

Engaging Men in Gender Equality

Toolkit for
Higher Education Institutions



This is going to take time.....

“ Six years is a long time – and no time at all. It’s the length of a realistic business plan or a course of study. It’s also enough time to change the world. Even small changes can – if they are visible, embedded and adaptable – create an entirely new basis for what happens next. And actions which alter norms, attitudes and expectations can empower people to make an entirely new future for everyone – together.

We have had the unique privilege of being HeForShe Champions for six years. We’ve been able to show the communities we lead that it’s possible to reduce gender inequalities with sensitive policies, targeted initiatives and meaningful actions that respect the needs of everyone involved, engage their enthusiasm, and demonstrate measurable benefits. If there’s any art in what we’ve helped to achieve, it’s been the art of attentive listening. We have learned that it’s possible to lead with humility as well as determination. ”

<https://www.heforshe.org/en/solutions>

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INTRODUCTION

Men, in all their diversity, play a crucial role in advancing gender equality within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and broader society (United Nations, 2014). Gender equality cannot be achieved without men acting as champions and agents of change, being active partners alongside women and minority groups. Yet, the impetus for developing this toolkit arose from HEI data and anecdotal evidence which demonstrates that women disproportionately carry the load of gender equality and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work across the Irish Higher Education (HE) sector – for instance, women are significantly more likely to join an Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (SAT), to sit on an EDI committee or working group, to participate in gender equality or EDI training, to organise a gender equality or EDI event, or to respond to gender equality or EDI surveys.

In this context, Munster Technological University, University College Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology led a HEA funded project to develop a tailored toolkit and programme for Irish HEIs. The objective was to enhance awareness amongst men of their key role in advancing gender equality and to equip HEIs with tools and strategies to deepen men's engagement in gender equality work across all aspects of the sector.

The other project partners were:

- Dublin City University
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Mary Immaculate College
- Maynooth University
- National College of Ireland
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
- Technological University of the Shannon
- University College Cork
- University of Galway
- University of Limerick

USING THIS TOOLKIT

Securing genuine stakeholder engagement, particularly in the complex area of gender equality, can present significant challenges. It requires more than simply inviting participation; it demands careful navigation of diverse viewpoints, competing pressures and, sometimes, resistance to change.

Effective engagement necessitates a substantial time investment to cultivate trust and open communication. Furthermore, it calls for specialised skills in facilitation and inclusive dialogue, ensuring all voices are heard. Understanding the specific barriers to men's engagement in gender equality initiatives, such as societal expectations, fear or perceived irrelevance, is paramount.

Recognising that successful stakeholder engagement is a learned skill, this toolkit aims to equip relevant HEI academic and professional staff with tools and knowledge to foster collaborative environments and drive meaningful change. It is aimed primarily at those with a role in empowering and enabling male engagement in gender equality, such as those in leadership, heads of schools/departments, EDI Units and HR Departments. However, for those with a genuine interest in being more involved *at an individual level*, it also includes a short section with practical tips for participation (see Section 2, page 19).

The toolkit is designed as a guide rather than a prescriptive model and does not purport to be exhaustive. It aims to assist HEIs by providing resources and content that spark discussion, promote innovation, and facilitate collaborative solutions. It consists of four sections, preceded by a summary section titled “In a Nutshell.”

IN A NUTSHELL

is a “Cheat Sheet” which provides a quick-reference guide with distilled principles, practical tips, and strategies for meaningfully involving men in gender equality initiatives.

SECTION 1

is all about engagement. It explains what we mean by “engaging men in gender equality”, provides a framework for understanding engagement levels (the “Spectrum of Engagement”), and features the perspective of men who participated in the research focus groups on their engagement in gender equality.

SECTION 2

provides practical tips for male academic and professional staff on enhancing their engagement in gender equality. It features many ways to get involved, inviting men to consider their own contribution at an individual level.

SECTION 3

is for anyone working to encourage and support men's participation in gender equality initiatives, such as those in leadership, heads of schools/departments, EDI Units, and HR Departments. It presents a suggested model with core planning and engagement components and shares best practices for effectively engaging men in gender equality work.

SECTION 4

explains why the toolkit was created, providing the relevant policy and legislative framework. It details the research methods used and shares the key findings from both the primary and secondary research.



The toolkit contains lots of real-world examples and case studies from Irish HEIs and other sectors across the world. Look out for this symbol!



In a Nutshell

A Cheat Sheet for Effectively
Engaging Men in Gender Equality



A Brief Overview of Engagement

There is no single, universally effective approach to successfully engaging men in gender equality.

Effective engagement requires more than simply inviting participation; it demands careful navigation of diverse viewpoints, competing pressures and, sometimes, resistance to change.

Hearing all Voices

Effective engagement necessitates a substantial time investment to cultivate trust and open communication. It calls for skills in facilitation and inclusive dialogue, ensuring all voices are heard.

Understanding Barriers

Understanding the barriers to men's engagement in gender equality initiatives, such as societal expectations, fear or perceived irrelevance, is key.

Bear in mind that men are not a homogeneous group. A complex interplay of factors shape individual men's perspectives on gender equality and their own role in promoting it. These include personal experiences, social norms, education, peer influence, economic factors, beliefs, and individual personalities. Understanding this complexity is crucial for creating effective engagement strategies.

The Spectrum of Engagement (page 13) is a useful tool for gauging individual starting points and tailoring approaches accordingly.

- From men who are "unaware" to those who are "leading"
- From men who are "not at all engaged" to those who are "actively engaged"
- From men who are "overtly hostile" to those who are "ready to lead"

Ways to Get Involved

Complete gender equality/EDI surveys	Mentor and support women and other underrepresented groups	Undertake gender equality/EDI audits of reading lists
Participate in gender equality/EDI training, focus groups and events	Embed gender equality/EDI into research	Share responsibility for getting involved with your colleagues
Speak up when you witness bias	Volunteer for gender equality/EDI committees and networks	Promote and practice work-life balance

Tips for Designing Engaging Activities

Fostering meaningful engagement requires carefully tailored techniques that recognise individual starting points and address obstacles to participation. Use these tips to help you design activities which are both engaging and relevant.

Recognise some men's fears around engagement

Don't be afraid of debate and disagreement

Assume good intentions, encourage questions, and value diverse perspectives

Focus on what motivates people

Recognise that compromise is needed along the way

Co-create solutions with all genders

Provide supportive and inclusive spaces for open discussion

Where appropriate, target gender equality initiatives to specific groups of men

Recognise that it is "OK to make mistakes"

Use networking events (with food!) as a powerful tool for fostering positive connections

Have a Plan!

If you have a role in promoting men's participation in gender equality in your HEI, remember that preparation is key. It's important not to rush into organising activities and initiatives in the absence of a well-thought-out and evidence-based plan. Ensure these 5 key components form the bedrock of your approach, using "design thinking" as a helpful project management tool.



1. Leadership

For real change, male leaders and influential figures must lead by example, be active champions, encourage others to engage, and foster dialogue to understand women's experiences as well as barriers to men's engagement.



2. Evidence-Based

An evidence-informed approach provides a solid foundation. To achieve this, listen to the voices of all genders in your HEI to ensure their experiences and perspectives inform your gender equality programmes and activities.



3. Design Thinking

Design-thinking uses evidence to inform the development of initiatives, and applies an iterative approach to continuous improvement. The design-thinking model on page 30 provides a step-by-step framework for this.



4. Meet Men Where Are At

Adapt engagement strategies to respond to where men are at on the Spectrum of Engagement. Use tailored approaches, multiple methods of engagement and a diverse range of inclusive activities.



5. Empowerment & Responsibility

Combine empowerment — equipping men with the tools and knowledge to engage effectively — with responsibility, individual men taking ownership of their role and accountability in achieving equality.



Section 1

All About Engagement

What we Mean by Engagement

Understanding the Spectrum of Engagement

Listening to Men's Perspective on Engagement

WHAT WE MEAN BY “ENGAGEMENT”



The Cambridge English dictionary defines engagement as “the fact of being involved with something”.

These are examples of what “being involved” looks like in the context of gender equality in the HE sector. In your HEI these initiatives might be delivered as part of a wider EDI initiative.

01

Complete
Gender
Equality/EDI
Surveys

02

Mentor
and Support
Women
Colleagues

03

Undertake
Gender/EDI
Audits of
Reading Lists

04

Participate in Gender
Equality/EDI Training,
Focus Groups and
Events

05

Embed
Gender
Equality into
Research

06

Share responsibility
for getting involved
with your
colleagues

07

Speak Up
when you
Witness
Bias

08

Volunteer for
Gender Equality/EDI
Committees and
Networks

09

Promote and
Practice
Work-Life
Balance

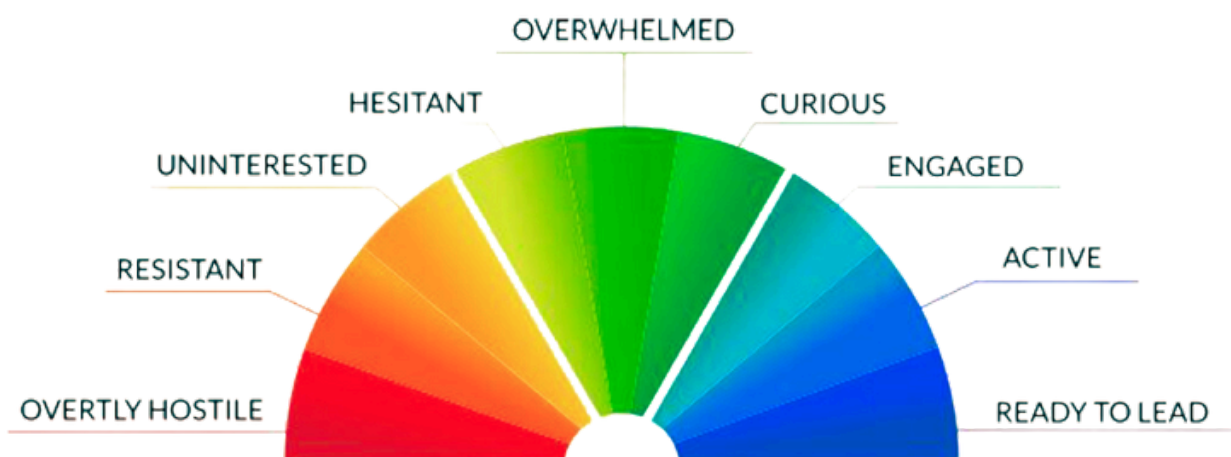
SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT

There is no single, universally effective approach to male engagement in gender equality.

When designing gender equality initiatives it's important to bear in mind that men are not a homogeneous group. A complex interplay of factors shape individual men's perspectives on both gender equality and their own role in promoting it. These include personal experiences, social norms, education, peer influence, economic factors, beliefs, and individual personalities. The research focus group findings demonstrate that men have different starting points, motivations, experiences, awareness and interest levels. For example, some focus group participants were just starting to explore the concept of gender equality, while others were committed advocates. Some were sceptical or hesitant, while others were enthusiastic and ready to lead.

Understanding this complexity is crucial for creating effective engagement strategies. The *Spectrum (or Continuum) of Engagement* is a useful tool for gauging individual starting points and tailoring approaches accordingly.

Continuum of Male Engagement: From men who are "overtly hostile" to those who are "ready to lead"



<https://rusfunk.me/continuum-of-male-engagement/>

Others Ways to Think About the Spectrum of Engagement

From men who are “not at all engaged” to those who are “actively engaged”



- Men who are not at all engaged
- Men who have been engaged but are less involved or unmotivated
- Men who are somewhat engaged and motivated to be even more so
- Men who are already actively engaged

From men who are “unaware” to those who are “leading”



- Unaware – Not aware of gender equality work and its impacts
- Resistant – Aware of gender equality work and resistant to change
- Neutral – Aware of gender equality work and neither supports or resists
- Supportive – Aware of gender equality work and supportive of change
- Leading – Aware of gender equality work and its impact and actively engaged in ensuring success

**It's important to “meet men where they are at”
by tailoring your activities to respond to
differing starting points, perspectives and
motivations.**

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Listening to men to understand the barriers and challenges that impact their engagement is essential. Remember, a tailored approach is far more effective than a one-size-fits-all solution. Meeting men "where they are at" requires aligning strategies with their current awareness, understanding, knowledge, motivation, and readiness for change.

This toolkit draws on insights from focus groups conducted with nearly 100 men across 13 HEIs. These discussions reveal valuable information about the obstacles to male engagement and strategies which promote engagement. The following pages summarise the key themes that emerged from the focus groups, including fear, apathy, disinterest, lack of awareness, lack of motivation, time constraints, work pressures, insufficient incentives, and dull/unstimulating methodologies. Full focus group findings are provided in Section 4.

While the focus group insights are valuable, it's important to remember they don't represent all men's views and experiences. Therefore, before launching any new gender equality initiative within your HEI – whether you are an EDI lead, a member of the Executive or a Head of School/Department – take the time to listen to the men you aim to engage. Consider partnering with a stakeholder engagement specialist or an independent facilitator to design and conduct an inclusive, participatory, and unbiased listening process. This will help you understand men's obstacles, motivations, and where they fall on the engagement spectrum, ultimately informing your strategies and gender equality action plan.

What Men in HEIs said About Their Engagement

In focus groups, men discussed enablers and obstacles to their engagement in gender equality initiatives and brainstormed ideas on enhancing their contribution. Key themes from these discussions are illustrated by direct quotes below and on the following pages.

About Fear and Apathy

When I looked in the door I was the only man in there – I debated whether I should go in there or not

Men don't engage in wellbeing stuff either. We need to look at the broader theme of engagement – a community approach

People are terrified of asking a questions, of being cancelled for saying the wrong things

Some men are nervous about this topic

It's a frustrating loop - you want to be involved but you don't have time

Just trying to keep up with language and social norms is hard, things are changing so much

Men don't feel as affected by this. We often take it for granted that we don't experience the same issues. We can be oblivious to the barriers faced by women

"Death by PowerPoint" doesn't work. In fact, it puts a lot of people off

EDI is written and framed from feminist perspectives. which is a very challenging zone for some men to be involved in

About Work and Life Pressures

A lot of men have a lot of stuff going on in life – this needs to be respected

Are men siloed in their professional and personal lives? If you're not used to talking about it, or if you don't have daughters or if you don't work in the area

People will pull out of being involved if they feel it is not being rewarded through a promotion

There is a hugely time pressured environment in academia in relation to research outputs

You can theoretically agree with something but that doesn't mean that you will invest your time in it. It has to really resonate with you. It has to be marketed well to different groups and motivations

About Language and Inclusion

Men feel excluded from this conversation

There is an entrenched understanding of masculinity and identity - we need to change the language around this. Masculinity tends to see itself as under threat But we need to see this a partnership, to talk the language of ordinary guys - in their own language

We need to end the narrative of women's oppression and men's power

The language is a real barrier - we need to smooth it out and make it more real and accessible

Ideas to Promote Engagement

We need to start with HEI specific stats

We need a toolkit. And more physical spaces for men to come together to talk in an open forum about things like this

It's so important to ask men in HEIs to be a positive role model for young people

It's vital to get active senior management buy-in

It's been great to have a safe space to discuss these issues today

A lot of the EDI initiatives are somewhat fringe - they are not always inclusive, they are not embedded enough

Men need to be directly asked

Have celebratory events, not preachy

We tend to conflate EDI with Athena Swan and with female gender equality - we need to concentrate on what the benefits are for men, women and for wider society. Athena Swan is not a phrase that motivates people

Strip this back to practical tips and advice

Start with the men who are already involved. We need men to explain to men - to be advocates

Bring in male speakers - that helps

Share examples of what works around the country. Enable HEIs to learn from each other

Rather than asking men to do a survey, hold a world cafe style conversation or consultation

HEI CASE STUDY: ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF IRELAND (RCSI)

Meeting Men Where They are At

For International Men's Day in November 2023, RCSI's EDI Unit joined with the Gym Team and Inspire Team (a dedicated Health and Wellbeing team within the HR/Estates Department) to deliver a five-a-side football tournament, lunch and talk on the importance of men's health. More than 20 male staff members were in attendance. Paul Nolan, RCSI's Head of Marketing, delivered a presentation on the importance of men's health, sharing his personal lived experience.

This event serves as an example of good practice, evidenced by the high level of engagement and positive feedback received. Notably, the event effectively engaged its target audience, an idea that originated from observing men playing soccer during their lunch break. "The idea for this event came to us when we saw all the men at lunchtime playing soccer at a nearby astro pitch – at the sight nearly 15 men colleagues, we thought, there is our audience!"

MARC - MEN ADVOCATING REAL CHANGE

Equipping Men to be Advocates of Gender Equality

MARC is an initiative that inspires men to leverage their unique opportunity and responsibility to be advocates for equity. Its research-based, experiential learning aims to enhance gender partnership and accelerate the creation of inclusive workplaces. While its specific focus is men, it aims to equip people of all genders with the skills to be more effective partners and to lead from a place of personal conviction and understanding. Through creating personal connections and unpacking root causes, MARC participants work to understand and address the core dynamics of gender inequity and related intersectional issues.

<https://www.catalyst.org/solutions/marc>



Section 2

Tips for Men

- Ideas for Men in Leadership Roles
- Ideas for Male Leads in Schools and Departments
- Ideas for Individual Men

OVERVIEW

If you are a male member of academic or professional staff, take action to promote gender equality in your HEI with these ideas and strategies.

Many of these suggestions are supported by direct quotes (in speech bubbles) from the men who participated in the research focus groups. Their firsthand insights provide an authentic perspective and reveal what truly encourages their engagement.

Experiment with some of these approaches and find the ways you prefer to participate. It's important to contribute in a way that feels right for you and to support other approaches, whether you're directly involved or not.

You'll find some ideas from other HEIs and sectors in the '*Engagement in Action*' pages at the end of this section and throughout the toolkit.



Ideas for Men in Leadership Roles

- As senior manager, ensure your support is active and visible. Challenge yourself to translate your commitment into practical actions that inspire confidence. Be a role model.
- Leverage the EDI Unit's expertise and encourage male academic and professional staff to engage in the Unit's programmes and initiatives.
- Wherever possible, ensure broad participation in EDI initiatives by rotating responsibilities among senior management (see *Academic "Chore Wheel"*, page 25).
- Allocate sufficient resources to support gender equality initiatives at HEI, School and Department level – for research, training, facilitation, communications, activities and events.
- Ensure there is a gender balance in decision-making spaces. Be aware of informal decision-making processes which can, inadvertently, be excluding (e.g. casual chats, meet-ups, social events).
- Ensure HR processes, such as recruitment and appraisal procedures and panels, follow inclusive practice.

Start by getting active and visible management buy-in

Get the President on board in a practical way that people can see

We need to see senior male professors giving of their time to EDI

Directly ask men in key roles to be a positive role model for young people. Be clear about what this means

Ask each EDI lead to ask two senior non-engaging men to come to a gender equality event

Plan this over 10 - 20 years, communicate it well, build a strategic approach, show the long-term goals. But balance this with achievable KPIs

Ideas for

Male Leads in Schools/Departments

- Appoint a gender equality or EDI champion within your School or Department to support collaborative efforts in embedding effective principles and practices.
- Create a gender equality role model programme that enables male academic and professional staff to serve as positive models for peers and early-career staff.
- Organise training for champions, role models and other academic and professional staff to build their gender equality skills and knowledge.
- Work closely with your HEI's EDI Unit and/or the gender equality champion, seeking guidance on aligning your School/Department's work with gender equality goals.
- Ensure that the School/Department's culture supports work-life balance. Lead by example and demonstrate a commitment to flexible work.
- Conduct regular reviews of your School's/Department's policies and practices to ensure that gender equality is meaningfully embedded. Engage in ongoing self-assessment of its role in promoting an inclusive environment, and commit to continuous learning on gender equality issues.

Celebrate successful initiatives and good practices that have effectively engaged men and advanced gender equality

Weave gender equality themes into existing social and work events where men participate

Integrate gender equality into existing academic and functional activities

Produce a short document that touches on lots of things, with links to a website with men telling their stories

Create safe spaces where men, and all genders, can discuss gender equality issues without fear of judgement

Start with men who are already involved. Ask them what got them involved. Get them to act as advocates. We need men to explain to men

Ideas for Individual Men

I went to a seminar called "Dads making a Difference". This went into the reasons why inequality is bad for women. This really helped me to understand more

We did Bystander Training here - it was participative and used diverse methods to keep people engaged

- Participate in surveys and focus groups on gender equality and EDI. Provide constructive feedback and suggestions on how to improve gender equality efforts within your HEI.
- Volunteer for the Athena Swan SAT or other EDI committees and networks.
- Attend and engage in gender equality workshops, training, panels, discussions, and lectures. Encourage colleagues to participate and promote the value of such learning in everyday work.
- Mentor female colleagues, supporting them to navigate organisational processes such as promotions and professional development.
- Use inclusive teaching methods and review reading lists to ensure they include diverse voices and perspectives. Integrate gender equality principles into research design and practices.
- Help to foster a positive work-life balance by advocating for flexible work practices and better support for carers within your School/Department. Actively demonstrate your commitment by adopting flexible approaches yourself.
- Seek guidance from the EDI Unit or the gender equality or EDI champion in your School/Department on aligning your work with organisational gender equality goals.
- Speak up when you witness bias, exclusion or inequality, whether in day-to-day interactions or in relation to organisational culture and practice. Encourage transparent discussions on inequality and advocate for diverse voices to be represented in decision-making spaces.
- For voluntary activities, take your turn on the "corporate chore wheel", i.e. a rotating list that equally distributes the non-core tasks, regardless of gender or seniority (See "Women end up doing the academic housework", overleaf).

HEI CASE STUDY: INSTITUTE OF ART, DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY (IADT)

National Technological University Transformation for Recovery and Resilience Programme (N-TUTORR)

IADT was one of seven higher technological education institutions that participated in the EU-funded N-TUTORR programme (2022 – 2024), an innovative learning and teaching project that delivered transformative change by providing a rich digital learning ecosystem, empowering students and developing staff capabilities. The project had a particular focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and EDI.

The project was notable due to the active involvement of male academic staff, compared to other EDI-related initiatives, such as Athena Swan. For example, two of the five N-TUTORR Academic Champions at IADT were men. Additionally, a high number of applications for N-TUTORR Fellowships in 2023 were submitted by men. Projects ranged from creating early access pathways for children to engage with art, to enhancing learner experience for students with disabilities.

Men's active engagement appears to have been driven by various factors including the project's broader definition of EDI (beyond gender), the availability of funding to collaborate with students on small-scale enhancement projects, the integration of technology-driven solutions and Universal Design for Learning principles as a means to advance social change, opportunities for involvement in academic curriculum development, and the interconnection with EDI and sustainability goals.

HEI CASE STUDY: MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY (MU)

EDI Champions

MU ran a pilot programme with the aim of empowering colleagues to step up as EDI champions. The role of the champions included:

- to role-model the values from the EDI policy
- to be aware of MU policies and signpost to MU EDI supports
- to be someone all staff can talk to about EDI activities
- to be empowered as an active bystander

Six of the thirteen voluntary participants were men. A pre- and post-survey was carried out which showed that participants were more confident in holding a conversation about EDI, were more aware of their Public Sector Duty obligations, and were more confident in being able to respond appropriately if they saw someone being discriminated against.

ACADEMIC “CHORE WHEEL”

“Women end up doing the academic housework”

This article discusses a new study from Danish academia (2024) that finds that women in senior faculty roles do more of the internal service work in their HEIs, such as administration of seminars, than their male counterparts. When the researchers looked at engagement with external services, such as participating in forums and collaborating with other academic institutions (often considered career-enhancing work), men engaged as much as their female colleagues.

<https://kifinfo.no/en/2024/03/women-end-doing-academic-housework>

IDENTIFYING GENDER BIAS

EIT Climate KIC - Gender Bias Bingo

To help identify and address gender biases in the workplace, EIT Climate KIC have produced the Workplace Gender Bias Bingo Card. This is a tool to help recognise various forms of gender bias that might be present in the work environment. By identifying these biases, it encourages men to take actionable steps to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

<https://www.climate-kic.org/news/men-allies-gender-equality/#:~:text=Change%20minds%20and%20cultures%3A%20Encourage,biases%20and%20promote%20inclusive%20behaviour.>





Section 3

Toolkit for HEI Leaders, Champions and EDI Units

- Have a Plan Key
- Core Planning and Engagement Components
- Using Design-Thinking
- Tips for Designing Activities for Successful Engagement

OVERVIEW

If you have a role in empowering and enabling men's participation in gender equality initiatives in your HEI, this section is for you. It presents a suggested model, with core components for planning and engagement, and shares best practice for effectively engaging men in advancing gender equality.

Remember, pace yourself – this is slow work! Don't bite off more than you can chew and keep in mind that gender equality work is challenging and complex. To avoid becoming despondent, “cut your cloth” in the context of time and resources available. Break down your strategies into actionable components with specific tasks and responsible individuals or teams.



HAVE A PLAN

Building true gender equality in HEIs is a marathon, not a sprint. It requires a multi-year commitment with clear short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Strong leadership is crucial to drive systemic change and support initiatives that can have a ripple effect throughout the organisation. Success depends on consistent, coordinated efforts across the institution, with every action, large or small, contributing to the ultimate goal of gender equality.

Focus on laying strong foundations – good planning and preparation is key. It's important not to rush into organising activities and initiatives in the absence of a well-thought-out and evidence-based plan.

In this section, we explore key components for success, with a focus on using “design thinking” as a helpful project management tool. Ensure that the 5 key components, overleaf, form the bedrock of your HEI's (or School/Department's) gender equality journey.



5 COMPONENTS FOR SUCCESS

Leadership

For real change, male leaders and influential figures in your HEI, School or Department must lead by example, be active champions, encourage other men to engage, and foster open conversations to understand women's experiences as well as barriers to men's engagement. Identify the key leaders and influential figures in your HEI, School or Department and engage with them about their role in instigating and modelling change.

Evidence

An evidence-informed approach provides a solid foundation for progress. To achieve this, listen to the voices of all stakeholders to ensure their experiences and perspectives inform your gender equality programmes and activities.

Design-Thinking

A design-thinking approach uses evidence to inform the development and prototyping of initiatives and applies an iterative approach to continuous improvement. The design-thinking model on page 30 provides a step-by-step framework for this.

Meet Men Where They Are At

Adapt engagement strategies to respond to the different factors at play. Use tailored approaches, multiple methods of engagement and a diverse range of activities. See the Spectrum of Engagement on pages 13-14.

Empowerment and Responsibility

Combine empowerment – equipping men with the tools and knowledge to engage effectively – with responsibility, individual men taking ownership of their role and accountability in achieving equality.



ABOUT DESIGN-THINKING

Design thinking is a process for solving problems by prioritising the “consumer’s” needs above all else. In the context of gender equality in HEIs, “consumers” are all genders in your HEI. The process relies on observing, with empathy, how people interact with their environment and employing a hands-on approach to creating innovative solutions. Ultimately, it is about employing the experiences and perspectives of real people to help design solutions.

A sample methodology for applying design thinking is set out below. This can be adapted to meet the needs of your HEI, School or Department. It is especially valuable for enhancing engagement on topics where men are typically less involved, such as menopause or gender-based violence.

Step 1: Understand / Discover

Use research methods such as focus groups, surveys or interviews with a diversity of women to:

- understand their experiences of gender inequality in the HEI
- garner their input on how gender equality can be enhanced

Use similar research methods with a diversity of men to gain insights into:

- their perspectives on gender equality topics
- obstacles to their engagement
- strategies to enhance their engagement

Step 2: Define

- Define the Challenge: Use the findings from Step 1 to help you define the challenge by understanding the experiences and perspectives of all. The goal is to identify the root cause of the problem: specifically, how gender bias manifests within your HEI, School or Department; how men are currently involved in addressing these issues; and what hinders their further engagement.
- Use the “Spectrum of Engagement” (pages 13–14) to help you understand men’s differing perspectives and starting points.

Step 3: Ideate / Brainstorm Solutions

- In collaboration with both men and women (separately and/or together), brainstorm a range of possible solutions (i.e. programmes, activities and initiatives) that involve men in combatting the inequalities and bias.
- Prioritise Ideas: Assess each idea based on feasibility, potential impact, and alignment with HEI policies, priorities and action plans.

Step 4: Prototype

- Develop a Pilot: Choose a high-potential idea and develop a pilot initiative with a small group of men.

Step 5: Test

- Implement the pilot programme with the target group of men.
- Gather feedback through surveys, discussions, and observation.

Step 6: Refine and Iterate

- Based on the feedback, refine the initiative content, delivery method, and outreach strategy.

DESIGN-THINKING IN PRACTICE

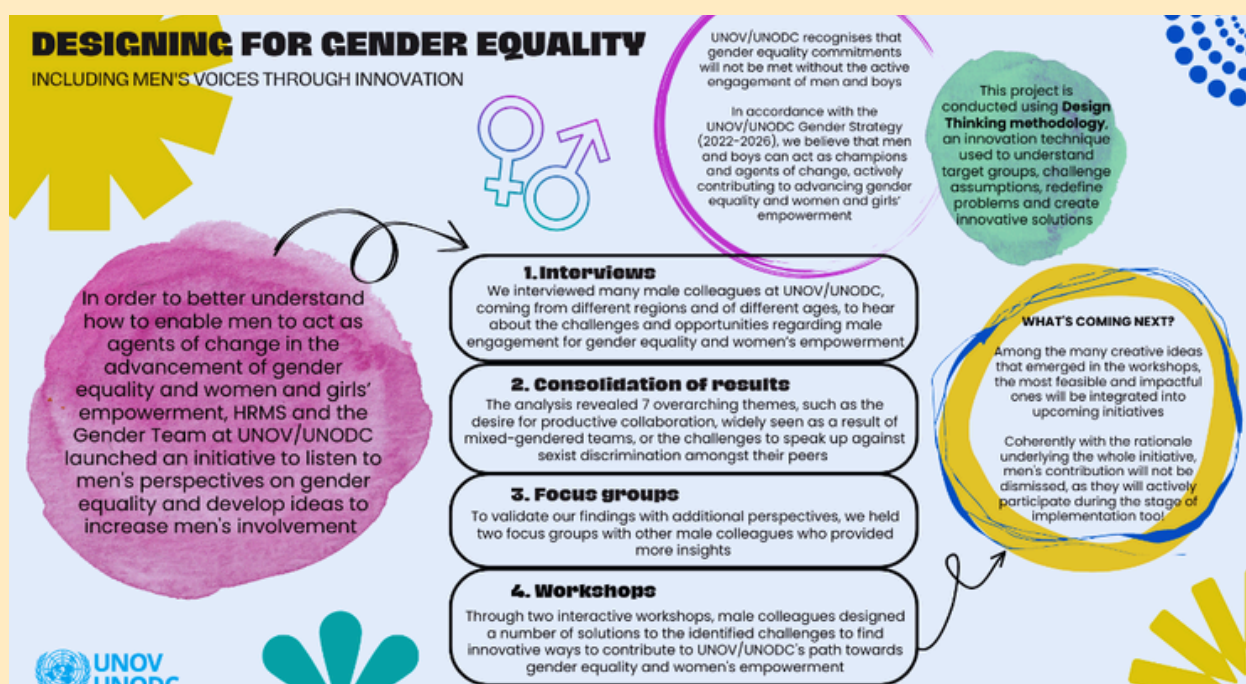
United Nations Office in Vienna (UNOV) “Food for Thought Session”

“Our goal is to listen to (men) and learn how our work can be even more engaging for everyone”.

In 2022, UNOV launched an initiative on male engagement in gender equality. The aim was to listen to men and understand their perspectives on what opportunities and challenges they face around gender equality, both in their individual lives and in their work. The initiative sought to engage men who were less involved in UNOV.

The initiative adopted a design thinking methodology to “gain a deeper understanding of the way men see gender equality and the empowerment of women and how they see their own role in it”. It culminated in two workshops, where men had the opportunity to design strategies to enhance their participation in UNOV’s work on gender equality.

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/gender/news/engaging-men-for-gender-equality-at-unov-unodc.html>





TIPS FOR DESIGNING ENGAGING ACTIVITIES

Engaging people, especially on complex topics, can be difficult. Our focus group findings show that men may not immediately see the relevance or feel intrinsically motivated to engage. Fostering meaningful engagement requires carefully tailored techniques that recognise individual starting points (see Spectrum of Engagement, pages 13–14) and address obstacles to participation. This is not a linear, formulaic process but one that often involves trial and error, with an emphasis on relationship-building and collaboration. This section offers practical tips for increasing male participation in gender equality initiatives.

Acknowledge Fears

It's important to recognise men's fears around engagement. The focus group findings indicate that fear of "saying the wrong thing" is a barrier to men's engagement. If the goal is a more equitable work environment, men's fears should not be dismissed on relative terms.

Communication

Sometimes, what you say is not the same as what people hear. Good communication requires effort to ensure the intended message is clear and to avoid misinterpretation. Don't be afraid of debate and disagreement. Instead, focus on creating meaningful and productive dialogue. Consider using an independent facilitator to support inclusive conversations which enable stakeholders to explore and critically analyse issues.

Motivations

Not everyone will be immediately on board. Focus on what motivates individuals; intrinsic motivation is key. Our focus groups, for example, revealed that fatherhood can be a strong motivator for men engaging in gender equality initiatives.

Compromise

Success means different things to different people. Engage with stakeholders to understand what success looks like for them and establish an acceptable baseline across stakeholders' diverging expectations. Take an incremental, long-term approach to achieving success, recognising that compromise will be needed along the way.

Co-Create Solutions

Bottom-up solutions, which are co-created with key stakeholders, are often the most effective. Consult with both men and women to get their input on what works. In some situations, it is appropriate to work in all-male groups; in others, it's important to have a shared space where men can listen to women's voices (see Design-Thinking for more, page 30).

Safe Spaces

Provide supportive and inclusive spaces for open discussion about gender equality. Be sensitive to the fact that these discussions can bring up difficult issues. Examples include a Men's Shed model or peer groups to bring men together for formal and informal conversations. These spaces offer an opportunity for men to reflect and discuss the issues on their own, as a first step, before introducing mixed-gender spaces.

Targeted or Universal

Gender equality initiatives can be implemented universally (across the entire HEI, School or Department) or targeted to specific groups. Universal programmes can reach a broad audience, while targeted programmes are often more effective in engaging groups at different points on the engagement spectrum (pages 13-14). Design and deliver initiatives that are relatable to the specific target group you are aiming to reach.

Assume Good Intentions

Approaching gender inequality with the understanding that "you don't know what you don't know" is most effective. While increased awareness is needed, blaming men for their current knowledge gaps hinders progress. Instead, foster a culture of continuous learning, assuming good intentions, encouraging questions, and valuing diverse perspectives.

Permission to Make Mistakes

By creating a space where "fumbling" through difficult conversations is allowed, safety and trust is fostered. It helps to shift the focus from blame to collaboration, and demonstrates a learning and growth mindset. One focus group participant suggested that a culture of "failing forward" is needed to recognise that it is "OK to make mistakes".

Food and Refreshments

Food can be a powerful tool for fostering positive connections. Where possible, incorporate a small refreshments budget into gender equality initiatives – it can help to break the ice, create a relaxed atmosphere, and facilitate conversation.

MORE IDEAS

The Ordinary Everyday

Run a photographic campaign to celebrate diversity and inclusion in your HEI, School or Department. Promote high-profile people and programmes, as well as the “ordinary everyday” where small changes and initiatives are making an impact.

Multi-Platform Campaigns

Develop a multi-platform campaign on the benefits of gender equality and ways to get involved. Use multiple formats such as podcasts, postcards, videos, pop-up “tell and ask” points, social media and electronic notice boards. Link in with your Communications Department to harness their expertise on reach and impact.

Training

Good quality training can help deepen staff’s understanding of gender equality. It helps them to build a strong knowledge base and hone their skills in a safe-space setting. Avoid “death by powerpoint” and opt instead for well-facilitated, interactive learning formats. Done well, training can also facilitate team building and provide a starting point for staff to co-create solutions to gender inequality.

Leverage Existing Events

Working at discipline and local level, incorporate gender equality initiatives into existing events and activities, such as networking events or learned societies. These can provide a seamless way to enhance men’s participation.

Ideas from the

FOCUS GROUPS

Segment the faculty experience from the professional experience. Different approaches are needed

*Run targeted events, like:
Men in academia & gender equality/EDI
Men in finance & gender equality/EDI
Men in HR & gender equality/EDI*

Rather than a survey, hold world cafe style consultation with men with a list of questions from an engagement specialist, maybe ask the men to complete a short survey in the room

Gear more initiatives towards white Caucasian middle-aged men and market them well

More physical spaces for men to come together to talk in an open forum about things like this

We did Bystander Training here - it was participative and used diverse methods to keep people engaged

Bring in male speakers - a celebrity or male champion. I attend events based on the quality of the speaker. I want to hear the stories of success, and progress. The speaker is the hook

Run EDI roadshows in the foyer

Have celebratory events, not preachy

The challenge is having the time to participate in activities - it's better to fuse EDI principles with existing activities

We need to understand people's battle to be their authentic selves help people to engage in a sensitive and caring way

I'd like to see this kind of focus group included in some of our short EDI courses - the openness and honesty has been very helpful

Use food and soccer to get to men. It will work for some

Set up a men's shed

Do "bacon-butt" mornings

HEI CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN (UCD)

Make a Plan!

UCD established an Engaging Men in EDI Working Group, chaired by two senior male academics, to facilitate meaningful discussions and explore strategies to encourage and enhance male involvement in all aspects of EDI, benefiting everyone. The Working Group aims to create a more balanced and inclusive environment where all voices are heard and valued. A key goal is to gain a greater understanding of the reasons some men are engaged and contribute greatly, but a greater proportion do not engage.

A consultation workshop was held in Spring 2024 with the aim of fostering meaningful conversations and strategies to engage men more actively. Visible role models and champions were cited as an important starting point. A roadmap and action plan is being developed by the Working Group with buy-in and leadership across a number of Schools and Departments.

CAPTURING AND DOCUMENTING EVIDENCE

“The Road to an Inclusive Workplace”

This lived experience research by Men for Inclusion is aimed at creating a set of benchmarks for measuring Inclusion. It is a “state of the nation” view on the experience of people in the workplace. Its goal is to help organisations achieve a greater level of insight on where workplace challenges around diversity and inclusion exist.

The publication is a good example of a succinct, user-friendly, accessible research report that can be mirrored by Irish HEIs to “tell the story” of people’s experiences of exclusion and inclusion in a localised, relevant manner.



https://www.menforinclusion.com/uploads/files/MFI_-_Lived_Experience_Research_2022.pdf

CREATING SAFE SPACES

Podcast to Mark International Men's Day 2022

Male leaders across the Irish technological higher education sector came together to discuss why gender equality matters for men in a podcast released to mark International Men's Day 2022. The podcast, featuring participants from South East Technological University, Munster Technological University, Technological University of the Shannon, Technological University Dublin, the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dundalk Institute of Technology and the Higher Education Authority, was a collective approach to examining the role of men in achieving gender equality in the sector.

In a wide ranging discussion, the contributors discussed their own personal journeys and reflections on gender equality, what men can do to improve gender equality at their respective universities, why men are sometimes reluctant to get involved in gender equality work, why allyship is critical, gender quotas and the concept of meritocracy, and the benefits of gender equality for men themselves.

<https://www.mtu.ie/news/gender-equality-matters-to-men-too-podcast/>

UN HeForShe Champions

Proven Solutions 2021

HeforShe is the United Nations Global Solidarity Movement For Gender Equality. HeForShe is an invitation for men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to create a bold, visible and united force for gender equality. The men of HeForShe aren't on the sidelines. They're working with women and with each other to build businesses, raise families, and give back to their communities. The HeforShe Proven Solutions document provides practical guides for people to use to extend gender equality in their own settings.



<https://www.heforshe.org/en/solutions>



Section 4

Rationale and Methodology

- Methodology
- Why a Toolkit on Gender Equality?
- Why is Gender Equality Important?
- Policy and Legislative Context (summary)
- Research
 - Secondary Research
 - Primary Research

Methodology

The aim of the project was to raise awareness amongst men of their role in achieving gender equality and to equip HEIs with the necessary tools to enhance men's engagement. The project brief incorporated the following elements:

- Desk-based research on the engagement of men in gender equality – the issues, barriers, and challenges
- Engagement with men from across the partner HEIs through online focus groups
- Design of a capacity-building workshop based on the toolkit, for tailoring by individual HEIs
- Development of a toolkit to accompany the programme
- Delivery of a pilot programme in two HEIs

In Spring 2024, an online consultation process was held with stakeholders across the 13 participating HEIs. The focus group recruitment process was coordinated by EDI Units using a targeted approach, rather than an open invitation, to ensure the participant profile aligned with the project's objectives. As the purpose of the process was to understand barriers to men's engagement, and to explore how to enhance it, EDI Units primarily targeted men to take part. In certain cases, women with relevant roles were also invited. The recruitment process aimed to attract a mix of men, including those with and without prior involvement in gender equality/EDI initiatives.

Thirteen focus groups were conducted, across 6 categories, with 85 men and 21 women taking part, with a cross-section of the project's partner HEIs represented:

- HEI Executive: 21 participants
- Head of Academic Departments: 17 participants
- Head of Functions: 11 participants
- Academic and Research Staff: 17 participants
- Professional, Managerial and Support staff (PMSS): 21 participants
- EDI Vice Presidents (or equivalent): 19 participants

A comprehensive review of literature was conducted to examine the key issues, barriers, and challenges associated with increasing men's engagement. This aimed to identify the factors that hinder men's participation and understand the complexities involved in motivating men to actively support gender equality efforts.

A photograph of a woman in a wheelchair, seen from behind, moving through a modern building with large glass windows and a high ceiling. Other people are visible in the background, and the scene is brightly lit.

Why a Toolkit on Gender Equality?

The impetus for developing this toolkit arose from HEI data and anecdotal evidence which demonstrates that women disproportionately carry the load of gender equality and EDI work across the Irish HE sector – for instance, women are significantly more likely to join an Athena Swan SAT, to sit on an EDI committee or working group, to participate in gender equality or EDI training, to organise a gender equality or EDI event or to respond to gender equality or EDI surveys.

To address this challenge, UCD, IADT and MTU led a consortium of HEIs that successfully secured funding from the then HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Fund (GEEF). This Fund aimed to support innovative projects designed to address gender inequality in HEIs. It specifically aimed to promote initiatives that addressed recommendations in the HEA's 2016 and 2022 National Reviews of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs and the Gender Equality Taskforce, and to encourage collaboration between different sectors to achieve national-level change. In this context, the consortium's funding proposal focused on gaining deeper insights into obstacles to men's engagement in gender equality initiatives and exploring effective strategies to address them. The proposal aligned with the GEEF objectives and actioned the recommendations in the 2022 National Review which stated that HEIs must "continue to effect culture change in relation to gender equality issues" and that "this should be done through resourcing and incentivising ... the engagement of men in the process of change".

Recognising that each equality ground is characterised by distinct and complex challenges requiring tailored solutions, further research is necessary to deepen understanding of obstacles to engagement in broader equality issues and to inform the development of effective strategies for promoting engagement across wider EDI domains.

Why is Gender Equality Important?



Gender equality in HEIs is not simply a "women's issue"; it's a fundamental matter of fairness, excellence, and social responsibility that benefits the entire HEI community. While HEIs have clear legal obligations to promote gender equality (see page 43), the importance of this principle extends far beyond compliance. The following factors underscore the intrinsic value of gender equality within HEIs:

Fairness and Equity

Historical and systemic barriers have disadvantaged women and other underrepresented groups in HE settings. At its core, gender equality is about fairness and equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender.

Improved Culture

Promoting gender equality fosters a more positive and respectful working environment for everyone. This can lead to increased job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being.

Maximising Potential

HEIs thrive on diverse perspectives and talent. By creating an inclusive environment, institutions can attract and retain the best minds, regardless of gender. This leads to better research, innovation, and teaching.

Social Responsibility

HEIs have a responsibility to promote equality and social justice within their own institutions and in wider society. By championing gender equality, they can act as role models and contribute to positive social change.

Policy and Legislative Context

Gender inequality in higher education is an issue that is observed nationally and internationally. In Ireland, efforts to address this imbalance have been shaped by a series of legislative and policy initiatives to promote gender equality across the sector.

- **Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015:** These prohibit discrimination on several grounds, including gender, in employment. These acts apply to all sectors, including higher education, and require HEIs to take steps to ensure equality in hiring and workplace practices.
- **Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014:** Under this act, public bodies, including HEIs, have a responsibility to promote equality, eliminate discrimination, and protect human rights, which include gender balance and equal opportunities.
- **Universities Act 1997, Technological Universities Act 2018, Institutes of Technology Act 2006:** These require relevant HEIs to promote gender balance and equality opportunities among staff, students and major decision-making bodies.
- **Higher Education Authority Act 2022:** This empowers the Higher Education Authority to hold HEIs to account regarding the advancement of equality, diversity and inclusion, including gender equality.

Beyond legislation, a number of national policy initiatives shape the work of Irish HEIs in promoting gender equality across the sector.

- In 2016, the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions produced a set of recommendations to ensure the achievement of gender equality in higher education.

- In 2017, the Minister of State for Higher Education established the Gender Equality Taskforce. The Taskforce produced the Gender Action Plan 2018–2020, which set specific targets for gender equality in the higher education sector, including a target that 40% of full professorships be held by women by 2024. The plan requires HEIs to adopt gender equality action plans and promote gender balance in decision making bodies.
- In 2022, the Second HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions made recommendations to encourage institutions to continue to implement gender equality action plans and challenged them to advance this work through further innovations.

Athena Swan

The Athena Swan Charter is a framework that is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality in higher education and research. It launched in Ireland in 2015 with a specific remit to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) employment.

Athena Swan has since been expanded to include arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL) and staff working in professional, managerial and support roles (PMSS). The framework also now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, including consideration of the experience of transgender and non-binary staff and students, as well as the underrepresentation of men in particular disciplines.

In 2021, the Athena Swan Ireland Charter was redeveloped in line with the findings of a national consultation and offers a framework for progressing equality in higher education and research that is unique to Ireland. The objective of the new Charter is to support higher education institutions, academic departments and professional units in impactful and sustainable gender equality work and to build capacity for evidence-based equality work across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation. Engagement with Athena Swan is a key pillar of Ireland's national strategy for gender equality in higher education, and institutional access to the Charter is nationally funded by the HEA.

Primary and Secondary Research

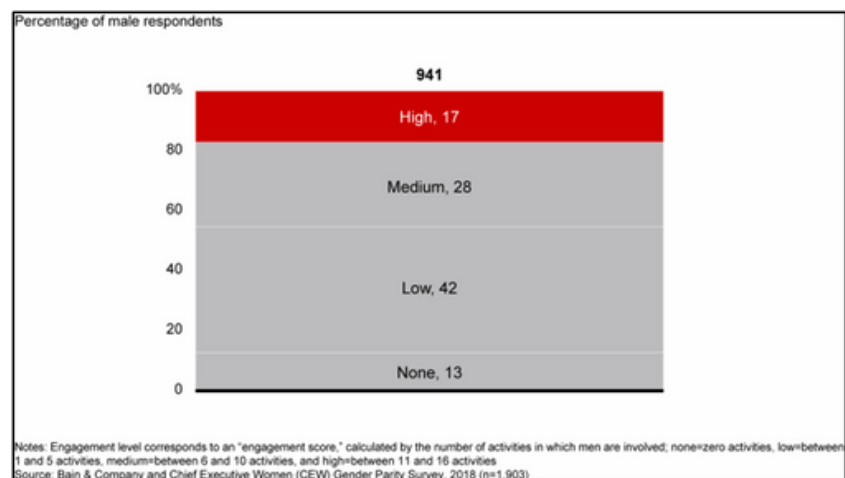
Secondary Research

The Importance of Men's Engagement

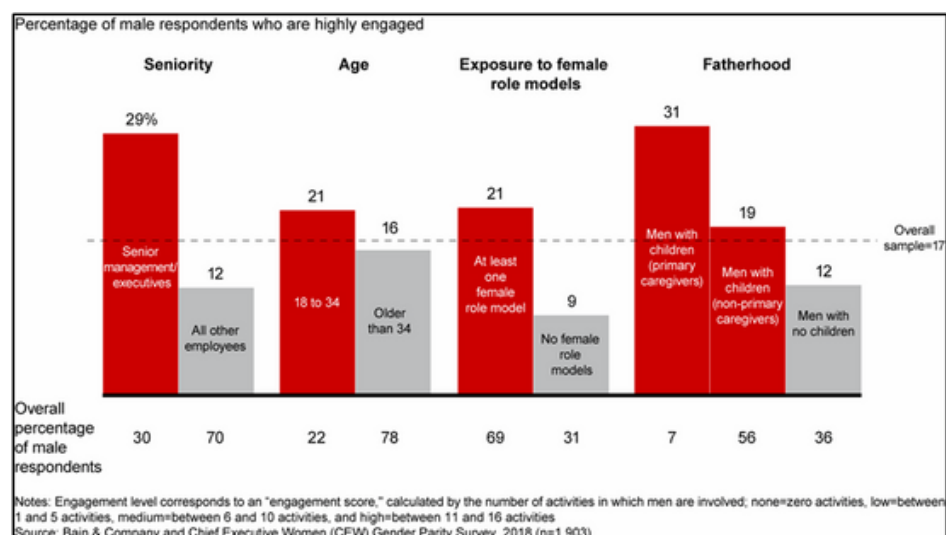
There is an increasing wealth of research highlighting the importance of engaging men in gender equality initiatives. Research by the American Psychological Association suggests that even men who initially hold negative attitudes towards the role of women in the workplace become more supportive of gender parity programmes when they are actively included in conversations about these initiatives [Hideg, 2011]. As such, it is clear that it is vitally important that men are engaged with gender equality initiatives, changing the view of gender equality from a 'women's issue' to a 'society issue' [Irvine, 2019].

Despite the importance of men's involvement, men are significantly less enthusiastic than women, and less aware of gender inequality. Data from 34 countries [Pew Research Center, 2020] shows that women place more importance on gender equality than men, and that they are less optimistic about the likelihood of attaining gender equality.

These attitudes are reflected in men's engagement with gender equality initiatives. Research in the UK on men in the workplace [Verastegui, 2019] found that just 17% of men were highly engaged with gender equality actions, while 55% had little to no engagement



Verastegui's research also showed a number of areas which correlated to higher engagement in initiatives, namely seniority, age, exposure to female role models, and fatherhood.



Obstacles to Men's Engagement

The literature review provides interesting data on the barriers to men's engagement in gender equality.

Apathy

Research found that 74% of men said that apathy toward issues of gender equity was a factor in lack of action and engagement from men. Men were either simply unconcerned or did not see a compelling reason to become actively involved in DEI, or both [Pollack and Kerr, 2022: 3]. A UK study by Men for Inclusion and Barnett Waddingham [2023: 3] found that many men are not fully committed to driving EDI initiatives within their organisations, with over 50% of men having passive or negative reactions to gender equality initiatives.

Lack of Awareness

The research also highlights that there can be a lack of awareness by men of their own privilege and of related issues of gender inequality. Recent research indicates that "men's awareness of gender inequalities is an important factor in 'getting men on board' so that they can serve as allies of women" [Mazzuca, 2022]. However, a number of studies compiled by Van Laar [et al, 2024] report that "men are less likely than women to recognize unfair treatment of women [...] find it harder than women to detect discriminatory acts [...], to recognize derogatory statements about women as prejudiced [...] and to notice unfavourable employment practices that disadvantage women".

Fear

The literature review reveals that fear plays a role, with some men fearing a loss of power from increased gender equality. This zero-sum bias can fuel "the belief that men cannot thrive in tandem with women – that they must sacrifice their resources or stature for women to earn a place at the table" [Roy et al., 2020]. A study of predictors of men's support for gender equality covering 42 countries found a universal pattern whereby viewing women as direct competitors correlated with a lower willingness from men to engage in collective action on behalf of women [Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2020].

A further factor is the fear of being judged negatively, either by those involved in gender equality work or by other men. Chant and Guttman [2000] suggest that men "may avoid raising gender issues for fear of disapproval and ridicule" from their co-workers. There is also a fear of "making mistakes and being criticized when trying to take action intended to reduce gender bias" [Pollack and Kerr, 2022].

Broader Challenges

General lack of engagement by men in workplace and wellbeing programmes is a broader challenge. A White Paper report by health services company Optum [2014: 8] noted that, in general, women are much more likely to attend workplace programmes than men. Research conducted by Robroek [et al, 2009] in the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, had similar results, finding that men were less likely to engage in almost any form of workplace well-being programme.

Other Findings

Intersectionality

Strategies developed from the UN's Regional Programme "Men and Women for Gender Equality" [UN Women, 2019: 2] suggest that, when developing initiatives, it is vital to "place gender equality within a human rights perspective and create spaces that are inclusive, participatory, and understanding of multifaceted forms of discrimination". This research further suggests that representatives of all target beneficiary groups be included in the design and planning of gender equality initiatives, ensuring that these initiatives, and attempts to engage men with them, are as inclusive as possible from the start.

Benefits to Men

Research from Concern [2014: 5] states that "men are victims of many forms of personal and institutional [harm], primarily at the hands of other men, and have a great deal to gain from moving towards gender equality". Cartier Philosophy et al (2019: 10] argues that effort should be made when developing actions for increasing male engagement to create programmes which help men "to understand how dismantling rigid gender norms and promoting gender equality benefits them, even when they have to surrender certain privileges in the process".

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) (2018) emphasises the limitations of highlighting the harms experienced by men as a result of gender norms and the benefits they might gain from gender equality. It argues that while this approach might be useful for initial engagement, it does not address the power structures that subjugate women in patriarchal societies. Therefore, focusing solely on men's experiences should be considered a stepping stone towards more comprehensive discussions about gender and power imbalance.



Primary Research

The tools and strategies suggested in this toolkit are substantially informed by the findings of the primary research focus groups which were designed to create a “safe-space” for men, with a welcoming, relaxed and non-judgemental approach. The focus groups explored the following themes:

- **enablers and obstacles to engaging men in gender equality**
- **good practice in HEIs in engaging men in gender equality initiatives**
- **opportunities to strengthen men’s engagement in gender equality in HEIs**

In the following pages, we provide a analysis of the focus group findings, supplemented by direct quotes from the men who participated, offering an unfiltered look into their viewpoints. The quotes provide a sense of the complexities involved and highlight the importance of listening to all perspectives in the pursuit of meaningful change.

Findings are grouped into three categories, aligning with the themes emerging from focus group discussions:

- Leadership and Collaboration
- Fear and Apathy
- Work Activities and Career Development

A fourth category, Suggestions and Ideas, focuses on effective strategies for engaging men in gender equality, as identified by the men themselves. These are presented in Section 2, “Tips for Men” and on page 36, “Ideas from the Focus Groups.”

LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

These discussions focused on the role of senior leadership and collaboration in driving gender equality initiatives. Participants were asked how the HEI Executive and other senior management demonstrate leadership on this issue. They discussed the perceived level of awareness within management of the need to incorporate gender equality into strategies and day-to-day work. They were also asked how HEIs can strengthen men's engagement through better leadership and support structures.

In response, most participants highlighted the importance of institutional action, calling for structural, top-down changes, such as active senior management buy-in and the elevation of EDI roles to the same status as other leadership positions. Some felt that men in managerial roles do not always see gender inequality as an issue.

Participants stressed the importance of defining an institution's values and identity. One participant suggested that a values-based, cross-institutional approach would help to translate gender equality and EDI principles into concrete behaviours. Others highlighted the importance of ensuring that schools/departments have sufficient resources for embedding inclusive practices.

Discussions also focused on reframing traditional understandings of masculinity to address perceived threats and using inclusive language that resonates with "ordinary guys" and fosters a sense of partnership in combatting inequality in all its forms.

Some participants advocated for moving away from narratives focused on oppression and power, towards balanced and conciliatory dialogue.

Finally, the need for improved data collection and visible role models was emphasised.

What men said about Leadership and Collaboration

In their own words

More resources are needed to ensure inclusive and participative arrangements

It's vital to get active senior management buy-in

It's vital to get the President on board in a practical way that people can see

We need a sense that things are being done institutionally – structural, top-down, incentivised

We need to see senior male professors giving of their time to EDI

There is an entrenched understanding of masculinity and identity - we need to change the language around this. Masculinity tends to see itself as under threat But we need to see this as a partnership, to talk the language of ordinary guys – in their own language

If you are male in a managerial position you don't necessarily see it as a problem

There are structural issues in our HEI – e.g. institutions saying that EDI roles must be delivered by women

Each school has a board of directors, but EDI doesn't have a seat on this board, so it's not an attractive position to be in. It's important to elevate the role to have the same status and to get the same "points" as the other roles

We have included EDI as part of our hiring process – the Registrar leads out on this

People need to see people in leadership roles that look like themselves

We need to end the narrative of women's oppression and men's power

I need a dedicated resource to help embed this, to guide the process (HEI Executive member)

We need to decide what type of institution we want to be - what do we want?

Men feel excluded from this conversation

We don't really know what the barriers are, there's not enough data

I'd like to see stats on men's participation in gender equality

As a manager, one thing I can do is to engage more junior members of our team

APATHY, FEAR AND LACK OF AWARENESS

Men discussed the challenges and barriers to their engagement in gender equality. They were asked to reflect on their own experiences and to identify obstacles to their participation. The discussion explored whether men are less likely to engage in EDI initiatives in general or in gender equality initiatives specifically. Participants also considered whether long-standing cultural or hierarchical dynamics in HEIs impact engagement or pose challenges to participation.

In response, many men expressed that they had a fear of being judged or "cancelled" for saying the "wrong thing". As a result, some were hesitant to engage in gender equality initiatives. Some expressed a level of anxiety or discomfort regarding a lack of familiarity with evolving language and social norms on gender equality and EDI topics. Many welcomed the opportunity to discuss barriers and concerns in the safe-space setting of the focus group, with most reporting that they had not been asked for their opinion in this way before.

Some reported that, when invited to gender equality events, they felt uncomfortable entering predominantly female spaces, questioning whether they should participate and wondering if they "have a right" to an opinion.

Some expressed the view that men often don't see themselves as directly affected by gender equality issues and can be oblivious to the barriers faced by women.

Practical barriers such as time constraints were highlighted, as well as the nature of mandatory gender equality training contributing to a sense of fatigue and reluctance to engage.

Finally, some participants argued that gender equality discussions often focus too much on problems rather than on positive progress. A few said they felt that some gender equality discussions are framed from feminist perspectives and that this made it difficult for them to feel included or fully connected to the conversation.

What men said about Apathy, Fear, and Lack of Awareness

In their own words

People are terrified of asking questions, of being cancelled for saying the wrong things

Some men are nervous about this topic

I haven't been asked my opinion before

It's been great to have a safe space to discuss these issues today

Men don't engage in wellbeing stuff either. We need to look at the broader theme of engagement – taking a community approach

EDI has become all-encompassing. There is a bit of fatigue..... mandatory training, various events, how do we make this more relevant for men?

EDI is written and framed from feminist perspectives this is a very challenging zone for some men to be involved in

When I looked in the door I was the only man in there – I debated whether I should go in there or not

Just trying to keep up with language and social norms is hard, things are changing so much

It's a frustrating loop - you want to be involved but you don't have time

"Death by PowerPoint" doesn't work. In fact, it puts a lot of people off

Men don't feel as affected by this. We often take it for granted that we don't experience the same issues. We can be oblivious to the barriers faced by women

A lot of men are just not interested

EDI is not just a gender-based issue

It's nice to talk openly [referring to the focus group discussion], it's not something I have had the opportunity to do before

There is a negative focus on gender equality and EDI. It's all about what are the problems and how do we solve them.. Should we concentrate more on the positives – reframe the focus?

You find yourself involved in something that you're not allowed to disagree with – you can't challenge, you have to agree, to go along with it

I'm quite nervous even though I know this is right. I grew up in a different world. I worry will I say the wrong thing and offend everyone

WORK ACTIVITIES AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

This theme covered how gender equality is integrated into daily work activities, academia and career progression. Participants were asked how gender equality is integrated into research, teaching, curriculum development, career development and promotional opportunities within their HEI. Focus group questions also explored how the Athena Swan accreditation process is regarded, and the challenges faced in its implementation.

In response to these questions, many men cited time pressures, particularly in academia's research-heavy environment, as being a major barrier. It was highlighted that involvement in gender equality and EDI initiatives has to compete with other professional demands.

Some emphasised that for men to invest time in gender equality and EDI, it needs to resonate personally. For example, some men shared that their personal experiences, such as raising daughters, motivated them to engage more in these initiatives. Others remarked that it would help if engagement was linked to tangible rewards, such as career advancement.

Participants also discussed the need for gender equality and EDI to be embedded more deeply into curricula. One participant suggested that EDI should be included in formal teaching qualifications to bridge these gaps and encourage more widespread participation.

Participants also discussed challenges in terms of entrenched ideas about masculinity and a perceived generational or professional divide, where EDI is often seen as the domain of early-career staff, women or professional roles more than academic roles.

What men said about Work Activities and Career Development

In their own words

Are men siloed in their professional and personal lives? If you're not used to talking about it, or if you don't have daughters or if you don't work in the area?

A lot of men have a lot of (personal) stuff going on – this needs to be respected

People will pull out of being involved if they feel it is not being rewarded through a promotion

Athen Swan is seen as the destination, not about changing the entire culture and mindset

There is a hugely time-pressured environment in academia in relation to research outputs

You can theoretically agree with something but that doesn't mean that you will invest your time in it. It has to really resonate with you. It has to be marketed well to different groups and motivations

Any EDI embedding into the curriculum has to be underpinned by values that act as a compass point as we try to navigate this. And then what do these values look like when they turn into behaviours?

We need to incorporate this into the curricula more. We can influence young men in our role, so we should do what we can

There are rubrics for cross-linking, and criteria relating to research projects. Increasingly, EDI is being brought in to these types of criteria

It's very hard to embed EDI learning outcomes into modules, you need to put a rubric in place with clear learning objectives

Some people feel "I'm in favour of EDI but just not in my module" It's a form of EDI nimbiism

EDI should be made part of the Diploma in Teaching and Learning

The biggest divide is between academic and professional staff, not between men and women

There seems to be age divide – EDI is something that is done by women and young people

CONCLUSION

The aim of the toolkit is to provide HEIs with the knowledge and tools they need to build collaborative responses which effect real change. Primarily, it is intended for those in positions to empower and enable male engagement in gender equality, such as leaders, school/department heads, EDI Units and HR departments. It is a guide, rather than a rigid framework, and aims to stimulate discussion, encourage innovative approaches, and facilitate collaborative problem-solving. It presents a proposed model with key planning and engagement components, and shares proven strategies for effectively engaging men in this crucial work. It also offers practical suggestions to men on how to get more involved in gender equality efforts.

The consortium recognises that inequality affects various minority groups and that systemic change requires the participation of all academic and professional staff. In this context, while the toolkit concentrates on men's role in gender equality, it offers principles and strategies that are applicable to broader equality issues. Much of the guidance and suggestions in the toolkit can be used to promote engagement by all genders in other equality areas, such as disability, ethnicity, socio-economic group or sexual orientation.

However, it's crucial to recognise that each equality ground is characterised by distinct and complex challenges, for which tailored solutions are required. Further research is needed to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of obstacles to engagement in these broader equality issues and to inform the development of effective strategies to promote engagement.

Ultimately, the optimal approach to achieving equality is through an integrated approach, where all EDI considerations are woven into the core of HEI culture, strategy, policies, and practices, rather than treated as separate topics. An integrated approach avoids a "hierarchy of exclusion" and helps to foster a sense of belonging, ensuring that all individuals feel valued and respected regardless of their background or experiences.

To achieve meaningful and sustainable change, men, in all their diversity, must be partners and champions. Their involvement is not merely beneficial; it is essential. Without their engagement, the goal of gender equality within HEIs and broader society remains unattainable.

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