

13 November 2009

Jacqui Rose
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
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Dear Jacqui,

RE: INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ECONOMIC POLICY

Thank you for the invitation to respond to the above consultation on the Independent Review of Economic Policy chaired by Professor Richard Barnett. Training for Women Network (TWN) always welcomes the opportunity to contribute to policy development.

After reviewing the above proposals TWN would like to make the following comments. The review aims to place Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of living standards and it believes this can be achieved through higher wage levels. However the report does not address the gender issue in terms of wages in that even if Northern Ireland is brought into line with the United Kingdom in terms of wages that would still mean that there would still be a gap between the wages of men and women. This has been recently highlighted by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) when it states that in the public sector; on average men get paid 21 percent more than women per hour, and in the private sector men get on average 28.8 percent more than women per hour. TWN believes that this gender wage issue must be addressed in order to create the higher standards of living the report talks about.

Great Emphasis in the report is placed on the expansion, especially in ICT, of existing businesses both domestic and foreign. This could hinder women and men who are looking to start up their own new business and it could mean that Invest NI would then discriminate against SMEs not fitting into this business model.

The review talks about creating a new department and sub-committee created by OFMDFM in order to combat the economy. Yet the report does not mention what role, if any, the Gender Inequality Advisory Panel would play in the formation of this. In this aspect greater clarification is needed.

TWN welcomes the idea of changing the local education system in order to prepare to meet the anticipated increased demand for higher levels of skills in STEM and other innovation relevant subjects, arising from the increased prioritisation of innovation and R&D. However we feel that there needs to be special provisions or mention of a desire to increase and encourage women out of choosing traditional subjects i.e. the humanities, and into choosing these new fields. This would have the added affect of increasing the pool of talent from which these types of companies could choose from.

TWN would also support the reports proposals to remove the concept of Invest NI 'clients' in order to allow Invest NI to work throughout the entire business base. We believe this is important as in the past Invest NI funding has been too sporadic to

those outside its client base. Businesses and SMEs need to be able to access funding and help when they need it, not when a particular programme comes around.

Troubling in the review is the lack of discussion about the minimal amount of women in leadership roles in companies and businesses. This is an important issue that would need to be addressed in this type of review on recommendations especially as the review does mention the importance of leadership roles in the new sectors of growth in the economic proposals.

The review discusses how more funding and emphasis needs to be placed in the private as opposed to the public sector. However it fails to acknowledge the fact that large amounts of women work in administration in the public sector. These are two areas the report looks to reduce which is a problem because if government funding in the public sector is reduced and the private sector is not increasing its administration roles, TWN is concerned about what will happen to these people.

Finally TWN would like to focus on the types of jobs the review focuses on. The review focuses on the high end jobs, yet it does not take into account women who are the majority in making up the low paid, part time work in society and these are the types of jobs that have been hit hard by the recession. The review feels that it does not have the remit to deal with this issue as these job losses can be argued to have happened due to the recession which the review does not deal with. However TWN would argue that these were issues that were prevalent before the recession and will be during and after it as well so therefore would have to be reviewed.

If you require any further comment, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Mooney', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JOHN MOONEY
Policy and Research Officer