

# Scottish Women's Convention

## Nairn Roadshow

Tuesday 18th August 2015

Health and Social Care

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

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) visited the Nairn Community and Arts Centre on Tuesday 18th August 2015. We met with local women and discussed a variety of issues including employment; childcare and caring; training, development and education; welfare reform and women's representation.

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

[www.scottishwomensconvention.org](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.

## Nairn

Nairn has a population of approximately 12,046. It is an ancient fishing port and market town around 16 miles east of Inverness. It was the county town of the wider county of Nairn also known as Nairnshire. It is covered by the Inverness and Nairn constituency of the Scottish Parliament and is part of the Highland Council.

The town is now best known as a seaside resort, with two golf courses, award winning beaches, a community centre/mid-scale arts venue (Nairn Community & Arts Centre), a small theatre (called The Little Theatre) and one small museum, providing information on the local area and incorporating the collection of the former Fishertown museum.



## 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

The labour market focus seems to currently be on getting people into work, however it should be about job quality. It's important to consider the kind of work that women are doing. It also does not take into account women's unpaid work, such as caring and running a home.

*"I don't think women's work is valued enough. If you're a carer, the hours you work should be recognised and rightfully rewarded."*

The public sector is the largest employer in the area - e.g. Highland Council, NHS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). There are large manufacturing employers in the food and drink and seafood industries, as well as opportunities in tourism. Much of the work undertaken by women in the area is part-time and seasonal. There is also a lot of self employment in the area.

Flexible working is limited outwith the public sector.

*"There's a perception that men are some kind of hero for asking for flexible working. However women lose out and are seen to put their career at risk if they do the same thing. How is this fair?"*

Young women in particular struggle to enter into work.

*"Sadly, there are limited career prospects so many have no choice but to leave."*

Young women at university who return home during the summer often take more than one part-time job, often on zero hours, with low pay and poor working conditions. As a result many are now going abroad during the summer. Those who want to return after they have left to go to university often struggle to find suitable employment.

*"We need to do something to make sure young people are encouraged to stay in the area. Otherwise the population will continue to age, the schools will start to close and jobs will go too."*

There are some opportunities for work in what are considered traditionally 'male roles' in the area. Many men still hold sexist attitudes, which can make it intimidating for women who want to go into jobs such as science, technology, engineering and maths.

*“My friend is an engineer and some of the things she has to put up with on a daily basis is awful. You’ve got to be really resilient to put up with the behaviour she has to at work.”*

Nairn is considered to be affluent, however this is not the case in all areas. The local Citizens Advice Bureau have given out approximately 100 foodbank vouchers this year alone, often to working families.

*“Many families are stuck in a place where they have a volatile income and don’t get tax credits. They are forced to rely on the local foodbank—it’s not a choice.”*

Many women are on zero or short term contracts, where hours can change from week to week. The constant uncertainty around working times and wages makes it very difficult for women to obtain tax credits. As a result, many do not bother applying in the first place.

There are serious financial implications for women on zero hours contracts. They impact not only in terms of access to welfare benefits for financial assistance, but also because the lack of guaranteed income or job security makes it extremely difficult to secure any type of regulated, credible loan or mortgage. This can lead to an increased reliance on short-term, pay day loans, which attract significant interest rates and can be extremely difficult to fully pay back.

Older women also face barriers to accessing employment. Many have caring responsibilities both with grandchildren and aging parents. Respite care is very limited in the area. Good employability projects have been available locally but they are often short term and many women don’t know what is available.

## **Childcare**

Many women do not have support networks round about them, such as friends and family, so rely on expensive private childcare.

*“The lack of accessible, affordable childcare is holding so many women back.”*

The geography of the Highlands makes it difficult for women to access childcare which is near to their place of work or study. They can be forced to undertake long journeys by public transport first to get their children dropped 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?”*

Childcare provision is limited. Where there is a nursery or a childminder available, they often do not offer flexibility. Wraparound childcare - which often means before 0830 in the morning and after 1530 in the afternoon - is limited.

There is also an issue with women who are being forced into work once their child reaches a certain age, but cannot afford the required childcare.

This means many women are going into a job they don't want to do, which does not reflect their skills or abilities, and which is not well paid. This can be very stressful for women and their families.

*“There should be a choice. Women should be able to enjoy their families.”*

It is important to note that they may not want the increased hours of Government funded childcare when their children are young, and instead would prefer their children to be looked after at home either by parent or grandparent. Women may, therefore, want a mixture of formal and informal childcare, with the caring which is carried out by friends and family being adequately recognised and rewarded.

In the past, communities helped in raising children - parents worked together to provide informal childcare which suited the needs of local parents. This no longer seems to happen.

*“Women make childcare work, but it's a complicated jigsaw. Access to free childcare would open up so many opportunities and more choices.”*

## **Transport**

Public transport is another barrier to women's participation in work and education. Within the main towns, transport is described as “adequate”, however in villages and more rural areas in general it is very limited.

*“There's a bus an hour if you're lucky. No services run after about 6pm and there's also no transport available on a Sunday. This makes it difficult to get around in general, never mind to get to work on a shift pattern. A car is a necessity in this part of Scotland, not a luxury.”*

There is only one bus company in the area, which means there is no competition and no perceived need to ensure that services fit the needs of the local community, rather than tourists. The use of summer and winter timetables is also extremely limiting for residents.

The limited bus service can also cause issues for wheelchair users and women with prams.

*“There's only room for a wheelchair or a pram, not both. If there's a wheelchair already on a bus, then the woman with the pram has to wait for the next bus, which can take up to an hour. It shouldn't be an either or choice.”*

The A96 is the main road between Nairn and Inverness and is used by many to travel to work and education. It can be a good road depending on the variation of traffic, particularly compared to the A9, for example.

More people would like to be able to cycle to work along this road.

*“Cycling is not really an option along the main road. It would be very scary. There are routes for cyclists along the back roads but this means longer routes which are not suitable for commuting. It’s all very well and good promoting healthy living and greener transport but it doesn’t really work in rural areas.”*

There are local Community Transport schemes, such as Dial a Bus, and the WRVS service in Dingwall. These are often used for hospital or doctors appointments and to get older people to the shops etc. While this service is well used, it requires 24 hours notice which can mean a lot of planning for people. Hospital transport, particularly to Raigmore in Inverness, is also limited.

### **Social Security**

Changes over the past few years to the Welfare Benefits system have had an impact in Nairn and the surrounding areas. Highland council was one of the pilot areas for the roll out of Universal Credit (UC). At present it is not available to everyone, however real concerns have been raised while it has been in operation, particularly around the issue of the single household claim.

*“There’s a real danger that this will put women at risk in relationships where abuse or addictions is an issue.”*

The changes which have been implemented, and will continue to be implemented, are forcing women into work. They are expected to undertake jobs that they do not have the skills for or are unable to do due to issues such as transport and caring responsibilities.

*“Many women have been away from the labour market for a number of years and for a number of reasons. It’s unreasonable to expect them just to be put into a job without doing any work on their skills, abilities and confidence.”*

In order to be able to claim tax credits, women must be earning under a certain amount of money and working a specified number of hours per week. Under the working tax credits system, the claimant receives support based on their previous year’s earnings. This can be detrimental and can lead more women to rely on short-term, pay day loans.

While there is support available for certain working people through tax credits, there is nothing to assist older people who undertake childcare for their family members.

*“Why shouldn’t grandparents be paid through working tax credits? They support working parents when they have no choice - formal childcare just isn’t available in rural areas. We need to start fully valuing the input of grandparents.”*

Those with mental health issues are also bearing the brunt of benefit reductions and sanctions.

*“If someone with mental health issues has a fit for work assessment on a ‘good day’, the person making the decision about them wouldn’t know there was anything wrong. It seems to be unless the person being assessed physically can’t walk, they’re fine and fit for work.”*

## **Caring**

The unpaid work carried out by carers, the majority of whom are women, must be valued by society. This role is seen as *“women’s work”* and as a result is not considered as important or worthy.

*“It beggars belief that a woman who devotes her life to caring for an elderly relative, child, spouse or other family member doesn’t get paid for it. Many carers continue to work while looking after the person who needs support and assistance. Juggling the two can take a real toll on their physical and mental health.”*

## **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?**

## **Representation**

It is extremely positive that the three main political parties in Scotland have women leaders.

*“It’s great to see more women going forward for these positions.”*

Representation at a local level is not always as positive. Travelling to get to Council meetings which are held centrally can be difficult, particularly due to issues around transport and childcare. The Council is dominated by men who don’t always have the ability to recognise all issues affecting everyone. Men in politics seem to only want to talk about issues relevant to men and leave what they see as ‘women’s issues’ to the side.

More should be done to ensure that women are given the opportunity to participate more in political and public life overall.

*“Women shouldn’t be pressured to go into politics but if they want to, the support should be there and they should have the opportunity to do it. Women should be able to enter politics on an equal footing to men.”*

## Barriers

It is clear that certain attitudes towards women in politics have changed. This is positive and has helped to contribute to increased representation.

*“When I was first involved in politics we were not treated well. You were resented as a woman in politics, however things have slowly started to change.”*

The way in which women can be referred to would suggest there is still some way to go.

*“Why is it if a woman is nice she’s as ‘lovely’ when someone meets her. Nobody would even think about saying that kind of thing about a man. I’ve heard women referred to as ‘doll’, ‘lassie’ and ‘hen’ in a political setting. That kind of behaviour needs to be challenged.”*

Women are often asked who will look after their home and their children while they are sitting as a Councillor or an MSP. This type of question is never asked of a man. Traditionally held values about the roles women should undertake within the home can also be detrimental. Girls fall into certain roles from a young age when playing with gender specific toys. These cultural perceptions need to be challenged from a young age.

*“We need to make it be perfectly normal for men to take on what are still considered women's roles, such as childcare, cleaning and cooking. These are still some of the key reasons as to why women don’t put themselves forward.”*

Women can also be put off from entering into politics due to the way in which high profile women are treated by the media.

*“Everything about a woman is scrutinised - what she’s wearing, her hair, her weight, right down to her nails. People never care what a man wears or if his hair is ‘immaculate’.”*

Politics is still considered to be *“a man’s world”* and women often need to work hard in order to fit in.

*“Women prefer co-operation rather than coercion.”*

Confidence is another barrier to women’s participation in political and public life. Male dominated environments can be intimidating for many. More needs to be done to build confidence, particularly amongst those who are currently involved at a local level with, for example, parent councils. Often these women, who are more than capable of becoming an elected representative, would benefit from assistance with growing their confidence.

*“Women are often their own worst critics. The voices in our heads create so much self doubt that we end up thinking we’re not good enough to take the next step.”*

The implementation of 50/50 representation through temporary special measures such as women-only shortlists would be a positive step. By putting this into place officially, barriers such as lack of childcare, respite care and transport would have to be addressed.

Ensuring 50/50 representation would also mean that local organisations would have to take account of how their Boards are made up.

*“Organisations such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) advise employers in the area. The people making decisions about the organisation’s governance should accurately reflect the people they speak for. More women would provide a much greater balance when difficult decisions need to be made.”*

### **Role Models**

Positive female role models are vital, both to encourage others to enter into political and public life, and to provide support and guidance to those who do make that decision.

In the Highlands it used to be the case that ‘men were men’ and ‘women were women’ and they did not deviate from their ‘traditional roles’. Women were not thought of as important, however the increase in positive female role models has changed this attitude for the better.

One of the key areas in which role models can be used is through education. Schools need to promote gender equality to boys and girls, breaking down the traditional stereotypes which continue to exist.

*“Mentoring in schools is really important. If you want to instil confidence into women, it’s vital that this is taught from an early age. Young people learn well from other young people. The power of this should not be underestimated.”*



### QUESTION THREE

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

- Improved access to affordable, appropriate childcare.
- More organisations and groups like the SWC, which provide a way for women to be able to discuss different issues.
- Support with social media and internet protection for children.
- Tackling alcohol misuse issues.
- Improved public transport, taking into account the cost, as well as routes and timetables which suit those who use them.
- Further education
- Valuing the work that women undertake, such as caring and running a home.
- More employment opportunities in rural areas which encourage young people to stay or return.
- Address lack of respite in the area for carers.
- Establish long-term confidence and employability opportunities for women.
- Re-establishment of the 'local high street'.
- Access to support services
- Confidence, skills for women. Women have choices but there are limited role models - awareness and communication



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.