



PRESS RELEASE

3 July 2013

Equality Commission launches new Equal Pay Code

“Women in Northern Ireland still earn on average 10% less than men,” Equality Commissioner Lyn McBriar said at the launch of the new Equal Pay Code at Equality House today. “When the first equal pay law was introduced in 1970 that figure was 30%, so things have improved, but there is clearly still more to do,” she said.

There is a lower gender pay gap in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK and the greater proportion of public sector jobs here may be a factor in that. While public sector wages in Northern Ireland are not out of line with those in Britain, private sector pay here is just 82% of the UK average.

“While the law governing equal pay can seem complex, its purpose in essence is very simple – to ensure that men and women doing equal work for the same or an associated employer get the same rewards for it,” Lyn McBriar said. “The new Code presents clearly to employers the information they need on equal pay issues.”

The Code, which comes into effect on 22nd July, gives employers practical guidance on how to promote equality of opportunity and avoid sex discrimination in pay structures.

“It gives guidance on the scope of the Equal Pay Act, on the concepts and definitions of like work, work rated as equivalent and work of equal value and on pay during pregnancy and maternity, part-time work and occupational pension schemes. The Code is aimed mainly at employers, but employees and their representatives or advisers, for example, from a trade union or Citizens Advice Bureau, should also find it useful.”

“It also sets out how the law is applied by the industrial tribunals, including the assessment of equal pay and employers’ defences to equal pay claims.”

While the Code of Practice is not legally binding, it is admissible in evidence in any proceedings under the Equal Pay Act before the industrial tribunal. The tribunal may take into account an employer’s failure to follow the provisions of the Code.

The Commission offers free and confidential advice, support and training to employers and organisations, to help them comply with the law. The Equal Pay Code is just one of a wide range of online, print and staff resources available from the Equality Commission to help employers promote equality of opportunity and avoid discrimination.

The Equal Pay Code will be available on our website www.equalityni.org after the launch on 3 July 2013.

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Notes to editors

The Gender Pay Gap in Northern Ireland

- Sex discrimination is consistently the second most common cause for complaint to the Equality Commission, and women's treatment in the workplace consistently gives rise to the largest proportion of these complaints. They involve issues such as pregnancy and maternity discrimination, sexual harassment, recruitment and selection, work-life balance issues, redundancy and dismissal, as well as equal pay.
- Although statistics no longer show significant pay disparity for women compared to men overall, closer examination shows 'a considerably gendered picture in the labour market, in education and in societal attitudes and behaviours.'¹
- In Northern Ireland last year, female median hourly earnings, excluding overtime, were 90.3% of male earnings – in 1997 that figure was 77%.² The size of the gap varies between the private and public sectors and across industries. Moreover, gendered patterns of employment such as gender differences in occupation, part-time work, overtime and incentives also impact on the pay gap between men and women.
- The Code recommends equal pay reviews as the best way to ensure that a pay system delivers equal pay.
- By helping employers to check the pay gap in their organisation and by encouraging good equal pay practice, this Code reinforces the Government's³ and the Equality Commission's commitment to equality between men's and women's pay.

¹ *Gender Pay Gap Measurement in Northern Ireland, a discussion paper* Alan McClelland, Office of the First and the Deputy First Minister, 2009.

² *Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2011*, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, November 2011.

³ *Gender Equality Strategy: A strategic framework for action to promote gender equality for women and men 2006-2016*, www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk