



The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded by the Scottish Government 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.

A key aspect of the SWC's workplan is the roadshow programme. The SWC has visited a number of areas throughout Scotland. Round table discussions allow women to discuss a broad range of issues affecting them. The SWC also hold thematic conferences and in the last year have twice looked at the issue of Women in Employment. Low wages associated with the type of employment broadly undertaken by women, as well as the multiple barriers faced when attempting to access better paid work, is frequently discussed.

In Scotland, women continue to be streamed into low-paid, low-skilled jobs. Occupational segregation within schools results in women being encouraged to undertake what are traditionally 'female' roles, with little value being placed on those who work in areas such as childcare and administration. This perpetuates a low-wage culture. Many of these jobs are undertaken on a part-time basis, often in order to accommodate caring responsibilities.

Scotland relies heavily on the tourist industry, particularly in rural areas. Job opportunities for women in these areas are severely restricted as work is not only part-time but seasonal and only available during the summer months. The low wages associated with such employment, combined with the higher cost of living in rural areas, has a real impact on women.

The cuts to public services imposed by the UK Coalition Government have had a profound effect on women's employment. The public sector is dominated by women, often at the lower end of pay and job scales. As budgets are tightened, these positions are the first to be cut. Similarly as a result of the cuts voluntary organisations, which are staffed predominantly by women, face continual budget reductions. Attempts have been made to save jobs, through job-sharing and part time positions, however this only serves to reduce women's wages further.

Lack of flexible working from many employers forces women to work less hours than they would like to, which greatly reduces both the wages they receive and their potential to progress.

The lack of accessible, affordable childcare in Scotland also contributes to the earning potential of women. In most areas there is little or no Local Authority provision and parents must rely upon expensive private nurseries. This is beyond the means of women who receive low wages.

“If you’ve got more than one child the cost of childcare takes a huge chunk out of your wages.”

Many women have to reduce their hours, and in turn their wages, as the cost of sending their children to a private nursery is prohibitive.

For many families, assistance provided by working and child tax credits is *“essential”*. Low wages mean that families rely upon money they receive as a vital source of assistance. Changes to entitlement thresholds for tax credits will undoubtedly have a detrimental impact. Under new rules, single people with children must work at least 16 hours per week. For couples, joint working hours need to be at least 24 a week, with one person working at least 16 hours a week. In a couple where only one person is working, that person must be working at least 24 hours a week. Few employers will be either willing or able to provide extra hours in order to maintain tax credit entitlement.

The introduction of a ‘living wage’ in some Local Authority areas in Scotland is seen as a positive step. This is particularly beneficial to women, who make up the majority of local authority workforces. However job stereotyping is still prevalent in a number of councils.

“A full equalisation of wages will not be achieved until this has been resolved and women are encouraged to apply for what are considered ‘men’s jobs’”.

The SWC continues to hear evidence from women throughout Scotland concerned about low pay and access to employment. It is clear that issues such as gender streaming, flexible working, access to childcare and the welfare benefits system must be addressed. Only then will women be able to achieve economic parity with men and be afforded the opportunity to earn a better wage.

www.scottishwomensconvention.org