

Consultation response: Priorities for the Economy, Energy and Connectivity Committee

1. Realising women's economic potential to meet productivity growth targets in Wales

Women's participation, progression, and entrepreneurship are integral to achieving the Welsh Government's new economic goal of halving the productivity gap with the rest of the UK. Yet, for too long, women's potential remained an untapped resource for the Welsh economy.

This is evidenced in our [State of the Nation](#) series. The report shows that, according to the latest available data, positive developments from previous years have been undone. By considering longer-term trends, it also highlights an overall lack of clear and consistent progress since the Welsh Government first expressed its ambition for Wales to become a world leader on gender equality in 2018.

- Progress on increasing women's employment rates continued to be undone in 2025 and now stand at 69.6%, compared to 75.8% for men.
- Economic activity rates for women stood at 72.5% (compared to 79.2% for men) and have seen almost no movement from their base level of 72.2% in 2018.
- Women remain over three times more likely to be economically inactive due to caring responsibilities, and almost three times more likely than men to work part-time.

The structural barriers that prevent women from entering, remaining and progressing in the labour market range from gender segregation in education, training and employment, over lack of affordable childcare to late diagnosis and care for health conditions. The Welsh Government's commitment to expand childcare and progress the women's health plan promises to reduce some of these barriers. To ensure existing structures within the enterprise and skills remit do not inadvertently hold back this potential, applying a gendered lens in the work of the Economy, Enterprise and Connectivity Committee will be essential.

This is even more important given the closure of Chwarae Teg, an organisation dedicated to advancing women's economic empowerment, in 2023. With around 50 employees and an annual budget of over £3 million, Chwarae Teg delivered targeted programmes and initiatives to address gender segregation by working directly with girls, women and employers, alongside substantial research and policy work to inform Welsh Government action and Senedd scrutiny. To our knowledge, the impact of this loss of expertise and support is yet to be fully understood and addressed, which makes a proactive approach all the more important.

2. Women in the economic transition

With a major economic transition underway, the skills demand in major growth sectors means Wales cannot afford to leave women behind. Yet, our research shows that women remain significantly underrepresented in sectors like construction (17%), electricity (17%), manufacturing (25%), and information and communication (37%). At the same time, the latest available figures show that young women in Wales are more likely to be economically left

behind and that gender disparities are worsening. In 2024, 16.7% of women aged 19 to 24 were not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared with 12.9% of men of the same age group. The rate for young women had increased by 2.9 percentage points since 2023, while the rate for young men fell by 3.4 percentage points over the same period.

Against this background, it is critical that the Committee considers how the Welsh Government's plans for a reformed skills system will address these disparities and more effectively equip women for work and progression, including within Wales' major growth sectors.

3. Women in business and economic leadership

The Welsh Government committed to make Wales the easiest place in the UK to start, grow and invest in a business and to establish a new agency to drive economic development and boost pay. This presents a key opportunity to ensure economic strategy and investment reflect the realities of women's working lives, entrepreneurship journeys, and contributions to local economies.

The figures above demonstrate that this is not currently the case. In addition to experiencing lower rates of employment and economic activity, women are severely underrepresented in business leadership. Wales has seen a steady decline in women-led SMEs since 2021, when figures peaked at 19%. In 2024, Only 14% of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Wales were led by women.

To understand and address these trends, we would encourage the Committee to explore to what extent women benefit from Welsh Government funded business support and investment, if the design and delivery of support schemes facilitate equitable access, and if more could be done to encourage female entrepreneurship. In addition, the Committee should consider how the Welsh Government can ensure equitable representation on relevant expert and advisory bodies, including in the new development agency.

About the Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales: Our vision is of a Wales free from gender discrimination where all have equal authority and opportunity to shape society and their own lives. We work with our vibrant coalition of organisational and individual members to transform society. Our work sits under three pillars. We will Connect, Campaign and Champion women so our vision is realised.

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