



## **Education and Culture Committee**

### **Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future**

#### **Engender**

**March 2014**

#### **Introduction**

Engender welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for written evidence on Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future. Women's economic inequality is a key pillar of our work, and within this we advocate for policy change to tackle gender inequality in the labour market, barriers to women's equal participation in public life and women's disproportionate reliance on social security. As such, our response focuses on Theme 2: Early Years, Childcare and Employability.

Engender fully supports Scottish Government proposals to develop a universal system of high quality early learning and childcare for children from the age of one. Universality is a key principle within this, which could indeed help to transform many parents' lives. The potential impacts for marginalised groups of women are far-reaching, in particular for lone mothers.

In terms of gender equality, over time universal childcare provision could also significantly increase the cultural value attached to unpaid care work predominantly undertaken by women in Scottish households and communities. In turn this would help to erode social gender roles that lead to women's economic and social inequality.

However transformational change will only occur through careful design and implementation of a system that is tailored towards meeting the needs of those it aims to support; investment in gender-sensitive economic development of the sector; employability support for unemployed and underemployed women to enter the workforce; coherence with related social policy areas; and macroeconomic treatment of public expenditure on childcare that reflects the true economic value of care.

#### **The benefits to children, families and the wider economy of investing in childcare**

The benefits of investing in childcare are widespread. Families stand to gain from increased income, flexibility, choice and opportunities, with positive impacts on health and wellbeing for women, men and children. In particular, the progressive

value of childcare is especially significant for different groups of women. Lack of accessible, affordable and quality childcare emerges consistently as the most immediate barrier to women's participation in the formal labour market, and to broader forms of participation in public life.

The current lack of adequate childcare options forces many lone mothers and second earners in couple households into low-paid, insecure, part-time underemployment. Many women juggle more than one 'mini job' or jobseeking commitments with childcare responsibilities, which is highly stressful and results in 'time poverty' that significantly compromises wellbeing. Women also tend to be 'poverty managers' and often put health needs of other family members before their own.<sup>1</sup> Women across all socioeconomic brackets experience limited career progression after taking time out of the labour market to care for children, in the absence of high-quality, affordable alternatives. This feeds into gendered occupational segregation and the persistent gender pay gap in Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

For lone mothers in particular, lack of access to childcare often leads to reliance on inadequate social security payments, leading to impoverishment and marginalisation for themselves and their children. In couple households, resources are often not shared equally and women's disadvantaged position in the labour market further undermines their financial autonomy. Where women cannot afford to leave abusive relationships, this puts women and children at risk of harm. Older women are impacted significantly by childcare issues as grandmothers plugging the gaps in provision, in terms of lost earning potential and increased risk of pension poverty. Migrant and refugee women are also particularly disadvantaged as they often lack support and family networks.

Investment in childcare stands to redress some of these issues, if adopted as one dimension of a broader approach to support women into the labour market. Nordic models show that universal access to childcare has a positive impact on gender equality and reconciles issues of family and work significantly, by linking women and children with benefits to the economy.<sup>3</sup> At European level, there has been a shift to childcare policies that are fused with social inclusion, child development and children's human rights. In Scotland and the UK the understanding that investment in childcare benefits the whole of society is yet to be widely shared. Yet the acceptance that schooling should be funded from the age of five, or that we have to choose between university education and childcare is simply normative.

The benefits of state childcare provision to the economy are largely absent from mainstream political debate, as are the economic dimensions of unpaid care that perpetuate gender inequality. Women's care and reproductive work props up the so-called 'real' economy yet it is persistently undervalued, and is not well captured by mainstream economic models. Childcare undertaken by parents is not counted towards GDP and is categorised by mainstream economics as 'leisure'. Childcare

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Budget Group (2005) *Making the links: Women's and Children's Poverty*

<sup>2</sup> On average women in Scotland currently earn 13% less than men on a full-time basis. The pay gap for women working part-time is 32% (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (2013) *Early Childhood Education and Care Provision: International review of policy, delivery and funding* (SG social research series)

provided by paid childcare workers contributes to GDP and is categorised as ‘work’, although it is systematically undervalued by the market, as reflected in the low wages that the profession commands.

Feminist economic modelling has long presented childcare as necessary ‘infrastructure’ that enables and constitutes economic activity in the same way as roads or public transport. Equally, professional childcare is a proven economic stimulus in terms of job creation, community regeneration, and increased opportunities for underemployed women. Over the longer term, the public purse also benefits from investment in childcare, through an increased tax base and relieved pressure on social security. As such, investment in childcare resonates far beyond the current year of spending and should be funded from capital budgets accordingly. To quote Women in Scotland’s Economy Research Centre:

“It is only an outmoded accounting convention that treats the pay of construction workers as investment and the pay of childcare workers as consumption. In economic terms the pay of childcare workers is just as much of an investment as the pay of construction workers, in that one creates physical capital, the other creates human capital.”<sup>4</sup>

The fact that much of women’s work is misread and uncounted has obvious and far-reaching implications for policy formulation, and therefore on women’s lives. Investment in a universal childcare system would be a step on the road to tackle this.

### **The planning, training and investment that would be required to bring about a transformation in childcare provision**

Scotland has some of the highest childcare costs in the UK. At present only 21% of local authorities can provide enough childcare for working parents, and only 10% report adequate capacity where parents work non-traditional hours.<sup>5</sup> Planning, training and investment required to transform existing infrastructure into a universal system of provision would be substantial. Sustained political will, ministerial investment and coherence across related economic and social policymaking would also be critical to ensure that proposals deliver for women, families and wider society.

The childcare proposal outlined in *Scotland’s Future* envisages a universal childcare system at the heart of a ‘social investment’ approach to social policy. As above, this concept is key to unlocking the progressive potential it holds for gender equality agendas. However, such a model must be tailored to meet the needs of those most disadvantaged by the current system. Despite its ambition, the allowance of childcare set out in *Scotland’s Future* is equivalent to the primary school day. Parents of primary school-age children working full-time rely on wraparound care, such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs, and childminders, to enable them to do so. Wraparound childcare for nursery age children would be essential to avoid the

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<sup>4</sup> Women in Scotland’s Economy Research Centre (2013) *The economic case for investing in high-quality childcare and early years education*

<sup>5</sup> Daycare Trust and Children in Scotland (2012) *The Scottish Childcare Lottery*

supporting the existing 1.5 breadwinner model of family working patterns that disadvantages women and children in low-income families.

Investment in economic development of the sector, and in training and employability support for the prospective workforce would need to be subject to rigorous gender analysis in order for potential benefits to be realised. Required gendered approaches would include gender budgeting analysis (GBA), which systematically takes account of ways that public spending decisions impact on women and men; robust equalities impact assessment across all public authorities involved, at both policy and project levels; and gendered data collection to feed into monitoring and evaluation processes.

Professional childcare is a low-paid sector, despite the implications for child development and wellbeing. This reflects the overwhelming extent to which the sector is female-dominated, in large part as a result of market dynamics.<sup>6</sup> Plans to develop an equitable public childcare system should also aim to address this, through adequate remuneration for workers and efforts to incentivise men to pursue careers in childcare. Greater gender balance would resonate widely, bringing the benefits of diversity to the industry and to children, and helping to erode gender stereotyping in Scotland over the longer term.

None of this will be possible without substantial financial and political investment. Regardless of the outcome of the referendum in September, however, Engender advocates that the Education and Culture Committee continues to investigate how progress on childcare provision can be made in Scotland.

**The extent to which youth employment could be boosted by: (a) a constitutional right to the opportunity of education, training or employment; and (b) the bringing together of job matching, employability training and career guidance.**

The current focus of the Scottish Government (SG) on youth employment is welcome and necessary, as a result of the profound impact of austerity policies on young people's labour market participation. However, to deliver on the stated SG priority of 'equity' in the Government Economic Strategy and to avoid reinforcing gender segregation in the labour market, this approach must also target marginalised groups of young people and include robust equality impact assessments. The Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, chaired by Sir Ian Wood, has not taken a gendered approach. It is, at the time of writing, consulting with equalities organisations, including Engender, as a second stage of activity after publishing its recommendations.

We have no detailed comments to make about links between constitutional rights, job matching, employability training, career guidance and youth employment, other than the need to apply gender analysis to any such initiatives, in line with the comments made above.

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<sup>6</sup> In 2013, only 1.3% of 'childcare starts' in Scotland's Modern Apprenticeship programme were male.

**For further information please contact Jill Wood, Policy Manager, Engender**  
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### **About us**

Engender is a membership organisation working on feminist agendas in Scotland and Europe, to increase women's power and influence and to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. We provide support to individuals, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve gender equality and justice.