



WPG Response to Department for the Economy 'Consultation on 10X Performance Management Framework'

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Contact:

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1. Introduction

The Women's Policy Group (WPG) is a group of policy experts and practitioners who advocate collectively for women and girls by promoting gender equality through an intersectional feminist lens. We challenge systemic injustice and discrimination affecting women and girls by informing society and influencing policy and law. Our work is informed by women and girls' lived experiences and rooted in international human rights law.

The WPG is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, women's networks, feminist campaigning organisations, LGBTQ+ organisations, migrant groups, support service providers, NGOs, human rights and equality organisations and individuals. Over the years, this important network has ensured there is good communication between politicians, policy makers and women's organisations on the ground.

The WPG is endorsed as a coalition of expert voices that advocates for women in Northern Ireland on a policy level. If you have any questions or queries about this evidence submission, or would like the WPG to discuss this evidence further, please contact Aoife Mallon, Women's Sector Lobbyist Policy Assistant at aoife.mallon@wrda.net.

2. Contact

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I am responding as: On behalf of an organisation

Name of organisation: The Women's Policy Group (WPG), chaired by the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)

3. Consultation Questions

10X Objectives

1. Do you agree with the overall objectives for the Department?

- a. *Our objective is for Northern Ireland to have a high performing economy driven by innovation underpinned by high levels of collaboration across business, academia, government and civil society. To do this we will increase total R&D expenditure by 55% by 2030 from a baseline of £1,167m in 2020.*

Agree.

- b. Our objective is to create opportunities for economic growth which are distributed across society to benefit everyone. To do this we will increase Northern Ireland Household Disposable Income above the SAE average while maintaining NI as one of the top performing SAEs in relation to the Gini-coefficient (a measure of income equality).*

Agree.

- c. Achieving 80% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2030 so that households and businesses have access to essential and affordable energy.*

Agree.

2. Do you have any further comments to make on these objectives?

In regards to the second objective, which refers to creating opportunities for economic growth, the WPG recommends that sections of society which are in most need of these opportunities should be identified and targeted for specific action. This requires an understanding of pre-existing economic inequalities, for example, an understanding of which groups of people have been historically excluded from these types of opportunities. This includes women, ethnic minority communities and other economically disadvantaged groups such as the LGBTQ+ community and those from a working class background. Any opportunities that are created should seek to address these pre-existing inequalities and be distributed accordingly.

The consultation document, and 10x strategy, do set out the current statistical picture of educational attainment, skills and labour market participation. However, achieving the second objective also requires an understanding of the drivers of these trends, which include socio-economic position, access to high quality education, access to support services and cultural factors, including educational and other stereotypes. From a gender perspective, childcare and adult social care are essential factors that shape women's economic choices and opportunities. Addressing these long-standing, structural and systemic issues is essential to achieve the aim that everyone will benefit from new opportunities.

Without a clear plan to create opportunities in a way that tackles pre-existing inequalities, it is likely that this Strategy will deepen inequalities and further harm disadvantaged people and communities, as well as the long term potential of Northern Ireland and its economy.

Innovation

3. The Department set out the following as contributing objectives for innovation, for each of these do you agree or disagree that these are reasonable objectives given the overall objective for innovation?

a. 450 additional R&D performing businesses in NI by 2030 [sub-regional monitoring of data]

b. 55% of NI businesses surveyed in Innovation Survey to be innovation active firms by 2030 [sub-regional monitoring of data]

c. 10% of NI businesses to be holders of an Innovation Accreditation by 2030 [sub-regional monitoring of data]

d. Increasing the proportion of individuals leaving Northern Ireland higher education institutions with first degrees and post-graduate qualifications in narrow STEM subjects Baseline: 24% in 2019/20 Target: 27% by 2029/30

4. Do you have any further comments to make on the proposed contributing objectives for innovation?

It would be helpful to understand how these targets have been identified, and what specific investment and intervention is planned to achieve these. In particular, consideration must be given to objective d) and how it can be ensured people from all backgrounds can equitably access all forms of higher education. Young people from lower income backgrounds, as outlined in the 10x strategy, are significantly less likely to go to university and to study 'pure' STEM subjects, and there are differences between schools in course offer as well as focus. Early anecdotal evidence indicates that the increase in cost of living is a barrier in particular for this group, and therefore addressing this is relevant to the 10x strategy as a prerequisite for a stable and sustainable long term economy, which enables and encourages young people from all backgrounds to choose higher education as well as careers in Northern Ireland.

Consideration should also be given to what skills and qualifications are required to effectively support the proposed narrow STEM industries, and what the long term needs of society are. This is essential to inform a sufficiently broad and diverse economic strategy, and to create pathways for support sectors and industries to grow and offer high quality employment to those whose skill sets and interests focus on other areas necessary to sustain a creative and sustainable economy.

Inclusion

5. The Department set out the following as contributing objectives for inclusion, for each of these, do you agree or disagree that these are reasonable objectives given the overall objective for inclusion? Close the employment gap between:

i. males and females (currently 9 p.p.)

Agree.

ii. individuals with and without a disability (currently 44 p.p.)

Agree.

iii. Least deprived vs most deprived (currently 22 p.p.)

Agree.

iiii. Increase the proportion of the working age population with qualifications at level 3 and above from 57.2% (2020) to 70%-75% by 2030

Agree.

6. Do you have any further comments to make on the proposed contributing objectives for inclusion?

Closing the employment gap between men and women will require the implementation of several targeted measures to address issues such as the gender pay gap, sex discrimination in the workplace, gender segregated labour markets and the motherhood penalty. In attempting to close this gap, measures that could be taken include promoting flexible working, ensuring that effective family leave frameworks are in place and making affordable, flexible and high-quality childcare accessible to all families.

The WPG would like to express concern at the Department's use of the term 'economic inactivity' to describe women who are not in employment. Many women are involuntarily excluded from the labour market due to home and family commitments, gendered stereotypes and systemic barriers to the labour market. This is a large proportion of women that could access the labour market if adequate childcare provisions and social support were in place. Women are therefore not economically inactive, but economically excluded, and their economic contributions are not recognised because of the stereotypes associated with unpaid care work.

The WPG would like to endorse the following statement from the Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report (2021) in relation to this issue:

“The contributions of those in managing home and family commitments should not be considered to have no economic value; the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the essential nature of care work, and this should be valued. It is crucial to recognise the economic value of unpaid work and challenge terms such as “economic inactivity” as they perpetuate the undervaluing of women’s domestic work. This has been estimated of being equivalent to 56% of GDP for the UK, with unpaid childcare alone being equivalent to 18% of GDP and long-term care being equivalent to 3% of GDP...”¹

Finally, when looking at the causes of “economic inactivity”, it is crucial that an intersectional lens is applied to understand the reasons for this. For instance, there are also many issues with the treatment of and discrimination towards gender minorities in the workplace and in public-facing roles, coupled with broader issues in access to mental health support, housing and education, that needs to be examined to ensure that gender minorities are not forced into being what is considered “economically inactive”. In addition, inaccessibility and discrimination are huge barriers for disabled people accessing employment, and many become involuntarily “economically inactive” due to these societal barriers.²”

Moving away from using the term ‘economic inactivity’ would give recognition to the fact that women are often excluded from the labour market as a result of unavoidable care responsibilities. It would also give recognition to the fact that care work is a valuable economic activity that provides essential economic infrastructure upon which our economy depends.

Further evidence on the employment gap between women and men

The European Trade Union Confederation estimates that if women were paid the same as men, the poverty rate among working women could be halved and 2.5 million children would come out of poverty. The WPG is extremely concerned that Gender Pay Gap reporting legislation and associated measures, which were promised in the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, are still to be delivered and implemented; despite a commitment to introduce regulations, there is still no clear timetable some five years after the introduction. The WPG would urge the swift introduction of reporting regulations and would further recommend that measures outlined in the original schedule are included. These include financial penalties for employers who flout the law as well as a requirement to report on pay gaps on the grounds of disability and race.

¹ ONS (2016). Changes in the value and division of unpaid care work in the UK: 2000 to 2015. <https://bit.ly/3iWAXv0>,

² Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report (March 2021): <https://bit.ly/3zSb1JJ>

Pay inequalities are further amplified when women have dependent children. An NIC ICTU policy document 'Childcare in Northern Ireland: Care, Cost and Gender Equality'³ found that women with dependent children are over-represented in part-time employment, compared with men with or without dependent children, and women with no dependent children. They are also more likely to be in temporary employment and much less likely to be self-employed than men with dependent children. Men with no children are more likely than women to be in a full-time permanent job and having children greatly amplifies the difference in likelihood of being in a permanent, full-time job.

Having one or more children reduces a woman's likelihood of being in a permanent, full-time job by almost one-third, with only 45% of women with one or more children working in a permanent, full-time job. The decrease in the proportion of women with children employed in permanent, full-time employment appears to be driven almost entirely by the much higher likelihood of women with children working part-time. Fewer than 1 in 3 women with no dependent children work part-time. This compares to almost 1 in 2 women with dependent children who are employed on a part-time basis. Having dependent children reduces average weekly working hours of both men and women.

Policy failures around family leave frameworks fail all workers, but disproportionately impacts women, while the lack of affordable childcare, structured to facilitate women returning and staying in work, is still a very significant issue.

Sustainability

7. Noting that more specific targets are likely to emerge through work arising from the Climate Change Act, do you agree with maintaining space in sustainable objectives for objectives arising from this work?

Agree.

8. Do you agree with the objective of doubling the size of NI's low carbon and renewable energy economy to more than £2bn turnover?

Agree.

³ Northern Ireland Committee Irish Congress of Trade Unions (2019) 'Childcare in Northern Ireland: Cost, Care and Gender Equality' Available at:
https://www.ictuni.org/sites/default/files/publications/ictu_childcare_report.pdf

9. Do you have any further comments to make on the proposed contributing objectives for sustainability?

The WPG supports the inclusion of sustainability objectives in this framework. However, if the Department is to successfully double Northern Ireland's low carbon economy and close the employment gap between men and women (under the inclusion objectives), targeted investment should be made into the care industry, which is a pre-existing low-carbon sector. The care sector is historically under-funded and under-valued, yet it is worth an estimated £4.6 billion to the Northern Ireland economy per year.⁴ Women are disproportionately represented in the care sector, both in paid and unpaid roles. Sustainability investment in the care sector would not only help to grow Northern Ireland's low-carbon economy, but it would also help to close the gender pay gap and address the historic under-investment in women-dominated industries.

A report produced by the UK Women's Budget Group (WBG) and the Women's Environmental Network (WEN) shows that: "Paid and unpaid care work are an integral part of a transition to a green economy, and are, for the most part, already low-carbon. The systemic lack of recognition and investment in social infrastructure has created industries in which small amounts of investment can create significant returns in both employment opportunities and service improvement... From a feminist perspective, it is essential to balance the emphasis on decarbonising the economy with the stated commitment to redressing social injustice, and this requires both awareness of and strategies for changing gender norms and stereotypes... Central to feminist ecological economics is the normative claim that gender equality should not be achieved at the expense of ecological degradation or the exploitation of nature and other species, and that environmental sustainability must not be achieved by exploiting feminised labour."⁵

WBG research indicates that a 2% GDP investment in care (social care, childcare, parental leave etc.), creates double the amount of jobs for women and almost as many for men than the same investment in construction. In particular, investment in free universal childcare returns almost all of its initial investment.⁶

⁴ Carers UK (2015) 'NI carers save government £4.6 billion a year'

<https://www.carersuk.org/northernireland/news-ni/valuing-carers-15>

⁵ Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor (2020), 'Towards a Feminist Green New Deal for the UK: A Paper for the WBG Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy', UK Women's Budget Group and Women's Environmental Network. Available at: <https://wbq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf>

⁶ International Trade Union Confederation (2016) 'Investing in the Care Economy' Available at: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care_economy_en.pdf

The care industry is 30% less polluting (in terms of greenhouse gas emissions) than the construction industry and the education industry is 62% less polluting than the construction industry. This is of particular importance to Northern Ireland given our calls for a universal, free and high quality childcare provision. If Northern Ireland introduced affordable universal childcare, statistics from the WBG submission to HM Treasury indicate that a full return would be made on this investment through additional tax revenue generated by the additional jobs created.⁷

Technology, Sector and Cluster Policy

10. The Department has set out that technology, sector and cluster policy will be developed within the framework of inclusion, innovation and environmental sustainability. Do you agree/disagree that our policy in this area should aim to produce outcomes against the following metrics?

a. Will represent a greater share of overall employment and GVA of our economy
Agree.

b. Drive innovation in our economy (R&D investing companies)
Agree.

c. Increase our global competitiveness through exports and investment
Agree.

d. Become more inclusive and address current patterns of employment which contribute towards inequality in our society (people with disabilities, women, people from deprived backgrounds backgrounds)
Agree.

e. Become the most sustainable in our economy both in ability to withstand economic shocks and in terms of environmental sustainability
Agree.

⁷ UK Women's Budget Group (2020) 'Budget Representation to HM Treasury' Available at: <https://wbq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/WBG-Budget-2020-FINAL.pdf>

Wider 10X Metrics

Linked to the above objectives, we have identified a number of Metrics that we will monitor to take forward this work. These are published in the 10X Vision Baseline Report. These will ensure we are on the right pathway and that we are performing well on all fronts as we deliver innovation led, inclusive and sustainable growth. We are particularly keen to hear your views on a range of the Underpinning Tier 2 Metrics that have been identified in Section 4 of the 10X Vision Baseline Report.

11. Do you consider that these are the right metrics to monitor as we take forward 10X?

12. Do you consider that there are other important metrics that we have not included but which should be?

Concluding Remarks

The Women's Policy Group would like to note its disappointment that the Department for the Economy allowed only two weeks for this consultation. The WPG understands the Department is facing time pressures, particularly in the context of the continuing cost of living crisis. However, this does not justify reducing timelines for public engagement to one sixth of what they should be. The Women's Policy Group would like to take this opportunity to remind the Department that the minimum amount of time for public consultations should be 12 weeks, in accordance with best practice guidelines laid out by the NI Equality Commission. Two weeks for public consultation does not allow enough time for meaningful stakeholder engagement, particularly with groups such as voluntary and community sector organisations who face significant resource constraints.

Going forward, we ask that the Department adhere to best practice guidelines and provide meaningful opportunities for engagement when consulting on policies and practices that will have a significant impact on the people of Northern Ireland. This means allowing enough time for groups and individuals to respond to consultations.

ENDS

For any questions or queries relating to this submission, please contact Aoife Mallon, Women's Sector Lobbyist Policy Assistant, Women's Resource and Development Agency at aoife.mallon@wrda.net.