

ENGENDER BRIEFING 4 • JUNE 2014

Scotland's futures: Women and the labour market

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.

Employment

Men and women have very different experiences of the labour market in Scotland. Women are clustered into stereotypically female jobs, like cleaning, caring, catering, clerical, and retail work, and these are relatively low paid and low status. Women are underrepresented at senior levels in all industries and sectors.

Women are still more likely to have primary responsibility for childcare and care for sick people and older people. Lack of quality childcare and the relative dearth of flexible working opportunities present significant barriers to women's ability to work in the formal labour market. This underpins the gender pay gap, and acts as a drag on economic growth.

Economic development

The Scottish Government Economic Strategy (GES) is shaped around driving investment towards, and growth in, the key sectors of energy (with a specific focus on renewables), financial services, food and drink, tourism, creative industries, and bioscience.

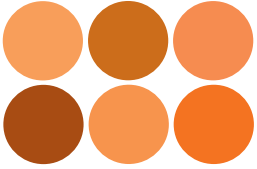
There is significant gender segregation across many of these sectors, and large tranches of low-paid, female-dominated occupations in some.

What has happened since devolution?

Both the UK and Scottish government have emphasised the economic and business benefits of gender equality. Different governments at Westminster have placed more or less weight on equalities regulation, but all in the last twenty years have advocated encouraging private sector employers to adopt best practice, rather than requiring them to take action.

The Women's Employment Summit that was held in Scotland in 2012 reflected increased political will to engage with women and work, but substantial shifts in policy resulting from the summit remain to be identified.





Women and work covers a broad range of policy areas. Specific programmes, policies, and initiatives include:

- Scotland's employability strategy recognises that gender is a key factor in shaping the barriers to employment. It commits to a cross-government action plan on women's employment, but to date, however, such an amalgamated policy tool has not been delivered.
- The UK Government's Children and Families Act (2014) extends the 'right to request' flexible working. However, modest gains towards progressive workplace practices are undermined by a predominant approach that 'employment' is an end in itself.
- Unfair dismissal and sex discrimination has been a significant barrier to gender equal employment practices. The UK has introduced fees of up to £1200 for individuals to access tribunals, with clear implications for sex discrimination and equal pay cases.

Power and responsibility

- The UK Government is responsible for all employment law, laws regulating trade unions, and anti-discrimination law.

Power and responsibility rest with: Westminster

- Education, training, economic development, and employability are predominately the responsibility of the Scottish Government and its agencies.

Power and responsibility rest with: Scottish Government