

Toothless Bill will not stop companies paying women less

The Equality Bill has been a long time coming and will no doubt delight and disappoint in equal measure. Whilst we welcome the Bill as a demonstration of the governments continued commitment to equality we, as women, hoped the bill would finally enable us to achieve what many think has already been achieved – equal pay. But no, whilst this bill requires employers with over 250 staff to publish gendered pay audits it does not require them to explain why they have gender pay gaps, or what they are going to do about it.

We have had an equal pay act for almost 40 years and the reality is that the gender pay gap, whilst reducing over the years, is again on the increase and is currently around 17.1%. If you asked anyone in the street if women should be paid less than a man in the same job it would be rare these days to find anyone that agreed that women should be paid less because they are worth less ...so why is it so hard to create policy that reflects today's values?

UK employers have had their chance to pay women equally and have failed. Whether through old-fashioned notions of women working for 'pin-money', or that it's a man that 'supports the family', the pay gap has endured under their watch. So despite their swift and predictable cries of "a recession is no time to be increasing costs on business!" we don't think the Bill goes far enough. Compulsory gender pay audits for the private and public sectors and the end of so-called 'gagging clauses' preventing employees from disclosing salaries may provide us with one of the tools we need to tackle the pay gap – transparency, but to make a real difference it needs to come with teeth - accountability, that is mechanisms that prevent women being paid less than men and that ensure justice for those that are.