



## Yvonne Harris

### Head of Customer Operations and Connection Developer Services

Yvonne Harris was just 18 and fresh out of school when she joined Dublin Gas in 1983, following the footsteps of her father and grandfather.

Since then, the organisation has undergone fundamental change, transitioning from Dublin Gas to Bord Gais and later to Eir, parent company of Irish Water, Gas Networks Ireland and Aurora Telecom. Yvonne's own career has also seen remarkable transition, from that first clerical job, via IT and business services, to her current role as Head of Customer Operations and Connection Developer Services and now an Executive Director of Irish Water.

One constant throughout that career journey has been Yvonne's commitment to continuous learning. Starting out with a City & Guilds Certificate in Computer Programming, she has, over the years, gained qualifications in Finance, Business Management, Project Management, IT Service Management, Organisational Development and Transformation, as well as a Master's in Business Practice in 2018. And she is still learning, having recently started the Institute of Directors' *Chartered Director Training Programme*.

*"I love learning and I have had lots of opportunities, supported by the company, to broaden my knowledge and skillset. Change is constant and continuously developing yourself gives you the tools to stay on top of new ways of thinking and positions you to contribute more to your organisation"* she says.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, Yvonne advises young women looking to emulate her success to celebrate their strengths, while also recognising and addressing any weaknesses they may have.

*“It’s really important that we acknowledge what we do well, celebrate it and do more of it, but also to understand areas for improvement. In order to really understand how effective we are as individuals, and how we are perceived by others, we need to have honest and open conversations with our managers, mentors and trusted individuals who will give us honest feedback. Without this feedback loop we may continue on a certain path or continuously display a behaviour that could limit our opportunities,” she says.*

She also advises young women to “*network, network, network*”. And while admitting that she is not a natural networker herself, it is a skill that can be learned and developed. “*Reach out to people as you travel throughout your career, education and social journeys, link-in and stay in touch. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, seek advice or simply just learn about another area of business. Networking is a two-way street and the individual you reach out to will welcome a new contact. A broad network of contacts will provide you with a valuable resource pool as your career progresses.*”

Irish Water is committed to gender equality, with 40% of the senior management team being female. In order to encourage more women to progress within the organisation, Irish Water, and its parent company Ervia, launched its Diversity and Inclusion Programme in 2019. The program has moved at pace since then and now includes a number of support groups, including the iBelong Women’s Network.

*“Through the network we host regular discussions with women leaders and give all employees an opportunity to ask questions and discuss what worked well, and not so well, in the careers of our guest speakers. We are also implementing a number of initiatives to support women who would like to progress to management and senior management positions. This is a very exciting time to work in Irish Water for women at all stages of their lives and careers.”*

Yvonne herself has been spending lockdown at home in Terenure with her husband Gerry and their two children – Lisa, 26, and Ben, 21. They are all keeping busy looking after their recently acquired puppy - a cockapoo named Marlo. She is looking forward to the end of lockdown so she can get back to playing golf, a sport she has become addicted to having just taken it up three years ago. “*It’s great for mindfulness. You forget all your worries as you concentrate all your efforts on the game. I’m a member of Stackstown Golf Club, which is located at the foot of the Dublin mountains, with fantastic views of the city. I thoroughly enjoy the escapism and am looking forward to getting back there,*” she says.

And what will Yvonne be doing to celebrate International Women’s Day?

*“Usually we would have a celebratory coffee morning in Customer Operations. We have a really great team and all of our colleagues would celebrate over a coffee and a cupcake. This year it will be a remote celebration, we will look back at 2020 and hope that 2021 will be a better year for us all.”*