

Women in Leadership Weekend – 17 October

Questions for Pauline Cullen – Submissions

- 1. What does she think gender equality success looks like and are there any pockets of society where this is evident today which we could shine a light on?**

Women and men have experienced lots of changes in their social and economic roles. Submissions were clear that progress including how well many girls do at school and the success of specific women in high level leadership roles in government, as diplomats, in business, as scientists, in sport, the arts and academia all indicate positive change. For most advocates of gender equality, goals including tackling the gap between female and male wages, eliminating violence against women and ensuring their equal representation and influence in senior decision making roles still remain out of reach. The curious thing about gender inequality is that it is very deeply rooted and it changes in character over time so that when women and men make some advances in sharing parenting, or in tackling unequal treatment at work, new aspects of gender inequality emerge including cyber (online) harassment/violence alongside the older and more durable elements. Women and girls have greater equality of opportunities but equality of outcomes for women (and especially disadvantaged women) – at home, in education, in the public life, or at work would represent success in gender equality terms.

- 2. On balance, will gender quotas result in the increased promotion and representation of women in leadership roles across all parts of Ireland's society and economy?**

Evidence provided by organisational submissions especially from organisations that work to increase women's presence in politics, in business and higher education support the role of gender quotas in increasing women's access to public life. They are understood to be particularly helpful in creating opportunities for women to compete with men for political office and when used as way of reserving places for women in senior roles can be very effective in immediate redress of imbalances.

Quotas are fundamentally about trying to correct a long term and historic imbalance. On their own they do not automatically change other areas of public life like the culture of organisations and ideas

people hold about leaders, etc. that help to maintain the over representation of men in these roles. The good thing that happens when quotas are used is that women gain opportunities to occupy public roles and this increases the visibility of women as leaders to the broader society. This was highlighted by research contained in submissions and by individuals as important in signalling to other women and girls that being a leader in a public role was possible.

However, most quotas have limitations attached to them and they may not work in ways that enable women who face additional obstacles including being working class, from a rural area, from an ethnic minority, or having a disability, access to these roles. In politics while some progress has been made using candidate quotas at national level, analysis of the 2020 election suggests we have stalled even with more women than ever seeking to run for an elected position.

The most recent research I am aware of also suggests that organisations and people can make informal rules that undermine quotas or interpret them in ways that limit their effects. A good example of this is when women candidates are placed in unwinnable seats or when women are appointed to a committee using a quota, but then the important decisions start to get made somewhere else in what is referred as “power leaving the room.” Women appointed by a quota can sometimes also be undermined in a personal way and experience resentment even though analyses suggests that ‘quota’ women generally match or outperform their non-quota colleagues. Finally, in societies where gender equality is not a strong value, quotas generally work best when they have incentives or penalties attached to them to push organisations to adopt them. Otherwise they may ignore them or implement them in ways that make some progress but at a very slow pace. Where women still carry out most of the care work and earn less money, they will find that quotas can only take them so far.

In sum, most studies cited in submissions support quotas as a crucial catalyst for change but recognise that they are not powerful enough on their own to correct the low levels of women in leadership.

3. Can it be written into law that every organisation has a gender equality officer and the training for that be provided by the state, perhaps online?

Submissions did argue for organisations to commit to gender equality through adopting action plans and mandating gender bias training. Some large companies and parts of the public and civil service already do this and or have commitments more broadly to diversity. Equal treatment laws already exist that prohibit sexual discrimination and sexual harassment and Ireland has commitments to processes known as gender mainstreaming that are aimed at encouraging policy makers to think about how gender matters for policy. Some submissions argue for a ministry or government department for gender equality as a way to create policies and laws to make progress. International evidence suggests that when you give some power on the national level and resources to tackling gender equality in a formal way it indicates a political and societal commitment to advance women's rights and support women and men to challenge stereotypes that narrow their choices. Public sector organisations also have commitments to protect human rights more broadly while some corporations have signed up to codes or frameworks that encourage them to support diversity and gender equality in their rules and practices.

4. Your presentation focused on women's dearth of representation in public life as submitted in submissions to the Assembly. Did those submissions also include other concerns e.g. concerns re groups of marginalized minorities or men? If so, will we have a presentation on those on those?

A number of submissions made reference to the experiences of ethnic minority women, migrant, asylum seeker and disabled women, poor women, transgendered people and lone parents. These are referenced in the presentation and detailed in the longer analysis of the submissions. A small number of submissions highlighted how sometimes when we focus on women's lack of representation we might not remember that men who are working class or poor are also not well represented in leadership roles. However, where submissions on this theme mention men, it was in relation to assessments that suggested that they experienced a lack of power in the justice system (in relation to family court or custodial agreements) or in employment related

matters. Some of these submissions also drew attention to the challenges that male lone parents had in access to influence and power in society. Some submissions on this theme that argued for men to be highlighted most often denied that women were interested in, capable of or suited for leadership roles. Some of this thinking was included in the presentation.

5. Will it ever be possible to correct the imbalance of women in public life and at what cost to society?

The submissions advocating for better representation were generally hopeful that equal representation was a possibility in the future. International evidence, cited in submissions, shows that Ireland is not doing well in many key indicators of gender equality including in decision making. Many submissions and broader evidence based assessments that compare nations to one another (for example the International Labour Organisation, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations) all agree that the most gender equal societies are the most prosperous, have the highest standard of living and the best health outcomes. Gender parity in decision making is seen overall to improve the quality of policy making, make societies fairer and in economic contexts improve profits. Given this evidence, correcting the imbalance is generally not understood to be a cost but rather a benefit for all.

6. Is legislation required to grant maternity leave to public representatives?

In Irish legislation there are no formal or special arrangements for Irish politicians (both members of the Oireachtas or MEPs) for maternity leave. There are no provisions relating to this matter in the Irish Constitution, the Electoral Act or the rules of the Irish Parliament (Standing Orders). Only provisions for a permanent replacement are provided in Irish legislation. Irish TDs and Senators cannot be substituted. However, there are also no provisions which prevent TDs and Senators from not attending Parliament for a vote. On an informal basis, pairing arrangements can be used. This is where a politician of one party agrees with a politician of an opposing party not to vote in a particular division, giving both politicians the opportunity to be absent

during the vote. Pairing arrangements can also be withdrawn by parties. In general, there is legislation for workers to take maternity leave. Irish politicians (including MEPs) are not employees but office holders and therefore not entitled to formal maternity leave. However, once elected a politician's salary is untouchable and can therefore not be reduced during the politicians' time in office. The salary is paid to the Member from the moment he or she is elected until the moment he or she loses the seat or dies. Were a Member to take time off for maternity leave, this salary would still be paid, as would the salaries of a Member's staff.

The Maternity Protection (Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas) Bill 2018 (introduced by Fianna Fáil) sought to ensure that female Deputies and Senators can take maternity leave in line with employees in companies and organisations across the country, and it removes the limbo which exists. If passed, it would have provided for maternity leave in respect of any female person: (a) elected to and currently a member of Dáil Éireann, and shall include the Cathaoirleach of Dáil Éireann, or (b) elected or appointed to and currently a member of Seanad Éireann. The Bill provides that a pregnant Member of the Houses of the Oireachtas will be entitled to maternity leave for a period not less than 18 weeks, with an additional six weeks provided, which still brings us up to the current standard for anybody who wishes to go on maternity leave from employment here, which is 26 weeks. The Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Dáil and Seanad in January 2020.

7. Do you think that public education has become the “go to solution” to all perceived ills in our society?

Is this too simplistic? Research cited in submissions indicates that public educational programmes that challenge in a concerted way sexism, or racism or ableism etc.. when well resourced delivered some good outcomes in terms of raising awareness and changing attitudes. On its own public education cannot create social change, but it can change attitudes and behaviours. The public campaigns to secure marriage equality and repeal of the 8th Amendment are often cited as examples of efforts to educate the public on an issue of importance that help underlying social and cultural changes become expressed in political and legal ways. In an era of social media and ‘fake news’ evidence based human rights focussed public education can make a difference. The Irish

Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) current campaign on knowing what discrimination is provides an example of how to educate everyone, including marginalised groups, about claiming their rights so that we can protect ourselves from discrimination. Women's organisations have also used public education campaigns (especially during COVID-19) to raise awareness of domestic violence.

8. If you examine the membership of state boards, would it be more true to say that gender is rarely the issue for selection, rather than maintaining the status quo through narrow selection criteria?

There are quotas for state boards now that look to fill 40% of the board with the underrepresented gender. This has helped to improve gender balance on some boards, along with campaigns by women's leadership organisations and individual women to encourage women to apply for membership. There may be other selection criteria used that maintain other forms of continuity on boards. The public appointments service has made some efforts to advertise membership of boards more broadly, but this has limits if women(and people from other underrepresented categories) do not know about or consider themselves suitable candidates.

9. How do you think the Assembly can actively ensure government take required steps to address issues raised in your presentation? Especially in political and corporate careers, where men continue to dominate senior roles here? Will higher quotas for women participation at senior levels in all careers, along with penalties of non-compliance be of benefit?

Initiatives such as *Better Balance Better Business* are supported by the government and work to encourage corporations to seek gender parity in senior roles. This programme has created some change, although many would suggest that incentives (including making sure that companies that get public contracts have gender balance) might secure change. There is broad consensus that higher quotas and penalties for non-compliance may be required to secure change in a shorter time frame.

10.If and when gender equality does come in to law, do you think that it should be put in place in school to educate young and will it come to tuition in work overall?

We have laws that ban sexual discrimination and we recognise lots of international treaties (even if we are often slow to incorporate them into law) that seek gender equality. Many submissions strongly suggested that the only way to secure gender equality is to start with young people and to confront deeply held gender stereotypes. Schooling can be a powerful force to seed new ideas about women and men's roles, but this also require similar values and messages at home and in broader society. Unfortunately the curriculum, how schools are organised and how teachers are trained still reinforce aspects of gender stereotyping.