

NUIG ‘flouting HEA approach on gender equality’, says IFUT

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NUI Galway are continuing to pursue a legalistic and confrontational attitude to female employees seeking equal treatment which is openly flouting the aims of Gender Equality Review currently being carried out for the HEA by former EU Commissioner, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, according to the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT).

Joan Donegan, Deputy General Secretary of IFUT, said that “NUI Galway is also grossly out of step with developments elsewhere in third-level and should instead learn from its previous mistakes in the Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington case, where the Equality Tribunal ruled last year that she had been discriminated against by the college in a 2008-09 promotion round.”

Ms Donegan welcomed initiatives now underway to address HEA data of last December that revealed just 19% of university professors are women, with further discrimination throughout academic grades and promotion.

“The HEA’s appointment of Máire Geoghegan-Quinn to chair a National Review of Gender Equality in higher education is highly symbolic in that she herself was the first ever woman appointed to a Cabinet position in Ireland in 1979.

“Other appointments to the review body, including the Head of the Department at University of York that received the first ‘Athena Swan’ gold award for gender equality, indicate that the HEA is at last determined to address persistent and ingrained gender discrimination in our third-level institutions.”

“A report by this independent and expert group will be completed in June 2016 and will address gender equality and the reasons for continuing gender inequality across all grades of staff, including administrative staff.”

Joan Donegan said that there are strong indications that, with the notable exception of NUI Galway, most universities now accept that gender equality is an ‘institutional’ not a ‘women’s’ issue, including EU FP7 funded initiatives such as:

- The ‘Glass Ceiling’ initiative and the Genovate Programme in UCC
- The Integer Project at Trinity College Dublin
- The Festa Project at University of Limerick.

Integral to these projects is the concept of ‘institutional buy-in’, as is the need to embed the gains and gender actions embarked upon, to ensure equal opportunities for women and men. This is designed to encourage more gender-competent management in research, innovation and scientific decision-making bodies, Joan Donegan said.

“In addition, TCD and UL have become the first Irish higher education institutions to receive awards for gender equality under a new accreditation scheme, Athena Swan. The new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) legislation has introduced a new positive duty on public bodies and the first ever HEA statistics of December 2013 continue to be updated highlighting the need for change.

“Simply recounting the above positives, however, should not be taken as evidence that all the issues have been resolved. The existence of so many initiatives proves there is a huge and complex problem requiring multiple measures and initiatives on an ongoing basis. The good news resides in the fact that some action is being taken, not that it is still desperately necessary,” she said.

ENDS

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