

CELEBRATING

WWD

#InspireInclusion

FOREWORD

On International Women's Day, we take a moment to celebrate the remarkable achievements of women across all fields, and particularly recognise those in STEM. As a research funding agency, we understand the crucial role women play in discovery and innovation. Diverse perspectives and approaches are essential to push the boundaries of knowledge and to engage equitably with all parts of society.

Despite progress that has been made we also recognise that women in STEM still face challenges. Girls in single-sex schools are less likely to have access to labs and the full breadth of STEM subjects, there is underrepresentation of women in senior STEM positions, and those in STEM careers often contend with unconscious bias, and the burden of balancing career and caring commitments. To that end we have been leading in implementing measures that tip the playing field.. to level it. Like funding women first when scores for research proposals are equal, having women and girls as target audience in our education and public engagement efforts and implementing gender as a KPI. These efforts are making a difference to women in STEM. On IWD 2024, let's think about how we can continue our efforts to throw the net of inclusion even further.

Finally, I'd like to recognise and thank all the inspiring women in SFI, and everyone who advocates for equality. Happy International Women's Day!



Ruth Freeman

*Director of
Science for Society*



Ursula Kenny

Head of HR and OD

As we celebrate International Women's Day, I am delighted to introduce this special edition IWD newsletter. IWD isn't just a day in the calendar, it is part of an international movement to recognise the achievements and contributions of women everywhere. We have a lot of pride and appreciation for everyone across the organisation, and today we particularly call out the work of our women colleagues, who contribute so much to SFI, our broader Science and Research colleagues, our communities, families, and friends.

It's important that we don't just mark these events and think 'box ticked'. We have made a lot of progress in supporting staff with our

blended working policies, more access to part time working, family friendly policies, Domestic violence policies and supporting Women's Aid as our charity partner in 2024. But there is more to do in this space, and we look forward to introducing a Menopause policy in the coming months as part of ongoing efforts to be an inclusive working environment.

Thank you to all of you who have arranged these events and I hope everyone comes together (online and in person) in support and appreciation.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

How SFI are Supporting Women Researchers

Marion Boland & Suz Garrard

SFI is committed to removing and mitigating any existing or perceived factors that may limit the participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The SFI **External Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2023-2028** builds upon the work previously undertaken as part of the Agency's Gender Strategy 2016-2020, which aimed to redress the gender (binary) imbalance amongst SFI grant holders, increase the participation and interest of girls in STEM-related activities, and ensure that sex and gender were considered by applicants when preparing their research proposals for review under SFI Programme Calls .

Whilst significant progress has been demonstrated in these areas, SFI acknowledges the necessity of taking an intersectional approach when addressing gender inequity, moving beyond a focus on gender as a standalone issue and aligning with the changing 'equity' landscape within research funding and research design. The External EDI Strategy's goals and objectives have been developed to support a diverse and inclusive research ecosystem and culture, reflecting the diversity and aspirations of the society SFI serves. They include further measures to support gender diversity in grant leadership and best practice sex- and gender-based analysis in SFI-funded research.

To promote gender equity in the Irish Research & Innovation system, SFI has already implemented several policies and initiatives. For example, the **SFI Grant Budget Policy** supports grant holders and their respective team members with caring/childcare responsibilities by permitting the use of up to €750 for companion travel. The SFI **Maternity/Adoptive Policy** aims to support researchers during critical times – such as those surrounding childbirth or adoption – which are often reported as factors underpinning the well-documented diminished representation of women in more senior STEM careers.

As part of the External EDI Strategy, SFI will continue to undertake consultation with the community, including representatives of Historically Underserved Communities, to ensure that its investment reflects the input of researchers that are representative of society, and thus the outputs are relevant to society.

Links Here:

[SFI Maternity Policy](#)

[SFI Grant Budget Policy](#)

[External EDI Strategy](#)

[Gender Strategy](#)

STEM PASSPORT PROJECT

Research shows that working class girls are being deprived of opportunities to build STEM skills. **The SFI Discover-funded STEM Passport programme** helps young women from underserved communities find potential career paths in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) fields.

The programme combines a Level 6 NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications), education supports and mentoring from industry role models to help students progress to third-level education and achieve a STEM qualification. SFI staff may remember the programme from the fascinating keynote at the 2023 Research Summit by **Dr Katriona O'Sullivan**, from the Assisting Living and Learning Institute, Maynooth University, who leads the SFI Discover Funded STEM Passport for Inclusion project.

We'd like to encourage you to support the STEM Passport for Inclusion through the **mentoring programme**. Through this programme, you will learn to mentor for equality and become part of this is a wonderful experience, building a talent pipeline for STEM through promoting where and how you work. The STEM Mentoring programme information and sign up links can be found below:



[Mentoring Programme Information](#)

[Mentoring Programme Sign Up](#)

IWD GUEST SPEAKER

We would like to give a huge thanks to **Dr Marica Cassarino**, Lecturer in Applied Psychology in UCC and Environmental Psychologist, who joined us for a fascinating talk on Thursday March 7th. Marica leads a team on the National Challenge Fund Programme funded by SFI.

Click on the link below to see her talk!



[Link to Recording](#)



The FIGHT for EQUALITY

NOTES ON A FEW WOMEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY WHO PAVED THE WAY OF SCIENCE, SPORT, ACADEMIA, AND CIVIL RIGHTS, CHANGING HISTORY FOREVER.

Maya Angelou

With 36 books, 7 autobiographies and more than 50 honorary degrees under her belt, the power of Maya Angelou's words continue to be an inspiration for both women and people of colour in overcoming abuse, prejudice, and racial and gender discrimination. In 1971, she became the first black woman to have a screenplay produced into film – *Georgia, Georgia*.

Tu Youyou

Pharmaceutical chemist Tu Youyou's study through traditional Chinese and herbal medicines led to her discovery of extracting malaria-inhibiting substance called artemisinin from sweet wormwood. Since her discovery, antimalarial drugs based on artemisinin have helped save millions of lives from malaria.

Billie Jean King

Billie Jean King, former world No.1 tennis player broke barriers for women in sport by campaigning for equal prize money for men and women. Her lived experiences of being a woman and a lesbian in American sport continue to serve as the basis for her ongoing social activism.

Mary Wollstonecraft

English writer and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft is regarded as one of the founding feminist philosophers in history. Best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which was published in 1792, she argued against Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories that women are inferior to men. Wollstonecraft's novel helped lay the foundations of equality for women.

Gloria Anzaldúa

Anzaldúa was an American scholar and Chicana feminist. She is perhaps best known for co-editing *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, a groundbreaking publication not only as a collection by feminists of colour, but also for confronting the racism/classism found at the time in feminist thinking. Anzaldúa was a guiding force in defining the contemporary Chicano/Chicana movement and a leader in lesbian and queer theory and identity.



Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell

Professor Dame Bell Burnell is a Northern Irish astrophysicist. While still a research student in 1967 she discovered the first radio pulsars, a watershed moment in the history of science. She went on to become a distinguished scientist who made a number of significant astronomical discoveries.

At a young age, Bell Burnell had to fight to study science.

With the support of her parents, she was permitted to study lab at school and, by the end of the term, she was ranked first in her class. She then studied at the University of Glasgow and obtained a PhD from the University of Cambridge.

In 1974, Bell Burnell's supervisor, Prof Antony Hewish, became the first astronomer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics and he shared the prize with Sir Martin Ryle. Bell Burnell was not one of the recipients, despite her contribution to Prof Hewish's research, and no woman has won the Nobel Prize in physics since 1963. Bell Burnell was later awarded the US Breakthrough Prize and received \$3 million in prize money, which she used to set up the Bell Burnell Graduate Scholarship Fund. She believes bringing people from diverse backgrounds into physics education and research will improve the discipline.



Did you know that the Burnell room on the 4th floor is named after Jocelyn Bell Burnell?



“Diversity adds to the creativity of a team, it brings an extra openness, and scientific breakthroughs are about taking data and when you come across something new, examining it open-mindedly. People from non-traditional backgrounds will not necessarily make the traditional assumptions, and that’s how you get breakthroughs. That’s what I did: I saw the data and realised it did not fit and needed attention – it was an anomaly that did not fit, and so was I!”

SPOTLIGHT ON SFI FUNDED RESEARCHERS

For this IWD edition newsletter, we asked women funded by SFI to tell us about their experience as a woman in STEM in the Irish Research & Innovation system. See below to read about **Dr Daniela Ottaviani, Assistant Professor Meghana Kshiragar** and **Dr Merve Zeden**.



Daniela Ottaviani

Research Fellow,
University of Medicine
and Health Sciences
RCSI

I am a STEM early-career researcher with one of the prestigious SFI-IRC Pathway grants awarded in 2023. I came to Ireland in 2019, and joined my current workplace as a postdoctoral researcher to investigate the use of new drugs as an alternative to treat therapy-resistant and metastatic breast cancer.

Throughout these years of hard work, and thanks to all the support I had since then, this initial project expanded and set the basis for my current SFI-IRC research grant.

"Being a woman (in science) was never easy".

This is a statement I have been hearing since before I started my PhD, and I always wondered if that was ever really going to be my situation. Over time I understood (and experienced) that social and cultural pressures affect our professional decisions, especially in challenging and highly competitive careers as this one. I always had this concern of inequality, although professionally I only got support from my work environment.

Should I say that I have been lucky? I hope not. Fortunately there are increasingly evident changes in terms of equity and equality in the scientific environment when it comes to promoting and supporting a greater representation of women in science. I have had the pleasure of working with many women throughout my career, I have learned from each of them, they have inspired, encouraged and helped me to progress, and I hope that one day I can be that person inspiring and helping other women to grow in this exciting and challenging career.

Meghana Kshirsagar

Assistant Professor, University of Limerick

Hello, I am Meghana Kshirsagar and I lead the Science Foundation Ireland National Challenge Fund project, "ALTER: Unleashing the Power of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Twins in Emergency Care." My team benefits significantly from the involvement of talented women in STEM, specifically Dr Alison O'Connor and Gauri Vaidya from the University of Limerick and Dr Carrie Garavan from University Hospital Limerick, each coming from diverse disciplines.



I have 20 years of academic experience in India holding a permanent position as Associate Professor in the Computer Science department at Government Engineering College, Aurangabad, India. During my tenure in India, I facilitated initiatives to foster women's participation in STEM, such as organising workshops to raise awareness about international opportunities in STEM tailored for women. My mentorship during the Smart India Hackathon 2019 led to the success of three teams, each featuring at least one woman student from STEM. I arrived in Ireland to start a postdoctoral role on the SFI-funded "Automatic Design of Digital Circuits" project in September 2019.

I was the sole female researcher among 15 researchers;

my critical contribution to the project includes jointly supervising a successful postgraduate thesis and developing cryptographic software, leading to a joint publication with Intel in the Scientific Reports. I joined the Limerick Digital Cancer Research Centre as a Research Fellow in September 2022 and presented my works at flagship bioinformatics conferences.

From January 2024, I started a tenure track faculty position within UL's CSIS department and serve in Lero's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee. I am Deputy Director of the Biocomputing Developmental Systems Research Group hosted within the CSIS department at UL having 6 postdocs, 10 postgrads and 5 interns from 10 different nationalities. I am of the firm belief that initiatives such as grants tailored for women researchers can actively encourage female participation in STEM fields.

Merve Zeden

Research Fellow, University of Galway



I am a Cypriot scientist, with BSc (2014), MRes (2015) and PhD (2020) degrees in Microbiology from Imperial College London. I moved to Ireland in 2020, for my postdoctoral research project in Prof. Jim O'Gara's group in University of Galway to integrate my molecular microbiology experience with antimicrobial resistance (AMR) research.

I secured grants from the NUI, HRB and internal funds supporting my work in Galway and was recently awarded a 4-year SFI-IRC Pathway Programme to establish my independent research in therapeutic strategies for tackling AMR pathogens. I have recruited a very motivated PhD student (Ms. Jessica Kelly) to work with me on this project.

My previous mentors inspired me, and I am proud that I can pass on my knowledge and passion to my own students whilst watching their careers flourish.

Being an early-career group leader and a woman in STEM, although very exciting and rewarding, can also be challenging, especially as an independent researcher without a permanent academic position. A senior academic staff referred to me as "just a postdoc" not a principal investigator, which I choose to view as a manifestation of his own limitations, as opposed to a reflection of my value to the research ecosystem.

Overall, as an early-career woman in STEM, I have been supported by the Irish Research and Innovation (R&I) system and I am very grateful to my mentors, collaborators, colleagues, and funders without whom I could not have come this far.

The AdvanceHE Aurora Leadership Programme encouraged me to establish a Research Staff Network, to support researchers within the University. I am a representative on College and School committees and believe that every committee should have early-career representation to bring the unique perspective of this diverse group.

The Irish R&I system is a dynamic space for an early-career researcher to be recognised and supported. There is still more work to be done however to fully support the next generation of academic staff, a challenge the office of the vice-president for EDI at the University of Galway is currently addressing.

SPOTLIGHT OUTSIDE OF RESEARCH

Jill Pitcher Farrell is the Chief Scout of Scouting Ireland. She is the first woman and the youngest person in Ireland to be elected to the office of Chief Scout. She has been involved in Scouting at both a local and national level for over 10 years.

She is passionate about and working on Youth Empowerment and the Sustainable Development Goals within and outside of Scouting. Alongside her position as Chief Scout, she has a degree in Environmental Science and a research Masters in Soil Science in the University of Limerick.



**Chief Scout of Scouting
Ireland**

Currently, she is working as a Development Officer with Ballyhoura Development and works on a variety of community based environmental projects. Jill is also an avid kayaker and has been involved as an ambassador for Canoeing Ireland's Bridge the Gap initiative which promotes women in Paddlesports.

"In many areas of my life, I have noticed the lack of representation of women in leadership positions. In the University of Limerick, there were no female professors in the Biology department yet the lab I worked in was full of female PhD students and researchers.

In Scouting Ireland, there had not previously been a female Chief Scout and currently there are only 2 women board members, although half of Scouting Ireland's adults are women.

I am keen to support, mentor and promote other women progressing with their goals and to support Sustainable Development Goal target 5.5, which is to 'Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life'."

**Jill
Pitcher Farrell**

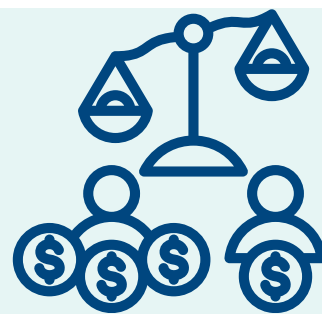
2024

The year is 2024 and yet gender inequality still prevails throughout the world.

Here are some statistics that might help draw a picture of our current climate.

Gender Pay Gap continues to be an issue worldwide. In the EU, the day of the year on which women symbolically stop on average to be paid compared to men is called the Equal Pay Day.

In 2023, the European Equal Pay Day fell on 15 November - a month and a half's difference in salaries compared to men.



41%

of Irish women know someone in their circle of family or friends who have experienced intimate partner violence

International Women's Day

started in **1911** but was only recognised as a day by the UN in **1975**.



76 % of women said they changed the way they use social media after experiencing cyber harassment, of which online hate speech is a form, and 32% said they ceased posting their opinions on certain issues for fear of incitement (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2022)

Between 1918 and 2018, only **114 women** were elected to be TDs in Dail Eireann, compared to **1179 men**.



The Seanad ranks slightly better with 99 women vs 801 men.



Career

Advancement:

In 2018, **26.2%** of full professorship positions were held by women. Women represented less than **25%** of heads of institutions in 2019. (*She Figures Handbook, 2021*)



Research & Innovation Statistics

All figures are from the updated '***She Figures Handbook***' (2021 edition) from the European Commission and it is the main source of pan European, comparable statistics on the state of gender equality in research and innovation and the **HEA 2022 report**.



Research and Innovation:

Women were significantly underrepresented as inventors at EU level. During the period 2015-2018, **10.7%** of patent applications were held by women. (*She Figures Handbook, 2021*)

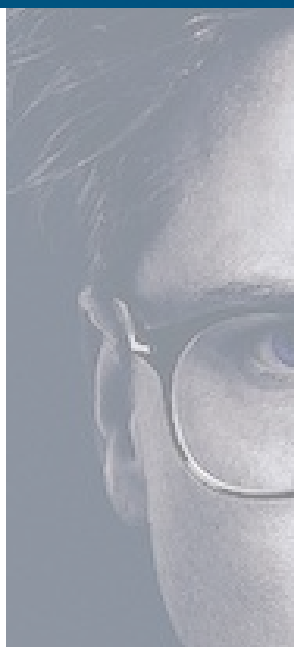
Academic Staff by Grade:

Among traditional universities, men made up **69.2%** of all full professorships. The only grade where women are overrepresented is at lecturer level. In Technological Universities, men are overrepresented at all academic career grades. (*HEA 2022 report*)



Working Conditions of Researchers:

Across the EU in 2019, a higher proportion of women researchers, compared to men researchers, worked part-time and held precarious employment contracts in the higher education sector. (*She Figures Handbook, 2021*)

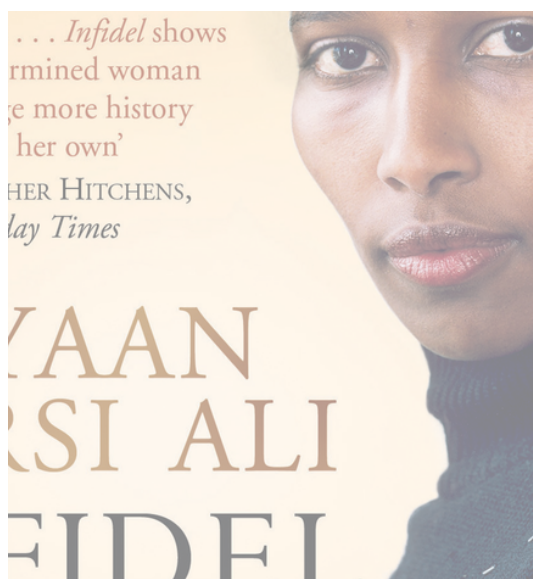
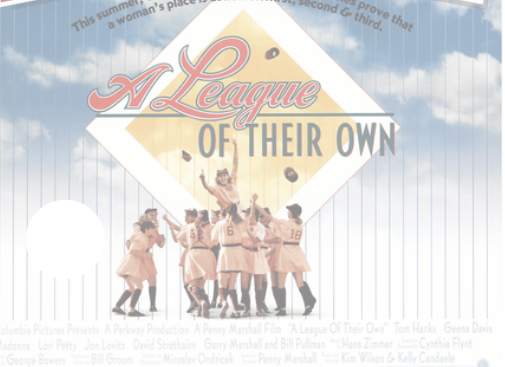


Films

- Mrs. America
- Hannah Gadsby: Nanette
- Suffragette
- Feminists: What were they thinking
- RBG
- A League of Their Own
- Hidden Figures
- Chi-Raq



RECOMMENDATIONS



Literature

- Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men – Caroline Criado Perez
- Infidel – Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- The Woman They Could Not Silence – Kate Moore
- Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color
- Kimberle Crenshaw

YOUR INTERNAL EDI COMMITTEE



Orla Finucane
Chair



Stephan O'Driscoll
Co-Chair



Suz Garrard



Noel Faherty



Laura O'Connor



Conor Kelly



Hannah Dunne



Tanja Callis



Maysoun Mustafa



Orla McCabe



Michael Ryan



Jia Wen Cheng



Laura Quinn

The Internal EDI Committee was originally a Working Group, formed to compose our Internal EDI Strategy. With its publication in 2023, we have now transitioned to a committee, supporting and championing EDI in our workplace.

Check out our
links here!



[Link to our site on
STEM](#)

[Link to the Internal
EDI Strategy](#)

The Committee would like to give a huge thanks to all those who contributed to this newsletter, and our wider IWD celebrations, including:

Lauren Hu, Nikki Spillane, Suz Garrard, Marion Boland, Ruth Freeman, Ursula Kenny, Tanja Calis, Laura O'Connor, Orla McCabe, Laura Quinn, Hannah Dunne, and Jia Wen Cheng.