

What Is the Gender Pensions Gap and What Are the Reasons Behind It?

Over the past week, the news has been buzzing around the recent report published by NOW: Pensions, an award-winning workplace pension provider, which highlights that the gender pensions gap is growing ever wider, with the likelihood that women now need to work an extra 19 years to retire on the same pensions as men.

<https://www.nowpensions.com/app/uploads/2024/02/gender-pensions-gap-report-24.pdf>

Some shocking statistics I'm sure you would agree but this is nothing new for far too many women.

So, what is the Gender Pensions Gap?

The gender pensions gap is the percentage difference in pension income for female pensioners compared to their male counterparts. Largely, there has been some confusion over what the gender pensions gap actually means in real terms. In these times of equality and equal pay for women, how this historical trend has affected retirement pension provision tends to be largely forgotten, with little consideration given to the issue until it starts to affect women – often when there is little they can do to change the financial predicament they've been left in.

The UK Government's lack of attention, or for want of a better phrase blatant disregard, to it, means there are no policies in place to address the issue nor any statistics on the growing number of women affected.

The trade union, Prospect, has been tracking this particular issue for many years and its latest report shows that the difference in pensions between men and women equates to approximately £7500 per year, sitting at 40.5% across the UK, and has increased on average by 0.4% year on year since their first reporting period several years ago.



There are many reasons behind the disparities in the level of workplace and private pension savings between women and men and these include:

- Women having to take breaks from paid employment to raise families or to undertake other caring responsibilities

There are several charities who work tirelessly on this issue including **Close the Gap** and **The Scottish Women's Convention**. Their websites are always full of up-to-date information, reports and blog posts on this and many other issues affecting women in the workplace - so always worth a look!

- The gender pay gap and the cumulative impact of women earning less than men
- Gender discrimination within the pensions framework itself, with many women in part time work facing exclusion from being automatically enrolled into workplace pensions due to their income not meeting the threshold required, currently set at £10,000 per annum.
- (Even if women had two or three part time jobs, their incomes from all their paid work cannot be combined in order to meet the threshold of £10,000).
- The inequality between the level of state pension awarded to men and women. The changes to the state pension age are not set to be fully implemented until 2041 but even then this will only be the case for those reaching state pension after this time.



Prospect's Deputy General Secretary, **Sue Ferns**, gave evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee and made the following recommendations:

- That a reform of the auto enrolment criterion be undertaken as soon as possible
- That there be an independent commission to decide a suitable level of contributions under auto enrolment to help bridge the gender pensions gap
- That it be made a statutory requirement for the government to give a full and frank report to Parliament on the gender pension gap and their recommendations for tackling it
- That there be a full inquiry by the Work and Pensions Select Committee on the Gender Pension Gap
- The implementation of an additional state pension credit for those who cannot work because they are looking after children under 12
- That measures be applied to allow more affordable childcare to be rolled out thereby limiting barriers for those who wish to return to the workplace

WASPI Campaign Continues Their Fight For Pensions Justice

In terms of the continuing arguments surrounding changes to the state pension age, we only have to look at the plight of the WASPI women who continue to fight for justice over the way their retirement future was handled. These women, most of them born in the 1950s, were given little or no notice of the changes to their state pension age with many now living in poverty due to an administrative blunder on the part of the UK Government and the DWP. As their campaign for justice continues, we stand firmly alongside them to make our voices heard.



Two-Tier Pension System - Where's the Equality in That?

The two-tier pensions system, introduced by former Prime Minister **Lord Cameron** when in office, has resulted in an unfair system whereby older pensioners, particularly women, are being discriminated against because of their birth date.

The latest Autumn Statement showed that pensioners who retired after April 2016 would receive £221.20 per week but those retiring prior to this, would receive £169.50 per week, meaning older pensioners will receive £2688.40 less per year than their younger counterparts.

Bearing in mind, any increase is still far less than the increases in food and energy costs related to the cost-of-living crisis. The much-threatened triple lock pension was introduced in an attempt to raise pensions, but our pensioners still receive one of the lowest state pensions in Europe – well below the UK's own poverty level.

The UK Government says that they offer a safety net for those most in need - a complicated, bureaucratic system that leaves a person's pride in tatters.

What we need is a shakeup of the whole system – a universal state pension which allows for dignity in old age not one that has you begging, cap in hand, for what is rightfully yours.

State Pension Age Review - Yet Again!

As the state pension age continues to rise with the publication of each new State Pension Review, we have even seen some out of touch right wing think tanks demanding that the state pension age should rise to 75 within the next 10 years – so basically work until we drop!

After our input to **Baroness Neville Rolff's** State Pension Review in May 2022, we took some comfort from her report's recommendations that the drive for the state pension age to rise to 68, as set out in the 2017 **Cridland Report**, be delayed due to a lack of adequate statistical evidence to support it. However, it seems that the UK Government are not for shifting – stating that a further review must be carried out within 2 years of a General Election, which to our reckoning is this year, 2024. It seems that this latest review, which obviously didn't fall into line with their agenda, was a flagrant misuse of the public purse. What's new?!

Watch this space closely - we will be too!

68 is Too Late Campaign

Over the past several months, we have continued to promote our joint campaign, alongside **Unite the Union** and the **NPC**, calling for no further raising of the state pension age. We have held regular meetings and have taken the decision to engage in joint hustings events prior to the forthcoming General Election – we will keep you updated!. We will also be holding an outreach meeting in Dundee, to coincide with the **STUC Congress** in April, to garner as much support for the campaign as possible so please feel free to pop in to hear what we have to say. The petition is currently sitting at just over 44,000 signatures so please support the campaign by signing via the link <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/don-raise-the-state-pension-age-68-is-too-late> or scan the petition's QR code with your smartphone's camera here.





Our campaign against escalating energy prices continues and after its launch in August 2022, we have continued to make our voices heard. After our initial meetings with **Ofgem**, we were invited to serve on their Vulnerable Stakeholders Steering Group where, aside from regular meetings, we engage in discussions and consultations on issues such as standing charges and digitalisation. We are always happy to hear your thoughts on what issues we should be bringing to the table, so please feel free

to get in touch with your views.



Our consultation responses are all available on the energy campaign page of our website but if you wish to receive a paper copy/ies, please get in touch and we'll get one out to you.

UN International Day of Older Persons



To mark the latest **UN International Day of Older Persons**, we decided to break with tradition and move our celebration inside the Scottish Parliament for a wee change.

Our parliamentary reception, gratefully sponsored by **Carol Mochan MSP**, saw over 60 invited guests listen to contributions from the **Scottish Government's Human Rights Bill** team, **Beth Friel** from the **Carers Trust Scotland** and **Claire Peden** from **Unite for a Worker's Economy** with proceedings ably chaired by our very own **Rose Jackson**.

Thanks to all of you from across Scotland who braved the stormy weather to attend, it made for a great celebration of the contribution older people continue to make within society.

Human Rights Bill Consultation

Those who attended our parliamentary reception will have heard about the Scottish Government's plans to implement a Human Rights Bill into law in Scotland. The Scottish Pensioners' Forum currently serves on their Governance and Engagement Advisory board as well as the Lived Experience and Wider Implementation Working Groups. As dignity and rights is at the very core of our work, we were more than happy to promote the proposed bill at every turn. The consultation closed in October 2023 and the analysis was recently published and can be accessed here <https://www.gov.scot/publications/human-rights-bill-scotland-analysis-consultation-responses/>

Our own response can be found on our website however if you require a paper copy, please don't hesitate to get in touch.



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Festival of Ageing

In January, we were delighted to be asked along to the Festival of Ageing in Edinburgh to form part of the expert panel discussion on *Rethinking Work, Retirement and Ageing*, alongside our OPSAF colleagues, **Age Scotland**.

The annual event, organised by **GenAnalytics** on behalf of the Scottish Government, began with an address from Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees, **Emma Roddick MSP** and included an expert panel session on *Inclusion, Community and Wellbeing*, served by our OPSAF colleagues, **SOPA** and **Generations Working Together**, as well as contributions on *Ageing in Scotland - the Facts and Fiction* and a motivational speech by **Mike Stevenson** on how to retain enthusiasm through the ages. Overall, an engaging and informative event.

GLOBAL INTERGENERATIONAL WEEK 2024

Our colleagues at **Generations Working Together**, who we are working with on a project funded by the Community Knowledge Fund exploring community safety and intergenerational connections, recently launched their programme for Global Intergenerational Week 2024. With a host of interesting events and activities, and with engagement from 15 countries worldwide, it is one not to be missed!



Our Affiliates at Work

North Lanarkshire

Recently, the SPF stood in solidarity with our colleagues at **North Lanarkshire TUC**, and other local groups, in their successful challenge against the local authority's plans to axe 39 community use facilities. SPF Executive Committee member, **Andy Locke**, attended a rally, as well as attending several public meetings, and spoke out on the devastating impact the proposed closures would have on older people and the wider community as a whole if they went ahead. North Lanarkshire Council eventually seen sense and withdrew their closure plans and, while delighted by this U-turn, Andy voiced his concern that we must all err on the side of caution and be vigilant to any future attacks to services in this area, as well as across other local authorities. We will be keeping a close eye on this one!



Dundee

Our colleagues at **Unite, Dundee Retired Members** branch, recently participated in the annual **Harry McLevy Memorial Award**, named after the former Convenor of Caledon Shipyard and a past President of the STUC. Harry was a great advocate for expansive education for young people and the competition, in his name, has been running across secondary schools in Dundee for over 20 years, tasking S3 Modern Studies students to devise a researched, investigative report on current issues.

The judging panel mark entries on their originality, structure and evidence of research and analysis techniques with each individual winner receiving a certificate and a cheque for £20. They are then put forward to compete against other schools in the area with the overall schools winner receiving an engraved trophy, a certificate for their school and a cheque for £50.



This year's overall winner **Sarah Villiers** of **Grove Academy**, whose research looked at homelessness in Dundee, was presented with her trophy by Harry's daughter and great granddaughter.

A great intergenerational initiative and one which would not be possible without the enthusiasm of the pupils and dedication of the staff, helping to strengthen the link between young and old. Well done Sarah and to all involved!

Renfrewshire

It was great to be back at the **Supporting Opportunities for Older People in Renfrewshire** event at a packed Lagoon Leisure Centre in Paisley. It was great to see so many older people taking part in the games and activities, with a welcome lunch thrown in too. What a great way to help combat social isolation and loneliness across the area and one we look forward to supporting year on year.



Better Buses for Strathclyde

We continue to support the Better Buses for Strathclyde campaign and will be in Glasgow on 23rd February at 9.30am for the petition hand in at the SPF Offices in St. Vincent Street. There is still time to sign the online petition here <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/take-strathclyde-s-buses-back-into-public-control>

