Introduction
The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.

SWC Evidence Source
The Scottish Women’s Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to the gender pay gap in Scotland.

Purpose of the Consultation
The Women and Equalities Select Committee is holding an inquiry to inform Government strategy on reducing the gender pay gap, focusing on policies aimed at reducing the pay gap for women aged over 40.

The Women and Equalities Committee was appointed by the House of Commons on 3 June 2015 to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO). The Minister for Women and Equalities and the GEO will now be held to account by a select committee for the Government’s performance on equalities (gender, age, race, sexual orientation, disability and transgender/gender identity) issues. The Committee joins more than thirty Parliaments worldwide with dedicated equalities committees. The creation of an Equalities Committee was recommended by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Women in Parliament in their July 2014 report on ‘Improving Parliament: Creating a better and more representative House.’

How adequate are the Government’s proposals for tackling the pay gap faced by women over 40? What additional measures would be most effective in reducing the pay differentials faced by this group?
While the SWC welcome measures set out by the Government to tackle the gender pay gap, the difference in wages and the barriers faced by women in the workplace, particularly for older women, will not be broken down by legislation alone.

For example, the requirement of companies with more than 250 employees to publish the difference between the average pay of men and women does, on its surface, seem a positive step. However beyond publication of the information,
there is no obligation for a company to do anything about any gender pay gap which occurs within their organisation. Many women have commented on the fact that this requirement is "nothing more than a tick-box exercise", which will, in real terms, has very little impact on the pay gap. This is particularly the case for older women, who are often undervalued within workplaces. Many employers will, unfortunately, see little point in investing in older women for a number of reasons, including them being close to retirement and many working part-time (either through informed choice or circumstance) because of caring responsibilities or health.

"Older women are seen as a bit of a disposable commodity in the workplace. Being close to retirement age means many employers would rather performance manage them out of the business than invest time and money in ensuring the work they undertake is valued and recognised. They don’t take into account the time and money that older women have invested in their work, with many remaining loyal to employers for a number of years.”

In order to effectively reduce the pay differentials within this group, it is vital that employers and other staff members recognise the skills and experience that older women bring to the workplace. There needs to be a basic understanding that although older women may, at times, require additional support, time and assistance, they are still more than capable of fulfilling their role and making a positive contribution.

Similarly, more needs to be done to value part-time work. Many women who would define themselves as older within the workplace have worked on a part-time basis since returning to work after having a family. This is especially the case for those who have been employed in the same company or organisation for the duration of their working life. Their value, particularly in monetary terms, should not be diminished due to the hours they work but should, instead, be judged on the years they have worked and the skills and abilities they have as a result.

**What actions would be most effective in improving recruitment, retention and re-training for women aged over 40?**

Personal perceptions and the perceptions of others often contribute to the stage at which women consider themselves to be older. People tend to make judgments based on what they see, rather than on what older women are actually capable of. This can be detrimental, particularly in the workplace.

Some women feel that they are beginning to "slow down", in terms of the pace at which they are able to carry out certain tasks. In the workplace this can be an issue, as although physically there may be a difference or a change, women’s minds are still fully alert and they still have much to contribute.
“There’s an issue for women about lack of equity. I like the idea of something like flexible retirement, because I still want to be in the workplace and I still want to be contributing. I don’t really feel like I want to or have to work full-time in order to still be a productive worker.”

There needs to be more recognition that older women have significant experience, and many have worked for the same employer throughout the course of their working lives.

The way in which the media perceives older women has an impact. Articles in newspapers, regardless of what they are about, will always mention the age of the people they pertain to.

"Where does this obsession with age come from? It seems to be used to define people in the media."

There are also issues for those who work in particular jobs, many of which are subject to Equal Pay cases. These women often undertake physically and mentally demanding roles, such as that of a carer, or a nurse, which can become more difficult with age. They have had to fight for the basic right to be paid fairly for the work they have done, and in many cases continue to do.

Restructuring and redundancies within workplaces can contribute to women feeling, or being made to feel, that they are older. They are being forced to compete for positions similar to those which they have occupied for years previously.

"It wasn't until I had to re-apply for jobs that management started to ask how old I was. Up until that point nobody had mentioned my age but when the re-organisation started all of a sudden it seemed to become relevant."

This type of process within organisations can make women feel that they should be considering retirement, especially when they are "displaced" into another role. Adjusting to new roles and responsibilities can be challenging, and older women are often afforded little or no assistance to make this transition.

Certain working environments can be seen to be the domain of young people, such as contact centres. This can be off-putting for older women,

"I was 48 when I joined this particular company and didn’t feel old. At that time there were a lot of older people working in the contact centre, and a lot of them had been displaced from the branches. The company were looking for people with experience to be able to properly assist customers. However over the last five years I have seen older women disappear.”
In these kind of workplaces, older women are being targeted through performance, without recognition that they would perhaps need more time to undertake certain tasks, or time off for health reasons.

"I saw myself being treated the way that other women who I would consider older were being treated and that’s when I started to consider my age."

The lack of recognition of the health issues faced by older women has become more apparent over the last five years.

“One of the key things is that women who aren’t necessarily having major health issues, they’re just having to deal with things that happen as you get older. More often than not they’re having to do this without little or no support at work.”

Often policies relating to menopause, for example, are extremely difficult to negotiate and implement. Misunderstandings and misinformation around menopause can cause difficulties for women who are experiencing it, which discourages them from seeking support from their employer.

One of the most significant changes to work situations has been the increased use of IT. Employers may offer inductions and training courses, however this is not always possible with the constant advances in technology. These training sessions rarely take into account the specific needs of older women, who may require more time and further information in order to be able to use systems. The increase in workloads across all forms of employment can also be problematic.

"We’re expected to do more and more, often with less time. In order to keep up with computer systems, I find I have to read up on things in my own time. There’s no policy for getting that time back. It becomes a debate where I end up having to explain that I’m not just slow at typing."

There is also seen to be a sense of competition between younger and older workers.

“Young people will be trying to impress their employers so are more likely to give up 4,5,10 hours of their own time. I just don’t have that time to give along with all of the other responsibilities I have in life.”

So much of life is online, young people do not feel that they’re giving up their time to carry out additional tasks because it’s an ingrained part of their world. Depending on what they’re doing it could be seen as socialising, whereas many older women do not use social media. That is seen as a big separation between generations.
Older women seeking work are also at a disadvantage when it comes to detailing their qualifications on application forms and CVs.

"Even if the form doesn’t ask for your age, it asks for your qualifications. I did O-Levels, and the people who are helping me seek work don’t understand that. They ask what grades I got, not realising that with those qualifications it was either a pass or a fail."

There are other ways of checking age without actually asking for it. Many women have ‘qualifications’ which come from in-house training and so are more informal but no less valuable. The lack of formal qualifications, or qualifications which are recognised now, means that many are seen as lacking because experience isn’t valued.

When those who are seeking work ‘sign on’ they must sign a pledge, part of which is that they will use Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin etc to seek work. A lot of older women just do not use these things. This means that even when they are out of work, barriers still exist.

There is a need for access to a computer/the internet as all applications are online, and also a mobile phone because that’s how the Department of Work and Pensions keep in touch about claims. These are just two examples of potential barriers for women starting to sign on and look for work.

Older women in rural areas experience further barriers. Mobile phone coverage and broadband access are poor, and in some cases non-existent.

**Is there any evidence that women aged over 40 face particular barriers to promotion? If so, what could be done to address this problem?**

At present, women who work part-time – for whatever reason – are too often seen to not be as committed and capable as those who work full-time. As a result, they are overlooked in terms of training, development and ultimately progression. Over time, this contributes to a widening of the gender pay gap. It therefore stands to reason that women over 40, many of whom work on this basis, will face barriers to promotion. Men, on the other hand, continue to be at a higher level of employment than women, which often means they are considered to be more ‘committed’ or able to do the job. As a result, they will be the first to be considered for a promotion.

"Men of a similar age will continue to progress within a company while the women are left behind, simply because they’ve taken time out to have children. The saying women have to work twice as hard as men to be thought of as half as good is so true. Women, older women in particular, continually have to prove themselves and their commitment in order to progress in the workplace. Nobody
ever asks a 55 year old man if he’s thinking of slowing down to help take care of his grandchildren,”

There needs to be a way of maximising the skills and experience older women possess, for example through mentoring other staff members or younger people.

“Employers need to understand the benefit they will get from having older women in the workplace.”

Women do not progress into senior management roles overall, for a number of reasons. However, their experience and often their loyalty should be valued as much as the people who have had a “meteoric rise to the top”.

In many areas of employment, such as the financial sector, there is a ‘macho culture’ which arguably contributed to the current financial climate. Not all promotion opportunities are advertised, due in part to the ‘old boys’ network which sadly still exists in too many workplaces. Business networking is too often carried out in traditionally male dominated activities, such as on the golf course, which can make it very difficult for women to access.

Are there particular difficulties in narrowing the gender pay gap for women working in predominantly female sectors and non-professional roles? Are there any evidence-based measures which could effectively address these issues? The key issue for women working in predominantly female sectors and non-professional roles is the lack of recognition, undervaluing and underpayment of the work that they do. Women continue to undertake ‘traditionally female roles’, such as caring, customer service, administration and cleaning, which attract low wages and offer little in the way of training and development. This gender streaming begins at a young age. Toys aimed at girls are very gender stereotypical. Things like prams and cookers are establishing what a woman’s expected role will be in society from a young age. This carries on within the school environment, where those who are unlikely to follow an academic path will be steered towards women’s jobs, such as childcare or hairdressing. Young men who wish to undertake training-based jobs will be given information on, for example, Modern Apprenticeships in what are traditionally seen as ‘male roles’ such as plumbing and mechanics. The wages which each of these gender stereotypical roles attract are subject to disparities.

"Why does a plumber get paid more than an early years worker? Being able to fix pipes is an important job but it’s nowhere near as valuable as the young women who look after our kids on a daily basis.”
As women get older, the gap widens, particularly when time is taken out of the workplace to raise families. This also raises issues around what is considered work.

“Too often you hear women say ‘oh I don’t do anything, I’m just a mum’ when they’re asked where they work. They don’t recognise the skills and abilities they have as a result of bringing up children, nor do they place a value on that role because in society it’s just expected. If a man takes time out of the labour market, however, he’s hailed as some kind of shining example. The balance is all wrong.”

Until women are valued for the work they traditionally do, in both a paid and an unpaid capacity, there will always be a gap in this type of employment. The SWC welcomes attempts to encourage more young women into ‘male roles’ and commends efforts to get more young men into ‘female roles’. However, wages should be higher in these areas overall, not simply because there are more men becoming early years workers.

**Should the regulations on gender pay reporting be extended to organisations with fewer than 250 employees?**
The SWC recently responded to the Scottish Government consultation on the introduction of diversity succession planning for board appointments and the lowering of the employee threshold for publishing gender pay gap and equal pay statements etc. The SWC fully supports proposals to amend the threshold for gender pay gap statement publication to organisations with fewer than 250 employees.

Amending the threshold would widen the publication of information on the gender pay gap and equal pay, meaning there is more data available overall to track whether there are increases or decreases between the wages received by men and women. Similarly, making those with fewer than 250 employees report on their gender pay gap could also prove to be a positive influence on other organisations, particularly if they are able to demonstrate a reduction in the pay gap. Positive practices could be used going forward to influence decisions and policies of others. Overall, accountability and transparency would be improved with the hope that more organisations would follow suit and publish this type of information.

**Would voluntary measures regarding what employers do with gender pay gap information be sufficient to create change within organisations? What could be done to ensure that information about an organisation’s pay gap is translated into action?**
Voluntary measures would be preferable, as it is hoped that employers would want to take all possible steps to reduce any gender pay gap they discover within their organisation. However, it is clear that voluntary steps are not working – if
they were, there would no longer be a gender pay gap. The publication of gender pay gap information is clearly not enough to make a difference, therefore more needs to be done at a policy level which compels companies to do something if they are found to have a gender pay gap within their organisation.

One suggestion would be to fine companies who continually report a gap in their wages, however fail to take steps to narrow or remove it. A ‘talent pipeline’ could be created, whereby the money gathered from these fines is put into initiatives which encourage more women to be able to progress within the workplace.

“Unless companies are forced to do something, they’re not going to do it. Big business are only bothered about profits and making sure they keep going up – they don’t care if the women who work for them are being paid less than the men. Perhaps if they had to pay a fine, for example, they would start to make the changes they should.”

2 December 2015