

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Ireland

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The relevant Irish legislative Acts related to promoting gender equality in research include: the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2011 (which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender in relation to hiring and promotion, amongst other measures); the Equal Status Acts 2000-2012 (which bans discrimination on the basis of gender and includes those attending or managing an education institute), the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 and the Universities Act 1997 (which requires these education institutes to develop and implement equality policies, including gender equality); and the Higher Education Authority Act 1971 (which gives the Higher Education Authority the legislative responsibility to promote equality in higher level education institutes). Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights Equality Commission Act 2014 requires public bodies (defined as including universities in Section 2) to integrate a human rights and equality assessment into their strategic planning processes and outcomes.

Policy framework

The Call for Proposals 2010-2015 of the Higher Education Authority's Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (or universities and other higher level education institutes) requires the gender-proofing of all research projects that the Higher Education Authority funds. This required gender-proofing includes the collection and recording of data on the composition of assessment boards at the research proposal formulation stage and data on the recruitment of researchers, both in relation to gender.

In 2014, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), in response to interest in the higher education sector, and with support and lobbying from the partners of the three EU-funded structural change projects, expanded the Athena SWAN Charter (originally initiated in the UK) to Ireland. From April 2014, Irish higher education institutes (HEIs) became eligible to join the Athena SWAN Charter with the aim of all Irish HEIs joining the Charter and applying for and securing an Athena SWAN Bronze Award in 2015.

Other stimulatory initiatives

Since the launch of the Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2020 by the Irish Research Council (IRC), a research funding organisation, all IRC funding applicants are required to demonstrate that they have given full consideration to any potential sex and/or gender dimension in their research proposals. The consideration of sex and/or gender is included in the criteria for assessment and all evaluators are given briefing material on how to best assess applications in this regard. Regular training is also provided for applicants and HEI staff in how to consider whether their research may have a sex or gender dimension, and how to take this into account in all stages of their research. For their postgraduate and postdoctoral schemes, the IRC gender-blinds all applications at assessment stage and provides detailed briefing material for assessors on same.

The Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) is a major research funding organisation for Ireland. It has initiated and supported a number of stimulatory initiatives to enhance women's participation in research activities and to increase women's participation in research decision-making in STEM areas. The SFI strategic plan 2012 to 2020, called Agenda 2020, includes a key performance indicator target to increase the proportion of female SFI award holders to 25% by 2020 in order to facilitate the retention of excellent female researchers within academia.

Key actors

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) initiated in 2015 a comprehensive national review of all higher level education institutes' gender-profiles and gender-equality policies, the review will deliver its final report in early summer 2016.

A National Coordination Committee was set up to support the expansion of the Athena SWAN Charter and Awards to Ireland in 2014. The Committee members are; the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI), and the Equality Challenge Unit UK (ECU).

Research funding organisations that are active in promoting gender equality and gender in research content are: the Irish Research Council, the Science Foundation Ireland and the Health Research Board. It is worth mentioning that the IRC takes part in GENDER-NET, an FP7 ERA-NET dedicated to the promotion of gender equality through structural change in research institutions, as well as to the integration of sex and gender analysis in research.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

All applicants for Athena SWAN Awards must develop an institution-wide or department level action plan (depending on the Award being applied for) to improve gender equality. By July 2015 ten Award applications were made by Irish universities and university departments to the ECU, indicating ten action plans existing in Ireland, however, only two of these action plans are in the public domain and available for analysis. In total two gender equality plans and two Athena SWAN application action plans (one of which was successful in gaining an Award) were analysed. All of the four plans are institution wide for each university, except for one of the plans that also has actions at a School level outlined too. The main actors identified in the plans for implementation include university staff at all levels, and are principally: Athena SWAN Steering Committees, Self-Assessment Teams, coordinators or administrators; Deans; department, faculty and school heads and managers; human resources staff; equality managers and research office/department staff. There appears to be some focus on enhancing women's participation in research activities in the plans by actions that include: supports for women at key career transition points (application, review, promotion etc.); monitoring proportions of women research staff; a fund to assist research career re-establishment post-maternity leave; establishing an early-career research support office; and initiatives to support career development and family friendly working policies. In relation to increasing women's participation in research decision-making, related actions in the plans include: unconscious bias training for research Principle Investigators (PIs), implementing recommendations to promote gender balance in key university decision making bodies and developing initiatives to increase the number of females on research committees and the research ethics committee. With regard to the integration of the gender dimension in the research content one plan proposes a university code of practice on gender equality and research excellence.

Two gender equality plans have been created in Irish universities as part of EU-funded structural change projects, namely the University College Cork (GENOVATE) and Trinity College Dublin (INTEGER). The University of Limerick is responsible for evaluating FESTA.

To sum up, the most significant drivers of initiatives addressing gender equality in research organisations appear to be connected to: the Athena SWAN Charter and Award process in Ireland, the threat of successful and costly legal action by staff against higher education institutes due to gender discrimination, the Irish Research Council sex and gender dimension application requirements, the three structural change projects funded by the European Commission and the Science Foundation Ireland initiatives.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Gender Project Manager

The role of Gender Project Manager is situated in the University College Dublin (UCD) Research and Innovation department and is sponsored by the Vice President for Research, Innovation and Impact within the University. The role places a staff member into a university research department in order to drive forward gender equality within its research processes, activities and outputs. The role seeks to engage the research community at all levels in UCD on gender equality and to support their needs and the integration of a gender dimension in relation to research projects and funding applications. This role is part-time at three days per week which began in June 2014 and will run for a minimum of three years. The role has not yet been evaluated.

Centre for Women in Science & Engineering Research (WiSER)

The Centre for Women in Science & Engineering Research (WiSER), at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), was established following a funding call from Science Foundation Ireland in 2005 aimed to address the under representation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) careers. The centre aims to recruit more women and girls into STEMM careers and education; to enable highly skilled women researchers to remain in STEMM careers; and to encourage and assist top-level researchers to return to work following a career break. WiSER collects sex-disaggregated statistics in TCD and reports on them annually to highlight gender gaps and to monitor progress. WiSER offers a range of practical professional development training to women academics and researchers working in SET in TCD such as a mentoring programme, seminars which provide networking opportunities for women, WiSER academic writing group seminars and tips and information on how women can build their academic research profile via online tools and checklist supports.