

**CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE
IN WELFARE TO WORK**



Six Steps to Promote Equality for Lone Parents in the Retail Sector

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THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
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Promoting Equality through Quality People Management

Ireland has the highest share of children living with one parent in the European Union according to a recent Eurostat survey which indicated that nearly one-quarter (23.2%) of young people under 18 lived with a lone parent.

The EU statistics agency reported that the EU average is 13.6% of younger people living in a one-parent household in 2008 and this falls to as low as 4.8% in Greece. Single parents – whether unmarried, widowed or divorced – are a large proportion of our population and workforce.

The retail sector attracts a larger proportion of lone parents than other employment sectors in the economy. Their flexibility, sense of responsibility and emotional intelligence often make them good employees and team-players. Their family-caring responsibilities also require good workplace management competencies to enhance the potential and skills of lone parents.

This six-step Toolkit, initiated by One Family and supported by the Equality Authority, is a very useful template and guide for managers on promoting workplace equality in the retail sector – whether large supermarket chains, department stores, small convenience shops or boutiques – who want to implement best people-management practices. One Family supports and advises lone parents and provides high-quality, much-needed services to the many different one-parent families in Ireland and the professionals working with them.

Much of this Toolkit meets the high standards promoted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD –Ireland) for effective employee engagement.

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This Toolkit for people managers in the retail sector has been developed by One Family who have extensive experience of providing support and services to lone parents across Ireland and in Europe. One Family is Ireland's leading national organisation for one-parent families. We work with all types and all members of one-parent families, respecting the realities of family life in Ireland, to effect positive change and achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families.

We aim to provide high-quality, much-needed services to the many different one-parent families in Ireland and the professionals working with them. We also work hard to ensure that one-parent families have a clear voice that is heard by policy and decision-makers (for more information go to www.onefamily.ie).



Purpose of the Toolkit

The Employers' Toolkit is aimed at retail businesses. Retail businesses are major employers of lone parents. This Toolkit will support employers to develop equality policy and best-practice which fully complies with equality legislation and also enhances best practice people management.

The Toolkit provides a practical guide for analysis and action. It focuses mainly on lone parents but it has a wider application in an equality context, since many of the issues also affect different types of families and groups covered by the equality legislation.

The Toolkit firstly introduces the key elements of a successful retail business. It then details six practical steps to promote equality for lone parents in the workplace. Finally it showcases a number of good practice examples from retail businesses.

The Toolkit has been inspired by One Family's work with those parenting alone; through our work with EuroChild¹; and also learning from policies and services across the European Union.

It aims to support employers in enhancing employee engagement while focussing on the particular needs or concerns of employees who have sole childcare responsibilities.



What is the Toolkit?

The Toolkit draws on extensive research and is based on consultation with retail experts Marks and Spencer Ltd, Applegreen, Boots Plc, Lidl Ltd, John Lewis Plc, SuperQuinn, Iceland Plc and 3mobile Retail. The Toolkit – which covers key management elements – is founded on the belief that employment policies and practices should be:

- informed by best practice in equality and human resource management;
- open to both lone parents' and employers' diverse needs;
- shaped by the complexity of managers' and employees' everyday lives; and
- should promote the recruitment, employment and retention of lone parents.

5. 1. The process starts by inviting retail sector employers to consider whether any of their employment policies and practices are likely to have a differential and possibly less favourable impact on lone parents.

5. 2. The guidance also includes an Action Plan template which guides and supports the retail employer through a series of questions to ensure that, wherever possible, employment practice is adapted to meet the needs of those with parenting responsibilities.

5. 3. The completed Action Plan enables employers to identify and monitor targets to evaluate the impact on lone parents. The Toolkit is a practical instrument designed to develop and review policies and practices. In order to ensure that it is as user-friendly as possible the toolkit includes:

- A** useful 'practice points' to help employers to use the toolkit as effectively as possible;
- B** practice examples of where adjustments enhance the workplace;
- C** an electronic version of the Toolkit and Action Plan, so that additional forms can be adapted to meet employers' needs;

Employment Issues for Lone Parents

- D** details of useful organisations and resources that provide additional people management information and offer policies specifically focussed on lone parents' needs; and
- E** examples of best practice and case scenarios from the retail sector.

Lone parent policies and practices are not just about identifying any gaps but also about highlighting positive practice and policies.

It is an affirming process which allows retail businesses to recognise what they are doing well, as well as where there may be a need for development.

It is true that larger retailers have greater resources and support structures on which to draw; however, it is also possible for smaller retailers to implement equality policies and practices aimed at those parenting alone.



One Family's definition of a lone parent is 'a parent with the main responsibility for a child/children under the age of 18 years'.

Lone parent families are an important and increasingly common family form which must be acknowledged¹

- 26 per cent of all families with dependent children are one-parent families;
- 87 per cent of one-parent families are headed by single mothers;
- there are currently 215,000 lone parents with dependent children in Ireland; and
- there are 350,000 children living in single parent families.

Most of us know that balancing work and family responsibilities can be a challenge. Becoming a working lone-parent family is far from easy and single parents that do manage this have to balance a number of competing demands.

Access to Employment/ Recruitment

Perceptions and Challenges

Lone mothers themselves cite caring responsibilities and financial factors as important barriers to work, also lack of work skills and experience, lack of confidence, transport, lack of job opportunities, and employer prejudice. Identity is important for lone parents and gendered expectations about family roles (especially about men as breadwinners) and about jobs ('women's jobs' and part-time jobs) affect how lone parents approach the labour market. Financial barriers are a significant factor for lone parents; these include concerns about making the transition to work, about meeting the costs of working, and about being able to manage financially. The barriers to part-time work are similar to the barriers to full-time work, but another important factor is

whether or not working part-time was seen as being 'worthwhile' – financially but also in terms of leading on to further or to full-time work or promotion and progression.²

Terms and Conditions of Employment, Including Pay

Two-thirds (65%) of lone parents are in occupations that are more than 80% female, and the female-dominated occupations tend to be lower paid.³

Women are still under-represented in higher-level jobs. Just over half (53%) of employed women were employed part-time, compared with 18% of employed men. Women make up three-quarters (75%) of all part-time workers in Ireland.⁴

On average, lone mothers tend to earn 81% of men's average weekly earnings, and 87.8% of men's average hourly earnings.⁵

Pay and employment equality is about ensuring that pay, conditions, access to the full range of jobs at all levels, and experiences in the workplace, are not affected by characteristics such as gender or family status. It also means that women should have the same opportunities as men to participate fully in employment.

Promotion/Progression

The skills and knowledge that lone parents (mostly women) bring to the work in female-dominated occupations may not be recognised and therefore not valued appropriately in comparison to other jobs.

Lone parents are often clustered in a narrow range of occupations. Lone mothers are more likely to be found at the bottom or middle of a retail business and find it difficult to move up into higher-level positions.

Lone parents tend to be the unappreciated sector of the labour market. The number of lone parents has increased dramatically in recent

years. Consideration of lone parents is the key issue within the contemporary labour market: the attempts by government to increase the number of lone parents in work. And relatedly, also to address the need for work-life balance for parents. Research from the UK suggests that the increasing numbers of students entering the labour market means that supermarkets are unlikely to consider lone parents as an important, discrete source of labour.⁶ This is something which this Toolkit initiative will help to resolve.

Training

There are employment barriers experienced by lone parents. Stigmatisation of some lone parents who do not receive a lot of sympathy from employers is one of the reasons why barriers are experienced. This affects how lone parents are included in opportunities for training, skill development and progression in work. Lone parents do experience difficulty in balancing family responsibilities, employment and career management. Both state and business training/education support structures need to address the capacity and infrastructure to become accessible enough to lone parents who wish to take up training. This means acknowledging that start times, location and length of training can be impracticable for lone parents who have family caring responsibilities.⁷

Working Hours and Childcare

More lone mothers than men combine primary childcare with part-time work. This limits women's access to better paying jobs and positions, since part-time work is more readily available in lower-paid occupations and positions. For many women, the key to better pay is in having access to better jobs – a wider range of jobs and higher-level jobs.⁸

Lone Parents find that opportunities for advancement are severely curtailed by the lack of affordable good quality childcare during atypical hours, such as weekends and evenings. Given the

expansion of employment during atypical hours, and increasing demand for working longer hours, childcare is also essential in order for low-skilled parents to secure and sustain employment.

Lone parents also talk about the difficulty of meeting childcare costs. “I can’t do the training at the weekend as this is a problem in my current position as a manager.” “When I worked at [supermarket], they were like: “Oh, these are your hours” and they’re 20 hours. You look at them and think “Oh, I want more”. But the reason I left was that she wanted me to work on a Sunday, I said I can’t on a Sunday because obviously I’ve got my daughter. Then another time she says “Oh there’s somebody off sick, can you come in at half past 7?” I went, “Well no, ‘cos I’ve got my daughter – who’s going to see to her?” And she turned around and said “Childcare is your problem and not ours.” This can be easily solved by understanding lone parents’ needs.⁹

Redundancies/Dismissals

The law is clear. It is unlawful discrimination to dismiss or otherwise disadvantage an employee for a reason related to her pregnancy or family status. This initiative will help to support retailers in best practice management. With the economic downturn has come a rise in the number of calls to our askonefamily helpline from women facing employment challenges. The impact of this recession on lone parents is shaped by three major factors. First, the significant increases in the numbers of women in employment over the past thirty years mean that women are more directly exposed as employees to the impact of the current recession than ever before. Second, the narrowing of the gender employment gap combined with the increase in the proportion of lone mother households means that women’s wages are more important than ever to the family economy. And, thirdly lone parents enter this recession on an unequal footing as the nature of

lone parent’s employment still remains markedly different and their experiences of employment are shaped by motherhood and other caring duties, and concentration in particular sectors, particularly the service industries.¹⁰ We have examples of lone parents being put under pressure because of their family situation.



The Business Case for Equality

Attracting and Retaining Employees

- Being a 'good employer' and having an equality policy are not aims in themselves. They are the proven means by which to increase workplace efficiency, competitiveness and profitability, including good staff morale and commitment.
- By supporting equality of opportunity strategies in recruitment and encouraging merit-based appointments and people-focused management practices, retail businesses are more likely to attract and keep the people they need to be successful.¹
- Equality employment strategies also ensure that a well-managed business maximises the benefits of a diverse pool of talent, which will help to improve business success.
- A 'good employer' encourages employees to develop in ways that respect their abilities and needs as individuals, and values them as a critical asset to the business. An inclusive and tolerant workplace motivates employees to perform to the best of their ability.
- It also promotes understanding between people and effective employee engagement. This then creates a stronger and more focused service and good teamwork.²

The Changing Work Environment

- The talents and abilities of many lone parents are currently being under-utilised. Our experience is that they are keen to take up paid work where workplaces are willing and able to accommodate their needs.
- This includes part-timers (mainly women) who want longer hours or higher-skilled work as well as those lone parents who are currently out of the workforce and need flexibility.

- In parts of the retail sector there have been recruitment and retention problems leading to higher costs in replacing and training new staff.
- Those retailers who look at what attracts people back into work and who can offer flexible and secure working hours can more easily manage recruitment and training costs.
- A survey by recruitment agency Hays, 2010³ has shown that due to the skills shortage, far more employers now believe retaining staff is more important than recruiting new talent.

Boosting Productivity and Innovation and Utilising the Talent, Creativity and Energy of Employees

- The business case for equality shows that when managers and supervisors create a work environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, and whose differences are accepted and celebrated, then employees are much more likely to be loyal to the organisation and to be more productive.
- Without recognition of employees' diversity and qualities, their contribution is often minimised or lost.
- Employees from diverse backgrounds are happier and more productive if they are appreciated and included, and not just 'tolerated'. Improved innovation and creativity are documented benefits.⁴

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Customers and Clients

- When employees identify with the customers or clients they serve, the employer benefits. Diversity and equality enriches the knowledge base of the workforce, and brings a broader range of resources to work.

- This makes it more likely that employees will understand the needs of customers, and be able to draw on the skills required to provide excellent customer-focused services.
- Also, if lone-parents as employees feel respected and valued, they are much more likely to deliver great service to customers.
- Providing equal employment opportunities for lone parents is just a part of the overall initiative to achieve improved staff satisfaction and ultimately better service.⁵

Improving Organisational Reputation

- A 'good employer' can brand and position themselves as an 'Employer of Choice'.
- Being branded a 'good employer' allows organisations to differentiate themselves from other businesses and achieve public acknowledgment for providing equal employment opportunities.
- Integrating equality for lone parents is one of the important ingredients for organisational success. It helps to improve services to customers and to attract and retain talented staff.
- Retail workplaces reflect the diversity of modern Irish society with employees from different national, racial or religious backgrounds.
- In addition they have a much broader range of training and family structures than the traditional 'one-size fits all' or 'typical' Irish person.
- The result is we have a more dynamic population which is both varied and flexible but which also has different needs in their working and personal lives.
- This is reflected in our employment equality legislation and reinforced by best people management practices promoted by professional bodies like the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD – Ireland).

- Legal cases taken against companies can damage their reputation on the wider market.⁶

Recent Case

€14k for woman dismissed for being pregnant Tuesday, August 16, 2011

A WOMAN has been awarded over €14,000 in compensation after it was found she had been dismissed on gender grounds because she was pregnant.

The decision by the Equality Tribunal was made in favour of Jevgenija Petrakova, against Lexor Entertainment Ltd.

Ms Petrakova claimed that approximately two weeks after she started working with the respondent in a restaurant she attended her doctor and discovered she was pregnant.

She notified her employers in writing immediately and was out on sick leave for two weeks.

On her return she asked about her hours and was told that all staff would be called to a meeting, at which she was told the restaurant would be closing for the month of April and that only some employees would be called back.

Ms Petrakova said that she was hardly given any hours on her return from sick leave and that she spoke with a number of people in order to get herself reinstated.

She submitted that she had even undertaken to carry out other duties in the respondent restaurant just to secure some work, but her name was not called out when the company stated the names of those returning.

The Tribunal ruled a "prima facie" case of discriminatory dismissal on gender grounds had been established and that "this inference has not been rebutted by the respondent", who did not attend the hearing.⁷

The Role of Equality and its Impact on Lone Parents

National legislative context

The Equality Authority is an independent body set up under the Employment Equality Act 1998. The Equality Authority has the mandate to promote and defend the rights established in equality legislation. The Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2004 ensure equality between employees and prohibit discrimination. The acts have a broad scope and legislate over all aspects of the workplace, from recruitment and selection processes to dispute resolution procedures. They also prohibit discrimination in pay on nine grounds including age, race, gender and sexual orientation. These acts ensure that an environment of equality and fairness is promoted in all industries, both public and private. In the context of workplace cultures, employees can be protected from discrimination that arises as a result of their family status (i.e. lone parents).

The Equal Status Act (2000) seeks to promote equality and prohibit discrimination on the same nine specific grounds as the Employment Equality Acts (although it does not cover employment). This is a broader equality act than the Employment Equality Acts but it similarly ensures equality in all areas in how people are treated. The Equal Status Act and the Employment Equality Acts are related to workplace cultures in that they proscribe behaviours or practices that discriminate against people or that hinder their equal opportunities. This establishes a legislative context for democratic procedures within the workplace, and should ensure that all workplace cultures are experienced as open to diversity and equality of opportunity. However, as stated previously, these acts cannot legislate over attitudes and behaviours that may contribute to negative workplace environments, such as the long-hours culture in many organisations that is accepted by many as a means to promotion¹. Many aspects of workplace culture are less tangible than obvious discriminatory

behaviours such as discrimination in pay and conditions, and thus impossible to legislate for.

What is clear is that there is a consistent and increasing demand for change in the workplace through the adoption of work-life balance as a guiding policy. This is because issues of work-life balance are as relevant to working parents as to men and women who do not have children:

<< Flexible working arrangements are not a 'women's issue', they are a 'people issue'. All employees, irrespective of their family situation or personal responsibilities, need and want to have greater balance between their lives inside and outside work >> ²

If work-life balance is promoted, and flexible working arrangements are already part of working lives, lone parenthood may not be perceived as a challenge for a job or career plans. Some retailers have already successfully met this challenge, for example Marks and Spencer, managing to adopt working practices that suit both the work-life balance, workplace culture and family issues for employer and the employee, which is the ideal outcome of work-life balance initiatives. Resistance to change has also been experienced, although it must be noted that many employers are now requesting help in order to create change, as well as more information on how to achieve best practice as an employer and in business. There are clear business arguments for adopting work-life balance initiatives associated with lone parents, including improved recruitment, increased retention of skilled staff, and increased employee morale, all of which will impact on performance and production.

The Equality legislation is governed by the key principle that a worker should receive 'no less favourable treatment'. In the field of employment, the prohibition of discrimination and the promotion of equality apply in relation to nine grounds: gender,

race (ethnic or racial origins and nationality), disability, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age or being a member of the Traveller Community.

Aspects of employment that are covered 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; and
 - collective agreements.
- Both direct and indirect discrimination are outlawed. The former occurs where an employer treats an individual less favourably because they fall within one of the protected grounds.
 - The concept of indirect discrimination goes beyond this and is a fundamental element of legislation. It allows the courts not only to deal with less favourable treatment – direct discrimination – but also with apparently neutral policies which put a protected group at a greater disadvantage.
 - An example of this would be having a policy requiring flexibility in an employment contract where it is recognised that such a requirement is likely to exclude proportionately more women than men and consequently could have a greater impact, for example on those parenting alone.³
 - Employers can implement positive actions initiatives, which means that they can take steps with a view to ensuring full equality in practice between employees on all of the nine discriminatory grounds.
 - For further information see www.equality.ie, www.equalitytribunal.ie

The gender division of labour in the household is still a key factor in determining women's position in the labour market.

However, demographic changes and an employment strategy aiming to increase female labour force participation have led to initiatives on work-life balance. These have given rise to widespread practices including job-sharing, career breaks and flexible working time patterns.

Issues of discrimination may also be addressed through collective bargaining.

At European level, the social partners have played a key role through the adoption of framework agreements, such as those on part-time work, fixed-term work and parental leave.

The objective of the agreement on part-time work is not limited to combating discrimination but has a wider social significance.

With a view to increasing female labour force participation, as well as extending the benefits of the non-discrimination principle to include male part-time workers, the agreement also aims to promote part-time work opportunities.

Therefore, the non-discrimination principle has also come to play a role in the more general field of social exclusion, employment policy and its potential impact on lone parents returning and staying in the labour market.

Key Elements for Successful Retail Business

A good employer is a retail business that provides and supports an environment where lone-parents feel valued and respected, where parenthood is celebrated and diversity encouraged, and where there is active employee engagement, transparency on policies and procedures, clear procedures, and regular feedback. The 'good employer' values equality and fairness in their workplace and has policies, programmes and practices that promote these values.

The 'good employer' makes maximum use of skills and strengths of all staff but has special regard for lone parents who may sometimes be overlooked or marginalised.

There are certain key elements that well-managed retail businesses concentrate on to ensure they are a 'good employer'. These are:

1 Leadership, Accountability and Culture

- strong leadership and clear vision where lone parents are valued
- engagement processes with lone parents and their representatives
- opportunities for them to engage and participate in organisational decisions
- managers accountable for providing equal opportunities to lone parents

2 Recruitment, Selection and Induction

- impartial, clear employment process for lone-parents
- no barriers or biases to employing the best person for the job

3 Employee Development, Promotion and Exit

- positive approach to support professional development of lone parents
- equal treatment for lone parents in relation to progression, through and out of the organisation

- clear and fair professional development practices in training, coaching, mentoring, promotion and performance management

4 Flexibility and Work Design

- consideration of flexible work practices to accommodate lone parent requirements
- workplace arrangements to assist lone parents to balance work with the rest of their lives

5 Pay, Recognition and Conditions

- equal wages for lone parents
- equal access to job opportunities and conditions for lone parents
- recognition of lone parents' contribution to the workplace

6 Harassment and Bullying Prevention

- zero-tolerance of all forms of harassment across the nine grounds and bullying
- managers and staff trained on their rights and responsibilities
- policies for addressing harassment and bullying

7 Safe and Healthy Environment

- pro-active approach to lone parents' health, safety and well-being
- managers, supervisors and staff trained on their rights and responsibilities
- environment that supports and encourages lone parent participation in health and safety

Six Steps to Promote Equality for Lone Parents in the Retail Sector

This section describes six steps to promote equality for lone parents in the retail sector. The six-steps can be adapted by retail businesses of any size, to suit their existing structures and ways of doing business. It relies on excellent analysis of the issues, identification of what is working well, and areas where improvement is needed.

Six Steps to Promote Equality through your People Management Success

- 1 establish and review the workplace profile;
- 2 analyse the workplace profile and each employment element;
- 3 prioritise the issues and develop a plan of action for lone parents;
- 4 take action to address priority issues for lone parents;
- 5 evaluate the effectiveness of those actions and outcomes achieved; and
- 6 plan actions for the future.

It is important that staff consultation is included in the process. Staff are the ones most likely to identify issues that need to be addressed, and to highlight what is working well, so that the retail business can build on success.

The Benefits of Creating a Culture of Engagement between Employers and Lone Parents

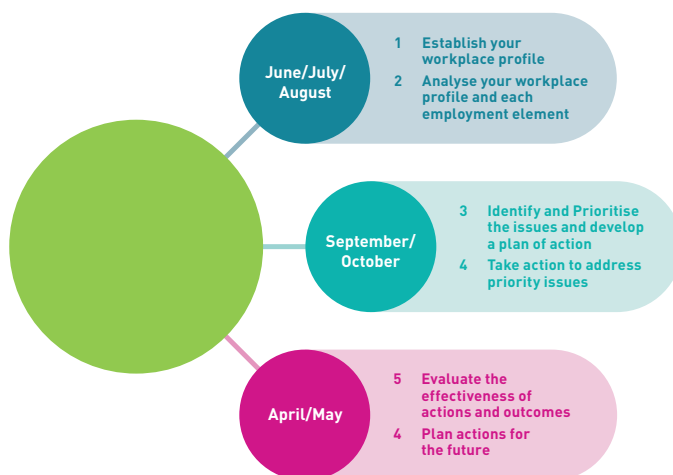
- builds commitment to equal opportunity and change;
- provides employers with the opportunity to promote equality;
- encourages the development of ideas;
- provides the opportunity for lone parents to participate in decision-making;

- helps identify barriers to equal employment opportunities for lone parents;
- enables lone parents to share responsibility for action; and
- improves workplace morale.

Example of developing Equal Employment Opportunities for lone parents

A Change Model in a calendar year

Active engagement and participation of all employees is important at all stages of this process



Step 1. Workplace Profile

The workplace profile needs to include factual information about the composition of the workforce. As a minimum, information relating to gender, family status and job-based characteristics of the workplace should be included.

Key questions to answer are:

- How many men and women work here?
- What is the family status of female employees?
- What is the family status of male employees?
- What types of jobs do men have?

- What types of jobs do women have?
- What types of job do lone parents have?
- At what level are people in the identified groups within the retail business hierarchy?
- How many people in the identified groups work part-time?

- What are the average wages of groups of employees, so they can be compared?

NB Comparison with those employees with no children will assist in highlighting where potential discriminatory practices may appear.

Family Status Workplace Profile

	Two-parent Family FT/PT AvWage		One-parent Family FT/PT AvWage		No Children Family FT/PT Av Wage	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Managers/Professionals						
Technicians & Trade Workers						
Supervisors /Team Leaders						
Customer Service Workers						
Till workers						
Warehousing/logistics						
Merchandising						
Sales workers						
Clerical/administrative						
General Operatives						
Other						
Total						

This could be the average annual wage or hourly wage depending on what information is more valuable for the retail business.

The retail business should also examine open term, fixed term and casual workers if applicable.

Gender Status Workplace Profile

	Male FT/PT AvWage	Female FT/PT AvWage	No Children Family FT/PT Av Wage
Managers/Professionals			
Technicians & Trade Workers			
Supervisors /Team Leaders			
Customer Service Workers			
Till workers			
Warehousing/logistics			
Merchandising			
Sales workers			
Clerical/administrative			
General Operatives			
Other			
Total			

This could be the average annual wage or hourly wage depending on what information is more valuable for the retail business.

The retail business should also examine open term, fixed term and casual workers if applicable.

Step 2. Workplace Analysis

- The retail business would benefit from undertaking a thorough workplace analysis.
- This is a key step in identifying the issues which may be preventing the employment of, or hindering the advancement of, lone parents, OR conversely uncovering initiatives that may be supporting equal employment opportunities for lone parents.

Analysis can occur through reviewing:

- 1 the workplace profile;
- 2 human resource statistics;
- 3 information received through employee consultation and discussion; and
- 4 human resource policies and practices relevant to the seven employment elements.

The level of investigation will vary depending on the retail business's specific circumstances.

For small businesses, with fewer than 50 staff, this will be a much less time-consuming process. It is still important to clearly identify the issues facing lone parents, and the actions required to make the most difference. When analysing issues, some key questions worth considering are:

- 1 What is working well for lone parents?
- 2 What are the reasons for lone parents doing well, or the reasons for them not doing as well as others?
- 3 What needs to be improved so lone parents can fulfil their potential?
- 4 What needs to happen to increase lone parent representation in the workforce at all levels?

At the end of this process, the retail business should have identified what is working well and what needs to be done in relation to equal opportunities for lone parents, and next steps to take.

Step 3. Prioritising Issues

- Once the issues are known, the next step is to distinguish between those needing long term focus and those needing priority over the next year.
- A realistic assessment should be made of what is most important to the retail business, and what can be achieved over the course of a year.
- At the end of this process, the retail business may end up with one or two key issues, or several smaller issues.
- Managers and supervisors will then need to work out what the priorities are, based on a range of considerations.

These may include the cost implications to the business and the employees if specific issues are not addressed; the speed with which the issue can be addressed; and whether addressing the issue fits with other changes the retail business is going through.

Sample issues are:

- 1 lack of lone parent recruits;
- 2 significant occupational segregation of lone parents;
- 3 poor rate of return from parental leave;

- 4 lone mothers leaving the organisation in greater numbers than other groups;
- 5 no lone parents are employed in permanent, regular or continued employment;
- 6 fewer training resources devoted to lone parents in comparison to other groups of employees;
- 7 lack of awareness among the workforce and management of equal employment opportunity practices for lone parents;
- 8 little access to regular part-time or home-based work for lone parents; and
- 9 weak leadership around the importance of good people management and the value of lone parents.

Priority issues can relate to any of the employment elements or, more commonly, will span a number of them.

Step 4. Taking Action

The effective retail manager will now determine what actions (or targeted interventions for lone parents) are going to be addressed and priority issues will be identified.

Example 1: Issue – Low rate of return to work after parental leave

Actions could be:

- develop guidelines to facilitate conversations between employee and manager regarding future plans for job and children;
- implement a stay-in-touch programme;
- make flexible work practices available for parents returning from parental/maternity leave;
- train managers and employees on how to access flexible leave practices; and
- provide assistance to parents to find child care.

Example 2: Issue – Despite good representation at lower levels in the business, no lone parent employed in supervisory roles or management

Actions could be:

- build relationships and engage with lone parents;
- establish mentoring and coaching programmes for lone parents;
- provide career development opportunities, and leadership training for lone parents;
- give line/operational experience to lone parents in staffing roles, as line experience is a more likely route to senior positions;
- write job advertisements to encourage lone parents to apply, and indicate the value the organisation places on equal employment opportunities for lone parents;
- check that recruitment consultants and interview panels are aware of the business' commitment to Employment Equality Opportunities and advise them to produce a balanced field of suitable candidates, including lone parents;
- Monitor the diversity of applicants, interviewees and appointments to measure numbers and any potential bias at different stages of the recruitment process; and
- make equal opportunity for lone parents a senior management performance indicator.

Example initiatives

- The following table provides ideas for provisions and practices that eliminate barriers to equal employment opportunities of lone parents and assist with managing equality of opportunity.
- This list identifies *possible* provisions, practices and initiatives under each of the employment elements.

- These are ideas only, but some mentioned, such as the anti-harassment or health and safety policy and procedure, are mandatory.
- These initiatives will not all be appropriate, desirable or affordable for every retail business; but they are worth consideration.

The size of an organisation is a critical factor in determining what the workplace can and should focus on.

Question and examples of potential solutions

- 1 How will employment policy and practice provide opportunities for soft-skills development (i.e. personal development including increasing self esteem)?
- 2 How will you ensure that lone parents can engage in activities that boost their self-confidence and self-esteem?

Solutions

- Referrals to locally provided soft-skills training
 - Time to train
 - Provide related transport and childcare costs
 - Signpost to or identify a lone parent mentor.
- 3 How will your employment policy and practice address lone parents' childcare needs?
 - 4 Does the lone parent already have childcare?
 - 5 Does this fit with work times, including dropping and pick-up time?
 - 6 Do times fit around nursery/school times or is it run at atypical hours?

Consider the number and ages of children, as this could impact on the type of childcare required.

Solutions

- Provide free on-site childcare at times of programme/service delivery
 - Refer lone parents to the local Child Care
 - Committee to find out about local availability of childcare
 - Ask One Family about childcare opportunities and childcare funding
 - Cover both informal and formal childcare cost
- 7** How will employment policy and practice address parents' needs for time to care for their children?
- 8** How will employment policy and practice ensure that lone parents are not discriminated against as a result of having to take time off to care for sick children, attend school events/ meetings, or care for children during half/term holiday times?
- 9** Does the lone parent work-hours/ time fit around nursery/school times?

Solutions

- Flexible and short delivery times
- Entitlement to paid time off when children are ill and to take leave during school holidays
- Opportunities to recuperate lost training/ working time/ appraisals
- Entitlement to take a period of time out due to family or health needs without prejudice.

Step 5. Evaluate Effectiveness

Evaluation is much easier if the retail business has previously identified what progress it hopes to achieve as a result of each action, and over what timeframe.

Some questions to help evaluate this are:

- 1 What change did the business hope to see as a result of the action, and over what time period?

- 2 For example: if gender segregation of job roles was an issue in particular jobs or areas of the business, were there changes to the make-up of workers in these jobs? E.g. was the first lone parent warehouse manager appointed?
- 3 What is the link between the action and what happened?
- 4 Do lone parents and/or their managers think the actions made a difference?
- 5 What are the learnings for next time?
- Evaluation techniques may include the use of quantitative data that measures numerical changes, e.g. increases in the number of lone parents senior positions or a higher percentage of lone parents in non-traditional jobs.
 - Updating the workplace profile may be a useful way to measure changes.
 - Consulting with lone parents is useful for identifying how well the interventions worked. Focus groups and one-on-one interviews provide an opportunity to get more in-depth qualitative information, where people can describe how the interventions affected their experiences at work.
 - If the actions do not produce results, it may mean the business needs to analyse whether the right issues are being addressed, and to explore whether the best actions are being taken to address the concerns and issues.

Step 6. Plan Future Actions

Many actions will take longer than 12 months to bear fruit. Therefore you need to be clear about what it will do in the long term to keep an issue on the agenda, or to monitor an action that will take a number of years to succeed.

Future actions will be determined by workplace issues that still need to be addressed, some of which will be ongoing or need more time and resources allocated to addressing them.

Below is a template for the Action Plan which can be used for each goal and can also be easily monitored.

Employment Equality Opportunities (EEO) Action Plan

Date _____

Purpose: To create a “script” for improvement effort and support implementation.

Directions:

- 1 Using this form as a template, develop a plan for each goal identified through the needs assessment process. Modify the form as needed to fit your unique context.
- 2 Keep a copy handy to review and update regularly. You may decide to develop new plans and therefore modify the Action Plan

Goal: _____

Action Steps What Will Be Done?	Responsibilities Who Will Do It?	Timeline By When? (Day/Month)	Resources A Resources Available B Resources Needed (financial, human, & other)	Potential Barriers A What individuals or organizations might resist? B How?	Communications Plan Who is involved? What methods? How often?
Step 1			A: B:	A: B:	
Step 2			A: B:	A: B:	
Step 3			A: B:	A: B:	

Action Plan Results/Accomplishments: _____

In-house Training and Development

In-house training and development is critical to building equality competency within the workplace. Workplaces that are planned and systematic in the approaches to equality are less likely to be workplaces where discrimination and conflict occurs.

The following in-house learning development outline has been developed and informed by a range of retailers including Marks and Spencer Plc, 3 mobile, Applegreen, and John Lewis Plc to assist the sector in disseminating the tool-kit across businesses.

Training Rationale: Business Case for Promoting Diversity & Equality of lone parents in the Retail Sector

Learning Objectives

- 1 Outline the benefits of promoting equality and diversity in recruitment, selection and promotion, such as:
 - Ensure that staff are confident they work for a fair employer
 - Reduce turnover of staff – savings in recruitment costs
 - Harness creativity/new ideas from a diverse work force
 - All staff to know that their contribution is valued.
- 2 Ensure compliance with the Equality legislation, which will lead to:
 - Saving on legal costs
 - Avoiding bad publicity
 - Ensure that the company's image is enhanced in the wider community – contributing to making it an employer of choice.

3a Understand the benefits of promoting equality and diversity for lone parents in employment practice, such as:

- Low levels of absenteeism
- Low levels of grievance and disciplinary actions
- Low turnover of staff
- Promotion is on merit and ability
- An organisational culture where people know they will be treated with respect and dignity
- Sense of loyalty.

3b Understand the business case for promoting equality in relationships with customers, such as:

- Enhance corporate image with prospective customers
- Recognise the potentially diverse nature of the market place and an increased customer base.

Awareness Programme

Duration – 2 hours

Target Participant Group

The programme is designed for those retailers who are interested in opening up employment opportunities and career advancement for those parenting alone. It is anticipated that participants will have a basic knowledge of equality legislation and practice.

Programme Overview

The programme aims to give participants an insight into how to deliver a 2 hours Awareness Programme to retail supervisors and managers who may have co-workers who parent alone or may want to better understand the needs of lone parent workers or those who are involved in recruitment and selection to better understand the family demands on those parenting alone.

The programme covers techniques for training; the knowledge and understanding informed by the One Family ToolKit for being a good employer to those parenting alone.

The Training Programme Expected Outcomes

By the end of the programmes participants will:

- Know how to deliver a 2 hour Awareness Programme
- Have increased knowledge and understanding of the family demands on lone parents
- Have knowledge of different equality and diversity management tactics
- Have a Toolkit to help them mainstream equality and diversity management practices reflecting on the needs of lone parents.



Summary

Many successful retail businesses promote equality and diversity in both their strategic and human resources policies. If you value everyone as individuals, research shows that equality and diversity can help stimulate creative interaction, motivate employees and improve retail business performance.

An equality and diversity policy is a useful management and recruitment tool and should include recognition of lone parents' identity and situation. For example, this policy could include:

- The fact that you are an equal opportunities employer and that lone parents are welcome in your workplace
- How you intend to achieve a lone parent friendly working environment
- How managers, supervisors and staff can participate in the business' commitment to lone parents both within and outside the organisation.

It is therefore important that workers are involved in the policy-making process. You can do this by for example by:

- promoting good relationships in the workplace between individuals, managers, teams and employers
- valuing and respecting differences
- understanding lone parents' needs to balance work and family commitments
- consulting with staff and management about the drafting and implementation of the policy maintaining open communication channels with staff.

Good Practice in the Retail Sector

Marks and Start Changes Lives

Marks & Spencer, in association with One Family and Gingerbread UK has been running a community programme, "Marks & Start", which has become the biggest programme of its kind in the UK and Ireland, aiming to offer up work experience placements to people who may face barriers getting a job and in particular those parenting alone.

Research shows that since launching in February 2004, Marks & Start has offered work to over **250** lone parents, and that 30% of them have secured permanent employment either at Marks & Spencer stores or with other retail employers. **Ninety per cent** said that the short work placements have changed their lives and given them the confidence to get back into work.

In addition, Marks and Spencer has a well established 'buddying' system as well as management practices which attempts to understand the need of those parenting alone and their family commitments.

These aspects cover flexible working; term-time working and a supportive and understanding approach to 'family needs' leave, if the business allows.

This has led to Marks and Spencer maintaining its reputation as a caring employer, an employer of choice with an enhanced reputation in the community.

3 Mobile's Perspective

Lone parents are often looking for part-time work. Employing part-time workers can be an efficient way to keep costs down in areas where a company does not need full-time cover.

3 retail operates on a variety of part-time contract types. 3 find that part-time working can also mean that you are able to attract a wide range of people

to fill vacancies and build in flexibility so that you can respond to changes in demand and develop business.

3's approaches to part-time working:

The most obvious form of part-time working is where the worker simply works fewer than the normal basic full-time hours. For example:

- every weekday morning, afternoon or evening
- a full day every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday
- weekend shifts and the occasional shift in the week.

We need people to get the job done. However, 3 are keen to build up loyalty and commitment. Currently, the average age in 3's retail outlets is 22. However there is an issue with absenteeism and 3 are looking at better ways to address things in recruitment and in management. The Tool-kit could be useful in attracting a different type of recruit. Recruitment is costly and therefore we want to retain employees – anything that can help us to reduce cost would be beneficial.

John Lewis Partnership Plc in the UK

The John Lewis Partnership's 76,500 Partners own one of the leading UK retail businesses – John Lewis and Waitrose. The profits and benefits created are shared by all the Partners. The Partnership believes that commercial success is directly linked to being a good corporate citizen. As co-owners of the business, employees, known as Partners, work hard under fair and equal employment practices and are determined to embrace equality and diversity and earn a reputation as an 'employer of distinction' by treating all Partners with respect, honesty and fairness; while sharing the rewards and responsibilities of co-ownership.

JLP's relationships with partners are based on mutual respect and courtesy. The Partnership's ultimate purpose is 'the happiness of Partners through worthwhile and satisfying employment in a successful business.' Their approach involves:

- recruiting and retaining people of talent and integrity;
- engaging with our Partners and listening to them; and
- operating a learning and development strategy for Partners.

They are committed to providing worthwhile and rewarding employment in a successful business and promote that there is more to a job than just work and pay. Their policies and benefits help Partners to achieve work-life balance and therefore stay happy, healthy and committed to long-term careers with the Partnership. Partners also get to share the profits; the equivalent of 18 per cent of annual salary (2010).

In practice this means that the Partnership endeavours to ensure that Partners' (workers) work-life balance needs are met to their best ability and within the confines of commercial needs. They attempt where practical to give school-friendly contracts to those who need it (however the demand for this is great and a rota system has been put into operation).

They have no specific policies or practices for those parenting alone; but their 'Opportunities for all strategy' reflects and responds to the needs of those parenting alone.

Case study: in 2010, John Lewis took on a Partner whose previous career in the travel industry had come to an end when she had her child 7 years ago. The Partner started in a Christmas temp role and was taken on full-time six months later and worked around her school needs and now has a term-time only contract in furnishings. In addition because the demand at Christmas can be intense there is an agreement with the employee that December full-time working is required: because the employee can plan for this it is all to the mutual benefit of the employer and employee.



Useful Contacts

For Further assistance Please contact Stuart Duffin at One Family on 01 662 9212 or email goodemployer@onefamily.ie

Visit our website www.onefamily.ie

Other useful contacts:

The Equality Authority

2 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2
Tel: +353 (0)1 417 3336
Fax: +353 (0)1 417 3331
www.equality.ie

NERA

For more information on employment rights
NERA Information Service Lo-Call 1890 80 80 90*
Lines open Monday-Friday, 9.30am–5pm

CIPD Ireland

Director Michael McDonnell
Marine House Clanwilliam Place, Dublin 2
Tel: +353 (0) 1 653 0400 / +353 (0) 1 653 0500
info@cipd.ie

Monday to Thursday: 09.15–12.45hrs / 14.00–17.30hrs
Friday: 09.15–12.45hrs / 14.00–17.15hrs

NB: Before emailing a query on an HR issue please check their resources page to see if there is any information on the website that will answer your question. <http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/>

Retail Ireland

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Tel: +353 (0) 1 605 1661

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)

Araby House, 8 North Richmond Street, Dublin 1
Tel: +353 (0) 1 856 0088
info@inoue.ie www.inoue.ie

Treoir

14 Gandon House, Lower Mayor Street,
IFSC, Dublin 1
LoCall: 1890 252 084
Tel: 00353 1 6700 120 :
Opening Times: Monday to Friday
9.30am–1pm / 2.15pm–5pm
info@treoir.ie

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

31/32 Parnell Square Dublin 1
Tel: +353 (0) 1 889 7777
congress@ictu.ie www.ictu.ie

Main unions for the retail sector

Mandate Head Office, O'Lehane House,
9 Cavendish Row, Dublin 1
Tel: +353 (0) 1 874 6321/2/3
www.mandate.ie

SIPTU Services Division, Liberty Hall, Dublin 1
Tel: +353 (0) 1 858 6300
<http://www.siptu.ie/divisions/services/>

IMPACT Services and Enterprises,
IMPACT Trade Union, Nerney's Court, Dublin 1
Tel: + 353 (0) 1 817 1500
<http://www.impact.ie/iopen24/services-enterprises-t-35.html>

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Equality Benefits Tool-kit Equality Authority

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