



women's **voices**  
women and **work**  
**scotland 2016**

Barriers, hopes and opportunities for  
women's work, careers and employment

An overview of insights and recommendations  
from the Women and Work Partnership Project



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## *Introduction*

An unprecedented interest in a collaborative and engaged approach to work and employment policy has been observed in Scotland in recent years. A growing appetite for better understanding of the impact of the workplace and working practices on citizens' livelihoods and Scottish society as a whole, initiated a positive, long-awaited wider dialogue between the government, unions, employers, employees and other stakeholders. Working Together Review<sup>1</sup> enabled all these stakeholders to understand each other in order to deliver a long-term common goal: higher economic productivity, better workplace conditions, fairer and more inclusive employment practices and higher levels of personal job fulfilment. The report of Working Together Review published in 2014 recommended a need for sustained continuing collaborative conversations at both national and organisational levels to seize opportunities and promote collective bargaining, workplace democracy, diversity and equality, including full participation of women in the labour market.

The Scottish Government's drive towards a more progressive policy-making manifest a commitment towards a levelling of access to work opportunities and improving work experiences for working people in Scotland. Not only has it recently taken steps to protect public sector employment and the pay rates for those earning the least<sup>2</sup>, but it is actively promoting two important agendas: the Fair Work<sup>3</sup> and the Living Wage<sup>4</sup>. Along with internal effort to set a good example in relation to matters of decent work and fair pay, the Scottish Government works with and recognises employers who pay a decent wage to their employees.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2014). Working Together Review. Progressive Workplace Policies in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2013). *Public Sector Pay Policy For Staff Pay Remits 2014-15* [Online]. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/09/6771/2> [Accessed 25 March 2015].

<sup>3</sup> The Fair Work Convention (FWC) is an independent body, with membership drawn from trade unions, public and private sector employers and the third sector representatives, FWC was established to provide independent advice to the Scottish Government on matters relating to innovative and productive workplaces, industrial relations and fair work in Scotland. *The initial task for the Convention was to develop a Fair Employment Framework for Scotland* (Framework has been published in March 2016). More information on FWC is available at: [www.fairworkconvention.scot](http://www.fairworkconvention.scot).

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2014). Working Together Review. Progressive Workplace Policies in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

The government has also become more committed to using its own procurement of goods and services as an important tool for improving wages and workplace working conditions<sup>5</sup>. Most importantly, in the light of this project's focus, the Scottish Government is committed to a boardroom gender equality. It has already become one of only three Cabinets in the industrialised world to have a 50:50 gender balance and takes an active role in encouraging companies to sign up to the "50:50 by 2020"<sup>6</sup>. In the long-term this sort of advancements in work-related policies are expected to make positive impact on the lives of working people. In meantime, the world of work remain far from ideal, particularly for the women workers, who are reported to be regular victims of precariousness in the labour market.

Despite a positive steady growth in female employment, with most recent statistics assessing the current female employment rate in Scotland is sitting at 72.4%<sup>7</sup>, long-term job security and financial reward for women's employment remain problematic. Gender pay inequality, harassment, occupational segregation, skills underemployment, unequal promotion opportunities and lack of flexible work arrangements continue to be the most often reported problems faced by women workers across the UK and Europe<sup>8</sup>. However, little disaggregated research has been done so far to understand the work and employment problems faced by women specifically in Scotland. In addition, trade union perspective and analysis of female union members' experiences have been left unexplored, despite of its vast potential for being a unique resource able to generate meaningful insights on work-related problems and barriers to satisfying and fulfilling employment.

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<sup>5</sup> Procurement Reform Scotland Act 2014. Available on <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/12/contents> [Accessed 29 June 2015]

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government (2015). Maximising economic opportunities for women in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Close the Gap (2015). Making Manufacturing Work for Women. Summary of research findings. Glasgow: Close the Gap; Close the Gap Working Paper 8, 2013. Shifting the balance? Exploring the trade union responses to tackling gendered occupational segregation. Glasgow: Close the Gap; Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2011). Sex and Power Scotland 2011. Glasgow: Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Data on trade union membership published in 2012 suggests Scotland's membership was the highest in the UK. 31.7% of the workforce in Scotland hold trade union membership in comparison to the UK's figure of 26%<sup>9</sup>. Thus, although the majority of people in employment across the UK, both men and women, are not members of trade unions, 55% those who are unionised were female<sup>10</sup>. Women now also make up over 50% of membership across the trade unions affiliated to STUC<sup>11</sup>. This trend of an increasing female membership in the trade unions in the last 13 years<sup>12</sup> corresponds with a demographic trend of a higher female population and a continuously increasing number of women in employment. In 2014 a record high female employment level (1,236,800) was reached in Scotland<sup>13</sup>, and statistics shows that Scotland continues to be a one of the leading countries in Europe within low female unemployment. The currently positive trend places Scotland in the second position in the European ranking of 28 countries<sup>14</sup>. However, recent STUC newest labour economic analysis suggests that a reported increase in female employment by 5.6 % recorded in Scotland at the beginning of 2015 has now levelled up with general employment. This rather fast and confusing change (conclusive reasons were never given to explain earlier female labour market advantage), encourages examination beyond the headlines and statistical analysis, which are limited in terms of lived through experience of the labour market, amount, type and quality of work, and career progression opportunities available to women.

In this ambiguous context of labour market analysis and with an ongoing problem of disaggregating Scottish data, it was therefore important for the Women and Work Partnership Project (WWPP) to further explore the working reality as experienced by working women in Scotland.

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<sup>9</sup> The UK Government Department of Business Industry and Skills Statistical Bulletin, Trade Union Membership 2012, Statistical Bulletin May 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> STUC (2015). Annual Congress Programme; pp: 44-45. STUC: Glasgow.

<sup>12</sup> Henderson, A. (2016). 'Women working together.' In Campbell, J. and Gillespie, M. (eds.) *Feminist Economics and Public Policy: Reflections on the Work and Impact of Ailsa McKay*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 137-152.

<sup>13</sup> Local Area Labour Markets in Scotland: Statistics from the Annual Population Survey, 2014

<sup>14</sup> Press Release December 2015; <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Scotland-a-leader-in-women-s-employment-20d3.aspx>

The project was established to explore the work problems and employment barriers, specifically by recognising and learning from the voice of female union membership, who collectively represent more than a quarter of a workforce across a variety of economic sectors and jobs<sup>15</sup>. This report intends to describe work and lessons learned from the WWPP. At the outset of this report it is important to indicate that the remit of WWPP had a wide scope to map out problems and activities relevant to barriers women continue to experience in their working lives. The project has therefore produced a number of snapshots which constitute stand-alone pieces of work but are also referenced in this report. All are available online. All these individual reports should be treated as outputs of scanning activities carried out in a particular place and time, not as exhaustive pieces of work but an explorative and developmental research. It is therefore highly recommended that the practice of scanning and reporting on women's experiences of work and employment in Scotland should be continued.

This report will firstly describe the background and aims of the WWPP. Secondly, it will list the project work carried out from 1st May 2015 to 31st March 2016. Thirdly, the report aims to provide a commentary that links all the individual supplementary reports, by highlighting the most pressing findings which emerged from the project research. Lastly, the report will list recommendations and points for actions, including the need for an ongoing important discussion about women's position in society, workplaces and unions.

## *Women And Work Partnership Project*

### **Background**

The Women and Work Partnership Project was set up as an established collaboration between the Scottish Government and STUC in order to better understand the work-related problems and barriers to fair and equal employment for women in Scotland. The early origins of this initiative can be traced back to the STUC biannual meeting with the First Minister in February 2012, during which the labour market figures reporting a fall in women's employment in Scotland were considered and discussed.

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<sup>15</sup> The proportion of female employees who were in a trade union was around 28% in 2014, compared with 22% for male employees.

An STUC/Scottish Government Women's Employment Summit subsequently took place in Edinburgh in September 2012 and was attended by policy makers, employers, economists, and trade union women<sup>16</sup>.

The Women's Employment Summit led to additional ministerial work focused specifically on women (including the Ministerial Advisory Group on Women and Work<sup>17</sup>) with an involvement of representatives from the STUC, childcare policy sector, from business and academia. The Women and Work Partnership Project was an initiative which would research and identify problems experienced by women in their workplaces and across the Scottish labour market in order to inform policies and interventions helping to reduce female unemployment/economic inactivity, and optimising conditions for flexible work recognising additional home / caring responsibilities often more frequently undertaken by women.

The main objectives of the Women and Work Partnership Project were identified as:

1. Understand the female labour market in Scotland taking into consideration disaggregated data which could better inform the work and employment policies in Scotland.
2. Identify specific issues affecting women in their current roles/workplace and arrangements/structures forcing women to exclude themselves from employment (gender inequalities in women's across their career spans).
3. Identify examples of and recognise progressive organisational practises set out to change the status quo by adopting equality audits and other women-centred initiatives.
4. Identify what specifically trade union movement do to address perceived gender inequalities in its own structure, procedures and processes.

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<sup>16</sup> [www.employabilityinscotland.com/key-clients/women-and-work/womens-employment-summit-12-september-2012/](http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/key-clients/women-and-work/womens-employment-summit-12-september-2012/) [Accessed on: 17.02.2016].

<sup>17</sup> Angela Constance MSP, Minister for Youth Employment, was the first to convey the Strategic Group on Women and Work, and in effect responsibility for Women's Employment was added to her remit. The first meeting of the Group was held on 27 March 2013. A revised Group has been chaired by the Minister for Youth and Women's Employment, Annabel Ewing MSP, from 25 February 2015; [www.employabilityinscotland.com/key-clients/women-and-work/strategic-group-on-women-and-work/](http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/key-clients/women-and-work/strategic-group-on-women-and-work/).

All four objectives were addressed throughout the project work and a link between particular objectives and project outputs will be further explained in (Table1, pp.13-14).

## Methodology

In order to meet the WWPP objectives a variety of data sources and research methods were used. Both secondary and primary data were used to produce the project's outputs. Desk-based research involved a review of existing literature (reports, policy briefing, policy papers, the STUC internal documentation, the trade unions' research, campaign materials and other publications). Primary data collection, designed and carried out specifically for the purpose of the WWPP, included two methods; firstly, a design and analysis of a questionnaire on female membership in the Trade Union movement in Scotland, and the collection of data on trade unions gender equality work (with some analysis of trade unions as employers of women). Secondly, interviews with senior trade unions officials from five unions which took part in the survey were designed to obtain further qualitative evidence<sup>18</sup> and to build a more focussed picture women's experiences in three rather different sectors: arts, education and finance<sup>19</sup>. The rationale for choosing these three sectors was pragmatic. Trade unions organising in these sectors were the first to respond to the initial survey, and were available at that time to discuss with the WWPP about the issues faced by their respective female memberships.

The focussed reports on the experience of these professional / vocational groups is a contribution to a much needed sectorial analysis of work patterns, conditions and career paths experienced by female workers. This choice was not meant to signify any higher importance of these sectors over others. However, the evidence collected to date suggests that these three rather different sectors do display similar and concerning characteristics for women's work and career experiences in general.

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<sup>18</sup> Five unions assisted with gathering of qualitative evidence on problems and barriers women face in their respective work environments. The evidence has been obtained in the period between November 2015 and January 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Three papers the WWPP produced focused specifically on the following contexts: performing artists within the Cultural and Creative Sectors; School teachers, researchers and university teachers (lecturers/teaching assistants) within the Higher Education Sector; and customer service workers within the Finance Sector.

Because of the limited timescale of this project, it was not possible to undertake further interviews, but the project recommends further sectorial analysis, for a better understanding of the interconnected gendered problems encountered in women's work and employment.

## *Project Work*

This section outlines the main activities undertaken by the WWPP project worker throughout the duration of the project, which focused on mapping out the current knowledge networks and establishing access to information-holders within the trade union movement, and setting a wider political context of this project. This section also lists all project outputs.

### **Project Activities**

The Project Worker, Aleksandra Webb, met with a wide range of trade union officials, worked with the STUC Women's Committee, and observed some of the meetings that are part of the regular Scottish Government / STUC engagement. This has assisted with mapping and understanding resources and reports already available with regard to women in the labour market in Scotland, identifying some useful comparative reports from elsewhere in the UK; and in familiarising the Project with the context set by the Memorandum of Understanding between the STUC and the Scottish Government. This included observing the STUC Annual Congress, April 2015; the STUC / FM Biannual meeting, May 2015; and the Ministerial Strategic Group on Women and Work, May and October 2015. In February 2016, the Project Worker made a short presentation to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Women and Work.

As part of the collaboration with the STUC Women's Committee, the Project Worker worked with the Women in Scotland's Economy (WiSE) tutors on the STUC Women's Weekend School 'Understanding the Economy' in May 2015; attended meetings of the Committee, and the annual STUC Women's Conference 2 / 3 November in Dundee, which was addressed by the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

The Project Worker was able to participate in the Women's Trade Union Council of the Isles event, hosted by the STUC in Glasgow 7 / 8 October, and addressed by the Minister for Youth and Women's Employment. The agenda included a report from Wales TUC on recent research 'From Evidence to Action on Gender Pay Gaps in Wales'; a report from the TUC reporting on Women and the Trade Union Bill, supplemented by a report from the STUC and Northern Ireland Committee of Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC ICTU). The ICTU reported on childcare strategies and policies, and both the STUC and NIC ICTU reported on devolution.

The Project has engaged with a variety of activities and events including those run by Close the Gap, Engender, Scottish Women's Convention, and Scottish Union Learning, all of which focused on discussing issues related to women's employment across different ages and economic sectors, fair and equal representation of women in the workplaces and in public life, gender stereotyping, flexible working and good employment practice, skills development and re-evaluation to tackle female economic inequality, improving governance to include trade unions and promoting a safe working environment and a respect agenda. This reflects the remit of the Fair Work Convention. The Project Worker attended one of the evidence sessions held by the Fair Work Convention at the STUC conference centre in November 2015. The Project has engaged with the Scottish Parliament through the Committee inquiry evidence process, the Scottish Parliament Women's Dinners as well as events organised with STUC affiliates, such as the presentation of the Scottish Federation of Entertainment Unions (SFEU) Manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections in February 2016.

Within the STUC, the Project was based in the Policy and Strategy Team, and has been able to contribute to STUC policy development and submissions to consultation documents and Parliament Committee evidence sessions. Material has been prepared to assist the STUC Secretariat with giving oral evidence, including on Welfare Reform, and on the Quality of Work.

A significant focus on the specific issues for older women in the workplace was provided by the Scottish Commission on Older Women, which had been established in February 2015, and on which the STUC was represented. The Project was able to contribute text and data analysis to the Report, and is credited accordingly in the Report. The work on older women also involved collaboration with the University of Edinburgh Business School, which provided an opportunity to participate in a local workshop as part of a European COST action 'Gender and health impacts of policies extending working life in western countries'.

This COST action is a network of representatives of 21 countries who have come together to explore how gender and health can best be taken into account when designing and implementing policies to extend working lives across Europe and beyond, and participation in the local workshop was of benefit<sup>20</sup>.

In the period between November 2015 and January 2016, the work of the Project focused on collecting qualitative evidence on some of the problems and barriers women face in their respective work environments. Data was obtained through interviews with senior trade union officials, equality officers and activists representing workers in the respective unions. The transcripts and case studies from some of these interviews will be archived for future reference. Groups of female workers in three different economic sectors were considered: Music and the Performing Arts Sector; Education Sector (FE and HE); and Customer Service Workers within the Finance Sector. This has allowed three more detailed reports to be produced, in particular with regard to Music and the Performing Arts.

## Project Written Outputs

This final report contains eight written outputs produced during the timescale of the WWPP. All eight outputs are listed below (with indication on the output location as either within this report's appendices, or as accompanied stand-alone documents).

A list of outputs:

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<sup>20</sup> More detailed list of events the project worker took part in can be found in the progress reports delivered throughout the project duration.

- A response to Welfare Reform Committee’s call for evidence on ‘Women and Welfare’ (June 2015) APPENDIX A
- The Scottish Commission on Older Women: Older Women and Work: Looking to the Future Report (August 2015)
- Short Paper Informing Fair Work Framework for Scotland: insights on job quality and workers’ well-being, which also informed the Scottish Parliament inquiry on Work, wages and wellbeing in the Scottish labour market<sup>21</sup> (October 2015) APPENDIX B
- Women in the Trade Union Movement in Scotland Report (March 2016)
- Challenges experienced by women working in music and the performing arts sectors (February 2016)
- Challenges experienced by women working in teaching and other academic roles in the education sector (March 2016)
- Challenges experienced by women working in customer service roles in the finance sector (March 2016)
- A case study: union-employer partnership (March 2016) APPENDIX C

Table 1 aims to map these outputs against the WWPP objectives (as listed on page 8). The final narrative will be presented in the following section.

<b>OUTPUT</b>	<b>WWPP OBJECTIVES</b>
<p><i>A response to Welfare Reform Committee’s call for evidence on ‘Women and Welfare’</i> APPENDIX A</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provides description and evaluation of impact of welfare reform in relation to workers economic/employment status (Objective 1)</li> <li>■ Identify main areas of concern for women (Objective 2)</li> </ul>
<p><i>The Scottish Commission on Older Women: Older Women and Work: Looking to the Future Report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provides descriptive statistics in relation to economic/employment status of older women (Objective 1)</li> <li>■ Identify main barriers experience by older women in accessing work and sustaining employment (Objective 2)</li> <li>■ Describes some positive practices focused on championing older women and their value in the workplace (Objective 3)</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/90669.aspx> [Last accessed on 29.03.2016].

<p><i>Short Paper on Informing Fair Work Framework for Scotland: insights on job quality and workers' well-being</i> APPENDIX B</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Give examples of trade union influence on bettering working lives of older women (Objective 4)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Women in the Trade Union Movement in Scotland: A Report</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identifies some experiences of deterioration of job quality and contextualises these findings into problem of "boring and toxic jobs" (Objective 2)</li> <li>■ Illustrates deterioration in some industry-wide management practices that impact on people's experiences of work (Objective 2)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Challenges experienced by women working in music and the performing arts sectors</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Profiles the female membership in Scotland in relevance to the labour market trends (Objective 1)</li> <li>■ Makes some reference to barriers to women's work and employment in relation to trade union equality work (Objective 2)</li> <li>■ Describes some positive recruitment practices adopted within the unions to level out career progression opportunities to women (Objective 3)</li> <li>■ Maps out trade union movement in Scotland in terms of capacity and resources available to support women in the workplace (Objective 4)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Challenges experienced by women working in teaching and other academic roles in the education sector</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provides description of industry economic productivity &amp; employment data (Objective 1)</li> <li>■ Identifies gender specific barriers to work &amp; career development in arts (Objective 2)</li> <li>■ Illustrates some industry-wide practices, e.g. gender audit exercises &amp; development of citizens/workers' driven co-operative childcare mechanisms (Objective 3)</li> <li>■ Demonstrates crucial role of trade unions in driving campaigns for change &amp; in ongoing provision of support &amp; guidance for unionised performers (Objective 4)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Challenges experienced by women working in the customer service roles in finance</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identifies gender specific barriers to work &amp; career development in school and post-secondary education sector (Objective 2)</li> <li>■ Demonstrates a crucial role of trade unions in supporting female members with problems experienced in their workplaces, campaigning towards elimination of job casualization, and national bargaining for better pay and conditions of work (Objective 4)</li> </ul>
<p><i>A case study: union-employer partnership</i> Appendix C</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identifies gender specific barriers to work &amp; career development in a specific role in the finance sector (Objective 2)</li> <li>■ Illustrates deterioration in some industry-wide practices (e.g. flexible working, poor performance management practices) (Objective 2)</li> <li>■ Demonstrates a crucial role of trade unions in supporting female members with problems experienced in their workplaces (Objective 4)</li> </ul>

**Table 1 WWPP objectives matched against project outputs**

In addition the Women and Work Partnership Project contributed to accumulation of additional knowledge and resources which can be accessed and utilised by partnership/interested organisations and individuals. They are stored at the STUC<sup>22</sup>.

### *What Has The Project Learned?*

Over the duration of this one year project, a variety of different outputs have been produced. All of these individual outputs contain some valuable insights into the experiences of women in their workplaces as well as in a wider context of their work and careers. Despite the project's wide scope, and therefore its multifocal thematic orientation, many common themes emerged from the data collected. This section aims to summarise and contextualise the project's learning lessons by drawing parallels between the experiences of women working in Scotland in different sectors.

#### **In-work poverty**

The Women and Work Partnership Project has learned that despite some progress and optimistic statistics on female employment/unemployment in Scotland, female workers continue to experience multiple work and career-related problems. These problems vary in complexity and nature, and individual sectors and workplaces will encounter them with different level of intensity. One of the most worrying problems found across today's workforce, is increasing in-work poverty of women and their families. Trade unions concerns in relation to women and welfare in Scotland were reflected in the motions proposed at the five separate STUC Equality Committees' conferences held between 2014 and 2015. Whilst each had a specific focus, common problems were detected, mainly around the ever growing pressure on living standards across Scotland, which has had a particularly negative

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<sup>22</sup> Additional list of resources accumulated throughout the duration of the WWPP include: Hard copies of reports and briefings related to the wide scope of women's problems and analysis (stored at the STUC premises – main office); Digital copies of reports and literature related to the wide scope of women's problems and analysis (stored at the STUC intranet M:\Women and Work Partnership Project 2015-2016); Digital copies of questionnaires and documented analysis which substantiated the body of the Interim Report; Transcribed interviews with officials from five unions which were carried out between November 2015 and January 2016; Some insights on the challenges to members organising and recruitment, and resource constraints union face in today's context ('Building knowledge about affiliates'); Analysis of delegates' attendance at the STUC Equality Conferences (based on the returned monitoring forms from the events held between 2010-2015).

effect on the already disadvantaged, including women. Multiple research identified women as the main victims of the UK Government's welfare reform because of their traditionally difficult position in the labour market due to childrearing responsibilities (Appendix A). The most recent tax and benefit reforms disproportionately affected women, who are already overrepresented in the casualised and insecure jobs in the lowest-paid sectors. Unpredictable job patterns on zero-hours contracts and the insufficient amount of work available in the labour market make meeting the criteria of in-work tax benefit very difficult. In practice, cuts in the welfare budget mean a further loss of income for women and their families.

### Unaffordable and inflexible childcare

In addition, austerity cuts in local authorities have affected public services provided particularly to women and children. When linked with low (and/or stagnant) pay; rising childcare costs; and reduced rights at work, a lack of effective support services means further deterioration in the quality of living for the Scottish workforce. With 27% of the average family income currently spent on childcare in Scotland this leaves women with far fewer choices. Around 25% of mostly female low-income workers are forced to quit their jobs to manage their family finances (Appendix A<sup>23</sup>). Findings from all three sectors – arts<sup>24</sup>, FE and HE<sup>25</sup> and finance<sup>26</sup> - in which the WWPP conducted further interviews, echo the same problem of unaffordable and inflexible provision of childcare as a main factor impeding women's employment choices and career paths.

Thus, when understood in a systemic and holistic way, barriers to full and fulfilling participation in the labour market seem to stem from the incompatibility of work and life domains.

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<sup>23</sup> In addition, the recent survey carried for Parents in Performing Arts (PIPA) discovered that amongst freelance community of performers around 74% of parents had missed out on work projects due to expensive and insufficient childcare provision. In: STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in music and the performing arts sectors, STUC: Glasgow.

<sup>24</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in music and the performing arts sectors, STUC: Glasgow.\*

<sup>25</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in teaching and other academic roles in the education sector, STUC: Glasgow.

<sup>26</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in customer service roles in the music and the finance sector, STUC: Glasgow.

Such incompatibility is not irreconcilable, but its greatest challenge has a two-fold nature: accepted societal norms – with a deeply-rooted expectation that women are, and are willing to, be the main carer (for both children and elderly); and insufficiencies (and patchiness) in the existing support structures which fail to help women and all those with parenting responsibilities embrace their working roles. While the current support system provided by the state and employers remains imperfect, women are expected to make hard decisions. Analysis of struggles experienced by female parents in artistic careers, in FE and HE teaching and in lower-paid jobs in the finance sector<sup>27</sup> suggest a strong link between childcare costs, access and provision arrangements and the hours women work, their income and realistic opportunities for career progression.

All three studies show that, flexible work in today's landscape of work in Scotland is a matter of necessity and not a lifestyle choice. For women who would have to spend almost all their annual income to cover the cost of a full-time childcare, flexible working isn't a choice about spending more time with a child/children but rather a need forced by a disappointing economic reality.

Interestingly, further lessons have been learned from looking into work problems experiences by musicians, actors, dancers and other performers. These careers offer excellent insights for better understanding the demands of today's workforce for flexibility in childcare provision. The evidence from women working in the music and performing arts sector shows high levels of precariousness<sup>28</sup>. Not only are jobs for performers limited and highly competitive but due to the way in which much creative work is organised, the patterns of work are highly unpredictable and varied. Working on very short-term contracts (in some instances as short as half a day), getting notified about successful work acquisition at the last minute, regular travelling with work productions, juggling simultaneous projects, doing multiple "split-shifts" a day (e.g. morning rehearsal, afternoon practice/new work development, evening performance) is a common pattern of work for performers.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. [all three sources]

<sup>28</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in music and the performing arts sectors, STUC: Glasgow.

Not having sufficient access to flexible and affordable care services substantially impacts on women's ability to take up work and sustain their careers. Lessons learned from music and performing arts sector are valuable because they assist in understanding more fractured and dispersed employment patterns. It encourages a focus on the requirements of a 24 hour economy, and hence also non-standard hours of work for many professions and vocations, are common, and are likely to continue to be so. At the same time, standard services, such as schooling, child/adult care, health provisions etc., operate on the historical '9 till 5' model. Extending services an hour before/after standard office time does not sufficiently respond to the needs of a changing society and economy.

### Erosion of professional status

The project has learned that the context of today's work is challenging also for professionals in jobs associated with higher status and better conditions of employment<sup>29</sup>. Education (Primary, Secondary and Further and Higher Education) is one of the key public sectors which employs a significant number of women. Teaching has traditionally been recognised as a good, stable career choice for women, with good terms and conditions, which unfortunately are starting to deteriorate. In particular, increasing casualisation of employment in the Further and Higher Education context, with a proliferation of Zero Hours Contracts in many Scottish universities, impacts on job security, quality of work, work satisfaction and the wellbeing of the teaching and lecturing workforce. Again, women are most frequently victims of insecure forms of employment, which significantly impacts on their ability to plan their lives, as well as having fulfilling careers. These exploitative but convenient arrangements for employers damage the confidence and health of many women.

On reflection, the changing dynamics in today's labour market shows that it is not only women in low-paid sectors (e.g. social care, retail, catering, cleaning and hospitality) who are struggling to find permanent jobs with regular hours. Job insecurity is also increasing amongst other professions, such as university lecturers and researchers. The increasing use

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<sup>29</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in teaching and other academic roles in the education sector, STUC: Glasgow.

of casual contracts is even more worrying when, as the project has learned, a significant amount of routine and planned work is carried out by zero hours contract staff within colleges. Flexible working is only an illusion in this context when the true impact on the individuals' lives is being considered. An ongoing demand for work which could readily be carried out by staff employed on more secure, fairer forms of contract, on the one hand, and a strong wish of many casually employed women to take up a permanent position, on the other hand, would seem like an easy problem to solve. While it is clear that cost-saving exercises undertaken by many large institutions in the sector appear to save money, it is also evident that in such cost-benefit analysis the respect for the workers, their skills and expert knowledge is, if only, notional.

A use of casual contracts for unexpected, exceptional and short-term or cover situations might be justified, but when employers use them to fulfil functions previously carried out by permanent or fixed-term staff, they truly exploit the flexibility of casual contracts and violate the human need for security.

Knowledge workers in today's economy, when little protection is offered to them, are highly likely to experience poverty and ill-health. The erosion of professional status of many university female workers, directly translates into economic inequalities. One of the direct consequences of the use of casual contracts is unpredictability of long-term income. As a result, those on zero-hours contracts, when seeking to apply for mortgages or loans etc. in the current economic climate, experience regular refusals. Many of them struggle to manage their finances and sustain a decent standard of living. Their finances also suffer long-term with inability to pay into pensions, which is particularly worrying for women, who are known to be financially worse-off after retirement. Insecurity of employment impacts also on casual workers' well-being and dramatically worsens for single mothers. Erosion of professional status has been also experienced by school teachers, but this has been linked with increasing pressures, workloads and bureaucracy, and an overall deterioration of quality of pay and work conditions. The role of teachers (in both school and university context) has enormous societal value. In order to educate and develop the views of future workforces and citizens, the teaching workforce need to be respected and appropriately rewarded. High quality of education with inspirational teachers requires commitment and

investment in the security of employment and good conditions of employment for the teaching workforce.

## Deterioration in quality of work, workloads and well-being

Deterioration in conditions and quality of work is yet another experience of many women working in Scotland. WWPP has learned that similarly to teachers, many women across other sectors are increasingly disappointed with pay and the mistreatment they receive at work<sup>30</sup> (and Appendix B).

Decreasing autonomy, prescribed behaviours, inflexible practices and lack of job ownership make women experience their jobs as “toxic”. A dehumanising approach to work often stems from unrealistic expectations that are exploitative and alienating in nature. When people are continuously monitored and managed very tightly, little space is left for the enjoyment of positive social and psychological aspects which work can offer. For women who are likely to be challenged by the dual focus on work and caring for family, heavy workloads, intimidating target-cultures and lack of support in the workplace is often a tipping point when jobs become unbearable and health starts to suffer.

A closer insight into the nature of work in the roles of customer service workers in the Finance sector confirmed the damage poor performance practices can cause<sup>31</sup>. The sector is highly polarised. On the one hand, the senior management earns arguably the highest wages in the labour market, whereas the bottom tier of the workforce is one of the lowest paid in comparison to other economic sectors. Typically, the lowest paid jobs such as customer-services roles, deliver outstanding amount of work with almost machine-like speed. They require complex knowledge of financial products and a range of vital skills in order to perform their work, but the salary for those in customer service roles pay suggests low valuation by the market and employers. Evidence gathered from the project work highlights that constant pressures, high responsibility, target-culture and ill-conceived performance management frameworks have a negative impact on women’s mental health

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<sup>30</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in customer service roles in the music and the finance sector, STUC: Glasgow.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

and wellbeing, particularly – as this project learned, for older women. Increasing mental-health problems in the workplaces affects working women whether due to stress, heavy workloads, poor performance practice or bullying – and therefore it is becoming a top priority for trade unions work<sup>32</sup>.

Job insecurity experienced by university level teaching and research staff, or indeed by performers, impacts on the ability of female workers to maintain their confidence and self-worth. It also poses more health risks for individuals who can neither plan their income nor lives.

Inability to access employment protections and support benefits, being blacklisted during pregnancies, the lack of support post pregnancy, no real prospects for returning to work, all mean that a time with no money and more worries experienced by many women can last long and bring long-term negative effects.

### Exclusive and inflexible character of career systems

The project has learned that while women tend to experience disadvantages related to the inability to find desirable and satisfying amount of employment in short to medium term, their long-term careers also seemed to be fractured. Insights from performing arts show how incompatibility between the industry's work organisation and women's lives makes career progression, and frankly, any efforts to sustain careers in a chosen field, systematically challenging<sup>33</sup>. Careers systems, which are inherently unequal in terms of access to opportunities, discriminate women of almost all ages as either less committed, less confident, less talented, too young or too clever. The inflexibility in careers to accommodate different stages of women's life courses is a main reason why they drop out from working in the industry. In arts a significant number of women in their thirties and forties change careers or stop working, which is understandable when 84% of part-time workers in this sector earn less than £10,000 per annum, and when work simply doesn't pay the bills. Their work cannot be performed remotely from the 'home-office', and therefore

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<sup>32</sup> STUC (2016). Women in the Trade Union Movement in Scotland Report, STUC: Glasgow.

<sup>33</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in music and the performing arts sectors, STUC: Glasgow.

managing disorganised project work around care for small children tends to fail, even when the determination of women and their families is strong.

Childcare responsibilities were identified as a barrier to the development of female careers in finance sector, and education<sup>34</sup>. Qualitative evidence collected through the project suggest that inflexibility of work is not limited to childrearing age.

The Scottish Commission on Older Women (SCOW) Report<sup>35</sup> showed that although the number of older women in employment in Scotland has been steadily increasing for two decades, the realities of work experienced by this demographic group have been largely neglected by policy-makers and employers. For many older women, continuing employment in later life is a positive choice, (a choice that reflects better education, improved health and more freedom to shape their own paths), for others and for the exact opposite reasons, it indicates a lack of choice. A rising state pension age and financial pressures mean that women are dependent on continuing work which brings income for them and their families. On the other hand, many older women are increasingly expected to help their children in looking after grandchildren and thus freeing mothers (and fathers) to (re)-enter the labour market. Older women in this position face multiple dilemmas, which are further escalated by the inflexibility in working patterns which often forces them to fully drop out from work, rather than adjust the amount of paid work they want/need to take up, within their circumstances.

The project gathered enough evidence to conclude that flexible working arrangements are insufficient. Discussion over what flexibility means in respectively different working contexts, and for women at different life stages, is now long overdue. Flexibility of work cannot be looked at in isolation. Lessons from the finance sector show that previously positive practices can deteriorate if a systemic approach is abandoned, e.g. when changes in the external and internal environment or demand are not accounted and planned for. As one of the key barriers to women's participation in work and employment, flexibility of work

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<sup>34</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in customer service roles in the music and the finance sector, STUC: Glasgow. STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in teaching and other academic roles in the education sector, STUC: Glasgow.

<sup>35</sup> Scottish Commission on Older Women (2015). Older Women and Work: Looking to the Future Report. SCOW: Edinburgh.

has to be discussed simultaneously with development of childcare provision and more collaborative job design.

Lastly, training and development opportunities enhancing women's skills are a prerequisite for a successful career progression. For a wide range of women, the only opportunity for learning new skills will be through workplace learning for which they do not need to pay no organise care support.

The project learned that cuts in organisational / local authority budgets impact on amount of learning opportunities available to working women. Yet, a delivery of these courses and sessions in out-of-work time is an even more worrying trend as it excludes many women from taking part due to their family-related responsibilities. Similarly, evening meeting and networking activities organised over weekends suggest that the understanding of flexibility in work organisation is highly gendered.

### Challenging existing stereotypes and female under-representation

Particularly interesting lessons this project has learned relate to a wider role of public arts in the process of changing the societal norms and prejudices. Women are commonly trapped in the views that society as a whole, and in particular some socio-demographic groups, impose on them. These stereotypes tend to disadvantage women by clustering their abilities, and thus their individual and societal worth, on the basis of their looks, reproductive abilities, nurturing qualities and companionships. Stereotypes are visible in TV productions which often portray women stereotypically as “young and pretty but stupid” or “wise but old and crinkly”, or always as “somebody else's [means male actor's] wife or girlfriend”<sup>36</sup>. Experiences of women working in performing arts<sup>37</sup> show that being subjected to misogynistic behaviours, and made to feel incidental are common. This sectorial case shows that public theatre and TV mirror the inequalities and work problems found across different economic sectors and society in general. The change is needed now and it is known, that arts can play an important change-agent role in challenging stereotypical views.

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<sup>36</sup> STUC (2016). Challenges experienced by women working in music and the performing arts sectors, STUC: Glasgow.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, the sector is equipped to lead the process of rewriting societal norms, which propagate gender inequalities.

The project work also discovered, that all three sectors which the WWPP looked at in more detail, demonstrate the same trend – overrepresentation of women in terms of the sectors' overall workforce, but a significant underrepresentation of women in the leadership roles. Christine Hamilton's recent gender audit<sup>38</sup> of Scottish Theatre confirms the hidden occupational segregation and prolific gender inequality of opportunities in theatre. Women are underrepresented at the senior and leadership levels in arts. 38% of the theatres had women in the key artistic leadership position either solely or jointly, only 17% were solely run by women. These findings fit within an overall underrepresentation of women in senior roles in the music industry, on stage and on screen, in politics and wider public life. These are statistics gathered in 21<sup>st</sup> century, when many members of the public believe an equal footing and equal access to opportunities has already been achieved. A lack of confidence, insufficient level of skills, employment breaks, childcare responsibilities, and prolonged marginalisation of women are common explanations for a 'glass ceilings' phenomenon. The problem is complex but this is yet another reason why seeing strong women representing all different professions and career paths on screen and stage are important for empowering new generations of girls and young women.

## Positive practices

In the context of so many explicit and implicit challenges for working women, the trade unions role in shaping and rebalancing women's status in the workplace, labour market and society is of great importance. The role of trade unions in providing advice, support, legal representation and developmental opportunities is widely known, highly appreciated by union members and increasingly recognised by a wide range of stakeholders. The Aegis-Aegon case study from the finance sector (attached in Appendix C) demonstrates the benefits of a collaborative and supportive relationship between union and employer.

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<sup>38</sup> Hamilton, Ch. (2016). Where are the women? An analysis of creative roles by gender in Scottish theatre 2014/15. <http://christinehamiltonconsulting.com/women-in-theatre/>

In addition, this project made a specific contribution in mapping out activities that the trade union movement in Scotland provides specifically for female members and women workers<sup>39</sup>. These range from gender equality, campaigning and positive action, and promoting and demonstrating the value of trade union work.

The WWPP project learned that producing materials and literature dedicated to women's lives (particularly around health and safety issues), organising training opportunities for women (development of leadership skill has become a particular focus), encouraging the employers to conduct equality impact assessments, and shaping and implementing women's equality policies were those most frequently included in the work of the STUC affiliated unions in recent years. Individual unions have their specific priorities and many of them can demonstrate how their campaigning or lobbying and negotiating work has benefited women working in Scotland. Some of these actions concentrated on elimination of zero-hours contracts, improving health and safety, improving working conditions for women, ensuring workplace bargaining includes parental rights on behalf of women workers for paid time-off for foster carers and paid time-off for fertility treatment, and improvement on statutory minimum pay.

One of the most exciting areas for trade union movement modernisation is progress towards reducing the 'glass ceiling' observed in the union's organising structures. As in majority of organisations, women's representation in trade unions decreases gradually and in relation to the top senior roles within the movement. However, some unions in the Scottish context can already demonstrate much higher female participation in union structures. Some national offices noted female representation as high as 100%. Within the STUC itself, positive steps were taken in the 1990s to ensure the STUC General Council better reflected the membership of the trade union movement. Through mechanisms including reserved seats for women, and representation from the other STUC Equalities Committees, the STUC General Council membership has been around 50% female each year in the last six years.

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<sup>39</sup> STUC (2016). Women in the Trade Union Movement in Scotland Report, STUC: Glasgow.

Many unions displayed a strong commitment to a gender balance agenda, and continue to encourage female activists to become full-time branch/regional/national officers. A National Women's Taskforce (NWT) has been developed by one of the unions specifically to ensure some inequalities within the union's own structures, processes and procedures are eliminated. The Taskforce addressed various levels of recruitment and career progression to design fairer and more transparent processes from job advertising, through to the appointment process and training and development.

Specific advances such as the provision of full equality training for appointment panels, robust selection criteria, task-based format for interviews, mixed interviewing panels with equal number of officers outwith a recruiting regional office, were implemented to ensure jobs are awarded on merit and capability and not on the support from appointees' social networks. The new improved and validity of the recruitment process is hoped to restore the eroded confidence of female appointees and encourage many more women to apply for officials' posts and actively engage in the future strategic decision-making of the union. Similar efforts are becoming increasingly more commonly adopted by STUC affiliates.

## *Conclusions And Recommendations*

The WWPP set out to map some of the problems that women working in Scotland continue to face in their work and careers, and which prevent them from enjoying fair, secure, quality employment and a fulfilling career progression. Specific outputs were produced during the duration of the WWPP and this report provided an overall narrative with summaries of findings emerged from the project work. Various barriers appeared to be problems of a systemic nature and were commonly shared across a wide range of professional, industry and workplace settings. A lack of adequate and sufficient support structures assisting women to become and remain active in the labour market throughout all life stages, is an area which requires an immediate focus through well-designed integrated policies and management practices. It is hoped that this report will stimulate further discussion over the themes identified in the previous section. To further add to this much needed discussion, this report makes the following recommendations for employers, unions and government,

in the spirit of the Working Together Review<sup>40</sup> and the Fair Work Framework<sup>41</sup> which advocated a collaborative approach to solving work-related problems.

## *Improving Services and Structures Supporting Women's Careers*

### CHILDCARE

#### *Recommendation for the Scottish Government*

A lack of accessible, flexible and affordable childcare emerged as one of the main barrier to women fully participating in the labour market. The WWPP project findings stress that childcare is an issue which affects not only female parents but fathers and also grandparents and a wider kinship network. Therefore a design of childcare provision needs to engage with a wider notion of service users. Including in them all in a consultation process, along with employers, to engage in a service design is a good strategic plan. The Scottish Government has a unique opportunity to invest in the design of an infrastructure for the free, universal childcare provided by high quality public sector workers at the point of delivery, through collaborative discussion.

The Scottish Government's pilot programme of increasing the Early Learning and Childcare allowance for three and four years old, is an expression of progressive action. This positive step will help in eliminating some of the deeply rooted barriers to female work and employment. As this project learned, the working patterns of today's workforce are dramatically different than a standard "9-5" model of service provision. It is therefore paramount that flexibility of care provision features strongly in the new services to address the needs of shift workers and those working irregular/unsocial hours (and all precarious workers).

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<sup>40</sup> Scottish Government (2014). Working Together Review. Progressive Workplace Policies in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

<sup>41</sup> Fair Work Convention (2016). Fair Work Framework 2016. Available at: <http://www.fairworkconvention.scot/framework/FairWorkConventionFrameworkSummary.pdf>

### *Recommendation for the Scottish Government, unions and other membership organisations*

The ELC extensions plans will require substantial workforce development to respond to the diverse needs of users, and the government should work with the unions, employers, the sector's council and skills organisations to address the current limitations. Trade unions, on the other hand should treat the sector as a focal point in their strategic organising in order to recruit and represent a workforce which will be highly sought after in the coming years.

The ELC service extension is a unique opportunity to re-evaluate and re-appraise the skillset of the workers in the childcare sector, who currently remain undervalued in societal and economic terms. The government and unions should work together in finding an appropriate solution to address this historical undervaluation.

## MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES

### *Recommendations for unions*

The WWPP research found that the age profile of women in trade unions is aligned with a wider phenomenon of an aging population. Thus in the same way as employers face challenges around the organisation of work for ageing workforce, the unions face a similar challenge in terms of an ageing profile of union membership, and most importantly, a much higher representation amongst older activists whilst this represents skills and strengths amongst women trade unionists, it is also a concerning trend because the pace of new young activists coming through into the unions structures does not match the pace of increasing proportion of older women in the movement. It poses a particular danger for the movement as a substantive amount of talent, knowledge and experience can be lost if there is no new generation ready to learn. Lost capabilities are always very difficult to rebuild, and battles won for women workers by devoted female trade unionists in the past might become endangered over time. It is recommended that women's committees across the movement adopt a united focus and call for action. For example, mentoring schemes could be a good solution for addressing these concerns. So far, however, mentoring is understood mostly in relation to its positive impact on career progressions. Trade unions have yet to fully capitalise on incorporating mentoring programmes within their own structures

incorporating a scheme into all levels of the movement structures could provide an opportunity for young female activists to learn through a shadowing and coaching process (e.g. face to face within branches or with aid of communication technology). Importantly, the trade union movement is encouraged to embrace the idea of inter-union mentoring for cross-fertilisation, furthering and stimulating the capacity building that will continue to benefit all working women.

### *Recommendations for employers and the Scottish Government*

It is proven that union recognition and representation improves workplaces and benefits individual workers. No robust mentoring programme can be developed and delivered without support from employers, particularly in relation to making such processes possible by granting release time. Lastly, in the spirit of progressive workplace policies, workers and activists should be, and increasingly are, becoming central to effective policy-making. Active citizenship as promoted by the union movement, is key to the success of modern Scotland striving for fairness and equality of opportunities. Stakeholders' active engagement in the workplace must be seen as a substantial contribution towards co-design of safer and a more innovative work and more equal society. Employers and the government are thus encouraged to contribute to the trade union movement in its own capacity.

## FLEXIBLE WORK

### *Recommendations for the Scottish Government, employers and unions*

The ability of women to take advantage of flexible work is another crucial area which has been widely demonstrated as having a direct impact on women remaining in or dropping out from the labour market. Flexible working is discussed most commonly in terms of part-time, reduced hours and home-based working patterns and is used mostly by women as a mechanism for balancing paid and un-paid responsibilities. Workplaces across Scotland differ in access to the amount of flexible work available to women. As a requirement for flexible work also grows among male workers, accommodating every worker's need is a new challenge for many companies. This is why there needs to be a more collective effort towards enabling flexible policies to remain a feature of contemporary workplaces.

The Government's role is expected to provide more child/elderly and special care so women can work longer. On the other hand, employers need to make steps towards increasing employees in number and capacity in order to be able to meet flexible work requests and to minimise the impact on full-time employees in the organisation.

There should also be a further discussion amongst partners around flexible arrangements for workers who are workplace-based but not in traditional working on 9-5 hours and for precarious workers working in unknown hours arrangements (e.g. assignment workers, performers, interpreters etc.), where assignments might last longer/shorter than expected, be cancelled or announced at last minute.

### *Building Capacity and Knowledge*

#### MEMBERSHIP KNOWLEDGE

##### *Recommendation for unions*

In preparing the Report 'Women in the Trade Union Movement in Scotland' problems were highlighted in relation to unions' resources in collecting and utilising membership data, and their ability to observe changing trends in members' profiles as they correlated with work related matters. Small unions in particular commented on their inability to access and use this sort of information. It is important for the trade union movement to take seriously the need to build capability in membership research to develop an appetite for, and to adopt, a new approach to thinking about evidencing trade union's work (specifically at grassroots level, i.e. documenting, recording and analysis casework) in order to inform campaigns, actions and lobbying on the most timely and pressing issues. It is also recommended that building up this capacity is not limited to individual unions but that a mechanism for sharing data and learning, and inter-union exchanges of knowledge are developed for the benefit of making the whole trade union movement more resilient and responsive to members' needs.

### *Recommendation for the Scottish Government other stakeholders*

In line with the recommendations of the Working Together Review and its spirit of partnership and cooperation among all partners, the Scottish Government can support the trade union movement in developing the necessary capacity by sharing its own expertise, and by supporting projects that can set up appropriate structures and processes. This can directly improve available data sets, enrich existing comparative analyses and in effect, inform more effective policy-making in relation to work, workplace and employment.

## GENDER AUDITS

### *Recommendation for the Scottish Government*

Gender-specific monitoring obtained from an analysis of gender audits or quotas recording is also an important tool for gathering information. In the context of Scottish theatre's demand for data on gender balance, this paper recommends all sectors seriously engage with a gender audit exercise. As illustrated in the performing arts, the mandatory scope of audits has to be wider than the audit of boards and organisational structures, but rather should include all workers (freelance, agency workers, fixed-term/short-term staffing, secondments etc.). Government should further support any work/community groups who express their interest in gender balance in any given profession/workplace/educational context. Gender balance data is the only way to find out the scale of the gender underrepresentation, in particular the hidden gender segregations, and the only reliable source in driving improvement strategies toward gender equality and away from damaging stereotypes.

It is also recommended the government considers and discusses possible initiatives for "policing" effectiveness of equality policies in making sure these important political achievements are not "for art's sake" but play a fundamental role in improving the lives of women, across their lives and with the attention to a heterogeneous characteristics of womanhood and women's identities, to include diversity around age, abilities, racial, ethnic

and religious backgrounds, and sexual orientation, as well overlapping dimensions of women' social identities.

## *Improving Work and Employment*

### IMPROVING JOB AND EMPLOYMENT QUALITY

#### *Recommendation for employers, unions, the government and other stakeholders*

In the light of the project's insights into diminishing quality of work, and in the context of enthusiastically welcomed report published by the Fair Work Convention<sup>42</sup>, it is suggested that an agenda of fairer work, a more collegiate work environment, person-centred management and secure employment is prioritised in policy developments. A necessary and immediate review of performance management practices, and the more general management techniques applied in the workplaces, a reduction of repetitive and boring work and unrealistic workloads, and the elimination of zero hours contracts, are suggested as a good first step in an attempt to regulate workplaces to produce work of a better quality for working women and men. This report argues that poor job quality is a serious problem which impacts on working women's well-being and therefore requires as much attention as regulations around the level of pay (minimum/living wage policies etc.). This is a significantly much complicated area to improve and/or regulate, but in the context of the Fair Work Convention's foundational work, employers and unions can work together to draw lessons and strive to help each other to overcome problems related to poor work and employment quality. It is expected that the Convention's framework will initiate further discussion and become a stepping stone for stakeholders' timely work towards workers' rights to decent, fair and humane work.

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<sup>42</sup> Fair Work Convention. (2016). *Fair Work Framework 2016*. Available at: <http://www.fairworkconvention.scot/framework/FairWorkConventionFrameworkSummary.pdf>

## JOB CO-DESIGN

### *Recommendation for employers and unions*

While there is a need for a critical discussion around the quality of today's jobs, to which the Fair Work Convention's report makes a significant contribution, it is recommended that practice-oriented initiatives should follow through, such as coordinated job re-design.

A balanced and guided approach should drive this, to ensure maximum impact on improving job satisfaction, alleviating burnouts and associated mental health problems amongst workers in a diverse range of sectors. The role of unions in liaising on workplace engagement and in shaping job re-design is crucial. Such an engagement exercise could lead to positive practices such as the adaptation of the work tasks to suit individual people. Importantly, a gender-specific focus when co-designing jobs could remove many of the existing problems around female performance and career promotions.

### *Improving health and well-being*

## OLDER WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

### *Recommendations for the Scottish Government and stakeholders*

It is paramount that the government and other learning and support agencies capitalise on the wealth of trade union knowledge about the problems older women specifically experience in their workplaces. With pensions reforms and an increasing life expectancy, women are expected to work for longer. Like other women, those still in training or education, at the beginning or midst of their careers, older women face their own sets of challenges. This report supports all the recommendations made by the Scottish Commission on Older Women and urges that support be available to women in their late working lives, including access to training, extended carer leaves and flexible working patterns.

## MENTAL HEALTH

### *Recommendation for the government, unions and other membership organisations*

Mental health problems, among women in particular, have been noticed as an exponentially growing trend. Stress, overworking, financial worries, insecure forms of employment can all contribute to mental health problems. Trade unions have already started to prioritise this issue. There is a great need for rethinking what can be done to improve the mental health and well-being of working people. It is recommended that all effort needs to be aligned and complimentary. Employers should consider reduction or adjustment of workloads, improving the quality of the work and influencing workplace culture towards one that is more collegial and supportive.

Unions already provide training, literature and support, and they do facilitate constructive conversation between employers and employees; however because of the scale of the problem, the efforts should be coordinated towards united and nation-wide actions supported by the Government.

In addition, services and facilities provided in and around a workplace have historically been recognised to increase and promote a healthy workforce, and there is an opportunity for work and employment policies to refocus on improvements of work in the most holistic sense. This should include an honest reflection on some of the modern policies that support and encourage working away from the physical workplaces, on the one hand, giving workers a choice, on the other hand, perhaps creating (un)intended barriers for workers to access common social support provisions.

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It is hoped that by reflecting on these recommendations, a further discussion will be stimulated among all stakeholders with an honest interest in improving the working conditions, quality of work and career opportunities for women across all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Furthermore, the Women and Work Partnership Projects hopes all future discussions will be pragmatic in approach and will effectively lead to practical and widely applicable solutions.

## **Appendices**

### Appendix A: The STUC response to Welfare Reform Committee's call for evidence on 'Women and Welfare'

#### **Q. "What is the impact of welfare reform on women?"**

##### **Sub-questions:**

1. *What is your (or your clients) experience of being on benefits or employment support?*
2. *How has your (or your clients) experience with the benefit system changed in recent years since the introduction of the welfare reforms?*
3. *Are there any challenges involved in being in receipt of your (your clients) particular benefits?*

This response focuses broadly on impacts on the most recent welfare reforms which is reported to have deeply affected the lives and livelihoods of working people. This response also aims to bring to the forefront particular areas of concern for working women captured from the perspective of the trade union movement and its representative organisations.

The Scottish Government report from 2013 concluded that the 2012 Welfare Reform Act would have a negative gendered impact. This impact of welfare reform on women in Scotland was expressed as indeed larger and more significant than the impact on men due to women's roles as carers for children and their receipt of benefits directed towards children<sup>43</sup>. The report summarised that changes in such aspects of the welfare reform as universal credit; housing benefit; income support for lone parents; employment support and allowance; disability living allowance; and child benefit would represent a loss of independent income for women.

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<sup>43</sup> Scottish Government (2013). *The gender impact of welfare reform*.

The Government's report restated the traditionally difficult position of women in the labour market due to childrearing responsibilities, which is aligned with views of other commentators who have also expressed their fears over a role of welfare reforms in increasing financial dependence within couples and leading to one partner dependency – which unfortunately and more likely will mean a loss of independent income for women<sup>44</sup>.

As Labour Research reports<sup>45</sup>, the policies with the biggest impact on women include cuts in tax credits, which took £8.3 billion from women, reductions in housing benefits, under which women lost £2.3 billion, and the three year freeze in child benefit, which has cost women £3.5 billion. Labour Research<sup>46</sup> emphasises that the most recent tax and benefit reforms disproportionately affected women, who are already overrepresented in the casualised and insecure jobs. More importantly, these jobs tend to be in the low-paid sectors.

According to TUC analysis of the Labour Force Survey women comprise a majority of Britain's growing zero-hours workforce (55%). The insecurity and irregularity of work on this type of contracts has an additional consequence in relation to Working and Child Tax Credits, and housing benefits accordingly, which are being claimed by workers on low income (particularly women) and 50.8% of the total in-work families who are constituted by part time workers (16-34 hours)<sup>47</sup>. The increase in the required hours to claim the Working Tax Credit (WTC) by working couples is noted as a particular difficulty in the context of low job availability in the fractured labour market, and this is even more distressful news for single parents who represent 60% of the recipients of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. USDAW recognises that the majority of people working 16-24 hrs earn low wages and work in the service sector which has been affected by recession.

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<sup>44</sup> The Observer (letters on welfare reform, Sunday 19 February 2012). Welfare reform makes women's lives even worse.

<sup>45</sup> Labour Research, (March 2015). *How have women fared under coalition policies?* Vol. 104 (No. 3) pp.20-21.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Comment: This is figure in relation to the UK as a whole.

Thus unsurprisingly, 78% of surveyed USDAW members who are affected by WTC changes admitted they would not be able to find the additional 8 hours of work needed to claim in-work tax benefits<sup>48</sup>.

Social researchers observe that in low-income families women are most likely to have continuing responsibility for day-to-day organisation of a family life, and hence also for spending. This means that the whole family unit is likely to be affected by the ill-considered and disabling welfare reforms. Findings from the survey of women experience published by Labour Research (2015) shows that women in the UK feel affected by the rising cost of living. Nearly one in two women say they now feel worse off financially than 5 years ago. Nearly one in 10 have obtained a loan from a pay day lender in the past year, and nearly one in 12 low-paid women with children have obtained food from a food bank in the past 12 months. This evidence can be a sound basis for predicting that situation of women-led lone parent households is even worse - as they might be the most affected group of all.

Thus having the right to an income of their own, or the contributory employment and support allowances for those on low income, should be seen as particularly important for women and their family units. However, cuts and caps of targeted support for working people are doing women injustice as they jeopardise positive attempts to reduce child and in-work poverty, as well as fundamentally limit women's work and employment choices. For women, this situation is a real threat not only to their workplace securities and employment rights, but also to their human right to be living a dignified and secure life. When women can't afford to go to work, or are reluctant to take up more hours in fear of losing their entitlements; when they need to work longer than they feel fit to, or when they are pressurised to cash their pensions to cover up the living costs – these are all examples of a badly reformed welfare system which violates the social contract between citizens and government (with potentially severe long-term human cost). A critical assessment of the re-structured UK welfare system was voiced strongly in many recent publications<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Labour Research (March 2015). *How have women fared under coalition policies?* Vol. 104 (No. 3) pp.20-21.

<sup>49</sup> Breitenbach, E. and Wasoff, F. (2007). *A Gender Audit of Statistics: Comparing the Position of Women and Men in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government; Engender (2015). Joint report: 'Women and Welfare Reform. A Widening Gap'; Engender (2014). *GENDER AND 'WELFARE REFORM' IN SCOTLAND: A JOINT*

Trade Unions concerns in relation to women and welfare problems in Scotland were reflected in the motions proposed at the five separate STUC conferences held throughout 2014. Despite a distinctive focus of each of them, common problems were detected, mainly around the ever growing pressure on living standards across Scotland and in-work poverty, which has a particularly negative effect on the lives of Black, Migrants and Ethnic minorities workers (BME)<sup>50</sup>, LGBT<sup>51</sup>, Disabled Workers<sup>52</sup>, and also women<sup>53</sup>.

STUC Equality Committees are concerned with the findings from the recent research by Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>54</sup> which found that a family with two children needs a combined income of £40,600 in order to maintain a decent quality of life. This is an increase of 46% since 2008. Such level of income is simply out of reach for many families across Scotland and changes to the Welfare Reform Act will only deteriorate the household income, and the standard of living of Scottish families. It was announced at STUC's Disabled Conference in 2014 that the number of women, disabled people and lone parents having their benefits sanctioned in Scotland has increased from 16,000 to more than 30,000 since 2009. Moreover, as one of fastest growing trade union (GMB) recently warned, the government's proposition to further cuts average weekly tax credits would mean that 250,300 in-work families in Scotland who currently receive Child Tax Credits (CTC) and Working Tax Credits (WTC) could face a potential threat of £40 per week, on average, being cut from their weekly incomes<sup>55</sup>.

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POSITION PAPER; Fawcett Society Policy Briefing (March 2012). *The Impact of Austerity on Women*; Scottish Government (2013). *The gender impact of welfare reform*; WRSF (February 2011). Analytical Note on Welfare Reform, Welfare Reform Scrutiny Group – Paper WRSF 1-04 (Rev).

<sup>50</sup> Decisions of 18th Annual STUC Black Workers' Conference, Cumbernauld, 4-5th October 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Decisions of 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual STUC LGBT Conference, Stirling, 17-18<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Decisions of 11th Annual STUC Disabled Workers' Conference, Dundee, 15th-16th November 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Decisions of 87<sup>th</sup> STUC Women Conference, Perth, 3-4<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Original publication reference: [The Joseph Rowntree Foundation]

<sup>55</sup> GMB [press release, 13.05.2015]: GMB call on government to rule out cuts to £121.80 average weekly tax credits for 3.3m in work families - 250,300 in Scotland. Sources given: *HM Revenue & Customs, Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics, Finalised annual awards in 2012-13: The above are the latest data for the finalised financial figures. These were first published 30 May 2014 but republished in December 2014 due to errors. 2013-14 data is due for release 29 May 2015. HM Revenue & Customs, Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics April 2015.*

STUC Women's Conference (2014)<sup>56</sup> offers a significant qualitative evidence of how austerity cuts affect women. Conference noted the Scottish Government has passed the majority of the cuts onto local authorities and these cuts are affecting the services that are provided to the public, particularly to vulnerable women and children. As union representatives report, the impact of the cuts in public services on women members in Scotland have been marked as disproportionate, especially when linked with the low (and/or stagnant) pay; rising childcare costs; and weakening rights at work. With 27% of the average family income currently spent on childcare in Scotland, conference notes such high cost means that for many parents work does not pay enough. Therefore in-work benefits and support are essential, particularly in the face of an increasing trend of at least 50% of Scottish families relying on grandparents' input and help.

This trend is worrying, even more so when confronted with the latest official labour market statistics for Scotland which show a significant increase in unemployment and a small fall in employment<sup>57</sup>. STUC believes this newest evidence suggests the recovery in the Scottish labour market is stalling, but is concerned mostly with a trend in the rise in unemployment which was almost exclusively down to women moving from economic inactivity into unemployment. The reasons for falling inactivity in Scotland are not immediately obvious but the STUC believes that falling household incomes are a significant factor. The STUC Women's Conference 2014 referred to a recent report by Save the Children, and enounced that the high cost of childcare led 25% of low-paid parents, and mainly women, to give up their jobs. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to assume that in the current economic, employment and welfare conditions women might be simply forced into unemployment or economic inactivity.

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<sup>56</sup> Decisions of 87th Annual STUC Women's Conference, Perth, 3-4th November 2014.

<sup>57</sup> STUC on new labour market statistics, 13.05.2015 [Press release].

**Sub-questions:**

*4. What would be your priorities for change when certain benefits / elements of employment support are devolved to Scotland?*

*5. Do you have any suggestions of practical improvements that you would like to see when certain benefits / elements of employment support are under Scottish control?*

Welfare reforms combined with a shift in the job market towards low-paid and casualised contracts is disadvantaging women and jeopardising the progress that has been made to improve women's position in the labour market. There is a vast and timely need to improve the employment and welfare reality for working women.

**Protecting vulnerable individuals and families:**

STUC recommends a fundamental re-design of the benefits system in the way that is set to serve and protect the most vulnerable individuals in the society against starvation, poverty and homelessness. This is to include the state's responsibility to protect young, minority, LGTB, disabled workers and women, by introducing policies that impose appropriate adjustment in the workplaces. In particular, the government has a responsibility to lift poor workers in all mentioned groups out of poverty and ensure they can live dignified, meaningful and independent lives.

**Helping women to work and be able to take up paid work opportunities:**

The employment and welfare systems are inherently linked and therefore a holistic approach to addressing social securities is needed. The primary expectation to create routes out of poverty and reliance on benefit systems must be a proactive role of government in helping to stimulate the economy, especially the sectors where women, who are mostly affected by the changes in labour market and welfare reforms, work.

Creating quality jobs, increasing women's wages, and fully utilising female skills at all career levels is essential but so is an effective childcare support.

An ability to find quality employment and work is linked with childcare provisions, and are especially important for women. STUC recommends a continuation of a progressive policies, like the one introduced by the Scottish Government in August 2014 offering families 15 hours per week of free childcare for three and four year olds. These policies could be further extended to help families with children over the age of five years, and families with disabled children, who are currently struggling to secure the appropriate childcare to fit in with their working hours. New progressive childcare policies should aim to address the needs of shift workers and those working irregular/unsocial hours. Thus a move towards a more flexible model of childcare for different age groups would be an ultimate goal.

STUC believes that with the further devolved powers, the Scottish Government has a unique opportunity to invest in and design an infrastructure of free, universal childcare provided by high quality public sector workers at the point of delivery.

## Appendix B: Informing Fair Work Framework For Scotland: Insights On Job Quality And Workers' Well-Being

### ***Work, wages and well-being***

Work, wages and well-being are inherently linked. No wages or low wages, and all cases of poverty (including increasing in-work poverty amongst working adults) impact on the well-being of individuals and their families, and in particular on women<sup>58</sup>. It is important to note that a combination of factors in addition to low wages, such as the cuts in public services, rising childcare costs and weakening rights at work contribute to a falling standards and quality of living.

Findings from the survey of women's experience published by Labour Research<sup>59</sup> shows that women in the UK feel affected by the rising cost of living. Nearly one in two women say they now feel worse off financially than 5 years ago. Nearly one in 10 has obtained a loan from a pay day lender in the past year, and nearly one in 12 low-paid women with children have obtained food from a food bank in the past 12 months.

Evidence from the casework of individual unions affiliated to STUC illustrates increasing number of women reporting anxiety and mental problems which are likely to be correlated with income related concerns and worries over insecurity of employment, limited amount of work available to women as well increasing tensions related to poor performance practices. In particular, however, 'a job quality time bomb'<sup>60</sup> needs to be recognised as a serious systemic problem. In the context of redundancies, and low employment it's natural to cheer any new opportunity offering the number (i.e. quantity) of jobs, but regularly the quality of these new (as well as already existing) jobs is overlooked. Specific sectors with prevalent female employment such as care, retail and hospitality have concentrations of particularly dangerous ill-quality workplaces.

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<sup>58</sup>The STUC response to Welfare Reform Committee's call for evidence on 'Women and Welfare'(unpublished).

<sup>59</sup> Labour Research, (March 2015). *How have women fared under coalition policies?* Vol. 104 (No. 3) pp.20-21.

<sup>60</sup> Warhurst, Ch. 2014. More and Better Jobs Please, <http://workinprogress.oowsection.org/2014/03/21/more-and-better-jobs-please/>

## ***Women and unpaid care***

A lot of pressures which impact on the well-being of women are associated with unpaid work. As the demands on carers combine psychological, physical and financial pressures<sup>61</sup>, individuals who provide more care are at risk of increased mental health problems<sup>62</sup>. Some research suggests that those who undertake 35 or more hours of caring responsibilities a week suffer substantial mental distress. The Scottish Government has noted that many women between 50 and 64 years of age are most likely to undertake unpaid caring duties<sup>63</sup>. As caring work remains a highly gendered activity, there is an over-representation of women amongst those suffering from poor mental health<sup>64</sup>.

The Scottish Commission on Older Women estimated that 6.5% of women aged 50-64 and 4.1% of women aged over 65 provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week. The increase both in the number of women providing some caring for (grand) children, partner or parents<sup>65</sup>, and of those for whom caring is a full time role, helps to explain why older women tend to completely leave the labour market. For example, three quarters of “kinship carers” who take on responsibility for grandchildren are very likely to exit the labour market when they are between 50 and 60. This trend suggests an increased expectation on older women to provide more care they might be able to do before leaving their existing work commitments. Such decision, however, is often motivated by the gaps in childcare arrangements in Scotland and a desire to help sustaining employment for their own children<sup>66</sup>. A survey carried out by UNISON found out that 17% of their women members aged between 50 and 64 provided kinship form of care to allow their own children to take up full time.

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<sup>61</sup> Scottish Government 2015. Scotland's Carers. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

<sup>62</sup> Scottish Household Survey 2014. Scotland's People. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

<sup>63</sup> Scottish Government 2015, *ibid*.

<sup>64</sup> Eurofound 2014. Work preferences after 50. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>65</sup> Grandparents Plus 2012. Giving up the day job: Kinship Carers and Employment. London: Grandparents Plus.

<sup>66</sup> Labour Research Department 2014. Women Deserve Better: a better deal for women aged 50 and over in employment. London: Unison.

## ***Quality of work***

Apart from the ill-paid, insecure and part-time employment in typically female jobs, the other important area of job quality to consider is the impact of modern technology on decreasing job complexity, de-humanisation of work and deskilling of workers. The loss of human skill in the process of work fragmentation makes work dull, unsatisfactory and potentially hazardous. Traditionally, management has taken control over the process of work by routinising and standardising work tasks, and making people to follow scripts rather than take ownership of their jobs<sup>67</sup>. Increased workloads under which workers don't cope (particularly in areas of work requiring 'mental/cognitive activities'), is by its very nature violating the idea of a 'quality job'. The nature of today's technology assisted work tend to hide workloads in various allocation models, and therefore it is difficult to protect workers against exploitative practices<sup>68</sup>.

It is understood that increasingly older women workers are subjected to a great deal of distress at work in relation to changing processes and procedures or modernised technologies for which insufficient training is provided and where target-driven performance measures are applied. Trade unions inform about increasing amount of work cases on consequences of performance-driven practices on disciplinary and dismissal procedures.

In addition, informal conversations with union reps (anonymity protected) provided some insights into the understanding of the changing nature of work today with regards to a diminishing quality of many jobs and a parallel increase in job dissatisfaction. Insights from the current research show the impact of increasingly "boring" and "toxic jobs" on workers.

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<sup>67</sup> Breverman, H. 1974. Labor and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor P. 2012. Performance Management and the New Workplace Tyranny, A Report for the Scottish Trades Union Congress .

## *“Boring” and “toxic jobs”*

It has been expressed that the nature of work today is increasingly difficult, mostly due to a cultural shift taking place in many workplaces. These workplaces, including an office environment in local, regional and national public bodies, are driven by a top-down culture with heavy managerial structures. Such culture, as one of the reps described, has little respect for workers' rights and their individuality. This culture has been characterised as

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*“You’re just being monitored all the time! - The amount of time you spent having a meeting, answering an email or conducting a conversation over the phone....”*

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*“It feels like the workplace constantly controls you. The workplace is so concerned with efficiency and a smart way of working but it doesn’t give you tools to do it. It forgets that you are a person and what that kind of environment does to you as a person! It has no regard to an individual!”*

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impersonal and centred on artificial perfectionism, which means any task in such a culture is expected to be performed effectively and efficiently, that is, accordingly with a detailed schedule. Such approach limits workers' ability to shape their work tasks to suit their individual circumstances, preferences, learning styles and personality. Qualitative evidence cited below reflects the negative impact of performance culture on how people feel about their work.

Many performance matrices, work schedules and benchmarks are created to assess the efficiency and speed of performed tasks, but without an acknowledgment of a worker who is pushed to do monotonous, boring, repetitive and mostly alienating jobs. In effect, job satisfaction has diminished from many workplaces.

Interestingly, jobs that used to be associated with a relatively good conditions and stable, secure employment contracts seem not to yield much satisfaction. Many of jobs in the public sector were described by reps as “boring jobs” accompanied by little joy.

*"I see more laughter at the supermarkets' counters these days than in my own workplace."*

– said one of the reps.

The problems associated with working in such an environment has been described as an effect of inadequate vision and “lacking leadership”, i.e. leadership which “stopped seeing people”. The jobs in the big public and private organisations are being designed with a limited view of, and no considerations for, an overall collective outcome. The project has learned that the distinct levels of organisational structures (division/department) seems to have their own agenda without a shared holistic vision required for a sustainable and a well-functioning system. While the specialisations of tasks, distinctive roles and responsibilities divide work into manageable chunks, workers feel they destroy the spirit of work and achievement that is developed collectively across any given organisation. Rather than working towards a collective purpose, an environment of this kind alienates workers. It makes them feel as slaves of the system trapped in structures which make them invisible and powerless, instead of feeling and believing they have ownership over their jobs. It seems many of today's jobs are "toxic" as they poison the worker's well-being.

The project understands that these toxic jobs are outcomes of performance-centred rather than a person-centred approach. They lack in employee engagement, developmental aspects and respect for human abilities. Many people work in jobs which provide few, if any, opportunities to develop new skills and capabilities. They might work in secure, long-term jobs, but which they dislike and which make them truly unhappy. In addition, one of the reps mentioned the design of these jobs lacks serious consideration for both personality and for the health and well-being of workers. Many workers feel that working with the computer in the office environment impacts their well-being. They think this aspect is seriously overlooked by employers and causes a collectively experienced frustration in the workplace.

An obsession with the performance in organisations and business prevails for which workers appear to pay a high price. Performance culture is affecting behaviours and is causing anxiety amongst workers. Cases of poor performance practice amongst the older group of workers, especially older women, have been well documented<sup>69</sup>, however union reps advise that in some office environments people of all ages increasingly express disappointments with their working lives:

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*“There is nothing for you there ... just reading numbers or text from the screen all day! Nothing, no joy, no challenge, no satisfaction! Surely work should be about more than earning money. Money is important but it's not all! Something is definitely missing in the workplace today.”*

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Concerns reported around older age and work performance is a timely issue, particularly in the context of pension age reforms and an increasing cost of living. However, as highlighted by the informant, the impact of performance focused impersonal practices amongst other age groups should not be overlooked.

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*“It wouldn't be the same in the context of the factory if you'd had to work with machinery. It would be different- you would have breaks and a protocol to follow, but in the office... there is nothing... Especially when you are getting older. Things like the small print, length of time you spent in front of the screen, individual conditions and so on.”*

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<sup>69</sup> Scottish Commission on Older Women 2015. 'Older Women and Work: Looking to the Future'.

## **Concluding**

A discussion about the quality of jobs is an obscure one. There are some 'objective measures' that scientists apply, however, subjectivity cannot be undermined. Different stakeholders (employers, workers, trade unions, H&S specialists, trainers etc.) will have different opinions, and will make different judgments on their perception/experience of work<sup>70</sup>. Even within one group of workers, there will be different outcomes of analysis, because people have different level of 'tolerances' to deal with, e.g. noise, workload, stress etc.

However, trade unions strongly believe in, and promote, a respect for health and safety measures in the workplace environment which act to protect the health and wellbeing of

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*"Older women complain about the pressures of performance culture but not only them. I hear everyone complaining – younger people too."*

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the workforce. However, due to increased fragmentation of the workforce, casualisation of employment and a greater focus on other policy agendas, a section of today's isolated workforce is being deprived of protections embedded in the workplaces. This is therefore an area that should be reconsidered and monitored closely, if we want workers to have employment, and enjoy their labour and the social aspects that come with work.

While there is definitely a need for a critical discussion around the quality of today's jobs, practice-oriented initiatives should also be carried out. It is recommended a job re-design exercise should be introduced, but a balanced and guided approach driving this exercise is absolutely essential for maximum impact on improving job satisfaction, alleviating burnouts and associated mental health problems amongst workers across a diverse range of sectors.

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<sup>70</sup> Michael T. Brannick M.T., Levine E.L, Morgeson F.P. 2007 Job and Work ANALYSIS: Methods, Research, and Applications for Human Resource Management ("The Future of Job Analysis").

The role of trade unions in liaising with the workplace engagement and in shaping the process of job re-design is crucial. It could lead to positive practices such as job co-design, with a paramount aim of adapting the work and workplace to suit individual people. Importantly, a gender-specific focus when co-designing jobs could remove many of the existing barriers to employment and promotions, which women currently experience. In addition, services and facilities provided in and around a workplace have been historically recognised to increase and promote a healthy workforce, and it is time that work and employment policies refocus on the improvements of work in the most holistic sense. This includes an honest reflection on some of the modern policies that support and encourage working away from physical workplaces, on the one hand, giving workers a choice, on the other hand, perhaps creating (un)intended barriers for workers to access common social support provisions.

## Appendix C: A Case Study: Union-Employer Partnership

### *Introduction*

This short paper brings forward a case of a positive and mutually supportive relationship between an employer and a trade union. The paper aims to highlight the benefits gained from the union engagement in the workplace for individual workers as well as for the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of the employer. This narrated case has been written on the basis of a conversation held with a senior officer of Aegis the Union in September 2015. The case includes some qualitative evidence to capture the positive role of a union in a particular workplace/union branch.

### *Aegis the Union: Aegon Group Partnership*

Aegis the Union, which organises and provides services for members in the financial sector, travelled an interesting journey from being a staff association in Aegon Group to becoming a trade union in its own right. The union has always had a positive relationship with the employer, which further improved with the union's involvement in a people change programme, including redundancies, driven by the impact of the financial crash in 2008. The quote beneath illustrates how this complex process has been remembered:

*“It was just after the financial sector crisis and basically two sets of pressures came on Aegon. One was the pressures from the shareholder and one from the regulator, which resulted in a cost-cutting exercise. They had to reduce the cost base by 25%, which meant the reduction of around 1000 roles. Additionally, there was the closure of the final salary pension scheme and a lot of staff being either transferred or made redundant. .... A lot of painful stuff but we worked well through it and although jobs went - the majority of people were volunteers. It was quite a challenging process, our membership was depending on one employer that was reducing its size and we lost a lot of members at that time.”*

Despite the challenges and difficulties, the union's role of supporting the employee – employer engagement and their involvement in the negotiation of redundancy packages and transfers, appeared to have benefits. It became a good way of building relationships and demonstrating to the employer the benefits of working with the union beyond a collective pay bargaining or individual issues. The focal point was to make the employer see the benefits of union work, which the union hoped could (and in fact, did) lead to the employer's greater investment in terms of providing support, facilities and time-off for activists engaged in union work.

Aegon-branch has a healthy number of activists, with a good gender balance (12 female and 11 male activists). Some of them act as general reps, some take on roles as Health & Safety and Learning Reps. Most commonly a chosen function reflects the particular interests of an individual rep. Some reps focus mainly on collecting and organising casework, others are more active in the areas of new members' recruitment or training and event organisation.

While most unions struggle with activation of their members and recruitment of reps, Aegis get a lot of people interested in being union activists because they see it as an opportunity that can help in progressing their careers in this particular workplace as well as in the wider sector.

***“In other organisations it might not be the same. They [reps] maybe see their involvement as a barrier to progress but here it is something that definitely helps. Actually some reps become reps because they want to be managers in the organisation.”***

For some reps their active engagement in the union is a strategic move towards increasing their chances of becoming a manager. Exposing themselves to prominent issues in the workplace and gaining a valuable set of skills is understood by reps as an advantage (in comparison to their work colleagues) and great career capital.

*“The reps are able to do well at the interviews and they have been exposed to much more than their colleagues, as well as being involved in negotiations with a senior managers, or even just knowing more about the business through exchange with other reps from other sides of business. So the reps find it actually help them to get on and we sell it as that.”*

The union organises a variety of training events for its activists and members - it helps people to develop their skills and grow both professionally and personally. It also give members the opportunity to try new things and ideas, which can equip them with experience and confidence crucial for their day-to-day job and across all possible career trajectories. The quote below clearly demonstrates how valuable a resource union learning is - not only for individuals but for organisations/employers and the whole sector that gains professional leaders able to demonstrate and use their experience, confidence and drive.

*“We used to put together two-days training for them [reps] and a couple of years ago we said: ‘look, we can’t have that this year. We don’t have the time to put it all together’. One of the reps came and said: ‘We can do it!’”. So we said: ‘On you go!’” So three reps formed a team and put together a two-day event. We helped them and it was brilliant! The next year one of these reps came and said: ‘I want to do it again.’ So another two people did it, and again it was brilliant!”*

For a long time unions advocated for the positive effects of learning they provide on the lives and careers of their members as well as the wider collective context. Benefits from training and gained knowledge translate into safer, fairer and better places to work, and unions encourage their active members to promote this message to their non-member colleagues and managers. Due to transferability of gained skills, well-trained union reps often find attractive career progression opportunities within the current workplaces and in the wider employment market. Many do have potential to become fantastic managers. Senior officer from Aegis said:

*“My view is, if you have union-trained future managers that’s great for an organisation. You have somebody that is trained in employment law, who has got experience of putting together training events, who knows the issues affecting people in this area of work and who was trying to help managers resolving these issues in the past. Why wouldn’t you want that in your team?”*

The union’s objective to help developing capabilities, skills, knowledge and personal attributes is not restricted to the members. The union’s positive role in the workplace can also be clearly seen through the ongoing support given to managers and HR department.

Unions step into many situations in which, most commonly, women, and other vulnerable individuals (with disabilities or with other protected characteristics) find themselves in. Often, the problems emerge due to a lack of understanding and for a union it is a case of educating managers and staff.

*“I don’t think it should be automatically assumed that managers should know how to manage in all situations. So you have to feel comfortable and confident to say – ‘actually I’m treating this person differently because this and this and this. Very often we help our members by helping managers.’”*

Aegis is a small and very open union with informal setting. It’s very accessible which allows members to be listened to and consulted almost instantly. Aegis was always sure they want to keep that informality and person-focus because it’s a luxury these days to be able to speak to somebody face to face.

*“When a member who just happened to receive bad news from the employer or had a bad time at work and they’re upset, they really want to speak to somebody who knows what they are talking about right away. “*

The union asserts that it knows its members well, which helps in solving their problems. The union also has a good relationship with the employer and HR department, which strengthen the union's position and benefits members whose problems are often resolved quickly and informally, without lengthy disputes and broken relationships.

### *Conclusion*

This paper showed that the relationship between employers and trade unions does not have to be hostile. The Aegis-Aegon case study exemplifies that solid relationships based upon mutual support and respect benefit individual union members and the organisation. A mutual understanding helps in resolving problems quickly and effectively. In addition, the union engagement in day-to-day-life of the organisation enables it to foresee areas of concern and address it proactively. Lastly, the union's role in upskilling and nurturing of the workforce, is appreciated by the organisation, as important value-adding work.



women's voices  
women and work  
scotland 2016



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