1.   Introduction

The 30% Club has a goal to achieve better gender balance at all levels in leading Irish businesses. Over 200 Irish Chairs and CEOs of leading businesses are supporters of the 30% Club Ireland. The 30% Club believes that gender balance on boards and executive leadership not only encourages better leadership and governance, but further contributes to better all-round board performance, and ultimately increased corporate performance for both companies and their shareholders.

We strongly believe that the issues affecting the pipeline for female talent starts very early in a girl's career and therefore have some points for inclusion in the review that we would like to be taken into consideration. Research indicates that choices made are strongly influenced by peers, parents and teachers as well as by those directly involved in career guidance so the attitudes of each are important factors in the development of a girl's working life and career.

Ireland has one of the lowest rates of female participation in the workforce; Ireland continues to lag significantly our international peers, with a little more than three out of five women in the workforce, compared with as many as almost nine out of 10 in countries such as Iceland. As we move towards full employment and positive signs for the growth of the economy it is critical we fully develop and exploit women's talents, improve women's participation rate and increase the representation of women at more senior levels in both the private and public sectors. The role of career guidance will be critical in achieving this.

2.   General challenges

Before addressing certain issues which are of particular concern to the 30% Club relating specifically to the education of girls and young women, we would like to address a number of issues which affect all our students, parents and teachers.

To meet Ireland's future skill requirements, we need to ensure that teachers, career guidance counsellors and parents understand the broader skillsets required to succeed in the workplace of the future and start to develop these in the classroom – collaboration, communication, team working, creativity. We also need to increase awareness of how the world of work is changing and how this will affect future working lives.   These changes call for closer collaboration between educators and parents and the business and public sector communities.

One of the challenges for schools and career guidance is for them to understand the new ways of working. e.g. new freelancer models and even the growth in temporary and contract work. It's important that they understand that this not lesser work but often a choice, an opportunity and/or perfect for the entrepreneurial mind. These opportunities need to be open to all children but again the education starts with teachers, career guidance and parents to inform students of their options. There also needs to be more knowledge and awareness of apprenticeship programs. The FIT (Fast track to IT) focus on apprenticeships in IT is an example of one that works effectively, and the value of apprenticeship models is something companies are starting to look at and again. There is still many who see the work apprenticeship inextricably linked to the trades sector. We can learn from models in places like Germany and Switzerland where apprenticeships are viable alternatives to university.

2.1   Understanding new careers, skills and the link to subject and career choice

There are limited opportunities for career guidance teachers currently to upskill themselves on the rapidly changing job market. The top 10 skills in demand today did not exist 20 years ago so we need to educate both career guidance teachers but just as importantly parents on the new jobs and skills currently in the workplace and those that need to be developed. With rapidly changing economies, markets and technologies and with longer lifespans, the idea of a 'job for life' as an accountant, lawyer or civil servant will be much rarer. We need to help career guidance professionals to be aware of this new environment and of new jobs and opportunities so they do not close doors on students. In practice, in considering options for continuing education and career, a student – and therefore their guidance source – needs to be aware of the current and emerging skills and aptitudes that will contribute to continuing development and career contribution and success.

Some specific examples around this:
- Data analytics – this is one of the most in demand skills at the moment and relatively new - one of the most important traits to succeed in data analytics is curiosity. As Isaac Asimov said, the most exciting phrase in discovery is not Eureka but "oh that's funny" so we need to develop the curious mind as many jobs labelled technology will be open to those with a curious mindset.
- STEM careers: We need to educate and excite students about all the new jobs that currently exist from these areas – whether it is the DNA editing tool CRISPR that could wipe out all disease in the future or Obayshi a Japanese company currently building a tube elevator to space. And to help them realise that these areas will continue to evolve in ways that we can't even predict. It is important that students and the teachers are exposed to all the exciting and interesting new jobs which STEM subjects can lead to if we are to inspire students. Vital to this – particularly for girls and young women, is to illustrate the significant contribution that STEM can make to society and to progress, to create a sense of purpose. In this way, we can hope to increase the numbers taking these subjects, both at second level and beyond.
- Technology: There is a particular need for students, parents and teachers to understand that every sector is now effectively moving towards technology – sales jobs, marketing, finance and most disciplines depend increasingly on technology - so technology is no longer only a career segment in itself but is integral to most jobs
- Arts: To demonstrate how quickly today's market is changing, people are now talking of 'STEAM' not 'STEM 'and adding in the Arts to Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. This highlights that more businesses are seeing the power of the arts degree as we need people to be asking better questions once the robots can give us all the answers.
- Maths: This goes also for subjects like maths where there is still a tendency to funnel students who display an aptitude for maths towards accounting and actuarial type jobs even though there are now much broader job types and opportunities available, e.g. Ryanair website used maths and algorithms to work out all flights on any given day. Connecting maths skills to broader purposes can help to connect students' thinking more from the subject to the real world.

If education is as Yeats said the lighting of a fire not the filling of a bucket we need to excite and inspire students but we need to give teachers the education and tools to be able to do this.

2.2 Skills not jobs

With the rapid rise in automation, robots and A.I., there are many headlines highlighting that up to 40% of today's jobs will go. The reality is that, in many cases, it is not the job that will go but certain parts of the job. With that in mind, we need to ensure that career guidance is helping the student to build a toolkit of skills that can be used across industries and that is somewhat future proofed against the rise in automation and the disruption of the jobs market.

2.3 Lifelong Learning

Given the future world of work as we now see it developing, the idea that many students either finish education at Leaving Cert or after college and never learn again will be a thing of the past. With such rapid change, it will be normal for the next and future generations to have over ten careers in their lifetime and also to work on freelance models and portfolio careers. This highlights the importance of engendering a love of learning. Ulrich Boser's recent book "Learn Better" highlights studies showing the importance of meaning in learning; if we can connect the learning with an understanding of "the why", the learning is better received. The important point is that we need to put a huge focus on the importance of learning, asking questions, being curious as these will be needed throughout one's career.

2.4 Process of learning

The process of learning is also changing. Many online platforms are building micro learning sites where we may get to a stage that anything can be learned online. Nonetheless, there is real value in school and university education which provides interaction and challenge from others and develops key skills that will continue to be important – influencing, networking, socialising - skills which are being lost somewhat in the age of the smartphone.

We need to embrace the opportunities provided by transition year more effectively as a key year to develop important people skills – collaboration, team working, innovation – and better link this to how they are used in the workplace through partnerships with business.

2.5 Access to Computer/ Technology

Our schools' systems are generally behind business in terms of the technology they have available, and indeed behind the tools at a child's own disposal (their latest phone or tablet). We need to recognise that most children now carry technology in their pockets and expect up to date technology from schools. While this topic may be beyond the scope of the present review, it is an important challenge for our education system.

3. Gender

In our introduction we referred to Ireland's relatively low rate of female participation in the workforce. Extensive research has also confirmed that women are significantly under-represented at more senior levels across sectors and at all levels in particular sectors. These patterns persist in spite of broadly equal (or indeed superior) achievements by girls and young women in education. We believe that this review provides an important opportunity to address certain contributing factors.

Caroline Keeling has told how, when she came first in her Loreto physics exam, a nun asked her had her brother helped her study. Such comments reflected gender stereotypes which still persist some 30 years later. Mindsets change very slowly and unfortunately, we continue to hear anecdotes which indicate that such stereotypes continue in many of today's classrooms and homes. This comment is not intended as a criticism of either teachers or parents. Stereotypes reflect societal attitudes and are built over generation; they take time to dismantle and reshape. It is past time to actively do this.

3.1   Female role models/ events access

We need the role models of today to be integral to girls' schools so that girls can recognise their own potential. Boy effectively have the 'privilege' of predominantly seeing men leading in the workforce (and elsewhere) and very few man as primary caregiver. The impact of gender stereotyping is particularly pronounced in relation to STEM subjects and careers. One academic has commented, for example, that girls are just as good as boys at maths, until they are told that they are not. This means girls need much more of a focus from teachers and others on building role models for them.

There are a number of interesting and innovative initiatives seeking to redress this imbalance, such as iWish now providing exciting exposure to STEM role models for girls in both Cork and Dublin. iWish research showed if a girl had attended more than 3 STEM related events (iWish, BT young scientist etc) her view of the possibilities in this area and likely subject choices were changed – hence making these type of events accessible and more consistently driven across schools would see an impact.

3.2   Unconscious Bias

We are all affected by our unconscious biases. Sadly, if you type CEO into Google and go to the images, you will predominantly see the faces of men. We still have predominant numbers of male CEOS, female nurses, female teachers, male ambulance crew. While some of this results from choice, some is unconsciously driven by the way we have been programmed. For example – a female student says she wants to do something to help people (purpose/societal impact is a big driver for girls in career choice) – they are likely to be advised to do nursing or social science……… they should also be encouraged to be an engineer and solve big Healthcare or Sustainability issues etc.

3.3   Subject choice and purpose

As mentioned earlier, purpose is seen as particularly important to girls and young women and can be a powerful contributor to subject and career choice. To increase the uptake of STEM subjects by girls, we need to illustrate the significant contribution that STEM can make to society and to progress, to create this sense of purpose.

Research shows that when Engineering changes to 'Sustainable Engineering' or 'Medical Devices Engineering' you will get more girls interested – hence how education institutes and career guidance counsellors market and structure courses is really important to get more diversity into choices girls take for third level. For example, Trinity saw a much higher female uptake when they had Computer Science coupled with a language as opposed to pure Computer Science, so marketing definitely has a role to play.

Organisation/logistics re subject choice can also be a challenge: in girls' schools often, Physics may not be on the curriculum because of the small number of students who want to take it, leading no students to take it and ever-declining demand perhaps. Schools need to think how they can offer wider subject choices using partnerships with other schools, online resources or other means to give girls as wide a choice as possible.

We would like to ensure that girls' schools and girls in mixed gender schools are given exactly the same opportunities in areas such as access to computer societies and computer rooms. It appears that these are seen as being more the remit of boys which means girls miss out on the opportunity at an early stage. We can see the power of *Coderdojo* and the huge female uptake in this when properly supported - girls do code, do like computers and need more from their schools.

4. Overall structure of Career guidance

Having regard to the issues outlined above, we believe that that the impact of career guidance on subject and career choice could be significantly enhanced for all students and, in particular, for girls by re-designing the approach to guidance. We recognise that resource constraints in this area have severely impacted on the development of the service currently available in schools. In spite of the dedication of teachers and guidance professionals, the appetite of parents for more effective information provision and the needs of students, our current service level and structures do not meet the needs of students, parents or our modern and rapidly evolving economy and society.

4.1   Regional Service

We suggest that today's challenges are difficult to meet purely on a 'school by school' basis. We also believe that more effective engagement between enterprise and indeed the public sector and our education system could enhance students' educational experience, choices and outcomes. These issues particularly affect schools serving less advantaged communities. For these reasons, we believe that this review is timely and offers an opportunity for a significant revision of our approach to guidance.

We envisage a career guidance service re-imagined as a service to schools (importantly focused not only on students but also informing teachers and parents) rather than a service in each school. This could function on a regional basis, perhaps using the ETB structure - with a service provided to a number of schools by 'multidisciplinary' and 'multi-experienced' teams - including teachers and others with different career backgrounds, ideally to provide a team in any area with a range of perspectives covering for example careers in education (obviously available through teachers), other public service areas including health, administration etc, technology, financial services, etc. This regional approach would facilitate a broader-based service meeting more varied needs and would deepen engagement with enterprise, public sector and community.

4.2   Engagement

The guidance service could be co-ordinated by teachers who best understand students and how schools and curricula work, but with effective input from other professionals who have in-depth knowledge and experience of varied career options. This structure could also provide better and more systematic opportunities for engagement with enterprise, with Further Education & Training and Higher Education Sectors and with external events.

There has been some mistrust between business and education, with educators thinking that business is only looking at ideas that will work for them in the short term and business leaders not always understanding the educational imperatives and objectives. We need ways to break down those barriers – more systematic and effective collaboration in the guidance area could provide an important bridge.

Accenture and DCU have run created and run a STEM internship programme for teachers – while its aimed at STEM teachers rather than career guidance – it is a good example of where access and experience and updated information is given to teaching staff on what is going on in industry, this could be a program idea for the career guidance sector.

4.3   Oversight

This structure should be supported on a national basis with oversight and input from an advisory council representing teachers, parents, students, enterprise and public sector as well as the Further Education & Training and Higher Education Sectors.

Overall, we suggest this would offer a more integrated and systemic approach to getting information to those making the decisions and to those who influence choices.

5.   Suggested Actions

The starting point is accepting that we are severely under-resourced in this area and that less than ideal choices sometimes being made by students could be ameliorated by much more positive intervention at an early stage. This would result in better outcomes for the student and more effective use of the resources invested in education to the advantage of all.

Clearly we need to educate and empower students, parents, teachers and career guidance teachers much more on a number of topics:
- The jobs and workplace of the future
- Unconscious bias - to see how girls schools run vs boys schools and whether this is leading to challenges at CAO time
- The focus on lifelong learning
- How they access business and partnership resources to help them
- How they can work with the primary caregivers, parents predominantly, to ensure they can also support students in making decisions which are critical to their futures

6.   Adult guidance

The main emphasis in this submission is on guidance services for schools and students. We recognise the important role of guidance for adults as they transition through their working lives. While we don't propose to analyse this in detail due to resource and time constraints, we believe that the overall approach proposed above could be mirrored in relation to adult guidance.

From a gender perspective, there are opportunities to release talent and experience through initiatives related to women who have left the workforce. We welcome the inclusion of 'returners' in the Government funded Springboard+ Programme and have collaborated with one university on a programme specifically aimed at returners. We are also aware of a number of our business supporters who are actively engaged in this area.

Approaching both 'returners' and others considering or in need of career change in a manner similar to that outlined above for schools would, we believe, result in better outcomes than providing services which can be somewhat detached from the changing needs of today's and future workplace.

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The 30% Club Ireland
https://30percentclub.org/about/chapters/ireland