

# Equality of Opportunity Committee

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## Inquiry into Gender Budgeting – Evidence from the University and College Union

### Submission to the Equality of Opportunity Committee

University and College Union (UCU) Cymru is the largest trade union for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education in Wales.

This paper sets out our views and concerns relating to the potential disproportionate impact on women of planned and future changes to public expenditure in Wales and the impact of current key policy initiatives.

#### Gender budgeting

Our experience as a trade union is that not enough consideration is given to the disproportionate impact on women of decisions taken by individual institutions or by government more generally. It was because of this experience – and the context of the expected funding cuts to further and higher education – that we first approached the committee to consider the use of gender budgeting as an assessment tool in Wales.

The Council of Europe defines gender budgeting as “an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. It means a gender based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality”. Gender budgeting should therefore be seen as an approach that can be used to mainstream equality into budgets, It is not a separate budget for men and women, instead it is an analysis of spending. Gender responsive budget initiatives can investigate if women and men benefit equitably from economic policy.

#### Impact of cuts on further and higher education

It is important that consideration is given to all aspects of cuts in public spending, not just potential job loss but also a reduction in services such as course delivery and holistic support for learners.

Specifically, there are three key themes UCU would like the committee to consider in this context. These are:

- a. Within post-16 education, women (both as educators and as learners) will be disproportionately vulnerable to the impact of the cuts;

- b. The current mechanism of Equality Impact Assessments is not sufficiently robust to ensure that the equality impact of institutional level changes does not disproportionately impact on women or on other equality strands;
- c. The impact of various Assembly Government policy initiatives on women and consideration as to whether they will sufficiently address the learning needs of women.

## **Disproportionate impact on women than on men**

Women as employees: Research from the Fawcett Society demonstrates that women are more directly exposed to the impact of this recession as employees than they were in the recessions of the 1990's or 1980's. This is also acknowledged in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's current guidance to public authorities.

The labour market continues to be highly segregated with women concentration in public sector jobs across the UK, with Fawcett Society research stating that approximately 38% of women are employed in public administration, education and health. Given that women are also more likely to live in poverty, have fewer financial assets, have working patterns which make them more economically vulnerable than men and often act as shock absorbers in respect of family finances it is likely that women will be more exposed to significant public expenditure cuts than men. It is within this context that gender responsive budgeting can play an important role.

Specifically within further and higher education, it is clear to UCU that without gender responsive budgeting any significant cuts in the post 16 education sector will have a disproportionate effect on women. Statistically women make up 60% of the workforce in FE and the majority of part-time employees within both higher education (53% of academic staff) and further education (70% of total workforce). The figures relating to part-time employment are particularly important given our experience that those employees on part-time contracts or as hourly-paid staff may be more vulnerable to redundancy in the face of spending cuts. It is also the case that women, workers from ethnic minority groups, young workers and workers with disabilities are over represented in low paid temporary jobs. This over representation means that these groups, including women, are at greater risk of having no or minimal employment rights. As a result they may have more limited access to redundancy pay and other statutory support in the event of a redundancy situation.

Women as learners: Women learners may also be disproportionately affected by both the impact of cuts, particularly if these cuts, as expected, hit adult learning most heavily. Within further education women make up 64 per cent of all learners over the age of 25 and 60 per cent of all women learners within further education are within this age group.

Given the clear focus of Assembly Government policy on the 16 – 25 age group (for example, through transformation and through addressing the problems of

those not in education, employment or training) there is a very real threat that adult education will take a disproportionate hit in terms of any cuts. This would clearly have a disproportionate impact on women learners within the sector.

Also of concern is that universities and colleges, in the face of budgetary cuts, will attempt to realign their academic profiles and cut back the wider support and provision they offer to more vulnerable or non-traditional learners. This was highlighted last year with the closure by Coleg Gwent of the Stepping Stones nursery, which had previously offered childcare provision for students attending courses and of the closure of significant adult learning provision at Cardiff University. Both had disproportionate impacts on women learners and our fear is that similar moves could be replicated across both the FE and HE sectors. Support and provision for non-traditional learners (for example, single parents and learners with disabilities) must not be seen as an easy option for cuts but instead as an integral part of any institutions core mission.

UCU colleagues working in adult education in England have already started to feel the impact of these cuts, such as in Bristol (the Beacon centre) and London's South Bank University, where plans have been made to cut adult education provision. In both of these cases vulnerable adults were affected, the majority of whom were women from ethnic minority backgrounds looking to re-enter the workforce or gain basic skills to assist in employment.

A retrenchment of support for non-traditional learners and a retreat to a narrower core business model will have a clear knock on effect for the Assembly Government's strategy for ending child poverty. Continued pressure on institutions to maintain support for vulnerable and non-traditional learners is vital if the generational poverty trap is to be broken. The needs of non-traditional women learners – for example, lone parents and ethnic minority women – are complex and need investment and commitment to be met. To begin to address this issue, further and higher education institutions should be brought directly within the scope of the recently passed Children and Families Measure in respect of being public authorities required to report and acting on the Assembly Government's child poverty commitment.

### **Equality Impact Assessments**

Our experience as a trade union is that broadly speaking colleges and universities give inadequate focus to the potential for disproportionate impact on women as a result of their decisions both in terms of policy and financial decisions.

The quality of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) within the sector varies considerably and the results of the assessments rarely lead to a reconsideration of the overall proposals. Typically they are a statistical exercise which rarely takes a broader and more qualitative assessment of the impact on women, particularly when considering redundancies, following a decision being made or following the introduction of a policy.

In guidance to higher education institutions, the Equality Challenge Unit is clear that EIAs should take place 'early enough to stop bad policy being made, but late

enough for a considered judgement to be reached.’ It further states that it is important that an EIA is an outcome and not a process driven tool and that adequate data is essential. On the latter point, UCU has successfully challenged one institution in Wales where the conclusion of an EIA was that the impact on the various groups was neutral as the required data to reach an informed judgement was not available. This is contrary to the Guidance from the Equality Challenge Unit which stresses that where there is insufficient data to reach a conclusion, arrangements should be made to collect further additional information.

Further, evidence from UCU representatives indicates that Institutions consider the EIA to be a box ticking exercise, rather than a genuine and substantive analysis of the impact the decision would have on the equality groups. This must not be allowed to continue and should certainly not be used as an excuse to remove the requirement on public authorities to carry out EIAs. Instead it is an argument in favour for stronger enforcement of EIAs across the Welsh public service.

Within this context we welcome the proposal from the Assembly Government to retain the commitment to EIAs within the new public sector duties, but would urge that ‘proportionality’ is not used by employers to limit their effective use and that work is undertaken to ensure their enforcement and to raise their quality.

## **Impact of Assembly Government policy initiatives**

Even within the context of the expected cuts there is considerable policy development taking place within post-16 education. The examples highlighted below are not meant as an exhaustive list but are merely intended to highlight the scope for gender budgeting to improve policy development.

- **Transformation and mergers:** Assembly Government policy for both further and higher education is towards reconfiguration of the sector. Structural change of this kind can however lead to considerable changes for lecturing staff, including in the sessions taught and the even the location of courses (whether through moving to a new campus or teaching under collaborative arrangements), both of which can have significant implications for women who are combining work with family responsibilities. Within higher education the HEFCW corporate plan sets out very clearly that Wales needs fewer institutions. It is understood that this will lead to the rationalisation of some provision where specific courses may be offered at only one institution within a region. Again, this could have a genuine impact on the ability of staff and students to combine their work / study with their family commitments. In our experience, little consideration or assessment is given to these implications both at an institutional level and in terms of the community that Institutions serve. For example, the availability of appropriate childcare (particularly important for members of the black and ethnic minority community) and an effective infrastructure including transport links.
- **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects:** While it is still too early to assess the impact of any possible cuts on the teaching

and research profile at an institutional level, it is clear that a greater focus on STEM subjects within higher education is expected.

There are very clear potential implications for such moves, especially in terms of a disproportionate impact on women. Recent research from the Equality Challenge Unit found that black and ethnic minority staff report having fewer opportunities to develop research capacity and enhance their promotion while research undertaken by the European Commission, shows that women researchers are more likely to work in sectors with lower Research and Development. This would suggest that any move towards strategic STEM research would have a negative impact upon women.

Increasing the focus on STEM at a time of an overall reduction in funding will inevitably mean a compensatory loss of provision in other subject areas. In light of the research outlined above, it is likely that the consequence of this shift will have a disproportionate impact on women teaching and studying in other subject areas, especially given the traditional dominance of STEM subjects by men.

- **Foundation Degrees:** UCU welcomes the opportunity for more flexible options to study and for this reason we broadly support the development of Foundation Degrees. They offer a route to a higher level of study for those currently in the workforce and ultimately this may benefit many women. However, there needs to be recognition that for many working women there are significant barriers to studying where they are already combining work and family commitments. The Assembly Government should undertake a gender budgeting exercise to assess whether or not the rollout of Foundation Degrees will meet the specific needs of women workers. Similarly all institutions planning to offer Foundation Degrees should be required to assess how they could meet the needs of women learners.

## Recommendations for action

Recommendation one: UCU recommends that the Assembly Government move towards the use of gender budgeting as the standard mechanism for assessing the impact of policies and financial decisions on men and women. A pilot should be undertaken whereby gender budgeting is used by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills when considering policy development. The outcomes of this pilot should then inform the introduction of gender budgeting across all departments.

Recommendation two: UCU recommends the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning explicitly states in his remit letter to HEFCW and to individual institutions that he expects both sectors to carry out gender budgeting exercises ahead of any redundancy proposals or curriculum changes at institutional level.

Further, individual Further Education Institutions and Universities should be brought directly under the remit of the Children and Families Measure. This would

place a requirement on them to produce and to report on action that institutions have taken, as public bodies, to address child poverty.

Recommendation three: UCU recommends that a stronger regulatory framework is introduced to ensure the greater effectiveness of Equality Impact Assessments within the Welsh public service. Employers must be made to move beyond the 'tick-box' mentality and the proportionality test must not be allowed to further undermine their use.