

Firms fear damage over gender pay gap reports

MORE than two-thirds of firms in Ireland are concerned about potential reputational risks of gender pay gap reporting, and half worry about the cost that addressing pay differentials might impose on their business, a recent survey shows.

The news comes as it has emerged that a Gender Pay Gap Information Bill has been brought before Cabinet by Justice Minister Charlie Flanagan and approved for tabling before the Dáil.

The draft legislation would give the Minister power to make regulations requiring publication of gender pay gap data by workplaces.

It's intended the requirement

By **Christian McCashin**

will apply to firms with 250 employees or more during its first two years after enactment. After a further year it could be applied to firms with 150 workers or more. Only four years after enactment would it apply to companies with 50 staff members or more.

The Government believes the rolling programme will encourage workplaces to take action.

Over half of Irish workplaces – and 56% of employees – will be covered if the threshold is set at 50 employees and over.

The Mercer 2018 Ireland Gender Pay Gap Snapshot Survey of 67 organisations employing a

total of more than 110,000 people in Ireland, reveals Irish-based companies agree with the principle of gender pay gap reporting – 74% – and believe it would have a positive impact – 67%.

However, there is concern about the potential negative reputational impact of mandatory disclosures, 67%, with a third of companies, 34%, fearing that they will underperform relative to Ireland's average gender pay gap of 13.9%.

Seven out of 10 of companies surveyed said they had yet to explore whether any gender bias existed, and less than half plan to conduct an equal pay audit in the next 18 months.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Wherever life may take you, there really is no place like home

THERE are many reasons why human beings are extraordinary, but one stands out above the rest – we love, and through that love we give things meaning. To love is to place in the orbit of our affections that which will remain there forever.

And it is not only other people that we love. We love nature, animals, the sunset, the starry sky and places to which we have become attached. We love them, and they acquire meaning and significance which only we can explain.

Why do I love the old house? I love it because I see in it something much more than bricks and mortar – something which far exceeds its everyday purpose. It is a monument to lives lived and lost, to memories which have attached themselves to every crevice and cornice, to every wall, window, chair and curtain. We love it because it has personality which speaks to our needs, our sorrows and joys.

Wherever humans lay their head, that place is infused with memory and meaning. It tells a story of who we are and what we value most. It is a dwelling which serves as a window to our soul.

That is why we are not naturally nomads. It is why to be displaced, homeless or dispossessed is so contrary to our nature. It is also why we consider such an act a crime against the moral law.

To be complete as human beings, we need a home where we can put down roots. Apart from the love of others, it is what the human heart yearns for most in this world. We long to cease our wandering, to settle down and be at peace.

Why, then, are we so intent on changing the way we live? Why are we altering the shape of our cities and streets as though the need for settlement and belonging are somehow passé? Today, we build as though we have dispensed with the very idea of putting down roots.

The price of property, changing lifestyles and smaller families are certainly a factor. It is also true that we live in a world where people come and go without so much as a pause. It seems that, despite our deepest instincts, we have

become nomadic and our cities and towns are merely reflecting this reality.

Our elderly neighbours, who are trying to sell their house, have had to confront this fact. They have lived here for 40 years, reared a family, and put down roots as strong and deep as those of an ancient oak. Even though they feel it is time to downsize, the thought of leaving is causing great heartache. As I said to them the other day: 'That is because you are not only leaving your home but also your memories.'

Talking to them and others in similar situations, it is obvious that what people are now looking for in a house is not a settlement. Gone, it seems, is the old idea of buying a house with the intention of staying for life. Gone is the concept of home as a sanctuary of the soul where memories are made, and futures are forged from the fire of our deepest affection.

Or is it? We are certainly more mobile than we once were. The speed of life has accelerated, and opportunities beckon from elsewhere. In our world of speed, we rarely remain in one place long enough to become attached.

BUT that does not mean that human nature has somehow adapted to the times. Young people who, by force of economic necessity, have had to adopt a nomadic existence, still yearn to go back home. They long to return to the homestead for the Sunday roast, the holidays or for Christmas. For that is also where their fondest memories reside, where they first sensed the security of a home filled with love.

Without a home, we have no story, no heritage and no lasting memories. But in the absence of such things we cannot be truly happy. Without roots we neither know who we are, nor the power of lasting love.

Each of us – young and old – looks at the world and yearns for a place of greater safety. We want that world to smile back at us, to extend its arms and offer us shelter from the storm. And when we shut the door behind us, we listen for those whispers which seem to say: 'Be at peace, be yourself, for this is where you belong. Welcome home.'

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