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Gender Equality Conference - Highlighting Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Balance in Business and Leadership

***Dublin Castle
25 November, 2014***

The Department of Justice and Equality and Ibec are today jointly hosting a major conference in Dublin Castle to actively promote gender balance in leadership positions in Ireland.

The conference '*Investing in Talent – Promoting Gender Balanced Leadership*', will, for the first time in Ireland, bring together the key decision-makers from the public and private sectors to discuss *why* gender balance is important in our organisations and *how* this can be achieved.

The event will be opened by the Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald, T.D. and the President of Ibec, Larry Murrin.

Minister Fitzgerald welcomes this timely opportunity to focus on what is one of the greatest challenges that we still face in fostering gender equality in Ireland:

Achieving gender balance in decision-making roles will require a concerted and sustained effort on the part of leaders across all sectors. Senior leaders must be willing to show a personal commitment to promote gender equality and to implement a cultural change within their organisation.

The reason why so many companies and organisations worldwide are implementing gender and diversity policies is simple – it makes good business sense.

Men have a key role to play in promoting and supporting gender equality. We must re-brand this from a “women’s issue” to an issue that affects all of society. By challenging the traditional gender stereotypes, involving men in championing gender equality and supporting more men to play an active role in home and family life, we can ensure women and men are free to realise their full potential in their careers.

Ibec President and CEO of Dawn Farm Foods Larry Murrin highlighted the importance of promoting gender-balanced leadership as a business issue:

"There is a general consensus that it is vital to have greater gender balance in our organisations', particularly in decision-making positions. Gender imbalance is not



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a women's issue but a strategic business issue - it's good for individuals, it positively effects the bottom line and it needs to be addressed through leadership."

The conference will be moderated by the well-known broadcaster and journalist, **Margaret E. Ward**, and will feature contributions from influential leaders from both the public and private sectors. Speakers include, inter alia: **Stephen Frost**, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at KPMG in the UK and former Head of Diversity and Inclusion for the London Organising Committee for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; **Fiona Tierney**, CEO of the Public Appointments Service; **Aongus Hegarty**, Dell EMEA President; and **Niall Burgess**, Secretary General at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We are delighted to welcome as our keynote speaker, **Avivah Wittenberg-Cox**, founder and CEO of 20-first consulting – Building Gender Balanced Businesses.

Minister of State for New Communities, Culture and Equality, Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, T.D., is hosting the event and is looking forward to a lively debate inspired by the contributions of our speakers:

"The conference presents a unique opportunity to move the debate forward in terms of how we can practically realise gender balance in our decision-making structures. We will be hearing from organisations who have already taken these steps and of the benefits which have followed. We are encouraging all delegates to actively engage in the discussion sessions to generate further debate and to take the key messages from the conference back to their workplaces and to their homes."

Minister Ó Ríordáin will close the conference, along with the Ibec Director of Policy and Corporate Affairs, Mary Rose Burke, commenting on the day she said:

"Today's conference gives us an opportunity to share how forward thinking organisations are tackling the various structural, attitudinal and unconscious barriers to ensure that they get the best people for the job, not only because it is the right thing to do but it makes clear, strategic business sense. We need the best talent available to maintain our organisations competitiveness and global reach. That requires the varied skills and abilities, backgrounds and experiences of qualified men and women collectively addressing the opportunities and challenges facing our enterprises."

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