



Close the Gap briefing for Scottish Government Debate: A Caring Nation – Setting Out a New Vision for Health and Social Care in Scotland

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Close the Gap is Scotland's policy advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation. We have been working with policymakers, employers and employees for 20 years to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's labour market inequality.

1. Introduction

Care is profoundly gendered. **Women do the bulk of unpaid and informal care, and comprise 85% of the social care workforce in Scotland.**¹ Social care is vital to women's lives, as workers and as service users, and to the functioning of Scotland's economy. Investment in the workforce is core to providing high quality personalised care. Despite this, the social care workforce remains underpaid, undervalued and under-protected.²

Early in the pandemic social care workers were designated key workers by Scottish Government, reflecting their essential role in society and in the response to COVID-19. The crisis has further highlighted pre-existing issues in social care provision, including the undervaluation of the predominantly female social care workforce. Over the course of the pandemic, there have been widely reported concerns around PPE for social care staff. The Royal College of Nursing have raised particular concerns around access to PPE for staff working outside of a hospital environment, including care home staff,³ and an analysis by National Records of Scotland identified that social care workers are more than twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as colleagues on the NHS frontline.⁴

The pandemic rendered social care work more visible and there has been a marked shift in societal attitudes around the low pay and poor terms and conditions associated with this work. While this recognition is welcome, it is not enough. It is crucial that investment in social care, with particular interventions to address the undervaluation of the workforce, are core to social care reform. The report of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care is clear that delivering a rights-based approach to social care should include the rights of the

¹ Scottish Social Services Council (2019) Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2018 Workforce Data available at <https://data.sssc.uk.com/images/WDR/WDR2018.pdf>

² Close the Gap (2020) *Disproportionate Disruption: The impact of COVID-19 on women's labour market equality*

³ Royal College of Nursing (2020) 'Nurse leader calls on First Minister to intervene on protective equipment supply' available at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/rcn-writes-to-fm-re-ppe-23-mar-2020>

⁴ McArdle, Helen (2020) 'Social care workers twice as likely to die from Covid as colleagues on NHS frontline', *The Herald*, 18th June 2020, available at <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/18524205.coronavirus-social-care-workers-twice-likely-ovid-colleagues-nhs-frontline/>

workforce.⁵ The creation of a National Care Service provides an important opportunity to enhance the quality of care services in Scotland, while also improving job quality and raising the status of paid care work. **Social care reform must recognise that many of the challenges identified with the system, particularly workforce challenges, are a cause and consequence of gender inequality.**⁶ Without tackling the chronic low pay and gendered undervaluation of social care work itself it will not be possible to attract and retain staff, or to deliver substantive improvements in the quality and provision of care.

2. The gendered undervaluation of social care work

The concept of undervaluation underpins gendered experiences of low pay, occupational segregation and the gender pay gap.⁷ In economics, the undervaluation of “women’s work” means that there is evidence of lower returns to women’s productive characteristics.⁸ Practically, this means that women will receive lower pay from investing in education or from their own work experience. This undervaluation contributes to women’s higher levels of in-work poverty, with **women accounting for 60% of workers earning below the Real Living Wage.**⁹

The undervaluation of the social care workforce is sustained by stereotypes around gender roles and assumptions about women’s and men’s capabilities and interests. There is a widespread assumption that caring and other unpaid work done in the home is better suited to women because historically it has been their role. This drives the undervaluation of this work when it is done in the labour market, with jobs such as cleaning, catering, childcare and social care paid at, or close to, the minimum wage as a result. In addition, the idea that women are intrinsically more caring is used to justify the low pay attached to care work in the labour market, with perceived job satisfaction a substitute for fair pay.¹⁰ The designation of care as low-skilled contributes to the economy-wide undervaluation of care work more broadly.

The extension of the Living Wage in the social care sector is an important starting point. However, the Living Wage is not a panacea for undervaluation as it does not address the crux of the low pay problem, which is that this work is undervalued because it is mostly women who do the work. Increasing the wages associated with these roles alone will be insufficient to better recognise the status and skills of the workforce. Tackling the inherent undervaluation of care work must, therefore, be core to the Scottish Government’s vision for social care reform.

⁵ Report of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (2021)

⁶ Close the Gap (2020) *Close the Gap submission to the Independent Review of Adult Social Care* available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-submission-to-the-Independent-Review-of-Adult-Social-Care.pdf>

⁷ Grimshaw, Damien and Jill Rubery (2007) *Undervaluing Women’s Work*, Equal Opportunities Commission

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Scottish Parliament Information Centre (2017) *The Living Wage: Facts and Figures 2017*

¹⁰ Folbre, N (2012) *Should Women Care Less? Intrinsic Motivation and Gender Inequality*

3. The link between the pay and conditions of social care work and the crisis in service delivery

Rising social care demand due to changing demographics and difficulty recruiting and retaining workers have combined with funding challenges to place huge amounts of pressure on the social care system in Scotland. The sector faces challenges around recruitment and retention and delivering a high standard of care. The report of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care makes a broad call for the extension of social care provision and eligibility, which would further necessitate an expansion of the workforce.¹¹ Many employers in the care sector are already reporting high vacancy rates, a shortage of good quality applicants and high staff turnover. **The overall vacancy rate in social care is already almost twice the Scottish average.**¹² Care providers say that they struggle to fill these posts and foresee this getting worse.¹³ **One in five care workers were born outside the UK**¹⁴ which is likely to compound staffing pressures, particularly when coupled with the impact of Brexit, as the wage threshold set in the UK Government's immigration bill excludes the majority of social care workers.

The recruitment and retention challenges in the sector are primarily driven by the pay and conditions of social care work. **Care workers cite the low pay and poor conditions of the work as a primary reason for leaving their jobs.**¹⁵ The average hourly pay in the wider social care sector is just £9.79¹⁶, with **43% of the Scottish social care workforce being paid less than the Real Living Wage.**¹⁷ Many social care workers report not being paid for travel time between appointments or for overnight stays¹⁸, effectively reducing their hourly pay rate, alongside highly compressed appointment times.¹⁹ Evidence shows that social care workers frequently do not have enough time to deliver high quality care to service users.²⁰ This has a detrimental impact on service users, but also on workers' mental health and wellbeing because they cannot deliver the standard of dignified and compassionate care they would wish to. This is a significant issue in homecare settings but is also evident in care homes due to understaffing.²¹

These are further significant drivers of social care workers leaving the sector, but also of the standards of care it is possible to deliver within the current system. Practices such as not paying for travel time and insufficient appointment times are a major barrier to quality of

¹¹ Report of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (2021)

¹² NHS Scotland and COSLA (2019) *An Integrated health and social care workforce plan for Scotland*

¹³ Ekosgen (2019) *The Implications of National and Local Labour Markets for the Social Care Workforce: Final Report for Scottish Government and COSLA*

¹⁴ Engender (2020) *Women and COVID-19*

¹⁵ Implementing the Scottish Living Wage in adult social care: An evaluation of the experiences of social care partners, and usefulness of Joint Guidance – CCPS and University of Strathclyde (2018) and Ekosgen (2019) *The Implications of National and Local Labour Markets for the Social Care Workforce: Final Report for Scottish Government and COSLA*

¹⁶ Fair Work Convention (2019) *Fair Work in Scotland's Social Care Sector 2019*

¹⁷ Williams, Martin (2010) 'Half of Scotland's care workers paid less than Real Living Wage', *The Herald*, 2 May 2020, available at <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18421934.half-scotlands-care-workers-paid-less-real-living-wage/>

¹⁸ CCPS (2015) Briefing for care and support providers: Holiday Pay and Overtime Sleepovers and National Minimum Wage

¹⁹ Rubery, J. et al (2011) *The Recruitment and Retention of a Care Workforce for Older People*

²⁰ GMB Scotland (2020) Show You Care: Voices from the Frontline of Scotland's Broken Social Care Sector

²¹ Ibid

care.²² **Evidence shows that pay is the primary determinant of care quality.**²³ **Delivering quality social care requires delivering high quality pay and conditions to the social care workforce. It is impossible to resolve these issues while maintaining low pay in the sector.** The report of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care highlights that there is widespread support for improving the pay, value and conditions of the social care workforce from a broad coalition including people who access social care support, advocacy groups, disabled persons organisations, and trade unions.²⁴

4. Fair work for Scotland's social care workforce

The Fair Work in Scotland's Social Care Sector report²⁵ concluded that fair work is not being delivered in the social care sector and highlights the undervaluation of women's work as a key theme. Indeed, in addition to low pay, employment in the social care sector is also characterised by a range of other features including:

- Increasingly precarious forms of employment, such zero hours contracts, which negatively impact predictability of shifts, household budget management, women's in-work poverty and children's poverty.
- A rise in self-employment, with women losing critical employment rights such as sick pay, maternity leave and pay, and the right to request flexible working.
- Limited progression opportunities caused by the largely flat staffing structures, with little differentiation in pay between levels of seniority, which makes working in the sector less attractive to potential new recruits.
- A lack of access to training and development opportunities.²⁶

The Fair Work Convention's report into social care highlighted that while the skills and qualifications necessary for social care work have increased, this has not resulted in a pay rise to reflect these additional requirements of the job. The report noted that "unlike social work or health, social care staff have limited access to adequate training and support, placing a predominantly female workforce under pressure in a sector which requires formal qualifications with little or no central funding for training." This has led to a situation where many care staff are required to cover their own training costs and undertake training in their own time, as a result of work pressures. The invisibility of women's skills is a major cause of undervaluation²⁷ and this is particularly the case for homecare workers, whose work is carried out in the service users' homes rather than in a workplace, and often alone rather than in front of or while working with colleagues. In addition to action to tackle low pay in the sector, the Scottish Government should establish robust job evaluation mechanisms, increasing coverage of collective bargaining, explore options for sectoral bargaining and the development of gender-competent minimum standards of employment.²⁸

²² Rubery, J. et al (2011) *The Recruitment and Retention of a Care Workforce for Older People*

²³ Rubery, J. and Urwin, P. (2011) *Bringing the employer back in: why social care needs a standard employment relationship*

²⁴ Report of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (2021)

²⁵ Fair Work Convention (2019) *Fair Work in Scotland's Social Care Sector 2019*

²⁶ Scottish Government (2019) *Social Care Support Reform: Summary of discussion paper responses*

²⁷ Grimshaw, Damien and Jill Rubery (2007) *Undervaluing Women's Work*, Equal Opportunities Commission

²⁸ Close the Gap (2021) Supplementary submission to the Independent Review of Adult Social Care

5. Investment in the care economy: recognising care as infrastructure

Evidence from Scotland²⁹ and internationally³⁰ finds that investment in care infrastructure, including investment in high quality childcare and social care, stimulates job creation, community regeneration, and increased opportunities for under-employed women.³¹ As mentioned previously in this submission, research by the Women's Budget Group found that **investment in care in the UK would produce 2.7 times as many jobs as an equivalent investment in construction.**³² **Care contributes an estimated £3.4bn to the Scottish economy, with a GVA greater than that of agriculture or the arts.**³³ Despite this, care is commonly framed as current consumption rather than capital investment.³⁴ It has been a long-standing call of Close the Gap to designate care, including both social care and childcare, a key growth sector.³⁵ The Scottish Government's response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery affirms their commitment to develop an approach that will treat investment in childcare and social care as infrastructure.³⁶ However, it remains a commitment to 'explore options' in this area, rather than to implement changes in the categorisation of spending on social care investment.³⁷ While this rhetorical commitment is welcome, there must be clear action if ambitions on developing this approach are to be realised.

Recognising care as infrastructure is critical to realising women's equality, not only for those accessing services but also for the predominantly female workforce. This would drive the policy focus and allocation of resources necessary to grow the sectors, and address the systemic undervaluation of 'women's work'. Social care, along with childcare, is critical infrastructure which enables women's labour market participation, and is a necessary step in realising women's wider economic equality. Caring jobs are also low carbon jobs and data analysed by the Women's Budget Group suggests that **investment in the care industry is 30% less polluting than the equivalent investment in construction.**³⁸ As yet, however, little consideration has been afforded to the importance and opportunities of implementing large scale investment in all forms of green social infrastructure, including childcare and social care as part of the drive for green jobs and a net-zero economy. Inclusive growth must mean investing in a care economy, with investment in childcare and care for disabled people and older people considered as necessary infrastructure for a sustainable wellbeing economy and a good society.

²⁹ Lapniewska, Zofia (2016) *Growth, Equality and Employment: Investing in Childcare in Scotland*, WiSE Research Centre

³⁰ De Henau, Jerome, Sue Himmelweit, Zofia Lapniewska and Diane Perrons (2016) *Investing the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries*, ITUC Research Centre

³¹ Lapniewska, Zofia (2016) *Growth, Equality and Employment: Investing in Childcare in Scotland*, WiSE Research Centre

³² Women's Budget Group (2020) *A Care-led Recovery from Coronavirus: The case for investment in care as a better post-pandemic economic stimulus than investment in construction* <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>

³³ The ALLIANCE (2020) *Response to the IJB Executive Group's questionnaire on adult social care*

³⁴ Close the Gap and Engender (2020) *Gender and Economic Recovery*

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Scottish Government (2019) *A Fairer Scotland for Women: Scotland's gender pay gap action plan*

³⁷ Scottish Government (2020) *Economic Recovery Implementation Plan*

³⁸ Women's Budget Group (2020) *A Care-led Recovery from Coronavirus: The case for investment in care as a better post-pandemic economic stimulus than investment in construction*