



TUI Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality 11th April 2022

Introduction

The TUI represents teachers, lecturers and staff (21,000+) in Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools, Youthreach, institutes of technology and technological universities and those working in out of school services.

TUI has been requested to make a brief written submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality as part of the Committee's examination of the 45 recommendations made by the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality.

We have focused on the specific recommendations most relevant to the work of TUI and include an outline of how those recommendations could be implemented.

Recommendation 26 Norms & Stereotypes and Education

26. Appropriately resource schools to facilitate:

- (a) Provision of a broad range of subject choice that counters gender stereotyping.*
- (b) Provision of gender-neutral career information and advice from early second level education.*

It is essential in order to counteract bias that Gender Neutral Career Information is made available to students in second level, further and adult education and higher education. It is necessary therefore that career guidance provision is enhanced in second level, further and higher education.

Detailed information should be available about access to apprenticeships for post-primary students to encourage students of all genders to consider taking up apprenticeships. There is currently a huge underrepresentation of women in the traditional craft apprenticeships and the inclusion of visible role models in promotion and communication campaigns would act as an incentive for more females to consider the merits of taking up an apprenticeship.

Boys should be encouraged to take up Further Education and Higher Education courses leading to non-traditional careers for males in the caring professions, including in teaching where men are currently underrepresented. Girls should be encouraged to opt for Further Education and Higher Education courses leading to careers in the STEM areas.

Every girl should have the opportunity to do subjects within the broad range of stem subjects and every boy should have the opportunity to do Home Economics etc. One way of doing this would be to provide taster courses in transition year for all students.

It is essential that funding be provided for the provision of Anti-Bias Training courses for all staff in addition to training in the areas of Equality Diversity and Inclusion.

Teacher /Tutor /Instructor /Educator /Lecturer role models are important particularly in relation to gender, for example if you have a female Construction Studies teacher more girls will be encouraged to opt to study Construction Studies.

Recommendation 27 re Curriculum Review and Development

27. Curriculum review and development should:

(a) Promote gender equality and diversity.

(b) Explicitly cover gender power dynamics, consent and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence – both online and offline – within the revised Relationships and Sexuality curriculum.

Curricular revisions and reviews need to ensure that gender equity and diversity is included. To this end there is a need for a review of the vocational and academic language used to progress gender inclusive language.

Educational resources need to be developed that avoid re-enforcing traditional gender stereotypes. When reviewing and developing the curriculum, textbooks and other resources, gender identity should not be ignored in the hope that silence on this subject might reduce focus. This would ignore gender equity and inclusion and may lead to gender oppression.

In the context of wellbeing and the SPHE/RSE programmes in schools, students should be provided with the space to explore the variety of gender identities while creating a safe environment for students to explore what gender identity means to them. In order to do this, teachers will require specific training to equip them with the skills sets to ensure that this is done in a safe environment.

There is a necessity to provide CPD for all school personnel, not just those who deliver the RSE curriculum in schools. This training will help to develop an understanding of the complexities of gender and gender identities.

This should focus on challenging our notions and understanding of gender and it should also address specific methods to stop gender-based harassment and bullying. In this regard, school policies especially anti bullying, child protection and wellbeing policies should be grounded in a rights based, equitable approach which embraces gender diversity. Anti-bullying policies should specifically name types of gender-based bullying which are unacceptable. In naming these they highlight and reinforce the unacceptable nature of same.

Recommendation 28

28. All levels of the education system from pre-school to third level, led by the relevant Government Department, should:

(a) Ensure that initial education and continuing professional development for staff includes modules promoting gender awareness and gender-sensitive teaching methods.

(b) Monitor policies and practices – including school inspection and whole school evaluation – through the lens of gender equality and report regularly on trends and outcomes by gender.

As part of initial teacher education curricula should include relevant modules outlining and promoting gender awareness. School textbooks should be cognisant of the portrayal of genders in a positive light. We need to include critical analysis of gender stereotypes in the literature and texts already prescribed for students.

As part of ongoing CPD, provide training courses on unconscious bias, equality, diversity, inclusion, consent, etc. This will help the teacher in the classroom be aware of how to refer to gender across all disciplines.

School Self Evaluation is a reflective process of school review and should include a monitoring of policies and practices through the lens of gender equality thus ensuring the constant review of gender equality in the school.

Recommendation 29 re reform of the Third Level Grants scheme

29. In view of the gendered impact on women, reform the Third Level Grants Scheme to ensure that those accessing part-time courses are eligible to apply for a grant.

The student grant and free fees scheme does not cover part-time or distance learning courses. This is a situation which needs to be rectified. In many instances people access third level education courses on a part time basis due to a necessity to work but often also due to caring commitments. This has a greater gendered impact on women. Last year the government produced a report which highlighted that men in Ireland record the lowest levels in the EU of difficulty in combining paid work with their care responsibilities – less than half the level reported by women in Ireland.

The necessity for student grants for part time students is highlighted by the lack of investment in universal childcare. Those students who due to financial or caring commitments cannot attend full time higher education institution courses should not be excluded from opportunities to attend part time due to lack of financial supports in the form of grants.

Recommendation 30 provision of State funding and resources

30. Provide appropriate State funding and resources for:

(a) Strengthening existing programmes to encourage women into male dominated careers (e.g. STEM, Science Technology Engineering and Maths) and including apprenticeships.

(b) Developing initiatives to encourage men into female-dominated careers (e.g. caring professions)

It is essential that Gender Neutral Career Information is provided for all students. In order to reduce the bias of all educators, funding must be provided for anti-bias training for all education staff.

In addition, enhanced career guidance information must be made available for all students and their parents/guardians in second level. Greater access to career guidance information should be available for students in further and adult education and higher education, particularly in relation to access, transfer and progression routes including apprenticeships.

The existence of visible role models in schools and colleges fulfilling non-traditional roles together with communication from these positive role models through social media channels will encourage males to make subject choices which will enable them to opt for courses which will facilitate them taking up careers in areas which have been traditionally dominated by females, for example in the caring professions and will similarly encourage females into the STEM areas where women are currently under-represented.

Every girl in post-primary education should have the opportunity to do subjects within the broad range of Maths and STEM subjects and every boy should have the opportunity to do Home Economics etc. Taster courses should be provided to all students in transition year or at an earlier stage in second level education.

Recommendation 31 re media and advertising

31. Media and advertising, including social media, organisations should:

(a) Be more strongly regulated to promote gender equality and avoid gender discrimination and stereotyping and take action where discriminatory behaviours occur.

(b) Be obliged to annually publish details of their monitoring of, and compliance with, gender equality and inclusion measures. (c) Make special efforts to improve the visibility of men performing caring roles.

It is important to use social media campaigns to raise awareness of gender stereotypes. As Transition Year will now be an option for every second level student, it is an opportunity to use this time for students to engage in an examination of the media, advertising, and social media and therefore critically analyse where the media may be promoting gender discrimination and if they have a role in promoting gender equality. As practically every student uses social media this would afford an ideal opportunity to educate students on how gender is portrayed in the media, and how stereotypes are unconsciously accepted. Examination by students of any monitoring carried out by social media would be very useful and raise an awareness and initiate a discussion around the portrayal of gender equity in social media.

Schools should encourage students going on work experience to engage with workplaces not traditionally associated with their gender.

Recommendations re the Constitution

1. Article 40.1 of the Constitution should be amended to refer explicitly to gender equality and non-discrimination.

Yes, the TUI agrees with this proposed change to the Constitution.

2. *Article 41 of the Constitution should be amended so that it would protect private and family life, with the protection afforded to the family not limited to the marital family.*

The TUI agrees with the above proposed changes to the Constitution. Reference to family in the Irish Constitution should be expanded beyond the marital family. The current definition of the family does not reflect the reality of Irish society today or indeed the composition of the student body in schools/colleges.

3. *Article 41.2 of the Constitution should be deleted and replaced with language that is not gender specific and obliges the State to take reasonable measures to support care within the home and wider community.*

Yes, the TUI agrees with this proposed change to the constitution.

Recommendation 22 re Leadership in Politics, Public Life & the Workplace

22. Public funding to cultural, sports, arts and media organisations should be contingent on

(a) A quota of 30% representation of women, and of men, on their Governing bodies by 2025 and 40% by 2030.

(b) Published plans to advance gender equality in their organisations.

(c) Annual reporting on progress towards agreed quotas on gender representation and funding. Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality 16

In 2012 the Oireachtas adopted a law which introduced gender quotas for elections to the Dáil. This quota system challenges political parties to develop a culture and selection process that encourages women candidates to put their name forward for election. This resulted in a small improvement in the gender balance in the Oireachtas.

Legislation to be enacted - the Irish Corporate Governance (Gender Balance) Bill 2021 - will provide for gender quotas at board room level in companies. We welcome this Bill and recommend that similar legislation is introduced to encompass organisations receiving state funding. This would make the introduction of gender quotas to those bodies receiving public monies a statutory requirement.

The introduction of quotas, forces organisations to remove barriers to participation (both direct and indirect) and helps to ensure that diversity of representation is not just tokenism.

While we are aware that the introduction of gender quotas will not remove all barriers to participation, it would make a significant shift in the culture and acceptance of women at the highest levels within organisations. In changing the culture by placing women in governing roles it removes the perception that certain roles are gender specific. It supports the paradigm for many young women that 'if you see it, you can be it'.

Recommendation 24 re Strengthening legislation, reporting and monitoring of press and social media

24. Strengthen legislation, reporting and monitoring of press and social media by:

(a) Holding technology and social media companies accountable for immediately removing online content that constitutes sexual harassment, bullying, stalking, sexually violent or abusive content that they have identified or about which they have been informed.

(b) Penalising and eliminating hateful and abusive language, including on the basis of gender, with regular reviews to ensure legislation keeps pace with technological advances.

Online content that constitutes sexual harassment, bullying, stalking, sexually violent or abusive content may mean life changing consequences for the victims of these unacceptable behaviours. The schools'/colleges' codes of discipline should outline clearly that such behaviours are not tolerated and warrant serious sanction. Unacceptable comment on social media should be removed in a timely manner to limit the negative and detrimental impact on the student concerned. All those working in education have an important role in the elimination of hateful and abusive language, including on the basis of gender. There should be regular reviews by the Oireachtas to ensure legislation keeps pace with technological advances.

Recommendation 25 re recruitment and promotion policies and practices

25. Workplaces should be required to develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-neutral recruitment and promotion policies and practices including:

(a) Specific policies to promote gender equality in leadership positions.

(b) A requirement to operate gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory selection and promotions processes.

(c) Equal access to training, assignments and mentoring opportunities for all employees including part-time and remote workers

Access to training and development opportunities for all staff is required.

Data should be collected and published on an annual basis in relation to the percentage of males and females in leadership positions in post-primary, further and adult education and higher education.

In areas where there is under-representation by women initiatives need to be undertaken such as the Senior Academic Leadership initiative (SALI) in Higher Education.

All recruitment and selection policies should be reviewed with a gender lens.

Conclusion

The TUI would welcome an invitation to elaborate on the above submission before the Joint Oireachtas sub committee on gender equality.