

ENGENDER BRIEFING 1 • JUNE 2014

Scotland's futures: Women, politics, and power

This briefing is part of a series that sets out how power and responsibility to tackle critical gender equality issues is divided between Holyrood and Westminster. It is part of Engender's contribution to the independence referendum debate.

Political institutions

Political power is still concentrated amongst a small number of people in the UK, and this elite is overwhelmingly male, white and privately educated. Global evidence links greater parliamentary gender balance with increased profile of women's rights issues and social policy. Parliamentary quotas and a range of mechanisms within selection and electoral processes are used worldwide to increase the female representation rate.

Women's political representation in Scotland

Scotland's proportional representation voting system facilitates, but does not guarantee, higher numbers of women in politics.

- The UK is currently 58th in the world on women's parliamentary representation, with a rate of 22%.
- At Holyrood, the rate of 36% is more encouraging, but the Scottish Parliament has dropped from a high of 4th to 13th place, internationally.
- Women have even less power across local government and grassroots politics in Scotland, with a 25% return of female councillors in 2012.

Women in public life

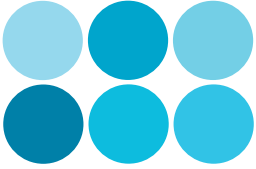
Women are unequally represented at senior levels in public, private sector and cultural institutions, as well as politically.

- 31 percent of head teachers in secondary schools in Scotland are women, despite overrepresentation at other levels in the sector.
- 15 percent of senior police officers in Scotland are women.
- 8 percent of FTSE 250 directors in Scotland are women.

Gender equality mechanisms, laws, and institutions

Gender 'architecture' includes mechanisms, laws and a government's international obligations to tackle gender inequality at a structural level. The Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010 are the statutory cornerstones of the UK's gender 'architecture'. Both are UK pieces of legislation.





Other approaches to structural governance of gender used around the world include:

- Targeted, issue-specific legislation, including anti-discrimination law, duties to promote equality, and laws that criminalise violence against women and girls.
- Temporary special measures, intended to redress a specific inequality, including political or boardroom quotas.
- Gender budgeting analysis, which systematically accounts for the impact of public spending decisions on women and men.
- ‘Gender mainstreaming’, which seeks to embed gender analysis across government, in all policy and legislative development.

What has happened since devolution?

The broad-based 50/50 campaign that happened around devolution influenced the institutions and processes of Scottish politics. Structures built into the Scottish Parliament include ‘family-friendly’ working hours, a crèche and progressive founding principles.

Heightened access and the openness of successive administrations to close working with the women’s sector in Scotland have led to equality gains.

The Scottish Parliament has an Equal Opportunities Committee and gender advisory groups, but these are not well integrated across government. Scotland has an Equality and Budget Advisory Group and publishes an Equality Budget Statement alongside its annual draft budget. These mechanisms are more progressive, and provide greater accessibility and accountability, than their equivalents at Westminster. However, these structures are not linked to the Scottish Government’s economic strategy, nor to the National Performance Framework.

Power and responsibility

- Parliamentary quotas and temporary special measures are reserved to Westminster.
- Many legislative areas critical to gender issues are reserved to Westminster including employment, equality, equal opportunities, and social security.
- Scotland has responsibility for the specific regulations that apply to Scottish public bodies under the public sector equality duty (PSED).

Power and responsibility rests with: Mostly Westminster