

# MEASURES TO TACKLE THE GENDER PAY GAP

GENDER PAY GAP CONSULTATION 2017

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## About Strength Within

Claire Flannery is the Founder and Owner of 'Strength Within' coaching and consultancy, where she focuses on helping people create the headspace and mental clarity to discover, cultivate and maximise their strength within. Claire is a qualified Business Psychologist and Executive, Business & Personal Coach with over a decade of experience working in HR leadership in Financial and Professional Services. She has worked with business leaders and individuals through significant organisational and personal change, including periods of organisational growth, restructure and downsizing. She is also a mum to two small boys and has personal experience of successfully managing her career while preparing to transition out of, and back into, the workforce.

Through one-to-one coaching, group coaching and workshops, Claire works with individuals and business leaders to increase clarity of thought, focus, strength and ultimately, success. She specialises in navigating change and helps individuals, teams and organisations to thrive in times of change - whether that is starting a business, starting a family, planning and implementing significant business restructure or taking that next step on the career ladder. As a large part of her work, she is also privileged to work with women and their partners as they make their journey through pregnancy, birth and early parenting. Along with coaching services, Claire runs Antenatal, Preparing-for-Parenthood and Return-to-Work workshops in Dublin. She is a volunteer with Cuidiú, Friends of Breastfeeding and AIMS Ireland and runs monthly coffee mornings for women planning their return to work.

As a member of the Psychological Society of Ireland, British Psychological Society, and Association for Coaching she is committed to their professional codes of conduct, and upholding the highest standards of professionalism and ethics.

## Introduction

Strength Within welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on 'Measures to tackle the gender pay gap', which forms part of the wider National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020. At Strength Within, our focus is on helping individuals and businesses to successfully navigate change, with a large proportion of our time dedicated to supporting new parents before, during and after taking a career break for family leave. As such, our response is primarily focused on the challenges faced during the early parenting years, and how to help parents to balance work and family commitments to keep women in their careers.

## Factors creating the Gender Pay Gap

In its publication 'Tackling the gender pay gap in the European Union', the European Commission states that the gender pay gap is a complex issue caused by a number of interrelated factors, and identified the main causes in the EU as follows:

- 1 Discrimination in the workplace
- 2 Women and men carry out different jobs and often work in different sectors
- 3 Workplace practice and pay systems
- 4 Undervaluing of women's work and skills
- 5 Few women in senior and leadership positions
- 6 Gender roles and traditions
- 7 Balancing work and family commitments

The factors outlined above distil a complex and nuanced situation. While factors such as 2, 3, and 5 are relatively straightforward to diagnose; matters such as gender roles, discrimination and undervaluing of work and skills are much more intangible, pernicious and often deeply ingrained in society, community and workplace culture. The ongoing absence of equal gender representation at senior decision-making levels compounds existing issues and enables gender bias to continue across politics, public service and private enterprises. Unveiling unconscious bias is an essential step in raising awareness among those privileged to not have first-hand experience of gender inequality. While fantastic work is underway within organisations and commencing in the school system, the oftentimes extreme variation in expectations of different genders in the home and community is another important aspect to consider in addressing points 6 and 7, and freeing up capacity for point 5.

Underpinning many of the causes above is women's confidence in returning to work following the significant, complex personal and professional transition of becoming a parent and taking time out of the workplace, whether for the duration of maternity or extended career leave. Outside of the workplace other factors affecting this transition can include: mental wellbeing and resilience, partner support, access to perinatal and community supports, and success in accessing suitable childcare.

## Action to address the Gender Pay Gap

### A. Awareness and information

We welcome the work that has already been undertaken and planned to raise awareness and provide information. This work is crucial in highlighting the issue and initiating a dialogue across employers and between employer and employees. An information campaign aimed at ensuring employees fully understand the concept of 'equal pay' and its contributing factors would be beneficial in maximising employers' time and resources available to address gaps.

### B. Human Capital

*With a view to increasing access to training opportunities for women and increasing the number of women returners to the labour market, the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 includes the following actions:*

- 1.7 Fund 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.
- 1.12 Publish the eligibility of homemakers to apply for Springboard + courses.

During early parenting years there are a myriad of challenges facing women returning to work including: self-confidence following personal transition and a career break; isolation or feeling removed from professional life; supports available within the workplace; skills and support available in commencing a job search or setting up a new business; access to affordable, suitable and available childcare; the financial viability of returning to work when factoring in the cost of childcare. The extent of these challenges can very much depend on individual circumstances and as such there is a need for a combination of standard and tailored approaches to address these issues. The Springboard + initiatives are a fantastic step in the right direction, and should form a cornerstone of a suite of solutions for women planning their return to work.

### Recommendations

- 1) Short workshops aimed at women who are planning their return to work and who need help with planning their return, preparing to look for a new job etc.
- 2) One-to-one or group coaching sessions for women returning to work, tailored to the specific needs of the individual, to help build their confidence and plan the correct course of action for them.

- 3) Workshops aimed at increasing awareness and upskilling business owners and line-managers to empower them to successfully lead and support pregnant women and parents planning family leave and returning to work following leave.
- 4) Encourage employers to work collaboratively with women planning family leave and implement initiatives such as 'keep-in-touch' days to reduce the risk of women feeling isolated and out-of-touch.
- 5) Work with business and employee bodies to encourage wider practice of flexible working, with increased focus on 'results' over 'time spent at work'.
- 6) Specific workshops, group coaching or coaching aimed at mothers returning to the workforce via entrepreneurship. Similar to women-only courses currently run by LEO, but further tailored to the needs of mothers specifically.
- 7) Networking sessions specifically aimed at women returning to work, whether starting a business, returning to an existing role or entering the job market – providing a space for women to support one another and build a network of support.
- 8) Information campaign to promote the wider benefit of returning to work e.g. total remuneration packages, pension benefits, social and well-being benefits etc.

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*The promotion of positive gender norms is a desired outcome of the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020. A set of actions to address gender stereotypes that, from the youngest age, limit women's and girl's educational and occupational opportunities include:*

- *3.3. Establish a programme of activity, include research, awareness-raising and cultural activities, to promote positive gender norms and challenge negative gender norms.*
- *3.4 Support initiatives to encourage men and boys to be champions of gender equality, drawing on the Men Advocating Real Change, HeForShe, ManUp and WhiteRibbon initiatives.*

In addition to the initiatives planned and underway in addressing gender norms and traditions within the educational system, there is a need to educate on and promote the familial, societal and economic benefits of men taking on more caring and household responsibilities.

## **Recommendations**

- 9) Workshops for expectant parents that help them to successfully enter parenthood together and work on a plan to ensure gender balance within their family unit.
- 10) Work with businesses and employee groups to design family leave initiatives in a way that encourages and enables men to take time off during the first year of their child's life (i.e. feasible AND culturally and organisationally acceptable).
- 11) Work with businesses to encourage flexible working initiatives that place emphasis on 'results' over 'time spent at work' and are equally available to men and women.
- 12) Information campaign to help challenge cultural norms, with men sharing their positive experiences of taking time out for caring responsibilities during early parenthood.

## C. Job-level and firm-level initiatives

*The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 includes the following actions aiming for greater gender balance in business and public sector leadership:*

- *4.1 Commission and independent review of the situation of women in the governance and senior management of companies in Ireland and of measures to promote and increase women's representation, such as targets for business.*
- *4.2 Informed by the recommendations of the independent review, develop and implement a package of measures to promote greater representation of women on corporate boards and in the senior management of companies.*

In addition to the initiatives planned and underway, a shift in focus from 'time spent at work' to 'results' is needed, along with bespoke interventions to assist female leaders in continued career progression.

## Recommendations

- 1) Invest in leadership skills and provide support to employers to upskill their teams on: the benefits of gender diversity; unconscious bias; and how to lead and support diverse employees.
- 2) One-to-one coaching for female leaders, along with mentorship initiatives that help to build medium to long-term mentoring relationships.
- 3) Implement funding and support to promote gender diversity within organisations, with particular focus on SME's.

## D. Societal Factors

*The following actions are included in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 to improve supports for working parents, increase availability of family leave and work-life balance to support parents in their caring role for children, and ensure that all parents have access to quality, affordable childcare and the information is gathered to support Government investment in childcare:*

- 1.1 Provide a platform of parenting supports for families and working parents
- 1.2 Publish proposals for the implementation of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to expand paid leave in the first year of child's life by end-2017 and legislate for them as soon as possible thereafter.
- 1.3 Promote initiatives to support women returning to work from maternity leave

A key aspect in improving supports for working parents is increasing the availability of family leave and work-life balance to support parents in their caring role for children. Outside of this, is the crucial element of preparing them to successfully navigate the significant personal transition of becoming a parent and the subsequent transition back to the workplace.

## Recommendations

- 1) The recommendations included in Section B above apply here also.
- 2) Provide coaching support for both parents in preparing to become parents via workshops or group coaching that provide a space for expectant parents to reflect on, and plan for, the changes and challenges ahead. Support new parents from the outset and before family leave commences.
- 3) Provide fora for working parents to network, discuss and support one another in navigating the challenges associated with taking a career break for family leave and the subsequent return to work. It is worth noting that a large proportion of very valuable support for new parents happens in online communities – it would be beneficial to support some of these networks to come together offline.
- 4) Ensure that all families have access to quality, affordable childcare with sufficient supply to meet demand and reduce the incidence of women having to delay returning to work until a childcare place has been secured.
- 5) Provide further funding and support for volunteer and community support groups such as Cuidiú to continue their valuable work and expand their network of day-to-day support nationwide.

## E. Other Factors

In addition to the above areas for action and recommendations, the following points from the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 are also noteworthy in ensuring that maternal and infant physical and mental wellbeing, and cultural norms do not prevent further barriers to successfully returning to work:

- 2.17 Implement HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020 to advance public support of breastfeeding.
- 2.18 Extend provision for breastfeeding breaks under employment legislation (currently available to mother of children under 6 months).
- 2.19 Implement the National Maternity Strategy (2016-2026).
- 2.22 Design and develop peri-natal mental health service capacity.

## Contributing to implementing these actions

At Strength Within we currently provide tailored solutions in many of the areas mentioned above and would welcome the opportunity to discuss further, and how we may contribute to addressing the Gender Pay Gap.

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