



nirwn

**Northern Ireland
Rural Women's Network**

Draft Code of Practice on Equal Pay NIRWN Response

**Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
15 Molesworth Street
Cookstown
Co Tyrone
BT80 8NX
Tel: 028 86769191
Email: nora@nirwn.org.uk**

Introduction

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a regional network established to articulate the voices of women in rural areas. It is jointly funded by Department of Agricultural and Rural Development (DARD) and Department for Social Development (DSD) under the EU BSP Programme.

NIRWN has four key objectives:

- developing weak community infrastructure in areas where little or no community based rural women's groups exist,
- increasing rural women's capacity and opportunities to influence decision-making and policy formulation,
- running Northern Ireland wide communication campaigns with a local focus, highlighting the value of rural women's contribution,
- offering a training and capacity building programme to rural women across the region.

NIRWN through its policy work strives to highlight the inequalities that rural women face. The last census showed that almost 35% of Northern Ireland's population live in rural areas. Quality employment opportunities are few and far between in many rural areas. Increasingly, only temporary or part-time jobs are available. Part-time jobs may suit some women, particularly those with young children, but in general there is a call for employment with better conditions.

NIRWN supports the Code of Practice (CoP) and welcomes the structure and format of it. We particularly welcome the fact that the Code separates what employers are required to do under the law from the provision of best practice guidance. NIRWN are pleased that the guide is easy to read and well structured.

General comments

Emphasis on consultation

An effective gender duty only can be achieved by effective consultation with employees and stakeholders. The need for consultation is given inadequate emphasis in the document by saying that "consultation is likely to increase understanding and acceptance". It is difficult to imagine circumstances where it would not be appropriate to consult with employees and stakeholders in relation to drawing up equality policies and plans. The requirement should be that employers must consult when developing gender equality schemes, goals and evaluation processes.

Same Employment

As drafted, a reader might understand this paragraph to mean that the woman can choose which test of “same employment” applies to her which, of course, is not correct. The paragraph should make clear the circumstances where the bullet points may apply.

Pregnant Women and women on maternity leave

It would be useful to include a cross-reference to other publications, for example, Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) Maternity Rights A Guide for Employers and Employees.

Equal Pay Review

NIRWN welcomes the recommendation that employers should carry out equal pay reviews. In the absence of a statutory framework the Equality Commission as a means of communicating this key message, should strongly highlight the benefits of developing equal pay reviews in the CoP.

Research conducted by Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in 2002/3 for the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), was to determine progress made in the absence of a statutory framework. The research found that just 18 per cent of large employers had conducted or were in the process of conducting an equal pay review. Pay review activity was lower among smaller organisations, and overall 60 per cent of all organisations employing 100 or more people had not conducted an employment pay review and had no plans to do so.

Employers need to be proactive and check that their pay system is fair and that they do not place a lower value on certain jobs simply because they are done by women. NIRWN believes that a statutory framework would provide a structured and standardised approach for employers to carry out Equal Pay Reviews.

Employment Equality Plan

The Code of Practice role is to highlight good practice in terms of establishing gender equality. HR policies and practices were identified as a significant barrier to women’s progression. A survey by Catalyst (1990) of human resource managers found that corporations were still not creating diversity initiatives or policies that effectively lessened the obstacles for women wishing to ascend through the ranks to senior management or chief executive positions.

Research conducted by Still's (1997) concluded that women feel “disadvantaged” compared with men in the areas of recruitment, selection, promotion and transfer, conditions of service and assessment of their personal qualities (perceived as relevant to promotion decisions). Men in Still’s research, on the other hand, felt that women were given equal

opportunities to progress, and that the organisational culture was supportive of their career aspirations.

Studies indicate that obstacles to progression arise only after the first five years of women's careers when men's compensation, promotion and job satisfaction begins to surge ahead. Women face certain challenges at work: female characteristics and stereotypes are viewed negatively, and their minority status increases their visibility (Riley, 1993). In addition, as women enter paid employment their male partners tend not to assume an equitable share of the housework and child care.

Mobility is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of accessing and retaining employment for working rural dwellers. From a rural development policy perspective, measures designed to enhance the mobility of rural dwellers are therefore a priority. Moss & Wallace (2004). Rural women face dual discrimination for their gender and location. The gender pay gap is also about wider discrimination, including discrimination on grounds of pregnancy; occupational segregation – women being crowded into a narrow range of lower-paying occupations (mainly those available part time) that do not make the best use of their skills; and the unequal impact of caring responsibilities. Bellamy & Cameron (2006).

It is evident that both public and private sector organisations currently have little understanding of the need to address discrimination against women. Lack of participation by women's organisations or women service-users when developing an equality plan will also undermine its effectiveness. It is important to ensure that officers carrying out the work are trained in equality issues and how to address discrimination against women, and have a very good understanding of the nature of institutional discrimination that women experience, in order to draw up and implement a realistic and effective plan.

Mainstreaming equal opportunities involves ensuring that all general policies and measures openly and actively take into account, during planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, their effect on the respective situations of women and men. It also entails the complementary design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of specific measures to promote equality and to assist women to participate and benefit equally. Overall, employment policies and procedures should contribute to improved equality between men and women, and should be able to demonstrate this impact, prior to, during and after implementation. Therefore as a good practice measure we feel that the Code of Practice should draw specific attention to this fundamental principle and recommend that all employment policies and procedures are gender proofed as standard good practice. This point should be strongly emphasised in the development of an Employment Equality Plan.

Equal Pay Policy

The recommendation for an equal pay policy is particularly welcome. Men's earnings are generally a higher proportion of two-parent family income than women's. Especially for modest income, two-parent families, the equalisation of women's pay will yield real benefits. Although progress has been made, significant problems remain.

Women's lower pay levels means that economic necessity demands that they are the ones who reduce working hours after children are born. This reinforcement of traditional gender roles often leads employers to view flexible working, or family-friendly working policies, as something solely for women.

We recommend that the Code of Practice gives a strong steer to employers on the advantages of adopting a proactive crossstrand approach, underpinned by human rights values.

Although the Code is easy to read and well structured, we are disappointed that the opportunity presented by the issue of the Code has not been taken to give a little more detail and more examples about aspects of this complex and difficult legislation. The Code of Practice should incorporate extensive examples of good practice.