



International Women's Day

Gender equality must be a priority

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As Northern Ireland's politicians start to negotiate the way forward for Government here, they will have many issues to consider, but on International Women's Day we ask them to consider actions to address the continuing issue of gender inequality in Northern Ireland.

The Equality Commission recently published its proposals on Gender Equality Policy: Priorities and Recommendations. This recommends measures which could enhance gender equality by challenging attitudes about gender stereotypes, instituting necessary law reforms, tackling outstanding inequalities and delivering affordable childcare.

The Commission will be sending our gender equality policy positions to all 90 newly elected MLAs – it is good to see the number of female MLAs up from 28% to 30% of the total - and we will continue to press for a robust and effective 'Gender Equality Strategy' by an incoming Executive.

More than 40 years after sex equality laws were introduced, a lot has changed for the better. The female employment rate has risen steadily and women are working in a broader range of occupations and industries. While there is a small gender pay gap in favour of women in Northern Ireland, when looking at overall gross weekly earnings for all employees (full time and part time), including overtime, in 2016 there is a pay gap (71.2%), as men are more likely to work full time and work overtime. It's clear that too many of the old familiar problems remain.

The Equality Commission still gets more complaints about sex discrimination than on any other discrimination ground except disability. It consistently accounts for over a quarter of all complaints received each year.

Late last year, the Commission published 'Expecting Equality' (*pdf, 5.9mb*), the findings of a formal investigation under the Sex Discrimination Order to examine the employment experiences of pregnant workers and mothers in Northern Ireland. Over a third of women responding felt they had been treated unfairly or disadvantaged because of their pregnancy or because they took maternity leave. This affected their finances, their career opportunities, their status at work and their health - this is an unacceptable

situation in the twenty-first century. The Commission has made recommendations based on the investigation findings which would improve access to advice and information for employers and for employees and improve employers' practices. We need employers across all sectors to show leadership at a senior level to building an organisational culture that promotes gender equality in the workplace.

On International Women's Day, the Commission is calling on all our politicians, and on our business and community leaders, to show leadership on gender issues and take the measures necessary to improve gender equality in the economy and in society generally.

Download the Commission's Gender policy priorities and recommendations:

- [Key point briefing](#) (pdf, 146kb)
- [Summary](#) (pdf, 297kb)
- [In Full](#) (pdf, 2.2mb)

Download our formal investigation reports:

- [Expecting Equality - Summary Report](#) (pdf, 1.3mb)
- [Expecting Equality - Full Report](#) (pdf, 5.9mb)
- [Expecting Equality - press release](#)

Related information:

- [Pregnancy and maternity at work - your employment rights](#)
- [Pregnancy and maternity at work - online guide for employers](#)
- [Pregnancy and maternity at work - pdf guide for employers](#) (pdf, 3.2mb)