



SHIFTING THE BALANCE?

Exploring the trade union responses to tackling gendered occupational segregation



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INTRODUCTION

In 2010 One Workplace Equal Rights published research on the work that trade unions in Scotland were carrying out on equalities issues. This mapping study repeated an exercise carried out in 2005 to chart the main focuses of trade unions' equalities work and the structures in place to support these. Close the Gap commissioned a section within the mapping study which aimed to assess what work was being undertaken to address occupational segregation. The study revealed that a small minority of unions had been involved in preliminary efforts to engage on the issue of occupational segregation in the labour market (Bond and Hollywood, 2010) but that these efforts were not part of a strategic programme to tackle occupational segregation. While there were a couple of examples of attempts to address problems related to horizontal segregation, there were no examples of work aimed at tackling vertical segregation. The study found that although there is some awareness of the issues around occupational segregation amongst some unions, there is a great need to raise awareness of occupational segregation and its wider impact on women and workplaces.

The findings are of major significance and it is disappointing that little progress has been made around occupational segregation in the labour market. Although the small scale efforts described in the mapping study are a step towards addressing occupational segregation, there is scope for unions to do a lot more. Union activity must be much more strategic, with measurable outcomes, if women are to achieve equality in the workplace.

This working paper outlines the causes of occupational segregation and the impact that it has on women in the labour market and in education and training. It also explores the work that unions have undertaken to engage on the issue, makes recommendations for unions to work towards achieving greater equality for women members in the workplace and suggests proposals for pilot work with Close the Gap.



WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION?

Occupational segregation, by gender, refers to the inequality of the distribution of women and men across different occupational categories and job types. Labour market statistics show that women and men dominate in particular sectors, and are channelled into different jobs within these sectors. Occupational segregation is most often discussed in relation to horizontal segregation, where women and men are clustered into specific job types. Women dominate in catering, cleaning, caring, cashiering (retail) and clerical (administration) jobs. These jobs are also generally low skilled, low-paid, and are usually part-time. There is some consensus around the idea that stereotypically female jobs are significantly undervalued by the labour market, particularly those that involve care. Although women comprise around half of the workforce, more than 60 per cent of women's employment is found across just ten occupations, with 20 per cent of women concentrated in administrative and secretarial jobs (Women and Work Commission, 2006). Women are also far more likely to work in the public sector than men, with women representing 67 per cent of local government workers and 78 per cent of those working within the NHS. In 2007, women made up 97 per cent of the childcare and early years education workforce including 98 per cent of all classroom assistants (Macpherson, 2008).

Table 1: Employment in occupational sector, by gender

Occupational sector	Percentage of men	Percentage of women
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	82.2	17.8
Energy and water	77.3	22.7
Manufacturing	77.7	22.3
Construction	82.6	17.4
Transport and communication	73.1	26.9
Public administration, education and health	27.0	73.0

Source: ONS data from 2009 cited in Scottish Government (2010)

This segregation is also seen at the sectoral level in Scotland. Table 1 shows the number of men and women working in occupational sectors in Scotland. There has been little change in these figures from 2001, with the position of some occupational sectors deteriorating. The proportion of women working in agriculture is down 9.9 percentage points from 2001. In manufacturing it is down 8.4 percentage points.

Gendered segregation is not only horizontal. Vertical segregation, in which women dominate in the most junior roles in any given organisation, and more commonly known as the ‘glass ceiling’, is endemic across the labour market.

Theoretical explanations of occupational segregation

Neo-classical economists consider the gendered segregation of the labour market as an outcome in which women and men obtain skills and knowledge, and build their human capital.¹ According to this theory, employers will choose the most attractive, and least risky, labour option to meet their demand.

Human capital theory assumes that women and men have equal access to resources and opportunities to make rational investment decisions to increase their productivity and, therefore, labour market value throughout their career. Over time, the cumulative effect of women and men making ‘rational choices’ in relation to the resources available to them will inevitably lead to a labour market which reflects those patterns of choices.

As a result, women will pose the greatest risk to employers because they are more likely to take long breaks from participating in the labour market, to have children or care for sick relatives, and at the same time, are less likely to be able to sustain their investment in skills, knowledge and training. Even after substantial investment, the value of those skills will depreciate over periods of absence or during periods of working in lower valued, part-time work.

Feminist economists recognise the flaws in this approach and present a more nuanced, structural analysis. They suggest that neoclassical economic analysis fails to situate the ‘choice’ of women and men in relation to their labour market value to a wider social and cultural expectations and assumes that women and men are equal at the point of entry to the labour market. For example, historically women’s access to education in the UK has been limited, but gradually over the past 60 years this has changed. The expectations and roles of women were firmly based

¹ Human capital refers to the stock of ‘productive’ skills and technological knowledge embodied in labour. The assumption which underpins human capital theory is that people have to increase their learning efforts in order to keep up with the rapidly growing knowledge requirements of a new ‘knowledge economy’.

on the assumption that their primary responsibility is to look after the household; unvalued and unpaid reproductive labour which is invisible to the formal market economy.

Critics of human capital theory also argue that the 'choice' women face to find the optimum balance between remuneration and the types of occupations where the value of skills will depreciate less, is a form of discrimination embedded in the value attributed to the role of women in society as carer, and dependent and subsequently as an employee. Despite recent changes, women's investment 'choices' are still limited as the necessity to strike a work-life balance prevails (women are still likely to be the main carer of children and relatives). Finding appropriate flexible work to match the levels of investment women have made can be problematic.

Part-time work is lower valued, and lower paid, and many women end up working below their acquired and potential skill level, with few opportunities for promotion. Women will fail to see a substantial return on their investment in skills and that same investment will depreciate over the long term, as women will have less opportunity to 'top up' their skills and knowledge in the workplace. The 'choice' of working part-time in this respect results in women being deskilled and clustered into specific occupations as they strive to find the balance between doing a job that pays well and one where the skills levels are low enough so as not to depreciate as much during periods of absence from the labour market. If the market operated in a vacuum, free from sociocultural influence as neoclassical economists suggest, then employers are almost justified in discriminating against women or those who invest in 'women's work' or attributes.

The causes of occupational segregation

The three main causes of occupational segregation are gender stereotyping, inflexible working practices, and the undervaluing of roles and occupations.

Gender stereotyping

Attitudes and expectations based on gender stereotypes can determine the job and career choices made by people. There is a widespread belief that the persistent inequalities between women and men is due to innate and immutable differences in the female and male brains. Women are perceived to be natural empathisers and, therefore, good at caring roles and using communication skills, whereas men are assumed to be better technical jobs and manual skilled work that is done outdoors, along with physical labour.

Fine (2010) critiques the commonly-accepted gender essentialist view and shows that the scientific evidence has been misinterpreted and that there are, in fact, no biological factors which determine these gendered assumptions. Rather, the brain is a fluid organ which is strongly influenced by social and environmental factors which renders conclusions about innate gender differences dubious. From birth, gender is emphasised above all social categories through conventions of dress, appearance, language, colour, segregation and symbols (Fine 2010). Fine argues that this 'neurosexism' holds back the education of girls and boys because of the preconceived views of influencing adults, such as parents and teachers, about the differing abilities of each sex.

Inflexible working practices

Women are more likely than men to have primary caring responsibilities for children, disabled people, or older people. The unpaid labour of caring for disabled and older people alone, represents a £10.3bn saving to the public purse, which is equivalent to the cost of all NHS services in Scotland.

Women face a number of barriers to find flexible work which can accommodate their caring responsibilities. This includes finding work that matches their skills and expertise, and more generally, the level of skills and training they have to offer. The lack of options mean that many women are required to look for part-time work which is usually low-skill and low-paid. Flexible working options further diminish for more senior roles and management positions.

Undervaluing of roles and occupations

The undervaluing of roles is intrinsically linked to stereotyping and the expectations placed on women where historically they have carried out similar roles in the home, such as caring and cleaning. 'Women's work' has lower status and value because the skills required for these jobs are perceived to be inherent in women and the work is, therefore, not fairly remunerated.

The potential for undervaluation of women's work is formally recognised in the Equality Act 2010. Women are not only at risk of being undervalued within a given job or occupation, in that they are at risk of being paid less for the same level of efficiency within the same job, but they are also at risk of undervaluation through employment in jobs or occupations which are themselves undervalued and this is reflected in the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

Equal value is measured in terms of the demands of the job. This means that an individual has the right not to be paid less than a comparator of the opposite sex where the work is different but is of equal value in terms of the demands of the job. Although two jobs are different, they can be regarded as being of equal worth in terms of the nature of the work, the training or skills required to do the jobs, the conditions of work and the decision-making that is part of the role.

Commonly, very different jobs are deemed to be of equal value when analysed in terms of the demands made on the worker such as effort, skills and decision-making. Tribunals have found a number of jobs to be of equal value, for example, a cook and a painter; a speech therapist and a pharmacist; and a sewing machinist and an upholsterer.

The impact of occupational segregation

One of the major impacts of occupational segregation is on pay. Occupational segregation is one of the main factors contributing the gender pay gap, together with pay discrimination and inflexible working practices. In Scotland, the gender pay gap is 14% when comparing women's average full-time hourly rate with men's average full-time hourly pay, and 35% when comparing women's average full-time hourly pay (ONS, 2012).

Occupational segregation also restricts the career and training choices of workers as well as the choices of employers looking for skills. It perpetuates the gender stereotype that cooking and cleaning are 'women's work' while at the same time maintaining the undervaluation of that work.

Occupational segregation is a major contributing factor to skills shortages. It functions as a labour market rigidity which, in turn, has a negative effect on productivity and reduces competitiveness in the wider global economy. The Women and Work Commission estimated that the cost of occupational segregation could be worth between £15 billion and £23 billion per year to the UK economy which is around 1.3 – 2.0 per cent of GDP (Women and Work Commission, 2006).

The benefits of breaking down gender barriers in employment, training and skills acquisition would be wide-ranging. Women and men would have freedom of choice in their careers while employers would have a greater pool of talent to choose from. Women would be encouraged into higher skilled, higher value jobs, and the under-utilisation of skills would be addressed which would subsequently lower the pay gap.

Education

Occupational segregation is not restricted to the labour market. Gender stereotyping is one of the main barriers that prevent girls and boys studying 'non-traditional' subjects at school and college or university. Expectations based on traditional ideas of gender roles affect the choices that children and young people make about what they want to do when they leave school. Girls and boys become segregated into different areas of study which results in the clustering of women and men into different occupational groups.

In subject choice, girls tend towards in biology, social sciences, modern studies, art, home economics and languages, and boys tend towards in physics, technology, computing, and craft and design (Scottish Government, 2010). Further and higher education subject choices made by women and men continue to show a gendered pattern. In further education courses in 2008-09, women dominated in arts and crafts (77 per cent); politics/economics/social sciences (72 per cent); education/teaching/training (69 per cent); and health care/medicine/health and safety (72 per cent), while men dominated in construction and property (93 per cent); transport services (90 per cent) and engineering (85 per cent) (Scottish Funding Council 'INFACT' Database cited in Macpherson 2010).

In higher education courses in 2008-09, women dominated in subjects allied to medicine (87.6 per cent); medicine and dentistry (62.6 per cent); biological sciences (64.9 per cent); veterinary science (77 per cent); social studies (71.2 per cent); education (75.3 per cent); creative arts and design (65.1 per cent) and languages (66.9 per cent). Men dominated in architecture, building and planning (70.6 per cent), engineering and technology (86.5 per cent); and computing science (76.3 per cent) (Higher Education Statistics Agency and Scottish Funding Council cited in Macpherson 2010).

² The MA programme is a publicly funded training scheme which gives individuals the opportunity to combine employment and training by following an industry designed training framework.

The Modern Apprenticeship programme

Patterns of gendered segregation are also found within the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme.² MAs include frameworks located in 'traditional' sectors where the notion of apprenticeship training is established, such as construction and engineering, and also in 'non-traditional' sectors where the concept of apprenticeship training is relatively new, such as early years education and care and retail. In 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission conducted a general formal investigation into gender segregation in the MA programme which focused on the five most segregated sectors: construction, engineering, early years

care and education, plumbing, and information and communication technologies (ICT). The investigation revealed a system of severe occupational segregation where young women are significantly less likely to be involved in science, engineering and technology (SET) related frameworks and young men are much less likely to be involved in health, social care and early years care and education.

The traditional frameworks were also found to be of longer average duration, more resource intensive than those in non-traditional areas, and were associated with enhanced rates of pay for apprentices in training and in the wider labour market. In 2007, the average weekly pay for female modern apprentices was £147 compared with £187 for male modern apprentices, representing a pay gap of 12 per cent. Men in Scotland can expect a percentage wage increase of over 20 per cent on a MA qualification but women can expect less than half that at just under 10 per cent (Walker and Zhu cited in Thomson and Gillespie, 2009).

Although young women are acquiring more skills, these skills are not being rewarded by the labour market. The extent of the gender pay gap among apprentices is explained by the close correlation between gender and industry sector rather than any particular pay discrimination based on gender (Fong and Phelps cited in Women and Work Commission 2006). In other words, the gender pay gap among apprentices is a consequence of gender-based occupational segregation. Table 2 gives a current snapshot of the most segregated frameworks of the MA training programme.

Table 2: Occupational segregation within MA programme

MA Framework	Percentage in training	
Framework	Female	Male
Business and Administration	74.0	26.0
Construction	1.6	98.4
Early Years Care and Education	97.6	2.4
Engineering	2.7	97.3
Hairdressing	92.7	7.3
Health and Social Care	85.5	14.5
Information and Communication Technologies	8.4	91.6
Plumbing	2.2	97.8

Source: Skills Development Scotland National Training Programme Performance Report 2010-2011

Trade unions and Modern Apprenticeships

There is some union involvement in the apprenticeships system but it varies depending on sector and workplace. Involvement has been most notable in male-dominated workplaces and sectors where traditional frameworks such as engineering and construction feature. The level of union engagement also varies depending on workplace. Some workplaces have established agreements with employers and are fully involved in the apprenticeship programme.

From a policy perspective, unions have contributed to debates on the issue of apprenticeships and have lobbied for further investment to increase the quantity and quality of the MAs available.

Scottish Union Learning Modern Apprenticeship Project

The Scottish Union Learning Modern Apprenticeship Project was a year-long initiative, which began in June 2011, the remit of which was to develop and increase trade union activity and engagement with the MA programme in Scotland. The aims of the project were to:

- assess the level of union awareness of, and involvement in, the MA programme in Scotland;
- identify good practice examples of unions engaging with, and supporting, Modern Apprentices;
- raise awareness levels amongst unions of the benefits of MAs through the development and delivery of workshops and seminars;
- support unions to raise awareness of workers' rights and the role of unions with Modern Apprentices;
- raise awareness of equality and diversity issues in MAs; and
- develop resources for union negotiators and reps (SUL 2011).

The project conducted a survey (SUL 2011) to gauge union awareness of, and engagement with, the MA programme. The majority of the respondents were union reps, health and safety reps and union learning reps. Less than half (48 per cent) of respondents had MAs in their workplace. Of those workplaces with MAs, the vast majority (79 per cent) of unions were involved with the apprentices. Union support to MAs included inclusion in negotiated pay agreements (69 per cent) and learning agreements (55 per cent). Respondents also highlighted other ways in which unions support MAs including involvement within collective bargaining; mentoring; developing and delivering the MA programmes with the employer; and union participation in the induction programme.

Although there was some union engagement on MAs, the majority (70 per cent) of respondents felt that their union could be more involved. 76 per cent of respondents either thought that there were issues around equalities or did not know if there were equalities issues (36 per cent and 40 per cent respectively). Occupational segregation was highlighted as major concern by respondents although specific figures relating to this were not available.

The project produced a number of good practice examples although none aimed at addressing occupational segregation. In general, the project did not have an equalities focus and occupational segregation was not a strategic priority for the project.

Apprenticeships in England

The Apprenticeships system in England is different to that in Scotland, with England delivering a greater number of apprenticeships with a Level 2 qualification while Scotland mainly delivers apprenticeships with the higher Level 3 qualification. Similar patterns of occupational segregation are evident, however, in the English system. The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is a 'one-stop-shop' for apprenticeships in England which supports, funds and co-ordinates the delivery of Apprenticeships. NAS is responsible for the delivery and promotion of apprenticeships to employers and potential apprentices, and for raising the profile of apprenticeships more generally.

NAS has responsibility for increasing the number of Apprenticeship opportunities and providing service for both employers and apprentices. The service includes simplifying the process of recruiting an apprentice through Apprenticeship vacancies, an online system where employers can advertise their Apprenticeship job vacancies and potential apprentices can apply. NAS has ultimate accountability for the delivery of UK targets, including those relating to equality and diversity (NAS 2009), and co-ordination of the funding for apprenticeships. NAS now specifically aims to increase diversity among apprentices and as well as challenging occupational segregation.

In partnership with the Skills Funding Agency, NAS is currently funding 16 diversity pilots to address the under-representation of particular groups in apprenticeships. Examples of pilots with a focus on gender segregation include:

- **Essex County Council** – Women in Engineering programme supporting 150 apprenticeships for women over the next three years. The first year will be an all-female group which offers a more inviting environment.

- **West Notts College** – increasing the number of female engineering apprentices within the Passenger Transport and Logistics sectors school liaison sessions for girls and young women; taster sessions including tour of workplaces for young women; sponsored ‘Bring Your Daughter to Work Day’; positive female role models; work placements at engineering companies for young women; and continued support once employed.
- **Bradford College** – partnership initiative with UK Resource Centre and major energy sector employers to increase the number of female apprentices within the craft, technical and professional levels of the energy industry including green/clean energy. Gender equality training for staff with responsibility for recruitment and training of apprentices; review existing recruitment procedures; and identify ‘drop off’ points in selection and engagement process and provide support.
- **Zodiac Training Ltd.** – increasing the number of male childcare apprentices (NAS 2011).

The TUC received funding from NAS for a two year project to promote apprenticeships to unions, encourage union reps to bargain for apprentices, and disseminate best practice and guidance to unions. Funding for the project has been extended and the work of the project continues.

The more general problem with MAs and Apprenticeships is that there is a lack of employer engagement. Apprentices are no longer contracted to remain with an employer once their training has completed. Individuals can also access training away from a workplace setting in further and higher education which means that there is less of an incentive for employer investment in the programme.

There is a significant evidence base for action on occupational segregation within the MA programme in Scotland and yet very little action has been taken. Thomson and Gillespie (2009) suggest that one explanation for this could be that the long list of stakeholders involved in the delivery of MAs allows considerable ‘passing the buck’. This may be coupled with a gender mainstreaming agenda within government that can often mean ‘everyone's responsibility’ becomes, in practice, the responsibility of no single body or governmental department or agency (Thomson and Gillespie 2009).

Skills Development Scotland undertook an equality impact assessment (EQIA) of national training programmes in 2010. This followed a number of Scottish parliamentary questions, and other high-profile critiques of the

persistence of the gendered segregation within a key intermediate skills delivery programme that attracts over £100m of public spend annually. This was done with the aim of ‘understand[ing] and remov[ing] barriers to participation by under-represented groups’ (Skills Development Scotland 2010). The preamble to the EQIA goes on to say that, ‘The data also shows the programmes are characterised by gender segregation, mirroring the gender segregation of the wider labour market.’

The EQIA identifies three key theatres of action on occupational segregation in the MA programme: marketing and communications, operations, and infrastructure and capacity building. Although the EQIA’s contents provide evidence of a wide-ranging literature review, providing an evidence base that is considerably more broad than most EQIAs that Close the Gap has read, the links between the research on occupational segregation, the specific barriers that persist in the operation of the programme, and the actions that might mitigate this segregation, are unclear. The verbs in many of the actions involve ‘exploring’, ‘identifying’ and ‘embedding good practice.’ Along with many other EQIAs, the action plan is not outcome-focused, and it is not clear what the indicators of successful delivery will be. The failure to identify a clear set of barriers to apprenticeships for protected groups is a critical difficulty. Without this, it is impossible to identify a set of appropriate actions, or to suggest outcomes. Instead, the action plan is constructed around spheres of influence, which will reduce its effectiveness.

Union responses to occupational segregation in MAs

There has been a commitment from unions to tackle occupational segregation in that union policy exists through a number of conference resolutions. Actions called for include:

- Raise with affiliates the need to ensure employers are attracting women into traditional male-dominated jobs. (STUC Women’s Conference 2005)
- Encourage affiliates to discuss with employers the barriers to women at work and to raise awareness among reps. (STUC Women’s Conference 2005)
- Continue to work with the [then] Scottish Executive on the national strategy and ensure [women’s] participation in the ongoing review and evaluation of the MA programme. (STUC Women’s Conference 2005)
- [Ask] the Scottish Parliament to tackle the low status and value of occupations and training where women predominate. (STUC Congress 2006)

- Work with relevant agencies to promote a diversity of subject and employment, including MAs, to young women prior to leaving school. (STUC Women’s Conference 2006)
- Lobby the [then] Scottish Executive regarding MA drop-out rates and gender segregation. (STUC Youth Conference 2006)
- Campaign for a review of the apprenticeship scheme to encourage women...onto the scheme. (STUC Annual Congress 2007)
- Pressure the Scottish Government to commit to specific targets for recruitment of Modern Apprenticeships, including...targets for getting women and men into ‘non-traditional’ MA. (STUC Congress 2008)

Work is ongoing around these resolutions and both the STUC and the STUC Women’s Committee continue to work around the issues affecting women’s inequality in the labour market. In 2011, the STUC participated in discussions with Glasgow City Council and Scottish Government officials working on the Commonwealth Games 2014, and with representatives from the Olympic Delivery Authority, with regard to the various apprenticeship programmes and labour market opportunities. The STUC has continued to work with a range of external organisations to further promote discussion on these issues, including the Scottish Women’s Convention, the Women’s National Commission (pre-2010) and the National Union of Students.

Although conference resolutions are policy, the actions called for have not been realised. The discussions by affiliates at STUC congresses and equality conferences, have not filtered down to a local level. Reasonably, there is often a divergence between policy set at conference and the workplace bargaining agenda. There may often be competing priorities, and a national policy issue may be seen as less important or relevant when compared with, for example, redundancies taking place at a local level.

It should be noted that when a resolution is adopted by affiliates at STUC Congress, it does not mean that individual affiliates have committed to a particular course of action although some might have. Rather, affiliates have signed up to the spirit of a resolution.

Sector representative bodies

Sector skills councils (SSCs) are employer-led bodies which have the responsibility for identifying the skills needs of workers in their sector, and ensuring that there is adequate provision of high quality training that will

meet those needs. Unions are represented on the board of each SSC board at a UK level, by at least one trade union official with knowledge of the sector. Unions are also sometimes represented on other specialist and / or regional committees of the SSCs.

There seems to be a variation in the work carried out by different regional committees and the extent to which individual SCCs have a distinct Scottish identity. There is also an inconsistency in the extent to which unions are involved. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity about level of union engagement with SCCs at a Scottish level. There are, however, several good practice examples of social partnerships between unions and sector skills councils at a UK level (TUC, 2011).

SCCs have a number of tools for achieving their objectives, including the development of sector skills agreements³ (SSAs) and national occupational standards (NOSs). Presently, Unionlearn, the organisation responsible for trade union education and lifelong learning in England, consults unions involved in a specific sector to ascertain views of those working in that sector with the aim of contributing to the development of the SSA. Scottish Union Learning also aims to help unions to have a maximum impact on, and influence over, the work of SCCs and SSAs in Scotland.

SSCs have carried out some work on women's participation in the labour market. The Women and Work Sector Pathways Initiative (WWSPI) ran from October 2006 to March 2011. Its aim was to address occupational segregation in the labour market through training, career progression and recruitment projects in England for women working in male-dominated sectors, sub-sectors and occupations. Through the UK Commission for Employment & Skills, the UK Government funded SSCs (match funded by employers) to implement WWSPI. After WWSPI was wound up, six SSCs are doing Women and Work projects with funding from the Employer Investment Fund (EIF). EIF projects are UK wide.

³A sector skills agreement is a contract between employers, government and partners, which aims to improve the performance and productivity of the sector. A SSA will analyse the sector's skill need and provision, and then make agreements with the supply side (providers) to fill those skills gaps.

Although there were some positive outcomes for WWSPI, a number of criticisms were levelled at the programme. Target outputs were missed which was seen by some to signal an under-performance. The projects funded were also relatively small-scale and whilst they appear to have been beneficial to individual women and individual employers, they are unlikely, in the short-term, to have a wider impact on the sector as a whole (Wiseman et al 2010). There is also little evidence of the effect of the programme on both organisational culture and the gender pay gap.

The content of WWSPI also had a heavy focus on building women's confidence and acquiring so-called 'soft skills', while there was less of an emphasis on the structural barriers that prevent women from entering or progressing in male-dominated sectors.

SSCs are currently in a period of transition. A number of SCCs are merging while some of the larger councils have merged with industry bodies, for instance, the finance sector SCC, Financial Skills Partnership, and City UK, and also the retail SSC, Skillsmart, and the British Retail Consortium, sectors where there has previously been poor engagement with employers. The eventual result will be a smaller number of SSCs. The nature of funding for SCCs has also recently changed. Funding from the UK Commission for Skills and Employment was previously allocated to individual SCCs on a demand-led basis but funding is now competitive.

There is no individual model for union engagement with SSCs. There are examples of union engagement with other sectoral bodies. Financial Services Skills Gateway is an employer-led initiative comprised of executive and senior level representatives from financial services companies. Unite the Union is represented on the council, in addition to the Scottish Government and the Financial Skills Partnership and Skills Development Scotland.

The skills landscape is also changing in Scotland with the introduction of Industry Advisory Groups by the Scottish Government. The groups have responsibility for developing and delivering industry strategies, and for providing strategic leadership to industry and the public sector. The groups are comprised of leading business figures from the private sector as well as senior representatives from public sector organisations and other key stakeholders. The group which represents the financial services sector, Financial Services Advisory Board (FiSAB), also has union representation from Unite the Union.

There are a number of other sectoral bodies, for example, the Scottish Funding Council, Scotland's Colleges and Universities Scotland in the further and higher education sectors respectively. Currently, though, unions only engage with such bodies on issues relating to employment, and not in relation to learning provision.

Supply-side strategies and skills utilisation

Previous approaches to addressing the gender imbalance in both the labour market, and in education, have focused on supply-side issues such

as training and skills development, specifically targeted at women. As exemplified by WWSPI above, this has involved an emphasis on increasing women's human capital, and 'confidence' to equip them to return to the workplace or to enter non-traditional education courses or training. Examples in Scotland include the Women@Work project which is a network that provides information, learning and support to women in the Highlands, Moray and Argyll, and the Scottish Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology which promotes gender equality in the SET industries with the aim of increasing women's representation (although the Scottish Resource Centre's work is not limited to supply-side activity).

Supply-side strategies are, however, incapable of addressing the structural barriers which underpin occupational segregation such as inflexible working practices, the undervaluing of female-dominated occupations, the design of senior posts, a long-hours culture, which are often incompatible with caring responsibilities. Even if supply-side strategies are successful in upskilling women and increasing their human capital, the structural barriers still exist which will prevent women from progressing.

Supply-side strategies also presume that if the state supplies more skills that are needed, over time the labour market will find a need for these skills, and productivity and pay will rise as a result. A better educated workforce may help deliver a more productive economy but only if the skills are used properly. Keep (2011a) argues for a move away from supply-side strategies and instead advocates a focus on supplying the skills that are really needed, stimulating further demand for skills and ensuring that skills in the labour market are put to better, more productive use. This approach has been termed 'skills utilisation'. Keep (2011b) notes that in recent years, Scotland has taken a policy lead in moving beyond fixating upon skills supply and is focusing on a skills utilisation approach.

The Scottish Funding Council currently funds an action research programme of 12 projects which aim to explore the role that universities and colleges might potentially play in improving skills utilisation in the workplace. Examples include:

- ***Enhancing Skills Utilisation by Social Care Providers***

The Open University in Scotland is working with social care providers to develop ways of improving management skills utilisation in the social

care sector, addressing how skills can be recognised and used in different workplace settings. Supervisory staff are able to use the skills they acquire through part-time degrees and this has meant helping employers to re-think the roles and responsibilities embedded in the design of supervisory jobs.

- ***Engineers of the Future***

Forth Valley College, Heriot-Watt University, Adam Smith College and Ineos Manufacturing Limited are involved in the Engineers of the Future programme which integrates the development of hand-skills, work-based training and the academic requirements to achieve a Masters in engineering leading to chartership. The programme aims to provide graduate engineer employers with graduates who are workplace-ready and do not require the traditional graduate training programme upon starting their first job.

- ***Creating Cultures of Innovation***

Glasgow School of Art is working with the Institute of Directors, on the Creating Cultures of Innovation (CCOI) project, which uses design thinking as a vehicle to explore the effective use of skills and subsequent impact on individual and organisational performance. The project deploys the principle of co-design, whereby the creativity of everyone in an organisation is tapped into in order to rethink both products and processes and identify new market opportunities.

Keep (2011b) argues that these projects have shown that employers can be helped and supported to re-think how jobs are designed and how workplaces operate in ways that can deliver much more effective use of the skills that their employees possess. This kind of publicly-supported intervention is quite common in Scandinavia – often branded as part of wider innovation policies but has hitherto been very rare anywhere in the UK. There is no well-established concern in UK public policy with job quality, work re-organisation, or job design. Policy assumes that better forms of work organisation, job design and better employee relations will just happen because globalisation and competitive pressures will force companies to do better (Keep 2008).

Research suggests that the way in which jobs are designed, both in terms of the complexity of tasks and level of autonomy and discretion afforded to employees, has a significant bearing upon the scope available to employees to engage in information learning and the opportunities they have to develop and deploy their skills (Payne 2011).

Women are increasingly acquiring more qualifications at all levels and yet very often are working in jobs in where their skills are not being used. Keep argues that work reorganisation and job design need to be viewed as the response to wider issues in an organisation, for example, problems with service and product quality, lack of innovation, weak productivity, and high labour turnover and low morale. Work re-organisation and job design can also be used to address some of the structural barriers women face in the workplace. Unions could usefully become involved in workplace job design and work re-organisation to enhance skills utilisation which would serve to lessen occupational segregation. Workplaces that can use skills productively are also liable to be good at creating new skills through learning on the job (Keep 2011b) and this will offer women members further opportunities to progress.



CHALLENGES FACING TRADE UNIONS

Unions face a number of structural constraints in taking action to address occupational segregation. Although there has been an increasing number of women joining unions, women are still under-represented at all representative and senior levels, as unions are still perceived to be ‘male, pale and stale’. There is also a cultural resistance to women being represented at senior levels and this resistance is reflected in unions’ bargaining priorities.

Union membership

Women make up 49.3 per cent of the workforce but comprise 54.7 per cent of union members (Brownlie 2012). Female workers are now more likely to be union members than male workers and this relationship holds whether by age, workplace size, job, whether working in the public sector or other individual characteristics. The higher union density among female workers can be explained by that fact that a greater proportion of women (38 per cent) work in the public sector (compared with only 20 per cent of male workers) (Achur 2011). However, male union density is still higher in the private sector at 15.9 per cent compared to 11.8 per cent for women (Brownlie 2012).

Although the number of women members is increasing, the membership of some individual unions is still segregated, reflecting the industries they represent. The membership of ASLEF, the train drivers’ union, comprises 96 per cent men, while UNISON, the largest public sector union, has a membership comprising more than two-thirds women.

The 2011 TUC Equality Audit found that 83 per cent of unions collate gender disaggregated statistics for their membership. This was down from 85 per cent in the 2007 Equality Audit. Less than half of unions collate disaggregated membership statistics on protected characteristics such as sexual orientation, race, disability, and age (TUC 2011). It was also found that there has been no increase in equalities monitoring of membership since the 2007 Equality Audit.

There has been an increasing recognition that unions can tackle the decline in membership by targeting under-represented groups. This strategy has been particularly successful when focusing on women. 48 per cent of unions had undertaken targeted recruitment activity aimed specifically at women (an increase from 38 per cent in 2007). For many unions, this activity focused on campaigning around topics of specific interest to women and then recruiting women into membership through their interest in those issues (TUC 2011). Just under half of unions (48 per cent) had taken action to recruit female stewards and branch officials (TUC 2011).

Although the number of women members has increased, unions are still perceived to be 'male, pale and stale'. This can be explained by the fact that power within unions is still concentrated among white, male members with women under-represented in senior and representative roles.

Lay representatives

The One Workplace Equal Rights mapping study found that unions had taken little action in order to try and encourage under-represented groups to become lay representatives. One union had some reserved seats for women and BME workers within certain industrial sectors, but this was not replicated throughout the union.

Although there has been some improvement in recent years, women still face structural barriers which prevent their full participation in the representative structures of a union. For example, meetings are often held after work or in the evenings and many women members, who will have primary caring responsibilities, are unable to attend. There is also a commonly-held belief that men are better suited to the role of lay representative means that many women members often under-estimate their abilities and are discouraged from participating.

Cultural resistance

The mapping study revealed that among some unions, there was still some resistance to women being represented at senior levels, or to acknowledge that this under-representation was even an issue. Where there had been an increase of women in senior positions, there could still be some hostility from within unions which was attributed to long-serving members who held discriminatory beliefs (Bond and Hollywood 2010).

This cultural resistance to gender equality within unions is not restricted to attitudes towards women's representation but is also reflected in

unions' bargaining priorities. Although women members are covered by collective bargaining, they are rarely involved in the process of negotiating collective agreements. When agreements are finally reached, any non-equal pay issues have normally been bargained away in favour of what are perceived to be more important issues.

Social good

Where unions with male-dominated memberships are resistant to acting on occupational segregation, it is arguably not unreasonable as it does not reflect, nor serve, the needs of the member, the majority of whom are men. Unions are membership organisations which exist to represent the interests of their members. When resources are finite and unions must justify where money is spent, unions might reasonably question why they should be allocating resources to an issue that does not directly affect the majority of the membership.

However, unions have been involved in a range of campaigns that do not directly affect the members, for instance, those issues with an international dimension such as the Palestine-Israel conflict and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Unions backed boycotts and disinvestment from Israeli companies, encouraged positive investments in Palestine, and called for sanctions against Israel because of the state's failure to comply with international laws and agreed principles of human rights. Similarly, unions supported and developed the boycott in opposition to apartheid in South Africa. They also supported, and assisted in the development of, the South African trade union movement, while at the same time challenging the UK Government which viewed Nelson Mandela as a terrorist.

The STUC and a number of its affiliate unions have taken action in support of people claiming asylum in the UK. The STUC campaign on this firstly focused on human rights, status, education and housing, and then on supporting asylum seekers and refugees to access the workplace. Unions also lobbied the UK Government on its asylum policy and consequent treatment of people claiming asylum in the UK, in particular, the detention of asylum seekers and their children at Dungavel detention centre and the treatment of asylum families facing enforced deportation.

In such cases, unions fight for these causes not for any direct benefit to the members but rather to show solidarity to others who are facing injustice. The trade union movement was founded on the principle of fighting inequality and injustice. It is on this basis, therefore, that unions can justify the allocation of resources to address the inequality faced by women because of occupational segregation in the labour market.



TRADE UNION ACTIVITY AROUND OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

STUC policy

STUC affiliate unions have formed policy, through conference resolutions, which support taking action to address occupational segregation. These are predominantly from the STUC Women's conference which has highlighted the following areas of concern:

- the under-representation of women in science, technology, engineering and maths;
- a lack of flexible working practices;
- the unequal representation of women in film and broadcasting;
- career progression and the under-representation of women in senior roles in the private sector;
- gender segregation in academic and vocational spheres;
- the under-representation of women in senior roles in the education sector;
- gender segregation within the MA programme;
- the under-representation of women in senior roles in society;
- the under-representation of women in public life; and
- gender stereotyping in education.

The One Workplace Equal Rights mapping study found that a minority of unions in Scotland had been involved in some very small-scale initiatives that may have had the outcome of increasing the number of women in some male-dominated workplaces. These initiatives were not, however, part of a strategic programme to tackle occupational segregation. There were one or two examples of attempts to address horizontal segregation. These included:

- targeted recruitment of female members using positive images of women working in male-dominated industries; and

- improving facilities for women in male-dominated industries through negotiation with individual employers.

There were no examples of work aimed at addressing vertical segregation. Overall, the study found that although there is some awareness of the issues around occupational segregation amongst some unions, generally there is a great need to raise awareness of occupational segregation and the wider impact on women and workplaces.

A review undertaken on union activity at UK and European levels revealed that some work had been undertaken by a small number of unions that aimed to address occupational segregation in the labour market.

UK level

As in Scotland, there is very little joined-up action on occupational segregation from affiliate unions at a UK level. Some examples of individual union activity on the issue have been identified.

CWU and BT campaign to recruit female engineers

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) was involved in a joint initiative with BT to recruit more female engineers into Openreach, the division of BT with responsibility for the network infrastructure. Focus groups with female and male engineers identified recruitment, career progression, flexible working, and facilities as the main concerns facing female engineers. As a result, the Open2all initiative was launched in 2006 and focused on three areas to attract and retain female telecom engineers.

- Recruitment: new channels and forms of advertising, targeting women directly, and including positive female role models; diversity training for all HR managers; redesigned selection tests free from sex bias.
- Role definition: increased flexible working practices, including part-time working, and promotion of policy via positive case studies; appropriate facilities, such as toilets, for women in male-dominated workplaces; and female-fitted uniforms for female engineers.
- Culture: a long-term programme to promote gender equality and combat stereotypes which includes promoting the business case for diversity, promoting positive role models, promoting a culture of zero tolerance of discrimination and harassment through staff training and communication (Jones 2007).

Table 3 shows the number of female apprentices recruited by BT Openreach. The target of 10 per cent female apprentices was not met

although there was a steady increase for a period of time. Exact figures for after this period were unavailable although CWU reports that the number of female apprentices has fallen. Openreach is, however, planning to increase its resources in this area this year.

Table 3: The number of female engineering apprentices

Period	Percentage of female apprentices
2005/06	2.0
2006/07	5.0
Q1 2007	6.5

Source: Internal CWU document 2007

Equity campaign for equal representation of women in TV, film and drama

In 2009, Equity, the arts and entertainment union, launched a campaign for the equal representation of women in TV, film and drama. To support the campaign, a petition was launched which gathered around 10,000 signatures. It was planned that the petition would be presented to broadcasters and arts funding bodies who are not meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

As part of this campaign, Equity, and Irish Equity, worked with the International Federation of Actors⁴ (FIA) to hold a seminar on female performers’ employment. The event, Engendering Change: Strategies to Combat Gender Stereotypes and Promote Equal Opportunities for Performers in Theatre, Film and Television in Europe, took place in Edinburgh in 2010 (Equity, 2010).

Based on views expressed in the petition, and the ongoing work in Europe with the FIA, Equity were approached by the BBC Director General to submit evidence to the Cultural Diversity Network for its “Serving All Ages”, a survey commissioned by the BBC. The survey was published in January 2012 and concluded that men and women felt there were insufficient images of older women on TV, radio and the internet.

Since the launch of the campaign, there has been an increasing focus⁵ on the issue in the national press and a number of new programmes⁵ with more balanced portrayal of gender and an increase in women's stories. Although the petition has not yet been presented to broadcasters and arts funding bodies, Equity has reported that the organisations are aware of the petition and that the comments on the petition have proved to be a useful tool for campaigning.

⁴ The International Federation of Actors (FIA) is an international non-governmental organisation representing performers’ trade unions, guilds and associations globally.

⁵ For example, ITV’s Scott and Bailey and BBC’s Call the Midwife.

ASLEF addressing women's under-representation amongst train drivers

ASLEF, the train drivers' union, commissioned an independent report from the Institute of Employment Rights (Robison, 2012) to explore reasons for the under-representation of women, and black and minority ethnic people, amongst train drivers. The report identifies a number of barriers to women becoming train drivers including the recruitment procedures of train operating companies (TOCs) which can indirectly discriminate against women, the image of the occupation as a 'man's job', and ASLEF's historical opposition to part-time working which means that there is a lack of flexible, and part-time, working available.

The report was launched at ASLEF's annual conference in May 2012 and was then sent to key stakeholders including government ministers and TOCs. A number of TOCs have set up working groups with ASLEF which will look at how some of the report's recommendations can be jointly taken forward. ASLEF is also developing guidelines for union reps on negotiating part-time roles at a local level.

Other examples of union engagement

A number of unions⁶ have also signed up to charters or developed policies which aim to tackle occupational segregation but do not state any specific actions that will be undertaken to achieve this.

Similarly, there are examples of unions establishing networks for women members working in male-dominated occupations. This includes Prospect's Wisenet (Women in Science and Engineering Network) which campaigns to keep women's needs on the SET agenda and serves as a contact for women scientists and engineers in Prospect.

European level

A number of examples were identified in the film, television, theatre and performing arts sectors in Europe (FIA, 2010).

Irish Equity

In 2010, Irish Equity, which represents actors, theatre directors, stage and set designers, adopted a policy to campaign for the Irish Arts Council (and then all funding bodies in Ireland) to have gender equality as a criteria for funding. The aim of this policy is to ensure a fair proportion of public funding is received by women-led companies and projects. Equality proofing funding criteria is essential to ensure that public funding is awarded fairly and that women-led companies and projects are receiving an equal share.

⁶ This includes Unite, ASLEF, CWU, EIS, FBU, NASUWT, NUJ, PCS, Prospect, POA, RMT, TSSA, UCU, and UNISON

Teaterförbundet and Svensk Scenkonst

In 2005 and 2006, Teaterförbundet⁷ (the Swedish Actors' Union) worked jointly with Svensk Scenkonst, the performing arts employers' organisation, to hold a management development and mentoring programme to train women to become theatre directors. The aim of the programme was to address the severe under-representation of women in senior positions in Sweden's performing arts establishments.

Swedish Actors' Union and Symf

In 2009 and 2010, the Swedish Actors' Union and Symf, an organisation for professional musicians, developed a training course which aimed to integrate gender equality and a gender perspective in leadership, organisation and programming for twelve leading directors of performing arts institutions in Sweden. Joint initiatives by trade unions and employers is a positive way to take action and mentoring has proven to be an one effective way to address vertical segregation. Employer buy-in is an crucial factor in realising gender equality.

Norwegian joint initiative

In 2008 and 2009, a group of Norwegian unions and professional organisations⁸ initiated a leadership programme for women to address the under-representation of women in top management positions in the theatre, music, dance, film and television. The aim of the programme was to give participants competence and confidence in their own leadership, and to also develop professional and social networks. Facilitating the development of network's for women is a effective way increase the number of women in senior roles. Women are often excluded from the networks that are instrumental in enabling men's progression into senior roles.

Swedish Actors' Union

The Swedish Actors' Union developed a gender equality checklist, a tool which aims to assess whether gender equality is considered in all work-related aspects of the performing arts sector. A separate checklist was produced for the film sector. The checklist is used widely in performing arts sector and an evaluation is currently being carried out jointly by the Swedish Actors' Union and Svensk Scenkonst, the Swedish performing arts employers' organisation. Assessing the differential impact of policies and practices on women and men is another essential tool.

It is positive to see examples of European unions taking action on gender equality, and specifically vertical segregation. In particular, it is encouraging

⁷ Teaterförbundet is the union for theatre, artists and media in Sweden.

⁸ The group included Norwegian Actors' Association, Norwegian Dance Artists, Musicians' Union, Norwegian Scene Instructors' Association, Norwegian Directors' Guild, Norwegian Film Association, Norwegian Film and TV Producers' Association, and the Norwegian theatre and Orchestra Association.

to see examples of joint union-employer initiatives and it might be possible for this model of partnership working be replicated in Scotland.

Other equalities work

There are also instances of European unions conducting equality monitoring exercises. While monitoring is a necessary precursor to any gender equality activity, it is only a description of the problem, and not an activity with outcomes.

It could be the case that there are other examples of engagement on occupational segregation but these have not identified, possibly because of definition difficulties. Occupational segregation is an economic term used in the equalities and academic sectors and this terminology is not always used across the movement. Unions could be carrying out work such as trying to increase the number of women working in science, or trying to address women's under-representation at management level but they do not relate this to 'occupational segregation'.



ACTIONS FOR TRADE UNION ENGAGEMENT

There are a number of opportunities for trade unions to engage on work around occupational segregation. The following initiatives could be carried out by unions at a workplace level.

Gendered job design and progression routes

Unions could map progression routes for women members in the workplace, and also play a greater role in job design. At present, these processes are not gendered, and unless the analysis considers the structural barriers faced by women, such as flexible working practices, returning to work after a career break, caring responsibilities, and long-hours cultures, gender segregation will remain. Bargaining priorities should be developed using a gender analysis so that unions can identify and address the specific challenges associated with occupational segregation, and utilise women members' skills.

Develop a mapping strategy

Unions are ideally placed to develop an occupational sector mapping strategy of their own industries. By providing an analysis of the skills in a sector, unions have a robust grounding from which to develop a strategy that focuses on the occupational segregation issues relevant to a particular sector. Internal scans conducted by workplace reps would also be a valuable contribution to the production of an industry-wide picture.

Build capacity amongst reps

Unions could build capacity amongst union reps to identify specific issues around occupational segregation in their own workplace, and how this impacts on women members. This would involve the delivery of training to union reps on occupational segregation, its causes and its consequences, and a general raising awareness of the challenges among branch members. Union reps could then carry out an internal scan of their workplace with the aim of developing an action plan to address particular problems.

Gendered learning agreements

Many workplaces have Union Learning Reps (ULRs) and learning agreements with employers, which aim to provide a framework for improving the knowledge and skills of employees, and to develop, promote and support learning and personal development. Unions could ensure that any learning agreement includes something beyond a very general, cursory commitment to equal opportunities. ULRs should have a gender analysis of skills and learning, and be able to apply that knowledge when analysing learner needs.

Work that Close the Gap has previously carried out with employers has often shown that a pluralistic approach to developing equalities work, where both employer and union are involved, has fostered a more positive working environment and contributed to better industrial relations.

Proposals for pilot work

There are several options for work which Close the Gap could pilot with individual unions.

	Outcomes	Outputs
1. Training for union reps and officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union reps and officials have an understanding of occupational segregation and how it impacts on women and the labour market. • Union reps and officials have the capacity to identify occupational segregation issues in their own workplaces. • Awareness of occupational segregation is increased across the trade union movement. • Occupational segregation is reduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and delivery of training for union reps and officials on occupational segregation and the actions to address it that can be taken at a workplace level.
2. Workplace internal scan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union reps have the capacity to conduct an internal scan of their workplaces. • Union reps have capacity to address occupational segregation issues in their workplace. • Occupational segregation is reduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and delivery of training for union reps, and relevant officials, on identifying occupational segregation issues within a workplace. • Support and guidance to unions undertaking activity to address occupational segregation.
3. Model learning agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union reps and officials have an understanding of occupational segregation and how it intersects with skills, learning and personal development. • Occupational segregation is reduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A model learning agreement encompassing gender analysis of skills, learning and personal development. • A case study of a union which has implemented the model learning agreement.
4. Process for gendered sectoral demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through trade union participation in the drafting process, industry demand statements have a gender analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry demand statement with a gender analysis which highlights occupational segregation.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Information on women and the labour market, the gender pay gap, and equal pay can be found on the Close the Gap website:

www.closesthegap.org.uk

 **[@closesthepaygap](https://twitter.com/closesthepaygap)**

 **www.facebook.com/closesthepaygap**

THE PROJECT

Close the Gap works across Scotland with employers to encourage and enable actions to address the gender pay gap. The project has been operating since 2001.

The project partners are Scottish Government, Equality and Human Rights Commission, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, and Scottish Trades Union Congress.

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Published February 2013