

Scottish Women's Convention

Benbecula Roadshow

Saturday 1st August 2015

Flexibility Family Modern Apprenticeships
Sanctions **Childcare**
Maternity **Low Paid** **Employment**
Benbecula
Low Skilled **Roadshow** Progression
Living Wage Benefits Mental Health
Training Schools Barriers
Development **Welfare Reform**
Caring Council Tax **Community**

Health and Social Care

Disability

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) visited the Dark Island Hotel, Benbecula, on Saturday 1st August 2015. We met with local women and discussed a variety of issues including employment; childcare and caring; training, development and education; welfare reform and women's representation.

The SWC would like to thank all of the women who attended. The information gathered on the day will be used to inform a number of SWC documents, including responses to consultations, calls for evidence and international reports.

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Introduction

Women face barriers in sustaining and progressing in the labour market. There are also difficulties in accessing further learning and education, training and development. With increased pressures from family responsibilities, women often struggle to organise themselves on a daily basis. This is all taking place against a backdrop of cuts to public services and changes to the welfare benefits system.

The 2015 Roadshow programme offers local women the opportunity to discuss these topics in more detail. It is important that they are given an opportunity to express how political decisions impact on them, their families and communities.

Benbecula

Benbecula is an island of the Outer Hebrides, which lie off the west coast of Scotland. According to the most recent census, the island has a population of approximately 1,300.

Benbecula lies between the islands of North Uist and South Uist, to which it is connected by road causeways. Travel to any of the other main Hebridean islands, or to the mainland, is done by air or sea. Benbecula Airport has daily flights to Glasgow and Stornoway. There are no direct ferry services from Benbecula to the mainland, but a service from Lochboisdale on South Uist provides a five-hour crossing to Oban, whilst another service from Lochmaddy on North Uist provides a two-hour crossing to Uig on the Isle of Skye, and then on to the mainland via the Skye Bridge. Ferry services from the islands of Berneray (linked by causeway to North Uist) and Eriskay (linked to South Uist) connect to the other Outer Hebridean islands of Harris and Barra respectively.

Benbecula's main settlement is Balivanich in the northwest. It is the main administrative centre for the three islands, and has the council offices and the administrative centre for the artillery deep sea firing range on South Uist. The village is also home to the airport and the island's bank. The township of Liniolate houses the area's main secondary school, which also doubles as a community centre containing a swimming pool, cafeteria, sports facilities, a small museum and a library. Next door is the Liniolate campus of Lews Castle College.

After a protracted campaign, local residents took control of parts of the island in November 2006 through a community buy-out. The previous landowners sold the assets of the 372 square kilometres (92,000 acres) estate including Benbecula, South Uist and Eriskay for £4.5 million to a community-owned organisation known as Stòras Uibhist, which was set up to purchase the land and to manage it in perpetuity.

Annabelle Ewing MSP Minister for Youth and Women's Employment

"The Scottish Women's Convention do great work in making sure women in Scotland have the opportunity to influence the government strategies and policies affecting them - so please take this opportunity to share your experiences.

Women's employment issues in Scotland

In the last year we have seen women's employment levels reach a record high in Scotland. In terms of numbers of women in work, we compare very well across the EU and beyond. The employment gap between men and women is also reducing. So where is the 'but'?

Despite the impressive figures, research shows there are still many inequalities. Women are more likely to be in low paid work than men, and are also more likely to be underemployed both in terms of hours worked and skills levels. A major cause of the pay gap between women and men is occupational segregation, with women working in lower paid sectors or struggling to progress to the most senior levels in their organisations.

We know that women are more likely to take jobs that fit around their caring responsibilities, opting for part-time work to ensure flexibility. Women also tend to be put off applying for promotion as there's a perception that senior roles are less flexible.

Actions we're taking to tackle barriers for women

The First Minister is clear that there should be no limit to ambition or what anyone can achieve. There should be no glass ceiling stopping women from achieving their ambitions.

So what are we doing to help women overcome these barriers?

- We've launched our Partnership for Change voluntary commitment. This will encourage organisations across all sectors to set themselves the ambition to achieve a 50:50 gender balance on their boards by 2020. This will ensure greater diversity and provide role models for girls to look up to in positions of power.
- We're funding equality organisations such as Equate Scotland and Close the Gap to tackle issues such as the pay gap, occupational segregation and the under-representation of women in STEM careers.
- We're also making progress in the area of flexible working. Although this is currently reserved to Westminster, we are proud to be a co-founder and active partner in the Family Friendly Working Scotland Partnership. Part of this work involves encouraging employers to provide high quality flexible working options, so that employees – including women with caring responsibilities – have suitable posts and quality long-term employment prospects.

- We're committed to increasing and improving high quality, flexible early learning and childcare which will help working mothers. We are working to provide 30 hours of early learning and childcare to all 3 and 4 year olds, and 27% of 2 year olds, by the end of the next parliament (2020).

Through these actions – and others - we're striving to remove the gender gap entirely. Research shows that if women started businesses at the same rate as men we could see the economy grow by 5.3%.

So we need to encourage women to set out in businesses of their own, we also need to champion female role models in every aspect of business, open every possible pathway into work and debunk the myth that there are jobs specifically for boys or girls.

Last year we launched the Women in Enterprise Action Framework and Ambassadors role-model project. The action Framework is being led by Women's Enterprise Scotland, who, along with other Framework partners, are inspiring and encouraging more women right across Scotland to start up and grow their businesses.

Scotland's Economic Strategy

Scotland's Economic Strategy was announced by the First Minister earlier this year and sets out a long term vision for the economy.

It's based on the fundamental principle that we'll become a more productive and prosperous country if we become a fairer country. Key to this is our commitment to continue to take specific actions to help people access and progress in the labour market. And it's not just about getting people into any work. We want to establish a culture of Fair Work.

Fair Work

Our approach to Fair Work reflects the Government's key priorities. We want to grow the economy and promote fairness and participation in workplaces.

Earlier this year, we established an independent Fair Work Convention to advise us on how best to take this further.

We are bringing trade unions and employers together to produce a practical blueprint for implementing Fair Work - something we can share as it develops.

The convention also signals the beginning of a new type of dialogue between Government, employers, employees and their representatives.

A key part of our approach to Fair Work is to ensure people receive fair pay. Within the limited powers we have in this area we are committed to going beyond the National Minimum Wage to promote a real Living Wage – a level of pay that can provide sufficient income for an acceptable standard of living. As an employer we pay the Living Wage and are encouraging others in Scotland to do so.

We also condemn the inappropriate use of zero hours contracts and are using all levers at our disposal to discourage these. We also continue to argue that powers over wage levels should be transferred from the UK to Scottish Parliament.

Devolution of Employment Services

Finally, I'd like to update you on the devolution of employment support services. From 1 April 2017 new powers will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament to provide employment support for those who are unemployed.

We are working to develop our own Scottish services to replace the DWP Work Programme and Work Choice. This is our opportunity to develop a *Scottish Approach* to helping unemployed Scots find sustainable and fair jobs, regardless of the specific barriers they may face. Our future employment support services will - while building on the strength of existing delivery in Scotland - contribute to our core principles of sustainable economic growth, fair work and social justice.

As we seek to develop a Scottish Approach, we are committed to engaging as widely as possible. We launched our consultation, *Creating a Fairer Scotland: Employability Support*, earlier this month and it is open until 9 October. I would encourage to take part in this conversation. You can do this by accessing the Scottish Government website, writing to the Employability Implementation team, or getting involved in the discussions on Twitter.

Building a Fairer Scotland

As well as inviting consultation from those with an interest in employability, we also want to hear from everyone who has a wider interest in building a Fairer Scotland.

In June the Scottish Government launched a national discussion, with Social Justice Secretary Alex Neil kick-starting a series of conversations which will take place with people across the whole of Scotland.

By the end of 2015 we want to have created opportunities for the widest possible range of voices to be heard in how we can tackle deep-rooted inequalities.

For further information please see our new website www.fairer.scot which includes a forum for discussion ideas. You can share your views online, attend one of the planned events or start your own conversation and let us know about it.

A timeframe of 2030 has been identified to achieve meaningful changes to issues such as the attainment gap for pupils from our most deprived communities, the persistence of women being paid less than men, or increasing numbers of people having to rely on food banks.

The early conversations and structured events will culminate in recommendations being made on how to create a fairer Scotland. The Scottish Government will set out its response early next year and we'll work with other organisations to encourage them to do the same."



QUESTION ONE

As of December 2014, women's employment in Scotland was at an all-time high; however women are still on zero hours contracts, in low-paid, part-time, precarious employment. Women also have to juggle commitments at home and at work.

What are your experiences of home and family life?

Employment

Due to the remoteness of the area, one of the most important aspects of ensuring employment opportunities is through access to **broadband**.

"I'm self employed and I used to be based in the central belt because the job opportunities were better there. However once we got a decent internet connection I was able to run my business from my home here."

As one of the most viable ways of creating employment and ensuring that young people stay in the area, web-based self-employment should be promoted more within schools.

"Self employment is never really discussed in careers advice. There's a 'get on and get out' mentality when it comes to young people here. Many are pushed towards moving away to go to university."

There is not as much emphasis or focus given to **training** for young people, such as information about Modern Apprenticeships (MAs). The tourist industry is one of the main employers in the area, and a lot of training could be provided to make this a viable and valued career path.

"There's a feeling that working in the tourist industry isn't as important as going on to college or university. This means there isn't any meaningful investment in, for example, the MAs associated with this type of work. As a result, a lot is done on what could be seen as a more 'amateur' level."

There are perceptions that young people would only undertake a MA if they *"weren't clever enough to get into university"*, rather than this being seen as a valued and important choice.

There are a lot of young people, particularly young women, working in the care sector on the islands. The older people they care for hold them in high regard and their employers appreciate the new ideas they bring to the table, as well as the dynamic and vibrant way in which they approach their work. Despite this, they are still not valued in monetary terms or more widely in society.

"We need to see the status of their roles raised."

There have been issues in the care sector recently, with staff so stretched that some of those who receive care had to be temporarily moved from their own homes and put into nursing homes.

“The staff are only just about coping with the work they have to do. They don’t have a lot of time with the folk they’re looking after and, because of the geography of the area, they have to travel a lot. This has an impact on carers. The majority of them are women.”

A lot of the employment which is available is part-time and low paid, for example in local museums and art centres. Many are minimum wage, although there is recognition that these workers should be paid a living wage. Steps are being taken to try and ensure this happens. While there are what could be considered limited employment opportunities in the area, there is a greater deal of flexibility for those who are working.

“Everyone here knows everyone, so they understand each other’s circumstances. If a woman has to leave work early or come in a bit later due to, for example, caring responsibilities, then that’s not an issue at all.”

More often than not, those who return from having studied and or working on the mainland have to accept short-term, temporary contracts. The lack of stability means they can find it very difficult to get a mortgage for a house, and often find themselves moving back in with their parents.

“More job security is necessary. We have an ageing population and we need young people to come back to the area, but there’s no point if they’re going to find themselves worse off than they would be on the mainland.”

As well as the tourist industry, other main employers in the Outer Hebrides are the Local Authority and the NHS. A lot of people have two jobs - they will have the employment they make money from, and they also croft, however it is difficult to earn a living from that. Many services rely heavily on volunteers, such as the Fire Brigade and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). Other community-based initiatives, such as youth organisations and sports clubs, are also volunteer-led.

There is a lot of **unpaid care** in the area.

“It’s probably one of the best things about the islands. There’s very much a community focus. People make time to look out for their neighbours. It’s expected, because that’s the way it’s always been.”

Transport

Most people rely on private transport, i.e. a car, to get around. There is a bus service, however it is *“not 100% reliable”*. The bus routes tend to remain on the main roads, travelling the length of North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist. They also meet ferries coming into port in North and South Uist. Many of the drivers know their passengers, and will let them off of their vehicles outwith the main bus stops. This type of service is appreciated, particularly by older people.

Getting out in the evenings can be very difficult because of transport options.

“I work at a local museum/art centre and we would love to be able to open in the evenings, but it’s not viable because people just wouldn’t be able to get there.”

The bus service stops running at 6pm and *“only really covers the spine of the road.”* There are taxis on the islands, however they can be expensive due to the geography of the area.

Childcare

There are two nurseries in the area which are well supported, however much of the care of children is carried out by family and friends.

“It’s not so bad for babies and toddlers but I know that accessing afterschool care can be quite problematic. It’s also difficult during the school holidays.”

Attitudes

“The island can be about 20 years behind the mainland in terms of certain attitudes, particularly towards women.”

There is an expectation, despite the fact they may be working full time, as well as crofting, that women will also be responsible for all aspects of running the home.

“There are still those who have a ‘who do they think they are’ attitude towards women who dare to employ, for example, someone to clean their house for them. That is still considered ‘women’s work’, regardless of the other responsibilities they undertake and pressures they may be under. That kind of attitude needs to be tackled at a pre-school level, with both boys and girls being taught about gender equality.”

Education

The population of the islands is dropping, and is made up predominantly of older people. As a result, local schools are amalgamating, meaning that children have to travel to a more centralised location. The standard of education in the area is *“excellent”*, with a high proportion of school leavers going to university.

“That’s great, but these young people leave the islands and don’t come back until they’re ready to retire.”

The amalgamation of the schools means that a lot of young children will now have to undertake a long journey to and from school each day. This will be exacerbated during the winter months, when the days are shorter and the weather is bad.



Health

There is a hospital on Benbecula, which serves North Uist, South Uist and smaller islands such as Barra. It is a cottage hospital, providing services such as physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapy, a dentist and mental health services. Specialists come in from other hospitals in some circumstances.

Women who are pregnant travel to Stornoway to access labour/delivery services, however can have scans and midwife check-ups at the local hospital.

Certain health issues must be dealt with in more central locations, such as Raigmore hospital in Inverness or one of the main hospitals in Glasgow.

“Sometimes you have to go to the mainland for an appointment. It’s not always possible to come back the same day, or even the next day, depending on travel arrangements. This can have an impact on caring responsibilities and general family life.”

Bad weather can sometimes mean that ferries and planes are unable to leave, however for many *“that’s just part of island life.”*

QUESTION TWO

Scotland has its first woman First Minister with a 50/50 gender balanced Cabinet. However, in the Scottish Parliament, only one third of elected members are women.

What needs to be done to encourage and support women to become more active, both at a local and a national level?

“A lot of what is done in this area is driven by women, who seem to be the ‘doers’ within the community.”

A lot of *“strong women”* are involved in the local Community Council.

“The women who do a lot in this area are great, but they are admittedly all older. Where are the younger generation going to come from?”

While much of the activity at a grassroots level is lead by women, the local Council is still dominated by men. Part of the reason for this could be restrictions on women’s time, as Councillors are expected to be available to the community they serve at all times. There is also a sense that women do not want to *“put their head above the parapet”* in such a small community.

“Everyone knows everyone else, so if someone is seen to be doing something that others don’t agree with, it will stay with them for a long time.”

Patriarchal attitudes around the role of women could also be a contributing factor as to why more women are not involved in politics at this level.

QUESTION THREE

What are the key priorities for women in your local area?

- **Long term security in employment.** Funding for projects in the area needs to be longer-term. More training and development is also necessary for those who work in industries which *“keep the community going”*.
- **Improved public transport** which would allow more people to access facilities in the evenings and at weekends.
- **More further and higher education opportunities.**
“The education really is good, and the University of the Highlands and Islands is trying to develop more courses. This is important, as many of the courses they have available at the moment can only be completed to a certain level. People have to go elsewhere to complete their qualifications.”
- Payment of a **Citizens Basic Income (CBI)** would make a significant difference to those living in the area. It would give much more freedom and financial autonomy to women and would be a positive way of ensuring that women could exit abusive relationships. It would also encourage more people to live on the islands.
“This area attracts a lot of artists who, if they were in receipt of a CBI, would be able to continue to live and work here. If everyone is given the same basic level of income then that would drive equality across other areas.”
- Access to **high speed broadband** is vital in remote areas such as Benbecula. The connection can, at times, be *“rubbish”*, which makes it difficult to sustain business, apply for things online and shop.



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.