



International Women's Day 2008

Dublin City Baile Átha Cliath

1910-1913-1917-1918-1999-2000-2008
women marched for rights
women's equality
visibility
On the eve of World War I...
Following the...
Copenhagen...
International Women's Day...
1910...
1913...
1917...
1918...
1999...
2000...
2008...
women marched for rights
women's equality
visibility

EVERY STEP OF THE WAY WOMEN ACCESSING POWER IN DUBLIN CITY

An initiative of the Dublin City Council Working Group on International Women's Day
08 March 2008



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Membership of the Working Group on International Women's Day



Cllr. Emer Costello,
Chairperson



Cllr. Browen Maher



Cllr. Louise Minihan



Cllr. Joan Collins



Cllr. Clare Byrne



Cllr. Julia Carmichael



Table of Contents

Membership of the Working Group on International Women's Day	2
Foreword by Councillor Emer Costello	4
Acknowledgements	5
Executive Summary	6
Section 1 Introduction	10
Section 2 Method of the study	21
Section 3 The experiences of women in leadership in Dublin City	22
Section 4 Conclusions and recommendations for the Working Group	33

List of Tables

Table 1	Employment rate of persons aged 20 – 44 by family composition, 2007
Table 2	Average time spent per week on selected activities, 2005
Table 3	Women and Men in National and Regional Decision Making Structures, 2007
Table 4	Women Candidates in Dublin Corporation and Dublin City Council Local Elections, 1999 and 2004
Table 5	Dublin City Council, Breakdown of Administrative Grades by gender
Table 6	Dublin City Council, Breakdown of Professional Grades by gender
Table 7	Dublin City Council, Breakdown of General Operatives and Fire Brigade by gender



Foreword

International Women's Day, 8th March, is a global day of celebration where women from all countries and of different political, economic, social, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds can join together to reflect on the struggle for equality over the past century, celebrate the achievements to date and identify the challenges for the future.

In July 2007 Dublin City Council passed unanimously the following motion proposed by Cllr Mary Murphy:

"That the Manager ends the trend of Dublin City Council failing to make use of the opportunities presented by International Women's Day to promote women's participation in the political, economic and social life of Dublin City. Given only one quarter of Councillors are women, as a signal of its commitment to gender equality, the Manager will initiate a programme of annual events which will become embedded in the annual life of the city and contribute towards promoting women's equal participation in governance of the city. The City of London, for example, marks the day each year with a Capital Woman event."

Following the adoption of the motion an 'International Women's Day Working Group' was established to address how best the sentiments of the motion could be achieved. The Working Group comprised Councillors from all parties and groups within Dublin City Council and also the Chairperson of the National Women's Council of Ireland, Dr. Joanna McMinn. Our work was very ably supported by staff from Dublin City Council including the City Manager's Department, the

Research Unit, Dublin City Libraries, the Press Office and the Community Section.

The IWD Working Group decided to focus on one theme in 2008 that would encapsulate women's participation in the political, economic and social life of Dublin City. The theme of 'Women in Decision Making' soon emerged to be a theme that resonated with the Councillors, staff of Dublin City Council and the Community at large. Hence, it was decided to carry out a research project into the opinions and experiences of women Councillors and women in decision-making roles within Dublin City Council and in positions of influence within the Community.

The findings of this report make very interesting reading. While there is much to celebrate in the achievements of women in all walks of life throughout the City, it is clear that there are still significant inequalities. The IWD Working Group is now seeking to be established on a permanent basis, to oversee the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report and to ensure that International Women's Day is permanently etched into the political, social, economic and cultural calendar of the City.

I would like to thank all the Members of Dublin City Council who supported this motion, the members of the IWD Working Group who gave up their lunch hours to attend the many meetings and the staff of Dublin City Council who worked with and supported the Group.

Cllr. Emer Costello
Chairperson
International Women's Day Working Group



Acknowledgements

The membership of the Working Group on International Women's Day represented a broad range of experience and expertise on the issues outlined in the report. In this way, each member provided valuable support and advice to the study throughout. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Dr Joanna McMinn of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) whose contribution to the Working Group and the research was invaluable. David Griffin from the City Manager's Department gave vital administrative support to the Working Group. Former Cllr Mary Murphy proposed the original motion to establish the Working Group and also gave generously of her time to contribute her views and experiences to the study.

A number of staff at Dublin City Council and elsewhere furnished the report with key information, essential to the logic of the report. In particular, John Ryan, Brian Teahan, Dymphna Farrell and Vincent O'Reilly of the Human Resource Department took time to provide the report with a gender breakdown of employees at DCC. Mary Clarke of the Archive Section at Dublin City Library Headquarters and Frank Daly of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government supplied the results of Local Government Elections, according

to gender. Hugh Fitzpatrick of International Relations contributed to the investigation of co-options onto the Council in the last number of years. Jamie Cudden of the Research Unit at International Relations made comments and suggestions on the final draft of the report.

A total of 18 women – elected members of Dublin City Council, Officials from Dublin City Council and Leaders from the community sector of Dublin City - each took time out of their very busy schedules to contribute their views and experiences on the topic. Deputy Catherine Byrne contributed an account of her journey from community activism to formal politics to the report. Their high level of reflection and expertise in the area was instrumental to the final report and for this the Working Group is grateful.

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*The Department of International Relations and
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initiatives on an inter-departmental basis.*



Executive Summary

International Women's Day, held annually on 8 March, is a global day of celebration of women and their achievements in the present and in history. The day also provides an opportunity to highlight some of the remaining inequalities between women and men in many spheres of public and private life.

In July 2007, as a signal of its commitment to gender equality, Dublin City Council unanimously passed a motion to establish a Working Group on International Women's Day (IWD), tasked with taking the opportunity of IWD to promote women's participation in the political, social, cultural and economic life of Dublin City.

The Working Group engaged the Research Unit at Dublin City Council to produce a piece of work on women's access to and their participation in the decision making process in Dublin city.

Method of the study

The research included a short review of Ireland's commitment to gender equality in decision-making, according to international and domestic legislation and policy. An examination of some key indicators of gender equality and of statistics relating to women's participation in national and local power structures completed the desk-based element of the research.

During January and February 2008, the research met with some 18 women with experience in leadership roles, drawn from several arenas of influence in Dublin City:

- Councillors of Dublin City Council (5)
- Officials of Dublin City Council in senior management positions (6)
- Women in leadership roles within the Community (6)
- The most recent female Lord Mayor of Dublin, Catherine Byrne, TD

Discussions with the women were on a one-to-one basis and took the form of guided conversations. The discussions explored women's experiences of accessing power structures and of operating in what were often male-dominated environments. The findings of the discussions contributed to a number of recommendations and suggestions for the consideration of the Working Group on International Women's Day.

Indicators of gender (in)equality

Ireland's commitment to gender equality in decision-making can be found in its adoption of several UN agreements such as the *Beijing Platform for Action* and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) among others. Membership of the European Union (EU) has also influenced Irish legislation and policy aimed at achieving gender equality in all spheres, including women's access to power and decision-making structures. A number of key pieces of domestic legislation and policy documents ground these aims in reality. *The National Strategy for Women* names the engagement of women as 'equal and active citizens' as a key theme to be addressed over the period 2007 – 2016. It aims to increase



the number of women in decision-making, women in politics and women on State and private sector boards

Despite the commitment to achieving gender equality, gender inequalities persist at many levels and in many arenas across society.

The research produced a snapshot of some key indicators of remaining gender inequalities internationally and in Ireland. In 2007, just over half of all women in Ireland aged 15 years were members of the labour force; this was true of 73 per cent of men. Of those women not participating in the labour force, 61 per cent were looking after home or family, while this was true of only one per cent of men outside the labour force.

Irish women and girls fare well in education and in 2005 almost 40 per cent of employed females aged 25 – 64 years had a third level qualification compared to just under 30 per cent of men in the same category. Despite this, the gender pay gap in Ireland stood at approximately 14 per cent in 2005.

Gender balance in decision-making

An examination of national and regional decision-making structures revealed that despite women's increased labour market activity and educational attainments, the balance of power remains with men.

Just 13 per cent of elected representatives in Dáil Éireann are women, while 20 per cent of Councillors at the local level are women. Dublin City Council fares better than the

national figure, with women accounting for 29 per cent of elected representatives.

More specifically, the Dublin City Development Board in 2007 consists of 28 members, six (or 21%) of whom are women. The six Strategic Policy Committees (SPC) of Dublin City Council who fulfil an important function for the city across a wide range of policy areas consist of a total of 90 positions, 28 of which are occupied by women. The work of the SPCs is fed into the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) which is made up of the six SPC Chairs, the City Manager and the Lord Mayor. The current membership of the CPG is entirely male.

Although there has been progress in recent years, the study found evidence of a continued gender imbalance in senior management positions at Dublin City Council. Administrative grades at Dublin City Council move from Grade 3 up to Grade 8, with Executive Manager and finally Assistant City Manager filling the top management roles. Just over half (54%) of those working at administrative grades in Dublin City Council are women. The breakdown of grades according to gender shows women in a majority of positions from Grade 3 up to and including Grade 5. However, there is a switch in the balance at Grade 6 through to Assistant City Manager, at each of which men hold the majority of posts.

There are over 400 staff members at Dublin City Council working at six professional grades, such as Engineer or Architect. These grades are occupied by a majority



of men (71%) and at each level from Assistant Professional through to Dublin City Professional, men hold the majority of positions.

Dublin City Council employs almost 3,000 General Operatives and almost 1,000 Fire Brigade personnel. These occupations are made up of 12 per cent and 3 per cent women respectively.

Findings of the discussions

Respondents to the report agreed that the proportion of women and men in decision-making roles indicated a need for further discussion and action.

There was a feeling that while there may be a general awareness of gender equality issues among senior management and Councillors, there was a need to heighten that awareness and to place some of the issues higher up the agenda.

Discussions revealed broad agreement of the importance of women taking their place at the decision-making table. There was consensus that women brought a necessary and different perspective to issues. The presence of women was described as akin to *'two heads are better than one'*. Some research participants felt that women influenced not only the content of decisions but the process of decisions also.

Councillors and community representatives in particular discussed the high level of activity among women at community level and

described some of the barriers to women's access to formal politics:

- Financial barriers
- Lower levels of confidence
- Education, training and capacity-building
- Caring responsibilities and childcare
- Structural and institutional discrimination
- Low value attributed to women's community work

As with their colleagues in politics and in the community, women in senior management positions within Dublin City Council suggested some of the potential barriers to women wishing to progress through the organisation:

- Lack of role models and mentors
- Low levels of job rotation

Family Friendly or Work Life Balance arrangements were discussed in relation to the tendency for them to be seen as *'for women'* and amid concerns that prolonged periods of reduced working time could lead to *'de-skilling'* if measures were not in place to control against such a phenomenon.

Networking and the opportunity to network were raised as important for career development in politics and administration and as important for influencing policy and accessing funding for community organisations. Some Officials and Councillors felt that this avenue of advancement remained more difficult for women to enter. Community organisations felt alienated by Officials and Councillors due to the lack of face-to-face and personal contact with these groups.



Some recommendations for action to be considered by the Working Group

A number of recommendations evolved from the review of the statistics and discussions with Councillors, Officials and Community Leaders. What follows is a selection of those conclusions and recommendations.

- **Establish a budget line for International Women's Day**

It is recommended that the Working Group on International Women's Day should be established on a permanent basis, with increased representation from relevant stakeholders. A budget line for IWD should be instituted.

- **Funding for women's groups**

Women's groups expressed serious concerns over the lack of funding at local level for initiatives such as training, research and events. Dublin City Council already provides funding for community organisations through the Social Inclusion Unit and the Department of Community and Enterprise. The Council should consider a coherent funding strategy aimed specifically at increasing women's participation in local decision-making.

- **Dialogue between Community leaders, Officials and Politicians**

Community groups and leaders would welcome meaningful dialogue between women leaders in each of the three spheres of the study. Organised meetings and sessions should examine interpretations of community development and the effects of DCC policy on, in particular, women's lives. Such contact would provide opportunity for greater understanding and future networking.

- **A Gender Audit of DCC¹**

Dublin City Council maintains high quality and valuable records of the spread of women and men employed across grades and positions within Dublin City Council. The entirety of these records, along with anonymised data relating to competitions and recruitment, should be examined and analysed to complete a 'gender audit' of employment at DCC.

¹ This recommendation is the author's own, developed from the findings of the employment statistics supplied by Human Resources Department. It is influenced and can be part attributed to e-mail correspondence with Professor Kathleen Lynch of the equality Studies Centre, UCD. January 2008



Section 1

INTRODUCTION

International Women's Day

International Women's Day, held annually on 08 March, is a global day of celebration of women and their achievements in the present and in history. Across the world, women as individuals, women within their families, women's groups large and small and women at work take time to mark the UN day, which was first celebrated in the early 1900s. Events are organised which provide the time and space to reflect on how far women's rights have come and to inspire generations of women to claim their rights and their place as citizens in an equal, safe and just society.

The day also provides an opportunity to discuss the persistent inequalities between women and men and to put forward suggestions and actions as to how to overcome the barriers to women's full and equal participation in all aspects of society.

This year, as a signal of its commitment to gender equality, Dublin City Council has taken the opportunity of International Women's Day to promote women's participation in the political, social, cultural and economic life of Dublin City.

To this end, a *Working Group on International Women's Day* was established by Council in July 2007. The Working Group engaged the Research Unit at Dublin City Council to produce a piece of work on women's roles and their participation in the decision making process in Dublin city.

In addition to the launch of the report, together with a panel discussion on some of the issues highlighted therein, Dublin City Libraries will mark International Women's Day across the City with a series of Creative Writing Workshops for Women.

Gender equality in decision-making internationally and at home

In 1995, on the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (UN), the city of Beijing played host to the Fourth World Conference on Women. At that time, the Irish government adopted and agreed to the basic principles included in the Beijing Declaration, which considers '*participation in the decision-making process and access to power*' as fundamental factors in full equality between women and men. *The Beijing Platform for Action* calls on governments and international organisations to commit to the advancement of women in power and decision-making structures. It acknowledges women's participation in community and grass-roots leadership, where traditional avenues of power in party politics, employer organisations and trade unions have been blocked to them.²

The principle of equal treatment of women and men was enshrined in the original Treaty of the European Economic Community in 1957. Since that date it has been implemented in legislation and through case law as well as through the adoption

² UN Fourth World Conference on Women. *Platform for Action*. Beijing, China – September 1995.



of non-binding decisions, recommendations, communications and policy. Membership of the European Union and the obligations associated with that membership has played a key role in the formation of gender equality legislation and policy in Ireland. The European Commission's *Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men*, adopted in March 2006, outlines six priority areas of action on gender equality for the period 2006 – 2010, including 'equal representation in decision-making'. Women's under-representation in politics across the EU is considered to be a 'democratic deficit' and the Roadmap outlines key actions for the Commission to promote and monitor women's participation in decision-making.³

In Ireland, under *Sustaining Progress*,⁴ the government and social partners committed to developing a *National Strategy for Women*. Launched in 2007, the Strategy is 'the Government's statement of priorities in relation to the advancement of women in Irish society for the period 2007 to 2016'. A key theme of the strategy is the engagement of women as 'equal and active citizens', sub-themes of which include the following:⁵

- Women in decision-making
- Women in politics
- Women on State and private sector boards

In a critique of the Strategy, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) expressed disappointment at the lack of analysis for the under-representation of women in politics, the cause of which is attributed to women's roles as principal carers together with work commitments and their subsequent lack of time and opportunity to participate more fully. The NWCI points to the omission from the Strategy of the structural causes for political inequality including 'lack of childcare, discrimination in the Constitution that has formed cultural attitudes and sexist attitudes'.⁶

Women and Equality in Ireland – some key indicators

A range of legislation now affords protection from discrimination on the basis of gender. The most recent Statutes include The Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Acts, 2000 – 2004. Together they ban direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of gender, among other grounds, in access to employment, education and training and goods and services. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and signed and ratified by the Irish government in 1985. In 2005, the CEDAW Committee recommended that the Irish government should take appropriate legislative measures to include

3 Commission of the European Communities (2006) Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *A roadmap for equality between women and men 2006 – 2010*. Brussels

4 Sustaining Progress was the sixth of a total of seven agreements negotiated between the Irish social partners

5 Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2006) *National Women's Strategy 2007-2016*. Dublin: Stationery Office

6 NWCI (2007) *National Women's Strategy 2007 – 2016. Analysis for AGM, June 2007*.



the definition of discrimination against women in line with Article 1 of the Convention, which states:

“discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.⁷

However, legislation and the implementation of that legislation can only ever be one part of the equality jigsaw. Cultural norms and attitudes towards women and men and their roles and status in society and in the home can perpetuate structural and institutional gender inequality.

Gender equality in a society can be measured according to a wide range of indicators, from the incidence of gender-based violence to access to health care and from the usage of new technologies to time spent caring for family.

Women and Men’s Labour Market Activity

Women and men’s participation in the labour force is of significance because access to decent work is arguably the most efficient route to a reasonable standard of living and

well-being for individuals and households.⁸

This is particularly important in light of the phenomenon of the feminisation of poverty – in 2006, some 22 per cent of persons living in women-headed households in Ireland were at risk of poverty compared to 14.2 per cent of male-headed households. Additionally, those in women-headed households were more than twice as likely to be living in consistent poverty, than households headed by men.⁹

In the third quarter of 2007, over half (55%) of all women in Ireland aged 15 years and over described themselves as members of the labour force (at work or unemployed) compared with 73 per cent of men. Of those women not participating in the labour force, 61 per cent were looking after home or family, while this was true of only one per cent of men outside the labour force.¹⁰

The presence of young children in a household has a dramatic effect on the activity of women in paid employment, as demonstrated in Table 1 overleaf.

The Table highlights the employment rate of women and men according to their parental status. The presence of children in a household has no real effect on the employment rate of men, while it significantly alters women’s labour market activity. The employment rate of women with no children is almost equal to that of men with no children but drops by approximately 30 percentage points when young children are present in the household.

7 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Part 1, Article 1

8 Conroy, P. (2005) Review of the FÁS Gateway for Women Process 2004. Dublin: FÁS Planning and Research

9 CSO (2006) EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions, 2006. Dublin: The Stationery Office

10 CSO (2007) *Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 3 2007*



The Division of Labour within the Home

Unequal power structures and gendered division of labour within the home can reinforce discriminatory attitudes and practices in the public domain. Additionally, unequal distribution of work in the home may limit women's time, availability and energy to participate in decision making structures, including top layers of management in the workplace and political or community activism and leadership.

In 2005, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) published a study on the average time spent by women and men on a variety of activities. Table 2 below, demonstrates some findings of the research.

Educational Attainment

An area in which Irish girls and women score consistently higher than their male counterparts is educational attainment. The World Economic Forum ranks Ireland joint

Table 1:
Employment rate of persons aged 20-44 by family composition, 2007

Family composition	Women % of 20-44 age group	Men % of 20-44 age group
No children	88.1	92.6
Youngest child aged 0 - 3	58.5	93.6
Youngest child aged 4 - 5	57.5	90.2
Youngest child aged 6 or over	64.7	91.0
Total	66.2	92.3

Source: CSO (2007) QNHS, Mar-May 2007

Table 2:
Average time spent on selected activities, 2005

Time Spent	Women Hours:Minutes	Men Hours:Minutes
Caring for others	4:55	1:27
Employment and study	3:40	7:38
Household work	5:12	2:39

Source: McGinnity, F. and Russell, H. (2007) 'Work Rich, Time Poor? Time-Use of Women and Men in Ireland' in *The Economic and Social Review*. Vol. 38, Number 3, Winter 2007, pp 323-354



1st (with 14 other countries) on a gender gap index in educational attainment.¹¹ The high ranking is borne out by national statistics, which tell us that almost 40 per cent of employed females aged 25 – 64 years had a third level qualification in 2005 – compared with just under 30 per cent of men in the same category.¹² In 2007, some 79 per cent of 18 year-old women were students while the proportion for men was 64 per cent. Less than 9 per cent of women in the 18 – 24 year age category were classed as early school leavers, while this was true for almost 15 per cent of males, both of which were well below the EU-27 average.¹³

The Gender Pay-Gap

The high level of educational attainment among women and girls in Ireland throws the continuing gender pay-gap into all the more stark relief. In 2005, men aged between 15 and 84 years had an average annual income of €31,138. For women in the same age category the average income stood at €20,660 or 66.3 per cent of men's average earnings. When the figures take account of the concentration of women in part-time employment (in 2007, women made up 80.9 per cent of part-time workers) women's average hourly income was around 86 per cent of men's in 2005.¹⁴

Women in Decision Making

Despite women's increased labour force participation and the educational attainment of women and girls, there remain a highly unrepresentative number of women in key decision-making positions in Ireland and elsewhere.

To mark the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All in 2007, the European Commission published the results of a Eurobarometer survey. The survey found that 86 per cent of Irish people thought that there should be more women in management positions and more women in the Dáil.¹⁵

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) maintains a statistical database on the proportion of women in management in countries across the world. Between the periods 1996 - 1999 and 2000 – 2002, the share of women as '*legislators, senior officials and managers*' in Ireland actually dropped from almost 35 per cent to less than 30 per cent.¹⁶

Table 3 overleaf, provides a breakdown of the representation of women and men in national and regional decision making structures in Ireland in 2007.

11 Hausmann, R., Tyson, L.D. and Zahidi, S. (2007) *The Global Gender Gap Report 2007*. Geneva: World Economic Forum

12 CSO (2006) *QNHS Special Module on Educational Attainment*. Table 3b. Dublin: The Stationery Office

13 CSO (2007) *Women and Men in Ireland 2007*. Dublin: The Stationery Office

14 CSO (2007) *Women and Men in Ireland 2007*. Dublin: The Stationery Office

15 European Commission (2007) *Special Eurobarometer 263. Discrimination in the European Union. Country Sheet, Ireland*.

16 International Labour Organisation (2004) *Breaking through the glass ceiling. Women in management*. Geneva: International Labour Office



Table 3:
Women and Men in National and Regional Decision Making Structures, 2007

Structure	Women %	Men %
Dáil Éireann	13	87
Seanad Éireann	22	78
Government Ministers	20	80
Ministers of State	10	90
Local Authorities	20	80
City and County Managers**	6	94
Regional Authorities	16	84
County Enterprise Boards	22	78
County Development Boards	20	80
State Boards*	30	70
VECs	33	67

Source: CSO (2007) *Women and Men in Ireland*. Dublin: Stationery Office

* As of end 2006

** City and County Manager are appointed positions. Source for figures: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Although the current President of Ireland is a woman, as was her predecessor, the fact remains that in 2007, the proportion of men in national and regional decision making structures far outweighed that of women.

The low representation of women in Dáil Éireann placed Ireland 23rd in the EU-27 figures for women in national parliaments. The National Women's Council of Ireland recently calculated that in the last 10 years women's representation in the Dáil has risen by just one per cent and that at this rate it will take 370 years for the proportion to reach 50 per cent.¹⁷ In 2007, at Cabinet level, three of the fifteen Ministers of Government are women,

while just 2 out of 20 Ministers of State are women. The representation of women in local politics is not significantly higher than that at central level, with women making up just 20 per cent of Local Authority Councillors. Additionally, of 34 County and City Managers, in February 2008, only two women held this position.

The most gender-balanced of the decision-making bodies listed above are the Vocational Educational Committees (VEC). However, the proportion remains low at 33 per cent, especially in the context of a highly feminised education sector at general employment levels.

17 NWCI *Women's representation in Decision-making*. See www.nwci.ie/our_work/political_equality



Dublin City Council elected representatives

Dublin City Council (DCC) has 52 elected members. Table 4 presents the election of women and men to DCC in Local Elections from 1985 to 2004.

As Table 4 below demonstrates, in the 2004 Local Elections there were a total of 139 candidates seeking office on DCC, 35 (25%) of whom were women. Of the 35 women seeking election, 15 were successful.

The 15 women elected to DCC represented only 29 per cent of Councillors overall. This compares with one local authority where almost 40 per cent of elected representatives are women and to other authorities where as low as only six to 10 per cent of the Council is made up of women.

Between 1985 and 1991, there was an eight per cent increase in the number of women elected to DCC. This proportion of women elected dropped back to 15 per cent in 1999. However, in 2004, it once again increased by 14 per cent to a high of 29 per cent.

Since 2004, a number of Councillors have resigned their positions on the Council for a variety of reasons. Six women and nine men in total have stood down from their Council seats. They have been replaced by a total of six women and nine men, thereby making no alteration to the gender make-up of Dublin City Council since the 2004 elections.

Reform of Local Government

The introduction and implementation of *Better Local Government* and the Local Government Act, 2001 extended national

Table 4: Women Candidates in Dublin Corporation and Dublin City Council Local Elections, 1999 and 2004

Year	Total number of candidates	Number of women candidates	Number of women elected	Women as percentage of members elected
1985	N/A	N/A	7	13%
1991	N/A	N/A	11	21%
1999	133	27 (20%)	8	15%
2004	139	35 (25%)	15	29%

Source: Kindly supplied by Dublin City Archivist and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government



social partnership structures to the local level with the introduction of County and City Development Boards, Strategic Policy Committees and Corporate Policy Groups. An underlying principle of the reform was to 'enhance local democracy and widen participation'.¹⁸ Although not named specifically, it was hoped or even assumed at the time that the new structures would increase the number of women involved in decision-making. Table 3 above demonstrates the gender imbalance on County Development Boards across Ireland. More specifically, the Dublin City Development Board in 2007 consists of 28 members, six (or 21%) of whom are women.

Six Strategic Policy Committees (SPC) in Dublin City provide an important opportunity for elected members and local sectoral stakeholders to contribute to policy-making for the city. The six SPCs are made up of the following:

- 90 members (individuals may be on more than one SPC)
- A total of 28 members are women
- A total of 62 members are men
- Of the sectoral members, 8 are women and 22 are men
- The position of Chair of each of the six SPCs is occupied by a man

The work of the Strategic Policy Committees is fed into the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) which is made up of the six SPC Chairs, the City Manager and the Lord Mayor. At the time

of writing (February 2007) each of the eight members of the CPG were male.

Women Officials

In 1973, the 'marriage bar', preventing married women from working in certain positions within the Civil and Public Service, was abolished. Public administration, together with Defence, is now one of the most gender-balanced sectors in Ireland, with only slightly more women than men engaged in that sector.¹⁹

The high proportion of women working in the public sector is not an Irish phenomenon. Across Europe, high levels of women work in public sector employment.

Dublin City Council operates strict equal opportunity procedures at every point of the recruitment and promotion process as well as in training and further opportunities. There is a policy of non-discrimination in employment and an open channel for complaint of discrimination, including sexual or other harassment. Despite this, there is an under-representation of women operating at senior management level within the organisation, although the situation has improved greatly in recent years.

The public sector grade system is complex, with over 200 grades and pay-scales currently in operation. What follows is an overview of Administrative, Professional and General Operative Grades disaggregated by gender.

¹⁸ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (1996) *Better Local Government – A Programme for Change*.

¹⁹ CSO (2007) *Women and Men in Ireland*. Dublin: Stationery Office



Table 5:
Dublin City Council, Breakdown of Administrative Grades by gender

Grade	Women	Men	Total
Grade 3	384 (61%)	246 (39%)	630
Grade 4	410 (62%)	249 (38%)	659
Grade 5	301 (57%)	224 (43%)	525
Grade 6	206 (43%)	278 (57%)	484
Grade 7	83 (39%)	131 (61%)	214
Grade 8	29 (43%)	39 (57%)	68
Executive Manager	8 (30%)	19 (70%)	27
Assistant City Manager	1*	7*	8*
Total	1,422 (54%)	1,193 (46%)	2,615 (100%)

Source: Provided by Human Resources Department, Dublin City Council. January 2008

* Numbers too small for per centage value

Just over half of those working at administrative grades in Dublin City Council are women. The chart above shows that more women are employed from Grade 3 to Grade 5. However, this trend is reversed from Grade 6 onwards, with men in the majority at Grades 6 to 8. At Executive Manager level, just eight out of 27 positions are held by women. Dublin City Council is divided into five local areas and

the key post of Area Manger (equivalent to Executive Manager) is occupied by a woman in each of three Area Offices.

There are over 400 staff members at Dublin City Council working at six professional grades, such as Engineer or Architect. Table 6 provides a breakdown of the professional grades, disaggregated by gender.



Table 6:
Dublin City Council, Breakdown of Professional Grades by gender

Grade	Women	Men	Total
Assistant Professional	28 (46%)	33 (54%)	61
Executive Professional	51 (35%)	95 (65%)	146
Senior Executive Professional	34 (22%)	122 (78%)	156
Senior Professional	13 (22%)	45 (78%)	58
Deputy City Professional	0 (-)	17 (100%)	17
Dublin City Professional	1*	4*	5*
Total	127 (29%)	316 (71%)	443 (100%)

Source: Provided by Human Resources Department, Dublin City Council. January 2008

* Numbers too small for per centage value

All professional level positions in the organisation are populated by a majority of men, with the per centage of women decreasing incrementally as the level or grade rises, up to Deputy City Professional.

The presence of one woman at Dublin City Professional level, changes this trend slightly. The figures for women and men working as General Operatives and in the Fire Service show a dearth of women working in non-traditional roles within the Council.

Table 7:
Dublin City Council, Breakdown of General Operatives and Fire Brigade by gender

Grade	Women	Men	Total
General Operative	366 (12%)	2,571 (88%)	2,937
Fire Brigade	26 (3%)	947 (97%)	973
Total	392 (10%)	3,518 (90%)	3,910

Source: Provided by Human Resources Department, Dublin City Council. January 2008



Why is gender balance in decision making important?

The above statistics demonstrate a real and objective review of the gender make-up of some key decision-making structures in Dublin city and in Ireland. The evidence clearly highlights a higher male participation rate in many of these bodies and organisations and a serious under-representation of women in senior management positions. But why is this important?

Women are not a minority group in society. In 2006, Ireland had the most gender-balanced population in the EU, with 100 women for

every 100 men in the population. A central tenet of democracy is that there is even representation of the population at the level where local and national decisions, policy and strategy are formulated.

Women are not all the same and women do not automatically hold the same opinions as each other. The inclusion of women in decision-making, however, brings the perspective and experiences of women as a group to the agenda. Women decision makers bring new concerns to the political table, including items that reflect women's gender-specific concerns as well as providing fresh perspectives on mainstream issues.



Section 2

METHOD OF THE STUDY

In order to give background and context to the subject of women in decision-making, the research sought and presented information on some key gender equality statistics in Ireland. Desk-based research outlined facts and figures on women in decision-making arenas, in particular on elected representation and women in management positions within Dublin City Council.

The primary objective of the study was to explore some of the barriers, which women may continue to face in accessing and influencing decision-making structures in Dublin City.

The research met with some 18 women in leadership roles, who continue to shape the social, economic, cultural and political landscape of the Capital and beyond. The women were drawn from key areas in the City:

- Councillors of Dublin City Council (5)
- Officials of Dublin City Council in senior management positions (6)

- Women in leadership roles within the Community (6)
- The most recent female Lord Mayor of Dublin, Catherine Byrne, TD

The discussions with women took place during January and February 2008 and each lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Respondents contributed their own experiences as women decision makers. They offered their views and opinions on the remaining potential barriers for women trying to influence the decision-making structures in their own particular area of work. The expertise and experiences of those women who participated in the research contributed to a short section on some suggestions for increasing women's participation in decision-making roles and in leadership. Those recommendations are for the consideration of the Dublin City Council Working Group on International Women's Day, which is made up of Councillors, Officials and Dr. Joanna McMinn of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi).



Section 3

THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP IN DUBLIN CITY

There are a number of reasons why women are under-represented in political and other decision-making structures. Structural discrimination against women has its roots in history and continues into the present. Stereotyping of women and men, often perpetuated by media, can lead to the assignment of gendered roles in women and men's private and public lives. Traditional working structures continue to mitigate against women and men who wish to care for family and develop careers at the same time, although more flexible ways of working are now available across employment sectors. The political and corporate environment has not traditionally welcomed the participation of women and while there has been much improvement in recent years, attitudinal barriers continue to percolate received wisdoms to new generations of leaders and managers.

Discrimination against women can intersect with other forms of discrimination, causing multiple discrimination against certain categories of women, including lone parents, women with disabilities and women from ethnic minority groups. The examination of particular crosscutting discrimination was beyond the time and budget constraints of this report.

During January and early February 2008, some 18 women engaged in leadership roles contributed to this report by way of guided discussions on the topic of women's access to decision-making and power structures.

What follows is a summary of the rich qualitative data the discussions yielded.

The research found a number of themes and patterns common to accessing leadership roles across the three areas – politics, public sector careers and community leadership, while some were specific to just one decision-making arena.

The findings do not purport to be representative of women's views in general but a flavour of some of the issues particular to the broad experiences of the respondents in their various roles at work and in the community.

Is gender equality still an issue?

Discussions did not start with the assumption that gender equality or gender discrimination in decision-making ever was, or continues to be, an issue worthy of research and debate.

The resounding answer to the opening question of each discussion was that *'the numbers show that it is'*. Despite the general acknowledgement of improvement in recent years there was a feeling that the number of women in decision-making roles had not yet reached a *'critical mass'* and therefore still merited discussion, debate and action. For respondents it *'speaks volumes that there isn't a representative number of women in the top layer of management'* in Dublin City Council. Equally in political circles, it was agreed that *'for any society to get on, you have to have equal participation'*.

Others worried that:

'People do not perceive there is a problem and even in the face of statistics they don't think it matters.'



Interestingly, some women felt that in the early stages of their political and professional careers, they *'had never suffered from gender inequality'* but now, looking back they were *'not so sure'*.

The view that women's access to decision-making was *'hugely important in the context of Dublin City Council, especially in the political environment'* was echoed across the board – by politicians, officials and community representatives.

Just two respondents were of the opinion that while the fact of gender inequality was borne out by the statistics, it was something they themselves had never found to be an issue. However, the two respondents who held this view equally went on to highlight some barriers that may exist for women and to make suggestions for Dublin City Council to further the agenda of gender equality.

Women officials were keen to point out that considerable progress had come about in recent years in the promotion of women to more senior positions. There was anecdotal observation of interest to the study that many of the senior positions that had been awarded to women had, in fact, been awarded to professional women rather than those with administrative backgrounds.

Locating gender equality on the agenda of decision makers

One Councillor was sure that a *'significant number of people'* would like to see more women in politics but that it was *'not*

necessarily at the top of people's agendas'.

Respondents across the board felt that there was *'probably awareness among top management and Councillors of the gender imbalance and gender issues'* but that did not *'necessarily mean that there is any concern'*. Others argued stronger positions, stating that *'gender is simply not on the agenda at Council level'*.

In these terms, there was agreement among some Councillors and Officials that there was a *'big need for awareness raising across the Council and the organisation of the problem and the nature of gender equality'*.

The *Women in Leadership* seminars, run by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), were cited as a useful and informative mechanism for awareness-raising.

At the table

The women interviewed for the study were all experienced and operating at high levels within their own arenas. They were therefore accustomed to working in what were often male-dominated environments. Although most said that they would *'notice'* being the only or one of only a few women at meetings and other work events, for the most part it did not *'bother'* them *'anymore'*. However, some remarked that for younger women or women who were less experienced it would probably be *'very intimidating'* and some remembered back to their earlier careers when they found such situations very uncomfortable.



In terms of having women *'at the table'* respondents agreed that

'...in decision-making processes, women bring a different view. For any decision you need a wide variety of opinions and skills and part of that is a female perspective.'

One informant commented that it could happen that she did not notice the gender imbalance at times until she would be *'sitting there wondering why X perspective hasn't come up and then I realise it is because there are no other women in the room'*.

Women were careful to point out that by a female perspective they did not mean the correct perspective. Rather, they felt *'a mix can make better decisions'*. Participants were of the view that a gender mix in decision-making created *'a bigger picture and better levels of communication'* and that while it did not *'necessarily change the decision'* it did serve to *'bring in more ideas'*.

One opinion put forward made a distinction between a female perspective and gender balance in decision making. It was argued that women did not need to be present in equal numbers but that it was important to have the view of a woman. However, this was not the case in other discussions where women felt that being the only woman at high level meetings was less than ideal:

"You can't have the same person doing it [bringing up women's perspective or issues] all the time. You just can't be that person all the time. I don't think I should have to represent 'womankind' or 'women' at a meeting."

Another respondent agreed that *'it is good when there are more women there to give each other support'*.

It was also felt that having more women at the policy table would mean that *'the process of communication on average would change – the style would be more practical and more discursive'*.

Catherine Byrne, a former Lord Mayor, was put forward as an example of how the policy content can change when women are in decision making roles for her part in *'putting childcare on the agenda'*.

Some women were disillusioned and felt that *'decision makers and managers are simply not looking for a female perspective'*.

From local activism to the seat of power

Women's involvement at community level was widely put forward as evidence of both women's interest in politics and decision-making as well as their competence in demanding and effecting change.

'Women become very involved at a local level. Local issues become very complex and women carry them through.'

Councillors and community representatives observed that much activity at community level, including in lobbying, issue-based campaigning and the provision of community services was almost entirely female-dominated. It was the widespread experience that *'if there is something to*



be fought for in the Community, it is the women standing up to do it'. They agreed that women were 'building the community, but they reach a certain level and then they stop'. The proportion of women willing to make representations to the media, to speak at public meetings, foster a high profile for themselves or to contest elections was considered a problem among respondents. This was not to suggest that the type of grass-roots activism in which women are involved was of lesser importance than formal political activity. The reality is that women's perspectives and contributions are needed at all levels of activity.

Several reasons were put forward for the specific issue of women who were engaged at some level in the community not stepping into more public or political roles:

- **Financial barriers**

Contesting elections and holding office was seen as a major financial drain and one which many women simply could not consider taking on. Women *'up to their eyes in bills'* would have to *'make choices to spend their money elsewhere'*.

The allowances, rather than a full-time salary, available to Councillors was regarded by some as a barrier to participation in politics. Those Councillors who were not working full-time expressed wonder at how anybody works and performs their political function. Respondents felt that if you were to add the family responsibilities many women have to that mix, then the task would be an impossible one.

It was pointed out that the financial barriers to participation also mitigated against participation on the basis of class and that cross-cutting socio-economic divisions were of equal, if not greater, importance to gender.

- **Confidence**

It was suggested that for many women, the confidence to put themselves forward was a key issue. Public speaking was seen as particular barrier with women saying *'I couldn't possibly stand up in front of everybody'*. This led to male spokespersons on agendas which had been predominantly orchestrated and fought for by women.

Some political and community leaders pointed out that many of the men in politics had experience at work and in trade unions which had built up their confidence over time.

- **Education and training**

Education and training, offered on community development principles of *'starting with where women are at'* were discussed as extremely important tools in increasing women's participation in politics. While community organisations were providing training and education from literacy classes to policy, the funding to carry these through to a meaningful level were often absent. An example was put forward of a 12 week course in how to influence policy. Although the course in itself was successful, the organisation did not have the resources to provide the course over a more prolonged period



of time. Twelve weeks was simply not long enough to engage the women on the course deeply enough and they had simply *'gone home'* at the end of the training.

Voter education was also considered important for engaging communities in the political process and encouraging more women to participate in formal politics. Councillors and community leaders were of the view that many residents did not have a real understanding of local government or were sceptical about the importance of voting.

The City, as an entity, was considered to have a key role in reaching out to women in communities and inviting their participation, essentially in driving home the message that women are *'needed'* in politics. It was suggested that while political parties in general had introduced measures to encourage participation by women, these were not by and large working and the city should step into that function.

- Caring responsibilities and childcare

Women's caring responsibilities in the home were identified as a major barrier to participation. The lack of availability of high quality and affordable childcare was signalled as a system failure and remained *'one of the biggest issues of all'*. This was especially true in the case of lone parents and women from minority ethnic communities who may not have the wider family support networks of Irish women. The division of work in the home, a wider

societal issue, continued to act as a barrier to women's active participation.

The women most often involved at community level were either young or older women. This was seen as a direct effect of childcare issues, where a whole age category of women who were rearing young children were missing from community activism. This was increasingly affecting older women in some areas, where grandparents were rearing children in the case of families affected in particular by drugs.

The demands of political life are strenuous and the schedule can be gruelling. Women explained that if you have a young family, to sustain an election campaign and then a term in office, a Councillor needs to have somebody at home who is entirely flexible, in essence *'keeping the show on the road'*. It was believed in some quarters that as it became *'more and more difficult to find quality candidates, including women'*, it was necessary for Council to consider *'normal working hours'*.

- Structural and institutional discrimination

Community organisations agreed that in large part, the barriers to women's participation were structural rather than personal. This implied a need for women's groups and other organisations to address important questions with the women they sought to represent. In this analysis, training and education needed to include an examination of structural inequalities, starting with questions such as *'Who rules the world?'*



- Value attributed to women's community activism

For several respondents the lack of acknowledgement of the value of women's contribution in the community was a barrier to further participation. Because those already in power placed little value on this type of work, women did not 'see themselves as key players'. There was a perception that women's organisations were seen by powerful organisations such as Dublin City Council as 'just a little group'.

Women needed to 'see reasons to be active participants' and part of that responsibility was seen to lie at the door of elected members and officials. Increased visibility and engagement with women's groups by elected members and officials was seen to be of paramount importance in encouraging more women to engage with and participate in decision-making. There was strong representation that unless this research and the opportunity of International Women's Day was utilised to the full and in a meaningful way, then Councillors and Officials of Dublin City Council should instead:

'focus on the day-to-day issues that affect women – housing, anti-social behaviour, drugs, homelessness, over-crowding - there are enough issues to lead on without getting into all this.'

The importance and relevance of attaching value to women's work in the community and in neighbourhoods is well supported by the experience of many of Ireland's elected female politicians. One such

example is that of the Dublin's most recent female Lord Mayor and sitting TD, Catherine Byrne. What follows is a case study of Catherine Byrne's political and personal journey from community activism to formal politics.

A Passion for Community in Dáil Éireann

At just seven years of age, the former Lord Mayor, Catherine Byrne spent Saturday mornings 'jumping on and off a lorry' to collect waste paper, which would fund the construction of a new Parish Centre. Community activism may have arrived early but it did not stop there. Catherine continued her involvement in many aspects of community life from summer projects to the Folk Choir and from St Vincent de Paul to the local football team. Just one serious encounter with gender discrimination stands out in Catherine's mind. When she was around 17 years old, she was manager of a local boys' football team. At the time, the Catholic Youth Council did not allow women managers. With the full encouragement and support of young players and their parents, Catherine and the team simply pulled out of the league and entered another.

Catherine's initial foray into formal politics, came via a family link to Fine Gael. Leafleting and canvassing were where Catherine expected to draw the line, with her mind still firmly focussed on her community activity, rather than politics *per se*. At a branch meeting in 1998, the sitting Fine Gael TD, Jim Mitchell, asked if she would consider



running in the up-coming Local Elections. With five young children and her community commitments, Catherine's immediate response was 'No'. She felt her background was not right for politics but after some advice and arm-twisting she decided to 'go for it'. Not long into the campaign, it became obvious that, in fact, her background in community and the contacts she had made, were exactly right for local politics. Catherine had always 'just enjoyed' what she was doing and had never considered it a journey towards political life.

Despite all her experience in community issues and activity, contesting that first election was a steep learning curve and an immensely busy time. Without the absolute support of her family and close friends, the new role would have been far too demanding to sustain. Although her community background was helpful, there were of course new topics for Catherine to 'get to grips with' – housing and health care were important issues for individuals and families.

Although Catherine's new colleagues at City Hall were predominantly male, she did not find this intimidating. She was 'reared among all boys' where she had to 'fight my corner' and was used to working in sport and so the male-dominated environment 'did not come as a big shock'. Despite this, Catherine keenly feels that having women present at decision-making fora can make a huge difference to the direction of those decisions. For her, 'women look at things differently' and will often be 'more aware of how policy will affect family, neighbourhoods and children'.

In 2005, facing into a term as Lord Mayor, Catherine was nervous of the challenge and worried about the effect it would have on her family. When the car came to pick her and her family up on the first morning all she could think was 'What have I let myself in for?' But 'you have to deal with it' and the staff at the Mansion House and again, her family, provided immense support. Looking back, Catherine reflects that it was possibly the 'biggest challenge' in her life but she learned the ropes and she learned to enjoy it at the same time. In her role as Lord Mayor, Catherine began to see the bigger view – the potential of the city as an entity rather than the focus on her own narrow patch of Dublin.

During her term as First Citizen, Catherine enjoyed 'the height of respect, no matter what'. At one point, while chairing a Council meeting, Catherine experienced a difficulty with a colleague. Although the problem itself was resolved quickly, the media reports the next day claimed that the Lord Mayor had left the Council 'crying'. It is probably not inconceivable that because of her gender, the report focussed on her emotional state rather than the actual substance of the relevant argument.

Fighting for a Dáil seat was yet another big challenge and Catherine is not afraid to admit that at first she was 'scared of where I was at'. This was partly to do with the fact that she left school at 14 but she has come to understand that it is her passion for the community and her dedication that get the work done. Together with a dedicated team and a family and friends who are 'on board' and always 'standing beside you', Catherine



feels able to fulfil her responsibilities as a politician. She is adamant that, for anybody in politics, having the full support and back-up of people at home – partner, family and friends – is essential.

Although Catherine believes that the women who are in politics are *'strong, persistent and articulate'*, looking around the Dáil, Catherine sees that there is an obvious unequal representation of women. She wonders if it is *'male dominated because we have allowed it to be'* or if young women feel they *'cannot survive'* on the allowance, considering the demands on time and what those demands take from family life. Perhaps women, who are already doing so much work in communities and neighbourhoods *"need to be appreciated more and encouraged that their backgrounds and experiences at that level are excellent starting points for fulfilling a political role."* However, she is optimistic that with *'effort in the right places'* the number of women elected to national and local seats can be increased. Catherine and *'any politician'* are keenly aware that *'times change and politics changes'*.

Climbing the career ladder

The discussions held with the group of women working at Dublin City Council revealed interesting insights into the potential barriers for women in reaching senior management positions.

- **Role models and Mentors**

There was a general perception that women are more reluctant to put

themselves forward for promotion at Dublin City Council and that part of the reason for this might be the lack of access to female role models.

'When you're ruled by a hierarchy of men, by osmosis you take that on. You think that the hierarchy is reserved for men only. If there were more female role models, then reaching the top would become more achievable.'

There was agreement and interest in the idea of a formal mentoring programme across the organisation, *'such a system would do no harm at all'*. Officials felt that in many instances women were more reluctant than men to put themselves forward for promotion and that the support and encouragement of a mentor could really address this situation.

Managers saw *'a real need'* for mentoring for staff from Grade 3 up to Grade 6. There was equal agreement that such a programme should not be restricted to female staff, as such a policy would be *'divisive and dangerous'* and might imply that women are somehow *'weaker and need something extra'*.

Despite this, Officials did feel that within a general mentoring programme, it would not be harmful to generally match women with women and men with men.

Women also described the informal mentoring that has evolved naturally at DCC and the existing practice within management to encourage staff to reach their full potential.



- Job rotation and job assignment

There were some strong views put forward about the implementation of job rotation policy at DCC. It was explained that to enhance promotional possibilities in Local Government, it was important to show a wide range of experience within the organisation. To gain promotion, staff need to be exposed to a *'variety of work across departments'* but *'mobility policy is not implemented consistently'*. There was a feeling among some respondents that less women were gaining experience in *'hard'* roles such as drainage or waste and were more likely to remain in *'soft'* roles such as social inclusion or press. In these instances women may have built up real expertise and become specialists in one area and *'allowing women to specialise is not good for their careers'*. This made it difficult to *'get out'* and that expertise was not always valued at interview.

Stricter implementation of job rotation policy and PMDS was one suggested avenue to address this situation. Other suggestions put forward were the introduction of *'more cross-departmental work, which is very good for confidence-building, networking and for broadening experiences'*.

In the absence of job rotation policy, one official discussed the idea of establishing a *'specialist career structure'* where value would be placed on expertise in one area of work.

Some officials felt that there was a need to really examine job assignment procedures. For instance, one woman maintained that

'the place would collapse at the notion of having a female Chief Fire Officer'. These officials maintained that there was still gender stereotyping when it came to job assignment and that there remained a need to *'start looking at the right person for the job and stop making assumptions'*. The most glaring example of gendered role assignment is in the outdoor work area, where it was claimed *'most depots wouldn't even have women's toilets'*.

Other officials felt that the notion of *'male and female jobs'* had diminished greatly in recent years and that this was no longer an issue.

Family Friendly or Work-Life Balance arrangements

There are number of family friendly and work – life balance arrangements available to staff at Dublin City Council. There is an argument to emphasises the concept of *work-life balance* rather than *family friendly* in order to neutralise the term and to take account of the needs of all workers. The respondents who engaged with the study tended to refer to these arrangements as *family friendly*. The two terms are used interchangeably in this report and no significance should be attached to the use of one over the other.

At DCC, in the majority of cases, family friendly or work life balance arrangements are taken up by women. There was some concern that in recent times, a slight resentment had built up towards women availing of these arrangements, especially *'the further up you go'*. In particular, *'term-time'* was sometimes



considered unfair on employees –male and female – who did not have young children and therefore the opportunity to *'take time out'*. Changing the eligibility and the name term time was considered a way to *'de-gender it as well because then it wouldn't be linked to care – it would not be seen as something just for women.'*

A further concern was raised that women often tend to cut down on their working hours during the family formation years of approximately 25 to 40 years of age. It was suggested that such a sustained period of job-sharing can lead to an element of *'de-skilling'* and that this issue should be examined further.

While these provisions were seen as positive and enabling there was some concern voiced over the impact of flexible working on the organisation.

'There is so much there now that there is almost a feeling that they are entitled to all the leave. I think it has swung almost too much the other way.'

It was stated that in some sections of the organisation, there could be a relatively large number of employees availing of, for instance, one day per week parental leave. Again, this was viewed in a positive light. The argument put forward was not to reduce or curtail this practice but to realistically acknowledge the effects this could have on colleagues and on service delivery.

Targeted measures

Both Councillors and Officials were in general agreement that targeted measures to increase women's participation or to advance them at work were often seen as *'giving advantage'*.

In the experience of Councillors, younger women members of political parties often hated the idea of, for example, targeted training for women. However, they also felt that the same women *'often look back when they are a bit older and realise where the idea was coming from'*.

Within DCC, one official commented that *'special support can create barriers'*.

There was also a suspicion that:

'Sometimes there can be an impression when women get promoted that it was something to do with a quota. Sometimes, I think there is a feeling or rumours that women got promoted just because they were women'.

However, the notion of a Women's Group within political parties was considered very beneficial by one Councillor. It was seen as an excellent opportunity for women to share policy concerns and to learn about the political process in an environment of solidarity. Other Councillors did not reject this view but rather had not had the experience of being part of such a group.



Selection process

For many party politicians, there was the issue of the tough and unforgiving nature of selection processes. Politics is a naturally competitive game and *'obviously, people want to protect their own positions'*. Councillors proposed that *'the real fight is internal'* and women were often shocked at the time of selection at *'how the rules suddenly change – it's dog eat dog'*.

Some felt that women *'often miss chances for advancement because they are often motivated by issues and are not prepared for the major obstacle of selection'*. These women felt that parties should offer more mentoring and development work for younger women activists to face the selection process.

Political, workplace and community networking

Women from each group placed huge emphasis on the importance of networking to advance careers, leadership and to affect change in the community. There was broad agreement that women remain locked out of informal networks, although to a lesser degree than in former times.

In politics, it was considered that *'the old boys' network still exists and unfortunately the young men's network is right behind them'*. Dublin City Council was described as a *'clan'* organisation where *'networking is very important'* but that women were still not *'part of the gang'*.

Networking between community groups, Councillors, officials and the business community was considered of major importance in influencing policy and accessing power structures. One individual suggested that on all sides of the equation, resources should be deployed in teaching staff the value of networking and how it can be done effectively.

For community organisations there was not enough opportunity to meet and network with locally elected representatives and officials alike. The low visibility of Councillors and Officials was a bone of contention among community organisations who felt that personal and face-to-face contact was missing from their relationships with power structures.

Women decision-makers are good for business

Politicians and Officials alike had experienced positive feedback from Dublin residents at seeing a woman or women in leadership positions:

'Customers come across as pleased to see a woman in a high up position.'

'Residents are often pleased to come across a woman in such a high up position, especially other women.'

'One woman recently commented to a staff member "It's great to see a woman on site."'

'Among voters, women, especially older women say they are glad to see a woman standing for election.'



Section 4

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORKING GROUP

Examining an issue such as gender equality in an organisation or in the wider society is not about apportioning blame to individuals or groups of individuals. Inequalities arise in the global and local historical, political and social context. For an organisation such as Dublin City Council, which has adopted and implemented progressive service delivery and employment practices, there is tremendous opportunity to play a lead role in continually adapting and developing those policies to serve and to represent an equal and just society.

The women who engaged with the study put forward a number of direct suggestions of action for change. Other recommendations are formulated through careful analysis of the discussions. Some are low-cost options to create awareness of International Women's Day and what it represents, in essence to increase and to lend volume to a conversation, which has its roots in international history. Other recommendations are closer to suggestions, some of which will necessitate further investigation, which are beyond the remit and resources of this short study. The recommendations are intended for the consideration of the Working Group on International Women's Day.

- **Increase awareness of International Women's Day**

Purple, Green and White are the official colours of International Women's Day (IWD), with Gold added in more recent times to symbolise a 'new dawn'. It was

suggested that a simple way to increase awareness of International Women's Day would be to encourage schools to ask pupils to wear an item of clothing or to dress completely in one or all of these colours on the day in question. This would 'get people talking, including the parents'. Leading by example, Dublin City Council could introduce the same idea for staff, with presentations on the history and meaning of IWD in the run-up to the day. There are examples in the public, private and community sector. One respondent suggested the idea of sponsoring a purple ribbon, akin to the coloured ribbons available to mark other causes such as HIV and breast cancer awareness.

Other suggestions included that DCC would hold events to commemorate women's contribution to politics, for instance the women of 1916 or the Dunnes Stores strikers of the mid 1980s, with an annual donation of a monument to the City marking such examples.

- **Play a co-ordinating and advertising role for events occurring around the city**

Dublin City Council is in a unique position to co-ordinate and advertise citywide events in honour of International Women's Day. Public libraries continue to play a vital role in local communities and are well placed to inform residents of plans around the city. There is also potential for DCC to provide a web-space for community and private organisations to register events and share plans for IWD.



- **Establish a budget line for International Women's Day**

Several respondents were clear that if *'they [DCC] are serious about marking the day, then there should be a budget'*. It is recommended that the Working Group on International Women's Day should be established on a permanent basis, with increased representation from relevant stakeholders. The Group should meet on a formal basis every quarter and more regularly in the run-up to IWD to plan and co-ordinate events.

- **Engagement with women's groups and other groups representing the interests of women**

The most positive experiences of women's and other community groups' engagements with DCC were those where Officials were approachable and where contact had been face-to-face. There was some disappointment expressed by Community leaders at the lack of interest on the part of some Dublin City Council officials and Councillors in attending various events and meetings. This had led in some cases to a feeling of isolation from the agenda of DCC.

Presence at events and on-going face-to-face contact between groups and Officials and Councillors was considered of importance to groups furthering the agenda of gender equality.

- **Funding for women's groups**

Women's groups expressed serious concerns over the lack of funding at local level for initiatives such as training,

research and events. Dublin City Council already provides funding for community organisations through the Social Inclusion Unit and the Department of Community and Enterprise. The Council should consider a coherent funding strategy aimed specifically at increasing women's participation in local decision-making. Engagement with migrant women should be given particular consideration. Migrant women and representative groups often have heightened contact with central government but less with local government. In light of the fact that citizenship is not a requirement to vote in and contest local elections, the appropriate engagement of migrant women should be a particular goal.

- **Dialogue between Community leaders, Officials and Politicians**

Community groups and leaders would welcome meaningful dialogue between women leaders in each of the three spheres of the study. Organised meetings and sessions should examine interpretations of community development and the effects of DCC policy on, in particular, women's lives. Such contact would provide opportunity for greater understanding and future networking.

- **Political role models**

Women's groups and community organisations acknowledged that while some Councillors were a strong presence in local communities these were in a minority. Groups representing women's interests felt that if women Councillors



were more visible in local communities this would have the effect of demystifying politics and encourage more women and girls to become involved in formal politics.

- **How Local Government Works**

Many Community groups provide training and education for women in how to effect change through lobbying and policy work. There are some excellent related documents already in the public domain, published by organisations such as the National Women's Council of Ireland and Combat Poverty. DCC should consider developing a stand-alone module or unit called '*How Local Government Works*' for insertion into education and training programmes.

- **A Gender Audit of DCC²⁰**

A widely acknowledged key factor in addressing equality issues is the collection, maintenance and analysis of data and trends in the field.

Dublin City Council maintains high quality and valuable records of the spread of women and men employed across grades and positions within Dublin City Council. The entirety of these records, along with anonymised data relating to competitions and recruitment, should be examined and analysed to complete a '*gender audit*' of employment at DCC. The initial research should be carried out by an external expert or a dedicated staff member with recommendations for how practice should best be continued and with results available to Council, Senior Management and to the public.

A sub-research project should be developed to examine job assignment, job rotation and the career aspirations of women and men working in Dublin City Council.

- **Career development**

It is important for women and men who wish to reach the upper echelons of the organisational hierarchy to be exposed to a broad range of experience. The continued implementation of the PMDS system of development will help women and men to reach their career and personal aspirations in a timely manner. Stricter implementation of job rotation policy would expose staff to a wider range of experience, providing them with greater chance of promotion further down the line.

It is equally important to place equal value on work areas of the organisation which have traditionally been considered '*soft*', which sometimes carry the connotation of '*less important*' or '*fluffy*'. An answer to the issue of segregating women into specialist roles would be to develop a specialist career structure, where expertise built up in an area over time is rewarded in a formal manner, in the same way that broad experience is valued at interview.

- **Mentoring**

Mentoring as a tool for women's advancement in the workplace is recommended by bodies such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO). A formal mentoring programme should be established by DCC. The programme should not be gender-specific but used

²⁰ This recommendation is the author's own, developed from the findings of the employment statistics supplied by Human Resources Department. It is influenced and can be part attributed to e-mail correspondence with Professor Kathleen Lynch of the equality Studies Centre, UCD. January 2008



to full effect across the organisation to develop careers and to identify and strengthen future leaders.

- **Your Council Needs You!**

Dublin City Council have a role to play in actively encouraging women to become involved in local politics. Catherine Byrne's testimony and the experience of other women involved in local and national politics highlights the relevance and importance of a background in community engagement for the work of formal politicians. While political parties have attempted in various ways to increase the number of women involved in politics, it may now be timely for DCC to take a proactive role in informing women that the Council indeed needs and wants women to participate more fully in formal politics.

- **Programme for schools**

A pack for schools, highlighting women's role in Irish politics, past, present and potential, should be developed with in-put from education professionals. The pack should include profiles of historical and current figures as well as information on the importance of gender balance in decision-making, with particular reference to local government. Presentations should be interactive, make use of new technologies and provide opportunity for discussion and analysis.

- **Awareness raising within Dublin City Council**

The IPA deliver regular and informative seminars on a variety of topics of interest

and importance to Local Government staff, including a programme on Women in Leadership. The IPA should be commissioned to develop further seminars and modules on the broad topic of gender equality at work and in politics. The course should be available to staff at all grades.

- **The impact of family friendly work arrangements**

There are now a range of family-friendly work arrangements available to women and men working at Dublin City Council. Although most flexible work and leave arrangements are available to all staff, to date take-up has been predominantly by female staff. It may be timely to conduct a review of the take-up of family friendly arrangements and the impact on the organisation.

- **From term-time to employee time**

As with other arrangements, the provision of term-time working for parents has been broadly welcomed by staff at Dublin City Council. It is recommended that DCC examine the possibility of altering eligibility and changing the parameters for term-time working. A name change from term-time to employee time would remove the association of the provision away from women to all staff. It was recommended to the study that workers who do not have childcare responsibilities would benefit from the opportunity to enjoy a period of leave over a three-month period at a point in their careers.







1910

1911

women marched for
rights

1918 - 1999
women's equality

global generation
participation

education
solidarity
emancipation

