

Women's Education and Social Mobility: Wednesday 20 June 2012, House of Commons

This meeting, chaired by Eleanor Laing MP, considered women's experience of education and its impact on their social mobility and independence. It brought together key speakers:

- **Nick Gibb MP**, Minister of State for Schools;
- **Nancy Platts**, Platform 51, Director of Policy, Research & Campaigns;
- **Katie Adams**, a Platform 51 young woman;
- **Becky Francis**, *Professor* of Education and Social Justice, Department of Education & Professional Studies, King's College London.

Nancy Platts gave an overview of Platform 51's experience in this area, highlighting some of the reasons girls and women miss out on their education, the reasons it can be hard for them to get back into learning, and some of the additional barriers they face, particularly highlighting a lack of affordable childcare and the high cost of education and training courses. Katie Adams, a young woman who attends Platform 51's West Kent centre, spoke of her own difficulties in education and stressed that more should be done to help girls and young women through difficult times. She also pointed to the cost of childcare as a barrier to women remaining and progressing in work.

Professor Becky Francis highlighted the persistently low participation rates of women in science and maths, arguing that gender segregation remains entrenched and impacts on skills shortages, meritocracy, and gender inequality. She also pointed out that there was a lack of centralized careers service policy to overcome this, and that young people face stereotypical expectations from parents and advisors, structural barriers, and their own stereotypical construction of gender identity.

Nick Gibb asserted that girls' academic success is not translating into representation in the professions and the board room. He stressed that the government are committed to closing the attainment gap between rich and poor, ensuring our education system competes internationally, and putting trust in professionals and teachers. He also agreed that careers' advice was crucial in enabling girls and boys to make informed choices about their future.