



Response to the Finance Committee's consultation on:

Welsh Government draft budget proposals for 2014-15

August 2013

Introduction

Chwarae Teg is funded by the Welsh Government to promote, support and develop the role of women in the Welsh economy. Since 1992, we have carried out valuable awareness-raising work to draw attention to the positive contribution women make to economy. We provide expert advice to Ministers and policy-makers in order that the barriers preventing women's participation in the labour market are addressed.

We welcome the opportunity to provide information to the Finance Committee to support their scrutiny of the Welsh Government's draft budget proposals for 2014-15. Women have been and will continue to be disproportionately impacted by budget cuts and we strongly advise that thorough Equality Impact Assessments are carried out before any decisions are taken forward.

Consultation Questions

1. What, in your opinion has been the impact of the Welsh Government's 2013-14 budget?

Inevitable cuts to public services as a result of austerity measures have had, and will continue to have, a disproportionate impact on women in Wales. Recent research from the Bevan Foundation highlights the dominance of women in the public sector where they account for 64% of the workforce.¹ This means that women are more vulnerable to cuts and are more likely than male public sector workers to have experienced redundancy over the last twelve months. Cuts have further impacted the voluntary sector which also employs a significant proportion of women (68% of the sector's workforce is female²) and many organisations are being forced to reduce their staff. Furthermore, women are more likely to use public services than men and will suffer when services are reduced. Although we acknowledge this situation is out of the Welsh Government's control, we would welcome more initiatives or funding to projects that assist women affected by the measures.

2. Looking at the indicative budget allocations for 2014-15, do you have any concerns from a strategic, overarching perspective, or about any specific areas?

Education and Skills

We welcome continued support for education and training standards as well as employment and skills development. The coming years will be challenging for our workforce and it is crucial that Wales commits to providing quality education experiences and supports skills for the workplace. Therefore, we would like to see training and skills development, particularly for women, prioritised for funding.

Economy, Science and Transport

We support the commitment to ICT infrastructure in Wales and continued allocations for entrepreneurship and business information. We also recognise the continued support for priority sectors and the promotion of Science. It is clear, however, that women are not benefitting from spending in these areas at the same level as men and so women are suffering from unintended consequences as a result of these budget decisions. It is important, therefore, that funding is prioritised for projects aimed at increasing the number of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths based employment.

¹ Bevan Foundation (2012) *Women, Work and the Recession*, Bevan Foundation, Merthyr Tydfil

² UK Voluntary Sector Workforce Almanac 2013

Equalities

We are encouraged to see no change to the revenue budget for Equality and Human Rights or digital inclusion. We stress that equalities organisations are experiencing high levels of uncertainty which poses a threat to staff levels as a result of job insecurity. We urge that budget decisions affecting organisations should be communicated at the earliest convenience. In light of cuts to public services, it is often women who are expected to step in to fill the gaps. We expect that gender impacts of cuts are considered fully before budgets are reduced.

Regeneration

We also note a cut to the regeneration budget despite the recent launch of a new regeneration plan. Revitalising our communities is crucial for Wales' future economic success and we hope that full consideration is given to the impact of this reduced allocation before decisions are finalised.

3. What expectations do you have of the 2014-15 draft budget proposals? How financially prepared is your organisation for the 2014-15 financial year, and how robust is your ability to plan for future years?

Chwarae Teg expects that the 2014-15 budget proposals will be assessed for equality impacts before final decisions are made. In particular, we would expect that steps are taken to ensure women are not disproportionately impacted by cuts. Chwarae Teg promotes gender budgeting as a tool to ensure that women are not disproportionately impacted by cuts. As a minimum, a process of gender mainstreaming should be applied to all decisions. This process ensures that the implications of policy decisions for women and men are considered before decisions are made so that both groups benefit equitably. In terms of preparing for the future, Chwarae Teg is taking a proactive approach to ensuring its financial sustainability.

4. What are your views to the Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending and how is this represented in your resource allocation (if appropriate)?

We support prioritising funding that supports either helping people out of crises caused by the economic context or prevents people entering crisis situations. Chwarae Teg's initiatives, funded by the Welsh Government and European Social Fund do exactly that. For example, through our Agile Nation project, we have enabled over £400,000 worth of additional income to enter women's pockets through career development. This helps women and their families out of in-work poverty and is particularly important as there are now more households where the woman is the bread-winner. It also helps to mitigate the impact of benefit changes as research from the Fawcett Society shows that $\frac{3}{4}$ of savings from the proposed benefit cuts will come directly out of women's pockets. It is exactly this type of initiative that will help people in Wales through the difficult times ahead and should therefore be prioritised by the Welsh Government and European programmes.

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