



**The Referendum
on Scotland's Future
Young Women's Event
Saturday 9th August
Menzies Hotel, Glasgow**

“Women need to have their voices heard as part of the debate around Scotland's future. They are the cornerstone of communities – both socially and economically. The campaigns need to engage with women and listen to their concerns and emerging issues. This event has ensured that those attending are able to raise and seek answers to the issues which are important to them.”

Agnes Tolmie
Chair, SWC

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Introduction

The SWC organised this event in recognition that women from different backgrounds throughout Scotland have significant questions and issues around the forthcoming referendum. Women want to know how this historic decision will impact on them, their families and communities as a whole.

This is the eighth in a series of conferences held by the SWC. Previous events have been held in Glasgow (x2), Dundee and Livingston, Aberdeen, Inverness and Inverclyde. The organisation will also visit Orkney to discuss the referendum with women in these areas.

The events are chaired by Agnes Tolmie, Chair of the SWC. Our organisation works with Yes Scotland and Better Together to source speakers and panel members.



Councillor Angela Crawley

“The reason I am here today is to provide you with a positive case for independence. I will also explain why I feel independence is not only relevant to all of us here today, but as part of the wider objective of achieving a fairer, more socially just and equal society. Right now we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to be the generation that achieves independence. A generation of young people who, for the first time in their lives, will have the opportunity to decide on the future of their country.

Anecdotally, the aspiration of most young people is to become independent of their parents, to get a job and to be in control of their own finances, to have a place of their own, and to have a car to transport themselves to where they want to be without limits. Why is it so inconceivable for a country to have the same aspirations?

I believe that Scotland can achieve its full potential by joining other independent countries in the world. I believe that Scotland can speak for itself and ultimately no-one cares more about Scotland than the people who live here. Our hope for the future is that Scotland can be a much stronger, fairer and socially just country with the real powers of independence. The reality of the status quo is that we are governed by a system that we didn't elect and that is not democratically representative of the Scottish electorate. How can we therefore trust that the decisions of the UK Government represent the best interests of the people here in Scotland?

In the past 30 years Scotland has achieved one in three of the governments it has voted for in the UK. We have the opportunity to always get the governments that we vote for with independence. Questions continue to remain unanswered for me. The Better Together campaign are offering Scotland simple promises that things will remain the same. Scotland should not be demarcated by questions about plan B and our position in Europe because these aren't the real issues here. The reality is the UK can't even provide these guarantees, there are no real certainties. A Tory/UKIP coalition and an EU in/out referendum are real possibilities. The current negotiating position on currency has received contradictory opinions.

We can create the real opportunities that are available to ourselves. We can do this in September. A devolved Scottish Parliament already governs itself on issues such as health, education and justice, and does its best to create a better, wealthier, healthier, greener, fairer, smarter and more creative Scotland. However we can do more. I believe that with control over welfare, defence, the economy and taxation we could have so much more. We could have a voice on the world stage and we could take decisions in the best interests of the people of Scotland.

I believe that the UK Government's agenda priorities are wrong. Welfare Reform and the bedroom tax primarily impact on the poorest in society, who get poorer while the rich get richer. On defence, Trident is minutes away from Glasgow while one in four children grow up in poverty and people queue for foodbanks less than ten minutes from where we sit. This is not good enough. We are not Better Together if that is the reality.

I am fortunate enough to have experienced, in my lifetime, a Scottish Government which makes decisions in the best interests of the Scottish people. This makes question me why are all decisions are not taken in Scotland. Devolution has allowed us to achieve many things that benefit people here in Scotland.

With regards to education, we have protected free tuition fees, whereby students are not saddled with thousands of pounds worth of debt. Access to education is based on ability, not income. The NHS, one of the greatest inventions of modern history, is something we should be striving to maintain and protect. Instead, we are witnessing the gradual privatisation of services in the rest of the UK. No prescription fees here in Scotland ensures that those who require medication receive the treatment they need with no further cost to their health. These are just some of the examples of the benefits of a devolved system, but again we can do more.

Scotland has been a country of innovation for many years. With modern inventions and an independent legal system we are already a unique country, not only in terms of rich natural resources but we have progressive advancements in renewable energy. We also have human resources and deserve to be recognised for its wealth of skills, talent, knowledge and ambition in its own right.

The referendum marks the most significant decision we will make. Young and old alike will have the opportunity to take a stance on the course of Scotland's future. An independent Scotland can put the priorities of Scotland's people first, allowing the wealth and talent of the nation to flourish, creating more opportunities for people here in Scotland. I am confident that like many other nations, Scotland can and should be an independent country and will be successful in managing its own affairs. It is for that reason that I ask you to consider the possibility of voting Yes."

Gemma Doyle MP

Gemma was elected as the MP for her home seat of West Dunbartonshire in May 2010. Before being elected to Parliament Gemma worked as a Political Officer for the Parliamentary Labour Party, as a Conference Producer for the Institution of Civil Engineers, a Conference Development Manager for a small business and also as a caseworker and parliamentary assistant for a number of MSPs.

Gemma attended the University of Glasgow, and despite being distracted by politics, graduated with an MA in European Civilisation. During University she worked behind the bar in the Dumbuck Hotel and as a cleaner in a busy Glasgow hotel. She has been a Labour campaigner since joining the party aged 15 and served on the Scottish Executive of the Party as well as Labour's National Policy Forum before being selected as Labour's candidate in West Dunbartonshire in 2010.

She served briefly on the Energy Select Committee before being appointed to Labour's frontbench by Ed Miliband in September 2010 as the Shadow Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, making her the first woman MP to represent any political party on defence matters.

"I will be voting to keep Scotland in the UK in September. I think that we gain more from being in the UK as well as having decision making powers in the Scottish Parliament over things that we have, quite frankly, always done differently here in Scotland. We already control schools and hospitals, our justice system, and many other things like public transport.

We live in a world of interdependent countries, where people gain by working together, not pulling up the drawbridge and staying in isolation. I understand that people feel remote from Westminster. I was in Carlisle recently and the group of women I spoke to there felt just as remote from Westminster as many women in Scotland. People in Scotland also feel remote from Holyrood and I think that's a challenge for all politicians and the public, to improve the way we do our politics and to be proactive. That's something that I do a lot in my constituency in West Dunbartonshire. I go out, knock on doors, write to people and ask them what they want to see in their communities.

Feeling remote from politics, whether it's Westminster or Holyrood, isn't a reason to change the borders of our country. I know that people don't like the Tory and Liberal Government at Westminster. I don't like them either and vote against them regularly. I also don't like a lot of things that the SNP Government are doing at Holyrood but that's politics. Governments are temporary and they can always be changed. That's not a reason to permanently change the borders of our country. When we look around the world at some of the awful situations that some people are in, particularly right now, it feels like half of the world is exploding, I think that we have to be really careful when we talk about us not having democracy. We do, and we're very lucky to have it and should always work to make it better. It's something that we should value.

I believe the risks of independence are just too great for us to take a gamble into the unknown. Just take the currency issue. Some people have said that's not an important issue but it really is. Alex Salmond says that he wants to use the pound, but we would not be using it as we are now, because we would not be in a currency union. Everyone, apart from the Yes campaign, agrees that for a currency union to work, you need a political union. If Scotland decides that it wants to be an independent country, we would not be in a political union with the rest of the UK because that's what people would have voted for, so we would be separate.

We need to know what the plan B is. It is important. The SNP won't tell us, the Yes campaign won't tell us and Alex Salmond won't tell us what money we would actually have in our pockets. That's just not good enough for me or my constituents. This issue is the one that comes up the most, as people are really worried about it. If you don't have a lot of money in your pocket, it might not seem important, but what currency you have affects an awful lot of other things, such as the price of goods and services and interest rates. It has implications for whether the government can borrow enough money to spend on the schools, hospitals and other public services that we all really value and rely on. If you have a mortgage or a pension and that's in pounds, they are affected and you can start to get into some really tricky situations.

If we left the UK, we would lose the financial security and the backup of the UK. A new country, without the pound, perhaps using a completely new currency, or still using the pound without a currency union, would mean a weaker financial system and higher costs. Membership of the EU as a separate country would put even greater pressure on our colleges and universities. The system would have to change completely because of the rules on what you charge and how you treat students. Our young people would be faced with competing with more and more students from the rest of the UK for places. It's worth mentioning as well that our colleges are facing a crisis at the moment. 30,000 places have been lost and that's not good enough for me. We might have the headline of free university fees but that doesn't mean that everything is good for Scottish students, because fewer young people have been able to go to college because the system isn't working.

I make the point all the time that young people care about exactly the same issues as everyone else – jobs, housing, transport, being safe when out and about. I don't see one single argument for why it is borders, and not political choices, that make the difference to peoples lives. It is the worst kind of politics to sell people a pipe dream. My constituency has high levels of deprivation, high unemployment and high levels of people claiming sickness benefits. Telling them that it's all going to be better and it's all going to be OK if we just have independence is not right. The people who have a lot of questions were told that they would be answered in the Scottish Government's White Paper. That's just not the case, because if the questions had been answered then we wouldn't still be having these debates with people asking for more information. The White Paper doesn't set out how independence would work and why it's the best thing for Scotland. It's simply an SNP manifesto. We can talk about policies but actually, those are political choices and whatever system you have, the choices will always be difficult. It's up to us as politicians to talk to people about that and have discussions about what the choices are.

The childcare pledge, which was announced as a big selling point for independence, has been entirely unravelled because the Scottish Parliament's Resource Centre (SPiCE) said there simply weren't enough women in the labour market to make it work. It was based on getting more women into the workplace and the government getting money in through tax receipts then that going back in and funding childcare. It was based on 104,000 women going back into the labour market, but there are only 64,000 women that would be considered in this group. Only about 14,000 wanted to go back into the labour market if the childcare was there. Selling people a pipe dream that independence is the gateway to health, wealth and happiness is just not right.

Politics is about choices. What you cannot do is say that we will have lower taxes and higher public spending. You have to be straight with people. The Labour Party is committed to increasing the top rate of tax if we win the election in May. Things are really difficult for people at the moment and we do not think it is right to give those who are earning the most a tax cut, which is what the Westminster Government has done. We will put the rate of tax up so that those who earn the most are paying more in.

Nothing is perfect. However I actually think we have about the right balance with the Scottish Parliament having control over health, education, policing, justice and tax raising powers, but staying part of the UK to be part of a bigger economy. We have more security over things like pensions, the security of the UK defence system and the armed forces, but will also have more powers for the Scottish Parliament.

If I genuinely thought that independence was the best thing for my constituents, I would be on the barricades of the Yes campaign. However, when I think about it and what it would mean for them I see more barriers, fewer opportunities and more hurdles. I see us competing with our neighbours in the UK, not working with them as we do right now."

Nicole Dempster MSYP

Nicole is 17 years old and lives in Newton Mearns. She represents the young people of Eastwood within the Scottish Youth Parliament and is one of three MSYPs from East Renfrewshire. Nicole has been an MSYP for two years and was recently elected as an MYP for the UK Youth Parliament, where she represents Glasgow and the West of Scotland. She is the convenor for the SYP's Jobs and Economy Committee. Nicole has just finished school and is moving to Stirling in September to study politics and sociology at Stirling University.

“The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratically elected voice for Scotland's young people. We meet three times a year as a Parliament and campaign on the issues that affect young people from the age of 12-25, at both a local and national level. I've been a member of the SYP (MSYP) for 2 years. It has given me a number of unique opportunities, such as attending the All-Female Cabinet event and going down to the House of Commons to engage in a debate there. It has also allowed me to go into my local constituency and ask young people about their views on politics, particularly speaking to young people whose voices are often forgotten about. This includes groups of young mums, young carers, people with physical disabilities and those with mental health problems.

This year the SYP has championed 'Care Fair Share', our national campaign which focuses on young carers rights and tackling the adverse financial conditions they face. The campaign calls for the government to support young carers to enable them to pursue their education and build positive relationships. We want to ensure that caring does not mean compromise for young people in Scotland. We have already made great strides with the campaign. The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) regulations are now more flexible so that young carers do not lose their EMA entitlement. We're still fighting for a bursary for young carers who are in higher education and we are also looking to tackle a travel concession for young people in caring roles.

Another important part of our work this year is the 'Aye, Naw, Mibbe' campaign. This is our voter engagement project, where we give young people the opportunity to access impartial information about the referendum. We have been looking at how you can register to vote, the importance of discussing voting, why it's important to vote and civic participation. As an organisation we've chosen not to take a side in the referendum. We see our role as giving young people the opportunity to find out both points of view. We're not persuading anyone to vote one way or another, but rather we want to ensure they're equipped to make an informed decision for themselves in September. As an organisation we campaigned for 16 and 17 year olds to get the vote and now we're campaigning to ensure they use their vote.

Being part of the SYP has made a really significant contribution to my life. I'm a lot more confident now. It's also made me realise that politics is not a man's world. As a youth parliament we are standing for equality. In June we elected a new board, which is made up of a female chair and vice chair, as well as two female trustees. This means that over half of our board are women. We also have had more young women come forward to senior roles within our organisation – half of the convener's group are women and lots of young women are putting forward policies at our sittings. That's such a big difference from two years ago when I started.

I think the reason we've been successful in doing this is because we don't just value inclusiveness, it goes to the very core of our organisation. It's the starting principle in almost everything that we do. We are striving to break down the barriers of participation and are aiming to be as inclusive as possible, however we are aware there is always more that can be done. We can always reach out to more people and we want to engage with more young women. As an organisation we're growing in scale and profile and I'm really excited to look forward to see what's in store for the SYP.

I hope that you can get a sense today that it's not about whether you vote Yes or No, but that young people are given the information to be able to make a decision. We all have a role to play in this really amazing referendum that's coming up."



Question and Answer Session

The main focus of this event was the 'Question Time' style Q&A session. This gave local women the opportunity to ask a panel of representatives from Yes Scotland and Better Together questions around a number of issues.

BETTER TOGETHER

Kainde Manji is a feminist and disability rights activist, who has worked across the equalities sector in Scotland. She has campaigned on a range of issues affecting women including childcare funding for student parents, the representation of women in Scottish politics, and against the gender pay gap. She is currently working for a PhD at the University of Glasgow looking at the impact of welfare reform on disabled people living in Scotland.

YES SCOTLAND

Cat Boyd is a trade union activist and co-founder of the Radical Independence Campaign. She is also involved in Women for Indy and making the socialist and feminist case for a Yes vote.

Do you think that more could be done to engage more young women in politics in general?

Gemma Doyle (GD)

I think young women are interested in the same issues as everyone else, so it's about jobs and schools and housing and those kind of issues. I think sometimes we try and draw a square round young people's politics or women's politics. There should be a space for talking about issues that matter to everyone. Incredibly, I am the first woman MP to sit in a defence team in the House of Commons. You don't have to be involved in party politics to make a difference. Anyone can lobby MPs and get their communities working together. I think politicians need to go to where people are and not just wait for their constituents to come to them. It's about getting out and talking to lots of different groups but also showing that you're listening to people as well. I don't think there's a magic bullet and I think we just have to keep trying lots of different ways.

Kainde Manji (KM)

If anything, this campaign has shown that there are a lot of unheard voices that are coming out and beginning to express themselves and that's really exciting. I've spoken at lots of women's events over the last two years since getting involved with Better Together and they've been the most interesting and consensual, where real issues have been properly discussed. I think it's a shame that here in Scotland we had such a positive start with the Scottish Parliament. In that first parliament 40% of MSPs elected were women and that was because, in particular, the Labour Party made a real effort to increase the representation of women in Parliament. As time has gone on that's decreased. I think it's about giving people a stake in politics, and that's one of the reasons I think it's so fantastic that young people have been given the opportunity to vote in this referendum. I think we should have done it in the last Local Government elections as the Scottish Parliament had the power and I'd like to see it happening across the board. If people are not involved from a young age then it's as if their voice is not important. Many don't get the opportunity to engage by the time they turn 18.

Angela Crawley (AC)

When it comes to representation of women and of young people in politics, I don't think we've come far enough. Often when I speak to young women who are engaged in politics at any level, be it local, national, UK Government etc, they will say 'someone asked me to be involved'. They didn't assume the role, they didn't step forward, they had to be asked and I think we have to change that. I think that rather than creating young people's issues and women's issues, we should be looking at greater equality across the spectrum. The first place to start for me is considering the Scandinavian model on parental roles. For example, it shouldn't be that childcare is a woman's issue. If a man leaves work early he is looked at funny by his colleagues.

Why shouldn't he want to pick his kids up from school? Why wouldn't he want to leave the boardroom early? Until we change the semantics and the politics of men and women's participation in parenting, we won't change boardrooms or Parliament or working hours and arrangements for women and young people. We all have a responsibility to change the semantics of the discussion and make it about equality overall.

Cat Boyd (CB)

I'm not a member of a mainstream political party but I'm involved in politics. The two things are not mutually exclusive, politics is not just about parties and men in suits on TV having a debate. That's not my kind of politics. I'm involved in Women for Independence and the Radical Independence Campaign, and these are part of the broader Yes movement. In terms of young people and women, we're not a homogenous block, we're not all the same. You have differences in class, race, sexuality etc so there are different elements in those two groupings. What's quite interesting is that they're two groups that have been hammered by Westminster, particularly by the current Government. It's no wonder that young people and women get turned off politics because politics at the establishment does not represent anything to do with our interests.



What I see at Westminster is a white, male, very rich elite who make decisions for them and their pals. That's one of the reasons I'm voting Yes. Of the Cabinet at Westminster, four fifths are men. That's not reflective of the population. Devolution in Scotland did help, but it has stalled. I think that's because the Parliament in Scotland has become infected with that Westminster problem. That embodies sexist, elite privilege. It's a system of politics that means who you are, where you're born and who you're born to means not just how far you go in life but how much access to political power you have. We need to break away and do our own thing. In terms of the comparison as to what's possible, the Nordic countries are a really good example. UNICEF did a study in 2007 about levels of children and young people's happiness. The UK came pretty much at the bottom of the list of developed countries. We have some of the least happy children. The Scandinavian countries, however, all came on top. They have less child poverty than us and more 15-19 year olds are in full time education. Their young people are happier and healthier, there's less violence, and more investment in education. Young people are taken seriously by the political establishment – in Norway, for example, 7% of the Parliament is under the age of 30. That's inconceivable under the current UK constitutional arrangement. The reason I think young people are happier and they stay in education more is because the societies of the Nordic countries are much more balanced. The distribution of wealth from rich to poor is much more equal, whereas the UK is one of the most unequal societies in the developed world. In order to engage young people and young women in particular, you need to have policies that are progressive across society. If you make things more equal for everyone, it gives them the chance to participate.

Agnes Tolmie (AT)

I want to pick up on the point about the 50/50 campaign, which was borne out of the trade union movement, and the Labour and trade union movement, and then through the STUC Women's Committee. Labour was the only party that was prepared to do the 50/50 seats. That's worth recognising but we still have a job of work to do with all of the parties and political bodies across Scotland who have to accept that. Until we get that society, we still need women's groups to pressurise and we still need youth groups to pressurise until we get that model. If we continue to have the overrepresentation of men in our society, then we have to be there knocking on their doors and reminding them that we are here and we're not going anywhere.

I would like to ask the panel – whether it's a Yes or a No, would you campaign for 16 and 17 year olds to have the vote on a regular basis?

CB

Of course I would support that, it's a basic democratic principle. The more people you extend the vote to the better. In terms of campaigning, of course, I didn't just get involved in politics because of the referendum so I will keep campaigning.

AC

I fundamentally believe in 16-18 year olds having the vote. A basic tenet of democracy is no taxation without representation and we deserve that at all levels. I won't stop campaigning against global inequalities and issues – we need to address those as a nation, whether we're together or not.

KM

I've been campaigning for votes from 16 since I was about 14, I wanted to vote when I was 14. I've been involved in campaigns my entire life and I will continue to do so. I think there's a lot we could do with the current constitutional settlement in terms of votes at 16 for Local Government. The Labour party is committed to introducing votes at 16 for Westminster elections and I very much look forward to seeing that happen.

GD

At our National Policy Forum, the Labour Party voted to support votes for 16/17 year olds, which was also in our previous manifesto. Ed Miliband has said that he thought the fact that 16 and 17 year olds had participated in this referendum showed that no-one could make the argument again that it wasn't the right thing to do to give them the vote.

What have you learned about Scotland through this process that you didn't know before and how has this contributed to your passion for Yes or No?

CB

I've learned a lot throughout the campaign. I've never considered myself Scottish, I don't have a strong Scottish identity. All of my family were Irish and we grew up with Irish traditions, so I never really considered myself Scottish and I didn't know about Scottish history, literature, art, culture or tradition. I didn't really think about Scotland's right to self-determination, but as the campaign has gone on and I've learned things that I should have been taught in school, it's opened up a whole new world for me. The movement for Yes is stretching all across Scotland. It's contagious, people are setting up Yes branches, being really active and engaging with the debate.

AC

The thing that I've learned is Scotland is a nation that cares. I don't think that other nations don't care, but when you go to the doorsteps and speak to people about the campaign, whatever side of the campaign they sit on, it's obvious that they care. They care about the future, their families, their children, their grandchildren and that's an incredible thing. One question has engaged every single person in the country. It's got people thinking, talking about and engaging in politics in a way they never have before. We have an office in the area I live in and every day people drop in, and the activists who are there every day give their time freely because they passionately believe in independence. It's not a pipe dream, it's an aspiration, it's a hope. It's the possibility of being instrumental in change. Calling it a pipe dream disregards the thousands of people who believe this is an instrumental opportunity.

KM

I've been really inspired by the amount of people that have got involved and that's very much been on both sides. I'm inspired when I go out door-knocking and there are constantly new people coming out to support Better Together who have never in their lives done anything like this. They believe so passionately in it that they want to give up their Saturday to stand in the wind and rain to speak to people. I'm really inspired when I chat to people on the doorsteps with how engaged they are. Even people who haven't made their mind up – it's not because they don't care, it's because they care so passionately and deeply about it. I had this experience a few weeks ago when I spoke to someone for about 20 minutes who was genuinely 100% undecided. We had a fantastic conversation and we spoke about a huge variety of issues. At the end, he was still undecided, I still believed what I believe, but he thanked me for my time nonetheless. It's been great having the opportunity to talk to people. I hope we can carry that on after 18th September. I strongly believe that whatever happens, it will be that inspirational commitment that will hold us all together and mean that we all work together for a much better Scotland, whatever happens.

GD

My ancestry is also Irish. I've always thought I have a bit of a split identity, in that my historical identity is Irish but my Scottish identity is a very modern thing that I associate with Glasgow, the regeneration we've had here in the West of Scotland and the opportunities that we have on our doorstep. It's been really interesting to talk to people on the doorsteps about their identities and although people can be very proudly Scottish, they still want to be part of the UK. Many don't see it as necessary to be separate to have that kind of identity. It's been interesting to see that people really do understand that this is a massive decision. They know there is no going back. They feel the weight of the decision. The other interesting thing I've learned is that you shouldn't make assumptions about young people. It was the right thing to do but there was a bit of cynicism as to why 16 and 17 year olds were being given the vote. There was a bit of an assumption that they would vote Yes but actually in most school debates they have come back with a No.

My son is 8 years old and is on the autistic spectrum so every day is a struggle for him. I feel he's being forgotten about at the moment, because he's not really disabled so he doesn't get one-on-one help but he's struggling in mainstream school. What's going to happen to kids like my son and education in general whether there's a Yes vote or a No vote? There have been so many cuts, teachers are so restricted and have had so much taken off of them.

GD

I continue to be astounded by how difficult it is for people to get the additional support they need when their children have additional needs. It shouldn't be that difficult. Education is already entirely devolved to the Scottish Parliament – that is about how you deliver services and it's about choices. It shouldn't matter what the constitutional arrangement is, it's about improving the service whatever the situation. My concern is that we will see even less money for public services if we are independent. We would lose the Barnett formula, which is how the money Scotland receives is worked out. At the moment, Scotland gets more money per head for public services for two reasons - one, because of our high levels of deprivation and two, because of the rurality of Scotland. Delivering services is always going to be more expensive because of our geography. We get about £1400 per person more for public services. That would disappear and that really worries me. The other aspect is, if you're setting up a new country with all of the infrastructure that would be necessary for it to function, that takes a lot of money. My concern is that it will mean taking money away from public services. The third reason comes back to currency, and the currency and financial system you use affects the amount of money you have to spend on public services. Given that we don't have the answer for that, there's a big question mark over it. My worry is there would be a lot less money if we became independent.

KM

I think where it's at is early years and that's something that the Scottish Parliament has always had responsibility for. A lot of that comes down to childcare. The thing that I found almost insulting about the childcare pledge in the White Paper was that it was purely based on economics, when actually, if what we care about is equality between men and women, and we care about giving young people the very best start in life, then good quality, highly flexible, where you need it / when you need it childcare is what's important. That could be delivered under current powers but the Scottish Government just don't want to do it. I have particular empathy with your situation. I am very severely dyslexic and it took me a really long time to learn to read and write. I'm now doing a PhD and that's absolutely to do with the support I received when going through school. I don't think I should be unique. Every child in Scotland should have the same opportunities.

AC

I grew up with a younger brother who had severe learning difficulties and throughout school he fell behind in class. It was the 1990s, it wasn't what it is now and we have come a long way. I don't necessarily think that the Curriculum for Excellence addresses all of the concerns for parents, especially for those with learning difficulties. There's a lot more that we need to do. As an elected member in South Lanarkshire Council I see every day the impact of the cuts from Westminster and the Scottish Parliament on the services that are provided through education. I have a number of family members who are teachers and who every weekend, out of their own pockets, go out and buy the resources they need to ensure the children in their classroom get the best possible experience. We need to do more to support teachers. It's an exceptional thing to do to keep a class of 20-30 children occupied and teach them every day and hats off to those who do it. The money needs to be there and it needs to come from somewhere. We can talk about the politics of it all but the reality is where we are now. I don't think that a Yes vote will transform the world overnight, the day to day won't change, we're going to have to work at it and it's going to take all political parties to work at it. It won't always be an SNP Government either, there could be all shapes and forms of Government in the future. It's possible that the shape and form of politics will change and the landscape of politics will change, however I think that we need to stop talking about politics and cuts. The only way we tackle questions like this is by having an aspirational view beyond today and tomorrow. We're looking at the future and how we can have a wider perspective on this debate.

CB

What we're talking about here in terms of education is rights. That your child should have the right to an education that's appropriate to him is a right, not a privilege. It's not something you should have to go asking for. The only way to have those rights is to have them enshrined in a written constitution created by the people of Scotland.

While education has been devolved since the Parliament's inception and while we're funded by the Barnett formula, as Westminster will make more cuts – there's about £25bn worth of cuts still to come – this will have an impact overall. Scotland raises 9.1% of the tax in the UK and we're 8.3% of the population. We do quite well, we're not a burden on the economy, we more than pay our own way. My issue is that the cuts that are coming will have an impact here. The axe is chopping at Westminster and they're cutting public spending there, that will have a domino effect on Scotland and it will be our hospitals and our schools that will suffer.

Questioner

Education is a right. Regardless of whether it's my son or anyone else's, every child should get the education they deserve. It doesn't matter whether it's a Yes vote or a No vote, this should be happening anyway.

I need specific medicine which I take on a daily basis - I need two sets every month. If we become independent and we have to start paying for our prescriptions, what kind of an impact will that have?

GD

Almost everything about the NHS is devolved and there's no suggestion that would change. Scotland already has those powers. This ties back in a bit to what we were talking about before. Every country was affected by the global economic crash and they have all had to make really difficult choices about spending because there was less money. My problem is with the idea that if Scotland were independent then we wouldn't have to make hard choices. We would, as much as the UK will have to. I think they would be even more difficult because setting up a new country is expensive and it's difficult. Interestingly, it is worth noting that more people voted Conservative and Liberal Democrat in 2010 in Scotland than voted for the SNP in 2011 for the Scottish Government. I think that's a point worth making.

KM

In Scotland, we have had the opportunity to introduce free prescriptions and that's been very positive. Personally, as a student, I would find it exceptionally difficult to be able to afford mine. One of the things I do as part of my PhD is to tutor undergraduates in public policy. I always tell them they have to be careful when using statistics. Percentages can tell a really interesting story but if you look at the figures underneath that it can be completely different. Gemma's point about the election numbers there is a classic example. We contribute 9.9% of UK taxation but only receive 9.3% in return. If you look at the figures underneath that, 9.9% is £56.9bn and 9.3% of spending coming back is £65.4bn. The statistics suggest that Scotland is getting a raw deal but in terms of money we get a better deal and that allows us to recognise that there are particular ideas we need to address. Things could be done a lot fairer with the NHS. The way that we care for people in this country should be the hallmark of a civilised society and I think we can do a lot better.

AC

With regards to prescriptions, its something I'm really proud that the SNP has done. When you look at the bureaucracy and red tape associated with means testing, the cost of paying staff etc, it is counter-intuitive to just saying if you need a prescription you get it. In England, people can pay up to £9 for one prescription alone. I represent an area in South Lanarkshire where people are struggling to put food on the table for their children. If I had to choose between a cough bottle for my child or putting food on the table, I don't know what my choice would be. I don't ever want to be in that position and I don't want to see anyone in the position where they have to decide whether to buy food or get medicine for their child. In my opinion, prescriptions are a basic right. We pay our taxes and deserve a healthcare system that looks after us. If I had the choice of paying more taxes in order to get better services, then I would pay more taxes. I'm saying that as an individual, not through the campaign or my party. I don't think anyone in this debate is prepared to say these things often enough. We are talking about making difficult decisions and hard choices but I'm not shying away from that. I don't think many people would if it was in the best interests of the people of Scotland. I want better. I want better Governments, better services and better outcomes. I think we can do that by changing the system as it stands.

CB

The reason that people in England have to pay for prescriptions is not because of austerity or a financial crisis, that's a political choice. There's more than enough to go around, it's how it's distributed and how the priorities are outlined by the current UK Government. We are seeing a move towards the privatisation of the NHS in England. That's not about charging for prescriptions, that will be charging for x-rays and overnights in hospital. That's what's happening down south right now and my concern is if we vote No, we're endorsing that. In terms of what happens under independence with prescription charges, you should never have to pay when it comes to health. Prescriptions are free at the point of use, they're paid for through taxes. The Scottish Government has chosen to prioritise health by saying free prescriptions for all. We've spoken about difficult choices and how we're going to afford it. Never let anyone tell you that we can't afford to be independent. We've got Nobel prize winning economists saying that it's financially viable for Scotland to be independent. Since when did politics become about how rich you are as a nation and how everything has a cost? Politics should be about how you distribute the wealth amongst people. I've made my hard decisions about how we afford things. We should tax the rich, stop corporations dodging tax and get rid of Trident. There's billions saved already and the money could be used for services. It's about priorities, not about pounds.

GD

I just want to clarify that in England, not everybody pays for their prescriptions. They have the system we used to have, so that people on low incomes are exempt. The choice that the Scottish Government has made is that everybody, even if you are very rich, gets free prescriptions. Down south the choice that's been made is that if you can afford to pay for prescriptions then you do.

CB

I know that the Scottish Labour Party is not in favour of universalism. So many people who are in poverty are in work and there's a huge stigma attached to means testing. I've seen the impact of that, where some people just don't quite make the cut and that decision is made by someone in an office.

The organisation I use are funded by a UK charity (Comic Relief). What will happen to our funding if Scotland becomes independent? The group is hugely important, a lot of us are young mums. There's a crèche for our kids, and we can come together and talk about things that matter to us.

AC

I think again that comes down to the way things are set up at the moment. My view is that charities will always exist and people will always give to charity, whether their offices are in Edinburgh or London. There are real issues that face women that men don't face such as domestic abuse which we've not really been talking about in this debate. Until we start looking at these issues we don't address the real points. I think there will always be support there for those who need it, it's just a matter of where the Head Office is and how it's funded. That brings me to the currency point. Plan B,C, D etc are all outlined in a Fiscal Report on Scottish Independence which has examined every possible outcome of currency. The negotiating position that we want is the pound, because it's Scotland's pound as much as anyone else's. I believe that the negotiating position of all political parties will change when Scotland makes it's decision. All parties will pay attention to what Scotland decides. If we vote No then there are decisions to be made about additional powers. If Scotland votes Yes, there's a respect to be had that the majority of people who voted in Scotland want independence in some form or another and I think that's really crucial. If we want to keep the pound who says we can't? Why are politicians telling us when they are accountable to us? They are elected by the people to represent their views and if people want the pound then I believe they should get the pound.

KM

In the event of a Yes vote, Comic Relief is an international charity and so Scotland may well fall under the rest of the UK development funding but there are no guarantees and organisations may see a hiatus. This question raises a number of points, including currency. There are two options with currency. There's the currency union, where we would give up our fiscal levers to the Treasury and have, if we were lucky, a representative at the Bank of England, which doesn't really offer independence. Or there's the other option, where we will keep using the pound like Panama uses the US dollar. What that means is that again we don't have control over our fiscal levers and don't have the back up of the Bank of England. That creates very difficult decisions. I would like to pay higher taxes, but what's on offer with independence has been set out in the White Paper. The only thing that's been laid out are tax cuts, on air



passenger duty and corporation tax. Neither of those are particularly progressive policies and they won't deliver the kind of spending that people want to see in Scotland. I would also like to take issue with the idea that Scotland and England's political choices are very different. When we look at things like poverty, it's easy to say we're so much more progressive and left wing here and we look after people more than they do in England. However a recent piece of research examined that if Scotland were to become independent, whether it would be likely to set a higher minimum income standard than in the rest of the UK. The research found that Scottish people would be no more generous, if anything, in some areas they're likely to be slightly less generous. There is so much more that unites us than divides us.

GD

I worry there will be more pressure on the charitable sector because of the issues that we've discussed around public spending. Big businesses will get a tax cut, which means less money coming in through tax receipts. At the moment a lot of charitable fundraising is done across the UK. Take the National Lottery for example. No matter where you buy the ticket, money from it goes towards groups across the UK. I worry very much about groups who rely on this type of funding. There are other issues like charities getting tax breaks from the UK Government, there's nothing in the White Paper about that. We come back to the point of there being unanswered questions. I hope that whatever happens your group would continue to be funded but I think you and others like you deserve the answer to that question.

CB

I don't know the specifics and I can't tell you either way things will be fine. However in 2012 there was some research done and it showed that across the charity sector, donations are down by 20% which is a significant amount. This was directly linked to people starting to feel the pinch in their pocket and not having that wee bit extra to give. Further cuts will have an impact on people's livelihoods and how much they have to spend and donate. The path we're taking as part of the UK is hammering people and that has impacts on all walks of life. I think by breaking away from that type of austerity politics would give people the chance to have a bit more in their pocket and would create a more equal society.

One thing I'm interested in finding out more about is the option of further devolved powers. What would these be and are they actually plausible? Are they a guise just to make more people vote No?

GD

Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats all have different proposals for further devolution. From the Labour Party's point of view, we have said we would devolve more powers on tax. The Scottish Parliament would then be responsible for making decisions about 40% of the tax that it spends. The reason I think it's important not to have completely different tax system is because if you have different systems of income tax, you will see people moving around and effectively you would see a race to the bottom. That's why we've taken the decision to propose more tax powers, but not full tax powers, because that would start to break up the political union we have in the UK. Pooling and sharing the resources that we have actually means that we benefit more. We think that housing benefit should be completely devolved and also want the Scottish Parliament to have powers over elections. We think that Local Authorities should have more power and I think that's really important. I want Local Authorities to have more power because they know what's going on in their areas and I would like to see them working more together. We also propose powers over the Health and Safety Executive, Employment Tribunals and Equalities legislation.

AC

I want to tackle the point about giving more powers to Local Government. I find that notion not disagreeable but questionable. I think it seems ridiculous to suggest that each of the 32 local authorities across Scotland would have scope to make different decisions from each other, yet the concept of Scotland making its own decisions is inconceivable. I find that hard to marry up. As a Councillor I see the confines that all local authorities in Scotland are faced with, in that they do have to make priorities and decide how much money goes to certain things. Council tax can only stretch so far.

CB

My question would be why can we have those powers but no powers over anything else? There's a strange unholy alliance developed between the No parties about further powers. The reason I'm not in a political party is because my trust in parliamentary democracy, particularly through the Westminster parties, has been shattered. We've seen an alliance of these three parties. We have Labour who have said they will be tougher on welfare than the Tories, the Tories thinking it's a good idea to privatise the NHS and then the Lib Dems who went back on promises such as tuition fees, so I have a really hard time thinking that devolved powers would actually happen. I think that the burden is on the politicians to get people's trust to believe that.

I'm involved in the Radical Independence. People don't like to use the word radical – however the reason we called it that is because radical means to tear something up by the root, and that's what our politics is about. It's not about slowly reforming things and giving Scotland a wee bit of power, we want to transform society. No devolved power is going to let us get rid of the House of Lords. It's bizarre that in a modern democracy we have an unelected upper chamber. Putting the future of the monarchy on the table is also not possible under devolved powers.

I work for a big PLC company based in England – what would the implications be for me if we were to become independent?

CB

I don't foresee a problem. I don't think it would be in anyone's interest for your job to be at risk. It wouldn't be in the interests of the company you work for, the Scottish Government or the rest of the UK. The issue I have with a lot of the stuff around jobs is that the economy is hardly booming with job opportunities. There's no real plan for green, sustainable, worthwhile and well paid jobs. That's my concern with both Yes and No.

AC

I don't think any politician can sit and say that a company will protect their jobs, because businesses face issues and politicians can't guarantee on that. I don't think that your job would be under threat by a Yes vote, I don't believe that for a second. On jobs in general, we've got a number of issues to deal with through employment. For example, zero hours contracts are not a choice for people who want to opt in, they're now standard. We need more than the minimum wage, we need the living wage. We need to start demanding more from businesses because they can dictate how the world goes round through job creation and opportunities. They have a real stake in the future of any economy so I think that we do have a lot to demand of them to ensure that people of all ages have employment opportunities. That's not unique to Scotland, it's a UK wide issue.

KM

This is one of the classic unanswered questions of the debate. We can look at what we know and the options that have been put on the table, but this is one of the things where you can't have it both ways. Scenario one is low corporation tax. You can't have the high public spending, social investment, social justice pushing issues that Yes have spoken about because there's not enough money to pay for that. Scenario two is that we're going to apparently have amazing public services, be able to tackle poverty in Scotland, we will have a really well resourced welfare state. We're going to need to pay for that and the only way to do that is through higher taxation. I'm in favour of that but I don't want to see Scotland becoming an equivalent of Jersey or Monaco because I don't think that's good for anyone's economy. As a trade unionist I don't think that's good for anyone's job.

GD

In some senses it depends what your business is. Your company will have taken a decision to set up here in Scotland and they will have taken that decision seeing no difference in terms of the regulations that they deal with. What they will want to know is are they going to be operating in a different tax regime, with different national insurance rules; will they be trading in different currency. That will affect the decisions they make. Your company, if Scotland were to go independent will look at all of those issues. We will have different regimes and we're unlikely to be in a currency union with the pound. I would be a bit worried about what that would mean. A lot of the big PLCs, in their annual reports, have said that they are concerned with the risks of independence.

CB

Regardless of the referendum, the only thing that can help protect your job is joining a trade union. Workplaces that have high levels of trade union membership have safer, less precarious jobs, they have better rights to holidays, better pay, and better terms and conditions overall. In the UK just now we have some of the most vicious anti-trade union legislation about workers rights to organise. That's the other thing with the Yes vote – it gives the trade unions a chance to be stronger.

GD

The Labour Government that came to power in 1997 brought about a lot of change. They brought in the minimum wage, and unemployment in my constituency plummeted under that government. Huge amounts of money were invested in public services to make them better. Then the economic crash came in 2008 and the whole world was affected by that. Before 2010, when the Labour Party were still in power, unemployment was going back down because the government were investing and getting us out of recession. After 2010 unemployment went back up in my constituency. The current UK Government have made the wrong choices and there is a better way to doing things. Institutions and borders are not how you change things, it's about politics, policies and choices.



I work for HMRC so I collect taxes from companies from across the UK as well as providing a service to vulnerable families who need extra time to pay when they've been overpaid tax credits and have to pay that money back. Civil servants in Scotland are stuck at the moment, we're damned if we do and damned if we don't. If we vote Yes, we face uncertainty over our jobs but if we say No I feel like we would be in an even worse position. At the moment we're in a pay freeze but household bills have gone up. What guarantees can be made for people in the civil service at the moment?

GD

I think you're right to be concerned. The UK Government are not going to continue to base their departments in what would be a foreign country and that would be the reality of independence for you.

KM

I don't agree with the pay freeze, it's been going on for too long. We need to respect public sector workers. The country is held up by the work that those in the public sector do and we need to do much more to ensure there's a living wage for everyone and that there's dignity and protection in the workplace. I believe that these problems won't go away with independence, those challenges will still be faced in an independent Scotland and across the rest of the UK. I would like to work to have a fairer standard of living for people across the UK. I think that's a difficult thing to achieve but it's a political choice and it's one that we should all be working for.

AC

Should Scotland become independent, we will require to establish our own welfare system which would have to create its own infrastructure, jobs etc. I hear some of the most awful feedback from civil servants who have fear and uncertainty over their jobs and that's irrespective of Scotland becoming independent and of the UK staying in or leaving Europe.

CB

I used to work for the DWP so I know a bit about what you're talking about. There's been a pay freeze for so long now that civil servants have to get their incomes topped up by tax credits and have to put their shopping on credit cards. In HMRC the work that you do is really important. There used to be inquiry centres to help people complete tax returns etc but the UK Government have shut them all down. This is happening all across the civil service. Because there are so many civil servants employed, keeping their wages down is really damaging for the economy. They don't have enough money to put back in. Earlier I said we can afford free prescriptions and education is by closing tax loopholes. PCS did research into this and it costs the economy about £1bn a year in benefits that haven't been rightly claimed but it costs £70bn in tax evasion by companies.



CLOSING STATEMENTS

Cat Boyd, Women for Independence

“I’m not in a mainstream political party. I’m not a nationalist. I first got involved in politics against the war in Iraq. I come from a Labour party background and my parents have been Labour party members all of their lives. I remember when Tony Blair won the General Election in 1997 and everyone was overjoyed, talking about the introduction of the minimum wage and other policies. However for me that Government represents something really different. It represents an illegal war, and you can’t mention that government without talking about the legacy of Blair.

I vividly remember the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and it was during that time that I got involved with the anti-war campaigns and became an internationalist for independence. I thought that would probably be the best way forward, not just for people in Scotland, but also abroad.

I’ve done a few meetings up and down the country talking about independence. Sometimes it’s for Yes groups, sometimes it’s for undecided voters and sometimes it’s a debate. Every time I hear someone speak they talk about their journey as to how they arrived at their decision. People have their own stories and reasons as to why they became a Yes voter – what happened to them and their experiences on the journey that they have taken.

I want to tell you about a really specific journey. This one happens every six weeks, from a place down in England to Coulport on the west coast of Scotland. It’s the journey of the nuclear convoy to Faslane. As the nuclear convoy rolls into West Dunbartonshire, it goes onto the A82. This is the only road that connects the West of Scotland with the island communities and it is riddled with potholes. As it drives into Clydebank, it passes a part-time fire station. It drives past the Vale of Leven hospital, which is dying a death from a thousand cuts. It drives past empty industrial spaces that used to be some of the most prosperous in the UK. It goes past Clydebank job centre, which has the highest level of benefit sanctions in the UK. It rolls past queues for foodbanks. Millions and millions of pounds worth of weaponry drives past those things. When I look at it, I see that what we have just now has failed and if we vote No, the debate on the future of Trident is off the table, it’s finished.

For me, independence isn’t about flags, borders, or any of that, and I can’t emphasise that enough. For me, it is a chance – just one chance. That’s how I see 18th September. A tiny little opportunity, a crack of light in a system that has created misery and despair for so many people. When you look at the UK today and see things like the Sunday Times rich list – in the same year that the thousand richest people in the UK’s wealth went up by 15%, 30,000 children in Scotland were plunged into poverty. There’s something very wrong about that. You can’t just change it by voting for a different party under the current arrangement we have at the moment. You’ve got to tear things up at the root and actually look at a new way of doing things.

I'm a socialist and I'm open about that fact. However I know that when I go into the ballot box on 18th September, it won't have my socialist vision of an independent Scotland as an option, nor will it have the SNP's White Paper vision of an independent Scotland. It will just have two options. One of those preserves three centuries of a union that's brought us to this point, and you don't need to be a social expert, or a great mind to see that something is very wrong. The other option, however, opens up infinite amounts of possibility and that's what I see on that referendum paper. In fact the question for me and the question for undecided voters to think about is not whether Scotland should be an independent country. What matters is which outcome on 18th September will best further the interests of ordinary people in Scotland. That's how I see the referendum."

Kainde Manji, Better Together

"It's really interesting to see the difference in events such as this, where you have just women, in this case young women, and the other debates that I have done. I participated in a debate earlier this week that was billed as a women's event, and which had an all female panel, but had a male chair and a predominantly male audience. The tenor of that debate was completely different to this. While we disagree on how we get to where we're going and how 18th September helps us to get there, I think we have a lot of similarities in our vision for what we believe could be better.

I think that what we're all faced with is a difficult decision, and it's right that it's a difficult decision. There are some really compelling arguments as to why we are Better Together. Devolution has already delivered enormously for women in Scotland. 40% of the first Scottish Parliament were women, which was the highest proportion in the whole of Europe. That was really exciting, and what it meant was that the parliament prioritised women's issues. We got the right to breastfeed in public before anywhere else in the UK. There was the smoking ban, which meant that women working in the service industry – where women traditionally predominate – were better protected in their workplaces in terms of health. We also got free personal care for the elderly. However I believe there's lots more that we could do within the powers we already have. The additional powers we've been promised could also make a real difference in Scotland.

I would like to see significantly increased access to affordable, and ideally free, high quality, flexible childcare for all people in Scotland. That needs not to be an economic argument but an argument based on equality. An argument based on the fact that men and women should have the right to be economically active, but they should also have the equal right to share in domestic and family life. I would like to see us doing lots more in terms of segregated employment and occupational segregation. I would like to see more apprenticeships in non-traditional industries, where we have more male nurses and more female plumbers.

We talk about Westminster as if it's the evil dog downstairs, but I think it's important to acknowledge that Westminster has delivered for women in Scotland. We have the minimum wage, which has set a precedent for us talking about a living wage. When I first started working, even the minimum wage was something that people didn't think possible. We've got the Equality Act, which allows parents to share maternity leave for the first time. We also have a social security policy which, although imperfect, pools and shares resources across the whole of the United Kingdom.

I'm not for a minute naive and I don't believe that the union is all motherhood and apple pie. Too often it's a case of the Yes campaign saying that Westminster is evil, rotten and broken and independence will make everything perfect. It has been positive today to see recognition that becoming independent would not necessarily be easy.

I know that the welfare reforms taking place do disproportionately impact on women, and that Universal Credit will have a particular impact on women experiencing domestic abuse. It will take away the independence they have when payments are paid directly to them, particularly in the case of child benefit. I know that women conduct the vast majority of household budgeting, so when things are tight and the money isn't the same, there will be massive challenges. However I don't think those challenges are unique, whether you're in Middlesbrough or Motherwell, Dundee or Durham. These are challenges that affect women across the whole of the UK. I don't think they're unique to the UK either, as we are seeing global challenges. It's about how we're best equipped to deal with these global challenges, because the world is increasingly interdependent.

I would like to end on this idea of interdependency, which as a feminist is a really important thing for me. Interdependence is recognising that if you have independence, there is always a loser. For example, for men to be financially independent, women have to do the lion's share of work. That's a really important principle that we have understand. We are not independent people, but are interdependent on each other. I think we need to recognise that we are not just connected to the rest of the United Kingdom historically and geographically, but that we are politically, economically, socially and for me, really critically, emotionally interdependent on the whole of the UK. That's why I genuinely believe that we are Better Together."