

What do we want from a Labour Government at Holyrood? Notes in response to Consultation (Sept 2009)

The following notes were compiled following an informal discussion session, which took place on 22 September, involving a group of Engender members and inspired by input via email from others who were unable to attend that evening.

A firm commitment to and implementation of gender budgeting. This would also require an action plan for how this will happen.

Engender would like to not only a commitment to gender budgeting, but also the *implementation* of gender budgeting. Both Labour and the SNP administrations have provided a commitment, we would like to see this followed up.

("If we can do carbon footprint budget assessment then we can do gender budget assessment.")

Quotas

Engender is aware that there are often strong reactions to the proposal of quotas. It is quite a common feeling that while positive action is ok, quotas are not.

Evidence accumulated through research in Norway has demonstrated that boards which have applied a 50/50 quota have made a substantial difference. Engender also recognises that quotas' addressing disability, age, ethnicity etc should be implemented as well. In doing so, quotas would be easier to manage and allow for a range of diversity.

Some excellent international research has emerged on quotas by Drude Dahlerup from Sweden, which suggests that quotas can be used in a positive and effective way that ultimately benefits the whole of society. Quotas should be considered, not as an act of discrimination, but instead, as a matter of minorities civil rights.

Engender would like measures to ensure that women are *at least* 50% of public appointments.

Contracting out services as local authority level

We are concerned that the opinion that contracting out of services is resulting in a decline in the quality of service is not justified with robust evidence. Distraction of whether services are provided in house or out can jeopardise the ultimate issue about the level of quality and the measure of equality. .

We agree that procurement guidance should require service providers to meet clear equality objectives. Through procurement much can be done in terms of equality and quality. Quality can not be achieved without equality.

Engender believes that a review and improving wages and career structures for ancillary staff in the public sector is very important. We would like to draw attention to the living wage campaign, where women who occupy the vast majority of carer working positions, have low wages and are un-unionised, a gender impact assessment would allow for this to be public and therefore challenged.

The Government needs to set a time scale to ending the pay-gap and included within this occupational segregation should be addressed. Women who work in positions that provide care are disadvantaged due to what has come to be known as the 'tax for caring.'

Resolution of Single Status

Engender would like to see Single Status resolved and also a gender analysis of where women have ended up as a result.

Criminalisation of Demand

Criminalising demand must be on international scale. Internet sites that advocate demand need to be shut down, but many of these are international. The Scottish government needs to be proactive regarding this.

Pornography is and should be considered a public health problem. Scotland should engage into a campaign for real sex. Young people are exposed an over pornograph-ised culture which is developing a skewed idealism of sex and women.

No Recourse to Public Benefit

Although Engender is aware that NRPB is a problematic area due to devolved power, we believe they must be some means of addressing it. NRPB can have devastating consequences for women, and it is concerning to Engender that although Labour have been in power before they have failed to address this key issue.

Attrition and Rape

Engender welcomes the change in legislation from rape being considered a common-law offence to a statutory provision. Rape conviction is an alarming problem in Scotland, with only a 3.4% conviction rate compared to England's 6%. Public attitudes towards rape must also be addressed, an excellent example of one such campaign can be found at www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk.

Sexualisation and Objectification of Children

Engender is currently undergoing research concerning the objectification and sexualisation of young girls as a result of raising concern. A recent study (Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls, American Psychological Association, 2007) has indicated that measures need to be taken to curb the negative influence that industries, such as the media, are having on young girls. There needs to be a greater public awareness concerning

this particular issue, and a “community wide effort.” The Scottish government needs to make clear that it in no way supports consumer councils or any other individual or organisation that projects children as sexual objects.

Recession

Engender anticipates that there will be a cut a variety of services as a consequence of the recession. We would like to assert though that equality work is not a burden. Equality and human rights are not up for negotiation and should never be considered in the argument of cost efficiencies. Scotland can not afford inequality.

Benefits, pensions and retirement issues

Engender is concerned with the many difficulties apparent in the benefits system. For example, someone on incapacity benefit is unable to take the opportunity to complete casual work to keep up their skills and increase their self esteem. The current benefit system makes it extremely hard for those that depend on benefits it to get back into work, restricting them both economically and mentally. Engender would like to see more flexibility within the benefits system to allow more women and those suffering of disability or illness to get back into work. It has also been recognised that many find it accessing what benefits they are entitled to difficult, there needs to be a more effective system in place to make sure that all those that are entitled to benefits are receiving them.

With the current state pension under attack, many people are confused over what they will be entitled to once at retirement age. There needs to be more clarity within this area.

Childcare

Engender would like to see universal free childcare. Evidence has shown that Scotland has its lowest birth rate in fifteen years, limitations in childcare are a key reason why parents are reconsidering having children. Engender would like to suggest the Swedish model, where childcare is affordable for everyone. Scotland should implement a maximum fee policy, whereby 1%-3% of a family's income goes towards childcare. Sweden is one of the few countries in Europe that does not have a problem with its birth rates and there is an obvious correlation with this to child care.