

Women in Leadership Weekend – 17 October

Questions for Women on Air

- 1. Is it a discrimination issue or is it down to less women going for/being interested in these roles? Is there gender comparison data on application numbers for these roles (DJ, TV Presenter, News Anchor, Journalist)? If you have 1,000 men and 100 women applying for 50 broadcasting jobs, is a 50/50 split still fair?**
- 2. What are the proportion of women in the media industry compared to the percentage in management?**
- 3. I would like to learn more about how women are under-represented in the hard news. If this is the case, why is this so?**

Women on Air is focused primarily on achieving greater gender equality of women contributors on TV and radio, as opposed to presenters/DJs/Anchors. However, the lack of systematic measurement or reporting on either is an issue. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. The BAI and other have stated in the past that measurement is key to improving gender equality on our airwaves, but no formal measurement is yet in place. There does appear to have been some progress on some media outlets with regards to women presenters / DJs etc, but the same progress isn't apparent in the area of contributors / expert voices, which is central to our mission.

The introduction of mandatory measurement and reporting would, in itself, be a huge step forward and we could ask that the Citizens' Assembly consider making this one of its recommendations. Ultimately, Women on Air is calling for mandatory quotas / targets set down, and where possible, funding linked to it. This 'carrot and stick' method has worked in other areas (note the Screen Ireland ['Six Point Gender Plan'](#) and the gender quotas set down in politics, also linked to party funding). The example we refer to in our submission – BBC's Open Source programme – where voluntary commitment was given to ensure 50/50 representation of male/female contributors on its programme, worked well and was then incorporated on a wider basis. We would strongly encourage Irish programme makers to do this independently/ voluntarily, but we also feel that measurement will be key to driving these decisions and policy making linked to funding, and therefore ultimately to achieving proper balance in this area, on a wider basis.

[Hearing Women's Voices?](#) a report by the NWCI in 2015 found that in news and current affairs on Irish radio stations, women's voices only accounted for 28%, compared with 72% for men. We are not aware of more up to date data – apart from a study conducted by academic Lucy Keaveney reported on [here](#) - but while it is likely the numbers have improved somewhat, in our view it is clear that there is still a long way to go to achieving an acceptable level of gender balance on our airwaves.

4. Do Women on Air agree with the present situation of a small but significant number of broadcasters, mostly men earning inflated salaries?

Women on Air is focused primarily on achieving greater gender equality of women contributors on TV and radio, as opposed to presenters/DJs/Anchors. The issue of remuneration of professional broadcasters is not central to our mission but of course we believe that pay parity is essential, across all professions.

5. Is a "them and us" focus detrimental to the pursuit of gender equality?

The group images were mostly, if not all, women. Is there room for the male voice/input or is the agenda of Women on Air one dimensional?

The question above has relevance for many of the stakeholders/vested interests. It was interesting to note that Gary Kennedy has been in a minority, as a male, in presenting/advocating gender equality. *[NB Gary Kennedy represented the 30% club in a panel discussion circulated at the same time as the Women on Air video]*.

Women on Air is a community of men and women who want to see greater gender balance on our airwaves. We have had the support of many men in the 10 years since the establishment of Women in Air and we wholeheartedly agree that the importance of gender equality is an issue for both genders to understand and to work for.

- 6. I did not know that Women on Air existed. It should be more widely promoted so as women interested in media could be involved & mentored & their voices be heard. Why can't Women on Air be more widely promoted on all media outlets?**
- 7. Why isn't Women on Air advertising more than it is?**

Women on Air is a not for profit organisation run entirely by a Board of Directors who volunteer their time. Unlike other organisations such as Women for Election, it does not have staff that are dedicated to driving its mission forward on a full-time basis. We receive a small amount of funding each year, primarily from the BAI, and that funding is mostly used to run a small number of specialist training programmes each year that prepare women to participate in broadcast media. This training takes place over a weekend and it followed by a mentorship programme, which again is a result of volunteerism. With more funding and indeed dedicated staff, more could be achieved however we are proud to have trained over 70 women and to continue this work as best possible with the resources we have, and with the support of a small but dedicated Board of Directors.

- 8. Dr. Mary Favier and Dr. Catherine Motherway have provided excellent impartial information throughout the pandemic. Is their experience informing your outlook?**

Dr. Mary Favier and Dr. Catherine Motherway have been excellent throughout the Covid-19 crisis, providing expert commentary across a range of broadcast media outlets. They are wonderful role models. However, while we cannot say definitively because of the ongoing lack of formal measurement or reporting of gender balance on Irish airwaves, without doubt the majority of commentators about the pandemic have been male. A report commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation looking at newsgathering and news reporting in the UK, US, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and India uncovered a substantial bias towards men's perspectives in both news gathering and news coverage of the pandemic across all the regions. Called The Missing Perspectives of Women Perspectives in Covid-19 news, the report is available here <https://www.iwmf.org/women-in-covid19-news/>

9. There is a huge issue with official and social media corporate responses to the abuse of women via social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook etc. Do good practice recommendations currently exist, or have been proposed, that would help corps respond better to trolling/harassment online? It's a huge issue and growing issue, and affects women's participation in so many areas of public and private life. See recent court case on twitter

Cyber bullying and trolling are significant issues that affects both women and men. The Programme for Government has committed to the establishment of an Online Safety Commissioner and we agree that this should be a priority so as to encourage more women, and men, to contribute to public debate without fear of vicious online trolling and abuse.