

Advocacy Panel – Ibec

- In a society where social welfare costs are so high, how do we transition to a society where gender equality at work becomes more balanced and social welfare costs reduce?**

To achieve this needs to see greater numbers of people enter the labour market and/or education and training opportunities that are leading to employment. We know that there can be many issues at play in particular for women with children and lone parents that can complicate an individuals ability to access education, training and employment. Addressing these issues both with INTREO and concerted labour market activation measures as well as the structural elements of quality, available and affordable childcare and after-school care are parts of the solution to enable that transition. Similarly, greater focus on flexibility and different ways of working where possible will also enable greater transitions.

- I would like to know why The IBEC representative did not mention pay or a decent living wage. IBEC has consistently resisted increases in even the minimum wage**

Gender equality, gender balance at work and the gender pay gap are not actually about pay but about representation. What I mean by that is, raising the level of pay is meaningless if we continue to perpetuate the real issues challenging gender equality which include the fact that there remain roles and sectors that are feminised or deemed female jobs just as there are others deemed male jobs. What we need for gender equality in employment is to address the myriad of structural, cultural and policy causes for the differences in how we treat men, women and gender.

If we look at the gender pay gap - there are a range of causes – to give two examples - we have a large number of single sex schools which do not offer the same range of subjects to boys and girls – similarly in mixed sex schools subjects can be put on the curriculum in a gendered fashion. As such this can mean that mechanical drawing or physics is often not available in the girls' school and home economics may not be available in the boys school. This narrows career choices very early on for students and has real implications for occupational segregation later on in life.

Similarly, in Ireland the cost of childcare is among the highest in the OECD accounting for 53.5% of the average wage, compared to an average of 27.6% in other OECD countries. This is resulting in parents having to step out of the workforce or reduce to part-time work to offset costs and more

often than not that defaults to the mother. Over time the career gap can extend and a “motherhood penalty” can occur due to interrupted employment, loss of experience and salary increments that would be gained while in employment. These can contribute to a gender pay gap and a lack of gender balance in decision-making roles. To address the gap will require business and society to stop seeing this as a women’s issue and rather to see it as an issue that affects all of society and requires a fundamental change in how we think of men, women and gender. It will require a range of strategies including:

- Significant interventions in the education system and teacher training curricula to address subject availability; subject and career choice; gender stereotyping and role modelling.
- A societal focus on the role of gender stereotypes and norms which influence the roles women and men hold in our country needs to occur if we are to further challenge the work and non-work opportunities available to all.
- The provision of affordable, quality childcare is essential to addressing some of the challenges around gender balance in the labour market as despite the investment to date the provision is still not fit for purpose.
- The examination by employers of organisational cultures for unconscious biases and taking corrective and preventative action to address the impact. This may include the provision of unconscious bias training; ensuring recruitment and promotion processes are transparent and equitable; encouraging the uptake of leaves by both males and females; calibrating performance management processes while examining evaluations for bias; and gender proofing policies and practices.