

Consolidated report  
of the Intersiversity Seminars:  
**Exploring the function of  
staff networks  
in supporting equality outcomes  
in the university sector**

University College Cork, 14 March 2009  
Trinity College Dublin, 7 May 2009

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## **Irish Universities Association (IUA) Equality Network**

The IUA Equality Network is a network of university equality personnel created under the auspices of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All in 2007. The network is a collaborative effort by all seven universities to combat discrimination and foster a diverse environment where all members of the university community, both staff and students, can reach their full potential.

In compliance with Irish legislation the universities outlaw direct or indirect discrimination on the nine grounds identified in Equality legislation (Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2004 and Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2004): marital status, family status, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability and membership of the Traveller community.

The network meets regularly to participate in shared learning, progress joint projects and compare best practice so as to further the Equality agenda across the university sector.

The initiative for this group was born under the auspices of the Equality Authority and as a response to the Anti-Racist Workplace Week campaign.

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# IUA Equality Network

## 1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the main themes arising from the two seminars on the role of staff networks in supporting equality outcomes in the university sector, with a particular emphasis on the role that networks can play in promoting equality in the workplace. The seminars were funded by the Equality Authority.

The seminars had the aim to explore the types of networks that would be most beneficial to staff and to discuss the next steps that are needed in establishing a local or intervarsity network.

The objectives of the seminars were as follows:

- To discuss the role of networks in promoting equality and as a source of support for staff in universities.
- To establish a learning network for equality officers to support the development of networks for specific equality groups.
- To provide an opportunity for staff to discuss the role and function of networks.
- To examine existing examples of networks and to learn from their development.
- To look at what types of networks could be developed and what staff would like to see emerging from these networks.
- To discuss what would help to make networks function effectively and what would need to be put in place to enable this to happen.

## 2. The seminars

Seminar 1: Pushing the Boundaries was held at UCC on 14 March 2009, attended by 29 people. The seminar examined examples of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans (LGBT) networks in UCC and in other public, private and NGO organisations.

**The report of this seminar can be found in Appendix 1.**

Seminar 2: Exploring the function of staff networks in the university sector was held at TCD on 7 May 2009, attended by 16 people. The seminar applied the learning from the LGBT seminar event in UCC to other equality grounds such as gender and disability.

**The report of this seminar can be found in Appendix 2.**

## 3. Main conclusions

The following is a summary of the main conclusions from the two seminars:

### **a) What are the main roles of networks?**

Staff networks in the university environment can be valuable in achieving equality outcomes and in relation to the addressing the support needs of staff across different equality grounds. In the case of the seminars LGBT, gender and disability networks were explored, and discussion also took place about networks across other grounds such as age.

In summary, networks can achieve the following:

- Provide support to meet the needs of groups that may experience discrimination, isolation or exclusion in the workplace.
- Provide opportunities for staff from different equality grounds to meet and network, to build personal networks and gain mutual support.
- Break down isolation and exclusion in the workplace, and build equality focussed organisations that meet the support and other needs of staff.
- Increase the participation of under-represented groups in all areas of university employment, and particularly to enhance career development opportunities for those experiencing discrimination or isolation.

## **b) What makes networks successful?**

There was general agreement that networks will function and thrive if they are responsive to and meet with the needs identified by staff.

Networks that are based on consultations and discussion with staff from different equality grounds is viewed as being crucial to ensuring that there is ownership of the networks. Without this ownership it is unlikely that networks will thrive in the long term.

In summary, networks are successful if they:

- Consult with under-represented groups / equality groups and identify areas of need.
- Have a role and purpose that meets with expectations.
- Play an active role that engages staff and that provides them with support to break down isolation or under-representation.

The seminars looked at existing university networks, as follows:

- UCC: LGBT Staff Network
- TCD Parents Group
- TCD Wiser network

The UCC seminar looked at LGBT staff networks that have been established in:

- Google LGBT network
- Labour Party LGBT network
- BelongTo LGBT youth network
- INTO LGBT group
- LGBT network in EMC Ireland.

The learning from these networks is as follows:

- Networks have provided opportunities for isolated staff to meet; this can help to build confidence and break down isolation.
- Networks can help universities, and particularly human resources personnel, to identify potential areas of discrimination.
- Networks can promote equality by ensuring that under-represented groups are supported in gaining promotion and career development opportunities.
- Networks function if they have a real purpose that engages and interests potential participants.
- In some cases networks can be ad-hoc in response to a specific problem identified at a particular time; in other cases they can be long-term and be sustained through a range of activities and initiatives.

- Staff networks appear to function best if they are provided just for staff; there is some evidence that they may not function so well if they involve staff and students.
- Consultation with under-represented groups is crucial to ensure that they are needed and relevant.
- Networks need to be bottom-up and top-down. Getting senior level management support for networks is important to giving them credibility and profile.
- Resources are needed to enable networks to function.
- A named person in human resources is important for networks to have a connection to human resources and through this to the senior management of the universities.

### **c) Development of future networks**

Following on from the UCC LGBT network there is an interest amongst university equality officers to support the development of an LGBT network in higher education in Ireland. Individual universities have also indicated an interest in developing LGBT networks. A range of other possible networks were suggested at the second seminar held in TCD.

The two seminars showed that there is a lot of enthusiasm about the role that networks can play in promoting equality. This is important for both Equality Officers and for staff.

This is relevant from the perspective of the university Equality Officers who have a role in promoting equality and combating discrimination. In this sense networks can play a vital role in creating a working environment that is based on equality and non-discrimination, that can ensure that under-represented groups have access to equal promotion and career development opportunities, and that a working environment based on equality, dignity and respect for all can be achieved.

For staff, networks can play a vital role in breaking down isolation and in ensuring that there is an equal working environment. By promoting equality through staff networks, it can be possible to provide equality of opportunity for under-represented groups. Many staff that are isolated because of their identity or status have highlighted the importance of networks to ensure that there is a positive working environment that values their capabilities and backgrounds.

## **4. Next Steps**

Feedback from the events has suggested that the Equality Officers network consider the following:

- a) Establish an all-Ireland LGBT network across all universities, and within that to carry out consultations with a view to establishing an LGBT network in each university. This could be considered in a follow-on workshop.
- b) Undertake consultations and examine the possibilities of establishing networks at university level for the following staff groups:
  - Women
  - Parents and carers
  - Older staff, particularly those approaching retirement
  - Disabled staff

## **Appendix 1**

### **Pushing the Boundaries: Setting up a Support Network for LGBT Staff in the Workplace**

**Seminar, 14 March 2009, University College Cork**

#### **Report of seminar**

##### **Introduction**

The seminar Pushing the Boundaries held at UCC on 14 March 2009 was attended by 29 people, who represented:

- LGBT staff in UCC, DCU, UCD, TCD, UL and NUIG
- Members of the university Equality Network, made up of equality officers from UCC, DCU, UCD, TCD and UL
- LGBT organisations in Ireland (GLEN, BelongTo and Labour LGBT)
- Trade unions working on LGBT equality issues (INTO and SIPTU)

To date UCC has developed an LGBT Staff Network Committee and there is an interest amongst university equality officers to support the development of an LGBT network in higher education in Ireland.

With this objective in mind the equality officer at UCC was successful in gaining funds from the Equality Authority to hold the seminar in Cork.

The objectives of the seminar were as follows:

- To establish a learning network for equality officers to support LGBT staff working in higher education in Ireland
- To provide an opportunity for LGBT staff to discuss the role and function of a network
- To examine how best to build an LGBT staff network by learning from the experience of networks in the private sector, in the LGBT community and in secondary level education in Ireland

##### **Prof Helen Whelton, Chair UCC Equality Committee**

Professor Whelton opened the seminar and highlighted the importance of the UCC Equality Committee in the promotion of an equal and inclusive working environment at UCC. She stressed the commitment, in particular, of the University to equality for LGBT staff and her support for the UCC LGBT staff network.

Workshop 1 examined how best to build an LGBT staff network by learning from the experience of networks in the private sector, community organisations and in secondary level education in Ireland. The session was chaired by Dr Joan McCarthy, UCC LGBT Staff Network.

This involved presentations from existing LGBT networks and the learning the LGBT network in Google, the Labour LGBT network, the BelongTo LGBT youth network, the INTO LGBT group and the LGBT network in EMC Ireland.

## **Ross Mahon, LGBT network, Google**

Ross gave an overview of the LGBT network that has been established in Google, which is also part of an LGBT professional group involving Microsoft and other companies. In Google Ireland the LGBT group has 50 members and it has been very important to the visibility of LGBT employees. The company has a strong commitment to LGBT equality and a crucial success factor has been the importance of senior level commitment to LGBT equality and to the network. The LGBT network has a web site and globally there is a group called Gayglers (the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] affinity network).

Google has Employee Resource Groups which receive a great deal of company support and draw their membership from across the globe. From the Employee Resource Groups Google create networks within the company that reach across functional and national boundaries to strengthen the company's employee retention programmes. The groups also provide valuable feedback about the workings of Google's HR programmes and policies, as well as provide valuable opportunities for personal growth and professional development. Google has received many awards for their inclusive work environment, and is widely considered to be one of the best places to work.

## **Labour LGBT, Niamh Hayes and Neil Ward**

Niamh and Neil gave a presentation about the role and function of the Labour LGBT network. The network was first initiated by a group of five people who met in a Dublin café, and was formally established in 2004. Initially, there was opposition from the Labour Party, who wanted to set up an equality committee across all equality grounds, and for that reason the LGBT structure was created within labour equality. In 2005 the report 'Realising equality for lesbian and gay couples' was launched, setting out the strategy for the recognition of same sex partnerships and marriage equality.

The current membership is of around 50 members and executive meetings are held monthly. The network publicises its work in GCN and through social networking sites such as Facebook and Bebo, and through discussion boards. The network promotes itself at Pride, internally through the party and through links with other LGBT organisations, such as Rainbow Rose of the European Socialist Parties, Jonny, NLGF, Teni and Marriage Equality.

The purpose of the network is fivefold. First, is to raise awareness, and provide mentoring and member development, so that LGBT people can be more active in party and politically. In Ireland there is an openly gay senator and three openly gay candidates in local elections and three gay people are staff members. Second, the network is also a training ground for members when they are canvassing and in their political activity. The network also has a policy role, for example, in lobbying for legislation for the recognition of same sex partnership and in supporting the civil partnership bill introduced by Brendan Howlin. The network has also developed a ten point plan and has worked with Teni on gender recognition rights. Third, is the role of the network in having a community focus through work with other community groups, particularly because many of the members are also active in other community groups. Fourth, the network has a social role and has held Red Riot social events and is involved in Pride events. Fifth, is the role played by the network in recruitment.

The challenges facing the network are to sustain the network's energy and to ensure that there is a gender balance. There is a rule in standing orders and in the constitution for co-chairs, one of whom must be a woman. Ensuring that women play a leading role in the organisation is difficult because of the general under-representation of women in the Labour Party.

### **Michael Barron, BelongTo's National Network**

BelongTo's national network of LGBT young people has been in operation for two years. BelongTo has the vision of "An Ireland where LGBT young people are empowered to embrace their development, to grow confidently and to participate as agents of positive social change in their own environment". BelongTo has been working to develop LGBT youth groups; there are four groups in Dublin one of which is for young women. BelongTo has had a campaign to stop homophobic bullying in schools and works with GCN, which has a youth issue every September.

BelongTo is both an LGBT organisation and a youth organisation, working with young people under the age of 23 years, the majority of whom are of school leaving age. BelongTo works with a wide range of statutory and youth organisations including the National Youth Council, the Office for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs, the National Office for Suicide Prevention, and other LGBT organisations. BelongTo sits on the National youth work advisory committee and has drawn up homophobic bullying guidelines for youth workers and a diversity toolkit for managers and youth workers.

Last year the organisation looked at its strategic fundraising and at how best to use its limited resources. They focussed on the negative experiences of young LGBT people and the importance of visibility and addressing fear, the use of alcohol and drugs, underachievement and homophobic bullying in schools, and suicide and harm. This was particularly important in the light of the recent report GLEN and BelongTo. A particularly important issue is that of life expectations and the need to look ahead to provide opportunities for young people regarding legal recognition and future family life.

The national network came about because many people were travelling from outside of Dublin, from as far away as Donegal and Mayo, to join youth groups in Dublin. Because young people were travelling alone, there were key issues of child protection for BelongTo. In addition, the school campaign with the Equality Authority resulted in a large number of contacts from teachers and youth workers, and the demonstration of a clear need for youth groups across the country. Many young LGBT people were also presenting with serious mental health problems or suicidal ideation. This led BelongTo to start campaigning on LGBT suicide risks and from that work young LGBT people were included as a risk group in the government's ten year strategy on suicide prevention. This led BelongTo to prioritise outreach to groups outside of Dublin, and to addressing LGBT issues in mainstream youth work, and to become a national voice for LGBT youth issues. It also supports development and training in the area of LGBT youth for youth workers and teachers. Youth groups have now been set up in Galway Limerick, Waterford, Dundalk, Tipperary and a support group is currently being developed in Donegal. Each group is independent but linked to standards and the support network.

The LGBT Network has developed a starter pack and accreditation scheme, which sets out a step by step approach for developing a youth group. The vision is to ensure that LGBT young people in Ireland have access to a regular LGBT group that is no more than 75 km from their homes. The Network has identified training needs, for example, around drug abuse, and regular network meetings of young people and youth workers are held. In the future the objective is to give increased visibility confidence and safety for LGBT young people, which is a huge issue in rural areas and to support the development of LGBT youth groups as part of mainstream services throughout the country.

### **Sheila Crowley, INTO LGB Group**

The LGBT group was established in 2004 in Dublin. This was at the request of lesbian and gay members who wrote to the Equality Office in the union requesting that a group be formed. The INTO Executive has given public wide ranging support to the LGBT group and has provided financial support for a leaflet which has been disseminated to every teacher in Ireland. The union gives the group an annual grant and there is strong support from the union's equality officer.

The majority of the members of the group live and work in rural Ireland and the group has been important in not only supporting LGBT teachers but also in helping to raise awareness of LGBT issues. One of the problems that lesbian and gay teachers face is that it is very difficult to be 'out' in the classroom and this means that they are unable to provide role models for LGBT young people. A key issue is the school curriculum and the exclusion of LGBT issues on the curriculum and the lack of visibility given to LGBT visibility and awareness. Schools transmit a culture of heterogeneity and this means that lesbian and gay teachers have to maintain a separation between their public and private lives, they fear being overlooked for promotion and the risk of losing their jobs.

However, silence is not neutral, particularly because of the ways in which schools have used Section 37.1 of the legislation, which promotes the religious ethos of schools. 36,000 schools in Ireland work under denominational patronage, which means if teachers present a lifestyle that is in variance of the ethos of the institution they could face dismissal. The Irish government managed to ensure that schools and hospitals could have an exception from the equality legislation in this regard (under Section 37.1). The law has a powerful effect in preventing teachers from coming out and from raising LGBT equality issues in the classroom. The LGBT group are aware of the challenges faced by teachers in making schools safe for pupils to come out, and also of homophobia from other teachers.

The LGBT group meets nine times a year and a small calendar is left in schools setting out the programme of meetings and events over the year. The group aims to inform, raise awareness and break the silence in the lives of LGBT teachers. The group would like to be involved in curricular reform and have a better visibility in the curriculum. Sheila raised the issue of how universities can influence the curriculum, for example, by including LGBT issues in teacher training in the HDip and the Diploma in Learning Support at UCC. The group would also like to promote a positive attitude to LGBT staff in the staff room. In the INTO itself there is a positive attitude to the group and there have been a number of policies put in place for equality, for example, the INTO credit union scheme allows joint accounts to be taken out for lesbian and gay couples and there is a five day leave of absence for lesbian and gay teachers who have a civil partnership ceremony in the North.

## **Ian Punch, LGBT network, EMC Ireland**

Ian spoke about the LGBT group that has been established in EMC globally and about the new network recently launched in Cork, which has had three meetings to date. EMC is a data information systems company employing around 1650 permanent staff in Cork and 40,000 people globally. The average age at EMC is 35 years. EMC is a company of diversity, with over 40 nationalities and 26 languages spoken. The company is committed to equality and diversity and won the Irish Independent's outstanding achievement award for being one of the 50 best workplaces in Ireland.

From a corporate perspective employee circles exist as resource groups to support inclusive work; there exists a corporate leadership team on diversity and a women's leadership programme. The company has created employee circles which exist as resource groups to support EMC's commitment to creating an inclusive work environment where everyone's ideas and contributions are sought out and considered. This is supported and funded by the Corporate Diversity Leadership Team, and the Circles provide persons of diverse backgrounds with an opportunity to feel welcomed and valued at EMC. Employees can share their personal experiences and collective talents, and from benefit career development.

EMC has an LGBT Advocates (ELGBT) Employee Circle which is committed to the needs and concerns of the EMC LGBT community. Its mission is to create a safer, more equitable and more comfortable work environment for LGBT employees, enabling them to maximize their potential in the company and make EMC an employer of choice.

The company recognises lesbian and gay partnerships, for example, the employee's partner has their VHI contributions paid by the company, there is pension recognition, and other in service benefits exist for all partners. Good work-life balance policies and wellness policies have been introduced in the company and these are available to partners and family members.

Ian spoke about the fact that many employees continue to keep their lives private and fear coming out in case their working environment will not be safe. Many have experienced homophobic bullying and abuse in other companies, whereas in EMC the company is a source of support for LGBT employees and this makes it easier to come out. A community outreach committee exists in Cork that wants to get active in supporting and networking.

### **Questions raised discussion held after this first session highlighted the importance of:**

- The importance of initiatives on LGBT visibility and support in the workplace and in work practices.
- The role of LGBT equality in the workplace concerning well-being, safety, respect and recognition.
- The relevance and importance of links between LGBT networks and LGBT community organisations.
- The critical need to integrate LGBT awareness into staff training and in the curriculum.

**Workshop 2 focussed on the specifics of LGBT networks at third level, based on the UCC LGBT experience.**

## **Eibhear Walshe, Member of UCC LGBT Staff Network Committee**

Eibhear raised the importance of LGBT equality with regard to the public sector pension scheme, equality of rights in the work place, safety, respect and visibility. He discussed the importance of the LGBT network and to the culture of universities that can enable staff to be out at work. Academics are very status conscious and universities are large and complex institutions; academics have a tiered and structured privilege base, which means that competition is tied to status at work and the way in which people are rewarded with rank and status.

The university's LGBT network is split between academic, admin and other staff. However, because of the divisions in the occupational structure there are gaps in sense of collegiality and often academics do not recognise the diversity of roles in universities. There are also differences between disciplines and Eibhear stated that "literature is not as decadent as we had hoped", with most clustering of LGBT studies taking place in the social sciences. In many cases staff hide their LGBT identity. Eibhear stated that the choices he has made and his career decisions have been impacted upon by his sexuality and these have also affected his professional standing, in good and also in not so good ways. In effect his work has outed him at work, since he has integrated LGBT issues in literature into his teaching of course on lesbian and gay literature. There is a good informal collaboration between lesbian and gay academics and there are also an increasing number of lesbian and gay students acknowledging their partners in theses

The LGBT network is supported by the university and there is evidence of the importance of a support network and that visibility is protection. A UK report by Professor Jeff Frank on gay glass ceilings, covering 800 staff in six universities found that gay men are less likely to be promoted than heterosexual colleagues. The issue is not pay, but less promotion. Two thirds of men say that it was homophobia, while lesbians said that it was not homophobia (this is most likely to be principally related to discrimination based on gender). The issue of how 'covering' is damaging is addressed in a book *Covering the Hidden Assault on our Civil Rights* (2007) which shows the damage that results from hiding one's sexuality.

## **Workshop 3 focussed on LGBT Networks, applying best practice. This was chaired by Paul Smith, DCU Equality Officer**

This workshop looked at the trade union experience and networks in Europe and Ireland, and at best practice in Ireland and Canada.

## **Jane Pillinger, LGBT equality in trade unions in Europe**

Jane provided an overview of a project on LGBT workplace equality held between the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the European section of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA-Europe). In 2008 the ETUC, in partnership with ILGA-Europe, developed the project on the rights of LGBT workers, resulting in a Europe-wide survey, a European conference, a report, and a leaflet in 22 languages (These can be accessed from <http://www.etuc.org/r/1355>). The project *Extending equality: trade union actions to organise and promote equal rights, respect and dignity for workers regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity*, started from

the position that LGBT rights are trade union rights, and that these need to be progressed in the workplace and within trade unions. The project for the first time brought trade unions together from all across Europe and brought LGBT equality to the centre of the trade union agenda. Following the conference and the report of the project, the ETUC adopted a Resolution on LGBT equality in the workplace, that now represents official policy for all trade union confederations, including the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

The project found that there continues to be many barriers to LGBT visibility, and many LGBT people experience inequality, harassment and homophobia in the workplace. In many countries there are still significant problems in progressing LGBT rights in the workplace. However, there is evidence that the ETUC and its affiliates are increasingly bringing LGBT rights, along with the rights of other groups facing discrimination, onto trade union agendas, into collective bargaining, and as key elements of union recruitment and organising work. Many trade unions argue that LGBT rights are human rights and that this requires a clear commitment from unions at all levels. The best developed trade union work on LGBT equality exists in the Nordic countries, the UK, Germany, France, Spain and Italy. The report of the project was launched at EuroPride in Stockholm in 2008; at the EuroPride parade all of leaders of all of the Swedish trade unions participated in the parade.

**Louise O'Reilly from SIPTU** gave a brief presentation of the development of the SIPTU LGBT group, which was formed this year. The first one-day workshop was held this year and was very positive. The union is at an early stage but has a commitment to LGBT equality and is currently creating a banner for Pride. Louise highlighted the parallels between the integration of LGBT people in the union with those that have existed for the integration of women in trade unions. She stated that it is critically important to reach out to SIPTU members, raise awareness in the union and to ensure that LGBT equality issues are integrated into union training courses for officers.

### **Cathal Kerigan, UCC LGBT Staff Network Liaison Officer**

Cathal is one of the founding members of the LGBT staff network, which started in UCC with a group of colleagues who were active in the gay community. At the time they did not think that they needed a staff group. When the University appointed an equality officer in 2006, an approach was made to LGBT staff to progress some work on LGBT rights. The resulted in an informal meeting with LGBT staff (The report of the consultation can be found on <http://www.ucc.ie/en/lgbtstaff/reports/DocumentFile,46599,en.doc>), which led to an awareness amongst participants of the need for a network to address the subtle effects of discrimination and the need to raise the visibility of and awareness LGBT equality issues. There was a recognition that visibility and silence is not neutral in its effects.

The university's equality officer was crucial to this process and because she is part of the university structure it was important to see change taking place from within the university. By opening the door to LGBT staff, there was a committed to an inclusive workplace; this is better for everyone, without them even knowing it. The network is now flourishing and a website has been created and funded by the human resources department of the university (The website can be accessed from <http://www.ucc.ie/en/lgbtstaff/>). The

network was launched by the President and this was particularly important because it showed a visible commitment from the senior level of the university.

Cathal cited examples of LGBT networks in other universities in the UK, USA and Canada, which provide useful learning and models for the network in Ireland. One of the difficulties in approaching this on all-Ireland basis is the discrepancy between the legal frameworks on LGBT equality and partnership rights in the North and South of Ireland. Work has also been carried out by Stonewall in the UK on LGBT organising in the workplace, which also represents useful learning (Information on setting up networks for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees <http://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/workplace/1473.asp>).

### **Greg Beaver, Vancouver Island University, Canada**

Greg presented the findings of his MBA study which examined the structures, goals, processes and outcomes of diversity programs targeting LGBT employees and other stakeholders in UCC and the University of Vancouver. The objective was to compare an employer-led, top-down, LGBT programme with a grass roots LGBT staff-led network. The UCC network is staff only, whereas the University of Vancouver programme was for staff and students. Greg's view is that a grass roots approach is the better approach, and that in some cases it may be more appropriate to have a separate group for staff and students.

In Vancouver, the objective was to create a safe and inclusive environment for staff and students. The study made a number of recommendations for the University of Vancouver's LGBT diversity programme in order to enhance its effectiveness. The recommendations identified, first, the need to show institutional support for LGBT diversity by including the funding of the programme in the university's formal budget, Second, it was recommended that the university increased its institutional involvement and acknowledge the benefits of this kind of diversity programme by including it in the formal structure of the university, under the responsibility of the human resource or human rights office. The third recommendation suggested that the programme should be an employee-only group, rather than an alliance of students and staff.

### **The final part of the seminar took place in break-out discussion groups.**

The break-out groups focussed on three main questions and the reports back are summarised below.

#### **1. What issues do you think should be taken up in the workplace?**

##### Group 1

- Equality of benefits for same sex partners
- LGBT visibility in the workplace
- For people on temporary contracts, there is a fear about renewal of contracts. It is important to ensure that there are no subtle barriers and that LGBT workers are not targeted with non-renewal of contracts
- Safety and inclusion, for example, bullying and the physical environ. Graffiti in schools can have a negative impact on students and teaching staff
- The importance of the diversity message that an equal workplace good for everyone

- Equality policies, including how the policy is communicated to staff. It is important that staff are consulted and are involved in writing policies
- Training LGBT awareness; this should be part of basic training in child protection and teaching, and should be part of health and safety training
- Larger organisations have a greater capacity to discuss LGBT equality

#### Group 2

- Training on LGBT awareness and integrated into vocational training
- Clarity on pension rights and the need for recognition of same-sex partnerships
- Anti-discrimination policies in the workplace
- A transparent promotion process, with a system that is transparent, documented and measurable

#### Group 3

- Visibility of LGBT workers in the workplace
- Flexibility of structures
- Proactive, as opposed to reactive policies in human resources so that their policies are based on best practice approaches

#### Group 4

- Training and education on LGBT issues, especially for teachers
- Pension rights and partnership rights
- Inclusive workplaces
- Rights at work
- Importance of a network for staff

## **2. How can you develop a network?**

#### Group 1

- Learn from the experience of other networks
- Ensure there is buy in from senior management; it is important to have motivated allies in the structure
- Grass roots leadership is also needed and for staff to be supported to do so. This should be top down and bottom up
- Sustainability of the network and the need to build a structure with motivated people, including a web site and communications strategy
- The approach should be to build the expectation that LGBT awareness is normal and part of everyday experiences

#### Group 2

- Important to be invited to join a network and to get the active involvement of the equality officer
- The Equality Officer has the responsibility to initiate work in this area and to get support from the senior level
- Carry out an equality audit, with resources in order to get an evidence base
- In some cases it might be necessary to find a way around an equality officer who could be blocking the formation of an LGBT network
- Make connections with chaplains, counsellors in the community and other members of the LGBT community

#### Group 3

- Use inclusive language and put in place a system for LGBT proofing all policies and documents LGBT sensitive person proofing all policies and documents
- Importance of partnership rights at the national and group level
- Importance of networking between groups, information sharing on how to get started and channels for political influence
- Importance of having resources and guidance

#### Group 4

- Importance of a network having tangible benefits
- Common goals should be in place, the importance of keeping people involved and of group dynamics
- Building support at senior levels
- Strong clear communication to get people active so everyone clear and can buy into it
- Confidentiality should be restated

### **3. Recommendation for the university equality personnel?**

#### Group 1

- Clarity of what is their remit around students and staff
- Take lead on LGBT equality; this should be part of the job for equality officers
- Equality officers can give endorsement and support
- LGBT training should be included as part of their work
- Important to link with student bodies
- Vital not to lose sight of the person

#### Group 2

- Create a web site, newsletter or email link, and maintain it
- Each member should pledge to bring another member along to each meeting to keep the network going
- Put in place after work wind down evenings; carry out the business for the network and follow this with a social evening
- Circulate questionnaires what staff would like to have put in place
- The equality officer can ask the difficult questions

#### Group 3

- Put in place safe zone training (modelled on work in US universities); those carrying out training on LGBT issues receive a safe zone sticker which is displayed in the offices of staff
- Straight allies should be encouraged to be involved and be supportive
- Importance of having training for curriculum development, for example, for teacher training

#### Group 4

- Ensure that equality officers are communicating their areas of responsibility and what their role is
- Equality officers should meet more often
- They should be proactive in identifying gaps and deficiencies in the system

### **Conclusions and summing up**

The seminar has highlighted the importance of the visibility of LGBT staff and the need for organisations to recognise the value of equality for LGBT staff. Establishing LGBT networks and having senior level support for LGBT equality means that the needs, experiences and rights of LGBT are more likely to be met. This added-value can be seen in those companies and organisations that have already established LGBT networks and the impact that this has on rights and visibility in the workplace.

The seminar found that discrimination against LGBT people can be subtle. There is still homophobia, isolation and invisibility in the workplace and the seminar identified the importance of networking and of workplace equality policies in creating an inclusive working environment that enables LGBT people to be more confident in coming out. In the universities invisibility can affect working conditions and opportunities for promotion. In schools and the youth service there are problems of visibility and LGBT teachers in particular are prevented from being role models for young people. Even when companies have introduced networks and policies a fear of coming out can persist, and in some cases there may not be a knowledge of these policies.

The seminar found that LGBT networks in two companies (Google and EMC), the BelongTo network, the Labour LGBT group and the INTO LGBT group had had a positive impact on promoting visibility and rights for LGBT people. In UCC the LGBT staff network has helped to enhance visibility and can give both protection and recognition of LGBT equality issues. In addition, the university can act as a promoter of rights of LGBT people, for example, through training of social workers, teachers and youth workers.

The conclusions of the seminar are that there is a wide support for a thriving LGBT network within and between the universities, and that this should be supported and championed by the university equality officers. It is critically important to gain senior level commitment so that LGBT equality runs through all levels of the organisation. This university commitment can also help to lever resources.

The participants at the seminar agreed that a follow up meeting, focussed on a university LGBT network, should be organised in Cork in order to progress a national LGBT university staff network that is supported and championed by the university equality officers.

The seminar was closed by Catherine Maguire, UCC Equality and Welfare Officer.

## **Seminar evaluation**

Participants gave very positive feedback on the seminar, stating that the seminar has been interesting, informative and well-organised. Participants stated the importance of having a follow-up seminar.

Evaluation forms were also completed by 18 participants and a summary of the main points from the evaluation can be found in Table 1. This shows that participants rated the different aspects of the seminar as excellent in most cases, followed by very good or good, on the evaluation scores. (There were no scores on aspects of the seminar that were fair or that needed improvement). A summary of comments given in the evaluation forms include:

"Well done, an excellent day"

"Very enjoyable day"

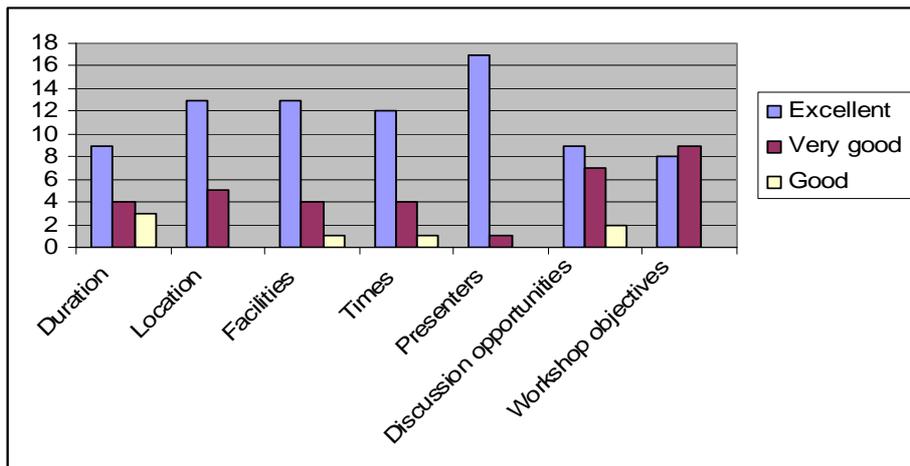
"A great day, very enlightening"

"Brilliant day, thoroughly enjoyable...Enormous thanks and congratulations to all involved in the organisation of a fantastic seminar"

"An excellent day with a wide variety of speakers. Good to hear different issues to raise awareness"

"Very impressed with the overall content and delivery of the seminar"

Table 1: seminar evaluation summary



## **Appendix 2**

### **IUA Seminar: Exploring the function of staff networks in the university sector**

**Trinity College Dublin, 7 May 2009**

#### **Report of seminar**

##### **Introduction**

The seminar was attended by sixteen people from UCC, UL, UCD, TCD and DCU. They included Equality Officers and staff representatives from each of the Universities, and representatives from the TCD Parents Group and the TCD WISER (Women into Science and Engineering) group. The seminar was facilitated by Dr Jane Pillinger.

The seminar was opened by Marie Connolly, Chair of the IUA Equality Network. The objective of the seminar was to examine the role that can be played by networks in promoting equality in the universities, and to learn from existing networks. The seminar was funded by the Equality Authority and is the second in a series of seminars, the first of which examined LGBT networks. Originally the plan for this seminar was to focus on gender and disability issues, but it was decided that it would be useful also to examine other potential areas for networking that could impact on equality outcomes.

##### **LGBT networks**

Jane Pillinger gave an overview of the learning from the first seminar which focussed on LGBT networking. The seminar held at UCC highlighted learning from the recently established UCC LGBT networks and other LGBT networks in the public, private and NGO sectors. Key points of learning included the need for energy and enthusiasm from staff to sustain a network; the importance of the key role the Equality Officer can play in helping to facilitate a network and provide support and resources for it; and the importance of having senior level commitment to networking. The seminar took learning from other networks that have been established in the private sector (EMS and Google), in the Labour Party (LGBT network), and LGBT networks established by the Irish National Teachers Organisation and BelongTo LGBT youth group.

Key issues raised in seminar discussions included the importance of giving visibility to LGBT issues in the workplace, partnership rights, raising awareness and changing attitudes towards LGBT people. The seminars also made a number of recommendations, including the possibility of developing an LGBT network in each Irish university, and leading towards the development of a pan-university LGBT network in the longer term, with the possibility of networking with LGBT university networks in the North and the rest of the UK. It was agreed that the university LGBT network should be for staff, and separate networks for students should be established.

##### **Examples of existing networks**

###### **TCD Parents Group**

Sally Ann Fisher from the TCD Parents Group gave an overview of the role and functions of the Parents Group. The group was established to support parents and to promote their work-life balance and parental leave. The HR department had also noted an increase the numbers of parents seeking support from the employee assistance programme on family related issues. The initial consultations were very positively received and well attended and this was followed by two brainstorming forums, a survey and discussions about parental leave and work life balance.

Identified issues and problems included the need for support for new parents, particularly in returning to work after maternity / parental leave. The consultations also wanted to identify what works and to have suggestions for the way forward. For example, it was found that there was no uniformity across the college and that flexibility tended to be agreed with managers, rather than on the basis of an agreed university policy. The consultations found that parents, like all employees, needed to work for pay and professional reasons and that this did not diminish their commitment to their jobs or their families. However, a lack of family support and cost of crèches led to a lot of guilt amongst parents and difficulties in organising work and family life.

The Parental Group was formed in response to the consultations and currently includes representatives of the Equality Committee, the Partnership Committee, staff and the Human Resources Department. To date this has worked well through practical initiatives, which include the following:

- A Staff Buddy system has been established for new parents, which provides information and support for parents and is an informal support system for both male and female staff parents-to-be. The Human Resources Department helps to match parental buddies by age, the place where they live, occupational background etc. The buddies provide advice and support starting six months prior to maternity leave is taken, during maternity leave and on returning to work after maternity leave.
- Lunchtime talks have been organised to provide information in areas such as helping a child study, internet security for children and child educational opportunities, role reversal of parents. Invitations are sent to parents who have identified an interest.
- The need for baby changing facilities has also been identified as a priority for parents. Funding was sought for four facilities across the university, which have now been put in place.
- A final priority has been to create a breast feeding room to enable women to breastfeed or express. Although funding has been provided for this, it has not yet been possible to find a room for this purpose.
- A website providing a one stop shop for information will be part of the redesigned staff office website.
- There are also local initiatives, for example, the TCD sports centre has organised a family friendly day and swimming sessions have been organised for parents and toddlers. Another idea is to develop a swap shop for toys and equipment.

The success of the group is that there is an open invitation to all parents and a space for discussing/consulting and addressing issues. The issue was raised about the need to have a champion for the group at the senior level as a hook for staff. There have been some discussions about including students in the network, but currently the network exists for staff.

## **TCD Wiser network**

Caroline Roughneen, Director of Wiser, gave an overview of the Women into Science and Engineering Network at TCD. In 2005, TCD contributed to research carried out by the Science Foundation Ireland on the issue of the under-representation of women in science and engineering. As a starting point interviews, focus group and surveys were carried out with women and men working in the area of science and engineering in order to identify issues, barriers and career insecurity faced by women. It was found that there is a low representation of women, they are disproportionately in temporary and lower level positions, and there is a gender pay gap. Many women identified a lack of confidence to go for promotion and in producing publications. The consultations found that there were other issues faced by women such as childcare and isolation in a male dominated discipline. Another factor is that across the university women are generally under-represented in senior positions. Although 40% of students are women, women are only 7% of those with professorial positions in the Faculty of Engineering, Maths and Science. Key objectives identified are the need to change the culture at the institutional level, while also working with women and supporting them in science and engineering.

In 2006 Wiser was launched with the main objectives to recruit, retain and return women into science and engineering jobs. Activities have included:

- Career development seminars (18 workshops have been held to date). Usually around 20 attend the workshops which are held on a Wednesday under the title 'Make Wednesday Wiser'.
- There is also a bulletin: 'Wiser words'.
- The Springboard programme has been established with career development workshops, which includes invited speakers and a peer network. The aim to create small networks that reflect different interests and needs as part of the wider network. To date there have been 62 graduates from the Springboard programme.
- A mentoring programme has been established in the Faculty of Engineering and Science, mentors are men and women in the faculty, while all of the mentees are women. The aim is to pilot the programme and then mainstream it through the Faculty for both women and men, on the basis that good practices always benefit women. Currently there are 20 mentoring pairs and 65% of the mentors are male.
- Academic writing groups have been established as a support for women in their writing and publishing roles.

These initiatives have been important in raising the profile of women in science and technology and to break down gender stereotypes. This is particularly important as evidence does show that the types of interventions that have been introduced at TCD contribute positively to the numbers of women in science and technology (See for example 'Diversification of a University Faculty: Observations on Hiring Women Faculty in the Schools of Science and Engineering at MIT'. The article shows that positive actions can have an impact on the proportion of women in science.

<http://web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/184/hopkins.html>).

## **3. Working groups**

In the second part of the seminar three working groups examined the role of networks, covering the following issues:

- What role do you think networks can play in the university? What is the learning from other networks that currently exist? What works?

- Who should be the main driver of future networks? Bottom up from staff / role of Equality Officer /other?
- What do you think are the main areas / groups that networks could be created around in the future?
- Select one area and have a discussion about how you go about establishing a network? What are the main themes / issues that are important to this area/theme? How would you consult with staff around this area/theme?

The following is a summary of the main discussions held in each of the working groups.

## **Group 1**

1. Networks play an important role to inform change, provide a sounding board, promote creativity, break down barriers, create friendships, and provide method for representation between the individual and management. Networks can also play an important role in breaking down isolation.
2. Networks function if there is a structured approach to learning; they can provide a sounding board, but they need to be action based and have a purpose. It is crucial that support is given from top but driven from bottom up, with resources and a contact person in management who links with the group and provides support in booking rooms, organising events etc. There needs to be an ongoing agenda or calendar that brings new issues. Some networks can be short term and created for a specific purpose, but in other cases they can be long term. Being clear about their purpose and timeframe is important.
3. There are several groups around whom networks would have relevance. It is crucial that there is something to network around, that there is someone to champion the network and that it is self-driven. It is important that there is support from HR and management.
4. Potential networks suggested by the group include:
  - Age and pre-retirement
  - Ethnic minorities
  - Carers for older relatives and disabled children
  - Same sex relationships and pensions
  - Parent group
  - Contact point for bullying and harassment
  - Gender

## **Pre-retirement network**

The group identified age and pre-retirement as their main priority area for a network.

- The target group should be 55+ years.
- It will be important to establish if there is a need and to consult with staff.
- The network could form staff in pre-retirement and post-retirement, and those who have retired through ill health who are often very isolated.
- Consultations should define the group, identify common interest e.g. pensions, finances, health, social aspects, loss of labels and status etc.
- Common interest seminars could be held e.g. on pensions; this could lead to the establishment of groups.
- It will be important to secure appropriate committee approval and involve the Equality Committee; and it will be important to have the hook of HR.

- Define the agenda through focus groups and carry out targeted communications and awareness raising.
- Establish a Website and work towards small wins, e.g. continued use of email addresses after retirement or car parking rights.
- Draw on experience of people who have already retired and share experiences.

## Group 2

1. The group discussed whether there is a role for staff networks and the role that networks can play. Networks are different from committees and working groups. They address real needs, create personal connections and interactions, create structures around these needs, and help to raise prominence and visibility. To function networks need champions – grass roots up and top level down. They should be embedded into the university structure. They should focus on practical outcomes and initiatives. It is important to have resources to support networks. Managing expectations is also vital if networks are to function effectively.
2. Networks need to be embedded in policy, there should be a framework for setting up a support network and management should be the main driver. The framework for a network should be driven by IUA – this will help to provide visibility and definition to the network and should promote learning from good practice.
3. Potential areas for networking include:
  - Parenting and work-life balance
  - Disability could also be organised under the cover of work-life balance and ability.
  - Tailored career development using the learning from the Wiser project and tailored to the needs of specific groups
  - Return to work network
  - Bereavement support network, for example, through a buddy type programme
4. The Return to work network was identified as a priority in the group for a network.
  - The aim is to give support to people making adjustments in their lives when they return to work from career breaks, ill health, parental or maternity leave.
  - Needs to be resourced, have a structure and provide reassurance and support in helping people in their transitions back into employment after a break.
  - Often people feel guilty and have difficulties adjusting back at work; particularly if there have been organisational or other changes.
  - There should be consultations to identify if there is a need, the issues and format of the network.
  - Information should be provided by email, bulletins, flyers and personal invitations

## Group 3

1. This group focused specifically on a women's network, based on the women's forum established at UL and the Wiser network. The purpose of a women's network should be peer support, social networking, discussion and influencing policy. The role of a women's network should be to support women in their careers, break down isolation, build confidence and be solution based. Learning from other networks it is important to target people directly. The network should have a structure, with a secretary, Chair and terms of reference. To enable a network to be dynamic it is important to build turnover into the structure, for example, through a rotating chair. Networks need to have time to develop and to grow in an organic way.

2. The drivers of a network should be from the bottom up, with importance given to initial funding, top level support and visible involvement of senior managers e.g. in UL the women's forum had five professors who gave visible support to the network. There is also the fear factor that a network may expose some people to revealing issues about themselves; for this reason confidentiality is critical. There is a need at all levels to have champions to address the culture.
3. A women's network could be important for women at all levels e.g. for senior women entering retirement as well as younger women starting their careers. The Equality Officer has a key role to play in mobilising support and in getting buy-in from the university. It is also important to build the champions as a starting point.

Sharing of good practice is very important across the universities. One suggestion is that each university takes on a different equality ground. This could also result in shared resources, for example, in developing resources, terms of reference, holding consultations and opening up networks across the universities.

## **Evaluation**

The seminar received a positive evaluation from participants. Evaluation forms were also completed by 14 participants. A summary of the main points from the evaluation can be found in Table 2. This shows that participants rated the different aspects of the seminar as excellent in most cases, followed by very good or good, on the evaluation scores. (There were no scores on aspects of the seminar that were fair or that needed improvement).

The comments on the evaluation forms suggest that the main learning from the seminar was in the areas of sharing ideas, learning from other universities, identifying new possibilities for networks, gaining insights on how to set up and what is expected of networks, and the importance of a national network group and the similarities between the nine groups. People found the elements of the seminar that were most useful were in the area of sharing knowledge, meeting others with an interest in equality and inter-university networking.

A summary of comments given in the seminar included:

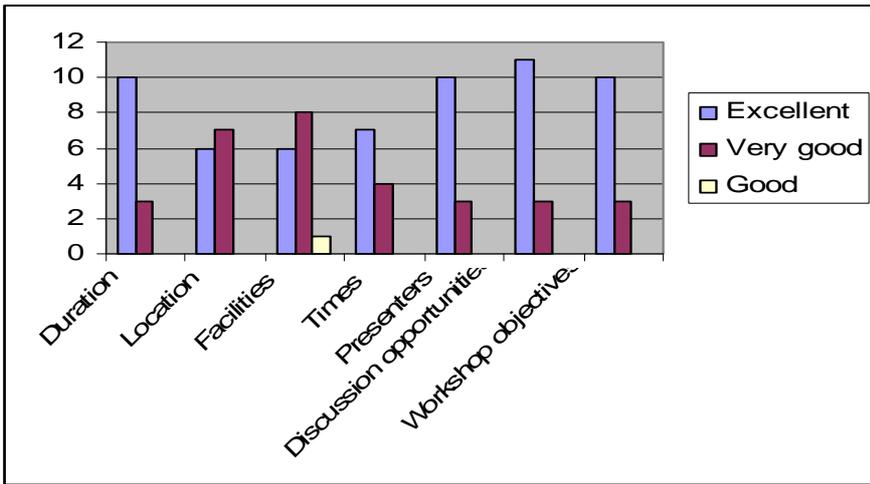
'The discussions have been really interesting and I have lots of ideas to go away with'

'The day has been fascinating'

'I have come away with lots of ideas about networks and for me it is important to see the university taking these issues seriously'

'I have enjoyed the seminar very much, it has been a really good experience and very interesting food for thought'.

## **Table 2: seminar evaluation summary**



Consolidated report  
of the Intersarsity Seminars:

# Exploring the function of staff networks in supporting equality outcomes in the university sector

University College Cork, 14 March 2009  
Trinity College Dublin, 7 May 2009

By Dr Jane Pillinger



[www.dcu.ie/equality/networks](http://www.dcu.ie/equality/networks)



[www.nuigalway.ie/equality](http://www.nuigalway.ie/equality)



[www.iua.ie](http://www.iua.ie)



NUI MAYNOOTH  
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

<http://humanresources.nuim.ie/>



[www.tcd.ie/equality](http://www.tcd.ie/equality)



[www.ucd.ie/equality/publications](http://www.ucd.ie/equality/publications)



[www.ucc.ie/en/hr/equality-wellbeing](http://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/equality-wellbeing)



[www.ul.ie/hr](http://www.ul.ie/hr)

