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Accounting for Gender in the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship Programme

This paper reports on a collaborative research project undertaken by team of academics from the Women in Scotland's Economy (WiSE) Research Centre at Glasgow Caledonian University and Close the Gap. This research is funded by the Knowledge Exchange Programme of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Close the Gap is a publically funded initiative that works with organisations of all types and sizes to encourage and enable action to address the gender pay gap. This research and knowledge exchange programme proposed by the WiSE/Close the Gap partnership has two main aims;

- to design a tailored Gender Impact Analysis (GIA) tool for public sector bodies/government departments linked to spending allocations that can be applied to any social/economic policy; and
- to develop a case study of Scottish Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) as a worked example that would assist public bodies/government departments in implementing the GIA tool.

Current resource allocation processes are built on the assumption of rational, self-interested economic actors with little or no reference to gender. However, evidence shows that women and men, and girls and boys, often have differing experiences of policy interventions across a broad range of areas including healthcare, transport and criminal justice. Similarly, gender is a key variable in determining individual and collective patterns of participation with respect to economic activities such as paid and unpaid work, academic and vocational education/training and caring. The assumption of gender-neutrality, within broadly defined policy objectives and priorities, can lead to policies that impact unequally on men and women. The budget process can therefore sustain and reinforce gender inequalities by not recognising, and subsequently accounting for, the different needs of women and men. As a result, resources are allocated inefficiently and unequally between men and women and girls and boys. A key example of where a gender-neutral approach to policy formulation and resourcing has led to the replication and reinforcement of gender inequalities can be found in the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme. A publicly funded training programme, the MA provides individuals with the opportunity to combine employment and training by following an industry designed training framework. The MA programme is 'modern' in the sense that it has extended the concept of apprenticeship training into sectors of the economy not traditionally associated with 'on-the-job' training, namely in service sector occupations such as retail and childcare. However, the programme display marks levels of occupational segregation where women dominate the service sector (or 'non-traditional') frameworks and men overwhelmingly dominate the frameworks where the concept of apprenticeship training is more familiar such as in vehicle maintenance, engineering and construction frameworks. This occupational segregation means that there are unequal outcomes for male and female MAs in terms of pay and career prospects on completion. Given that they are overwhelmingly accessed by men, even a most basic gendered analysis of public spend on MAs suggests the potential for significant male bias.