Bridging The Gap

When equal pay for equal work was made a legal requirement almost 50 years ago it had a profound effect on women, who up until then had usually been paid only about 80-90% of an equivalent man's salary or wage. It has not, however, brought about a situation where women, taken as a whole, earn the same as men.

This disparity in average hourly earnings between males and females across an entire organisation, more commonly known as the 'Gender Pay Gap', is generally considered to be partly caused by the greater percentage of men in senior managerial positions than women, among other factors such as women carrying a greater share of unpaid care work than men in general.

The Government is at present looking closely at the current employment renumeration scene and requiring businesses with 250 employees or more to report on the gender pay balance in their enterprise. The employer could choose to report on any day during June 2022 and has six months to prepare quite specific data.

For each employee, they must calculate the hourly rate of pay, including any bonuses, and report the mean and median hourly pay gaps between men and women, plus the proportion of male and female employees in various pay bands. These calculations also have to be done for temporary and part-time employees.

According to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O'Gorman, who announced the legislation on International Women's Day (March 8) this year, this new step will help to bring about pay transparency in the participating organisations, which will play an important role in furthering gender equality at work.

"The introduction of gender pay gap reporting is a major step forward for gender equality in the workplace in Ireland," Minister O'Gorman commented. "The legislation sets out some clear metrics which employers can use to measure their gender pay gap, and which will be comparable across other organisations of similar size and industry sector."

And it won't be just a matter of providing the data: employers are invited to study their results, reflect on the reasons behind that gender pay gap, and state how they are going to deal with it. It should be noted that this disparity in earnings can be in favour of either men or women, though it is highly probable that women will be the disadvantaged gender in most, or possibly all, cases.

Detailed instructions on what data to collect and analyse can be found on www.gov.ie – *How to Report on the Gender Pay Gap*.

Government Funded Programmes

Despite the existence of the gender pay gap, women's participation in business and professional life continues to grow. Already in Ireland there are more female than male doctors and solicitors, and women strongly outnumber men in healthcare and teaching. They are also increasingly turning to entrepreneurship. The recent Covid-caused working-from-home phenomenon also seems to have given rise to an interest in setting up and running one's own business in place of the traditional five-day-week commute.

The government is keen to encourage female entrepreneurship, seeing it as a key source of job creation and innovation, as well as, according to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 'a necessary step for addressing income inequality and social exclusion.' Among the Department's initiatives 'to encourage, support and develop women in leadership in business and female entrepreneurship' are Women in Business Networks – run by Local Enterprise Offices; the Competitiveness Start-Up Fund, and the Fuelling Ambition Programme, both run by Enterprise Ireland; the Going for Growth Programme; and the Acorns Programme.

High Potential?

While these programmes and schemes so far are specially designed for women, there is no need to confine herself to them. For example, Enterprise Ireland's High Potential Start-ups (HPSUs) programme is open to everyone with a business or business idea that meets rigorous criteria.

To qualify as an HPSU, the company must be internationally focused, with the potential to employ ten or more people within three years, and to generate revenues of at least €1m. The company must plan to introduce a new/innovative product or service, and be involved in manufacturing or internationally traded services.

30% Club Ireland

As suggested earlier, one of the reasons there is a gender pay gap in Ireland is because fewer women than men are in senior positions. The Irish Chapter of the 30% Club is proving rather successful at tackling this problem. This is a global campaign committed to achieving better gender balance at leadership level and is supported by board chairpersons and CEOs of medium and large organisations.

The Irish chapter was set up in 2015 and hosts over 300 organisations representing over 650,000 employees. The aim was to achieve a minimum of 30% gender balance at all senior levels of decision-making in Ireland. According to www.30perentclub.org, by 2018 it had achieved 18.1%. In 2019, this figure rose to 25.3%, and in 2020 to 27.4%. This year it has surpassed the target, with a figure of 32%.

'Enable future women leaders through mentoring, executive education scholarships and board-ready initiatives'

It achieved its goal by a three-pronged approach: 1) activate senior leaders to drive change; 2) influence those with the power to drive change; and 3) enable future women leaders through mentoring, executive education scholarships and board-ready initiatives.

In February this year the 30% Club Ireland announced a new sponsorship partnership with EY for 2022. Niamh O'Beirne, EY Ireland Partner commented: "As People Partner at EY, I regularly see first-hand the huge contribution that diversity, in all its forms, brings to both the culture and performance of our organisation. It is essential that the business community leads by example in this space and that we remain committed to making progress towards greater diversity and inclusion, both in the boardroom and beyond."

Dr Vivienne Mee

World Class Cyber Security & Digital Forensics

In 2014, Dr Vivienne Mee identified an opportunity to provide a digital forensic and cyber security consultant service to the Irish market, in particular a digital forensics expert witness service. This opportunity became **VMGroup** *– a world class digital forensics boutique firm.*

ON ESTABLISHING VMGroup, Mee's dream was to have the largest digital forensics firm in Ireland, and 2024 will see the tenth year of VMGroup in operation. Mee believes this dream will be achieved by that anniversary: "We are an Irish company, serviced by an Irish team and delivering services to Irish clients across the country. We feel this has given VMGroup a strong footing in the Irish market."

Clients would often ask if any of the services were being outsourced or being carried out offshore, but with the nature of digital forensic investigations this can be challenging. Mee did investigate whether offshore personnel would be an advantage, and identified, from a commercial perspective, that it would be and that it would cost less. However, she felt that it would have impacted on the branding of VMGroup. "Our clients expect to speak to people nearby, and, pre-pandemic, they required us to work onsite and be part of their teams. Remote working has allowed some of our team members to move to more rural areas in Ireland, but VMGroup clients are still experiencing the same excellent service as before," Mee continues.

IRISH BASED COMPANY

Being Irish also assisted VMGroup in their growth phase: "Many of our competitors are not wholly Irish owned, and are a lot bigger in the scheme of employee numbers and commercials. VMGroup, albeit small and from humble beginnings, was able to compete and stand out from these larger multinational competitors. As we are an Irish based company, it's much easier for our clients to meet the team, thereby having full sight of who was doing the work. This means our clients know they are going to get our full attention for their projects."

Mee studied her PhD in digital forensics in Wales, and had the opportunity to meet the best in the field during her studies: "These people are very much still part of my network, and I embark on regular research with the team I was involved with in Wales." As a problem solver, Mee looks at every engagement as a problem: "In every problem there is a learning element to understand the issues, then there's a research element to determine how to approach the project, and finally how the project should be delivered. Not all services are the same out of the box. Therefore, they need tailoring and adjusting to suit the client's needs." This approach to projects ensures that the team at VMGroup are always on the cusp of the latest technologies, trends, threats and cyber security issues.

DIVERSE SET OF CLIENTS

Mee believes that in order for each team member to grow into an expert in their given area, they must be provided with the tools, training, time and opportunity to flourish: "To keep the VMGroup team motivated and excited about their role we are lucky to have a diverse set of clients in which we engaged with to provide high-end, bespoke and often very unique services to," she explains.

As the team grows, and its branding strengthens, Mee believes more opportunities will be apparent over the coming years, allowing VMGroup to strengthen even further: "We have a new location opening in Q3 2022, in the north west of the country, which will be our fourth office. The purpose of these offices being spread around the country is to allow our consultants to continue to live in rural Ireland, with the opportunity to work in an office environment for part of their work week. We believe this will attract more talent and allow for the further growth of our team and personnel. If we have talented people, our team will grow not only as a company but each individual will thrive professionally too."

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VMGROUP

IN THE Irish Pens office in Ballinagh, Co Cavan, Catherine Daly places an Irish bog oak pen, hand-turned by her husband and business partner Richard, into the solid oak gift box; the darkness of the wood complements the glistening pen trim. She then double-checks the very personal words her client requested to be engraved into the oak box – imagining the recipient's expression when they see their pen, and the excitement of the gift giver as they watch on.

Irish Pens is not just a business – to Catherine it's personal. In 2014 Richard made the decision to step

Catherine Daly

away from the all-consuming corporate world, and Catherine was 100% in favour: "It was time to take control of our lives and spend more time together doing the things we love."

However, as the regular paycheque was no more, they needed a new venture.

Combining Catherine's love of art and drawing and Richard's passion for woodworking, they set up their crafts business – Irish Pens: "I'm never without a pen in my hand so I can draw and doodle on any piece of paper I can find; it relaxes me and gets me thinking. Many people thought we were mad at our age to start a new business, but doing mad things has never been an issue for us," comments Catherine.

Working with private and corporate clients is one of Catherine's biggest joys: "We welcome discussing the best pen for a personal or corporate gift – the design, wood choice, and of course the budget. The knowledge gained in the past seven years allows us to offer that guidance. When we receive that five-star feedback, I feel all the hard work and attention to detail has paid off. It really gives us the fuel we crave to continue developing Irish Pens as the creative gift for the creative mind. Our passion and determination has created a business we are extremely proud of," concludes Catherine.

Irish Pens proves you are never too old to get into a business you love.

www.irishpens.ie

Louise Whelan

FOUNDED by Louise Whelan in 2016, Pioneer HomeCare is a family owned and run company that was set-up in response to the changing needs of an ageing population. Whelan has always had caring in her background – her family run a successful nursing home in Dublin, and through her involvement there she recognised the growing requirement to deliver excellent homecare with a personal touch.

Whelan strongly believes that homecare, where assistance is provided by a professional caregiver within the home, provides a valuable alternative to residential care: "My mission has always been to provide a high-quality, personalised homecare service to clients and their families in a compassionate and respectful manner, thereby enhancing the client's quality of life in their own home," she comments. As a hands-on Managing Director, she leads from the front and inspires pride in Pioneer HomeCare's organisational values and mission.

Honing her entrepreneurial skills through ownership of multiple award-winning restaurants, this experience gave Whelan an understanding of the importance of uncompromising standards in customer service, and she rigorously applies this principle to the homecare field: "I am passionate about the homecare industry and committed to ensuring that the highest standards of performance and care are met. I want people to be able to live happy and healthy lives in their homes and communities," Whelan continues.

Pioneer HomeCare is looking towards the future and Whelan's vision is steadfast: "Above all, we will continue to expand, to serve further communities with patience, empathy and a personalised approach while maintaining our ethos of placing people at the centre of all that we do."

www.pioneerhomecare.ie

Helena Golden

HELENA Golden had an established management career in the food industry and community/rural development before she branched out on her own with her basket making business – Helena Golden Willow Woman.

A native of Manorhamilton, Co Leitrim, and now based in Leitrim village, Golden began basketmaking in a recreational capacity, but her inherent interest in the sustainable/green nature of her hobby ultimately led to her weaving a range of baskets and commencing trading at craft markets. It was at these markets that she found there was a demand for willow basketry classes.

Having established her company in 2020, she now travels around the country delivering basket making classes and workshops: "Within a few weeks of the lockdown, I was delivering live classes online and this was absolutely key to the success of the business," comments Golden.

With a range of contemporary basketry items available for sale, including make-at-home willow craft kits, Golden also delivers classes to the corporate sector, community groups, day care centres, schools, and women's groups, as well as doing live online training: "The basket making workshops are particularly popular as staff development and team building events," she continues.

With a master's degree in communications, Golden's ability to explain the techniques of this craft ensures that her business is growing exponentially: "My success rests in the aim that, regardless of ability, each participant in my classes will create an item of basketry that supersedes their own expectations. One of my key business objectives is to preserve the tradition, history and tranquillity of the willow weaving craft, while maintaining an eco-friendly, sustainable business model."

Golden currently employs one administrative assistant, but is planning to grow the business by increasing her product range and employing more basket makers to help in her expansion.

www.helenagoldenwillow.ie

LOCATED in Newtown, Bantry, Co Cork, Rowa Pharmaceuticals Ltd is one of the largest generic pharmaceutical companies in Ireland. Originally founded in Germany by Roland Wagner in 1952, it was established in Ireland in 1959. Following Mr Wagner's death, his wife, Brigitte Wagner-Halswick became Managing Director of Rowa Pharmaceuticals Ltd in 1979.

Mrs Brigitte Wagner

There was a lot of economic instability in the area at this time, which fed into uncertainty in employment and union unrest. However, Mrs Wagner was able to get great support from the local community, ensuring that the doors of Rowa stayed open, that people had jobs, and that the company had the opportunity to grow. Under Mrs Wagner's leadership the company flourished and today employs over 100 people and exports to over 80 countries worldwide.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Mrs Wagner took it upon herself to grow the business on an international level – travelling the world to promote not only Rowa products but also Bantry itself. In 1993 Mrs Wagner set up Rowex Ltd, the Irish marketing division of Rowa Pharmaceuticals, as a joint venture with Sandoz Worldwide – the generic division of Novartis Worldwide. Rowex Ltd, currently provide a wide range of high quality branded generic medicines for the Irish market, including OTC brands such as Cetrine Allergy, Brupro, Diclac, Emazole Control and Sumatran Relief, to name but a few.

'As we look ahead, it is our intention to build on our success. Backed by the experience of a highly skilled and dedicated workforce, ROWEX Ltd will continue to introduce quality, innovative, cost-effective medicines.'

As an entrepreneur, Mrs Wagner believes that she has a social responsibility to give back to the community. Most companies do this by donating to good causes; however, Mrs Wagner believes that, while a donation is important, it is vital to get involved in supporting your local community at a hands-on, face-to-face level. So, in 1999, she became involved with the Bantry Hospice Project, and is still an active board member to this day.

Today, Mrs Wagner is Managing Director of three companies: Rowa Pharmaceuticals Ltd, which last year was awarded the best business prize in West Cork; Rowex Ltd, and Rowa-Wagner, which is located in Germany, and exports all over the world.

As the driving force behind Rowa, Mrs Wagner's hard work, determination, and drive has helped the brand expand and develop a plan for the future to build momentum in developing generic medicines, which, directly and indirectly, improve all our lives.

www.rowex.ie

ROWA®
Pharmaceuticals Limited

Daphne Kaye

CHOOSING an estate agent to sell your home should not be about fees and marketing costs. It should not be about appointing the agent who provides the highest valuation on the property. Many agents give unrealistic high values to win the instruction – with valuable time being lost as a consequence.

I like to think the difference between **Daphne Kaye & Associates** and other agencies is that we actually care. We understand the emotions our clients go through when selling their homes, and recognise that each client is different and has different needs. Our core values revolve around full engagement on a personal level to identify their needs and expectations. Client satisfaction is vital – from the very beginning we invite our clients to be part of our team, and we take the time to bring them through all the elements of the sales process.

We have a tight-knit crew that are introduced to the client from the get-go – a client is known individually to all and is never just a number. At all stages of the process the client is kept fully informed, and they have confidence in the knowledge that I am personally involved in all stages of the sales process – measuring, advising on presentation for photography/viewings, drafting brochures to negotiating with prospective purchasers and closure.

We have the skill-sets, expertise and in-depth knowledge of the marketplace, and it is how we employ these strengths that sets us apart from other agents. Most importantly we are not driven by having to achieve high commissions, meet quotas, or protect market share – we are motivated by a real passion.

At the closing of a sale, the team takes pride in the knowledge that we achieved the best possible price for our client. We have fulfilled our core company value – client satisfaction. This is what it is all about for us!

'At the closing of a sale, the team takes pride in the knowledge that we achieved the best possible price for our client.'

Understanding the property market and identifying trends are essential in order to assess a realistic value of a property. It is equally important to identify the target market; who is going to buy a particular property and their ability to do so. Funding is most crucial. Armed with this knowledge, we engage with our database of prospective purchasers with the ability to purchase at a particular level. With off-market sales we engage with our extensive contacts in private banking and corporate, legal and financial firms.

Our clients appreciate the full extent of our in-house, behind-the-scenes work that we do for them. Attention to every detail is our hallmark and the basis of our modus operandi. All of this is possible because of the commitment of our dedicated team.

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Daphne Kaye (F.S.C.S.I. F.R.I.C.S.) is a Fellow of the Society of Chartered Surveyors and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Daphne Kaye & Associates provide an expertise in sales, acquisitions, probate valuations and family law.

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& ASSOCIATES