

A more productive economy and society through gender equality

Integrating equality into the productivity agenda is essential for a medium to long term strategy for raising productivity that aims at improving well-being for all. Not doing so risks the development of an increasingly polarised and dysfunctional society. Over recent decades, OECD countries have relied on women's investments in education and steadily rising higher employment participation to boost growth, but now further growth requires attention to raising productivity. A summary of findings and recommendations is below:

UK specific

- » The UK's low aggregate productivity growth and inequality is partly through a **failure to provide progression and skill development opportunities for women**. This is often regarded more as a social than an economic or organisational problem. The potential for women to assist in filling some of the often-discussed skills gaps has been noticeable mainly by its absence.
- » The Levelling Up agenda is seen as the main route to greater equality in the UK but **raising female productivity growth in the UK is just as vital** if productivity growth is to benefit most people and not be concentrated on the few. Skill development and progression opportunities are limited in many female-dominated sectors even though they provide essential services.
- » **The UK could learn from Sweden** where the part-time to full-time wage gap is much smaller than this gap in the UK as rights to reduce hours are stronger, with parents able to reduce hours in existing roles until a child is eight.
- » **Women's educational investments are not leading to the same returns as men** in forms of earnings, particularly from the point they have children.

Policy recommendations

Looking at productivity with a gender lens reveals not only problems of underutilisation of women's potential talents and skills within the current jobs and pay structures, but also the **undervaluation of women's current contributions to growth and the productivity** within those jobs and pay structures. To focus on women and women's work in solving the UK's productivity problem we need to:

- » **Treat family support** as an essential component of state-supported infrastructure.
- » Extend the equality focus from boardrooms to the **foundational economy** where women work in essential services.
- » **Change the culture and working practices** within organisations to enable women to progress and thrive.
- » Ensure women's skills and contributions are properly **recognised and rewarded**.
- » **Raise skills and productivity in female-dominated sectors** such as social care, early years education, cleaning and catering.
- » Be sensitive to **geographic variations** in access to good quality jobs; women's commuting ranges are often restricted by childcare responsibilities.

Key messages

- OECD growth has been boosted by women's increased participation and educational investments.
- Women's talents need to be both better utilised and better rewarded and opportunities improved through systematic efforts.
- Progress requires changes in the way work is organised both in the workplace and the home and in the support available to working parents.
- Men's behaviour needs to change at work and in the home – with policy initiatives to support and incentivise changes at individual and family level and work and employment arrangements within organisations and sectors.
- Different approaches are needed depending on both life stage and occupational position.
- Investing in social and physical infrastructure to support working parents is essential to enable more equal parenting and a more equal and productive society.