

The #WorkEqual Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality's Public Consultation

05.03.2020

Practical Policy Measures to Progress Workplace Equality in Ireland

1.0 The #WorkEqual Submission

This submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality has been drafted by the #WorkEqual campaign, run by Dress for Success Dublin, in response to the call for submissions by the Assembly.

Through our one-to-one work with individuals and campaigning work with corporations, political groups and representative bodies, we have gleaned insights that will be of use to this public consultation on gender equality, particularly in relation to gender equality in the workplace.

2.0 Dress for Success Dublin

Dress for Success Dublin was founded in 2011 by TV Presenter, Designer & Social Entrepreneur, Sonya Lennon. We promote the economic independence of women by providing career development tools and a support network, while also campaigning at all levels of politics, business and civil society for gender equality in the workplace.

We are a not-for-profit organisation and a registered charity.

3.0 About the #WorkEqual Campaign

The WorkEqual campaign has been running since 2016, and raises awareness about gender inequalities in the workplace and explores how more women can be empowered to take on leadership positions.

As part of the campaign, we have marked Equal Pay Day for the past four years, the symbolic day on which women effectively stop earning, relative to men, because of the gender pay gap. We have also organised a range of awareness-raising activities, including briefings for members of the Oireachtas, local government representatives, and MEPs at the European Parliament; public debates and events; and online campaigns.

Arising from this work, in April 2019, we partnered with SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, on an event focused on women's participation in the labour market. The event attracted widespread media coverage, and all attendees expressed a strong desire for practical action to facilitate the involvement of more women in the labour market. From there, the idea for the inaugural #WorkEqual conference was born.

4.0 The #WorkEqual Conference

The conference took place at the end of November 2019, and brought together business leaders, politicians, policymakers and NGOs to develop practical recommendations on how to progress workplace equality in Ireland. An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, delivered the opening address, and the day-long programme featured international and domestic guest speakers. A key feature of the day was facilitated breakout discussions to ensure all attendees could share their views on what can be done to ensure women and men can participate fully and equally in the workforce.

Attendees included representatives from trade unions and NGOs, SMEs and MNCs, politics and the media.

During the facilitated breakout discussions, attendees were invited to share their views on the practical and implementable actions required – from businesses, policymakers and society at large – to address gender inequalities in the workplace. A report based on attendees’ feedback is currently being collated by Dress for Success Dublin as part of our ongoing #WorkEqual campaign, and will be presented to government in the coming months.

In the meantime, we have collated the key recommendations arising from the conference. The actions are grouped under five themes, which were identified by the conference attendees as the greatest barriers to full gender equality in the workplace. Each of the recommendations pertain to policy makers, business and/or civil society.

4.1 The WorkEqual Conference Recommendations

The following practical and implementable actions are for business, policymakers and civil society, to address and expedite gender equality in the workplace, and by extension, society at large.

The five key pillars identified by the conference attendees to be addressed are:

- A Strategy for Caring Responsibilities.
- Tackling Societal Gender Norms.
- Flexibility in the Workplace.
- Women in Leadership.
- The Gender Pay Gap.

4.1.1 A Strategy for Caring Responsibilities

Recommendations for Government:

The introduction of a broad ranging government strategy which acknowledges the significance and importance of caring responsibilities for men, women, families and society at large and enables those in employment to realise their preferred work life/family balance. Such a strategy should:

- Acknowledge the life course nature of caring responsibilities from infancy to the elderly.
- Introduce shared parental leave in the first year of a baby’s life whereby parents can opt to share maternity leave between them.
- Commit to Universal State Childcare being provided by 2025. This would facilitate improved quality of childcare whilst improving the wages and working conditions of the (mainly) women employed in the sector.
 - In the interim, the introduction of a State Insurance Scheme for Childcare Providers would lead to a decrease in the cost of childcare and an increase in the wages of those employed in the sector;

- Acknowledge the vital role of professional care workers and create wage bands to ensure a well-resourced, high quality and sustainable childcare sector.
- Improve the state provided home-care infrastructure for the elderly and disabled.

Recommendations for businesses:

- Ensure that paternity and parental leave take-up becomes the norm with improved measures taken by employers to encourage more men to avail of their full paternity leave requirements.

4.1.2 Tackling Societal Gender Norms

Recommendations for Government:

The introduction of a government-led campaign to change societal expectations around gender norms and roles in Irish society, challenging gender stereotypes from childhood and across the life course. Such a campaign should:

- Conduct a review of the educational curriculum and the materials used in classrooms which reinforce historical stereotyping of men and women in relation to caring responsibilities and employment.
- Provide unconscious bias training to all teachers, as a component of the Continuous Professional Development programme.
- Introduce modules on teacher training courses on awareness of gender stereotyping.
- Attract more male students into the teaching profession through the provision of state scholarships.
- Provide training and awareness raising programmes for employers, recruiters and managers on issues such as unconscious bias.
- Implement broadcasting codes of conduct in relation to negative gender stereotyping in advertising.
- Introduce a State-driven quality assurance mark for products and services assessed on the criteria relating to gender equality and dismantling historical gender norms.

4.1.3 Flexibility in the Workplace

Recommendations for Government:

Develop an employment landscape in Ireland in which flexibility in the workplace becomes the norm for all employees. This will result in improved work/life balance for employees and benefits to the employer such as increased productivity and retention.

The introduction of the EU Work Life Balance directive requires the Irish government to pass legislation to support a work-life balance for parents and carers, to encourage a more equal sharing of parental leave between men and women and address women's underrepresentation in the labour market by 2022.

This would require:

- Introducing a legal requirement for employers to disclose their policies on maternity, paternity and parental leave, and associated supports.
- Introducing measures which would negate the negative state pension implications for those who work part-time.
- The building of awareness amongst employers of the benefits of workplace flexibility.

4.1.4 Women in Leadership

Recommendations for Government:

In order to address women's underrepresentation in the workplace, and positions of leadership in the workplace and wider society, the following measures should be taken:

- Introduce target-led employment initiatives in sectors where women are underrepresented at all levels of organisations.
- Introduce a state-driven quality assurance mark for organisations that demonstrate adherence to criteria relating to achieving gender parity and striving towards equality.
- Enable access to credit or bond systems for self-employed women to encourage female entrepreneurship by introducing a state guarantor credit scheme.
- Public awareness campaign around sustainable work practice, acknowledging that working hours should be adhered to, rather than exceeded, and dismantling the perception that over-working equates to commitment/success.

Recommendations for business:

- Create mentoring programmes for women at all stages of their career.
- Introduce policies and procedures for recruitment and progression to manage and mitigate against unconscious bias.

4.1.5 The Gender Pay Gap

Recommendations for Government:

- Implement a Public Awareness Campaign to explain the gender pay gap and why it matters.
- Implement gender pay gap reporting (GPGR) which includes a mandatory requirement for companies to submit their strategy and action plan to close their pay gap.

Recommendations for business:

- Devise internal communications strategy to explain GPGR and its implications.
- Develop and communicate a clear action plan relating to how any identified gap will be reduced.

5.0 Follow-Up Assistance

The #WorkEqual campaign is happy to provide further assistance to the Citizen's Assembly in relation to identifying measures to achieve greater gender equality in Ireland. We are happy to present the above recommendations and the rationale for implementing each of them to the assembly.

6.0 Contact Details

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