



Irish Research Council

Gender Strategy & Action Plan

2013 – 2020

Ensuring excellence and maximising creativity and
innovation in Irish Research

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INTRODUCTION

Due to under-representation by gender, Ireland, like other countries, is currently underutilising a significant population of highly talented researchers who could be vital assets in maximising collective research intelligence and optimising creativity and innovation potential. Studies have demonstrated that collective intelligence increases when there is a balance with neither women nor men in the majority¹.

There is also a gender dimension to the definition of research projects. While there are research projects in which sex and/or gender may not be relevant in terms of the research content, it is well established that, where relevant, not integrating sex and gender analysis into the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of the research can lead to poor results and missed opportunities.

The Irish Research Council Gender Strategy and Action Plan address these two main issues in regard to gender in research.

The strategy and action plan include *both sexes*, and aims to provide *equal outcomes* to both men and women so that Ireland can attract and retain the most talented, creative and innovative researchers thereby maximising its collective research intelligence.

The Council will also only fund excellent research, and excellent research fully considers whether a potential sex and/or gender dimension is relevant to the research content and fully integrates sex/gender analysis where relevant, thereby ensuring maximum impact, societal benefit and optimising innovation in Irish research.

There has already been much work focusing on these issues internationally, with the European context of most relevance to Ireland. The Irish Research Council will be informed by international best practice and seek to contribute to advancing international best practice in this regard.

Underutilisation of talented researchers

Women accounted for just 33% of European researchers in 2009². In addition to the general under-representation of women in research, a 'leaky pipeline' phenomenon exists. Although the overall ratio between men and women is often balanced at doctoral level (in 2010, 46% of all PhD graduates were women), there is considerable loss of intellectual capacity after this point with only 15.5% of the heads of European higher education organisations being women².

This career progression pattern exists also in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The number of women in academic and research positions decreases as the

¹ Woolley Anita W. et al., *Science*, Vol. 330, pp. 686-688, 2010

² *She Figures 2012* "Gender in Research and Innovation – Statistics and Indicators"

seniority of the positions increases, and just 18% of professors in Ireland are female³.

It is also well documented that on average there is an imbalance in the level of men choosing to take up certain subjects such as psychology, humanities and education and women choosing to take up the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Integration of sex/gender dimension into research content

Whereas researchers in some fields, particularly in humanities and social sciences, are well practised at considering whether there may be a potential sex/gender dimension to their research, this is less true of some other fields. This is despite the fact that there are many examples that also show the importance of integrating sex/gender analysis across a range of fields including health and medical research, engineering, environmental research, and in the development of new technologies⁴.

A conscious decision to focus solely on one sex, or not to take into account gender issues, is a valid research approach as long as this is clearly stated in the project and the results are evaluated and disseminated as such. A problem only arises when the researcher has consciously ignored sex and/or gender as a valid variable or has not realised that a sex and/or gender dimension is relevant to their research. In this instance, extrapolation of the results to the population as a whole, when they actually only apply to half the population, is misleading and could have serious implications.

CURRENT SITUATION

European gender equality initiatives

The European Commission (EC) adopted a gender mainstreaming approach in 1996 and all policies since have included an integrated gender equality objective.

The EC European Research Area (ERA) reform agenda focuses on five key priorities, one of which is gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research⁵. EU organisations, including the League of European Research Universities (LERU)⁶ and Science Europe⁷ (of which the Irish Research Council is a part), have signed up to delivering on the ERA (July 2012) and are undertaking their own actions to achieve structural change through implementation of gender strategies or action

³ Recommendations for Actions towards Gender Equality in Academic and Research Careers in the Higher Education Sector, *Ireland, November 2012*

⁴ <http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/>

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/era_communication_en.htm

⁶ http://www.leru.org/files/publications/LERU_Paper_Women_universities_and_research.pdf

⁷ <http://www.scienceeurope.org/policy/working-groups>

plans. The EU2020 Strategy includes seven flagship initiatives, one of which is on new skills and jobs, including the aim to encourage gender equality⁸.

Ireland is participating in a new type of European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) initiative, a Targeted Network on Gender, Science, Technology and Environment (genderSTE)⁹ which aims to advance knowledge on implementation of gender-focused policy measures for structural change in science and technology institutions.

The three-year GENDER-NET ERA-NET project has recently been funded to address the common challenges still facing European research institutions in achieving gender equality and integrating the gender dimension in research and innovation, and to help Member States and Associated countries join forces to achieve the European Research Area (ERA)¹⁰. The Irish Research Council is a partner in this project.

Gender has prominent focus in Horizon 2020, with the European Parliament and Council stating that 'Horizon 2020 shall ensure the effective promotion of gender equality and the gender dimension in research and innovation content¹¹'. In order that this is realised, gender balance in teams and the integration of the gender dimension in research content will play a part in funding decisions under Horizon 2020¹²¹³.

Irish gender equality initiatives

Irish involvement in European initiatives targeting institutional transformation in gender equality is impressive: the University of Limerick is a partner in FESTA (2012-2017)¹⁴; University College Cork is a consortium partner in GENOVATE (2013-2016)¹⁵; and Trinity College Dublin, through WiSER, is involved in INTEGER (2011-2016)¹⁶. All of these projects are funded under the EU Commission's Science in Society programme as part of the Seventh Framework Programme.

Significant momentum on this front can be felt nationally, with the establishment of a National Network for Gender Equality in Academic and Research Careers. The network has arisen out of work carried out under the "Through the Glass Ceiling: Career Progression Programme and Strategy for Female Academics and

⁸ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/eu2020/em0028_en.htm

⁹ http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/governance/genderste

¹⁰ 'Promoting gender equality in research institutions and the integration of the gender dimension in research contents', *Grant Agreement n°618124 – GENDER-NET, FP7-ERANET 2013-RTD, SiS-2013-2.1.1-2*

¹¹ Article 15, HORIZON 2020 Framework proposal. *In: Regulations of the European parliament and of the Council, Establishing Horizon 2020 - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2014 - 2020*

¹² *Research Europe*, 18 July 2013, Pg 4.

¹³ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-1085_en.htm

¹⁴ <http://www.festa-europa.eu/>

¹⁵ <http://www.genovate.eu/>

¹⁶ <http://www.tcd.ie/wiser/integer/>

Researchers” project based in University College Cork¹⁷. In November 2012 ‘Recommendations for Actions towards Gender Equality in Academic and Research Careers in the Higher Education Sector’ were published¹⁸. The recommendations set out formalise a system of national collaboration to drive forward structural change.

European integration of sex/gender analysis in research content

The EU Commission funded the production of a ‘Toolkit on Gender in EU-funded Research’¹⁹ in 2009, as a means to provide a number of concrete examples on how to introduce the gender dimension in research projects in different thematic scientific areas.

The EU-US “Gendered Innovations” project²⁰ indicated that gender can be a critical aspect of research and innovation, in areas ranging from pharmaceuticals to transportation. This peer-reviewed project develops practical methods of sex and gender analysis for scientists and engineers and provides case studies – in science, health, medicine, engineering and environment – as concrete illustrations of how integrating the gender dimension in research can lead to better research and innovation. The new European COST initiative genderSTE²¹ will advance knowledge on implementation of the integration of sex and gender dimensions in the content of science and technology by dissemination existing research on the topic, i.e. the EU-US Gendered Innovations project.

The GENDER-NET ERA-NET project²² (of which the Irish Research Council is a partner) has a particular focus on utilising lessons learned and best practise internationally in regard to the integration of the sex/gender dimension in research programmes and contents. An output of the project will be the development of tools to enable research organisations to do this more effectively.

Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue in Horizon 2020 and shall be implemented across all priorities. This will extend to promoting the gender dimension in research and innovation content²³. Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn is seeking a consistent system where gender balance and the gender dimension are followed up throughout the research cycle: from the conception of Work Programmes, through proposal submission and evaluation, to reporting and monitoring.

¹⁷ <http://www.ucc.ie/en/iss21/recentresearchprojects/glassceiling/>

¹⁸ Recommendations for Actions towards Gender Equality in Academic and Research Careers in the Higher Education Sector, *Ireland, November 2012*

¹⁹ http://www.yellowwindow.be/genderinresearch/downloads/YW2009_GenderToolKit_Module1.pdf

²⁰ <http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/>

²¹ http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/governance/genderste

²² ‘Promoting gender equality in research institutions and the integration of the gender dimension in research contents’, *Grant Agreement n°618124 – GENDER-NET, FP7-ERANET 2013-RTD, SiS-2013-2.1.1-2*

²³ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-1085_en.htm

Irish integration of sex/gender analysis in research content

The Irish Research Council requires all applicants to demonstrate that they have given full consideration to whether there is a potential sex and/or gender dimension in their proposed research. In 2013, the Council hosted workshops with international gender experts on how to identify whether a sex and/or gender dimension was relevant and, if so, how to fully integrate sex/gender analysis into the design, implementation, evaluation, dissemination of the research.

IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL GENDER STRATEGY

The Council has a social responsibility to ensure that it actively works to maximise collective research intelligence, creativity and innovation, and to only fund excellent research which has maximum impact and societal benefit, thus ensuring the quality of the Irish research system.

The Council Gender Strategy includes *both sexes*, and aims to provide *equal outcomes* to both men and women so that Ireland can attract and retain the most talented, creative and innovative researchers thereby maximising its collective research intelligence.

The Council will systematically and consciously work to address gender challenges by:

- encouraging more equal gender representation in the research population, for example by showcasing relevant role models;
- acknowledging unconscious gender bias may exist and taking steps to limit any effect on internal processes and procedures to deliver an level playing field for all applicants;
- supporting the development of national initiatives to remove gender related structural constraints and barriers in the recruitment, advancement, retention and mobility of all researchers in the Irish research system;
- increasing awareness of the need to consider whether a potential sex and/or gender dimension is relevant in a research proposal and, where relevant, requiring integration of sex/gender analysis into the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of the research.

IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL GENDER ACTION PLAN

Supporting Gender Equality in Researcher Careers

Objective

The Council will encourage and implement initiatives which promote equality between women and men at all stages of the researcher career.

The Irish Research Council will:

- continue to support the development and roll-out of national initiatives focusing on gender equality in research careers;
- raise awareness about the Council gender strategy and action plan among potential applicants and work to improve the balance among researchers submitting applications in all research fields;
- showcase Council success stories, thereby providing role models in underrepresented groups and areas;
- investigate mentoring programme and targeted initiatives to support men and women awardees in under-represented research areas;
- partner with international organisations in GENDER-NET²⁴ to utilise lessons learned and international best practise for gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

Integration of sex/gender analysis in research content

Objective

The Council will ensure that researchers have fully considered whether their research contains a sex and/or gender dimension and, if so, that they have fully integrated it into the research content.

The Irish Research Council will:

- require all applicants to indicate whether a potential sex and/or gender dimension may be present or could arise in the course of their proposed research:
 - and, if so, outline how sex/gender analysis will be integrated in the design, implementation, evaluation, interpretation and dissemination of the results of the research proposal;
 - if not, outline why it is not relevant to the research proposal;
- facilitate researchers to correctly identify and recognise whether or not there is a potential sex and/or gender dimension in their proposed research through the provision of reference materials and training sessions;
- provide guidance and training for Irish based researchers targeting international funding programmes where the sex/gender dimension is a review criterion;

²⁴ 'Promoting gender equality in research institutions and the integration of the gender dimension in research contents', *Proposal 618124 – GENDER-NET*, FP7-ERANET 2013-RTD, SiS-2013-2.1.1-2

- provide guidance and training for Council peer-review assessors in evaluating whether a potential sex and/or gender dimension is present in the proposed research and if so, how well the sex/gender analysis has been integrated into the research content;
- include review of the sex and/or gender dimension in the ongoing monitoring and review process of funded research proposals where these have been identified as relevant variables.
- partner with international organisations in the GENDER-NET²⁵ to share lessons learned and utilise best practice in the development of future initiatives to ensure the integration of sex/gender analysis in research content.

Internal Gender Proofing

Objective

All efforts related to gender equality and inclusion of sex/gender analysis in research content will be a shared, overall task for the organisation as a whole.

The Irish Research Council will

- carry out an assessment of existing policies and processes in relation to gender equality in research careers and integration of sex/gender analysis in research content;
- implement training measures to enhance competence within the Council on gender equality and the integration of sex/gender analysis in research content;
- gender-proof criteria for assessment processes to ensure that there is no implicit gender bias, disadvantage or deterrent in the language or criteria and investigate utilising blind assessment procedures;
- aim for balance²⁶ in the membership of all assessment, advisory and management boards, committees, workshops, focus groups, etc;
- produce annual statistics with sex-disaggregated data;
- monitor and analyse the patterns of awards to better assess trends and inform the development of targeted gender initiatives;
- consult with Irish representatives of national and international groups that are working to advance gender equality and integration of sex/gender analysis in research content.

²⁵ 'Promoting gender equality in research institutions and the integration of the gender dimension in research contents', *Proposal 618124 – GENDER-NET*, FP7-ERANET 2013-RTD, SiS-2013-2.1.1-2

²⁶ at least 40% of each gender to be represented.