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Best Public Relations Event



(L to R) Pic shows Hayley Barnard, UK-based consultants and conference speaker, Angela Smith, CEO, Dress for Success Dublin, Andrew Brownlee, CEO of SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, which is sponsoring the #WorkEqual conference, Sonya Lennon, founder of DfSD, An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, Nikki Gallagher, Director of Communications & Secretariat, Solas, Tatjana Latinovic, Chair of the Icelandic Women's Rights Association, and a keynote speaker at the event and Emer Bucukoglu, UK-based consultants and conference speaker. Photo by Maxwell Photography.

Campaign

WorkEqual Conference: Practical Steps to Workplace Equality

Description of Campaign

This thought leadership conference brought together politicians, policymakers, employers, employees, and NGOs to develop recommendations for progressing gender equality in the workplace. It took place as part of WorkEqual, an annual campaign organised by the Dress for Success Dublin charity, aimed at raising awareness of gender inequality at work.



Public Relations Consultant

Alice PR & Events



Client

Dress for Success Dublin

Background to the Campaign

Despite some progress in recent years, gender inequalities persist in Ireland. According to the 2019 Index published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE):

- Women's mean monthly earnings are €2,808 in Ireland, compared to €3,423 for men.
- The full-time equivalent employment rate for women is 43.9%, compared to 60% for men.
- A woman's working life lasts for 33.1 years, on average, compared to 40.1 for men.
- 7% of women are doing cooking and / or housework every day, compared with 48% of men.

Dress for Success Dublin (DfSD) is a charity that works to empower women economically and give them the tools to establish and sustain successful careers. It provides interview clothing and coaching; mentoring and career development supports for women seeking employment. The charity was founded in 2011 and, since then, has supported over 3,000 women.

Through its work, DfSD became acutely aware that, even after a woman has secured a job – as illustrated by the EIGE

Index – she will likely face gender-specific challenges that may hinder her career development. To highlight these challenges, in collaboration with Alice PR & Events, DfSD developed the WorkEqual campaign. The campaign has run annually since 2016.

In 2019, DfSD wished to move the campaign beyond **raising awareness** of gender inequalities to **finding solutions** aimed at progressing workplace equality. The charity saw an opportunity to bring together all those with the potential to tackle this issue – employers, employees, politicians, policymakers, and civic society leaders – to agree a set of recommendations for presentation to government. This was DfSD’s ambition for the inaugural WorkEqual conference.

The main challenges faced in executing this ambition were:

- **Financial:** DfSD had no budget for the event. Therefore, it was essential that the event would generate an income to cover its expenditure and be run on a cost-neutral basis.
- **Staffing:** DfSD has only two permanent staff-members, both of whom work part-time. Therefore, the organisation did not have internal resources to devote to the event.

Alice PR has worked with DfSD since 2015 and was charged with organising and promoting this event on the charity’s behalf.

Statement of Objectives

The inaugural WorkEqual thought leadership conference – entitled ‘Practical Steps to Workplace Equality’ – took place on 27th November 2019 at The Marker Hotel, Dublin.

For DfSD, the ultimate aim of the conference was to collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to develop practical, implementable recommendations – for businesses, policymakers, and society at large – to address gender inequalities in the workplace. In the aftermath of the conference, these recommendations would be collated and presented to government as part of the ongoing WorkEqual campaign.

In the long term then, the objective of the conference is to influence public policy and opinion in relation to the changes needed to ensure more gender-equal workplaces.

In the short-term, and specifically in relation to the PR brief, the objectives were as follows:

- Secure the funding and supports needed to deliver a high-quality event with national reach.
- Programme the event with domestic and international guest speakers with strong appeal for the agreed target audiences.
- Programme the event in a way that ensures delegates can proactively share their views on the actions needed for women and men to participate fully and equally in the workforce.
- Use the event as an opportunity to raise awareness of the WorkEqual campaign amongst elected representatives, on a cross-party basis.
- Attract attendance of at least 100 people from the target audience categories (politicians and policymakers, relevant NGOs and civic society leaders, employers, and individual workers).
- Attract high levels of media and public attention in the lead-up to and aftermath of the event.
- Ensure the event leads to the publication of recommendations – agreed by all conference delegates – to be presented to government by DfSD.

Keep within budget and deliver on schedule to coincide with Dress for Success Dublin’s annual WorkEqual campaign (i.e. event must take place during November 2019).

Programme Planning and Strategy

Planning

Planning for the conference began in mid-October 2019, allowing a six-week lead-in time for this event.

Roles and responsibilities were agreed for the event team, with Martina Quinn of Alice PR serving as Project Manager, supported by her colleagues, Darragh McGirr and Emma Walsh. Key team-members from DfSD (for review and sign-off on all event plans and promotional materials) were Sonya Lennon, founder of the charity, and Angela Smith, CEO.

Programme Design

A draft running order was developed, with 'first preference' speakers, panellists and facilitators identified for the different conference sessions.

Because a key objective was to ensure delegates could proactively share their views, the programme was designed to include breakout discussions in smaller groups, in addition to keynote addresses and panel discussions during plenary sessions.

The event was programmed to run from 10am to 4pm, considering the caring duties of many target attendees. The later start-time and earlier finish-time were subsequently commended by delegates, as it allowed them to manage school drop-offs, pick-ups, and other caring duties.

Financial Management

Sponsorship was secured from SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority. It was also agreed to charge a small fee to conference delegates, and an Eventbrite profile was set up to manage registrations.

We developed a working budget, which was updated daily. A key consideration always was to ensure the event was run on a cost-neutral basis.

A date was agreed – Wednesday, 27th November 2019 – and a venue sourced that provided the flexible set-ups required for the conference programme, including space for breakout sessions.

Due to the limited budget available for the event, we negotiated a discounted rate with the venue (the Marker Hotel in Dublin). We also negotiated a discounted design and print package to produce conference materials.

As planning for the event progressed, we continued to negotiate discounts and pro-bono support from suppliers and event participants. All guest speakers, for example, either waived their usual fee or offered significantly discounted rates.

Audience Definition and Profiling

The success of this event depended on having a mix of the different relevant stakeholders in the room – employers, employees, NGO and civic society representatives, politicians, and policymakers.

In the early stages of this project, we developed a contacts database for invitees, reflective of this stakeholder mix. We also identified and engaged with influential organisations with the capacity to amplify key messages about the conference, such as the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI), the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), Ibec, The 30% Club and the trade union movement.

Programming

To ensure the right mix of people were in the room – reflective of our target audiences – it was essential to devise an interesting, varied, and relevant programme with some high-profile names on the line-up.

We secured the participation of Mark Paul, Business Affairs Correspondent with The Irish Times as event MC, and our two 'first choice' international guest speakers agreed to participate during the early planning stages. These were Tatjana Latinovic, Chair of the Icelandic Women's Rights Association and a member of the Gender Equality Council at the Icelandic Prime Ministry, and British author and journalist Christine Armstrong, who writes about the challenges of juggling a career and family life.

Importantly for DfSD's objective of increasing political awareness of the WorkEqual campaign, we also secured the attendance of An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, to deliver the opening address.

Panellists over the course of the day included:

- Nikki Gallagher, Director of Communications and Secretariat at SOLAS.
- Emily Logan, the first Chief Commissioner of IHREC.
- Orla O'Connor, Director of the NWCI.
- Fiona Taylor, Head of Employee Relations, Permanent TSB.
- Dara Calleary TD, Deputy Leader, Fianna Fáil.

- Patrick Naughton, Executive Director, ESB.
- Julie O’Neill, former Secretary General of the Department of Transport.

Sonya Lennon and Professor Michelle Millar of NUI Galway served as joint conference rapporteurs. We also enlisted nine high-profile facilitators to lead the break-out group discussions. These were:

- Andrew Brownlee, CEO, SOLAS.
- Eva Dowling, Green Party, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.
- Ciara Garvan, Founder, WorkJuggle.com.
- Dominic Hannigan, former Labour Party Senator and TD.
- Senator Colette Kelleher.
- Siobhán Lawlor, Employer Relations Division, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.
- Emmet Malone, football correspondent, *The Irish Times*.
- Andy Pike, National Secretary, Fórsa.
- Anne-Marie Taylor, founder, Career Returners.

Promotion

We established a dedicated webpage on the DfSD website with details about the conference, and managed daily social media activity across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

We used Canva to design social media graphics and promotional materials, profiling the different speakers and organisations involved in the conference in the weeks leading up to it. Using MailChimp, we issued weekly direct marketing mailers, encouraging target organisations and individuals to register to attend.

Three weeks out, we held a photocall to launch the conference and promote DfSD’s annual WorkEqual campaign. We issued press materials to relevant national and sectoral media and undertook pitches to key targets for advance and post-event coverage.

In the days immediately leading up to the conference, we liaised closely with the Press Office in the Department of An Taoiseach to coordinate press activity around his attendance.

We issued reminder press and photo notification before the conference to maximise ‘on-the-day’ coverage and issued a press release and images on the day of the event.

Pre-Event Survey

To ensure attendees felt a strong sense of buy-in in relation to the conference, we invited them to participate in a pre-event survey, sharing their views on measures to promote gender equality in the workplace. The survey findings were presented during the conference’s opening session; formed the basis for the breakout discussions; and gave the lead news angle for the ‘on-the-day’ press release. Quotes from An Taoiseach were also included in the release.

Logistics

In the lead-up to the conference and on the day itself, Alice PR provided full logistical support, managing venue relations, registrations and communication with attendees, travel and accommodation for international speakers, catering, AV support, and staffing of the event.

Measurement

Financial Results

- Sponsorship and in-kind support secured to partially cover conference costs.
- Remaining costs covered by income generated by ticket sales, with a small net surplus raised for DfSD.

Attendance

- 132 attendees.
- 42% from corporate/private-sector organisations.
- 23% from NGOs/civic society.
- 20% from politics/policymaking (including government agencies). 15% attending in a personal capacity.

In a post-event survey, attendees gave the following scores (out of 100):

- 92 for speaker line-up.
- 89 for usefulness of conference overall.
- 82 for event programme, including topics covered and diversity of session types.

Political Awareness

- Attendance by representatives from Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Labour Party, Green Party, and Seanad's Civil Engagement Group.
- WorkEqual mentioned in Oireachtas debates three times during November 2019.
- 8% of attendees were current / former elected representatives.

Media Coverage

- 72 pieces of positive coverage secured, with combined reach of over 14 million.
- Coverage secured consistently throughout 4-week period.
- More coverage in political and business media than in previous years, including articles by Pat Leahy, Political Editor of The Irish Times, and Anne-Marie Walsh, Industry Correspondent with the Irish Independent.

Digital Communications

- Direct marketing emails reached 1,600. Average open rate of 51.5% and click-through rate of 18.3% (compared to industry averages of 25.2% and 2.8% respectively).
- #WorkEqual hashtag reached 158,961 on Twitter.
- DfSD increased Twitter following by 5%, with engagement rate of 13.9% and overall organic reach of 117,000 (increase of 493.7% on previous month).
- Facebook organic reach increased by 25%, with 57% more new page likes than in previous month. 9,500 impressions on LinkedIn.

Event Follow-Up

- Draft conference report will be shared with all attendees for feedback during March 2020 before being finalised, presented to government, and publicly launched in May.
- Pro-bono support secured from M.CO to manage report design.
- Planning for 2020 conference underway.
- Partnership in development between DfSD and government agencies in Iceland to explore how Ireland can learn from Iceland's expertise. Iceland has ranked first in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for over a decade.

This campaign had a reach of approximately 14,291,000, resulting in a cost per thousand reached of €0.88.

KANTAR

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