Dear Ms McFaul,

Gender pay gap inquiry

The Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee is carrying out an inquiry into the gender pay gap. We have heard evidence from a range of organisations from the public and private sector and visited some relevant businesses and projects. More information about the inquiry can be found at the following link:


An emerging theme in the inquiry has been the role of the education system in informing the career path of both women and men and within that, the role of the careers service.

Statistically, although in Scotland currently there is an overall balance in take-up by women and men of college places, there is a gender imbalance in apprenticeship numbers towards men and a gender imbalance in university student numbers towards women. Within each of these there are wide variations within particular subjects or sectors in terms of gender balance.

In evidence to the Committee, by way of example, Close the Gap suggested that “gender norms and stereotyping about girls’ and boys’ interests and capabilities result in their eventually studying different subjects at school, in further and higher education and in modern apprenticeships.” Aberdeenshire Council said that it is important that schools do not sustain perceptions that gender influences ability in certain subjects.
On the evidence received by the Committee, it would appear that there is a role for schools, parents and further education organisations to play in encouraging pupils to consider and pursue a wider range of subjects and careers, particularly those in which there are marked gender imbalances.

The Committee agreed that I should write to Education Scotland to seek further information on these issues, specifically:

- The Committee has heard evidence about the role of education in dealing with the gender pay gap, for example, around STEM. Could Education Scotland update the Committee on any steps being taken to encourage a gender spread in subject choice, both in STEM and other subjects, and in choice of the type of post-secondary training or education undertaken, whether in higher education, college or via apprenticeships? What systems are in place to ensure that primary school teachers’ skills in STEM are kept up to date?

- The Committee has heard evidence of the importance of early years, primary and high school in influencing the gender pay gap. Witnesses have spoken about the impact of nursery, schools and teachers on career choices and perceived gender stereotyping. Could Education Scotland tell the Committee what steps are being taken to ensure that teaching staff provide equality of information about and availability of career opportunities to all pupils? Is any training given to assist staff in tackling this?

These are important questions for the Committee to consider in reaching conclusions for its final report on the gender pay gap. Your input at this stage would be greatly appreciated. If you could respond to me by 25 May, that would be helpful.

Kind regards

Gordon Lindhurst MSP
Convener