

# Equality Statement of the Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18

## Scottish Women's Convention Response to the Equality Statement of the Scottish Draft Budget

January 2017

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) has consulted with women throughout Scotland using a variety of communication channels including roadshows and thematic events, surveys, localised round table discussions and conferences.

Our response to the Equality Statement of the Scottish Draft Budget for 2017-18 is informed by the voices of women who have participated in SWC activities. The main focus of our work during 2016 concentrated on consultation throughout Scotland on a variety of issues including access to services, employment and education opportunities for women, health and social care, social security and the impact of the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

Although some issues are specific to certain geographical areas, in the main, women throughout Scotland have concerns and opinions on a number of key issues.

**Employment**



**Education**



**Social Security**



**Health and Social Care**



## Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) welcomes the Equality Statement which accompanies the 2017-18 Draft Budget. The recognition by the Scottish Government of the impact of spending decisions on all equality strands is extremely important.

The SWC also welcomes the way in which the Scottish Government continues to outline and demonstrate its commitment to the advancement and attainment of gender equality. Positive examples of this include the gender balanced Cabinet, as well as policies which aim to tackle other forms of inequality faced by women.

In particular, the devolution of a range of powers over social security will have a significant impact on women throughout Scotland. The SWC has been involved in the extensive consultation carried out around the establishment and development of a new system of social security for Scotland. The organisation has made clear the impact of the powers which are being transferred on women, who make up the majority of claimants. The SWC will continue to be involved in this process to ensure that women's voices are heard.

As with previous years, Scotland's budget is set against the backdrop of a challenging economic climate. The SWC continues to be aware that the Government must focus on measures to accelerate economic growth and recovery. The SWC believes that a strong focus on the gender considerations of proposed spending will go some way to making this happen. This response will examine all points which have been raised by women throughout Scotland at SWC events.



## Chapter 2: Overview by Protected Characteristic

The SWC commends the Scottish Government for not only recognising the equality impact of spending decisions, but by outlining these through the Equality Statement. The overview by protected characteristic is welcomed by women, however not without caution. There is a danger that if a decision is seen to fall into the age, disability, race or any other category, then the full gender impact will not be recognised. Recognition of the importance of intersectionality is an important step in gaining a 'broader picture'. The SWC suggests that it is better to take individual spending decisions and examine the equality impacts in that manner, as opposed to grouping certain issues together as "*women's issues*".

*"Although they're important, there's more to budgetary issues than violence against women, representation on public boards and participation in sport."*

## Chapter 3: Inclusive Growth

*“All Government portfolios have considered their potential impacts on inclusive growth and key policy highlights have been included in the Draft Budget strategic chapter ... The Scottish Government is further expanding our Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) entitlement giving more parents, particularly women, the choice to move into employment, increase their hours of work, or to study.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 20**

The SWC supports the provision of high quality, accessible, flexible, appropriate childcare, provided free at point of delivery. This would go a substantial way to ensuring women's ability to participate in education, training and employment. Access to decent childcare is good for children, good for women and good for the economy as a whole.

It is hoped that the expansion of ELC to 1140 hours per year will go some way to breaking down obstacles and increasing women's ability to enter into education, training or employment, as well as providing the best start in life for Scotland's children. The way in which the funded hours are delivered, where they are provided and by whom will have significant bearings on the achievement of this aim.

It is extremely important that the current lack of flexibility around childcare provision is acknowledged when the key features of Scotland's ELC model are being considered. Many parents would not have to pay such high costs for private childcare if the funded hours available to them were provided in a much more flexible way.

*“The lack of accessible, affordable childcare is holding so many women back. It's a complicated jigsaw which can lead to real stress and anxiety. Access to more free childcare, provided with the needs of families in mind, would open up so many opportunities and more choices.”*

The type of work offered to and undertaken by women must be taken into account when delivering flexible ELC provision. Jobs such as work in hotels, restaurants, call centres and care homes, are outwith school hours. The proposals for the extension of ELC do not take into consideration the childcare needs of those who work shifts, particularly early mornings, evenings and weekends. The lack of wrap-around, flexible provision can lead to a reliance on assistance from friends and family. Lone parents can find it especially difficult, as they do not have a partner they can rely on to look after their children while they go to work. Working patterns, coupled with the inflexibility of childcare, means that children are often missing out on the funded places they are entitled to.

*“I feel like I rely on my family too much sometimes and I feel bad about that. But there's nothing I can do. If they didn't look after my children then I wouldn't be able to work.”*

Little regard is given to those who are employed on zero hours contracts, which are becoming increasingly more common in fields where women predominate. Many choose not to work because of the difficulties they face in securing a place.

*“It's impossible to organise childcare when you're on a zero hours contract because you don't know what's happening with shifts from one week to the next. It's extremely difficult to access Local Authority childcare, especially if you live outside of main towns and centres and private childcare is so expensive that it's outwith the reach of those on low incomes.”*

Some working mothers do not have support networks round about them, such as friends and family, so have no choice but to rely on expensive private childcare. Ensuring that the extra hours of funded provision suit women and their families is essential in the design of a new national childcare service. Without this consideration, there is a real danger that women will continue to be unable to move into employment, increase their hours of work or to study.

*“The Scottish Government has an obligation to ensure that funded ELC is provided in a way which supports all families, allowing women the opportunity to actively participate in work.”*



## Chapter 4: Health and Sport

*“The five-year investment of £150 million in mental health as well as the forthcoming mental health strategy will have a positive impact by reducing waiting times and supporting these individuals to manage their own conditions and stay well.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 22**

The SWC welcomes this budget commitment. The organisation has called for all aspects of the forthcoming strategy to have a strong gender focus. Women can experience mental ill health at various stages in their lives and for varied and diverse reasons. These must be taken into account when the Scottish Government begins to implement actions to deliver its ambitious plan for mental health.

The Scottish Government’s focus within the Mental Health Framework on early intervention for pregnant women and new mothers is extremely positive. There is a real stigma around post natal depression which can deter many women from seeking help. Too many believe that it is something *“which happens to other women”*, often because they are not given enough information and guidance during pregnancy.

*“I remember someone making a really innocent comment after my son was born about the love between a mother and their child. The reality was I couldn’t even bear to look at my baby, never mind try and establish a bond with him. Before he was born I was so excited to become a mum, but my head was turned upside down after the birth. I couldn’t recognise that was because of post natal depression. It just wasn’t something I thought would ever happen to me.”*

The Scottish Government must encourage more dialogue and discussion around post natal depression. Health visitors and midwives should be given the time and resources to enable women to discuss the potential for this both before and once the child is born. Many do not realise or recognise that the way they can feel post partum is post natal depression.

Similarly, the focus on prevention and early intervention for infants, children and young people was also seen as positive by women throughout Scotland. Young women today are subject to different pressures which come in many forms, such as through peer groups, families, teachers and the media. They have spoken about the difficulties in challenging stereotypical and unrealistic images presented in the media, as well as peer pressure to conform. The increased use of social media perpetuates views of how young women should look and act. It also allows anonymous comments and images to be posted of impressionable and vulnerable people.

These pressures can have a hugely negative effect on how young women see themselves and how they think others see them. This, in turn, can have a detrimental impact on their mental health.

*“Nobody is perfect; everyone has something they don't like about themselves. But views that everyone must think, act and look a certain way before they are accepted have to stop. Too many young women are becoming both physically and mentally ill trying to conform to society's idea of perfection. It's so sad to see 14 and 15 year olds with significant mental health issues because of the pressure they're put under.”*

Primary care providers must also be more aware of mental health issues and the impact they have on people. More recognition of the support required would be welcome.

*“When I sought help from my GP I was referred to guided self-help which did not help me at all. I didn't really know where to go for the support I really needed.”*

While some women have commented on positive experiences of accessing mental health services, as well as strong support and guidance from GPs, others have not. Issues around a lack of involvement in processes have a significant impact.

*“This year I was discharged from my psychologist without being involved in the decision. As someone with a long-term mental illness this has obviously had a negative effect on how I manage my condition. When I complained, I was advised I would have to start the process again and be referred by my GP. I had great support for a number of years which was taken away from me without any consultation. My GP has referred me again, give them their due, but I am now on an 18 week waiting list. I am lucky not to be in crisis at the moment otherwise it could have been a very different story.”*

More also needs to be done to recognise the varying levels of support required by those who suffer from mental health issues. Some GPs have been criticised for prescribing medication, as opposed to seeking a holistic approach to treatment.

Support services which are available to those with mental health issues are highly valued. They *“should never be underestimated”*. At present, support, guidance and services are not as readily available as they should be. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where mental health services are centralised and can be difficult for many to physically access.

*“My mental health referral appointment is taking place at the hospital in Inverness, which means a three hour round trip on a bus. I'm already anxious about travelling all the way there myself, not to mention the cost of doing so. It's not helping my mental health at all.”*

Stigma around mental health is also often more acute in rural areas and is more likely to 'stick' to a person due to a perceived *“small town mentality”*. These attitudes can deter many from accessing the support they are entitled to receive.

The role of the family, friends and carers in tackling mental illness is vital. As well as the provision of information for these invaluable support networks, the work done by carers, the majority of whom are women, must be recognised, valued and adequately supported. Their mental health often suffers as a result of their caring responsibilities.

Access to services for anxiety and depression, such as talking therapies, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and peer support, is considered *“invaluable”*. Unfortunately, this type of assistance is not available in all areas of the country. As a result, many are missing out. The increase of people suffering from mental health problems with little or no support at the early stages of their illness is also a concern.

*“My son has severe anxiety and depression, but there is limited assistance for him where we live. I find that he’s leaning on me more and more and it’s taking its toll on my health. I’m his mother, I would never not help him, but it’s getting to the stage where talking to me isn’t enough. I’m worried he will end up on a real downward spiral unless he gets more support.”*

It is clear from conversations with women throughout Scotland that the focus on introducing new models of supporting mental health in primary care is vital. Early intervention, for example, is extremely important for both mental and physical health and wellbeing.

*“Everyone would benefit from a more holistic approach to health from the outset. Treatment and cure are often the only way to deal with a number of illnesses. There are, however, so many conditions which could be prevented if the people of Scotland were given more realistic information about how to take responsibility for ensuring healthy minds and bodies.”*



***“The integration of health and social care will be supported by the additional investment of £107 million for Integration Authorities in order to support the delivery of improved outcomes in social care.***

***By addressing the very particular needs of local communities within each Integration Authority and their localities, services and support will be planned and tailored to the specific needs of local people taking into account different equality groups.”***

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 22**

This commitment by the Scottish Government to support the delivery of new models of health and social care in all areas is positive, particularly the recognition of the challenges faced in rural areas. The geography of rural Scotland can cause significant inconsistencies in health and social care provision. Hospitals, and other services, including mental health care as well as GP and dental provision have all been reduced at a local level. Services are being centralised to main towns and too many community services have been withdrawn. This is of particular concern to women, who are often the main users of healthcare amenities.

The integration of health and social care has the potential to be extremely important both for those who receive and provide care in Scotland. However, it is vital that the principles underpinning those new policies do not have any adverse gender impacts, particularly on rural women, for whom accessing services can be extremely difficult.

As part of the new approach to health and social care, more consultation with unpaid carers is essential.

*“Unpaid carers should be able to attend meetings where important decisions are made. They are experts in so many conditions; they are with the people they care for most of the time. It makes no sense for doctors, social workers etc to be making key decisions about patients when they have nowhere near the same level of knowledge of that individual as the carer does.”*

*“Investment enables adult care workers to receive the Living Wage—a development that will impact positively on women who are more likely to fill these roles.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 22**

The SWC welcomes the commitment to paying the Living Wage to adult care workers, the vast majority of whom are women. Those who work in the care sector are already struggling to be able to provide the levels of care they want to. This is often due to the need for them to visit a certain amount of people in a day, as opposed to being able to spend time with the – often vulnerable - people they care for. Workers have described feeling undervalued within their roles, with the seeming expectation that they are happy to undertake challenging, demanding *“because they are women.”*

*“Paying adult care workers the Living Wage sends out a real message about the importance and value of this role. It’s not an easy job, but it’s seen to be because it’s ‘women’s work’. We need to understand exactly how physically and mentally demanding being a care worker is. This decision also suggests it’s time to look at a similar payment for unpaid carers. We can’t only value the paid work that women do because, after all, it’s the unpaid work that saves the economy such a significant amount of money.”*



*“Continued investment to increase the Health Visitor workforce will have a positive impact on women and children by ensuring every child in Scotland receives quality health development support. Similarly, increased funding for the Family Nurse Partnership programme and its expansion beyond first-time teenage mothers to cover vulnerable first-time mothers up to the age of 24 will also have a positive impact on women and children.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 22**

While there is a lot of praise and positivity around maternity services and the care received by expectant mothers, there are a number of areas which could be improved. Women have recently expressed serious concerns about maternity services, which are subject to cuts throughout Scotland. There have been reports of women being *“turned away”* from labour suites at certain hospitals because of a lack of availability. They have then been expected to travel to other hospitals, which are likely to be significantly further away from their homes and support networks, in order to have their children.

*“The stress and anxiety faced by these women cannot be underestimated. When a woman is in labour and presents at hospital she expects to be able to go through the final stages before her baby is actually born in a private, safe, supported environment. It should not be the case that women are being sent into empty wards when they are as far as 10cm dilated with nothing more than a buzzer. Not only can this be distressing for the woman, but it places significant pressures on what is a female-led workforce. How must a midwife feel to have to tell a woman she will have to go to another hospital? What happens if there are complications?”*

The potential closure of midwife-led birthing units in Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire are also causing concern amongst expectant mothers, as are issues with maternity services in Caithness.

*“Women in these areas are looking at having to travel more significant distances to have their baby if the midwife led units close. Some of these journeys will involve crossing the Erskine Bridge, which can often be closed in high winds. Others could involve over 200 mile round trips in extremely challenging weather conditions, just to give birth. Women are being failed by these decisions.”*

Similarly, the ever-increasing workloads of community midwives and health visitors, the majority of whom are women, mean that many are not receiving the levels of care and support they should be. This also has a significant impact on those providing the care, who are becoming increasingly frustrated at being able to do less and less to support pregnant women. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where large distances need to be covered. In these instances, both the midwife/health visitor and the mother/expectant mother are affected.

The SWC fully supports initiatives such as the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) and its expansion. The importance of personal care and intensive support for young mothers from deprived communities cannot be underestimated. While the expansion of the FNP is undoubtedly positive, the workload of each team, plus the geography of Scotland must be taken into account. Just like the care sector, the majority of those who work in maternity care services are women. One FNP team covering an area the size of, for example, NHS Highlands and Islands, will mean a significant workload over a remote, rural and super sparse area of the country. It is therefore vital that the needs of the local area are taken into account when allocating a FNP to each NHS Board.

In rural areas of Scotland, women often feel isolated in the services offered around maternity care. In some cases, air ambulances are used to uplift women in labour, resulting in women giving birth alone without a family or support network surrounding them. Rural women have commented on the lack of health visitors and midwives. Many who live on the islands must leave 38 weeks into their pregnancy, creating childcare issues, as well as removing support networks.

It is, therefore, important to ensure that the investments outlined within the draft budget around maternity services are not off-set by the potential impact of the reduction and closure of other services on women.



## Chapter 5: Finance and the Constitution

*“The impact of income tax policy is limited to those who are in receipt of a taxable income. In Scotland, there are almost 2 million adults with no income tax liabilities due to low or no income, which is over 40 per cent of the 16+ population.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 26**

Unpaid carers are not in receipt of a taxable income, which means that the roles they undertake are not valued. The amount of unpaid work undertaken by women saves the economy a significant amount of money every year. However because these roles, such as cleaning, cooking and particularly caring, are seen as *“traditionally women’s work”*, they are not afforded the value that they should be. Women who undertake caring roles for family and loved ones are not adequately valued by society, nor do they receive remuneration which reflects the work that they do. They are not afforded access to respite care, which would make a significant difference to the health and wellbeing of many.

*“There needs to be a proper recognition of the work we do – because it is work, it’s like a full time job. Being able to get someone to help for a few hours a week would make such a difference. I need a bit of time to myself to feel human again.”*

As long as women continued to be expected to carry out this type of role and the importance of caring continues to be undervalued, there will always be gender inequality. The Scottish Government, therefore, has a responsibility to seriously consider the amount of money saved each year because of the women carry out a significant amount of unpaid work.



## Chapter 6: Education and Skills

*“We will continue to invest in early learning and childcare (ELC) as we work towards delivering the increased entitlement of 1,140 hours per year by the end of this Parliament. Our vision is for this expansion to deliver high quality, flexible early learning and childcare which is affordable and accessible for all.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 27**

Childcare continues to be one of the most significant barriers for women seeking to enter into education or employment throughout the country. The topic is discussed in some way at every event held by the SWC.

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

A well trained, highly skilled, well paid workforce is one of the most important aspects of a quality system of ELC. It is vital that the workers who provide this type of care, the majority of whom are women, are given recognition for the work they do, both in monetary and societal terms. This is beneficial for children. They are guaranteed to receive a positive, valuable early years experience when they are looked after, nurtured and educated by well paid, well valued workers.

It makes a significant difference when these women have enthusiasm and experience for the challenging, demanding work they do.

It is also good for parents, who would be safe in the knowledge that the women who are looking after their children are as well equipped as possible to do so.

*“Choosing a childcare provider is a big responsibility. I want to make sure I’m leaving my child, the most precious thing in my life, in the capable hands of people who are good at their jobs, who want to be doing their jobs and who are going to give my little girl the best start in life. This is just as important as the accessibility, cost and flexibility of the service. It needs to be recognised as such.”*

Unfortunately, many who work in ELC are not given the support they should be to develop and grow within their roles, which can make it more difficult for them to fully carry out the tasks they are expected to.

Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and further education courses in ELC do not attract the same levels of funding as those traditionally undertaken by young men, such as construction and plumbing. This perpetuates a cycle of low paid, low skilled work, much of which is seen to be ‘women’s work’ and as such is not valued by society.

*“Plumbers are paid more than early years practitioners. Why is fixing pipes worth more than looking after our children?”*

The Scottish Government’s drive to ensure that the childcare workforce is ‘degree led’ is having a detrimental impact on women who have worked within the sector for a number of years. The focus on obtaining formal qualifications suggests that the years of knowledge and skills gained by experienced, committed staff members have very little worth. The time and expense incurred by those workers who, despite their understanding of the childcare sector, must obtain qualifications if they are at a certain level, is not taken into account.

*“I’ve worked as a nursery nurse for over thirty years. I manage a facility, which means I have had to go to university to obtain a BA in Childcare Practice. I’ve had to study part-time for three years, all the while working and juggling other family responsibilities. This made me feel as if the work I’ve done over the course of my career in childcare means nothing, because it’s not validated until I have a piece of paper to prove it. You don’t see plumbers or mechanics having to do this, so is it just because we do ‘women’s work’ that it’s not valued without the qualification?”*

It is important to recognise that there are often significant disparities in the way those employed in the private sector and those employed in the public sector are treated. This is not often acknowledged by policy and decision makers, which results in significant disadvantage, particularly for the workers outwith the public sector.

Workers in private nurseries are open to more exploitation than their Local Authority counterparts. They are often only paid the minimum wage, with younger workers who are in training through a Modern Apprenticeship or college placement paid even less than that. These workplaces are, more often than not, non-unionised. Once the young women are fully qualified, they tend to be let go in favour of a younger, cheaper trainee. They will often either become supply staff, which offers no guarantees of permanent employment or income, or will have to take a job in another industry, meaning that their training and qualifications are not being used in the way they should.

*“This is exploitation in its most obvious form, which causes competition between recently qualified early years practitioners.”*

Conversely, Local Authority childcare workers are in nurseries and pre-five centres which receive better funding, where they are able to join a trade union, and where the payment of the Living Wage is a real possibility. There are more opportunities for training and progression, which strengthens the workforce overall through skills and qualification improvement. These workers are more likely to be adequately equipped to fully support children at the transition stages through their early-learner journey. The ability to specialise their development to focus on, for example, supporting children with additional support needs, as well as behavioural and nurture issues, is also more widely available within the public sector.

*“Not recognising the differences in wages, terms and conditions and opportunities to further a career between the public and private sectors does so many workers a real disservice. They do the same job, but are not always treated the same way. For many, caring for the kids they look after is the only thing that keeps them going, rather than the wages they get paid or the hours they work. There needs to be a balance.”*

There also needs to be more recognition and value placed on the work of childminders, who provide high quality ELC to many children. Childminders often provide more flexibility, for example they are more likely to offer care before 8am and after 6pm. They are undervalued, however, as they are not considered to provide ‘quality’ ELC. For example, employees cannot use employer’s childcare vouchers for childminders.

*“Childminders provide a positive environment for children because of the home based situation and also the mix of ages that they are likely to look after. They’re a lifeline in many areas, particularly more rural parts of the country, where they are often the only childcare providers in an area. They are high quality providers and should be recognised as such.”*

It is widely accepted that the overwhelming majority of the ELC workforce are women. There are a number of reasons as to why this is the case, most of which are rooted in gender inequality. Perceptions and misconceptions that childcare is “*women’s work*”; the perpetual streaming of young women into this type of employment; and the low wages which are paid within this sector are just some of the key reasons as to why the workforce are dominated by women.

The argument is often made that if more men were to enter into the ELC workforce, then roles would be more highly valued which would, in turn, increase wages overall. The SWC rejects this point of view. Women have frequently told the organisation that while they believe it is important for the ELC workforce to become more gender balanced, it is more fundamental that society overall learns to value the work that women traditionally undertake, such as caring.

*“Childcare and early years education is fundamentally undervalued as a career because it is seen as ‘women’s work’. It won’t be seen as something that men will come into until that stigma is broken down and it’s recognised as the difficult, but extremely rewarding, job it is.”*

Regardless of the type of childcare provider they use, parents should be assured that the women who are looking after their children are subject to the same working conditions, are well paid, and tend to be given the recognition they deserve for the vital work that they do.

Families with disabled children face significant barriers in accessing childcare which is appropriate for their condition. There is very little provision available which meets the needs of disabled children, or those with additional support needs. Many parents are unable to return to work because of the lack of availability.

*“Families with disabled children are being failed because there’s so little childcare available to be able to fully and adequately support our children. It’s hard enough for parents of non disabled children to access publicly funded provision – we’ve got no chance.”*

The Scottish Government must do more to ensure that disabled children and those with additional support needs are afforded access to state funded childcare. There are a number of measures which should be put in place in order to achieve this aim. These include further training and development for all staff with regards to the variety and range of conditions children can face, improving physical access to buildings and providing specialist Early Years Practitioners whose sole purpose is to educate and care for disabled children.

*“A lot of the things which could improve the situation for disabled children and their families are very simple – there just needs to be more awareness, understanding and specialist provision.”*

The Scottish Government must take into account the geography of rural Scotland. In a number of remote, rural and super sparse areas, it is extremely difficult for women to access formal childcare. Where there is a nursery or a childminder available, they often do not offer flexibility. Wrap-around childcare - which often means before 8.30am and after 3.30pm - is limited. Similarly, provision is not always near to a place of work or study. As a result, women can be forced to undertake long journeys by public transport in order to drop their children off, then to get to work or college, before doing the same again in the evening. Many of the women who have to juggle these responsibilities are in low paid employment.

*“By the time you pay for the bus and pay for the childcare, what’s the point in working when wages are so low?”*

It is also important to note that Local Authority childcare facilities are only open during school term times. This does not reflect the working patterns of parents, who are then forced to seek alternative provision during school holidays. Again, this often means relying on family and friends to offer help and support.

*“I don’t have enough annual leave to take every holiday that the nursery has and I can’t get my kids into private childcare during this time because they won’t take children on a short-term basis. This leads to me being stressed trying to coordinate where they’re going to go, not only during longer breaks, but also on odd in-service days and other mid-term holidays. Sometimes I feel as if my children are being passed from pillar to post but I’ve got no other option.”*

Many women in rural areas rely on childminders to provide their childcare. They are likely to be able to offer more flexible hours than, for example, nurseries. As a result they are in high demand due to the lack of formal provision across the geographical area.

The lack of childcare in rural areas can put pressure on women to apply for jobs with an increased salary. This can result in more responsibility and longer working hours just so they can pay for childcare. Otherwise they can be forced to choose not return to work at all.

*“It’s a catch 22. If you go back into work you have to try to balance that with a family life. If you don’t go back to work you feel as if you’ve wasted your education or are not fulfilling all of your potential. It’s so hard.”*

As a result of difficulty in accessing services, there is a significant reliance on informal provision from friends and family. In some circumstances older women in local communities have offered to look after other people’s children as they have recognised the need for the assistance.

*“Unless you have family in the area, it’s really difficult to get any kind of childcare. Not everyone is lucky enough to have support networks around, which makes it even more difficult for them to find someone to look after their children.”*

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

*“We’re paying roughly the same every month for childcare as we do for our mortgage. That’s frightening.”*

One of the main difficulties faced by parents is the availability of affordable childcare, either in the area where they live or close by to where they work. For families with children aged between 3 and 5 years old, it is extremely difficult to access places within Local Authority nurseries, which guarantee funded hours. They are forced to rely on expensive private provision as a result.

The expansion of funded hours of childcare and early years provision is positive for the children it will benefit. The provision of ELC for pre-school children is undoubtedly important; however families also rely on after school care, holiday clubs and breakfast clubs.

*“Cuts within Local Authorities have led to the reduction and, in too many cases, the complete removal of publicly funded and provided breakfast and after school clubs. Parents are still going to struggle if there’s more flexibility and availability of childcare for younger children, if there’s nothing to support school-age kids.”*

It must, therefore, be borne in mind that the need for good quality, accessible, appropriate childcare does not always end when a child goes to school. The Scottish Government must consider childcare as a whole, not only for 3 and 4 year olds, but for children of all ages. Reinstatement of breakfast, after school and holiday clubs within a Local Authority setting would be extremely beneficial to many and must be taken into account as part of a full package of measures. This would not only be positive for children, but also their parents, particularly mothers, who would have more support and therefore more opportunities to undertake or re-enter education, training or employment.



*“Our college sector provides a modern, responsive and valued part of our education and training system. We will increase our investment in our college sector to ensure that it continues to add real value to our economy and offer opportunities to adults of all ages. We will continue to maintain at least 116,000 full-time equivalent college places.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 29**

Women tend to make up a higher percentage of college students. Care has the largest number of enrolments, with over 18,000 students in the last year. The majority of these are women. There has been significant centralisation of colleges over the last few years, with ten institutions now existing where twenty five previously served Scottish students. The SWC has expressed concern over the impact of these mergers, which have, in many cases, further restricted the opportunities for women to access education and training. Significant cuts to part-time courses have also had a detrimental impact on women, who made up the majority of students in this type of study.

*“Many of the part time college courses which were available were more focused on ‘soft skills’. This type of learning was ideal for women who have been away from education, training or employment for a long time, because it built skills and confidence as well as giving them qualifications. These are almost impossible to come by now which means that so many women are missing out.”*

It is hoped that the increased investment in the college sector will take into account the removal of part time courses. Their reinstatement should be considered as a matter of priority.



*“We will continue to ensure that apprenticeship opportunities are open to all. We will support Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to deliver more opportunities for individuals to earn a wage and gain industry-recognised qualifications, while supporting employers to develop a skilled, diverse, inclusive workforce. However, we have long acknowledged that there are challenges with advancing equality in relation to the labour market, and this is reflected in the Modern Apprenticeship programme.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 30**

The Modern Apprenticeship (MA) scheme could be an excellent way to tackle occupational segregation. For individuals, an MA is a job which lets them earn a wage and gain an industry-recognised qualification. Each year, over 25,000 people start a Modern Apprenticeship, combining a qualification with on-the-job experience.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) contributes towards the costs of their training, through a training provider who works with the business. There are over 80 Modern Apprenticeship frameworks – from healthcare and financial services to construction and IT. These have been developed by sector skills councils, in consultation with their industry.

Apprenticeships are highly gendered. Young men continue to be steered towards fields such as construction, joinery and engineering. Young women are encouraged to undertake MAs in subjects such as hairdressing, early years education, administration and retail. While young men are known to enter into what are traditionally ‘female’ roles, young women are unlikely to take up MAs in traditionally ‘male’ fields. 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.

*“Why is it seen as a good thing when a guy does childcare, but nobody says anything about the hundreds of young women who do this every year? Is it only valuable when a man gets involved?”*

Young women are seldom offered information about Modern Apprenticeships through careers advice in school and are, therefore, often unaware of the range of training available. Careers in subjects such as engineering are encouraged through academic routes, i.e. a university degree, however that option is not suitable for all. As a result, many young women are missing out on opportunities to learn while working.

## Chapter 7: Justice

*“There is also a strong focus on tackling violence against women and girls, with the introduction of a domestic abuse bill that reflects modern understandings of abuse and will provide police, prosecutors and courts with new powers to bring perpetrators of abuse to justice.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 32**

Women in Scotland are proud of the gender-based definition of violence used by the Scottish Government. This recognises that VAWG is both a cause and a consequence of fundamental gender inequality. The clear commitment by the Scottish Government to tackle VAWG is welcomed by women throughout the country. The implementation of policy and practices, such as ‘Equally Safe’, the National Group to Address Violence Against Women and the creation of the Caledonian System, are all important steps towards the eradication of VAWG.

The legal protection which has been put in place by the Scottish Government and as a result of lobbying, campaigning and support from public and third sector organisations is also extremely important. For example, the introduction of a specific offence of domestic abuse will afford women who have experienced violence increased access to justice. It sends out a clear message that the courts will impose custodial sentences on men who commit offences under this legislation.

*“This issue is so important. The only way to ensure women have access to justice, support and most importantly safety, is by putting laws in place which punish the men who abuse.”*

More needs to be done, however, in terms of securing convictions for sexual offences. Despite this legislation, conviction rates remain disappointingly low in Scotland. There are a number of contributing factors as to why so few men are brought to justice. Attitudes towards the victim in court, questions about their previous sexual partners, what they had been wearing when the rape happened and whether they had been drinking can all lead to low conviction rates.

Campaigns such as ‘This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me’ and ‘Not Ever’, which were run by Rape Crisis Scotland, are excellent examples of preventative work being done. The Scottish Government should do more to endorse and run this type of advertising campaign, not only for rape and sexual violence, but across the broader VAWG spectrum.

The work undertaken by the justice system and various agencies in tackling domestic abuse, such as Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), is also welcomed by women throughout Scotland.

Despite these advancements, there are still too many loopholes within the law which means those who perpetrate abuse are not punished in the way they should be. Victims, the majority of whom are women, are denied access to justice as a result. Domestic abuse is a highly gendered issue and VAWG overall is both a cause and a consequence of the significant gender inequalities which exist in society.

It is extremely important that the services which provide advice and support to victims of VAWG are provided with adequate funding, especially given the rise in 'new forms' of VAWG, such as revenge porn. It is also vital that the police and the courts are given thorough training in order to be able to properly deal with both victims and perpetrators. Without this full circle approach, women will continue to be limited in access to justice and redress.

The establishment of specialist domestic abuse courts in locations throughout the country has been extremely important. Women have called for domestic abuse courts, or similar appropriate, community-based justice mechanisms to be set up in more areas throughout Scotland. Many women are afraid to disclose that they have been abused. If specialist mechanisms operated in more parts of the country, awareness of this type of access to justice would increase. This would, hopefully, further increase awareness of domestic abuse and take away the stigma that is too often attached to women in this situation.

Those who have experienced violence and abuse often drop charges in cases in the mainstream courts as *“financially it's them who have to bear the brunt”*. Case processing times are different (often longer) in smaller, more outlying areas than they are in the main towns.

Many solicitors often do not fully understand the complexities of VAWG and are therefore not best placed to represent victims. Accessing specialists can be very difficult, particularly for those who live outwith main towns and cities. Many women are also unaware that they are free to seek alternative legal representation if they are unhappy with the advice they receive.

*“There just isn't enough information available for women who are looking to get protection from the courts. This discourages too many from even trying.”*

More advocacy services are necessary, particularly for women from BME communities, disabled women and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This should be considered, with particular attention paid to cultural issues and specific needs.

*“Too many vulnerable women are frightened of the legal system and do not know where to turn for help.”*

While prevention work being carried out at the moment is vital, more needs to be done to tackle the root causes of VAWG. A change in the culture of Scotland is necessary, looking at the way in which women are viewed and how this can both stem from and lead to VAWG.



*“The central element of our vision for reducing reoffending is that our criminal justice system uses prison less and has an even stronger emphasis on robust community sentences, including greater use of electronic monitoring.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 33**

The SWC supports the Scottish Government’s vision for reducing reoffending, in particular the presumption against short periods of imprisonment. The majority of women in the prison system are serving sentences for economically motivated crimes, such as shoplifting. Low level crimes, which attract short sentences, are most common. Most women in the prison system, whether on remand or convicted prisoners, come from troubled backgrounds. The sentences they receive are considered to be *“much harsher than if a man committed the same crime.”*

Imprisonment removes these women from their family and support networks. A period of as short a time as thirty days imprisonment has a significant impact on welfare benefit entitlement, access to their children, housing and much more. Short periods of imprisonment are often part of a cycle for women who should instead be able to access education and support against reoffending. This could be achieved if the presumption in place at the moment was extended.

*“If a woman gets seven nights for non-payment of fines, then still can’t pay the fine when she gets out, she will end up receiving a sentence of, say, thirty days. When she’s finished that sentence she may have to resort to shoplifting, or worse, in order to be able to pay the fine, which will result in another short sentence. It’s a vicious cycle and women will continue to be trapped unless more is done to encourage rehabilitation and community disposals.”*

Going to court, potentially being placed on remand and being sentenced are extremely daunting processes. There are very few services available which specifically assist women in this situation. The lack of support can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and stress for those who find themselves in unfamiliar and vulnerable positions.

*“I couldn’t take in what was happening to me. I didn’t really want to. I just kept looking at the sentence I was given and thinking that I wanted to die.”*

Women who enter prison for the first time are given very little information and support. Most new prisoners have to ask others to *“show them the ropes”*.

*“The staff ask you if you’re suicidal and that’s about it.”*

Women serving sentences in prison in Scotland typically get one visit per week. Prisoners on remand are entitled to more than this as they have not yet been sentenced.

*“The visiting areas aren’t great. You feel as if the officers are always looking at your visitors, especially the kids. You’re not really allowed physical contact either which is very hard.”*

The prisons which women can be put into are difficult to reach. Cornton Vale is considered the least accessible for friends and family who wish to visit. If visitors are late, regardless of the reasons why, e.g. public transport issues or caring responsibilities, then they are not allowed entry into the prison.

*“There should be some sort of arrangement for transport to Cornton Vale - a bus that leaves from Buchanan Bus Station or something like that. They do this for some of the men’s prisons. Why don’t we get the same?”*

Women who have committed what would be considered petty crimes, who do not pose a danger to society, should be offered more in the way of community disposals. These women need support and assistance to break the cycle they are in. This is particularly the case given a large amount of the prison population suffer from significant psychiatric issues.

*“Most of the women in there shouldn't be in prison. They should be in a hospital being treated for mental health issues. They shouldn't be locked up.”*



***“The Justice portfolio's continuing investment to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) will have an ongoing and positive impact on women and young people.”***  
**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 34**

Women have unreservedly welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling the causes and consequences of VAWG. Many have, however, raised concerns about the lack of leadership around issues of commercial sexual exploitation, in particular prostitution, despite condemnation of this in the overall VAWG definition.

Recently the dialogue around this subject has been moving towards one of sex work as a choice for women. But does a woman wake up in the morning and choose to sell her body? As an organisation, it is the SWC position that prostitution is a form of violence against women and is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality with women being subjected to exploitation on a daily basis.

Women in prostitution need support, not punishment. Conviction for prostitution is often penalised with a fine, however women often have no money of their own to pay this so have no choice but to return to prostitution. It is important to note that while the woman is criminalised, the man who pays to use her body is not held to account. If men did not 'purchase' sex, then there would be no demand and, therefore, no trade in prostitution.

*“We need some form of leadership and commitment from the Scottish Government which recognises that women are the victims in prostitution and should not be punished. We need to recognise the complex and chaotic lives they often lead. Women need support and guidance to escape this cycle of abuse.”*

The SWC recently launched a booklet, entitled 'A Guide on Images of Violence against Women in the Media', which aims to show how highly sexualised everyday adverts and newspaper articles are. This guide focuses on VAWG within the media which, is often overlooked. The ways of describing, depicting and featuring women and men in the media affect our daily lives, yet seems to go unnoticed. A lot of people think that an advertisement, a joke, a newspaper headline or a magazine cover can be in bad taste but that it ultimately does no harm.

By focusing on how violence is present in the portrayal of women in the media, the SWC hope to challenge some of the issues and stimulate discussion. This guide looks to demonstrate how the media use violent images and words every day

*“We will maintain investment in our fire and rescue and police services to enable the delivery of effective and efficient services that reflect the needs of local communities.”*  
**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 35**

Many women have commented on the potential risks to community safety following the closure of a number of police stations, particularly in smaller towns and villages. The creation of a Scottish Police Force, as well as a national Fire and Rescue service, has resulted in significant centralisation, often to the detriment of local residents.

*“We used to have a police station in the town. Over the past few years staffing levels have been reduced and after the single police force came into being the station closed altogether. As a woman living on my own, this has made me feel quite apprehensive. Previously, if I needed assistance, I knew I could contact the station and a local officer would come to my house. Now I have to phone a central call centre and wait until officers are available. It’s really disconcerting.”*

It is also important to note that some Local Authorities have introduced cost-cutting measures which are having an impact on the safety of individuals. In certain areas, councils are turning street lights off in order to save money. This has a particular impact on women, who are left feeling unsafe when, for example, returning home from work. This is especially true for those in rural areas, where many of the employment available is shift-work within the hospitality industry.

*“I finish work at about ten o’clock at night and have to walk fifteen minutes along the road to get home. It’s not so bad in the summer because it’s still fairly light so you don’t notice that there are no streetlights. In the winter, however, when it’s dark and freezing cold and wet, it’s horrible. I don’t have a choice though - I need my job, I don’t drive and there aren’t any taxis in the area that would take me the equivalent of a few minutes in the car.”*

## **Chapter 8: Economy, Jobs and Fair Work**

*“The Economy, Jobs and Fair Work portfolio is central to deliver Scotland’s Economic Strategy and achieving a more competitive and inclusive economy, improving Scotland’s ability to withstand economic shocks, sustain higher employment and created better quality jobs and fairer work. Crucially, we recognise that increasing growth and tackling inequality are mutually supporting in making Scotland a more successful country with opportunities for all to flourish.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 36**

### **Women and Employment**

The issue of women’s economic participation is discussed at each and every event held by the Scottish Women’s Convention. The complex issues which are attached to women’s place in the labour market cannot be underestimated.

Many women continue to be steered towards and clustered into what are seen as traditionally female roles, such as caring, administration, cleaning, retail and hospitality. These jobs offer low wages and more often than not are on a part-time basis. Many are temporary, undertaken on a zero hours contract. There are little to no opportunities for flexible working or training and development in this type of employment.

Women undertake the majority of part time work in Scotland. While for some this is an informed choice, for many others it is the only option available to them. Family and caring responsibilities, as well as poor public transport in many areas, mean that part-time work is often the most feasible means of employment.

Women often have to undertake more than one part-time job as opposed to full-time employment. This contributes significantly to women's underemployment in Scotland and happens for a variety of reasons. Lack of accessible, affordable, appropriate childcare, poor public transport and limited job availability are some of the key contributing factors.

Only being able to find this type of work can be detrimental to women's confidence. There is not a lot of support available for those who wish to progress.

*“How can a woman give up one or two part-time jobs (which suit family circumstances) to go to university to get a teaching degree or an accountancy degree, regardless of her abilities or ambition?”*

Many of the jobs available in the current climate are undertaken as zero hours contracts. This type of work is often offered in areas where women predominate. Workers on zero hours contracts do not accrue holidays and are not paid for sick days. There are no guarantees of work from day to day, therefore no fixed income.

*“It's not right. People have to phone in every day to see if they have a shift or not. How can you plan your life around that?”*

Organising childcare, or cover for other caring responsibilities, is extremely difficult. The nature of a zero hours contract also means that it is impossible to claim financial assistance through tax credits to top up income and pay for childcare costs, because there is no guaranteed income and therefore an assessment cannot be made.

Women also continue to undertake the majority of unpaid work in Scotland. The value of the roles they do, such as caring and housekeeping, are all too often underestimated and undervalued in society.

*“Not enough people understand the skills and abilities gained through unpaid work. A woman isn't 'just a mum' or 'just a housewife'. The reality is she's juggling a number of responsibilities under that title and should be recognised and rewarded for the vital role that plays in society.”*

While it can be difficult for women in urban areas to access employment, issues are exacerbated for those who live in more remote, rural and super sparse areas of the country. Due to the rural nature of Scotland's geography, there is a distinct lack of investment in employment opportunities within the regions. Tourism is one of the main employers in many parts, with women often working part-time, in seasonal, low paid work within this sector. Some women establish their own businesses relying on local support and networking to promote their enterprise. Physical access to employment can be difficult due to a lack of childcare and poor public transport.

*“Buses in this area are extortionate. If you're paid the Minimum Wage then you end up working two or three hours a day just to be able to get to work.”*

High speed broadband connections are not always available in many rural areas. Small, remote enterprises with poor transport links need to rely on internet services to promote and conduct their business. Some areas of rural Scotland have no access to broadband, resulting in restricted opportunities for trading. In areas where there is internet provision, there is often little competition between providers, meaning those in rural parts of the country pay more than those in more urban areas.

*“Lack of high speed broadband limits so many social and business opportunities. Slow internet connection stops people working from home and being able to shop online.”*

Online forms are the most common way of applying for jobs. It is, therefore, extremely difficult for those with poor or non-existent broadband to carry out what are taken for granted as simple tasks by many employers.

Another key issue faced by women is occupational segregation, gender streaming and the gender pay gap. Despite the intentions set out in legislation, policy and practice to improve women’s position in the workplace, the glass ceiling undoubtedly still exists. Progression is too often denied to many women for a number of reasons. These include women not being considered for further training or promotion if they work part-time, if they are seen to be of ‘childbearing’ age, or they are unable to work more than the standard 9am – 5pm working patterns because of caring responsibilities.

*“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.”*

Similarly, employers can make returning to work very difficult for women after maternity leave. Despite anti-discrimination legislation having been in place for a number of years, roles can be changed and lines of responsibility altered.

The lack of flexibility shown by employers can have a detrimental impact on women’s future potential. This can be damaging for prospective earnings, as well as having the knock on impact of diminishing skills and making career progression even more difficult. As a result, many choose not to return to their previous job, but instead seek part-time employment which fits around their family and other responsibilities.

*“I was a bank branch manager in a town approximately 30 miles away from where I live before I had my second baby. Travelling there and back plus the cost of childcare meant it was not worth my while to go back. I now work part-time at the weekends when my husband is at home so we don’t have to pay for childcare. He increased his hours slightly and because he is a lower wage earner we qualify for tax credits. It’s crazy how we are better off now than we were when I worked 6 days a week as a bank manager.”*

Women who work or who have worked in senior roles find themselves extremely disadvantaged when they choose to have a family. Those returning from maternity leave can struggle to return to the role they held before they had their baby.

It must also be borne in mind that older women are often subject to discrimination within the workplace, difficulties accessing employment and barriers to developing within the workplace. Older women have significant experience, skills and abilities gained throughout the course of their working lives. Their value in the workplace cannot and must not be underestimated. Some women are reluctant to define themselves as older, as the way they feel about their own skills and abilities may change. Women who work in certain areas feel it necessary to keep a “*young attitude*” because of the nature of the work they do.

There are issues for many who work in particular jobs, many of which are subject to Equal Pay cases, in which women predominate. These women often undertake physically and mentally demanding roles, such as that of a carer, or a nurse, which can become more difficult with age. They have had to fight for the basic right to be paid fairly for the work they have done, and in many cases continue to do.

Restructuring and redundancies within workplaces can contribute to women feeling, or being made to feel, that they are older. They are being forced to compete for positions similar to those which they have occupied for years previously.

*“It wasn't until I had to re-apply for jobs that management started to ask how old I was. Up until that point nobody had mentioned my age but when the reorganisation started all of a sudden it seemed to become relevant.”*

This type of process can make women feel that they should be considering retirement, especially when they are “displaced” into another role. Adjusting to new roles and responsibilities can be challenging, and older women are often afforded little or no assistance to make this transition.

The lack of recognition of the health issues faced by older women has become more apparent over the last five years.

*“Women aren't necessarily having major health issues, they're just dealing with things that happen as you get older. They usually have to do this with little or no support at work.”*

Often policies relating to menopause, for example, are extremely difficult to negotiate and implement. Misunderstandings and misinformation around menopause can cause difficulties for women who are experiencing it, which discourages them from seeking support from their employer.

It is vital that employers and other staff members recognise the skills and experience that older women bring to the workplace. There needs to be a basic understanding that although older women may, at times, require additional support, time and assistance, they are still more than capable of fulfilling their role and making a positive contribution. There needs to be a way of maximising the skills and experience older women possess, for example through mentoring other staff members or younger people.

*“Employers need to understand the benefit they will get from having older women in the workplace.”*



*“The Scottish Government's new employability powers will be key to advancing equality.”*  
**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 38**

It is vital that the impact on women of employability powers which are being devolved to the Scottish Parliament are fully considered. There is real potential for the establishment and development of a Scottish programme which can significantly improve the lives of women.

More needs to be done to assist women during the initial stages of seeking employment. One of the key issues faced is a lack of knowledge as to where to physically look for work.

*“I was made redundant and decided to go to the Jobcentre who were extremely vague, telling me to ‘look around online for a job’. I left feeling more confused than when I went in. There should be a centralised database of vacancies rather than having to trawl through agency sites, council sites etc.”*

Many women do not have experience of using IT equipment on a regular basis, let alone preparing a CV, completing application forms or attending interviews. This can result from having been made redundant from a job they have been in for a number of years, or because they have spent a significant amount of time away from the labour market. This is often due to caring responsibilities, particularly for children. The current system does not give consideration to those who do not have the relevant computer skills or knowledge. Very little is provided in the way of career’s guidance. As a result, women can find themselves applying for unsuitable jobs, or not securing the type of employment they are able to do because they are not adequately prepared for an interview.

*“An interview is an extremely daunting thing if you’ve never had to do one before. A bit of help beforehand can really make all the difference.”*

Women are often unaware of the skills they possess when seeking work. This is particularly the case for those who have been away from the labour market for some time.

*“Too many say ‘I’m just a mum’, not realising the wide variety of skills they possess as a result of running a home and raising children.”*

At present, there is little support available for disabled women who want to access sustainable employment.

*“I went to the Jobcentre to seek work knowing I would need help with a disability. I was told that there would be external organisations which could help, however in reality very little support was provided. I was given a job in retail which involved lifting, despite telling my disability employment adviser that I would struggle due to my condition. I was basically given no choice but to take the job, which I ended up having to give up. Nobody is really listening to disabled people.”*

Disabled people need a firm diagnosis before they can access certain benefits and assistance. This can be difficult, particularly for those with mental health issues, whose conditions can fluctuate on a daily basis.

Many women have commented on the difficulties faced when accessing employability services which exist at the moment. They are not meeting the needs of those who access them, particularly as they are not taking into account the specific issues and barriers faced by women.

*“The Work Programme isn’t working. Women are being forced into training programmes which don’t meet their skills and abilities, which as a result are not effective. There seems to be a focus on meeting targets rather than how these schemes can help women into work.”*

Jobcentre workers are now referred to as ‘job coaches’, however the change in title does not mean that they are being adequately trained to meet the needs of claimants. For many, attending Jobcentre Plus feels like it’s more about meeting targets rather than supporting individuals.

The current Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, which is an evidence-based approach to supported employment for people who have severe mental health issues, is seen to work reasonably well. There is, however, not enough information out there for people about it, nor are there enough places offered.

*“You cannot underestimate the importance of personalised support from the people who are supposed to help you find work. The way things are at the moment, people often feel like they are simply an inconvenience to staff.”*

Jobcentre staff need to be aware that many people who go to seek work have never accessed the benefits system before.

*“I was self-employed for a number of years. However, due to a big change in my circumstances, I now have to sign on while I look for work. This has been a real challenge for me. Jobcentre and DWP staff do not offer any sympathy or grant leniency towards women who are dealing with the psychological impact of having to cope with housing, feeding and raising children on their own with no support from family members. There’s not enough training to deal with women on a case by case, individual basis.”*

There is also a lack of information for women who have recently been made redundant. Cuts to public services and vast redundancies in the private sector, both in areas where women make up a large proportion of the workforce, have led to a significant number of women having to seek work again.

Individual needs and skills are not taken into account in employability services. Support is not directed in the way it should be, meaning that many women are not provided with enough information about access to work. This results in the Jobcentre sending people for interviews in jobs they do not have the skills or abilities for.

For most women, support when seeking work is either limited or not available at all within their local area. While assistance is available in theory, there are often a number of barriers for women which prevent them from being able to physically take advantage of support.

For example, basic support from the Jobcentre is provided. However because staff are under so much pressure to deal with so many claimants, with varying skills, levels and competencies, it is extremely difficult to access the individual support that many require. There are also issues for women who have been made redundant and attend the Jobcentre in order to find a new job.

*“While there is help available around applications and interview processes, it is at a very basic level. I have good computer skills and a good standard of education. I have, as a result, been turned away from attending courses as my CV as it stands is considered to be ‘good enough’. I don’t know where to go from here.”*

Any new employability service needs to be aware that entering the labour market after a long time away, or for the first time, can be extremely daunting. The level of support will depend solely on the needs of the individual. Assumptions cannot be made about what they need or do not need based on complex, inflexible forms and assessments.

*“What is the point in making people apply for jobs they are not qualified to do or are unable to undertake because of e.g. caring responsibilities, just to be able to show that they have completed a specific number of applications in a week?”*

Women in Scotland undoubtedly benefit from legislation, policy and practices which enhance women's economic empowerment. Despite these advances, however, it is clear that a number of barriers must be overcome in order to create equality in the world of work.

More women would be able to actively and meaningfully participate in the labour market if the following were addressed and tackled.

- Recognition that women undertake the majority of part-time, low paid, low skilled work and the impact this has on economic activity.
- Awareness of the unpaid work that women do and the amount of money this saves the economy each year.
- The prevalence of in-work poverty and the resulting reliance on top-up assistance through social security.
- The lack of accessible, affordable, appropriate, flexible childcare and the barriers this creates to women's participation in the labour market.
- Difficulties in accessing employment in rural areas.
- Occupational segregation and gender streaming, particularly in training programmes such as the Modern Apprenticeship scheme.
- The existence of the gender pay gap and the difficulties in closing this, particularly in certain job roles.
- The importance of older women in the workplace and the value, skills, knowledge and experience they bring.
- The difference between what is set out in legislation in relation to pregnancy and maternity working rights and parental leave, and how this works in practice.



## Chapter 9: Communities, Social Security and Equalities

*"We are committed to preserving and expanding our social housing stock as part of creating a fairer society, and 70 per cent of the 50,000 affordable homes target will be for social rent, representing a 75 per cent increase on our previous five year social rented target."*  
**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 42**

There is a critical need for more affordable, appropriate housing overall in Scotland. This is particularly the case in the social housing sector, where families often live in unsuitable accommodation. Many are overcrowded, or are forced to move away from support networks due to lack of availability.

*"I don't want to have to live in a two bedroom flat with my two kids, but I know there are no bigger properties available round about this area. I rely on my family and friends, who live nearby, for childcare so that I can go out to work. If I had to move outwith the area, I would have to get a bus to drop my kids off, get another bus to work, and then do a similar journey at night. It would make me going out to work completely pointless and I don't want that."*

The availability of affordable, safe and secure housing is one of the most important aspects of a fair society is under threat by the removal of council tax and housing benefit brought about by the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). While the Scottish Government will be given the power to change this when further welfare measures are devolved, this change will not come into effect for some time.

Women who are used to having their rent paid directly to the landlord will, under the new system, be given the money directly and expected to make the payment themselves. This could cause issues with rent arrears. More often than not, women manage tight household budgets, which run to the dates upon which small pockets of money will be received.

*“If we have a bad winter I won’t be paying my rent. The money will go towards my gas and electricity instead. I can’t cope with my kids being cold again.”*

With a greater reliance on high-cost private let homes, women are sourcing unregulated, high interest ‘payday’ loans or credit cards in order to pay increased housing costs.

*“The Welfare Reform measures are a financial assault on women. All of the cuts are impacting on women more than men due to the inequalities we are exposed to in the first place.”*

There is also a stigma attached to those who live in social housing which can have a detrimental impact on women and their families. This needs to be challenged.

*“Social housing used to be the norm in Scotland, but the introduction of right to buy meant that the best houses were bought and those who needed accommodation were placed in less desirable areas. Living in a ‘council house’ became an insult, something to be ashamed of, instead of a normal, decent way of living.”*

The Help to Buy (Scotland) scheme is welcomed by women, as it allows many to be able to consider purchasing a home, which they would be otherwise unable to do this without the assistance provided by this scheme. However, the availability of this type of housing, particularly in rural areas, is often scarce. The Scottish Government must ensure that appropriate properties are built in all areas of the country, so that as many families as possible are able to benefit from taking part in the scheme.



*“A programme of work is already underway to help ensure that the new social security system is, as far as possible, equality-proofed.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 44**

The SWC has been consulting with women on social security provision at length over the last few years. The SWC organisation welcomed the recent opportunity to ensure that women’s voices were heard as part of the Scottish Government’s recent consultation on the future for social security in Scotland. The organisation understands that this consultation marked the beginning of ongoing engagement which will result in a social security system which both benefits and befits the people of Scotland. The response reflected the views, opinions and ideas of women throughout Scotland. While the consultation itself was extensive, there were a number of key themes which emerged from discussions and engagement with women. These are outlined below.

**The SWC’s full response to this important consultation exercise can be found at :**

**<https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/content/resources/Social-Security-Consultation-Reponse.pdf>**

## Language

One of the most important aspects of a new social security system for Scotland is the language used. This is the case both for describing the system itself, as well as those who use it. Women have welcomed the change in terminology from welfare benefits to social security implemented by the Scottish Government.

*“It’s so undignified constantly having to ask for money to be able to live. I am unable to work, but I still get treated as a ‘scrounger’ by society. I would love to be able to get a job but I can’t so instead I need to rely on state support.”*

The use of the phrase social security as opposed to welfare benefits has already been welcomed. Broadly, some women believe that changing words used – such as claimants, benefits and assessments – would go some way to demonstrating the Scottish Government’s commitment to ensuring dignity and respect in the new system.

*“So much of the language used at the moment is so negative. We in Scotland need to be seen to be changing those attitudes and start being a lot more positive.”*

It is very difficult, however, to achieve consensus as to the correct wording which should be adopted. The use of ‘clients’ or ‘customers’, instead of claimants, is seen as too corporate and could, arguably, be more impersonal than current terminology. The words must be positive, for example service user or individual.

Similarly, there is potential for creating more stigma and division if the word benefit is changed. Some women have argued that using ‘allowance’ would be positive, because people would be receiving something they are ‘allowed’ to have. ‘Entitlement’ has also been suggested, however there is an argument that this could create a presumption that every person is ‘entitled’ to receive a benefit, which may not always be the case. Overall, ‘payment’ is seen to be the most appropriate word that could be used. There is a feeling of universality with the phrase.

*“Payment seems the most simple way to describe it. If you work, you get paid, so why shouldn’t that be the case if, through no fault of your own, you can’t? It’s a much fairer way to describe things.”*

## User Experience

From application to assessment and onto award, women have had significantly more negative experiences under the current system than they have positive. The way in which individuals are treated at the Jobcentre can be extremely off putting.

Women’s experience of the current welfare benefits system often depends upon the way they are treated by frontline staff. Some have been described as “*cruel*” and “*mean*”, unable to treat people as individuals or take into account personal circumstances. There are, however, others who are “*an asset to the job*”, who go the extra mile and ensure individuals receive all of the help and support they deserve. The attitude and professional nature of staff has a significant impact on those accessing the benefits system.

*“I know so many women who are scared to go to the Jobcentre because they’ve had such a bad experience. It’s not uncommon to hear of people having sleepless nights and panic attacks in the run up to an appointment.”*

BME women report particular difficulties around claiming benefits and getting into work. Letters, information booklets and other forms of communication should be translated into a full range of language options. At present, information on social security is only openly offered in some languages. This can disadvantage women who do not speak any of these languages – they may be unaware they can ask for the document relevant to them. Similarly, more bilingual staff would be a welcome addition to the system.

*“The lack of language support can put women off. Telephone interpreters need to be made more readily available to support those who do not speak English.”*

The establishment of ‘User Panels’ could be a positive way to ensure that the system is designed using a co-production and co-design approach. These must be made up of individuals who have direct experience of social security. It would be advisable not only to include current claimants, but also those who work within the current system, as well as those who provide advice and assistance to claimants through the public and third sector. It is vital that panels are gender balanced and take into account the impact of the devolution of these benefits on women.

### Disability Benefits

The principles of respect and dignity must be adhered to and demonstrated as soon as an individual begins the process of applying for a disability or ill health benefit. The use of more positive, supportive, appropriate language would be welcomed.

*“We need to get rid of the stigma that’s associated with claiming benefits – that’s going to take a societal change though, looking at the language used, the way that people who claim are treated, media perceptions etc.”*

In order to apply for any benefit, long and often complicated forms have to be completed online. This assumes that everyone has access to, as well as the skills to use, a computer and the internet. Many women have been advised not to attempt to fill in certain applications by themselves, because they are unlikely to be able to complete complicated forms without missing important information or incorrectly answering questions.

*“There’s only so much you can do with half an hour’s free access in a library. The timescales built into the DWP website mean that claimants are often ‘timed out’ of their applications, so lose a lot of, or all of, the information that’s been put in. It’s really frustrating.”*

Under the new system, application forms must be simplified. These should be created with the input of those using the system, in order to ensure real accessibility for those who rely on vital support.

There is a perceived lack of humanity throughout the application and assessment process. The number of computer-generated letters received by many makes them feel as if they are under attack. A more person centred approach, which provides the opportunity to be able to communicate with a human being, must be a key consideration.

Women would also benefit from the provision of more appropriate, locally based support and advice services when applying for benefits. This should be built in as part of the process through the new social security agency.

Qualification for ill health and disability benefits can be extremely difficult for those who suffer from mental health issues. Fitness for work is dependent on physical conditions, i.e. whether a person can walk a certain length, as opposed to how individual conditions can have an impact on daily lives. This lack of understanding can lead to people with significant mental ill health being declared capable of taking on a job when they are unable to do so.

*“When you have a condition like anxiety, depression or PTSD (which can stem from abuse), it can be difficult to describe a typical day. No two are the same. It’s unlikely I’ll ever get better, but that’s not considered. I can walk 50 metres so as far as they’re concerned I’m fit and healthy. Getting called in intermittently for assessments does my condition no favours whatsoever.”*

In creating and implementing assessment processes which are specific to Scotland, the often crippling impact of mental health issues on individuals must be given key consideration. It is unfair to suggest that a person’s ability to work should be solely based on physical ability. Again, joined up working with the NHS and GPs would ensure that those who need state support are given it and are not forced into work they cannot undertake.

Assessments for disability related benefits require a significant overhaul. At present, the system is seen as punitive, impersonal and not designed to fit the needs of individuals. The lack of empathy shown by assessors, who are not medically qualified, is causing more harm than the individual’s own illness or condition.

*“Unless you’ve been called for that kind of appointment and had to go through an assessment, you’ll never understand how anxious and nerve wracking it is. I answered everything about my condition honestly yet I felt that the person asking the questions didn’t believe a word I said. The way they’re conducted could be so much better.”*

The system as it stands makes little to no provision for the input and medical expertise of GPs. These professionals tend to have extensive knowledge of the individual, particularly if they are disabled or suffer from ill health. More weight should be given to their opinions and suggestions with regards to health conditions and how that relates to the financial support being applied for.

*“The Jobcentre has overruled what my own doctor has said about my fitness to work. This was the result of one interview with someone from ATOS, who had never met me, who was only interested in whether I could walk up and down the room. That’s not right. Many conditions have ups and downs – an assessment on a particular day is unlikely to be able to show the whole picture.”*

Individuals own GPs, practice nurses, consultants etc should also be able to provide written information and evidence to support their patients who are attending assessments.

*“Why do there need to be intense assessments if a person’s doctor has diagnosed them? Are we saying we don’t trust the judgment of a doctor, who has trained for a number of years in order to obtain medical qualifications?”*

### Carers Allowance

The provision of Carers Allowance is extremely important for many women. The Scottish Government has a real opportunity to ensure that this payment is made to the right people and is a true monetary reflection of the work that those who undertake caring responsibilities do.

At present those who undertake unpaid caring, the majority of whom are women, save the economy a substantial amount of money each year. It is vital that their hard work is appreciated and adequately rewarded under a new social security system.

*“It’s insane that carers are only eligible for a very small amount of financial support for working 35 hours per week in their caring role. This then bars them from eligibility for learning and employment. Caring is stressful enough and the negative health impact it can have has been proven. Carers need to be encouraged and enabled to pursue their own personal goals, which will have a positive impact on their mental health, as well as ensuring they have the skills to be able to return to the labour market when their caring role ends. This makes sense, both socially and economically.”*

When considering potential changes to Carers Allowance, the Scottish Government must take into account the caring hours and weekly earnings thresholds of those who provide care. There is a belief that all carers should receive an entitlement to financial reward for the work they do. This could either be through the direct provision of the benefit or, for example, by having their National Insurance (NI) contributions paid which will contribute to their pension. This is often an issue for women in later life, who can be ineligible for state support despite the caring they have undertaken.

There needs to be more flexibility in the criteria for receiving Carers Allowance. The expectation that those who provide care must spend at least 35 hours per week caring, not earn more than £110 per week and not be in full time education is completely unrealistic.

*“So many women work 35 hours per week and then go home and provide 35 hours of care. It’s as if unless they reach these almost impossible standards, they’re not really caring. This is unfair – carers need to be treated with more respect.”*

The working hours and earnings threshold act as a disincentive for carers to continue with or enter into employment, which is often an important way to ensure they maintain good mental health. They are caught between *“a rock and a hard place”*, not earning enough money to sustain themselves by not working but struggling to fully undertake their caring responsibilities by working.



*“A significant part of the [rural economy and connectivity] portfolio’s budget in 2017-18 will continue to be spent on improving Scotland’s transport infrastructure. This will improve connectivity by making sure that all modes of transport, as well as day to day services, are accessible to all in both urban and rural locations.”*

**Equality Statement: Scottish Draft Budget 2017-18; Page 54**

The lack of safe, accessible, affordable, working public transport continues to be a significant issue for women throughout Scotland. This is particularly acute in rural areas, where provision is extremely limited. In more remote parts of the country women and their families are forced to rely on cars, which are expensive to run and are being driven on roads which many believe are *“not fit for purpose”*.

The SWC welcomes the budget commitment to invest in improving Scotland’s transport infrastructure. In many areas, bus services are unreliable, inflexible and are not suited to the needs of individuals who rely on services.

Poor timetabling means that women are unable to use public transport to commute to work, access healthcare or other services, or attend social events. Women feel isolated as a result.

*“It’s not fair – we’re at a real disadvantage just because of where we live.”*

Services are seen as *“not fit for purpose”* for those who work part time or unsocial hours. In many areas, bus timetables change during school holidays and in the evenings, often meaning less availability of services. Routes which are not considered profitable by transport companies are often withdrawn or removed without any consideration as to the impact this will have on service users.

*“We live in a 24 hour society, but our transport infrastructure does not reflect this. It needs to be regular, flexible and available to allow women to get to work and balance family life.”*

The cost of public transport is seen to be *“continuously increasing”*, however women have noted that this does not correlate with the level of service provided, with many being reduced and in some cases removed completely. This is especially the case in areas where expensive taxis or private cars are the only alternative. Women have expressed their frustration at this situation.

*“It’s the trap of living rurally - we struggle to afford a car due to the price of petrol and insurance, but there is no public transport. We’re in a Catch-22 situation.”*

Women have recently commented on issues with the rail service in Scotland, in particular late-running and cancelled services, as well as a real lack of value for money.

*“The trains have been terrible recently. I can be standing on a platform waiting for a train, the boards indicate that the service is due, but when I look at the app on my phone it says the train is cancelled. You can wait long enough for an announcement to back this up. If and when a train does appear, it’s usually over-crowded, meaning I have to stand. I pay a lot for my monthly season ticket, but I can’t really see what for. I’m considering switching to the bus, which would make my journey longer, but at least I’m more likely to get a seat and if one doesn’t turn up another will come along shortly.”*

Unreliable, expensive, inefficient public transport seriously curtails education and employment opportunities for women. The Scottish Government must take this into account when attempting to ensure that all modes of transport are accessible to all.



## Conclusion

It is vital that gender considerations are made in every area of Scottish Government budgets. This is particularly important given that women are more likely to:

- Use a wide range of health services;
- Undertake unpaid caring roles;
- Claim the majority of benefits which are being devolved to Scotland;
- Be negatively or inappropriately portrayed in the media;
- Face significant barriers in entering, sustaining and progressing in education and employment;
- Be steered towards traditional career paths through participation in Modern Apprenticeships and further education;
- Bear the brunt of childcare responsibilities;
- Be sentenced harshly and face barriers in the criminal justice system; and
- Be adversely affected by living in remote, rural and super sparse areas of Scotland.

Without a full and measured analysis of the impact of public spending, the economic position and wellbeing of women will be undermined. The contribution made by women to the economy, both in paid and unpaid roles, must be recognised and valued, both in societal and financial terms.



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.

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