

## **Press release**

**May 14, 2014**

### **Men must champion gender equality in business**

“If we are to build an economy in which all women are supported to achieve their full potential at work, men must be prepared to champion gender diversity in the workplace and in the home,” Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said today.

Speaking at the international business women’s conference, organised by Women in Business, in Belfast today (May 14), Dr Wardlow challenged men to confront the attitudes and culture which perpetuates gender imbalances throughout our society.

“It is quite shocking that we only have 5% of women leaders in our top 100 companies,” he said. “In Britain, there is a government target to have 25% female representation on company boards by 2015. We do not have a comparable target in Northern Ireland and it is still men who make the majority of decisions about the economy and in business.”

“The business case for gender diversity has been well made. Study after study suggests that organisations with a greater gender balance are more successful,” he added.

Dr Wardlow referred to research that shows that male executives are less likely to see value in diversity initiatives and are less likely to support measures that they see as favouring women. He said that the challenge is to change this mindset and to recognise that opening the door to women is ultimately good for men and good for business.

“There is a much lower uptake by men of family friendly rights in the workplace. If we are to change the cultural expectation that it is women who will sacrifice or interrupt their career for family reasons, men need to take a greater role in sharing caring responsibilities - and employers need to be more open to requests to facilitate them,” Michael Wardlow said.

The Equality Commission welcomes the Women in Business 30:30 Vision initiative that aims to encourage 30% of Northern Ireland's top companies to commit to a gender diversity agenda.

The Commission can help companies with advice and guidance on how to improve their gender balance at all levels through the use of lawful positive action. This includes advice on good recruitment practices and measures to ensure work/life balance. Employers can contact the advice team on 028 90 500 600 or via [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)

Ends

### **Notes**

Dr Michael Wardlow will be speaking at the Women in Business International business women's conference at the Waterfront Hall on Wednesday, May 14 – link to programme

Link to speech