

#WakingTheFeminists

Presented by Lian Bell, Campaign Director
with input from Amplify Women, Sarah Durcan, and Brenda Donohue



#WakingTheFeminists was a grassroots campaign for equality for women in Irish theatre. It ran for one year from late 2015, and in that short time it had a significant impact on the Irish theatre community.

Women were facing discrimination and underrepresentation in most publicly funded Irish theatre organisations. Women's stories and female artists were being given less space, continuing the myth in our wider culture that male dominated is both normal and acceptable. #WakingTheFeminists encouraged and supported individuals to speak up: to ask what stories are told, who gets to tell those stories, who makes those decisions, who is represented, who advances in their career, and who has the money.

Our [campaign objectives](#) for every publicly funded theatre organisation were:

1. **A sustained policy for inclusion with action plan and measurable results**
2. **Equal championing and advancement of women artists**
3. **Economic parity for all working in the theatre**

#WakingTheFeminists was made up of women and men who spoke out for equality for women working in all aspects of theatre in Ireland. A small group of volunteers worked with leading arts organisations and funders at the level of **policy and governance** to make sure gender equality becomes part of our sector's DNA, knitted into the fabric of how we make theatre in Ireland, and by extension, how women are represented in our culture and society.

The group commissioned **Gender Counts**, the first ever [study](#) into gender balance in Irish theatre, which showed how serious the imbalance really was. That study gave baseline statistics to help the community measure the changes coming from the campaign over the following years.

While the campaign ran for just a year, it has left a lasting legacy that reached far beyond the theatre community, into other artforms, into Irish society more widely, and into theatre communities internationally. That included, for example, all **National Cultural Institutions** being asked by the then Minister for the Arts to publish a gender equality policy; a **working group of theatre leaders** set up to address gender inequity in the sector, working to a **5 year deadline** to achieve gender equality; written commitments from theatre organisations to prioritise gender equality at all levels; and the Arts Council developing its **Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy and Strategy**, published in 2019.

The key successes of #WakingTheFeminists included: visibility of the campaign and broad recognition that the problem was a problem for everyone to help solve; placing responsibility and accountability at the top of organisations; ensuring there we knew the statistics and could begin to measure progress; all key organisations and funders getting involved; setting firm targets and a 5 year deadline.

However, representation and achieving equality in the numbers is not enough in itself to fix the problems of gender equality. There is still a lot more to be done, in theatre and in the wider arts community – from the #MeToo movement which has reverberated in the Irish theatre, poetry and comedy communities, to the gender pay gap, lack of family friendly practices, the types of stories that are told about women and marginalised communities, and deeper changes that will make the arts more open and welcoming to people of diverse genders and backgrounds.

Recommendations:

1. **Build in accountability at the top: at government, board and executive levels**

Unless there is ownership at the top, the issues won't be taken seriously enough, and sufficient progress in inclusive, equitable practices won't happen.

- **Add gender equality to Boards' risk register.** Make sure they are holding themselves accountable by tracking and reporting progress in their annual reports (including pay rates and gender pay gaps).
- Make sure women, as well as people from diverse backgrounds, are **represented equitably at board and governance/government level.** Introduce quota systems to accelerate change.
- Make sure there are **consequences for organisations** who fail to track and measure equality or meet policy targets (i.e. withdrawal of funding, license, etc.).
- Organisations in receipt of public funding must be monitored to ensure they are **compliant with the Public Sector Duty** (Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act) which confers a positive duty to ensure equality of opportunity and access, and protection from discrimination, for both employees and service users.
- Recognise that representation and equality in numbers alone is not enough - the **quality of women's experiences** in the workplace, in society and in leadership matters.

2. **Focus on policies, processes, practices and personal beliefs**

Too often policies aren't implemented. It is simple day-to-day actions that need to change, which is why processes and practices are equally important in changing systemic gender inequality.

- All national cultural institutions, organisations in receipt of public funding, and private companies (i.e. PAYE registered, possibly measured through tax legislation), must have a **gender equality policy** in place. These policies need to include measurable action plans, sanctions for non-compliance, reporting details (for transparency and measurability) to a government body and/or shareholders.
- Identify areas where one gender is significantly under-represented in relation to others and change this through **sponsorship, mentoring, training, outreach activities and education.**
- Support, fund and prioritise activities and events that **highlight women's achievements**, to ensure the work of women is visible, recognised, and valued.
- **Include all women and marginalised genders.** When we talk about feminism and supporting women, we make sure that we understand and make allowance for intersectionality - that other aspects of a person's identity and/or experience, such as ethnicity, race, sexuality, socio-economic background, ability etc. may have further impacts on their experience as a woman.
- Pay particular attention to **bullying and harassment**, which is often gendered. The current processes for dealing with bullying and harassment are wholly inadequate. They often favour the perpetrator rather than the complainant through lack of robust and transparent policy, fear of reprisal or a belief that organisations will seek to prioritise those in senior positions over complainants.

3. **Make sure there is equitable pay and conditions**

Understanding that a gender-equal society is better for everyone, that gender equality will be much better for boys and men and their wellbeing too, and will also significantly boost our economy.

- **Collect, analyse and publish gender statistics of organisations on an annual basis**, and make that the norm. These statistics should include participation, pay, quality of employment (full-time, part-time, casual, freelance), leadership, visibility, board membership.

- **Paid parental leave**, with specific measures to encourage paternal leave, and minimum mandatory paternal leave, otherwise allowing parents to decide what allocation of the parental leave they will take.
- **Ensure equal pay to women who are doing the same job** (for less pay) than a man in the same position or with the same responsibilities.
- More extensive **gender pay gap legislation**, requiring organisations to demonstrate how they are working to close the gender pay gap, and paying particular attention to both entry-level gendered pay, and leadership gender pay gaps.
- Care work of children and older people often falls to women so they may be forced to leave the workforce at different stages of their life cycle. Encourage and enable women of all ages by providing opportunities, training, upskilling and re-entry to the industry. Encourage men to choose caring over career also. **We need to re-value and adequately compensate care in our society.**

4. **Keep counting so the changes are measurable**

See it, say it, count it, change it. Experience shows that short-term gains can slip backwards. Counting and publishing the results keeps us honest about how progress is really going. Ambitious targets and/or quotas need to be set.

- **Set quotas** to make leadership representative of the population it leads/serves.
- **Make funding available to research gender balance** within the arts on an ongoing basis so that changes can be tracked. Support shared methodology and systems for tracking progress, so benchmarking can continue. When people see the reality of what they are doing in gender segregated data, it has an effect. Women also need to be able to easily track progress, and this is something that cannot be done on a piecemeal basis - it must be done at an institutional level.
- **Fund annual gender equality research** across all publicly funded bodies or those that provide public funding to ensure equal progression and disbursement of funds.
- **Commission a 'status quo' report** that shows the gender equality picture in the cultural and media industries by job title, salary and quality of employment (full time, part-time, contract, pensionable, etc.).
- **Measure pathways and career development**, by researching graduates' roles and tracking career paths in relation to leadership, to assess corporate-culture topography that inhibits access or promotion for women.
- **Tracking gender trends against economic cycles**, as it is thought that when industries are in crisis women take on more diverse roles, but when economies recover women can be shunted back out (often referred to as the "glass cliff" phenomenon).

5. **De-gender schools, and address gender inequity in its earliest development**

Gender differences, and abilities traditionally ascribed to different genders, are set by society very early. It is damaging to both boys and girls and their sense of what is possible in their lives.

- **De-gender all schools, curricula, and classrooms** from the earliest stages through to third level.
- As well as changes in curriculums and subjects' content, it is essential that **teachers and education providers also receive gender awareness, unconscious bias, and sociology training**, included in all Professional Development programmes for teachers and trainers
- Ensure the **Leaving Certificate 'Politics and Society' subject** includes compulsory modules on gender equality and diversity.
- Continued **support of informal education programmes** (such as panel discussions, conferences, social meetings, cultural events and campaigns), that address issues around gender discrimination, or which provide social awareness activities, and/or celebrate and promote the work of women in creative industries.



For further information, we recommend the following resources: 

- [WakingTheFeminists website](#)
- Lian's List - [70 personal and organisation action points toward gender equity](#)
- Arts Council [Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy and Strategy 2019](#)
- Amplify Women's Anti-Harassment toolkit <https://wft.ie/harassment-toolkit/>
- Irish Theatre Institute's Dignity in the Workplace Code of Behaviour
<http://www.irishtheatreinstitute.ie/attachments/c512602b-e015-48fa-a071-b70ed31a5e65.PDF>
- Iris Bohnet: What Works, Gender Equality by Design
http://scholar.harvard.edu/iris_bohnet/what-works
- one of the best books on developing gender equitable organisations and systems, by the director of public policy at Harvard.
- [Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders](#) by Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli <https://hbr.org/product/through-the-labyrinth-the-truth-about-how-women-become-leaders/an/1691-HBK-ENG>
- Caroline Criado Perez: Invisible Women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men
<https://www.penguin.com.au/books/invisible-women-9781784742928>
- Unfinished Business: Women, Men, Work, Family by Anne Marie Slaughter
<https://www.amazon.com/Unfinished-Business-Women-Work-Family/dp/0812984978>
- The Fix: Overcoming The Barriers That Hold Women Back At Work by Michelle King
<https://www.michellepking.com/book-1>
- No More Boys and Girls: Can Our Kids Go Gender Free? BBC documentary on a gender free education
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2iZ3RTVA_U_RQhzsg13VONTuzAjiqdh