Background

The STUC is Scotland’s trade union centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the trade union movement in Scotland; reflecting the aspirations of trade unionists as workers and citizens.

The STUC represents over 627,000 working people and their families throughout Scotland. It speaks for trade union members in and out of work, in the community and in the workplace. Our affiliated organisations have interests in all sectors of the economy and our representative structures are constructed to take account of the specific views of women members, young members, Black/minority ethnic members, LGBT members, and members with a disability, as well as, retired and unemployed workers.

Fathers and the Workplace – an overview

The questions outlined by the Equal Opportunities Committee focus on individual experience. Whilst case studies from workplaces will be available, at this point the STUC would like to submit some general comments, and would be available for further discussion as the Inquiry develops.

Clearly a significant number of trade union members are fathers with parenting responsibilities, including fathers as single parents and as parents with shared residence of children. For lone parents the workplace can be very important in reducing the isolation that can be experienced at home.

Access to education, training, the labour market, and supporting parents in remaining in employment are central to the collective bargaining agenda, and workplace agreements can play a crucial role in supporting parents, including single fathers and fathers with shared residence of children.

Policies long supported by the STUC, such as the extension of the provision of universal childcare, free at the point of delivery, will greatly increase the opportunities for financial security and employment amongst fathers. The STUC welcomed the recommendations on childcare provision from the Equal Opportunities Committee following its Women and Work Inquiry, and will be following the implementation of the Children and Young People’s (Scotland) Bill, as now agreed by Parliament. There are opportunities for local authorities, in consulting with parents about the anticipated need for childcare in their areas, including the provision of the option of compressed hours for the 600 hours of childcare to which many children will now be entitled, to structure the consultation in a way which takes cognisance of any particular concerns raised by fathers.

The Inquiry questions include seeking evidence with regard to particular challenges, for example with finance. With evidence available which shows a number of the financial difficulties faced by single parent households in general, support in
remaining in employment or in adjusting to new care responsibilities can be provided through the involvement of workplace reps and the relevant trade union. Specific reference can be made here to the role of Union Learning Reps, and the work supported through Scottish Union Learning, including the Everyday Skills programmes, which have demonstrated effective support for parents in the workplace, including single fathers or fathers with shared residence.

The Women’s Employment Summit hosted jointly by the STUC and Scottish Government in September 2012 included in the recommendations from delegates a call for childcare policies, parental leave, and flexible working agreements, to take account of the needs of all parents, thereby including fathers. Clearly where shared residence arrangements are in place, there are a number of services and policies which both parents will be accessing for their children, including education, health, and childcare, and linking the needs of the whole family to retaining employment opportunities is important.

Developing effective flexible working policies and guidance for employers, including a more positive approach to part time work in good quality jobs, would benefit all parents and adults with caring responsibilities, and this may be an area of policy development to which further consideration can be given as the individual experiences of single fathers and fathers with shared residence arrangements are discussed by the Equal Opportunities Committee.

The STUC looks forward to following the progress of this Committee Inquiry, and can seek further information from our affiliated trade unions and workplace representatives in due course.

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The STUC
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