Introduction and Challenges

Women’s contribution to the economy, paid and unpaid, continues to be overlooked and undervalued. The global financial crisis, recession, and reconfiguring of public finances all have significant implications for women’s economic activity, with consequences for families and households, as well as for economic policy. These issues are central to debate in Scotland on sustainable economic growth. The Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) Women in Scotland’s Economy (WiSE) Research Centre is at the forefront of promoting a feminist approach to economic policy in Scotland and promoting dialogue between academia, government and business on the issue of gender equality.

The overall aim of the WiSE Research Centre is to promote and make visible women’s contribution to the Scottish economy through high quality research, consultancy and knowledge transfer/exchange activities. In doing so, the WiSE Research Centre brings an alternative perspective to the analysis of women’s position in, and contribution to, Scotland’s economy.

Actions taken

WISE was established through a yearlong series of public seminars that explored issues relating to gender equality and the economy, providing a forum for applied knowledge transfer and dialogue. Issues for discussion included ‘Women, Work, and Recession,’ ‘Women in Scotland’s Knowledge Economy’ and ‘Women in Scotland’s Public Sector Economy.’ In May 2011, the WiSE Research Centre hosted its first international conference entitled ‘Counting on Women – Gender, Care and Economics.’ Keynote speakers included GCU Honorary Doctorate Professor Marilyn Waring, and Professor Martha Fineman, both renowned international experts in their fields.

WISE produces research briefings, academic commentary and analysis across a range of issues informed by analysis and commentary based on feminist economics and feminist public policy analysis. A key part of the WiSE programme of work involves creating opportunities for enhanced dialogue and knowledge transfer, as evidenced by the co-production of briefing sheets and research in partnership with the charity Save the Children Scotland and Close the Gap, an initiative aimed at raising awareness of and promoting action to address gender pay.

Building knowledge networks and forums for discussion is also enhanced by the Centre’s key knowledge exchange programme, ‘Economics for Equality,’ a short course that introduces the concepts of feminist economics and its application to public policy to non-specialist audience.

WISE members have given numerous presentations and taken part in discussions with academic audiences in Scotland, the UK, and overseas, and with civil society organisations, including the Trades Unions Congress, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Scottish Insight Institute. WiSE researchers are also regular contributors to parliamentary committee evidence sessions and thematic inquiries, including the budget scrutiny phase and the recent Inquiries into Women and Work by the Scottish

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Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee as well as Underemployment in Scotland by the Scottish Parliament Finance Committee.

Recent and current research activity has included work on the extent to which Scottish businesses report on their gender pay gaps and the business benefits associated with actions to promote gender equality in the workforce. In September 2012, WiSE produced its first briefing paper outlining the potential link between maternal employment rates and child poverty. WiSE has also contributed to studies on the economic cost to Scotland of women leaving science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) areas published by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2012.

Results

The arguments and analysis put forward by WiSE have already had significant impact with the Scottish Government and policy makers in Scotland. This is evident, for example, in the Scottish Government’s Equality and Budgets Advisory Group, an agenda-setting group that regularly reports to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth on equality analysis in the Scottish budget process, including the Government Economic Strategy. Its members include the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser, Prof. McKay, and other WiSE researchers, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and key departments of the Scottish Government. Prof. McKay played a leading role in the Scottish Government and STUC Women’s Employment Summit in 2012 and the subsequent commissions and workstreams focusing on occupational segregation, data gathering and analysis, and childcare provision.

Most recently, researchers in WiSE have been awarded an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding grant. This will support research focused on conducting a gender impact analysis of the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship programme and the co-production, along with Close the Gap, of a tailored analytical framework to assist stakeholders with gender impact assessment of public spending. This research project brings together Prof. McKay’s expertise on gender budget analysis with previous research undertaken by the WiSE team for the former Equal Opportunities Commission into occupational segregation in Scottish Modern Apprenticeships. For further insight and information on Women in Scotland’s Economy visit:

http://www.gcu.ac.uk/research/researchcentres/womeninscotlandeconomyresearchcentre

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

The central purpose (P1) of the WiSE Research Centre is the promotion of an alternative understanding of women’s economic contribution to a re-distributive, inclusive and sustainable economy. As a research centre, WiSE is committed to feminist methodology (P3) underpinning empirical and qualitative research (P4) that informs our analysis of women’s paid and unpaid economic contribution visible and valued.

Our values (P1) reflect the PRME concern for responsible management through our commitment to progressive economic and social policy. Partnership (P5) and dialogue (P6) are characteristic approaches of the WiSE Research Centre, as evidenced in the research, conferences, and collaborations to date. In establishing a reputation for authoritative and credible research and analysis, WiSE has already engaged effectively with government, academic, and civil society networks, and organisations in Scotland and further afield.