

## Scottish Women's Convention response to:

### The Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee Inquiry on the Gender Pay Gap in Scotland March 2017

#### The Consultation

##### **The remit of the inquiry is:**

*“To explore the effect of the gender pay gap on the Scottish economy, with a particular focus on business performance, the Scottish public sector and Scottish Government action required to address the issue.”*

##### **Key Issues**

The Committee plans to focus the inquiry on three areas:

- Defining the gender pay gap, and looking at how it is measure.
- The gender profiles of Scotland's public and private sectors, looking at good and bad practice in these areas and the benefits to businesses of closing the pay gap.
- What action the Scottish Government is taking, and could take, to reduce the gender pay gap.

#### The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to the issues around the sexual portrayal of under-18s in advertising as outlined below.

#### Introduction

The SWC consults with women about key issues and priorities. Although the gender pay gap, per se, may not always be discussed, key issues which impact on the pay gap are. When women are looking for work, or looking to progress in the workplace, there are other considerations which they take into account as well as their pay. In order to fully understand its impact, the Committee must take into consideration other factors which contribute to and perpetuate the gender pay gap.

Childcare, for example, is a key priority for women. There is often a lack of local, accessible, affordable childcare which suits the needs of working women. Childcare is often only available between 7.30am and 6pm. While this suits women who work 9am-5pm, many employers require shift work, unsociable hours etc. This means that women have to rely on informal care, most often provided by family and friends. These issues are discussed by most women attending SWC events and are particularly severe in rural areas of Scotland.

Occupational segregation continues to perpetuate the gender pay gap. Women still tend to be clustered in low paid, low skilled jobs, such as cleaning, catering, caring etc. Women feel undervalued but are unable to move on from these jobs due to a lack of training opportunities, childcare support and employer flexibility. Women have also expressed concern at the lack of opportunities for young women in schools to undertake science and IT qualifications.

Underemployment also has a massive impact on women. Many undertake part-time work to accommodate family and caring responsibilities, as well as being forced to because of poor public transport links. Low wages paid in part-time roles mean it is common for women to undertake two or three part-time jobs in order to make ends meet. Temporary, seasonal and part-time jobs are often the only work available in rural Scotland, where women are massively underemployed. As well as a lack of childcare services, public transport in these areas is “expensive and unreliable”.

### What reasons are there for the existence of the gender pay gap?

The pay gap exists because of women’s inequality within the workplace. Issues such as the type of work that women undertake, gender streaming and a lack of accessible, affordable childcare are barriers to women’s full participation in the labour market. Until these key areas are addressed, women will continue to be unable to participate in work on an equal footing with men. As a result, the gender pay gap will continue to persist.

- Pay and Conditions

Women continue to be clustered into roles in what is known as the ‘5c’s’ – catering, cleaning, caring, cashiering and clerical. These jobs offer low wages and little in the way of training, development and progression. This type of employment is often part-time. It can also raise issues around temporary and zero hours contracts and agency work. These are insecure forms of employment and tend to be predominant in areas of what is traditionally seen as ‘women’s work’.

The lack of decent pay and conditions means there is a significant amount of in-work poverty, as well as a reliance on ‘top up’ welfare benefits, such as Housing and Council Tax Benefit and Tax Credits. Changes to the welfare system are making it increasingly difficult for women to claim and be eligible for additional income assistance.

- Younger Women and the Gender Pay Gap

This gender streaming begins at a young age and carries on within the school environment, where those who are unlikely to follow an academic path will be steered towards women’s jobs, such as childcare or hairdressing. There is often a focus by schools on ensuring that young people are entering further and higher education, which can mean those who are less academically able are “forgotten”.

Young men who wish to undertake training-based jobs will be given information on, for example, Modern Apprenticeships in what are traditionally seen as ‘male roles’ such as plumbing and mechanics. The wages which each of these gender stereotypical roles attract are subject to disparities.

*“Why does a plumber get paid more than an early years worker? Being able to fix pipes is an important job but it’s nowhere near as valuable as the young women who look after our kids on a daily basis.”*

As women get older, the gap widens, particularly when time is taken out of the workplace to raise families. This also raises issues around what is considered work.

*“Too often you hear women say ‘oh I don’t do anything, I’m just a mum’ when they’re asked where they work. They don’t recognise the skills and abilities they have as a result of bringing up children, nor do they place a value on that role because in society it’s just expected. If a man takes time out of the labour market, however, he’s hailed as some kind of shining example. The balance is all wrong.”*

- [Women Returning to Work](#)

Employers can make returning to work very difficult for women after maternity leave. This further exacerbates the gender pay gap. Men, who have not had to take time out of their working lives to have children, tend to be further on in their careers at this stage in their life than women. Despite anti-discrimination legislation having been in place for a number of years, roles can be changed and lines of responsibility altered.

The lack of flexibility shown by employers can have a detrimental impact on women’s future potential. This can be damaging for prospective earnings, as well as having the knock on impact of diminishing skills and making career progression even more difficult. As a result, many choose not to return to their previous job, but instead seek part-time employment which fits around their family and other responsibilities.

*“I was a bank branch manager in a town approximately 30 miles away from where I live before I had my second baby. Travelling there and back plus the cost of childcare meant it was not worth my while to go back. I now work part-time at the weekends when my husband is at home so we don’t have to pay for childcare. He increased his hours slightly and because he is a lower wage earner we qualify for tax credits. It’s crazy how we are better off now than we were when I worked 6 days a week as a bank manager.”*

Many women returning to work after having children would prefer to do so on a much more flexible basis. Many are unable or unwilling to work the same hours they did before they had children, however this does not affect their ability to do their job, nor does it mean they are lazy or *“not fully committed to the workplace.”*

Women who work or who have worked in senior roles find themselves extremely disadvantaged when they choose to have a family. Those returning from maternity leave can struggle to return to the role they held before they had their baby.

It is difficult to find employers who are willing to offer part time or job share positions. Decision makers and employers need to recognise that women don't stop being the people they were before they made the decision to have a family.

At present, women who work part-time – for whatever reason – are too often seen to not be as committed and capable as those who work full time. As a result, they are overlooked in terms of training, development and ultimately progression. Over time, this contributes to a widening of the gender pay gap. It therefore stands to reason that women over 40, many of whom work on this basis, will face barriers to promotion. Men, on the other hand, continue to be at a higher level of employment than women, which often means they are considered

to be more 'committed' or able to do the job. As a result, they will be the first to be considered for a promotion.

*"Men of a similar age will continue to progress within a company while the women are left behind, simply because they've taken time out to have children. The saying women have to work twice as hard as men to be thought of as half as good is so true. Women, older women in particular, continually have to prove themselves and their commitment in order to progress in the workplace. Nobody ever asks a 55 year old man if he's thinking of slowing down to help take care of his grandchildren."*

It is vital that support is offered which suits the needs of women and their families, recognising that the childcare needs of these women need to be taken into account. Until this happens, the gender pay gap will continue to be particularly acute at this level.

- [Older Women and the Gender Pay Gap](#)

There is recognition that the gender pay gap is more significant for older women, who are often undervalued within workplaces. Many employers will, unfortunately, see little point in investing in older women for a number of reasons, including them being close to retirement and many working part-time (either through informed choice or circumstance) because of caring responsibilities or health.

*"Older women are seen as a bit of a disposable commodity in the workplace. Being close to retirement age means many employers would rather performance manage them out of the business than invest time and money in ensuring the work they undertake is valued and recognised. They don't take into account the time and money that they have invested in their work however, with many remaining loyal to employers for a number of years."*

In order to effectively reduce the pay differentials within this group, it is vital that employers and other staff members recognise the skills and experience that older women bring to the workplace. There needs to be a basic understanding that although older women may, at times, require additional support, time and assistance, they are still more than capable of fulfilling their role and making a positive contribution.

Some women feel that they are beginning to "*slow down*" in terms of the pace at which they are able to carry out certain tasks. In the workplace this can be an issue, as although physically there may be a difference or a change, women's minds are still fully alert and they still have much to contribute.

*"There's an issue for women about lack of equity. I like the idea of something like flexible retirement, because I still want to be in the workplace and I still want to be contributing. I don't really feel like I want to or have to work full time in order to still be a productive worker."*

There needs to be more recognition that older women have significant experience, and many have worked for the same employer throughout the course of their working lives.

## [Conclusion](#)

The SWC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's Inquiry into the Gender Pay Gap in Scotland. This issue has a significant impact on women and is exacerbated by the range of issues outlined above. It is vital that these factors, all of which contribute to the existence and exacerbation of the gender pay gap, are given serious consideration by the Committee during this Inquiry process.

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