

UCD reacting like a 'dinosaur in distress' on equality, say IFUT

The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has strongly criticised University College Dublin in a case involving age discrimination against a senior staff member, saying the approach of senior management more resembles a dinosaur in distress than a college seeking to address discrimination.

IFUT General Secretary, Joan Donegan, said that UCD are refusing to engage on a very significant ruling against it by the Workplace Relations Commission. Last March the WRC instructed UCD to retrospectively appoint a female lecturer of long standing to a Senior Lecturer position, together with relevant pay adjustments, pension and other relevant entitlements.

Since then, UCD have refused two written requests from IFUT to meet to discuss the matter and UCD President, Andrew Deeks, has issued a circular that he 'does not accept' the decision.

"It would seem that UCD is determined to squander perhaps a six figure sum, siphoned off from taxpayers' money and student fees, to fight this case legally, instead of accepting the very clear ruling by the WRC," Joan Donegan said.

"The position of UCD flies in the face of a clear acceptance that workplace discrimination must be tackled," Joan Donegan said.

"The government has announced plans for a constitutional referendum later this year related to women's place in work and society. The Department of Education is finalising a major report on measures to address ongoing gender equality. Most universities are actively participating in the Athena Swan process to improve gender balance among senior academics.

But UCD management seems to think we are still living in the era of Jurassic Park," she said.

IFUT recently concluded a negotiated agreement with NUI Galway on a long-standing discrimination case against one of its members. More generally, there is an increasing acceptance that using legal mechanisms to stop the gender equality clock is not just improper, it can cause severe reputational damage where it is attempted, either directly or indirectly.

"The blunt refusal of UCD to even discuss the issue is why IFUT must now publicly call on UCD management to reverse its stance and seek a balanced and fair resolution of this issue."

In the discrimination case taken by IFUT, the WRC ruled that the college breached Sections 6(2)(f) and 8(1)(d) of the Equality Employment Acts in its treatment of a female lecturer of 25 years' standing.

The complainant's considerable expertise and contribution to the university was disregarded, based on a 'five-year' rule that dismissed work undertaken more than five years before her application for the post.

"This blatantly discriminates against all staff of long-standing but especially female academics, who are more likely to take career breaks to care for children or elderly dependents.

The college further sought to frustrate the WRC's investigation by refusing to supply anonymised copies of applications by other applicants except, as stated by the WRC, "so extensively redacted as to be useless." Joan Donegan said.

ENDS

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