

SUBMISSION FROM PROSPECT

INTRODUCTION

1. Prospect is an independent trade union representing over 120,000 members in the public and private sectors across the UK and 9,000 living and working in Scotland. Our members work in a range of jobs in both the public and private sectors in a variety of different areas including in aviation, agriculture, communications, defence, energy, environment, heritage, industry, and scientific research.

2. We welcome the Equal Opportunities Committee inquiry into 'Women and Work.' While great strides have been made over recent decades in terms of increasing participation of women in the labour market, the fight for equal pay continues and there is much still to be done to promote flexible working and tackle the gender pay gap. Occupational segregation, both vertical and horizontal, is still rife. Many of the Westminster Government's policies and programmes on these issues are regressive.

3. In this submission, we focus on the issues of occupational segregation and equal pay. Prospect represents around 50,000 professional scientists and engineers across the UK, including 14,000 women who work in these areas, so has obvious and direct concerns to tackle occupational segregation. Although the Committee has highlighted a particular interest in equal pay issues in local authorities, we would emphasise that attention should also be directed to equal pay issues in central government and the private sector. We should, of course, welcome an opportunity to discuss these and the other issues covered by the Committee's inquiry in oral evidence.

Occupational Segregation

4. Women's under-representation in science, engineering and technology (SET) is not a new problem but, despite some slow progress in recent years, it remains pervasive. Women accounted for little more than 1 in 10 of all employees in SET occupations, compared with one in two women in the workforce overall. Women are even less well represented in some SET occupations, notably among engineering professionals and skilled tradespeople. Furthermore, the 'leaky pipeline' ensures that a higher proportion of women than men either never use their academic qualification in a SET role or leave for other occupational pastures.

5. In 2012 Prospect surveyed our women members working in science and engineering across the public and private sectors. 35% of our 2,000 respondents said that they had been inspired by a teacher or educational opportunity, and 25% cited their main motivation as interest and enjoyment of their subject. This, in our view, provides a clear pointer to the need for further emphasis on action targeted at younger age groups.

6. Less positively, our survey also confirmed that women leave science due to:

- Uncertainty over funding or contract renewal – Currently threats of redundancy and outsourcing are having a significant impact in the public sector,

though concerns over short-term contracts are particularly marked in higher education.

- The professional impact of having a family or part-time working – There is still something of a presumption against part-time working, especially at more senior levels, and many women identified this as a barrier to progression or promotion. Legislation to prevent discrimination against part-time workers has not resolved this problem. Our respondents also revealed a deficit between the formulation of family-friendly policies and their implementation.
- Unhappiness with male-dominated workgroups and culture – A majority still work in teams and for employers where women are in the minority. This is particularly marked in the private sector.

7. We have identified four phases in women's STEM careers:

Optimism – 'As the engineering population demographic in [my industry] is highly skewed, with many due to retire in the next few years, there are real opportunities for those with time left to progress'.

Uncertainty – 'The only reason I would leave ... would be for redundancy'.

Glass ceiling – 'I think I have reached the highest level I can in the organisation, there are less women higher up and I think I'd feel even more isolated'.

Resignation – 'My male counterparts who I was recruited with have all progressed to [a higher] level and have been there for a good few years. I have taken a year off on maternity leave so should be a bit behind, but maybe not this far'.

8. No doubt these perspectives reflect a combination of factors including pressures on public finances, career stage, scarcity of specialist career paths, employment sector and quality of management.

9. Some views will have resonance beyond science and engineering, but there is no doubting the particular challenges that emanate from working in highly skilled and highly competitive environments where women are so significantly under-represented. Our members' experiences confirm that more still needs to be done to deal with endemic problems, for example relating to work-life balance, the glass ceiling and the culture of SET workplaces.

10. Equally it is clear that there is no single agency that can resolve the range of economic, institutional, organisational and cultural challenges that exist. But politicians, educators, business leaders and individuals all need to play a part. Prospect will continue to negotiate for better practices at work and to campaign for better and longer-term funding and against policy-driven cuts and closures as well as supporting our members individually.

11. In 2012 we published a charter summarising the action that we think needs to be taken. We will be pursuing these objectives at national and workplace

level and would welcome an opportunity to work with the Scottish Parliament in taking them forward.

CHARTER FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHS

PROMOTE the economic and business benefits of a more diverse STEM workforce.

TARGET science and engineering-based companies to enhance board level representation of women.

ENCOURAGE all employers – public and private sector – to provide career pathways accessible to all.

SUPPORT mentoring programmes and buddying schemes for women in STEM at all career stages and make sure they are not isolated in workplaces.

PILOT science and engineering apprenticeship programmes for disadvantaged young women and provide a sustainable funding model for higher-level STEM apprenticeships.

WORK with unions to enhance and broaden the STEM ambassadors' programme and support Union Learning Representatives in encouraging women to return to STEM learning.

COMMIT to greater longevity and stability of STEM funding to reduce short-termism and uncertainty in STEM employment.

CREATE a Cabinet level science minister with specific responsibilities to increase the representation of women at all levels of the STEM workforce.

PRIORITISE action to remove barriers to part-time working in STEM occupations.

INCENTIVISE professional development and outreach for STEM.

Equal Pay

12. The equal pay problems in local authorities have been well documented, and rightly so, but less attention has been given to equal pay issues for women professionals. For example, findings from Prospect's 2012 membership survey demonstrated a gender pay gap among 11,800 survey respondents of around 22 per cent. The median level of pay for men was £41,000 and for women the median was £33,700. 39 per cent of the women responding to the survey earned less than £30,000 whereas only 18 per cent of men did. At the higher pay levels the picture reverses with 28 per cent of men earning over £50,000 compared to only 12 per cent of the women. We are also conscious that the gender pay gap is worse in the private sector linked to a lack of transparency in pay, the failure to have robust job evaluation schemes, and the absence of equal pay reviews to identify problem areas.

13. These findings are broadly in line with those reported by the Office for National Statistics in the Annual survey of Hours and Earnings (summarised below), which shows one of the largest gender pay gaps among managers and senior officials.

Gender pay gap by occupation for full-time and part-time employees

Description	FT Median	FT Mean	PT Median	PT Mean
All employees	9.2%	14.8%	-5.6%	9.1%
Managers and senior officials	20.0%	24.0%	19.4%	30.3%
Professionals	4.2%	8.1%	3.0%	11.3%
Associate professional and technical occupations	7.2%	11.3%	-13.4%	7.1%
Administrative and secretarial	6.3%	8.4%	-9.7%	-2.9%
Skilled trades	24.9%	20.2%	6.9%	25.6%
Personal service	6.8%	7.8%	-1.1%	0.8%
Sales and customer service	4.6%	5.3%	1.1%	1.4%
Process, plant and machine operatives	21.3%	18.4%	4.3%	10.1%
Elementary occupations	14.8%	12.6%	0.3%	4.3%

Source: ONS

14. Prospect, in common with other unions, has pursued a number of equal pay cases – including the high profile case of Cadman v HSE – and will continue to do so where necessary to secure a just outcome for our members. Current restrictions on public sector pay are likely to make further such action necessary, not least because of an inability to fund progression to the rate for the job. However, Prospect’s strong preference is for a negotiated outcome both to eliminate unlawful pay discrimination and to address the long-term problems of occupational segregation. To support this, we strongly believe that there should be mandatory equal pay audits for all employers. Promoting transparent pay systems that are regulated through collective bargaining is the best way of ensuring equality and reducing the gender pay gap that persists.

15. In pursuit of these objectives, Prospect has recently revised and updated our Negotiator's Guide to Equal Pay, which can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/XgWoHd>. The guide provides practical advice on how to review pay systems, what particular elements of pay are especially vulnerable to discriminatory practices, and an overview of the law. To accompany this new guidance and to assist negotiated progress, Prospect also provides flexible training options for our full time officials and lay representatives. Where appropriate, this training could be delivered jointly with employers.

Sue Ferns
Director of Communications and Research
Prospect
4 February 2013