

SUBMISSION FROM ALLISON JOHNSTONE

I understand from the Scottish Parliament website that you will be shortly looking into the topic of "Women and Work". I wanted to therefore submit written evidence to highlight the current lack of quality part time jobs in Scotland and how this impact women's engagement in the labour market.

As someone who has worked part-time, since the birth of my son in 2004, I am acutely aware of the limitations this decision has placed upon me, in terms of engagement with the world of work. And it is a story I have heard many times over when speaking to other women.

I am aware that I am only one individual, and so to provide wider evidence on this issue I enclose a link to the recent UK Government Equalities Office (GEO) commissioned review of evidence on this area: <http://sta.geo.useconnect.co.uk/pdf/Review%20of%20Evidence.pdf> I will also quote from this document written by Lyonette, Baldauf and Behle (2010).

Currently within Scotland, and the UK, there is a shortage of quality part time positions. Nearly 80% of part time workers are women. The transition into part time work, from full time employment, is problematic. If an individual negotiates a move with their current employer to part time work, it leaves them tied to that company, and that role, as there are very few professional and quality jobs advertised either externally or internally.

This lack of quality part time positions often results in individuals downgrading their employment and working below their skill level, in order to find the part time hours they require. Lyonette et al (2010) state

“Occupational downgrading occurs when more highly qualified or highly skilled women or men choose to reduce their hours, usually for childcare reasons. However, more women than men do so, and women’s choices are constrained by expensive childcare and long full time working hours in the UK.... Because of the limited part time options available in highly skilled jobs, many women compromise by crowding into lower-level jobs”

Research also confirms that working part time negatively impacts an individual’s opportunities for training and promotion. Lyonette et al (2010) state that

“For those women who do manage to retain their occupational level, many are doubly disadvantaged when moving to part time work: although they have often trained for many years within a particular occupation, they are sidelined into work that does not maximise their skills, and as a consequence, they will also be less likely to be considered for promotion”

They go on to say,

“Extrapolating from survey evidence, researchers have estimated that 69% of female part time “down graders”, equivalent to around 1.25 million women in the UK aged 25-54, are “stuck” in jobs below their skill and experience levels”

As the opportunities for quality part time working are so limited, and un-advertised, it also prevents part time workers moving between employers and building and developing their human capital further, resulting in an under-utilisation of skills within the labour market and contributing to the gender pay gap. Further quoting Lyonette et al (2010)

“For those women who move to part time work, the pay penalty is more severe if they also change employer: moving to part time work as well as downgrading and changing employer leads to an immediate earnings reduction of 32%. Upgrading (switching back to full time work) leads to an earnings increase of around 13%”

I'm aware that many employers now have flexible working policies, but the literature also shows that there is a gap between the policy and implementation.

At a time when the population is aging, more and more people will be faced with caring responsibilities, not solely women as has traditionally been the case. Generation Y already see the need for greater work life balance and fathers increasingly want to play active roles in their children's' lives. The need for greater flexibility in the workplace is becoming and will become ever more required.

While these issues have a foundation in equalities, they also impact the skills and growth agendas. The skills council SEMTA forecasts skills shortages in the near future due to the demographics of its workforce. A response to this is often to get more school children studying appropriate subjects. While this is undoubtedly important, it will have little impact on its own if the work place structures as so inflexible that people (in particular women) end up leaving or downgrading.

In this time of economic difficulty, Scotland and the UK should be utilising ALL members of its labour force: not only the people that can fit neatly into traditional working patterns.

In October last year I wrote to my local MSPs and MP raising this issue. Since then I've had positive responses from all parties, with everyone agreeing that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. It heartens me that MSPs from all parties are willing engage in discussion about the lack of quality part time jobs and it's impact on the Scottish economy and society, but I also know that change in these matters takes time and it's important to constantly raise awareness of issues and keep them on the agenda.

This is why I am writing to you. I hope that by contacting the committee at this time, you will be able to consider the evidence regarding quality part time employment. I believe that the lack of quality part time jobs is preventing Scottish women engaging with the world of work and reaching their full potential, as well as contributing to the potential of Scotland as a whole.

Allison Johnstone
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