



**Victorian Equal Opportunity
& Human Rights Commission**

Report: Pay Equality 2026

**An evaluation of the Pay
Equality Toolkit and next
steps for improving pay
equality in small businesses
in Victoria.**

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Disclaimer: This information is provided as a summary of findings derived through research, with the sole purpose of providing educative recommendations for future improvements. It is intended for informational use only and does not constitute legal advice.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways upon which our lives depend.

Our office is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung People of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge and pay our respects to Ancestors of this Country, Elders past and present, and all First Peoples.

We recognise that First Peoples are disproportionately affected by prejudice and hate. We acknowledge the ongoing harms that colonisation causes to First Peoples communities, including entrenched and systemic racism.

We honour the tireless efforts of generations of First Peoples who have stood against racism and advanced the values of freedom, fairness and equality. It is through the continuing efforts of First Peoples leaders and communities that language, lore, custom and culture continue and flourish.

We commit to working with First Peoples to try to prevent historical injustices from continuing, including through Treaty and truth-telling.



Introduction

Equal pay for work of equal or comparable value is a basic human right. Regardless of where we work – or our sex, gender, race, age, disability or care-giving status – we are all entitled to be paid and treated fairly at work.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) protects and promotes human rights under Victoria's laws. The Commission works to prevent unlawful behaviour through advocacy, law reform, dispute resolution, and educational services.

The Commission also assists duty holders in meeting their responsibility to actively eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation as part of the positive duty under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*.^a

Equal pay for work of equal or comparable value is a basic human right. As Victoria's premier human rights agency, the Commission is committed to promoting and protecting the right to pay equality for all Victorians.

^a "Positive Duty," *Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission* <<https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-organisations/positive-duty/>>.

The Commission's work to promote pay equality in Victoria



Research

In 2021, the Commission was engaged by Industrial Relations Victoria (IRV) and the Equal Workplaces Advisory Council (EWAC) to conduct research into barriers to gender pay equality in small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Victoria, and how the sector can achieve equal pay.

The Equal pay matters: Achieving gender pay equality in small-to-medium enterprises report^b focused on three objectives:

1. Improving understanding of gender pay (in)equality in small and medium organisations (2-50 employees)
2. Understanding the characteristics of small and medium organisations and the drivers of unequal pay in small and medium organisations, including how the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has affected equal pay in such organisations
3. Understanding what factors are likely to motivate small and medium organisations to achieve equal pay and inform the development of tailored educational resources and other measures to advance equal pay.

The Commission's research found that roughly two in three employed Victorians work in small or medium organisations. As such, the findings and recommendations in this report address the day-to-day reality, financial security, dignity and future of millions of Victorians, particularly women.^c

The findings and recommendations highlighted the need for tailored education and targeted strategies that respond to the unique characteristics and needs of SMEs.

^b [Read our Equal Pay matters report.](#)

^c In this report, references to "women" are intended to include all people who identify as a woman. The evaluation did not distinguish between different experiences or identities within this group. The Commission encourages future work on pay equality to consider the experiences of trans and gender-diverse people, which was not included within the scope of this evaluation.

Educational materials

One year after the release of the *Equal Pay Matters* report, the Commission delivered Recommendations 1-3 which resulted in web-based education resources.

These include:

- A three-part series of Equal pay matters videos with interactive activities that explored equal pay concepts, principles and requirements and also the value and benefits of equal pay.
- Online learning modules providing the opportunity for deeper understanding and knowledge development through a variety of learning formats.

In partnership with IRV and EWAC, the Commission created educational materials that were codesigned with SME's and industry experts to support SMEs to develop, adopt and drive leading practice around gender pay equality in a way that builds confidence levels, encourages curiosity and embeds life-long learning strategies.



- Commission encourages future work on pay equality to consider the experiences of trans and gender-diverse people, which was not included within the scope of this evaluation.

Practical guidance

In 2024, the Commission was again engaged by IRV and supported by EWAC to develop the Pay Equality Toolkit (the Toolkit), a suite of resources to support Victorian SMEs to achieve equal pay. This toolkit met recommendation 5 of the *Equal Pay Matters* report.

Recommendation 5

The Victorian Government should resource an appropriate education provider to develop tailored action-oriented resources to support SMEs to achieve equal pay in practice, including:

- a capability matrix that SMEs can use to develop position descriptions
- a simple tool to guide gender pay audits in SMEs
- a model policy on gender pay equality in SMEs and guidance on how to increase visibility and engagement with this policy and related procedures
- a step-by-step guide to conducting gender neutral job evaluations in SMEs
- a step-by-step guide on how to set up a complaints procedure regarding unequal pay
- a step-by-step guide on how to complete action plans to advance equal pay
- a guide on how to ensure equitable access to professional development
- a simple monitoring and evaluation template that supports SMEs to continuously strive to achieve equal pay across a scale of beginner, intermediate and advanced level progress and includes provision for workers to provide feedback.

The Pay equality toolkit aims to help SMEs to take practical steps towards meeting their legal obligations under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*. It provides advice on equal pay practices and templates for preventative measures, including:

Understanding pay equality

Education resources

The Pay Equality Compass

Conducting an equal pay audit

Policies, procedures and action plans

Creating an equal pay policy

Developing a complaints procedure

Creating an equal pay action plan


Capability and performance

Creating a capability matrix


Ensure equitable access to professional development

Conduct gender-neutral job evaluations

Access the Pay Equality Toolkit



Get started with the **Pay Equality Compass** – in under 15 mins it'll help you identify equal pay priorities for your organisation, track your progress and point you towards other useful tools to help you achieve equal pay.



Evaluation

In 2025, the Commission was engaged by IRV to undertake an evaluation of the Pay Equality Toolkit. The evaluation was designed to assess the use and perceived effectiveness of the Toolkit since its release, and to identify what further supports may be needed to strengthen its uptake among small businesses in Victoria.

It examined whether the Toolkit is supporting employers to identify and address gender pay inequality in their workplaces, and the extent to which it has influenced business practices, awareness, and capability. This work was undertaken as an action-research evaluation.

This report on Pay Equality 2026 describes the outcomes of the evaluation and practical insights to inform future improvements to pay equality in Victorian small businesses.



Executive summary



This evaluation examined how the Pay Equality Toolkit is being used by small businesses in Victoria and what is needed to strengthen its impact over time. The findings highlight that the effectiveness of the Toolkit depends not only on its content, but also on the perception of equal pay and its value in the day to day running of a small business.

The importance of promoting pay equality to small business through various support systems that they engage in was a key finding of this evaluation. The lack of engagement in the pay equality roadshows is a clear indication that pay equality is not viewed as a priority issue for small business in this current climate. This was supported in the survey responses and comments on social media during the awareness campaign.

Continuing to work with local councils, Chambers of Commerce and industry bodies to create a co-ordinated promotional approach would benefit those small businesses who have not considered pay equality to be an issue.

SMEs engaging in equal pay

This evaluation found that small businesses that value pay equality engage at different levels of awareness, capability, and depth of implementation.

1. Businesses starting their pay equality journey benefit from clear entry points, accessible guidance, sustained promotion, and, where appropriate, compliance-based mechanisms such as procurement requirements to encourage engagement. Tools that support employees to understand and advocate for fair pay can further strengthen awareness and action.
2. Businesses that have used the Toolkit are looking for motivation to continue to translate their work into practical steps towards achieving equal pay. Peer learning, case studies, and opportunities to see how other organisations implement change are critical to maintaining momentum and embedding pay equality practices.
3. More mature organisations are focused on embedding and extending their practice, including broadening pay equality from remuneration to workforce equality issues such as contract security, intersectional equality, and paid parental leave, supported by benchmarking, recognition, and ongoing accountability mechanisms.

This evaluation found SMEs who are using the toolkit find it easy to use and relevant, with the Pay Equality Compass being the most useful tool, particularly for SMEs who are beginning their pay equality journey. Functionality of the Toolkit could be improved by removing the need to login to the Pay Equality Compass and including case studies and time-based reminders to encourage revisiting pay equality regularly as standard business practice.

Ensuring that small businesses can engage effectively with pay equality is a matter of upholding human rights in Victoria's workplaces. The findings of this evaluation highlight the importance of supporting businesses at each stage of their journey, from initial awareness to embedding and extending practice, and acknowledge that these stages can vary depending on external business pressures.

By working together to strengthen promotion, ongoing support and extended practice, funders and policymakers in pay equality can play a pivotal role in enabling small businesses to meet their obligations and contribute to a fairer, more inclusive Victoria.



Methodology



Scope

This evaluation was undertaken shortly after the release of the Pay Equality Toolkit. As a result, the scope of the evaluation focused on understanding early use and awareness of the Toolkit, rather than long-term outcomes. In particular, it did not seek to assess whether the Toolkit has led to a reduction in the gender pay gap across Victoria. Given the timing and the level of promotion to date, it was considered premature to assess whether the Toolkit has contributed to measurable changes in pay outcomes. Instead, the evaluation examined how the Toolkit is being used in practice, and the extent to which it is supporting businesses to engage with pay equality.

The original scope of the project included a series of regional roadshows to promote and test the Toolkit with small businesses.

The roadshow component was not able to be delivered due to challenges in securing host organisations and limited capacity among stakeholders to support delivery. As a result, opportunities for in-person engagement with small businesses were more limited than initially planned.

The evaluation also sought to engage a broad range of industry stakeholders through interviews. While some stakeholders participated, engagement across the sector was more limited than anticipated despite multiple attempts. This reflects the broader challenge of reaching and engaging small businesses and representative organisations on work to promote pay equality.

To complement the qualitative data collected through interviews and surveys, the Commission engaged an external agency to undertake a comparative analysis of the Toolkit. This analysis provided an independent assessment of the Toolkit against similar resources for small businesses in Victoria and internationally, including benchmarking of its quality, scope, and relevance. In the absence of the regional roadshows, this approach provided an alternative mechanism for testing the Toolkit's design and positioning against comparable offerings. Incorporating this external perspective strengthened the evaluation's rigour and overall evidence base, while identifying opportunities for future development.

Data collection

The Commission used a mixed-methods approach to collect evidence for the evaluation. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with members of the original reference group involved in the development of the Pay Equality Toolkit, as well as key industry stakeholders. These interviews provided insight into the development of the Toolkit, how it has been promoted, and perceptions of its relevance and usefulness for small businesses.

Quantitative data was also collected through a survey of small businesses. The survey was designed to gather information about awareness and use of the Toolkit, the experiences of businesses that have engaged with it, and perceived barriers to uptake.

The Commission also commissioned an external agency to conduct a comparator analysis of the Toolkit. This analysis examined the Toolkit against similar tools designed to support small businesses, both within Victoria and internationally. The comparator analysis included benchmarking to assess the quality, scope and relevance of the Toolkit relative to comparable resources.



Survey

To gather quantitative data for the evaluation, the Commission developed an online survey for Victorian small businesses. The survey included 29 closed-response and open-ended questions and was open from 6 March 2026 to 20 March 2026.

The survey was administered internally by the Commission using an online survey platform. Participants accessed the survey through a general link that could be completed on any internet-enabled device with a web browser, including computers, tablets and smartphones.

Participation in the survey was voluntary. Respondents were not asked to provide their names or identifying contact details, and responses were collected anonymously. Survey data was analysed in aggregated and de-identified form to protect the privacy of participants.

As there is no single directory of small businesses in Victoria, the survey was not distributed directly to individual small businesses. Instead, the Commission disseminated the survey through multiple channels to reach the target audience. The survey was promoted through the Commission's social media channels and shared with key project stakeholders for distribution through their email newsletters and other owned communication channels. This approach aimed to maximise the reach of the survey among small businesses across Victoria.

The survey asked respondents about their awareness and use of the Pay Equality Toolkit, how the Toolkit had been used within their business, and whether it had supported them to identify or address gender pay inequality. It also explored broader barriers to using the Toolkit and areas where respondents believed further support or improvements may be needed.

The survey collected a small amount of demographic and organisational information to help contextualise responses. This included the size of the respondent's business, as well as personal demographic information such as gender, role within the organisation, and age.

A copy of the survey questions is provided at [Appendix A](#).

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative data collection component of the evaluation. Interviews were conducted online by two members of the Commission's evaluation team.

The interviews were semi-structured and followed a set of questions developed by the Commission, while also allowing flexibility for participants to discuss issues or perspectives relevant to the evaluation.

Information shared during interviews was confidential. The Commission analysed the information provided to identify themes and issues that are discussed in this report. No identifying information about participants has been published or shared outside of the Commission's evaluation team.

Members of the original reference group who contributed to the development of the Toolkit were invited to participate in interviews. These interviews were intended to capture reflections on the usability and impact of the Toolkit. In total, the Commission conducted five interviews with reference group members.

The Commission also conducted interviews with key stakeholder organisations, including industry bodies, chambers of commerce and representatives of small businesses. These interviews provided insight into how the Toolkit has been promoted and used within the small business sector, as well as stakeholder views on its relevance and effectiveness. In total, the Commission conducted three stakeholder interviews.



Comparator review

As part of the evaluation, the Commission engaged an independent comparator review of the Pay Equality Toolkit. This work was undertaken by an external evaluator with expertise in education program reviews.

The purpose of the external evaluation was to assess the Toolkit against comparable resources designed to support small businesses, and to provide an external perspective on the Toolkit's quality, relevance and positioning within the broader landscape of similar tools.

The external evaluator conducted a structured desktop review of the Toolkit and a selection of comparable resources. The analysis focused on toolkits targeting small businesses with similar subject matter, audience or format. In total, five comparator tools were examined. These included:

- Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) Small Business Hub
- Ontario's Pay Equity Solution for Small Business
- Queensland's Safety Fundamentals Toolkit
- Scotland's Think Business, Think Equality Tool
- The UK's Equal Pay Review for Smaller Organisations

The review considered factors such as the scope and structure of the tools, their accessibility and usability, and the extent to which they appear designed to support practical action by businesses.

The comparator analysis was based on publicly available information about the Pay Equality Toolkit and the comparator resources. The external evaluator applied a structured assessment framework and developed a comparative matrix to benchmark the Toolkit against the five selected tools.

The findings of the comparator analysis provide an external assessment to complement and balance the Commission's own research undertaken as part of this evaluation.

Analysis

The Commission used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse the data collected through the evaluation.

These methods enabled the Commission to develop an evidence-based assessment of the Toolkit's awareness, use and perceived effectiveness among small businesses and stakeholders.

The analysis also explored factors that may support or limit engagement with the Toolkit.

Interviews and survey analysis

The Commission applied both deductive and inductive content analysis to the interview and survey data. Deductive analysis involved examining the data against key evaluation questions and themes identified in advance, including awareness of the Toolkit, experiences of using it, and perceived barriers to uptake.

Inductive analysis was also used to identify additional themes emerging from participants' responses. This approach allowed the Commission to capture new insights and perspectives that were not anticipated at the outset of the evaluation.

Survey responses were analysed in aggregated form to identify patterns and trends across respondents. Open-text responses from the survey were analysed alongside interview data to identify common themes and issues raised by participants.

Limitations

This evaluation collected information from multiple sources and was designed to incorporate both individual perspectives and a balanced external review. However, there are some limitations to the findings. The survey relied on voluntary participation and was disseminated through social media channels and key stakeholder networks. As a result, not all small businesses in Victoria had the opportunity to participate, and responses may over-represent organisations with greater awareness of the Toolkit. The Commission cannot determine the characteristics of businesses that did not participate, so there is potential for non-response bias.

Similarly, interviews were conducted with members of the original reference group and selected key stakeholders, but it was not possible to speak in depth with all individuals who may have had relevant insights. Despite multiple attempts to engage industry bodies, small business councils, and other key actors, uptake was limited. While the Commission made every effort to include a diverse mix of perspectives, some voices and experiences may not have been captured.

Many of the themes and findings in this report echo the Commission's original research, reflecting the enduring barriers and enablers that shape small business engagement with pay equality in Victoria. This demonstrates that the original research remains highly relevant and reinforces the Commission's role in understanding and promoting pay equality as a fundamental aspect of human rights in the state of Victoria. Complementing this prior research, the evaluation provides new insights into early Toolkit use, sector perspectives, and practical mechanisms to support businesses in progressing their pay equality journey.

These limitations do not prevent the evaluation from providing meaningful insights on awareness, use, and perceived effectiveness of the Toolkit, but they should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Findings

One of the key findings from this evaluation is that pay equality is still not seen as an issue for many businesses.



Awareness campaign

As part of the evaluation project, the Commission developed and delivered a targeted awareness campaign to promote the Pay Equality Toolkit. The campaign was designed to increase visibility of the Toolkit among small businesses and to encourage engagement with the Toolkit more broadly. The Commission developed roadshows to run in regional Victoria following the successful engagement from regional Victoria in the development of the Toolkit in 2023. This was accompanied by a social media campaign that coincided with key days around pay equality such as Equal Pay Day in August 2025 and International Equal Pay Day in September 2025.

The Commission planned to run 8 roadshows but was only able to secure 4 – in the Shepparton, Bendigo, Wodonga and Colac regions. However, all 4 were cancelled due to lack of registrations.

In response to the lack of engagement with the roadshows, an intensive paid social media campaign to coincide with International Women’s Day 2026 was conducted by the Commission. This date was selected to leverage its high-profile timing to maximise reach and engagement. It was delivered through the Commission’s primary social media channels: LinkedIn and Meta (Facebook and Instagram). Content was aimed at highlighting the Toolkit’s practical value for businesses seeking to address gender pay inequality. This campaign received 5,906 website conversions from 1,182,914 views.

Analysis of public social sentiment from the comments on social media indicates persistent misunderstanding about the meaning and relevance of pay equality. Online commentary suggests that some members of the public perceive pay equality as an issue that has already been resolved or deny the existence of pay inequality altogether.

Comments on the campaign were hidden; however, the commentary that did occur tended to express strongly negative views toward pay equality work, including claims that pay inequality is a myth, that it is already illegal, that no gender pay gap exists, or that women are paid more than men. These views indicate ongoing misconceptions within parts of the public audience about pay equality and the nature of gender pay disparities.

Businesses that value pay equality

Findings from this evaluation indicate that businesses engage with pay equality at different stages of maturity. Survey data, stakeholder interviews, and social media analysis point to variation in awareness, capability, and depth of implementation across the small business sector.

Across all data sources, a consistent theme emerged: while the Pay Equality Toolkit currently supports initial engagement, it requires continued use from businesses to meet their pay equality obligations.

It would be good to have a way of being reminded to go back to equal pay, so we don't forget the tools that are there. There should be some benefit it – maybe something from Small Business Victoria calling out those of us who take equal pay seriously.

– Interview participant

For businesses who are using the Toolkit, further engagement is needed after completing the tools to support implementation and sustain progress over time. This could take the form of reminders in the Pay Equality Compass, encouragement from industry bodies or support from small business support organisations.

As a result, a single intervention is unlikely to meet the needs of all organisations. Instead, a staged approach is required, where different supports and levers are applied depending on where a business is in its pay equality journey.

External evaluation of the Toolkit

The external evaluator found that the Pay Equality Toolkit provides a clear and accessible foundation for supporting small businesses to engage with pay equality, particularly at early stages of awareness and capability building. Its practical focus and alignment with small business contexts support ease of engagement.

A key strength identified was the Toolkit's explicit intersectional approach, which recognises that experiences of pay inequality can differ across intersecting identities, a focus that was less evident in comparator toolkits.

The VEOHRC Pay Equality Toolkit takes an intersectional approach, recognising that experiences of pay inequality can differ based on age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and caregiving status. This recognition of intersecting identities was not reflected as strongly in comparator toolkits, which tended to focus on gender alone and did not encourage employers to explore overlapping forms of identity.

– External evaluator

The evaluation findings also indicate that the Toolkit is most effective as an entry point, and that additional support is required to assist businesses to sustain their continued use of the tools. While it supports initial engagement and prioritisation, it does not require businesses to return to pay equality and would benefit from features that are designed to support sustained engagement over time.

The external evaluator identified opportunities to build on the Toolkit's existing strengths by extending support as businesses move through different stages of maturity. This includes strengthening examples of practical application and more clearly articulating the benefits of action to support ongoing engagement.

Strengths:

Intersectional approach

Clear entry point and assessment mechanism guides users through self-assessment, prioritisation and action planning via the Pay Equality Compass.

Action-oriented design produces practical outputs, including editable plans and templates that support implementation.

Modular structure supports flexible, needs-based engagement, allowing small businesses to access relevant tools as issues arise.

Content is framed within small business operating contexts, including routine management systems, legal compliance requirements, and an explicit intersectional understanding of pay inequality.

Limitations:

Upfront expectations about time, effort and outputs could be communicated more clearly, and access to the Pay Equality Compass involves an additional login step.

The value proposition for small business is not always made explicit, with compliance and ethical considerations more prominent than commercial or productivity benefits.

Use of peer examples and small business case studies is limited, reducing opportunities for social proof.

Encouragement of ongoing engagement could be improved through clearer use-case entry points to support rapid access in moments of need.

Business that are building foundational knowledge and capability

At this stage, the Toolkit plays an important role as an entry point. It enables businesses to assess their current position, including pay practices, systems, and recruitment processes, and provides practical guidance to support initial engagement.

However, findings indicate that access to the Toolkit alone is not sufficient to drive engagement at scale. Continued effort is required to ensure that businesses can easily find, access, and begin using the Toolkit.

Survey findings indicate that a proportion of small businesses have limited awareness of pay equality concepts and available tools. This was reinforced in interviews, where stakeholders consistently noted that many businesses perceive pay equality irrelevant to their business or as complex and resource intensive.

We have not used the Pay Equality Toolkit because our business already pays employees according to the relevant award rates and workplace laws, which require equal pay regardless of gender. We are not aware of any pay inequality issues within any workplace.

– Survey participant

This was also reflected in the Commission's social media awareness campaign for the Toolkit, where comments from the general public suggested that pay inequality is either not widely understood or not seen as a current issue.

Compliance-based mechanisms, such as procurement requirements linked to government contracts, may act as a strong initial driver for engagement. These mechanisms can create a clear incentive for businesses to engage with the Toolkit, particularly where awareness or prioritisation of pay equality is low. To be effective, compliance measures should be supported by accessible guidance and education to enable meaningful participation.

At the time of its launch, the Toolkit was promoted within the small business sector through localised engagement, but this was not sustained. Without ongoing awareness and co-ordinated education, there is a risk that businesses will not engage with pay equality at all or will deprioritise it in favour of more immediate operational concerns. Ongoing promotion and clear entry points are therefore critical to reinforcing both the relevance and necessity of pay equality work.

Survey and interview data collected show that the Pay Equality Compass, Equal Pay Policy and Capability Matrix tools have been the tools most used by businesses at this stage. This indicates a desire to address pay equality and the recruitment stage being a key initial engagement.

Findings also suggest there is a role for complementary tools that support individual employees to engage with pay equality in their workplaces. This may include accessible resources that employees can use to initiate conversations with employers, including those that can be shared or promoted through unions and representative bodies. Such tools can help to build awareness and create additional pathways into the Toolkit, particularly where businesses are not yet actively engaged.

It's a perfect service, you just have to get people to shop for it.

– Interview participant

Supporting continued application

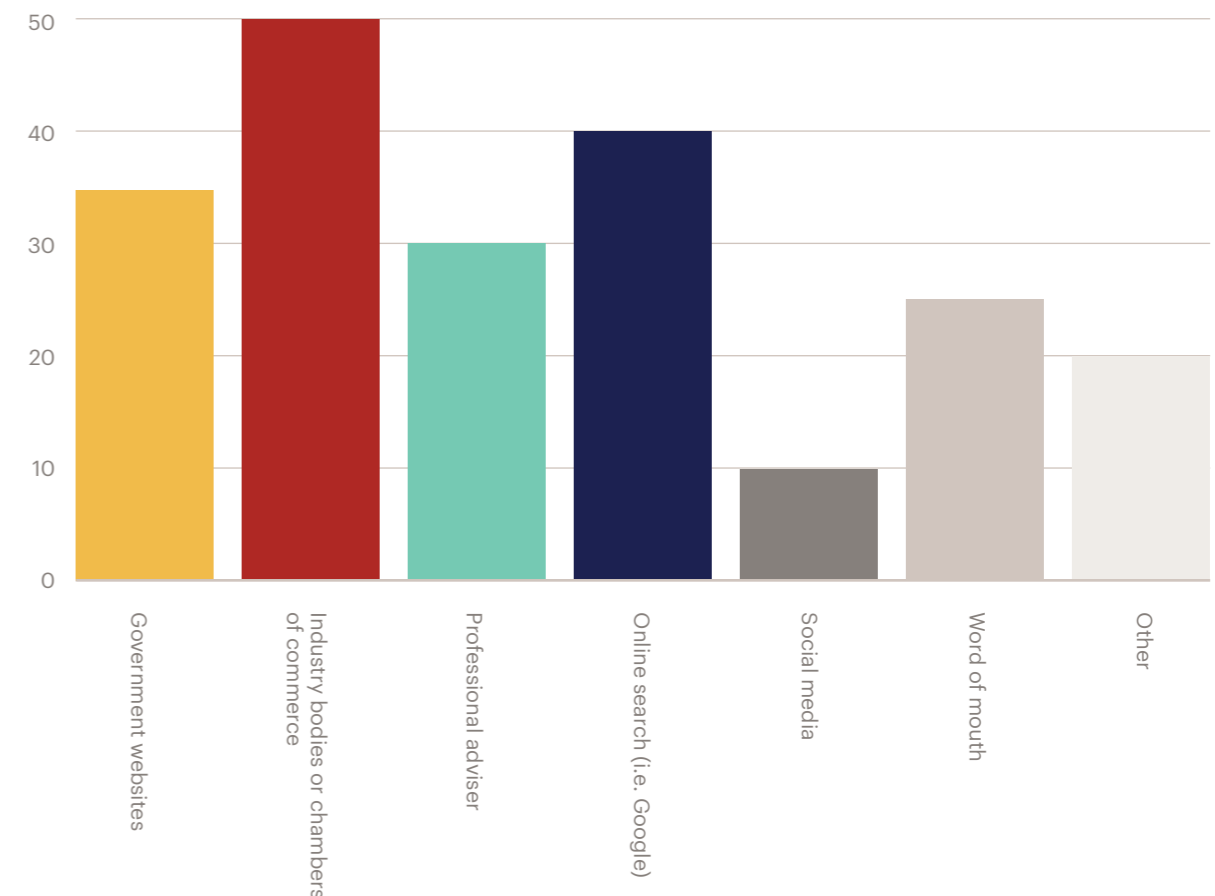
Evaluation findings suggest that some businesses are aware of the Toolkit and have engaged with its tools but are less confident in how to apply the outputs in practice or unclear about the next steps in their pay equality journey. Stakeholder feedback consistently points to a gap between initial use and sustained implementation.

Used the toolkit to ensure that we were already meeting our obligations.

– Survey participant

These businesses demonstrate both awareness and intent but are often left asking what to do next after the initial use of the Toolkit. Without practical guidance from industry bodies, regulators, or other peak organisations, engagement can stall at the assessment stage rather than progressing to meaningful and lasting change.

Survey participants were asked where they found information on business tools. The significant majority of respondents identifies industry bodies and chambers of commerce as their primary source of information on business tools, closely followed by google searches and government websites.



Interviews and findings from the external evaluation highlighted a need for more contextual support. This includes examples of how other organisations like their own have interpreted Toolkit results, implemented changes, and embedded pay equality into their day-to-day operations. Peer-based learning, including case studies and communities of practice, was consistently identified as a mechanism for maintaining momentum.

Opportunities for improvement... including case studies that can support users to navigate the toolkit, communicate the rationale to act, or draw attention to common challenges in the SME context.

– External evaluator

Industry bodies can play a key role in providing peer examples and facilitating connections between businesses. When organisations can see how similar businesses have navigated challenges and translated insights into action, they are more likely to continue the journey beyond initial assessment.

These findings highlight the importance of strengthening practical support and creating clear pathways for ongoing engagement. Without these mechanisms, the Toolkit risks functioning as a one-off diagnostic tool rather than a driver of sustained organisational change.

Embedding and advancing practice

A cohort of organisations have progressed beyond initial implementation and are seeking to embed and refine their approach to pay equality. These businesses require more advanced support to sustain and deepen their practice over time. Findings indicate that, at this stage, businesses are less focused on diagnostic tools and more on ongoing monitoring, accountability, and continuous improvement.

This includes integrating pay equality into business systems, regularly reviewing outcomes, and maintaining internal accountability for progress. Comparator analysis suggests that some similar tools offer additional features to support this level of practice, such as benchmarking, more detailed data analysis, and mechanisms for ongoing tracking. These features enable organisations to measure progress over time and situate their performance relative to others.

Businesses at this stage also play an important role within the broader small business ecosystem. Their practices provide a visible standard for others and can influence norms across the small business sector. This role is not currently formalised or consistently leveraged, though recognition and visibility can act as a driver. Adding case studies to the Toolkit could capture these examples of good practice, although it must be noted that in the original toolkit development, when SMEs were asked about the usefulness of case studies, they suggested that no small business would have the time to read case studies. Short videos or communities of practice might be more accessible for SMEs.

Findings indicate that, as organisations mature in their approach to pay equality, their focus often broadens beyond pay alone. This includes consideration of related workforce issues such as contract security, access to paid parental leave, and the intersectional dimensions of inequality. At this stage, businesses are not only addressing pay gaps but are beginning to embed more holistic and inclusive employment practices. This progression is an opportunity for growth in the current Toolkit offering.

Acknowledging organisations that have embedded and extended their practice, for example through awards, accreditation, or procurement recognition, can reinforce progress. It can also provide tangible, credible examples for businesses in earlier stages of their journey. This highlights an opportunity to extend the current offering to better support organisations seeking to deepen and broaden their approach, and to more effectively leverage their role in driving broader sector change.

I think if there was a way businesses could be rewarded or acknowledged for using the toolkit or showing that they care about equal pay, you'd get more uptake. Unfortunately, in this financial climate, small businesses are really focused on keeping the lights on.

– Interview participant

Conclusion



The function of the Toolkit would be improved by removing the need to login to the Pay Equality Compass and including time-based reminders and industry-based case studies to encourage revisiting pay equality regularly as standard business practice.

While the Toolkit provides practical guidance, investment to date has been limited in promoting it and supporting sustained awareness. Early-stage businesses need clear entry points, accessible education, visible promotion, and, where appropriate, compliance-based mechanisms such as procurement requirements to begin their pay equality journey. Advocacy tools for individual employees could also support uptake by helping small businesses understand their obligations.

Businesses that have engaged with the Toolkit require support to sustain momentum. Peer-based content such as case studies, communities of practice, and opportunities for industry engagement can help maintain momentum and demonstrate what meaningful change looks like in practice. Organisations refining their practice need more advanced support to deepen and extend their work, including broader workforce measures, benchmarking, and recognition mechanisms.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of a more integrated approach that reflects the varying levels of engagement and readiness among small businesses. Positioning the Toolkit as part of a broader, evolving system of support will help ensure it remains relevant, widely used, and impactful across the sector.



Appendix A: Survey questions

Section 1: Awareness and use

1.1 Before today, were you aware of the Pay Equality Toolkit?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure (please specify)

1.2 If yes, how did you hear about the toolkit?

- Industry body or chamber of commerce
- Government website
- Social media
- Professional adviser or consultant
- Word of mouth
- Other: _____

1.3 Where do you find information on business tools?

- Government websites
- Industry bodies or chambers of commerce
- Professional advisers
- Online search (e.g. Google)
- Social media
- Word of mouth
- Other: _____

1.4 Have you personally used the Pay Equality Toolkit or any of its resources?

- Yes → Go to Section 2
- No → Go to Section 3

Section 2: For people who have used the toolkit

2.1 How have you used the toolkit?

- To understand pay equality obligations
- To analyse or audit pay data
- To design or review workplace policies
- To support organisational decision making
- For training or capacity building
- For advocacy or advice
- Other (please specify): _____

2.2 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The toolkit helped me understand pay equality issues	1	2	3	4	5
The toolkit helped me take practical action	1	2	3	4	5
The toolkit was relevant to my role or organisation	1	2	3	4	5
The toolkit supported better decision making	1	2	3	4	5

2.3 How would you rate the following aspects of the toolkit?

	Very poor	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Clarity of information					
Practicality of tools/templates					
Accessibility and ease of navigation					
Evidence base and credibility					

2.4 As a result of using the toolkit, did any of the following occur? (Select all that apply)

- a. Increased awareness or understanding
- b. Changed advice, policy, or practice
- c. Increased confidence to act on pay equity
- d. Influenced organisational decisions
- e. No noticeable change
- f. Not applicable / too early to tell

2.5 Please describe the changes you have observed since using the toolkit

2.6 What could be improved in the toolkit?

Clearer guidance

More practical examples or case studies

Better templates or tools

Sector-specific guidance

Easier navigation or shorter content

Other: _____

2.6 Your thoughts on what else is needed

Please share any specific suggestions for improvement.

Section 3: for people who haven't used the toolkit

3.1 What are the main reasons you have not used the Pay Equality Toolkit? (Select all that apply)

Not aware of it until now

Did not think it was relevant to my role

Lack of time or capacity

Already use other resources or advice

Difficult to find or access

Not confident it would be practical or useful

Other: _____

3.2. How relevant do you think the toolkit is (or would be) to your role or organisation?

Not at all relevant

Slightly relevant

Moderately relevant

Very relevant

Unsure

3.3 What would make you more likely to use the toolkit in future? (Select all that apply)

Clearer explanation of benefits

Stronger leadership or organisational endorsement

Practical tools/templates

Sector specific examples

Training or walkthroughs

Shorter or more targeted guidance

Other: _____

3.4 If you are unlikely to use the toolkit, what types of support would be more useful? (Select all that apply)

Case studies from similar organisations or industries

Clear policy or compliance guidance

Training workshops or short webinars

Short checklists or quick-reference guides

Ready-to-use templates or calculators

Access to an external, affordable reviewer or adviser to assess pay equity

A simple online tool to check or benchmark pay equity

A quick, free online survey or self-assessment to identify issues

A mobile-friendly tool or resources that available on a mobile phone app

One-on-one advice or support (for example, helpline or office hours)

Other: _____

3.5 Open feedback

Is there anything else you would like to share about what would help you address pay equity in your work?

Section 4: About you

4.1 Which of the following best describes your role?

Business owner / director

Manager or team leader

HR / people and culture

Payroll / finance

Consultant / adviser

Other [*Please specify*]

Prefer not to say

4.2 What is the size of your organisation?

Fewer than 5 employees

5–19

20–49

50+

Prefer not to say

4.3 What is your gender? (Optional)

Woman

Man

Self-described [*Please specify*]

Prefer not to say

4.4 What age group are you in? (Optional)

18–29

30–39

40–49

50–64

65+

Prefer not to say



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