

## **Women as Legal Changemakers Conference**

The Queen's University Belfast School of Law is committed to actively promoting positive female role models for staff and students as part of its Athena Swan agenda. In keeping with this objective, on 29 September 2021, the School will host a conference to celebrate women with law degrees. These women are from or work within Ireland and Northern Ireland and have been pioneers in using the law to advance social equality and tackle historical injustices or drive change within the legal profession. Our inspiring speakers are drawn from the legal profession, the judiciary, and the legal academy. Their presentations will reflect on how they have used to their legal training and practice to bring about positive change as well as identifying areas with further change is needed.

The one-day conference will be structured around three panels. Given the online format, each panel will be one-hour long with 30-minute breaks between panels. Each panel will have three speakers, who will speak for 10-15 minutes each, allowing time for discussion with the audience following the presentations.

### **Panel 1: Advancing Social Equality**

In recent years, Ireland and Northern Ireland made considerable progress towards greater social equality. Notable campaigns include the introduction of marriage equality (2015 in Ireland and 2020 in Northern Ireland), and the removal of legal barriers to women's reproductive rights (Ireland in 2018 and 2020 in Northern Ireland). Women have played leadership roles in advocating for and achieving this progress. In addition, women from minority groups are gaining greater representation within the public sphere, and women have been at the forefront of campaigns to tackle discrimination. This panel will hear from speakers who have been pivotal in challenging in social inequality in their reflections on how they were able to advance change, the challenges that they faced as women in doing so, and what remains to be done.

### **Panel 2: Addressing Historical Abuses**

Both parts of the island of Ireland are grappling with the legacies of historical institutional abuses committed in Magdalene laundries, mother and baby homes, and industrial schools. The law has been a central vehicle for pressing these demands as well as a subject of contestation and struggle. Legal processes have been deployed to investigate and provide acknowledgement, but at times, their work has at times as been criticised for being insensitive to victims' need and experiences. This panel will hear from women who have played an important role in using the law to challenge impunity for past abuses.

### **Panel 3: Change within the Legal Profession**

This panel will reflect on the progress that has been made to transform within the legal profession through supporting the career development of women. This will include reflections on the importance of taking account of intersectionality and valuing the contributions made by women from diverse backgrounds to the profession. Our speakers will reflect on the progress that has been achieved through their work, the challenges they have faced as women in pursuing their careers, and identify areas where further work is needed.