Role & Functions of the Branch Equality & Diversity Officer

This note has been prepared to assist Branch Equality and Diversity Officers in the performance of their role. It is not intended as a prescriptive document but simply seeks to highlight possible areas of activity for the members who perform these functions on behalf of their Branch memberships.

We hope we have captured everything but if anything is missing we will update the note again.

PSEU & Equal Opportunities

The PSEU has always had a big role to play in the development of an equal opportunity agenda and this continues to be the case. A look through our Annual Reports over the past 30 years or so will show that many of the issues we now take for granted in the employments where PSEU members work came about, or were largely shaped, by the work of PSEU representatives.

Major schemes such as work sharing, term time facilities, career breaks and family leave arrangements are in place because PSEU representatives made sure that they were developed.

Some of our more recent members may not be able to conceive of, for example, a Public Service without these facilities but it did exist and there are plenty of people working in the Public Service who will remind you that there was a time, not all that long ago, when women left the service on marriage and pay was differentiated on the basis of gender – with men being paid more.

That is not to say that everything that needs to be achieved has been secured. Of course, there are improvements needed, both in individual employments and at national level, to ensure that people are able to combine their work and family responsibilities. Based on our record to date PSEU members know that we will be involved in trying to secure those necessary changes.

Women comprise just under 62% of our membership but this is not reflected in our representative structures:

- At Branch Committee level just 47% of our Committees are women.
- At Branch Officer level just 52% of our Branch Officers are women.
- Only 47% of the delegates to Annual Delegate Conference are women.
- Just 19% of the Union's Executive Committee are women.
- Just over a third of the delegates we send to the ICTU Conference are women.
- At Head Office all of our Administrative staff are women and all of our full time officials are men!

The only people who can change these levels of representation are ourselves. We cannot blame any employer for the fact that, in our representative structures, at every level, women are underrepresented. There is an obligation on us to look at our rules, look at our nomination processes and decide if we need to adapt them to ensure that, at every level, women are enabled to participate in the affairs of our Union in more or less equal proportion to their membership of the organisation.
The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 aim to:

- promote equality
- ban discrimination across nine grounds
- ban sexual and other harassment
- ban victimisation
- make sure suitable facilities for people with disabilities are available in relation to access to employment, advancing in employment and taking part in training
- allow positive action to ensure everyone gets full equality across the nine grounds.

Who is protected under the Acts?

The Acts apply to:

- full-time, part-time and temporary employees
- public and private sector employment
- vocational training bodies
- employment agencies
- trade unions, professional and trade bodies.

Obligations of Employers

The Equality Employment Acts 1998-2015 prohibit discrimination under the nine grounds in employment, including vocational training and work experience. The main obligations of employers under the act include the following:

- Employers may not discriminate against employees or potential employees on the basis of any of the nine grounds.
- The aspects of employment which are covered under the Employment Equality Acts include:
  - Advertising
  - Equal pay
  - Access to employment
  - Vocational training and work experience
  - Terms and conditions of employment
  - Promotion or re-grading
  - Classification of posts
  - Dismissal
  - Collective agreements.

The Nine Grounds

There 9 grounds of discrimination recognised in law are:

- Gender
- Civil status
- Family status
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Age
- Disability
- Race (includes race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins)
- Membership of the travelling community.

For more information visit [https://www.ihrec.ie/](https://www.ihrec.ie/)

The Diversity & Equality Officer within the Branch

Each Branch is asked to appoint an Officer responsible for Equality & Diversity issues within the Branch. How the role is performed will vary depending on people involved and the issues of concern or interest within the Branch. As with all other areas of Union activity Head Office will offer assistance, guidance and information where needed.

The Branch Equality & Diversity Officer is seen as having responsibility at Branch level for all of the issues covered under the heading of “Diversity Issues” in the Union’s Annual Report.
These issues would include:

- Meetings of the Union’s Diversity Forum
- Equality & Diversity in Employment
- Equality Claims by Union
- Implementation of policies on Equal Opportunities
- Issues related to childcare and family responsibilities
- Work Sharing
- Shorter Working Year Scheme
- Term Time
- Family Leave including Maternity, Adoptive, Force Majeure and Carers Leave
- Equality within the Union

We ask that our Branch Equality & Diversity Officers take an intelligent interest in the work of the Union in the area of Equal Opportunity and to take an interest in the work of ICTU and the wider Trade Union movement.

Branch Equality & Diversity Officers should participate fully in the work of their own Committees. Branches are encouraged to have “Diversity & Equality Issues” - as a standing item on the agenda for Committee meetings. Additionally, this item should appear on the agenda for the Annual General Meeting and time should be allowed for the Branch Equality & Diversity Officer to report on his/her activities throughout the year. Branch Officers with responsibility for this area should, of course, be available to members to deal with their problems in an efficient way.

Where newsletter or bulletins are issued by Branches space should be afforded to the Diversity & Equality Officer to report on activity within the Branch and beyond.

Of course the fact that the Diversity & Equality Officer may be the focus for Branch activity in this area does not mean it is not the responsibility of all Committee members.

**Resources for Branch Equality & Diversity Officers**

In the case of the Civil Service the Branch Equality & Diversity Officer should be familiar with “Dignity at Work” – an Anti - Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment policy for the Civil Service. Similar policies exist in other employments.

Be familiar with the Workplace Relations Commission Procedures for bringing Employment and Equality Complaints.

Try and be familiar with the terms of schemes (e.g. work sharing, shorting working year etc.) available in your employment in order to assist members with queries or problems.

PSEU has also produced a number of resources including:

- **Survey of PSEU LGBT Members 2009**
- **PSEU Survey on Anti-Racism and Interculturalism 2012**
- **PSEU Anti-Racism Leaflet 2013**
- **Online Course: Delivering Equality in Public Services (from the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission**
- **PSEU Reports on Gender Equality in the Union April 2017**

Billy Hannigan
Deputy General Secretary
15 August 2017