Written evidence submitted by the Women’s Association, University of Birmingham

This statement is critical of the exclusion of the model of decriminalisation in the Home Affairs Select Committee’s Prostitution Inquiry and urges the committee to consider this model in the interest of the safety of sex workers.

[1] We, as an association representative of women and non-binary students at the University of Birmingham, are disappointed that the Home Affairs Select Committee’s Prostitution Inquiry shows bias in its questioning. It is not sufficient to consider shifting the burden of criminality, as criminalisation does nothing to deter sex work but instead increases the stigma and danger around it. That the Home Affairs Select Committee has framed this inquiry in such narrow terms suggests a deliberate attempt to guide the outcomes of the inquiry, which if it is such is an affront to democracy.

[2] We find that this inquiry deliberately overlooks the merits of decriminalisation and its successes in countries like New Zealand. In criminalising buyers of sex, the government forces sex workers to move underground in order to attract clients, therefore heavily compromising their safety. Furthermore, these proposals ignore the main reasons behind women entering sex work; increased unemployment and welfare cuts force more women into prostitution.

[3] Decriminalisation is a model supported by Amnesty International, and it is questionable that this has been ignored in the devising of this inquiry. Amnesty have also advised governments to help sex workers who want to leave prostitution through “state benefits, education and training and/or alternative employment”. Sadly, it appears that the government would rather settle on cleanly criminalising people than actually looking to resolve issues around sex work.

[4] Current research shows that one in twenty students turns to sex work to fund their time at university, and the numbers could prove to be even higher once the NUS complete their own survey into student sex workers.

[5] We are concerned by the bias of this inquiry as it clearly affects the people we represent as well as women in general. It appears that the Home Affairs Select Committee have neglected to invite the views of sex workers in devising the Inquiry, thereby completely undermining their agency. These women deserve the opportunity to speak on their own behalf - and have done so through the English Collective of Prostitutes, the Safety First coalition and other organisations, yet they continue to be disregarded by ministers.

[6] The current regulations around sex work are so convoluted that it makes sense to try and change them, however we would like the committee to reframe its line of inquiry so that decriminalisation is at the very least taken into consideration. It is our belief that this model is the most just as it allows sex workers the autonomy that is their right while minimising the danger around their work. We hope that the Home Affairs Select Committee take this into account and do the right thing.