

## SUBMISSION FROM ENGENDER

Engender is a membership organisation working on gender equality 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 information and support to individuals, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve equality and justice.

Engender commends the Equal Opportunities Committee for its work on women and work in Scotland and we welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. Engender is a key stakeholder in this debate, through our work with women's communities-of-interest (women living in poverty, refugee and asylum seeking women, transgender women, women carers), cross-sectoral analytical and policy focus (mitigating welfare reform, child poverty, refugee/asylum, disability and carers), and collaborative working relationships with organisations such as Close the Gap and Women onto Work. As an intermediary organisation, working on systemic issues, we do not produce data or quantitative evidence on barriers to women's employment. However, in addition to targeted practical interventions, positive labour market outcomes for women must be anchored within a framework of long-term, overarching gender equality goals; it is from this perspective that we respond.

We would also like to highlight that Engender does not equate 'work' with employment. In our view, an inquiry into women and work implies broader parameters which would include women's unpaid care work and informal social reproductive economies. By way of a final introductory remark, this paper does not aim to be comprehensive, rather will highlight an indicative range of potential action in line with areas of our recent work with marginalised groups of women in Scotland.

### **Workforce issues**

The lack of flexible working, including extremely narrow scope for job-sharing in Scotland is a key area this inquiry should seek to address. Prejudices and discrimination linked to flexible working restrict prospects for equality of access to employment enormously. Meanwhile conventional working patterns and expectations, especially in the context of public sector cuts and recession, are impacting on health and wellbeing in gendered ways.

Cuts to services and the recession also put organisations like Women onto Work and Women's Enterprise Scotland at risk of reduced capacity. Such targeted support for women's employability is both rare and extremely valuable, including with regard to skills, esteem and awareness of employment rights. These organisations also play an indispensable role in challenging normative, gender-blind and discriminatory models which perpetuate women's marginalisation in the labour market.

*We believe this inquiry should therefore recommend:*

- *the business case for flexible working, including job-sharing in Scotland is developed through the lens of gender, and subsequently widely disseminated and promoted*
- *exploring scope for incentivising uptake of flexible working requests*
- *targeted support for gendered employability services in Scotland.*

## **Childcare**

The need for improved childcare, in terms of affordability, accessibility and quality, is recognised in numerous existing Scottish Government (SG) strategy and policy documents, yet childcare in Scotland is the second most expensive in Europe.<sup>1</sup> At Engender, we call for universal access to free childcare at the point of delivery, based on influential role of Nordic models in reducing gender inequality. Though this inquiry calls for practical solutions, it certainly bears emphasising that barriers to progress with childcare is normative and values-based. Any approach which is not underpinned by a vision of transformative shifts in cultural attitudes towards caring professions will result in flawed analysis and severely limited prospects from the outset.

Childcare policymaking processes should question conventional wisdom that maintains: free or heavily subsidised education begins at 5 years old (not normatively so in Scandinavia, France, Belgium); childcare is not understood as infrastructure and budgeted for accordingly (if 25% of household income was earmarked to shore up deficit in the transport budget this would not be tolerated by society); childcare is not understood as capital investment (our current economic models indicate that maintenance of boilers is five times more valuable than Early Years development, and care of children is not accounted as an investment in the future but as consumption). Indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities explicitly made this point about 'childcare as infrastructure' at the Women's Employment Summit in September 2012. Engender is calling for more ambition across childcare advocacy agendas over the coming months.

*We believe this inquiry should therefore recommend:*

- *increased investment childcare as a key pillar of the Scottish Government's action plan on women's employment*
- *a shift in public expenditure categorisation of childcare to capital spend*
- *cross-party and cross-departmental support (champions) for integrated gender budgeting analysis throughout scrutiny of the budget processes*
- *development of educational tools which address gendered value-systems around social reproductive economies.*

## **Occupational segregation**

Scottish Government also recognises the need to tackle horizontal and vertical segregation and has paid plentiful lip service to the need for faster progress on the pay gap across a range of policy areas.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, however, the SG approach to women's employment is framed in terms of GDP-growth and productivity and is

overly-focussed on aggregate unemployment rates to an extent which masks gendered drivers of the pay gap. Achieving meaningful change to deeply embedded structures of occupational segregation will require much wider policy approaches that tackle normative, cultural assumptions around what women want and are able to do, both in formal and informal economies and with regard to choices around family. Over the shorter term, the Scotland-specific public sector equalities duty (PSED) provides a useful set of levers, which stand to be utilised more effectively by government and third sector stakeholders alike.

*We believe this inquiry should therefore recommend:*

- *equal investment across Modern Apprenticeships*
- *investigation into high drop-out rates of women from male-dominated MAs including qualitative research with young people, Skills Development Scotland and employers*
- *development of educational tools for young people which challenge normative discriminatory attitudes*
- *funding for gendered training programmes which challenge normative discriminatory attitudes*
- *analysis and publicity of progress reports due under the PSED in April 2013, with a view to highlighting best practice as well as failures in equal pay auditing.*

## **Data**

The lack of gender-disaggregated data on employment (and more broadly) has been widely recognised as a major barrier to progressive change, including by policymakers. Nonetheless, some stakeholders assert that to some extent this has become a smokescreen in certain areas. From this perspective, the time has come for Scottish Government to make incisive policy interventions with existing data, particularly given statements of political will by the First Minister and a variety of Cabinet Secretaries.<sup>3</sup> This clearly calls for a dual approach.

*We believe this inquiry should therefore recommend:*

- *the EET committee pushes the Office of National Statistics to provide disaggregated data as per existing agreement with the Scottish Government*
- *strong interventions to ensure PSED regulations regarding data collection are adequately implemented*
- *comprehensive mapping of existing data is undertaken and submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth for operational use in the SG action plan on women's employment*
- *a review of criteria / indicators for gender-disaggregated data at Scottish level is subsequently undertaken.*

## **Disability**

A particular area of cross-cutting concern for Engender is the pervasive lack of both understanding and consideration of intersectionality; the dynamics between multiple

nodes of inequality and discrimination, and women's employment. For instance, through recent work with women with disabilities, access to paid work emerged as a fundamental and broad set of gendered challenges. These included deeply embedded assumptions regarding desire, ability, capacity, fertility and family, homogenising treatment of disability and accessibility issues.

*We believe this inquiry should therefore recommend:*

- *the EO committee engages with stakeholders, like Scottish Disability Equality Forum and Inclusion Scotland, to develop these findings*
- *outcomes are integrated in wider SG processes on women and employment, such as the employability action plan and training initiatives for employers.*

## **Welfare Reform**

Welfare reform is extremely gendered and will disproportionately impact on women (and children) in complex ways.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the single means-tested benefit will undermine women's financial independence, with far-reaching impacts on gendered cycles of violence and abuse. Anecdotal evidence and qualitative research from advocacy organisations and service providers have shown that stress and mental health issues relating to the impending introduction of Universal Credit and other reforms is an escalating problem, with particular reference to women's existing problematic experiences with DWP.<sup>5</sup> In turn, this erosion of gender equality gains will have substantive impacts on parallel policies to promote labour market outcomes for women.

*We believe this inquiry should therefore recommend:*

- *the Welfare Reform committee engage in latter stages of this process, with a view to strengthened consideration of gender in its workplan for 2013-14*
- *the Welfare Reform committee is encouraged to scrutinise the Scottish Government budgetary process, including gender budgeting analysis.*

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## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EconomyEnergyandTourismCommittee/WiSEIs.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EconomyEnergyandTourismCommittee/WiSEIs.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/154279/0041448.pdf>;  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/344949/0114783.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Alex Salmond, Nicola Sturgeon, Angela Constance (Women's Employment Summit: 12/9/12)  
Margaret Burgess (Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum, EPiC: 13/11/12)  
John Swinney (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00402275.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.wbg.org.uk/RRB\\_Briefings.htm](http://www.wbg.org.uk/RRB_Briefings.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [http://povertyalliance.org/userfiles/files/EPIC/Reports/EPIC\\_Research\\_Surviving\\_Poverty2013.pdf](http://povertyalliance.org/userfiles/files/EPIC/Reports/EPIC_Research_Surviving_Poverty2013.pdf)