the institutional levels to reach full equality, rather than a reliance on ad hocfunding opportunities to develop interventions. They argue for HEI critical reflection on normative behaviour so that the 'goals of the institution can be achieved while not restricting any individuals' potential to succeed in their career'.

Part II ends with two interesting but different transformative case study vignettes. Vignette 2 discusses a tailored mid-career development programme, Vistas Sisters, designed to address systemic inequalities faced by women in higher education, particularly those who have taken career breaks for maternity, parental, or caregiving responsibilities. These women often struggle with establishing their career identity and are confined to limited roles. The programme, developed collaboratively by institutions like DkIT, DCU, and the University of Galway and funded by the Higher Education Authority, featured a modular and customisable structure supported by professional coaches and senior sponsors. It utilised a blended delivery method combining in-person workshops with an online hub, facilitating interactive learning, self-reflection, and network building. Participants benefited in several areas, including increased autonomy, enhanced career planning, improved strategic thinking, and stronger professional networks. The programme also fostered greater self-awareness, empowerment, and confidence by emphasising personal strengths and values. Additionally, structured access to senior sponsors contributed positively to the participants' development. On an institutional level, the programme promoted inclusivity, boosted workplace morale, and encouraged inter-institutional collaboration and the sharing of best practices. Overall, the initiative created a supportive environment that enabled mid-career women in higher education to grow professionally and build meaningful peer networks. Vignette 3 explores recent changes in higher education, particularly through the AS Charter, have prompted institutions like Carlow College to reassess their EDI practices and culture. For this small College, the process underscored the need for institutional reform while emphasising the role of education and civic engagement in driving change. The College's founding principles of social justice are now viewed as an ongoing responsibility by both students and staff. This renewal of ideals is reflected in curriculum innovations and civic initiatives, leading to a stronger integration of social justice principles within the institution.

Part III—Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education

Part III introduces new evolved and wider EDI aspects that evolved from national discourse towards gender-based violence and harassment within higher education, entitled *Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment*

in Higher Education. This section highlights the research and evidence base that laid the foundations for several local and national initiatives to educate for consent and the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence that are now mainstreamed across higher education in Ireland.

In Chapter 11, MacNeela, Connolly, Friel, McIvor, O'Reilly and O'Higgins present on *The Active* Consent programme* at the University of Galway, which has pioneered sexual consent education and research with young people throughout Ireland since 2013, reaching over 100,000 higher education students since 2019. MacNeela et al. report on the positive ethos applied by the programme ethos (i.e. that consent is ongoing, mutual, and freely given—for everyone, in all relationships, across genders and sexual orientations, and for each form of intimacy, if or when someone chooses to become intimate), outlining also how they also address sexual violence and harassment. With a multidisciplinary team that draws expertise from psychology, health promotion, social work, theatre and drama, nursing, and psychotherapy, and in partnership with organisations including Galway Rape Crisis Centre, the authors outline how Active*Consent incorporates storytelling methods, engaging participants in discussion and critical reflection of realistic, contextualised consent scenarios. They go onto document how learning and development has been a necessary response to challenges that Active* Consent has encountered to date, noting also that work to date has occurred during a period that has seen progressive policy changes and increased sectoral resourcing. Reflecting echoes of other chapters, the authors conclude by noting that the Irish HEI sector must meet further challenges before we can say whether policymakers, advocates, higher education communities, and programmes such as Active* Consent, will achieve a long-lasting, impactful realisation of the positive potential of consent education.

Crowley, McGing and Quin present on *National examples of practice to tackle sexual violence and harassment at Third Level: the UCC Bystander Intervention programme and IADT Moving Parts campaign* in Chapter 12. Here, the authors outline the development, outcomes and impact of each programme, noting that both were designed to instil pro-social behaviours and attitudes at personal level and across the communities at UCC and IADT. They reflect on the depth of collaborative efforts within and across the higher education sector that made these programmes possible and highlight the goodwill that underpinned work to make both programmes freely accessible to support wider cultural change.

Concluding this part, Vignette 4, *From Grassroots to Institutional Leadership: A Staff-Student Partnership Approach to Consent at Trinity College Dublin (TCD)*, highlights the evolution of the Together Consent Together Programme at the oldest university in Ireland. Here, Murphy, Skelly and Grimes give a flavour of embedded consent work which began as a series of pilot workshops over a decade ago, and subsequently mainstreamed as a staff-student collaborative project. They underscore that a partnership approach between the student and staff bodies to eliminate and end sexual violence and harassment is the most successful hallmark of this programme. In addition, they give an overview of the national sexual violence and harassment anonymous reporting tool, Speak Out, funded by the Irish government through the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

Part IV Gender and Intersectionality

Part IV *Gender and Intersectionality* focuses on recent wider intersectional challenges issues and the complexity of identity as it pertains to race, disability, gender, sexual identity and orientation and beyond. The chapters consider aspects of inclusion and exclusion from the lived experience perspective with academic and student agents of change insights.

In Chapter 13, *Transforming the EDI Agenda: Including Disability as an Intersectional Consideration*, a group of authors based at Trinity College Dublin with the lived experience offers insights into how disability often is ignored or falls down the list of EDI priorities within higher education through practice, policy and legislation. Their chapter focuses on how the EDI landscape could be transformed and be made more inclusive and diverse if disability issues are included conceptually and practically. This narrative is buttressed by case study insights into two authors' lived experience as professionals working in a university context. McCarthy, Loughrey, Rath, Treanor and Leeson highlight several contemporary challenges facing those with a disability including isolation, under-employed and risk of poverty, access barriers to postgraduate education and a lack of opportunities for future employment within higher education, as well as precarity. They present strong sectoral recommendations that are applicable internationally and include statutory funded pathways into education and the workforce designed to support the needs of disabled employees and their employers' access equipment,

personal assistants or sign language interpretation. They recommend that the agenda be cognisant of intersectional equality, diversity and inclusion and a workplace culture change that is underpinned with a universal design understandings and practices.

In Chapter 14, *Moving Beyond the Binary: Embedding Gender Identity, Expression & Diversity Training and Best Practice into Irish HEIs,* Coady, Kenneally, Wrenn, Foster and Ó Criodáin critically review and evaluate work they undertook to embed inclusive gender identity, expression and diversity training and best practice into Irish HEIs, contextualising this with reference to the Gender Recognition Act (2015) and the wider suite of equality legislation that underpins work in this sphere. They outline work that commenced in 2020 aimed at combatting stereotyping and unconscious bias regarding gender identity minority groups by South East Technological University, Technological University of the Shannon, Mary Immaculate College, St. Patrick's Carlow College and University of Galway, together with ShoutOut, with funding from the HEA's Gender Equality Enhancement Fund. This initiative developed and implemented a gender identity, expression & diversity training programme for staff in the partner Irish HEIs. In this chapter, Coady et al. critically reflect on work to date, concluding by offering a series of recommendations to ensure inclusion and equality for gender diverse people across the Irish higher education sector.

Crosbie, McIlrath, Nassli, Sartori and Thornton address the issue of forced migration and higher education in Chapter 15. In Higher *Education Inclusion for Refugees and International Protection Applicants in Ireland through the Universities of Sanctuary Movement—'Today I have the keys, and I am wearing my good coat'*, they situate the context of HE responses to forced migrants within the broader Irish response, specifically regarding the Universities of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI) movement, established in 2016. They outline HE national policy and strategy regarding race equality and interrogate the ways in which this intersects with significant barriers for forced migrants, which include legal status, access to housing, and welfare rights. Crosbie et al. thoughtfully address how these challenges combine to impact on refugees and international protection applicants or forced migrants experience seeking to access HE in Ireland, interrogating, in their work, the idea of education as both a right and a public good. Bridging theory with practice, they offer rich, challenging, insights into the HE experiences of Sanctuary scholars, and presenting how the UoSI movement challenges the status quo through three core

principles: learning what it means to seek sanctuary; taking positive action; and sharing best sanctuary-related practice.

The Emergence of an Intersectional Race Equality Agenda within Irish Higher Education is addressed in Chapter 16 by Kangataran, Porter, Duvvury and Michael. Kangataran et al. address the higher education sectoral approach to race equality which connects to public sector obligations on equality and is aligned with gender equality work. They argue that there are unique structural factors in the Irish HE system which affect how race equality work is both interpreted and implemented, noting that the integration of race and ethnicity into the AS Charter opens a meaningful opportunity to advance genuine change, challenging entrenched power structures. However, they argue that to make this possible further revision of the AS Charter is required. Critically, they argue that a prioritisation of race justice and an explicit embedding of race equality within the AS framework is essential if we seek to secure equity in the Irish HE sector, ensuring transformative action in its wake, and avoiding institutional performativity.

In Chapter 17 Nwanze-Akobo and Benson-Olatunde offer insights through an autoethnographic lens on their experiences as Black women students and professionals within the education system in Ireland using the method of a walking dialogue. This is a challenging read for any audience and highlights a sense of the overt racist experiences that these two professional and scholarly women face daily through casual encounters and through the higher education system. They bring together Critical Race and Black Feminist Thought theories through storytelling and interactive dialogue between the authors to explore their separate but common challenges faced through the intersection of race and gender. As they describe themselves, they have abandoned in this piece 'traditional methods which are considered the standard academic writing' and adopt a 'culturally-relevant' (Ladson-Billings, 2014) approach of narrating their lived experiences. This chapter significantly contributes towards the very limited scholarly literature on the experiences of Black women in higher education institutions.

Chapter 18, the *Conclusion*, focuses on how this book that details Ireland as a case study has applicability elsewhere and will point to policy initiatives and practice example that may have impact globally in terms of transformation and change within higher education. It brings together broad messages that emerge from the book and ends with the EDI Charter that documents ten points of wisdom and advice for others

and for institutions looking to advance EDI within higher education stemming from themes explored in the book.

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PART I

Contextualising Gender Equality Within Irish Higher Education

CHAPTER 2

National Contemporary Pioneers and Gender Equality

Yvonne Galligan

Introduction and Context

Today, Ireland is recognised as a leader among European countries in advancing gender equality in higher education. The remarkable characteristic of this profile, though, is the speed at which the higher education sector has embedded gender equality as a distinctive and integral feature of the system. Earlier initiatives, particularly those undertaken during the period in which Gemma Hussey was Minister for Education, quickly stalled (HEA, 1987; Smyth, 1984; Smyth, 1996). A 1987 review of gender equality among academic staff was carried out by the Committee on the Position of Women Academics in Third-Level Education in Ireland established by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The review was a response to Minister Hussey's suggestion that the HEA establish a working party to study the findings of the report *Breaking the Circle*. Hussey had described the invisibility of women academics as a 'thoroughly unsatisfactory state of affairs' in a Seanad speech in

Y. Galligan (✉)
Technological University Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: yvonne.galligan@tudublin.ie

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December 1984 (Seanad Éireann, 1984). The HEA review found that women's representation among senior academics (professorial ranks) had actually disimproved from the 1970s: women comprised 2% of professors and 5% of associate professors in the 1984/85 academic year compared to 4.5% of professors and 6.5% of associate professors in the academic year 1975/1976 (HEA, 1987, p. 16; Smyth, 1996, pp. 16–17; O'Connor & Irvine 2020, pp. 3–4). The Committee report contained ten recommendations, one of which was that 'a programme for positive action in third-level institutions should be drawn up and publicised', and elaborated ten specific measures to give this programme effect, including reviewing the assessment procedures for appointment and promotion, training on non-discriminatory interviewing practices, and all staff to be encouraged to apply for promotional posts (HEA, 1987, p. 30). The upshot of this policy and political attention to gender equality was twofold. One was the legitimisation of the emerging discipline of Women's/Gender Studies in universities that began to develop a cohort of feminist scholars and activists who applied their critique to the status quo and created a momentum for change in economics, politics and society (Daly, 1997; Fine-Davis, 2016; Russell et al., 2017). The second was the establishment by the HEA of the Access and Equality Unit in University College Cork in 1989 (O'Connor, 2014, p. 215). This unit, later described as the Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU), with a remit to drive change in university access and employment, held a significant stocktaking conference on the state of gender equality in higher education in 1995 (Egan, 1996). The overall finding was continuation of a gender-blind culture in Irish higher education, alongside a growing resistance to the systemic nature of gender inequality via feminist organising (Ruggi, 2023).

One decade on from the HEA report, the 1997 Universities Act, introduced by another female Education minister Niamh Bhreathnach, placed specific obligations on universities to develop and implement equality policies in relation to access for under-represented groups and in respect of employees (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020, p. 4).[1] By 2007, women's

[1] Universities Act 1997, Section 12 provides for universities 'to promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the University'; Section 36 on Equality Policy states that the governing authority of a university shall 'prepare a statement on the policies of the university in respect of access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people, by people who have

inclusion among senior academic ranks, although improved, remained far from equal with their male peers: women comprised 10% of professors at that time compared with the European average of 19%. Accentuating this disparity, only 3% of all women academics in Ireland held professorial posts compared to 20% of all-male academics (European Commission, 2009, pp. 75–77).

The HEA closed the HEEU in 2002 and assigned its remit on widening access to a National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. Soon afterwards, the gender equality unit in the Department of Education also closed (McGuire, 2015). As a consequence, there was no longer a focus on equality among the higher education workforce, and the fundamental work of data collection and monitoring ceased until 2012 when it resumed and was published in the European Commission *She Figures 2015* publication.[2] In 2003 the HEA commissioned a statutory external review to assess the state of universities equality policies and their implementation, set an agenda for progress, and provide for review (HEA, 2004, pp. 14–15). Under Section 49(c) of the 1997 Universities Act, The HEA (An tÚdarás) could review the equality policies of universities and publish the findings.

Of the 25 recommendations provided by the external team, three advised institutional change to embed equality, one of which specifically addressed gender inequality, 'effective action needs to be taken by universities to deal with the gender imbalance in higher staff positions' (HEA, 2004, p. 60). However, these recommendations did not find their way into successive HEA strategic plans (2008–2010 and 2011–2016) and by 2015, there was little evidence of progress. Although women comprised 50% of academics at the entry level of Lecturer, their average representation among the professoriate was 19% (HEA, 2016, p. 3). There was also significant variation between universities, ranging from women comprising 13% of professors in the National University of Galway to 31% of the professoriate in the University of Limerick (HEA, 2016, pp. 9, 13). It is in this institution that feminist action crystallised into a concrete legal challenge to university promotional processes that brought the matter of

a disability and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body, and equality, including gender equality, in all activities of the university'. https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1997/act/24/enacted/en/html.

[2] The data supplied by Ireland for the 2015 *She Figures* (2015, 131) was incorrect, as it claimed that females constituted 28.2% of Grade A (professorial) positions in 2013.

gender discrimination in higher education to public attention (Quinlivan, 2017; Ruggi, 2023).

The case of university lecturer Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington against the National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway) was the fulcrum on which organisational and systemic action turned (Equality Tribunal, 2014; Quinlivan, 2017; Ruggi, 2023). It is also the immediate context, directly and indirectly, for the reflections to follow. Given its central importance in Ireland's higher education equality journey, its main elements will be reprised. Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington, employed in NUI Galway as a lecturer from 1980, sought promotion to Senior Lecturer in the 2008–2009 promotions round which was conducted by means of an internal competition. She had been an unsuccessful applicant on three previous occasions. In the 2008–2009 competition outcome only one woman was among the 17 successful persons from a total of 47 applicants (15 women, 32 men). Sheehy-Skeffington lodged a claim of direct and indirect discrimination on gender grounds to the Director of the Equality Tribunal on October 2009, citing the Employment Equality Acts 2000–2011. The matter was heard before an Equality Tribunal in September 2012 and remained a live case until November 2014 when the Equality Officer issued findings. The Officer upheld Sheehy-Skeffington's case, instructed her appointment to Senior Lecturer backdated to 2009, ordered the University to carry out a review of its policies and procedures in relation to promotion to Senior Lecturer with particular reference to gender, required a report on progress of this review within one year, and awarded a redress payment of €70,000 (equivalent to one year of salary) to the complainant (Equality Tribunal, 2014).

The consequential impact of this outcome was foundational to the development of gender equality in Irish higher education. It mobilised national agencies such as the HEA and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to engage with the issue of gender equality in higher education, following a call from NUI Galway in January 2015. In discussion, it was clarified that the HEA had the statutory responsibility for reviewing gender equality policies and practices, deriving from its powers under the 1997 Universities Act (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission [IHREC], 2015). The story of this review is told from the point of view of the Chairperson, Máire Geoghegan Quinn. On losing the Sheehy-Skeffington case, the NUI Galway President soon thereafter requested the University Governing Authority to establish a Task Force on gender equality and make recommendations for change

(NUI Galway, 2016). The story of the Task Force is told by the Chairperson, Professor Jane Grimson. In parallel, three Irish universities were involved in European projects leading to the development of gender equality plans. The University of Limerick was a partner in the FESTA project, Trinity College Dublin was a partner in INTEGER, and University College Cork was involved in GENOVATE.[3] This work laid the seeds of the adoption of Athena Swan (AS) as the framework, and accreditation process, for gender equality (O'Connor & Drew, 2023, p. 65). Leading this initiative was Professor Eileen Drew, of Trinity College Dublin who relates how AS came into the sector. The recollections of these heady times is rounded off by the thoughts of Mary Mitchell-O'Connor, Minister for Higher Education in the Department of Education. She describes extending implementation of the 2016 Review, and pushing the system to advance gender equality. The recollections of these four contemporary leaders were shared with the author through individual phone and in-person conversations conducted over a three-month period from April 2023 to June 2023. Each contributor then agreed the text attributed to them.

Reflections

Maire Geoghegan Quinn

On Being Invited to Chair the First National Review of Gender Equality

In spring of 2015 I received a call from Tom Boland (Chief Executive Officer of the HEA) wishing to meet me in private. He was concerned about the gender discrimination issue in NUI Galway that was in the public domain at the time. I too was equally worried, and wondered if it was a widespread phenomenon. Tom thought it was, and was considering establishing small committee, an expert group, to investigate the extent of the problem on behalf of the HEA. He asked if I would be interested in chairing it. My first reaction was to refuse. But Tom persisted, pointing out that as European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science I had done a lot of work through Horizon 2020 for gender equality. I was

[3] INTEGER (1 March 2011–30 June 2015), https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/266638; FESTA (1 February 2012–31 January 2017), https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/287526; GENOVATE (1 January 2013–30 June 2017), https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/321378 (all accessed July 10, 2024).

an independent figure and not from the academic community, features he held were important in adding credibility to the initiative.

After the meeting, I then spoke with two persons who were of the view that this work badly needed to be undertaken. I returned to Tom Boland to accept the task and discuss the membership of the committee. We spoke about inviting Professor Pat O'Connor, from the University of Limerick, whose work on gender in higher education I held in high regard. While putting together Horizon 2020, my office had drawn significantly on Pat's work. I also had high regard for Paul Walton, whose work on gender equality in chemistry in York had received widespread recognition. Helen Peterson, Uppsala University and Ryan Shanks, Accenture were both distinguished leaders in understanding how gendered organisations work from academic and corporate perspectives.[4] Tom assigned Gemma Irvine (HEA Head of Policy and Strategic Planning) and Maeve O'Riordan (academic consultant to HEA) to support the group's work.

The Review

After the first meeting of the expert group, I drew attention to Professor Jane Grimson's excellent report on gender equality in NUI Galway and encouraged the expert group members to become familiar with it. Jane Grimson was approached about briefing the group. She agreed on condition that the meeting was not a public one, and so a working dinner was organised to gain an insight into the state of affairs at NUI Galway through discussion of the report. Jane was fantastic and spoke frankly about where the problems were in NUI Galway. She also advised that it was very important for the expert group report to be punchy, radical, specific, and make people responsible for the actions. This point, and the general discussion, gave an extra drive to thinking about how the group could make recommendations that no-one could escape responsibility for implementing.

Pat brought up the issue of gender quotas. My view was that we had gone down that road in politics, and because of this I had totally changed my mind on the subject. In the past, if a woman was added to a ticket, she had no hope of getting elected and so no chance of making a difference. With the quota, and the financial penalty accompanying it, this had changed politics. But I was of the view that one did not work without

[4] Mon 20 July 2015: https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/education/high-powered-panel-to-review-gender-equality-in-education/31388674.html.

the other. When it came to that part of the report, the group looked at it in detail. Gemma Irvine and Maeve O'Riordan[5] were incredibly good in providing the group with analysis and background reports. Tom Boland was fantastic in guiding the group regarding what could be done under the Act and how far to the edge the recommendations could go without breaching the Act.

Most Significant Challenges

Early on, the group invited every interested organisation and individual to give input on the subject matter. We had a survey that drew over 4800 responses, and we heard from over 28 national stakeholders in addition to 26 higher education institutions. However, awareness of the need to address gender inequality had not reached senior higher education leaders at the time. As Chairperson, I issued an invitation to all University Presidents—all male—to meet to discuss the issue, and only four of them accepted: University College Dublin, Maynooth University, Dublin City University and Trinity College Dublin. In discussion, they seemed to lack awareness of the issue. Their view was one of 'fix the women', and they had no concept of unconscious bias. None were aware that they would need interview boards that were equally composed of women and men, or that there were problems with all-male candidate slates. My view was that if they were not prepared to give their institutions a steer on this issue, then everyone would evade it, and nothing would be done.

Did the Report Go far Enough?

The Report was as much as we could do at that point. It suffered from a lack of data available to give a full picture of gender in the higher education workforce. The group had a limited time to produce the Report and to make clear to higher education institutions (HEIs) the serious intent of its recommendations. So it was important that the recommendations identified who was responsible for each one, so that later they could be held accountable for implementation of these recommendations. It was also important for the HEA and Government to include a provision that asked HEIs to account for their work to address gender imbalance as part of the annual funding review.

A Priority Action for Today

There is a need to see who is doing well on gender equality and what the HEA can do through the strategic dialogue process to prompt further

[5] 27 June 2016: https://hea.ie/2016/06/27/higher-education-institutions-will-risk-funding-penalties-if-they-fail-to-address-gender-inequality/ (photo).

improvement in 'promoting excellence through gender equality'. It may be time to consider seriously addressing the funding penalty contained in the recommendations in order to move reluctant institutions along.[6]

Final Thoughts

When we reported in 2016, there never had been a woman University president. Now (April 2023) four of the seven 'traditional' universities are led by women. This is a phenomenal advance in a short period of time, and it gets commented on. It will be an embedded feature of higher education, though, when women are appointed to these high leadership positions without comment. Now also, 6 of the 7 University Governing Authority chairpersons are women, with two completing their terms of office soon. I hope that women's names will come forward when their replacements are being considered.

Jane Grimson

Personal Interest in Gender Equality

I was the first woman to graduate in engineering from the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in 1970 and not surprisingly my early work on gender equality focused on encouraging more girls to consider careers in Engineering and in STEM more generally—on increasing the numbers entering the 'pipeline'. But as my career in academia developed, I began to focus more on the 'leaky pipeline' itself and why so many women fail to reach senior positions in academia and in organisations generally.

On Being Invited to Chair the NUI Galway Task Force on Gender Equality

The publicity which NUI Galway attracted as a result of losing the Dr. Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington equality case was damaging to the University's reputation in 2014 and required an immediate response from the University's Governing Body. In 2015, they established a Task Force;

> To consider the University's present gender mix among staff, including academic and support staff, and advise the University what measures it should take to develop effective gender equality. (NUI Galway, 2016, p. 9)

[6] HEA National Review of Gender Equality (2016, p. 79). 'Funding will therefore be linked to institutions' performance, and will be withheld if they fail to meet the agreed KPIs and targets as set out in their compact'.

Membership of the Task Force were selected by the Governing Authority, and I was invited to be its independent Chair. We were a mix of internal and external women and men and all were all deeply committed to address the gross inequalities which clearly existed within the University. I included some additional members to ensure that we had the necessary expertise particularly in gender equality as well as broad coverage of the University community.

The Challenge of Leading the Task Force

The Task Force was not uniformly welcomed by the University community, and there was a strong feeling that it was not independent of the University authorities and that our work would just be a whitewash. This meant that individuals and groups including the staff representative bodies refused to engage with us, which was a great pity and an opportunity missed.

It was therefore imperative that we established our independence from the start. We were determined that all our recommendations would be based on objective evidence and not anecdote. We therefore sought input through surveys and meetings to understand the culture of the University insofar as it related to gender equality and what the experience of women staff—both academic and administrative—was. The surveys were all conducted anonymously and analysed by an independent expert. We also gathered detailed gender disaggregated data concerning recruitment, progression, promotion and pay, and we analysed the research literature on gender equality to see what lessons could be learned from elsewhere and not just in academia.

There were many outside NUI Galway who welcomed the establishment of the Task Force and awaited our report with interest. The Sheehy-Skeffington case led the Higher Education Authority to establish a review of gender equality across the sector, suspecting rightly as it turned out, that other higher education institutions were not much better when it came to gender equality. This infuriated some who blamed NUI Galway for exposing the whole sector to a detailed examination of the issue and of their policies and practices.

The Findings of the Task Force and Their Implications

We concluded that the culture within the University did not support women to achieve their full potential and that the Sheehy-Skeffington case and that of the other 5 women [who were also involved in similar cases of discrimination litigation against the University] were not outliers but rather were part of a consistent picture of on-going discrimination against

women. Many of our recommendations were going to be challenging to implement especially as the overall objective was to change the culture which is inevitably a slow and painful process.

Given the attitude among some in the University to the Task Force, it was with some degree of trepidation that I decided it was essential to circulate our draft final report throughout the University and to invite comments and suggestions. This proved to be a very fruitful exercise as not only did it demonstrate our independence and commitment but crucially resulted in a number of excellent suggestions, all of which were carefully considered by the Task Force. These were compiled unattributed into a report together with an explanation as to why each of the suggestions would or would not be included in our final report. The Task Force report, published in May 2016, contained 24 recommendations covering Leadership and Governance, Policies and Procedures, Capacity Building and Training, and Monitoring and Implementation (NUI Galway, 2016). The most radical and potentially the most controversial was the recommendation to introduce mandatory gender quotas for academic assessments and promotions. It is particularly interesting to note that this recommendation also found its way in to the HEA's final report, which was published a month later in June 2016, as did a number of our other recommendations.

Final Thoughts

NUI Galway has made considerable progress since the publication of the Task Force's Report and has implemented or is in the process of implementing almost all the recommendations. However, the University has still got a long way to go. In 2014, only 14% of full professors were women compared to 19% across the sector but at the end of 2021 this has risen to only 19% compared to 30% nationally.[7] The low number of promotions each year across the entire sector during this period certainly made it more challenging for institutions to address gender inequality. However, it is instructive to compare the case of NUI Galway with that of Trinity College Dublin. Both had the lowest percentage of female professors across the sector in 2014 at 14%; however, the percentage in Trinity had risen to 37% by 2022, above the national average, which suggests that change can take place more quickly with strong leadership and sustained commitment.

[7] https://hea.ie/policy/gender/statistics/higher-education-institutional-staff-profiles-by-sex-and-gender/.

Eileen Drew

Introducing AS to Irish Higher Education

Gender equality in Irish higher education was already under the spotlight when the Higher Education Authority chief executive Tom Boland announced in May 2014 that the AS Charter would be adopted to stimulate action on gender equality. This announcement did not come out of the blue. There had been extensive activity in the background since 2012, stimulated in part by European-funded projects, and in part by internal events in Irish higher education. I became involved, in different ways, in these activities.

On the international front, at the time there were three universities engaged in European Union-funded structural change projects designed to address gender inequality among academic staff: the University of Limerick (FESTA), University College Cork (GENOVATE) and Trinity College Dublin (INTEGER). Those of us leading these projects put pressure on the HEA to introduce AS to address the cultural and institutional gender inequalities in Irish higher education. We also sought national data to benchmark our work. Muiris O'Connor, head of policy in the HEA at the time, acknowledged that data were needed to begin to tackle gender inequality. At national level, there was a very significant amount of attention to the case taken by Michelle Sheehy-Skeffington against the NUI Galway, both before and after the Equality Tribunal found in her favour.

I led Trinity's participation in the INTEGER project, which focused on developing gender equality plans in a university setting. Although this is a common action today, it was far from familiar in higher education at the time. As the INTEGER project neared completion, I was acutely aware of the need to maintain the progress we had achieved through an internationally-recognised accreditation process. After evaluating various possibilities, I believed that the UK AS Charter offered the only viable accreditation scheme for Irish higher education (Drew, 2022). I set out to examine how the AS accreditation process worked, and whether it delivered the promised transformational cultural change. A visit to Queen's University Belfast, which had recently obtained an institutional AS Silver award, informed our work in Trinity College. It also brought home to me the value of AS as a change mechanism, so I took the initiative of attending a panel evaluation meeting in London to observe the evaluation process. I later became an AS evaluator. My impression from these experiences was that the AS framework and validation process provided a

robust mechanism to progress gender equality in the Irish higher education sector. From this point (June 2013) I began discussions with the UK Equality Challenge Unit (who owned and managed AS) to explore if, and how, the Charter could be extended to Ireland. It was very clear that the scheme needed all Irish HEIs to be involved to be successful.

The Challenge of Persuading the HEA, and Other Institutions, of the Benefits of Adopting Athena Swan

Up until that time, any gender equality initiatives were in individual institutions and the results were patchy, at best. I could see a need for a more collaborative and integrated national approach if we were to make any consistent progress. So, on 16 October 2013, using the WiSER centre[8] in Trinity College as a base, and the INTEGER project as a forum, I brought together a network of HEIs in Ireland and Northern Ireland along with key stakeholders, the HEA, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), the Irish Research Council (IRC), the Institutes of Technology Ireland (IoTI, later THEA) and the Irish University Association (IUA) to explore the feasibility of pursuing the AS process.[9] The fifteen attendees unanimously sought the extension of the AS Charter to Irish higher education institutions. From this meeting, the first Irish AS National Committee was formed (Drew, 2022, pp. 25–26).

Within one month, on 29 November 2013, I hosted and chaired the first formal meeting of the Irish National Committee for AS. On the agenda was a revised proposal from the Equality Challenge Unit to extend AS to Irish higher education institutions, with a request for HEA funding support. In 2014, the HEA agreed to underwrite the rollout of AS in Ireland for a three-year pilot period, with funding for a dedicated Irish Athena Swsn office (HEA, 2014, p. 20). In addition, funding from the HEA was made available for visits by Irish network members to UK institutions to see how AS worked, and for attendance at AS-related conferences and events. These activities began to familiarise the sector with the AS framework. The AS Charter of Principles and accreditation process was launched in Ireland in February 2015 by the then Minister for Education, Jan O'Sullivan (Dublin City University [DCU], 2015).

[8] Centre for Women in Science Engineering Research, funded by Science Foundation Ireland.

[9] Athena SWAN—Trinity Centre for Gender Equality and Leadership—Trinity College Dublin (tcd.ie).

The Impact of Athena Swan on Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education

At a meeting to disseminate the findings of the INTEGER project, held in Trinity on 28 May 2015, Tom Boland, HEA Chief Executive Officer, announced an investigation into gender equality in higher education with former government Minister and EU Commissioner, Maire Geoghegan Quinn as chair and Gemma Irvine of the HEA staff as Secretary. I was very pleased that Maire Geoghegan Quinn had agreed to take on this role, as I knew that she had given a particular focus to gender equality in her Research and Innovation European Commission brief. For me, it was a signal that the HEA meant business.

Attention to gender equality in the sector was long overdue, as the HEA-funded Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU) and shortly afterwards the gender equality unit in the Department of Education both closed. That meant that there was no data collection on gender issues for a decade until the three EU-funded projects, mentioned earlier, sought national data to benchmark their work.

The first AS awards in Ireland were announced in the autumn of 2015. Trinity College and the University of Limerick obtained the first institutional awards, followed in 2016 by University College Cork. It is not accidental that these early recipients of AS accreditation were also the universities that had participated in the EU FP7 gender equality projects. This prior experience had primed the institutions for AS as the self-evaluation processes required were similar. The short time between launch of the Charter and issuing of awards gives a good indication of the pent-up demand for tackling gender discrimination in a systematic way in Irish universities.

The 2016 HEA's Expert Review report recommended the adoption of AS and reinforced the importance of the framework as a way of improving gender equality in the sector. Since then, AS has become the vehicle for addressing gender and intersectional inequalities in Irish higher education institutions. The HEA has agreed a schedule with each HEI for continued engagement up to and including a Silver institutional submission. Subsequent national initiatives such as the Gender Action Plan and the Second Review of gender equality have added to the embedding of AS, and reinforcing the need for an equality culture and mindset. In 2024, just over a decade after the first national network was formed, 20 institutions and 104 departments held awards. I hope this collective commitment to gender equality continues.

Mary Mitchell-O'Connor

Obtaining the Higher Education Portfolio

I was Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, with special responsibility for higher education, from 2017 until 2020. Previously I was Cabinet minister of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation from 2016–2017 under Taoiseach Enda Kenny. In this latter role, I was acutely aware of the importance of jobs for our economy which was coming out of a recession. The government really grappled with this when it came into power from 2011 to 2016, especially with unemployment in rural and regional Ireland. In addition, I was a former school principal and came from a rural area, so I knew how important both jobs and education were for people's prospects for a decent and fulfilling life. When Leo Varadkar became Taoiseach in 2017, I requested and was assigned the higher education brief. I was elated because I thought I could make a difference to young people and their families in this role.

Priorities in Higher Education

My time in Higher Education was busy and productive. My guiding principle in this role was that the student was at the centre of all initiatives emanating from the Department of Education and Skills, and everything was done in the interest of enhancing student experiences and their career opportunities. I had a few key priorities that I wanted to deliver on—one was seeing through the legislation on technological universities to provide for a new type of university in our higher education landscape. I achieved this and was delighted to see the first technological university, TU Dublin, come into being and that the foundations were firmly laid for a further four technological universities to be formed. A second priority was tackling the blatant gender inequality in the higher education system, and improve outcomes for women. My third priority was addressing sexual abuse with a plan for safer campuses, and my fourth priority was to tackle the problem of drug and substance abuse among third-level students.

Addressing Gender Inequality in Higher Education

I had seen blatant gender inequality in different sectors of society, not least in politics, prior to becoming responsible for higher education, and I really wanted to improve this inequality. I could see that young women were going into universities and other higher education institutions and were not getting to meet role models in senior academic positions that would inspire their careers. I listened to diverse voices within the system including Professor Pat O'Connor and Professor Yvonne Galligan,

the presidents of the universities (all male), and students. I also had evidence of gender-based systemic disadvantage in the sector, such as that evidenced in the 2016 HEA Expert Group report.

AS was beginning to take hold as a framework for addressing gender inequality in higher education, but I wanted to do something more, something that would change the horizons for women and indeed change the male-dominated higher education culture. University presidents had argued that it was difficult to promote women academics because they were not meeting research requirements such as publishing high-quality papers. I also observed that women were given the 'caring' roles in universities which didn't count for promotion. I wanted to cut through that mentality and send a clear message to university presidents, Government, cabinet, society and young women and men that this inequality was structural rather than logical, and it needed to change.

Introducing the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI)

I was aware of the guidelines and recommendations coming from the 2016 HEA expert report, chaired by Maire Geoghegan Quinn. But the change coming from implementing these recommendations was a slow, slow burner. One of its recommendations was to use positive action to address gender imbalance at professorial level, with a 40% gender target by 2024. The statistics showed that the change was only in the order of 2% per year. To try to speed change, I set up a Gender Equality Task Force, chaired by Marie O'Connor, to draw up guidelines in relation to transparency in recruitment, promotion and progression in higher education, identify national and international best practices, and prepare a prioritised three-year plan of action. When the Task Force delivered its report to my office, its essence became the Gender Equality Action Plan 2018–2020. I then began to work on the positive action measure with the Assistant Secretary in the Department of Education, William Beausang. This was designed to provide funding for Professorships to address the gender imbalance at this level of academia. When I was Minister in Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation I had been impressed by the results of an initiative on entrepreneurship for women that had a dedicated grant scheme, and I thought this model had potential to transfer to higher education.

The Department officials, Lynda McQuaid, Special Adviser and I worked on a positive action measure that came to be known as the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI). I wanted it to apply to all higher education institutions (HEA. 2019). A similar initiative was underway in Delft University of Technology, and we examined it closely. We also

drew on other international positive action initiatives. I knew that this idea would cause ripples and that there would be resistance and so we had to make it as robust as possible. Dr. Gemma Irvine of the HEA did solid work in developing the initiative.

Because it was such a different idea we had to have strong arguments in support of it. So, we worked very closely with the Attorney General Seamus Wolfe and his officials to ensure that the proposal was legally defensible. When the SALI document came to Cabinet in its final form, with the support of the Attorney General, the measure was passed, though it did raise some eyebrows! It provided a framework and a budget for 3 years for 45 Professorships. Since it was introduced in 2019, women's overall share of professorial posts has increased from 24 to 31%(HEA 2020, 2023b).

The Impact of SALI, the Gender Action Plan and Consent Framework

The Senior Academic Leadership Initiative added to, and complemented, the Gender Action Plan 2018–2020 from Gender Equality Task Force. To ensure there was consistent monitoring of progress by informed officials, I initiated the creation of a new Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality in the HEA. After that I turned to the matter of sexual abuse which was emerging as an issue in Irish higher education. I provided funding to the National Women's Council of Ireland to devise a sectoral response. Dr. Padraig McNeela in NUI Galway University and Professor Louise Crowley in University College Cork also worked closely with me and my officials on a framework to end sexual harassment and violence in higher education. The outcome was the *Framework for Consent* which I launched in April 2019.

With these initiatives I was pushing at the edges of what was possible within the existing legislation and the culture of higher education. I think these interventions were radical at the time, and still are today. I can see that they are helping to change the culture of higher education to be more diverse, inclusive and fair.

A Priority Action for Today

I am rather disappointed that our models for addressing gender inequality and sexual violence, the SALI initiative and Framework for Consent, have not travelled beyond the sector into other areas of work. However, I am hopeful that the Department of Defence may look at our initiatives to promote more women within the senior army ranks and reduce sexual violence. At the same time, I really believe that during my

time as Minister we laid the foundations for the culture change that I can see today in higher education.

Final Thoughts

We need to be mindful of the threat to jobs posed by Artificial Intelligence. We need to focus on giving students strong critical thinking skills so that they are prepared for the next wave of change and that students emerging from third-level institutions can adapt to the challenges of the future workplace. And we also have to be aware that AI engineers (the majority of whom are male) do not build their biases into the AI algorithms. It is of vital importance that our female and male students are educated to be aware of, and know how to address and counter against gender and other inequalities.

Conclusion

Action on the equality agenda in Irish higher education has grown exponentially since 2014, when the Sheehy-Skeffington case 'disrupted the status quo' of a deeply unequal and gender discriminatory culture (O'Connor & Drew, 2024; Quinlivan, 2017). The narratives of four women central to leading the systemic change that has happened since that time give a flavour of the challenges, resistances, and opportunities to begin to redress higher education's systemic-level injustices. Each reflection shows that the focus of these contemporary equality pioneers was on leading systemic change, not 'fixing the women' (Geoghegan-Quinn, 2017). It also shows how inter-related and complementary to one another were the initiatives they led. These exceptional leaders brought their experience in work and life, and their skills in navigating institutional and systemic complexities, to bear on a sector that was often misogynist in practice, at best gender-blind. Their work initiated a reset of priorities and values in Irish higher education that continue to have impact (Drew, 2022, pp. 27–28).

The 2016 report, delivered by the expert group led by Maire Geoghegan Quinn to the HEA comprised of detailed recommendations addressed to all stakeholders, including the radical provision of introducing a 'cascade' quota for recruitment and promotion[10] along with a target that women comprise a minimum of 40% of professors by 2024

[10] The flexible cascade quota required that the 'proportion of women and men to be recruited or promoted to a certain level is based on the proportion of each at the

attracted international attention (HEA, 2016, pp. 71–72). Suddenly, Ireland's experience of reviewing and addressing cultural and institutional gendered inequalities was of global interest, and the HEA received numerous invitations to share the process and findings with other governments and higher education systems (Looney, 2017 pp. 297–298). In December 2016, Ireland's three major research councils—Science Foundation Ireland, the Health Research Board, and the Irish Research Council—announced that research funding would be conditional on institutions having a Bronze AS award by the end of 2019, and a silver award by the end of 2023. This concerted action by the funding councils signalled their adoption of a key recommendation from the 2016 Review Report on gender equality in research careers and further added the gender dimension in research content, a requirement for obtaining European research funding(Meehan, 2017, pp. 260–261; SFI, 2016).

The HEA Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality has engaged in multi-annual service agreements with Advance HE to fund Ireland's participation in AS. Over the course of time, the framework has been revised to become more compatible with the Irish sectoral context, and the accreditation now works on a franchise model, similar to that in Australia. The HEA Centre of Excellence has expanded in scope to include research on the state of race equality in the sector, the development of Race Equality Principles and Plan for the sector, adopting some features of the AS process, particularly the public institutional commitment to ending inequalities (Kempny & Michael, 2021; HEA, 2024). In 2019, it initiated a fund for enhancing gender equality that has proved highly popular in the sector for advancing collaborations on change (HEA, 2023a). The Centre also monitors and supports the delivery of the Consent Framework and ending sexual violence actions, including funding Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Managers in most public higher education institutions (HEA, 2022c). Importantly, too, the HEA gathers annual data on gender equality among the staff of higher education institutions. This database provides vital evidence for measuring progress, identifying the locus of further challenges, and for informing policy (HEA, 2023b).

career level directly below', HEA (2016, p. 71). women academics would be represented at senior levels, including professorships, according to their proportion in the level immediately below.

AS accreditation continue to grow. In 2024, four institutions enjoyed Silver status—Trinity College Dublin, the University of Limerick, Dublin City University and University College Dublin (Advance HE, 2024). Another 15 institutions hold Bronze or Bronze renewal status and two have legacy awards from their time as institutes of technology. In addition, 114 Schools or Departments enjoy AS accreditation. This total of 135 award-holders to November 2024 shows that addressing gender (including intersectional and trans-gender) equality is a pervasive feature of the Irish higher education system.

On 15th March 2022, Simon Harris, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science announced a second review of gender equality in higher education. The remit of this expert group, chaired by former Secretary General of the Department of Social Protection, Niamh O'Donoghue, was to assess progress since the 2016 review and 'make recommendations to ensure that gender equality is amplified in Higher Education Institutions as they move into the future' (HEA, 2022a). The review concluded in November 2022. It found that while there was significant progress on a number of key indicators in some institutions, the experience was not uniform across the sector or in relation to all indicators. It concluded that many of the recommendations in the 2016 Review and 2018 Gender Action Plan were still relevant. Along with further work to advance the recommended actions in these reports, the Second Review added the need to take account of intersecting inequalities, and consider the impact of precarious employment on academic careers (HEA, 2022b).

This chapter ends as it began, with data In December 2022, of the 18 higher education institutions recognised by the HEA, eight (44%) were led by women. Fifteen institutions (83%) had a gender-balanced Governing Body; 14 (78%) had a gender-balanced Academic Council and 12 (67%) had a gender-balanced Executive management team. All 18 institutions had appointed a senior executive leader for equality, as recommended by the 2016 Report. Among the eight 'pre-2019' universities, women comprised 31% of professors and 40% of associate professors. In the five technological universities ('post 2019'), women accounted for 38% of Senior Lecturer 3 posts—the highest academic grade, and 40% of the grade below, Senior Lecturer 2 (HEA, 2023b). And what of NUI Galway (now University of Galway), whose discriminatory promotion policies began this journey? In December 2022, women comprised 25% of professors, and 46% of senior lecturers (HEA 2023b). This is a

significant improvement on the situation a decade previously, but it is still the lowest proportion of women professors among the long-established universities. More generally, as the Second Review found, there is still some way to go before the Irish higher education system fully embraces gender equality.

It is the work of another day to parse and analyse the lasting impact on the culture and practices of Irish higher education institutions that the four women pioneers in this chapter initiated (though see O'Connor & Drew, 2023, 2024). This contribution offers their unique perspective, in their own words, as central players in a period of momentous change. Irish higher education owes a debt of gratitude to the energy, focus and commitment of these four women leaders—Maire Geoghegan Quinn, Jane Grimson, Eileen Drew and Mary Mitchell-O'Connor—and the many women and men who worked with them to make their vision for gender equality an actionable reality. Finally, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn (2017) puts into words the motivation to undertake gender equality work that drove these four women, and inspires others that follow them;

> Only if everyone's potential is fully realised—and talent fairly recognised and rewarded—do we stand a fighting chance of tackling the global challenges we face and of eradicating the inequality which is fuelling such discontent across the world.

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CHAPTER 3

National Policy as a Driver of Change: The Case of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Irish Higher Education

Jennie Rothwell and Ross Woods

Introduction

In November 2014, in a landmark judgement, Ireland's Equality Tribunal found that one of the country's leading universities had directly and indirectly discriminated against a female employee in respect of access to promotion (Equality Tribunal, 2014). While ostensibly this high-profile case served to shine a light on gender inequality in one higher education institution, it also pointed to a broader systemic issue in Irish higher education. As a result, the HEA commissioned a national review of gender equality in higher education institutions (HEIs), which has had wide-ranging impacts and propelled Ireland from laggard to leader in equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education.

J. Rothwell (✉) · R. Woods
Higher Education Authority, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: jrothwell@hea.ie

R. Woods
e-mail: rwoods@hea.ie

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It should be noted that this was not the first attempt to shine a light on gender inequality in Irish HE. For years, a number of leading Irish academics had worked tirelessly to bring the issue to the fore, through their own research and involvement in major European gender equality projects such as INTEGER, FESTA and GENOVATE (Drew, 2022, p. 23). Indeed, in parallel to the Equality Tribunal case, the HEA had negotiated the extension of the Athena Swan gender equality charter to Irish HEIs in 2014 on a pilot basis. By 2015, all of these factors coalesced to bring about a national policy focus on gender equality in HE under the oversight of the HEA.

The Breakthrough: 2016 Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions

Against this backdrop, in May 2015, the HEA announced a national review of gender equality in higher education institutions. Announcing the review, HEA chief executive at the time, Tom Boland, noted the importance of the review as an instrument of change:

> Our aim is an ambitious one, to make Ireland a world leader in our academic communities. It is entirely realisable. Gender inequality, like all discrimination, damages all of us — the women of talent who do not get promoted and the wider society who do not have the benefit of that talent, properly and fully realised. (in Murray, 2015)

A five-person expert group was appointed to undertake the review, chaired by the former EU Commissioner, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. This Expert Group, comprising national and international experts on gender equality, was tasked with making recommendations to HEIs as to how they might enhance their equality policies and their implementation to support gender equality. It would also make recommendations to state agencies and government departments as to how they might optimally support HEIs to enhance gender equality. The group engaged widely with stakeholders across the higher education sector, government, state agencies, trade unions and women's interest groups. An online consultation survey received over 4,800 responses from the Irish higher education community and the wider public. When asked if gender inequality existed in Irish higher education, 56% of respondents to the survey answered yes, 23% were undecided and 22% answered no (HEA. 2016a, p. 26).

The resulting *Report of the Expert Group: HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions* (HEA, 2016a), made several recommendations to be implemented by the Irish higher education sector. In addition to this focus on the institutions themselves, the Expert Group made extensive recommendations to the HEA, Irish research funding agencies and to other key stakeholders (including the then Department of Education and Skills). Alongside these recommendations, the consultation, review and report would form a key foundation of the evidence base for advancing gender equality in Irish higher education institutions.

Data collected to inform the 2016 Review was published in the first Institutional Staff Profiles by Gender (HEA, 2016b) and demonstrated that in 2015, 19% of professorial positions in Irish universities were held by women and, while women represented 62% of professional, management and support staff (PMSS), 70% of the highest paid PMSS in universities were male (HEA, 2016b).[1] The expert group recommended that gender-disaggregated data be collected and published annually by the HEA. These Profiles have been compiled and published every year since. This data has allowed the HEA to monitor progress and identify areas where improvement is needed. Progress has been steady since 2016, with the 2023 Profiles indicating that women hold 32.4% of professorial positions in universities (an increase of 13.4% since 2016), 62.6% of PMSS positions across all HEIs and 49% of the highest paid PMSS positions across the sector.[2]

The Expert Group called for the prioritisation of resources and for the mobilisation of all stakeholders to address gender inequality. Some of the primary recommendations included that each HEI establish an equality sub-committee of its governing body, and that there should be gender balance on key HEI governance and decision-making structures and committees. In December 2015, only two of the seven universities,

[1] Data on professorships is based on statistics provided by higher education institutions that can appoint staff at professorial level. In 2015, this was seven publicly funded universities.

[2] Data for academic posts is based on working time equivalent (WTE) data provided by Higher Education Institutions to the HEA. Data on PMSS posts is based on headcount data provided by Higher Education Institutions to the HEA. Data collection in 2015 included core-funded posts only for PMSS in universities. Data collection in 2023 included core and non-core funded posts for PMSS in all higher education institutions that the HEA receives Staff Profiles data from.

two of the five colleges and three of the fourteen Institutes of Technology had 40% or more women on their executive management team. In addition to the collection of data, the Review recommended that recruitment and selection policies were reviewed to ensure they are gender sensitive, and recommended the development of HEI gender equality plans as a key driver of institutional change. Significantly, the Review recommended that each HEI appoint a Vice-President for Equality who is a member of the HEI's senior management team and reports directly to the President, and that those appointed to senior positions would have experience of leadership in advancing gender equality. For Presidential appointments, it was recommended that at the final selection step, in so far as possible, the pool of candidates will comprise an equal number of women and men.

Significantly, the Expert Group recommended that Athena Swan award attainment be a requirement for research funding eligibility and that the charter be established in Ireland on a permanent basis. In response to strong interest from the Irish higher education community, the Athena Swan charter was extended to Ireland in late 2014 with the first applications from Irish HEIs in early 2015.[3] While the 2016 Review did not have an immediate impact on gender equality in Irish higher education, it marked a watershed moment. Gender equality in HE was now a topic being discussed by senior government policymakers and, crucially, by senior staff in Irish HEIs.

Slow Progress: Gender Action Plan 2018–2020

Despite the publication of the Review of Gender Equality in Irish HE in 2016, progress on implementing the recommendations remained slow a year later. In November 2017, following her appointment as Ireland's first Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, TD established a Gender Equality Taskforce to identify significant measures that could accelerate progress in achieving gender equality in Irish HEIs. At the time, data analysis conducted by the Taskforce suggested it could take twenty years to achieve gender balance at professor level (i.e. minimum 40% female professors), while in the Institute of Technology

[3] For more detail on the evolution of the Athena Swan charter in Ireland, see vignette in this volume, Sect. 1: Fink and Dickinson Hyams, Building Capacity for a Nationally Contextualised Equality Charter: Key Learnings from Athena Swan Ireland 2014–2023.

sector it could take up to seven years to achieve gender balance at this level.

In this context, in 2018 the Taskforce published its Gender Action Plan 2018–2020 (HEA) which recommended a suite of initiatives to bring about sustainable organisational change and to empower a culture of gender equality in HEIs for all staff at all levels. This Action Plan endorsed the 2016 Review and placed a renewed focus on HEI Gender Action Plans. The Taskforce called on HEIs to set ambitious short, medium and long-term goals and actions at institutional level to progress gender equality. Further emphasis was placed on the role of leadership and the need to gender-proof HEI recruitment and promotion procedures.

A critical feature of this plan was that it gave the HEA responsibility for determining the optimal requirements in relation to Athena Swan certification. Considering this, publicly funded HEIs would have to comply with timelines set out by the HEA for the achievement Athena Swan awards in order to retain eligibility for national research funding. The Taskforce also recommended that a new Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality be established in the HEA. Specifically, the Taskforce stated that this Centre should ensure sustainable acceleration towards gender equality in HEIs, foster collaboration and disseminate good practice, provide centralised support for HEIs and report regularly to the Minister. For the first time, a specific unit in the state agency with oversight of the sector had responsibility for the advancement of gender equality in Irish HE.

A National Approach

The HEA Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality was established in June 2019. The Taskforce's Action Plan included a recommendation that positive action interventions be taken by HEIs to promote gender equality. In the early years of the HEA Centre of Excellence, two such actions were key to raising awareness around gender equality in HE and to supporting HEIs to develop innovative interventions in response to national policy recommendations: the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative and the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund.

At a national level, Minister Mitchell O'Connor launched the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) in 2019. The SALI was a groundbreaking scheme and one of a few of its kind internationally.[4] Specifically, it aimed to help achieve equality of outcome in the higher education sector by awarding forty-five senior academic leadership posts to HEIs to assist in improving gender balance at senior levels. New and additional posts would be funded in areas where HEIs documented that there was clear evidence of considerable gender under-representation; where an appointment would have significant impact within the HEI and the relevant functional unit; and where they would be a proportionate and effective means to achieve accelerated and sustainable change within the institution. HEIs were invited to submit applications for funding under two SALI calls to date (2019 and 2020). Ten years of funding is provided for each permanent post, after which the HEI must incorporate the post into its institutional salary budget. As a result of the two national calls, a total of thirty posts were approved across a range of disciplinary areas, from Biochemical Engineering to Sustainable Geoscience, Intersectional Humanities and Pharmaceutical Engineering.

Considering the responsibility assigned by the Taskforce, in July 2019, the HEA issued a Statement on the Athena Swan Charter in Ireland, which sets out the timeframes and the implementation process for the Expert Group recommendations and the Taskforce actions that related to the Athena Swan Charter in Ireland. The statement outlined that engagement with the Athena Swan charter within the timelines set out by the HEA was required for institutions to apply for funding from the three main state research funding agencies: the Health Research Board, the Irish Research Council and Science Foundation Ireland. As the two national policy documents (the Review and Action Plan) had highlighted the need for funding repercussions in relation to gender equality, this signalled a statement of intent from state regulatory and funding bodies. Not only was the message that progressing gender equality was a national priority being sent to institutional presidents, but it was also now being directed at senior staff in charge of one of the key portfolios in terms of institutional rankings: research funding. The increase in Athena Swan awards from 2020 onwards demonstrates that this connection between

[4] Examples include the TU Delft Technology Fellowship and TU Eindhoven Irène Curie Fellowship.

gender equality and research funding has been one of the most important drivers in advancing gender equality in Irish HE.

In order to provide seed funding for advancing gender equality initiatives in Irish HE, funding of €250,000 was made available annually by the HEA under the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund from 2020 to 2023. The fund encouraged HEIs to work collaboratively to submit applications for funding, and funded projects are expected to have national level impact and/or a pathway to national level rollout. Awards have been made across three areas: research on or advancing gender equality initiatives in Ireland; training programmes specifically addressing gender equality; and Athena Swan capacity-building activities.[5] The variety of projects funded is testament to the breadth of gender equality work being undertaken across HEIs.

By mid-2020, less than a year after the Centre's establishment, HE stakeholders were calling on the HEA to broaden its focus on equality policy across the sector. Indeed, the appointment of Vice-Presidents for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across the HE system was at odds with the HEA's singular focus on gender equality. Work at local level was overtaking national policy and its focus on advancing gender equality, while at the same time the HEA was embarking on new programmes of work complementary to but not solely centred on gender equality.

In August 2020, the new (and first) Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, TD, announced that the HEA would be taking responsibility for oversight of the implementation of the *Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions* strategy (referred to as the ESVH Framework) (Government of Ireland, 2019). As well as assuming oversight of the ESVH Framework, the HEA committed to further engagement to end sexual violence and harassment in HE, including undertaking national student and staff surveys to build the evidence base in this area. Simultaneously, the Minister broadened the emphasis of the HEA's Centre of Excellence to cover a wider remit on equality, diversity and inclusion. In line with this

[5] A list of awards made since 2020 is available on the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund webpage. In 2024 the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund was expanded to become the EDI Enhancement Fund, with increased funding available for collaborative projects in the areas of gender equality, race equality, ending sexual violence and harassment, and advancing understanding of intersectionality in practice.

shift of focus, in 2020 the HEA National Committee for Gender Equality (comprising key senior HEI stakeholders) became the HEA National Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Broadening the Scope: Race Equality

Athena Swan Ireland had established a National Intersectionality Working Group in 2019 with an initial goal to develop a cross-sectoral approach to collecting data on staff and student ethnicity in the Irish HE sector. The group was open to HEI staff with academic or professional expertise in this area as well as representatives from the HEA. In 2020, the Group produced a statement to provide staff in HEIs with information on the rationale for collecting ethnicity data and the complexities of categorisation. This statement provided some context for race equality work in higher education as well as including recommended actions for HEIs to consider. The statement was endorsed by all publicly funded HEIs, as well as by the representative bodies for higher education, the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), which was a clear indication to the HEA that this was an area where action was needed.

Recognising the need to establish an evidence base in relation to race equality in Irish HE, the HEA leveraged the expertise in the Intersectionality Working Group to develop the first National Survey on Race Equality in Irish HEIs, which aimed to capture the lived experience of HEI staff in relation to race equality. For the survey, race equality was defined as "equal representation, equal experiences and equal outcomes of staff from minority ethnic groups" (HEA, 2021, p. 3) All staff working in HEIs in the Republic of Ireland—regardless of ethnic background or nationality—were invited to participate. 3323 staff (approximately 10% of the total number of HEI staff nationally) responded to the survey. The findings were included in the *Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector* report (HEA, 2021), authored by Dr Marta Kempny and Dr Lucy Michael and published in October 2021. This report demonstrated that there was clear consensus across that "race inequality exists in Irish HE" (HEA, 2021, p. 60). Respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds emphasised the need to acknowledge that race inequalities can also emerge through microaggressions, and not simply through direct racism. Staff from minority ethnic groups in the survey also highlighted

subtle forms of inequality, prejudice, unconscious bias and microaggressions which affect their daily lives. Upon publication of this report, the HEA committed to develop an action plan to respond to the survey findings and recommendations.

In September 2022, following a period of consultation with stakeholders, including the Intersectionality Working Group, the Centre of Excellence for EDI launched the *Race Equality Implementation Plan 2022–2024* (HEA, 2022c). The ambitious Plan contains actions to be delivered by the sector, informed by the findings of the Race Equality Survey and Report. Actions at national level included a race equality conference and the development of a national statement and anti-racism principles for HEIs. The HEA organised the first National Conference on Race Equality in March 2023, hosted by the University of Galway. The Conference brought key stakeholders together to highlight the structural, institutional and historical dimensions of racism which have informed past and current practice in HEIs and the societies in which they are situated. At the Conference, the HEA launched the *Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions* which aim to harness the power that HEIs have as leaders of positive change in society to challenge racism and race inequality and seek to embed a culture of race equality across HE.

In April 2024, the HEA launched the National Anti-Racism Advisory Group to advise the HEA on policy relating to addressing racism in HEIs and advancing race equality as part of institutional culture and strategic priorities. This includes but is not limited to, the implementation of the Race Equality Report (2021), the Race Equality Implementation Plan (2022) and the Anti-Racism Principles (2023). Membership comprises experts on anti-racism and individuals with lived expertise of race equality in HEIs, in addition to representatives of relevant higher education stakeholder groups and specialist external agencies.

With the signing of the Anti-Racism Principles by 21 HEIs to date, the sectoral commitment to advancing race equality is clear. However, much work remains to embed the commitment to race equality as part of HEI institutional culture and strategic priorities and to acknowledge that race inequality and racism exist in Irish HE.[6]

[6] For further analysis see Chapter 16 in this volume, Duvvury, Kangataran, Michael, Porter "The emergence of an intersectional Race Equality agenda within Irish Higher Education".

Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment

As noted above, in August 2020 the incoming Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD, highlighted ending sexual violence and harassment (SVH) in HE as a key policy priority. Concurrently, the newly elected Irish government's Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, contained clearly stated aims to tackle sexual harassment in higher and further education (Government of Ireland, 2020, pp. 99–100). As a result of this, the HEA assumed responsibility for oversight of the implementation of the *ESVH Framework*, the scope of which was now expanded to cover both staff and students. The Centre supports implementation through the provision of funding for policy implementation and research, development and provision of guidance and expertise, sharing of resources and facilitation of shared learning, good practice and collaboration.

Much like in its work on Race Equality, the HEA needed to build an evidence base to make informed policy decisions in this area. While a survey of students had been carried out by the Union of Students in Ireland and researchers at the University of Galway in 2020, there was a need to create a national baseline in relation to student and staff experiences of SVH. As with its engagement with the National Intersectionality Working Group, the HEA established an expert advisory structure in the form of the HEA Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment (ESVH) in HEIs. This group drew its membership from within and outside the sector and included representatives of relevant HE stakeholder groups and specialist external agencies, as well as experts in the area of SVH.

This Advisory Group worked intensively with the HEA in early 2021 to develop national surveys of staff and students in relation to SVH. These surveys were launched in April 2021 and received 11,417 responses (7901 students and 3516 staff). Student respondents noted high levels of positive intentions and attitudes towards active consent and proactive bystander intervention. However, 66% of student respondents had experienced sexist remarks or sexualised comments and 34% of female student respondents indicated they had experienced sexual violence. Only 25% of students knew where to access help on campus. A large majority of staff indicated willingness to take part in training on handling disclosures, bystander intervention and consent, however, less than half of staff were aware of how to make a report of SVH. Higher levels of SVH were

reported by female staff, younger staff (aged 18–34), academic staff in Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law, staff working in research and staff who identified as bisexual, gay, lesbian or queer.

Following publication of these findings, the HEA committed to developing an action plan in collaboration with the Advisory Group on ESVH. The *Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions Implementation Plan 2022–2024* (HEA, 2022b) was launched in October 2022 and directly addresses the recommendations that emerged from the analysis of the national survey results. The ambitious plan includes 19 actions ranging from further analysis of survey findings, qualitative research, mappings and feasibility studies, events and targeted initiatives. These include the national #UmuteConsent social media campaign, which garnered 11 million views; the hosting of an ESVH conference in December 2022 by the HEA; the development of guidance for reporting sexual violence and harassment statistics; and the completion of a feasibility study into forming a panel of independent investigators for SVH complaints. Several more actions are underway, including further analysis of survey data to explore risk and vulnerability; qualitative research; mapping of training provision; targeted interventions and pilot initiatives. HEIs submit annual reports against the 15 outcomes in the Framework to the HEA, which allows the HEA to monitor progress, identify best practice and highlight areas where further capacity building is necessary.

The establishment of a robust evidence base, despite challenging findings, has led to renewed government investment in this area. At the launch of the *Implementation Plan* in October 2022, €1.5 million in annual funding was announced to appoint Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response Managers in HEIs. The HEA has established an ESVH Practitioner Network to bring these managers together and to facilitate sharing of knowledge, resources and learning, and to promote coordination and collaboration, among ESVH practitioners across the sector. While much commendable progress has been made towards implementation of the Framework, SVH remains a serious issue and concerted efforts and resources continue to be required to improve HEI responses.

Continuing to Prioritise Gender Equality

In 2016, the Chair of the Expert Group that conducted the HEA National Review of Gender Equality, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, had noted that

> the passion and commitment to tackling gender inequality demonstrated by a wide range of stakeholders, has inspired us with great confidence that our recommendations will be fully embraced and that gender equality in Irish higher education will be achieved in the years ahead. (HEA, 2016a, p. 3)

As detailed above, much progress had been made since that landmark review and, by 2022, gender balance had been achieved in senior leadership positions across Ireland's twelve universities. However, gender inequality remained a serious barrier to female progression in academia, and this situation was exacerbated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2023).

In this context, the HEA, along with an External Expert Group, conducted a *Second HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions* (HEA, 2022d) over the course of 2022. The Review assessed the progress made since the 2016 Review and the perception of gender equality among HEI staff and made recommendations to ensure the continued advancement of gender equality in HE.

Feedback to the stakeholder consultation for the Second Review indicated that Athena Swan has been a *game-changer* for Irish HEIs. A stakeholder commented that the reporting requirements of the HEA and the linking of Athena Swan to research funding eligibility have solidified EDI and GE [gender equality] in Ireland which has not happened in other countries. Ireland has turned Athena Swan into something unique. Athena Swan in the UK still has a 'fix the women' approach whereas Athena Swan in Ireland has a 'fix the institution/structure' approach which has allowed HEIs to look at themselves with a gendered lens and build a culture of EDI (HEA, 2022d, p. 34).

In 2021 the Athena Swan Ireland charter was re-developed in line with the findings of a national consultation exercise, offering a framework for progressing equality in higher education and research that is

unique to Ireland and tailored to the Irish HE context. From a European perspective, from 2022 onwards, the European Commission (EC) requires that applying public bodies, research organisations and HEIs from EU Member States and associated countries, have a Gender Equality Plan or equivalent strategy (which meets a set of mandatory requirements set out by the EC) in place to be eligible for funding (European Commission, 2021). Feedback from the Irish HE sector stressed the importance of ensuring that Action Plans developed as part of Athena Swan activities align to the requirements set by Horizon Europe. This was incorporated into the redevelopment of the Athena Swan Ireland Charter in 2021. Gender Equality Plans developed via the Athena Swan Ireland charter framework assist Irish HEIs in meeting the EC requirements.

Ireland as International Exemplar

The Irish higher education system has come a long way since a female academic had to bring her own institution to a tribunal to ensure gender equality in academic promotion processes. Indeed, recruitment/promotion statistics collected by the HEA show that female academic staff have a higher percentage chance of success in professorial competitions than male staff (HEA, 2022a, pp. 16–17). The work of Irish universities to tackle gender inequality in higher education was recognised by the European Commission upon the announcement of the inaugural winners of the EU Award for Gender Equality Champions in March 2023. Three of the four winners came from Ireland (Maynooth University, South East Technological University and Trinity College Dublin) and this milestone clearly identified Ireland as an international exemplar in terms of gender equality in HE. In the second year of awarding the prizes, Technological University of the Shannon received a Gender Equality Champion Award in May 2024, and Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland received an award in the third edition in March 2025.

In some ways, the keys to Ireland's success are scale and coherence. As O'Connor and Irvine point out, the Irish case has seen multilevel interventions and centralised policy development, which have supported sectoral advancement of gender equality, rather than a singular emphasis on progression in individual HEIs driven by local champions (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020, p. 11). While the HEA has led at national level, HEIs have continued to drive the EDI agenda at institutional level.

And, by working together as a system, Irish HEIs have been able to lift each other and share best practice.

In both the areas of Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment (ESVH) and Race Equality, the HEA Centre of Excellence for EDI adopted a bottom-up advisory structure, particularly given advancements already being made in the HE sector. This structure, supported by national policy, has allowed the HEA to embark on an ambitious programme of work with significant buy-in from key HE stakeholders.

Ireland's experience of advancing gender equality in higher education demonstrates that real change—systemic, cultural change—does not come easily or quickly. Since 2014, there is much to be lauded from both an institutional and national policy perspective. While the advances in recent years have been welcome, there is now a need to double down on this work, rather than consider the problem fixed. In its concluding remarks, the Expert Group that carried out the Second Review of Gender Equality highlighted that there remained "a need for concerted institutional action and additional resourcing in order to ensure that progress can continue" (HEA, 2022d, p. 11). A key challenge for the future will be finding the balance between ensuring that the hard-won gains in the battle for gender equality are not lost and attempting to break further ground for equality, diversity and inclusion in Irish HE.

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CHAPTER 4

Mainstreaming EDI in Higher Education: A Policy Practitioner Perspective

Marcellina Fogarty and Colin Scott

Introduction

This chapter addresses the broad challenge of developing and implementing the processes, tools and techniques by which to mainstream the values of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in higher education institutions. The adopted approach is one of practitioners who have been closely involved with developing EDI strategy, policies and actions in University College Dublin. The meaning of EDI and a commitment to mainstreaming in a higher education context is first examined, noting that commitments to EDI can be challenging and contested. Secondly, the range of different processes, tools and techniques to advance EDI in universities are considered, ranging between consultations, data collection

M. Fogarty (✉) · C. Scott
University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: marcellina.fogarty@ucd.ie

C. Scott
e-mail: colin.scott@ucd.ie

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and dissemination, the making of policies, communication, competitions and behavioural measures to enhance recruitment decisions. Thirdly, some conclusions on the mix of multiple and overlapping measures to support EDI mainstreaming are offered, with a degree of redundancy, continuing reflection and adaptation to changing circumstance, to mainstream EDI in institutional practices and culture.

Conceptualising EDI in Higher Education

The introduction of formal roles and measures to address equality challenges in higher education in Ireland likely stems from what has been referred to in the US context as a 'rights revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s (Sunstein, 1990) in which domestic legislation, often inspired by EU norms, progressively required employers and service providers (of which higher education institutions (HEIs) are both) to address systemic inequality, initially with respect to gender. Parallel to this trend, the state has taken a greater interest in ensuring access to higher education for students who have experienced inequalities, particular with respect to socio-economic status, disability and membership of the Traveller and Roma communities, under the moniker of access and widening participation. Thus, precursors of contemporary EDI teams and actions in Irish higher education, can be found in offices and roles devoted to implementing legislative equality requirements as an aspect of HR, and distinctly, initiatives to promote access to higher education from underrepresented groups.

A significant step in commitment to equality in higher education in Ireland was the inclusion amongst the statutory objectives of universities of promoting 'gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university' (Universities Act 1997, s.12 [k]). This established a more specific duty on universities than that created for employers and service providers more generally under a series of equality measures adopted in Employment Equality and Equal Status legislation. It may be observed that the implementation of duties in equality legislation is a necessary but insufficient step to advance equality.

Allied to the higher education requirements, more specific duties have been placed on public sector bodies, encompassing higher education institutions. The Disability Act 2005 places a statutory obligation on public service providers to support access to services and facilities for people with disabilities and sets a target whereby a minimum of 3% (increased to 4.1%

in 2024 and to 6% in 2025) of staff employed by them are people with disabilities. The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, introduced by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, places a legal obligation on all public bodies to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect human rights.

Whilst universities, alongside other major employers and service providers, have sought to act on requirements under the various equality measures adopted in Ireland, there was for a long period little official encouragement from government or government agencies to demonstrate effectiveness in addressing equality issues. Collection and publication of equality data by the Higher Education Authority was intermittent in the period from 1997 (O'Connor, 2014). A renewed national commitment to gender equality in higher education was initiated in 2015 and has been further enriched subsequently with a renewed focus on other equality grounds such as intersectional race equality (Kangataran et al., 2025; Rothwell & Woods, 2025).[1]

The ratcheting up of equality activity generally, and gender equality actions in particular, in the Irish higher education sector from 2014 (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020) raises significant questions about concepts and definitions of equality being pursued, especially when put alongside the distinct and long-established stream of equality activity concerned with enhancing access into higher education for students from underrepresented groups. Most HEIs in Ireland have chosen the label of 'equality, diversity and inclusion' to organise their equality actions with some also explicitly drawing on the language of human rights. The use of the term equality may be explained by reference to the various general statutory regimes and EU legislation which has tended to anchor around the concept of equality. In a legislative context equality is frequently interpreted as formal equality, the treating of all equally as with the imperative for equal pay and assessment of candidates for appointment and promotion by standard uniform criteria as well as with equal access to goods and services. Whilst equality legislation does permit deviations from formal equality, for example to correct historic inequalities (exemplified by the

[1] For more detail on the HEA's national commitment to EDI see Chapter 3 Rothwell, J., and Woods, R. 'National Policy as a Driver of Change: The Case of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Irish Higher Education'; Chapter 16 Kangataran, S., Porter, O., Duvvury, N. and Michael, L., 'The Emergence of an Intersectional Race Equality Agenda Within Irish Higher Education' in this book.

national Senior Academic Leadership Initiative in Ireland, announced in 2018) such deviations are very much the exception.

In the United States the concept of equity is frequently more prominent than equality, implying not equal treatment, but rather differential treatment by reference to characteristics and needs to support all equally to fulfil their potential. Significant Irish scholarship has retained the term equality, but seeks to move beyond basic and liberal egalitarian conceptions of equality by advocating for 'equality of condition' as the objective of a more equal society (Baker et al., 2009). At least implicitly, much recent equality work in Irish higher education has targeted goals of equality of condition, including broadening access to higher education with supports by reference to needs and strong engagement with interculturalism and diversity.

The concept of diversity draws attention to the nine statutory equality grounds in Ireland (and which are similar across the EU) and the consultation to establish a tenth ground of socio-economic status. Some HEIs have moved beyond legislation and adopted additional equality grounds in their equality policies adding grounds such as socio-economic status and neurodiversity. Understanding diversity requires the collection of data to know what proportion of staff and students are drawn from the protected classes, having a disability, from minority ethnic groups and so on. Apart from gender, data gathering has been weak in Irish higher education with commitments to correct this over time.

For many, the concept of inclusion provides an organising concept for higher education institutions which are capable of recruiting and supporting staff and students from all backgrounds and protected groups and supporting each to fulfil their potential. Inclusion requires policies which enable full participation, for example by taking account of caring responsibilities and ensuring they do not provide a barrier to achievement and enhancement. Inclusive approaches in higher education are well illustrated by the work of university access teams. Access programmes seek to draw in a wider range of students through diverse entry pathways with special supports and considerations. These supports seek to make for a level playing field such that all who could benefit from higher education are able to find their institution and course, gain admission and then be supported around particular needs to feel included. These actions are intended to enable all students to participate equally both in learning and wider student activity through accommodations, for example taking account of physical or intellectual disabilities, ongoing mental health

challenges, legacy barriers experienced by Traveller and Roma communities, and other forms of difference. In Ireland, there is an emergent commitment nationally and across higher education institutions to adopt principles of universal design for learning to underpin more inclusive education (AHEAD, 2024). Whilst a relevant organising concept, this chapter does not examine the specifics of student underrepresentation in any detail.

EDI Mainstreaming

Taking the steps beyond enforcing formal equality commitments to build more inclusive campuses for students and staff is a challenge of culture as much as one of legal compliance. The concept of EDI mainstreaming is frequently deployed to capture the idea of the wide variety of measures necessary to build a culture of inclusion. Gender and EDI mainstreaming originated with commitments from international organisations, first the United Nations and then the Council of Europe and European Commission, as a means to advance equality and has progressively been taken up as an approach by higher education institutions (Peterson & Jordansson, 2022). Mainstreaming and promotion of cultural change is of particular significance because of a perception that equality policies and practice are liable to meet resistance, not least from those who perceive themselves as benefiting from the status quo (Hodgins et al., 2022). Mainstreaming can be seen as an example of change management, on which there is a voluminous literature, and a very wide variety of practices designed to support change within organisations, including with respect to EDI in higher education (Bailey & Drew, 2020).

There are many definitions and examples of gender and equality mainstreaming in the literature across Europe and Ireland. However, common themes or key principles can be identified. One national guidance document suggests that equality mainstreaming 'simply means integrating equality into the day-to-day working of an authority. This means taking equality into account in the way the authority exercises its functions. In other words, equality should be a component of everything an authority does' (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016, p. 9). For the European Commission:

> Equality is a goal that is shaped through non-discrimination on grounds of sex, race, language, religion, economic or family situation, or any others.

> To achieve it, equality mainstreaming is the incorporation of a focus on equality, non-discrimination and diversity into all legislation, policies and programmes designed and developed at all levels and at all stages of the planning process, and into the policies, procedures and practices of all institutions involved in the design and delivery of public sector policies and programmes. (2010, p. 1)

Focusing on that institutional dimension, a prominent transnational equality NGO in higher education states that:

> [mainstreaming] sets out to effect both cultural and systemic change in an organisation so that an equality perspective is integrated into its day-to-day working across all functions. It is a long-term, strategic approach to ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion sit at the heart of an institution's culture and operational delivery. It is not a quick fix, but requires time, resources, the support of specialist staff and the commitment of senior management. (Advance HE, 2024)

Core values of mainstreaming include participation, human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, equality, human rights, non-discrimination and protection of the marginalised.

Mainstreaming EDI Techniques in Higher Education in Ireland

EDI mainstreaming is fundamentally about promoting change in culture. Whilst change, from the perspective of social sciences, is concerned with explaining how and why things have happened, from the perspective of policy actors inside a change process it feels more like developing myriad ways to promote changes which remove barriers to equality. Prioritisation of gender mainstreaming as a national policy for higher education institutions in Sweden exhibited limited results attributed to implementation which often sought to align to rather than change organisational culture (Peterson & Jordansson, 2022).

It is important to understand that many initiatives develop iteratively with learning as a key aspect of their development (Scott, 2020). From the perspective of policy actors, such as University EDI teams, EDI mainstreaming is about promoting change through embedding EDI in institutional processes and structures. For Bailey and Drew this involves

'systemic, integrated, long-term approaches rather than piecemeal short-term measures' (Bailey & Drew, 2020, p. 124). Drawing on a wider literature on change management in higher education, Bailey and Drew identify a number of building blocks of change and a systemic eight-step change model which starts with creating a sense of urgency through coalition building, strategy development, communication, empowerment, generation of short-term wins, consolidating gains to produce more change and anchoring new approaches in the culture (Bailey & Drew, 2020, p. 125). They describe very effectively how change models were adopted as part of a multi-country research and change project to embed gender equality across several European higher education institutions.

Reviewing change after the event, it is possible to see change being driven by three layers of drivers: top down where institutions meet mandatory obligations from government through legislation and policy changes (or sometimes others), as one aspect of mainstreaming, noted above; horizontal where institutions act to compete and/or collaborate with each other, sometimes learning from each other or imitating each other in the process, and bottom-up where institutions act to address needs identified internally, often through community actions and other forms of bottom-up development, identified above as the organisational change aspect of mainstreaming. This framework draws on institutionalist approaches to policy change which simultaneously capture something of the source of change and also the mode through which change is undertaken (Gilardi, 2005). This set of three modes of acting can be combined to generate further hybrid modes, in some cases combining all three modes.

Top-Down Change

Higher education institutions tend to be conservative and slow to change whilst also seeking to preserve a high degree of autonomy over the direction of research and educational programmes, and selection of staff and students. As state investment in higher education grew in the twentieth century, not just in Ireland, but across Europe and more widely, HEIs have come under pressure to meet wider governmental objectives around innovation, research impact, employability of students and widening educational participation (Scott, 2021). State objectives for higher education in Ireland were articulated in legislation in 1971, 1997 and 2022, with the Universities Act 1997 enshrining the commitment of higher education institutions to advancing gender equality.

However, performance and state monitoring of gender equality in HE were under-developed in the period between 1997 and 2015.

A core aspect of recent trends in EDI in higher education and Ireland has been the prioritisation and framing of EDI initiatives by government and state agencies, focused principally, but not exclusively, on gender. O'Connor and Irvine note the demotion of gender equality issues in the early 2000s and a significant reprioritisation of gender equality in higher education following an adverse tribunal decision against a University for gender discrimination in 2014 which led to the establishment of a task force to review gender equality in higher education, reporting in 2016 (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020).The focus on gender equality as an aspect of higher education policy was further ratcheted up following the establishment of a government Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and a related Ministerial post in 2020. This new department has overseen the implementation of findings from a further review in 2018 and initiated a second review of gender in higher education, which reported in 2022. The external environment of policymaking, legislation and monitoring can be regarded as a top-down imposition on higher education institutions, but it can also be regarded as a resource and, either way, has been very significant in shaping HEI actions on gender equality.

HEIs engaged enthusiastically with the Athena Swan (AS) programme from 2015 as a support to advancing gender equality (Drew, 2022). A decision by the main research funding bodies to mandate, initially, Bronze, and later Silver AS accreditation could be regarded as an imposition, but for EDI teams within institutions this was a resource ensuring support not just for initiating but also maintaining momentum for AS engagement. Key national actors in establishing and developing the AS initiative have included the Irish office of the UK NGO Advance HE and a national AS committee drawn from across Irish higher education institutions. Advance HE and the National Committee have led on adapting AS to Ireland, with a new AS Charter launched in 2021, and also on the accreditation of higher education institutions applying for AS recognition. Whilst participation in AS is de facto mandated, the instrument for achieving this is competition based, by requiring it as a condition for research funding, and the mode of action is bottom-up institutional and school self-assessment, subject to validation by a national panel. Thus, the development of AS in Ireland exemplifies a mixed mode approach,

simultaneously deploying top down, horizontal and bottom-up policy modes.

Alongside the three HEA inquiries into gender in higher education, the HEA has significantly developed its own capacity for engaging HEIs on gender equality. This includes the establishment of the HEA Centre for Excellence in Gender Equality following the 2018 Taskforce review, the annual Gender Equality Enhancement Fund competition and building gender equality targets into the strategic dialogue process.[2] The range of work led from the Centre has broadened from the concerns raised by the inquiry reports to embrace also the quite distinct stream of work geared to ending sexual violence and harassment in higher education, taking an intersectional approach and addressing race equality.

Top-Down Monitoring

There are several national reporting requirements imposed on HEIs in the area of EDI mainly by the HEA. Examples of these include reports under the HEA Mission-based Performance Compact, the Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions report, and, prospectively, the HEA Gender Equality Review Reports, notably the 2nd National Review report published in 2022. A key example of mandatory reporting requirements on HEIs with respect to EDI arises from EU and national legislation on gender pay gap reporting for larger employers across the whole economy. The first reporting date for mandatory gender pay gap reporting for employers with more than 250 employees was December 2022. To date there has been little by way of comparative reporting of the Gender Pay Gap of HEIs such that there is not yet the pressure of publicity amplifying the perceived need within HEIs to address the gender pay gap found in all institutions in favour of male employees.

[2] The name and work of the Centre and the Gender Equality Enhancement fund have been changed to represent Equality, Diversity and Inclusion more broadly.

Bottom-Up Modes of Change

In this section of the chapter, the focus switches away from national initiatives to the experience in our own university of developing and implementing strategy and policy on EDI.[3] The trigger for establishing the university management's EDI Group at UCD was a commitment in UCD's strategy 2015–2020 to recruit and retain an excellent and diverse staff and student population. The same strategy committed the University to a range of values including Diversity. It was a decision of the President that, in line with other strategy commitments, it was necessary to have machinery to advance strategic objectives for EDI in the form of a new UMT EDI Group to be chaired by a member of the University Management Team and supported by the University Equality Manager within the University's HR team. It was significant that the President, newly appointed in 2014, had experience advancing gender equality through AS in his prior role in the UK. In parallel with the establishment of the UMT EDI Group, a Gender Equality Action Group was established with another UMT member chairing. At this stage AS was viewed largely as related to gender in research in the STEM disciplines and leadership of the group was assumed by the Vice President for Research, Innovation and Impact. AS has progressively expanded beyond its initial remit addressing academic staff and students in STEM disciplines to cover also AHSS and Business & Law disciplines and then professional and support units.

The Establishment of EDI and Gender Equality Action Groups occurred alongside an existing Widening Participation (WP) Committee working to advance the participation of underrepresented students in the University and supported by the University's Access and Lifelong Learning (ALL) unit. Whilst WP and ALL had no remit around gender directly, their activity was clearly very important to the University's wider EDI work. These initiatives generated a complex and interlocking structure in which the UMT EDI Group, reporting to the University Management Team, was supported by 7 sub-groups addressing communications and events, ethnic diversity and inclusion, disability, data, LGBTI, mainstreaming and widening participation and also a distinct gender equality action group. The work of the group explicitly targeting mainstreaming focused initially on requiring a self-assessment of how new

[3] For comparison, systemic research was carried out on the effects of similar processes in another Irish university, see Hodgins, O'Connor and Buckley, 2022.

policies advanced or impeded EDI goals as a condition of submission of new policies to the management team.

The reference in the UCD Strategy and values to diversity and development of the UCD EDI Policy and Strategy provided the foundation for the development and implementation of all other EDI-related policy. The development of the EDI policy and strategy itself followed good practice in terms of being led by the EDI group consisting of broad representation i.e. key areas, EDI-related groups and networks, grades, staff category, students and minority staff representatives. Consultation took place through a university-wide EDI event consisting of a series of lightning presentations which helped to inform priorities. Since 2016 an EDI Annual Report has been prepared and published each year reporting to the University Management Team, Governing Authority and wider University community on the implementation of the strategic objectives and actions including a range of data to measure impact. A further means of measuring the impact of activities under the strategy is through undertaking an EDI survey of all employees on a bi-annual basis and obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data, and then demonstrating how survey responses have informed further change.

Athena Swan as Regulated Bottom-Up Self-Regulation

As noted above, the AS programme is based on bottom-up self-assessment, combined with the development and implementation of a gender equality action plan, but involves also top-down accreditation and a degree of horizontal competition between institutions, for example over the timelines for their awards and the numbers of schools/departments involved. The importance of AS in Ireland has been highlighted through a top-down decision of research funding agencies to mandate accreditation as a condition of funding, thus injecting further top down and horizontal modes to its embedding in the national scene (Drew, 2022). Similarly, the need for gender equality plans has been emphasised by the European Union in its use of research funding levers to address gender inequalities in European research (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 1116).

Engagement with the charter is a key pillar of Ireland's national strategy for gender equality. All of Ireland's universities and institutes of technology and several colleges participate in AS Ireland. The AS Ireland charter underwent a re-development in line with the findings of a national consultation and offers a framework for progressing equality in higher

education and research that is unique to Ireland. The objective of the AS Ireland 2021 charter framework is to support higher education institutions, academic departments, and professional units in impactful and sustainable gender equality work and to build capacity for evidence-based equality work across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation.

UCD holds an institutional AS bronze award since 2017 (renewed in 2020) and achieved a Silver award in 2024. At institutional level, the University adopted a model of Working Groups with Co-chairs (1 academic, 1 practitioner) to address each of the key strands of the self-assessment required for institutional accreditation under AS. This approach enables the academic perspective to be strongly represented and to push the boundaries but also enables the practice elements to be considered. This co-chairing approach also supported buy-in and ownership of the implementation of the action plan later. Co-chairing has also been an aspect of UCD's response to the recognition that too frequently self-assessment and gender equality action plan development has fallen to women, generating counter-productive effects (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 1128). The Gender Equality Action Group has overseen both the self-assessment and development of the gender equality action plan and implementation processes.

In each instance, the institutional self-assessment process and creation of a gender equality action plan has been supported by extensive consultation in focus groups and world café events and through a biennial EDI survey. The University has additionally organised many awareness raising events in support both of institutional and school level applications drawing in expertise from other institutions and from Advance HE. The self-assessment process has been further supported by dialogue externally with critical friends nationally and internationally who have reviewed drafts and internally with the University Management Team and Governing Authority.

By engaging with the University community, it helped to gain support for the actions in the action plan and ensured that key challenges were identified. Approval by senior management meant that support was obtained for the implementation of the proposed actions. The establishment of Working Groups with co-chairs was a key success factor for mainstreaming responsibility developing the gender equality action plan for the implementation of actions. As a result, many actions are led by numerous roles and areas across UCD, not by the EDI Unit, which leads

to a greater sense of commitment to achieving the desired outcome—distributed ownership is one of the key principles of mainstreaming.

The AS model supports the mainstreaming of the institutional level action plans locally as local level actions plans should be aligned to institutional level action plans. UCD's EDI Strategy and Action Plan and Gender Equality Action Plans involve many bottom-up measures to remove barriers to equality and to build a more inclusive culture, including, beyond particular policies, training, communication and awareness raising, for example through newsletters, campaigns, and events.

Reflexive Governance of EDI

The AS processes are not simply key examples of bottom-up actions by institutions to remove barriers to equality. They exemplify also a mode of reflexive governance requiring institutional reflection, consultation and participation which seeks to shift institutional preferences and culture drawing on the resources and knowledge of the institution itself (Scott, 2020). Research on gender equality plans (GEPs) in the EU, whilst identifying limits to effectiveness, also concludes with some optimism about the potential for more reflexive modes of governance in shifting gender power relations in higher education institutions.

> The process of producing a GEP can provide the setting for reflexivity, consensus-building, and interrogation of the gendered norms (both formal and informal) that underpin the assignment of epistemic authority. If the imbalance of power experienced by women in higher education is to be addressed in a sustainable manner, this paper suggests that actions aimed at effecting institutional change in academic organizations need to tackle both epistemic privilege and discrimination, reset a traditional culture that normalises unequal gendered expectations and behaviours, and distribute epistemic-supporting resources in a gender-just manner. (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 1128)

UCD committed itself to deploying reflexive governance modes in the introduction to its 2015–2020 strategy and subsequently developed other examples of reflexive governance as a core aspect of EDI mainstreaming. A key example of reflexive development of EDI policies is provided by the processes to review and revise UCD's Dignity and Respect policies in 2020–2021. In parallel with national committee work directed towards

Ending Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Third Level Education (ESHTE), evidence emerged of very significant challenges, affecting students and staff, of sexual harassment and sexual violence nationally and in UCD which were not being effectively addressed through policies and procedures. A decision was made in UCD in 2019 to consult on a major review and revision of policies and procedures for addressing dignity and respect (which included sexual harassment and sexual violence and bullying and harassment).

The approach to addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence included national collaboration on identifying and addressing challenges, engagement with the Irish Universities Association to prepare detailed guidance on addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence, working through some of the major challenges including addressing capacity for action where institutional knowledge of policy breaches is not supported by a complaint and also relations with criminal procedures and reporting to an Garda Siochana (Irish Universities Association, 2020). Within UCD, a working group drawing on expertise across the University met to develop revised policies and procedures, addressing the issues identified, but recognising that the wider University community would be able to provide both more evidence of issues and ideas to address the challenges identified. Eleven focus group meetings were held with employees and students including focus groups with senior management and the Governing Authority. These were conducted by an external independent facilitator, which enabled people most effected to participate and share their experiences. However, following extensive consultation on the first draft of new policies and procedures, it was recognised that significant concerns about the effectiveness of new policies and procedures had arisen within the community. Because further consultation resulted in more policy changes, people felt their voices has been heard, they had ownership of what was developed, and a greater sense of responsibility as regards implementation. External engagement with 3 expert bodies coming from different perspectives gave an objectivity to the process and built confidence in the policy and process. Confidence in a process will be more likely to support implementation resulting in mainstreaming and buy-in. Support for the policy and process was achieved early and exemplified both a top-down and bottom-up approach to mainstreaming.

A full report on the dignity and respect review and resulting policies was published which included the raw outputs of the consultation process and the themes that emerged. This was very important for two reasons:

- Transparency—demonstrated the importance of being open and transparent about perceptions and experiences of individuals on dignity and respect in UCD. This had a knock-on effect on building up trust, demonstrating that diverse views were considered carefully and addressed.
- Embedding/Mainstreaming of the D&R Policies—the above approach to policy development was essential to be able to move to successful implementation of the Policies. Working groups were formed to support implementation consisting of key stakeholders and so there was a shared ownership approach. There was regular reporting both to the management team and governing authority from a new Dignity and Respect Oversight Group.

The implementation of the newly adopted policies and procedures was pursued through 5 workstreams additional to establishing the new Oversight Group: 3 tiers of training, a communications campaign; ongoing external engagement; monitoring; and, critically, the establishment of a new Dignity and Respect Support Service.

Horizontal Actions

As compared with the top-down and bottom-up initiatives described above, there are also a variety of more horizontal forms of change in EDI, under which institutions are not required to act, but may be incentivised by learning from other organisations or by government measures through competitive funding processes. Examples of competitive funding processes have included the scheme to recruit more women to senior academic roles—the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) and also regular calls for funding of projects from the national Gender Equality Enhancement Fund scheme. More horizontal modes of change are exemplified also by participation in and learning from institutional, national and international networks, including staff and student support groups around particular issues, national EDI in HE networks, and international university associations.

So What?—Evidence of Impact of EDI Mainstreaming

There is a good deal of critical literature which is sceptical of the impact of gender and EDI mainstreaming to enhance equality. For some, the AS programme has been window-dressing, maintaining patriarchal dominance of higher education institutions, whilst distracting women and members of minoritised groups from career-building with equality work (Hodgins et al., 2022). For others, HEI gender equality policies focus too much on high profile issues such as proportions of women in senior academic roles, neglecting other core issues such as the gendered experience of caring responsibilities in the sector (Ruggi & Duvvury, 2022). It is not a full response to the critical literature to show that the data demonstrates change, as critical literatures may be sceptical of what can be seen as a neo-liberal trend to set targets and monitor quantitative data trends. That said, if higher education institutions have data monitoring demonstrating change at the heart of their management, then mainstreaming requires that EDI data is among the data which is monitored.

It is significant that much of the national and institutional data we have focuses on gender rather than all equality grounds or indeed data showing the intersectionality of gender with other equality grounds recognising that people's identities and social positions are shaped by several factors. This is an important limitation on understanding the impact of EDI mainstreaming. In the UK, it has been suggested that the primary focus of the AS Charter on gender equality has tended to privilege gender equality over race equality (Bhopal & Henderson, 2021). In a different national context, similar, but distinct concerns have been raised about the relative neglect of disability issues in the sector (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021).

There is a range of data available which provides some indication of change over time. Data trends in Ireland generally have shown some positive movement on key indicators, though it is difficult to attribute causation, whether in national policies, the AS Charter, or distinct institutional initiatives (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020). Official HEA data shows significant movement in the proportion of women in the most senior academic grade in the University sector, from 23% in 2018 to 32.4% in 2023, but falling far short of the government target of 40% women in the top professorial roles by 2024.

There has also been progressively much higher compliance with the norm that there should be at least 40% male and female representation in key decision-making groups. For example, in 2018 fewer than 40% of executive teams were gender balanced, by this criterion, but by 2022 more than two thirds of institutions met this criterion with much higher achievement rates with respect to governing bodies (83.3%) and academic councils (77.8%) Whereas in 2018, fewer than 20% of institutional presidents were women, and no traditional university had ever had a women president, by 2023 nearly half of presidents were female and four of the seven traditional universities were led by women. The positioning of women in the most senior leadership may be both an indicator and a carrier of change with respect to EDI mainstreaming.

Conclusion—Mixing Mainstreaming Measures

Pressures for EDI mainstreaming can be seen as top down, horizontal and bottom up and each has been significant in driving change. This chapter is written from a policy practitioner perspective rather than a research perspective. We conclude with our thoughts on the key priorities for promoting EDI mainstreaming in higher education.

The evolving approach taken by Irish HEIs to achieve EDI mainstreaming is very much in alignment with the policy literature. Taking this policy literature together with sectoral experience of EDI mainstreaming in higher education in Ireland it is possible to discern a range of emergent principles necessary for EDI mainstreaming at an institutional level (alongside continuing priorities for national leadership, resourcing, data etc.):

- The key foundations need to be in place through a university strategy that supports diversity and a specific EDI policy and strategy at university level.
- Undertake research to identify best practice.
- Ensure broad representation (genders, minoritised groups, grades, category of employee, and student at different stages) in reflexive learning processes to identify and address EDI challenges.
- Promote leadership in EDI and discussions with senior management periodically to ensure that they remain engaged and supportive of the initiative.

- Training/education of stakeholders to ensure they are confident and feel equipped to do the work at hand, understand language etc.
- Engage key groups which the policy most impacts in numerous ways to ensure that their voices are heard, and they have a safe space to do this.
- Engage external organisations who are expert in the area but also give credibility and confidence and objectivity to the process (supporting both perception and expertise).
- Be transparent throughout—everything published, including feedback. This also includes data following implementation.
- Measure the impact—are the policies making a difference?
- Embed EDI into other programmes (e.g. leadership programmes including new Head of School induction, orientation for employees and students, recruitment skills)
- In a sector where resources are scarce ensuring sufficient resources to achieve tasks through institutional and sectoral funding opportunities.

As we often remind ourselves in UCD, and as we have demonstrated in this chapter, much has been done to mainstream equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education in Ireland, but we are not complacent and much remains to be done.

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CHAPTER 5

Understanding Dramatic Changes in the Gender Profile of Presidents of Irish Public Universities

Pat O'Connor and Gemma Irvine

Introduction

From the foundation of Trinity College Dublin (TCD) in 1592, men led Irish public universities until the announcement of a female interim President at the University of Limerick (UL) in July 2020. From then until May 2023, a period partly coinciding with the global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), seven women became Presidents of Irish public universities (on ten-year contracts). These included TCD, the oldest and most prestigious university; University College Dublin

P. O'Connor (✉)
University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: pat.oconnor@ul.ie

Geary Institute, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

G. Irvine
Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland
e-mail: vicepresident.equality@mu.ie

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(UCD), the largest one; as well as at two of the relatively young pre-2019 universities (Maynooth University [MU] and University of Limerick [UL]), and three of the five new Technological Universities (TUs: 2019–2022) formed by combining at least two existing Institutes of Technology (IoTs). These were the Munster Technological University (MTU); Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and South East Technological University (SETU). These TUs (post-2019 universities: HEA, 2018a) could have been considered unlikely sites for female leadership given their historical disciplinary prioritisation of science and technology, although a small number of women had previously headed up the Institutes of Technology.

Now, 58% of Ireland's public university Presidents are women (seven of 12, 2024). The fact that this change occurred over less than three years undermines the view that the absence of women in these positions for the previous four centuries reflected women's perceived 'deficits' (such as lack of confidence, political 'nous', ambition, leadership skills, caring priorities, or biology) as assessed by those in power. In most countries, men continue to be over-represented in such positions, with roughly three quarters of higher education Presidents in the EU being men (European Commission [EC], 2025). However, in Sweden and New Zealand, roughly half of the Presidents/Rectors were female (O'Connor & White, 2021), while three quarters of Ivy League universities in the US had a female President (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023) before falling to half at the start of 2024. With some notable exceptions (e.g. O'Connor, 2014a; Peterson, 2015, 2016) relatively little attention has been paid to this. In this chapter, using secondary data, we look at the evidence for possible explanations for this change and raise questions about its depth.

Possible Explanations?

Four analytically distinct hypotheses are identified. The first revolves around the demands of the job in crisis situations, i.e. the 'glass cliff' hypothesis (Ryan, 2022; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). It suggests that women are appointed by organisations in 'turbulent conditions' where the likelihood of failure is high (Peterson, 2016. p. 114). The global COVID-19 crisis experienced from 2020 could be seen as a glass cliff situation, with university Presidents ultimately responsible for protecting the health of students and staff, organising and managing in-person to

online learning and reduced revenue possibilities (e.g. from international students, renting student accommodation, hosting international visitors/conferences etc.). In these situations, the attractiveness of women as Presidents may lie in the perception of them as generally more 'risk adverse' than men (Charness & Gneezy, 2012), not least because they are more likely to face negative consequences (Dawson, 2023; Morgenroth et al., 2022; Ryan & Fine, 2022).

The second hypothesis focuses on the impact of recent (2015 onwards) state interventions putting pressure on higher educational institutions (HEIs) to tackle gender inequality through systemic change in procedures, structures, or culture.[1] It is difficult to differentiate this from the impact of COVID-19, although clues are provided by the timing of the changes. In Sweden the proportion of women in Presidential/Rector positions increased from 20% in 2003 to 48% in 2019, well before the COVID-19 pandemic—arguably reflecting the involvement of the state in the process (O'Connor & White, 2021).

The third hypothesis revolves around the availability of 'qualified' and interested candidates and/or the reduction in the attractiveness of these positions to men. Traditionally, a professorial position was seen as a prerequisite, with women's differential access impacting on the perceived availability of 'qualified' female candidates. Under the influence of neoliberalism and new public management, HEIs have been faced with increased commercialisation, marketisation, corporatisation, the intensification of academic labour, and pressures deriving from the state's increasing regulation and HEIs decreasing institutional autonomy (Lynch et al., 2012; Peterson, 2015). Such pressures could reduce the attractiveness of these positions to men (potentially creating opportunities for women).

The fourth hypothesis focuses on the characteristics and dynamics within specific HEIs (Ni Laoire et al., 2021) including the age of the HEI; the gender profile of professorial positions and other indicators of a commitment to gender equality including a tradition of women's studies as a discipline; the presence of informal gender equality champions; other individual and institutional change agents and gender equality awards.

Although these hypotheses are analytically distinct, they constitute a broad set of contextual factors which may facilitate change in the gender

[1] A comprehensive overview of policy interventions and initiatives at national level are considered in Chapter 3 in Sect. 5.1 of the volume.

profile of the Presidency. They may also impact on each other. Thus, for example, the actions of individual gender equality champions in a HEI might impact on state interventions, which in turn might create the conditions for change in individual HEIs and/or in the overall HEI system. Disentangling this is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Finally, the depth of institutional change will be explored. It will be suggested that resistance to gender equality in HEIs may persist (Agócs, 1997; Hodgins & O'Connor, 2021; Hodgins et al., 2022; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2022) despite such changes. Therefore, while the appointment of women to Presidential positions is a welcome and long-awaited development, it may not signal an end to gender inequality in HEIs.

Methodology

The chapter draws on secondary data including Higher Education Authority (HEA) reports providing data on gender balance in governing authorities, academic councils and executive committees; annual reporting and selection requirements and the gender profile of (full) professors. Additional sources are used to explore the existence of a female leadership 'pipeline'; Athena Swan (AS) awards; a tradition of formal women's studies courses; the existence of gender equality champions involved in advocacy, research and EU gender equality funding, as well as other individual and institutional change agents (including the appointment of Vice Presidents for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion).

Gender balance is defined as at least 40% women and at least 40% men, not including non-binary representation (historical data on the latter is not available). The date and timing of changing patterns are used to support or reject the various hypotheses. Since some of the data is potentially relevant to several hypotheses, it will be mainly referred to in the section where its timing suggests that it supports a particular hypothesis.

Glass Cliff Hypothesis

The COVID-19 pandemic was publicly identified as starting from March 2020. The change in the Presidential gender profile in Ireland occurred during that pandemic (2020–2023). The nine Presidential processes

announced between 2009–2019[2] prior to COVID-19, all resulted in male Presidents being recommended for appointment,[3] replicating and maintaining earlier trends. In comparison, the nine Presidential processes announced 2020–2023 resulted in seven female and two male Presidents, UniversityCollege Cork (UCC) and the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) were the exceptions in 2021. This offers support for a glass cliff hypothesis.

The Chair of Governing Authority/Selection Committee plays an important role in the appointment of the President. Of the nine Presidential processes prior to COVID-19, three had a female chair (33%) and all appointed male Presidents. Of the nine processes post COVID-19, five had female chairs (56%) and appointed four female Presidents; four had male chairs post COVID-19 and three of these appointed female Presidents. Thus, the gender of the chair of the selection processes does not appear to be significant.

The gender profile of the governance structures in the universities has changed since 2015, with an increased number becoming gender balanced in accordance with the national policy agenda. Thus, all seven of the pre-2019 universities, now have a gender balanced Executive Management Committee (which allocates resources, decides on priorities, and is chaired by the President), compared with just two in 2015. This pattern began to change in 2017, and by 2019 had stabilised in six of these seven universities. In the pre-2019 universities, all but one of the Academic Councils (which are responsible for the academic direction of the universities, but without a resource remit) were gender balanced in 2022, compared with just one in 2015. This change began in 2018, and increased steadily to seven gender balanced in 2021, but fell back to six in 2022. Gender balance has also now been achieved on all Governing Authorities (whose power includes appointing/dismissing the President) compared to just five in 2015. This pattern has not been linear—with a fall back to four in 2020, followed by a rise to seven in 2021 and 2022. Overall, the timing of these changes do not predict change in the gender profile of the Presidents. However, it was striking that in the pre-2019

[2] 2009-Dublin City University; 2011-Maynooth University; TCD; 2013-UCD; 2016-University College Cork, University of Limerick; 2017-University of Galway (previously NUIG); 2018-Technological University Dublin; 2019-Dublin City University.

[3] The public announcement of the appointment of the new President is taken as the relevant time point.

universities (where data is available) all three of these governance structures were gender balanced in the relevant HEI in the year the female President was appointed.

There is limited data available on the five post-2019 universities. Only SETU had a gender balanced Executive Management Committee in 2022. Accommodating existing executive staff from the original IoTs may have restricted flexibility, which could explain this. All five of the TUs achieved gender balance on their Academic Councils in 2022; with four of the five having gender balanced Governing Authorities. Overall, the clearest support for a COVID-19 related 'glass cliff' hypothesis comes from the timing and outcomes of the Presidential processes.

State Intervention Hypothesis

The change in the gender profile of the Presidents since 2020 has not occurred in a vacuum. The 1998 Universities Act specifically stated that one of the university's objectives was to promote 'gender balance'. The impact of this was limited by the decline in state support for this agenda and by the economic recession from 2008 (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020). The HEA (2016a) report recommended linking state funding to the gender profile of senior positions. It also recommended gender balance on all key decision-making bodies, assessment panels and short-lists; awareness training for panel members and a requirement that all line managers have demonstrable experience of leadership in advancing gender equality and that full-time Vice-Presidents Equality, members of the executive team, be appointed in all HEIs to drive this change. To varying degrees these changes were implemented from 2017. Thus, for example, four of the seven pre-2019 universities appointed women as Vice Presidents of Equality and Diversity (University of Galway = 2016; UCD = 2017; MU = 2019; TCD = 2019), with three of these subsequently appointing women Presidents.

Following the Workplace Relations Commission decision in the Micheline Sheehy Skeffington case in 2014 (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023), there have been almost annual state initiatives to promote gender equality in Irish HEIs, starting with the report of the first Expert Group (HEA, 2016a); the Taskforce report in 2018; the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative in 2019; the Research Funding Agencies making AS awards an eligibility requirement for research grant applications in 2016; efforts to tackle sexual violence and harassment in 2019–2023

(O'Connor & Irvine, 2020); and the second Expert Group Report (HEA, 2022a).

State pressure was also reflected in the introduction of Athena Swan (AS), a gender equality charter, originating in the UK in 2005 and extended to Ireland on a pilot basis in 2015 supported by the HEA (Drew, 2021).[4] In Ireland, there are 101 AS department/division awards (91 Bronze, 10 Silver). As of November 2023, all seven of the pre-2019 universities had bronze institutional AS awards, with UL and TCD advancing to silver institutional awards in 2023. To get a silver, 'impact' must be demonstrated, whereas an initial bronze only requires 'demonstration of clear critical analysis and an action plan to address issues identified' (HEA, 2019b, p. 3). Of the five institutions with silver departmental holders, four now have female Presidents, and three of these HEIs have more than one such award. Their timing suggests that they reflect rather than explain those appointments. Very few of the IoTs which merged to make up the post-2019 universities had achieved departmental AS awards before they became TUs (a legacy award was transferred to TUD, which has a male president; and to SETU which has a female one). Overall, it appears that state interventions did not impact directly on the gender profile, but it seems probable that collectively they had an impact.

Availability of 'Qualified' and Interested Candidates Hypothesis

Being a professor has traditionally been a criterion for appointment as a university President. Thus, women's access to professorial positions is important as is the existence of a local pipeline of women occupying senior leadership positions in higher education (HE). In addition, since men have been the incumbents, any decline in their interest in such positions potentially creates an opportunity for women.

Across the seven pre-2019 universities, the proportion of women at (full) professorial level increased from 19% in 2013–15 to 31% in 2022. This increase has been steady since 2015-with some stalling in 2018–2020, before rising again. Four of the five pre-2019 universities that have consistently had the highest proportion of women at professorial level are those which have a female President (UL, MU, TCD and UCD).

[4] See chapters 2, 3, 6 and vignette in Sect. 5.1 of this volume for further detail.

Prior to the Universities Act 1998, Presidents were seen as *primus inter pares* (first among equals) and were elected in TCD and in all National University of Ireland universities (i.e. UCD, UCC, UoG), with Governing Authorities choosing from the list of names submitted to them (rather than being required to appoint the first person on the list). This was the procedure through which UCC got its first female Vice President in 1993 (Professor Maire Mulcahy), and UCD in the mid-1990s (Professor Caroline Hussey). From 1998 on, the President became the Chief Officer and (apart from TCD) in all other universities the President was appointed rather than elected. Under this new system UCC got a second female Vice President (Professor Aine Hyland, 1999–2006), and DCU got its first (Professor Pat Barker, 2000–2004). Many others followed, for example, Vice President for Research posts were held by women in UCD, TCD, UL and UCC. This indicates the existence of a local female talent pipeline at Vice President level.

With the exception of TCD, the structure of what was effectively executive committee changed dramatically. Thus, whereas in the 1990s it simply consisted of three people: President, Registrar (effectively the Vice President) and Bursar/finance, by 2008 it typically consisted of 6–11 members; with a greater diversity of Vice Presidents (including those in research, teaching, students affairs, international education etc.). In 2008, the proportion of women on this structure varied from zero (MU) to 33% (DCU) in the younger universities and from 9% (UCC) to 24% (UCD) in the older universities. Some of these were in non-academic positions, e.g. the Bursar in University of Galway. There was no relationship between the size of this group and the proportion of women on it (O'Connor, 2014b).

In Sweden, men were most likely to get Presidential/Rector positions in the more prestigious HEIs—a pattern also seen in the US, EU and historically in Ireland. Thus, in the IoT sector, between 2015 and 2020, women headed up five of the initial 14 IoTs (HEA, 2016b-2021). Paradoxically, the proportion of women heading IoTs fell over this period: from 2015 when four of the 14 Directors/Presidents of IoTs, or 29%, were women (HEA, 2016a), to two out of 14 (14%) in 2017 (HEA, 2018b) and two out of 11 (18%) in 2018–2020 (HEA, 2019a, 2020, 2021) when the IoTs became absorbed into post-2019 universities. In some of the post-2019 universities, one element of the TU consortium had a female President but in only one case (ATU) did this translate into a female presidency.

There were also women in other leadership positions in HE during this period. For example, the (independent) National College of Industrial Relations (later the National College of Ireland) had a female President (Professor Joyce O'Connor, 1990–2007). Third Level Colleges, usually involving predominantly female disciplines, had women Presidents at various stages (including Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; St Angela's College, Sligo; National College of Art and Design, Dublin). Again, however, these like the IoTs were smaller and less prestigious than the pre-2019 universities.

It has been suggested that the unattractiveness of Presidential positions (Blackmore, 2014; Harford, 2018; Morley, 2014; Peterson, 2015, 2016) particularly to men might create opportunities for women. There has been no research on this in Ireland where such positions remain very well paid, with power within HEIs increasingly concentrated in these roles (O'Connor et al., 2019). Under the (atypical) collegial system of nomination in TCD, three women and no men emerged to contend for the position of Provost/President in 2021 with a reputed salary of €231,000 pa and accommodation in a magnificent house in the centre of Dublin.

The HEA (2016a, p. 47) recommended that: 'in so far as possible, the final pool of candidates will comprise an equal number of women and men'. If this did not happen, the interview panel had to account to the Governing Authority. The majority of HEIs running Presidential processes had gender balanced shortlists (two pre COVID-19, and six after COVID-19).[5]

In summary, neither the existence of 'qualified' female candidates, nor the disinterest of male candidates appear to explain the appointment of female Presidents. However, the consistently higher proportion of women in professorial positions in HEIs which appointed female Presidents may have had a positive impact on the perception of women as credible candidates.

Characteristics and Dynamics of a Specific HEI Hypothesis

This hypothesis focuses on the characteristics and dynamics of individual organisational contexts (Ni Laoire et al., 2021), including their age; the proportion of women in professorial positions and other indicators of a

[5] Personal communication to the authors from the Higher Education Authority, 8th May 2024.

commitment to gender equality. Prior to the creation of the post-2019 HEIs, three of the seven universities in Ireland were seen as historically 'young' owing to their date of establishment: UL, DCU and MU, with potential implications as regards the gender profile of their senior leadership. Two of these 'young' universities appointed a female president (UL and MU), as did two of the four 'older' pre-2019 universities (TCD and UCD), and three of the five post-2019 ones. Therefore, age seems to be unrelated to the Presidential gender profile.

There was also no relationship between the absolute level or change over time in the proportion of women at (full) professorial level and the appointment of a female President, although four of the five pre-2019 universities which have consistently had the highest proportion of women at professorial level have a female President. However, DCU also consistently had one of the highest proportions of women at professorial level (reaching 30% in 2017) and it had an early female Vice President (2000–2004) who was also a gender champion, publishing on gender equality and running management training courses for women in the 1990s, but DCU has never appointed a female President. Similarly, UCC, despite its two early female Vice Presidents, has continued to appoint only male Presidents. This underlines the importance of the wider context within which such developments occur and hence their meaning and impact.

In UCD, UL and TCD there was a particularly strong and persisting tradition of women's studies going back to the 1990s and all three of these have female Presidents. However, in UCC that tradition also existed and did not lead to the appointment of a female President. Dr Ailbhe Smyth (UCD) was one of the first and the most prominent Gender Equality Champions for many years; as were Professor Prof Pat Barker (DCU), Professor Eileen Drew (TCD) and Dr Caitriona Ni Laoire (UCC); in addition to Orla Egan who made a substantial contribution at the Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU) in UCC in the 1990s, prior to its closure by the HEA in 2002. The role one of the authors played in highlighting gender inequality was referred to by Fleming (2012, pp. 171–2): 'through her own research and frequent denunciations of the imbalance, the issue was not only highlighted within the university but nationally and internationally' and, as Dean, she 'enthusiastically pursued a gender equality policy'. Tom Boland, former CEO of the HEA, in a stakeholder evaluation referred to one of the authors as 'one of the great champions, if not the great champion of gender equality in Irish

academia', referring specifically to her 'powerful combination of scholarship, expertise, experience and commitment' (University of Limerick, 2015) Many women worked more quietly on the issue in their own HEIs. In TCD, UL and UCC, there was a track record of attaining EU funding for gender equality from 2011 onwards (INTEGER and SAGE in TCD; FESTA in UL; GENOVATE and Through the Glass Ceiling in UCC: O Grada et al., 2015). While it is hard to identify a direct relationship between these indicators and the subsequent appointment of a female President, it is difficult to believe that such activities had no impact on the organisational culture.

The existence of other individual change agents working towards gender equality in HEIs is difficult to systematically assess. In MU where a female President was appointed, there was an insistence on providing both male and female nominations for governing authority and a Presidential refusal to sit on all male professorial boards in the mid-2000s: thus providing leadership in challenging the organisational culture (O'Connor, 2014b). In University of Galway, there was a very strong 10-year period of agitation around equality in the wake of the Micheline Sheehy Skeffington case in 2008 (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023), but this was not associated with a female presidency (although it did impact considerably at national policy level).[6]

Four of the five pre-2019 universities who submitted data to the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2020–2023 for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, Gender Equality (which assesses research and policies on gender equality and commitment to recruiting and promoting women) are those with women Presidents (TCD, MU, UL and UCD). Given the timing of such rankings this however was unlikely to have been causal. In summary, there is some support for the hypothesis involving the internal dynamics of specific HEIs, with the four pre-2019 universities with female Presidents having a consistently higher proportion of women in professorial positions, in addition to other indicators of a commitment to gender equality.

[6] See Chapter 7 for an in-depth discussion on this case.

Depth of the Change?

The underlying question here is does change in the gender profile of the Presidents indicate institutional transformation as reflected in the profile of those appointed and/or other manifestations of new and existing sources of gender inequality.

Profile of Those Appointed

Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) is the dominant underlying discipline of five of the seven female Presidents (the exceptions being UL and MU). This is not atypical. Only four of the 18 Presidents appointed from 2009–2023 have a background in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (AHSS). This could reflect at a macro-level, government perceptions of valued knowledge; and at a micro-level, homosocial discipline specific sponsorship. STEM is an area where women are more under-represented at senior level nationally than other areas. Thus, whereas a 'door' so to speak to university presidency has been opened to women, the disciplinary channel to access it is very narrow. This raises questions about the sustainability of women's access to these positions.

Furthermore, compared with other disciplines that study the nature, extent and impact of power structures, STEM disciplines (with such notable exceptions as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (MIT, 1999) have historically struggled to recognise and respond to social, cultural and organisational sources of discrimination and privilege: with men (who still dominate in Irish STEM departments) being less likely than women to see gender inequality as important or even real (HEA, 2016a). Furthermore, STEM's higher research funding and lower teaching loads even in Iceland (Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2019) mean that women in those disciplines have more to gain by identifying with their male STEM counterparts than with their female non-STEM ones.

Before COVID-19, five of the nine HEIs (56%) appointed candidates who had not previously worked in that HEI, whereas after COVID-19 only three candidates who had not worked in the HEI previously were appointed (33%): indicating an in-house impact of COVID-19. Five of the seven women appointed President had previously been in a Vice-Presidential/Presidential position (MU, UL, TCD, UCD, ATU). Four of the seven (MU, UL, SETU, MTU) had no formative HE experiences

in Ireland (i.e. having done neither their undergraduate nor their post-graduate experiences here), compared to none of the post COVID male Presidents. Two of the female Presidents had never worked in Ireland before their appointment (MU, MTU). In a globalised academic labour market, their recruitment could be seen as signalling a willingness to embrace change. However, pre- COVID-19 two male Presidents in a similar situation were appointed (UCD and UCC).

Signs That Inequality Persists

Although increases in the proportion of women in Presidential positions is important at a representational level, it is no guarantee of organisational transformation. Gender inequality is still very much a reality in Irish HEIs. Thus, although the proportion of women at (full) professorial level in Irish universities has steadily increased, male academics continue to be at least twice as represented in such positions compared to women. Thus, in 2023, 17.4% of all male academics were (full) professors compared with just 9.2% of female academics (HEA, 2023) Table. 5.1.

Table 5.1 Percentage of professors among (a) female and (b) male (c) total academic staff in pre-2019 HEIs 2014–2022e (HEA, 2016b, 2017, 2018b, 2019a, 2020, 2021, 2023) and Female President (FP)

	2014–16	*2017*	*2018*	*2019*	*2020*	*2021*	*2023*	*FP*
DCU	a)4.7% b)16.3%	a)5.1% b)12.5%	a)5.8% b)14.3%	a)6% b)13%	a)6.7% a)b)13.8%	a)6.7% b)12.5%	a)7.8% b)14.3%	
MU	a)9% b)15.5%	a)12% b)17.1%	a)10.2% b)17.4%	a)10.5% b)18.2%	a)10% b)14.7%	a)8.5% b)12.7%	a)9.4% b)12.6%	(+F)
TCD	a)5.1% b)15.8%	a)6.6% b)13%	a)7.8% b)14.3%	a)8% b)14.1%	a)9.2% b)14.8%	a)8.2% b)12.8%	a)9.4% b)12.7%	(+F)
UCC	a)4.4% b)15%	a)4.7% b)15%	a)5.6% b)14.3%	a)5.6% b)14.4%	a)6.4% b)14.5%	a)7.2% b)14.3%	a)7.6% b)14%	
UCD	a)8.1% b)20.9%	a)9.1% b)20.1%	a)8.7% b)19.7%	a)8.4% b)19.3%	a)8.7% b)18%	a)9.2% b)17.9%	a)9.5% b)17.8%	(+F)
UoG	a)3.2% b)16.1%	a)3% b)16.2%	a)3.6% b)15.2%	a)4% b)15.3%	a)4% b)16.4%	a)4% b)15.7%	a)11.9% b)32.7%	
UL	a)7.7% b)12.8%	a)7.4% b)13.6%	a)8.8% b)16.6%	a)8.1% b)16.7%	a)7.5% b)16%	a)9.3% b)15.6%	a)8.1% b)15%	(+F)
Total	a)6% b)16.6% c)12.1%	a)6.5% b)15.9% c)11.8%	a)7% b)16.3% c)12.1%	a)7% b)16.1% c)12.1%	a)7.4% b)15.8% c)12.1%	a)7.6% b)14.9% c)11.6%	a)9.2% b)17.4% c)13.6%	

This is similar to the overall EU picture, with the EU figures for Ireland being even starker i.e. 8.7% of all academic men being professors, compared with 4.6% of all the academic women in 2022 (EC, 2025 p. 239; the contrast with HEA figures may reflect methodological factors). In any case using the HEA data, the proportion of all male academics who were professors has changed little over time (16.6% in 2014–16 as compared with 17.4% in 2022) while the proportion of women has increased (from 6% to 9.2%). This implicitly suggests that overall improvements for women reflect the increased availability of these positions (e.g. through the SALI) with little change in men's access to such positions.

The AS process is meant to involve institutional reflection and the formation of a gender action plan, led by senior management, one which has bottom-up support and through which departmental and institutional transformation occurs. AS awards have been seen as a key driver of gender equality in Irish HEIs (Rothwell & Irvine, 2022). However, Yarrow and Johnson (2022, p. 758) suggest that it is being used in 'institutional peacocking' i.e. 'the virtue signalling that institutions engage in…while vertical segregation, gender pay gaps, and the disproportionate burdening of women with equality work remains prevalent'. AS has had no demonstrable impact on the gender pay gap in UK HEIs (Amery et al., 2019) nor on proportion of female professors (Graves et al., 2019). Both O'Mullane (2023) and Tzanakou and Pearce (2019) noted that the work of AS was disproportionately undertaken by junior female staff. O'Mullane (2023) focusing entirely on Irish HEIs, noted a lack of collective engagement in the AS process, with senior men simply doing vague 'happy talk' (Ahmed, 2012) about its impact; and others referring to it as a marketing/ box ticking exercise focused at a formal level, where 'it's the informal old boy networks that are at the root of an awful lot of the inequality' (O'Mullane, 2023, p. 7; see also Hodgins et al., 2022).

In the UK, only just over half of the academic staff saw AS as having a positive impact on the work environment or on work practices—with men more likely than women to see it this way (Graves et al., 2019). Even in HEIs that had received an AS award, women were less likely than their male counterparts to be familiar with the criteria and processes for promotion; less likely to see such processes as evidence based, unbiased and fair; less likely to be optimistic about their career prospects; less likely to have been encouraged to apply for promotion, although they were more likely to be mentored (Graves et al., 2019; see also Ovseiko et al., 2019). In

Ireland (Rothwell & Irvine, 2022), as in the UK, AS has made it easier to raise gender equality issues. However, Barnard et al. (2024) found that AS awards made little difference to female academics who had done Aurora Leadership training; with equal respect for women leaders being particularly poor in (Republic of) Ireland universities. Case studies of individual gold award-winning departments in the UK did show an increase in female representation at senior levels (Graves et al., 2019), but this may reflect their strong, positive departmental leadership. Even in such departments, academic men were more likely than their female counterparts to be encouraged to apply for promotion (Graves et al., 2019).

There is evidence that sexist hostility or microaggressions remain very much part of HEIs organisational culture. Thus, for example, just under half of the academic staff reported being put down or condescended to because of their gender—with women being twice as likely as men to have those experiences (particularly staff in Arts, Humanities, Social Science, Business and Law and those in the research areas: HEA, 2022b). According to the HEA (2022b, c) more extreme forms of sexual violence were experienced by students, with half of the female students describing non-consensual touching and just over one third of those who answered the question referring to rape (i.e. non-consensual vaginal penetration). Since sexual violence was more likely to be referred to by the 3rd year undergraduates than the 1st years, it seemed that the organisational culture in HEIs exacerbated such behaviour (HEA, 2022c). An attempt is being made to tackle this through bystander intervention programmes and anonymous reporting. Neither of these interventions hold the perpetrators to account—an increasingly problematic approach. Since 2022, the focus has moved to update policies, to create independent investigation panels, dedicated Prevention and Response Manager posts, and more active interventions that are trauma informed.

At the same time tenure track procedures, which prolong the probation period to five years at the start of an academic career, and which are particularly problematic for women and for those in Arts, Humanities and Social Science, have been introduced in several universities (including TCD and UCD), without any attempt to monitor their gendered implications (O'Connor & Drew, 2023). Similarly, although all institutions now have Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) the extent to which they tackle issues related to power is problematic at least in some HEIs (Clavero & Galligan, 2021; Hodgins et al., 2022; Roos et al., 2020). Overall, the

evidence suggests the persistence of gender inequality despite the dramatic change in the gender profile of the Presidency.

Summary and Conclusions

The gender profile of those at Presidential level in Irish universities suddenly changed over less than three years (2020–2023) with 58% of Presidents of public universities (seven of the 12) now being women: a dramatic change after 429 years of male leadership. Secondary data has been used to evaluate four possible explanations for this change.

The clearest support for the glass cliff hypothesis comes from the timing and outcomes of the Presidential processes, with all of the nine processes run prior to COVID-19 appointing male Presidents, compared to seven of the nine (78%) processes post COVID-19 (2000–2023) appointing female Presidents. There is no evidence that state intervention impacted directly on the gender profile of the Presidents, although it seems probable that collectively the almost annual state initiatives since 2015 had some impact. Similarly, the (continued) availability of 'qualified' female candidates and the increasing proportion of women in professorial positions arguably had a positive impact on the perception of women as credible candidates.

There was some support for the individual HEI hypothesis. Thus, in the presence of COVID-19, the emergence of a female President was associated with a number of other indicators of a commitment to gender equality: including the gender balance of governing structures in the year of their appointment; a consistently higher proportion of women in professorial positions; the appointment of women as academic Vice Presidents, and particularly Vice Presidents Equality and Diversity; having a tradition of formal women's studies and identifiable gender equality champions. Given their timing, some of these are correlates/consequences rather than causes.

The depth of the change which has occurred is unclear. Thus, although the 'door' to the Presidency appears to have been opened, since most of the female presidents are from STEM backgrounds, its sustainability is problematic since women are significantly under-represented at senior level in these areas. The premature resignation of one of the female Presidents the UL President in September 2024 is disquieting. A return to the status quo of male power may not be entirely farfetched. Male academics continue to be at least twice as represented in full professorial positions

as women, and data emerging about other faces of gender inequality (including sexual violence and tenure track) indicates that, despite the dramatic change in the gender profile of the Presidency in Irish HEIs, which is to be welcomed, gender inequality still exists.

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CHAPTER 6

Through the Lens of Critical Actors: Embedding Gender Equality in Irish Universities Through the Athena Swan Ireland Charter

Monica O'Mullane and Caitríona Ní Laoire

Introduction

The introduction and implementation of the Athena SWAN (AS) Charter in Ireland in 2015 marked a key turning point in the drive for institutional change for gender equality within higher educational institutions (HEIs) in the country. The AS Charter, originally established in the UK in 2005, seeks to promote and advance impactful gender-equality work in HEIs (Advance HE, 2022) and is noted as 'one of the most important initiatives that we have in the higher education sector in Ireland' by

M. O'Mullane (✉) · C. N. Laoire
University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
e-mail: m.omullane@ucc.ie

C. N. Laoire
e-mail: c.nilaoire@ucc.ie

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the Minister for Further and Higher Education (Harris, 2022). The backdrop to the introduction of the Charter in Ireland was a bleak one. Court rulings of discrimination on the grounds of gender inequality (Boland, 2014) and Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2022) reports on systematised gender inequality in positions across HEIs in Ireland, in particular in senior management and key decision-making roles, made the introduction of the Charter a welcome one. Previous studies conducted in an Irish HEI context have highlighted the importance of addressing institutional structures and culture so as to embed gender equality (O'Connor, 2020) and a study of HEI staff perceptions of gender-equality interventions shows that a significant proportion of respondents felt the interventions were failing to transform institutional structures and culture meaningfully (Hodgins et al., 2022).

The AS Ireland Charter aims to promote and advance gender equality through change in organisational processes and cultural norms and behaviours. Under the Charter, HEIs and departments within HEIs apply for AS awards at Bronze, Silver or Gold level. Each award recognises institutional work towards addressing gender inequalities, with higher expectations associated with Silver and Gold compared to Bronze awards. Applicant institutions must demonstrate that they have followed Charter guidelines in setting up a cross-institutional Self-Assessment Team (SAT), in gathering and analysing institutional data and in developing (and implementing) a gender-equality action plan on the basis of the research. Importantly, institutions have to reapply within four years to retain an award, or seek a higher award, based on the continued activity of the institution in implementing the gender-equality action plan they themselves developed.

International research shows that the AS Charter has had positive impacts, for example in terms of support for women's careers, recognition of caring responsibilities and more generally opening conversations and raising awareness of gender issues in higher education (Bhopal & Henderson, 2019; Ovseiko et al., 2017; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). However, the literature also points to its limitations. It has been critiqued as a neoliberal policy measure which espouses core managerialist features, such as a highly technocratic administrative application process, action planning and the measurement of productivity through metrics (Clavero & Galligan, 2021; Lynch, 2015; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). Tzanakou and Pearce (2019, p. 1191) argue that AS as a 'product of neoliberalisation' is a moderate feminist venture that aligns easily with

institutional processes. Yarrow and Johnston (2023, p. 757) conclude from their study of the perceptions and experiences of AS champions in UK and Irish HEIs that, 'rather than contributing to transformational change, AS serves as an effective tool for institutional reputation gains and (extended) virtue signalling, conceptualized and coined here as "institutional peacocking"'.

As the Charter is relatively new in an Irish context, an exploratory study of the perceptions of critical institutional actors responsible for designing and implementing actions under the Charter was carried out from 2018 to 2022. This chapter reflects on findings from this study, discussing perceptions of critical actors within the context of institutional change theory, in relation to the type of change the Charter is embedding, the role of formal and informal institutions in this change agenda, and the tendency for HEIs to resist radical change in favour of more incremental change.

Acker's (2006) seminal work on inequality regimes asserts that societal inequality largely stems from, and is reproduced and reinformed within, political and social institutions (including HEIs). Institutions can be understood as being made up of 'rules and procedures (both formal and informal) that structure social interactions by constraining and enabling actors' behaviour' (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). The AS Ireland Charter was constituted and implemented as a predominantly formal and formalising official process of instigating institutional change in order to embed gender equality. However, within the largely technocratic and performative implementation of the Charter actions, there is little recognition or awareness of the role or influence of informal institutions, which are often the unsaid and unseen constraining and facilitating factors moulding change agendas (O'Mullane, 2021). Helmke and Levitsky (2004, p. 727) define informal institutions as 'socially shared rules, unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels' as opposed to formal rules and procedures which are 'created, communicated and enforced through channels widely accepted as official'. Using these definitions of formal and informal institutions in this chapter, we seek to demonstrate the important role played by both informal institutions and the formalising force of the AS Charter in the change agenda in Irish HEIs, as described by the individuals, or critical actors, who are designing, driving and rolling out this agenda in their own institutions.

The GendeResearchIreland Project

GendeResearchIreland was a research project carried out between 2018 and 2022 as part of an EC-funded Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action fellowship, led by [Author 1]. A study conducted within the research project sought to explore how AS is being adopted and utilised in an Irish context and how HEIs have responded to the change process implied in the initiative. It used a case-study research design, employing a qualitative semi-structured interviewing method as the primary data-collection approach.[1] The study included three purposively selected universities as three cases. Universities were chosen, as opposed to other HE institutions, in order to explore institutions with predominantly masculinist environments and because they make up the oldest, most prestigious, and autonomous settings for higher education in Ireland (O'Connor, 2014). As Leathwood and Read (2009) point out, university systems are associated with a tendency for men to occupy positions of power and prestige, an assumption backed up by the latest HEA staff profile figures of all HEIs in the country (HEA, 2022).

As part of the research study, 26 participants from across the three institutions were interviewed between 2019 and 2021 (Table 6.1). All participants were members of the institutional AS Self-Assessment Team (SAT) of their institution. This means they were part of the group that was responsible for developing AS Charter actions. The research participants were purposively selected from amongst all SAT members on the basis of their positions in the university, to obtain a diverse range of lived experiences, from across academic, senior university management, professional and research positions.

The interviews took an average of one hour each and in some cases, participants were interviewed more than once over the course of the project. Questions in the topic guide sought to elicit insight and reflection

Table 6.1 Research sample

	Gender ratio of interviewees		*Total*
	Men	*Women*	
University A	6	4	10
University B	4	5	9
University C	2	5	7

from the participant in relation to the ongoing process of AS implementation in their institution. Questions were asked about the kind of institutional change participants believed the Charter was instigating, including whether the ways of working required by the Charter, specifically, were formal or more informal, as well as questions which sought to elicit participants' understandings of their own roles and the purpose of their work as SAT members. The interviews sought to uncover the lived experiences of some of the key actors tasked with rolling out change within their institutions. An interpretive narrative analytical methodology was used to analyse the accounts (Bischoping & Gazbo, 2016). This methodology is suitable for examining an implementation process that is complex (Ball, 2013) as was the case in this research study (O'Mullane, 2023).

Embedding Institutional Change Through the AS Ireland Charter

There is broad consensus in the literature that implementing change for gender equality in academic institutions is challenging (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). HEIs are described as often being change averse; 'inert, that is, they resist efforts at change' (Jepperson, 1991, p. 145). HEIs are built on and guided by norms, principles and ideas that structure their institutional establishment (Lovenduski, 2014). Ahmed's (2012) ethnographic research on institutionalising diversity in UK and Australian HEIs points to the integral role played by informal and seemingly mundane practices in reproducing inequalities and how they become formalised over time and cast within institutional memory. Such research mirrors similar observations from studies conducted in an Irish HE context, for example, in relation to maternity practices (Maxwell et al., 2018), dearth of women in the professoriate (Harford, 2018), and the difficulty posed for institutionalising gender equality within male-dominated Irish HEIs (O'Connor, 2020).

There persists a 'gender paradox' (Byrne & McCulloch, 2012) in academia, meaning that formal organisational frameworks instituted to address gender inequalities, such as gender-equality action planning, often do not result in sustainable career progression outcomes for women in practice (Hodgins et al., 2022). In addition, the effectiveness of formal gender-equality measures is highly contingent on the specificities of localised and informal gender structures (Ní Laoire et al., 2021). As Waylen (2014) argues, while formal rule changes may prohibit gender

discrimination, this does not necessarily completely overcome male bias, as formal rules can be undermined by the informal. She suggests that feminist institutionalism provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding how formal and informal rules and structures interact to undermine, or support, efforts at institutional change for gender equality. We draw here on feminist institutionalism, in conjunction with institutional change theory, to analyse institutional change in the context of the implementation of the AS Ireland Charter within Irish universities. Recognising that most institutional change is gradual rather than abrupt in nature, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) developed a taxonomy for identifying and explaining types of institutional change. Informed by feminist institutionalist analysis, Waylen (2014) uses these categories to explore the role of informal institutions in institutional change relating to gender equality. Mahoney and Thelen (2010, p. 15) identify the following four modes of institutional change:

1. *Displacement*—removal of existing structures, with the introduction of new ones.
2. *Layering*—introduction of new rules with or on top of old ones.
3. *Drift*—changed impact of existing rules due to shifts in the socio-political environment.
4. *Conversion*—the changed enactment of existing rules due to their strategic redeployment (occurs when rules remain the same formally but interpreted and enacted in new ways).

Given the conservative and bureaucratic nature of HEIs and their characteristic 'slow to change' quality (Bird, 2011), institutional change could take the form of *layering* or *conversion* (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) as opposed to any radical removal of procedures or introduction of new rules or cultural norms (*displacement*). Layering and conversion refer to institutional change that is 'short of all-out' reform and 'below-the-radar' (Lowndes, 2020, p. 559). The typology is useful as it recognises different types of institutional change, particularly those that occur in large, complex organisations such as HEIs (Bagilhole & White, 2013). Each mode of change involves different dynamics of formal and informal institutions. Layering is one of the most commonly observed modes in strategies for gender equality; however, in this mode, often new rules or processes that are introduced alongside or on top of old ones can be

subverted by pre-existing informal rules and norms (Waylen, 2014). Similarly, conversion is a risky strategy as it relies on gender actors who may not have a lot of power in an organisation. The next three sections present some of the study's findings, drawing on the concepts of layering and conversion to help to make sense of the lived experiences and narratives of AS critical actors.

AS as a Mechanism for Modest Institutional Adaptation

Most participants described, in different ways, the change that was happening in their institutions as being an adaptation of existing processes alongside new processes being brought in through the institutional AS action plan. However, having claimed that the AS process involved the introduction of some new processes, when pressed to describe these, most of the participants explained that what AS is embedding is a modest change to existing processes rather than the introduction of new ones, as the following two quotes illustrate. Both participants suggest that the existing structures need to be strengthened rather than changed or removed, which resonates with the *layering* category of institutional change:

> It hasn't necessarily led to removal of existing structures. It has … we have certainly bedded down the AS ethos in all of the different units across the institution. [I: Yeah]. So those new structures that have been put in place - we've got vice-deans in each of the college for equality and diversity for example. I think most of the Schools have probably got an associate head of School for equality and diversity and we have documentation being read to be gender proofed, key documentation, for example, the promotion scheme. There is expertise elsewhere that our equality people here have relied on and they will have them look at the documentation again on gender proofing and so on. So it hasn't changed, it has introduced one or two new structures but it hasn't changed fundamentally the overall structure. (University Senior Manager 1)
>
> I think it is an adaptation. I think that's a good word. There's certainly not been the removal of any structures. … There has been a bolstering and adaptation of what would have been a single person function around equality, to being a much more structured unit, with a more specific remit to support equality and diversity and inclusion. Where that sits within the institution has also been adapted and then there has been the creation of new executive posts, which would provide a kind of a strategic oversight

for this broad agenda. And that will be the creation of a new structure. (Member of Professional Services Staff 1)

Both participants from different institutions, when asked about the AS actions they are familiar with, focus mainly on the introduction of new formal roles and functions with responsibility for equality, an important first step in embedding gender equality, but a classic example of layering, where new roles are layered on top of existing structures.

Two other participants, university senior managers in different institutions, when asked about whether the process of change involved the introduction of new processes, or adaptation or removal of existing ones, started their discussion by referring to 'removal'. One participant said AS removed the *barriers to conversation* in the university, enabling the university environment to be more open and inclusive through the Town Hall format of dialogue. The second participant (quoted below) said that the Charter ensured that certain *practices* were removed, as well as pointing out implicitly that AS actions were formalising practices not already formalised. However, neither participant talked about 'removal' as a form of institutional change which would occur through *displacement*, that is, the replacement of old structures with new and the displacement of the status quo (Waylen, 2017). What is noteworthy here, nonetheless, is the participants' perceptions of institutional change.

R^2	Yeah. We've had examples of I would say practices that were long overdue being removed to be quite honest, right, because …
I	Like what?
R	… like just gender balance on interview panels
I	Oh right, okay
R	It's not stuff that we weren't doing but we weren't consciously doing it
I	Yeah
R	You know the … and we've had some new practices. You know meeting times, stuff like that, you know
I	Yeah
R	Those old practices and it's always a challenge when you're making a change it's how do I deal with the legacy and that can be a challenge. Now it's quite interesting we're having this conversation because we're currently devising the next strategy for the University and we're holding out respect as a value that we want to see as core to what we do and in that you know we're a large community of employees here, staff here, and a larger community of students (University Senior Manager 2)

In this quote, 'the stuff that we weren't doing but we weren't consciously doing it' implies that change was not really needed. The

participant also changes the subject towards a more comfortable topic—strategy—than actual practical changes brought in due to the AS Charter. This phenomenon of averting discussion from the micro-level detail of concrete changes is theorised in O'Mullane (2023) as institutional happy talk. This work builds on Ahmed's (2012) study of diversity practitioners' experiences of working in HE in the UK and Australia, where 'happy talk' creates a brick wall of resistance and obstacle to meaningful action in institutionalising an equality agenda.

Clearly, AS has triggered changes and led to the introduction of some new practices. However, most critical actors struggled to identify what these changes were. The tendency was to claim that changes introduced as part of the AS agenda were things that would have happened anyway or were already happening but not formalised, or, to focus on the creation of new roles/responsibilities or strategies *as the change*. We can conclude this section of the chapter with an assertion that these descriptions resonate with the *layering* category of institutional change, where new formal rules or practices are introduced without displacing existing rules or practices. Furthermore, for many study participants, layering is the *goal* of the change that is being embedded through the AS Charter, that is, the goal is not radical change but adaptation and modification of existing structures. While many participants recognise the need for change, they do not view this change as being something far-reaching or as something that could, or should, fundamentally change power relations within their university.

The Formalising Nature of AS Actions

The embedding of the AS Charter in Irish HE has been a remarkable story of the introduction of formalised commitments to gender equality in the sector (Drew, 2022). Waylen (2014) points out how important it is to formalise actions in order to avoid the informal rules, norms and behaviours subverting the introduction of new processes. As we show in this section, some of the AS critical actors had become aware of this imperative. When reflecting on the changes that AS was bringing to their institutions, many participants talked about the formalising nature of the programme, as an enabler to embedding institutional change.

A senior manager viewed the Charter as a way to formalise processes, such as the role of unconscious bias training as a formalised and mandatory requirement for all staff who sit on committees, as well as introducing new processes that 'had to happen' such as a grant for

women returning from maternity leave, supporting their transition back to academic working life. They went on to say:

> But I think the formal piece is really important. And it's really important for things like AS in particular because if you don't set that up and use it, it doesn't reach some people's radar, right, usually the power-makers' or the power holders' radar in sufficiently frequent a way and that's one of the reasons, for example, that we absolutely bring the updated gender-equality plan to the university management (name of group) every (number) months, because this is the institutional gender action plan. It's not the action plan from (name of VP office with responsibility for equality agenda) it's the institution's and we should be accountable not only to our community but actually to the external environment, to the HEA, whoever, on that. And if some of the stuff that we're being asked to do is completely impossible we're responsible for saying that too. You can really only do that effectively through formal channels usually, in terms of at least getting sign off on stuff. (University Senior Manager 3)

In other words, there is a recognition of the importance of the formal nature of AS resulting from its status as an institutional project and the responsibilities that entails. Athena Swan (AS) was perceived by this participant as a way to formalise structures and processes so as to remove the 'discretionary culture' (University Senior Manager 3) that thrived on informality and line manager discretion.

One member of academic staff views the actions brought in with the AS action plan as making 'existing processes more inclusive' through its formal process. Another member of academic staff spoke about the benefit of AS being a formal process requiring institutional commitment, as opposed to a more informal, voluntary process:

> R I don't think informality works too well around here because it becomes like a one-man [sic!] mission. You know I think formality is needed to ensure that there is compliance because many of the issues associated with AS can be if not formally implemented can be side-stepped or ignored deliberately or through omission or not being aware of. So I think generally speaking that formal ways of implementation and auctioning are really important
>
> I Alright
>
> R And it also gives it the gravitas that it deserves. I think informal implementation or gathering awareness through social contacts or networks rather than formal structures suggests lack of sort of respect or gravitas associating with the action so I think it's important that it's formalised. …
>
> R … but by all means I would pick up the phone and say you know 'there seems to be a bit of a block here, what can we do about it?'

I Okay, yeah, yeah
R Yeah and I think that people are generally amenable to that
I Yeah
R But there are certain issues where you'll just hit a wall and there will be no give (Academic Staff Member 1).

This referral to the formal process as being a way to solve the issue of 'hitting a wall' suggests that the AS Charter requirement for formalised commitment and action is a safety-net for those within the institution who are driving change. One participant refers to it as 'leverage' in driving the change:

> I think that it has the potential, but I think that people need to realise its potential. And the only way to do that is by getting more and more people involved and actually telling them to be … excuse me … as ambitious as possible with those action plans and to use them as leverage. Use them to drive the change. (Academic Staff Member 2)

This analogy of the 'brick wall' is also used by Ahmed (2012) to describe the working environment facing diversity practitioners in HEIs. She likens institutional diversity work to the feeling of coming up against a 'brick wall', which she explains as encountering institutional inertia. This can be understood as what can happen when formal institutional diversity work meets informal institutional cultures and structures, which are not open to change. Ahmed (2012, p. 139) argues further that institutional commitments to diversity on their own are not enough—they require individuals who are willing to be 'diversity drivers' to ensure institutions fulfil these commitments. This phenomenon is apparent in the preceding quotes, where participants are very clear that while the formal commitment to the AS Charter is crucial, they as individuals still need to push for fulfilment of these commitments, in doing so pushing against informal structures that are resistant to change. This resonates with the conversion mode of institutional change, wherein critical actors take advantage of ambiguities in existing structures to achieve change. In this case, the ambiguities lie in the contradictions between formal commitments to achieving gender equality on the one hand and the informal institutional inertia that works against change on the other. However, conversion can be a difficult strategy due to the limited power of gender actors in

contexts where there is institutional resistance to change (Gaweda, 2021; Waylen, 2014).

Achieving AS 'Success' Through 'Low-Hanging Fruit'

This section of the chapter explores, through examples from our data, how moderate a programme AS is in terms of the type of institutional change it instigates. We argue that institutional change dominated by layering, with some elements of conversion, is inevitable given the nature of the AS Ireland Charter itself and the context of Irish HE. Drawing on Waylen (2014), we argue that with layering there are inherent limitations, as underlying informal institutions can undermine attempts at introducing changes through new formal rules. This is because, with layering, the existing status quo has high veto power and existing rules are difficult to alter (Waylen, 2014). There is often a gap between decision-making and implementation, and new formal rules can be subverted by informal ones. Sometimes, as shown in the previous section, critical actors can take advantage of ambiguities to redirect existing rules to new goals, through conversion, but this is more likely to be effective if those actors wield sufficient power to do so.

In this context, it is likely that critical actors who seek more radical change but lack the institutional power to influence the change process may become frustrated with the AS process. A number of our study participants were critical of the limitations of the AS process in terms of its effectiveness in bringing about transformative change:

> I will say that you know AS has a ... my view on it is that it has a very benign change mandate, you know it's not going to radically change universities and for that reason I've a love/hate relationship with it I suppose you know because it does progress some things but it can be in quite a limited way sometimes. (Academic Staff Member 3)

Another participant voiced concerns that the decision-making processes in the university were nebulous, difficult to navigate and concentrated in the hands of a core number of people. When asked about implementing AS in the context of university structures, they responded:

> I think it's not very transparent and I think it's typical of an institution like a university, like most universities, not all but most, where ... my perception is that management is concentrated in [name of higher management university decision-making group] and there's [name of another higher management university decision-making group with fewer people] and Strategy, and really, it's [the smaller group] which is a small group of about a dozen people that seem to make every decision in the University (laughs) ... . (Professional Service Staff Member 2)

This narrative on the opacity of decision-making processes reflects a wider recognition of this issue within the sector that is documented through research (Hodgins et al., 2022; O'Mullane, 2023). It resonates with a similar sentiment expressed by a research staff member:

> I attended that meeting [AS self-assessment team (SAT) meeting] and I wasn't overly pleased at the way that that had gone about because I felt like the actions that I thought were the strongest or at least would have had the most impact were the ones that kind of were left to one side and the ones that were maybe easiest to implement were [chosen]. There's like a flood of communication but you know it's ... the real kind of decision-making process I'd say would be lacking somewhat so. (Research Staff Member 1)

Research Staff Member 1 was frustrated not only with the resistance to change they had noticed on their institutional SAT but with the way in which the HE sector in Ireland in general resists fundamental structural change to the growth of precarious employment in the sector. This criticism resonates with scholarly critiques of the nature of the current HE working environment and its reliance on highly gendered precarious contract employment (Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019). Furthermore, this participant felt that the current action plan did not include the meaningful actions that were needed to change the university system to become more gender equal and a fair working environment:

> But you know again it comes down to the fundamental issues.... these are ones that are a lot harder to address, reduced staff numbers, increased student numbers, reduced Government funding. It requires hard actions to be kind of adopted and that's where it [AS] falls down. (Research Staff Member 1)

Both quotes above from Research Staff Member 1 suggest that AS actions that could have greater impact in embedding gender equality and could represent meaningful change are too difficult and unattainable. Given the overwhelming impetus within the competitive HE sector to use AS structures for reputational gain rather than achieving meaningful change (Yarrow & Johnston, 2023), it is unsurprising that institutional decision-makers may choose the 'low-hanging fruit', the easier actions, before those that may be more challenging but could have greater impact. As discussed in an earlier section, many critical actors talked about the new AS actions as things that were already happening but needed to be formalised. Others talked about actions that were due to happen anyway but were given added impetus due to AS, such as this participant who talked about the introduction of a new HR data-monitoring system:

I Uh-huh and that was driven by AS?
R That was … well yeah it was driven by Athena …
I Yeah?
R … well we wanted to get there anyway …
I Yeah, yeah, yeah
R … but I think AS gave it a further impetus to actually bring it forward (Professional Services Staff Member 3)

These are what could be termed the 'low-hanging fruit'—the actions that can tick a box but do not threaten existing power relations in the organisation. Tzanakou and Pearce (2019) refer to the 'box-ticking' orientation of AS, which means that measures that promise more positive public recognition can be favoured above those that tackle structural change. As Ní Laoire et al. (2021) found, gender-equality measures that make inequalities visible and thus are exposing for an organisation are less likely to be implemented than measures that do not challenge the organisation's image of itself, such as those oriented to supporting women in their career development. Thus, it can be argued that the Charter itself, through its alignment with a neoliberal ethos of performativity and metrics, is undermined by its own tendency to reward 'easy wins'. Actions that could potentially have greater impact are 'left to one side' as if they are not what the Charter is about. This tendency can be related to the layering approach to institutional change, which avoids the displacement of old structures and instead layers new practices and functions, ones that boost an organisation's self-image, on top of existing unchanged structures.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Based on the narratives of critical actors involved in the AS process across three Irish universities, the dominant approach to change across all three could be described as a combination of layering with an element of conversion, whereby new formal practices or rules are layered on top of existing structures which are not fundamentally challenged, alongside efforts by some critical actors to take advantage of informal structures and gaps in existing structures to achieve change. The data reveals that change is largely perceived by most AS actors in terms of a form of institutional adaptation, wherein existing structures and processes are being adapted or modified and new practices and functions are layered on top of existing ones. Many critical actors view modest institutional adaptation as the goal of their work in driving the AS agenda in their institutions and, as modest adaptations are largely achievable and visible, most are positive about the impact of AS. At the same time, there are critical actors who are more ambitious for change and who see the need to go beyond the 'institutional happy talk'. Some of these are quite critical of the limitations of AS and frustrated by the lack of progress. Some others, who tend to be in positions where they can influence the process, point to the need to take advantage of the formal status of AS to drive change; in other words, they are implicitly referring to the power of informal structures to block meaningful change and the need to take advantage of opportunities to challenge these blockages.

It is clear that the AS Charter has triggered processes of institutional change in Irish HE; however, our research suggests that it is dominated by modes of change that are not only slow and gradual but at risk of being undermined due to the focus on the formal at the expense of the informal. While layering and conversion can be considered useful mechanisms of achieving incremental change in contexts where more radical change is not deemed possible, it is important to recognise that they do not always achieve transformative change, even in the longer term. This is important, given that the HEA's (2016) own review stated that radical and ambitious measures were needed to address gender inequalities in the sector. As Waylen (2014) argues, in layering and conversion, formal rules can be easily subverted by informal structures, and the effectiveness of efforts towards change is contingent on the extent to which informal structures can also be changed.

Therefore, if the AS Ireland Charter is to be successful in achieving greater gender equality, it will need to tackle the informal structures that continue to reproduce gender inequalities. In other words, cultural change needs to be acknowledged as a core goal of gender-equality work in the sector. Clavero and Galligan (2021) emphasise the importance of cultural change in academia—they point to the need to identify the informal practices that give rise to misrecognition of women's knowledge as well as the need for reflexivity, consensus-building and continuous interrogation of gender norms, as essential to transforming organisational cultures. These are not necessarily the kinds of activities that are encouraged by the AS process, as they do not show immediate results, and they are exposing and challenging endeavours. In other words, meaningful cultural change for gender equality is difficult—it means that organisations need to face up to their own inequality practices and structures and address these at the level of invisible and informal structures. However, there is some evidence that AS processes can contribute to changing organisational discourses around gender equality, through raising awareness of the issues and making conversations possible (Bhopal & Henderson, 2019; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). Therefore, the potential exists for AS Ireland Charter to contribute to meaningful cultural change even if this potential is not being fully realised in its current form.

This study was conducted at the institutional level, and further research could explore the perceptions of change associated with the AS Ireland Charter at School/Departmental levels, where institution-level rules are implemented and formal institutional commitments meet the everyday dynamics of institutional practices. The GendeResearchIreland project has shed light on the dynamics of responses to the AS Charter in Irish HEIs, highlighting the tendencies towards modest institutional changes and the power of informal structures of gender inequality to persist despite formal commitments to equality. The narratives of critical actors are revealing of these dynamics and it is important that national policy-makers listen critically to these perspectives and take action, so as to ensure the Charter programme reaches its full potential for institutional change in Irish HEIs.

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Notes

1. Ethical approval for the study was attained from the Social Research Ethics Committee in University College Cork (approval number: 2019–048).
2. R = respondent; I = interviewer.

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CHAPTER 7

Mobilisation and Resistance at Galway: Impact and Wider Influence on Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education

Aoife Cooke, Laura Loftus, and Helen Maher

Introduction

The characteristics and process of addressing gender inequality in Irish higher education have been multifaceted, dynamic, proactive and reactive, employing distinctive tactics and informed by feminist mobilisation in some instances. Over the past decade, a key driver of change emanated

A. Cooke (✉) · L. Loftus · H. Maher
University of Galway, Galway, Ireland
e-mail: aoife.cooke@universityofgalway.ie

L. Loftus
e-mail: lloftus@universityofgalway.ie

H. Maher
e-mail: helen.maher@universityofgalway.ie

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from the findings of discrimination against women in academic promotion from a series of high-level legal cases at the University of Galway[1] (Equality Tribunal, 2014a, 2014b). The specifics of gender inequality at Galway prompt further consideration of the institutional context within which female academic staff mobilised, the organisational strategies and tactics employed, reflecting on the response within the specific institution, subsequent outcomes within the national higher education landscape and policy domain. The analytical frame draws on feminist theory and analysis of women's activism in the context of mobilisation, resistance, and change. The chapter is framed by a situational lens pertaining to institutional systems, processes and resistance, and is therefore context specific. The impact of women's agency both internally within the university and as a driver of policy change within the national higher education landscape is a key consideration. Pertinent to this analysis is the feminist positionality of the authors informed by both *insider* reflection, *outsider* critical standpoint and reflexivity (Ackerley & True, 2008; Dottolo & Tillery, 2015).

Methodology

The methods employed for this chapter case study were based on insider direct experience supported by secondary data. The reliance on secondary data was informed by newspaper articles, Tribunal reports and the publication on the legal cases by Sheehy Skeffington herself (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023). The authors were satisfied that this also addressed any ethical considerations in terms of protecting anonymity due to the existence of this material in the public domain. One of the authors of this chapter was involved in the process of institutional change through their employment in the Human Resources department of the University during the specific time within which this study is located. The remaining two authors were not directly involved; however, they work within the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Office of the University at the time of undertaking this analysis. Accordingly, as referenced, this chapter is shaped by reflectivity at the outset of the research process, recognising

[1] The 'University of Galway' was previously named 'National University of Ireland Galway' also known as 'NUI Galway', with the name changing in 2022. Where there is an official report referred to, the previous name will be used for accuracy. All other references will use the current title 'University of Galway'.

that subjective and objective perspectives need constant interrogation and reflection as a methodological choice.

This chapter is underpinned by a feminist standpoint, while recognising that there isn't a singular feminist position, the authors acknowledge that feminist research methodologies which are orientated towards critical perspectives on gender equality and the position of women, informed by both theory and practice were purposely embedded in this case study analysis by design (Falconer Al-Hindi & Eaves, 2023; Hesse-Biber et al., 2004; Leavy & Harris, 2019). This chapter is further informed by feminist praxis underpinned by a reflective approach to the research process, conceptual basis, and underlying assumptions (Ackerley & True, 2020). Additionally, the application of a feminist analytical framework specifically draws on existing feminist scholarship on women's mobilisation to situate the unique context arising from women's agency in addressing inequality and discrimination at the University of Galway.

Gender Inequality at the University of Galway: Sheehy Skeffington Case

The University of Galway's recent history on gender equality is well known and documented in Ireland, following the 2014 Equality Tribunal[2] landmark decision that Dr Micheline Sheehy Skeffington had been successful in her complaint of gender discrimination against the University (Equality Tribunal, 2014b; Quinlivan, 2017; Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023).[3] The gender discrimination pertained to her application for promotion to Senior Lecturer in the 2008/2009 round of academic promotions. At the time, opportunities to apply for promotion to Senior Lecturer occurred every two years and Dr Micheline Sheehy Skeffington had been unsuccessful on four occasions, up to and including the 2008/2009 round. The 2014 Equality Tribunal decision

[2] The Equality Tribunal is an independent body, established to investigate, mediate and determine cases brought under the Irish Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts. The Tribunal has extensive powers with the effect that decisions and mediated agreements are legally binding.

[3] In November 2014, the Equality Tribunal found that Dr Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington had been discriminated against for promotion due to her gender. NUI Galway, was ordered to pay €70,000 in damages and also to carry out a review of its practices in this area and report to the Commission within a year.

triggered a major response both at University of Galway and across the sector with the establishment of the NUI Galway Gender Equality Task Force and shortly followed by the HEA Expert Group that conducted a National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2015).[4] The statistics concerning the numbers and proportions of women in senior academic grades at the University of Galway brought the reality of academic women's career progression into sharp focus in the wake of the Equality Tribunal decision. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) statistics for Irish universities featured in a lead story in the national newspapers in December 2014, highlighting the fact that less than a third of senior academic posts in Ireland's universities and Institutes of Technology (IoTs) were held by women. Galway was reported as the worst case whereby almost four in every five (79%) senior academic staff members were male and women accounted for just 13% of Associate Professors[5] and 14% of Professors (Duncan, 2014).

While these statistics may have come as a surprise to many in the higher education sector and general public owing to the lack of routine collection and reporting on gender disaggregated data, senior management and members of the Governing Authority (Údarás na hOllscoile) at University of Galway were already well appraised of this highly gendered context as outlined in an earlier report compiled by the university's Equality Office.[6] The comparative data in the report showed that the percentage of women in the same senior academic grades was lower than that in the other Irish universities where data were available for benchmarking. The report also presented data on the European context, which illustrated that the share of academic women in grade A positions (equivalent to Full Professor in most countries) was particularly small in Ireland, Germany, Spain, Cyprus,

[4] See Chapters 2, 3 and 5 in this volume.

[5] Associate Professors in Galway are similar to Personal Chairs in other institutions, except the Associate Professor is appointed on a single salary point at the midpoint of the Professor salary scale.

[6] Following the 2008/09 round of promotions to Senior Lecturer concerns were raised at Governing Authority regarding the progression of women to senior academic posts highlighted by the fact that of the 17 applicants promoted, only one woman was successful. At this juncture, the Equality Office submitted a report on the numbers of academic staff in various grades by gender as well as comparative data from other Irish universities to the Governing Authority showing the significant under-representation of women at senior academic grades i.e. Senior Lecturer, Personal Professor, and Professor.

Lithuania and Malta. Thus, University of Galway ranked in the lower echelons for gender equality in academia in Europe.

The institution's response to the report was to establish a working group to explore the matter and to ascertain the reasons for the imbalance between the proportions of women at senior levels and that at Lecturer below and above-the-bar levels. Following an in-depth consultation process with academic staff, the working group reported back to Governing Authority setting out their main findings including a set of recommendations with the specific purpose of removing gender bias, prioritising the areas most in need of change and development and responding to the issues about which staff had expressed particularly strong opinions (Doherty & Cooke, 2011). The outcome resulted in a thorough revision of the Senior Lecturer Promotion scheme for the subsequent round in the academic year 2013/14 which anticipated and addressed the key failings of the promotion scheme as conveyed by Ms Orlaith Mannion, Workplace Relations Commission Equality Officer in the Dr Sheehy Skeffington discrimination case, albeit the decision was not issued by the Equality Tribunal until later that year in November 2014. Ms Mannion stated in her report that implementation of the promotion to Senior Lecturer process fell short of best practice in recruitment and described a *ramshackle* approach to the process. This included no training for interviewers, no pre-meeting to discuss each candidate, no questions agreed beforehand, notes were only retained by the rapporteur with a collective mark being given. There was also considerable emphasis on the way that some male candidates had less outputs and achievements under some criteria yet scored higher than Sheehy Skeffington for that sub criteria. The composition of the interview panel was highlighted as problematic with no attention to gender balance, all which Ms Mannion concluded was universally accepted as an essential prerequisite to the effective attainment of full equality of opportunities between men and women in employment, particularly so in professions and occupations in which women have traditionally been underrepresented. Mannion also noted that there were discrepancies in terms of the application of the promotion criteria fairly and consistently, and that Sheehy Skeffington had been awarded low scores which were at odds with the criteria (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023).

The Human Resources Office at the University of Galway received notification of the Equality Authority's decision in the Sheehy Skeffington case late in the day on Thursday, 13th November 2014. The decision was

immediately forwarded to key Senior Managers including the President and Deputy President and Registrar. Notably, there was no acknowledgement of that communication of the decision; good, bad or indifferent. With the insider perspective of having been involved in the investigation of Sheehy Skeffington's internal complaint under the Equal Opportunities grievance, there was a definite sense of relief at the decision with the detailed findings in the Tribunal report echoing many of the same issues which had been identified and sought to address in the intervening period. Notwithstanding the lack of response or acknowledgement of the decision internally, this changed when the national broadcaster RTÉ showed up on campus the following Monday (17th November) to interview Sheehy Skeffington. This was entirely unexpected as the Equality Tribunal requires both parties (complainant and respondent) not to publish the findings for 28 days, which is the time available for either party to lodge an appeal. It's not possible to say for sure if the decision would have prompted any significant response in the absence of a very public airing, however, it was not the first time a complaint of gender discrimination has been successfully taken against the University in recent times, but without any publicity it had gone under the radar.

Between Resistance and Mobilisation: An Opportunity for Change

The University did not appeal the Tribunal decision, they publicly accepted the findings, and immediately complied with the Equality Officer's orders to promote Dr Sheehy Skeffington, including necessary adjustments and backpay, award compensation and to conduct a review of the Senior Lecturer promotion process and procedures. That would normally have been the end of the matter once the publicity surrounding the decision had passed. However, Sheehy Skeffington clearly understood how the flaws in the implementation of the promotion process described in the Equality Tribunal report could be said to equally apply to an additional five women who were ranked but ultimately deemed unsuccessful for promotion in the same round. While Sheehy Skeffington intended to publicly celebrate the positive outcome she had achieved, in fact she noted that this went against her concerns for the other women who had not been successful (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023). The structural nature of the inequities experienced by female academics was deeply understood by Sheehy Skeffington and her analysis and motivation is consistently articulated in statements issued at the time of the Tribunal, in

subsequent discussions (Boland, 2014; IFUT, 2016; O'Brien, 2018), and in the book which documents her fight against gender inequality (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023). It was interesting to learn much later that Sheehy Skeffington had been planning for months to use the result—win or lose—to get publicity for how few women were promoted to senior posts in Irish universities (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023). On the advice of Niall Crowley, former Chairperson of the Equality Tribunal, she strategically chose not to abide by the 28-day embargo, understanding that it was not a legally binding instruction, to highlight her experience within a wider institutional and sectoral campaign. This turned out to be the start of 'Three Conditions', a campaign which would last for four years, and which according to Sheehy Skeffington, was never planned but evolved (Foley & Sheehy Skeffington, 2023). The 'Three Conditions' were announced at a public gathering on campus attended by colleagues and supporters which Sheehy Skeffington called via a press release to set the record straight in relation to her participation on the University's gender equality task force. She did not agree to be on the task force but stated that she would consider being part of a board to examine gender equality if the university met three conditions:

1. That NUI Galway promote to Senior Lecturer the other five women who, along with her, were shortlisted but not promoted in 2009 and back date their promotion to 2009.
2. That NUI Galway admit that the 2014 round of promotions to senior lecturer was also at fault and corrects the gender imbalance.
3. That NUI Galway set clear targets to create gender balance in senior posts and promotions throughout the University.

The University's Gender Equality Task Force was established by the Údarás na hOllscoile (Governing Authority) with a specific remit:

> To consider the University's present gender mix among staff, including academic and support staff, and advise the University what measures it should take to develop effective gender equality. (NUI Galway, 2016, p. 9)

There has been much cynicism as to whether this was motivated for the purpose of optics, nonetheless, from an internal EDI perspective it created a unique opportunity and momentum for change, bearing in mind that this predated the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in

Irish Higher Education Institutions and the gender focused research and policy developments that followed thereafter. Undoubtedly, considerable resources and effort went into the work of the Task Force, and subsequent implementation of their recommendations, including the appointment of the first full-time Vice President for Equality and Diversity[7] in an Irish university with a resourced office reflecting the importance of the role. There was explicit commitment to driving change and much energy put into the development and implementation of a Gender Equality Action Plan. However, this was significantly at odds with the institutional response and treatment of the additional five women who had not been promoted in 2008/09 and signaled that Sheehy Skeffington's reservations were not unwarranted.

The University steadfastly held a position that there was no legal basis to promote the five women. Technically, that was correct, the decision did not apply to the five women as they had not taken a case individually. So, on one hand, there was an institutional acknowledgement of the Tribunal decision and commitment to address gender equality via the established Task Force and implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan. On the other hand, the resistance to accepting that the cumulative findings in the Tribunal report logically implied that there were structural inequalities and that all five women could have established a prima facie case of discrimination, demonstrated that there was a deep-rooted reluctance to fully accept that the 2008/09 round of promotions discriminated against those women. The President of the University resolutely held the perspective that there was no basis to acknowledge this systemic inequality. Through his membership? within the Irish Universities Association (IUA), he advocated that the HEA adopt a sectoral approach to addressing gender equality, the only credible explanation given his position on the evident instances of gender discrimination, is that he sought to reposition the University of Galway as normative in terms of the existence of gender inequality across the higher education sector as a whole.

On reflection, it is clear from the outset that the feminist positionality that Sheehy Skeffington espoused resulted in a distinctive approach that sought to maximise institutional change to harness greater effect in tackling gender discrimination. This led to a sustained campaign which is notable in the progression of gender equality in the Irish HE context,

[7] Professor Anne Scott was the first Vice President for Equality and Diversity appointed in the Irish HE sector.

drawing attention to the deep-rooted patriarchal practices which were differentially applied to male and female academics at the time. While at times the public face of the campaign was held by a handful of feminist activists, the broad-based tactics employed included engagement with senior management to highlight injustices, collective action, public gatherings, mass meetings, protest, cartoons, exhibitions and petitions. Women's agency in addressing the systemic nature of gender inequality employed a strategic assessment of the structural barriers, took advantage of the opportunities emerging when the Sheehy Skeffington outcome was successful, giving further legitimacy to the campaign.

Although it took four years for a resolution which rightfully acknowledged the gender discrimination experienced by the five women, this arose in the context of an opportunity brought about by a change in the President of the University. The cases of the women were finally fully and quietly settled in 2018 under the new President, Professor Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh. However, during the period that the cases remained unresolved, the controversy and reputation for gender inequality dogged the University despite the progress on gender equality actions recommended in the Galway Task Force Report. It was difficult for colleagues to acknowledge the change and progress and, at times, the incongruence between the different positions adopted by management seemed to undermine the work to address gender equality. The action of the women who initiated high court proceedings at considerable personal risk and the 'Three Conditions' campaign orchestrated and sustained by Sheehy Skeffington to support the women kept the pressure and focus on the gender equality agenda in a way that would not have happened otherwise and was ultimately a critical factor in the successful outcomes. While the cases were strictly out of scope for the Office of the Vice President for Equality and Diversity, as they were for the University Gender Equality Task Force before that, there was nevertheless an appreciation that there was a unique opportunity to maximise the situation and drive change at a pace which might have been inconceivable previously. The extent of the resistance to promoting the women illustrated that the commitment given by the University leadership in 2014 was neither rooted in a genuine understanding or acceptance of gender inequality or a willingness to disrupt the highly gendered status quo.

Feminist Mobilisation in Higher Education Institutions

While higher education institutions provide a space for engagement and social change, the institutional context is not a neutral space (Lynch, 2010), it remains gendered with patriarchal norms and conditions underpinning masculinist culture, structures and systems (Albenga, 2016; Bustelo et al., 2016; Hodgins, O'Connor & Buckley, 2022; O'Connor & Irvine, 2020; O'Connor & White, 2021; Rosa & Clavero, 2022; Rosa et al., 2020). Feminist academics, managerial and professional support staff have sought to tackle gender inequalities and to change the gender dynamics that permeate higher education through institutional engagement, advocacy, mobilisation and research (Donovan et al., 2020). According to Verge, 'feminist activists have managed to shape the prevailing political opportunity structure through formal and informal engagement with institutions' (2021, p. 192). Scholarship on the paradigm of women's activism illustrates the multifaceted nature of women's mobilisation, feminist movements, and solidarity networks (Gouws, 2008).

Activist mobilisation has been examined extensively in theory and empirical analysis of social movements and social change (Snow et al., 2018). Feminist researchers and practitioners have been concerned with the gendered nature of social activism within broad based movements for social change. In addition to those that seek to address women's oppression, discrimination and the gendered nature of inequality (Bhattacharjya et al., 2013; Hurwitz & Crossley, 2018; Mohanty et al., 1991; Molyneux, 1998). This scholarship has considerable value for understanding the mechanisms for creating and sustaining substantive change for women when applied to different settings such as higher education institutions. The catalyst for change examined in this chapter emanated from discriminatory practices which were successfully legally challenged, a context which is not dissimilar in social movements that seek to address social, political, cultural, civic, and economic inequalities. The situation at the University of Galway is particularly unique given that one woman who had experienced significant and cumulative discrimination in relation to promotion adopted a strategy that was not a singular action to address her experience of inequality. Instead, she chose to position her experience within a wider institutional and community campaign to address the systemic nature of inequality for academic women in the university. This

strategic approach sought not only to address women's specific interests but also to tackle the substantive issue of gender inequality within the University underpinned by an explicitly feminist standpoint.

According to Molyneux 'a women's movement does not have to have a single organizational expression, and may be characterized by a diversity of interests, forms of expression, and spatial location' (1998, p. 224). This analysis has resonance for the complex picture of women's mobilisation for change in higher education in Ireland and provides a useful position from which to investigate this complexity. Women's mobilisation at the University of Galway shares the features and characteristics of women's movements although operating in a distinctive organisational space, namely a public sector institutional environment. Synthesising some of the key dimensions of social movement theory emanating from resource mobilisation and political opportunities, a complex range of exogenous and endogenous factors are critical to advancing objectives and achieving outcomes. Furthermore, empirical and theoretical analysis of the context within which social movements mobilise provides additional insight into the role of the institution, power dynamics, resistance and opportunities for change (McAdam et al., 2012; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Tarrow, 1998; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Accordingly, there are factors that have the capacity to 'enhance or inhibit a social movement's prospects for (a) mobilising, (b) advancing particular claims rather than others, (c) cultivating some alliances rather than others, (d) employing particular political strategies and tactics rather than others, and (e) affecting mainstream institutional politics and policy' (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004, p. 1457). The process for addressing gender discrimination and inequality at the University of Galway relied on a multiplicity of strategies and tactics, enhanced by the framing of injustice in the public domain, the legitimacy of the legal process which found in women's favour, the higher education sectoral momentum for addressing gender inequality and critical mass of tangible and intangible support. Notwithstanding the successes, the extent of the resistance to change remained a significant characteristic despite the upward trajectory for change.

Convergence, Progress and Limitations

The gender equality legal cases brought against University of Galway, and the subsequent recommendations of the University's Gender Equality Task Force Report (2016), acted as a catalyst that contributed to the

acceleration of change in the Irish higher education landscape in terms of policy positions and action plans to progress gender equality, discussed in detail in other chapters in Sect. 1 of this book. The controversy regarding University of Galway had a broader impact on higher education which propelled Irish HEIs to reflect on their own unequal practices leading to a convergence of agreed actions reflected in the Galway Task Force Report (2016) and the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (2016) and National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Higher Education (2018). While recognising that women's agency to address gender inequality in higher education was not a new phenomenon (Drew, 2022; Ruggi & Duvvury, 2022), the situational context in Galway, combined with the pockets of activism by female academics and professional service staff rendered the inequalities experienced by women visible across the sector. The HEA review report was described as 'a blueprint for change', to which all higher education institutions were deemed accountable (Galligan, 2023, para 5). The HEA Action Plan (2018) contained several recommendations which were reflective of those in the National University of Ireland, Galway Task Force Report,[8] pertaining to leadership; funding; attainment of Athena Swan awards; recruitment and promotion procedures and practices; governance and management; and embedding gender equality in organisational culture. This represented a step-change in terms of recognising gender inequality in a manner that necessitated a proactive action-oriented response premised on institutional accountability.

The gender equality outcomes to date are evidence of the commitment to addressing inequality with progress across all of the seven areas of emphasis in the HEA Review Report including the gender profile of institutional leadership; the changing composition of Senior Lecturers, Associate and full Professors; gender balance in institutional governance and decision making structures; substantive revisions to recruitment and promotion; multi-layered approaches to addressing sexual violence and sexual harassment; achievement of institutional and departmental Athena Swan awards and attention to cultivating inclusive institutional culture through policy and practice. According to Galligan, these interventions have 'resulted in the development of a supportive ecosystem for tackling endemic gender inequality in the sector' (2023, para 11). The impact

[8] Referred to as the 'Galway Task Force report' hereafter.

is reflected in changes to the gender composition of the Irish higher education landscape since 2016. For example, all Universities in the Irish University Association (IUA) have now reached the 40% gender threshold on their Governing Authorities and 88% have achieved 40% gender balance on their executive management (HEA, 2022).[9] This compares with a baseline of just 57% of universities meeting the 40% threshold in relation to their Governing Authority and 0% in relation to their executive management in 2016 (HEA, 2017). In 2019, there were no female Presidents of universities in Ireland, whereas currently 7 of the 12 Public University Presidents are female (O'Connor, 2023). This compares to the average of women leaders in the European University Association of 18% (European University Association, 2022).

University of Galway, once viewed as the Irish institution with the least position on gender equality is also notable with all central key decision-making committees having at least 40% women. This includes the University Management Team at 47%, Academic Council at 52%, Governing Authority (Údarás na hOllscoile) at 53% and Academic Promotions Committee at 50%. Promotions and recruitment campaigns since 2016 have also improved the gender composition of academic staff:

- Senior Lecturer 33%F to 47%F (2016–2024)
- Personal Professor 13%F to 33%F (2016–2024)
- Established Professor 12%F to 20%F (2016–2024)
- Overall, women currently represent 37% of the full Professoriate (Personal Professor and Established Professor).

Galway's Task Force report included additional measures to address gender equality, recommending that the University establish an External Advisory Group (EAG) of EDI experts tasked with reviewing University of Galway's progress on equality on an annual basis. These annual reviews enable a critical dialogue and hold the University to account in relation to gender equality, and EDI more broadly.

[9] This includes all Universities who are members of the Irish University Association-Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Trinity College Dublin, TU Dublin, University College Cork, University of Galway, University College Dublin, and University of Limerick.

In March 2022 the HEA published the 2nd National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education. This report is a core milestone in the sector's EDI journey. It commended Irish HE's progress in relation to gender equality and highlighted the important developments and changes that have occurred within the sector. However, it also documented the persistence of gender inequality, drawing specific attention to intersectionality, precarious employment and the impact of caring responsibilities (HEA, 2022). In addition, this report also noted the importance of cultural change, leadership, recruitment, career progression, resourcing and workload illustrating that the gender inequality remains a significant burden for women in higher education (HEA, 2022).

Analysis of the progress on gender equality in Irish HEIs has been critiqued by feminist scholars in Irish higher education (Ní Laoire et al., 2021; O'Connor & Irvine, 2020; Ruggi & Duvvury, 2022). The persistence and pervasiveness of gendered cultural norms and the failure to address gender relations remains an issue of contention among feminists seeking to address gender inequality in Irish higher education. It is argued that the adoption of measures to progress gender equality have been primarily individualist in nature, focused on 'fixing the women' through training, development, mentoring and coaching (O'Connor, 2014; O'Connor & Irvine, 2020). The fundamental weakness of this approach is the reliance on a liberal individualist strategy which allows highly gendered inequitable institutional structures and cultures to prevail. However, this criticism also fails to consider that the discourse and practice continues to evolve, while such interventions are commonplace, they are being progressed in tandem with feminist analysis of the structural and systemic nature of gender inequality, in addition to a consciousness of the intersectional and cumulative impact of sexism, racism, disablism and classism. Although this may not appear to be the overwhelming national policy direction, it is nonetheless a critical aspect of the agenda for change. The challenge is to cultivate a shared understanding of the process in which the structural inequalities can be dismantled, this cannot happen without an agreed philosophical basis, or as bell hooks advocated an understanding that 'feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression' and that emphasising the 'collective as well as individual experience challenges women to enter a new domain' (1984, pp. 24–25).

The patriarchal status quo within Irish universities remains reflective of the wider societal norms whereby gender relations are inherently unequal,

and it is irrefutable that the required systemic and cultural change is a slow-moving process. While it is often more palatable for those in positions of power to concede to liberal individualist demands, even so the first HEA review referred to the necessity of organisational and cultural shift to address gender inequality (2016). However, the changes in leadership, the critical mass of women at senior management level, the attention to gendered practices, procedures and structures is an integral element of the achievements to date. These actions are slowly undermining the logic and fabric of this highly inequitable status quo. Nonetheless, progress which enhances the gender equality composition of leadership among research, academic and professional and managerial support services staff is not a guarantee of change without a robust analytical and tactical framework. At the same time, the critiques of liberal individualist interventions, while warranted, do not entirely capture the scale of ambition, the practitioner expertise, politically conscious standpoint espoused by activists which form part of the current profile of EDI leaders in HE, many of whom are also authors in this volume, along with the more deep-rooted structural changes which were envisaged some decades ago, reinvoked in 2014 in Galway and in the 2016 HEA Review Report. In addition to the philosophical standpoint, it is argued that factors such as ensuring that 'there are gender competent HEI leaders at every level willing to tackle the historically male dominated, masculinist structure and culture of HEIs' and that progressing gender equality has to be tackled at multiple levels, state, institutional and situational (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020, p. 16).

A task for the sector is to create the opportunity for further convergence beyond the level of initiative, to integrate the conceptual, the strategic and the practical, while problematising the underpinning feminist positionality. This is not to be read as a positing a simple solution given the complexity of the issue, addressing gender inequality is neither ahistorical or acultural; it is deeply situational and embedded in power dynamics at localised levels. Lessons from the experiences at the University of Galway illustrate that the capacity for driving change can be informed by a multi-faceted and coherent political campaign, a consciousness regarding the gendered nature of injustice while leveraging opportunities to create and sustain the momentum for change. Social movement analysis provides analytical perspectives that assist in identifying the political opportunities, the tangible and intangible resources and the necessity of redefining cultural norms through legitimising the feminist agenda.

Conclusion

Progress on gender equality is neither linear nor separate from the influence of the wider societal context and norms. The cases of discrimination at the University of Galway illustrate that even when legally proven and publicly highlighted, resistance to gender equality materialises in different and seemingly incongruent ways within higher education leadership. No singular intervention has the capacity to address the deep-rooted nature of gender inequality which has been the status quo for generations in higher education. The critiques of liberal 'fixing the women' initiatives remain valid while also demonstrating that both the knowledge and consciousness of these limitations is in fact understood among many leaders, practitioners and academics. The experience at Galway tells us that feminist agency and activism is required to progress cultural and systemic change, cultivating a critical mass that propels the momentum for change. Social movement analysis reminds that sustaining activism can be costly in terms of social and economic status, career progression and reputation, even more so under the auspices of neoliberal managerial conditions. Progressive change needs to be well orchestrated, planned and strategically executed through collaborative and dialectic engagement.

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CHAPTER 8

Building Capacity for a Nationally Contextualised Equality Charter—Key Learnings from Athena Swan Ireland 2014–2023

Sarah Fink and Sarah Dickinson Hyams

Introduction: Background to the Athena Swan Charter

The Athena Swan Charter is a framework for higher education and research institutions to apply for awards at bronze, silver and gold levels. They are conferred in recognition of steps on a journey in addressing gender inequalities. The process consists of committing to a set of shared principles, conducting a self-assessment grounded in quantitative and qualitative analysis, developing an action plan, and submitting an application which is assessed by a peer-review panel.

Initially established in the United Kingdom, versions of the Charter have also operated in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, India, Ireland

S. Fink (✉) · S. D. Hyams
Advance HE, Heslington, England
e-mail: sarah.fink@advance-he.ie

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and the United States. It is owned by Advance HE, which aims to develop equality charters that are globally comparable, yet locally contextualised (Advance HE, n.d.-a). This case study explores a sample of Athena Swan activity from the perspective of operating and delivering the Charter at a national level in Irish higher education.

2014: Work Begins to Launch Athena Swan in Ireland

In 2014, the Athena Swan Ireland National Committee was established by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU, now Advance HE) with financial support from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to advise on how the Athena Swan framework would be tailored to meet the Irish sector context and review and recommend any changes to documentation and guidance. The committee was made up of representatives from participating higher education institutions, the Higher Education Authority, the Irish Universities Association, the Irish Research Council, Science Foundation Ireland, Institutes of Technology Ireland (now represented by the Technological Higher Education Association) and ECU. A pilot programme was developed, and the scope of the Athena Swan Ireland Charter has continued to evolve since its introduction in the Irish higher education (HE) sector.

2015–2017: Focus on Women Academics in STEMM

During a pilot phase of the Athena Swan Charter in Ireland, the framework focused on the recruitment, progression and retention of women academics working in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) disciplines. Although some adaptions were made in consultation with the Athena Swan Ireland National Committee, the application forms and assessment processes were broadly aligned to the UK iteration of Athena Swan. At the end of this period, 7 institutions and 12 academic departments held awards, all bronze, following the assessment of 39 applications. Additionally, the adoption of the recommendation in *The Report of the Expert Group: HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions* that Athena Swan award attainment be a requirement for research funding eligibility was implemented by Science Foundation Ireland, the Irish Research Council and the Health Research Board (HEA, 2016).

2018–2020: Broadening to all Genders, Roles and Disciplines

After the roll-out of an updated version of the Athena Swan UK, the Athena Swan Ireland National Committee reviewed and approved an expanded version of the Ireland Charter that aligned to the UK's latest iteration. This version of the Charter considered gender equality more broadly, including the underrepresentation of men where appropriate, and the inclusion of support for Trans staff and students. Intersectional staff data requirements on gender and ethnicity were added as well. It was expanded to cover arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law disciplines. Professional, managerial and support staff were included to some degree, depending on if applicants were applying for bronze or silver, with a focus on their experiences of organisational culture. At the end of this period, a total of 19 institutions and 52 academic departments held awards, after assessing 69 more applications.[1] 70 of the awards held were bronze and one was silver. During this period, the Gender Equality Taskforce also solidified the Higher Education Authority's responsibility for determining the requirements in relation to Athena Swan awards and access to research funding (HEA, 2016).

2020: Sector-Wide Consultation

In November 2020, a survey was launched by Advance HE to gather feedback on perceptions of, and experiences with, the Athena Swan Ireland Charter framework. The survey included demographic questions (e.g. gender, ethnicity, etc.) to understand how they may impact on engagement with, and experience of, Athena Swan, alongside professional context (e.g. staff category, contract type). There were 661 respondents (66.5% identified as female, 30.6% as male, 0.7% as non-binary, and 2.3% as prefer not to say).

Respondents were asked to rate how important aspects of the application requirements were in identifying gender equality challenges and opportunities and progressing work. The relatively high level of importance rated across all themes may demonstrate that the framework, while

[1] Note that awards at this time were valid for 3.5 to 4 years, depending on the application form used.

comprehensive, is also attuned to the key pinch points where inequalities emerge in higher education institutions (Table 8.1).

Survey respondents were also asked to rate the difficulty of specific aspects of the application process (Table 8.2).

Qualitative responses highlighted concerns about additional workload, often described as a lack of resources within the institution. This finding can create tension within the framework itself, as there is a need to simultaneously ensure the Charter inclusively addresses equality challenges without overburdening the groups it aims to support.

The survey also explored perceptions of the link between Athena Swan awards and access to research funding. 72% of respondents working on Athena Swan in some capacity agreed the link to funding played an important role in their institution's commitment to gender equality. This likely connects to the growth in awards during the evolution of the charter.

2021–2023: Development of the Charter to Respond to Challenges and Build Capacity Across Additional and Intersecting Inequalities

Athena Swan Ireland was redeveloped in 2021 with updated principles, application forms, criteria and guidance. The updated framework has stated aims to drive impactful and sustainable gender equality work through an emphasis on developing gender equality priority areas and renewing and upgrading awards based on demonstrated progress and success. It also aims to build capacity for evidence-based equality work across additional and intersecting equality grounds and initiatives, including a requirement that institutional applicants develop a related evidence-base and action plan priority areas (Advance HE, n.d.-b).

This iteration also aims to fully include professional, managerial and support staff across all application themes and award levels. There is also space in the application form to support exploration of how centralised policy and practice is embedded and experienced in departments and units within institutions.

A particularly important development was further alignment of the Irish Charter to national and European contexts. This included updating materials and resources to reflect data resources such as the Higher Education Authority's staff profile reporting, the inclusion of ending

Table 8.1 Athena Swan Ireland application themes rated by importance

Application theme	*Proportion of respondents rating as 'very important' or 'somewhat important'*
Academic and research staff career pipeline	93.2%
Promotions	89.2%
Policies and practice relating to caring responsibilities	89.2%
Culture	88.3%
Recruitment	87.4%
Academic and research staff contracts	86.3%
Action Plan	85.0%
Flexible working arrangements	83.9%
Cover and support for maternity leave	82.3%
HR policies and practice	81.8%
Student data (departments only)	81.0%
Visibility of role models	80.4%
Support given to academic staff for career progression	78.5%
Representation of men and women on internal committees	78.5%
Maternity return rate	72.5%
Paternity, adoption, parental leave uptake	72.4%
Student data by course (departments only)	71.3%
Workload model or workload allocation	71.2%
Heads of School by gender (institutions only)	70.5%
Representation of men and women on external committees	69.6%
Appraisal/development review	68.3%
Training	68.0%
Induction	65.8%
Outreach activities	65.7%
Intersectionality data—gender and ethnicity (institutions only)	65.6%
Support for those applying for research grants (departments only)	65.3%
Academic and research staff leavers	65.2%
Support given to students for academic career progression (departments only)	64.3%
Supporting Trans people (institutions only)	63.0%
Institution's childcare provision	61.5%
Equal pay audits (institutions only)	56.9%

Table 8.2 Aspects of the Athena Swan Ireland application process rated by difficulty

Aspects of the application process	*Proportion of respondents rating as 'very difficult' or 'relatively difficult'*
Recruiting self-assessment team members	24.9%
Identifying self-assessment team leads, e.g. Chair or Champion roles	24.8%
Accessing and collecting data	63.6%
Analysing data	39.3%
Consulting with staff and/or students	27.9%
Deciding appropriate interventions and SMART actions	49.4%
Evidencing progress on previous activity (bronze renewal only)	47%
Evidencing impact of previous actions (silver only)	51%
The word count restriction	50.4%

sexual violence and harassment as a theme, consideration of legislation related to family leave and the gender pay gap, and alignment to Horizon Europe gender equality plan requirements. Alignment to the national context has also emerged within applications aiming to renew or upgrade awards. Higher Education Authority initiatives such as the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund and the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative have been referenced when applicants detail progress, successes and activities for the future (HEA, n.d.).

While the Charter needs to hold institutions to account and support them on their equality, diversity and inclusion journey through effective and progressive award pathways, such as through retaining validity periods tied to peer-review processes, there have been some steps to reduce the administrative labour involved in the application process. There has been a reduction of certain data requirements, updated guidance related to benchmarking and consultation, a new emphasis on quantified priority areas to reduce likelihood of unwieldy action plans, a lighter touch renewal process for applicants staying at the same award level, and the introduction of revisions process to better support applicants to meet the award criteria.

Alongside the need to respond to concerns about the administrative labour involved in Athena Swan, has been a requirement to ensure

reward and recognition of contributions to equality, diversity and inclusion activity is built into the framework itself. As part of the redeveloped Charter, applicants are asked to provide information on the formal processes in place to resource, distribute, recognise and reward equality, diversity and inclusion work; resource provision for the action plan and associated activities to ensure effective implementation; the support for equality activity in sub-units (e.g. academic departments and professional units) of the institution, including steps taken by the institution to support and resource sub-units to apply for Athena Swan awards; and what supports or resources are provided to the chair to lead the self-assessment process. Additionally, the criteria for an award includes assessment on the structures and processes that underpin and recognise equality work, with an underpinning expectation that there are formal processes for recognition and reward of said work (Advance HE., n.d.-c).

At the end of this period, there were 131 award holders (119 bronze; 12 silver), including those held by 19 higher education institutions, 1 research institute, 110 academic departments and 1 professional unit (Advance HE, n.d.-d). Ninety-two applications were assessed during this timeframe.

Key Learnings and Looking to the Future

Looking to Athena Swan Ireland as an example demonstrates that an equality charter framework will need to evolve over time to meet the needs of the sector. The growth from 19 award holders to 131 in under ten years demonstrates positive engagement, but survey findings also indicate the need to ensure that this growth is sustainable through dedicated resources.

Co-development with key stakeholder groups and relationships (such as the Athena Swan Ireland National Committee and the Higher Education Authority) and ongoing development in consultation with the sector are needed to drive the work. Additionally, strategic support at a national level supports engagement and success. The roles of the Higher Education Authority and research funders as significant drivers of gender equality work have likely propelled positive change.

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PART II

Gender Transformations, Interventions, and Impact

CHAPTER 9

Advancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Ireland's Technological University Sector

Marian Duggan, Yvonne Galligan, Allison Kenneally, Margaret Linehan, Jacqueline McCormack, and Noirin MacNamara

Introduction

Technological universities (TU) mark a notable change in the Irish higher education (HE) landscape and were created by merging former Institutes of Technology (IoT), which had been in existence for over 50 years in

M. Duggan (✉)
Technological University of the Shannon, Midwest, Ireland
e-mail: Marian.duggan@tus.ie

Y. Galligan · N. MacNamara
Technological University Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: yvonne.galligan@tudublin.ie

N. MacNamara
e-mail: Noirin.macnamara@tudublin.ie

A. Kenneally
South East Technological University, Waterford, Ireland
e-mail: allison.kenneally@setu.ie

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Ireland. Historically, the IoTs had provided a more vocationally oriented education and have focused on both expanding access to non-traditional learners and having a more regional orientation (Houghton, 2020). Therefore, despite their obvious strengths on metrics such as research outputs and funding, as well as status and societal esteem, the IoTs were traditionally seen as the 'poor relation' in Ireland's binary HE system (Hazelkorn & Moynihan, 2010, p. 177).

The rationale for establishing TUs was first presented in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (HEA, 2011) and elaborated in Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape (HEA, 2012). The goals of merger and re-designation were twofold: to reduce fragmentation in the sector and increase quality, efficiencies and economies of scale (Keneally, 2017, p. 15). This was seen as a positive development for IoTs, which were less well-funded than established universities, more heavily regulated, had significantly less autonomy and had greater difficulty in attracting international students (Keneally, 2017, p. 12). The re-designation process also attracted criticism, however, with concerns raised, mainly by the traditional universities, that the process would undermine the Irish university brand and further weaken an already under-performing sector (Flynn, 2012). Following the enactment of the Technological Universities Act 2018, 12 of Ireland's 14 IoTs came through the re-designation process outlined in the 2012 Strategy, resulting in the formation of five Technological Universities—TU Dublin (TUD, 2019); Munster TU (MTU, 2021); TU of the Shannon (TUS, 2021); Atlantic TU (ATU, 2022); and South East TU (SETU, 2022).

As explored in Section I of this volume, at the same time as these highly complex and political mergers and re-designation processes were underway, the Irish HE sector also began to place an increasing focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Reviews and recommendations on gender (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2018;

M. Linehan
Munster Technological University, Tralee, Ireland
e-mail: Margaret.Linehan@mtu.ie

J. McCormack
Atlantic Technological University, Sligo, Ireland
e-mail: McCormack.Jacqueline@itsligo.ie

HEA, 2016; HEA, 2022), tackling sexual violence and harassment (HEA, 2019), and race equality (Kempny & Michael, 2021) led higher education institutions (HEIs) to put EDI policies, strategies, and structures in place to meet the requirements of legislation, regulators, and funders. This context has presented both challenges and opportunities for Irish TUs. This chapter examines how the ever-growing EDI agenda has been approached by Ireland's TU sector. It explores how these new universities have responded to the national EDI agenda from a strategic, structural and policy perspective, while simultaneously addressing significant integration challenges in these newly merged entities.

This chapter begins by outlining distinctive aspects of the TU sector, focusing on features which are particularly relevant to the work of EDI. The second part of the chapter provides short case studies from the five TUs, discussing key challenges and opportunities faced when integrating EDI into overall structures, policies and strategic plans. Finally, it summarises progress to date and outlines some of the challenges and opportunities for EDI in the sector in the future.

Distinctiveness of the TU Sector

Ireland's TU sector emerged between 2019 and 2022 from a series of amalgamations of former IoTs. The majority of IoTs were established from 1970 onwards as a response to the need to develop third-level technical education to support national and regional economic growth and innovation (Steering Committee on Technical Education, 1967, pp. 7–8). This focus remained and evolved in the following decades as the IoTs matured and conditioned the vision shaping the new TUs. The distinctiveness from their university counterparts was evident in several ways including the significant regional socio-economic focus and provision of craft, vocational and professional education. As part of their remit to develop regional technical education, IoTs bequeathed to their new TUs a significant history of achievement in providing access to education for many under-represented groups. These include first in family entrants to HE, access to students from lower socio-economic groups, and to students with learning challenges. The TUs are now building on that legacy, aided by the 2018 legislative requirement to formulate an equality statement with a strong emphasis on access to, and inclusion in, education for under-represented groups.

The path dependency inherited by TU institutions is also reflected by many of the structures and cultural aspects which underpin these new universities, including the funding model and academic staff contracts, which have not changed. For example, in the TUs, recruitment, promotion and progression for academic staff are based on legacy IoT rules. These rules are differentiated by process as follows:

1. Recruitment by external advertisement: Competitions are open to internal and external candidates.
2. Promotion by advertisement: internal advertisement for Senior Lecturer 1 posts, which generally only occur when a vacancy arises. Senior Lecturer 2 and Senior Lecturer 3 competitions are advertised internally and externally, as they are management roles—Head of Department/Discipline (Senior Lecturer 2) or School (Senior Lecturer 3) (or equivalent).
3. Progression from Assistant Lecturer to Lecturer is by application and panel evaluation.

There is an input workload model for academics where key responsibilities are allocated a time budget. All academic staff have a nationally agreed contract of employment requiring them to teach up to 18 teaching hours per week depending on level. This contrasts with the traditional university sector where a more flexible workload allocation model in line with the international norm provides time for teaching, research and engagement/service activities.

This presents a few challenges for the sector and for EDI work in general. The high teaching load leaves little time for research or engagement activities, which are generally necessary for promotion to more senior academic posts. This is particularly the case for junior staff, who carry the highest teaching hours. Furthermore, the nationally agreed academic contract does not provide for any workload allocation differentiation between small and large classes. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that these features often disproportionally impact upon women, who often teach larger class groups in arts, humanities and social sciences, and women who take maternity or adoptive leave. Those returning from leave of this kind can face into teaching new modules, a full teaching allocation, and timetabling that is unfamiliar and not compatible with their new family life. Caring responsibilities also often means that these women

cannot engage in *out of hours* work on research or external engagement activities, which are critical for promotion. Therefore, failure to allocate time for these activities within the existing academic staff contract mitigates against those with caring responsibilities when it comes to promotional opportunities.

Despite these challenges and limitations, the TU sector has made significant strides towards addressing gender equality and equal opportunities in recent years. All TUs engage with the Athena Swan Ireland Charter and Principles and are in various stages of securing Bronze-level recognition. Many now have gender balance across all academic grades from Assistant Lecturer to Senior Lecturer 3, and on their Academic Councils and Governing Bodies. In addition, two TUs, South East TU (SETU), and TU of the Shannon (TUS) have been recognised at European level as Gender Equality Champions, and TU Dublin has led significant European-funded consortia projects on gender equality, all of which demonstrate the EDI leadership the Irish TUs have shown in the wider European context.[1]

To explore this journey further, this chapter will now present five case studies, one from each TU, outlining progress to date in embedding EDI into structures, policy and strategic plans.

Atlantic Technological University (ATU)

Context

ATU was formed in April 2022 via merger of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), Letterkenny Institute of Technology in Donegal (LyIT) and Institute of Technology, Sligo (IT Sligo) forming a University with eight campuses stretched the length of the west/north-west of Ireland. More recently, St Angela's College, Sligo joined, becoming the 9th campus. From the date of designation as a TU, EDI has had a whole cross-university remit relating to both staff and students. The three EDI Leads from the three legacy colleges each take a leadership role in various

[1] SETU was recognised as an Inclusive Gender Equality Champion in 2023 and TUS won the Newcomer Gender Equality Champion award in 2024. See for further details https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/prizes/eu-award-gender-equality-champions_en#ref-2022-edition-details-and-winners and https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/new-winners-announced-eu-gender-equality-champions-research-and-innovation-2024-05-15_en.

EDI issues as well as championing EDI in their local ATU campuses. ATU obtained an Athena SWAN institutional legacy bronze award based on the three founder colleges all having awards.

Executive Structures and Gender Equality Metrics

ATU is currently (2024) operating in an interim University organisational structure. A Vice President whose responsibilities include EDI is a member of the senior executive decision-making team of the University, which, as well as the Governing Body and Academic Council, reached the University's gender equality target of a minimum of 40% males and females in 2023. Whilst gender parity among ATU academic staff was achieved in 2023, there is under-representation of women at the Senior Lecturer 3 grade. A gender balance in favour of women was evident in 2023 across the research categories. Similarly, the university follows the TU trend of having a predominance of women in the Professional, Managerial and Support Service (PMSS) category.

EDI Structures/Committees

There is an EDI Sub-Committee of the Governing Body, which is chaired by the Chair of the Governing Body; an EDI Steering Committee; and a Consent Framework Working Group. The ATU Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (SAT) are working towards a submission for Athena Swan award and reviewing the ATU Gender Equality Action Plan. ATU has adopted the HEA Anti-Racism Principles and a Race Equality Working group, which are beginning work to develop a Race Equality Action Plan.

Policy and Strategy

Strategically, ATU has committed to promoting equality in all aspects of the University's activities and to create an environment and culture where all students, staff, and others are mutually treated with dignity and respect. ATU is working to create conditions whereby students, staff and all others associated with the University are treated equitably and inclusively regardless of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin, membership of the traveller community, religious beliefs, civil

partnership status or family status, including where these characteristics intersect.

The EDI team in ATU is leading on a range of matters related to gender equality (including Athena Swan); race equality; EDI-related aspects of disability and accessibility; LGBTQI + equality; age-friendly university; EDI training; EDI events, EDI in the curriculum and EDI Projects. The EDI team works collaboratively with Human Resources in relation to EDI-related data and policies and processes and with the office of the Vice President for Students, Teaching and Learning, particularly, in the area of sexual consent and gender-based harassment, and training of students and EDI aspects of universal design and accessibility.

The Sexual Violence and Harassment policy, approved at the first Governing Body, has recently been reviewed and is under consultation. A Dignity at Work policy and procedure is similarly currently under consultation. In March 2024, the ATU over-arching EDI policy and an ATU Gender Identity and Expression Policy were approved by the Governing Body.

Munster Technological University (MTU)

Context

Munster TU (MTU) is the newest university in the southwest of Ireland, established on 1 January 2021 at the height of the global pandemic, when Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), and the Institute of Technology Tralee (ITT) merged. Following designation as a TU, MTU achieved an Athena Swan Legacy Award, which recognised the prior institutional commitment to equality. In 2024, MTU was accredited with an Athena Swan Bronze award.

Executive Structure

Of the main MTU leadership committees, only the Academic Council was gender balanced in 2022 and 2023. Women members dominated the Governing Body in 2022, though by the end of 2023, this had adjusted to gender balance, as had the Executive Team. Membership of these committees will change in the academic year 2024–2025, and a new University Executive Team will also be created. Currently, there is no plan for a dedicated Vice President for EDI in new executive, and the

EDI remit will be incorporated in the portfolio of the Vice President for People and Culture. Until members of the new Executive are appointed, the President champions EDI-related matters at the University Executive. In the interim, the Chair of the Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (SAT) attends Executive Team meetings to update on relevant matters.

Key Staffing Metrics

The MTU staff profile is gender equal overall, though like other TUs, there is a higher representation of men in academic categories (52% male), and a higher representation of women in PMSS (59% female). There is also gender balance across all academic grades from Assistant Lecturer to Senior Lecturer grades.

EDI Staffing

During 2021, MTU hired both an EDI Officer and EDI Manager. As of 2024, these two staff members report to the Chair of the Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team, who is also a Head of School. The Athena Swan work was previously supported by an administrator; however, this role is currently vacant, and more administrative support together with more EDI staff are required to work across all six campuses of the university. These resources are now more critical as the Athena Swan Action Plan has committed to at least four departments applying for, and achieving, Athena Swan awards over the next 4 years.

Policies and Strategies

In 2022, MTU's strategic plan *Our Shared Vision 2022–2027* was launched, with EDI highlighted as the first strategic enabler (MTU, 2022). An Equality Statement was published in April 2021, setting out MTU's commitment to equality and diversity across the university. MTU works to ensure equality for all, and it is underpinned through policies such as the Dignity and Respect Policy, the Gender Identity and Gender Expression Policy, and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy (MTU, 2021, p. 8). When the new Vice President for People and Culture is appointed, the EDI strategy will be developed.

EDI Structures/Committees

In 2022, the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee was established as a sub-committee of the Governing Body. It has the authority to review and consider all strategic proposals and developments in relation to EDI. Membership of this body is predominantly female (7 female, 2 male). Membership of the university-wide Athena Swan SAT is also predominantly female (21 female, 9 male). The SAT has a target to increase the representation of men, and technical and professional services to a minimum of 40%, respectively. It is also exploring the inclusion of postgraduate student representation. The development of additional structures to support the EDI mission awaits the appointment of a Vice-President for People and Culture.

South East Technological University (SETU)

Context

SETU was formed on 1 May 2022, by the amalgamation of Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC). In October 2022, SETU approved a new SETU Gender Equality Plan (GEP), and this formed the basis of SETU's European Inclusive Gender Equality Champion Award and its successful Athena Swan Legacy Award application. As a new TU, SETU is required to make a new application for a full Athena Swan Bronze Award within 3 years of designation, which requires a considerable amount of time and effort, whilst also managing the integration of EDI activities across the campuses, and the positioning and integration of EDI into the new university structures and policies.

EDI Policies, Strategies, and Structures

At present, SETU has an EDI policy in place, has an EDI Committee of its Governing Body in operation, and will publish its first university wide EDI strategy in October 2024. Leadership structures in SETU, including its executive and wider management team, are all gender balanced. This can be attributed both to strong female representation and role models in the legacy IoTs, and a demonstrable commitment to gender equality and EDI in the new TU. SETU has also achieved gender balance across all academic grades, from Assistant Lecturer (52% female, 48% male) to

Senior Lecturer 3 grades (50% female, 50% male). However, significant challenges remain both within academic discipline areas (e.g. underrepresentation of women in computing and engineering), and in relation to research staff where gender imbalance persists (58% male, 42% female). And while women make up the majority of our PMSS, they are still less likely to reach higher grades than their male counterparts.

One of the key challenges at SETU is to ensure that EDI remains both adequately prioritised and resourced, at a time when there are enormous demands on time and resources due to the merger, and ongoing organisational re-structuring activities.

At designation day, SETU had multiple people at senior level with responsibility for EDI, including a dedicated VP for EDI. While this can, of course, help strengthen leadership in this area, it can also cause confusion and lead to challenges with communication. SETU has recently appointed a new VP for People, Culture and EDI, who will assume responsibility for EDI at executive level, with an Associate VP for EDI reporting to them. It will be critical to ensure that EDI does not now slip down the agenda due to not having a full VP with sole responsibility for EDI at executive level. It will also be critical to ensure that EDI remains a whole of university endeavour, and does not become siloed in the People/Human Resources function of the university.

SETU currently has three Athena Swan Departmental Bronze Awards, which were resourced through a workload allocation for a project coordinator at Department/Faculty level. Resourcing Athena Swan work at departmental level, however, is likely to be an increasingly significant challenge, as more areas begin to engage with the process, and in the context of increasingly challenging fiscal conditions in the sector.

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)

Context

TU Dublin (TUD) was established on January 1 2019, from a merger of three founding institutions: Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB), and Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT), with a combined student enrolment of 28,500 and 3,000 employees. In 2022, TU Dublin obtained its first institutional Athena SWAN Bronze award, while the School of Mathematics and Statistics gained the University's first ever School-level Bronze award.

Executive Structures and Staffing Metrics

In 2020, TU Dublin embarked on a major institutional reorganisation resulting in a 12-person University Executive Team (33% female: 67% male). The EDI function was assigned to the President's Office alongside with other pan-university services. The EDI Director became an *attending member* at University Executive Team (UET) meetings, a demotion from her initial position as a full Executive member. In other executive decision-making functions, there is close to gender parity. At December 2023,[2] women represented a small majority on the Governing Body and Academic Council (GB 53% female; AC 56% female) and comprised 40% of Heads of School.

The reorganisation process augmented the personnel resources of the EDI office. The EDI Director now leads a 6-person team, comprising a senior manager, three EDI action leads, and two administrators. The Research Centre on Inclusion and Equitable Cultures (RINCE) was established in 2019 by the EDI Director to provide research-informed expertise on equality issues. The Centre provides research-led training on inclusive gender equality plans.

The Governing Body established a gender-balanced 8-person EDI Committee in 2019, chaired by an external member, that meets at least 4 times annually. The EDI Director is a full member of this Committee. All EDI and Human Resources policies are presented to this committee for discussion and recommendation to Governing Body. A number of separate committees addressing gender equality (including an Athena SWAN self-assessment team) are due to come under the operational governance of a pan-University EDI Council in 2024. This inclusive committee will also make recommendations to the Executive Team on policy and practice.

TU Dublin has an overall gender-balanced employee profile (48% female; 52% male). Yet, gender stereotypes are evident: men predominate among academic staff (58% male), women are in the majority among professional services (57% female). An academic glass ceiling is also evident as the proportion of women holding Senior Lecturer 2 and Senior Lecturer 3 positions comprises 37% in each case. Not surprisingly, the TU Dublin 2023 Gender Pay Gap Report showed a 12.7% gap in favour of men.

[2] All figures for TU Dublin are from December 2023.

Strategy and Policy

The TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030 *Creating a Better World Together* (TUD, 2020) embeds EDI as a strategic goal. The EDI office leads the development of specific University-wide EDI policies and supports all other services to equality-proof policies and practices (TUD, 2022). It also develops institutional and individual awareness of the historical, structural, systemic and individual dimensions of inequality. In 2024, the EDI Office initiated a process for developing an EDI strategy aligned to the University strategy that is expected to have completed all approval stages by the end of 2024.

Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)

Context

TUS was designated on October 1, 2021, based on the merger of Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) and Athlone Institution of Technology (AIT). Prior to the amalgamation both founding institutions had achieved Athena Swan Bronze Awards. TUS received an Athena Swan Legacy Bronze Award in 2022. In 2024, work on implementing its Gender Equality Action Plan was recognised by the European Union when TUS obtained the EU Newcomer Gender Equality Champion award. TUS applied for a full Athena Swan Bronze Award in June 2024, and includes a GEAP plan for 2024 to 2028.

Executive Structures and EDI Resourcing

There is gender balance on TUS Governing Body and Academic Council. On formation of TUS, the President established an interim senior operating model and structure for the seven Vice Presidents, based on cross-campus functional responsibility, to enable TUS to operate efficiently and coherently. Under this process, a Vice President for People, Culture and EDI was appointed on a temporary basis and is responsible for cross-campus Human Resources, EDI and Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment (ESVH) functions. TUS also appointed a Vice President for Student Education and Experience to advance EDI objectives, with responsibility for ensuring equality of access and opportunity for students and for the promotion of EDI in teaching, learning and assessment. The Executive Management Team TUS is not currently gender

balanced, (33% female, 67% male). The TUS EDI Office has three staff members that include the EDI Manager appointed in 2021, the Senior Officer and Administrator appointed in 2022 and the Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response Manager appointed in 2023.

Key Staffing Metrics

TUS has achieved overall gender balance among academic staff (45% female, 54% male). Female representation at Senior Lecturer 2 level has improved to gender balance, though women's share of Senior Lecturer 1 positions has fallen back, proportionally, to below gender balance. Like other TUs, women make up the majority of PMSS in TUS, but female representation at higher pay scales falls below gender balance. While research leadership roles are predominantly held by male staff, there is gender balance among research staff.

Policy and Strategy

The TUS Gender Equality Action Plan is underpinned by the values and strategic priorities contained in the TUS Strategic Plan 2023–2026. To give effect to the above, TUS Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2024–2027 has been approved. Under development are TUS EDI Policy and TUS Policy and Procedures on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence and Harassment.

EDI Structures/Committees

TUS has established an EDI Committee Structure comprising a Governing Body Sub-Committee on People, Culture and EDI (chaired by an external GB member) and a Senior level EDI Steering Committee (chaired by TUS President). Reporting to the EDI Steering Committee is an Athena Swan Self-Assessment team (SAT) formed in 2023 to prepare TUS Athena Swan Bronze Award application and a Promoting Consent and Ending Sexual Violence Sub Committee (both chaired by VP People, Culture and EDI).

Discussion and Conclusion

From the case studies above, it is evident that while the individual TUs are at different stages of their institutional and EDI journeys, all have made significant progress in striving to embed EDI into their universities.

Significant Progress on Gender Balance

The TU sector has made real strides in achieving gender balance across their universities. All TUs have now achieved gender balance on their Governing Bodies and Academic Councils, in line with legislative requirements. Interestingly, all have achieved gender balance across their academic staff profiles, and some have achieved gender balance across all academic grades in the university, with others very close to achieving this metric.

A range of factors have undoubtedly contributed to this success. Firstly, TUs are very new institutions, with the benefit of being established at the same time as the emergence of the EDI agenda at national level in Ireland. This undoubtedly focused the minds of all involved to try to ensure that good practices were embedded in these new universities from the beginning. The legislation which established TUs also placed a clear emphasis on equality and access, which further strengthened the focus on EDI. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the preceding ITs, which became TUs already had a strong track record of success on access and inclusion. It is notable, though, that there are difficulties in obtaining gender balance at executive level in all but one university. As these posts are open to competitive recruitment and are singularly decided on by interview panels, the levers available to Governing Bodies and Academic Councils for balancing membership are not available to Executive teams.

Secondly, as the TU sector has traditionally been tightly regulated at national level and operates in the context of relatively stringent boundary conditions around promotion, progression and staff contracts, there has been less scope for negotiated discretionary practices to take hold. This rigid framework may have partly contributed to the more balanced staff portfolios, particularly amongst academic staff, seen in the TUs compared to other HEIs in the sector. On the other hand, though, the highly uneven distribution of staff, with senior grades designated as management roles, and with few posts at these senior grades, militates against academic progression of the type found technological universities elsewhere in the world.

Yet, the pattern also shows where gender equality is weak. Not surprisingly, the PMSS field of work is dominated by women at the lower grades, but not necessarily at the higher ones—a classic workplace stereotype. Of concern too, is the under-representation of women at executive level, indicating a glass ceiling in operation. Given that some of the universities must complete their transitions, it will take another year or two before a settled picture emerges. This area is more difficult to regulate for gender balance, given that each executive position is filled through an open recruitment process, with the most *suitable* candidate selected. The pattern revealed across the sector suggests that recruitment panels for executive posts need to be mindful of the biases shaping their choices and decisions.

Policy, Strategy and Athena Swan

Turning to TU performances on key EDI metrics, there is a general consistency in the profile of the TU institutions on major EDI strategic issues—all have developed and approved the obligatory Equality Statement, EDI is a component of the University strategic plan, all have Athena Swan recognition in some form, and with one exception the EDI remit is pan-University, covering staff and students. All have an EDI strategic plan under development, or have an intention to do so pending key executive appointments.

One support in bringing about this positive embedding of EDI has been a very significant collaboration on EDI work across the TU sector itself, with colleagues regularly working together on funding applications, EDI-related projects, participating in national committees, and cooperating on other activities. Strong working relationships, particularly at a time of critical change, have enabled the development of an informal community of practice which has been a vital contributor to many of the EDI developments led by the sector.

Ongoing Challenges

However, despite the evident progress, key challenges remain for the TUs if they are to truly embed and sustain progress on gender equality across the sector. One of the key recommendations from the HEA in relation to gender equality is the need to have a Vice President or equivalent with sole responsibility for EDI at Executive level. During the merger and

reconfiguration processes in the TUs, there has been a move away from this by the sector, and a drift towards VPs for People, Culture and EDI, or for other senior roles with mixed portfolios, with EDI no longer the main focus. The TUs must remain vigilant to ensure that EDI remains firmly on the agenda at top level and is not weakened by such an approach.

Challenges around resourcing EDI work remain across all TUs. The ever-increasing policy focus and demands are generally not being met with increasing resourcing at institutional level, and this is putting considerable pressure on EDI Offices within the TU sector. Added to this is the anticipated requirement to resource EDI work to progress Athena Swan Awards at Departmental level, which will scale up considerably across the TUs over the coming years. These increasing resource requirements must be planned for now to ensure the sustainability of EDI work in the TUs in the future.

There are further challenges to EDI work in the TU sector, which may come from external sources. For example, a changing political or policy landscape at national level could leave the EDI mission, structures, policies and practices more vulnerable to dilution, even to dismantling. There are also other emerging policy priorities at national level in HE, such as sustainability, which could potentially divert time, energy and resources away from EDI initiatives in the sector. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that EDI is seen as a values-based, whole of university activity, adding important dimensions to the quality of the educational outcome rather than perceived as a national policy or funding requirement.

Finally, the existing staff contract, as discussed above, remains a key challenge to be addressed in terms of recognising workload and ensuring that those with caring responsibilities are not being adversely impacted when it comes to career progression.

Looking Forward

Despite the challenges brought about by the creation of technological universities, their advent in the HE sector is a timely one for EDI. Created at the same time as the national push for enhanced gender equality in the sector, these universities offer a once-in-lifetime opportunity to make a substantial impact on the culture and practice of these new institutions. As the case studies illustrate, EDI values, strategies, structures, policies, and practices are being vigorously embedded at a foundational time in the history of these five institutions, who have all made significant strides

on gender equality in particular over their short lifespans. Although there is much more to do to nurture and deepen the commitment to EDI in the sector, the imprint of EDI will constitute a legacy for generations to come.

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CHAPTER 10

Data Gathering in the Irish Higher Education: Context, Policy, and Systems

Mary Nestor, Tom Reilly, and Tom Costelloe

Context

The higher education sector in Ireland includes eight traditional universities, five technological universities, two institutes of technology, and two colleges. There are 256,000 students (HEA, 2023b) and 36,000 staff (HEA Staff Profile Data, 2022c). The mergers of Institutes of Technology into larger Technological Universities have reconfigured the regional landscape. Higher Education policy is directed by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, with oversight from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Quality and

M. Nestor (✉) · T. Reilly
Atlantic Technological University, Mayo, Ireland
e-mail: mary.nestor@atu.ie

T. Reilly
e-mail: tom.reilly@atu.ie

T. Costelloe
University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: tom.costelloe@ucd.ie

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Qualifications Ireland. National agencies include Research Ireland and Athena Swan Ireland. Neoliberal values underpin Ireland's higher education model (Grummell et al., 2009; Walsh & Loxley, 2014; Mercille & Murphy, 2017). Lynch et al. (2012) argue that new managerialism is the organisational arm of neoliberalism and describe it as:

> a mode of governance designed to realise the neoliberal project through the institutionalising of market principles in the governance of organisations....it involves the prioritisation of private (for-profit) sector values of efficiency and productivity in the regulation of public bodies, on the assumption that the former is superior to the latter. (Lynch, 2014, p. 1).

This new mode of governance is characterised by the use of performative frameworks at a sectoral level, requiring HEIs to justify their decision-making and resource allocation with evidence and supporting data. The outcome of this evaluative process ranges from the allocation of additional performance funding to the withholding of core funding where insufficient progress has been made. Therefore, the data-informed performance compact has the ability to drive progress in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

EDI is a key element in Ireland's higher education (HE) landscape. HEIs are guided by national policy in priority areas such as gender equality, race equality, and ending sexual violence and harassment, each with specific data requirements. The assumption is that integrating equality and diversity into institutional policies is beneficial, reflecting values of justice, equality, and fairness. These values support the dignity of all individuals, are essential for a democratic society, and are important graduate attributes that prepare staff and students to address the challenges of a complex, interdependent world. Data collection and monitoring are widely regarded as essential in informing policy on EDI, establishing a baseline and in measuring progress over time (HEA, 2016, 2018a; RIA, 2021, p. 8; LERU, 2019). It is established practice throughout Europe for HEIs to collect equality data for various reasons: transparency, accountability, external reporting, identifying disadvantaged groups, understanding diverse needs, raising awareness about specific activities, and measuring the performance and impact of EDI initiatives (European University Association, 2019). Systemic data collection helps to understand the diverse composition of educational institutions,

monitor trends, detect and follow up on inequalities, and identify bottlenecks where targeted policies are needed. The primary goal of collecting EDI data is to translate findings into actions that reduce intersectional inequalities.

However, data collection is not unproblematic or neutral and much has been written about how data collection on minoritised communities for research purposes can itself be an act of violence and oppression that may need resisting if it does not lead to targeted actions to address inequalities. Benjamin (2021, p. 11) summarises these positions to include: data collection as epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988), administrative violence (Spade, 2015) and data violence (Hoffmann, 2020), notwithstanding individual GDPR and privacy concerns. Data collection has the potential to define, reduce and restrict personhood, deny certain groups the agency to exist as a person with lived experience embedded within relational contexts and in the face of discourses and power structures in which such regulation has been created. Benjamin (2021) critiques the terms of data collection and the norms and expectations such terms engender and argues that "collection" emphasises the perspective of the "collector" and implies that were data not collected then it would be without purpose. A terminological shift from "collection" to "compilation" is proposed, as this allows for the act of editing and translating narratives of lived experience; it acknowledges co-creation between subject and collector while highlighting differences in roles and power imbalances. Benjamin postulates

> In the state of its current dominant narratives, data collection is performed as an exploitative and oppressive act. But it can be conceived, constituted and performed otherwise. (2021, p. 21)

Performative critiques on data collection like Benajamin's (2021) centre the need for HEIs to be clear about the purpose, benefits and risks of data collection, and the need to maintain regular communication on the rationale for data collection with staff and students. EDI data collection in HEIs should be underpinned by the values of justice, equality, and fairness so that the danger of losing sight of the humans behind the figures is avoided. The following summarises the key drivers for EDI data collection in the Irish HE sector.

The Sheehy-Skeffington Case

The Sheehy-Skeffington case in 2014 brought to the fore the issue of gender equality in the higher education context in Ireland. In a landmark case, the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) was found to have discriminated against Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington for promotion on the grounds of gender, more details on this can be found in brief in detail in Chapter 7. Sheehy-Skeffington, a botanist, had begun working as a lecturer in NUIG in 1990 and by 2009 had been unsuccessful in five promotional rounds. This case marked a pivotal moment for gender equality in academic promotion in Ireland's higher education institutions (HEIs), sparking significant conversations on the topic. The HEA confirmed that women were significantly underrepresented in senior academic roles, with NUIG having the lowest representation at 21%. University College Cork followed with 27%, Maynooth University with 28%, University College Dublin with 29%, and Trinity College Dublin with 33% (Boland, 2014). At that time, no woman had ever held the role of President at an Irish university in its 424-year history. These data underscored the need for action, with the Sheehy-Skeffington case serving as the catalyst for the establishment of an Expert Group by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, to lead policy development in gender equality, including systematic data collection to inform gender inequality policy development. The Expert Group was formed in 2015 and included both national and international experts in the field of gender equality. In 2016, the HEA published the Expert Group report, the National Review of Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions (hereafter referred to as the Gender Equality Review).

Legislative Context and Equality Infrastructures

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) is Ireland's national institution for human rights and equality. An independent public body accountable to the Oireachtas, IHREC was established under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 to protect and promote human rights and equality, fostering a culture of respect and intercultural understanding. Key legislation includes the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2018, the Equal Status Acts 2000–2018, the Disability Act 2005, and the IHREC Act 2014. These acts prohibit employer discrimination based on nine protected grounds: age, race,

gender, disability, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, and membership of the Travelling community. HEIs, as employers, must comply with these provisions.

Since the IHREC Act 2014, HEIs have an increased responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and protect the rights of employees, students, and the public. This Public Sector Duty involves assessing, addressing, and reporting, supported by data collection and analysis. HEIs must monitor staff and student equality data to protect vulnerable groups within university structures, prevent discrimination and provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, as required by the Disability Act 2005. Initially, data collection focused on gender, disability, and, more recently, race and ethnicity, as mandated by the HEA. However, 76% of HEIs are now collecting data across all equality grounds as standard practice. Despite being implied in equality legislation, data collection has been limited and sporadic.

Athena Swan

The introduction of the Athena Swan Charter in early 2015 significantly drove the collection of gender-disaggregated data in higher education. Funded by the HEA, this UK-based charter's extension to Ireland supported applications from 21 higher education institutions. HEIs undertake substantial self-assessments, analysing legacy and current data, and devise SMART action plans to tackle gender inequality. The charter aims to support institutions in sustainable gender equality efforts and build capacity for evidence-based equality work across all grounds enshrined in Irish legislation. Engagement with the charter is central to Ireland's national strategy for gender equality. The Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) linked eligibility for major research funding to attaining an Athena Swan Bronze Institutional award. HEIs were required to apply for a bronze award by September 2019 (HEA, 2018a, p. 11).

All of Ireland's universities, institutes of technology, and several colleges participate in Athena Swan Ireland. The charter's 2015 introduction necessitated robust data collection from HEIs to evidence their gender equality status and has been a key operational driver. The charter has seen strong sectoral engagement, with 131 award holders in Ireland as of November 2023 (119 Bronze; 12 Silver). This includes 19 institutions, one research institute, and 111 sub-units holding awards. The strong engagement is credited to the mandated link to funding. In

October 2021, the Athena Swan Charter was redeveloped for the Irish context, taking an intersectional approach. Data collection remains a critical requirement in the redeveloped charter.

Infrastructures and Systems That Support EDI Data Collection

Around the same time as the establishment of the Expert Group on gender equality in higher education, the relationship between HEIs and the state, mediated by the HEA, changed in 2014 with the introduction of the Strategic Dialogue Compact Agreement. This policy shift towards individual mission-based institutional compacts introduced a more regulatory and evaluative regime (Loxley et al., 2017). This change led to the emergence and expansion of an audit and compliance regime aligned with national priorities, including gender equality objectives (HEA, 2018a; Walsh & Loxley, 2014; Harkin & Hazelkorn, 2015). The outcomes of this evaluative process range from additional performance funding to withholding core funding for insufficient progress. Thus, the data-informed performance compact can drive progress in equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), while also making institutional actions increasingly performative.

Another change in the HE landscape was the establishment within the HEA, of the Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality in 2019. This Centre was established to support HEIs in their gender equality efforts, including supporting the Athena Swan Charter, establishing a National Committee for Gender Equality, annual HEI reporting on gender objectives, compiling HEI Staff Profiles by Gender, engaging in System Performance Framework/Strategic Dialogues, sharing good practices, implementing the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative, and administering the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund. This initiative followed the HEA Gender Action Plan (2018a) recommendations to help HEIs implement the National Review of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs (HEA, 2016) and monitor progress. In 2020, the unit was renamed the Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, reflecting its expanded intersectional brief. This broader scope now includes work on race equality and sexual violence and harassment, with potential for further expansion. Given these HEA reporting requirements, HEIs have become accustomed to collecting and monitoring data on the gender of staff and students for equality purposes. Prior to 2012, the HEA

required HEIs to return staff statistics quarterly through the Employment Control Framework (ECF), a budget-driven framework managing staffing numbers in the sector. To gain a more comprehensive picture of HEI staff, additional data broken down by gender was requested from the HEIs for September 2015 staff profiles. This gender disaggregated data broke down staff by category of post, academic discipline, contract type and by academic and professional, managerial, and support (PMS) staff categories and continues to be collected and published annually as an element of the annual December staff return on an ongoing basis. These data are openly available in a basic dashboard format on the HEA Centre of Excellence for EDI website but have limited value for analysis and benchmarking. Before 2016, the Annual Statement of Governance and Internal Control submitted to the HEA did not include data disaggregated by gender. Information on the gender breakdown of governing authority/body, academic council and executive management team was requested from the HEIs from December 2015 onwards. These data are published annually in the Higher Education Institution Staff Profiles by Gender. Since December 2022, this has been expanded to seek ethnicity data of all employees.

The approach to data gathering has evolved (see Fig. 10.1) from a relatively simple capture of gender data for academic staff by grade from 2012, to an intermediate level in Institutional Profiles by Gender which includes contract type and academic and PMS staff, to the more advanced end, which encompasses broader data capture from both inside and outside of the HEI. The sectoral momentum created by the Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) and the Gender Action Plan (HEA, 2018a), the establishment of the Centre of Excellence (2019) and to enable fulfilment of the data requirements for Athena Swan (2015) applications, drove this enhanced approach to data collection.

The HEA Act 2022 mandates the broader collection of data, extending beyond equality monitoring to include personal information about students such as name, address, date of birth, student number, PPSN,[1]

[1] Personal Public Service number (PPSN) is a unique reference number that helps you access social welfare benefits, public services and information in Ireland.

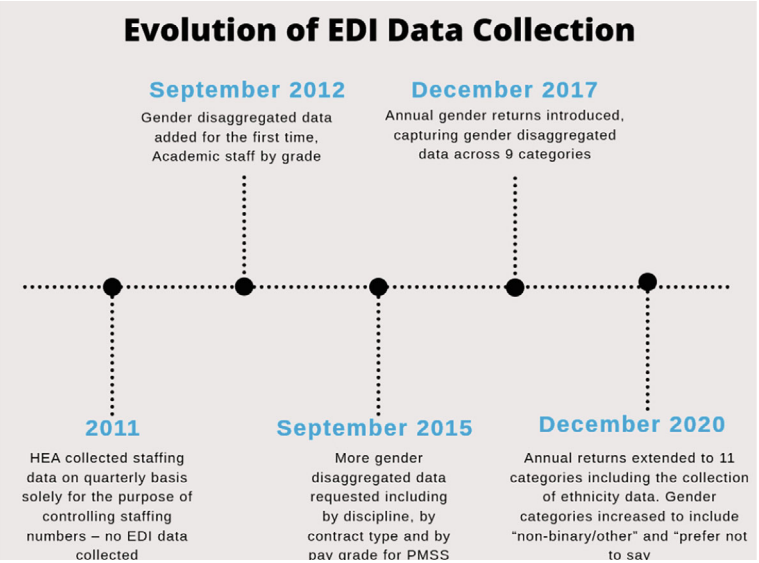


Fig. 10.1 Evolution of EDI data collection by the Higher Education Authority 2011–2020

Eircode,[2] SUSI[3] grant code, CAO[4] data, educational history, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic status. For staff, personal data collection includes PPSN, salary bands, gender breakdown, disability information, and ethnicity. This data will be managed centrally by the HEA Statistics Office instead of the Centre of Excellence in EDI.

[2] Eircode is Ireland's postcode system, each Eircode is unique to a postal address and its geographic location.

[3] Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is Ireland's national awarding authority for further and higher education grants for students.

[4] Central Applications Office (CAO) processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Broader Social Change

A discussion of key drivers is incomplete without reference to broader social change which has occurred in Ireland in recent years. From 1992 onwards, there was an accelerated period of social change in Ireland. Migration accelerated from the 1990s onwards. The population has increased and become more diverse going from 3.5 million in 1991 to over 5 million in 2021 (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2021). Since 2016, the number of Irish nationals has increased by 176,800 (4.2%) while non-Irish nationals showed gains of 95,100 (17.2%) over the same period (CSO Ireland, 2021). Recent figures from the CSO estimate the rate of female participation to be 58.9% (Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2021). The constitutional recognition of same-sex marriage in 2015 demonstrated that Irish values aligned with those of EU in terms of dignity, equality and freedom. The removal of the Eight Amendment from the constitution through a referendum in 2018 was equally pivotal in terms of gender equality. Two thirds of the electorate voted in favour of repeal and for provision to be made for the regulation and termination of pregnancy. These demographic and constitutional changes demonstrate how Irish society and cultural norms have evolved. This is reflected in the diversity profiles of our higher education institutions. In this context, the need for reliable data collection and analysis systems is more pronounced.

The structural responses within the higher education sector to the confluence of drivers set in motion by the Sheehy-Skeffington case, range from: policy developments in the National Review of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs (HEA, 2016, 2022) and Gender Action Plan (HEA, 2018a); to the changing nature of the relationship between the HEI and state as mediated by the HEA; to the deepening of the collection of gender disaggregated data; to the embedding of the data-hungry Athena Swan Charter; all identify this as a key decade. The centrality of data to these responses evidences the critical need for robust data systems to evidence, benchmark and identify barriers as to the extent of gender inequality in HEIs.

Policy Narrative, Current Practices, and Challenges in Relation to Data Collection

As gender equality gained prominence in the higher education sector in Ireland around 2014–2015, the lack of comprehensive equality monitoring data became evident. Prior to this, the Report of the High Level Group on University Equality Policies (HEA, 2004), stated equality data as essential to monitoring progress to greater equality in Irish society. The lack of data systems to monitor the effectiveness of equality measures in the sector was identified as an issue of concern that had yet to be addressed:

> the Team was struck by the absence of adequate data about actions taken or possible outcomes of equality measures, or even data gathering systems in place. In earlier reports on this subject, the absence of data was highlighted repeatedly and strong recommendations made for improvement. To date, however, these recommendations have not been implemented. (HEA, 2004, p. 20)

The Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) also highlighted significant data gaps that hindered the review process. Consequently, specific data requests were necessary from HEIs, underscoring the need for sector-wide improvements.

Subsequently, the Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) made several recommendations foregrounding the need for enhanced data collection, analysis, and reporting across both institutions and the HEA. These recommendations are outlined in Table 10.1.

The Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) underscored the critical role of evidence-based approaches reliant on comprehensive data collection within HEIs. Reviewing progress made in the implementation of its recommendations provides insight into barriers to data collection.

Of the three recommendations, 2.2 and 2.3 are system-wide recommendations for the HEA, and 1.15 applies to individual HEIs. In terms of the former, there has been much progress with Objective 2.3 whereby the HEA publishes extensive profiles which have evolved over time and currently include data visualisations which provide a useful resource to HEIs. These profiles enhance the visibility of progress in addressing gender inequality. Therefore, in many respects, 2.3 could be said to

Table 10.1 Data-related recommendations from HEA (2016) Gender Equality Review

Number	*Objective*	*Recommendation*	*Lead stakeholder*	*Timelines*
1.15	To enable gender disaggregated data-driven decision-making	A comprehensive gender-disaggregated data collection system will be in place in every HEI	HEIs	From 2016
2.2	To provide comprehensive evidence base upon which to monitor the progress of HEIs in addressing gender inequality	The HEA will establish a comprehensive database of staff in HEIs	HEA	Ongoing
2.3	To enhance the visibility of HEIs' progress in addressing gender inequality	Gender will be introduced into the multi-dimensional profiles of HEIs, published annually by the HEA	HEA	Annually

Source Higher Education Authority (2016) HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions

be complete, however, the gender profiles are not part of the *"multi-dimensional profiles of HEIs"* referred to in the recommendation. Rather they are a separate and standalone set of profiles, captured and published by the HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion[5], not by the central HEA Statistics Section. This is an example of the challenge of mainstreaming EDI into standard operational processes, an issue as much for the HEA as it is for HEIs.

Recommendation 2.2, on the other hand, has seen minimal progress. There is no HEA database of staff in HEIs, nor is there any timeline for developing one, some eight years after the recommendation. Interestingly the narrative has changed on this issue; the National Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) stated, *"The HEA will establish a comprehensive database of staff in HEIs"* (2016, p. 80); the HEA (2018a) Gender Action Plan 2018–2020 stated, *"The development of a staff database should be progressed as a matter of priority by the HEA"* (2018, p. 39). It has

[5] Statistics | Policy | Higher Education Authority (hea.ie).

since been omitted from the 2022 recommendations. This raises questions about why a priority described by an Expert Group was abandoned without progress, despite its role in supporting evidence-based policy development.

However, at various EDI stakeholder forums,[6] concerns were raised about the legal basis for establishing such a database. It is arguable that, at a general level, the establishment of a database would be comprehended as one of the general functions of the HEA Act 1971, 3(d) *"promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education"*. The introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations (2018) significantly heightened the scrutiny on the legal basis for collecting and analysing personal data, prompting the HEA to advocate for legal clarity. This culminated in the passage of the Higher Education Authority Act (2022), which amongst other important changes to governance within HEIs, also mandates HEIs to provide specified personal data of staff, including gender and other prescribed data, upon request by the HEA. This legislative development effectively removes any perceived or actual barriers related to data collection in the higher education sector.

With the legal certainty afforded by the HEA Act 2022, the HEA have scope to develop this database. This commitment was set out in the HEA Strategic Plan 2018–2022[7] (HEA, 2017, p. 22). The development of a new staff database was identified as a flagship initiative in the delivery of a HEA Data and Knowledge Management Strategy to have been completed by 2022. The recently published HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026 (HEA, 2023a) states the strategic objective to *"Capture information to better inform the higher education sector through improvement in collecting and analysing methods"*. The performance measure by which this will be achieved is to *"develop a staff database (2023–2026)"* (HEA, 2023, p. 10). Although a sectoral staff database has featured consistently in policy statements since the Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016), there has been no action to date. While HEIs submit an annual data return to the HEA in the form of Institutional Profiles by Gender, which enables high-level comparisons, the data do not consist of individualised data so do not allow for in-depth and intersectional interrogation.

[6] National Committee for Gender Equality; Athena Swan National Committee.

[7] HEA-2018–2022-Strategic-Plan-FINAL.pdf.

In the UK system, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is responsible for the systematic collection and analysis of all data relating to higher education including equality monitoring data. HEIs submit comprehensive data sets annually, and this is used to inform policy-making decisions for higher education provision in the UK, as well as for benchmarking purposes by HEIs. While not all data collected by HESA are directly applicable to the Irish higher education sector, there is valuable learning in the approach of mandating a set of data points. This empowers HEIs to develop the capacity for thorough data interrogation, facilitating intersectional analysis across various equality dimensions. The authors advocate for a model inspired by HESA's principles, enabling users to explore sectoral data comprehensively across all equality grounds.

Having considered the challenges to data collection at a sectoral level (as per 2.2 and 2.3 above), the barriers that exist at an institutional level will now be explored. The requirement for every HEI to have a "comprehensive gender-disaggregated data collection system in place" (Recommendation 1.15) represents a challenge to many institutions, to greater or lesser extents. The authors conducted a survey to assess data collection challenges faced by HEIs in Ireland, targeting EDI staff across 19 institutions with a 100% response rate from April 3 to May 5, 2023. Findings revealed significant variation in the ability of HEIs to collect, analyse, and report on equality monitoring data. Each institution was queried about their EDI data collection methods using both fixed-answer and open-text questions, yielding qualitative and quantitative insights.

The survey highlighted operational hurdles, primarily the addition of equality monitoring tasks to already burdened and under-resourced departments. Responsibilities for this task were distributed across various entities including the EDI function, President's Executive Office, HR, Finance, Athena Swan Officer, Student Services, and Quality Office, depending on the specific data requirements.

These findings provide a comprehensive view of EDI data collection practices in Irish higher education, pinpointing areas for enhancement and proposing strategies for improvement. As is set out in Fig. 10.2 below 85% of HEIs use Access/People XD/CoreHR as their HR Information System, and this should make the introduction of a sector-wide approach more straightforward.

However, HEIs were operating various different versions of Access/People XD/CoreHR, and the use of the system functionality varied greatly from one HEI to the next Fig. 10.3.

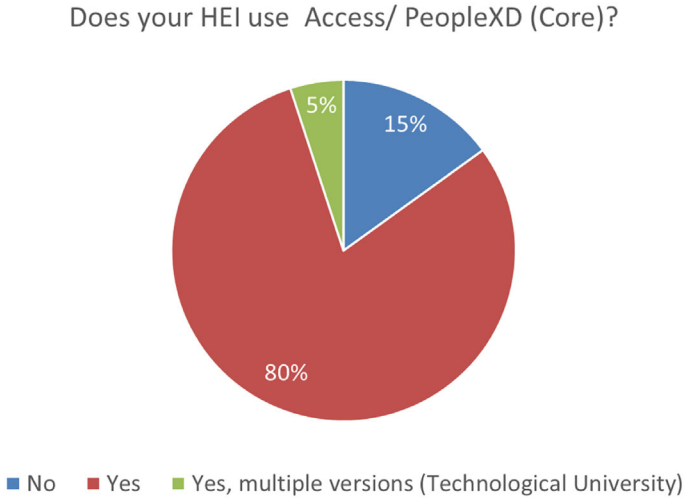


Fig. 10.2 Does your HEI use access/people XD/Core. (*Source* EDI Data Collection Methods in HEIs Survey 2023)

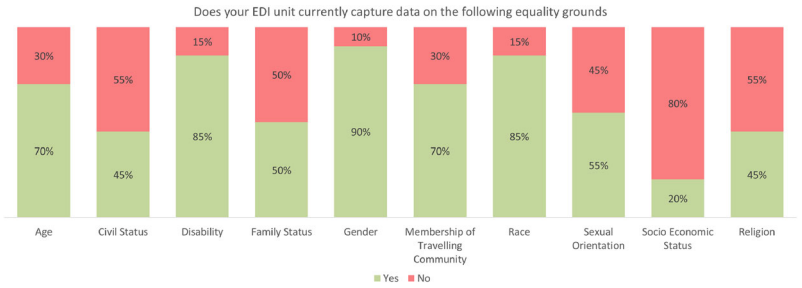


Fig. 10.3 Data captured on equality grounds by HEIs. (*Source* EDI Data Collection Methods in HEIs Survey 2023)

The survey findings also showed that 26% HEIs surveyed have identified and addressed the capacity and capability issues by recruiting Data Analysts. These roles were all created in established universities, whereas none of the new technological universities or institutes of technology or colleges have recruited for Data Analysts to date, perhaps reflecting the earlier engagement of established universities with the charter and the

need to allocate resources to fulfil the data requirements was recognised earlier. (5 established universities obtained an institutional Athena Swan Award in 2016 and it was not until 2018 that the first two Institutes of Technology attained institutional awards.) Fig. 10.4 illustrates that the first Data Analyst positions were recruited in 2019. Yet even for those universities that have recruited Data Analysts still face significant challenges such as system limitations, data accuracy issues, and limited access to national benchmarking data.

While some benchmarking data are currently available to analysts, it is limited, and further improvements are necessary to enable standardised, comprehensive, and accurate data analysis across institutions.

For HEIs that have not yet appointed a Data Analyst with the necessary technical skills, the task of collecting, analysing, and reporting data remains highly challenging. This challenge is set to increase with the expanding requirements for reporting, such as the HEA's mandate to collect ethnicity data from 2022, fulfilling obligations under Human Rights and Equality legislation, and Gender Pay Gap Reporting.

Survey results show that 85% of HEIs support the establishment of a national data collection system encompassing all institutions. One respondent commented

> "A national data collection system will/could work if great care was taken to set it up in a way where HEIs can access exactly what they need and

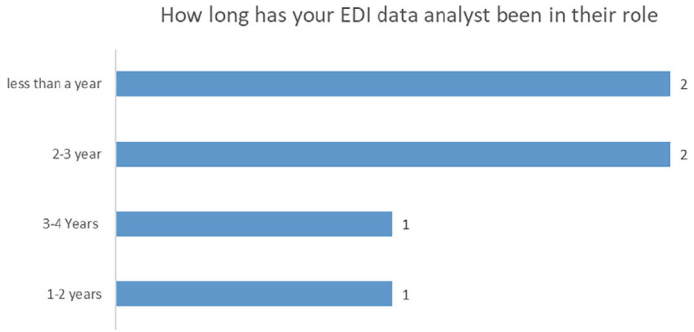


Fig. 10.4 Length of time data analysts have been in post. (*Source* EDI Data Collection Methods in HEIs Survey 2023)

allow for benchmarking against national trends." (Survey respondent X, 2023)

Additionally, 100% of respondents indicated that their EDI units would benefit from enhanced support and guidance from the HEA's Centre of Excellence for EDI in terms of data collection practices.

Respondents were also asked about their views on creating a national network of HEI EDI data practitioners to facilitate the sharing of best practices among peers. Figure 10.5 illustrates that 95% of respondents expressed support for such an initiative.

The survey results provide a current overview of how HEIs are progressing in collecting data on equality and related areas. Despite varying practices and functionality of HR systems, data collection and analysis demonstrate ongoing efforts to advance gender equality. Figure 10.6 illustrates an upward trend in gender-balanced representation on governance and management structures across the sector since mandatory reporting to the HEA on HEI Institutional Profiles by Gender began in 2016. This accountability mechanism shows clear progress.

Notably, in the IoT/TU sector, gender-balanced representation on Executive Management Teams increased from 27% in 2018 to 55% by 2022. In the University sector, there was a significant rise from 0% gender-balanced Executive Management Teams in 2016 to 88% in 2022. Similarly, gender-balanced representation on Academic Councils in the University sector saw marked improvement from 2016 to 2020, following

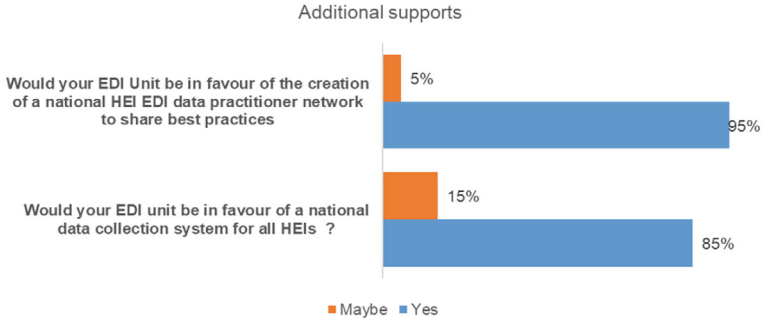


Fig. 10.5 Additional supports. (*Source* EDI Data Collection Methods in HEIs Survey 2023)

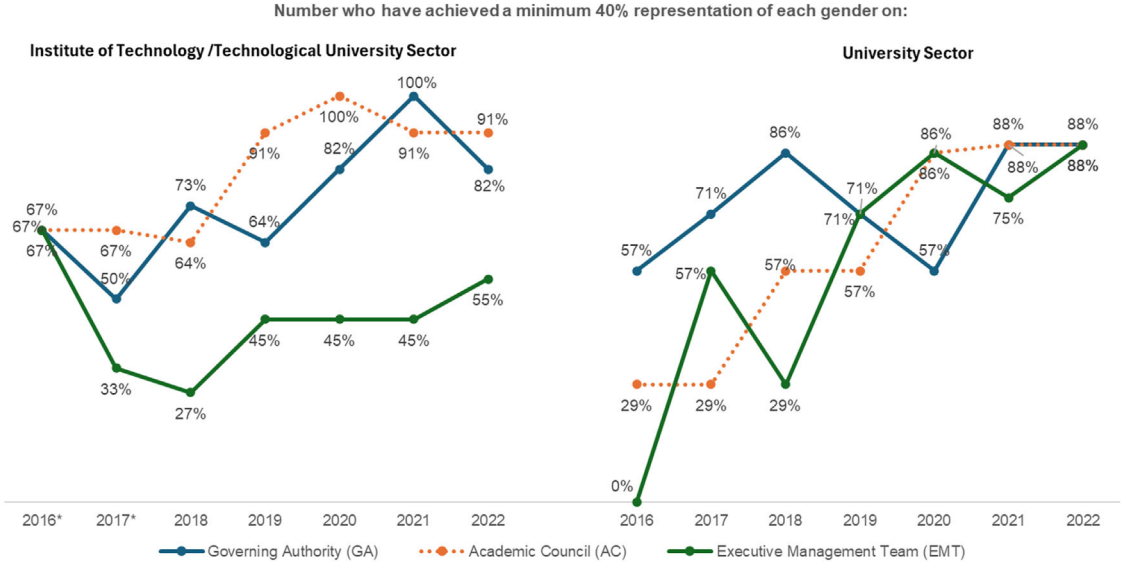


Fig. 10.6 Governance and management structures in universities and IoTs from 2016 to 2022. ***2016, 2017 (in these years only three IoTs submitted data on governance and management structures, which skewed the data during this period with the result that 2018 effectively represents the baseline year) (*Source* Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Sex and Gender

recommendations from the HEA Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) and the adoption of the Athena Swan Charter.

Conclusion—What Next for Data Collection?

In this chapter, we have sought to map out how gender equality has come to the fore in Higher Education over the last 10 years and how inextricably linked the development of EDI data gathering is to the equality work of HEIs. Fears that data collection could become a performative activity in itself have been allayed, notwithstanding the increasing reporting requirements of the HEA. In the three priority policy areas where the collection of data has been used to identify specific problems and barriers (gender equality, ending sexual violence, and race equality), evidence-based interventions have been developed and implemented, and subsequent progress is being tracked. The requirement for data collection in and of itself has given an impetus for and delivered progress.

To advance data collection, revisiting two key recommendations from the Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) is crucial: 1.15 urges all HEIs to adopt comprehensive gender-disaggregated data systems, while 2.2 calls for the HEA to establish a staff database for HEIs. These recommendations connect institutional and sectoral systems, supporting the creation of a sector-wide database. Such a database would offer systemic, usable data for evidence-based policy and practice development to promote gender and other equality characteristics. In collaboration with HEIs, the HEA should initiate the development of an integrated, sector-wide data portal, capturing anonymised individual returns across nine grounds, linking to HR staffing and post details. This approach would eliminate the need for time-consuming ad-hoc report requests, allowing EDI staff to focus on enhancing data capture and analysis.

A sectoral database, containing a full suite of prescribed data fields, would also provide the impetus for remaining HEIs to progress an institutional gender (and other equality characteristics) disaggregated data collection system (Recommendation 1.15).

The authors advocate for a sectoral model broadly guided by HESA principles, enabling users to analyse sector-wide data across all equality grounds. This approach would mandate a structured reporting framework, ensuring consistent policy and practice alignment across HEIs. It aligns with the original Gender Equality Review (HEA, 2016) and the Gender Action Plan (HEA, 2018a), emphasising a systemic approach

to data collection. Implementation of these recommendations offers an opportunity to integrate advanced data practices into a comprehensive staff database for HEIs, potentially reducing inequalities through insightful analysis.

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CHAPTER 11

Transformative Interventions to Supporting Gender Quality in Senior Roles Within Higher Education

Marie Connolly, Elaine Berkery, Caroline Murphy, and Christine Cross

Introduction

The dearth of women in senior roles within higher education has been the focus of debate for some time internationally as well as in the Irish context (MacFarlane, 2010; O'Connor, 2014; Rayner et al., 2010; Watson et al.,

M. Connolly (✉) · E. Berkery · C. Murphy
University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: marie.connolly@ul.ie

E. Berkery
e-mail: elaine.berkery@ul.ie

C. Murphy
e-mail: caroline.murphy@ul.ie

C. Cross
Munster Technological University, Cork, Ireland
e-mail: christine.cross@mtu.ie

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L. McIlrath et al. (eds.), *Transforming Gender Equality and Inclusion Within Higher Education in Ireland*, Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89502-9_11

2016). The reasons for this are complex and multifaceted but include a combination of organisational and social barriers. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) undertook its first National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education institutions in 2016, followed by a second review in 2022, between which an Expert Group and Gender Equality Taskforce action plan (2018) were established, as discussed in Section One of this volume. This chapter outlines and examines a range of institutional and sectoral funded initiatives that were put in place to advance gender equality and support the career advancement of women during this period. The chapter is structured as follows. We begin with a brief overview of the literature on the reasons contributing to the low representation of women in senior roles, this outlines the context that gave rise to the design and execution of the three interventions (Research Grant for Returning Academic Carers (RGRAC), Preparing for Academic Advancement Programme (PAA Programme)) and the Vista Development Programme for mid-career academic and professional women (or those that identify as women). Crucially within this, we acknowledge that these interventions were designed as tools to support women in advancing career progression within the existing system, rather than being actions designed to challenge the structure of the existing processes. We then outline the impact of these interventions through qualitative data with the participants, and the use of tracked quantitative metrics and a qualitative vignette demonstrating how these interventions contributed to increased female success rates at institutional level. The paper concludes with a future research agenda for identifying targeted impactful interventions to those at specific career stages.

Context

Vinkenburg (2017) presents academic career advancement in terms of upward career mobility with fixed career steps, typically for academic posts. In the Irish context this consists of entry level lecturer roles, progression to tenured posts, and promotion to senior lecturer and professorial grades. In 2015, 81% of professorial positions in Irish universities were held by men. Furthermore, while women represented 62% of professional, management, and support (PMS) staff, 72% of the highest paid PMS staff were men (HEA, 2022), demonstrating that career advancement challenges for women within the higher education has not been limited to academic areas, but also to broader administrative and

support roles. The Gender Action Plan endorsed the recommendations of a HEA Expert Group in recommending a number of measures to advance gender equality across the sector, explored in Section One of this volume. They called upon higher education institutions to build on actions already taken to continue to effect culture change in relation to gender equality issues. Among the recommendations was that this should be achieved through resourcing and incentivising appropriate and quality-assured training, and other change initiatives in relation to gender equality. Secondly, it was recommended that appropriate supports and mitigations for the burden of caring on those staff with caring responsibilities be put in place.

The term 'career script' refers to how organisations shape and guide career behaviour by setting formal and informal rules that embody institutional views on career progression (Van Helden et al., 2023; Van Laer et al., 2021). According to Laudel et al. (2019), career scripts entail the collective shared interpretation of successful careers in a profession which then become visible in the conditions set out in promotions systems. In the academic environment, there have been reports of continued marginalisation of women academics, and the culture of academia has been described as less than hospitable to women as they attempt to navigate the various aspects of their positions and environments (Gibson, 2006; Hamrick, 1998). Women frequently viewing themselves as 'outsiders', feel isolated, marginalised, and constrained by the structure and political climate of the institutions they work in, and feel excluded from informal mentoring partnerships (Burke & McKeen, 1997). Furthermore, lack of access to networks is considered a significant barrier to career progression to more senior-level positions.

An organisational factor that hinders women's progression in higher education is the persistence of status differences between men and women in the workplace more broadly (Acker, 2006). Arguably, the norm of an ideal academic career continues to be forged around men (Van Helden, 2023). In addition, women may face challenges in finding female mentors and role models in higher education. This can limit their opportunities to develop the skills and experiences needed to advance to senior positions. Scholars have emphasised the role of work-life balance issues and related life events, such as care responsibilities on academic career advancement, as was brought into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019; Van Helden et al., 2021). Guillaume

and Pochic (2009) demonstrate how structural constraints in organisational cultures emphasise employee availability and geographical mobility. Robinson et al. (2016) highlight the importance of organisational factors such as protected research time, institutional resources (financial, technical, facilities), and support for career development. Therefore, targeted efforts to ensure that women are on an equal footing when going forward for promotional opportunities are crucial.

In relation to Professional, Managerial and Support Staff (PMSS), the 'think manager–think male' (TMTM) association elucidated by Schein (1975) appears to continue to underlie the dearth of women occupying the most senior roles in higher education. This refers to a situation where a bias or stereotype exists where by an individual is more likely to associate a managerial role with a male. A form of vertical segregation (Blackburn et al., 2001) has occurred within what is a female-dominated occupational cohort within higher education, where men are significantly more likely to hold the high-status and better-paid positions, with women concentrated in the lower-level positions. Importantly, the presence of women at senior levels in organisations is expected to facilitate the progression of women at lower levels of the organisation. Kurtuslos and Tomaskovic-Devey (2012) found that an increase in the share of female top managers was associated with subsequent increases in the share of women in midlevel management positions. While attention is often placed on the diversity and representativeness of academic staff, at the same time, Whitchurch (2007) has pointed to the fact that professional staff in universities represent an increasingly diverse grouping of staff, with increasingly important roles as boundaries blur between academic activity and the supports required to deliver that.

De Vries et al. (2006) bi-focal approach to mentoring emphasises the importance of both individual and organisational change through the process. As Dreher and Ash (1990) indicate, individuals with mentors receive more promotions, have greater career mobility and advance at a faster rate than those without mentors. Mentoring is widely acknowledged as a critical step in career progression for both men and women (O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002; Kram, 1985). Research, however, continually suggests that while mentoring relationships are important for men, they are essential for women who face greater organisational, individual, and interpersonal obstacles to career advancement than their male counterparts (Wanberg et al., 2003; Raggins et al., 1998; Burke & McKeen, 1997; Ragins, 1989; Kanter, 1984).

However, there must be recognition that such approaches are associated with a 'fixing the women' approach. Thus, 'the problem is women' appears to shift the responsibility towards programmes and measures aimed at 'fixing the women' and away from the organisation reflecting on a culture that is not generally encouraging to women (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). Crucially, emphasis on fixing the women helps to rationalise why women are not progressing in their careers (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This has been criticised as a 'deficit model' approach which focuses on why women are not successfully reaching leadership roles, rather than accepting that is the organisational culture of higher education which needs fixing rather than women (Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010).

We now move to discuss the three interventions designed to support women in pursuing career progression within the Irish higher education system. The programme aimed at female academics will be examined in detail in this chapter, and also at the end of this chapter, a review of a programme targeted at professional, managerial, and support staff is included.

Critical Interventions: Design and Implementation

Returning Carers Grant

A Research Grant for Returning Academic Carers (RGRAC) was introduced at the University of Limerick in 2015 to help academic staff re-establish their independent research careers on returning from extended carers leave (20 weeks or more). This was in recognition of the negative impact such leave can have on career interruption. The aim of this support is to address the leaky pipeline for female academics, which is evident at both the Lecturer (L) to Senior Lecturer (SL), and SL to Associate Professor (AP) levels within the institution. However, it is important to note that while the grant is available to all carers in the institution; to date only females have applied for the grant, primarily on return from maternity leave. Each grant is worth €21,000. To date, 73 grants have been awarded at a cost of over €1.5 million to the institution.

Between 2018 and 2021(institutional data prior to 2018 is unavailable), there were 45 female recipients (5 of which were in receipt of the grant more than once) of RGRAC (this number is calculated on the number of grants that awarded between 2018 and 2021). The bar

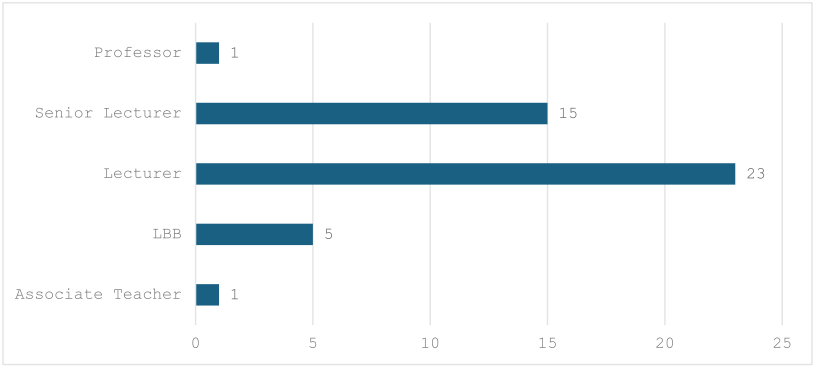


Fig. 11.1 Level of recipient at the time of availing of RGRAC (*Source* Internal UL EDI Data)

chart shows the grade of recipient before availing of RGRAC during this timeframe (Fig 11.1).

63% of recipients have been successful at promotion either through the promotion progression process or changed roles internally to move up the academic ladder, 5% of recipients had secured promotion before receiving the grant, and 2% of recipients were at professorial level and were not eligible for promotion. These figures are outlined in Fig. 11.2.

32% of recipients have not shown promotion activity since availing of RGRAC and were still working in the institution in May 2023, 7 Ls, 4 SLs, and 2 LLBs. 4 of these 13 submitted promotions applications, 3 in 2023 but were unsuccessful. Of the individuals who have no record of promotion, 3 individuals availed of the grant again after 2021. However, it is important to note that this data coincides with a promotion pause in 2020 and the pandemic which caused a shift in people's workloads and priorities. 50% of individuals have not recorded any activity since the receipt of RCRAG are academics from a medical background, and therefore may have had to reprioritise their workloads during COVID. This is an area that needs further exploration in the wider context of COVID impact on careers and perhaps too early to demonstrate impact?

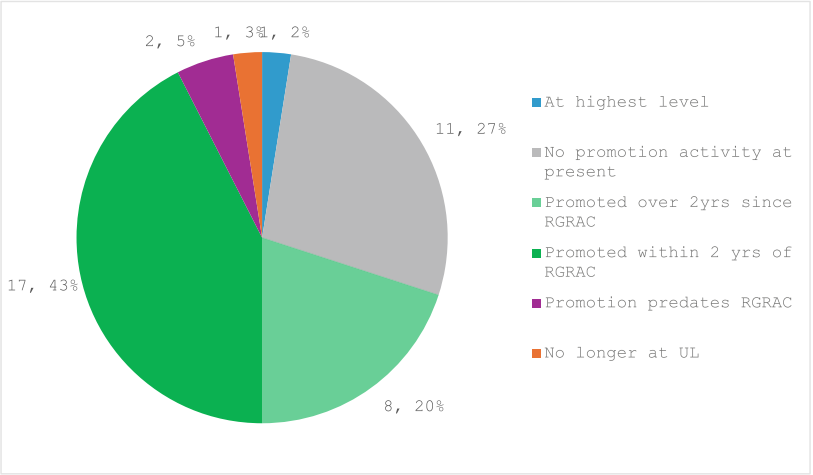


Fig. 11.2 Promotion summary of RGRAC recipients 2018–2021 (*Source* Internal Institutional EDI Data)

Preparing for Academic Advancement Programme

Funding was provided through the HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Fund 2020 to design, deliver and evaluate a cross-institutional targeted career advancement pilot programme to drive change using positive action interventions for female academic staff. For the pilot programme, females currently at SL level were invited to apply for the programme with the aim of supporting their advancement to AP/Professor level. A total of 24 participants took part on the pilot programme. Following the rollout of the pilot PAA programme further funding was secured through the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund 2021 to roll out a further three programmes. An additional 24 participants enrolled in the PAA programme in 2022, with the latest call for applications for the latest PAA programme taking place in June 2023. The programme comprises of six bespoke workshops, one 1-hour one-to-one coaching session, and a year-long cross-institutional mentoring programme with a senior mentor at Full Professor level from outside of the participant's institution.

A key aspect of the PAA has been to track the impact of the programme on the success rate of participants applying for promotion to AP and Prof A levels (these titles vary across institutions but typically refer to different

levels of professor grade). Participants to the programme in their application for acceptance were required to commit to submitting a promotional application within 2 years, or to the next application round within their parent institution. To date 48 SLs in total from seven institutions have engaged in PAA programmes. Cohort 1 commenced in July 2021 and cohort 2 commenced in July 2022. 68.42% of participants from cohort 1 and 71.43% of participants from cohort 2 indicated that they were highly prepared to apply for promotion upon completion of the programme. 50% of cohort 1 had applied for promotion within 2 years, of which 75% were successful in their application. Of those that had not applied for promotion 75% intended on doing so within the next 12 months or when the next promotion call was announced. It is also important to note that within one of the participating institutions there has been no call for promotions since the completion of the programme. 26.3% of participants from cohort 2 had applied for promotion within 1 year. Of those that had not applied for promotion, 91.67% intended on applying within the next 12 months, or at the next available time. 66.6% of respondents from cohort 1 and 72.73% of respondents from cohort 2 felt that the PAA programme had significantly/very significantly prepared them for submitting a portfolio.

Impact of the PAA

Upon completion of the programme, 78.95% of cohort 1 and 100% of cohort 2 rated the programme as highly relevant to where the participants were at in their career. Feedback from participants also highlights that the programme has had a positive influence on participants opinion of their own readiness for promotion and afforded them time to reflect on their career progress to date.

> I am currently in the throes of preparing my promotion application and feel very well supported and informed through this programme as well as through the mentoring I'm receiving. (2021 PAA participant)
> In my institution there were 15 promotions to Professor B. of those 11 were men, and 4 were women. Of those 4 women, three of us had done this program. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind or in the other two women who were promoted, that during this program was absolutely crucial in our promotions. (2021 PAA participant)

In preparing participants for the submission of a promotion application, applicants were given the opportunity to reflect on the promotion criteria in their individual institution. 94.74% of cohort 1 and 89.92% of cohort 2 rated the workshop on evidencing achievements against promotional criteria as very good/excellent.

> As a result of this programme I have decided to apply for promotion in the next round, which prior to this programme, I was incredibly unsure of submitting an application. (2021 PAA participant)
> I also felt that the evidencing the criteria workshop was incredibly helpful. (2022 PAA participant)

Affording participants this opportunity to reflect on the promotion criteria was hugely beneficial.

> I really found useful the session on how a Senior Lectureship application really differs from a professorial application, and the need to document and highlight how you led and made a difference. (2021 PAA participant)
> The specific aspects that spoke to (what I thought) the intended learning outcomes were excellent, i.e the aspects of the workshop that focussed on the promotions criteria, on how to go about meeting them, how to word application etc. (2022 PAA participant)

The opportunity to network with other female academics in similar positions was another hugely beneficial aspect of the programme. This allowed participants the opportunity engage in peer-supported reflection and to showcase their achievements to date.

> I got fantastic insights into how I and others perceive my achievements. (2021 PAA participant)
> This was a wonderful way to connect with like-minded people at a similar career stage and to prepare us for our future career path. (2021 PAA participant)
> The interaction with other participants and also the mentoring sessions were great. (2022 PAA participant)
> I met super fellow female academics and made new connections within and beyond UL. (2022 PAA participant)

Allowing participants a dedicated time and space to engage in the programme gave participants an opportunity to: reflect on the promotions

process, their achievements to date, and the criteria that need to be documented in their promotions application, that they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to do. This was achieved in a workshop titled 'Masterclass on Evidencing achievement against promotional criteria for academic success'. The aim of the masterclass was to facilitate individuals in any discipline to develop their skills to present evidence of the 'best version' of their achievements against criteria applicable to Associate Professor/Professor grades. 95% of participants from cohort 1 and 92.9% of participants from cohort 2 rated this masterclass as very good/excellent.

> I cannot stress enough how just ensuring I made the time in my calendar to focus on this part of my career development was excellent. (2021 PAA participant)
> I have found this programme really fantastic and would highly recommend it to a colleague. I have liked a wide variety of the approaches and content, in particular the interaction with like-minded peers, the time to reflect and connect to my future aspirations. (2021 PAA participant)
> The entire programme, the content, and just creating this space to think and discuss career plans, evaluate what is important for me, and examining 'the why' was incredibly empowering and motivating. (2022 PAA participant)
> The final session on criteria was so useful—and really took us to a space of practical inflection. (2022 PAA participant)

Overall, participants found the programme to be very supportive, while also challenging participants to reflect on their careers to date and future trajectories in a way that they may not have previously done. This was achieved through a workshop titled 'Realising the Vision of my Career Workshop' and individual coaching sessions. The aim of the workshop was to support participants in crystallising their career ambitions, expanding participants' possibility thinking and supporting the realising of a career vision that includes and enables advancement to Professorial levels. 79% of participants in cohort 1 and 100% of cohort 2 rated this workshop on career vision as very good/excellent. The coaching session allowed participants to reflect on their careers to date, outline future plans and goals, in a supportive environment, that challenged participants assumptions and beliefs around their career trajectory.

> It was a great experience and definitely really useful in building confidence and recognition of own achievements as well as skills in how to present them in a promotion application. (2021 PAA participant)
> The programme gave me an important space and a lot of different perspectives from which to consider my professional advancement. (2021 PAA participant)
> The personal coaching session particularly effective. (2022 PAA participant)
> I found the coaching session enlightening. It pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me to stand-up and acknowledge my achievements and to stop downplaying them to myself and others. (2022 PAA participant)

Mentoring

A unique aspect of the PAA programme was the provision of cross-institutional mentoring, providing one to one advice specifically on portfolio development. Participants were matched with mentors outside of their own institution. During the pilot programme, the partner institutions provided a panel of mentors (male and female) at AP/Professor level. The mentor panel was extended to all Universities with participants on the programme. To date, 47 professors (21 men and 26 women) have provided mentorship to help participants prepare a successful portfolio to AP/Prof A levels. Prior to meeting with mentors, both mentors and mentees attended a masterclass titled 'Getting the most from our mentoring'. 52.7% of participants from cohort 1 and 92.9% of participants from cohort 2 rated the masterclass as very good/excellent.

> I felt uplifted by the coaching and hugely supported by my dedicated mentor who reviewed by application (twice!) in minute detail and is now a trusted colleague. (2021 PAA participant)
> Interactive and informative, mentors spoke with authority and experience. (2022 PAA participant)
> The mentor training workshop was invaluable, and it provided the necessary confidence in us mentors in terms of knowing how to proceed and in particular how much the experience was to be driven by the mentee. (Mentor 2021).

Thus far 47 mentors have engaged in mentoring partnerships. 81% of mentors felt that mentoring candidates from outside their institution was a positive experience, with 79% of mentors reporting that they themselves

had derived positive benefits from the mentoring relationship. It is also encouraging to report that in 47% of cases, the mentor and mentee had met between 4–6 times in the past 12 months, with a further 9% meeting more than 6 times in the past 12 months, indicating the establishment of an ongoing relationship in 56% of the mentorships established through the programme. There was also strong evidence of guidance through the portfolio preparation process for promotion with 71% of mentors providing feedback on a portfolio draft to mentees, and 79% of mentors had developed an action plan for the next 12 months with their mentees.

When asked about their personal motivation to act as a mentor on the PAA programme the respondents referred to the desire to give back, the willingness to help others, having received mentorship themselves in the past and an acknowledgement of the difficulties women face in academia were the most frequently cited reasons for partaking in the mentorship programme:

> I am determined to support colleagues to reach their full potential and if I can help them along the way—this is very important to and for me. (Mentor 2022)
> I love to mentor young female academics. I benefited from ad hoc mentoring myself and I particularly enjoy being a mentor in the past. (Mentor 2022)
> Was recently promoted myself and felt it was an opportunity to give something back, acknowledging all the difficulties that still exist for women in HEI. (Mentor 2021)

In terms of the benefits of the mentoring relationship to mentors, mentors felt as their mentees were from other HEIs in Ireland they gained a good insight into internal promotion processes in other institutions, the opportunity to work closely with individuals from other disciplines, and to engage in new networks and networks outside of their institution.

> Positive engagement; insight to a separate institution; cross-disciplinary perspective; thoughtful conversations. (Mentor 2022)
> Sharing experiences and understanding better the issues faced by more junior Colleagues in promotion processes. Building a sense of collegiality with colleagues in other institutions. (Mentor 2022)
> To visibly see the mentoring relationship have a positive effect; my mentee was in a different discipline, and I learned much about her discipline'

> 'Positive engagement; insight to a separate institution; cross-disciplinary perspective; thoughtful conversations. (2021 Mentor)
> To visibly see the mentoring relationship have a positive effect; my mentee was in a different discipline, and I learned much about her discipline. (Mentor 2022)

Impact of These Interventions

Both the RGRAC and PAA were introduced to address the leaky pipeline for female academics, at both L to SL and SL to AP levels, both of which have yielded significant returns in terms of promotion success. In addition, these programmes generated broader outcomes for the institutions such as allowing females to re-establish their research pipeline following an extended period of carers leave, allowing recipients the opportunity to anew their research trajectories. Feedback from the PAA programme has shown the benefits to participants by affording them the time and space to reflect on both their career to date and their future plans, increasing participants' confidence and allowing them the time to recognise their achievements to date. It also afforded participants the opportunity to share experiences and create a support network which will yield benefits long after the promotion process. The mentorship programme also proved to be hugely beneficial for both mentors and mentees. Mentors highlighted their desire to give back to female academics, acknowledging the obstacles often faced by women when applying for promotion, and welcomed the opportunity to meet and work with individuals outside of their discipline and institution. Mentees acknowledged the support and confidence they gained from the mentoring relationship.

Conclusion and Future Research Agenda

The second report of the Expert Group on Gender Equality (2022) identified two issues that have emerged as key to the advancement of gender equality in higher education, namely, the need to take an intersectional approach when addressing gender inequality, and the impact of precarious employment on career development. Broadbent and Strachan's (2016) study found negative effects of fixed-term contracts on several career development outcomes, including on publications and development of collaborations. While the impact of these factors is most prevalent among junior faculty, there is a lack of research on the impact of careers in the

longer term, that being the scarring effect of precarious work on academic career progression, particularly for female academics who may find precarious employment, followed by career interruptions due to pregnancy and caring. A study focusing on career interruptions or delays at the junior level and how these elements correlate with later career progression would be interesting from a cumulative inequality perspective, reflecting the intersectional differences that persist from early to senior career levels. In relation to intersectionality, much has been written about this issue within this book, see for example Chapter 13 and Chapter 15. One aspect which we argue is worthy of further investigation is the participation of those with intersectional needs on development programmes. While data on the representation of minority groups at various levels are known, ensuring that training and development programmes aimed at career development and leadership are as inclusive as possible is a pre-requisite to advancing representation at senior levels. Carnes et al. (2017) suggest that awarding endowed chairs to female academics could be a useful strategy in advancing their status and leadership in particular disciplines. Bates et al. (2021) make the point that academia remains overwhelmingly white, relative to the diversity of students and wider populations, and therefore there is a need to be more intentional in seeking out and developing black and racialised academic staff. We argue that this is particularly true in relation to participation in initiatives supporting career development to ensure that these programmes and opportunities take account of intersectionality.

The progress made in relation to gender equality through a range of initiatives such as those discussed in this chapter has been notable. However, while such initiatives have a proven value, their deployment could be regarded as piecemeal at best owing to a reliance on ad hoc, sporadic or extremely specialised sources of funding. A critical question of EDI initiatives impact is the extent to which they address systemic issues? To fully do that we argue this there is a need to embed initiatives of this nature within institutions' core budgets such that they become sustainable in the long term and can have systemic impact. As Clark (2011) highlights changes in the state of the economy that can negatively impact funding can leave EDI initiatives at risk of cuts in funding sources, arguably this could derail progress towards gender quality and wider EDI within higher education. Greater comparative research is needed to identify examples of funding mechanisms that have been put in place that systematically underpin equality initiatives, allowing others to learn from such best practice examples, if and where they exist.

Finally, the issue of whether gender equality, or equality more generally, can ever be fully achieved within higher education remains an ongoing question. We hold the view, as is a theme of this book, that equality is an ever-evolving goal. With that in mind we argue that complacency is a threat to progress and therefore institutions need to continually invest time and resources in understanding how equality may become undermined within their institution, and in helping all constituents to thrive within a meritocratic culture. The factors that shape the broader culture of the organisations should be considered as to recognise what forces are driving individuals to act in certain ways. For example, Foucault (1988, p. 18) refers to 'technologies of the self' as practices relating to 'training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes'. The ways in which institutions inculcate particular norms of behaviour require critical examination in a pragmatic manner such that the goals of the institution can be achieved while not restricting any individuals' potential to succeed in their career.

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CHAPTER 12

'VISTA Sistas': The Personal and Sectoral Transformative Powers of VISTA: A Mid-Career Self-Development Programme for Women in Higher Education

Bernadette Brereton, Karen Dunne, and Joanne Mulligan

In higher education, for many women at mid-career stage, the *systemic issues of inequality* which have impacted on their careers are often compounded by the *challenges* of having spent some time out of the workplace through maternity, parental, and/or caring responsibilities (Brown, 2015; Danhauer et al., 2019). This can mean that many women at mid-career are struggling to find their career identity and may find themselves pigeon-holed into restrictive roles and self-identities. They

B. Brereton (✉) · K. Dunne
Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dundalk, Ireland

K. Dunne
e-mail: karen.dunne@dkit.ie

J. Mulligan
Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: joanne.mulligan@dcu.ie

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would greatly benefit from the opportunity to engage in 'mid-career identity development and career re-framing' (HEA, 2020). This programme aimed to redress these systemic inequalities, often compounded by the challenges of having spent some time out of the workplace.

Initially developed by a programme team in DkIT, as well as the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Units of Dublin City University (DCU) and the University of Galway and funded by the HEA under the Gender Equality Education (GEE) funding stream, this Mid-Career Development Programme provided a modular, supported programme (delivered inter-institutionally) to foster self-development and networking skills, as well as the development of detailed career development plans for the participants, with specific objectives and agreed timeframes. The programme provided participants with a unique opportunity for personal growth and development, supported by a senior sponsor from within their institution. There were also opportunities to develop a powerful peer network within and across the participating institutions, opening up new perspectives of benefit to participants and institutions.[1]

The target audience comprised women (or those who identified as women) in HE, with at least 15 years of experience in professional, support, technical, and academic roles. The pilot programme included 10 staff from each of the three higher level institutions, namely, Dublin City University (DCU), Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), and University of Galway (UG). The official roll-out of the programme, which also consisted of 30 participants, was widened to include three additional HE institutions—Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), University College, Cork (UCC), and University of Limerick (UL).

The programme comprised an introductory half-day session, with three core workshops, each involving some preparation and post-workshop reflection. In consultation with the programme team, these workshops were devised by two separate consulting agencies who were successful in the tender process; 'Mojo For Leaders' and 'Carbon Coaching'. This collaboration with specialists external to the institutions (and indeed higher education) was a crucial element of deepening the impact of the

[1] Dedication—We dedicate this paper to all the 'VISTA Sistas' who planned, delivered, and/or participated in VISTA programme and made it such a transformative experience for all. We are particularly indebted to pilot participant Suzanne Cullen-Smith, (DkIT) who created the 'VISTA Sistas' title when creating the social media groups and allowed us to use the term.

workshops. A customised online hub was available to the participants in which learning materials, reflection exercises and further developmental reading were available to all.

During the workshops, participants worked collaboratively to prime themselves for success, develop personal and professional skills, and move from vision to action for positive career development. The programme also incorporated appropriate sponsorship to support these participants in their empowering journey. In addition, all participants chose a skip-level sponsor within their institution, and detailed guidelines were provided to both participants and sponsors to support these interactions. Three one-day modules were delivered in a blended method, while face-to-face networking events included a high degree of interactivity, allowing for much reflection and self-reflection, engagement, and network building, in addition to many opportunities for ongoing collaboration.

Each participant was sponsored through the programme by a 'skip level' manager (i.e. their Line Manager's Manager). Specific objectives and stretch goals were committed to by each participant in consultation with their sponsor. Guidelines were provided to participants and sponsors to ensure objectives were appropriately challenging and measurable. The relationship with the sponsor was a crucial support for the participants, as it allowed them to reflect and set challenging objectives to ensure they achieved maximum benefit. This relationship between participant and sponsor spanned a 9-month period so that meaningful progress could be achieved. In addition to meeting with their sponsors, the participants also completed a Personal Development Plan (PDP) in advance. The aim of the Personal Development Planning was to support the participant in turning their learning into action. This included identifying one stretch goal to undertake during the three-month duration of the programme and two further stretch goals to undertake during the six months after completion. The PDP process also encouraged reflection and the development of a Career Design Journal.

The online hub and toolkit of resources were an essential means of supporting formal module content and self-reflection. Participants wrote personal reflections after each module and were also surveyed immediately before and after the programme to ensure specific impact was measured. The pilot programme ran from January to April 2022, while the first full roll-out of the programme took place from September to December 2022.

To measure and showcase the impact of the programme, data were gathered by means of pre—and post-participation reflections, which were personally anonymous but specific to each institution. These were thematically analysed with reported levels of engagement and success examined. Themes included: Autonomy, Career Development, Learning and Development, Network, Organisational Support, and Self-Insight. There was an improvement across all themes after participating in the programme (both in the pilot and full programme data—(see table 12.1)).

This feedback showed a focus on the development of 'career identity', as well as enhanced self-awareness and supportive networking, including face-to-face meetings and an online collaboration space (two social media platforms: a WhatsApp group for attendees and facilitators to stay connected, and a VISTA group on Teams at DkIT)—the 'VISTA Sistas'.[2]

More details of these positive outcomes include the opportunity which the programme provided for reflection:

> The main benefit of the programme was allowing the time and space to consider my own goals, strengths, weaknesses, etc. This was particularly valuable in the company of women who were at a similar phase in life/career.

The programme also incorporated networking opportunities, which participants found highly positive, reflecting that the opportunity to meet with female colleagues across different universities to speak to them about their experiences was very valuable:

[2] According to pilot participant 1, the title 'VISTA Sistas' was 'devised to capture the idea of sisterhood'. Social media platforms were set up with 'a hope for continued engagement, networking, support, encouragement, camaraderie, and connection between the members of the VISTA programme. Connections between women are often formed based on emotional support and validation and these were effectively woven into the format of the VISTA workshops'. Although the interactions were initially numerous, these tailed off with the progress of time. However, there continue to be positive on-going effects, such as 'spontaneous invitations to meet in person, conversations about cross-disciplinary project collaborations, committee co-membership, and invitations for student supervision or examination'. Looking to the future with increased numbers of VISTA participants, it is hoped that 'the availability of opportunities to re-engage with the 'VISTA Sistas' may have a role to play in supporting women in academia to get what they need from the VISTA programme: whether the encouragement and confidence to forge ahead on their own path with their existing networks or to dip in and out of the network to give and receive encouragement and support as needed, ultimately meeting the VISTA goal of empowering women to be able to do what we need to do'.

Table 12.1 Impact of programme on participants

% change per statement: "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"

	Pilot phase			Full roll out		
Statement scores	**At outset**	**At end**	**Change**	**At outset**	**At end**	**Change**
Theme: autonomy						
I have or can create opportunities to use my key strengths at work	87%	93%	**+ 6%**	83%	100%	**+ 17%**
I have or can create opportunities to do the work that gives me most satisfaction	60%	86%	**+ 26%**	61%	78%	**+ 17%**
I can shape my work so that I am making a difference in the world that I want to make	57%	76%	**+ 19%**	57%	78%	**+ 22%**
Theme—Career						
I know what areas of my career I am keen to develop further, and I have a plan for doing that	53%	93%	**+ 40%**	26%	83%	**+ 57%**
I have short-term and medium-term goals for developing my career	47%	83%	**+ 36%**	17%	78%	**+ 61%**
Theme—Learning and Development						
I regularly set stretch objectives for myself	50%	66%	**+ 16%**	30%	61%	**+ 30%**
When I try something and succeed: That's fantastic; When I try something and it doesn't work out: That's learning	83%	97%	**+ 13%**	74%	87%	**+ 13%**
I confidently ask for and act on advice and feedback from people whose opinions I trust	73%	83%	**+ 9%**	61%	87%	**+ 26%**
Theme—Network						
I have a trusted network of people across the institution I work in who provide support and different perspectives	63%	76%	**+ 13%**	48%	57%	**+ 9%**

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

% change per statement: "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"						
I have a network of people from other third-level institutions who provide support and different perspectives	27%	45%	**+ 18%**	26%	43%	**+ 17%**
I seek out multiple perspectives and consider the needs of all stakeholders, including myself, when making decisions	70%	86%	**+ 16%**	52%	87%	**+ 35%**
Theme—Organisational Support						
My institution supports my personal development	43%	69%	**+ 26%**	52%	65%	**+ 13%**
My career development is supported by my organisation	43%	69%	**+ 26%**	30%	61%	**+ 30%**
Theme—Self-Insight						
I know what my key strengths are	77%	100%	**+ 23%**	74%	100%	**+ 26%**
I understand my personality traits and preferences	67%	100%	**+ 33%**	52%	100%	**+ 48%**
I understand how my personality traits and preferences may interact with others' traits and preferences	53%	100%	**+ 47%**	52%	100%	**+ 48%**
I have a clear intention around the unique difference I want to make through my work	50%	76%	**+ 26%**	48%	74%	**+ 26%**
I recognise and raise awareness of unconscious bias in myself and others	50%	72%	**+ 22%**	52%	74%	**+ 22%**
I manage my energy and resilience	53%	86%	**+ 33%**	39%	61%	**+ 22%**

> I had always detested networking as a negative, contrived activity but now I realise that it can be very beneficial and beyond that, it is an essential part of progressing—recognition and exposure are things I rarely thought about before.

Another key outcome of the programme related to self-recognition, recognising strengths and values:

> It was wonderful—really energising—and demystified a lot of the barriers that I was facing, giving me tools to recognise myself and identify the areas that I need to focus more on.

The feedback gathered showed a sense of empowerment, with participants stating that working with others in sessions boosted confidence and supported participants' honesty and openness in their contributions:

> This programme allowed people to have a voice and to gain support and encouragement from the participants which has certainly helped me to re-evaluate my career but also to give myself a pat on the back for what I have achieved so far.

The participants also reported the importance of the access to the sponsor—participants welcomed the opportunity to have access to senior members of the institutions via the sponsorship element.

In summary, the key reported outcomes of the programme for participants relate to Autonomy; Career; Learning and Development; Network; Organisational Support; and Self-Insight.

Institutional impacts included accessing untapped potential by providing a 'breakthrough' experience for staff at mid-career stage; creating new role models for cultural change; and providing access to senior figures, via the sponsorship element of the programme, hence improving vertical integration and networking. Sectoral benefits included greater collaboration between institutions; instigating a cultural shift through creating a network of positive voices and influencers, and the sharing of best practice.

A participant of the pilot roll-out of the programme highlighted the positive effects which the programme effected for her personally:

> The VISTA programme was a transformative professional and personal development experience. With the guidance of the facilitators and encouragement of colleagues on the programme, I found the safe space to identify my personal mission for the next stage of my career and life. It has given me the courage to finally embark on a PhD after years of wondering if I could or should. There are not enough ways to say 'go raibh maith agaibh' (thank you).

Another participant from the full roll-out commented on the benefits of the camaraderie and cordiality of the group:

> I participated in the VISTA programme to evaluate where I am currently at in my career path and where I'd like to get to. What I realised is that I really love my current role and want my future path to stay on this track. I came to that conclusion and learned a lot about myself in the process thanks to VISTA's holistic and heuristic facilitators and the generosity of other participants in sharing their stories and listening to mine. I strongly recommend VISTA to other women.

Constructive feedback regarding some gaps and confusions needing refinement also proved crucial in building the programme. These centred on:

1. Confusion around stretch goals: participants should develop their stretch goals together.
2. Online versus in-person sessions: full-day online sessions require high amounts of energy to remain focused, in contrast to the ease of sociable interactions which characterise the in-person sessions.
3. Too much covered in a short period**:** avoid information overload with a more structured delivery.
4. Timing of sessions: the semesterised timeline of the programme was intense and should be scheduled further apart.
5. More tailored content: real-world examples and case studies from the higher education sector would help deepen engagement with the learning points.

> On reflection, the benefits of the programme are multi-faceted. The programme team collaborated very well and modules were delivered with warmth by the facilitators.[3] It was hugely rewarding to work with amazing

[3] In reflecting on their experiences, the facilitators praised 'the enthusiasm, collaborative spirit and solid intention to make a meaningful difference to the careers and lives of women by everyone involved in the design, administration and delivery of the programme'. They were also hugely impressed by the 'sincerity, courage, openness to learn, level of commitment, emotional intelligence and power' of all the participants. In describing their most special moments, they recounted the powerful impact of hearing two participants from the pilot phase speak from the heart about the huge, positive difference the programme had made to them. They also spoke of the inspiration for collective empowerment contained in the participant-generated acronym ('Vision Inspiring Sisters to Action'): 'this was a real-life example of women collaborating to contribute something meaningful to the collective...it was a privilege to be involved, both in collaboration with the team and other coaches and with the unstoppable women involved'.

women in higher education who shared their experiences and built their skills and confidence to contribute to a more equal and empowering higher education sector in the future.

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CHAPTER 13

Change and Continuity: Embedding EDI from a Social Justice Perspective

Elizabeth Dawson, Fiona McGuill, and Michael Sherman

History and Context

Carlow College, St. Patrick's functioned as both a seminary and lay College from its establishment in 1782, exclusively as a seminary from 1892, and since 1989 it has operated solely as a lay college for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Founded in the wake of the relaxation of the penal laws, which suppressed the education of Catholics in Ireland, the College founders sought to address this disparity (Fleming, 2017). Social justice, particularly in the context of education, has therefore been a central tenant of the College's ethos from its inception. This commitment to educational equality carried into the nineteenth century and is best

E. Dawson (✉) · F. McGuill · M. Sherman
Carlow College, Carlow, Ireland
e-mail: edawson@carlowcollege.ie

F. McGuill
e-mail: presoffice@carlowcollege.ie

M. Sherman
e-mail: msherman@carlowcollege.ie

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observed in the activism of some of the College's notable lecturers and alumni who brought the values of education-for-all to their work at home and overseas. More generally, seminarian training required students to work with those marginalised and on the periphery of society, in schools, hospitals, and community settings.

The pillars on which the College was founded, whilst particular to their time, have remained central to its ethos. More recently developments in EDI at an institutional, educational, and social level have coalesced and led to a rearticulation of these social justice values. Whilst engaging with the formalisation of EDI at a statutory level and within the third-level landscape, the advancement of social justice initiatives within the College has been heavily influenced and informed by curriculum design and implementation. The direction and nature of change in the College has, therefore, been shaped by the work and activities of staff and the student body. Crucially, the bottom-up embedding of EDI in College life and the curriculum has led to a focused reassertion of the College's founding ethos, and a prioritisation of social justice as part of the identity and functioning of the modern institution. This is reflected in its most recent Ethos Statement (2016), which begins:

> Carlow College, St. Patrick's strives to be a place of active citizenship, a site of engaged critical thought, and a forward looking and responsive learning community for the twenty-first century and beyond. To this end, one of our principal aspirations is to foster a sense of civic responsibility amongst our students. We pursue this aim through educational programmes directed towards social understanding and transformation, the participation of our learners in the decision-making structures and processes of the college, and through lively debate on college and societal issues (Carlow College, 2016).

Social Justice and EDI at Curriculum Level

Several programmes developed in the College in recent years have significantly impacted pedagogical practices and methods and led to the hiring of staff with expertise in student-based learning through community-based projects. Indeed, many of the faculty who teach on the academic programmes and modules which relate to social justice are human rights activists. Crucially, the implementation of these programmes has led to an embedding of social justice initiatives within the College community

more broadly. In 1996, the College delivered a *Youth and Community Studies* degree as part of a University College Cork outreach programme. Building on its success and that of other related programmes, in 2009, the College introduced a BA (Hons) in *Citizenship and Community Studies,* which was subsequently revalidated in 2018 as the BA (Hons) in *Social, Political and Community Studies* (SPCS). This programme is designed for students who have a particular interest in social and political issues, with an emphasis on the field of social justice at both local and national levels. In particular, the degree supports students who wish to deepen their knowledge of social and political issues, international development, and peace and conflict studies.

The programme is designed to enable students develop knowledge, skills, and competencies relevant to community and non-profit work, see Table 13.1 for full outline.

It introduces students to key sociological and political theories to provide a conceptual foundation for the analysis of contemporary society and community. Specifically, the social strand of the programme develops learner appreciation of the nature of sociological enquiry and integrates learning in relation to equality, diversity, cultural awareness, and activism. The political component focuses on examining citizenship, community engagement and social activism emphasising the political nature of community action, social capital, relationships, and networks. It also addresses the structural and conflict-related factors that contribute to exclusion and inequality, exploring the political foundations of civic engagement, participatory, and deliberative democracy. An essential element of the programme is experience working in a community setting, and this has led to a range of collaborative partnership projects and initiatives with organisations and programme stakeholders. For instance, students have worked with County Development Partnerships, Focus Ireland, Men's Sheds, Rohingya Action Ireland, and a range of homeless services and youth organisations.

Since its implementation, the programme has influenced the development of other modules which are offered to the wider student body including those on the SPCS, Arts and Humanities, and Applied Social Studies programmes. For instance, since 2022, a new trans-disciplinary module, *Theology of Social Justice and Applied Ethics*, has been offered. This module examines social justice through the lens of theology, philosophy, and community studies, delving into liberation theology, ecofeminism, and their intersections with geo-political and environmental

Table 13.1 Carlow College SPCS programme design

Year 1 (all mandatory modules)	
Semester 1	*Semester 2*
• Communication & People Skills • General Ethics: Guiding Rules • Introduction to Academic & Digital Skills • Community Concepts • Introduction to Political Ideology • Introduction to Sociology	• Citizenship & Civil Society • General Ethics: The Good Life • Group Dynamics & Facilitation • Approaches to Working with Communities • Irish Government & Politics • Sociology & Contemporary Society
Year 2 (all mandatory modules)	
• Community Arts: Theory & Practice (year-long) • Equality & Diversity • Introduction to Advocacy • Introduction to Economic & Social Analysis • Community Psychology	• Community Arts: Theory & Practice (year-long) • Advocacy Skills in Practice • Social Psychology • Human Rights: A Philosophical Approach • Irish Social Policy • Legal Studies
Year 3 (mandatory modules in semester 1 with the option to choose electives in semester 2)	
• International Development: From Colonialism to Development • Media & Communications 1 • Research Methods • International Peace & Conflict Studies • Political Philosophy & Secular Belief Systems • Leadership & Management: Theory & Practice	• Internship (Mandatory) • Political Philosophy: From Enlightenment to Communitarianism (Mandatory) • International Legal Studies • Youth & Community Studies • Community Health & Well-being • Media & Communications 2 • Theology of Social Justice and Applied Ethics
Year 4 (mandatory modules in semester 1 with the option to choose electives in semester 2)	
• Dissertation & Seminar (year-long) • Sustainability & Community Resilience • International Development: From Development to Globalisation • Mediation, Negotiation & Peacebuilding • Social Movements, Activism & Social Change • Creativity & Social Media	• Dissertation & Seminar (year-long) (Mandatory) • Religion, Conflict & Peace (Mandatory) • Project Management & Evaluation (Mandatory) • International Legal Studies • Youth & Community Studies • Community Health & Well-being • Media & Communications 2 • Theology of Social Justice and Applied Ethics

practices. The module also draws on the College's traditions of social justice and activism, highlighting its role in shaping graduates who pursue careers in advocacy, activism, politics, and social justice reform. Thus, the module embodies the potential for education to be a transformative experience, realised through well-established and recognisable models.

Social Justice at Institutional Level

Whilst the ideals of social justice have played an important part in the history of the College, the institution has had to address various challenges and inequalities in recent years, particularly considering the legacy of its function as a Catholic seminary. In 2015, a new College President was appointed and commissioned a listening exercise for all staff to examine challenges and inequalities in the College systems and structures. It was clear that action was needed to transform the status quo and ensure incremental embedding of EDI, specifically gender equality. This led to the establishment of a monitoring and implementation team and signalled the beginning of an increased formalisation of EDI principles as part of the institution's structures. To date, this has been addressed in several ways. In 2016, the governance of the College transitioned from a Board of Trustees, all Catholic clergy, to a Governing Body with diverse external representatives. This change promoted a new Ethos Statement, rooted in the College's founding social justice principles. Key appointments followed; the first female Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs and Head of Student Services in 2017, the first female Vice-President (non-cleric) in 2018 and the first female Registrar and Vice President for Academic Affairs in 2024.

As part of these ongoing developments, in September 2019, the College signed up to the Athena Swan Charter and in December 2021 was awarded an Athena Swan Institutional Bronze Award. The self-assessment process carried out illustrated evidence of gender stereotyping and inequality, leading to an action plan focused on institutional and cultural gender equality. The College also established a Civic Engagement Hub in 2022 placing greater emphasis on the involvement and influence of the College and its staff in civic engagement, and the successes achieved in different areas of outreach. As part of this commitment, civic engagement activities have been added to the work allocation package of academic staff, and whilst only in its infancy, to date the Hub has increased staff and student participation in civic engagement activities

by 20%. The College now hosts an annual Civic Engagement Festival featuring conferences, public talks and initiatives, such as a garden of wellbeing, and renaming rooms after female role models. Recently, the Hub has established a link with the Blouin Scholars at Walsh University, Ohio, and during summer 2024 hosted a 3-week programme for staff and students in both institutions, which focused on the topic of human trafficking and placed a strong emphasis on volunteering in the community.

Conclusion

Recent developments in the third-level landscape in Ireland, particularly the implementation of the Athena Swan Charter, have led institutions to reflect on their practices and culture of EDI. For Carlow College, this has not only highlighted the need for institutional reform but also the centrality of education and civic engagement in articulating and affecting change. The principles of social justice that lie at the foundation of the College are now not only reflected upon as historic fact but as part of its ongoing duty to student and staff alike. Crucially, these rearticulated ideals remain heavily informed by and expressed through innovation at curriculum level and civic engagement initiatives. The formalisation of EDI has therefore captured and harnessed the important work of staff and students in the College and led to a deeper embedding of social justice principles at institutional level.

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PART III

Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education



CHAPTER 14

The Active* Consent Programme

Pádraig MacNeela, Rebecca Connolly, Gavin Friel, Charlotte McIvor, Paul O'Reilly, and Siobhán O'Higgins

Introduction

Active* Consent is a research-based university programme that first pioneered sexual consent education and research with young people in Ireland in 2013, before scaling up nationally from 2019 onwards. It has done so while increasing evidence has amassed that sexual violence and harassment are commonly experienced in our society. Concurrently, the concept of consent has attained growing prominence as a focus for hope and change, which may help to crystallise our collective power

P. MacNeela (✉) · R. Connolly · G. Friel · C. McIvor · P. O'Reilly · S. O'Higgins
University of Galway, Galway, Ireland
e-mail: padraig.macneela@universityofgalway.ie

R. Connolly
e-mail: rebecca.connolly@universityofgalway.ie

G. Friel
e-mail: gavinjonathon.alcorn-friel@universityofgalway.ie

C. McIvor
e-mail: charlotte.mcivor@universityofgalway.ie

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to create greater openness about sexual decision-making and respectful, mutual communication. The Active* Consent programme has employed a multi-faceted conceptualisation of consent that explores this potential—incorporating personal agency over decisions about intimacy and the absence of personal control due to incapacity and coercion—with the ambition to lead out on awareness raising, education, and skills enhancement.

Over this period, the programme team designed a methodology of research, implementation, and training to support culture change in educational institutions in particular. The ecological model associated with culture change initiatives (Dills et al., 2016) guides the programme to address all levels, from microsystems to macrosystems—reaching out to individuals, peer groups and individuals in relationships, staff members, senior management, and policymakers. We have operationalised this model through outreach to young people, building capacity among staff members, institutional ownership, and inter-institutional network development.

This chapter describes how the Active* Consent methodology was built over time by the programme team, focusing on our work in higher education (HE). It situates the achievements of the programme in the context of a decade of societal change in Ireland, highlighting the critical role of educational policy in enabling the programme to gain traction. We introduce the multidisciplinary interventions and creative arts projects we have delivered since 2013, alongside the challenges of working toward sectoral change. We describe the resolution of some emerging challenges and recognise those which remain intractable. In so doing, this chapter describes the scope for future action to create a HE sector that makes effective and consistent use of a consent ethos in the effort to eliminate sexual violence and promote healthy relationships.

P. O'Reilly
e-mail: paul.p.oreilly@universityofgalway.ie

S. O'Higgins
e-mail: siobhan.ohiggins@universityofgalway.ie

Underlying Principles

Sexual consent education has an important role in preventing sexual assault, as the absence of sexual consent is a characteristic feature of sexual violence (Beres, 2014). Sexual consent has gained traction as a pivotal issue for researchers and policymakers, not least because sexual violence is a persistent, pervasive problem affecting young people (Thomas et al., 2016). Incidents of sexual assault are particularly prevalent among college students, with rates internationally ranging from 20 to 34% of women and 5–31% of men inter alia (Thomas et al., 2016).

The Active* Consent programme has examined and reported on these experiences in Irish HE (Burke et al., 2020, 2023; Dawson et al., 2024; MacNeela et al., 2022a, 2022b), through the 2020 Active* Consent/USI Student Experiences Survey of 6026 students and 2021 HEA surveys of students ($n = 7901$) and staff ($n = 3516$):

- 44% of students surveyed experienced sexual violence since beginning college (unwanted sexual touching, completed or attempted penetration);
- 60% of students and 24% of staff experienced sexualised comments referencing gender;
- 56% of students and 10% of staff experienced unwanted attempts to establish a sexual relationship;
- High-risk groups included females, sexual minorities, students with a disability, early career researchers, and students with high alcohol and drug use;
- Awareness of complaints mechanisms and supports may be as low as 10% among particular student cohorts;
- Most staff express support for systems change, yet typically lack the preparation or training needed to exercise this potential.

Typical consent communication practices may emphasise nonverbal and implicit acts, with active, verbal consent seen as unnecessary. Implicit and nonverbal acts appear to remain common forms of sexual communication (Johansen et al., 2020), with consent assumed through silence or absence of verbal refusal. In reaction, the Active* Consent programme developed consent education resources that encourage young people to question communication norms and assume greater responsibility for ensuring that consent is present (Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

Active* Consent has applied the health promotion settings-based approach (Dooris, 2022) to the post-primary sector as well as the Further Education and Training [FET] and HE communities. The programme has created multidisciplinary training methods and education resources that draw from psychology, psychotherapy, nursing, social work, theatre and drama, health promotion, and public advocacy. Working with partners such as Galway Rape Crisis Centre, our initiatives bring a learning community through a tiered, spiral model of increasing complexity, from brief social media messaging to workshops and arts-based interventions, and on to specialised training to lead consent projects.

To give a practical example, staff members who deliver student consent education workshops in HE institutions can be supported by graduates of our professional development training module, student 'Consent Champions' who contribute to implementation, individuals who have completed 'First Point of Contact' disclosure skills training, and senior managers who engaged with briefings to raise their awareness of institutional responsibilities.

Across settings, the programme content is unified by key principles—that consent is ongoing, mutual, and freely given, and that consent is for everyone, in all relationships, across genders and sexual orientations, for each type of intimacy if someone chooses to engage in it. In addition to addressing positive rights to sexual health (Gruskin et al., 2019), the programme addresses negative rights to freedom from violence, harassment and discrimination (Burke et al., 2020; MacNeela et al., 2022a, 2022b). Our choice to focus on positive developmental outcomes concerned with achieving agency springs from an optimism rooted in positive youth development (Burkhard et al., 2020), emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2024), and human flourishing (Ekman & Simon-Thomas, 2021).

Storytelling has been a hallmark of the Active* Consent programme approach. The stories that feature in our creative arts initiatives are presented on stage in scenes with multiple intersecting characters. In the case of consent or digital intimacy workshops, written vignettes and stories are used to embed consent behaviours in a context of gender, alcohol use, or relationship status which readers use to construct social meaning. The story situates intimacy between two people in relation to a familiar sexual script, either confirming it or perhaps running counter to expected norms. Story characters may be cast as intimacy initiator or responder, resulting in a consent dilemma that the reader—or workshop peer group—are asked to resolve.

For example, in the story reprinted below, two characters ('Martin' and 'Aoife') meet. Initially, their language is mutual, but further on a change in roles occurs. Martin becomes the initiator—'Martin took Aoife by the hand … Martin took a condom out of his drawer'. Aoife's smile is the only reaction we have from her before he has sex with her.

> Aoife and Martin were Second Year students at the same college. They didn't know each other but had mutual friends. One evening their friend groups met up while they were in town enjoying the good weather and having a few cans of beer. Aoife and Martin got along well. They ended up spending a lot of time talking and they started kissing.
> Around midnight some of the friends came back to Martin's apartment. Aoife and Martin each drank a naggin of vodka (200 ml of vodka) at the apartment. They started kissing again for a while and touching one another.
> Then Martin took Aoife by the hand and brought her to his bedroom. They continued being intimate for another 15 minutes. Then Martin took a condom out of his drawer and put it on. Aoife smiled, then Martin had sex with her.

Variations on the Aoife and Martin story have been used several times in Active* Consent research. It poses the dilemma of 'is a smile enough'? as an indicator of consensual agreement to sex. The story and associated research findings have been integrated into consent workshops. Small groups of students talk about whether Aoife consented to sex, followed by facilitator-led discussion drawing on research findings to prompt critical reflection. Following the introduction earlier in the workshop of consent definitions, participants are nudged to conclude that verbal consent is preferable over nonverbal consent, and they may question whether Aoife and Martin have the capacity to consent due to their drinking, regardless of verbal agreement.

This story presentation took place in an online survey of 366 college students in Ireland (MacNeela et al., 2024). Students rated their agreement with statements presented after the story. Nearly all (93%) agreed that verbal consent would have made the situation clearer—a powerful message that workshop facilitators can incorporate as feedback. Most students (78%) agreed that the amount of alcohol consumed made them less able to consent, which could be introduced as a data point if workshop participants did not consider that alcohol consumption impacted consent.

Agreement fell to 49% when students considered whether communication was mutual and equal, highlighting doubts about Aoife's power and control. Even fewer students (42%) agreed that Aoife consented to sex with Martin. The story was designed to elicit mixed responses to whether consent was present. Using this story in a consent workshop should, following group discussion and skilled workshop facilitation, increase participant uncertainty in their position if they considered that Aoife had consented by smiling. Openness to change should arise following feedback from others who did not consider it consenting, following definitions of active, empowered consent agreed earlier and the presentation of peer-derived statistics. The facilitators guide rather than employing a didactic approach, assuming participants do not wish to harm others and endorse respect for others.

The team has incorporated a range of such stories into workshops. These resources affirm definitions of consent as being 'the freely given verbal or non-verbal communication of a feeling of willingness to engage in sexual activity' (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999, p. 259), occurring when 'a person consents to a sexual act if he or she freely and voluntarily agrees to engage in that act' (Government of Ireland, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017, 48.9.1).

Engagement in Societal Change

Active* Consent came into being as global activism on gender, sexuality, and sexual violence was spurred on by #MeToo, #TimesUp, and Ireland's referendums on marriage equality (2015) and abortion (2018). This period was also marked by domestic events focusing attention on gender-based violence. These include Aisling Murphy's murder in 2022, a prominent example of the 267 instances of femicide Women's Aid recorded from 1996 to 2024. High-profile court cases increased public awareness of more critical approaches to how non-consent is described and understood. Two took place in 2018, both provoked commentary and public discussion—the acquittal of the 'Belfast rugby trial' defendants (Gallagher, 2018), and of a man accused of raping a 17-year-old female whose choice of underwear was critiqued by the defendant's senior counsel (Heylin, 2018).

The Active* Consent programme has been highly engaged with contributing to societal and sectoral discourse: Since 2014 (MacNeela et al., 2014, 2017, 2018, 2024; Active* Consent, 2023), we have

utilised research findings not only to design education resources but to continually inform stakeholders and the public. Since 2019, Active* Consent's contribution has been cited in over 120 regional or national newspapers, magazines and digital articles, with more than 60 radio, television and podcast interviews. This exposure alerted professionals to our work, extending our network of supporters and implementation partners. It also raised public awareness of sexual consent as a novel concept to deliberate on, and enabled engagement with the first Junior Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor TD, in 2018. Her successors, Minister Simon Harris TD, appointed to the new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) in 2020, and his successor Patrick O'Donovan TD, appointed in 2024, maintained interest and support on gender violence. Government departmental interest extended to the Criminal Justice, Penal Policy and Victims' Rights Pillar at the Department of Justice, framed by the goals of the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2022).

Fruitful collaboration took place with advocacy groups and NGOs, including the Union of Students in Ireland, the Irish Second-Level Students' Union, Rape Crisis Network Ireland, and Galway Rape Crisis Centre. Our work was welcomed by a newly emerging policy structure after DFHERIS was established in 2020, and by the Centre of Excellence in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The first HEA National Gender Equality Review of Irish Higher Education Institutions (2016) contributed to a supportive emerging infrastructure as EDI departments began to be established in HE, which have strongly supported consent programming institutionally alongside Student Services units.

The publication of the Department of Education and Skills *Consent Framework* (2019) was followed in 2020 by a letter from Minister Harris to HEI Presidents requiring institutions to implement consent education for all students (DFHERIS, 2020). Together, these prompted an upsurge in consent programming. DFHERIS responded to the Active* Consent/USI National Sexual Experiences Survey of students (Burke et al., 2020) by requesting the HEA to conduct national surveys of students and staff members in 2021 (MacNeela et al., 2022a, 2022b). The subsequent 2022–2024 HEA Implementation Plan increased sectoral capacity through the appointments of Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response Managers at each Irish university.

These developments illustrate an increasingly supportive public and policy environment. They also suggest a reciprocal role for the programme, not alone facilitated by new policies, but also by proactively engaging policymakers and the public by articulating research findings and offering practical solutions. What was a whisper 10 years ago has amplified into an active national conversation on consent. Having established a foundation, Active* Consent has further challenges to manage—not least the constraints on resources and scope of ambition that continue to limit the degree to which all students and staff have significant and repeated engagement with consent programming in HE.

Story of the Programme

The efforts of the programme team over the past decade have led to a systematic model dedicated to culture change, enabled by philanthropy, Irish government agencies, and other funders. Beginning with initial primary research (MacNeela et al., 2014), the team's model has been devised over several phases:

- 2013: Student focus groups and qualitative online surveys revealed that, typically, consent was not discussed by students. A story-based, non-judgemental approach to eliciting views on consent supported open discussion.
- 2015–2018: Pioneering surveys enabled the development of consent drama initiatives and consent workshops that foreground group discussion. Train-the-trainers' methods were devised to build capacity in workshop facilitation.
- 2019–2022: Active* Consent scaled up through philanthropic funding from Lifes2good Foundation, the University of Galway, Rethink Ireland, and the Government of Ireland. The increased programme capacity enabled national research on consent, alongside the design of new workshops and other educational resources, drama-based outreach, and social media-based awareness raising.
- 2023 onwards: The programme is pursuing the goal of integrating consent programming from post-primary schools to further education and training and the HE sector. The programme is being internationalised, learning from U.S. colleges while in turn sharing our resources, learning, and implementation model.

Hosted and encouraged by the University of Galway, Active* Consent has grown into a national programme to help young people achieve 'consent literacy', an adaptation of health literacy (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2022) that comprises:

- *Knowledge:* Accurate information on consent attitudes and behaviours, how alcohol and drugs affect consent, digital intimacy, laws on consent and sexual assault.
- *Communication skills:* Verbal and nonverbal behaviour, what helps or hinders consent, how to talk to peers or partners about consent.
- *Confidence:* Seeking assistance or support for themselves or their peers should they need it from their college or a professional service.
- *Challenge:* Being part of the change in our culture that recognises and responds to non-consenting attitudes or actions, including sexual harassment and sexual assault.

The programme team apply a development cycle to designing resources that address these components of consent literacy. Beginning with reviewing research findings and collecting data, the team construct a new resource supported by relevant theoretical concepts and processes. The resource is assessed and adapted through pilot testing of acceptability with the target audience. Next, the feasibility of engaging the target population is addressed by testing a training and delivery model. The efficacy of the resource is reviewed using evaluation techniques. Finally, policymakers and other stakeholders are engaged using reports and events to maintain the cycle of change.

Active* Consent supports students and staff in HE through brief messaging, workshops, creative arts, the provision of training, and professional development. A range of offerings for awareness raising, education, and training have been designed, including:

For both students and staff:

- Social media campaigns (e.g., '*Start Here', 'Consent is for Everyone'*).
- Campus initiatives such as '*Consent Week', 'Green Flag Stall'*
- eLearning module on consent, sexual violence and harassment.
- ConsentHub national website for learning resources.
- Consent workshop facilitator training.
- Campus climate survey tool.

For students:

- Consent educational resource designed for orientations.
- Discussion-based consent workshop for smaller groups.
- Theatrical drama, *'The Kinds of Sex You Might Have at College'*, study guide and video.

For staff:

- Staff awareness-raising information video.
- Management briefing session.
- 10-ECTS Level 9 continuous professional development module.
- 4-session First Point of Contact in disclosure management skills (with Galway Rape Crisis Centre).

The cycle of development continues, currently focusing on creating workshops and facilitator training to address digital intimacy, post-graduate students' needs, and student 'consent champion' peer educators. The Active* Consent model has also been applied to settings beyond secondary, further, and higher education to include Youthreach, Teagasc, and rugby clubs. Consent programming can be provided when embedded in the class timetable, in scheduled orientation sessions, or in training associated with extracurricular activities. For instance, ten Active* Consent workshops were held in 2022 with 173 GAA and Athletics students in Dublin City University sports teams (Table 14.1).

'Consent Is for Everyone': Active* Consent Orientation Resource

The Active* Consent orientation resource comprises video, interactive elements, and facilitated discussion of consent. Typically delivered in a session on campus, the resource is introduced during orientation or induction to ensure that students are familiar with the meaning of consent and sexual violence, legal rights and responsibilities, practical ways to communicate consent and non-consent, and support services. Running the orientation resource expresses the educational institution's commitment to a respectful, caring culture. It provides a foundation for information campaigns and in-depth consent education during the

Table 14.1 Examples of learning offered by sports participants following consent workshop participation

- Consent is key
- Consent is active and ongoing
- Communicate
- Be open and mind everyone around you
- What is right and what is wrong, gaining a good understanding of situations
- Consent shouldn't be taken for granted
- Ongoing, freely given
- Always make sure that the other person you are involved with wants to go ahead with it
- It's important to give and get consent
- Consent in practical conditions
- Make sure you ask for consent. Listen to others
- Always ask for consent
- Relationship or not, consent must always be asked
- You should ask verbally if you are not sure of someone's body language
- It's ok to say no
- You can always say no at any time
- Double check, Listen
- It's never silly to double-check with someone no matter what
- If you consent once doesn't mean it's every time
- Drink less and talk more
- Listen to anyone else who has a story and be there for support
- Don't be afraid to tell someone if something happens
- Talk to someone if you experience an assault
- There is lots of help available on campus. They don't blame the victim they support them and help them
- There're loads of support available and the law is in place
- Definition of rape
- The number of males that are sexually assaulted
- Sending someone's nudes = illegal
- Sending intimate pictures without consent is illegal
- Drink is a major factor which affects consent and I think it's important for college students to realise that

academic year. Staff members and student leaders are responsible for roll-out, supported by training provided by Active* Consent. Feedback from participating HEIs suggested that approximately 25,000 First Year students engaged with the orientation resource during the 2023–2024 academic year. Approximately one-third of participating students scanned a QR code to complete an online feedback survey, yielding 8338 responses from HE and FET students. 80% agreed that they learned something useful from the Active* Consent orientation resource, while 79% agreed that the resource was relevant to them, and 91% said that they would recommend it to a friend.

In-Person Active* Consent Workshop for the Higher Education and Further Education and Training Sectors

The in-person Active* Consent workshop brings together up to 25 students in an interactive, discussion-based session led by two trained facilitators. Typically lasting 1 hour, the workshop is designed as an empowering, positive learning experience. Facilitators encourage participants to share their knowledge and views on consent in online and offline situations. Participants are not asked to share personal experiences, while a group agreement is made to confirm that everyone's voice is welcomed, valued, and respected.

Participants work together to achieve a shared understanding of consent in their own words, which the facilitators subsequently relate to definitions and legal perspectives on consent. Having established a consensus, the facilitators introduce stories that challenge the participants' understanding through consideration of contextual factors that regularly arise in real-life situations. These include alcohol use, earlier intimacy, relationship status, and gender as seen in Aoife and Martin's story, above. Working in small groups, students address the consent dilemma posed following each story. The workshop introduces verbal strategies and phrases that people typically use to express when they want—or don't want—to participate in intimacy of any kind. It also introduces the social norms and expectations typically held about peers. The workshop concludes with information on supports and resources available to students.

A range of implementation strategies have been used to roll out the workshop, including:

- Integration in course curricula, such as undergraduate Medicine, Occupational Therapy, and Speech and Language Therapy programmes at the University of Galway.
- 'Consent Champions' peer education training has been piloted at the University of Limerick, Atlantic Technological University, the National College of Ireland, and the University of Galway, enabling students to lead in workshop facilitation.

- Inclusion in introductory training for student-led societies, sports clubs, and student volunteer activities. For example, the University of Galway Kayak Club requires all members to have completed this workshop before going on external trips.

Following completion, workshop participants are invited to access a brief online survey. Although not all participants complete the post-workshop survey, feedback is integral to ensuring that the workshop content continues to be relevant and effective. In 2023–24, 1187 students and learners from HE, FET colleges/centres, and Teagasc Agricultural Colleges responded to the survey invitation. Nearly all (94%) responded that they learned something useful from the workshop, while 90% would recommend it to a friend; 81% felt that it was relevant to them, and 71% said they had gained information on new skills.

eLearning Learning Resource: 'Sexual Violence and Harassment: How to Support Yourself and Your Peers'

Designed for young adults, this resource typically requires 45 minutes to engage in the game-based learning techniques that introduce knowledge and build confidence in consent skills, practical strategies to support friends who disclose negative sexual experiences, and active bystander skills. Thousands have completed this training since 2020, and the eLearning resource was updated in 2023, covering topics including:

- Irish laws on consent, sexual violence and harassment;
- The nature of sexual violence;
- What is meant by harassment;
- The role of alcohol, drug use, and intoxication in sexual violence;
- The pros and cons of digital intimacy;
- What you can do to listen to and support a friend affected by sexual violence or harassment;
- The skills in being an Active* Bystander.

Some 758 participants completed an online survey at the end of the eLearning resource during the 2023–24 academic year, with 93% of survey participants saying they would recommend the resource to other

students. Further, 96% indicated that they were well informed about sexual consent after taking part. Large majorities of respondents indicated that their knowledge or understanding of sexual assault and rape had increased (86%), that it would help them to intervene in problematic situations (87%), and 90% said it would help them support their peers who have had a negative sexual experience. 89% agreed that the resource provided information on mutual communication with a partner, while the same number said it would inform how they deal with sexual consent.

HEIs have reported a variety of implementation techniques to encourage engagement with this resource. For instance, IADT in Dún Laoghaire required student societies and clubs to have at least two committee members complete it, while Dublin City University, Munster Technological University, and the University of Bath embedded the eLearning resource into institutional Virtual Learning Environments.

Communications and Social Media

The Active* Consent programme uses social media and other communication formats to engage stakeholders. By responding to cultural events and trending topics, we can draw out the implications for consent and sexual health. The programme has also run targeted information campaigns using social media. The 2022 *'Consent Is For Everyone'* social media campaign for HE students achieved 1.4 million impressions across platforms. The 2021 *'Start Here'* disclosure awareness and skills campaign reached over 250,000 students, resulting in 1.9 million Instagram impressions.

A dedicated website, ConsentHub.ie, was designed by Active* Consent in 2022 as the first national, publicly available online resource on consent awareness and learning in Ireland. ConsentHub.ie provides reliable, evidence-based information to young people aged under 17 and over 17, parents and guardians, and educators. Consistent with our tiered approach to engaging people to meet their particular needs, the website hosts resources ranging from brief awareness raising to in-depth resources for professionals who have completed one or more trainings.

First Point of Contact Training

Disclosure management training for non-specialists is typically subject to wide variation in duration and scope. Consistency is lacking in what it means to be sufficiently prepared to receive a disclosure and signpost an individual to further support. The Active* Consent team collaborated with Galway Rape Crisis Centre (GRCC) in 2021 to adapt GRCC disclosure management training to HE. The 12-hour 'First Point of Contact' (FPOC) programme comprises therapist-led training offered over four sessions—facilitated in-person, online, or using a hybrid model. The training covers topics such as:

- Understanding consent, sexual violence, and harassment;
- Disclosure experiences and responses;
- Helpful and unhelpful responses when receiving a disclosure;
- Myths and beliefs concerning rape and sexual violence;
- Experiential learning including role play;
- Trauma: Neurobiology and vicarious trauma;
- Self-care and sustainability of being a First Point of Contact;
- Culture change and organisational initiatives;
- Policy and procedures on SVH.

Our goal is to successfully embed the capacity to receive disclosures throughout educational institutions. The FPOC programme introduces a relatively high expectation for non-specialists through the duration of training, the scope to assess proficiency using reflection exercises, ongoing supervision and peer group meetings. The success of this partnership is illustrated by successful roll-out of training at the University of Galway, made possible by collaboration with GRCC, the Student Counselling Service, and the Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. To date, almost 200 staff members and students have completed FPOC training, creating significant capacity throughout the organisation.

Our Irish Research Council New Foundations evaluation project has documented the training using an online survey of 154 participants, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. While varying in age and background, the vast majority (85%) of survey respondents were female. Respondents were very positive about their training experience. Over 90% rated the

training as effective and well delivered (e.g., 'I found the training incredibly well done and informative. I was concerned it would be triggering for me, but the facilitators and the group were extremely supportive. I would highly recommend this to anyone, for both professional and personal learning'. (Academic or research staff, 30s, Female).

Level 9 Micro-Credential Module: 'Consent, Sexual Violence and Harassment: Practitioner Skills and Practice'

The Active* Consent MicroCred module is a one-semester Level 9 module that results in a 10 ECTS award from the University of Galway. Designed as a continuous professional development opportunity for professionals and for student leaders, the module commenced in 2020 and graduated its sixth cohort in 2023–24 bringing the number of participants to 133. The module combines online sessions with in-person attendance on campus. Module learning strategies include practice-based assignments, reflective journaling, seminars, experiential learning sessions, and assigned readings.

The module equips practitioners and advocates with the skills to design and support the implementation of consent education and prevention programmes, respond effectively to disclosures, and develop a critical perspective on how organisations can respond to their responsibilities concerning consent, sexual violence and harassment (e.g., 'Completing the module … was invaluable to me. Not only did it equip me with essential skills and knowledge on how to address and manage these critical issues in my institution, but it also allowed me to build a strong network of colleagues working in a similar space'. Module participant, HE, 2023).

Module participants have come from varied professional backgrounds including sexual violence prevention and response support services, HE and FET, An Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces, youth work, and student leadership. Graduates have been instrumental in creating and changing institutional policies and practices, as well as rolling out consent education interventions and some graduates have been appointed to specialist posts in the area of consent, sexual violence and harassment.

Drama-Based Outreach

In development since 2014, the Active* Consent's original research-based play (Bleuer et al., 2018) uses drama as a communication tool to achieve attitudinal and behavioural change. Drama programming has shaped the programme's signature strategy of utilising data-based, storytelling approaches. The research-based Active* Consent play has been re-developed seven times with more than 40 individuals contributing to the theatrical ensembles that have responded to new research over the last decade.

The play toured 11 HEIs during 2019–2020 with *'The Kinds of Sex You Might Have at College'*. A second HE sector tour followed in 2022–2023, while post-primary schools were toured in 2024 ('*How I Learned About Consent*'). Each play re-development uses the 'devising' theatre technique to revise scenes and create new ones, employing a 'range of collaborative methodologies of creation that are characterised by collective dramaturgical input into the generation of a 'new' work' (O'Gorman & McIvor, 2015, p. 2). A group of students, theatre specialists, and consent education practitioners collaborate to co-create new scenes based on creative responses to research data, revise older scenes and decide on their inclusion. The theatrical director leads the devising process and is responsible for writing and production decisions (McIvor, from 2014 to 2023; Jérémie Cyr-Cooke and Gavin Friel, from 2024), in consultation with the Active* Consent programme team.

The original version was created by undergraduate students in a module on theatre and social change taught by Charlotte McIvor following an invitation by Pádraig MacNeela to respond to the report *Young People, Alcohol and Sex: What's Consent Got To Do With It?* (MacNeela et al., 2014) commissioned by Rape Crisis Network Ireland. McIvor described the final theatrical product from this first workshopping phase as shaped by the 'working methods of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre (particularly its nonlinear dramaturgy) and the concrete political and aesthetic strategies of feminist performance practice' (McIvor, 2017, p. 138).

Each play version has maintained these core Brechtian and feminist stylistic and storytelling signatures. We consciously use a wide range of theatrical styles from realistic to abstract, comedic to dramatic, shifting the tone of dramatic storytelling onstage. This artistic approach keeps an audience in a critical rather than passive mode, encouraging attention to

how identities (including gender and sexuality) and behaviours are influenced by social norms (Aston, 1995, 1999; Kuhn & Giles, 2005; Martin, 1996). Finally, our play utilises poetic language, movement and dance theatre, prompting audiences to look at the everyday in novel ways. These convictions maintained over time have been met by positive audience and stakeholder feedback.

For the play to be relevant to all students, it is important to include a wide range of stories and perspectives, an approach also formed by Brechtian and feminist performance theory. The play does not follow one story or set of characters. Our actors play different roles over the course of the play, so they might be a survivor in one scene, and a perpetrator or bystander in another. Ultimately, as McIvor concludes, this role switching allows 'us to interrogate sexual scripts enacted by individuals from a variety of subject positions (survivor, perpetrator, bystander) and link them to a wider social and cultural context as part of a network of social relations' (McIvor, 2017, p. 138). This expanded set of stories and characters allows us to prioritise how LGBTQ and other minority sexual perspectives are represented and include male survivors of sexual assault.

An audience Q&A takes place after each performance for audiences to engage the troupe. For example, the scene '*You Think He'd Have Noticed*' has prompted constant debate since 2014 regarding one character's ability to read the speaker's non-verbal cues that suggested his discomfort with intimacy and withdrawal of consent. The Q&A allows moderated conversation of this issue, discussing the importance of giving space to partners to have agencies in their sexual consent decisions.

To date, approximately 5000 audience members have attended live play performances across HE and schools. Survey data have evidenced self-reported learning. For instance, comparisons of pre- and post-performance audience surveys demonstrated significant improvements in ratings made of the majority of consent attitude statements. In addition, 89.6% of HEI audiences and 81.9% of post-primary school pupils agreed that the play had important messages and that they understood those messages.

Each performance poses the challenge of requiring extensive production resources. The play requires a director, producer, tour manager, actors, professional light and sound, transport, accommodation, and appropriate venues. Pre-performance, intensive rehearsal and devising processes take place, in which care and wellbeing are prioritised. Touring with a small company requires a planning process for each production,

management of the company members, outreach and promotion with our venues. The challenges of this delivery method extend to the hosting EDI units and schools which typically sponsor our visit.

Attendance patterns at HEIs are variable and can be unpredictable. Achieving a sustainable model in HE is likely to involve targeted recruitment and advertising, integration with key identified courses, or course credit. By comparison, post-primary student attendance may be included as part of that day's learning programme, resulting in more predictable attendance, with the scope to input to assessed project work. Regardless, the decade spent developing this play and testing it with secondary school and third-level audiences has had a profound impact, not only on audiences or artists who created and performed in it, but in shaping the development of the Active* Consent programme. Social change will not ultimately happen as the result of one play, one workshop, or one media campaign. Rather, it will be because of the symbiotic functioning of these resources over time, a commitment to implementation, and support from key stakeholders (Table 14.2).

Learning and Challenges

Over the past decade, the Active* Consent programme has sought to ensure that everyone, everywhere can exercise choice over what intimacy they consent to. This societal challenge is still not close to completion, but we continue, believing that consent education positively impacts healthy relationships and brings an original voice to sexual violence and harassment prevention. On reflection, critical success factors enabled the programme to progress in this work. Some arose from the surrounding environment, including positive changes in public discourse on gender equality and sexual violence, HE public policy, greater access to specialist staff, and government funding. Further, the commitment of a philanthropic family foundation empowered the programme to make freely available a model to the HE sector, and made possible additional funding bids to design new resources and appoint team members.

Further success factors arose from our responses to serious challenges to programme viability, arising from external stresses. For instance, scaling up face-to-face consent workshop delivery required us to design a train-the-trainers implementation model. The challenge of moving from individual-based student education to a socio-ecological culture change approach necessitated equal focus on institutional capacity building,

Table 14.2 Overview of selected scenes from the Active* Consent drama repertoire

Scene title	*Background research*	*Description*	*Learning goals*
The Kinds of Sex You Might Have at College	Approximately 25% of Irish teenagers have had sexual intercourse by the ages of 15–17. This rises to 85% for young people entering college	Light-hearted, upbeat, comedic representations of usual and unusual sexual experiences that students might encounter	Demonstrating to the audience that the performance is textured and covers a variety of perspectives
Am I Right to be Upset?	26% of males, 32% of females, and 58% of non-binary people described sexual harassment occurring via electronic media including, but not limited to, unwanted sexual comments, jokes, or pictures, and having unwanted sexual rumours being spread online (Burke et al., 2020)	Uses voice and physical theatre, depicts an instance of image-based sexual abuse in a relationship in a dark tone. Demonstrates the experience of both the perpetrator and survivor. Ends without resolution	What is meant by Image Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA), how this act may affect targets and survivors. Shows the influence of social norms and peers. Demonstrates the role of communication and personal responsibility in relationships
One Event, Many Perspectives	24% of female college students reported feeling safe when socialising at night (13% of those who experienced sexual misconduct since joining college). 47% of students reported that the perpetrator was a student at their college; 26% reported that the incident happened on campus. Two-thirds of females and 70% of males reported that the perpetrator was using drugs and/or alcohol just prior to the incident (Burke et al., 2020)	A member of a friend group has non-consensual sex with another after a night out. Scene depicts the thoughts and feelings of the aftermath, from the perpetrator, the survivor, and the bystanders. Told through physical theatre and abstraction. Dark in tone and ends without resolution	Audiences are made aware of sexual violence carried out while intoxicated, situational awareness, and how to intervene in a similar situation

(continued)

Table 14.2 (continued)

Scene title	*Background research*	*Description*	*Learning goals*
The Weakest Kink	7% of females, 22% of males and 3% of non-binary people said that if a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a man assumes she wants to have sex. While 88% of students felt that sexual consent should always be obtained before the start of sexual activity, 62% thought that most other people feel that asking for consent is something they should do (MacNeela et al., 2022a)	Comedy approach using a gameshow method featuring common sexual experiences. Contestants include male and female stereotypes, with the 'straight man' answering using situational awareness. Definitive ending, with characters showing best outcomes happen with consideration, respect and communication	Scene provides contrast to darker scenes, encouraging audiences to challenge gendered notions of sexuality and favour clear communication and respect. Audiences should be reminded that sex and sexuality can be looked at with humour
All the Difference	86% of college students would ask their partner if they are interested in engaging in sexual intercourse; 26% said that they would keep moving forward in sexual behaviours unless their partner stopped them (MacNeela et al., 2022a)	Monologue and physical theatre. Depicts a young woman's experience with an unpleasant and pleasant sexual encounter, recounting how each made her feel, concluding with a message of instinct and communication that is light-hearted and joyous	Audiences should understand that there is power in deciding what to do and how to do it

mainstreaming, and planning. The programme adopted a tiered, spiral approach for all community members to have a basic awareness of consent, sexual violence and harassment, that some display greater engagement through workshop facilitation and responsibility for roll out locally, underpinned by a relatively small number of consent education champions with specialised preparation or dedicated roles. Later, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions created significant problems for maintaining outreach and we responded through a short orientation resource that could be delivered online, which increased male participation to over 40%

since 2020 and led to online campaigns such as '*Start Here'* and '*Consent is For Everyone'*.

Partly, the ability to respond has been achieved through an ethos of collaboration and stakeholder partnership. As a multidisciplinary team, we have diverse skills, in intervention design and theory, trauma-informed practice, psychological measurement, settings-based approaches, and creative arts. The University of Galway Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Dean of Students and Student Services provided institutional support for pilot initiatives. Partnership with Galway Rape Crisis Centre allowed us to access expert content review and disclosure training. Developing wider networks of stakeholders allowed the sharing of resources, research and learning, and a channel to their needs and challenges. Finally, student co-production and co-delivery have been a critical success factor, with the student voice additionally represented through research findings and Student Union collaboration.

This chapter has described the Active* Consent programme story, a fitting approach considering the critical role storytelling plays for us to connect with consent as a personal, relational, and contextual phenomenon. Using the story metaphor more broadly, we leave this first decade of consent education in Irish education on a cliffhanger, marked by tension over whether culture change can truly be achieved. Enduring challenges remain, including pushback in wider society to issues such as gender equality and inclusion, and questions over the sector's capacity to accommodate prevention and healthy relationships programming alongside the administration of enhanced investigation and complaints policies.

While there has been progress, some students report not having had any engagement with programming on consent, sexual violence and harassment, and we remain in the early phase of engaging HE staff members in awareness raising and training. It is therefore as yet unknown whether sectoral goals for addressing positive and negative rights will be achieved. There is now a pressing need for policymakers and institutional leaders to commit to ensuring that all staff and students engage with programming (MacNeela et al., 2024). Time will tell whether policymakers, advocates, HE communities, and programmes such as Active* Consent, can together achieve a successful resolution to the story of culture change on sexual violence, to achieve a long-lasting, impactful realisation of the positive potential of consent education.

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CHAPTER 15

National Examples of Practice to Tackle Sexual Violence and Harassment at Third Level: The UCC Bystander Intervention Programme and IADT Moving Parts Campaign

Louise Crowley, Claire McGing, and David Quin

Introduction

The National Framework to End Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) was developed by an Expert Group appointed by the then Minster for Higher Education Mary Mitchell

L. Crowley
University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
e-mail: l.crowley@ucc.ie

C. McGing (✉) · D. Quin
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: claire.mcging@iadt.ie

D. Quin
e-mail: david.quin@iadt.ie

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O'Connor in response to a number of high-profile sexual assaults on female students at the beginning of the 2018–2019 academic year. Broadly, the Framework sets out obligations for HEIs in terms of institutional culture, organisational policies, procedures and structures, and education and awareness-raising initiatives for students and staff. HEIs are expected to proactively demonstrate their efforts towards achieving the Framework's goals, with annual progress reports submitted to the Higher Education Authority (HEA). In respect of educational development, the Framework mandates the development by all HEIs of targeted initiatives, meaning 'Direct student-facing activities including workshops/classes that promote an understanding of consent and calling out unacceptable behaviour' (Department of Education, 2019, p. 8).

The educational programmes and messaging delivered, coupled with the institutional culture, must support the development of both an individual and collective appetite for change, to ensure a safer and respectful student and working experience for all. Once cultivated, this sense of personal responsibility for self-well-being, the well-being of others and the need for an overarching campus culture of respect and support will motivate action, made effective through the development of appropriate knowledge and skills.

This chapter focuses on two national practice examples that support this objective across the Irish higher education system: the Bystander Intervention Programme at University College Cork (UCC) and the Moving Parts animation campaign led by Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) in collaboration with UCC Bystander Intervention and University of Galway Active* Consent.

The Bystander Intervention Programme at UCC identifies participants as vehicles for change with capacity to identify problematic behaviour and to make safe and effective interventions. It supports the recognition of all forms of hostility, harassment and violence and empowers participants to make safe and effective interventions. This provides a catalyst for cross-campus understanding, and motivates informed, pro-active behavioural change amongst the campus community.

Led by IADT with expert input from UCC Bystander Intervention and University of Galway Active* Consent, Moving Parts is a peer-led animation campaign aimed at third-level students. Grounded in student survivor testimonies and empirical research, the videos highlight the impact of sexual violence and sexual harassment (SVSH) on this demographic. They call on viewers to engage in both individual and collective

actions to promote a culture of dignity and respect on campuses and beyond.

In this chapter, we detail the development, outcomes and impact of each programme, both designed to instil pro-social behaviours and attitudes at personal and collective levels. What is notable about these two case studies is the depth of collaborative efforts within and across the higher education sector and the willingness to make both programmes freely accessible to support cultural change.

University College Cork (UCC) Bystander Intervention

UCC's strategic plan promotes the values of respect, equity, accountability, integrity and compassion.[1] The university strives to ensure a safe and welcoming campus for new and existing staff and students through effective, transparent and accountable practices and policies. In tackling the issues of sexual hostility, harassment and violence, the university has recognised the capacity for the UCC Bystander Intervention Programme to not only provide a mechanism to educate staff and students on the law and practice governing safe, lawful sexual relations; but also to cultivate a campus culture of zero tolerance of all forms of unacceptable behaviour by empowering all staff and students to actively contribute to a safe, supportive environment. Specifically, by developing both individual and collective capacity to effect change through pro-social behaviour and attitudes, the programme contributes to the University's commitment to the delivery of both a strong student-focused support framework and a safe and respectful working environment, which address the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, cultural and welfare needs of all members of campus life. A key aspect of this framework is the development of a progressive, effective culture around the issues of sexual respect, sexual assault and consent, enhanced by an improved engagement with and amongst students and staff. The UCC Bystander Intervention Programme demonstrates the capacity for students of every discipline together with all staff, to participate in an evidence-based programme to enhance their knowledge, skills and sense of social responsibility.

[1] *Securing Our Future* UCC Strategic Plan 2023–2028, https://www.ucc.ie/en/president/strategy2028/#vision-mission-and-values.

Unwanted sexual encounters, ranging from inappropriate comments and unwanted advances to sexual violence and rape are a devastating aspect of modern society[2] and are unfortunately no less evident on university campuses across Ireland.[3] In response to the university's capacity to engage directly with its students, the Bystander Intervention Programme at UCC,[4] modelled on the work of Dr Rachel Fenton,[5] seeks to address issues of sexual and relationship violence experienced by students, exposing them to two key issues; the dangers of the social normalisation of abusive behaviour and the related capacity of a bystander to intervene. The bystander intervention approach is premised upon the fact that as members of society every person is a bystander to many events and is thus often positioned to make an intervention. The material presented to students at UCC ensures participants develop a clear understanding of the nature and breadth of all forms of unacceptable sexual behaviour, facilitating an understanding of the importance and meaning of consent, but also more broadly, a realisation of their immense capacity for personal assertiveness and social responsibility. It presents students and staff with a safe environment to better understand appropriate social interactions and the unacceptability of abusive behaviour, whilst supporting the development of a visible institutional pro-social culture which stands against unacceptable behaviour and abuse and foster a culture of positivity and support.

Introduced initially as a programme-based, credit-bearing academic module, the Bystander Intervention Programme was piloted in 2016/17 with all first-year students in the School of Law as a compulsory module with academic credit by UCC-based facilitators. In 2017/18, this pilot was extended to first-year Nursing and Midwifery students, again on a credit-bearing basis. For both years of the pilot, students who did not

[2] The 2022 National Sexual Violence Survey reported a high prevalence of sexual violence with 40% of adults, and 65% of women aged 18–24 reported experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime.

[3] The 2022 National Surveys of Student and Staff Experiences reported that of the students who responded, 34.2% of female students (over 1100 students) experienced non-consensual vaginal penetration through coercion, incapacitation, force, or threat of force. MacNeela P, Dawson K, O'Rourke T, Healy-Cullen S, Burke L and Flack W *Report on the National Survey of Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions* (2022).

[4] http://bystanderintervention.ucc.ie/.

[5] https://www.exeter.ac.uk/research/groups/law/interventioninitiative/.

complete the requisite number of workshops were not eligible to progress to their second year of studies.[6] Separately in 2017/18, it was made available to all undergraduate Applied Psychology students on an optional basis, resulting in the award of a UCC Digital Badge upon completion.[7] This overview will demonstrate the evolution of the programme over the last 9 years, the transition of the academic module to a training programme undertaken through a blended learning approach in 2018/19, its ever-extending reach across the HE sector and beyond, revealing a significant appetite amongst Irish society for an all of community response to the ubiquitous issue of SVSH.

In delivering the material to the students and staff in their capacity as bystanders rather than directly addressing either perpetrators or victims, the UCC programme allows for a collective buy-in as to the capacity of pro-social bystanders to recognise unacceptable behaviour and effect change, and to receive the learning as members of the collective community rejecting such acts. By positioning the message in terms of community and cultural change as opposed to individual personal encounters, participants develop a broader context for their new learning, giving rise to both personal development and normative societal expectations. This approach identifies a 'new normal' premised on the social unacceptability and community rejection of such behaviour. Additionally, whilst the content of the Bystander Intervention Programme recognises the reality of the gendered nature of most SVSH, it remains entirely inclusive in its student engagement, as evidenced by student feedback during the pilot delivery.

> This is a fantastically organised module… In my opinion the inclusion of this module as an essential module for all 1st year students is a fantastic way for UCC to make a stand on an enormous global societal issue.

The programme cultivates a shared understanding of the unacceptability of unwanted advances, inappropriate comments, threatening

[6] In 2016/17 two students attended repeat workshops in order to complete the requisite number of to pass the module. Three students failed to attend to the workshops and the repeat workshops these students failed a number of modules meaning they did not fail to progress simply on the basis of failing to pass the bystander intervention module.

[7] Within UCC, a digital badge is a non-credit bearing micro credential awarded to earners in an online format. It is a means for the university to recognise non-accredited learning that supports the values and attributes the university seeks to foster.

behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence. The second aspect of the bystander intervention approach introduces students to the actions required to effect behavioural change, through practised skills of intervention. To encourage ownership of the ability to perform effective interventions to reduce incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence, each student participant is identified as a vehicle for change with potential to identify problematic behaviour and capacity to choose to actively intervene. The bystander intervention approach is inherently layered, involving both knowledge and skills development. It represents an appropriately dual-faceted response to the complexity of the issues and the need for participants to be able to both recognise unacceptable behaviour to trigger any instinct to intervene as well as ensuring that they have the capacity and skills to do so safely and effectively in the circumstances.

The transition to blended learning, with predominantly self-directed online delivery of substantive learning, ensured the capacity for the Bystander Intervention Programme to effect cross-campus cultural change, avoiding the inevitable practical limitations relating to financial resources, availability of facilitators, and timetabling/general capacity challenges. The repeated calls from pilot participants to make the programme available to all on campus reflected a shared ambition for the upscaling of the programme delivery:

> … because imagine if 20,000 people took one thing from that class that's changed that's a lot of people…. if [they] learn how to prevent it or see it leading up to what was going to happen it could prevent it, that will be quite significant…[8]

The Bystander Intervention blended learning module was launched at a dedicated conference in January 2019 by the then Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, during the inaugural Bystander Intervention week at UCC. The launch provided an opportunity to present the nature and impact of the pilot programme to members of the university community, local support services and national media. The launch was strongly supported by staff and students and attracted positive media coverage, both locally and nationally. The launch was followed by the posting of the Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third

[8] 2017–18 Focus group participant.

Level Education (ESHTE) *It Stops Now* mural on the wall of the Boole library at the heart of the campus.

Whilst online resources were required to enhance student reach, the importance attached to in-person engagement to cultivate a sense of shared, community response mandated the inclusion of an in-person workshop for students on completion of the self-directed online component of 5 modules. A password-protected section was embedded into the online programme, where parties were invited to share views and responses to the material on discussion boards, to answer a series of questions and to complete interactive assignments as they progress through the five online modules. This not only served to demonstrate interaction with the content but also in respect to the discussion boards, allowed the individual responses to be shared anonymously amongst participants, facilitating a sharing of diverse views, but more typically illustrated the shared views of most participants. Conversely, it was decided not to include an online discussion forum to avoid the potential for unsupervised interaction. It was envisaged that students would complete the online workshops in their own time and upon completion, participate in the final in-person reflective workshop with participatory scenario-based learning. This is now actively in operation. These workshops are organised in response to participant completions, with a maximum attendance of 20 students/staff per workshop. The purpose is to facilitate a strong cohort of members of the UCC community to collectively complete the programme, emboldening the campus community and enhancing the overall culture through knowledge and pro-social inclinations.

To demonstrate the value of the learning and the significance attached to the module by the University, completion of the programme attracts a university Bystander Intervention Digital Badge. Assessment criteria for the badge include engagement with the online content, attendance at the final group workshop and completion of a short assignment that reflects student learning. Given the disciplinary breadth of the student audience the assignment is completed in a medium of the students' choice, subject to prior approval by the programme director; submissions have included powerful reflective essays, paintings and poetry, for example:

> #ibelieveher trended today
> reminding me of #itsnotokay
> #timesup was supposed to reclaim power but #metoos grow by the hour
> #believewomen they tried to say

> cries of false allegations never go away #nomeansno seems pretty clear yet sometimes "no" gets choked by fear[9]

Cross-Sectoral Work

The Bystander Intervention Programme demonstrates significant impact on participant knowledge and ability to act to combat the devastating issue of SVSH at third level and ultimately serves as a powerful means to effect broad cultural transformation across the sector by enabling staff and students to become active agents for change. By sharing this programme with other third-level institutions, UCC strives to facilitate more widespread understanding and engagement with these important issues; both on an individual and cross-campus cultural basis. A range of initiatives have been developed to support the sharing of the Bystander Intervention training. In September 2021, at the behest of Simon Harris, the then Minister for Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, a new video entitled, 'Bystander Intervention—A Quick Guide' was developed by the UCC Bystander Intervention team and shared across the HE sector.[10]

Funding was subsequently provided by the HEA to support pilot delivery of the UCC Bystander Intervention Programme to 2000 staff and students in participating institutions. Access was provided to each institution for up to 100 participants (staff and students) to the UCC Canvas Catalog training platform to allow them to develop an institutional evidence base of the experience and impact of the training, and to encourage each HEI to self-finance the delivery of the programme. The places offered provided access the extended 5 module student and staff Bystander Intervention Digital Badge Programmes (updated June 2022). Over a 12-month period it became apparent that institutions, due to financial constraints struggled to allocate funding to support the purchase of access the training. As a result, the Bystander Intervention team at UCC utilised their remaining funding to explore the capacity to share the UCC e-cartridge *free gratis* with all institutions. Whilst

[9] A powerful student participant reflection.

[10] https://www.ucc.ie/en/bystander/news/video-ucc-bystander-intervention-team-launches-new-video---bystander-intervention-A-quick-guide.html.

UCC was happy to share the materials on a non-fee basis, the challenge centred on the capacity to make the programme operational on the various Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) used in Irish third-level institutions. Many Irish institutions use the Moodle VLE and, following discussions with Dr Sean Daffy who had spearheaded the conversion of the UCC Canvas-based training to the Moodle platform at ATU, Dr Daffy agreed to support the conversion to Moodle for relevant campuses. This generosity has allowed us to overcome a major obstacle in enabling rollout of the programme across the sector.

In addition to sharing programme materials, the UCC Bystander Intervention team continues to meet regularly with colleagues from across the sector to offer support with rollout at their institutions and to discuss issues including workshop structure and frequency, the inevitable technical issues arising from the embedding of the Bystander Intervention Programme on Moodle and other VLE's, the provision of certificates of completion, and the collection and dissemination of data and research. Since January 2022, the UCC Bystander Intervention team has facilitated 10 Train the Trainer sessions for 40+ colleagues across the sector. These sessions enable participants to deliver and roll out the facilitated in-person workshops, which are critical to the learning experience. In 2019, the HEA recognised this as a high-impact project, awarding €350,000 to UCC in recognition of the capacity for national rollout.[11]

Institutional Partners

The success of the programme can be seen when considering how the Bystander Intervention programme has been adopted by institutional partners across the sector. For example, in January 2023, South East Technological University (SETU)[12] launched its new online Bystander Intervention programme, making it available to all staff and students via their online learning platforms, Moodle and Blackboard. Referencing the 'pioneering programme at UCC', the Bystander Intervention Programme was introduced to complement and supplement the university's existing student Active Consent workshops and Staff Training on

[11] https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/managing-performance/institutional-stories-of-impact/university-college-cork/.

[12] https://www.setu.ie/news/setu-launches-its-new-bystander-intervention-programme.

Tackling Sexual Harassment & Violence, with clear support from SETU President, Professor Veronica Campbell:

> This is a really important initiative for SETU and builds upon the work we have already done rolling out consent training classes for all of our students. Everyone in the SETU community has a role to play in preventing sexual violence and harassment in all its forms. With the skills gained by participating in this programme, every member of our community can make a difference by helping others, stepping in, and speaking up to help prevent sexual harassment or violence.[13]

Other partners who have adopted/built on the UCC Bystander Intervention Programme include the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Dublin City University (DCU) and the University of Limerick (UL). RCSI's EDI unit offers an online RCSI Bystander Intervention Programme for staff and students, which was developed from the UCC Bystander Intervention programme, with additional material added to address medical scenarios and their diverse student body.[14] At both MIC and UL, the Bystander Intervention Programme has been made available to all staff and students on their local VLEs.[15,16] DCU's Student Bystander Intervention Programme was launched in March 2022 through Student Support & Development, with over 350 students enrolling in the programme on their VLE in the first week.[17]

Bystander Intervention Week

Bystander Intervention Week at UCC is an annual on-campus event. An important week in the calendar, information stands are located on both the main UCC campus and the Brookfield campus, with community

[13] Professor Veronica Campbell, President of SETU, https://www.setu.ie/news/setu-launches-its-new-bystander-intervention-programme.

[14] https://www.rcsi.com/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/training-and-education.

[15] https://www.mic.ul.ie/edii/sexual-violence-harassment/training-opportunities?index=0.

[16] https://www.ul.ie/equality-diversity-inclusion/consent-framework/bystander-training.

[17] https://dcustudentlife.ie/news/student-bystander-intervention-programme.

Gardaí joining the event each year to distribute information and answer questions from students and staff. It is an opportunity to create awareness of support services and the services of our community partners.

In 2024, Bystander Intervention Week was celebrated on campuses across the sector, which provided an important opportunity for UCC to support colleagues to further embed Bystander Intervention training within those institutions with the delivery of Train the Trainer sessions, a webinar on the impact and reach of the programme at UCC, the sharing of slide decks to promote delivery of the programme, and the development and sharing of social media templates and resources to support localisation. During Bystander Intervention Week 2024, the Bystander team offered events to highlight the reach and impact of the programme within UCC. At sectoral level, EDI and Sexual Harassment and Violence Prevention and Response Managers attended the webinar and two 'Train the Trainer' workshops. UCC Bystander Intervention continues to work with and support institutions to embed and support the training across the sector.

Impact

The impact of the training at UCC is predominantly measured through participant completion of two questionnaires—one prior to commencement and a second on completion of the training. Significant progress is evident in respect of key elements; (1) ability to recognise problematic behaviour, (2) ability to make an intervention, and (3) sense of personal capacity and responsibility to effect change on campus and broader society. The 2022/2023 data demonstrates critical progress in both the capacity to recognise problematic behaviour and willingness to intervene when judged necessary.

I have a good understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment and violence (Table 15.1):

Following the training, there was a 23% increase in students who had a good understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment and violence. Whilst 73% of students stated that prior to the training they had a good understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment and violence, this increased to 94% upon completion.

There is little I can do about sexual harassment and violence at my institution (Table 15.2):

Table 15.1 Understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment and violence

	Pre-commencement average %	*Post-commencement average %*
Yes	73	94
No	4	3
I have limited understanding	23	3

Table 15.2 What I can do about sexual harassment and violence at my institution

	Pre-commencement average %	*Post-commencement average %*
Yes	2	3
No	53	73
I have limited capacity	45	24

Following the training, there was a 20% increase in students who believed they can make a difference to SVSH at their institution. Upon completion, 97% rejected the suggestion that they could do little about the issue.

It is not my responsibility to address the issues of sexual harassment and violence, this is the responsibility of the perpetrators, the support services and the Gardaí (Table 15.3):

Similarly, 35.6% of students who prior to the training did not feel any responsibility to address the issue of sexual harassment and violence all changed their view to recognise their responsibility upon completion of the training.

Table 15.3 Responsibility for addressing sexual harassment and violence

	Pre-commencement average %	*Post-commencement average %*
I have a role to play	0	83
I have a small role to play	64.4	17
Agree	35.6	0

Table 15.4 Ability to intervene in a threatening or dangerous situation

	Pre-commencement average %	*Post-commencement average %*
Agree	18	50
I do not know how	27	0
I have limited ability	55	50

I have a good ability to intervene in a threatening or dangerous situation (Table 15.4):

Following training, 100% of participants believed that they had the ability to intervene in a threatening or dangerous situation.

Finally, the testimonies of student participants exhibit the powerful impact of the training, vividly demonstrating their ability to safely and effectively intervene, using the education and skills developed during their training.

> I was coming home from my shift when I saw a woman sitting on the footpath and I felt it was dangerous to leave her. So, I asked her whether everything was ok. Her phone was out of charge. I was able to help her by lending my phone for a call. I could both identify her need for help as well as successfully and safely provide her with a solution.

> I was at a friend's house. There were three lads in the room where the drinks were, and I knew one of them was interested in my friend. As we were getting our drinks the lads tried to separate my friend and I so she would be in the room alone with one of the lads, which I could tell she was uncomfortable with. From the bystander programme I knew to distract and draw attention elsewhere by pretending I lost my phone and needed my friend's help to find it, and so we left.
> I helped a girl find her friends on a night out when her friends were lost, and some guy would not take no for an answer about going back with his mates. I'm 6 ft 4" so I simply stood in front of her, and he scarpered like a startled dog.

IADT Moving Parts Campaign

Based in Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin, IADT is a multidisciplinary campus for the creative industries. A strategic mission is to build a community of ambitious students, scholars and professionals who know

that creativity can be a transformative power for positive social and sustainable change.[18] The Institute is home to the largest and most competitive animation degree (DL832 BA [Hons]) in the country, located in the National Film School (NFS). Animation graduates have gone on to achieve many successes in the film and TV industry, up to the level of Oscar nominations.[19]

For several years, IADT's animation students and recent graduates have leveraged their creative and technological skills to tackle complex and sensitive real-world problems. For example, a key feature of the DL832 programme is the incorporation of social and civic participation into the core curriculum for third-year students. Under the supervision of academic staff, students collaborate directly with clients, conceptualise visual responses based on project meetings and supporting materials, and produce short animated assets guided by expert input. Through this work, originating from the grassroots efforts of individual lecturers on the programme, IADT animation students and recent graduates have visualised the work of multiple charities, NGOs, state agencies and HEIs to target audiences, fostering strong external collaborations in the process. Recent examples include impactful projects such as Moving Parts, on tackling SVSH in higher education; animations about transgender and non-binary experiences; cultural awareness of the Irish Traveller community; Athena Swan and EDI activities in HEIs; youth mental health; and living with an acquired brain injury. These and related IADT projects highlight the power of employing a creative approach to reflect on societal challenges and amplify the voices of marginalised groups through the development of pro-social animated representations (Coughlan et al., 2021).

Introducing the Moving Parts Project

Comprising a collection of 15 short animated and motion graphic videos,[20] Moving Parts delves into the critical issues of active consent, bystander intervention and image-based sexual abuse, incorporating the

[18] *Towards a University for the Creative Industries* IADT Strategic Plan 2024–2028, https://strategy.iadt.ie/.

[19] https://iadt.ie/news/three-iadt-graduates-nominated-for-oscars/

[20] https://iadt.ie/about/equality-diversity-inclusion/moving-parts/.

lived experiences of student survivors of SVSH and empirical studies. Created by IADT animation students and graduates, the project evolved through close collaboration with University of Galway Active* Consent and UCC Bystander Intervention. As the project was undertaken during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, all of the work was completed by students and staff online and mostly off-site. The project's steering team comprised staff from the Animation and EDI teams at IADT and subject matter experts from Active* Consent and Bystander Intervention. Financial support was provided by the HEA under the 2019 call for applications aligned with the Framework for Consent. A key outcome of this Framework involves continuous messaging to disseminate information that aligns with its objectives for cultural change and awareness, including the delivery of accessible, evidence-based prevention messages, campaigns and educational plans for students and staff, integrating into a wider response plan to SVSH across the campus ecology (Humphreys & Towl, 2020).

Animated content has many advantages over live action when it comes to addressing sexual consent and SVSH in student-friendly training materials. For instance:

- Animations are accessible, effectively and meaningfully communicating difficult topics. Though the depth of animated shorts is limited, the videos are engaging due to their brevity of duration and clearly distilled messages. They serve as conversation starters.
- Animation is less triggering than other forms of visual representation.
- Animation lends to an ethical, trauma-informed and pro-social visual representation that neither trivialises nor sensationalises the subject concerns of sexual consent and SVSH. Instead, it reinforces messaging around consent awareness, counters negative normative beliefs about SVSH, and invites collective action.
- Animation is a more inclusive approach to visual creation. With EDI considerations built in from the start, it avoids the positive or negative stereotyping of specific groups and allows for the representation of diverse characters.
- Animation can be designed to incorporate multiple, diverse voiceovers in a single video.

What sets Moving Parts apart in the higher education landscape in Ireland (and beyond) is its distinctiveness as a peer-led initiative, with the materials generated *by* students (and new graduates) *for* students. This approach was informed by research indicating the efficacy of peer-to-peer communication in enhancing students' understanding of sexual consent and addressing SVSH (Ortiz & Shafer, 2018). The project's name, Moving Parts, was chosen purposefully to represent the multi-faceted nature of SVSH, influenced by diverse factors such as social norms, misogyny and popular culture.[21] Drawing upon IADT's established record of utilising animation and other artistic practices to raise awareness of societal issues, Moving Parts represents a creative and dynamic effort to combat the all-too-common problem of SVSH in HEIs. Through widespread distribution of the videos to students nationwide, the project aims to foster cultural change within and beyond the higher education sector, offer support to survivors and ultimately contribute to reducing the prevalence of violent acts.[22] Contributing to the launch of the Moving Parts campaign, then Minister Simon Harris commented that:

> This is the type of project which is key to developing a culture of respect and of integrity within our third level institutions. Relationships and sexuality are key elements of healthy social and personal development in all of our lives. Students need to have the right tools to help their development and to have an understanding of their own sexual health, of sexual health awareness and of relationships. Experiences of sexual violence or harassment have a hugely negative impact on the individual student's wellbeing, but also on the academic attainment of a student and indeed the broader college campus.[23]

As the institutional lead, IADT's EDI Office extended invitations to the Active* Consent and Bystander Intervention teams to join the project steering team, engaging them in the conception, development and implementation of the Moving Parts initiative. Although their respective programmes are distinct, both teams are national leaders in the Irish

[21] https://iadt.ie/news/iadt-launch-moving-parts-A-creative-response-to-consent-and-bystander-awareness-programmes/.

[22] https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/managing-performance/institutional-stories-of-impact/iadt-2022/.

[23] https://iadt.ie/news/iadt-launch-moving-parts-A-creative-response-to-consent-and-bystander-awareness-programmes/.

higher education sector and bring extensive experience in developing evidence-based educational and awareness initiatives aimed at addressing SVSH among third-level students. The 2020 Sexual Experiences Survey of students in Irish HEIs demonstrates the positive impact of such programmes, revealing a correlation between participation in preventive workshops and heightened awareness of SVSH in the student population (Active* Consent & USI, 2020). It was within this context that Moving Parts was conceptualised and created.

The Creative Process

The module commenced by dividing animation students into three groups, each tasked with creating animated videos. Two recent graduates were hired to develop additional animations to maximise the offerings. As part of the learning process, each student took on a specific role within their group, such as production, storyboarding, scripting, visual development or post-production. Throughout the academic term, they participated in weekly online meetings with external partners and IADT staff, presenting visual concepts for feedback and providing updates on the progress of the animations. The external partners also made themselves available beyond scheduled class times, offering to meet with individual groups and responding to queries and providing feedback via email.

Recognising the potentially triggering content of Moving Parts, particularly for any primary or secondary survivors of SVSH, the IADT project team prioritised a trauma-informed pedagogical approach tailored to the creative arts (Heise & Kay, 2021). Importantly, students who felt uncomfortable working on this topic were given the option to select an alternative project for a different client, focused on workplace ergonomics. Regular meetings with the project steering team featured informal well-being 'check-ins' with students, reminding them of the support services available. Before starting the Moving Parts project, all students participated in a 30-minute Active* Consent workshop. Additionally, those working on Bystander Intervention animations completed the online training provided by UCC.

The scripts for the 'Active Consent' and 'Image-Based Sexual Abuse' videos were collaboratively developed by the respective student groups and the team from Active* Consent. Each animation emphasises the importance of sexual consent within offline and online contexts, aligning

with Active* Consent's messaging and branding. Depicting a 'hook up' scenario between two individuals, active consent is conveyed as 'OMFG'—ongoing, mutual and freely given.

In the case of the 'Image-Based Sexual Abuse' animation, the Moving Parts project coincided with the passing of 'Coco's Law,' the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act, 2020 (Government of Ireland, 2020). This legislation, enacted after several years of mobilisation by activists, criminalises the sharing of, or threatening to share, intimate images of a person without their consent. The animation serves as a creative response to the national dialogue surrounding this highly gendered issue. In consultation with staff from Active* Consent, student animators crafted an impactful scene of a young woman experiencing the widespread sharing of her intimate images by a male partner without her consent, leaving her feeling exposed and vulnerable. The animation powerfully portrays the influence of 'lad culture' in perpetuating misogyny and SVSH within higher education settings (Phipps, 2018).

The 'Introduction to Bystander Intervention' video, animated by graduates using a script provided by UCC, functions as a simple guide to understanding the role of an Active Bystander. Designed as an informative resource, it offers viewers an initial insight into the Bystander Intervention Programme while helping to promote the training among specific target groups.

A distinctive approach was taken for the creation of 'Bystander Intervention: Survivor Story 1' and 'Bystander Intervention: Survivor Story 2'. Unlike the other productions, the dialogues in these animations were directly sourced from the personal narratives of two student survivors of SVSH, who were also former participants in the UCC Bystander Intervention Programme. Through a series of impactful and trauma-informed writing sessions, facilitated without the presence of animators, these courageous young women collaborated with experts from Bystander Intervention and Active* Consent. Together, they reshaped their written accounts into functional, anonymised scripts tailored for animation. These narratives encapsulate the survivors' experiences and the personal ramifications for them, emphasising the importance of active bystanders in addressing SVSH. Viewers are encouraged to participate in the Bystander Intervention Programme at their institution. Given the subject matter of these animations, a trigger warning was provided at the outset (Fig. 15.1).

Back at IADT, in what was a steep but crucial learning curve for the students at this stage of their professional development, the animators



Fig. 15.1 Stills from Moving Parts animations

meticulously and sensitively translated their peers' scripts into visualised content, under the guidance of their lecturers and in collaboration with the clients. Throughout the production process, the animatics were shared with the two survivors for feedback and approval, and they were also consulted on the selection of voiceover actors.

The animators were afforded significant artistic autonomy in visualising the content of each video, closely collaborating with external partners throughout the process. This creative approach not only provided a platform for IADT's students to hone their craft, aligning with the Institute's pedagogical emphasis on practice-based teaching and learning but also supported the critical peer-led element of Moving Parts. By adopting this method, the animations, including depictions of social settings and clothing choices, resonated more authentically with the preferences and lived experiences of the targeted student demographics. In terms of EDI considerations, animators were encouraged to critically reflect on the diversity of their character representations and also to minimise negative stereotyping of particular groups as far as practicable, offering another valuable learning opportunity for the students at this stage of their careers. This is particularly evident in the 'Active Consent' animation, which features two monster-like characters devoid of specific demographic characteristics, such as gender, race or ethnicity.

Dissemination and Impact

The animations have been widely disseminated to date. The majority of HEIs in Ireland were represented at the online launch of Moving Parts in March 2022, with most attendees working in EDI or student service roles. Importantly, the resources are openly accessible to HEIs, other stakeholder organisations and the general public through IADT's website[24] and YouTube channel[25] and the University of Galway Consent Hub.[26] By their design, the animations, whether used individually or as a whole suite, can be easily integrated into training workshops for students and/or staff, which some HEIs have chosen to do as part of awareness-raising and educational responses to SVSH (HEA, 2023). The standalone 'Image-Based Sexual Abuse' resource has been embedded into the Active* Consent Digital Intimacy Workshop for third-level students, and a version of this animation is also used by the team in workshops with second-level students. Beyond educational offerings, due to their brevity, these assets prove highly effective for social media campaigns, contributing to initiatives such as the #unmuteconsent campaign coordinated annually by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) since 2022.[27] Two years post the launch of Moving Parts, the project's impact is evident, with the animations receiving over 5000 views on YouTube—an almost twofold increase within a year. In reality, this figure is likely much higher, as the materials may be viewed by groups of students or staff in workshop or training settings, but are only counted once as a metric. Ongoing efforts by IADT are aimed at increasing awareness of these assets across the higher education sector, including dissemination among newly appointed Sexual Harassment and Violence Prevention and Response Managers and other relevant staff in Irish HEIs.

A distinctive feature of Moving Parts is the inclusion of Irish language resources. All videos were translated, with voiceovers added by dedicated student volunteers from UCC, introducing an additional peer-led dimension to the project. The decision was made to translate the animations

[24] https://iadt.ie/about/equality-diversity-inclusion/moving-parts/.

[25] https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU4ejMmjHiEtSpPMdlQZuTi65bxWimTwS.

[26] https://www.consenthub.ie/; https://www.consenthub.ie/explore/educators-student-leaders/moving-parts-animations-educators/.

[27] https://hea.ie/policy/policy-development/unmuteconsent/.

into Irish, or as *Gaeilge*, in order to raise awareness of consent education and bystander intervention training within the Irish-speaking community. Desk-based research conducted by the project team identified a lack of resources in this area nationally. The Irish language videos, also freely available, serve as an invaluable, classroom-friendly resource for educators seeking to diversify their teaching materials, with considerable potential for project expansion into secondary schools. Interestingly, the translation process for Moving Parts raised the complexities of translating terminology related to sexual consent and SVSH into Irish. At the launch, a student translator highlighted the absence of universally agreed-upon definitions in the native language for certain English words or phrases, stressing the need for rigour and sensitivity in such endeavours, and further study.

Like the UCC Bystander Intervention programme, the campaign's impactful performance received national recognition when IADT was awarded over €800,000 in HEA Performance Funding in 2022.[28] Building on the success of Moving Parts, this funding has facilitated the development and dissemination of additional socially informed, student-led creative projects. It has also supported a broader range of initiatives at IADT to advance dignity and respect, and EDI, and enhanced access routes for prospective students and the wider community.

Conclusions

The Bystander Intervention Programme and the Moving Parts campaign have contributed significantly to raising awareness and understanding of the challenging issues of sexual hostility, harassment and violence in Irish society and the heightened experiences of students and staff at third level. As educational institutions, both UCC and IADT have utilised their position as educators to create evidence-based programmes to underpin and direct the sectoral ambition to end SVSH at third level. Both efforts seek to empower participants through education and the development of skills, to challenge the normalisation of SVSH to effect real and meaningful cultural change across the sector.

The Moving Parts campaign reflects the uniquely collaborative approach demonstrated by colleagues across the Irish third-level sector in

[28] https://iadt.ie/news/minister-harris-announces-e833000-funding-to-iadt-to-support-and-recognise-exceptional-performance/.

the effort to end SVSH, maximising the acquired knowledge and insights of a number of institutions to provide resources for the benefit of all. In respect of Bystander Intervention, the generosity of UCC in providing free access to the training to all participating institutions demonstrates their prioritisation of effecting sectoral change over any sense of proprietal claim on the materials. In terms of accessibility, the resources created by both initiatives seek to reflect the unfortunate lived reality of many of our staff and students, and in capturing these experiences, they provide an accessible and honest opportunity for meaningful reflection, discussion and action. It is undoubted that through education, communication and dedication, both the Moving Parts animation campaign and the Bystander Intervention Programme provide clear pathways to a new normal of respect and safety for all who participate in third level education.

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CHAPTER 16

From Grassroots to Institutional Leadership: A Staff-Student Partnership Approach to Consent at Trinity College Dublin

Trish Murphy, Rachel Skelly, and Aoife Grimes

> The consent workshops have been a huge part of student life over the past three years and they have helped a lot of students, and it's brought consent into the vernacular of the college community. (Synott, 2019)

Special thanks to Ruth McMahon and Reagan Degeare, TCD Consent team.

T. Murphy (✉) · R. Skelly
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: trish.murphy@tcd.ie

R. Skelly
e-mail: raskelly@tcd.ie

A. Grimes
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: aoifegrimes24@gmail.com

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Introduction

Trinity College Dublin (TCD) is the oldest university in Ireland, established in 1592 and located in the centre of Dublin City. Its student population is just over 21,000 students, a third of whom are postgraduates while approximately a quarter are International (from outside the EU). Due to its location, historical buildings and beautiful squares, TCD is a huge tourist attraction, and thus students and tourists mingle on campus throughout the year. In addition, TCD has 1300 spaces for on-campus accommodation and 1000 beds in a residence hall in the Dublin suburbs, and this is where the Consent Workshops are located during Freshers week, the first week of the academic year. TCD now has a female Provost for the first time in its history and is very proud of its proactive stance on consent.

In September 2016, a small group of students and staff gathered at the historic Oldham House in Trinity Halls of Residence: these were to be the first participants in a pilot programme on sexual consent, which came about as a result of collaboration spanning the Trinity College Dublin Students Union (TCDSU), the Senior Tutor's Office, the Counselling Service, and other services across campus. On that first day, 93 people turned up for one session alone, going way beyond the capacity of the space that had been booked. With 40 people already in one room, the team had to call in extra facilitators to accommodate the queue of students outside. One participant noted that 'It was fabulous that people were… so happy and comfortable asking questions' (McNamee, 2017). Nine sessions ran each day across that first Freshers weekend, and this catalysed the roll-out of our now year-long programme.

At the core of these workshops is partnership, and workshops continued to be rolled out until the TCD Together Consent Programme was developed. The Programme has reached 25% of all TCD students in its first few years (4356 freshers to date). The TCD Association and Trust[1] funds the website and, from 2016 to 2023, a dedicated Consent Intern was recruited from the graduating student body on an annual basis, in the last year, this post is no longer needed as there is now a dedicated team in line with national strategy. As the success of the programme led to an increase in informal reports and disclosures of sexual harassment

[1] TCD Trust provides grant support for a wide variety of College projects where funding is not available from mainstream resources: https://www.tcd.ie/alumni/.

and violence, we responded by establishing training to support those responding to disclosure. The core principle of universal access is inherent to our work, and all the materials and programmes (materials and training manuals) are licenced for everyone to use.

It is now a long way from the first heady days of the 2016 consent workshops. What was initially a pilot was subsequently mainstreamed, with a dedicated team leading the Together Consent Programme. In 2023, the university established a Dignity, Respect, and Consent unit, which has now taken on a leadership role with regard to the delivery of consent training. However, the original elements still hold true with a staff-student partnership at the core of the programme and universal access in terms of accessing and sharing materials and training. The impetus for the workshops and subsequent Together Consent programme was the Say Something study by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) (2013) finding in which '16 per cent of students reported having experienced some form of unwanted sexual experience while in their current educational institution' (USI, 2013, p. 6). Momentum had been building for some time around change and action in this area, but this was the spark that set the movement and programme alight.

TCD Together Consent Process and Practice

> It is scary, to wake up the morning after and not know what happened. (Student feedback, 2017)

This quote from a first-year student relates to the issue of sex, consent and alcohol, and reinforces the message of consent workshops that consent cannot be given when one of the parties is under the influence of alcohol. From 2016 to 23, staff and student volunteer facilitators were recruited annually by the Together Consent team. TCDSU conducted interviews with interested students, to ensure that they were both able and safe to facilitate a workshop covering consent (experience of/history of group work facilitation was desired). A training day was organised to bring together a staff member and student to form a team that subsequently worked together delivering workshops for incoming first years. Those who volunteered reported their joy in seeing the consent 'penny' drop for participants alongside the pleasure and connection that comes from working across staff-student boundaries. The grass-roots nature of

the Together Consent programme was remarkably effective: annually, we saw some 20 students volunteer to work alongside staff who brought knowledge and expertise on consent and disclosure back to their schools and departments, spreading and embedding the message of consent. Each successive Student's Union has committed to supporting the ending of sexual violence, participating in the university's Consent Framework Implementation Oversight Group, and ensuring that the array of consent workshops led with a sex-positive message that provided an easy sell to the student body. As Together Consent grew to include bystander training and Consent + training (an amalgamation of consent, bystander and responder training), the next topic for development was obvious—pornography (Lehmiller, 2020). In 2024/5, a 'Porn and Bias' module will be delivered on the student Blackboard platform as a result of new evidence on the increased use of porn during COVID-19 (Döring, 2020). This module will be aimed at students and sit under the umbrella of the Healthy Trinity Programme.

However, during the COVID-19 period, pivoting to online delivery of the workshops made it more difficult to gain as much traction as had previously been offered in face-to-face workshops. This was a setback, but the staff-student partnership rose to the challenge. Train the trainer sessions were held for facilitation teams that hosted live online workshops using interactive elements, including the range of tools offered by online conferencing programmes like Zoom and Teams (e.g. shared whiteboards and scope for sharing documents). There is, of course, no substitution for a workshop held in person, but COVID-19 challenges uncovered the advantages of accessibility and comfort for attendees for certain groups online (see Chapter 17). The feedback from the training was also indicative that they achieved their purpose in changing perspectives and beginning conversations in the student body. Of the 106 students who responded to a 2021 survey on the workshops, only three participants disagreed with the statement;

> I feel more confident to discuss consent now than I did before this workshop. (Together Consent Feedback, 2021)

The learning from the online workshops fed forward into subsequent delivery of the Together Consent programme, and between July 2021 and June 2022, 995 staff and students completed Together Consent training.

Consent Workshops in Action—Lessons Learned

Many young students have experienced poor sex education in second-level education in Ireland (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2019) and the possibility of actually talking about sex was a novel and new learning experience for our students. This lack of ability to speak about sex can lead to lots of misunderstandings and breaches of consent that can have serious consequences for students, particularly those who have just arrived on campus. Together Consent emphasised how to seek consent, and the importance of each party involved being enthusiastic in their consent, not just complicit. The recognition that sexual violence can be accidental, and is preventable, has been core to Together Consent's ethos. The onus is placed on each individual to *seek* consent, not on those who are not consenting to learn to *speak up* and say no. We know, in reality, that this is often not possible, and that consent and no consent are communicated in a variety of ways. Time is spent in each workshop on recognising verbal and nonverbal non-consent, and perhaps most importantly, how to recognise that someone is not, or is no longer, consenting. Using the acronym 'FRIES[2]', (we remind students that consent has to be freely given, retractable, informed, enthusiastic, and specific), we set out to help to actively prevent sexual violence, as well as recognise what sexual behaviour they do, and do not, wish to engage in (Everymum, 2022).

The combination of staff and student co-facilitation facilitated the building of a sense of trust in the capacity for the college to respond to disclosures of sexual misconduct from a range of positions (e.g. student/student disclosures and student/staff disclosures), something that we have since built on, with the launch of our Dignity, Respect and Consent Unit[3] in 2024.

The commitment of TCDSU, supplying sabbatical and part-time officers to the programme over several years, provided feasibility and longevity to the Together Consent programme in TCD.

The Student Union Welfare officers, and associated residence officers in locations such as TCD Trinity Hall received disclosures of sexual violence regularly, and this informed the development of a new Sexual Misconduct

[2] Let's Talk about How We Talk About Consent: FRIES and Together Consent [movie] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2uXPPnK7TA&t=83s.

[3] https://www.tcd.ie/hr/dignity-and-respect/.

Policy, approved by the College's Board in 2023. This is characteristic of how activism and policymaking can go hand-in-hand. TCDSU published and annually updated a guide to navigating the previously limited system for reporting that was in place and published documents for people who receive disclosures of sexual violence including a document that set out to support disclosure of sexual violence and harassment in the Trinity community (TCDSU, n.d.). Further, *'What do I do now?' and 'What do we do now?* guides, written by the then Gender Equality Officer of the Union, were distributed via posters with QR codes all over the college campus.[4]

In 2019, the TCDSU voted to support a motion to fund a full-time intern whose role would be to centre the voice of sexual consent education in higher education. This was the first such full-time position created in Ireland.

In 2023, 17 Higher Education Institutions in Ireland received HEA funding for a Sexual Violence Prevention Response Manager, with many already in post. TCD hired our Dignity, Respect, and Consent Response Manager in September 2023 alongside two additional full-time equivalent staff to support the Unit's work. The foundations for these positions can be traced back to this post.

Together Consent and Innovations in Consent and Sexual Violence Prevention Education

Disclosure Training

As students developed the language from the consent workshops to describe and understand their experiences, more disclosures of sexual misconduct began to emerge. A duty of care to these students led the team to research and develop disclosure training to equip those who might hear of disclosures to be able to respond confidently. This was trialled with integrated groups of staff and students and then quickly shared with HEI colleagues. This contributed to a rising sense of awareness across the sector of the need for policy development and in-depth training for those in receipt of disclosures. Consent workshops were mainly aimed at students, but disclosure training brought staff into

[4] And see https://www.tcdsu.org/sexual-health#:~:text=If%20you've%20had%20a,ie%2Fcollegehealth.

the conversation about sexual misconduct and encouraged a whole-of-university response. Rather than being an issue for individuals, we moved towards a shared responsibility to change culture, to prevent sexual violence.

Speak Out

In 2019, the TCD Together Consent programme and the Psychological Counsellors for Higher Education in Ireland (PCHEI) received HEA funding to develop an online anonymous reporting tool. Initially, nine HEIs participated in the pilot of the Speak Out tool, now rolled out across the sector. The Speak Out tool aimed to gather data on bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual violence but with recognition of the intersectionality of experiences and the potential for collaboration with the wider HEI sector, and later broadened to include bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, discrimination, hate crime, coercive behaviour/control, stalking, assault, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape.[5] For the first time, HEIs were collecting real-time data on the lived experience to inform policy, practice and training. Prior to this data collection, there was no central collection or reporting on sexual violence data in HEIs in Ireland.

Following the launch of Speak Out in 2021, TCD has used the experiences reported through the tool to guide localised education, policy and practice. In 2024, TCD was awarded the contract to host the National Speak Out Office.

Looking Back, Moving Forwards

The knowledge gained from running Together Consent workshops, developing training, working with colleagues in other HEIs, using data from the Speak Out tool and conducting research within the College's communities has led to clear directions for the elimination of sexual misconduct and violence within higher education. Within TCD, we moved to establish a dedicated Dignity, Respect and Consent Advisory Service that holds the remit for both prevention and response in 2024. This team focuses on making the service available and accessible to all by

[5] https://hea.ie/policy/gender/ending-sexual-violence-and-harassment-in-irish-higher-education-institutions/speak-out/.

aiming to embed dignity, respect and positive sexual norms within the culture of the whole College.

The staff-student partnership approach that underpinned the Together Consent programme has seen benefits that have far outreached our original targets. Beyond the participation rates outlined in Table 16.1, Together Consent facilitated the forging of friendships between previously segregated groups; connections across professional and academic boundaries; and opened up opportunities for students and staff to find support in each other that have nothing to do with titles or courses. Funding for initiatives like the development of animated materials to support the programme was secured from Trinity Trust, part of Trinity Development & Alumni (e.g. see Everymum, 2022), and principles underpinning our consent work have been shared, mainstreamed, and fostered policies. Some of the early interns have turned their passion into careers in the area, and all kinds of people have become champions of consent. Together Consent proves that staff-student partnerships can be a blueprint for implementing cultural change, urgently needed in an increasingly complex and integrated society. We know that policies are only as good or as useful as the people who enact them, and this methodology ensures that the people engaging with the policies are also those who are delivering the training, reviewing and developing further changes and who are directly affected by the outcomes. We leave the final word to an early student facilitator:

> When I volunteered to become a consent facilitator, I thought it would look good on my CV, but I had no idea it would change me so much. … I used what I learned in my own life and improved my own intimate relationship, as well as feeling confident in intervening in dodgy consent situations I came across, and finally I discovered that I loved facilitating, and this is always going to be a part of my working life from now on. Thank you, Together Consent! (Facilitator feedback, n.d.)

Table 16.1 Overview of engagement with together consent programme (2016–2024)

	2016	*2017*	*2018*	*2019*	*2020*	*2021*	*2022*	*2023*	*2024*
Together Consent Workshops Students in Trinity Hall for first-year students	600	700	636	585	261	500	200	383	491

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PART IV

Gender and Intersectionality



CHAPTER 17

Transforming the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Agenda: Including Disability as an Intersectional Consideration

Patricia McCarthy, David Loughrey, Vivian Rath, Declan Treanor, and Lorraine Leeson

Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that traditionally, Ireland's higher education institutions (HEIs) have not been inclusive, spaces. In recent years, this led to national requirements for HEIs around gender equality (Higher Education Authority [HEA], 2022a; Chapters 2–6 in this

P. McCarthy (✉) · V. Rath · D. Treanor · L. Leeson
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: MCCARTP2@tcd.ie

V. Rath
e-mail: vrath@tcd.ie

D. Treanor
e-mail: dtreanor@tcd.ie

L. Leeson
e-mail: avpedi@tcd.ie

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volume), race equality (Kempney & Michael, 2021; HEA, 2022b; Chapter 21 in this volume) and widening participation (HEA, 2015, 2022c).

The twentieth century heralded a rapid growth in higher education (HE) in response, in part to economic demands for highly qualified skilled employees (Harrison & Atherton, 2021), and a recognition that those who obtain higher levels of education live better quality lives (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development, 2020). In recent decades, HEIs have actively encouraged participation of more diverse learners via 'widening participation' (Reilly, 2016). Across the European Union, the widening participation agenda has, over the last thirty years, led to a focus on increasing participation of students from under-represented, disadvantaged social backgrounds, including disabled students.

Moreover, the European Union has ratified and committed to the principles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006), and to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] (United Nations, 2015). These international human rights instruments make specific reference of the need to protect the rights of disabled people to access and engage in education, (UNCRPD Article 24 and SDG Goal 4, quality education). However, some scholars argue that they don't go far enough with Wickenden (2023, p. 1) arguing that '… the SDGs and other guidelines and treaties do not address disability as a significant identity sufficiently, nor recognise it as an important aspect of many people in combination with other identities, rather than a stand-alone feature of them.' She argues for a broader, more flexible approach to be taken, one that recognises how different identities combine and influence experience to be adopted when analysing the types of disadvantages that people experience.

This chapter opens with a case study that presents one disabled woman's experience of navigating the academic system, reflecting that we recognise disability as an intersectional issue and note ways in which

D. Loughrey
Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: david.loughrey@dcu.ie

intersectionality impacts on participation in HEIs for disabled people. Next, we reflect on the policy landscape that has underpinned a significant increase in participation in higher education by disabled students in recent decades. We then consider the need to diversify the higher education workforce, building on progress seen with respect to the student population. We note the limited data available at present to help benchmark and understand the landscape as fully as we would like. For disabled people studying and/or working in our HEIs, many challenges persist. Two further case studies illustrate approaches to identifying systemic barriers within one HEI, Trinity College Dublin (Case Study 2), while Case Study 3 focuses on supporting students towards employment via an in-house internship programme. Finally, we make some recommendations for further change and demonstrate that authentic understanding of the lived experience contributes positively to the development of effective policy in relation to disabled staff (TCD Forum, 2021).

Case Study 1: Navigating Higher Education and Academia: One Woman's Journey

Commencing education in Ireland in the 1970s as a vision impaired person meant 'special education' was the only real option if I was to have an education. This required moving over 250 km from family. I was among the first cohort of students in the school I attended to sit state examinations in the late 1980s. At that time, there was little or no recognition of my abilities or what I might like to do as an adult and no expectation that I would pursue higher education. Societal and policy changes that emerged in the 1990s provided me the opportunity to complete an undergraduate degree, a masters degree and, in 2014, my PhD.

I have been a casual member of staff since 2014 and during that time have undertaken a range of tasks including coordinating modules, delivering lectures and supervising master's students' dissertations. Throughout this time, my work has always been of a precarious nature while making a valuable contribution to the institution. During my time in academia, I have always believed that the valuable work undertaken by casual/occasional staff has not been recognised or appreciated. My work also involves advocating for the rights of disabled staff and postgraduates as their voices have been absent from decision-making positions. Over the years, it was evident that there were no pathway or

leadership routes open to those like me who are disabled and on precarious contracts. Consequently, it became apparent that if any change was to occur, we would have to make a space for ourselves. Thus, leading to the establishment of the Trinity Forum for Disabled Staff and Postgraduate Students (see Case Study 2). Although a space has now been created for the voice of disabled people at the decision-making table, there is a need to ensure that this voice is supported to amplify and prioritise disability concerns at all levels of the university if systemic change is to occur.

The Legislation and Policy Landscape

The profile of students HE in Ireland has changed significantly across the past decades, with increased diversification of the student population. This has occurred as result of a series of strategies, policies, human rights instruments, accessible infrastructure, support and linked funding to HEIs.

Legislation including the Disability Act 2005 (Government of Ireland, 2005) and the Equal Status Acts 2000–2018 (Government of Ireland, 2018) provide a legal framework for protecting the rights of disabled individuals, including their right to access education. Additionally, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, derived from Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Act 2014 is a driver of change (Government of Ireland, 2014). With IHREC, all public HEIs must undertake assessment and monitoring, and have policies and plans to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of staff, students and the wider public that are served by the work of HEIs.

In March 2018, the Irish government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), one of the last European Union member states to do so. The UNCRPD identifies disabled people as 'those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.' (Article 1, UNCRPD). Article 24 focuses on education, stating that States Parties 'will ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities' (Article 24

(5)). Article 27 focuses on work and employment, including reference to ensuring opportunities for employment of disabled people in the public sector (Article 27 (1(g)).

In Ireland, supports available to disabled people in the workplace are based on the Employment Equality Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) and the Disability Act (Government of Ireland, 2005). The Employment Equality Act outlines, among other things, the obligations of employers to ensure disabled people are actively supported in the workplace (Leonard, 2023) while the Disability Act (2005) defines disability vis-a-vis employment as follows:

> A substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the Irish State or to participate in social or cultural life in the Irish State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment (Government of Ireland (2005), Disability Act 2005, Art 2(1)).

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015–2024 (Government of Ireland, 2015) includes the obligation on public sector bodies to have disabled people constitute 6% of employees by 2024 (Leonard, 2023). Yet, Irish people are less likely to declare a disability than those in other countries (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment [DETE], 2022, pp. 15–16) suggesting concerns around disclosure remain significant for disabled people. Ireland has the fourth lowest rate of employment of working aged disabled people in the European Union (38%) (Kelly & Bertrand, 2021). Barriers to employment include hurdles around the recruitment pipeline, which are also further hampered by insufficient accessible public transport and housing options (Leonard, 2022, 2023) alongside lack of a statutory Access to Work Fund, which is in place in many other European countries including the UK, Belgium and Germany has been highly problematic (Napier et al., 2021). We note that in July 2024, the Department of Social Protection announced a new Work and Access programme which seeks to respond to feedback regarding the lack of provision to date,[1] but the provisions included are far from ideal (e.g. 24 hours per year of Irish Sign Language/English interpreting).

[1] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/429d6-operational-guidelines-work-and-access/

Pipelines to Academia: From Undergraduate to Postgraduate and Beyond

The range of policies outlined above have led to a 273% increase in disabled students accessing disability support services over the last 13 years (AHEAD, 2023). In 2021/22, 18,097 students (6.9% of all students in HE) registered with their HEI's disability support services (ibid.). Of these, 16, 196 were undergraduates. At postgraduate level, however, while AHEAD reports a marked increase on the percentage of postgraduate students registered with supports for the academic year 2021/22 in contrast with 2020/21, numbers still remain low with just 3% ($n = 1901$) of postgraduate students registered with supports. Of these, 14.9% ($n = 278$) report more than one disability (Table 17.1). Table 17.2 demonstrates the same general proportional progression of disabled students to postgraduate level, but at much lower rates at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level. As AHEAD notes, '…pathways to postgraduate study are frequently more challenging to negotiate' (2023, p. 33). The numbers are particularly low for those who are sign language users with Coogan and O'Leary (2018) reporting that only 4 of 301 Irish deaf women aged 18–60+ years who see themselves as members of the Irish Deaf community (see Matthews, 1996) reported holding a masters degree.

Table 17.1 Disabled students registered with HEI support services in 2021/22 (data drawn from AHEAD, 2023)

Disability	*Percentage*	*Number of students registered*
Significant Learning Difficulty	40%	7204
Mental Health Condition	21.70%	3919
Significant Ongoing Illness	12.60%	2284
ADD/ADHD	10.20%	1851
Aspergers/Autism	9.8%	1640
DCD-Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia	8.8%	1640
Neurological/Speech and Language	6.60%	1195
Physical Disability	6.20%	1122
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	2.80%	505
Blind/Visually Impaired	1.60%	422
Other	1.10%	236
Total students registered 2021/22		22,018

Table 17.2
Postgraduate disability breakdown (Primary and additional disability combined) (AHEAD, 2023, drawn from Fig. 6, p. 33)

Other	0.50%	10
Blind/Visually Impaired	2.30%	44
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	2.90%	56
Neurological/Speech and Language	6.10%	116
DCD-Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia	6.30%	120
Aspergers/Autism	7.90%	151
Physical Disability	8.40%	160
ADD/ADHD	10.20%	194
Significant Ongoing Illness	12.40%	236
Mental Health Condition	21.30%	404
Significant Learning Difficulty	37.80%	718

Disability As An Intersectional Consideration

The welcomed diversification of the student population outlined above is not yet reflected in the staffing of Irish HEIs. This volume (e.g. see Section 17.1) illustrates the work undertaken to address the under-representation of women at senior levels in HEIs in Ireland and the measures implemented across the system to address gaps identified, most notably via the Athena Swan Ireland Framework, mapping gender equality work to institutional eligibility for national research funding. In late 2021, the new Athena Swan Ireland Framework was launched, incorporating an intersectional approach, including consideration of disability.[2] This recognises the intersection between gender and other identities that combine to result in multiple-marginalisation within HE. Intersectionality argues that individual identities such as disability, gender, economic status, ethnicity, race, marital status, family status, religion, sexual orientation and age, overlap and combine to create different modes of discrimination and inequality (Kelly et al., 2021 and see Chapters 3 and 6 in this volume).

Intersectionality is the understanding that social inequalities are not just summative, they are mutually constituting. Crenshaw (1989) used the term to describe how individual characteristics (e.g. race, class, gender) 'intersect' and overlap with one another. The term was originally used by Crenshaw to describe the experience of Black women, outlining that disadvantage experienced by a Black woman may be compounded by the

[2] For further detail, see: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/international-charters/athena-swan-ireland/FAQs/intersectionality.

inequalities they face as a woman and as a Black person, and is distinct from the experiences of a Black man or a white woman. Since then, the term has been used in different ways. Crenshaw herself refers to the term's changing use and meaning, noting in a 2020 interview with Time Magazine's Katy Steinmetz that:

> Intersectionality is not identity politics…it is a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.

Here, we build on this, and drawing on the work of scholars like Wickenden (2023), Garland-Thomson (1997) and Naples et al. (2018), insert disability as a key consideration in the conversation on intersectionality. We are also keenly aware that we are at the beginning of a journey in considering how we can deliver truly effective intersectional policies and practices; for us, it is essential that disability be considered in any conversation relating to intersectionality in Irish HEIs.

Diversification of the population is complex and 'diversity itself does not necessarily carry a social justice agenda and does not itself create justice' (Keane et al., 2022, p. xvii). While the focus of this volume is on inclusive gender equality, it behoves us to remember that gender is only one part of a person's identity. Equally, disability is just one element of a disabled person's identity. Therefore, to fully understand the lived experience of disabled people and to ascertain to what extent their intersectional identities interact with experiences of discrimination and marginalisation, we must consider the entire picture of a person's identity. Brown recommends that 'as we examine ableist ideologies and structures, we must also pay attention to intersectional experiences, that require us as academics to understand the ways that multiply-marginalized people are subject to interlocking oppressive systems of, for instance ableism.' (Sins Invalid, 2015,[3] n.p. as cited in Singer & Bacon, 2020).

[3] See for futher information: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bed3674f8370ad8c02efd9a/t/5f1f0783916d8a179c46126d/1595869064521/10_Principles_of_DJ-2ndEd.pdf.

A Note on Ableism

Ableism can be described as the stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and social oppression of disabled people. (Bogart & Dunn, 2019) It is a term that is constantly evolving as disabled people take greater ownership of the language of disability. Ableism is distinct from but related to disableism which describes acts of oppression and discrimination enacted against disabled people simply for being disabled (Goodley, 2016). While there may be obvious and direct forms of discrimination across mainstream society often this marginalisation is more subtle and pervasive leading to internalised ableism (Harrison & Atherton, 2021). Timmons et al. found 'clear evidence that ableism manifests differently depending on the nature of the individual's disability, their gender and the social context, questioning previous conceptualizations of ableism as a general attitude' (2024, p. 637). This, in turn, impacts upon disabled peoples' opportunities for wider social engagement, education and employment, resulting in multiple-marginalisations.

Diversification of the Higher Education Workforce and the Employment of Disabled People

As Chapter 10 in this volume reports, we currently have a very incomplete picture of the make-up of the HEI workforce from an EDI perspective. This is a result of the convergence of several things, including low levels of disclosure relating to equality characteristics generally and the resulting lack of benchmarking that is possible. For example, we note the HEA's Race Equality Implementation Plan 2022–24 (HEA, 2022b) includes an action around systematic data collection with the goal of providing the necessary evidence base regarding staff and student representation, access and outcome by ethnicity and benchmarking of this data against Census data via a voluntary disclosure campaign to be led by the HEA and HEI representative bodies. Similarly, while there are statutory employment targets in place that arise from the Disability Act, there are also issues around level of disclosure in cases where disabled people are in employment in the HEI sector.

Census 2022 reports that 22% of the population report have 'a long-lasting condition or difficulty' CSO,[4] with 8% (407,342 people) reporting experiencing 'at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to a great extent or a lot'. For those aged 20–49 years, the percentage experiencing a long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent ranges from 16–19%. For those aged 50 years and above, this rises, with a more rapid increase in reporting beyond 75 years.

Ireland's public sector bodies have a national target to employ a minimum of 6% disabled people by 2025, an increase on earlier targets of 3%, and (for 2024) 4.5%, arising from Part 5 of the Disability Act (2005). Public bodies report annually to the National Disability Authority regarding progress and compliance reports are published annually, with 66.2% meeting the 4.5% target in 2022. For the Further and Higher Education sector, not all HEIs are listed in the 2022 report, but of those included, 17% of staff at Dún Laoighre Institute of Art, Design and Technology report a disability, while the lowest percentile listed is from Atlantic Technological University Galway-Mayo, recording 2.1% (National Disability Authority, 2023).

As noted earlier, there are multiple challenges in securing reliable data across equality grounds, and this is equally true for the disability ground. While figures that inform annual reporting on disabled staff employment to the NDA relies on disclosures by staff within their HEI's HR Core Portal,[5] the figures recorded there may differ from figures reported via other venues, e.g. all-staff equality, diversity and inclusion surveys. As an example, 1625 staff at Trinity College Dublin completed the disability status section of the Trinity HR Core Portal with 61 (3.75%) sharing a disability under the definition in the Disability Act 2005 as of January 2023. Disability (alongside gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age) can also be disclosed voluntarily via the College's equality, diversity and inclusion all-staff survey. Table 17.3 shows voluntarily disclosed diversity characteristics for Trinity College Dublin across the period 2018–22, demonstrating a higher level of disclosure for disability than

[4] For the Press Statement Census 2022 Results Profile 4—Disability, Health and Carers, see here: https://tinyurl.com/yc4y9rpk

[5] Core Portal is a HR software solution where staff can access salary, pension and other information and, at the employee's discretion, they can include their own diversity details in their personal profile.

ethnic origin, religion, or sexual orientation. These figures relate to an all-staff survey of 3977 people, which garnered 1302 responses.

We currently do not have a mechanism for clearly understanding the breadth of roles that disabled staff hold in HEIs; any analysis here would offer an unreliable picture of the situation. Increased levels of disclosure within the HR Core Portal would facilitate better understanding of pipelines and progression. Even with progress in the public sector, captured in the NDA's annual compliance monitoring reports, we know that there are significant barriers to securing academic roles and progressing across the academic pipeline for disabled academics. At present, we simply do not know how many junior/senior disabled academics there are in HEIs nor have we any clarity as to the disability groups that are less represented. However, extrapolating from AHEAD annual reports on disabled student participation rates, and our engagement with disabled postgraduate students and staff on the ground, we see evidence of a leaky pipeline. In part, this is a legacy issue reflecting the still low progression rates through postgraduate study by disabled people. We also believe that biased perceptions which tend to cluster around a deficit framing of disability and a narrow conceptualisation of human capital impacts outcomes for disabled people, which Connell (2013, p. 104) describes as, 'the business of forming the skills and attitudes needed by a productive workforce—productive in the precise sense of producing an ever-growing mass of profits for the market economy'. Further, many have noted that individualism and hyper-competitive academic student

Table 17.3 Overview of voluntarily disclosed diversity characteristics 2018–22 (Trinity College Dublin Institutional Silver Athena Swan Application 2023 (redacted))

Core portal	*Date of birth*	*Civil status*	*Nationality*	*Disability*	*Ethnic origin*	*Religion*	*Sexual orientation*
21/22	100%	99%	97%	35%	21%	20%	18%
20/21	100%	99%	97%	34%	20%	19%	17%
19/20	100%	99%	96%	33%	18%	18%	16%
18/19	100%	99%	96%	32%	15%	13%	13%
17/18	100%	99%	93%	29%	11%	11%	10%
Growth	–	–	+4%	+6%	+10%	+9%	+8%

environments magnify and spread ableist ideals (Brown & Leigh, 2018; Leigh & Brown, 2020).

What Happens When Disability And Gender Intersect?

Historically, disabled people have been absent from academia within the HE sector. Many state that disability is socially constructed and that social structures shape and socialise us into adult members of society (e.g. Burnell Reilly, 2022; Thomas, 2004). Consequently, how disability has been constructed within society has resulted in many disabled people feeling that employment within HE is not a suitable option for them. The lack of visible role models further strengthens this belief. As a result, the prevailing culture means that the number of disabled people working within the sector remains persistently low.

Bourdieu asserts that one's habitus is deeply engendered within individuals and that this can influence how we act or think (Burnell Reilly, 2022). As habitus is seen to operate below the level of consciousness, with habits 'internalised as a second nature' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56), it could be considered that changing one's habitus as a disabled person to include higher educational and employment aspirations would be too challenging. However, Reay et al. (2009) assert that habitus is permeable and can be adapted and modified as one's circumstances change (see Case Study 1).

The impact of having a disability on employment opportunity varies by disability type, with those who have a 'psychological or emotional condition' or 'difficulty with basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying' most severely impacted (Kelly & Bertrand, 2021). We caution that securing disaggregated data that truly allows to identify the challenges of particular disability groups remains a challenge. For example, it is hard to secure reliable figures of Irish Sign Language users in datasets as they are often included in a category 'hearing impairment' or 'sensory disability', which renders the specific barriers that signers face invisible and makes it incredibly difficult to propose data informed policy recommendations (see Napier et al., 2021). Kelly and Bertrand also report that for all disability types, the negative effect is slightly higher among males, presenting us with an intersectional gender + disability point for consideration at sectoral

level. Socio-economic status also plays a role with the Higher Education Authority reporting that people with a 'physical condition' are most disadvantaged, with 13.9% coming from disadvantaged areas (HEA, 2022c). Furthermore, the intersections of disability + race also require consideration, as, at present, there is a paucity of published empirical data in this regard (Miller, 2022, 2023; Ressa & Danforth, 2023). Miller (2023), reflecting on the situation in the UK advocates for HEIs to engage in a genuine way with students and staff from diverse backgrounds to ensure their voices are heard and their needs considered in decision-making processes. This, she notes, means that the people sitting around the decision-making tables must come from diverse backgrounds. She writes:

> By recognising and addressing the intersectional nature of persistent barriers, universities can then claim they are striving towards creating equitable, diverse, inclusive and accessible teaching and learning environments that meet the needs of all students, regardless of their race or disability status. Alternatively, the possibility of achieving significant change remains an illusory pipe dream. (2023)

Within HEIs, the policy and legislative landscape around employment and equality of opportunity for marginalised groups has changed, however, the risk remains that disability falls down the priority list within a competitive EDI agenda (Rath, 2021). While pathways to further and higher education for disabled students have opened up across the past three decades, following the establishment of AHEAD and the introduction of the Disabled Access Route to Education (DARE)[6] scheme and support services within HEIs, there remain significant systemic barriers that impede participation, especially when examined via an intersectional lens.

Responding to the Challenges

While significant work remains to ensure that disabled people from all backgrounds are recruited into academic and professional, management and support roles in Irish HEIs, we note that in 2024, the Irish Universities Association published a guidance document for members focused

[6] https://accesscollege.ie/dare/

on the recruitment, interviewing and onboarding of disabled candidates, which we believe will be an important point of reference for HEIs.[7]

For those in employment in HEIs, a range of challenges persist, summarised in Case Study 2, and see the TCD Forum's report on ableism in academia (2001). Trinity College Dublin has seen several recent developments that have led to partnership between disabled staff and management, resulting in transformational change. The first is the Forum for Disabled Staff and Postgraduates (Case Study 2) and the other is the Disabled Internship Programme, an innovative development led by the disAbility Service at TCD (Case Study 3).

Case Study 2: The Forum for Disabled Staff and Postgraduates

The TCD Forum for Disabled Staff and Postgraduates (TCD Forum), founded and chaired by Dr Vivian Rath, was established in 2020. This is a grassroots group focused on developing a community through a weekly virtual-tea and fostering a more inclusive university for all through representation of disabled people in decision making in the university. The Forum advocates for a partnership approach between universities and disabled people (Rath, 2024), and was established in line with the UNCRPD Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) structure: thus, the group is led by and comprised of disabled people. It has produced two reports examining the experiences of disabled staff and postgraduates, 'Ableism in Academia in Ireland: Experiences of Disabled Academics and Recommendations for the Future', and 'Shifting Sands: Disability and Reasonable Accommodations in the Covid/Post Covid Higher Education Environment'. The overarching finding from these reports is that disabled staff and postgraduates researching and working in HE face systemic ableism which impacts on them in numerous ways including, fear of disclosing a disability, difficulties accessing reasonable accommodations, advocacy exhaustion, lack of representation of disabled people in employment and in decision making in HE, failure to provide career pathways for disabled staff and an HE environment where disabled postgraduates

[7] https://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IUA-Guidelines-Regarding-Accessibility-and-Inclusiveness-of-Recruitment-processes-June-2024.pdf.

and academics felt they do not belong (Rath, 2022; TCD Forum, 2021). The reports make a number of recommendations for improvement:

- Create an environment for disclosure
- Take a whole of life-cycle approach to the employment of disabled people
- Position disability as an equality and diversity consideration
- Cultural change, awareness and education is needed
- Take a universal design approach across HE, including language and communication.

The Forum has been a catalyst for a wider discussion on progression to postgraduate and academia resulting in the formation of a HEA funded, national three-year programme, LaunchPAD,[8] to increase representation of disabled people at postgraduate level and on to early career research (Rath, 2023).

Representation from the Forum prompted Trinity College Dublin's Equality Committee[9] to establish a Disabled Staff Working Group in 2021 to consider and make recommendations on EDI vis-a-vis disabled staff. The Working Group has representation from the Forum and is co-chaired by a disabled staff member (McCarthy) and (until 2024) the Deputy Director of HR. As of May 2024, it is a Working Group of the recently established People and Culture Committee, a Principal Committee of Board. This offers a formalised structure to include the voice of disabled people from the bottom-up, and to inform and influence policy development for the university, which feeds through formal university governance structures. This has offered a mechanism to ensure flow of concerns, proposals and recommendations grounded in the lived experience of disabled academics in the institution, allowing a bottom-up process of leadership. From this, we also have developed mechanisms for ensuring that there is also a responsiveness loop and a responsibility loop factored into the system.

[8] https://www.ahead.ie/postgraduate

[9] Now, as a result of changes to committee structures in academic year 2023/4, the Equality Committee has been replaced by our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Sub-Committee, which reports to the Principal Committee—People and Culture.

Case Study 3: The disAbled Internship Programme

The Trinity disAbled Internship Programme emphasises the critical need for inclusive employment strategies within Trinity College Dublin. This initiative targets the systemic employment challenges faced by underrepresented disabled groups, by creating effective pathways from undergraduate and postgraduate levels to professional and academic roles in HE.

The programme is uniquely designed to address the intersectional nature of disability, acknowledging that disabilities often intersect with other identity factors, leading to multiple-marginalisations. By fostering an environment that understands and accommodates these complexities, Trinity not only aims to enhance workplace inclusivity but also to set a standard for employment practices across the educational sector. Key to this initiative is the structured transition it offers, which is supported by various components:

- Internship Placement: Internships are provided within Trinity College itself, tapping into different sectors such as academic schools and professional services. These placements are crucial for practical experience and are tailored to ensure inclusivity.
- Professional Development: A series of workshops and seminars that equip interns with essential skills, from resume building to personal branding, are integral to preparing them for the workforce.
- Peer Mentoring and Networking: The programme facilitates connections with seasoned professionals and includes mentorship opportunities that are vital for professional growth and networking.
- Inclusive Work Environment: Trinity is proactive in implementing accessibility measures and sensitivity training, ensuring that all spaces are inclusive and supportive of diverse needs.

We also focus on the tangible outcomes of the programme:

- Eighteen departments have engaged with the programme to date, offering a broad spectrum of opportunities.
- A significant proportion of participants have transitioned into full-time roles, highlighting the programme's effectiveness in fostering career readiness and employability among disabled students.

The Trinity disAbled Internship Programme aligns with Trinity's strategic goals and also addresses critical gaps in employment for disabled individuals, thereby promoting a more inclusive and accessible academic community. This initiative is a pivotal step in reducing employment barriers and exemplifies Trinity's commitment to diversity and inclusion within the global educational landscape.

Where to Next?

As we have outlined, disabled people face substantial challenges in progressing through the academic pipeline from the undergraduate student body to academic and professional, management and support service roles in Ireland. They are under-represented, experience a lack of employment opportunity and often feel they do not belong (Rath et al., 2022; Sheikh et al., 2021). For certain disability subgroups the challenges are much greater: the representation of those with sensory disabilities in the student body is lowest, and, over the last eleven years has increased by less than half the average rate (AHEAD, 2021). Disabled PhD holders are more likely to be under-employed or become adjunct faculty (Dolmage, 2017). Only a small proportion of faculty have a disability (Curtis & Thornton, 2013; Grigely, 2017) with some research suggesting these disabilities are acquired in later career stages (National Center for Science & Engineering Statistics, 2021). Progression for disabled academics can be limited because structures are designed by and for people without disabilities (Sang et al., 2021; Yerbury & Yerbury, 2021). The traditional route of progression forces disabled academics to compete via normal pathways within which the disabled academic is characterised as lacking the necessary qualities for promotion, both by themselves and their line managers (Sang et al., 2021). This represents a loss to the diversity of universities and addressing this legacy gap will require strategic initiatives that address institutional barriers.

In Ireland, schemes such the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI)[10] have been successful in addressing the hierarchical under-representation of senior academic women. Additionally, the DARE scheme has increased significantly the representation of disabled people in

[10] https://hea.ie/policy/gender/senior-academic-leadership-initiative/

the undergraduate student body. We propose that initiatives which incorporate a similar approach to addressing inequities with disabled academics are required. Programmes developed to facilitate the development of minorities among academic faculty in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields have reported significant improvement in engagement of students from diverse backgrounds (Allen-Ramdial & Campbell, 2014). Representative mentors can help support the successful progression of disabled students in their degree programmes (Meeks et al., 2020).

A potential initiative modelled on these prior schemes that we propose here is the Disability Access Route to Academia (DARA), with the goal of supporting the progression of early career disabled academics to faculty by creating a targeted pathway for them. This would involve allocating a small number of places to qualified academics who, because of disability, have experienced additional challenges in career progression. Crucially, priority would be given to those with disabilities that are particularly underrepresented in HE. For example, as with DARE, those with sensory disabilities who are qualified for such a position would have priority. Such an initiative would be in line with the targets of the National Access Plan, the Public Sector Duty and the goal of achieving gender equality. Such a scheme would signal a paradigmatic shift from seeing disability as a potential hindrance in an academic candidate to a view which acknowledges the aptitude and skills involved in managing the substantial additional challenges with disability in progressing through the educational system. This in turn would have a transformative impact on the culture of academic institutions in reducing ableism. Reframing disability as form of cognitive diversity that has the potential to contribute to the development of various human initiatives would help reduce stigma surrounding disability (Bauman & Murray, 2010) encouraging academics and students to disclose a disability and access supports to fulfil their potential.

A final proposal relates to the long called-for 'Access to Work' type scheme which operates in the UK and in many European Union countries, providing statutory funding to disabled employees and/or their employers to cover, for example, personal assistant costs, sign language interpreter costs, etc.[11] While the Irish government does provide some

[11] https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work.

supports, e.g. the Reasonable Accommodation Fund provides for a Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant (WEAG), the Personal Reader Grant (PRG), the Job Interview Interpreter Grant (JIIG)[12] and the Employee Retention Grant (ERG), these do not go far enough for example, the JIIG is available only for pre-employment interviews and no support is available as a matter of course once a person has been employed. The process of navigating the highly bureaucratic existing system has been problematised and the need for reform raised in a documentary, 'London Calling', aired on RTÉ in 2019 (and see Napier et al, 2021), though we wait to see how the Work and Access programme launched July 2024 impacts on the experiences of individuals.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a high-level overview of the context of disabled peoples' access to Irish HEIs from undergraduate to postgraduate and employment, with the proviso that data available at sectoral level is incomplete. We identified a range of challenges and recommendations, including the need to work on legacy issues to support more disabled people through to postgraduate level and into academic, professional, managerial and support service roles in HEIs. We noted that there are bias issues that need to be explicitly addressed and emphasised that an intersectional perspective is required when considering disabled peoples' inclusion. We considered existing awareness of intersections across gender + disability and disability + socio-economic status and highlighted the need for focused attention on disability + race and ethnicity.

The lack of conscious focus on disability to date, and the limited inclusion of consideration in, e.g. gender equality actions and race and ethnic equality actions at sectoral level, emphasises why disability must be positioned firmly as an intersectional equality, diversity and inclusion concern. This in turn underpins the need for cultural change, awareness and education, and supports the goal of taking a universal design approach across the Irish higher education sector.

[12] https://www.gov.ie/en/service/4c4ce4-job-interview-interpreter-grant/

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CHAPTER 18

Moving Beyond the Binary—Embedding Gender Identity, Expression and Diversity Training and Best Practice into Irish HEIs

Áine Coady, Allison Kenneally, Carol Wrenn, Edel Foster, and Ruadhán Ó Críodáin

Introduction

It is here, in our universities, that we can begin to enact such transformative thinking as is necessary to create the foundations of a society that is more inclusive, participatory and equal. (President Michael D. Higgins, Speech at the EUA Annual Conference, University of Galway, 7th April 2016).

Á. Coady
Teagasc, Carlow, Ireland
e-mail: aine.coady@teagasc.ie

A. Kenneally (✉)
South East Technological University, Carlow, Ireland
e-mail: allison.kenneally@setu.ie

C. Wrenn
Technological University of the Shannon, Athlone, Ireland
e-mail: carol.wrenn@tus.ie

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This chapter outlines the innovative and highly collaborative cross-sectoral approach to embedding best practice in relation to gender identity and expression in Irish HEIs, flowing from a highly successful Higher Education Authority Gender Equality Enhancement Fund (GEEF) project on 'The development and implementation of a Gender Identity, Expression & Diversity Training Programme for staff in Irish HEIs'. This chapter focuses on the outcomes, challenges and learnings of this project, providing a critical reflection on the work in this area, and making recommendations for sustainable change. It aims to contribute to continuing education, training, awareness and inclusion of the trans[1] and non-binary[2] community across higher education in Ireland.

Over the past number of years, and largely in response to national policy (and see Chapter 3, this volume), Irish HEIs have put in place a number of structural, policy and practice initiatives to ensure they provide welcoming and supportive environments for a diverse staff and student body. This includes staff and students with a variety of backgrounds and gender identities. A number of policy imperatives and legislative requirements are in place to direct work in this area and have been the catalyst for action at institutional level.

Ireland passed the Gender Recognition Act in 2015 in response to the High Court case of Foy v. An t-Ard Chlaraitheoir & Others (2007), which held that the failure to allow a transgender woman who had undergone gender-affirming surgery, to obtain a new birth certificate recording her gender as female violated her rights under Article 8 and 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This decision was unchallenged by the State and eventually led to the introduction of the 2015 Act. That Act

E. Foster
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: edel.foster@mic.ul.ie

R. Ó. Críodáin
ShoutOut, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: director@shoutout.ie

[1] Those who experience a gender identity/expression that differs from their sex assigned at birth (Hughto et al., 2015). Transgender individuals often describe their gender identity as being within the male/female binary.

[2] Non-binary individuals may describe their gender identity as being somewhere between or outside of the male/female binary (Matsuno & Budge, 2017).

provides a legal mechanism by which trans people in Ireland can apply to have their preferred gender legally recognised by the State. The process is based on self-declaration and does not require any details or certification of care such as medical history or confirmation of a diagnosis. Further, the person is not required to have lived in the acquired gender for a specific period of time after their transition. In this way, the act provided a clear legal mechanism by which transgender people in Ireland can legally change their gender and have this recognised by the State.

Irish equality legislation prohibits discrimination on specific grounds under the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts (the Equality Acts), both of which may apply to HEIs, depending upon the context. These Acts prevent unlawful discrimination and harassment on protected grounds including gender. These Acts give effect to EU legislation on equality, and it has been established under EU law that a transgender person who experiences discrimination arising from their gender reassignment, or transition, is protected on the ground of gender.[3]

The European Courts of Justice have approved the approach that the gender ground protects transgender persons from discrimination (e.g. see P v S and Cornwall County Council (Case C-13/9)). In Ireland, the Workplace Relations Commission decision in Hannon v. First Direct Logistics Limited (Decision No. DEC-E2011-066) affirmed this approach and the gender ground in our Equality legislation has therefore been interpreted to protect transgender people from discrimination.

From a policy perspective, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) First National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEA, 2016), the Gender Equality Taskforce Action Plan (HEA, 2018) and, more recently, the HEA's Second National Review of Gender Equality (HEA, 2022c) all recommend that Irish HEIs take an intersectional and inclusive approach to gender equality work, commit to the Athena Swan Ireland Charter Principles and apply for Athena Swan Ireland Institutional Awards. This requires institutions to reflect on the support, policies and practices that are in place to ensure that staff and students are not discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity.

[3] The European Union's Gender Recast Directive DIRECTIVE 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast)] protects against discrimination arising from the gender reassignment of a person as outlined in Recital 3.

The HEA reports also highlight the need to embed gender equality in the organisational culture of HEIs to increase gender awareness amongst staff and to combat the stereotyping of traditional binary gender roles in our HEIs. To this end, it is interesting to note that 41% of respondents from the 2022 HEA's National Online Survey (Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data from the Second Gender Equality Review of Irish HEIs, HEA, 2022d) who identity as 'non-binary/other/prefer not to say' disagreed/strongly disagreed that leaders and senior management in their HEI are visible in addressing issues around gender equality.

Primary research and data on gender identity in Irish higher education is limited. However, a recent study by Ceatha et al. (2023) found that just over 1% of Irish 17–18 year olds surveyed identify as gender minority youth (1.1%), with 0.7% identifying as transgender and 0.5% describing their gender as other. This broadly aligns to data from the United States where Herman et al. (2022) found that 1.3% of those aged 18–24 years identified as transgender or gender non-conforming, as did 1.4% of those aged 13–17 years. In the 2021 England and Wales census, 0.5% (262,000 people) indicated that their gender identity was different from their sex registered at birth (Office for National Statistics, 2023). A 2021 global study of over 19,000 people across 27 countries found that an average of 1% of people globally identified as transgender, non-binary, non-conforming, gender-fluid or "in another way", with an average of 4% of those born since 1997 who are no older than 24 identifying as transgender, non-binary, non-conforming, gender-fluid or "in another way" (IPSOS, 2021). This implies that, at an estimate of 1%, based on HEA Higher Education Key Facts and Figures (HEA, 2023), there may be in the region of 2500 students and 350 staff in Irish HEIs who identify as transgender, non-binary, non-conforming, gender-fluid or in another way.

According to the Report on the National Survey of Staff Experiences of Bullying in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEA, 2022a), minority groups such as LGBTQ+ respondents, ethnic minorities and respondents with a disability were more likely to endure negative acts at work, bullying and cyberbullying compared to majority groups (i.e. heterosexuals, ethnic majority groups and respondents with no disabilities). A higher rate of non-binary respondents (50%) and of those who did not disclose their gender (50%) endured bullying compared to female and male respondents. Data from the Report on the National Survey of Student Experiences of Bullying in Irish Higher Education Institutions

(HEA, 2022b) found that 45% of non-binary students in Irish HEIs reported sexualised comments related to their trans/binary identity, and this group also experienced a relatively high rate of sexualised comments referencing their sexuality (68%).

The Active* Consent/Union of Students in Ireland Sexual Experiences Survey 2020 reported that LGBTQ+ students are acknowledged to have a particularly high level of exposure to misconduct and harassment. Higgins et al. (2016), found that when compared to the My World National Youth Mental Health Study (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012), LGBTQ+ young people in their study had two times the level of self-harm, three times the level of attempted suicide and four times the level of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression. They found that transgender and intersex people were more likely to self-harm and to attempt suicide than lesbian, gay and bisexual people. They also found that gay men, transgender people and intersex people experienced the highest levels of harassment and violence in public, with one in four transgender and intersex people having been punched, hit or physically attacked in public. Further, one in three transgender and intersex people reported having had hurtful things written about them on social media, while one in four intersex people and one in five transgender people surveyed reported that they had experienced sexual violence. Most recently, Lipinsky et al. (2022) report on gender-based violence and its consequences in European academia, found that respondents from minoritised groups (based on gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or disability) were more likely to disclose gender-based violence; that women and non-binary people were more likely than men to experience all forms of gender-based violence, except for physical violence, but that non-binary people are most at risk.

Against this backdrop of increasing disclosure of gender diversity in Ireland and internationally, and increasing evidence of the discrimination, harassment and negative mental health outcomes experienced by this group, there is a real and clear need for awareness, training and supports in the area of gender identity and expression in Irish HEIs. Increased attention in the media, both mainstream and online, has led to some dangerous misconceptions on the narrative surrounding transgender people and those of diverse genders. We know that third level education can be a formative time for young people—it is often a time of discovery and self-expression where young people can explore and express their gender identity. HEIs have a unique opportunity and, indeed,

responsibility, to make this time in students' lives a positive and beneficial experience.

To achieve these objectives, and particularly to challenge gender stereotyping and binary norms within the sector, a number of HEIs began to work collectively in this area. In 2020, South East Technological University, Technological University of the Shannon, Mary Immaculate College, St. Patrick's Carlow College and, University of Galway, together with ShoutOut, successfully secured funding from the HEA's Gender Equality Enhancement Fund. This initiative piloted and rolled out an ambitious and pioneering work programme to develop and implement a gender identity, expression, & diversity training programme for staff in the partner Irish HEIs.

Recognising the need to ensure the lived experiences of the trans, non-binary and intersex community were central to the work, the partner HEIs collaborated with ShoutOut. ShoutOut is a national community-based organisation that delivers educational programmes on topics such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and intersex identity. Collaborating with ShoutOut ensured that expertise in this area was readily available to the partner institutions, and that the real and lived experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, and particularly the trans, non-binary and intersex community, would be central to training and policy development initiatives in this space. This, in turn, contributed towards increasing knowledge awareness and support for LGBTQ+ colleagues and students, facilitating education and empathy through listening to the stories of trans, non-binary and intersex individuals.

This project aimed to assist participating HEIs in raising awareness across their campuses of gender identity and expression amongst the staff population and to help ensure that all people, regardless of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation and/or sexual characteristics, do not experience discrimination in any form.

This project provided partner HEIs with a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership by advancing organisational culture and societal change in support of gender equality in the widest possible sense. Many gender equality initiatives focus on changing policy or practice, but there is also a clear need to address underlying gender biases, stereotypes and inequalities relating to gender identities, expression and diversity, for real change to take effect. The project also aimed to benefit stakeholders and other HEIs nationally by developing and sharing resources and best practice in this area.

Project Outline, Delivery and Feedback

The project consisted of two main phases. Phase 1involved the design, piloting and implementation of a multifaceted training programme for academic and professional, managerial and support staff. A project steering group was established which included representatives from each of the EDI teams within the partner HEIs and ShoutOut. Initially three specific programmes were developed—one for academic and professional support staff, one for senior executive/management teams and one for human resource teams within the HEIs. This was to ensure that the content covered was tailored to the audience and delivered in a way which would encourage maximum participation and impact amongst that group. The training materials were developed by ShoutOut, with support and input from the project steering group. The programme content firstly looked at the LGBTQ+ acronym, explaining key pieces of terminology. It then examined the differences between sexual orientation, sexuality, gender identity and gender expression. The training session also looked at gender stereotypes and in particular, stereotypes about the trans and intersex communities. Finally, the programme presented research on the LGBTQ+ community in higher education, along with some suggested action points to further LGBTQ + inclusion and ally ship in HEIs.

ShoutOut then facilitated three pilot online training sessions with representatives from each of the partner institutions. 128 participants registered for these sessions, which were delivered via Zoom in 90-minute sessions incorporating MentiMeter to gather input and provide interaction for participants. Feedback was gathered from each of the participants after each session, along with a full de-brief by the project steering group, who also attended the training. Participant feedback ($n = 77$) on these pilot sessions indicated strongly a sense that the training was comprehensive ($n = 75$), easy to understand ($n = 73$), engaging ($n = 72$) and interesting ($n = 76$). Qualitative feedback included comments like the following:

> Very clear explanations. The diversity and complexity of issues were explained in a non-confrontational way, normalising the diversity of identities.
>
> Maybe a short session also might get more staff to attend.

This feedback informed the development of further sessions, with an iterative process of updating and improving the training materials and methodologies after feedback from participants. For example, respondents suggested that the material could have been more specific to the third level environment, as well as addressing intersectionality regarding students and staff coming from different backgrounds. This was subsequently incorporated into the training materials.

During this pilot phase, feedback from participants also included the extent to which the lived experience of transgender and non-binary people was used in the training, which some members of the LGBTQ + community found triggering. For example, some of the research presented during the programme about the historic (and indeed, sometimes continuing) exclusion and sidelining of LGBTQ + people from society and education, along with information on violence and harassment of LGBTQ + people was triggering for some staff on the training programme due to their own lived experience. This led the partners to ensure very clear communication in advance of the training around the content and delivery style of the programme so that participants were prepared for the content ahead of participating in the sessions.

The outcomes from this first round of funding highlighted the importance of a multifaceted approach to the delivery of this bespoke training in the HE sector. The feedback from participants who engaged in the online training demonstrated that the interactive and experiential pedagogical approach to the delivery of the training was a key factor in its success. The evaluation of the pilot phase of the training illustrated the potential to scale the project beyond the five partner institutions across the sector. Feedback from participants was very positive and insightful, for example:

> Delivery was excellent- it was a safe space & it also clarified terms such as dead naming, cisgender. I was not aware of the stats for Intersex, so that was very helpful. this should be mandatory training for all staff. The opening session on unconscious bias was great, this needs to be part of our staff development too, as it impacts our agency in the workplace.
> (I) liked it- but wondered why we didn't ask more questions. Were we afraid any of our questions might be seen as negative?

Secondly, the partners developed and rolled out train the trainer sessions for designated key HEI contacts from across the sector. Twenty-one participants from the partner HEIs completed this training, the aim of which was to build confidence and capacity and to train staff members within the partner organisations to deliver the programme within their own institution after the project ended, thus ensuring sustainability of work in this area. This programme took a more expansive look at gender, the trans and intersex communities and intersectionality. It explored how participants could facilitate and guide discussions on gender identity and expression in their own HEIs, how to build an effective workshop and how to engage their institutions with the work. It also provided materials and Q&A information for participants to use at their own HEIs when delivering workshops themselves.

An exciting, planned outcome of this phase of the project was the establishment of a National Higher Education Gender Identity & Expression Champion Network, which aims to identify challenges and opportunities within the sector, to support policy development and to share learning with partner HEIs. The network also sets out to support staff members in EDI, student facing and HR roles. Internal LGBTQ + staff groups and networks were also invited to be part of the network, which was launched in 2022.

Finally, the partners are currently working to develop an asynchronous resource base for staff in the form of a Gender Identity and Expression training programme which will be accessible across the higher education sector for staff and students on their virtual learning platforms. presenting an excellent opportunity to scale the project far beyond the initial partners and to have impact across the entire Irish HE sector.

Opportunities, Challenges and Lessons Learned

A total of three hundred and seventy-eight staff completed the training. While this is a small proportion of total staff numbers from across the partner institutions, for most partner HEIs, this was the first time such a formalised training was rolled out. As such, it presented the project steering group with a variety of opportunities and challenges during implementation.

The project provided an opportunity for demonstrating inclusive leadership within partner institutions to clearly demonstrate commitment and support for inclusive gender equality. In designing the programme, the

project steering group was cognisant of the different layers and levels of targeted training required. Ensuring senior managers buy in and involvement in the range of training provided was critical to supporting the project overall.

From Individual to Collective

This project is one component of a multifaceted approach to supporting an inclusive culture within the partner HEIs. While the training was for individuals, the numbers of people who have completed the training has allowed for a level of collective understanding of the training content and has supported a broader understanding of LGBTQ + equality within partner HEIs.

Empowering Staff and Students

The development of a permanent resource provides an opportunity to normalise terminology, language and seek to address fears or perceptions staff and students may have. This in turn will empower staff and students to be confident in their own knowledge and understanding of gender identity and expression. The 'train the trainer' session also supported staff to have confidence to deliver such training within their own institutions. Further, this initiative helped catalyse and support others which were underway within partner institutions, including:

- increased staff use of pronouns in email signatures;
- staff support for LGBTQ+ and Ally networks;
- development of gender identity and expression policies and procedures to support students and staff;
- staff engaging with and supporting LGBTQ+ related events;
- support and implementation of name change practices for students and staff.

Value of Collaboration

GEEF funding provided an important opportunity for collaboration across the 5 partner HEIs. The steering group included both academic

and professional, managerial and support staff from colleges, technological universities and universities. This provided opportunities for further collaboration in this area, including sharing learnings from the development and implementation of institutional policies and procedures to support gender diversity and expression within higher education. Key learnings included the need to essentially start from scratch in this area, and not to assume that staff had any knowledge of the topic at all. As was evident above, feedback from the training was very positive, which meant that as people who had completed the programme spoke to their colleagues about it informally, interest in the programme grew. The project steering group learned that it was important to roll out the training over a period of time, rather than in one fell swoop, as this allowed staff who may have been sceptical or disinterested at first, time to hear about the programme from other colleagues and perhaps reconsider their approach. In terms of policy development, the project steering group learned that it was necessary to take a step-by-step approach, and to address issues which arose sensitively and respectfully to ensure widespread support for the policies. Certainly, training in this area was a pre-requisite to policy development and should be the first step for HEIs wishing to expand work and supports in this area, as it helped develop a shared understanding and support for the LGBTQ+ communities on campus. The collaborative approach taken by the partners meant that those undertaking work in this area had a support network and expertise upon which to build and grow work in this area, and this was critical.

Supporting Inclusive Campus Cultures

Each project partner institution comes with its own history and ethos: the project included two partner institutes with a traditional Catholic ethos who also have a strong sense of social justice. All HEIs engaged fully with the project and garnered wide-ranging support from staff and students. While recognising the sometimes-polarising views expressed online or in wider society, the broad support and engagement within all partner institutions demonstrates the commitment to supporting social justice issues and an inclusive culture within higher education.

Facilitation

The training involved delivery of content by ShoutOut, as well as several breakout sessions for staff to discuss the content. Initially the breakout sessions were unmoderated, which posed some challenges for some groups. These included a reluctance to contribute for fear of saying something potentially inappropriate; a sense of overwhelm regarding the level of content within the sessions; and in some circumstances, a tension between academic freedom and dignity and respect for students and colleagues. Following feedback from some sessions, we ensured that steering group member presence for all trainings, so that there would be additional support for moderation and clarification of any confusions during the breakout sessions. In addition, ShoutOut developed an FAQ guidance for staff who had completed the train the trainer session, to further enable them to engage.

Training Delivery

There were several challenges relating to training delivery. These included the varying degrees of knowledge held by participants on topics discussed during the training, which meant ensuring the content was pitched at an appropriate level was sometimes challenging. In addition, given the multi partner involvement in the project, delivery of the programme to dispersed staff across 14 campuses, during the COVID-19 pandemic required considerable coordination and administrative support.

Increasing Prevalence of Transphobia

The increasing prevalence of transphobia, which is often most vociferous on social media and should be a huge concern for all in society, was not something we had to contend with to any real extent at the beginning of this project. However, it was something which became more prominent as the project progressed and something which people engaging in work in this space must be mindful of. In this project, for example, one of the partners experienced some negative media coverage and backlash to its new Gender Identity and Expression Policy, as well as some e-mail objections (including anonymous emails) to the training and policy. They also received anonymous correspondence in the post, including cutouts of newspaper articles, and social media direct messages voicing objections

and anti-trans views. In that instance, seeking advice and support from colleagues in the network and at national level, highlighting supports for staff and students affected, along with taking additional expert external advice were steps taken to resolve the issue.

As increasingly divisive media and political discourse continues, it is clear that taking active steps to ensure self-care and taking care of those delivering training, developing policies and actively supporting transgender and non-binary communities in our HEIs is increasingly necessary. Taking care of our transgender and non-binary students and staff in this context, and particularly if and when localised or national issues flare up, is critical. Working collectively with other HEIs and taking a collective approach to work in this area has considerably strengthened the resilience of colleagues across the partner HEIs when working in this space.

Measuring Impact of the Project on Trans, Non-Binary and Intersex Staff and Students

One final challenge has been gauging the impact of the project, specific to the experiences of trans, non-binary and intersex people. Trans, non-binary and intersex people can often be less visible within LGBTQ+ staff networks and further research is required to gauge the impact of this project within the partner HEI's on this community. While the project itself is drawing to an end, it is hoped that the HEI Gender Identity and Expression National Network will continue to lead the work going forward. In terms of measuring impact, there is certainly scope to go back to those who participated in the research to gauge the extent to which the leaning from this project has been integrated into practice, along with feedback from the LGBTQ+ networks and members of our HEIs on the impact, if any, this work has had on their experiences within their HEIs. This, along with research into the experiences of trans, non-binary and intersex communities more generally in HEIs would provide useful evidence to inform policy development and other initiatives in this space going forward.

Recommendations for Sustainable Change and Transformation

We have a responsibility towards all of our learners, and a duty of care towards our staff and students. We learn from the experiences of our HEI community and by engaging with partner organisations who have specific lived expertise on specific issues. The disclosure of gender diversity of our student and staff population has increased in recent years, and our HEIs must be ready to embrace change. As this was first time most institutions involved in the project rolled out institution wide training on this topic, it allowed for a broader recognition and understanding that gender equality work needs to be more inclusive and move beyond the binary. As one participant noted:

> I've done a lot of work on gender equality, and it was refreshing to have a workshop that wasn't confined to the binary (I often joke that its extra hard to get academia/research to understand that gender is a spectrum when they have only recently discovered that women exist).

On this basis, we make the following recommendations at sector, institutional and individual level as to how real and sustainable change can be embedded in this area (Fig. 18.1).

System Level Recommendations

Sustained Funding

We see a clear need for further sustained work in this area to truly embed gender equality in its widest sense in our sector. This project was made possible by funding from under the HEA's GEEF awards with significant in-kind contributions from the partner HEIs. For progress made to be further developed and replicated at sectoral level, further investment in terms of human and financial resources in intersectional EDI work is required to allow HEIs to truly embed LGBTQ+ inclusion across their campuses. For example, it was noted above that sustained training over several years is required to help shift culture, along with continued efforts to establish and support networks, host events and support ally ship. This requires a more sustainable funding base to allow EDI units to work on multiple and intersecting equality issues and grounds simultaneously and effectively. There is significant opportunity for Ireland to be

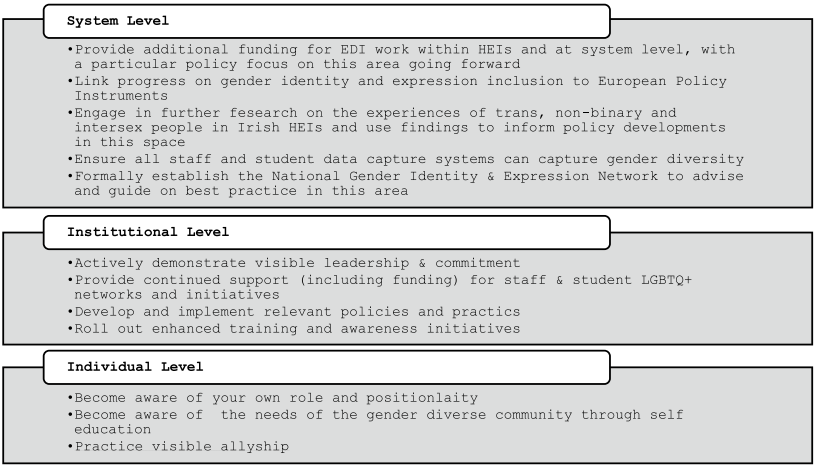


Fig. 18.1 Key recommendations arising from the project

an international leader in inclusive gender equality, and for Irish HEIs to be amongst the most welcoming and inclusive for LGBTQ+ communities worldwide.

Link Inclusive Gender Equality Work to National and European Research Funding

We have seen first-hand the effectiveness of the policy decision to link gender equality work within HEIs to both core funding and research funding. It has undoubtedly created the impetus for broad change within our sector. While gender identity and expression work is part of the Irish Athena Swan Charter Principles, this needs to be further articulated in other national and European policy instruments. For example, a strong articulation of the need to include our LGBTQ+ communities within Horizon Europe action plan requirements would serve to enhance work and commitment to work in this area at European level.

Further Data and Research

The lens through which we view gender equality work has changed over the last number of years. Further data and research at national level is required to better understand the needs of trans, non-binary and intersex students and staff across HEIs. Many of our data capture systems for students (e.g. CAO, Banner) and staff do not currently provide options outside of the gender binary. This limits the availability of relevant data for our sector. As a basic measure, all our student and staff data capture systems should include trans and non-binary options. When this is in place, this should also then be reflected in Athena Swan data capture requirements.

While there have been pockets of localised research with LGBTQ+ communities at institutional level, to date, there has not been a coordinated national level analysis of the experiences of trans, non-binary and intersex staff and students in our HEIs. This research should be an imperative and would feed into further policy and practice developments in this area. Additionally, research on the impact of work to date in this area on trans, non-binary and intersex staff and students would allow us to better understand and measure successes and failures, guiding further initiatives in the area. We have seen the HEA's EDI Centre of Excellence produce research and reports on Gender Equality, Race Equality and Sexual Violence and Harassment in recent years, and a focus on LGBTQ+ staff and students, particularly members four trans, non-binary and intersex communities, would be most welcome, particularly considering the increasingly divisive media and political commentary which is emerging across Ireland today.

Supporting and Embedding the National Network

A key development from this project was the establishment of the national Gender Identity and Expression Network across partner HEIs with ShoutOut. Continuing to support and expand this network to include all Irish HEIs will be crucial to supporting sector wide change. Building networks takes time, commitment and resources. Continued commitment from partner HEIs and leadership from the HEA to drive this network will ensure continued success of this work. There are already several national networks in place such as the HEA's EDI Committee, or others which report back to the HEA, such as the Athena Swan National

Committee and Practitioners Network, and the soon to be established Race Equality Advisory Forum. A practice and experience-based Gender Identity ad Expression Network which reported into the HEA's EDI Committee would be a significant step forward in understanding and addressing the needs of these communities in our HEIs.

Institutional Level Recommendations

There is much that individual institutions can and should do as agents of the common good, which, we suggest should include the following measures.

Visible Institutional Leadership and Commitment

Visible leadership and support of work in this area is essential. For example, some HEI Presidents (along with many Vice-Presidents) attended the training sessions the first time they were offered, and this sent a strong signal of support to the staff and student community. Others launched LGBTQ+ networks and allyship drives, and publicly supported and launched Gender Identity and Expression Policies in their HEIs. Some senior leaders began to include pronouns in their e-mail signatures for the first time, or wear rainbow lanyards or badges, which served as important displays of ally ship in their HEI. Such leadership had the effect of ensuring trans and non-binary staff and students feel seen, heard and included in our HEIs.

Continued Support for Institutional Level LGBTQ+ Staff and Student Networks

While most partner HEIs formed their LGBTQ+ and allies staff networks over the course of this project, these networks require continued support. Collaboration between staff and student networks is very important to increase visibility and support. They also offer an opportunity to share learning, helping to ensure people can be their authentic selves in work and over the course of their studies.

Policy Development and Practice

It is incumbent upon all HEIs to ensure they have the necessary policy framework and practices in place to support the increasing numbers of trans and non-binary students and staff within our HE system. There are many areas to consider across all university functions including student admissions, registration, facilities, clubs, societies access to medical supports, counselling, IT systems, education and training etc. For staff, considerations also include payroll, pension, IT and other staff supports which may be necessary.

Ongoing Training and Awareness

In order to ensure that both staff and students have the knowledge, confidence and supports required, ongoing training and awareness initiatives are critical. While training has been developed and rolled out as part of this project, significant scaling up is required if we are to reach critical mass across our sector. The development of the online training resource will support needs in this area, and this is currently underway. It is expected to be completed by mid 2026 and will be available through the project partners. Ideally, training and awareness initiatives such as this will take place in all student and staff inductions in our HEIs, with regular refresher training and awareness campaigns provided thereafter. The training should provide a safe and inclusive place for staff and students to learn where open and respectful dialogue is encouraged.

Individual Level

Self-awareness and Education

We know that members of the LGBTQ+ community are some of the most marginalised members of society (Mayock et al., 2008). As educators and staff working within HEIs, we have an individual responsibility to educate ourselves on the impact of this marginalisation and ensure we are treating all students and colleagues with dignity and respect. Work in this area is a learning journey for us all—we learn and grow when we actively listen with empathy to the voices of those with different lived experiences to our own.

Ally Ship

Through this project, we have seen evidence of many individuals across the partner HEIs who have become active allies and supporters of the LGBTQ+ community. These individuals have led on the creation of staff and student networks and policy development as well as other initiatives to demonstrate LGBTQ+ inclusion. Such ally ship by individuals creates a powerful force for positive change and inclusion.

Conclusion

While our project has now reached a conclusion, we are hopeful that the impacts will continue to be felt across our HEIs well into the future. A key strength of this project was its collaborative approach—both with other HEIs and with ShoutOut. Indeed, it was this collaboration which was key to its success. It would not have been possible to develop and roll out credible and impactful training without the voices and lived experiences of trans and non-binary people which ShoutOut brought, nor would it have been possible to achieve reach and scale across the sector without the inter-institutional collaboration. As mentioned above, equality work which focuses on trans and/or non-binary people is becoming increasingly contentious and divisive, particularly in the online space, and HEIs need to be strong to withstand potential backlash which may come when they work in this area. Again, this is where the power in collective action/collaboration can really be felt. By working together and learning from each other, HEIs have the opportunity to not only make real and positive changes to the lives of their trans and non-binary staff and students, but also to show leadership to others across society on this critical issue.

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CHAPTER 19

Higher Education Inclusion for Refugees and International Protection Applicants in Ireland through the Universities of Sanctuary Movement—'Today I have the keys, and I am wearing my good coat'

Veronica Crosbie, Lorraine McIlrath, Kinda Nassli, Sarah Sartori, and Liam Thornton

Prologue by Kinda Nassli

I have the keys in my hand to one of the offices in the Adult and Community Education building at Maynooth University, where I am doing a radio interview to share how being a University of Sanctuary student at

V. Crosbie (✉)
Places of Sanctuary Ireland, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: veronica@posi.ie

L. McIlrath
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: lorraine.mcIlrath@mic.ul.ie

K. Nassli
Schools of Sanctuary Ireland, Dublin, Ireland

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Maynooth changed my life. Today, I own the keys of my life as a Syrian refugee woman in Ireland, but I am thinking about the long journey I have been through to be here today. The trauma of the war, the fear while protecting my babies, the shame of being a refugee, and the pain of being stereotyped. But today I have the keys and I am wearing my good coat.

When I left my home with three kids, newborn twins and a teenage boy, I did not know where to start, what to pack in three suitcases. How could I measure my forty-three years in kilos? Fifty kilos to get ready to leave my dangerous, sweet home and go to the 'safe' unknown. The only thing I needed to pack for myself was my good coat. This coat waited in my suitcase for three and a half years, unable to wear it, because refugees are expected to look vulnerable and dress from charity shops. When I went into one of the charity shops, asking about the price of jeans, the lady looked at me and said, 'These jeans are for a model, they're not for you, darling'. Or the advice I received from my Iraqi friend; 'Dear Kinda, I want to give you a tip. Please forget who you were in Syria and accept who you became in Ireland. You are now just a refugee. No one cares if you have a bachelor's degree, or you were working in TV. You must start over again from zero'.

My mother started from zero when she was 40 years old. She joined law school and became a lawyer. I need to be like her but being a 'safe' refugee made me feel vulnerable. The label itself swallowed me, and I vanished into this black hole of a system of accessing higher education, the difficulties of leaving my kids, and navigating complicated transportation to arrive at a destination where I could find my identity again.

e-mail: kinda@sosi.ie

S. Sartori
South East Technological University, Carlow, Ireland
e-mail: sarah.sartori@setu.ie

L. Thornton
University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: liam.thornton@ucd.ie

> My friend was wrong. There are people in Ireland who care about me and my life experience. I joined College Connect[1] and met wonderful people who want to help refugees and asylum seekers. I was awarded a University of Sanctuary scholarship by Maynooth University. I gained my voice again and I found a place for me in my new home, Ireland. Today, I am a proud mother and a friend who supports my Syrian community, who wants to learn more about how to integrate in Ireland. I also engage with my Irish community, who want to learn about Syrian culture, too. Access to higher education is how we, as Syrian refugee women, will be empowered.

Introduction

Our intention in this chapter is to explore higher education as a public good, and to outline the modes of exclusion and inclusion of refugees and international protection applicants (IPAs), or forced migrants, in terms of access to higher education (HE) within a broader societal context. Regarding exclusion, we focus specifically on forced migrants and their right to, or lack of, access to HE in Ireland, and lay out the specifics of how many are on the margins of Irish society because of law, politics and public policy. In terms of inclusion, we contextualise the rationale for Universities of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI), a grassroots movement initiated and led by staff and students in Irish higher education institutions (HEIs), to challenge inequity to access to HE for forced migrants. UoSI is a national network of Irish universities that has challenged the status quo by collectively offering over 500 scholarships for IPAs and refugees. This was not a national mandate nor one led by government. It is a movement that evolved despite, rather than because of, national concerns, and led by those who have seen an injustice within the HE system. This is followed by a presentation of some findings from research conducted with Sanctuary scholarship recipients and other HE stakeholders. The chapter culminates with a reflection of the role that UoSI has played,

[1] College Connect is a Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH 3) initiative, funded by the HEA, that encompasses four HEIs in the Midlands and North Dublin area of Ireland. PATH 3 is intended to provide funding to support the development of regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education by specified groups.

to date, in the Irish HE context, complementary to the objectives of the national Irish Race Equality agenda as set out by the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2022), to ascertain whether UoSI is living up to its aim of transforming lives, institutions and society.

Higher Education, Public Policy and Forced Migrants

Legal systems, in Ireland and elsewhere, create various categories of forced migrants. Persons seeking refugee status or subsidiary protection status, collectively known as international protection applicants, are lawfully residing in Ireland for the duration of their protection claim (International Protection Act 2015) (Government of Ireland, 2015a, 2015b) (see s.2 and s.16). A person's migration status impacts significantly on their entitlement to access a range of social rights in Ireland—social welfare, social housing, ability (or not) to enter employment and entitlement to access education (Thornton, 2021). Persons recognised as having some form of protection status—as a refugee, a programme refugee, or entitled to subsidiary protection or temporary protection—in general have the same rights as Irish citizens, including access to higher education. International protection applicants (IPAs, also known as 'asylum seekers') may wait several years for a lawful determination of entitlement, or not, to some form of protection status. While awaiting determination of protection status, IPAs are faced with an inability to flourish. There are restrictions on their right to work. IPAs are placed in a separate social welfare system, known colloquially as 'direct provision'. Decisions on whom they live with and the food they wish to eat are taken away from IPAs (Thornton & Ogunsanya, 2023). Therefore, IPAs in Ireland cannot do what they value, and what they have reason to value, such as obtaining secure employment, housing or accessing HE (Sen, 1999). Sen's capability approach provides us with a useful analytical framework. It seeks to philosophically assess a quality of life that persons are able to achieve. We posit that access to HE is a social good that people have 'reason to value'. However, for IPAs, the question of access to HE (what Sen would term 'functionings') may be in abeyance or unachievable linked inherently to Ireland's educational policies that in effect limit access of IPAs to HE. This limitation is not based on any sort of prohibition of IPAs from accessing higher education, but rather the lack of resources to enable entry to HE for the vast majority. The philosopher

Hannah Arendt has noted that the world finds nothing sacred in the 'abstract nakedness of being human' (Arendt, 1958). For Arendt, it is one's legal status as citizen that generally secures most readily an ability for one to live their life as they choose. For IPAs in Ireland, the 'right to have rights' remains in suspended animation until such time as they are either recognised as having a protection need, or removed from the country (Oudejans, 2014). The precise rights one enjoys depends inherently on the particular legal status of forced migrants.

Participation of refugees in higher education strengthens national education systems to the benefit of both host and refugee communities, and the UN Refugee Agency has set a '15by30' target to ensure that 15% of young refugees, approximately 500,000 in total, can access higher education by 2030 (UNHCR, 2021). However, it is well documented that forced migrants face a series of obstacles and challenges when accessing higher education (Bajwa et al., 2017; Cronin et al., 2020; Dajani, 2020; Lambrechts, 2020; Sartori & Nwanze, 2021). Only 7% of all refugees transition to HE, compared with a global average of 47%, (UNHCR,), and while there is a dearth of statistics in Ireland, it is recognised that there are significant barriers to accessing university education (Sartori & Nwanze, 2021). For certain categories of forced migrants, those who are seeking or who have been granted protection or residency, a complex tapestry of policy rules and legal dis/entitlements can act as a significant barrier to entry to higher education.

Access to higher education in Ireland is subject to persons meeting a certain level of achievement in Ireland's final State examination (the Leaving Certificate) or equivalent foreign qualification (Devereux & Whelan, 2021; Quality Qualifications Ireland, 2024). Entitlement to have fees publicly paid to pursue a course of study in a HEI in Ireland is based on two conditions: citizenship/legal status and length of residence. Irish, UK, Swiss or European Economic Area citizens who have had three years of continuous residence in these countries can have fees paid to pursue an undergraduate degree in public universities in Ireland (Higher Education Authority (HEA), 2024). Entitlement to a maintenance grant requires meeting the same residency requirement, along with an income threshold means test (Student Universal Support Ireland, 2024).

Forced migrants are also subject to a three-year residency requirement to access so-called 'free fees', otherwise those not meeting this three-year requirement will often have to pay international fees. The calculation of the three-year period includes the time a refugee would have spent in the

international protection system. For those granted subsidiary protection or permission to remain in Ireland, the residency requirement is calculated from the date of issuance of this permission. A limited scheme permitting IPAs access to free fees and a maintenance grant to participate in higher education was introduced in 2015 (Government of Ireland, 2015a, 2015b). This was restricted to IPAs who had at least three years of secondary level education in Ireland, who completed their Leaving Certificate and did not have an outstanding deportation order. Since 2022, Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) administers this ad-hoc scheme, which, while its remit has been expanded, is subject to yearly approval by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science' (DFHERIS), the latest approval provided for the 2024–2025 academic year (DFHERIS, 2024). IPAs who have been awaiting a determination of their protection claim for a period of three years may be entitled to free fees and a student maintenance grant to study in universities (DFHERIS, 2024, Clause 3). Persons with a deportation order have no entitlement to free fees or a maintenance grant. On one hand, HEIs have obligations to promote access for socially and economically disadvantaged persons (Universities Act 1997, s.55 (as revised); Technological Universities Act 2018, s.9). However, other aspects of law and policy can frustrate this aim.

Forced migrants who do not meet residency requirements, but who do meet educational entry requirements are considered 'international students'. Gilmartin et al. (2021) highlight the various tensions arising from governmental, political and university institutional dynamics, co-creating legal, economic and personal precarity for international students. International students are highly valued in the Irish university sector, given that they may pay more than triple the amount for the degree programme than non-international students (Finn et al., 2022). Some international students have identified themselves as "cash cows' to prop up the underfunded third-level system' (Capplis, 2022), while being quoted international fees has been highlighted as one of the main barriers in terms of access to HE for refugees and IPAs (Sartori & Nwanze, 2021).

Within Ireland, one's forced migration status is determined through a series of legislative enactments, wherein such status can limit access to various social rights. At one end of the spectrum, persons with a protection or residence status, will have access to social rights akin to Irish citizens. Legal limitations on equal access to social rights for IPAs are

seen as legally permissible on the basis that the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) has a legitimate interest in restricting IPAs' social rights to prevent 'welfare tourism' (Osinuga v Minister for Social Protection, 2018). IPAs without means are entitled to communal shelter, the provision of meals and specific services and a weekly payment of €38.80 per adult and €29.80 per child (S.I. 230/2018, 2018). The totality of this system is known as 'Direct Provision' (DP). Smyth (2014), O'Reilly (2018) and Lentin (2022) all highlight the significant violations of human rights that occur in the DP system. The lack of flexibility and compassion in some centres result in people going to college hungry as they miss the set mealtimes; walking very long distances as they are unable to afford the bus fare, often the while dealing with racism and a lack of cultural awareness by others both on and off campus (Sartori & Nwanze, 2021). Despite the Irish government finally acknowledging that the DP system violates human rights (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth [DCEDIY], 2021), there has been no progress in dismantling this system (Thornton & Ogunsanya, 2023). Instead, there are plans to further expand the system to accommodate a higher number of arrivals of international protection applicants (DECDIY, 2024). The legal limitations on accessing HE for forced migrants can be viewed through the prism of bordering practices (Murray & Gray, 2023). Bordering practices refer to everyday obstacles that forced migrants may face when living in society, whereby their legal status-or lack thereof- continuously impacts on their ability to engage with society. While forced migrants are not legally excluded from accessing higher education in Ireland a key bordering practice relates to most forced migrants being treated as international students for the purpose of fees. Therefore, financial independence is seen as a prerequisite to accessing higher education. Bordering practices also fail to take into account language and literacy issues, interrupted schooling, mental health issues, xenophobia, stigmatisation and fears of deportation. These are often interrelated and exacerbate each other, having been termed 'super-disadvantage' by Lambrechts (2020).

Migrant women face even greater disadvantages. A study by AkiDwa,[2] a national network of migrant women living in Ireland, found that migrant women encounter a multitude of traumatic and stressful experiences in their lives prior to migration, during the migration journey, but

[2] Akina Dada wa Africa means sisterhood in Swahili.

most particularly in their post-migration lives (AkiIDwA, 2020). Childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in the OECD (Doorley et al., 2023) and therefore, childcare, or the lack thereof, is a major barrier to social integration for migrant women, as it limits opportunities for employment and education, and increases social isolation (AkiIDwA, 2020). Women who participated in research through the aforementioned College Connect project described threats by Direct Provision centre management to report mothers trying to access higher education as failing to adequately provide care for their children (Sartori & Nwanze, 2021), while Syrian women in Ireland communicated a fear of becoming involved in Irish society as a result of Islamophobia and a lack of awareness at all levels of Irish society about Arabic culture. Contrast these limitations on access to HE, to the experience of another subset of forced migrant—Ukrainians granted temporary protection in Ireland due to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. In 2023, an ad-hoc scheme was established to cover fees and provide a form of maintenance grant for Ukrainians granted temporary protection (DFHERIS, 2024). This evidences the capacity of government to acknowledge the importance of HE for persons with temporary protection, which begs the question, as to why there is significant less support for other forced migrants.

University of Sanctuary Ireland Movement

Universities have traditionally focused on the three pillars of teaching and learning, research and service. The service pillar is what concerns us here and it is often ascribed different terms within the literature including engagement, third mission, knowledge transfer, social responsibility and, more recently, academic citizenship (Macfarlane, 2007). The concept of academic citizenship has wide and varied interpretations, but research indicates that academic citizenship implies a broader requirement or emphasis or practice in connecting academic 'work with the concerns of society' (Macfarlane, 2007, p. 264). This pillar is often articulated in the literature as ostensibly capability enhancing (Boni & Walker, 2013) but expressions can be more rhetorical than real in many instances. The Universities of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI) initiative was established in 2016 as a type of academic citizenship to work with concerns of society, and at HE institutional level to be more inclusive in response to a lack of

political will at government level. Based on the City of Sanctuary (CoS) movement, which started in 2005 in Sheffield, UK (Bauder, 2017), UoSI-accredited institutions receive designation based on commitment to, and evidence of, three core principles: learning what it means to seek sanctuary; taking positive action; and sharing best sanctuary-related practice (Cronin et al., 2020; Daniel & Crosbie, 2022; Grace & Margolis, 2019). Since its inception, the growing network of UoSI (9 universities in the country) has challenged the status quo by offering, to date, over 500 forced migrant scholarships for a range of programmes including undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, diplomas and access courses (UoSI, 2024). Terms and conditions for these scholarships differ between each of the universities, including eligibility criteria, stipend rates and application deadlines (Irish Refugee Council [IRC], 2023). Many HEIs that have not yet received UoSI designation, also offer similar scholarships. For those forced migrants, who otherwise do not qualify for free fees and a maintenance grant, Sanctuary scholarships offer the most accessible entry route to higher education.

The UoSI scholarship statistics are reported to the Global Compact for Refugees on a regular basis (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2024) in fulfilment of its pledge at a collective level to provide greater access to higher education for those forcibly displaced, and, in so doing supporting *Objective 2: Enhance Refugee Self-reliance*, and *Objective 3: Expand Access to Third Country Solutions*. While the scholarship offerings constitute a core activity, Universities of Sanctuary must also demonstrate a willingness to engage in inclusive practices involving both the host HE community and refugee cohorts, ideally in a reciprocal learning and sharing environment, e.g. the DCU Mellie storytelling project (Daniel, 2022).

UoSI was advised by the umbrella organisation, Places of Sanctuary Ireland (PoSI), a not-for-profit organisation with charitable status, to establish a steering committee with rotating chairpersons and to invite representatives from sanctuary accredited HEIs to participate. A positive outcome of this initiative has been the process of coalition building across the HEI sector in the context of increasingly competitive national and global markets. In addition, and in keeping with the 'nothing about us without us' principle of inclusion embedded within the sanctuary ethos, allyship with related Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and forced migrant groups, including the IRC, Doras, and the Movement of Asylum Seekers Ireland (MASI), has helped inform UoSI policy

and practice. Sanctuary scholarship holders are also included in the forum, which strategises against forms of injustice embedded at structural level in HE and state-level institutions and services. The steering committee, while it does carry the responsibility of (re)accrediting HEIs is largely made up of HEI staff and students who contribute on a voluntary basis. This work is not always accounted for in workload allocation templates and underfunding of this vital service contribution is an identified issue that needs to be addressed, especially as it is acknowledged that UoS initiatives contribute to institutional rankings, particularly in the areas of equality, diversity and inclusion and community engagement, adding value to branding and public relations initiatives.

In 2022, a study was conducted with a variety of stakeholders, including existing and former Sanctuary scholarship holders, UoSI personnel and NGO representatives, to ascertain the extent to which Universities of Sanctuary in Ireland are 'getting it right'. This research was borne from a desire to understand at a deeper level the impact that Universities of Sanctuary are having on the lives of forced migrants. This research also included the impact of sanctuary status on the host HEIs. These were examined through the lens of Nussbaum's capability perspective (Nussbaum, 2011). In particular, we wanted to better understand how UoS create opportunities for these cohorts to do and be what they value and have reason to value (Sen, 1999) and for such institutions to be human development friendly (Boni & Walker, 2016). Following ethical approval for this study from Dublin City University (DCU), a survey was conducted with students together with a series of focus group (FG) interviews with academic and professional staff and NGO representatives. Twenty-three students responded from four accredited Universities of Sanctuary (UoS) across the country and were canvassed on questions relating to the following themes: preparation for study; financial support; the level of welcome experienced; participation and empowerment; identity and belonging; and looking to the future. Wellbeing and inclusion were two overriding factors that informed all the themes. This was in keeping with the epistemological framework adopted for the study concerning students' expansion of capabilities and the freedom to do and be what students value and have reason to value. The focus groups focused on the HEI as a potential space for 'fertile functioning', that is, access to and achievement in HE, will also benefit other aspects of a student's life (Wolff & De Shalit, 2013). Human development therefore underpins the ethos and practice in various domains, including

teaching and learning, research, engagement, policy and the wider HE environment (Boni & Walker, 2016).

From the Sanctuary student perspective, the understanding of what the UoS programme is, and how it impacts them, is voiced largely positively, often via a rich assortment of concepts and metaphors, including windows, bridges and keys, signifying access to spaces of safety and learning. These UoS are thus identified as welcoming homes. Hopes and dreams, joy and happiness are aspirations and sentiments expressed as respondents contemplate their experiences as a Sanctuary scholarship recipient. Many write of the opportunities that the scholarship, and the initiative overall, presents. These range from developing confidence and self-esteem, through opportunities to integrate in an inclusive environment, to allowing them to aspire and reach for (now) tangible goals. The valued scholarship is seen as an invitation to create a new life in Ireland, and beyond. The following quotes illustrate these sentiments:

> It is an opportunity of a lifetime to give the people in need another chance in life and to help them gain their hopes and dreams again.
> It's a very empowering space that will one day help in making the world a better place and to help one another always.
> It is an opportunity to grow one's confidence in terms of integration to Irish culture.
> My window to opportunities and becoming independent in the near future.
> An inclusive space where all cultures and ethnicities are accepted on campus.

As scholarships are a key aspect of the UoS initiative due to the financial barrier accessing HE in Ireland, fee waivers and material supports such as laptops, meal vouchers, transport cover, free bicycles, etc. all contribute greatly to the wellbeing of Sanctuary scholarship holders. This wellbeing is manifested in different ways, including psychological wellbeing, such as feeling free from worry, feeling blessed and comforted; securing autonomy and self-actualisation; and having the opportunity to reciprocate and give back to family. The scholarships also help people to regain control over their lives, enabling them to plan their life and their studies. While the positive benefits are clearly evident and dominate the responses, there were a couple of more muted responses, including a negative one, indicating that the scholarship negates social welfare entitlements:

> There's so much support provided but, sometimes, it takes time. The major issue is housing and the effect the scholarship has on the eligibility for any other social welfare payments such as back to education.

Concerning equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) matters, attaining a Sanctuary scholarship allows students to escape the trapped identity of 'asylum seeker', giving them the opportunity to be and do what they value intrinsically and individually (Sen, 1999), feeding into the related sense of wellbeing engendered by autonomy. This is illustrated in the following:

> [T]he opportunity to get the scholarship has ensured that I get the opportunity to interact with university culture independently from my identity as an asylum seeker which is amazing.

The staff focus groups also alluded to positive benefits from the host community perspective, both at individual and institutional level, with the network of UoSI being singled out as 'foundational' and a 'superstructure' in terms of the support it provides. However, many voiced concerns that sanctuary work is largely done on a voluntary basis, on top of competing professional demands. A need was expressed to create the role of dedicated Sanctuary Support Officer, who would be able to provide services based on equitable (rather than equal) needs. Additionally, the creation of the post would send out a message about the value of sanctuary across the university. To date only two of the UoS HEIs have created this role. Participants also spoke about the vital role that sanctuary 'champions' play in each institution but expressed concern about sustainability of the programme if left to individuals to promote and maintain sanctuary values and practices. The importance of having sanctuary inscribed in HEI strategic plans was seen as vital for sustainable practice. One respondent says:

> [It] is an accountability mechanism [...] if it's in the strategic plan and is identified as one of the priorities, whether that's a priority for action or priority as part of our ethos.

In many instances, respondents referred to the fact that sanctuary work is woven into intercultural and global citizenship ideals, which all HEIs purportedly subscribe to. They raised concerns about the sanctuary endeavours being equated with 'white saviour' and 'charitable'

dispositions, and that it is not sufficiently embedded within institutional structures and practices, as per these comments:

> Sanctuary is not just charity, sanctuary is being a global citizen. And that switch is not happening yet, you know: people don't see it like that because it costs money.
> [Sanctuary] also needs to appear at deeper levels, all throughout the curriculum…universit[ies] talk in their strategic plans about widening participation and [say] very little about how you actually concretely embed those values in the curriculum.

Other points raised include the importance of students taking the initiative and not leaving it solely in the hands of staff; the need for intercultural and trauma-informed training for academic and professional staff alike; and concerns about preferential treatment being given to certain cohorts of forced migrants, including Ukrainians, thus creating an unequal and unfair system.

Discussion

Students from forced migrant backgrounds bring with them a unique approach that forces us to examine our systems and structures more closely. Yet, we still appear to be a long way off from a more strengths-based approach that moves beyond viewing diversity as a matter of representation in HE settings, and instead considers equality and equity alongside diversity. There are differences between 'race equality' and 'race equity'. Race equality, the preferred term utilised by the HEA, is defined as equal representation, opportunities and experiences of all racialised HEI staff and students in Irish HEIs (HEA, 2023). This focuses on outcomes. Race equity, on the other hand, challenges and seeks to fundamentally change the systemic societal causes of racial disparities that require race equality measures (Minow, 2021). Race equality measures can and do include people of migrant and racialised backgrounds (Kempny & Michael, 2022); therefore, forced migrants cannot be left out of the drive to address race inequalities in higher education and the creation of inclusive spaces where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive irrespective of their ethnic background. Achieving race equity for forced migrants, the majority of whom are racialised persons, requires

an overhaul of broader HE entry policies, as well as changes to migration systems.

The process of becoming a University of Sanctuary scholar highlights the complexity of the issue of access to higher education for this cohort, exposing opportunities for better commitment to race equality and broader issues of inclusion and belonging on campus, though the scheme, while undoubtedly providing vital support, does raise the question as to whether they relieve pressure on the government to radically reform its policies on access to HE for the refugee and protection seeking communities (Cronin et al., 2020). UoSI provides a shared space of dialogue, mutual support and identifying institutional practices focused on encouraging HEIs to reflect critically on how they can enact solidarity beyond the State (Murray & Gray, 2023). This solidarity has been expressed by many Irish HEIs by introducing their own pathways for forced migrants to access higher education. This, in its own way, seeks to achieve equity in access to HE for forced migrants, in spite of broader state policy, in particular through fees, that results in exclusion of most forced migrants from HE.

As explored throughout this book, equality, diversity and inclusion within higher education in Ireland has had a prominent role and is a core priority for the sector, driven by government policies, strategies and funding arrangement. Universities were encouraged to address gender equality issues through signing up for accreditation with the UK Athena Swan programme, and eligibility for national research funding is dependent on Athena Swan accreditation at Bronze or Silver level (O'Shea, 2016; Scott, 2020). More recently, the HEA has committed to tackling race inequality within higher education in Ireland so as 'to create an inclusive culture and environment where individuals are able to thrive, irrespective of their ethnic background' (Kempny & Michael, 2022). In 2020–2021, the HEA commissioned a national survey to develop a 'picture of race equality' (HEA, 2022, p. 3) (and see Chapter 13 for detailed analysis). While the focus of this work was on staff and their perceptions and experience of race inequalities, there was little reference to students, and more specifically, students from refugee, international protection and migrant backgrounds. Within the report, there is one direct reference to the inclusion of Black and Ethnic Minority Students, the provision of scholarships, funding for anti-racism activities and the necessity of affirmative action policies. The categorisation of entitlements for differing groups of forced migrants to access higher education, based on 'legal

status', can mask racialised differences. The HEA's Anti-Racism Principles (2023) acknowledge race inequality as an issue in Irish higher education, as well as intersections of race with other statuses, such as immigration status (p. 7), nonetheless, it does not specifically identify issues pertaining to forced migrants and equity in access to, and support in, higher education. The requirement is on HEIs that adopted these principles in 2023 to highlight and address structural and institutional barriers that impact on race and racism. This offers the potential for forced migrants and other representative groups, inside and outside the HE sector, to emphasise the intersections of forced migrant status and the impacts of State law, policy and practice and policy on access to and State support in higher education. Migrants are mentioned in the survey report within the context of English language provision with efforts to provide this support being refused on grounds of equality; this cohort must nonetheless demonstrate the same learning outcomes and standards as native English speakers. The report goes on to suggest that 'white privilege is considered a given' with 'no desire to empower these students to be the best they can be' (Kempny & Michael, 2022, p. 51). It also extends this idea of white privilege and makes the point that while Ireland is increasingly diverse, the 'more prestigious, more well-remunerated, more erudite professions have not seen the same diversity trickle into their—particularly better-paid—ranks (p. 17).

Conclusions and Future Aspirations

At the beginning of this chapter, we set ourselves the challenge of ascertaining whether the collective of Universities of Sanctuary is living up to its aim of transforming lives, institutions and society. Yet, transformation is difficult to measure, is unevenly paced, is slow and does not always reach everyone at the same time in equal ways. If transformation is on a continuum—where are we, the Universities of Sanctuary movement on it?

In Kinda's introduction, she claims that being a University of Sanctuary scholar 'changed [my] life', while others who participated in the UoSI survey describe a reclaiming of identity, separate to that of asylum seeker, through education. So certainly, transformation through education, and therefore through Sanctuary scholarship happens, but it is more likely in spaces where participants' socially situated knowledge can be validated, and where this knowledge, generated from lived experience,

is valued (Duckworth & Smith, 2018). The drive for higher education to achieve equality targets, is often at the expense of a critical, reflexive, inclusive and dialogic process, so how does UoSI stay committed to a strengths-based and people centred approach? What we might think of as indicators of commitment to formal equality, do not necessarily deliver equality of outcome, and may in fact maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within the HEI environment (Scott, 2020). Furthermore, the UoSI movement can feel like fighting a tide, in the face of government policies deliberately designed to limit inclusion of certain forced migrants from higher education. In such a landscape, how can the UoSI movement best leverage the resources and support to challenge such policy mandates, particularly when working within the State funded higher education system?

As has been described in this chapter, the UoSI movement came about from the grassroots initiative of HE staff and students to counter the exclusion from higher education of certain forced migrants deemed 'undeserving' of support by State policy, denied "the right to have rights" and to flourish. The very word 'sanctuary' connotes a kinder place, one of safety, welcome and support, and contrasts with the harsher terminologies, labels and stamps assigned to people who may be forced migrants. As Ireland witnesses a rise in anti-immigration protest (Laurence et al., 2024), the notion of sanctuary is even more precious. Kinda's introduction highlights higher education as a route to empowerment for refugees, but it is one that is stymied by the deliberate barriers to access based on how law, policy and practice label some forced migrants as 'undeserving' (Sales, 2002).

In 2023, UoSI laid out its new strategic plan, and while there is no grant incentive in terms of receiving official UoSI designation, the application process is rigorous and robust, and designation is very much a celebrated achievement that has become embedded within universities' EDI framework and connected with commitment towards race equality. In the last decade, Ireland has seen the impact of grassroots movements in creating systemic societal change in areas such as marriage equality and abortion rights (Enright et al., 2020; Harding, 2016; Mullally, 2018). The challenge facing UoSI is to put forward research and evidence-based arguments to ensure that EDI actions and practices, within and outside higher education, are meaningful and acknowledge societal and legally imposed barriers denying access to higher education for many forced migrants. This task will likely become more challenging in the face of

anti-immigration protests and political one-upmanship on limiting these rights, as well as the rise of disinformation via social media and other platforms (Boland, 2024; Fletcher, 2024; Gallagher, 2024).

The integrity of movements such as UoSI, even in the face of these challenges, concerns emphasising our duties of hospitality, our shared humanity and ensuring higher education genuinely becomes a place for all—regardless of migrant status—to fulfil their potential.

Epilogue by Kinda Nassli

I have just finished recording a podcast with a famous Irish fashion designer. It is September 2024 and it is a long time since I have felt proud, equal, and confident in an interview. Today, I am not only a former TV presenter, not only a refugee, but I am myself. Today, I am Kinda Nassli, a Masters graduate from the Adult and Community Education Department in Maynooth University.

'Education is my high heels' I say in the podcast. Education lifted me up again from the undervalued position I had been stuck in since becoming a refugee. Education changed the way I see the world around me and empowered me to change, for the better, how the world sees me.

I had always thought that graduating with a degree in English Literature and becoming a TV star in my country was all I needed to achieve to lead a stable and respectable life. My neighbours used to tell me that they knew the time in the morning from the sound of my high heels and from the scent of my perfume when heading downstairs every day to start my live morning show on TV.

I never expected to leave my home, Syria. But because of the war I moved to Turkey and living there for three and a half years was a huge shock for me. In Turkey, for the first time in my life, I stepped into a world I had never known before: the world of housewives, women who did not have mothers like mine, women who did not graduate or even work, just forgotten housewives with hidden undiscovered skills, with silent steps in this world.

Years passed, and before getting my education opportunity in Ireland, I also started to recognise the sound of other women's high heels, leaving early in the morning to their work or colleagues and leaving all the bored, unqualified and unemployed housewives behind. I also started to recognise how I myself had become one of them.

Today, I wonder how many human beings are hiding in silence, waiting in the shadows for the hand to lift them up or to guide us down to hear them, where we can educate each other, to walk in confident, steady steps.

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CHAPTER 20

The Emergence of an Intersectional Race Equality Agenda Within Irish Higher Education

Oluchi Porter, Siobhan Kangataran, Nata Duvvury, and Lucy Michael

Introduction

The Irish higher education landscape has undergone significant demographic shifts over the past two decades, yet the commitment to a comprehensive race equality agenda has remained largely absent. However, the sector has seen a notable shift in recent years toward addressing racial

O. Porter (✉)
Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland
e-mail: oluchi.porter@mu.ie

S. Kangataran
Munster Technological University, Cork, Ireland
e-mail: siobhan.kangataran@mtu.ie

N. Duvvury
University of Galway, Galway, Ireland
e-mail: nata.duvvury@universityofgalway.ie

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disparities, spurred by emerging public sector obligations and the maturation of gender equality initiatives. This chapter delves into the trajectory of this journey, navigating through the policy landscape and the centrality of intersectionality within it. As Ireland grapples with a growing international student market and a diverse migrant population, questions of representation, leadership, and structural racism come to the fore. Drawing parallels with gender equality efforts, it explores the unique challenges and opportunities for Irish higher education institutions in embracing race equality. Against a backdrop of historical and contemporary racial dynamics, the chapter examines the emergence of anti-racist discourse within academia, the imperative for institutional change, and the critical role of leadership in advancing race equity.

A top-down approach to race equality in Irish Higher Education has been evident in recent years, connected to emerging public sector obligations on equality, and aligned with the maturity of gender equality work across institutions. A national-level statement on ethnic data collection, followed by a national survey on race equality, have settled the direction of equality work to include and incorporate a race equality approach. A rapid establishment of aims, and a solid policy direction connected to establish Athena Swan structures, have set in train a significant number of initiatives at institutional level. This chapter traces the journey so far, explores the implication of the policy direction chosen and the centring of intersectionality within it, and highlights the challenges for institutions embarking on this work as well as the international lessons to be learned. There are unique structural factors in the Irish higher education system which will affect how race equality work is both interpreted and implemented, addressing the lucrative international student market, as well as a maturing population of migrant background children in Ireland. The settling of race equality work within already established gender equality structures at institutional and national level raises particular questions about representation and leadership in this area. Finally, as Irish higher education defines the scope of race equality work, the question of how it can address structural racism is brought sharply into view.

L. Michael
Lucy Michael Research Training & Consultancy, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: lucy@lucymichael.ie

Ireland, Education, and Race

Considering that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) exist and are reflections of the wider context of Irish society with rapidly changing demographics (Central Statistics Office, 2022), it is important to consider the extensive evidence of racial inequalities in Irish society. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and public bodies have published reports highlighting challenges faced by ethnic minorities (including Travellers and Roma) and migrants in areas such as employment, education, health, and housing (Laurence et al., 2024; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; O'Connell & McGinnity, 2008; Smyth et al., 2009). Black and ethnic minority communities in Ireland face multiple forms of discrimination in the labour market, independent of qualifications or skills (Joseph, 2020). Census data reveals disparities in employment rates, income levels, housing conditions, and educational outcomes among different racial and ethnic groups (Central Statistics Office, 2022). Collectively these highlight the multifaceted nature of racial inequalities in Irish society.

The cultural and policy context of race equality in Ireland should be distinguished from that of neighbouring jurisdictions. In Ireland, it reveals a complex landscape where both historical and contemporary factors shape discourse. McVeigh (1992) and Garner (2004) highlight how state racism in Ireland has been deeply embedded in societal structures, often overshadowed by the country's focus on its own national identity and post-colonial history. This state racism persists, as argued by Lentin and McVeigh (2006), through institutionalised practices and narratives that marginalise and discriminate against ethnic minorities and immigrants. Moreover, policy failures are evident in the lack of comprehensive measures to address racism and promote inclusion (Fanning & Michael, 2019). Despite increasing recognition of the need to confront these issues, the Irish Network Against Racism's (INAR) quantitative data reveal that racial incidents and hate crimes remain a pressing concern (Michael et al., 2023).[1] This data underscores the urgency for Ireland

[1] The increasing trend in hate crimes has continued with 36% of hate crimes in 2023 being racial in nature (Heaney, 2004).

to not only acknowledge racism's presence but also to adopt and implement robust policies that foster diversity, equity, and anti-racism initiatives across various sectors.

There has been comparatively little attention to racism in Irish higher education in academic literature, despite extensive literature in the neighbouring jurisdictions of England, Wales and Scotland, and engagement by Irish academics in discussions of the racialisation of the Irish in UK higher education. That UK literature demonstrates a concerted effort to understand and address racial disparities in higher education through issues such as participation and attainment gaps between white and ethnic minority students (Richardson, 2018), disparities in hiring and promotion among academic staff, and the under-representation of racialized groups in senior leadership positions (Bhopal, 2015). Research also highlights the challenges faced by minority ethnic students and staff, including experiences of racism, microaggressions, and exclusionary practices on campus (Arday, 2022; Tate & Bagguley, 2017). Various reports and studies underscore the importance of implementing targeted initiatives such as inclusive curricula, mentorship programmes, and equitable recruitment practices to combat these disparities. Policy interventions, such as the Race Equality Charter in the UK, aim to guide institutions towards greater inclusivity and accountability, albeit with fluctuation in commitment (Pilkington, 2018), varied effectiveness across the sector (Campion & Clark, 2022) and concerns about policymaking not adequately addressing the core challenges (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020).

A well-founded literature on racism in Irish education highlights the pervasive issues of racial discrimination and inequality across different educational levels. Kitching (2011) and Devine et al. (2008) explore racism within Irish primary and secondary schools, revealing the challenges faced by students from ethnic minority backgrounds, such as marginalisation, exclusion, and prejudice from peers and teachers. These scholars emphasise the need for more inclusive and equitable practices within schools. Bryan (2009) examines policy failures in responding to racism, pointing out the gaps in existing measures and the lack of robust anti-racist strategies within educational policy frameworks. Meanwhile, O'Connor (2010) delves into racism in adult education, uncovering similar patterns of exclusion and bias against racialized individuals in adult learning environments. Together, this body of literature underscores the necessity for systemic change across all educational levels in Ireland to address racism and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

While racism in Irish universities has not been widely discussed in academic literature, there are some notable exceptions that provide insight into the challenges faced by ethnic minority and migrant students in higher education. Lentin (2002) explores racial dynamics in Ireland, providing a broader context for understanding racism in Irish society, which can be extended to higher education settings. Wang and King O'Riain (2006), though briefly, investigated the experiences of Chinese students in Ireland, shedding light on the specific challenges faced by this group, such as cultural adjustment and potential instances of discrimination. McGloin (2016) examined the limited access to higher education for migrant learners in Ireland, highlighting systemic barriers and obstacles these students encounter. Similarly, Ní Dhuinn's (2017) work focused on the barriers to higher education progression and experiences of exclusion faced by minority ethnic students in Irish universities. This includes issues such as marginalisation, isolation, and a lack of support for these students within the university environment. These studies reveal the need for a more comprehensive examination of racism in Irish universities. Internationalisation has also not motivated HEIs to particularly address racism despite evidence of its negative impact on the lives of international university students. (Finn & Darmody, 2017; O'Connor, 2018).

Putting Race Equality on the Agenda in Irish HE

Gender equality has arguably been the historical equality priority in Irish Higher Education in relation to the investment and focus attributed to the work to date. The first national review on gender equality was carried out by the HEA expert group in 2016 (and see Chapters 2, 3 and 4, this volume). Subsequent years of institutional and governmental investment have led to a second review of the sector's progress in 2022. The Higher Education Authority's Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, first established with a remit to ensure 'sustainable acceleration toward gender equality', was expanded thereafter to include all equality grounds in legislation (HEA, 2023b). Given this context, the emergence of the sector's race equality agenda has been influenced by the resourced and ongoing work of gender equality as evidenced by the evolution of the Athena Swan Framework.

The Athena SWAN Ireland Intersectionality Working Group was established at the end of 2018 by the National Committee for Athena SWAN in Ireland with an initial goal to develop a cross-sectoral approach to

collecting data on staff and student ethnicity in the Irish higher education sector (HEA, 2020). In May 2020, this Working Group of HEI academic and professional staff, published a 'Statement on the Use of Ethnicity Categories in Irish Higher Education' to provide fellow staff with information on the rationale for collecting ethnicity data and the complexities of categorisation (HEA, 2020). Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 was referenced as the impetus for this statement, with the collation of data seen as being central to the achievement of the HEA's Public Sector and Human Rights Duty. The Statement gave recommendations on the progression, promotion and monitoring of ethnic data collection to support the development of an evidence base for 'tackling institutionalised racism and advancing equality'. On the recommendation of the Working Group, the HEA expanded the existing gender-disaggregated data returns to include the voluntary collection of ethnicity data by HEIs. This has been implemented by 17 HEIs at the time of writing, with ethnicity data being returned to the HEA on an annual basis, but the collated results are yet to be published nationally.[2]

Importantly, the Statement specifically called for 'Individual institutions to advance the recruitment, retention and progression of staff and students from minority ethnic groups through dedicated actions, and equality action plans, as appropriate' (HEA, 2020). The statement was endorsed by 25 HEIs, as well as by the Irish Universities Association and the Technological Higher Education Association, providing the first indication of sector-wide support for actions in this area of EDI work. The Royal Irish Academy and the British Council in Ireland (2021) published a report on ethnicity, race, and inclusion in higher education in Ireland and the UK which provided further clarity and evidence for the need to improve experiences and outcomes for staff from Irish Traveller, Black, Asian, minority ethnic, and migrant backgrounds in the higher education sector. Four key themes were identified: addressing under-representation across all groups and learning from gender equality initiatives; building capacity to enable institutional change; the role of leadership; and the importance of good data to make progress (Royal Irish Academy-British Council, 2021). The following year, Advance HE's EDI Literacy Glossary was published, with Advance HE noting that, 'The most frequently

[2] It should be noted HEIs collect ethnicity data on a voluntary basis from staff as it is not legally mandated.

mentioned issue was the need to talk about race equality and the capacity building required to facilitate honest, open, and constructive conversations about race and racism on campus in Ireland' (Advance HE, 2021a).

The timing of this progress is key, as it is set against the backdrop of the expansion or creation of EDI units across Irish HE, the impetus for which followed the HEA's 2016 National Gender Equality Review of Irish Higher Education Institutions and the establishment of the first HEA Expert Group and Taskforce (and see Chapter 3, this volume). Alongside this, action was being taken within individual HEIs to highlight and facilitate conversations on race and racism on a local level, with the first Race Equality Forum established by UCC in 2019 (UCC, 2023). That same year in NUI Galway (NUIG), now known as University of Galway, an International Staff Network was formed to influence greater support and action on issues relating to migration, protection of minorities, and international staff (NUI Galway, 2019; Raghavendran, 2021). A history of commitment to Traveller education within NUIG preceded this staff network. There was also an emerging public discussion of a range of personal reflections from academic staff on the role that 'race' plays within higher education in Ireland (DeSondy, 2020).

Around this time, there were also the very first signs of public discussions about decolonisation of the curriculum at Irish universities. In 2020, a student campaign at Trinity College Dublin, inspired by campaigns at the University of Cape Town in 2015, and across the UK in 2016 (National Union of Students, 2016), resulted in the establishment of a Lecturer in Black Studies post (Fogarty, 2020). In 2020, a student engagement and partnership (StEP) programme, which models student-staff partnership, set out to increase the representation of clinical presentations in ethnic minority skin tones in the medical curriculum which has since been expanded to other universities (Haley & Hutch, 2022). Emerging interest in decolonizing the curriculum resulted in a seminar hosted by Institute of Technology Carlow and National Forum of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in November 2020, and a limited literature on implications of this agenda for university libraries (Darby & Dowling, 2021). From a global perspective, the wider cultural context of the Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020 cannot be overlooked. As Ni Chonaill et al. (2022) noted, '[t]he Black Lives Matter movement has placed a spotlight on racism, not just as a global phenomenon but as a feature of Irish society'.

Building Momentum for the Race Equality Agenda

In 2020, the HEA launched its first Race Equality in Higher Education Survey to map and benchmark the experiences of minority ethnic staff across all higher education providers.[3] This was the first significant national action taken to address race equality in Irish higher education. The survey revealed that more than one-third (35%) of minority ethnic third-level education staff said they have been subjected to racial or ethnic discrimination on campus. Less than half of minority ethnic staff who took part in the survey were on full-time contracts, compared to 38% of white Irish and 25% white other not on full-time contracts.[4] Just over 17% of minority ethnic staff earns over €75,000, compared to 38% of white Irish staff and 25% of 'white other' staff. Staff across all ethnic groups described witnessing racial or ethnic discrimination against ethnic minority staff. Staff also expressed concern about students' experiences of exclusion and harassment, as well as institutional inertia regarding equality in student outcomes. Awareness of policies or guidelines to support reporting discrimination was low. Recommendations were made in eight key areas: leadership, supporting diversity in staffing, making race/equality policies transparent, reporting mechanisms, awareness, and training, fostering diversity in HEIs, supporting diversity in student recruitment, and data collection. Since the publication of the survey's findings, the HEA has rolled out an implementation plan identifying actions for the HEA and HEIs.

Following the report's publication, the HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion prepared a discussion paper on the report and sought feedback from the Athena SWAN Intersectionality Working Group, the HEA National Committee for EDI and HEIs. This contributed to the development of the Implementation Plan launched in 2022. The HEA Implementation Plan outlines a number of areas that reflect the core elements of an equality charter, e.g. leadership, recruitment, policy, reporting, and equality data collection. It requires HEIs

[3] Minority ethnic staff in the survey included any person who identified as other than 'white Irish' or 'white' of another nationality, but also included Irish Travellers on the grounds of recognition as an ethnic minority under Irish law.

[4] It was promoted through university staff mailing lists, although in practice this meant that in some institutions the survey was not made available to part-time staff. This means the percentage may be significantly higher.

to undertake a wide variety of actions to identify and target support for under-represented groups. These actions include reviewing job specifications for inclusivity, organising intercultural activities, developing university strategies to engage diverse views, and providing race equality training and signposting relevant policies. Actions relating to students include supporting minority ethnic students in respect of scholarships and funding, placement and training opportunities, and career advice.

While the HEA Implementation plan provides a welcome framework for engaging with senior leaders, having difficult conversations and implementing targeted action, the measurable change required and monitoring of the same remains outstanding. The HEA statement for the launch of the implementation plan highlights the 'opportunity' for universities 'to play a critical role' to tackle racial inequality (HEA, 2022a). The framing of anti-racism work as an opportunity rather than an imperative is in stark contrast to national gender equality work. This is evident in the Athena Swan Ireland Charter which requires measurable, evidence-based action and change, and which is linked to a defined motivation beyond simply doing the right thing, e.g. institutional funding (Advance HE, 2021b). Given the evidence that considerable resources and incentives are needed to see change in equality work (Bhopal & Henderson, 2019a), formal oversight, monitoring, and implications of failing to progress the recommendations in the implementation plan would support progress.

The HEA intended to develop a Race Equality Charter and National Conference to support progress on institutional actions across the sector (HEA, 2022a). However, the envisioned Race Equality Charter was not parallel to that adopted in UK universities. Instead, the HEA noted that feedback from the sector as a whole favoured including race equality under the Athena SWAN Ireland Charter as the most efficient way to implement a number of recommendations (HEA, 2022b). Instead of a Charter, a set of Anti-Racism Principles were designed, in consultation with the HE sector, which all HEI's were encouraged to endorse in order to officially demonstrate their commitment to embedding a culture of race equality in their institutions (HEA, 2023a). However there remains an absence of any repercussions should an institution fail to live up to the principles. A National Conference took place on 20 March 2023, heralding this welcome commitment and acknowledging that institutions need to do more to address race equality for their staff and students. At this event, all institutions were asked to sign up to the Statement of Anti-Racism Principles; at the time of writing, 20 HEIs have signed

these. It remains to be seen whether the principles will act as a raised flag for anti-racism activities across the sector or whether, as elsewhere, the slow production of race equality plans (and some resistance to their production) will reflect what Sara Ahmed (2007, p. 590) has observed in other countries is more about the universities being good at 'doing the document rather than doing the doing''.

Around the same time and shortly after the publication of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Race Equality survey findings, there emerged a limited new academic literature on racism in Irish higher education. Darby (2022) conducted a qualitative study on a single campus, focusing on the experiences of minority ethnic students of discrimination and marginalisation. Lentin's (2021) commentary on the limited academic sociological work regarding racism in Ireland pointed out significant gaps in existing research and the failure of Irish universities to adequately address issues of racism, both within the institutions themselves and in wider society, due to a lack of engagement with anti-racist scholarship and a continued avoidance of confronting systemic racism. Ruggi (2023) explored in detail the lack of understanding of the barriers faced by international staff and students in terms of visas, housing, and academic networking.

In 2021, RCSI became the first higher education institution in Ireland to publish a Race Equality Action Plan (RCSI, 2021). Actions included work to embed a student-led approach to decolonising the medical curriculum (Lynn et al., 2023). In September 2021, University College Dublin (UCD)'s College of Arts and Humanities published an EDI report which detailed a range of actions taken to address discriminations and inequalities including racism during the academic year 2019/20, including discussions around decolonising the curriculum (UCD, 2022). A campaign by Trinity students in 2022 to remove the name of the philosopher and slave owner Bishop George Berkeley from the TCD Library resulted in a public consultation later in 2022 and removal of the name in April 2023 (McGreevy et al., 2023).

It is difficult to draw general conclusions on the progress made by the HE sector in advancing race equality as institutions are at varying stages of understanding and addressing the issue for their staff and students. However, there are common areas of foundational progress among Irish HEIs. Specifically, there is evidence of initiatives that contribute to foundational work of addressing race equality such as ethnicity data collection at recruitment (UCD, 2022), self-directed consultations (UCC,

2024), curriculum reviews and research (Ni Chonaill et al., 2022), or publishing stand-alone race equality action plans (RCSI, 2021). In addition, many have developed consultative mechanisms through staff and student forums/working groups. It is positive to see groups forming to contribute to anti-racist efforts. For example, a campaign for Black Studies at University of Galway in 2023 (Connacht Tribune, 2023), resulted in the advertisement of a permanent post of Lecturer in History of Race and Ethnicity in 2024 following the publication of the University's first Race Equality Strategy in 2023. A national student campaign by STAND and USI campaign to decolonise curricula at Irish universities is ongoing.

Improving EDI data infrastructure is key to ensuring senior leaders and EDI Committees can make evidence informed, impactful decisions. There is a risk however that an overemphasis on gathering data as a first step is guided by an imperative to prove the existence of racial discrimination as a problem, rather than a detailed structural analysis relating to the dominance of whiteness in HE institutions (Grewal, 2022). Closing the gap in understanding systemic and structural barriers affecting the participation of minority ethnic staff and students (Royal Irish Academy-British Council in Ireland, 2021) and improving data collection on the specific experiences of staff within their institutions will be key for institutions (Ni Chonaill et al., 2022). The HEA Survey on Race Equality in HE reported persistent differences in perception based on ethnicity regarding the extent of racism at their institutions which indicates the importance of effective consultation with affected groups. However, relatively little published research exists in relation to the lived experiences of students within HEIs. Therefore, there is a tension between taking action based on good data, and risking lengthy delays on action to wait for data systems and internal processes to catch up with ethnicity data collection (HEA, 2020).

Given the critical role of HEIs in relation to racial inequalities in wider society, a significant opportunity exists for real evidence-informed leadership in this area (Kempny & Micheal, 2021). Since the response of senior leadership to the race equality agenda is likely to be overarchingly determined however by the demands of institutional assessment and funding, it is important then to consider the implications of the encapsulation of accountability on race equality primarily within the Athena Swan assessment process.

Adopting an Intersectional Approach to Race Equality

Until 2022, the Athena Swan Ireland Charter framework, and the HEA annual staff data returns constituted the only formalised, sector-wide approach to race equality work. Introduced in 2015, the Charter is now well established within the Irish Higher Education system and has undergone various revisions. Notably, the strategic requirement for public and accountable progress on gender equality by Irish (HEA, 2019) and EU institutional funding bodies (European Commission, 2021) was key in building the reputational standing and influence of the Charter which is now a feature of EDI practice across the HEI sector.

In subsequent years, the Charter expanded its ambitions beyond gender equality and sought to 'build capacity for evidence-based equality work across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation' (Advance HE, n.d.b). The current, expanded Athena Swan Charter includes provision for institutions to select up to five equality priorities outside of gender equality which presents an opportunity to focus on anti-racism work, and the Charter also now has a specific principle dedicated to intersectionality more generally. However, the choice to pursue or the depth of the race equality work to be undertaken rests with the applying institution. An immediate review from the Charter team would be of great value in order to understand the extent to which HEIs are committing to embedding meaningful race equality metrics within the charter framework. That notwithstanding, the evolution of the Charter is evidence of efforts to deepen the equality of outcomes for staff and students with intersecting identities by using pre-existing frameworks established for gender equality work.

There are benefits, potential pitfalls, and learnings to take from the Irish HEI sector's progress on gender equality and the way in which elements of race equality work has been subsumed therein (rather than via a separate race charter). Currently, sectoral benchmarking is the common tool for analysing and comparing progress. However, institutions can attribute gaps in their ethnicity data collection to immature data systems and actions to improve data quality become targets for future dates (Advance HE, 2021b) which pushes this foundational progress further down the line. Certainly, the reputational and funding weight attached to Athena Swan makes the expanded Charter an attractive mechanism for race equality work, as is advancing equality without the requirement

for separate frameworks. However, an expert review of the Charter is required to support the explicit integration of race and ethnicity markers throughout, e.g. explicitly mentioned in the guiding principles; in recruitment impact measures and data analysis of progression and attainment. In addition, more specific guidance is needed in the Charter Framework References as to the way in which intersectionality should be properly interpreted among the approaches detailed in the sections above.

The approach taken to address race equality in Ireland thus far is distinct to the UK. Learnings from the UK and critiques of a separate race charter note the large workload and resource needs associated with it and the hidden emotional labour often falling to affected groups. However, over emphasis on workload and resource allocation risks presenting race equality as an option rather than imperative, and suggests this work can only happen 'after' gender, given this framing as additional workload (Bhopal & Henderson, 2019a). Other concerns relate to competing or conflicting equality agendas within the sector (Bhopal & Henderson, 2019a, 2019b). This is particularly pertinent in the Irish context, where HEA survey findings noted respondents reported discrimination based on gender was 'more likely to have an impact in HEIs than racism' (Kempny & Micheal, 2021). What remains to be seen is how we might centre tackling racism in a culture of competing inequalities (Verma, 2022). Adopting an intersectional approach from the offset in the Irish context could offer a solution to any potential competition or tension (Kempny & Micheal, 2021). Sector wide and accountable race equality targets are also required. Given that the changes to the Athena Swan Charter were standardised in 2022, it is still too early to determine whether incorporating race equality within the framework is sufficient to advance race equality priorities, such as those outlined in the HEA implementation plan. Therefore, as noted, a detailed review would be highly welcome.

Intersectionality extends beyond identity to emphasise systems of oppression based on race, gender, class, and disability (and see Chapter 13, this volume), with racism as the starting point of analysis. Currently, Irish and EU law do not recognise intersectionality in complaints of discrimination. The upcoming review of equality legislation in Ireland presents an opportunity for progress. Incorporating intersectionality into policy and legal frameworks can guide us towards a more nuanced understanding of social inequalities, resulting in more equitable outcomes for all individuals, especially those at the intersections of various

marginalised identities. This also builds on learning from Kimberlé Crenshaw's work (2013), which highlights how traditional legal frameworks have failed to recognise the complexity of intersecting identities.

An intersectional approach to race equality does not simply 'add' characteristics together (what we call the additive approach), since that is to consider different forms of discrimination as separate and independent of one another. Relying on disaggregated data by single categories can obscure disparities faced by individuals with intersecting identities. By embracing intersectionality, we can develop more nuanced, inclusive, and equitable strategies that account for the complex realities of those affected by multiple forms of discrimination.

Adopting an Intersectional Approach in Irish HEIs

Intersectionality is now integrated as a key principle of undertaking equality, diversity, and inclusion in the Irish higher education sector. For example, in the Commitments to Advance Race Equality in Irish Higher Education, institutions commit to 'adopt an intersectional and intercultural approach when developing anti-racism actions and policies' (HEA, 2023b, p. 6). However, there is no unpacking of what this intersectional approach entails, a similar vagueness seen in other EDI documents.

The word intersectionality has become a signifier for noble intention to do work on other forms of inequality in addition to gender inequality. This use of the word serves to sweep under the carpet the very difficult work of addressing race inequality which is shaped by dynamics of ethnicity and migration, class and gender in the current globalised world. What is often missed is that intersectionality is not simply a theory of identity but into how structures of oppression operate (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). As intersectionality is mainstreamed there is the danger that the emphasis shifts focus to individuals rather than structures and systems. What is forgotten is that intersectionality is not a feel-good term as it fundamentally focuses on the operation of oppression via three systems of oppression—gender, race, and class. Thus, intersectionality is a way to understand how power and inequality affect people's lives and to identify strategies for change (Cole & Duncan, 2022).

Intersectionality is often perceived as feminist theory and there is an assumption that feminists have the necessary conceptual clarity and tools to do intersectionality work (Christoffersen & Emejulu, 2022). This is particularly true in the European context where race is an uncomfortable

concept and intersectionality is often mobilised to strategically erase race, racism, and affirm white supremacy (Christoffersen, 2022; Emejulu & van der Scheer, 2021). A distinct problem in Irish HEIs is that despite growing internationalisation of Irish workplaces and society, a majority of these institutions are predominately white with *white* women gaining positions of power within the EDI architecture created to implement gender equality. It is not popular to think about universities as part of any system of oppression, let alone reproducing or amplifying their effects. To speak about systems of oppression then, is to challenge deeply rooted power structures and privileges within academic institutions, confronting uncomfortable truths about the role universities play in perpetuating racial inequalities and systemic racism.

To do intersectionality, a common pitfall made by institutions is to focus on a particular identity as an entry point and simply assume that adding one category after another is 'doing' intersectionality. Essentially, this approach perceives that individuals belonging to two (or more) different groups separately are simply victims of discriminatory practices in an additive manner: on top of discrimination on one ground, they suffer an *extra* disadvantage or exclusion stemming from another inequality ground. This is seen as the most effective way of addressing the multiple needs of different sections of a population who experience gender, race, class, and ethnicity inequalities. However, such an approach in fact perpetuates policy privileges to affluent, educated, white women (Hankivsky, 2007) given that gender is often perceived as the first or fundamental ground of discrimination. Hankivsky's work highlights the need for an integrated approach that understands and addresses the compounding effects of intersecting identities, rather than merely stacking them in a one-dimensional manner.

It is not surprising that the approach to intersectionality in most Irish HEIs is additive considering how race and gender are co-constitutive. This co-constitutive nature is partly evident in the action plan for race and anti-racism developed by the HEA and followed by the HEIs. This action plan, similar to the approach of the Race Equality Charter, is largely patterned after gender mainstreaming strategies—(a) awareness raising, (b) more robust data collections, (c) increasing diversity in staff and students, (d) targeted supports for minority ethnic groups (scholarships, funding, internships, placements) (e) review and develop policies and procedures and strategies to tackle racism and ethnic group harassment and promote intercultural communication.

Ensuring that the equality, diversity, and inclusion agenda in HEIs is grounded in an intersectional approach entails careful critical reflection on the multiple grounds of inequality and discrimination and how they interact. Without this integrated understanding, there is danger that systemic reproduction of power and oppression will not be addressed with the different experiences of inequality only partially addressed continuing a hierarchy of oppression.

Conclusion: Implications for Gender and Race Equality Agendas

Intersectionality, a term often invoked but inadequately understood, must be centred in the pursuit of true equity in Irish higher education. Integrating race and ethnicity into the Athena Swan Charter offers the potential to challenge entrenched power structures and advance genuine change. It is essential to avoid the commodification and depoliticization of intersectionality; instead, race and ethnicity must be foregrounded in these efforts.

The UK experience underscores the ineffectiveness of separate charters for advancing race equality. Instead, should the Athena Swan Charter intend to be truly intersectional and commit to addressing race inequality in a meaningful way, it must undergo revision to prioritise race justice and explicitly embed race equality within its framework. This revision is crucial to shift the narrative from performative commitment to transformative action.

The HEA's sector-wide approach can introduce standardised practices across all HEIs, but without targeted funding and dedicated resources, it risks perpetuating superficial changes. This may burden existing EDI teams, particularly in newer or smaller institutions, and hinder their ability to drive meaningful progress.

The alarming rise of far-right protests in Ireland highlights resistance to a more multicultural society and demands urgent, direct confrontation with systemic racism and its legacies. Ireland's long history of oppression, from British occupation to the treatment of Irish Travellers, necessitates an honest reckoning with the past to pave the way for a just future.

To achieve meaningful change, it is imperative to go beyond tokenistic gestures and performative measures. Intersectionality starts with race, and ignoring this foundational aspect perpetuates erasure and reinforces systems of oppression. For instance, assessing Athena Swan data solely by

gender conceals racial disparities that require immediate attention. Similarly, considering leadership representation or decision-making committee membership through a gendered lens alone overlooks race and ethnicity disparities that must be rectified.

By confronting these issues directly and embedding race and ethnicity in analyses and actions, institutions can radically transform the higher education landscape. We must reject complacency and strive for an academia that truly represents and uplifts marginalised voices, establishing a more equitable and just future.

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CHAPTER 21

'What About Us?' A Critical, Autoethnographic Conversation by Two Black African Women (BAW) About the Intersectional Nature of the Challenges They Experience in Irish Academia

Lilian Nwanze-Akobo and Tonye Benson-Olatunde

Introduction

The University as an institution is a key arena where "legitimate" knowledge is established. While discourses of power may have qualities of constraint and repression, they are not, nor have they ever been, uncontested. Indeed, the process of determining what is "legitimate knowledge"

We acknowledge the difficulty in achieving language that can capture the heterogenous categories of people who are not of the dominant ethnic origin in Ireland and we acknowledge that "different societies apply differing criteria

L. Nwanze-Akobo (✉) · T. Benson-Olatunde
Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland
e-mail: lilian.nwanze@mu.ie

T. Benson-Olatunde
e-mail: tonye.bensonolatunde@mu.ie

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> and for what purpose that knowledge should be produced is a political debate that rages in the University. Our presence, as working-class people of color (especially women of color), in an institution that values itself on its elitist criteria for admission, forces the debates and challenges previously sacred canons of objective truth…It is probably for this reason that our presence here is so complex—and so important. (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p. 169)

The issue of gender equality in Irish academia has been to the fore of national policy in the last seven years. Despite obvious breakthroughs in the gender equality agenda since that time (for instance, the emergence of women as heads of seven of the 12 Irish universities), there are still issues of concern regarding the experiences of women in higher education in Ireland (Hodgins et al., 2022). In November 2022, the HEA Gender Equality report (Higher Education Authority, 2022) highlighted intersectionality and racial inequality as some of the issues that were not adequately addressed in previous reviews but are important in attaining the ambitious national vision of getting Ireland to 'become a world-leading country for Gender Equality in Higher Education by 2026' (Higher Education Authority Gender Taskforce, 2018, p. 5).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist thought rely on the premise that Black people experience the world differently from their white counterparts. Solórzano and Yosso (2002, p. 272) state that "one important tenet of CRT is recognizing and valuing the experiences and voices of people of color", and that "critical race theory recognizes

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regarding who is classified as 'black', and these social constructs change over time" (Kim & Ng, 2019, p. 7). We write from a particular frame of experience as Black women who migrated from Nigeria to Ireland. We consequently refer to ourselves in this chapter as Black African Women (BAW). We believe that extending our experiences as Black African Women (BAW) to all people of Black or other Minoritised Ethnic (BME) heritage may be too ambitious, as some in this category do not have the exact experiences that we do. At points in this chapter, we will write about others from minoritised ethnic origins and will refer to them using the acronym BME. Again, we acknowledge the limitation of using such terminology. In spite of this dichotomy in the use of language, we identify with all colleagues from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and note that the solutions we proffer can and should be applied to all from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (p. 26). The 'voice' component of CRT, according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), provides a means to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed— "a first step on the road to justice" (p. 58). Ladson-Billings (1998) further argues that 'adopting and adapting CRT for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it' (p. 22). Animating CRT 'within' Ireland's education system means recovering and gathering erased counter-narratives of those who do not fit the particular national' liberal anti-racist paradigm. (Kitching, 2013, p. 16). Therefore the experiential knowledge possessed by Black people and people of colour is a unique 'voice' and bestows on us competence to speak about how race and racism intersect with our other social identities to cause disadvantages (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In this chapter, we, two Black African Women (BAW) occupying different roles in Irish academia, engage in a critical autoethnographic conversation (Akinborewa et al., 2020; Burke & Brown, 2021; Ellis, Adams & Butchner, 2011; Warren-Gordon & Jackson-Brown, 2022) where we explore and highlight issues that are either ignored or conflated with other more ubiquitous issues within gender equality narratives (Crenshaw, 1989). Auto-ethnography is a research form of 'self-narrative that places the self within a social context' (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). This method of social science research, "preserves the unique strengths of self-reflexivity associated with autobiography and the cultural interpretation associated with ethnography" (Chang, 2008, p. 17). In this personal narrative, we allow our conversation to explore the effects and the impact of issues like migration, racism, accent, nation, and psychological trauma and how ignoring such issues perpetuates discrimination and inequities against Black women within Irish higher education. Our choice of method and presentation in this chapter is influenced by our intention to lean into our unique African way of knowing (and creating knowledge) through dialogue and storytelling which is often undermined in Western Academic writing. This method allows us to share our experiences as marginalised Black women in Irish academia and to represent the voices of those who have seldom, if at all been heard before in Irish academia. We align with the view of critical theory that such ordinarily "dishonoured views of the

world can help subvert oppression but also rethink the nature and production of knowledge and selfhood for individuals from diverse backgrounds" (Kincheleo & Steinberg, 2008, p. ix).

Both of us had a series of informal dialogues and conversations, some as we walked around the beautiful grounds of our campus after work on some evenings and others on Zoom calls. When we chose to start documenting our thoughts, we were exploring the question—What are the experiences and challenges we face in academia as Black migrant women? We both kept reflective journals as well as listened back to our recorded Zoom conversations. We met to discuss and agree on the themes that emerged from our conversations and our individual reflective journals. We highlighted four broad cluster themes—(i) absence of mentorship, isolation, and the unofficial role of the mentor; (ii) Stereotypes, precarity, and trauma; (iii) Occupational Downgrading and skills depreciation; iv. Inaccessibility and precarity. We present extracts from our dialogue under these themes and we have interspersed the dialogue with relevant literature.

Absence of Mentorship, Isolation, the Unofficial Role of Mentor

Lilian: Tonye, one thing that goes under the radar and is not spoken about often enough in my opinion is the racialised nature of higher education space in Ireland. Sara Ahmed (2006, p. 129) speaks about spaces that have a 'habit' of whiteness and the consequent struggles of non-white people to fit into those spaces. The recent HEA Race Equality report puts the statistic of Black educators at 1.7%. This means that only about 1 in every 100 lecturers is Black! Remember that this statistic includes men and people who were born and have lived all their lives in Ireland. There is an almost total absence of Black migrant women in the academy. Even when we find our way into this white space of Higher Education, we usually exist on the margins (Hill-Collins,)—precarious and without any real 'power' to effect change. I recall the interview I had when I was to commence my PhD study. My interviewer asked me what my plans were post PhD and I told him I intended to join the academy as a lecturer. He told me about 5 times (I'm not exaggerating), that it was a 'very very very' difficult field to get into. He was not telling a lie, academia is a difficult space to get into but I often wonder why he felt the need to keep repeating it to me. Was he really saying it was a difficult field to get into

for everyone or did he mean that for me, a Black migrant woman who speaks English with a Nigerian accent, academia was a no-go area? I can't say for sure but research indicates that this sort of experience isn't unusual when a person is perceived to not represent the 'racial somatic norm' in higher education (Mirza, 2018, pp. 178–179). Yes, we now have seven female presidents of universities in Ireland (as explored in Chapter 5) but we have less than three BAW in full-time lecturing positions in our university. I am tempted to ask as Sojourner Truth[1] did—Aren't we women, too? (McKissack, 1992).

When we do eventually get into the space, the isolation, the overwhelming amount of micro-aggressions, the lack of relatable mentors, and the automatic burden of providing pastoral care and informal mentorship to one another as well as to Black students is huge and often not acknowledged (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). However, we are neither supported nor equipped for this kind of unrecognised work and are likely to suffer burnout and other psychological issues as a result.

Tonye: I have experienced all that you have just spoken about, Lilian. In the 11 years I have worked in the university I can't use all the fingers on one hand in counting Black women with secure jobs in this university. I know only two women. Before I met you, they were the two women I spoke to, trusting that they understood me and could relate to my experiences and feelings. Findings from studies confirm that the isolated position and loneliness of BAW and BME workers could be overcome by meeting other BME colleagues outside their unit or department and that such socialising benefits information sharing on job opportunities and other key resources in the institution (Equality Challenge Unit, 2011).

Speaking of the unofficial role of mentoring BME students, this is a part of my unofficial role as well. Year after year, BME students come to me with multiple issues looking for me to support them. They explicitly tell me that they feel that I can understand and relate to their issues. A few have gone as far as telling me that seeing me on the website of my department encouraged them to choose to study in my department, believing that the department would be an inclusive place and knowing

[1] Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) was an African American Woman and Human Rights Activist who herself escaped slavery and later became an abolitionist who fought to end slavery. Sojourner Truth delivered a speech titled 'Ain't I a woman' in a Woman's Right Convention in 1851.

that they could find a mentor in me. This creates additional responsibility and pressure. Mentoring students is a privilege, but it's not always a picnic in the park (Stanley, 2006). I provide mentorship and even a mediator role in issues of conflict involving Black students. So, I very much relate to the issues of being an unofficial mentor and of isolation which you spoke of.

Stereotypes, Precarity, Invisible Emotional/Psychological Trauma

Lilian: I find that navigating academia in Ireland has taken its toll on me. It is as though I am in constant struggle. Trying to prove that I am good enough to be in the space. Trying to act in such a way that will debunk negative stereotypes. For instance Tonye, you won't believe it but I often worry about how loud my voice is when I'm teaching and I worry about this only because there is a stereotype of the loud angry Black woman. *Laughs*. I find myself working hard to not fit into that stereotype. As silly as this sounds, it creates an extra layer of burden for me; an invisible one. The burden of dealing with interpersonal manifestations of racism from some of my students and having no safe space to speak about it is frustrating. I'm also constantly trying to get a secure foot in the door as my employment is precarious. This precarity feeds into the "impostor syndrome" (Clance & Imes, 1978) that I so often battle with. This emotional and psychological burden is something that must be highlighted. These are the things that get lost in fancy reports and action plans. But what use is there in getting me into the door only for me to get burnt out? I think Beverly Tatum sums up the situation succinctly: "Whether one succumbs to the devaluing pressures of the dominant culture or successfully resists them, the fact is that dealing with oppressive systems from the underside, regardless of the strategy, is physically and psychologically taxing" (Tatum, 2000, p. 5).

Tonye: The 'Caucasity' (Mos-Shogbamimu, 2021, p. 52) of policing BME people's tone is a power play to silence us. It is rather sad than silly that we modify ourselves to conform to the dominant Caucasic diction and demure in order to dissociate ourselves from the stereotype about our accent and our outspoken nature, but we do and it drains us and traumatizes us. A person's accent is said to be an indicator of their geographical identity (Wells, 1982). Linguistic profiling has been likened to racial profiling with similar negative consequences (Baugh & Sinfree, 2003) including accent discrimination (Marshall, 2013). This stereotype

is perpetuated by classist and racist narratives to devalue and stifle the intelligence and confidence of BME people. Unfortunately, it does more than this; it leads to employment discrimination (Skaggs & Bridges, 2013) as well as impacts our career progression (Friedman & Laurison, 2019). Baratta (2017) claims that some teachers are told to modify their 'broad accents' so that they can be considered more professional. But as Trevor Noah (2019 5:12) said, "An accent is not a measurement of intelligence, but just somebody speaking your language with the rules of theirs". However, we continue to be stereotyped for our accents and the power in our tone. Regarding the insecurities we feel in the classroom, I can't promise you that these will disappear soon or ever, but I can say that you will learn to deal with them better, as you speak to and learn from other BME academics. Findings from a study indicate that BME mentors are considered vital in supporting fellow BME staff members by helping to debunk cultural assumptions (Equality Challenge Unit, 2011). For a longer-term solution though, we need therapist intervention and support.

Occupational Downgrading and Skills Depreciation

Tonye: Just like you, Lilian, I came to Ireland with a master's degree which is a level 9 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2014). However, I thought to acquire more skills to better my chances in the Irish labour market eventually. Due to my circumstances and challenges at the time, I was not in a position to afford tuition. You can imagine the shock when I was informed that the courses I could freely access were courses 4 to 5 levels below the academic level I had already attained. I was also surprised that the courses recommended to me appeared tailored towards sectors that have been described as 'ethnicised sectors' with jobs defined as 'migrant work' or 3 Ds job—dirty, dangerous, and difficult (Mucci et al., 2019; Yeates, 2005, 2017).

I was worried about the future where the education I had acquired, including experiences I had accumulated over the years before arriving in Ireland, would be irrelevant. A few have posited that migrant women are doubly disadvantaged by both gender and migration statuses in the labour market (Donato et al., 2014; Fleischmann & Höhne, 2013). Yet, BAW have more intersecting identities that add to their disadvantage and

dilemma such as race, class, citizenship status, accent, devaluation of their education, etc.

I remember going to the guidance counsellor several times to reiterate that I already had a masters degree and wanted courses that would improve my skills. Each time she told me that my degree was not recognised in Ireland. As Duleep and Regets (1999) and Barrett et al., (2006) highlight, education obtained in 'less developed' countries is devalued. Later, I also enquired about a job in the Foreign Affairs Department as I had a keen interest in the sector and a masters degree relevant to working in that department but the guidance counsellor told me that I needed qualifications from Ireland and proficiency in the Irish language to work in that department. I was afraid that the prospect for my future employment in Ireland would be that of what Chort describes as a "negative vertical mismatch" (2017, p. 1808) and occupational downgrading (Barret et al., 2006; Voitchovsky, 2014), and the likelihood of my skills depreciating (Ivan Privalko et al., 2023). It took me a decade of working in mismatched jobs to save up for another master's degree. Following this degree, I got the opportunity to become a university tutor in a department headed by a courageous White woman whose philosophy of life is challenging the negative 'isms' constructed by some to oppress others.

Lilian: I think we really need to interrogate this issue of degrees not being recognised because I believe that there is a cultural code we aren't really naming. My law degree wasn't recognised to give me an inroad to become a lawyer in Ireland but it was recognised to get me into a masters degree where I paid over 16,000 Euro as International fees. A degree from the USA is readily accepted but not one from Nigeria? What are we really saying? The narrative I get every time I query, "Why there aren't more Black migrant teachers in the academy?' is that there are too few BME people with PhD degrees which are now a prerequisite for teaching in higher education. Yet, I know of at least three PhD holders, two who got their degrees from Nigeria and one from Ireland who are working as health care assistants because they cannot get jobs in academia or jobs that match their level of education. Are PhDs from Africa not PhDs too? The UK is dealing with its own issues of racism but they seem to have crossed this hurdle of recruitment of people from Black Africa into academia. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (2011) in the UK confirms that as with the population of Britain, staff and student populations in higher educational institutions (HEIs) have become increasingly diverse. But in

Ireland, there are thousands of BAW whose previous experiences and education are devalued and essentially erased.

(In)accessibility and Precarity

Tonye: Speaking about PhDs, funding is an inhibiting factor for Black women. Yes, I know that funding is not an issue specific to BAW but we are further impacted by other intersecting issues like a lack of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) due to migration, lack of access to relevant information (Gittell & Vidal, 1998), and the lack of mentors to advise about scholarships and how to apply for them. These undoubtedly have a more profound impact on us. This impact is worsened on those of us in the arts and social sciences as there are more scholarships and grants targeted at Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM).

Using myself, for example, there was no way I could pay for a PhD from my meagre earnings. Paying for my second masters degree was a struggle. I paid for it in instalments until I finished the course. So, I knew that I couldn't afford to do that with the PhD, not only because it goes on for more years, but also because the PhD entails other expenses apart from tuition, such as costs of travelling nationally and internationally to attend seminars, to present at conferences, and so on.

In an ideal situation, I could have saved up money after working for three to five years to pay for the PhD but the precarity of my employment in the university makes saving impossible. For seven years of my employment, I was on a precarious contract where my contract was renewed every few months. In an Irish Times opinion piece online titled 'Universities are preoccupied with market growth as if educators were stocks and shares,' Diarmaid Ferriter (May 29, 2020) calls this the "casualisation of academic labour".

And don't think that I haven't been looking for another job, despite my love for this profession. However, my search for other job opportunities that I consider fulfilling has yet to be successful. This confirms the difficulty migrants encounter in obtaining jobs as highlighted by many (Powers & Seltzer, 1998; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013, McGinnity & Lunn, 2011). More so, Black African Women like us find it even more difficult with employment in Ireland (Privalko et al., 2023).

Lilian: I'm tempted to jump in and speak about the devaluation of our personality that occurs through the Irish labour market and how there

seems to be an agenda to skill BAW for work only in the care industry but I won't digress. *Laughs*. Let's stick to academia, a sector you and I can totally relate to. The precarity we experience stifles our progression, honestly. I know that precarity affects others, not just BAW but when you add the other issues we face, including even getting precarious work in the first place, the negative impact is huge. I attribute my entry into academia to the doggedness of a White woman who insisted on practicing what she preached. There is a lot of talk about inclusion and diversity and all these other things that have acquired buzzword status but how many people will go out of their way to remove the barriers that BAW face in accessing jobs in academia? While we wait for a structural resolution of the issue, there are White people who stand as gatekeepers in Universities who champion EDI discourses but how many have gone out of their way to appoint a BAW for a job? And I think the hypocrisy should be called out. We can't keep naming a problem yet pretending that we can do nothing about it. Come to think of it, why is it so difficult for BAW to get into academia? It is either one of two things—there is something wrong with us BAW or there is something wrong with the system. The answer is obvious. It is a systemic issue. Have you looked around our university? Can you see the number of BME students on our campus? Where are the role models for these students? What/who motivates them to have hope that their degrees will give them equal access to employment, including in academia? The EDU Report in the UK highlights that BME students want a more representative workforce, diverse teaching practices, and more BME role models (ECU, 2011). I know that the narrative every time I bring this up in critical spaces is that the rapid increase in migration to Ireland began fairly recently and that it takes time for the system to reflect the new demography. Sadly, I cannot argue against this because I do not have the statistics. No one does. There is a dearth of racial data in Irish academia—I suggest that data on the numbers of people applying for roles, being shortlisted, and being appointed is needed for us to prove that access to employment is unequal.

Tonye: There is nothing wrong with us, Lilian. We are fighting against a system that is not designed to support the professional growth of people like you and me (Collins, 1996; Tillman, 2001). Bhopal and Henderson (2019, p. 3) speak about the significant inequalities in higher education institutions for women and people of colour in areas "such as entry to the academic profession, access to permanent, secure employment, and career progression."

Just like you, I also got a foot into academia due to the pertinacity of a White woman who simply sees people as human beings (not colour-blind though) but who also acknowledges the reality of a fragmented society and world, and who unequivocally and unapologetically fights for human rights, social justice, and equality. Because you and I came into academia on the back and the goodwill of two White women, it strengthens the call of BAW for allyship with White women. We also solicit the allyship of White men. We cannot ignore that they hold more positions of power and should be held accountable for providing some of the support we need.

Erskine and Bilimoria (2019) posit that courage and positive deviance are the virtues of White allyship. Allyship is integral for women of colour to not only survive but also thrive in academia (Chrifi et al., 2016). For clarity, we adopt the following definition of allyship:

> We define White allyship as a continuous, reflexive practice of proactively interrogating Whiteness from an intersectionality framework, leveraging one's position of power and privilege, and courageously interrupting the status quo of predominantly White corporate leadership by engaging in prosocial behaviors that foster growth-in-connection and have both the intention and impact of creating mutuality, solidarity, and support of Afro-Diasporic women's career development and leadership advancement in organizations. (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019, p. 319)

This is the type of support we need to get into academia and the type of allyship we need to progress in academia.

Talking about access to academia, a few years back, a BAW who was finishing a master's degree at this university inquired as to how she could pursue her interest in academia as a career. She was advised to ask me. I was flabbergasted at this. At that time, my position in the university remained as precarious as when I started more than six years prior. Was that advice suggesting that there is an expected route into academia for Black women and that it is okay to remain on a career treadmill as I have been? This is why occupational mismatch (Chort, 2017) and occupational downgrading (Barrett et al., 2006; Voitchovsky, 2014) remain the reality for BAW in Ireland. Access to skilled jobs remains a mirage for us. Even when Black women pay highly for master's and even PhD degrees, gatekeepers of institutions stand in the way with arms akimbo and turn

Black women back to low-level social care jobs where the skills they have acquired in higher institutions depreciate. What can we do about this?

Lilian: We must first acknowledge that academia is complicit in reproducing racial injustice (Darder & Torres, 2003; Giroux, 2020; Kincheleo & Steinberg, 2008). Racial injustice is not an abstract concept. The institutions perpetuate this injustice– whether through lack of representation, devaluation of our previous experiences, a total absence of Black thought in literature, or in the myriad other ways that racism occurs in the academy. Relying on CRT's interest convergence[2] principle, I advocate strict implementation of the Athena Swan framework that provides funding to universities' action on recruitment based on race and gender with a specific interest in the recruitment of migrants from underrepresented parts of the world (especially Africa). I propose that some kind of incentive be applied to institutions with an agreed-upon benchmarked number of migrant women. Until our interests are tied to the interests of the universities, we will be singing the same sad song for very long. I am in essence saying that I advocate for affirmative action. I am well aware of the way affirmative action can reinscribe "paternalistic domination[3]" (hooks, 2009, p. 24) but I believe that in the first instance, it will work as an effective solution to the alarming dearth of Black migrant women in the academy. There is evidence that having a diverse staff base is more beneficial for students and that minoritised ethnic students are better served by the presence of minority ethnic staff (ECU, 2011). Calling for affirmative action is in essence calling for a better, more balanced holistic approach to learning. I also recommend that racially responsive counselling services offered by trained counsellors (preferably BAW counsellors) who understand the culture and the experiences of BAW be put in place for minority ethnic staff. I could spend the whole day speaking about what I think can be done but how about you? What are your thoughts?

Tonye: I think that the conditions for entry to academia exclude Black people and other minority communities from applying. It projects HEIs

[2] The interest convergence tenet of Critical Race Theory states that the interests of BME people will only be advanced when those interests align with the interests of the dominant group (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

[3] Bell hooks writes about how the use of the word *affirmative* in affirmative action implies that the privileged is bestowing a 'big yes' on the marginalised, consequently, reinforcing the very structure of domination that affirmative action is supposed to redress (2009, p. 24).

as an elite, White space (Bhopal & Henderson, 2019). As I mentioned earlier, funding is a big hindrance for BAW to pursue a doctorate. I suggest that to close the gap, targeted funding should be made available to Black and Minority Ethnic communities to assist them in pursuing doctoral degrees to qualify for a career in academia. Also, interviewers have to be trained to have an open mind as part of "measures for a fair and transparent recruitment process for staff" (HEA, 2021, p. 69).

There is a need for targeted support mechanisms for minority academics. A report in the UK which can apply to Irish higher education shows that '[M]ost institutions (85%) indicated that general support frameworks and arrangements for staff exist, but fewer reported more targeted support, either for BME staff (33%) or for other groups (46%)' (ECU, 2011, p. 15).

Mentoring for Black women in academia is important. Research indicates that BME staff need mentoring as they too could "lack confidence, networks and know-how" (ibid). A good model to adopt will be a dual-dimensional mentoring system that will soften the power dynamics between mentors and mentees. More advantages to this two-way mentoring model have been proposed by others:

> In this model, both parties simultaneously adopted the roles of both mentor and mentee. Usually, because of the existing hierarchy of an HEI, the non-BME individual assumes a mentor role in matters of career and organisational culture, while the BME individual assumes mentorship in terms of social, cultural, and diverse background. Such an arrangement provides career support for the BME individual and, at the same time, has the potential to have an impact on institutional management and culture. (ECU, 2011)

However, mentorship should be an institutional initiative and well-resourced. Self-organisation and informal support may create additional pressures by asking those most affected by inequality to take on the additional burden of organising against it. There may therefore be a greater need to focus on providing institutional resourcing and support (ibid). Indeed, all efforts to achieve equality in HEIs must be institution-led. As Price (2015, p. 497) states, "[L]ike 'global', 'sustainable', 'engaged' and other pithy notions, 'diversity' has no real flavour until it marinates in institution-specific sauce". Speaking about resourcing, one of the only modules on anti-racism I know of in our university, lost funding after the

first year of its running. It is now facilitated by lecturers and contributors voluntarily with book voucher tokens. On the day I contributed to the class in the 2023/2024 academic year, 115 very engaged students were in attendance at a 3–5 pm class. This showed great interest by students in the topic/issue of anti-racism, yet the module has been relegated to running only if there are volunteers. Our universities would have to think about putting their money where their mouths are.

Discussion

In this chapter, we articulate some of our experiences working in a higher educational institution in Ireland. We abandoned the traditional methods which are considered the standard academic writing model. Instead, we went for a 'culturally-relevant' (Ladson-Billings, 2014) method of dialogue and storytelling. This allowed us to express ourselves explicitly and without cowering in or pandering to the dominant gaze. Storytelling/counter-storytelling and 'naming one's own reality' refers to the use of narrative storytelling to illuminate and explore lived experiences of racial oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). We chime with Warren-Gordon and Jackson-Brown (2022) in saying we hope that just as we were able to set aside many of the traditions of academic research and writing, you the readers of this chapter will likewise set aside how you engage with research and be open to this different form of expression.

Our walking meetings provided a safe space for us to vent (Warren-Gordon & Mayes, 2017) and reflect on our experiences as a form of self-care and self-love (Haarhoff et al., 2015). As we mutually empathised on our shared dilemma, we discovered the value of mutual unburdening and renewed collegiality. This deepened our friendship and expanded our sense of support for each other. We register that race, class, and gender are the salient issues that impact our lives within the academy. This shows that our community of marginalised people goes beyond the Black and White binary.

We leaned into CRT to project our voices. CRT networks in the UK have begun to provide safe spaces to explore racialised oppressions and to 'hear' alternative counter-cultural voices in the academy (Hylton et al., 2011). "Animating CRT 'within' Ireland's education system means recovering and gathering erased counter-narratives of those who do not fit the particular 'national' liberal anti-racist paradigm" (Kitching, 2013 p. 16).

We propose extending such spaces across Irish higher education institutions as a way forward in the exigency to consider confronting racism in HEIs in Ireland. The ethnic fabric of Ireland is changing rapidly as a result of varied forms of in-migration. There is a need to acknowledge and respect the new reality of Irishness. Kitching (2013) elucidates this point succinctly when he writes that greening CRT in Irish education should involve 'a radical anti-racist approach that does not fall into the trap of projecting Irishness ….as whiteness' (ibid., pp. 17–18).

Though we did not have the space to discuss the full range of the intersection of our issues, we respectfully acknowledge Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) who coined the term intersectionality to name how the intersections of identities in the experiences of women of colour were ignored or divided, resulting in injustice for them. Building on Crenshaw's work, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains the matrix of domination as a system where privileged and oppressed positionalities collide with one another, forming different experiences based on our multiple identities. As we highlighted earlier, race, gender, and class are only some of the identities that work against BAW in the academy.

Currently, achieving Athena Swan award, at a minimum of bronze, is a requirement for SFI, IRC, and HRB to be eligible to apply for funding as explored in Chapters 3 and 6. We propose a stricter implementation of a similar framework and increased funding to institutions with a good representational number of Black African women in their employment. We acknowledge that the new framework for Athena Swan is more intersectional and mindful of race equality than previously. However, we recommend that specific funding is ringfenced and released for race equality work by funding agencies to promote racial equity in HEIs.

In March 2023 the HEA launched the Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions as a sequel to the launch of the Race Equality Implementation Plan 2022–2024 the previous year. These are laudable, germane, and exigent strategies. While the principles signal progress, their impact depends on strong execution, specificity, and sustained commitment. HEIs must actively translate these principles into concrete actions for meaningful efforts to combat racism. Universities must go beyond mere endorsement and actively integrate these principles into their policies, programs, and practices. If not rigorously implemented, they risk becoming mere rhetoric. Without dedicated resources

(financial, human, and time), the principles remain ambitious. Institutions of higher education must particularly allocate resources to make meaningful changes.

We also propose affirmative action as an active and effective framework for getting Black migrant women into the academy. Critical race theorists have also argued in favour of affirmative action. They argue that so-called meritocratic standards for hiring and educational admissions are not race-neutral and that such standards are part of the rhetoric of neutrality through which dominant groups justify their disproportionate share of resources and social benefits (Delgado, 1995; Kennedy, 1990; Williams, 1991). Despite the argument that affirmative action can reinscribe 'paternalistic domination' (hooks, 2009, p. 24), we believe that in the first instance, it will work as an effective solution to the alarming dearth of Black migrant women in the academy.

We recommend that HEIs in Ireland should devise methods such as annual diversity reports to monitor diversity within their staff body. This will encourage the governing and key decision-making bodies to reflect on the diversity, or lack thereof, in the composition of their staff body. We call for a more effective collection of racial data to better measure and monitor the ratio between their BME staff and the BME student body, and aim for a representational balance between them. These are achievable proposals for cohesive learning communities. According to Frenk (2016) "Universities can help improve a sense of belonging by setting clear goals, fostering inclusive environments, and challenging negative stereotypes about certain groups" (2016, p. 3).

Literature that centres on the lived experiences of BAW in academia is scant (Stanley, 2006). This chapter may be one of very few (if any) that proposes to do so in Ireland. However, we feel a sense of responsibility and are emboldened by our positionality in the academy in Ireland. According to Blackburn et al. (1994), "higher education institutions, as well as national research centres, need to focus on the experiences of faculty of color if we hope to understand the work environments needed to support creative talents" (p. 280).

Lastly, we recommend that culture-sensitive and culture-competent counselling services be made available to Black and Minority Ethnic staff and students of HEIs in Ireland. The chief criticism against counselling as it is presently, is that it has remained essentially, Eurocentric and individualistic (Moodley, 1999). The inefficacy of this is clearly seen in the

premature termination and lack of participation by minorities in counselling and therapy. Culture-sensitive counsellors and counselling with a 'culture fit' model have been suggested as a way of making the process more appropriate to a diversity of cultures (ibid.). Therapy with a culture fit model understands the cultural backdrop that shapes the client's identity, values, and worldview. It has been said that "when stepping into the journey of therapy, finding someone who 'gets you' means a lot more than sharing common interests. (Therapy Route, 2024). It is about aligning on deeper levels, including culturally.

We hope that this chapter contributes to the limited body of literature which highlights the experiences of Black women in higher education institutions, particularly in Ireland. We hope that it gives the reader an insight into the lived experiences of two BAW who continue to agitate for an academy where they are seen and their voices are heard. For our non-Black and non-migrant colleagues who would like to be allied with us in our fight against marginalisation and oppression, we hope that this chapter has awakened a new spirit of collegiality and fairness within you as well as awakened the activist within you to speak up for a better institutional culture and to be the actors to drive the exigent need for change in institutions of higher education in Ireland.

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CHAPTER 22

Conclusion

Helen Maher, Lorraine McIlrath, Marie Connolly, and Lorraine Leeson

Introduction

This book has documented and analysed the evolution of policy and practice to support inclusive gender equality in Irish higher education (HE). Here we synthesise the narrative of the book that moves towards a significant programme of work on ending sexual violence and harassment, both in the context of the research and evidence base which informs this work,

H. Maher (✉)
University of Galway, Galway, Ireland
e-mail: helen.maher@universityofgalway.ie

L. McIlrath
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: lorraine.mcIlrath@mic.ul.ie

M. Connolly
University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland
e-mail: Marie.Connolly@ul.ie

L. Leeson
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: avpedi@tcd.ie

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and the practical orientation at institutional level, and onto the recent attention on race equality that has followed a similar pathway, albeit there is an evidence gap at national level regarding the experiences of minority ethnic students. The 65 authors within this book have traced this evolution and expansion pointing to pioneers, evidenced inequalities, policy, interventions and sustainable practices with resources allocations to embed EDI as a prevailing pillar of activity with HE in Ireland. Incorporating an intersectional lens into analysis and practice is a developing norm as the commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the higher education landscape is mainstreamed. There is much to celebrate in relation to the progress that has been achieved to date and the evident good practice articulated throughout this book points to key lessons which have value for the Irish, European and wider international contexts. Nonetheless, despite this relatively progressive trajectory, there remain substantial challenges and limitations, and we are also cognisant of the lengthy duration of change within the sector. While acknowledging these shortcomings, we end our conclusion with a proposed *Charter for EDI Leaders and Advocates* stemming from the broad themes and wisdom threaded throughout the book. This Charter we feel has practical applicability for those looking to disrupt the status quo and our aspiration is that it will lend itself as a touchstone for present and future practitioners.

This chapter also looks to the future, noting lessons learned and securing the gains achieved to date as identified and discussed throughout the chapters in this volume. Additionally, the analysis is mindful of the wider societal issues and impact of racist, sexist and misogynist discourses on race, gender and sexuality and their potential impact on Irish higher education systems and culture. In doing so, we note the notably regressive impact of the culture wars on higher education in the United States and the United Kingdom. Accordingly, this chapter examines the specific nature of these challenges while looking to examples of good practice in the wider global context.

Advancing Equality in Irish Higher Education

The evolution of the EDI in Irish higher education as considered in this book, illustrates that there is a multi-faceted approach to the progressive realisation of equality, involving diverse levels of collaboration and partnership, as well as distinctive moments of advocacy, among feminist academics, gender activists, national and European higher education

bodies and associations, policy makers, funding bodies, in addition to institutional actors. It is recognised that the higher education landscape is gendered, racialised and ableist, and encompasses a legacy of culture and systems underpinned by elite class-based norms (Acker, 1992; Baltaru, 2022; Clavero & Galligan, 2020; Lynch et al., 2020; Trinity College Dublin Forum for Disabled Staff and Postgraduate Students, 2021). It is against this background that the types of initiatives, research, policies and practices discussed across this volume have emerged, seeking to disrupt the status quo with a range of strategies, tactics and collective endeavours. The successes and limitations of EDI in Irish higher education warrant some analysis. The extent to which this progressive trajectory can be sustained into the longer term remains a key concern for those who have been integral to placing issues of gender, race, sexuality, age and disability at the centre of the higher education policy domain. As EDI thematic areas expand, seeking to address intersectional considerations, so too does the volume of additional necessary work increase among EDI personnel that are already over-burdened.

Key Lessons

The chapters in this book have drawn on the multiple experiences of developing and influencing research, strategy, policy and practice in progressing equality in the Irish higher education context. The combination of perspectives from political actors, policy makers, scholars, professional staff, community stakeholders and students, including scholar-activists, provide substantial insights from which lessons can be drawn. This can assist in both giving guidance and direction to the evolution and maturation of this work while also signposting some of the limitations, challenges and pitfalls that prevail. It is understood that there are other examples of good practice that are beyond the scope of this book, however as editors we call for further reflection and scholarship on other transformative initiatives that seek to progress EDI in HE in Ireland and beyond. Nonetheless, the breadth and depth of consideration offered in this book provides an opportunity to synthesise some of the central learnings that have emerged. These include recognising the extent and precise nature of the problem of inequality and exclusion using quantitative and qualitative data and evidence which incorporates lived experience; and understanding that progressive change and transformation requires courageous drivers who often operate in opposition to the status quo.

Additionally, this book demonstrates the value of a strategic approach to embedding EDI at national and institutional policy level; the importance of targeting macro, meso and micro levels; of placing responsibility and accountability within institutional leadership, while also promoting transparency. Allocating appropriate and sustainable resources for achieving objectives and targets established at national and institutional levels is also a fundamental factor in being able to devote time and expertise to advancing EDI. In many respects, the primary elements of the process and practice for addressing inequalities in HEIs has followed strategic intent incorporating public value, legitimacy and support, and means such as resources and operational capacity (Moore, 1995). However, this is differentiated and strengthened by the adoption of a gender lens which, more recently, has sought to incorporate a critical understanding of race inequality and intersectionality.

Evidence-based Approaches to EDI

This book highlights the centrality of a data driven and evidence-based approach has been a critical factor to presenting the cases and challenges, in the first instance for tackling gender inequality in higher education institutions in Ireland, and secondly, in addressing the broadening and intersectional focus on inequality. The routine and systematic collection of data at institutional level and reporting on same in a coordinated manner by the national higher education body, the HEA, underpins legitimacy, provides a benchmark and supports visibility and transparency across all our HEIs and is not merely a performative task. In tandem, evidence and data provide a framework for future comparisons and ability to track progress as well as transformation. Comprehensive multi-faceted quantitative and qualitative data is fundamental to identifying the extent and nature of the problem, setting policy objectives, developing targeted responses and associated responsibilities.

The HEA has played a key role in gathering and collating data on the profile of staff and students in higher education annually, illustrating the patterns and trends within and across institutions. This activity cannot solely be attributed to HEA leadership but emanated from the attention to gender discrimination and inequality which, as outlined in Sect. 1, was highlighted by academic and professional support services women through their engagement in collaborative initiatives, legal cases and lobbying the HEA. Alongside data gathering, the HEA has also

administered surveys and published reports to ascertain the extent of sexual violence and harassment experienced by staff and students, and race equality as understood and experienced by staff in higher education (HEA, 2016, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). Much of this work has also had Ministerial oversight and engagement to support the agenda which strengthened the impetus within the policy arena at national level (e.g. as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3). Linking the attainment of an Athena Swan Gender Equality Award to research funding as an outcome of the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions resulted in research funding agencies making this a condition of funding by the end of 2019, a crucial policy position supported by national research on gender equality.

HEI staff engagement and collaboration with HEA staff in EDI structures such as the Athena Swan National Intersectionality Working Group (established in 2019) also had a significant role in expanding the concentration on gender equality to incorporate analysis of race inequality, thus propelling this work forward. This data driven approach has served to identify and illuminate the issues and without which there would be limited understanding of the extent of inequality and related impact. HEIs are a key element of this process in terms of their role in gathering data at institutional level, however there is a need for a more in-depth dataset in relation to ethnic diversity, along with the production of annual diversity audits considering intersectionality, which are currently underdeveloped.[1] At this time, some HEIs have a specific employee position dedicated to gathering and analysing equality and diversity data, however, there are several institutions that don't have this resource yet or if they do it is only on an ad hoc basis.

Policy Development

The adoption of clearly defined policy positions at national level, under the auspices of the HEA, has been a critical factor in driving progress on gender equality and the broader EDI agenda (Chapters 2, 3), facilitating significant change (Chapter 5). The strategic development of distinctive policy pillars on gender, sexual violence and harassment (SVH), race and equity of access, within the HEA and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science at the national macro level, has the effect of providing a platform for institutional EDI leaders to

leverage support within their HEIs. This contextual, evidence-based rationale is supported at institutional level through University and College strategies and elaborated further in institutional EDI strategies, with accountability reinforced annually through multiple reporting channels back to the HEA. This includes the Annual Governance Statement; the HEA System Performance Agreement; Annual Report on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education; Institutional Staff Profiles documenting sex, gender and ethnicity and the newly introduced EDI Annual Progress Report which monitors progress on race and gender actions captured in national implementation plans. Much of this data is aggregated by the HEA with cross-sectoral reporting, allowing for shared insights and understanding of progress at the macro level while continuing to impact on the policy landscape. Additionally, there are institutional obligations to report annually on compliance with the Disability Act (Government of Ireland, 2005) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 'Public Sector Duty' (Government of Ireland, 2014), both of which segue with HEA reporting obligations. However, both national and institutional policy arenas are not without limitations: the collective formation of EDI policy 'can take the shape of dissent, disagreement is a tool in knowledge production, and consistent change requires the steady probing' of the nature and representation of problems and challenges, illustrating the necessity of maintaining critical perspectives (Ruggi & Duvvury, 2022, p. 485). The collective approach to EDI in Irish HEIs is one where there are multiple policy actors, staff and students are not merely subjects in response to this agenda but are actively engaging as agents of change.

Integrated Partnership

Governance at both macro and meso levels therefore draws together key stakeholders and actors, some of whom are responsible for driving change, and others for implementing actions based on the function they hold. Arguably, this integrated partnership approach is then further bolstered by the agency of individual actors at grassroots or micro level, holding institutions to account in terms of their various action plans, in addition to guiding new initiatives and interventions in a proactive manner. The critical voices and perspectives at the micro level can have substantial influence and effect on the national agenda, based on their own insights, strategic interests and practical needs, academic specialisms, knowledge

and skills, alongside lived experience. Accordingly, these different interconnected layers collectively fostering and shaping national strategy, embedding within HEIs and the progressive action from below, is essential for reinforcing EDI. While it may appear that this is intentionally hierarchical, it is acknowledged that there is a fluidity between these different levels which has allowed for some diffusion of power, particularly in enabling and supporting collective and individual agency supported by collaboration, consultation and consolidation.

A related point is that inter-institutional collaboration across the sector is greatly valued. This is supported and encouraged by policy makers via the HEA's Gender Equality Enhancement Fund, since 2024, the EDI Enhancement Fund (and see Chapter 3). Indeed, this volume has demonstrated the sector's acknowledgement of the need for collaborative, engaged work across a range of key EDI areas, and commitment to learning with and from sectoral and non-sectoral partners in this regard. Illustrating this, we have seen very transparent examples of pathways and challenges to implementing change in the technological (Chapter 8) and 'traditional' universities (Chapters 4, 6, 7), while Chapter 12, along with several of the vignettes illustrate the transformative power of community partnerships.

Authentic Representation and Lived Experience

Cultivating and maintaining meaningful engagement, participation and authentic representation of staff and students with lived experience of inequality and exclusion in a manner that is sensitive, ethical and mindful of power relations, is paramount to the process of developing and embedding effective equality strategies and actions. Redressing historical power imbalances cannot be achieved in isolation from those most affected by racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, ageist and classist institutional legacies and norms. Acknowledging that many of these norms remain intact is even more important in terms of understanding the pitfalls and challenges when seeking to engage a plurality of participants with diverse identity characteristics and lived experiences. Moreover, there are some fundamental considerations for sustaining longer term engagement, such as avoiding tokenism, being open to dialogical and reflective means which value critical perspectives and voices, being co-creative by 'doing with' as opposed 'doing for'. Focusing on empowerment in a critically conscious manner assists with creating the conditions within which people can

develop their own agendas and represent their strategic interests and practical needs. Feminist, critical race and disability studies scholarship and activism has brought into sharp focus the danger of essentialism and homogeneity in terms of assumptions applied to different identity groups (Brown & Leigh, 2020; Connell, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1983; Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984).

In practice, developing a shared sense of agency and responsibility requires being mindful of not 'empowering people' but of cultivating an environment which recognises power and autonomy as a true measure of empowerment (McLaughlin, 2016). As Nwanze-Akobo and Benson-Olatunde outline in chapter 17, adopting a lens informed by critical race theory can also expose the limitations of participation, illustrating both the value and necessity of adopting different methods of representation and engagement which recognise the Eurocentric and culturally normative institutional practices and spaces that serve to exclude people of colour, rendering experiential knowledge invisible. Similarly, chapter 13 identifies that authentic understanding of the lived experience of disabled students and staff contributes positively to change. This demonstrates that such engagement therefore can only be meaningful if there is a critical consciousness supported by dialogue, reflection and reflexivity at the heart of the process of forming and implementing EDI policy and practice (Freire, 1970). This consciousness also must take into consideration the position held by minoritised participants in terms of their disproportionate representation among staff with precarious contracts, the overreliance on some staff and students creating a burden of engagement and representation with expectations of contribution which have time, intellectual and emotional consequences. Allyship is an important element of collectively addressing inequality and it is recognised that while those with lived experience are best placed to articulate the nature and impact of their experiences, it is not their responsibility to fix the structural, systemic and cultural issues which contribute to inequality. Awareness is only part of the process, implementing this approach requires a fine balance and has its own challenges when power is centralised and hierarchical. In summary, taking some analysis from the consideration of power dynamics central to grassroots community development, it has long been noted that the process is as important as the outcome, a tenet that is applicable to embedding EDI in higher education when engaging with staff and students with lived experience (Green & Haines, 2016; Jackson & O'Doherty, 2012; Meade et al., 2016).

Building on this argument that lived experience is a central dimension of addressing discrimination and promoting equality, it would be remiss to ignore the emphasis on developing a trauma informed response to sexual violence and harassment outlined across Sect. 3, in addition to experiences of discrimination across the nine protected characteristics under Irish equality and human rights legislation. As chapters 11 and 12 note, developing and implementing a trauma informed approach is now a critical element of training and awareness raising in relation to consent, sexual violence and harassment. Additionally, the national implementation plan on ending sexual violence and harassment in HEIs prescribes a trauma informed accessible approach to institutional SVH/sexual misconduct policies and investigation procedures reporting, counselling and advocacy (HEA, 2022d, pp. 4, 8). It is also beginning to be recognised that being trauma informed in relation to policies and procedures to address to complaints of discrimination is central to implementing supportive and person-centred approaches. It is notable that despite the lack of provision for socio-economic status in equality and anti-discrimination legislation in Ireland, some HEIs have also been proactive in recognising this characteristic as a key signifier of inequality and exclusion.

Sustained Funding and Resourcing

Underpinning the strategic, policy and practical actions outlined in the aforementioned; is the necessity of allocating funding to resource the delivery of the programmes of work and drive institutional cultural and systemic change. While responsibility for progressing national EDI policy imperatives ultimately rests with the most senior representatives of the HEI, emanating from the recommendations of the University of Galway Task Force Report (NUI Galway, 2016) and the First HEA National Gender Equality Review of Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEA, 2016), it is accepted in the Irish context that:

> a specific academic agent of cultural and organisational change is needed in each HEI to help embed gender equality within all aspects of the work of the institution. This follows international best practice where institutions have appointed senior managers with responsibility for enhancing gender equality. (HEA, 2016, p. 49)

Resourcing and support for a senior EDI leader is now a norm among Irish public sector HEIs. The HEA has allocated resources have to the implementation of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative as outlined in Chapter 3. Annual project-based funding which supports inter-institutional collaboration has been administered by the HEA since 2020, initially via the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund, since broadened to become the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Enhancement Fund in 2024.[2] Additionally, the HEA has committed to annual funding for SVH resourcing point to the value of committing long term and sustainable funding which will assist with attracted experienced practitioners to deliver complex and multi-faceted strategies and programmes. As Chapter 4 notes, given the scarcity of resources in the sector, it is important to ensure that there are sufficient resources to achieve tasks using both institutional and sectoral funding opportunities. Ultimately, the failure to adequately resource EDI personnel and programmes will result in an increased burden on those already adversely impacted by inequality, discrimination and exclusion, and above all, lack of resources will maintain the status quo.

Persistent Inequalities and Limitations of progressing EDI in Higher Education

It would be remiss to emphasise the lessons outlined in the above discussion without due regard for the persistent inequalities and prevailing limitations in relation to progressing EDI. It is essential to stay attentive to the impact of power relations, systemic cultural and structural inequalities, much of which is rendered invisible by the more dominant power dynamics which support a gendered, racialised and ableist status quo. In some instances, actions have targeted individuals who experience discrimination and exclusion with the primary objective of supporting personal and professional development to progress within the wider institutional structures while allowing the very systems that perpetuate inequality to remain intact. In terms of gender equality, this approach has been criticised for focusing on 'fixing the women'. There is a lack of those not directly affect by the issues which can lead to a disproportionate burden to advocate for change being held by those most affected. Nonetheless, these critical insights are evident in the HEA reviews on gender equality which have emphasised the necessity of addressing systemic inequality and cultural change (HEA, 2016, 2022c).

Gender scholarship on HE and the national policy domain on equality in the HE sector is cognisant of the gendered impact of caring responsibilities and care work (HEA, 2022c; Lynch, 2010; Lynch et al., 2020). The second national review of gender equality gave substantial attention to the necessity of incorporating 'appropriate supports and mitigations for the burden of caring on those staff with caring responsibilities' (HEA, 2022c, p. 9). Additionally, the review also highlighted the gendered impacts of precarity, and related challenges experienced by women in academia (HEA, 2022c).

Fragility and Resistance

Progress on gender equality in terms of moving beyond legislation and policy has been slow to affect systemic change. Recent analysis undertaken by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2024) predicted that it will take more than 60 years to achieve full equality in the European Union (EU). Such entrenched inequalities are also at the core of the persistence of gender inequality in higher education in Ireland, the EU and internationally.

Under the EU Commission 2019–2024, an entire portfolio was dedicated to equality. However, the 2024–2029 Commission demonstrates the ease with which the dilution of commitments to gender equality and equality in a broad context can occur in a singular but impactful way. We witnessed the downgrading of equality, incorporating responsibility into a portfolio that is primarily focused on crisis management (Gálvez Muñoz, 2024), signalling a more limited commitment at a time when it is crucial to sustain progress. Gálvez Muñoz[3] (2024) argues that this illustrates the failure to recognise the backlash against gender equality and democracy in Europe and internationally. Failures to incorporate gender analysis are also reinforced by purposeful institutional and individual resistance to EDI which are manifest through direct and indirect exclusion and discrimination.

Scholars have documented, analysed and critiqued the preservation of power in ways which have dispossessed and excluded people based on their race, class, gender and disability (Ahmed, 2012; Baker et al., 2004; Crenshaw, 1989; Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1980; Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; Lynch et al., 2020; Thompson, 2003). Connell (2005) cultivated theoretical and applied insights exposing and analysing the systems and structures which support the maintenance of

gender inequality, the nature and impact of hegemonic masculinity in terms of informing power, position, cultural norms and gender relations, a perspective that has also been applied to the white, middle class, male dominated culture that has prevailed in higher education (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020). Chapter 10 illustrates the necessity of critically examining norms of behaviour. The consequence of systemic inequality is even more pronounced when intersectional factors are taken into consideration, with identity characteristics such as race, class, age, disability and sexuality being important signifiers in exposing the cumulative impact of inequality. Undoubtedly, the resistance to recognising that all people are worthy of equal rights and respect is not in any way a new phenomenon, it is at the heart of maintaining the status quo which affords power and privilege to a select minority.

Populism

In many instances of contemporary statehood, the social, cultural and political terrain has become increasingly fragmented and polarised with the overt turn to populist politics and rhetoric reliant on sexist, misogynistic, racist, trans- and homophobic discourse and actions (Brysk, 2023). Such perspectives also explicitly surface in the higher education landscape and there are instances of resistance, backlash and attempts to delegitimise claims for equality and human rights; in addition to outright dismantling of EDI policy, practice and infrastructure and the erosion of related legislation (Casey, 2024; Ellis, 2024; Liyanage, 2022). In the United States, legislation has been introduced in several states to prohibit EDI offices, training, inclusive promotion (Ellis, 2024). In the United Kingdom, attacks on the EDI infrastructure have been framed as oppositional to free speech and as lacking in value for taxpayers, a position espoused by Conservative government Minister Michelle Donelan. In 2022, UK Minister of State for Higher and Further Education, Donelan reiterated a warning on adopting both gender and race equality charters which had been issued by interim CEO of the Office for Students, that universities 'should be thinking carefully and independently about their free speech duty when signing up to these sort of schemes' (letter to universities, Donelan, 2022). Furthermore, the conflation of diversity and inclusion initiatives with a threat to free speech and academic freedom is an emergent argument dismissing the value of EDI (McConalogue et al., 2021; Reville, 2024). The argument regarding academic freedom is flawed in

terms of positioning diversity and inclusion in polar opposition to the core principle of freedom of thought and expression in teaching and research. Furthermore, the notion that focusing on equality and anti-discrimination based on identity and rights can be dismissed as being part of a 'woke' agenda demonstrates a seriously limited understanding of the historical evolution of rights based on characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, family or marital status and membership of the Traveller community. To suggest that equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education is part of the 'woke agenda' is a diversion in delegitimising which ignores the multi-faceted rights movements which were characteristic of the twentieth century collective social action. Attention needs to be given to how this stance plays a role in legitimising discourses of racism, sexism and ableism in higher education.

Discussions on the Irish societal context in Chapters 15, 16 and 17 have identified the specific challenges posed by the backlash against migrant communities. In many respects, this backlash has targeted minority ethnic communities in general, and the increased racism and the rise of far-right mobilisation in Ireland cannot be ignored by higher education institutions. However, it is also noted that there is a counter current to this regressive action to be found in the agency and pursuit of strategic action exhibited by movements led by asylum seekers, refugees, national and local minority ethnic organisations. The mass mobilisation in the context of achieving progressive rights in relation to marriage equality and reproductive rights over the past decade is also critical to understanding the potential for reversing this destructive trend, understanding that movements for change in society can have a positive impact on the higher education.

Gaps and Possibilities

There remain some significant gaps at national level in terms of policy and strategy. For example, the attention to disability in HE has to a greater extent focused primarily on students under the national access strategies, as noted in Chapter 13. While individual HEIs have inclusion targets for disabled staff at institutional level and are expected to achieve some strategic objectives in relation to the Disability Act (Government of Ireland, 2005), there hasn't been an evidence-based survey across the sector or a national implementation plan under the HEA. As identified

in this chapter, coordinated strategy and policy responses can significantly impact sectoral attentiveness and are therefore a very important element of the EDI landscape. Gaps such as the mainstreaming of institutional commitment to university of sanctuary programmes, as referenced in Chapter 15, also require further consideration although there is recent evidence that some of these programmes are being incorporated into International/Global or EDI offices within HEIs. Taking both examples, there is already a well-established infrastructure of representative organisations and social movements which have been at the forefront of national policy in relation to disability and forced migration, many of whom are well-placed to support the creation of policy positions relevant to HE.

Recent developments in HEIs have included initiatives to diversify and decolonise curricula, pedagogy and assessment, incorporate alternative perspectives and practices, particularly drawing from scholarship in the Global South. Specific examples include, the Fallist movement in South Africa which has been influential in the development of decolonisation initiatives across European universities (Ahmed, 2020). Beyond decolonisation the broader institutional equality perspective illustrates that while there are similar challenges in terms of women's experiences of gender inequality in South African higher education, there are also evident differences (Wheeler & Wiese, 2024). Lessons from South African HEIs, demonstrate in full the significance of intersectionality, not solely owing to the 'multiple and interlocking oppressions', but also to Black 'feminist practice that is unapologetic about its agenda' (Mazibuko, 2020, pp. 488, 490). Reflecting on the impact of the Fallist movement, Mazibuko (2020) argues that understanding multiple forms of oppression provides a deliberate alternative to single categories of analysis, is neither hierarchical nor competitive, and offers multiple responses through solidarity. In Ireland, there remain challenges due to the lack of data on minority ethnic staff and students, inability to measure intersectional discrimination and inequality. While beyond the scope of this book, further research on EDI considerations in the wider European and international higher educational context would be beneficial to practitioners in Irish HEIs. Beyond this, we acknowledge that there is much to be done regarding intersectionality across all of the equality grounds, including, for example, (but not limited to) support for faith-based groups and age-friendly campuses.

Conclusion

Progress to date on embedding EDI in Irish HEIs is notable as evidenced by the lessons learned, the presentation and analysis of research on gender, race, disability and SVH in tandem with the broadening and deepening policy landscape outlined in this book. Collaboration across the HE sector to inform policy and practice is the fundamental mechanism through which EDI has evolved and expanded over the past decade. The conceptual framework to support this work has been informed by feminist, critical race and intersectional analytical perspectives. The importance of continuing to strengthen and deepen the theoretical, strategic and practical basis for achieving substantive equality collectively cannot be underestimated. Reflections in this book noted the reawakening of the activist in addition to activist approaches that have harnessed significant change.[1] This requires moving from awareness raising to consciousness raising.

Charter for EDI Advocacy and Leadership

1. Centre Authentic Lived Experience

Draw upon the diverse lived experiences of individuals. To achieve intersectionality, involve those with varied backgrounds in creating pathways towards equity, and strive to view the world through the perspectives of others.

2. Embedding Lived Experience in Practice and Policy

Integrate diverse representation across gender, minoritised groups, roles and academic programmes into decision-making, reflexive learning and open dialogues to tackle EDI challenges.

3. Share and Decentralise EDI Efforts

Share achievements generously and encourage everyone—inside and outside the institution—to take part in EDI efforts. A collaborative and distributed approach is essential for embedding EDI sustainably.

[1] See Chapters 7 and 17.

4. Forge Key Partnerships

Partner with external experts to lend credibility, objectivity and confidence to EDI initiatives. Honour these relationships to bolster institutional efforts with specialised knowledge and support.

5. Engage Leadership in EDI

Involve institutional leaders in EDI conversations and empower them to advocate for meaningful change. Encourage them to drive initiatives that support minoritised groups and foster an inclusive culture.

6. Provide Education and Training on EDI

Equip all stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and nuanced understanding of EDI through engagement and training, ensuring they are prepared to actively contribute to EDI goals.

7. Foster Critical Reflection and Bravery

Embrace challenging conversations with courage. Regularly reflect on actions and engage in critical dialogue to address and understand systemic inequalities.

8. Promote Belonging and Inclusion

Cultivate an environment where every member feels valued, included and connected to the community, building a strong sense of belonging for all.

9. Commit to Transparency and Accountability

Publicly share EDI data, policy implementation results and feedback to build trust and maintain transparency. Measure and assess the impact of policies and initiatives regularly to ensure they bring about real change.

10. Sustain EDI Efforts with Adequate Resources

Ensure the availability of resources and funding to support EDI goals, even in resource-scarce environments. This commitment is essential for sustaining and scaling EDI efforts effectively.

This charter is a commitment to the continuous improvement and genuine integration of EDI principles into the institutional framework, fostering a culture of inclusion, support and progressive change.

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