

# Scottish Women's Convention

## Hamilton Roadshow

Thursday 1st October 2015

Progression Skills Modern Apprenticeships  
Flexibility Family Sanctions **Childcare**  
Maternity **Low Paid** Community  
**Zero Hours Contracts** **Hamilton** Affordable Schools  
**Roadshow** Benefits Barriers **Disability**  
**Living Wage Employment**  
Training Council Tax **Welfare Reform**  
**Development** **Caring** Mental Health

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) visited the Town House, Hamilton on Thursday 1st October 2015. We met with local women and discussed a variety of issues including employment; childcare and caring; training, development and education; welfare reform and women's representation.

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

[www.scottishwomensconvention.org](http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org)

## Introduction

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

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

## Hamilton

Hamilton is a town in South Lanarkshire. It serves as the main administrative centre of the South Lanarkshire council area and is the fourth-biggest town in Scotland. It sits 12 miles south-east of Glasgow and 35 miles south-west of Edinburgh. It is situated on the south bank of the River Clyde at its confluence with the Avon Water. Hamilton is the historical county town of Lanarkshire.

Service industries and local government are major employers in Hamilton. The town centre has been regenerated with new indoor shopping centres (the Regent Shopping Centre, New Cross Shopping Centre) Hamilton Retail Park and the Palace Grounds Retail Park.

Restaurants and national retail outlets are situated in a redeveloped part of the Palace Grounds that are visible upon entering the town from the M74 motorway. The creation of a circular Town Square has resulted in Hamilton receiving numerous town planning awards during the past decade. This development transformed the Hamilton side of Strathclyde Park, which was the original site of the Duke's palace. Hamilton has been a Fairtrade Town since 2005.



## QUESTION ONE

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

### What are your experiences of home and family life?

#### Employment

There are a number of barriers which can make it more difficult for women to access, sustain and progress in employment in the local area. The type of work offered, working hours and support such as childcare and transport all have an impact.

Many of the jobs available locally are undertaken as zero hours contracts. This type of work is often offered in areas where women predominate, i.e. low paid, low skilled, part-time jobs. 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?"*

Women need work to be flexible. A good example of this is through the NHS. 'Bank staff' provide temporary staffing cover to various services within the health board area, with work opportunities available to fill temporary full or part time hours. Workers, the majority of whom are women, are able to 'pick and choose' hours to suit them and their family responsibilities. They do, however, accumulate holidays and are entitled to sick pay when they are ill.

*"I suppose it's technically a zero hours contract but it provides decent working terms and conditions which makes all the difference. It's a flexible approach which, ultimately, suits and benefits women."*

Another example of positive terms and conditions within NHS is the way in which workers are able to take parental leave when their children are ill. This is accepted as something which parents need to do as part of their family responsibilities and as a result it takes the pressure off many. More employers should act like this. Those who do should be used as examples of best practice.

*"Employers need to be aware that people's lives are not constant and that things change. They need to be able to work with their employees to accommodate these changes. It's better for the business or organisation overall."*

LGBT women also face barriers within the workplace which often go unnoticed. Where they are taken into account, little is done to offer support and assistance to overcome the issues.

Women returning to work after maternity leave often find that their job roles and responsibilities have changed. There is a feeling amongst some employers, often in the private sector, that women who have had children are not as committed or ambitious as others.

*“I showed an interest in working part-time when I went back after having my baby. My male boss was surprised as prior to becoming a mother I was interested in a promotion – he didn’t see how this would work if I wasn’t working all the hours in the day.”*

It is also extremely important to ensure that women who are promoted to senior levels within the workplace do all they can to support and encourage those coming after them.

### Education

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) has a campus in Hamilton, which is well used and is within a five minute walk from the town centre. There are also good transport links to the University. The future of the campus is uncertain, with the real possibility that it will relocate to nearby Eurocentral or to a business park in Bellshill. Neither of these locations are as easy to get to as the present campus is. This could have a significant impact on young women who study there, as well as on the women who work there.

*“The cleaners at UWS, most of whom are women, have to start work at 6am. They can do that just now because there’s a decent transport system. What’s going to happen to them and their jobs if the campus moves out of town?”*

### Caring

It is important to remember that caring does not only relate to childcare, but also care for older relatives, partners etc. The Scottish Government’s focus on childcare, while welcome, means that women who undertake kinship care are not receiving the same focus and as a result are missing out on the same level of support.

Employers expect workers to be more and more flexible. Women with caring responsibilities are being affected, particularly as a result of difficulties in accessing affordable, appropriate childcare and respite care and assistance.

Gendered expectations in society through, for example, TV programmes and children’s toys, lead to women being stereotyped from a young age. Issues around caring are much more complex than women simply choosing to care. Society expects women to undertake this role and does not adequately value the contribution carers make.

*“Women are expected to be caring and nurturing. We teach this from a young age, when little girls play with dolls and cookers and hoovers from a young age and boys are given cars and trucks and action figures. Why do we insist that society is structured like this?”*

Until institutional sexism is addressed, the way in which women undertake caring roles will not change. There is seen to be an expectation that women will give up work completely or reduce their hours to look after their children. If they don't, they're criticised. However women who do choose to give up work and be with their children are also subject to criticism. They can be accused of lacking ambition or not giving their children a positive working role model.

*"You're damned if you do and damned if you don't. Men never have to take this into consideration."*

Many of the jobs available to women have antisocial hours. There is no childcare to cover these shift patterns, which often cover evenings and weekends, apart from some childminders.

*"They are few and far between and even then women are still having to rely on one person – what happens if they take ill? Employers don't take too kindly to mums needing time off to look after their kids in these circumstances."*

Local Authority nursery places are only available in AM or PM sessions which do not suit the needs of working parents.

*"If you have to be in work for 8.30am and the nursery doesn't take kids until 9.00am, what are you supposed to do? Anything before 9 is seen as wrap around care and you have to pay more for it."*

During school holidays many secondary school age children have to stay at home themselves because their parents have to work. If they have little or no family or support networks round about them, they have no other option.

Similarly breakfast and after school clubs are not always available, particularly in more rural areas of South Lanarkshire. Where they do exist, they are heavily relied on by many parents. It is often the case that schools and organisations who provide these services do not have enough places to cope with the demand. It can also be expensive to make use of this provision.

*"After care costs anything up to £12.50 per day per child. If you work part time you end up spending almost all of your wage on childcare. It's not worth it."*

The NHS are considering piloting a 24/7 service where all facilities will be available around the clock. For example, routine operations will be carried out in the evenings and at other times which suit patients.

*"Given that the NHS are one of the biggest employers of women, they're going to have to take childcare into consideration if this proposal is rolled out."*

## **Transport**

Access to education and employment can be hindered by poor public transport. While Hamilton itself is a main centre with rail and bus services, there are a number of smaller towns and villages in South Lanarkshire which are not well served.

Women, who are more likely to use public transport than men, can find it difficult to balance dropping children off at school and nursery and getting to work on time.

*“Everything has to be timed to perfection, between leaving the house, getting to the bus stop to get the kids to school on time and then for me to get on to work. If a bus is late or just doesn’t turn up it completely throws everything out.”*

The lack of decent public transport, as well as limited childcare availability, significantly restricts the type of work that women can undertake.

*“The HMRC office in East Kilbride is a big employer in the area, however many women are excluded from working there because of where they live. There are no transport links from smaller towns and villages.”*

### **Social Security**

There is a reliance on additional financial assistance through tax credits by many families living in and around Hamilton. Without this extra support, many would struggle to be able to make ends meet. This is particularly the case for women who receive state support to pay for childcare.

Women working in low paid, low skilled jobs, such as cleaning and in the care sector, have to rely on ‘top up’ benefits. They would be at risk of in-work poverty without this additional financial help. The nature of this type of employment, however, means they are often unable to secure sufficient hours from their employer in order to secure the necessary support. The constant worry around their financial situation can have a significant impact on their mental health.

*“For too many women, going to work is more of a financial strain than staying away from the labour market and relying solely on social security. This is down to a combination of low pay, high rents, council tax and expensive private childcare.”*

Women who are looking to re-enter the labour market after long periods of time away are able to access some positive support. For lone parents, One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) take referrals from the Jobcentre to help lone parents with childcare and other support. However the organisation has no control over the types of work women are undertaking and, as a result, they are seeing lots of women going into entry level jobs on zero hours contracts.

Dress for Success (DfS) is a local organisation which helps women with appropriate clothing for job interviews and for starting work. They take referrals from other organisations, such as the Lone Parent Association and help to build women’s confidence and self esteem, as well as providing clothes. DfS charges the organisations who refer the women, but not the women themselves. Anyone who accesses the service must have a referral.

## Public Services

The Local Authority is making cuts to a number of public services in order to reduce a budget deficit of approximately £36 million. As a result, essential services are being subject to a reduction and in some cases removal of funding. This has an impact on women, who rely on support and assistance provided from, for example, services supporting those who have experienced violence against women.

Cuts have also resulted in proposals to change the way in which children qualify for transport to and from school. The Local Authority is planning to change the rules so that children have to live three miles and over away from the school to qualify for the buses.

As well as safety issues, there are concerns around the potential for creating a stigma for children whose parents are on low or no incomes, as they are entitled to free transport. Many women will increase working hours as their children get older, often in low paid work. This could result in financial issues, as these women may now struggle to be able to make a contribution towards bus fares. Transport entitlement is in line with free school meal entitlement for children in primary four and above. The earnings thresholds for assistance are not uniform.

*“Some families are seen to be able to pay for certain things, when in reality they’re only earning just over the limits. This can have repercussions, both on the parents and their finances, as well as the children. They can be subjected to name calling and bullying.”*

As a result of the changes to buses, some children and young people will be expected to walk up to six miles.

*“The kids have been told that they have to keep a change of clothes in their locker and if they get wet on the way they need to change when they get to school. Their other option is using public transport. This whole thing has been estimated to save the Council approximately £625,000. Surely they have to weigh that up – it comes down to children’s safety.”*

## Public Engagement

There have been a number of consultations in the area recently on various issues, including the school buses. They are, however, poorly advertised. There is also a perception that what women have to say on these matters won’t make a difference as the authority or organisation carrying out the consultation is doing so purely as a paper exercise.

It is important to recognise the potentially positive outcomes of meaningful consultation, particularly those on decisions which influence women’s lives. This is especially the case with public bodies which have a responsibility to local people.

Some women do not realise the power they can have through having their voices heard. More needs to be done to encourage all women to get involved in local issues through consultations on important matters in order to make an impact and create change.

On the other hand, a lot of women have become much more empowered following the 2014 referendum on Scotland's future. The momentum gained from the process has continued and women are much more politically engaged than they were before. It is clear that they want to make change.

## QUESTION TWO

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

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

It should be the role of all women to give others the tools to realise their skills and abilities and to do that from an early age. Women shape children's lives by being strong influences as, for example, primary school teachers.

*"It's often women who realise the value of others – their opinions, skills and abilities. Women don't often assume they're the best person for the job. We need to draw out of them what they're capable of and give them the confidence to take it forward."*

Support must be available at an early age to ensure that women are able to be involved. Gender equality should be a priority from a young age. For example, pupil councils within schools should have to ensure 50/50 representation.

*"If you start with small changes like that, bigger societal changes will follow."*

More needs to be done in to empower young women. It is often not until later in life that women realise their capabilities and abilities. Young women today are growing up feeling as if they are not equal to boys. This must be challenged. Local Brownie and Guides groups are taking positive steps to teach young women about equality. There is already a significant difference in the attitudes and outlook of these young women, who are becoming more confident at challenging decisions.

*"A lot of the female Councillors are older – why are younger women not coming forward? How can we help and support them to realise their potential?"*

Confidence is one of the key ways in which young women can be encouraged to stand up and have their voices heard. Social media can be a significant barrier to this. Young women go through so many changes, both physically and emotionally, as they grow up and develop. The increased use of sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat and the 24 hour contactable society we live in means that young women open themselves up to often anonymous online abuse which can be extremely damaging. The way that boys and young men view girls and young women can also be very negative.

*“Some of the things that are said on social media can be soul destroying. One comment can spark such a dangerous series of events.”*

Women in elected positions are also subject to significant abuse on social media, being criticised both for what they say and also the way they look. Online interactions are not carried out on a face to face basis, therefore people think they can say what they want without repercussions.

*“There’s so much misogyny out there. You have to develop a thick skin to put up with a lot of what’s said.”*

There is also a perception that elected representatives are contactable 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*“It’s almost as if a woman is fair game for attack as soon as she puts herself forward for any kind of position.”*

It is important to note that many women are unable to get involved in political and public life in the way they might want to, as they are busy juggling work and family commitments. More needs to be done to help these women to become active and make the changes that they know they can.

*“I’ve been apathetic for a long time – I’ve been so wrapped up in bringing up my children, working part time, keeping the house that I’ve had neither the time nor the energy to get as involved as I would have liked to – I feel now like I’ve just woken up to it all and I can’t get back to sleep!”*

Basic things organisations need to do to encourage more women to be involved include not having meetings in the evenings and look at holding them on, for example, Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoons. It’s important to get back to grassroots involvement, starting with small groups and working up.

*“There’s quite a lot of deprivation in and around South Lanarkshire. We need to build community capacity and encourage women to get involved at that level to start with. This isn’t easy though, especially with increasing cuts to public services.”*

Similarly, information about meetings and events should be made available in places where women are likely to be – e.g. schools, nurseries, supermarkets and doctors surgeries.

*“How do you get involved with something if you don’t know where and when it is?”*

Childcare needs to be made available for women to attend meetings. It is also important that there are no issues when women do take their children to meetings and events. That should be the rule rather than the exception to it.

Politics is often seen as a ‘dirty word’ in society. Women see the way that politicians act towards each other and do not want to be involved for a number of reasons. The behaviour of many politicians, more so at Westminster than at Holyrood, can be extremely off-putting. Women are often more interested in issue based politics. The way in which some political processes are carried out can result specific issues being lost, which also dissuades women from becoming involved.

It is important to encourage involvement not only in politics but also public life, for example boards of public bodies. There is not enough female representation at this level. This means that the voices of the women who are affected by the decisions of, for example, a housing association or a health board, are not being given consideration.

*“It’s quite simple - the people who make the decisions need to look and sound like those upon whom the decisions will impact.”*



### QUESTION THREE

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

- Ensure that school transport is not taken away from children who live under three miles from their local school;
- The money being spent by the Local Authority in continuing to fight Equal Pay claims and how this is diverting resources from vital services.
- Traffic calming measures around schools and the impact this has on parents and carers.
- Lack of parking in the area – the cost and limited availability doesn't encourage a sense of community – *“people go to retail parks and shopping centres, not into the town centre anymore.”*
- Improved transport links in rural areas.
- Access to well paid, flexible, secure employment.
- More job creation, with mentoring support for women getting into business.
- Accessible, affordable and appropriate childcare.
- Increased measures to tackle in-work poverty.



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.