

Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is the SALI?

A: Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI).

The SALI is a new initiative run by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) aimed at taking positive action to accelerate gender equality goals and objectives in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ireland.

HEIs have been invited to submit applications for funding under the SALI to support activity aimed at achieving gender balance at the highest point on their academic career ladder, i.e. professor or senior lecturer level 3.

Q: How will it operate?

A: The Initiative is managed by the HEA, on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

HEIs will be invited to apply for funding through a Call for Applications (launching on 21st June). Following a competitive process based on the annual Call for applications from HEIs, the HEA will approve a defined number of new and additional senior academic leadership posts to successful HEIs. There will be a total of 45 such posts provided over a period of three years.

Q: How will the recruitment process work?

A: There are two phases to the process. The first phase involves an application from the HEIs to win funding for the posts from the HEA. The second phase involves an assessment process to determine who will take up the new posts under this initiative which will be undertaken by the HEI themselves. The HEI will utilise their own recruitment and appointment processes so that these posts are subject to the same high standards of any HEI appointment at this level in the institution. Only suitably qualified candidates shall be appointed.

Q: How does the HEA assessment of potential new posts work?

A: The HEI can submit up to three areas per application which present:

- clear evidence of significant gender under-representation in the area;

- the new appointment will have a significant impact within the faculty/department/functional unit and the HEI;
- where the addition of a new post would have a proportionate and effective outcome to achieve an accelerated and sustainable change within the institution.

Applications will be first reviewed by the HEA for eligibility, then sent for remote evaluation to an international Assessment Panel. The Assessment Panel will arrive at an overall judgement of standard and make final recommendations to the HEA. An independent audit processor will be present at the Assessment Panel meeting. The HEA's decision on whether to award a SALI post under this Initiative is final.

Q: What is meant by benchmarking and using international best practice to inform applications?

A: Institutions should seek to benchmark and use international best practice to inform their applications. While it is acknowledged that the HEA Expert Group recommendations and Gender Equality Taskforce actions are based on national and international best practice, HEIs may also wish to refer to best practice that they have identified in relation to their own HEI's situation.

Benchmarking where possible is also welcome, however this is in relation to informing their applications, it is not necessary for HEIs to have detailed benchmarking information in relation to the area in which they are requested posts as it is acknowledged that comparative data may be hard to obtain as it is only relatively recently that data such as this has started to be collected by HEIs.

Q: How many posts will be created?

A: It is envisaged that 45 senior academic leadership posts will be awarded to HEIs over three years to assist in accelerating gender balance at senior levels.

The first posts will be issued in 2019 to the HEIs and recruitment for suitable candidates to take up these posts will follow in 2020.

The timeframe for the first cycle of posts is:

- Call for applications issues to HEIs – **21st June 2019**
- Deadline for applications - **12:00, 18th October 2019**
- Announcement of outcome - **November 2019**

Q: How narrow or broad should HEIs define the area for the posts?

A: It is up to HEIs to determine the specificity of the posts that they apply for but HEIs should specify areas that are broad enough to ensure that there is a spread of candidates that can apply, and where they have a robust evidence base to demonstrate that there has been a significant under-representation of women in this area at the senior level.

Q: What is the SALI’s core objective?

A: The SALI aims to help achieve gender balance in the higher education sector, through the procurement of funds for new and additional senior academic leadership posts over and above what already exists in the system.

A key objective of the Initiative is to strengthen gender diversity at the senior academic leadership level within HEIs and to encourage the benefits that such diversity can deliver.

The initiative aims to attract outstanding applicants both from within the sector in Ireland and internationally.

The SALI will also assist in increasing the number of women involved in the decision-making processes in the institutions.

Q: Why do we need an initiative like this to help achieve gender equality?

A: The Initiative is based on a detailed evidence and research base comprising the 2016 HEA Expert Group Report and the Gender Equality Taskforce analysis.

There is a significant imbalance in female representation at professional level in universities in Ireland. The HEA’s [Higher Education Institutional Staff by Gender](#) report (2018), highlighted that in 2017 only 24% of Professor posts were held by women as compared to 51% women lecturers, an entry level for academic posts in the university sector.

The Minister of State for Higher Education established the Gender Equality Taskforce in November 2017, to identify significant measures that could accelerate progress in achieving gender equality in the Irish HEIs. The Taskforce was established to oversee a national system review of the recruitment and promotion policies and practices in place in higher education institutions, with a view to identifying good-practice and highlighting areas that needed improvement.

New data analysis conducted by the Gender Equality Taskforce, on the estimated rate of change for the future suggests that the adoption of a particular approach to recruitment and promotion, the “Flexible Cascade Model”¹, could take some 20 years to achieve gender balance at professor level in universities (i.e. minimum 40% female professors).

While, in Institutes of Technology, 45% of Lecturers were female in 2017, whereas only 31% of senior Lecturer 3 level posts were held by women. Analysis by the Taskforce suggests that it could take up to seven years to achieve 40% gender balance at this level. The SALI aims to accelerate this process.

¹ Where the proportion of women and men to be recruited or promoted to a certain level is based on the proportion of each at the career level directly below.

The HEA Expert Group and Gender Equality Taskforce both recognised that in addition to the organisational and culture change initiatives needed, a significant targeted positive action initiative was required in order to effect change within a reasonable timeframe at the highest academic level in both sectors.

International evidence is that the establishment of new and additional gender-targeted posts would be a proportionate and effective means to achieve rapid and sustainable change, and on that basis has the potential to be transformative for the higher education sector in terms of securing gender equality goals.

Q: How can the SALI help with organisational and cultural change?

A: The SALI will help with progressing systemic change of HEIs internal assessment process, helping to embed gender-proofing in HEI appointment procedures and practices.

Research has shown that a perceived lack of confidence in one's chance of success, which results in women not putting themselves forward for roles, is often not due to a lack of confidence in themselves, but rather a lack of confidence in the environment to judge them fairly.² Pre-existing subtle biases have been shown to affect the assessment of applications with a female name and the procedures for appointments³. The HEA Expert Group and the Gender Equality Taskforce have highlighted particular key areas for focus to help address this. The implementation of these by the HEIs will be taken into consideration as part of the SALI assessment process, thereby helping to embed the gender-proofing of appointment procedures and practices in the HEIs.

Therefore, the SALI will not only appoint new and additional senior leaders in areas where there is a significant under representation of women, but it is a signal to candidates that the HEI offering a SALI post has demonstrated their commitment to gender equality, through the provision of their Gender Action Plans and evidence that they are progressing their stated objectives and targets to achieve organisational and cultural change. The institution must also demonstrate plans for future developments in this area and outline the organisational and cultural initiatives in place to support the newly appointed staff. In this way, the SALI posts are also helping to bring about organisational and cultural change in HEIs.

Q: How inclusive is the SALI in regard to candidates past experience?

A: A key objective of the Initiative is to strengthen diversity at senior academic leadership level in HEIs given the benefits that increased diversity would be expected to generate for HEIs as set out in the report of the Gender Equality Taskforce. Consequently other capabilities and life experiences which have been acquired by applicants outside of the academic

² McKinsey and Co. (2010) *Women Matter* 2010, p11.

³ C.A. Moss-Racusin et al. (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favour male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109(41)16474-79 2012; van den Brink et al. (2010) Transparency in academic recruitment: a problematic tool for gender equality? *Organisation Studies* 31(11)1459-83; Nielsen, M.W. 2015 'Limits to meritocracy?'

environment (e.g. from the performance of caring responsibilities) can be taken into account in assessing candidates, in so far as they are of importance for the suitability, performance and capability of applicants to perform senior academic leadership roles in higher education and to underpin the achievement of increased diversity at that level.

Q: How much funding has been allocated for the SALI?

A: Funding allocated to these additional professorial posts in universities / senior lecturer 3 level posts in IoTs will be €2.8m in 2020, growing to €4.7m in 2021. When applying to the SALI, HEIs must outline the organisational and cultural supports that will be in place for the newly appointed SALI staff, including non-pay costs, administrative supports, research supports, etc. In accepting funding for a SALI post, HEIs must commit to providing these necessary supports for the posts.

Q: How are these new posts being funded?

A: These posts are new and additional to the sector, i.e. they are in addition to the existing Employment Control Framework (ECF), and they will be funded through new and additional funding provided specifically to help address the significant gender-imbalance among academic staff at senior levels.

Q: Is the funding permanent and ring-fenced?

A: Funding will be provided for a period of 10 years, after which the HEI must incorporate the costs associated with these additional posts into the HEI pay overall budget.

Funding for these posts is subject to the continued receipt of funding by the HEA from the Department of Education and Skills. In the event of such funding being reduced or discontinued, neither the Department of Education and Skills nor the HEA will be under any liability to provide funding or to compensate HEIs for any reduction or cessation of such funding.

The successfully appointed candidates (successful candidates to each post) will be permanent employees of the HEI, under its normal terms and conditions.

Q: Is the SALI for women only?

A: No, both women and men are eligible to apply. However the core objective of the SALI is to enhance underrepresented groups within the higher education sector, and the key objective of this Call is principally to attract outstanding female applicants both from within the sector currently and internationally in order to address their lack of representation at the top level in higher education institutions.

In exceptional circumstances, candidates who are in a minority or protected under Irish social legislation, or who also belong to an underrepresented minority in academic posts may be approved if the individual HEI can clearly articulate reasons worthy of legal protection as to why these candidates should be considered for funding under the SALI.

Q: Can men apply for these posts?

A: Yes, men can apply for these posts, in exceptional circumstances. The SALI is aimed primarily at supporting significantly underrepresented groups in the higher education sector, and for this Call the priority for the new and additional roles will be highly qualified female candidates from within the sector in Ireland and internationally. However, in exceptional circumstances, male candidates who are in a minority or protected under Irish social legislation, or who also belong to an underrepresented minority in academic posts may be approved if the institution can clearly articulate reasons worthy of legal protection as to why they should be considered.

Q: Many other groups are underrepresented in our HEI's, will the SALI provide them with an opportunity to participate in this scheme?

A: The SALI's core objective is to address female underrepresentation in HEIs through the addition of new posts which will be funded in areas where there is clear evidence of underrepresentation.

In exceptional circumstances, candidates who are in a minority or protected under Irish social legislation, or who also belong to an underrepresented minority in academic posts may be approved if the individual HEI can clearly articulate reasons worthy of legal protection as to why these candidates should be considered for funding under the SALI.

Q: Are these posts 'token positions' for women?

A: No, these posts will be subject to the same normal high level of strict institutional assessment and processes as for any other professor or senior lecturer level 3 posts in the HEIs. Any candidate who is appointed to a SALI supported position must have the requisite skills, qualifications and academic experience as would be required currently for comparable senior academic leadership roles in the HEIs. These new and additional posts differ only in that they will be targeted at areas where there is a significant evidence of an underrepresentation of women.

After a period of austerity, where we had an Employment Control Framework (ECF) on staff numbers while at the same time the numbers of students coming into third level were increasing, HEIs are in need of new and additional staff at senior levels. The Government has recognised this need and responded with 45 new and additional posts that will be funded in areas where there is a significant under-representation of women, thereby helping to address

two important issues in HEIs, the need for more staff and the need to increase the numbers of women at senior levels in the HEIs.

Q: Is there a risk that substandard women will end up getting these posts?

A: No, only applicants who are suitably qualified will be appointed. If applicants do not meet the normal high level of strict institutional assessment and competition rules for appointment at Professorship/SL3 level, then appointment will not be made.

Internationally, the experience in Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands was that in running a targeted initiative to attract women to their professor posts, their own University Deans were so impressed with the calibre of talented women that applied, that they pooled their own money to secure an additional three candidates over and above the original ten posts that had been advertised. Talented women are out there.

Q: Are men who are not eligible to apply under the exceptional circumstances criteria being disadvantaged by this initiative?

A: No, all the same opportunities that were available to these men before this initiative was launched are available to them still. The SALI posts are new and additional over and above what was already in the system.

Q: Will the posts be evenly distributed across all HEIs?

A: Each HEI can put forward up to three areas per application to be considered for new posts under this Initiative.

In addition to the quality assessment of the applications, posts within the SALI will be awarded with consideration to Institutional, faculty/department/functional unit, and geographical spread.

There will be a total of 15 (45 over 3 years) senior academic leadership initiative posts provided across sectors (e.g. university and institute of technology).

Q: How will the HEA and Department of Education and Skills assess the success of this initiative?

A: An evaluation of the Initiative will be conducted before the commencement of cycle two to examine its effectiveness.

This evaluation will be conducted at the institutional, sectoral and national levels.

Q: Why are women not naturally progressing to professorship posts in higher education?

A: The reason why women are not to be found in the same proportion as men in the most senior positions is not because women are not talented or driven enough to fill these roles, it is because numerous factors within HEIs, conscious and unconscious, cultural and structural, mean that women face a number of barriers to progression, which are not experienced to the same degree by their male colleagues; systematic barriers in the organisation and culture within higher education institutions mean that talent alone is not always enough to guarantee success. (REF: See discussion, HEA (2016) *Report of the Expert Group: HEA National Review on Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions* p. 14 -18.)

Q: Why are these new and additional SALI posts only being offered at professor and senior lecturer level 3 and not at the other levels of the career pipeline?

A: Analysis of recruitment trends by the Gender Equality Taskforce highlighted that rate of change, over the period 2013 – 2017, at the most senior grades is slower than at other grades.

Other countries have been actively working on trying to address gender inequality for longer than Ireland, but they still have a significant underrepresentation of women at the professor level (e.g. in 2016 women professors represented 24% in France; 23% in Germany; and 21% in Switzerland). This highest point on the career structure seems to be particularly problematic to change, which may in part be because there is a very low turnover of staff as they are permanent roles.

In 2017 in Ireland, there were c. 530 professors in the system and data analysis conducted by the Gender Equality Taskforce, estimated that annually only c50 posts became available for appointment/renewal. Therefore, the amount of change that is currently possible in the system is very limited/restricted, e.g. even if all these posts were won by women every year from now on, it could still take over 6 years to reach gender balance at this level. Therefore, a significant targeted positive action initiative such as an injection of new and additional posts was required in order to accelerate the change possible.

Q. How many female candidates apply for professorships and what is the rate of success?

A. Per the report of the Gender Equality Taskforce published in 2018, in the university sector, over the period 2013-17, 32% (37 out of 114) of applicants for the promotion to Professor were female and 29% (17 out of 59) were successful (i.e. 68% of applicants were male and 71% of successful applicants were male). However, success rates for female and male candidates were broadly comparable, at 46% and 55% respectively. (Please note that these statistics are a rough guide and not an absolute figure, as not all the data was available to the taskforce.)

Q. If a HEI is recruiting a new president, should this post be reserved for a female candidate?

A. The Gender Equality Taskforce recommended specific action around the recruitment of a new president. In planning for a new president, the governing authority will ensure that measures to promote gender equality within the search and selection process (as well as documenting the gender balance in the applicant pool, and at each stage of the selection process), are undertaken.

Q: The SALI apart, what are the HEA doing to address this wider systemic issue?

A: The [HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions \(2016\)](#) was an important first step in highlighting the gender inequality that exists at senior academic levels within HEIs, and set out recommendations for stakeholders across the system in order to bring about organisational and cultural change.

The HEA publish annual staff statistics by gender, in the [Higher Education Institutional Staff by Gender](#) (2018) report it was highlighted that in 2017 only 24% of Professor posts were held by women as compared to 51% women Lecturers, an entry level for academic posts in the university sector.

The HEA has oversight for implementation of the Gender Equality Taskforce Action Plan (2018-2020), which encompasses a suite of initiatives to bring about sustainable organisational change and to empower a culture of gender equality in the HEI's for all staff, academic and professional, as well as management and support staff at all levels. In particular:

- The establishment of a *Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality* in the HEA will be a key enabler of this and in particular will ensure sustainable change by providing centralised support for the institutions, sharing of good practice, and funding for innovative organisational and cultural change initiatives nationally.
- Ambitious targets for the proportion of academic and professional, management and support staff of each gender to be in senior positions in 1, 3 and 5 years will be agreed with the HEA and monitored annually through the Strategic Dialogue process. Each HEI will be held accountable for achieving their targets and performance will be incentivised through funding incentives or consequences as appropriate, to ensure progress is constant and considerable.
- Attainment of [Athena SWAN](#) certification is an important part of this Action Plan. Engaging with the Athena SWAN process has been transformative for HEIs, according to stakeholder feedback to the Gender Equality Taskforce. All seven universities have now achieved institutional bronze awards, as well as the Dublin Institute of Technology, Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology, Carlow. The other IOTs are also starting the process of applying and the sector has issued a [Gender & Diversity Statement](#). It is a key aim of government to ensure that Irish HEIs have the necessary support to engage fully with Athena SWAN and be ambitious so that they can work towards obtaining a Silver, and eventually a Gold, level award.