

A Manifesto for Women

Scottish Parliament Elections 2016

Health and Social Care Zero Hours Contracts
Progression Skills Modern Apprenticeships
Flexibility Family Sanctions Childcare
Maternity Low Paid Disability Affordable

What Women Want

Justice Benefits Community Barriers
Living Wage Employment Schools
Council Tax Welfare Reform Mental Health
Caring Work Development Training

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) has consulted with individuals and women's organisations ahead of the 2016 Scottish Parliament Election campaign. Women want decision makers to challenge the key issues raised in this document during the campaign and beyond.

Women account for over 50% of the adult population in Scotland, but are still overlooked when policy decisions are being made. This document details the key areas where women want to see change.

Women have a right to be heard and decision makers have a duty to listen.

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Carers

The work undertaken by kinship carers, the majority of whom are women, saves the economy a significant amount of money every year. Their contribution, however, is extremely undervalued and grossly underpaid.

Those who work in the care sector, again the majority of whom are women, are struggling to be able to provide the levels of care they want to. This is often due to the need for them to visit a certain number of people in a day, as opposed to being able to spend time with the people they care for.

- **Recognition that unpaid care is work, which should be valued and remunerated accordingly.**
- **Provision of respite services for carers, in order to safeguard their physical and mental wellbeing.**
- **Reduce 'targets' for women working in the care sector, allowing them to provide meaningful support and assistance to some of the most vulnerable in society.**

Childcare

- **A national, flexible, free childcare service with well trained, well paid and valued staff providing the highest level of care to children.**
- **Recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach to funded hours does not work in rural areas. More investment in remote parts of the country and more innovative ways of providing childcare, must be made available.**
- **Ensure parity in wages, as well as terms and conditions, for all who provide childcare, whether they work in the public or private sector.**

A lack of free, accessible, appropriate wrap-around childcare is the biggest barrier to women entering and sustaining education and employment.

The geography of rural Scotland makes it difficult for women to access childcare near where they work or study. They can be forced to undertake long journeys by public transport in order to access provision.

There are significant disparities in the terms and conditions, as well as the wages of the childcare workforce. The majority of those who undertake this type of work are women, employed in the public and private sector.

Employability and Social Security

Welfare reform measures have had, and will continue to have, an adverse impact on women. Those who rely on social security benefits manage strict household budgets.

New devolved powers over aspects of social security, such as employability services, carers benefits and a host of other areas which directly affect women, have the potential to positively impact on women's lives. Scotland appears to have a stronger sense of social justice. It is hoped that will be reflected in the design and implementation of any new services.

- **Ensure that women are fully consulted on the impact of the devolution of social security.**
- **A commitment that the Scottish Government will engage with Westminster to mitigate the impact of conflict between reserved and devolved powers.**
- **Ensure new powers are managed and administered in a way which keeps the dignity and respect of those claiming support at its heart.**

Employment and Pay

Women's employment is higher in Scotland than the rest of the UK. Many of the jobs which have been created over the last few years are, however, temporary, part-time, low skilled, zero hours contracts with low pay. There is little opportunity for development and progression as well as limited flexibility.

Despite over 40 years of legislation, women still do not receive equal pay. The gender pay gap is 10.6% for full time workers and 33.5% for part-time workers.

Many women are underemployed, whereby they have one or more part-time job instead of a full-time job, or do work which they are over-qualified for. The main reasons for this include lack of flexibility in full-time employment, part-time work not being valued and few job opportunities overall.

- **Encourage all employers to pay the Living Wage, with incentives available to those who do.**
- **A commitment to ensure that all bodies and organisations which are publicly funded in Scotland produce frequent, robust equal pay audits.**
- **Recognition of the value of part-time work and a commitment to encourage employers to provide training and promotion for these workers.**

Media Representation

- **The promotion of positive female role models in the media in order to break down pre-conceived ideas of women's capabilities across television, radio, journalism and the arts.**
- **A ban on adverts which use sexualised imagery to sell products in public places, such as billboards, bus stops and on the side of taxis.**
- **Recognition that the normalisation of hyper sexualisation is both a cause and consequence of violence against women and girls (VAWG).**

The media has the power to influence perceptions and prejudices in all aspects of society. The way that women and girls are portrayed shapes opinions in real life. Role models, in all aspects of the media, can impact on society's views of women in economic, social and cultural activities.

Sexualised imagery is used to sell everything from computer games to grooming products. This type of advertising introduces people to the idea that women's bodies are commodities from a very young age. The normalisation of these types of images is extremely dangerous.

Mental Health Services

Mental health support is highly valued and the assistance provided should not be underestimated. Assistance and guidance services are not, however, as readily available in all geographical locations as they should be.

GP's often do not fully understand the complexities and issues faced by those with mental ill health. As a result, many patients are not properly diagnosed.

- **Specialist mental health services are needed in more areas, recognising the geography of Scotland and balancing this with the needs of those with mental health issues.**
- **More awareness from GPs of mental health issues and their impact on patients. Improved patient involvement in referral processes is vital.**

Occupational Segregation

The glass ceiling still exists and progression within workplaces is often denied. Women are often not considered for promotion if they work part-time, if they are seen as being of 'child bearing age' or are unable to work longer than many employers expect because of caring responsibilities.

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

- Recognition that women who work part-time, or who are unable to work beyond standard working hours, are no less committed or able to do their jobs.
- Ensure that public bodies, such as the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government, NHS Scotland and others put measures in place to create a 'talent pipeline' of women. This will encourage support women to progress within their organisation. Women who are part of this scheme should be guaranteed that their jobs will be protected should they take time off to have a family, or require to work flexibly.

Political Representation

- All political parties should put measures in place which ensure that equal numbers of women and men are encouraged to stand for election.
- Following elections, political parties should publish gender specific statistics, with regards to the number of women seeking election and the number of successful candidates. Publication of this information would not only show the percentage of women elected, but would help to identify gaps in representation.

The referendum on Scotland's future engaged more women in politics than ever before. Women are more vocal and more interested in a variety of issues. They want to hold their elected representatives to account.

Although women represent over 50% of Scotland's population, they are not proportionately represented in political and public life.

Primary Healthcare Services

There are a number of health inequalities in Scotland. GP services are often not consistent. Women in deprived inner city areas live much shorter lives than those in less populated, more affluent parts of the country. Women in rural areas often have to travel significant distances in order to access basic support.

Lack of information as to where to access advice and assistance for both mental and physical health is frustrating for many.

- A unified approach to primary healthcare across Scotland so that all patients, regardless of where they live, are able to access an appointment within a timescale specific to their need.
- Provision of information regarding appointment systems in all GP surgeries, as well as materials advising of referral and waiting times for various procedures.

Public Life

Women continue to be significantly under-represented on the boards of both public and private organisations.

While the introduction of quotas as a temporary special measure to encourage women into these positions is a positive step, it must be recognised that quotas alone are not enough. A number of barriers exist which will not be broken down simply by legislating for a mandatory minimum percentage of women on boards.

- In order to encourage gender equality on public boards, positions must be advertised where they are visible to women.
- Organisations must consider when and where they hold meetings, taking into account women's working lives, caring responsibilities, where they live and the availability of transport in their area.
- A framework should be put in place so that women who are already in these positions can act as mentors to others.

Skills and Training

- Encourage schools and careers advice services to promote all MAs to young women, particularly those which are at present mostly undertaken by young men.
- Ensure that both societal and financial value is attributed to MAs in which women predominate.
- Re-instate part-time college places, across a variety of subjects, in order to allow women to enter into further education or build on existing skills.

Despite targets being put in place, women continue to be under-represented in traditionally 'male' Modern Apprenticeship (MA) frameworks, including plumbing and construction. They make up the majority of what are considered traditionally 'female' roles, such as early years education, administration and hospitality.

In 2015-16, only 28% of those in training for a MA are women. The majority are aged 16-19 years.

Cuts to college places over the last few years have had a significant impact on women, with part-time places being removed across a significant number of geographical areas and subjects.

Transport and Housing

Public transport in many parts of the country is expensive, unreliable and in some cases non-existent. The lack of provision makes it extremely difficult for women to access education and employment, childcare and many other activities.

There is not enough affordable, appropriate housing in Scotland. This is particularly the case in the social housing sector, where families often live in unsuitable accommodation. Many are overcrowded, or are forced to move away from support networks due to lack of availability.

- An integrated system of safe, affordable, reliable public transport should be created. Particular focus is required on the difficulties faced by women in rural areas. A decent transport system would have a positive impact on their lives.
- Removal of the stigma of living in social housing, making it a viable option for families and not a last resort.
- Engagement within communities when building more houses, so properties suit the needs of those who will live in them.

Violence Against Women and Girls

Women throughout the country have praised the Scottish Government for its commitment to funding VAWG services such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis. The value of these services is undeniable. Funding for these services should continue, despite tightening budgets across the public and voluntary sectors.

More barriers exist for BME women who seek to access VAWG services. Issues such as a lack of trust or uncertainty around organisations often prevents those who have experienced violence from accessing help and support.

Prevention work carried out from a young age around issues such as domestic abuse and rape and sexual violence is very important. Awareness on wider VAWG issues must, however, be raised in all levels of society.

- **Services which support women who have experienced violence and abuse need to be fully funded, without fear of reduction or removal of resources. Particular consideration must be given to the stretch on capacity in rural areas.**
- **The unique challenges faced by BME women attempting to access VAWG services must be recognised, with advocacy and interpretive services being made available to assist them.**
- **More public campaigns around specific aspects of VAWG are necessary. These should raise awareness and educate all aspects of society about the issues.**

Young Carers

- **Meaningful engagement and consultation with young carers and where appropriate, the people they care for, so that the next Young Carers Strategy for Scotland is created with their best interests at its heart.**
- **Ensure that when powers over carers benefits are devolved to Holyrood, there is a particular recognition that young carers will need additional financial support in order to enter into and sustain education or employment.**

At present, there are an estimated 100,000 young carers in Scotland, looking after parents, grandparent, siblings or other relatives, friends or neighbour, who are unwell, or disabled. Young carers also can help to look after someone who has a mental health problem, or who is having difficulty as a result of their use of illegal or prescription drugs or alcohol.

Caring responsibilities have a significant impact on young people, particularly young women, and their ability to sustain secondary education, or go on to further study or enter into employment.

Despite a number of positive efforts across the political spectrum, women continue to face barriers and discrimination, which leads to an unequal and ultimately unfair society. The issues that confront women on a daily basis cannot be tackled unless policy and decision makers listen to and take into account women's views, experiences and ideas.

The SWC therefore calls on all political parties to:

- **Fully consider the gender impact of their manifesto commitments.**
- **Engage with grassroots women to ensure that policy decisions do not have an adverse impact on them, their families and communities as a whole.**
- **Take into account the unique geography of Scotland and be aware of the diverse and varied issues faced by women in urban areas and in remote, rural and super sparse parts of the country.**