

PMW 05

Ymchwiliad i feichiogrwydd, mamolaeth a gwaith yng Nghymru

Inquiry into pregnancy, maternity and work in Wales

Ymateb gan: Plaid Cydraddoldeb i fenywod

Response from: Women's Equality Party

## **A caring Wales**

1. We all need care at some point in our lives. Yet the old political parties treat care as separate from the economy, as if our communities and businesses could survive without the paid and unpaid care work that is mainly undertaken by women. Those who care at home are classified by statisticians as “economically inactive”, and many employers dismiss time spent on care giving in the same way. Parents and carers know better. Caring is not only essential work but a huge learning experience that broadens perspectives and enhances organisational and interpersonal skills.

2. The majority of the people who give up employment to care full-time are women. It has been estimated that the economic value of the unpaid care provided by women in the UK is around £77 billion per year. When care is compensated, it is underpaid. Trying to fulfill their statutory duties, local authorities have turned to zero-hour contracts for social care, pushing women, who make up 82% of the workforce, into poverty, which then causes them to retire into poverty. Yet it is widely accepted – as the Women's Budget Group has repeatedly pointed out – that investment in care creates twice as many jobs as investment in construction.

3. WE ask Welsh Government to:

- invest in universal childcare so that all parents have access to good quality, free care for their children from the end of shared parental leave
- invest in shared parental leave so that all parents can share the joys and responsibilities of parenthood (as further detailed below)
- stop the use of the stigmatising term “economically inactive” for those working at home, by changing the Labour Force Survey
- encourage and support men who wish to take on caring roles in work and in the home, including tackling gender stereotyping, encouraging more men into the teaching profession, and making parental leave a reality for fathers and same sex partners.

## **Entrepreneurial and working Wales**

4. There has been a huge growth in female self-employment but, for many women, starting their own business is not a choice. It is a consequence of public sector job losses, increases in retirement age and driven by a need to balance unpaid caring with an income. The pay gap widens for women after 50, and older women who have taken a career break to care for others struggle to get back into work. Women also more often retire into poverty because they are likely to have earned less than men and to have taken time away from work to meet caring responsibilities.

5. In total, women earn just 52% of what men do every year because not only are they paid less, but they also are more likely to sacrifice opportunities for paid work for the sake of their family. While many parents choose to spend time at home with young children, at least 600,000 stay-at-home parents would prefer to work if they could afford to do so. The Women's Business Council has estimated in 2012 that there were 2.3 million women who wanted to be in work but were not, and a further 1.3 million who wanted to work more hours. Across the UK working mothers of young children are effectively paying to work. This is not only bad for women and for the wider economy, but it is bad for children.

6. Reports of underfunding of the 30-hour free childcare scheme for working parents of three- and four-year-olds in England is a stark warning for Wales. In England it has resulted in nurseries not being able to sign up to it and 50,000 eligible children missing out. The Welsh Government's own research shows that capacity is simply not there for parents to access the 30 hours of care being promised. Wales has the lowest rate of female employment across the UK and providing access to affordable childcare is key to changing this.

7. WE is the only political party putting forward a solution that works for everyone and gives children the best possible start in life: universal free childcare, available from the end of shared parental leave. Other parties approach these vital issues piecemeal and without addressing the ways in which they are connected. Our plans will boost the economy, create up to 1.7 million jobs across the UK and save as much as £37 billion through higher tax revenues and lower benefit payments. Evidence shows that a 10% increase in the proportion of mothers working could raise £1.5 billion in increased tax revenue and reduced in-work benefits.

8. Overall, the contribution of women to our economy and our society is undervalued, both in paid work and at home. The OECD has shown that if we unleashed the true potential of women the economy could grow by an extra 10% by 2030, and McKinsey has estimated that bridging the UK gender gap in work would create an extra £150 billion on top of business-as-usual GDP forecasts by 2025. This could translate into 840,000 women getting to work and gaining financial independence. It is time to end the occupational segregation and the pay bias for occupations perceived as "male" or "female" which means caring work is paid less than manual labour. Women who want to work should be able to do so and be paid fairly for it.

9. WE ask Welsh Government to:

- offer free childcare all across the UK from the end of paid parental leave at nine months, meeting the criteria of being universal and not for profit. Parents who work non-traditional hours and need more flexible childcare will have the option of a voucher alternative
- extend the recent requirement for gender pay reporting for businesses, organisations and public bodies with more than 250 employees to smaller businesses of 50 employees or more, and monitor the impact of the gender pay gap reporting in Scotland where public authorities with more than 20 employees are to be required to publish their gender pay gap
- require gender pay gap reporting to be broken down by age, employment status, ethnicity, race, disability, industry and working hours, as well as gathering data on

retention during – and up to a year after – parental leave

- increase the capacity of public authorities to undertake an equal pay audit review, broken down by other protected characteristics, and publish the results, along with an action plan to close the gender pay gap and reduce occupational segregation, and define ways to expand this to all organisations contracting with the government
- work with HM Revenue and Customs to gather data through PAYE and self-Assessment forms on gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability status, industry and working hours. This data should be anonymised and published in an open data format to allow researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of disparity in pay
- remove barriers to justice for those who have suffered workplace discrimination by lowering the fee for issuing an employment claim from the current £250 to £50, and scrapping the hearing fee of £950 altogether. Monitor the Scottish Government's intention to abolish employment claim fees. Fee remissions for those on low incomes will remain in place
- restore the power of employment tribunals to advise those employers who have been proven to discriminate
- investigate the most appropriate way to introduce split Universal Credit payments to ensure women's financial independence
- give new parents a longer grace period of nine months – rather than the current three months – for cases involving maternity discrimination or parental leave discrimination
- activate the provisions of the 2010 Equality Act that permit dual discrimination claims; require the criteria that protect women from being made redundant while on maternity leave to be extended to pregnant women before they start maternity leave
- require employers to provide time for, and a place where, women can breastfeed or express milk in the workplace
- support the development of a fully qualified workforce in early years education with pay scales that are commensurate with the importance and value of pre-school and early years care
- make pre- and after-school clubs available and affordable on school premises from 8am to 6pm
- incentivise companies to put in place on-site childcare by exempting on-site childcare facilities from business rates, paid for by a small uplift in the rates for large premises
- commission a public education campaign to raise awareness of the level of unpaid care work placed on women, and encourage men to share the load

- hold businesses to a higher standard when they publish data on the gender pay gap so that they show the number of men and women working part-time, the number of BAME and disabled women, and retention rates before and after maternity leave.

## **Equal parenting in Wales**

10. The joys and responsibilities of parenthood are not shared equally in our society. Mothers undertake the majority of care for children, impacting their employment, progression and future earnings. In later life, care for elderly parents tends to fall to daughters, rather than sons. This holds back women in the workplace – but men suffer from this imbalance, too: denied the opportunity to care for and enjoy time with their children or parents and penalised if they do choose to leave or reduce their work for caring. Our goal is to achieve truly shared parenting and care giving. This will help reduce the pay gap, make it easier for employers to hold on to good staff, permit more women to take on decision-making roles in business, politics and beyond, enable more men to take part in childcare and allow more children to benefit from time with both their parents. International evidence demonstrates that the best way to increase fathers’ take-up of parental leave is to allocate a longer and better compensated period on a “use it or lose it” basis – otherwise the stigma and cost of taking time away from work remain huge barriers to take-up. As enlightened businesses now understand, managed properly, flexible working is not a cost but a benefit to all involved, regardless of gender. This can be crucial for workers who also have caring responsibilities. By building up a caring economy, WE will ensure care is valued. As women and men start sharing the joys and responsibilities of care more equally, our economy will thrive and families prosper.

11 WE ask Welsh Government to:

- implement a fully equal system of nine months parental leave at 90% of pay. It will guarantee each parent (including same-sex couples and adoptive parents) three months away from work, with an additional three months they can split in whichever way they want. Currently, mothers are entitled to six weeks leave on 90% of pay and fathers just two weeks. Mothers will still be entitled to a year off work. Statutory pay will remain in place for non-working parents, for those whose earnings are lower than the statutory pay and for those who wish to take longer parental leave
- ensure that single parents are able to nominate a second caregiver of their choice for the shared parental leave entitlement, and that fathers’ or same sex partners’ entitlements are not reliant on whether a mother is in paid work or not
- ensure that self-employed parents have the same maternity, paternity and adoption leave and pay entitlements, as proposed in the 2016 Self-Employed Review conducted by Julie Deane OBE
- protect low-income women, and those who are struggling to find work – a struggle which can become impossible during pregnancy – by making parental leave available to all working mothers irrespective of how long they have been in the same job
- ensure fathers and same-sex partners who work have paid leave to attend ante-natal scans with their partner

- start an inquiry into the rights of pregnant women and new parents in casual and precarious work to ensure they can attend their antenatal appointments, have safe working environments and take sick days without fear of losing their job
- reform health and safety protections for pregnant women and new mothers to ensure that employers assess the risks affecting individual women and swiftly address them
- examine existing leave systems of all kinds to understand who takes what and for how long, and challenge any inequalities identified
- work with the business community to make flexible working the default, starting with all those on the government's own Universal Jobmatch platform and adverts posted by companies with 250 or more employees – making it a requirement to state what forms of flexible working the post is suitable for by means of a checklist. Instead of opting in to job sharing, home working or flexible hours, such companies will have to find a business reason for opting out
- require Business Wales to support small businesses in their area with the initial costs of investing in remote working
- permit employees to submit a claim for unreasonable refusal of a request for flexible working and for unreasonable refusal to offer a trial period, with compensation where this is proven to have taken place
- require Careers Wales and Welsh Government funded employment schemes to promote internship/returners programmes for all ages, working towards subsidies to high quality “returnship” programmes based on the funding model for apprenticeships
- require baby-changing facilities to be available to all genders in all public buildings, and work with businesses to ensure this is delivered in privately owned premises too;
- review all government publications and services – and material handed out in public premises – to ensure they promote a narrative that raising children is a whole-family responsibility, however families are formed
- build a general social and legal expectation of the full involvement of both parents in the lives of their children – emotionally, practically and financially – even if the parents are not together, unless there is a pattern of violence or clear risk to either parent or child.

## 12 The Women's Equality Party calls for

- Equal pay, pensions and access to work
- Zero tolerance for workplace discrimination
- Investment in childcare
- Equal parenting and a whole family approach
- Equal parental leave
- Flexible working for all
- Valuing care and the caring economy