

Oddi wrth: Sarah Rees

From: Sarah Rees

Pregnancy & maternity discrimination consultation response

Sarah Rees, I am an 'economically inactive' mother of two (girl age 4 and boy age 15 months). I have experienced discrimination whilst on maternity leave in 2013 and it has continued to impact my life to date.

- 1) Following the birth of my first child I lost my job. In the early days of becoming a parent my employer showed warning signs which caused me much upset and undue stress, including removing my name from the list of staff on the website, ignoring my emails where I asked to discuss a return to work, and discussing my possible redundancy amongst other staff members in Steering Committee meetings before I was informed. I raised a grievance with my employer about these issues and was unable to attend my own grievance meeting as they refused to hold it in my local office in Cardiff, and despite having over £4m in reserves stated they could not afford a train ticket for both myself and my mother, who would care for my 12 wk old breast-fed baby whilst I was in the meeting. The meeting itself caused me much upset as they brought up a series of issues against me, when I had done nothing wrong and there had been no complaint against my work before I took leave; I felt it was an attack in response to me daring to speak out.
- 2) In the first 12 months after I experienced discrimination I was too upset, angry and ashamed to discuss it publicly. Since sharing my story I have been contacted by many women whom are going through similar issues and looking for help. At the time I found an organisation called Maternity Action, I was never able to get through to their contact line as it was always engaged during the few hours it was open. I now forward others to Pregnant Then Screwed, as they have a lawyer on hand to provide advice to mothers.
- 3) I decided to take the redundancy offer as I did not want to work for an employer who would treat me in such a way. I did not take the case further, because, at that time there was no access to legal aid for such cases, and I could not afford the court fees, and I did not want to spend my precious early days of motherhood doing so.
- 4) The irony is that I was working for a project that was funded by the Welsh Government Equality and Inclusion Grant; the WG should have been better at auditing such issues, as they had a duty of care to me which was totally missed. The Welsh Government should monitor the retention rates of pregnant staff working on projects they fund and companies they invest in.
- 5) Whilst it was slightly complicated in that the project I worked on was separating from the charity which employed me; other staff were not made redundant but instead were continuously employed in the organisation. I strongly believe that were I not on maternity leave and in a vulnerable position I would have continued to have been employed. I believe I should have been able to TUPE transfer into the new project. In fact, one staff member whom was in a less senior position than me

was given a promotion, whilst I was offered redundancy only. During the time I would still have been on maternity leave other people were employed into the organisation too, into jobs that easily suited my skills. Current protections for mothers on maternity leave should have meant that I was offered any of these roles, but that was never an option that was offered to me.

- 6) I believe that women who experienced such issues should be given a grace period to fight their cases now that legal aid has been reinstated. I also believe that the time limit to raise a tribunal claim should increase from 3 months to at least 6 months. New parents have barely had a full night's sleep within the first 12 weeks of birth, let alone have the strength to fight a legal case.
- 7) When I started to look for new employment I faced a new barrier – the job opportunities with part-time or flexible options are sparse. It almost became a full time job to find a part-time job. The majority of part-time work is in low paid positions, I, as many other parents like me, want to continue their careers on a flexible or part time basis but this is elusive and is a huge barrier to many mothers wanting to work. The gender pay gap clearly correlates with motherhood, and the core problem is the lack of decent part-time and flexible jobs. I believe the Welsh Government should require all jobs advertised in Wales to be offered on a part-time or flexible basis unless there is a business requirement for a fixed position. This would open up a world of employment opportunities for mothers who have invested time and money in their career and education. As I often quote “I had a baby not a lobotomy” and should not have to lower my employment expectations simply because I need to balance work and caring. I would also like to see Welsh Government open Ministerial positions on a part-time, job-share basis; if employers could see this happening at a senior level they would follow. It would also greatly increase equality in Government.
- 8) I decided to set up my own social enterprise as I could not find a part-time job at a decent wage that suited my skills. I received a bursary from Chwarae Teg that provided me with office space and new business support for 6 months. This meant my family took my idea more seriously than ‘kitchen table mumpreneuring’ and within 12 months I was able to pay myself a salary whilst supporting other women in their employment. I also became an employer, supporting the Welsh economy further. Wales is doing quite a lot right now to support entrepreneurship and business but there is a distinct lack of support for new parents. Many women become entrepreneurs post-baby because the traditional world of work excludes them due to their caring responsibilities; why aren't the Welsh Government doing anything to support us?
- 9) In the early days of my business I had a meeting with Business Wales; I provided them with my business plan beforehand but it was clear that they had not even looked at this as the meeting began. They simply checked boxes on a form and told me that because I was not under 30, a recent graduate or living in a convergence area then there was little support available. They did offer me childcare so I could attend a course to write a business plan, when I prompted them to take a look at my

business plan they agreed that I didn't need this beginner level course and wished me luck. All I wanted was support with childcare costs so that I could go out and build my business. Women need better childcare in order to enable them to re-enter the workplace, I believe that parents should be provided with free childcare from the end of paid shared parental leave at 9 months.

- 10) Then I had a second child; I have been unable to return to work this time around because having two children under 5 means that childcare is simply too expensive to work. Wales has the lowest rate of female employment in the UK and a lack of affordable childcare is a key issue. Whilst I was running my business part-time, I had to work evenings and early mornings to meet my commitments. With 2 small children my energy to run a business, be part-time carer and run a home would push my mental health to its limit. I am also extremely limited by the cost of childcare.
- 11) To work a single 9-5 day the fees are £49 for my 15 month old and £45.45 for my 4 year old. I thought that when my daughter became 3 and was entitled to state nursery my costs would get lower, but due to wrap around requirements I do not save anything. In fact, if I add in the state nursery costs of uniform, snack money and school trips my costs would be higher. Our state nursery provide an absolutely brilliant start to education, which is why parents go to the effort and cost of enrolling their children, but this provision should not at all be seen as a childcare option to enable employment. The Welsh Government need to decide what they call 'childcare' that supports parents to work and what they call 'early years education'.
- 12) I have visited the WG webpages on the 30 hours provision for 3-4 year olds, there is no information on when it may be coming to my local authority, and does not answer questions of eligibility for parents who are not working but wish to re-enter the workplace. There are a series of questions I would like answers to regarding the offer; would I be eligible as soon as I found work or would I have to find a place and wait for the next start of term (as my the current state provision), would I be able to use it in a private nursery or state only, how will the state offer be increased locally when it is currently at capacity when providing 2.5 hours a day in a morning OR afternoon session?
- 13) The Welsh Government must have a plan for rolling out the 30 hours provision but it has not been communicated to parents or nurseries/ education settings. It is essential that the offer is fair and provides all families in Wales with childcare support, and it is also important that it does not impact on the cost of childcare for under 3's – which is currently around £50 a day and is already unaffordable for most.
- 14) One of the reasons I set up my social enterprise, Career Women Wales, is because Careers Wales does nothing to enable women into work. There is one very short paragraph on their website on returning to work after having children, it's very simplistic and does nothing to address the real problem women face; the lack of flexible and part times jobs at decent salaries. I supported 100's of women; addressing the real concerns we face including losing confidence, assessing their skills and re-building their networks. I would love to continue this work but cannot

afford to pay the £100 per day childcare bill for my own children that's essential for me to get back out there, network and generate funding.

15) The Welsh Government need to provide women, in particularly mothers, with careers support. Careers Wales have not provided this, as it is too focused on young people, I would be happy to discuss my work further to provide a careers service that works for mothers. Whilst the PaCE programme was supposed to address this it is not advertised very well; this is all I found in my local area and the contact email is out of date.

[https://earlyyears.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/fiso\\_live/fsd/Search.aspx?BX=bc3nZHGwFNI%3D](https://earlyyears.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/fiso_live/fsd/Search.aspx?BX=bc3nZHGwFNI%3D)

16) There is also a requirement for a campaign to ensure employers are welcoming parents back into the workplace. There are brilliant campaigns in England that need to come to Wales, such as Flex Appeal by Mother Pukka.

17) It is also essential to discuss mental health. I was devastated by the way my employer treated me, which is even harder when you are at such a vulnerable time becoming a new parent. The stress of the discrimination itself, followed by losing my employment had an impact on my confidence and abilities as well as affecting my relationship with my partner. Since having a second child and being unable to afford to return to work the pressure has increased, we are down to a single income. It has also impacted the family dynamic as I am now financially dependent on my partner.

18) Financial independence is a key factor in gender equality and having children can devastate a woman's independence for the rest of her life. I feel like nothing prepared me for this situation. I had heard the stories of losing sleep, battles to lose the baby weight etc, but never did I think that having children would take away my career, my pension, my mental health and my financial independence. I recently had a chat with my health visitor as she was concerned I was suffering with post natal depression, I told her that I feel frustrated and trapped at home but can't find a part-time job or afford the childcare cost that would enable me to work and her response was that that is the lot of a mother. 2018 may have celebrated a centenary of women winning the vote but we still have very far to go to bring about equality for parents.

19) Finally, I would like to raise your awareness of the Pregnant Then Screwed UK-wide 'March of the Mummies' protests. I organised the Welsh protest in Cardiff, which was attended by over 50 parents. We outlined a series of issues and demands that need addressing:

20) The problems:

- Government legislation is completely outdated and does not effectively protect working mothers

- 54,000 women lose their jobs for getting pregnant and 390,000 working mums experience negative and potentially discriminatory treatment at work each year. These numbers have doubled in a decade. Far from improving, the situation for working mums is rapidly deteriorating
- Pregnant women and new mums have limited access to justice, demonstrated by the fact that less than 1% of victims take legal action against a discriminatory employer
- Discrimination tends to have a negative impact on a woman's confidence and mental health. This often has a long-term impact on their career and sometimes this has a negative impact on their relationship with their child and partner
- The legal process is incredibly confusing and stressful for pregnant women and new mums who are very vulnerable
- Motherhood is a major contributor to the gender pay gap. The gap between young women and men is almost non-existent, but widens consistently for 12 years after the first child is born, by which point women receive 33% less pay per hour than men.

#### 21) The solutions:

- Increase the time limit to raise a tribunal claim from 3 months to (at least) 6 months for pregnant and postpartum women. The [#Givemesix](#) campaign asks that the Government extend the time limit to raise a tribunal claim for pregnant and postpartum women. The current law says you have 3 months, less 1 day to raise a claim; we want to see that increased to at least 6 months. The petition has been signed by over 54,000 people and the [Early Day Motion](#) is supported by 91 MPs.
- Require companies to report on how many flexible working requests are made and how many are granted.
- Give fathers access to 6 weeks non-transferable paternity leave paid at 90% of salary.
- Give the self-employed access to statutory shared parental pay.
- Subsidise childcare from 6 months old, rather than 3 years old.