



Decent Work for Women in Wales: A Sectoral Study

Executive Summary

A qualitative research study exploring decent work and barriers to progression for women in the Domiciliary Care and Food and Drink Sectors

October 2017

Produced for



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Foreword

The question of decent work is one that must be at the heart of discussions of gender equality. Women continue to face disadvantage in the workplace and are more likely to be in insecure, poorly paid employment that offers little opportunity to progress. Those sectors that are more likely to offer poor quality employment, such as care and retail, are also more likely to employ women.

The cost of this disadvantage is felt by women, but also the wider economy.

Chwarae Teg were therefore pleased to prepare this report on behalf of Oxfam Cymru during 2017. The context of these discussions in Wales has shifted slightly since the report and recommendations were written. The Welsh Government's economic action plan has been published, which includes a welcome focus on securing inclusive growth. Notably, care and food and drink are included as key foundational sectors that will benefit from additional support and investment from Welsh Government, including action to improve career progression within them.

The Fair Work Board has been set up and a Chair appointed, and it has been made clear that the Board will be tasked with looking at issues such as the gender pay gap, as well as the broader fair work agenda.

In this context the findings from this report, and the other reports in this suite of studies, are all the more important. Securing decent or fair work for all must remain a top priority to ensure that prosperity truly is felt by all. These discussions must always include a gender lens, so that the continued economic inequality felt by women throughout Wales is tackled and the gender pay gap becomes a thing of the past.

1. Introduction

The desire for decent work is an important issue for many people in Wales today. Since women continue to be disproportionately concentrated in lower paid sectors and on precarious contracts, and are therefore at greater risk of living in poverty, the gender element of this matter cannot be ignored.

What constitutes decent work has been the subject of much discussion, and while pay remains an important consideration, it is broadly agreed that decent work encompasses a much wider range of factors. Oxfam Scotland's report on decent work (2016) includes a ranked list of 26 priorities for low-paid workers, six points related to pay, including the top spot on the list, followed closely by culture, working hours, progression and then benefits.¹

In 2017, Chwarae Teg were commissioned by Oxfam Cymru to carry out a sectoral study exploring decent work for women in Wales. Based on a number of factors, this report focuses on the care and food and drink sectors.

2. Sector choice

This report focuses on two key sectors in the Welsh economy, which offer potential for growth but are often considered to face challenges in relation to decent work – care and food and drink.

In addition to concerns around pay, women in the care and food and drink sectors face further barriers to decent work. Care work, which is heavily female-dominated, often involves long working hours, zero-hour contracts, insufficient training and little opportunity for progression. Gender segregation in the food and drink sector is not as pronounced as the care sector, although there is a relatively large gender pay gap, and full-time, permanent contracts are far from the norm. All of these factors can lead to in-work poverty for women in these industries.

We predominantly consider domiciliary care. As a sub-sector within social care, domiciliary care has had significant focus from the Welsh and UK Governments and has unique challenges and opportunities given the nature of the work. Issues within this sector around pay and conditions have also been well publicised in recent years.²

The food and drink sector is difficult to define, given the complexity of its supply chain (which includes animal care workers and veterinarians, biological scientists and food technology specialists, environmental health workers, fishing and agricultural workers etc.)

¹ UWS-Oxfam, *Decent work for Scotland's low-paid workers: a job to be done*, p. 3.

² For example *Number of care workers on zero hours contracts jumps to one in seven* The Guardian 17/11/2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/17/care-workers-zero-hours-contracts-unison-minimum-wage/> / *A day in the life of a care worker: 23 house calls in 12 hours for £64.80*; The Guardian 17/11/2016; *Britain's Home Care Crisis* BBC Panorama first aired 20/03/2017 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b08k9zgn/panorama-britains-homecare-crisis>

and its overlap with the tourism and leisure industries (particularly restaurants, cafés and bars). For purposes of this report, the food and drink sector refers to produce picking, food manufacturing, catering, and restaurant and bar staff. These sub-sectors provide a cross-section of low paid roles in the food and drink sector.

3. Methodology

This research uses qualitative research methods to explore the experience of women working in the domiciliary care and food and drink sectors. It seeks to provide evidence to develop policy recommendations that secure decent work for women in low paid sectors and tackle barriers to progression.

Thirteen semi-structured interviews were carried out with women working in these sectors and eight strategic interviews were carried out with workplace representatives and sector representatives. Interviews lasted between 15 and 60 minutes, and were carried out during July and August 2017.

Within the scope of this study, it was not possible to reach a representative sample group through either focus groups or interviews or ensure coverage of the wide variety of sub-sectors within the food and drink sector. Therefore, while the sample is not big enough to represent all working in these two sectors, common themes and concerns came through clearly in the interviews, which read in conjunction with current literature, suggest key barriers to progression and a lack of decent work.

Our analysis was based around a number of themes including the nature of work, pay, contracts and working conditions, progression and priorities for change. Below we summarise the key findings in each sector.

4. Domiciliary care: Summary of key findings

Low pay and poor working conditions remain a key challenge to securing decent work and improving recruitment, retention and ultimately progression in the domiciliary care sector.

The perception of the sector as being low-skilled and of low value persists and is out-of-step with the reality of the work. This perception contributes to ongoing low pay, recruitment issues, such as the low skill level of some of those entering the workforce, and retention. Work in the sector is demanding and the prevalence of lone working can leave workers without support networks. This can have a negative impact on workers well-being and is a barrier to collective action.

Zero-hours contracts are not a clear-cut issue within the care sector. Some employees appear to value the flexibility while for others this can lead to insecurity and financial worries. Employers are not necessarily in favour of offering these contracts as standard but feel that current commissioning models leave them little room for manoeuvre and the issue is much broader than just zero hours contracts, with problems arising from contracts offering very low guaranteed hours. It also appears that efforts to reduce the proportion of

workers on non-guaranteed hours contracts may not be having the transformative impact envisaged.

Career progression, while possible, is difficult in domiciliary care. A supportive manager who can identify opportunities, and access to training are crucial but not all workers are fortunate to have these. We also see many moving out of domiciliary care, or at least out of private care provider settings, in order to progress. Some domiciliary care workers do not want to progress into management as they wish to continue delivering care services. Therefore as well as addressing barriers to progression action must also be taken to ensure that entry level pay and conditions are adequate and do not leave people at risk of poverty or constantly concerned about money.

Commissioning is key. Many providers would like to increase pay and offer more secure and flexible ways of working but are unable do so under the current model.

5. Food and drink

Similarly to domiciliary care, the perception of the food and drink sector is at odds with reality of the work. This has an impact on the ability to recruit and retain staff and potentially on the way staff that engage with the general public (e.g. waiting staff) are treated.

The food and drink workforce remains notably segregated on the basis of gender and issues of sexism and discrimination remain. This can be more marked for those workers who have come from outside the UK.

Low pay is an issue and does not reflect the difficult nature of many jobs in the sector. As in care, contracts are a complex issue and overworking is the norm. While the flexibility offered by zero-hours contracts are welcomed by some, a lack of permanent contracts is seen by others as affecting retention.

There is a long-hours culture in the food and drink sector and a lack of work-life balance is a key issue. This has an impact on the well-being of staff and can make progression much tougher for women, who are more likely to have caring responsibilities outside of work.

Career progression is not the aim for everyone in the food and drink sector. For some, jobs in the food and drink sector are a job 'for now' while they pursue other interests and passions, which are linked to their career aspirations. For those that do wish to progress, it can be difficult and the rewards for moving into managerial roles can be minimal.

Initial training for compliance is good, but there is limited investment in professional development training. While there are examples of good training and development programmes, these tend to be in larger corporate settings in the hospitality industry.

While our sample is small, there appears to be a difference in approach in hospitality and food manufacturing whereby moving from front-line roles into management is common, and in fact desirable, in hospitality but not in food manufacturing.

For some, progression in the sector means setting up their own business. This raises different questions about what decent work looks like and there could be scope to explore this topic with those that are self-employed or running their own business.

6. Recommendations

Our analysis has shown that these sectors share a number of challenges and will require a variety of actors to work together to secure decent work for low-paid women workers in Wales.

Recognising the value of low-paid sectors

Perceptions of both the domiciliary care and food and drink sectors have been shown to be at odds with the reality of working in them. The perceived low value of the work done in these sectors continues to drive many of the challenges that must be dealt with to secure decent work including low pay, insecure contracts, high turnover of staff, recruitment and retention challenges and limited investment.

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Government should ensure that the new economic strategy recognises the important contribution that foundational sectors, such as care and food and drink, make to Wales' economy and ensure that these sectors benefit from investment in innovation and skills development.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Government should adopt a broader definition of success in the new economic strategy to include a measure of the quality of employment alongside more traditional measures such as Gross Value Added (GVA).

Collectivism

Collectivism, either through trade unions or other networks and forums, is challenging in these sectors, partly as result of the mobile and transient nature of the workforces. This limits the ability of workers in these sectors to call for change and access support and training opportunities.

Recommendation 3

Trade Unions to prioritise activities to adapt to a new work environment, with more mobile and transient workforces, making full use of new technology to enable workers in low-paid sectors to benefit from union membership.

Recommendation 4

Businesses to encourage and support the creation of internal networks to enable staff to better access peer support and explore options for professional development and training.

Supporting progression: Access to training

Access to training, beyond induction and basic training for compliance, is difficult in these sectors. While there are example of good practice, particularly in larger companies who have greater resources, training is not consistent and the cost of undertaking training can land on employees who are already struggling financially. Training that is currently available, such as apprenticeships and leadership and management training, is often funded by European structural funds and with Brexit on the horizon there is a risk that access to training could become even more difficult.

It remains unclear in the Autumn of 2017 what exactly will replace structural funds. During the 2017 General Election, Theresa May pledged a UK Shared Prosperity Fund to replace structural funds that will seek to reduce inequalities between communities across the four nations, while the Welsh Government has spoken about a “made in Wales” successor in *Prosperity for All: A National Strategy*.³

Recommendation 5

Welsh Government to work with UK colleagues to determine what will replace current EU structural funds, which are used to deliver training including apprenticeships and management training, and ensure such schemes remain a priority,

Recommendation 6

Businesses to work with sector bodies to define career pathways, share resources and best practice to widen access to training and development opportunities.

Supporting progression: The role of managers

In both care and food and drink it’s clear that the opportunity to progress can depend on working with a manager who is able to identify and support employees to take advantage of opportunities. However, without support and training themselves it can be difficult for managers to perform this role, and while we heard examples of good practice, it can come down to luck of the draw for many employees.

Recommendation 7

Welsh Government and sector bodies to better promote management training opportunities to ensure that managers are able to effectively champion training and development and the progression of workers within their workplaces.

³ The Conservative Party *Forward Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future* 2017 p. 35 / Welsh Government *Prosperity for All: A National Strategy* 2017 p. 9

Culture change

In both sectors, a lack of work-life balance, long hours and overworking were reported as being the norm. This has an impact on worker's well-being but also presents further barriers to progression for women, who are more likely to have pressures on their time outside of work.

Gender stereotyping is also present in both sectors, but manifests itself in different ways. It shapes the demographic of the care workforce, which continues to be predominantly female, and in food and drink, it leads to a heavily segregated workforce, continued issues of sexism and limits progression opportunities for women.

Recommendation 8

Welsh Government should ensure that businesses across Wales have access to bespoke support to explore how they can structure their workplaces differently that enable employees to better balance work and home life.

Recommendation 9

Businesses need to prioritise improving the diversity of their workforces, so that they better reflect the communities they serve and are able to recruit from the broadest talent pool.

A sectoral approach

While these two sectors share a number of challenges and some cross-sector solutions can be developed, there remains a need for a sectoral approach to deliver decent work. The context in each sector is very different and a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to address the key barriers to decent work in different sectors.

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Government should ensure that the new Fair Work Commission considers sectoral differences and engages with both employers and employees in different sectors when considering what constitutes 'fair work' and prioritises actions to improve the provision of it.

Care Sector Recommendations

Over the next few months a number of changes will be made that seek to professionalise the social care sector, clarify career paths and qualifications and improve working conditions. Many of these changes are welcomed by those we spoke to and could have a notable impact on the provision of decent work in the sector.

Recommendation 11

Forthcoming changes in the social care sector should be closely monitored to ensure that they are delivering the anticipated improvements to pay and working conditions and are improving progression opportunities within the sector.

Ultimately, we have to conclude from our interviews that the social care sector needs to see an increase in funding. However, we recognise that if such a move is possible, it will require action from the UK and Welsh Governments and Local Authorities and is unlikely to happen in the near future. In the meantime, some impact can be had by improving commissioning models.

Recommendation 12

Local Authorities should change the weighting used when awarding contracts for the delivery of care so that quality is considered equally with cost.

Recommendation 13

Welsh Government and Local Authorities should require all companies submitting bids to deliver care contracts to do so on an agreed set of terms and conditions, to prevent companies from squeezing terms and conditions in order to offer a lower cost.

Food and Drink Sector Recommendations

The food and drink sector workforce remains heavily segregated on the basis of gender and we heard from a number of participants that sexist attitudes and behaviour remains more prevalent than in other sectors. While there was not a suggestion that legal minimums were not being met, it does seem that in practice legislation around discrimination has not led to a shift in the culture in some food and drink workplaces.

Recommendation 14

Businesses should adopt a no tolerance policy for any discrimination based on gender and sexist comments from staff or customers to tackle discrimination and segregation and bring about a meaningful shift in workplace culture.

The food and drink sector is not necessarily viewed as one in which people can forge a career. While progression from front-line roles is favoured in some parts of the food and drink sector, career pathways overall are not as clearly defined as in social care and there is less consistency in job roles across the sector.

Recommendation 15

Welsh Government, sector bodies and businesses should work together to communicate the career pathways available in the food and drink sector, including entrepreneurship.