Submission by Fair Play South West

Introduction
Fair Play South West is the gender equality network for the south west of England. As well as working with women and women’s organisations to obtain qualitative views, we produce detailed analyses of published data to support campaigns and responses to local consultations. In respect of women’s position in the economy, we have previously published analysis of gender pay gaps as they vary by geography. We are currently working on a report bringing together detailed data analysis with qualitative intelligence on the definitions, causes of and potential solutions to the gender pay gap. This will address the issue of variations by age, as well as variations by occupation and geography. This submission provides some emerging thoughts on the variations by age.

The impact of age on the gender pay gap
1) To understand the pay gap between full-time women and men above the age of 40 it is necessary to consider the movement of women between occupations as they reach their 30’s. The proportion of full-time women relative to full-time men declines in their 30’s across the economy as a whole. In higher paid occupations this decline is quite marked. In lower paid occupations it is less marked. The return of women to full-time work in their 40’s is almost entirely to the lower paid occupations.

2) The pay gap between full-time women and full-time men in most higher paid occupations is significant at all ages but increases marked both by age and at the higher pay end of pay distributions within occupations.

3) The combination of the pay gaps both within and between occupations contributes to the increase in the pay gap for full time workers above the age of 40.
women above the age of 40, but this effect is dwarfed by the movement of women from higher to lower paid occupations as they move back into full time employment after a period of absence from the labour market and/or working part time.

The impact of government actions to date

1) Publishing of gender pay gaps within employers is a welcome step provided that it goes deeper than a single number, including variations amongst occupations and grades and analyses the distribution of women amongst these.

2) However, this will not impact at all the key issue of women’s changes in occupation in their 30’s and 40’s. This requires much stronger action in respect of the availability of flexible working in higher paid jobs, the distribution of quality employment geographically and the availability of affordable, convenient transport between places of residence and quality employment opportunities.

3) Improvements in the funding of childcare are welcome but do not go far enough and are not being implemented in a way which will increase its supply, particularly in respect of quality and convenience.

6 December 2015