



**UK Government**  
**Inquiry into Women in the Workplace**  
**Report to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee**

***Background***

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, as well as relevant policy and decision makers.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.

***Introduction and Evidence Base***

The SWC has consulted with women throughout Scotland using numerous communication channels including roadshows and thematic events, surveys, Geographical Information Groups and Conferences.

The response to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee Inquiry into Women in the Workplace is informed by the voices of women participating in SWC activities. During discussions with women the topic of employment is always discussed. Barriers in accessing and sustaining employment as well as being promoted within the workplace are key areas considered.

The SWC has also held two Conferences on Women and Employment. The first explored the current employment opportunities afforded to women, while the second concentrated on positive workplace practices.

## **Women and the Public Sector**

Throughout Scotland, concern has consistently been expressed at the reduction and removal of jobs in the public sector, where women predominate. In many cases, full-time jobs have been reduced to part-time or job-share. This, combined with massive redundancies in the private sector, has undoubtedly contributed to the current rate of women's unemployment.

*"The amalgamation of jobs has led to one person doing the job of three people"*

Women are aware of the impact of cuts and redundancies however many *"are not complaining about changes in services and conditions - we're just glad to have a job"*.

## **Women and Employment**

The SWC attended and participated in the Scottish Government Women's Employment Summit, held in September 2012. The consistent rise in female unemployment has resulted in discussion around barriers to seeking and remaining in work. Women continue to be clustered in roles in what are known as the '5 c's' - catering, cleaning, caring, cashiering and clerical. These jobs offer little in the way of training, development and progression.

The stress of looking for a job is described as *"horrendous"*, especially as there are few vacant positions in the current economic climate. Where vacancies do exist, an increasing number of women are forced to work on a part-time basis, meaning reduced wage potential, because of caring responsibilities. The cost of childcare is very high in Scotland. As a result some women sacrifice returning to work full time in order to look after their children. Shift work and unsociable hours are not recognised working patterns with regards to the services available. Distance travelled to access childcare, in addition to hours worked, is having a detrimental impact on quality family time on a daily basis.

In some areas of the country, women are forced to undertake additional part-time jobs as a result of the current economic climate. Women are expected to live on wages that have not increased in a number of years, while the cost of living continues to rise.

## **Young Women**

Youth unemployment is having a detrimental effect on local communities. There is a serious lack of employment opportunities for young women. Access to Modern Apprenticeship schemes is limited and heavily gender streamed, with young women taking up roles in childcare, hairdressing, beauty etc. whereas young men predominate in construction, engineering, joinery etc.

*"I fear for the future of young people. Many school leavers must have no hope."*

Young women who wish to pursue non-academic careers are often discouraged through lack of opportunity and support. Occupational segregation and gender streaming need to be discouraged through education and employer stereotypes.

*"More needs to be done to encourage girls into non-traditional careers."*

## **Women and Education**

Community and adult education services have undergone significant spending cuts. Women take courses in order to gain skills and qualifications which in turn, enhance their job opportunities. These cuts ultimately have an adverse effect on local communities and families.

*“As a result women are just not skilled enough for jobs which come into the area.”*

## **Rural Women**

The public sector - Local Authorities and the National Health Service (NHS) - are major employers within rural Scotland. The current loss of public sector jobs is having a harmful effect on rural communities, in particular the women employed to provide necessary local services.

*“The public sector employs 40% of workers in the region, the majority of these are women. It stands to reason we will be the most likely to feel the repercussions of policy decisions.”*

A lack of increase in wages is resulting in rural women experiencing severe financial hardship. Fuel prices, for example are *“extortionate - it’s unbelievable how much it costs to fill a tank these days”*. The rising cost of fuel means that deliveries of food etc to rural areas is more expensive, which in turn puts up the prices for those living there.

## **Comments from Women in Employment Conferences**

Main barriers for women getting into employment - Attitudes (societal, employer and political); Caring (a lack of suitable, affordable childcare); Lack of confidence.

Main barriers for women progressing in the workplace - Attitudes and gender prejudice; maternity leave; ageism (women of childbearing age); Work / life balance tensions.

Factors which could bring about a significant difference for women in employment - Better educational opportunities, change in attitudes, change in Equality Legislation.

*“The number of women who have gained professional qualifications yet left their sectors of expertise is shameful. Policymakers and employers should be more focused on why this is happening.”*

*“It is well documented that women face educational and employment disadvantage as a result of other social and economic factors such as race, poverty and being a lone parent. The loss of women from employment sectors where their numbers are just becoming established or within industries vital to the economy is ‘a seriously leaking pipeline that has to be sealed’. Public policy and employers must confront the inequities that contribute to this loss of talent and experience. “*

*“There is a new ageism in employment - “women of child bearing age”. The issue needs to be more open and under scrutiny. A lack of transparency is more apparent in the private sector. Equality legislation compels the Public Sector to be less ambiguous.”*

*“Women still experience difficulty breaking through the ‘glass ceiling’. There is still a macho culture in workplaces and the glass ceiling exists. It is often as a result of poor workplace policies and procedures and this needs to be actively challenged.”*

*“Cost and availability of childcare is still an issue. More government / employer promotion of positive workplace practices could help overcome this.”*

## **Conclusion**

The lack of suitable, sustainable employment coupled with limited access to flexible childcare and transport is having a damaging effect on a woman’s ability to fully engage with the employment market.

## **Government Action**

What can the Government do to support women to sustain and develop their employment opportunities through positive workplace practices?

*“Support childcare provision that meets the needs of working women and encourage employers to adopt flexible working practices.”*

*“Make policies more transparent and introduce yearly monitoring of these policies.”*

*“Uphold and put into practice equal opportunities and pay structures.”*

*“Promote policies which not only encourage women into employment but also progression to higher positions within the organisation.”*

*“Equal Pay should be that - equal! - regardless of full time, part time, job share or status.”*

*“Provide clearer guidance on existing legislation and policies.”*

*“Encourage small businesses to implement flexible working and have better employer/employee communication.”*

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