

SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy.

This is achieved in a number of different ways - through roadshow, round table, conference and celebratory events. Following each event a report is compiled and issued to women who attend and relevant policy and decision makers.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.

SWC Evidence Source

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events throughout Scotland, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to this Inquiry.

Purpose of the Inquiry

The Inquiry into Women and Work has so far gathered information and promoted awareness of the issue by holding a round-table session during Trade Union Week (February 2012); leading the Parliament in a debate on Women and Work (June 2012); attending and following the Scottish Government's summit on women and employment (September 2012) and scrutinising the Draft Budget 2013-14 with a gender perspective (October/November 2012).

Following on from this work, the Committee now seeks views on how to overcome the many difficulties that have been described to them. The issues fall under the following headings:

- Workforce Issues;
- Occupational Segregation;
- Childcare;
- Women in Business;
- Managing Unequal Pay in Local Authorities; and
- Cross-cutting issues.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

Such as shift work and its impacts; lack of part-time working in some sectors and, more generally, the increase in the number of women taking up part-time work; employers reactions to flexible working requests and comparative public, private and voluntary sector approaches; the impact of public and voluntary sector cuts; and the double disadvantage faced by disabled women.

Much of the **shift work** carried out by women is done on a part-time basis. This can create a number of issues, most often with regards to childcare. There is very little provision in Scotland which caters for those who work before 7.30am and after 6pm. If and when it is available, this type of private childcare is very expensive.

Shift work can also raise issues around temporary and zero hours contracts and agency work. These are all insecure forms of employment and tend to be predominant in areas of what is traditionally seen as 'women's work', for example cleaning, customer service and catering.

Some women who currently work full time would prefer to work on a **part-time** basis. They are often unable to do so, however, due to a lack of opportunity for this type of employment in the areas they work in. Employers can make returning to work very difficult for women after maternity leave. Despite anti-discrimination legislation being in place for a number of years, roles can be changed and lines of responsibility altered. Employees can ask for flexible working arrangements, however employers have the right to refuse the request.

"I was a bank manager in a town approximately 30 miles away from where I live before I had my second baby. Travelling there every day plus the cost of childcare meant it was not worth my while to go back. My employer did nothing to slot me in elsewhere. I now work part-time at weekends. It's crazy how we are better off now with the help of tax credits than me working 6 days a week as a bank manager."

The lack of flexibility shown by employers can lead to underemployment. This can be seriously damaging for a woman's earning potential, as well as having the knock on impact of diminishing skills and making career progression even more difficult.

The increase in part-time working can in part be attributed to the **cuts to public and voluntary sector jobs**, in which women predominate. Posts are being reduced from full-time to part-time or job-share. Women face taking a cut in hours, wages and associated benefits, or becoming unemployed altogether. While part-time hours – and, by consequence, underemployment - are not desirable, they are often the only real option for many women throughout Scotland.

"I'm so aware of the impact of cuts and redundancies but to tell you the truth I'm not going to complain about the changes – I'm just glad I still have a job."

The current economic climate has also contributed to a vast number of redundancies in the private sector. Jobs at the lower end of the scale, where women predominate, have been the first to go. This undoubtedly contributes to both unemployment and underemployment for women.

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

Such as women being clustered into certain types of work, such as caring, cleaning and clerical work; women taking on part-time, low status or low-paid work because of caring responsibilities or underemployment; the impact of the glass ceiling and whether it is about more women in the boardroom or career progression more generally; and the lack of evidence of measures to tackle gender inequalities, for example, meaningful work experience could be a way to challenge inequalities.

Women continue to be clustered into roles in what is known as the '5c's' – catering, cleaning, caring, cashiering and clerical. These jobs offer low wages and little in the way of training, development and progression. This type of employment is often part-time.

Women undertake the majority of **part-time** work in Scotland. For some this is an informed choice, however for many others it is the only option available. Family and caring responsibilities and poor public transport mean that part-time work is often the most feasible means of employment. Low wages in part-time roles mean it is common for women to take on two or three jobs in order to make ends meet.

Women often undertake more than one part-time job as opposed to full time employment. This contributes massively to women's underemployment in Scotland and happens for a variety of reasons, including lack of accessible, affordable, appropriate childcare, poor public transport and limited job availability.

Many women who work on a part-time basis rely on the money they receive from welfare benefits in order to 'top up' their incomes. For example tax credits which are used to cover childcare costs or small amounts of housing and/or council tax benefit.

Working hours thresholds for tax credit entitlement are increasing. Lone parents must work at least 16 hours per week. For couple, joint working hours need to be at least 24 per week with one person working at least 16 hours per week. In a couple where only one person is working, that person must be working 24 hours a week. These changes are causing concern as employers may be unwilling or unable to increase working hours where necessary. Women will therefore be forced to take up more part-time work and face additional childcare and transport costs and worries.

If the infrastructure was put in place to enable women to undertake more hours, and a living wage was paid, there would be less of a reliance on these welfare benefits. More economic activity also means increased Income Tax and National Insurance contributions which would be better overall for the economy.

The **glass ceiling** undoubtedly still exists and progression within workplaces is often denied. This happens for a number of reasons, including women not being considered for promotion if they work part-time, if they are seen as being “*of child-bearing age*” or are unable to work longer hours than 9am-5pm because of caring responsibilities etc. It is vital that more women are represented in the boardrooms of public bodies and private companies. However it is also important to examine the other reasons as to why women do not progress in the same way as men.

“Women often find themselves stuck in the ‘marzipan layer’ at work – they have progressed to a certain level but are unable to be promoted to attain the ‘icing’ benefits worthy of their talents. In the main, this is due to child bearing and caring commitments.”

The **Modern Apprenticeship** scheme could be an excellent way to tackle occupational segregation. There are, however, limited opportunities for training through the scheme in many areas of the country. Apprenticeships continue to be very gender specific, with young men entering fields such as construction, joinery, engineering etc and young women taking up careers in areas such as childcare and hairdressing.

Young women are seldom offered information about Modern Apprenticeships through careers advice in school and are therefore not aware of the opportunities available to them. Careers in subjects such as engineering tend to be pursued through an academic route, i.e. a university degree, however that option is not suitable for all. Many young women are missing out.

While it is important to encourage and steer young women into ‘non-traditional’ roles, it is also vital that the value of the work traditionally carried out by women is fully recognised.

“Plumbers are paid more than, say, Early Years Practitioners. Why is fixing pipes worth more than looking after our children??”

CHILDCARE

Such as the need for widely available, flexible childcare to meet workers with shift patterns’ needs; the need for childcare to be free at the point of delivery; and the need for sufficient capacity in the workforce.

“If employment is the route out of poverty and onto a better life, then childcare is the bridge.”

There is not **enough accessible, affordable and appropriate childcare in Scotland**. The provision of at least 475 hours per year of free nursery education for three to five year olds is undoubtedly a positive measure. The proposal to increase this to six hundred hours per year, as well as extending availability to looked-after two year olds, is welcomed. This does not, however, equate to wrap-around childcare.

Parents have to rely on private nurseries and childminders in order to ‘top up’ their childcare requirements. Those with children under the age of three and over the age of five access private provision, or alternatively seek informal caring from family and friends.

Informal caring is becoming increasingly relied upon, with many women in the “*middle layer of caring, looking after both young grandchildren and elderly grandparents.*” This can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of these women, many of whom continue to hold down part-time jobs.

The **cost** of childcare is a huge barrier for women accessing employment or increasing working hours. This is particularly the case for families with more than one child, a disabled child and lone parents.

Changes to working hours thresholds for tax credit entitlements will have a huge impact on women. There is a reliance by many upon the assistance they receive in order to be able to cover the cost of childcare.

“There are no guarantees my employer will increase my hours so I still qualify for tax credits. I need this money to pay for my childcare. If they can’t increase my hours I really don’t know how I will manage.”

Middle income families do not qualify for assistance with childcare costs therefore sending a child to nursery takes “*a huge chunk*” out of their salary, particularly if they have more than one child. Women will often delay returning to work until their children are at school as it is the only financially viable option.

Women in various parts of the country encounter further barriers when accessing childcare. Rural Scotland registers 18% of the population and accounts for 94% of the country’s land mass. Those living rurally often have to travel long distances to access employment, which in turn means they have to travel to access childcare. Women rely on public transport more than men and in rural areas this is often described as “*patchy and inconsistent*”. Timetables are subject to frequent changes and many routes stop before 7pm. Fares in rural areas are also much higher than those in urban areas.

These transport issues, coupled with the fact that there is little childcare available in rural areas, has a strong influence on employment for women. This is especially the case as much of the work available in these parts of Scotland is part-time, seasonal and temporary.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Such as the impact of attitudes, in particular where they create a gap between employers policies and their implementation; the difficulty of assessing and understanding patterns of men and women’s employment because of a lack of gender-disaggregated data; and how much Welfare Reform might impact on women and, consequently, families.

Welfare Reform proposals have been described as “*a financial assault on women*”.

There are many women currently in employment who would not be able to function without the financial assistance they receive from a variety of welfare benefits.

Changes to entitlement thresholds for tax credits, relied upon by families to ‘top up’ household incomes and to pay for childcare, have the potential to push many into poverty. There is a sense of fear and worry amongst those who may not be able to match the new working hours requirements. There is also, in general, a lot of confusion about the changes that will come into force in April. This is put down to a lack of information from the UK Government.

The proposed changes to Housing Benefit will also have an impact on those in employment who receive small amounts of this benefit in order to keep their homes running. At present, Housing Benefit is paid directly to the landlord. Women do not, therefore, have to factor this money into household incomes as they are not in direct receipt of it.

Under the Welfare Reform Act 2012, Housing Benefit will come under the wider Universal Credit. This will be paid monthly in arrears, which will force women to completely change the way they manage their budgets. This could be detrimental to a number of women, particularly those who are not used to having large sums of money at one time. Spending more than they normally would on a weekly basis is a strong possibility. This could lead to an increased dependence on payday loans, as women struggle to make ends meet.

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