



Chwarae Teg response to: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee:

Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

August 2021

Introduction

Chwarae Teg is Wales's leading gender equality charity. We work to secure a fairer Wales where women achieve and prosper, ensuring that women enjoy economic equality, are fairly represented in all walks of life and are no longer at risk of poverty, violence, and exclusion.

Wales needs a gender equal economy, where women are able to fully participate in work, where their work is valued and where we have eradicated income inequality. Economic strategies provide the framework in which much of the work of government is designed and delivered. It's therefore critical to avoid gender-blind economic policy and to ensure that equality is pursued as an economic goal in and of itself. The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee can play a key role in making sure that this happens.

1. What do you think the Committee's strategic priorities should be over the next six months?

1.1. *Mainstreaming equality into all of the committee's work*

1.1.1. Inequality continues to be a significant issue, that affects all aspects of life and all areas of policy. We know that scrutiny works in driving change.¹ We are therefore calling on all Senedd committees to mainstream equality into their work. This means considering how equality needs to be included in terms of reference for inquiries and the diversity of those invited to give oral evidence, as well as shaping the issues the Committee looks to explore.

1.1.2. It's also important that all Welsh Ministers are scrutinised on their commitments to equality. While the Equality and Social Justice Committee has an important role in doing this, it's vital that other committees also scrutinise Ministers on issues related to equality. The Welsh Government is committed to mainstreaming equality into all that it does². Progress towards this needs to be seen across all departments of government, and the ETRA Committee can play an important role through scrutiny work, in pushing Ministers and officials to embed equality in their work.

1.2. *The Economic Contract*

1.2.1. The Economic Contract is central to ambitions for a fair and inclusive economy, with a commitment to further strengthen the Economic Contract this term. We think it's timely to consider the extent to which the Economic Contract has driven behaviour change, both within

¹ Chwarae Teg (2018) *Rapid Review of Gender Equality: Phase One*

² As outlined in the recommendations of the Gender Equality Review Report *Deeds Not Words*, all of which were accepted by Ministers

Welsh Government in relation to funding decisions, but also among businesses who have made commitments under the Economic Contract Calls to Action.

- 1.2.2. From an equalities perspective, it would be beneficial to understand which sectors have benefited from WG financial support through the Economic Contract, explore whether this approach to awarding financial support has contributed to meeting equality ambitions and consider how the Economic Contract could better deliver against equality and well-being goals.

1.3. Employability support

- 1.3.1. Delivery of employability support changed significantly last term with the creation of Working Wales, as a single point of access to Welsh Government employability schemes. This term, there will also be the reduction and eventual end of European funding, which supports many Welsh Government skills programmes, as well as initiatives run by many third sector organisations, including our own Agile Nation 2 project. This will be against a backdrop of Covid-19 recovery and a changing economic landscape (e.g., greening the economy, increased automation).
- 1.3.2. It could therefore be timely for the Committee to explore how well Working Wales is delivering, with consideration of how well the service is meeting the needs of diverse people, and to investigate what is needed to continue delivery of vital support programmes following the end of EU funding.

2. What do you think the Committee's longer-term objectives and priorities should be for the term of the sixth Senedd?

2.1. Hybrid/Remote working

- 2.1.1. Following the pandemic, and with the ambition for 30% of Welsh workers to work remotely, we will likely see a significant shift in how work is structured and organised over the next few years. The EIS Committee carried out an important inquiry into remote working at the end of the last Senedd term. During the course of this Senedd term, we believe it will be important to revisit this topic to consider the extent to which the previous committee's recommendations have been taken into account, and to ensure that this shift in how we work is equitable and inclusive, as well as contributing positively to Wales's economic performance.

2.2. Fair work

- 2.2.1. Fair work is critical to securing a gender equal Wales. Women continue to face inequality in the labour market and are more vulnerable to being in poor quality work. We think it's important that good progress is made this term to make fair work a foundation of the Welsh economy, and therefore think it's an issue the Committee would be well placed to investigate.

2.3. Greening the economy

- 2.3.1. There is rightly a strong focus from Welsh Ministers on tackling the climate crisis, which will include work to "green" the Welsh economy. This will likely see greater investment in the green economy which, without consideration of gender equality, will likely reinforce and recreate inequality already seen in the STEM sector. It's therefore important to consider how this shift to a green economy can be equitable, to identify both the challenges and opportunities. There is increasing research on what a feminist green agenda could look like, that could help to mainstream equality into an inquiry.

2.4. Childcare

- 2.4.1. Childcare remains a critical barrier to gender equality. Our report *One Big Juggling Act* demonstrated how care continues to largely fall to women, and studies from across the UK show that childcare continues to be a major barrier to work for many women. Concerns have also been expressed about the potential impact of the pandemic on the childcare sector, which could result in a further reduction in availability.
- 2.4.2. A truly effective early years and childcare system needs to deliver on numerous fronts – good educational outcomes for all children, supporting people to work and keeping our economy moving and reducing inequality. While the investment in childcare through the current Childcare

Offer is welcome, there is still much more to be done to deliver the childcare system Wales needs. However, there are limited commitments to childcare in the Programme for Government. We therefore think that there is a strong case for a cross-committee inquiry involving the ETRA, ESJ and CYPE committees, into childcare to consider the issue in its entirety.

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