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Siobhian Brown, MSP
Convener
Covid 19 Recovery Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Our ref:
26 January 2023

Dear Convener,

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ACTION ON MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

Further to my attendance at the Committee on 8 December, I am writing to follow up on the request made for further information on the work underway across Government to address the impact of the menopause in taking women out of the workplace and the support available for those affected.

Our approach to addressing issues around menopause in the workplace, and women's health more broadly, is built on collaboration, engagement and using our wider powers and strategic influence to ensure that, going forward, women are no longer disadvantaged due to their gender and are supported fully in the workplace. Women must be provided with consistent information and care when they seek help with menopause symptoms – however they access this support.

MENOPAUSE AND FAIR WORK

Addressing the inequalities experienced by those experiencing menopause at work is an integral part of realising our ambition to become a leading Fair Work nation by 2025, where everyone has the same opportunity to enter, sustain and thrive in employment. These benefits are also felt throughout the economy more widely, as economies that have higher wellbeing also have stronger productivity growth. It has long been advocated that tackling inequality supports economic growth, and good businesses recognise that well-paid and respected workers are more productive.

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The following Fair Work activity forms part of the refreshed [Fair Work Action Plan](#), which I am pleased to say was published last month. This refresh brings together the aims and actions from our original Fair Work, Gender Pay Gap and Disabled People's Employment action plans, along with the actions from our new [anti racist employment strategy](#); and embeds an intersectional and interconnected approach to drive forward Fair Work.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

Women who contributed to the Women's Health Plan, mentioned below, said that what they wanted most from employers was flexibility to manage their own symptoms – such as being able to work from home or change their hours if needed.

Although the legal powers governing flexible working are currently reserved to Westminster, we are committed to working with employers directly and through their representative bodies to explore ways of promoting and encouraging flexible, agile and inclusive workplaces that benefit all employees.

Since 2021, we have funded flexible working experts Flexibility Works to support and promote the adoption of flexible working practices to employing organisations across Scotland. We are currently providing £222,000 in 2022/23 to enable them to continue this work. Since 2019 we have also provided funding of £350,588 to Timewise to deliver 'A Fair, Flexible Work Programme for Scotland' which focused on training a network of 70 Change Agents, both employment professionals and employability advisers on how to promote flexible working to employers and individuals. This network is continuing to be supported this year by Flexibility Works as part of their workplan.

Our landmark Fair Work First approach to public sector spend includes key criteria to support women in the workplace such as asking employers to take action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace and since October 2021 to offer flexible working from day one of employment, a measure that the UK Government have recently agreed to introduce into legislation.

WOMEN RETURNERS PROGRAMME

Recognising the continued barriers that women face, particularly those who have taken career breaks due to caring or health commitments, we are taking forward our 2018/19 Programme for Government commitment to support up to 2,000 women with their transition back to work following a career gap.

Our Women Returners funding has helped over 1,600 women since 2020 with their transition back into the workplace offering training, skills and peer support at a time and pace that best suits their needs. Eleven projects are receiving funding in 2022/23 to support women, especially those who experience multiple barriers to employment such as disabled women, women from racialised minorities and those experiencing the menopause.

The 'Return with Resilience' project run by The People Portfolio specifically supports women experiencing menopause and offers participants employability support and access to a variety of skills sessions such as 'managing menopause', digital skills, 'Resilience and Change' and opens them up to peer support and networking opportunities.

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WORKPLACE EQUALITY FUND

Our Workplace Equality Fund is a further intervention aiming to remove labour market barriers, including those for women transitioning through the menopause, and reduce labour market inequality by working with employers to improve their workplace policies and procedures by exercising fair work and developing best practice. We are currently supporting 13 projects with over £750,000 worth of funding in year one of the fund. Four of these projects are specifically supporting women and the over 50s workforce.

In particular, the Cornerstone's Menopause Awareness Project focusses directly on addressing issues around menopause in the workplace. Cornerstone is one of Scotland's largest and most innovative social care providers, employing almost 2000 staff, of which 1500 are women.

Cornerstone are working alongside The People Portfolio, a company with extensive specialist experience in menopause initiatives as noted above. Cornerstone's project aims to raise awareness on the menopause; reduce associated challenges and barriers; increase support; and improve the recruitment and retention of women between the ages of 45 and 55. Further information can be found on [Project Spotlight - Equalityadvice.scot](https://www.equalityadvice.scot/project-spotlight)

WOMEN'S HEALTH PLAN

Menopause care and support is a top priority in our Women's Health Plan, which was published on 20 August 2021.

The Women's Health Plan underpins actions to address women's health inequalities by raising awareness around women's health, improving access to health care for women across their life course and reducing inequalities in health outcomes for girls and women, both for sex-specific conditions and in women's general health.

There are 10 actions specific to menopause for the short, medium and longer term that we will be driving forward so we can make a real difference to women's experience of menopause, including timely access to menopause care and support.

Through the Plan we have been improving access to information on menopause by creating a [menopause resource](#) which launched on our Women's Health Platform on NHS Inform in October 2021. The platform includes accessible information to help women feel more informed and confident about the menopause and aims to bust menopause myths. It also includes information specifically on menopause and the workplace, for those experiencing the menopause, line managers and employers.

We have also worked with our partners at the Health and Social Care Alliance to provide additional information to women on menopause through a series of webinars. This includes one on menopause support in the workplace for women, and another webinar delivered by the organisation Close the Gap which was specifically for employers on creating a menopause-aware workplace. The recordings for these webinars can be found online here:

- [Menopause and the workplace - Webinar - YouTube](#)
- [Menopause and the Workplace - What can you do as an employer? - YouTube](#)

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Following the webinars the Health and Social Care Alliance and Close the Gap produced accompanying resource packs on menopause on the workplace. These two resources launched in October for World Menopause Day and can be found online here:

- <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/news/menopause-and-the-workplace-resource-pack/>
- <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Creating-a-menopause-aware-workplace.pdf>

Within the Women's Health Plan we have also committed to develop a menopause and menstrual health workplace policy for NHS Scotland, as an example of best practice and to promote equivalent efforts across the public, private and third sector.

An expert Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy Working Group has been established to progress this action. They have conducted research to better understand staff experience of menstrual health and menopause in the workplace. This includes a survey that researchers from Glasgow University developed for staff in NHS Scotland. The survey launched on World Menopause Day 2022 and received over 7,000 responses. The results are currently being analysed which will help to inform the development of the workplace policy.

In addition, The ALLIANCE has agreed to conduct focus group research within the NHS which will add to the evidence base used to develop the policy, later in 2023. The intention is that the policy will act as an example of good practice that can be adapted for other sectors.

Lastly, we recognise that our efforts to address menopause inequality for women across workplaces in Scotland must be felt equally by women working in the Scottish Government itself. That is why our own internal Menopause guidance, published in January 2021, offers guidance and advice to employees, including managers, who can play an important role in supporting women living and working with the menopause. The guidance sets out our ambitions as a menopause friendly employer; informs managers and colleagues about the symptoms and impacts of menopause to ensure there is good quality and consistent support for employees experiencing menopause symptoms in the workplace; and signposts relevant sources of information and support for colleagues and managers.

I hope the Committee finds this a helpful overview.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Lochhead

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