



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 20 March 2014

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2014, Session 4

CONVENER

*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

*Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Brenda Armstrong (Police Scotland)

Patrick Burke (Royal Bank of Scotland)

Ann Henderson (Scottish Trades Union Congress)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 20 March 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Fathers and Parenting

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): Welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee's sixth meeting in 2014. I ask everyone to set any electronic devices to flight mode or to switch them off, please.

Today's only agenda item is an evidence session on our fathers and parenting inquiry. We will start the session with some introductions. At the table, we have our clerking and research team, the official reporters and broadcasting services. We are also supported by security officers around the room.

My name is Margaret McCulloch and I am the committee's convener. I invite members and witnesses to introduce themselves, in turn, starting on my right.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I am the MSP for Edinburgh Central and the deputy convener. Good morning.

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

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Good morning. I am a member for North East Scotland.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Madainn mhath; good morning. I am a member for the Highlands and Islands.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Hi. I am a member for Central Scotland.

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

Brenda Armstrong (Police Scotland): I am the equality and diversity lead at Police Scotland.

Patrick Burke (Royal Bank of Scotland): Good morning. I am the regional resource manager for Royal Bank of Scotland business banking.

Ann Henderson (Scottish Trades Union Congress): I am an assistant secretary at the STUC.

The Convener: Thank you. John Mason will start our questions.

John Mason: As you have probably gathered, we have had several evidence sessions, and we will probably refer back to some of them as we go along. The first area that I want to touch on is policies on and approaches to allowing time off, especially for fathers, around the birth of a child. Two of you represent employers, so you can perhaps refer to your own organisations. The STUC might have a wider picture of what is going on.

Patrick Burke: I can speak for the bank and as a father, having taken paternity leave myself. The father gets two weeks off on the birth of their child, and we are flexible about how they take that time. It does not need to be two weeks in a row; it could be a couple of days one week, three days the next week and so on. That gives the new father time to spend with the child and help out, as it is a stressful time.

John Mason: I think that I saw somewhere—I do not know whether this is a statutory provision—that the father is meant to book the time off 15 weeks ahead. Does the Royal Bank of Scotland not operate that policy?

Patrick Burke: That could be a statutory provision. We follow the correct procedures, but we are very much about giving autonomy to the fathers' direct managers to ensure that individuals have sufficient time to spend with their children. They must understand that there is a business need to be served, but we would be extremely flexible for any new parent, particularly in my area of the business. I know of at least four or five colleagues who will take such leave this year.

Brenda Armstrong: The police look to get as much notice as possible of fathers' intentions. There is statutory paternity leave for police officers and police staff, the first week of which is on full pay and the second week of which is paid at the statutory level. That is very much supported within the business. We also use keep-in-touch days and other things to support men in the workforce and men as parents.

John Mason: The timing of births is not entirely predictable, but I understand that the police would have to fix rotas.

Brenda Armstrong: Yes.

John Mason: I do not know how far ahead they are fixed.

Brenda Armstrong: We are trying to move to five weeks so that people know a couple of months in advance what their shifts will be. However, that can change when things happen at short notice. People may have to come in at short notice or move somewhere else according to the chief constable's requirements. It is all based on trying to be flexible and supportive with, again, a

push for managers to take responsibility and to support the force.

John Mason: I would be interested to know from the STUC whether that is typical of employers across the board.

Ann Henderson: That would be the experience in general. The difficulties that are flagged up to us are probably to do with smaller employers or the increasingly less structured employment—the more casual work and other broader patterns—that we see in the Scottish labour market in general.

We do not know all the ways in which those patterns have an impact, but they certainly have an impact on maternity leave requests and, therefore, it is likely that they also impact on fathers who request their statutory entitlements, although we do not have statistics on that yet. As the labour market becomes more fragmented, smaller employers try to manage difficult situations and changes in the workforce and people take part-time jobs and casual work, it is harder to comply with all the protections for parenting for which the employment legislation provides. However, the issue has not been identified as a big problem.

We have had—as I am sure employers are having—some discussion about the implementation and likely consequences of the changes that are being discussed at Westminster and how they would work in businesses. The changes would increase the scope for people to take paternity leave flexibly. Obviously, our concern is that, at the moment, the conversation is not about a paid period of leave comparable to some of the existing statutory maternity pay top-ups.

Although it is a welcome aspiration to allow fathers more time away from work with their families and for that to be more flexible—as people rightly point out, the first two weeks might not be the critical time, depending on the family's situation—trade unions are concerned about how that would be negotiated and implemented, how to get as much local negotiation as possible to meet the needs of every local team and what it would mean for a family if the leave was unpaid.

John Mason: We got the impression that some employers understand that the woman has to be off for maternity leave but that they do not seem to understand quite so much that the guy has to be off for paternity leave. Perhaps that is changing over time. We also got the impression that, even in the public sector, schools make it quite difficult for the father to get time off if he is a teacher. Have you picked that up? Is it your impression?

Ann Henderson: I can certainly go back and ask some of the affiliated trade unions about that,

but when we prepared for the meeting, no evidence came back from shop steward representatives, for instance, about a difference between applications for maternity leave and applications for paternity leave. I think that, in the teaching profession for instance, some of the issues apply to both parents.

Alex Johnstone: I have asked previous groups of witnesses questions to try to work out whether there is a difference between behaviour in the public, private and third sectors. In fact, the answers that I got indicated that the difference is not based on the sector but is more to do with the size of the organisation—whether it is small, medium or large. Are there significant differences in the treatment of fathers depending on the scale of the organisation?

Brenda Armstrong: It depends on the organisation. There is a big difference between public sector, private sector and voluntary sector employers. We have statutory obligations in relation to equality to support people in the workforce, ensure that we eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and foster good relations. There is a big agenda on trying to make the public sector more equality friendly, both externally and internally, but it very much depends on the nature of the organisation.

Policing has predominantly been a male environment, and there are sometimes strong stereotypes about who flexible working is for. The view of businesses is sometimes that flexible working is a benefit for employees, but not for the business as well. It is fairly complex.

Patrick Burke: There is an element of truth in that with regard to the size of the business. Larger companies, such as the bank, have been investing in flexible working policies for some time now. For example, we offer home working, and many staff now have BlackBerrys, iPhones, iPads with remote access and so on. Probably one of the main differences for a smaller organisation is that it may not have the funds to invest in providing that flexibility.

It is beneficial to the person who is taking time off to spend time with their child. If they get a bit of time, they can perhaps work from home as opposed to coming into the office. Having dealt with small businesses and been their face-to-face contact in the organisation, I would agree that it is more difficult for a smaller business to respond to a need for paternity leave because smaller business are reliant on a smaller number of staff.

Ann Henderson: There are issues here that have arisen in some of the other areas that the committee has been looking at. However, as Brenda Armstrong indicated, the responsibilities of public bodies in relation to the equality duty have

been very helpful. Certainly in the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, there is scope for using the guidance and the legislation to assist managers and representatives in negotiating good practice. In the public sector in Scotland there are some excellent examples of good practice that have been good for the business and good for the workforce.

There is some work to be done. Although the legislation cannot be enforced in the same way in the private sector, the Scottish Government has been looking at transferring some of the knowledge gained in the public sector to the private sector and has, in a constructive way, been having further discussions around the transfer of good practice to the private sector. Where negative experience has been recorded among fathers, I would hope that there is some way of feeding back into your inquiry that there is also a wealth of really good practice out there already.

Some attention could be given to the third sector. The trade unions that represent our members in the third sector sometimes raise problems relating to applications for flexible working and parental leave. There is an interesting question about the substantial amount of public money that is routed through contracting out, arm's-length organisations and a number of other structures that now exist in Scottish society. Basically, public money is used to provide a service to the public for the public, and there is an on-going discussion about how much of that is covered by the equality legislation and the public sector equality duty.

That overlaps very much with concerns that may be raised about the bad or poor experiences of employees in small voluntary sector organisations that are carrying out a public function or public duty. The care sector springs to mind, but it applies across the board—to leisure companies and housing organisations, for example. As you know, local authorities have contracted out a large number of their services, and once people have been contracted out there is no automatic procedure that means that they will be able to make applications or will be protected by the public sector duty and the good practice that we have developed throughout the public sector.

09:45

Christian Allard: That response conflicts with the evidence that we have received so far, which has been that small private businesses seem to be a lot more lenient with fathers than public services are. We have had examples of public services that have not fulfilled their promises, although perhaps middle management is to blame for that. However, perhaps you should have looked at the evidence that we have received so far.

One pressure is that the UK has some of the highest levels of conflict arising from competing work and family demands, and that includes fathers. I have a few questions for Ann Henderson of the STUC. Do trade unions offer specific targeted support for new fathers? Do you have a dedicated policy on helping new fathers? Have you done any work on the issue?

Ann Henderson: The short answer is that nothing has come through our democratic structures that has led to a policy being adopted on new fathers. However, we represent 32 affiliated trade unions, and individual trade unions in a range of workplaces in the private, third and public sectors will negotiate with their employers around compliance with Government guidance and the legislation on things such as paternity rights, which we have mentioned, and on the adoption of flexible working in the most supportive way.

The STUC submission refers to some of the work that is done through Scottish union learning. There is an issue about how effectively we work to support new fathers on protecting their access to work, on employment rights and on making their experience of work and becoming a new father as supportive as possible. We have talked about paternity leave, but the issue is more complex than that, as I am sure the committee appreciates. That is why we have made some provision through trade union organisations such as Scottish union learning.

We provide support for all parents, but maybe by focusing on numeracy and literacy work with a predominantly male workplace, we will have a beneficial knock-on effect on the way in which fathers deal with the demands of a new child. For workers who go into work having left school with no qualifications, it is often only when they become involved in supporting their child through education that they realise that they do not have the skills to do that. We have found that, because it is away from home and is a place where men and women talk to one another in a different environment, the workplace can be used to provide support that relates to some of the needs that develop as children grow up.

Christian Allard: That is interesting. Are you more reactive to legislation and what happens in workplaces, or are you proactive in thinking about how fathers can have a place in looking after their children at home?

Ann Henderson: I am not sure. We support moves to increase paternity leave and the moves that are being discussed to share leave, with the proviso that there has to be some way of adequately funding that. In low-paid families in particular, people will not be able to take leave from their work unless that is funded. By definition,

a number of our policies as well as some of the training that we provide on equality for workplace reps are about better identifying and supporting all parents, including fathers.

If the outcome of the committee's inquiry is that there is a series of bad experiences that are related to the workplace, we will take that away and look at it and consider where the trade union movement can assist.

In our submission, we tried to emphasise that we understand that fathers—and mothers—are workers, that they are parents, too, and that workers, including fathers, have responsibility not only for caring for children but for caring for elderly parents. We are absolutely aware of that. There is an inadequately explored question about how those issues fit together, and it is good that the committee is considering that a bit further.

The issue can be exaggerated. I previously worked in the railway industry, which is not an industry in which it is easy to work from home. Various questions needed to be resolved in relation to how a flexible working approach could be applied in a way that ensured that shifts were covered—especially because the rotas were done six months in advance. There are issues there about how new parents can be supported. Of course, sometimes the focus is on the new parent and not on those parents with children who are at secondary school or have disabilities or whatever. Different packages of support are required throughout a child's life. That is why we say that workers are parents too. It becomes quite a permanent state of affairs. For a lot of families, the issues that need to be addressed do not occur only in the first year, which is where policy tends to focus.

The railway industry, certainly on the train crew side and the signalling side, is a primarily male-staffed place, and the majority of those men are parents. They find a way to make things work, through discussion with their shop stewards. A lot of people choose to work shifts because it better suits the way that they organise their family care.

I would not say that there were big problems. There was a willingness on the part of the company and the part of the union to work together to accommodate someone who, for example, wanted to be on night shifts permanently in order to meet their family's needs.

The issue has not been disregarded, but it comes up in a way that is more generally about ensuring that everything in the business or in the public service still operates.

Christian Allard: Regarding the agenda and the vocabulary that you use, the STUC has moved from talking about mothers and fathers and, instead, talks about parents. Do you think that that

is the right attitude to have, or should we emphasise the role of fathers? Do you think that trade unions have a responsibility to break down the idea that a father should be at work and a mother should be at home?

Ann Henderson: We deal with parents who are in work. The STUC sees significant differences in the labour market with regard to where men work and where women work. Before I came to the meeting, I was looking at the census figures for lone parents. As you probably know, 92 per cent of lone parents in Scotland are female and 8 per cent are male. However, when you break that down with regard to who is in work, you see that 18 per cent of the male lone parents are in part-time work and the remainder are in full-time work. In comparison, the female figures show that 64 per cent of lone-parent women who work are in part-time work. There are some big questions there that we need to explore a bit more. How do those fathers, who have reported difficulties in other areas, manage to hold down full-time employment while caring for their children? It does not mean that they are not being excellent fathers at all. Does it mean that their wage levels and access to flexibility were better in the first place, which is why they have been able to accommodate having a child on their own? Why do so many of the female lone parents work part time? Why have they not been able to get back into the labour market full time? I do not know the answer to those questions, but a lot of things need to be explored a little bit more.

The vast majority of lone parents in Scotland—men and women—work. That is not what the headlines might tell us. Nearly 68 per cent of women in Scotland are in the labour market—they are in work. The majority of women are not just at home, even in two-parent households. Most people work, and most people want to work. Other factors are keeping people out of the labour market.

Part of the discussion is undoubtedly about things that the committee has considered before around childcare, access to work and support. When the report arising from our discussions today is published, I will take it back to colleagues in the STUC for more discussion on the matter.

There is a further issue about fathers who work. Historically, issues around childcare or flexible working requests have been put on trade union conference agendas by the STUC women's conference—by women organising and speaking up to improve policies and resources. In the long term, that will benefit all workers and all parents. It has been women, however, who have organised around those issues, and I commend them for that, as it will improve working conditions for

everybody, and it has improved conditions for some women.

There are some questions around that. Why have all those fathers not felt it a priority to raise the campaign on childcare to a higher level? The position is changing, which is a welcome development, but over the past 100 years, that has not always been the case. The picture is complex, and it is changing. That is why this discussion is important and useful.

The Convener: I will go back to Patrick Burke and Brenda Armstrong. We heard at a previous evidence session that fathers working in the public sector have difficulties accessing time off. How do you ensure that you have the same standard and accessibility of entitlements at your Royal Bank of Scotland branches throughout Scotland and England, and throughout Police Scotland? Am I right in saying that decisions about such entitlements will be made at a branch level? How do you ensure that the people who make those decisions are making the same decision throughout Scotland?

Patrick Burke: You are right that there is autonomy at local level for staffing and that the decision will be down to the branch manager, supported by an area manager covering a group of branches.

The approach will very much depend on the area where the office is. You will not be surprised to hear me say that it will probably be easier to implement a flexible working pattern in a city centre office with 100 people working on a floor than it will be in a branch with eight or nine staff. There are a number of ways for managers to work—perhaps not a permanent rota as such, but some sort of rota system. Staff could come in early or leave a bit later to cover busier times, particularly at branch level.

In that way, the approach would be consistent throughout Scotland—and in branches in England, too. The requirement is there and it will be met, but we are a customer-facing industry. I completely take on board Ann Henderson's point; we are very fortunate in some parts of the Royal Bank of Scotland, in that we can afford our staff who can work remotely. However, at a branch level there is a customer to be served, and it is difficult to do that while also giving statutory leave.

The managers are given autonomy to work out how that should happen. We might get in some temporary staff to help out or use the resource from elsewhere in the area to help. We make the approach consistent so that, if there is a new father in the area, he will get the level of time off that is afforded to him. As I said earlier, that might not necessarily be two weeks in a row—it might be a couple of days this week and three days the

next—but it is very much to suit exactly what the father wants. That should be consistent throughout the whole of the UK.

10:00

Brenda Armstrong: There is a big difference between formal and informal arrangements. We are probably not aware of the majority of informal arrangements because they work and do not present any issues.

Prior to the creation of Police Scotland, we had the eight different police forces and two agencies, but flexible working has largely been available since 2005. That was not just for parents or carers; it was open to everyone to apply for it. The uptake has been predominantly female, although that is changing over time. We see more examples of males applying for flexible working arrangements within full-time compressed hours, whereas women take more part-time work. We did some investigations in Lothian and Borders—one of the legacy forces—and found that 64 males have flexible working arrangements whereas 348 females have them. Those are the formal arrangements.

Now that we have moved to one police service for Scotland, we are looking at policies and practices and trying to make sure that we have standard approaches and policies for all staff. We have a real opportunity to see what our policies are actually saying and how we ensure that they fit everyone.

Policy is one thing, but the implementation of policy is also important. Being in the public sector, we do a lot of employment monitoring to see who makes use of the policies, who applies and what reasons are given by people who do not apply. More work needs to be done on the reasons why people do not apply.

We have active staff associations, an active women's development forum and an increasingly active disability and carers police association. We are trying to work more in conjunction with them to find out what we need to do. At the end of the day, we are talking about business benefit and performance.

Alex Johnstone: I will go back to something that occurred to me when Patrick Burke was talking. It might relate to something that he talked about in the bank, but it could relate to men in other positions. Do men who work in relatively small groups, particularly if they have a management responsibility, feel under pressure to minimise the time that they take off for their families? That pressure could have many sources, but does it often come from themselves?

Patrick Burke: Yes, I would say that that is a fair point. A lot of people join the banking industry when they leave school, so the industry has a lot of time-served workers who have been there for 30 to 35 years and have seen all the changes within the organisation. Having made it to a management position, they might have a slightly different outlook and think that, if they take time off for the birth of a child, or if one of their members of staff wants to do that, they are under pressure to come back or to take two weeks as an entirety and then come back. Certainly, no one in the organisation would put that pressure on them to come back.

I can speak only about my own experience, having been in a management position in which I was flexible around the needs of my wife and child. I was also conscious that there would have been two or three people covering for me and taking on elements of extra work. If you are working with a team ethos, there comes a point at which you want to get back to work and to dealing with your internal or external customers.

Alex Johnstone therefore makes a fair point—but there would be no pressure on the organisation to tell the individual to come back before they were ready to do so.

The Convener: Do you have any posters advertising the fact that single fathers or fathers-to-be can have those flexible working hours or that they can approach someone in human resources to discuss flexible working?

Brenda Armstrong: In Police Scotland we do not have any posters. It would largely be the responsibility of line managers to discuss with fathers and prospective parents what options they have in relation to taking time off, but it would not be as visible as a poster.

The Convener: Does the Royal Bank of Scotland have anything like that?

Patrick Burke: No, we do not, but we do have a dedicated wellbeing website for staff. It does not focus specifically on new fathers, but it gives staff advice on how to cope with their workload and with life in general, and on any requirements such as term-time working, fully compressed working hours and flexible working hours.

We do not have posters at local level, although there may be some in the head offices in Gogarburn and London. The website is highly visible on our home page and all staff will be mailed relevant articles from it. We also have our own internal publications that are emailed to staff, which could focus on a story about a new father. Although we have no posters, we have relevant material that staff can refer to.

The Convener: I asked because, at a recent meeting that we had with fathers, someone brought up the fact that, when they went to the doctor or hospital, the photographs on the posters always showed a mother and child, not the father, and so they sent out mother-orientated messages. I am desperate to have a look at your website to see if it does the same.

Patrick Burke: It might not focus specifically on an individual, but I can completely understand that point.

The Convener: The focus is very much on the mother, as opposed to its being on the mother and father or on a single father and child. It would be worth while looking at that.

Brenda Armstrong: The deputy chief constable recently launched a new flexible working policy and standard operating procedure on the Police Scotland website with a briefing about his expectation that it would be used successfully throughout the organisation. That gives a focus to the commitment of the organisation.

Marco Biagi: I would be interested to hear what Ann Henderson thinks about the convener's question. The point clearly has implications for women, because the posters reinforce traditional gender role perceptions. You may have a broader perspective across all employers on whether that is an issue.

Ann Henderson: That is partly why the language that I used was about working parents. One thing that was clear from the women's employment summit, which the STUC held jointly with the Government in 2012, was that the focus on the real experience of women in the workplace is something of a double-edged sword, as it reveals the assumption that women will primarily take responsibility for childcare. There were also examples of situations in which women had chosen to—or perhaps felt that they had to—stay in part-time work to facilitate family needs.

Simultaneously, however, it was very clear in the workshops that people wanted their partners or husbands to take more responsibility—and to be perceived in the workforce as having that responsibility. Therefore, the language we have used is more about working parents. Like parenting across Scotland, we see some of the work that is being developed with working families and the use of the phrase “Happy to talk flexible working” as welcome across employers. As I have explained, the STUC does not have direct representatives, but we would expect workplace representatives in every sector to negotiate and work on flexible working.

On bargaining for equality, there are training courses on collective bargaining and what equality content they should have. We would expect men

and women as reps to develop those equally and to apply them equally across the workforce. That is certainly not always the experience, and that is why those issues continue to dominate the women's conference and issues that women raise.

At the STUC, we are delighted that the childcare discussion, for instance, has recently moved more into a discussion about economic growth, economic investment and investment in children's wellbeing, and away from childcare being seen as primarily an issue for women to address. Obviously, a big shift is required, and that continues to be an issue. It is not an accident that it is still in the women's spaces in our movement that those discussions are brought up most often.

John Finnie: Some of the issues that I was going to cover have been picked up. My first questions are for Mr Burke and Ms Armstrong. How would the people who work for your organisations be aware of their entitlement?

Brenda Armstrong: The information is communicated. It is available on the internet, and a lot of work is going on to ensure that people are very clear about the changes in going from the legacy forces to Police Scotland. Communications regularly go out about new policies and standard operating procedures. They go out to human resources and line managers who are responsible for cascading them down through the business.

John Finnie: So it would be for a line manager to explain things to an operational officer.

Brenda Armstrong: Yes.

John Finnie: Is that done proactively?

Brenda Armstrong: Yes.

Patrick Burke: Similarly, we have a dedicated HR website that is accessible to all staff in the organisation. In addition, each area has an HR or resourcing representative who works with the line manager. There is an onus on the line manager to be fully aware of any paternity or maternity regulations that come in via the website and line manager guides. That is probably similar to what happens in the police.

John Finnie: Most decisions will be taken by the front-line, immediate managers. Do they get additional training?

Brenda Armstrong: Yes. Training will be offered. Line managers would be given their own training to be a line manager and to manage staff, and then there would be different—

John Finnie: As terms and conditions change, are they updated?

Brenda Armstrong: No. Currently, people are still working with their legacy terms and conditions,

but they will be updated whenever we have our job evaluations.

John Finnie: Police regulations and employment law are standard, regardless of whether there has been a move to a single service. If there are changes to either of those, would the first-line managers be made aware of them?

Brenda Armstrong: Yes. People would be made aware if there were to be changes.

John Finnie: Is Mr Burke's answer the same?

Patrick Burke: Yes. If people were looking for any clarification, they would contact their local rep in the first instance. If their rep was not aware of changes, they would contact our HR department, which would keep on top of them.

The website is set up as a one-stop shop. If someone types the word "paternity" in the search, it should bring up the relevant articles, and the first articles should be the group's guide and the group's policy. They are accessible not just to line managers but to all members of staff in the organisation.

10:15

John Finnie: That is good; thank you.

If I noted you correctly, Mr Burke, you said that there is "a business need", and I say to Ms Armstrong that I know from past experience that everything in the police is underpinned by the term "subject to the exigencies of duty". What weighting is given to either of those terms when decisions are made regarding the terms and conditions of officers and members of staff? Mr Burke said that things are more easily accommodated in a larger branch, and I presume that the same is the case in larger areas for the police. However, that tends to suggest that there is not uniformity of terms and conditions.

Patrick Burke: I would not say that there is not uniformity. In our industry, we are there to serve customers first and foremost, so the vast majority of our staff should be in a position where they are customer facing. However, that should not take away from the needs of the member of staff.

Whatever area the member of staff works in, the line manager needs to sit down to discuss matters as soon as they have been made aware of the situation. Obviously, they will usually have been made aware of it months in advance, so there should be sufficient time—at least six or seven months—to plan for the time when the member of staff will not be in the organisation for the two weeks.

It would not be the case that an individual would not get the time off. It is just a case of making sure

that the branch or the office is staffed to its relevant ability and relevant need. If it is not, the line manager in the local area or region will have a responsibility to ensure that resource is either brought in or pulled from other areas to help.

Brenda Armstrong: There is no one solution that will fit every situation across Scotland. It is a question of managers and staff looking at what the potential solutions are for individual cases. Sometimes, the solutions are more innovative where there are smaller groups of staff who work together, because they and their managers have to work hard to find a different solution. Having a family friendly workforce means looking beyond just parents, as it is also about grandparents. It is about being family friendly throughout.

John Finnie: You mentioned monitoring. I presume that it will show up good practice, but will it show up problems as well?

Brenda Armstrong: Yes. There is monitoring on a national basis—the first report is going to happen this year—but we will also divide up the information into divisions and look at who takes up what in relation to flexible working.

John Finnie: What have been the difficulties with the application of work arrangements for people in such circumstances? The experience cannot all have been good; there must be occasional problems.

Brenda Armstrong: Without a doubt. We aspire to have, and we continue to work to have, a workforce that feels valued. It is about an opportunity to work with values and ethics in Police Scotland. The more supported the workforce, the better the performance. I cannot sit here and say that everything has been perfect, but we work to the best of our ability to ensure that we support the vast majority of people in their home lives.

John Finnie: How many individuals in each of the divisions and at the senior command level work on a flexible basis?

Brenda Armstrong: I honestly do not know. I would need to check that out.

John Finnie: What about the chief officer ranks?

Brenda Armstrong: As far as I am aware, the majority of them are not formally working flexibly.

John Finnie: The majority are formally working flexibly.

Brenda Armstrong: No—I am not aware of any of them having formal flexible working arrangements. However, it is accepted that the further up in management people go, the more flexibility they are likely to have.

John Finnie: Does that raise an issue for all the witnesses? Should managers lead by example? If they feel under pressure, as we have sometimes heard, that pressure might be alleviated if some of them worked more flexibly.

Brenda Armstrong: There is very much an opportunity for role modelling to support that.

The Convener: Brenda Armstrong mentioned support groups and information for mothers. Does Police Scotland or RBS have support groups for fathers? I ask that because, when we went along to a fathers group, the fathers said that they gained a lot of help and strength from talking to other fathers. Do your organisations have facilities for fathers—whether they are single or in a relationship—to speak to colleagues about their experiences and ask questions?

Brenda Armstrong: Police Scotland does not have a group for fathers, but we have a number of staff associations that need to be looked at. There is a desire for a strong carers group, which we are looking at, but we have nothing for fathers or for men.

The Convener: Do you have anything for women?

Brenda Armstrong: Yes. We have a women's development forum, which supports females in the workforce. It also aims to work with males, so men can be part of that group. The majority of managers are still male and the aim is to get them on board so that they understand flexible working and, in turn, begin to use such arrangements.

Patrick Burke: I am not aware of fathers networks in the bank. The most well-known group that we have is women in business, which is similar to the group that Brenda Armstrong described. The group is about more women making it to managerial and senior managerial positions in the bank. As far as I am aware—I would have to check this—there is no mothers group, either.

The Convener: If such a facility was available, would fathers be inclined to use it?

Patrick Burke: I am not sure.

The Convener: Is that crystal ball gazing?

Patrick Burke: That is an element of it. I am unsure about the idea; I think that a pilot would have to be run. To be honest, I am not completely sure that the proposal would work.

The Convener: Do your organisations have a day when parents can bring in their children to see the workplace and see what their fathers and mothers do, with a view to challenging stereotyping and showing children that women mechanics fix cars in the police force or that women work in information technology and do

computer programming, for example, rather than just general admin stuff?

Patrick Burke: I am not aware that the bank does that. However, at a local level, people bring their children into offices to see their colleagues and show them about. In the Glasgow office that I work in, some of my colleagues—male and female—have brought in their children for an hour or two more informally to show the children what their mum or dad does in the workplace. I would have to check, but I do not think that we have a workplace kids day, for example.

Brenda Armstrong: The situation is very much the same for Police Scotland. Nothing is formal. There might be pockets of such practice, but it does not happen throughout Police Scotland.

The Convener: When you go into schools and colleges to advertise your job vacancies, do you try to attract females into roles that have traditionally been viewed as being more for males and vice versa?

Patrick Burke: There are a number of programmes throughout the bank. We have a school leavers programme whereby school leavers are encouraged to apply for a role in the bank and are placed in different parts of the business—they might be in a branch network; a retail network; a business, commercial or corporate network; or one of the back offices. That is supplemented by our on-going graduate programmes, internships and that sort of thing. We are also involved in the Career Academies UK programme whereby staff are encouraged to mentor fifth and sixth-year students to give them an idea of what the workplace is like.

At Scotland level, we are heavily involved with organisations such as Entrepreneurial Spark, the Peter Jones entrepreneurial academy, the business gateway, Scottish Enterprise and so on. We have had an extremely high profile in that area over the past two or three years.

It is completely up to the individual to decide which path they want to follow—that is made very clear at the interview and during the selection process. We would not pick somebody to go down a particular route on the basis of their sex; our decision would be based on what they chose to do and what they wanted their career progression to be.

Brenda Armstrong: Police Scotland has been very active in trying to recruit a diverse workforce. A lot of the work that is done in schools and universities is about trying to illustrate the variety of roles that there are in the police and about trying to tackle some of the myths, such as that police officers are male, need to be 6ft tall and so on. We try to make the opportunities more real for people.

We are also working with some of the specialist teams within policing to address occupational segregation and to encourage females to join specialist firearms teams, search teams and things like that. We are trying to make those teams more friendly towards females in order to get more females to join them. That work is on-going and we are monitoring the situation.

The Convener: Does Ann Henderson want to comment?

Ann Henderson: Some really welcome initiatives across a number of organisations in Scotland are looking at occupational segregation, which overlaps with what we are discussing.

Linked to our earlier conversation about fathers is the extent to which young men define themselves as fathers and the extent to which young women define themselves as mothers. A lot of Government resources go into the modern apprenticeship programme, but we know from evidence that we have not quite cracked how to prevent the programme from reinforcing occupational segregation issues. Do we know how many of the 16 to 24-year-olds who are modern apprentices are parents? Do we know what work is being done to encourage young men who are parents to define themselves as fathers and parents in the modern apprenticeship programme? It is an important recruitment route into work for many young people.

By the age of 24, a significant number of young people in Scotland will be mothers or fathers or will be thinking about starting a family. How do we look at occupational segregation in the modern apprenticeship programme and at how people in that programme define themselves? We often find that male workers are parents and fathers, but they do not define themselves in that way. Not defining themselves in that way but defining themselves as engineers or whatever affects the discussions that they have in their workplace over a cup of tea, how policy is made and many other things.

10:30

There are messages to be sent and there is some work to be done, which is why we are trying to get the discussion going about workers being parents, too. People make false separations in policy discussions, and that runs into the discussion about occupational segregation. When a male or female police officer goes out to give a careers talk, perhaps they should also say that they are a parent and not conceal some of the rather important facts that contribute to how we plan and negotiate flexible working.

People's lives change, and older women might be more attracted to and more able to go into

some of the jobs that are classically defined as male jobs because they have organised some other things in their lives and are more confident and able to do that. We have been doing some work on that in discussions at the STUC. We should be more flexible about having that discussion rather than targeting 16 to 18-year-olds.

There are other questions, but they are bound up with some of the earlier questions that colleagues asked about parenting.

John Mason: What you said about how people perceive themselves is interesting. Perhaps women—including young women—place their role as mothers higher up the agenda or, at least, will be more open about it when they speak to an employer. When it comes to modern apprenticeships, are employers flexible with young mothers and fathers?

Ann Henderson: Skills Development Scotland is supporting a small piece of work on diversity that the Scottish union learning team is carrying out. That work, which explores in a bit more detail what is happening in the modern apprenticeship scheme, is not yet complete. However, there is a good example of a young woman who has managed to negotiate doing a three-year apprenticeship over five years and has had two children during that time.

All modern apprentices in Scotland are based in the workplace rather than a college, and where good conditions have been negotiated in the workplace those are transferred and applied to the modern apprentices as well. There is some very good practice on that. I would be interested in discussing how we could develop that for young men and women and make it more visible.

John Mason: Would a young woman be more likely than a young guy to ask for such an adjustment?

Ann Henderson: Exactly. I do not know, but I wonder how many young men in modern apprenticeships have asked to take paternity leave. Somebody here could probably find out the answer to that question, which might be quite interesting.

There is an issue about people not asking, which I am sure links to evidence that you heard earlier about people feeling that they cannot ask. Let us make it more of a conversation. Let us say that such adjustments are good things that are about strengthening society and helping people to stay in work or complete their college studies.

Similarly, there are probably some interesting questions that we could ask about college courses and visibility. I will look back at some of the material that has been produced by affiliated trade

unions on the advice that we give about negotiating on different aspects of flexible working and parenting requests and see what the images are. My feeling is that some of them are quite mixed because the workplaces in which our reps work are not always primarily female. We might be able to provide some material for the committee to consider.

The Convener: That is excellent. Thank you very much.

The committee has no further questions. Would the witnesses like to make any final comments?

Ann Henderson: The inquiry refers to shared parenting, which, I presume, also relates to situations in which there are shared residence orders. Much of the data that is collected in society—through the census, for instance—does not make provision for categories that allow us to pick up the existence of shared residence arrangements. For example, if we look at household data we can identify single-parent households and lone-parent households, but being a lone parent is clearly not the same as having a shared parenting arrangement.

Given the continuing trend away from the model of two parents and two children in a hard-working household, which is talked about but is not the reality, we need to consider how we collect some of the data in the longer term, because it does not reflect shared parenting. We cannot find it. Even our organisations do not know the figures. We know that 11 per cent of households in Scotland are lone-parent households, but we do not know how many have shared parenting arrangements. How do we record which house the child lives in or is based in for accessing services? How does the parent declare it to their employer if they have shared residence but the child is shown as being resident at another household?

There is a gap in some of the information that we are collecting that the trends suggest it would be useful to start to address over the next 10 or 20 years.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate.

The Convener: Thank you all very much for coming along and giving us your evidence.

That brings us to the end of today's meeting. We will conclude oral evidence for our inquiry into fathers and parenting at our next meeting, on Thursday 27 March, which will include evidence from the Minister for Children and Young People.

Meeting closed at 10:36.

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