



The Meaningfulness of Diversity among Teaching Staff - a Student Perspective

My name is Cathleen Joyce, I am member of the Travelling Community. I studied at Trinity for five years and recently completed a degree in Social Studies (social work). Throughout my studies, I did not see myself represented in the university in terms of teaching staff or fellow students. I was the only Traveller student in my class, and there was only one person from an ethnic minority among the staff. Here I want to talk about how important this one person having to represent me and be a role model for someone like me was, and to call upon Trinity – and all universities – to continue to work towards a more diverse and all-inclusive teaching board.

I feel for people who are coming from diverse backgrounds because I know for myself as a Traveller how hard it has been to access education. Many of my community would have left education early. For me I was lucky that, despite leaving education early, the path I took led me eventually to college. However, there are few spaces where I feel I belong and, in many spaces, I feel afraid to speak out because I fear I will be discriminated against. College was the same: I was uncomfortable to be open about being from the Traveller Community. So, to protect myself, when I started College and even throughout my first placement, I didn't share.

Early on in my college days, I remember a class led by the staff member I mentioned who was from an ethnic minority in which there was a debate related to the Travelling Community. At that time, I wasn't confident to speak up for myself. However, in observing her and with her encouragement, I gradually learned to be more open. I found my voice and learned how to use it to assert myself. Seeing others from other ethnic minorities using their voice too, gave me more confidence.

I do not mean that women, or people from ethnic minorities or with disabilities, should be added to staff as tokens for diversity, but that the College should make more of an



effort to support such individuals and communities. These people are not only just as capable to work but are so important to show students like me that someone from an ethnic minority – or with a disability – can also be a lecturer or professor or social worker.

Seeing more people from ethnic minorities on board teaching staff would have provided me with a deeper sense of belonging and identity within Trinity. We all like to see ourselves wherever we go, to know we fit in, that we belong. If I saw someone from my background, or who came from a similar background, I wouldn't have felt so alien. It goes beyond words, however. Back to the staff member who was from an ethnic minority: her being there, showed me that I could do this: "If she can do this, so can I". It's inspirational and motivational. I cannot express how big a deal it was for me to meet a fellow Traveller who was a primary school teacher. I had never met a Traveller who was a teacher before. To see myself represented in such a profession was so uplifting. Any space you go into, you want to feel like you fit in; you want to see people you can relate too. It just makes things easier.

For other ethnic minorities too, to see themselves represented may also offer them similar encouragement and a sense of identity and belonging. The same may go for a person who has a disability. I feel inclusivity is subject that is quite often discussed in Trinity and one can see this represented among the students at Trinity at times, but there is a way to go among teaching staff.