The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 9 May 2013

Session 4

Thursday 9 May 2013

CONTENTS

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
15th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
*Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Lynsey Calderwood (One Parent Families Scotland)
Patricia Cleghorn (Orchid International)
James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)
Debbie Duncan
Claire Falconer
Carol Fox (Fox and Partners)
Jacqueline Hogg
Kassandra Hughes
Allison Johnstone
Lynn McLachlan (Royal Bank of Scotland)
Tanveer Parnez (BEMIS (Scotland))
Dr Caroline Wallace (Society of Biology and University of Edinburgh)
Professor Lesley Yellowlees (Royal Society of Chemistry and University of Edinburgh)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 9 May 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Mary Fee): Good morning and welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee's 15th meeting in 2013. I remind everyone to either set their electronic devices to flight mode or switch them off.

The first agenda item is a decision on taking business in private. Does the committee agree to take in private item 2, on scrutiny of the draft budget 2014-15?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We move into private session.

09:15

Meeting continued in private.

09:28

Meeting continued in public.

Public Petitions

Magazines and Newspapers (Display of Sexually Graphic Material) (PE1169)

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is consideration of two petitions, the first of which is PE1169, on sexually graphic magazine covers. Paper 2 gives us an update on the petition's situation. The recommendations in paragraph 5 are that we can either close the petition on the basis that the matter has been reviewed at United Kingdom Government level, inform the petitioner and give them copies of correspondence, or that we can take any other course of action. What would members like to do with the petition?

I am content to close the petition, given that it has been reviewed at UK Government level, but I am happy to take members' views.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I am inclined to agree, but the fact that the petition has been reviewed at Government level does not necessarily mean that it will be addressed as we would wish. The subject of the petition is one that often takes us into the area of censorship, which is complicated and gives us a lot more to consider. However, I think that what the petition proposes is a very simple and practical measure, which I suspect is already good practice; it does not happen generally, but we should be pushing for that. I am content to close the petition on the basis that the matter is being reviewed nationally, but I would wish to keep a watching brief on it to ensure that something else can be done if progress is not made in that direction.

The Convener: We could certainly keep a watching brief on it after closing it.

09:30

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I have a similar concern to Alex Johnstone's. The set of voluntary guidelines on the issue is an improvement on the previous situation, but it might fail to deliver the change that we want and might not satisfy the petitioner. If the guidelines are not adhered to, the petitioner might have the right to submit a different petition based on that. However, that might put the petitioner in a difficult position and it might not be the best way of addressing concerns about the matter, which will remain outstanding until the guidelines take effect.

Perhaps, instead of closing the petition, we could refer it back to the Public Petitions Committee or take a similar action. I feel that the

issue is not quite resolved. It has almost been resolved, because there has been a noticeable improvement, but I would not say that the issue is entirely finished. I have a great deal of sympathy with the petition's aims.

Mary Fee: Are there any other views from around the table? No? Do we wish to refer the petition back to the Public Petitions Committee?

Alex Johnstone: It can keep a watching brief on the issue.

Marco Biagi: Can we enter into correspondence with the petitioner again?

The Convener: We can ask the Public Petitions Committee to do that, and the petitioner can keep a watching brief on the issue as well. Do we agree to do as suggested?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Access to Justice (Environment) (PE1372)

The Convener: The next petition is PE1372, on access to justice in environmental matters. Again, we have an update in the form of a letter from Friends of the Earth Scotland. Paragraph 5 of the briefing paper indicates that we can revisit the petition when further updates are received from Friends of the Earth in late 2013 and early 2014, or we can take any other course of action that we see fit. Given that we have on-going correspondence with Friends of the Earth on the matter, I favour taking the first action suggested. However, I am happy to take members' views.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): It has been some time since the petition first came to the committee. Undoubtedly, the justice system, including civil justice, faces considerable financial demands. I understand and share Friends of the Earth's frustration about certain justice matters. There are a number of overlapping issues, so I think that it is important that we keep the petition live, not least because of the factors that are highlighted in the letter from Friends of the Earth.

The Convener: We will revisit the petition when further updates are available, and we can keep in contact with Friends of the Earth.

Marco Biagi: Why did the petition come to the Equal Opportunities Committee? The issue is one of access to justice, but it seems be about broad access to justice rather than one that interacts with any of the protected characteristics. I would have thought that the petition would be for the Justice Committee.

Douglas Thornton (Clerk): The petition does not relate to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, but the Scotland Act 1998 gives the Equal Opportunities Committee a role in looking at discrimination on the basis of social background. The petition comes within the remit of this committee under that criterion.

The Convener: The petition is really about a financial aspect, because people without access to sufficient finance are disadvantaged when trying to go to court on environmental issues. Are we happy to do what has been suggested?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you.

09:34

Meeting suspended.

09:47

On resuming—

Women and Work

The Convener: Good morning, everyone. I welcome our witnesses, who have just joined us, and the observers in the gallery. I remind everyone to switch their mobile phones to flight mode or to switch them off completely, as they interfere with the broadcasting equipment.

Agenda item 4 is an evidence session on women and work. I will make some introductions. At the table, we have our clerking and research team, together with the official reporters. Around the room, we are supported by broadcasting services and the security office. My name is Mary Fee and I am the committee's convener. I invite members and witnesses to introduce themselves in turn, starting on my right. When witnesses introduce themselves, it would be helpful if they could give a brief explanation of their situation, as that might help members in directing their questions.

Debbie Duncan: Hello, everyone. I was previously a volunteer for Fife Gingerbread and was involved in the evidence, participation, change—EPiC—research project with the Poverty Alliance, in which we looked at surviving lone parenthood and the effects of poverty. I am currently employed as a teen parent project worker with Fife Gingerbread.

Allison Johnstone: Hi. I wrote to the committee as an individual in February last year to raise the issue of the lack of availability of quality part-time work in the labour market. I wear another hat, in that I am employed by the Scottish resource centre for women in science, engineering and technology. We work to increase women's participation in those sectors, in which they are underrepresented.

John Finnie: Good morning. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

Jacqueline Hogg: I am a mother who is returning to work. I have been looking for a job for the last two years. Having had a break, I am finding the process of returning to the private sector, from getting an interview to getting back into work, quite challenging.

Alex Johnstone: I am a member for North East Scotland.

Lynn McLachlan (Royal Bank of Scotland): I am the director of business banking in Glasgow for the Royal Bank of Scotland. I look after 5,000 small and medium-sized enterprises, with a team of 16.

Claire Falconer: I am a volunteer with Fife Gingerbread. I took part with Debbie Duncan on the EPiC project on surviving lone parenthood and the effects of poverty. I am here today mainly to gather more evidence on the barriers faced by people seeking employment, especially those who are lone parents.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am an MSP for Central Scotland.

Tanveer Parnez (BEMIS (Scotland)): I am from BEMIS (Scotland). I will speak on the race equality agenda and on the barriers to women coming into employment.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston.

Dr Caroline Wallace (Society of Biology and University of Edinburgh): I work full time in two part-time positions—I am wearing lots of hats today. I am the science policy adviser at the Society of Biology. In that role, I produce the "Tapping all our Talents" report for the Royal Society of Edinburgh on women and science. I also work at the University of Edinburgh, supporting its scientific schools and achieving Athena SWAN—the scientific women's academic network—accreditation for good practice in progressing academic women in science.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Cathcart.

Professor Lesley Yellowlees (Royal Society of Chemistry and University of Edinburgh): I also wear two hats today. I am the president of the Royal Society of Chemistry. I am the first woman to hold that position in the society's 171-year history. I am also vice-principal and head of the college of science and engineering at the University of Edinburgh and have worked unceasingly since I took up that position to try to introduce, and force people to look at, projects such as Athena SWAN in all my schools.

Carol Fox (Fox and Partners): I am a lawyer from Fox and Partners in Edinburgh. For the past five years, I have dedicated my time to fighting mass equal pay cases against councils throughout Scotland. I am here on behalf of the 12,500 women whom we represent, but particularly on behalf of the 68 women who have died while waiting for their equal pay case to be resolved. I especially want to ask the MSPs from the west of Scotland to take less evidence and more action in relation to resolving those cases, because taxpayers' money is being used to defend the indefensible, and the cases have been running for eight years.

Marco Biagi: I am the MSP for Edinburgh Central and the committee's deputy convener.

Patricia Cleghorn (Orchid International): I am principal and founder of Orchid International. We run very focused personal development courses, helping businesses to create success. We work globally and also with small, one-woman bands, if you like, so we are very aware of current issues. I also work quite a bit in the public sector with social workers, lecturers and teachers and the young people who are in their charge. We have a particular stream of "Flourish" courses for women. We consider that it is very necessary to do everything possible to help women flourish, because we see evidence that when women flourish, everybody flourishes. That is what I am gearing towards today.

The Convener: Thank you. Members have a number of questions for our witnesses. If you would like to answer a question, please indicate that and we will take a note of your name. We will ensure that everyone is included in the discussion.

John Finnie will start, with questions about skill shortages and demographics. John Mason, who has questions on self-employment and part-time working, will be next.

John Finnie: In the evidence that Allison Johnstone submitted there is a reference to demographic changes and how they will prompt the need for greater flexibility. You also touch on skills shortages and downgrading. Can you expand on that and perhaps open up some areas of discussion?

Allison Johnstone: Sure. When I wrote to the committee, I wanted to highlight the lack of quality part-time jobs and flexibility, both of which I see as different with regard to employment. Although a lot of this discussion focuses—rightly, I think—on women and childcare, I think that as we move forward that will be seen as only one part of the issue. Given the ageing population, the caring responsibilities that both men and women will face will change; indeed, I believe that one of the submissions refers to sandwich care, which means looking after children and young people as well as elderly people. The changing demographic will increase the amount of caring that will need to be done and the number of people involved in it.

My submission also mentions skills shortages. With my Scottish resource centre for women in science, engineering and technology hat on, I note that when the sector skills council for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies—or SEMTA—looked at the demographics of its workforce, it found that much of it was made up of men in their 50s and 60s and that the pipeline of people coming through to continually fill the skills gap was simply not there.

Both issues present challenges for employers in how they structure the workplace. Do they continue to operate in the same, quite rigid way or do they look at all the talent that is out there and ask how they might adapt their approach to the workplace in order to attract women, ethnic minorities and all those who are not fully embraced in the workplace?

Jacqueline Hogg might be able to expand on this point, but from my perspective—this is the reason why I wrote about quality part-time work in my submission—I think that as far as returning women are concerned, a wealth of talent out there is not being utilised fully just because people do not properly fit into various tick boxes or meet the right criteria such as the ability to work 9 to 5 and because, according to employers, they are simply not ready.

Patricia Cleghorn: Quality part-time work is as essential to the Scottish economy as it is to women; after all, businesses get far better value from part-time skilled and managerial workers.

Allison Johnstone referred to elder care; I note that that issue is not on the agenda, but it really needs to be. The proportion of women who statistically and experientially are the carers not just for children but for the elderly and those who are sick or need help is a key issue and does not seem to have been structured into any plans.

John Finnie: Thank you for that.

Dr Wallace, I note that under the heading "Lost talent" in the summary section of the report that you submitted, you say that although such lost talent

"represents a loss of opportunity to individuals, it also represents a major, quantifiable loss to the economy and society. It is estimated that a doubling of women's high-level skill contribution to the economy would be worth as much as £170 million per annum to Scotland's national income. It is an economic loss that Scotland can ill afford".

Can you say a bit more about that?

Dr Wallace: When we were preparing the "Tapping all our Talents" report, we commissioned Professor Ailsa McKay at the University of Glasgow to estimate the cost of lost talent to the Scottish economy not just in science but in all areas of the workforce. Although £170 million might not seem a lot when we are used to talking about billions of pounds, the figure is incredibly significant for our struggling economy.

The women in question are not able to return to work because of a lack of support, or are working part-time because that is what employers automatically think of when they think about flexible working. However that is not what flexible working is; I am very lucky in that I work full time and flexibly, but when women ask for flexible working they come up against problems and end up being forced into part-time positions. Of course,

lots of women want to work part time but that is still a loss.

The energy sector faces the problem that Allison Johnstone identified. A couple of years ago, Scottish Power said that 80 per cent of its staff were due to retire within the next 20 years. There are women out there who can do the work. We have a huge engineering department at the University of Edinburgh, which has a significant number of women, but people are being lost at every stage.

10:00

John Finnie: Is a growing sum of money being lost?

Dr Wallace: I do not know the details of that.

Allison Johnstone: John Finnie asked about downgrading, and I did not respond to his question. There is often downgrading when women move from full-time to part-time work, because of the lack of availability of part-time jobs. Research by Women Like Us for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that only 3 per cent of jobs in the advertised job market were part time and offered a salary of more than £20,000 full-time equivalent. That is a tiny proportion.

A woman who is looking to go into part-time work faces stark choices. Either she stays full time, to maintain her skills, or she opts for the flexibility of part-time status but downgrades her employment and works below her level of qualifications and experience.

In a report that the Government equalities office in London commissioned, it was suggested that some 35 to 41 per cent of women who move into part-time work downgrade when they move to a different employer. Even if they stay with the same employer, some eight to 18 per cent downgrade when they go part time. Even women who have a history of employment with their employer are forced to make a choice between working part time and maintaining the level of skills and qualifications at which they are able to operate.

That adds to the loss that Caroline Wallace talked about. It is a vicious circle. There are many points at which women's talents are being lost in the move towards flexibility and part-time work.

Professor Yellowlees: I did not want to concentrate on part-time work. For me, one of the most interesting statistics in the "Tapping all our Talents" report is that only 27 per cent of women who take degrees in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—subjects stay in that subject area and use their skill set. The country needs to address the loss of 73 per cent of the skill set, because that is too great a loss. Given that we know that we have a skills shortage, and given the demographics, why are we not trying to find out how to keep this huge body of people who have the skill sets that we need using those skill sets, for the benefit of us all in Scotland?

I think that about 52 per cent of men who have studied a STEM subject stay in their area, so about 48 per cent of them leave, which is a problem. However, there is a stark difference between the percentage of women who stay in the STEM sector and the percentage of women who leave.

Dr Wallace: Allison Johnstone talked a bit about the difference between flexible and part-time working. I am wearing both my hats when I say that I meet a lot of women in science. Many say that because they feel that they cannot work flexibly, they will take part-time positions but work full time. They will be at work for more hours than they are contracted to work, because they feel guilty about working flexibly. They want to be able to pick up their children from school, so they say that they are working part time, when actually they are working far more hours. That is incredibly common, and I am sure that it does not apply just to women in science.

Jacqueline Hogg: I want to add my voice to the discussion, as someone who has tried to get back into work. I have a masters in multimedia technology and I have 16 years' experience of work on software development. I was made redundant from my previous position and decided to take a few years out. Then the stock market crash and everything else came along.

I have been trying to get back into employment for the past two years. I do not want to take a secretarial job, because I do not think that that would be good for me, and I do not think that it would be good for the Scottish economy. I have paid for my masters and I want to use it. I like working with technology and I like being in that area, so my challenge is to find a position there. It is very difficult to do that.

I go through the recruitment process, and I can match all the criteria, but I might not have a PRINCE2—projects in controlled environments—qualification or an Agile qualification, for instance, because they involve new methodologies and work techniques that have come out since I was last in the workplace. However, I understand all those principles and how to work to them, and I understand more than that. I will still know more than a graduate or somebody who has done those qualifications, but I cannot specifically say on my CV—I do not want to lie—that I have those qualifications. It is necessary to be constructive in how to word that. I have noticed that I am now getting picked up for a couple of jobs, as I can now

say that I can do the techniques—but without saying that I have the qualifications in them.

The question is how I get from sending my CV out to an employment agency to being picked up by an employer. CVs that have breaks of as short as 12 to 18 months might get sifted out. I have had a break of almost seven years in any real work since my last professional employment. That puts me at a disadvantage, and I might not get picked up because of that.

A job description might say that somebody is sought who is currently doing a certain job. That is not going to be me. How do I move forward? How do I get myself on to the books of employers? Employers seem to tell everybody that they are willing to take back women who are returning to work. They want to do that—they want our skills. However, the recruitment process means that we do not get through.

Sometimes the agencies take our CVs and they will say that they have some people coming back into employment. However, the employer might say, "On this occasion, we're looking for somebody who is actually doing the job already." How do you stop that? How do you encourage employers—I am primarily talking about the private sector—to see us returners as attractive people to have in the workplace? Perhaps we should be applying something along the lines of the incentive to employ young people to women returners, too. That might make us more attractive in the workplace.

I do not want to have to change my CV, although that is what I may have to consider, as I am now coming up to my one formal year of claiming income support and jobseekers allowance. I am not quite sure of the changes, but I think that there will be changes for people still claiming after a year, and I could be forced to look for other work. I could be forced to start looking for a secretarial position, which means that I have to downgrade everything on my CV.

I am not looking for part-time work. It does not exist in my industry, so I am not even looking for it. I am looking to go back full time, and I want to work. I have sent out a lot of CVs for a lot of jobs, but they just do not seem to get anywhere.

Lynn McLachlan: I will speak from a personal point of view. At my original employer, I had a very high-profile position, and I fell pregnant. The employer automatically assumed that I would be downgraded, and I could not continue doing what I was doing at that point. I am very pleased to say that that has significantly changed.

The organisation that I work for now, the Royal Bank of Scotland, has a lot of flexible working. I hear Caroline Wallace's point about women who work part time or flexibly and who do extra hours and so on. Flexibility can mean working from home. We have systems in place whereby we can allow our women and all our other employees to work from home. There is also the possibility of compressed hours.

For me, our biggest challenge is the loss of the skill set. Women themselves think that they should automatically downgrade or go part time, because that is seen as the thing that they should be doing. That is my personal opinion.

Siobhan McMahon: I note the point about losing women from STEM, and also what Lynn McLachlan has just said about the downgrading of skills.

The "Tapping all our Talents" document states on page 28:

> "One of the biggest factors for many women in deciding whether to remain in or return to a STEM career is the provision of good quality ... childcare."

It mentions that, although facilities exist in some areas, they are "often over-subscribed". Do you know what type of crèches or other facilities are used, and how they are used? How do women—and men—engage with them? How can that provision be replicated not just in the STEM industries but in other sectors? What should the Government be doing?

Dr Wallace: The universities—the University of Edinburgh is not alone in this—often provide on-site nursery facilities, and Lesley Yellowlees has fought hard to get such a facility on Edinburgh's science campus. However, those facilities are often incredibly expensive, so people just cannot afford to use them. The opening hours are short, which means that parents cannot be too flexible in their working pattern because the nursery is open perhaps from half past 8 to half past 5. That automatically removes the option of working compressed hours—working four and a half days in four days, for example—because people cannot find childcare outside those hours.

My child gets only two of her allocated five places in the little village that we live in, Lauder, as there are just not enough places. That is an extra burden on us. There are university facilities but, in my experience—and from what I have heard from others—they are very expensive. We need to make those facilities more affordable, and we need them to be open for longer to allow people to be more flexible about how and when they work.

I will come back to what John Finnie and Lynn McLachlan said. Lynn mentioned downgrading. I could not answer John's question about whether the £170 million figure was growing, but I can tell the committee now that the figure is at least £170 million. What I meant to say—Lynn has just reminded me—is that, although that figure takes account of how many people there are in the

workplace and what hours they are working, it does not take into account people who are working at a lower level than their skill set.

Debbie Duncan: I would like to tell you my story, because it fits in very well with the evidence. Five years ago, I was an area manager for a building society, and after that I was in business with my husband for a couple of years. The marriage ended and I became a lone parent, and things changed drastically. At that time, my youngest was one year old. I had planned ahead and thought about what I could do for future employment, and I decided to retrain. Having previously worked full time for a very handsome salary, I have subsequently been studying childcare and early education.

We have talked about downgrading—I am now looking at a full-time salary that is half the amount that I would have earned previously. I have had to make that concession because, as a lone parent, it is down to me to look after the house and the children as well as trying to earn an income.

I have planned to find a job where—I hope—I will not have to pay for childcare during the summer holiday period. I am using a childminder at present, and I am finding that it is fairly tricky to get childcare in a rural situation. There is not a big selection, so extra travelling time is involved. In addition, the before-school and after-school clubs are not open to a four-year-old, so I would have to leave one child at the school club and one at a childminder, which does not make sense either. As a result, I am paying more money to a childminder just now. Those are the decisions that I have had to make as a lone parent, and they have involved downgrading to fit in with my family life.

Tanveer Parnez: The same problem—especially the childcare element—applies to ethnic minority women. A lot of the women do not go to work because they cannot leave the children behind or they cannot depend on their extended families to look after them. Childcare is very costly, and a lot of the women in ethnic minority communities are lone parents.

BEMIS has tried to encourage and empower women through various capacity building programmes. We found that childcare was a problem for women, especially when they had to leave children at school at 9 o'clock in the morning and then come to the university for whatever training course we were putting on for them. The hardest issue was that they always had to collect the child before 3 o'clock. Many of the organisations need more resources to address that, perhaps by building in childcare if they are running training programmes.

10:15

We have been lucky in a way because, through the capacity building programme, we have supported a lot of women to do BA degree courses. However, our concern is that a lot of people who come out with degrees do not get jobs that are matched to their skills. Most of the women are working in call centres. Women want jobs that match their skills, but there is a greater lack of opportunity in the jobs market for ethnic minority women than there is for the indigenous community.

I have been lucky because I entered employment quite late after bringing up my children. I had to work hard—I would say that I worked harder than most people—to get where I am today. There is multiple discrimination against ethnic minority women in the labour market, not just in accessing a job but in staying in that job. There needs to be more sustainability and progression. We do not see many ethnic minority women in boardrooms or in managerial jobs, and something needs to be done about that. The Government must look into that and provide more training.

There are women in the ethnic minority communities who want to work. They often come to us and say, "We want to work, but there are no opportunities for us." There are different levels of jobs in the community, and they are doing a lot of voluntary work for community groups. A lot of women have gone into the care sector and are helping people with disabilities in the ethnic minority communities.

I would like to see more women in managerial positions, as there are down south. They have good jobs and a progression route, and they are promoted within their organisations. I work for an ethnic minority organisation and am fortunate in having been supported by my organisation and the board to get where I am today, but a lot of women in Scotland lack that support and training. Training is one of the biggest issues in the sector, and the lack of training means that women cannot get to where they want to be, which includes boardrooms. Some ethnic minority women want to be on boards, but they do not apply because they think that it is not for them. I am on various boards, but I can tell you from personal experience that a lot of people still do not accept someone from an ethnic minority—they see them as something alien sitting there as a token. We need to shift the culture and start to accept people from the ethnic minorities.

Claire Falconer: I will pick up what Debbie Duncan and Lynn McLachlan have said about the downgrading of skills. I studied hard in accountancy and would love full-time work in finance, but I cannot get that work due to the

barriers that exist. One of the main barriers—which people are not even aware of—is my having had a poor credit rating. My poor credit rating was over eight years ago, but I cannot progress in finance because that is still a barrier for me. It does not matter what level I have studied to, I cannot get past that. Like Jacqueline Hogg, I am having to revise my CV and downgrade my skills to what they were previous to my study. I am applying for part-time jobs that are lousy and unsustainable just to make sure that there is an income coming in.

Like Debbie Duncan, I am a lone parent and face the same childcare barriers. In our area, there is not much childcare available for young kids before or after school. That means that I have to use a childminder. What people do not take into consideration when they say that I can use a childminder is the fact that my kid has additional support needs and a dairy allergy, and trying to find a childminder who will cater for those things is extremely difficult. There are 27 childminders registered in my local area, but only four of them would take my son because of his illnesses, and I cannot get him in because of the lack of places.

I also need flexibility in employment, but in lousy jobs that is not available in the part-time hours that I need. It is an ever-losing battle. Employers need to realise that lone parents—male and female—and women returning to work have skills. Everyone has a past, but they need to realise that we are working through that. We are willing to work and we will do the full-time hours like every other person who is on their books, but breaking the barriers and getting through to them is the issue.

Patricia Cleghorn: Well said.

First, on a general point, I have not attended a committee before, but I presume that there will be time to ask the MSPs what they intend to do. Perhaps those of us who have specific points to raise can make some recommendations so that today has a practical outcome.

Summing up, I think that it is clear that an enormous amount of time, money and talent is being wasted in Scotland because we do not provide the conditions for women to flourish in the workplace.

Childcare seems to be predicated on women being the providers of care. Legislating for full provision of childcare is far better—that is totally obvious—but we also need change at another level, whereby men buy into the need to look after, and also want to care for, children. They need to do more of the domestic chores and step up to the line when needed and before they are needed. There needs to be that change, and the conditions need to encourage it. Otherwise, you can talk till the cows come home. An exception is lone parents, who need all the support.

Difficulties getting back into the workplace are experienced by very talented women. We know from the Davies report that quotas will be brought in for FTSE 100 companies if they do not achieve an improvement of 33 per cent so that at least 25 per cent of their board members are women. Surely we should look at doing that in other areas as well. I would prefer not to use quotas, but we are working against the backlog of the mores and manners of the past, so we need to take positive action.

With regard to women being rewarded in a way that is commensurate with their responsibilities, we need to look at that issue and not just within the business sector. For instance, with the getting it right for every child initiative, a huge responsibility—I was going to say burden—is put on nurses and midwives, but they are stymied by the largely male senior members of the hierarchy. Even doctors are side-stepping providing the care that is needed. A whole lot needs to be looked at, and it needs to be not just looked at but acted on quickly before things slide even further.

Interestingly, the Save the Children report "Surviving the First Day", on the wellbeing of women and children, notes that political participation is a key factor. In the mothers index in that report, the UK is ranked only at number 25. Female representation in Parliament is better in Scotland, but we need to see more use made of that power. The percentage varies from party to party, but I feel that a lot more could be done there.

The Convener: Before I bring in Allison Johnstone, let me just respond to your point about asking questions of the MSPs. Perhaps I should explain that the process for today's meeting is that this is one session in our on-going inquiry into women and work. When we finish all our evidence sessions, the considerable amount of evidence that we have gathered will be collated and put into a report, in which we will make our recommendations to Government. Those who have given evidence will then be able to see what recommendations we have made and what other evidence has been given.

Patricia Cleghorn: How long has the evidence process been going on? Has it been going on for years or months?

The Convener: This is our fifth evidence session in our women and work inquiry.

Patricia Cleghorn: What period of time has it covered?

The Convener: We started the evidence sessions last month, and we expect our report to be published before the summer recess.

Patricia Cleghorn: Right. I understood that evidence had been given to the committee over a much longer period of time, but I may have misread that.

The Convener: We have had a round-table evidence session and a chamber debate on women and work. All of that will feed into the committee report. The women and work inquiry started at the beginning of last month and will finish with our report before the summer recess.

Patricia Cleghorn: When would we hope to know what changes will be implemented?

The Convener: Once we publish our report, the Government has two months to respond to it. The Government will come back with views on the suggestions and guidance that we have given.

Patricia Cleghorn: Women certainly need to know whether there will be better or worse conditions if the whole separatist thing goes ahead, because women always suffer when there is stress, and plenty of stress is being caused by the current lack of information and uncertainty.

The Convener: That would certainly not be covered by the Government's response to our report. The Government will respond to the recommendations that we make in the report, and the committee will not comment on that at all.

Patricia Cleghorn: So we will then hear through the Parliament about what will be done and when.

The Convener: Yes.

Patricia Cleghorn: Okay. That is fine.

Allison Johnstone: I want to pick up on a couple of points.

First, Patricia Cleghorn mentioned men's involvement with the family. The gender stereotypes that underpin our discussion about part-time and flexible working affect men as well as women. While there is a link between part-time work and caring and those two roles are undervalued, that makes it quite difficult in the world of work for men to make a legitimate choice to work flexibly, and that impacts on their ability to engage with the family. We have to acknowledge that gender stereotypes affect everybody, not just women.

Secondly, I want to go back to caring. I have listened to the stories from people around the room. My niece has autism, and my sister and her partner are involved in a lot of caring. They live in Ayrshire, and my niece goes to an excellent charity in Stirling called the Speur-Ghlan Early Intervention Service. The commitment that is involved from them and the entire family is quite considerable. That is for one child. Without the flexibility of her employer and her partner's employer, it would be hugely difficult, if not nigh-on impossible, for one or both of them to continue to work.

When we talk about caring, we talk about childcare, but the area is more complicated than that, as it involves elder care and care of children with disabilities. All of that needs to be considered in considering the issues that we are here to talk about.

The Convener: I welcome Lynsey Calderwood and Kassandra Hughes, who have now joined us. It would be useful if they gave us a little bit of background to their situations.

Lynsey Calderwood (One Parent Families Scotland): Hi. I apologise for being late.

My background is that I am a lone parent with three children, and I work for One Parent Families Scotland—I try to support other lone parents into work. My marriage broke up, and I have one child in school and two in private nursery. I have struggled to maintain that while working with one income. I have worked with lone parents to try to support them into work and seen the barriers that they face, which are mostly related to childcare. They come off benefits to try to maintain an income, and go into low-paid jobs with temporary contracts.

10:30

Kassandra Hughes: I worked in administration before I became a lone parent. I have basically been a lone parent from the start. When I had my daughter, I stopped working for a while. When she went to school I decided to try to get back into work, but I found out how hard that was. I now find that the jobs that are available are not suitable for me due to childcare and stuff like that. I am retraining so that I can get work, but I intend to become self-employed because work with suitable hours is not available to me otherwise.

The Convener: I now turn to John Mason, who has questions about self-employment and part-time work. Marco Biagi will then ask questions about occupational segregation and biosciences.

John Mason: We have already touched on the issues that I will ask about, so I will build on what witnesses have said.

I am interested in Lynn McLachlan's comments in her submission. If I understand it correctly, you have gone from employment to self-employment and back into employment. One of your reasons for going into self-employment was that you felt

that there was not enough flexibility in your previous workplace. You also refer to

"a jobs for the boys mentality"

and state that

"female potential is still being limited by poor organisations and managers within them and unfortunately by women themselves."

Can you expand on that?

Lynn McLachlan: I could expand on that for a long time, John. Where do I start?

To go back to the very beginning, I had a very high-profile job in the Halifax Building Society—similar to the one that Debbie Duncan had. When I fell pregnant, I was automatically downgraded—there was no way that I could continue in that post. To my detriment, I did not fight that decision—I should have.

We moved on from there. I looked after my children and went into two further areas of employment. South Lanarkshire Council, which was one of my employers, was very flexible. It allowed me to go part time and to do certain things that I wanted to do, but when I asked whether I could have a career break so that I could go to Jordanhill College to train to be a teacher, the response was a categoric no.

At that point my personal circumstances changed and I became self-employed. I started a wedding stationery business with my best friend, because I could not get back into employment anywhere. I had left the Halifax and South Lanarkshire Council and, due to my own personal circumstances, I could not go to Jordanhill College, because I did not have enough money and so on.

I needed to earn money and I did so by starting my own business. I have gone full circle, because I then moved to London and had to sell my business. When I came back I was offered a position with the Royal Bank of Scotland on its fast-track programme for two years. When I went into that, I realised that the situation had not changed much since I was at the Halifax. However, we have worked continuously for a long number of years to drive change internally to try to eliminate childcare issues and to allow flexible working and working from home. I am pleased to say that the situation is getting much better. In the past five years, there have been huge improvements in everything that we have all talked about this morning.

The most interesting thing for me, because it is where I am working right now, is in business with businesswomen. Women still tell me that, as they cannot get into employment, they are going to start up their own businesses. As much as I think that that is fantastic for the economy and that it is fantastic that women want to be entrepreneurs, something is missing with large employers. The ladies round the table have confirmed my view. The change that I would like to see is to get people with all these skills back into large organisations.

John Mason: My question, which follows on from your comments—Allison Johnstone touched on this issue in her submission—is whether we need to introduce new rules that mean, for example, that employers have to advertise all jobs as being available for part-time or flexible working. The introduction of such rules was suggested at a previous evidence session. We obviously have limited power over the private sector, but we could introduce such rules in the public sector. Are such rules required or is the issue more about mentality and attitude? Allison Johnstone mentioned in her submission that very few professional jobs are advertised as being part time. Can you give us a steer?

Lynn McLachlan: Both elements are required. All our roles at the Royal Bank of Scotland—which is in the private sector, although it could be said to be in the public sector—are advertised as being open to flexible working, job sharing and so on, but the mentality has not changed. Jobs might be advertised as being open to flexible working and so on but, even though that is in black and white, there will still be some people—this goes back to my point about managers and organisations—who will do what they have to do to tick a box but who will then choose the person who does not want flexible working or a job share. To be perfectly blunt, they will choose mainly men.

Allison Johnstone: I agree—I think that both aspects are required. Employers need to take the step of making a conscious decision to have more flexible working and more part-time workers, and to advertise on that basis. However, that needs to be accompanied by a cultural change. Many employers still operate on an ideal worker model and look for people who fit it, whereas discussion needs to take place in the workplace about the range of workers who are available to them.

More and more, human resources tasks have been devolved to managers and have become one small part of the complicated job that they do. How are managers trained to be aware of all the issues that we have talked about? The role of managers in recruitment decisions and decisions to allow part-time and flexible working is critical. They are often the decision makers, and I wonder whether they are truly supported and truly informed to make the best decisions.

Carol Fox: I will respond to John Mason's question about whether we need to bring in new rules on advertising for jobs by employers. Unfortunately, as the law stands, there is no right

to part-time working. There is no point in imposing a rule on an employer that says that jobs must be advertised as being open to part-time working when no law says that employees must be allowed to work part time. We must look at reviewing and reforming employment law.

If any woman applied for a job and was not allowed to get it on a part-time basis, she could make a sex discrimination claim, but it falls on the woman to prove her case. She must make such a claim within three months. In July, a new fees regime is coming in, whereby someone who wants to make an employment tribunal claim must pay the fees up front. Therefore, the position is getting ever more difficult for women. If they identify an obstacle that they face, get legal advice on it and want to do something about it, more and more obstacles are put in the way of their being able to access justice or redress.

We need to look at the Scottish Parliament's ability to influence employment legislation at Westminster so that a law can be introduced that respects the skills and experience of women and means that they have a legal right to part-time working as opposed to a right to ask for part-time working. The burden of proof should shift to the employer—it should be for the employer to prove why it is not possible for a woman to work part time. At the moment, all the burden and responsibility rest on the woman's shoulders, when she also has to deal with childcare and economic difficulties.

As a single parent who was entering the legal profession, I had to take a legal case against the Law Society of Scotland. Some people advised me that that was not the best move to make, given that I was trying to become a solicitor. Even though I had got myself through a law degree, I was required to undertake a full-time diploma in legal practice, which would have involved becoming a full-time student. That was back in 2000. I contacted the Law Society and told it that I could not become a full-time student, as I worked part time for the Equal Opportunities Commission. When I asked what it intended to do about its stupid rule, it said that it intended to do nothing about it.

Sometimes, it is a case of not being dismayed by the obstacles that we find in front of us. Sometimes, it is a case of kicking over the obstacles and seeking allies in our politicians to help us to do that by showing the political will and holding to account for their poor practice employers who do not uphold employment law.

I speak as someone who has been an employer for the past three years. I set up my own legal practice, which now employs 10 people. I took the firm into employee ownership so that everyone has a stake in moving things forward. It is a case of being creative and not accepting the status quo. On the basis of my experience, I encourage every woman around the table and every single parent not to accept the phrase, "No, you can't." I say to them, "Yes, you can," and I advise them to get some legal advice.

John Mason: Can I press Carol Fox on that point?

The Convener: Yes.

John Mason: Other witnesses have said that both the law and the attitude need to change. You seem to say that it is just the law that needs to change. Are you saying that we should wait until Westminster legislates, or do you think that the Scottish Parliament and local authorities could start to introduce best practice, whereby people would have a right in practice—as opposed to a legal right—to part-time working?

Carol Fox: There is lots of positive practice and there is endless training and advice on equal opportunities. The issue is implementation. If employers fail to implement that, we do not have the tools and statutory underpinning to hold them accountable. We are relying on the good will of employers, some of whom may already be on our side because they are talking to us about equal opportunities. The issue is the employers who have no interest.

I have an anecdote about another lawyer who was asked to go in to deal urgently with a situation and who did not understand why it was urgent. What had happened was that a woman's employer had been looking on her Facebook page, which had a picture of a kid wearing a little T-shirt saying, "I'm going to be a big brother." That woman had not yet told her employer that she was pregnant. Her employer quickly got a lawyer in to make her redundant before it knew officially that she was pregnant.

Such things happen day and daily. We must be aware that we are not always dealing with people who are signed up to a progressive agenda. They may be nodding and saying the right things, but we need to hold them accountable.

The particular reason why I am here is to ask why our public authorities are allowed to spend taxpayers' money on trying to defend equal pay cases when there is no legal defence. I am talking about Glasgow City Council, North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council, which are now the only councils in Scotland that are spending taxpayers' money in that way. Those councils will carry on appealing until someone holds them accountable and says, "This is not good enough in this day and age."

My plea to local elected politicians and MSPs is to ask the local authorities what they are doing in

the name of taxpayers and on behalf of low-paid women. Sixty-eight of our claimants have died waiting for the outcome of their equal pay cases. That is a disgrace. I will not accept it or be silent about it. However, I am increasingly frustrated at trying to persuade any MSPs, local elected politicians or even journalists. Most of the journalists who inhabit this building run the other way when they see me, because they know that I will come after them asking, "What about equal pay?" One of the responses that I get is, "But Carol, women don't get equal pay. We all know that. Where's the story?" I say, "The story is that 68 of our claimants have died. Who's going to do anything about that?"

Patricia Cleghorn: Well spoken, Carol.

Jacqueline Hogg: In support of what has been said, I would like to say that I am one of the women affected. I became pregnant and was returning to work after maternity leave when I was informed that I had been made redundant. I think that that was set off by the fact that I had asked to work flexibly for a short period. I do not have a job because, when I asked for flexible working, my employer decided that I should be made redundant.

I am now in the position of getting back into work. I am not sure whether members understand the process of getting a job these days. The employer writes a job description that may or may not accurately describe the job. If someone manages to redo their CV to give the employer all the points that it is asking for, they will, if they are lucky, get through to the interview stage.

My most recent interview was quite interesting, because the employer could not work out why I was there for the job and thought that something might have gone wrong in HR. It was a lower position for me. The two people who interviewed me were surprised that I was going for a lower position, but I said that I was interested in the job—I could see that I could do a lot there.

However, I had not written any code in a number of years, although not a lot of coding would need to be done. Had the job description been written up more accurately, I could have answered the questions in the interview, because I could have prepped for them. It would not have taken long to look at some code and I would have been able to handle the technical side for the purposes of the interview. I did not have any problems with doing that in the future.

The interviewers were very complimentary about the fact that I had worked at a much more senior level and that my career had taken off. However, they felt that after a while I would become discouraged by the lower salary and that I would be bored by the job and would leave.

I was quite happy that I had managed to turn round the interview and give the answers. However, when the email came back from HR, the reason that was given for me not getting the job was that I did not have the core technical skills, which had not been outlined in the job description.

When someone applies for a job, they might not be rejected on the specified criteria—lots of other things are happening behind the scenes. An employment agency told me that it had not written a full job description for a job because, if it had done that, people would have known who the employer was and the agencies want to keep everything for themselves, because that is how they make their revenue.

The process of getting through an interview is really tough and it is very difficult to find out why you have not got a position. That is not transparent at all.

10:45

James Dornan: It is even more difficult if someone falls between the two stools of being overqualified and having been out of the business for a wee while when they go for an interview.

I have a question about Lynn McLachlan's comments about RBS and one about the employment law point that Carol Fox raised. Lynn McLachlan said that RBS has started to do quite well on flexible working and making life easier for women employees.

Lynn McLachlan: There have been huge improvements. Over the past five years, there has been a tremendous improvement.

James Dornan: We do not have control over employment law and cannot go down that route. Does any research show that RBS benefits from that more flexible approach?

Lynn McLachlan: I cannot think of any off the top of my head.

James Dornan: If we do not have the law, we must show good practice. It would be good to have an opportunity to do so with RBS—a company that is working in a flexible, mature way—if it could get the message out that it benefits from treating people fairly.

Lynn McLachlan: I can certainly investigate that for you and come back to you if you want.

James Dornan: I would appreciate that. If you could come back to the convener with that information, that would be great.

I had not realised that Glasgow City Council was still fighting equal pay cases. I used to be the leader of the opposition there, and we tried to fight

that point. I would be happy to take that on, if Carol Fox gives me some information.

Carol Fox: There are two hearings in the tribunal in Glasgow at the moment. When I leave here, I will get the train to Glasgow.

North Lanarkshire Council, Glasgow City Council and South Lanarkshire Council are fighting equal pay cases. That is surprising, because all the mass litigation against councils in England has been resolved and the cases have been settled. Fortunately, most of the cases in the east of Scotland—involving the City of Edinburgh Council—have been settled. It is hugely perplexing for me that three large Labour local authorities that might have every equal opportunities policy under the sun on their websites are spending vast amounts of money unnecessarily on defending claims.

One manager who came into the tribunal to give evidence yesterday—this is on the transcript and I am sure that the committee can be provided with it—had undertaken an assessment of various caring roles. One of them was a social care night shift in an old folks home. When questioned about his assessment of the work that women, primarily, do to look after the old people in that home, his answer to the tribunal—which leaves me aghast—was that the job was fairly straightforward because, when the old people come into the home, they only really last 18 months and they only come to die. There was an audible intake of breath when he said that. It is on the transcript.

Similarly, in February, we had another manager who had assessed some of the roles of female home carers, who are the backbone of our public services. Many of our claimants do two or three part-time jobs just to make ends meet. The assessment had concerned their working conditions and, of course, they have to deal with elderly, incontinent clients and patients day in, day out. They get an assessment of value, which becomes a grade, which becomes money.

One question concerned how the home carers got the assessment that they were given in relation to their working conditions. They had been scored at level 2. The witness was asked how that was possible when a gardener, who occasionally picks up dog excrement, was scored at level 5. The response was, “These women know that that is part and parcel of the job.”

The issue is as much about attitudes as anything else. People in our big employers—local authorities, private employers and so on—have such attitudes but are not being challenged on them and are not thinking correctly about the application of the law. These matters are now with the tribunal and we are confident that judgments will be made in the fullness of time.

However, we suspect that councils will appeal. Appeals are going to the Court of Session and the Supreme Court. South Lanarkshire Council, which was mentioned earlier, is taking a case to the Supreme Court in London in July because it refuses to respond to a freedom of information request for very basic pay information. My question is: how can that happen? How can vast amounts of public funds be wasted in that way, particularly in a recession?

For those who do not know about the equal pay cases, I make it clear that we are not talking about small sums of money. Our client base mainly comprises carers, cleaners and catering assistants; although they are on the same grade as street sweepers, binmen and grave-diggers and should therefore take home the same rate of pay, all the men are paid 50 or 60 per cent more and get paid simply for turning up. They do not even need to do anything; sometimes, they get paid for not turning up, because they are on the sick.

For years, everyone in Scotland has known that this is a huge problem, and I do not understand why no one is paying attention to it. At the international women’s day debate that was part of the committee’s inquiry, I called on our elected politicians to associate themselves with and pay attention to this struggle. I asked Nicola Sturgeon for a meeting but, because of diary conflicts and so on, that has not happened. I have tried to have meetings with Labour MSPs. I must congratulate Margaret Mitchell, who is one of the MSPs in South Lanarkshire, on issuing a press release that said that the amount of money being spent on the cases is a disgrace. It is a strange world when the only supporter I can find is a Conservative MSP—

Alex Johnstone: Sometimes these things happen.

Carol Fox: I will take allies wherever they might come from and from whatever direction.

The work that I have done in the past five years has been the most important of my professional career and has demanded great determination and stamina, because it is hugely difficult to get basic information out of the employers involved. We need political will to solve the issues, and that will have to come from the top. Our women canvass their local councillors and MSPs, but everyone seems to be turning in the other direction or not coming together over the issue. Individual MSPs are making individual comments, but there is no collective will to say, “Enough is enough—get this sorted.”

We have a Convention of Scottish Local Authorities document dated 1997 that makes it clear that all the employers in Scotland knew that there was a huge problem and had in black and

white an undertaking from the unions that they would not raise equal pay claims for women because they would try to sort the matter out. Those collective discussions did not work; people started to raise cases in 2005, and here we are in 2013 and those cases are still going through the tribunal system. Unfortunately, they might have to go further—to London or Europe. In the meantime, how many more women—and I stress that we are talking predominantly about women—will have to die before there is the political will in Scotland to address the situation?

The Convener: I will bring in Tanveer Parnez and then come back to John Mason, but I am keen to move on to Marco Biagi's questions.

Tanveer Parnez: I agree with Jacqueline Hogg about job descriptions. Applying for jobs is all about public relations, but various women from ethnic minorities who have come to me have sent in hundreds of applications for jobs and have never even been shortlisted. As soon as employers see the applicant's name or ethnicity, they just turn down the application. Another issue that I see is that women are considered overqualified, in which case they are seen as a threat by men or the organisation and are turned down.

It is up to the Government; we need some good practices or positive action. Moreover, a requirement should be built into funding streams that organisations must consider flexible working hours for women and encourage women to learn new skills and so on to ensure that they can progress and sustain their jobs.

We find it very difficult to address such issues with organisations. Only a couple of days ago, a girl came to me to complain that, four months into the job with an ethnic community organisation that she had moved into through the community jobs Scotland fund, she was being treated very badly. Similar situations happen with other organisations. The girl was supposed to be gaining experience and being enabled to gain new skills, but she was cleaning tables, making tea and so on. She was in tears when she spoke to me. I urge the Parliament to build something into its funding streams to set up a regulatory body—not just for ethnic minorities but for everybody—that can monitor practices, but particularly job descriptions and flexible working for women.

John Mason: I will comment briefly on Carol Fox's statement. I think that all the MSPs here would be happy to sign up to sorting out the equal pay problem, but we must be clear that we—whether it be Alex Salmond, the convener or any of us—cannot give local government instructions. We can encourage or criticise, but we cannot give instructions.

My question touches on what we have already said about self-employment. It was suggested that some people get into self-employment because they cannot get a sufficiently flexible job. However, if I read it correctly, Patricia Cleghorn's submission is positive about self-employment. It says:

"We also need to consider self-employed and entrepreneurial women ... Many women business owners and those who aspire to set up their own business are raring to go—let's give them the funding to do so!"

What should we do to help women into self-employment?

Patricia Cleghorn: We should make access to funds easier.

John Mason: Is that RBS's fault?

Patricia Cleghorn: Access can partly be done via banks, but the public are not too hot on banks at the moment, so there can be unwillingness to go down that road. However, there are all sorts of ways of accessing funds. Certainly, banks need to lend more to women, possibly in differing amounts, but without dallying.

The process of businesses tendering for procurement contracts is abominable. If someone wants to tender for training with a public sector employer, the process is totally amazing: they must attend a training course before they can even fill in the form. That situation creates jobs in the public sector but not in the business economy—we see that happening time and again. Accessibility to funding from the banks would help with that.

One exception is the flexible training opportunities fund, which I am a fan of. If a business pays for a training course that costs, say, £1,000, the fund gives it back £500. That encourages the entrepreneurial notion of putting something in to get something back, and businesses get something back for the training that they undertake. That moves things forward and is positive.

Mr Mason said that I am positive, and I am very positive about Scotland. It is such a small country, so surely we can get a grip on all the issues that have been discussed. As we are such a small country, we should be a beacon of light to the world and not be scuffling around with problems with councils.

The Convener: I think that Lynn McLachlan wants to comment on the point about RBS.

Lynn McLachlan: Specifically, it is not RBS's fault—thanks, John. [*Laughter*.] RBS as an organisation offers a huge amount of support across the diversity agenda, which has worked really well for the past five years. A women's enterprise conference is taking place in Glasgow at the moment, at which RBS is commenting to

300 women and focusing on access to funding. We have done a few studies, and we appreciate what the key issues are for people going into business, which will obviously help me, as that is what I deal with in my day job.

The issue is also about women's confidence. We need to help and mentor women—

Patricia Cleghorn: That is what I have suggested.

Lynn McLachlan: Absolutely. I read your paper and I understand where you are coming from. However, I think that there is a perception that we are not lending money. We absolutely are—

Patricia Cleghorn: I have had reports to that effect. However, if you are lending money, that is fantastic—more power there.

We need to build self-belief, to offset the backlog of practice.

11:00

The Convener: I am sorry, Patricia, but we need to move on.

Marco Biagi: We talked about occupational segregation in our first two evidence sessions. To what extent is the fact that elements in society regard some work as men's work and other work as women's work a big part of the problem? I suppose that we have covered much of that. We heard from RBS; have other witnesses come across attempts to change that perception that have started to bear fruit?

Carol Fox: The whole issue of occupational segregation drives me mad, because it takes the focus away from what is actually happening. We want to address equal opportunities by valuing the jobs that women do, but sometimes the response is, "We have mentoring", or, "We have a work shadowing programme, so we can give a woman an orange jacket and she can go off and be a bin man for a week." That is not solving the immediate problem about the need to value the work that is done in caring.

Occupational segregation is a huge issue, of course, which needs to be tackled and will be tackled in the longer term, as barriers are broken down as a result of the all the work that is going on to encourage people to get into different sectors. However, if society valued the roles that women have traditionally undertaken and such work was paid properly, that would ensure that a mixed workforce wanted to take up those roles.

My worry is that the focus is always on attempting to get women away from roles that they currently occupy. However, the issue is about choice: a lot of women choose to do the work that they do, and we should value that work. We talked about the need for childcare and we talked about elder care. I really want to stress the need to value such roles, while opening up access and breaking down barriers to do with gender stereotyping.

A focus on gender segregation completely shifts the focus away from what is happening in the here and now and the average pay gap—although that is a generality, because in law a woman needs to focus on the actual difference between her pay and a male comparator's pay, so there is no such thing as an average pay gap that can help any woman in an equal pay case. I agree that in the longer term we must do everything that we can do to break down gender segregation, but we must do that in a way that does not take the focus away from valuing the roles that are taken on primarily by women in the here and now.

Allison Johnstone: I completely support what Carol Fox said. I work in the Scottish resource centre for women in science, engineering and technology, so I guess that our focus is on increasing women's participation in those sectors, but I certainly would not want to take anything away from the value of the roles that women currently do.

Science, engineering and technology are heavily gender-segregated sectors, and we work in different ways to try to address the lack of women. There is a perception about women's work and men's work, and I think that women who choose to go down the route of science, engineering and technology have to make very clear decisions about that. I read an article yesterday that referred to women swimming upstream when they choose a career in such sectors, because they must prove themselves time and time again. That is a shame, because there is real value and richness of experience in jobs in those sectors. Women can be put off because of their experiences along the way.

Much needs to be done. We support women to remain in science, engineering and technology once they have made that choice, because it is about not just getting women into those sectors but retaining them, for all the reasons that we have heard. We can do that, but employers need to come on board and must make a conscious decision to do that. They must want to create cultures within their workplaces that support women to remain there.

Lynn McLachlan: Marco Biagi asked whether there has been an improvement. At RBS there has been a massive improvement in equal opportunities, but there are different divisions within the organisation.

The division that I work in is corporate banking. The retail division includes all the branches, and the majority of the staff in that division are female.

It has often been thought that females should go and serve on a counter, while going into business is seen as a man's job—it is seen as the hard stuff. I am pleased to say that, where I work, there is an impetus at the moment to encourage women to get involved in business banking. Within the 5,000 small and medium-sized enterprises that I and my team look after there is a diversity that we must replicate as an employer. Therefore, I have a very diverse team.

I also have a women in business ambassador who looks after our women customers. That is replicated throughout the whole UK: we have one ambassador in every area throughout the country.

Yes, there are still perceptions that some roles are women's work, but I sometimes think that it is women who have those perceptions and who limit their own potential. We have very successful women around the table can do something about that, along with the men. By providing supportive managers and a supportive culture within organisations, we can change the situation. I totally agree with what Carol Fox said.

Dr Wallace: I speak with my science hat firmly on. In science, there is segregation in the disciplines that women generally go into. Lesley Yellowlees and I are fortunate to work in biology. There are quite a lot of girls studying biology and chemistry at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, but there are far fewer studying physics and engineering.

In my Society of Biology role, I work with the chemists and the Institute of Physics. We go out into schools and encourage girls to see our disciplines as being for them. However, I often feel a little embarrassed and uncomfortable about the fact that I am encouraging them to go into areas of research where they will be clustered at the bottom and in which the majority of them will not progress to the highest positions. That makes me feel quite guilty at times.

When we produced the "Tapping all our Talents" report, it was great to see some leadership from Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer down south. She said that, if medical schools wanted to apply for a particular stream of funding, they would have to apply for the Athena SWAN silver accreditation, which demonstrates good practice. The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has also told the universities that it expects that to happen. Lesley Yellowlees, who was my employer at the University of Edinburgh, embraced that approach and issued a diktat from on high that all the scientific schools would go forward with it. I am pleased to say that, by the end of the year, all the scientific schools at the University of Edinburgh will have submitted for Athena SWAN accreditation, and I am pretty sure that they will have got it at one level or another.

Good things are happening, but it takes powerful people such as Dame Sally Davies and the threat of money being removed to make them happen. There needs to be a carrot, but there also needs to be a very big stick. When we wrote our report, we were conscious that we were taking universities and academia to task quite a lot, but that was because they were the ones that we could get the data for. There are lot of small and medium-sized businesses in Scotland that we cannot get data for, so we have no idea how women are progressing in those companies.

I listened to what Patricia Cleghorn said about how difficult the procurement process is. I sympathise, but I want it to be harder. I want to make damn sure that when Government buys things—in particular, when the health service buys things from my own industry, the life sciences industry—that is a route to ensuring that businesses progress their women. They should not just have women at the lower levels but progress them to the senior levels—and procurement is the hook.

The Convener: I am conscious of the fact that Professor Yellowlees has to leave shortly. Therefore, before I bring in Lynsey Calderwood, I will bring in Lesley Yellowlees.

Marco Biagi: Could I ask something?

The Convener: Yes, certainly.

Marco Biagi: Professor Yellowlees, you might be in a good position to address this question. We have had a few examples of women entering industries or professions and there being a gradual change over the years. We have also heard that in secondary teaching women have generally been in the majority at the classroom level but have not knocked on to become headteachers.

The evidence has given us the sense that women have been getting further in bioscience, at least, and that there has been some slight movement there. How genuine and substantive do you think that change is at the upper levels?

Professor Yellowlees: The graphs in the "Tapping all our Talents" report do not make for pretty reading. If we consider what is called the leaky pipeline from school right through to senior level in all science—by "science" I mean science, engineering, maths and technology—the graphs all show a steep decline in female representation. That is a real concern.

As has been said, the issue is one of culture. The law is one thing, but each and every one of us can help to change the culture. The change is depressingly slow, however. I always said that I never wanted my daughter to have to experience exactly the same things that I had to experience,

but I am sorry to say that there will probably not be that big a shift in the numbers.

More people are buying into the culture change. I was delighted to hear about RBS, and I think that the universities are also that way inclined. I think that we have to buy into the change, because we need to be able to use everybody's potential and everybody's skill sets. When we get into positions to influence the culture and make the change, we should not shy away from that. We have to step up to the plate. We have to recognise that there is a job to do, and we should not hide or shy away from it.

Of course it is difficult, but I want to pay back, and I want to make things better. Therefore, I will continue to speak out and to do things, wherever I can, to make things better. I tell all my schools that they should go for Athena SWAN accreditation. If they buy into that culture and what it stands for, it will make them do things differently. There are things that we have to do.

There are just jobs; there are no girls' jobs or boys' jobs. We have spoken about schoolchildren, getting that message across to them, getting them involved and getting them to see it. We also have to pay great attention to the parents. Unfortunately, they sometimes think that there are girls' jobs and boys' jobs, and they have a huge impact on their children. We have a huge sales job to do as far as they are concerned, too.

I am sorry that I must leave now to catch a train but, before I go, I wish to emphasise the point about culture: we have to change the culture, and we have to work to do that. If we can do that more quickly, count me in.

The Convener: Thank you for that. I will bring in Lynsey next.

Lynsey Calderwood: I want to comment on predominantly female roles. I work with lone parents, mostly female but some males, on work placements with a huge national retailer. The lone parents do a two-week work placement, and we then try to get them jobs. Even those lone parents now struggle to get into retail jobs because of the hours that are being requested of them.

The retailer asks for fully flexible hours but, for a lot of lone parents, that is obviously impossible because the childcare hours do not suit. In addition, the contracts are temporary. Parents are told that, if they take one day off, their contract will not be renewed. They have that struggle—and that is in a predominantly female role. It is the same even in the care sector: lone parents struggle to do the hours because of childcare reasons.

Marco Biagi: In your experience, what is the gender division further up? I am talking about the managers who make the decisions about staff having to be fully flexible. Are they predominantly male?

Lynsey Calderwood: Yes.

Marco Biagi: Do you think that that is part of the problem?

Lynsey Calderwood: When we are doing the placements, female managers will tell me that, when they started off at the bottom and had young children, they would not have been able to take the job the way that it is now. The retailer is looking for people to work from 6 in the morning, and they must work weekends to take a temporary job. There is no childcare at weekends for people who do not have family support. It is now a struggle for lone parents even to get into low-paid retail work.

The Convener: I have one specific question to ask before we close the meeting—we need to finish shortly. I refer to page 30 of the "Tapping all our Talents" report. Under the heading, "Recommendations to the Scottish Government", you propose

"A National Strategy for Scotland".

Could you give us a bit more detail on what you think such a strategy should look like? How should it be monitored?

11:15

Dr Wallace: We outlined a very basic strategy. I think that the Government needs to show leadership in much the same way as Dame Sally Davies has done—I drew attention to her as someone who is in a powerful position. The threat of taking money away is one hook.

As we mention in the report, we are grateful for the new legislation that makes parenting much more equal in terms of the rights of fathers to take time off, but we would like to see much more use of equal pay audits. We should try to get those used by business and industry, although I know that that is hard to do. Perhaps offering a carrot—rather than a stick—is the only thing that could be done.

We also need to encourage universities by saying that we expect to see equality for women at senior levels. Much as Lord Davies did in his report down south, which said that we should expect our large companies to have women on their boards, we think that we should drive at the same thing in universities. Our report suggests quite a few targets that we expect, or hope, that the Government will take forward.

The Convener: I think that Siobhan McMahon has a supplementary question.

Siobhan McMahon: Convener, if it is okay, my question is on a different point and is again for Lynn McLachlan—I am sorry for directing so many questions to her.

James Dornan raised a point about how programmes are monitored and evaluated. I know a bit about RBS's focused women network, as I know some women who are involved in it. How is that evaluated throughout the business? In your submission, you mention that you have had good managers and not so good managers. Being mentored as part of a network may be good for people, but if they do not have an employer—or whoever they go to for advice and various other things—who is signed up to the network, the practicality is that they will face a barrier. I was just wondering how that is evaluated.

Lynn McLachlan: That is evaluated very much by the individual. If you have a barrier, you can come to the network. The focused women network is internal, so it can help with career progression and breaking through the glass ceiling. Those issues are monitored via the women who run the focused women network.

One challenge is trying to encourage as many females as possible to apply for roles. To put it very simply, women tend always to need a track record, whereas men are viewed as having potential, which is a slightly different concept. Lots of women whom I have spoken to in RBS will look at the competencies for a role and think, "I need to be really good at five things, but I have only got three, so I will not go for the job." However, the guys will look at the same role and think, "I have got three, and I can learn the other two." That is a very common challenge that comes out in many of our conversations in the focused women network.

Chris Sullivan, who is the chief executive officer of our corporate banking division, has a programme in place that actively encourages people to apply. I do not like quotas but, as I said in my submission, they might be a necessary evil to encourage people at every level. We need to ensure that, when we are interviewing for board level, there are women who have applied. When we are interviewing for a teller in a branch, we need to have lots of women and lots of men applying for the job.

This process is in its early stages—to be perfectly honest with you—but we are five years in. I was a founder member of the Women in Business Network and of the focused women network, and progress is slow. As was said earlier, change takes a wee while, but it is cultural and we will get there.

Siobhan McMahon: Finally, I have a question on a different point for Tanveer Parnez. Is there a difference in the way in which women from visible and invisible minorities are treated, or is it the same for both? If there is a difference, do employers recognise that?

Tanveer Parnez: There definitely is a difference when ethnic minority women go for a mainstream job. I would like more ethnic minority women to go into mainstream jobs, because some people are stuck in an ethnic minority organisation where there is no progression. Many are in dead-end jobs and, because they are in small organisations, more demands are put on them. If a person from an invisible community, say the Polish community, goes for a mainstream job, they have a lot more chance of getting it than a person from the visible communities would have. That has always been the case.

I would like to see monitoring by the universities. I do not know whether any data exists on how many people from ethnic minorities go into certain roles and undergraduate and postgraduate courses. I would like to know where the gap is and how organisations can help to bridge it.

We have not touched on apprenticeships. At present, the scheme applies to 16 to 24-year-olds, but there are other people out there who need some sort of apprenticeship. If the upper age limit was increased, that would give more people an opportunity to get into apprenticeships.

The Convener: As members have no further questions, I thank all our witnesses for coming and for giving us their evidence. The session has been informative and useful, and it will help us a lot as we proceed with our inquiry.

That concludes today's meeting. Our next meeting will be on Thursday 23 May and will include ministerial evidence on women and work.

Meeting closed at 11:21.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by APS Group Scotland.

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78307-988-9

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78351-001-6

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland