

Better Boards, Better Business, Better Society.

A Handbook for
Increasing Women
on Boards in Ireland



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About the National Women's Council of Ireland

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) is the leading national women's membership organisation seeking equality between men and women. We represent over 170 member groups from a diverse range of backgrounds, sectors and locations.

We exist to lead, and to be a catalyst for change, in the achievement of equality between women and men by articulating the views and experiences of our members.

Our vision is of an Ireland and a world where there is full equality between women and men.

Our beliefs and values shape how we work, key among these are:

- We are a feminist organisation. We believe that feminism is about equality and we believe in working to change society so that women and men have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives
- Solidarity between women in all their diversity, through empowerment, collaboration and participation of all women in Ireland and internationally. The recognition of care and the need for the redistribution of care work between women and men
- Protection and respect for the bodily integrity of women and girls.
- The importance of human rights, global interdependence and sustainability in all its forms.
- The leadership role of women in the achievement of a more equal society.

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Foreword



Equal representation of women and men in society is critical for achieving gender equality in Ireland. Over the past 41 years since NWCI was established, there have been significant advances and achievements for women's rights and equality. Increasing the number of women in power and decision making has consistently been a core priority of NWCI. As a feminist organisation, we believe that feminism is about working to change society so that women and men have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. The presence and active participation of women in central decision making arenas goes to the heart of feminism and recognises that women must play an active part in the decision making processes in all areas of society.

While substantial gains for women's equality have been made, women are still significantly under-represented in senior decision making in multiple sectors in Ireland – the public sector, politics, the diplomatic service, state boards and non-state boards. In order to realise a democratic society, we can no longer exclude over 50% of the population. This report, through voices of women and the perspectives of NWCI members, clearly demonstrates how change is not only possible, but necessary for building a more a sustainable society in addition to achieving greater equality.

Women currently comprise just 10% of Irish corporate boards and 36% of all State Boards. This report seeks to ask why 90% of Irish private board rooms

are male, why the culture of excluding women exists and persists and why the routes for board appointments are inherently discriminatory for women. There are recent signs of progress which are highlighted in the report, and there is clearly a growing public intolerance for cronyism and sexism in the corridors and boardrooms of power in Ireland. We now have an opportunity for change and NWCI is proposing a series of realistic measures from the workplace to the boardroom, that have been proven to work elsewhere, which provide sustainable solutions to changing practice and culture in order to achieve equality in our Boardrooms.

We believe that women in senior decision making positions at all levels of society-locally, nationally and internationally- offer key sources of leadership and skills in relation to achieving equality between women and men. Structures must be changed, supports must be resourced and enabled and incentives must be introduced to change the picture of boardrooms across Ireland. Women in Ireland are board ready but are our boards in both the public and private sector ready for women? Ultimately the power base must shift from men to women so that all of society can benefit.

Orla O'Connor
Director,
NWCI

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Summary of Key Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION

01

Directors and CEO's of state and non-state companies:

CREATE A LEADERSHIP PIPELINE FROM THE WORKPLACE TO THE BOARDROOM.

- Establish and maintain a family-friendly work environment.
- Incorporate gender-sensitivity training into workplace management, human resources, and employee training to identify 'unconscious bias' and promote gender equality in the workplace.
- Implement training and mentoring programmes for women at senior management and board levels.

RECOMMENDATION

02

Chairpersons and Board Members:

SELF-REGULATE ON BOARD DIVERSITY – SET GENDER GOALS, STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE, SEEK OUT WOMEN, AND INVEST IN DIRECTORS AND POTENTIAL DIRECTORS.

- Establish specific gender goals as indicators of organisational performance for the board, board committees, and senior management.
- Strengthen and support gender diversity governance standards for private, public, and third sector organisations.
- Actively seek women for board positions by advertising openings, encouraging women to apply, and challenging search firms to promote qualified women.
- Invest in boards by planning board successions with gender balance in mind and professionally develop both female and male board members and potential members.

RECOMMENDATION

03

**Government, Chairs and
Members of State Boards:**

TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO ENSURE THAT THE STATE BECOMES A MODEL OF GENDER PARITY AND STANDARD-SETTING AT BOARD LEVEL AND IN THE WORKPLACE.

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- Reach the existing goal of 40% women on state boards by 2016 – and then surpass it.
 - Legislate on gender quotas for non-state boards.

RECOMMENDATION

04

**Government or nominated
state agency:**

ACT AS A WATCHDOG, THROUGH RIGOROUS MONITORING AND MEASURING OF WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED, IMPLEMENTED AND ACHIEVED ON BOARD GENDER BALANCE AND PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND MOVING FORWARD.

-
- Incentivise future efforts on board gender balance by sharing best practices across industries and using procurement processes and publicity to reward those who take positive action.
 - Establish a formal system requiring regular reporting to monitor the gender composition of boards and establish an Irish 'Women on Boards' independent review.

Introduction





This handbook outlines recommendations for change in the workplace, and in corporate and state board rooms. This handbook outlines how state policy and expenditure towards the realisation of gender balance and gender equality in state and non-state corporate decision making in Ireland. The recommendations target key audiences with the capacity to bring about change: government, board members, industry, management, executive search companies, and investors. Some changes are legislative, some relate to governance codes, and others to best practice activities. Case studies have been used to demonstrate international best practice in relation to the recommendations. The handbook also includes testimonies from individual women who sit on state and/or corporate boards.

‘The right person for the job, regardless of gender’.

This is a common refrain heard in debate and discussions of workplace equality. And it is a refrain that makes sense – until it doesn’t, as it fails to recognise or understand the barriers and obstacles to women’s progression. The Department of Justice and Equality have divided these barriers into two categories:

- Traditional gender roles – The reconciliation of family/private life and working life and the availability of accessible and affordable childcare (and caring services to support other dependent groups) are essential
- Attitudes and perceptions – stereotypes and perceptions continue to frustrate women’s efforts to reach top management positions in all areas of decision-making in Ireland.”¹

1 Department of Justice and Equality (2013), ‘Towards Gender Parity in Decision Making’, Pg 7.

The common refrain is also a passive idea in an otherwise dynamic environment. Organisations, be they private, public, or third sector, are committed to success. Private businesses, for example, are proactive in their pursuit of profits, shareholder returns, a positive public image, and much more. There is an opportunity, and a need, to be just as active in realising the full potential of people in Ireland, and their capacity to contribute.

Men and women have long had unequal access to leadership and positions of authority in the workplace. Despite significant gains over the past 40 years, this inequality persists today. Women are still significantly under-represented in senior decision-making positions in Ireland's public and private sectors, in politics, the diplomatic service, as well as on state and non-state boards.

Women currently comprise just 10% of Irish corporate boards. Women fare somewhat better on state boards – comprising 36% of all state board members². Just 21% of state board chairs however, are women. Women remain significantly under-represented on the state boards responsible for economic decision-making.

These figures set Ireland apart – and behind – internationally. Significant strides in women's corporate board representation have been made by European countries such as Finland (29.8%), France (29.7%), Sweden (26.5%), the Netherlands (25.1%), and Denmark (22.9%)³. The Women on Boards Directive, initiated by the European Commission and passed by the European Parliament, supports these efforts and calls for a minimum of 40% representation of women on boards of public companies. Ireland's closest economic partner, the United Kingdom (UK), has made significant strides in recent years most notably since launching a public campaign on the issue of women on boards in 2011. UK non-state boards currently have close to 21% women, more than double the number in Ireland although significant work remains in order to reach the EU target.

Perceived merit-based selections cannot rectify this disparity on their own; they must be coupled with proactive efforts specific to gender. Examples include, but are not limited to: developing a leadership talent pipeline for women, setting gender goals for board appointments, increasing transparency and expanding recruitment efforts, and legislating for quotas – all of which and more are explored in this report, with specific and actionable recommendations for implementation.

2 http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/ireland_in_the_eu/impact_of_eu_on_irish_women/index_en.htm (Accessed February 2015).

3 European Commission (2014) "Gender balance on corporate boards: women are cracking the glass ceiling" http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/140303_factsheet_wob_en.pdf (Accessed February 2015).

Targeting the boardroom and the pipeline to it

In this report, NWCi looks at the dominance of men in boardrooms in Ireland and the persistent absence of women. We propose a number of recommendations for reform that will bring about improved gender balance in decision-making, the workplace, and wider society.

The recommendations focus on changes that must be made in the workplace, in corporate and state board rooms, and in state policy and expenditure. Key stakeholders with the capacity to implement change are targeted including, board members, management, government, executive search firms, investors, and industry and advocacy groups.

Targeting change in three key areas

This report identifies opportunities for improvement in three areas, and targets specific groups in each area with the capacity to lead and make change happen:

- The leadership talent pipeline
- Board membership and activities in the private and community/voluntary sectors
- Board membership and standard-setting in the public sector

It outlines the status quo on gender balance issues in each area and sets out specific recommendations for change and strategies for how to achieve it. It concludes with a future-oriented section on how to incentivise non-state and state efforts moving forward and monitor progress towards gender balance goals.

How we got to here

Ireland's low representation of women in senior decision-making is a symptom of a society that has structurally excluded women through law, policy and practice over the course of its history.

The issue of women and work is a particularly complex issue for a number of reasons: the Irish constitution, in Article 41.2, still regards a woman's place as being in the home; the Marriage Bar, in place until 1973, forced women to give up their civil service jobs upon marrying; and the State historically supported the use of institutional settings for women. Despite the challenging historic barriers experienced by women at work in Ireland, there has been significant progress over the past 40 years, owing particularly to; the strength and activism of the women's movement; our membership in the European Union; the introduction of free post-primary education; and the abolition of fees for third level education.

According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the employment rate for women in Ireland rose from 55.4% in 2003 to 60.6% in 2007, though it has since fallen back to just over 55%⁴. But these statistics do not reflect the complex reality underpinning women's employment in Ireland.

- Women are more likely to work in part time, precarious and often low paid employment. Women represented 72.1% of those who worked up to 29 hours per week in paid employment in 2013.
- The Irish workforce is characterised by **high levels of gender segregation**. In 2012, the education and health sectors employed 35.5% of all working women in Ireland, while the construction sector had just 5.7%. There is also significant **horizontal segregation** with few women in leadership in sectors where they outnumber their male colleagues.
- Women and men join the labour market at approximately the same rate. However women's participation is characterised by more obvious age patterns, peaking between 25-34 years at 78%. **From age 35 onwards the number of women in employment falls**, and the disparity between men and women sits at approximately 20% in each subsequent age bracket until the age of 65, where the gap widens further.
- These **age patterns are more enlightening when looked at alongside marital status**. In 2013 married men worked longer hours in paid employment than married women, with 44.1% of married men working 40 or more hours per week compared with 16.8% of married women.
- **While women are achieving higher qualifications than men, they are still paid less**. The **gender pay gap**, the difference between men and women's pay based on the average difference in gross hourly earnings, stands at 13.9%. This means that women earn less over their lifetime, which results in lower pensions and a risk of poverty in old age.
- **Childcare costs** in Ireland are some of the highest in the world. A dual-earner family with two children aged 2-3 years pay between 24% and 35% of their net income on childcare, this rises to 40% for a lone-parent family. High care costs combined with the gender pay gap often leave women with no option but to become the primary carer.
- The absence of **paid paternity leave, and parental leave** denies fathers the opportunity to bond with their children and reinforces the stereotype of a mothers place being in the home and fathers being at work. Such stereotypes frustrate women's progression in decision making in Ireland, which is acknowledged in Governments own reports.

4 http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/ireland_in_the_eu/impact_of_eu_on_irish_women/index_en.htm (Accessed February 2015).

How a focus on gender equality at board level serves business and society

Given the broad set of challenges around women and work in Ireland – from unequal pay to unaffordable child care – why focus specifically on the boardroom?

Board members represent a small fraction of the overall workforce, but they wield a disproportionate amount of power and influence. Board decisions impact business decisions, which in turn, impact the economy. And the economy impacts society as a whole.

The current gender imbalance on Irish boards is a reflection of the systemic inequality in the workplace, as outlined above. But the board is also a highly visible place from which to affect change.

Increasing the number of women on boards, therefore, “should be based on both equality and economics grounds”⁵.

The responsibilities of a board are many: “they oversee management, finances, and quality; set strategic direction; build community relationships; establish ethical standards, values, and compliance; and select a CEO and monitor his or her progress”⁶. In doing so, the actions of the board are responsible for both the governance of an organisation, as well as its public tone.

As women make their way into the boardroom around the world, research on the impact they are having has begun to emerge.

Many studies now show demonstrative positive financial results with an increase of women on the board – other research is equivocal⁷. Research efforts are hampered, however, by the fact that in many countries, only a small amount of what some term ‘diversity data’ (or gender metrics on board membership) is available⁸. To this end, NWCi outlines specific steps in this handbook that Irish stakeholders can take to improve data collection and reporting on this issue.

5 Choudhury, B. (2014) “New Rationales for Women on Boards” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 34(3), p. 511.

6 Arnwine, D. (2002) “Effective governance: the roles and responsibilities of board members” *Proc (Bayl Univ Med Cent)*, 15(1): 19–22.

7 For a review, see Chapple, L. and J. E. Humphrey (2014) “Does Board Gender Diversity Have a Financial Impact? Evidence Using Stock Portfolio Performance” *Journal of Business Ethics* 122:709–723 or Terjesen, S., Ruth Sealy and Val Singh (2009) “Women Directors on Corporate Boards: A Review and Research Agenda” *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 17(3): 320–337.

8 Wang, Y., & Clift, B. (2009) “Is there a ‘business case’ for board diversity”. *Pacific Accounting Review*, 21(2), 88–103.

Research has also revealed the pervasiveness of gender bias. One study investigating whether there was a relationship between female board appointments and declines in firm share price found that the firm's profits and other business outcomes remained steady – the decline in share price was, in fact, due to gender bias on the part of a set of investors⁹. But investors in other instances, such as public pension funds in some countries, have been champions of board gender equality efforts and as such, represent an important stakeholder group for our recommendations as well.

Notably, the definition of 'board gender diversity' as measured in much of the studies to date categorises a board as diverse with the presence of just one female director¹⁰. Yet we know from other research that in order for the presence of women (or any other formally excluded group for that matter) to have a significant affect on group decision-making and behaviour, there must be a critical mass of at least 30% women – as there is the potential for one woman on her own to be marginalised in her efforts¹¹. Studies that test for significant affects from female directorships, then, will find more affects when female directorships reach a critical mass.

This is why the 10% representation of women on corporate boards in Ireland is far from where we need to be. And why it matters for Ireland's economy and Ireland's society.

Boards are about more than the bottom line – they are about governance. And in this area, research has shown women to be an unequivocal value-add.

Female board members have the tendency to be more risk-averse¹², which can produce better outcomes. A 2011 study of financial institutions, pre-crisis, found that financial institutions engaged in subprime lending had a particular set of board characteristics (busier, less tenure, and notably, less gender diverse) as compared to financial institutions that were not¹³.

9 Dobbins and Jung (2011) "Corporate Board Gender Diversity and Stock Performance: The Competence Gap or Institutional Investor Bias?" *North Carolina Law Review*, Vol 89, p. 809-838.

10 Adams, R., & Ferreira, D. (2009) "Women in the boardroom and their impact on governance and performance." *Journal of Financial Economics*, 94(2):291-309.

11 Konrad, A. M., Kramer, V., & Erkut, S. 2008. "Critical mass: The impact of three or more women on corporate boards. *Organizational Dynamics*, 37(2): 145-164.

12 Srinidhi, B., Gul, F. A., & Tsui, J. (2011) Female directors and earnings quality. *Contemporary Accounting Research*, 28(5):1610-1644.

13 Muller-Kahle, Maureen I. and Krista B. Lewellyn (2011) "Did Board Configuration Matter? The Case of US Subprime Lenders" *Corporate Governance: An International Review*,19(5): 405-417.

Women on boards are associated with an increased effort, better communication, and better decision-making among all directors¹⁴. Women on boards often “possess expert backgrounds outside of traditional business and have on average higher formal education than their male counterparts”¹⁵. Importantly women on boards beget the potential for more women on boards – female board directorship is linked to a real increase in corporate social responsibility measures, particularly those related to gender equality¹⁶, meaning that the general workplace environment and organisational practices for women at all levels improves.

All of the above evidence, and more, supports NWCI’s call for more women on boards in Ireland. But board appointments, in and of themselves, are not enough. We must also develop women in their directorships. Studies show that female directors receive less mentoring than male directors – which is then linked to fewer appointments to other boards for women, and an overall exclusion from “the inner circle of corporate leadership”¹⁷.

As was noted in Norway, in advance of their landmark legislation to increase the representation of women on boards:

“In a society where market forces might be said to be more important than ever before, it is even more important that women are well represented where the power is situated within the companies and the boards.”¹⁸

We cannot wait any longer. In 2012, the European Commission pointed out that if the pace of female board appointments continued at its current rate, 40% women on boards would not be reached for 40 more years¹⁹. Ireland needs a comprehensive approach and it needs it now.

14 Bilimoria, D. (2000) “Building the business case for women corporate directors”. In R. J. Burke & M. C. Mattis (Eds.), *Women on corporate boards of directors: International challenges and opportunities*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

15 Choudhury, B. (2014), p. 528.

16 Larrieta-Rubín de Celis, I. et al. (2015) “Does having women managers lead to increased gender equality practices in corporate social responsibility?” *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 24(1).

17 McDonald, M. and J. D. Westphal (2013) “Access Denied: Low Mentoring of Women and Minority First-Time Directors and its Negative Effects on Appointments to Additional Boards” *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(4): 1169-1198.

18 Choudry (2014), p. 519.

19 European Commission (2012) *Women in economic decision-making in the EU: progress report*. A Europe 2020 initiative.

A note on merit-based board appointments

In 2011, Lord Davies of Abersoch, former UK Minister for Trade, published his inaugural report, *Women on Boards*, which has since become a global touchstone for reviewing and promoting the inclusion of more women on boards.

In his introduction, he notes that:

“board appointments must always be made on merit... but, given the long record of women achieving the highest qualifications and leadership positions in many walks of life, the poor representation of women on boards, relative to their male counterparts, has raised questions about whether board recruitment is in practice based on skills, experience, and performance”²⁰.

Indeed, when a director from the Institute of Directors in Ireland was challenged with the notion that there “may not be enough of a talent pool with appropriate skill-sets to effect that quick a change” on gender equality in Irish boardrooms, the response was:

“For the past 20 years, 50% of graduates from our universities are female and are outperforming the males. Therefore, in terms of education and experience, we have developed a large pool of very talented women in this country with experience across all business sectors. The marriage ban is gone a long time and so are the barriers to females entering the professions”²¹.

The case for change

The need for women in senior decision-making is recognised on a global scale. Gender balance is more than a ‘buzz’ issue, it is a business, economic, and social imperative.

The business case

“Companies with three or more women in senior management functions score more highly, on average, for each organisational criterion [work environment and values; direction; coordination

20 Davies, Lord (2011) *Women on Boards*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31480/11-745-women-on-boards.pdf (Accessed January 2011).

21 Institute of Directors in Ireland (2013) *Women on boards in Ireland: Insights from women directors on the progress made and obstacles remaining*. <https://www.iodireland.ie/information-advice-policy/research/women-on-boards-in-ireland-insights-from-women-directors-on-the-progress-made-and-obstacles-remaining> (Accessed January 2015).

and control; leadership; external orientation; motivation; capability; accountability; innovation] than companies with no women at the top.”²²

The ‘business case’ for women in the boardroom is well established. The body of evidence from a variety of different sources links board and senior management diversity to improved decision-making, financial performance, corporate governance and oversight for business, as well as higher levels of innovation and creativity.

Companies also increasingly recognise that women’s departure from the workforce is a significant business cost. When seeking to reduce attrition rates, companies now look to practices that will encourage their female employees to continue to work with the company. These practices are established to ensure continuity in organisational knowledge and a return on investments made during induction and training.

From an external perspective, women are the predominant purchaser of goods and services and are said to control 70% of consumer spending on a global scale²³. Businesses are slowly starting to recognise this and are seeking to mirror the market by having more women on their boards to contribute to, and inform, the decision-making processes that target the consumer.

The economic case

The negative impact of a lack of diversity in decision-making beyond businesses themselves is also widely acknowledged, particularly in relation to governance and ethics. The 2011 Government-commissioned Nyborg Report into the banking crisis identified ‘groupthink’ and ‘herding’ as key contributory causes for governance failures in Irish banks²⁴. The European Commission described the global economic crisis as ‘very male’²⁵.

“When I joined Eirgrid it seemed to me that the entire executive management had engineering degrees so talk about group thinking!”

Bride Rosney, Secretary to the Irish Board of Trustees at Mary Robinson Foundation

22 McKinsey & Co (2007) Women Matter: Gender diversity, a corporate performance driver, p. 14 www.mckinsey.com/features/women_matter. (Accessed February 2015).

23 See: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-24/women-controlling-70-of-consumer-spending-sparse-in-central-bankers-club.html> (Accessed February 2015).

24 (2011) Misjudging Risk: Causes of the Systematic Banking Crisis in Ireland: Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Banking Sector in Ireland. www.bankinginquiry.gov.ie (Accessed February 2015).

25 European Commission, ‘Women in economic decision-making in the EU (2012)

The impact of poor decision-making processes are long lasting, and still being felt in Ireland today. Recent austerity measures have further excluded women from participating in society and have increased inequality, particularly for vulnerable women with children. Ireland is still reeling from the domestic impact of the crisis.

Women outperform men at all levels of educational attainment, yet remain excluded from the most senior executive and board positions once they enter the labour market. Boys are more likely than girls to leave school early, and girls outperform boys in both the junior and leaving certificate²⁶. Women are also more likely to have a third-level qualification; over half (55.3%) of women aged 25-34 possessed a third-level qualification in 2013, compared to just 42.7% of men of the same age²⁷.

The State can receive a maximum return on its investment in education by reducing the gender pay gap; targeting skills shortages and clusters of women and men in certain sectors; improving women's position in the workforce; and increasing their voice in senior decision-making. Increasing the number of women in better paid positions will translate into increased financial independence (and less financial dependence on the State), increased tax revenue, and increased pension fund contribution (which is key, as the Irish gender pension gap is currently one of the highest in Europe²⁸).

The social case

Improving the economy and increasing GDP alone will not create a more equal society, nor will it eliminate poverty or deprivation. There is a social case for better decision-making, in business and in politics. For example, decisions regarding sourcing of materials, how much staff are paid, and under what terms and conditions they work, all have an impact on the social order. Research indicates that gender diversity in decision-making allows for the dissenting voice, and the contrary viewpoint to be heard. NWCI believes that this contrarian position is critical in a post-austerity era, as we move to develop more sustainable solutions.

In addressing the absence of women on the boards of Irish companies, we have an opportunity to reflect on the gendered social norms, and traditional biases, that serve to hold women back. Though these norms and biases are often unintended and unnoticed, they are at play in our homes, in our schools and universities, in our workplaces, and in the boardroom.

26 Byrne, D., S. McCoy, and D. Watson (2007) "School Leavers Survey Report, 2007", Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

27 (2013) "Women and Men in Ireland Report, 2013", Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

28 Bettio, F., P. Tinios, and G. Betti (2013) "The Gender Pay Gap in Pensions in the EU, 2013", Luxembourg: European Commission – Directorate – General for Justice.

High levels of segregation in the workforce is a contributory factor in the discrepancy between the wages of men and women²⁹ which currently sits at 13.9%³⁰. This segregation also contributes to the problematic, and persistent stereotyping of jobs for boys, and jobs for girls³¹.

“We have huge gender segregation in the Irish workforce. For example, child care workers are paid appallingly low levels. That wouldn’t happen if it was a male-dominated area”
Ciairín de Buis, Director of Start Strong

Women do the majority of care work in families; they care for children, the elderly, the sick, and those with disabilities. It is often unpaid and as such invisible, unmonitored, and unmeasured by GDP³². Care work is socially and economically essential. It is a vital resource to families, communities and to society. It is ultimately however, undervalued. The women who carry out this work have developed a wide range of skills that are essential to building a sustainable society. We must make use of this diversity of experience, and recognise the value that these skillsets can bring to the decision making process.

Increasing the number of women in senior decision-making provides visible role models for women of all ages. These role models are critical to challenging the traditional role of women in Irish society. Corresponding policy changes, such as the provision of paid paternity and parental leave, are critical to challenging the perception that care is only women’s work, to the exclusion of men and fathers.

The following sections outline specific recommendations that a broad set of stakeholders – public and private, individuals and organisations – can take to increase women on boards in Ireland.

29 Löffström, Å (2009) Gender Equality, Economic Growth and Employment <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=3988&langId=en> (Accessed February 2015).

30 (2013) ‘Tackling the Gender Pay Gap in the European Union’, European Commission.

31 (2014) ‘Powering economic growth; Attracting more young women into science and technology’, Accenture)

32 Central Statistic Office, Profile 8 ‘Our Bill of Health’, <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile8/Profile,8,Full,document.pdf>

Testimonial

Jane Williams
Managing Director of Sia Partners



“My first board position was in 1996. I got a phone call from the Chairman of the Board to advise me that the Minister had appointed me to the Board. It came totally out of the blue as I have no connections with any political party and I had not put my name forward for such positions. Subsequent Boards came through a less mysterious route! I was not given any option to accept or decline. The Chairman told me I had been appointed.

There were two other woman on the Board, one a local representative and the other a representative of the voluntary sector. There were cursory introductions at the beginning of the first meeting, followed by a statement of the purpose of the Board. Some documentation was given in relation to the process of decision-making. The Chair took questions and clarification but ran the meeting in an autocratic style, with all comments being addressed to him. It was highly formal, as he turned on the microphone in front of the individual and the red light came on to indicate speaking time, I felt I had landed in the European Parliament!

He probably was doing what he knew, but it was not a good process for the work we were setting out to do. We received no training. The culture was command and control. The atmosphere was tense. It did ease out as people got to know one another, as sub-committees did their work and reported to the Board and as we became accustomed to the process imposed. My experience with subsequent chairs has been a significantly improving one with the most recent being an excellent one. I did not have enough experience to realise that the process was one I could try to change. Looking back, I did not know the ‘political’ game that needed to be played and the Chair had the power advantage.

Boardroom culture has changed drastically over the 20 years since that first encounter. I served 4 years on that board and it shifted a bit there. Today, there is a greater consciousness of the need to induct new members to their roles and responsibilities while on the board, and there is a dawning realisation that the board process and culture has an impact on the effectiveness of the board. I have had the pleasure of working hard with two excellent chairs in the last 10 years, who were conscious of the climate, culture and process of the Board.

I have also chaired three boards and understand the work that needs to be put in, on an on-going basis, to develop and maintain these elements of Board functioning.

I have served on 15 corporate, public sector, and voluntary boards and many 'quasi boards' in the 20 years since then, across the range of corporate, commercial, policy, regulatory, and development. In my experience, board process and effectiveness varies depending on the gender balance. My preference is a board which is balanced 60/40 or 50/50 as this tends to have the diverse expertise and backgrounds, together with the interpersonal EQ to develop the Board's capacity to the full. I have been the only woman on a board and know the challenges of behaving in an authentic way. The research on this area shows clearly that it requires a third to 40% of a board to be female before the value that women bring can be fully harnessed. I currently chair a board that is 100% female and it works very well. I don't see that there is anything missing in that Board's performance (but I am female so might miss it, as males do on pre-dominantly male boards).

I would like to see more women on boards because we need all the talent we can harness to make our Board effective, not drawing on half the talent pool reduces the chances of real effectiveness significantly. The experience of board members who have lived as women is very relevant for many of the decisions that any Board takes. The absence of that perspective unbalances decision-making. Women in our society are socialised to support and lead the social processes. Therefore they have a keener awareness of group dynamics and the ways that these can be enhanced and supported. A good group dynamic is not about everyone getting on (though competitive conflict is not necessarily productive), but about having sufficient trust and methods of working together is essential, particularly with challenging issues.

There are significant changes needed to underpin more women on Boards. A shared understanding that this is primarily an issue of effectiveness rather than equality is important. Recognition that the current routes for appointments to Boards are geared to deliver males and alternative pathways are needed to draw through the talented women that are available. Boards need training to assist in recognising the barriers that exist invisibly such as the mode of engagement on the Board, the ask to women to operate in an environment which is characterised by male norms, and others.

I believe that quotas are necessary to get change. Without them, change will not happen. I believe that the misconception that quotas mean that meritocracy is ignored needs to be blown open. The current system is NOT a meritocracy.

Recommendation



Directors and CEOs of State and non-state companies:

Create a leadership pipeline from the workplace to the boardroom.

- Establish and maintain a family-friendly work environment.
- Incorporate gender-sensitivity training into workplace management, human resources, and employee training to identify 'unconscious bias' and promote gender equality in the workplace.
- Implement training and mentoring programmes for women at senior management and board levels.



Rationale

A talent pipeline is an “organisation’s ability to identify, attract, develop, mobilise, utilise, and retain the best talent”³³. In other words, it is the measure of an organisation’s investment in its workforce.

An organisation’s talent pipeline determines who in the workforce will advance. A 2015 global survey “positions Ireland as one of the worst performers in terms of gender balance on corporate boards”³⁴. This is an indicator not just of Ireland’s boardroom diversity (or lack thereof), but an indicator of Ireland’s talent pipeline as a whole.

When women are under-represented in the boardroom, it is because “women are under-represented in the pipeline to senior leadership, especially in crucial line management roles”³⁵.

A 2013 review by the Institute of Directors in Ireland (IoD) bears this out. 70% of the IoD female board directors interviewed said that it was “more difficult for women to become non-executive directors in Ireland than men” – in part because “there are fewer women than men in senior business roles...[and] it is the men in these roles who are selecting potential directors who are already known to them”³⁶.

“targets should be based on women in senior executive positions and a number of actions will be required to achieve this change, I don’t think it will be solved by Board quotas only.”

Caroline Keeling, CEO of Keelings

There are also other, more complex issues at play. A US study found that while there are no sex differences in experience-based qualifications of board or corporate tenure, female directors hold less powerful corporate titles and fewer multiple directorships, occupy more staff functions, and earn considerably less than male directors – implying that women are both undervalued and underutilised in the executive suite and corporate governance³⁷. This represents significant issues for the pipeline, as women do not appear to be strategically placed to progress to a senior role over their male counterparts. NWCi believes that Irish organisations can create effective leadership pipelines for women to the boardroom – by creating family-friendly

33 Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2015) “Key Focus Area: talent pipeline” <https://www.wgea.gov.au/gender-strategy-toolkit/key-focus-area-talent-pipeline> (Accessed January 2015).

34 “Time for quotas? Ireland is second worst in Europe for gender balance on boards”, Irish Times, 13 January 2015. <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/work/time-for-quotas-ireland-is-second-worst-in-europe-for-gender-balance-on-boards-1.2064335> (Accessed January 2015).

35 Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2012) <https://www.wgea.gov.au/media-releases/women-boards-not-pipeline-leadership> (Accessed January 2015).

36 Institute of Directors in Ireland (2013).

37 Zelechowski, D. and Bilimoria, D. (2004) Characteristics of women and men corporate inside directors in the US, *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 12(3): 337–42.

work environments, identifying and training against unconscious gender biases, and proactively supporting women's professional development.

- **Establish and maintain a family-friendly work environment.**

As noted in NWCI's 2013 report 'A Parliament of All Talents: Building a Women-Friendly Oireachtas', women in Ireland "are responsible for most of the care and domestic work, even when both partners in a relationship are working". Just as this puts pressure on women – and places an extra burden on women who are lone parents – who seek to enter and advance in politics, so it does for women who seek to advance in the workplace.

Contributing to this pressure is the fact that Ireland has the second highest child care costs in the OECD³⁸, with low paid maternity leave, no paternity leave, and unpaid parental leave. As such, when faced with caring responsibilities, women in Ireland often "leave the workforce permanently or temporarily, work part-time, or opt out of the tracks that lead to higher management positions"³⁹. Women can also end up excluded from networking and other career advancement opportunities that regularly occur outside of routine working hours.

NWCI advocates for a publicly subsidised quality early childhood infrastructure and paid family leave so that women and men can reconcile work and family life. Specifically, NWCI calls for 10 days paid paternity leave, and 26 weeks paid parental leave, shared out between the parents, as the family sees fit.

Businesses also have a clear role to play in supporting their employees' childcare and family leave needs. Increasing the number of women in senior decision-making roles is linked to better business outcomes⁴⁰ – but businesses must take action to realise these benefits.

38 Richardson, L. (2012) "Costs of childcare across OECD countries". http://www.ifs.org.uk/docs/OECD%20countries_Richardson.pdf (Accessed January 2015).

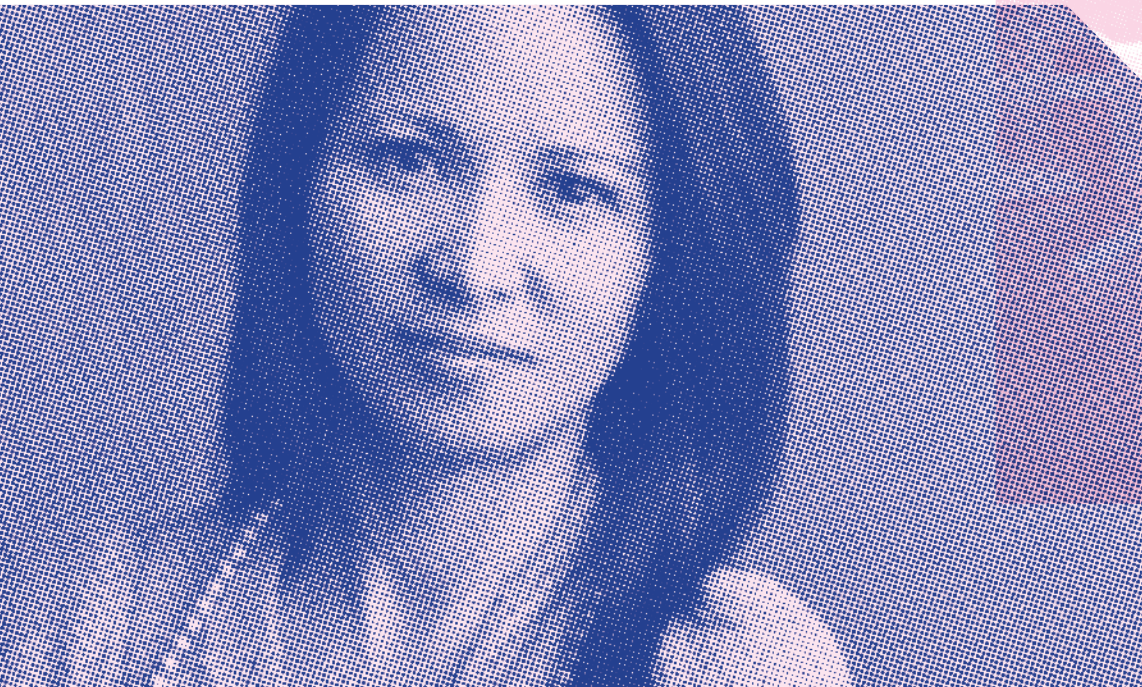
39 Brosnan, Karen (2013) Gender Equality Audit: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebstitemedia/newspress/publications/2014-Gender-Equality-Audit-DFAT.pdf> (Accessed January 2015).

40 See, for example: ESW and Burke (2004) "Person-organisation fit and the war for talent: does diversity management make a difference?" *International Journal of Resource Management*, 16(7):1195-1210; Catalyst (2007) "The Bottom Line: Corporate performance and women's representation on boards", New York; and McKinsey & Co. (2007) "Women Matter: Gender diversity, a corporate performance driver", France.

To accomplish this, organisations should:

- consciously build paid maternity leave into their regular planning processes;
- offer paid paternity and flexible parental leave options, and ensure their human resources departments work with employees to find the arrangement that best meets their needs;
- incorporate a right to request flexible working and leave conditions;
- explore options for on-site (or nearby) childcare provision or creating partnerships with other businesses to share services; and
- actively encourage employees to make use of these policies.

As technology continues to improve, virtual work options and flexible hours should also be implemented when possible. Formal acknowledgements that employees and leaders need not be ever-present to be recognised for their work should be incorporated into workplace policies, and supplemented by regular feedback.



How Irish businesses can support families

A number of resources and best practice examples exist to help organisations create and maintain family-friendly work environments – particularly through periods of change, such as family leave.

*Women’s Empowerment Principles*⁴¹ – a UN Women and United Nations Global Compact initiative – are a set of business-informed best practices on corporate responsibility and how to increase gender equality in the workplace. It offers case study examples from companies across sectors and around the world (from Levi Strauss & Co to Banco de Brasil) on for example, maternity and paternity leave schemes; occupational health and safety and leadership programmes.

The Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), which represents 7,500 organisations, released a “Maternity and Parenting Toolkit” in 2010. This contained guidance on how to incorporate maternity, adoptive leave, and similar care situations into mainstream business and budgeting practices. Information ranges from remuneration and benefits timing and top-up advice, to options for maternity cover; line manager role and training; communication during leave; and managing employees’ return to the workplace.⁴²

Electric Ireland, formally known as ESB, has a 2020 strategy in place to improve women’s personal and professional growth in their company. Part of this strategy includes work-life balance initiatives that “range from employee assistance programmes, education support and bursaries, childcare, retirement planning, health screening and promotion, and flexible working and leave arrangements...[as well as] an annual staff attitude survey”.

Electric Ireland also has family leave support programmes, including “Preparing to go on maternity leave” and “Returning to work after maternity leave” organisational checklists; a communications network to keep women connected while they are home; and a “Parenting with Confidence” programme in place.⁴³

41 See weprinciples.org/Site/CompaniesLeadingTheWay/ for more information. (Accessed February 2015).

42 IBEC (2010) http://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/ES.nsf/vPages/HR_best_practice-Diversity_and_the_integrated_workplace-maternity-and-parenting-toolkit-16-03-2011?OpenDocument#.VM4tHMai1pk (Accessed February 2015).

43 Department of Justice and Equality (2013) *Towards Gender Parity in Decision-Making in Ireland*, p.47-48.

- **Incorporate gender-sensitivity training into workplace management, human resources, and employee training to identify ‘unconscious bias’ and promote gender equality in daily work in the workplace.**

Creating a more inclusive workplace – and more tracks to leadership for women – requires changing minds as well as policy. To do so, it is important to recognise and confront unconscious bias, which includes stereotyping of behaviours or beliefs by gender.

Charlotte Sweeney, founder and director of Charlotte Sweeney Associates Ltd, Special Advisor to the Lord Mayor of the City of London on Diversity and Inclusion, and part of the Lord Davies UK Women on Boards review, defined unconscious bias in a 2011 Financial Times interview as:

“apply[ing] our attitudes, thoughts, and values, without realising, to the decision-making process. The challenge is making everyone aware of this and the potential impact”⁴⁴

Unconscious bias may lead men to be less able to see women as potential leaders. And it is so pervasive that it can also affect how women perceive themselves – “from assuming you need to take on more ‘masculine’ characteristics to succeed, to doubting your abilities and strengths”⁴⁵.

An Irish female civil servant, participating in a 2014 focus group with NWCI and the Department of Justice observed that:

“Assignments give people experience, and build profile within the Department. Here assumptions can be made which ... ultimately [affect] your potential to progress, “She’s a great organiser, he’s great on policy”, “He’s more confident”. There is a very gendered nature as to how assignments are assigned. What are seen as high profile, political jobs will often be assigned to men, and corporate services to women.”

To tackle this issue, organisations should incorporate gender sensitivity training into workplace management, human resources, and employee training. This can help everyone to understand and identify unconscious influences on their decision-making and the

44 Murray, Sarah (2011) “Glass Ceilings: ‘Unconscious bias still holding women back’”, Financial Times, 25 May. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/595fdd2a-86e5-11e0-92df-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Ok9oUtFD> (Accessed January 2015).

45 Chu, Trang (2014) “How unconscious bias holds us back”, The Guardian, 1 May. <http://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2014/may/01/unconscious-bias-women-holding-back-work> (Accessed January 2015).



organisation's overall performance (including, for example, on issues such as pay equity), and establish both personal and procedural methods to address it.

An example of how gender sensitivity training can be put to use is in performance reviews. As Ilene Lang, former President and CEO and current Honorary Director of Catalyst, explained a few years ago, a performance review;

"[f]or a man it might say 'assertive, strong, driver for results' and for a similar woman it might say 'aggressive, sharp elbows'....So [you must] look for a code that betrays unintentional bias and do training around it to make sure they have consistent standards".⁴⁶

Checklists for companies to combat bias and promote workplace inclusion

In 2013, the Business Council of Australia (BCA) set a goal of achieving 50% women in senior roles in all BCA organisations. To help their members achieve this, they published a comprehensive report, "Increasing the Number of Women in Senior Executive Positions: Improving Recruitment, Selection and Retention Practices."

This report contains 10 practical checklists related to identifying and overcoming unconscious bias for use by "companies and individuals in considering practices aimed at improving gender diversity and inclusion".

The 10 checklists include:

- Checklist 1:** The role of the board
- Checklist 2:** The role of the CEO
- Checklist 3:** Targets, measures and accountability
- Checklist 4:** Culture and merit
- Checklist 5:** Role definition and recruitment
- Checklist 6:** Assessing applicants and the interview process
- Checklist 7:** Improving decision-making processes and the success of women once they are appointed
- Checklist 8:** Retention, development and succession planning
- Checklist 9:** Career management and performance reviews
- Checklist 10:** Remuneration

For more information, visit: <http://www.bca.com.au/publications/increasing-the-number-of-women-in-senior-executive-positions>.

- **Implement training and mentoring programmes for women at senior management and board levels across non-state and state sectors.**

Many of the respondents to the 2013 IoD study cited the problem that “women did not have enough role models at board level” in Ireland⁴⁷. Programmes that encourage and formalise training, shadowing, mentoring, and sponsorship opportunities for women are key to reversing this reality.

As described in “Towards Gender Parity in Decision-Making in Ireland”, a 2013 National Women’s Strategy publication, by the Department of Justice and Equality, the importance of mentoring for women is two-fold:

“The lack of female role models in decision-making positions can influence self-selection among other women who perceive that there are few opportunities for women in senior management and so exclude themselves from going forward for promotion or training programmes.

Conversely, successful female role models can inspire other women to push themselves to attain positions in senior management, on company boards and in politics.⁴⁸”

But these programmes must be implemented with care. Cynthia Trudell, Executive Vice President, Human Resources and Chief Human Resources Officer at PepsiCo, has argued:

“the mix of candidates in the pipeline is critical. Where these women are in the organisation is really important. So if your critical mass is in finance, HR, and legal, the chances of women rising to the senior ranks of the company are less likely than if you have a mix of women in sales, operations, and marketing as well⁴⁹.

NWCI supports the training and mentoring recommendations outlined in the 2013 “Towards Gender Parity in Decision-Making in Ireland”, as a good starting point and calls for a sharper focus on gender balance goals. In addition NWCI calls for:

47 IoD (2013), p.5.

48 Department of Justice and Equality (2013), p. 9.

49 Murray (2011).

- Collaboration between employer organisations, Trade Unions and voluntary organisations, in the development and dissemination of ‘women in leadership’ training courses and mentoring programmes, across their membership, management, and human resources departments.
- The implementation of the 2014 Irish Civil Service Renewal Plan goals⁵⁰ on opening up public recruitment and promotion processes, with the inclusion of gender-specific professional development training and mentoring programmes at mid-level positions in every Department.



50 See www.pergov.ie/civil-service-renewal/ for more information. (Accessed February 2015).

Irish and international examples of women's leadership training and mentoring programmes

In Ireland, the Leadership Initiative has developed a number of initiatives, including the Future Leaders programme for women in middle management and organisational leadership discussions and training DVDs.

To complement these efforts, a number of international examples of training and mentoring programmes are also worth exploring further for their potential adaptation to Irish organisations.

These include:

Female Future (Norway)

Funded by NHO (the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise), Innovation Norway, and participant fees, the Female Future programme was established in 2004 – “originally designed as a self-regulatory alternative to the proposed quota-regulation in 2003”. However, the programme alone was unable to deliver upon the 40% target for gender balance on Norwegian boards and “it was only after mandatory gender quotas on company boards were introduced that the Female Future programme took off and started to fly”⁵¹.

As of 2010, 1250 women had been nominated by more than 700 companies to complete the programme and 62% of the participants had been promoted to a senior executive or board position – or both.

The programme takes place for 2 weeks each year, offering a series of leadership development and network building training; boardroom competence and rhetoric instructions and exams; breakout meetings and goal-setting; and a national conference for participants and their company heads. The International Labour Organization (ILO) nominated it as one of the ten best practice examples of gender equality.⁵²

51 Norway Mission to the EU (2012) “Women on Boards” <http://www.eu-norway.org/news1/Women-on-Boards/#.VM4Irsai1pk> (Accessed February 2015).

52 NHO (2010) “Female Future” <https://www.nho.no/siteassets/nhos-filer-og-bilder/filer-og-dokumenter/female-future/femalefuture-english-web.pdf> (Accessed February 2015).

Women on Board® (Canada)

Operated by Catalyst, this is an example of a mentoring network. The programme “pairs women corporate director candidates with experience corporate board members for two years”. The female candidates drive the relationship and the candidate and mentor strategise together to set real, obtainable goals for the candidate to plan and execute; the mentor champions their candidate for positions on corporate boards and assist them in broadening their connections with other sitting directors; and the mentor provides ongoing feedback.⁵³

53 Catalyst “Women on Board: A Catalyst Initiative” <http://www.catalystwomenonboard.org/MentoringProgram/WhatsInvolved.asp> (Accessed February 2015).

Testimonial

Ciairín de Buis
Director of Start Strong

My first position was on the board of the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), maybe 20 years ago. I was one of the younger members but I didn't stand out in that way as the board itself was representative of its members. Through the NYCI, I was nominated on to the National Crime Forum, from that point one board led to another, which led to another over time. I was appointed to boards because I was plugged into the network.



Training was provided for us by NYCI. I remember there being a huge emphasis on governance issues and we as a board were very aware of our governance role. That was quite daunting as a 21 year old. On taking up the position, I really hadn't a clue what the role involved, if it had been spelled out to me I would have run a mile! If it had been spelled out that I was joining a board that was an employer; taking on staff, letting them go, refurbishing a building, etc., I don't think I would have touched it.

In my experience there is a huge variation between boards; the level of involvement, in capacity, the boards understanding of their role, the way of working, etc. I've been on boards where everything was decided through a vote, and on others where everything was decided through consensus. Personally I feel that depending on the issue there is a role for both forms of decision making, relying exclusively towards one or the other isn't good for decision making.

Most of the boards I have been involved in have been male dominated. I am used to being in situations that are male dominated, so that doesn't faze me. I think it unusual and abnormal, but I'm not shocked when I'm the only woman in the room.

I haven't been on one board consistently for the last 20 years, so it's hard to say how much of a culture change has occurred as all boards work differently. I've been on a board where child protection issues arose, specifically around reporting incidences of child abuse, where Children First Guidelines applied. Some members of the board felt that these statutory guidelines should not apply. Ultimately they did and were implemented, but we needed to have a row (twice!), for that to happen. That the members of the board seemed to feel they were above these guidelines, for me, was quite shocking. After that I began

to wonder whether there was more openness and transparency, or scrutiny, or do boards still feel they can do whatever they want. I think we all bring our own identity and experience with us and women bring an experience that men can't have. On a fundamental level in all aspects of our lives we bring our own identity and experience and background with us, women bring a layer to it that otherwise isn't there.

For example at a Parole Board level our decisions aren't a yes or no answer. If the ultimate decision is whether someone is going to be released or not then I don't think more or less women being on the board would make a huge difference. I do think there would be a marked difference to the process leading up to that decision however, which then influences the various aspects of the ultimate decision.

We have huge gender segregation in the Irish workforce. For example child care workers are paid appallingly low levels. That wouldn't happen if it was a male dominated area. These will always be intractable problems as long they remain gendered. So much of that comes back to roles and expectations given to children from the very time they're born – through the toys we give them, the clothes we dress babies in, the subjects children choose in school, you're either slotting into a role or fighting against it. Unless we start joining up those dots, we're going to continue having male dominated parliaments, legislature, and boards.

Having been quite fundamentally against quotas, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that quotas are necessary, presuming they are time limited. If they are applied indefinitely they may achieve more balance at a representative level but it won't shift a power balance, this is a broader more fundamental issue. We still have old assumptions, and gender biases that we don't necessarily recognise, but it is important that we start to. In work, the board that I report to is female dominated, with a male chair. The assumption was that he would become the chair, and he is a great chair, but I think his becoming chair was seen as a natural progression, a gendered order, a power balance.

Quotas are a part of the puzzle of achieving gender equality; they cannot be seen as an isolated solution.

Recommendation



Chairpersons and Board Members:

Self-regulate on board diversity – set gender goals, strengthen governance, seek out women, and invest in directors and directors-to-be.

- Set specific gender goals for the board, board committees, and senior management and establish them as indicators of organisational performance.
- Strengthen and support gender diversity governance standards for private, public, and third sector organisations.
- Actively seek women for board positions by advertising openings, encouraging women to apply, and challenging search firms to promote qualified women.
- Invest in boards by planning board successions with gender balance in mind and professionally develop both female and male board members and potential members.



Rationale

Boards have a legal and ethical responsibility to the owners of their organisation. In publicly held companies, there is a responsibility to represent the interests of shareholders – which is often the maximisation of profit. In state and community/voluntary organisations, this is a responsibility to deliver positive change in the public interest, at the best value for money.

Any other board activity – including efforts to improve board diversity – is often cited as a potential distraction away from a board’s primary role. But increasing the number of women on boards and maximising profit are not mutually exclusive.

Research now indicates that there is a strong link between an increased number of women on a board and improved finances and performance for the organisation. The UK Davies report found that:

*“companies with more women on their boards were found to outperform their rivals with a 42% higher return in sales, 66% higher return on invested capital and 53% higher return on equity”.*⁵⁴

To investors in 2015, a lack of women on boards is “like a canary in the mine...and suggests the company is not looking to the future”⁵⁵.

But challenges remain. On the supply side, women are underrepresented in the senior ranks of organisations that funnel candidates into board positions. On the demand side, boards themselves are not taking on, in large enough numbers, the qualified women that do exist across sectors when board positions become available.

Boards can help solve both sides of this challenge. A board of directors sets the tone of an organisation. It sets agendas, performance targets, ethical standards, and much more, depending on its exact remit.

As the Business Council of Australia points out:

*“boards have an essential role in modeling gender diversity and inclusive mindsets. The level of involvement of boards in setting companies’ people strategies and priorities – and monitoring progress – through reports and board discussions – sends a strong signal to the rest of their organisations”*⁵⁶

54 Davies (2011), p.7.

55 Murray (2011).

56 Business Council of Australia (2013) Increasing the Number of Women in Senior Executive Positions.

So, what can boards do better? They can start with self-regulation.

Across sectors, boards have the ability to act immediately to set gender diversity goals and include them in the governance standards and performance indicators of their organisations, while working to find more female applicants and investing in those who become board members.

NWCI recommends the following board-led action:

- **Set specific gender goals for the board, board committees, and senior management.**

The increase of women on boards in the UK, with a 7.5% increase on FTSE 100 boards, following the release of the 2011 Davies report demonstrates that in order to effect change, organisations must set explicit goals and hold themselves publicly accountable.

Set gender goals for female board membership and female executive committee leadership – particularly the nominations committee.

As per the Women on Boards Directive, which was passed by the European Commission and the European Parliament, NWCI calls on all chairs of Irish non-state companies to set a goal of at least 40% women on their boards by 2020, setting an interim target of 30% by 2018. Boards should also set specific gender goals for female leadership on executive committees – specifically, the nominations committee, which is responsible for new board appointments.

A 2012 review of Australian boards found that “women are more likely than men to chair the audit or remuneration committee, but less likely than men to chair the nominations committee...[which] may explain why there are fewer women put forward as potential candidates”⁵⁷.

Tie gender goals to performance indicators and rewards for boards and senior management.

Boards should publish their gender goals and company-specific strategies to achieve them in their annual reports. Strategies should include performance indicators for the chair, relevant senior executives and management on progress towards these gender goals, “linking them to incentives and other bonus payments”⁵⁸.

57 Australian Government, Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (2012) Australian Census of Women in Leadership, p. 22.

58 Business Council of Australia (2013) “Increasing the Number of Women in Senior Executive Positions”, p. 2 <http://www.bca.com.au/publications/increasing-the-number-of-women-in-senior-executive-positions> (Accessed January 2015).

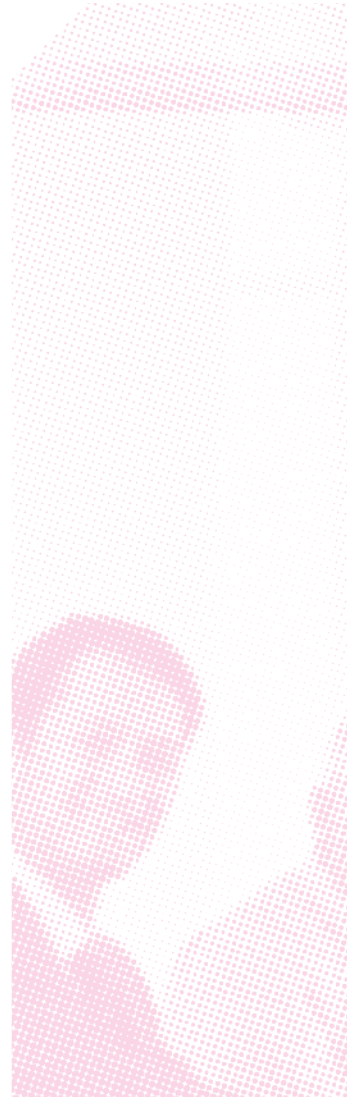
Ensure female representation on board interview panels.

Irish directors interviewed in the 2013 Institute of Directors report suggested that introducing requirements for women on interview panels for any new board appointments “might encourage other women to come forward in the knowledge that there is an equal process from the start”⁵⁹.

- **Strengthen and support gender diversity governance standards for public, private, and third sector organisations.**

Governance standards are the set of principles that guide an organisation’s behaviour. They are a core part of self-regulation. Companies listed on the Irish Stock Exchange are meant to adhere to the Combined Code – the UK Corporate Governance Code (recognised as a global standard on the issue of corporate governance) and the Irish Corporate Governance Annex (largely based on the UK code, with some additional recommendations). Community and voluntary organisations create their own governance codes – a leading sector standard being the Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary, and Charitable Organisations in Ireland⁶⁰.

These codes set out behavioural guidelines for organisations – and as such, offer a prime opportunity to promote standardised gender equality goals and reporting requirements.



59 Institute of Directors (2013), p.12.

60 For more information, see: www.governancecode.ie/about.php. (Accessed February 2015).

Gender provisions in the UK Corporate Governance Code⁶¹

The UK Corporate Governance Code, first established in 1992, defines good corporate management – though it has real relevance to public and third sector organisations as well. It is recognised as a global industry standard on governance, serving as the model for many countries’ corporate governance codes, including Ireland. Following the global economic crisis, there is now a widespread “recognition of the need to follow the spirit, as much as the letter, of the code”.

Section B of the code specifically cites gender in a number of key recommendations on the composition and work of corporate boards. Among other things, the code instructs boards to engage in:

- transparent board search processes with “due regard for the benefits of diversity on the board, including gender”;
- regular evaluations of board performance on areas including gender, as related to board effectiveness;
- published accounting of board gender diversity policy and measurable performance objectives, indicators, and progress; and
- explanations when open advertising for board positions is not conducted.

The Higgs report – another landmark UK review on corporate governance – notes:

“the Code can and should regularly evolve...many listed companies exceed its current provisions, and there is every reason why all companies should aspire to the standards of the best”⁶².

61 UK Financial Reporting Council (2014) The UK Corporate Governance Code, p. 9-16. <https://www.frc.org.uk/Our-Work/Publications/Corporate-Governance/UK-Corporate-Governance-Code-2014.pdf> (Accessed January 2015).

62 Higgs, Derek (2003) Review of the role and effectiveness of non-executive directors, London: UK Department of Trade and Industry, p. 4. <http://www.ecgi.org/codes/documents/higgsreport.pdf> (Accessed January 2015).

Amend the Irish Corporate Governance Annex and Irish community and voluntary sector governance codes to include gender-specific recommendations on board diversity.

Currently, Irish corporate governance guidelines do not explicitly reference gender. The UK Corporate Governance Code includes gender-specific recommendations, which are therefore implicit in the Irish Annex, but the Annex itself does not specify gender at all. An oft-cited model for non governmental governance codes – the Dóchas code⁶³ for Irish development organisations – includes language around board ‘equality and diversity’, but does not define those terms and does not specify gender. Explicitly including language on gender and board diversity in Irish governance codes will raise awareness that can spur action.

Publish an organisational code of practice on gender equality, specific to each individual organisation.

Industry standards on board gender diversity and balance are important, but every organisation is different. To make industry governance recommendations relevant to their operations, individual organisations should write organisational codes of practice – with specific reference to organisational gender goals, performance metrics and incentives, and reporting requirements on strategy and outcomes.



63 Corporate Governance Association of Ireland and Dóchas. Irish Development NGOs Code of Corporate Governance. http://www.dochas.ie/sites/default/files/CGAI_Governance_Code_FINAL_0.pdf (Accessed January 2015)

Using a governance code to report on gender (im)balance and progress

In 2010, the Australia Stock Exchange Securities Council amended their governance code to include a gender metric reporting requirement. This amendment aimed to “achieve a significant increase in the proportion of female directors, and thereby avoid any requirement for government intervention in the form of legislation”⁶⁴.

Gender metrics is the reporting of the proportion of women across all levels of an organisation – it helps to identify the distribution of women in the organisation’s pipeline, as well as the percentage of women in leadership positions.

Below is an example⁶⁵ of a gender metrics report used in Australia that can be published in the annual reports and on the websites of Irish organisations to measure their progress on gender balance in the workplace and on the board. Early results in Australia were positive, with the proportion of new board appointments going to women increasing from just 5% in 2009 to 27% in 2010.⁶⁶

Role Category	Female Representation (%) (as of March 2014)	Female Representation (%) (as of March 2015)
Key Management Personnel	--	--
General Managers	--	--
Senior Managers	--	--
Managers	--	--
Specialist Roles	--	--
Generalist Roles	--	--
Whole Organisation	--	--

These gender metric reporting efforts also had the full support of the Australian leadership advocacy group, Male Champions of Change, who pointed out that:

“making these targets and progress against them public via websites or stakeholders reporting will help Australian businesses to easily identify and replicate effective strategies for advancing women at work”⁶⁷.

64 Davies (2011), p.13.

65 KPMG and ASX Compliance (2013) ASX Corporate Governance Council Principles and Recommendations on Diversity, p. 27.

66 Davies (2011), p.14.

67 KPMG and ASX Compliance (2013), p.26.

'Comply or explain' – publicly and regularly – on organisational adherence to governance code recommendations on board gender diversity.

In addition to publishing organisational codes of practice on gender equality, boards should publicly specify – in quarterly and annual reports, as well as on the organisation's website – what actions they have taken to move forward on organisational gender goals and celebrate progress made. If efforts fall short, boards should adhere to governance code 'comply or explain' requirements and publish detailed explanations as to why no action on gender equality was taken.

'Comply or explain' – i.e., if not, why not?⁶⁸

'Comply or explain' is the "trademark of corporate governance in the UK...strongly supported by both companies and shareholders and...widely admired and imitated internationally".

An "alternative to a rules-based system" (i.e. one based on laws or statutes), the concept of 'comply or explain' underpins a system of self-regulation, where behaviour is dictated by principles. In relation to corporate governance, it means that if companies do not adhere to industry standards, they must publicly explain the reasons for not doing so.

In theory, the idea is that in publicly acknowledging shortcomings, organisations risk sanctions or other retaliatory action by the market, rather than the state. These negative effects can range from bad publicity to disinvestment by shareholders and should incentivise positive behaviour.

The press, industry and advocacy groups, and the state all have a role to play in making 'comply or explain' a meaningful governance principle by holding organisations to account on their gender equality goals and actions.

68 UK Financial Reporting Council (2014), p.8.

Sign up to public gender-specific commitments and report on efforts to meet these goals.

Boards can also self-regulate by signing up and holding themselves accountable to public commitments on board gender balance. There are a variety of public commitments and campaigns already in place to which Irish organisations can sign on. For example, since 2011, the EU Commission has been circulating the “Women on the Board Pledge for Europe” to “develop self-regulatory initiatives to get more women into top jobs, with a view to reaching 30% of women on the boards of publicly listed companies by 2015 and 40% by 2020”⁶⁹.

To date, however, not one Irish company has signed up.

The 30% Club – in place in Ireland since mid-2014 – offers another way for organisations to publicly commit. The 30% Club offers membership to board chairs and CEOs, and offers organisations mentoring, investor group, public policy, business scheme, and career strategy development opportunities.

- **Actively seek women for board positions by advertising openings, encouraging women to apply, and challenging search firms to promote qualified women**

In a 2013 survey, Irish board directors overwhelmingly agreed that increasing the number of women on boards requires “greater transparency in the appointment process”⁷⁰. This is because – respondents noted – the group of people on Irish boards currently is a small one, with “appointment[s] on a ‘who you know’ basis”⁷¹.

In Irish corporate life, ‘who you know’ is directly related to whether you are a man or a woman. More than half the directors surveyed by the Institute of Directors believed that women and men did not have “equal access” to board vacancy information.

As one director surmised:

“my guess is that lack of transparency and the high level of networking means that many roles can be filled before (if even) advertised”⁷².

69 A copy of the pledge is available here: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-124_en.htm (Accessed January 2015).

70 Institute of Directors (2013), p. 9.

71 Ibid, p.6.

72 Idem

Indeed, a male director surveyed in 2007 by the Leadership Initiative, said:

“The dynamic of recruitment is interesting. The views of existing board members are in the mix, and boards tend to reproduce themselves. So to change the gender balance requires a break in the cycle”⁷³.

Advertise board vacancies widely and specifically target female applicants.

Boards should publicly advertise their openings, with detailed descriptions of the mix of skills and experience relevant to the position and with specific reference to the fact that women are encouraged to apply.

Encourage women to apply by activating networks of professionals across sectors and by stressing the value of diverse experience.

Boards should spread word of board vacancies widely, by tapping networks outside their immediate sector for recommendations of female candidates. For example, corporate organisations can look for women with state sector experience and vice versa. Boards should also be open to those with a broader diversity of experience or perspectives, such as those from the community and voluntary sector, a variety of age groups. This should be explicitly stated to recruiters, headhunters and other stakeholders during the recruitment process. When suitable female candidates are identified, boards and organisations should reach out directly to the women and encourage them to apply.

Challenge executive search firms to include women on their long- and short-lists for board candidates.

Boards should ask the executive search firms they partner with to specify the steps they take to identify qualified women as candidates for board vacancies. Boards should ask executive search firms to ensure there is a mix of genders on both the long- and short-lists of candidates submitted for review and hold the search firms to ‘comply or explain’ standards – requiring a detailed explanation if women are not included.

Executive search firms should also consider adopting a voluntary code of practice on gender equality within their industry, as has been done in the UK.

⁷³ Scally, Dorothy, Valerie Judge, and Frances Stephenson (2007) Training and Development Interventions for Women on Boards: A Feasibility Study. Dublin: The Leadership Initiative, p. 54.



The roles and responsibilities of executive search firms

Executive search firms play an important, if sometimes overlooked, role in determining the number of women on boards. They are an often-tapped resource to board chairs and nomination committees in searches for new board members and in succession planning. International best practice offers a model for Irish firms looking to improve gender balance in their work:

Executive search firms in Ireland should establish a voluntary code of conduct regarding gender diversity goals for board search work. UK executive search firms banded together to create a voluntary code of conduct “intended to raise the standards of professionalism and conduct in the recruitment of women to the boards of FTSE 350 companies”.⁷⁴ A similar code of principles can be developed for Ireland.

Executive search firms should publicly advertise openings for board positions, with a specific description of related skills and experience and an explicit call for female applicants.

Executive search firms should regularly publish the gender breakdown of their hiring outcomes, in their annual report and on their website.

Support investor-led initiatives on gender.

Investors in Irish companies – both block investors, such as public pension funds, and individual or small groups of shareholders – should push for board and organisational action on gender equality. Boards should support investor engagement, hearing and voting on gender-related proposals.

⁷⁴ A copy of the code and accreditation process can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enhanced-code-of-conduct-for-executive-search-firms-accreditation-process> (Accessed January 2015).

The role and responsibilities of investors

To date, both big and small investors around the world have pressed boards on issues of gender equality. As boards have a legal and ethical duty to shareholders, investor action can produce significant results.

The behaviour of investors with significant market influence (e.g. blockholders and public pension funds) is often scrutinised by smaller investors and other players in the stock market. If these investors take action on issues of gender equality, there is great potential for their actions to be noticed and influence organisational change.

Examples of investor action include:

- Both large-scale and smaller investors using shareholder proposals to push for:
 - the establishment of gender-balance targets and company strategies;
 - board nominations and voting policies;
 - defined board terms and election/appointment schedules; and
 - similar actions as outlined through this report to increase the number of women on boards.
- Public sector pension funds and associations such as the Council of Institutional Investors have used shareholder proposals to actively promote gender and racial diversity on corporate boards, “with some success, [as] in large firms, the proportion of female board members has risen, even as boards on average have become smaller”.⁷⁵
- A 2007 report, “Responsible Investment in Focus: How leading public pension funds are meeting the challenge”, by the UN Environment Programme Finance Initiative and the UK Social Investment Forum⁷⁶ contains country-specific and cross-national examples of investment management group action to direct their investment according to a set of socially responsible principles (gender equality among them) to promote good corporate governance in public companies.

75 Dobbin, F. and J. Jung (2011) “Corporate Board Gender Diversity and Stock Performance: The Competence Gap or Institutional Investor Bias?” North Carolina Law Review, Vol. 89: 809-838.

76 Report available at: <http://www.unepfi.org/fileadmin/documents/infocus.pdf> (Accessed February 2015).

- **Invest in boards by planning board successions with gender balance in mind and professionally develop both female and male board members and potential members.**

In pursuing board diversity, candidates without previous board or executive experience should not be disqualified from consideration. Indeed, with an opportunity to advance and train, they have the potential to make excellent board members.

The Davies report noted that while:

*“the call for the professionalisation of boards meant that the skills criteria for candidates increasingly focused on the need to have substantial business and board level experience...financial responsibility, just like sector experience, **can be taught** and should not be a pre-requisite for appointments”⁷⁷.
(emphasis added)*

Irish research also places a real value on board training and goes one step further by stressing the value of it for both men and women. Ongoing training for all board members is important, the 2007 Leadership Initiative study explains, not only to avoid creating an image that female members are not up to the task, but because men need instruction as well.

As one Irish male director said:

“There is definitely a learning curve – it took some time to get used to how the board operated and, indeed, to understand the role of the board as opposed to the executive. The curve was sharp in relation to my understanding of the issues and in respect of expectation of my input. Naturally, I wondered if my contribution was useful or not”⁷⁸.

As the gender balance of boards continues to change with the inclusion of more women, continuous training for all members is also an opportunity to refresh skills and recognise the addition of new talent to the board. Or as another Leadership Initiative respondent put it:

“group dynamics would also be useful – for men too – to show them that men don’t know everything. Training needs to be done together or it’s not going to be real”⁷⁹.

77 Davies (2011), p.12.

78 Scally, et al (2007), p.66.

79 Ibid, p.68.

Build specific gender goals into formal short - and long-term board succession planning.

Succession planning – or the process of developing new talent for future board openings – is directly related to an organisation’s leadership talent pipeline. Boards and senior management should link their short- and long-term succession planning directly to organisational codes of practice on gender balance, board and senior management gender goals, internal training, mentoring and sponsorship, and other programmes.

Set defined board term lengths and regular board elections.

The Davies report noted that even with all the proactive steps taken by UK companies in recent years, a remaining barrier to increasing the number of women is the lack of board turnover. Undefined board term lengths and irregular elections mean that board vacancies do not regularly occur. As such, boards should set definitive term lengths and publish a regularly updated schedule of elections.

As Bride Rosney, Secretary to the Irish Board of Trustees at Mary Robinson Foundation, has said:

“People should not be on a board for 10 or 20 years. They should be rotated, in a structured, clear way, with a given number going every year”.

Research finds a significant difference in the gender balance on boards with short versus long tenure among members. The following chart highlights this difference, which the Institutional Shareholder Services has found to hold true across firm sizes⁸⁰.

80 Information for the chart from: Institutional Shareholder Services (2014) “Gender Diversity on Boards: A Review of Global Trends”. Available at: <http://www.issgovernance.com/file/publications/2014-iss-global-board-diversity-report.pdf> (Accessed February 2015).

Average Proportion of Female Board Directors



*long-tenure boards have a majority of board members serving 12+ years

Conduct formal training for male and female new and existing board members.

According to the Leadership Initiative survey of Irish directors, the most useful training for board members and potential members are programmes related to:

- governance and compliance
- boardroom effectiveness
- individual effectiveness

and should be incorporated into board induction programmes, ongoing training for current members, mentorship programmes⁸¹ and sponsorship programmes.

Provide detailed feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

Board nomination committees, interview panels, and executive search firms should provide feedback and other related information to new applicants who advance to second-round consideration, but are unsuccessful, in their bid for a board position and if applicable, encourage them to apply again in the future.

81 Scally, et al (2007), p.6.

Testimonial

Anne-Marie Taylor
Management Consultant



In the early 90s I was involved in some research on women on boards which showed that 6% of directors on Irish boards were women. At the time, the percentage of female graduates was coming close to the percentage of male graduates, and professional services firms were recruiting men and women in virtually equal proportions. It seemed to us that it was only a matter of a few years until these women worked their way through the pipeline and the balance at boardroom level would correct itself naturally.

More than 20 years later I had occasion to look at the figures again. Now the percentage of women on Irish plc boards is 10%. In over 20 years, it has increased from 6% to 10%. At this rate of progress even our granddaughters may not see gender balance in boardrooms. I got involved with Vivienne Jupp in setting up the Board Diversity Initiative in 2010 as a practical way of addressing this issue. Many chairpersons have pointed to the lack of suitable women candidates when making board appointments. To counter this perception, Vivienne and I put together a directory of highly qualified and experienced women who were willing to serve on boards. Since the initiative began the women in the directory have been appointed to a total of 52 boards.

Arising from my involvement in the Board Diversity Initiative, I joined the Steering Committee of the 30% Club Ireland, which is a voluntary movement of Chairpersons and CEOs who believe in better representation of women at all levels in organisations. The 30% Club promotes a business-led approach focused on developing a pipeline of senior female talent, and is opposed to mandatory quotas. There is growing empirical evidence supporting the business case for better gender balance at board room level which has fuelled the momentum behind the business-led approach. The UK now has 23% women on FTSE-100 boards, up from 12.5% in 2010. The Davies report set a target of a minimum of 25% women on FTSE-100 boards by 2015 through voluntary efforts - this is on track to be achieved.

My own experience on boards is as a director of the National Treatment Purchase Fund and the Public Appointments Service, both of which I was appointed to in 2014 having applied through the state boards appointments process. By registering on stateboards.ie you

get an email alert when a state board appointment is posted and if you are interested in applying you proceed to submit an application. It's now a much more transparent and fair process for state appointments.

I was also, until 2014, a director on a voluntary board, the Migraine Association of Ireland, which I sourced through Boardmatch. Boardmatch provides an online matching service which matches professionals from the corporate/public sectors to not-for-profit boards.

How can women individually help to address the gender imbalance on boards? Be proactive in putting yourself forward for directorships. It goes without saying that, as with any job, you need to have experience or expertise which will contribute to the board. So, build your skills. Develop boardroom experience by starting on the board of a small scale organisation. Register with Boardmatch, and stateboards.ie, and with an executive search company specialising in director appointments. And build qualifications in corporate governance or finance to enhance the boardroom-specific portfolio of skills you bring to the table.

Recommendation





Government and Members of State Boards:

Take concrete steps to ensure that the state becomes a model of gender parity and standard-setting at board level and in the workplace.

- Reach the existing goal of 40% women on state boards by 2016 – and then surpass it.
- Legislate on gender quotas for non-state boards.

Rationale

To help achieve gender balance on boards, the state has a dual role: to set standards of achievement and accountability on gender equality, and to practice – on state boards – what it preaches.

The Irish government has increased its focus on targeting barriers to women's equality in the past decade, as seen through a number of its key publications including the National Women's Strategy launched in 2007 and the 2013 report, "Towards Gender Parity in Decision-Making".

Well before that though, in 1993, the Irish government set its original target for 40% female representation on Irish state boards. That goal was not prioritised and twenty-three years later, it has still not been met.

As of 2013, Ireland has 265 state boards with 3,426 board members. In 2014, 36% of state board members, and 21% of board chairs, were women. These are undeniably better balanced statistics than those on gender in Irish corporate boards, just 10% of which are women. But considering how long the Irish state board target has been in place, it is not good enough.

In 2011, the government renewed its commitment to this target in the 2011-2016 Programme for a National Government. In the years since, it has released proposed action steps, guidelines, and monitoring measures to work towards this goal.⁸²

Even so, troubling patterns remain. For example, it has

*"emerged over the years where women have been consistently under-represented in economic portfolios, with other certain types of [state] portfolios earmarked for women – generally those associated with caring roles"*⁸³

This is evident in the fact that women represent just 24% of the positions on the powerful economic state boards within the remit of the Department of Finance, compared to 36% of the state board positions overall.

Irish directors have also noted a history of a lack of transparency in state board appointments. One director interviewed in the 2007 Leadership Initiative study reported: "the concept of the 'club'

82 See, for example, the Government Decision of 23 July 2014 on Gender Balance on State Boards and the November 2014 Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards.

83 Department of Justice and Equality (2013), p. 61.

(selection from networks of known contacts) seems to operate more on state/voluntary boards⁸⁴. But “openness, transparency, and independence is needed in the appointments process”⁸⁵ if women are to succeed.

State actions since 2011 have held promise. In late 2014, the Public Appointments Service released guidelines, on state board appointments, committing themselves to an “open, accessible, rigorous, and transparent” process in order to “increase access and widen the pool” of potential candidates⁸⁶. These guidelines incorporated many of NWCI’s own recommendations.

A transparent and rigorous state board appointment process is not only good for state boards themselves; it also puts the state in a better position to urge action on board gender balance in the non-state sectors.

There are a range of actions that governments have taken in other countries to influence and incentivise corporate and voluntary sector action on board appointments. A common approach is the introduction of board gender quotas for non-state sectors.

Quotas have real merit as a mechanism for overcoming structural inequality. Quotas will only achieve lasting success, however, as part of a larger strategy that tackles not just board requirements, but the board leadership pipeline and board-led actions as well.

- **Reach the existing goal of 40% women on state boards by 2016 – and then surpass it – by reforming state board appointment processes and formalising a civil service leadership pipeline.**

NWCI supports the November 2014 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards. We urge immediate adoption of it by state boards and related stakeholders and outline key additions to the guidance below.

84 Leadership Initiative (2007), p. 51.

85 Institute of Directors (2013), p. 12.

86 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2014) Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards. Available at: http://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/publication/document/2014_1125_Guidelines_Appointments_to_State_Boards.pdf (Accessed January 2015).

Implement the 2014 Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, particularly Section 16, the gender-related recommendations, without delay.

Section 16 of the new guidelines include the following gender-related recommendations:

- State departments must publish their plans to achieve 40% gender balance on their boards and actively seek women to apply for vacancies;
- Ministers and state board stakeholders must focus first and foremost on state boards where there is a significant gender imbalance. In addition they must advise, support and encourage boards that have already reached or are on target to reach 40% goal to continue on towards 45%;
- www.stateboards.ie must establish a publicly available database with statistics on the gender breakdowns of each state board;
- Ministers and state board stakeholders must update the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies to reflect gender-related requirements;
- The Department of Justice and Equality must identify a clear strategy to increase registrations of interest from board-ready women, potentially through the infrastructure provided by the Public Appointment Service.

A number of these recommendations echo action that NWCI also urges for non-state boards. As they work to implement this guidance, Ministers and state board stakeholders should also note:

- The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies – similar to the Irish Corporate Governance Annex and Irish community/voluntary code models, currently lacks explicit mention of gender. Specific language should be included on requirements for gender diversity on boards, in state departments, senior management and leadership pipeline tracks.
- In actively seeking women for state board positions, advertised posts should include detailed summaries of the skills and experience needed, as well as mention of the 40% gender target and an explicit call for women to apply. Ministers and board appointment panels should directly reach out to diverse professional networks and non-state sectors to ask for recommendations of qualified candidates, where there is an absence of these candidates on the existing database on www.stateboards.ie, a targeted, public information campaign aimed at women, and encouraging them to register their interest with www.stateboards.ie would also help in achieving this goal.

Improve the 2014 Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards by requiring Ministerial training and board induction training on gender mainstreaming.

Awareness of gender equality and gender imbalance issues needs to be raised from the beginning of the state boards appointment process.

Gender mainstreaming is a process of integrating a gender perspective into policy, planning and service delivery in order to provide equality of access to services, equality of participation and equality of outcomes for women, men and transgender persons. This approach should be included in the baseline training and induction processes for those who make appointments to state boards and those who become board members. These include Ministers, chairpersons, management committees, general board members, and should also include staff at senior, middle, and lower levels of management as well.

Establish a formal mentoring and leadership pipeline for women within the Civil and Public Service.

“Towards Gender Parity in Decision Making in Ireland 2007 – 2016” welcomed the establishment of the Senior Public Service (SPS) and the commitment to networking, education, training and coaching, and mentoring opportunities for officials at Assistant Secretary level and above. They acknowledged that

*“as women only account for a very small percentage of senior officials, these opportunities will largely be afforded to male officers. Therefore, the Sub Committee recommends that a formal mentoring scheme is established for female officers at Assistant Principal and Principal level in each Department. This scheme could have an Inter-Departmental focus with mentors/mentees coming from different Government Departments”.*⁸⁷

The implementation of this mentoring scheme must be prioritised to ensure that the number of women at senior level is increased.

Consolidate all Talent Banks and databases into a state-led database that can serve both professional development and recruitment goals – and do so quickly and with significant publicity.

The Department of Justice and Equality is due to pilot a Talent Bank programme⁸⁸. It is designed to be a “resource available to Ministers and other nominating bodies” in compiling profiles of “women who would be prepared to serve on State Boards”.⁸⁹

A state-led talent bank has the potential to be a significant resource for increasing the visibility of potential female candidates. While NWCi welcomes this move, we also acknowledge the significant work already carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the Public Appointments Service.

NWCi encourages the Department of Justice and Equality to work closely with the Department of Public Expenditure and reform, as well as the Public Appointments Service, in an effort to consolidate all databases by creating one central, state-led database. This will maximise the use of project resources and establish the database as a centrally-accessible resource.

To provide an effective contribution towards the 2016 state board target, this work needs to be rolled out quickly and with significant publicity. Women need to know to register and those involved with state board appointments need to know to use it. A high impact public relations campaign to drive women to register should involve outreach to existing databases and talent banks, the corporate sector, the community/voluntary sector, and the public sector to ensure a diverse mix of participants. Those recruiting board members must also recognise the positive contribution that those with a diverse mix of skills developed both inside and outside of paid employment can provide.

“My own experience on boards is as a director of the National Treatment Purchase Fund and the Public Appointments Service, both of which I was appointed to in 2014 having applied through the state boards appointments process. By registering on stateboards.ie you get an email alert when a state board appointment is posted and if you are interested in applying you proceed to submit an application.”

Annemarie Taylor, Management Consultant

There is also opportunity, in the design of this database, to establish it as a tool for professional development as well as recruitment. It can act as a central resource to advertise initiatives such as training, skills development and mentorship opportunities. The database should also facilitate the provision of meaningful feedback to unsuccessful candidates for state board positions.

88 Department of Justice and Equality (2013), p.12

89 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2014), p. 9.



Talent banks and Databases in action around the world

Ireland: Women in Technology and Science (WITS) Talent Bank

Launched in 2005 by the Irish Association for Women in Technology and Science, the WITS Talent Bank is a “directory of expert women scientists, engineers, and technologists (SET) who are willing to serve on advisory, selection or management boards [that is intended to] facilitate women participating at the highest levels of policy making”⁹⁰. The new pilot Talent Bank launched by the government should collaborate with the WITS bank and others already in operation in Ireland.

Australia: Women on Boards Register

Seeking to increase the representation of women on boards in Australian companies, the Women on Boards Register “links aspirant directors with current board vacancies and provides training and resources for them to develop their networks and skills”. Additional services for interested participants include mentoring matches and access to professional executive coaches.⁹¹

Denmark: The Experts Database

KVINFO, the Danish Centre for Gender, Equality, and Diversity, operates a “database of women experts contain[ing] easy-to-access bibliographical information on professionally qualified women in Denmark. The database contributes to the strengthening of the public image of women and to increasing the visibility of their knowledge, experience, and expertise”⁹². KVINFO also has an extensive female professional mentorship programme.⁹³

New Zealand: Nominations Service

The government of New Zealand has set a target for 45% representation of women on state boards. As of 2013, it was at 41%. To reach this goal, the Ministry for Women operates a nominations service to which interested female candidates can register and their information will be used to nominate them for suitable state sector and committee positions.

90 (2005) Address by Mr. Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. <http://www.djei.ie/press/2005/20050414a.htm> (Accessed February 2015).

91 Women on Boards: next generation directors, “The Boardroom Toolkit” <http://www.womenonboards.org.au/resources/boardroom/> (Accessed February 2015).

92 Husu (2009) “Nordic governmental initiatives to promote women and gender equality in science” (Powerpoint presentation). Available at: <http://jspsusa.org/FORUM2009/powerpoint-presentaion/LiisaHusu.pdf> (Accessed February 2015).

93 See <http://kvinfo.org/mentor> for more information. (Accessed February 2015).

Penalise state boards and departments that do not meet the 2016 goal of 40% – and celebrate those who meet and exceed it.

As of 2014, only 3 of the 14 government departments had met the 40% goal: the Department of Health, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and the Department of Education⁹⁴. Those who meet – and particularly those who exceed – the 40% goal by 2016 should be recognised for their work.

However, it should also be recognised that the original 40% target for gender balance on state boards has been in place since 1993. With the guidelines and pilot programmes that are due to be implemented this year, state boards and departments that fail to meet the goal should be penalised for doing so.

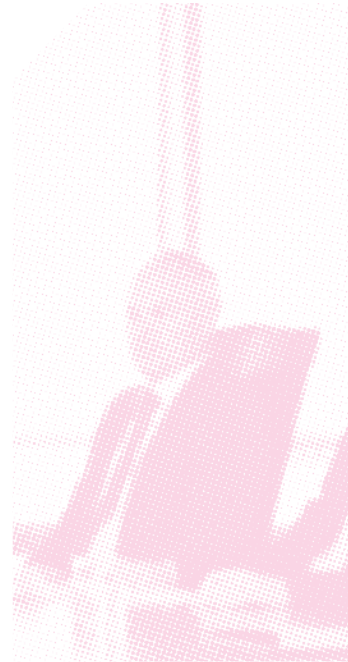
Sanctions must be “effective, proportionate, and dissuasive”⁹⁵ and the government should consider financial penalties or other similar options. Sanctioning state bodies for non-compliance will also set an example to the non-state sector on the government’s commitment to this issue.

- **Legislate gender quotas for non-state boards.**

The international trend is undoubtedly towards public standard-setting.

- The UK Davies Women on Boards initiative has a minimum goal of 25%, (to be increased accordingly) of women on boards of listed companies.
- The EU directive obliges listed companies to “favour the under-represented sex, where candidates are equally qualified for board positions, until a 40 per cent share is reached by 2020 or earlier”⁹⁶
- In November 2014 the German government announced a 30% mandatory quota for women on boards by 2016.

Germany is the most recent, but far from the only country to decide on quotas as their preferred policy method for achieving gender balance.



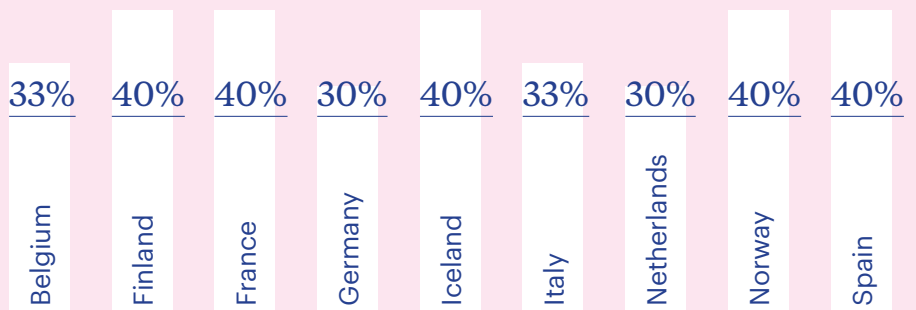
94 Regan, Mary (2014) “Lack of gender equality in State’s decision-making”, Irish Examiner, 24 July. <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/lack-of-gender-equality-in-states-decision-making-276948.html> (Accessed January 2015).

95 Department of Justice and Equality (2013), p. 64.

96 Institute of Directors (2013), p. 11.

Board gender quotas in place internationally

The following EU countries have legislative gender quotas in place, requiring the corresponding minimum percentage representation of each sex⁹⁷:



Ireland too, has quota experience. Since 2012, political parties in Ireland are required to ensure that at least 30% of each gender is represented in their candidate list – or they will lose half of their public funding⁹⁸. This requirement increases to 40% within a set timeframe thereafter.

“I believe that quotas are necessary to get change. Without them, change will not happen. I believe that the misconception that quotas mean that meritocracy is ignored needs to be blown open. The current system is NOT a meritocracy.”
Jane Williams, Managing Director, Sia Partners

97 <http://www.catalyst.org/legislative-board-diversity> (Accessed February 2015).

98 This is under the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act, 2012.

Undertake a 2016 review of the state board target experience to identify potential best practice and inform state guidance board gender equality across sectors.

The gender target for state boards was put in place in 1993, but languished until 2011, when the government publicly re-committed to the goal and began to take action in support of it. This experience suggests that targets alone cannot achieve meaningful results. Supporting pipeline and management efforts, and effective sanctions are all required. Lasting change requires the dedicated attention of a diverse set of stakeholders. In advance of establishing a broader quota in Ireland for gender balance targets on non-state boards, it is important to take stock of the state board target experience in order to best inform future efforts.

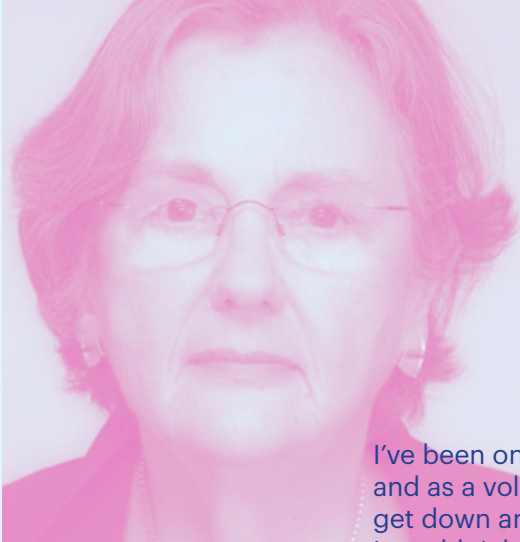
Legislate for a national board quota of a minimum 40% gender balance with a 3-year phased-in implementation for non-state boards.

NWCI urges the Government to establish a 40% quota for gender balance on non-state boards. It should feature a 3-year implementation period, with a required benchmark of 50% mandatory improvement each year. If these goals are met, gender balance will be well over the 40% minimum by year 4.

Progress should be monitored by a dedicated state committee, as well as the press and external industry and advocacy groups. This monitoring should include the publication of detailed gender metrics statistics on changes in board gender composition every 6 months and identify the companies that are taking action towards the goals, as well as those that are not. Appropriate sanctions should be put in place for non-compliance.

Testimonial

Bride Rosney
Secretary to the Irish Board of Trustees
at Mary Robinson Foundation



I've been on arts and cultural boards since the 1970's, always for NGOs and as a volunteer. Our work was driven by interest and willingness to get down and dirty. Gender didn't raise its head on those boards at all, I wouldn't have been aware of it within that sector.

When I retired, I decided to work on a maximum of five areas – that turned out to be accepting membership on five boards. I never actively looked for a position, and I'm not sure if I ever actually would. When I was offered a position on a State Board, Eirgrid which is effectively in an engineering area, my initial reaction was 'what do I know about engineering?' The Minister at the time told me that the skills they needed on the board related to communications and the voice of the punter and that's something I'm terribly comfortable with. I had been Head of Communications in RTÉ, and I believe it was because of my work there that I was put forward.

The association between boards and cronyism was something I had to think about when I was offered the position. I have never been a member of any political party, though there would be a perception that I was, and my perception of State Boards has always been that the people who received appointments, did so because of patronage. That is something I don't particularly like and it is still going on.

It's a huge luxury to be on such a variety of boards and I do see huge differences. It is important to have a very clear Memorandum of Association on a board, and clear and regular rotation of members. People should not be on a board for 10 or 20 years. They should be rotated, in a structured, clear way, with a given number going every year or two. Consideration should be given to the role of Chair being split into a three year term, to cover three roles within that term; designated chair, chair and past chair, spending one year in each role. But it will clearly depend on the organisation – it is not a case of "one size fits all"

I'm delighted to say that Eirgrid is probably one of the best State Boards for gender balance. Currently, the Chair is a man, with four men and four women non-executives on the Board. The other Boards I am on each have a number of women, but in no case is it close to 50 per cent. It can appear to be better than it is if you look around the table, but then you realise that the extra woman is often the non-voting secretary or similar.

Gender balance is important as there is a fundamental difference in the way people think and even in the language women use. I think emotional intelligence is better developed in most women than men. Emotional intelligence is needed for any healthy interaction and boards should be no different. You may have to rely on the analytical information to make the final decision, but emotional intelligence is essential in the discussion leading up to that decision.

Basic good governance is essential. People often find it a chore, but they've been forced to think differently now. I would prefer decisions to be made by consensus, but I also think having a vote is important and dissenting opinion should be respected and recorded. If someone firmly believes in their position it is terribly important for people to listen. I have seen the situation where one person isn't prepared to go with the flow, where the conversation continues on and on, and eventually the whole board is persuaded.

One woman on a board of 10 men is doing no one a good deed, there must be a critical mass. A minimum of 20 per cent in the room will give a comfort factor. That may only be two people, not a big number but knowing there is someone else who has a generally similar approach to things and does think that little bit differently to the group helps.

When I joined Eirgrid it seemed to me that the entire executive management had engineering degrees, so talk about group thinking! Two additional women directors have since been appointed, one in HR, one in communications and they've made an enormous difference. The executive team has expanded in terms of gender but more importantly it has expanded in terms of skillsets. Time and support is essential to engaging successfully at board level. I couldn't have done the work I do now in preparing for and attending board meetings if I was working full time.

I get great satisfaction out of mentoring younger people. I had a good life, and I am in part driven by the pay back scenario. Younger people should be nurtured as board participants. Women in senior decision making must become the norm. The presence of role models is critical, young people must see gender balance as the absolute norm.



Recommendation



Government or nominated state agency:

Act as a watchdog, through rigorous monitoring and measuring of what is being proposed, implemented and achieved on board gender balance and pipeline development in Ireland .

- Incentivise future efforts on board gender balance by sharing best practices across industries and using procurement processes and publicity to reward those who take positive action.
- Establish formal monitoring on board gender balance by requiring regular reporting and establish an Irish 'Women on Boards' independent review.



Rationale

Whether it is developing the leadership pipeline, self-regulating with board-led efforts, or looking to examples set by the state, there exist a wide variety of opportunities to take action to increase the number of women on boards in Ireland. While these opportunities can be taken up individually at any point by Government, by managers, boards, CEOs, executive search firms, investors, industry groups, advocacy groups, state bodies, and other, the recommendations in this report are complementary strategies that will produce the best effect when taken together, with a collaborative approach amongst all involved.

Because the range of opportunity for action is so wide and the set of key stakeholders so diverse, it can be a challenge to keep track of what is being proposed, what is being done, and what is being accomplished.

Keeping track is important. As the old adage says, ‘what gets measured, gets done’. In practical terms, Fiona Tierney, CEO of the Public Appointments Service described to NWCI:

“We are committed to a policy of equal opportunity and it is only through consistent monitoring, measurement and reporting that we will achieve our objectives”.

Below are our recommendations to establish a system of measurement for gender balance on Irish boards; ideas to spur continued action, monitor efforts, and celebrate progress made.

- **Incentivise future efforts on board gender balance by sharing best practices across industries and using procurement processes and publicity to reward those who take positive action.**

Encourage and assist best-practice sharing on board appointment processes across non-state and state organisations.

Many organisations, non-state and state in Ireland and internationally, are already working to address gender imbalance on their boards and in their leadership pipelines. As such, there is great potential for organisations to learn from one another on ‘what works’. While some industries may already engage in information sharing on this topic, non-state and state organisations should establish formal peer networks to share knowledge, experience, and best practice on increasing women on boards.

There is also value in creating a centralised cross-sector resource to increase transparency on board gender balance issues and appointments across sectors and facilitate further knowledge exchange.

In 2014, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform carried out a review of the existing process of appointments to State Boards. The Department, working closely with the Public Appointments Services (PAS), issued revised guidelines with specific measures to improve gender balance on state boards through the appointments process.

With the February 2015 launch release of new guidance, their website www.stateboards.ie is poised to be a comprehensive point of contact for state board appointments – and a potential resource for informing non-state efforts. Resources should be provided to ensure that citizens, particularly women, are aware of this platform.

In non-state contracting and public procurement processes prioritise companies committed to gender balance

Contracting and procurement processes can be a powerful tool to balance gender in the workplace and on boards. Just as organisations should challenge executive search firms to prioritise gender diversity and equality, non-state organisations can establish a policy to award overall contracting preference to companies with gender balance commitments or good practice in place. This policy can be formally published in the non-state organisation's code of practice and used when contracting out for services such as IT, human resources, catering, or much more.

As the biggest purchaser of goods and services in Ireland, the state should also incorporate similar gender-specific contracting preferences into the public procurement process. Three new procurement Directives (on Public Procurement, Utilities, and Concessions) currently scheduled to become national law by April 2016 represent a prime opportunity to include gender equality goals within mandatory obligations, pre-procurement state negotiations, the establishment of best price quality ratios and social clauses, and in dealing with breaches of contract.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Please visit www.nwci.ie for more information on NWCi's position and recommendations on issues of gender and public procurement.

Procurement processes as a tool to promote gender balance on boards

A number of countries have public procurement processes in place that recognise and reward companies for building gender equality into their work, and specifically for achieving gender balance on their boards.

Spain

The Spanish Gender Equality Act, includes a 40% gender quota to be reached by 2015 for companies with 250 employees or more. There are no formal penalties in place for non-compliance, but there is a system of positive reinforcement for those who meet the goals – as “compliance may lead to the status of preferred supplier for government contracts”.¹⁰⁰

United States

The 2010 financial reform bill, the Dodd-Frank Act, set out responsibilities for rules on the “fair inclusion and utilisation of minorities and women in all firms that do business with government agencies”.¹⁰¹ The Federal Office of Contract Compliance Programs in the Department of Labor requires companies that contract with the government to report on their hiring and labour practices on potential “barriers to equal employment opportunity”, with particular regard to women’s employment and discrimination.¹⁰²

Reward with good publicity, organisations taking action and developing best practice on gender balance.

In encouraging organisations and stakeholders to step out on gender balance issues, it is important to publicly recognise their efforts and celebrate wins. This can be done in a variety of ways. Industry groups – such as IBEC, the 30% Club, or organisations such as NWCI can publish regularly updated lists of organisations who have committed to board gender goals and who are meeting their targets. The state should also publish such lists, including the work of state agencies and departments striving to meet the 2016 quota.

100 European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy (2011) “Working Paper: The Quota-instrument: different approaches across Europe” http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/quota-working_paper_en.pdf (Accessed February 2015).

101 Davies (2011), p. 23.

102 US Department of Labor, “Facts on Executive Order 11246 – Affirmative Action”. Available at: <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/aa.htm> (Accessed February 2015).

More creative ideas are also encouraged. “Towards Gender Parity in Decision-Making in Ireland” suggested expanding the ‘Best Workplaces in Ireland’ award categories to include ‘Best Workplaces for Women in Ireland’. Enterprise Ireland sponsors women in business awards through ‘Business Networking for Women Across Ireland’ and the ‘Image Business Awards’. The expansion of such efforts, with an emphasis on innovative workplace initiatives to promote women into leadership, should be considered by industry groups moving forward.

- **Establish formal monitoring on board gender balance by requiring regular reporting and establish an Irish ‘Women on Boards’ independent review.**

Require quoted companies to regularly report gender breakdown numbers for their boards, senior management, and employees.

In 2013, the UK Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills established a regulation that required quoted companies to regularly publish information on gender metrics – similar to the requirement in place in Australia.

Requiring the same of companies quoted on the Irish Stock Exchange would complement state reporting efforts and contribute to a transparent environment in which gender balance progress can be more easily identified and measured.

Create an Irish Women on Boards independent review to formally monitor efforts towards increasing the number of women on boards in Ireland.

To achieve meaningful results in the near future, the Irish government must take care to link the various elements of the sector-specific strategies outlined in this report and centrally monitor them moving forward.

To do so, Government must demonstrate clear leadership and commitment on this issue. An independent review, modelled on the Lord Davies review and other international examples such as the Australian Census of Women in Leadership should be established. Public and private resources should be made available to support its development. It should include an advisory committee of diverse private, public, non- governmental and voluntary sector representatives. A baseline investigation report should be launched and a timetable agreed to include annual, and interim, public reporting on progress and activities.

Testimonial

Caroline Keeling
CEO of Keelings



I was first appointed to a Board in approximately 2000, when I joined the Board of Keeling's, the family business.

I was appointed to the state board, the Horticultural Bord Bia in 2004, on Joe Walshe's last day as Minister in the Department of Agriculture. I had met him at an event a few weeks previously, and had spoken to him at length about the industry in order to agitate change. I was very surprised to receive the phone call. I accepted the role without too much deliberation, I believe in Team Ireland, we are a small country and I was and am very happy to play my part to support the team.

I am the only woman on the board of Keeling's, but that is not unusual in the agricultural sector broadly, but I do not see that as a major challenge compared to the many business challenges we have. I believe we will have more women on the board in the future.

The culture of the boardroom is generally masculine as the large majority of the members are men, but that is not something I would be uncomfortable with. At this stage I am used to male dominated rooms; I am often the only woman in meetings, and this is not something that is particular to Ireland, the situation is no different in many other countries in which I do business.

In my experience, state board room culture is different to the corporate board. The former is far more polite with discussion and decisions being highly structured, and organised through the Chair. Rules and a good Chair can be more important than gender balance to ensure everyone at the board tables views are heard. It is critical that the Chair ensures that everyone has a voice.

I would tend to have a different point of view on the women on boards debate, insofar as I want women in senior executive positions more than on boards. I think we need to focus on increasing the number of women at senior executive level first and then progressing to improving the balance at board level. It is at senior executive level I believe women will have more influence on how an organisation is run.

I would have no interest in being on a board to balance gender only, I would only want to be there if I could contribute to the business. I think most women would feel this way. I believe the greater focus should be on how to increase women's participation in senior executive roles. Board quotas are potentially one piece of the solution but I don't know if quotas have led to a higher percentage of women in senior executive roles in other countries.

I do believe efforts to ensure women have access to senior executive roles is important for our business as we are reducing the pool of capable and intelligent people we are selecting from by 50% if women are prevented from getting into a position to be selected.

I believe the targets should be based on women in senior executive positions and a number of actions will be required to achieve this change, I don't think it will be solved by Board quotas only. We need a lot more information on why women are not reaching these senior roles in high numbers.

This report contains a multitude of options for increasing the number of women on boards in Ireland. It specifically outlines actions for workplace initiatives to develop the leadership talent pipeline; board activities in the private and community and voluntary sectors; and what the Irish government can do to establish itself as not only a model of gender parity, but also as an effective standard-setter and enforcement body.

In making these recommendations, NWCI draws upon experiences from a number of other countries who have made progress on board gender balance in recent years.

In particular, the UK Lord Davies Women on Boards review has been quoted extensively in this report, and indeed cited as a model for the final recommendation on establishing an independent review in Ireland.

The Davies report is currently recognised as an international example of best practice on how to investigate and incentivise voluntary action to increase the number of women on boards. By purely reviewing the data, the initiative can be regarded as a success.

Since the 2011 publication of the inaugural Women on Boards report, the percentage of women on boards in FTSE 100 companies has increased from 12.5 per cent in 2011 to 20.7 per cent in 2014 – with a goal of 25 per cent by the end of 2015. The 2014 annual report cites significant increases in company transparency on gender equality issues, as companies set their own individual gender targets; engage in ‘Think, Act, Report’ information-sharing activities; sign on to the UK executive search firm voluntary code; and engage in pipeline development – with notable public efforts by large companies such as Diageo, Lloyds Banking Group, and Barclays.¹⁰³

It must be noted however, that the 25% target set by the Lord Davies Report is extremely low – well below the European Directive, and the Irish state board target of 40% representation of women on boards. Research indicates that positive outcomes for decision-making and board and organisational performance require a critical mass of at least 30% of the underrepresented gender.

103 Davies, Lord (2014) Women on Boards: Davies Review Annual Report 2014. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320000/bis-women-on-boards-2014.pdf (Accessed January 2015).

Furthermore, without mandatory requirements, there are indications that UK companies may become complacent once the 25% goal (but not a critical mass target) is met. To this end, the UK Independent Review of the Voluntary Code for Executive Search Firms, itself noted:

*“Although these statistics are encouraging and suggest the target of 25% by 2015 will be met, continued focus and energy is required as we cannot assume the trend will continue without it”*¹⁰⁴

This reinforces NWCi’s belief in the need for a multi-faceted strategy to increase the percentage of women on boards. Ireland needs a strategy that engages a diverse set of stakeholders and encourages voluntary action, but one that hinges on mandatory quotas to incentivise immediate action and penalise non-compliance.

Improving the gender balance on Irish boards, and in decision-making roles in the workplace, will help challenge and address the gender norms at play in Irish society. Organisations and institutions that do not sufficiently value the contribution of women are also refusing to ensure that women, business, the economy and wider society realise its full potential. Improved gender balance will facilitate the emergence of a new reality, where women are more active in the workplace and in decision-making and are recognised and adequately rewarded for their work. Skills shortages will be addressed, labour market productivity increase, and social and economic well-being will improve making Ireland an attractive destination for families and business.

The need for more women on boards in Ireland is about women, yes, but it is also about the society in which we live and the economy that services that society. Men will also benefit from the realisation of these goals. They need to be in the conversation about how to get there.

Ireland cannot afford to wait.

104 (2014) Women on Boards: Voluntary Code for Executive Search Firms – Taking the Next Step, March 2014, p. 14. http://www.eeagrants.spain.msssi.gob.es/novedades/docs/UK_women_boards.pdf (Accessed February 2015).



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