

Holistic Support of Transgender Students in TU Dublin

Introduction

There are a number of surveys that have been carried out over the past decade on the topic of Trans Mental Health and Wellbeing. These include the 'UK Trans Mental Health Study 2012' (the largest survey of its kind in Europe at the time), 'Speaking from the Margins' (the largest study of its kind in Ireland at the time), and the 'LGBT Ireland Report' (where over 278 of its respondents identified as transgender).

Statistics from these surveys all broadly follow the same pattern; those who identify as transgender are at a significantly higher risk for self-harm (x2), severe depression and anxiety (x4), and suicide (x3) compared to the general population. Transgender people are also more likely to commit suicide than lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

These studies also illustrate that the overwhelming majority of participants are more satisfied with their lives after transitioning (70%), are more satisfied with their body since undertaking hormone therapy (85%), and are more satisfied generally after gender-affirming surgery (87%). For those who were less satisfied, interestingly, the reasons provided were nearly exclusively 'transphobia', 'loss of family or friends', 'significant costs' and 'poor surgical outcomes' [all external factors rectifiable by social change + medical improvements].

Finally, each of these reports highlight the poor quality of Gender Identity Services available to Transgender people. In the UK, 62% of respondents reported multiple negative interactions, with 27% reporting withholding information out of fear of treatment being stalled or stopped. In Ireland, over 60% of participants were dissatisfied with their experience of Gender Identity services, 10% waited over three years for an initial referral appointment, and over 10% reported staff deliberately using incorrect pronouns.

What does this data mean?

All of the data, regardless of location or year of publication, provides the same result. Transgender people (many of whom are students in institutions like TU Dublin):

- 1) Are at a higher risk of life-threatening conditions
- 2) Benefit significantly from gender-affirming care
- 3) Lack adequate access to efficient, compassionate, life-saving care

Current State of Transgender Healthcare in Ireland

The National Gender Service (NGS) recently reported that they are "seeing people referred between three and three and a half years ago". However, this statement is fundamentally misleading given the exponential growth of wait lists; statistical analysis of data accessed through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request indicates that those added to the list now may be waiting over 9 years to be seen.

Waiting times of this length, as evidenced by the myriad of statistics above, are increasing the risk of self-harm and suicide amongst an incredibly vulnerable population. Despite these abhorrent wait times, the NGS continues to advise GP's not to prescribe Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), a life-saving intervention, to transgender and non-binary patients. This has, unsurprisingly, led to increasing numbers of transgender people 'self-medicating' (taking HRT medications accessed through unregulated sources).

Furthermore, the NGS also advises GP's not to provide blood tests or ongoing monitoring to Transgender individuals who are 'self-medicating'. Finally, the HSE has failed to establish a public transgender healthcare service for those under the age of 18; this effectively means that there is no healthcare for transgender children or adolescents.

Stance of the University

TU Dublin's '*Gender Identity and Gender Expression Policy for Staff and Students*' states that "*We are committed to supporting students and staff at all stages of their transition journey.*"

Despite this, TU Dublin has, to date, failed to illustrate this through action. For example, gender neutral signage for bathrooms in Grangegorman (which were in the original blueprints) took 3+ years to retrospectively order. This was despite lobbying from the LGBTQ+ Society, the Union, funding being provided, innumerable emails from the SU President, threats of media action, formal committee structures, engagement with the EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) department, and informal requests for help.

Similarly, proposals for the establishment of a 'T-Fund', in partnership with the University, have been denied formally on multiple occasions. The first proposal was only denied after repeated requests for feedback across several months (which were consistently ignored), while the second proposal was shut down via a formal committee discussion.

Stance of the Union

TU Dublin has a student population of nearly 30,000 students; statistically, a significant number of these students will, and do, identify as Transgender. The Union, aligning with its constitutional mission, will therefore seek to advance and defend their rights.

Furthermore, it is the view of the Union that the current treatment of Transgender people in Ireland is in breach of several fundamental human rights under the Irish Constitution.

Finally, the Union believes that, while the University often relies on its 'policies' to support Transgender students and staff, these policies consistently fail to produce any meaningful action or change that would tangibly improve the quality of life for these same people.

What actions can the Union Take?

The Union has, over the years, evidenced its attempts to improve the lives of transgender students in TU Dublin. However, the Union must now formalise its beliefs, views, and

actions, to ensure that it properly, and consistently, advocates for students. The Union will therefore commit to the following actions / goals:

1. Advocate for the use of Pronouns in Email Signatures

All Officers of the Union (Full-Time and Part-Time) will firstly ensure that they include their pronouns in email signatures. Secondly, they will ensure that all relevant Union media contains pronouns as appropriate.

Thirdly, the VP for Welfare & Equality, will circulate an email annually to all staff within the University, explaining the importance of pronouns, and requesting they include pronouns in their email signatures.

2. Advocate for Gender Neutral Signage in TU Dublin & Nationally

The Union will advocate for appropriate gender-neutral and inclusive bathrooms to be available across all TU Dublin sites, for both staff and students. This must also extend to changing facilities in campuses such as Central Quad and Tallaght, where culinary courses exist. Where changing facilities do not meet this requirement (such as in Central Quad), the Union must take action via emails, formal committee structures, and if necessary, media. The Union will also more generally advocate for the normalisation of gender-neutral, inclusive facilities across Ireland.

3. Host an Annual 'Pride Week'

The Union must commit to running an annual 'Pride Week' campaign. This campaign must include a mix of events i.e. some must be 'social/entertainment', while others must be 'educational/informative'. This campaign must platform important topics such as the inadequacy of transgender healthcare, and other topics deemed relevant that year.

This campaign must be carried out in consultation with all TU Dublin LGBTQ+ societies (or equivalents) to prevent duplication of work / de-platforming of other queer voices (e.g. the campaign should not run immediately before/after a society's equivalent 'Rainbow Week', and should not be called by the same title, if at all possible).

4. Platform the Experiences & Views of Transgender Students

The Union must consistently seek the experiences and views of transgender, non-binary, and gender con-conforming students, particularly when drafting relevant policy, organising relevant events, and when platforming topics that relate to Transgender students. The VP for Welfare & Equality must meet with all TU Dublin LGBTQ+ societies (or equivalents) at least twice a semester to evaluate current needs, evaluate progress on policy, and celebrate wins.

5. Support Transgender Organisations

The Union will actively endorse, platform, work with, and support the actions of transgender organisations such as Transgress the NGS, TENI, Trans Harm Reduction, Trans Pride Ireland, and others that work to maintain and improve the rights and welfare of Transgender people.

6. Participate in all related Direct Actions

The Union will ensure consistent, in-person support, wherever possible, for direct actions, protests, and other 'influential' events organised by these groups. This means that, where possible, there should be at least one Full-Time Officer present at all times.

7. Ensure the Establishment of a T-Fund Initiative (by TU Dublin)

The Union must prepare a comprehensive proposal document, regarding the establishment of a 'T-Fund' (Transgender Fund), for submission to the University. The purpose of this T-Fund must relate specifically to offering financial assistance to trans/non-binary students to support 'social transitioning'.

This submission must be completed by January 2024, and should be submitted to the following areas:

- 1) The Student Experience Committee
- 2) The Governing Body EDI Sub-Committee
- 3) The Director of EDI

Should the proposal be denied, the Union should immediately communicate this decision (and rationale) with Student Council, and prepare an escalation plan. This escalation plan must include alternative routes of proposal, media, and direct actions. This plan, once approved by Council, must be enacted as soon as is reasonably possible.

8) Denounce the current system of Trans healthcare in Ireland

The Union must, wherever relevant and legally possible, denounce the NGS (National Gender Service), and all other relevant parties (such as the HSE and Government), for the abhorrent wait lists, mismanagement of care, and pathologizing of Transgender people. The Union must carry out actions that seek to improve/overhaul this system of care, and criticise it wherever relevant in media. This must include a statement from the Union Executive, to be published before March 2024.

Summary

These actions must be championed by the VP for Welfare & Equality, with oversight by the President, and questioned regularly at Council by the Part-Time Officer for LGBTQ+ Rights.

This Policy therefore repeals the following motions:

14. 'T-Fund'

30. 'Pronoun Use in Email Signatures'

Proposers + Seconders:

Proposed by: Brian Jordan

Seconded by: Jeremy Lawler

References

<https://www.tudublin.ie/media/website/policies-and-forms/human-resources/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Expression-Policy-for-Staff-and-Students.pdf>

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<https://nationalgenderserviceireland.com/waiting-times-2/>

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