

**The Young Women’s Movement Parliamentary Briefing: Women in STEM**

1 June 2023

***Parliamentary briefing for the Scottish Government debate on Women in STEM***

**Who are we?**

The Young Women's Movement are Scotland’s national organisation for young women’s feminist leadership and collective action against gender inequality. Funded by the Workplace Equality Fund, we conducted a [review](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6413232bf29ba901ed614415/t/646398b22b8d8d4f86b52837/1684248755602/Young+Women+Code+-+Findings+and+Key+Recs+May+2023+%281%29.pdf) of tech organisation CodeClan with an intersectional and feminist lens to shine a light on the ways they could consider evolving to better meet the needs of young women in their training programmes and their staff team. Alongside a working group of their staff, students, and graduates, we then produced a set of recommendations on how they could do this. This review and accompanying recommendations are useful for all organisations wishing to make their workplaces more inclusive and supportive of young women.

**What could be done to support more women into taking up teaching roles?**

* Multiple women participants discussed entering the job market and feeling they were being “measured by a different standard” to their male peers, often being interviewed by panels of all men who view their skills and attitudes differently to their male peers, even when these are identical.
  + Interviewing panels must be diversified wherever possible, and biases need to be removed from the way people view women in tech generally, and biases against hiring young women, falsely viewing likeliness to take maternity/childcare leave equaling a reduced commitment to a job.
* Caring responsibilities, which tend to fall on women, can have a huge impact on women’s schedules. Women told us that they may have to leave their teaching roles as they do not have sufficient annual leave to cover the entire school holidays and cannot cover childcare costs on their salaries.
  + Childcare support systems must be implemented in the workplace to mitigate this issue for women's progression, as well as improved flexibility in job hours/working arrangements. For example, hybrid teaching would enable women to teach from home, if they needed to balance childcare. Additionally, childcare funds for staff would enable women to work the same hours and structure as men, without this issue disproportionately impacting them financially.
* Maternity Leave policies that provide more than just statutory maternity pay are essential; we were told that these are integral to staff retention.
* Staff members we spoke to felt encouraged by senior leaders at CodeClan being women.

**Did you have any results around the experiences of women who face multiple forms of oppression?**

* Working group participants talked about barriers to learning and work faced by those who are pregnant and/or have children, as hours tend to not be compatible with childcare, and concerns about maternity pay can hugely impact pregnant women in their roles.
* Ethnic minority participants talked about the value of training for staff so that people are able to understand and appreciate the different backgrounds people come from, and therefore behave as active bystanders if discrimination were to arise.
* Students and staff alike value and want more diverse representation at work, including students wanting to be taught by more women, and wanting Ethnic Minority and Parent support groups for staff and students.
* Young women often experience discrimination and bias in the workplace, relating to their gender, age and ethnicity primarily.
  + Workplaces should ensure there are designated staff members/champions to support young women experiencing discrimination in the workplace. We were told on multiple different occasions that women often believe that what they have experienced is not bad enough to seek support. With a champion or staff member to go to to discuss the discrimination they have faced, they would be better supported to report the incident, even where they themselves diminish the severity of their experiences.

**Is there anything else that came up in the course of your research that you’d like to flag?**

* Women are interested in tech jobs due to the flexibility of the hours and working arrangements, and the high pay.
* Language around ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills needs to be de-gendered, as this hugely contributes to myths around the gendering of skills.
* The underrepresentation of women in the tech industry is not caused by lack of skill, but stigma from a young age pushing women away from STEM in the first place.

**Is there anything that you think the government could be doing to provide more support in this area?**

* Women value mentorship - accessible Women in Tech networks that provide women with mentors and a support network when entering jobs would be valuable.
* Bursaries and funded places ringfenced for women (re-)training in tech – this could include childcare and cost of living bursaries.
* Increased outreach to schools to help break stigmas around the gendering of STEM early on to get more women to pursue tech in the first place.
* Improved statutory maternity pay would support small businesses to offer women better benefits packages.