

Evaluation Report of Senior Academic Leadership Initiative

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1. Executive Summary

In 2019, the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI), a positive action initiative, was launched by the HEA on behalf of DFHERIS. This aimed to help achieve gender equality of outcome in the higher education (HE) sector, by the creation of new and additional senior academic posts. These posts would be targeted at senior academic leadership level in HEIs – which translated to professor in universities and senior lecturer 3 (SL3) in the technological sector. These posts were designed to be new and additional to the sector – above the Employment Control Framework (ECF) targets for each HEI and funded through incremental funding provided specifically to improve gender balance among senior staff at academic levels. A total of 45 posts were proposed in 2019; to date there have been two SALI calls, with 20 awards made under Cycle 1 and 10 awards made under Cycle 2, resulting in a total of 30 posts awarded to date.

The overall purpose of this independent review of the SALI initiative is to assess overall effectiveness, value for money and impact of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative. Ultimately it seeks to evaluate the potential of SALI to contribute to systemic change around gender equality in higher education in Ireland. The review specifically explores (a) SALI call process and awarding of posts (b) HEI experience of recruitment, appointment process and integration of SALI posts and (c) the experience of SALI post holders. This evaluation report seeks to make recommendations on the future of SALI in terms of next steps and improvements in implementation.

Key findings from the evaluation report demonstrate that the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative to date, has made a significant contribution to accelerating progress in gender

equality in Irish higher education. Within the 30 SALI Awards made to date – there have been 23 to the university sector, 6 to the technological sector and 1 to a college. The majority (24) of the SALI awards have been in STEMM disciplines but there were also 5 awards in AHSSBL areas and 1 award in Other disciplines. Process auditors for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 were satisfied by the fairness, gender balance, transparency, decision making and standards of the International Awards Approval Committees. HEI feedback to SALI evaluation survey was broadly positive about the SALI call process and awarding of posts – in terms of the calibre and credentials of the International Assessment Committee, the application criteria, application feedback and information available.

The HEI experience of the SALI post awards has been broadly positive, despite some ‘learning curves’ on how to best implement SALI recruitment, appointment and integration successfully. The majority of HEIs are very positive about the calibre of SALI appointments and they appreciate their contribution to teaching, research and broader leadership culture and decision making within the HEI. The individual HEIs have all submitted reports which confirm that the institutional SALI recruitment process was designed with gender equality, gender balance and mitigation of gender bias in mind. Some HEIs mentioned that the SALI process had already led to ‘positive externalities’ with the overall HEI culture, where other recruitment processes are now being held to higher ‘gender equality standards’ than previously, and a new norm around ‘gender equality’ within HEI recruitment processes is being established.

There were some learning curve aspects for HEIs in general around (a) the need to define the SALI role in broad enough terms to secure a strong pool of applicants (b) the time and resources needed for recruitment and (c) the time, resourcefulness and preparation

needed to ensure successful contract negotiation and post-holder integration into the institutional culture.

The experience of the SALI appointed post-holders has been broadly positive and fulfilling. The majority of the SALI post-holders have relished the opportunity to tackle a senior academic role in Irish higher education, whether they are international candidates or moving within Ireland. Some were positive about explicitly being known as 'SALI post holders' but others were neutral or negative and did not want perceptions of their role to be limited by the funding rationale behind their appointment. In a similar way, some were strong champions of gender equality and happy to drive this mission within their HEIs, while others were willing to participate in gender equality initiatives but only at the same level as other (male) colleagues.

In terms of overall effectiveness, value for money and impact, the HEIs and SALI post holders both endorse the strong contribution that the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative has already made to accelerating progress towards gender equality in Irish higher education.

This independent evaluation of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) recommends that DFHERIS and the HEA continue to invest in this positive action. This would mean investing in a third cycle, which would include funding the 7 'reserve' posts from Cycle 2 and an additional 8 posts, bringing the total to 45 posts. In addition, this evaluation recommends that the SALI scheme continues to focus on professor /senior lecturer 3 level in the short term.

This independent evaluation recommends that DFHERIS and the HEA consider awarding the next cycle of SALI positions, within an agreed time frame. In Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, the SALI funding has been ‘ring-fenced’ despite delays in making the SALI appointments – because the HEIs have found that the overall recruitment, selection, appointment, negotiation of these high calibre appointees can take additional time and resources. This is a consequence of the ambitious objective of the SALI scheme and. It is hoped that the learnings from the first two cycles will mean that HEIs are conscious of the time and resources needed to put high quality SALI post-holders in position.

Finally, it is recommended that the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative is leveraged fully in conjunction with other gender equality initiatives (e.g. the HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the appointment of Vice Presidents for EDI (or equivalent) in every HEI, institutional Gender Equality Plans, and Athena Swan awards for every HEI in terms of sustainable systemic change. SALI has already been cited by the European Commission¹ as evidence of Ireland’s higher education sector tackling gender under-representation, in terms of ‘getting the incentives right’² to drive systemic change in gender equality in higher education. This ground-breaking programme can be a powerful leverage to turning aspirations about gender balance into a reality for Irish higher education at a national level.

¹ European Commission (2021). *SHE Figures. Gender in Research and Innovation – Statistics and Indicators*.

² Hafner-Burton, E. M., & Pollack, M. A. (2009). Mainstreaming gender in the European Union: Getting the incentives right. *Comparative European Politics*, 7, 114-138.

2. Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) Background

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) **National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (2016)**³ was the first report highlighting the gender inequality that existed at senior academic leadership levels within HEIs in Ireland. The HEA Expert Group report outlined key recommendations for higher education institutions (HEIs), the HEA, research funding agencies and other stakeholders. However, despite the publication of the HEA Expert Group report, progress in gender equality (at senior academic levels) remained slow.

In 2017, the Minister of State for Higher Education established the Gender Equality Taskforce⁴ to identify significant measures (drawing on the Expert Group Report) **that could accelerate progress in achieving Gender Equality in Irish HEIs**. The Gender Equality Taskforce developed an action plan aimed at accelerating change in gender equality within the higher education sector. This taskforce identified a suite of actions including the establishment of a national Centre of Excellence for gender equality (now the Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in the HEA), the appointment of Vice Presidents for EDI in every HEI, and encouraging every HEI to apply for Athena Swan awards.

³ Higher Education Authority (2016) *Report of the Expert Group: HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions*. (Dublin: HEA)

⁴ Higher Education Authority (2017). *Gender Action Plan 2018-2020. Accelerating Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions*.

A report on Higher Education Institution Staff Profiles by Gender highlighted that in 2019, only 26% of professorships in universities were held by women, as compared to 52% of women Lecturers, an entry level for academic posts in the university sector⁵. This indicated a systemic imbalance in female representation at professorial level in universities. Data analysis conducted by the Gender Equality Taskforce in 2017 on the estimated rate of change for the future suggested that the adoption of the 'Flexible Cascade Model'⁶ approach alone (as recommended by the HEA Expert Group in 2016⁷), could take some 20 years to achieve gender balance at professor level (i.e. minimum of 40% female professors). **It was concluded that this rate of change did not address in a timely way the structural imbalance in female representation at top levels in universities.**

At the same time, as noted in the SALI Call document in 2020, in the technological sector, 46% of lecturers (an entry level grade) were female but only 32% of senior lecturer 3 grades were female⁸. Analysis by the Gender Equality Taskforce in 2017 showed that it could take up to seven years to achieve gender balance if there was reliance on the 'Flexible Cascade Model'. **It was proposed that targeted and proportionate action should be taken to accelerate the achievement of gender equality objectives.** This was

⁵ Higher Education Authority (2020). *Higher Educational Institutional Staff by Gender Report*.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Higher Education Authority (2016). *Report of the Expert Group: HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions*. (Dublin: HEA)

⁸ Higher Education Authority (2020). *Higher Educational Institutional Staff by Gender Report*.

consistent with other Government strategies like the National Strategy for Women and Girls⁹ and the Equality Budgeting Initiative¹⁰.

In 2019, the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI), was launched by the HEA on behalf of DFHERIS. This aimed to help achieve gender equality of outcome in the HE sector by the creation of 45 new and additional senior academic posts. These posts would be targeted at the most senior academic grades in HEIs – which translated to professor in universities and senior lecturer 3 (SL3) in the technological sector, including technological universities. These new posts were to be funded through incremental funding provided specifically to improve gender balance among senior staff at academic levels. In 2019, it was proposed that there should be 45 SALI posts created to help accelerate gender equality in Irish higher education and there have been 30 SALI posts awarded to date.

The key objective of this SALI initiative was to attract outstanding female applicants both from within the sector and internationally. It was also hoped that this initiative would increase the number of women involved in decision-making in higher educational institutions, as advocated by the EU Commission Strategy on Promoting Equality in Decision Making¹¹. Systemic change around equality of gender is complicated and requires shifts in cultural ‘norms’ and expectations over time. Research has shown that a perceived lack of confidence in one’s chance of success, which results in women not

⁹ Department of Justice (2017). *National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020* – creating a better society for all.

¹⁰ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2017). *Equality Budgeting- Proposed Next Steps in Ireland*. Staff Paper: Sarah Swaine.

¹¹ European Commission (2022). *Gender Equality in Decision Making*.

putting themselves forward in roles, is often not due to lack of confidence in themselves, but rather a lack of confidence in the environment to judge them fairly¹². Pre-existing subtle biases have been shown to affect the assessment of applications with a female name and procedures for appointment^{13 14 15}.

Under the SALI calls, proposals were invited from HEIs for the recruitment of additional posts at the highest academic grades within their institution. The three criteria for these new roles were (a) clear evidence of significant gender under- representation (b) proposal for how the post will have significant impact within the faculty/department/functional unit and the HEI and (c) support for how the new appointment would be a proportionate and effective means to achieve accelerated and sustainable change within the institution. SALI appointees are permanent employees of the HEI and the SALI post funding is provided by the HEA for 10 years, after which time the post must be incorporated into the HEI pay budget.

The SALI applications from HEIs were assessed by an Independent Assessment Panel. These panels were comprised of members with gender equality expertise, as well as disciplinary and strategic expertise and gave due regard to gender balance. These panels

¹² McKinsey & Company (2010). *Women Matter*.

¹³ Moss-Racusin, C. A., Dovidio, J. F., Brescoll, V. L., Graham, M. J., & Handelsman, J. (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the national academy of sciences*, 109(41), 16474-16479.

¹⁴ Nielsen, M.W. (2015). Limits to meritocracy.

¹⁵ Van den Brink, M., Benschop, Y., & Jansen, W. (2010). Transparency in academic recruitment: A problematic tool for gender equality?. *Organization Studies*, 31(11), 1459-1483.

assessed applications from HEIs on the basis of (a) evidence on how that HEI was progressing versus their stated gender equality targets to achieve organisational and culture change, in line with recommendations from the HEA Expert Group (2016) and the Gender Equality Taskforce Action Plan (2018-2020) (b) demonstration of plans for future developments in Gender Equality and outlining the organisational and cultural initiatives to support the newly appointed staff (c) providing a critical analysis of significant gender under-representation in the faculties /departments/ functional units¹⁶ being submitted in the plan. Institutions were also encouraged to benchmark and use international best practice in their submissions.

To date, two cycles have taken place in terms of SALI Call, 30 Awards have been made and the majority of appointments have been made. A reserve list of 7 potential SALI posts was also identified by the Cycle 2 Awards Panel in 2020. Funding the reserve list and awarding an additional 8 posts would bring the total SALI posts up to the initial target of 45 additional posts at senior academic leadership level in the higher education sector.

¹⁶ Up to a maximum of 3 faculties /departments/ functional units in Cycle 1, this was updated to 2 in Cycle 2.

3. Requirements of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) Evaluation

The overall purpose of this independent review of the SALI initiative is to assess overall effectiveness, value for money and impact of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative. Ultimately it seeks to evaluate the actual and potential contribution of SALI to achieving sustainable systemic change around equality of outcome in relation to gender equality in higher education in Ireland.

The evaluation report will also explore the following elements of SALI and seeks to make clear, specific recommendations as relevant:

- The SALI call process and awarding of posts.
- HEI experience post-award including reference to recruitment and any related issues.
- Experience of appointees under the SALI.

Finally, this evaluation report seeks to make recommendations on the future of SALI in terms of next steps and improvements in implementation.

4. Evaluation – Methodology

The overall approach to this evaluation has been ‘*triangulating data*’¹⁷. This triangulation methodology is important in light of the complex, interconnected and longitudinal challenges of achieving meaningful systemic change around gender equality of outcomes^{18 19}. This has required the integration of different data sources about the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative and its output, process and outcomes to date. It includes quantitative data (evidence of applications, interviews and appointments) - and qualitative data – perspectives of stakeholders including the HEIs awarded SALI posts, SALI post holders, process auditors and the HEA.

1. The SALI Call document.
2. Process Auditor reports for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2
3. HEA Analysis of SALI Awards (Cycle 1, Cycle 2) by HEI category* and Discipline**
4. HEI recruitment reports for each SALI position appointed to date.
5. Group & Individual Consultations with HEIs and with SALI Post Holders
6. Key Strategic Frameworks – Gender Equality, Higher Education, Science, Innovation – Ireland & EU.
7. Academic Literature- Gender Equality, Systemic Change and Higher Education

*HEI Categories (2023) are Universities (7), Technological Universities (5), Institutes of Technology (2) & Colleges (2)

**Disciplines are defined as STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths & Medicine), AHSSBL (Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business & Law) and Other

¹⁷ Noble, H., & Heale, R. (2019). Triangulation in research, with examples. *Evidence-Based Nursing* 22: 67-68.

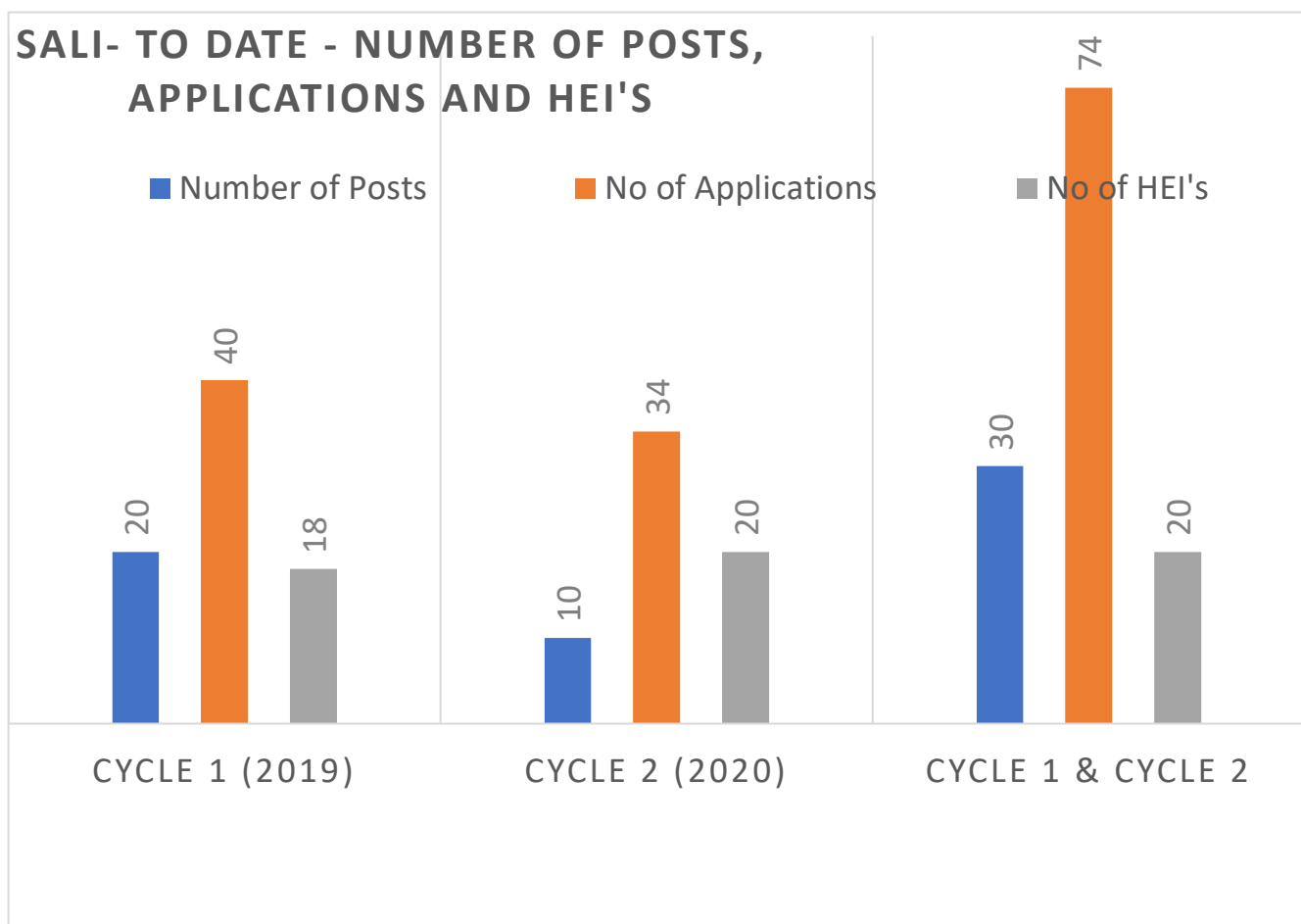
¹⁸ Rao, A., Sandler, J., Kelleher, D., & Miller, C. (2015). *Gender at work: theory and practice for 21st century organizations*. Routledge.

¹⁹ Goldin, C. (2021). *Career and family: Women’s century-long journey toward equity*. Princeton University Press.

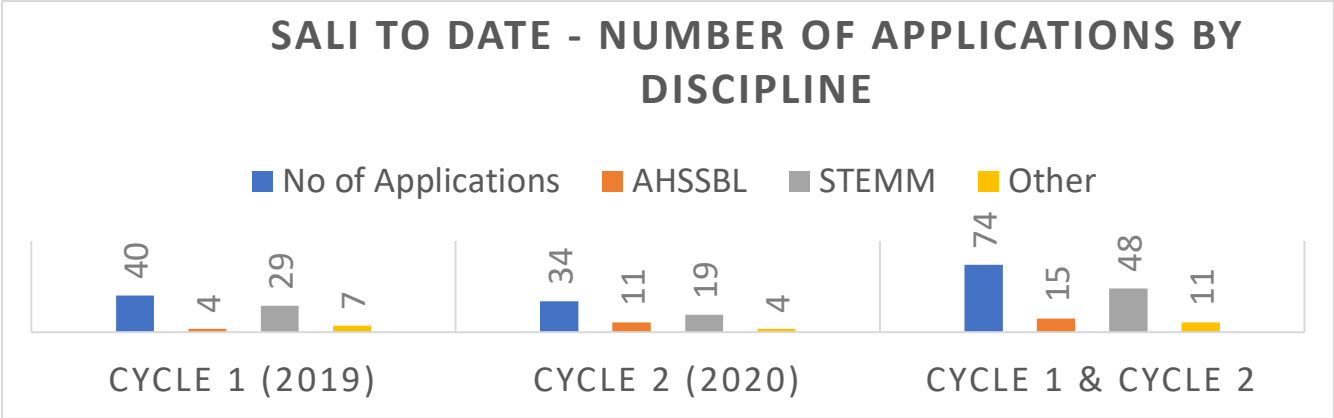
5. Key Evaluation Findings

5.1. SALI Applications to Date

- An overall total of 74 applications were received from 20 HEIs across the two cycles, leading to 30 posts awarded. A total of 40 applications from 18 HEIs were received for Cycle 1 in 2019, with 20 posts awarded. A total of 34 applications from 20 HEIs were received for Cycle 2 In 2020, with 10 posts awarded.

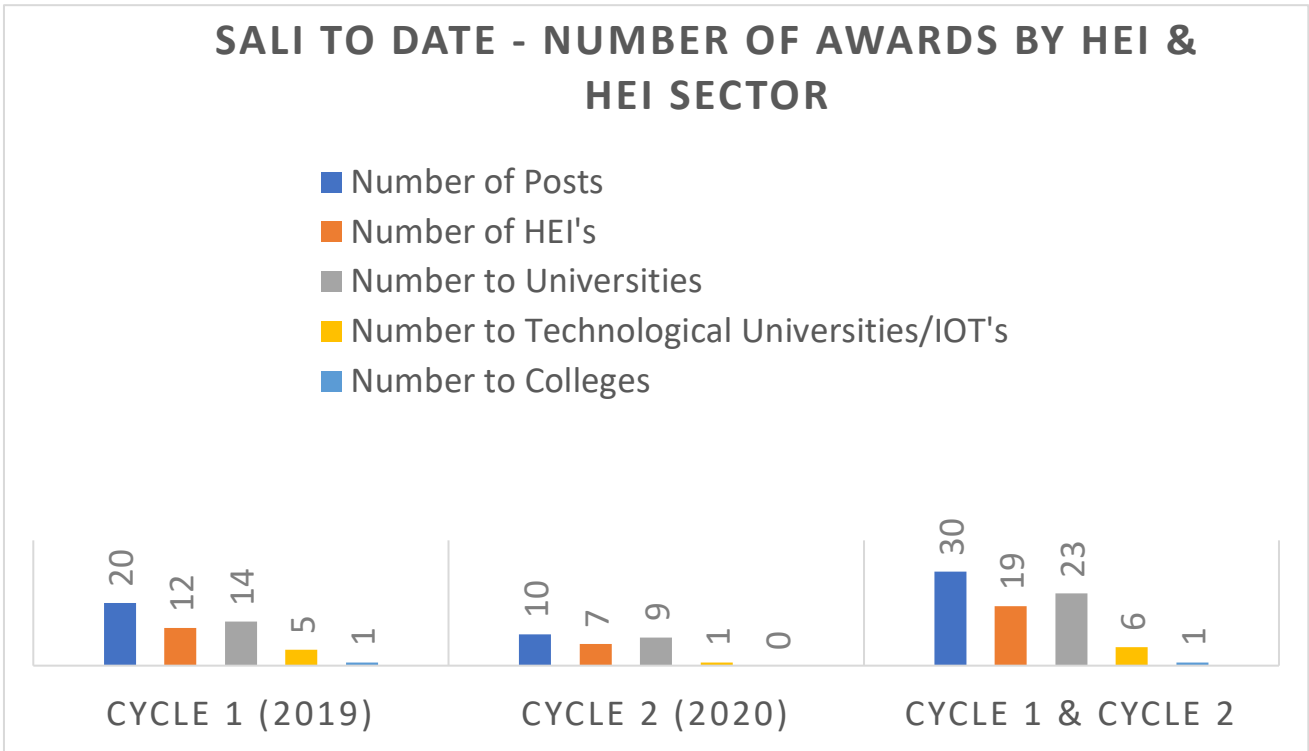


- Within the overall 74 applications for SALI, 48 applications were for Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine (STEMM), 15 applications were for Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law (AHSSBL) and 11 applications were from other disciplines.

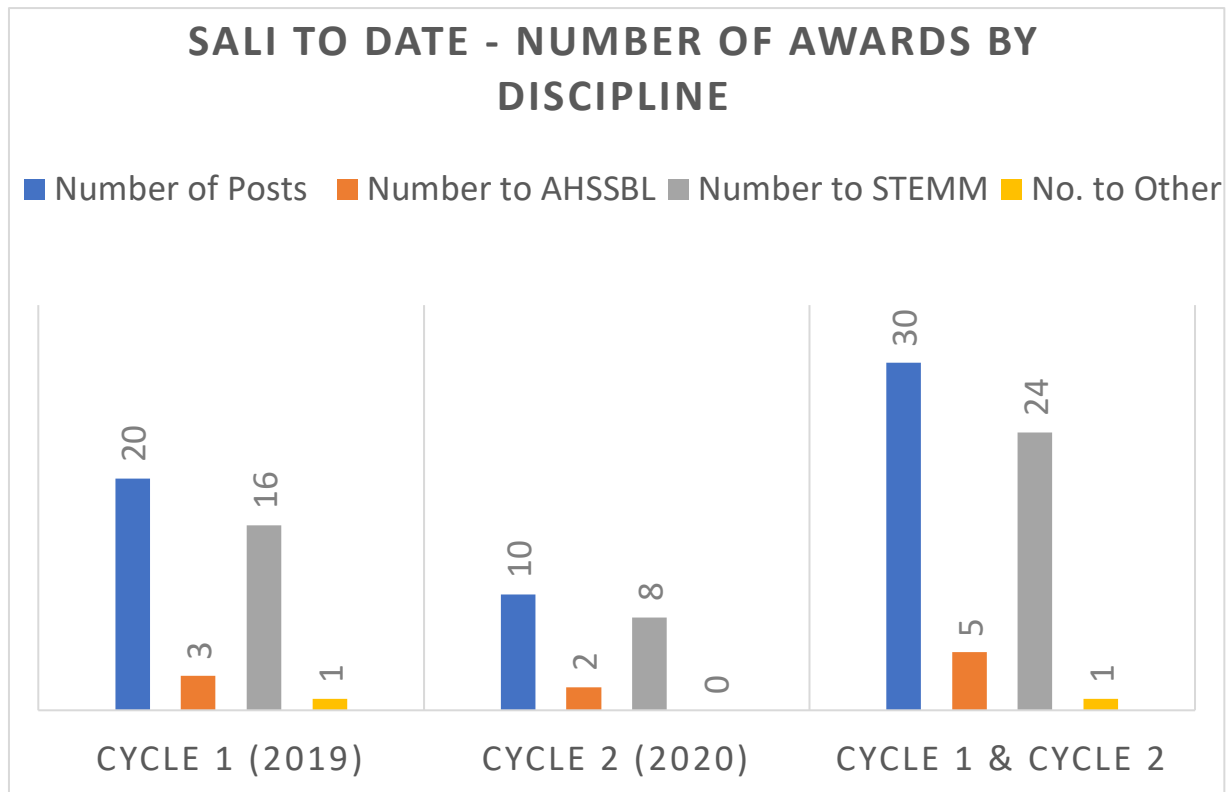


SALI Awards to Date

- Within the 30 SALI Awards made to date – there have been 23 to the university sector, 6 to the technological sector and 1 to a college.



The majority (24) of the SALI awards were in STEMM disciplines but there were also 5 awards in AHSSBL disciplines and 1 award in other disciplines.



5.3 SALI Applications, Interviews and Awards by Gender

- Analysis of the HEI recruitment reports for overall SALI to date – including Cycle 1 and Cycle 2- per position demonstrates that there were 60% female and 40% male applications for SALI positions to date. Candidates which met the criteria for the SALI post were invited to interview at the respective HEIs (99% female and 1% male candidates invited to interview) and 100% of appointments for Senior Academic Leadership Initiative have been female.

5.4 SALI Call Process and Awarding of Posts

- Process auditors for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 were satisfied by the fairness, gender balance, transparency, decision making and standards of the International Assessment Panels.
- HEI feedback to SALI evaluation survey was broadly positive about the SALI call process and awarding of posts – in terms of the calibre and credentials of the International Assessment Panels, the application criteria, application feedback and information available.

5.5 HEI experience post-award including reference to recruitment and any related issues

- Once the SALI awards were announced, the HEIs commenced a recruitment process to appoint a candidate. It was important that both gender equality and academic excellence were central to the recruitment, interview and appointment process. The HEI was required to report on and monitor the process, timelines and outcomes of each SALI appointment.
- The HEI experience of the SALI post awards has been broadly positive, despite some 'learning curves' in how to best implement SALI recruitment, appointment and integration successfully.

- The majority of HEIs are very positive about the calibre of SALI appointments – and they recognise the contribution of SALI post-holders to teaching, research and instilling a broader culture of gender equality.
- The individual HEIs have all submitted reports which confirm that they implemented measures to ensure gender balance within the Appointments Committees and continually kept gender equality outcomes at ‘top of mind’ during the selection, interview and appointment process.
- Some HEIs mentioned that SALI process had already led to ‘positive externalities’ with the overall HEI culture – where other recruitment processes are now being held to higher ‘gender equality standards’ than previously – and a new norm around ‘gender equality’ within recruitment processes is being established.
- The key area of learning from the HEIs was around the need to define the SALI role in broad enough terms to secure a strong pool of applicants. This was due to the fact that (a) there can be less candidates ‘visible’ in the under-represented gender and (b) the female candidates who fit the academic excellence criteria of these roles are quite often in ‘high demand’ and can get other offers at the same time as the SALI appointment.
- This difficulty in identifying and attracting these high calibre candidates meant that, in some cases, the HEI needed to (a) extend the timeline for the recruitment search and/or (b) employ external Academic Search firms to supplement the search

process and/or (c) ask other faculty/school/HEI colleagues to approach their networks.

- In some cases, the HEIs combatted the SALI recruitment challenge by broadening the scope of the SALI post to a wider discipline, rather than narrowing it to a 'sub-discipline'. This sometimes had the extra benefit of building a positive competition within the sub-disciplines in a given school or faculty.
- In addition, there were sometimes issues in negotiating contracts and finalising appointments – especially when candidates are coming from International roles. However, some HEIs also mentioned that some schools and faculties had found a way to be more resourceful in their overall package to the SALI candidate – in some cases HEIs offered highly customised 'start-up' packages which could include aspects such as relocation costs, funding for research teams, housing assistance and or reduction in teaching hours / teaching buy-outs.
- For the technological sector, there were additional concerns and issues with the SALI positions – due to the disparity between 'professor level' (in universities) and 'senior lecturer 3' level (in the technological sector including technological universities). This disparity between the two sectors has separately been highlighted within the OECD (2022) review. From a SALI perspective, it shines a light on the difference between the professor and senior lecturer 3 level in terms of pay, seniority, reporting lines, responsibilities and benefits (offices, etc.). This can be frustrating for some of the SALI appointees as it risks a sense of 'inequality' within the SALI initiative. However, the HEIs also understand that the SALI scheme

can only operate within existing academic staff contracts in Irish higher education and all SALI applicants were clear with regard to the terms and conditions at the time of the post advertisement.

- There were also some learnings from the HEIs around 'Integrating the SALI post holder' into the HEI. By definition, the SALI post holder is coming into a culture where female academic leaders are under-represented. This is not always a problem but some HEIs believe it might be important to plan for the SALI post-holder arrival to ensure a successful integration into the HEI culture. This might include 'Mentors', 'Buddies', Cultural briefings etc. In addition, a SALI post-holder network has been formed by SALI postholders and can be an asset for new SALI appointments – and there is an opportunity for support and solidarity within that network.
- There was some sense from the HEIs that they might have required more knowledge about the SALI scheme (from the HEA) and how it was designed to work but there was also a sense that the first two Cycles had been a learning curve – and that each HEI was now accumulating competence and confidence in applying for SALI awards and in recruiting, appointing and integrating an excellent SALI candidate into their HEI.

5.6 Experience of Appointees under the SALI

- The SALI post-holders were given an opportunity to participate in an evaluation survey and to attend evaluation workshops to discuss their experience of SALI in terms of recruitment, negotiation with HEIs and integration into the HEI culture after appointment. The survey and workshops both found that the overall experience of Appointees under the SALI scheme has been largely positive and fulfilling.
- The postholders were positive about these academic leadership opportunities. For international candidates, this was an opportunity to 'return home' or 'move to Ireland' into an academic leadership role in Irish higher education. For candidates from Irish institutions, this represented an opportunity for internal promotion or to move to another HEI in a prestigious role.
- About half of the candidates spoke about frustrations with the negotiations with the HEI employing them – some of these candidates were international and they were surprised by some of the differences in Irish higher education packages and supports versus other countries. There was a sense from some SALI post-holders that other prestigious research funding schemes (e.g. the Science Foundation Ireland Research Professorship scheme) offered different /better benefits – especially in terms of research funding and support staff.
- The most frustrated SALI appointees were within the technological sector. For some of these SALI post-holders, there was frustration about salary level and

seniority (versus universities) and a lack of consistent treatment across the whole Irish higher education sector. Some SALI postholders in the technological sector did not share these views but it is likely that their HEI went to lengths to ensure that the appointment and integration of the SALI position was extremely successful.

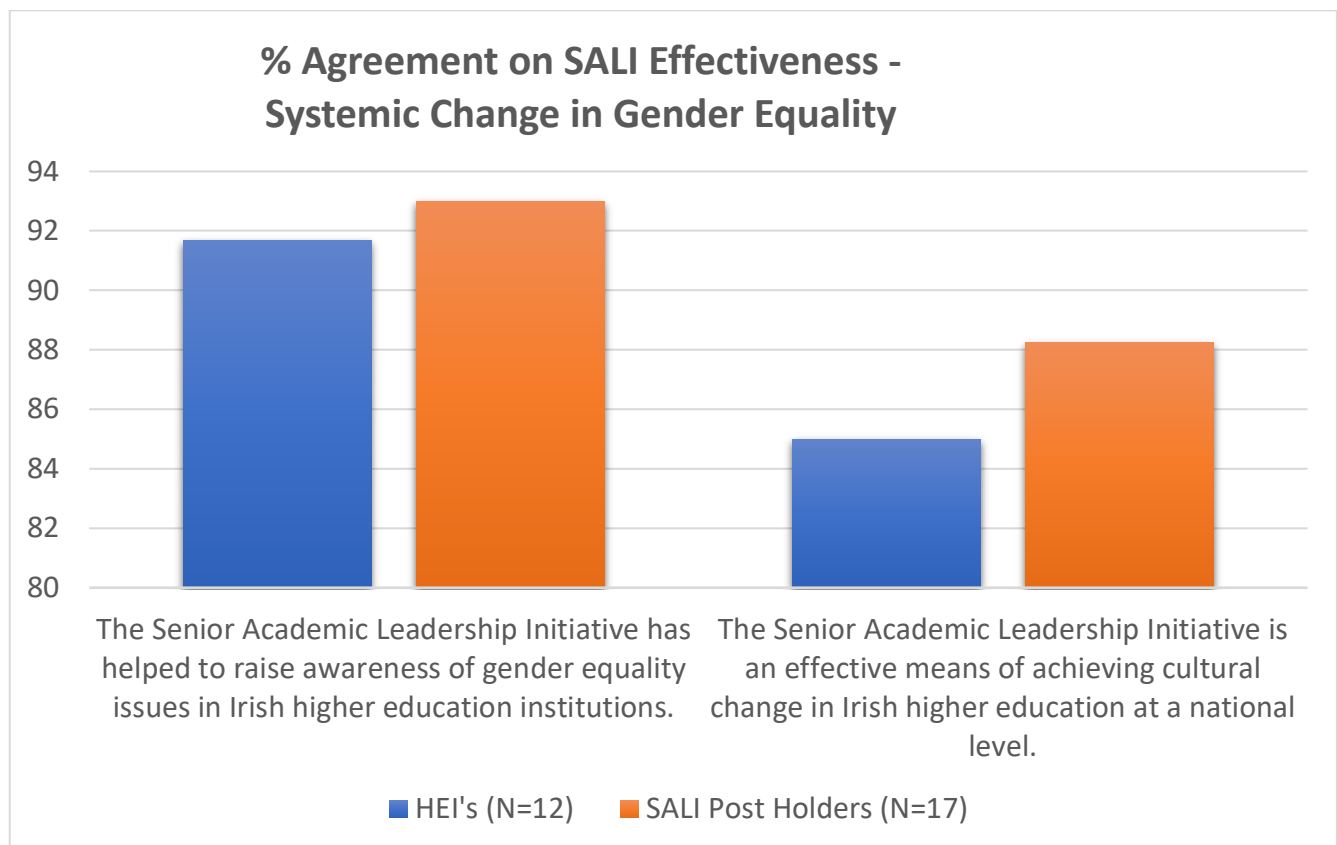
- There was a range of views on being 'labelled' as a SALI post holder. Some post-holders were extremely positive about the 'SALI' mission and wanted to be explicitly part of driving awareness around the initiative. Some post-holders were neutral on being advertised as a 'SALI' post-holder – they did not have a problem with it but they saw themselves as an equivalent to all other academics at the same grade. One or two people were resistant to the 'SALI' label. They believed it was a funding-mechanism for HEIs to tackle gender inequality – but this did not mean that they had to be a 'poster-child' for SALI – in terms of building awareness around this gender equality initiative.
- There was also some resistance to the acronym 'SALI' as lacking the gravitas suited to the 'Senior Academic Leadership Initiative'. (This was seen to be a poor choice of abbreviation – in light of the possibility of 'sneering' or 'mockery' from unsettled male colleagues.)
- There were a similar range of views in terms of SALI post holders championing or driving gender equality within a given HEI. Some SALI post-holders were passionate about gender equality, they were delighted to be leading out on

Athena Swan initiatives and Gender Equality plans and other gender-balancing programmes and conferences. Some SALI post holders were involved in gender equality initiatives, but they did not feel that they should be expected to drive gender equality, in light of their SALI appointment. Finally, one or two felt that the administrative workload of gender equality is quite often 'left to women' within higher education – and they believed that male academic leaders in certain disciplines should do the majority of gender equality work, because they represent the majority of academic leaders within these disciplines.

- A shared positive for the majority of SALI post holders has been the SALI post-holder network. This is an informal network established by some of the post-holders. The participants have felt a strong sense of belonging and solidarity within this network. There is also a practical level where the post-holders can support each other and share experiences

5.7 Effectiveness, impact and value for money of the SALI

- There are strong levels of agreement amongst the HEI stakeholders and SALI post holders that SALI has (a) helped raise awareness of gender equality issues in Irish higher education institutions and (b) that SALI is an effective means of achieving cultural change in Irish higher education at a national level.



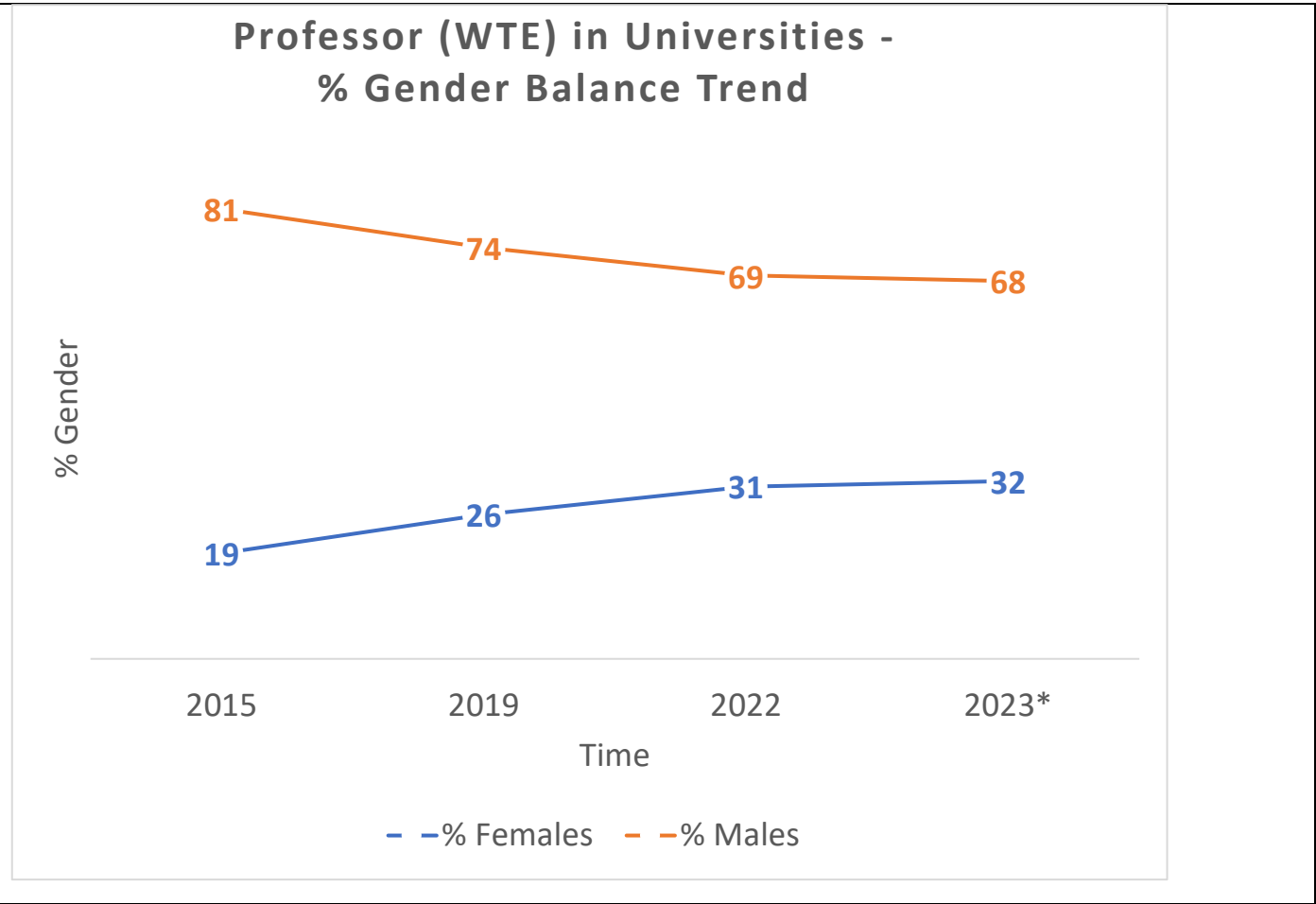
- In terms of gender equality trends, the latest data published by the HEA* demonstrated a positive trend in gender balance in the overall higher education sector. This positive trend cannot be exclusively attributed to the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative but it is encouraging to see evidence that SALI has been successful in contributing to an upward trajectory, (as intended) in conjunction with other key gender equality initiatives (Centre of

Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Vice Presidents for EDI or equivalent in all HEIs, Gender Equality Plans and Athena Swan awards).

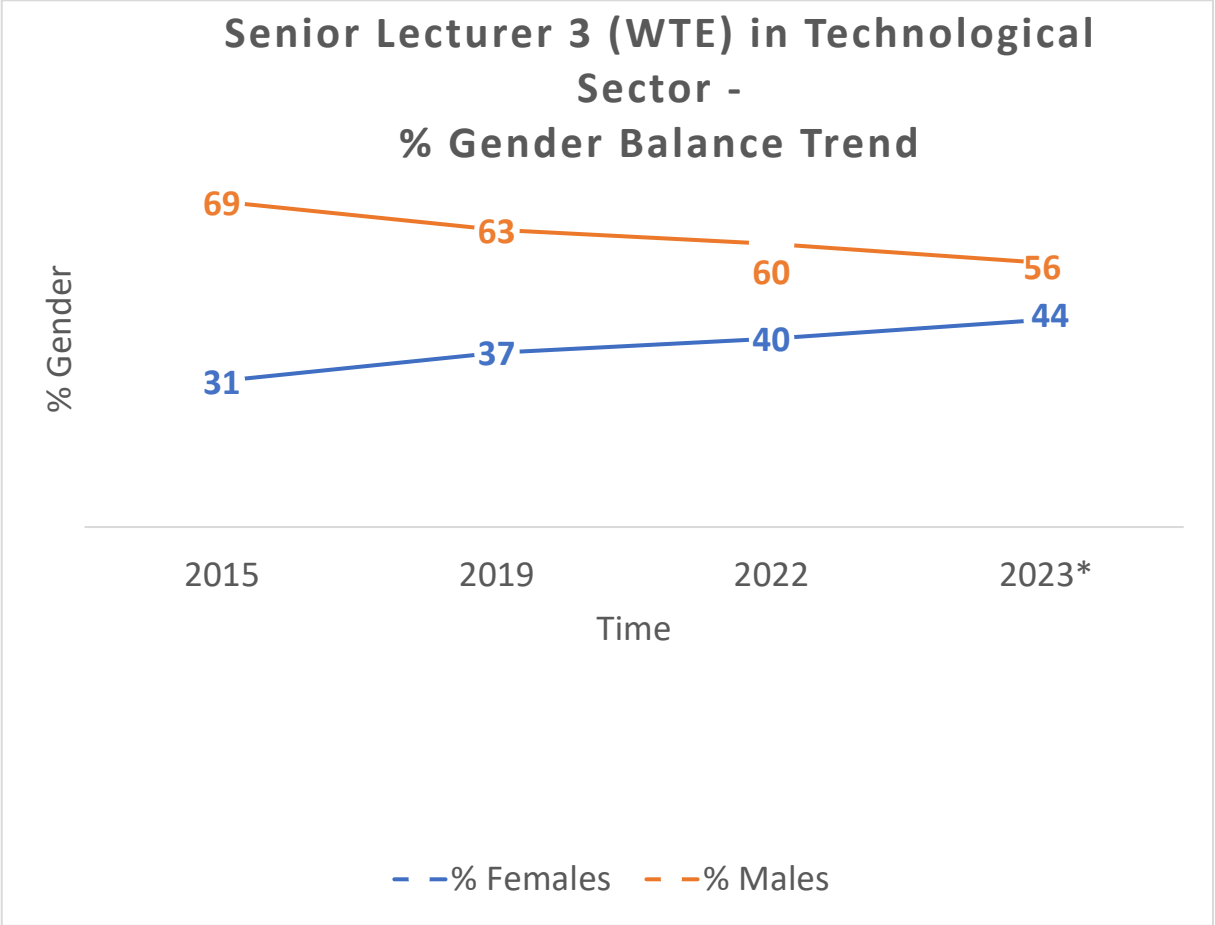
- The specific gender equality trends (WTE) in the higher education sector are demonstrated below, using HEA published data*;
 - In the university sector, the percentage of females (WTE) at Professor level has increased from 19% in 2015 to 32% in 2023*:
 - In the technological sector, the percentage of females (WTE) at Senior Lecturer 3 level has increased from 31% in 2015 to 44% in 2023* :
 - In the overall Higher Education Sector, the percentage of Professional, Management and Support females (WTE) at Highest Pay Grades has increased from 15% in 2015 to 41% in 2023* :

(* Please note the HEA 2023 data is provisional at the time of publishing this evaluation report and may be subject to change at a later date)

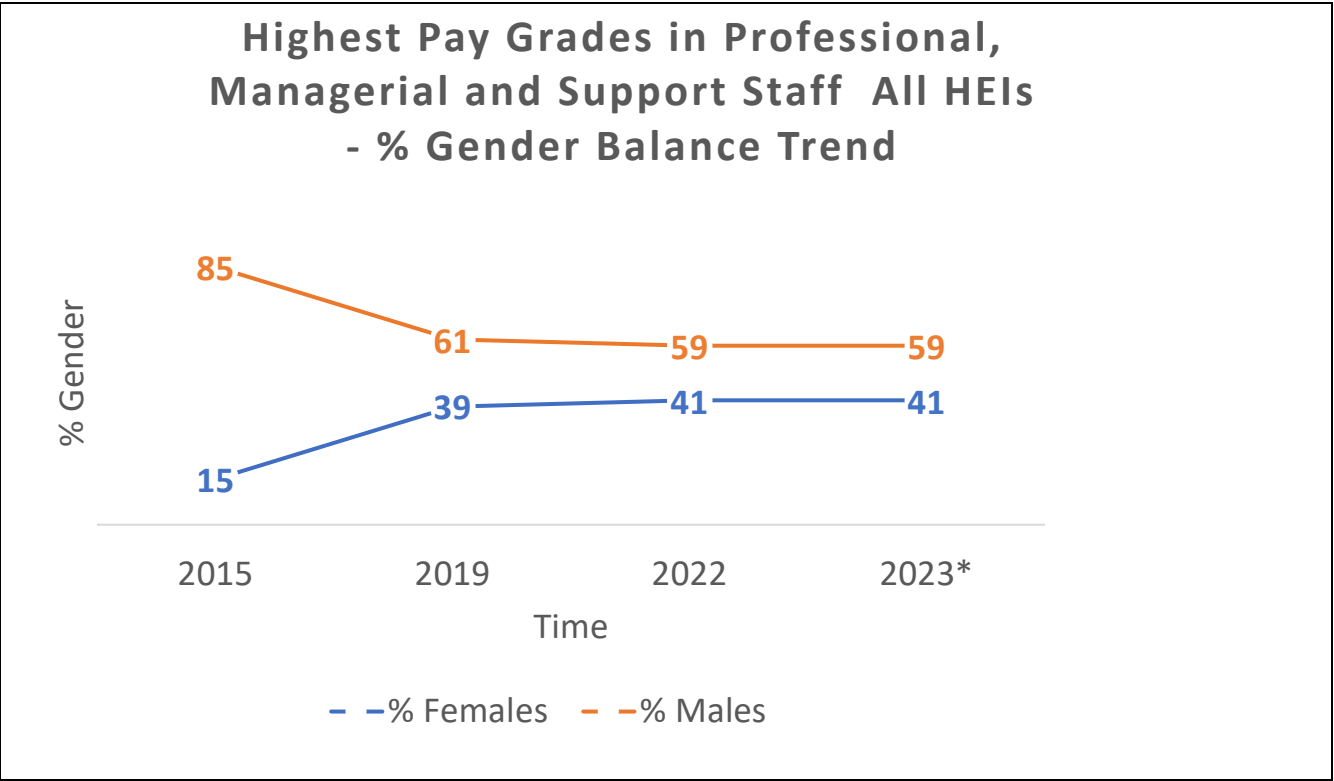
Professor (WTE) in Universities - % Gender Balance Trend



Senior Lecturer 3 (WTE) in Technological Sector - % Gender Balance Trend



Highest Pay Grades in Professional, Managerial and Support Staff Across All HEIs - % Gender Balance Trend



- On-line surveys* across HEIs in 2022²⁰, also support the importance of ‘female role models’ to ensure gender equality in higher education in Ireland and both females and males support the use of ‘targeted gender initiatives’ (like the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative) to help accelerate change towards gender equality:
 - 71% of females and 50% of males believed that ‘availability of women as role models’ was the most important factor in ensuring gender equality in Irish higher education.
 - 41% of females and 34% of males believed that ‘availability of women as role models’ was their strongest experience of best practice in supporting gender equality in Irish higher education.
 - 71% of females and 47% of males strongly agreed /agreed with supporting ‘use of positive action initiatives (targeted gender recruitment) to help attain gender equality in the higher education sector.
 - *Survey respondents: N= 2025 respondents in HEIs
- These data trends in gender balance at senior academic levels are very encouraging in terms of progress towards the DFHERIS and HEA targets to get a minimum of 40% women at senior academic leadership level and to achieve gender balance in governance structures.

²⁰ Higher Education Authority (2022). *Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data for the Second Gender Equality Review of Irish Higher Education Institutions, National Online Survey*. Conducted by Insight Consulting – Erskine, S. & Harmon, D.

SWOT Analysis Based on Triangulating SALI Data, Surveys, Reports and Audits and Strategic Frameworks

STRENGTHS

- SALI represents a strong statement of leadership from Government, HEA and the higher education sector to seriously tackle gender inequality in Irish higher education, alongside other gender equality initiatives. The vast majority of HEIs, SALI post-holders and stakeholders are extremely positive about this ground-breaking gender equality investment in Irish higher education.
- There is a shared sense of courage and tenacity in grasping the nettle of persistent gender inequality at senior academic leadership level in Irish higher education. (This level of gender inequality at this level in higher education is not unique to Ireland but Ireland has shown ambition and resourcefulness in seeking to tackle gender balance by funding positions for under-represented groups.)
- The design of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative is strong and clearly aligns the goals of gender equality with HEI teaching and research excellence, sustainable funding and attracting world class staff and students.
- Independent Process Audits have concluded that the SALI Call and Awards process was fair, transparent and independently governed by Chairs in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, resulting in trustworthy credible Awards outcomes.
- Recruitment Reports submitted by all the HEIs also confirmed that there was a considered gender-balanced process for recruitment which led to the appointments of strong, academically excellent candidates for the SALI roles.
- Early indications from the HEIs and SALI post holders are extremely positive about the effectiveness of the SALI positions in terms of the contribution they are making to academic and teaching excellence as well as building a more gender-equal leadership and

culture and being role models (and often explicit champions) for gender equality within their HEIs.

WEAKNESSES

- It can be challenging to secure a strong pool of candidates to fill SALI positions – as these candidates can be hard to track down. (This is a function of the historic underrepresentation of women in particular disciplines). Some HEIs employed established recruitment practice to overcome this difficulty (e.g. by redefining the role specification and /or creating a reserve list of qualified candidates).
- A more intensive recruitment process can require additional external HR support, addition effort from the HEI or specific school in reaching out to networks and extending deadlines if needed.
- HEIs need to anticipate how to best support each SALI candidate to ensure a smooth transition into the new role and culture.
- Disparity between universities and the technological sector staff specifications means that there can be differences in role requirements, reporting lines and pay-scales.
- Complexity of recruitment and appointment of SALI positions can mean that DFHERIS and the HEA need to 'ring-fence' funding to allow for longer timelines for recruitment and appointment. This results in delays in terms of expending committed funds which may impact on planning for other initiatives.

OPPORTUNITIES

- SALI can help build Ireland's reputation as a leader in gender equality alongside building Ireland's reputation and capability in excellent teaching & research and attracting progressive staff/students.
- Learnings from Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 can help optimise recruitment, appointment and transition for future SALI Cycles.
- SALI has the potential to be extended in future to deal with other aspects of inequality – and more broad intersectional inequality.
- SALI can build a strong case for global and national best practice which can be translated to other contexts and sectors.

THREATS

- Important to maintain investment and sustain momentum behind attaining gender balance at senior academic leadership level within Irish higher education sector.
- Failure to invest in a third cycle – last 15 posts- would risk sustaining momentum for systemic change around gender equality in the Irish higher education sector.
- Individual HEIs need to anticipate potential issues for the SALI post-holders within specific cultures and seek to build in supports to ensure smooth transitions towards greater gender equality.
- Tackling gender inequality in higher education is a long-term challenge requiring sustained investment, effort and measurement.

5. Overall Conclusions from SALI Evaluation

The higher education sector in Ireland has shown courage, commitment and leadership around tackling gender equality within higher education. The Senior Academic Leadership initiative is a strong investment signal from DFHERIS, the HEA and individual HEIs on a national commitment to systemic change around gender equality. The SALI has been designed to leverage and accelerate HEI investment and commitment to systemic change around gender equality in their own context, and to help align gender equality objectives with objectives around excellence in teaching, research, sustainable funding and attracting world class staff and students to Ireland.

To date, SALI has helped Irish HEIs secure additional leadership posts – with excellent academic candidates. There have been 30 posts awarded in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. There are already 7 posts in reserve for a potential third cycle. As a national initiative, SALI has been commended by International and EU best practice (Eu Commission, 2021 - SHE Figures²¹) – in actively driving gender equality, excellence in teaching and research and strengthening Ireland’s internal and global reputation for excellent, progressive higher education with future staff and students.

On a practical level, there has been a learning curve in implementing SALI where HEIs have learned (a) to be conscious about how they define potential SALI positions, bearing in mind the underrepresentation in these roles (b) be aware that excellent candidates will be in demand – and there may need to be negotiation to ‘land’ the final person (c) that

²¹ European Commission (2021). *SHE Figures. Gender in Research and Innovation – Statistics and Indicators*.

these roles are 'exceptional' so may require more thought, more resources, more planning and sometimes, more time to ensure the excellent candidate that fits all criteria is found.

There are critiques and concerns within HEIs around the disparity between roles /sectors– 'professor' in universities has a different definition, expectation and salary range than 'senior lecturer 3' in the technological sector. This is a legitimate 'equity' concern for the technological sector- and the OECD (2022) review has recommended that the employment framework for academic staff in the technological sector needs to be revised – but the SALI programme can currently only operate within existing academic contract frameworks.

SALI is an important lever for systemic change around gender equality in Irish higher education and research, but it cannot work in isolation – and needs to be supported by specific elements (packages, buddy schemes, induction, networks, etc) and by the overall HEI commitment to gender equality through its Gender Equality Plan and wider EDI work. This allows the whole sector, supported by the Centre of Excellence for EDI – to drive systemic change around gender equality in line with best-practice.

SALI can contribute to better gender balance – but true systemic change around gender equality will take momentum, sustained investment and time. The results from Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 have yielded high calibre appointments and positive endorsement from HEIs and SALI post-holders. SALI is not the sole solution to achieving gender equality, but it can act as a strong incentive to galvanise and accelerate positive systemic change around gender balance and gender equality. In 2022, the Expert Group

acknowledged within the second HEA National Review of Gender Equality that there has been significant progress made in the higher education sector in tackling gender inequality and that there has been engagement and investment in this process. However, the Expert Group also recommended that there is still a need for effort and resources in helping sustain systemic change around gender equality within higher education in Ireland.

7. Recommendations for SALI Next Steps and Future Improvements

1. Continue to Invest in the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative – funding a third cycle to a total of 45 posts - as a powerful lever for systemic change in gender equality across higher education, research and innovation in Ireland.

- The SALI scheme leverages national funding and HEI commitment and support to maximise the opportunity for aligning gender equality objectives with HEI objectives and DFHERIS objectives around excellence in education, research and sustainable funding for the sector in Ireland.
- The SALI Call and Award process is seen as fair, transparent and upholding excellence in academic standards. The transparency of the Awards Panel and awarding process is supported by two Independent Auditors of the Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 call and award process. The individual recruitment reports from HEIs concerning individual SALI appointments also support this. In addition, the majority of HEI responses to the call and award process are positive and SALI post holders are positive about the initiative.

- This evaluation has demonstrated that SALI to date (Cycle 1 and Cycle 2) has been broadly successful in identifying specific roles in HEIs which improve gender equality in tandem with excellent teaching, research and sustainable funding.
- The learnings from application of SALI through Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 can now be applied nationally and in HEIs to maximise return on investment within the posts. This includes (a) being conscious of how SALI positions are defined in light of under-representation in these roles (b) ensuring resources and time for search process (c) designing and delivering support packages to ensure a successful appointment and transition for SALI post-holder into the HEI.
- It is recommended that a third cycle should be funded for the next 15 posts – to continue to build and sustain momentum around gender balance and gender equality across the Irish higher education sector. There are already 7 applications for posts ‘in reserve’ which were deemed by the Assessment Panel to have met the criteria during the Cycle 2 awarding process. Ideally, these 7 posts would be funded and a call would be opened for 8 additional SALI posts, bringing the total to 45, which was the original stated ambition for this ground-breaking Senior Academic Leadership Initiative.

- Systemic change in the area of gender equality is complex and interconnected and requires time for systems, structures and cultures to adjust and adapt to new 'norms' if long term change is expected^{22 23}.

2. Maintain the current focus of SALI on senior academic grades - professor (university) and SL3 (technological sector) - as the best 'equivalents' for senior academic leadership in each context – accepting there are structural differences in employment frameworks) at present.

- International evidence and data²⁴ have continued to highlight that this senior academic leadership level is a focus area for tackling gender inequality in higher education.
- The Senior Academic Leadership Initiative has been designed to focus on this senior academic level, by aligning gender equality objectives with HEI and national objectives around excellent teaching and research, sustainable funding and attracting world class staff and students.

²² Rao, A., Sandler, J., Kelleher, D., & Miller, C. (2015). *Gender at work: theory and practice for 21st century organizations*. Routledge.

²³ Allen, K. A., Butler-Henderson, K., Reupert, A., Longmuir, F., Finefter-Rosenbluh, I., Berger, E., ... & Fleer, M. (2021). Work like a girl: Redressing gender inequity in academia through systemic solutions. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 18(3), 03.

²⁴ European Commission (2021). *SHE Figures. Gender in Research and Innovation – Statistics and Indicators*.

- This evaluation has broadly demonstrated that the current SALI design is effective in making a difference in gender balance at professor and SL3 levels – but also in driving additional positive culture changes around gender equality in HEIs.
 - The direction of change in gender balance within universities and the technological sector at senior academic leadership level has been positive in the short-term, but we cannot assume this change is permanent, over time. We need to sustain investment and commitment at these levels, to ensure broader and deeper systemic change around gender equality within higher education institutions.
3. Consider 'time-bound' process for SALI cycles in order to ensure that the DFHERIS and HEA budget for gender equality is maximising impact within all HEIs.
- The SALI recruitment process to date has taken time in order to identify and attract applicants and secure the appointment due to the high standards of the positions and the high quality of the candidates. SALI appointees are permanent employees of the HEI and the SALI post funding is provided by the HEA for 10 years, after which time the post must be incorporated into the HEI pay budget.
 - As is the case for many senior academic posts, high calibre candidates may have multiple posts to consider alongside SALI post and some candidates will require time to change location or country to take up the role.

- These extended timelines for recruitment and appointment have meant that DFHERIS and the HEA have had to 'ring-fence' funding for the SALI positions. This results in delays in terms of expending committed funds, which may impact on planning for other initiatives by the HEA and DFHERIS.
 - In future SALI cycles, it is recommended that DFHERIS and HEA implement specific time-bound awards, in order to ensure that the SALI budget is delivering impact in a timely manner. It is hoped that HEIs have now greater learning on how to recruit and appoint SALI positions in terms of processes and resources. Consideration should be given as to how the funding for existing cycles is closed out in a timely manner to facilitate planning for future initiatives.
4. Following the learnings from SALI, consider establishing a Senior Academic Leadership initiative to include posts on the basis of other under-represented groups, once there is sufficient data and evidence for HEIs to make a case for under-representation of these minorities in specific fields and positions.
- Inequality is often 'intersectional'²⁵ and there are undoubtedly inequalities around ethnicity, disability, class etc. that should also be tackled to create truly diverse inclusive cultures across Irish higher education, in order to ensure stronger leadership, excellence in teaching and research and attracting world class academics, researchers and students.

²⁵ Wijeyesinghe, C. L., & Jones, S. R. (2014). Intersectionality, identity, and systems of power and inequality. *Intersectionality and higher education: Theory, research, and praxis*, 9-19.

- As we measure and collect more data across the sector and build a national evidence base over time, we will have stronger evidence to build a case for future Senior Academic Leadership programmes to ensure a more diverse inclusive higher education sector.

Appendix A - Bibliography

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Appendix: Questionnaire- Evaluation of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative for HEIs awarded SALI posts.

1. In the experience of your HEI, what are the main barriers to recruitment and retention of under-represented leaders (both within and outside of the SALI scheme)?
2. Based on the experience of your HEI, should there be a timescale associated with the ringfencing of funding for a particular post where recruitment has not been realised?
3. What, if any, were the key challenges faced during the SALI recruitment process?
4. Describe the timeline of the hiring process (from advertisement being released, to closing date, to interview) and requirements in interview (e.g. presentation, duration of questioning etc.)? Please also give rationale for any significant delays in the process.
5. Briefly describe how have you incorporated the SALI appointees into the academic, research and administrative direction of your university.
6. How would you evaluate the impact of the SALI in your institution?
7. Considering the learnings from your HEI's participation in the SALI, do you have further suggestions for how to support the drive towards gender equality in senior level posts in Higher Education?
8. Please add any additional comments below:
9. In the context of the technological higher education sector, please outline any specific challenges that have been faced in relation to the SALI application process, as well as the recruitment process.
10. Finally, please add any additional comments (not captured by the previous questions) below:

Appendix – Questionnaire – Evaluation of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative for SALI Post-holders

1. Where were you recruited from?
2. Where did you see the post advertised?
3. What was the key driver in your decision to apply for a post under the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative?
4. What, if any, start-up package did you receive? Please do not disclose figures.
5. Is your association with the SALI of any significance or relevance to you, e.g., do you refer to yourself as a SALI Professor/post holder, do you discuss the initiative with your colleagues, etc.?
6. Have you engaged in gender equality activities (e.g. Athena Swan, Project Juno, public engagement etc.) in your institution?
7. Are there alternative ways to improve gender equality that would be more impactful than the SALI?
8. Please add any additional comments below:
9. Finally, please add any additional comments (not captured by the previous questions) below: