Dear Ruth,

Response to evidence provided at the Equalities and Human Rights Committee on 26 September 2019

I hope that this letter finds you well. As you will be aware, Engender submitted evidence to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee in respect of its pre-budget scrutiny. There has clearly been a significant, and welcome, amount of interest this year’s process, and the Committee has received a wide range of oral and written evidence in and around its pre-Budget scrutiny sessions. I am writing to provide correction to some specific misapprehensions about Engender’s work that was given in evidence to the Committee on 26 September 2019 and to reiterate a point about funding that we made in our written evidence.

Engender’s work
At the Committee meeting, Susan Smith, speaking for ForWomen.Scot said that “Two years ago, Engender’s report still talked about collecting data on the basis of sex and about the importance of sex as an analytical tool for measuring discrimination. That seems to have changed just in the past year or so. Nobody is sure how it happened.”

Although her oral evidence was not completely clear on this point, Ms Smith appears to be drawing adverse inference from the Directors’ Report in Engender’s annual accounts.
for 2017-18. In this, a narrative paragraph that introduced our Mission, which for the previous two years had described gathering “separate data on men and women”, was replaced with a paragraph noting that it was our 25th anniversary, for that particular year only. This does not represent a change to our Mission, our constitutional documents, or a downgrading of our focus on data.

As those who are familiar with our work will know, Engender has been a keen advocate for gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data (commonly referred to as gender-disaggregated data) during the entirety of our quarter-century of operations. Our written evidence to the Committee included precisely this point. For the avoidance of doubt, this remains a critical concern to our organisation.

Ms Smith additionally claimed that “Engender no longer says that it is a sex-based organisation; it says that it is a gender-based organisation”. This is untrue. Engender has a number of formulations that it uses to summarise and explain its work and analytical perspective, but in none of them do we claim to be a ‘gender-based organisation’. We are more than happy to confirm that we are feminist policy advocacy organisation, working around women’s equality and rights.

**Scottish Government funding**

The SPICe summary of written evidence that was produced in advance of the Committee session on 26 September gave significant prominence to erroneous claims that Scottish Government imposes conditions of grant on women’s equality and rights organisations through grants which prevent lobbying and policy advocacy contrary to the Government’s own policy position.

Although the individual pieces of written evidence were not published on the Committee’s website in advance of the session, the SPICe summary seems to have considered these baseless assertions credible because they were repeated by multiple newly-formed and online groups. We wish to emphasise, as we did in our evidence, that Scottish Government imposes no such conditions on the national women’s organisations that it funds, including Engender. We are entirely free to speak as ‘critical friends’ to Scottish Government as it formulates policy, choosing strategically how to raise our concerns and across multiple forums.

This is an important point in respect of our pan-UK advocacy work in consortium with other women’s organisations, because UK Government does impose conditions of grant that prevent women’s organisations from lobbying UK Government and criticising its policymaking. We find it helpful to contrast the funding practices of Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government in criticising this approach, both to UK Government directly but also to various UN Committees with which we engage on women’s rights.

In our evidence, we described the way in which Scottish Government top line policy priorities around gender equality and women’s human rights are not adequately reflected
in the Budget. We also proposed outlined the case for integrating gender budget analysis into the Scottish Budget process to ensure that public expenditure and revenue raising meets the needs of women and men in Scotland. We recommended that the Committee focus on two key issues during its Budget scrutiny:

1. How the 2020-21 Budget can more adequately reflect Scottish Government’s specific commitments to women’s equality and rights; and
2. How future Budget processes can build Scottish Government’s capacity to integrate gender budget analysis.

I hope this information is helpful, and would be very happy to clarify any additional points that may be of assistance to the Committee as it proceeds with its pre-Budget scrutiny.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Ritch
Executive Director