

Cross Party Group on Women in Enterprise Meeting, 15.11.2016

Gillian Martin MSP: Opening Remarks

We all speak with one voice to support Women's Enterprise Scotland and highlight the work that needs to be done. We are already making a difference and drawing attention to this important issue. Women's engagement in business will be a win for Scotland, and for the world of work and business. I like what my colleague Ivan McKee said about women in business being contagious, and I hope that tonight will encourage and inspire more women to look into starting businesses.

We will have ambassadors from Women's Enterprise Scotland speak as well as women have just completed the WES Military Wives Start-Up programme.

Jeanette Forbes

Jeanette presented a number of points that are important for the CPG to consider:

1. We need to get young people involved in business.
2. We need gender specific support for businesses and women's support networks.
3. We need access to finance.
4. We need to tackle inequality and unequal treatment in the workplace.

Particularly after the economic downturn, it's important to support women in business and it's incredibly difficult for young people and women to make a go of it.

Fiona Turnbull

Fiona presented her experiences in rural businesses and farming. She emphasized that women can and have always added profitability to farming and have been able to develop new ways to bring money to farms. For example, Fiona noted the work of Caroline Miller and the Hideaway Experience. However, women's roles in farming and rural enterprise are still undervalued with very few women on boards. She encouraged the CPG to take into account rural enterprise as one of its areas of focus.

Liz Dodd

Liz took part in the military wives start up programme and developed a company—Little Red Hen Crafts. She noted that it is difficult for military wives to stay in employment due to the regular house moves that are required. In this way, a start-up business allows women to take their jobs with them, especially if that business is mobile/digital. Liz's arts and crafts business is now launched and the WES programme provided business knowledge and achievable targets. A key point that allowed the programme to be successful was the provision of childcare.

Parresa Meikle

Parresa noted that military life can be difficult due to the regular moves, making it hard for women to build a support network of friends and also living at a distance from family. The start-up programme provided a network of support, both from the WES trainers and from other women taking part. The online support community provided remains hugely helpful. Parresa started a photography business as a result of the start-up programme.

Jennifer Lindsay-Finan, WES Communication and Training Manager

Jennifer was the trainer and read a statement from Eugenie Price, a participant who couldn't attend the CPG due to child care issues. Eugenie emphasized the importance of social

media engagement with other women in the programme and of using digital skills to support start-up businesses. She noted that women coming together can inspire confidence and courage to begin businesses.

Questions and Comments from Attendants

- What do women need now?

There should be continued online support and mentoring for women in the start-up programme to continue the positive trajectory. Peer support is very important. There should also be a focus on spreading the start-up programme to different constituencies: rural, young, and migrant women are priorities.

- Areas of multiple deprivation

In areas of multiple-deprivation, women's businesses allow them to work while fulfilling childcare responsibilities. Current programmes and agencies that support businesses may seem intimidating to women from these areas. These small start up businesses help not only the women who start them but the communities within which they are based, and there may be more scope for women to get active by using the Community Empowerment Bill.

- The role of mentoring

Mentoring and sponsorship are different and it's important for women to advocate for each other behind closed doors as well as to support one another. Mentoring can combat the loneliness of being an entrepreneur. It can also help with some of the tricky parts of starting one's own business, such as the digital part of the business.

RBS has a programme for its women business advisers and this includes support to mentor women interested in starting up businesses.

Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Employability and Training

The Minister emphasized that encouraging entrepreneurship is an ambition of the Scottish Government and that businesses that are engaged in this agenda should play a clear and central role to developing Government policy. Earlier in the day, the Minister announced £200,000 funding for projects to support more women into business and tackle the gender gap. He noted that this is just a small pot of money, but that the Government will also continue to try to connect women with angel investors and other sources of funding for their businesses.

Laura Galloway, Professor in Business at Heriot Watt University

While latent potential and economic activation were unlocked by WES's military start-up programme, there remain structural problems. How will you address these?

Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Employability and Training

Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Keith Brown is working to support those transitioning out of the military to get into education and employment and is also doing work with military spouses.

The Minister is undertaking a skills agency review, and the points made at the CPG and in the member's debate on women's enterprise will be fed into this review. There are also gender norms that need to be addressed earlier on in life by challenging the idea that women need to do the most of childcare and domestic work. Childcare is a major barrier for women entering the labour market.

The Government has also challenged Skills Development Scotland to come up with an Equalities Action Plan which will rectify imbalances in terms of male/female participation in different industries and to encourage inclusion of minorities and disabled people into the workforce. While some progress has been made with Modern Apprenticeships, this can still be improved.

Jackie Bailie MSP

Jackie Bailie challenged the Minister on the areas being included in the Enterprise Agency review, in particular noting the exclusion of Business Gateway and suggesting that the way in which data was collected needs to be improved.

One of the WES ambassadors (Lynn Mann, Supernature Oils) noted their own experience with Business Gateway had been negative, in particular once the service had moved into local authority management.

Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Employability and Training

Keith Brown has emphasized that data and information will be included in the review. In terms of Business Gateway, we hope that this isn't a routine experience but the aspiration would be that hiring of appropriate and skilled staff could be improved. Evidence should be provided to the Scottish Government to allow administration to improve.

Susan Harkins, Principal Officer - Business Gateway

The Business Gateway environment can be male dominated so they've set up a Women in Business network. They will seek to bring these women along to the CPG when appropriate, and agree with the need for mentoring programmes with gender taken into account. They will be providing diversity training to BG advisors in partnership with WES.

Gillian Martin MSP: Closing Meeting

The meeting has been really positive and has allowed us to see the challenges to women's engagement in business while also hearing from those who have been successful.

Next meeting: 28 February, 6-8 PM.

Attendees (with CPG members in bold):

From Women's Enterprise Scotland (WES):

Anne Meikle

Lynne Cadenhead

Carolyn Currie

Jennifer Lyndsay-Finan

Gaynor Simpson

WES Ambassadors:

Lynn Mann

Sylvia Douglas

Margaret Ann Craig

Jeanette Forbes

Suzanne Doyle-Morris

Shelagh Swanson
Michelle Smith
Fiona Turnbull
Bharti Rajput

MSPs

Gillian Martin
Jackie Baillie
Christine Grahame
Alison Harris
Kezia Dugdale
Jamie Hepburn
Kevin Stewart

Other attendees

Laura Galloway – Heriot Watt University
Yvonne Greaves – RBS
Susan Harkins – Business Gateway
Laura McKelvie – Federation of Small Businesses
Wendy Maltman – Association of Scottish Business Women
Elaine Morrison – Scottish Enterprise

From the Start Up with WES programme -

Liz Dadd
Parresa Meikle

APOLOGIES

Clare Haughey MSP; Ivan McKee MSP; Johann Lamont MSP; Graeme Roy, Fraser of Allander Institute; Angus MacDonald MSP; Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP;
Louise Macdonald, HIE.