

**MINUTES**  
**Successful Second Careers**

**Women and Work APPG Meeting Tuesday 20 November 2018**  
**4.00pm-5:00pm, Committee Room 17, House of Commons**

**Chair:** Gillian Keegan MP, Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG

**Parliamentarians in attendance:**

- Baroness Burt of Solihull
- Baroness Goudie
- Baroness Howe
- Baroness Garden of Frognal

Due to Parliamentary business, **Co-Chair, Gillian Keegan** was delayed in the Chamber. APPG Officer, **Baroness Burt** convened the meeting as Chair.

**Minutes**

The first speaker, **Kevin Rowan**, Director of unionlearn outlined the work of unionlearn as the learning and skills arm of the Trades Union Congress (TUC). It assists unions in the delivery of learning opportunities for their members. **Kevin** highlighted that participation and learning are in steep decline but people's lives can be transformed through access to learning throughout their working lives.

He noted there is a general decline in those accessing further education, particularly amongst women. He made the case for increasing part-time apprenticeships for women returners. Employment measures that ensure quality and well-paid work as well as better arrangements for parental leave can all help women returners.

He called for greater innovation in further education, stating that the TUC's experience demonstrated that innovative learning mechanisms such as offering courses online had delivered profound results for women in leadership programmes, enabling women to develop and progress in their organisations. Unionlearn has stewards in the work place who concentrate on learning, making it a part of the culture and more accessible to everyone.

**Kevin** argued that there was very little evidence that employers invest in women returners and that there is a need to incentivise apprenticeships for vulnerable people, including women returners, especially as the government is about to consult on the apprenticeship levy. He highlighted that there needs to be a greater push for improved access to learning. Time and cost have been identified as the biggest barriers, and for women, access to learning and training is essential as it is often difficult for women to adapt to coming back to work as things have progressed and changed. **Kevin** ended by noting that there is a strong case for careers skills and advice for everyone, but the need is particularly strong for people returning to work.

**Naomi Cooke, Head of Workforce at the LGA** discussed the work that councils have done especially to encourage returners. She stated that returner programmes seek to fill a multitude of skills gaps; there are 1.5 million people working in local government, covering 800 distinct occupations, and within councils, half of the workforce work part-time and three quarters are female. For councils, getting women back into work after having children or fulfilling other caring responsibilities is therefore a key priority.

She focussed on the shortage of social workers which the LGA has been working on. She stipulated that there are three important R's in employment – recruitment, retention and returners. Flexible working is essential for women returners. Job adverts also need to be considered in terms of how they are advertised and how long for. The LGA has run two returner programmes for social workers, of which the vast majority of the work force are women. The programmes help women back into work, providing an easy route for returning as well as support and guidance along the way, coupled with good working conditions.

Building confidence is a key issue especially when women are returning to work, having taken a career break. She highlighted the immense benefits of women returners: there is less agency use and less time training new starters.

The LGA is committed to investing in returners and going forwards, they are planning on running five return programmes including return to legal and return to planning. She stressed that as these are skilled professions, they require refreshment learning to meet standards but this is done through blended learning and one to one coaching. Many women have reported that support is the most crucial and the most valuable aspect of these return programmes.

She concluded that there was not one silver bullet to solving these issues but that this is why discussions such as these are so valuable to learn from one another.

The third speaker, **Yvonne Greeves, Head of Women in Business across NatWest, Royal Bank of Scotland and Ulster Bank** started by talking about her own personal experience. She joined RBS after a five-year career break and initially failed her interview to get into RBS but was offered a one-month internship, which she took to gain work experience. She spoke of the cultural change that she has experienced in the bank, noting that when she first joined it was a very masculine environment, and is now much more inclusive. She described her experience of trying to set up a business: she found that a lack of confidence was a key issue, especially as ten years ago there were very few women at senior levels. Within NatWest, RBS and Ulster, women now make up 37% of the board and 44% of the talent pipeline but they are working towards 50/50 across divisions across the banks.

**Yvonne** spoke about technology and how it has been hugely embraced by the banks. She said that now, 63,000 people can work from home or a remote location, this offers people freedom and makes them more agile. She noted that she preferred the term agile to flexible as agile was a more universal phrase, compared to flexible which is often associated with female working patterns. She noted that the freedom of agile working has enabled her to still do the school run in the morning. It has shrunk property and taken away desks. Hot desking is less divisional and it offers benefits such as meeting different people from other departments, promoting collaboration across departments. She highlighted

that agile working enables productive working, rather than hampering it: with certain targets to reach, it shouldn't matter where you work from as long as you are meeting your targets.

On the issue of returnships, **Yvonne** spoke about the comeback programme which is now an official programme at the banks. It was initially aimed at senior management but it is now available at all levels and it is a paid internship. Not only does the comeback programme offer great opportunities for returners but it also presents a fantastic opportunity for the bank as well. The comeback programme offers mentors, networking as well as the opportunity to work in a variety of careers. From a business perspective, investing in returners reduces recruitment risk as these women have a wealth of experience and skills. She reported that there was a 90% conversion rate at the end of the comeback programme into full time employment.

**Gillian Keegan MP (Chair)** remarked that the cultural and technological change in businesses had been huge and that these changes have made work more efficient. She noted that when she worked in banking, the culture was very masculine.

The final speaker, **Baroness Goudie** discussed the work of the 30% Club, first set up in 2010. The idea came from a Goldman Sachs event focusing on balancing gender diversity at an executive level, which shed light on the issues that women in business were experiencing: that there wasn't enough guidance or cross-mentoring available to help these women reach high level positions. There was little sign of breakthrough and businesses were failing to appoint more than 10-15% of senior roles to women. The 30% Club works with businesses across the world to appoint more women to their boards through hosting events and seminars. The group works across countries in the G20 including Australia, Canada, East Africa and Hong Kong, to influence both companies as well as the national agenda. She stipulated that by working to influence the national agenda, there was a far greater reach which meant that these issues were being discussed at national and international levels. The group has two campaign goals to reach by 2020: 30% female representation on FTSE 350 Boards by 2020 and 30% female representation in senior management within FTSE 100 companies by 2020.

One of the ways that the 30% clubs helps women is through offering MBA scholarships to develop a women's skills and opportunities. **Baroness Goudie reported** that all the 30% Club chapters have a free MBA programme on offer and there are up to 50 on offer globally.

**Baroness Goudie** reiterated the importance of agile working, stating that employees do not need to be sat at their desks to be productive, they can work just as effectively from elsewhere. She also stressed the importance of apprenticeships and the opportunities that these can present. She emphasised the need for companies to advertise these opportunities better, especially to outside applicants. Women returners are important to the workforce and the UK economy needs returners.

She also discussed the equal importance of voluntary or unpaid work that women do in their career breaks. Women often discount voluntary or unpaid work that they have done, thinking that it is not applicable, leading to gaps on CVs. She stressed the transferrable

skills and experience that arise from these opportunities and urged women not to forget about the value of such work.

**Gillian Keegan** thanked **Baroness Goudie** for her contribution and stated that she had herself started work as an apprentice and then later gone on to complete an MBA. **Gillian** spoke of the difficulty of getting back into the headspace of corporate competencies. She noted that having transitioned from business to politics herself, through becoming a councillor, confidence-building mechanisms are essential when transitioning from one career area to another or when returning to work.

## Q&A

**Gillian Keegan** then opened the floor to questions.

**Tim Julier** from the **Daphne Jackson Trust** which works to support women returners in STEM, commented on the relatively recent government announcement that the returners fund will now be run out of the Government Equalities Office. He stated that there is quite a lot of money in this fund but the problem was they are seeking new models. He noted that the Trust has an existing model in partnership with universities but that because of this requirement, they are unable to get funding. He noted that other organisations are receiving funding, but have less successful models.

**Baroness Garden of Frognal** stated that she had attended an event in the House of Lords about girls' opportunities and the barriers and opportunities facing younger generations. She commented that this had given her huge faith in the younger generations as they were coming up with solutions to these barriers. She also commented on **Baroness Goudie's** emphasis on the importance of voluntary work and stated that personally, she had been involved in lots of voluntary work, but this didn't give her the confidence that she needed when she entered full-time employment.

**Georgia Jamieson** from **Yorkshire and Clydesdale Bank** said that after she had been made redundant and she wanted to look for flexible or part-time work. However, she found that the majority of jobs advertised, especially outside of London, only offered flexible working after a year. She stressed that this was a barrier to women returners and asked how this could be improved as it puts women off applying.

**Baroness Goudie** agreed that women returners need flexibility. She also noted that it was in the company's interest therefore flexible working provides mutual benefits. She encouraged the audience to give evidence to calls for evidence in order to put pressure on the government to look at alternative methods to encourage flexibility.

**Kevin Rowan** said that it was important not to confuse flexibility with agility and stressed that it was important to encourage people into work wherever and whenever. He highlighted that the opportunities for work are limited when you have other responsibilities. He expressed that there was a difficulty in addressing this but emphasised that a lack of flexibility makes the workforce less content and less productive.

**Baroness Burt** raised the issue of confidence. She argued that men can leap ahead in their careers and women are left behind, feeling penalised for taking a career break. This only exacerbates the lack of confidence that they feel. She expressed interest in the 12-week internship programme that **Yvonne Greeves** had spoken about and said more needs to be done to encourage the government to provide internships. She raised the possibility of the government offering financial rewards to inclusive employers which would go a long way to encourage women back into work.

**Yvonne Greeves** reiterated the importance of these internships being paid. However, she noted that these internships have to be ingrained into the culture of the company rather than just offering them for financial rewards.

**Gillian Keegan** agreed and said that whilst financial rewards were attractive, it means that if the funding is retracted or the grant moves on then the return programmes will also stop. She also said that more can be done to make use of the apprenticeship levy, which is currently being underutilised.

**Claire Annesley from the University of Sussex** stated that the university set up a study group with women returners and found that it is particularly hard for them to get jobs at senior level. As a result, the university has implemented a policy change to make flexible working a default right from day one. She noted that this is a journey of cultural change. It is important for returners but also for other employees. She noted that as a result, the culture has become less masculine.

**Yvonne Greeves** noted that it was a journey to change company culture. She stressed that agility also helped male colleagues as it helped them to share the burden of family and home life. As a result of the growing acceptance of agile working, there is less stigma against it.

**Gillian Keegan** commented on the growing acceptance of flexible working as demonstrated by the increase in men taking shared parental leave.

On the topic of shared parental leave, **Naomi Cooke** said that councils have championed shared parental leave. She also commented on **Baroness Goudie's** previous comment about unpaid and voluntary work and stated that lots of women returning to work don't think that they have the skills matching a job specification, but they are not counting transferable skills from their own personal lives such as managing a care budget.

**Melanie Fernandes** from the **ABI** discussed the motherhood penalty. She noted that part of the issue was to do with how a job is advertised, and that more inclusive working patterns such as job sharing need to be better advertised.

**Jenny Donnelly, Head of Inclusion and Diversity at Lloyds Bank** shared her personal experience of job sharing. She said she was still relatively new to job sharing, having only started four months ago. She said the key to successful job sharing is communication which gives you confidence that on the days that you are not working, the work is still getting done. She stated that job sharing had many benefits including getting "two heads

for the price of one” as you get two different sets of experience and skill sets which are hugely beneficial for businesses.

**Carla Welsh** from **Lloyds Banking Group** spoke about flexible working and returners, stating it is through role models at senior levels that agile working becomes an acceptable norm.

**Clare Grey** from the **Shaw Trust** noted that many of the returnships and flexible working schemes discussed in the meeting would also apply to disabled women. She asked whether any of these schemes were open to disabled women.

**Gillian Keegan** stated that it was her personal view that there was a lot more still to be done for women with disabilities and autism. She stipulated that the recruitment system was old-fashioned and that it was essential to allow more flexibility to benefit all women.

**Baroness Goudie** stressed that more money needs to go into retraining. She stated that many more people need to be retrained or else these businesses aren't going to survive in the economy.

**Kevin Rowan** talked about the disabled workers committee and said the TUC is keen to advise on how to support disabled workers. They provide guides for reps to ensure a bigger reach as well as a guidance to supporting apprentices with disability. He stated that employers were crying out for this kind of guidance in order to broaden their recruitment reach and that the guidance had been adopted by many organisations. He noted that it can't be assumed that employers necessarily have the skills or the confidence to navigate these fields.

**Dominie Moss** from **The Return Hub** asked if there was what the government can do to ensure that there is a real job at the end of returnships. She stressed that it was often difficult to convert internships into permanent roles and highlighted that reorganising your life to accommodate a returnship with no visibility of a real job at the end is a difficult ask.

**Baroness Goudie** noted that this was a problem and that businesses running returnships had to guarantee a job at the end. Completing a returnship programme and then not being offered a full-time role at the end can add to a lack of confidence.

**Gillian Keegan** agreed with this and stressed that without a job at the end, returner programmes can very easily turn into “*three month interviews.*”

**Dominie Moss** spoke about the future of interviewing using artificial intelligence, noting that AI is only as good as the data that it is programmed with, and this data can include embedded unconscious biases.

**Baroness Goudie** said that it was a matter of courtesy to have a proper interview and agreed that the problem with AI was how and what information is put into it in the first place.

**Jenny Donnelly** from Lloyds Bank agreed saying that it takes a human to recognise the value of experience and skills on a CV.

### Non-Parliamentarian attendees

Carla Welsh	Lloyds Banking Group
Teresa Boughey	Jungle HR
Keith Jones	Institute of Civil Engineers
Sophie Stratton	Conservative Women's Organisation
Kelly Green	Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
Julie Gaultier	Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
Lenny Rolles	University of Sussex
Claire Annesley	University of Sussex
Georgia Jamieson	CYBG
Sophie Bonnel	AXA
Sarah Thorne	The Return Hub
Dominie Moss	The Return Hub
Vanessa Pine	The Return Hub
Clare Grey	Shaw Trust