

Industrial relations failures forcing women into equality ‘limbo’ says IFUT

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Women seeking to pursue cases on career progression in the workplace are being both delayed and discouraged by an effective failure of industrial relations processes in this area, Joan Donegan, incoming General Secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has stated.

Speaking ahead of the 2017 Conference of IFUT in Dublin on Sat May 6th, Joan Donegan said that the current discrimination cases being taken by four women in NUI Galway are an example of the practical result of such a failure in overall industrial relations policy.

“For the past two years these women have been forced to engage in lengthy and extremely costly High Court proceedings. While the issue has been referred to mediation almost on the steps of the High Court, the extent of financial and personal stress on the women involved, over a two year period, is a cause of grave concern. It also acts as a major deterrent to any other woman, in any workplace situation, who is experiencing discrimination.”

A fifth female lecturer is pursuing a case against NUI Galway in the Labour Court, with the support of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT). A hearing of this case is scheduled for May 31st.

IFUT General Secretary-Designate Joan Donegan said that “it was disappointing that there had been such a delay in the hearing of the Labour Court case while the costly and difficult legal route in the High Court considers a mediated resolution before the “no-cost option” at the WRC.

“This sends out a message to female academics and to the wider employment sector that industrial relations is not a viable option. This is something which should give rise to serious soul searching by all parties including the trade unions, employer bodies, the Labour Court and the WRC.”

“Despite a major review and report on the issue, produced under the auspices of former EU Commissioner, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn in June 2016, there appears no greater urgency now to resolve the issue than in the past.”

While in the specific area of third-level education a number of universities are now engaging with the Athena Swan process to facilitate women’s career progression, the situation is still very much a ‘push-not-pull’ approach.

“The result is that women, not just in third-level, but in the entire workplace environment, are being sent a very clear, if indirect signal, that tackling gender discrimination is not a ‘real’ priority.

“They are being left in a limbo and forced in many cases to respond to or initiate very costly and stressful legal proceedings to advance individual cases,” Joan Donegan said.

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For further information on this media release please contact:

John Gallagher - John Gallagher Consulting - Tel 087 9369888

Joan Donegan - Gen. Sec. Designate, IFUT - Tel. 087 1315960.

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