

Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Promoting gender equality in Cypriot universities: Challenges and Opportunities

February 2022



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Introduction

On 9 February 2022 an online discussion was held with EDI representatives from Cypriot universities to exchange challenges and discover opportunities that exist in Cypriot universities regarding the promotion of gender equality. The universities were Cyprus University of Technology, Neapolis University Paphos, Open University of Cyprus, University of Cyprus, and the University of Nicosia.

This was an initiative of the British Council in Cyprus, under the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy of the organisation and as part of a working group with EDI representatives from Cypriot universities. This activity is part of a wider portfolio of events with focus on Higher Education and training work.

The objective of the discussion was to exchange challenges and discover the opportunities that exist in Cypriot universities regarding the promotion of gender

- Identifying and addressing the issues/challenges and
- Sharing good practices and lessons learnt.

Panel One: Identifying and addressing the issues/challenges, presented by:

Associate Professor Miranda Christou, Sociology of Education, Department of Education, University of Cyprus.

Professor Constantinos Phellas, Senior Vice Rector, University of Nicosia.

Panel Two: Sharing good practices, presented by:

Alison Johns, Chief Executive of Advance HE¹.

Professor Emeritus Mary Koutselini, President of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education.

¹ Advance HE is a member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address systemic inequalities and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, supports the work of our members and the HE sector.

Part 1 Main points identified

- Speakers identified the existence of gender inequality in Cypriot Universities.
- The role of primary and secondary education is very important, as well as attitudes of society in the home and family.
- HE institutions' role is to be ambassadors of change and for change with the power to do so within the institutions. A gender equality plan alone is not enough. Milestones are needed to check if goals are reached or not. An audit needs to accompany it, to verify the change.
- In order to achieve change, there needs to be a well thought out plan with set milestones which needs to be reviewed frequently with what has been achieved and what needs to be worked on. We need to challenge stereotypes and traditional roles as well as mediocracy.
- Gender is not synonymous with sex or women. Teaching with a gender perspective is not only about women, it considers gender and sex as key analytical variables.
- How do we gender-proof our curriculum?
- At some point, as a society, as a democracy, as a State we will have to begin to promote a bottom-up approach.
- Cultural change is needed.
- There is a need for gender mainstreaming in education. It is essential that universities create and implement a gender strategy and gender equality action plan.
- Benefit from existing good practices/projects. AURORA² and Athena Swan Charter³ projects.
- Good practice: information and education = educate and sensitise the academic personnel, teachers, and mentors, especially men in male-dominated fields. Attitudinal change - abilities do not inherently differ according to gender.

Educate students: Develop a programme that empowers them to take meaningful action and build an inclusive workplace culture.

² <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/programmes-events/aurora>

³ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter#:~:text=The%20Athena%20Swan%20Charter%20is%20a%20framework%20which,gender%20equality%20within%20higher%20education%20%28HE%29%20and%20research.>

Encourage good practice: introduction of “*gender at work*” programme, as an orientation course in all the Departments.


There is a need to place practices in the proper context. There are four key determinants for a context promoting gender equality:

1. Acceptance of the existence of gender inequality, by the society and institutions.
2. Existence of gender policy expressed in documents, processes and activities.
3. Development of an equality plan containing milestones for change.
4. Regular audit of the verification of change.

Part 2 Proposal for the university institutions

- Universities need to embed the Athena Swan Charter⁴ projects framework.
- There needs to be admission of gender inequality by the society and institutions.
- Gender policy shown in documents, processes, and activities.
- Development of an equality plan containing milestones for change.
- Regular external audit of the verification of change.
- Orientation programme on gender equality for ALL students upon entering universities.
- University institutions to create and apply policy on sexual harassment that will apply to all structures of the institutions (professional/administration, staff, students) and clearly indicate how to report, to whom, and actions that will be taken by the university, as well as support for the person reporting the incident).
- Orientation programme regarding gender-based violence and sexual harassment among students.
- University institutions need to find ways to co-operate with other society structures and sectors, government, policy makers, business sector, as well as NGOs, in order to share the knowledge (data, research) they have and the capacity they have or can raise.
- Career officers and consultants can promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes in education and careers. Within the Cyprus Universities’ Rectors working

⁴ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter#:~:text=The%20Athena%20Swan%20Charter%20is%20a%20framework%20which,gender%20equality%20within%20higher%20education%20%28HE%29%20and%20research.>



group, gender equality issues should be discussed, and collective actions implemented.

- Other aspects of EDI need to be incorporated in university equality policies and strategies. Equality cannot be mentioned without other EDI aspects. The ideal is a comprehensive EDI strategy that would include all gaps in equality.



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University of Cyprus

University of Nicosia

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