

WorkEqual Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality

10th June 2022

1.0 Introduction

The mission of [WorkEqual](#) (formerly Dress for Success Dublin) is to promote the economic independence of women and build an Ireland that champions workplace equality. The organisation, a registered charity, provides free supports to women seeking to (re)enter the workforce. These include professional styling, mentoring and career development services.

WorkEqual also runs an annual awareness campaign to highlight and tackle gender inequalities in Irish workplaces. The campaign has run since 2016 and is centred around a month of activities each November, including Equal Pay Day – the date on which women effectively stop earning, relative to men, because of the gender pay gap. Since the campaign’s establishment, it has built up cross-sectoral support amongst employers, employees, politicians, policymakers and civil society in Ireland and further afield. A WorkEqual Oireachtas All-Party Group was formed in 2018, and is currently co-chaired by Ivana Bacik TD and Senators Lorraine Clifford-Lee and Emer Currie.

1.1 Policy Priorities for WorkEqual

In 2019, WorkEqual agreed five key themes to guide its campaigning work:

1. Tackling gender stereotyping;
2. Addressing the gender pay gap;
3. Promoting flexible working;
4. Ensuring caring duties are valued and equally shared between women and men; and
5. Promoting more women in leadership.

Over the past year, WorkEqual has focused – in particular – on the theme of ‘caring duties’. Our November 2021 awareness campaign held a flagship seminar on the topic of ‘Reimagining Childcare Provision’. This seminar aimed to showcase best practices in public childcare provision, with speakers including:

- The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman TD;
- Brynhildur Heiðar-og Ómarsdóttir, then Secretary General of the Icelandic Women’s Rights Association;
- Michell Doull, Head of Professional Learning and Quality Assurance at Early Years Scotland; and
- Frances Byrne, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Early Childhood Ireland.

As part of our November 2021 campaign, WorkEqual also commissioned market research on public attitudes to gender equality and caring duties.

For our November 2022 campaign, this focus on caring – and, in particular, childcare – will be maintained. Currently, we are collaborating with the Icelandic Women’s Rights Association to organise a study tour for Irish parliamentarians to visit Iceland (in early autumn 2022) to witness first-hand the public childcare system in place there and to learn about the impact that Iceland’s public childcare model has had on gender equality and women’s participation in the workforce.

2.0 WorkEqual Research on Public Attitudes to Gender Equality and Caring Duties

As referenced in Section 1.1, WorkEqual commissioned [market research](#) last year on public attitudes to gender equality and caring duties. This research was carried out by B&A in October 2021 with a nationally representative sample of 1,011 adults aged 16+. Key findings are as follows:

The Gender Pay Gap

- 74% of people believe closing the gender pay gap is important and should be a priority for government and employers.
 - Support is particularly strong amongst women: 85% of women agree with this statement (that closing the gender pay gap is important and should be a priority for government and employers), compared to 63% of men.
 - Older men are more likely to agree with this statement than younger men.
- The vast majority of people (70%) believe concerns about the gender pay gap represent awareness of a real issue.
 - In contrast, 16% believe they are an example of political correctness going too far.
- Understanding of the gender pay gap is mixed.
 - 70% of people recognise that the gender pay gap is the difference in the average hourly wage of all men and women across a workforce.
 - 85% equate addressing the gender pay gap with ensuring people who do the exact same job get paid the exact same salary.
 - Only 52% believe the gender pay gap exists because women often make career decisions influenced by the need to care for children and / or other family members.
 - Males and females who have likely experienced the gender pay gap (for men, most probably in the form of a partner's experience) are much more likely to understand what the gender pay gap is.
 - Those in probable caring roles (e.g. with family at pre-school, pre-teen and teen stages) are most likely to agree that it can stem from career decisions influenced by family caring duties.

Pay Transparency

- 67% of people are in favour of pay transparency: they believe people should have the right to know what other colleagues doing the same work are paid.
- Support is highest amongst women (70% of women agree vs. 63% of men).

Caring and Household Duties

- 52% say that, in their own family, household planning tasks – such as shopping lists; meal planning; and organising gifts, holidays and social occasions – are more likely to be a woman's responsibility. 42% feel these tasks are likely to be shared between women and men, but only 2% said they are more likely to be a man's responsibility.
- 48% say housework – such as laundry, cooking and cleaning – is more likely to be a woman's responsibility. 46% say it is likely to be shared. Only 3% say it is more likely to be a man's responsibility.
- 48% believe childcare arrangements – including sourcing and selecting a provider, drop-offs and collections – are more likely to be a woman's responsibility. 37% say this is likely to be a shared responsibility, while only 2% believe it is likely to be a man's responsibility.
- When it comes to covering childcare costs out of your own salary, 18% say this is more likely to be a woman's responsibility; 59% say it is likely to be shared; and 7% believe it is more likely to be a man's responsibility.

- In summary, women are most likely to be seen as having caring responsibilities solely placed on them. While many survey respondents see caring responsibilities as being divided between the two genders, the idea of caring responsibilities falling solely on men is almost non-existent.

Workplace Support for Caring Duties

When asked to rate their own workplace in terms of family caring supports, the results were very polarised:

- 30% state their workplace is highly supportive (rating it 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale).
- 24% feel their workplace is unsupportive (rating it 5 or less).
- Those with children, in Dublin and from middle-class backgrounds consider their workplaces to be more supportive.
- Those without children rate their workplaces as less supportive.

Impact of Caring Duties on Career Progression

- 35% of people say family caring duties have impacted on their career.
- 45% of women feel they are impacted, compared to 25% of men.
- 33% of women with teenage children say their career has been impacted vs. 0% of men.
- For parents of pre-teens, 41% of women feel impacted, compared to only 10% of men.
- For parents of pre-school children, 46% of women feel impacted, compared to 16% of men.

2.1 Dissemination of Research Findings and Our Conclusions from the Research

WorkEqual presented these research findings to the WorkEqual Oireachtas All-Party Group last November – at a special meeting of the Group to mark Equal Pay Day 2021. The findings were also shared – via email and postal correspondence – with the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman TD.

It is our intention to conduct a follow-up piece of market research in autumn 2022.

We believe our 2021 research findings demonstrate the following key points – all of relevance to the current work of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality:

1. While there is strong public support for closing the gender pay gap, there is confusion about what exactly the pay gap is and what factors contribute to it. There is a need for a public awareness campaign aimed at informing people about what exactly the gender pay gap is, and why it is important for employers (and society as a whole) to measure it and take steps to address it.
2. Women disproportionately bear the burden of household and caring duties – and caring duties impact more severely on women’s careers than on men’s. We strongly believe that prompt implementation of the recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality will help to change this, ensuring greater equality between women and men in Ireland.

In the following section, we have highlighted the recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality that are of most relevance to WorkEqual, and we have included our response in each case, including an outline of how we believe these recommendations could be implemented.

3.0 Relevant Recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

3.1 Relevant Citizens' Assembly Recommendations on Care

- Recommendation 4: To improve the terms and conditions of those in paid employment as carers (for children and adults): (a) They should have a pay structure and benefits (including sick pay and pensions) that reward their level of skill and training, similar to those of teachers and nurses. (b) They should have a career structure, including access to training and professional registration, which enables them to progress in their chosen area.
- Recommendation 8: Ireland should: (a) Over the next decade move to a publicly funded, accessible and regulated model of quality, affordable early years and out of hours childcare. (b) Increase the State share of GDP spent on childcare, from the current 0.37% of GDP to at least 1% by no later than 2030 in line with the UNICEF target.
- Recommendation 9: Paid Leave for parents should: (a) Cover the first year of a child's life. (b) Be non-transferable to encourage sharing of childcare responsibility between parents. (c) Provide lone parents with the same total leave period as a couple. (d) Be incentivised by increasing payment levels to encourage increased take up.

3.1.1 WorkEqual's Response

In our 2019 report, ['Practical Steps to Workplace Equality'](#), we recommended the introduction of a government strategy that acknowledges the significance and importance of caring responsibilities for families and society at large; and enables those in employment to realise their preferred work life / family balance. We believe such a strategy should:

- Acknowledge the life course nature of caring responsibilities from infancy to the elderly.
- Commit to a properly-funded system of public childcare being provided by 2028. This would facilitate improved quality of childcare whilst improving the wages and working conditions of those (mainly women) employed in the sector.
- In the interim, introduce a State Insurance Scheme for childcare providers which would lead to a decrease in the costs of childcare and an increase in the wages of those employed in the sector.
- Introduce a legal requirement for employers to disclose their policies on maternity, paternity and parental leave, and associated supports.
- 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 entitlements.

3.2 Relevant Citizens' Assembly Recommendations on Leadership in Politics, Public Life and the Workplace

- Recommendation 22: Public funding to cultural, sports, arts and media organisations should be contingent on: (a) A quota of 30% representation of women, and of men, on their Governing bodies by 2025 and 40% by 2030. (b) Published plans to advance gender equality in their organisations. (c) Annual reporting on progress towards agreed quotas on gender representation and funding.
- Recommendation 25: Work places should be required to develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-neutral recruitment and promotion policies and practices including: (a) Specific policies to promote gender equality in leadership positions. (b) A requirement to operate gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory selection and promotions processes. (c)

Equal access to training, assignments and mentoring opportunities for all employees including part-time and remote workers.

3.2.1 WorkEqual's Response

In our 'Practical Steps to Workplace Equality' report, we recommend:

- The introduction by government of target-led employment initiatives in sectors where women are underrepresented at all levels of organisations.
- A State-driven quality assurance mark for organisations that demonstrate deep gender parity and a framework to strive towards equality. A similar mark has been introduced in Iceland, and we have been collaborating with the Icelandic Women's Rights Association since 2018 to explore how Ireland can learn from Iceland's experience of successfully promoting gender equality¹.

We also include specific recommendations for employers / the business sector, namely the introduction of:

- Mentoring and sponsorship programmes for women at all stages of their career.
- Business policies and procedures for recruitment and progression to manage and mitigate unconscious bias.
- Gender targets at leadership levels and an action plan to achieve the targets.

3.3 Relevant Citizens' Assembly Recommendations on Norms and Stereotypes and Education

- Recommendation 27: Curriculum review and development should: (a) Promote gender equality and diversity. (b) Explicitly cover gender power dynamics, consent and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence – both online and offline – within the revised Relationships and Sexuality curriculum.
- Recommendation 28: All levels of the education system from pre-school to third level, led by the relevant Government Department, should: (a) Ensure that initial education and continuing professional development for staff includes modules promoting gender awareness and gender-sensitive teaching methods. (b) Monitor policies and practices – including school inspection and whole school evaluation – through the lens of gender equality and report regularly on trends and outcomes by gender.

3.3.1 WorkEqual's Response

In our 'Practical Steps to Workplace Equality' report, we recommend the introduction of a government-led campaign to challenge gender stereotypes and social norms from childhood across the life course. We believe such a campaign should encompass the following key elements:

- A government-conducted review of the education curriculum and the materials used in classrooms to assess whether they reinforce historical stereotyping of men and women in relation to caring responsibilities and employment.
- The provision of unconscious bias training for all teachers.
- Attracting more male students into the teaching profession through the provision of State scholarships.

¹ The World Economic Forum's 'Global Gender Gap Report 2021' rated Iceland as the most gender-equal country in the world for the 12th time: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/>.

3.4 Relevant Citizens' Assembly Recommendations on Pay and Workplace Conditions

- Recommendation 32: The State should set targets in legislation to reduce the hourly gender pay gap (currently 14%²) to 9% by 2025 and to 4% by 2030 with a view to eliminating it by 2035.
- Recommendation 33: The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill should be enacted and implemented without delay. The law should include penalties for non-compliance and an obligation for annual reporting.

WorkEqual's Response

In 'Practical Steps to Workplace Equality', we recommend the rollout of a government-backed public awareness campaign to explain the gender pay gap and why it matters. We have been pleased – since then – to see the enactment of the Gender Pay Gap Information Act. We are aware that the Government is currently running an advertising campaign aimed at informing relevant employers about their duties under this Act. However, as evidenced by the findings of the market research we commissioned in autumn 2021 (as detailed in Section 2 of this document), we still firmly believe that a public awareness campaign is needed to ensure full buy-in and long-term support for the Act. We also believe that a strong emphasis must be maintained on the importance of employers submitting action plans to address their gender pay gaps, along with their gender pay gap data.

4.0 Conclusion: Linking Civil Society, Employers and Policymakers

Over the years, through our work in providing career supports for women, WorkEqual became acutely aware that, even after a woman secured a job, she would likely face gender-specific challenges that hindered her career development. This knowledge is what drives our campaigning work.

One of our key strengths is our capacity to link civil society, employers and policymakers. We are an agile charity, operating with excellence governance and working in a collaborative manner with grassroots groups and national civil society organisations across Ireland. At the same time – through our corporate partnership programmes – we work with some of the largest and most progressive employers in the country. SOLAS and Permanent TSB have sponsored our annual awareness campaign for the past three years, while we also work closely with organisations such as: Brown Thomas Arnotts, JP Morgan, Lincoln Recruitment Specialists, McCann Fitzgerald, Northstar Healthcare, One4All Rewards, Oracle, and many, many more. The WorkEqual All-Party Oireachtas Group, meanwhile, provides a means for us to share our learnings with parliamentarians and highlight ways in which they can introduce policies and laws that will lead to practical improvements in relation to gender equality.

Our expertise is in tackling gender inequalities in Irish *workplaces*. But, in order to do so, we know widespread public and political understanding of gender inequalities is essential.

We wholeheartedly support the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality and we urge the Government to implement them without delay.

ENDS

- A report on the findings of the B&A market research commissioned by WorkEqual in autumn 2021 is available at: <https://workequal.ie/work-equal-research-equal-pay-day/>.
- WorkEqual's 2019 report, 'Practical Steps to Workplace Equality', is available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P0M8EB9MZb85Q9hanT9XrnVOuCDK-UQ/view>.

² The latest data for 2018 available since the citizens considered this topic shows a gap of 11.3%. See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en