



Close the Gap
Annual Review 2021



Introduction

It's almost hard to remember what life was like before Covid-19. The pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on the way we live. Women's lives are more difficult as the impacts of the pandemic mirror and magnify the structural inequalities they face when engaging with the labour market. Women are the vast majority of Scotland's key workers, yet they are routinely undervalued, underpaid and underprotected. Women in low-paid work, Black and minoritised women and young women have been particularly affected because of the sectors in which they work. School and nursery closures have meant that many women have had to struggle with the increase in childcare and having to supervise home learning, while also being expected to do their job at the same time. Close the Gap has worked to highlight the gendered effects of the pandemic on the labour market, and advocate that policy responses must ensure that women's labour market inequality isn't deepened. The pandemic has highlighted the critical points where action is needed to advance women's equality at work including occupational segregation, undervaluation, women's in-work poverty and violence against women. Close the Gap will continue to advocate for change in these areas and on all causes of the gender pay gap, so that women's equality in the labour market can be realised.

Anna Ritchie Allan
Executive Director



Policy advocacy on responses to Covid-19

Covid-19 continues to disproportionately affect women's employment in a range of ways, and Close the Gap has delivered a significant amount of work to influence policy responses to pandemic to ensure that women's labour market inequality is not exacerbated.

One Year On: How Covid-19 is affecting women's employment in Scotland

We published a report setting out how the pandemic was affecting women's employment one year after the first lockdown. It shows that women's employment continues to be disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 job disruption in a number of key ways. In particular, women were more likely to have been furloughed since July 2020 and two female-dominated sectors, retail and hospitality, had the highest rates of furlough. This increases women's risk of redundancy in the longer term. Women are also less likely to have had their salary topped up by their employer while on furlough, exacerbating women's financial security and increasing poverty. Young women have been particularly affected by furlough, and are more likely to have been furloughed than young men. Covid-19 job disruption continues to have a disproportionate impact on different groups of women, including low-paid women, Black and minority ethnic women, disabled women and young women, who already face multiple barriers to good quality employment. We used this report to advocate for a gendered approach to labour market policymaking, and wider Covid-19 policy responses.

Gendering the economic recovery

Close the Gap continues to advocate for an economic recovery that works for women. Our work is informed by the nine principles for a gender equal economic recovery, jointly developed by Close the Gap and Engender, which were published in 2020. We have worked to influence economic policy development processes, including around the national strategy for economic transition and the Covid recovery strategy. This work has enabled us to advocate that the causes of women's labour market inequality be addressed, and for economic policy to take account of the impact of Covid-19 on different groups of women.

Reactive policy advocacy work around Covid-19

We advocate for a gender mainstreaming approach in policy development, and have provided evidence and expertise to support a broad variety of equality impact assessment processes. We also participate in a number of working groups to advocate for change including the Young Person's Guarantee implementation group, Scottish Government's flagship initiative to address youth unemployment, and the Social Renewal Advisory Board's low income policy circle, which made recommendations to tackle systemic low pay. Importantly the Social Renewal Advisory Board called for action to address the undervaluation of women's work.



Policy advocacy work with policymakers, employers and other stakeholders working around the labour market

In spite of the pressures of Covid-19, we have also progressed existing policy advocacy priorities to support the delivery of our strategic objectives.

Women's poverty

Tackling women's poverty remains a strategic priority for Close the Gap, as women's employment remains clustered in low-paid, stereotypically female jobs. We have strengthened links with anti-poverty organisations, and delivered activity to highlight the gendered dimension of in-work poverty. As part of the End Child Poverty Now Coalition, we successfully campaigned for the Scottish Child Payment to be doubled. We also continue to advocate for a gendered approach to policymaking and interventions on tackling low-paid work including advocating for a gender-sensitive minimum income guarantee.

Addressing the undervaluation of women's work

The economy-wide undervaluation of women's work is a key cause of women's poverty and the gender pay gap and is therefore a strategic priority for Close the Gap. We have worked to influence policy development so that action on undervaluation is central to the National Care Service, the women's health plan, the new child poverty delivery plan, and the retail strategy. Our advocacy during the Independent Review of Adult Social Care resulted in the report of the Review explicitly recognising the gendered undervaluation of social care work, and shaped the Review's recommendation on national minimum terms and conditions for social care workers.

Participation in public body equality advisory groups and working groups

Staff participate in a number of public sector equality advisory groups and working groups, which enables us to influence and advocate for the gendering of employment and/or service delivery policies. Existing memberships include Social Security Scotland advisory group, Skills Development Scotland gender stakeholder group, Scottish Enterprise inclusive growth advisory group, Audit Scotland equality advisory group, Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service equality advisory group, City of Glasgow College equality and diversity group, and Education Scotland equality advisory group. We also participate in Scottish Government's STEM strategy equality group. Close the Gap works with partner and stakeholder organisations to share learning and expertise around gender and the labour market. As part of this, we are members of the Equate Scotland steering group; the advisory group of the joint Rape Crisis Scotland and Zero Tolerance project, Equally Safe at School; and the gender working group for Scottish Women's Aid's Equally Safe in Practice.

Other policy advocacy work with key stakeholders

A large component of Close the Gap's work is reactive policy advocacy which may be focused on the development of strategy or policy, and also includes responding to consultations, giving evidence to parliamentary committees, and briefing parliamentarians ahead of debates. This year our reactive work has included work on the gender pay gap action plan, the gender equality taskforce on education and learning, the review of the public sector equality duty, the mainstreaming strategy, the national taskforce on human rights leadership, the ethnicity pay gap strategy, the National Care Service, the career review, and the EU exit impact.

We have also engaged with a variety of other consultations, inquiries and legislative scrutiny processes focused on a broad range of policy areas including fair work, inclusive data, education reform, flexible working, Scottish Employment Injuries Council, and Carer's Allowance Supplement.



Equally Safe At Work

Close the Gap has continued to deliver the innovative employer accreditation programme, Equally Safe at Work, which after unprecedented interest from local government employers was piloted with an early adopters group of councils from across Scotland. A shadow group of councils was also established as a community of practice to share learning from the pilot.

Equally Safe at Work enables councils to deliver action that will advance gender equality at work, better support victim-survivors in the workplace, and prevent violence against women (VAW). We're delighted that Shetland Islands, Aberdeen City, Midlothian and North Lanarkshire Councils received bronze accreditation which was awarded at an event in March.

Close the Gap published the evaluation of Equally Safe at Work which found that the programme has been successful in leveraging action from employers on gender equality and VAW. Equally Safe at Work has generated a significant level of interest not only from councils, but also other public, private and third sector organisations. It has also produced a rich source of data on local government women workers' experiences of gender equality at work, and VAW. Importantly this includes new data on the experiences of women in low-paid work, a group which is often missing from discourses on the pay gap.

We would like to thank the early adopter councils for their continued commitment to Equally Safe at Work, advancing gender equality at work, and preventing VAW.



Enabling employers to tackle the gender pay gap

An important part of Close the Gap's work is influencing and enabling employers to identify and tackle the inter-related causes of the gender pay gap.

Supporting private and third sector employers to report their gender pay gap

We supported large employers obliged to report their gender pay gap information under the UK regulations by promoting the use of our Close Your Pay Gap online tool. We also published new guidance on how to account for furloughed staff when reporting a pay gap. We provided bespoke support on pay gap reporting to individual employers to enable them to tackle the causes of their pay gap, and benefit from the gains of gender equality. UK Government suspended pay gap reporting in 2020 in response to Covid-19, and in 2021 employers were given a six month extension to submit their information. The decision to deprioritise pay gap reporting risks exacerbating women's workplace equality by signalling that gender equality at work is not important during times of crisis.

Building capacity in employers to tackle sexual harassment

Close the Gap has continued to develop work to tackle sexual harassment in Scotland, as part of a project funded by Rosa: the Fund for Women and Girls. Close the Gap is leading the project in Scotland, which is part of a wider collaborative initiative with gender equality organisations working in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scottish partners are Engender and Scottish Women's

Rights Centre. Close the Gap is developing and piloting an Equally Safe at Work training resource for use in early adopter councils; and developing a Think Business, Think Equality resource on sexual harassment.

Building capacity in employers

We have delivered a range of capacity-building activity with employers so that they are better equipped to apply a gender lens to their employment practice, and develop positive activity that will create meaningful change for women in their workforce. This has included tailored capacity building on compliance and good practice around the public sector equality duty, the role of line managers in advancing gender equality, and developing action plans to address the pay gap.



Parliamentary engagement

A significant component of our parliamentary engagement work this year has been the development of our manifesto and advocacy to influence political party manifestos for the Scottish Parliament election in May 2021. Our gender pay gap manifesto made 14 calls to tackle the causes of the pay gap. This included developing an action plan to address gender gaps in data used to develop skills policy; recognising childcare and social care as vital infrastructure by designating them key growth sectors; developing a strategic mechanism to build capacity on gender stereotyping and occupational segregation in the early learning and childcare workforce; action to address the undervaluation of “women’s work”; ensuring policy responses to automation are gendered; and delivering 50 hours of funded childcare. We used this to successfully influence political parties, with ten of the 14 calls being included in four party manifestos.

Close the Gap has also developed a range of MSP briefings for parliamentary debates. These have covered a broad variety of topics including improving employment opportunities for BME women; the impact of Covid-19 on women in the economy; International Women’s Day; economic recovery; tackling poverty; the tackling child poverty progress report; health and social care; COP26; early learning and childcare; and Long Covid.



Collaboration

Collaboration is core to Close the Gap's work, and we would like to thank the broad range of organisations we have worked with this year.

Engender | Rape Crisis Scotland | Scottish Women's Aid | Scottish Women's Rights Centre | Zero Tolerance | EQUATE Scotland | Work and Equalities Institute at University of Manchester | ALLIANCE | Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights | Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre | Improvement Service | COSLA | Aberdeen City Council | Highland Council | Perth & Kinross Council | Midlothian Council | North Lanarkshire Council | South Lanarkshire Council | Shetland Islands Council | Poverty Alliance | One Parent Families Scotland | Poverty and Inequality Commission | End Child Poverty Coalition | Human Rights Consortium Scotland | Young Scot | Scottish Environmental Protection Agency | Social Security Scotland | University of Edinburgh | UK Women's Budget Group | Fawcett Society | Chwarae Teg | WEN Wales | Women's Resource and Development Agency | Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group | Women in Aviation and Aerospace



Infrastructure

Our board sets policy and objectives, and ensures good governance practice around management and financial stability. The board of trustees meet quarterly to provide governance and oversight to ensure the effective delivery of Close the Gap's strategic aim of women's labour market equality. Responsibility for operational activity is delegated to the Executive Director, who leads the staff team.

In 2021 we recruited one new trustee, Jenifer Johnston, who brings to the Close the Gap board a range of valuable skills and experience.

Our trustees are:

Nicole Busby, Convener

Claire Fleming, Vice-Convener

Samantha Bedford, Treasurer

Jenifer Johnston

Polly Jones

We would like pay tribute to Emma Ritch - sister, friend, former trustee and staff member at Close the Gap - who tragically died in July 2021. Emma's contribution to Close the Gap was invaluable and she will be missed immeasurably.

We would like to extend our thanks to Scottish Government which provides core funding for Close the Gap and Equally Safe at Work, and Rosa: the Fund for Women and Girls which funds our project on sexual harassment.



Staffing

This year, our dedicated staff team have worked hard to ensure that women's experiences of the labour market are visible during Covid-19, while also managing the personal impacts of Covid-19. We were delighted to welcome Helen Schwittay to Close the Gap, who is our new Communications and Administration Assistant. We would like to thank our skilled staff team for their hard work during this challenging time.

We're also delighted to continue our work with University of Manchester to support the PhD studentship of Joanna Wilson, whose work focuses on how the availability of flexible working affects the distribution of unpaid work, and the gender pay gap in Scotland.

Anna Ritchie Allan

Executive Director

Lindsey Millen

Policy and Development Manager

Ruth Boyle

Policy and Parliamentary Manager

Kelsey Smith

Programme Manager

Helen Schwittay

Communications and Administration Assistant

Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and unions to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's inequality at work.

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Close the Gap

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