

MFHEA

Gender Equality Plan

**prepared by the Malta Further & Higher Education
Authority**

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Design: MFHEA

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A **GEP** is a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through institutional and cultural change. ”

(p.5, Directorate – General for Research and Innovation, 2021)

Introduction

The aim of this document is to act as a transparent roadmap for the Authority to achieve gender equality at the workplace where all employees feel safe and valued. The MFHEA already has several gender sensitive measures in place, as dictated by the relevant Maltese legislation and as outlined in the Authority's Collective Agreement 2021 -2024.

A gender equality working group, comprising of a representative from each unit within the Authority has been formed to implement the GEP.

The members comprising the **Gender Equality Working Group** includes an employee from each of the following units:

- **MQRIC:** Ms Graziella Debattista
- **MRC & EU Affairs:** Ms Abigail Mallia
- **Accreditation & Quality Assurance :** Ms Aurora Attard Coleiro
- **Research & Policy:** Ms Hannah Cassar
- **Legal & Compliance:** Dr Dennis Zammit
- **Corporate Services :** Colonel Michael Cardona (retd.)
- **Communications:** Mr Bernard Carabott
- **IT:** Mr Andrew Vassallo
- **Office of the CEO:** Ms Natasha Buhagiar

The main goal is not only to increase gender equality but also to eliminate gender inequality. In order to achieve this, the following objectives have been identified:

- To increase awareness and understanding of what unconscious gender bias is and be mindful of it and how it influences our actions and decisions.
- To foster a culture of inclusion and an appreciation for diversity at the workplace.
- To collaborate with foreign counterparts by assimilating and sharing ideas on how to achieve gender equality at the work place.
- To continuously recognise that creating a gender-inclusive environment is the responsibility of every staff member within the Authority.

This document has been compiled by keeping all staff members and prospective ones in mind. A preliminary gender equality audit was carried out by:

- i. using administrative data to assess the Authority's current gender balance status, and
- ii. disseminating a questionnaire to all MFHEA staff and analysing its findings.

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Findings

2.1 Administrative Data

The charts below represent where the MFHEA stands on its gender balance statistics.

Whilst the Authority employs a slightly greater number of females, there is a greater number of males occupying managerial roles.

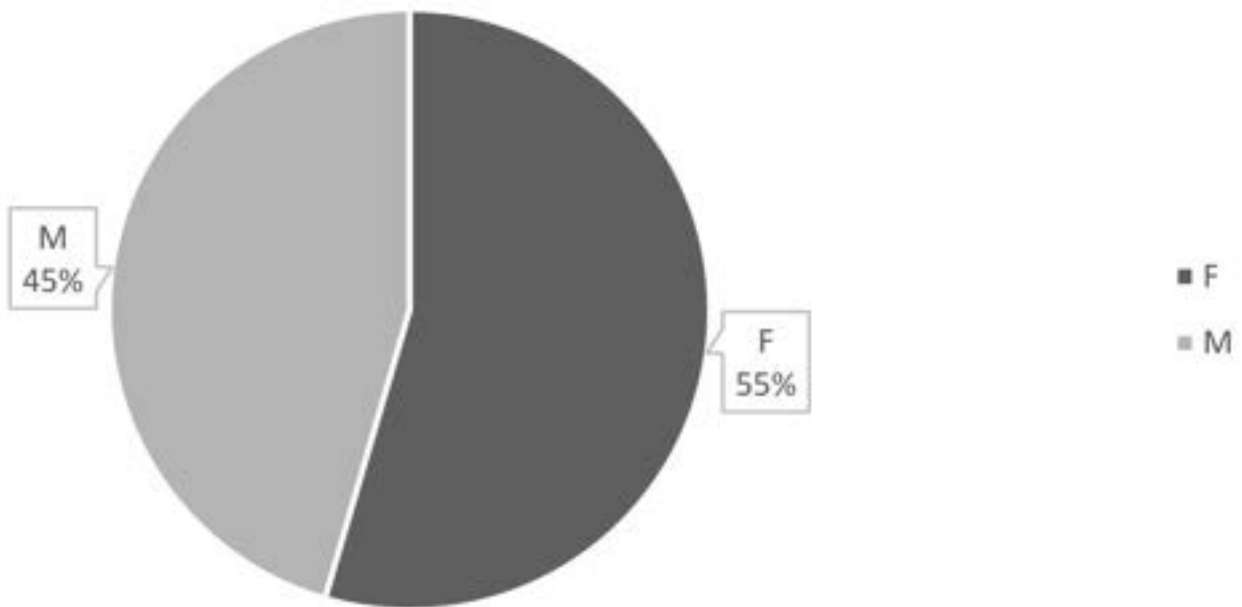


Figure 1 - The MFHEA currently employs 44 individuals: 20 males and 24 females (January, 2024).

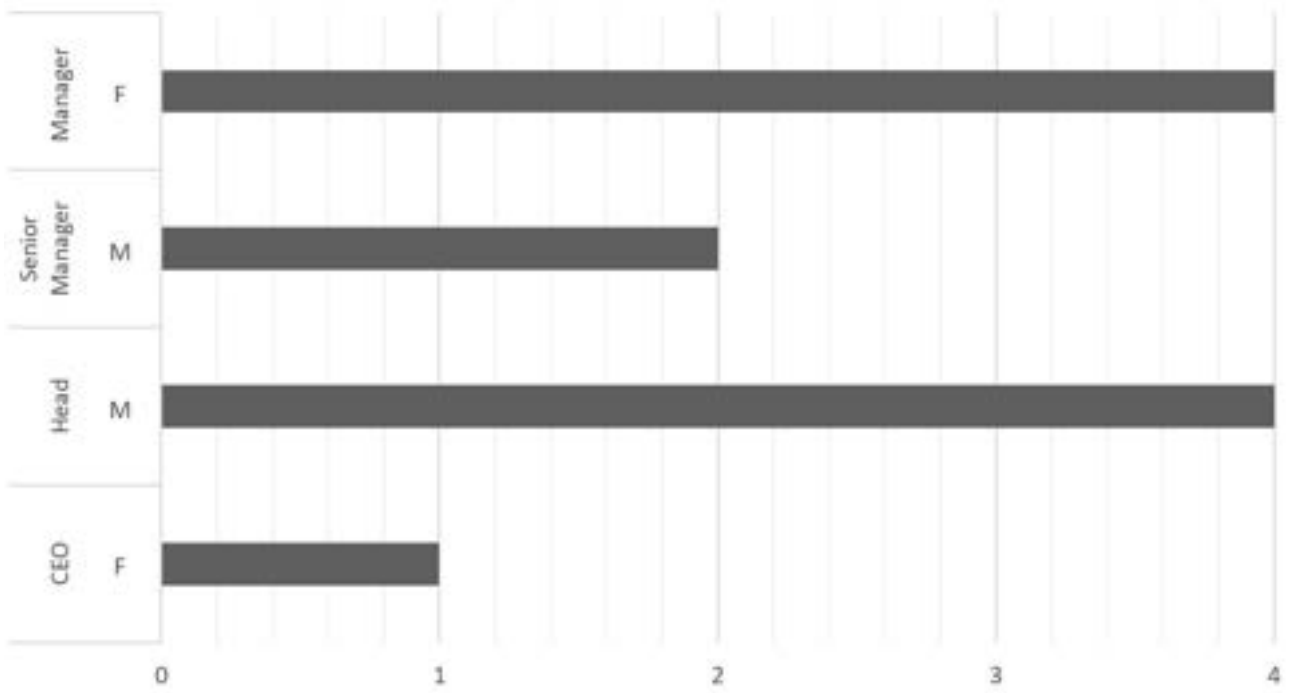


Figure 2 - Number of males and females in Managerial positions (January, 2024).

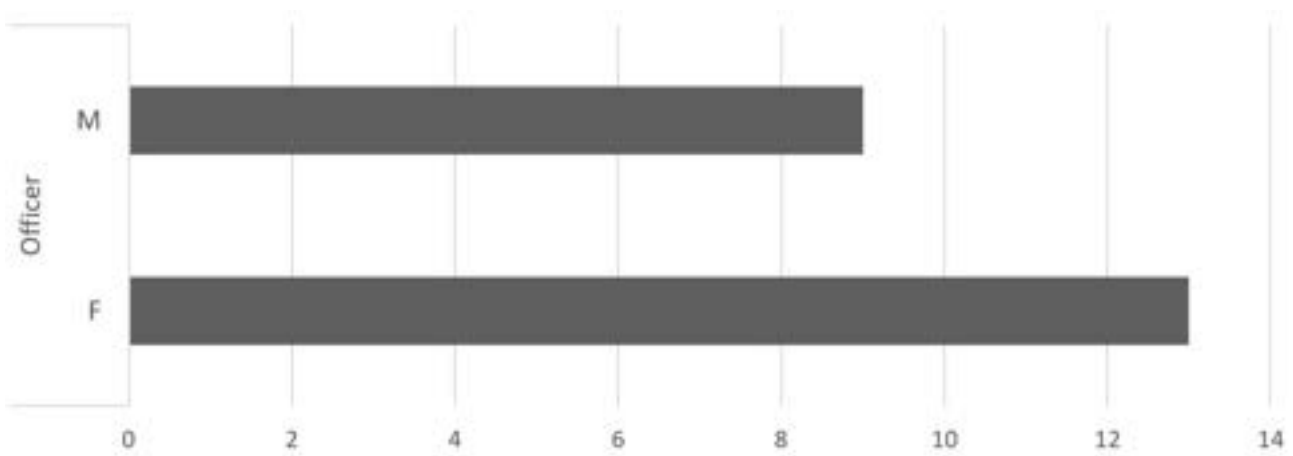


Figure 3 - Number of males and females in Officer positions (January, 2024).

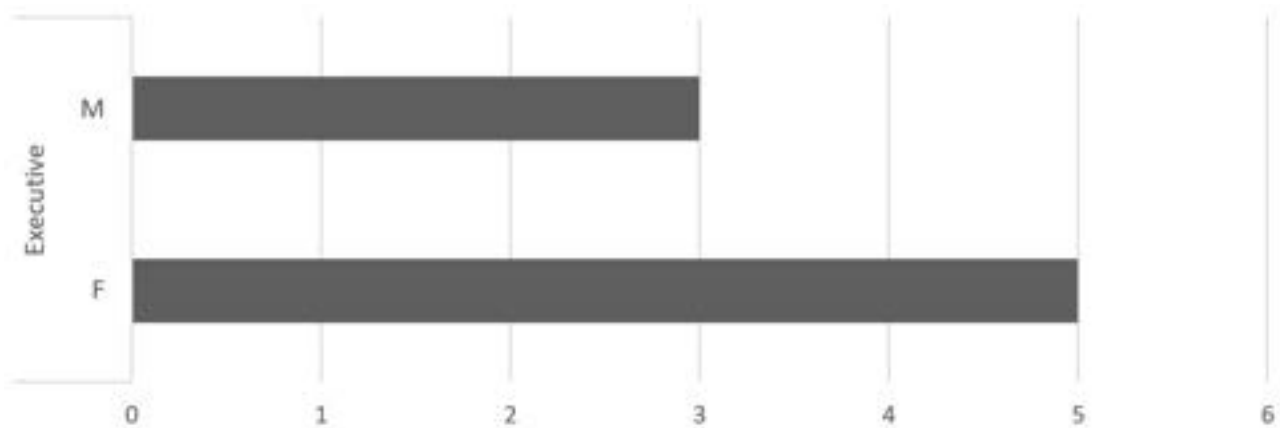


Figure 4 - Number of males and females in Executive positions (January, 2024).

2.2 Questionnaire:

An anonymous online questionnaire (see Appendix I), disseminated amongst all MFHEA staff was used to gather information on the staff's perceived experience of working at the MFHEA. There was a 77.3% response rate with 34 completed questionnaires. The individuals who completed the questionnaire identified as follows:

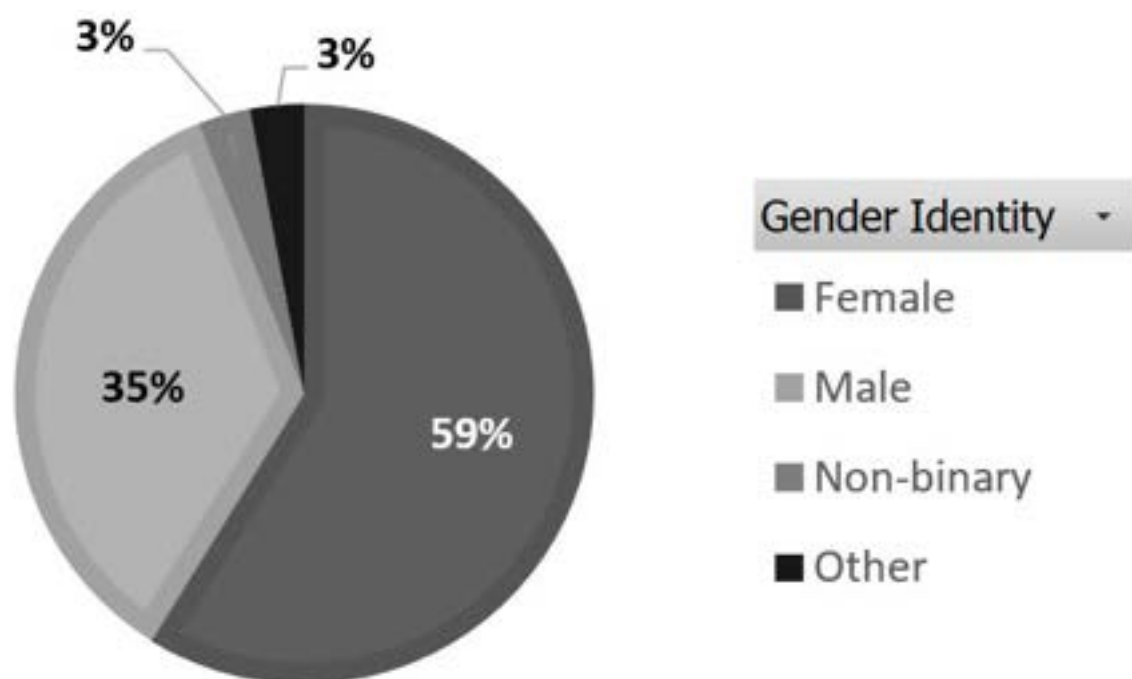


Figure 5 - Results showing how MFHEA staff identifies in terms of gender (January, 2024).

As illustrated in Figure 5, most employees who completed the questionnaire identify as female. Whilst the survey received a satisfactory response rate, there seems to have been a reluctance to fill in the questionnaire by small fraction of employees. From the sample that answered, it was made possible to deduce a number of facts:

1. The majority of MFHEA employees feel that the organisational culture and working environment offered by the Authority was allowing them to effectively carry out their duties.

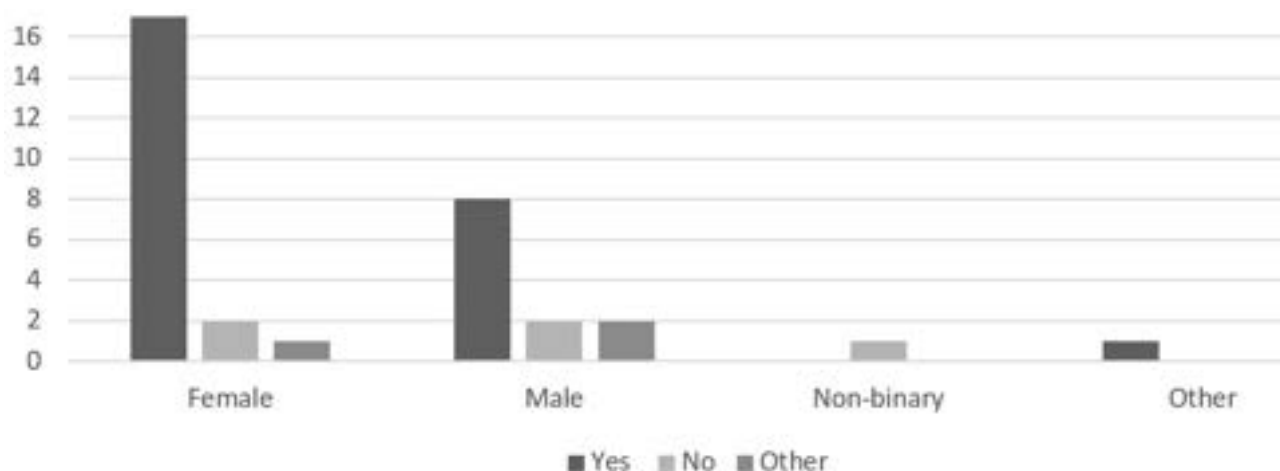


Figure 6 - Satisfaction with organisational culture & working environment (January, 2024).

Nevertheless, a small number of employees reported that they are not satisfied by the work-place environment, with some commenting that their experience changed from one unit to another.

2. Most staff members feel valued at work and that their contribution is recognised. However, 41.6% of respondents answered that they did not feel valued at work.

3. Whilst most respondents feel secure in expressing themselves and their views, a significant number do not always feel this way, the majority of the latter being female.

4. The overall majority felt that the Authority has provided them with opportunities to further themselves professionally and academically. Despite this, a couple of employees elaborated that more opportunities should be created.

5. Roughly half of those who completed the questionnaire felt that the workload is distributed fairly, allowing them to have a healthy work-life balance. 29.4% of respondents felt that this was not the case and 23.5% elaborated that work could be distributed better not only amongst employees and units.

6. Most employees make use of measures that promote a healthy work-life balance such as flexi-time and telework, with the majority of staff members stating that these have had a very positive and/or positive effect on their lives.

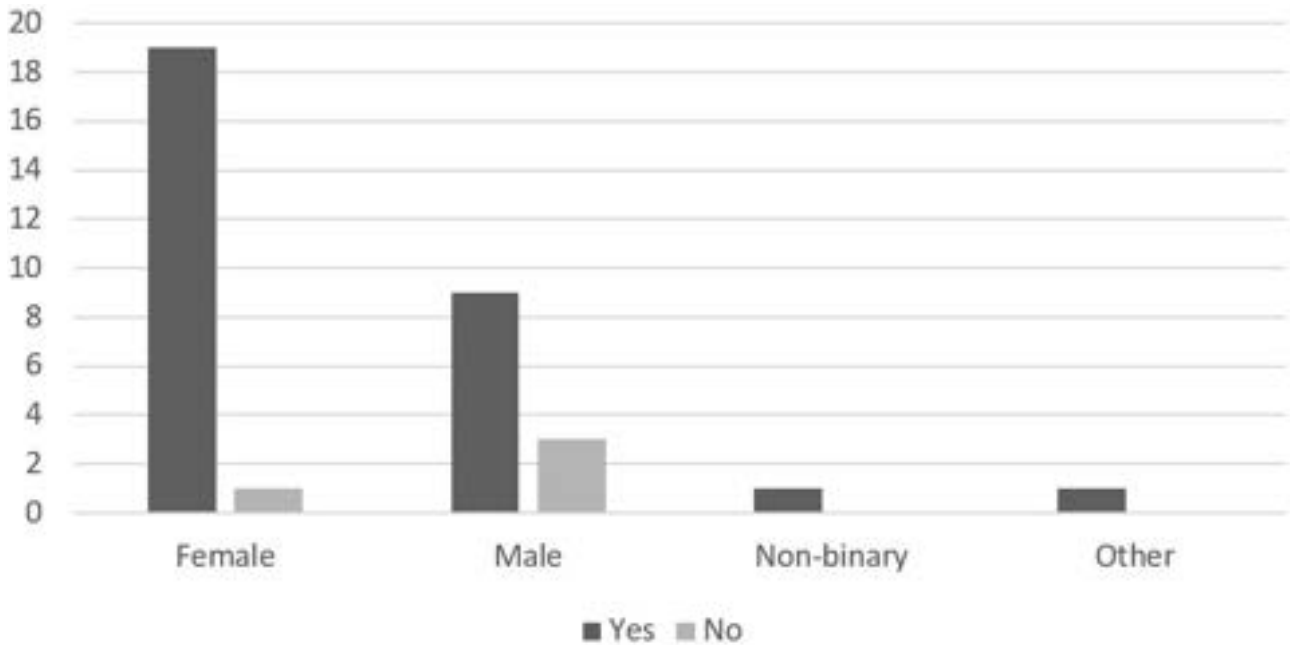


Figure 7 - Number of employees making use of work-life balance measures (January, 2024).

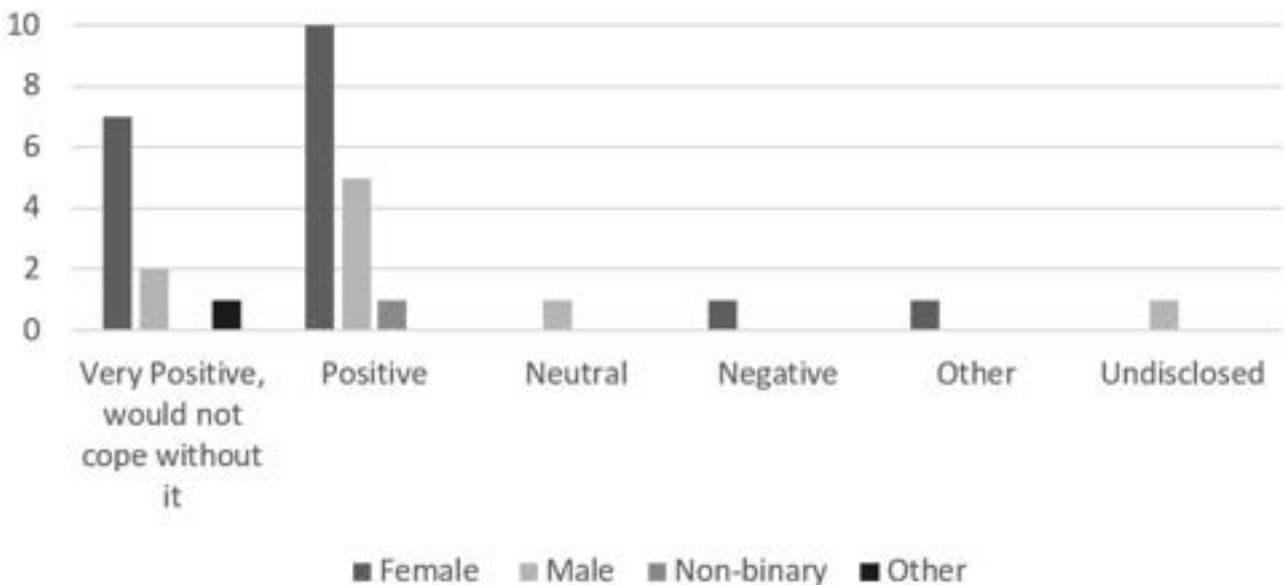


Figure 8 - Effect of work-life balance measures (January, 2024).

7. Only a small number of staff have made use of special leave related to life events, such as maternity leave, parental leave, family-related career-break, etc., but all those who have availed of this measure have felt supported upon their return.

S

- Flexitime
- Telework
- Family-friendly measures for those with dependants
- Maternity, Parental Leave
- Study Leave
- Continuous Professional Development
- The number of males and females working at the Authority is balanced
- The number of males and females occupying managerial roles is balanced
- The majority of staff members identifying as both male and female feel valued
- Staff members felt that healthy work-life balance measures implemented by the MFHEA have positively affected their life

W

- Staff members reported that there are not enough motivational incentives in grades despite increasing in workloads.
- Whilst most staff did feel comfortable expressing themselves and their views, there was a small percentage who did not. Seeing that our goal is to increase inclusion, this small number is still significant and further probing will occur so that we can ensure that all members of staff feel safe to be themselves whilst respecting others.
- Half of the staff members feel that work is not distributed fairly.

O

- Collective Agreement Approaching: Document can be updated to be more gender inclusive and implement new measures.
- Strong Research function: The Authority will be able to track improvements.
- Opportunity to get funding to work on gender equality policies through EU call for proposals on GEP.

T

- Narrow mindset
- Not enough resources
- Lack of communication between employees

4

The Plan 2024 - 2028

Considering the above, the MFHEA has identified a number of proposed processes and procedures that may improve inclusion and equitable distribution of opportunities, by 2028:

1. The **Gender Equality Working Group**, shall first meet by mid-2024 and it will plan and oversee that any measures introduced will be beneficial for the Authority as a whole, including its employees. The aim is to create a space of open conversation and transparency. The Gender Equality Working Group shall be meeting twice a year.

2. **Gender Equality Audit** through qualitative and quantitative data, shall occur once yearly and it will include:

- Analysis of specific indicators through statistical data
- Semi-structured interviews towards end of year
- Review of current MFHEA policies and procedures to ensure gender sensitive practices
- Annual Report

3. By the end of 2026, two mandatory information lectures and a workshop training session shall be held, and collection of feedback after each one on the topics below:

- **Ethics:** topics to include respect, boundaries, tolerance, equal opportunities
- **Conceptual Lectures:** what is gender, different genders around the world, feminism, machismo, etc.
- **Equality and Diversity** at the workplace: eliminating unconscious gender bias, coming together as a team, increasing retention rate

4. Mandatory **Team Building** sessions yearly.

5. Reviewing GEP and its implementation with **Advisory Committee Members**, taking their proposals into consideration, by the end of 2026.

6. **Selection Board** members will all be trained to be mindful of unconscious gender bias and how it may manifest. A member of the MFHEA gender equality working group will form part of the Selection Board, by the end of 2025.

7. Through training, staff should be more mindful of the gender dimension when drafting **project proposals** and during their entire implementation.

8. A clear message of **zero tolerance towards sexual harassment**, intimidation, and gender-based violence will be sent through a memo (including its definitions, reporting procedures for

victims and witnesses, duration of investigation, disciplinary measures, support for victims ESP) to be distributed yearly and updated with new legislation when applicable.

9. Communications published onto MFHEA social platforms shall be done in a **gender-neutral language**.

Indicators

- Retention rate
- Attendance to trainings
- Gender Balance

Measurable Targets

- Increase retention rate
- Achieve a high attendance rate to gender-related trainings
- Maintain and/or Improve gender balance



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Bibliography

- Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 452 of the Laws of Malta)
- Subsidiary Legislation 452.87 “Organisation of Working Time Regulations”
- Subsidiary Legislation 452.88 “Urgent Family Leave Regulations”
- Subsidiary Legislation 452.91 “Protection of Maternity Employment Regulations”
- Subsidiary Legislation 452.95 “Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations”
- Subsidiary Legislation 452.114 “Leave for Medically Assisted Procreation National Standard Order”
- Equality for Men and Women Act (Cap. 456 of the Laws of Malta)
- Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act (Cap. 540 of the Laws of Malta)
- Government of Malta Policy Manual (Manual of Work-life balance measures)
- MFHEA et UHM (2020) Collective Agreement 2021-2024
- MFHEA (2023) Code of Ethics of the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
- MFHEA (2023) MFHEA Staff Development Policy
- Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2021) Horizon Europe guidance on gender equality plans, Publications Office of the European Union <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/876509>

Appendix I - Questionnaire

1. How long have you been working at the MFHEA?

Response:

- More than three years
- More than a year
- More than six months but less than a year
- Less than six months

2. Have you held the same role throughout the duration of your employment at the MFHEA/NCFHE?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify)

3. Does the organizational culture and working environment of the MFHEA allow you to fulfil your role effectively?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify)

4. Do you feel valued at work? (Is your work recognized, and are your ideas taken into consideration, etc.)?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify)

5. Have your experiences during your employment at the Authority led you to feel secure in expressing yourself and your views?

Response:

- Yes

- No
- Other (Please Specify)

6. Have you availed of work-life balance measures (flexitime, teleworking)?

Response:

- Yes
- No

7. If yes, how have they contributed to your ability to balance work and other commitments?

Response:

- Very positive contribution, I would not keep up without them
- Positively
- Neutral
- Negatively
- Other (Please Specify)

8. Has your employment at the MFHEA provided you with opportunities for professional and academic advancement, such as through CPD trainings, networking, or study leave?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify)

9. Have you utilized special leave, such as maternity leave, parental leave, unpaid parental leave, or a family-related career break, during your employment?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify)

10. If yes, did you feel supported upon your return?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify)

11. Do you feel that the workload is distributed fairly, allowing you to have a healthy work-life balance?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please Specify)

12. Could you identify any measures that could improve inclusion and equality at the workplace?

Response:

- Yes
- No

13. If yes, please elaborate:

Response:

14. Could you identify any threats that hinder or act as a barrier to the MFHEA achieving or continuing to achieve, gender equality at the workplace?

Response:

- Yes
- No

15. If yes, please elaborate:

Response:

16. Do you identify as:

Response:

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Other (Please Specify)

