

EDI Report launch speech:

On behalf of the Union Welcomes the work that has been done by the University on the EDI report, by staff and students coming together and collaborating. We are happy to see such a focus on these issues at a Senior Management level. We have been delighted to have had students extensively involved, and sometimes spearheading some of these initiatives, including the LGBT+ staff network, the University of Sanctuary campaign, and the Gender and Identity expression policy.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the Gender Identity and Expression Policy. Trans people still face disproportionate amounts of discrimination within society. Having to use an old name that doesn't reflect the identity of the person can be a traumatic experience for many trans people, dragging them back to an identity that isn't theirs, and we are delighted that this new policy will mean that staff and students will be able to change their name and gender on college documentation, reflecting who they truly are.

A quick word on the University of Sanctuary campaign as well, which is working so tirelessly against the cruelty of the Direct Provision system, to prove that Ireland is a country that supports and welcomes asylum seekers, and wants to provide them with all the opportunities of a third level education.

With increasing numbers of international students and students from non traditional backgrounds, now is the time for us to ensure that Equality is embedded into the agenda of everything we do. Representation matters, you cannot be what you cannot see. It is so important for minority groups to see themselves represented at all levels, including at the top levels. To this end we took a look at our own structures within the Union last year and brought forward a proposal to students to add new officers to our exec, including a Gender and LGBT rights officer, a disability rights officer, an ethnic minorities officer and an international officer. Already these officers are championing anti discrimination campaigns and broadening the work that we are able to do in this area.

A lot of people might think the Students' Union exist just to sit on committees and bring the student voice, but we have a much broader remit; which is to achieve social and educational change through our representation. That is why we tackle social issues and question the status quo.

Universities and ITs have a key role to play in pioneering ideals of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. We have real and tangible opportunities to shape the society that we live in and we should use that to the best of our ability. We are change makers, future leaders, researchers and community activists. Young people have been the driving force behind two major referenda that have brought about positive social change in Ireland in the last few years. It is up to the staff and students of this institution to not simply just pay lip service to buzzwords around equality, but to really challenge the stereotypes we hold internally and to question the unequal

systems that they have created in our society. Sometimes that means having uncomfortable conversations with ourselves and with others. We need to not just tolerate, but embrace and celebrate diversity. Difference is often something we are scared, because it challenges our perception of the way the world works, maybe it makes us feel insecure, maybe it forces us to question prejudice within ourselves, but it is essential if we are to create a truly inclusive campus and community in NUI Galway

A lot has been done within the institution on the Equality Agenda, and massive credit is due to Anne Scott's office in this respect, but there is still work to be done. We need to throw our full weight behind the University of Sanctuary campaign. We need full University and Government support for consent classes. We need to make our campus more accessible to those with physical disabilities. There is a deficit in funding for mental health services and support services in general, we need to strive towards improving the learning experience for all students in the form of a Universal Design for Learning so that they may reach their full potential, proper policy implementation, supporting students from different cultural backgrounds, and we must continue to empower women and Our most vulnerable students and staff are often those who are part of minority groups, and we must ensure that they are not just surviving, but thriving.