

FROM GENDER *BLIND* TO GENDER *FOCUSED*: RE-EVALUATING THE SCOTTISH MODERN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

This article outlines the research findings from an investigation carried out by the authors on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Scotland on the extent of gender based occupational segregation in the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme in Scotland. The paper begins by highlighting the main arguments relating to the economic costs of occupational segregation. This is followed by an outline of how the MA programme operates in Scotland alongside a short discussion of recent research into evaluating the operation of MAs. A further section reports on the actual research findings. Finally the paper concludes by highlighting how a more gender *aware*, as opposed to gender *blind*, approach to policy design, implementation and evaluation should be considered with reference to the MA programme as it operates in Scotland.

The UK has for a number of years suffered from a productivity gap whereby output per worker is low compared to that of other European economies and the US (Walby and Olsen 2002). This has often been attributed to the UK's comparatively low levels of intermediate skills:

Although participation in post-compulsory education has been increasing, the UK remains a long way behind some of its international competitors in

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terms of young people entering the labour market with intermediate vocational qualifications.

(DTI 2003, p.60)

Education and training, particularly vocational training, have therefore been viewed as a means by which industry and the government can act in partnership to increase productivity. The MA programme was introduced by the Conservative administration in 1994 in England and Wales, and extended nationally in 1995/6 (QPID 1999). The main aim of the programme was to address the shortage of workers with intermediate skills. Demand for workers with these kinds of skills was expected to rise reinforcing the need to address this issue through the development of a new vocational training programme.

In defining what constitutes an ‘apprenticeship’, Ryan and Unwin draw attention to the following characteristics:

... a structured programme of vocational preparation, sponsored by an employer, juxtaposing part-time education and on-the-job training and work experience, leading to a recognised vocational qualification at craft or higher level, and taking at least 2 years to complete, after requisite general education.

(Ryan and Unwin 2001, p.100)

Apprenticeship training has a long established tradition within specific occupational sectors, such as craft trades and manufacturing. However, the growth in service-sector and new-technology-related employment has led to a wide range of occupations offering training opportunities. By extending the concept beyond the ‘traditional’ occupational sectors, the ‘modern apprenticeship’ is thus primarily a means of improving upon the national training system to deliver the skills required in a modern dynamic economy. The notion of a ‘modern’ apprenticeship allows for a more fluid definition of apprenticeship training (Canning and Lang 2004). This has resulted in an increased range of options for employers and young people, differences in terms of the length of time it takes to complete an MA and a ‘flexible’ interpretation of core skills requirements. However, despite the attempt to modernise the apprenticeship system by both Conservative and Labour governments the evidence would suggest that MAs are still heavily segregated in terms of gender.

THE COSTS OF OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION: WHY DOES GENDER MATTER?

Occupational segregation is a major market distortion that impacts on both women's earning potential and economic efficiency. It is one of the key causes of the pay gap.

(DWP 2003, p.29)

Concern over persistent skills and productivity gaps in recent years has resulted in a policy focus in many EU member states on investing in human capital at a national level (EC 2004). Within this context gender based inequalities, particularly those directly associated with the operation of modern labour markets, is receiving greater attention in terms of public policy interventions. That is, the 'social justice' case for the promotion of gender equality has been strengthened by a heightened awareness regarding the negative consequences of gender based inequalities for overall economic performance. However, despite this focus, combined with an existing legislative framework promoting the equal treatment of men and women with particular reference to the world of paid work, 'gender segregation remains one of the most entrenched characteristics of the labour force in the European Union' (Rees 1998, p.1).

The continued concentration of women in low-status and low-paid occupations indicates that the structures and processes associated with modern labour markets operate in such a way as to sustain women's relatively disadvantaged position within the world of paid work. The current gender pay gap for full time workers in Scotland, based on hourly earnings (which excludes overtime), is 16% and, for part-time workers, this figure rises to 37% (EOC 2004). Recent research suggests that the consequences of occupational segregation, such as the lower wages that 'women's work' commands, their employment in smaller firms and the lessened likelihood of unionisation, accounts for 18% of the gender pay gap (Olsen and Walby 2004).

In addition to the pay gap, occupational segregation can be arguably associated with gender based differences in productivity levels. By effectively constraining the employment, training and education opportunities for many men and women, gender based occupational segregation serves to create labour market rigidities. This not only limits individual choice but also acts in restricting the available pool of suitably qualified workers. Under conditions of gender stereotyping the market may operate in ways that fail to allocate the most appropriate worker to any given job vacancy, thus resulting in an

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inefficient allocation of resources that will have both micro and macroeconomic impacts. Indeed, the main causes of low productivity have been identified as skills deficits and labour market rigidities (Walby and Olsen 2002). Thus, if left unchecked occupational segregation could contribute to the continuation of existing gender based skills gaps, which in turn may impact negatively on overall productivity levels.

Clearly then gender matters when considering both efficiency *and* equality objectives and improving the socio-economic position of women is increasingly recognised as an overall policy priority. This has been made explicit through high-level political commitments to the concept of ‘gender mainstreaming’. The systematic integration of a gender equality perspective into every aspect of policy-making, implied by the concept of gender mainstreaming, has been advocated across the EU, both at an institutional and a national government level. Indeed, the continued and future operation of the European Union’s Structural Funds will be strongly influenced by the EU’s policy of mainstreaming and the UK government have on several occasions stated their firm commitment to mainstreaming, specifically with reference to spending decisions (Rees 2000, Rake 2000). Such commitments imply a complete overhaul of the policy making process as opposed to taking remedial actions to remedy identified inequalities as and when required. Within a Scottish public policy context, the stated commitment to mainstreaming appears to incorporate such a transformative approach:

Mainstreaming aims to change organisational cultures so that an equalities perspective becomes an integral part This means that the Executive must make sure that equality issues are considered in the formulation, design and delivery of policy/legislation/services. This approach will make sure that equality is considered in the development of policy from the start and is not a ‘bolt-on’ at the end of the process.

(Scottish Executive 2000, pp.14-17)

It follows, then, any strategy aimed at securing productivity and efficiency gains, alongside an overall agenda of promoting equality as interpreted within the construct of gender mainstreaming, should incorporate measures to tackle issues relating to gender based occupational segregation. Within this context the role of education and training is highly significant:

Systems of training and their take-up tend to reinforce and solidify patterns of occupational segregation. This applies to both horizontal segregation

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(men and women working in different industries and occupations) and vertical segregation (men and women found at different levels of the hierarchy). But vocational education and training (VET) are as segregated as the labour market itself. Indeed, initial further and continuing training manifest highly gendered patterns of participation which reinforce those of the workplace.

(Rees 1998, p.2)

Actions to increase the number of women entering traditionally male dominated careers would appear to be one way to enlarge the pool of qualified candidates for Scottish businesses facing skills shortages, as well as having a positive impact on the current gender pay gap. Overall, the benefits of addressing occupational segregation at the training level include increased productivity and enhanced economic efficiency as well as widening the career choices available for young people and promoting gender equality. The extent to which these arguments have penetrated current government discourse in Scotland with specific reference to the design, delivery and evaluation of the MA programme remains a subject of debate.

MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS IN SCOTLAND

MAAs in Scotland were incorporated into the existing 'Skillseekers' programme offering a structured framework in which young people can achieve a Scottish/National Vocational Qualification (S/NVQ) at level 3 and obtain a range of 'core' or 'key' skills, such as communication, numeracy, problem solving, working with others and information technology. MA frameworks are designed by industry or occupational sector ensuring that apprentices acquire knowledge and skills specific to that sector (Scottish Office 1999). The MA programme is targeted mainly at the 16-24 age group and places young people with a relevant employer, providing them with the opportunity to work towards a vocational qualification whilst being paid. The length of training depends largely on the occupational framework: for example construction apprenticeships take around 4 years to complete whereas some frameworks in ICT and business administration can be completed in 6 months.

In Scotland, funding for training comes directly from the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department of the Scottish Executive and is administered through the Local Enterprise Companies under the direction of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The Enterprise

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Networks are the main economic development agencies for Scotland. Set up in 1990 and constituted as ‘companies’, the Local Enterprise Companies are required to have the majority of members of their boards from the private sector (Blake Stevenson Ltd 2001). Training providers, which include private sector organisations and Further Education colleges, deliver the training element of the MA under contract from the Local Enterprise Companies. Sector Skills Bodies, in their capacity as industry representatives, have significant input into the delivery of the MA programme through the design and development of occupational frameworks and the identification of skills needs. Careers Scotland, a subsidiary of the Enterprise Networks, also has responsibility for marketing the programme alongside the Sector Skills Bodies. The Scottish Qualifications Authority reviews and awards the SVQs.

Table 1
MA participation (numbers in training) in Scotland

	male	female	total
April 2001	10563	3387	13950
April 2004	20031	13829	33860
<i>% change</i>	<i>+89.6%</i>	<i>+308%</i>	<i>+143%</i>

Source: MA Performance Report, Skills Development Teams, SEnt and HIE.

In Scotland, the total number of MAs in training more than doubled in the period 2001 to 2004. Overall the increase in participation can be attributable to government strategies aimed at promoting the MA programme, in particular encouraging greater participation amongst under-represented groups (Scottish Executive 2004b and 2004c). Table 1 indicates that the majority of this growth was driven by a huge increase in female participation, which expanded by 308% from 2001 to 2004. In exploring the actual nature of this marked increase in female MAs, the evidence indicates a clear gender divide in terms of occupational choices. That is, the ‘traditional’ frameworks, defined as those where the apprenticeship mode of training is entrenched, such as plumbing, tend to be dominated by men, while significantly more women enter the modern, ‘non-traditional’ frameworks where the concept of apprenticeship training is relatively new, such as Health and Social Care.

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In the five traditional frameworks (Construction, Plumbing, Motor Vehicle, Electro-technical and Engineering), identified within the 'top ten' most popular frameworks in Scotland in 2004, women accounted for 4.8% of the total numbers in training. In the top five non-traditional frameworks (Health and Social Care, Management, Hospitality, Customer Service and Business Administration) women accounted for 68% of those in training. Women dominated the Health and Social Care and Business Administration frameworks, representing 82% and 86% respectively, while the gender split in Hospitality and Management was more balanced with women accounting for 49% and 59% respectively of the total numbers in training.¹ Such marked gender based divisions, particularly severe in the traditional sectors where female participation is negligible, closely mirror patterns of occupational segregation in the wider labour market. That is, women remain concentrated in service sector, administrative and 'caring' occupations and men overwhelming dominate the more traditional industries. For example, evidence from the Labour Force Survey indicates that around 1% of UK construction jobs are held by women (Labour Force Survey 2003 *cited in* Miller et al 2004). Given the evidence of the extent of gender segregation you would expect any evaluation of the MA programme to include a gender perspective. However, as the following section highlights, the extent to which gender has been considered has been limited.

EVALUATING THE MA PROGRAMME EVIDENCE OF A GENDER BLIND APPROACH?

Occupational segregation, or the gender stereotyping underpinning it, has not been adequately considered by the majority of existing research on the MA programme in the UK. The relatively high level of non-completion in some sectors and measures to improve the 'quality' of delivery have been the main focus of many investigations both at a UK level and in Scotland. However, the possible link between these issues and gender has not been considered. The evaluation of the MA programme thus far has either ignored gender as an influential variable or underplayed the significance of gender in its relation to other variables such as age and occupation.

¹ *From the Modern Apprenticeship Performance Report, Skills Development Team, SEnt, Oct 2004.*

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Recent research on the operation of the MA programme has investigated various issues pertaining to the success, or otherwise, of the programme in delivering skills and enhancing employability in the UK labour market. For a detailed review of the literature evaluating the MA programme see Thomson et al (2004). For the purposes of this paper, only the most recent UK studies are considered.

Matlay (2004) investigated MAs in comparison with other training initiatives and concluded that MAs and AMAs (Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, operating in England and Wales) were ‘much better suited to the specific training needs and H[uman] R[esource] D[evelopment] strategies of smaller businesses’ (Matlay 2004, p.512). In contrast to the findings on the comparative success of the MA for small and medium enterprises, Spielhofer and Sims (2004) used a qualitative methodology to examine the experience of the MA programme from the perspective of large employers in the London area and found barriers to encouraging large employers to take on young people through MAs. However, it was found that many of the large companies interviewed had ‘very little knowledge of MAs and regarded “apprenticeships” as irrelevant to their businesses’ (Spielhofer and Sims 2004a, p.117). Of those employers who were aware of the MA, many identified serious barriers to increasing the involvement of large employers in the future. The MA itself was seen as being too bureaucratic and complex (*ibid*). The same authors investigated the use of MAs in the retail sector and discovered a lack of employer commitment and high levels of non-completion (Spielhofer and Sims 2004b, p.14). In these two studies, issues relating to gender differences do not feature as a significant focus of the research. Given the dominance of female labour in the retail sector, it would seem appropriate and indeed essential to explore evidence of any gender-determined differences which may impact upon individual outcomes and the overall ‘success’ of the MA programme.

A further study, evaluating MAs from an employers’ perspective, aimed to identify factors that would facilitate the expansion of MAs amongst employers already participating (Anderson and Metcalf 2003). From a telephone survey of 1500 MA employers, their results suggested that;

... the number of MAs with current MA employers will fall by at least 6%
... due to a combination of factors including poor employer experiences of MAs, a belief that training is not relevant and an inability to recruit suitable young people, among other things.
(Anderson and Metcalf 2003, p.5)

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Drawing on 12 action research projects designed to address issues of retention and achievement of MAs, Maynard and Smith (2004) recommended measures be taken to improve the 'quality' of the Work Based Learning experience, concluding that a 'holistic approach' that is learner centred would be the best way forward. Again, these studies did not investigate the possible differentiated experience of male and female learners or the gender dimensions of different occupational sectors within the studies.

Two major studies that have made reference to gender, but have not been conducted from a specific gender perspective, are Canning and Lang (2004) and McIntosh (2004). Using data from the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) McIntosh concluded that the wage gains from completing an apprenticeship were around 5-7% for men. Women, on the other hand, could expect no wage premium on completion of an apprenticeship. This may go some way to explaining the severity of non-completion rates for the non-traditional sectors, found by Canning and Lang (2004), as women overwhelmingly dominate the service-oriented MAs.

Gender stereotyping, occupational segregation or the concentration of women in the non-traditional frameworks has not been adequately considered by the majority of research on MAs in Scotland or in the UK. One notable exception is the QPID Study Report No 71 (March 1999). However this report only pertains to the delivery of the MA south of the border, investigating the role that the Training Enterprise Councils could have in addressing gender imbalance. This role in delivery has since been taken over by the Local Learning and Skills Councils in England. The research indicated that occupational segregation permeated the MA programme as it does in the wider labour market. However, the report concluded that the primary 'equal opportunities' priority of the Training Enterprise Councils at that time was the under-representation of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. It would seem that evidence of increasing female participation rates overall has been accepted as an indicator of improving the participation of 'under-represented' groups and remains a key focus in terms of delivering on equality goals. This position has been made explicit by the Scottish Executive with a stated commitment to target the under-representation of women in the MA programme. The Scottish Executive's Draft Budget 2005-2006 states that their commitment to equality 'will be enhanced by continuing to support Modern Apprenticeships and [therein] targeting under-represented groups' (Scottish Executive 2004c, p.84). In the most recent spending proposals (2005-2008),

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the Scottish Executive reiterated a commitment to 'increase the number of women doing Modern Apprenticeships' (Scottish Executive 2004b, p.13).

Achieving gender balance in terms of MA participation rates may be an appropriate goal if the occupations were similarly gender balanced. However, as indicated above patterns of participation are highly differentiated in terms of occupation and the traditional/non-traditional split. Within the MA programme itself the traditional and non-traditional frameworks are differentiated not just in terms of the 'old' and the 'new' apprenticeship concept but also in delivery. It could be argued that the traditional frameworks are, historically at least, predisposed to offer 'successful' apprenticeships to their established client group of young male school leavers. This could mean that men and women benefit from the resources available to the programme unequally in that men overwhelmingly dominate in the traditional frameworks. Furthermore, in the non-traditional sectors the visibility of the minority gender is greater than in the male dominated traditional sectors. The prevalence of gender differentiated outcomes in delivery and resource allocation presents a challenge for the MA programme itself but, given that the MA is often a first point of entry for young people into the formal labour market, its consequences could have wider implications. Thus the MA programme contributes to gender based occupational segregation in the Scottish labour market by reinforcing it.

Strategies that are primarily designed to improve women's participation in the formal labour market will do little to address the very gendered nature of that participation. Taking action to promote more gender balanced outcomes with reference to career choices requires that policy makers develop an understanding of the actual nature and causes of occupational segregation and that policy is subsequently designed and delivered with this in mind. That is, moving beyond a gender blind approach to policy making to a more gender focused approach requires an initial undertaking to recognise and explore the influence gender differences have on individual behaviour.

EXPLORING OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION IN THE MODERN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME IN SCOTLAND: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In September 2003, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) began its first ever General Formal Investigation into the segregation of women and men in training at work, with a specific focus on the MA programme. The purpose of

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the investigation was to explore issues of gender segregation within the MA programme, focusing on five sectors identified as experiencing shortages of trained staff: construction, engineering, plumbing, information and communications technology (ICT) and childcare.

Research carried out by the authors as part of this investigation represents the first major study that investigates MAs in Scotland from a specific gender perspective. As such, a significant ‘gap’ in the existing literature has been addressed. The following section outlines the key findings and conclusions of this research. The study’s purpose was to clarify the distinct nature of the delivery mechanisms associated with the MA programme in Scotland; to identify the extent of gender segregation across all frameworks, but with specific reference to the five selected sectors; and to explore issues and potential barriers faced by young people wishing to pursue occupational choices identified as non-stereotypical.

The first stage of the research project involved three elite interviews with key policy makers and stakeholders: a representative from each of the Scottish Executive’s Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department, Scottish Enterprise and Careers Scotland. In addition, a detailed survey of all 22 Local Enterprise Companies in Scotland was undertaken. The second stage involved a number of focus groups with atypical² apprentices, employers and representatives from the Sector Skills Bodies: 2 focus groups with Modern Apprentices (nine individuals in total), 1 with employers (six individuals) and 1 with employers’ representatives (four individuals). Evidence collected at the focus group discussions gave a qualitative indication of the existence of barriers that atypical apprentices had encountered both in making their career choices and in employment. Similarly, from their extensive knowledge of the industry, employers and Sector Skills Bodies representatives indicated the barriers to recruitment of atypical candidates from their perspective, including those stemming from the operational nature of the MA programme itself.

The initial stages of the research uncovered a range of key issues organised under three main headings: ‘recording and reporting’, ‘delivering skills’ and ‘equal opportunities’. In terms of recording and reporting, it was found that there was a distinct lack of transparency surrounding the collection of data relating to MA participation and completion rates. Furthermore, data was not

² The term ‘atypical’ refers to candidates of the minority gender in any given occupational category.

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wholly available in the public domain and that which was accessible was not disaggregated by gender. Where figures were made available, statistical evidence indicated marked and systematic segregation by gender in all occupational areas under scrutiny, with the exception of ICT (see Table 2).

Table 2
MA participation (numbers in training) in the Scottish Enterprise Area (October 2004)

sector*	total	male	female	% female
Plumbing	1354	1328	6	0.4
Construction	6420	6373	47	0.7
Engineering	2015	1976	39	1.9
ICT	235	124	111	47.2
Childcare	1029	9	1020	99.1

Source: Modern Apprentice Performance Report, Skills Development Team, SEnt.

**one framework (the largest) has been chosen to represent each occupational sector.*

Under the delivering skills theme, elite interviews revealed differences between the Scottish Executive's view of the main objective of the MA programme and that of Scottish Enterprise. The Executive regarded the programme as primarily concerned with expanding the current labour pool based on the fact that it is targeted at 16-19 years olds who would not otherwise be in the labour market, or in full time education. Scottish Enterprise, on the other hand, believed that the programme's main objective was developing skills in the existing workforce. This perspective was based on the perceived high levels of skills that the Modern Apprentice would acquire. With the piloting of Adult Modern Apprenticeships (for those over 25 years), the reality is that the programme can be used to recruit *or* to up-skill existing employees, to suit the needs of employers.

When investigating the equal opportunities theme, it was found that although the MA programme was considered by employers and delivery agents to be a very good 'product', the success of the programme was perceived as being linked to the historical entrenchment of the apprenticeship concept. As argued earlier this indicates the potential for gender bias in that the frameworks

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dominated by men tend to be more resource intensive often taking up to four years to complete. Some non-traditional MA frameworks can be completed in as little as six months. Furthermore, the flexibility afforded by the variations in defined timescales could be arguably generating perceptions of relative values regarding the actual worth of the MA qualification, to the detriment of the non-traditional frameworks. Given the evidence relating to gender based segregation within the MA programme this has important equal opportunities implications.

It was clear at this stage of research that the MA programme displayed marked occupational segregation by gender in the sectors considered under the remit of the EOC's investigation and in terms of traditional/non-traditional apprenticeships. Indicators that consider overall participation alone may serve to mask the extent of segregation across all frameworks. Barriers may exist to the recruitment of women into the MA programme overall but the horizontal segregation of men and women by occupation within the MA programme is argued to be of more immediate concern. The second stage of the research explored the main barriers to desegregation in the MA programme as it operates in Scotland.

It was found during the course of investigation that significant barriers to occupational desegregation existed in the actual delivery of the MA programme, particularly in terms of funding. The funding of the MA programme was identified as a potential barrier to recruitment overall in that funding was only guaranteed to the 16-18 age group. There was no incentive therefore for employers or training providers to recruit MAs over the age of 18. This fact, coupled with minimum wage requirements, meant that employers often discriminated against the over 18s, particularly in traditional sectors. Given that women have an older age profile in MA participation, this discrimination could be argued to affect female participation more than male. Crucially, for atypical candidates, the confidence required to make non-traditional career choices may not be fully formed at ages 16 and 17. Also, the age limits on funding effectively prohibit career changes from occurring via the MA programme.

In terms of delivery, the interaction of work-based learning with the further-education sector also created barriers to change in terms of the lack of 'parity of esteem' between further and higher education and the MA qualification. This was perceived as a potential barrier to school leaver recruitment in that schools 'push' people into further and higher education and apprenticeships are seen as the 'last resort' for low academic achievers. Similarly, the limited

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capacity of FE colleges to train was a barrier to recruitment in all sectors. This was of specific concern in the traditional industries where training can involve large capital outlay. There was also a lack of suitably qualified staff in the traditional sectors, as trades people were not opting to go into lecturing.

Barriers to change, identified outwith the MA programme itself, were slightly differentiated by gender. For atypical candidates across the sectors it was found that negative attitudes from friends, family and peers made it difficult for them to make non-traditional career choices:

... there was a lot of people saying to me at the time [when deciding to do an MA] 'that's going to be a hard job, you won't be able to do that'.

Things that they say jokingly but you know they half mean it. They say it to you to see your reaction, if you're actually serious about doing it or not.

[Apprentice, Engineering]

Employers in the traditional sectors were often reluctant to employ women because they feared they would face additional costs because of the need to adapt facilities:

They'll come up with all sorts of excuses – 'oh, I'll have to provide separate toilet facilities' and all that. That's what they'll tell you ... They'll come up with everything!

[Employers' Representative, Plumbing]

The recruitment of men into childcare was limited because of the low pay prevalent in this sector but also due to a widespread belief that parents would be suspicious and uncomfortable with male childcare workers:

There's very much a perception that if you're a guy and you're working with kids ... alarm bells start ringing ... you need to start asking questions. Even in primary teaching.

[Employer, Childcare]

Where atypical candidates had been recruited into male dominated sectors, co-workers were described as often doubting the abilities of women in traditional industries meaning that atypical candidates often had to work 'twice as hard' as their male colleagues;

They don't talk to you or make an effort unless you do, you really have to try to let them see that you are normal and you're not some stupid wee

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lassie that wants to run about having her nails done and stuff like that, you've got to make the effort with them a lot more.

[Apprentice, Engineering]

Workplace culture often led to the exclusion of women at work in the form of co-workers 'protecting' females from examples of masculine culture such as pornography and 'dirty' jokes;

When I first went in they were all watching their tongue, watching what they said because I was the first girl the company took on so they were a bit wary and they took all their posters down, and their calendars.

[Apprentice, Construction]

There was a consensus among all the focus group participants that tackling occupational segregation would be a positive benefit for the Scottish economy. During discussions with both employers and apprentices, a strong business case for occupational desegregation emerged where atypical candidates and some employers recognised the value of hiring and training female trades-people to cater for female customers:

I want to have my own business and I want to have my own all-female construction company – all different trades ... Like old people ... they don't want guys coming into their house with all the bogus callers and that. I want to do that, a good few years down the line.

[Apprentice, Plumbing]

Apprentices also described how having more female peers and role models at work would enhance their working lives, as often the only other women many of them came into contact with were domestic and administrative staff;

I just sometimes wish there was another lassie, somebody that I could talk to because they all have their own wee conversations about football or anything else that I don't know anything about and stuff like that ... I just wish there was another lassie. When that cleaner comes in, I go mad!

[Apprentice, ICT]

Introducing more male role models in the lives of children through occupational desegregation in childcare was also viewed as being a desirable outcome in terms of challenging perceptions of gender stereotypical jobs at a young age. Less segregation itself would also help in that role models would

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become more visible and might encourage people to think of careers they might not have otherwise considered.

Clearly the MA programme is not in itself the cause of gender based occupational segregation in the Scottish economy. Rather, patterns of segregation are the direct result of long established perceptions about the respective roles of men and women. However, the question remains whether these perceptions are actually damaging to economic performance in the 21st century and is there the political will or desire to take action to address this issue?

PROMOTING A SMART SUCCESSFUL AND 'EQUAL' SCOTLAND: A CASE OF MAINSTREAMING IN PRACTICE?

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive has two key strategies outlining its vision for a competitive economy and highly skilled workforce. 'A Smart Successful Scotland' (Scottish Executive 2001) lays out the policy direction and remit of the enterprise agencies, an important part being to help people gain the knowledge and skills they will need for tomorrow's jobs. The lifelong learning strategy, 'Learning through Life' (Scottish Executive 2003), seeks to ensure that everybody can access the best possible learning opportunities to bridge the opportunity gap, the skills gap and the productivity gap. The Enterprise Networks are responsible for delivering the objectives laid out by the Scottish Executive in 'A Smart Successful Scotland' in which there are three key priorities: 'Growing Business', 'Global Connections' and 'Learning and Skills'. The lifelong learning strategy sets out the Scottish Executive's strategy for lifelong learning and the link between learning and a successful Scottish economy and society. The strategy is aimed at bridging the opportunity gap between those in work and those who are not; and closing the productivity gap between Scotland and the successful economies of the world.

In November 2004, as part of the ongoing evaluation of the Smart Successful Scotland strategy, the Scottish Executive published their 'refresh' of this enterprise strategy (Scottish Executive 2004b). This updated strategy acknowledges the importance of education, skills and learning opportunities for all and the need for a real partnership approach in providing the framework required to achieve higher and sustained levels of productivity.

However, Scottish political rhetoric makes no specific reference to the importance of taking action to break the barriers to achieving gender equality

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in access to education, learning and work. Specifically, there is no acknowledgement that this is an important contributory step towards creating the Scottish Executive's vision of sustained economic growth. This is surprising given the Scottish Executive's explicit commitment to equality mainstreaming, referred to above.

The importance given by the Scottish Executive to the MA programme in promoting vocational training and skills as a means of achieving economic growth and increased productivity is highlighted in 'Building a Better Scotland' (Scottish Executive 2004a). However, within the same document there is little evidence that adequate consideration is being given to the extent of gender segregation within the MA programme and the wider labour market, its contribution to the gender pay gap and effective ways in which to tackle the problem. A near-exclusive policy focus on increasing the number of women participating in the MA will do nothing to address the severe horizontal segregation of men and women into specific occupations and its significant contribution to the gender pay and skills gaps.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The segregation of men and women into occupations considered 'appropriate' for their gender has many sources, not least the extent of gender stereotyping in society in general (Begum 2004). Quite apart from the negative constraints that stereotyping places upon men and women, occupational segregation by gender represents significant labour market rigidity. While the MA programme may be successful in providing vocational training, unless the issue of occupational segregation is tackled, the programme will not realise its full potential in terms of both promoting gender equality and enhancing the performance of the Scottish economy.

Increasing the number of women doing MAs is seen by the Scottish Executive as a way to promote equality (see Scottish Executive 2004a, p.3 and 2004c, p.84). However, it has been found that where women do participate in the MA programme, they are concentrated in low paid and largely stereotyped occupations. In order to ensure there is equality of access to education, skills and careers, action needs to be taken to ensure a greater gender balance within key sectors of the economy where skills shortages and gaps exist, not just an increase in the number of women participating. This will not only allow for equality of opportunity for all but could help to reduce the gender pay gap. As more women enter traditionally higher paid male occupations and more men

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enter traditionally lower paid female occupations women will increasingly receive a wage comparable to men. It could be argued that the pressure for increasing the value given to the work traditionally done by women will rise and the gender pay gap will start to reduce. Maintaining a labour market segregated by gender will allow the pay gap to continue, will sustain existing stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and continue to delimit the potential of Scotland's workforce.

Gender based occupational segregation is not unique to the MA programme in Scotland but the Scottish Executive is promoting the programme as one of the main vehicles for achieving a highly skilled workforce. This objective may be jeopardised by the failure to address the persistent and dramatic under-representation of men in childcare MAs and women in construction, plumbing and engineering sectors and gender segregation between other traditional and non-traditional frameworks.

It is argued that the Scottish Executive's commitment to the mainstreaming of equality has clearly not filtered through to its express objectives in terms of increasing female participation in MAs. Furthermore, the design and delivery of the programme is an example of a gender 'neutral' policy, which reinforces existing gender inequalities in the wider labour market: For gender-neutral, in this instance, read gender-blind. Unless action is taken to make the delivery and promotion of the MA more gender aware then it will continue to contribute to gender segregation and inequality by failing to promote and support individuals' and employers' access to real freedom of choice in the Scottish labour market. A gender aware approach would involve recognising that whilst overall participation is important this need to be reflected in a more balanced gender split at occupational levels. In addition it would require acknowledging the barriers to desegregation highlighted in this article and developing appropriate measures to tackle them. The MA programme is not the cause of occupational segregation but given that it is often the first point of entry for young people into the labour market and involves a plethora of public and private sector agencies in terms of delivery it would be an appropriate place to tackle this problem.

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