

Chair: Amber Rudd MP

Speakers: Jo Swinson MP (Minister for Women and Equalities); Ceri Goddard (Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society); Laura Dewar (Single Parents' Action Network)

THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON SEX EQUALITY

Women and employment

Wednesday 24 April 2013, Committee Room 14

Minutes

1. Registered attendees

Baroness Howe	Elizabeth Gardiner, Working Families
Baroness Prosser	Sumi Rabindrakumar, Gingerbread
Nia Griffith MP	Scarlet Harris, TUC
Mary Macleod MP	Juliet Webster, Work and Equality Research
Sandra Osborne MP	Jenny Duncan, Lambeth Council
Daisy Sands, Fawcett Society	Lydia Holland, Norman Broadbent
Elly Robson, Fawcett Society	Rachel Anderson
Fran Perry, CESI	Chris Green, White Ribbon Campaign
Sophie Bennett, Object	Sarah Hutchinson, Platform 51
Claire Knights, Unison	
James Caspell, Tower Hamlets Homes	

2. Amber Rudd MP (Chair)

- Amber Rudd introduced the meeting on women's participation in the labour market, based on the findings of a new report from the Fawcett Society. Jo Swinson – Minister for Women and Equalities.
- She introduced the speakers: Ceri Goddard, CEO of Fawcett Society, a great advocate of women's equalities; Laura Dewar from SPAN who will talk about how we can improve working

opportunities for single mothers; and finally Minister for Women and Equalities, Jo Swinson, to who will respond the report.

3. Ceri Goddard (Fawcett Society)

- Ceri Goddard explained the initial thought behind the report: the need to better understand the key drivers behind the current 25 year high in women's unemployment and why women seemed to be fairing worse in the labour market than men since the 2008-9 recession ended. There is also a need to understand the longer term implications for women of the fundamental shift from public sector employment to private sector growth.
- Ceri Goddard noted that the UK labour market is almost unrecognisable from where it was 50 years ago, with much higher levels of female participation. She highlighted the importance of this shift both for women's own autonomy and economic independence & for the wider success of the economy.
- However, she also noted that current levels of women's participation are far from ideal, with a slow-down in the rate of female participation – somewhere around 1 million women are missing from the UK workplace, where the evidence suggests a continuing and substantial unmet demand for work amongst women. She highlighted that once in work, women continue to face stark inequalities: a persistent pay gap and the predominance of women in low paid, low grade work. As a result, women make up the majority of pensioners living below the breadline.
- She pointed out that women are also underrepresented in the worlds of business and finance, particularly at top tables of power. Overall, The Women in Work Index recently ranked the UK 18 out of 27 OECD countries on five key indicators of women's economic empowerment.
- Overall, the concern was raised that the UK's progress on women's economic empowerment has stagnated since the recession hit. The Fawcett report identifies two key drivers of women's unemployment since the recession - large scale cuts to public sector jobs where women make up the majority of the workforce and the growing numbers of single parents being required to seek work. Overall, since the end of the recession to the last quarter of 2012, men's unemployment has fallen by 7.3% and women's risen by 11.9%. In addition, almost three-times as many women as men have become 'long term' unemployed in the last two and a half years – 103,000 women in comparison to 37,000 men.
- The report also shows that women are not accessing job opportunities in the private sector - because there is both fierce competition for the types of flexible work opportunities that many women - particularly single mothers – require, and because government strategies for growth and job creation in the private sector are not yet sufficiently reaching women as they tend to be focused on male-dominated business and industries.
- Ceri Goddard also highlighted concerns about the types of jobs that are currently being created in the labour market: around half the jobs created in the private sector since the beginning

of 2010 are 'underemployed' jobs + around an additional third are in self employment – all forms of employment that are typically lower paid and less secure than permanent full time jobs.

- Further concerns were raised over the hit to women's pay as jobs move from the public to the private sector: private sector work offers poorer pay across the board, particularly for low paid and part-time work, where women tend to be concentrated: two-thirds of those earning the minimum wage are women, the majority in the private sector. On average, women working part-time in the private sector earn around 30% less per hour than their public sector counterparts. These factors also contribute to the considerably higher gender pay gap that women face in the private sector: 24% in the private sector versus 17% in the public sector.
- It was emphasized that unless sufficient action is taken to both ensure that women are able to benefit fully from decent work opportunities in the private sector and to tackle the lower levels of pay and the wider gender pay gap in the private sector, we are likely to witness: rising levels of female unemployment, particularly amongst single mothers; diminishing levels of female pay across the board and a widening of the pay gap; the proportion of women in low paid work increasing. This is bad for women and bad for the economy. The latest ONS figures support Fawcett's concerns on unemployment: whilst women's unemployment did start falling in May 2012 it has recently started to rise again. Since the beginning of this year, men's unemployment has fallen by 15,000 and women's has increased by 40,000.
- The report identifies a range of focused, realistic and often cost-neutral solutions to ensure that government progresses its stated ambition of ensuring that the talents and skills of women are fully utilised in the drive for economic growth.
- Recommendations include; protecting the incomes of the lowest paid in the private sector by up-rating national minimum wage in line with RPI inflation and promoting voluntary adherence to the living wage in the private sector – but also government leading by example by promoting it in the public sector. The recent lower than inflationary increase in the National Minimum Wage (NMW) will hit women twice as hard as men. Improving the general accessibility of the labour movement through greater extension and promotion of progressive working practices. Fawcett welcomes Modern Workplaces proposals in the Children and Families Bill, which is heading in the right direction, but more can be done. Making it more likely that women can benefit from employment opportunities in the private sector, particularly male-dominated industries – for example by supporting programmes to get women into STEM careers and entrepreneurship. Dedicated action on barriers for single mothers. Dedicated action on the pay gap – most obviously, the implementation of section 78 of the Equality Act 2010.
- Ceri Goddard ended with a call for a robust cross-departmental employment strategy for women reflecting the size of the shifts in the labour market.

4. Laura Dewar (SPAN)

- Laura Dewar works for the Single Parents Action Network, a charity based in Bristol, with some national work.
- She stated that she would focus on the time when single parents are entering the workforce, and the importance of access to well tailored employment support services, and good quality flexible employment opportunities. Single parents are a significant group in the population: 3 million children live in single parent families. A quarter of all families with dependent children are single parent families. Single parents and their children are twice as likely as coupled parents to live in poverty.
- She highlighted that both the last government and this government see work as the best route out of poverty for this group. As a result, there has been a steady increase in the number of parents who need to seek work as a condition of their benefits. The majority of single parents are also in work: 59% in total. But as a result of welfare changes since 2008, 400,000 single parents have moved onto jobseekers benefits. Now if you are a single parent and your youngest child is 5, you need to look for work.
- SPAN research following 50 single parents over a 3 year period coinciding with many welfare changes was outlined. Of those followed, none got a job as a direct result of their interaction with the job centre. Lots of the women felt shoehorned into a system not designed for their needs. A common theme throughout was a lack of flexible employment opportunities and downgrading expectations. Women reported very low opportunities to train, despite the fact that many had been out of the labour market for some time. Those that had skills and experience were pushed very quickly to look for very low paid work; for example, qualified teachers etc pushed into cleaning and shop work.
- Those single parents who are longer term unemployed now transfer to the Government's work programme: from government figures, in the first year of the work programme, single parents made up 7.5% of those transferred. In terms of outcomes, they do worse than a jobseeker overall.
- Laura Dewar had conducted interviews with 16 single parents who transferred to the work programme, from across England and from very different providers. She noted that there were examples of good practice, which must be learnt from. But overall, her research showed that the satisfaction rate with the work programme was very low: it scored 3.5 out of 10 and there was much poor practice. Little account was taken of single parents' childcare responsibilities. Many work programme providers won't let children onto their premises for health and safety reasons. A number of single parents have turned up with their children in school holidays only to be turned away, some were threatened with sanctions and one parent was told that she needed

to leave her 9 year old in a separate room while she was interviewed. She emphasised how hard it is hard for single parents to comply with the work programme.

- SPAN research also showed that there was an expectation that women would downgrade their expectations of the work they would do. One teacher was offered a food hygiene course so she could become a dinner lady. A social worker who needed refresher training in order to go back to work wasn't offered training, but was moved toward shop work.
- Laura Dewar emphasised that inadequate employment support provision is compounded by a lack of flexible employment opportunities, including part-time employment. The current employment rules mean that if you are entering the workforce and you want flexible employment, you have to wait 26 weeks to request to work flexibly.
- She pointed to research last year by Women Like Us and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation about job advertising. This found that, although a quarter of jobs were advertised as part time in London, they were much less likely to pay a reasonable rate. For every one part time job that paid pro rata £20,000, there were 18 full time jobs. The Resolution Foundation found last year that nearly half of the women they surveyed took a lower paid job because they were working part time. International comparisons show that Britain is falling behind in making the most of the skills of workers who need to work flexibly. In the Netherlands, 46% of the population work part time – men and women.
- It was emphasised that the lack of flexible working opportunities in the UK is a waste to the economy. Moreover, it also undermines the effectiveness of the welfare changes, as many single parents are unable to find work that fits in with their caring responsibilities or they move into very poorly paid employment. In terms of the new 'in work' conditionality which will come in under the welfare changes, over time it will mean that many women will just have to work longer hours to comply, whereas actually, many of them are qualified and could work part time in better quality work. It has been estimated in Britain that underutilising women's skills costs between £15 and £23 billion. Laura stressed that addressing the issue of flexible employment and improving job seeking services will be good for business, but also good for the business of government, because current practice short-changes so many women and does not make the best use of government's resources or the skills of its workforce.

5. Jo Swinson MP (Minister for Women and Equalities)

- The Minister welcomed the report from Fawcett and work of the APPG for Sex Equality. She recognised the problem about unemployment, but highlighted the positive flip-side of more women are in work than ever before. Whilst she noted that there are more women of working age – she stated that women's employment rate is 66.6%, compared to an all time high of 67%.
- As a constituency MP, the Minister emphasised that she was aware of the huge challenge of unemployment, especially youth unemployment and for young women starting out in their careers. She pointed to a range of different government measures to tackle unemployment. In

terms of youth unemployment, the Youth Contract is a £1 billion investment in wage incentives and extra support for apprenticeships, where more than half of all people doing apprenticeships are women. The Minister acknowledged the occupational segregation that exists in apprenticeships and other parts of the labour market, but stated that solutions must be long term, working with industry, with schools, with careers guidance. She pointed to the early onset of occupational segregation. For example, there is a huge shortage of engineers in this country, of whatever gender – but only 6-7% of engineers are women, so one good way to deal with the shortage is encourage girls to become engineers. However, over 50% of state schools don't have any girls doing A-Level physics. As a result, early guidance, encouragement and involvement from industry is very important. She pointed to similarly shocking statistics in the growing video games sector – where just 241 girls took computer science A-level in the whole country last year. She stated that this is partly something where government must intervene – but there's also a wider societal challenge about tackling wider gender stereotypes.

- She emphasised that government saw maximising women's potential as essential to economic growth. Women are nearly half the work force, but only a third of managers, directors and people in senior positions. At the very top – the FTSE 250 for example – it's only 13%.
- The Minister outlined the government's action to maximise women's workforce participation. She highlighted the a gender gap in entrepreneurship; 150,000 extra businesses would be started up every year if women started up businesses at the same rate as men. The Government is investing £1.6 million specifically over the next 3 years to support rural women's enterprise; they have 15,000 new business mentors of whom 5000 are women, who will particularly support new and existing female entrepreneurs; and they are also investing £2 million in grants to people who want to set up new childcare businesses. The Government is also taking action to make it easier to be a childminder by allowing agencies to taking away a lot of the bureaucracy and training requirements. This will help more women to access the labour market through providing both work and childcare services.
- On the pay gap, the Minister highlighted the 'Think, Act, Report' initiative covering over 1.3 million employees already, with 80 large employers signed up to analyse and think about issues about gender equality in their organisation, take action to improve them, and then report back to staff, shareholders and customers about what they are doing.
- On the National Minimum Wage (NMW), the Minister noted two thirds of those on NMW are women. She stated that the Government recently up-rated NMW by 1.9%: this is lower than inflation, but it was what was recommended by the Low Pay Commission. She also argued that compared to the recent average wage increase in the last year of 0.8%, NMW is going up faster than average wages, benefiting women. She also pointed to government action to help people who are on low pay by raising the income tax threshold: as of next April, people will be able to earn £10,000 without paying any tax whatsoever. Someone working fulltime on NMW will see their income tax bill cut in half and 6 out of 10 people that benefit from that change are women.

- The Minister stated that childcare is a big challenge for many women in participating in the workforce, and pointed to government measures extending free early years education for 3-4 year olds to 15 hours a week, and also extending that 2 year olds for the 40% hardest pressed families – this is not just lone parents, but many lone parents will benefit from that additional support. In addition the Government are also giving tax breaks in childcare of up to £1200 per child from 2015.
- The Minister stated that our workplaces are stuck in the 1950s, so in a way it comes as no surprise that they deliver outcomes for women that are not fit for twenty-first century Britain. She highlighted that for many employers, greater flexibility in working patterns is possible. It is beneficial for employers too: employers that use flexible working experience greater staff morale, greater staff productivity, lower staff turnover. As a result, the Government are extending the right to request flexible working through the Children and Families Bill, but the Minister highlighted the need for a parallel shift in the culture of employers around part time working, about job share, about different ways, about different ways of structuring their workforce to make the most of the skills out there.
- The Minister related a debate in the Committee stage of the Children and Families Bill about whether the way to do that is to make flexible working a day one right, rather than putting 6 month employment requirement on it. The view prevailed that employers do need some degree of certainty when taking on a member of staff, so that the employee is not immediately going to want to negotiate the hours and conditions on which they have accepted the job. She pointed to the work of Sarah Jackson from Working Families with the private sector employers to get them to recognise the benefits of advertising posts flexibly.
- The Minister also pointed to the Women’s Business Council, chaired by Ruby McGregor Smith, a team of people from a range of different businesses coming up with a range of recommendations, which are due towards the summer, about how government - and indeed industry - can better support women and use their talents. Government expect to take forward their recommendations.
- Pensions were mentioned briefly in relation to government efforts to eliminate the persistent real penalty for women in the pension system. The Minister stated that there has been an increase in state pension of £165 a year since 2010, as well as highlighting the single tier pension. She also pointed to the triple lock mechanism to help pensioners in poverty, especially women, whereby whatever happens, the state pension will go up by inflation, by earnings, or by 2.5% - whichever is the greatest.
- She offered to take up SPAN reports with government colleagues, stating that it was important that the work programme did not create more barriers for women.

6. Questions and discussions

- A question was raised around a large national government backed campaign around better quality part-time employment, on a similar model to the Women on Boards programme. It was felt that any money spent on this campaign would be recouped over and over again by the major contribution that women would be able to make by getting back into jobs that much more suit their capacities.
- Another suggestion was that government could lead by making every public sector job available on a job-share, part time, flexible basis, unless they can identify a strong business reason why it should not be, following practice already implemented in the Civil Service.
- It was highlighted that flexible working must be targeted at men as well as for women.
- The need for early careers advice was emphasised, with employers in the local area involved in seeing that their needs are being met in schools.
- The Minister linked issues around part time working and the Women on Boards initiative, as she felt that without part-time working opportunities for women with children, the pipeline of women coming through to senior positions will stop around middle management. The Minister pointed to research done in the professional services, where interviewers asked both men and women if they were 'prepared to do what it takes to get to the top' –far many men than women said that they were. When they asked what they thought it takes to get to the top, the men had much lower view of what was needed, whereas women saw it as massive dedication, working all hours of the day. In order to get pipeline in operation, businesses and others are going to have to address different ways of working to enable parents – men and women – to be able to juggle those different responsibilities. The Minister emphasised that it's about every woman being able to achieve her potential.
- Laura Dewar stated that she was very surprised by interviewing some single parents who were very qualified but just couldn't get these jobs. Her research showed the paucity of good quality part-time working opportunities. 107 primary jobs were advertised last week: 8 were advertised as part time. In social work, there were 481 vacancies in London last week, 5 were advertised as part time. The Government service advertising nursing vacancies last week had 1,851 advertised, 216 were part time. In light of the squeeze on the public sector, she argued that the jobs that are there are need to be more fairly advertised.
- The Minister acknowledged that there is more that can be done in the public sector to promote flexible working, with government taking a leadership role. She also agreed that flexible working needs to be accessible to everyone - men and women - to accomplish necessary cultural change and show that this is about how lots of people want to work. She pointed to a booklet issued by Women Like Us of their top 50 people working part time to bust the myth that it is not for successful people.

- However, others pointed out that flexible working is not for everyone: it is for people who have managed to get secure employment and stay in that job for 6 months rather than those entering work.
- The Minister responded that a change in employers' culture will lead to employers recognising the value of advertising jobs on a flexible basis. She agreed that local employers need to be far more involved in education – through skills, through further education funding, through schools. She recommended a website called Inspiring the Future, aimed at getting those with expertise to share it with local schools.
- The importance of an effective work programme was emphasised, both for women and the economy. The questions were raised of how could the work programme be improved and whether private providers need better incentives? It was noted that the incentives are very perverse at the moment and do not aim at finding the best work for that person. It was suggested that job advisors should have more of an advocacy role, promoting part time working opportunities. Moreover, questions were raised around the 26 weeks rule for flexible working, as it was felt that this would not solve the problem for women entering the labour market.
- Laura Dewar highlighted the cost to the business of government of an ineffective work programme, which shoehorns single parents into a system that assumes that someone who is unemployed is shirking in some way. She called for more upfront investment in people on the work programme and, for women, more recognition of their particular needs – being out of the workforce for some time, having to think of their children and being more likely to need flexible employment. She pointed to good practice in the case of one single parent who did move into employment off the work programme. This woman was a trained teacher who needed a certificate to be able to teach in this country and couldn't afford it, but the work programme paid for her training.
- It was raised that to challenge occupational segregation, there was a need for a long term strategy and good resourcing in a whole range of areas – employers, careers advice etc. It was pointed out that much good work on this is being undone and that much investment is piecemeal rather than consistent, sustained, resourced public action.

7. Closing remarks

- Ceri Goddard said that Fawcett's report was deliberately set out within the spending confines which government has placed upon itself, with cost-neutral or very low cost recommendations which will yield a significant return. All the evidence points to the fact that the more women in employment, the lower the cost to the Exchequer.
- Amber Rudd MP thanked everyone for attending, and highlighted that there was agreement on keeping women's working lives on the agenda.