

Higher Education Authority Submission to the Joint Committee on Gender Equality
20.05.2022

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is committed to addressing gender inequalities in higher education and to supporting Irish Higher education institutions (HEIs) to create an inclusive culture and environment where individuals are able to thrive, irrespective of gender. Two policy documents, the 2016 [HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions](#) and the [Gender Action Plan 2018-2020](#), have been developed in recent years to inform the implementation of a gender equality framework in Irish higher education (HE). National recommendations in these documents as well as the [Framework for Consent in Irish HEIs](#) already address a number of the recommendations made by the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality (specific details can be provided upon request). The below is an overview of HEA activity aimed at advancing gender equality in higher education.

1. Second National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions

To ensure sustainable progress towards gender equality, both the 2016 HEA Expert Group and the 2018 Gender Equality Taskforce recommended reviews of progress at the end of the lifespan of their recommendations. In line with these timelines, the HEA is now undertaking a Second National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions. This Review will assess the progress made since the 2016 Review and the perception of gender equality among HEI staff and make recommendations to ensure the continued advancement of gender equality in the higher education sector. The review is specifically focussed on staff in higher education.

The review is being conducted by a 6-member independent Expert Group chaired by Niamh O'Donoghue (former Secretary-General of the Department of Social Protection) and comprising national and international members, as follows:

- Dr Allison Kenneally (Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Waterford Institute of Technology);
- Dr Karl Kitching (Reader in Education Policy, University of Birmingham);
- Dr Marcela Linkova (Head of Centre for Gender and Science at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences);
- Dr Philip Owende (Assistant Head of Academic Affairs, TU Dublin);
- Professor Anne Scott (former Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, NUI Galway).

Data gathered by the HEA demonstrates that significant progress has been made since 2016, particularly in relation to the headline issue of female professors in our universities. The professoriate has risen from 532 professors in 2015 to 642 in 2020. The number of female professors has risen by 69 from 109 to 178, while the number of male professors has risen by 41 from 423 to 464. Encouragingly, of the 110 new professors in the system, females represent 63% of this increase. Professorial recruitment statistics compiled by the HEA between 2018-2020 showed significant success rates for women, with females making up 26% of applicants yet representing 44% of appointments, and males made up 70% of applicants yet representing 51% of appointments.

The gender-proofing of recruitment practices was a central recommendation for institutions in 2016. Initiatives implemented to promote gender equality in recruitment and promotion include delivery of equality and diversity training for all staff members acting as interview panellists or conducting

performance reviews and a mandatory minimum of 40% of each gender on interview and selection panels. New policies have been developed on flexible and agile working. Such policies have never been more important, as the balancing of caring responsibilities with the new and unique demands of hybrid working become a more prominent equality issue.

One of the major advances in Irish HEIs in recent years in relation to equality has been a broadening out of gender equality work to encapsulate other grounds of discrimination under Irish legislation. Indeed, the work on the ground is often much more innovative and reacts in real time to demands of HE staff. The ground-breaking report on Race Equality in Higher Education published by the HEA last year has given a baseline to address issues in that area. The development of progressive, equality-proofed initiatives will benefit everyone and ensure that HEIs are maximising the potential of all staff, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability status etc. This focus on inclusive gender equality needs to be a feature of future policy decisions.

In order to consolidate the work pioneered by the 2016 Review, it is now clear that the higher education sector needs to intensify its efforts to advance gender equality, particularly as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is expected that the current Review will run from March to October 2022, with the Report of the Expert Group's findings and recommendations published in November 2022. The Review is being undertaken in close partnership with the higher education sector and in consultation with all stakeholders. The Expert Group will produce a report that makes 5 to 10 high-level recommendations as to how, in their view, higher education institutions might enhance their equality policies and their implementation to support gender-equality.

The HEA recommends that the Committee is cognisant of this review and ongoing work in the higher education sector as part of its own examination of the recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. What follows below is an overview of the HEA's work to advance gender equality, which we hope will inform the Committee's consideration of the recommendations of the Citizen's Assembly.

2. HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

In June 2019, the HEA Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality was established, evolving into the HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in August 2020. In addition to the work in the broad area of EDI, the Centre oversees several initiatives in relation to gender equality in higher education, including the *Senior Academic Leadership Initiative*, *Gender Equality Enhancement Fund*, the *Athena SWAN Charter*, and the annual publication of staff data disaggregated by gender.

The HEA Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality was originally established to ensure sustainable acceleration towards gender equality in Irish HEIs by providing centralised support for the institutions, sharing of good practice, and funding for innovative organisational and cultural change initiatives nationally. The Centre also advises the Minister and his department on progress, new developments and measures which may be required in future for Ireland.

Detailed data obtained by the Centre from HEIs is key to enabling data driven decisions to be made so that actual, rather than perceived barriers to gender diversity can be addressed. The Centre is pivotal in enabling sharing of good practice, joint initiatives and co-operation between HEIs, and in developing a better understanding of the impact of interventions taken and determining the areas of future focus. The Centre works closely with the HEIs to achieve efficiencies across the system through the coordination of activities, such as the centralised identification of experts and delivery of training.

The Centre oversees a framework for gender equality that encompasses a variety of initiatives and reporting structures, which aim to ensure that Irish HEIs are implementing national policy recommendations in order to ensure progress towards gender equality in the institutions. The various initiatives within this framework overseen by the Centre are: [Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Gender](#); the [Athena SWAN Charter in Ireland](#); [Gender Equality Enhancement Funding Call](#); HEA National Committee for Gender Equality; [Senior Academic Leadership Initiative](#); monitoring implementation of the [Framework for Consent in HEIs](#); [HEA Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs](#); annual HEI reporting on stated gender objectives; centralised support for HEIs.

2.1 Data-driven decisions

The [Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Gender](#), collated and published annually by the HEA, offer a valuable baseline from which progress can be measured, and includes all grades of staff in Irish HEIs. In addition to this data, the HEA requires HEIs to report on [progress](#) in relation to the recommendations of the HEA Expert Group in 2016 and the actions recommended by the Gender Equality Taskforce in 2018, allowing the Centre to review progress on gender equality and make data-informed policy decisions. The forthcoming HEA legislation will strengthen the Authority's data collection powers and will enable more comprehensive analysis of equality monitoring data across HEIs.

2.2 Funding initiatives

The [Senior Academic Leadership Initiative](#), launched in 2019, will assist in accelerating gender balance at senior levels through the award of 45 gender-targeted senior academic leadership posts over three years. The Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) is a national call which first launched on 21st June 2019 and aims to help achieve equality of outcome in the higher education sector. New and additional senior academic leadership posts will be funded in areas where:

- there is clear evidence of significant gender under-representation.
- where the appointment would have significant impact within the HEI and the relevant faculty/department/functional unit.
- they would be a proportionate and effective means to achieve accelerated and sustainable change within an institution.

While the core objective of the SALI is to enhance underrepresented groups within the higher education sector, the key objective of this Call is principally to attract outstanding female applicants both from within the sector currently and internationally in order to address their lack of representation at the top level in HEIs. As is set out in the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative call document, the SALI provides for posts to be awarded at the most senior level on the current academic career framework for each HEI. This is the academic career level of professor in traditional universities, and at the academic career level of Senior Lecturer 3 in the technological sector, including Institutes of Technology and Technological Universities. To date 30 posts have been awarded under cycles 1 and 2 of the initiative.

The [Gender Equality Enhancement Fund](#) is an annual funding call with the following objectives:

- to encourage innovative approaches to addressing gender inequality across HEIs;
- to facilitate gender equality initiatives that respond to the recommendations of the HEA Expert Group and/or Gender Equality Taskforce's recommended actions;
- to encourage cross-sectoral collaboration as a means to achieve national transformation.

To date, the HEA has awarded funding of €536,114 to advance gender equality initiatives in Irish higher education. Awards have been made across three areas:

- research on or advancing gender equality initiatives in Ireland.
- training programmes specifically addressing gender equality.
- Athena SWAN capacity-building activities.

Projects funded under this initiative include

- Mid-Career Development Programme for Women
- Irish Network for Gender Equality in Computing (INGENIC)
- TechMate: A best practice toolkit for driving sustainable acceleration towards gender equality in technology disciplines in HEIs
- You can be what you can see: pSTEM Role Models
- Getting ahead versus getting along: Investigating how gender stereotypes are contributing to gender inequality in HEIs
- Embedding Equality Diversity & Inclusion in the Curriculum of the new Technological University Sector: EDIT Project
- Integrating the gender dimension into teaching, learning and educational outreach in initial teacher education
- Working Women and the Menopause: a study of the impact of the menopause on careers of a sample of women working in the HEI sector in Ireland.

2.3 Centralised support

The Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality acts as a centralised support for HEIs. The Centre plays a pivotal role in enabling co-operation between HEIs, and in developing a better understanding of the impact of interventions taken and determining the areas of future focus. An example of this is the **HEA National Committee for Gender Equality**. To support a coordinated national approach to advancing gender equality in higher education, **the HEA established a national committee comprising the vice-presidents for equality of all HEIs, and the IUA and THEA**. This Committee supports the coordination of new national and institutional initiatives in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), as well as providing a forum for sharing good practice and for developing leadership capacity in this area. The Committee acts as an external support to individual institutions.

2.4 Athena SWAN Ireland

The Athena SWAN charter is a framework that is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality in higher education and research. The Charter launched in Ireland in early 2015. The extension of the charter to Irish HEIs is funded by the HEA and 26 HEIs are currently eligible to make applications to the charter. The Charter has been a key driver of gender equality in Irish HE since its adoption was recommended by the 2016 HEA Expert Group. Institutional eligibility for research funding from the Irish Research Council, the Health Research Board, Science Foundation Ireland and the Environmental Protection Agency is now [linked](#) to Athena SWAN accreditation and this has ensured ongoing engagement with gender equality initiatives and action plans at the most senior institutional levels. The HEA has worked closely with Advance HE to ensure the development of an Irish Charter separate to the longstanding UK version. As a result of this, the Athena Swan Ireland Charter has recently undergone 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 Athena Swan 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.

3. Framework for Consent in Irish HEIs

The HEA has oversight of the national *Framework for Consent in Irish HEIs* and has been working with HEIs to ensure that our institutions have safe, respectful, supportive and positive institutional cultures. Activities in this area include:

- HEIs submitted to the HEA Action Plans on tackling sexual violence and harassment in March 2021;
- HEIs report annually on their implementation of the framework for consent, including monitoring of the development of policies for reporting and addressing cases of harassment and bullying;
- Funding of national roll out of training for staff and students in relation to consent, bystander intervention, etc.;
- Funding of the [#unmuteconsent](#) awareness raising campaign
- Funding for the development and national roll out of the “Speak Out” tool to allow staff and students anonymously report incidents of harassment and bullying.

As of November 2021, across all HEIs 92% of actions in the framework have been implemented or are in progress – a 27% increase on progress in 2020. A further 7% of actions are in the planning phase, while, overall, only 1% of the actions have seen no progress.¹ This signifies a significant annual increase in activity across all HEIs to address sexual violence and harassment and indicates continued commitment to the implementation of the consent framework and institutional action plans.

In April 2021, at the request of the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the HEA conducted a national survey to monitor the experiences of staff in relation to sexual violence and harassment with a view to informing national equality, diversity and inclusion planning processes. Reports on the survey findings were published in January 2022. The HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion continues to work with the sector and the HEA Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in HEIs to implement the recommendations in these reports. This work will incorporate any actions/recommendations into the *Framework for Consent in HEIs* and ensure that any implementation and related funding have the maximum impact across the HE system.

Data from the recent HEI progress updates on implementation of the Framework for Consent and the findings of the survey reports will provide an evidence base for any funding and priority areas identified in the reports’ recommendations. Specifically, the Centre of Excellence for EDI continues to work with the HEA Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in HEIs to consider the reports’ recommendations and develop an implementation plan to consolidate the advances that have been made in this area since the publication of the Framework for Consent in April 2019. An implementation plan will be published in Q3 2022, and the advisory group will act as the implementation oversight group.

¹ Percentages refer to level of implementation across 20 HEIs. Each HEI reported against 15 actions, giving status updates against 300 actions overall. In relation to “no progress”, this response was registered against only 4 actions, giving an overall percentage of 1%.