Business in the Parliament Conference 2019

Agents of Change: Scottish Business Leading the Way (BiPC in the 20th Year of the Parliament)

Workshop Note – Equality and Diversity in Business: Men as Agents of Change

Co-hosts: Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills and Jamie Halcro Johnston, MSP for the Highlands and Islands region

Speakers:
- Mark Logan – Tech Investor and former COO Skyscanner
- Steve Dunlop – Scottish Enterprise
- David Sole – Schools for CEOs

Summary

Mr Halcro Johnston welcomed everyone to the workshop and explained that the session would explore how men in all organisations can and should become leading change agents.

Mr Hepburn shared his ambition to step up action in this area, given his portfolio responsibility for Fair Work and specifically, the implementation of the government’s Gender Pay Gap Action Plan: A Fairer Scotland for Women. He highlighted the complexity of why women suffer disadvantage in the workplace, which is predominantly caused by their caring responsibilities. He also referenced some of the policies that the Scottish Government has put in place to tackle this, such as the funding for Family Friendly Working Scotland to encourage flexible working, our promotion of the real living wage and the Workplace Equality Fund.

Participants then heard short presentations from the speakers, setting out their thoughts on the causes and potential solutions to the inequality faced by women. This was followed by a facilitated discussion.

The discussion was wide ranging and suggestions were made for future actions to address the issues covered.

Key points discussed

Conscious and unconscious bias - how can we as leaders become more inclusive to drive transformational culture change across Scotland?

It was felt a key starting point for business leaders and their teams was to assess and address their own biases. Undertaking unconscious bias training, such as the Harvard’s Implicit Association test, although potentially uncomfortable was essential to make progress.
Mr Dunlop was keen to hear from participants what more Scottish Enterprise (SE) could do to address the lack of younger women in enterprise, and specifically strengthening the “pipeline” of women who may be considering establishing their own business but may be dissuaded by the conscious or unconscious bias of key influencers, such as their families or teachers. He asked for views on whether SE could and should undertake more community/education focused work to encourage more business start-ups from this cohort of women.

**Language and role models are powerful** - In order to make systemic change, we need to change the way we talk about women in the workplace. Also male leaders have a responsibility to support and nurture future women leaders. They should call out bias and discrimination when they see it. Women face a “gender tax” not experienced by men, and are scrutinised and held to account much more than they are.

**Women are an economic opportunity.** It was felt that Scotland is small enough to galvanise key players across the system but this wasn’t happening to allow us to maximize the benefits of bringing women fully into our economic thinking.

The benefits of diversity are many and well-known – diversity of thought through different life and business experiences leading to better decision-making, more representative of all stakeholders, increased innovation, less group-think and higher return on equity and increased profitability to name just a few – yet Scotland still lags behind many countries with regard to key diversity indicators. A cohesive, collaborative and consistent long-term approach to improving diversity could be transformational for the Scottish economy.

Whilst progress is being made, particularly in the public sector, the pace of change remains slow in the private sector.

The Scottish Government and others in the public sector should look to examples from America of how to use procurement as a positive lever to create change in businesses, i.e. using conditionality to ensure business are including equality in their systems and practice.

It was felt there is a mythology surrounding the supposed meritocracy in the workplace. Measures such as quotas are required to rebalance the skewed position that women face, which has been cemented by historic discrimination.

**Actions agreed/suggested**

Participants urged to undertake unconscious bias training and to encourage their teams and managers to do so too.

Mr Dunlop’s suggestion of increasing SE’s community and education outreach activity was welcomed and he took this away for SE and the Scottish Government to consider further.

**Close**