

IFUT welcomes WRC ‘Age Discrimination’ Ruling in favour of Lecturer

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The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has welcomed a ruling by the Workplace Relations Commission that an IFUT member was discriminated against on grounds of age. The case, one of a number of recent similar cases on discrimination at university level, resulted in an award of compensation to the female Lecturer concerned.

IFUT General Secretary, Joan Donegan, said that the case again highlights the need for university managements to address bias and discrimination based on gender or age, in the context of the particular impact that this is having on women's progression in academia.

The Workplace Relations Commission ruled that the university failed to prove that age was not a factor in the decision not to promote the Lecturer.

The case involved a less qualified candidate 15 years younger than the complainant, who was promoted to the post, despite not working in the area where the vacancy occurred, whereas the complainant had almost a decade of senior responsibility in the relevant area.

The WRC rejected the university's argument that age discrimination did not occur. It noted the 'greater proximity' of the complainant's qualifications, her 'comparable if not superior qualifications' and complained of "opaqueness" and "generalisations" in the allocation of marks awarded in the interview.

They added that the complainant's background, qualifications and experience were more proximate to the post than the successful applicant and that it was 'striking' that the complainant's work was in the exact area advertised.

On that basis, it found that the university had breached equality legislation and awarded the equivalent of six months' salary to the Lecturer concerned.

Joan Donegan said that "in view of the recent attention drawn to discrimination issues by the Task Force Report on Women in Higher Education from Minister Mary Mitchell-O'Connor, I would expect a more positive and less litigious approach from university managements in future, combined with additional measures to address conscious and unconscious discrimination based on gender or age."

ENDS

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