



Young Women's Alliance

UK Youth Statement CSW61

As young people from across the United Kingdom, we have become increasingly concerned about the impact that issues such as the conflict in the middle east, the refugee crisis and the election of new government administrations will have upon the rights and freedoms of women worldwide. We believe that these recent global developments have made it even more imperative that women and men are able to voice their opinions regarding gender equality on an international scale, knowing that governments are taking action to ensure that Sustainable Development Goal 5, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, is implemented. By attending CSW61, we hope to effect change and give women and young people an insight into their rights on an international scale so that they have the capacity, knowledge and confidence to stand up, be counted and be heard.

Living in a more economically developed country, we have been privileged enough to have received a high standard of education but we understand that this is not the case for many girls around the world. We recognise the extent to which education, SDG 4, is vital in enabling women to have successful careers, but often girls are not given the same opportunities in education as boys, with a total of 130 million¹ girls out of education across the world. This occurs for a variety of reasons including forced and early marriage, girls having to work in order to support their families financially and prioritising boys' education over girls'. Education opens the door to many opportunities and plays a large part in working towards gender equality as educated young people secure better paid work and are more likely to play an active role in the development of their communities and of society as a whole. Providing girls with an education is more likely to break the cycle of poverty with an average wage increase of 12 percent² for every additional year of schooling that a child receives. Education is also an integral factor in improving the health of women, reducing population growth, delaying child marriage and empowering women both in the home and in the workplace. To us it seems shocking that so many girls across the world are denied such a basic human right because in the words of Malala Yousafzai "One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world." We hope that governments recognise the astonishing benefits of allowing girls to access a free and good quality education and therefore prioritise the issue by changing cultural attitudes to girls in education and ensuring that school is a safe and secure environment in which girls are able to reach their full potential as it is estimated that 246 million³ girls and boys are harassed and abused on their way to, and at school every year, with girls being particularly vulnerable.

¹ <https://www.malala.org/girls-education>

² World Bank 2014

³ <https://plan-international.org/because-i-am-a-girl/violence-at-school>

One issue that we see as particularly significant that is preventing gender equality is the gender pay gap. As young people who will soon be entering the workforce, we hope that we will be paid according to our ability and achievements rather than our gender but this appears not to be the case, with the gender pay gap currently standing at 20.9%⁴ in the United Kingdom according to the European Commission, whilst the average for Europe stands at 16.7%⁵ showing that the UK is lagging significantly behind other European countries. Although this type of discrimination has been illegal in the United Kingdom since the implementation of the Equal Pay Act in 1970, women still face an uphill struggle in getting the same treatment as men in the workplace and the gender pay gap exhibits the ongoing inequalities and discrimination affecting women in the labour market. The fact that women devote a higher proportion of their time to unpaid childcare and housework, approximately 26 hours per week in comparison to 9 hours per week for men, results in women often having to work part-time in order to facilitate this, with 1 in 3 women reducing their paid hours to part-time compared to 1 in 10 men⁶. Women are therefore less likely to progress as far in their careers as their male counterparts. We believe that the government can play a key role in reducing the gender pay gap by creating legislation to allow more flexible working hours, subsidised childcare and introduce changes and improvements to paternity leave to allow women to fulfil their duties both as a parent and as a professional. Increased transparency with pay would also tackle the issue as men and women would be able to see their relative salaries.

We recognise the disparities in representation between men and women within certain important fields of work. These fields range from STEM careers, to jobs in the creative industry, such as music producers and film directors. It is alarming that only 14.4% of the STEM workforce are women in the UK⁷ in contrast with China - a culture with a strong emphasis on engineering, mathematics and science for both sexes - where 40% of the STEM workforce are women⁸. This perhaps takes root in the preconception that men are better suited to STEM careers which affects the jobs which women choose, making them hesitant to pursue careers in these fields. A predominantly male workplace is suspected to be patriarchal, with high levels of gender based discrimination and harassment, as evidenced in the International Business Times, where gender inequality in the workplace is described as an 'invisible and endemic problem.' Thus, women are reluctant to enter these environments as the notion that a woman can never excel as much as a male colleague based on their gender dissuades women from working in these fields. We propose that the government aims to eradicate career stereotypes, as well as encouraging more young girls to consider typically male-dominated professions including STEM careers by putting in place more programmes that allow girls to gain insight into such careers and foster an interest in the subject. Currently in Hereford a new engineering university is being set up which aims for 50% of lecturers and students to be women, if more schools, business' and work places took gender equality as seriously as this we could be seeing major, positive changes with regards to women in STEM subjects.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_pay_gap/2016/gpg_country_factsheet_uk_2016_en.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_pay_gap/2016/gpg_country_factsheet_uk_2016_en.pdf

⁶ Office For National Statistics- <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/the-value-of-your-unpaid-work/>

⁷ Apostolides, Z. (2016) Want to close the gender pay gap? Start with more women in stem. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/2016/nov/10/want-to-close-the-gender-pay-gap-start-with-more-women-in-stem-careers> (Accessed: 6 February 2017).

⁸ Wu, J. and Kennedy, J. (2016) Innovation fact of the week: Women represent 40% of STEM workforce in china, but only 24% in US. Available at: <http://www.innovationfiles.org/innovation-fact-of-the-week-women-represent-40-of-stem-workforce-in-china-but-only-24-in-us/> (Accessed: 6 February 2017).

Women are more likely to be in low paid and low skilled jobs, once again contributing to labour market segregation. 80% of those working in the low paid care and leisure sector are women, with

women making up 60% of those earning less than the living wage⁹. Meanwhile men continue to make up the majority of those in the highest paid and most senior roles – for example, there are just seven female Chief Executives in the FTSE 100, showing the extent to which the ‘glass ceiling’ acts as a barrier to success. Not only is this prevalent within businesses but within the UK Parliament itself where only 191 of the 650 MPs are women (27%)¹⁰. Although the United Kingdom has a higher percentage of women in parliament than the USA (19.1%) we are 47th on the rankings with Rwanda taking the top spot with 61.3% of its national parliament made up of women. We find this particularly worrying because this means that the majority of major decision makers in the United Kingdom are men and women need greater influence when it comes to policy making in order to implement change regarding gender equality. We would like to encourage businesses to promote gender equality within the workplace by allowing greater opportunities for women to progress up the career ladder. However, in order for this to be made possible, we need to start by removing the misconception that career-driven women are domineering, yet career-driven men are good leaders, as noted by MP Harriet Harman in her book ‘A Woman’s Work’. We would call upon the government to build on the successes to build on the successes of the Davies review¹¹ on women in boards and to continue to provide support for the Hampton Alexander review¹² to ensure it to ensure it achieves its goal of increasing the representation of women on the boards of FTSE 100 companies from 26% to 33%¹³, as well as promising future reviews to maintain and improve the standards of gender equality at the top of society.

In the light of the recent referendum on the United Kingdom’s membership of the EU, we often feel powerless to make our voices heard because we are currently unable to vote, however we hope that this youth statement will allow the government to listen to our concerns and to take action. As young people, we want to impress upon the government that we will not be part of the problem, we will be part of the solution.



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⁹ <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/policy-research/the-gender-pay-gap/>

¹⁰ <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN01250>

¹¹ Davies Review-https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482059/BIS-15-585-women-on-boards-davies-review-5-year-summary-october-2015.pdf

¹² Hampton Alexander Review- https://30percentclub.org/assets/uploads/UK/Third_Party_Reports/Hampton_Alexander_Review_Paper_Nov_2016.pdf

¹³ http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.city.ac.uk%2Fnews%2F2016%2Fjuly%2Ffrallying-call-for-female-boost-in-business-and-the-boardroom&h=ATOYsdfdyNOMN1x_ba55r2HNO8LsnbRyNhzfTPL7mTd2EfaRqsbbz6QSMqcwHfNHvlla0xoj88-1RlCgoMxrR15225XnwQcqPU0bi4hlOatzsnnHEU9NbTcJr-jqsqYAvLkXv