



**Submission from Dress for Success Dublin  
to the Public Consultation on Measures  
to Address the Gender Pay Gap in Ireland**

**Submission Date: 4<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

## 1.0 About Dress for Success Dublin

Dress for Success Dublin was founded in 2011 by stylist, designer and tech entrepreneur, Sonya Lennon. We promote the economic independence of women by providing career development tools and a support network.

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

We currently receive no statutory funding. We are dependent on the involvement of volunteers to provide our core services. We cover our costs through fundraising initiatives, corporate partnerships and sponsorships and philanthropic grants. Our core corporate partners currently include: BNY Mellon, A&L Goodbody, Boots, Bobbi Brown, eir, LK Shields and Marks & Spencer.

We are an affiliate of a global organisation, Dress for Success Worldwide, an international not-for-profit dedicated to improving the lives of women in 145 cities across 23 countries.

The core services we provide at Dress for Success Dublin include:

- Professional styling advice for women in advance of job interviews – in our on-site Clothing Boutique.
- One-to-one interview preparation with experienced HR professionals in our Career Centre.
- The provision of starter ‘work wardrobes’ for women who succeed in gaining employment.
- Sector-specific workshops, aimed at giving the women we work with insights and advice on establishing a career in their chosen field.
- Sustaining Success: a workshop series aimed at assisting women to develop the skills they need to establish sustainable careers and, in the longer term, to achieve economic independence.
- Mentoring programmes: for women participating on schemes like JobBridge, Community Employment schemes and Tús, whereby participants are partnered with mentors from some of the corporate organisations that support our work.

## 1.1 Our Clients

We work with:

- Recently unemployed women.
- Long-term unemployed women.
- Early school-leavers who are currently in training.
- Immigrants who have recently arrived in Ireland.
- Vulnerable groups, such as lone parents and women with disabilities.

Fifty-eight per cent of the women we work with are in the 31-50 age-bracket; 41 per cent are mothers.

To date, 87 per cent of the women who accessed our services have come from central Dublin and suburbs, with 13 per cent coming from further afield (we are currently in the process of expanding our organisation to provide services nationwide).

The women we work with come from all walks of life and range from early school-leavers to women struggling to find work again after a career break for family reasons. Their common characteristic is that they have faced barriers in entering / re-entering the workforce.

## 1.2 Our Impact to Date

Since we were established:

- We have formed partnerships with 78 referral agencies across Dublin (Jobs Clubs, Local Employment Centres, etc.), who refer women to us when they are ready to begin applying for jobs and participating in interviews.
- We have supported 1,523 women with the clothes, skills and development opportunities they needed to secure employment and achieve success.
- 57 per cent of the women we have supported are now working; 75 per cent are where they want to be (whether in employment or in further education and training).
- Results from our confidence measurement surveys show that the vast majority of women leave our services feeling more confident and with higher levels of self-esteem.
- Feedback from referral partners and women is extremely positive.

## 1.3 Our Work on Addressing the Gender Pay Gap

In November 2016, Dress for Success Dublin ran our inaugural Equal Pay campaign, aimed at highlighting the gender pay gap in Ireland, and raising awareness of how individuals, companies and politicians can work to close this gap.

### ***Context for our Campaign***

In the UK, France, Iceland and other countries, highly visible campaigns take place towards the end of each year – on the date from which women are, effectively, working for free (usually at some point in November, depending on the exact gender pay gap in each country).

Dress for Success Dublin decided to establish an awareness campaign in 2016 to highlight Ireland's gender pay gap in a similar way. We devised a high-level month-long campaign, with a year-round rollout, with the following aims:

- To raise public and political awareness of the gender pay gap and advocate for change on this issue.
- To raise public and political awareness of Dress for Success Dublin's work.
- To secure support from employers, including commitments that they will tackle this issue in their own workplaces.
- To raise funds to support the work of Dress for Success Dublin in helping women to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Key elements of our 2016 Equal Pay Day Campaign included:

- A campaign launch on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016.
- Sustained media relations and online communications.
- An appeal for online donations.
- A flagship fundraising event.
- Political awareness-raising, culminating in a briefing in Leinster House for members of the Oireachtas.
- Consultation with corporate partners on effecting cultural change.

### ***Impact of the 2016 Campaign***

- Our 2016 Equal Pay campaign achieved high-profile media coverage, including in leading national outlets such as The Irish Times and the Irish Examiner, and on TV3's 'Xposé' and Today FM's 'Sunday Business Show'.
- The campaign generated a net income of €6,445.05 for Dress for Success Dublin and helped us to leverage additional funding to support our work.
- Over the month of the campaign, visitors to our website increased by 83 per cent and page views on the website increased by 69 per cent.
- The number of likes on our Facebook page increased by 2.5 per cent, and posts about the campaign reached over 19,000 Facebook-users.
- The reach of our tweets during the campaign was over 79,000.
- We received inbound requests for involvement from five key FDI corporates.

### ***Equal Pay Campaign 2017***

Dress for Success Dublin will run our second annual Equal Pay campaign in November 2017. This will incorporate:

- A month-long awareness-raising campaign, including a media launch and intensive social media activity;
- A briefing for members of the Oireachtas, aimed at demonstrating how the gender pay gap impacts on the women with whom we work;
- A roundtable event with senior leaders from the corporate entities that support our work.

## **1.4 Rationale for our Submission**

This submission to the public consultation on measures to address the gender pay gap is based on our experience and learnings from our annual Equal Pay campaign, as well as our six years of service provision for women seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce.

## 2.0 Actions to Be Taken to Address the Gender Pay Gap

As stated in the consultation document produced by the Gender Equality Division of the Department of Justice and Equality, women's economic empowerment emerged as one of the strongest themes from the recent consultation to inform the new National Strategy for Women and Girls.

This issue was given added impetus in recent months due to the widespread media coverage on gender pay gaps at the BBC and RTÉ.

At Dress for Success Dublin, we are concerned that the majority of discourse on the issue of the gender pay gap focuses on higher-income earners working in corporate settings. The stark realities of the gender pay gap start when a woman joins the workforce – in her initial salary negotiations. Moreover, we believe the experiences of women in more vulnerable situations are being overlooked, for example:

1. Women in lower-income roles;
2. Women in part-time positions;
3. Women on zero-hour contracts;
4. Underemployed and unemployed women; and
5. Women with lower levels of educational attainment.

In short, we believe the experiences of the poorest and most vulnerable women in Irish society are not being reflected in the current discourse on gender equality.

The majority of low-paid and part-time workers in Ireland are women. According to NERI, 73 per cent of the 70,000 workers on the minimum wage are women and, according to the NWCI, 11 per cent of female workers are underemployed, compared to six per cent of working men.

Addressing the gender pay gap in an equitable and sustainable way means requires removing barriers to economic independence regardless of income or educational attainment levels.

### 2.1 Proposed Action 1: Undertake Research on how the Gender Pay Gap Impacts on Lower-Income Earners and those with Lower Levels of Educational Attainment

One of the obstacles Dress for Success Dublin has faced in our work to date on highlighting the gender pay gap is the lack of Irish-focused research on this topic, particularly in relation to the experiences of lower-income earners and those with lower levels of educational attainment.

The consultation document produced by the Gender Equality Division of the Department of Justice and Equality points to a number of research-focused measures included in the National Strategy for Women and Girls (pages 10-11 of the consultation document). These include:

- An independent review of the situation of women in the governance and senior management of companies in Ireland and of measures to promote and to increase women's representation, such as targets for business;
- Using the findings of this independent review to develop measures to promote greater representation of women on corporate boards and in the senior management of companies;
- Research with the ESRI on barriers preventing women from application for senior positions in the Civil Service; and

- A mapping exercise on gender balance in senior positions in the public service, including assessment of possible barriers to achieving greater representation of women in senior positions.

While Dress for Success Dublin welcomes and supports the above measures, we would like to see the research and assessments proposed under the National Strategy for Women and Girls broadened to include the experiences of lower-income earners and those with lower levels of educational attainment. In particular, we would like to see the Government supporting independent research on:

- The extent of the gender pay gap for those on lower incomes;
- The long-term impact of gender inequality on lower-income families; and
- The extent to which the gender pay gap acts as a barrier for women seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce.

## **2.2 Proposed Action 2: Introduce Mandatory Shared Parental Leave and Address Gender Stereotypes**

The report of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland<sup>1</sup>, published in 2015, recommended “the conversion of existing unpaid maternity leave to paid parental leave with the option for some sharing of the additional paid element between both parents”.

However, this recommendation has not been progressed by government, and Ireland continues to lag behind our European neighbours in this regard.

In Ireland, mothers are entitled to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave, and a further 16 weeks of unpaid leave. Fathers are entitled to just two weeks of paternity leave.

In contrast, in Sweden, for example, parents get 480 days’ leave to split between them – at 80 per cent of their regular salary – and it is mandatory for fathers to take at least 90 days of this allocation.

In the UK, the mandatory maternity leave period is 12 weeks, with a further 40 weeks to be split between parents as they wish.

Similar models are in place in Norway, Iceland, Denmark and elsewhere.

Dress for Success Dublin believes the introduction of mandatory shared parental leave – to be split between couples as they see fit – is a key step in addressing the gender pay gap.

Furthermore, men must be encouraged and supported to avail of their parental leave entitlements: in August of this year, it emerged that only one-third of new fathers had taken their two weeks’ paternity benefit of €235 per week since it was introduced last year<sup>2</sup>.

If fathers are supported to play a more equitable role in early-years childcare, there will be obvious benefits for women. Firstly, it will make it less likely that women will miss out on promotions or pay rises because of gaps in their CVs due to child-rearing responsibilities. Secondly, it will make it less likely that employers will discriminate against women when hiring or awarding promotions. Thirdly,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/20150722IDGReportonEarlyYrsInvestmentReport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/why-we-need-a-daddy-quota-and-shared-parental-leave-1.3182482>

it societally embeds a culture of equality, empathy and understanding in the home, mitigating against cultural inequalities in the workplace.

Shared parental leave will also contribute to addressing gender stereotypes, which can limit women's and girls' educational and occupational opportunities from the youngest age.

As highlighted in the public consultation document, the promotion of positive gender norms is a desired outcome of the National Strategy for Women and Girls; this is something that Dress for Success Dublin fully supports.

In particular, we would welcome progress in relation to the following actions specified in the National Strategy:

1. The holding of a referendum on Article 41.2.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann regarding a "woman's life within the home"; and
2. Support for initiatives to encourage men and boys to be champions of gender equality. In all our work to date, this is something that Dress for Success Dublin has emphasised: we firmly believe that the gender inequality cannot be addressed without the full support and involvement of men as well as women.

### **2.3 Proposed Action 3: Make Childcare More Affordable**

Access to high-quality affordable childcare is crucial if women are to participate fully and equally in the workforce.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme introduced in Budget 2017 was an important first step in implementing a system of publicly-subsidised universal childcare in Ireland. This scheme must be sustained and expanded in future years, so that a high-quality model of public childcare becomes embedded in Irish life, placing us on a par with our European neighbours.

We fully support the action in the National Strategy for Women and Girls to implement, on a phased basis, a new national scheme of financial support for parents towards the cost of quality childcare.

### **2.4 Proposed Action 4: Implement Measures to Address the Gender Pension Gap**

Women in Ireland typically enter retirement with lower pensions than their male counterparts, often due to the fact they assumed caring duties for children or other family-members over the course of their working lives.

Women are also more likely to rely on State pensions. However, for various reasons – and as continuously highlighted by the NWCI<sup>3</sup> – they continue to have less access to State pensions than men: 84 per cent of those receiving a full State contributory pension are men.

According to the CSO, the gender pension gap widened from 35 per cent in 2010 to 37 per cent in 2012.

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[http://www.nwci.ie/index.php?/discover/what\\_we\\_do/womens\\_economic\\_independence/women\\_and\\_social\\_protection/women\\_and\\_pensions/](http://www.nwci.ie/index.php?/discover/what_we_do/womens_economic_independence/women_and_social_protection/women_and_pensions/)

Currently, women struggle to build up sufficient contributions across both the public and private pension systems because of the gender pay gap, precarious and low-paid employment, caring duties, and labour market exclusion brought about by the lack of affordable childcare options.

In examining measures to address the gender pay gap, we urge the Government to also heed the gender pension gap and the poverty risk it poses for women as they age. We support the NWC's calls for the introduction of a universal pension, which would be independent of PRSI contributions and which would ensure equality in older age.

## **2.5 Our Support for Other Actions Specified in the National Strategy for Women and Girls**

In addition to the measures we have highlighted in Sections 2.1 to 2.4, we wish to publicly express our support for the following actions from the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020:

- Funding the provision of locally delivered courses for women, comprising a series of training opportunities on self-development and work-related skills, to assist a return to the labour market and promote entrepreneurship.
- Introducing an 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion mark' for businesses.
- Promoting wage transparency by requiring companies of 50 or more employees to complete a wage survey periodically and report the results.
- Promoting initiatives to support women returning to work from maternity leave.
- Reducing the gap in poverty rates between female-headed households and male-headed households by introducing measures to assist return to the labour market and encourage entrepreneurship.
- Examining the existing suite of in-work supports for families, including lone parent families. Based on this examination, finalising proposals for an approach to the Working Family Payment guided by the principles of making work pay and reducing child poverty.
- Promoting awareness of and access to Department of Social Protection employment supports via DSP Case Officers and promotional campaigns.



### **3.0 How Dress for Success Dublin Can Contribute**

Dress for Success Dublin can contribute to implementing measures to address the gender pay gap in the following ways:

- We would be happy to sit on any advisory / working group established by government to progress the outcomes of this public consultation process.
- We will roll out our Equal Pay campaign again in 2017 (and beyond), with a view to raising awareness of the gender pay gap and its root causes.
- We have over 50 high-profile corporate partners, ranging from law and accountancy firms to technology companies and MNCs. We will use our existing links with corporate entities across Ireland to raise awareness of the gender pay gap amongst employers, and encourage the companies that support our work to demonstrate leadership in addressing gender inequality in their own workplaces and sectors.
- We have a large social media following and a proven track record in attracting high levels of media coverage for our campaigns. We are happy to leverage this to assist in the dissemination of practical information resources to explain and increase understanding of the multifaceted aspects of the gender pay gap and its causes.
- We will continue to draw awareness to and address both the external and internal limiting factors that women face in the move towards gender pay equality.

#### **3.1 Conclusion**

The primary purpose of Dress for Success Dublin is to support women to achieve economic independence. Based on our six years of service provision, we know the gender pay gap is a significant barrier for women seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce and establish sustainable careers.

We are committed to gender equality, and we would welcome an opportunity to be actively involved in the development and implementation of measures to address Ireland's gender pay gap.

## 4.0 Contact Details

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