



Wales Assembly of Women – response to covid-19 pandemic

Getting women back to work

Wales Assembly of Women is glad of your positive response to our letter and appreciates your assurance that the Welsh Government is committed to ensuring recovery plans will reflect its vision and principles for achieving gender equality in Wales. As an independent campaigning NGO, we now welcome the opportunity to contribute further to the consultation on Our Future Wales.

We would like to suggest Welsh Government looks to take positive action to help women – across the generations – to enter or return to the workplace. Analysis by the *Women's Budget Group*¹ shows that as we approach the end of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in October, women across the UK are most at risk of redundancies. This will have an inevitable knock-on impact on women's job progression, income and future pensions.

The challenges to women's career progression are not new. They were highlighted in the 2018 *Is Wales Fairer?*² report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales which flagged that traditional gender roles, norms and stereotypes continue to affect educational attainment, strong gender segregation remains in apprenticeships, and women are still more likely to be in low-pay occupations than men.

The report noted, too, that difficulties in balancing caring responsibilities are a barrier for women moving up the career ladder. The 2017 *Who Runs Wales?*³ report found that women only accounted for 6% of chief executive roles or equivalent in the top businesses. This shows a clear need for investment in specific adult education courses targeted at women across a broad range of skills and concomitant child-care services. Covid-19 has highlighted the need to step-up care for the elderly, an occupation in which women – and low pay – predominate. If the pandemic leaves behind even more medical problems, as reported by the BBC,⁴ even more women could be likely to have to take on a caring role.

All these reasons are why we are calling on Welsh Government to act boldly, and creatively in the recovery phase of the outbreak to ensure there is no turning back the clock on gender equality. We would like to see Welsh Government create new platforms and opportunities for

¹ Women's Budget Group May 2020 Easing Lockdown: Potential Problems for Women <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Easing-lockdown-.pdf>

² Is Wales Fairer? 2018 The state of equality and human rights <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/is-britain-fairer-2018-is-wales-fairer.pdf>

³ Who Runs Wales? 2017 https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/wrw_2017_english.pdf

⁴ Coronavirus doctor's diary: Why are people remaining ill for so long? July 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-53368768>

women – both for young women and for women returning to work – to enter or return to the workplace. These are our suggestions for your consideration:

1. A commitment to an apprenticeship scheme specifically for young women. We would like to propose something in the nature of a Young Women's Apprenticeship Wage Subsidy that would make it more attractive to employers to recruit young women. We would also suggest this is done in conjunction with support for young women in the shape of on-line coaching and help with job applications and interviews.
2. For women returning to work, we would propose an allied scheme of a Wage Subsidy for Women Returners to apply to jobs more generally. This would target a known disadvantaged group and reflect the spirit of the government-funded furlough scheme that has already supported so many workers in Wales.
3. We would ask Welsh Government, too, to look at schemes like 'returnships' for mothers who have taken some time out of the labour market. A returnship is a short-term internship designed for people returning to work. Like traditional internships, they are paid, fixed term contracts with supportive employers, designed to help someone into employment.

In further support of these proposals, we would like to draw your attention to some recent significant research, hard evidence for the need of positive action if the Welsh Government is to achieve its vision of gender equality.

Data from a *University of Cambridge*⁵ study suggests that women are already four percentage points more likely to have been made redundant instead of furloughed. These are challenges faced by all women regardless of race, sexuality, disability, class, age and faith.

On younger women, analysis from *Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre* on Covid-19 and the Welsh economy⁶ flags that shutdown measures have 'hit the youngest workers the hardest', and young women 'particularly hard' with 39% of all female employees under 25 working in shutdown sectors.

Analysis by the *Resolution Foundation*⁷ suggests that an additional 640,000 18-24-year-olds could find themselves unemployed in the UK this year alone. It highlights that three years after having left full-time education, the employment rate of today's graduates is projected to be 13% lower, three years down the line, than they would have been absent the crisis.

⁵ Cambridge University April 2020, Women bear brunt of coronavirus economic shutdown in UK and US <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/women-bear-brunt-of-coronavirus-economic-shutdown-in-uk-and-us>

⁶ Cardiff University, Wales Fiscal Analysis June 2020 Covid-19 and the Welsh economy: shutdown sectors and key workers https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/2410343/Covid-19-and-the-Welsh-economy-shutdown-sectors-and-key-workers-briefing-paper.pdf

⁷ Resolution Foundation May 2020 Young Workers in the coronavirus crisis <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

In evidence to the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher and Further Education, Dr Myfanwy Davies⁸ said women with children who are academics had spent the last three months doing at least two jobs.

She said: 'The kind of contrasting expectations that we have of men and women in terms of caring responsibility are already clear. We're only 12 weeks into lockdown, but they were already clear in terms of research and journal submissions that are led by men and women in the past few weeks—you can see that happening. Men have greatly increased their submissions in terms of journal articles and research bids. Women have a little bit, but, as a proportion, compared to last year, women have fallen dramatically behind.'

The fact that there have been disproportionately more papers written by men than women during lockdown is a clear illustration of the already demonstrated gender imbalance in universities.⁹ And these figures are not just a matter for the past. They will affect the ability of these women to get research grants in future and, potentially, their future employment within universities.

As an organisation, Wales Assembly of Women has supported the development of women in academia through the establishment of the *Audrey Jones Awards for Research by Women* to provide a platform for women new to academic research.

New research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies¹⁰ focuses on the need to support older women's return to work. It found that mothers are more likely to have quit or lost their jobs or to have been furloughed, since the start of lockdown. It showed that of parents who were in paid work prior to the lockdown, mothers are one-and-a-half times more likely than fathers to have either lost their job or quit since the lockdown began. They are also more likely to have been furloughed. In all, mothers who were in paid work in February are 9% points less likely to be currently working for pay (either remotely or on-site) than fathers.

In addition to the impact of the lockdown, research shows that women already face barriers on returning to the labour market after a period of not working. Analysis shows there is bias against people who have been out of the workforce, even for as little as six months and an unconscious bias from recruiters and hiring managers towards women who are older than average.

⁸ Dr Myfanwy Davies, Council Governor Appointed by Academic Staff, Bangor University, June 2020, Evidence to the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher and Further Education – Staff and Student voices
<https://record.assembly.wales/Committee/6343>

⁹ Gender and Academic Rank in the UK
<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/11/3171>
Female academics 'discriminated against' by universities, research claims
<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/female-academics-discriminated-against-by-universities-research-claims/>

¹⁰ Institute for Fiscal Studies May 2020 How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN290-Mothers-and-fathers-balancing-work-and-life-under-lockdown.pdf>

As the Fawcett Society has noted: Many women experience multiple periods out of the labour market as they have a second or third child or go on to care for grandchildren. This can lead to an accumulation of disadvantage with women repeatedly having to work their way back into the labour market. We would like to see the Welsh Government design creative and challenging interventions along the lines of a returnship in the workplace to help older women overcome some of these hurdles.

We hope you will feel able to add these suggestions to your wider discussions on recovery plans and offer them in a spirit of openness that will see Wales move closer to towards being a world leader in gender equality.

*Submitted on behalf Wales Assembly of Women, an independent campaigning NGO, by
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