

**Evaluation of the second phase of the World Programme for Human
Rights Education**
pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 27/12

Response of Ireland

April 2014

A. Human rights education in higher education

1. Policies and related implementation measures

In January 2011, the Government of Ireland published the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, which recognises ‘that higher education has an important role to play in preparing students [...] for their role as citizens, and that undergraduate education should explicitly address the generic skills required for effective engagement in society’.¹ Identifying ‘engaging with the wider society’ as a core role of higher education, it also recommends that ‘engagement with the wider community must become more firmly embedded in the mission of higher education institutions’.² Following the publication of the *National Strategy*, and taking its direction from the United Nations’ World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE), the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Ireland’s National Human Rights Institution which is now known as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), published an overview of the current provision of human rights education across the Irish education sector, *Human Rights Education in Ireland: An Overview* (July 2011), to provide ‘an impetus and support’ for the development of an Irish national action plan for human rights education.³

Ireland would also like to provide information on equal access to education to provide a broader context. It is incumbent on higher education institutions in Ireland to uphold and protect the human rights of students and staff. Under the Equality Act 2004, the Equal Status Act 2000, and the Disability Act 2005, higher education providers are required to prevent discrimination against students and staff, and to accommodate the needs of those with disabilities. The statutory responsibilities of Ireland’s Higher Education Authority (HEA), as stipulated in the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971, include promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education.

¹ Department of Education and Skills, *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Dublin: DES, 2011), 56–57, <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf>.

² *Ibid.*, 74, 79.

³ Irish Human Rights Commission, *Human Rights Education in Ireland: An Overview* (Dublin: IHRC, 2011), 6–7, http://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/human_rights_education_in_ireland_an_overview.pdf.

Further to the establishment of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education in 2003, this aim has been advanced through national access plans, the latest of which, the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008–2013*, supported a rise in participation in higher education at national level as well as by students with disabilities.⁴

2. Teaching and learning processes and tools

As detailed in the IHRC’s *Human Rights Education in Ireland: An Overview*, a wide range of programmes and modules pertaining to human rights are on offer within Irish higher education.⁵ These include programmes concerned exclusively with human rights, such as the B.A. in Human Rights offered within the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies of the National University of Ireland, Galway, modules within law courses, and modules embedded in programmes across a wide range of disciplines, including nursing, medicine, education, geography, archaeology, music, religion, and political science.

3. Research

As noted by the United Nations’ WPHRE, through their research role, higher education institutions have a responsibility ‘to generate global knowledge to meet current human rights challenges, such as eradication of poverty and discrimination, post-conflict rebuilding, sustainable development and multicultural understanding’.⁶ Within Ireland, such research is supported by two dedicated centres for human rights—the Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights at University College Cork, and the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland, Galway—in addition to which a number of centres in Irish higher education institutions have a strong human rights focus, including Trinity College Dublin’s Centre for Post-Conflict Justice and University College Dublin’s Equality Studies Centre.⁷ Targeted funding for innovative research to support the mission of Irish Aid (the official development assistance programme of the Government of Ireland) and to develop the capacity of the higher education sector in Ireland and abroad for developmental research, has been provided under the Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education and Research Institutes, funded by Irish Aid and managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).⁸ Projects funded through this scheme have included ‘Global Development through Education: Enhancing Teacher Education and Educational Research through International Co-

⁵ See IHRC, *Human Rights Education in Ireland*, 164–179.

⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Plan of Action for the second phase (2010–2014) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education* (2010), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/PlanofActionforthesecondphase%282010-2014%29oftheWorldProgrammeforHumanRightsEducation%282010%29.aspx>.

⁷ See <http://www.ucc.ie/en/ccjhr/>; http://www.nuigalway.ie/human_rights/; <https://www.tcd.ie/cpcj/>; and <http://www.ucd.ie/esc/>.

⁸ See <https://www.irishaid.ie/what-we-do/how-our-aid-works/research/programme-for-strategic-cooperation/> and <http://www.heai.ie/en/funding/research-funding/programme-strategic-cooperation>.

operation’; ‘Transformative Education to Address Hunger, HIV/AIDS and Climate Change in Africa’; and ‘Doctoral Training for Development in Africa’. In addition, the Irish Research Council’s new scheme, ‘Research for Policy and Society’, will provide a mechanism through which Irish government departments and agencies can fund peer-reviewed academic research on questions which they pose in specific policy areas, potentially including human rights.

4. Learning environment

In accordance with their statutory responsibilities, all institutions have in place policies and procedures for addressing complaints about bullying and harassment, as well as codes of conduct and ethics policies. Support services in higher education institutions include disability, counselling, and health services, as well as online information services and pastoral care provided to students by personal tutors.

Gender equality

The Universities Act of 1997 and the Institutes of Technology Act of 2006 require Irish higher education institutions to promote gender-balance and equality of opportunity among students and staff, and to prepare and implement statements of policy in respect of equality, including gender-equality, across all of their activities. The HEA is charged with reviewing these policies. In addition, the Irish Research Council’s *Gender Strategy & Action Plan 2013–2020: Ensuring Excellence and Maximising Creativity and Innovation in Irish Research* aims to ensure gender-equality in the research arena.⁹ There is now a strong momentum to build on this firm foundation for gender-equality across Irish higher education, and in 2014 the U.K.’s Athena SWAN Charter was launched in Ireland in response to strong interest from the Irish higher education community.¹⁰ Aiming to effect cultural and systemic change in higher education institutions to support gender-equality, and recognising institutions that succeed in this endeavour, Athena SWAN promises to make a significant impact on the advancement of gender-equality in Irish higher education, which will also be supported through enhanced data-collection and analysis by the HEA in this area.

Suicide-prevention

While recognising that supporting the health and well-being of students and staff is the responsibility of individual higher education institutions, the HEA will participate in the new cross-departmental framework for the new ‘National Strategic Framework to Reduce Suicide in Ireland 2015–2020’ on behalf of the higher education sector, committing to working in partnership with the National Office for Suicide Prevention and the Department of Health to encourage the coordination of suicide-prevention initiatives and research, develop national guidance for institutions in this area, and support the development of critical mass in research into suicide-prevention.

⁹ See http://research.ie/sites/default/files/irish_research_council_gender_action_plan_2013_-2020.pdf.

¹⁰ See <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charter-marks/athena-swan/>.

Student-participation in higher education policy-making

As stated in the IHRC's Human Rights Education in Ireland report, all higher education institutions in Ireland 'are required to have a number of student and staff representatives as members of the governing authority of the institution and the academic council', and 'within higher education, students are given a voice through students unions', as well as through class representatives 'who represent their fellow students' interests to their lecturers or department'.¹¹ In addition the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), launched by the HEA in partnership with the IUA, Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), provides a mechanism for first-year and final-year undergraduates and taught postgraduates to provide feedback on their learning-experience in higher education;¹² and through a series of seminars, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning is supporting higher education institutions' responsiveness to the data obtained through the ISSE on a disciplinary basis.¹³

In addition, the National Forum's biennial 'Teaching Heroes' awards scheme provides another mechanism for giving students a voice in the policy-discourse. The submissions to this national, student-led awards scheme, launched in 2014 in partnership with the USI, provide a rich source of qualitative data on the student-learning experience which will inform the design by the National Forum of a professional development framework for teachers in higher education. More broadly, the student-voice informs higher education policy-making across a range of initiatives. For example, as part of the research underpinning the DES-led 'transitions reform' process, a consultation with 5th and 6th-year students was undertaken in 2013, and this will be complemented by further research on students' experience of transitioning into higher education that is being commissioned by the National Forum.¹⁴ Through the USI, there is student-representation on the boards of the Higher Education Authority and the National Forum, as well as on a range of committees and at policy fora. The *Eurostudent Survey* of the social, economic and living conditions of higher education students, in which Ireland participates, provides a further mechanism through which student-feedback is garnered periodically, providing a rich repository of internationally comparable qualitative data on which policy-makers can draw.¹⁵

The HEA is establishing a working group on student-engagement, which will report on student participation in the governance of higher education institutions by mid-2015.

Student-participation in civic engagement

¹¹ IHRC, *Human Rights Education in Ireland*, 179.

¹² See <http://studentsurvey.ie/wordpress/>.

¹³ See <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/t-l-scholarship/closing-loop/>.

While Irish higher education institutions have, for many years, been active in promoting active citizenship among students and staff, the establishment in 2013 of Campus Engage Ireland as a new national network for the promotion of civic engagement as a core function of higher education institutions has provided a strong impetus for the ambition, articulated in the *National Strategy for Higher Education*, for ‘higher education institutions [...] to become more firmly embedded in the social and economic contexts of the communities they live in and serve’.¹⁶ Having grown out of an inter-institutional project led by the National University of Ireland, Galway and funded under the HEA’s SIF, Campus Engage Ireland is now based in the IUA and overseen by a Steering Committee drawn from across the Irish higher education sector. In June 2014, the Minister for Education and Skills launched the Campus Engage Charter for Civic and Community Engagement, under which the signatory institutions have committed to the promotion of civic and community engagement through their mission and strategy.¹⁷ Under the Charter, Irish higher education institutions commit, *inter alia*, to:

- Promoting civic and community engagement through community-based learning, community-based research, public scholarship and volunteering activities, and to aligning these activities with institutions’ overall teaching, research and outreach missions.
- Building a campus community imbued with civic culture.
- Contributing to the widening participation and lifelong learning agendas by promoting civic and community engagement, combating disadvantage and furthering the social inclusion mission of higher education.

B. Human rights training for civil servants, law enforcement officials and the military

1. Training policies and other related policies

- a) In 2010 the IHRC developed and began implementing the Human Rights Education and Training Project (HRETP) based on the UN World Programme for Human Rights Education. The training was provided by specialist trainers employed by the IHRC.

To encourage the embedding of the concept of such human rights training across the public service “Human Rights Champions” were identified across the wider Civil and Public Service.

An important element of the Project was the provision of “training for trainers” and in the Commission’s view this had the greatest impact on cultural change both at an individual and organisational levels. Trainers gained knowledge and

¹⁶ DES, *National Strategy*, 78. See also <http://www.campusengage.ie/>.

¹⁷ See <http://www.campusengage.ie/groups/presidents-irish-higher-education-sign-national-charter-civic-and-community-engagement>.

practical experience about where human rights fit into the training they already provide within their government departments, agencies or services.

- b) The B.A. in Applied Policing Programme which is delivered in modular format to Trainee Gardaí (Police) addresses issues with regard to respect of diversity and policing for intercultural and vulnerable communities.
- c) Specialised and tailored training has been provided by the HRETP to the Irish Prison Services, Defence Forces, Local Government, Revenue Commissioners, National Employers Rights Authority and Irish Naturalisation & Immigrant Service.

One of the e-learning tools provided by the project is a module on Human Rights, Custody Management and Policy. It is a pilot initiative which has been developed to reach multiple staff in An Garda Síochána and the Irish Police Service. This tool minimises legalese and has a practical focus on human rights, custody management and policing. The training is set within the relevant international, European and domestic human rights framework and promotes human rights principles throughout.

In 2013, the HRETP developed an intensive tailored pilot programme called Human Rights Training for Trainers with the Irish Prison Service College. This programme supports Trainers within the Irish Prison Service to deliver a 2 – 3 hour training pack for Prison Officers.

This human rights training course is offered to Trainers in the Irish Prison Service who do not need to have previous knowledge of human rights. The aims of the training are three-fold: (1) To provide an introduction to the human rights system that is relevant to Ireland, looking at human rights in Ireland, Europe and at the level of the United Nations, (2) To raise awareness of the main areas of focus for civil and public sector staff in relation to human rights and (3) To provide trainers with participatory human rights training methodologies and tools for use in the training environment

The HRETP has significant input into the overall programme of the United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI) annual course. The HRETP delivers 3 out of 10 days of this international course (2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014).

The UNSTI programme offers a ‘Training for Trainers’ focus and past participants have included a mixture of Irish Military and Peacekeeping personnel, international Military, Police and Diplomatic Core.

Many participants, some experienced trainers, have previous training in human rights. The course aims to build and expand on their knowledge of human rights,

peacekeeping and international humanitarian law, explore human rights in terms of their own work and practice, as well as a number of specific issues relating to these concepts and frameworks, such as power relations, vulnerable groups and gender issues.

- d) Section 42 of the IHREC Act 2014 creates an obligation on public bodies to take due account of human rights and equality in the course of their work and allows IHREC (formerly the IHRC) to provide support and, if warranted, to request that identified deficiencies be addressed in a review or action plan. This is an opportunity for IHREC to take a proactive approach and to work with public bodies to bring about real change, including in terms of cultural competence and customer service standards, that will have a real impact on the lives of persons whose rights need protection or vindication.

The Act also provides for codes of practice to be prepared by IHREC and signed into law by the Minister. The value of a code is that it goes beyond the letter of the law and provides guidance on best practice to avoid difficulties and breaches of duty.

C. Overall human rights education national efforts

1. Has a National Plan for Human Rights Education or a similar strategic document been developed? Please provide details.

No National Plan has been developed but IHREC, which is an independent statutory body, provides detailed information on the Human Rights Education and Training Programme. This includes copies of training guides produced for use by civil and public servants. The establishment of a multimedia platform and e-learning tools was also undertaken by IHREC as part of the project.¹⁸

2. How have you disseminated information on the World Programme for Human Rights Education in your country? Please provide details.

In 2013, an International Conference on Human Rights Education and Training for the Civil and Public Service was held in Dublin with over 100 participants. The conference was jointly organised by IHREC and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The conference focused on the themes of the World Programme for Human Rights as well as the following overall aims:

- Showcase and share good practice in human rights training for the Civil and Public Service, including law enforcement officials.

¹⁸ See <http://www.ihrec.ie/training/training/>

- Encourage and support the design and implementation of human rights training for Civil Servants, including law enforcement officials.¹⁹

3. Please indicate the main challenges to advancing human rights education in your country, both in the areas covered by the plan of action for the second phase and beyond, and opportunities for overcoming them.

The main challenges to advancing human rights education include resources, both staffing and financial, and ensuring that such training remains high on the agenda of diverse organisations especially when "Human Rights Champions" move on.

Opportunities include the new role with regard to Section 42 of the IHREC Act 2014 which creates an obligation on public bodies to take due account of human rights and equality in the course of their work. As mentioned above, this will allow the IHREC to provide support including training and, if warranted, to request that identified deficiencies be addressed in a review or action plan.

4. Information on the institution/department responsible for preparing this report, including contact details.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Human Rights Unit had primary responsibility for collating the response to this request. The Permanent Mission of Geneva can be contacted via email: genevapmhumanrights2@dfa.ie

¹⁹ A report of conference is attached: http://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/ihrc_post_conference_report_web.pdf