



## **Inequality in Irish Higher Education *Research Symposium***

### **Opening address**

#### **Neoliberalism and New Managerialism: Promoting market-led subjectivities in Higher Education**

*Professor Kathleen Lynch, UCD*

Drawing on empirical research on primary, secondary and higher education for *New Managerialism* (Lynch, Grummell and Devine, 2012, 2015) and on data from over 100 interviews and visits across ten Irish higher education institutions for the *Equality in Working, Learning and Caring* project (2014-17), // [www.irc-equality.ie](http://www.irc-equality.ie), this paper explores the ways in which new managerialism operates as a political project heralding a new mode of governance in higher education. It explores the new type of moral regulation operating within Irish higher education as colleges are modelled on businesses and disciplined through market mores. In adopting business models of operation, universities and colleges move increasingly from centres of learning and disinterested scholarship to service delivery operations with productivity targets.

The impact of the new normative order is explored. Through the operationalisation of new managerialism, universities do not just service capitalism; they emulate its core norms and values. Mediating education through business models of operation legitimates the pursuit of individualised economic self-interest and credentials among students, and career interests among staff.

Moreover, a focus on market efficiency over-rides and weakens other values. First order social and moral values are reduced to second-order principles: trust, integrity, honesty, care, equality, collegiality, compassion and solidarity are subordinated to regulation, control and competition. In this climate, student and staff idealism to work in the public interest is diminished. The focus moves from regarding higher education as a right to seeing it in terms of its market potential. Within higher education, the glorification of competition means the amoral has become the necessitous: documenting oneself in terms of citations, impact, indices has become an industry in itself.

## Session 1: Issues for staff: precarious work, gender, care and class

### **Creating Organisational Change? The Recommendations of the HEA Expert Group on Gender Inequality in Irish Higher Education Institutions**

*Pat O'Connor, UL, FESTA, visiting Professor Geary Institute and member of the Expert Group for the HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Higher Education 2016*

The National Review on Gender Equality in Irish Higher Educational Institutions (June 2016) has four important characteristics: its recommendations are **evidence based** (drawing on a wide range of research); they are **systemic** (directed at HEIs, HEA, research funding agencies, Government Departments and other stakeholders); they are **implementable** (in the sense that performance is linked to funding with time lines) and **radical** (including demonstrable experience of leadership in advancing gender equality as a criterion for senior appointments; mandatory quotas based on the flexible cascade model and a 40% quota for those at full professor level). The process involved face-to-face consultations with a wide range of stakeholders in addition to an online survey completed by roughly one in five of all staff in HEIs. The review, which was chaired by Maire Geoghegan-Quinn included Prof Paul Walton, York; Prof Helen Peterson (Uppsala); Prof Pat O'Connor (UL) and Ryan Shanks (Accenture) supported by a secretariat from the HEA. In addition to briefly outlining some of the 61 key recommendations, and presenting key data on UCD, Pat O'Connor will also reflect on the conditions which facilitate 'best practice' in HEIs globally and will critically evaluate the recommendations in these terms.

### **Knowledge Workers of the World Unite? Work Practices and Career Aspirations among Postdoctoral Researchers in Irish Universities**

*Dr. Andrew Loxley, Dr. Aidan Seery & Dr. John Walsh, TCD*

This paper reports on a project aimed at examining the work practices and career aspirations of postdoctoral researchers in higher education in Ireland. This group of academic workers has been assigned a significant role in the development of research capacity in the European Higher Education Area but policy implementation has been slow and promised career paths and prospects have not yet materialised. The project employed survey and interview methods and the analysis of the survey data constitutes the core of the paper. Some of the key findings include the positive disposition of postdoctoral researchers towards work practices and the 'products' of their work in higher education while at the same time experiencing profound insecurity caused by fluid and precarious contractual relations. The paper concludes with the recommendation that more is done to enact the policy aspirations for this crucial group in higher education.

## **Precarity, Gender, and Care: A View from the Neoliberal Academy**

*Dr. Mariya Ivancheva and Kathryn Keating*

Based on over fifty in-depth interviews with women across higher education in Ireland, this paper explores how women are affected by the neoliberal reforms of higher education and the interplay of precarity, care and gender. Neoliberalism has had destructive effects on academic labour, and a generation of young scholars who enter the job-market with minimum income but under maximum pressure for visibility are faced with flexibility and recurrent migration. While much of the research on gender in academia have focused on tenured staff and senior management (Acker 2006; O'Connor 2014), there has been relatively little reflection on the new divisions between an ever tinier elite of permanent academics and a reserve army of workers with short, low paid, hyper-flexible contracts. This phenomenon is not exclusive to women, yet women are over-represented in part-time and fixed-term appointments, in a societal context in which women remain the default carers and care work is systematically undermined.

Our data shows that two distinct 'ideal type' career tracks have emerged among academic women, both of which are far from ideal in reality: while some are pressed to seek serial employment abroad severing social and professional ties at a given locality, others opt out of transnational mobility but remain trapped into zero-hour teaching and precarious research arrangements. Those who seek to balance care responsibilities with an academic career, do so in the context of ever-declining welfare regimes at home. Those who seek transnational mobility as the new 'ideal', face a trajectory that is hostile to care of dependent others, and requires them to sacrifice locality and the familiar commitments in return for loneliness and growing lack of care for the self. The appearance of the two distinct career tracks reflects a 'care ceiling' (Lynch 2010) that ignores the lived reality of workers for whom the creation and maintenance of affective bonds are central to development and wellbeing.

## **Session 2: Students' Experience of Globalisation, the 'Knowledge-Based Economy' and Access programmes**

### ***"It doesn't really matter which university you attend": The Stratification of Student Mobility Programmes and Implications for Equality in Irish Higher Education***

*Dr. Aline Courtois, Centre for Global Higher Education, Institute of Education, University College London*

Irish higher education institutions have renewed their efforts to increase student participation in international mobility programmes. Yet by focussing on numbers, they often fail to consider the implications for equality. The important questions 'who goes where?' and 'how do they benefit from it?' are rarely asked.

Through a discourse focussed on soft skills and employability, some universities claim that students will benefit from any experience abroad, no matter where they go, and no matter what they study while abroad. On closer examination, this is not the case. With expansion in numbers comes a marked stratification of mobility programmes and destinations. These are differentiated not only in terms of prestige but also in terms of allocated resources, access, academic relevance and overall

quality. In other words, stratification is also a product of institutional practices as these are driven by competing demands (position on the market, prestige, quantitative strategic goals, financial constraints). Strong differences emerge between the more prestigious non-EU exchange programmes on the one hand, and 'second best' programmes, which have largely absorbed the increased outgoing numbers, on the other. Outcomes vary as a result, with some students drawing more benefits from the experience compared to others. Situations where the exchange is made compulsory, while academic benefits are limited and support insufficient, are particularly problematic for underprivileged students.

University exchange programmes offer another access to the global higher education market and some of its benefits. It is a stratified space and an arena, where privileged students may deploy strategies aimed at gaining a positional advantage, while others are either excluded, or limited in their choices.

This paper is drawn from a study of students' international strategies at third level conducted from 2014 to 2016 under the *National University of Ireland Dr Garret FitzGerald Post-doctoral Fellowship in the Social Sciences*.

**Educating for a knowledge economy:  
the affective and performing self in a Neoliberal Era**

*Dr. Luciana Lolich, UCD*

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have been assigned a key role in promoting national economic growth in a competitive global economy. In turn, students have been reconfigured as performing subjects, who engage in higher education as a way of securing their future, avoiding the risk of poverty and unemployment and contributing to the national and global economy. This transformation of the student as an economic performing citizen has happened within a discourse of risk and uncertainty and the marketisation of HEIs with a focus on 'performativity' in a globalised knowledge economy. This paper examines the factors involved in reconstructing the new educational subject of higher education and how this discourse of performativity is contested, mediated and transformed by students. Using a governmentality framework, it locates the conditions of possibility for the student within dominant policy articulations of the global knowledge economy and emerging rationalities of risk and uncertainty. The research methodology involved a large-scale survey of three major HE institutions in Ireland. Questionnaires were completed by 4265 students. The results show that the student, as an economic performing citizen, actively goes through a process of self-capitalization, making choices and investing in higher education. However, not all students feel confident and secured in their choices; many feel the future is uncertain. Students spoke about the struggle to perform in HE while trying to earn a living and care for dependents. Also, the narrative to perform is mediated and resisted by the students' own educational and care needs: they are expecting to be better cared for in colleges than they are currently; and their presumed future, and for some, current lives are not only defined in terms of occupational goals but in terms of care and nurturing (affective) relations.

## **Race and racial stratification infiltrates nice places like higher education institutions**

*Dr. Ebum Joseph, UCD*

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in modern states which are both racialised and hierarchical in their organisation (Ahmed, 2012)<sup>i</sup>. This paper outlines lessons from a recent racial stratification study that compared the disparity in labour market outcomes for different groups of migrants in the Irish labour market. It offers insights for higher education on how racial discrimination works institutionally. The paper also draws on a considerable body of studies which highlight the tensions experienced by those categorised as 'other' within HEI in terms of staffing, promotion, and student experience and participation. It cautions against the colour blind approach to racial difference in HEI which silences people who present as visibly different while they are impacted by the racial order within the system. The pervasiveness of implicit bias, group favouritism, inferiorisation of difference and the harshness of the learning environment for those at the bottom of the racial ladder is also discussed. This paper argues that the HEI is complicit in the proliferation of inequality by enabling the [re]production of the racial order which disempowers not only those othered but also the dominant population. Despite the increasing diversity of students in lecture rooms, this paper concludes that the HEI is still a white place of white privilege that invisibilises difference.

## **Experiences of members of the Travelling Community in Higher Education**

*Hannagh McGinley, NUIG*

Hannagh McGinley, a member of the Irish Travelling community, is a PhD candidate in the School of Education, NUI Galway. Hannagh is a Traveller activist and Community Development practitioner, an anti-racist educator and she also has a background in post-primary school teaching. She is currently employed as a Teaching Assistant in the School Of Education in NUI Galway and she is also the Chief Academic Traveller Coordinator of a 12 week module on Travellers, Rights and Nomadism in UCD and in NUI, Galway.

Hannagh will speak about her own experiences at third level i.e. wearing a "white mask", coming out and learning the etiquette. She will also refer to the anecdotal experiences of other Travellers that have gone to third level.

## **Gender in student access and participation to Irish higher education**

*Dr. Bernie Grummell and Rose Ryan (Maynooth University)*

This presentation will explore how gender is situated as part of the complex of enduring and deeply embedded inequalities in student access and participation to higher education, exploring the technologies of measurement used and the implications for student access and support services

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<sup>i</sup> Ahmed, Sara (2012) *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham and London: Duke University Press