



## **Briefing for Scottish Government debate: Ensuring Scotland's Skills System is Fit for the Future**

**October 2023**

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

### **1. Introduction**

**Gender inequalities within the skills system, including subject segregation in education and gender segregation in apprenticeships, reinforce and sustain the inequalities women face the wider labour market** such as occupational segregation, their higher levels of poverty, and the gender pay gap. It is therefore crucial that a gendered approach is taken to skills system reform to ensure that women's experiences are recognised, and gendered inequalities tackled.

In particular, as Scotland pursues a just transition to a greener economy, the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce will be critical. However, if gendered inequalities are not taken into account, the green job creation and support for gaining green skills will continue to disproportionately benefit men, and women will be left behind. The reform of the skills system is therefore an important opportunity to do things differently so that both women and men have access to fair work and benefit equally from a sustainable wellbeing economy.

### **2. Occupational segregation in the skills system**

Occupational segregation is a defining feature of Scotland's labour market and refers to the clustering of men and women into different types of work and occupations (horizontal segregation) and at different levels of an organisation's hierarchy (vertical segregation).<sup>1</sup> As a result of occupational segregation, women become concentrated in low-paid, undervalued and increasingly precarious jobs, such as care. **Occupational segregation reinforces women's labour market inequalities by constraining their choices and limiting their outcomes in employment, and it is a central cause of the gender pay gap.** It also drives women's and children's poverty, as women's predominance in low-paid and precarious jobs has lifelong financial implications.

Occupational segregation is a cradle to labour market issue. It is ingrained throughout the education and skills pipeline, starting in early years settings and reiterated at each

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<sup>1</sup> Close the Gap (2019) *Everything you wanted to know about the gender pay gap but were afraid to ask*, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Pay-gap-FAQ.pdf>

stage of the learning journey.<sup>2</sup> **A key driving force behind occupational segregation is gender stereotyping and norms that reinforce ideas about gender and the types of jobs are appropriate for men and women.** Evidence has shown that this gender stereotyping impacts the decisions that girls and boys, and young women and men, make about subject and career choice,<sup>3</sup> resulting in women being more likely to enter caring professions and men more likely to enter STEM professions.

**The skills system in Scotland both reflects and upholds patterns of occupational segregation found in the wider labour market.** The degree of occupational segregation within the skills system, particularly within Modern Apprenticeships is well-rehearsed. **Men dominate in 'traditional' frameworks, such as construction (97.5%) and engineering (93.2%) whilst women are concentrated in 'non-traditional' frameworks, such as sport, health and social care (86%) and personal services (95%).**<sup>4</sup> On completion apprentices move into similar sectors within the labour market, with men entering higher paid, technical occupations and women entering low-paid, undervalued occupations. This further reinforces patterns of occupational segregation and perpetuates women's labour market inequalities. **It is therefore vital that skills policy is designed to tackle occupational segregation.**

### **3. Occupational segregation in Modern Apprenticeships**

One of the key routes to skills acquisition in Scotland is through apprenticeships. Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) in particular are the key entry point into the labour market for young people not in further or higher education. There have been some initiatives to tackle the acute and chronic segregation in MAs but these have largely focused on supply-side activities to increase the representation of girls and women in STEM. As a result, there has been little change.

**A large body of evidence highlights significant and sustained gender imbalances within the education and skills pipeline.**<sup>5</sup> This gender segregation is particularly acute within MAs. Men and women are concentrated into certain apprenticeship frameworks attracting different levels of funding, and different labour market outcomes. Evidence has shown male apprentices predominate in the higher qualification level in the MA programme, receive greater investment in their training, and have more positive

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<sup>2</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *The Gender Penalty. Exploring the causes and solutions to Scotland's gender pay gap*, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/The-Gender-Penalty-Feb-2018.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See Levy, G. D., Sadovsky, A. L., & Troseth, G. L. (2000). Aspects of young children's perceptions of gender-typed occupations, *Sex Roles*, **42**(11-12), 993-1006; Care, E., Deans, J., and Brown, R. (2007) The Realism and Sex Type of Four- to Five-Year-Old Children's Occupational Aspirations, *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, **5**(n2), 155-168; and Chambers, N., Kashhepakdel, E. T., Rehill, J., and Percy, C. (2018) Drawing the Future: Exploring the career aspirations of primary school children from around the world, Education and Employers

<sup>4</sup> All statistics taken from Skills Development Scotland supplementary tables for quarter 4, 2022/23

<sup>5</sup> Thomson, E., McKay, A., Campbell, J., and Gillespie, M. (2005) *Jobs for the boys and the girls: promoting a smart successful an equal Scotland. The final report on the Scottish Component of the EOC's general formal investigation into occupational segregation*, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Occ-seg-Scotland-Final-report-Feb-2005.pdf>, Campbell, J., Gillespie, M., McKay, A., and Meikle, A. (2009) *Jobs for the boys and the girls: promoting a smart successful Scotland three years on*, available at: <http://www.scottishaffairs.org/backiss/2009.html#winter>

outcomes post-apprenticeship.<sup>6</sup> When women finish their apprenticeships, they tend to enter into low-paid, undervalued “women’s work”, such as care, which reinforces their socio-economic and labour market inequalities.

**Male-dominated apprenticeships typically command higher pay both during the programme and in post-apprenticeship employment, which results in male apprentices earning on average more than female apprentices,<sup>7</sup>** reinforcing the gender pay gap. Evidence has found there is a gender bias in apprenticeship funding, with traditional frameworks commanding more investment and resources than non-traditional ones.<sup>8</sup> **A report from Audit Scotland highlighted that female apprentices only receive a third of public funding, which is attributed to them doing apprenticeships that attract less public sector contributions.<sup>9</sup>** This gender bias in resource allocation disproportionately benefits men, and contributes to them having more positive outcomes post-apprenticeship. These issues are also replicated within the foundation and graduate apprenticeship programmes, which further highlights the need to address these issues.

#### 4. Just transition and green skills

Green job creation in a just transition is a key priority for the Scottish Government. This involves equipping and re-training the Scottish workforce with the skills and opportunities to access good green jobs, according to the Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan. However, **women are vastly under-represented within the energy sector which relies heavily on STEM occupations, and in ‘green jobs’ more widely.** By Skills Development Scotland’s definition of green jobs, women account for just 28% of workers in these roles,<sup>10</sup> and are vastly under-represented in the most in-demand green jobs, such as engineering, where they comprise just 13%<sup>11</sup> of the workforce. Care work, which is overwhelmingly female-dominated, is not included under the definition of a

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<sup>6</sup> Campbell, J., and Gillespie, M. (2017). Gender analysis of spending on the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship programme, *Local Economy*, **32**(5), available at:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0269094217721669>

<sup>7</sup> TUC (2018) *Tackling apprenticeship gender inequality*, available at:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Apprenticeships%20gender%20inequality%20booklet%20%283%20web%29.pdf>; Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2020) *Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2018/19 – Scotland*, available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/857211/aps-2018-19-scotland-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/857211/aps-2018-19-scotland-report.pdf); McIntosh (2007) *A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Apprenticeships and Other Vocational Qualifications*, available at:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130401151715/http://education.gov.uk/publications/eorderingdownload/rr834.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, J., and Gillespie, M. (2017). Gender analysis of spending on the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship programme, *Local Economy*, **32**(5), available at:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0269094217721669>

<sup>9</sup> Audit Scotland (2014) *Modern Apprenticeships*, available at: [https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2014/nr\\_140313\\_modern\\_apprenticeships.pdf](https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2014/nr_140313_modern_apprenticeships.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Rubio, J., Cardenas, C., and Anderson, P. (2022) *Green Jobs in Scotland: An inclusive approach to definition, measurement and analysis*, Warwick University, available at:

[https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/49856/green-jobs-in-scotland-report\\_final-4.pdf](https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/49856/green-jobs-in-scotland-report_final-4.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Annual Population Survey – Employment by Occupation (SOC2020) by sex, engineering professionals (Jan 2022 – Dec 2022)

green job, despite research showing investment in the care sector is 30% less polluting than the equivalent investment in construction.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the sectors identified for investment and policy focus, such as energy and manufacturing, are male-dominated, meaning without targeted actions, it is very likely that men will benefit most from the just transition, and women will be left behind.<sup>13</sup>

**Skills shortages are identified as a pressing challenge** within the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan,<sup>14</sup> as this remains a key concern for renewable and green energy and the wider STEM sector. **It is not a coincidence that sectoral skills shortages are correlated with occupational segregation which functions as a labour market rigidity.** In order to effectively tackle skills shortages, occupational segregation must be reduced which means developing gender-sensitive upskilling and reskilling initiatives.

Despite this imperative, **there is a lack of focus on addressing women's underrepresentation within the green skills space and there are no targeted initiatives that will substantively support women's access to training or upskilling required for green jobs.** There is a significant risk that women will miss out on vital opportunities to gain the skills necessary to thrive in a just transition, and will further perpetuate the socio-economic and labour market inequalities they face.

## 5. Reform of the skills system

There has been little consideration of women's experiences of skills acquisition in skills policy, and no recognition of the inequalities that disabled women and racially minoritised women face. Current approaches to upskilling and reskilling are gender-blind, and lack the coherence needed to deliver positive outcomes for women's labour market equality.<sup>15</sup> **This sustains gendered patterns of skills acquisition and employment, further entrenching occupational segregation and funnelling women into low-paid, undervalued jobs and sectors.**

Close the Gap welcomed the commitment to review the skills system. However, the Withers review was also gender-blind, and failed to recognise the gendered experiences of women and girls. The reform of the skills system is an important opportunity to create a system that works for everyone, not just men and boys. Reform needs to engage with gender norms and stereotypes, occupational segregation, and women's disproportionate caring roles if women are to benefit in the new skills system. However,

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<sup>12</sup> De Henau, J., and Himmelweit, S (2020) *A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus: The case for investment in care as a better post-pandemic stimulus than investment in construction*, available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Close the Gap (2023) *Close the Gap briefing for Members' Business on Increasing Participation of Women and Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-briefing-for-Members-Business---Increasing-Women-and-Girls-Participation-in-STEM-June-2023.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Skills Development Scotland (2020) *Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025*, available at: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/47336/climate-emergency-skills-action-plan-2020-2025.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Close the Gap (2023) *Response to the Scottish Government Consultation on the Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan*, available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-response-to-the-draft-energy-strategy-and-just-transition-plan-May-23.pdf>

Scottish Government's framework for reform, the purpose and principles for post-school education, research and skills does not mention gender, women or girls. This is deeply concerning and suggests an approach that will continue to make women and girls invisible. If Scottish Government is to realise its ambitions on the gender pay gap, fair work, and gender equality, it must ensure that gendered experiences are taken into account in the design and implementation of a new skills system. An essential part of this is collecting intersectional gender-sensitive, sex-disaggregated data for all skills programmes and interventions to measure the extent to which the reformed system is addressing or entrenching occupational segregation and women's wider labour market inequality.