

Towards A Fairer Future

Implementing the Women and Work
Commission recommendations



Executive Summary

WOMEN & WORK
COMMISSION

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April 2007

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Executive Summary

When the Women and Work Commission issued their report in February 2006, they set out a wide-ranging, demanding agenda for action. Their recommendations address all the causes of the gender pay gap from challenging assumptions about the types of jobs women and men can do – gender-stereotyping – which still affect the choices girls (and boys) make at school, to giving people greater choice about balancing work and family life.

This report gives a full update on progress against the Women and Work Commission recommendations, building on our initial response set out in the Government Action Plan issued last September. We are taking forward a comprehensive and co-ordinated programme of action across government. We are also working closely with a wide range of organisations which have an interest – including employers, trade unions, and the voluntary sector – many of whom play a key role in tackling the issues.

Introduction

This is a major phase of work but the actions described here are a step on a longer journey. **Chapter 1** puts the progress made this year in context. We discuss the impact of legislation on equal pay and sex discrimination in the 1970s and the reforms in the Work and Families Act 2006, supporting greater choice and flexibility for families. On 6 April 2007 we will introduce the Public Sector Duty on Gender Equality, another major force for change.

Getting it right early on

Choices made at school affect future careers and earnings. Informing those choices is therefore very important. The Women and Work Commission found that despite girls' high aspirations, and outperforming boys in exams at school and university, many girls and young women follow traditional routes in education and training. Patterns of occupational segregation persist, and more women are concentrated in low-paid and low-skilled jobs. **Chapter 2** sets out how we are improving careers information, advice and guidance and work-related education.

Careers information, advice and guidance

- We are introducing new quality frameworks for both the Early Years Foundation Stage for children in nursery and reception class, and Quality Standards for Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance, that will ensure that children's horizons are not limited by outdated assumptions about the types of jobs men and women can do.

The Women and Work Commission found that girls perceive vocational qualifications as being stereotypically male and are less likely than boys to take them up. We want to encourage all pupils to stay on in education and training after the age of 16 and for all routes to be equally appealing to girls.

New Diplomas

- We are introducing new Diplomas which will, for the first time, put academic and applied learning on an equal footing. The Diplomas are a blend of theoretical and practical learning which are being designed in partnership with employers.

We also point to some excellent work by employers informing girls in school about jobs in their sector and breaking down pre-conceptions about working in traditionally male-dominated occupations.

Goldman Sachs – school partnership programme

Goldman Sachs runs a school partnership programme with 30 schools across the UK to encourage girls in Years 12 and 13 (sixth form) to consider careers in investment banking. 30 female associates promote Goldman Sachs' pre-university programmes to the girls and maintain supportive dialogue with teachers and programme alumni entering higher education. Goldman Sachs also works with teachers through school outreach programmes and by hosting annual conferences to raise teachers' awareness of the investment banking industry.

Skills, training and career development

As well as getting it right early on, women in work can significantly improve their earnings prospects through training and career development. In **Chapter 3** we outline programmes designed to improve the skills of those women already in the workforce, as well as the unemployed and those on training programmes. The Women and Work Commission found that gaining new skills can also allow women to break into male-dominated occupations.

Support for higher-level skills

We are working with employers and Sector Skills Councils to increase the training available to low-skilled women and to explore new ways of helping women get jobs and progress in those jobs. The initiatives also support our drive to meet the challenging objectives set by the Leitch report.

- We are providing £20 million for a Level 3 training pilot in London which will deliver over 7,000 A Level equivalent qualifications for women returners and those with low skills. Engineering, construction, transport and logistics are all priority areas. The pilot will ensure that women are equipped to take up opportunities in relation to delivery of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.
- We have extended Skills Coaching pilots, which help low-skilled women improve their skills and return to work, to 19 Jobcentre Plus districts with funding of £10 million.
- We are supporting eight Sector Skills Councils, through the £10 million Women and Work Sector Pathways initiative, to develop projects providing women with the skills, confidence and mentoring support to move up within or move into male-dominated occupations.

Careers information, advice and guidance for adults

The quality and accessibility of careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults can be particularly important for women, who are more likely to take a career break or want to change direction later in life.

- We are trialling an extended *learn*direct telephone service to test the value of in-depth personal guidance on learning, work and careers. It is aimed at adults returning from career breaks, seeking to progress in their careers and/or wanting to develop skills for jobs requiring a Level 3 qualification. 55 per cent of callers to this service are women.

Career development in social care and childcare

The Women and Work Commission argue that a culture change is needed in the social care and childcare sectors. Both have female-dominated workforces and jobs are often undervalued, underpaid and lacking opportunities to upskill.

- We are considering a range of options from the Options for Excellence report, *Building the Social Care Workforce of the Future*. These include measures to improve the public perception of social care jobs, developing new roles and new working methods.
- We have introduced a Transformation Fund, worth £250 million from 2006 to 2008, to raise the quality of early years provision whilst ensuring that childcare remains affordable for working families.

Increasing women's economic participation

Women often face multiple barriers to returning to work after taking time out to care for children or others. The Women and Work Commission found that increasing women's participation in the economy and breaking down the gender segregation of jobs (whereby women and men make job choices constrained by traditional stereotypes) could be worth between £15 billion and £23 billion per year for the UK economy.

In **Chapter 4**, we describe the raft of measures which are currently supporting women into work, including advice on training and looking for jobs. Some initiatives are designed to address the needs of particular groups, such as lone parents or black and minority ethnic people. There are also pilots exploring new ways of helping women get jobs and get on in those jobs.

Childcare

The Women and Work Commission found that the lack of availability and cost of childcare are major constraints on women's choices of occupation and working patterns. We are committed to helping people get appropriate access to good quality childcare so that all children, from whatever background, get the best start in life.

- To make childcare more affordable we are providing more help than ever before (around £2.7 million a day) to working families with their childcare costs through Working Tax Credits.
- Three and four year olds are guaranteed a free, part-time early education place and there are plans to do more.

By 2010:

- All schools will offer extended services to all pupils from 8am to 6pm.
- 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres will be established offering easy access to high-quality, integrated services for all children under five and their families. Over 1,150 Centres are already open.

Increasing employment opportunities

The Women and Work Commission found that lone parents are often matched into jobs with low pay and low prospects. Difficulties in finding childcare or flexible working can lead to them "cycling" in and out of low-quality jobs. We want to support women who want to work in finding the right jobs for them with hours to suit.

- We are exploring new ways of improving the retention and advancement of those on the margins of the labour market, including lone parents. The Employment, Retention and Advancement project is being piloted in six Jobcentre Plus districts.

Ethnic minority women and work

The Equal Opportunities Commission's investigation into the pay and progression of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women found that women from these groups are more likely to face a higher risk of unemployment, lower pay, and fewer prospects for promotion. We are committed to reducing the gap in employment rates between ethnic minorities and the rest of the population.

- The Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force, a ministerial body led by the Minister for Employment and Welfare reform, has agreed to focus on issues relating to ethnic minority women across all areas of its work.
- Partners' Outreach for Ethnic Minorities is a new service, delivered by the private, voluntary and community sector, supporting the choices of mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who neither work nor claim benefits.

The Future of Work

People increasingly – and rightly – expect to be able to balance a rewarding and fulfilling career with family life and other interests. One of the challenges for the workplace of the future will be to meet these expectations. **Chapter 5** describes our efforts to encourage flexibility at work and facilitate a cultural change which allows women and men to achieve their desired work-life balance.

Flexible working

The right to request flexible working has already had a huge impact. 47 per cent of new mothers work flexitime, compared to just 17 per cent in 2002, and 31 per cent of new fathers now work flexibly; almost triple the number in 2002.

- The right to request flexible working will be extended to carers of adults from April 2007, making another 2.65 million people eligible to request flexible working patterns.
- We will continue to consider the case for extending the right to parents of older children, working with employers and taking into account the impact of the extension to carers.

Quality part-time work

Women working part-time still earn around 40 per cent less than men working full-time per hour worked. The Women and Work Commission highlighted the lack of quality part-time work as being both a major constraint on women's choices of occupation and a reason women's skills are being under-utilised.

- We are funding projects from across the private, public and voluntary sectors from a £500K fund designed to increase the number of quality jobs which are available on a part-time or job share basis. These range from re-designing jobs, coaching managers, and setting up a national job share register.

Exemplar employers

- We are working with a set of over 100 "exemplar employers" through Opportunity Now, who have developed initiatives on gender equality in the workplace. The employers are from both the private and public sectors and their initiatives range from working with girls in schools, to programmes for women returners, to management training for women.
- We are facilitating the exchange of best practice between employers. We hosted an event with CBI and Opportunity Now to launch the exemplar employer initiative. We are planning a conference in May 2007 to discuss best practice and will produce a summary of the initiatives and learning points. This will be placed on the web as a resource for employers who want to learn about best practice.

John Lewis Partnership – creating flexible career paths

The John Lewis Partnership aims to create a culture that values difference and makes the most of the talents of all employees, who are known as Partners because they are co-owners of the business. To this end, the right to request flexible working is extended to all. But a gender forum of Partners found that there is still a perception that it is difficult to combine a career with parenthood. In response, the Partnership has continued to develop its work-life balance policies and promotes senior role models who work flexibly. For example, a career break scheme allows up to 12 months unpaid leave with continued service and a job to return to. Case studies of senior managers working flexibly are highlighted in the staff magazine.

Women's Enterprise

Women are significantly under-represented among the self-employed and as owners and directors of businesses. If the UK were to match the US level of activity there would be around three quarters of a million more business.

Chapter 6 gives details of a range of initiatives which will support the start-up and growth of female-owned businesses.

The Women and Work Commission recommended that in promoting entrepreneurship to women it should be stressed that owning your own business opens up the possibility of achieving a better work-life balance. Whilst hours worked might not necessarily be shorter, business owners have more autonomy over when they work and to their preferred pattern. We want to access the untapped potential of women, particularly women returners, as potential entrepreneurs.

Support for women entrepreneurs

- We have set up a Task Force on Women's Enterprise to co-ordinate activity across Government and the Regional Development Agencies. It will help women set up businesses and existing female entrepreneurs to grow their businesses.
- The Regional Development Agencies and Enterprise Insight are currently recruiting a national network of 1,000 female entrepreneurs. They will work alongside the Task Force to inspire and support women in setting up their own businesses.
- We are piloting training material on social enterprise aimed at ethnic minority women, providing useful sources of information, with a view to encouraging more ethnic minority women to set up a social enterprise.

Organisational best practice

Employers play a crucial role in changing workplace culture and many already have successful policies and initiatives on gender equality. The Women and Work Commission recommended that Government provide support for employers to help them to take action on the issues that will most improve women's pay and opportunities. **Chapter 7** draws together the various tools and mechanisms which are supporting employers and ensuring that women and men are treated equally in matters of pay and reward.

Best practice in the public sector

- The public sector is leading the way through the new Public Sector Duty on Gender Equality, which comes into force on 6 April 2007. It will oblige public authorities to promote equality of opportunity in employment practice and service delivery. Public authorities must produce Gender Equality Schemes, which identify objectives on gender equality and the steps needed to achieve them, and assess the impact of new legislation, policies, employment and service delivery changes on men and women.
- Whitehall is leading by example on promoting gender equality through diversity in recruitment and progression of female staff to senior management.

Working in partnership with employers

The Women and Work Commission called for employers to tackle all the causes of the gender pay gap, not just pay discrimination. They also conclude that employee participation, and genuine dialogue between employers and employees, produces better results than equal opportunities policies operating in a vacuum.

- We are developing a light touch, “gender equality check tool” in partnership with the Small Business Service, Equal Opportunities Commission, the TUC, and private sector equality experts. It will enable employers to quickly and easily assess appropriate action to improve gender equality. It will be launched later in 2007.
- Trade union equality reps were identified as a priority theme in the second round of the Union Modernisation Fund. The deadline for applications is 20 April 2007 and new projects are expected to be announced in September 2007.

We believe that this programme of action, taken as a whole, will help to drive forward culture change, further reduce the gender pay gap and help people balance work and family life.

