

Appendix 2

COVID-19 EDI CHECKLIST

Vice-Presidents for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: COVID-19 response

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Each of our universities is dealing with the COVID-19 crisis and many health, study and work-related concerns are being addressed through personal contact, dedicated university webpages and communications.

The appreciation across the sector to date, evident in measures already in hand, that all staff and students, but particularly those with caring responsibilities, and those in more vulnerable groups, will require explicit support and understanding while working and studying remotely is to be acknowledged and supported. Part of our collective national response as EDI Vice Presidents across Ireland is to highlight some key areas that will make a significant difference to how fair the university's response is to COVID-19. It also lines up our universities' responses with Athena SWAN principles and the Public Sector Duty, which requires universities to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of our employees, students, service users and everyone affected by our policies and plans. A crisis like this tests our resolve to be institutions that foreground equality.

We acknowledge the exceptional response and efforts from our university staff and management recently to support students and staff in really difficult circumstances. We are asking that each crisis team in each university consider whether they have taken or can take the actions listed below to ensure that everyone is treated in as equitable manner as is possible and feel supported during this difficult time. We provide here a checklist which ensures that we proactively promote equality even in such difficult times.

We are aware that some of the questions below have already been answered but hope that this provides some new considerations that you can take into account:

Access to facilities and equipment

Can laptops and/ or other technology be supplied to students in need?

Is there a system in place to assist students that many not have the library books they need, e.g. through online access or a mechanism to have books sent to them?

Is the HEI able to provide one-to-one online support for students most in need/disadvantaged, e.g. through the Access Office advisors/supports?

Has all online content been assessed for accessibility?

Is online teaching content accessible at any time, in preference to live class delivery, so that people with restricted broadband can access what they need when they have the ability to download it?

Exams

Have different locations of students and different levels of internet access been taken into account in moving to on-line exams to ensure fairness?

Has consideration been given to whether the network will cope with large classes doing an assessment at the same time?

Can PhD vivas be moved on-line? It is particularly important that international students are accommodated in this way, as their working visa only becomes available to them once they have submitted their final thesis to the Examination Board.

Accommodation

Can university residences be made available to students without alternative options, e.g. international students, students who would become homeless without this option or students for whom their home situation is unsafe?

Staff

Have the relevant policies regarding sick leave and other leave which will support staff at this time been circulated/ flagged by the HR department or relevant officer?

Have Government policies been communicated to all staff?

Could the development and communication of a statement for staff about what is required from them as a home worker with caring responsibilities be considered? Could a dedicated area of the intranet or internet be used for giving information and support on home working? Has guidance or a policy been provided to staff on home working, setting up the home office safely, ideally with videos?

Have employees been given information about bringing home equipment, how to manage work while they still have caring responsibilities and childcare is closed.

Has a healthy lifestyle/exercise/frequent breaks from the workspace been encouraged?

Are you happy to accept that once all essential work is done, the expectation from employees is less than 100% in these difficult conditions? Have you let staff know this?

Can expectations and duties of Heads of Units in supporting their staff be defined/described? Can Heads of Unit be advised on supporting their employees who are now being faced with stress due to this extra/different work, and/or potential stress if they are finding working from home in the current situation difficult due to ongoing mental health issues or as a result of the change and/or lack of routine and therefore have decreased capacity.? Have they been advised to check in with individual members of staff to offer support, or to set up teams of senior people in their units who would be able to do this?

Can the Employee Support Service, which is available 24/7, be promoted, recognising that staff may be finding the current situation they are in to be quite stressful?

Could hourly-paid staff be getting extra pay for transitioning to on-line? They are now doing extra work because of the current crisis. Or is there an option to offer them different/alternative work during the crisis, e.g. contract tracing?

Has a Policy on Homeworking been created and the potential implications of this (e.g. reduced household income and/or increased bills due to homeworking) been considered?

Athena SWAN in the UK highlights some areas of good practice, such as asking any staff member with children at home to come forward and delegate some of their work to others where possible, to alleviate pressure. Would this work at your university?

Wellbeing

Has consideration been given to supports organised in terms of online meditation, exercise, etc programmes, and also some instances of daily/weekly virtual coffee mornings, including some where family members are invited to join in?

Has there been an email from the central management acknowledging the extra time that putting classes online takes and providing care to children at home while working at home?

Are managers being advised that many staff are overwhelmed and asking colleagues to do more needs to be carefully considered, and deadlines flexible where possible?

Racism

Staff from minority ethnic backgrounds may be particularly vulnerable to xenophobic or racist sentiments or attacks, referencing the pandemic at this time, often via social media. Is there a mechanism within the university which allows one to listen to those negatively affected directly or indirectly by such ideas, and to advise them to report any comments directed at them (using social media channels or ireport.ie)?

Athena SWAN

Can Athena SWAN networks be leveraged to understand how homework and caring responsibilities are affecting people? What actions can be implemented from this? How might Athena SWAN principals guide your university at a time of crisis? (see: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/infographic-story-of-athena-swan>)